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## 'We are not Kenyans': extra-judicial killings, manhood and citizenship in Mathare, a Nairobi ghetto

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### ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the systematic police killings of young, male crime suspects by local police officers in Mathare since 2002. It explores the relationship between executions of young ghetto men by police and notions of citizenship. It first examines the impact of such killings on positions of manhood among these men and the different roles of 'gangs' in popular processes of becoming men. My aim is to move away from the current association of young ghetto men with violence and ethnic politics—i.e. as 'thugs for hire'. One of my main discoveries was that work and manhood are at least as important to grasp processes of group formation among them. After this, the article delves into the question of how to understand the narratives that legitimise and perpetuate this particular form of state violence. It concludes by discussing how processes of subjectivation that constitute, and are constituted by, the dominant discourse on citizenship produce positions of non-citizenship ascribed to ghetto residents, and in particular to young ghetto men.

### KEYWORDS

Kenya; extra-judicial killings; police; citizenship; masculinities

## Introduction

*On 17 October 2013, as I left the University of Amsterdam, my phone beeped. The What's App message from a friend in Kenya stated: 'How are you Siz? Now it is dangerous and hectic in the ghetto. Three guys were shot dead by police. Silas is one of them, so shocked and sad'. My knees gave in. Then my phone beeped, and beeped and beeped again. My stomach churned as I slowly grasped the horror of this fact. I pictured Silas' sweet face, a young man whom I had known since his childhood. What had happened? After days of shock and talking with friends in Kenya who had witnessed the murders, I was able to get a clearer image of what had transpired in Mathare, a Nairobi ghetto, that ill-fated Thursday afternoon.*

*Silas and two of his friends sat near a stone tenement building in Mathare, chatting and relaxing with a cold soda in the dark yellow warmth of the late-afternoon sun. The dirt road where they hung out was busy with women selling vegetables and children playing in their school uniforms. Suddenly, two known police officers showed up in dustcoats concealing their guns, and they started shooting at the three young men without any warning. Afterwards, the two police officers placed knives, a fake gun and other weaponry on the young men, and controlled the scene until the press arrived hours later.<sup>1</sup>*

Shockingly, the murder of these three young men by the police was not a first or single event. In fact, such assassinations by the police have taken the lives of thousands of young men over the past decade in Kenya. The most common explanation by Mathare residents of why the police continue to shoot crime suspects instead of taking them to court relates to the widely held ineffectiveness of and corruption within the judiciary system. According to many residents, special police units (popularly called ‘death squads’)<sup>2</sup> work together with local informants to kill suspects in attempts to curb crime.<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, many residents also shared other reasons for such executions with me. For instance, a young self-proclaimed thief explained to me in early February 2016 that police officers at times collaborate with local thieves. He said: ‘If the risk gets too high police officers can just kill the thief to protect themselves.’ Such partnerships are not as far-fetched as one might think at first glance, seeing that the police are also heavily, and quite openly, involved in the illegal alcohol and drugs trade. Many policemen who execute criminal suspects are known locally by name, but investigations are generally blocked. Family and friends who try to gain more information and pursue these cases are often threatened. As a result, local activists from, for instance, the Mathare Social Justice Centre who try to document and prepare evidence for court cases against individual police officers meet great difficulty in convincing witnesses to come forward.<sup>4</sup> To date only a few cases of police brutality have actually reached court, despite the fact that according to these local activists said cases represent hundreds and hundreds of extra-judicial killings of crime suspects in Mathare that occurred over the past decade.

To give an indication, executions of crime suspects by the police have led to the death of at least one young man from Mathare, a Nairobi ghetto,<sup>5</sup> per week on average between January 2013 and December 2015.<sup>6</sup> Hence, conservative estimates put the number of extra-judicial executions in this period at 150 in Mathare alone. Since January 2016, such killings seem to be on the rise again. I was in Kenya and worked together with local activists to document 16 police killings of young men from Mathare between 1 January and 18 February 2016. In comparison, activists in Korogocho, another Nairobi ghetto notorious for crime, have estimated that police officers have murdered around 25 young men in 2015. I do not have such assessments from other areas in Nairobi or nationwide, but I do have information from activists on the ground in different localities that similar killings occur systematically in various parts of Kenya.

This article focuses on the systematic police killings of young, male crime suspects by local police officers in Mathare since 2002.<sup>7</sup> It explores the relationship between executions of young ghetto men by the police and notions of citizenship by first giving a background to this type of police violence. In the first section, I discuss the different attentions the three main groups of victims—i.e. Mungiki, terrorist and crime suspects—have received from human rights organisations over the years. Then, I continue to explore the impact of police killings of crime suspects on positions of manhood among young ghetto men, and discuss the different roles of ‘gangs’ in popular processes of becoming men. My aim is to move away from the current association of young ghetto men with violence and ethnic politics—i.e. as ‘thugs for hire’. One of my main discoveries was that work and manhood are at least as important to grasp processes of group formation among them. After this, the article delves into the question how to understand the processes that legitimise and perpetuate this particular form of state violence. By taking a closer look at the framing of the notion ‘gang’ in media and other discourses, it examines the master narratives of fear and threat that justify these killings. It concludes by discussing how processes of subjectivation<sup>8</sup> that

constitute, and are constituted by, the dominant discourse on citizenship produce positions of non-citizenship ascribed to ghetto residents, and in particular to young ghetto men.

### **Mungiki, Al Shabaab and crime-related extra-judicial killings**

Human rights activists observed an upward trend in extra-judicial killings of young, urban and poor men by the police during the 1990s, with as many as four to five deaths a week in 1998.<sup>9</sup> These unlawful killings rose dramatically from 2002, declined slightly after 2008, only to rise again after the General Elections held on 3 March 2013.<sup>10</sup> The first increase between 2002 and 2008 corresponds with the nationwide government crackdown on Mungiki. In this period, the Kenyan police are reported to have killed over 8,000 young and poor men,<sup>11</sup> many of whom had no affiliation to said group.<sup>12</sup> The current rise since 2013 correlates with growing terrorist threats, heightened political tensions between the government and the opposition and with the securitisation of the state.<sup>13</sup> Hence, fluctuations in executions of Mungiki, terrorist and crime suspects by the police to a large extent connect to broader political dynamics, with young men living in ghettos such as Mathare often bearing the brunt.

Several reports have highlighted unlawful killings in relation to Mungiki<sup>14</sup> and to Al Shabaab.<sup>15</sup> Yet, the systematic executions of young ghetto men suspected of crime largely go unnoticed even if these seem to constitute a great number of the total. Independent Medico Legal Unit (IMLU), for instance, reported 126 deaths by police bullets between January and December 2015,<sup>16</sup> and this figure may include the different groups of victims—this is not always clear from the case descriptions. Nevertheless, it seems a rather low number if we take into account that local activists counted approximately 50 executions in Mathare alone in the same period, whereas this ghetto is just one of many locations in which such executions occur.<sup>17</sup> During discussions, since 2010, with different human rights organisations in Kenya, staff members have repeatedly admitted to me that they are aware that reported numbers of police killings by their organisations only represent the ‘tip of the iceberg’. Many pointed to a lack of systematic documentation on police killings and to a lack of substantial evidence in the few cases that were reported to them. Both derive from the extreme risks involved.<sup>18</sup>

The dangers involved in documenting and reporting police killings to human rights organisations for witnesses and activists on the ground applies to data collection on all three groups of victims. This tells us that despite courageous efforts, the reports on police killings of Mungiki and terrorist suspects perhaps may also not be comprehensive. To illustrate the risks, the Director of the Oscar Foundation and his colleague were mysteriously killed on State House Road in Nairobi early 2009 after they had spearheaded a demonstration against extra-judicial killings of alleged Mungiki members.<sup>19</sup> These executions sent a rather chilling message to activists protesting against particular police practices, and deterred many from gathering more substantial data on police killings.<sup>20</sup> However, another reason behind the lack of reporting on police killings of crime suspects—as opposed to Mungiki and Al Shabaab suspects—by such organisations hinges on the ‘normalisation’ of their executions, as illustrated by the rather ‘casual’ media reporting and an absolute lack of public outcry over such executions.

Despite the persecutions of human rights activists, the reports by Oscar Foundation and Alston,<sup>21</sup> together with the widespread outrage over the police response to the post-election violence of 2007–2008,<sup>22</sup> did prompt the police reforms that are currently underway in Kenya<sup>23</sup>—even if reluctantly<sup>24</sup> and rather ineffectively.<sup>25</sup> Extra-judicial executions of

(mostly) young and poor men by the police continued nonetheless, and, as mentioned, even increased. Overtime, the more visible target group changed from Mungiki to Al Shabaab. Following the nationwide government crackdown most Mungiki groups effectively ceased to exist by 2008. Since then, terrorist attacks allegedly organised by Al Shabaab have been on the rise. The police shifted attention from Mungiki to Al Shabaab terrorist suspects and prominent Muslim leaders, and public focus and human rights organisations followed this move. Away from this attention, however, criminal suspects remained a target throughout, even if their murders did rise and fall in connection to such broader events. For example, the growing terrorist threat prompted the highly controversial Operation Usalama Watch in April 2014, which targeted thousands of people with Somali backgrounds in Eastleigh.<sup>26</sup> The ensuing chaos, night raids, increased demands for bribes, mass arrests and harassment of all residents and the killings of terrorist suspects by the police in this neighbourhood spilled over to nearby Mathare. Local activists observed an immediate rise in executions of crime suspects here by the police.<sup>27</sup>

Shockingly, ‘shoot-to-kill’ orders are issued on a regular basis,<sup>28</sup> without any actual legal framework to corroborate them,<sup>29</sup> and this hardly ever raises public concern. The perpetuation of the killings of crime suspects by the police, despite attempts at police reforms,<sup>30</sup> tentatively tells us two things. First, the government and by extension the police deem shooting an effective and justified approach to curb crime.<sup>31</sup> This line of thinking frames such executions as an effective means of getting rid of active thieves and deterring emerging ones. Second, the lack of public outcry over these killings tells us that the wider public seems to buy into the legitimating narratives that these young men embody an imminent threat to society at large and to police officers in particular. Hence, shooting young and poor men who are suspected of being thieves is considered quite legitimate within the public domain. This all begs the question of how the systematic unlawful killings of crime suspects by the police affects the young, poor and urban men who feel under siege.

### **The last man standing**

In late 2010, Kingi, a 34-year-old father of two, told me that most of his friends had been thieves at the time when he became a father at the age of 19. ‘Many of my friends, when I was young, they were thieves, now they have been shot by police, some are also killed by mob-justice and *chang’aa*—illegal alcohol—but most by police’. He named 23 friends during our discussions, and I knew half of them. He shared with me that he had witnessed some of these killings, and had also been nearly killed by a police bullet on more than one occasion. Our talk on unlawful killings was sparked by the murder of his cousin. He had just received a phone call from his aunt who had told him that they had finally found the body of his 25-year-old cousin, Kuch, who had been missing for over a week.

Kingi’s cousin Kuch had been tortured and shot dead by police officers. He had been killed during the night of 23 October 2010, ostensibly after being suspected of a robbery in Ngara, Nairobi. He had been in the company of a friend who had narrowly escaped the sudden spray of police bullets. This friend had spoken to Kingi on the phone and told him that he had witnessed from afar how Kuch had succumbed to the gunfire and had even been slashed with machetes before going limp. Kuch’s mutilated body had eventually been discarded in City Park, allegedly by the police officers who had killed him. Other officers had found his body early on a Sunday morning. Upon receiving the dreadful news from Kuch’s

friend, his mother and aunt, Kingi's sister, had hurried to the local police station where they were told to try the different mortuaries in Nairobi to locate the body. After checking several facilities, they eventually discovered the body at the City Mortuary underneath a heap of anonymous corpses in various stages of decomposition. The horror of his cousin's death and the way his female relatives had found his body provoked immense anger in Kingi.

On Sunday 31 October 2010, a week after Kuch's death, Kingi and I were walking towards his aunt's house in Kayole—a poor neighbourhood in Eastlands, Nairobi—to attend a meeting organised to raise funds for the funeral. Before entering the *matanga*—‘a funeral fund raising meeting’ in Kiswahili—Kingi suddenly took my arm, pulled me aside and said in a strained voice: ‘I can't do anything today, I will be all right tomorrow. I first have to settle my mind, but now it disturbs me, my head is so full’. A faint smile appeared on his grief-stricken face, but his jaw tightened, trying to hold back his emotions in an attempt to compose himself before facing his family inside the one-room house. As one of the few men of his age still alive in his family, he shared with me that he wanted to ‘be strong and focused’. Some of his uncles and cousins had died from alcohol abuse, AIDS-related illnesses or police bullets, and he expressed the need to be a ‘leader’ in his family.

*They look up to me. Most of my family is women, some men died, some men, they went away. I need to show them we can arrange this funeral. Okay, he was a thief, not an innocent [...] but they [police] don't have to shoot you. Why not go to court? In mtaa [‘ghetto’ in Sheng<sup>32</sup>] you can only become a thief or a distiller, or both. Me, when I was young, I admired thieves, thieves had too much pesa [‘money’ in Kiswahili], I looked up to them, I wanted their money, but Shosho scared me. Saying so and so is in jail, so and so died. That scared me. I did not have friends who thought not to steal [...] they steal mostly in Mathare, they are from a different category who steal inside than thugs who steal outside mtaa. Like Kuch. Shosho gave me a job, and that made me not to steal, also her advice, she helped me a lot.*

Not many young men enjoyed the support of a stern grandmother the way Kingi had, a caring but strict grandmother who was also able to provide him with job opportunities. Kingi's grandmother was a known illegal alcohol distiller and seller in the ghetto, and even if she was not at all wealthy, she earned enough to employ her grandson from the age of 12. According to Kingi, this saved him from becoming a thief and risk getting killed by the police. However, he felt a growing burden of responsibilities with regard to his extended family as more and more men died and left women and children behind. He said: ‘I don't want to be the last man standing, [...] I don't have a father, my uncle is dead. My grandfather, he is also dead. Now, my cousin died. Many friends, they died’.

### **Age-sets and achieving manhood**

The 40 young men I conducted research with in Bondeni and Kosovo, Mathare, all responded to being cast as ‘dangerous criminals’ by investing a lot of energy and time in adhering to popular notions of manhood,<sup>33</sup> such as the provider, like Kingi.<sup>34</sup> The tenacity with which these men adhered to this hegemonic standard of masculinity against all odds stemmed from a desire to still feel in charge. Many young men in Mathare grew up without a father, but nevertheless harboured ideas of manhood that defined men as future heads of households and main breadwinners for, and protectors of, women and children.<sup>35</sup>

Interestingly, the provider is popularly imagined as the embodiment of ‘traditional African masculinity’ in the dominant discourse, yet this notion emerged during the colonial era in response to changes wrought by government policies. The rise of wage labour and

overpopulation in the Native Reserves had a profound impact on existing gender roles.<sup>36</sup> Women were less and less able to feed their families with what they produced on the family farms. Subsistence farm work is still generally taken as female labour in Kenya, and in pre-colonial times was one of the ways women contributed to the survival of their families. However, land became a growing problem within the confines of these reserves. As a consequence, families became increasingly dependent on the money, mostly, men were able to earn as migrant workers on, for instance, European farms. As a result, a new social value system developed that bestowed on men in particular new obligations and responsibilities. This was epitomised by the imaginary of the provider.<sup>37</sup> What this imaginary entailed in precise terms was constantly redefined in relation to ever shifting contexts, yet it continued to centre on male responsibilities. This was especially the case in the urban area, as women often continued to practise subsistence farming rurally, which shaped different notions of the provider. These changes, especially in the urban contexts, do not withstand the fact that ‘the provider’ predominantly remained a male position, including in rural contexts. Interestingly, among young, urban professional couples in Nairobi who earned comparable salaries, the male provider role continued to shape gender relations, which continues to be affirmed by both men and women.<sup>38</sup>

In struggling to live up to this masculine ideal, most young men in Mathare carried multiple burdens and tried to take care of a grandmother, a mother, several sisters, a wife and children. Labelled merely ‘dangerous criminals’ in dominant discourse, and obstructed from social and economic opportunities to establish themselves as men in society, marriage and family were often considered by them as the last domains where they could still try and claim power. Accordingly, adhering to the role of the provider was paramount among their ambitions. The epitome of the provider, which continued to be perpetuated and affirmed by both women and men within the ghetto, stood in stark contrast with the fact that most households in Mathare were actually run and provided for by women. Female sex workers founded Bondeni—and a few other localities in Mathare—during the 1930s.<sup>39</sup> In contrast to women, men who came to the city during the colonial era in search of work could often return to the rural area because they could inherit land, which women often could not. As a result, female-headed households have dominated Mathare, and especially Bondeni since the outset, and the first and second generation of female sex workers have built the illegal alcohol industry here.<sup>40</sup> Many young men in Bondeni and Kosovo worked for them, and only a few became bosses themselves. Becoming a man in these ghetto localities thus involved the relentless pursuit of unattainable ideals, and engaging in relationships with women that were irrefutably fraught with contradictions, confusion, diminishing control and concomitant anxieties.

Local networks of men, often termed ‘gangs’ in dominant discourses, provided them with access to legal and illegal social and economic opportunities and brotherhood.<sup>41</sup> The networks I worked with were involved in illegal alcohol distilling, brokering stolen goods, providing security and dealing heroin, and these rather fluid groups were often dubbed companies by their members,<sup>42</sup> see more below. These companies were one of the few spaces, in and outside the ghetto, where their members were able to enact manhood, claim status and exert some kind of power. Yet, despite the opportunities these rather fluid groups offered, they also posed an inexorable problem to their membership, for they were locally imagined as age-sets of junior manhood. Subsequently, membership was considered appropriate for men only within a certain age-bracket. The local category ‘junior man’ is a rather fluid

notion that is not based on biological age per se. This category has to be understood as a context-bound social and political position, which is loosely founded on reconfigured and mythologised notions of ‘traditional age-sets’ and generational transformations of power.<sup>43</sup>

The local discourse on manhood held that men were expected to leave these companies, and the work these were engaged in, around their early 30s to take up their role as ‘senior men’ and thus become fully recognised men and members of society. Among other things, this entailed an expectation that they were to be economically independent and act as heads of their extended families. Thus, male, junior workers were expected to gradually take up responsibilities widely associated with being the provider. Hence, the socio-economic position of these young men as workers did not correspond with hegemonic masculine ideals. These companies were imagined as an age-set that enabled young men to acquire skills and social, economic and cultural capital<sup>44</sup> to increasingly prepare for senior manhood. They were meant to help workers in eventually becoming company bosses (in alcohol distillation or dealing drugs) or otherwise independent business owners, and thus establish themselves as full providers and heads of their households. Kingi, for instance, left the company he founded while working for his grandmother (an influential alcohol boss) when he became a, rather minor, alcohol boss himself. Accordingly, leaving the company was an inherent part of becoming a fully recognised man. Yet, the blatant ramifications of protracted economic crisis obstructed many young men from garnering sufficient social and economic capital to leave the company and become independent providers; hence they became trapped in a state of ‘junior manhood’. The inability to leave and establish themselves according to popular notions of manhood exacerbated their shared sense of ‘being stuck’—or in ‘prison’ as some of these young ghetto men put it. This feeling of ‘being stuck’ resonates strongly with the conceptualisation of ‘social death’ by Vigh,<sup>45</sup> and this fear of ‘social death’ was exacerbated exponentially by the growing threat of police executions.

### **‘We men live in a warzone’**

A young drugs dealer from Mathare called Malik described how he saw his cousin chased and then killed by a policeman in July 2009:

*They [policemen] came, just like that, to get him. He ran and they chased him to St. T [near Juja road]. They forced him to kneel down. I saw him beg for his life. They just shot him through the head, executed him, from behind. It was very busy and many people were looking. That is how he died, in the line of duty.<sup>46</sup>*

The shared fears of not growing older than 25, thus never being able to achieve physical and social maturity and old age, highly affected the social praxis of, and choice-making by, many young ghetto men. All young men from Mathare I met and worked with expressed the fear brought out in the above by Kingi, of remaining the last man standing or, worse, of dying before becoming a father and a grandfather. Numerous young men told me that they desperately wanted to become a father in order to leave their mark—a ‘mini-me’—before they die. This shows that social suffering was complexly gendered in Mathare. Being a police target solely for being young men living in a Nairobi ghetto impinged heavily on their gendered senses of the self. As said, Kingi had lost 23 close friends in the span of a decade, and told me how he felt about being a young man and father in Mathare:

*I think it was 2004 and also 2008, we had mazishi [a funeral in Kiswahili] every week. But also in 2002, yes [...] it started earlier. So many of us were shot dead by karao [‘a policeman’ in Sheng], so*



*many! It is like, what? [...] you know him and him, and you work together rowe [‘at the riverside’ in the Kikuyu language, where illegal alcohol is made], and the next week he is a dead. Many guys who were in my football team, also they died. I showed you the picture. From us, only five are alive [...] Ok, some were not innocent, but they are shot dead, not brought to court. And you saw it with Kuch, it still happens. [...] All men in ghetto have been in cell, all of us, ha ha ha you are not a man if you have not been in cell. When there is a msako [‘a police raid’ in Sheng], we have to hide, they [police] can ask you to lala chini [‘lie face down on the ground’ in Sheng], they peremba [‘pickpocket’ in Sheng] you, they take your things, and when they are not happy with what they find, they can just take you to Centa [a ground in Eastleigh, a neighbourhood near Mathare, where many young men have been executed] to shoot you, just like that. We are not safe, even if we are innocent, they will shoot you. They can place a fake gun on you, and put a report that you are a thief. A thief has 40 days,<sup>47</sup> but what about me? How many days do I have? My son? Here in ghetto, we men [...] we live in a warzone.*

During a more recent conversation in May 2015, he said that it is much more frightening to raise a son than a daughter in the ghetto. Every night, he fears that his 17-year-old son might be arrested by the police, solely for being a young man in the ghetto. In early February 2016, I observed that he and his wife even locked their son inside their small house for two days when a close friend of his son was shot dead by the police at a funeral gathering. He shared: ‘You know, Victa, he is tall, handsome, and has good clothes, now he is finished school. How can a boy from the ghetto, look so good? That is what police think, he must be a [...]? A thief! So they can just shoot him, like they shot his friend.’

Ghetto men’s fear, and ensuing frustrations, sparked by a deep anxiety of never achieving senior manhood and becoming superfluous, does not only hinge on a lack of belonging within society at large and on the inability to live up to hegemonic standards of masculinity within what they term ‘their community’. The clear and present danger of being murdered by the police, voiced rather poignantly here by Kingi, informs a gendered sense of the self in which young men feel as if they stand clearly apart from other social groups, such as women, girls and older men sharing the same intersecting ethnic and socio-economic positions. Kingi stated that young men, not women, girls or even older men, ‘lived in a warzone’. Many young men from the ghetto thus feel hunted, obstructed and discriminated against.

## Representations of gangs

In the dominant discourse, the young, poor and urban men which are the focus of this article are all cast as ‘dangerous criminals’ belonging to ‘gangs’. The above shows that a different reality appears if we look more closely at the groups often referred to as ‘gangs’. Still, the term ‘gang’ and concomitant stereotypes of perpetrators of violence continue to inform narratives of threat that fall onto fertile soil among the urban middle class. This begs the questions: What was imagined as a ‘gang’ in the public domain, and why did this term justify state violence against young, male bodies?

The term ‘gang’ features regularly in media representations in Kenya, but the social phenomena it is assumed to describe are more often than not opaque, disparate and highly contradictory. For instance, this term may denote a wide range of groups such as ‘thugs for hire’, terrorists or militias—the latter are often described as ‘tribal’ groups with a purported political agenda<sup>48</sup>—or groups of ‘thugs’ who rob houses and hijack cars,<sup>49</sup> but also ‘cartells’ who control the delivery of services, such as electricity, sanitation and water, in ghetto neighbourhoods.<sup>50</sup> Obviously, this is just a sample for these lists are endless, yet it gives us an indication that the term ‘gang’ with regard to the Kenyan context means different things

in different situations and to different people. However, stating that the term is contingent, its application ambiguous and inconsistent, and that the phenomena it generally is assumed to describe are highly ephemeral, hardly does justice to the shocking reality of thousands of dead bodies killed by the police under its guise.

What is more, said media representations often explained the alleged susceptibility of young ghetto men to political manipulation by using the term 'idle'. Describing young and poor men in this way, and therefore as dangerous, is an often-heard repertoire in Kenya when it comes to explaining political violence and other social ills that are ostensibly perpetrated by young and poor men.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, most of the young men I worked with can hardly be described as idle; they woke up early to look for work (long-term arrangements) or hustling (short-term activities), and would often not return home before nine in the evening, thus spending a total of 18 h out on the street to make themselves available whenever opportunities arose. Such pervasive stereotypes, however, continue because of a lack of knowledge, even if these are to some extent informed by actualities. Some young men do participate in violence. The problem is that portrayals of violence predominantly feature groups of angry young men shouting in the street, destroying property and physically harming people.<sup>52</sup> Yet, they almost never show the women<sup>53</sup> and elders who cheer these men on and provide food and weapons, as happened during the 2007–2008 post-election violence in Mathare.<sup>54</sup>

Contrary to the 'continued existence of folk constructions of Africa',<sup>55</sup> and African men, violence is not a typically 'African' or 'male' trait, but a universal phenomenon. In the ghetto, acts of violence—such as looting, raping and killing—are remarkably commonplace, and not only involve young men. During my fieldwork, for instance, I frequently encountered mob justice, i.e. a spontaneous group of men and women killing an alleged thief with stones and fire—so called 'necklacing' using a car tyre and gasoline. This type of violence shows that young men did not have monopoly over violence. It also reveals how divided Mathare residents are in relationship to police killings. Many local residents condemn police executions of criminal suspects, especially when they target young men from Mathare who steal *outside* the ghetto, whereas others support them and consider both police executions and mob justice as effective ways to deter youth from stealing *inside* the ghetto. In some cases, local police officers have teamed up with local residents to punish youth who steal inside the ghetto.<sup>56</sup> This, however, is not a clear-cut position since distinctions between stealing inside or outside the ghetto are blurry at best. At present, tensions between different neighbourhoods in Mathare—i.e. 4B and Bondeni/Shantit—centre on exactly this issue, which is becoming more and more politicised in the run-up to the 2017 General Elections. In fact, several residents and activists I spoke with interpret the sharp increase in executions since January 2016 along these lines.

Currently, a competition of epic proportions between the main opposition party and the government is taking shape nationwide. Mathare is a highly contested constituency in Nairobi because it allegedly has a high number of voters for both sides. As in any other political battleground in Kenya, electoral candidates and their local brokers make use of local tensions in Mathare to gain support. As it happens, popular discourse holds that many victims of crime live in 4B, an alleged opposition stronghold in Mathare, whereas most perpetrators are imagined to reside in Shantit/Bondeni, purportedly a government support base in Mathare. These imaginaries also intersect with alleged ethnic identifications. Residents from 4B are mostly imagined as having Luo backgrounds, and the majority of people living in Shantit/Bondeni are widely considered to have Kikuyu backgrounds. Being for or against

police killings is thus used to mark boundaries between different neighbourhoods—i.e. the neighbourhood of ‘the perpetrators’ versus that of ‘the victims’—and between alleged ethnic identifications and concomitant political affiliations.

However, there is another layer to it. Politicians and their brokers from both sides usually work with local security groups—mostly comprising young men—to provide them with security and help mobilise voters. Such security groups in 4B are generally organised around the notion of defending their ‘village’ from the ‘criminals from the other side’—with which they mean Shantit/Bondeni. In organising security in 4B, these groups work together with local politicians and police officers. Similar groups in Shantit/Bondeni are typically organised around the notion of defending their ‘village’ against ‘attacks from the other side, the side of the informers’—with which they mean 4B. Since the expulsion of Mungiki from Bondeni in November 2006, an ongoing turf war between these politically affiliated security groups has led to frequent outbreaks of violence, especially around election time. In fact, the 2007–2008 post-election violence has to be analysed as part of this history.<sup>57</sup> Some of the abovementioned activists explained to me earlier this year that the overt support of police killings by 4B’s security groups—for instance by posting pictures of dead young men allegedly shot by the police on Facebook—should thus also be seen as attempts to intimidate and provoke their counterparts in Shantit/Bondeni during a time in which power is rapidly shifting due to election politics.

As brought out in the above, many local ‘gangs’ in Nairobi turn out to be groups organised around local notions of work, which contribute to structuring processes of becoming men.<sup>58</sup> In contrast to dominant representations of such groups, many of these networks organise access to income generating activities which they dub work if it is long-term (i.e. brokering stolen goods, providing security, dealing drugs or distilling illegal alcohol) or hustling if it is short-term (i.e. fetching water, collecting garbage, chopping firewood).<sup>59</sup> Many people in Mathare construct strict binaries, based on popular notions of respectability, between work and hustling on the one hand and crime on the other, such as stealing in and/or outside the ghetto. These notions of work, hustling and crime are thus based on dominant discourses of morality that are adapted to meet the local context. The aforementioned use of the term ‘company’ also reflects this. In contrast to the term ‘company’, ‘gang’ is a term people in Mathare often only use to describe groups of young men who steal, especially those who steal inside the ghetto. All such groups, however, often overlap and shift, making boundaries between them rather indistinct and short lived, and members of either one or the other or both—at some point in time—may belong to the same.

The *baze* is an emic term which refers to a rather fluid network of friends—generally age mates who live in the same neighbourhood, and to the particular site where they mostly hang out.<sup>60</sup> At the *baze*, they chat, smoke, drink, chew khat, gamble (using cards) and organise work, hustling and, sometimes, stealing opportunities together, and each *baze* has a particular name. Company members and young men involved in stealing can be part of the same *baze*, but not all *baze* members are company members and/or engaged in stealing. Moreover, not all *bazes* are spaces of economic activities—be it work, hustling or stealing, but all companies and groups of thieves are linked to, sometimes multiple, *bazes*. The *bazes* where I conducted my research in Bondeni and Kosovo were exclusively male, but there are also many gender-mixed or exclusively female *bazes*. In dominant imaginaries, concepts such as *baze*, company and ‘gang’ have become conflated and epitomised by the ‘thug’ personae, making all of them targets for police brutality. Yet, the rather fluid groups

belonging to the *bazes* where I conducted most of my research can perhaps best be understood as organisations of work<sup>61</sup> within the informal economy.<sup>62</sup>

### Political youth wings and vigilantes in Mathare

The majority of the current companies engaged in illegal alcohol, security provision, brokering stolen goods and/or dealing drugs in Bondeni can be traced back to the early 1990s.<sup>63</sup> Kosovo is quite a recent neighbourhood in Mathare, hence most of the local companies here have roots in other areas. Interestingly, the companies and the *bazes* to which these groups belonged in both Bondeni and Kosovo are key to understanding the rise and demise of more political groups such as Mungiki in Mathare—which also often had strong components of work in the way they were organised locally. Yet, these companies and *bazes* have received very little attention in media and academia, overshadowed as they were by the spotlight on Mungiki groups. Accordingly, media representations of Mungiki groups largely shaped the popular imaginary of the ‘gang’ in dominant discourse, and as a result the government crackdown on Mungiki also affected these highly local groups. A closer look at these groups, however, also reveals a much more complex reality. Mungiki groups were widely considered to be unique because of their strong ethnic profile, reputed cruelty and widespread power through their vigilante practices within the public transport industry.<sup>64</sup> Yet, these features were not exactly new to groups in these ghettos.

Kenya African National Union (KANU) youth wingers have been active in Mathare ever since independence in 1963 but grew to full power during the 1980s. The dominant, and later only, political party KANU deployed young men and women in ghettos like Mathare, and in many rural areas, since the 1960s. Their job in Mathare, for instance, was to arrest and to discipline petty thieves and *chang’aa*—i.e. illegal alcohol distillers, sellers and customers—and to report cases of domestic violence and other neighbourhood disturbances to the local chief.<sup>65</sup> Also, these groups claimed control of bus stations and routes in poorer regions of Nairobi and environs. Hence, the youth wingers exacted fees for security from drivers and conductors years before Mungiki groups took over this industry between 2002 and 2007. Many KANU youth wingers were also involved in illegal activities, blurring an already thin line between state authority and criminal activities in Mathare. A more recent phenomenon, branded ‘vigilantism’ in dominant discourses,<sup>66</sup> saw the rise of groups—including both young men and women—that were in charge of security, for a fee, and that worked in conjunction with the local government authorities—be it the local branch of the main political party or the local chief. These security groups were often also involved in so-called illegal economic activities in Nairobi ghettos such as stealing, dealing drugs and brokering stolen goods.

In earlier times, all these groups mostly had multiple ethnic backgrounds, yet during the 1990s similar vigilante-cum-political groups emerged that had particular ethnic profiles. The return of multi-party politics, from 1991 onwards, opened up a political space marked by intense electoral competition. Local political leaders of emerging oppositional political parties followed KANU’s example and also established youth wings in Mathare and in other Nairobi ghettos—or armies, *jeshi* in Kiswahili, as they were dubbed locally. These ‘armies’ carried names such as *Baghdad Boys* and *Jeshi la Embakasi*,<sup>67</sup> and many—though not all—of these groups had members who had ethnic backgrounds similar to that of the politician with whom they were affiliated. These groups assisted their *godfathers*—‘Big Man or Woman’ in

Sheng—in politics, by mobilising crowds at rallies, disrupting rallies of opponents and using general intimidation tactics during elections. Many established themselves as vigilantes—i.e. security guards—in ghettos like Mathare for a fee.<sup>68</sup> Similar to their predecessors, these groups were also involved in hijacking cars, armed robbery, dealing drugs, distilling illegal alcohol and brokering stolen goods. If all this was already going on, what then changed in 2002 that sparked a sharp increase in unlawful killings by the police?

### **The rise and fall of Mungiki groups in Mathare between 2002 and 2008**

The year 2002 marked the emergence of Mungiki groups in many Eastlands ghettos in Nairobi, such as Mathare, though they had existed long before this date. Between 2002 and 2008, Mathare residents on multiple occasions described—and a few showed me—a ground called Centa in Eastleigh, just across from the ghetto alongside Juja road. They told me that criminal and Mungiki suspects—often imagined as one and the same—were executed here after being arrested by the police during night raids. This ground was a football field during the day, but functioned as an execution ground at night, and many Mathare residents I spoke with told me they had lost relatives and friends here. Others had been executed in City Park or in Karura forest. I have also talked to several suspected Mungiki members who survived what they termed ‘death trips’ to Karura forest and who had witnessed the murder of friends at first hand. Not all young ghetto men who were executed were killed at night and out of sight. Others, like Silas and his two friends in the vignette at the beginning of this article, were murdered by the police during the day and in plain sight of everyone nearby.

A particularly violent conflict between Mungiki and another group called the Taliban,<sup>69</sup> resulting in the death of more than 20 people and many more injured, spurred the Kenyan government to outlaw a disparate array of groups in March 2002.<sup>70</sup> It was unclear why certain groups were included in this list and what the exact legal status was of the ban (and consecutive bans in more recent years), but many ghetto residents referred to this announcement as the start of the increase in unlawful killings of young ghetto men by the police. This conflict had been more violent than previous ones, but the number of deaths was not the main reason these and other groups were banned and unlawful killings of young ghetto men increased. What was so exceptional about Mungiki to spark an increase in such executions by the police? To answer this question, we first need to look at the emergence of Mungiki groups in Mathare.

Mungiki groups gradually emerged in Mathare during the late 1990s, first apparently more as religious oriented groups and later more as vigilante groups with protection rackets and –highly shifting– local and national political affiliations.<sup>71</sup> Around 2000, these groups started to fight the Taliban over control of public transport routes in Eastlands Nairobi.<sup>72</sup> All these groups had a strong Kikuyu profile and were somehow linked to the national Mungiki movement.<sup>73</sup> This movement was allegedly founded during the late 1980s, and was geared towards protecting the squatter communities with Kikuyu backgrounds during the clashes in Rift Valley Province that were instigated by the Moi Government during the 1990s. These clashes were aimed at ousting inhabitants with Kikuyu backgrounds, and hence ostensible opposition voters, from its strongholds.<sup>74</sup> The violence brought about an influx of refugees, with mainly Kikuyu backgrounds, to poor urban areas such as Mathare in Nairobi, and with them came Mungiki members who then later established groups of their own in this ghetto. The Mungiki movement allegedly had ties to highly-placed politicians, mainly with

Kikuyu backgrounds, and also earned money through revenues from the many Mungiki groups operating in Nairobi ghettos, along certain public transport routes and, later, also in a few rural areas.<sup>75</sup>

Within a few years the local Mungiki groups controlled half of the Mathare ghetto.<sup>76</sup> These local Mungiki groups exacted taxes for public transport, for the right to distil illegal alcohol, for security, electricity, and even for access to sanitation. In contrast to the dominant perception at the time, however, the Mungiki groups were not such a unique phenomenon in Mathare or in other Nairobi ghettos. As said, vigilante groups, even with very specific ethnic profiles, had existed before in Mathare and in other ghettos, but one of the reasons why Mungiki groups received a lot of attention, from media and academics alike, had to do with the sudden ubiquity of Mungiki groups in Nairobi. Most Kenyans were taken by surprise at how quickly these groups spread, and how powerful they were.

Malik recounted in August 2008: ‘They came from outside. Mungiki brought security, they killed the big thugs, then other thugs they joined them, we had fear’. He narrated this to me a year after Mungiki had been expelled in Kosovo. This and the fact that he was talking to me, a white, older woman—even though he knew me very well—decidedly informed his attempt to distance himself from those who fully joined Mungiki, interestingly, by using the term ‘thug’. Malik had never fully joined out of fear, but he had worked closely with Mungiki, and many of his friends from the same company and *baze* had indeed joined as full members. He shared with me that Mungiki groups could not have emerged in Bondeni, and later in Kosovo, without collaborations with local companies. Many company members even shifted temporarily to join Mungiki because of the different opportunities these groups offered—not just related to economic activities but also to a sense of belonging. Interestingly, most companies in Bondeni and Kosovo continued to exist, and after the demise of the Mungiki groups former company members returned to their previous company for work. I observed the same during the rise and fall of a Taliban group in a part of Bondeni between January 2008 and late 2009. From a local perspective, companies turned out to be crucial in understanding how and why Mungiki, Taliban and other political groups came and went. I explore this further in my other work,<sup>77</sup> but for now it must suffice to state that the interactions between Mungiki groups and local companies led to their conflation in dominant discourses, which further legitimised police persecution of young ghetto men in general.

Today, Mungiki groups are pushed back to the fringes of everyday urban politics and economy, not completely eradicated but also not the force they once were. The Mungiki groups could not have taken control of entire ghetto areas, matatu routes and so on without powerful political backing, hence their demise has to be also understood as a direct consequence of a dramatic shift in this backing.<sup>78</sup> During the violent crackdown on Mungiki, the government threw a wide net and also killed many young men who were not even remotely involved with Mungiki. It is not hard to imagine that the same is taking place in relationship to the more contemporary executions of terrorist suspects. Having said this, executions of crime suspects cannot only be explained in connection to these broader dynamics. The above has shown that these executions also relate to local processes of security, crime and politics, which need further exploration, as these seem to be intensifying now in the run-up to the 2017 General Elections. Above all, the structural killings of criminal suspects continue to be legitimised by the ‘othering’<sup>79</sup> of young ghetto men as ‘thugs’, which is one of the processes of subjectivation at the heart of the dominant discourse on citizenship.

## Mathare is not Kenya

As came out in the above, young ghetto men were cast as ‘dangerous gangsters’, as ‘thugs for hire’<sup>80</sup> and as figureheads in political struggles within the dominant discourse on citizenship, and as such as non-citizens. Popular notions of belonging, central to the dominant discourse on citizenship,<sup>81</sup> inform these modes of ‘othering’. With regard to citizenship here I mean who is imagined to belong to the Kenyan nation and who does not according to widely held perceptions and experiences. This notion of citizenship goes beyond legal status and aims to identify the differentiated access of particular social groups to civil rights and opportunities. Citizenship in Kenya remains defined by specific (time and space bound) power configurations based on age, gender, class, ethnic and local positions. Articulations of such intersected belongings in the dominant discourse on citizenship in Kenya continue to be shaped by the remnants of colonial assignations.<sup>82</sup> Ensuing processes of subjectivation set in motion different trajectories of access to resources and (state) power in post-colonial Kenya, and laid the foundations for current social divisions in Kenyan society.<sup>83</sup> The mainstay of the dominant discourse on citizenship is the simultaneous configuration of the dominant position of men over women, and wealthy older urban men over poor younger and/or urban men.<sup>84</sup>

Imagining young and poor urban men as ‘dangerous criminals’ and as a ‘threat to public safety’ has been part of discourses on citizenship since the colonial era. For instance, during the time of emergency, between 1952 and 1958, one of the colonial framings of Mau Mau pointed at the danger of reckless young men (imagined as having predominantly Kikuyu backgrounds) who defied their own older and more moderate leaders.<sup>85</sup> Since the colonial era, young poor men, especially within urban areas such as Mathare, continued to be described, by media and politicians, as a threat to the current leadership and overall stability. An interesting historical continuity can be detected here. Mathare as a location of urban Mau Mau resistance during the 1950s was imagined as a criminal hub, a perception which resonates with today’s notion of the ghetto. The continued spatial ‘othering’ of Mathare became ever more epitomised by the othering of, particularly, young men living here in recent years. This and other processes of othering—of women, of Muslims, of Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay and Transgender persons, of Kenyan Asians, of specific ethnic groups, etc.<sup>86</sup>—are central to conjuring up the Kenyan nation state and serve to legitimise the concentration of power in the hands of a small, ageing and predominantly male elite.

The above has demonstrated that young ghetto men have become the embodiment of the ‘thug’ in master narratives of threat. As such, killing young, poor ghetto men became increasingly conceptualised as ‘protecting us from them’, and marks out who belongs to the Kenyan nation and who does not in the most physical and brutal sense of the word. Yet, the concomitantly skewed representations of acts of violence by young ghetto men obscures the fact that despite such stereotypes many young ghetto men are victims instead of perpetrators of violence. Moreover, it omits the everyday violence of poverty, exclusion, police brutality and humiliation from which direct acts of violence emerge.<sup>87</sup> This demonstrates that, along with ethnicity and gender, three other key markers of subjectivation play a significant role in the dominant discourse on citizenship: class, age and locality. These young ghetto men thus mark the unstable and highly contested boundaries of citizenship, national identification and belonging,<sup>88</sup> that continue to be marked—albeit in constantly shifting ethnic configurations—by ‘Big Men’. Within this still predominantly patriarchal system, these

young men are violently exploited, oppressed and confined to the ghetto. Thus, the system works to affirm the power of the political and business elites.

In response to being targets of extra-judicial killings by the police, many young men in Mathare imagine themselves as *not* belonging to the Kenyan nation, but only to the ghetto—*mtaa* in Sheng. A website made by a young man from Mathare that is called *Mathare sio Kenya*—which means ‘Mathare is not Kenya’ in Kiswahili—expresses this position quite strikingly. In such imaginaries, this urban locality stands in stark contrast to the ‘city’—*tao* in Sheng—with which they mean Nairobi city centre. Some even voice this sense of belonging to the ghetto and not to the nation state as ‘ghetto pride’. Taken in the dominant discourse as criminals who threaten the nation and deserve to be killed, these young men flip the meaning of non-citizenship to claim the moral upper hand. Instead of perpetrators, they take themselves and fellow ghetto residents to be victims of abusive authorities, and they take great pride in protecting ‘their community’ against such a predatory state. Nevertheless, this sense of pride does not withstand a continued longing shared by many young ghetto men to also belong to the Kenyan nation state and access related rights and opportunities.

## Conclusion

This article explored the relationship between citizenship and police violence, particularly extra-judicial killings, with regard to young ghetto men in Mathare, a Nairobi ghetto. It first brought out the different groups of victims of most extra-judicial killings in Kenya over the past decade, i.e. Mungiki, terrorist and crime suspects, and discussed why especially police executions of crime suspects largely go unnoticed. The above has demonstrated that this, to a large extent, is tied to the way young ghetto men are imagined in dominant narratives of threat. Such imaginaries have informed the ‘normalisation’ of these executions in the everyday, which is evidenced by the lack of protest among the wider public. These men have become the embodiment of the ‘thug’ and as such are cast as a ‘threat to public safety’. Hence, killing ‘them’ became ever more imagined as protecting ‘us’, which highlights how such narratives of threat and concomitant processes of ‘othering’ shape, and are shaped by, processes of subjectivation within the dominant discourse on citizenship. Imagining these young ghetto men as ‘them’ and thus ultimately as non-citizens served to legitimise their killings by the police, allowing such executions to continue to the date of writing this article. Thus, the dominant discourse on citizenship produces the subject position of ‘thug as non-citizen’ which is ascribed to all young ghetto men, a process that is brutally affirmed by the act of killing them.

The young ghetto men I conducted research with tried to resist the allotted subject position of the ‘thug’ by attempting to adhere to ideal notions of manhood, such as the provider, and by constructing a position of ‘ghetto pride’. Taking a closer look at how these men negotiated such positions in extremely dire everyday circumstances also revealed the very different roles of groups that are often referred to as ‘gangs’ in dominant discourses. Away from such stereotypes, many of these groups turn out to be organised around local notions of work and hustling, and enable these men to achieve positions of manhood, even if rather fleetingly. As discussed, sensational media representations of Mungiki have significantly informed the imaginary of the ‘thug’. However, the above showed that similar to local companies Mungiki and Taliban groups too can be understood as organisations of work and opportunities—including a sense of belonging, even if this does not completely grasp



all of the complexities involved. It is, thus, interesting to consider that, taking into account the long history of local groups with comparable characteristics, Mungiki groups—and to some extent also Taliban groups—were not as unique as often portrayed. Also, the fact that many local companies and individual company members temporarily joined such groups, to access the myriad opportunities these groups offered, helps us to further understand these groups in a different light. Alongside highly shifting political affiliations and junctures of violence, this understanding connects groups like Mungiki to the economic dynamics that gave rise to the local companies—which often also have local political affiliations of their own. Indeed, this may provide new avenues to further explore many of the groups popularly imagined as ‘gangs’ as self-organisations within the informal economy.

## Notes

1. Personal notes based on reports from eyewitnesses, 18–23 October 2013.
2. Tom Mboya, ‘Kenya: Death Squads Still at Work Inside Police.’ *The Star*, 26 March 2011.
3. There is quite some documentation that so called ‘death squads’ are operative in Kenya. See for instance: Alston, ‘Report of the Special Rapporteur’, on the KweKwe squad, and Vikram Dodd, ‘Britain Accused of Complicity in Kenyan Death Squad Terrorism Suspect Killings.’ *The Guardian*, 7 December 2014.
4. For more information on their courageous work please visit: <https://matharesocialjusticecentre.wordpress.com>
5. Most Mathare residents, especially those under 40, preferred the term ghetto to slum or informal settlement, because of the derogatory connotations the latter had in their eyes. The other word many residents use is *mtaa*, a Swahili word for neighbourhood but which translates to ghetto in Sheng. Sheng is an abbreviation that stands for **Swahili** and **English**, and this is a very dynamic creole language spoken in most urban centres and among most young people in East Africa. In this article, I adopt the popular usage of the word ghetto to refer to informal neighbourhoods; these are residential areas that are not state-planned and, thus, lack any government services. Their use of the term ghetto has been inspired by Hip Hop, especially by TuPac, during the 1990s, and later by Dance Hall music (by artists like Vibz Kartel and Mavado).
6. These data, though obtained from and verified by different protected sources in Mathare between 2013 and 2015, are not based on systematic data collection because this is far too dangerous. Also, it is only focussed on young men because the activists I work with deem their killings to be one of the most underexplored but poignant social injustices. As such, these figures may not cover all murders by police in Mathare. Every time a killing occurred, usually overnight, I would receive messages the next morning from different sources to inform me. It is hardly a reliable or verifiable way of collecting data, but it does give an impression of the sheer quantity.
7. I have done research and worked in Mathare since 1998, hence I have been able to establish long-term friendships and relationships of trust with many local residents, especially in Bondeni and Kosovo. I conducted 17 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Kenya for my PhD research on which this article is based, spread out over five years and covering two election cycles (2007–2013 general elections). Since 2013, I have continued research in different ghettos in Nairobi, including Korogocho, Mukuru and low-income areas such as Huruma, Eastleigh and Kariobangi. I also have included some of the data from more recent research in my analyses. I combined historical and anthropological (ethnographic) methods, scholarly literature reviews, and newspaper and other written-source analyses with up-close participant observation, focus group discussions and interviews. I held contextual interviews with government officials, aid workers, church officials, NGO workers, teachers and local residents. However, I mostly worked with two so-called companies (engaged in illegal alcohol and drugs, mostly) in two separate parts of Mathare, i.e. Bondeni/Shantit and

Kosovo, and conducted multiple interviews with over 40 members. I also organised 19 focus group discussions with around 20 participants (their attendance varied somewhat), and 12 focus group discussions with women who worked as sex workers at the bars frequented by the men I worked with, some of whom were their girlfriends or family members. I have also interviewed the wives, mothers, grandmothers, other relatives, former company members and current friends of my main research participants.

8. Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', 212.
9. Kiai, *Extrajudicial Killings in Kenya*.
10. Olive Burrows, 'EU Decries Rise in Extra-judicial Killings in Kenya'. *Capital FM*, 6 October 2013. Available at: <http://www.capitalfm.co.ke/news/2013/10/eu-decries-rise-in-extra-judicial-killings-in-kenya/> [Accessed 31 May 2016].
11. Oscar Foundation, *The Veil of Impunity*; Alston, 'Report of the Special Rapporteur'; Probert, *Unlawful Killings in Africa*.
12. Personal observations during regular periods of fieldwork between 2002 and 2008.
13. KNCHR, *The Error of Fighting Terror*; Okech, 'Asymmetrical Conflict and Human Security'; Clar Ni Chonghaile, 'Kenyan Muslims Fear the Worst over Proposals to Boost Police Powers'. *The Guardian*, 27 September 2012.
14. Oscar Foundation, *The Veil of Impunity*; Alston, 'Report of the Special Rapporteur'; KNCHR, *The Cry of Blood*.
15. KNCHR, *The Cry of Blood*; MUHURI and OSI, *We're Tired of Taking*; Maalik, 'Somalia: Extra Judicial Killings'; Faalada Warka, 'Kenyan Counter-Terrorism Police Confess to Extrajudicial Killings Kenya'. *Al-Jazeera Investigates*, 8 December 2014.
16. IMLU, *Report on Deaths*.
17. For more information on inconsistent reporting by the Independent Police Oversight Authority—IPOA, see: Osse, 'Police Reform in Kenya', 8.
18. The question, however, remains why these human rights organisations do not mention in their reports that they are aware that their totals are just a fraction of the actual number of people killed by the police each year.
19. Xan Rice, 'Two Kenyan Rights Activists Shot Dead'. *The Guardian*, 6 March 2009.
20. Felix Olick, 'NGOs Targeted over ICC and Police Killings'. *The Star*, 19 December 2014.
21. Oscar Foundation, *The Veil of Impunity*; Alston, 'Report of the Special Rapporteur'.
22. KNCHR, *The Cry of Blood*; Waki Report, *Commission of Inquiry*.
23. Osse, 'Police Reform in Kenya'.
24. Laban Wanambisi, 'Kavuludi Commission Bad for Police—Nkaissery'. *Capital FM*, 28 December 2014. Available at: <http://www.capitalfm.co.ke/news/2014/12/kavuludi-commission-bad-for-police-nkaissery/> [Accessed 31 May 2016].
25. Amnesty International, *Police Reform in Kenya*; ICPC, *Position Paper on Security Sector Reform*; UNODC, 'UNODC Launches Police Reform Project'.
26. Amnesty International, *Somalis are Scapegoats*.
27. Data obtained from protected sources in Mathare, May 2014.
28. BBC, 'Fury at Kenya Shoot-to-Kill Order', 23 March 2005. Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4374649.stm> [Accessed 3 May 2016]; Star Editor, 'Kenya: Shoot-to-Kill Due to Police Laziness'. *The Star*, 10 September 2014; Stanley Mwahanga, 'Police Issue Shoot to Kill Order on Terrorism Suspects'. *Standard Digital*, 26 March 2014. Available at: <http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/thecounties/article/2000107870/police-issue-shoot-to-kill-order-on-terrorism-suspects> [Accessed 15 November 2015]; Sarah Mc Gregor, 'Kenyan Police Using Shoot-to-Kill Strategy to Fight Islamists'. *Bloomberg News*, 20 October 2014. Available at: <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-10-20/kenya-police-said-to-use-shoot-to-kill-policy-to-fight-islamists.html> [Accessed 8 November 2014].
29. Osse, 'Police reform in Kenya', 10.
30. Osse, 'Police reform in Kenya'; Ransley Commission, *Report of the National Task Force*; Abdullahi Boru Halakhe, 'Is Kenya's Heavy-Handed Response to Security Threats Justifiable?'. *Al Jazeera English*, 4 April 2014.

31. Fred Mukinda, 'Police Get Green Light to Shoot When Threatened'. *The Daily Nation*, 18 August 2013.
32. See endnote 6.
33. Lindsay and Miescher, *Men and Masculinities*, 5. I take manhood to include localised notions of what it means to be a physically mature man (such as being circumcised). For my research participants, it denoted a desired status that was marked by the transition from 'boy' to 'junior' and, eventually, to 'senior'. Masculinity refers to 'a cluster of norms, values, and behavioural patterns expressing explicit and implicit expectations of how men should act and represent themselves to others' (Connell, *Masculinities*). The 'hierarchy of masculinities' indicates that not all notions of masculinity have equal power and legitimacy in society. At the same time, shifting dominant masculinities govern different spaces and are often in competition with each other.
34. I would like to refer interested readers to the following authors for excellent research on young and poor men in sub-Saharan Africa: Shefer et al., *From Boys to Men*; Morrell, *Changing Men in South Africa*; Morrell 'Youth, Fathers and Masculinity'; Ouzgane and Morell, *African Masculinities*; Richter and Morrell, *Baba: Men and Fatherhood*; Lindsay and Miescher, *Men and Masculinities*; Gibson and Hardon, *Rethinking Masculinities*; Vigh, *Navigating Terrains of War*; Silberschmidt, *Women Forget*; Mwangi, 'Masculinity and Nationalism'; Uchendu, 'Masculinity and Nigerian Youths'; and Ako-Nai *Gender and Power Relations*. This list is of course not all-inclusive, but I hope to have at least given an impression of this fascinating and growing body of work.
35. See also: Silberschmidt, 'Men, Male Sexuality and HIV/AIDS', 45–47, 51; Silberschmidt, 'Disempowerment of Men'; Hunter, 'Fathers without *Amandla*', 102; Lindsay and Miescher, *Men and Masculinities*, 20.
36. Silberschmidt, *Women Forget*, 48.
37. *Ibid.*, 49.
38. Spronk, *Ambiguous Pleasures*, 62, 266, footnote 17.
39. White, *The Comforts of Home*, 195.
40. Van Stapele, 'Respectable Illegality'. I refer to the women and men who gave the company members assignments to distil and smuggle illegal alcohol—or sell heroin—as 'bosses'. The company workers refer to these people as *masonko* or *wadosi* (both of which mean 'bosses' in Sheng). During the time of my research, between 2007 and 2013, a majority of the alcohol and drugs bosses were still women and their dominance emanated from the history of sex work in this part of the ghetto. As the numbers of the older generation of women who have controlled the alcohol industry since its onset gradually decline, more and more men (many of whom are descendants or other relatives of these women) are becoming bosses. In both industries (alcohol and heroin), the bulk of the business continues to be controlled by a few families who have both male and female members working as bosses. So, one company may have a grandmother, a mother and a daughter from the same family as a boss, with sons and uncles starting to join their ranks in more recent times. Previously, male relatives were mostly employed to distil the alcohol, but as some family businesses grew, these men also started to take on positions as bosses.
41. Ethnographic studies on, and the corresponding theoretical interpretations of, gangs in sub-Saharan African countries, other than South Africa and Nigeria—such as Kynoch, *A History of the Marashea Gangs*; Harnischfeger, 'The Bakassi Boys'—are still rather rare. Gangs in most African cities are, more often than not, excluded from the considerations of such groups within a global framework. See for instance: Hagedorn, 'Gangs, Institutions, Race and Space'; Hagedorn, *A World of Gangs*. Gang Studies is a body of work that is still dominated by studies on gangs in the Americas, with the exception of gang studies such as *Global Gangs* edited by Rodgers and Hazen; and Covey, *Street Gangs Throughout the World*. For more examples of interesting literature on gangs in different African countries, see: Jensen, *Gangs, Politics and Dignity*; Salo, 'Mans is Ma Soe'; Kinnes, *From Urban Street Gangs*; Glaser, *Bo-tsotsi*.
42. Hagedorn, 'Gangs, Institutions, Race and Space', 301. Like their American counterparts, these young men often shunned the term gang in their self-definitions given its negative overtones in

dominant discourses. See for examples of discursive framings of the term gang and equivalents: Philip Mwakio and Stanley Mwachanga, 'MRC, Tribal Gangs Target Police at Coast'. *Standard Media*, 30 March 2013. Available at: [https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/?articleID=2000080427&story\\_title=-MRC,-tribal-gangs-target-police-at-Coast](https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/?articleID=2000080427&story_title=-MRC,-tribal-gangs-target-police-at-Coast) [Accessed 15 November 2015]; C. Ombati, 'Thugs Attack IEBC Office, Steal BVR Machine'. *Standard Media*, 16 March 2013. Available at: <http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/?articleID=2000079434> [Accessed 15 November 2015]; M. Kamau, 'Cartels Mint Billions from Electricity Black Market'. *Standard Media*, 31 March 2013. Available at: [http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/?articleID=2000080485&story\\_title=Cartels-mint-billions-from-electricity-black-market](http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/?articleID=2000080485&story_title=Cartels-mint-billions-from-electricity-black-market) [Accessed 15 November 2015].

43. See also: Uzoigwe, 'The Warrior and the State', 36; Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, 196; Lonsdale, 'The Moral Economy', 344–350.
44. See also Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital'.
45. Vigh, *Navigating Terrains of War*, 240. See also: Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*; Salo, 'Mans is Ma Soe'.
46. In response to the systematic executions of their peers, many young men began to refer to their murdered friends as 'fallen soldiers' who died in 'the line of duty'. Such idioms were intertextual references to similar phrasings and themes in contemporary Hip Hop and Dance Hall lyrics.
47. 'A thief has 40 days' is direct translation of a Swahili proverb: *Siku za mwizi ni arobaini*, which means that a thief will eventually always get caught.
48. Mwakio and Mwachanga, 'MRC, Tribal Gangs Target Police'.
49. Ombati, 'Thugs Attack IEBC Office'.
50. Kamau, 'Cartels Mint Billions'.
51. See for instance: Wamucii and Idwasi, 'Social Security, Youth, and Development'; Were, *Drivers of Violence*.
52. See for instance: Ombati, 'Thugs Attack IEBC Office'.
53. Kihato, 'Go Back and Tell Them'.
54. Van Stapele, 'Respectable Illegality'.
55. Bay, 'Introduction', 3.
56. Personal conversations with activists, January 2016.
57. Van Stapele, 'Respectable Illegality'.
58. Ibid.
59. See also: Thieme, 'The "Hustle" Amongst Youth Entrepreneurs'.
60. Githinji, 'Bazes and Their Shibboleths'.
61. Sassen, 'The Global City', 98. Taking alleged criminal activity as work is not uncommon in so-called illegal economies, and participants often evince the same motivations as workers in the so-called legal economy. Previous research has shown that, upon close scrutiny, purported contrasts between legal and illegal and formal and informal economies are problematic at best. See also: Wacquant, 'Scrutinizing the Street'; Bourgois, *In Search of Respect*; Fagan and Freeman, 'Crime and Work'. Contrary to common perception, economic activities that are generally considered to be illegal may in fact make a sizeable contribution to recognised economies, and uncoupling one from the other seems to be impossible. Yet such notions of legality and illegality stubbornly prevail in dominant discourses in Kenya and elsewhere. See also: Roitman, 'The Ethics of Illegality', 249. However, the prevailing notions on what is legal in Kenya did not coincide with local perceptions of licit and illicit practices in Mathare, such as the popular distinctions between work and crime aptly demonstrate.
62. This understanding of gangs has been widely researched in gang studies, especially in the USA, for instance by: Hagedorn, 'Gangs and the Informal Economy'.
63. Van Stapele, 'Respectable Illegality'.
64. Anderson, 'Vigilantes, Violence and the Politics'; Kagwanja, 'Facing Mount Kenya'; Kagwanja, 'Power to Uhuru'; Wamue, 'Revisiting our Indigenous Shrines'.
65. Mwangola, 'Leaders of Tomorrow?'.
66. Anderson, 'Vigilantes, Violence and the Politics'.
67. Ibid.

68. Ibid; Mwangola, 'Leaders of Tomorrow?'; Wa Mungai, 'Identity Politics in Matatu Folklore'.
69. Maupeu, 'Physiologie d'un massacre.' The Taliban had no relation to the Afghan Taliban, and did not follow religious ideologies. The name Taliban was in fact a pun, and referred to how many poor people with a Luo background compared their level of hardship to that of the Afghan Taliban whom they saw as trying to resist American occupation with crude weapons such as stones. Before the name Taliban came into vogue, some groups of young men, often Big Men's armies, with a Luo background called themselves *Baghdad Boys* or *Palestinians* for similar reasons. See also: L. Opala, 'The Shadowy World of Mungiki'. *The Daily Nation*, 24 April 2000. In the late 1990s, a group calling itself the Taliban emerged in Kariobangi where it managed a public transport route to the city centre. The expansion of Taliban groups with a Luo profile in Mathare was prompted by the rise of Mungiki groups.
70. Anderson, 'Vigilantes, Violence and the Politics'.
71. Ruteere, *Dilemmas of Crime*. For instance, President Moi ordered a crackdown on the Mungiki movement in 2000, and meetings of its members were sometimes dispersed with violence by the police, while at other times the police seemed curiously reluctant to interfere. The relationship between the Moi Government and the Mungiki changed in August 2002. The Kenyan public was shocked to see the movement demonstrate on Nairobi's streets in support of Moi's 'chosen heir', Uhuru Kenyatta (Kagwanja, 'Facing Mount Kenya'; and Kagwanja 'Power to Uhuru'). I would like to refer interested readers to an excellent and insightful report on this shift within the Mungiki movement by Kannevorff, 'These Dreadlocked Gangsters'.
72. Rasmussen, 'Inside the System'.
73. Kagwanja, 'Facing Mount Kenya'; Kagwanja, 'Power to Uhuru'; Wamue, 'Revisiting our Indigenous Shrines'; Anderson, 'Vigilantes, Violence and the Politics'. The Mungiki movement is a national movement that operates through local cells that I term groups. It has, often intermittently, been described as a Kikuyu revivalist group, for example by Wamue, and as an urban vigilante group with a strong ethnic profile, for instance by Anderson. Strong resemblances with the *Hema ya Ngai wi Mwoyo* ('Tent of the Living God' in the Kikuyu language) and *Thaay* or sometimes *Thaayo* ('peace' in the Kikuyu language), which are both famous Kikuyu religious organisations in Kenya, suggest a connection with them, at least during the movement's emergence. Other myths of origin link the founding of the Mungiki movement to a group of old Mau Mau fighters in the Rift Valley Province, who called upon a group of 'grandsons'—a younger generation of men with Kikuyu backgrounds—to continue to fight for independence because the objectives thereof, such as land, had not yet been achieved. There is probably truth in both of these stories. Many narratives also connect the Mungiki movement to different politicians, but these links probably developed at a later stage.
74. Rutten and Owuor, 'Weapons of Mass Destruction', 314; Akiwumi Report, *Report of the Judicial Commission*.
75. Rasmussen, 'Mungiki as Youth Movement'; Rasmussen, 'Inside the System'; Frederiksen, 'Mungiki, Vernacular Organization'; Kagwanja, 'Power to Uhuru'.
76. The strong Kikuyu profile of the Mungiki groups intensified the ethnic dimensions of already existing socio-economic fault lines in Mathare. Young men recruited by the Mungiki groups began to identify and position themselves as Kikuyu (even if they had multiple and/or even different ethnic backgrounds). Specific ethnic identifications increasingly determined access to opportunities provided by these groups, and triggered growing resentment among young men who felt more and more excluded, especially those with Luo backgrounds. In response, they joined the growing number of Taliban groups. The local Mungiki groups were, however, far more powerful than the Taliban groups. Both the national media and the Mungiki leadership itself even estimated its membership during the late 1990s and early 2000s at 1.5 million or even higher (Wamue, 'Revisiting our Indigenous Shrines', 454). This is an unlikely high number. Even if exaggerated for reasons of sensationalism (in the case of the press) and propaganda (in the case of the Mungiki leadership), Mungiki groups were a force to be reckoned with in local and national politics, especially between 2002 and 2006.
77. Van Stapele, 'Respectable Illegality'.
78. Lindijer, 'Kenya has Become a "Bandit Economy"'

79. Said, *Orientalism*; Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak*; Morris, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*.
80. See for example: Branch and Cheeseman, 'Democratization, Sequencing and State Failure'.
81. Geschiere, *The Perils of Belonging*.
82. Rutten and Owuor, 'Weapons of Mass Destruction', 306–312. See also: Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 86.
83. Lonsdale, 'Kenya: Ethnicity, Tribe and State'; Lonsdale, 'Soil, Work, Civilisation and Citizenship'.
84. Barker and Ricardo, *Young Men*; Silberschmidt, 'Men, Male Sexuality and HIV/AIDS'. Rural men feature less and less in the imaginary central to constructions of citizenship—except when the 'rural Luo boy' as a representation of unfit leadership is invoked in political polemics.
85. Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*; Odhiambo and Lonsdale, *Mau Mau and Nationhood*; Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*.
86. In their project of nation-building, successive Kenyan governments have instigated different processes of 'othering' based on (intersectionalities between) ethnicity, gender, age, class, locality and so on. The pervasive 'othering' of young poor men is just one of them.
87. Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, *Violence in War and Peace*.
88. See also Willemse, 'The Darfur War', 226–227.

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## Notes on contributor

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