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# Postcolonial Culture in Nairobi's Margins 1963-c.1982

Daniel Heathcote

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in history.  
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Many able-bodied people come to town and spend many months living on relatives and friends, and being generally a nuisance. Such people distort the purchasing power of their relatives and friends making them poorer and miserable, and also interfere with the social plans and provisions for the genuine residents of the towns. This is a clear waste of manpower, and a definite obstacle to proper farming for the future. Any able-bodied man who exploits his relatives and friends in this manner is a disgrace to his manhood and our society.

Jomo Kenyatta, "Back to the Land", 11<sup>th</sup> September 1964

Jomo Kenyatta, "Back to the land – 1964," in *Suffering without Bitterness: The Founding of the Kenya Nation* (Nairobi, Kenya: East African Publishing House, 1968), 233-234.

People think and say that we people from town are thieves and some say that we know or we are more civilised than them. They speak of the people but not of the city. They say that they are lazy and clean. They should say that [Nairobi] is the most poor area in the country. Although people there earn a lot.

Anne Wanjiru, Unemployed Resident of Mji wa Huruma, Nairobi, 16<sup>th</sup> February 1970

Interviewed by Dominic Waweru, 16/2/70, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37, Study of Problems faced by Nairobi Youths.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself. Except where stated by reference or acknowledgement, the work presented is entirely my own. It has not been submitted in any previous application for a degree.

Signed:

Daniel Heathcote, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2024

## Abstract

This thesis argues that there was a standoff between elite political culture and popular culture in early postcolonial Nairobi. The hegemonic vision espoused by elite historical actors was negotiated, contested, and challenged by ordinary urban citizens. This alternate reading of Kenya's postcolonial history is made possible by using sources that allow a history-from-below methodology. Thus, my work contributes to the social and cultural histories of Kenya by exploring countercultural movements, groups, and practices that existed in the city during the early postcolonial period. By using sources such as oral history records, newspapers, tourist guidebooks, music, and novels, my work explores the complexity of Nairobi's popular cultures during the early postcolonial era. An image emerges of a globally connected Nairobi where cultural practices and political visions are observed to have continuity both regionally and globally. By looking at the postcolonial history of Kenya through the lens of a globalising city, continuity across the region and across networks can be seen in political cultures, consumption habits, and cultural practices.

Further, I reflect on the importance of global patterns of consumption and their pivotal importance in the formation of urban subcultures and identities. While it is crucial to this thesis to conceptualise Nairobi as tightly integrated within a network of intra-East-African thoughts, practices, and cultures, it invites a perspective that considers urban Kenyans as global consumers. I emphasise the importance of global consumption habits upon the influence of urban, national, and popular culture. At times, these global commodities, thoughts, and trends were welcome additions to competing national ideologies; more often, they presented complex and uncomfortable issues that challenged "elite" ideations of a national culture and contributed to a "Kenyan" identity that existed outside of state control.

While global networks flourished in some cases, this thesis interrogates the concept of "global" and demonstrates that the 1960s did not necessarily present fertile ground for global connections and opportunity. The thesis emphasises the competing visions for the future were as

inhibiting as they were liberating and highlights that any plurality in perspectives and freedoms were hard fought for and hard won. Likewise, the 1970s are often presented in stark contrast to the 1960s, as a time of insularity, erosion of networks and hostility. While there are logical reasons for considering these two decades in this way, particularly when considering military, political and economic histories, these decades are not binary, and the image becomes more complex when considering popular culture, globalisation, and consumption. Tracing continuities of both popular and national culture between the two decades is an important component of this thesis, hence the chronological scope of the thesis covers 1963-1982.

To unpack these connections, the events and stories within this thesis take place in a selection of discrete urban spaces. Nairobi's bars, hotels, music, and streets come to the fore in this contest for identity and a national culture. While giving due attention to these spaces is crucial to this study, this thesis takes a different approach compared to some of the more recent scholarship. It views the city as more than just a physical construct, encompassing emotions, feelings, and ideas, expanding the understanding of the urban realm beyond mere bricks and mortar. The radio, for example, carried concepts of an urban Kenya beyond the city limits; popular novels created narratives of the urban far beyond the experiences of those that moved within it, and the activities of people within the city created urban cultures beyond the expectations of urban planners and politicians. I emphasise that urban spaces are visual, aural, physical and ideological experiences; through acknowledging this, this thesis emphasises the multiplicity of Kenyan urban experience.

## Lay Summary

This PhD thesis explores the clash between cultures in early postcolonial Nairobi. By examining sources like oral history, newspapers, music, and novels, the study reveals the diverse and interconnected popular cultures that emerged during the years 1963-1982. It also highlights the influence of global consumption patterns in shaping urban subcultures and identities, and the ways these challenged the dominant national culture. The research sheds light on the complexities of Nairobi's history and its place within regional and global networks, demonstrating how cultural practices and political visions transcended borders and influenced Kenyan identity beyond state control.

*For Maja*

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onwards, I am particularly thankful for these individuals who went above and beyond to support my in-person research during challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

I must also thank my family – Mum, Dad, and sisters, Molly, Katie, and Erin – for their love, support, and no-nonsense attitude towards my occasional aversion to writing. I must also mention my terrific friend, Jamie Hutton, for always picking up the phone. Finally, my partner Maja deserves special recognition for her support, love, and kindness. She has been an unceasing font of optimism, generosity, and patience. I cannot express how grateful I am to her for her daily encouragement, and for never complaining, despite how challenging this process has been. Without her, there would be no thesis.

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## Introduction

This thesis begins its historical focus in Nairobi as it approached the moment of independence. Over the subsequent two decades – a period I refer to as the early postcolonial period – the citizens of independent Kenya encountered seismic political and social change. While these years were charged with the optimism felt among citizens going through decolonisation, I argue that there was a standoff between national culture and popular culture during this period. Elite historical actors with powerful influences over Kenyan society espoused a hegemonic vision for the nation and embarked upon a national cultural project referred to within this thesis as the “*Harambee* nation.” This vision was negotiated, contested, and challenged by ordinary urban citizens. To demonstrate this tension between a national project and the people, sources have been used that allow a history-from-below methodology. The historiography of Kenya has been dominated by some key research areas, namely the Mau Mau rebellion, Kenyatta, and ethnicity.<sup>1</sup> The histories of popular culture, however, have been under researched, particularly during the early postcolonial period.<sup>2</sup> This study explores the intricate dynamics of post-colonial Nairobi from 1963 to c.1982, examining the interplay between national culture and popular culture in the wake of Kenyan independence. It asks how ordinary urban citizens contested, challenged, and disrupted the prevalent national ideology. On the other side of the conflict, it demonstrates how elite political visions for a national culture shaped cultural activities, ideas, and materials in Nairobi during the

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<sup>1</sup> For select examples see David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005), Daniel Branch, “The Enemy within: Loyalists and the War against Mau Mau in Kenya,” *The Journal of African History* 48, no. 2 (2007): 291-315, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853707002812>; Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, “The Labors of Muigwithania: Jomo Kenyatta as Author, 1928-45,” *Research in African Literatures* 29, no. 1 (1998): 16-42; Caroline Elkins, *Britain’s Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya* (London: The Bodley Head 2014); Fred Hobson, “Freedom as Moral Agency: Wiathi and Mau Mau in Colonial Kenya,” *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 2, no. 3 (2008): 456-470, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17531050802401841>; Tabitha Kanogo, “Kikuyu women and the politics of protest: Mau Mau,” in *Images of Women in Peace and War: Cross-Cultural and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Sharon MacDonald, Pat Holden, and Shirley Ardener (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1987), 78-99; John Lonsdale, “Jomo Kenyatta, God, and the Modern World,” in *African Modernities*, ed. J-G Deutsch et al (Oxford: James Currey, 2002), 31-65; John Lonsdale, “The Moral Economy of Mau Mau: Wealth Poverty and Civic Virtue in Kikuyu Political Thought,” in *Unbappy Valley, Book Two: Violence and Ethnicity*, by John Lonsdale and Bruce Berman (London: Currey, 1992), 315-468; Cora Ann Presley, “The Mau Mau Rebellion, Kikuyu Women and Social Change,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 22 (1998): 502-527, <https://doi.org/10.2307/485952>.

<sup>2</sup> Kenda Mutongi’s research stands out as a notable exception, see Kenda Mutongi, *Matatu: A History of Popular Transportation in Nairobi* (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2017).

1960s and 1970s. By asking these questions this thesis demonstrates that there was a prevalent national culture as promoted by elite figures and institutions. I interrogate the ways political visions championed by elites played out in shaping the development of national culture and ask what opposition they faced from ordinary citizens who sought to redefine culture and their experiences in the city.

This research therefore serves to contribute and provide important historical context to ongoing research across the humanities by shining a light on countercultural movements and practices during early postcolonial Kenya. A diverse collection of sources has been used to piece together a series of episodes that demonstrate a common theme of tension between the popular and the normative, such as oral history records, newspapers, tourist guidebooks, music, and novels. This thesis delves into the microcosms of Nairobi, emphasising discrete urban spaces that emerged as significant in constructing identities, reflecting emotions, feelings, and ideas. Unique opportunities have been taken to question what sources we use to construct this history, and how to use sources widely available in the contemporary popular domain to contribute to a popular history of Nairobi. An image emerges of a globally connected Nairobi where cultural practices and political visions are observed to have continuity both regionally and globally. By looking at the postcolonial history of Kenya through the lens of a globalising city, continuity across the region and across networks can be seen in political cultures, consumption habits, and cultural practices.

The study further addresses the global dimensions of Nairobi's identity, questioning the role globalisation and global connections played during this period. I explore the extent to which Nairobi was a "globalising city," and how its inhabitants engaged with global materials and culture. As outlined in the first chapter, I present colonial Nairobi as a city of villages where race, ethnicity, and local networks primarily defined urban experiences. This groundwork sets the stage for a deeper investigation in the subsequent chapters. Here, I pivot to demonstrate how access to the global was characterised in Nairobi, revealing the ways in which this access was partial and uneven among different social groups. By uncovering how global symbols were appropriated and imbued

with new and significant meanings in diverse contexts, the analysis elucidates the complex interplay between global influences and local realities. Implicit within these observations is the question of how these cultural habits depart from “traditional,” “colonial,” and “national” visions for culture and society. While it is crucial to this thesis to conceptualise Nairobi as tightly integrated within a network of intra-East-African thoughts, practices, and cultures, it invites a perspective that considers urban Kenyans as global consumers. I emphasise the importance of global consumption habits upon the influence of urban, national, and popular culture. At times, these global commodities, thoughts, and trends were welcome additions to competing national ideologies; more often, they presented complex and uncomfortable issues that challenged “elite” ideations of a national culture and contributed to a “Kenyan” identity that existed outside of state control.

While global networks flourished in some cases, this thesis questions the concept of “global” and demonstrates throughout that the 1960s did not necessarily present fertile ground for global connections and opportunity. It emphasises the competing visions for the future were as inhibiting as they were liberating, and highlights that any plurality in perspectives and freedoms were hard fought for and hard won. Likewise, the 1970s are often presented in stark contrast to the 1960s, as a time of insularity, erosion of networks and hostility. While there are logical reasons for considering these two decades in this way, particularly when considering military, political and economic histories, these decades are not binary, and the image becomes more complex when considering popular culture, globalisation, and consumption. Tracing continuities of both popular and national culture between the two decades is an important component of this thesis, hence the chronological scope of chapters 2-5 cover 1963-1982.

### Theory and Approaches

This thesis relies on several key terms that have complex histories and interpretations within the humanities. This section aims to elucidate and define the crucial theoretical framework and interpretive concepts underpinning this thesis. It will also articulate the rationale behind using

these concepts, detailing their significance in understanding the central historical subjects addressed in this study.

“National culture” is a crucial term I employ throughout this thesis. I define national culture as an ideal propagated by elite figures within Kenyan society. In this context, national culture or what I call “*Harambee*” culture is a project that focussed on the ideals of good citizenship, self-reliance, and hard work. My argument to demonstrate the existence of a national culture or project is proposed in Chapter 2 where I demonstrate how definitions of good citizenship proliferated public life through texts such as newspapers and in political speeches, thus contributing to the growth of national ideals. The term “*Harambee* nation” is used synonymously with the “national project”; I use the term “*Harambee*” (all pull together) to demonstrate that nation building had an ideological heritage grounded in the reimagined use of the Swahili ideology. This, I argue, was the guiding light for national culture. While the word “*Harambee*” was used at the time, the “*Harambee* nation” and “*Harambee* culture” are not contemporary terms. I examine elite methods of using ideas of national culture to impress upon citizens their duties to the nation and endorse loose codes of practices and beliefs. Specifically, the terms “*Harambee* culture” describes these practices, and “*Harambee* nation” describes the national project. While not homogenous and subject to different interpretations by elite actors, my work demonstrates that these beliefs had powerful rhetorical value and were part of a cultural hegemonic ideal. An interpretation of national culture in this way has precedence among researchers of East Africa. Kelly Askew, for example, writing about Tanzania has emphasised the ways national culture was part of a performance between state and people.<sup>3</sup>

I posit that in the Kenyan context, “national culture” was a normative ideal controlled by the political and social elites. This elite-driven narrative, encapsulated in the concept of “*Harambee* culture,” emphasised values such as good citizenship, self-reliance, and hard work, which were

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<sup>3</sup> Kelly Askew, *Performing the Nation: Swahili Music and Cultural Politics in Tanzania* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 12.

promoted to foster a sense of unity and national identity. This thesis has drawn upon Frantz Fanon's and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's interpretations, which critique the postcolonial manipulation of national culture by new elites who inherit the colonial legacy.<sup>4</sup> Both argued that the emerging bourgeoisie in newly independent nations often perpetuated the colonisers' cultural domination, using national culture as a tool to maintain their socioeconomic advantages. Ngugi extends this critique by illustrating how the Kenyan state manipulated cultural symbols and narratives to consolidate its own nation-building projects. While building on these foundational ideas, this thesis departs significantly from previous interpretations by focusing on the constructed nature of national culture through elite narratives rather than a grassroots phenomenon.

Unlike Fanon, who saw national culture as having unifying and liberating potential from below, this thesis views it in the context as an imposition from above, used to solidify a fragile national unity that glossed over internal diversities and conflicts. Furthermore, while other work on national culture in Kenya such as Colin Legum and Gail Presbey's research have also focused on the positive unifying potential of national culture, especially in times of crisis, this thesis explores how such a culture also served as an instrument of elite hegemony, masking deep-seated social and economic disparities.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, this thesis provides a reading of "national culture" in Kenya, challenging the homogeneity and authenticity often attributed to this concept by highlighting how it was wielded by elite figures to shape national identity. By contrasting elite-driven cultural ideals with the diverse, lived experiences of ordinary Kenyans, it reveals the complex interplay between hegemonic national narratives and the vibrant, contested expressions of culture at a popular urban level.

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<sup>4</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (London: Penguin, 2001), 181-188. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*, (London: Heinemann Educational, 1981), 56.

<sup>5</sup> Colin Legum, "'Harambee' in Kenya," *Current History* 46, no. 271 (1964): 142-147; Gail Presbey, "Attempts to Create an Inter-ethnic and Inter-generational 'National Culture' in Kenya," *Diogenes* 59, no. 3-4 (2012): 48-59.

I use the term “elites” to denote the individuals and institutions that held hegemonic power in Kenya and were pivotal in setting the discursive agenda for the nation. This definition encompasses a broader spectrum than merely President Jomo Kenyatta and his immediate circle of Kikuyu kinsmen, traditionally recognised as the postcolonial elite.<sup>6</sup> Instead, it extends to include significant figures within the emerging African middle class – those who leveraged colonial education to secure influential roles in government and business. While drawing on anthropological studies that often equate elite status with middle-class markers such as income and consumer habits, my usage specifically distinguishes between the broader middle class and the elites.<sup>7</sup> The elite, in this context, are not defined merely by their economic status but by their capacity to influence and direct national discourse and policy.

Elites are characterised by their leadership roles and their ability to impact decision-making processes that affect larger groups of people, as outlined by Carola Lentz. Lentz suggests a restricted definition of elites as those in commanding positions across various societal fields, including politics, the military, and the clergy, who actively shape policy and societal norms.<sup>8</sup> Historically, such groups formed a distinct minority, making terms like “middle class” less appropriate for the African context of the 1950s and 1960s. Therefore, in my framework, elites include not only prominent politicians like Presidents Kenyatta and Daniel arap Moi or figures like Tom Mboya but also cultural influencers such as children’s author and columnist Barbara Kimenye, who offered alternative cultural narratives. These elites wielded extensive rhetorical, political, and coercive power, influencing other powerful entities such as the media, community gatherings (*baraza*), and security forces, which were instrumental in promoting the national culture

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<sup>6</sup> The argument for Kenyatta’s centralisation of political power is well made in Anaïs Angelo, *Power and the Presidency in Kenya: The Jomo Kenyatta Years* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

<sup>7</sup> Claire Mercer, “Middle class construction: domestic architecture, aesthetics and anxieties in Tanzania”, *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 52, no.2, (2014), 228.

<sup>8</sup> Carola Lentz, “African Middle Classes: Lessons from Transnational Studies and a Research Agenda,” in *The Rise of Africa’s Middle Class: Myths, Realities and Critical Engagements*, ed. Henning Melber, vol. 10, 1st ed. (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2016), 21.

project. By this definition, the elites were more than just leaders; they were the architects and disseminators of a national ideology that sought to mould Kenyan identity and public opinion.

In this thesis, the term “middle class” is employed in a specific context that diverges from an association with an identifiable group of people. Instead, it encapsulates the ideals and aspirations of various groups in Kenya, but especially the landless poor in Nairobi, representing a normative ideal that, while representing a common lifestyle among elites, did not always align with the national project. The term signifies a system of cultural touchstones that were embraced by the very small middle class, reflecting a set of values and aspirations distinct from, yet informative of, the broader societal and cultural dynamics. Although the exploration of the middle-class culture and lifestyle per se falls outside the direct scope of this thesis, its mention serves to illuminate the array of competing and complementary visions for society and culture that existed alongside and interacted with the national project. This approach allows for a richer understanding of the social fabric and the diverse aspirations that influenced and were influenced by the national agenda.

The term “popular culture” is used throughout this thesis and is defined by the practices of “ordinary citizens.” This invites the question: who were the ordinary citizens of Kenya? These are the individuals who are left, the everyone else. African popular culture emerges from the experiences of everyday life and ordinary people, it represents the informal and non-traditional aspects of society and refers to the culture of regular individuals rather than the educated elites, politicians, military leaders, and wealthy businessmen who hold positions of power.<sup>9</sup> The desire to box cultural practices in Africa as “traditional”, “popular”, and “elite” has long been challenged by researchers such as Karin Barber.<sup>10</sup> These divisions of cultural production are considered insufficient, especially as the category of “popular” has been seen as interstitial, lacking sufficient boundaries, definition, and historicity.<sup>11</sup> This thesis does not seek to reify these artificial boundaries

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<sup>9</sup> Karin Barber, *A History of African Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 1.

<sup>10</sup> Karin Barber, “Popular Arts in Africa,” *African Studies Review* 30, no. 3 (1987): 1-78.

<sup>11</sup> Stephanie Newell, Onokome Okome, and Till Förster, eds., *Popular Culture in Africa: The Episteme of the Everyday* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 1.

but rather to identify the manifestation and use of different cultural practices and beliefs. Instead of presenting distinct definitions of “national,” “popular,” and “traditional” culture, the image that emerges is one of cultural practices blending and merging together. For example, in my work, “national culture” exists as an ideal rather than a lived cultural reality. Likewise, the term “traditional” is used not to denote an objective reality, but rather as a belief or an idea historical actors called upon, emphasising its subjective nature rather than its factual accuracy. The dances at the Bomas of Kenya which I introduce in Chapter 5 are – to this day – often perceived to be “traditional”, static, and outside of time, but are in fact evolving cultural phenomena. Likewise, certain practices are shown to be transgressive across these cultural definitions: listening to *benga* music (Chapter 5), and the use of skin lightening cream (Chapter 3). These are demonstrative of consumption habits that were experienced differently by various groups in Nairobi. The tension I present between national ideals and urban realities comes from the people themselves; goods, products, and cultural practices could assume different meanings in different hands. An element of Caleb Owen’s recent doctoral thesis integrates the issue of cultural concerns of sports, dances and cinema with ongoing material struggles over land; my contribution to the history of Nairobi and Kenya is similar in that it reconciles various visions for Kenya’s future with the cultural practices that came to give these beliefs practical, physical, and aural meaning.<sup>12</sup>

Karin Barber’s recent work on popular culture in Africa invites other historians to take and use two key methods proposed in pioneering work on African cultural history in the 1970s.<sup>13</sup> The first being to develop the regional approach as championed in Terence Ranger’s 1975 history of the *beni* dance. Efforts have been made within this thesis to situate expressions of culture within a regional context and make comparisons, where possible, to popular culture and the national project in Tanzania. Secondly, Barber advocates for the proposition made in Johannes Fabian’s

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<sup>12</sup> Caleb Owen, “Lands of Leisure: Recreation, Space, and the Struggle for Urban Kenya, 1900-2000,” PhD Thesis, Michigan State University, 199-257.

<sup>13</sup> Barber, *A History of African Popular Culture*, 5-6.

1978 article “Popular Culture in Africa: Findings and Conjectures”, which creatively suggests that “ideas and creative energy may jump from one genre to another.”<sup>14</sup> His rationale asserts that there is value at looking not only at changes within a genre but how different but interconnected cultural expressions emerged across all areas of social life.

Fabian’s article illustrates that popular culture does not form a coherent system but can be interpreted through a totalising process that integrates seemingly disparate data.<sup>15</sup> The dispersal of his findings are held as crucial to the analysis: “It is precisely this phenomenon of dispersal (uneven and often contradictory occurrence of a theme in different media) which necessitates the search for semiotic structures common to popular song, religious speculation, and the imagery of popular painting [i.e. the sources he was using].”<sup>16</sup> This understanding of dispersed but connected cultural material and practices is integral to this thesis. By threading together different sources that contend with similar problems, the connections are made clearer. This is why during the analysis of this thesis, urban songs, newspapers, American LGBTQ literature, novels, and parliamentary debates, are able to sit alongside one another. Methodologically, Fabian invites a pragmatic and incisive way of drawing these connections between sources. His approach, outlined in his matrix of comparison advocates for approaching popular sources across four broad dimensions of comparison.<sup>17</sup> The first is context, which is divided further into three features of expression, historic-political situation, social referent, and setting. The second is message/function. The third is message/form. The fourth is narrative/structure, which is divided further into plot, actors, resolution, and figures. As with Fabian’s research I approach, where possible, these factors to give evidence for “ongoing, connected discourse.”<sup>18</sup> This framework is useful particularly when approaching Kenya as a “postcolony,” a condition Achille Mbembe described as:

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<sup>14</sup> Barber, *A History of African Popular Culture*, 6.

<sup>15</sup> Johannes Fabian, “Popular Culture in Africa: Findings and Conjectures,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 48, no. 4 (1978): 316, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1158799>.

<sup>16</sup> Fabian, “Popular Culture in Africa,” 316.

<sup>17</sup> Fabian, “Popular Culture in Africa,” 321.

<sup>18</sup> Fabian, “Popular Culture in Africa,” 319.

a given historical trajectory – that of societies recently emerging from the experience of colonisation and the violence which the colonial relationship, par excellence, involves. To be sure, the postcolony is chaotically pluralistic, yet it has nonetheless an internal coherence. It is a specific system of signs, a particular way of fabricating simulacra or re-forming stereotypes.<sup>19</sup>

Employing this framework to understand Kenya as a “postcolony” offers insightful perspectives on its unique historical path and the complexities of its societal structures. It enables a deeper analysis of how Kenya navigates its postcolonial identity, revealing both the chaotic plurality and the underlying coherence that characterise its evolution since independence. Both can be true through this framework.

This thesis also belongs to the field of African urban history. It seeks to demonstrate how the social and cultural character of the city developed and changed during the early postcolonial period. By approaching a popular history of Nairobi, the ways in which the city fostered cultural developments come to the fore. Further, using the city as the space of study allows insight into the organisation of society, class structures, community dynamics, and social interactions. Within this thesis, I discuss “urban identities”, this refers to the construction and expression of identities within the urban context and explores how citizens of Nairobi built and defined their identities in the city. I also refer to discrete urban spaces; this is to highlight specific, distinct areas within Nairobi that held significance in shaping identity. No piece of academic literature could cover every space that influences a city's culture, I have therefore opted to focus on a collection of key spaces and media to uncover specific urban influences upon prevailing national and popular cultural movements.

### Literature Review

There are multiple contributions to the history, anthropology, and sociological studies of Nairobi. The completeness of these studies when taken together, however, has some notable shortcomings.

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<sup>19</sup> Achille Mbembe, “Provisional Notes on the Postcolony,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 62, no. 1 (1992): 3, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1160062>.

Kenda Mutongi, writing in 2017, lamented the sorry state of postcolonial histories of Nairobi. It was, to her, incomplete.

While it may be surprising that so little attention has been given to the history of the matatu, it is even more surprising that scholars have largely ignored the history of postcolonial Nairobi—despite the fact that as a city with a population of more than four million people, Nairobi is representative of other major megacities of the Global South... In fact, Luise White's *The Comforts of Home*, published twenty-five years ago, is the only book available on the history of Nairobi, and it focuses on the colonial period.<sup>20</sup> Within a few years, however, Bethwell and Madara Ogot had published their encyclopaedic work outlining the entire history of the city. Mutongi's *Matatu*, Luise White's *Comforts of Home*, and the Ogot's *History of Nairobi 1899-2012*, are the most significant contributions to the history of the city in terms of scope and depth. While their contributions are perhaps the core biographies of the city, there has been much literature that contends with Nairobi, it is therefore necessary to make note of contributions from across the humanities, especially including contributions from anthropology and sociology. Studying the history of Nairobi is slippery and fraught with challenges. Many of these challenges are outlined in John Lonsdale's introductory chapter to the edited collection: *Nairobi Today: The Paradox of a Fragmented City*, such as the fact many of Nairobi's inhabitants were in flux, torn between rural and the urban, that Kenya's cities and towns were so varied and different in character thus affecting the methods which we use to study them, and the practical challenges of usefully periodising the city.<sup>21</sup> These challenges have no doubt contributed to the fewer historical contributions that centre Nairobi as the historical subject. The following literature review covers the main contributions to the study of the city as understood through core themes. Under each theme I will briefly discuss the most significant works in that area.

The first theme is economic and social history. Some of the earliest texts written about the city contended with the city's social challenges during the colonial period. Much of this research was conducted to understand and make sense of the Mau Mau rebellion and emergency. Richard

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<sup>20</sup> Kenda Mutongi, *Matatu: A History of Popular Transportation in Nairobi* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 12-13.

<sup>21</sup> John Lonsdale, "Town Life in Colonial Kenya," in *Nairobi Today: The Paradox of a Fragmented City*, eds. Deyssi Rodriguez-Torres and Hélène Charton-Bigot (Dar es Salaam, Tanzania: Mkuki na Nyota Publishers, 2010), 5-6.

Stren's work, for example, on the evolution of housing policy followed the paper trail of colonial reports and documentation on the socio-economic challenges faced by Africans in Nairobi and discussed how these issues contributed to the prevalence of Mau Mau in the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>22</sup> Likewise David Throup's *Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau*, (1987) took the view that inadequate colonial infrastructures and the political disenfranchisement of the Kikuyu fomented anticolonial sentiment among Mau Mau recruits.<sup>23</sup> His work emphasised the violent potential of Nairobi in the 1940s and 1950s citing the collapse of colonial authority in the neighbourhoods of Pumwani and Shauri Moyo especially, before tracing the origins of such urban violence.<sup>24</sup> From a sociological perspective, Andrew Hake wrote a fascinating overview of the city: *African Metropolis: Nairobi's Self-Help City* (1977).<sup>25</sup> This work provided greater insight into the lifestyles and challenges of the urban poor especially. After describing the growth and development of Nairobi, his work describes what he calls the "self-help" city, showing the housing and institutions of the urban poor that had developed outside of the control of (both colonial and postcolonial) government authorities. This work was pivotal in demonstrating the ways that those in the "backyard" had provided housing, jobs, schooling, churches, and welfare for one another. In many ways, the contribution made in this thesis connects to Hake's work – indeed, I have even revisited some sources that he collected in Chapter 3. Instead of self-help houses and churches under observation within this thesis, subversive culture and behaviours come under analysis. Similar to Hake's work, this thesis demonstrates how these alternative avenues – far removed from normative postcolonial ideals – were part of meaning-giving systems created by the urban poor. Other notable economic

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<sup>22</sup> Richard E. Stren, *Housing the Urban Poor in Africa: Policy, Politics, and Bureaucracy in Mombasa* (Berkeley, CA: Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1978); Stren, "The Evolution of Housing Policy in Kenya," in *Urban Challenge in East Africa*, ed. John Hutton (Nairobi: EAPH, 1971), 57-96.

<sup>23</sup> David W. Throup, *The Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau* (London: James Currey, 1987).

<sup>24</sup> Throup, *The Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau*, 172.

<sup>25</sup> Andrew Hake, *African Metropolis: Nairobi's Self-Help City* (Brighton: Sussex University Press, 1977).

and social studies of Nairobi have focussed on numerous other topics including, micro-studies of specific neighbourhoods, the wider political culture during colonialism, and corruption in the city.<sup>26</sup>

Following the first waves of economic and social history, which had predominantly focussed on urban labourers – in other words, men – came perhaps the most crucial contribution to the history of Nairobi. Luise White's *The Comforts of Home* situated women's experiences and gender dynamics within the narrative of the city demonstrating that despite historically being outnumbered by men, women played crucial roles in all areas of city life. White's contributions to the history of Nairobi have helped unearth the connections between urban prostitutes and rural communities. By viewing the small cadre of urban prostitutes in the colonial period through the lens of labour history, White identified the connections between gender, labour, empire building, urban housing, and urban culture in a way that was not only compelling but pioneering for Kenyan, African, and urban historiography. The success of her research lay in her demonstration of the agency these women had; this challenged assumptions of sex work's associations with broken homes, unwanted pregnancies, and exploitative pimps, and framed these sexual and reproductive labour interactions with women's agency front and centre. Women sex workers were among the earliest established African groups in Nairobi. They accumulated wealth and land, were able to support their rural families, and provided essential reproductive labour for the men that sought out their services.<sup>27</sup> While White's work extends our understanding into the 1930s and 1940s, it is important to note the limitations imposed by the temporal boundaries of her research. The focus on the colonial period, particularly during World War II, leaves a noticeable gap in urban histories of the early postcolonial era, where research on the culture and identity in Kenya becomes less

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<sup>26</sup> See for example (in alphabetical order of surname), Philip Amis, "A Shanty Town of Tenants; The Commercialisation of Unauthorized Housing in Kibera, 1960 to 1980" (Unpublished doctoral thesis, Kent University, 1983); David Anderson, "Corruption at City Hall: African Housing and Urban Development in Colonial Nairobi," *Azania* 36/37 (2001): 138-54; Dallas LaSalle Browne, "Kawangare: Urbanisation by Absorption, Identity, and Social Change in Nairobi" (Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Illinois, 1983); Walter Elkan, "Is a Proletariat Emerging in Nairobi?," *Economic Development & Cultural Change* 24, no. 4 (1976): 695-706; Joanna E. Lewis, *Empire State-Building: War and Welfare in Kenya 1925-52* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000); Emil Rado and Judith Wells, "The Building Industry in Kenya," in *Urban Challenge in East Africa*, edited by John Hutton (Nairobi: EAPH, 1971), 200-224.

<sup>27</sup> Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 1-4.

prominent. Moving beyond the colonial period, further studies were – and still are – needed to explore how the dynamics of urban life, identity, and labour evolved in the subsequent decades. Alongside White, there have been numerous contributions to studying gender dynamics in the city particularly by Nici Nelson writing in the 1970s and 1980s, and later, Claire Robertson.<sup>28</sup>

From a cultural history perspective, Kenda Mutongi's work on *Matatus* (minibuses) has taken considerable strides to use Luise White's methodology and themes into the postcolonial period: "my understanding of history changed... I have since modelled much of my work on *The Comforts of Home*."<sup>29</sup> Mutongi's *Matatu* has demonstrated the effect minibuses had on the establishment of shared experiences of moving through the city and the profound cultural ripples it had upon Kenyan culture.<sup>30</sup> Mutongi has presented the story of Kenyan urban life through the *Matatu*. Far more than a vehicle (although *Matatu's* role in transporting urban dwellers cannot be overstated), Mutongi has shown the connections between transport, the global economy, youth, art, and industry. Her research shows a new Nairobi emerging in the wake of colonialism, from one that served the needs of the white settlers to an African metropolis for African people. Her research also speaks to the observations sociologist Andrew Hake made in the 1970s of Nairobi as a self-help city: the *Matatu* emerged because the people of Nairobi needed them.<sup>31</sup> There were no foreign investors or government initiatives, the hustlers of the city saw the opportunity and took it. Similarly, urban music, novels, and habits have impacted the experiences of Kenyans as much as its politicians, elites, and the middle class. These topics have been the objects of some incisive scholarly interest; however, the focus tends to be on the latter part of the twentieth century

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<sup>28</sup> Nici Nelson, "Women Must Help Each Other: The Operation of Personal Networks among Buzaa Brewers in Mathare Valley, Kenya," in *Women United, Women Divided*, eds. Patricia Caplan and Janet Bujra (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 77-98; Nici Nelson, "'Women Without Men': Mathare Valley Beer Brewers," *Kenya Past and Present* 13 (1981); Nici Nelson, "Selling Her Kiosk: Kikuyu Notions of Sexuality and Sex for Sale in Mathare Valley, Kenya," in *The Cultural Construction of Sexuality*, ed. Patricia Caplan (London: Tavistock, 1987), 217-239; Claire Robertson, *Trouble Showed the Way: Women, Men, and Trade in the Nairobi Area, 1890-1990* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

<sup>29</sup> Kenda Mutongi, "The Wages of Harlotry—Luise White's *The Comforts of Home*: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi (1990–2020)," *The American Historical Review* 126, no. 3 (2021): 1124.

<sup>30</sup> Kenda Mutongi, *Matatu: A History of Popular Transportation in Nairobi* (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2017).

<sup>31</sup> Hake, *African Metropolis*.

and into the twenty-first century.<sup>32</sup> The study within this thesis explores the impact of urban culture during the early post-independence period therefore providing a greater historical context for these other works.

Kara Moskowitz's research, while not urban in its focus, deeply connects to themes of national and popular culture. Her work explores Kenya's late colonial and early postcolonial periods as an era of transformation, where aspirations for independence were closely linked with the language of development. Through locally grounded case studies, she demonstrates the interplay between official development policies and the active engagement and resistance of rural communities.<sup>33</sup> Her findings demonstrate that disputes surrounding the planning and execution of development projects—initiated by the rural poor, formal state entities, and transnational agents—played a significant role in shaping the perceptions of new postcolonial citizens regarding their entitlement to state resources, their views on authority, and their influence on policy formation.<sup>34</sup> Similar research from an urban perspective is needed, and the findings of this thesis go some way to situate urban space in similar dialogues.

As its own theme or genre, the recent contributions made by Bethwell and Madara Ogot to Nairobi's history need to be mentioned. I have benefitted immensely from their history of Nairobi, it stands alone as a unique contribution to the history of the city.<sup>35</sup> The approach is comprehensive and covers swathes of Nairobi's history from its inception as a railway camp to frontier town, to segregated colonial city, to postcolonial metropolis. The Ogots' work has afforded me, and no doubt many future historians of Kenya, opportunities to use their research

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<sup>32</sup> See for example Chege J. Githiora, *Sheng: Rise of a Kenyan Swahili Vernacular* (Woodbridge: James Currey, 2018); Kenneth King, *Jua Kali Kenya* (London, Nairobi, Athens, Ohio: James Currey, 1996); Joyce Nyairo, "Of National Longing and the Antinomies of Post-colonial Kenya: The Case of Eric Wainaina's Sawa Sawa," in *Our Turn to Eat: Politics in Kenya Since 1950*, eds. Daniel Branch and Nic Cheeseman, (Berlin: Lit, 2010), 53-176.

<sup>33</sup> Kara Moskowitz, *Seeing Like a Citizen: Decolonization, Development, and the Making of Kenya, 1945-1980* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2019); Kara Moskowitz, "'Are You Planting Trees or Are You Planting People?' Squatter Resistance and International Development in the Making of a Kenyan Postcolonial Political Order (c. 1963-78)," *The Journal of African History* 56, no. 1 (March 2015): 99-118.

<sup>34</sup> Moskowitz, "'Are You Planting Trees or Are You Planting People?'," 117.

<sup>35</sup> Bethwell Ogot, and Madara Ogot, *History of Nairobi 1899-2012: from a Railway Camp and Supply Depot to a World-Class African Metropolis* (Kisumu, Kenya: Anyange Press Ltd., 2020).

as a touchstone for crucial information of events, institutions, and key figures in Nairobi's history. At its core it is a political and social history of the city and the authors have benefitted from using difficult-to-access archival material. During the postcolonial years their section from 1964-1972 are described as "the period of growth and optimism," which contrasts to the following section 1973-1992, as times of "political decay and state in crisis." Within this framing is situated a rich array of material that introduces seismic movements and phases such as settler colonialism, the impact of the Mau Mau rebellion, and Africanisation alongside discrete select biographies of buildings, groups, and key political figures. While far-reaching in its approach the book acts as an invitation to write more about Nairobi's spaces, movements, and phenomena through studies that are narrower in scope but different in their approach. Their research has synthesised a colossal amount of archival research and provided a strong narrative of the city, full of useful insights which have helped provide crucial context to the work within this thesis.

### Methodology

This thesis is based on an array of sources accessed in archives and libraries both physical and digital. I conducted in person archival and library research during a research trip to Kenya (winter 2019). Further archival research was conducted in Edinburgh and London. As noted in the footnotes and bibliography, I have accessed source material from a range of archives and libraries. These include: the Kenya National Archives, Nairobi; the McMillan Library, Nairobi; the University of Edinburgh; the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh; the British Library, London; the British National Archive, London; and SOAS' special collections, London.

As part of one of the "Another World? East Africa and the Global 1960s" outputs, the six permanent members of the project visited Kenya to collaborate with Kenyan colleagues in a weeklong archival research trip from 17<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2019 which culminated in a presentation of our research at the *Institut Français de Recherche en Afrique (IFRA)*, during a workshop entitled

“East Africa’s Global Lives”.<sup>36</sup> Having completed this project, our team went separate ways while I remained in Nairobi to conduct preliminary research. I travelled by *matatu* (minibus) daily to the centre of Nairobi to visit the Kenya National Archives (KNA) and the McMillan Library. During this time, I learned key skills in navigating Nairobi’s archives and data management.

Given that this research trip fell early into my PhD research, just ten months in, and envisaging that I would have subsequent research trips, I did not have a coherent vision of the material I needed to engage with for my thesis. Looking back, very little of the material I consulted during these ten weeks have made it into my final thesis. These sources contributed mainly to world building; I learned about the anxieties, hopes and aspirations colonial administrators had for Nairobi during the colonial period. My interests in popular literature and my endeavours to find popular magazines published after independence proved broadly unsuccessful. The positive stories I had heard about material kept in the University of Nairobi collections were inaccessible to me due to delays in the approval of a visiting student certificate. (The certificate’s arrival, just ten days before I left Nairobi, was of little use to me. The University’s archivist had taken compassionate leave and would not return until after I had left the country.) I left Nairobi with a collection of photographed sources, pages of research notes, but most crucially ten weeks of experiencing the city which I was to write about. Therefore, the time I spent in Nairobi served not only research purposes but to understand and experience the city that I had come to research. These experiences offered new perspectives of the city that I had not previously contemplated and have made a lasting impression on this thesis.

Encouraged by the research trip to Kenya, I had intended to return to Nairobi in May 2020. These plans, for obvious reasons, were rendered impossible and the uncertainty of the

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<sup>36</sup> For more information on these research events see Anna Adima, “A Week in the Archives,” *Another World? East Africa and the Global 1960s*, December 2019, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://globaleastafrica.org/blog/week-archives>; Daniel Heathcote, “East Africa’s Global Lives, 23 October 2019,” *Another World? East Africa and the Global 1960s*, December 2019, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://globaleastafrica.org/blog/east-africas-global-lives-23-october-2019>.

pandemic affected my early research efforts profoundly. I, however, found exciting and innovative ways to circumvent these challenges by making the most of Edinburgh's research collections and using online resources. To complement my online and Edinburgh-based research, I spent time in London conducting crucial library and archive-based research. During these trips, most of my research time was spent at the British Library, where I mainly consulted the *Daily Nation* and the *Standard*, two Nairobi based newspapers. I also visited SOAS' special collections, where I consulted the Andrew Hake collection. At the British National Archives in Kew, I consulted Colonial Office material about Nairobi in the late 1950s and 1960s.

The restrictions of the pandemic have, in many ways, led to some of the more exciting moments of research. For example, using an unlikely collection of American periodicals, accessed through the Gale Archive of Gender and Sexuality, afforded me the opportunity to consider the effects of tourism on culture in hotels and social spaces in Kenya. By contrast, my research conducted in Kenya in 2019 has served mainly to provide context due to the changed scope of the thesis. The challenges of writing this thesis have been eclipsed by the rewarding moments of doctoral research. I have been fortunate enough to trace captivating stories through sources, whether they were found in Nairobi, Edinburgh, London, or on a computer screen.

Methodologically, the constrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic have provided a unique lens to approach Nairobi's history. It is perhaps fitting that this thesis, which emphasises the resourceful and unique ways Kenyans expressed themselves in Nairobi, was produced during a period which has demanded innovation and resilience.

### Nairobi and the Global

The following research elaborates upon Nairobi's journey from a city of villages in the early 1940s to a cosmopolitan and modernising city in the 1960s and 1970s. I present a history of Nairobi that emphasises the transition experienced during the early postcolonial period where the importance of the local gave way to the global. Chapter one begins by demonstrating the impact of colonial

policy, housing crises, and racial divisions upon the urban landscape. It foregrounds the way that broad economic and political events and movements were experienced differently across the city of villages. Nairobi during the colonial period was a patchwork of relatively insular communities, where looking inwards served social and cultural needs. This contrasts to the early postcolonial period where the influence of globalising markets provided a new vocabulary which could be used to articulate expressions of culture and identity.

Under colonial rule the fabric of Nairobi's social and economic life was sharply divided along racial, ethnic, and class lines, reinforcing a mosaic of distinct communities – a city of villages – within a singular urban landscape. Despite their differences, Nairobi's residents came to share a collective yearning as they approached the dawn of independence: they desired empowerment, meaning-giving work, and survival. The end of colonial rule and the colossal opportunity of decolonisation, political change, and globalisation kindled aspirations for “modernity”, “cosmopolitanism”, and “the global.” After a generation characterised by poverty, World War, internal conflict, Mau Mau, and oppressive rule, the 1960s seemed charged with potential. As the following chapters demonstrate, this period delivered on some of these promises, not through a radical decolonial movement, but through meaning-giving globalised cultural practices. The short history of Nairobi in the 1940s and 1950s outlined in Chapter 1 demonstrates why Nairobi's popular culture developed in such a distinctive way. The tension and struggle between prescriptive colonial, anti-colonial, ethnic, and local ideas encountered the urban realities of daily survival. These events reified local and ethnic connections through distinct and uneven urban experiences. This short history is divided into three sections. The first introduces the social and economic challenges the city faced across the 1940s and 1950s. The second section, which focusses on how these challenges manifested in the lives of Nairobi dwellers, demonstrates the ways communities were affected differently across this colonial city of villages. The third demonstrates the impact upon cultural practices.

This story begins with one of the most pressing challenges faced by the late colonial and every successive post-independent government, Nairobi's housing. I frame the colonial city as "insufficient", demonstrating how the colonial state's urban shortcomings had profound, often negative, social repercussions. The crisis of housing during the post-war period was the socio-economic bedrock of many successive problems experienced in the capital. While many of Nairobi dwellers were negatively affected by these conditions, I introduce the unique ways the Kawangware Kikuyu and Kibera Nubians navigated these circumstances. The housing crisis was the foundation upon which unique cultural practices emerged, it exacerbated ethnic tensions, it created the perfect circumstances for crime to flourish, and it galvanised many landless Kikuyu behind the Mau Mau freedom movement. In this section on housing, I observe the settlers' and colonial government's visions for African Nairobi. The culture that emerged from the conditions presented by an overwhelmed colonial regime, and the political influence of the pro-authoritarian white settler minority upon African Nairobi are discussed. As experiences within different villages are explored, the gender demographics of the city are introduced. I describe Nairobi as 'a city of men,' underscoring the notable gender disparity during the period in question. Although (or perhaps because) women were vastly outnumbered, they played crucial social roles that had profound influence within Kenyan urban culture. I use existing historical and anthropological literature to examine women's work, such as beer brewing in Mathare and involvement in the informal economy, including prostitution to demonstrate this. Moving through the 1940s and into the 1950s, we observe the total collapse of colonial power and authority within African Nairobi. Criminal gangs became the arbiters of power and retributive justice within the city. Urban experiences became further polarised within African neighbourhoods and the city hurtled violently toward becoming an urban battleground during guerrilla Mau Mau warfare. Operation Anvil and the subsequent internment and processing of urban Kikuyu detainees was a crucial moment in the history of the city. How these experiences played out within a city of villages was uneven and disparate – African experiences were not homogenous; throughout, I introduce a selection –

although not all – of these villages within this history to demonstrate the effects of urban challenges upon communities.

While the globalisation process was incomplete by the 1980s, the individuals that moved through the city held globalisation as a collective aspiration. The ways whereby these aspirations of globalisation were articulated and symbols of the global were accessed were uneven within the city across social, class, ethnic, and racial lines. The following chapters introduce this complicated dynamic and invite a reading of Kenya's postcolonial history where globalisation becomes a difficult but inevitable bedfellow within the national project, and a seductive if elusive idea for Nairobi citizens. To explore these areas, I have adopted an approach that privileges the analysis of small moments, events, and the seemingly innocuous. While Chapter 2 argues that there was a national project propagated by elite political actors, this is not a history of big moments, sweeping movements, political parties, rebellions, or big men (although they do show up, often in supporting roles). As with Karin Barber's decision to build each chapter of her history of popular culture around select case studies and a handful of detailed examples, I too have used selections of songs, magazines, and fiction to further my arguments in Chapters 4 and 5 especially.<sup>37</sup> Where sources such as newspapers and parliamentary debates appear in this study, they do so to establish normative, high political, national ideations of Kenyan postcolonial culture. This serves two purposes; it establishes the existence of a national cultural project and provides the broader context within which Kenyan popular culture existed. Descriptions of popular experience within this thesis is read against these official, canonical, sources.

Chapter 2 establishes the prevalence of a national culture within high political rhetoric and popular newspaper media. The relationship between these visions and urban ways of living are analysed in this chapter. Living in the city, consuming globalised commodities, and working in certain occupations were presented as deeply unpatriotic by the political elite. The rhetoric of

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<sup>37</sup> Barber, *History of Popular African Culture*, 16-17.

urban vulgarity reveals conflicting generational tensions, the postcolonial state's preoccupation with "the authentic" and a deeply gendered conception of the city. The chapter demonstrates that the postcolonial elite or "comprador bourgeoisie" – to use Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's preferred term – constructed a concept of a corruptive, indecent, and violent city that could be negotiated only through "respectable" employment. While it is not unique to observe the continuities of power, ideas and methods that postcolonial states inherited from colonial predecessors, the new African elite in Nairobi conceived of urban spaces upon similar lines. The complex image of the city presented by politicians and state-pressured media was, however, by no means uniform. I argue that this was due to the ideological inadequacies of Kenyan postcolonial rhetoric. The tempting but inadequate concept of *Harambee* failed to galvanise a coherent vision for urban Kenya (this is a crucial difference between Kenya and Tanzania). Unpacking these general trends of how the elite constructed imaginaries of urban spaces is pivotal to this thesis as it reveals the conception of the city that bohemian, disenfranchised, and landless Kenyans resisted. Newspapers, in particular the *Nation*, were a crucial tool in the establishment of these imaginaries. I investigate the dynamic interactions between national, gerontocratic, conservative, authoritarian, "traditional," and rural notions of postcolonial identity and how they were both influenced by and, in turn, co-opted and challenged by historical actors in popular urban settings. Within this chapter I also demonstrate how "respectable employment" and the globalised signifiers of success were fervently desired by urban dwellers. The promises of employment closely aligned to the promises of globalisation in ways that limited access to ethnic moral economies could not compete with.

A core objective of this thesis is to demonstrate the agency and experiences of urban unemployed young men and women. Chapter 3 does this by an examination of questionnaires produced by Andrew Hake in the 1970s. These sources are read similarly to oral testimony: as private and personal reflections upon urban experience. I argue that they are life-on-the-ground documents representative of daily life and popular culture. In these sources we see that the globalising city offered a new lexicon of opportunity far removed from the state propagated view

of postcolonial life. Irrespective of these individuals' lack of employment, they desired middle class lifestyles and were active cosmopolitan consumers. Wage labour and employment, which had been championed under both the colonial and postcolonial regimes, was seen as the surest opportunity to earn respectable adulthood. Rural life, land-ownership, and agricultural labour had diminishing significance as the younger generations were further precluded from access to kin-networks and self-mastery. Access to the global, through music, film, and dancing broke the monotony of unemployed boredom and offered fulfilment and pleasure within the networks it helped establish. As Lonsdale and others have contended, it is important to consider 'agency in tight corners', where historical actors demonstrated agency within the confines of their economic and social experiences, and this chapter demonstrates agency forged under extremely difficult circumstances.<sup>38</sup> The unevenness of access to global symbols is foregrounded through the ways these urban dwellers articulated their hopes, aspirations, and consumption habits.

Global markets, I argue throughout this thesis, were important in the formation of less visible urban subcultures. In Chapter 4, I make this argument explicitly, providing a study of the changing semiotic importance of hotels, which had been central to settler sociability under colonialism. After 1958 these hotels became important sites for African mobility, intimacy, and gay interactions, but they also became spaces to perform neo-colonial fantasies. I respond to the current body of literature produced by anthropologists and sociologists on Kenyan sex tourism who have produced excellent research in unearthing narratives of sexual economies. This research, however, has been dominated by studies of heterosexual interactions between old white European men and women with far younger African individuals of the opposite sex. I look to incorporate gay men into this historical narrative, and demonstrate that the new globalising tourist economy provided opportunities for sociability, mobility and intimacy in hotel lobbies, bars and bathrooms. I further argue that tourists and expats brought with them neocolonial expectations of young

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<sup>38</sup> John Lonsdale, "Agency in Tight Corners: Narrative and Initiative in African History," *Journal of African cultural studies* 13, no. 1 (2000): 5-16, <https://doi.org/10.1080/713674303>; Ocobock, *An Uncertain Age*, 59-87.

African men into these spaces and that African men were able to work with these expectations when looking for sex, intimacy, and capital. Through this chapter, I historicise some of the important contributions that have been made about the commodification of ethnicity and presentation of self.<sup>39</sup> I also use this chapter to demonstrate that colonial fantasy – itself, an important part of globalising ideas – was tolerated by the postcolonial elite in the face of new challenges. The discreet segmented nature of tourist activity ensured that these visions of Kenya did not significantly disturb prevailing national ideologies.

The postcolonial urban music scene in Kenya challenged national debates around the identity and authenticity of a Kenyan sound. This sound, while once a great weapon in the arsenal of anticolonial resistance, became side-lined in elite post independent discourses of national culture and identity in favour of ‘traditional’ music. I unpack some of the debates around “African” sounds and academic and elite fascination with rural music in Chapter 5. During the 1960s and 1970s *benga* underwent a journey from being endorsed by the political elite and considered of nationalistic importance, to a subcultural soundscape that criticised the shortcomings of the postcolonial state. This point is elicited through the case study of Gabriel Omolo’s “Lunchtime”, a *benga* classic that dominated the airwaves in the 1970s, its production straddling this shift in *benga*’s lifecycle: it was endorsed by the Kenyan government as a great success in Kenyan music production, while the lyrics were implicitly critical of the postcolonial state. I highlight the importance of illusion and allegory in this musical style to protect artists from the violence of the postcolonial state. The chapter concludes by arguing that the subsequent ethnicization of *benga* in the 1970s was born of economic hardship and an exploitative music industry that capitalised upon the inexperience of emergent vernacular musicians, and that this process was by no means inevitable. Globalisation remained the ideal for many urban dwellers, but was confronted by economic realities that reinvigorated the importance of local connections. Contributing to the established histories of

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<sup>39</sup> Meiu, *Ethno-Erotic Economies*; John Comaroff, and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnicity, Inc.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

music and dance in East Africa, this chapter demonstrates how music, the places where it was played, and its consumption were integral to the development of urban subcultures.

Taken together, the examples of urban subcultures demonstrate that there was a standoff between national and popular culture. At the core of these standoffs sits a story about globalisation, and it was a period not yet marked by full globalisation but driven by a collective aspiration towards it. This aspiration, however, was mired in contention over how globalisation should unfold, a theme explored across the thesis. Through the lens of daily activities—be it protesting for jobs, engaging with cinema, creating music, or socialising in bars—this work reveals how Nairobi's inhabitants navigated the complex interplay between national and popular culture, each steeped in its own vision of identity, be that national or global. The five chapters detail these confrontations, revealing how ordinary citizens contested and negotiated with almost fundamentalist national ideologies. This exploration not only highlights the interplay between hegemonic ideals and popular resistance but also demonstrates how these interactions were crucial in shaping the lived experiences of urban Kenyans against the backdrop of a globalising mid-century. By exploring these narratives, the thesis reveals the profound ways in which visions of self and nationhood were constructed and contested, offering insight into the dance between national ideologies, global aspirations, and vibrance of urban cultures in Nairobi.

## Chapter 1: A city of villages – late colonial Nairobi

During the final years of colonial rule, Nairobi underwent a series of economic and social changes. To many, the effects of the Second World War and the Mau Mau Rebellion had given the city a hostile and unforgiving character. Others, however, benefited from an unprecedented industrial boom, and enjoyed the city as a space of great opportunity despite its shortcomings. The following short history of Nairobi in the 1940s and 1950s demonstrates some key processes that Nairobi underwent, which sets the stage for the distinctive way Nairobi's national and popular culture developed during its postcolonial years. The insufficiencies of the city, which had developed under colonial rule, presented problems for the postcolonial regime. It was overcrowded, some areas were very dangerous, and infrastructure, such as sanitation and roads, were woefully inadequate in many neighbourhoods. It would therefore become extremely challenging for elite actors to comfortably situate the urban within its nation building rhetoric. Alternatively, for ordinary Kenyans, the failure of the national project to provide meaningful and respectable employment ensured that the city was looked upon as a site where new ideas and hopes could be explored. The ways that the global came to the city is therefore explored in later chapters.

In Nairobi, during the final two decades of colonial rule, life was divided within distinct communities – a city of villages. The importance of these distinct villages would wane throughout the postcolonial years as citizens identified more closely with the cosmopolitan and globalising city as opposed to inward looking local villages. Under colonialism, however, their presence was stark. This chapter therefore explores the intersection of colonial and local ideologies with the challenges of urban survival in Nairobi across this city of villages. Structurally, this chapter starts broadly, focussing on societal issues, then narrowing to focus on the communities affected, and daily practices and lives. It is structured into three parts: the first examines the social and economic challenges faced during the 1940s and 1950s, while the second unpacks how these issues impacted Nairobi's villages, revealing the diverse ways the same events and movements were experienced

differently, especially focussing on the Kawangware Kikuyu and Kibera Nubians. Finally, I explore the implications of these wider processes on urban culture focussing on the historical work conducted on prostitution in Nairobi to demonstrate how these changes affected daily practices within the city of villages.

### An insufficient city – housing in Nairobi

Colonial housing policies have had an enduring impact on the geography of the city. With the exception of Eastleigh, which was occupied by Asians and Africans, all other Nairobi suburbs were exclusively reserved for whites until independence in 1963.<sup>1</sup> In 1962, 82 percent of the European population of the city,<sup>2</sup> around 17,500 individuals, lived in Upper Nairobi.<sup>3</sup> Some prosperous Africans and Asians had been able to acquire property there by that time, but many of these individuals were made up of domestic workers living in servant quarters on white-owned land, or were hospital staff. There were around two Africans living in the area to every three Europeans. Of the 155,388 Africans in Nairobi, 110,227 were recorded as living in Eastlands (Figure 1.1).<sup>4</sup> These were the working-class estates principally constructed by the City Council or by large employers. The oldest housing was nearest the centre of town at Kariokor and Pumwani which was near to the railway and the Industrial Area which offered employment opportunities. Newer and better-quality housing was found in the east of the region, particularly Makadara and Ofafa. Most Asians lived in the Parklands-Eastleigh area. Of the 86,454 Asians in Nairobi, 68,906 or 80 percent lived there.<sup>5</sup> There were three times the number of people per dwelling than in Upper Nairobi.<sup>6</sup> In the 1950s, Nairobi South experienced growth to meet the housing demands of a

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<sup>1</sup> Bethwell Ogot and Madara Ogot, *History of Nairobi 1899-2012: From a Railway Camp and Supply Depot to a World-Class African Metropolis* (Kisumu, Kenya: Anyange Press Ltd., 2020), 30.

<sup>2</sup> The town was eventually granted city status in 1950.

<sup>3</sup> Dorothy M. Halliman and W. T. W. Morgan, "The City of Nairobi," in *Nairobi: City and Region*, ed. W.T.W. Morgan (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1967), 106-107.

<sup>4</sup> Halliman and Morgan, "The City of Nairobi," 106-107.

<sup>5</sup> Halliman and Morgan, "The City of Nairobi," 106-107.

<sup>6</sup> Halliman and Morgan, "The City of Nairobi," 106-107.

growing Asian population, as the available housing in Parklands-Eastleigh was insufficient to accommodate their needs. The other two regions of the city, Central and the Industrial Area had fewer residents and were reserved for commercial and industrial activity respectively.

**Figure 1.1**

“Principal Residential Areas in Nairobi,” in Juliana K. Mutua, “The Role of Non-Governmental Organization in Slum and Squatter Settlement Upgrading: A Case Study of Undugu Society of Kenya in Kitui Village” (PhD diss., University of Nairobi, 1992), 56a.



Nairobi experienced an unprecedented industrial boom from the 1940s which would last approximately ten years. During this time, housing in Nairobi underwent significant changes. Despite this economic growth, however, ambitious housing projects could not keep up with the pace of urban growth and migration to the city. By 1956, when Kenya’s economy entered a depression, housing efforts languished behind the needs of the city, and this depression would last until independence. However, the effects of the housing crisis would continue into the post-independent period with Nairobi housing outputs falling behind that of colonial efforts.<sup>7</sup> The building industry was hamstrung by several other pragmatic factors. High building costs, access to

<sup>7</sup> Herbert H. Werlin, “Nairobi’s Politics of Housing,” *The African Review* 3, no. 4 (1973): 612.

resources, insufficient expertise within the labour force, and extreme competition for contracts meant that construction in Kenya was inefficient, and far more expensive than in other colonies.<sup>8</sup>

Before the Second World War, the colonial government's approach to housing was marked by a distinctive inclination toward control within the African residential areas. From the inception of Nairobi as a backwater railway camp, social life was reified upon racial (and ethnic) grounds. Segregationist urban planning was the answer to white fears of black bodies. The establishment of a segregated city solved two of the early settlers' "problems". Firstly, the "diseased races" of Africans and Asians – upon whom they depended for labour, industry, and expertise – supposedly threatened public health, and were thus kept away from settlers. This excuse enabled settlers to achieve the second and more pressing desire to exercise control over Africans and Asians.<sup>9</sup> The existence of a dominant minority European community in Nairobi depended on the reification of specific shared assumptions and beliefs.<sup>10</sup> The racialised and segregationist policies of the colonial regime had a powerful impact upon the freedoms of Africans and Asians while the European population lived on vast estates in the Happy Valley of the White Highlands, in semi-rural dwellings on the outskirts of town, or in Upper Nairobi – particularly Westlands.

Despite these prevalent anxieties within the settler population, there was a conspicuous absence of meaningful guidelines to manage the growing urban centres of Kenya, resulting in ad hoc measures rather than systemic urban planning.<sup>11</sup> This all transformed during war time (1939-1945). Political change, a war economy, and shifting beliefs about African urban labour coalesced

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<sup>8</sup> Emil Rado and Judith Wells, "The building industry in Kenya," in *Urban Challenge in East Africa*, ed. John Hutton (Nairobi: EAPH, 1971), 200-224.

<sup>9</sup> Godwin Murunga, "Segregationist Town Planning and the Emergence of African Political Protest in Colonial Nairobi, 1899-1939," PhD Thesis, Northwestern University, 2006, 90-93; Claire Médard, "City Planning in Nairobi: The Stakes, the People, the Sidetracking," in *Nairobi Today: The Paradox of a Fragmented City*, eds. Hélène Charton-Bigot and Deyssi Rodriguez-Torres (Nairobi: Institut Française Recherche en Afrique, 2010), 25-60.

<sup>10</sup> Murunga, "Segregationist Town Planning," 93.

<sup>11</sup> Richard E. Stren, "The evolution of housing policy in Kenya," in *Urban Challenge in East Africa*, edited by John Hutton (Nairobi: EAPH, 1971), 61.

to form the basis of new policies and research on urban Kenya.<sup>12</sup> Kenya's new Governor, Sir Philip Mitchell, believed radical economic changes in agriculture would bring Africans to the levels of "civilization and skills" where they could work on equal levels to that of Europeans.<sup>13</sup> This was understood in conjunction with urban challenges: labour migration, stabilisation, productivity, and urbanisation were understood as inextricably linked. The connection between these issues were steadily becoming prioritised: the Native Affairs Officer in 1939 wrote that, "Native policy in Nairobi should encourage the better type of native worker and provide accommodation for him and his family in the town."<sup>14</sup> The 1946 Report of the Development Committee similarly advocated for appropriate housing and the integration of African families, not just men, within urban environments:

[I]t is important that industrial undertakings should not be erected on unsatisfactory labour conditions and that the industries should be built up on the assumption that the employees will become completely urbanized with their families... This in turn means the provision of adequate and suitable housing and health services, and the payment of adequate wages to maintain family life.<sup>15</sup>

Concerns around labour stabilisation and the colonial desire to manage cyclical migration grew during this period. Significant change did not come fast enough, and by the mid 1950s there were still serious challenges; the Report of the Committee on African Wages, otherwise known as the Carpenter Report (1954), asserted, "by reason of its profound economic and social implications, is the consideration that the migrant labour system – with its implied acceptance of the adult male, rather than the family, as the consumer unit – must indirectly entail a degree of dependence of

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<sup>12</sup> For an extensive overview of these colonial intellectual processes see, Joanna Lewis, *Empire State-Building: War and Welfare in Kenya 1925-52* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000) 136-140; a more personal exploration of these challenges may be read in Tom Askwith, "African Vagrancy Memorandum," January 12, 1950, in *From Mau Mau to Harambee: Memoirs and Memoranda of Colonial Kenya*, ed. Joanna Lewis (Cambridge: African Studies Centre, University of Cambridge, 1995), 60-5.

<sup>13</sup> Stren, "The evolution of housing policy in Kenya," 61. (Sir Philip Mitchell was Governor of Kenya from 1944-1952. He was succeeded by Evelyn Baring, not to be confused with his father of the same name: Evelyn Baring, Controller-General and Consul-General of Egypt.)

<sup>14</sup> Government of the Colony of Kenya, *Report of Committee of Inquiry into Labour Unrest at Mombasa [Phillips Committee]* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1945), part II, p.50, quoted in Stren, "The evolution of housing policy in Kenya," 61.

<sup>15</sup> Report of the Development Committee (Nairobi: Government Printer 1946) Volume II, 192-193, quoted in Stren, "The evolution of housing policy in Kenya," 61.

industry upon the resources of the African reserves.”<sup>16</sup> Following efforts to keep Africans out of urban spaces, these perspectives of urban development represented new beliefs on urbanisation. The current system was understood as extractive and detrimental to both urban and rural spaces; men did not remain in rural environments long enough to benefit rural communities and could uproot to move to the city when they desired. Every time a man went to the city, he had to begin almost from the very bottom of urban hierarchies: his previous job filled by another, his contacts – like him – in other work, unemployed, or with rural families, and his situation as desperate as it had been before. Talents developed in one industry often did not translate to others, and employers viewed all potential employees as unskilled, irrespective of their working history. With only 20 per cent of African employees with a record of service in their job for longer than two years, few became skilled enough to earn above the minimum wage (and employers were hardly incentivised to pay anything more than minimum wage).<sup>17</sup> Competition also grew as urban migration increased alongside the economic boom. The city was in flux, and it was challenging for the migrant worker to benefit from such fluidity. The change in colonial attitudes toward urban Africans came during a time of transformation, as the city began to grapple with the complex realities of a diverse and growing population seeking space and opportunity within its confines.

Efforts to establish adequate housing for Africans in Nairobi were fraught with significant challenges. The Government and Municipal Council, while rapidly building accommodation, could not keep pace with the overwhelming numbers of new migrants. Between 1939 and 1947, state provision of housing for Africans in Nairobi had almost doubled.<sup>18</sup> During the Second World War an additional 2,100 housing units were constructed, with the number growing by 2,219 during the initial two years of Governor Philip Mitchell’s leadership.<sup>19</sup> This expansion saw the creation of

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<sup>16</sup> Kenya, Report of the Committee on African Wages [Carpenter Report] (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1954), part I, 16, accessed February 3, 2024, <http://kenyalaw.org/kl/fileadmin/CommissionReports/Report-of-the-Committee-on-African-Wages%20-1954.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> Werlin, *Governing an African City*, 61.

<sup>18</sup> David W. Throup, *The Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau* (London: James Currey, 1987), 178.

<sup>19</sup> Throup, *Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau*, 179.

new housing developments in Makongeni (1940), Ziani (1943), Kaloleni (1944), and Marurani (1946).<sup>20</sup> Additionally, existing housing facilities in Starehe, Shauri Moyo, and Pumwani were expanded to accommodate more residents. In 1941 the case for £150,000 worth of low-cost housing for Africans in Nairobi was posed by the Municipal Native Affairs Officer and the Senior Medical Officer of Health for the 6,000 Africans they estimated needed accommodation.<sup>21</sup> This case was made upon both health concerns and the social dangers that arose out of the sub-standard living conditions, including theft, prostitution, and disease.

The government and Municipal Council's capacity to build new housing projects expanded due to the allocation of new funds. The first Housing Ordinance established in 1943 aimed to use a free grant provided by the Colonial Development and Welfare Vote. The subsequent Colonial Development and Welfare act of 1945 provided a cash injection into the Government's spending. By 1947, however, the coffers had run dry. Spending on the construction of sub-economic housing had resulted in significant increase in debt over the years. The shortfall between what renters could afford with their sub-economic rents and the Council and Government's debt repayments were substantial. At £587,566 in 1940, the burden of debt expanded to £860,869 by the end of World War II.<sup>22</sup> This figure further escalated, reaching £2,634,260 just four years later. By 1957, the cumulative effect of these policies saw municipal borrowing swell to a total of £9,021,836.<sup>23</sup> Debt was in freefall. Despite efforts to build new housing and growing debt, the city's capacity to house urban Africans languished behind its needs. By 1947, Nairobi was at over 28 percent capacity. A third of Nairobi's African population lived in Pumwani, where people endured the most overcrowded of conditions at 375 people per acre.<sup>24</sup> This figure, as startling as it is, is reliant on accepting official data, the situation was almost certainly worse due to issues collecting data – it is

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<sup>20</sup> Throup, *Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau*, 179.

<sup>21</sup> Stren, "The evolution of housing policy in Kenya," 63.

<sup>22</sup> Throup, *Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau*, 182.

<sup>23</sup> Throup, *Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau*, 182.

<sup>24</sup> Throup, *Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau*, 179.

suggested that there could have been as many as 13,000 people unrecorded in the census data with only 15,000 officially recorded.<sup>25</sup> This deficit of 26,000 beds increased by 10,000 year-on-year.<sup>26</sup> The true extent of these issues was likely far worse.

Colonial administrators mooted numerous solutions to the spiralling problem of housing and debt. In early 1949, a study tour to South Africa and the Rhodesias was undertaken by the Deputy Labour Commissioner and the Commissioner for Local Government.<sup>27</sup> The insights gained from these more urbanised territories were thought to hold potential lessons for Kenya. The subsequent report produced by Nairobi Alderman, Ernest Vasey, placed emphasis on the development of economic housing that would enable Africans to become homeowners.<sup>28</sup> Vasey had already pioneered a successful scheme whereby the council raised the funds to build accommodation, while private industry plugged the deficit gap between the sub-economic rates paid by labourers and the full economic rent required by the council to cover its debt repayments.<sup>29</sup> The first of these estates was called Gorofani, and consisted of 800 two-storey blocks with three men to a room. His subsequent report (the Vasey report) advocated for building a sense of community and stability among the urban population. Moreover, the report highlighted the necessity of careful physical planning of housing estates.<sup>30</sup> Such planning aimed to reduce both the distance and the financial burden of commuting for work, addressing one of the critical challenges faced by urban workers. Sub-economic housing would be inevitable in the interim, and employer-built schemes only marginally useful; the true solution for Vasey lay in raising African wages and empowering them to build their own houses.

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<sup>25</sup> Throup, *Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau*, 179.

<sup>26</sup> Throup, *Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau*, 179.

<sup>27</sup> Stren, "The evolution of housing policy in Kenya," 67.

<sup>28</sup> Copies of the Vasey report are kept in the Kenya National Archives which have not been accessed as part of this study, however the Hake collection at SOAS contains detailed reports and notes concerning the Vasey report, African Affairs Committee, "Report by the African Affairs Committee on the Vasey Report on African Housing in Townships and Trading Centres" SOAS, PP MS 46/04/01/02, Reports and notes concerning the Vasey report on African housing with related correspondence.

<sup>29</sup> Throup, *Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau*, 185.

<sup>30</sup> African Affairs Committee, "Report by the African Affairs Committee on the Vasey Report on African Housing in Townships and Trading Centres" SOAS, PP MS 46/04/01/02, Reports and notes concerning the Vasey report on African housing with related correspondence.

There were significant issues, however, with using South Africa as a blueprint upon which to implement urban policy and projects in Kenya, notably due to the vast differences in economic contexts. Wages, for example, in South Africa were four times higher for Africans than in Kenya.<sup>31</sup> Most of the Kenyan African population could not afford to invest their own capital in construction projects. Further, the cost of construction materials in Nairobi was substantially higher than in other areas. A ton of cement costing £4 in London or Johannesburg and £7 in India went for between £12 and £20 in Nairobi in 1953.<sup>32</sup> Any possible savings that could be made in using cheaper labour were offset by the fact that the small cadre of best skilled artisans earned as much as men in the same profession in London.<sup>33</sup>

Alternate housing solutions were suggested by settlers and Municipal Native Affairs Officer, Tom Askwith, such as building mud and wattle houses using construction methods common in rural areas. These ideas were swiftly dismissed by the medical establishment on the basis that disease could sweep through settlements built in this manner.<sup>34</sup> These risks were supposedly mitigated in the reserves as houses were more spread out. Areas of the colonial administration were not prepared to compromise on quality even in the face of overwhelming overcrowding. Limited self-help schemes had better success. The council provided land, dug roads and drains, and provided materials at cost to the handful of prosperous Africans who could afford to build their own houses. While these schemes were very popular among those that could afford it, they had limited impact upon the urban masses who did not have the means.<sup>35</sup> Many, however, looked to squatter villages, the informal settlements that emerged throughout the city, for accommodation and support. These were crucial as reception centres for the influx of migrants. While built in unfavourable locations, often with poor drainage and sanitation, (the site upon which

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<sup>31</sup> Throup, *Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau*, 183.

<sup>32</sup> David M. Anderson, "Corruption at City Hall: African housing and urban development in colonial Nairobi," *Azania* 36/37 (2001): 149.

<sup>33</sup> Anderson, "Corruption at City Hall," 149.

<sup>34</sup> Throup, *Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau*, 184.

<sup>35</sup> Throup, *Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau*, 187.

the first settlers of Nairobi had chosen to build the city were less than favourable) these settlements possessed great potential for community building, cheap accommodation, and potential employment. Kitui village (next to Pumwani), for example, became a well organised community into the postcolonial period, administered by elders, with churches and schools.<sup>36</sup>

Despite the celebration of African housing schemes in the city in the early 1950s, the Nairobi City Council was rife with corruption and mismanagement especially in its handling of construction projects.<sup>37</sup> The situation was starkly uncovered by Sir Alan Rose, a Colonial Office lawyer, in the Rose Commission's findings (1955-1956). Kenya's new Governor, Evelyn Baring, had made it an early priority of his leadership to uncover these issues, and several senior council officials were charged with fraud in 1955.<sup>38</sup> These widespread allegations of fraud and unethical practices among senior council officials culminated in a scandal that not only marred the council's reputation but also severely affected the implementation of housing policies.<sup>39</sup> The picture painted was a bleak tableau of corruption, greed, and malpractice: "deliberate fraud at the expense of the ratepayers," "general practice of accepting presents," blind eyes cast by Councillors, and City Council servants "demanding or accepting... bribes."<sup>40</sup> Rose's report, while concise, was rigorous. Poor practices were spelled out through extensive research and vivid interviews, and the list of incriminated individuals was long. The problem was systemic. This deep-rooted misconduct led to the squandering of resources meant for the development of adequate housing for Africans, thereby exacerbating the living conditions in already overcrowded estates. The Rose Commission's revelations highlighted the deep-rooted issues within the municipal governance system, casting a

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<sup>36</sup> Herbert H. Werlin, "Nairobi's Politics of Housing," *The African Review* 3, no. 4 (1973): 619–620.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, H.R. Bridger (city engineer), 'What Nairobi is doing to house Africans,' *East African Standard*, May 22 1953; 'City Council's five-year plan to aid Nairobi Africans,' *East African Standard*, May 23 1953; 'Plan to House 10,000,' *East African Standard*, May 28 1953, 'Big housing plan for Kenya', *The Manchester Guardian*, 3 August 1953.

<sup>38</sup> Anderson, "Corruption at City Hall," 139.

<sup>39</sup> Anderson, "Corruption at City Hall," 139.

<sup>40</sup> Government of the Colony of Kenya, *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Alleged Corruption or other Malpractices in Relation to the Affairs of the Nairobi City Council, December 1955 – March 1956* [Rose Commission Report] (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1956), 45, 46, 48.

long shadow over the council's ability to manage urban development effectively. The consequences of such corruption and mismanagement extended beyond the immediate financial losses, impacting the social fabric of Nairobi's African communities. It stifled the implementation of effective housing policy and construction, which were crucial to the general wellbeing and safety of the growing African population. This ultimately hindered improved living standards and had an indelible impact upon quality of life and African society.

#### The view from the urban village – land, gender, crime, and Mau Mau

The challenges posed by the housing crisis and colonial visions for African Nairobi affected the villages within the city differently. The following section approaches some of Nairobi's villages in turn – Kawangware, Kibera, Mathare Valley, Pumwani and Shauri Moyo – demonstrating the unique experiences of these villages. Finally, attention is turned to Operation Anvil and the effects of Mau Mau across African Nairobi.

Despite the effects of corruption and fraud upon construction, the city still grew at a rapid rate. Some African communities stood to benefit from these rapid changes. The Kikuyu community at Kawangware (who made up two-thirds of the African population of Kawangware) had a unique experience within Nairobi through the preservation of their community's historic power structures.<sup>41</sup> Unlike many communities affected by urbanisation, the Kikuyu of Kawangware did not migrate to Nairobi, but benefitted from the city coming to them (Figure 1.2). Their community, networks and infrastructure already existed on the land that was subsumed into the city's limits. As the city's limits expanded, the inhabitants of Kawangware had no other option but to become urban. This enveloping of their communities meant that power structures and kin networks were preserved instead of disrupted by migration. Encouraged by the colonial regime to develop family farms to supply affordable food for low-income urban African workers, the

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<sup>41</sup> Dallas LaSalle Browne, "Kawangware: Urbanisation by Absorption, Identity, and Social Change in Nairobi" (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Illinois, 1983), 5.

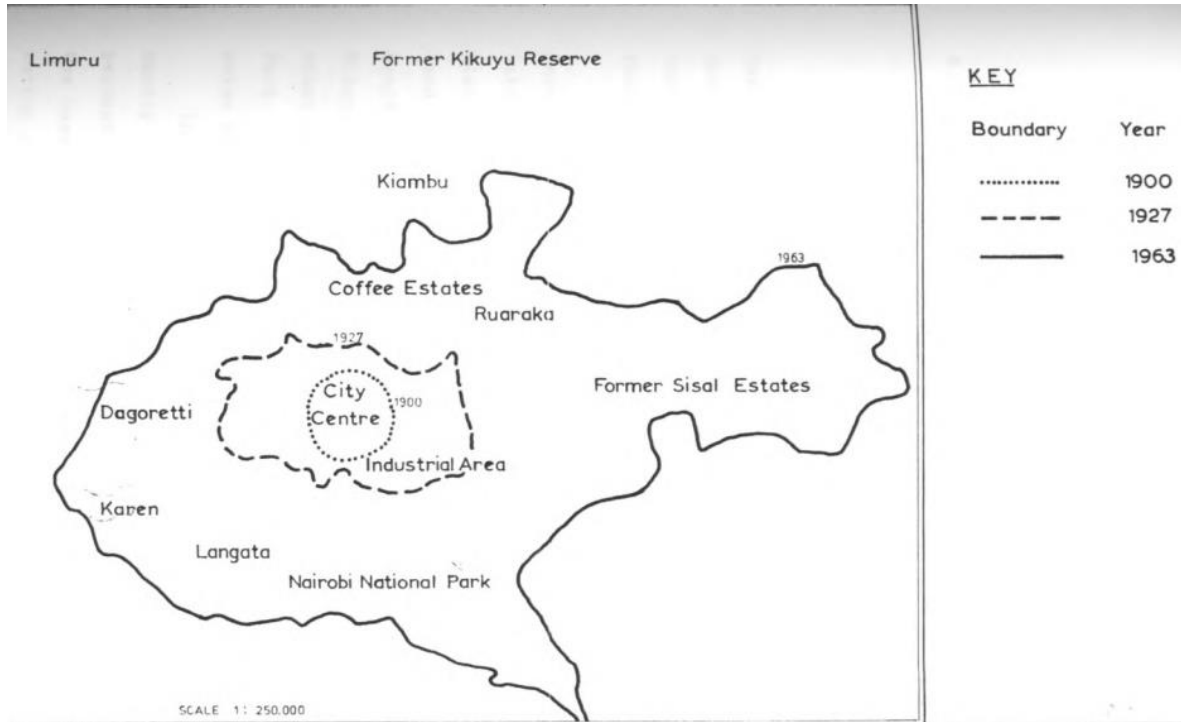
Kawangware Kikuyu recognised the economic benefits in becoming landlords during the 1940s. This led to a period of prosperity for many of the land holding families in Kawangware. Having retained possession of their ancestral lands they could maintain control over community life within an urban context; the council of elders and core (land owning) families dominated the legal settlement of disputes, criminal cases, and maintained law and order in an urban environment where these provisions could not be provided by colonial authorities.<sup>42</sup> This gerontocracy, while by no means egalitarian, provided stability in the face of a rapidly changing urban environment. The Kawangware community further benefitted from greater integration within urban systems, the land-holding families diversified their economic means, became prominent wholesale traders and held roles in the banking sector. The money generated from these enterprises stayed in Kawangware as people took opportunities to invest in their community. The land-holding families attained a middle-class income status but deliberately stayed within the neighbourhood.

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<sup>42</sup> Browne, "Kawangware," 1-6.

**Figure 1.2**

“Boundary changes in Nairobi,” in Juliana K. Mutua, “The Role of Non-Governmental Organization in Slum and Squatter Settlement Upgrading: A Case Study of Undugu Society of Kenya in Kitui Village” (PhD diss., University of Nairobi, 1992), 52a.



This period of good fortune for the Kawangware Kikuyu was interrupted, however. During the Mau Mau emergency, stringent regulations temporarily slowed down these processes and led to the relocation of residents from their semi-urban farms to synthetic villages through the process of villagization. During these processes social life was deeply changed. For the first time, Kawangware Kikuyu lived in incredibly close proximity with one another as opposed to on their own separate, isolated, family holdings.<sup>43</sup> Further, the British forced them to form cooperatives and communal work groups. Individuals who belonged to these groups were exempt from forced labour on the days their work group met. While the British had seen this as a method of westernising Kikuyu and undermining their culture, core families saw this as a new expression of traditional Kikuyu cooperation called *gwantaniro*.<sup>44</sup> One of the most successful articulations of these

<sup>43</sup> Browne, “Kawangware,” 48.

<sup>44</sup> Browne, “Kawangware,” 48.

*gvantaniro* cooperatives was established in 1956 with Mama Monica Kamuyu as chairperson: the Kawangware Women's Egg Co-operative had 86 members.<sup>45</sup> While the organisation fulfilled the colonial regime's intentions as a forced co-operative, Chairperson Kamuyu also noted that it served an important role in building solidarity and social connections between the women of the land-holding families.<sup>46</sup>

The Mau Mau emergency brought about significant changes in Kawangware, as suspicion of involvement with or sympathy for the fight for the freedom movement led to the strict use of the *kipande* system to control population movement.<sup>47</sup> The *kipande* system worked almost as an internal passport, designed to control the flow of African migrants within the colony. From 1920, males over the age of fifteen years were required to register before a local administrative officer and be issued with a pass which included a finger-printed certificate of identity.<sup>48</sup> These passes, referred to as *kipandes*, included personal details and were used as evidence of employment.<sup>49</sup> While the original idea behind the system was conceived to protect African labour interests, in practice the pass could be used by officials to trace individuals and monitor their movement more easily. Urban trades in banking and as wholesale traders were hamstrung; the mobility of the Kawangware's men and women about town were severely impacted. The eventual abolition of the *kipande* pass in 1960 facilitated easier movement in the city, benefiting Kikuyu merchants. By independence, the Kawangware Kikuyu underwent a unique journey in the early colonial period from a network of farms led by core families to an integral village within the city. After the emergency, committees were established to reallocate land that had been taken from the Kikuyu Kawangware. This was a process marred by questionable influences and corruption. While some were allocated land in more desirable neighbourhoods like Riruta and Waitthaka, others, particularly

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<sup>45</sup> Browne, "Kawangware," 48.

<sup>46</sup> Browne, "Kawangware," 48.

<sup>47</sup> Browne, "Kawangware," 64.

<sup>48</sup> David Anderson, "Master and Servant in Colonial Kenya, 1895–1939," *Journal of African History* 41, no. 3 (2000): 464.

<sup>49</sup> Anderson, "Master and Servant," 464.

tenants and the landless, were assigned plots in Kawangware, often securing their rights through bribery.<sup>50</sup>

The Kikuyu of Kawangware had a unique experience and represent a remarkable journey from pastoralists to townspeople, and townspeople to Mau Mau suspects. Their landholding rights and proximity to the city afforded them opportunities but came under scrutiny in the face of punitive anti Mau Mau measures. Other land-holding communities were faced with different challenges in the city. Upon settlement of Sudanese soldiers in 1912 in Kibera, a forested area on the outskirts of Nairobi, it seemed that the prospects of Nubian soldiers were positive. While the East African Protectorate had rules about the settlement of Nubian servicemen, the Nubians of Nairobi were permitted to live with their families, keep *shambas* (small holdings), and graze cattle.<sup>51</sup> Recognising these fortunate circumstances, the Nubians of Kibera largely kept to themselves. A golden age for Nairobi's Nubians followed. By 1933 there were 251 Sudanese and 320 non-Sudanese in Kibera.<sup>52</sup>

The issue of land, however, reared its head. Colonial town planners resented that preceding protectorate authorities had granted these Sudanese wanderers land in such proximity to the settlers' paradise of Nairobi. These individuals, who were soldiers or children of soldiers that had served for the British were swiftly brought under scrutiny. Like the Kikuyu of Kawangware, the Nubians of Kibera started to rent out their properties to Africans from other ethnic groups. This exacerbated tensions with the colonial authorities: humouring ex-soldiers out of a sense of duty was bad enough, that they were housing other Africans was worse.<sup>53</sup> Colonial authorities attempted to manipulate the situation, first claiming that the land had only been promised to the askaris themselves, however their administrative attempts to evict the Nubians was unsuccessful. By 1939

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<sup>50</sup> Browne, "Kawangware," 64.

<sup>51</sup> Samantha Balaton-Chrimes, "The Nubians of Kenya: Citizenship in the Gaps and Margins," in *Citizenship, Belonging, and Political Community in Africa: Dialogues between Past and Present*, ed. Emma Hunter (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2016), 152.

<sup>52</sup> Balaton-Chrimes, "The Nubians of Kenya," 153-154.

<sup>53</sup> Balaton-Chrimes, "The Nubians of Kenya", 153.

with the colonial regime exhausted their efforts and instead decided to neglect the area in terms of service provision, meanwhile sporting clubs, railway lines, and settler residences encroached on all sides.<sup>54</sup>

Before 1952, Kibera had a relatively uniform community predominantly comprising Muslim Nubians, alongside Kikuyu agricultural settlements on its outskirts.<sup>55</sup> The living arrangement of these Kikuyu resembled that of squatters on European-owned farms, where individuals were allowed to reside on the land in return for their labour on various agricultural endeavours. During 1954 Operation Anvil, which led to the demolition of Mathare Valley, Kibera was affected. It became one of Nairobi's remaining locales that offered affordable housing options for Africans and opportunities for self-constructed homes. The destruction of the Mathare Valley was part of a broader strategy aimed at reducing the Kikuyu presence in Nairobi. This objective was further facilitated by promoting the resettlement of Luo and Luhya migrants from Western Kenya into Nairobi, thereby gradually diminishing the Kikuyu's dominance in the city's African labour market.<sup>56</sup> Kibera was deemed a secure place to settle, largely due to the Nubians' reputation for loyalty to the British, and the land was settled by Luo and Luhya groups, steering them away from the predominantly Kikuyu Mathare Valley.<sup>57</sup> The 1950s witnessed a significant influx of these new migrants, a development that the established Nubian community used to their benefit. They started to expand their homes and construct new ones for rent, tapping into the burgeoning housing demand.

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<sup>54</sup> Balaton-Chrimes, "The Nubians of Kenya", 154.

<sup>55</sup> Philip Amis, "A Shanty Town of Tenants; The Commercialisation of Unauthorized Housing in Kibera, 1960 to 1980" (unpublished doctoral thesis, Kent University, 1983) 152.

<sup>56</sup> Amis, "A Shanty Town of Tenants," 153.

<sup>57</sup> Amis, "A Shanty Town of Tenants," 153.

### Urban lives in colonial Nairobi

How these broader social circumstances played out and affected daily lives in colonial Nairobi is observed in the following section, focussing particularly on the lives of women and their roles within their respective villages. This overview of some key narratives, unearthed by leading scholars of Nairobi's gender dynamics, demonstrate that the challenges faced by urban actors also presented opportunities. Despite the skewed gender demographics, women carved indispensable roles in Nairobi. Mathare Valley, despite its destruction during Operation Anvil, was informally reconstructed by urban dwellers. At independence it housed a significant population within its makeshift homes. Mathare Valley was one of the very few places in Nairobi where women outnumbered men. The women of Mathare, often heads of their households, engaged in various forms of small-scale entrepreneurship to sustain themselves and their families.<sup>58</sup> In a context where men held the rights to land, women's economic activities became their avenue to financial and social autonomy. Women's work, especially beer brewing, became a cultural cornerstone as well as a vital economic activity.<sup>59</sup>

The daily life of a Mathare beer brewer, particularly one with children, was characterised by long hours of labour-intensive work. Early morning brewing sessions, preparing meals, fetching water, and managing household chores filled their days. These women, while maintaining their homes, navigated the complex economic landscape of the informal sector to support themselves and dependents. Claire Robertson argues that the imposition of the Emergency from 1952 to 1960 was designed to curb not only the guerrilla warfare of Mau Mau but also to manage the increasingly visible traders of Nairobi.<sup>60</sup> Even though the Emergency had largely concluded by 1959, a sort of informal version persisted until 1963, particularly targeting the regulation of street vendors.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Nici Nelson, "Women without Men: Mathare Valley Beer Brewers," *Kenya Past and Present* 13 (1981): 7.

<sup>59</sup> Nelson, "Women without Men" 8.

<sup>60</sup> Claire Robertson, *Trouble Showed the Way: Women, Men, and Trade in the Nairobi Area, 1890-1990* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997) 102.

<sup>61</sup> Robertson, *Trouble Showed the Way*, 102.

Women sex workers were among the earliest established African groups in Nairobi. A police report in 1907 claimed that there were between three hundred to five hundred “prostitutes” in Nairobi, many of whom from the Nandi and Lumbwa tribes.<sup>62</sup> Sex workers accumulated wealth and land, were able to support their rural families, and provided essential reproductive labour for the men that sought out their services.<sup>63</sup> They were one of the first urban “problems” that colonial authorities faced when constructing villages and townships, accused of “spreading disease, gambling, thieving”.<sup>64</sup>

However, (except for in Mathare Valley) women were heavily outnumbered by men. In 1939, Nairobi's Municipal Affairs Officer estimated that there were around eight African men for every one African woman.<sup>65</sup> Around a quarter of these men were domestic servants. According to the first official census in 1948, the male to female ratio had more than halved to 3.5 : 1, due to the effects of the Second World War.<sup>66</sup> In the neighbourhoods of Pumwani and Shauri Moyo from 1946 to 1952, the post-war period heralded significant shifts in the practices of prostitution. This era saw the blending of the distinct forms of sex work - *watembezi*, *malaya* and *wazi-wazi* – (as defined in Luise White's seminal work) as women navigated the new opportunities and economic challenges that emerged in the aftermath of World War II.<sup>67</sup> The rigid classifications that once defined their trade became increasingly fluid, as women resiliently adapted their practices.

In the late 1940s, women who identified as *malaya* (urban tenant) prostitutes carved out a niche for themselves as independent household heads, building their income from sex and reproductive labour.<sup>68</sup> Their clientele primarily consisted of economically stable African men –

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<sup>62</sup> Letter from Asst. Dist. Supt. Police W.R. Forzan to The Acting Provincial Commissioner, Nairobi, 6<sup>th</sup> July 1907, KNA, AP/1/400, Prostitutes in Nairobi - Removal of undesirable Nandi and Lumbwa women 1907.

<sup>63</sup> Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

<sup>64</sup> Letter from Sub Commissioner's office, Naivasha to The Crown Advocate, Mombasa, 28<sup>th</sup> January 1907, KNA, AP/1/400.

<sup>65</sup> John Lonsdale, “Town Life in Colonial Kenya,” in *Nairobi Today: The Paradox of a Fragmented City*, eds. Hélène Charton-Bigot and Deyssi Rodriguez-Torres (Nairobi: Institut Française Recherche en Afrique, 2010), 8.

<sup>66</sup> Lonsdale, “Town Life in Colonial Kenya”, 8.

<sup>67</sup> White, *Comforts of Home*, 1-28

<sup>68</sup> See for a full definition of the *malaya* form of prostitution, White, *Comforts of Home*, 16-19.

skilled laborers, domestic servants, or self-employed individuals – residing in areas like Ziwani, Eastleigh, Mathare, and Kawangware. Post-World War II, a notable shift occurred as men started avoiding prostitutes without children, fearing sexually transmitted diseases, particularly gonorrhoea. Consequently, prostitutes with small children, especially those arriving from Railway Landhies, became increasingly preferred, as their maternal status was perceived as a marker of health.<sup>69</sup>

The aftermath of World War II ushered in a change in the dynamics of prostitution, with the *wazi-wazi* form, where women attempted to engage with prospective clients from the front door or veranda of their properties, gaining prominence among women with children, owing to its perceived safety and convenience for childcare. However, not all prostitutes with small children opted for this form between 1946 and 1952. The decline in real wages disrupted older methods of securing affluent clients, prompting many women, especially from Pumwani, to engage in daytime *watembezi* (streetwalking) prostitution. By 1950, this practice had adapted to the social changes, with some men, particularly those who were previously KAR veterans, showing a preference for women with children (as fertility was seen as linked to sexual health). Concurrently, in Shauri Moyo and Pumwani villages, the diminishing value of wages led wealthier men to offer gifts instead of cash, with *malaya* women placing significant value on the outer garments they received, which influenced their societal perception and interactions. Luise White demonstrates that while some prostitutes, were cautious about appearing too lavish and alienating potential local clients, others revelled in the gifts from Europeans and Africans, critiquing the lesser offerings from Kenyan men post-war, highlighting the interplay between clothing, status, and gender dynamics within the community.<sup>70</sup>

Complaints about prostitutes were consistently raised by welfare associations following the second world war. Samwel Ong'wen Okuro has studied post-war colonial Nyanza to reveal how

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<sup>69</sup> White, *Comforts of Home*, 195-196.

<sup>70</sup> White, *Comforts of Home*, 201.

vocal rural Luo elders were in their attempts to repatriate and thus assert control over young Luo men and women.<sup>71</sup> Away from the control of elders to colonial forces feared town dwelling Africans as becoming “detrribalised” who lived dangerous lives away from such stabilising forces.<sup>72</sup> Beyond Nyanza however, the story was similar. In 1951 the Kipsigis Nandi Union Nairobi decided to bring to the attention of the Commissioner of police in Nairobi the issue that “Kalenjin” (in this case Nandi, Elgeyo/Keiyo, Tugen and Kipsigis) women from their communities were engaging in sex work and migrating away.<sup>73</sup> The representatives of the Kalenjin community claimed that “the name of the Nandi Speaking people” had “been spoiled by... harlots”, they had “no where to stay,” and were “wondering all the places and comit [sic] immorality every where they go.”<sup>74</sup> To them, urban sex work affected the moral fabric of these institutions. The process of attempting to repatriate urban men and women was ultimately a fruitless endeavour. In 1941 a labour commissioner described the process of sending vagrant young men and boys back to reserves as “joy rides for juveniles.”<sup>75</sup> In 1945, a notable twenty-one percent of young vagrants found themselves simply set free. Police officers identified what they deemed “visible” indications of idleness in the expressions of young Africans, leading to their arrest and subsequent court appearances.<sup>76</sup> However, judges, overwhelmed by the sheer volume of cases, and municipal bodies, constrained by budgetary limitations for repatriation, were unable to process all these individuals effectively.<sup>77</sup> Consequently, a substantial number of these young people were merely given a verbal reprimand before being discharged back onto the streets.

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<sup>71</sup> Okuro, Samwel Ong’wen, “Our Women Must Return Home: Institutionalized Patriarchy in Colonial Central Nyanza District, 1945-1963.” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 45, no. 5 (October 2010), pp.522–33.

<sup>72</sup> Lewis, *Empire State-Building*, 296-7.

<sup>73</sup> Letter from the Kipsigis Nandi Union Nairobi to the Commissioner of Police Nairobi, 26<sup>th</sup> September 1951, KNA, AM/1/1/13, Prostitution and Brothels – 1951.

<sup>74</sup> Letter from the Kipsigis Nandi Union Nairobi to the Commissioner of Police Nairobi, 26<sup>th</sup> September 1951, KNA, AM/1/1/13.

<sup>75</sup> Labour Commissioner P. de V. Allen, quoted in Paul Ocobock, *An Uncertain Age: The Politics of Manhood in Kenya* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2017), 134.

<sup>76</sup> Ocobock, *Uncertain Age*, 135.

<sup>77</sup> Ocobock, *Uncertain Age*, 135; War Council Memorandum – Vagrant Juveniles, 1958, UKNA CO 822/1804: Increase of crime in Nairobi and security in towns in Kenya.

Gang violence and organised crime in the city were an important part of this story. Luise White has proposed that there has been some hyperbole regarding crime during the 1940s and 1950s, such as in the work of David Throup, as women were able to move within the city, especially in poor neighbourhoods such as Pumwani, with relative ease.<sup>78</sup> However, the threat of violence, particularly toward the *Tai-tai*, (those that worked in government employment, as clerks and office assistants) was significant as they were singled-out by Mau Mau fighters and terrorised.<sup>79</sup> The largest gang, the *anake a forty*, was comprised of young ex-servicemen who openly opposed the colonial regime and the chiefs whom they considered colonial collaborators, were the most prolific gang in Nairobi between 1947 and 1949. They had been driven to organised crime due to their compromised maturity, loss of self-mastery, and the high cost of living in Nairobi (which speedily ate through their accumulated capital as servicemen).<sup>80</sup> While their intentions were sometimes rural in focus, to reclaim access to kin networks, self-mastery, and land, the liminal space of the city offered a space to articulate their discontent.<sup>81</sup> Mau Mau fighters, who considered the approach of the Kenya African Union too moderate, mobilised sex-workers, taxi drivers and squatters as part of the early movement. By the 1950s, Mau Mau oaths were taken within the city, especially in Eastlands.<sup>82</sup>

While the rural violence of the Mau Mau rebellion is an important element of the conflict, the events of the emergency – particularly the early stages of the conflict – deeply affected Nairobi too. The city provided a “convenient and rich source of supply of recruits, arms, ammunition, and money” to the Kikuyu who were “either active or passive supporters of Mau-Mau.”<sup>83</sup> It was

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<sup>78</sup> White, *Comforts of Home*, 185-186.

<sup>79</sup> For an overview of these events, see, Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, 190-200.

<sup>80</sup> John Lonsdale, “The Moral Economy of Mau Mau: Wealth Poverty and Civic Virtue in Kikuyu Political Thought,” in *Unhappy Valley, Book Two: Violence and Ethnicity*, by John Lonsdale and Bruce Berman (London: Currey, 1992), 315-468.

<sup>81</sup> Richard Waller, “Rebellious Youth in Colonial Africa,” *Journal of African History* 47, no. 1 (2006): 89, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853705001672>.

<sup>82</sup> David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005), 190-91.

<sup>83</sup> *Operation Anvil, Outline Plan by Joint Commanders*, 1954, 2, 6, UKNA, CO 822/796, Emergency in Kenya: Operation ANVIL and resulting conditions in Nairobi.

decided that the Kikuyu, who constituted 75% of the African working population, should be excised from the city during Operation Anvil.<sup>84</sup> On 24<sup>th</sup> April 1954, in an effort to control the dissident Mau Mau rebels in the city, Nairobi was cleared of all Kikuyu inhabitants who were then sent for processing in screening camps.<sup>85</sup> Operation Anvil brought Mau Mau out of the city, disproportionately affecting the Kikuyu.

### Conclusion

This chapter has explored the effects of Nairobi's economic situation during the late colonial era and has unpacked the impact of urbanisation and housing crises, and the interplay of colonial policies, ethnic dynamics, and socio-economic shifts. This narrative approach has positioned the housing crisis as central to broader social and cultural issues, and the acceleration of Mau Mau. Despite colonial housing efforts languishing behind the needs of the city, the post-independence Council could not keep pace either: between 1964 and 1970, 4,647 units of housing were added to the Council's housing stock (only one unit per 58.0 people) versus the 13,187 units of council housing that were built pre-independence (one unit of housing for every 20.9 people.)<sup>86</sup>

This chapter has illustrated how Nairobi, a colonial city segmented into distinct villages before independence, each with its unique character and challenges, navigated through the final decades of colonial rule. The examination of communities, particularly the Kawangware Kikuyu, Kibera Nubians, Mathare Valley, Pumwani and Shauri Moyo reveals the different impacts of the housing crisis upon the city of villages. The housing crisis served as a catalyst for the emergence of unique cultural practices, the intensification of ethnic tensions, and the shaping of movements such as Mau Mau. Operation Anvil, the climax of the struggle between colonial authorities and the

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<sup>84</sup> *Operation Anvil, Outline Plan by Joint Commanders*, 1954, 6, UKNA, CO 822/796.

<sup>85</sup> For an overview of Operation Anvil see Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, 200-12; Caroline Elkins, *Britain's Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya* (London: The Bodley Head 2014), 121-25.

<sup>86</sup> Werlin, "Nairobi's Politics of Housing," 612.

Kikuyu landless for the city, underscored the complex tensions of urbanisation, resistance, and identity.

In the following chapters, I demonstrate how urban spaces were similarly problematic for the postcolonial regime as their colonial predecessors. Both in practical and ideological terms, the new political elite had to contend with how to approach urban spaces, as they were similarly overwhelmed by problems of overcrowding and insufficient resources. These challenges thus made it difficult to situate the urban within the nation building project and subsequently the *Harambee* nation was conceived as rural. The urban would have to be approached in ways that did not show the post-independence regime in a poor light. Likewise, as in this chapter, there is continuity between urban individuals looking to the city for opportunities. With national projects languishing behind the expectations of many Kenyan citizens, exciting new spaces in the city presented opportunity for access to new ideas and meaning-giving practices. These processes had already begun in the colonial period and escalated due to the waning prominence of the village structure in the city. Given the end of the colour bar, the disruptions caused by Operation Anvil, and the emergence of new industrial classes during the emergency, the city was poised for significant change as it entered the independence era.<sup>87</sup>

The individual villages of Nairobi, highlight the uneven and disparate experiences of its inhabitants, shaped by a complex myriad of factors including land rights, gender roles, crime, and political unrest. Through this lens, this chapter has elucidated the profound implications of colonial urban policies and their enduring legacy in the post-independence era. As I explore in the following chapter, land hungry urban citizens called upon their understandings of independence, land, and labour to challenge the hegemonic national culture as advocated by elite actors. Through these processes the village became less important to these historical actors, as increasingly cultural

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<sup>87</sup> For an overview of the direct implications to urban workers during the Emergency read, Carol Dickerman, "Africans in Nairobi during the Emergency: Social and Economic Changes, 1952-60" (MA diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1978).

practices influenced by globalisation became the touchstones to call upon in their endeavours for meaning-giving work.

## Chapter 2: Staging the Nation: *Harambee* and Nairobi

This chapter looks at the interplay between the emerging national project and urban culture that characterised the early years of independence. This exploration begins with an examination of President Jomo Kenyatta's pivotal "Back to the land" speech, presenting urban migration not as a pursuit of opportunity but as an exploitative endeavour against the rural character of the nation. Through this lens, subsequent manifestations of national culture are introduced, and the chapter aims to unpack the multifaceted national project: the "*Harambee* nation." This endeavour was championed by elite historical actors who were keen on creating a unified national identity. The proposed code of unifying practices is presented as part of "*Harambee* culture." The chapter draws intellectual parallels with Tanzania's well-documented national project, employing a comparative approach to illuminate how both nations embarked on similar performative journeys of nation-building. Despite contrasting historiographical narratives that often contrast Tanzania's socialist project against Kenya's capitalist inclinations, this chapter seeks to highlight the commonalities in their strategies to forge cohesive national identities, thereby challenging prevalent binary interpretations. This comparative framework contributes to our understanding of East African postcolonial nation-building efforts and sets the stage for a deeper examination of the unique manifestations of Kenya's national project in subsequent chapters. These efforts to establish the rationale and methods of promoting the *Harambee* nation are therefore integral to the rest of the thesis.

Thereafter, the chapter explores the early moments of independence, where industrial action overshadowed immediately followed. Articulations of dissent and civil unrest were not mere expressions of discontent with the pace of developmental opportunities; they were foundational to articulating a vision for Kenya that could accommodate the aspirations of its diverse citizenry. The chapter contends that for national project, engagement in waged labour and the promotion of *Harambee* were strategic adjustments aimed at readjusting national aspirations to accommodate urban realities. Conversely, for the urban poor, these endeavours symbolised a gateway to global

participation, a means to assert their place in a rapidly globalising world. However, the government's response to these competing visions was far from conciliatory. The chapter reveals the early signs of a government struggling to maintain control, resorting to violence as a means to delineate the boundaries of acceptable national identity. This coercive approach to nation-building underscores the challenges inherent in managing the divergent aspirations of urban Kenyans versus the *Harambee* nation.

In the final section of the chapter, I take a critical view of how women's fashion and leisure activities, particularly the controversy surrounding miniskirts, became emblematic of broader cultural tensions. These instances of popular urban culture, influenced by global material cultures, presented a direct challenge to elites' vision of a *Harambee* nation. By scrutinising these moments of cultural tension, the chapter sheds light on the gendered dimensions of national culture, illustrating how global influences were perceived as subversive threats to the established order.

In synthesising these themes, this chapter not only outlines the construction of Kenya's national project but also demonstrates the interplay of resistance and adaptation that characterised its early manifestation. It situates the early postcolonial period as a critical stage for the articulation of the *Harambee* culture, setting a precedent for the challenges and negotiations that would define urban Kenya's path towards a desire for global identities. It lays the groundwork for subsequent discussions on how these initial visions and challenges have shaped culture, offering insights into the negotiation of national identity against a backdrop of internal incoherence and global influences. This exploration contextualises the broader ambitions of later chapters, highlighting the critical role of urban culture in shaping and contesting a normative national identity.

#### Elite political visions for national culture

On the 11<sup>th</sup> September 1964, Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, in a television broadcast, called upon Kenyan citizens to go "back to the land". He opened the address to say, "I have spoken at public

meetings and called on our people to recognise the value of land. I also called on our people to begin to dirty their hands in the effort of nation building.”<sup>1</sup> In the speech the relationship between his visions for the nation and how it conflicted with postcolonial urban realities came to the fore.

Many able-bodied people come to town and spend many months living on relatives and friends, and being generally a nuisance. Such people distort the purchasing-power of their relatives and friends, making them poorer and miserable and also interfere with the social plans and provisions for the genuine residents of the towns. This is a clear waste of manpower, and a definite obstacle to proper farming for the future. Any able-bodied man who exploits his relatives and friends in this manner is a disgrace to his manhood and to our society. Their friends and relatives must get rid of these people and stop feeding them.<sup>2</sup>

The pleasures, pursuits, and opportunities of the city were counterproductive to the important needs of nation building. According to Kenyatta, such nation building took place in Kenya's farms and not in the streets of Nairobi. The rest of the speech outlined the aims of the government land policies. Inflected by the influence of British colonialism and his personal interpretations of Kikuyu philosophy, Kenyatta's speech advocated land consolidation “in order to use our land efficiently and effectively, we must ensure that each farmer is certain of his land rights.”<sup>3</sup> The following “back to the land campaign” gave priority to the “productive exploitation of land” through private and individual ownership.<sup>4</sup>

In Kenyatta's speech, comparing the Kenyan urban experience to that of the idealised rural experience, served important purposes in the creation and establishment of postcolonial national culture. This was by no means the first time that urban issues had reared their problematic head for elite political actors. The colonial government had been determined to exclude Africans from urban spaces in their segregationist policies. During the late colonial period, the city had been the site of political demonstration, a hotbed of anticolonial activity, and the influx of migrant labourers had stretched the deliberately exclusionary infrastructure of Nairobi to its very limits. The

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<sup>1</sup> Jomo Kenyatta, “Back to the land – 1964,” in *Suffering without Bitterness: The Founding of the Kenya Nation*, by Jomo Kenyatta (Nairobi, Kenya: East African Publishing House, 1968), 232.

<sup>2</sup> Kenyatta, “Back to the land,” 233.

<sup>3</sup> Anais Angelo, *Power and the Presidency in Kenya: The Jomo Kenyatta Years* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 181; Kenyatta, “Back to the land,” 233.

<sup>4</sup> Angelo, *Power and the Presidency in Kenya*, 181.

postcolonial government had inherited these problems, and while the new political elite knew that modern economic solutions and industry would be integral to the postcolonial economy, it sat uncomfortably alongside the elite vision for the nation.

Beyond Kenyatta's "back to the land" speech, his political rhetoric is a useful starting point to identifying the character of the post-independent national project. Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya's first Prime Minister, President, and 'Father of the Nation,' was a pivotal figure in the formation of a national identity and culture following Kenya's independence. By independence, Kenyatta had already lived a full and varied life. Born around 1897 he had witnessed first-hand the formation of Kenya as a colony, and played a pivotal role in its transformation into an independent country and eventually republic. Ethnically Kikuyu, Kenyatta was born to farmers in Kiambu. Kenyatta, while raised in accordance with Kikuyu custom, was deeply affected by imperial institutions after he left home in 1909 when he enrolled as a pupil at the Church of Scotland Mission (CSM) at Kikuyu station.

As a young man he became politically involved in the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA). During the 1920s, the KCA were engaged in the task of Kikuyu nation building.<sup>6</sup> The KCA sought to galvanise the different Kikuyu communities of the central highlands into a self-conscious Kikuyu nation, with the intention of perhaps achieving self-governance one day under the British crown.<sup>7</sup> During these years Kenyatta wrote about the Kikuyu people in the Kikuyu periodical *Muigwithania* and later, from England, in his book *Facing Mount Kenya*.<sup>8</sup> These texts served the purpose of imagining a democratically unified Kikuyu past, challenge British rule in Kenya, and to reinforce his personal claims to leadership and elderhood.<sup>9</sup> However, except for his speeches as a

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<sup>6</sup> Tom Cunningham, "A Muscular Christianity: The Church of Scotland Mission, Gikuyu, and the Question of the Body in Colonial Kenya c1906-c1938." PhD Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2018, 243.

<sup>7</sup> Cunningham, "A Muscular Christianity", 243.

<sup>8</sup> Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya: The Traditional Life of the Gikuyu* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1938); Julius Nyerere, *"Ujamaa": the Basis of African Socialism* (Dar es Salaam: Tanganyika Standard, 1962); Julius Nyerere, *Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism* (Dar es Salaam, 1968).

<sup>9</sup> Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, "The Labors of Muigwithania: Jomo Kenyatta as Author, 1928-45," *Research in African Literatures* 29, no. 1 (1998): 16.

leader, his visions of postcolonial Kenya during decolonization were not documented in writing due to the seizure of his personal papers by the British during the Mau Mau rebellion.

In 1929, Kenyatta travelled to London to represent the Kikuyu people and lobby for better land rights. He was educated at University College London, London School of Economics, and the Communist University of the Toilers of the East in Moscow. He moved in circles of Pan-Africanist thinkers with figures such as George Padmore (Trinidadian Pan-Africanist), who was committed to anticolonialism, and co-organised the Pan-Africanist Conference in 1945. In his absence from Kenya the KCA was banned in 1940.

Kenyatta returned to Kenya in 1946 and was shortly thereafter elected president of the Kenya African Union (KAU), the successor of the KCA. In 1960, it would become the Kenya African National Union (KANU). Kenyatta was heralded as a saviour or great elder by his Kikuyu kinsmen and attempted to gather support for the KAU from other ethnic groups. KANU would later go on to be the main political party in Kenya, winning elections pre-independence before establishing itself as the only political party in what would become a de facto one-party state.

By the 1950s, long-standing land tensions among the Kikuyu people led to the outbreak of violent Mau Mau action. The following conflict, both an anticolonial struggle and Kikuyu civil war, had a profound effect upon Kikuyu society where many faced the violent horrors of forced villagisation, detention camps, and execution. Despite publicly calling for Mau Mau to be excised from Kikuyu society, Kenyatta was arrested by the British in an effort to quell civil unrest in 1952. He was eventually charged, alongside five other senior members of the KAU, as being the mastermind behind the Mau Mau. He had been made a scapegoat and had become deeply unpopular among the white settler population, the Church of Scotland Missionaries, and district officers alike.<sup>10</sup> He would remain incarcerated until 1961.

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<sup>10</sup> John Lonsdale, "Mau Mau of the Mind: Making Mau Mau and Remaking Kenya," *Journal of African History* 31, no. 3 (1990), 403, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853700031157>.

John Lonsdale has demonstrated the influence of Kenyatta's life before independence and the formation of Kenyatta's ideologies for national culture.<sup>11</sup> Lonsdale has emphasised Kenyatta's desire for order and his distaste for 'detrribalization' that he perceived would result in the end of communities in Kenya. Central to the formation of this political ideology was the influence of the Christian god (as he had learned of it through the Church of Scotland Mission where he had grown up,) the Kikuyu god, Ngai, and his "pole star" *niathi* (self-mastery) which was the guiding light of Kikuyu self-actualisation.<sup>12</sup> This informed the way he governed Kenya post-independence:

He believed in order, in stability, as a condition of progress. Open to the charge of self-interested hypocrisy, it was a hegemonic project, all the same. It made room for the self-mastery of others, by no means for all Kenyans but for all the more important ethnic vassals who, having done with trifling aspired to realise their ambition under an elder's shade.<sup>13</sup>

It was this desire for order, the establishment of a society that was gerontocratic, 'tribalized', built around his understanding of self-mastery and God, that guided Kenyatta's vision for an independent Kenya. It is perhaps unusual to consider these factors in the context of "nation-building" and "creating citizens", but they were fundamental in the formation of a new Kenya. Lonsdale's use of the term 'hegemonic project' in the above quotation is significant. I consider this to go one step further and wish to make explicit that Kikuyu history, culture and tradition were fundamental to nation-building after independence.<sup>14</sup> The nation building project in Kenya following independence was therefore an extension of ethnic identity, and Kenyatta called upon his interpretations of Kikuyu philosophy as central to the Kenyan national project.

Rural life and land had been central to Kenyan culture under the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-independence period as crucial to earning-adulthood and reaching self-actualisation. Consequentially, it was an important tenet of elite ideations of postcolonial national culture.

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<sup>11</sup> John Lonsdale, "Jomo Kenyatta, God, and the Modern World," in *African Modernities*, ed. J-G Deutsch et al (Oxford: James Currey, 2002), 31-65.

<sup>12</sup> Lonsdale, "Kenyatta, God, and the Modern World," 31-50.

<sup>13</sup> Lonsdale, "Kenyatta, God, and the Modern World," 62-63.

<sup>14</sup> Kenyatta's leadership, the establishment of the presidency, and his consolidation of power are best interrogated in Anaïs Angelo's recent contribution to the already rich field of Kenyatta studies: Angelo, *Power and the Presidency in Kenya*.

Questions around land, in particular land conflict and land redistribution, were (and remains) one of the most difficult political, social, and cultural issues that Kenyan people have faced throughout history. Land had been at the core of the Mau Mau freedom fighters' promise for a better life. *Ithaka na wiathi*, translated to "land and freedom", or better understood as "freedom through land" was the guiding message of Mau Mau rebellion.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, loyalists – those collaborators who sided with the colonial regime to fight back against Mau Mau insurgents – were similarly motivated by the same intellectual debates around land and labour that had motivated the Mau Mau.<sup>16</sup> As the path to independence was paved, land – and in particular the question of redistribution – hung over the new emergent political elite.

Kenyatta was no radical, however. There would be no compulsory purchase of land or nationalisation of property. Populist policies in Dar es Salaam, such as the nationalisation of buildings – in particular, Asian-owned buildings – in 1971, were dramatic and unlike anything Kenya would experience.<sup>17</sup> Kenyatta explicitly ruled out the seizing of land, much to the relief of the settler population, "I would not like to feel that my shamba [smallholding] or house belongs to the Government. Titles must be respected and the right of the individual safeguarded".<sup>18</sup> In keeping with Kenyatta's vision of self-mastery, access to land would be (in theory) won through the fruits of hard labour, "*Harambee*". Africans would have to raise the money themselves and purchase European-owned land that had been compensated at proper market values (if they decided to sell).<sup>19</sup> Between 1962 and 1966, approximately 20 percent of the land in the White Highlands was purchased through state-financed programs, mainly from departing European

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<sup>15</sup> John Lonsdale, "The Moral Economy of Mau Mau: The Problem," in *Unhappy Valley, Book Two: Violence and Ethnicity*, by Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale (Oxford: Currey, 1992), 326.

<sup>16</sup> Daniel Branch, "The Enemy within: Loyalists and the War against Mau Mau in Kenya," *The Journal of African History* 48, no. 2 (2007): 291-315, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853707002812>; Daniel Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau, Creating Kenya: Counterinsurgency, Civil War, and Decolonization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> James Brennan, *Taija: Making Nation and Race in Urban Tanzania* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012), 144.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Daniel Branch, *Kenya: Between Hope and Despair, 1963-2011* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 9.

<sup>19</sup> Branch, *Hope and Despair*, 10.

settlers.<sup>20</sup> This land was divided into parcels of land either as part of the “low-density schemes,” which established farms of 8-16 hectares for commercial farming, or “high density schemes,” which were mainly around 4-6 hectares and were designed for subsistence farming.<sup>21</sup> By 1970, the Kenyan government had settled around a half-million people on this newly purchased land out of a population of 11.2 million.<sup>22</sup> This process was inadequate to meet the demands of the land-hungry masses in Kenya, however. While many of the white Europeans have since left Kenya, the legacy of colonial land policy is still felt. In 2017, white owned farms and ranches were raided and burned by disenfranchised pastoralist herdsman, and the MP for Laikipia North, Matthew Lempurkel, was arrested for inciting the violence. Of this conflict in Laikipia, he said, “in my constituency there are a million hectares owned by 36 settlers... It’s very clear, it is white and black, and there’s historical injustices.”<sup>23</sup> Short of populist land policies and redistributive wealth policies, many Kenyans were left without land following independence. Further, the conditions under which newly acquired land was managed was strictly controlled by the state. State officials selected heads of households on a case-by-case basis to determine the allocation of land.<sup>24</sup> These new settlers on the land scheme accepted thirty-year mortgages, which were payable to the government, and financed on a thirty-year government loan at a six percent interest rate, which had to be farmed in accordance with conditions laid out in a Letter of Allotment.<sup>25</sup>

Kenyatta’s vision of postcolonial Kenya was the guiding principles upon which the nation was built. However, that is not to say that these were the only visions for a postcolonial Kenya at independence. Majimboism was an attractive prospect for many at independence and was the flagship policy of the Kenya African Democratic Union (Kadu), the rival party of Kanu. Majimboism

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<sup>20</sup> Catherine Boone, “Land Conflict and Distributive Policies in Kenya,” *African Studies Review* 55, no. 1 (2012): 79, <https://doi.org/10.1353/arw.2012.0010>.

<sup>21</sup> Boone, “Land Conflict,” p.79.

<sup>22</sup> Colin Leys, *Underdevelopment in Kenya: The Political Economy of Neo-Colonialism, 1964-1971* (London: Heinemann 1975), 75-76.

<sup>23</sup> J. Starkey, “Kenya’s white farm invaders leave trail of death and chaos”, *The Times* (UK, Online), February 1, 2017, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/kenyas-white-farm-invaders-leave-trail-of-death-and-chaos-zb37tn5vw>.

<sup>24</sup> Boone, “Land Conflict,” 79-80.

<sup>25</sup> Boone, “Land Conflict,” 79-80.

means “regionalism”. In the pre-independence negotiations between 1960 and 1963, it was promoted by Kadu to establish constitutional arrangements that would protect smaller “minority communities” from the dominance of larger communities.<sup>26</sup> Unlike Kanu, Kadu promoted a federated and decentralised system, with each of the six provinces having an equal status. Kadu lost the 1963 general election by a considerable margin. Obtaining just 33 seats versus Kanu’s 83, majimboism would give way to nationalism. In the months that followed, many Kadu members crossed the floor, joining Kanu, thus paving the way toward a de facto one-party state. On 12<sup>th</sup> November 1964, following six Kadu MPs announcing their resignation from Kadu and crossing the floor, Kadu leader, Ronald Ngala, dissolved the party. They joined Kanu and some would go on to have particular success within the party, especially Daniel arap Moi, who would become Kenya’s second president. Others did not fare as well, Ngala would hold government positions, but died in 1972 in a car accident (the circumstances of his death are well known to have been suspicious).

Single-partyism, which in Tanzania moved the nation toward authoritarianism and closed down political spaces, was also de facto the case in early postcolonial Kenya.<sup>27</sup> The difference was, that these political decisions were not made explicit in the Kenyan context. Multi-partyism in Kenya, as an example, was in principle possible, and at independence, Kenya did have a parliament that featured members of an opposition in the parties of Kadu and a few years later in the Kenya Peoples’ Union (KPU). However, this was short-lived, Kadu joined the fold of the Kenya African National Union. The KPU, a socialist party made of Kanu defectors were forced to stand for re-election in the “Little General Election” (1966), where they inevitably lost many seats. Its founder, Oginga Odinga, was placed under house-arrest and the party was promptly outlawed for becoming

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<sup>26</sup> David Anderson, “Yours in Struggle for Majimbo’. Nationalism and the Party Politics of Decolonization in Kenya, 1955-64,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, no. 3 (2005): 547, doi: 10.1177/0022009405054571.

<sup>27</sup> Branch, *Hope and Despair*, 40-43.

“more subversive both in its nature and its objectives.”<sup>28</sup> In principle, multi-partyism was possible, yet in practice the environment was hostile. In truth, single-partyism was the standard, even if the way that Kenya got there was a little different. Despite key differences between Kenya and Tanzania’s postcolonial political cultures, the nations shared many of the same anxieties and challenges post-independence. Kanu, therefore, held a monopoly over the political vision for Kenya's future. However, mere membership in Kanu was insufficient to safeguard politicians, as those who were considered radical or posed a threat were systematically eliminated. By the end of the 1960s and into the 1970s, potential challengers within the party, such as Josiah Kariuki orator of the famous “Kenya has become a nation of 10 millionaires and 10 *million* beggars” speech and the charismatic Tom Mboya, were publicly assassinated.

There are many similarities between the ways Kenyatta and Nyerere promoted national culture. South of the border, Julius Nyerere, first president of Tanganyika and Tanzania, had introduced the concept of *Ujamaa* to independent (Tanganyika and thus) Tanzania following independence. *Ujamaa* is the Swahili word for ‘brotherhood’ and was used by Nyerere to outline his vision of African socialism, centred around a commitment to hard work, self-sufficiency and a rejection of laziness, dependency, and exploitation.<sup>29</sup> Nyerere presented *Ujamaa* as a fundamentally African state of being. He mobilised images of precolonial African families to emphasise an inherent nature to his vision of African socialism, and while a socialist vision, it departed from Marxist traditions. Nyerere conceded that Tanzania was not an industrial nation, nor did he believe that it should become one. Rather, the onus of *Ujamaa* was to realise the potential of the Tanzanian citizenry through self-reliance. Tanzania was an agricultural nation, and therein lay its strength. Nyerere envisioned a transformative and restorative development that aimed to establish a robust socialist agrarian economy while safeguarding the perceived traditions of the African family.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), October 31, 1969, p.1.

<sup>29</sup> Priya Lal, *African Socialism in Postcolonial Tanzania: Between the Village and the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 27.

<sup>30</sup> Lal, *African Socialism in Postcolonial Tanzania*, 27.

The inconsistencies in the application of *Ujamaa* principles are extensively documented, largely attributed to insufficient capital and chronic underfunding of the Tanzanian national project. Kelly Askew's *Performing the Nation* reveals how informal performance in customs and habits between citizens was an integral part of the dialogue between the Tanzanian state's and citizens' dialogue and conceptualisation of the Tanzanian nation. To Askew, the nation was not just established through state projects and rhetoric:

No amount of rhetoric can construct a nation if it fails to find resonance with the state citizenry. There must be some degree of mutual engagement for nationalism to flourish, but this very element of mutuality, of sharedness, of common participation, admits the possibility of dissension from those excluded from state activities.<sup>31</sup>

This communication between nation and citizen is the basis for her analysis of the ways citizens imagined and reimagined their relationships with the state. It is through this mutual performance, therefore, that nationhood acquired meaning. This is useful to bear in mind in a Kenyan context, where the – at times – *laissez faire* approach to industrial and cultural projects belies the complexity of the vibrant discussions taking place between all members of Kenyan society about what it meant to live in post-independent Kenya.

The application of *Ujamaa*, especially villagisation, was very inconsistent in Tanzania. The state's grand visions were hamstrung by lack of capital. The leading party, Tanganyika/Tanzania African National Union (Tanu), dominated citizens' public lives but could not achieve its postcolonial expectations of independence. Internationally, Tanzania's endeavours to cultivate amicable relations with communist China and the Soviet Union resulted in a loss of favour with its three major donors: Britain, the USA, and West Germany.<sup>32</sup> As a consequence, Dar es Salaam gained a reputation as a hub of revolutionary activity, leading to the loss of capital needed for the national project and thus the decision to adapt its methods of state building were made.

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<sup>31</sup> Kelly Askew, *Performing the Nation: Swahili Music and Cultural Politics in Tanzania* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 12.

<sup>32</sup> George Roberts, *Revolutionary State-Making in Dar Es Salaam: African Liberation and the Global Cold War, 1961-1974* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 44-47, 65.

Finally, in 1967, *Ujamaa* was codified as a series of policies as part of the Arusha Declaration of Socialism and Self-Reliance. Beyond Nyerere's speeches and a pamphlet written in 1962, this was the first official document to revisit the concept of *Ujamaa*.<sup>33</sup> Major reforms followed. The government instigated a wave of nationalisations and sweeping reforms. Within these reforms came many evident contradictions. The attempts to balance 'traditional' African family values with 'modern' expectations led to some confused and contradictory outputs. Most notable were the attempts to create *Ujamaa* villages during Operation Vijiji (Operation Villages). These villages, often organised in a symmetrical grid structure, comprising of a minimum of 250 households and divided into ten-cell units, where inhabitants worked on the village's communal farm, were unlike any precolonial rural village that had ever existed.<sup>34</sup> Due to these dramatic differences between the application of national ideologies and state building, it has been tempting to consider Kenya and Tanzania as very divergent in their approaches to postcolonial policy.<sup>35</sup> This perspective needs revisiting.

A national ideology had emerged in Kenya too. Kenyatta's ideology of *Harambee* went some way to outline a national character and described the ideal citizen. It is perhaps a little harder to define than Nyerere's *Ujamaa* or Ghanaian Nkrumahism. In the postcolonial years, there was no Kenyan equivalent to the Arusha Declaration to clarify the aims and intentions of the postcolonial Kenyan government, nor a testament on the aims and ideals of *Harambee*.<sup>36</sup> Of course, Kenyatta left many other sources from which we may infer his interpretation and vision of *Harambee*. His speeches, for example, go some way to define his expectations of *Harambee*, national culture and the urban. However, prescriptive, normative or manifesto-like documents clearly outlining cultural expectations do not exist. This ambiguity was likely deliberate and was useful to the post-

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<sup>33</sup> Lal, *African Socialism in Postcolonial Tanzania*, 31.

<sup>34</sup> Lal, *African Socialism in Postcolonial Tanzania*, 32-33.

<sup>35</sup> See for example Paul Nugent, *Africa Since Independence: a Comparative History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 141-206.

<sup>36</sup> TANU, *The Arusha Declaration and TANU'S Policy on Socialism and Self-Reliance* (Dar es Salaam: TANU, 1967).

independence regimes. Such lack of codification offered fluidity and reinterpretation. Daniel Arap Moi, second president of Kenya, would enjoy such fluidity in his use of “*Njyayo*” (footsteps), where he promised Kenyans first that he was following in Kenyatta’s footsteps; then, that he was the interpreter of Kenyatta’s footsteps; before finally concluding that the citizenry should simply follow his footsteps.

Kenyatta’s revival and reimagined interpretations of the long African tradition of *Harambee*, or “self-help”, subsequently became his rallying cry.<sup>37</sup> Its message is comparable to the Tanzanian concept of stand-alone “*kujitegemea*”, which was becoming prominent in Tanzania as a sister concept to *Ujamaa*.<sup>38</sup> *Kujitegemea* could be applied in multiple ways, but one definition of self-reliance had a very literal meaning: that the productivity of the individual was linked to the prosperity of the nation.<sup>39</sup>

Understanding Kenyan national culture and what was meant by *Harambee* is by no means clear. There are, however, some important features of the attempts to establish constellations of national ideas. Firstly, these national concepts, while dominant, were not monolithic. They changed, were mobilised, and appropriated new meanings in different contexts. Anthropologist Angelique Haugerud exemplifies this point in her study of postcolonial Kenyan politics where she has demonstrated that the use of open political meetings, *baraza*, were important spaces not for the creation and establishment of an inevitable national hegemony but as a malleable and mobile arena for the state to rationalise the existing social order.<sup>40</sup> Likewise, political rhetoric of elite figures had similar malleable applications. The application of Kenyatta’s *Harambee* demonstrates an example of the mobilisation of “traditional” thought. This was common in both colonial and postcolonial contexts as it had specific value to ruling regimes to shore up central authority.<sup>41</sup> As

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<sup>37</sup> Angelo, *Power and the Presidency in Kenya*, 17.

<sup>38</sup> Priya Lal, “Self-Reliance and the State: The Multiple Meanings of Development in Early Post-Colonial Tanzania,” *Africa* 82, no. 2 (2012): 214, doi: 10.1017/S0001972012000022.

<sup>39</sup> Lal, “Self-Reliance and the State,” 214.

<sup>40</sup> Angelique Haugerud, *The Culture of Politics in Modern Kenya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 8.

<sup>41</sup> Haugerud, *The Culture of Politics in Modern Kenya*, 75.

the 1960s wore on, Kenyatta's regime would, for example, use a supposed search for African values to manipulate the constitution to increase the power and authority of the presidency.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, *Harambee* had multiple and malleable applications. The role of Kenyatta in the formation, or attempted formation, of a national spirit or culture is paramount. Even in 1963 and 1964, before his office as prime minister and later as president consolidated and strengthened, Jomo Kenyatta wielded formidable influence over Kenyan society, a power that would continue to grow throughout his tenure as a leader.

Kenyatta's vision for national culture, henceforth referred to as "*Harambee* culture", could manifest in many ways. One of the most popular types of *Harambee* projects was the building of local schools, as many citizens regarded education as a means of upward mobility. An example of one of these *Harambee* projects is the following fundraiser in 1974, which is a useful demonstration of how *Harambee* was mobilised to perpetuate a sense of national culture. During this episode, a heritage of struggle and the mobilisation of the traditional all came to the surface. In July 1974, Josiah M. Kariuki (then the assistant minister for tourism and wildlife), attended a local fundraiser for Gathiriti primary school in Nyeri District and gave a personal donation of £150. Kariuki then "castigated" Kenyans who had been lured to town life, and seized the opportunity to use the public fundraiser to promote his vision of good citizenship and *Harambee* culture.<sup>43</sup> He especially targeted those who had not returned to their rural homes to see the problems and poor living conditions that their parents experienced, particularly as it was those same parents whom had "laid the foundation to their current luxurious lives."<sup>44</sup> He caused laughter when he said that while the "majority [of] the people attending the Sunday meeting were children and old *Wazee* and *Mamas*, the well-to-do were nursing their weekend hang-overs ready to go to the movies and play golf."<sup>45</sup> He expressed hostility toward urban spaces, particularly urban pursuits like going to bars and

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<sup>42</sup> Haugerud, *The Culture of Politics in Modern Kenya*, 75.

<sup>43</sup> "Kariuki lashes new urbanities," *The Standard*, (Nairobi), July 2, 1974, 2.

<sup>44</sup> "Kariuki lashes new urbanities," *The Standard*, (Nairobi), July 2, 1974, 2.

<sup>45</sup> "Kariuki lashes new urbanities," *The Standard*, (Nairobi), July 2, 1974, 2.

drinking and decadent sports such as golf. This was in the run up to the October elections, and it is probable that Kariuki's well wishes to those gathered at the school was also an attempt at flattery to these rural Kenyans. The event was also deeply ironic, the same decadence that Kariuki castigated were likely the same urban pursuits that he enjoyed in Nairobi. While it is possible that the newspaper report of this event is misleading or inaccurate, it is expected that Kariuki was greeted with mirth and enthusiasm by the residents of Gathiriti.

Despite the differences in wealth between Kariuki and the rural individuals gathered, the events that took place were all part of a performance of *Harambee* culture. Haugerud notes that "Political mobilization since independence has [centred] on competition for access to the patronage of such wealthy individuals, rather than on opposition to them as a class."<sup>46</sup> In this context, Kariuki played the part of the generous, socially responsible, rich individual. Similarly, the citizens of Gathiriti performed theirs, of the worthy, altruistic, and public-spirited community. The space of this *Harambee* project became the arena for Kariuki to establish and reaffirm three important, if broad, facets of Kenyan national identity. The first was to approve the type of community building project that Gathiriti citizens had taken part in; the second was to affirm that the older generation were the progenitors of an independent Kenya; and finally, the third was to emphasise the importance of localities, where rural Kenya existed as genuine, pure, and representative of the Kenyan national identity. This final point was made explicit by setting up the stark contrast to urban spaces, which represented decadence, lack of community and vice. According to Achille Mbembe, "to ensure that no such challenges takes place, the champions of state power invent entire constellations of ideas; they adopt a distinct set of cultural repertoires and powerfully evocative concepts."<sup>47</sup> This may be true here, for the most part, Kenyan political actors did use evocative imagery of gluttonous, morally corrupt, decadent individuals to convey

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<sup>46</sup> Haugerud, *The Culture of Politics in Modern Kenya*, 48.

<sup>47</sup> Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 103.

the supposed moral and economic shortcomings of urban Kenyans, and as a foil to the rural Kenyans who represented the pure and noble core of Kenyan society.

Whether these events at Gathiriti unfolded in this way remains to be seen. The event was reported in the *Standard* newspaper and it is very difficult to corroborate how the fundraiser took place, who attended, and how Kariuki was received. The press in Kenya were under considerable pressure from Kenyatta's government and it is likely, if not certain, that many embellishments and omissions took place on the pages of Kenya's periodicals. Irrespective, these events were presented to wider Kenyan society on the pages of the *Standard* in this way and were consequentially rhetorically powerful.

*Harambee*, despite its ideological inadequacies, affected Kenyan culture deeply. However, as in Tanzania, while the national project was disorganised and underfunded, it had profound impact upon public discourses of national culture.<sup>48</sup> Kariuki's visit to the primary school in Gathiriti is emblematic of the performative nature of these discourses. This provides a useful entry point to understanding elite conceptions of the postcolonial urban and its urban dwellers that highlighted the inadequacies of the state and resisted such conceptions. Protests, riots, industrial action, and clothing, on one side, and speeches, baraza, state control, and a state pressured media, on the other, reveal a performative dialogue between urban citizens and elite concepts of nationhood and citizenship. Between these moments of tension, an image of national identity and the expectations of the citizenry and the new elite emerged. The popular interpretation of *Harambee* is therefore of equal importance to Kenyatta's use of it.

This baraza in 1974 provided a rhetorically powerful image for those gathered. Its retelling in the press amplified this neat symbolic message upon a national stage. Impressed within this one innocuous event is a story of national culture, a national project, Kikuyu discipline, unity, hierarchy, gerontocracy, and legitimacy. How did these images coalesce? What were the foundations of these

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<sup>48</sup> See Askew, *Performing the Nation* for wider debate on the underfunding of the Tanzanian national project.

national symbols? How did the early moments of independence set the stage for these dialogues to take place? The following section demonstrates the role that the press in Kenya played in the creation of a national culture during the early years of independence.

### Media and Nation Building

New media emerged in the independence years that were crucial in the formation of national identities. In Kenya, the Aga Khan owned *Nation* group, which comprised of two English language titles, *The Sunday Nation* and the *Daily Nation*, alongside Kiswahili periodicals *Taiifa Leo* (Nation Today) and *Taiifa Weekly*. These periodicals were fast becoming the most read newspapers in the country. The *Taiifa* publications were acquired through Charles Hayes, a former District Commissioner, and his business partner Althea Tebutt in 1959. The English papers followed thereafter, first the *Sunday Nation* in March and then the *Daily Nation* in October 1960.<sup>49</sup> The Aga Khan had intended to buy an existing newspaper and remodel it into a new platform for the voice of Kenyans, however the *Sunday Post* snubbed his offer to buy it. The decision was made to start the *Nation* from scratch and its success swiftly caused the *Sunday Post* to fail. The *Nation* established itself as the most read national newspaper in a relatively short period of time, surpassing the readership of its contemporaries by the 1970s. It would sell twice as many copies as the *Standard* by 1973, over 70,000 per day.<sup>50</sup>

Gerard Loughran's biography of the Newspaper *Birth of a Nation*, in celebration of the history of the paper, emphasises its commitment to the freedom of journalism and the active resistance the paper displayed in the face of governmental pressure.<sup>51</sup> While Loughran makes useful observations between the differences of nation building and regime building, the biography of the newspaper falls short in unpacking the former in sufficient detail. This belies the complicity

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<sup>49</sup> Gerard Loughran, *Birth of a Nation: The Story of a Newspaper in Kenya* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 2.

<sup>50</sup> Loughran, *Birth of a Nation*, 10.

<sup>51</sup> Loughran, *Birth of a Nation*, 10.

of the paper in perpetuating a vision of Kenya in line with its new political elites after independence.

In truth, both the *Standard* and the *Nation* were heavily policed by the Kenyatta regime, even in the early moments of independence. This control was applied both directly and indirectly. As the government was the single largest advertiser at the time, the Kenyan government could exercise control over the media as a business rather than a government.<sup>52</sup> Despite their partiality, newspapers retain great value in the corroboration of dates and in describing events. The presentation of this news, however, is of equal importance, and while Loughran has insisted upon the resistance and tenacity of the *Nation* during its formative years and into the present day, his decision to omit much of the content of the early *Nation*, including its style and delivery, hides the important detail that while the paper resisted involvement from the postcolonial government, the tone of the *Nation* was characteristic of the emergent elite. There are many questions we may ask of these sources. Emma Hunter, for example, uses *The Nationalist* (a newspaper published by TANU) as a Tanzanian example of a source that could be used to understand how the party, TANU, sought to demonstrate to the Tanzanian population and the world that its nation-building efforts were successful.<sup>53</sup> Likewise, the *Nation*, while not published by the Kenyan ruling party, invites similar questions regarding the presentation of national identities in Kenya.

The media, post-independence, can be seen as a partner of the state in the nation-building project.<sup>54</sup> According to Hilary Ng'weno, the first African editor-in-chief of *The Daily Nation*, “the governments of East African nations, like others in Africa, [had] enormous powers to curb press freedom. Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania all [had] rather- restrictive sedition laws that were inherited from the British and have been kept on the statute books almost unchanged.”<sup>55</sup> There were

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<sup>52</sup> George Ogola, “The Political Economy of the Media in Kenya: From Kenyatta’s Nation-Building Press to Kibaki’s Local-Language FM Radio,” *Africa Today* 57, no. 3 (2011): 80, doi: 10.2979/africatoday.57.3.77.

<sup>53</sup> Emma Hunter, “Newspapers as Sources for African History,” in *The Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History*, ed. Thomas Spear (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 9.

<sup>54</sup> Hunter, “Newspapers as Sources,” 9.

<sup>55</sup> Hilary Ng'weno, “The Nature of the Threat to Press Freedom in East Africa,” *Africa Today* 16, no. 3 (1969): 1.

repercussions, often violent, for dissident behaviour. Toeing the government's line was therefore as much about self-preservation as it was about selling copies. Although the Aga Khan expressed his intention to create a newspaper that would serve as the voice of Kenyans, it became evident that safeguarding his profits and prioritizing the interests of the Ismaili community took precedence on the agenda. Aligning with Kenyatta's interests was deemed most beneficial in this regard.

Other than being mild in its criticism of the Kenyatta regime, the *Nation*, like other popular newspapers in post-independent Africa, contributed to regime and nation building plans by "appropriating and popularizing the state's invented mythologies."<sup>56</sup> In response to the government's decision to ban public gatherings in January 1964, following unemployed unrest outside parliament buildings in Nairobi, the *Nation* condoned government action and referred to Kenyatta as the Father of the Nation.

The *Nation* takes the view that the people who are stirring up these troubles are being grossly unfair to the Government and displaying an utterly contemptible lack of loyalty to the Prime Minister. If Mr Kenyatta was prepared to spend almost ten years as a prisoner to gain his ends, cannot some of the troublemakers (who have sacrificed little or nothing by comparison) wait more than a month to see the fruits of victory?<sup>57</sup>

The use of Kenyatta in an evocative way, as the father of the nation, is particularly suggestive. Frantz Fanon had predicted that the lives of postcolonial leaders would be mobilised in these ways to "mystify" and "bewilder" the masses.<sup>58</sup> In invoking the memory of his own life, the struggles he had suffered and his incarceration, Kenyatta was able to "intimate to the masses," so that they could continue to place their trust in him.<sup>59</sup> As a dramatic foil to the self-sacrificing Father of the Nation, urban dwellers who protested against the independent government were not only disloyal and unpatriotic, but implicitly un-Kenyan. The *Nation* defended the government during these moments of public demonstration and claimed that not enough time had passed to warrant the

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<sup>56</sup> Hunter, "Newspapers as Sources", 9.

<sup>57</sup> "Jobs Must be Found but... Please be Patient," *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), January 20, 1964, 6.

<sup>58</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (London: Penguin, 2001), 135.

<sup>59</sup> Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 135.

outpouring of bitterness and anger. It suggested that the unrest on behalf of the Kanu Youth Wing and the unemployed would have been deserved “[if] this were four or even two years hence and the Government had obviously failed in its plans to reduce unemployment, encourage Africanisation and generally raise living standards for all the people”.<sup>60</sup> Just five weeks post-independence, the *Nation* considered the “intense activity” in administration, changes of policy and personnel, as positive steps taken by the Kenyatta government that would bring about the desired changes.

The *Nation* framed the civil unrest as a betrayal of the people toward the government and by consequence the Kenyan nation. Those that protested were presented as having sacrificed little or nothing by comparison to the almost ten years Kenyatta spent as a prisoner. The paper went as far as to say that the people who had protested ought to be put to the bottom of the government’s priority list due to their defiance. They criticised these protestors as well as those that had broken the law and the trade unions who were asking for higher wages for the employed “making it worse for their comrades with no jobs at all.”<sup>61</sup> The *Nation*, however, conceded that the youth had to be organised and found work, despite the need for “imaginative leadership, solid administration – and a great deal of money.”<sup>62</sup> Those protesting among the urban poor were conceived as ungrateful and dissident, however, the paper noted that the nation was hamstrung by its precarious position post-independence.

These articles in defence of the government came following significant unrest across the country. Most notable were the marches outside parliament where landless urban individuals protested for more jobs and better conditions. The *Daily Nation* reported that on 17<sup>th</sup> January 1964, five-hundred demonstrators marched to parliament, shouting “We want to see the Minister for labour. He must give us jobs now.”<sup>63</sup> Addressing the crowd, one of the demonstrators said: “We

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<sup>60</sup> “Jobs Must be Found but... Please be Patient,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), January 20, 1964, 6.

<sup>61</sup> “Jobs Must be Found but... Please be Patient,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), January 20, 1964, 6.

<sup>62</sup> “Jobs Must be Found but... Please be Patient,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), January 20, 1964, 6.

<sup>63</sup> “March to Parliament by Kenya Jobless,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), January 18, 1964, 3.

sufferers of this country want to be given jobs by the Government for which we fought during the election. We can accept any job or any wage, even 30/- a month.”<sup>64</sup> Another shouted: “We sufferers want jobs immediately. This is Uhuru Government and all Members of Parliament owning big expensive cars should sell them and the money be distributed to the poor.”<sup>65</sup> Government decadence was well known. Alongside requests for calm in the *Daily Nation* sat, unironically, reports of lavish government spending. Adjacent to an article in the *Daily Nation* that recorded Mwendwa’s call to strikers to observe legal methods of activism, a short unassuming article outlined how a luxury eight-seater plane, “of the type used extensively by American financial tycoons” had been acquired for the transportation of top ministers.<sup>66</sup> The protesting crowd remained outside parliament for several hours, shouting and calling for the Minister for Labour, Mwendwa. This caused police to close the main doors to parliament and two police lorries with “contingents of constables” arrived and stood by to observe how the day progressed. Some key figures rallied behind the activists’ cause. Senator Clement Lubembe, general secretary of the Kenya Federation of Labour, who was in Parliament at the time addressed the crowd: “It is the Minister for Labour, Mr Mwendwa who should be blamed,” he said, “He went round the plantation estates promising unemployed people that he has a plan to get jobs for them. He should fulfil that promise...If he had no such plan why did he promise jobs?”<sup>67</sup> Later that day the protestors dispersed.

A few points are crucial here; the first is that the *Nation* notes that there was popular fervour for employment. Daniel Branch, using government reports, has noted that these protest movements were part of a call for land distribution.<sup>68</sup> However, the *Daily Nation* omits this and records that this movement was motivated by access to employment. It also failed to mention that

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<sup>64</sup> “March to Parliament by Kenya Jobless,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), January 18, 1964, 3.

<sup>65</sup> “March to Parliament by Kenya Jobless,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), January 18, 1964, 3.

<sup>66</sup> “Luxury Plane for Ministers,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), January 7, 1964.

<sup>67</sup> “Luxury Plane for Ministers,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), January 7, 1964.

<sup>68</sup> Branch, *Hope and Despair*, 32-33.

these protestors had other notable figures supporting more radical land reforms such as Vice President Oginga Odinga, the Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Tourism Achieng' Oneko and Assistant Minister for Education Bildad Kaggia.<sup>69</sup> It is likely that the grievances of the urban protestors were multitudinous, and that calls for radical change in both land ownership and employment were desired. However, in the interest of placating the Kenyan government, reporting on the protests as part of a desire for employment was, in the government eyes, the less radical of the two positions. As part of the *Harambee* spirit roughly outlined in Kenyatta's speeches, the ideal citizen, if not a rural farmer, was a wage-earning urban individual.<sup>70</sup> The government lacked the readiness to implement extensive land redistribution campaigns, thereby making it unlikely for protesting citizens to achieve self-mastery through land ownership. As a result, the new government sought alternative visions of self-fulfilment. Similar to their colonial predecessors, the Kenyan government had to promote waged labour as a viable option. Consequently, advocating for alternative livelihoods that did not rely on land redistribution became of paramount importance, as the government lacked the capacity or inclination for radical reforms. Urban individuals placed the blame squarely on the government, acutely aware of the stark wealth disparities between themselves and the ministers. Whether deliberately or otherwise, the *Daily Nation* omitted the crowd's calls for land redistribution (as evidenced in Branch), and reported on this specific event without too much condemnation.<sup>71</sup> These moments are pivotal in unravelling the visions of the future held by the political elites. As Haugerud observes, crises like famine and social protests "bring into sharper analytical focus the cohesive thought it threatens."<sup>72</sup> Kenyan politicians were eager to cultivate the image of African exceptionalism, characterised by notions of free markets, stability, and industry. This carefully crafted image aimed to harness national identity and appease the protesting masses.

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<sup>69</sup> Branch, *Hope and Despair*, 32-33.

<sup>70</sup> Kenyatta, "Back to the land," 232.

<sup>71</sup> Branch, *Hope and Despair*, 32-33.

<sup>72</sup> Haugerud, *The Culture of Politics in Modern Kenya*, 10.

Waged labour and *Harambee*, freedom through labour

During the Mau Mau rebellion, the fighters advocated for “freedom through land.” As previously established, the postcolonial government also regarded land as sacred to national culture, freedom, and self-actualisation. The early moments of independence in Kenya revealed the reality that comprehensive land distribution to all citizens would not be achieved. Consequently, new imaginaries of good urban citizenship had to coexist with those of good rural citizenship. Through the reinforcement of colonial education, the European view that urban spaces were immoral and threatening continued into the independent period. As in Tanzania, where typical letters from Africans to the periodical *Kwetu* during the 1930s and 1940s portrayed Dar es Salaam as an unruly place, full of drunkenness, foul language, and crime, Nairobi was viewed similarly.<sup>73</sup> Despite migration to the city, both Tanzanian and Kenyan society had remained overwhelmingly agrarian. A minority of Kenyans lived in the cities: by 1970 the population of Kenya stood at 10,942,700,<sup>74</sup> with approximately only 530,000 living in Nairobi.<sup>75</sup> However, the growth rate was phenomenal, and despite a relatively small urban population, contemporary demographers estimated the rise in the Nairobi population to be six percent a year, mainly due to migration from rural areas.<sup>76</sup> This was a significant growth rate, and the acceleration of urban growth was noted by politicians of the time. While concepts of modernity and urbanisation seem inextricably linked, Kenyan politicians found urban life difficult to reconcile with their visions for postcolonial culture, and thus ideas about living respectably in the city had to be created.

An increase in the number of waged labourers, in keeping with Kenyatta's vision of “hard work and discipline” for urban Kenyans, was at the forefront of a new initiative: the “three-way

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<sup>73</sup> Andrew Burton, *African Underclass: Urbanisation, Crime & Colonial Order in Dar Es Salaam* (Oxford: British Institute in Eastern Africa in association with James Currey, 2005), 73.

<sup>74</sup> “Family Planning,” *The Standard* (Nairobi), July 1, 1974, 7.

<sup>75</sup> “Nairobi population,” World Population Review, accessed 20<sup>th</sup> May 2023, <http://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/nairobi-population/>.

<sup>76</sup> “Family Planning,” *The Standard* (Nairobi), July 1, 1974, 7.

*Harambee* pact”, which was celebrated by the *Daily Nation*.<sup>77</sup> An invention of Tom Mboya’s, the agreement was between the government, the Federation of Kenya Employers (FKE), and the Kenyan Federation of Labour (KFL), and was a commitment to hire 50,000 unemployed Kenyans. The total number of unemployed was estimated somewhere between 70,000 to 100,000 at the time.<sup>78</sup> The Kenyan government committed to hiring fifteen percent more people, private employers to increase their work forces by ten percent, and the KFL would commit to a “no strike” clause.<sup>79</sup> The plans were ambitious and relied on the honouring of agreements by the government, the KFL and FKE; no repercussions were to be imposed to guarantee these commitments.

Despite the agreement, strikes took place; in the six weeks following the announcement of the pact there were fifteen strikes, however, they did not have union support.<sup>80</sup> In 1964 and 1965, there were indeed some strikes (albeit less frequent), but more significantly, employers neglected to increase their workforce numbers. These tripartite agreements, which would again be pledged in 1970 and 1979, therefore did not create any meaningful changes in employment rate.<sup>81</sup> By the end of March, employers in commerce and industry boasted that they had submitted orders for a total of 18,000 jobs, which would rise to 20,000, in accordance to the targets set by the tripartite agreement.<sup>82</sup> However, despite the *Daily Nation* heralding the success of this scheme, these increases in employment figures were largely aesthetic. The majority of employers would increase their employment figures by the required ten percent by simply converting pre-existing casual, contractual and temporary workers into permanent workers.<sup>83</sup> Subsequently, while workers and

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<sup>77</sup> Jomo Kenyatta, “Madaraka Day – 1965,” in *Suffering without Bitterness: The Founding of the Kenya Nation*, by Jomo Kenyatta (Nairobi, Kenya: East African Publishing House, 1968), 277; “Jobs for 50,000: Three-way Harambee pact,” *Daily Nation*, February 11, 1964, 1.

<sup>78</sup> “Jobs for 50,000: Three-way Harambee pact,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), February 11, 1964, 1.

<sup>79</sup> “Jobs for 50,000: Three-way Harambee pact,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), February 11, 1964, 1.

<sup>80</sup> “18,000 in jobs – and more on way,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), March 24, 1964, 1.

<sup>81</sup> J. Omolo, *The Dynamics and Trends of Employment in Kenya* (Nairobi: Institute of Economic Affairs, 2010). 14.

<sup>82</sup> “18,000 in jobs – and more on way,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), March 24, 1964, 1.

<sup>83</sup> Omolo, *The Dynamics and Trends of Employment in Kenya*, 14.

trade unions generally refrained from lock-outs and asking for wage increases, employers did little to change their employment numbers.

During the initial months following the launch of the initiative, there were significant issues. Mwendwa blamed the unemployed for the shortcomings of the initiative. In a statement, he claimed that many unskilled work-seekers had turned down jobs because they were not exactly what they had wanted. Of these work-seekers, he said they ought to remember the proverb: "When a lion is hungry but cannot get meat, he eats grass."<sup>84</sup> Work – in this case, any work – was presented as liberating, and Mwendwa, through this proverb presented the jobless as lazy. Mwendwa's use of proverb here is akin to the Kikuyu *nyimbo*, that had a long history of emphasising that only through hard work were rights to land earned.<sup>85</sup> The lazy, the shirkers and the skivers were not destined for freedom, according to these philosophies "God helps those who help themselves".<sup>86</sup>

Mwendwa also claimed that employers had caused some issues too. A procedure had been created to give employers the right to nominate individuals for certain jobs. The intention of this procedure was designed for cases where specific experience or skill was required in the position. Supposedly, many employers were complicating the process by insisting on nominating individuals for jobs which required no skill.<sup>87</sup> Others had more obscure answers as to why employment rates were consistently poor. Writing to the *Nation*, reader G. J. Kitale commended the tripartite agreement but claimed that Africanisation lay at the heart of so many of employment issues. "Big posts previously held by Europeans or Asians" had been taken over by Africans; however, these Africans had supposedly not taken on the domestic staffs employed by the Europeans and Asians.<sup>88</sup> By their estimates, there were many cooks, house stewards and drivers that were now unemployed. Their solution to this issue was to encourage these Africans to hire more domestic

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<sup>84</sup> "The Minister warns job plan may fail," *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), March 21, 1964, 16.

<sup>85</sup> John Lonsdale, "The Moral Economy of Mau Mau: Wealth Poverty and Civic Virtue in Kikuyu Political Thought," in *Unhappy Valley, Book Two: Violence and Ethnicity*, by John Lonsdale and Bruce Berman (London: Currey, 1992), 444.

<sup>86</sup> Lonsdale, "Wealth Poverty and Civic Virtue in Kikuyu Political Thought," 444.

<sup>87</sup> "18,000 in jobs – and more on way," *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), March 24, 1964, 1.

<sup>88</sup> G. J. Kitale, "Jobs for jobless," *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), February 18, 1964, 6.

workers or face a reduction in salary. However, it is useful to note that there was an acute awareness that wealth and power were being hoarded by a select elite: the antidote to this problem was presented as characteristically African and not a class issue. To use Fanon, this hoarding of wealth would be situated in the psychology of the new bourgeoisie: “that of the businessman, not that of a captain of industry; and it is only too true that the greed of the settlers and the system of embargoes set up by colonialism has hardly left them any other choice.”<sup>89</sup>

Kenyatta heralded the tripartite agreement a great success for the government and newly independent Kenya. According to the *Nation*, in Mombasa, he spoke to a crowded stadium on 23<sup>rd</sup> February declaring that “the new Kenya government had done more for the people of Kenya in two months than the British colonialists had achieved in seventy years”.<sup>90</sup> In a speech to outline the major successes of his new government, he mainly emphasised the future advancements and opportunities that had not yet come to pass. Kenyatta pointed out his government’s aims to train 5,000 Youth Wing members and the intention to recruit a further 2,000 troops. His speech ended with a warning that anyone who flouted the law or intimidated other people would be dealt with firmly by the government.<sup>91</sup> This warning was apt and came during a time where there were rumours of anti-government movements in various parts of the country who had been harassing citizens, and conducting “subversive activities”.<sup>92</sup>

Kenyatta’s warning had little effect on the unrest that followed. Over the subsequent weeks, riots broke out around job centres across the country as unemployed masses flocked to centres following the promises of more work. The new procedure was designed to give “super-priority” to the 2,600 individuals who had “validly registered as work seekers at the Labour Exchange immediately prior to the introduction of the new scheme”.<sup>93</sup> Other job-seekers were

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<sup>89</sup> Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 120.

<sup>90</sup> “Great progress by Kenyans,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), February 24, 1964, 1.

<sup>91</sup> “Great progress by Kenyans,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), February 24, 1964, 1.

<sup>92</sup> Kirio Gitimu, “Nation Forum,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), February 13, 1964, 6.

<sup>93</sup> “Jobs registration procedure,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), February 28, 1964, 5.

placed in a series of categories on a basis of priority: Category A, Locally domiciled unemployed ex-wage earner; Category B, Locally domiciled, unemployed person, who has not previously been employed; Category C, Locally domiciled, not wholly dependent on employment; Category D, those outside the other categories.<sup>94</sup> Unrest first broke out in Mombasa on 26<sup>th</sup> February when police were needed to disperse over 6,000 job seekers over the distribution of cards to those that had registered for work. The *Nation* reported that unrest broke out when the crowd had gathered to register for employment. Within this group some members of the crowd had already registered, and under the government's new scheme to find new jobs the department had been instructed to return registration cards to their owners. While this took place, there had been a rush forward from the unregistered section of the crowd who demanded they be registered for employment.<sup>95</sup> Later, some of the crowd looked for the mayor, Msanifu Kombo, to lodge a complaint. However, they were unable to find him at his office or the Kanu office. Kanu's Mombasa branch assistant, David Kioko, placated the crowd by assuring them that he would speak to the mayor on their behalf.

A week later, in Nairobi, police used tear gas to suppress thousands of job-seekers looking to register at the Makadara centre. A police officer estimated that a crowd of between 12,000 to 15,000 had gathered at the centre; he said, "Men and women started gathering here at about 3:00am."<sup>96</sup> The crowd threw stones against the walls and roof of the registration office, and chairs, tables and windows were broken. Four individuals were arrested, including one man for inciting the crowd and obstructing the police. Another police officer said it was reminiscent of the general election "everybody [was] eager to register first."<sup>97</sup> Likewise, the crowd at the employment centre in Ziwani (area of Nairobi) became violent when a crowd of 3,000 started throwing stones.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> "Jobs registration procedure," *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), February 28, 1964, 5.

<sup>95</sup> "6,000 Job seekers dispersed," *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), February 28, 1964, 2.

<sup>96</sup> Francis Raymond, "Tear gas at jobs centre," *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), March 3, 1964, 1.

<sup>97</sup> Raymond, "Tear gas at jobs centre," 1.

<sup>98</sup> Raymond, "Tear gas at jobs centre," 1.

Although registration at the centres in Kibera and Kahawa were less violent, there were fewer work seekers who registered at these locations (Kibera, 1,000 and Kahawa 800). Beyond Nairobi, registrations took place under less dramatic circumstances. Around 1,200 registered in Nakuru, despite a crowd of around 3,000 gathering in front of the labour office. Hundreds had travelled to the town from other districts in defiance of the government instructions to register at local centres and despite the government's emphasis that employment prospects were in fact better locally. There were calmer scenes at Kisumu where around 5,000 gathered to be registered, and the situation in Mombasa eventually eased. The opening of new suburban employment offices had relieved some pressure and while 5,800 unemployed had registered and 2,000 presented themselves at the Labour Exchange compound on 2<sup>nd</sup> March, there was little accompanying violence or unrest.<sup>99</sup>

With registration efforts established, unemployed conflict subsided. However, the slow process gave way to frustration and unrest once again broke out in Nairobi on 12<sup>th</sup> March outside the Starehe registration centre. As before, when people from a certain category of jobseekers were told to come forward, others surged forward who felt they were being treated unfairly.<sup>100</sup> Mounted police were called in, however the riders and horses were pelted with stones. The crowd moved on to Akamba Hall, where other people were being registered as unemployed, and threw stones at the building, smashing a few windows before the arrival of a General Service Unit (GSU) caused the crowd to disperse. On the same day in Eldoret, police officers used tear gas to disperse the 1,500 jobseekers gathered at the labour office after they started to throw stones at the building.<sup>101</sup> Similarly, on 21<sup>st</sup> March in Kericho, police used tear gas to disperse a crowd of jobseekers who had refused to leave the Labour Exchange. Registration of the unemployed in the Kericho area had gone seamlessly for the first three weeks, however jobseekers had grown exasperated. Many

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<sup>99</sup> Raymond, "Tear gas at jobs centre," 1.

<sup>100</sup> "Jobless riot in Eldoret," *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), March 13, 1964, 16.

<sup>101</sup> "Jobless riot in Eldoret," *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), March 13, 1964, 16.

protested that only men who were members of the Kalenjin ethnic group had been selected for jobs on the nearby tea estates.<sup>102</sup> When the jobseekers had been told earlier that day that there was no work available, they grew restless and gathered near the labour exchange. After refusing to disperse, the police used tear gas.

As industrial action and protest escalated into Kenya's first independent year, the tone of politicians and subsequently the press became explicitly condemning of these actions. Rhetoric around *Harambee*, invoking the image of Kenyatta and individual success stories were mobilised in speeches and the press to cool feelings of frustration among the citizenry. Constructing an image of an ideal citizen, and consequentially blaming the shortcomings of the postcolonial state on transgressive figures, became a useful method of shoring up a sense of national character. As in Tanzania, the ideal national citizen was a rural farmer, or failing that an urban labourer.<sup>103</sup> However, given that a comprehensive land redistribution effort would not be taken by the Kenyan government, the postcolonial regime had taken up the colonial mantle of encouraging Kenyans into waged labour. This proved to be popular among urban citizens, but the pace was too slow and inconsistent for most. Radical policies to improve employment were expected and desired immediately, especially from the landless and the disenfranchised. When politicians insisted on patience, the urban unemployed had grown restless.

The *Daily Nation* was unsympathetic toward the strikers and largely supportive of the government's responses to industrial action, again imagery of useful citizens and transgressive rebels were used. On the banning of public meetings, the *Nation* claimed that "the Cabinet [was] extremely concerned at the pressures which [were] building up among the unemployed, the landless and the Youth Wings – assisted no doubt by certain elements in the [Kenyan Federation of Labour] and among the freedom fighters newly emerged from their forest lairs."<sup>104</sup> The paper

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<sup>102</sup> "Tear gas used at Kericho," *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), March 21, 1964, 16.

<sup>103</sup> Brennan, *Tajifa*, 144-147.

<sup>104</sup> "Jobs must be found, but... Please be patient!" *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), January 20, 1964, 7.

introduced organisations into its narrative of the civil unrest that would have evoked alarm among its readership. These organisations were, the Kanu Youth Wings, who were well known for their abuses of power; the KFL who were now targeted by the Kenyan government out of fear of the considerable power they had wielded during the colonial period; and the Mau Mau freedom fighters, who were used to evoke memories of a terribly violent era in Kenya's history where many had suffered at the hands of both the British and the Mau Mau fighters. Beyond the Mau Mau fighters, the *Nation* also suspected that there may have been "forces... at work so quickly after Independence for the purpose of stirring up trouble."<sup>105</sup> These groups all had competing images for the future which contrasted to the high political line. The unions were pivotal in bringing an end to colonial rule, the Youth Wing had been incredibly powerful for protesting during the final years of colonial rule, and the Mau Mau rebellion had also played a significant role in the end of empire in Kenya. Once broadly on side of Kanu, their visions of postcolonial Kenya were now incongruous to the new elite. These competing visions of independent Kenya, which were not in keeping with Kenyatta's centralisation of power had to be eliminated. Exclusion, demonising dissenters, and the removal of competing visions of nationhood was as much an elite national project as mobilising *Harambee* or *baraza*.

#### National culture through authoritarianism and exclusion

The exclusionary nature of urban rhetoric became violent reality in the government's efforts to exert control over potentially dissident movements and groups. Beyond tightening control and quelling civil unrest, this also served to reify the government's authority and power and could propagate their visions of national identity, culture, and citizenship through coercive means. The government reaction to post independent industrial action is a useful case of this escalation in state sanctioned authoritarianism. Just a month after independence, on 6<sup>th</sup> January 1964, in Mweiga,

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<sup>105</sup> "Jobs must be found, but... Please be patient!" *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), January 20, 1964, 7.

Nyeri, the Kenyan government warned strikers that while they recognised the rights of workers to strike, only “proper and legal methods” should be used.<sup>106</sup> On the same day, a crowd of three-hundred gathered and sang anti-government songs at Kahuro in Fort Hall district.<sup>107</sup> The government threatened these workers and strikers by warning that improper abuse of their rights to strike could see industrial action banned in its entirety as in Uganda and Tanzania.<sup>108</sup> These threats materialised, leading to the restriction of trade unions' powers in the postcolonial period. The curtailing of trade union power during the early postcolonial period was an early ambition of Kenyatta's government, as the trade unions were powerful in the late colonial period and had been pivotal during the Mau Mau rebellion and the overthrow of colonial rule.<sup>109</sup> Now that the nationalist leaders were in government, the unions presented a challenging threat to their authority; they had proven themselves as adversarial through challenging the colonial state. Further, the intelligence service believed that Odinga's supporters considered influence within the trade unions to be essential to furthering their political aims.<sup>110</sup> From independence, it was essential for Kenyatta to neutralise the threat they presented to maintain order and crush threatening political debates around land redistribution in Kenya. In August 1965, fearing a general strike, the Confederation of Trade Unions was established to amalgamate existing labour groups and increase state control of union activity.<sup>111</sup>

Other coercive and exclusionary methods could be informal, an incident at Homa Bay demonstrated how good citizenship and party membership came to fore during a moment of conflict between a local MP and youth. At Rangu, near Homa Bay, members of the Kanu youth wing, often referred to as Youth Wingers, had attacked and beaten up the Kanu MP for Homa Bay, Ngala Obok, after he had told them to attend to their own work and that the “only Kanu”

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<sup>106</sup> “Workers warned,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), January 7, 1964, 2.

<sup>107</sup> “Crowd of 300 Sang Anti-Govt. Songs,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), January 7, 1964, 2.

<sup>108</sup> “Workers warned,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), January 7, 1964, 2.

<sup>109</sup> Branch, *Hope and Despair*, 46-47.

<sup>110</sup> Branch, *Hope and Despair*, 47.

<sup>111</sup> Branch, *Hope and Despair*, 47.

were district commissioners, district officers, and government-appointed chiefs.<sup>112</sup> They demanded jobs and assurances for the future before stoning his car and beating him. Many young African men and boys looked to the youth wings of political parties as they had promised their members jobs following independence. However, by 1963, Kanu youth wingers had begun acting as arbiters of justice and self-appointed policemen, collecting money for their “services” from ordinary members of the citizenry.<sup>113</sup> The MP’s claim that the only (or perhaps the only true) Kanu were district commissioners, district officers and government appointed chiefs, while rebuffed by other senior members of the party as nonsensical, is indicative of generational tension and conceptions of civic duty. Claiming that these young men and boys were not part of Kanu is linked to conceptions of patriotic citizenship. Emma Hunter has demonstrated that two conceptions of citizenship – one universal by virtue of membership of the state, and one focussed on membership of TANU (Tanzania African National Union) – existed in 1960s Tanzania.<sup>114</sup> In presenting the youth wingers as non-Kanu, MP Obok separated the violent actions of this protest from the actions of Kanu. As in Tanzania, ideal citizens were moral constructions as well as political ones.<sup>115</sup> In rejecting youth mobilisation as disruptive, un-Kanu, and implicitly un-Kenyan, these figures defined social responsibility and conduct as what it should be, and what it should not be. The party line may have disagreed with Obok’s chastisement, however, given Kenyatta’s future efforts to neutralise the youth threat, these views were likely shared among wider political elites. The lines of exclusion were being drawn.

The government’s response to urban civil disobedience was heavy handed and progressively authoritarian. The closing down of countercultural spaces was part of the urban project following independence. Ngugi wa Thiong’o (then, James Ngugi) reported on the clearing

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<sup>112</sup> “MP beaten up by Homa Bay Youth Wingers,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), January 9, 1964, 3.

<sup>113</sup> Timothy Parsons, “No More English Than the Postal System: The Kenya Boy Scout Movement and the Transfer of Power,” *Africa Today* 51, no. 3 (2005): 71, <https://doi.org/10.1353/at.2005.0029>.

<sup>114</sup> Emma Hunter, *Political Thought and the Public Sphere in Tanzania*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2015), 187-209.

<sup>115</sup> Hunter, *Political Thought and the Public Sphere in Tanzania*, 193-196.

of the illegal hawkers' market "Machakos Airport", where the police descended before dawn to clear the shacks. He remarked that no force was used and hawkers that showed up to trade that day dismantled their stalls voluntarily. However, the people affected were left furious and anguished.

I saw a woman sitting over the ruins of her shanty and weeping. Her name was Wanjiku Njeri, the mother of three children, who has been eking out a living selling tea and food. 'What shall I do now?' she asked 'To build this shanty cost money. I have no land, or else why should I come here? And my children must go to school,' She said she and the other hawkers had not been warned, adding that the operation had come as a surprise. Another man, M. Matuthu, looked at the broken door of his tea stall and told me 'I have been driven out, a poor man. I don't want to steal.'<sup>116</sup>

The state had started to close spaces within the informal economy. Such spaces that individuals depended on to eke out a living were integral to urban survival in Kenya's post-independence years, but were seen as transgressive by the postcolonial regime.

Similarly, during the civil unrest that followed the three-way *harambee* pact, the state escalated its capacity for violence. Despite promises of jobs and opportunities for the unemployed, state violence was threatened upon the poor. Kenyatta celebrated the fact that in the first three weeks 47,000 unemployed had been successfully registered and that jobs had been found for 12,000 of that number.<sup>117</sup> (By the end of March, about 36,000 men and 7,500 women were registered in Nairobi.<sup>118</sup>) However, following calls for more radical laws for violent crimes, Mboya had announced that the government had "decided to introduce corporal punishment for any crime of robbery with violence," and that flogging was to return to Kenya as a punishment.<sup>119</sup> This caused much controversy, particularly given the humiliating history of corporal punishment in Kenya.<sup>120</sup> Leader of the opposition, Ronald Ngala, called for empathy and suggested that in the cases of unemployment and hunger, punishments and sentences ought to be reduced rather than

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<sup>116</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong'o (then, James Ngugi), "The Big Clean Up", *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1964, p.1.

<sup>117</sup> "Jobs found for 12,000 unemployed", *Daily Nation*, 7<sup>th</sup> March 1964, p.1.

<sup>118</sup> "18,000 in jobs – and more on way", *Daily Nation*, 24<sup>th</sup> March 1964, p.1.

<sup>119</sup> Adrian Begg, "Flogging for Violent Crimes," *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), March 6, 1964, 1.

<sup>120</sup> David Anderson, "Punishment, Race and 'The Raw Native': Settler Society and Kenya's Flogging Scandals, 1895–1930," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 37, no. 3 (2011): pp.479–97; Paul Ocobock, *An Uncertain Age: The Politics of Manhood in Kenya* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2017), 114–36, 213.

increased.<sup>121</sup> However, just a day after the announcement of the return of corporal punishment, the *Nation* said the decision to implement the law was also as part of the process of controlling the landless and to discourage squatting. On the subject, Kenyatta said, “We have started removing illegal squatters from European farms... We find as a Government that we must keep law and order. We must make our citizens understand and respect other people’s property.”<sup>122</sup> He celebrated the recent measures in clearing of illegal squatters and *bandas* (thatched houses) on the outskirts of Nairobi. Corporal punishment was envisaged to help with issues of squatting and while Kenyatta conceded that corporal punishment was a “horrible thing”, he said that criminals could not be condoned.<sup>123</sup> A policy that Kenyatta had fought against for years was now being implemented by his government. While it has been well observed that the postcolonial government came to look and act as the colonial regime had before it, this is an early example of the authoritarian tone that would characterise the Kenyatta government. Violence had become the vehicle used to maintain the state’s image of order and control. Competing visions of the future and industrial action could all be contained through the state’s escalation of authoritarianism.

As established, National culture was defined as much against lines of inclusion as it was exclusion. The disenfranchised, the protesting, the landless and the uneducated, while problematic for the postcolonial regime, were at times useful as they provided a foil to normative national culture. The *Daily Nation*, for example, presented the rapidly expanding informal settlements as a crucial problem within the city, not out of sympathy or due to concerns for public health but due to their unsightly nature. Many urban dwellers lived in poor conditions within the city. While housing had long been an issue in Nairobi before independence, there were now increasing numbers of landless in the city. Increases in migration from rural spaces had resulted in overcrowding and unfavourable conditions, and informal settlements had swollen to

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<sup>121</sup> Begg, “Flogging for Violent Crimes,” 1.

<sup>122</sup> “Jobs found for 12,000 unemployed”, *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), March 7, 1964, 1.

<sup>123</sup> Begg, “Flogging for Violent Crimes,” 1.

accommodate the incoming crowds. For example, average occupancy was fifteen people per dwelling in Eastleigh.<sup>124</sup> Developing these areas was a difficult undertaking and while the city council had redeveloped some neighbourhoods such as Kariokor and Kilaleshwa, these redevelopments often resulted in the displacement of thousands of individuals. Development of these areas was conceived by the *Nation* in violent and brutal terms, and deeply unsympathetically: “The elimination of Kariokor will mean the disappearance of one of the worst eyesores in the city”, and “[o]bviously, an outright attack must be made on the problem of Pumwani, which has a population estimated at about 11,000.”<sup>125</sup> The solution presented was the removal of these settlements and, implicitly, the people within them. Mathare Valley, a well-known informal settlement grew in population to around 70,000 within a few years of independence, this area was entirely disconnected from the city’s infrastructure: rubbish was unable to be collected and there was no running water.<sup>126</sup> The *Nation’s* vitriol of these urban spaces played into the hands of the political elites who, realising that rehousing and developing the existing settlement would be no small feat, concluded that the best solution lay in resettling the city’s landless elsewhere. These individuals’ lifestyles were mobilised in the media to present an image of urban living that was corrupted and antithetical to the national project that promoted rural labour or waged urban work.

The city was also deeply gendered, and lines of exclusion demarcated the city as a masculine zone. The population census in 1962 had recorded that population of women in the city were vastly outnumbered by men (the ratio stood at 55:100).<sup>127</sup> While the *Daily Nation* was critical of urban protestors and individuals living in informal housing, the conception of urban areas as immoral places was not reserved for the landless; women were subjected to rhetoric of urban exclusion from a political elite and media that was overwhelmingly male. These views were in many

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<sup>124</sup> Branch, *Hope and Despair*, 47.

<sup>125</sup> Desmond Healey “Nairobi must combat fantastic odds,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), January 23, 1964, 9.

<sup>126</sup> Branch, *Hope and Despair*, 47-48.

<sup>127</sup> Dorothy M. Halliman and W. T. W. Morgan, “The City of Nairobi,” in *Nairobi: City and Region*, ed. W.T.W. Morgan (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1967), 106-107; these figures were up considerably from the 1930s where the ratios were anything between 25:100 to 12:100, see Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 57-8.

ways, contradictory to their public visions of becoming a “modern” nation. As in Tanzania, where modernity and tradition were uncomfortable bedfellows in the formation of the *Ujamaa* state, in Kenya images of robust urban wage-earning men sat alongside antithetical images of pure, crop farming, mothers and wives. In the *Nation*, a piece about the supposed successes of the Tripartite Unemployment Agreement introduced Kenyan citizens to the story of a young Kikuyu family as emblematic of the post-independent working family ideal. James Muriithi, a 23 year old graduate from a college in Uganda, had fallen on hard times following a scholarship scheme to Bulgaria that was cancelled. He had wandered the streets of Nairobi looking for work and food around the Industrial Area and the Labour Exchange: “There seemed to be more people looking for work than those who were in employment. Every office had the ‘No Vacancy’ notice on the door and nobody was sympathetic with a workseeker.”<sup>128</sup> By his good fortune and the supposed successes of the tripartite agreement James found himself employed as an office boy for Esso, the job was more junior than the construction work he had had before the failed scholarship in Bulgaria, however, in true *Harambee* spirit he was pleased to be working: “It was the only job available and I know that I have an opportunity of rising. I know many people who have made a success in life and who started right at the bottom of the ladder.”<sup>129</sup> A few hours north in the town of Karatina, James visited his wife, and two children who live in a four-room, iron-roofed mud and wattle house built on a two and a half acre *shamba* (smallholding or farm). His industrious wife, Isabella, grew coffee trees, as they fetched more money, and vegetables for their home. On James’ return to Karatina, he and Isabella, went to the market, James handing cigarettes (despite not smoking himself) to friends; they bought bread, potatoes, bananas and new shoes for Isabella. Alongside the article (slightly comical) images of James and Isabella both holding the same loaf of bread and getting shoes fitted, served to reinforce their success story. The article portrayed an ideal, *Harambee* spirit in action, as James and Isabella performed their gendered roles respectively. James was the

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<sup>128</sup> Sammy Githegi, “The Sun Begins to Shine,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), April 9, 1964, 8.

<sup>129</sup> Githegi, “The Sun Begins to Shine,” 8.

hard-working, resilient beneficiary of the government's work scheme in the city; and Isabella, the equally hard-working farmer and mother at the family *shamba*. Whereas images of rural life or "the country" could serve as a criticism of urban development, where "the country" [is presented] as natural, pure, authentic, or whole have provided powerful alternative moral images to be contrasted against urban realities conceived as artificial, immoral, corrupt, and anomic.", the image here is one of the rural and urban in synergy.<sup>130</sup> The industry offered by the city did not mean that James became grounded in Nairobi, but retained a status as a migrant labourer, and the capital he accrued there was subsequently invested in his family and his rural community. Likewise, Isabella maintained the *shamba* for his return. The image of Kenyan women as rural was affirmed across different media and became the topic of debate in multiple areas of Kenyan society.

The contradictions of wanting to be a "modern" nation, yet actively discouraging women from what may be considered symbols of modernity, and from living and working in urban spaces is characteristic of this postcolonial Kenyan paradox. Tom Mboya addressed the conference organised by the East African Institute of Social and Cultural Affairs and the National Council of Women of Kenya (24<sup>th</sup> April 1967). He opened his speech with an affirmative position on the role of women in Kenyan national development. However, he reminded listeners of what he considered women's place in the postcolonial state:

As mothers and housewives, women are in the vanguard of the new struggle for economic reconstruction and social progress. The future of all those ideals and objectives that we have defined for ourselves rests heavily on their shoulders. As mothers and farmers – let me repeat farmers – they hold the key to the success of the programmes of development that we have designed for our rural areas.<sup>131</sup>

Mboya, in emphasising women as the vanguard of social and economic progress, placed women in "traditional" roles. First, Mboya identified women as mothers, then wives, and finally as farmer;

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<sup>130</sup> James Ferguson, "The Country and the City on the Copperbelt," in *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology*, ed. James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 145.

<sup>131</sup> Tom Mboya, "Women's Role in National Development. Address at the Conference Organised by the East African Institute of Social and Cultural Affairs and the National Council of Women of Kenya (24<sup>th</sup> April 1967)," in *The Challenge of Nationhood: A Collection of Speeches and Writings*, by Tom Mboya (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1972), 115.

their value to postcolonial society clearly held more currency in these roles, as opposed to, for example, a small business owner, a wage labourer or office worker. This is in contradiction to his own definitions of modernity and in contradiction of his own statements about women: “All our womenfolk, educated or not, need to be more closely involved at every level in the political and social life of the nation.”<sup>132</sup> He, albeit softly, looked to exclude women from certain areas of political life, by pushing them toward rural engagement in politics. As had become popular in much of African nationalist rhetoric in the lead up to independence, Mboya had similarly appealed to women as mothers, giving emphasis to their ability to give birth as integral to their power.<sup>133</sup> A future for women in an urban environment was dismissed in Mboya’s speech under the following justification:

[O]nly 7.8 per cent of our total population of nearly ten million live in urban areas. More significant for African population is concerned, the proportion is even smaller – it is about 5 per cent who live in the urban areas. More significant for our discussion is the fact that as far as women are concerned, there are very few of them living in the urban areas – although their proportion is increasing rapidly.<sup>134</sup>

While noting the rise of urban living, particularly among women, Mboya did not see women’s place as in the city. Instead he emphasised “development in adult education, health, agricultural practices, housing, water supply, [and] marketing facilities”.<sup>135</sup> His vision and recommendations for the future of Kenyan women were in fact similar to the recommendations made by the Colonial Office’s final report on nutrition published in 1939, which gave general recommendations and advice for specifically gendered education for women in subjects relating to agriculture, health and domestic chores.<sup>136</sup> As Mboya did, the report published some twenty-eight years prior, emphasised the importance of education:

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<sup>132</sup> Mboya, *Nationhood*, 20.

<sup>133</sup> Iris Berger, *Women in Twentieth-century Africa: New Approaches to African History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 67.

<sup>134</sup> Mboya, *Nationhood*, 116.

<sup>135</sup> Mboya, *Nationhood*, 117.

<sup>136</sup> Joanna Lewis, *Empire State-Building: War & Welfare in Kenya, 1925-52*, *Eastern African Studies* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000), 59.

To this end various schemes have been set on foot to educate the native in modern methods of pasture management, stock breeding and improved cultivation. Eventually this policy must result in a general raising of the standard in native living.<sup>137</sup>

Despite the seismic changes in Kenyan society following the end of British rule, women's role in "reconstruction" was still understood in a similar way to that of the colony. Although there were different intentions: one to preserve empire and one to create the postcolonial state. While Mboya could make statements such as: "I feel a women-leaders' training programme should be introduced within the party on the same lines as the one proposed for the youth-wing",<sup>138</sup> the reality was that political engagement for women was encouraged through rural engagement or through women's institutions such as *Maendeleo ya Wanawake* (Women's Development), which, a colonial invention, retained some imperial ideas and had had a modest effect upon community and social development.<sup>139</sup> It appears from Mboya's speeches that women could save the day provided they stayed in their gendered lane. On the surface, Mboya appeared to be supportive and egalitarian in approaching women's place within Kenyan politics, however emphasis remained upon rural engagement of politics. The suggestion was that Kenya could become an African country of modernity, but women must tend to children, farms, and homes. This rhetoric was reinforced by the colonial institutions that had survived independence, and through pre-independence nationalist rhetoric where women's power was perceived to come from reproductive abilities.

Further, cosmopolitan and global trends in women's fashion, work, and leisure habits were seen as transgressive and not conducive to nation building by some elite political figures. An episode in the Kenyan parliament exemplifies these tensions. Women's clothing, particularly urban and global fashion trends interrupted usual proceedings in parliament in June 1972. MP Muthamia (first name unknown), in a Kenyan parliamentary debate turned the attention of those gathered from the status of Kenyan hospitals to discuss growing concerns regarding the issue of the

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<sup>137</sup> Mboya, *Nationhood*, 117; Great Britain Economic Advisory Council, Committee on Nutrition in the Colonial Empire, *First Report: Presented to Parliament by Command of His Majesty, July 1939* (London: HMSO, 1939), 120.

<sup>138</sup> Mboya, *Nationhood*, 56.

<sup>139</sup> Mboya, *Nationhood*, 56.

miniskirt. He argued that it was inappropriate for others to interfere with wearing miniskirts and that those in favour of intervention were being unconstitutional and inappropriate.<sup>140</sup> While implicitly concerned by the mini skirt, he used his understanding of fashion to justify his opinion on the matter: “Fashion does not go on for more than two years. This is commonsense [sic] and we have seen this happening. I, therefore, do not think there was any necessity of issuing directives against them.”<sup>141</sup> The then Minister for Finance and future vice-president (and indeed president) of Kenya, Mwai Kibaki, “on a point of order”, called out MP Muthamia for his supposed empirical knowledge of the cycles of fashion, knowing that the miniskirt had in actual fact been popular for six years.<sup>142</sup> A further challenge to Muthamia came from MP Mwamzamdi (first name unknown) who claimed that “the Constitution itself does not allow people to go naked unless one is mad. Is the hon. Member in order to impute that when we stop girls from walking naked we are interfering with their liberty?”<sup>143</sup> A seemingly bewildered and flustered Deputy Speaker intervened and claimed that he “d[id] not know that the mini can be construed as leaving a girl naked except that the things are a little more exposed than you may want them to be. Some of us like the mini skirts.”<sup>144</sup> With the situation not settled, Muthamia moved discussion swiftly to the topic of unemployment in Kenya. Evidently, not all those gathered saw a cause for concern regarding the issue of miniskirts – indeed the speaker of the house appeared to like them. However, the kinds of sentiment apparent are comparable to ideas and legislation prevalent in Tanzania at the time where legislation, campaigns and rallies challenged women’s conduct and clothing. One such case is emblematic of the issue in Tanzania: The trial of Pauline Joseph (1970-1), who was taken to court over claims of inappropriate dress. In this case, national culture was propagated just as much through reactionary movement against decadent, urban (often feminised) practices as it was

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<sup>140</sup> Kenya, Parliament, *Kenya Parliamentary Debate* (June 29, 1972), 561.

<sup>141</sup> Kenya, Parliament, *Kenya Parliamentary Debate* (June 29, 1972), 561.

<sup>142</sup> Kenya, Parliament, *Kenya Parliamentary Debate* (June 29, 1972), 562.

<sup>143</sup> Kenya, Parliament, *Kenya Parliamentary Debate* (June 29, 1972), 562.

<sup>144</sup> Kenya, Parliament, *Kenya Parliamentary Debate* (June 29, 1972), 562.

around the promotion of 'nationalised' forms.<sup>145</sup> While in Kenya no official legislation was drafted to control women's dress, masculine anxiety over their dress were clear. Andrew Ivaska has conducted pioneering work in the Tanzanian context of these debates and activities to restrict women's behaviours and habits:

As visual signs, fashions like the mini-skirt in late sixties Tanzania were extraordinary indices of social conflict, registering debates over national culture and 'modern development', the construction and crises of new femininities and masculinities, generational conflicts over resources, and contests over public space in a postcolonial capital.<sup>146</sup>

While less extreme, there was a similar situation in Kenya. The body and the presentation of the body became a site whereupon a larger debate of "national" and "modern" culture could be enacted. As shown for example, the members of parliament debated the interpretation of the constitution through a discussion on miniskirts. While Ivaska debated the "struggle for the city", it seems possible that individuals could appeal to rural identities when working in the city to save condemnation of decadence and poor morals. Emily Callaci's more recent work has looked at the policies of *Ujamaa* in Tanzania where rural socialism came to be imagined as a site of progress and the city – in particular – Dar es Salaam, came to be seen as negative.<sup>147</sup> Her methodology shows how those migrating to the city found moments of meaningful morality in Christian literature, novels and songs (her so called "Street Archives"). Through these redemptive sources, Tanzanians – particularly women – could save themselves from the corruption of the city.

While discussions about women's dress and political engagement were important, more practical considerations over women's employment entered a debate at parliament. A vocal minority of MPs saw certain occupations as unsuitable for women. One MP, Mr Cheptai (first

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<sup>145</sup> Andrew Ivaska, *Cultured States Youth, Gender, and Modern Style in 1960s Dar Es Salaam* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 86-124.

<sup>146</sup> Andrew Ivaska, "'Anti-Mini Militants Meet Modern Misses': Urban Style, Gender and the Politics of 'National Culture' in 1960s Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania," *Gender & History* 14, no. 3 (2002): 604, doi:10.1111/1468-0424.00283.

<sup>147</sup> Emily Callaci, *Street Archives and City Life, Popular Intellectuals in Postcolonial Tanzania* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

name unknown) on 12<sup>th</sup> July 1972, raised concerns over female employment in the office of the president during a debate:

Mr. Speaker. You will find what very many women are employed by the Directorate of Personnel and these women are bringing about a lot of corruption in the Office of the President. I am saying this because when letters are sent to the Office of the president from the provincial headquarter nobody takes action because everybody seems to be busy attending to the women.<sup>148</sup>

On a point of order, the then minister of state, Mbiyu Koinange forced him to withdraw the statement as he could not substantiate the claims. Irrespective, Mr Cheptai continued:

[Y]ou cannot be attended to because the officials are busy talking on the telephone with their girl friends and you have to wait for such a long time before you can be attended to. We would not like to see these people misusing the office of the president in this way. Mr Speaker, Sir you will find that these women always go to night clubs and this is very dangerous especially when these women are the same people who type confidential letters. These women do not even do their work properly because when they attend night clubs they come to the office very later and when they do so, they are always very tired and lazy after spending the night in the night clubs. Therefore, Sir, men should be employed in the President's office so that they can work perfectly for the government in Kenya.<sup>149</sup>

As in Nkrumah's Ghana and Nyerere's Tanzania, women who worked in secretarial roles were perceived as gossipers, idle, and susceptible to manipulation.<sup>150</sup> This time, Mr Cheptai was called out by the speaker, again, for such unsubstantiated claims. While there appears to have been some support in the house for the accusations Mr Cheptai fired at the female workers of the presidential office, they were generally dismissed by the speaker who claimed he had "a psychological fear of women."<sup>151</sup> Cheptai's claims of women attending night clubs and underperforming in their jobs could be remedied, in his opinion, by having men fill these positions, however, young men went to the very same nightclubs too. Indeed, the speaker's remark that Cheptai had a psychological fear of women may have been hyperbole, yet with such a disdain for urban decadence amongst the political elite, he may well have feared women's place in a "modern" Kenya. Cheptai, among

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<sup>148</sup> Kenya, Parliament, *Kenya Parliamentary Debate* (July 12, 1974), 909.

<sup>149</sup> Kenya, Parliament, *Kenya Parliamentary Debate* (July 12, 1974), 909-10.

<sup>150</sup> Jeffrey Ahlman, *Living with Nkrumahism: Nation, State, and Pan-Africanism in Ghana* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2017), 98.

<sup>151</sup> Kenya, Parliament, *Kenya Parliamentary Debate* (July 12, 1974), 911.

those that agreed with him in the chamber, appeared to think that men were immune to the same temptations and vices that the modern city offered. Alternatively, he was of the view that men were able to go out to the same bars and clubs, and able to do their job effectively without it having as much of an effect.

The theme of women as outsiders or unbelonging to the city was reaffirmed in popular literature too. Using sources such as novels and plays can help unpack how images of women in the masculine imagination were disseminated in popular fiction and its effect upon Kenyan society. In many cases the women of the city were either absent, or if they are present then they are presented as sex workers. In Meja Mwangi's *Kill Me Quick*, two women are presented but only as "screws" of the male characters.<sup>152</sup> Maina's girlfriend, who is only mentioned briefly, works as a "barmaid". While novelist and playwright Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o is not particularly well known for urban themed literature, the city is presented as an active agent in the formation of the central character's (Remi's) identity in the play *The Black Hermit*. Remi's mother Nyobi appeals to the local pastor to 'save' him: "I shall go to the pastor. / He knows our son is lost, / Swallowed by the pleasures of the city, / and to him I will say: / Go to the city, oh prophet of God, / Tell Remi to come back to us."<sup>153</sup> The city was presented as the corrupting influence upon Remi's Christian identity, and at the centre of the city, as a physical embodiment of these corrupting values, sat a European woman. The African women in the play remained pure, because they did not live in the city and were therefore not corrupted through urbanisation. Their value as mothers and wives reinforced the nationalist rhetoric that women's value lay in their ability to be a mother and in traditional roles in rural areas. The absence of urban African women is a thread that runs through the literary sources and is a reminder of their marginalised position.

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<sup>152</sup> Nici Nelson, "Representations of Men and Women, City and Town in Kenyan Novels of the 1970s and 1980s," *African Languages and Cultures* 9, no. 2 (1996): 148, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09544169608717807>.

<sup>153</sup> Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *The Black Hermit* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1968), 6.

When women authors situated the experiences of women in the city, their protagonists faced harassment and were marginalised. Grace Ogot, in some of her short stories in the collection *Land without Thunder*, contended with some of the difficulties that women suffered in the postcolonial city.<sup>154</sup> In the Story *Elizabeth*, the eponymous protagonist is well educated, hardworking and exceptional in all that she does. Elizabeth starts her employment at the Department of Aviation on a salary of £790, as a secretary, and stays in a nearby hostel after moving jobs several times due to sexual harassment from previous employers. The story ends tragically, after her seemingly fatherly and kind employer, Mr Jimbo, rapes her. The realisation that she is pregnant with his child, coupled with her trauma and the shame of losing her virginity, drives her to kill herself in Mr Jimbo's laundry house.

Before her untimely death, the character of Elizabeth contended with some of the issues of urban living, in particular feelings of isolation and separation.

Elizabeth drew up the curtains to shut out the city and its people from her. She felt out of step with the sophisticated life in towns. She wondered whether she would ever get used to it. A sudden aching longing for her home in the country, the close-knit family life she had shared there, and the security she had felt, gripped her.<sup>155</sup>

Despite the postcolonial state actively discouraging migration to the city through the paradigm of nationalism, many women found it impossible to resist the opportunities of the city despite their own preferences. A reader from Homa Bay sent an exasperated letter to the *Standard* emphasising that:

Some of the typists within South Nyanza District are really deteriorating for the scarcity and lack of commercial colleges. One wonders to see a group of typists travelling to Nairobi for their Pitman examination. Again, it may surprise one to hear that typing and other commercial courses are only being run in such distant places such as Kisumu, Nairobi and so forth.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Grace Ogot, *Land without Thunder: Short Stories* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1968).

<sup>155</sup> Ogot, *Land Without Thunder*, 200.

<sup>156</sup> "LTE," *The Standard* (Nairobi), August 15, 1974, 6.

With opportunities rare in the city, and rarer still in the countryside, young women looked to the city for jobs and opportunity. Despite the challenges the city posed, the autonomy and opportunity afforded by the city was reason enough to stay.

The role that violence and exclusion played in the creation of a national culture was paramount. For women, this meant that their habits and work were called into question, and they were confronted with normative expectations in the ways that they lived. The city was consequentially conceived of as a place unsuitable for women within the principles of *Harambee* culture. From politicians, writers and the popular press, the message, while varied, was consistent in its core message: women do not belong in cities. Further, the escalation of state endorsed violence and the closing of political spaces ensured that key political figures held a powerful monopoly over visions for national culture.

### Conclusion

The concept of establishing a national identity and building the nation has been relatively excluded in the study of postcolonial Kenyan history. Recent contributions to the histories of postcolonial Kenya have gone a considerable way to help foreground the story of the rural poor and their dialogues with the Kenyatta and Moi regimes.<sup>157</sup> This work has demonstrated the ways farmers and squatters interacted with national ideologies and political figures through engaging in *Harambee* projects or appealing to Kenyatta, thus showing the important ways Kenyans imagined themselves, social order, and national identity in the postcolonial nation. This chapter has attempted to situate the urban within this narrative.

The postcolonial state had an active national project, which I have described as the *Harambee* nation. While not codified in its approach, *Harambee* culture involved numerous elite actors and encouraged a citizenship based on self-sacrificing, disciplined, hard work. I have

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<sup>157</sup> Kara Moskowitz, *Seeing Like a Citizen: Decolonization, Development, and the Making of Kenya, 1945-1980* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2019).

demonstrated the ways *Harambee* culture had to contend with urban realities in the face of a postcolonial situation where access to the most crucial of resources, land, was restricted. In its character, this chapter has identified some core similarities to efforts of nation-building projects in Tanzania. Beyond *baraza* and speeches, efforts to create a national culture were also made by the popular newspaper press. The *Nation's* reporting of key moments of civil unrest in the first year of independence reveal how *Harambee* culture had become a theme of its writing. Alongside editorials of beneficiaries of state projects were criticisms of individuals who had challenged the postcolonial state. While disruptive, these individuals also provided useful opportunities to draw exclusionary lines in their political rhetoric and in the press; *Harambee* culture could be defined as much by what it *was* as what it *was not*.

Defining the nation by exclusion is seen in the treatment of squatters, hawkers, and women. State violence closed down countercultural spaces and used legal precedent for the displacement of hawkers in the city and squatters on rural land. The tightened vice over the trade union movement in the country neutralised the threat of popular industrial resistance to the regime and ensured political hegemony in the hands of Kenyatta and his circle.

While laws controlling women's dress did not come to fruition in Kenya, there were powerful social mores at play in political rhetoric and the popular press. The examples in this chapter have demonstrated a commonality: that cities and women were incongruous to the national project. The paradox of the postcolonial national project is evident here, however, these visions align with the gendered, traditional, and gerontocratic visions for Kenya that Kenyatta championed.

This chapter opened with a quote from Kenyatta's famous "Back to the Land" speech where he expressed his discontent toward certain aspects of urban living. To Kenyatta, these subversive behaviours represented disruption and disunity. Hilary Ng'weno, writing about the effects of the lack of freedom of press, said this of African nations' governments:

[Most] new countries' governments tend to treat themselves as the sole judges of what constitutes the national interest. On a great many issues which pertain to the public, governments in Africa and elsewhere have proved time and again that this view of themselves is completely unwarranted.<sup>158</sup>

From the early moments of independence, the government had embarked upon a project of national culture and mobilised the resources they had to achieve these means. As described by Ng'weno, Kenyatta and his followers were the arbiters of these visions. The subsequent chapters offer an opportunity to examine how historical actors challenged and engaged with these dominant ideals.

Over the course of the following chapter, further nation building structures are explored such as the establishment of the National Youth Service and growth of the police force. These institutions were insufficient to satisfy the needs of urban youth and the effects of urban experiences are proposed. Comparing the experiences of young men who were part of national institutions such as the National Youth Service and the police force, to unemployed inhabitants of Mji wa Huruma, the ways of finding access to meaning-giving practices are introduced. On the one hand, the state's projects, which were emblematic of the *Harambee* culture established in this chapter were impactful for the few who were able to benefit from such initiatives. On the other hand, the city, with all its shortcomings, uncleanliness, and moral ills was also the canvas upon which young Kenyans could articulate their hopes for the future. Access to globalised cultural practices, much like the miniskirts and pursuits introduced in this chapter became increasingly important as cultural signifiers and provided meaning-giving value.

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<sup>158</sup> Ng'weno, "Press Freedom in East Africa," 4.

### Chapter 3: The Backyard City

This chapter seeks to unravel the dual narratives that defined youth engagement with the national project and some of their cultural experiences during the early postcolonial period. At the core of this chapter is an examination of the multifaceted ways through which culture provided meaning for youth – whether through participation in state-driven initiatives like the National Youth Service and limited police force expansions, or via globalised consumption, manifest in cinema, music, and dance. These divergent paths reflect not only the aspirations of those championing the *Harambee* nation, but also the burgeoning influence of global cultural practices that offered alternative avenues for identity formation. The narrative delves into the lived realities of Mji wa Huruma’s residents, presenting a stark contrast between the priorities of Nairobi’s youth and the expectations of national culture, alongside diminishing desire for land accumulation and adherence to ethnic moral economy expectations. This chapter, therefore, positions itself as a critical analysis of the bifurcated cultural landscapes that offered Nairobi’s youth various means of navigating their social worlds. On one hand, the national project and the spirit of *Harambee* championed collective efforts and national integration, captivating those fortunate enough to partake in institutional roles. On the other, the city’s global influences unveiled new horizons of personal expression and experimentation, challenging the conventional pathways championed by elites.

By threading together the principle themes of youth experiences, the impact of national projects, the emergence of globalised subcultures, and the formation of new identities, this chapter aims to present an overview of the challenges facing the urban youth during the early postcolonial period. It underscores the standoff between the national culture propagated by political elites and the popular cultural practices adopted by disenfranchised urban youth, highlighting the resilience and ingenuity required to forge meaningful existences in the backdrop of postcolonial Nairobi. This analysis contributes to the broader thesis by illustrating the mechanisms through which a national culture was interacted with and fought against among Nairobi’s youth but also depicts

how these urban dwellers' competing visions for the nation were shaped by global cultural practices.

Postcolonial Nairobi presented many challenges for Kenyan youth. The works of fiction author, Meja Mwangi, often featured disenfranchised youths attempting to survive the harsh urban environment they found themselves in:

Meja sat by the ditch swinging his legs this way and that. A few people passed by engrossed in their daily problems and none of them gave the lanky youth a thought. But the searching eyes of Meja missed nothing. They scrutinized the ragged beggars who floated ghostly past him as closely as they watched the smart pot-bellied executives wrinkling their noses at the foul stench of backyards. And between these two types of beings, Meja made comparison.<sup>2</sup> His novel, *Kill Me Quick* (1973), told the stories of two street youths, Meja and Maina, who came to the capital with dreams of fortune, employment, and fulfilment. At first "raw and proud", they became jaded and weary, physically changed, and no closer to their dreams of becoming middle class consumers with a "job and [earning] six-seven hundred shillings a month... a house, radio, good clothes and food".<sup>3</sup>

As the quote suggests, the city was rife with contradictions: other Kenyans had better success. Inclusion and exclusion were central to the experiences within postcolonial Nairobi. Other novelists presented young protagonists as superficially more fortunate than Mwangi's young Meja and Maina. Samuel Kahiga for example, in his novel *The Girl from Abroad* (1974), tells the story of the opportunities and challenges faced by young men and women in the emergent middle classes to which he belonged.<sup>4</sup> The events of his novel took place in central Nairobi and Kangemi, a semi-rural neighbourhood steadily becoming gentrified during the period. The central character, Matthew, was presented as a cool and collected individual. Educated abroad, he made the choice to move back to Nairobi to exploit the opportunities the city had come to offer, "I forgot the frustrations of the western world and fully enjoyed my status as a privileged child of a city that still

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<sup>2</sup> Meja Mwangi, *Kill Me Quick* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1973), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Mwangi, *Kill Me Quick*, 1.

<sup>4</sup> He was the son of a civil servant, and brother to the acclaimed author Leonard Kibera, a good overview of the Kenyan postcolonial literary scene can be found in J. Roger Kurtz, *Urban Obsessions, Urban Fears: The Postcolonial Kenyan Novel* (Oxford: James Currey, 1998).

knew a lot of mirth and warmth. The women and the beer were plentiful and cheap. My salary was in the super-scale.”<sup>5</sup> Despite successes in his professional life, Matthew existed as a figure torn between worlds. He now belonged to a rootless professional class and the pleasures of beer and women could not hide the fact that he still identified as a “child”. This identity sat uncomfortably within his family network, where his identity as a son at the family homestead was strained and his conservative father disapproved of his decadent lifestyle. Underlying generational tensions in Kenya came to the fore in Kahiga’s telling of *The Girl from Abroad*.

The dissonance in the main character’s identity seemed to make him feel inauthentic and un-Kenyan at times. During one of the protagonist’s escapades, he travelled to some of the poorer areas of the city:

Sometimes, tired and weary and wanting a change, we moved east into Bahati, Jerusalem and other old African estates to get the feel of the people ... barmaids wiping tables with greasy rags, juke-boxes going off so loudly you had to lean across the table and shout, fights erupting suddenly, forcing you to upset the table and hold it like a shield. Smell of shit drifting in the night air from the sewers, an old man boasting, young clerks arguing, barmaids thanking you for a beer and telling you you were welcome to their houses. The urban people, your own people, separated from you by a vast margin of wealth.<sup>6</sup>

The central characters of the novel considered Bahati, Jerusalem and “other old African estates” as seemingly more authentic of Nairobi than their own homes and experiences; it was here that they considered the true character of the city and the spirit of the people to reside. These two anecdotes from Kenyan popular authors suggest that the poor craved the wealth of the rich with their radios, jobs, cars, and accommodation. The youth of the emergent middle-class, on the other hand, craved the authenticity, belonging, genuineness and legitimacy that, for whatever reason, could only be achieved through living in the poorest neighbourhoods of Nairobi.

Understanding the multiplicity of experiences among youth in Nairobi during the early postcolonial period has not been fully realised. Historical literature has focussed on the expansion

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<sup>5</sup> Samuel Kahiga, *The Girl from Abroad* (London: Heinemann, Nairobi, 1974), 25.

<sup>6</sup> Kahiga, *Girl from Abroad*, 13.

of state youth initiatives under the immediate postcolonial period (1963-c.1973).<sup>7</sup> Anthropologists and sociologists have demonstrated that there was a decline in state projects focussed on youth following destabilising global moments in the 1970s, such as the oil crises, and the HIV and Aids crisis in the 1980s.<sup>8</sup> While this is true, I challenge that this process is as linear and clear as this sociological and anthropological literature suggests: that youth were in crisis under colonialism, in relief in the 1960s, before returning to crisis from the mid 1970s to the present day. Instead, this chapter introduces the multiplicity of youth experiences at independence where opportunity and misfortune sat side by side. Mamadou Diouf has posited the importance of African youth at independence by emphasising how the nationalist project sought firstly to “maintain the frontier between elders and juniors,” but also place young people at the centre of economic development.<sup>9</sup> He argues, “Youth was conceived not only as the hope of African nations under construction – the chief actor in African societies’ struggle against underdevelopment, poverty, misery, and illiteracy – but also as the hope of the world.”<sup>10</sup> Practically, however, only a minority of youth benefited from these nationalist visions.

The assumption that the state had the capacity to provide for youth in the immediate postcolonial years has informed recent scholarship on globalised practices of culture. Consequently, assertions such as “[c]areer paths related to state institutions... were central and obvious to the first post-independence generations of non-elite men and women aspiring to middle class living are [now] no longer available on a large scale in a climate of neo-liberalism,” is lacking.<sup>11</sup> Statements like the above suggest that earning adulthood through globalised cultural practices in Kenya, (and Africa, more generally) are a very recent phenomenon. I suggest instead that young adults outside of state-initiated post-independence youth projects have observable

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<sup>7</sup> Paul Ocobock, *An Uncertain Age: The Politics of Manhood in Kenya* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2017), 226-246.

<sup>8</sup> Bodil Frederiksen and Jairo Munive, “Young Men and Women in Africa: Conflicts, Enterprise and Aspirations,” *Young* 18, no. 3 (2010): 249-258, <https://doi.org/10.1177/110330881001800301>.

<sup>9</sup> Mamadou Diouf, “Engaging Postcolonial Culture: African Youth and Public Space,” *African Studies Review* 46, no. 2 (2003): 3-4, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1514823>.

<sup>10</sup> Diouf, “Engaging Postcolonial Culture,” 3-4.

<sup>11</sup> Frederiksen and Munive, “Young Men and Women in Africa,” 253.

subcultural practices that imply a long history of globalised “desires and expectations”.<sup>12</sup> Filipe de Boeck and Alcinda Honwana’s observations, that for most African youth neither local tradition nor modern states offer meaningful frameworks for understanding their lives, are useful.<sup>13</sup> However, these processes have a broader historical context and are not unique to the past thirty years. While these fissures between older and more recent cultural practices have been made stark by an anthropological and sociological focus upon crisis moments, these are processes that were accelerated by crisis, not born of it. Jennifer Cole and Ritty Lukose have observed that most youth in contemporary Africa “desperately want to become adults but are prevented from conventional institutionalised paths. Many grow up far away from the idealised norm”.<sup>14</sup> While true, this could easily be used to describe the youth experience of many Kenyans in the 1960s.

This chapter therefore serves firstly to continue my argument that there was a standoff between national culture as propagated by the new political elite on one side, and popular cultural practices as performed by disenfranchised urban classes on the other. In this chapter, urban youth comes to the fore of these dissonant and distinct experiences. I challenge the implicit arguments of the above scholars that suggest decline and crisis from the mid 1970s onwards resulted in the breaking down of older practices of finding adulthood through state projects and local practices. These processes were already disturbed during the 1960s. Similar to how scholars have highlighted how very recent globalised cultural practices have offered new frameworks for African youth to seek meaning and opportunities for personal growth, the urban youth in Nairobi during the 1960s and early 1970s found similar significance in new media and commodities.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The term “globalization of desires and expectations” is taken from Diouf, “Engaging Postcolonial Culture,” 3.

<sup>13</sup> Alcinda Honwana and Filip de. Boeck, *Makers & Breakers: Children & Youth in Postcolonial Africa* (Oxford: James Currey, 2005), 11.

<sup>14</sup> Jennifer Cole and Ritty Lukose, “A Cultural Dialectics of Generational Change: The View from Contemporary Africa,” *Review of Research in Education* 35 (2011): 60, <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X10391371>.

<sup>15</sup> For example, the global story of rap and hip hop have had a profound effect upon space and the performance of self across Africa and in particular Nairobi; see Paul Khalil Saucier, “Continental drift: the politics and poetics of African hip hop,” in *Sounds and the City: Popular Music, Place and Globalization*, ed. B. Lashua, K. Spracklen, and S. Wagg (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 196-208; Chris Wasike, “Jua Cali, Genge Rap Music and the Anxieties of Living in the Glocalised City of Nairobi,” *Muziki: Journal of Music Research in Africa* 8, no. 1 (2011): 18-33, <https://doi.org/10.1080/18125980.2011.570073>.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section introduces the National Youth Service of Kenya (NYS), a state sponsored youth organisation, and a useful case study to demonstrate how youth was mobilised by the political elite as part of a nation building project. Far from an emancipatory organisation, I emphasise the duality of this organisation as both meaning-giving to youth but also as a means of shoring up power around President Kenyatta. The second section tells the story of a recruitment drive to hire young police officers into the ranks of the Kenyan police force. The stringent requirements and the exclusionary nature of these projects further support the argument that while the state expanded its youth centred projects following independence, more were precluded than included. Section three uses source material from the Andrew Hake collection at SOAS which has previously been unused by historians. Forty-five interviews conducted between 1970-1971 of Kenyan young men and women reveal alternate lives outside of the support and control of state sponsored initiatives. These individuals make up a distinct urban group and their lived experiences demonstrate that alternative local and globalised cultural practices provided meaning to them. Further, their experiences and questionnaire answers demonstrate new desires to engage with Nairobi as a modern labour force, and that connections to land and farms were waning. The ambitions of these individuals are comparable to Meja Mwangi's characters that I introduced at the start of this chapter. Finally, I use the example of one of the interviewee's interest in skin lightening cream to demonstrate the connections between globalised commodities and urban cultural practices. This urban class of disenfranchised youth looked to commodities such as these as value-giving symbols that aligned with their desires for social mobility. As Andrew Hake did when researching these individuals, I too refer to these individuals as living in the back yard city: they are the back-yarders, men and women who had to survive and create meaning in their lives through their own resources, without notable support from state or family. This phrase is a useful reminder of the many Kenyans who depended upon their own ingenuity and resourcefulness to survive and carve meaningful existence in Nairobi in the 1960s and 1970s.

The National Youth Service: creating national youth culture

The historical literature around the youth experience in Kenya in the 1960s and 1970s has focussed on the growth of state institutions and the individuals that benefitted from them. Paul Ocozbek has contributed to this knowledge by looking at the establishment and growth of the National Youth Service in the 1960s.<sup>16</sup> Fanon had called for the mobilisation of youth into new nations' military or national guard to serve communities and make productive a restless youth.<sup>17</sup> The Kenyan National Youth Service, however, did not have such origins. While Kenyatta in 1974 could "boast that the NYS had cleared 18,286 acres of land, built 1,100 miles of road, planted 100,000 trees, and built 7 airfields", their successes were framed as his own.<sup>18</sup> This was because National Youth Service members owed their good fortune of recruitment to Kenyatta after 1965, whereby alongside the expansion of executive powers under a new constitution and the dissolution of KADU, the recruitment of NYS servicemen now came under the control of the provincial administration who answered to Kenyatta.<sup>19</sup>

Its origins were born out of political necessity, rather than altruistic leadership. At the end of January 1964, Minister Mwendwa announced that the government was to launch the National Youth Service.<sup>20</sup> There were to be six units set up in different regions of Kenya, each recruiting 500 young men and women. Alongside Mwendwa, a committee of eight ministers had been formed to support the initiative: the minister for Agriculture, Bruce McKenzie; minister for education, Joseph Otiende; Minister for Finance James Gichuru; Minister for Health, Dr Mungai Njoroge; the minister for Home Affairs, Oginga Odinga; Minister for Settlement Jackson Againe; and the minister for works Dawson Mwanyumba.<sup>21</sup> Around 2,000 acres of land was set aside for each unit and activities would come to include handicraft, commercial subjects, policing and

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<sup>16</sup> Ocozbek, *An Uncertain Age*, 226-246.

<sup>17</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (London: Penguin, 2001), 162-63.

<sup>18</sup> Ocozbek, *An Uncertain Age*, 242.

<sup>19</sup> Ocozbek, *An Uncertain Age*, 242.

<sup>20</sup> "Harambee Jobs for 3,000: Kenya to mobilise its youth," *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), January 31, 1964, 1.

<sup>21</sup> "Harambee Jobs for 3,000: Kenya to mobilise its youth," *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), January 31, 1964, 1.

military. While not technically employment, the National Youth Service was to be run on a voluntary basis, volunteers received food, uniforms, and a small sum of money. In return, they were expected to attend courses and work in groups on projects such as “building roads, dams and irrigation schemes”.<sup>22</sup> Likely motivated by the general feeling of discontent in Kenya at the time, the government announced the launching of the initiative early: “before it got really working so that the public may know that the Government “meant business.””<sup>23</sup> Just weeks later, Mwendwa would call this initiative a “drop in the ocean.”<sup>24</sup> Although these state organised initiatives were ambitious and achieved some successes, a large portion of Kenyan youth were, by design, left behind and consequently had to seek other opportunities for earning adulthood.

Further, the National Youth Service had similarities to some institutions that existed during colonialism. Former colonial official Geoffrey Griffin was called upon to design the National Youth Service. He had been instrumental in running the Wamumu Youth Camp that was used to “rehabilitate” nearly two thousand youths accused of being Mau Mau in the 1950s.<sup>25</sup> The curriculum Griffin implanted for the NYS thus bore remarkable similarities to Wamumu Camp.<sup>26</sup> During the two years the young men (and later, women) spent in the NYS, they received vocational training and a basic academic education. Among the military instructors employed to oversee drills and maintain discipline, there were individuals who had previously been Mau Mau fighters, including Waruhiu Itote, also known as General China. This neutralised the threat that ex-fighters may have posed to Kenyatta, by paying lip-service to Mau Mau veterans and including them in some state organisations without giving them any real political influence. Thus, the NYS served the purpose of shoring youth power behind Kenyatta while simultaneously ensuring Mau Mau fighters were kept onside.

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<sup>22</sup> “Harambee Jobs for 3,000: Kenya to mobilise its youth,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), January 31, 1964, 1.

<sup>23</sup> “Harambee Jobs for 3,000: Kenya to mobilise its youth,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), January 31, 1964, 1.

<sup>24</sup> “Jobs for 50,000: Three-way Harambee pact,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), February 11, 1964, 1.

<sup>25</sup> Ocobock, *An Uncertain Age*, 232.

<sup>26</sup> Ocobock, *An Uncertain Age*, 232.

NYS members' work was gruelling. After the first two months of military drills, they spent several months travelling across the country building roads and clearing bush. The work was backbreaking, but it came with the promise of a year of academic and vocational training.<sup>27</sup> Despite the physical labour, just ten percent dropped out of the NYS program. The aim of the members' training was to get them to pass grade-three trade tests, which were the highest qualification tradesmen could earn. This was to be achieved in just one year. At Kabete Technical Institute, the nation's best vocational school, apprentices would take several years to achieve the same. However, an overwhelming number of NYS members passed their examinations. This may demonstrate that the NYS was seen as a crucial way for youth to achieve a meaningful education and was therefore successful in providing a rudimentary education to those able to join its ranks.

However, most young Kenyans were precluded from institutions such as the National Youth Service or other organs of the state, such as the police force. The Kenyan government had felt forced to introduce these new initiatives to placate a disenchanted youth. Ocobock has attributed the decision of Kenyatta's to form the National Youth Service due to a letter that Kenyatta received from Kanu's youth wing members in February 1964. In this letter they expressed disappointment at the postcolonial nation's failure to overturn the colonial socioeconomic order.<sup>28</sup>

The letter was a prop in a generational morality play, a form of ritualized rebellion, whereby the young reminded Kenya's newest political elder of his reciprocal obligations to them. The youth identified themselves as a unique actor on Kenya's political stage, mobilized around collective senses of age, economic impoverishment, and political disenfranchisement.<sup>29</sup>

While this letter performed an important role in demonstrating the dynamics of generational power and the duties of both Kenyatta and Kenya's youth, Kenyatta faced the very real threat of youth in rebellion across urban and rural spaces. A moment of unrest a month earlier (January 1964) in Mombasa clearly articulates the restlessness and agitation of this youth, when a hundred

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<sup>27</sup> Ocobock, *An Uncertain Age*, 236.

<sup>28</sup> Ocobock, *An Uncertain Age*, 226.

<sup>29</sup> Ocobock, *An Uncertain Age*, 226-227.

members of the Kanu Youth Wing disputed the decision to move a branch office, which they saw as a means of “getting rid of the [party’s youth].”<sup>30</sup> The Youth Wing Secretary, Joshua Makange and Chairman Ali Mohammed said that the new office had insufficient room for some of the youth to sleep in. He claimed that they would, instead have to “hang around at night.”<sup>31</sup> The youth felt as though they were being edged out of politics once *uhuru* had been actioned. The connections between independence, economic freedom, and the improvements in standards of living were clear to these protesting Youth Wing members: “It is said that youth had played a great part in the struggle for Kenya’s Uhuru. Some had died others had been beaten and imprisoned, and they failed to understand why they should be “thrown out on the streets, now Uhuru is here.”<sup>32</sup> Tom Mboya had called the Youth Wing in Kenya the “vanguard in the struggle for independence: they sing party songs, dance at rallies, they express themselves adventurously, they help organise, they are prepared to take ‘positive action’ when it is called for, they are in the forefront of the pickets when there is ‘civil disobedience’”.<sup>33</sup> In Mombasa, as elsewhere in Kenya, the Youth Wing desired recognition for their role in independence, however, in this case they believed their role had not been recognised sufficiently. Mboya noted that discontent like this would manifest if the Youth Wing was not attended to: “Once the young people are organised, they have to be disciplined and – what is even more important – they have to be kept occupied, for otherwise discipline disappears.”<sup>34</sup> Here was the case in point: the youth had not been given the resources they saw themselves as deserving and were rebelling against the party that they had supported on the path to independence. The incident in Mombasa is one of many occasions where youth took action to protest the lack of opportunity from the outset of independence.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> “Mombasa Kanu in new row,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), January 10, 1964, 3.

<sup>31</sup> “Mombasa Kanu in new row,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), January 10, 1964, 3.

<sup>32</sup> “Mombasa Kanu in new row,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), January 10, 1964, 3.

<sup>33</sup> Tom Mboya, *Freedom and After* (London: A Deutsch, 1963), 91.

<sup>34</sup> Mboya, *Freedom and After*, 91.

<sup>35</sup> See for example (in chronological order), “Workers warned: Abuse of right to strike,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), January 7, 1964, 2; “MP beaten up by Homa Bay Youth Wingers,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), January 10, 1964, 3; “March to Parliament by Kenya Jobless,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), January 18, 1964, 3; “6,000 Job seekers dispersed,”

Youth presented a real threat to legitimacy and authority; they had zealously championed anticolonial nationalism in the country and thus needed to be put to use. Political leaders mobilised young men into the nation-building institute of the NYS (and later women). Beyond pacifying a number of young adults, the NYS also served to perform a political elite endorsed vision of productive youth. These men were embodiments of *Harambee* culture and were used to describe model young citizens. The growth of these state organisations also served to perform an image of the new postcolonial state as benevolent, with youth held as crucial to the national project. However, given the inherently exclusionary nature of these projects, the stage was set: empowered youth on one side (who owed their good fortune to the benevolence of the Mzee), and disenfranchised youth on the other. To the political elite, those excluded represented real problems, and (as demonstrated in Chapter 2) were described as subversive and potentially dangerous. To themselves, however, they were just men and women trying to get by in a city and country where opportunities were elusive. The next section establishes the difficulties other youths faced when attempting to join other national youth initiatives through the study of a police recruitment drive shortly after independence.

#### Police Recruitment Requirements: Scrutinised youth

There were numerous state initiatives following independence, however they had varying levels of success. An example of the state's failure to improve conditions for Kenyan youth is evident during an initiative to recruit police following independence. The events of this recruitment drive occurred during the same month that the government announced the launch of the NYS. One of the resolutions to satisfy the unemployed and the Youth Wing's clamour for employment was to recruit some of the Kanu Youth Wing into the country's police force. Kenyatta

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*Daily Nation* (Nairobi), February 27, 1964, 2; "Police use tear gas: Jobless riot in Eldoret," *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), March 13, 1964, 16; "Unfair action by council: 150 hawkers battle ban," *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), April 1, 1964, 5; "Hunger protest in Nairobi," *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), April 18, 1964, 1; "Hawkers stage a protest march," *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), July 1, 1964, 3.

announced the initiative on 21<sup>st</sup> January 1964; in less than a week, the recruitment drive starting in Nairobi would be completed.<sup>36</sup> From Nairobi the programme was extended to Kiambu, Thika, Fort Hall, and Nyeri. In each region, just 45 Youth Wingers were to be recruited, with the initial stage of the programme hiring 225 Youth Wingers to the police force. This initiative appears to have been received enthusiastically by Kenyan youths with many eager to have a respectable job in the police force. Party youth often had a “puritan vision of the future”; institutions like the police force were attractive as they offered uniformity, a return to order and self-mastery.<sup>37</sup>

Mass participation in the police force may have been desirable to the Youth Wing representatives, however, in practice this was entirely impractical and impossible. Kenya already had an inflated police force at 12,000 men, a direct consequence of the Mau Mau emergency, when numbers had doubled to accommodate the authoritarian practices of the colonial government.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps the Youth Wing's hunger for productive nation-building labour would have been sated by an urban volunteer force as existed in Tanzania and Zanzibar in the late 60s and 70s. The Zanzibar “Green Guards” or “Volunteers” were entrusted with enforcing discipline among the urban youth. Working directly under the control of Afro-Shirazi Party Youth League, these young men volunteered their spare time to patrolling the streets, checking individuals were dressed appropriately, upholding curfew, and completing petty tasks that police officers hated.<sup>39</sup> They worked for very little: soap, and an allowance for food and transport expenses while on duty.<sup>40</sup> However, such a system did not come into being in Kenya. Restrictions around peoples' dress, while hotly debated both publicly and in parliament, were not enacted; the purpose of such a youth force in Nairobi therefore would serve little purpose. The lack of a need to expand an already

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<sup>36</sup> “Kanu youth for police,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), January 22, 1964, 1.

<sup>37</sup> Timothy Parsons, “No More English Than the Postal System: The Kenya Boy Scout Movement and the Transfer of Power,” *Africa Today* 51, no. 3 (2005): 71, <https://doi.org/10.1353/at.2005.0029>.

<sup>38</sup> Charles Hornsby, *Kenya: A History Since Independence* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 100.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas Burgess, “Cinema, Bell Bottoms, and Miniskirts: Struggles over Youth and Citizenship in Revolutionary Zanzibar,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 35, no. 2/3 (2002): 304-305, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3097615>.

<sup>40</sup> Burgess, “Cinema, Bell Bottoms, and Miniskirts,” 304.

bloated police force, however, did little to comfort members of the youth wing who considered themselves to be good candidates for police work.

The police recruitment initiative angered many within the Kanu Youth Wing. The executive of the Nairobi branch of the Kanu Youth Wing criticised the standards prescribed for the absorption of Youth Wingers into the police.<sup>41</sup> Following Kenyatta's announcement, the police subsequently announced their standards: to be a member of the Kanu Youth wing, to be at least 5ft8in., a clean criminal record, and to have achieved a KPE level of education (among other requirements).<sup>42</sup> Joel Magambo, chairman of the Nairobi Youth Wing branch, called the required standards as set by "an imperialist-minded" police officer and that the whole process was an "imperialist trap devised to make it impossible to have Kanu Youth Wingers in the police... [most] of our Youth Wing members are illiterate" thus failing the educational component, "and [most] have been to prison fighting for our Uhuru", thus failing the criminal record component.<sup>43</sup> Magambo called for the (faceless and nameless) police officer who had created these requirements to be "removed from the country immediately."<sup>44</sup> The only requirement the youths had wanted were language requirements – to speak Swahili – and the ability to work efficiently. Further, they had only wanted to be taken to Kiganjo Police Training School for a week, with any further education to take place in Nairobi; the initial course was supposed to take six months.<sup>45</sup> The Westlands sub-branch of Kanu appealed to the police to reduce the minimum qualifications. The secretary, Elijah Olliech Anyango, said that the education qualification would prevent many Youth Wing members getting into the police force.<sup>46</sup> Some resistance came from within parliament too: the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury, Mr T. Okelo Odongo called the initiative "good with the exception of the requirement of the KPE standard... not all our best policemen today

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<sup>41</sup> "Police standards anger youth wingers," *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), January 24, 1964, 2.

<sup>42</sup> "Chance to be Policemen: Kanu 50 listed 'possible'," *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), January 28, 1964, 2.

<sup>43</sup> "Police standards anger youth wingers," *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), January 24, 1964, 2.

<sup>44</sup> "Police standards anger youth wingers," *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), January 24, 1964, 2.

<sup>45</sup> UKNA INF 10/156/150, British Empire Collection of Photographs: 220 photographs compiled by the central office of information depicting occupations and services.

<sup>46</sup> "Police standards anger youth wingers," *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), January 24, 1964, 2.

completed their KPE education.”<sup>47</sup> Recruitment thus depended upon adhering to rigorous physical and education requirements, as well as clean criminal records. The process was inherently exclusionary. Far from a fresh start under independence, the futures of these young men often depended on the education opportunities under colonialism.

Others thought the entire project was futile. Wafula Wabuge, President of the Western Region criticised the government’s plan saying that Kenya needed a well-behaved police force that could obey laws and work with the public: “I strongly object to this plan, Youth Wingers cannot carry out the duties of the force or maintain its past good record.”<sup>48</sup> To some, the Youth Wing were still noisy rebels and did not deserve a place in the police force. Some citizens even felt compelled to write into the *Nation* to complain about the decision to recruit from the Youth Wing. A Clive Edwards wrote in questioning whether the move was worth jeopardising the “efficient service of the Kenya Police” to simply facilitate a better rate of employment. He defended the entry requirements and standards that had been upheld by the police force as maintaining the standard of policing that he considered the “finest on the African continent.”<sup>49</sup>

Kanu Youth Wing leaders’ concerns were valid; few from their ranks passed even the earliest stages of recruitment. In this instance, just fifty Kanu Youth wingers were short-listed as “possible” out of the 5,000 who turned up for police recruitment at Mathari on 27<sup>th</sup> January 1964.<sup>50</sup> Height proved to be a barrier for most: only two-hundred managed to pass the 5ft. 8in. qualification. Of that two hundred, just sixty-eight were members of the Kanu Youth Wing in the Nairobi area. (It is unclear as to whether they were members of Kanu elsewhere or whether they simply weren’t registered in Nairobi.) Of the remaining sixty-eight, just fifty came forward to declare they had attained the necessary KPE standard of education. The process did not stop there. The possible fifty underwent further scrutiny by the recruiting team. They had to demonstrate that

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<sup>47</sup> “Police standards anger youth wingers,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), January 24, 1964, 2.

<sup>48</sup> “Police standards anger youth wingers,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), January 24, 1964, 2.

<sup>49</sup> Clive Edwards, “Kenya’s police force (LTE, Daily Forum),” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), February 18, 1964, 6.

<sup>50</sup> “Chance to be Policemen: Kanu 50 listed ‘possible’,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), January 28, 1964, 2.

their age was between eighteen and twenty-five years, that they had no criminal record, that their chest measurement was at least 32 inches (deflated), and that they were medically fit.<sup>51</sup> Kanu's Nairobi branch Organising Secretary Sammy Maina and the Secretary General of the Youth Wing branch George Makadolla were both present at the recruiting centre. Sammy Maina pressed the recruiting team not to reject those with convictions of a political nature due to the involvement of certain members of the Youth Wing in anticolonial activities pre-independence.

These state initiatives were not without their successes, however, many young Kenyans were left behind. The police recruitment drive in January 1964 is emblematic of how difficult it was for young adults to enter projects aimed to support youth. These initiatives had the potential to be more exclusionary than inclusive: of a total of 5,000 just fifty were eligible to progress to the following stages of recruitment. Consequently, youth were forced to find means of survival and adopt meaning-giving practices in other ways. The standoff between national culture and popular culture also took place among youth as some were patronised, and others disenfranchised. The next section tells the story of a distinct group of disenfranchised youths looking for waged work in postcolonial Nairobi.

### Living in the backyard

This section introduces a series of interviews conducted by Andrew Hake's research assistants in Nairobi during the final months of 1969 and into 1970. Andrew Hake (27<sup>th</sup> February 1925 – 18<sup>th</sup> August 2003) was a British missionary with the Church Mission Society who worked in Nairobi in the post of Industrial Adviser to the Christian Council of Kenya from 1957 until his return to the UK in 1969.<sup>52</sup> Beyond his religious commitments, Hake was a dedicated researcher. His personal collections donated to SOAS, University of London, in 1992 are vast and broadly cover the following topics: the Church, the family, social issues and culture, urban life, industry and

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<sup>51</sup> "Chance to be Policemen: Kanu 50 listed 'possible'," *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), January 28, 1964, 2.

<sup>52</sup> Christian Council of Kenya would later become the National Christian Council of Kenya.

economic development and politics.<sup>53</sup> The ninety-five boxes at SOAS's special collections are filled with handwritten notes, newspaper cuttings, maps, aerial photographs, reports, pamphlets, and all manner of paraphernalia that Hake accumulated during his twelve years in Nairobi.

During his career, his recommendations informed the Christian Council of Kenya. His book: *African Metropolis: Nairobi's Self-help City* (eventually published in 1977) remains a fascinating insight into Nairobi during the 1960s and the challenges it faced. While a serious and incisive piece of literature, Hake was also personally passionate about Nairobi: "this book is about a city which I love."<sup>54</sup> He posited the thesis that "Nairobi was a 'two-faced city', presenting a modern front to the world, with a growing number of people living in the back yard."<sup>55</sup> It was the back yard people that fascinated Hake, and his book resolved to consider the barkyarders not as threatening or subversive but as having incredible potential for the future of the city and nation. This back yard city, or the 'self-help city', he saw as crucial in providing income and "status to the hundreds of thousands who would otherwise be in even greater deprivation in overpopulated rural areas."<sup>56</sup> As a sociologist working in the 1960s and 1970s, he employed methods that were characteristic of the era, prioritising statistical analysis and empirical data. His approach did not involve delving into the personal narratives of the individuals he interviewed. His research notes benefit from being situated in current historiographical work such as research into the history of youth and identity in Kenya as I do here. Hake's research assistants' interview notes provide insight into the rhythms of the city for a group of landless and jobless men and women.

This section serves to consider the perspectives of those who were outside of formal employment and state initiatives. Through unpacking the experiences of Hake's interviewees, this section reflects on the opportunities these individuals forged for themselves outside of a monthly

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<sup>53</sup> Additional papers received in 1993, "Papers of Rev Hake", Archives Hub, accessed November 18, 2021, <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search/archives/307c2e2b-4deb-3e8a-8974-5c373b64a5f9>.

<sup>54</sup> Andrew Hake, *African Metropolis: Nairobi's Self-Help City* (London: Sussex University Press, 1977), 9.

<sup>55</sup> Hake, *African Metropolis*, 9.

<sup>56</sup> Hake, *African Metropolis*, 9.

wage and without significant state support. In doing so, we may consider the ways urban residents integrated themselves within global markets of consumption, found new identities, made networks, and were released from the obligations of family, generation, and church. Without trivialising the difficulties these young men and women experienced however, they suffered very real anxieties around survival and self-preservation, these individuals faced unique meaning-giving opportunities. For example, those who found themselves in the employment of the police, or National Youth Service may well have benefitted from financial security, however, they surrendered control over their bodies and their movement; they ultimately contributed to order and power structures that served to reinforce Kenyatta's power and a gerontocratic Kenya. Alternatively, these "loiterers", unemployed, and landless youth in Nairobi were crucial in the formation of subcultures and represented resistance, both actively and passively, to gerontocracy, and the emergent constellations of power that held the president in the centre. The individuals did not belong to a monolithic group but did share experiences, I refer to them collectively as the "backyarders".

This section demonstrates the experiences of these backyarders by using a collection of interviews taken from Hake's collection. Given the lack of information about the interviews, it is necessary to make some certain assumptions. Hake returned to the UK in 1969, the interviews were conducted in December the same year and into early 1970. It is likely that Hake left the questionnaires with the young men who conducted the research on his behalf. These interviews have been catalogued by SOAS as part of Hake's "Study of problems faced by Nairobi youths."<sup>57</sup> Whether these interviews came to inform any of Hake's published material is unclear, however, their intention was supposedly to discuss urban youths' experiences in cities, "draw conclusions," and help inform Church support. Given Hake's research style, it is likely that if consulted, this material has been approached entirely differently. The questionnaire took the following format:

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<sup>57</sup> SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37, Study of Problems faced by Nairobi Youths.

## Study of Problems Facing Young People in Nairobi

### Background

All over Africa young people are coming to live in cities in very large numbers. Some of them face years of frustration and unemployment; all of them have problems of one sort or another. The purpose of this small study is to meet some young people in Nairobi, and discuss their experiences, especially since leaving primary school, and to draw conclusions, particularly for the ministry of the churches in urban areas. In any report that is issued, the names of the people who have kindly agreed to help will not be used without their permission.<sup>58</sup>

1. Name
2. What is your present age? (Delete one). Ref. no: )
3. Where were you born? (Place and district)
4. What schools have you attended? District of school:
  - Std I
  - Std II
  - Std III
  - Std IV
  - Std V
  - Std VI
  - Std VII
  - (Std VIII)
  - Form I
  - Form II
  - Form III
  - Form IV
  - OtherIn what districts have you lived since you were born? (Give years)

### Visits to and living in NAIROBI:

5. What visits as a child? How often? How long?
6. What visits during school years? How often? How long?
7. What were your first impressions of Nairobi on your first visit to the city?
8. How old were you at the time?
9. What do people say about Nairobi back in the rural areas? How do they speak of it? What do you feel are the most important things to be said about Nairobi at the present time?

### Movements since leaving school:

10. Have you left full-time schooling? If so:
11. When did your last term end? (date and year):
12. What did you do then?
13. How long did you stay in your rural home?
14. Where did you go then?
15. How long did you stay?
16. What visits did you pay to Nairobi? Who did you stay with each time?

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<sup>58</sup> In keeping this promise, I have used invented names. In order to specify which interview I refer to in my footnotes, I have used researchers' real names and the date that the interview took place. If an interviewee had a Gikuyu family name and a Christian forename, I have reflected this in their anonymised identity. I believe these measures to be in keeping with the ethical recommendations made by the Oral History Society. "Legal and Ethical Advice", The Oral History Society, accessed May 2, 2022, <https://www.ohs.org.uk/legal-and-ethical-advice/>.

17. At present you have been staying in Nairobi since: (date)
18. Have you moved to different houses during this period?
19. How do you manage over food and accommodation?

Rural activities since leaving school:

20. Have you spent any time at your home in the countryside since leaving school? (If not, please pass on to question 8). If 'yes':
21. How did you spend your time each day when at home (generally speaking)?
22. About how many hours a day did you work on the farm, on average?
23. What sorts of jobs were you doing?
24. What rewards or pay did you receive?
25. How many acres is your father's farm?
26. Do you feel that there could be a permanent job for you there on the farm?
27. What chances do you have of making a living from farming, (anywhere) in your opinion?
28. What chances do you have of getting a job of any kind outside a town?
29. In what ways did you spend your leisure hours at home in the country? What recreational activities did you take part in?
30. What things did you spend your money on?
31. How do you feel about living in the countryside? What are the main advantages and disadvantages, in your opinion?

URBAN activities since leaving school:

32. Why did you come to Nairobi this time?
33. What are you doing at present?
  - Full time study.
  - Part-time study.
  - Job.
  - Seeking work.
  - Visit.
34. What do you really hope to do?

Further Education:

35. Do you hope to pursue further education? What are your plans?
36. What courses are you taking at present?
37. Where?
38. For what qualifications?
39. What are the fees, per term/month/etc.?
40. Where do you get the money to pay the fees?
41. Comments about these courses?

Looking for a Job:

42. Have you been seriously trying to look for a job?
43. In what ways have you already tried?
44. What kind of job?
45. Where?
46. When?
47. How contact?
48. What results?
49. Was your experience different during the first three months of job-seeking compared with the following months?
50. Are you still trying to get a job?
51. How do you go about it now?

52. Do you write letters of application?
53. Roughly how many every month?
54. How do you select the people to write to?
55. What results?
56. Do you answer advertisements?
57. Which ones during the past month?
58. What results?
59. Do you go from door to door looking for a job?
60. How much time spent in this way during the last week?
61. Where do you go?
62. What results?
63. Do you have friends who are IN JOBS who try to help you get a job?
64. How
65. What results?
66. Do you have friends who are also JOB-SEEKERS, with whom you look for jobs?
67. Where do you go?
68. What results?
69. Have you been to the Ministry of Labour Employment Exchange to look for a job?
70. What procedure did you follow?
71. What results?
72. Do you go these days?
73. When did you last report there?
74. What do you think are your chances of getting a job in Nairobi? "Almost certain to" / "probably will" / "hope to" / "might possibly" / "probably won't" / "I regard it as almost hopeless." [sic] - ?
75. What do you regard as the most hopeful method of job-seeking?
76. Have you been asked for a bribe, by someone who might have given you a job? What happened?
77. What other cases of this sort are known to you?

	Whom approached?	Relationship or friend?	What was the exact request?	What results?
78. For help in getting a job				
79. For financial help?				
80. To live with them?				
81. For other help				

Other activities in Nairobi:

82. Apart from Further education and job-hunting, how do you spend your time in Nairobi these days?
83. Do you earn any money by casual jobs or selling things?
84. About how much a month do you manage to get?
85. Otherwise how do you get your 'spending money'?
86. Do you spend much time in organised recreation?
87. What groups do you belong to?
88. What do you do there?
89. Where do they meet?
90. How much does it cost?
91. How often do you go into the centre of town?
92. Do you meet with the same group of friends most days?

93. What are the things you like most about Nairobi?
94. What are the biggest frustrations about life in Nairobi?
95. What do you feel the churches should be doing with young people in town?
96. Do you belong to a church? Which?
97. What activities do you join in?
98. Are you a leader or office-bearer in any of these groups?
99. What else needs to be done by other authorities among young people in Nairobi? Any suggestions..
100. What are the three most important qualities you look for in a possible marriage partner? 1. 2. 3. Other:
101. What do you expect to have to do about dowry?
102. How much do you expect to have to pay?
103. To whom exactly?
104. Who do you expect will help you pay?
105. How will you raise the money etc.?
106. Over how long a period do you expect to be paying?
107. Would you consider starting to live together before the dowry is agreed?
108. What are the advantages and disadvantages of doing this?
109. Would you like to be married:
  - by traditional custom only
  - in church
  - by traditional custom, and church
  - sometime later
  - in the D.C.'s office
  - other type of ceremony
  - no formalities or ceremony
110. What initiation ceremonies have you undergone?
111. Do you think that most of your friends have been through the same ceremonies?

INTERVIEWER

PLACE

DATE

LANGUAGE

[MONTH] [YEAR]

Visiting Research Associate

Cultural Division, I.D.S.

University College, Nairobi.

Andrew Hake

To Hake and his researchers, there was an assumed “normal” life course. The questions asked, even without interviewees’ answers, are insightful to the kinds of problems Hake, other researchers, and the Church Mission Society deemed important to philanthropic endeavours in Nairobi. The questionnaire presented the interviewee as having a linear and binary existence of a presumed rural and urban life. The questionnaire assumed that all interviewees were rural migrants and did not conceive of interviewees having only lived in Nairobi despite some of the interviewees’ claims that they had only ever experienced life in the capital.<sup>59</sup> Urban and rural experiences from the questionnaire’s perspective were clearly delineated as separate and defined by age; life began on the farm, education took place at the rural school, there was some work on the land but a general lack of rural opportunity. After initiation, the city was sought for money, to earn bride wealth, and acquire land. The men would then continue their lives in the rural sphere once adulthood had been achieved through a wife and land. The answers to the questionnaires reveal that life had not been that simple for many of the interviewees. While the questionnaire focuses on education and its opportunities, for many interviewees, the promises of an education had not been fulfilled. The opportunities that they had come to expect simply did not exist and they were forced to eke out livings informally or to depend on the generosity of other urban dwellers.

Whether deliberate or otherwise, only three out of a total of forty-five interviewees were women. Some of the questions reflect this gender bias, for example a portion of the questions were dedicated to raising and paying a dowry. Urban issues, especially unemployment, were understood as issues that men faced more than women. Men had historically outnumbered women in Nairobi, and while the gender disparity had reduced significantly through the 1950s and 1960s, it was still stark.<sup>60</sup> Solutions to the kinds of problems that urban city dwellers faced were therefore

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<sup>59</sup> For example, Ruth Wanjiru, interviewed by Dominic Arthur Waweru, interview conducted on March 13, 1970, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37, Study of Problems faced by Nairobi Youths; Meja Wanyaga, interviewed by Stephenson Gitonga, February 2, 1970, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37, Study of Problems faced by Nairobi Youths.

<sup>60</sup> The ratio of women to men stood at 55:100 in 1962, Dorothy M. Halliman and W. T. W. Morgan, “The City of Nairobi,” in *Nairobi: City and Region*, ed. W.T.W. Morgan (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1967), 106-107; these figures were up considerably from the 1930s where the ratios were anything between 25:100 to 12:100, see Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 57-8.

often conceived along gendered lines. Among Hake's notes a fundraising leaflet titled "Home Sweet Home For 160 Boys?" called for donations to build a hostel for young schoolboys in the city. Young men and boys were perceived to be at the centre of urban issues.<sup>61</sup>

These sources present numerous methodological challenges. The questions were written by Hake and handed to research assistants who then conducted the interviews, typically in Kikuyu, Swahili or English, before transposing the answers in English. The answers to the questions have gone through many layers of mediation and interpretation. Some research assistants were more astute than others and diligently wrote long responses to the questions asked, others preferred a monosyllabic approach. Further, some researchers seem to have added their own responses to questions after the interview had taken place, and some questions seem to have been ignored entirely. Given that the interviews have been mediated through transcription, translation, and interpretation, it is impossible to know exactly what these individuals said.<sup>62</sup> The quality, however, of the testimonies provide valuable insight to unique perspectives from the mouths of landless, unemployed, young Kenyans. Within the questionnaire that interviewers used, questions covered a wide range of topics and the responses provide information on many facets of the interviewees' lifestyles. The selection of interviewees appears to be random, and in some cases, interviewees were friends, associates, or girlfriends of the interviewers. While these interviews offer an insight to the lives of these men and women, it is naturally very difficult to understand what these young adults felt. The interviews were not recorded. It is therefore not possible to unpack the performativity, mutability, and collaboration of these interviews, as one would with an oral history recording.<sup>63</sup> However, there are passages of the interviews that feel emotive, and some interviewers

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<sup>61</sup> Christian Hostels Fellowship, "Home Sweet Home", March 13, 1970, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37, Study of Problems faced by Nairobi Youths.

<sup>62</sup> Marc Epprecht faced a similar issue of inconsistency while working on the Gay Oral History Project in Zimbabwe. However, he benefitted from the opportunity to intervene and shore up a sense of consistency among the interviewers, Marc Epprecht, "The Gay Oral History Project in Zimbabwe: Black Empowerment, Human Rights, and the Research Process," *History in Africa* 26 (1999), 25-41, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3172136>.

<sup>63</sup> Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2016), 18-32.

seem to have gone to lengths to preserve the ways in which the interviewees saw themselves in the world.

The everyday experiences of those interviewed were defined by walking and waiting. Days were monotonous. Job seekers walked to the promising areas of town, especially the Industrial Area. Many of those interviewed stayed in the Mji wa Huruma area, an informal settlement mainly populated by Kikuyu in the north of the Karura Forest. The land has a long history of church organisation support.<sup>64</sup> Some of the residents at the time lived in tents that had been erected by the city council.<sup>65</sup> The walk to the Industrial Area from Mji wa Huruma took approximately three hours. A cramped matatu ride across town may have made the journey far more comfortable but was subject to scraping together the necessary cents to afford passage across the city. The fastest way by foot from Mji wa Huruma to the Industrial Area would have been to walk south-east through the city; along this journey jobseekers were confronted with Nairobi's gulf of wealth. From the Kiambu Road, jobseekers could see the building and grounds of the Muthaiga Country Club, a colonial era members club, before cutting through Pangani and Eastleigh, two notoriously poor neighbourhoods of the city. The urban landscape then opened up to the Industrial Area, where warehouses and factories offered hope of employment.

Once in the Industrial Area, the task was simple, if steadily demoralising: to go door to door and ask for work. Many of the interviewees said that they looked for work from 8.30am to 4.30pm, most, if not every day of the working week. Ruth, a young woman aged sixteen, attempted to find work outside of the industrial area however, favouring the offices along Government Road (now Moi Avenue). She found brief success making tea in 1968, but the job did not last, and she found herself wandering the Nairobi streets once more in search of work. Ruth's networks had struggled to support her during the difficult times she faced in the city. Her father had died during the Mau Mau emergency, a family member named Benson had been unable to help her look for

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<sup>64</sup> The land is owned by the government but is supported by Christian groups such as the Salvation Army.

<sup>65</sup> Ruth Wanjiru, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37.

work, the Red Cross had turned her away when she had asked for clothes for “no reason”, and her boyfriend Michael could not afford to live with her to support her.<sup>66</sup> When asked how people in rural areas describe Nairobi, she said that they would say it was good with plenty of places to visit including “bugis” (boogies), dances and films.<sup>67</sup> Unlike many of the other interviewees, she had been born near Nairobi. She left full-time schooling aged just nine. For food and accommodation, she depended on staying in the tents built by the City Council at Mji wa Huruma. She wanted “any kind of job that can earn me a living”.<sup>68</sup> She sought work through travelling through the city, door to door in industrial areas, asking for any vacancies. Ruth’s experience is evocative of Meja Mwangi’s descriptions of his young protagonists drifting through the city asking each boss for work at the very beginning of the novel *Kill Me Quick*. The protagonist Maina explains his situation to Meja: ““Well, I tried to get a job,’ he said and shrugged ‘ “ What qualifications?” they would ask me. “Second Division School Cert.” I would start to say but before I had finished the man behind the desk would roar, “Get out, we have no jobs.””<sup>69</sup> In Mwangi’s description the boys were promptly booted out back on to the street before they could finish their sentence; every time, their clothes becoming more and more dirtied and torn.<sup>70</sup> When Ruth was asked what she regarded as the most helpful method of job-seeking she replied: “If I had [known that,] I could have used that message”.<sup>71</sup> The experience of looking for work was presented across the interviewees as solitary and lonely. Ruth and her friends were all seeking jobs, however it was a task they undertook alone: “Everyone her own way.”<sup>72</sup> Outside of the times that she spent job-hunting she would cook and read novels, go to “bugis”, dances, and the cinema. The small money she earned was from performing casual jobs for other women. However, the amount was negligible, and she struggled to think of how much it would actually amount to in terms of a

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<sup>66</sup> Ruth Wanjiru, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37.

<sup>67</sup> Ruth Wanjiru, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37.

<sup>68</sup> Ruth Wanjiru, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37.

<sup>69</sup> Mwangi, *Kill Me Quick*, 4.

<sup>70</sup> Mwangi, *Kill Me Quick*, 1-15.

<sup>71</sup> Ruth Wanjiru, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37.

<sup>72</sup> Ruth Wanjiru, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37.

monthly income. She said that clothes and education were the best thing about Nairobi and that she missed schooling considerably. On the biggest frustrations about life in Nairobi, she said that there was not anything in Nairobi that frustrates her, except, of course, not having a job.<sup>73</sup> She thought the Churches could do more for young people in the city, helping them find work, offer schooling and training, and provide opportunities to become a nun. She also suggested that the government could do more too by providing places to live for poor people, food, clothes, education and nursing training for teenage girls and young women.

Many of the interviewees were dependent on networks to provide enough money and food to live in the city. For food, some depended on the city council who provided some free commodities at Mji wa Huruma. Alice Wanjiku, 18, depended on council food and on her mother brewing and selling “native beer” to provide enough money for her to live in Nairobi.<sup>74</sup> James Kuria, 22, relied on his sister Minnie to help with money, food, accommodation, and clothing despite going door to door every day from 8.30am to 4.30pm in the city and sending around twenty job applications a month. He attempted to further his skills by training as a mechanic in the evenings at a cost of 50/s a month, another expense his sister covered.<sup>75</sup> A different interviewee depended upon romantic connections for support. Paul Stephen Ng’ang’a (21) lived with the “girl [he] loved” who worked in a bar.<sup>76</sup> He depended upon her to make ends meet alongside some support from his brother. He also told the interviewer that he had recently taken up pickpocketing to try and make some more money.

Job seekers’ aspirations were often in vain. Jack Kihanya, 28, had dropped out of school younger than many of the other interviewees, and had worked as a mechanic on a good wage of 220/s a month. However, this work did not last, and he found himself in a similar position to

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<sup>73</sup> Ruth Wanjiru, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37.

<sup>74</sup> Alice Wanjiku, interviewed by Dominic Arthur Waweru, interview conducted circa. March 13, 1970, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37, Study of Problems faced by Nairobi Youths.

<sup>75</sup> James Kuria, interviewed by Stephen Njenga, interview conducted on February 19, 1970, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37, Study of Problems faced by Nairobi Youths.

<sup>76</sup> Paul Stephen Ng’ang’a, interviewed by Stephen Njenga, interview conducted on February 25, 1970, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37, Study of Problems faced by Nairobi Youths.

many other jobseekers in the city. Lack of work and the pressures of age had become a significant issue for him.

I was putting things to the transporting lorry. I am staying with my parent and my mother is in M. Hospital. We don't have a land back home. Here in Nairobi I can get a good leaving with some way like. I am growing old I hope to get family with can not work without land, town life to a jobless person is to trouble sum, than to un married person. [sic]<sup>77</sup>

At the age of twenty-eight, Jack was soon to leave the category of youth (a legal category that still exists today: 16-30) and his anxieties reflect the transition he was going through. Of the interviewees, he was one who saw land possession as crucial to a fulfilling adulthood. Others, however, had seemingly come to terms with the lack of hope in earning their adulthood through the acquisition of land and saw waged labour in the city as a way of living respectability. One interviewee, for example saw land as important in the future, but not immediately. Mark Jecgih (24) said that he may be able to afford land: “after retirement of any job I am doing if God wishes.”<sup>78</sup>

Out of urgency to find work, some of the interviewees had attempted to bribe others. Jack Kihanya had attempted to bribe someone to get a job but despite assurances that work was on the way, the bribe had produced nothing, and Jack decided to see whether he could get the money back. He realised that this would be a difficult enterprise, and if he could not get the money back easily, he would be unable to go to the police for assistance. Likewise, Kit Ndungu (22) had been asked for a bribe in order to secure a job in the city. He said that he hoped to “accuse the man,” but did not know where he would be able to find the money to accuse someone as he assumed he would “have his own lawyer”.<sup>79</sup> Two other interviewees, Moses Dirangu (24) and Mark Jecgih had

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<sup>77</sup> Jack Kihanya, interviewed by Stephen Njenga, interview conducted on February 15, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37, Study of Problems faced by Nairobi Youths.

<sup>78</sup> Mark Jecgih, interviewed by Stephen Njenga, interview conducted circa February 25, 1970, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37, Study of Problems faced by Nairobi Youths.

<sup>79</sup> Kit B Ndungu, interviewed by Dominic Arthur Waweru, interview conducted circa February 15, 1970, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37, Study of Problems faced by Nairobi Youths.

experienced similar issues and despite their bribes had not found any employment.<sup>80</sup> Interviewee, Patrick Gitau (20), had heard that some jobseekers had “invited bosses concerned for beer and supper, in order to have a discussion” about employing prospective individuals.<sup>81</sup> The interviewees showed resourcefulness in their pursuit of alternative employment opportunities. However, the success rate of these endeavours seems to have been quite slim. It is important to note that these interviews were conducted with urban poor individuals, and not with those who were already employed, making it challenging to gather insights on their experiences in the workforce.

What little money was earned by these individuals was made through casual labour and through informal markets. Moses Dirangu did not have any support from friends and family depended on selling beer in order to have enough money to live: “I never get any other help, I am selling this African beer after I came [sic] back from seeking a job in town and Industrial Area.”<sup>82</sup> When asked about his recreational life he confessed “to speak the truth I am spending my time seeking for a job and selling this African beer in order to get food and clothes.”<sup>83</sup> From this work he was able to get two shillings a day, however he found it impossible to make any more: “through my own business of selling African liquor, I never get more money because of bribing police men not to arrest me.”<sup>84</sup> Likewise, George Kimone depended on selling African liquor to get 20/- a month.<sup>85</sup>

Other informal labour included selling produce, labouring, or working in friend's businesses. Ruth, mentioned earlier, was one of the unluckiest and earned so little that she struggled to even put a number on the amount that she earned.<sup>86</sup> Others had modest success on

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<sup>80</sup> Moses P Dirangu, interviewed by Stephen Njenga, interview conducted on February 16, 1970, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37, Study of Problems faced by Nairobi Youths; Mark Jecgih, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37.

<sup>81</sup> Patrick Gitau, interviewed by Dominic Arthur Waweru, interview conducted on February 18, 1970, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37, Study of Problems faced by Nairobi Youths.

<sup>82</sup> Moses P Dirangu, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37.

<sup>83</sup> Moses P Dirangu, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37.

<sup>84</sup> Moses P Dirangu, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37.

<sup>85</sup> George Kimone, interviewed by Dominic Arthur Waweru, interview conducted on February 15, 1970, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37, Study of Problems faced by Nairobi Youths.

<sup>86</sup> Ruth Wanjiru, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37.

the informal markets. Anne was able to get together 30/- a month through selling her brother's vegetables.<sup>87</sup> Meja Wanyaga (26) was able to make half of that from selling what he could, and Benjamin Macharia (16) made his money from supporting his friend's business.<sup>88</sup> On the more successful end of the spectrum, Patrick Gitau made 80/- from "cleaning cars of big men", Sam Thaita (20) did the same, and Daniel Gichuki (20) was able to make 50/- from casual jobs on building sites.<sup>89</sup> Gordon Kangethe (20) had the most luck of the group and was able to make around 150/- each month through working at a sawmill.<sup>90</sup>

Life was not always entirely unpleasant in the city, however. Despite struggling to find work, Thomas Ochien'g (18) seemed to be doing better than the other interviewees; he was not a resident of Mji wa Huruma, and depended on his father to provide for his food and accommodation.<sup>91</sup> At the time of his interview he was waiting for his KTSE results and was using his allowance from his father to pay for further lessons in accountancy that cost 25/s a month, go to dances, and buy records.

While many of the interviewees had depended on the city council for their tents in Mji wa Huruma, for most, connections to state initiatives ended there. Finding enough money for necessities such as food was eked out through familial networks for those lucky enough to have friends, family, or partners who could support them. Otherwise, individuals had to sustain themselves through informal means: selling what they could, brewing beer, and pickpocketing. There was a demonstrable lack of support and opportunity for these urban dwellers. Despite

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<sup>87</sup> Anne Wanjiru, interviewed by Dominic Arthur Waweru, interview conducted on February 16, 1970, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37, Study of Problems faced by Nairobi Youths.

<sup>88</sup> Meja Wanyaga, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37; Benjamin Michael Macharia, interviewed by Stephenson Gitonga, interview conducted on February 27, 1970, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37, Study of Problems faced by Nairobi Youths.

<sup>89</sup> Patrick Gitau, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37; Sam Harrison Thaita, interviewed by Stephenson Gitonga, interview conducted between February 1x28, 1970 SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37, Study of Problems faced by Nairobi Youths; Daniel Gichuki, interviewed by Stephenson Gitonga, interview conducted between February 1x28, 1970, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37, Study of Problems faced by Nairobi Youths.

<sup>90</sup> Gordon Kangethe, interviewed by Stephenson Gitonga, interview conducted on February 25, 1970, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37, Study of Problems faced by Nairobi Youths.

<sup>91</sup> Thomas Ochien'g interviewed by Stephenson Gitonga, interview conducted on February 20, 1970, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37, Study of Problems faced by Nairobi Youths.

hardships, however, many of the individuals found pleasure in urban pursuits and consuming global commodities. The final section unpacks how the interviewees looked to alternative local and globalised cultural practices for fulfilment. As value-giving symbols and practices, many of these pursuits demonstrated desire to engage with and become the aforementioned middle class as portrayed in Kahiga's *Girl from Abroad*.

### Globalised consumption

Notably, many of the interviewees emphasised the positives of life in Nairobi, despite its hardships. Interviewees did not claim their lives would be better away from Nairobi – rural life was not the answer to their problems. The opportunities that existed in the city were elusive but could save them from their current situations. Some interviewees found pleasure in making and learning music. Patrick Gitau met at a friend's home to learn how to play guitar and drums. Unable to afford instruments himself he contributed 50 cents as an admission to the club of musicians and have the opportunity to play someone's instrument.<sup>92</sup> George Kimone was in a similar group, paying 20c "per play" on a guitar and was a member of his (Catholic) church's choir.<sup>93</sup> George met at other interviewee Moses Dirangu's house to play guitar. Moses himself, aspired to earn money as a guitarist. To Moses, the most exciting thing about Nairobi was the fact that it offered the greatest opportunities to become a musician.<sup>94</sup>

Beyond the excitement of the freedoms offered by Nairobi, the interviewees had mixed feelings about the city. Anne Wanjiru had not been impressed when she arrived at ten years old "cause I found bad like a boy beating a girl for fun."<sup>95</sup> When asked to reflect on how Nairobi was viewed from rural areas of Kenya, Anne said that:

People think and say that we people from town are thieves and some say that we know or we are more civilised than them. They speak of the people but not of the city. They say

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<sup>92</sup> Patrick Gitau, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37.

<sup>93</sup> George Kimone, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37.

<sup>94</sup> Moses P Dirangu, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37.

<sup>95</sup> Anne Wanjiru, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37.

that they are lazy and clean. They should say that [Nairobi] is the most poor area in the country. Although people there earn a lot.<sup>96</sup>

When asked to consider the advantages and disadvantages of living in a rural area, Anne said, “I feel that I do not like staying in the countryside. It is untidy and not good things like cinemas and many of the people I used to know had left that village. I looked a stranger.” Elders, concerned that young adults who left for the city eroded connections with rural life, perhaps had reason for their fears; Anne felt alienated from her childhood home. Her dreams were modest, if excruciatingly impossible: she dreamt of going into nursing if she could get the training, although her applications had so far been unsuccessful.

Interviewees emphasised the enjoyment of attending dances and “bugis” (boogies), buying good books, and going to cinemas.<sup>97</sup> Anne would go dancing with her boyfriend, and sometimes go to church on Sundays (she was Catholic), or would simply rest in parks.<sup>98</sup> She also described her love of picnics, drinks, the Nairobi Show and swimming. Anne, despite “[having] been in great troubles” looking for work, was able to earn a small amount of money through selling her brother’s vegetables. She told the interviewer that with any extra money she could get she would usually “buy cosmetics to make [her] boy [admire]” her, sometimes buying Ambi Soap Powder.<sup>99</sup> It should be noted that Anne was interviewed by her boyfriend for the study.

Given the financial hardships that Anne faced, it may be surprising that purchasing cosmetics and in particular the skin lightener Ambi Soap Powder was a priority of hers. Timothy Burke’s study of the importance of skin lightener products in colonial Zimbabwe (among them Ambi) has noted that individuals used cosmetic products to connect with “modern living” even when outside the formal economy to publicly signify their hopes and dreams.<sup>100</sup> He demonstrates

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<sup>96</sup> Anne Wanjiru, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37.

<sup>97</sup> Anne Wanjiru, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37.

<sup>98</sup> Anne Wanjiru, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37.

<sup>99</sup> Anne Wanjiru, SOAS, PP MS 46/04/02/37.

<sup>100</sup> Timothy Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996), 184.

how luxuries could become necessities incredibly quickly through the reimagining of life practices; here too, the uses of cosmetic and hygiene products became paramount to the urban poor.<sup>101</sup> One of Burke's examples shows how young Zimbabwean men named soap as integral to daily living after basic amenities such as food and water.<sup>102</sup> More recently, Lynn Thomas' comparative work on skin lightening products in South Africa and Kenya reveals the intertwining connections of consumer habits between the two countries.<sup>103</sup>

The rise in use of skin lightener was associated "with a range of girls and women labelled modern, independent, and self-assured, and viewed as testing the limits of female propriety."<sup>104</sup> Its use was ubiquitous, however and Thomas demonstrates its use by "bar maids, sex workers, musical performers, and dancehall attendees as well as secretaries, teachers, nurses, and high school and college students".<sup>105</sup> Likewise, it was consumed by women (and men, though less so) who were precluded from formal employment. As in colonial Zimbabwe, the use of these products by a class of unemployed young adults reflects their beauty ideals and desires for a middle class lifestyle. While Anne's use of the product was limited, due to her lack of funds, it perhaps symbolised a desire to belong to this emergent class. Although, more simply, it is worth remembering that cosmetic and beauty products at its most basic level are used by consumers to look and feel attractive. While products such as skin lightening cream may have connected women to globalised beauty standards, class aspirations and to a sense of being modern, these concerns probably took place at a less conscious level.

The importance of these cosmetic products was reinforced by new media intended for the emergent middle class developing in East Africa. The columns of Ugandan children's author and socialite Barbara Kimenye make for excellent examples of how these commodities had importance to urban consumers. She had a regular feature in the new Kenyan national paper the *Daily Nation*.

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<sup>101</sup> Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women*, 8-12.

<sup>102</sup> Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women*, 8-12.

<sup>103</sup> Lynn Thomas, "Consumer culture and 'black is beautiful' in apartheid South Africa and early postcolonial Kenya," *African Studies* 78, no.1, (2019): 6-32.

<sup>104</sup> Thomas, "Consumer culture," 13.

<sup>105</sup> Thomas, "Consumer culture," 13.

Writing from Kampala, Uganda, until moving to Nairobi in 1965, her columns provided advice, mainly for women, on fashion, cosmetics, hosting parties, childcare and food and drink. It is likely that women in the region saw Kimenye as emblematic of the “modern woman” that they attempted to emulate.<sup>106</sup> In one of her typical articles, she emphasised the importance of modernity and what modern identities and relationships looked like: “Modern husbands are always complaining of the large amounts of money their wives spend on cosmetics. But most of what they have to say is seldom worth considering and we continue to apply the paint and powder without the slightest pang of conscience.”<sup>107</sup> The lifestyle she portrayed seemed expensive and rather glamorous. In this specific article she presented cosmetics as necessary for dating and winning over the attention of men: “Do you recall those happy courtship days when he never ceased to wonder at your flawless complexion? He honestly thought it was... unaided. And... he is astounded to realise your face can cost as much as it does to run a small car.”<sup>108</sup> Her article concluded with advice on where to find cheaper cosmetic products and her final point reinforces the importance of bleaching cream in the region: “I hear they are working on a bleaching cream – one guaranteed to have absolutely no harmful effects on the skin.”<sup>109</sup> There was perhaps also something seductive and rebellious in using these products; skin lighteners were, after all, illegal in Tanzania (1968) and the legal status of these products had been debated in the Kenyan parliament.<sup>110</sup> It is crucial to situate landless urban youth within these patterns of consumption. Lynn Thomas notes the ubiquity of these products particularly for women in formal employment, however it is also useful to note the intersection of middle class or working class habits and consumer activities of the homeless, jobless, urban youth. Anne’s interest in skin lightening cream

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<sup>106</sup> Anna Adima, “Barbara Kimenye (1929-2012): one of East Africa’s most prolific children’s writers,” *Another World? East Africa and the Global 1960s*, December 2019, Accessed March 26, 2023. <https://globaleastafrica.org/global-lives/barbara-kimenye-1929-2012>.

<sup>107</sup> Barbara Kimenye, “Barbara Kimenye studies the paint on your face,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), 7<sup>th</sup> February 1964, 10.

<sup>108</sup> Kimenye, “Barbara Kimenye studies the paint on your face,” 10.

<sup>109</sup> Kimenye, “Barbara Kimenye studies the paint on your face,” 10.

<sup>110</sup> Thomas, “Consumer culture”, p.17.

is emblematic of the ways that these commodities had become important among the backyarders. Newspapers, though perhaps hard to afford, had wide readerships: copies were circulated widely and often read aloud.<sup>111</sup> Even the poorest individuals in Nairobi would have had the opportunity to engage in the fashion and lifestyle material Kimenye wrote about in the *Daily Nation*.

### Conclusion

The government's approach to youth was reflective of their distinct efforts to create a national culture. With the aim to shore up authority around Kenyatta, youth were offered meaning-giving labour and education through the National Youth Service that served to mobilise youth around *Harambee* projects but also neutralise the threat that unproductive youth posed. The types of work that these young men and women engaged with was extremely challenging and labour-intensive; however, dropout rates were low, and individuals felt fortunate to work for such an institution. The NYS represents a small proportion of the youth experience at (and immediately after) independence. A swollen police force that had been mobilised under the Mau Mau emergency promised Kanu youth wing members the opportunity to join their ranks. However, the police force did not have the capacity to take on more individuals. Familiar colonial practices such as education requirements, criminal record requirements, and bodily requirements, were used to ensure that only a minority of young men (exclusively) were selected to serve in the Kenyan police force during the January 1964 recruitment drive. There is a great sense of continuity across the colonial and independence regimes. While it took place only a month after independence, the opportunities to break with colonial practices were not taken, although the framing of recruitment – to serve the independent Kenyan nation – was decidedly new.

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<sup>111</sup> As in colonial Africa, it is likely that more than one person read each copy of a newspaper and the contents read aloud and debated as in colonial Uganda. Emma Hunter, "Newspapers as Sources for African History," in *The Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History*, ed. Thomas Spear (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 20; Luise White, *Speaking with Vampires* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 2000), 252.

From the backyard city, the independent experience of youth broke with that of the government endorsed youth initiatives. Interviewees from Mji wa Huruma attempted to engage in labour that would afford them wage-earning opportunities. They aspired to become middle class consumers and engage in urban pursuits, such as going to the cinema, dancing, and owning luxury commodities. Their experiences highlight the disparities between the state-promoted vision of the *Harambee* nation, which emphasised communal work, rural living, and finding meaning through land, and the prevailing social and cultural practices among urban individuals. These practices were characterised by isolation and a belief in the importance of seeking waged labour as a pathway to adulthood and navigating the challenges of youth. It did not take a moment of crisis for these young adults to look for alternative meaning-giving practices as has been suggested by the anthropologists and sociologists introduced at the start of the chapter, but born of a continued inability for the state to keep up with the demands of youth.

Commodities and globalised consumption were important to these backyarders; music, dancing, going to the cinema were all part of these processes. As established in Chapter 2, the ideal citizen was rural and worked the land. Failing this, they were waged labourers. These ideas had become appealing to the Kenyan citizenry and many young adults desired a middle class lifestyle in Nairobi. A middle class, while small, had started to emerge in Nairobi; it was modern and cosmopolitan, and this was reflected in the culture and practices of individual's consumer habits. Urban culture was deeply affected by these global cultural patterns and Nairobi can be considered as "glocal" where these forces have shaped its urban systems.<sup>112</sup> The final section of the chapter focussed on skin-lightening cream to demonstrate how luxuries were becoming necessities for urban Kenyans, and linked this to the growing visibility of the emergent middle class in Nairobi. Just as globalised cultural practices in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century have given African youth

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<sup>112</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 27-47.

global systems to call upon to find meaning and earn adulthood, new media was influential to backyarders in Nairobi during the 1960s and early 1970s.

This chapter has examined culture and expectations within the peripheries of Kenyan culture. The following chapter explores further the ways the global came to interact with urban spaces in new and unusual ways. Through the growth of tourism in Kenya, visitors brought with them fantastical ideas and expectations of Kenya. These views, while antithetical to the national project were tolerated, and tacitly endorsed in order to satisfy the financial needs of the new nation. Life on the ground was also affected by the new wave of holidaymakers in the city. They brought expectations of interactions which provided both opportunity and challenges for urban dwellers. Much like for the residents of Mji wa Huruma, these globalised practices could create new meaning-giving opportunities.

#### Chapter 4: The view from the hotel: neocolonial fantasies, black mobility and gay tourism in the postcolony

This chapter delineates how Kenyan urban culture has been shaped not only by local elite political visions but also by the influence of foreign tourists, thereby unpacking the multifaceted dynamics of cultural identity in postcolonial Kenya. As established in previous chapters, this analysis continues to explore how various visions for Kenya's future – both local and imported – coexisted and interacted within urban settings. This chapter focusses on how tourism introduced competing or even conflicting ideas about Kenya, which, while often at odds with national ideals, found a place within the cultural landscape due to the economic importance of tourism and the physical and social compartmentalisation of tourist spaces. The principal themes of this chapter revolve around the integration of global cultural exchanges into local contexts and the economic versus cultural impacts of these interactions on national identity. Specifically, the chapter examines how perceptions brought by tourists from the West, including emergent gay identities and neocolonial fantasies, were absorbed and managed within Kenyan society. These interactions, while potentially disruptive, are shown to coexist with Kenyan cultural and national ideals due to the controlled environments in which they occur. This containment ensures that while these foreign ideas challenge the status quo, they do not destabilize the prevailing national narratives and identities.

Furthermore, the chapter explores the opportunities that tourism provides for ordinary Kenyans, such as new forms of sociability, romance, and economic advantages. These benefits highlight the resourcefulness of Kenyans in navigating and capitalising on the globalised practices introduced by tourists. However, when the visibility of global subcultures crossed into public awareness, it became a point of cultural contention, challenging the delicate balance of accepted behaviours and ideologies in Kenya. The reactions to these transgressions, particularly visible in the control measures against non-discreet behaviours by non-Kenyans, underscore the negotiation of identity in postcolonial Kenya. This chapter illustrates how Kenya's early postcolonial experience was deeply entwined with globalising processes. Far from the city of villages of the

1940s and 1950s, the effects of tourism exemplify the complex interactions between internal aspirations and external influences, providing concrete examples of the impact of global interactions on Kenyan urban culture and identity. Through these analyses, the chapter aims to enhance understanding of the nuanced ways in which Kenyans explored identity in the face of diverse and sometimes contradictory influences.

Just eight months before independence the Minister for Tourism, Arvind Jamidar, gave a speech before opening a brand-new tourist information bureau in Mombasa. In this speech, Jamidar emphasised the importance of tourism to the emerging nation, and the role the Coast Region would play in generating much needed capital to fund the ambitions of an independent Kenya. Tourism, he claimed, would play a central role in the national economy, “not only because this young country is itself a tremendous tourist attraction, but because it is eager to aid its somewhat unstable economy by rapid development of its travel facilities.”<sup>1</sup> He saw great promise in the industry on the grounds that: “ours is an exotic individualistic country which needs foreign visitors. Not only to improve our balance of payments situation, but also to promote understanding to support the accelerated changes in our social system.”<sup>2</sup> Further, it had: “become the object of personal interest of a large number of the common people of the country.”<sup>3</sup> A booming tourist trade, to Jamidar, could be a reliable economic and identity cornerstone for the new nation.

Jamidar's observations were correct, tourism would play a vital role in the national economy. In just fifteen years, the tourist industry had exploded from a 1948 income of £250,000 to £6,000,000 by 1963,<sup>4</sup> and one of Nairobi's biggest travel firms serviced 18,000 tourists in 1963.<sup>5</sup> Into independence the industry continued to grow, and by 1970 Kenya received £K18.5 million

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<sup>1</sup> Nation Reporter, “Tourist Trade Now Concern of all Kenya,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), April 6, 1963, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Nation Reporter, “Tourist Trade Now Concern of all Kenya,” 3.

<sup>3</sup> Nation Reporter, “Tourist Trade Now Concern of all Kenya,” 3.

<sup>4</sup> Nation Reporter, “Tourist Trade Now Concern of all Kenya,” 3.

<sup>5</sup> “Kenya Heading for Record in Tourism,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), March 3, 1964, 3.

from foreign tourists.<sup>6</sup> Only coffee earned more for the economy, worth £K22.3 million the same year.<sup>7</sup> Even coffee would be outstripped, and in 1971 and 1972 earnings from tourists became the country's top foreign currency earner at around £k23 million a year.<sup>8</sup> While not without its challenges, the history of Kenyan tourism is something of a national success story.

However, there were moments of instability that threatened the trade at independence. The infant industry was fragile, fickle, and, like many industries, was easily affected by national and global politics. Regional disturbances and conflicts that gained national and international attention were often downplayed when they jeopardised the industry. In Kenya's first year of independence, Nairobi travel agents experienced a surge in tourism. However, the same travel firm that had welcomed 18,000 tourists in 1963 encountered a setback during the mutiny at Lanet Barracks in January 1964 and faced the cancellation of bookings worth £K20,000.<sup>9</sup> Front page newspaper articles, Prime Minister Kenyatta,<sup>10</sup> and the new minister for information, broadcasting and tourism, R. Achieng Oneko, insisted that tourists were still welcome and that the "people of Kenya had nothing but friendly intentions toward intending visitors".<sup>11</sup> The Shifta War (1963-1967) and military unrest at the Lanet Barracks (1964) attracted the wrong international attention and great pains were taken to assure regional and international communities. The incident at Lanet was dealt with secretly and to this day the exact sequence of events is still hard to discern. The erasure of this moment demonstrates the importance of international image in the creation of a new national identity; it was spun as a minor incident regarding pay to preserve the image of the fragile new state.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> R. T. Jackson, "Problems of tourist industry development on the Kenyan coast," *Geography* 58, no. 1 (1973): 62.

<sup>7</sup> Jackson, "Problems of tourist industry development on the Kenyan coast," 62.

<sup>8</sup> Jackson, "Problems of tourist industry development on the Kenyan coast," 62.

<sup>9</sup> "Kenya Heading for Record in Tourism," *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), March 3, 1964, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Jomo Kenyatta would be made president on 12 December 1964, upon Kenya becoming a republic.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Parry, "Tourists Welcome!" *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), January 31, 1964, 1.

<sup>12</sup> Timothy Parsons, "The Lanet Incident, 2-25 January 1964: Military Unrest and National Amnesia in Kenya," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 40, no. 1 (2007): 51-70.

This thesis has emphasised the ways that Kenyan urban culture was affected by elite political visions of the future for Kenya (Chapter 2). Contesting and complementary visions for post-independent Kenya have also been explored from the perspective of urban subcultures (Chapter 3). Local networks, ethnic moral economies, global networks, and intra-African visions for the future moulded these ideologies. This chapter makes explicit how this crucible of political and social thought interacted with a multiplicity of new and antiquated visions of Africa that were the import of the waves of European and American individuals who travelled to Kenya as tourists. I argue that competing or conflicting notions of Kenya that were imported by tourists were tolerated by most Kenyans due to the containment of tourist spaces and the importance of tourism to the national economy. I demonstrate that these imported visions though often at odds with Kenyan visions for the future, could be shown to complement Kenyans' various internal aspirations for the nation's future.

The chapter is divided into three parts. The first section illustrates how foreign concepts of Kenya, which were incompatible with national ideals, were brought to the new nation through the imaginations of tourists. These ideas had the potential to disrupt or challenge high political and popular visions of the nation. However, I demonstrate that these ideas, while neocolonial, antiquated, or illegal, could exist alongside Kenyan visions for national culture. I attribute this to the compartmentalisation of social and tourist spaces. I use the examples of gay American tourists to demonstrate how neocolonial fantasies and emergent gay identities could exist in Kenya due to containment of space. Stories of sexual experiences between men who had sex with men reinforced prevalent gay identities while feeding neocolonial visions of independent Kenya. Simultaneously these activities and behaviours did not threaten or challenge the national ideologies. The second section of this chapter turns to the social opportunities afforded to Africans due to the influx of tourists. As in the previous chapter, this section demonstrates the resourcefulness of urban Kenyans and their encounters with potentially meaning-giving globalised practices. Newfound mobility for black Kenyans in previously segregated spaces presented new

opportunities for sociability, but also romance and sex. This section uses examples of African men pandering to the aforementioned neocolonial fantasies of tourists to create opportunities. Again, the containment of these encounters ensured they did little to destabilise prevalent national narratives and identities. Finally, the chapter turns to subversive tourist and migrant behaviour that crossed the threshold of popular decency and came into public view. Global subcultures, when visible, were perceived as challenging to the postcolonial state. Here, a unique story of efforts to control Euro-American hippies is used to show how non-discreet behaviours disturbed the alchemy of these finely balanced ideologies. While unfrontational, this subculture was deemed too transgressive, and under Vice President Moi individuals hippies' entry into the country was banned. Letters to newspapers and popular magazines demonstrate the conflicted hopes and anxieties Kenyans felt toward this visible subculture, where existential questions of what it meant to be Kenyan come to the fore. Beyond political and economic global connections, this chapter situates the real, lived, and intimate global connections tourism offered into the social and cultural experiences of Kenyans.

#### Gay sex and neocolonial fantasies in an independent Kenya

The decline of colonial Kenya coincided with the emergence of an imagined Kenyan Colony as a global brand. Will Jackson argues that the histories of tourism in Kenya are best understood as entwined with colonial rule rather than parallel to it and the colonial image of Kenya that endured after independence.<sup>13</sup> Evocative colonial images, despite seismic political and demographic changes, thrived following independence, where fantasies of British colonial Africa were nurtured by different historical actors including the Kenyan political elite.

The attractive image of colonial Kenya that persisted following independence owes much to the settler community that lived in Kenya: Elspeth Huxley, Karen Blixen (Isak Dinesen), and

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<sup>13</sup> Will Jackson, "White Man's Country: Kenya Colony and the Making of a Myth," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 5, no. 2 (2011): 345, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2011.571393>.

the Delamere family, alongside popular writers who wrote about Kenya such as Evelyn Waugh and Robert Ruark. The image that developed was one of a decadent aristocratic paradise, characterised by mastery over the land (be that through hunting, safari, or photography) and servile African workers. It was a seductive image: a writer for *Vogue* in 1972 remarked of a meal in Kenya, “Dinner at the Country Club outside Nairobi, center of the famous Happy Valley set in the ’30s. Its atmosphere still to be found today, liveried servants obsequiously serving black-tied men, loud laughing décolleté women under rather crumbling dated decoration.”<sup>14</sup> While the aristocratic settler population only represented a tiny proportion of white Kenya, the imagery stuck. There were, for example, a greater number of working-class settlers from the manufacturing industries who settled in Kenya after the First World War but the image had already been constructed of colonial villas, the White Highlands, and exploration of the “bush”.

A steady current of new people came to interact with the city of Nairobi and Kenya at large, following independence. These people offered opportunities for new interactions, relationships, and ideas, even if for fleeting moments. Tourism subsequently offered an opportunity for Africans to forge a new relationship with the city and these liminal people who moved within it. The city had, in many ways, been reclaimed by African individuals. The white people who moved within the country increasingly represented holidaymakers, and not settlers who just a generation prior could have Africans flogged for minor indiscretions.<sup>15</sup> Despite these profound changes, Kenya still had inherited a legacy of empire, particularly in the formation of a new identity as a tourist hub. Of these new tourists, a small minority of travellers were young gay men who used their time in Kenya to indulge in erotic fantasies and to reaffirm emergent gay identities. The increased visibility of gay tourism in the 1970s serves as a useful example of the ways spaces were appropriated to accommodate colonial fantasies. These spaces also nurtured

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<sup>14</sup> Lady Diana Cooper, “Vogue travel: Safari by eye,” *Vogue* 160 (November 1, 1972): 70.

<sup>15</sup> David Anderson, “Punishment, Race and ‘The Raw Native’: Settler Society and Kenya’s Flogging Scandals, 1895–1930,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 37, no. 3 (2011): pp.479–97.

emergent Euro-American gay identities in new spaces. Gay cultures had become more visible in the 1960s in Europe and America. Seismic events such as the Stonewall Riots in New York (1969) and the decriminalisation of (specific, age related) homosexual sexual interactions in the UK (excluding Scotland, 1967), had profound effects on the LGBTQ communities in Europe and North America in the 1960s. While LGBT communities continued to suffer stigma across Europe and America, the visibility of these communities grew. With this growing visibility came new literature, social spaces, and vocal identities. As part of these emerging identities, some Euro-American gay literature presented the community as worldly, well-travelled, sex-hungry, and adventurous. The use of Euro-American gay tourism in this context is particularly useful as it demonstrates the performance of preconceived colonial fantasies, as well as a non-heteronormative culture wrestling with new aspects of its identity in the face of increasing global visibility.<sup>16</sup>

The study of gay tourism, communities and identities in Europe and America is well established.<sup>17</sup> By contrast, it is far more difficult to write LGBTQ histories from an African perspective. Without established historical research on LGBTQ history in Kenya, I therefore refer to the Kenyan men within the texts who had sex with tourists as “men who have sex with men” (MSM), and the study of these men as “LGBTQ history”. The term “gay” has little use in the Kenyan context of the 1960s and 1970s, as it is an identity-based category that is loaded with far more meaning than sexual practice. I believe the term “LGBTQ history” is flexible enough to describe the historicization of these encounters. I do, however, refer to the American individuals who appear in this chapter who were writers for gay periodicals in Kenya as “gay”; this was how

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<sup>16</sup> I use the term Euro-American throughout this chapter to refer to European and American tourists. In this context, the habits, practices, and expectations of Kenya can be roughly homogenised. These tourists visited similar places, had similar recreational habits, ate at the same restaurants, and stayed in the same hotels. The cultural touchstones where they formed their visions of Kenya were broadly the same.

<sup>17</sup> For a selection of British examples see Harry Cocks, *Nameless Offences: Homosexual Desire in the Nineteenth Century* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003); Adrian Bingham, *Family Newspapers: Sex, Private Life, and the British Popular Press 1918-1978* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Roger Davidson and Gayle Davis. “‘A Field for Private Members’: The Wolfenden Committee and Scottish Homosexual Law Reform, 1950-67.” *20th Century British History* 15, no. 2 (2004): 174-201, <https://doi.org/10.1093/tcbh/15.2.174>.

they identified. In her exemplary overview of the “affective, the intellectual and gender history” in African history (2014), Nancy Rose Hunt noted: “The unethical and the transgressive, the criminal and the violent, the strange, the quirky, and non-normative have received less attention...”<sup>18</sup> This is an important area to develop in Africanist history. The classic African social histories have been influenced, for good reason, by moral economies.<sup>19</sup> While this was crucial in the past to demonstrate that African societies were moral, complex, and socially organised, there has not been enough historical attention dedicated to what we may call LGBTQ histories.

Despite the challenges of LGBTQ research in sub-Saharan Africa, since the late 1990s there have been some serious interventions into contemporary and historical research of homosexuality. The most significant contributions have come from Southern Africa.<sup>20</sup> However, the literature has mainly focussed on specific sites, such as mining communities and prisons as opposed to urban space in a more general sense. In East Africa, there have been some recent advancements in gay studies particularly around homophobia, activism and religion (although due to the extreme punitive measures in Uganda, Ugandan studies dominate the conversation).<sup>21</sup> However, excellent steps have been taken to explore romance, sex and the affective by

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<sup>18</sup> Nancy Rose Hunt, “The Affective, the Intellectual, and Gender History,” *The Journal of African History* 55, no. 3 (2014): 332, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853714000607>.

<sup>19</sup> Examples include Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya & Africa* (London: Currey, 1992); John Iliffe, *Honour in African History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>20</sup> Zackie Achmat, “‘Apostles of Civilised Vice’: ‘Immoral Practices’ and ‘Unnatural Vice’ in South African Prisons and Compounds, 1890-1920.” *Social Dynamics* 19, no. 2 (1993), pp.92-110; Marc Epprecht, “The Gay Oral History Project in Zimbabwe: Black Empowerment, Human Rights, and the Research Process,” *History in Africa* 26 (1999), 25-41, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3172136>; Marc Epprecht, “‘Unnatural Vice’ in South Africa: The 1907 Commission of Enquiry,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 34, no. 1 (2001): 121-140, doi: 10.2307/3097289; Patrick Harries, “Symbols and Sexuality: Culture and Identity on the Early Witwatersrand Gold Mines,” *Gender & History* 2, no. 3 (1990): 318-335, doi: 10.1111/j.1468-0424.1990.tb00103.x; T. Dunbar Moodie, “Migrancy and Male Sexuality on the South African Gold Mines,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 14, no. 2 (1988): 228-256, doi: 10.1080/03057078808708172.

<sup>21</sup> Henni Alava, “Homosexuality, the Holy Family and a Failed Mass Wedding in Catholic Northern Uganda,” *Critical African Studies* 9, no. 1 (2017): 32-51, doi: 10.1080/21681392.2016.1245104; John Blevins, “When Sodomy leads to Martyrdom: Sex, Religion and Politics in Historical and Contemporary Contexts in Uganda and East Africa,” *Theology and Sexuality* 17, no. 1 (2011): 51-74, doi: 10.1558/tse.v17i1.51; Kristen Cheney, “Locating Neocolonialism, ‘Tradition,’ and Human Rights in Uganda’s ‘Gay Death Penalty,’” *African Studies Review* 55, no. 2 (2012): 77-95, doi: 10.1353/arw.2012.0031; Adriaan van Klinken, *Kenyan, Christian, Queer*, vol. 3 (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019); Stella Nyanzi, “Dismantling reified African Culture through Localised Homosexualities in Uganda,” *Culture, Health and Sexuality* 15, no. 8 (2013): 952-967, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2013.798684>; Rahul Rao, “Remembering Mwanga: Same-sex Intimacy, Memory and Belonging in Postcolonial Uganda,” *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 9, no. 1 (2015): 1-19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2014.970600>.

anthropologists and sociologists working in Africa; examples in Kenya include the works of Rachel Spronk and George Paul Meiu.<sup>22</sup> A reciprocal effort is needed from the school of historians, and while these anthropological contributions are welcome, they mainly focus on heterosexual interactions between older Europeans and younger Africans (of the opposite sex).<sup>23</sup>

Of the Kenyan gay scene, an American gay travel guide provided the following, “Kenya: Although homosexuality is completely illegal, there is enough of it going on to make the effort worthwhile.”<sup>24</sup> This quote preceded a modest list of hotels and restaurants in Nairobi and Mombasa that had “enough” of a gay scene to make the cut in an extensive list of global gay-friendly spaces. As the only East African country in the guidebook, there was something about Kenya that had meant it had earned a reputation in the international gay community for having a “worthwhile” gay scene.

In amongst Nairobi's bustling central business district, the usual multinational hotels can be found. On the corner of Kimathi Street lies the Stanley Hotel. In the past it had been an extremely popular, must-visit, destination in the capital; now, it is just one of many other hotels in the centre of town. Its street-facing restaurant, the Thorn Tree Café, named after the large fever tree that grows outside, was the happy refuge for many travellers throughout the twentieth century. A notice board by the tree had supposedly served as an early message centre before a postal system was established in Kenya. People would pin a letter for someone living elsewhere and a traveller heading that way would take the letter to its destination.<sup>25</sup> By the 1970s the message board was still in use, now for travellers leaving notes for friends passing through. The clientele were mainly

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<sup>22</sup> See Rachel Spronk, *Ambiguous Pleasures: Sexuality and Middle Class Self-Perceptions in Nairobi* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012); George Paul Meiu, *Ethno-Erotic Economies: Sexuality, Money and Belonging in Kenya* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2017).

<sup>23</sup> Examples include Wanjohi Kibicho, *Sex Tourism in Africa: Kenya's Booming Industry* (Abingdon; New York: Taylor & Francis, 2016); Nina Berman, *Germans on the Kenyan Coast: Land, Charity, and Romance* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2017).

<sup>24</sup> Ronnie Anderson, ed., *International Guild Guide 1978*, vol. 12 (Virginia, 1977), 195.

<sup>25</sup> Nancy Cooper, “Nairobi, the Ngong Hills and Beyond,” *The New York Times* (New York, N.Y.), January 12, 1986, 15.

American and European tourists, who sat in the shade provided by the fever tree and the green and white umbrellas, and chatted while having a few cold beers or soft drinks. In front of them Volkswagen minibuses loaded and unloaded safari-bound tourists. The Thorn Tree café was the place to be, and many who have passed through Nairobi will have visited. Few may realise, however, that just as the café served as a hub for the sociable tourist, it was also the centre of Nairobi's tourist gay scene.

**Figure 4.1.**



Harrison Forman, "Kenya, street scene in front of New Stanley Hotel in Nairobi", ca.1960, 35mm slide, (33c2, 85-1-9), Harrison Forman Collection, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries.

Figure 4.2.



Harrison Forman, “Kenya, street scene in front of New Stanley Hotel in Nairobi”, ca.1960, 35mm slide, (33c2, 85-6-6), Harrison Forman Collection, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries.

There were no gay bars in Kenya in the 1970s: “Contrary to the gay listings sold in this country, Nairobi does not have a gay bar; any bar is gay – when you’re there.”<sup>26</sup> George Desantis, publisher of the New York based gay magazine *Queen’s Quarterly*, offered gay tourist information in his article “Call Me Bwana: Bush Orgies on the Dark Continent.” While there is little information about the writer of the article, George Desantis, it appears that he was the publisher for the entire time that *Queen’s Quarterly* ran. Following important events in LGBTQ history, particularly in the United States, gay lifestyles were becoming publicly defined and magazines such as *Queens Quarterly* and *Ciao!* were pivotal in presenting a new ideal of gay travel. It was less about sightseeing and more about the potential for “nonstop erotic adventure.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> George Desantis, “Call Me Bwana: Bush Orgies on the Dark Continent,” *Queen’s Quarterly: the Magazine for Gay Guys Who Have No Hangups*, Winter 1970, 37.

<sup>27</sup> Lucas Hilderbrand, “A Suitcase Full of Vaseline, or Travels in the 1970s Gay World,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 22, no. 3 (2013): 373-402, <https://doi.org/10.7560/JHS22301>.

*Queens Quarterly* was published as a glossy national publication and was centrally concerned with establishing what a gay lifestyle was and how to live it. While *The Advocate* was the most popular gay magazine in the US, *Queens Quarterly* had a self-professed readership of around 95,000.<sup>28</sup> The magazine seems to have a wide appeal among the American gay community, several pages of personal ads in the back of the magazine listed names and details of young men across North America (and a handful in Europe). *Ciao!* was the travel offshoot of the magazine. Tourism and travel, it established, were central to a gay lifestyle. Hence, it needed to offer specific advice on different gay cultures both within the USA and internationally. Likewise, while gay culture had become more visible, it was still restricted and contained in many parts of the USA and the world. Therefore, providing advice on negotiating new spaces was paramount. Working in tandem, the two magazines gave advice on how to be gay (*Queens Quarterly*), and where to be gay (*Ciao!*).

In depth guides in *Ciao!* treated each city as specific and changes within cities during the decade were updated in follow-up articles (it should be noted that American spaces were updated more regularly.) As texts, this travel literature “offer highly subjective accounts of different gay scenes written in anecdotal voices and reflecting the particular inclinations of individual writers and their cruising habits.”<sup>29</sup> While these writers’ works are based upon personal experiences, their pieces depend upon the reader’s own imagination and interpretation. While they do have value as historical documents providing authoritative accounts of events, they are at the “intersection of authority and fantasy.”<sup>30</sup> By consequence, it is necessary to apply a level of critical fabulation to make reasonable assumptions about encounters, events, and imaginaries.<sup>31</sup> These periodicals, especially *Ciao!* were global in their coverage. A seldom used repository of information of gay histories, their value across other spaces is hitherto untapped.

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<sup>28</sup> Hilderbrand, “A Suitcase Full of Vaseline,” 378.

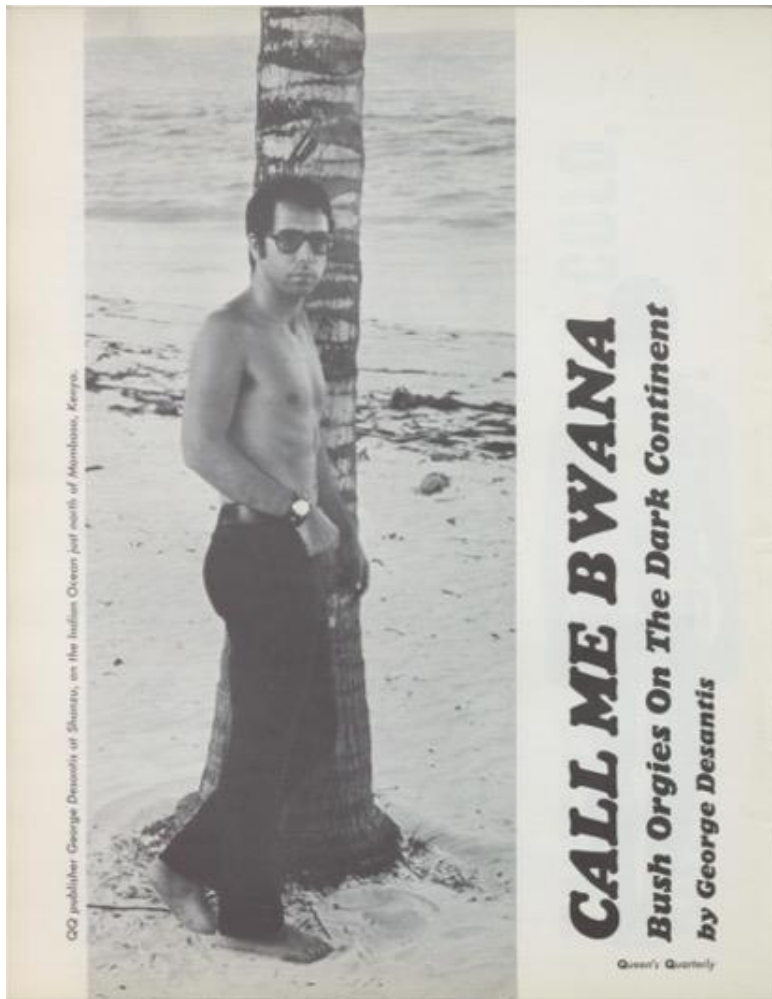
<sup>29</sup> Hilderbrand, “A Suitcase Full of Vaseline,” 375.

<sup>30</sup> Hilderbrand, “A Suitcase Full of Vaseline,” 375.

<sup>31</sup> Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe: A Journal of Criticism* 12, no. 2 (2008): 1-14, <https://doi.org/10.1215/-12-2-1>.

Article topics in *Queen's Quarterly* ranged from lifestyle, party drugs, fashion, sex tips, travel and sexual health and the article here was based on Desantis' travels around East Africa. His travel writing provides insight into the gay scene in Nairobi and Mombasa. Despite the title of his article (which included a nod to the 1963 film *Call me Bwana*), there were no "bush orgies" but rather an overview of his limited erotic experiences in the country and marketed as a piece of escapism or as informative for more affluent readers.

**Figure 4.3.**



George Desantis, "Call Me Bwana: Bush Orgies on the Dark Continent", *Queen's Quarterly: the Magazine for Gay Guys Who Have No Hangups*, Winter 1970.

Desantis suggested the Thorn Tree Cafe was the best place to meet other gay men while in Nairobi:

Featured at the New Stanley is an outdoor cafe, built under a thorn tree from which it takes its name; the international set gathers for afternoon tea and booze and food – and it is here that you will meet local and touring gay guys.<sup>32</sup>

Confident that the gay scene in Kenya was generated by the tourist population, he rejected the notion that Africans were participating in this scene: “If you dig only Black guys, don’t bother going to East Africa”, he immediately told the reader.<sup>33</sup> It appears that within the emulated café culture, gay men could express their sexual identity. The clientele of the Thorn Tree café were mainly white, most likely exclusively made up of tourists and the settler community. While the tourist population fed the gay scene, and made it explicit, it still kept it relatively out of sight to most Kenyans. While it is very likely that gay tourists would have met through mingling at the hotel, Desantis further described that there was a cottaging and cruising culture at the Stanley hotel:

Curiously, because of the heavy traffic (coming and going safaris, all day long), the john at the rear of the building has become a potential meeting spot. So are the streets bordering the hotel; you will meet Americans, Europeans, and Asians, primarily – seldom Africans. How much of this somewhat restricted action will switch to the newer hotels as tourists continue to pour in, in ever-increasing numbers, remains to be seen.<sup>34</sup>

This passage reveals many things about the tourist gay culture in Nairobi. Firstly, the toilets at the back of the Stanley Hotel generated a cottaging culture much like in European and North American contexts.<sup>35</sup> Secondly, he explains that there was a zone around the hotel that offered good opportunities for cruising, if only for tourists. The compartmentalisation of this space as a potentially gay space, kept gay interactions out of view from most of the Nairobi population, and cruising tourists around the Stanley Hotel would have been discrete (as is often the case with cruising). Desantis’ repeated emphasis that African individuals were excluded or did not participate

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<sup>32</sup> Desantis, “Call Me Bwana,” 45.

<sup>33</sup> Desantis, “Call Me Bwana,” 37.

<sup>34</sup> Desantis, “Call Me Bwana,” 37.

<sup>35</sup> For literature on London cottaging culture, see Matt Houlbrook, “The Private World of Public Urinals: London 1918–57,” *The London Journal* no. 25, 1 (2000): 52–70, <https://doi.org/10.1179/ldn.2000.25.1.52>.

in either the cottaging or cruising scene is important to understanding gay culture in Nairobi. These specific interactions therefore took place mainly between tourists coming together and did not present opportunities for many gay African men. The cosmopolitan environments in Nairobi provided the appropriate environments for gay men to create gay spaces within instantly recognisable spaces: hotels, restaurants, and bars. Outside of the city, however, the Africa that existed within these imaginations could easily be painted onto landscapes and peoples that conformed to these imaginaries. Nairobi therefore existed as a corridor to the Kenya of the colonial imagination.

Other texts confirm the importance of the Stanley Hotel and the Thorn Tree café as central to the Nairobi gay scene. An article by Ronnie Corbell entitled “Gay East Africa” appeared in the gay periodical *Ciao!* in 1976. Similar to the article by Desantis, the article was a tourist guide for gay white men living in the USA. The article focuses exclusively on Kenya, opening with a very disjointed commentary from the writer about the politics of East and Southern Africa, claiming that tensions and conflicts in Rhodesia would manifest in the same way as the Mau Mau rebellion. After, it discussed what a gay tourist can expect when travelling in East Africa:

The various lodges are not gay, and gay life on a safari is largely a matter of luck; it all depends on who happens to be staying at the same lodge you are at the same night – and how good you are at making the most of innocent encounters at the bar.<sup>36</sup>

A recurrent theme is present in these periodicals that spaces were not explicitly “gay” but could be made into a gay-friendly space and that the identity of these bars and spaces were available to be appropriated as seen fit by the gay tourist. Despite discretion required on the part of the tourist, these spaces no doubt could afford a great sense of freedom and opportunity. A space that could not be gay for the African population was available to the tourist population.

The town [Nairobi] is always filled with Americans and Europeans on safari – for it is here that everyone begins or ends his journey. If you are lucky, many gay others will be passing through the same time you’re there. You’re likely to meet them either at lunchtime or at tea (between 3 and 6 p.m.) at the outdoor café, called The Thorn Tree, which is part of the New Stanley on Kimathi Street and Kenyatta Avenue. Sit and look and sooner or later

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<sup>36</sup> Ronnie Corbell, “Gay East Africa: Nairobi and Mombasa,” *Ciao!*, May-June 1976, 16.

everybody who's anybody will show up. If you meet a local it will probably be an East Indian (there are quite a few gay ones around) and not an African (there are very few gay ones; if you do meet someone he's likely to be an airlines employee who has broken all ties with tribal life.)<sup>37</sup>

A consensus among all the texts is that the Thorn Tree Café was the place to be if you were gay and travelling through Kenya. He perceived the Africans who engaged in MSM activities to have broken kinship ties, demonstrating that these behaviours and activities were the domain of visiting tourists and challenged traditional ties in Kenya. Corbell's article concurs that there was a small cruising scene too and that:

At night, from around 7 to 10, or even later the best street cruising is in the vicinity of the New Stanley, on the Kenyatta Avenue side. But don't expect much. You'll make out better if you keep a watchful eye – not only at night, but all day long – on the john on the main floor of the New Stanley at the back; there is an excellent chance of meeting a humpy local or tourist – for action here, or at his place, or your room.<sup>38</sup>

Again, sexual activity was kept discrete and suggestions of MSM sexual encounters were kept out of view of the public. The cruising scene appears relatively limited to that of the surrounding areas of the hotels in Nairobi, the nuclei of MSM friendly behaviour. The Radio City Cinema was also cited as a place to cruise:

If you like john cruising – and it is perhaps the surest method in this town – try upstairs john at the Radio City Cinema on the Queensway. It is also a good idea to check the main floor johns at the Inter-Continental and Hilton from time to time.<sup>39</sup>

Corbell's article, written six years after Desantis', while still making it known that the Stanley Hotel was the best place for cruising and cottaging, emphasised that other hotels had risen in prominence as well as other spaces of leisure.

The *International Guild Guide 1978* was a directory published yearly to inform male gay travellers of places where they may be welcome, bars and restaurants to visit, to offer advice and warnings, and where the best places to have sex were. Gay guides became particularly popular in the UK and America during the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Naturally, as the tourist industry grew in the

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<sup>37</sup> Corbell, "Gay East Africa: Nairobi and Mombasa," 16-17.

<sup>38</sup> Corbell, "Gay East Africa: Nairobi and Mombasa," 16-17.

<sup>39</sup> Corbell, "Gay East Africa: Nairobi and Mombasa," 17.

early 20<sup>th</sup> century, so too did the publications of tourist guides. In the late 1930s however, a cryptic gay guide, perhaps the first of its kind, entitled *For Your Convenience* by Paul Pry was published as a guide to the cottages (public bathrooms) of London.<sup>40</sup> The *Guild Guide* here, published out of Virginia some forty years after the more subtle guides of the 1930s, is a straightforward directory of places to go that are gay friendly, where to hook up with other men and things to look out for. They are perhaps most comparable to the “*Green Book*”, which helped African American travellers find safe and “welcoming hotels, restaurants and services” from 1930s-1960s.<sup>41</sup> The content of this guide, and others like it, are not only informative, but witty, fun, and sarcastic.

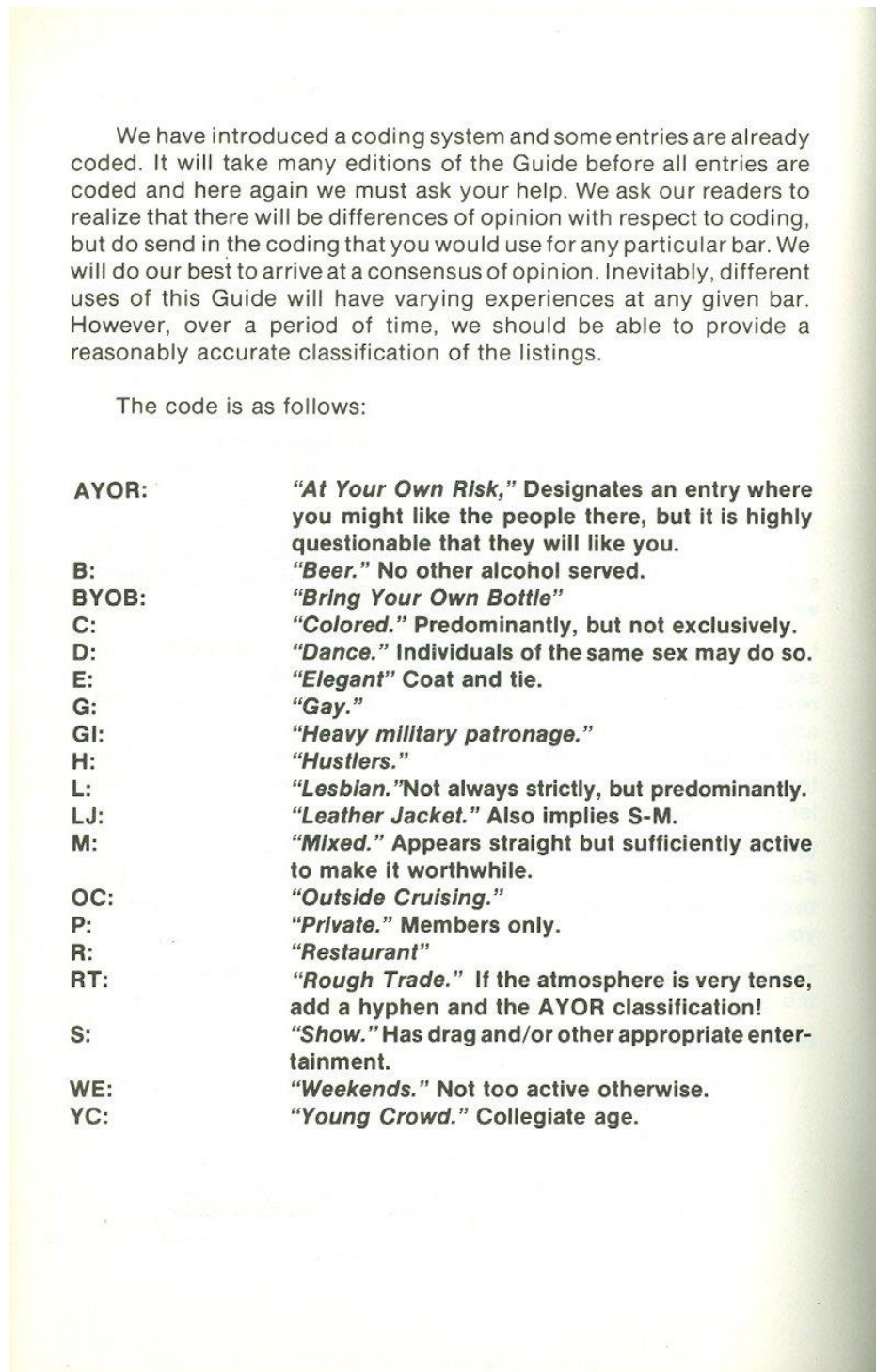
A code runs through the entire volume implying what to expect at various establishments:

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<sup>40</sup> Matt Houlbrook, “Gay guides, cognitive maps and the construction of homosexual London: 1917-c.1967,” in *Identities in Space: Contested Terrains in the Modern City since 1850*, eds. S. Gunn and R. Morris (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 165.

<sup>41</sup> Miranda Rectenwald, “Where Was That? Using Travel Guides to Reconstruct LGBTQ History,” *Washington University in St Louis University Libraries*, accessed May 1, 2023, <https://library.wustl.edu/using-travel-guides-reconstruct-lgbtq-history/>.

Figure 4.4.



Ronnie Anderson, editor. *International Guild Guide 1978*. Vol. 12, (Virginia, 1977), p.3.

With the first hundred pages or so dedicated to American cities, this guide is useful to understanding the evolution of the American gay scene in the 1970s. However, the second half of the guide is dedicated to the international scene, and there are a few slim entries about East Africa. There are no entries for Tanzania, and under Uganda there is a simple one sentence warning: "Surely there is no one so adventurous, so hungry and so insane that they would visit Uganda at this time!"<sup>42</sup> The punishments for homosexuality in Uganda were well known. Under Kenya, by contrast, there seems to have been a far more interesting and active gay scene. Again, however, there were a few warnings:

Although homosexuality is completely illegal, there is enough of it going on to make the effort worthwhile. Despite stories in the newspapers, things in Mombasa and Nairobi are quite peaceful. Do not cruise the streets at night.<sup>43</sup>

Two modest lists offering locations in Mombasa and Nairobi were suggested as potential places to hook up. Under Nairobi were the following: "Big Five Bar (M) Hotel Intercontinental, Thorntree Street Cafe – Front of Stanley Hotel, Starlight Night Club (M), Hallian's Night Club (M) – Tom Mboya St."<sup>44</sup> All, except the Thorn Tree Café at the Stanley Hotel, have an "M" after the listing, this denotes that these spaces may appear straight but were "sufficiently active" to make a trip worthwhile.<sup>45</sup> The absence of an "M", denoting a "mixed" scene, could imply that the Thorn Tree Café was understood as an openly gay space. While by no means a gay bar (or else it would be followed by the code "G"), as explained before, there were no gay bars in Kenya at the time, there was still a sufficient scene. The guide published eight years after Desantis' article suggests that the Thorn Tree Café retained its reputation as an active gay space.

From an international perspective, Nairobi was, and remains, a central hub for the country: a gateway to the rest of Kenya. From Nairobi, tourists would access the rest of the country, and during this period, its popularity as a tourist destination increased. Desantis noted that the newer

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<sup>42</sup> Anderson, *Guild Guide 1978*, 218.

<sup>43</sup> Anderson, *Guild Guide 1978*, 195.

<sup>44</sup> Anderson, *Guild Guide 1978*, 195.

<sup>45</sup> Anderson, *Guild Guide 1978*, 3.

hotels may have offered other opportunities for gay tourists; however, other than a couple of nightclubs and a hotel, the Thorntree Café at the Stanley Hotel appears to have remained a stylish place to visit for the duration of the 70s.<sup>46</sup> However, it is worth noting that it was very likely that the listings in the international Guild Guide were updated inconsistently, particularly in spaces that were less visited by gay tourists (with listings in the US updated more regularly). There are obvious methodological challenges in working out how many gay tourists were passing through Nairobi, and of those, it is further difficult to work out who were contributing their knowledge to these guides. Clearly, however, the designation of Nairobi gay spaces surrounded international hotels and spaces of leisure.

Outside of Nairobi, the interactions between the travel writers and the Kenyans came into contact with changed, indulging neocolonial fantasies became important. Instead of financial exchanges for goods and services, corporeal interactions became more prevalent: “You will pass local tribesmen dressed only in red blankets; they are friendly and will pose for a few cents”.<sup>47</sup> Mastery over land and an implicit mastery over the people become an important feature of the writing, for example, the writer Desantis, said this of the Masai:

The colorful Masai, the nomad tribesman who inhabit this land, are seen everywhere – herding their cattle on foot across the vast plains, and in their manyattas (mud and dung huts) – which they build wherever they wish, only to live in them a few weeks and then move on. They are a proud people, reflecting their past glories as warriors. Good-natured, they make ideal photographic subjects.<sup>48</sup>

While presented as once-proud-warriors, African individuals were also framed as docile and uncomplicated, and interactions between them were seen as commoditised or transactive.

Unsurprisingly, Desantis' piece in *Queen's Quarterly*, had a particularly prejudiced and racialised gaze. While the audience of *Queen's Quarterly* appears to represent gay men across different classes, it was likely intended for a mainly white audience. For most, reading this article

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<sup>46</sup> Anderson, *Guild Guide 1978*, 218.

<sup>47</sup> Desantis, “Call Me Bwana,” 46.

<sup>48</sup> Desantis, “Call Me Bwana,” 46.

would have served as an exciting piece of escapism on travel in East Africa, and for a minority of incredibly affluent readers it may have informed travel decisions (the piece concludes with George Desantis calling for readers to get in touch with him to organise a trip out to East Africa together). While *Queen's Quarterly* made claims to being open and inclusive: "Maybe it is because we gay guys are the object of prejudice that we don't practice it on others," the piece had problematic and racist language throughout:<sup>49</sup>

If you dig only Black guys, don't bother going to East Africa – or any part of the Dark Continent, for that matter; you won't make many African bed buddies here. East Africans are a restless breed on the brink of exploiting their long idle independence. Those who are civilized are too involved with growing pains to concern themselves with sex; those in the bush are quite primitive and filthy, and there is a world which has no place for outsiders – Black and White.<sup>50</sup>

While this paragraph is laden with racist tropes, it is informative that Desantis used such ideas within a piece on tourism: there are some unusual, if misinformed, ideas present. The fact that sexuality was understood to be drawn across agrarian-cosmopolitan lines or class lines is particularly telling. It is also the inverse of what may be expected from a text like this. One would assume that writers like Desantis would claim that attitudes around sex would be more liberal in the city due to the anonymity offered by city spaces, a more visible sex work industry, and more cosmopolitan attitudes. In the words of Houlbrook: "Urbanization, by disrupting structures of authority, weakening the family and offering metropolitan anonymity, is seen as a precondition of the homosexual social type, identity and subculture."<sup>51</sup> Houlbrook's generalised, universal rule, developed from his London case studies is clearly Eurocentric however, and activities may have been different in Kenya. Desantis, however, attributed middle-class African concerns around state building and getting the most out of independence as eclipsing sexual desire. It may be possible that Desantis was struck by the force of early independence nationalism, or was simply frustrated

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<sup>49</sup> The Editors, "Prejudice – We Are of One Color", *Queen's Quarterly: the Magazine for Gay Guys Who Have No Hangups*, Fall 1969, 5.

<sup>50</sup> Desantis, "Call Me Bwana," 37.

<sup>51</sup> Houlbrook, "Gay guides, cognitive maps and the construction of homosexual London," 166.

by the lack of a black African gay scene. He used a great leap in logic, and it may be assumed that Desantis took the absence of an explicit dating culture, gay scene, and public displays of affection alongside that of a bustling Nairobi, put the two together, and concluded that these two factors were somehow linked. The so called “primitive” Africans in the “bush” belonged outside of the domains of sexuality altogether.<sup>52</sup> While this may make sense to Desantis’ misguided logic, it no doubt played to the tired stereotype that agrarian life was simple, unchallenging, consistent, and uncomplicated. Moreover, it is doubtful that he would have seen many heterosexual African couples in Nairobi either. If he did, it is further doubtful as to whether he would have seen public displays of affection. Affection in Kenyan society was generally expressed in more covert ways.<sup>53</sup>

Gay tourism manifest differently in Mombasa: “daytime and nighttime bars afford opportunities. Ditto for the beach, with tourists and locals alike – but locals charge.”<sup>54</sup> Tourism at the coast has had a different history entirely. Coastal resorts were particularly popular among the Kenyan settler population, who would hire beach cottages at low rates, especially over the Christmas holidays until the early 1960s. From 1962, an increasing number of foreigners began to make use of package holidays. The character of tourism was affected by the nationalities that visited, with shop signs and menus in German, Italian and French, whereas game lodges with their higher prices catered more toward American consumers.<sup>55</sup> The small town of Malindi, for example, resurged during this time from a population of under 3,000 in 1948 to nearly 11,000 in 1969. This is demonstrable in the publication and readership of the German language newspaper *Malindi Zeitung*, which had a readership circulation of 3,000.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Desantis, “Call Me Bwana,” 37.

<sup>53</sup> Rachel Spronk, “Media and the Therapeutic Ethos of Romantic Love in Middle-Class Nairobi,” in *Love in Africa*, ed. Jennifer Cole and Lynn M. Thomas (Chicago, 2009), 182-203.

<sup>54</sup> Corbell, “Gay East Africa,” 17.

<sup>55</sup> Jackson, “Problems of tourist industry development on the Kenyan coast,” 62.

<sup>56</sup> Jackson, “Problems of tourist industry development on the Kenyan coast,” 62.

Figure 4.5

THIS CHANGING WORLD

*Table I*  
THE GROWTH OF TOURISM IN KENYA 1965-70

*Table Ia*  
Tourists staying in Nairobi International Hotels

Year	Total number of bed-nights ('000)	Percentage bed-nights (foreign residents)	Percentage bed-nights (E. African residents*)	Percentage hotel room occupancy
1965	247	79	21	79
1966	274	81	19	87
1967	288	84	16	89
1968	288	84	16	88
1969	332	86	14	76
1970	440	86	14	74
1971	495	92	8	72†

*Table Ib*  
Tourists staying in beach hotels

Year	Total number of bed-nights ('000)	Percentage bed-nights, (foreign residents)	Percentage bed-nights, (E. African residents*)	Percentage hotel room occupancy
1965	166	32	68	56
1966	238	52	48	67
1967	267	64	36	53
1968	345	59	41	56
1969	403	64	36	59
1970	507	71	29	59
1971	617	75	25	55†

\* East African residents includes expatriates from Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.

† Estimates, provisional.

Jackson, "Problems of tourist industry development on the Kenyan coast.", 63.

A different experience of intimacy and sex tourism is apparent in Mombasa compared to Nairobi. Corbell's article goes into rich detail of his personal experiences there. It very straightforwardly described how the gay scene worked for tourists in Mombasa.

At such hotels you can usually make contacts with the staff – but expect to pay. The Nyali Beach Hotel is among the better places, very near town, and its daytime and nighttime bars afford opportunities. Ditto for the beach, with tourists and locals alike – but locals charge.<sup>57</sup> The *Guild Guide* concurred that Nyali Beach Hotel was one of the best places to meet people; the absence of the “M” further implied that it was a well-known gay space.<sup>58</sup> In town, along Kilindini Road the guide cites four further locations: Castle Hotel Street Café, Central Night Club, La Frontanella Restaurant, and Maritime Night Club. Corbell notes that La Frontanella was very popular with young travellers and is likely to be one of the best places to meet people.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, he stated that Kilindini Road (at least around La Frontanella) was available for cruising after 7pm.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Jackson, “Problems of tourist industry development on the Kenyan coast,” 62.

<sup>58</sup> Anderson, *Guild Guide*, 195.

<sup>59</sup> Corbell, “Gay East Africa,” 17.

<sup>60</sup> Corbell, “Gay East Africa,” 17.

Figure 4.6.



Harrison Forman, “Kenya, street scene in front of Castle Hotel in Mombasa”, ca.1960, 35mm slide, (33c2, 84-2-10), Harrison Forman Collection, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries.

On sex work, Corbell provided a unique insight into the scene.

[If] you meet a young local – expect to pay him at least \$5 (he will probably ask for \$20). And if you do cruise the streets be sure you are not wearing expensive clothes or jewelry [sic]. If you do not want to take him back to your place, he will take you to a modest hotel or brothel; the room will cost you between \$2 and \$10.<sup>61</sup>

Clearly, there were male sex workers openly working in the Mombasa area. This is quite unlike the scene portrayed in Nairobi, where interactions take place more subtly. Furthermore, Corbell describes the brothel culture in Mombasa. “If you prefer to go directly to a brothel that has men

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<sup>61</sup> Corbell, “Gay East Africa,” 17.

as well as women, the name of the place is Khamisi's in the Old Town."<sup>62</sup> Located in the old Arabic quarter, the article warns the reader of the potential dangers that may greet them:

At night it's dark and mysterious – and scary, if you wander in alone. Most places do not have electricity, and at night if you enter a brothel by the light of oil lanterns all the veiled women standing around watching you enter with a boy or negotiate for one, will make you ill at ease and wonder if you'll ever see morning. So – I strongly recommend that you go to Khamisi's in the day time.<sup>63</sup>

The brothel appears to have marketed to homosexual and heterosexual preferences:

Have a taxi driver escort you in (arrange payment for his services before you start – and don't let him think you are interested in boys; Khamisi's has more women than men, so you needn't feel awkward or hesitant about asking strangers for directions if you go on your own).<sup>64</sup>

While homosexual interactions may have taken place in more explicit contexts within brothels it was still imperative to hide gay desire to members of the Mombasa public.

The piece goes into very specific detail of what to expect from the brothel and the figure of Khamisi.

Arabs and Africans are available; if what you want isn't there, Khamisi himself – a flaming queen – will be glad to take your order for whatever color and endowment you want, and whip it up for you within an hour while you relax over a gin at a nearby bar.<sup>65</sup>

The colourful character of Khamisi emerges in these narratives as the broker or pimp in this space negotiating the transactive element of these sexual interactions. This is particularly different to Nairobi, Luise White in her work on sex work, goes to great lengths to show that the sex industry in Nairobi was rarely negotiated through a pimp or madame. The description of sexual encounters in Mombasa reveal alternative colonial fantasies among travel writers through the creation of orientalised images. Mysterious, shadowy, decadent, and archaic describe the figures in Corbell's article who were set up in contrast to the writer, presented as rational, wealthy and modern.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Corbell, "Gay East Africa," 17.

<sup>63</sup> Corbell, "Gay East Africa," 17.

<sup>64</sup> Corbell, "Gay East Africa," 17.

<sup>65</sup> Corbell, "Gay East Africa," 17.

<sup>66</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*, reprint with a new preface (London: Penguin, 2003), 108.

The piece went into graphic detail of sexual encounters at Khamisi's. These experiences were likely informed by the writer Corbell's personal experience.

The boys here – typical of all of Africa – prefer to do the fucking and will do little else. If this is not your thing, or if you can accommodate small size only, then discuss particulars with Khamisi before sealing the bargain with cash. And don't expect stateside cleanliness; it's the wise man who refrains from rimming and uses condoms at both ends – and specifies to Khamisi in advance that he will reject any guy whose cock is less than healthy looking. For good measure it might be beneficial to take a couple of Tetracycline capsules immediately after your encounter, and stay on it at a prescribed dosage for at least 10 days (discuss the matter with your physician before you leave; you can be general enough if your doctor is straight – but don't expect any useful information if his is very moral and uptight). When you arrive home have your blood checked for V.D. If you experience achiness or stomach cramps, discuss the possibility of amoebas and /or worms with your doctor so as to help him with an accurate diagnosis.<sup>67</sup>

What is perhaps most interesting here is the throw-away comment at the beginning of the quote regarding MSM sex. This is typical of the periodical and other gay writing in the US: “in US locales, the nongay men who had sex with men were assumed to be closeted or merely curious, whereas in foreign destinations, men who had sex with men were typically presented as securely straight but available for paid sex as trade.”<sup>68</sup> The sexuality of these African men were not called into question and there appears to be a clear understanding that these men were not “gay” or lived something that may be understood as a “gay” lifestyle. They were steadfastly straight and if anything, somewhat reluctant toward the sexual acts that followed. The clear commodification of these sexual encounters somewhat contributed to the mystery and allure of these sexual interactions.

The encounter at Khamisi's brothel is demonstrative of the opportunities that interracial homosexual interactions could afford MSM sex workers at the coast. However, the travel writer's sexual experiences at Khamisi's may speak to wider debates of historical sexuality studies in Southern Africa. Patrick Harries and T. Dunbar Moodie have studied male sexual interactions, culture, and identities in mining communities throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Moodie discusses

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<sup>67</sup> Corbell, “Gay East Africa,” 17.

<sup>68</sup> Hilderbrand, “A Suitcase Full of Vaseline,” 383.

extensively the act of *Metsba*, a non-penetrative sex play enjoyed in both an MSM and heterosexual context (a form of inter-crural sex: the thighs are pressed together and used to create a vagina-like opening for the penis to pass through).<sup>69</sup> He noted that among these homosexual or MSM (if we may call them that) interactions, anal penetrative sex was very uncommon.<sup>70</sup> As in Southern Africa, it may be reasonable to assume that the act of anal sex was similarly considered more taboo than other MSM sexual play. With anal penetrative sex likely to be considered an inevitability in the context of sexual relations with American and European tourists, perhaps a way of negotiating some control during these encounters was to assume the role of the giver, penetrator or what we may refer to as “the top”. It may have been desirable to assume the more conventionally masculine role as the penetrator in these contexts. It is not unreasonable to assume that most of these men who were sex workers preferred heterosexual sexual experiences themselves, and that they were adapting to the opportunities presented by the American and European gay tourist. The economic opportunities may have yielded reciprocal social benefits to the male sex workers; the acquisition of a nightly rate of \$5 (approximately 35 shillings) may seem modest, however an entire lower income household earned around 400 shillings a month.<sup>71</sup> Sex work, when one could get it, paid. While this is not directly comparable to the complex and well-studied mine marriages in Southern Africa, both Moodie and Harries note that the mine relationships emerged and became established both for domestic and sexual purposes, but also “[t]he value of sex as a means of reproduction declined and other (non-reproductive) forms of sexuality took on a new validity and legitimacy,”<sup>72</sup> and “men became ‘wives’ on the mines in order to become husbands and therefore full ‘men’ more rapidly at home [through the steady acquisition of extra capital]”<sup>73</sup>. Perhaps there was a process of accelerated wealth acquisition among these men, which aided the production of much-needed

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<sup>69</sup> Moodie, “Migrancy and Male Sexuality,” 228-56.

<sup>70</sup> Moodie, “Migrancy and Male Sexuality,” 231-32.

<sup>71</sup> Kenya, Central Bureau of Statistics, *Consumer Price Indices, Nairobi* (Nairobi: Central Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Finance and Planning, 1977), 1.

<sup>72</sup> Harries, “Symbols and Sexuality,” 332

<sup>73</sup> Moodie, “Migrancy and Male Sexuality,” 240.

capital to “become men” through marriage and land purchases away from the dim lights of Khamisi’s.

From American gay writers it can be concluded that there was a notable gay scene that occurred in the hotels, bars and cinemas of Nairobi and Mombasa. In many ways this scene was the preserve of white tourists. However, through the anecdotes of cottaging in Nairobi hotels, and cruising Kilindini Road, much like in Houllbrook’s case studies of London, the heterosexist city could be made “gay”. These texts in and of themselves will have contributed to the reproduction of gay spaces. The creation of these narratives and gay mapmaking was very important, to Michel de Certeau: sources like these could “traverse and organize places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them. They are spatial trajectories.”<sup>74</sup> Equally, the gay tourism guides and travel articles furthered the narrative building of a gay culture that served Euro-Americans in a Kenyan context.

Further, gay men looked to Kenya to indulge their neocolonial fantasies. The commodified ways the writers discussed the bodies of Africans, not just as objects of erotic fascination, but of exotic curiosity through photography, were informed by a long history of the marketing of a white man’s country. Despite going through the throes of decolonisation, these perceived images of Kenya and clandestine sexual activities did little to concern officials and the Kenyan population. The peculiarities of Euro-American tourism were not only tolerated but encouraged due to the importance of foreign capital.

As a caveat however, it should also be noted that there were LGBTQ practices, cultures, and communities, within Kenya that we have very little visibility of. Again, writers in America hint at the sizable gaps in LGBTQ Kenyan histories. Further, the clearly racialised gaze and problematic views of the American gay periodicals is not uniform. A guest article reproduced in *Moja: Gay & Black* sets out an impressive understanding of “Gay Life in Africa”.<sup>75</sup> Supposedly, the author had

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<sup>74</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 115.

<sup>75</sup> Peter Fontaine, “Gay life in Africa,” *Moja: Gay & Black*, no. 2, (6<sup>th</sup> November 1978), 8.

“lived in sub-Saharan Africa for nearly ten years and [drew] on his personal experiences during that time from over a dozen countries on all parts of the continent.”<sup>76</sup> The informative feature explained a brief and general history of homosexuality in Africa, taking the opportunity to look at the effects of colonialism on perceptions of homosexuality and the development of homophobia.

On tourism, the writer of the piece, Peter Fontaine said, “mass tourism in Kenya, Gambia and Senegal, for example has made male contacts more frequent, easier and, unfortunately, has also resulted in the probably inevitable rise in male hustlers. It is difficult to walk down the main avenue of Mombasa, Kenya, or the beaches north of there towards Malindi or have a drink in the main bar of the Intercontinental Hotel in Nairobi after 10 p.m. without being approached.”<sup>77</sup> The intercontinental hotel indeed was one of the places listed in the *Guild Guide* as having a “mixed crowd,” but a popular location for the gay tourist. In response to claims that most if not all MSM interactions between tourists and Africans were in the context of sex work Fontaine discussed more longer-term romantic relationships in Africa.

This is not to say that most gay encounters in Africa are between Westerners and Africans or that most are for financial reward. On the contrary, those Africans with whom I have had a loving physical relationship or who I have known to have had similar relationships with others would never ask for payment, since it is a matter of pride to them that they can satisfy and be satisfied by their friend. Further, a small number of gay African couples – usually young, of above-average intelligence, and full of a special zest for life – can be found in Nairobi, Dakar, Abidjan, Lagos, Lusaka, Accra, Kinshasa and elsewhere. Africans who either have had or are willing to have a gay experience can also be found in small villages and towns across the continent.<sup>78</sup>

While Nairobi appeared as the first place on the list above as a place with a notable gay scene, the dearth of source material about these people causes challenges when writing about Nairobi's gay history. Fontaine's article offers a unique insight. Unlike the other texts cited in this chapter it is not an opinion piece about tourism in Africa but rather an informative feature on the status of homosexuality and its often-clandestine nature. Perhaps it is more nuanced as the essay was

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<sup>76</sup> Fontaine, “Gay life in Africa,” 8.

<sup>77</sup> Fontaine, “Gay life in Africa,” 8.

<sup>78</sup> Fontaine, “Gay life in Africa,” 8.

circulated in more intersectional pieces. This time the article appeared in a “gay and black” magazine, and also appeared in “Azalea: A magazine by third World Lesbians;” its content does not appear to have been targeted toward white men.

An interesting outlier, Fontaine’s article offers a perspective not seen in the other texts. It is unfortunate that he did not explain more about the couples he met and gay cultures he had encountered. Despite his claims of a clandestine gay community in Nairobi, it is clear the spaces and interactions explored in this article were the preserve of the international tourist population. A notable exception are the gay interactions taking place between male sex workers engaging in MSM sex.

#### Black mobility, performing stereotypes, and leisure in hotels

While black bodies in Kenya were subjected to external stereotypes by the different liminal actors moving within the new nation, Africans were able to subvert, reclaim and exploit these visions. The following section outlines how young heterosexual men found opportunities for romance with tourist women and negotiate the essentialisation of their corporeal forms with their very own prejudices.

While colonial “White Kenya” had been made up of all manner of people from different classes and backgrounds, the legacy of the highly visible aristocratic settlers in Kenya had left a lasting reputation.<sup>79</sup> Karen Blixen’s anecdotes in *Out of Africa*, had captured the imaginations abroad more so than the lives of Afrikaner farm managers. While empire declined, the marketing of a “white man’s country” had been successful; it was this Kenya, the *Kenya Colony*, that existed as a commodity in the neo-colonial imaginations of many Europeans and Americans.<sup>80</sup> It was upon

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<sup>79</sup> Jackson, “White Man’s Country: Kenya Colony and the Making of a Myth,” 344–368.

<sup>80</sup> Jackson, “White Man’s Country: Kenya Colony and the Making of a Myth,” 358-359; On the topic of the commodification of ethnicity see John L Comaroff, and Jean Comaroff. *Ethnicity, Inc.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

this inescapable background of colonialism and neo-colonial thought that Africans interacted with European and American tourists.

There were new opportunities afforded to African men in tourism spaces following the end of empire. The agency that these young men exercised through pandering to the neo-colonial fantasies of young American and European women contributes to wider anthropological and sociological work currently being conducted in Kenya. Magazine articles exhibit the palpable excitement that young African men had for social, sexual and, to an extent, financial opportunities presented by these women. Neocolonial fantasies were played out which were sensationalised in these white post-independence writings on the matter. Kenyan Africans, by these tourists' reckoning, were described as objects of touristic fascination. Individuals' cultures, interests, hopes and grievances were second to photo opportunities and many Africans they encountered remained nameless and faceless. While white tourists were conceptualised along national stereotypes, Africans were well aware of the fascination many of these people had over the supposed exoticism of Africa, and capitalised on it.

These spaces are crucial to understanding change during the colonial and postcolonial period and are pivotal to the formation of identity. It was in these spaces that white people during the colonial period, through the segregation of races, had been reminded of their whiteness. Through exclusion of access to these spaces, black people were appallingly reminded of their perceived inferiority. Challenging and breaking these boundaries were incredibly important. The current owner of Kilindini bar, the oldest bar in Mombasa, proudly told me that her father was fined for serving an African man during the colonial period.<sup>81</sup> However, following the Lidbury report in 1955, racial discrimination in the civil service was banned, wages improved, and Africans were given greater recognition.<sup>82</sup> The colour bar was on the way out. New Year's Day 1964 was ushered in without a colour bar. At the Africa Club, black and white men and women danced

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<sup>81</sup> Daniel Heathcote, "Research notes" (November 2019).

<sup>82</sup> Tom Mboya, *Freedom and After: Tom Mboya*, (London: A Deutsch, 1963), 51.

together, enjoying the jubilant party atmosphere.<sup>83</sup> No doubt, it had been a memorable night as revellers entered the first year of independent Kenya, marking the dawn of a new postcolonial era.

**Figure 4.7**



“Image taken of New Year’s Eve celebration, Africa Club, Nairobi”, *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), 2<sup>nd</sup> January, 1964, p.3.

Spaces once considered impenetrable to Africans in Nairobi were progressively opening their doors to black and Asian people. While these spaces continued to be dominated by white people (the white population living in Kenya was contracting, however tourist numbers grew), they presented many new opportunities for black men and women for socialisation and entertainment. An article in the popular magazine *Trust* provided East African men with a code of conduct for picking up white tourist women. The magazine constructed the new influx of tourists as a “new problem” but also as one full of opportunities, particularly for African men rather than women, to have many romantic and sexual opportunities.<sup>84</sup> However these tourist women were

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<sup>83</sup> “Image taken of New Year’s Eve celebration, Africa Club, Nairobi”, *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), January 2, 1964, 3.

<sup>84</sup> Askari, “Teen Scene: Know your Tourist Girl,” *Trust: Drum’s Younger Sister (East Africa Edition)*, January 1972, 30-31.

presented as wily and difficult to impress: "It's one thing lying to some young local chick until she is out of her wits. It's another. with the foreign chick... Exactly how do you handle some Swedish, Swiss, Russian, English or American chick you suddenly encounter at a restaurant or in a party amidst some tourist group?"<sup>85</sup> The article had all the answers, and was designed to guide young African men to romantic and sexual successes with the young tourist women coming and going through the city.

The article, written as a tongue in cheek if flagrantly sexist guide, outlined how best to approach each nationality in turn. First, however, it showed how best to divide the women encountered into three distinct categories, teenagers, over-twenty-threes, and over thirties. The writer's advice was to avoid teenagers as they "might not be using the pill, prefer childish pursuits and will generally be a problem."<sup>86</sup> Twenty-three to thirty year olds were his first choice, as they were "independent, self-governed", and while he noted the value of chasing after over thirty year olds, they were "no-nonsense women" with lots of money, however, their propensity to "fall in love with some young man easily", was enough to keep them at arm's length.<sup>87</sup> He claimed that these women tended to be "fascinated by black men"; the anonymous writer (pseudonymously named Askari) noted that this may seem strange. However, he claimed that it was comparable to how some African "women [were] equally fascinated by white men", because they were "strange" while white women, by his reckoning, were drawn to Africans because "they think somehow we are more highly sexed than white men."<sup>88</sup> The *Trust* article advocated pursuing women who fell in the middle category. Askari described them as having enough money to keep up with social pursuits and could split most bills without causing any offence. Having established the perfect age of women to pursue, the writer moved on to profiling each nationality: "A white woman is not

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<sup>85</sup> Askari, "Teen Scene: Know your Tourist Girl," 30.

<sup>86</sup> Askari, "Teen Scene: Know your Tourist Girl," 30.

<sup>87</sup> Askari, "Teen Scene: Know your Tourist Girl," 30-31.

<sup>88</sup> Askari, "Teen Scene: Know your Tourist Girl," 30-31.

just a white woman. They are of different nationalities, and have been brought up in different ways".<sup>89</sup>

Swedish women were described as independent and unexpected. Their behaviours around men caused Askari particular interest as he recounted how they were comfortable leaving a conversation with a man to speak to another man. Throughout his piece there were cautionary details regarding each category of women. Swedish women, he recalled, were particularly dangerous as "the more she likes you the more she drinks", which could end up costing a young man a lot of money in drinks.<sup>90</sup> Russian women, to Askari, were "just plain", formal, distanced, and big drinkers (he advocated avoiding bars entirely and buying two bottles of Smirnoff ahead of the date). A short entry under the British woman said the following: "For the British woman I would say, don't bother. Unless she actually comes for you, never take a chance with a British woman. They are fastidious. They are proud (about nothing), distant, evasive, sensitive, and talk a lot about nothing."<sup>91</sup> Swiss women he called, "domestic and fairly intelligent", before imparting some final wisdom. The writer advised having fun before rejoicing and going back to "our good old folks, and therein seek[ing] a chick after your own heart. They are simpler."<sup>92</sup> It would seem that the writer's advice served to encourage the reader to look for sexual opportunities with these temporary visitors to the city, as opposed to forging relationships and lasting connections.

He introduced the American woman as the headliner: "we come to what you have been asking about". Dispelling myths that every American was a millionaire, the writer explained how they were often very tight with their money. He noted that they were particularly fond of politics, and by that he emphasised this meant American politics, especially the Vietnam War. He warned that they expect others to know everything about this topic and therefore advocated steering well

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<sup>89</sup> Askari, "Teen Scene: Know your Tourist Girl," 31.

<sup>90</sup> Askari, "Teen Scene: Know your Tourist Girl," 31.

<sup>91</sup> Askari, "Teen Scene: Know your Tourist Girl," 31.

<sup>92</sup> Askari, "Teen Scene: Know your Tourist Girl," 31.

clear of the subject in its entirety. The writer explained that despite American women's protestations, they are the most insincere, pretentious, and contradictory.

Askari encouraged the reader to appeal to the American woman's desire for romance and adventure. When implored to "talk to me like you'd talk to anybody else. I want to know things as they really are, not as the tourist would like to see them", he suggested promising to take her to a Maasai manyatta on the weekend to win her over. These comments are very illuminating and provide historical context to the work of anthropologist George Paul Meiu who has analysed "ethno-erotic economies".<sup>93</sup> Here, as in the works of Meiu, the performance of ethnicity pandered to tourists' fascination with the "exotic". Young black men were able to look for opportunities to have sex with tourist women. However, unlike Meiu's study of Samburu Morans, the financial aspect of these liaisons, while important, were not crucial. The emphasis was on sexual and romantic gratification and not on generating a sexual economy. All the same, the performance of ethnic and gendered identities has similarities and there are clear links to Meiu's work on the coast about performing ethnicity for wealthy tourist women, albeit with different intentions. This contribution to the field is significant, as it sheds light on the longstanding history of men leveraging American and European expectations of Kenyan ethnicities for social and economic gain.

#### A step too far, transgressional hippies

By contrast to discreet gay culture in Nairobi and Mombasa, visibly deviant and subversive behaviours were challenged by the post-independent regime. Hippy and drug culture, for example, were seen as a step too far and were challenged. The aforementioned individuals, gay tourists, young tourist women, young African men with disposable income, all performed understandings

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<sup>93</sup> George Paul Meiu's excellent work uses the term "ethno-erotic economies" to unpack how sexualities are enmeshed with constructs of culture and ethnicity. He focuses on a specific "ethno-erotic economy" in north-western postcolonial Kenya where Samburu Morans (or warriors) travel seasonally to the Swahili coast to engage in sexual economies and make money, see Meiu, *Ethno-Erotic Economies*.

of the concepts of Kenyan culture within moments of intimacy. The stories of these moments and connections were consequently embellished and stories omitted in travel and lifestyle magazines. A recurrent theme persists, that these interactions took place in discreet spaces such as bars, clubs, cinemas, and hotels. The nightclub, for example, has been observed to be a space where the fantastical can be experienced, dissociated from a reality and society outside its walls.<sup>94</sup> Here tourist spaces performed similar functions, African men could appeal to colonial fantasies, racialised views of African bodies, or the modernity of a new Nairobi, to facilitate flirty, romantic, or sexual dialogue with young tourists. Likewise, gay men ascribed colonial fantasies, cottage culture, and orientalist views, to ensure exciting experiences with one another or Kenyan men on their fleeting visits through the country. These spaces kept out of view from Kenyan individuals these encounters. Euro-Americans brought with them ideas of what these experiences would entail; sometimes, however, these conflicting visions for the future spilled outside of these discreet spaces and had the capacity to disturb and challenge ideologies. Untethered to hotels or tourist spaces, hippies' subversion of space made them visible and potentially dangerous to *Harambee* culture.

While Nairobi may not immediately come to mind when considering global movements of countercultural activity, it was affected by these global movements in the 1960s and 1970s. It was with a mixture of curiosity and hope that the readers of *Trust* magazine considered the hippie movement as it made its presence known in east Africa. An article entitled "Here come the Hippies", asked whether Africans should "'dig them', deport them, or allow these long-haired drop outs from Western society to live in self-conscious Peace among us?"<sup>95</sup> Considered dangerous and subversive to some, a local community affected by the hippies sent a delegation to Vice President, Daniel Arap Moi, asking him to do something about them.<sup>96</sup> This small number of American and

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<sup>94</sup> For a recent example see, Regan Michael Lynch, "Back for Good: Heterotopic Memory in Melbourne's Queer Nightlives," *The Drama Review* 66, no. 4 (2022): 143-60.

<sup>95</sup> Askari, "Here comes the Hippies!" *Trust Drum's Younger Sister (East Africa Edition)*, January 1972, 6.

<sup>96</sup> Askari, "Here comes the Hippies!" 6.

European hippies co-opted public parks to “groove”, “hold pot parties” and “keep their peace.”<sup>97</sup> Public parks were far more visible than the clandestine activities contained within tourist spaces. While these characters were approached by some with a mixture of fear and disdain, one Nigerian *Trust* reader found the prospect of this new subculture of white individuals curious and their vision of a future optimistic:

If actually the hippies are peace-loving people, they should be allowed to remain in Africa. The aged world wants to start anew; and there will be a stage where the simple and natural life in underdeveloped countries will be preferred to that in the sophisticated cities of the modern nations. Moreover, the willingness of white to mix freely with black could bring the long-desired experience of racial equality.<sup>98</sup>

However, these views were not shared by the government, and Vice President Moi intervened. The *Nation* reported that Moi had announced a ban to prohibit the entry of hippies into Kenya in March 1972.<sup>99</sup> According to the *Nation*, this decision had wide support. A street dealer, Persia Njoki, claimed that hippies disturbed generational relationships, “Business-wise, I like them. They buy my articles. But I don’t like their behaviour... They don’t have shame. You see them stop schoolgirls anywhere, even in public. These schoolgirls no longer have respect for their parents.”<sup>100</sup> A father of four school children, Mr. Robert Waithaka, also hailed the Vice-President’s announcement. He accused hippies of introducing drugs to Nairobi’s youngsters. A. S. Khalif, Assistant Minister for Housing, referred to the hippies as “shenzi types” (savage) who should not be allowed in “our beautiful country.”<sup>101</sup> Mr. Khalif added “I have observed in the course of the past year some of our youths being spoiled by hippies, and the Government action to ban them is timely. If hippies are not banned I am of the opinion that the percentage of our spoiled youths will increase considerably.”<sup>102</sup> Nairobi resident, Mrs. A. Lobo, said “Mr. Moi’s decision is excellent.

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<sup>97</sup> Askari, “Here comes the Hippies!” 9.

<sup>98</sup> Cosy Chidy Egowuonwu Awka, “Africa can Rejuvenate the Weary Whites,” *Trust Drum’s Younger Sister (East Africa Edition)*, May 1972, 5.

<sup>99</sup> “Kenyans Agree Ban all the Dirty Hippies,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), March 10, 1972, 4.

<sup>100</sup> “Kenyans Agree Ban all the Dirty Hippies,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), March 10, 1972, 4.

<sup>101</sup> “Kenyans Agree Ban all the Dirty Hippies,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), March 10, 1972, 4.

<sup>102</sup> “Kenyans Agree Ban all the Dirty Hippies,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), March 10, 1972, 4.

The hippies only spoil the morals of the people.”<sup>103</sup> Nairobi University student, Mr Samuel Waweru Ndindiri, said “Only last night I was wondering why these very dirty and filthy people should be allowed to stay on the campus which [seems] to have become their favourite spot.”<sup>104</sup> The general secretary of the Welfare Society for the Aged in Nairobi, Mr. D. R. Khanna, accused hippies of bringing drugs into the country. He said hippies did not “make a good impression, although some were learned and came from rich families.”<sup>105</sup>

By contrast, there was some sympathy for the hippies. Resident, Irene Kock felt that hippies should not be driven away from the country. They should be asked “to look a little less sickening and to be better behaved.”<sup>106</sup> Another said, “Kenya... was a democratic country and should not interfere with personal affairs of her people and visitors.”<sup>107</sup> “So long as they don’t walk naked, they should be left alone,” was the opinion of Kenya’s famous singer, Sal Davis. “If a man wants to keep his hair long, it is up to him.”<sup>108</sup> If the objection was that hippies being long-haired people were dirty, then they should simply be told to clean themselves, he added. On the grounds of defending the rights of individuals, one Nairobi student defended the freedom of hippies’ movement in Kenya:

We cannot reasonably pretend that hippies are the major cause of drug-taking in this country. Perhaps they encourage it, but drugs have been known and taken in Kenya for centuries, and therefore it is an unacceptable pretext for banning hippies. Who can certify that drug-taking will in fact decrease with the ban on hippies? And if we are really so much concerned with the effects of drugs, why don’t we also ban alcoholic beverages, and cigarettes, as essentially these have the same, if not worse hazards. Let us face reality: We have more important immediate problems than the minor issue of hippies. Why don’t we instead concentrate on enrolment to Kanu, education, economics and good health?<sup>109</sup>

Anxieties around drug consumption and their influence upon youths appears central to the debate around hippies. Other hysterical reactions to drug consumption occurred during Kenya’s early

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<sup>103</sup> “Kenyans Agree Ban all the Dirty Hippies,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), March 10, 1972, 4.

<sup>104</sup> “Kenyans Agree Ban all the Dirty Hippies,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), March 10, 1972, 4.

<sup>105</sup> “Kenyans Agree Ban all the Dirty Hippies,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), March 10, 1972, 4.

<sup>106</sup> “Kenyans Agree Ban all the Dirty Hippies,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), March 10, 1972, 4.

<sup>107</sup> “Kenyans Agree Ban all the Dirty Hippies,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), March 10, 1972, 4.

<sup>108</sup> “Kenyans Agree Ban all the Dirty Hippies,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), March 10, 1972, 4.

<sup>109</sup> James N. Amolo, “The Rights of a Free Individual (LTE),” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), March 22, 1972, 6.

postcolonial years. For example, an article in the *Daily Nation*, warned of dangerous drug cultures which were presented as directly connected to American influences. The language of the article drew connections between American slang: “Man it’s real cool. Take ’em and you can really get with it.”<sup>110</sup> Supposedly, these were the words of a real Nairobi teenager, and the writer underlined what had the potential to become “a very serious problem for all Kenya – drug addiction”.<sup>111</sup> The individual was joined by four others in a “coffee bar”, all of whom admitted that they took tranquiliser pills regularly for the “kicks”. Whether the journalist had fabricated these children and the events is impossible to tell, however, the article warned of the dangers of access to cheap, if relatively weak, tranquiliser drugs that could be obtained without a prescription in Kenya. Again, visibility is crucial here, subversive activity in the middle of the day in a public space was explained as nationally important. The rise in the use of these drugs was, according to the article, in line with “Kenyans trying to copy the worst aspects of neuroses prevalent among the so-called Beat Generation of the West”.<sup>112</sup> Based on quite loose evidence: the author did not have any specific statistics on drug sales, he instead relied on anecdotes from chemists that claimed sales in these pills were climbing at a steady rate which sufficed. The problem was supposedly connected to students studying overseas who adopted these habits from American universities. On returning to Kenya, they allegedly discovered that they could not find the pills they have grown accustomed to which were only accessible through a prescription in Kenya. The off-prescription tranquilisers would have little to no effect on them. This, the author claimed, would lead to dangerous consumption of “bhang” (an edible way of consuming cannabis) and “traditional African ‘tranquilisers.’”<sup>113</sup> These fears appeared to be a lot of fuss over very little. The article demonstrates the prevalent anxieties around unproductive youth and the corrupting influence of international youth movements rather than of a serious endemic drug issue.

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<sup>110</sup> Desmond Healy “‘Pep Pills’ Menace”, *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), March 11, 1964, 9.

<sup>111</sup> Healy, “‘Pep Pills’ Menace,” 9.

<sup>112</sup> Healy, “‘Pep Pills’ Menace,” 9.

<sup>113</sup> Healy, “‘Pep Pills’ Menace,” 9.

Another reason why the hippies were feared were due to their “protest against clean, organised society.”<sup>114</sup> These individuals were seen to challenge and protest the cleanliness of their homes, “aspiration for material prosperity,” the “social mores of [their] parents’ generation” and the “sober life” of their parents.<sup>115</sup> In a nation where order, respect, gerontocracy and kinship were at the heart of the elite political national project, these perceived ideologies were incongruous.

### Conclusion

The creation of an imagined Kenya by tourists did not disturb elite or popular national ideologies. Tourism had powerful economic potential and it was consequently vital that holidaymakers were encouraged to visit and felt comfortable during their stays. This new influx of tourists brought with them preconceived notions of Africa and new cultural practices. Neocolonial ideas were found to be tolerable by both the political elite and wider population. Tapping into the tourist imaginations, African men and women could find new opportunities to sell products and services. Some individuals used these imaginations to create opportunities for intimate and bodily encounters. The brothel at Khamisi's, for example, became an orientalist playground for gay Euro-American men to explore sexual desire. Similarly, Kenyan bargoers in Nairobi could use their perceived exoticism to appeal to heterosexual tourist women's desires. These opportunities presented potentially meaning-giving opportunities to young Africans. Male sex workers at the coast had the potential to earn much needed money, and bargoers in Nairobi could experience new friendships, relationships, and sexual encounters. In the next chapter, the external fascination with “tribe” and “authenticity” is explored further in the efforts to produce national music, and in the performance of ethnicity at the Bomas of Kenya.

Subversive sexual practices, such as MSM sex, were tolerated by the post independent regime. While likely discreet, tourist men having sex with one another did so in relative safety.

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<sup>114</sup> “The banning of the hippies,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), March 28, 1972, 10.

<sup>115</sup> “The banning of the hippies,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), March 28, 1972, 10.

There were fewer opportunities than “back home”, however men could create queer spaces such as bars and toilets by transplanting Euro-American gay sexual practices into an East African context. Despite homosexuality being illegal in Kenya, these men felt comfortable enough to have sexual encounters without the fear of punishment or surveillance. Gay guides and popular literature paint a picture of a Kenya where their sexual practices were not under threat.

As an additional note, this chapter has illuminated LGBTQ histories within East Africa. Far from a comprehensive history of LGBTQ culture in Kenya in the 1960s and 1970s, this chapter has explored an untold story of mid-century LGBTQ practices in East Africa. It can be difficult, sometimes impossible, to study and write about historical and contemporary MSM interactions in Sub-Saharan Africa. Since starting this thesis in 2019, the LGBTQ community in Kenya has suffered significant trauma, and LGBTQ rights remains a critical issue. The more extreme cases of violence have garnered national and international attention. Recent cases include the murder of LGBTQ activist and fashion designer Edwin Chiloba, who was found dead in a metal box on a roadside near Eldoret on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2023, he was smothered to death.<sup>116</sup> This was not an uncommon act of violence: in April 2022, Sheilla Lumumba, a non-binary lesbian, was murdered.<sup>117</sup> There has undoubtedly been progress for the LGBTQ community within Kenya, for example (despite being unsuccessful) campaigners were able to go to the high court seeking to overturn a law banning gay sex in 2019. It was found that the colonial-era law criminalising gay sex was not unconstitutional.<sup>118</sup> Gay sex remains illegal as of the time of writing in 2023.

Finally, the social and moral panic around hippies is both an amusing and illuminating story of Kenya grappling with globalising influences. Despite the harmless ways members of this subculture interacted with the city, hippies were deemed as too transgressive. This, I have posited,

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<sup>116</sup> Damian Zane, “Edwin Chiloba: LGBTQ activist found dead in Kenya,” *BBC News*, January 6, 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-64184372>.

<sup>117</sup> Esther Akello Ogola, “#JusticeForSheila: Kenyan anger after lesbian’s murder,” *BBC News*, April 22, 2022, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-61192594>.

<sup>118</sup> Kevin Mwachiro, “Gay rights in Kenya: ‘Why our fight isn’t over,’” *BBC News*, May 23, 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-48400801>.

was due to their visibility and transgression of spaces. Unlike gay men who abided by their home country's cruising habits, keeping to bars, hotels, and bathrooms, hippies were out in the open. Unusual appearances, moving in very public places, and openly consuming drugs were too transgressive to be tolerated. Similarly, they could not be packaged as tourists, and their liminality as new inhabitants or passers-through was too ambiguous. Moi's decision to crack down on the subculture demonstrates how imported globalised cultures had to be contained. Further, the hippy incident, having happened in the 1970s, was also indicative of change in the air. Kenya was closing down its global networks and authoritarianism was in the incline. In the next chapter, I explore how these changes affected popular music and elite efforts to create an authentic national sound and musical culture.

This chapter has explored the influence of tourism as a globalising phenomenon upon the development of national and popular culture. In the next chapter, specific and important cultural expressions are explored through music and dance. As with tourism in Kenya, the ways that popular music, such as *benga*, could satisfy the ambitions of both ordinary urban dwellers and the elite visions for national culture are explored. The importance of access to globalising cultural practices are emphasised in the music consumption habits of urban dwellers. The resurgence of ethnic influences in Nairobi's music scene during the 1970s is portrayed not as a return to a city of villages, but as a phenomenon born from inevitable economic conditions. Globalisation remained the collective aspiration for urban Kenyans. Efforts to establish a Kenyan national aural identity is explored through projects such as the Bomas of Kenya which go a significant way to demonstrate how elite political actors wanted to perform a national identity while facing increasing numbers of foreign tourists, thus continuing the arguments made within this chapter.

## Chapter 5: Food and work: tracing aural authenticity and national culture from *benga* to *boma*

This chapter tells the story of early independence popular music in Kenya. Specifically, it focuses on an urban genre called *benga* or *zilizopenda*. The postcolonial music scene in Kenya challenged prevalent national debates around the identity and authenticity of a Kenyan sound. The aural space was an important area for contesting and promoting competing identities; it was imbued with semiotic meaning through its instruments and lyrics, but also was the canvas for the expression of different dances. The *benga* sound, which was once embraced by the new African elite as a symbol of anticolonial resistance, gradually lost its prominence and was overshadowed by musical genres that aligned more closely with elite narratives of national culture and “traditional” music. Exploring the fascination around an “African” sound alongside academic and political elite fascination with rural music illuminates some of the decisions made around the patronisation of Kenya’s aural arts. During the 1960s and 1970s, *benga* underwent a journey from being endorsed by the political elite and considered of nationalistic importance, to being a subcultural soundscape that criticised the shortcomings of the postcolonial state. The case study of Gabriel Omolo’s “Lunchtime”, a *benga* classic that dominated the airwaves in the 1970s, is used as an example of a popular urban song that straddled this shift in *benga*’s lifecycle. The song was endorsed by the Kenyan government as a great success in Kenyan music production, yet the lyrics were simultaneously critical of the postcolonial state. The chapter concludes by arguing that the subsequent ethnicization of *benga* in the 1970s was born of economic hardship and an exploitative music industry that capitalised upon the inexperience of emergent vernacular musicians. By comparing the treatment of urban music to the efforts of the East African Institute of Social and Cultural Affairs and the Bomas of Kenya a clearer image of the dissonance between urban subcultures and national ideations of culture emerges. While elite conceptions of national identity were not entirely homogenous, *benga* was progressively shown to be incongruous to these visions. This chapter aims also to historicise some

of the important recent work on urban music in the Twenty-first century, and to consider what understanding aural space has upon wider discourses of belonging and exclusion. Building upon the established histories of music and dance in East Africa, it demonstrates how this music, the places where it was played, and its consumption were integral to the development of urban subcultures.

The story that emerges crucially centres on globalisation. While elites and contemporary academics had focussed on local, ethnic, and “traditional” manifestations of music, all Kenyan musical culture were connected to globalising processes. As in the previous chapter where tourism had a complex relationship with national culture, here elites’ visions for musical culture was inflected by access to the global. These ideological challenges can be seen within debates around national music education and the establishment of the Bomas of Kenya. Further ways of commoditising Kenyan identity as a nation of “tribes” with an “authentic,” “traditional,” and rural heritage was propagated upon a global stage when actors and dancers performed Kenyan-ness in front of audiences. National culture, in this context, was about taking the local to a global audience. On the other hand, urban musicians in the 1960s created music that had local and global influences, and was neither self-consciously “traditional” or “modern”. The subsequent ethnicization of popular urban music in the late 1970s does not represent a return to the city of villages, but the ways economic realities affected cultural production. By the end of this period, processes were in motion that could not be undone and the city had experienced a succession of global cultural influences, and the urban networks of the 1940s and 1950s were unrecognisably changed by 1980.

The mid-century, urban, East African, popular music genre, “*benga*,” has been romanticised by its listeners in the twenty-first century. Its synonymous moniker, *zilizapendwa*, is Swahili for “those that were loved”. During an early presentation on *benga* legend Daniel Owino Misiyani, delivered to a Kenyan audience at Institut Français de Recherche en Afrique (IFRA), a man expressed his immense pride in being Kenyan, prompted by my discussion of Misiyani and the

global connections of benga.<sup>1</sup> Looking at the comments below the line of various *benga* songs on YouTube further support that this was a golden age, not only for Kenyan music, but for Kenya at large.

Fans of the *benga* artist Gabriel Omolo reminisce about the song “Lunchtime” affectionately: “Legend for all times, all seasons. Lunchtime has defied the sands of time to remain a forever hit, eternal, really. I love it. Rest well Gabriel.”<sup>2</sup> Another, calls it “The leading song in Nairobi in the early 1970s.”<sup>3</sup> Many other commenters freely offer their affectionate thoughts and memories of the song online and pay their respects to Gabriel Omolo. Similar hyperbolic praise is lauded in the comments of other *benga* videos. The artist Daniel Kamau, for example, has songs on YouTube, where the following comments appear:

The legend of our own in kikuyu land. You make me remember my dad and how he made me love our legend he could sing this to my mum [sic]<sup>4</sup>

Back down memories, I miss Kenya motherland.<sup>5</sup>

Great memories, when we would walk for miles to a party in the middle of the night and nobody would stop you. Crime rate was almost zero.<sup>6</sup>

I have fond memories of this sweet love songs of yester years. I also have passionate memories of the buses where this sweet music was used to entertain travellers to and from Nairobi and Central Kenya. Cool drivers - no accidents. Cool conductors - no misbehaviour [sic].<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that the paper did not contain any of the controversial material regarding Misiani's life. The paper can be read here: Daniel Heathcote, “Daniel Owino Misiani (1940-2006): The father of Benga music, taking multilingual lyrics to a global audience,” *Another World? East Africa and the Global 1960s*, December 2019, accessed May 4, 2022, <https://globaleastafrica.org/global-lives/daniel-owino-misiani-1940-2006>.

<sup>2</sup> Tanya and Zara (comment written 2019x2020), in “Lunchtime by Gabriel Omolo,” *YouTube*, 2009, accessed May 4, 2023, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=63rup9lrwWo&ab\\_channel=bkkariukibkkariuki](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=63rup9lrwWo&ab_channel=bkkariukibkkariuki).

<sup>3</sup> Maurice Oduor (comment written February 2021), in “Gabriel Omolo Lunch time new,” *YouTube*, 2018, accessed May 4, 2023, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=idzs-4j1PTc&t=110s&ab\\_channel=ZILIPENDWAMUSICZILIPENDWAMUSIC](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=idzs-4j1PTc&t=110s&ab_channel=ZILIPENDWAMUSICZILIPENDWAMUSIC).

<sup>4</sup> Justice Patrick Nduta (comment written 2018x2020), in “Daniel Kamau (D.K) - Ningwite Nawe (Official Video),” *YouTube*, 2017, accessed May 4, 2023, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yY1t-rZnnhQ&ab\\_channel=DKWaMaria](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yY1t-rZnnhQ&ab_channel=DKWaMaria).

<sup>5</sup> Dennis Kinuthia (comment written 2018x2020), in “Daniel Kamau (D.K) - Ningwite Nawe (Official Video),” *YouTube*, 2017, accessed May 4, 2023, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yY1t-rZnnhQ&ab\\_channel=DKWaMaria](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yY1t-rZnnhQ&ab_channel=DKWaMaria).

<sup>6</sup> George Gathecha (comment written c. September 2022), in “Daniel Kamau (D.K) - Ningwite Nawe (Official Video),” *YouTube*, 2017, accessed May 4, 2023, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yY1t-rZnnhQ&ab\\_channel=DKWaMaria](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yY1t-rZnnhQ&ab_channel=DKWaMaria).

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Irungu (comment written 2018x2020), in “Daniel Kamau (D.K) - Ningwite Nawe (Official Video),” *YouTube*, 2017, accessed May 4, 2023, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yY1t-rZnnhQ&ab\\_channel=DKWaMaria](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yY1t-rZnnhQ&ab_channel=DKWaMaria).

These were days when Men meant what they said [sic] <sup>8</sup>

These fans have written posts in praise of these artists, but also in memory of the time that the music was from. With active YouTube streamers commenting recently and regularly, the music of *benga* retains an important place in the cultural imagination of the past. Beyond their glowing praise of these *benga* artists, the comments reveal a rose-tinted view of Kenya's early postcolonial history.

The global reach of a record such as "Lunchtime" is perhaps one of the most surprising things we learn from online commenters: "This Reminds me about Gbarnga Liberia 1973... Jerry the 45 record plate salesman"; "Shall forever remain a great HIT song even to some of us in Zambia. RIP great HERO!".<sup>10</sup> Some commenters did not even know that the song was Kenyan, one comment claims that they "[n]ever knew it was from Kenya. It was so hot back in Eastern Region of Nigeria. Believe me this song used to dominate the air waves back in the 70s. I love me some Kenyan music."<sup>11</sup> Clearly, the song had popularity across southern and west Africa too. Given the success of West African music across the continent and beyond, East African music may look insular by comparison; however, the global consumption of Kenyan music, in particular the intra-African passion for Nairobi's tunes, is clear.

### Nairobi's aural landscape

Nairobi is made of more than bricks and mortar. Like any city, it has been affected by the layering of experiences: the people that moved within it, bodies, joy, and trauma. Nairobi also has an aural identity and is an aural space. It was the sound of grumbling *matatus*, the cries out of its

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<sup>8</sup> Rose Kaibunga (comment written c. May 2022), in "Daniel Kamau (D.K) - Ningwite Nawe (Official Video)," *YouTube*, 2017, accessed May 4, 2023, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yY1t-rZnnhQ&ab\\_channel=DKWaMaria](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yY1t-rZnnhQ&ab_channel=DKWaMaria).

<sup>9</sup> Dennis Nyeayea (comment written 2016x2017), in "Lunchtime by Gabriel Omolo", *YouTube*, 2009, accessed May 4, 2023, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=63ruP9lrwWo&ab\\_channel=bkkariuki](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=63ruP9lrwWo&ab_channel=bkkariuki).

<sup>10</sup> Kennedy Sumbwanyambe (comment written 2018x2019), in "Lunchtime by Gabriel Omolo", *YouTube*, 2009, accessed May 4, 2023, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=63ruP9lrwWo&ab\\_channel=bkkariuki](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=63ruP9lrwWo&ab_channel=bkkariuki).

<sup>11</sup> primeminister51 (comment written 2016x2017), in "Lunchtime by Gabriel Omolo", *YouTube*, 2009, accessed May 4, 2023, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=63ruP9lrwWo&ab\\_channel=bkkariuki](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=63ruP9lrwWo&ab_channel=bkkariuki).

drivers, its conductors, the hubbub of conversation, the cries of conflict, the call of the muezzin, and the cracked shouts of hawkers, whose voices have been broken by too-many-years of crooning. The languages in the 1960s, much as they are now, were of English and Swahili, but also Arabic, Luo, Luhya, Kamba, Kikuyu, Dholuo, Maasai, Somali, Turkana, and many more. Deep in Eastlands, a traveller may have also heard early iterations of “Sheng”, a Nairobi street-dialect popular with the urban youth. There was also Gujarati, Konkani, Punjabi, and other South Asian languages spoken by the Asian population, and a myriad of European languages spoken by the tourists coming and going at the bars, restaurants, and hotels. Along River Road, from streetside *dukas*, came tinny blasts from streetside radios and from those that could afford it, record players.

The radio had been a welcome new addition to the arsenal of the new nationalist project, and the state enjoyed a monopoly over Kenyan radio until the establishment of commercial stations in the 1990s. Under independent rule, as in colonial Kenya, the radio was an important instrument of governance and had the powerful potential to influence subjects.<sup>12</sup> It could fill the gaps of the state as an “infrastructural prosthetic”, to prop up an “ideologically dense but infrastructurally thin developmentalist state”.<sup>13</sup> With the establishment of commercial stations, the radio would go on to have a period of democratisation in the 2000s following the widespread uptake of mobile phones which enabled call ins.<sup>14</sup> In the 1960s and 1970s, while there were no Kenyan commercial stations, one could also tune into new stations across Africa, and indeed the world. Short wave radio frequencies can travel thousands of miles, and Kenyans would not only enjoy the state-owned Voice of Kenya (VoK) soundscape in the street and in their homes, but radio and music from across Africa. The world came to Kenya through the radio.

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<sup>12</sup> Emma Park, “Infrastructural Attachments: Technologies, Mobility, and the Tensions of Home in Colonial and Postcolonial Kenya”, PhD Thesis, University of Michigan, 2017, 129.

<sup>13</sup> Park, “Infrastructural Attachments,” 169.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Tirop Simatei, “Heshimu Ukuta: Local-language Radio and the Performance of Fan Culture in Kenya,” in *Popular Culture in Africa: the Episteme of the Everyday*, ed. Stephanie Newell and Onookome Okome (New York: Routledge, 2014), 267.

Kenya was one of the first countries in Sub-Saharan Africa to establish a radio service in 1928. In 1953, the first broadcast service for an African listenership was created. African Broadcasting Service (ABS) transmitted programmes in Swahili, Dholuo, Kikuyu, Kihaya, and Arabic.<sup>15</sup> The Kenyan radio service was operated by private companies until 1956, when the network was taken over as a government function in the form of the Kenya Broadcasting Service (KBS), and in 1961 became part of the short-lived Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC).<sup>16</sup> Alongside television, the radio was incorporated as part of the Voice of Kenya in 1964. The Voice of Kenya had 19 radio studios around the country by 1980, producing three regular services: the “National Service” (Swahili), the “General Service” (English) and the “Vernacular Service,” which transmitted in 18 different languages across the nation.<sup>17</sup> By 1969, over half of Kenyan homes had radio receivers, 67% by 1975, and between 70 and 75% by 1980.<sup>18</sup> With these numbers, it is safe to assume that the radio was an important and common part of everyday life for Kenyans.

Musically, Nairobi's tastes were varied. Cuban-inspired Congolese rumba had swept across Eastern Africa and was a staple at dancehalls across Kenya and Tanzania. Music from America and Europe were also popular across the region. Writing in to the *Daily Nation*, one Beatles fan expressed his admiration:

“Beatles’ Fans”. I am an old and ardent fan of the Beatles, who in my opinion are the greatest. There must be many more teenagers whose idols are the Beatles. So, come on all Beatles fans and form one fan club of the Beatles...<sup>19</sup>

Often African artists were described in the context of American or European artists, for example, as the next James Brown, an artist that seemed to be on everybody's lips by the 1970s.<sup>20</sup> From the

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<sup>15</sup> Douglas Kierieni, “Tracing history of KBC and evolution of broadcasting,” *Business Daily* (Nairobi), May 21, 2021, <https://www.businessdailyafrica.com/bd/lifestyle/society/tracing-kbc-and-evolution-of-broadcasting-3408050>.

<sup>16</sup> G.O. Coldevin, “Broadcasting Development and Research in Kenya,” *Journal of Educational Television* 6, no. 2 (1980): 62, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0260741800060207>.

<sup>17</sup> Coldevin, “Broadcasting Development,” 62.

<sup>18</sup> Coldevin, “Broadcasting,” 62; T. Rose, D. Browne, and A. Krystall, *Zaa NaUwarunze: Listenership and Education Impact* (Nairobi: University of Nairobi, Bureau of Educational Research, 1975), 12-13; J.S. Roberts, “Kenya,” in *Broadcasting in Africa: A Continental Survey of Radio and Television*, ed. S.W. Head (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), 54-61.

<sup>19</sup> Y.N. Rajgor, “Viewpoint, LTE,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), September 1, 1964, 3.

<sup>20</sup> “Soul Scene: Rochereau thrilling sound of the Congo,” *Trust: Drum's Younger Sister (East Africa Edition)*, no. 11, March 1972, 12-13.

Swahili coast came other musical interests. Since the late-nineteenth century, *Beni*, a dance style that drew on the styles of military dance bands, had been popular throughout the early-Twentieth century.<sup>21</sup> *Taarab*, as in Tanzania and particularly Zanzibar, had a strong audience in Kenya, especially in Mombasa and Lamu. As with other genres, Swahili *taarab* changed the lyrics of established songs: Swahili words were set to melodies from Hindi film songs.<sup>22</sup> Mobile Kenyans brought these musical tastes with them to Nairobi and exchanged their interests within the city. Likewise, a generation before independence, soldiers in the King's African Rifles, having served with soldiers from across Africa and fought in Italian East Africa and Madagascar, had returned to Nairobi with a new repertoire of orally shared songs, and musical paraphernalia, including instruments, from across the globe. *Dansi* and dancehalls had also been popular throughout East Africa, particularly in the late colonial period, as an arena to perform "racial respectability" and socialise, but also to earn adulthood outside of the norms of colonial or "traditional" paradigms.<sup>23</sup>

Nairobi, however, was not just a passive agent in the history of music in Kenya. Since the city's inception, at the end of the Nineteenth century, its history has always been a global one, and while the Nairobi music scene benefitted from migrants bringing their musical traditions with them, it had its own distinct musical culture and was active in the production and dissemination of music. The bootleg lo-fi amp-crackle of its recordings, the countercultural imagery of the lyrics, its language, the difficulties of its production, its shifting audiences, and its optimistic, if jangly, tone ensured that *benga* was the sound of Nairobi in both the late colonial and early postcolonial period. Nairobi's hustle, transport, homes, leisure spaces, and its vast chasm of wealth became the colour palette *benga* artists used in their songs. This exchange was reciprocal. *Benga* became a distinct thread within the cultural fabric of the city.

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<sup>21</sup> Terence Ranger, *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa: The Beni Ngoma* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1975), 5-7.

<sup>22</sup> Andrew Eisenberg, "The Swahili Art of Indian Taarab: A Poetics of Vocality and Ethnicity on the Kenyan Coast," *Comparative studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 37, no. 2 (2017), 336, <https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201x-4133978>.

<sup>23</sup> Emily Callaci, "Dancehall Politics: Mobility, Sexuality, and Spectacles of Racial Respectability in Late Colonial Tanganyika, 1930s-1961," *Journal of African History* 52, no.3 (2011), 365-384. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853711000478>.

The story of popular music in East Africa is complex and is full of labyrinthine stories of betrayal, success, and failure as well as gossip, fiction, myth, and illusion. Debates as to the origins of styles, songs, and band names continue to this day which makes unpicking its history a difficult process. Accounts conflict one another and in cases “myth” is more important than “reality”. First, it is necessary to define terms such as “*benga*” and “*zilizopendwa*”. While there is some debate around these phrases they are generally used synonymously. The word *benga* used to be defined as something far more specific, however, today most of the music scene from the 1960s and 1970s Nairobi is simply referred to as *benga*. Nuances in defining the different urban styles is now largely lost; however, the importance of the delineations of these genres was perhaps overstated in the first place, as the various urban genres clearly influenced one another, and for the most part have similar elements. For example, Gabriel Omolo’s “Lunchtime”, could be considered a song in the “*twisti*” genre, however, it is also widely considered to be a *benga* classic. It is worth noting however, how urban music was defined in Nairobi throughout the 60s and 70s. *Twisti*, which was most prominent in Kenya in 1960s, before declining in 1970s, had a bright and bouncy guitar line, usually in two-part harmonies. It was played with a shuffle beat, most likely inspired by American rock-and-roll (especially given the name *twisti*) and South African “kwela”.<sup>24</sup> Rumba, which sounds similar but with a Cuban groove, was imported from Zaire and Tanzania. *Benga* differentiates in that it was first developed by Luo musicians in western Kenya and brought together the rapid style of *nyatiti* playing to the electric guitar. Daniel Owino Misiani was attributed as the father (and later, grandfather) of this musical movement.<sup>25</sup> *Zilizopendwa* is a general term that is Swahili for “favourites” or “those we loved”; it is comparable to using the term “golden oldies” when talking about American music from the 1960s and is the word many Kenyans now use when referring to

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<sup>24</sup> Andrew Eisenberg, “Digital Technology and the Music Recording Industry in Nairobi, Kenya,” *Music in Africa*, October 2015. Accessed May 18, 2021, <https://www.musicinafrica.net/sites/default/files/attachments/article/201607/eisenbergmusdigwebreport-final-301015.pdf>.

<sup>25</sup> Heathcote, “Daniel Owino Misiani;” Charles Pfukwa, “When Cultures Speak Back to Each Other: The Legacy of Benga in Zimbabwe,” *Muziki: Journal of Music Research in Africa* 7, no. 1 (2010): 169-178. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1812590.2010.483842>.

this period (it was not a term used in the 1960s and 1970s). Today, *benga* simultaneously refers to the urban Luo musical sound and also works as a general term by Kenyans for a number of popular music forms that came out of this period.<sup>26</sup>

The music of *benga* and *zilizopendwa* are still well adored today. Ethnic radio stations that emerged following the opening up of radio programming in the early Twenty-first century, have produced radio programmes in honour of the music of this time. “Heshimu Ukuta” or “Respect the Wall,” a programme on the Kalenjin-language Kass FM is “more than a mere request for old favorites; it involves instead the reliving of the social and cultural practices that were produced in the performance of the popular village “disco party” dances of the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s”.<sup>27</sup> These recollections and radio dialogues represent more than a lovesickness for the past, but are used to rationalise current events and reinvent identities in a politically volatile present.<sup>28</sup>

There is debate around the origins of these musical genres, especially *benga*, where some scholars attribute the influence of Congolese musicians as paramount. In particular, an innovative Zairean guitar player, Mwenda Jean Bosco, is often attributed to have influenced *benga*.<sup>29</sup> The 1950s are noted as “an important phase in the history of popular music in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda”, and that Bosco’s music “led to a revolution in guitar-playing techniques in East Africa.”<sup>30</sup> Here began the process of re-Africanisation of imported Afro-American kinds of music, which has intensified since then [until time of writing, 1981].<sup>31</sup> However, historians such as Joseph Muleka have challenged the influence of Congolese musicians, claiming that the influence of their music has been overstated.<sup>32</sup> This is not to say that Congolese musicians did not have a significant

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<sup>26</sup> Gregory Barz, “Meaning in Benga Music of Western Kenya,” *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 10, no. 1 (2001): 108, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09681220108567312>.

<sup>27</sup> Tirop Simatei, “Local-language Radio,” 269.

<sup>28</sup> Tirop Simatei, “Local-language Radio,” 266-274.

<sup>29</sup> Stephen Martin, “Popular Music in Urban East Africa: From Historical Perspective to a Contemporary Hero,” *Black Music Research Journal* 11, no. 1 (1991): 44, <https://doi.org/10.2307/779243>.

<sup>30</sup> Martin, “Popular Music in Urban East Africa,” 44.

<sup>31</sup> Gerhard Kubik, “Neo-Traditional Popular Music in East Africa Since 1945,” *Popular Music* 1 (1981): 93, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S026114300000933>.

<sup>32</sup> Joseph Muleka, “Pioneering a Pop Musical Idiom: Fifty Years of The Benga Lyrics in Kenya,” *Journal of Arts and Humanities* 7, no. 11 (2018): 58-67, <http://dx.doi.org/10.18533/journal.v7i10.1491>.

presence in Nairobi, and many had dominated the club bands in the 60s and 70s.<sup>33</sup> Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Congolese musicians made Nairobi their home especially when the situation in the Congo deteriorated in the 1970s, with some Congolese groups playing *rumba* regularly at night clubs.<sup>34</sup> These musicians ensured their music was accessible by translating the Lingala lyrics to Swahili.<sup>35</sup>

The debate over *benga* and its “authenticity” as a Kenyan sound is typical of many debates around the authenticity of national or ethnic cultural and musical phenomena. Country music is supposedly “authentically” American, and yet the banjo is an African invention; Irish folk is “authentically” Irish, and yet the mandolin was first played in Italy; the Beatles are “authentically” British, and yet rockabilly, the South Asian sitar, and Elvis, were highly influential to their sound. These modern cultures are part of the fabric of a modern, *global* world. In short, the “truth” of the authenticity of Kenya’s urban musical styles is less important than the debates themselves. There has been a desire to prove that *benga*, *twisti* and *zilizopendwa* are authentically Kenyan, which of course they are, however, those championing the authenticity of Kenyan culture lose sight of the importance of Kenya’s global connections.

The urban music phenomenon in Africa has been described as having three key elements, “the dissemination of various styles of music from other parts of the world by means of radio and phonograph to Africans; the availability of Western instruments, especially cheap guitars; and popular music forms invented by young people in Africa.”<sup>36</sup> While there had perhaps been a long history of guitar music along the coast due to connections with the Portuguese, others have noted the importance of the connections between the Second World War and Kenyan music. The popular band Rhino Boys played as a band before the Second World War, and many of its

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<sup>33</sup> Douglas Paterson, “The Business of Pleasure, Vol:I,” *Africa Beat*, Summer 1986, accessed May 18, 2021, <http://eastafricanmusic.com/busines1.htm>.

<sup>34</sup> Douglas Paterson, “Trends in Kenyan Popular Music”, *East African Music*, December 7, 1996, accessed May 18, 2021, <http://eastafricanmusic.com/trends.htm>.

<sup>35</sup> Paterson, “Business of Pleasure, Vol:I.”

<sup>36</sup> Martin, “Popular Music in Urban East Africa,” 40.

members were “recruited into the entertainment unit of the Education Corps of the King’s African Rifles”.<sup>37</sup> Some servicemen also brought back guitars from their time in various campaigns. The effect seems profound; Daniel Owino Misiani, the great innovator of *benga* who supposedly replaced the *nyatiti* with electric guitars, was said to be influenced by a brother in the army.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, the influence of African-American bands on the East African scene cannot be overstated. Bands modelled themselves on African-American jazz bands, particularly in their names: for example Misiani’s Shirati Jazz (and in Tanzania: Jamhuri Jazz, NUTA Jazz and Morogoro Jazz) despite not sounding like American jazz music.<sup>39</sup> In East African magazines articles on American artists sat alongside that of the new East African artists on the scene.<sup>40</sup>

Primarily, people would have heard *benga* music through the radio, particularly on the Voice of Kenya radio station. In this way *benga* was transmitted through the country and contributed to a collective musical experience. Whether working on a farm, an office, or on the streets of Nairobi, a radio would not be far away. The effect of the radio in establishing a national musical culture was significant. It is, however, difficult to work out how often songs were played, what international music was played, and what the fan favourites were without radio recordings, programme listings, and information on listening figures. Similarly, contemporary accounts of live performances are rare. Accounts from ethnomusicologists and anthropologists help build a picture of the scene. Douglas Paterson, anthropologist and avid Kenyan music enthusiast, visited a bar at Muungano Point, East Nairobi, in 1986 to watch the band Simba Wanyika. He described the gig as being in a “drive-in bar” where entertainment took place in a car park with one small corner dedicated to dancing and the band.<sup>41</sup> The band were stood on a crowded bandstand, and despite their thoroughly battered equipment, their music sounded very similar to their recorded tracks

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<sup>37</sup> Kubik, “Neo-Traditional Popular Music in East Africa Since 1945,” 92.

<sup>38</sup> Pfukwa, “When Cultures Speak,” 170.

<sup>39</sup> Martin, “Popular Music in East Africa,” 43.

<sup>40</sup> “A long wait for the Sweet Inspirations,” *Trust: Drum’s Younger Sister (East Africa Edition)*, no. 9, January 1972, 11; “NUTA Jazz Band Swing to the Top,” *Trust: Drum’s Younger Sister (East Africa Edition)*, no. 9, January 1972, 11.

<sup>41</sup> Douglas Paterson, “The Business of Pleasure, Vol:II,” *Africa Beat*, Summer 1986, accessed May 18, 2021, <http://eastafricanmusic.com/busines2.htm>.

(this was not necessarily a good thing as the quality of recordings were sometimes very poor). A small building with a hatch served as a bar where waitresses and patrons queued for beers. Except for some benches and the occasional table, the bar had no other furniture. Around the dancefloor were a few pickup trucks and cars where some patrons sat to watch the dancers and the waitresses hurry back and forth with beers.<sup>42</sup> As a band, and by Kenyan standards, Simba Wanyika had enjoyed relative success. They had regular singles aired on VoK, four solo albums recorded with Polydor Records, and regular employment at Muungano Point.<sup>43</sup> Their successes, however, paled in comparison to the overwhelmingly popular Congolese musicians on the scene.

Beyond a handful of serious enthusiasts, *benga* has not enjoyed much serious historical or academic focus. Contemporary ethnomusicologists, committed to searching for “authentic” and “traditional” music in rural Kenyan communities, were fascinated by a precolonial past. They largely ignored the music and bands that were playing in their hotels before flying out of Nairobi back to London or the US. While pioneering ethnomusicologists have preserved fascinating material, it is easy to imagine the vast, now lost, aural material that has moulded urban culture. Vinyl, while robust, breaks, bends, and warps, and material cannot always be preserved in archives. The *benga* archives of Kenya perhaps now exist in personal collections of cassettes, vinyl, and later CDs. The music of many more smaller bands that could not afford to press their recordings have been lost. As “popular” music, there have been paradigmatic reasons as to why *benga* has largely been left out of the narrative of Kenya’s history. It is neither “traditional” nor “elite”. These myopic categories of analysis have fortunately been significantly broken down; this shift owes a great deal to Karin Barber for her seminal work on African popular culture.<sup>44</sup>

Barber’s framework moved beyond understanding the popular as a hybridisation of tradition or elite, which came with the implications that it was an “amoebic, hybrid, syncretic mode

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<sup>42</sup> Paterson, “The Business of Pleasure, Vol:II.”

<sup>43</sup> Paterson, “The Business of Pleasure, Vol:II.”

<sup>44</sup> Karin Barber, “Popular Arts in Africa,” *African Studies Review* 30, no. 3 (1987): 1-78.; Karin Barber, *A History of African Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

of production”, consequently precluding it from the ability to have historicity or political agency.<sup>45</sup> Barber’s more recent contribution to the history of popular culture in Africa has championed the use of discrete examples and cases to focus sufficiently on the forms of the creative arts themselves as evidence of “attitudes, beliefs and responses to experience”.<sup>46</sup> These bold methodologies are provocative and insightful. I have attempted to replicate her methods of close cultural analysis through the exploration of a *benga* classic: “Lunchtime”.

### “Lunchtime”

The song “Lunchtime” by Gabriel Omolo presents a useful insight into the positionality of *benga* at a crucial turning point in Kenya’s cultural history. It is also reflective of a countercultural scene that, once endorsed by anticolonial nationalists, had turned upon the postcolonial elite in an implicitly scathing indictment of urbanisation where the lyricist confesses feelings of anomie within the city. A multiplicity of experiences and implied emotions were conveyed of Nairobi citizens, some living fulfilling lives, but others frustrated with postcolonial society, the new elite, and the inability to achieve adulthood.

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<sup>45</sup> Stephanie Newell, Onookome Okome, and Till Förster, eds., *Popular Culture in Africa: The Episteme of the Everyday* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 1-23.

<sup>46</sup> Barber, *A History of African Popular Culture*, 5.

Lunchtime, in Kiswahili (original), and English (translation), Gabriel Omolo, Apollo Komesha Band (c.1972).

Sasa ni lunchtime  
Tufunge makazi  
Twende kwa chakula  
Tuje tena saa nane  
Wengine wanakwenda kulala uwanjani  
Kumbe ni shida ndugu  
Njaa inamuumiza  
Wengine wanakunywa soda na keki  
Huku roho yote kwa chapati na ng'ombe  
Na wengine nao wazunguka maduka  
Huku wakijidai wanafanya window shopping  
(Lunchtime)

Now it is lunch time  
We stop working  
So that we go for food  
Then come back again at two  
Others will go to lie in the field  
Because of problems, brother  
Hunger is biting him/her  
Others take a soda and cake  
While the heart longs for pastry and beef  
And others go round the shops  
Pretending that they are window shopping  
(Lunchtime)

Kufika mwisho wa mwezi  
Uwanja tire mundu  
Ukiona anaye lala ni asiye na kazi  
Wamekwenda wote kula hotelini  
Wengine kwa biriani  
Wengine kuku na wali  
Watu wa Industrial Area watoroka maharagwe  
Waenda hotelini  
Kwa chapati na ng'ombe  
Na wengine nao wale mishahara juu  
Siku hiyo wote kwa hoteli za wazungu

By the end of the month  
The field has nobody  
If you see one lying then he is jobless  
All have gone to eat in the hotel  
Others eat cooked rice with fried steak  
Others chicken and rice  
Industrial area people thus avoid beans  
They go to the hotel  
For pastry and beef  
And others with higher salaries  
Will on that day be in the white dominated hotels

Kumbe shida ndiyo hufanya  
Mtu kulala chini ya miti  
Kumbe shida ndiyo hufanya  
Mtu kung'ang'ana na maharagwe  
Kumbe shida ndiyo hufanya  
Mtu kuonekana kama mtoto  
Nimeelewa ee nimeelewa oh  
Nimejua kumbe ni shida oh  
Nimeelewa ee nimeelewa oh  
Nimejua kumbe ni shida oh

So it is just a problem that makes  
Somebody to lie under trees  
So it is just a problem that makes  
Somebody to scavenge for beans  
So it is just a problem that makes  
Somebody to behave like a child  
I've understood ee I've understood oh  
I've now known that it's just a problem oh  
I've understood ee I've understood oh  
I've now known that it's just a problem oh

Twanga ngoma

Beat drums

Kumbe shida ndiyo hufanya  
Mtu kulala chini ya miti  
Kumbe shida ndiyo hufanya  
Mtu kung'ang'ana na maharagwe  
Kumbe shida ndiyo hufanya  
Mtu kuonekana kama mtoto

So it's just a problem that makes  
Somebody to lie under trees  
So it's just a problem that makes  
Somebody to scavenge for beans  
So it's just a problem that makes  
Somebody to behave like a child

The song "Lunchtime" enjoyed great popularity during the early 1970s. Its singer and lyricist, Gabriel Omolo, was awarded a "golden disc" by his record label Phonogram International on 19<sup>th</sup> September 1974. A ceremony took place at a Nairobi hotel where, on behalf of Phonogram

International, the Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, John Ithau, handed over the golden disc to Gabriel Omolo and the Apollo Komesha Band.<sup>48</sup> It was not just an event that represented Omolo's personal accomplishment, but was an event of national cultural significance. Guests at the event received a souvenir copy of Omolo's record: "Lunchtime", recorded in Nairobi. On the B side was a special pressing of the highlights from the evening's speeches (it must be assumed that these speech extracts were recorded and pressed ahead of the event).<sup>49</sup> The first East African to be awarded a golden disc, Omolo had set sales records, cutting twenty records with sales at around 300,000. Of these sales, 125,000 were credited to his hit "Lunchtime," which had sold copies across East and West Africa.<sup>50</sup> The social commentary in his lyrics "simply put people on".<sup>51</sup>

The awarding of Omolo's golden disc came at a crucial time in the Nairobi music scene. There was a change in the air, the Swahili singing old guard were on the way out, and the fresh faces singing in regional vernacular languages were moving in. The larger record companies in Nairobi had bands right where they wanted them, overworked, underpaid and completely dependent: they wielded a lot of fiscal power over new and old performers alike. Omolo's "Lunchtime" straddled an intersection in the Kenyan music scene. Omolo had been a part of the first wave of the post-independence bands that had praised the feats of the nationalist movement, however his lyrics were now different and were deeply critical of the failings of the postcolonial state. Two paradigms in Kenyan music met in this one song. The government praised the feats of Omolo by sending John Ithau to the ceremony, but were also growing more deeply intolerant of subversive activity and less interested in *benga*. It had served its purpose during the anticolonial struggle and was too critical of the postcolonial state, as it had been of the colonial regime. Further,

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<sup>48</sup> "Omolo awarded golden disc," *The Standard* (Nairobi), September 20, 1974, 5.

<sup>49</sup> "Omolo awarded golden disc," *The Standard* (Nairobi), September 20, 1974, 5.

<sup>50</sup> "Omolo awarded golden disc," *The Standard* (Nairobi), September 20, 1974, 5.

<sup>51</sup> "Omolo awarded golden disc," *The Standard* (Nairobi), September 20, 1974, 5.

*benga* lacked “tradition” or a distinct “African-ness,” making it unattractive as a symbol of national pride.

Information on Gabriel Omolo’s life is somewhat conflicting. Some texts attribute his birth to 1938 or 1939, and the location of his birth to Makongeni (Nairobi), or to Nyabeda Village in Siaya county.<sup>52</sup> Texts concur that he spent formative years in Makongeni, Nairobi and that his parents had originally come from Siaya District. His interest in music started in the 1950s, and as a schoolboy he had learned to play the guitar. He started recording for Associated Sound Limited, who were later bought by Phonogram Limited, “graduated from his wooden guitar” and started recording with an electric guitar.<sup>53</sup> There he came under the tutelage and management of Kenyan-British record producer Charles Worrod and (*benga*) musician Fadhili William. Gabriel Omolo joined the famous Equator Sound band and played the bass guitar with Daudi Kabaka in the band African Eagles. In 1968 he played with another band, the Blue Shades, before putting together Apollo Komestra 71 Band and signed a contract with Phonogram Limited. This was attributed as the “turning point” in his career, and Gabriel Omolo’s records soon became a “feature of every African house.”<sup>54</sup>

While the golden record event on the 19<sup>th</sup> September was orchestrated in order to celebrate the commercial success of the single “Lunchtime”, lyrically, the very song the gathered had come to celebrate was a damning indictment of the sorry state of affairs in Nairobi since independence. Omolo’s record was more than an innocuous retelling of the difficulties people in the city face when trying to eat, but a more damning criticism of urban society in the postcolonial 1970s. Much like other *benga* songs from the period, the material contended with the day-to-day events that affected urban Kenyans.

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<sup>52</sup> Okal, “A Psycho-Realist Analysis of Gabriel Omolo’s ‘Lunch time’,” 15; Amos Ngaira, “‘Lunch time’ singer Gabriel Omolo dies in hospital”, *Nairobi News*, 4<sup>th</sup> January 2018, accessed, 10/05/2021, <https://nairobineews.nation.co.ke/chillax/lunchtime-singer-gabriel-omolo-takes-last-bow>.

<sup>53</sup> “Omolo awarded golden disc,” *The Standard* (Nairobi), September 20, 1974, 5.

<sup>54</sup> “Omolo awarded golden disc,” *The Standard* (Nairobi), September 20, 1974, 5.

Omolo highlighted the vastly different experiences of Kenyans eating within Nairobi. These consumption habits and choices were more than simple cases of preference. In Kenya, as in South Africa and other settler colonies, Africans had been banned from consuming certain food and drink. Africans had been banned from drinking “European alcohol” during the colonial period and access to certain hotels and restaurants had been restricted before the removal of the colour bar in the late 1950s.<sup>55</sup> The use of food and consumption in the song was therefore loaded with political meaning. The song “Lunchtime” focused on the inclusion and exclusion citizens of the city faced around access to food and food-spaces. By the 1970s, when Omolo was writing, these lines were now less about race, but instead about employment and class. The importance of consumption was therefore far more significant than sustenance: “[consumption] also couples selfhood with collective experiences, at the same time as it localizes the global.”<sup>56</sup> Whereas food and national cuisines have been used to develop constructs of national identities and imagined communities, here food was used to highlight the dissonance in urban Nairobi culture. Consumption had been heavily regulated under colonial rule and the situation had taken on a new character into independence.<sup>57</sup> The comparisons of urban experience presented by Omolo served to demonstrate the extreme inequalities that had persisted.

Omolo revealed a variety of urban experiences around food and work in Nairobi. The first group he presented to his listeners were the individuals who “lie in the field” (I have assumed this to mean parks). Omolo here describes the individuals who had to rest in between attempts to find work in Nairobi’s central parks such as Jeevanjee Gardens or Uhuru park. It remains common to see young men resting in the grass Jeevanjee Gardens, usually alone or in small groups engaging in quiet conversation. In Omolo’s telling of lunchtime in Nairobi, these individuals were

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<sup>55</sup> Charles Ambler, “Alcohol and the Control of Labor on the Copper-belt,” in *Liquor and Labor in Southern Africa*, ed. Jonathan Crush and Charles Ambler (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1992), 340.

<sup>56</sup> Paul Nugent, “Do Nations Have Stomachs? Food, Drink and Imagined Community in Africa,” *Africa Spectrum* 45, no. 3 (2010): 89, <https://doi.org/10.1177/000203971004500305>.

<sup>57</sup> Ambler, “Alcohol and the Control of Labor,” 340-1.

significantly affected by their lack of access to food: hunger “bites” them and they were resigned to lying and waiting. Omolo then introduces another group of urban Kenyans, those with enough small change to buy bottles of soda and cake, from roadside dukas. An improvement upon their compatriots in parks and fields, but still insufficient. Others, likely ashamed by their inability to pay for lunch in the city, window shop.

As the narrative of the song continues, it transports the listener to the end of the month and payday. Here, the performative nature of food and consumption is important. Those that remained lying in the fields were completely without good fortune. They were the individuals without any work and consequently no money to collect at the end of the month. Others were able to enjoy more indulgent pursuits. Biriani, chapati and beef, and chicken and rice were enjoyed by those who could afford it come lunchtime. Those with coveted jobs in the Industrial Area were able to go to hotels to eat. The greatest achievement for the characters in the song comes at the end of the second verse; these individuals could eat in the hotels that were still dominated by the white population of the remaining white settlers and tourists. Entering these spaces was coveted as not only an indulgent place to visit but to demonstrate that they were not prevented from entering these ordinarily exclusive areas. More than getting something to eat, it was the reimagining of spaces that had once wielded such racialised power. As young men in the previous chapter sought out bars to socialise with (predominantly) white European and American women, urban workers laid claim to food spaces. Naturally, indulging in a spending spree at the end of the month is not unique to Nairobi. However, it provided an opportunity for workers to assert their ownership of space and to transgress the ordinary boundaries of their postcolonial urban experiences, particularly in relation to eating habits.

The song invites a reading of the urban experience as destructive. The polarisation of experiences where some were able to eat at the finest hotels and restaurants whereas others had corrupted bodies, pained with hunger, scavenging for beans, or regressing to children speaks to critical theory and literature on the ruins of colonialism, and necropolitics. While less extreme than

examples of state violence, the imagery evoked in this song are demonstrative of the “less perceptible effects of imperial interventions and their settling into the social and material ecologies in which people live and survive.”<sup>58</sup> The ruination of colonialism, as outlined in Ann Laura Stoler’s comprehensive and sharp introduction to the topic, are present in the lyrics of this song. The haves and have-nots within postcolonial society were now an inevitable reality due to the legacies of empire. To suffer or die were made features by the colonial state, inherited by the postcolonial elite, and impossible to reverse: “the more protracted imperial processes that saturate the subsoil of people’s lives and persist... over a long durée”.<sup>59</sup> The song’s content may seem banal, Omolo was writing about food, however, the lyrics are evocative of the swollen towns, food scarcity, and poor conditions that had come to be the features of modern colonialism during the 1940s and 1950s and the escalation of African empire. Likewise, this song was also a story of necropolitics, African youth, today, in 1974, and under colonial rule, were victims of malnutrition, joblessness, but also disease, conflict, state and organised violence, and (later) HIV and Aids. The lyricist found himself within a new necropolitics, where lived experience was regulated through the perspective of death.<sup>60</sup>

The song, in the final two stanzas, focusses on a very important motif of working individuals being made to scavenge for beans and therefore becoming childlike. As has been emphasised throughout this thesis, the inability or challenges to earning an adulthood, of reaching a position of self-actualisation, was incredibly damaging culturally, socially and psychologically to young men and women throughout Kenyan history. As is well known, self-mastery (or lack of access to self-mastery) was a crucial element of the Mau Mau rebellion where the perversion of access to adulthood totally destabilised the Kikuyu moral economy. It is perhaps important to note, although self-evident, that the Kikuyu were not the only group to be affected by the lack of

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<sup>58</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2013), 4.

<sup>59</sup> Stoler, *Imperial Debris*, 4.

<sup>60</sup> Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, trans. Steve Corcoran (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019); Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 13-18.

access to opportunity, self-actualisation, and adulthood during the colonial and postcolonial periods. Music, while mainly a medium of entertainment, serves an important role across all Kenyan ethnic groups, but especially within the Luo community to whom *benga* was popular.<sup>61</sup> Memories and stories of a better past helped foment these anomic feelings of exclusion within Kenyan “youth”. As in the colonial period, many men felt trapped in a prolonged period of liminality between childhood and adulthood (often defined as the period between initiation and marriage), the “uncertain age”, irrespective of their biological age.<sup>62</sup> Old opportunities that forefathers (supposedly, though not always) had enjoyed access to, such as the ability to accumulate land, livestock, clear forests, work the soil, trade, and grow families, had become difficult, if not impossible, for most Kenyan young men during the colonial period.<sup>63</sup> Likewise, the opportunities of the colony, wage-labour, (meaningful, applicable) education, and the pleasures of town life were increasingly difficult to access too. For Omolo to say that people were behaving or looking like children was perhaps the most scathing of the song’s criticisms. Scavenging for a status-less food, beans, these sufferers had been failed by the postcolonial state. The song’s characters had a hunger that represented more than an incapability to meet the physical or financial means to meet basic nutritional needs, but representative of social and cultural deficiencies within the state.

Reading these texts as an articulation of criticism and disdain toward the postcolonial regime may invite criticism of overstating the lyrical meaning of “Lunchtime”. However, Omolo developed a repertoire of songs with social criticisms or observations such as ‘*Maro Oketho Ugunja*’ (mother-in-law’s tragedy at Ugunja), ‘*Mr. Agoja*’ (wife beater), ‘*Jopango*’ (townsmen), and ‘*Jaluo asili*’ (authentic Luo).<sup>64</sup> A deliberate vagueness helped protect the singers from accusations of anti-government behaviour, and is typical of the social commentaries within *benga* music.

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<sup>61</sup> Adams Oloo, “Song and Politics: The Case of D. Owino Misiani,” in *Songs and Politics in Eastern Africa*, ed. Kimani Njogu and Hervé Maupeu (Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota Publishers, 2007), 181.

<sup>62</sup> Paul Ocobock, *An Uncertain Age: The Politics of Manhood in Kenya* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2017), 166-169.

<sup>63</sup> Ocobock, *An Uncertain Age*, 166.

<sup>64</sup> Oloo, “Song and Politics,” 181.

Gabriel Omolo's contemporary, another Luo *benga* musician, Daniel Owino Misiani, was a master of using allegory and allusion to criticise the postcolonial state. His commentaries ensured Misiani had several altercations with the police throughout his life. He was even expelled from Kenya for his music, upon the grounds that he was born in Tanzania. When asked in an interview about the political nature of his songs, he feigned ignorance: "sometimes I sing about lakes, fish and other things but when in two to three years, things happen, people say that I am a prophet."<sup>65</sup> His song "Jane Macline" released in 1968 exemplifies this point where the political tension between Kenyatta and Odinga in the mid-1960s were symbolically presented through the personification of animals: "*Simba ruto to Kwach chur achura gi chunye to thuol wach nit er mos waloso*" (the lion is growling as the leopard rumbles in his thoughts in silence while the snake insists on taking things slowly as they were still discussing matters).<sup>66</sup> Supposedly, the lion represents Odinga, the leopard, Kenyatta; and the snake, Mboya.

The implicit criticism of the lyrics within *benga* songs was one of several reasons that *benga* no longer enjoyed endorsement from the Kenyatta regime. However, the music of *benga* had once been enjoyed by the same political elites before independence, as anticolonial nationalists, and in the immediate period following independence. Daudi Kabaka, prominent *benga* musician, had recorded one of the most famous pieces of *benga* music in the 1960s: "*Harambee Harambee*". It was a song that celebrated an optimistic vision of nation building.

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<sup>65</sup> Quoted in Oloo, "Song and Politics," 183.

<sup>66</sup> Quote and translation taken from Oloo, "Song and Politics," 183.

Harambee Harambee, in Kiswahili (original), and English (translation), Daudi Kabaka, (date unknown, c.1965).<sup>67</sup>

Harambee, Harambee	<i>Harambee, Harambee</i>
Tuimebee pamoja	let's sing it together
Harambee, Harambee	<i>Harambee, Harambee</i>
Tuimbe pamoja	let's sing it together
Harambee, Harambee	Harambee, Harambee
Tuimbe pamoja	let's sing it together
Tujenge serikale	let's build a government
	many said
Wengi walisema	Kenya will be troubled
Kenya itakuwa matata	many said
Wengi walisema	Kenya will be troubled
Kenya itakuwa matata	many said
Wengi walisema	Kenya will be troubled
Kenya itakuwa matata	
Watu wote wastaarabu	Kenya will be troubled
	all civilized people
Wananchi Harambee,	
Tuvutee Pamoja	<i>Harambee</i> citizens,
Wananchi Harambee,	pull us together
Tuvutee Pamoja	<i>Harambee</i> citizens,
Wananchi Harambee,	pull us together
Tuvutee Pamoja	<i>Harambee</i> citizens,
Muongoze na usalama	pull us together
	guide him with safety
Watu wa Kenya	
Hatuna ubagunzi	Kenyan people
Watu wa Kenya	we have no discrimination
Hatuna ubagunzi	Kenyan people
Watu wa Kenya	we have no discrimination
Hatuna ubagunzi	Kenyan people
Kila rangi tunaipenda	we have no discrimination
	we love every color

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<sup>67</sup> Lyrics taken from, "Daudi Kabaka – 'Harambee Harambee' (information, video, & lyrics)", Pancocojams, accessed May 4, 2023, <http://pancocojams.blogspot.com/2015/09/daudi-kabaka-harambee-harambee.html>.

The song was used throughout the independent era, on the radio and television, to celebrate public holidays and prefaced every news bulletin until the mid 1990s.<sup>68</sup> It was a song that encapsulated the spirit of optimism and hope that the postcolonial regime had wished to develop. In the early postcolonial years before *benga* fell out of favour with the Kenyatta regime after growing critical of the regime's shortcomings, it had been enjoyed by the new political elite as galvanising music. An unofficial anthem, the song ended with a call to address and move past one of the most significant problems in Kenyan society, racial inequality and ethnic tensions.

While *benga* had its useful moments, this, however, did not mean that *benga* was taken seriously as a genre to be taught or promoted on a national stage. This is not to say that music could not be considered constructive to nation-building. As demonstrated in chapter one, the press acted as an important arm of the state's nation-building project. Endorsed in the press and by local politicians, events such as choirs, pageants and carnivals were held in high esteem. Carnival Kenya, produced by the *Daily Nation* journalist Cyprian Fernandes, enjoyed multiple double-page spreads in newspapers during its production and days of performance. The carnival was held in March 1964 in aid of the Kenya national fund and was attended and endorsed by the then Mayor of Nairobi Charles Rubia.<sup>69</sup> At two and a half hours long, the show exhibited performances from young Kenyans from the age of eight upwards. The *Harambee* spirit was emphasised by its producer in the run up to its performance, "The spirit of getting together to work for a cause, a worthy cause, mingled with the air of friendliness and co-operation, makes the show a winner."<sup>70</sup> The show also promised a new dance for teenagers: " "Delite Kenya" – a new dance "invented" by the producers – which will be introduced."<sup>71</sup> While it seems that "Delite Kenya" never caught on, the

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<sup>68</sup> Ian Eagleson, "Between Uptown and River Road: The Making and Undoing of Kenya's 1960s 'Zilizopendwa,'" *World of Music* 3, no. 1 (2014): 31.

<sup>69</sup> J.D.H, "Carnival Triumph for Teenagers," *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), March 9, 1964, 4.

<sup>70</sup> Cyprian Fernandes, "Viewpoint," *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), February 29, 1964, 6.

<sup>71</sup> Cyprian Fernandes, "Viewpoint," *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), February 29, 1964, 6.

media of song and dance were understood at a high political level as possible avenues for cohesion and nation-building.

The future of Kenyan music and the ways citizens were educated about music was consequently important to the state. Naturally, there were different ideas for the future of Kenyan music during the postcolonial years. The publication of *East Africa's Cultural Heritage*, commissioned by the East African Institute of Social and Cultural Affairs (EAISCA), came out of a seminar programme by the institute in 1965. The EAISCA, established in Nairobi in 1963, had humble origins with the publication of a journal and sponsorship of seminars. The institute was created following a meeting in Berlin in 1963 between various representatives of foundations and East African politicians.<sup>72</sup> Tom Mboya had been present and wished to establish a private organisation to act as a discussion forum on issues of East African public interest. From this meeting the EAISCA emerged and was patronised by the leaders of the region such as President Jomo Kenyatta, Julius Nyerere, and Dr Milton Obote.<sup>73</sup> This particular seminar's aims were simple, if extremely ambitious: to respond to the cultural needs and wants of East Africans.<sup>74</sup> The seminar on African Culture and new East African writing was held in the East African Institute from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> December, 1965. The four-day seminar had a number of high-profile attendees, including Minister of State in the President's office, Mbiyu Koinange, government officials, university representatives and experts in education from across East Africa. Three papers were offered to give advice on music and its future in the Kenyan state. All contributors emphasised the importance of music in education and offered solutions to an art form that across all three papers was framed as an issue.

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<sup>72</sup> Bethwell Ogot, "East African Institute of Social and Cultural Affairs, Nairobi," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 3, no. 2 (1965): 283-85.

<sup>73</sup> Ogot, "East African Institute of Social and Cultural Affairs, Nairobi," 283-85.

<sup>74</sup> East African Institute of Social Cultural Affairs, eds., *East Africa's Cultural Heritage* (Nairobi: East African Institute of Social Cultural Affairs, 1966).

One contributor to the seminar conceded: “even if we wanted to isolate Africa musically, what hope is there of being able to do so? Transistor radios and record players bring the greatest mixture of music to listeners in the remotest corners of Africa – and not always the best music either.”<sup>75</sup> No one wanted to isolate East African music, however, they continued to frame music in East Africa across two distinct paradigms, “Western music” and “African music”. This tension ran through all three papers, the “problem” of Western music and African music and how they may work together or in competition with one another. The authors did not describe their understanding of the delineations between the two aside from broad claims such as the piano is decidedly Western, and instruments such as the *nyatiti* are African. The contributors did not provide any attempt to think about music across these two paradigms. All contributors failed to mention *benga*, or other urban pop sounds that had African and Western roots. *Benga* is interesting in this context because it was excluded, yet the debates as to whether *benga* was authentically Kenyan or “hybrid” was an important part of ethnomusicology debates beyond this seminar. While the seminar took place soon after independence and *benga* could still be seen as having a galvanising influence upon Kenyan national culture, it did not feature.

*Benga* was side-lined and not considered a serious African or Kenyan art form during the postcolonial period, in favour of music and art that could more obviously be considered traditional. Contemporary cultural projects offer insights into the anxieties and priorities of the state at the time. The Bomas of Kenya, for example, were constructed in 1972, the invention of Barack Hussein Obama Snr.<sup>76</sup> The village museum tourist attraction, just a few kilometres from the centre of Nairobi, featured from the 1970s onwards, performances from Kenyans where songs from across Kenya are sung alongside accompanying dance routines. It is a tourist attraction that exists to this day and is widely popular among international tourists to come see the “traditional” dances

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<sup>75</sup> Graham Hyslop, “Music and Education in Kenya,” in *East Africa's Cultural Heritage*, ed. East African Institute of Social Cultural Affairs (Nairobi: East African Institute of Social Cultural Affairs, 1966), 20.

<sup>76</sup> Bethwell Ogot, and Madara Ogot, *History of Nairobi 1899-2012: From a Railway Camp and Supply Depot to a World-Class African Metropolis* (Kisumu, Kenya: Anyange Press Ltd., 2020), 452-454.

of Kenya. Bomas of Kenya was a subsidiary of the Kenya Tourist Development Corporation (KTDC), designed to perform a singular major function: to “sell Kenya’s cultural image to tourists and citizens”.<sup>77</sup> It had been envisaged to be a microcosm of Kenya where the nation’s different ethnic groups and cultures could be celebrated and viewed.<sup>78</sup> In order to achieve its goals the concept of living villages or “bomas” was used. (Bomas is a word that can be used to mean “homestead” or “community enclosure” in Swahili and across East Africa more generally.) The establishment of Bomas of Kenya was at the centre of a struggle between Obama Snr and Richard Leakey, the Administrative Director of the National Museums of Kenya (NMK). Upon appointment as the KTDC’s Senior Development Officer in 1967, Obama wrote to the Commissioner of Lands in November asking for ten acres of land to establish an “African Village”.<sup>79</sup> The idea of such a village had been discussed for a few years by the KTDC’s executive board, whose membership included Kenneth Matiba (Permanent Secretary for Commerce), G. G. Kariuki (MP), John Michuki (senior civil servant, later politician), and W.M. Dunford (restauranteur). Tensions between Leakey and Obama grew. Leakey wanted to display “primitive lives of Kenya Africans”, whereas Obama had wanted a village that would exhibit the “living cultures of Kenyan Africans”.<sup>80</sup> Obama envisioned a village museum in line with other examples internationally, such as village museums in Honolulu, Hawaii, Tivoli in Copengagen and Skansen in Stockholm. While just ten acres were requested for Bomas, Obama was allocated eighty-two. However, after he awarded contracts which consequently upset the board, he was fired. Nevertheless, his legacy upon Kenya’s culture and heritage had been ensured, the Bomas of Kenya exists to this day and has now recreated various homesteads of the major ethnic groups and sub-nationalities of Kenya. Abagusii, Abaluhya, Akamba, Gikuyu, Luo, Maasai, Meru and Mijikenda

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<sup>77</sup> Ogot and Ogot, *History of Nairobi*, 452; The KTDC is in turn a government owned public enterprise under the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife.

<sup>78</sup> Ogot and Ogot, *History of Nairobi*, 452.

<sup>79</sup> Ogot and Ogot, *History of Nairobi*, 452-453.

<sup>80</sup> Ogot and Ogot, *History of Nairobi*, 454.

communities are all represented at Bomas. It also is home to the only resident dance company in Kenya. Made up of over eighty dancers, there are daily performances in the auditorium which houses around 2,000 spectators or the open-air stage.

The establishment of the Bomas of Kenya speaks to the commodification of culture that has been widely studied by anthropologists, such as John and Jean Comaroff, whose work on this subject has emphasised the longevity of national identity and culture as linked to the ways in which it can be commodified and sold.<sup>81</sup> As the Comoroffs outline in their work, this was not necessarily a bad thing. Kenyan dance therefore contributed to the establishment of an outward performance of Kenyan culture that could be marketed on a global stage. “Traditional” dance spoke to European and American tourists’ fascination with “tribes”, ethnic groups, and Kenya’s precolonial history far more than *benga*, which was seen as urban, inauthentic, and political (of course, all music and dance are fluid and there was and remains no music or dance in Kenya that is static in its meaning or form). It therefore proved to be both a lucrative from a tourist appeal, but also galvanising in the postcolonial state’s vision of an independent Kenya. The patronisation of an institution such as the Bomas of Kenya, where ethnic groups’ historically important dance and music was celebrated upon a global platform ensured that the vision of national culture and identity, the *Harambee* nation, was emphasised. The semiotics of its organised spaces as a boma within the city, with diverse ethnic groups living harmoniously on the museum land presents (if a little conspicuously) an idea of an ethnically harmonious and nationally unified state. It is now presented as the “official custodian of Kenya’s tangible and intangible heritage”.<sup>82</sup> By 1975, this vision was already advocated with a report published by UNESCO in 1975 which claimed that Bomas demonstrated that “young people anywhere in Kenya [could] perform dances from all the

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<sup>81</sup> John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnicity Inc.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

<sup>82</sup> Bomas of Kenya DVD front material on Bomas of Kenya: The Traditional Dances of Kenya (Narobi: Bomas Productions, 2011), quoted in Susanne Franco, “Reenacting Heritage at Bomas of Kenya: Dancing the Postcolony,” *Dance Research Journal* 47, no. 2 (2015): 5, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0149767715000170>.

ethnic groups”.<sup>83</sup> The image of unity was complete, and the Bomas of Kenya dealt with the multiplicities of identities in Kenya by creating a space that celebrated a national unity in diversity.<sup>84</sup> The rural was championed over the urban, village over city, tradition over modernity, order over subversion. When *benga* was benign and unthreatening, it could be condoned by the postcolonial state. It could even be endorsed when in praise of the nation, such as in the case of Daudi Kabaka’s “Harambee Harambee”. However, it was too fickle to become a part of the national culture, it threw up challenges, questioned authority, and called out the postcolonial state, albeit in a relatively unthreatening way. While music has been central to every revolutionary moment in Africa, these singers were not revolutionaries, but artists.

#### A genre in decline: The 1970s and *benga*

“Lunchtime” was written at a key turning point in Kenyan pop music. By 1972, there were very few *benga* artists who were still writing music in praise of the postcolonial regimes. Omolo was not alone in his criticism of Kenyan society and the postcolonial state. Daniel Owino Misiani, the father of *benga*, had also grown increasingly critical of the president. His song *Kalamindi*, released in the early 1970s, criticised Kenyatta’s development policy for perpetuating class and regional inequalities.<sup>85</sup> He would also go on to sing about murdered political heroes such as Argwings Kodhek, Tom Mboya, Oruko Makasembo, and J.M. Kariuki.<sup>86</sup> Other artists such as Daudi Kabaka, Joseph Kamaru, Isaiah Mwinamo, David Amunga, John Nzenze, Them Mushrooms, Joseph Kariuki, Albert Gacheru, (and later) Queen Jane sang about the problems within Kenyan society alongside usual pop song topics such as romance.

Other than the content of the songs, there were structural changes within the music industry in Kenya that had profound effects upon the urban music scene. Along with Kenyan

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<sup>83</sup> Kivuto Ndeti, *Cultural Policy in Kenya* (Paris: Unesco Press, 1975), 31.

<sup>84</sup> Franco, “Reenacting Heritage,” 9-10.

<sup>85</sup> Heathcote, “Daniel Owino Misiani.”

<sup>86</sup> Oloo, “Song and Politics,” 183.

politics of the 1970s, the music scene in Kenya became more parochial than inclusive. The inward gaze of these bands was borne of the terrible economic situation that affected most Kenyans: "Entertainment became more localised and instead of clients following musicians, the musicians followed the clients into bars and nightclubs."<sup>87</sup> This was experienced across much of Kenya's cultural attractions, for example Kenyan theatre was left in a sorry state of affairs. The theatre correspondent for the magazine *Mambo* lamented "All too often the picture from the Nairobi stages is of a group of people sitting in the auditorium bravely trying to appear like twice the number."<sup>88</sup> With a somewhat pompous attitude, the writer attributed the apathy of "poor audiences" toward the theatre as symptomatic of a laziness "peculiar to Nairobi" who had a "wait and see syndrome".<sup>89</sup> The only explanation for the "House Full" sign coming out for the Royal Ballet and the Vienna Opera Company was due to their "snob appeal".<sup>90</sup> The author failed to note the extravagant expense of theatre tickets, the importance of the reputation of theatre companies, and the global economic crisis.

Consequently, apathy and disenchantment toward the postcolonial state, and the breaking down of networks drove *benga* musicians away from praise songs and toward songs that spoke to their respective ethnic groups.<sup>91</sup> A sense of this drift toward ethnic pop steadily becomes clear in the magazine *Trust*, "Drum's younger sister," as the ethnicity of performers was progressively emphasised: "Among the pastoral tribes of the Rift Valley in Kenya are a number of talented guitarists and musicians who have given tribal music an exciting new sound."<sup>92</sup> A new group of Kalenjin musicians was described as "typical of the new breed of local musicians".<sup>93</sup> Strangely, the article failed to mention the name of the band. However, the article introduced K.J. Kileges (25)

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<sup>87</sup> James Ogude, "The Invention of Traditional Music in the City: Exploring History and Meaning in Urban Music in Contemporary Kenya," *Research in African Literatures* 43, no. 4 (2012): 154, <https://doi.org/10.2979/reseafrilite.43.4.147>.

<sup>88</sup> James Falkland, "Will Laziness and Apathy Destroy Kenya Theatre," *Mambo*, November 1975, 7.

<sup>89</sup> Falkland, "Will Laziness and Apathy Destroy Kenya Theatre," 7.

<sup>90</sup> Falkland, "Will Laziness and Apathy Destroy Kenya Theatre," 7.

<sup>91</sup> While imperfect, for clarity, I will refer to this music as "ethnic pop".

<sup>92</sup> "Kalenjin Music Goes Pop," *Trust: Drum's Younger Sister, (East African Edition)* no.9, January 1972, 14.

<sup>93</sup> "Kalenjin Music Goes Pop," 14.

and A.K. Kering (24) (the third was not named) from Kericho district, who performed songs in their own vernacular as well as in Kiswahili.<sup>94</sup> The two named men worked in Nairobi and recorded their songs when off-duty. Kileges, who was a rhythm bassist, said of this music: “We want the people who ask for a record to be sure they are getting something representative of us all.”<sup>95</sup> The article explained that many of their songs had a moralistic angle to them: their record ‘Sarah’, was an attack on a girl who boasted her riches; and the B side, ‘Arap Suswo’, talks of the plight of a man who likes to “backbite his friends and his colleagues”. As with preceding *benga* music, this music contained social commentaries and could be moralistic. Another record of theirs, “Borop Jamasiz,” encouraged the Kalenjin to remain attached to their cattle and emphasised the importance of meat and milk, the B side “Nyalil Neo” was a song that “in short says you should never starve an orphan”.<sup>96</sup> Given that the promises of the postcolonial state had not been fulfilled, some Kenyan youth looked to their ethnic networks and more conservative visions for community and society to articulate desires for belonging. *Benga* consequently provided a medium for young individuals to communicate their allegiance to their ethnic group when other avenues for earning adulthood were impossible. Morality, good conduct, and ethnic identities were foregrounded in this new wave of popular music. Similarly, an article in *Mambo* a few years later called the singer Daniel Kamau “probably Kenya’s top singer”.<sup>97</sup> The key to his success lied in “the fact that in his ballads he touches the souls of the Kikuyu tribe. His presentation and the background music quite often touch on traditional beats and the words of his songs reflect the Kikuyu prose at its best”.<sup>98</sup> Pop music could therefore speak to different sides of Kenyans’ identities. The unique experiences of ethnic groups were consequently emphasised by these artists’ songs.

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<sup>94</sup> “Kalenjin Music Goes Pop,” 14.

<sup>95</sup> “Kalenjin Music Goes Pop,” 14.

<sup>96</sup> “Kalenjin Music Goes Pop,” 14.

<sup>97</sup> Paul Kamau, “Meet D.K. Kenya’s top recording artist,” *Mambo* no.9, December, 1975, 9.

<sup>98</sup> Kamau, “Meet D.K.,” 9.

Challenges and changes within the industry further contributed to the closing down of music connections. In an interview for the magazine *Mambo*, musician Steele Beuttah explained the exploitative nature of Kenya's record labels. Beuttah was a musician who recorded with the band Air Fiesta, and at the time of the interview was in a band called Juju, who were the resident band at the Kenyatta Conference Centre. He also held the position of Treasurer of the Union of Musicians and Entertainment Industry. In the presence of Ronald Andrews, the management advisor of A.I.T. Records, Beuttah called out the poor attention from the Nairobi recording companies: "you are promised royalties you never see... local musicians are not promoted. Again, payments made to musicians here are negligible..."<sup>99</sup> When questioned on the role of the Union in these cases he explained that "The Union only protects the rights of its employees. The Union cannot talk about all the musicians in Kenya and at the same time promote them. A lot of money is needed to make a record successful and this is where the promoter comes in. Right now the foreigner is sitting on us."<sup>100</sup> Ronald Andrews in response to the claims of foul play rebuffed them claiming "our books are always open for inspection."<sup>101</sup> While it is not an uncommon story that musicians dislike their record label, there were some specific tensions at play: lack of promotion and poor wages.

Beuttah further highlighted a perhaps more sinister explanation for the rise in the recordings of "ethnic" pop: "Some recording companies are trying to *Kill* Kenyan Music. When a Kenyan has something different he wants to try on the market, they're not ready for it. They want to take *benga* from Kisumu because all they'll pay is 300 shillings and the poor artist goes to Kisumu and never bothers them again."<sup>102</sup> In short, ethnic pop was quick and cheap, and local musicians were ripe for the picking. Veteran musicians in Nairobi perhaps had become too shrewd for the record labels to find them attractive, and quick shillings could be made from other scenes. Beuttah

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<sup>99</sup> Paul Kamau, "The Discords of Kenya Music," *Mambo* no.8, November, 1975, 21.

<sup>100</sup> Kamau, "The Discords of Kenya Music," 21.

<sup>101</sup> Kamau, "The Discords of Kenya Music," 21.

<sup>102</sup> Kamau, "The Discords of Kenya Music," 21-22.

identified a further issue for the music scene: disco. "It has no life. It is dead. The Union would like to see the discos banned, 'cause they would give each musician a chance."<sup>103</sup> Clearly a threat and far from dead, one does not usually seek to ban inoffensive things, disco's invasion had come to East Africa. Maurice Kariuki, a DJ of the most popular mobile disco in Nairobi, called this "outrageous", and that "many people prefer original music, and music that is continuous".<sup>104</sup> Calling out poor musicianship, he told the interviewer "Think of the 'Kung Fu Fighting'. It has been out for quite sometime, and few bands can play it well."<sup>105</sup> Kung Fu Fighting had been a number one hit in the UK an entire year before and had reached the top of the South African charts on 29<sup>th</sup> November 1974.<sup>106</sup>

Economic realities further affected the music scene. Kenyan musicians were dependent upon their patrons' wealth, and as resources dwindled during the 1970s, so did Nairobi's artists. Entertainment thus became more localised, instead of patrons following musicians into bars, it was the musicians who followed their patrons.<sup>107</sup> Consequentially, numbers of band members were kept low and it was not uncommon for *benga* musicians to split themselves into two groups in order to perform in two different gigs during the same night in order to maximise any profits. Furthermore, the music scene had not been helped by the Kenyan public who, by the 1970s, did not show much respect or loyalty to Kenyan artists.<sup>108</sup> Supposedly, Kenyans expected entertainers in nightclubs and bars to play all night, or at the least between seven and eight hours. This contributed to the decline of the music scene as the model was unsustainable. Entry fees were low enough to ensure that punters arrive, however profit was made on the beer. As musicians often depended on entry fees, they found it hard to buy back the equipment a club owner may have bought them as part of a residency contract. Consequently, a band would have to stay at the same

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<sup>103</sup> Kamau, "The Discords of Kenya Music," 22.

<sup>104</sup> Kamau, "The Discords of Kenya Music," 22.

<sup>105</sup> Kamau, "The Discords of Kenya Music," 22.

<sup>106</sup> "South Africa Singles Charts," *South Africa Singles Charts*, August 31, 2017, accessed May 4, 2023. <https://sacharts.wordpress.com/2017/08/31/29-november-1974/>

<sup>107</sup> Ogude, "The invention of traditional music in the city," 154.

<sup>108</sup> Paterson, "The Business of Pleasure, Vol:I."

club, hotel, or bar for years “satisfying if not exciting the regulars, which hardly makes for innovation.”<sup>109</sup>

According to John Katana of the band Them Mushrooms, in 1987, in response to the largely Western foreign music dominating Mombasa nightlife, an African night was organised and Them Mushrooms played.<sup>110</sup> By the 1990s, as the African night had grown in popularity, “ethnic nights” had developed where bands played songs in ethnic vernacular languages. Them Mushrooms then relocated to Nairobi from Mombasa in the late 1990s as coastal melodies had become popular in Nairobi nightclubs too.

Some, however, have argued that these “ethnic nights” were far from insular.<sup>111</sup> James Ogude notes the relationship between the urban and the rural, claiming that “The very fact that theme night music is produced out of a constant negotiation and mobility between urban and rural spaces, allows it to constitute new audiences that are not just driven by the ethnic and rural origins of the music, but through adaptations and translations that make it attractive to its new consumers.”<sup>112</sup> The relationship appears to be more dynamic and less insular than initially believed. While there were “ethnic nights” that focused on specific groups, they actually brought people from various backgrounds closer together. The emphasis on ethnolinguistic groups may be less pronounced than it initially seemed. Those not belonging to the ethnic group of the performers appear to have been welcome. It perhaps begs the question as to whether these “ethnic nights” and ethnic pop before the 1990s were exclusive or exclusionary. These nights reinvigorated the *benga* scene and a dedicated fanbase grew. Ethnomusicologist, Gregory Barz, was taken by Kenyan dancer, Victor Mdenyo, to see one such event where Daniel Owino Misiani played at a social club in Kisumu in 2001. A makeshift event began in darkness due to a power outage. Committed fans waited in candlelight, around tightly packed tables, drinking Tusker beer and Fanta and waited for

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<sup>109</sup> Paterson, “The Business of Pleasure, Vol.I.”

<sup>110</sup> Ogude, “The Invention of Traditional Music in the City,” 147-65.

<sup>111</sup> Ogude, “The Invention of Traditional Music in the City,” 147-65.

<sup>112</sup> Ogude, “The Invention of Traditional Music in the City,” 156-157.

the power to return: “No electricity, no benga”.<sup>113</sup> These prominent, popular musicians had enduring legacies, long after their heydays in the 1960s and 1970s and were of cultural significance to urban social networks and groups performing late into their lives.

As demonstrated in this chapter, throughout the mid Twentieth century, the allegiances of *benga* artists shifted. Their media had been enjoyed by prominent anticolonial nationalists who consequently went on to inherit the institutions of the state as postcolonial elites. When the promises of independence were not kept by these postcolonial elites, *benga* artists turned on the state, songs in praise of *Harambee* were replaced with allegorical and satirical pieces, yet the pendulum swung back in the 1980s. Artists felt compelled to praise the government once more. Criticising the state has always been a dangerous enterprise in Kenya, however, Daniel Owino Misiani had earned a reputation as being anti-government. It is difficult to corroborate source material and find specifics, yet it appears Misiani had occasional confrontations with the post independent regimes and was arrested a handful of times for his lyrics. Using allegory and allusion had protected artists from the worst Kenyatta and Moi's retribution. Misiani, out of the need to protect his musical career, felt compelled to write praise songs such as “Kenya I Love You” in 1988. This song praised KANU and claimed “Kenya alama ya KANU,” which implies that KANU was synonymous with nationhood.<sup>114</sup> The songs were back in Swahili, not Luo, ensuring a broader listenership.

There is a danger of romanticising the lives and cultural contributions of *benga* artists: seeing them as self-sacrificing artists standing up for their local and national communities in the face of a stronger opposition. While *benga* songs as texts reveal alternate visions of the future, some songs had more sinister notions. Misiani may now be affectionately heralded as the father, grandfather, or “king” of *benga*, however his interest in Idi Amin saw him praising Amin's power

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<sup>113</sup> Gregory Barz, “Meaning in Benga Music of Western Kenya,” *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 10, no. 1 (2001): 108, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09681220108567312>.

<sup>114</sup> Oloo, “Song and Politics,” 192.

grab as noble and the expulsion of the Asian population as admirable in the song “President Amin”, in 1975.<sup>115</sup> That said, Misiani’s opinion would change the following year in the song “Amin Jamadari”, where Misiani lamented the awful conditions Ugandans were forced to live under, and the treatment of disabled citizens.<sup>116</sup> *Benga* was as exclusionary as it was inclusive, especially during the 1970 and criticisms of other ethnic groups were not uncommon. For example, Misiani would criticise Tom Mboya as a traitor of the Luo people in favour of the Kikuyu. The industry was cut-throat and there were far more stories of failure than success. Even the “success stories” are deeply unglamorous: artists working incredibly hard to make ends meet, sometimes provoked by the police, and living on very little money. By the mid 1980s, the music industry in Kenya remained a risky enterprise for budding musicians. Production costs were around £1500 for the first 500 LPs, (this is not including studio time), and returns could be as little as 5% subject to all albums being sold.<sup>117</sup> This should serve as a reminder that, though underdogs in the competitions for culture and musical identities, *benga* musicians were not cultural martyrs and were as susceptible to similar prejudices that pervaded Kenyan society.

### Conclusion

This chapter has invited a reflection upon the lyrical material of a handful of *benga* songs, particularly Gabriel Omolo’s “Lunchtime”. The lyrics reveal the ways *benga* musicians drew upon their lived environment to communicate dissatisfaction with the current social systems but also imagine alternatives to the existing world.<sup>118</sup> Omolo communicated the multiplicities of urban experience through the imagery of food and food spaces revealing a Nairobi that was deeply divided in the wake of colonialism. Likewise, the *benga* genre demonstrates the difficult relationship

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<sup>115</sup> Oloo, “Song and Politics,” 183.

<sup>116</sup> Oloo, “Song and Politics,” 184.

<sup>117</sup> Paterson, “The business of pleasure, Vol.I.”

<sup>118</sup> This concept is explored further in Till Förster, “On Creativity in African Urban Life: On African Cities as Sites of Creativity and Emancipation,” in *Popular Culture in Africa: The Episteme of the Everyday*, ed. Stephanie Newell and Onokome Okome (New York: Routledge, 2014), 32.

that the postcolonial state had with popular culture. Once a tool in the arsenal of anticolonial nationalism, *benga* had the potential to criticise new regimes. Much like the need to control youth (as outlined in Chapter 3), the state needed to find a place for music in the story of independence. Thus, existential debates around music, culture, and identity, took place through the publication of *East Africa's Cultureal Heritage*, by the EAISCA, and in the decision to establish the *Bomas* of Kenya.

Future studies of urban music may benefit from a reflection upon the decentring of urban spaces. The sharp rural urban divide that permeated the rhetoric of various political figures was less stark than imagined. The urban and the rural were interconnected through various ways. Music was one of these transcendent media. The radio carried the messages of the urban plight to the shambas and homes of almost every Kenyan. As with much of Kenyan culture, at a national level, there was an emphasis on rural arts and music. This was reflected in educational decisions and the establishment of the Bomas of Kenya. The performance of Kenyan musical culture in this way ensured that global observers and the postcolonial state alike understood the identity of the nation as rural.<sup>119</sup>

The Bomas of Kenya have made efforts to present an authentic representation of Kenyan culture, but their pursuit of authenticity can be seen as problematic. It is a syncretic institution whereby a synthesised African-ness, Kenya and “tribe” are performed to an overwhelmingly foreign audience in accordance with the viewers’ tastes. For example, the “Maasai Dance” is a regular daily feature that speaks to Euro-American curiosity and fascination with the Maasai ethnic group; the dance the programme refers to is called *Eunoto* but “Maasai Dance” proves to be more popular.<sup>120</sup> Despite the way Kenyan culture has been presented at Bomas, the institution has played a crucial role in Kenya’s history, culture, and heritage. It has also assumed new cultural significance

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<sup>119</sup> Cécile Feza Bushidi, “Reflections on the Fabrication of Musical Folklore in Kenya from the Early 1920s to the Late 1970s,” *Les Cahiers d’Afrique de l’Est / The East African Review* 50 (2015): 8-21.

<sup>120</sup> Franco, “Reenacting Heritage,” 10.

in the last few decades as it was the location where a new constitution was drafted in 2003, following the victory of the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) in the 2002 election. This constitution draft was referred to as the “Bomas Draft.” Perhaps there is an argument to be made that even for all its heavy-handedness, the importance of these state approved cultural spaces cannot be emphasised enough.

This chapter may run the risk of reading the history of *benga* or *zilizopendwa* as linear. For example, this chapter emphasises that *benga* singers in the early 1960s were optimistic for the future of independence before the growth of ethnic pop, satirical songs and anti-government sentiments, before the pendulum swung back in the 80s and 90s. However, it is worth emphasising that these are very general trends in the Kenyan music industry and that, of course, there were *benga* musicians who sang anti-government songs in the 1960s, and songs in praise of the government in the 1970s. Generally speaking, the optimism of the new nation in the early 1960s made fertile ground for songs that captured the *Harambee* spirit in praise of the government. These themes in *benga*: ethnicity, nationalism, and the urban, provide a novel perspective to understand everyday encounters with aural cultural production. Broader issues of political divide, economic hardship, and ethnic tension were written upon the lyrics of the music that not only urban Kenyans, but all Kenyans, engaged with.

Future studies of *benga*, particularly of the resurgence of *benga* in the 90s, may benefit from new research into the establishment of hip hop across Africa. Hip hop has become one of the most popular musical genres among youth populations across Africa, and hip hop has resonance to communicate the struggles against the conditions of urban life.<sup>121</sup> Much like how hip hop today “give[s] voice to their generation’s dreams”, *benga* was a medium through which to imagine a better future and challenge prevailing power structures.<sup>122</sup> Complementary works that could interrogate

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<sup>121</sup> Paul Khalil Saucier, “Continental drift: the politics and poetics of African hip hop,” in *Sounds and the City: Popular Music, Place and Globalization*, ed. B. Lashua, K. Spracklen, and S. Wagg (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 196.

<sup>122</sup> Saucier, “Continental drift,” 197.

further the internal lives of *benga* artists would be rewarding. While source material gives scant mention of musicians' lives, and oral history research becomes increasingly difficult – many *benga* musicians from the 1960s and 1970s are now dead – it would be valuable to explore how the music of the period affected the lives of Nairobi youths. Much like how the Bills of Kinshasa provided youth with a new lexicon of “*art de la débrouille*” (the art of making do) to cope with their status within the city it is easy to imagine the profound effect a distinct Nairobi style of music and musician may have had upon many Kenyan citizens as they negotiated the challenges of the city.<sup>123</sup>

The legacy of *benga* may be humble internationally, as an African genre it has been eclipsed by the music of West Africa and South Africa. Even in Kenya, Kenyan born *benga* musicians had to jostle against the immensely popular Congolese musicians with their flashy soukous style and broad repertoire of songs. *Benga*, however, has found fertile ground among passionate fans, who cite the genre as evocative of the supposedly better Kenya of yesteryear. The aural thread of Nairobi urban music from the 1960s and 1970s can be followed through to today where Sauti Sol, perhaps the biggest band in Kenya currently, cite *benga* legends Daudi Kabaka and Fadhili Williams as influences.<sup>124</sup>

This exploration of *benga* music within Kenya's urban landscape has highlighted its significant role as part of a globalising phenomenon, reflecting broader historical patterns of cultural exchange and adaptation. While the Kenyan elite and contemporary academic discussions often centred on local, ethnic, and “traditional” manifestations of music, the evolution of *benga* tells a story of a genre inherently shaped by both local influences and global cultural flows. This genre's journey from a nationalistic symbol to a marginalised subculture challenges the simplistic division between “traditional” and “modern,” illustrating how Kenyan musical expressions were

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<sup>123</sup> Didier Gondola, *Tropical Cowboys: Westerns, Violence and Masculinity in Kinshasa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 180-200.

<sup>124</sup> Samuel Kisambe “Celebrating African Music: Daudi Kabaka vs Sauti Sol,” *China Global Television Network*, last accessed December 24, 2022, <https://africa.cgtn.com/2015/11/06/celebrating-african-music-daudi-kabaka-vs-sauti-sol/>.

intricately linked to global developments. The transformation of *benga*, influenced by economic realities and international music trends, showcases the complexities of cultural globalisation, where local identities and global influences intermingle to redefine cultural landscapes, offering a perspective on the interplay between global dynamics and local cultural production.

## Conclusion

### Principal findings

This thesis, “Postcolonial culture in Nairobi’s margins”, has aimed to develop a richer understanding of the interconnected history of national and popular culture in the context of a global mid-century. One of the principal goals of this thesis has been to demonstrate the ways that globalisation was a collective aspiration of urban dwellers throughout the early postcolonial period. During the early postcolonial period the ways in which “the global” could be achieved was deeply contested. To establish these transitions, I have demonstrated that Nairobi could be conceptualised as a city of villages in the 1940s and 1950s. Despite challenges facing all Africans living in the city during the twilight years of empire, such as housing crises, lack of employment, World War and the Mau Mau Rebellion, these events had entirely different repercussions across the city. I have evidenced this by demonstrating the ways the Kawangware Kikuyu, the brewers of Mathare, and Nubians of Kibera experienced the same housing crisis in different ways. For some this offered opportunity, for others financial instability. Likewise, the effects that the city of villages had upon everyday culture – the ways that people lived – is demonstrated through the exploration of changes in prostitution practices within Pumwani and Shauri Moyo. Through the process of exploring the city of villages this research has shown how communities looked inward – toward the local – for meaning-giving, social, and cultural needs. This has contrasted to expectations during the early postcolonial period where I have demonstrated the ways that globalisation became a collective aspiration. This research has shown how the backyard city provided liberatory experiences through globalised cultural practices. As evidenced in the oral testimonies of the residents of Mji wa Huruma (Chapter 3), going to the cinema, luxury commodities, “boogies”, and learning instruments were more captivating than normative expectations and ideologies on a national stage. For these backyarders, this research shows that *Harambee* visions of owning land, tending *mashamba*, and (for the men) acquiring bride wealth were understood to be impossible feats

given their current circumstances. Instead of a collective yearning for access to these practices, the testimonies suggest global cultural practices, aspirations to a middle-class lifestyle, and waged employment were the new ideals. Within these processes, I have proposed that the small but visible middle class in Nairobi had a seductive effect upon the lifestyles, aspirations and expectations of these citizens by introducing some of the media that Kenyans would have come into contact with during this period.

Differing ways that aspirations to the global manifested during this period have been further explored. In Chapter 4, I introduced the ways global tourism came into contact with the *Harambee* nation and popular culture. Through using the examples of gay tourism, neocolonial fantasies, exoticized expectations of Kenya, I have demonstrated the ways some Kenyans could subvert these expectations for personal benefit. These observations and arguments have been made cautiously, demonstrating how the sources available suggest ways that global phenomena played in the role of acquiring wealth, creating new romantic and sexual experiences, and the profound changes in social spaces that had occurred since the colour bar days under the Empire. Further aspirations toward the global are evidenced in popular music culture. In Chapter 5, I demonstrated the ways popular urban music may be understood from a global perspective, whereas the nation and contemporary ethnomusicologists fixated on the “traditional”. Through the blending of music influences in the *benga* sound, musicians were able to articulate their aspirations, disappointments, and patriotism through a dynamic medium. I have suggested that while musical networks did become more introspective in the 1970s, focussing on ethnic histories and languages, these changes were reflective of economic circumstances; access to the global was still desired, but had become far more difficult to achieve. These pragmatic changes are evidenced in the ways the music industry began to make quick money from musicians singing in ethnic vernacular languages. Taken together, the examples of youth in Mji wa Huruma, Kenyans connecting with tourists in bars and hotels, and popular musicians demonstrate a city engaging with globalising cultural practices. These processes were not fully realized, and access to global

resources diminished due to the economic impact of the 1970s. Nevertheless, this research has suggested that throughout the years 1963-1982, globalisation continued to be a widely held aspiration.

Another principal aim of this thesis has been to demonstrate the tension between national and popular culture. In order to establish this tension, I had to first demonstrate the existence of a national ideal or project as championed by elite political actors. I have theorised the manifestations of national culture in the Introduction and Chapter 2. I have used the term “*Harambee* culture” to describe the processes the newly independent government used to establish a national project. The national project, in turn, has been called the “*Harambee* nation”, reflecting the normative intellectual ideal propagated by elite political actors. In Chapter 2, I made the claim for the existence of a national project – the *Harambee* nation – outlining some of the methods – *Harambee* culture – used to impress upon subjects the importance of these ideals. While not homogenous and subject to different interpretations by elite actors, my work has demonstrated that these beliefs had powerful rhetorical value and were part of a cultural hegemonic ideal. That there were other seductive postcolonial ideas, such as *majimboism*, was worth acknowledging, but competing ideas had limited effects upon national culture due to the pervasive power and control of Kenyatta, and later, Moi. *Harambee* culture was simultaneously inflected by regional politics, legacies of colonialism, Kikuyu philosophy and global intellectualisms. My contribution has argued that Kenya’s existential urban debates are comparable to Tanzania’s: women’s dress, industrial action, “slum clearances” and *baraza* became battlegrounds for larger debates about national culture, visions for the future, and citizenship. This does not mean that the legacies of colonialism and the importance of ethnicity-based philosophies should be ignored, they have both been crucial elements in the formation of Kenyatta’s national philosophies (as evidenced by Angelo and Lonsdale), but the continuities of postcolonial national visions across East Africa cannot be

ignored.<sup>1</sup> My work has demonstrated that these beliefs were communicated to citizens through powerful vehicles. The press, I have demonstrated, was complicit in the communication of national culture and the *Harambee* nation. I made this clear in Chapter 2 by focussing on the reporting of key events in the first year of independence by the *Daily Nation*. Conclusions can be drawn that there were key features to these images: good citizenship was characterised by self-sacrifice, discipline, and hard work. I have shown how images of Kenyatta and his commitment to the nation were mobilised to “mystify” the masses and present as a dramatic foil to the industrial action taking place throughout the country. And finally, some urban dwellers were othered to define national culture as much by inclusion as exclusion. At the centre of this process were women and the landless urban. As in Tanzania, women’s bodies, dress, and employment, became important areas where culture, citizenship, and decency were debated. This suggests cultural and political continuities across the region.

By establishing the ideals of the *Harambee* nation in Chapter 2, research in the later chapters has shown how these normative ideals came into contact with popular culture. Within each chapter, I have attempted to set up a series of conflicts between the national and the popular, the normative and the lived, the “ought to be,” and the “as it was.” Far from showing a total perspective of this period, this work has focussed on a series of discrete encounters between these ideals. In Chapter 2, this conflict manifest in the struggle on the street where the urban unemployed articulated their desires for change and employment. In Chapter 3 the dissonant experiences between participants in the National Youth Service and the experiences of young residents of Mji wa Huruma demonstrate the ways both the *Harambee* nation and access to the global excited imaginations; in the absence of access to the *Harambee* nation, resourceful young adults found hope within the city. Finally, in Chapter 5, the positioning of *benga*, government efforts to influence

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<sup>1</sup> Anais Angelo, “Chapter 1: Kenyatta’s Stateless Political Imagination,” in *Power and the Presidency in Kenya: The Jomo Kenyatta Years* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 38-65; John Lonsdale, “Jomo Kenyatta, God, and the Modern World,” in *African Modernities*, ed. J-G Deutsch et al (Oxford: James Currey, 2002), 31-65.

music education, and the establishment of the Bomas of Kenya demonstrate that the city was central to these ongoing debates. In conjunction with the image that appears in Chapter 2 of urban space as antithetical to the *Harambee* nation, the reasons behind the subsequent exclusion of Nairobi popular culture from the hegemonic norm begins to make sense.

This research has shown how globalisation impacted both national and popular culture. Through looking at the ways globalising cultural practices interacted with early postcolonial *Harambee* culture, I have suggested conflicting visions of Kenya were tolerated by elite and urban historical actors (Chapter 4). Beyond global intellectual networks and ideologies, there were very real practicalities of globalisation: the world came to Kenya after it had established itself as a popular tourist destination. Euro-American tourists brought with them concepts of Kenya that, despite being neocolonial, were acceptable to political figures. I have proposed, that more than tolerable, these stereotypes were nurtured and developed; the visions of a white man's country were too good an opportunity to miss. Economically, the nation benefitted greatly from marketing Kenya in this way. Political independence had been achieved; culturally, however, images of the Kenya colony could be mobilised. A national and tourist fascination with the authentic, "tribe", and tradition, came to the fore in the establishment of the tourist attraction the Bomas of Kenya: a utopian vision of Kenyan postcolonial society, where ethnic groups lived in harmony, and rural practices were central (Chapter 5). Further, I have argued that potentially destabilising sexual practices which were illegal in Kenya, were tolerated through the example of gay Euro-American tourists who enjoyed relative sexual freedom in tourist spaces. The mutability of *Harambee* culture has also been emphasised as I have shown how political cultures were confronted with urban realities. Utopian visions of rural Kenya had to sit alongside visions of respectable urban employment: I have demonstrated that the postcolonial state did not have the capacity nor desire to create a nation of land-owning smallholders. Therefore, stories of citizens were used to demonstrate normative expectations of the urban classes as in the case of 23-year-old James Muriithi (Chapter 2), a supposed beneficiary of the state-sponsored tripartite agreement to

improve employment. These visions, I have suggested, were challenged, reinterpreted, and negotiated by urban dwellers. This standoff between elite visions and urban realities comes to the fore particularly among youth. The government's approach to create productive youth was demonstrable of their desire to create a national culture, but was also crucial to shoring up power and authority around President Kenyatta. The dissonance between the experiences of youth within the National Youth Service and the unemployed urban is evident and demonstrates this standoff (Chapter 3).

### Research implications

The research within "Postcolonial culture in Nairobi's margins" has broader research implications for the history of Nairobi, Kenya, East Africa, and global methodologies. The contributions made in this thesis cover three (albeit overlapping) core areas: contextual, theoretical, and practical. Contextually, it broadens our understanding of Nairobi's global history and its integration into ongoing studies of the city. Theoretically, it underscores the concept of nation building, drawing parallels with national projects in Tanzania. Practically, it introduces innovative methods for conducting historical research on Kenya's cultural scene during the early postcolonial period.

In the introduction of this thesis, I used a quote from historian, Kenda Mutongi, who claimed that historians had "largely ignored" the postcolonial history of Nairobi.<sup>2</sup> Having attempted to answer this call, I have discovered the various reasonable explanations as to why postcolonial histories of Nairobi have fallen short of other research in Kenya, such as ethnic moral economies, colonialism, domestic politics, Mau Mau, and Kenyatta. In Nairobi's archives, material on the city, while relatively rich during the colonial period, vanishes before your eyes after 1963. Nevertheless, many of these omissions have been filled by the recent work conducted by Bethwell

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<sup>2</sup> Kenda Mutongi, *Matatu: A History of Popular Transportation in Nairobi* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 12-13.

and Madara Ogot. Access to sources remains an incredibly difficult challenge, however the Ogots' work on Nairobi has made considerable gains in bridging this impasse. In turn, their research invites researchers to explore popular cultural sources. This research has therefore made contributions in forwarding our knowledge and histories of urban experience following independence.

This thesis has situated urban Nairobi's experience of the city within the context of globalisation. This historical research has precedence in East Africa, and connects closely to work conducted in Dar es Salaam by Emily Callaci and Andrew Ivaska.<sup>3</sup> Callaci in her work on Dar es Salaam's street archives and city life, pulled together narratives of Christian reformers, pop literature, songs and nightclub rituals to investigate how urban migrants understood their identities and their futures in urban spaces.<sup>4</sup> She used the site of the dancehall as a way to understanding youth culture, sexuality and identity, charting the history of *Dansi*, and its shifting embodied meanings in order to develop an understanding of youth mobility, sexuality and expressions of racial political identity in Dar es Salaam.<sup>5</sup> By using similar methods, I have demonstrated continuity across the region using sources such as urban music in Chapter 5 and hotel bars in Chapter 4. Likewise, my work in Chapter 2, which introduced urban protest and women's exclusion from the national project connects closely with research on Dar es Salaam where the connections between Tanzania's ruling party Youth League, the outlawing of mini-skirts, and national culture have been made.<sup>6</sup> As in a Tanzanian context, in Kenya these debates took place in urban contexts and were reflective of intersecting anxieties around nation building and globalising consumptive habits. My

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<sup>3</sup> Emily Callaci, "Dancehall Politics: Mobility, Sexuality, and Spectacles of Racial Respectability in Late Colonial Tanganyika, 1930s–1961," *The Journal of African History* 52, no. 3 (2011): 365–84, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853711000478>; Emily Callaci, *Street Archives and City Life: Popular Intellectuals in Postcolonial Tanzania* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017); Andrew M. Ivaska, "Anti-Mini Militants Meet Modern Misses: Urban Style, Gender and the Politics of 'National Culture' in 1960s Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania," *Gender & History* 14, no. 3 (2002): 584–607, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0424.00283>; Andrew M. Ivaska, *Cultured States: Youth, Gender, and Modern Style in 1960s Dar Es Salaam* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Callaci, *Street Archives*.

<sup>5</sup> Callaci, "Dancehall Politics," 365–84.

<sup>6</sup> Ivaska, "Anti-Mini Militants," 584–607.

contribution has clearly linked the continuity of these experiences across the region which subsequently invites further historiographical questions about the true differences between the applications of national ideologies across East Africa. In practice, perhaps the east-oriented Tanzania and west-oriented Kenya were not as divergent in their applications of national ideologies as has been suggested.<sup>7</sup> Answering these questions goes beyond the scope of the research of this thesis, however, commonalities in the expectations of national culture have been identified. At the centre of these tensions sat globalising culture, debates and processes with seemingly unique local contexts have been shown to bear remarkable similarity regionally. By looking at the interactions of local and global influences upon culture, the threatening potential this had upon elite ideations of national identity have been identified; this could be as impactful as publicly singing songs of rebellion (for example in Chapter 5) or as personal as spending one's only money on skin cream (for example in Chapter 3).<sup>8</sup>

Research on globalisation in East Africa benefits from the contextual understanding and historical insights into global cultural practices provided by this thesis. My work, for example, on the intersection of tourism, romance, sexual practices and self-performance (Chapter 4) demonstrates a narrative of longevity for ethno-erotic economies as identified in the works of George Paul Meiu.<sup>9</sup> In addition, this work has situated queer sexualities within this history, not as something to have emerged as a recent phenomenon, but as having an identifiable historicity. Research on heterosexual intimacies in bars provides more important context for recent work on media and romantic love.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, recent developments in the study of hip hop and rap as meaning giving media and studies of popular music cultures across Africa benefits from global

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<sup>7</sup> See for example Paul Nugent, *Africa Since Independence: a Comparative History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 141-206.

<sup>8</sup> Sara Rich Dorman, Daniel Hammett and Paul Nugent, eds., *Making nations, Creating Strangers: States and Citizenship in Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 7-8.

<sup>9</sup> George Paul Meiu, *Ethno-Erotic Economies: Sexuality, Money and Belonging in Kenya* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> For example in Jennifer Cole, and Lynn M. Thomas, eds., *Love in Africa* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009); Rachel Spronk, *Ambiguous Pleasures: Sexuality and Middle Class Self-Perceptions in Nairobi* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012).

histories of pre-independent and early postcolonial globalised music forms (Chapter 5).<sup>11</sup> At the core of each of these stories has been the theme of globalisation. This research therefore belongs to a body of growing global history from an East African perspective. The ‘Another World? East Africa and the Global 1960s’ research team have identified the power of national historiographies in obfuscating the global histories of East Africa.<sup>12</sup> The Tanzanian narrative has been one of nation building and the Zanzibar Revolution; Uganda: kingdoms and military rule; and Kenya: the Mau Mau rebellion, ethnicity, and Kenyatta. The contributions made in this thesis have challenged these paradigms. My work has adopted a global approach through observing the effects of global and deglobal events, practices, and cultures upon the local. I have focussed upon the connections between commodities, practices, consumption, and media to demonstrate how the interactions between national and popular visions for culture interacted with globalisation and fostered popular intellectual connections. These efforts have demonstrated both regional continuity and historicised crucial research in Kenya by situating recent anthropological and sociological work in broader histories. Crucially, these historiographical processes are far from complete. This thesis has made use of a collection of sources that have demonstrated a connected narrative of a city grappling with nationhood and the global. Further sources will no doubt complicate and contribute to this story. Pulp fiction, varieties of popular magazines, and leaflets – sources that eluded my efforts to track down but have been used in a Tanzanian context – would be fascinating additions to these narratives.<sup>13</sup>

When writing about the history of radio in Kenya, Emma Park used the following phrase: “[Radio] could fill the gaps of the state as an “infrastructural prosthetic”, to prop up an

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<sup>11</sup> Paul Khalil Saucier, “Continental drift: the politics and poetics of African hip hop,” in *Sounds and the City: Popular Music, Place and Globalization*, eds. B. Lashua, K. Spracklen, and S. Wagg (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 196-208.

<sup>12</sup> Ismay Milford, Gerard McCann, Emma Hunter, and Daniel Branch, “Another World? East Africa, Decolonisation, and the Global History of the Mid-Twentieth Century,” *The Journal of African History* 62, no. 3 (2021): 394-99, doi:10.1017/S0021853721000566.

<sup>13</sup> Callaci, *Street Archives*.

“ideologically dense but infrastructurally thin developmentalist state”<sup>14</sup> The words “ideologically dense but infrastructurally thin” are extremely insightful when approaching the early postcolonial period in Kenya; not just in the context of the history of radio but across Kenya’s history. Thus, the ways that nation building was communicated, that *Harambee* culture was constructed, was part of a dialogue of performance through an “infrastructurally thin” *Harambee* nation. I have demonstrated this throughout the thesis, from the inherited issues of colonialism in Chapter 1, to the “drop in the ocean” employment projects in Chapters 2 and 3. Consequentially, looking to the informal means of creating the nation has been fundamental to this research. My contribution has demonstrated the ways that the informal, the sidenotes, the failed efforts, and the margins are as important to interrogate as the empirical. These efforts have been informed by a range of historical research, particularly aligning with Karin Barber’s recommendations, embracing John Lonsdale’s concept of ‘agency in tight corners,’ and addressing the archival silences and omissions that Luise White has identified as presenting significant opportunities.<sup>15</sup> My contribution, which has emphasised the tensions between state executed national projects and popular expectations, connects to the well-researched rural challenges to state developmental policies.<sup>16</sup> This work therefore suggests that disputes around national projects were contested across the nation, and pivots our understanding to include the urban within these dialogues.

Since starting this research project into the intersection of global, popular, and national culture, something very intriguing has occurred on Kenya’s political stage. The election of William Ruto as president of Kenya in September 2022 is a fascinating moment for Kenya’s political

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<sup>14</sup> Emma Park, “Infrastructural Attachments: Technologies, Mobility, and the Tensions of Home in Colonial and Postcolonial Kenya”, PhD Thesis, University of Michigan, 2017, 169.

<sup>15</sup> Karin Barber, “Popular Arts in Africa,” *African Studies Review* 30, no. 3 (1987): 1-78.; Karin Barber, *A History of African Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); John Lonsdale, “Agency in Tight Corners: Narrative and Initiative in African History,” *Journal of African cultural studies* 13, no. 1 (2000): 5-16, <https://doi.org/10.1080/713674303>; Luise White, “Hodgepodge Historiography: Documents, Itineraries, and the Absence of Archives,” *History in Africa* 42 (2015): 309-318.

<sup>16</sup> Kara Moskowitz, *Seeing Like a Citizen: Decolonization, Development, and the Making of Kenya, 1945-1980* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2019); Kara Moskowitz, “‘Are You Planting Trees or Are You Planting People?’ Squatter Resistance and International Development in the Making of a Kenyan Postcolonial Political Order (c. 1963–78),” *The Journal of African History* 56, no. 1 (March 2015): 99–118.

history. A key part of his appeal during the election was his rejection of Kenya's political dynasties – he is not a Kenyatta, an Odinga, or an Ngala. He has self-consciously distanced himself from the status quo. Despite having had a political career since the 90s, his appeal to the “ordinary” people of the nation, starting his speeches with ‘my friend’ and coining the term ‘hustler nation,’ made for a fresh and attractive candidate.<sup>17</sup> Popular images of hustle, hard work, and inclusivity, have now found fertile ground on a national political stage. Understanding the historical context of these visions, the origins of the ‘hustler nation’, has great value. My contribution to Nairobi's history provides context for how these imaginaries coalesced during the early independent years. During Chapter 2, I analysed the interview responses of landless and poor individuals living on the outskirts of Nairobi. Ruto's desire to “[build] back better from the bottom upward,” to “[include] the marginalized, working majority in the economic mainstream”, connects closely to the interviewees' experiences, who, despite working hard and engaging with the postcolonial state, were excluded from opportunities for employment.<sup>18</sup> Time will tell if this rhetoric is a flash-in-the-pan success, or whether popular manifestations of culture and identity, forged on the streets of Nairobi, will grow in importance on the national stage.

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<sup>17</sup> Declan Walsh, “William Ruto, the self-proclaimed champion of Kenya's ‘hustler nation’,” *New York Times*, August 9, 2022, accessed February 18, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/09/world/africa/kenya-elections-william-ruto.html>; Evelynne Musambi, “William Ruto's rise from chicken seller to Kenya's president,” *BBC News*, September 21, 2022, accessed February 18, 2023. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-24017899>.

<sup>18</sup> William Ruto, “[Speech] Ruto urges world to focus on ‘building back better from bottom up’,” *NTV Kenya*, September 21, 2022, accessed February 18, 2023. <https://ntvkenya.co.ke/news/speech-ruto-urges-world-to-focus-on-building-back-better-from-bottom-up/>.

## Abbreviations

ABS	Africa Broadcasting Service
FKE	Federation of Kenyan Employers
GSU	General Service Unit
HMSO	Her Majesty's Stationery Office
Kadu	Kenya African Democratic Union
Kanu	Kenya African National Union
KAU	Kenya African Union
KBC	Kenya Broadcasting Corporation
KBS	Kenya Broadcasting Service
KCA	Kikuyu Central Association
KFL	Kenyan Federation of Labour
KPU	Kenya People's Union
KTDC	Kenya Tourist Development Corporation
NARC	National Rainbow Coalition
NMK	National Museums of Kenya
NYS	National Youth Service
Tanu	Tanzania African National Union
UKNA	British National Archives
VoK	Voice of Kenya

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*The British Library. London, United Kingdom.*

Beyond using published books, I made use of the library's rich microfilm collections of Kenyan newspapers and periodicals, including the *Daily Nation*, and the *East African Standard*.

*The British National Archives (UKNA). Kew, London, United Kingdom.*

The following files were consulted:

CO 822	Colonial Office: East Africa: Original Correspondence (1927-1964)
CO 822/588	African urban housing in Kenya (1953)
CO 822/303	Loan requirements of the Nairobi City Council, Kenya (1951-1954)
CO 822/1792	Riots in Nairobi (1959)
CO 822/2873	Strike of Nairobi City Council employees (1962)
CO 822/2544	Eviction of African tenants by Nairobi City Council (1960)
CO 822/796	Emergency in Kenya: Operation ANVIL and resulting conditions in Nairobi (1954-1955)
CO 822/1804	Increase of crime in Nairobi and security in towns in Kenya (1957-1958)
CO 822/1148	Working Party on certain aspects of African affairs in Nairobi (1955)
CO 822/491	Memorandum from the Electors; Union, Nairobi, called "The Rise of Mau Mau; European Warnings" (1953)
INF 10	British Empire Collection of Photographs
UKNA INF 10/156	Kenya: 220 photographs compiled by the Central Office of Information depicting occupations and services. Photographs are described at item level (1942-1963)

*University of Edinburgh Library, Centre for Research Collections. Edinburgh, United Kingdom.*

Beyond using its rich secondary literature, I used the Centre of African Studies (CAS) Collection.

C.A.S. Ken                      Centre of African Studies, Kenya

*Gale Archives of Sexuality and Gender. Online.*

Consulted the archive's selection of American gay literature, including *Ciao!*, *Queens Quarterly*, and *Moja: Gay & Black*.

*Kenya National Archives (KNA). Nairobi.*

The following files were consulted:

AG AG/16/391	Attorney General Police prostitutes traffic between Seychelles and East Africa 1907-1915
AP/1 AP/1/400	Judiciary Deposit One Prostitutes in Nairobi - Removal of undesirable Nandi and Lumbwa women 1907
DC/KMG/2 DC/KMG/2/1/133	District Commissioner Kakamega Deposit Two Brothels and Prostitutes 1945-1964
PC/COAST PC/COAST/1/3/117	Provincial Commissioner, Coast Complaints by the Provincial Commissioner because of prostitutes 1918
AB/1 AB/1/73 AB/1/78 AB/1/82 AB/1/89	Community Development Department Deposit One Advancement of African women 1950-1960 Youth division YWCA 1953-1956 Music and Drama 1958 Nairobi area Rehabilitation 1950-1960
BY BY/11/15 BY/11/57	Medical Vagrancy Ordinance 1959-1960 Methylated Spirit by Natives (drinking of) 1944-1970
VQ VQ/1/40	Provincial Commissioner Central Province. Control of Entry of Native girls into towns 1939
AM/1/1/13 CQ/10/5	Prostitution and Brothels - 1951 Prostitution and Brothels - 1958-1970

*McMillan Memorial Library. Nairobi, Kenya.*

Consulted the library's selection of Kenyan periodicals and newspapers, including *Daily Nation* and *The Standard*, as well as a wealth of published literature.

*National Library of Scotland (NLS). Edinburgh, United Kingdom.*

*School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). London, United Kingdom*

The following files were consulted:

PP MS 46/04	Papers of Rev Andrew Hake, Urban life
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- 01: Housing  
PP MS 46/04/01/02                      Reports and notes concerning the Vasey report on African housing with related correspondence. (1950)
- 02: Nairobi  
PP MS 46/04/02/37                      Study of Problems faced by Nairobi Youths. (c.1970)

*University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries, Online.*

Harrison Forman Collection

- Harrison Forman, "Kenya, street scene in front of New Stanley Hotel in Nairobi", ca.1960, 35mm slide, (33c2, 85-1-9), Harrison Forman Collection, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries.
- Harrison Forman, "Kenya, street scene in front of New Stanley Hotel in Nairobi", ca.1960, 35mm slide, (33c2, 85-6-6), Harrison Forman Collection, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries.
- Harrison Forman, "Kenya, street scene in front of Castle Hotel in Mombasa", ca.1960, 35mm slide, (33c2, 84-2-10), Harrison Forman Collection, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries.

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