

## Preface

There is a poem titled, 'On the Pulse of the Morning' that Maya Angelou wrote and performed at Bill Clinton's first inauguration ceremony in 1993. While the contents of that poem are irrelevant here, that title kept coming back to me as I read this collection of essays. Then it hit me. Is Dagoretti the beating pulse of Nairobi? Is Dagoretti the unpretentious, unassuming but prodigious Nairobi baby? Like a healthy child, Nairobi has grown. Thus, this collection of essays is an ode to the spatial, socioeconomic, and political landscapes of one of its most important cultural hubs-Dagoretti.

Secondly, this collection is an example of how to read the world from Africa. We could theorize and bemoan decolonizing the scholar's mind, but a practical demonstration of this ideal is streets ahead. Further, while respecting the 'outsider perspective' that positions and privileges academics from other cultures as experts of humanities from the South, this journal introduces the 'insider perspective'. It presents the South as seen, interpreted, appreciated, and communicated by researchers steeped in the same cultural context, who turn an inward glance to enunciate the heart of their communities. This is a contribution to the ongoing *africanisation* of the discipline of African Studies that has historically been anchored in the academies of the North.

Therefore, these articles present research carried out by local researchers who belong to the lived experience they write about. Further, the investigative framework, theoretical assumptions and publication criterion are what one would call the 'insider perspective'. The researchers present their own social and cultural reality, complete with their blind spots, even as they position themselves as the intellectual interpreters of their selfhood, lived realities, histories, and aspirations. They perform for the local as well as the global academy and general readership.

It begins with Lydia Muthuma's piercing contextualization of Dagoretti. It is a mirror reflecting the serious land conflicts that plague Nairobi and its children. These conflicts have left in their wake displaced and dispossessed residents. Thus, her essay, though contextualized in Dagoretti can be used to study and understand land conflicts in Kenya. She uses public artefacts in the district like roads and their names, mausoleums, schools, and satellite townships, to demonstrate the impact of land tenure on social cohesion. Further, she historicizes the today's struggles by tracing the current land conflicts in Dagoretti to the traditional *mbari* land system and colonial segregation policies that disrupted the existing systems with forced urbanisation. The 2017 ethnic battle on Macharia Road is also described.

Fredrick Mbogo then asks, 'What happens when a space is at once seemingly ancestral yet has ties to a brash city like Nairobi?' Isn't that the question in our minds 60 years after independence? He furnishes an answer by comparing the signage of business premises in Dagoretti with those in Nairobi West (an adjacent district within the same city). The essay then develops into an investigation of cosmopolitanism and

gentrification of Dagoretti. Gentrification is an issue that scholars are grappling with in other parts of the world.

The essay reads like Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* in which the characters struggle with an identity crisis. Dr Mbogo argues that Dagoretti struggles with identity issues as some historical factors make it neither a city nor a rural outfield or an in-between. The essay suggests Dagoretti forces you to ask, 'Who am I?'. Lastly the essay argues that Dagoretti is forced to perform its identity to navigate this straddled phenomenon.

Land ownership is Raquel Jerobon's concern, the transition from squatter-status to legal landholders reflects the stability and permanence of belonging to Dagoretti. The essay teases out the struggle for space in Nairobi's growing urban landscape. Dagoretti, originally a rural home to some is now part of the city and land values continue to increase; there's increasing pressure to sell land for urban development. The essay asks, 'What happens to ancestral claims on this land with family gravesites? Graves exist as sites of hope and resilience. Makes one think of the biblical ancestor, Joseph, who instructs his children to carry up his bones with them to the promised land. His progenitors then carry his bones throughout their journey from Genesis to Joshua, where they bury his bones in a piece of land they purchase. Indeed, graves ensure that descendants have the same connection to their land and culture and maintain the same values. Graves are important cultural markers for memory and continuity. However, the essay observes that graves have had to be exhumed and bodies moved to pave the way for development, in Dagoretti. The question of how to maintain tradition in the face of these changes will haunt the reader.

Lorna Mungai, on the other hand, points to the possible fossilization of tacit cultural knowledge. She queries the method and means used to document diverse cultural heritage. The making of postcards is offered as a documenting tool that can help capture cultural dynamism. However, the author advises that by embracing the richness of oral traditions, environmental cues, and material culture, researchers can engage in a more inclusive exploration of community dynamics while fostering mutual learning and appreciation of tacit knowledge.

Another variant of capturing this dynamism is Gitau Muthuma's fictional piece depicting the life and struggles of a typical Dagoretti resident. This fictional piece will remind the reader about the spiritual and moral sacrifices Nairobi residents make to survive.

Music is yet another entrée into Dagoretti; Asajile Mwakalinga demonstrates its transformative power using the *Nyimbo cia Mau Mau* album. He avers that music empowers and fosters collective memory within certain families in this locale. His essay makes valid claims by first taking us on a revolutionary music journey. When I read about Nina Simone's *Mississippi Goddam* in the essay- I saw in my mind's eye- Miss Nina, sitting by the piano, hitting the keys while violently singing, 'Alabama's got me so upset/Tennessee made me lose my rest/And everybody

knows about Mississippi Goddam!”). Nina had written this song as a response to the news of the death of four young black girls in a church bombing. Thus, this essay is a heart-stirring tapestry of protest and revolutionary music. The author explores the role of music in the Mau Mau uprising and paints it as a form of resistance, resilience, and cultural expression. The *Nyimbo cia Mau Mau* album described in the essay points to the struggles and triumphs of the Mau Mau fighters. The album’s content cover takes its listener on a journey of resistance, solidarity, sacrifice, and hope. Additionally, the album’s enduring legacy includes Kwame Rĩgĩ’s modern reinterpretation of one song in the album, “Mwene Nyaga”. The essay suggests that by preserving and re-imagining the themes of Mau Mau songs, contemporary artists ensure that the original revolutionary spirit remains alive and relevant .

Joyce Omwoha looks at murals as public artworks that reflect and reveal the lived experience of the immediate community. She contextualises her paper to Kawangware Market and its environs. Her article suggests that the murals have provided a platform for artists to comment on social and political issues. The murals of Dagoretti foster community pride, identity, and belonging. The author notes two challenges. The lack of economic impact of murals in Dagoretti. Yet, there is evidence that public art raises the visibility of spaces by turning them into a ‘Mecca’ that people visit. Additionally, there exists the challenge of maintaining and preserving the murals. This is because mural preservation requires technical know-how and has financial implications.

Meanwhile, Joseph Kedogo presents architectural morphologies as reflective of given socio-political, cultural, and economic influences. He starts with Dagoretti in the 1950s, highlighting painful experiences that underpin its architectural expression and human settlement pattern. This paper speaks to the recent flooding season that plagued Nairobi. In some areas, the flooding was partly caused by the consequences of building human development on wetlands. Wetlands offer biodiversity and ecological balance. The wetland issue is affirmed by an elder who offers that, “Nairobi was built on a wetland, the water just wants to go back home”. The elder further derides the current capitalistic architectural developments in the city that have led to the loss of life and wealth. Additionally, there is a question posed by the elder in the paper that reveals an enduring concern. He ponders if the city dwellers will sober up and return to the old architectural planning that considered the safety of animals, human beings, and the environment –safe and sustainable architectural planning.

Grace Gatere redirects interest to copyright law and its application to the visual arts. She illustrates the chasm between visual artists and copyright law. She reveals that the artists she interviewed devalue the importance of copywriting their works as they don’t see financial benefits in doing so. Further, she encourages artists to stay informed about copyright laws, understand their rights, and proactively manage their intellectual property assets. This will protect their creative expressions. The author also warns that the digital revolution and social media have made artistic works more accessible and available, expediting imitators’ works. Lastly, the author advises that

by leveraging copyright protection and strategic approaches to licensing and enforcement, painters can maximise the value of their creations and ensure continued recognition and respect for their artistic contributions.

The series ends with Waithera Kibuchi's reflection on the dimensions of self and how they affect social research. The tenor of the essay speaks to decolonising identity research mythologies. If we are to read the world from Africa, we must question our current research practices and how they affect the quality of research output from the continent. Here, the writer suggests that researchers must courageously improvise identity research methodologies by softening closely held certainties about identities – both their own and those of others. By applying this lens to their work, they can go beyond the surface level and create value for their communities and beyond.

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