Volume 1, Number 1, December 2024

WRITING THE ARTS & HUMANITIES IN AFRICA

The Dagoretti Experience

ISSN xxx

WRITING THE ARTS & HUMANITIES IN AFRICA
The Dagoretti Experience

Volume 1, Number 1, December 2024

Writing the Arts & Humanities in Africa is a publication approved by The Technical University of Kenya (TUK) and Strathmore University (SU). It is run by TUK's Faculty of Social Sciences and Technology (FSST) together with SU's School of Humanities and Social Sciences (SHSS). The journal is hosted on creative commons (open access) with limited publish on demand (POD) hard copies.
The journal examines emerging issues in the arts, humanities and technology, giving voice to research carried out by local and international scholars. Its purpose is to encourage discourse and give visibility to researchers from the region and others who anchor their work on Africa.

Strathmore University Press
Madaraka Estate, Ole Sangale Road
P.O.Box 59857 – 0200
Nairobi, Kenya
Tel: 0703-03400, 0703-034200

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 todays 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-betwixt. 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 Rĩgĩi'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.

Prof. Peter M. Matu
Dean FSST, Technical University of Kenya

Contents

Public Memorials in Dagoretti; the impact of land tenure on social cohesion

Lydia Muthuma
Technical University of Kenya

No land is bereft of art whether the latter is fashioned consciously or unconsciously. Dagoretti is no exception. This article picks out land markers, wrought by collective experience and therefore considered public artefacts. Furthermore, the artefacts indicate the impact of land tenure on social cohesion within the same district.
Initially, Dagoretti was characterised by the mbari land tenure system with trustees (aramati) holding land for their families. Tenants (athami or ahoi) had limited cultivation and building rights. But colonial interventions and urbanisation disrupted this system, leading to tensions and struggles over land ownership. Road names, mausoleums, schools and satellite townships memorialise significant episodes, even as they indicate compact (or otherwise) social cohesion.
Specific historical events, such as the exile of Waiyaki wa Hinga, followed by the rise of Kinyanjui wa Gathirimu, not only memorialise but also chronicle the navigation of both chiefs in the changing landscape. The discussion includes the subsequent racial segregation policies of the colonial era and their impact on Dagoretti's socio-economic dynamics. It explores a singular effort to desegregate, by establishing a multi-racial school on the fringes of eastern Dagoretti, amidst officialized apartheid-like segregation.
The infamous 2017 battle for Kawangware, inscribed into the Mau Mau bridge, concludes the paper. Collective lived experience has fashioned land markers and imbued them with specific meaning and value –they await the keen appreciation of informed readers.

A tale of two chiefs

Like a double edged sword, land tenure either knits people into a common union (community) or dismembers them into pieces that cannot cohere. Tenure in Dagoretti has etched landmarks, as public memorials, giving the district its unique identity. As Odote (2013) points out, because land is man's most valuable resource, supporting basic and critical needs of food, shelter and business, its adjudication presents significant uncertainties and paradoxes (cf. Institute of Surveyors of Kenya for more detail).

At the beginning of the 20th century, the banks of the Nairobi River were agricultural rural land operating under the *mbari* land tenure i.e. a cyclical system of land ownership. They included *aramati* and *ahoi.* Kinyanjui wa Gathirimu was a *muhoi* or *muthami* (tenant) and as a tenant he had cultivation and/or building rights only.

Conversely, Waiyaki wa Hinga was a *muramati* (in Gikuyu the term translates to a trustee or titular *githaka* [land] owner). Being a *muramati*, Waiyaki stood to lose land to the incoming Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC) that had encroached by setting up Fort Smith in his neighbourhood. He therefore fell out with these officials and the colonial administration. He was subsequently exiled to the coast but died at Kibwezi (oral narrative has it that Waiyaki was buried alive).

Kinyanjui on the other hand, as a poor *muthami, used* his position (tax collector for the British administration) to acquire *muramati* rights (land owning/property rights). It is difficult to decide whether he succeeded because, in life as in death, Kinyanjui leaned more toward the colonial administration and less to Gikuyu traditional custom. Tellingly, his was a state funeral, organised by local chiefs of his ilk. They chose to memorialise him by building a mausoleum; a structure as foreign today as it was in 1929, for the Gikuyu are not accustomed to constructing mausolea in honour of the dead. Mausolea are seen as foreign, distant and without local meaning or traditional pathos. So in building Kinyanjui a mausoleum, the chiefs highlighted –accidently or by design– his foreign-bestowed social position. These chiefs did not speak to (or for) the local population; they did not memorialise the lived cultural position of a Gikuyu *muramati.* The mausoleum, to date, refuses to be embedded into Gikuyu social cultural dynamics. It memorialises instead, the intrusion of foreign symbols with their attendant meaning. Kinyanjui is not remembered as a benevolent *muramati.*

Meanwhile, Waiyaki's family abides in his lands. Together with other *mbari*s they regained about 1000 acres from the Church of Scotland Mission (CSM) headquartered in Thogoto (Njoroge, L :2022). This followed the London depositions made by the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA) culminating, four decades later, in the Swynnerton Commission. Waiyaki is memorialised in a main road leading out of Nairobi's Central Business District (CBD) due west to Nakuru and farther. His memory is as alive as the thoroughfare is busy.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Dagoretti was sandwiched between the municipality of Nairobi and other lands alienated for European farming (see figure 4). It was like a thin slice, a remainder of the previous African occupation between the white highlands and the European part of the municipality. Godfrey Muriuki (1974) describes it as lying at the southern tip of the Kikuyu plateau and among the last areas to fall under the migratory waves from central Kenya. Dagoretti was however, by 1920s, the most densely populated area in the then Kikuyu Reserve.

Paramount Chief Kinyanjui wa Gathirimu (ca. 1880s -1929) was responsible for the Riruta location in Dagoretti. He sent unwilling labourers to the European farms–there to become landless squatters who years later were repatriated once mechanisation rendered their services superfluous. Kinyanjui had himself started off as a run-away youth with no property (Njoroge, 2022). He collaborated with the colonials in entrenching British rule.

At times Kinyanjui copied the methods of his masters. The Kiambu District Commissioner (D.C.) at one time held an enquiry into certain allegations against him; that he pressganged natives to send them to work in European farms. These allegations were true. Kinyanjui stated that he had endeavoured to supply labour to European settlers whenever he could and that those Kikuyu who refused to go were fined a goat in order to pay for a substitute and in certain cases were flogged for disobedience to Kinyanjui's orders (KNA PC/CP1/4/1, 23).

Much as sending out or conscripting the Dagoretti population to squat on European settler farms was the administration's preference, it interfered with the *mbari* land system. And, change in the underpinning land tenure diluted Dagoretti's social cohesion. It fomented instead, a bitterness about land that developed into a national political uprising. Nyadimo (2006) reflecting on the consequences of land adjudication in Kenya, asserts that the process has been critical in the conversion of land held under customary tenure into individual holdings.

Boundaries and Land Tenure

The concepts of land use and land tenure are significant in urban planning, sustainable development and in addressing socio-economic issues. Available literature on Dagoretti, in this vein, is moderate; A. O. Otieno's (1999) study, discussing Dagoretti's urban planning challenges, is a case

in point. But without explicitly focusing on Dagoretti, other scholars of Nairobi examine the city's neighbourhoods in a bid to understand its complex socio-economic and spatial dynamics.

Beyond the confines of urban planning authors have pegged their studies –in a mediate way– on land use and land tenure; Michael Chege (1981) a political scientist, Dauti Kahura (2017) journalist and Tim Weiss et al. (2024) serve as examples. I join their ranks as an art historian, in looking at Dagoretti as a stage set where different communities perform their collective lives. It was Shakespeare (1913) who declared, 'all the world's a stage and all men and women merely players.' The players bring their values to shape the land accordingly: setting out its boundaries, reserving it for agriculture, crowding it with semi-permanent housing, with markets and manufacturing–they determine the social flavour within its boundaries, driven by the value and meaning they seek to forge in this 'Dagoretti' that is their stage set.

There are different ways of interpreting the relationship between a people and their land, between the players and their stage set. These provide boundaries that can vary; those outlining Dagoretti depend not only on the issue under discussion but also on the point of view taken. It is these multiple ways of 'reading land' that impose varied boundaries. For instance, in considering voting patterns for political office, the constituency boundaries of 'Dagoretti North' and 'Dagoretti South' will be followed (see map appendix 1). But when discussing matters historical, Dagoretti is viewed chronologically: as the southernmost tip of the Agikuyu plateau, then as part of the colonial Kiambu district, and lastly as the western end of the post-colonial city of Nairobi.

There is yet another perspective that can be projected onto Dagoretti, the significant geographical landform–the ridge–that slopes into Nairobi River, whose source is Ondiri Swamp near Kikuyu town. The river flows eastwards into Nairobi's CBD, then on to Dandora where it joins the Mathare River and later, the combined streams become the Athi River, eventually draining into the Indian Ocean. That part of the ridge (*rugongo*) that hosts the first twenty kilometres of Nairobi River constitute Dagoretti. Its man-made boundaries are Waiyaki Way to the north and to its south the Southern Bypass. Eastwards, Dagoretti stretches up to the old municipal boundary of Nairobi. (see figure 1)

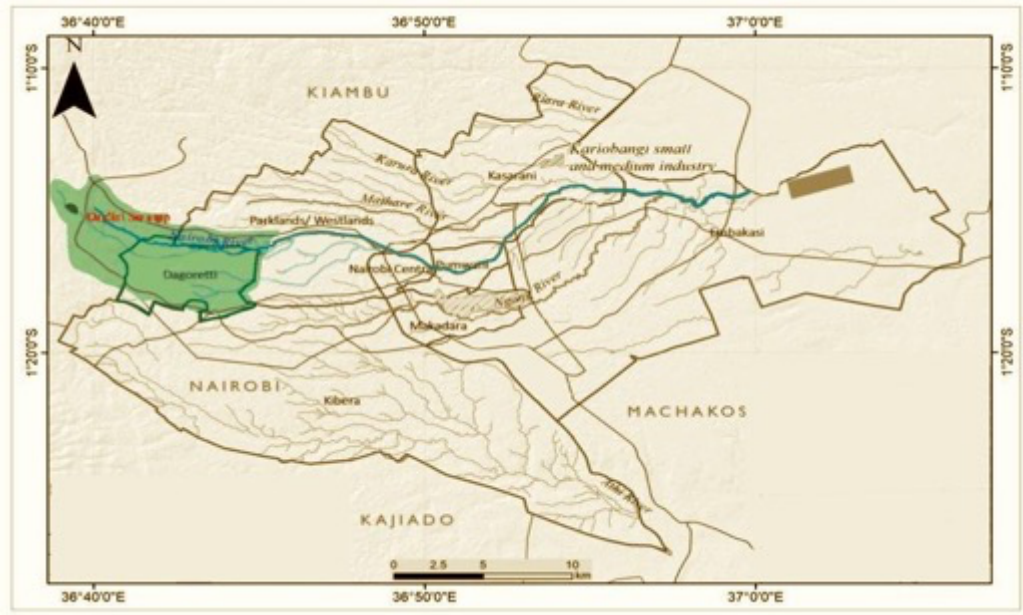


Figure 1.
The highlighted ridge is Dagoretti. Geographically, it runs further eastwards up to Nairobi CBD.
Map source: Osoro, Enock et al. https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Map-of-the-study-area-showing-the-nine-sampling-sites-along-Nairobi-River-basin-ie_fig1_349788145
Nairobi River and area of study have been highlighted by this author.

Nairobi River with its tributary streams is the main natural feature. For an agricultural economy, valleys and their ready water source are seen as advantageous. Not so for an urban economy. The national policy, guided by environmentalists, outlaws building in riparian reserves citing the menace of flooding. Unauthorised urban dwellings, referred to as slums-cum-informal settlements, in the Nairobi metropolitan area, like Mathare and Mukuru on Mathare River and Ngong River consecutively, are unsurprisingly situated on riparian land. Some consider Dagoretti one of the many informal settlements. Nairobi Slum Profiles by Citiesalliance and UN Habitat among others, have studied Dagoretti precisely from this point of view.

In this study I examine the re-arrangement of the land, the *de facto* land use pattern that is closely linked to the underlying land tenure system. I interrogate selected communities that have occupied Dagoretti, their relationship of (un)belonging, their agency or lack of it, all in a bid to

establish the rationale behind the contemporary status quo. The aim is to investigate the shift from agricultural rural land to today's urban formation while weighing in on either ethnic inclusivity or exclusivity, that obtains in tenant/landlord relations; the overriding interest is the delicate tweaking of social cohesion, consequent to the shifting positionality of land tenure whenever it is used as a proactive tool or simply tolerated as a passive effect.

For the sake of brevity and coherence the study concentrates on eastern Dagoretti. Three locations have been picked: Kawangware, Kangemi and Rituta (see figure 3). Again, lived experiences have been selected to punctuate the broad time spectrum: a tale of two chiefs unfolded in the first two decades of the 20th century, the desegregated school was established in 1961 while the Macharia Road epic battle took place in 2017. I look for telltale public landmarks that have encoded these events.

Mbari (Clan) versus individual land rights

According to Gikuyu land tenure, as outlined by Jomo Kenyatta (1938: 22-26) communally owned land or ancestral land–as the collective property of the tribe–did not exist. There was nothing equivalent to no-man's land (*terra nullius*) which perhaps undermines the 1904 and 1920 legislation declaring all of Kenya British crown land. Land in Dagoretti (*ithaka*) was bought before ca. 1860/70s by Gikuyu clans/families (*mbari*) or by individuals who later founded their own families. The previous landowners were the Dorobo.

H. A. Gogarty (1920:26) writes, when the Kikuyu came [into Dagoretti in southern Kiambu] the land was owned by the Wandorobo. The Kikuyu bought the land from them, giving in exchange flocks and herds. Having lived under British occupation in Ireland, Gogarty quips, 'Protectionist European Powers might learn a lesson from this straight, direct dealing'. The Irishman appears to be critiquing the British approach to matters land ownership, in Kenya as well as in Ireland. He is categorical that it was neither forthright nor just.

Gikuyu land tenure reflected the social and cultural set up; it also dictated inheritance law. The head of a family (*muramati*) enjoyed land ownership rights while *athami*, *ahoi* (tenants), enjoyed only cultivation and/or building rights. Waiyaki wa Hinga was a *muramati* in Dagoretti while Kinyanjui wa Gathirimu was a *muthami*; one possessed land ownership

rights while the other, cultivation/building rights –squatter rights as it were.

The *muramati* was the equivalent of a trustee or titular owner who held land on behalf of the *mbari*. The system was cyclical (cf. Kenyatta, 1938 for a more detailed account) designed to support and keep a *mbari* together. Their sustenance depended on land ownership. Changing or tweaking this system meant changing or breaking up social units. The members got dispersed because a vital tool (and/or rich value) used for hewing their commonality was either blunted or attenuated.

Simultaneously, the British introduced statutory land ownership. While it appears similar to the *mbari* system, it rests on ***individual*** land ownership; an idea foreign to Gikuyu customary law that rests on the philosophy of ubuntu (*unduire*). In Gikuyu land law persons are considered primarily as members of a community –their social nature is hierarchised above individual rights. An individual person therefore holds/owns land for the benefit of his/her family (*mbari* or *nyumba*). The highlighting of individual ownership rights over the same individual's responsibility for family, makes all the difference. And it is with significant difficulty and great social instability that ubuntu (*unduire*) dovetails into the concept of individual ownership with its concomitant right to 'use and abuse'. The problem was the importation of legislature cured from a given cultural society (British common law) to a foreign society without considering the latter's mores and customs.

Whereas the customary *mbari* system was not perfect, it sought to guarantee the livelihood of each person –as a member of a family– that enjoyed either *muramati* or *muthami*/*muhoi* rights. The ongoing transition from customary *mbari* law to statutory land ownership –with its emphasis on the individual or nucleur family– allows for some people to fall through the cracks of society, rendering them landless and stripping off the means of supporting a livelihood. (The challenge is not unique to Dagoretti but rather common to many societies transiting from agricultural rural sustenance to urban livelihoods) The introduction of statutory law can fail to capture all the nuanced interpersonal relationships with their attendant rights and responsibilities. It defines, inadequately, the obtaining nature of family relationships. From colonial times to date, families in Dagoretti may appeal to either customary or statutory law; the ensuing confusion allows for myriad abuses and an undermining of social cohesion.

In pre-colonial Dagoretti Gikuyu land ownership (*ithaka cia mbari guuranu*) was in force; its purpose was the continued sustenance of *mbari* (family units) rather than that of individual persons.

A desegregated school

Dagoretti also provided space for initiating desegregation in Kenya, the crown colony. It witnessed public acts that re-focused on equal provision of education to all the races–Europeans, Africans and Asians.
In 1961 a group of professional women from Ireland and Spain wanted to start a finishing-cum secretarial school in Nairobi, as Olga Marlin (2011: 90-93) relates.

> It wasn't easy to meet Africans because in Nairobi [1960] the races were segregated. Buses were divided into two sections (the front for Europeans), and residential areas were also divided according to race. We lived in the European area called Lavington, Asians had their own areas, and Africans lived outside the city in "reserves." [the administration was inordinately interested in reserves –for natives as well as for wild game]
>
> Mrs Jemima Gecaga, the first African woman on the Legislative Council and a relative of Jomo Kenyatta had a strong sense of justice… "you have arrived at a very good time to open a school for girls. Our women need education in order to become self-reliant, respect themselves, and make themselves respected. This can only happen when they are financially independent. Your school should provide them with the necessary skills."
>
> She went ahead to introduce me [Olga Marlin] to Tom Mboya, "Let me introduce this young woman to you. She is an American and has come with several other ladies to start a multi-racial finishing school for girls in Nairobi."
>
> Mr Mboya, "There is need for a school of that kind. I wish you success. When you get started I'll certainly send you some students."

The memoirs of Marlin (2011) pick up the story, Our [multi-racial] school was due to open on January 13, 1961. Seventeen students had been admitted, but they were all Europeans. Only one non-European had applied: a Goan girl. When we went to register the school with the city's

education department, I was told that before a nonwhite could be admitted to a school in our residential area we had to get the written permission of all our neighbors. Tere and I drew up a letter and brought it from house to house—but everyone refused to sign!
It was against everything we stood for. We had to get another place as soon as possible where we could admit girls of all races. Where can that be, with the city segregated?

The answer was Dagoretti. An estate agent, Paddy Roche, provided the solution. Along Sclaters Road [today's Waiyaki Way] onto Churchill Avenue [Karbarsiran Avenue] Marlin continues, a gray stone bungalow built in the colonial style, with low ceilings, small windows set in wooden frames, and a red corrugated iron roof (…) standing on five acres of land [was to be our new school]. From the front veranda we could see on the opposite ridge the African huts, the beginning of the Kangemi Reserve.

Figure 2 (a)
Gray stone bungalow [now painted white] built in the colonial style. It housed Kianda College from 1961

Figure 2 (b)
Kianda School today (2024) on the same compound

Ethnic Strife in Macharia Road

After the land consolidation exercise (1956/57) the Agikuyu landlords in Dagoretti exercised freehold in a manner derived from the English common law. However, these landlords (perhaps unconsciously) harboured—and still harbour—expectations of leaning on advantages that flow from the customary *mbari* land tenure system.

When eastern Dagoretti fell under the administration of Nairobi City (1963), house-renting became booming business. Many people, coming into the city in search of jobs, from the western part of Kenya, sought housing in this district. The occurrence has led to a joke that many a cook and watchman, working in affluent Nairobi homes, are Luhya. They rent houses in Kangemi and in Kawangware.

In this multi-ethnic Kawangware, the 2017 repeat presidential elections, degenerated into a fierce battle on Macharia Road (see figure 3). Because Kawangware landowners (all Kikuyu) claim firmer belonging, they

expected theirs to be the decisive voice in the political fracas. But their tenants (from western Kenya) far outweighing them in number, carried the day. Besides, eastern Dagoretti economy is simply not viable without these tenants. So against the century old expectation–of entrenched landowners deciding on matters social and political–this ethnic battle proved the opposite; the non-landowners, regardless of their transient status, sway political opinion thanks to their superiority in numbers.

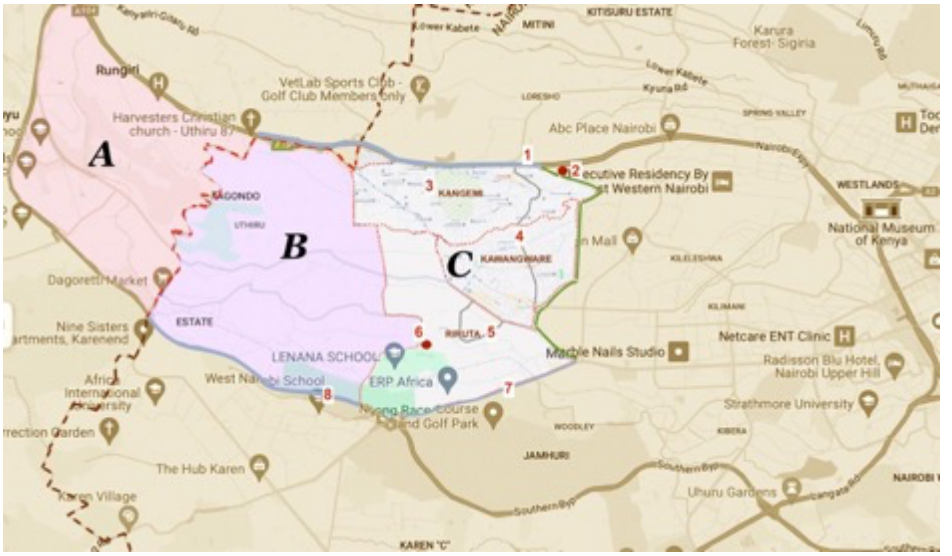


Figure 3
Map of larger Dagoretti according to the main landform, Nairobi River

A: forms part of Dagoretti because Nairobi River begins from this area. However, in the post colonial dispensation the area falls under the jurisdiction of the county of Kiambu.

B: is Western Dagoretti (part of the county of Nairobi). Public memorials studied in this paper are NOT located in this area

C: is Eastern Dagoretti (Kangemi, Kawangware, Riruta) Public memorials in this study are located in these 3 districts

*The green line to the east corresponds to the municipal boundary that obtained from 1929-1963.

Features that memorialise some collective events in eastern Dagoretti

1. Waiyaki Way	5. Kinyanjui Road
2. Kianda School & site of former Japanese consulate	6. P. C. Kinyanjui Technical Training Institute
3. Mountain View Estate	7. Ngong Road
4. Macharia Road	8. Southern Bypass

This is how events unfolded –Kawangware 56 is a hotbed of cross-cultural ethnic politics, writes Dauti Kahura, a journalist with *The Elephant*. It is largely populated by non-Kikuyu communities from the western part of Kenya. In 2017 there was brutal ethnic fighting on Macharia Road. On the night of October 27th Mungiki fought Luhya, Luo and Kisii youth, into the dead of the night. Kahura's source claimed that 'whoever controls the bridge [the Mau Mau bridge, on Macharia Road, connecting Kawangware 56 to Kangemi] carries the day.' The fight left many dead, among them policemen.

Blame was laid at the door of politicians, 'all that violence could not have taken place without the unseen hands of the politicians. Arati, an ethnic Kisii, is distrusted by the Kikuyu landlords and business class who accuse him of fomenting trouble, in the ultimate hope of ejecting Kikuyus from Kawangware 56. Belonging to the land –the stage set– is at the bottom of the distrust that leads to fighting.

Arati and other politicians are accused by Kawangware landlords [Kikuyus] of 'telling people [from western Kenya] they cannot remain tenants forever. They must secure their space. Already we [the Kikuyu] have been outnumbered by these foreigners. That is why they are able to elect one of their own in our homeland. Today's Kawangware is totally different from the Kawangware of two decades ago [i.e. 1990s].'

Could the landlord above, be referring to the sense of belonging? Who belonged to Dagoretti (Kawangware) in the last decades of the 20th century? And, why and when did these performers exit the stage?

Whether the current status quo contributes to sustainable social cohesion is yet to be determined. The underpinning principle appears to be 'might

is right'; superiority in numbers grants authority to rule despite the temporary tenancy position.

Figure 4
A 1961 map of Nairobi Extra Provincial District (red boundary) surrounded by several native reserves.
Dagoretti lies at the southernmost tip of the Agikuyu plateau. It appears tucked in between land designated for European use. (consider the brown blocks to its north and south
Map source: KNA

Conclusion

The exploration of Dagoretti's landscape, through its history and changing social dynamics reveals a profound interplay between land tenure systems and collective experiences. These have shaped the district's identity and social cohesion. The traditional *mbari* land system, colonial racial interventions and urbanisation have each inscribed landmarks that serve to memorialise past performances while giving character to the district.

The narratives of Waiyaki wa Hinga and Kinyanjui wa Gathirimu, illustrate a complex (mis)use of land ownership rights and its impact on social structures. Colonial disruptions, racial segregation policies, and subsequent struggles for land ownership underscore this intricate relationship.

The establishment of a multi-racial school in the context of empire-wide segregation added nuance to the character of Dagoretti. In the 21st century however, the district is experiencing not racial segregation but ethnic tensions, perhaps because the land tenure mismatches contemporary concerns.

Challenges such as the 2017 ethnic battle on Macharia Road have laid bare the unresolved tensions and power dynamics between landlords and tenants. It is this affect that is landmarked into Macharia Road, making the road and its bridge much more than a mere connector of Kawangware to Kangemi; it is a public artefact imbued with effect and meaning, a barometer of Dagoretti's social cohesion.

In this context, the critique points to multiple interpretations of landmarks including as memorial tropes, as sites for questioning past and present struggles or as lenses for casting a discerning gaze into the social structure/s that is Dagoretti. This may inform future thought and action.

References

Chege, M. (1981). A tale of two slums: electoral politics in Mathare and Dagoretti. *Review of African Political Economy*, *8*(20), 74-88.

Gogarty, H. A. (1920). *In the land of the Kikuyus, by Rev. HA Gogarty*. MH Gill and son.

Kenya National Archives KNA PC/CP1/4/1,23

Kenyatta, J. (2015). *Facing Mount Kenya: the traditional life of the Gikuyu*. East African Educational Publishers.

Kungu, J. N., & Gichobi, B. K. C. N. (2022). The Swynerton Plan And Political Economy Of Land In Kenya: A Historical Perspective.

Marlin, O. (2011). *To Africa with a dream*. Boissevain Books.

Muriuki, G., & Berg, F. J. (1974). *A History of the Kikuyu 1500–1900*. University of Nairobi.

Njoroge, L. (2022). Beyond Century of Endeavour-A History of the Catholic Church in Kenya.

Otieno, A. O. (1999). *The Satellite-Kawangware area An urban design intervention* (Doctoral dissertation, University Of Nairobi).

Slum Profiles, Dagoretti
http://www.old.citiesalliance.org/sites/citiesalliance.org/files/CA_Docs/resources/Nairobi%20In
ventory/SlumProfiles5_DagorettiDivision.pdf
Shakespeare, W. (1913). *Shakespeare's As you like it*. Macmillan.

Appendix 1
Constituencies in Nairobi
Kangemi is part of the Westlands constituency in this political map

Lydia Waithira Muthuma, PhD is a senior lecturer in Visual Arts at the Technical University of Kenya and a member of the Executive Committee of the International Association for Aesthetics (IAA). She has published several papers and book chapters about the History of Art in East Africa, among them *Architectural Conservation in Nairobi: the Don Bosco Shrine* (2024) in The Routledge companion to the philosophy of architectural reconstruction. Dr. Muthuma's current research interests include the re-articulation of African Studies in the 21st century. Beyond the lecture hall, she contributes to UNESCO as a member of the Executive Committee for Memory of the World, Africa Region (ARCMoW) and also as a member of UNESCO'S international body, the Register Sub Committee (RSC).

Cosmopolitanisms: Premise naming in Dagoretti and Nairobi West as a site for exercising Identity

Fredrick Mbogo
Technical University of Kenya

What happens when a space is at once seemingly ancestral but with ties to a brash city like Nairobi? How does its residences define themselves? What can populate some of its signage for business premises? This paper is interested in comparing the naming of business premises in Dagoretti, in an area known as Kawangware Market, and what obtains in Nairobi West's market area off Lang'ata road. The paper is interested in how names point to different kinds of cosmopolitanism, as well as the problematic idea of gentrification. In what ways has the kind of gentrification in Dagoretti as opposed to Nairobi West's suggest a marriage of ethnicities, where no one is unafraid of performing their own identity? What can this imply?

Did they ever have a name for Dagoretti?

Bruce Berman and John Londsdale have a glossary in their book titled *Unhappy Valley: Violence and Ethnicity* that declares that "Gikuyu and Muumbi" is "The Kikuyu 'Adam' and 'Eve.'" I find this problematic on many fronts: Firstly, that glossary entry suggests that the Kikuyu could not simply be understood in their own terms, and within their own myths of origin, without reference to foreign ideas, mostly as introduced via Christian missionaries on the origin of man. And, secondly, obviously from the implied idea that Adam and Eve are universal–that everyone has heard this story–and that whoever has not heard of it then becomes the "other", possibly one who has not benefited from the "civilizing mission", so often cited in the justification of colonialism.

The glossary entry above brings to the fore problems of "originality." It questions ideas about whether the Kikuyu actually remember anything of their own; for if Gikuyu and Muumbi is indeed a version of "our" "Adam and Eve", then what has the Kikuyu person, or African person for that matter, ever named for themselves without reference to the colonizers' terminologies or mythologies. This is a good place then to start on the idea of "Dagoretti". Historians fumble about for meanings of the word

"Dagoretti", some say that it is a corruption of "The Great Corner"[1], an English reference to the area in which a fort was to be built, others say that it is a corruption of "Endia kurret" a Maa phrase that is in reference to "Place of a coward dog," because apparently there was a white man in the area who had a big dog that only barked but was no action[2]. With these ideas of "Dagoretti", the word, seems to be a suggestion that either the place had no name, or that the area's former name was simply ignored for a new one that exists only in reference to activities coming out of interaction with whiteness or the coloniser. Still, there is an argument that the Dagoretti area, first occupied by the Ndorobo, was either uninhabited or was occupied on a seasonal nomadic basis, and so, many people who came to the land would be referred to as "someone who has not bought it" which in Kikuyu should read "Ndagurite", and so very close to "Dagoretti" in pronunciation.[3]

Dagoretti is in Nairobi, yet unlike Lang'ata or Makadara, or any other location within the city, it carriesa with it a rural feeling. Apparently, there are ancestral lands in the area[4]. Dagoretti appears to have become part of Nairobi only after some time, rather than organically like Makadara or Lang'ata[5]. In a sense, Dagoretti's uniqueness is in its occupation of an in-betwixt space psychologically, as a still-ancestral space, and also as part of the hustle and bustle that is Kenya's thrifty capital. How can one living within Dagoretti reconcile its neither-nor-and sometimes-is status? Its history is replete with figures such as Waiyaki wa Hinga, who some historians say is of mixed Maasai and Kikuyu ethnic heritage.[6] This furthers the problems of Dagoretti, for it defies any one known "tribe" as its owner in the sense of "ancestral" land. Yet, one must consider the question of what "tribe" means if one is to deal with the apparent mixed-heritage status of one of Dagoretti's greater personalities. In the estimation of Mbugua wa Mungai;

---

[1]From conversations in Dagoretti in our 2023 research in Dagoretti around the Kawangware Market area as well as in discussion groups with "Writing the Arts" etc

[2] Ibid, and also as gleaned from social media conversations, on Facebook, under "Muthui Mkenya", 2018

[3] This is from a conversation with Lydia Muthuma an art historian interested in the evolution of Nairobi.

[4] Ibid (from Writing the Arts group)

[5] ibid

[6] From conversations held with Dr. Lydia Muthuma, an art historian, with interests in research in the Dagoretti area.

> The word 'tribe'–to refer to a group of families related to each other by blood and common ancestry–is inappropriate as a description of the ethnic entities in Kenya. The reality is that people who speak the same language or dialect of it are not necessarily related. Formulated within colonial experience, tribe is an administrative term devised for purposes of policing rather than sociological formulations, a situation that was reinforced by colonial anthropology.[7]

This then throws us into even more confusion, or a somewhat difficult clarification; that before the coming of the colonizer, it was possible that Chief Waiyaki wa Hinga was simply a man who thrived without the cares of answering either to his Kikuyu or Maasai ancestry. Indeed, even in his battles against colonialism, he was driven more by being against the colonizer than by his ethnic –Kikuyu nor Maasai– affiliation. He simply fought an outsider based on his skin colour. In later years, after Kenya had become a colony, Dagoretti turned into a settlement for a displaced group of people during the Mau Mau period. The trend continued after the country's independence, so that specific spaces in the area are occupied by people from other "ancestral" reserves. The Kikuyu refer to them as "andu a guuka" (people who came). The ethnic composition in places such as Dagoretti corner, Kawangware, Riruta Satellite, Uthiru, Mutuini, Waithaka is diverse. Housing in Dagoretti suggests the various classes that occupy its different areas. There are exclusive locales around Kianda School, for example. Golf courses, in many ways, announce opulence on the one hand, while, on the other, semi-permanent dwellings in places like Kawangware point to aspects of the lower middle class and poverty. This current situation lends Dagoretti a certain sense of cosmopolitanism in terms of class and financial status.

This sense of cosmopolitanism as practiced in Dagoretti differs from the way it is practiced elsewhere in Nairobi. This paper observes that in Dagoretti, especially as pronounced in the market areas of Kawangware (or the specific Ndunyu market) shops or business premises names tend to:

a) Names like "Mkamba Butchery", "Tharaka Cereals", "Subukia Cereals", "Kiambu stores", "Narok Cereals" among others;

[7] Mbugua wa Mungai, (2010) "Iconic Representations of Identities in Kenyan Cultures" IN Mungai, M and Gona, G., *Re-Membering Kenya Vol. 1: Identity, Culture and Freedom.* Nairobi: Twaweza Communications

clearly announce the parts of the country the proprietors hail from, or their ethnicity.

b) Names like “Upendo Clinic”, “Baraka shop” or “Israel Cereals” announce the religious affiliation of their owners. They propose a certain sense of godliness, mostly bent towards Christianity – even though Dagoretti also has a significant Muslim population complete with its own specific residential area simply called Muslim.

c) Few others like entertainment spots, such as a video shop named“ Highbury Parlour”, after the Arsenal Highbury stadium recall major brand names, or the supermarket called “Wallmart” after the famous American “Wallmart” supermarket franchise –these point to aspirations that are foreign, and that belong to known brands.

This approach to naming business premises works within a need to appeal to the idea of belonging. In the first case, there is a strong sense of recall of the business owner’s, “place of origin”. It plies within the realm of nostalgia, a remembering of “where one comes from”, and sends signals that the individual is not culturally uprooted, and is aware of his origins – "home”, which is not here! It also hails those from the owner’s place of origin to the business. They can congregate at his/her shop to affirm their common identity and to deal with the logistics of communicating with those at “home”, in their said ancestral space–for example in Narok, or Tharaka or Subukia. In the face of threats such as the enforcement of City Council regulations, and its sometimes infamous askaris, or the ever-present problem of capital, security, as well as fears of being duped or threatened by landlords, these name identities create branding that grounds a business. It gives a sense of permanency, not as a mere make-shift outfit, but as a trustworthy entity that can be engaged with.

How do names carry meaning? Can they protect, summon, serve as charms of good luck? Can they transport one over the ocean to the lands of Coca-Cola and soccer? Or maybe empower and provide a needed shelter in the guise of one's hometown?

Walking through the *vichochoro* (alleyways) of the Kawangware Market, *duka* (shop) names can inscribe countless meanings. Some shops carry the names of places in Kenya, such as Subukia, Kitui, Nyahururu. Some shop owners have included words with religious connotations like Tumaini (hope), Salama (peace), Pendo (love). In a place familiar with 'football', a shop name spotlights "soccer" in capital white letters on the backdrop of a landscape boasting words like "Wallmart Centre" and "Young Brothers Movies and Soccer Arena", pointing towards a vocabulary borrowed from the movie screen.

These names, when combined, give rise to forms that go beyond mere business– weaving together meanings, aspirations, complex histories, and connections into built environments. "Graceland Textiles Centre", operated by A. derives its name from the sense of grace she attributes to the divine providence that enabled her to establish the business. This naming decision is intricately connected to religious aspirations, where the proprietor openly acknowledges the grace bestowed upon her by a higher power. A's choice is also influenced by her son being a pastor, emphasizing the spiritual significance of the enterprise, creating a narrative that enriches the essence of Graceland Textiles Centre.

We would like to extend our deepest gratitude to our community collaborators Joseph and Antoni

By acknowledging religion through naming, business owners seem to be at once evangelizing, or as charismatic Christians might say, playing witness to the power of divine intervention or blessing. The use of names with religious connotations in business also shows a sense of belonging while suggesting that unlike others that are not "God-fearing", this business is clean, and does not countenance corruption, selling of inferior products, overpricing–or many of the vices associated with similar businesses. Values such as "Grace" or "Upendo" (love), are employed to show affiliation to religious causes or persuasions. Some like "Israel", or "Canaan", are employed in reference to lands mentioned in religious texts such as the Bible.

Adopting names that are linked to brands known all over the world helps businesses attract customers. Customers are hardly concerned with the goods-value of the associated brands; in fact what they celebrate is the idea that "we can have our own Wallmart." In her unpublished PhD dissertation, Njeri Gatere, of the Technical University of Kenya, focuses on iconography related to trademark and copyright, it has been observed that sometimes business people celebrate the "fake" in circumstances that mirror the humoring of production at whatever level. The fake, rather than the real, sometimes profits the businessmen. In that light then, business premises in Dagoretti might be creating conversations about product and production in general – but they also suggest that they are "with it" and are "trendy" and that they have caught up with the world, possibly with a need to catch the eye of the youth! These ideas of the fake verses the real, have been well captured in Umberto Eco's *Travels in Hyperreality*, where arguments are made about whether the real is better than the fake, or whether people merely want to make do, and are happy to imitate the real. In the film *House of Gucci*, conversations about fake Gucci bags, give an interesting idea about brands cashing in on fakes, or even have a cunning rapprochement with their fake counterparts. In the case of Dagoretti, names such as Wallmart come with ideas of 'grand' places like America, or England where the association is evoked by the name Highbury (after Arsenal Football Club's stadium). These are the envy of young people who hope one day to "vuka border" (cross borders), as has been immortalized in the song *Natoka Mbali* by Jaguar, who epitomizes, in the persona of the song, the aspiration of many young Kenyans to go abroad where the standard of life is perceived to be better. But these references to international brands, even where fake, give a promise that even if the youth

cannot access the real Wallmarts, or Highburys, they can have versions of them in Dagoretti.

When one compares Dagoretti's naming approach, especially at the Kawangware Market, with what is available at Nairobi West, one can clearly see a difference. Where Dagoretti's business premises have tended to stake a claim to places where their proprietors hail from or point towards religious affiliation, at the Nairobi West market area, the names are completely different. First, the businesses around the fish area, for example, go by the single first names of the business owners, which more often than not are Christian or European (Maureen, Sarah, Deborah are some of them). At other times, the business premises go with names like "Morlins", or Jates, or even Kenya Meat Processors – these are names devoid of reference to ethnicity – they appear city friendly.

Perhaps, the differences lie in the histories of both places. Dagoretti has spaces whose identity points to ancestral ownership and a number of communities settled there. Nairobi West seems to be more urban in the sense that land is not ancestral, and that the residents are constantly changing. Nairobi West borders Madaraka Estate, a government established estate that has housed government workers for many years. It also borders universities such as Strathmore, Riara, AMREF, among other institutions of learning. It therefore has a youthful character with no hang-ups about ethnicity. This means that unlike Dagoretti, Nairobi West might not experience the urge to perform identity that suggests particulars in terms of ethnicity.

A more nuanced reading of Nairobi West can be arrived at with the thought of history at play. In the colonial period, Nairobi residential areas were divided along racial lines, and Nairobi West, in particular, was part of what were referred to as Asian quarters. Africans only come into Nairobi West after independence. Even then, such Africans could only do so after realistically meeting certain financial conditions. Nairobi West's proximity to the capital city's Central Business District gives it a certain advantage that necessarily makes its rents comparatively higher. But it also means that the Africans that were coming into Nairobi West after 1963 had to bear particular social factors in mind. For example, Madaraka Estate which is in the immediate neighborhood of Nairobi West, and which came into existence in the early 1970s, had houses that could accommodate only so many people. In an ancestral space, as can be argued about what

happens in some of the Dagoretti lands, one can live with the extended family within huge compounds, but in the newly built houses of Madaraka Estate (as established in 1973), there was space for the nuclear family only.

The gentrification of Nairobi West then is more in terms of breaking the definition of Asian quarters, or its demarcation, and letting in Africans in greater numbers so that certain aspects such as architecture, school and shopping amenities, change or are developed in greater numbers. This definitely changes the character of Nairobi West, yet because the ownership of many of the residential houses has taken time to change, there is still a distinct "Asian quarters" aesthetic, in the buildings, and character of amenities such as schools. What is changing, or has changed over time, is the coming up of hotels (or Inns), such as Summerdale, Rio, Highridge, as well as a growing market for hostels, such as Nairobi West Girls Hostel. Nairobi West has also become a space for the growth of hospitals, such as Nairobi West Hospital, Meridian Equator Hospital, as well as The Nairobi South Hospital.

Nairobi West is increasingly attracting high-rise construction of residential flats, so that much of the architectural landscape that existed previously is quietly being edged out. This also comes with a change in demography, and sometimes class issues. The Nairobi West market, just as the Kawangware Market in Dagoretti, is a space that attempts to attract, and keep a steady flow of customers from within its vicinity. What it manages to do, through its various business outlets, is to create the idea of an aspiring cosmopolitanism that is beyond race or ethnicity. Unlike the naming strategies at the Kawangware Market, the Nairobi West strategy appears to suggest a veneer of looking out to the world. The foreign names of enterprises acknowledging towns or cities outside Kenya, is an indication for a hungering for the international rather than the local – Rio, from Brazil Summerdale and Highridge, from England. This is also an indication of class, suggesting that the residents of Nairobi West are in touch with the outside world and that they possibly fly in and out of the country.

One key problem with this research is that sometimes what obtains in Dagoretti, at Kawangware Market, for example, in terms of naming, could also be said to be taking place in other spaces within Nairobi with similar class ideals. This means that it is possible to find aspects of Kawangware Market's business outfit's naming strategies in Dandora, as well as in

Kasarani, in places like Mirema Drive, or such spaces as Githurai off Thika road, or even in Umoja estate and Kayole. So what marks out Kawangware Market, and Dagoretti in general, from these other spaces? One could point at the history of the growth or development of Dagoretti vis a viz these other urban spaces. As pointed out at the beginning of this paper, it can be argued that Dagoretti occupies a city-within-a-rural space kind of imagery. Unlike other urban suburbs, Dagoretti still has burial sites on people's lands where relatives are buried as happens in rural Kenya's freehold land ownership. This is subject to review as Dagoretti has now become part of Nairobi City and is subject to the city's bylaws which include laws on land use. Yet, given its space as one that has had some ancestral bearing, and the settlement of people from other ancestral lands, there is bound to be anxiety about the self, and this then becomes explored, in part, through the self-identity strategies of naming business premises in ways that attempt at diffusing underlying discomfort. On the other hand, Nairobi West has a fair share of issues to do with the economy, so that it bears the face of impermanence. The nature of its residents, given their status as students and civil servants who can easily be moved from one work station to another such as from one county to another, as well as service providers such as mechanics, hotel workers, supermarket attendants and the like, suggests a high turnover in terms of demography. These, coupled with the high rents, gives Nairobi West a certain element of constant change or shift, and therefore a restlessness that robs it of any claim to home! Business owners are less likely to be interested in creating homes in what appears to be temporary accommodation.

Conclusion

This paper has compared the strategies of naming business premises at Kawangware Market, with what transpires at Nairobi West Market, off Lang'ata road. It has argued that the historical factors making Dagoretti a neither city nor rural outfield, or an in-betwixt, difficult to identify space, is an important factor in the way in which naming occurs for business outlets. That is, that there is a hungering for a display, or performance of identity in order to extinguish anxieties to do with belonging in a space dominated by people who claim the space as ancestral. One could use naming to coalesce a group of people that feel like outsiders, as well as to perform difference, perhaps even pointing at the quality of products. On the other hand, identity becomes vital to show spiritual affiliation and connection. In Nairobi West, the history of the urban space as part of a residential area that was specific for Asians in colonial times continues to

have an effect on how it is perceived. Firstly, as a place people come to, as well as one that receives a certain element of gentrification from a reestablishment of architectural tastes, and the growth of highrise buildings. This comes with the question of rising rents, given its proximity to Nairobi's Central Business District. These states of circumstances have made Nairobi West seem an impermanent place of transitions especially with its high number of students and civil servants and in establishments that are constantly changing. Hence the naming strategies that look out to foreignness, internationalization, or branding that suggest companies far removed from Kenya's everyday experiences. In comparison to Kawangware Market, Nairobi West seems to avoid any suggestion to ethnic affiliation.

References

Berman, B and Lonsdale, J. *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa – Book Two*. London:
James Currey. 1992

Eco, U. (Trans. Weaver, W.). *Travels in Hyperreality*. New York: Harvest Books. 1990

Gatere, N. "Intellectual Property: A critical Evaluation of the Prevalence of Piracy Among Designers in Nairobi, Kenya". Unpublished PhD Thesis. Technical University of Kenya, Nairobi

Ng'weno, B. (2018). ""Betting is Part and Parcel of Someone who is Cultured": Ballroom Dancing
and the Spaces of Urban Identity in 1950s Nairobi." In: Kiiru, K and Mutonya, M. *Music*
and Dance in Eastern Africa. Nairobi: Twaweza Communications. (pp. 32-47)

Rahbaran, S and Hertz, M. *Nairobi Kenya Migration: Shaping the City* Zurich: Lars Muller
Publishers. 2014

Wa-Mungai, M. (2010). "Iconic Representations of Identities in Kenyan Cultures" In: wa Mungai
and Gona, G (Eds) *(Re)Membering Kenya: Identity, Culture and Freedom. Vol. 1* (pp. 72-
95)

Filmography

Scott, Ridley, Director. *The House of Gucci.* 2021

Discography

Jaguar, (featuring) AY *Imetoka Mbali.* 2010

Fredrick Mbogo, PhD, is a Senior Lecturer at The Technical University of Kenya's Department of Music and Performing Arts. He is also a researcher with a number of paper publications in various peer reviewed journals as well as in books as a chapter contributor. Mbogo is also an actor for the stage, as well as for film and television with a number of projects to his name. His plays, as a playwright, have been staged in various cities and towns in East Africa. One of his written plays staged at The Kenya National Theatre (2023/2024) titled *They That Have Missing Marks Shall not Graduate* made him a winner of the Kenya Theatre Award's prize for Kenya's Best Playwright for 2023.

Dagoretti: Claiming Land and Space in the City

Raquel Jerobon
Technical University of Kenya

The essay examines Dagoretti's transformation in three key moments: Generational Land Ownership: After the Mau Mau uprising, African families, including Mr. N's, were allocated land in Dagoretti. Over three generations, the family's transition from squatters to legal landholders reflects increasing stability and permanence. The second is Rental Income and Demolitions: Informal rental housing has been crucial in Dagoretti, but these structures often face demolition for not meeting city building codes. Despite this, informal settlements persist, highlighting the struggle for space in Nairobi's growing urban landscape. The last moment is the Shift from Agriculture to Residential Use: As Dagoretti urbanized, land values rose, and pressure to sell increased. The tension between maintaining cultural heritage and adapting to urbanization reflects the area's ongoing transformation and identity struggle.

Introduction

Dagoretti is located in Western Nairobi and is an eclectic neighbourhood whose construction and creation is tied to the narrative of the making of the city of Nairobi. It sits at the edge of the plateau at the bottom of Ng'ong Hills and is located in what was the Kikuyu Reserve in Colonial Kenya (Chege, 1981). Situated on the edge of the White settled Westlands area of the city, and the colonial White Highlands, its people became the source of cheap labour for farms in the neighbouring countryside of the white highlands. Land here, has therefore been a subject of contention. By the 1920s, it featured in the social structure and social politics of the area, with mixed agitation for individual land tenure and protection of the native reserves from further annexation and delineation and demarcation of real boundaries. Proximity to the city made it a vibrant area for trade and easy access to rental houses made of mud and wattle (Chege, 1981). These two became avenues for Africans to participate in the colonial economy. Here, a mixture of peasants, smallholders and newly minted capitalists rubbed shoulders but the racially motivated legislation in the city and country at the time ensured equal measures of discrimination were meted out. The Emergency declaration led to mass relocations. In its aftermath, repatriated Kikuyu people from the Rift Valley and landless peasants returned to Kiambu and settled as squatters in various parts of the district mostly

working as labourers (Chege, 1981). Dagoretti received most of this population influx. The peasants joined poor land holders and squatters on contested land. The Emergency altered the economic dynamics of trade and rental housing.

This essay attempts to read Dagoretti as a place *becoming*. It examines the narratives that the people of Dagoretti have used to create their identities while claiming the place and the city as part of themselves. We situate a respondent's (Mr. N) family history in the space through conversations held in the field as the starting point to present people's occupation of space in the city, the moulding of their identity within it and the reinventing of themselves within that space. In doing so, people contest their right to belong in the city. This essay follows Wangui Kimari's sentiments that amidst the changing and often exclusionary planning landscape that is Nairobi, and the imperativeness to situate everyday encounters and experiences of its residents in a bid to understand the changes presents opportunity to connect these to broader issues beyond their locality (Kimari, 2023). The essay presents three moments-***the family's existence on the space over three generations amidst changes in the city and country and the uncertainty of what the future holds; rental housing in Dagoretti as a supplemental source of income over time; the changing uses of land from agricultural to residential uses; and the crisis of culture and identity produced and the future that it portends***.

Moment 1: Three Generations

Mr N. spoke of his grandfather's allocation of land in Dagoretti in 1968 where they have now lived for three generations following the land demarcation exercise and issuance of a freehold title deed under the Native Land Registration Ordinance of 1959 in the then colonial Kenya. The land allocation exercise came on the heels of the Mau Mau resistance, the State of Emergency, and the villagization scheme that displaced and forced vast numbers of people into encampments, separating them from their ancestral lands (Overton, 1988). The Native Land Registration Ordinance was the colonial government's attempt at addressing land grievances without actually returning ancestral lands to their rightful owners. In this process, the displaced and dispossessed people –mostly the Kikuyu–had found their way to Nairobi and specifically to Dagoretti, where they settled illegally as squatters until the land consolidation and allocation exercise that apportioned land to some of them. There were varying degrees of equity and justice in this exercise (Overton, 1988).

The city government, in conjunction with the colonial government, in the aftermath of the State of Emergency introduced policies to calm the masses and quell independence calls from the Mau Mau. Land consolidation was one such reaction and it led to the creation of an emergent African middle class. In Dagoretti this was composed of freehold land owners, those for whom the land consolidation had allowed property holding. Land consolidation stratified the community and produced three distinct classes: the educated and wealthy; the landlords-who sold labour in the city; the poor and peasants uprooted by the Mau Mau rebellion, who were landless and squatters (Chege, 1981). The apportioning of plots following consolidation efforts of supposedly small and largely unproductive parcels of land encouraged the Africans who could afford it, to take up these larger plots of land.

Mr. N recalls how land in Gathungu, the village in Dagoretti he calls home, was allocated to different families unequally as influential families received larger portions. Even with the injustices of this allocation, having a title deed assigned rights to a people who had lived precariously in the city's periphery. They could now build and live assured of their legal occupation rights. When Mr. N's grandfather passed away, he followed Kikuyu tradition and divided his property among his sons. N's father followed the same tradition upon his passing, leaving N and his sibling's the land. The current subdivision of this land reflects the existence and permanence of the family over time and space. Mr. N's father's land was divided into 12 pieces of half acre plots, from the road to the river. Of the 12 plots, two were registered in their mother's name while the remaining 10 were distributed to the siblings each assigned two plots. Deviating from tradition here, the girls were also given land. This family land history over generations went on in the backdrop of governance and administrative changes in the city and country. From the colonial Native Land Registration Ordinance of 1959 that assigned them legal rights, to the Registered Land Act cap 300 of 2002 (now repealed) that registered the subdivision to 12 plots and allocated Mr. N his two plots in 2003.

Our land is our meeting point. We hold all of our family gatherings here. Any of us can farm the land whenever they want. Our mother wanted us to make sure we plant trees. We farm maize, beans, cassava, and sweet potatoes. All of our ancestors lie here.

In Dagoretti, some families were displaced and those who were lucky received a portion of land that ran from the Nairobi River to the main road. This household land has remained undivided and is a source of connection for the family, far and wide.

We tell, through these truths, a past to be unforgotten.

The title deed has, over time, assured the family's right and claim over the land. Within the same period, residents of Dagoretti who had no legal claim to land have been continuously evicted and displaced. Notably, the city led evictions from the 1970s following the inclusion of Dagoretti into Nairobi City boundaries. Similarly, the materiality of construction and buildings on the family land and in the neighbourhood has changed over time from mud and wattle to wooden structures and finally to stone, bricks and cement. Mr. N's father's house was made of wood but in 1987 when Mr. N built his own house, he used stone, bricks and cement reflecting the certainty of his occupation and his family's growing economic status. This change of materiality continuously reflects the solidity of their claim over space in the city. On the other hand, the slums and informal settlements within Dagoretti that exist on land of contested legal claims, are built of

mud and wattle, iron sheets or wood, reflecting their temporality despite some of these settlements having existed since the 1960s and 1970s. The choice of these building materials according to the Nairobi Building Codes of 1968 denotes them as temporary structures of unapproved materials, meaning they are subject to demolition by the City Government for not meeting the city's building standards; additionally, some of the settlements are located on public land.

Moment 2: Rental Income in Precarity and Demolition as Governmentality

Demolitions as a means of regularizing development and maintaining the image of the city and its planning standards has been constant practice since the founding of Nairobi. As early as 1902, hygiene and sanitation narratives were used to justify the demolition of the Indian Bazaar along present day Moi Avenue following outbreaks of plague. Later on, with the legal support of the 1922 Vagrancy Act, African settlements deemed unfit and illegal were constantly demolished (Kimari & Cap, 2022). But Informal settlement dwellers attempted to survive even within the constant threat of eviction. They are still considered illegal by successive regimes. They are unwanted, unseen and under threat of erasure by the state (Rocco & van Ballegooijen, 2018). They therefore build and exist on the margins. By their everyday lived experiences, of building and occupying space, they boldly claim space in the city. They contest for infrastructure and services and call for security of tenure. Imperceptibly, these informal settlements dwellers, resist and endure the various attempts to remove and erase them from the city's space.

The use of unapproved materials is one such survival tactic used by informal settlement dwellers. The materials are cheap and the building process is fast. Since the colonial period, cheap housing has been a source of income for landowners in Dagoretti. First for the squatters from the annexed White Highlands and later the displaced persons from the Mau Mau uprising and Emergency period displacement (Chege, 1981). The initial houses, made of mud and wattle, were constructed using cheaply available material in order to solve the rising need for housing. This was essential as the city and country laws, in the colonial period, restricted Africans to living outside the city. The exception was provision of bachelor housing in the African quarter of the city for those registered and permitted to work within the city (Kimari & Cap, 2022). The unregistered, lived in the city's periphery such as in Dagoretti. They built or rented these houses.

In the post-independence context, Dagoretti land owners continued this practice of building small rental units within their property. These houses were either made of mud and wattle, iron sheets or wood/timber. These structures did not adhere to the city's building standards as enshrined in the 1968 Building Codes and were therefore continuously demolished by the authorities who required that they conform to the varying planning frameworks of 1948, 1978 and later 2013.

In the post-independence period, restrictions on Africans living in the city were lifted. Urban populations grew and so did the demand for housing. Housing and service provision by the city and national governments could not meet this increasing demand so low-income immigrants from rural areas were forced to either construct or rent shacks as houses. Informal settlements grew in unoccupied land, majorly public land as a majority of the urban population lived in such settlements (Lines & Makau, 2018).

The biblical verse from Ephesians 5:28 is prominently displayed on a ceramic plaque in N's family living room. Surrounding this inscription, a collection of keys line the four walls, each a spare key for the family's forty-four rental houses. Upon our arrival, the elderly wife graciously welcomed us into her home, introducing herself and proudly presenting her husband. This biblical reference underscores a family dynamic that extends beyond religious connections. Notably, the grandmother -- the matriarchal figure, orchestrates and influences family dynamics from behind the scenes. The abundance of keys, strategically placed within the home for maximum visibility, serve as a tangible manifestation of her authority. She eloquently elucidates the significance of each key, gesturing with pride. While the men's names may appear on official documents related to the apartments, the household functions as a testament to the dual partnership between the men and women within the family and by extension, in the community.

Ansh Shetty, Sanskriti Agarwal, Laïssa Alexis, Eleanor Ding, Raquel Jerobon, Emily Muchika,

The population of Dagoretti was about 63,700 in 1974. 87% of this population was made up of tenants. Renting houses was a lucrative business. Putting up a basic structure in the 1970's cost about 1,467 shillings and they were rented out for 70-100 shillings a month (Chege, 1981). Most did not purchase land but squatted on it. But the city government had other ideas and demolished any new unauthorised buildings, supposedly to prevent the rise and emergence of slums (Chege, 1981). As part of the city, Dagoretti was now subjected to new administration and governance conditionalities. There were new planning regulations in relation to typology and housing materiality as well as land ownership, prompted by the valuation process and the expected payment of land rates. The city government used demolition as a means of governing and structuring the image of the city to align with its planning frameworks and standards.

Muthiora, an aspiring politician and resident of Dagoretti, and his supporters protested against the 1970s demolition decision by the city authorities. For Muthiora it was personal. In 1974 he vied for MP and won and since then, houses and rooms for rent have continued to mushroom. This was his legacy for Dagoretti (Chege, 1981). Such are the houses that Mr. N has built, wooden structures following a row-housing typology. They are just next to the road, with shared sanitary facilities, acting as a frontage to his property. The houses all open to a common 'hallway'. The rent they fetch supplements his income and is more important now that Mr. N has retired. Additionally, at the back of his house, he has also built a 3-floor rental flat. Here the structure meets the material requirements

specified in the city's building codes, but not the required development permission from the Nairobi County Government, now that Dagoretti is part of the city. This building has not been approved -- a constant irregularity in Nairobi, where developmental approvals and entrenched corruption processes make it difficult.

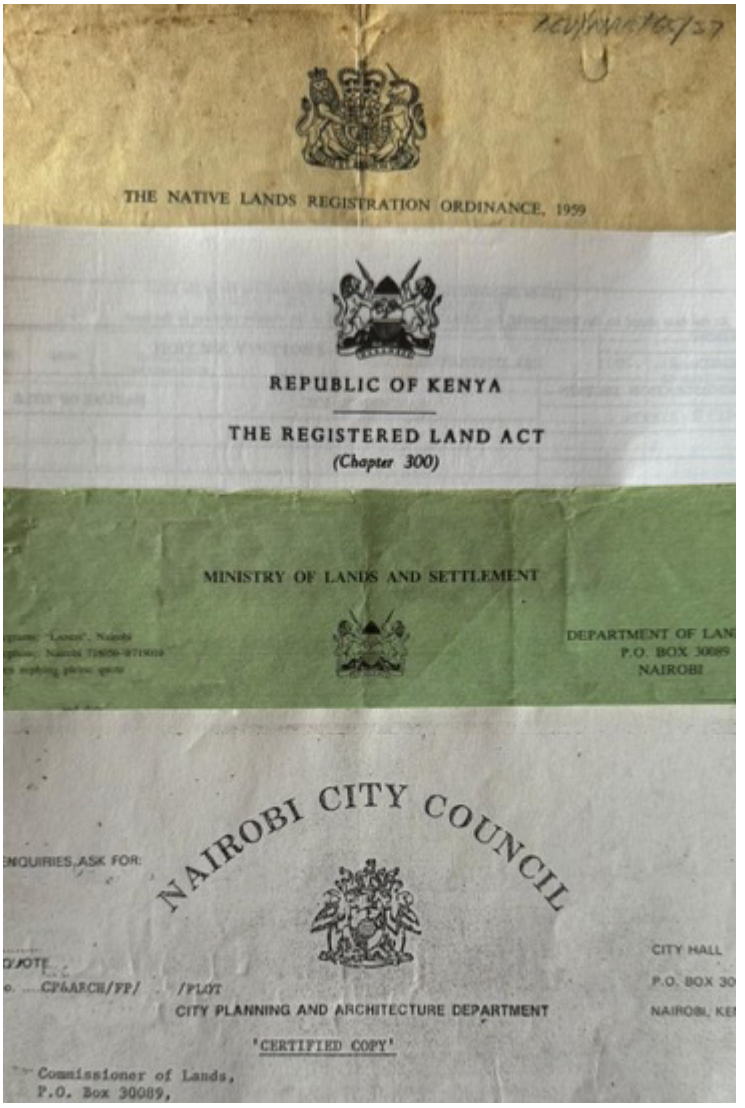
The city government adopted a demolition policy of such informal settlements/structures from the colonial government as they contravened the requirements of the building codes and other urban planning frameworks. It wasn't until the 1980s that forceful evictions were restricted to development in contravention of approved plans such as roads and other infrastructure service provision (Lines & Makau, 2018). However, the eviction threat for settlements with no security of tenure is always constant.

Moment 3: From Agricultural to Residential Uses and the Crisis of Identity and Culture

In 1963 Dagoretti was incorporated into Nairobi and notions of a garden suburbia made up of the new African middle class were abandoned (Chege, 1981). The country had just gained independence. The colonial government was no longer calling the shots and the need to incorporate a particular class of Africans into the capitalist economy through land ownership and to dissuade calls for independence was no longer needed. Dagoretti was now part of the capital city and the issues of land, squatters and peasants took a different dynamic. A newly independent state and a contested territory that was largely rural was now part of the capital city. The population in Nairobi increased as Africans migrated from the native reserves following the lifting of colonial restrictions on movement and occupation for Africans. This kickstarted a period of auto construction changing the materiality of buildings from mud and wattle to timber by both small and big land owners. Agricultural uses were no longer profitable. Rental housing then became a big source of income for landowners in Dagoretti as increasing population increased demand for housing.

We walked around the neighbourhood with Mr. N and noted that land parcels closest to the road were under residential uses while parcels closest to the river, were under agricultural use. The city government approves development applications for residential development as can be seen by the growth of new high-rise buildings and flats. The Riparian land regulations and right of way claims for infrastructure and services have changed/reduced their land sizes. Mr. N points out the ongoing sewer

connection project and the piece of land that was excised for the right of way, conceding that at least the city is finally attempting to supply infrastructure and services to them. But he complains about the amount they pay as rates to the city. This is the cost of being part of the city.


THE NATIVE LANDS REGISTRATION ORDINANCE, 1959

REPUBLIC OF KENYA

THE REGISTERED LAND ACT
(Chapter 300)

MINISTRY OF LANDS AND SETTLEMENT

DEPARTMENT OF LAN
P.O. BOX 30089
NAIROBI

NAIROBI CITY COUNCIL

ENQUIRIES ASK FOR:

CITY HALL
P.O. BOX 30
NAIROBI, KE

CP&ARCH/FP/ /PLOT
CITY PLANNING AND ARCHITECTURE DEPARTMENT

'CERTIFIED COPY'

Commissioner of Lands,
P.O. Box 30089,

The Gikuyu people who settled in Gathungu in colonial Nairobi were farmers in the former Kiambu district. Independence brought land security in the form of title deeds. This together with structures changing incrementally from wooden to stone houses, suggests a permanence and security in land tenure. These changes

have solidified their claims to the territory as made manifest by stone walls and the paying of land rates to the city. After showing us the title deeds and other official documents, P. continues to shows us a photograph. It is of his mother and daughter with a cake on the table. He is recalling the long heritage they have had on the land.

The idea that achieving success must necessitate leaving home does not factor in for these children. Unlike the projected impressions of their life paths and ideas of success by outsiders, the children's future visions and their ties to their homes are interwoven. They made and continue to make the city home. Despite the changes occurring around them, the family remains unfazed. Home is a sacred space, a space of shared intimacy, of archive making, of ancestral longing. There is very little that will change that.

Ansh Shetty, Sanskriti Agarwal, Laïssa Alexis, Eleanor Ding, Raquel Jerobon, Emily Muchika.

Because Dagoretti is ancestral land to Mr. N's family and other land owners, they bury their dead here. This is home for them, they have ancestral connections to land here. But they are now part of the city. As land values continue to increase, there's increasing pressure to sell their land for urban development, but what happens to ancestral claims to this land with family gravesites? In some instances, graves have had to be exhumed and bodies moved to pave way for development. However, gravesites are ancestral linkages and are important for culture and continuity. How do they maintain these linkages and traditions in the face of these changes? The people persevere, graves exist as tiny islands in a sea of change with the continued hope that their children and grandchildren will have the same connection to their land and culture and maintain the same values.

The people who have bought land in Dagoretti do not have a similar connection to this land. Their interest is economic, but they maintain connection to cultural practices by picking and choosing which practices to value. For instance, the Kiza Residential development project in the neighbourhood, that centres the *Mugumo* tree within their development plans and visions. This pays homage to the space and the Gikuyu people who consider the *Mugumo* tree as sacred in Gikuyu mythology; or a cultural appropriation to fit in; to co-opt cultural practices and associate culture with their new development and claim and assert belonging to Dagoretti too. The Kiza development is reflective of the changing developmental needs in the area and possibly an image of what is to come. It is also an image of Dagoretti as a *space becoming*, the people are

constantly remaking the space, making the statement and claim, that they belong, that it's theirs.

References

Chege, M. (1981). A Tale of Two Slums: Electoral Politics in Mathare and Dagoretti. *Review of African Political Economy*, *20*, 74–88.
Kimari, W. (2023). Resisting imperial erasures: Matigari ruins and relics in Nairobi. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17531055.2023.2231787
Kimari, W., & Cap, C. (2022, March 12). Under Fire: Forced Evictions and Arson Displace Nairobi's Poor - The Elephant. *The Elephant*. https://www.theelephant.info/analysis/2022/03/12/under-fire-forced-evictions-and-arson-displace-nairobis-poor/
Lines, K., & Makau, J. (2018). Taking the long view: 20 years of Muungano wa Wanavijiji, the Kenyan federation of slum dwellers. *Environment and Urbanization*, *30*(2), 407–424. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956247818785327
Overton, J. (1988). The Origins of the Kikuyu Land Problem: Land Alienation and Land Use in Kiambu, Kenya, 1895-1920. *African Studies Review*, *31*(2), 109–126. https://doi.org/10.2307/524421

Raquel Jerobon is an urban designer, planner and researcher whose interests are in spatial production processes, people, identity and the relational processes of people and places becoming. She's pursuing a PhD exploring such processes within extended urban territories in Southern Kenya.

Beyond Traditional Documentation: Dagoretti Area

Lorna Mungai
Pioneer University

Culture is commonly known as the way of living practiced by people existing in a similar space, making culture dynamic as it changes with people as a result of the external factors within the space. Due to this cultural dynamism, documenting the tacit cultural knowledge becomes hard if not impossible and if done in a manner that doesn't capture its constantly changing parts as it fossilizes the cultural tacit knowledge. This study aims to display the importance of cultural resilience against fossilization of knowledge which is brought about by the popular concept of "documenting for future generations" in comparison to looking at the alternative forms of knowledge that align with the oral communication used to communicate cultural knowledge while going beyond the traditional documentation forms. Lastly, it examines the contribution that various forms of knowledge have had on continuing the legacy of a community and remembering its previous generations. The study was carried out in Dagoretti, Nairobi, Kenya, where a week long ethnographic engagement was carried out by going around the area. This study concludes that fossilization is brought about by a documenting culture that uses forms of knowledge which make it lifeless and skewed. This is the case when using conventional methods to document cultural knowledge which include the authors' interpretation among other perspectives thus taking away from the intended message. The various forms of knowledge discussed were the outcome, from the study carried out in Dagoretti, they are highlighted to display how words alone cannot communicate the depths of a communities' cultural dynamism as a means of preserving tacit knowledge.

Introduction

Culture is the way of life a community lives by; the norms and regulations. This is the case for all communities due to the belief that there is a certain way of living and practices that should be followed for life to be complete. However, we must acknowledge that culture is dynamic and changes due to various factors, both internal and external. Advancement of technology is not the only reason culture changes; it has always been dynamic and changes to fit current living conditions.

Fossilization is the process of fossils being preserved, be it an animal or a plant, in a hard, petrified form. In the context of culture, it is cementing cultural and traditional beliefs, practices and societal structures about a community within a specific area. Especially once it is documented using forms of knowledge and perceptions that do not acknowledge the various forms of cultural knowledge present in different contexts. This knowledge once documented becomes hard if not impossible to change, since the perception has already been created. Additionally, there is confidential information within communities which they are reluctant to share. It is only held by specific people within that community. This is a challenge to communities when researchers seek indigenous knowledge through interviews and the information obtained is said to be final, describing the whole community. This does not acknowledge that, that knowledge keeps changing or is used differently in various occasions.

Writing is one form of externalizing knowledge; from the oral state to the written one that employs words or symbols. Therefore, writing cements indigenous knowledge about a specific area's culture, raising the question **is writing as a form of documentation necessary** for African communities where oral communication is used and the cultural knowledge changes depending on the situation? Norms and practices in African communities are communicated orally on a need basis. Information obtained from communities is not final. This paper questions the appropriate form of knowledge to be adopted in order not to skew indigenous knowledge towards the researcher's interpretation.

The transmission of knowledge is pivotal in safeguarding and sharing cultural heritage, particularly in African communities where tacit knowledge holds significance. In Dagoretti, a lively peri-urban area of Nairobi, Kenya, knowledge is disseminated not solely through formal avenues but also via life narratives, surroundings, environment, structures, documents and other artefacts. This paper delves into the intricacies of tacit knowledge transmission, focusing on the portrayal and preservation of community experiences across various mediums. Dagoretti serves as a unit of Nairobi life, encompassing diverse cultures, histories, and socio-economic dynamics. Through the exploration of key landmarks in the Dagoretti area such as the Riruta Church, Kawangware market, Muslim village households, and the KEZA building project, this study delves into the multifaceted nature of knowledge dissemination within the Architecture as a Form of Knowledge Program. These landmarks not only

function as physical spaces but also as repositories of tacit knowledge, encapsulating the community's collective experiences and narratives.

Central to this exploration is the concept of tacit knowledge, denoting the implicit understanding, skills, and insights ingrained within individuals and communities. Unlike explicit knowledge, which can be formalized and documented, tacit knowledge is often communicated through non-verbal cues, lived experiences, and social interactions. In Dagoretti, tacit knowledge forms the foundation of community identity and resilience, shaping daily practices, beliefs, and values. The methodology employed in this study involved collaboration with selected tour guides from Dagoretti and the Go Down Art Centre, Kilimani, who generously shared their tacit knowledge and personal experiences. Through guided tours of the area, researchers from, Technical University of Kenya, Barnard College; Columbia University and School of Environment and Architecture from Mumbai, gained invaluable insights into life in Dagoretti, from the bustling markets to the serene homesteads. These tour guides served as custodians of tacit knowledge, offering perspectives that transcended traditional documentation methods.

Through this program, groups were able to develop design postcards, reflecting how knowledge dissemination had impacted them, particularly in the realm of architecture. Architecture is designing, planning and construction of buildings. In this study architecture is used to mean the structure or design of something more. A key finding was the inherent value of tacit knowledge in capturing the essence of community life and preserving cultural heritage. While there is increasing emphasis on converting tacit knowledge into explicit forms, such as written records or digital archives, it is crucial to recognize the intrinsic worth of tacit knowledge in its oral and experiential forms. The act of sharing life stories, observing the built environment, and interacting with artefacts fosters a deeper understanding of community dynamics and facilitates knowledge transmission. This was manifested in the outcomes of various groups, as they did not focus on converting knowledge into explicit forms but instead used various forms of knowledge to convey their understanding of the various areas. These depictions spoke volumes about how the groups perceived the different locales without necessarily fossilizing the knowledge.

G's land, initially assigned to different families, reflects a historical trend of unequal distribution. Historically, larger portions have seen substantial development for new settlers, while smaller allocations consistently accommodate ancestral families like Mr. N's. The transition from agricultural land is apparent in the patchwork landscape marked by shrinking land sizes yet escalating in value.

In the neighborhood, a master-planned gated community is emerging, embodying visions of a transformed future for the area. Mr. N's family land, subdivided over generations, reflects a trend of smaller parcels and denser development. His father subdivided the land into 12 plots, allocating two each for his sons and two for himself and his wife. While Mr. N focuses on rental housing as his 'retirement plan', his brother's parcel is witnessing a new commercial development. Following tradition, his parcel will possibly be divided amongst his children. What is the future of this family?

Findings

From the Architecture as a Form of Knowledge program the outputs included various methods of knowledge conversion such as images, 3-D designs, drawings, collages and songs. Group 1 visited Mr.J's Homestead and they were able to produce a 3D design of the homestead. The 3D design was used to disseminate the knowledge they received from the family and display the environment without any loss in converting it to explicit written knowledge. It was an exact replication of the homestead's

layout at the moment of the visit which highlighted the important areas for the family. Additionally, the group designed a stone image which portrayed the sweet potatoes their grandfather would often share with them. Group 2 visited Mr. N's Homestead and designed a drawing from one of the children's perception of a home which included the family, food and drinks. This showed the value of a home and its definition has been passed down to the children. The group was amazed as the child was able to make the definition simple and clear, using stick figures that passed on the message, 'family is important'.

What is a home? Is it the four walls you live in? Is it the place that holds so much heritage? Is a home made on freehold titles and subdivision documents? Or is it a sense of comfort and a place where you feel safe amongst the people you love? The seven-year-old T. would agree with the latter. He describes his home as a place where his family gets together and feasts on soda, meat and chapati. He describes it as a place where he and his cousins can run around and play whilst his grandmother chats with his aunts and uncles. A lot gets revealed through the innocence of a child's drawing. Even though they all live under different roofs within the homestead, he draws all of them under one roof. He draws his grandmother at the centre of the house and his mother and his aunt at the top. He draws himself amongst his cousins beneath his grandmother. To him, the dynamics of a complex and layered system of land, tradition and economy are simple and clear. The homestead in Dagoretti serves as a point of intersection

between ancestral connections, land ownership and worsening financial condition, yet it provides warmth and comfort to all who enter it. It reveals the intangible beauty of the homestead and its quirks. It revels in strong ancestral bonds reflected in three distinct generations and makes one realize what makes a homestead a home.

Ansh Shetty, Sanskriti Agarwal, Laïssa Alexis, Eleanor Ding, Raquel Jerobon, Emily Muchika.

Images and collages were also used to display the knowledge within the Dagoretti area and as a way to preserve the area without any loss of information. Group 2 designed an image that included a ceramic plaque found in the home quoting Ephesians 5:28 which talked about husbands loving their wives as they love themselves, which was displayed as a sign of the value system of the family they visited. Group 3 visited St. John the Baptist Catholic Parish–Riruta; they were able to get narratives of the story behind the church and how it is a pivotal point for the people of Dagoretti as it transcends the various phases of their lives and has been present through various generations. An image of the walls of the church was depicted and it showed how close the architecture is to their heart. Mr. M, their tour guide told them he participated in the cementing of the walls, therefore the walls are a living memory that he carries every day. The image on its own without words displayed the importance of the church to the people and the architecture told a story without any words.

An inherited memory "This is my home, this is my inheritance"
I hold on to things, he says, the time my father was building this, he used to say he was building it for me and my family because I was the last son. "As a Kikuyu, the last son has to inherit the house the father lives in." His father was employed by a European as a Shamba boy. "My father was very happy that Europeans promoted him from being a gardener to a cook. He was taught about cooking and everything related to it. After that he was taken to Italy where he was employed by the government press. It is from the earnings he made there that my father bought this land. This house was built in 1975. We were the first family in the area to build a permanent house. He still has his father's things, such as the record player which he had held close to his ears and listened to. He also had a typewriter that his father had used when he was working for the European.

His memories are the storytellers of history. His house, a land of remembrance, an inherited memory. Such collective memories are always shifting—after all it's about how he has arranged his house and the spaces within it, his living room which is also the dining area. The kitchen with a backyard garden. Gardening is an activity which he inherited from his father. He waxed poetic when describing his garden, the avocado tree grown as tall as the fence. A little pepper plant nestled at the corner and the snake plant growing near a drum. The tall croton tree with its branches hanging out. The garden … weaved a narrative of memories that he had inherited from his father, it seemed to be a canvas curated by him, a garden of memories.

Aditi Bhandari, Ameleya Habby, Drashti Thumar, Khusboo Tejwani, Kinaya Hassane, Nishadh More, Waithira Kibuchi

Lastly, Group 5 visited Kawangware market, and created a collage of the names of the shops in the market as a means of showing how names carry meaning. The collage cut across religious connotations, identity with places, activities, brands and aspirations. The collage was a means to display the built environment in Kawangware market and how the names of the shops stem from one's identity and what resonates deeply with them. The title of the collage was "*jina za duka*" which goes against Kiswahili tenses which would have been "*majina ya maduka*" . However, that is the local saying, which was important in portraying the reality of the market and which the local people of Dagoretti could easily associate with the collage. Without using any words, the group was able to use a diverse knowledge form.

Lastly, Group 6 visited the Mararo Homestead; they were able to use a song to communicate the dreams of continuity and rupture that the family held dear in the story of their life. The family values the home and they used a Kikuyu song "Ngemi Ciumaga Nakũ" by Joseph Kamaru to communicate the values of the family's life's narrative. Architecture is used to showcase this in a way that still maintains the life narratives, surroundings, structures, documents, and artefacts. This is an aspect of how knowledge conversion is not just about using words to document it. Other forms of knowledge such as architecture can be used to conserve knowledge for future use in a manner that preserves its meaning.

This study highlights the importance of embracing alternative approaches to knowledge dissemination that respect the tacit nature of indigenous knowledge systems. By embracing visual storytelling, participatory design, and artistic expression, researchers can establish inclusive platforms for knowledge exchange that resonate with local communities. Through collaborative efforts, tacit knowledge can be celebrated and preserved in ways that enrich both academic scholarship and community empowerment.

In summary, this study emphasizes the significance of tacit knowledge transmission in Dagoretti as a means of portraying the lived experiences and cultural heritage of its people. By embracing the richness of oral traditions, environmental cues, and material culture, researchers can engage in a more inclusive exploration of community dynamics and foster mutual learning and appreciation of tacit knowledge. Ultimately, the practice of disseminating tacit knowledge stands as a testament to the resilience and resourcefulness of communities in safeguarding their

collective wisdom for future generations, without external interpretations skewing it.

Was the research being done capturing the African essence, in the knowledge captured and documented? Or is it another way of people telling their stories in the pretense of doing research and skewing the knowledge of communities to fit a desired perception. Is it better to leave the knowledge oral and get it from the primary source risking the loss of knowledge once the primary source dies? Or try and customize the forms of knowledge to fit into the oral nature of tacit knowledge, specifically from African communities which use it as a primary mode of communication.

Lorna Mungai is an information scientist who works as a librarian and focuses on addressing gaps in knowledge dissemination, cultural preservation and information management. Championing for dynamic, inclusive documentation methods, emphasising the importance of accurately and sustainably preserving transmitting tacit cultural knowledge, such as in the Dagoretti ethnographic research. Email: lornawmungai@gmail.com

Kamzee's Donkey

By Gitau Muthuma

The Villager

This fictional piece depicts the life and struggles of a typical Dagoretti resident.

Evan Kamzee had finally had enough of the retail cigarette distribution business, the risks had become too much. His supplier manufactured counterfeit cigarettes from his Kangemi slum base in Dagoretti and Kamzee was one of his main distributors. The Kenya Revenue Authority inspectors had become more vigilant and he could no longer afford the hefty bribes these inspectors invariably demanded when they apprehended one…. and that is how the story of the donkey began.

Wangare, Kamzee's rather shrewish wife, harassed him incessantly over his inability to earn enough to support his three children and constantly complained about his addiction to cheap moonshine liquor. Kamzee had long ago forgotten how to love Wangare, while she, on her part, preferred to make him miserable by her company rather than let him be happy elsewhere. What she felt for him was not really love but the possessiveness of love.

The Regen shopping centre, where Kamzee and his family lived was blossoming into a township, high rise residential buildings in the neighbourhood were springing up and Regen was fast losing its rural aura. It was slowly but perceptibly changing into a suburb of Nairobi, Kenya's capital city. The population was growing and so was the demand for basic services such as water. The Nairobi Water Supply Company better known for its constant failure to supply water was derisively nicknamed the Nairobi Water Shortage Company by the locals, who were lucky if they accessed the precious commodity once a week.

Shrewd Kamzee smelt an opportunity and thought he would successfully venture into the water supply business. With the not inconsiderable earnings from the illegal cigarette distribution job, Kamzee decided he would buy a donkey, a cart and plastic jerrycans to sell water in the neighbourhood. Were he to sell around fifty jerrycans for twenty shillings each that would amount to about a thousand shillings daily, not quite a lot but adequate to keep Wangare, his difficult to please wife, reasonably happy.

Kamzee talked over his plan with Wangare who thought it a good one. "So where will you buy the donkey from?" she asked. Kamzee thought for a moment, "I hear donkeys in Gilgil are cheap, I think that is where I will go." Gilgil was about fifty kilometres away from Regen.

“Won’t the transportation be too expensive? Wangare asked, the lorry drivers may ask for a lot.”

“No, one does not put a donkey on a lorry, I will have to walk back on foot with it, it is a long way but it can be done.” Kamzee confidently stated.

“I hope this will not turn into a drinking spree, your money could be stolen by one of those women of easy virtue you are so fond of,” Wangare sarcastically observed. Kamzee knew better than to respond, he was in no mood for a quarrel.

Very early on Saturday morning Kamzee embarked on his journey to Gilgil. Munyotu his friend had introduced him to a donkey owner in Gilgil but when they got down to the bargain he realized he could not afford the young mare he admired and was forced to settle for a rather tired looking old ass. The transaction, after some haggling was completed to the satisfaction of both parties and Kamzee set off for home with his newly acquired donkey.

When he reached Mai Mahiu, a town about halfway between Gilgil and Regen, at around midday he decided to have his midday meal there. He tethered his sleepy looking donkey to a tree and headed into a butchery and ordered *mutura,* a popular African sausage made from the intestines of a cow or goat, and ugali. After the meal he dashed off into a bar next to the butchery and gulped down a bottle of the fiery Diamond hard liquor. He felt quite rejuvenated and was ready to resume his journey home.

A few kilometres from Mai Mahiu, Kamzee ran into a Maasai herd of cattle grazing along the road. It was a numerous herd but he was not quick enough to change direction to avoid plunging into it. It swamped his tired looking donkey and swallowed it up, digesting it into itself. Kamzee tried to hail the herders to stop the herd and help him find his donkey in vain. They did not seem to notice him and continued herding their cattle towards the Mau forest, far off in the hazy horizon and did not even deign to answer him.

Image source: online in public domain

Kamzee continued to rave at the herdsmen like a demented madman, perhaps they had not seen his donkey get swallowed up into the herd; he waved his hands at the indifferent, stonyhearted herdsmen, he shouted himself hoarse, he tried charging into the impenetrable mass of the moving cattle; but his donkey was indistinguishable in the teeming mobile mass. That was the last time Kamzee ever set his eyes on his newly acquired, tired looking donkey.

Kamzee sat down on the grass by the roadside and watched the herd, his donkey within it, disappear into the Mau forest. He wondered what to tell his wife. He knew she would never believe him. He thought of the recriminations, the taunts and the insults that awaited him. He wondered how he would feed his family. He felt very dejected. After what seemed like a long time he stood up and started walking back to Mai Mahiu to board a vehicle home where the formidable Wangari awaited him.

It was while walking back that he saw a tethered donkey outside a seemingly deserted homestead. It looked younger and healthier than the one he had just lost. Its only defect was its left ear; it was half torn off and jagged at the edges, perhaps torn off in a fight with another donkey. He grew thoughtful, ‘why not untie the donkey and take it home with him’. After all, he had lost his through no fault of his really. God would understand and forgive him this one sin.

Kamzee was not by nature a thief but the situation he found himself in needed an urgent solution. The thought of facing his formidable wife empty handed made

him warm up to the idea and he considered chances of ever being found out practically nil; Regen was far removed from Mai Mahiu and its owner would never dream of his donkey having been taken to such a far off destination. He hovered around casting anxious glances all about him; but there did not seem to be anybody within the homestead.

Kamzee entered the homestead whistling nonchalantly, trying to appear as relaxed and as proprietary as possible as he untied the donkey. It was a cold, cunning and deliberate business. The few people walking on the road did not seem to pay any particular attention to him as he led the donkey onto the road and began his journey home. The first few kilometres were anxious moments but as he travelled farther his confidence was restored. It seemed unlikely anybody would pursue him. He got to Naivasha town in the evening and looked for a cheap lodging at the outskirts of the township and tethered his donkey outside. He paid the watchman to keep an eye on it but he hardly slept a wink and kept on waking up to check on 'his' donkey. He resumed his journey early in the morning after a hurried breakfast of tea and *mandazi* and after fortifying himself in a nearby pub with a bottle of the fiery Diamond moonshine brew that he was addicted to and that was often his consolation.

He arrived home towards dusk to an unusually warm reception from Wangare. "You have for once done well, I believe our days of poverty will soon be over," Wangare beamed. "Let me warm up some food for you, you must be famished, how was your journey? Did the donkey cost you too much?" Too many questions Kamzee mused silently, of course he had no intention of telling her the truth…. well, not the whole truth anyway, she must never know that he had lost one donkey and stole another. "Let me go have a talk with Munyotu first, I need to ask a few questions about how to get started in this water supply business," Kamzee evasively replied. "Oh, I know you are thirsty and you want to go to the pub after your long journey, just say you want to have a drink; but for once I don't mind, but do buy a kilo of meat while you are at it, and don't take too long my dear, it's what I will prepare for dinner." Wangare had not used the term 'my dear' in reference to Kamzee in ages and Kamzee knew the coast was now clear, he could go have his drink in peace and relieve the tension of his eventful journey.

Kamzee's water supply business picked up slowly but steadily but there were quite a number of water vendors and competition was stiff. Each vendor had his own customers, who did not see the need to switch from their old vendor to a new one and Kamzee had to work hard to acquire his own regular customers. The only issue the vendors agreed upon was the cost of water per jerrycan -- a standard twenty shillings.

Kamzee's was an easy going and open nature; he was warm and friendly. He was a natural salesman and the housewives who bought his water found him

endearingly charming. Wangare was naturally hostile to all these housewife customers, as she was to any young female who had anything to do with her husband. She could not sometimes help overhearing some of the seemingly more romantic sounding conversations between Kamzee and some of his so called 'customers'. While she could not quite make out what the other party was saying on cellphone, she was irked by some of her husband's responses such as "okay my dear, I will be there in thirty minutes." Wangare would sarcastically comment, "so your customers have now become 'my dear', is that really a customer or one of your girlfriends?" Kamzee therefore preferred to take his calls outside the house arousing Wangare's suspicions even more.

One of the things he discovered about his customers, mostly housewives, was that they did not always have ready cash. Unlike the other water vendors who demanded cash on delivery, Kamzee began vending water on credit to some of the housewives, much to Wangare's chagrin. "It seems you give your water away for free to some of these 'special customers' of yours," she commented one day while noisily washing up utensils at the sink, "maybe they pay you in other ways that I do not know about," she sarcastically added. Kamzee who was innocent of all these innuendos barely paid attention and thought of his customers who after all were unlikely to shift from the estate any time soon without paying him up. In this way, he ensured that the housewives were unlikely to make their purchases from any other water vendor and his customer base steadily grew.

Kamzee also made it a point to get on friendly terms with the residential rental houses caretakers. He generously plied them with drinks at 'Shakahola' pub on the understanding that should any of their tenants require water, they should contact him first before the other vendors. He also got friendly with the building sites foremen using the same tactic and he landed quite a number of contracts to supply water to their sites. This was very lucrative business since the volumes of water required at these sites were huge. Wangare his wife could not quite disguise her satisfaction with their increased income and the new state of affairs; though she continued to grumble about his drinking and the inevitable female conquests which she imagined he achieved and which she assumed were a natural consequence to a man in a state of drunken disequilibrium.

"Kamzee, your donkey seems to be growing fat, what are you feeding it?" Wangare asked him one day. Kamzee had also noticed that his donkey was growing rounder, he normally tethered it by the roadsides where patches of grass grew and let it browse for whatever meagre meal it could scrounge; so he had not given the matter much thought. It was Munyotu who upon examining it declared that it was pregnant and Kamzee was overjoyed. Although he had nearly had a disastrous start, matters were turning out very satisfactorily; two donkeys would mean more income.

Kamzee's donkey --- he had named it Toto --- as most donkeys were invariably named, eventually calved and he was now the proud owner of two donkeys, well, a donkey and its young mare. He envisioned himself becoming a prosperous man, Wangare growing into a plump contented matron, and his children's school fees problems solved.

Tyson Bwere was a mason by trade and the growing investments in real estate, especially the increase in the construction of high-rise rental apartments had drawn him to Regen from his home in Mai Mahiu. It was being said that these were some of the billions of shillings earned by Kenyans in the diaspora being invested in real estate. One day Kamzee brought water to the construction site where Bwere was the site manager. Bwere thought there was something familiar about the vendor's donkey; he had a peculiar feeling that he had seen it somewhere before.

Later in the day when Kamzee was long gone, Bwere still musing over the matter of the vendor's donkey, thought that it vaguely resembled his neighbour Torekia's lost one. He recalled the hue and cry from his neighbour Torekia's home when he found his donkey gone. He had dashed off to help but there was nothing to be done, the donkey had evaporated. They had speculated that it had probably been on heat and dashed off in search of a male. Or probably again, it had been stolen by a cartel of thieves who specialized in selling donkey meat. Bwere racked his brains as to why he strongly felt the donkey resembled Torekia's lost one. Then it hit him, the half-cut ear with the jagged end! Yes, it resembled Torekia's donkey. He continued observing it when Kamzee delivered water later but was unable to decide whether it really was Torekia's lost donkey.

One day when they chanced to bump into each other at Shakahola pub, Bwere offered Kamzee a drink. As they sipped the fiery Diamond moonshine, Bwere broached the subject, "Kamzee my friend, where did you buy that donkey of yours from?" Kamzee looked startled for a moment, but hid his momentary panic behind a smile. This builder would not know much about donkeys anyway.
"Why do you ask, you are not planning to abandon brick laying and become a water vendor, are you? Have a drink on me, hey Kasmokie! bring this stone mason a drink." Kamzee ordered the chubby waitress trying to deflect the question. "Don't you think this Kasmokie lady is hot?" Kamzee observed as she served their drinks. Bwere noticed Kamzee's evasiveness on the issue of the donkey and did not pursue the matter; but he became more firmly convinced that Kamzee's donkey was indeed Torekia's lost donkey.

On one of his weekends home from his construction work, Bwere bumped into his neighbour Torekia in a local pub. Bwere had completely forgotten about the strange resemblance of the water vendor's donkey to Torekia's had not Torekia happened to talk about his lost donkey. It was then that he recalled the coincidence

of the vendor's donkey similarity to Torekia's lost donkey and Kamzee's reluctance to talk about how he had acquired it. He related the apparent coincidence of the donkey's appearance, especially the jagged half-cut ear.

Torekia got very interested in Bwere's story. He ordered another round of drinks and asked Bwere to go over it again. He was especially curious about Kamzee's brushing off the matter. "What do you think Bwere, should I come to Regen and take a look at this donkey?"
"Why not, it may just turn out to be your donkey, I will first scout where he normally tethers it and let you know, then you can come over," Bwere replied.

Kamzee tethered his donkey and its mare outside his house. Any slight commotion outside at night made him wake up to anxiously peep through his bedroom window to see whether all was alright with his donkeys. This was a precaution against theft as he very well knew ---from his own experience, to what might happen to an unattended donkey. Bwere found out where Kamzee lived, but when he saw the donkey tethered outside his home he was surprised by the young mare beside it. He realized the donkey must have given birth. He communicated this important piece of information to Torekia.

Torekia turned up on a Friday evening and Bwere took him around to Kamzee's home. Kamzee had inherited a quarter acre of land from his father, where he had constructed a two bedroomed timber family house. He tethered the donkeys outside in his small compound. When they got there, Torekia immediately recognized Toto his lost donkey. The half-torn ear was proof enough, he also noted the young mare beside her. He wondered how Kamzee had got possession of his donkey. It is said that donkeys have an uncanny memory; when Toto saw Torekia, she brayed loudly in recognition of her former owner.

Bwere took Torekia to Shakahola pub which he and Kamzee normally patronized. They ordered their drinks from Kasmokie and settled down to wait. "Tell me Bwere, how is this Kamzee fellow, is he the criminal type?" "Not really, he seems a hardworking, good natured fellow. He is sharp to be sure, but you can't survive in this world if you were a fool, would you? He is very fond of his drink though," Bwere observed. "How do you think he came into possession of my donkey?" Torekia wondered. "Someone might have sold it to him, he is unlikely to have gone all the way to Mai Mahiu, but you never know," Bwere replied. "I need your advice Bwere, since I must repossess my donkey, how do I go about it?"

Bwere finished his drink and hailed the waiter, "Kasmokie! you lovey lass, bring us two more drinks." The pub's business name was Upper Hill but the patrons had baptized it 'Shakahola' because once one entered there one emerged quite broke having drank all his money. Some drunken wag had nicknamed it after the infamous Shakahola farm where some misguided born again Christian converts

had once retired to after gifting their pastor with all their worldly belongings which they would not need in heaven and had died fasting, waiting to meet Jesus……and the name had stuck. The noise level in the pub from about six o'clock was normally very high, the music was blaring loudly and the patrons had to almost shout to hear each other and to summon Kasmokie the waitress.

It was amidst this bedlam that Kamzee walked in. Bwere hailed him and made space for him at their table. "Have a drink my friend, how is the water vending business getting on?" Bwere asked. "Quite well thank God," Kamzee replied waving to some of his acquittances as he sat down. His drink arrived, "sweet Kasmokie how are you?" Kamzee greeted the waitress, staring at the outline of her panting breasts beneath her blouse. "Am fine Kamzee, and stop staring at me like that," Kasmokie replied while opening his bottle of the lethal Diamond brew; but she was flattered to see that she aroused such powerful desire in him.

"Kamzee this is my friend Torekia, he is my immediate neighbour back home at Mai Mahiu, did you know I come from Mai Mahiu?" Bwere asked. "No," Kamzee replied shaking hands with Torekia. "Torekia has come to visit me,",but he has a greater mission; he has come in search of his donkey that was stolen last year." Bwere had decided not to beat about the bush over the issue at hand.
Kamzee looked sharply at Torekia and felt uneasy, it was about one year ago when he had lost his donkey and stolen Toto at Mai Mahiu where these two hailed from. He sipped his drink and waited for Bwere to continue. "Do you remember my asking you one day in this same place where you had acquired your donkey from?" "I bought my donkey from Gilgil," Kamzee replied.

Torekia was watching Kamzee carefully trying to size him up, to understand what type of a person he really was, wondering how he would react to his disclosure that Toto was his stolen donkey. Kamzee looked like the hardworking decent type, but appearances could be misleading; his claim that he had bought the donkey from Gilgil cast doubts on his character too, why travel so far to purchase a donkey when there were much closer livestock markets? It was more probable he had bought it from a broker much nearer Regen than Gilgil, but both he and Bwere never thought that Kamzee might have actually stolen the donkey himself.

Torekia spoke up for the first time. "I took a look at your donkey, and it has an uncanny resemblance to the one I lost. In fact I may be so bold as to say that your donkey was stolen from my home." He went on to relate the circumstances surrounding the loss of his donkey but Kamzee hardly paid attention, he had after all, been the sole actor in that drama. "Bwere told me about a donkey whose left ear was half torn off and your apparent reluctance to talk about it, tell me truthfully, where did you acquire your donkey from?" Torekia asked.

Kamzee appeared lost in deep thought. He mentally cursed those hardhearted Maasai herdsmen who had landed him in the trouble he was in now. He wondered

how to handle this new and quite unexpected existential threat. He weighed the pros and cons of telling the truth and did not see how that would improve his situation. “I bought the donkey in Gilgil from a broker in the livestock market”, Kamzee replied, “there really is no way of telling whether what one is buying is stolen property……. I mean one wouldn’t expect stolen livestock to be openly sold in a market.” Torekia mused over Kamzee’s reply and thought it reasonable enough. “I think you do have a point there, these livestock thieves have become very daring.”

“The main question now is what is to be done about this matter,” Bwere interposed, “in my opinion there are only two courses of action possible; either report this matter to the police since it is a crime or discuss amongst ourselves what to do about it.” Torekia looked at Kamzee thoughtfully, “I think we are all reasonable men here,” he said, “I do not see how the police would help us, unless of course you remember the broker who sold you the donkey.”

“No, I don’t think I can recall him, and one year after is a long time and these brokers move all over from market to market; no I do not think I could recall him.” Kamzee repeated emphatically. He wanted nothing to do with the police, his past brushes with the law during his counterfeit cigarette distribution days had given him a bad reputation with them and the aura of past criminality around him might just work against him. “I saw a young mare too,” Torekia told Kamzee, so the donkey gave birth, did it?”
“Yes it did,” Kamzee replied glumly as he mused. How was he going to earn his bread now? What was he to tell his wife Wangare?

“Torekia should take his donkey back and he should not compensate you for your loss,” Bwere said, “you have after all made money using his donkey, but he is a fair man and we sympathize with your situation. This is what I propose we do. Let Torekia take back his donkey and leave you with its young mare. That way you will have had no loss at all and he will have got back his donkey, it will be a win-win situation for both of you.”
“No!” both belong to me,” Torekia thundered slapping the table, “I must have both of them.”
They sat silently sipping their drinks. “Be reasonable my friend,” Bwere told Torekia, “Kamzee here has been quite cooperative and has not raised any difficulties. He might have insisted that the donkey is his and dragged us off to the police where the matter would take ages to resolve. The law could probably side with him for all you know and you will have laboured for nothing.” Torekia thought over Bwere’s line of reasoning and concluded that it made sense. He must not let his greed have the better of him. “Okay, he may keep the young mare but he should compensate me for the year he has had it, I too incurred a major loss by being forced to hire a donkey to ferry things from my farm.”

“Does this fellow look wealthy to you? forget about the past Torekia, what happened cannot be undone, thank God that you will at least have your donkey back,” Bwere wisely observed. “Why not sell the donkey to me, I will give you a fair price for it, Kamzee suggested. “No, Toto was very useful on my farm and I have never been able to replace her, I need to have her back,” Torekia replied. “What if you took the young mare instead and leave me with its mother,” Kamzee persuasively countered. “You are lucky Torekia has agreed not to take both the donkey and its young mare away, be content with what is left you.” Bwere assertively stated. “Torekia please sell me the donkey instead of taking it away, I need to continue earning a living.” Kamzee persuasively tried again. “That donkey was very useful to me, you know I am a farmer and a donkey does a lot of work on the farm,” Torekia replied. “I have not had the money to replace it and I thank my friend here for being so observant and for alerting me of my donkey’s whereabouts. I think you shall just have to find other ways of making money.”

Kamzee did not see that he had any option, at least he was to be left the young mare. As Torekia had correctly observed he had earned his daily bread for an year with his donkey. He was sure that had Torekia known the truth, he would have insisted on taking even the young mare away, or worse still, complained to the police. As it were he was lucky to get off lightly.

“When do you plan to take back your donkey to Mai Mahiu?” Kamzee asked. “Tomorrow first thing in the morning, it’s a long walk to Mai Mahiu,” Torekia answered. Kamzee knew of the long trek only too well. “I have one request to make to you, could you please accompany me to my house and help me explain to my wife why I will no longer be the owner of a donkey.” Torekia did not think that a very good idea, he saw no need to involve himself in Kamzee’s domestic affairs but Bwere, seeing Kamzee’s predicament, intervened and declared that they should both go and help Kamzee explain to his wife. That way, he argued, the explanation would be more credible and believable.

Wangare was surprised when Kamzee turned up with the two since he normally met his friends at Shakahola pub. She was about to go start preparing the customary cup of tea for the visitors but Bwere asked her not to since they were in a hurry and would not stay very long, they had just come to pass on some information. Kamzee cleared his throat, introduced his guests and hesitantly began, “Mama Karendi you remember when I went to purchase a donkey at Mai Mahiu?” “Yes I do, that was about an year ago wasn’t it?” she replied looking puzzled. “These gentleman here,” Kamzee said indicating Torekia, “was the owner but I did not buy the donkey from him. I bought it from a broker in the market.” Wangare’s puzzlement grew and she wondered what this was all about. Kamzee continued, “It seems the broker had stolen the donkey from Torekia here and his neighbour Bwere, who works in construction here in Regen happened to see my donkey when I was delivering water at the construction site he is working

at and recognized it." Wangare looked sharply at Bwere but did not think she had ever seen him before. "How did you recognize the donkey, I thought all donkeys look the same, at least they do to me, although I don't know much about donkeys anyway." Bwere launched into a long explanation of what had transpired, carefully emphasizing the similarities especially the half torn left ear before Torekia took over and narrated how his donkey got stolen.

Wangare was aghast, "so what happens now? Do you want to involve the police and have my husband arrested?" Wangare despite all her grousing could not imagine life without Kamzee. She pictured him languishing in jail and the thought frightened her. "No Mama Karendi, your husband is not to blame, he would not have known that the donkey was stolen property," Torekia reassured her. "This is what I propose to do, I have come to take my donkey back but I will not leave your husband empty handed. I will let him keep the young mare that the donkey birthed so that he does not lose everything." Wangare was silent for quite a while trying to understand the new turn of events. She thought Torekia's decision fair and did not see any other way out of the predicament. "I think what you have said is reasonable, at least we shall retain the young mare," Wangare replied at length. The gentlemen stood up to leave and shook hands with Wangare, "So sorry Mama," Bwere consoled her, all will turn out well in the end. Kamzee escorted them out.

It was much later in the evening as Kamzee and his wife were discussing their future economic prospects that he decided to tell her the truth of what had really happened at Mai Mahiu. Wangare listened without interruption and for once sympathized with her husband. She was amazed at Kamzee's audacity in stealing the donkey and for perhaps the first time appreciated her hold over her husband and understood how much she dominated him. That the thought of displeasing her had made him attempt this dare devil act was proof of the fact. She wondered what she would have done in his place. She doubted that she would have had the courage to steal a donkey.

"It's okay my dear," she said parting him on the back affectionately, "we still have the young mare; can it carry the weight of the load its mother carried?" "Not really, but I shall increase its load gradually and we will, by God's grace, survive.

So the villager does have such encounters with the hard facts of life at one time or the other during his existence. Kamzee's mare has since grown and he is still vending water. Wangare's hostile feelings towards Kamzee's young 'special' housewife customers who take water on credit is unabated and she continues to vilify his escapades to Shakahola and the female conquests that she imagines happen when he is under the influence of the moonshine liquor he is so fond of.

Gitau Muthuma, MA, has been a Senior Lecturer of English at the College of Business and Economics; National University of Rwanda. Institute of Modern Languages, SIMAD University, Mogadisho, Somalia and Department of English Language, Eelo University, Borama, Somaliland. He has also been an editor with Focus Publishers, Nairobi and is a researcher with a number of paper publications in various peer reviewed journals. He is currently dabbling in fictional writing.

Voices in Melodies: Remembering Mau Mau

Asajile Mwakalinga
The Technical University of Kenya

This paper explores the transformative power of music in amplifying marginalized voices, with a specific focus on the 'Nyimbo cia Mau Mau' album and its contemporary musical expressions. By examining the historical and cultural significance of these songs and conducting field visits in the Dagoretti area, the study reveals how music serves as a vital conduit for addressing and preserving the silenced narratives of the Mau Mau uprising. The research involved interviews with respondents aged between 55 and 80 years old, who shared personal stories and reflections on the enduring impact of Mau Mau songs. The analysis extends to contemporary compositions like Eric Wainaina's "Fungeni Macho" which draws parallels between past injustices and present political realities. The study underscores the multifaceted role of music in uniting communities, empowering the oppressed, and fostering a collective memory of resistance. By bringing to light the powerful legacy of Mau Mau music, this paper highlights its continued relevance in advocating for social justice and commemorating historical struggles.

Introduction

The Mau Mau movement that took place in Kenya during the 1950s and 1960s was a pivotal period of resistance against British colonial rule (Van De Walle et al., 2005). The Mau Mau fighters, primarily consisting of the Kikuyu community, experienced marginalization and oppression, leading to the suppression of their voices. This paper seeks to investigate the utilization of music as a form of expression for marginalized communities and its significance in the Mau Mau movement.

Dagoretti's relationship with the Mau Mau movement was deeply intertwined with the area's socio-economic dynamics and proximity to Nairobi. The colonial restrictions on African cultivation of cash crops led Dagoretti's residents to turn to trade in foodstuffs and rental houses as a primary means of capital accumulation. However, these activities faced severe restrictions from the colonial government, intensifying local grievances. Both the Kenya African Union (KAU) and the Mau Mau movement in Dagoretti relied heavily on the marginalized peasantry and economically oppressed segments of the population. This socio-economic

context fueled the radicalization of the local populace, making Dagoretti a significant base for Mau Mau leaders who were embittered by racially discriminatory legislation and economic disenfranchisement. Additionally, the repatriation of Kikuyu squatters from the Rift Valley during the Emergency period added to the radical political dimension in Dagoretti, further solidifying its role as a stronghold of anti-colonial sentiment and activity (Chege, 1981).

This relationship was particularly evident during our interviews in the Dagoretti area. Although Mau Mau wasn't the primary focus of our visits, it consistently emerged as the predominant topic of discussion among respondents aged between 55 and 80 years, hence the interest of this researcher. One respondent mentioned that he had received a piece of land as restitution after their previous land was taken during the Mau Mau period. This illustrates the deep historical connection the area has with the Mau Mau uprising.

Speaking through music

Music has been a powerful medium for marginalized communities to voice their concerns and address social issues throughout history. It serves as a platform for expressing experiences, frustrations, and aspirations that may otherwise remain unspoken. By examining instances of music being used to amplify the voices of the silenced, we can gain valuable insights into the transformative potential of music.

One notable example of music being used to voice concerns is found in the African context. During the apartheid era in South Africa, music played a crucial role in the struggle against racial segregation and oppression. Artists such as Miriam Makeba and Hugh Masekela used their music to protest against the apartheid regime and raise awareness about the injustices faced by black South Africans. Makeba's song "Soweto Blues" (1987) and Masekela's "Bring Him Back Home" (1987) are powerful examples of how music can convey the pain, resilience, and hope of a marginalized community (Hull & Coplan, 1987). These songs became anthems of resistance, uniting people and inspiring them to fight for justice.

Beyond Africa, music has also been used as a means of expressing concerns and advocating for social change. In the United States during the Civil Rights Movement, musicians played a significant role in the struggle

for racial equality. Artists like Nina Simone, Bob Dylan, and Sam Cooke used their music to address issues of racial discrimination and promote social justice. Simone's iconic song "Mississippi Goddam" (1964) and Cooke's "A Change Is Gonna Come" (1964) became powerful anthems that captured the spirit of the movement and gave voice to the frustrations and aspirations of African Americans.

These examples demonstrate how music can transcend barriers and amplify the voices of marginalized communities. Through its emotional and evocative power, music can convey the experiences and struggles of a community, fostering unity and inspiring action. It provides a platform for marginalized individuals to express their concerns and demand change.

Music and Mau Mau

The Mau Mau movement in Kenya was characterized by a strong sense of resistance against British colonial rule, and music played a crucial role in mobilizing and uniting the fighters. Music served as a powerful means of communication, conveying messages of resistance, solidarity, and hope thus providing a space for the fighters to express their grievances, share their stories, and inspire others to join the struggle.

During the field visit, respondents frequently turned the conversation to music, each offering unique insights. One respondent expressed discomfort with listening to Mau Mau songs due to the painful memories of torture they evoked. In contrast, others referred to the album "Nyimbo cia Mau Mau" as a valuable tool for remembering the struggle. They noted its significance during the Mau Mau era, its relevance in post-Mau Mau times, and its enduring importance today.

Furthermore, the ongoing popularity of the "Nyimbo cia Mau Mau" songs on platforms like YouTube, where they have garnered significant views, underscores their lasting impact and relevance. These songs continue to attract interest and serve as a contemporary source of cultural and historical connection, highlighting how historical music can bridge past and present.

By recognizing and honoring the significance of music in the Mau Mau Movement, we not only pay homage to the past but also draw inspiration for the ongoing struggle towards a more just and equitable society in Kenya and beyond. The transformative power of music as a vehicle for amplifying marginalized voices remains a vital tool in the fight for social justice,

ensuring that the legacy of the Mau Mau Movement continues to inspire and resonate with future generations.

Nyimbo cia Mau Mau

Nyimbo cia Mau Mau, which translates to "Songs of the Mau Mau" stands as a poignant musical anthology that encapsulates the spirit and struggles of the uprising in Kenya. The album, composed by Joseph Kamaru, comprises a collection of songs passed down through oral tradition. Its songs were composed during and after the period of colonial resistance. Through the album's stirring melodies and evocative lyrics, it offers a window into the untold stories, sacrifices, and triumphs of those who fought for Kenya's independence, making it a living legacy of the enduring spirit of resistance and liberation. A Kikuyu elder from Nakuru, who refers to himself as a son of Mau Mau and did not want his name disclosed, helped with the translation and summaries of the randomly selected ten songs from the album "Nyimbo cia Mau Mau".

Wiyathi na Ithaka: (Self-Rule and Our Land) This song symbolizes the fighters' unwavering commitment to reclaiming their ancestral land and re-asserting their right to self-rule. Through stirring lyrics and evocative melodies, it served as a rallying cry for independence and galvanized support for the Mau Mau cause.

Twathiaga Tukenete: (We Happily Went) vividly portrays the experiences of the fighters in the forests, weaving together Kikuyu proverbs to narrate their struggles, triumphs, and sacrifices. Despite the hardships endured, the song emphasizes the fighters' resilience and determination, highlighting their unwavering commitment to the struggle for freedom.

Mbara Ndiri Mwago: (War is Not Fun) This somber song reflects on the profound losses suffered by the Kikuyu community during the uprising, particularly the tragic fate of many first-born males who perished in the forests. Although sorrow permeates the lyrics, the song conveys a message of resilient hope, honoring the sacrifices of fallen heroes.

Kambi ya Lang'ata: (Lang'ata Detention Camp) is a haunting reminder of the atrocities committed in detention camps, where detainees endured brutal, inhumane treatment meted out by the colonial authorities. Its lyrics bear witness to the long suffering of the detainees, serving as a testament to their indomitable spirit.

Uka Murata Twaranirie: (Come We Talk, My Friend) uplifts and celebrates the camaraderie and solidarity among the fighters. It encourages mutual support in the face of adversity. Its lyrics instill a sense of unity and purpose, reinforcing the resolve to overcome all obstacles in fighting for freedom.

Mwene Nyaga Twakuhoya: (Almighty God We Beseech You) This is a heartfelt prayer expressing gratitude while seeking divine guidance in warfare tactics. The lyrics provided spiritual solace and strength to the fighters, reminding them of the power of prayer in times of trial and tribulation.

Aciari Tigai Kumaka: (Parents, Don't Panic) is a song that sheds light on the betrayals and treachery that unfolded in the community because of war related anxieties and lack of faith. Parents are urged to cease worrying in the face of this treachery. The poignant lyrics are a stark reminder of the betrayals endured by the community because of the Mau Mau uprising.

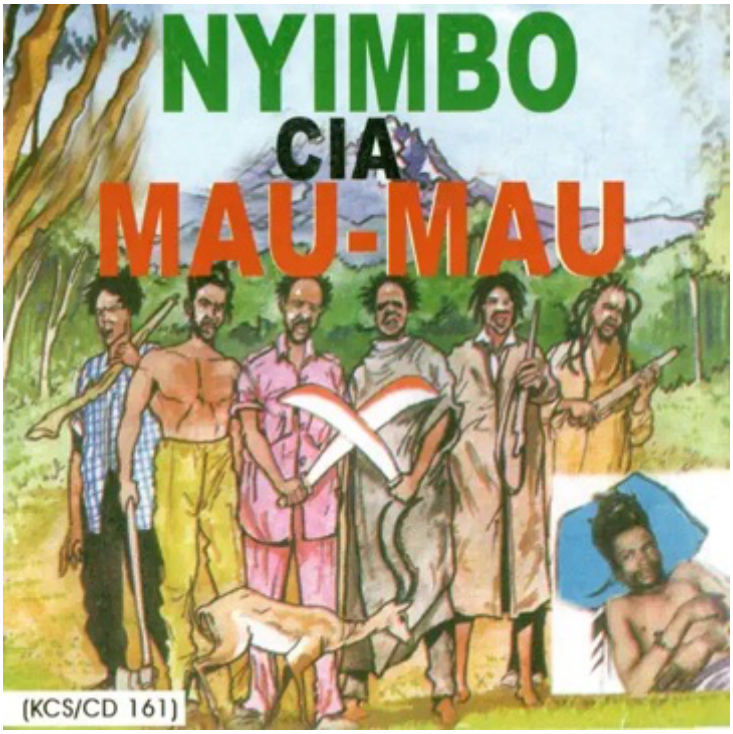
Bururi Witu wa Gikuyu: (Our Land, O Gikuyu) celebrates the divine blessing bestowed upon the Gikuyu people, affirming the unbreakable bond between the people and the land gifted to them by God. Through its empowering lyrics, the song instilled a sense of resilience and determination in the hearts of the listeners, rallying them to defend their ancestral homeland.

Kenyatta Niagathirwo: (Kenyatta Was Praised) pays homage to Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya's first president, revered as a chosen leader and it recounts his arrival at the Yatta detention camp amidst a thunderstorm. Its stirring lyrics celebrate Kenyatta's enduring faith and vision for a free and prosperous nation.

Ndiui Undu Ungi: (I Don't Know Anything Else) This song serves as a defiant anthem mocking the futile attempts of British interrogators to extract information from Mau Mau fighters. Its lyrics are witty. It celebrates the fighters' steadfast refusal to betray their cause and their unwavering loyalty and solidarity in the face of adversity.

The ten songs from the 'Nyimbo cia Mau Mau' album encapsulate a diverse range of themes that held significant relevance during the Mau

Mau uprising and continue to, in contemporary Kenya. Themes such as resistance and defiance underscore the fighters' unwavering commitment to challenging British colonial rule, while solidarity and camaraderie highlight the importance of unity in the face of adversity. Sacrifice and loss speak to the profound hardships endured by the Gikuyu community during the struggle for independence. At the same time, themes of endurance and resilience emphasize the fighters' determination to persevere despite the challenges they face. Additionally, faith and spirituality play a role in providing solace and guidance. They bring to the surface the deep-seated beliefs that sustained the community throughout the Mau Mau ordeal. In contemporary Kenya, these themes continue to resonate, serving as enduring symbols of courage, resilience, and unity in the ongoing quest for social justice and liberation. Through reinterpretations by modern artists, the songs remain relevant, offering a powerful reminder of the enduring legacy of the Mau Mau movement and its impact on the collective consciousness of the Kenyan people.



Nyimbo cia Mau Mau album cover (JOSEPH KAMARU – Kamaaru wa Wanjiru, 2020)

Mau Mau music in Contemporary Kenya

The reverberations of the music from the Mau Mau era continue to be heard in contemporary times. Eric Wainaina's 2001 song, *'Fungeni Macho'* reflects the historical injustices faced by the Kikuyu people, relating them to the country's current political state while underscoring the significance of remembering and learning from the past. Through the lyrics, Wainaina pays tribute to the sacrifices made by the Mau Mau fighters, calling for a collective understanding of their enduring struggle. A respondent, in Dagoretti, mentioned Eric Wainaina during the interview, pointing him out as a contemporary artist imbued with the spirit of Mau Mau.

In exploring music's role in the Mau Mau era, a respondent shared a personal connection to the hymn *"Mwene Nyaga"* that is part of the 'Nyimbo cia Mau Mau' album. The respondent said the song resonates with him because it encapsulates the cultural and historical essence of his community. It is a symbol of his personal connection with the [Mau Mau] historic movement. He emphasized the hymn's rich metaphorical lyrics that capture the emotions and narratives related to the historic resistance. This intimate connection to *"Mwene Nyaga"* adds a poignant layer to his narrative, illustrating that music is more than a mere documentation of historical artefacts. Music is a living, breathing embodiment of personal experiences that bring back to life a spirit of resilience that was borne in the Mau Mau experience.

The resonance of "Mwene Nyaga" is palpable in contemporary Kenya. Modern artists continue to draw inspiration from this iconic song. A notable example is Kwame Rĩgĩi's, rendition of the song which pays homage to the original while infusing contemporary elements into it. His re-interpretation not only honours the legacy of the Mau Mau movement but also recontextualizes the song for the current generation. By preserving and re-imagining the themes of faith, resilience, and liberation embedded within "Mwene Nyaga", Rĩgĩi ensures that the Mau Mau spirit remains alive and relevant in Kenya's musical landscape.

The songs from the 'Nyimbo cia Mau Mau' album were uploaded on YouTube between 2019 and 2022, six decades after the end of colonial

rule. They have since garnered significant attention. For instance, the song "Wiyathi na Ithaka" had accumulated 157,000 views by June 2024, demonstrating the continued relevance and resonance with listeners today. The album serves as a contemporary source of cultural and historical connection.

Conclusion

The exploration of music's role in the Mau Mau uprising illuminates its profound impact as a form of resistance, resilience, and cultural expression. The 'Nyimbo cia Mau Mau' album serves as a poignant testament to the struggles and triumphs of the Mau Mau fighters, encapsulating themes of resistance, solidarity, sacrifice, and hope. Through its evocative melodies and powerful lyrics, this musical anthology continues to resonate in contemporary Kenya, inspiring artists and activists to draw from its legacy in their quest for social justice and liberation.

The enduring significance of Mau Mau music is evident in modern reinterpretations, such as Kwame Rĩgĩi's rendition of "Mwene Nyaga" which honours the legacy and recontextualizes the song. By preserving and re-imagining the themes of Mau Mau songs, contemporary artists ensure that the spirit remains alive and relevant in today's Kenya.

References

Chege, M. (1981). A tale of two slums: electoral politics in Mathare and Dagoretti. *Review of African Political Economy*, *8*(20), 74–88. https://doi.org/10.1080/03056248108703457

Hull, R. W., & Coplan, D. B. (1987). In Township Tonight! South Africa's Black City Music and Theatre. *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, *20*(4), 748. https://doi.org/10.2307/219674

Munene, M. (2012). Kenya: Between hope and despair, 1963-2011. *African Affairs*, *111*(445), 680–682. https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/ads052

Van De Walle, N., Anderson, D. M., & Elkins, C. (2005). Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty

War in Kenya and the End of Empire. *Foreign Affairs*, *84*(3), 151. https://doi.org/10.2307/20034404

Discography

Hugh Masekela - Topic. (2015, August 28). *Mandela (Bring him back home!)* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F9Pj0P2HXMI

Joseph Kamaru - Kamaaru wa Wanjiru. (2020, October 23). *Nyimbo cia Mau Mau* [Video]. YouTube. https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PL4Kfck4F4k-dzVaB5VMwnLmZnugofHnSD&si=pTX8ibD2AhwJsdIW

Miriam Makeba Official Channel. (2015, March 17). *Mariam Makeba - Soweto Blues (Live in Concert)* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YGbEQ210_J4

Nina SimoneVEVO. (2015, June 26). *Nina Simone - Mississippi Goddam (Official Audio - Live)* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-HM2S6TVYII

Sam Cooke VEVO. (2016, January 22). *Sam Cooke - A Change Is Gonna Come (Official Lyric Video)* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wEBlaMOmKV4

Asajile Mwakalinga is in the Department of Music and Performing Arts, Technical University of Kenya
assahsasha@gmail.com

The Murals of Dagoretti: Examining Visual Communication and its significance on Social Change

Joyce Omwoha
Technical University of Kenya

The paper discusses how meaning is socially constructed through personal feelings and opinions, particularly in the context of interpreting images. Although image interpretation can be subjective, visuals have a significant influence on human reasoning. The study focuses on murals in the Dagoretti area of Nairobi, analyzing how these public artworks reflect the lived experiences of local residents. It explores murals as a medium for visual communication, their impact on social change, i.e. on shaping the behaviour and attitudes of the community. Field visits to various wards in Dagoretti were conducted, employing qualitative techniques such as content analysis and interviews. The findings affirm that murals play a powerful role in shaping community behaviour, in mobilizing and connecting people. However, the socio-cultural significance of murals, in urban spaces, is less appreciated.

Introduction and context

The significance of art and music, as expressions of a community's identity and heritage, is discussed by focusing on street art, murals and graffiti. Street art includes various forms of public artistic interventions that are often thought-provoking and accessible (Aquilani, 2023). Murals, described as large-scale commissioned artworks, transform public spaces with narratives and cultural symbols. They are created using traditional artistic tools like paint and brushes. Graffiti, typically unauthorized, is seen as a rebellious form of self-expression or vandalism, often marking or tagging property. The distinction between murals, street art and graffiti is debated, with some arguing that they are closely related. Street art, a rapidly growing and popular art movement, primarily appears in urban areas and public spaces. While it reflects political and social issues, it ranges from simple sprayed tags to monumental murals that define the character of neighbourhoods and cities worldwide.

According to #LiveInNairobi (2023) street art is vibrant and diverse, reflecting Nairobi's cultures and communities. "Nairobi has a vibrant street art culture, with a wide range of colourful murals and graffiti that can be found throughout the city (…) on the walls of buildings, bridges,

and other public spaces". Johnson & Munene, (2022), in the Africa Design Review Journal explore street art as a form of expressive art for political change, affirming that "lacing visual art in Nairobi's open spaces extends possibilities for social transformation (…) for publicizing protests and resistance movements, while creating public sociopolitical spaces of engagement". Johnson and Munene single out American artist Joel Bergner and Kenyan graffiti artist for contributing to a peace narrative that was featured across all media platforms in the run up to Kenya's 2013 elections. Their murals used a mixture of imagery and text (coming from the youth and community consultations) covering 'tribalism', corruption, unity, peace and reconciliation. Further, Gnana, S. K. and Rajendran, J. (2023) note that historically, murals have been used to tell stories, convey cultural values, and promote political or social messages. In recent times mural painting has gained significant attention for its potential to contribute to socioeconomic development. Murals are visually captivating forms of public art due to their size and accessibility. Gacheru's article *Graffiti art spreads all over Nairobi* (2021) decries the lack of documentation of Kenyan graffiti artists yet they have been painting since the 1970s.

Although murals are seen as cultural expressions that celebrate identity and tradition, those selected for this study were painted by non-specialists, and are analysed to gauge their impact on social change and how they shape the behaviour and attitudes of the Dagoretti community.

Methodology

This study sought to identify the communicative and transformative power of murals, and their expressive, creative and evocative qualities in Dagoretti Constituency with a focus on Kawangware and Kabiro wards. The study employed qualitative techniques (content analysis of 8 murals), with Focus Group Discussions (FDG) and interviews to provide deeper insights into the reasons behind certain behaviors and attitudes by community members, analyzing the various elements contributing to the creation, significance, and impact of murals in urban Dagoretti. Data was collected through murals (8) accessed on various walls around Muslim, Soko Mjinga and Msalaba as some of the areas that featured most murals. One FGD was carried out with 8 community members aged between 18-34 and one key informant, Mr. John Mwangi, Director of Voice of Dagoretti (popularly known as Voice of Dago, CBO). Voice of Dagoretti is a Community Based Organization (CBO) that uses youth talent to

change the community through advocacy, activism and peer mentoring. The choice of the study sample (18-34) was based on our pilot study that revealed that murals speak mostly to the youth. This study defined the youth according to Article 260 of Kenya's Constitution which defines a Youth as a person aged between eighteen (18) years and thirty four (34) years.

Findings

As much as murals are large-scale public artworks that often carry powerful messages and beautify the urban landscape; the ones in Dagoretti lacked the aesthetic aspect; because, unlike Dagoretti artisans, mural artists work voluntarily and do not derive any income or tourists to the area. Mural paintings can be seen as both an expression of the people, as well as other people's representation of them, and therefore creating a shift in the power of representation. Alleyne and Brint referred by Waterton E. and Smith, L. (2010), *The recognition and misrecognition of community heritage*, p 7. A male Dagoretti resident (31) remarked that "*ordinary people's lives are communicated through the murals."* In an interview carried out with Mr. John, while speaking about who works on the murals of Dagoretti, he affirmed that most artists who have commercialized their skill, do so on canvas. Mr. John notes too that art empowers the youth in Dagoretti by giving them a platform to share their stories and influence their environment. The FGD with community members (the youth who are also the artists of the murals, community leaders and residents) , revealed that art fosters a sense of unity and pride; advocates for change and brings attention to the challenges faced by the community.

From the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) that I held with 8 community members aged between 20-35, the following sentiments were expressed:

A 30 year old lady noted that "*When community members are involved in creating ideas about murals and are allowed to design and paint the murals; it encourages community participation and fosters a sense of ownership and pride among residents*".

A 26 year old male concurs by highlighting that "the murals are canvas for social expression, as they enable people to tackle social situations well".

A young mother (20) noted that "*.....mural paintings are a tool for change, if someone had told me about domestic violence, I would not have stayed in an abusive marriage for 2 years. The murals gave me information about where to seek help.*"
Controversies over mural's placement and messages have not been witnessed in Dagoretti, this is because the community's culture dictates that the only murals accepted are those that do not attract conflict, are not vulgar and speak to developmental aspects of Dagoretti. Permissions are sought so that community ethics are maintained.

Below are the murals selected for this study

Muungano Wanavijiji

Fig. 1. A mural aiming at educating community members about climate change and its impacts. The mural is in Kabiro Ward, Dagoretti North Constituency. Photo taken on April 2024.

Young Imm Kang Song, and Jo Ann Gammel further discuss perspectives of mural painting, and community art in the article *Ecological Mural as Community Reconnection.* Based on a specific context, the authors find patterns where the murals can serve as effective tools to create awareness of environmental issues in local communities. The text on the mural (Fig.1) - *Muungano Wanavijiji* translated to English reads: A union of community/village members. Here, community members have come together to speak about climate change and it's effects to their lives. The image of the world appears sad, this depicts the state of the world as affected by climate change. The dull colors used to draw the tree stump (illustrating deforestation) and the smoke from the locomotive (illustrating air pollution); all cause global warming, a major cause of climate change.

The text *Mazingira yetu jukumu letu* translated to English reads: Our environment our responsibility. Here, community members are called upon to take care of the environment they live in. Knowledge of and understanding climate change is important in the world today because it helps young people to understand and tackle the consequences of global warming, encourages them to change their behaviour and helps them to adapt to what is already a global emergency.

Mental Health Mtaani

Fig. 2. A mural on mental health. The mural is in Kabiro Ward, Dagoretti North Constituency. Photo taken on April 2024.

The text on the mural (Fig.2) – Mental Health *Mtaani* translated to English reads: Mental Health in the neighbourhood. Murals as methods to reach out to people in the community is manifested in this mural. Where imagery has been used vividly through words, which creates visual representations in the mind of the audience. While it evokes emotions about mental health (by using words like: anxiety, pain, suicide, fear, anxiety, depression) the

main message is conveyed by the taped mouth, The message being that the youth need to speak out on any of the stated states of mind. Speaking helps to end mental health stigma. This particular mural was sponsored by The Voice of Dagoretti CBO. The Director, Mr. Mwangi notes that the purpose of this mural was to encourage the young people to speak up so that their issues can be identified and addressed. Mwangi observed that many young people in Dagoretti have been resorting to drugs as a coping mechanism, instead of speaking up and getting help. These expressions strengthen youth bonds and inspire hope and resilience. They portray positive messages and aspirations for a better future.

Wezesha young mothers

Fig. 3. The Aim of the Mural is to encourage the community to report Gender based violence cases. And be courageous enough to speak out about various challenges and issues they are going through. It also focuses on empowering young mothers in the informal settlement. The mural is in Kabiro Ward, Dagoretti North Constituency. Photo taken on April 2024.

Shane Grammer Arts (2024) discuss how artists, armed with brushes and creativity, become agents of change, giving neglected walls a new lease on life. Murals transcend mere art; they become conduits for hope, expression, and revitalization. The text on the mural (Fig.3) - *Wezesha* Young Mothers translated to English reads: Empower young mothers. Other text on the wall note Sexual and Gender Based violence, mental health, *inua ndoto* (lift up the dream) are issues that affect young mothers in the society that need societal intervention. This mural is for all members of the community

to help fight systematic and cultural barriers that prevent young mothers in urban areas from being successful.

The photo above illustrates the community's anger over gender disparities manifested in the community. It shows protest over the matters mentioned (Sexual and Gender Based Violence, Climate justice etc, that affects women).

Visit the nearest health clinic for all health services

Fig. 4. The Aim of the Mural is to educate the community about communicable diseases such as COVID. The mural is in Msalaba, Dagoretti North Constituency. Photo taken on April 2024.

Murals as methods for raising awareness are depicted in the above mural (Fig. 4.) urging community members to visit the nearest health clinic for all health services. These services include; Laboratory services, Clinical and emergency services, Occupational therapy, nutrition health, Prevention and control of HIV and AIDs, etc. A 28 year old male revealed (in FDG) that "....this particular mural made me visit the clinic to get HIV testing and I encouraged my partner to get family planning services.

Nisome

Fig. 5. The Mural aims at stimulating conversations about teenage pregnancies and encourage parents to engage in similar conversations with their children. The mural is in Muslim area, Dagoretti North Constituency. Photo taken on April 2024.

The text on the mural (Fig.5) - *Nisome* translated to English reads: Allow me to have an education. *Chanzo cha mimba kwa watoto ni nini?* translated to English reads:What is the source of child pregnancies? *Wazazi kutowashauri watoto* translated to English reads: Parents not advising their children. *Tuwashauri* translated to English reads: Lets advise them. This mural depicts the inhabitants' diverse experiences. Their daily life is conveyed, and reflected through this; these are; child/teenage pregnancies, girls dropping out of school and poor parenting.

Komesha Vurugu, Dumisha Amani

Fig. 6. The Mural urges the residents to maintain peace during and after Kenya's general elections. The mural is in Soko Mjinga, Dagoretti North Constituency. Photo taken on April 2024.

The text on the mural (Fig.6) - *Komesha Vurugu, Dumisha Amani* translated to English reads: End violence, Maintain Peace. The Mural urges the residents to maintain peace during and after Kenya's general elections. Maintaining peace in Kenya has always been problematic because politics in Kenya has been ethnicized, with parties coalescing around ethic power barons. Dagoretti is a cosmopolitan space, inhabited by people from various ethnic communities, hence a potential hotbed for political violence. This mural urges everyone to maintain peace no matter their political affiliation.

Tiba ni sisi

Fig. 7. The Mural encourages the community to take caution during the COVID pandemic. The mural is in Muslim area, Dagoretti North Constituency. Photo taken on April 2024.

The text on the mural (Fig.7) - *Tiba ni sisi* translated to English reads: The cure is us. The Mural encourages the community to be cautious during the COVID pandemic. Here, community responsibility is sought to reduce direct contact with other people to reduce chances of infection; education on COVID-19 vaccines, practicing good hygiene and other practices that improve hygiene.

Dhuluma za kijinsia

Fig. 8. The Mural offers insights on the various types of Gender-Based Violence (GBV), and sensitizes the on the reporting mechanisms. The mural is in Muslim, Dagoretti North Constituency. Photo taken in April 2024.

The text on the mural (Fig.7) - *Dhuluma za kijinsia* translated to English reads: Gender-Based Violence (GBV). *Tusinyamaze, Tusemezane, Tujiepushe* translated to English reads:Let's not be silent, Let's talk to each other, Let's avoid temptations. Gender-Based Violence (GBV), also known as the silent killer is an issue of concern around the world. Dagoretti is not an exception. The mural seeks to provide a voice to those who might otherwise be marginalized. Those affected are urged to speak up, while those not affected are taught how to identify potential GBV situations .

Conclusion

This study concludes by noting that social change is gradual and there are signs that it has profound effects on Dagoretti. 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 two challenges noted are that; there is no economic impact of murals in Dagoretti and there exists challenges of maintaining and preserving these murals. There is need to form and utilize partnerships with various institutions in the communities; religious, administrative and gender institutions to give opportunities for more conversations on contentious issues affecting the community.

References

Gacheru, M. (2021, June, 28). The Graffiti art spreads all over Nairobi. Nation Newspaper, Life and style. Retrieved on July 21, 2024, from: https://nation.africa/kenya/life-and-style/art-books/graffiti-art-spreads-all-over-nairobi-3453488

Gnana, S. K. and Rajendran, J. (2023). *Role of mural painting in the social economic development*. International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts (IJCRT) https://ijcrt.org/papers/IJCRT2303281.pdf

Government of Kenya (GoK) (2010). The Constitution of Kenya 2010.Nairobi: Government Printer.

Sharon K. Johnson, S. K. & Munene, M. (2022) Street Art: A Form Of Expressive Art for Political Change. Africa Design Review Journal. Vol 1 No 2. 166-177.

Street art, video and Social Change: Kenya street artist WiseTwo visits witness - witness blog: Street artists, street art, street graffiti. Pinterest. Retrieved June 26, 2024, from https://www.pinterest.com/pin/427138345886616451/

Lindstro, M., (2014). *Contemporary Art as a Catalyst for Social Change: Public Art and Art Production in a Community of Practice.* Master's thesis, Institutionen for studier av samhällsutveckling och kultur – ISAK LiU Norrko

#LiveInNairobi blog, (2023). Overview of the vibrant street art culture in Nairobi. Retrieved July 20, 2024, from https://medium.com/@liveinnbo/overview-of-the-vibrant-street-art-culture-in-nairobi-988ad5652698#:~:text=Nairobi%20has%20a%20vibrant%20street,bridges%2C%20and%20other%20public%20spaces.

Paley, E. (2023). Exploring the Role of Street Art in Urban Development and Social Com-mentary in Kenya. International Journal of Arts, Recreation and Sports, 1, 27-38.

https://carijournals.org/journals/index.php/IJARS/article/view/1515
Voa. (2014, August 6). Kenya Graffiti Artists Spray for Social Change. VOA. Retrieved June 26, 2024, from https://www.voanews.com/a/1972890.html

Joyce Omwoha, PhD is a Lecturer at the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at The Technical University of Kenya. Her research areas of interest are: Media, Citizenship and Identity, Peacebuilding, Gender Studies, Health Communication and the analysis of the Social Media Culture in Kenya and beyond.
email: Joyce.Omwoha@tukenya.ac.ke joyeomwoha@gmail.com

The Architectural Morphology: Narratives of the Elders of Dagoretti

Joseph Kedogo
Technical University of Kenya

Architectural morphologies reflect the socio-political, cultural, and economic influences of their time and place. The illustration used is Dagoretti, Kenya, in the 1950s. This period, marked by the end of colonial rule, was traumatic for the people of Dagoretti, who suffered under the hegemony of the colonialists and their local collaborators. The painful experiences of this era remain largely unrecognized, hindering healing and reconciliation. The text raises questions about the nature of "official history" and whether an untold, unofficial history exists among the ordinary people of Dagoretti. It suggests that architectural expressions and human settlements, shaped by these socio-political forces, might provide insight into this counter-history. Through discussions with those who lived through the state of emergency, the paper seeks to understand how these individuals coped, whether they healed, and how their architectural expressions have evolved. It suggests that these counter-narratives might challenge official histories, which often reinforce subjugation and servitude, and could be key to achieving true liberation and positive change.

Shoes, Torch and Stove

'My father's new shoes, torch, and our precious pressure stove' is how one of the elders began his narration, as the heavy rains drummed on the iron sheet roof of the house their mother had built several years after the Mau Mau uprising and state of emergency in Kenya. The elders narrated their experiences, perceptions, and perspectives to a group of scholars. The elders comprised a number of siblings led by their eldest sister, while the group of scholars comprised researchers from Kenya, India and the USA. The scholars were interested in elements of the philosophy, history and theory of architecture, especially the evolving of architectural and urban morphology in the area of Dagoretti in relation to Nairobi and Kenya in general; as it related to forms of knowledge production (creation), preservation, conveyance and dissemination, and more importantly alternative and subaltern narratives that are commonly subsumed, suppressed or overridden by the discursive power of hegemonic powers and their dominant narratives

I remember seeing, from the corner of my eye…I must have been around 6…those home-guards taking away my father's shoes, his torch, and the pump stove he had bought from Uganda.

From 1953 to 1955, the British colonial government employed armed Kikuyu Home Guards to police and surveil anyone they suspected to be fighting for Kenya's freedom.

We learn, through these stories, a past well remembered.

Official and unofficial Narratives

As Spivak (2023) puts it, 'the narrative of subalternity is always already subsumed by the discursive power of patriarchy, imperialism, and nationalism, which purport to both represent (in terms of politics) and re-present (in terms of artistic renditions) the subaltern subject. More importantly the discussions with the Dagoretti elders followed a period of engagement with the conventional narratives garnered from visiting museums, archives, contemporary art galleries, and colonial, national and heritage sites such as the Karen Blixen Museum, Bomas of Kenya, and special exhibitions in the Nairobi National Museum. Therefore, it was envisioned that the discursive engagement with the elders would provide a backdrop for developing a deeper, richer and more nuanced understanding of morphology and knowledge creation in a combined, collaborative process and synergetic way, starting with the story of the shoes, torch, and the pressure stove.

Architectural Morphology

In discussing the architectural morphology of Dagoretti, the objective was to look at the evolution of form within the built environment including the changes in the formal syntax of the built form and layouts (e.g. courtyard homesteads, low rise and high rise structures etc) as their relationship to people evolved and changed. This includes the study of change of buildings and their use from a historical perspective. Architectural morphologies are reflective and indicative of political influences of their time and place. Since the inception of human settlements, the built form and their architecture may be seen to act as evolutionary open systems that are continually shaped and transformed by social and political events and by market forces. Hence, architectural morphology provides an understanding of the form, its establishment and reshaping processes, the spatial structure and the character of human settlements through an analysis of historical development processes and the constituent parts that compose settlements. This could assist in determining the transformation processes of urban fabrics by which the built environment acts as an element of a multidimensional form in a dynamic relationship where built structures shape and are shaped by the open spaces around them.

From the narratives and conversations with the elders concerning the evolution of architectural morphology in the area, six architectural archetypes become discernible over the decades:

- The pre-emergency traditional homesteads (pre 1950s)
- The emergency villages (1950s)
- The post emergency homesteads (1960s)
- The houses of independence/postcolonial homestead and tenements (1970s-1980s)
- The low rise apartments (1990-early 2000s)
- The (very) high rise apartments and tenements (2010 to date)

These radical and often traumatic phases form part of the elders lived experiences, from which we can reflect and glean the past.

The pre-emergency traditional homesteads (pre 1950s)

The elder proceeds with his narrative, "As I lay down, pretending to be deep asleep, I remember seeing from the corner of my eye- I must have been 6- those home guards taking my father's new shoes, torch, and our precious pressure stove.' A few days before these home-guards had just taken their parents to detention on suspicion of being Mau Mau sympathisers, now they had come to ransack their house for valuables, and indeed the home guards looted their most precious items. A few days later the home-guards would return with the order to have their homestead, comprised of several houses, be destroyed and the family forcefully and brutally be moved to the emergency 'village'. The original homestead ordered to be demolished comprised of the traditional Kikuyu homestead, organically growing, with the hut of the Grandfather and the huts of his wives (Grandmothers) comprising the main compound while those of his married sons (including the elder's father) forming subsidiary homesteads attached to their father's homestead and were counted as part of the main homestead. This was most likely not the original home of their forefathers. Their grandparents and their great grandparents, had most probably been forcefully moved to this place from the more productive areas by the colonial government to pave way for the 'White settlements'. Their predecessors had settled in this designated native reserve and had recreated their traditional architectural philosophies, history and theory. While the homestead existed in a rapidly changing politico-cultural, and socio-economic milieu, it changed very little until its sudden death during the state of emergency.

Why and how was the traditional homestead able to persist through the first five decades of colonialism in Kenya till the late 1950s when it was forcefully eradicated? The movement from the homestead to the 'village' which was more or less a concentration camp, ushered in the architecture of violence and oppression. This form of violence would continue into the independence era, especially with the numerous forceful evictions that continue to be experienced in the county to date. Thus, even after over 60 years of 'independence', Nairobi remains a monument to the colonial project of discriminatory citizenship, inequality and structural violence. Recent evictions have been justified under the banner of cleaning-up, new infrastructure, and 'saving' people from floods. The loss of the homestead is profound and just as traumatizing as the loss of the shoes, torch, and pressure stove.

The emergency villages (1950s)

In 1952, the colonial government declared a State of Emergency in a bid to stamp out the Mau Mau rebellion. One of the measures included "villagization" intended to isolate Mau Mau fighters in the forests from material and food supplies from the village homesteads. According to the elders, the colonial government considered the villages a security measure, justifying the villages as protection for 'loyal natives' who could now be easily guarded in those fortified villages, as well as be centrally provided with educational, agricultural and health services.

Families that had formerly lived on isolated traditional homesteads with households of about twenty to thirty individuals ,were to now move to villages of over 1200 residents (Thurston 1987). The villagers were allowed to go back to and cultivate their holdings at their former lands, on condition they went back to their village before curfew, being found outside the village after curfew hours had lethal consequences. "This was how our uncle and cousin, who were hurrying back to the village from the farm, were shot dead, by that 'European Askari', who enjoyed shooting Africans, for only being a few minutes late. These villages are the perfect exemplar of the Architecture of Violence and Oppression.

The villages, which were in fact concentration camps, comprised of a series of huts, organised with military and policing objectives, devoid of historical and socio-cultural considerations, thereby breaking extended family ties. The villages were surrounded by stockade walls coupled with deep and wide trenches with sharpened lethal spikes. These was meant to keep the Mau Mau out, and constrain the villagers in. This archetype is curiously similar to the emerging gated communities (estates) that would become fashionable in subsequent decades. Similar also to the Colonial Villages, many of the these 'upmarket' communities comprise of just a row or series of villas, bungalows, mansionettes, or apartments arranged in a utilitarian manner, devoid of historical and socio-cultural considerations, many built mainly following commercial interests, mostly with western based imagery, and surrounded by a fortified wall. How did this Architecture of Violence and Fear become a desirable goal? What can be done to restore our socio-cultural and contextual issues in our housing? With even social housing following the trend, providing houses using this capitalistic and traumatic model. This model provides housing in an extremely utilitarian manner, without basic social and community services

and amenities, without open spaces or playground for children, where children are locked indoors since playing on the road is unsafe, and where the children spend over two hours on a school bus to and from school.

The elders of Dagoretti stories uncover the long-hidden or less written colonial crimes by the British in Kenya, especially during the brutal war between the colonial government and the insurrectionist Mau Mau between 1952 and 1960, the final bloody decade of imperialism in East Africa. How long have the repercussions and reverberations been felt, and in which ways have they continued to be exhibited or revealed through the ensuing architectural morphology? Anderson (2011), the 'Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire', portray a teetering colonial empire in its final phase; employing whatever military and propaganda methods it could to preserve a particular order and structure. On the other hand the natives were also fighting to preserve or restore an order and structure that could no longer hold. For both the colonizer and the colonized, the centre was not holding and things were falling apart rapidly. Whereas the events of the 1950s decade were quite drastic and traumatizing, they most probably were just setting the stage for the more tumultuous decades in terms of architectural morphology and how the affected people would react, relate and interact with land and the built form.

Change in land tenure to individual ownership in Kenya in the preceding years, had resulted in most households 'owning' several distinct and fragmented holdings or separate plots geographically scattered all over. The Colonial government deemed this detrimental to agricultural development in Kenya. Therefore in 1953, the Swynnerton land consolidation plan was enacted so that those small fragments would be combined to form larger holdings and given to one individual in exchange of the said individuals giving up their other fragments elsewhere. The Swynnerton plan became easy to implement since the people had already been moved to villages and the Administration could do the consolidation without having to deal with established homesteads. Secondly, consolidation became a mechanism for rewarding loyalists with economic patronage, while punishing those deemed to be members of Mau Mau or their sympathizers. One elder continues the narration "With our father being in detention on the suspicion of being a Mau Mau sympathizer, we lost over 90% of what we originally owned, we got less than a tenth of what we had before, while the colonial collaborators -- home guards and chiefs, got over one hundred fold. But what could we do? When the

emergency was lifted in 1960, we left the village and returned to our new, very small plot to start afresh, but it was much better than the village, which was actually a prison. Then our father came back having miraculously survived years of brutal detention and torture, he was a pale shadow of his past, he was only a tenth of who he had been, but we were thankful to have him back. For many families their fathers, brothers and even mothers and sisters never came back, we had lost our grandparents in the emergency village."

The post emergency homesteads (1960s)

A somber mood enveloped the room as the narrations proceeded. The losses occasioned by the emergency were profound. The loss of the traditional homestead planning principles, and socio-cultural norms guiding how people lived were seemingly altered forever. The elder's mother who had to be strong, commenced the building of a new homestead. The first houses were extremely utilitarian, built with meager resources, by a woman-led household. The new homestead was devoid of many useful traditional concepts and philosophies of ordering human settlements that had guided the people for many generations. More than ten traumatic years in detention and the villages had completely altered the course of people's lives and their architectural expression. The homestead was transformed to just a number of huts in an ostensibly unstructured compound, in which most activities would be performed. More huts would be added as and when the need arose and resources were available. Structures were erected with little regard to traditional planning principles. The Emergency had in a way ushered in 'Modern Architecture' whose main tenet was stripping away historical and cultural 'luggage' from the built form towards pure utilitarianism of 'Form Follows Function' resulting in built forms without a soul. Indeed the traumatic experiences that the family had gone through had been aimed at de-souling them.

Furthermore, instead of the extended family based traditional homestead, the new post-emergency homestead became nuclear family based. The War for Independence had turned cousins into bitter foes, and many families had been split. According to the elders, The unfair land rewarding system through the Swynnerton plan had massively increased inequalities within extended families, with some households owning more than a thousand times what the others owned. This would have a big impact on subsequent land use, human settlement, and built form patterns. In the end,

most families left the villages for their new lands. However, some, especially the Mau Mau families, had nowhere to go, and more than half a century later, some generations of the displaced continue to live in Emergency era villages without any legal ownership documents. Some of these villages have become major town sections, while some have developed into 'slum like' settlements with residents living in grossly sordid conditions.

Outside the Saint John the Baptist Catholic Church, Riruta Nairobi
Photo: D. Wamugi

Therefore at independence, distinct economic cases emerged, with vast and rapidly growing socio-economic differences, with varied architectural expressions and human settlement patterns. The era of independence saw the explosive growth of slums in Nairobi including areas abutting Dagoretti, to house the poor, who in the main did not own the structures but rented them from the 'land owners' or quasi land owners who came to

be referred to as ‘Slum Lords’. The second category, of which our elder could fall into, steadily developed their homestead. With increasing income and sales of portions of their land, they were able to eventually build a large family iron roofed stone house. A dream come true for a middle income household. “This was like the “houses of the Europeans’, the toilets and the kitchen were inside the house, we did not need to go outside, when it was raining.” However all the bedrooms were inside the house and the boys wished they had their own huts for their own ‘independence’ like other boys. However their father who “valued the education of both his sons and daughters would have none of it, he argued that the lack of control and independence the children sought would be detrimental to their education and future. Having lost most of their land, their only hope was education. True to its intended purpose all the children successfully completed their education, and moved out when they were ‘financially independent’”. With the ‘children’ moving out ‘the house became too big’ and lonely for the parents, they would only use one or two rooms. The house would roar back to life only when the ‘children and the grandchildren’ came back. “I wish the house would have been more adaptable to the changing needs of the parents, sometimes the big house felt cold and depressing”. Eventually all the ‘children’ who were now grown ups moved out to build their own houses following the same model of the “houses of the Europeans” as the their parents had done. Some built bungalows while others built storeyed houses all with subsidiary support buildings such as stores, animal pens, and guest houses. An elder quipped “as all my children are leaving the home, I will move into the guest house and rent out the big house’. In addition, with increasing income their mother was able to build some tenement row housing comprising of two roomed units to rent out for income. The home became more cosmopolitan, and transformed from a rural to an urban outlook. Indeed the area’s population density had rapidly increased. With the increasing sales of land and the building of tenement houses, the area lost its rural character. Soon the number of the ‘new comers’ greatly exceeded that of the ‘original land owners’.

The houses of independence/postcolonial homestead and tenements (1970s-1980s)

Close by in Nairobi, ‘independence’ also saw an emerging African bourgeoisie, rapidly occupying the upper strata of society in the newly ‘independent’ country. Well aware of the pathos of their position, and at

the same time, now having almost boundless opportunities for wealth, power and fulfilment in the new neo-colonial state, they began amassing wealth at an amazing speed probably to ensure they put a vast distance between them and poverty. The emerging African bourgeoisie, rapidly occupied formally 'White locations' in Nairobi such as Kileleshwa, Kilimani, Lavington, Karen and Muthaiga, as the new upper class. The middle upper class moved into the formally' Asian locations' such as Parklands, Westlands, and Ngara. Whereas the architectural morphology of these areas had steadily evolved over the decades, in the main it maintained a low population density, and its low rise structures character until the turn of the millennium, which saw their replacement with multi-storeyed apartment blocks, with over twenty residential units on at least an acre of land. While there was an outcry concerning 'overdevelopment' that had greatly outstripped the carrying capacity of existing infrastructure and services, this was a far cry from the over twenty to fifty storey buildings that would emerge in the 2020s. Other locations such as Huruma and Pipeline, already had these grossly overpopulated, squalid, and unventilated, poorly lit, extremely dense high rise blocks that were commonly referred to as 'vertical slums'. The main motivation of the owners seems to be to get maximum rent regardless of the conditions their tenants live in. By the 2010s, this high rise apartments epidemic was now threating the upmarket areas of Kileleshwa, Kilimani, Lavington and Parkands. The residents have put up a seemingly futile resistance to this 'defilement', while other residents have moved out.

Could the same trend be threating Dagoretti? Some of the elders exhibited concern over the new massive high-rise multi-storey developments taking place in their location, decrying the loss of their old homes, Sacred Mugumo trees, burial grounds, and socio-cultural historical heritage sites among others. Other elders posit that their days are almost over and land use should take into consideration current needs and demands. They argued that those upmarket developments would transform the area into another Lavington. However, other elders are appalled by the changes occurring in up market estates such as Lavington. As the sound of the rain on the roof got even louder one elder broke the silence with the remark "this reminds me of the 1961 rains and floods, beware of these rains, the floods could be worse". Indeed, floods were sweeping through Nairobi, engulfing several neighbourhoods including upmarket ones such as Runda, while in Huruma, Dagoretti and other low income areas some of the high rise buildings collapsed with colossal loss of life and property. Experts blame this on the changing architectural morphology and land use patterns.

Riparian reserves have been built upon, and rivers blocked. Increased densification, loss of open green spaces and trees, canalization of rivers and other forms of environmental degradation have led to reduced water absorption, increased surface water flow and flash floods.

However, an elder reminds the group "Nairobi was built on a wet land, the water just wants to go back home". The elder is against the current trend of development that will only "result in 'tears', as we continue losing our people and hard-earned wealth, due to the unbridled and unscrupulous pursuit of wealth". The elder who had been so quiet and pensive for some time asked the gathered group "is there any hope for a better and more appropriate and better guided housing development plan that respects and reminds the new generation of our culture and values, that is safe and sustainable, or all is gone with the wind? Is it possible like our father's shoes, torch, and pressure stove' they are gone forever?"

References

Spivak, G. C. 2023. Can the subaltern speak? In Imperialism (pp. 171-219). Routledge.

Thurston, A. 1987. Smallholder agriculture in colonial Kenya: the official mind and the
Swynnerton Plan. Cambridge, African Studies Centre, U.K.

Anderson, D., 2011. Histories of the Hanged: Britain's Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire
London: Orion

Joseph Kedogo, PhD heads the Department of Architecture and Building Science in the Technical University of Kenya

Is Art What You Can Get Away With? Copyright Law is Useless for Dagoretti-based Visual Artists

Grace Njeri Gatere
Technical University of Kenya

This section explores the relationship between copyright law and the visual arts. It looks at the historical development of appropriation and imitation culminating in piracy. It highlights the importance of protecting creative expressions through legal frameworks and their limitations. It uses the lived experiences of the visual artists from Dagoretti to tell their stories and determine if copyright is useful.

Introduction

The lively Dagoretti area in Nairobi, Kenya, forms a dynamic community of visual artists of different ages and skills. These visual artists contribute meaningfully to art scenes both locally and internationally. These diverse community includes painters, sculptors, draughtsmen, muralists, and mixed-media artists. Consequently, their practices span various mediums, comprising acrylics, oils, watercolors, clay, wood, and recycled materials. The artists' inspiration is drawn from Kenya's cultural heritage, incorporating traditional stories, motifs, symbols, and contemporary issues, creating a unique blend of traditional and modern art. This diversity allows for a wide variety of innovative artistic expressions and techniques.

In Kenya, works of art are classified as intellectual property protected by the Copyright Law under the Kenya Copyright Board (KECOBO) (Copyright (Amendment) Act, 2019). Both registered and unregistered artworks are protected under the law. Based on this law, acts of plagiarism or forgery can lead to legal prosecution and justice for the original creators. Copyright is the source of all the legal rights that an artist has in the imagery in a work of art created (Bouchoux, 2013). It is the artist's intellectual property interest in their creative expression, apart from the physical artwork.

The relationship between copyright law and creativity is complex. Copyright law aims to protect visual artists' rights and incentivize creation by giving them exclusive rights over their works. However, the impact of unauthorized copying on creativity is not always clear-cut. For ages,

imitation has been an artist's way to refine their technique and develop an individual style. Research shows that one of the training methods used during the Renaissance period was copying images of renowned artists by younger artists (Prowda, 2013) to create new and original works of art.

Appropriation is reworking pre-existing objects and images to translate them into something original (Amerika, 2011). It is a common trope in modern and contemporary art. The practice of lifting and altering pre-existing matter has been in the art world since at least the early 20th century (Gontarczuk, 2017). Artists such as Pablo Picasso, Marcel Duchamp, and Andy Warhol have carried out various approaches involving appropriation aspects. *During Picasso and Braque's Synthetic phase of Cubism, they introduced found objects and materials into art, producing layered collages featuring newspaper extracts, pieces of chair caning, and other ephemera from daily life, which they integrated into their multilayered and richly complex images, reflecting on the increasingly fragmented nature of the modern world (Lesso, 2023).*

Sometimes, the original is slightly altered, leading to debates around copyright and ownership. On other occasions, the original is barely noticeable, having been reworked to the extent that it has been converted into something completely new. Imitation has also evolved into appropriation and is seen in several art movements, from Dada to Pop Art to the Pictures Generation. Artists have been a mutual source of inspiration, influencing and stimulating each other's innovation and creativity. Furthermore, the relationship between unauthorized copying and creativity is not necessarily a zero-sum game. Hence, unauthorized copying may pose challenges to creators in terms of potential lost revenue or infringement of their rights, and it can also be a catalyst for artistic expression.

While technology has democratized access to images and expanded the possibilities for artistic expression, it has challenged traditional notions of authorship and authenticity. Therefore, visual artists continue to grapple with the implications of copying as they navigate the complex terrain of creativity, innovation, and intellectual property in the digital age (Crawford, 2022). Hence, this article interviews artists found in Dagoretti to understand what inspires them and how piracy affects their daily endeavors. Appel et al. (2018) have explained piracy as reproducing someone else's design, meaning there is no significant difference between

a copy and an original. The pirate claims that the designed piece is an original piece of work. Visual art piracy doesn't always make big headlines like other forms of copyright infringement; however, it is an authentic problem (Sanders, 2018).

What copyright entails

Copyright is an exclusive right automatically granted to creators under the declarative principle once their work takes a tangible form (Abram, 2006). This right is part of intellectual property law and is subject to specific legislative restrictions. Copyright ensures that creators have legal control over the use and distribution of their original works. Copyright is a property right; this means the creator receives legal protection against unauthorized use or without permission (Hick, 2017). Copyright does not last forever. If society uses creations freely, it is unfair to the creator. Conversely, creators' use of creations without time limits also brings injustice to society (Gervais, 2020).

The compromise between copyright proponents and those who reject copyright is that copyright has a limited validity period. The rights included in copyright are exclusive economic and moral rights. Some exclusive rights generally granted to copyright holders are the right to make copies or reproductions of works and sell these copies; import and export creations; create derivative or derivative works based on the creation; display or exhibit the work in public; and sell or transfer the exclusive rights to another person or party (Copyright Act 2019).

Copyright Act 2009 defines "artworks" as original works of art created by artists, including paintings, drawings, etchings, prints, woodcuts, and engravings, among other creations. They should exist in a single copy or a limited edition signed and numbered by the author. Interestingly, copyright law is about copies; however, visual art hardly exists in copies. Visual artworks are almost always produced as unique works or as limited editions. Artists' possibilities to appropriate have encountered rampant growth in the digital age. The reason is that the technological revolution has changed how the information contained in art can be processed and disseminated to the public.

Who are Visual Artists?

Crawford (2022) describes "visual artist" as including cartoonists, craftspeople, graphic designers, illustrators, painters, photographers, printmakers, sculptors, and textile designers." The author opined that visual artists should not start from nothing because the solution is probably out there**.** The artists who use the internet to get solutions usually rework the pieces to obscure the source. This appropriation can take many forms, such as lifting part of artwork to create a website heading.

Visual artists in Kenya have exclusive rights to control their works' reproduction, distribution, public display, and adaptation. These rights allow artists to benefit financially from their creations and to license or sell their works to others. The click, like, and share culture enabled by digital technology has made visual art more accessible to artists and the public (Collopy et al., 2017). This culture has also provided artists with new tools to create and modify imagery, establishing significant marketplaces. Hence, it fosters the creation of a variety of art forms. Courts encounter challenges while attempting to draw a line between legal appropriation and copyright infringement.

The art market rewards scarcity rather than volume and originals rather than copies. Consequently, the distinction between originals and copies forms the foundation of the art market. However, other kinds of intellectual property, like music, generate income from selling copies of their works in high volumes. The foundational premise of intellectual property law is that copyright protection is essential for the progress of the arts; uncontrolled copying would kill the incentives for artists to create Beebe (2017). This article looks at the law of copyright from the reality of visual artists' perspective. The goal is to see if copyright law can incentivize the creation of visual art. Does copyright law enable art to flourish, or does it impede it?

The advent of technology has equally transformed the creative process for visual artists. Instead of debating whether copying is acceptable, visual artists now focus on selecting suitable sources and methods for incorporating existing works. This shift is attributed to new techniques enabled by technology, which have altered the artistic landscape. In this digital age, the daily experience of encountering countless, fragmented images on screens resembles how the natural landscape of Giverny inspired Monet's art (Hoptman, 2015).

Method and Data

A phenomenological research approach focuses on understanding and describing individuals' experiences with copyright law and piracy in visual art. The interviewees were picked using snowball sampling. Existing visual artists assisted in nominating interviewees from among their peers within Dagoretti. Unstructured in-depth interview questions afforded flexible and open-ended conversations. This allowed for an exploration of issues in a natural manner, leading to richer insights into the artists' experiences. A diverse range of visual artists born or working in Dagoretti, cartoonists, architects, and painters comprehensively understood the visual arts community's creative processes, motivations, and challenges.

Where do you draw your inspiration from?

Visual artists drew inspiration from various sources dependent on their interests, experiences, and artistic goals. Visual artists often draw on their own life experiences, emotions, and memories to create art that is personal and meaningful to them. One painter said that he gets his inspiration from people's situations and by being empathetic to them. While looking at some of his works, one feels his paintings have the same energy as Picasso's during the Blue Period.

Sometimes, cultural, social, and political issues may inspire. Visual artists use their art forms to comment on specific themes or to raise awareness about important issues. Cultural issues such as identity, heritage, and tradition are explored as they grapple with questions of belonging. Drawing upon their experiences and broader cultural narratives, visual artists create works that challenge stereotypes or critique cultural norms. One artist who draws inspiration from such themes said, "*I do 'research' in the bars and back streets of Nairobi, exploring what goes on after dark when people who are out at that hour believe nobody is looking, things no one wants to discuss."* The goal is to spark meaningful conversations and foster empathy and understanding. The artists look at people in their spaces. *How people relate with each other knowingly and unknowingly.*

Nature has been a template for artists across various mediums. The natural world's intricate patterns, vibrant colors, and sheer diversity offer endless inspiration. Visual artists have explored and captured the essence of nature in countless ways. Hiking is a powerful source of inspiration for artists. The experience of immersing oneself in nature, surrounded by towering trees, winding trails, and breathtaking views, can evoke a deep sense of

wonder. For one visual artist, hiking is his artistic practice, as he sketches and draws trees along the way, which are prevalent in his art forms.

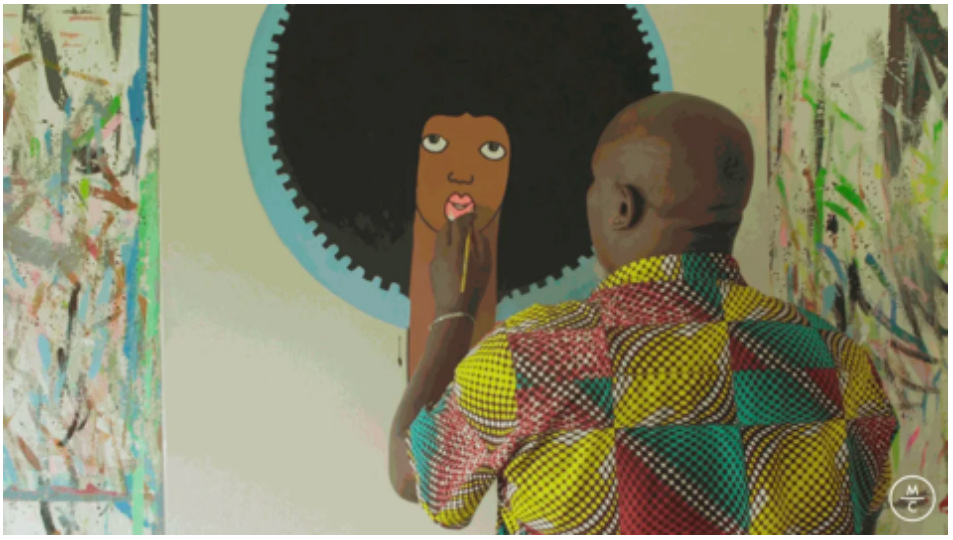
Title: When Nature is you Inspiration
Artist: James Mweu
Artist's Instagram @jamo.mweu

How do you deal with imitation?

Imitation refers to works that illustrate both internal and external similarity. This occurs when a visual artist knowingly copies works and passes them off as their own (Lucken, 2016). After copying severally, a creator's style emerges since copying gives the creator a starting point (Dewis, 2017). Copying, whether through direct reproduction, appropriation, or homage, has become a fundamental technique for many contemporary artists. One interviewee was proud that people copy his work: "If someone finds my work worth copying, *I feel impressed."*

Due to technological advancement, artists have access to an array of images and the capacity to manipulate and reproduce them with ease. The digital age has rendered copying a universal and essential part of the artistic process, blurring the lines between originality and appropriation. As one

artist said, "*Established artists need to give imitators space since we were also given space to copy."* Hence, the boundaries between inspiration and infringement become unclear: "*If Gucci can be pirated, what is so special about me?."* Since the artist's tote bags are hand-painted, most people download his images online, print them on canvas, and sell them as their creations. So, he gets emails asking him if these are genuine bags. Copying has become an essential tool for making art, as basic as oil paints once were (Hoptman, 2015). Exploration of the nature of representation and authenticity can also be done through copying. Furthermore, others may employ it as a strategy for engaging with authorship, ownership, and cultural production issues.



Artist at work
Source: https://www.montaguecontemporary.com/video/10-in-the-studio-with-michael-soi/

Enforcement of Rights

The Kenyan Copyright law allows visual artists to enforce their copyright by taking legal action against individuals or entities that infringe on their works. Some actions may involve sending cease and desist letters, pursuing civil litigation for damages, or seeking criminal charges for severe infringement cases (Rahayu & Taufik, 2024). The results show that copyright enforcement has been challenging, especially for visual artists

who need more resources to pursue legal action against infringers. It has led to a sense of helplessness when copyright violations occur: a common theme derived from the responses was, "*Will I spend time fighting people online or creating more works?"* Due to the ease of production in the digital age, artistic works can be easily reproduced and shared online across borders, making it challenging to control the unauthorized use or distribution of creative content.

Artists may find monitoring and enforcing their rights in a global marketplace hard. Stemming from a limited understanding of how to do so. One artist said, "*In Thailand*, *they print my pieces on shopping bags and hand them out at supermarkets for free*."Copyright law was designed to allow artists to control the use and distribution of their works, allowing them to benefit financially from their creative endeavors. The focus of the artists interviewed is more on creation and less on safeguarding their works. However, creators are provided with a legal framework to protect their intellectual property, fostering a vibrant cultural landscape. When copyright disputes, or violations occur, most holders prefer compensation over legal action; therefore, there is little precedence in dealing with such matters (Kanti Rahyu, 2024).

What does the visual artist do?

Visual art has proven to be fundamentally different from other copyrightable creations. Unlike books, music, or other core realms of copyright protection, copies play a minimal economic role in the art market. In the art market, copying does not harm the market for the original. As this article has shown, copying in art appears to help the market for the original or even to create a market that did not exist before the copy (Stewart, 2014). Consequently, it is deemed that theft produces value.

Despite the legal framework, visual artists in Kenya, like in many other countries, need help to protect their copyrights. Their challenges may include difficulties proving ownership of works, a need for more awareness about copyright laws, and limited resources to enforce their rights effectively. Most artists interviewed have not experienced copyright infringement; the ones who had did not pursue the matter.

Continuous dialogue, education, and adaptation of legal frameworks can ensure that stakeholder perspectives are considered. This, in turn could

assist in upholding the integrity of copyright and still foster a vibrant and diverse creative ecosystem for future generations. Education can assist visual artists in effectively navigating copyright issues, hence promoting more innovation/creativity. By embracing these principles, a dynamic and inclusive creative environment that celebrates the richness and diversity of visual arts while respecting the artists and creators rights can be sustained. This ensures a legacy of cultural vitality for future generations.

Conclusion

Copyright law plays a vital role in protecting visual artists' creative expressions. Art is a passion, so visual artists tend to produce pieces of art for art`s sake. This brings about a collision; hence, copyright seems to provide no significant monetary incentive for visual artists to create. As this study shows, copyright is useless for Dagoretti-based visual artists since they have shown no interest in safeguarding their creations. The digital revolution and the dawn of social media networks have made artistic works more accessible and available, expediting imitators' works (Alder & Fromer, 2019).

As the art world evolves in the digital age and global marketplace, visual artists are encouraged to stay informed about copyright laws, understand their rights, and proactively manage their intellectual property assets. By leveraging copyright protection and strategic approaches to licensing and enforcement, painters can maximize the value of their creations and ensure continued recognition and respect for their artistic contributions. Copyright law tells us that creativity would shut down in a world where one cannot control one's copies. That artists would stop producing art if copyists undercut them. This theory seems to misunderstand the market for visual artists because copies upon copies are the model of creativity. Hence, the study has shown that copyright law is useless for Dagoretti's visual artists.

References

Abram, H. B. (2006). *The Law of Copyright* (Vol. 2). Thomson West.
Alder, A., & Fromer, J. C. (2019). Taking Intellectual Property into Their Own Hands. *California*
Law Review, *107*.

Amerika, M. (2011). *Appropriation*. Remix The Book. http://www.remixthebook.com/the-
course/appropriation
Appel, G., Libai, B., & Muller, E. (2018). On the monetary impact of fashion design piracy.
International Journal of Research in Marketing, *35*(4), 591–610.
Bouchoux, D. (2013). *Intellectual Property: The Law of Trademarks, Copyrights, Patents, and*
Trade Secrets (Fourth). Delmar, Cengage Learning.
Collopy, D., Drye, T., Koempel, F., Jenner, P., & Carey, C. (2017). *Share and Share Alike: The*
Challenges from Social Media for Intellectual Property Rights. Intellectual Property
Office. Copyright (Amendment) Act, 20 of 2019 (2019).
Crawford, T. (2022). *Legal Guide for the Visual Artist*. Allworth Press.
Dewis, G. (2017). *Photograph Like a Thief*. Rocky Nook Inc.
Gervais, D. J. (Ed.). (2020). *Fairness, Morality and Ordre Public in Intellectual Property*. Edward
Elgar Publishing Limited.
Gontarczuk, M. (2017). *Beyond Imitation and Influence. The Notion of Appropriation In Modern*
And Contemporary Fine Arts. Central Saint Martins College, The University of the Arts
London.
Hick, D. H. (2017). *Artistic License The Philosophical Problems of Copyright and Appropriation*.
The University of Chicago Press.
Hoptman, L. (2015). *The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World*. MOMA.
Lesso, R. (2023, September 22). What Is Appropriation in Art? *TheCollector.Com*.
https://www.thecollector.com/what-is-appropriation-in-art/.
Lucken, M. (2016). *Imitation and Creativity in Japanese Arts From Kishida Ryūsei to Miyazaki*
Hayao. Columbia University Press.
Rahayu, K., & Taufik, M. (2024). Law Enforcement Of Copyright As An Effort To Strengthen
The Creative Economy. *International Journal of Society Reviews*, *2*(4), 1025–1035.

Sanders, J. (2018, June 20). How Fine Art is Protected from Piracy and Fraud. *CreativeFuture*.
https://www.creativefuture.org/protecting-fine-art/
Stewart, J. B. (2014, November 28). With Art, Investing in Genius. *The New York Times*.

Grace Njeri Gatere is a dedicated scholar and educator whose academic journey intertwines intellectual property law and design education. Currently pursuing a Ph.D. in intellectual property, her research focuses on the intersection of law, creativity, and innovation, particularly in protecting and managing intellectual property rights in design.

The Inside and The Outside
Identity performance in the context of social research

Waithera Kibuchi
Fashion Product Development Consultant, Nairobi Kenya

Identities are an irrevocable component of social life. They help us better know ourselves and others, enabling communication, mutual understanding, and social cohesion. We assume different identities in our day-to-day lives, performing the 'self' depending on whether we are being observed, and who is observing us. This 'on stage' and 'backstage' behaviour corresponds to public 'outer' and private 'inner' dimensions of self, with the outer self observing the prescribed social norms and behaviour despite what the inner self may think and feel. When two groups interact, alternative realities come face to face, and multiple 'inside' and 'outside' selves emerge, with participants performing the roles they believe fit the context. This article examines this identity performance and the 'inside-outside' positionality in the context of social research. Reflecting on interactions and activities undertaken during a collaborative North-South research module, I posit that research engagements would do well to implement actions that diminish the perceived power distance between the parties involved.

Introduction

The rain was coming down steadily when we received the marriage proposal.

It was November, the short rain season in Nairobi, and I was walking through one of Kawangware's main streets. Ordinarily, nobody would have paid attention to me in such weather, preferring to stay indoors to keep warm, but today it was different. I was walking amongst a cluster of light-skinned people, the majority of whom were women. We were conducting an academic research module, walking the neighbourhood under the guidance of two local community members.

Our group was a little unusual for the time, place and weather. We drew the attention of the locals, and some of them directed various comments at us – welcoming us to Kawangware, asking us where we were from, and

from one of the more cheeky ones, a marriage proposal, aimed in the direction of the lighter-skinned women. Now, if I had been alone, I would have easily dealt with the situation as you learn to in Nairobi – by ignoring them. However, in this context, I felt caught in between different worlds and their corresponding identities. On one hand, I wanted to dissociate from my 'Kenyan' identity, as the hecklers were making such a poor show of it. This is not what being Kenyan means, I wanted to say to the visiting students. On the other hand, I also wanted to signal to the hecklers that I was one of them; I, too, was Kenyan. Our guests had been profiled for their complexion, appearance, and the cadence of their walk. It was uncomfortable to be profiled along with them simply because we were walking together. Above everything else I felt a keen sense of responsibility for the safety of the visiting students, being only one of two Kenyan participants in the group. It is important to be constantly aware of your surroundings in Nairobi, especially as a woman, but it seemed vital to be hyper-aware in this context, and I continuously scanned our environment to make sure we all returned to the bus safely at the end of the exercise. This was exhausting, to say the least.

I soon noticed my feelings regarding other module activities with interest. Before our walk through the neighbourhood, we visited our local guide at his home to interview him and his family on their history in the area. In this space, I realised, I had felt responsible for making sure that our guests behaved appropriately within the context of a Kenyan home, internally taking on the role of a leader. I also felt the need to distance myself from the visiting students because some of them were very direct – almost insensitive – in the questions they were asking. Confronted by the discomfort of our hosts, I desired to disown the 'researcher' identity I had adopted and take on my 'Kenyan' one instead.

As we got deeper into conversation with our hosts, who all along had been very guarded and formal, I noticed them begin to glance at me surreptitiously. They offered us some tea after the main interview session was over, and as we were taking it, our host turned to me and said, "You look like one of ours." What he meant was that I looked like I came from the same ethnic community he was from. This question, in itself, was not unusual to me. My facial features are somewhat ethnically ambiguous, and I am often met with puzzled looks when introducing myself. What made this particular instance stand out to me was what followed after I answered in the affirmative. He warmed up to me instantly and even began to address me directly when answering questions or volunteering further

information, sometimes in the mother tongue, with the expectation that I would translate to the rest of the group.

Comparing notes with my Kenyan colleagues later, some of them also spoke of feeling responsible for the guests in their group and ill at ease with the home visits. The more I observed the group dynamics, the more I became aware of the discomfort rippling beneath the surface of their experience. It was as if we were actors in a play: playing our roles perfectly on stage, and discussing what we thought of the script, the characters and the audience backstage. I could sense a similar stance in the members of the Kawangware community who hosted us; their outwardly polite and welcoming demeanour may have been satisfactory for our guests, but to me, it seemed that their true thoughts and feelings on the matter were being disclosed privately.

What, then, was this phenomenon I was witnessing, and what did it mean for the work we were carrying out? Why did we all find it necessary to 'put on an act'? For whom were our chosen identities intended, and what power dynamics did they reflect? And finally, how authentic could the information we were gathering be if we were collectively 'putting on an act'?

On the presentation of self

Erving Goffman, in his seminal work, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1956), likens the presentation of self to a theatrical performance, observing that individuals 'perform' their behaviour depending on 1) whether they are being observed, and 2) who is observing them. Our behaviour, when being observed ('front stage'), is akin to that of actors in a play; adhering to the appropriate social rules and conventions in a bid to project a desirable image. No performance is necessary in a private ('backstage') setting, and the 'actor' can therefore be more natural and relaxed.

Reading identities in this manner, we may be tempted to ascribe conscious, manipulative motives behind their performance, but this is hardly ever the case. Humans are social beings; since we occupy the same space as others, our existence is marked by an endless stream of individual and social interactions (Alfrey et al., 2023). We derive our beliefs about ourselves and others from these social observations, interactions and experiences, and this, in turn, forms the basis for our identities (Burke & Stets, 2023). Our identities are a critical part of how we relate to and make meaning in

the world. They are the interface through which we communicate to self and other. The way in which we perceive ourselves and others, therefore, determines how we behave and interact with them in different contexts. We tend to make instant judgements about who others are or might be, and calibrate our behaviour to align with our perceptions, adjusting it as we get to know them better.

Because identities are multifaceted, with personal, social, and cultural components (Spreckels & Kothoff, 2007; Yep, 2002), they are dynamic, continually changing through different contexts, spaces and time (Burke & Stets, 2023). To be human, therefore, is to constantly juggle different sets of identities in time and space. We use identities to express who we believe ourselves to be, the social groups we want to be associated with, and our 'ways of being' that are based on socially constructed categories such as gender, ethnicity and social class. To express our identities we employ a wide range of gestures and props, such as starting a gathering with prayer, prominently displaying a flat-screen TV in the living room, streaming gospel music directly from YouTube, and serving milky tea with jam or Blueband-layered sandwiches. These examples typically signal a generous, morally upright, middle-class, Christian Kenyan family.

The theatrical metaphor for self-presentation implies the existence of private 'inner' and public 'outer' dimensions. We do not have to look too far to see this concept in practice. When we are born into the community we are named by others; as we grow, we take on more responsibility for naming ourselves and guiding others in how they are to name us (Wilshire, 1982). We learn, while quite young, to mask our true thoughts and feelings in favour of what the adults say is right; and as we grow up, show up more and more as our 'outside' selves, observing the prescribed norms and conventions outwardly despite our natural inclinations.

When we reach adulthood, the power difference between us and other adults shrinks, and we suddenly discover that we can express more of our 'inside' selves without any significant repercussions. This brings me to the point that I want to make here: our natural tendency to calibrate ourselves to what we believe is expected of us in specific cultural contexts is tempered when we are in the presence of those we believe to be like us or on the same 'level' as us. I do not need to perform for the people in my day-to-day life – given our similar backgrounds, we are both on the 'inside' of the culture and can perfectly understand each other's spoken and unspoken cues. In interacting with those located 'outside' my culture,

however, we are operating from different sets of references; I must play the role that I believe best suits the situation. This may result in misunderstandings, or, at the very least, an inability to access the authentic thoughts and feelings of the other party.

The need to perform a 'prescribed' identity grows even greater in the presence of those we perceive to have power over us or some aspect of our lives. Power, in this case, may be defined as the extent to which one can mobilise and dominate means and resources, and use this capability to influence or impose one's will over others (Tobore, 2023). Having power over others implies psychological, economic, or cultural distance from them, reinforcing the position of being 'outside' the group you exercise power over. As alternative 'realities' come face to face with each other during cultural interactions, the result is decided by the relative material power of the groups involved, with the 'dependent' group experiencing itself as the 'object' of outsider scrutiny, control, and sometimes, disdain (Greenwood, 1982). This subject-object dynamic is often enacted in academic research, where increasing North-South collaborations replicate asymmetrical power relations by benefiting the Northern partner more than the Southern one (Choquez-Millan et al., 2024).

It is important to note that while the 'inner' and 'outer' dimensions of self are handy categories for delineating our lived experience, they cannot truly be separated. Identity involves the mediation of each dimension through the other (Wilshire, 1982). One cannot come to any real knowledge of self by meditating in the forest, alone; to do so necessarily requires interactions with others. Similarly, it can be difficult to know others without knowing oneself; as doing so requires one to imagine oneself in the other's shoes, and use their internal reactions as a starting point for what the other may think and feel.

Conducting the research

Our research module brought thirty-six participants from three academic institutions in Nairobi, Mumbai and New York together under three respective instructors to utilise Dagoretti's built environment as a basis for inquiry into current and historical social, cultural and political systems. The programme ran for one week and consisted of interactions with individuals and communities within and around Kawangware. We adopted an ethnographic approach, using the methods of walking the neighbourhood, observation, and in-person unstructured interviews. Data

were documented through field notes and photography and verified by comparing our findings to those of the other groups. The fieldwork was complemented by visits to museums, galleries, institutions and green spaces within and around Nairobi.

Experiencing the inside
Inside Mr. M's house during the Dagoretti research

Identity performance in social research

Unlike the visiting participants, who were full-time students and lecturers at their respective institutions, and had taken time off to travel to Kenya for this experience, the Kenyan participants remained rooted in their day-to-day lives, juggling work and family responsibilities alongside the research. We were commuting to and from our homes, which are not all located within the city. This made it difficult to attend all the scheduled site visits, especially since quite a number of them were located in far-flung areas of the city, and either started very early or ended quite late. Navigating these challenges, imagine my surprise one day when one of our guest facilitators made a quip about my having showed up 'just in time' for lunch. I had been detained on work duties in the morning and had only managed to join the group for the afternoon discussion session. Naturally, I smiled pleasantly and reassured them I was only there to attend the group discussion; the fact that I had arrived just in time for lunch was a mere

coincidence. I might have ignored this interaction had the individual in question not made similar comments to other Kenyan participants on separate occasions. On paying closer attention, I wondered, had the individual in question had assumed the (superior) identity of the 'benefactor' and cast the Kenyan participants in the (inferior) identity of the 'beneficiaries' of the funding that had facilitated the module?

Goffmann (1956) contends that individuals both 'give' and 'give off' expressions; the former communicating the intended message to the audience, and the latter conveying unintended impressions. The individual in question may have been aiming to reprimand me for my perceived lack of professionalism, but what they did instead, by making their comment about food, was to erode whatever trust and moral authority they possessed and increase the distance between us. How could they be trusted to see any of us (Kenyans) or our experiences clearly, if they assumed that the reason we were taking part was for the free meals? Moreover, in many cultures, meals are considered a basic component of all gatherings: the ritual of eating together creates room for conversations that nurture relationships, trust, belonging and togetherness among partakers (Rokach, 2020). To treat shared meals as a favour to the 'other' party is to impoverish the relational experience and block oneself from an invaluable opportunity to truly know the other.

On the inside and the outside

There are many potential reasons why the individual in question may have felt the need to comment as they did. I may never find out why, as our paths are unlikely to cross in the future. Legitimate reasons or not, what was never in doubt throughout the whole experience was their perceived (superior) position as the academic 'expert', and my perceived (inferior) position as a mere 'local student'. This power distance may not have been the cause of the misunderstanding, but it certainly did nothing for the authenticity of the interaction between us.

As social researchers, we are often encouraged to maintain our distance from the subject or phenomenon we are studying in an attempt to preserve objectivity and reach a 'scientific' conclusion. But how objective can we truly be when we come to the work from an outsider's perspective? Operating on this level, we only have access to pre-conceived notions and ideas about the 'Other', and this is all we can bring to our work. On this level we can only access a set of staged identities, and, having no

alternative, try our best to make our data fit pre-determined categories and universal theories. This limits our ability to perceive the reality.

The greater the distance there is between the researcher and the subject, the more unlikely they are to see the whole picture. My delicate 'inside' position in the home we visited in Kawangware may have been compounded when the family recognised me as 'one of their own' – if I had been bound by convention before, I was even more securely bound now, as my behaviour was now going to be held to a higher standard. But this also established a higher level of trust between me and the family, and, I would argue, positioned me closer to the truth than anyone else in that room. This does not mean that we can only research those who are like us, or come from the same background as us. In truth, we can never truly know what it is to be the other, for we do not live life as them. The reality of what it means to live, or have lived, in Dagoretti, can only be seen from within. I may have empathised more easily with the community than our visiting students did, but could not possibly stake a claim to the 'Dagoretti' experience without participating in it myself.

I merely use this example to illustrate the point that researchers must strive to be aware of the distance between them and their (human) subjects, designating research methodologies that shrink this distance down as much as possible to enable them to get to the truth. Participating in the culture, and studying it from the inside, by no means taints the study with subjectivity: empathy and rationality can co-exist. Participating from within reduces the need for staged performances of identity and increases the probability that the researcher will pierce into a reality that is untainted by externally imposed assumptions.

How can we cut through the staged identities that typically feature in such collaborative research projects, in the absence of the time and effort that complete immersion would require?

Scheduling unstructured time around planned activities might be a good start. The most organic reflections and exchanges between group members mostly took place in the liminal spaces – during transits from one venue to another, and over shared meals. The visiting students may have had more of this unstructured time together, as they were sharing accommodation, but this arrangement limited the amount of interaction they had with the Kenyan participants and the lived Kenyan experience. It may not have been possible to eliminate the distance between us and the guests within one week, but it was certainly possible to reduce it.

Perhaps uncoupling social research from conventional forms of academic research outputs might also make a difference. After all, it is not the mere commercialisation or the assignment of market value to academic research that generates an undesirable effect, but the prioritisation of this economic value over other forms of value such as use value. This conventional approach predisposes researchers to remain on the outside looking in, as a significant proportion of their conclusions have to be in line with dominant concepts and theories for them to be published and receive the 'proper' accolades from leading academic institutions. We might want to look into alternative ways of disseminating knowledge, ones that are accessible to members of the community that our research is based on. A collaborative event hosted by the community, for example, might have given the visiting participants a more palpable sense of lived Kenyan culture than a series of museum visits.

Building such spaces of common ground in North-South collaborations might help to soften the rigid hierarchical notions that characterise such engagements. It is nearly impossible to participate in a culture and retain illusions of superiority or inferiority to the other. To project certain identities in the hope that the more resourced party might bestow some resources on the less resourced one is just as extractive as expecting the less resourced party to behave in certain ways to justify the endowment of resources upon them. Both diminish the Other's humanity and reduce them to a commodity.

Whatever strategies they choose, researchers must adopt a posture of courage and willingness to go off the beaten path, subjecting themselves to new and unknown environments, and softening closely held certainties about identities – both their own and those of others. Applying this lens to their work, they can go beyond the surface level and see to creating real value for their communities and beyond.

References

Alfrey, K. L., Waters, K. M., Condie, M., & Rebar, A. L. (2023). The Role of Identity in Human
Behavior Research: A Systematic Scoping Review. *Identity, 23*(3), 208–223.
Burke, P. J., & Stets, J. E. (2023). *Identity Theory: Revised and Expanded* (2nd ed.). New York:
Oxford University Press.

Choquez-Millan, M. F., Lechtape, C. L., Löhr, K., Schröter, B., & Graef, F. (2024). Uncovering
power asymmetries in North-South research collaborations – An example from
sustainability research in Tanzania. *Futures, 156*.
Goffman, E. (1956). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Monograph No. 2 ed.).
University of Edinburgh Social Sciences Research Centre.
Greenwood, D. (1982). Cultural "Authenticity". *Cultural Survival Quarterly, 6*(3), 27-28.
Rokach, A. (2020). Belonging, Togetherness and Food Rituals. *Open Journal of Depression,*
9(4), 77-85.
Spreckels, J., & Kotthoff, H. (2007). Communicating Identity in Intercultural Communication. In
H. Kotthoff, & H. Spencer-Oatey (Eds.), *Handbook of Intercultural Communication* (pp.
415–19). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
Tobore, T. O. (2023). On power and its corrupting effects: the effects of power on human
behavior and the limits of accountability systems. *Communicative & integrative biology,*
16(1), 2246793.
Wilshire, B. (1982). The Limits of Appearance. In *Role Playing and Identity: The Limits of*
Theatre as Metaphor (pp. 282-296). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
Yep, G. A. (2002). My Three Cultures: Navigating the Multicultural Identity Landscape. In J. N.
Martin, L. A. Flores, & T. K. Nakayama (Eds.), *Intercultural Communication:*
Experiences and Contexts (p. 61). Boston: McGraw-Hill.

Ms W. Kibuchi believes that reflecting on who we are and how we got here contributes to the practice and networks that foster knowledge and help shape the societies we strive to build. She is currently working as a Fashion Product Development Consultant in Nairobi, Kenya. waitherakibuchi@gmail.com

The Dagoretti Experience