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**Respectable 'illegality': Gangs, masculinities and belonging in a Nairobi ghetto**  
van Stapele, N.

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*Citation for published version (APA):*

van Stapele, N. (2015). Respectable 'illegality': Gangs, masculinities and belonging in a Nairobi ghetto

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## CHAPTER 3: Leaving the Gang: Masculinities, Mind-sets and Marriages.

### Introduction

The emergence of alcohol distilling gangs in Mathare, heralded by the founding of the One Touch gang in 1994, provided young men in this ghetto with safer ways to generate income than stealing. Several *wagondi* groups (involved in stealing in and outside the ghetto) joined the up and coming alcohol gangs in the late 1990s, and soon the ghetto counted five thriving distilling sites offering work to hundreds of young men who lacked the required education and connections to be gainfully employed elsewhere. Many of these men were primary or secondary school dropouts, and working at the distilling site was one of the few long-term options open to them. Other opportunities, such as stealing, brokering stolen goods and doing chores in the neighbourhood (such as fetching water), were commonly short-term and, as a consequence, highly erratic (and at times even risky). A few of the men occasionally joined the daily queues at nearby construction sites, but work was scarce and there was a lot of competition for the available jobs. However, despite the long-term employment offered by gangs, most young gang members wanted and struggled to leave. As explored in the previous chapter, working gangs were locally taken as age-sets of recently circumcised (or otherwise mature) young men that allowed them to garner social and economic capital in order to gradually achieve senior manhood. However, to become fully recognised and respected as senior men according to popular notions (Willemse 2009:218), they were expected to leave the gang and become independent at around the age of 30. What kind of strategies and pathways did these young, male gang members construct and navigate to leave the working gang? And why did the majority of these gang members fail to leave despite the great effort they expended on trying to do so?

In this chapter, I first describe a collective trajectory initiated by the One Touch gang members that was geared towards helping them to leave the working gang (this occurred during one of my more recent fieldwork periods – 2010-2011 – and the gang members involved me in it). I also explore the challenges these men faced in trying to leave the group, and delve deeper into why many of these predicaments seemed, to them, to be tied to imagining and enacting different and seemingly conflicting positions of manhood. Then, I continue to discuss the impact of feeling trapped in the social position of a junior man on gendered senses of the self, as told to me by many of the young ghetto men. I also consider how uncertainties about the future shaped everyday practices such as drinking heavily. I conclude this chapter by taking a closer look at Kingi's successful trajectory to leaving the One Touch gang in an attempt to reveal how his success hinged on his connections to alcohol bosses, the period in which he tried to leave and, most importantly, his partnership with his wife. This helps me to highlight the multiple obstacles the One Touch gang members encountered in more recent times, and why the majority of the current gang members failed to leave, even after instigating a joint attempt to do so. I therefore set out to analyse the social predicaments that young men increasingly faced when the gang space

seemed to become a more permanent phase in their life trajectories; instead of being a space that helped young ghetto men in their transition to senior manhood, the gang space became increasingly imagined by these young men as an obstacle to building meaningful lives. Accordingly, this chapter shows how these young gang members reflected upon changes in their social environments, how this influenced their future opportunities and constraints, and how they redrew trajectories, both individually and collectively, to continue pursuing their dream of becoming senior men.

### **Aspiring to leave**

In the face of very few long-term employment opportunities (UNDP 2013) outside the gang, most gang members considered setting up micro-businesses inside the ghetto (such as bars, road-side restaurants, kiosks or electrical appliance shops) as a viable alternative that would help them become autonomous and leave the group. These men regarded grocery stalls as a feminine option, and even though they were potentially quite profitable (even during periods of high inflation rates – *see also* Nzuma 2013), they preferred to engage in businesses they considered to be more masculine. Due to rising food prices and concomitant higher living costs, it became increasingly difficult for these men to develop individual micro-businesses that would eventually enable them to leave the gang. Accordingly, some *chang'aa* groups engaged in collective income-generating activities. During my more recent fieldwork periods, I became involved with one such project.

One morning in early October 2010, I carefully descended the narrow and slippery pathway to *rowe* (the 'riverside' in the Kikuyu language), as I did almost every day. I was met by a few One Touch gang members who forcibly grabbed my arms and shouted excitedly in my face. They dragged me along the rocky, slippery alleyway and sat me down on an empty jerry can near the drums. Despite the morning hour, it was already hot and dusty. The foul smell of human waste was something I had become used to, as there were open sewers scattered throughout the ghetto, but it always took me a few minutes to adapt to the heat and smoke coming from the drums positioned on the river banks. With admiration, I watched a young man adjusting the fires of two drums below me while I was catching my breath. I remember thinking how incredibly difficult this work must be, and then it hit me: only two drums; normally, the One Touch gang had at least six lined up! Lately, however, the work had seemed to be steadily declining.

The young man at the drums joined the rest of his fellow gang members, who were all squatting around me. There was something different about them that day. By now, they had grown accustomed to me hanging around their distilling spot, and they usually continued gambling or working while I was there. However, the reception I got that day told me something was most definitely up, and the expectant looks on their faces confirmed my suspicion. Motion smiled right at me, his face only a few inches away from mine, meaning that I could smell the stale alcohol on his breath: "You can help us, Naomi. All we need here is ideas, we lack ideas, you can give us ideas." The rising sun lit up his scarred face, and his blood shot eyes were beaming with eagerness and something else. Like most of the One Touch gang members, he had woken up to the shaking hands that only a glass of

*chang'aa* could alleviate. Cosmos interrupted impatiently: "We want to be a group like before and start a business, *chang'aa* is down, *ngutu* ('sugar waste' in Kiswahili) is too expensive. What do you think we can do to change this life?" He gestured to the two drums, "This is not a life!"

### **Group trajectories to leave the gang**

In 2007, the One Touch gang members had already registered as a youth group in order to try and access funds from the government (*see also* Okoth et al. 2013), as this would enable them to develop income-generating activities other than distilling and hustling. The certificate received upon registration had allowed the gang to officially (that is, with the approval of the chief) manage the Manoki public toilet for money. At the time, I had helped the group to link up with a Dutch graffiti artist to paint and decorate the toilet. This, according to the gang's leaders, would give extra allure to the facility that would help them to increase daily revenues. At their request, I also held various meetings with them to both discuss the way forward for the newly-registered youth group and see how it could develop more long-term income-generating activities. Unfortunately, the One Touch gang as a youth group broke up soon after these meetings, as a few of the leaders had embezzled the small amount of funding it had managed to access. Nevertheless, long after the official group ceased to exist, I continued meeting with individual One Touch gang members to discuss how they could access the few local development programmes that also targeted young men in the area. This was not, however, very successful. Most of the organisations operating in Mathare were led by people who came from outside this ghetto, and they regarded the gang members as criminals. Likewise, many of the young men from the One Touch group harboured grave suspicions in relation to most development organisations operating in Mathare. Indeed, they told me of several negative experiences with particular organisations (*see more in Chapter 5*) that had allegedly used their "stories", as they put it (meaning their life histories), to access funds without them benefitting in any way.

Cosmos had not been part of the One Touch gang when it was registered as a youth group, but he had heard of the earlier successes and failures, and saw an opportunity when I started my research. He said:

It is good you tell our story, yes. But you are here for a very long time, and you see work is low. I know before we did not listen. We saw other members go to get a loan, some even went to school. We know only *chang'aa* and stayed down, money was ok, so why go? We did not believe they would succeed, we did not believe you...But now work is low and work is hard, we earn nothing, most days there is no work. We drink because there is no work. We want to start our own group.

Kingi, who was one of the founders of the One Touch gang, had been able to leave it in 2007 through a loan scheme offered by Safi, and this organisation had hired him in 2008 to coordinate its youth programme (*see Chapter 1*). In 2008 and 2009, Kingi had tried to

encourage the One Touch gang members to revive the youth group and connect to opportunities at different development organisations (including Safi). Only four gang members had taken him up on his offer, but they were now the proud owners of large businesses (such as a firewood business, a large bar and a *matatu*). Another younger man had gone to school through a scholarship programme at Safi and had graduated as a web designer within a year. He now worked as a social media strategist at Amnesty Kenya and as a freelance web designer for big companies in the city centre. Cosmos knew about these successes, and explained that it was only after work at the riverside began to decline in September 2010, as a result of the legalisation of *chang'aa* (BBC 2010) and rising sugar prices (*see also* Nzuma 2013), that more gang members began to consider other options. Also, the majority of the current gang members were getting older without seeing possible ways out of the group, and the social pressure to take up the position of a recognised senior man was beginning to take its toll.

I suggested a visit to one of the One Touch gang leaders, Brayo, who was also good friends with Kingi. Cosmos, Motion and I therefore went to see Brayo to further discuss the plan at his bar, which was located a few dozen metres up the alleyway from the One Touch distilling site. Brayo instantly phoned Kingi and Monga, who were working at the Safi office near the gas station on Juja Road, asking them to join our discussion. Monga had also been a One Touch gang member until he had been able to set up his own kiosk in Dandora, outside the Mathare ghetto. Like Kingi, he had also been partly supported by a loan programme from Safi, and had also been hired by the organisation in October 2010 to help Kingi with coordinating the expanding youth programmes. Together, we brainstormed until late in the afternoon on the content of what they dubbed the “One Touch outreach programme”, and we planned the first meeting a few days later.

The initial problem with implementing this programme arose on the first day that the 20 participating One Touch gang members had planned to meet with Kingi for its launch: no one showed up. After waiting for two hours at Brayo's bar, which is where they had agreed to meet, Kingi, Brayo and I walked around Mathare to locate the men and find out what had happened. We found Motion down at the distilling site operating a drum. He apologised and told us that he could not “ignore money.” Cosmos, meanwhile, was fast asleep in the small iron sheet structure at the *baze*, which was dubbed State House, after drinking himself into a stupor early in the morning. The others had remained at the *baze* when Cosmos and Motion had not shown any signs of preparing to leave for the meeting. After several more failed attempts to get together, we agreed with the gang leaders (Motion, Brayo and Cosmos) to organise a bi-weekly trip involving the entire group to the Arboretum National Park on the other side of the city. Leaving early in the morning with a hired *matatu* helped the gang members to remain sober, and both the prospect of an excursion and the fact that we provided transport and lunch persuaded them to join us. We also agreed to come back early enough (around 4pm) for the men to resume work and earn at least half a day's wages before going home at night.

Meeting between trees, without the noise, dust and constant pull of the *baze* in Mathare, worked out really well. So, for seven months, we alternated our weekly meetings.

One week, we met inside the ghetto for a half-day meeting and house calls to familiarise ourselves with the home circumstances of the men and have individual discussions with them, while the other week we organised a day of counselling, training and interviews at Arboretum Park. During these bi-weekly meetings at the park, the men engaged in vigorous debates and discussed at length how they could leave the gang and transform their lives. In between group discussions, training and counselling sessions, we exercised, played football and ate lunch at a nearby roadside restaurant.

### **Positions of manhood: on hustlers and fools**

The information above provides some background as to why and how Motion and Cosmos approached me, Kingi and Monga to set up an outreach programme. As noted, most of the current One Touch gang members wanted and struggled to leave the gang in order to establish themselves as senior men according to popular notions of senior manhood. Working together in the programme with ex-gang members who were social workers and trainers at Safi was their way to develop collective pathways to try and leave the gang and become fully recognised as senior men. Soon, however, tensions emerged around positions of manhood during the training sessions. The trainers positioned themselves as street-smart hustlers (*see also* Thieme 2013), and increasingly judged the One Touch men as *mafala* ('fools' in Sheng). This was an extremely offensive term, because in the context of the gang it denoted men who lacked the masculine power to perform the street-smart hustler role, which was, to most of the men in Mathare, a vital quality when it came to becoming a senior man.

One afternoon in late November 2010, Motion, Cosmos and the other participants in the programme lay in a circle on their stomachs on the wet grass in the park. They listened attentively to Kingi, who shared with them how he had struggled to leave the One Touch gang in late 2007. What particularly seemed to resonate was the way he explained how he had felt stuck while distilling *chang'aa* seven days a week for almost nine years. "Sometimes weeks passed", he recounted with a sad smile on his face "...before going up the cliffs to the main road and see vehicles pass by." Some of the men murmured in recognition and agreement, and one of them said that he felt as if he were in a prison called *rowe* ('the riverside' in the Kikuyu language). Motion responded that it was "okay to brew for a short period to build a life", but he also shared that he now felt like he was going nowhere as there were very few opportunities for young men like him, that is young ghetto men who lacked a proper education and connections. On hearing these words, some of the men sat up and stared hard into the distance, undoubtedly pondering the tough life they lived. Most of them woke at four in the morning to make their way to the distilling site near the river to face a day, come rain or shine, of either waiting for work or of backbreaking work that earned them no more than 30 Euro cents an hour.

Brayo broke the silence and suddenly stated vehemently: "Without a plan you are lost. Down there (the riverside in Mathare) you are locked inside. Your mind is not thinking outside." He had clearly startled the men into listening to him, as most now looked up at him in surprise. Brayo later explained that his blaze of frustration derived from his own

history of feeling imprisoned while working *rowe*. By using terms such as imprisoned, many of the young men seemed to largely locate the causes of their marginal position as being beyond their own making. However, Brayo later explained to me that he had experienced how easy it is to imprison yourself by "...thinking there is nothing for you out there. We need to change the mentality down (of people living and working by the riverside), of what they think. So many, they think that this is the only life for them." During the training sessions, the current gang members opened up about their fear of the future and their lack of hope. Anticipating such bleak social horizons (*see also* Vigh 2006:30) at times triggered a sense of powerlessness among these young ghetto men. Yet, all of those I worked with adhered to the position of manhood that they referred to as "the hustler." Kingi, Monga and Brayo, however, took their expressions of temporary powerlessness as proof that these men had already given up. Brayo exclaimed: "Yah! They (the participating One Touch gang members) have no hope, no plan, they don't see what they can do to change, they say there is no work for them, no business outside *chang'aa*, and the problem is they don't get paid enough by the bosses, that is what they say." The way Brayo phrased his comment that these young men "don't see what they can do to change" is telling. He loathed their temporal sense of powerlessness, and deemed it to be weak and unmanly. This is because, to him, it stifled initiative, which was key to performing the role of hustler. In Brayo's opinion, the current One Touch gang members were seizing fewer and fewer of the opportunities that were available to them. By calling them *mafala* ('fools' in Sheng), he positioned them as counter to the hustler, who is supposed to be street-smart and motivated to make use of available opportunities. As a consequence, opposite *mafala* stood *wajanja* in the popular discourse. This is the Sheng term for hustlers who know how to navigate difficult circumstances and sometimes even tweak situations to their own advantage. Kingi and Monga (the trainers) often engaged in vigorous debates with the One Touch men to emphasise that they, as Kingi put it during one such discussion, "need to stay alert (*kukaa rada* in Sheng) and take opportunities" (*see also* Vigh 2011), whereas the gang members persistently emphasised that they had no power to change their situation because there were no opportunities. A rift between the trainers and Brayo on the one hand, and the other participants on the other, became increasingly evident during the course of this project, and led to frequent outbursts during meetings.

Most of the men in Mathare, including Brayo, Kingi and Monga, coped with feeling temporarily powerless in the face of grave predicaments. At the same time, all of the men I worked with in this ghetto were heavily engaged in enacting the hustler, including One Touch participants like Motion and Cosmos. Yet, some denounced expressions of powerlessness, while others did not consider them to be a paradox when it came to performing the hustler. It was remarkable to see how Brayo, Kingi and Monga imagined the street-smart hustler (*mjanja*) without expressions of temporal defeat when addressing the gang members. This served to underscore their position as trainers (Kingi and Monga) and the spearheads of the programme (Brayo), while the training itself revolved around notions of taking responsibility as a man and seizing even the slightest opportunity. To them, there were always prospects, and they equated not being able to see and seize them

with being a fool (a *fala* in Sheng) and not a hustler (a *mjanja* in Sheng). This positioning also enabled these men to distance themselves from their own past and present gang affiliations. This was not so much aimed at denying the past, but more at emphasising their current position as senior men, especially in relation to their peers. It also alluded to the imaginary of the gang space as a trap which, if it is not left on time in one's life trajectory, gradually transforms into a space of emasculation where one gradually becomes less and less manly. The *fala* position to them epitomised the 'lesser man' and so marked the boundaries of what they took to be masculine ideals (see also Willemse 2009: 226; Connell 1987:184, 1995, 2000; O'Neill and Hird 2001:221).

Brayo's positioning during the training, when he distanced himself from the other participants, emanated from the history he shared with Monga and Kingi as Safi youth group members (see Chapter 1). Brayo had joined the Safi youth group in 1997, six years after Kingi and Monga. All three took part in an intensive counselling programme in 1998.<sup>1</sup> The Director of Safi, Dr. Karanja, emphasised in her counselling approach that everyone is fundamentally good, and that "self-destructive behaviour is caused by past hurts, distresses, that have not been properly discharged." She used drama and other art forms to encourage youths to express themselves, discover and develop their talents, and deal with past traumas. Kingi, Monga and Brayo often shared with me how being part of the Safi youth group had helped them to develop a sense of self-respect. In Kingi's words: "I learned myself in the youth group. Mama [Dr. Karanja] taught us we are good, and we are worth something, we are not just Mathare people, like so many look at us. We can do things for ourselves. She gave us that faith in ourselves." Brayo did not work for Safi at the start of the training, but gradually positioned himself as a fellow trainer, and when Kingi and Monga decided to start their own organisation in August 2013 to fully focus on gang rehabilitation programmes and peace-building initiatives, they asked him to join them.

During the implementation of the first outreach programme with the One Touch gang members, these young trainers described an incident that had been pivotal in their lives, as it had made them realise their potential. In 1998, Dr. Karanja had organised a drama recital at the All Saints Cathedral in the centre of Nairobi for 10 members of the Safi youth group. The youths had prepared a short play about the daily challenges they faced living in Nairobi's ghettos. They had performed this drama on several occasions in Mathare, and each time the audience had received it with massive applause. This had spurred Dr. Karanja on to seek other opportunities for the youths to perform the play outside the ghetto. Monga remembered, with tears in his eyes from laughing: "Ha ha when we got there, you were there Naomi, ha ha, they did not let us in." Kingi took over: "No, they thought we can't have these youth from Mathare in our church." Brayo finished: "But we performed and all the people they loved us, they wanted to be our friends and hang out with us after the service ha ha." I remembered the incident and the amount of persuading it took by Dr. Karanja to convince the youth leader at the church to allow the Safi youths to go in and showcase their drama about everyday life in Mathare. They were a hit, and it was

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<sup>1</sup> For privacy reasons, I cannot disclose the counselling method because the organisation feared that its privacy may be compromised.



the first time these young actors had experienced that people, even if after initial hesitation, looked past the stigma of being a 'slum dweller' and appreciated their talents. This confirmed to them what Dr. Karanja had been saying all along: that they were talented youths and had something valuable to offer the world. Through this and similar experiences, they had been guided by Dr. Karanja to develop not only a sense of self-worth, but also skills like interacting with people outside Mathare in order to make use of the few opportunities that were available to them. Her teaching had further shaped their notions of manhood, among which the position of the hustler remained paramount. Within their conceptualisations of the hustler, there was little room for feeling powerless. Kingi often explained that he “closed the doors in his head” because he feared that giving room to such feelings would hinder his “struggle” (*kung'ang'ana* in Kiswahili). The struggling hustler was always on the move, whereas expressing powerlessness was likened to standing still, and thus to giving up. This particular construction of the hustler was key to their social navigation struggles and shaped their negative appraisals of the One Touch participants during the training sessions.

Despite the harsh judgements of the trainers and Brayo, most of the other One Touch gang members continued to express feelings of powerlessness and even despair. Their specific enactments of the hustler position, as they too adhered to this position of manhood, emanated from feeling stuck in the space of the gang. Although this seemed to indicate a shared sense of “giving up”, as Kingi worded it repeatedly, it was possible to also detect agency in their positioning. For instance, locating the causes solely within the restrictive structural forces of society (no work for them), and pinpointing oppressive bosses (who did not pay enough), enabled the gang members to imagine that it was society and their bosses who had failed them instead of them failing. This allowed these men to hold on to a sense of self-respect and manhood as part of their social navigation trajectories and in relation to, at least, each other, which was crucial to their social survival. The One Touch participants never called themselves *fala* (singular for *mafala*), and took great offence whenever the trainers used this term in reference to them. The trainers nonetheless ignored their protests, and continued using the word to impress on the gang members the importance of taking matters into their own hands. This led to regular arguments during the training sessions, which I will explore further below. However, I will first delve deeper into the relationship between the position of the struggling street-smart hustler and the sense of being increasingly trapped in the gang space, which was a feeling shared by most of the gang members in Bondeni.

### **Trapped in junior manhood**

As discussed above, the salience of (time and space-bound) feelings of powerlessness among many of the young men in Mathare was shaped by a shared sense of being stuck in the social position of a junior man, i.e. not a boy, but also not yet a senior man. As the gang members grew older, the social pressure to leave and establish themselves as senior men intensified. When the social and economic situation deteriorated even further in Mathare as a result of the economic crisis, the young men who participated in my research felt

increasingly hampered in terms of leaving the gang and, thus, becoming fully recognised as senior men. Their frustrations at 'being stuck' were further exacerbated by the way young ghetto men were described in the dominant discourse, where the ghetto boy is never a man, but always a boy, and never leads, but is always led by other more powerful and knowledgeable men. As a consequence, this label resonated to some extent with the epithet *fala*.

*Fala* is the fool who never becomes a senior man, because he gives up and therefore lacks the strength or wit to, in the words of a One Touch participant, "beat the system, so he is used by Babylon." Many young ghetto men made intertextual references to Rastafarian viewpoints and terminologies in their attempts to comprehend their own positioning. With the term Babylon, these men denoted, in line with the Rastafarian religion (*e.g.* Murrell 1998:6), all of the oppressive structures (varying from government to business people) that they typified as being morally corrupt, influenced by Western powers, and so inherently perverse (see the section in Chapter 4 about lesbianism for more). They often made a sign with their hand that symbolised an upside down pyramid which, to them, stood for revolution and power to the people, which was a phrase that I heard them utter repeatedly. A hustler, in this vein, was not a "slave to Babylon", as Brayo explained, but a "master of his own destiny." The local conceptualisations of the term Babylon shaped a mind-set of mental resistance to oppressive power structures (such as the police), and was just one of the mind-sets available to young men in Mathare to help them deal with daily situations of oppression. This state of mind was, however, incessantly challenged by everyday violence and the growing obstacles that young gang members faced when trying to leave the gang. Indeed, many of them did not feel like masters of their own destiny. As a consequence, some found new ways to continue to adhere to the position of the hustler while giving vent to feelings of powerlessness.

Feeling trapped referred to the tensions these gang members experienced with regard to the growing permanence of a social position that was, even if rather fluidly, delineated by biological age. As explored in Chapter 2, young men in Mathare often took up the position of gang member after completing the rite of passage of male circumcision that usually took place between the ages of 14 and 16. In this vein, gang membership had parallels with popular notions of a junior warrior. Many ethnic groups that practise male circumcision also have (notions of) a period following this rite of passage in which young men of a certain age-set become junior warriors (*see also* Uzoigwe 1977:36). In more recent times, many groups have stopped observing the more institutionalised rituals commonly associated with such notions of manhood, yet the concepts of a junior and senior warrior continue to shape popular masculinities nonetheless. In Mathare, for instance, the junior positions of male gang members were often counterposed to senior manhood (perhaps informed by the notion of a senior warrior – *see also* Uzoigwe 1977:36). Strikingly, during the years when they took up the position of a junior man, these men gradually took on responsibilities and gained the powers associated with senior manhood. This underlines present-day and local improvisations of what were popularly considered to be traditional repertoires (*see also* Spronk 2012). In the dominant discourse, marriage

and fatherhood are taken by most ethnic groups to be the prerogatives of only senior men, whereas they were regarded as key steps for junior men preparing for senior manhood in Mathare.

Counter-positioning junior and senior manhood also resonated with the mainstay of the dominant discourse on citizenship and masculinities in Kenya, which revolves around the simultaneous configuration of the dominant positions of men over women, and wealthy older urban men over poor younger urban men (Spronk 2012:61; Silberschmidt 2004; Barker & Ricardo 2005). Rural men feature less and less in the imaginary that is central to dominant masculinities and in the construction of citizenship, except when the 'rural Luo boy' as a representation of unfit leadership is evoked in political polemics (Ahlberg & Njoroge 2013; Throup & Hornsby 1998; Wa Wamwere 2003). Within the dominant discourse on citizenship and masculinities, young ghetto men are cast as ghetto boys and thugs for hire (Branch & Cheeseman 2009), and as non-citizens and figureheads in political struggles. They are considered to be only foot soldiers for criminals or opportunistic political leaders – that is wealthy, older urban men (and sometimes women – especially in Mathare). Taking great pride in becoming a father as a junior man was thus one of the ways young ghetto men negotiated this dominant discourse, as fatherhood underscored their social status as men instead of boys.

Over the past ten years, the fear of remaining as a junior man has intensified among many of the young men in Nairobi's ghettos as a result of what one could justly call 'gendercide' (Willemse 2009). As discussed above, countless young men in Mathare have been shot dead by the police (see previous chapter, Alston 2009; IMLU 2011) before reaching the age of 25. Moreover, young ghetto men are not only othered as ghetto boys and non-citizens, but are also increasingly seen as a risk to society (*cf.* Were 2008). This demonstrates that, along with ethnicity and gender, three other key markers of subjectivation (*see also* Foucault 1982: 212) play a significant role in the dominant discourse on masculinities and citizenship: class, age and locality. These young ghetto men thus marked the unstable and highly contested boundaries of citizenship, national identification and belonging (*see also* Willemse 2009:226-227) that continue to be marked – albeit in constantly shifting ethnic configurations – by 'Big Men.' Within this still predominantly patriarchal system, these young men were violently exploited, oppressed and confined to the ghetto. Accordingly, the system worked to affirm the power of the political and business elites.

The shared fear of not growing older than 25, and thus never being able to achieve senior manhood, had a significant impact on the social praxis and choice-making of many gang members. Numerous young men told me that they desperately wanted to become a father in order to leave their mark ("mini-me" as they put it) before they die. This shows that social suffering was complexly gendered in Mathare. Moreover, being a police target solely because they were young men living in a Nairobi ghetto impinged heavily on the gendered sense of the self of these young men, as well as on their (temporal and context-bound) feelings of powerlessness. Kingi had lost at least 23 close friends in the span of a decade, and told me how he felt about being a young man and father in Mathare:

I think it was 2004 and also 2008, we had *mazishi* (a funeral in Kiswahili) every week. But also in 2000, yes... it started earlier. So many of us were shot dead by *karao* ('a policeman' in Sheng), so many! It is like, what?...you know him and him, and you work together *rowe* ('at the riverside' in the Kikuyu language), and the next week he is a dead. Many guys who were in my football team, also they died. I showed you the picture. From us, only five are alive... Ok, some were not innocent, but they are shot dead, not brought to court. And you saw it with Kuch, it still happens. But *roundi hii* ('this time' in Sheng) it is calm, maybe you hear one case a week, a month, maybe it is because of the new constitution. [...] All men in ghetto have been in cell, all of us, ha ha ha you are not a man if you have not been in cell. When there is a *msako* ('a police raid' in Sheng), we have to hide, they can ask you to *lala chini* ('lie face down on the ground' in Sheng), they *peremba* ('pickpocket' in Sheng) you, they take your things, and when they are not happy with what they find, they can just take you to Centa (a ground in Eastleigh, a neighbourhood near Mathare, where many young men have been executed) to shoot you, just like that. We are not safe, even if we are innocent, they will shoot you. They can place a fake gun on you, and put a report that you are a thief. A thief has 40 days, but what about me? How many days do I have? My son? Here in ghetto, we men live in a warzone.

Accordingly, the fear and ensuing frustrations of these men not only hinged on a lack of respect by society at large, but also on their inability to live up to the dominant standards of senior masculinity. The clear and present danger of being murdered by the police, voiced rather poignantly here by Kingi, informed a gendered sense of the self in which young men felt as if they stood clearly apart from other social groups in Mathare, such as women, girls and older men who shared the same class and ethnic positions. Kingi stated that men, not women, girls, or even older men, lived in "a warzone." Young men from the ghetto thus felt deeply haunted, obstructed and discriminated against, and this shaped their temporal sense of powerlessness.

### **Everyday drinking and giving up**

Facing seemingly insurmountable problems, many gang members battled heavy drinking and, for some, even full-blown alcohol addiction. At the end of most of the bi-weekly training days that we spent at Arboretum Park in Nairobi, Cosmos and a few other gang members shook badly as a result of the lack of alcohol in their addicted bodies. Indeed, they could hardly stand up. Cosmos reflected on his addiction as follows:

We drink because that is what you do, at the *baze*. There are no good ideas down there, no morale, they all want to see you down, because they are down. You drink because you have no money, you can't go

home, and you know *biko* ('the first strong alcohol produced in the process of distilling *chang'aa*', in Sheng) is free, no money there. So you forget your problems. Even when we work we drink because they (bosses) don't pay us enough, we only work three days a week, the rest we drink. Because there is no work.

Cosmos regarded the availability of *chang'aa* at the *baze*, in conjunction with a perpetual lack of work, as a prime cause of his addiction to alcohol. Kingi replied to him: "You, ha ha, okay so there is no work so you drink to forget the problems...You have problems because you have no work, but you don't get work when you drink!" This evidently made Cosmos's head spin and he looked at me with his big, misty eyes: "Naomi, do you think I would drink if there would be work?" This remark highlights how these men often included me in their exchanges. Although their positioning during these encounters was mostly directed at each other, they also often addressed me in an attempt to convince me, and perhaps themselves, that it was not their fault that they were 'stuck.' This again reveals that enacting a position of victimhood, and thus incorporating elements of the *fala* position such as acknowledging feelings of powerlessness in their enactment of the *mjanja* position, helped these men to hold onto a moral upper hand, despite the harsh verdicts of the trainers.

Distillers were certainly at high risk of becoming addicts given that they had to taste the alcohol during the distillation process to separate the strongest drink from the rest, as roughly the first five litres of distilled alcohol, known as *biko* (see Chapter 1), are more valuable. They also had to ensure both the quality and potency of the rest of the *chang'aa*. Sellers too faced a high risk of becoming addicts, as they had to prove to their customers that the drink was not poisonous and would not blind or, worse, kill them. *Chang'aa* is highly addictive and hazardous due to its potency; a few sips every day is probably enough to be detrimental to the body and mind. What is more, despite its already high alcohol content, *chang'aa* is often adulterated to enhance its impact, and may contain varying levels of the highly poisonous methanol. Yet, even without the addition of other harmful supplements to increase the potency of the drink (such as kerosene, formalin from mortuaries, ARVs from AIDS patients, and battery fluid), *chang'aa* is a potentially lethal beverage (see also Masime et al. 2013; Izugbara et al. 2013). Only a few gang members claimed to drink occasionally, with most doing so on a daily basis, and some had the tell-tale signs of *chang'aa* addiction, such as reddish and flaky skin, a swollen face, yellow and bloodshot eyes, and blistered lips. Of the 20 participants in the outreach programme, 11 were dealing with serious health problems that were all related to the excessive drinking of *chang'aa*, meaning more than two drinks a day. The physical and mental problems I observed throughout my fieldwork varied from large, infected open wounds that would not heal to severe psychological complaints such as insomnia, amnesia and depression.

Clearly, the use of and an addiction to alcohol and other substances had an impact on the physical and mental well-being of these men. Yet drinking, many stated, also served as an easy way to escape from their everyday problems. At the same time, these issues were considered by some, like Kingi, to be the very reason for the manifestation of these

problems. According to Kingi, the *chang'aa* was not helping these young men to develop strategies and make use of available opportunities as part of the social navigation projects on offer. Yet, drinking (excessively) was also part of the everyday encounters between these men. Cosmos stated: "We drink because that is what you do, at the *baze*", and not merely to escape harsh conditions. A former One Touch gang member, Buda, who had recently moved out of Mathare, confirmed this by claiming: "When I am back in ghetto, I have to go down and see my *mabeshte* ('friends' in Sheng), to drink. In Rome do like Romans, ha ha ha, that is what they say, ha ha ha, so that is what I do." Drinking together forged a bond between friends and fellow gang members; it was part of their homosociality (see also Kiesling 2005), as it induced a sense of brotherhood and togetherness.

Monga further explained to me the impact of both the ubiquity of *chang'aa* in the realm of the everyday and the routinisation (see also Vigh 2006: 149) of drinking in the everyday social praxis.

Drinking in Bondeni is what you see growing up. You see it as normal, everybody drinks. For women, it is a problem, only prostitutes drink, ha ha ha, but all women in Bondeni drink...so... not all are prostitutes of course...but for men, no problem, it is part of being a man. You don't hide. You don't drink at home, but at a bar in company with your friends. Oh but ha ha, almost every house is a bar.

Over the years, I have visited many homes in Bondeni where at least one open 180-litre steel drum, filled with a distilling mixture (*kango* in Sheng) in various stages of fermentation, was part of the few household items on show. Other homes doubled-up as bars, and it was not uncommon to find children drinking their breakfast porridge alongside (mostly) male customers drinking their "wake-up" glass, as the first drink of *chang'aa* in the morning was jokingly dubbed by some. Being used to the habit of drinking and the widespread availability of *chang'aa* in everyday life contributed to its pervasive use among the One Touch gang members. Drinking illicit drinks (such as *chang'aa* and *busaa* – see Chapter 1) was widespread in Bondeni (and other ghetto villages in Mathare), and was governed by certain codes: men were not supposed to drink at home (unless it also functioned as a bar), and it was less accepted for women to drink in public. As Monga revealed, many people deviated from these codes in everyday practice, yet, when asked about the boundaries of respectability with regard to drinking, my interlocutors often evoked these and other notions of morality. Even more, these drinking habits seemed to constitute the frame of reference that people often called upon to size each other up as either *wajanja* or *mafala*.

Drinking alcohol, especially *chang'aa*, was widely perceived to be acceptable behaviour for men in Mathare in particular, and indeed in Kenya in general (Silberschmidt 2004), even though women were just as likely to drink as men (Nelson 1978a, 1978b; White 1990). The women who sold alcohol drank the beverage to prove its safety to their customers, while the women who sold sex often drank *chang'aa* with potential clients as

part of the transaction. As one woman from Bondeni explained to me: "The men in a bar, they don't like drinking alone, so they buy you to drink with them, then you can make a deal with them." The gender difference with regard to how drinking practices were imagined concentrated on the way addiction in men and women was considered and disciplined. Among both sexes, addiction was deemed to be a weakness, albeit not to the same degree, as addicted women were condemned more severely in popular discourse than addicted men.

Monga shared with me why addiction in general was taken to be a weakness: "You lose control, anything can happen. You act irresponsibly, and forget everything. You know my brother was burned in his house when he was drunk. You can sleep like a dead when you drink only two glasses." The widespread condemnation of alcohol addiction largely derived from the fact that most of the families I worked with over the past two decades had either lost someone from addiction-related illnesses or from accidents caused by being drunk (such as fires). Moreover, addicted family members were notorious for hindering the social and economic progress of households by, for instance, using money that was meant for food and selling household items to support their habit. Female addicts often bore the brunt of public denunciation. In Kenya in general, and in Mathare in particular, women (more than men) who went against commonly held social norms were considered to be disrupting social relations and challenging the boundaries of popular notions of respectability (*see also* Hodgson & McCurdy 2001:6). Even more so, female bodies were, more than anything, inscribed with a longing for, and localised notions of, safety and homeliness (*e.g.* Lovesey 1992). The fact that most households in Mathare were headed by single women made women, perhaps more than anywhere else, the sole embodiment of home, safety and hope. A female addicted body thus constituted a threat to morality and social ties, and to dreams and hopes, even more than was the case for addicted male bodies. Meanwhile, addicted men were taken to be weak, but they were also regarded as potential customers. Most families survived in Bondeni by distilling, selling and smuggling alcohol, and thus depended heavily on a wide customer base. Monga spoke about the ensuing ambivalence with which most people in Mathare related to *chang'aa*:

I was born with *chang'aa*, raised by it, but I have never taken even one sip...I know it kills. You see *walevi* ('drunkards' in Kiswahili) sleeping in the middle of the road, the goats can even eat their ears, they don't feel it, ha ha ha. I always spit it out when I brew, or when I sell. I could tell just by tasting with my fingers, whether it was *biko* or *chang'aa*, so I did not need to swallow. I am glad for *chang'aa* because it helped me to go to school. But it also killed my brother and so many friends. I used to live in my brother's bar, you remember? Ha ha...it made me strong to think I would not become like the customers, those crazy, drunk men I sold *chang'aa* to ha ha ha. When you swallow, the next day you drink a glass, and the next day you drink two...then in a year you can die, or become crazy. I have seen this happen so many times.

Monga's statement "I was born with *chang'aa*" rang true for most of the young people in Mathare, as many single mothers there worked as sex workers, selling both *chang'aa* and sex from their homes (see also White 1990). Monga, like many of the men I worked with, did not know who his father was and grew up helping his mother, and later his brother, at the family bar. He explained his success in leaving the gang by referring to his abstinence from alcohol. To him, this type of self-discipline constituted the core of being a street-smart hustler. Many One Touch gang members to some extent agreed that drinking excessively did not help them, but they also pointed out the multiple problems young men faced, and how drinking was sometimes a help when it came to forgetting these difficulties. Again, many claimed that they just really, really liked drinking together. Cosmos worded his experience of the different layers of everyday drinking as follows: "Ha ha, I have to see *mabeshte*, yah we drink. It's not bad. Also, nightmares chase me at day, I can't sleep without drinking, I scream aloud, problems make me to drink." He identified friendship, a lack of work, and ensuing problems and severe anxieties as reasons to drink. Cosmos continued to drink heavily but, encouraged by the training, shaved off his rough looking beard and shaggy hair and applied for a job as a security guard in the city centre. To his amazement, he was hired, and at the time of writing this chapter had been working in this role for over two years, while also balancing his drinking with his friends from the One Touch gang. He still suffered from frightening nightmares, but was less worried about the future. He commented in February 2013:

It is God, somehow I thought to go to get this job. After job I go down to drink, to see my friends, to have fun. I make sure I don't go to job when I am drunk. I don't want the boss to smell alcohol on me. I can't stop drinking, I don't want to. It is what I do with my friends. It is not a problem to me. I always eat when I drink.

Cosmos's narrations show that drinking for men was not considered to be a problem per se. What is more, drinking heavily was regarded as *hard core* ('hard ghetto living' in Sheng) and could therefore be part of performing the hustler. Many marked the distinction between *ufala* (foolishness) and *ujanja* (street smartness) with respect to drinking practices as the difference between whether one had eaten before drinking, and whether the drinking interfered with 'chasing money.' Graffiti on an iron sheet wall of a house near the distilling site underlined this, stating: "Eat Before Drinking, Don't Drink Before Eating."

### **Social horizon and living in the now**

"*Wasee wa rowe* ('men from the riverside' in Sheng) think of today, ha ha only today. I think of tomorrow, that is my focus." By using the word focus, Kingi thus captured the constant striving to not only survive today, but to also procure an income and a better social position tomorrow (preferably outside *chang'aa* and, accordingly, the gang). Brayo also alluded above to the significance of having a focus, or planning ahead, when he said:



"Without a plan we are lost." Many young gang members seemed to grapple with social horizons that, often, did not appear to reach beyond the space of the *baze* and the span of today. Tomorrow was perhaps just too frightening to think about. Consequently, many of the One Touch gang members also had a focus, except theirs did not seem to extend very far into the future. This, according to Kingi, Monga and Brayo, had a negative bearing on their social position and exacerbated risk-taking behaviour among them.

During a private conversation with me, Brayo expounded how he was often reminded of the time when he had lacked focus: "*Nilikua fala* ('I was a fool' in Sheng). I know to live only for today, and it did not help me. I was warned by a bullet." He was talking about 1998, when he had just joined Safi. One Sunday in July of that year, he had been caught stealing at a football match by the police, who shot at him and his accomplices (including Monga and Buda) as they were trying to remove a floodlight from the stands. Luckily, the crowd had dispersed instead of dropping to the ground, allowing him and his friends to run for cover among the bolting spectators. Yet, one bullet had caught his side, but he could not visit a hospital as they would have to hand him over to the police, as all bullet wounds had to be reported to the relevant authorities. A trained nurse and a friend from Bondeni removed the bullet and took care of the wound, but for weeks it remained angry and raw and Brayo suffered several infections. When Monga and I learned that he was cleaning his wound with *chang'aa*, we immediately bought him a medical kit. Nevertheless, it took him months to recover and in some ways he never did. The trauma of not just being shot, but also losing his ability to take care of himself, as he was bedridden for some time, was etched on his brain. Fear had grabbed hold of him. He explained to me that it had made him contemplate the possibilities of a tomorrow, instead of just being geared towards day-to-day survival, as had been common among him and his friends. Previously, the deep insecurity of tomorrow had, according to Brayo, caused him to only focus on today. Yet, only thinking of today had led to him almost "losing tomorrow", as he put it, as it had driven him to take exceptional risks. This became the bedrock upon which he appraised his peers during the outreach programme, and explains why he was so set on changing their alleged 'living in the now' mentality.

In offering the outreach programme, Kingi, Monga and Brayo stated that their aim was to counter the maxim '*leo ni leo, kesho ni baadaye*' ('today is today and tomorrow is later' in Kiswahili) which, according to them, guided the social praxis of many of the gang members in their everyday lives. Kingi often said during our meetings at Arboretum Park: "Without hope you die", which is a poignantly warranted proclamation when the volatility of and sheer poverty in Mathare is considered. The correlation between excessive drinking and lacking a focus stood at the core of their conceptualisation of the *fala*, or the fool. To them, losing focus seemed to be on a par with giving in to the position of the fool, and this was enacted by excessive drinking. Alcohol addiction was thus considered to be a weakness, mainly because it traversed their struggle and hindered them in considering the possibilities of a (better) tomorrow. They repeatedly exclaimed that drinking excessively was an obstacle for young gang members who wanted to move beyond the space of the gang. Addiction was thus taken by them to be a symbolic expression of giving-up hope,

which was, to Kingi, equal to suicide: "Giving up is not part of life, it is part of death. You remember Jimo? When he asked you for money when his brother died? He had to take the body to *ocha* ('the rural area' in Sheng). [...] He became crazy of *cham* ('*chang'aa*' in Sheng) because he gave up, then he dies."

Listening to the trainers and Brayo talk about the problems associated with 'thinking only of today', most participants nodded their heads and spoke in concurrence. During one afternoon session, Motion shared that compared to the other distilling gangs, the One Touch had become infamous for its drunkards. He confessed that he drank a lot himself, and that it did not help him. The group of men laughed at this and made jokes in agreement. One of them stood up and mimicked a drunkard in the middle of our circle to the great delight of the others. Motion, shouting now to be heard above the laughter, continued to explain that, as a result, this gang was considered to be occupying a lower social position than the other distilling groups in Bondeni. Brayo interjected, still with a smile on his face and laughter in his voice, that this was underlined by the Manoki bar owners (who worked with the One Touch gang), who paid less than the bar owners who worked with other gangs (a difference that could be up to 20 Kenyan Shillings – approx. 0.20 Euros per working hour). Yet, the number of non-gang members at the One Touch *baze* surpassed that of other *bazes*, as the former was locally configured as a space for *kuraha* ('having fun' in Sheng). "At One Touch, they are *lives* ('prone to enjoy life' in Sheng), they want *kuraha*." By referring to the One Touch gang as 'they', Brayo was showing that he, for that moment, had distanced himself from his gang. Motion replied and faced me: "It is true, we think of today, but he (Brayo) does not understand...he does not brew, without work, you can't think more than today... If there is work...yah... you can think of tomorrow." Motion confirmed Brayo's separate position, but absolutely disagreed with the way he cast all of the other gang members as drunkards who concentrated on day-to-day survival and were thus *mafala*. This again shows how they included me in their conversations in order to explain why different circumstances compelled them to imagine the *mjanja* position differently from the trainers.

Despite the challenging remarks made by the trainers, I observed that many One Touch gang members did in fact plan ahead, even when work was erratic and income patchy. Indeed, without doing so, they would not have been able to rent houses, pay school fees for children and organise the brokering of stolen goods, as this needed intricate networks of sellers and buyers to be maintained. Furthermore, the majority of the gang members were not heavily addicted to *chang'aa*, despite their everyday heavy drinking practices. Indeed, they often worked 18 hours a day, which required a lot of physical strength, very specific skills and a high level of mental alertness. Motion later told me in private that the only reason he thought Kingi, Monga and, to some extent, Brayo were ahead of him and the others was linked to their connections with Safi, through which they had received training, loans and other kinds of help. "Kingi and Monga, ha ha, they are spoiled, they now work for Safi, so... they don't have to wait for work." Kingi and Monga did not in fact get paid much by Safi and still required their own businesses to make ends meet. Nonetheless, Motion saw their experiences with, and employment by, Safi as the defining

difference between these men and the current One Touch gang members. However, one aspect of the harsh judgements of the trainers seemed to correspond with the expectations of most of the participants: many did not see a future outside the alcohol industry, whereas this was the main objective of the outreach programme.

### **Evaluating the programme**

The outreach programme was carried out over a period of six months, after which it had grown to encompass three groups of gang members from different *chang'aa* gangs and one group of female sex workers. From the first group, Cosmos and four other men had been able to leave the gang as a result of the programme. Meanwhile, Motion and the other 14 participants continued their work near the riverside, but were still part of a second group of One Touch gang members who participated in the programme. Motion had failed the first group, because he had lacked a national identity card and could not therefore qualify for a loan; the others who had failed had used their loans for emergencies, such as a fire, a hospital bill and a bribe to avoid a jail sentence. As a result, their micro-businesses had gone bust and they had been unable to repay their loans. All of the participants had faced such emergencies, and only a few had refrained from using their loans to pay for them. Interviews with the participants revealed that the few who did not use their loans for emergencies positioned themselves – mostly – as *wajanja* in a similar way to the trainers. They missed the back-up of family connections and NGOs, yet they also completely downplayed their feelings of powerlessness, not just in the context of the training, but also in private meetings with me. Mato said:

Yes, my daughter she is sick, very sick, you know that, so I took her to *hosi* ('hospital' in Sheng), but no I did not use the loan. I need a second loan. I thought, what if I did not have this loan? This business? What would I do? How would I pay for the hospital bills? So I took some money from a friend, and I have to pay him back. But I can make my business, so I can pay him back.

Mato was adamant about making his clothes business thrive, and he had therefore decided not to use the loan to cover the bills. He had not, however, borrowed the money from a friend, but had earned it by smuggling alcohol and brokering stolen goods. He did not tell me this, because he wanted me to believe that he had stopped these highly risky endeavours. As noted above, all of the participants engaged in such activities, dubbed by them as hustling, and so had multiple sources of income in addition to working the drums and setting up their small businesses, however small the returns of these undertakings sometimes were. The others could also have sourced the funds to pay for emergencies from elsewhere, just like Mato. Yet, many told me during the evaluation stage of the programme that they did not think they could change their situation by setting up a business, and this perhaps had made it a little easier for them to use the loan to pay for emergencies. Motion said: "Who is going to buy from me? Maybe if I have a bar. That is the only way." This shows

the ambivalence that most young men felt with regard to developing different pathways out of the gang.

There were several examples of former gang members who had left the gang via micro-businesses. Indeed, that is why Motion and Cosmos approached me to set up the outreach programme. Nevertheless, there were also other former gang members who had been able to leave the gang by setting up their own bars and building from there. In fact, Kingi was a prime example of this, as will become clear below. Most participants continued to envisage this route, despite waning profits, high risk and their wish to set up their own micro-business outside gang structures. They, as Motion brought out, did not think people would buy anything else from them than alcohol. These participants did affirm the *mjanja* position but, as stated, incorporated elements the trainers deemed to be *ufala*, such as foregrounding temporal feelings of powerlessness. The specific sense of powerlessness expressed by Motion and many others during our private interviews seemed to affirm the popular idea that these men were not considered to fully belong to the community, and would thus not be expected to do anything other than work in the alcohol industry (I will return to this in Chapter 5). This, to some extent, shows that the way the participants negotiated dominant discourses on manhood and positioned themselves shaped different vistas and, accordingly, different decision-making processes among the programme's participants. As a consequence, wanting to develop a micro-business that was separate from the gang, and actually believing that this would help them to leave, were considered to be two very different things by most.

Kingi and Monga eventually resigned from Safi and set up their own community-based organisation (CBO) with Brayo, which focused solely on gang rehabilitation and outreach based on the design of the first outreach programme. I have helped them to raise funds that enabled them to make this move. At the time of writing this chapter, both Kingi and Monga lived outside Mathare, Brayo had moved into a stone room in Upper Bondeni and all three had a second-hand iPhone. They were thus moving up, and the five graduates from the first programme group had also been able to improve their living conditions. Cosmos, for instance, was preparing to move out of Mathare at the time of writing this chapter, and Mato had opened a second-hand clothes stall at a market nearby. The CBO that was founded by Kingi, Monga and Brayo was geared towards helping other gang members to follow these examples. Nevertheless, the journey to senior manhood was long and hard for most of these men, and some would never reach this social position because they either died from a police bullet or succumbed to alcohol addiction. However, even if a gang member had been able to leave the gang by gaining some form of social and economic independence, the struggle to become and establish oneself as a senior man, and to be recognised as such by the wider community, continued nonetheless.

### **A successful trajectory**

As discussed above, Kingi has succeeded not only in leaving the gang he had once founded and setting up his own organisation, but also in being a husband and father for over 17 years. Indeed, he has established himself as the head of his household and of his extended

family, which has included his family-in-law, over the course of the past few years. He was thus widely recognised as a senior man. However, he still struggled every day to adhere to the ideals commonly associated with this position, revealing that the process of becoming a senior man never ended. So, what made his trajectory very different from those of the majority of gang members in Mathare who struggled to leave and felt stuck? A closer look at his and his wife's biographical narratives and life trajectories will help us to unearth why Kingi's (long and rocky) pathway out of the gang was eventually successful. It should also reveal something about the difficulties other young gang members faced in attempting to follow suit in recent times.

Kingi had founded the One Touch gang in early 1994 and left the group in late 2007. At the time Kingi founded the gang, *chang'aa* had been in high demand and police bribes and competition were relatively low (compared to more recent times). Accordingly, it was possible to save, little by little, and invest in small businesses on the side. *Chang'aa* was still in high demand in 2010, but police bribes had become very high and competition had grown fierce. Moreover, the cost of the ingredients required to make the mixture had risen steeply over the past decade, whereas the price of a glass had stayed the same. The continuous slump in the purchasing power of the Kenyan Shilling (*e.g.* Fengler 2011) and the stagnation of earnings among low-income families led to a price freeze for one glass of *chang'aa* in Nairobi's ghettos. This made it increasingly difficult for gang members to save and invest in the *chang'aa* industry as a step towards a business outside *chang'aa*. Kingi was roughly five years older than most of the gang members-cum-programme participants (although three were older than Kingi). As a consequence, he had been able to start developing micro-businesses between 1998 and 2004, which was a time of relative growth in the *chang'aa* industry. Yet, his age and the fact that he had been able to profit, however minimally, from the *chang'aa* boom in the late 1990s do not explain everything about Kingi's story. Monga was closer to the age of the majority of the gang's current members, and yet he left the group in 2005, which was before Kingi took the same step. Motion brought this out in the discussions examined above when he deemed Monga, Kingi and Brayo to be different from him and the other One Touch gang members because of their connection to Safi. As noted, these men developed skills and a sense of self-esteem, and had been able to access loans through this NGO. I will therefore now take a closer look at Kingi's narratives in order to highlight both how this NGO has helped him and the other factors that have played a role in his success.

Kingi almost always smiled, but this hid a turbulent and violent past from which the mental scars continued to plague him. Similar to most young men in Mathare, Kingi grew up without knowing who his father was. As a young boy, at barely seven years old, he was physically and emotionally abused by his mother and often slept outside the house to avoid her. At one point, he ran away and lived with his grandmother, Shosho Kingi, during the latter part of his troubled childhood. His grandmother had moved to Mathare in 1968 after divorcing her wealthy husband for reasons still unknown to Kingi:

I am changing the pattern, you see my mother she is a single woman now, my grandmother she is a single mother. All my aunties, they are all single, but one. I don't know why Shosho left her husband. Her husband was a rich, very wealthy, a *sonko* (a wealthy person or a boss in Sheng). He is a family of Charles Njonjo (an influential politician during the Kenyatta era). He has land in Kangemi, and in Ngong. We are royalty living in ghetto. But we don't know why. We could have been rich, and have a different life ha ha ha. We don't know why Shosho left her husband and come to Mathare to brew *chang'aa*...can you imagine from that life to here?...You talk to Shosho, maybe she can tell you but it is a secret. I want to know because it is the reason why all my family, they are a single mothers, and poor. And have children from many fathers, also my sister, she is repeating the pattern. My mother was very beautiful and proud when she was young. I think Shiko (Kingi's daughter) has that from her. I want my family to be different, I want to break the pattern and be a father. I stay with my wife, my children have a better future. All these people down there (near the river in Bondeni), they think marriage *mara hiyo hiyo* ('instantly' in Sheng) when they love someone, but when love goes, they leave babies behind, they don't stay and these women they have to find other husbands to take care of them. But men cannot take care of another man's baby, like what happened to me. I did not know my stepfather was not my father, but he did not treat me the same, my mother blamed me when he left her, she never liked me, and now she asks me for money and to buy her things ha ha ha. Also my sister, she asks. But she spends money badly. She does not pay rent but when she has money she buys a new TV. She goes through my mother so I give her. They abuse me. Without them I would be far now, very far. When Victa was born Shosho helped me, my mother did not come for weeks. My mother and I, we still don't have a good relationship. She never told me my father, it was my auntie, you were there, in 2005, how...how! Then I find out he is a known man in ghetto, and I have brothers and sisters...ha ha ha I could have married my sister. How...my mother did not tell me. My dream is to move away from ghetto and give my children a different life. You see how Shiko, she does not even remember we lived in a *mabati* ('iron sheet' in Kiswahili) house, and we only ate *uji* ('gruel or porridge made with water' in Kiswahili). Victa remembers, but Shiko she thinks we are a rich. Ha ha ha. For Jamal (his new born son), he will have a new life, he is a prince now, he even eats fruits!

Besides love, Kingi's resolve to marry his wife and recognise his first-born son, even though they had just started dating, was induced by his wish to break 'the pattern' of his own family. The moment he learned his girlfriend was pregnant (not because she told him, but

because she started showing), he decided to marry her and leave the Safi youth group and the other activities he was involved with (such as break-dancing in a club in the city centre). Instead, he started distilling alcohol seven days a week as a leader of the One Touch gang in order to provide for his young family, and as such he became the father he never had.

Kingi sometimes expressed regret that he had been so utterly unprepared for fatherhood. When Mama J and Victa moved in with him, he lived in a room with an earthen floor that was half the size of a normal one-room house in Mathare, as the structure was sub-divided by thin cardboard. His only possessions were a few clothes, a single woodworm-infested bed and a few second-hand items of bedding. He did not even have a stove or cooking utensils. Despite his unpreparedness, he told me he had been adamant about the way forward, and that the memories of his violent childhood had helped him to make the decision to marry his girlfriend. "I know I can do it. So many told my wife, don't marry him, he will not go anywhere. He is from [the riverside]. It makes me angry, also today, but I know when they say that, I can do it."

Kingi's self-awareness derived from his experiences as a youth leader and later as a gang leader, and was further shaped by his relentless faith in his abilities. Shosho had been a frontrunner of a women's cooperative that was connected to Safi during the late 1980s and early 1990s, and she had introduced Kingi to the youth group when he was just 12 (see also chapters 1 and 2). This group trained him and the other members in leadership skills, drama and dancing. Kingi discovered that he had talent and that people took him seriously when he spoke, and he developed a profound sense of self-respect as a result. The Director of Safi, Dr. Karanja, also counselled him, and this helped him to deal with some of his childhood traumas. On the whole, he grew into a self-assured man, despite his young age and troubled childhood. In his words: "I know myself. I struggle to keep a decision, it is my attitude. No fear there. Just to focus. Ha ha ha, just to struggle, I am used, and I never give up." When his girlfriend started to show that she was pregnant, he did not hesitate, and rose up to meet the occasion because he believed he could make it work. I talked to him in 1998 right after he had become a father and a husband, and he shared with me how he missed his "old life", but he felt proud of himself that he was able to work hard and provide his young family with food. This again highlights the importance of fatherhood to men like Kingi, and his experiences with Safi had helped him to take up this position and counteract the lack of faith and support from his mother, his girlfriend's family and neighbours.

### **A ghetto marriage: 'come we stay'**

Kingi met his wife Mama J in 1996 when he was distilling alcohol for Shosho and other bosses at the One Touch site. She was 15 and he was 19. She came from the upper half of Bondeni, and her mother, neighbours and older sisters strongly advised her against dating a man from 'down' the riverside (*rowe* in the Kikuyu language). Mama J came from an all-female household that shared a one-room iron sheet house close to Juja Road. Her mother worked as a sex worker from her house, and she had six daughters from five different fathers. Mama J and the other sisters who were old enough helped their mother by selling

*chang'aa* from a small bar. This bar was adjacent to the room where her mother received her "husbands", as Mama J euphemistically called her mother's customers. Her mother worked in the same room in which they all lived and slept, and Mama J vividly remembered that her mother often had to work while her younger sisters were sleeping on the floor beside the bed. She laughed when she recalled how her mother even sometimes gave orders to them from the bed while she was working by pulling open the thin curtain that hid the bed from sight to show her face. Obviously, all six daughters knew exactly the line of work their mother was involved in, but unlike most women in the ghetto Mama J's mother did not try to hide it. On the contrary, she engaged in open discussion with her daughters to encourage them to make different choices in their lives. Besides selling *chang'aa* at the family bar, Mama J also supplemented the family income by hawking clothes in bars in the city centre at night. Older women from the ghetto who were doing the same usually accompanied her. These women, she recounted, protected her from the sex work that often went along with hawking, as she was considered to be too young. She started hawking when she was 12 years old, yet she was very tall and beautiful and attracted a lot of attention from men while going in and out of the city's bars at night to sell the garments she herself had made. Her mother wanted her to escape their poor and hard life by marrying a wealthy man, and Kingi, a gang member without an education and influential (family) connections outside the *chang'aa* industry, did not qualify. Yet, Mama J became pregnant soon after she started dating Kingi, and encouraged by love agreed to marry him against the wishes of her mother.

She gave birth to Victa on 30 November 1997, when she had just turned 16. Fearful of her mother's disapproval, she did not initially tell her that she intended to move down to Kingi's one-room iron sheet house. On the day she came home from the hospital, she waited eagerly for Kingi to pick her up. Her mother sensed something and initiated a name-calling ceremony on the spot to claim the child and deny Kingi his fatherhood. However, a sympathetic older sister alerted Kingi, who rushed up the cliffs that separated Upper Bondeni from down to whisk away his wife and baby before the ceremony kicked off properly. Mama J reminisced: "That is when we marry, first it is between me and my husband. I move in, that is like a marriage." In local conceptualisation in Mathare (and in other Nairobi ghettos), moving into a man's house as a woman equated marriage, yet in general certain formalities to strengthen the union between husband and wife were observed in due course. This type of marriage was initially referred to as 'come we stay' (e.g. Frederiksen 2000:216), denoting a couple living together, and most of the time this arrangement would gradually be transformed into a marriage through specific ceremonies. This mode of organising a marriage was quite common among people who were born and raised in Nairobi ghettos, and it involved relatively little money. This marriage practice was partly shaped by the abject poverty that hampered many ghetto residents in terms of observing the more elaborate marriage ceremonies that are common among most ethnic groups in Kenya (often involving sums of money above 3000 Euros). Moreover, second and third generation residents in the urban area, especially poor families, often lacked (strong) ties to rural families. In general, rural families were considered to have more access to



resources such as land and cattle than urban (ghetto) residents, enabling them to carry out some of the more complex rituals that often involve transactions with a number of goats and cows. Similar to the male circumcision rites discussed in Chapter 2, marriage ceremonies were not set in stone, but varied immensely according to the ethnic group, social class, and urban and rural setting. These practices were ever-shifting, not just to fit new and ever-changing social dynamics and settings, but also new belief systems. Accordingly, people improvised with such practices to suit local contexts and popular perspectives and values (*see also* Spronk 2012:8/79; Frederiksen 2000; Hetherington 2001; for a study on changes in brides' wealth practices in South Africa see: Posel et al. 2011). Mama J shared with me:

Marriage is expensive, we can't do that in ghetto, we don't have *ocha* ('rural land' or a 'home' in the rural area in Sheng), it is unfair, we can use that money for business. But we pay also for 'come we stay', to make it like a marriage, a ghetto marriage ha ha, but not at once, we pay in years, and we don't pay that much.

Mama J further explained that certain formalities, such as paying the 'bride's wealth', could gradually transform an initial come we stay set-up into a formally recognised marriage in the years that followed ("to make it like a marriage"). Interestingly, the come we stay arrangement, which is a couple deciding to start living together without a formal consultation with elder family members, was almost always taken as the first step in the popular marriage praxis. In fact, all of the couples that I came across who lived and had children together perceived themselves, and were formally considered by their families, to be married. Sometimes, the come we stay set-up had achieved a more permanent mode among them as a result of a lack of funds to pay for the necessary ceremonies, such as a bride's wealth. The act of living and caring for children together was commonly taken as a marriage. It also made it easier for couples to get divorced, as fewer people (that is family members from both sides) had been involved in arranging the union in the first place. Accordingly, the more permanent come we stay arrangements – without further ceremonies to bind the families of the two partners more strongly together – were considered to be less secure (Frederiksen 2000:216). In this vein, Mama J stated that the main criterion people in Mathare appropriated in order to qualify a come we stay living arrangement as a marriage was the position of the man with respect to the woman's family. In most cases, the man uttered to his girlfriend's family his intent to follow the required ceremonies when the couple started to live together. This was taken by the family as a sign of commitment, and the man was therefore generally recognised as the woman's husband and the father of her children. However, this recognition would become more solid after the first payments of the bride's wealth had been made. Mama J told me that Kingi had been set on formalising their come we stay arrangement from the beginning, and had started saving money the moment he had discovered she was pregnant. "I was so scared because I

thought he would jump (*kuruka*, 'jump' in Kiswahili and 'leave' in Sheng), but he accepted me and my *ball* ('pregnancy' in Sheng), and when I moved down we married."

Kingi visited his mother-in-law with a few male relatives and friends a year or so after his first son was born to inform her officially that he had taken her daughter as his wife. He had waited a long time before initiating this visit in order to save enough money to provide food and drinks for the occasion, and to also present his mother-in-law with a monetary symbol of his commitment to his wife and her family. During a second visit, he promised to pay the bride's wealth that was agreed upon, which he did in small instalments as time went by. The bride's wealth in the come we stay marriages (or, as Mama J also put it, "ghetto marriages") in Mathare that I came across always approximated a figure of 30,000 Kenyan Shillings (about 300 Euros). This was, however, exclusive of additional financial demands from the family-in-law (such as school fees for younger siblings) that in many cases also became the responsibility of the new husband, especially in the absence of a father-in-law. The bride's wealth in come we stay marriages thus constituted only 10 per cent of what was common in most marital ceremonies in Kenya. Moreover, in this type of marriage praxis, most men were granted more leeway to spread out payment of the instalments required to pay off the bride's wealth over long periods of time. Kingi's mother-in-law unfortunately died of cancer and AIDS-related illnesses in 2010, but her death did not absolve him of the debt he had to his family-in-law, as he continued to pay the bride's wealth to Mama J's grandmother.

When Mama J's mother died, another debt was transferred to Mama J and her sisters. Her mother had never been married, and following localised notions of Kikuyu practice, Mama J explained that she, due to her mother's lack of a husband, had to pay her own bride's wealth to her own mother. Mama J clarified: "We call it *Kamweretho* (in the Kikuyu language). It is like you marry yourself. You visit your parents and give them a dowry ('bride's wealth' in Kenyan English); it is like an honour to them. But also you can't accept dowry from your daughters if you have not paid dowry to your parents. It is bad luck." Consequently, her mother could only accept Kingi's instalments because Mama J was paying her own bride's wealth to her mother. When Mama J's mother died, the unpaid part of her bride's wealth was thus left for her and her sisters to pay off to their ageing grandmother.

Another reason for them to continue paying off this debt was tied to land that Mama J's mother was supposed to inherit from her mother. This was land that Mama J and her sisters could then inherit from their mother. Mama J's grandmother had been a sex worker in Mathare during the early 1960s. In 1964, President Kenyatta had launched a land scheme for, mainly Kikuyu, urban and rural squatters (*cf.* Huchzermeyer 2007:722; Anderson & Lochery 2008). Mama J's grandmother had acquired a large piece of land through this scheme on the slopes of the Aberdare mountain range, and had promised to divide it among her daughters, as she did not have any sons. To access this land, the unmarried daughters (like Mama J's mother) had to honour their mother through *Kamweretho* and pay off the debt. Mama J could thus not access the land that she and her sisters were supposed to inherit from their deceased mother if they did not pay off her

mother's debt. Furthermore, Kingi had to continue paying off his debt to Mama J's grandmother. It had thus become a deeply complex situation for both Kingi and Mama J when the latter's mother passed away.

I accompanied them on a visit to Mama J's grandmother in August 2010, which was two months after Mama J's mother had died. The visiting group also included Mama J, two of her sisters, all of their children and Kingi. It was like a holiday for the children, as they rarely ventured outside the ghetto, let alone spent much time in the rural area. Hiking in woodlands and on ridges, taking care of animals and sleeping on an earthen floor were all part of a great adventure to them. The two younger sisters, however, enjoyed it much less, and complained constantly about the persistent cold (it hailed and rained continuously), the lack of electricity (no TV or radio and no mobile phone connection), and the mud that managed to cling in big chunks to our shoes, clothes and even hair. It was winter and, high up in the mountains, it was below zero degrees Celsius during the night-time. Mama J's sisters left the following day without accomplishing what they had come for. Mama J, however, stayed behind with Kingi, her children and me. She still wanted to discuss with her grandmother whether, even before finishing the bride's wealth payments, they could be allowed to start growing crops on the idle piece of land they were supposed to inherit. The grandmother outright refused, and Mama J could not understand why. Later, they heard via another relative that there was an ongoing tussle between two aunties, because one wanted to deny Mama J and her sisters the land, whereas the other defended their right to inherit it. The grandmother's refusal thus emanated from a wish to avoid taking sides. This tussle is continuing today. Mama J's grandmother unfortunately also passed away in 2013. Mama J told me that both debts (her mother's and Kingi's) had been transferred to a few male uncles and cousins, but these were relatives she hardly knew. Mama J was thus left even more confused, and the whole family ended up in court, because the unpaid bride's wealth had become the argument used by her family to deny Mama J and her sisters the piece of land that they, to their knowledge, were supposed to inherit from their mother and grandmother. The court case was still going on at the time of writing this chapter.

Kingi and Mama J's complex trajectory into marriage and the way the bride's wealth became part of a family conflict is not uncommon. Most married couples I encountered in Mathare were struggling with similar tensions. They often reflected on the greed of family members (both their own and their in-laws) and the way this practice was frequently manipulated for personal gain. Sometimes, these frictions even led to a couple's divorce. Kingi reflected: "For Shiko (his daughter), I don't want dowry. I don't want to do like our parents, that I depend on them (his children). No. It is not fair. I am happy when they have their own life, happy. And that they can build a life. I would be so far without my family." His wife saw this in a slightly different light: "It is a sign of respect. Kingi gives me respect by paying my mother dowry. When Shiko gets married, I must get dowry." To Mama J, the fact that Kingi had "visited her mother" (as she put it) gave her a sense of security that he would stay with her. Even though both contributed financially to the household, Kingi was the main breadwinner. Accordingly, Mama J's own experiences informed the way she

viewed the issue of bride's wealth in relation to her daughter, although this might be different if Shiko becomes able to provide for herself. In the meantime, the discussion continues between the couple.

### **Navigating a 'ghetto marriage' during crises**

The section above shows the difficulties that young couples in Mathare have to face when starting to live together, yet teen pregnancy and family demands and conflicts were but a few of the challenges Kingi and Mama J navigated during their early years together. The first year of their marriage was riddled with disasters. Three weeks after Victa was born, Kingi was arrested on bogus charges by a police officer who was being bribed by the real perpetrator to frame someone else. Kingi just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Mama J had to use all of their savings, and even ask for additional money from Kingi's grandmother, to bribe local policemen to secure his release. Then, he became almost terminally ill with typhoid, a disease he had probably picked up in the police cell, and had to stay in hospital for weeks on end, adding another burden to the already financially and emotionally constrained young family. Indeed, it took them both months to recover physically, psychologically and economically from these two very traumatic episodes.

Mama J was equally set on continuing their marriage, though, and this helped them both considerably through such quandaries. Like Kingi, Mama J also came from a family of two generations of single mothers and sex workers, and was just as passionate about 'changing the pattern', but the odds were against the young couple. Indeed, they were so much in debt that they could hardly afford food, and each day agreed to go their separate ways to look for something to eat. As well as visiting family members strategically around lunchtime, Mama J would sometimes go to small roadside restaurants far away from their ghetto village and leave without paying. In doing so, she accepted the risk of getting a beating from the proprietors that often followed, but knew that she needed nutritious food to nurse her baby. Kingi survived by eating once every two days at his grandmother's house. When the debts to the hospital and his grandmother were finally paid off, Kingi continued with a stringent financial regime in order to save money until he had enough to distil his own illegal alcohol. Mama J began selling this from their small house, and even if daily survival was still an uphill battle, they could now afford food and even a few clothes for Victa.

Despite their young age, Kingi and Mama J persisted with pooling their minds, bodies and other resources to counter the adversities that people inevitably meet living inside Mathare. Their determination was wrought by the hardship they had both endured while growing up; this had laid the foundation for a partnership between a husband and wife that I have seldom witnessed in the ghetto (or anywhere else). Kingi felt acute pain about not knowing his father or maternal grandfather, and about the thought that he would have lived another, wealthier, life had he known them and had they recognised him. This gave him the focus, which was a word he used often, to become the father of his son. However, becoming a father proved to be a ceaseless process, and he held onto a specific

social horizon, which was a vision he himself had constructed: he saw himself as a father to his son, living at home with his wife and child. He stated: "I have to keep that picture in my head, see it there, now and in the future, so I keep focus, (*kukaa rada*, 'to stay alert' in Sheng) without focus you lose hope, and without hope you die." Apart from his ageing grandmother, Kingi had no one to fall back on and, to him, losing focus portended death. His fear of death caused him to fight and invest all of his energy and other resources in creating a more stable situation for himself and his family. Being a gang member helped him to live by this image, provide for his family and stay true to his deeply felt desire to be the father of his children. If he had not joined the alcohol gang full-time, he would, in his own words, "have probably died before even becoming a father." He ended our conversation by saying: "Victa's birth was a new birth for me because I became focused and worked hard. One Touch helped me to get work and work so hard I can earn my money. [...] I also knew this is not my life. I don't want this for my son. I have to stop distilling." Kingi's words show that fatherhood is often conceptualised by young men as a 'new birth', because to them it was a firm step towards senior manhood. They also reveal the ambiguous attitude that most men had with regard to the working gang, which was shaped by the social pressures to leave this group on time.

### **Why Kingi was able to leave the gang**

Kingi was only able to leave the gang after balancing multiple jobs and businesses for nine long years. He distilled *chang'aa* in the afternoon, sold chicken in the morning and managed the roadside restaurant he and his wife had in the evening so that she could take care of their children. He went back and forth between the gang and these other ventures until he was financially secure enough to leave the gang for good. He normally worked from five in the morning until 11 at night, and on Sunday, his only day off, he volunteered at the Safi youth group. At the close of 2007, he had finally saved enough to stop distilling *chang'aa* and concentrate fully on the other businesses. At the same time, Safi had recognised his dedication and skills, and hired him as a youth group coordinator. He continued working 18 hours a day for seven days a week, because Safi did not pay enough and he still needed the earnings from the restaurant, but he never went back to *chang'aa*.

Kingi's narrative and life trajectory provide a glimpse of how hard it is for young men to actually leave the gang, and how crucial a good partnership between husband and wife is. It also shows the sheer dedication and perseverance it took for Kingi and his wife to build several micro-businesses (including a home bar) with the money he earned from distilling and smuggling *chang'aa*. Yet, when it comes to commitment, Kingi can hardly be called an exception. The excerpts of discussions between participants in the outreach programme above show that if work was available all of the *chang'aa* distillers worked hard, although, as noted elsewhere, this type of work had been on the decline. It is not a coincidence, however, that both Kingi and Monga succeeded in leaving the gang and were, eventually, employed by Safi as coordinators and trainers. Moreover, Brayo's positioning as a *mjanja*, and the way he separated himself from his fellow gang members throughout the first training period, alludes to the crucial role Safi played in his life. This is underscored by

the fact that he joined Kingi and Monga when they started their own organisation. These men had been trained and counselled by Safi from being young, and so had acquired skills, self-esteem and contacts that had helped them to successfully navigate the stringent rules set by this and other loan programmes. Motion, in the sections above, referred to these skills, self-image and contacts as ideas when he said to me: "We lack ideas." Motion had initiated the outreach programme because he had observed the successful trajectories of the trainers, and saw how hard it was for him and his fellow gang members to develop a micro-business without additional loans, skills-sets and guidance.

Along with his connection with Safi, being a grandson of a well-established bar owner had also helped Kingi to leave the gang. Even during hard times, Shosho had continued to give him assignments to distil and smuggle *chang'aa*, and this had laid the foundation for his future micro-enterprises. Monga and Brayo had also been family members of old and current bar owners, whereas the majority of the present gang members are not. Furthermore, the partnership between Kingi and his wife helped him to build the roadside restaurant and manage their money flow. In the following chapters, I will further explore how relationships with women (family bar owners, gang bosses, CBO leaders and wives) play a dominant role in processes of gang formation, imagining masculinities and trying to leave the gang. It is, however, possible to conclude now that Kingi, Monga and Brayo stood out compared to the participants in the outreach programme, because of their family ties to female bar owners, their connections with Safi and their experiences as youth leaders. All of this provided these young men with more options and social capital than their peers at the riverside when it came to making use of emerging opportunities. Moreover, most of the young men who have been able to leave the gangs at the riverside over the past decade had likewise been relatives of bar owners and members of youth groups. Many of the men who still worked the drums *rowe* had fewer connections to the alcohol bosses, fewer links to networks such as youth groups and NGOs, and, perhaps, less self-esteem as a result of feeling stuck at the riverside. Many even said that they did not feel as if they belonged to any other place than the riverside.

Without the back-up referred to, many outreach programme participants used their loans to address the multiple emergencies that mark life inside the ghetto. They were thus left without a business, but in debt to their own programme. The programme is still trying to break this downwards spiral, but the number of emergencies people face living in Mathare can be quite overwhelming, as is illustrated by Kingi's biographical narratives. Interestingly, Motion told me that despite not yet having profited financially from the programme, "it did help to make us feel closer to the community, to be more accepted by the community." Later, he also told me that this deeper sense of belonging to the community and feeling respected led to him becoming one of the frontrunners in a peace-building programme initiated by Kingi, Brayo and Monga in the run-up to the 2013 elections. I will return to the relationships between these men and what they termed the community in Chapter 5.

## Conclusion

This chapter analysed possible pathways and strategies that young, male gang members navigated to leave the working gang, and why many failed despite their great efforts. In the past, *chang'aa* gangs allowed young men in Bondeni to establish themselves as senior men according to popular notions of manhood, as illustrated by Kingi's life history. Yet, more recently, gangs also posed a dilemma when they became more permanent entities and the sole option for young men wanting to build meaningful lives within a context of deteriorating socio-economic conditions inside the ghetto. As a consequence, gang spaces were increasingly imagined as a way to cope with gendered experiences of hardship, although the members also felt more and more stuck in a position of junior manhood. Their frustrations were further exacerbated by the way these men were inscribed with the labels ghetto boy and thugs for hire by the dominant discourse and were killed as such by the police.

The discussion above showed that the trainers perceived themselves to be steps ahead of the participants in the outreach programme according to local notions of manhood, and so highlighting individual responsibility during the training bolstered their self-image. In particular, it underlined that their relative success was of their own making, and provided them with a feeling that they could help current gang members by being, in their words, a "good role model." In their positioning as *wajanja*, the *fala* position marked the boundaries of what this particular notion of manhood entailed to them. In contrast, many participants enacting agency largely by blaming structural forces and reimagining feelings of powerlessness (generally associated with the *fala* position) as part of performing the *mjanja* position. Nevertheless, even if all of these men shared the subject position of ghetto boy in the dominant discourse, the way they negotiated this discourse and took up popular notions of manhood differed enormously. This was largely shaped by changing circumstances (for instance, a fall in profits from *chang'aa* in more recent times) and individual differences (for example, a lack of connections to bar owners and youth groups), but also by a sense of belonging (or not) to the community (see more in Chapter 5). Accordingly, differences in positioning among these men to some extent brought forth diverging choice-making processes that are central to their social navigation struggles.

The main social dynamics that seemed to help men to leave the gang hinged on their connections to bar owners (access to work) and their relationships with their wives. Other contributing factors appeared to be affiliations with and experiences in youth groups and other development organisations (skills, ideas and network/opportunities), a sense of self-esteem, which helped to develop a feeling of belonging outside the gang, and the recognition and seizing of less obvious opportunities. However, self-esteem ostensibly depended on individual achievements made possible through connections to bar owners and youth groups. Yet, the trainers of the outreach programme played it out as if success was a matter of choice. In the context of this programme, their notion of 'the struggling street-smart hustler' located the responsibility squarely with the individual man, as illustrated by their emphasis on the need 'to change the mind-sets' of the participants. Indeed, the trainers went to great lengths to hide the feelings of powerlessness that they

too often felt. The participants, on the other hand, more openly enacted the seemingly contradictory positions of the hustler and feeling powerless (dubbed the fool by the trainers). The ensuing conflicts between the majority of the participants and the trainers during the programme thus centred on how to consider the more structural forces that impacted individual and collective social navigation trajectories, and how this tied into imagining different positions of manhood. In private, the trainers often expressed temporal feelings of powerlessness to me, and this illustrates how context-bound their performances of different manhood positions in fact were.

This chapter illustrated how shifts in social environments (current possibilities and constraints) influenced possible social horizons (imagined future possibilities and constraints) and, thus, social navigation trajectories. Yet, it also revealed that despite current changes and increasingly bleaker social horizons, all of these young men (both the trainers and the participants) continued to picture themselves in the future as senior men and active fathers of their children. They envisaged different pathways to reaching independence, for instance by developing micro-businesses or becoming a bar owner. Seemingly against all odds, however, all these men relentlessly pursued these ambitions despite deteriorating present-day contexts and concurrent future possibilities. The vigour with which they held on to this vision may partly explain why all of these men were so active. They were literally constantly on the move, in action, responding to capricious presents (*see also* Vigh 2011, 2008) while holding on to very specific vistas. Their determination to move, to hope, and to try and achieve their ambitions probably derived from their multiple experiences that standing still equalled death. Kingi said: "There is no choice between death and life, you always choose life." Most men did temporarily lose hope, whether they revealed this or not, but the fear of death always compelled them back into action (*see also* Vigh 2011).

In the end, the majority of the One Touch participants did not succeed in setting up a micro-business outside the gang, as many chose to use the loans they had acquired for this purpose for emergencies. This begs the question as to whether access to more money made it easier for gang members to leave the working gang and, if not, which other factors were at play. In the next chapter, I take up this question by having a close look at a gang of drug dealers in Mathare who made more money than the *chang'aa* distillers.