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CHAPTER 6: 'Political Violence' in Mathare: On Jealous Neighbours and Street-smart Visitors.

Introduction

If the clash over the Manoki public toilet discussed in the previous chapter had occurred in the run-up to, during or in the immediate aftermath of elections, it would probably have attracted a lot of media attention. Indeed, it would subsequently have been branded as political violence by the media, government authorities and NGOs. Moreover, keen journalists would have scrutinised the incident through a framework most familiar to them, namely ethnicity. The term political violence in Kenya in both popular and academic discourse thus seems to be entirely conflated with ethnic violence (*e.g.* Mueller 2011; Waikenda 2014). Yet ethnic identifications had very little to do with the clash over the Manoki public toilet, as most of the people on the two sides of the conflict identified as Kikuyu. The previous chapter has already suggested that imaginings of 'us' and 'them' in Mathare shifted constantly and were based on a myriad of possible identifications and mechanisms of exclusion. This shows that taking ethnicity as the main trope with which to understand direct acts of violence in this ghetto, and branding it as political violence, grossly eschews the local dynamics and complexities at play. Looking at how political practices (Pandey 2006) like the ethnic notions of belonging conjured up by the political discourse, *majimboism*, were negotiated by Mathare's residents in relation to shifting contexts may help to shed light on how different acts of violence emerged from the social and material effects of routine violence. In this vein, the concept of everyday violence is helpful when it comes to approaching how these effects are experienced by people and shape their involvement in violence.

The media did not pick up on the Manoki conflict. Yet other incidents that took place close to the March 2013 elections were widely understood in ethnic terms and taken as preludes to forthcoming political violence. Ethnicity did play a role in many of these conflicts, but never on its own; it was always intersected with other types of identification, and master hate narratives on ethnic groups were often re-imagined to legitimise violence against each other. Accordingly, a closer look at the historical, political and social factors that converged during a specific moment in time and space, based on the perspectives of the people involved, is necessary. Moreover, most moments of violence in Nairobi's ghettos have political implications (see previous chapter), but were not directly linked to elections. Viewing violence in Mathare (even if it took place around election time) through a political lens only perpetuates the stereotypes that young, working gang members in particular were driven by 'primordial ethnic animosities' and so-called 'idleness.' The latter is a term frequently used in the Kenyan media to point to the alleged susceptibility of young ghetto men to being hired as 'thugs' by politicians. In this view, they 'have nothing better to do and are in desperate need of money' (*e.g.* Wamucii & Idwasi 2011; Were 2008). This

persistent perception reduces complex decision-making processes among working gang members to money and takes them as being devoid of any morals.

In this chapter, I take a close look at junctures of violence that have all been labelled as political violence by local residents and the media. I begin by analysing a case in which Kingi was accused of having participated in the post-election violence of 2007/8 based on an incident that had happened weeks after this particular moment of violence had subsided. This case allows me to detect how notions of us and them based on ethnicity interacted with ideas of natives and visitors, and why and when such intersecting and shifting notions gained strength between neighbours. Kingi lost his business during the post-election violence and, along with other young men from his building in Upper Bondeni, had to sleep outside for weeks on end to protect his family inside the tenement. I discuss why close friends and fellow working gang members (led by Motion) attacked him and other gang members during the post-election violence. This helps to highlight the fluidity and context-boundedness of working gang membership, especially during junctures of violence, and how shifts in membership were tied to addressing immediate needs and were often legitimised by drawing on master hate narratives. This will allow me to uncover when, how and why ethnicity intersected with the notion of natives and other space and time-bound identifications, narratives and positions. In an effort to further contextualise the apparent self-evidence of ethnicity in the dominant depictions of violence in Mathare, I then proceed to analyse conflicts between ethnic-based and working gangs in Mathare in the aftermath of the 2007 and in the run-up to the 2013 general elections. These analyses will enable me to reveal when, why and how ethnicity temporarily moved to the fore- and background in shifting social and political relations. I thus set out to contextualise the role of ethnicity in boundary-making by exploring the experiences, motivations and legitimisations of young working gang members. I also delve into the overarching question of why and how many conflicts emerge in Mathare.

Charged with political violence

The following case introduces the ambiguous articulations of local and ethnic notions of belonging that are prevalent in Mathare, as well as the fluid ways in which people there legitimise processes of othering and moments of violence by drawing on ethnic hate narratives.

I was on the number 46 *matatu* late one Tuesday afternoon in August 2009 when my mobile phone vibrated in my back pocket. Mindful of the infamous snatchers operating near Ngara market who could open the bus window and grab your phone in the blink of an eye, I answered with my head down between my knees. It was Mama J: "You have to come!" she gasped. "They took him to Kamithi (a prison outside Nairobi). They..." She started crying silently. I got off the *matatu* and took another one back to Mathare. When I entered the *hotelli*, Mama J ordered her children out of the small tin-roofed restaurant and started to explain what had happened. Kingi had been arrested because he had been charged with participating in the political violence that had followed the general elections held on 27 December 2007. According to Mama J, the complainant had bribed the police, court officers

and alleged witnesses to exaggerate the accusation of minor assault that Kingi had previously been charged with. The new charge was a serious offence, especially in light of mounting international pressure on the newly-installed coalition government to act on and bring to justice the supposed perpetrators of political violence (Amnesty 2008). Kingi could face years in prison for what seemed to have been a trivial tiff between neighbours in the form of a punch-up that had happened weeks after the political violence in Mathare had subsided, and days after the coalition agreement between the two main presidential contenders had been signed (Juma 2008:160). So, what had happened between Kingi and his neighbour, and why had Kingi suddenly been charged with participating in political violence?

In mid-March 2008, Mama J, who was Kingi's wife, had got into a row with her next-door neighbour because they both wanted to wash clothes at the single sink in front of their houses, and both had been in a hurry. They lived on the sixth floor of a stone flat in Mathare and shared one toilet and tap with 12 families living in adjacent one-room houses of four-square metres in size. The women exchanged harsh words, and both left the sink fuming with anger. No washing was done that day. Later in the afternoon, the neighbour's husband came home and banged on the door of Mama J's house. He grabbed her forcefully and shouted that she was a dog (a very abusive swear word in Kenya), was in the same boat as him and should not feel superior. He then walked along the corridor and shouted to the people living in the other one-room houses to close their doors because thieves could come and rob them. The neighbour's husband here was drawing on the dominant hate narrative depicting Kikuyu people as thieves and arrogant exploiters. Kingi, who at the time was serving customers at the *hotelli*, had been told by another neighbour what was happening and entered the scene when the man was shouting abuse about Mama J across the staircase for the entire building to hear. I have not been able to establish who struck the first blow, because the neighbours gave me different accounts of the same event, but all agreed that the man eventually pushed Kingi down six flights of stairs and out onto the street. A crowd had gathered, and a few young men jumped in to help Kingi who was on his back trying to fight off the neighbour. When they were pulled apart, the two men were bleeding from cuts made by the keys they had both used during the scuffle. Two young men gave the neighbour a last punch in the stomach and on the head, allegedly to punish him for starting the fight in the first place. Kingi and the neighbour went back upstairs to their adjoining rooms, and the crowd slowly dispersed. Another brawl, another day, or at least that is what most people thought after the fight had ended.

Over the next few days, the man stayed at home, and Mama J and Kingi became increasingly worried until the police came and confirmed their growing fears; instead of filing an assault charge with the chief, which was common in the case of minor disputes, the man had formally accused Kingi of assault. He had also not gone to the nearest police station in Pangani, where the case could have been settled by paying a fine, which was the second option if the chief refused to take on a case or was unavailable. Instead, the neighbour had filed an assault charge at the main police station in Kasarani, which was located much further away from the ghetto, and where he knew a few police officers. This

increased the gravity of the case significantly, as the investigation would be conducted by higher ranked police officers and would almost certainly be redirected to court. It would also cost more to bribe officers at the station to persuade them to drop the case, which was money that Kingi and Mama J did not have. Accordingly, the matter went to court, and Kingi had been summoned for a pre-trial hearing in May 2008. In return, Mama J and Kingi had tried to file an assault case at the Pangani police station, but they were sent away by the desk clerk because, as Mama J put it, "the case did not need official investigation, to them (the police officers at the Pangani station) it was merely an argument between women." I arrived back in Kenya in August 2008 and discussed the case with Kingi:

Thank you siz, but I don't need a lawyer, ha ha, you know this man is lying and everyone knows, everyone! He can't make a case against me. You know how they (police and court officers) do it, they just make the case go on so they can eat money, and also him (the neighbour). He is only after some money. I don't have the money, so I just have to go to court, maybe now, then it is postponed again so I have to go back in two months, it really is nothing serious. Don't worry siz, nothing will happen. He is just *fala!*

There are several reasons why court cases in Kenya often take a long time. The most obvious is that its court-houses are generally overburdened with work (Analo 2014). This means that there is not enough time for court officers and investigators to properly prepare cases and scrutinise claims, with the result being that hearings are repeatedly adjourned. Furthermore, I myself have observed and heard of several cases where the court dragged them out to increase the number and amount of bribes that were exchanged to influence certain outcomes. Kingi's case involved a little of both.

Between August 2008 and August 2009, Kingi had been summoned to court several times, and the case was always postponed, officially for the lack of a formal investigation, although one was never initiated. When Kingi returned to court on that fateful Tuesday in August 2009, he expected another adjournment on the same grounds, but was instead met by a row of fake witnesses, who were people he had never seen in his life. Apparently, the neighbour had not only bribed the officers at Kasarani police station to take up such a minor dispute at the start of the case, but had now also invested a lot of money in hiring a group of eight people to pretend that they were neighbours and witnesses to the event. These people did not live in Mathare, as Mama J and others later told me. As noted above, the man had stopped working, allegedly because he was too injured to do so, and he expected Kingi to pay him a large sum of money in compensation. This was recorded in the case file I read when I met the investigating court officer at the time that Kingi was in prison. Kingi's neighbour had thus invested a lot of money, time and energy in this case. These investments had significantly boosted the stakes for him, which Kingi was yet to become aware of. The higher stakes had led the neighbour to bribe case officers at the court to change Kingi's charges from minor assault to the far more serious accusation of

'participation in post-election violence'. This considerably increased the potential financial settlement that was expected to be part of the verdict.

During this fateful hearing, the hired witnesses gave a completely different account of what had actually happened. I have also read the report that was produced afterwards and talked to the two neighbours who had accompanied Kingi and Mama J to court that day, but were not given permission to speak. The main difference in the accounts pertained to the motivation the hired witnesses ascribed to Kingi for 'attacking' his neighbour. Kingi's neighbour identified as Kissi. Strikingly, during the violence that had followed the 2007 general elections, putative Kikuyu and Kissi groups had not been regarded as enemies in the way that Luo and Kikuyu groups had been pitted against each other in the dominant discourse. This discrepancy had not stopped the bribed witnesses from claiming that Kingi, with a Kikuyu background, had attacked his neighbour with a Kissi background in revenge for the losses suffered during the post-election violence. This purportedly substantiated the new charge, even if the incident had taken place after the post-election violence had subsided. Kingi was arrested on the spot, and it took us some time before we discovered that he had not been taken to Kamithi, but to a prison in the industrial area in Nairobi.

At least he was imprisoned in the city, and over the following weeks Mama J and I waited at the prison gate at seven each morning to ask for permission to see Kingi and help him with money (for water, a mattress and basic food items) and other permissible items (a blanket, slippers and toothbrush) that he needed to survive inside. We never saw Kingi alone or even in the same room; during visiting hours, prisoners were huddled together in a small locked room with only a few dirty triplex windows with tiny holes for sound to pass through. Visitors also had no privacy, as we had to stand in an open hallway full of guards and shout through the window to exchange information. We never knew how much of the money and other items made their way into Kingi's hands, because the guards who secretly passed them on to him took their own share, allegedly to compensate for the risks involved. Kingi became very sick in prison, and the 14 days until the next court date were almost unbearable for him and Mama J. Apart from our morning visits, Kingi at times managed to phone us at night on a clandestine mobile phone to tell us how he was. In the meantime, a court officer had started an official investigation and often visited Mathare to talk with neighbours and friends of Kingi.

Two weeks later, we all went back to court, and Mama J and I first met with the official investigator to discuss the outcome of his research, which seemed to favour Kingi. Many family, friends and neighbours had gathered in the courtyard to show Kingi support, hopeful of his release. The courtroom was full, and among the spectators sat Kingi's neighbour, the complainant, all by himself. Kingi was arraigned in court with 19 other men, and the presiding judge rapidly closed 18 cases before lunchtime. Kingi and one other man were still sitting on the bench for the accused when we were all ushered out of the courtroom for the lunch break at noon sharp. The clerk assured us that even though the court had been adjourned, the judge would continue at 14.30. However, when we arrived back on time, we found an empty courtroom. Mama J panicked, and we tracked the investigative officer down who reluctantly explained that Kingi had already been taken

back to prison. Without looking directly at the man, Mama J whispered to him in the Kikuyu language that we had brought money. He then left, and after an agonising hour came back to escort Mama J to the office of the presiding judge. She told me later that she had given him and the court officer the money she had been able to raise among friends and family before the court date. After receiving the money, the judge had curtly told her to wait outside without confirming to her whether or not Kingi would be released.

We stood outside the courthouse watching other families leave with their loved ones when suddenly we heard Kingi say "hi" behind us. He later told me that he had already been put back on the prison bus when a guard suddenly came in to release him from his handcuffs. He looked sick and thin, but was a free man and all charges had been dropped. Even now, Kingi and Mama J speculate about what led to his release and still cannot figure out why the neighbour had shown up in court all by himself. They did not think that the money they had raised exceeded the bribes the neighbour had invested, and nor did they think justice had prevailed and the judge had finally seen through the charade conjured up by the neighbour. They thought it was more likely that the neighbour's brother, who happened to be the caretaker of the building, had forced the complainant to drop the case because the tenants at the flat were siding with Kingi. Their supposition was supported by the fact that the neighbour was forcefully evicted by his own brother the day after Kingi was released from prison. Apparently, other neighbours had complained that they could not reside in the same building as this man, and the caretaker had acknowledged publicly that his brother had been wrong. Kingi reflected:

I can't believe my luck, I came back to paradise, home is paradise. I don't know how, some people they stay in there [prison], they get lost. It could happen to me, if I did not know people in Mathare, they help me, my neighbours, my family. I saw many of them, also many from Mathare who just are inside. Ha ha, you know they helped me? Some knew me from before, they are seniors in prison, and they helped me to get a mattress. Others left me alone because now they know I was from Mathare. Ha ha, finally a place where it helped me to be from ghetto!

This case has multiple layers that I will analyse below in relation to other violent cases and events in Mathare in order to explore the complexities often involved in the label political violence. These layers pertain to relationships between neighbours and putative notions of natives and visitors that intersected with shifting and fluid constructions of ethnic identifications.

The jealous neighbour

Kingi's case was not unique in Mathare. There were many incidents between neighbours, family members and friends that occurred during and right after the period of post-election violence (December 2007- February 2008), and which later received the overarching label of political violence (*see also* Jacobs 2011). Most of these cases did not, however, reach

court. Accordingly, Kingi's case reveals an aspect of political violence that I have come across in many other incidents that occurred in Mathare during this volatile period. I term this trope 'the jealous neighbour' following the regularity with which people in Mathare drew on this imaginary to explain multiple and diverse moments of violence. The term neighbour is opaque in and of itself, and was often used by local residents to qualify many different types of social relationship. The neighbour could be the person(s) next-door, or someone living in the same alleyway, block or building. It also often referred to people staying in the same area or ghetto village, and could even describe friendships, family relationships and other social ties that did not necessarily emanate from actually living in each other's vicinity. The neighbour could be both friend and foe, and more often than not these aspects were embodied by the same person(s) in different temporal and spatial contexts. Accordingly, at different junctures, the label of neighbour typified different relationships that intersected with ever-changing notions of us and them that were tied to similarly shifting notions of belonging and entitlement.

I have not been able to interview Kingi's neighbour and discuss his version of events and his reasons for acting as he did. He has not told anyone in Mathare, including his brother, where he and his family swiftly moved to after he had been evicted. However, in terms of his motivation for acting as he did, most neighbours and Mama J shared the view that he had been driven by jealousy and a desire to extort money from Kingi. Jealousy was often evoked by local residents in Mathare as the impetus for people's behaviour, and Mama J defined it as follows:

Here in ghetto, you always look what other people have, their style, and you want to have that too. It is like you want to have other people's things so you can show you are doing ok, that you don't have problems. So you want things to show people your class. Higher than your class. But, yeah... we also hide if we have good things because people think you are doing good, better than them, they start asking you for things. Ha ha, like the watch you bought for Kingi, for his birthday. You thought he had lost it but he can't wear it in ghetto, what if people think he is of a higher class? They think we are, so they ask us, all the time... for money. You have two types of friends in ghetto. One that asks: can you buy me lunch? And one that asks: can you buy me beer? Ha ha. It is not only you [me as a white person] they ask, they ask us because they think we are *ghetto punk*, ha ha of a higher class. They don't know how we live. But we dress well, and we look clean, and we move with white people. So they ask, and if we say no, they think we are proud. They can even put *juju* ('witchcraft' in Sheng), but we don't believe in that, but it happens in ghetto, all the time. To bring you down [...] Also when you start business and the other person, your friend, you start at the same time, but you do well and the other business goes down. They are jealous and say it is *juju*. But you know what happens? Here in ghetto we don't like to support business from friends because we don't want them to move up. You have to stay down with

the rest of us. With Kingi, they see him up, and many people feel jealous [...] No, they don't think it is *juju*, they think it is you ha ha ha. You made him go up. And you know it is not true, but people think you pay everything for us.

Almost all of the young men I worked with from different ethnic backgrounds shared with me that their mothers or grandmothers had made small cuts on their bellies when they were toddlers to supposedly protect them from jealousy. By this, they meant spells that could make small children ill. Apparently, boys elicited more jealous gazes than girls, as this practice was mainly carried out to protect them. Jealousy was a common theme, and the jealous neighbour was a popular imaginary that people evoked when discussing and analysing social incidents. Major events (such as illnesses, the loss or success of a business and even death) were often explained using the trope of witchcraft that, according to many local residents, was intrinsically linked to jealousy. Relationships between most neighbours were often fraught with mistrust and were to be navigated with caution. At the same time, neighbours depended on each other for security, electricity, privacy and so on, and also engaged in relationships of trust. Balancing the thin line between demonstrating a certain status, or class as Mama J put it, and what was considered to be dangerously boastful remained a constant challenge in navigating these potentially perilous relationships. Accordingly, many people in Mathare were set on hiding their problems by performing *swag* on the one hand, but without trying to entice (too much) jealousy on the other.

The population density in the ghetto, the overcrowded one-room houses and the ensuing intimacy between neighbours also contributed to the potential volatility of social relations in Mathare. In the case discussed above, the neighbour temporarily constructed Kingi as them instead of us. He had tried to mobilise the other tenants against him by drawing on the dominant hate narrative that cast Kikuyu people as criminals and ethnic chauvinists, which was a narrative that gained considerable leverage in the political domain in the run-up to the 2007 elections (*e.g.* Klopp & Kamungi 2008; Kagwanja 2009). Strikingly, Kingi eventually overcame his predicament purportedly because most tenants perceived him as us. Another process of othering seemed to have traversed the putative social divisions based on ethnicity evoked by the neighbour. Like Kingi, the majority of the other tenants considered themselves, and were considered to be, natives in Mathare, whereas the neighbour and his wife had only arrived recently in the ghetto and were widely taken as visitors. When I discussed this case with a neighbour called Chalo, he pointed to the significance of the fact that Kingi was considered to be a *mzaliwa* ('native' in Kiswahili).

He was born here, in Mathare. His Shosho, she lives here, and his mother also lived here. He is from an old family in ghetto. You see these young boys, they helped him fight. They even wanted to do mob justice. They helped him [...] No, not because he is a Kikuyu like them, no, because he is *mzaliwa* like them. They also come from this *mtaa*, and they know him growing up. Also for us,

we are born here. Others come later, they are not from here. They don't know us like we know each other.

Even though Kingi had been born in Mathare (or at Pumwani hospital near Mathare), he had not been raised there. He spent his early childhood at his mother's house in Kangemi, which was a more rural ghetto west of Nairobi city centre. Nevertheless, many took him, and he considered himself to be, a *mzaliwa*, because his grandmother had lived in the ghetto since the late 1960s, and because he had been the informal leader of the first *chang'aa* gang there. Moreover, Kingi was known to be the illegitimate son of a locally famous man who had established one of the first homesteads in Bondeni Village during the 1960s (see Chapter 1). This all leads to the following questions: who were imagined as *wazaliwa* ('natives' in Kiswahili), by whom, when and why? How did this notion relate to shifting constructions of *wageni* ('visitors' in Kiswahili)? And how was this linked to shifting constructions of us and them based on ethnicity and locality?

Fights between friends

A few weeks before the December 2007 elections, Kingi had decided to stop distilling *chang'aa* for his grandmother and left the One Touch gang for good. His chicken business and the roadside restaurant were making enough to sustain his family and required his full attention. A few months prior to this decision, he had moved from a tin-roofed and mud wall house down the valley to a one-room house on the sixth floor of a stone building nearer to Juja Road. The room was still the same size as the old house, but it did not flood when it rained, was not plagued by rats and snakes, and had electricity throughout the day and night. Moreover, it was safe to use the toilet on the corridor at night, and the couple did not have to queue at the communal tap each morning as there was a water tap on each floor. Kingi was literally and symbolically moving up in the valley, and this sparked jealousy among many in Mathare, not just in neighbours, as we saw above, but also among a few of the One Touch gang members who felt left behind. These men had been Kingi's best friends, and some of them, like Petero, had started the One Touch gang with him and had been part of his posse or *riika* ('a small group that stayed together after circumcision).

Right before the 2007 elections, a few One Touch gang members led by Motion and Petero, who were both long-standing friends of Kingi, visited the latter's *hotelli* to warn him that the business would be theirs after election day. They told him that they had a right to his property because the ODM (the Orange Democratic Movement – Cheeseman 2008; De Smedt 2009) would win, and, as Kingi paraphrased it, "the time for the Kikuyu was over, to have everything while the rest suffered, that time would be over when a Luo man [Raila Odinga] would be president." Petero's mother had a Kikuyu background and his father was Luo. Strikingly, Petero did not really know his father and, other than Sheng, he only spoke the Kikuyu language. Yet he identified mostly as Luo. During the Mungiki control of Bondeni, he had used his fluency in this language to work with its members, but because he strongly identified as Luo he never became a full member. Nevertheless, he did access some of the opportunities this group had to offer, for instance, managing a small pawn shop that

was backed by the Mungiki where residents could pawn valuable items such as mobile phones. After the Mungiki gang's demise in Bondeni, Petero had lost this business and became addicted to *chang'aa*. I wanted to talk to him to understand why he had attacked Kingi, but he refused to speak to me, which Kingi thought was because he was ashamed. Kingi again evoked the trope of 'the jealous neighbour' to explain why one of his best friends had turned against him. Petero's brief life-story here shows how contingent ethnic identifications in Mahare possibly were in practice, and this again reveals the need for contextualisation. Petero had foregrounded his Kikuyu identification when it provided him with access to opportunities provided by the Mungiki, but downplayed it and foregrounded his Luo background when he joined Motion and the others to threaten, and later attack, Kingi.

Election day on 27 December 2007 passed without a presidential winner being declared. The first skirmishes in Mathare occurred early the following day when groups of young men started to vent their frustration over contradictory reports, rumours of rigging and the delay in announcing the official results (*see also* Wallis & Nguyen 2007). Until late at night, Raila Odinga had been leading the exit polls (Hornsby 2012:758), which was in line with his slight lead in a majority of the prognoses published ahead of the elections (*see also* Hornsby 2012:757; Agina et al. 2007). However, early on the Friday morning, Kibaki seemed to undergo a resurgence. For the next two days, tensions culminated in a few fights here and there. However, Bondeni Village was plunged into widespread chaos when Kibaki was hurriedly inaugurated late on Sunday afternoon on 30 December 2007 (Gettleman 2007). At dusk, groups of young men wielding crude weapons, such as clubs and machetes, barricaded the high street that separated Lower and Upper Bondeni, and started looting businesses and houses near the river. Most residents from down the valley escaped to the main road, where they set up camp for the night, still unaware that they would be displaced for months to come. Motion, Petero and their group came back and destroyed Kingi's roadside restaurant, looted all the equipment and violently chased Kingi from the premises. Later that week, I met Kingi in the city centre to give him food supplies and other items he had asked for, and he shared the following with me:

We don't sleep, it is me and the other guys (from his block), we stay outside. My whole family is in my house, they have to stay indoors, no one can go outside, it is not safe. We see a lot of bodies. I even saw fingers, cut off, just there and there, in the sewer. Nobody knows what is going on in *mtaa* ('ghetto' or 'neighbourhood' in Sheng), it is a war. And we don't sleep because we have to guard so that they don't come to our side, ha ha ha we hide behind some stones, you know those stones near the flat, so they can't see us...and we are ready for them...we have some *rungus* ('clubs' in Kiswahili) and *pangas* ('machetes' in Kiswahili). We are with many ha ha ha so they can't come, our side is still ok. But down there, where Shosho lives, I can't go there. They party all night, they roast *mbuzi* ('goat' in Swahili) and we hear them. There is a lot of fighting going on, people shout and things

are very insecure. They (a few One Touch gang members) took some houses and they have looted the shops. Ha ha ha, I have to buy *unga* (maize meal in Swahili) from them for 250 bob, why? There is no cabbage, we only eat *ugali* (a porridge of maize meal in Kiwahili) once a day. I sometimes sleep during the day when things are calm [...] I can't believe what is happening in my village. I never expected them (friends and fellow gang members) to fight us like this. I think it's because they are jealous because we own houses and the businesses and they work for us (Kikuyu alcohol bosses like Shosho). They came before election and you know who, they told me that my *hotelli* will belong to them after election time. They looted my *hotelli* but did not burn it.

Tensions between visitors

As well as looting Kingi's *hotelli*, Motion had also attacked another long-term friend and fellow One Touch gang member, Odhis, who identified as Luo. His *chang'aa* bar had also been ransacked and looted by Motion and his friends, and Odhis still carries the scars on his face from a machete wielded by Motion. Motion had almost hacked his entire ear off. When I asked him about Motion's reasons for seemingly suddenly turning against him, Odhis, like Kingi, thought that Motion had been jealous, and that he had seen the 2007/8 post-election violence as an opportunity to, in his words, "finish competition and settle old grudges." As analysed in the previous chapters, all of the young One Touch gang members struggled to leave the gang and follow in the footsteps of Kingi and Odhis, but competition was fierce and opportunities rare. According to them, the resentment Motion allegedly harboured against Kingi and Odhis emanated first and foremost from their success, and not from their respective ethnic identifications. However, Motion did explain their differences with regard to success in ethnic terms.

Motion and Odhis were around the same age, and had even arrived in Mathare from Kisumu around the same time. They had been neighbours in Bondeni and had become gang members together. In contrast to Motion, however, Odhis had married a woman with a Luo background who had been born in Mathare and who had a wide network of family members, friends and neighbours there she could rely on. He had been able to access loans through his wife, as she was a leading member of several savings groups. This had helped him to build a small, but thriving, *chang'aa* business outside the gang. As discussed in previous chapters, many men accessed opportunities through the women in their lives. Kingi had also enjoyed financial and other types of support provided by his grandmother, and had been able to gradually build his businesses outside the gang with additional help from his wife. Motion had lacked some of the financial and other types of support that Odhis and Kingi had received from wives and other family members.

Strikingly, Motion grasped the difference in success between them and himself in ethnic terms, even with regard to Odhis who had a Luo background like Motion. In my discussions with Motion, he claimed that Odhis had learned to act like a Kikuyu, because his wife had been born in Mathare and, 'despite her Luo background', had adapted to what

Motion imagined as a dominant Kikuyu culture. This was a common narrative among alleged *wageni* ('visitors' in Kiswahili) with Luo backgrounds to explain differences in wealth between purported natives and visitors. Its mainstay held that Luo people who had been born in Mathare had lost part of their ostensible 'Luoness' by mimicking Kikuyu *wazaliwa* ('natives' in Kiswahili). Boss, a 29-year-old man from 4B with a Luo background who had been born in Mathare, said the following:

They take us like a Kikuyu because we also buy houses here in ghetto ha ha ha like a Kikuyu. You see my father, he lived with Kikuyu and know that houses in ghetto bring money. Other Luo they come later and they like to work, not do business. They invest in *ocha* (rural area in Sheng). They say we are not like real Luo because like Kikuyu we like business too [...] Yah I am circumcised. Ha ha ha. I can talk in front of people here. When they say, don't listen to him he is not a man. Others say, 'No he is circumcised'. I feel proud.

Boss told me that he did not feel any less Luo, but he took himself as a Mathare native, and claimed that this, to him, meant that he was well adapted to ghetto dynamics. He did bring out that he imagined the ghetto dynamics to be Kikuyu, which was evidenced by his phrase: "You see my father, he lived with Kikuyu." Yet he did not take this as being in conflict with identifying as Luo. He had grown up with friends (with different ethnic backgrounds) who had almost all been circumcised, and this had led to him also undergoing this practice (see Chapter 2). This reveals that identifying as 'being ghetto' and having an ethnic background were not exclusive positions; these positions related to one another, and these time and space-bound relationships require more analysis in order to further contextualise the contingencies of ethnicity in social relations.

Boss had followed in his father's footsteps by becoming a landlord of two tin-roof shacks in 4B. This was a position most residents constructed as Kikuyu, despite the fact that many landlords had Luo and other ethnic backgrounds. The reason why many imagined this position to be Kikuyu emanates from the master narrative that conceives people with Kikuyu backgrounds as property owners and business people. Due to the history of settlement there, this conceptualisation of people with Kikuyu backgrounds resonated with many people's experiences in Mathare. As described in Chapter 1, the majority of the early residents in Mathare had migrated from nearby native reserves and settlers' farms, many of whom had identified as Kikuyu. In the beginning, it had still been relatively easy to access the right to construct informal houses there and lease them to other migrants. In later years, however, it had become increasingly difficult for people to become landlords. Available housing and land have become scarce over the past few decades, and people could only access such informal assets if they were connected to influential individuals such as village elders and the chief. Boss, for instance, had become a landlord through his father's connections. Motion and other residents who had not been born and raised in Mathare often lacked the skills, knowledge and connections to navigate the highly intricate labyrinth of social relations and access such resources.

Over the years, I have talked to many people who, like Motion, were considered to be visitors by self-proclaimed natives. Many of these supposed visitors described their failure and other people's success in ethnic terms, especially when it concerned the success of purported natives who were identified by them as Kikuyu. They often did not consider themselves to be visitors, but they also did not view themselves as permanent residents, and many drew boundaries between themselves and what they took to be 'real ghetto people', which was a term they used often to refer to self-proclaimed natives. According to a young man from 4B called Ouma, real ghetto people had Kikuyu backgrounds, lacked moral values and engaged in crime, prostitution and alcohol and drug abuse "without any shame." In October 2010, we were standing on a ridge in 4B overlooking Mathare, and he pointed fervently to Bondeni. "Look how dirty their houses are, and this village [4B] is clean, but we don't have their money. They are not decent people." He told me that Bondeni residents, all of whom he imagined to be Kikuyu, were richer than residents in 4B because they were involved in what he regarded as illegal activities (such as selling *chang'aa* and sex work). Despite the fact that many residents with Luo (and other ethnic) backgrounds also engaged in these practices, Ouma and many other recent migrants constructed them as Kikuyu. "No, I don't know Luo who steal" Ouma said, "ha ha, or who sell alcohol. No, we like education and work hard. It is Kikuyu, like in Bondeni, who sell alcohol, and they are prostitutes. They are thieves, and have money because of crime. Not like us, we work...we are decent people." This depiction not only draws on ethnic hate narratives but also on dominant notions of slum dwellers as immoral and criminal, and served to set the 'temporal ghetto residents', imagined as Luo, apart from the allegedly 'real ghetto residents', imagined as Kikuyu. Ouma and many others who engaged in this type of othering strategically omitted that people with multiple ethnic backgrounds engaged in stealing, selling *chang'aa* and engaging in sex work. This narrative likewise did not take into consideration the fact that relative wealth disparities between ghetto villages, social groups and individual residents were predominantly caused by diverging access to social and economic opportunities that was largely determined by migration histories and the concentration of resources among a few earlier settlers. This begs the question as to why Ouma, Petero, Motion and others repeatedly turned to dominant discourses on slum dwellers and ethnicity, instead of other available explanatory models, to grasp social differences and legitimise (participation in) acts of violence directed at putative ethnic others.

Talking about 'political violence' at the river

After Kibaki's inauguration on 30 December 2007, Motion became a ringleader of a group of young men who took to the streets of Mathare to demonstrate against the, in his eyes, stolen elections. At the time, it was too dangerous for me to talk to him. He did not have a mobile phone, and I could not go down into Mathare to look for him because young men had barricaded the roads and the military police had cordoned off the main access routes. It took us three years before we were able to discuss his view on the violence and his own involvement in it. We had met and spent time with each other in between, but Motion

evidently needed time before he was able to revisit the post-election violence with me, as he mostly avoided questions on the topic.

When he suddenly brought it up on 12 February 2011, it took me by surprise as he was surrounded not only by a few friends, but also some of his previous victims. We were sitting on a heap of garbage in the middle of the Mathare River near the One Touch distilling spot, surrounded by smoking drums and the smell of the open sewer that ended up in the river beside us. Someone produced a yellow pamphlet issued by the Green Belt Movement campaigning to galvanise support for the court case at the International Criminal Court –ICC– (GBM 2011) against highly placed politicians who were allegedly responsible for whipping-up violence after the 2007 general elections (Waki 2008). This immediately elicited a reaction among a few of the young men who stated that the ICC case reflected incidents that occurred in Rift Valley, and perhaps Kisumu, but entirely ignored what had transpired in Mathare. These young men with Kikuyu backgrounds referred to the fact that Raila Odinga, the main opposition candidate at the time, was not on the infamous 'O-Campo list' of suspects (Al Jazeera 2010), but was held responsible by many Mathare residents for inciting young men who identified as Luo. Motion interjected by stating that Kibaki should also be on the list, and the rest of the men fell silent. Motion, encouraged by alcohol, continued.

He shouted: "You can't imagine, it was like a war, eeeh." Cosmos interjected: "You don't know who is fighting and you just slash here, and there." Motion interrupted him again: "You need to protect yourself." Cosmos shot back: "You can't believe the things you did, you never think that, ha ha that you can do that...but it was to protect our family, you see. You have to defend your family." Both clearly tried to claim the moral upper hand by taking up a victimhood position. Motion confirmed: "They come to your house, what can you do?" But it had also been a good time for some. He smiled: "For many days, at night it was a party." They both laughed out loud: "We had *nyam chom* (roasted meat) and *cham* (alcohol), and it was us in the streets. People really feared us." I asked whether they thought it would happen again. Other young men at the distilling site quietly observed our conversation while continuing to adjust the heat of the fires or just standing around waiting for the drink to be ready. Motion boastfully asserted: "Will it happen again? Of course. But we have to teach those young boys they can't do like that." This illustrates that these men felt rather ambivalent about the violence. They had protected their families and had fun, but they had also lost friends and properties. Above all, they felt that it had not changed power relations in their favour. Motion pointed to Gjo, a 14 year old boy with a Luo background, who had already dropped out of school to start working at the distilling site. He continued: "We still have nothing, they still have everything." He aggressively pointed to an older man with a Kikuyu background distilling alongside the others. The man averted his eyes and seemingly ignored the remark, but I saw his shoulders tense up. Motion jumped ashore and half-jokingly grabbed the man forcefully by the shoulders while stating: "He is the problem, ha ha ha, they are, they have everything we still have nothing." Cosmos, swaying on his legs and clearly drunk, jumped in to stress the point: "And that is the problem, but a war it did not help us. People really died." Motion and Cosmos sat back

down again. Cosmos concluded: "When I am in the bus to Kisumu, the driver is a Kikuyu. Why? And he knows everywhere. He knows what I don't and it is not even his area. Where are we? We don't get that chance, so we need to take it."

The way both Motion and Cosmos drew on the master hate narrative on the Kikuyu group, depicting Kikuyu people as thieves (Somerville 2011) and foreigners (*see also* Wa Wamwere 2003), to explain the violence and legitimise their participation was striking. The older man they had pointed out at that one moment embodied every rich person with a Kikuyu background. This group was believed to have stolen from other ethnic groups to become rich and were thus considered to be standing in the way of the development of other ethnic groups. In reality, this man still distilled *chang'aa* despite his old age, indicating that he was probably even more deprived of economic opportunities than Motion and Cosmos. This dominant discourse on the Kikuyu label had, however, acquired meaning in the local context of Mathare as a result of the history of migration there, which led to the dominant perception in Mathare that the rich were Kikuyu and the poor Luo (see Chapter 1).

Motion in motion: shifting sides

Motion lived with his family on the other side of the river in 4B, where work was scarce and many people lived, even more so than in Bondeni. He shared a nine metre-square room with his wife and two children, his brother and his wife, and their new-born baby. They all slept in a double bed, sideways. He and his brother had been members of the One Touch gang for a long time, and had a significant history of working as alcohol distillers in the more affluent Bondeni Village for predominantly female bar owners with Kikuyu backgrounds. Motion never talked in detail about his participation in actual incidents of violence, but through eyewitnesses I have been able to establish that he and his friends have ousted several families and older women with Kikuyu backgrounds from their homes. Among those targeted by Motion were a few bosses and mothers of fellow gang members. I also learned that he was held responsible for looting most of the shops close to the One Touch distilling site. Mama J told me:

Even now I fear when I see him [Motion]. I ran to a plot when we heard many men come up the cliffs [near the Manoki toilet, see map]. And we hide, but I tried to open the gate to see to go and look for Kingi. In front of the gate, it was a crowd, and a man cut this man, his head was like a plate, it came off like a plate, a bowl full of blood. He stood but the top of his head, like a plate was on the ground, like a bowl, a bowl of blood, then he dropped down. He [Motion] was there, I know it was him, he was part of that group. I know what he did.

In the tumult that followed Kibaki's inauguration, Motion and a few Luo friends stole goats from older women with Kikuyu backgrounds in Bondeni (some of whom were their bosses), and feasted on roasted meat and the alcohol they had also confiscated from them.

Up until the elections, Motion, as a One Touch gang member, had worked for many different older Kikuyu female bosses. In the section above, Motion and Cosmos described the initial days after the general election as a “party.” This was an odd choice of words at first glance, given that many people died during the chaos. Yet the looting of goats and alcohol from their female bosses may have been a way of reversing power relations, even if only for a day. Denouncing the Kikuyu group out loud and drawing on the anti-Kikuyu political rhetoric that had gained particular strength in the political domain in the run-up to the 2007 elections seemed to be a way for these young men to stand up to their bosses and break away from the daily grind of back-breaking work for little pay. Indeed, these men generally earned around two Euros a day, while their bosses, the majority of whom had a Kikuyu background, made between 10 and 200 Euros daily.

Motion told me that he had expected to be stopped at any moment by the General Service Unit (GSU), which was the military police in Kenya. He had been surprised when he noticed that local residents with Kikuyu backgrounds began to move away instead of calling on the local administration to arrest him and his friends. Later reports showed that in some cases the local police and administration officials were implicated in whipping-up the violence during the chaos that followed the election (Waki 2008, HRW 2008). Their reluctance to intervene gave Motion and a few other alcohol distillers (with Luo and many other ethnic backgrounds) from the One Touch gang leeway to take over the shopping street inside Mathare, which was a dirt road where most micro-businesses were located, within the space of a few days. They re-dubbed this Mau Mau Avenue 'Gaza'. This was an intertextual reference, not only to Palestine, but also to dance hall music. It stood in counter-position to Shantit, an area near Bondeni Village that was temporarily renamed the Gullyside.¹ For the first few nights, Motion and his friends roasted the stolen goats on open fires, drank the stolen alcohol and slept in the houses of residents who had fled to the main road on the fringe of the ghetto. Here the refugees camped in makeshift tents and could see the 'party' taking place in the valley below them.

A few days into the unrest, a miller from Bondeni with a Luo background and political connections to the opposition party ODM (Orange Democratic Movement), approached Motion and offered to arm and pay him and the other young men. He had parked a truck full of machetes near his maize mill at the mouth of the ghetto and in full sight of the refugees camping nearby. He asked Motion and his friends to link their efforts, as Motion put it, with another group of young men with mostly Luo backgrounds from 4A, a ghetto village in Mathare on the other side of the river. Otiesh, who was a famous thief from 4A, led this group. This and similar groups were often dubbed the Taliban in (inter)national media representations, and inside the ghetto also had different names such as Siafu ('killer ants' in Kiswahili). As Motion explained, the purpose of joining forces was to deter young men from the renamed Gullyside area near the bridge, who he described as

¹ The Gullyside is a term that refers to the famous group of artists in Jamaica headed by Mavado and which competed with the Gaza camp's collective led by Vybz Kartel. The term Gullyside is a nickname for Brixton in South London, where many Jamaican migrants live, and was supposedly chosen by Mavado and his crew to reflect their hard-core ghetto lifestyle. The term Gaza by Vybz Kartel's group was intended to trump Gullyside's display of ghetto toughness (see also, Boyne 2009).

Kikuyu and even Mungiki gang members. These young men from Shantit had not been Mungiki members, as the Mungiki had long left Bondeni, and Shantit members had multiple ethnic backgrounds. Yet, they were named as such by Motion and others because of their supposed shared identity as Kikuyu, and because of the history of the Mungiki gang in Shantit. These were clearly meant as derogatory terms. Shantit gang members had begun to attack the Taliban groups from 4B and 4A at night to push these latter gangs out of Bondeni Village and stop the looting of houses and shops.

By joining the Taliban gang that was led by Otiesh during the 2007/8 post-election violence, Motion had been able to sell stolen goods and accumulate just enough money to start distilling his own alcohol. He later described the moment he accepted being armed by the miller and joined Otiesh's Taliban gang as a turning point in his life. He also claimed that it had literally taken him only minutes to decide. In this brief period of time, he had evaluated his past life and the present chaos, and began to anticipate possible new social horizons in which he saw himself becoming a senior man according to popular notions of manhood (Willemse 2009:218). However, looking back, Motion could not pinpoint a clear, rational moment when he decided to leave the One Touch gang and participate in the mounting violence. If anything, it was a gradual process marked by extreme chaos and quick power shifts, high risks and uncertain outcomes. In the overall confusion, a series of smaller events (stealing and eating goats and alcohol to party –*kuraha* in Sheng) and the absence of others (no GSU to arrest him and his friends) produced a growing space for him and a few friends to gradually take control of Lower Bondeni Village. Compelled by a desire to meet his own immediate needs (protecting his family, for instance), Motion navigated the rapidly changing circumstances inside the ghetto to his own advantage. He improvised as he went along, without a clear picture in mind of where he was heading, although he was guided by a strong desire to become a senior man. In retrospect, he identified the incident with the miller as the moment it began to dawn on him that taking part in this conflict could mean a radical change from his life as a distiller. Yet, it is more likely that his later reflections were based on how he had eventually stepped away from the violence.

When the violence subsided two months after the general elections, which had been held on 27 December 2007, Motion did not stay with Otiesh and his crew at the Vietnam distilling site. He explained to me that he had earned enough (from selling stolen items) to start distilling his own *chang'aa*, which he began to sell in bulk to customers in Kibera (another major ghetto in Nairobi). He later even opened his own bar in 4B. At the same time, he continued to distil for his old bosses in order to spread the business risks in case his distribution channel to Kibera failed. He did not go into it too much, but it was clear to me that he re-joined the One Touch gang because he preferred to work at a site that he was familiar with and where most of his friends (including the two men he had attacked) hung out. He hardly knew Otiesh and the other gang members from 4A who had taken over the Vietnam distilling site in Bondeni Village. Strikingly, the One Touch gang members accepted Motion back, and he continued his work alongside the young men he had attacked and for bosses he had violently ousted from Bondeni Village. Motion thought he was accepted back because most of the One Touch gang had been his friends. Yet, Kingi told me

that many One Touch gang members and bosses had been afraid of him, and had only taken him back because they had feared the repercussions that refusal might bring.

A street-smart visitor

The binary between visitors and natives emerged in 2002, and, in this popular imaginary, the latter were often separated from the former by referring to the year 1982. In this view, the term visitor in Bondeni denoted people who had arrived in Mathare from the rural area after an attempted coup in 1982 (*see also* Throup and Hornsby 1998:31), which was a watershed moment in the lives of people in Mathare. During the failed coup, many people from the area had gone on to the city streets to loot shops. When the Moi government had restored order, the GSU regiments had conducted door-to-door searches of houses. During these raids, they confiscated stolen goods (such as TVs, carpets, radios and mattresses), and had beaten and arrested a great many people. The crackdown had taken days, and had a lasting impact because it had been the first time (of many) that the GSU had been widely deployed inside the ghetto. In popular imaginary, the period before this coup was characterised by homesteads, *malaya* prostitution and *busaa* bars. From the 1980s onwards, however, *chang'aa* gradually replaced *busaa* and *malaya* prostitution was increasingly superseded by a short-call service (*see* Chapter 1). The eventful year of 1982 thus proved to be a fruitful landmark when it comes to capturing the memory of significant changes that occurred during the late 1970s and early 1980s. As a consequence, the imagined differences between before and after the 1982 coup gave strength to notions of natives and visitors in more recent times. This binary emerged around 2002 in response to the intensification of ethnicity in social relations that was sparked by the growing influx of migrants and the emergence of ethnic-based gangs. Looking closely at this imagined boundary, however, reveals its shaky underpinnings. For instance, I have met many residents who took themselves and were considered to be natives who had arrived in Mathare after 1982 or had been born from parents who had done so.

Looking at the time and space-bound intersections of ethnicity with the popular binary forged between *wazaliwa* ('natives' in Kiswahili) and *wageni* ('visitors' in Kiswahili) brings us closer to understanding why, for instance, Motion participated in the violence and shifted alliances, even if only momentarily. Motion drew upon ethnic hate narratives to explain his position of multiple marginalities (*see also* Vigil 2003) and legitimise participation in direct violence against imagined others. Yet, these others did not all have Kikuyu backgrounds. Nevertheless, Motion bestowed on Odhis an alleged Kikuyuness, which is a form of ethnicity that one can acquire by association. In response to the foregrounding of ethnicity by putative visitors, self-proclaimed natives reinforced the ghetto as a locus of belonging. Nevertheless, they also drew on ethnic stereotypes by fixing visitors as 'tribalists.' This highlights how ready-available ethnic narratives were to people in their attempts to grasp putative differences between social groups. It also describes how notions of ethnicity acquired different meanings in different contexts and among different (groups of) people. The contextualisation of ethnicity is thus crucial to understanding the ambiguity of such notions and grasping if, when, where, why and how these shaped

conceptions of us and them. The need for such nuanced analysis is underscored by the fact that the binary between natives and visitors did not neatly intersect with ethnicity or locality, and potentially shifted according to changing power dynamics. For instance, not all residents with a Luo background in Bondeni, 4B and 4A were considered to be visitors, or saw themselves as temporary residents. Moreover, not all residents with a Kikuyu background living in Bondeni Village saw themselves and were perceived as natives, and so on.

From all this, one might get the impression that the residents in Mathare only identified with two ethnic groups, whereas the ghetto was in fact marked by ethnic diversity and many residents did not even know their ethnic origins or had multiple ethnic backgrounds. In everyday encounters, people did refer mostly to the Kikuyu and Luo labels when commenting on purported asymmetrical power relationships. This probably emanated from the fact that the two main political contenders in Mathare for the past ten years represented political parties that were constructed as either Luo or Kikuyu in the popular discourse (*see also* Somerville 2011). As noted, this did not indicate that the local representative had to identify with the same ethnic background as the one widely associated with the respective political party. On the contrary, Bishop Wanjiru identified as Kikuyu, but as she competed for an ODM seat in the 2007 elections was imagined in Mathare to be the 'Luo candidate'.

To complicate matters further, Motion was considered by some from Bondeni (like Kingi) to be a *mgeni* ('visitor' in Kiswahili), yet he was taken as a native by others. He and a few of his brothers had arrived during the 1990s when Motion had been around nine years old, and he had been part of different gangs since the day he set foot in Mathare. Accordingly, most of his peers did not take him to be a (total) newcomer. Nevertheless, residents in Bondeni who, like Kingi, belonged to families that had lived in the ghetto for decades still regarded Motion as a visitor. This highlights how relational and situational these notions were, and how they potentially shifted per spatial, social and temporal context and in relation to different boundary-making projects.

The popular notions of natives and visitors often coincided with the putative dichotomy between *mjanja* ('street-smart hustler' in Sheng) and *fala* ('victim or stupid/backward person' in Sheng and Kiswahili). It is not surprising that people who regarded themselves as having been born in the ghetto also saw themselves as streetwise hustlers (or *mjanja* in Sheng), and considered visitors to be stupid or backwards. These constructions further tied in with the way that many in Mathare drew from discourses on the 'urban' versus the 'rural' and on the 'modern' versus the 'traditional', in which the rural was equated with backwardness and traditions and vice versa. Visitors were widely assumed to still have strong connections to family 'up country' and, as such, to ethnicity, and this was considered to be *ufala* ('backwardness' in Sheng) by self-proclaimed natives. Although Motion was regarded as a *mgeni* in Bondeni by residents like Kingi, he was also widely taken as a *mjanja* in both 4B and Bondeni because he was a known thief and long-term member of the One Touch gang. Certainly, no one would dare to dispute his reputation as a streetwise hustler. Motion took great pride in being, as he termed it, *janjess*

['streetwise' in Sheng], and often took me on a tour through the ghetto to show me different bars and friends who all treated him with respect and some even with visible fear.

In the end, other One Touch gang members who had likewise briefly joined Taliban groups during the 2007/8 post-election violence also returned to the One Touch gang after the violence ended, but this did not mean that things went back to normal; tensions abounded, but work continued. Illustrated by Motion's narrative in the above passage, many people (with Luo backgrounds and otherwise) still explained their marginal position within society by drawing on master hate narratives that imputed the Kikuyu group. Similarly, many people who had suffered from past episodes of violence (also with multiple ethnic backgrounds) were bitter and resentful, with some waiting for an opportunity to retaliate. One might expect that these tensions within the gang would have led to multiple conflicts over the past few years, but something else happened instead; shockingly, four of the nine One Touch gang members who had briefly joined the Taliban groups during the 2007/8 post-election violence died the following year. Kingi explained that to local residents these deaths were clouded in mystery because it was only One Touch gang members who had participated in this violence who died in this brief time-span. The causes of death varied from alcohol poisoning and mental illness to being shot by the police. Kingi told me that he and others thought that: "The blood of their victims haunted them, made them crazy and killed them." To many, these deaths settled a score. The remaining five men, including Motion, continued to be eyed with suspicion by Odhis and other gang members. Yet, Motion in particular had a vast network of bar owners, thieves and customers, both in- and outside the ghetto. He could thus help other gang members to access opportunities to generate income from activities other than distilling, such as brokering stolen goods. Accordingly, it was not only fear that allowed Motion, and others like him, to continue to work at the One Touch distilling site; the fact that these young men could provide access to opportunities also contributed considerably.

Against this background, Motion and Cosmos initiated the outreach programme in October 2010 (see Chapter 3). It is remarkable to consider that a group with such a volatile and complex history was able to collectively engage in a programme that encouraged these men to open up to each other. This tentatively shows a tendency I have also encountered in many other cases: the people in Mathare are highly inter-dependent, and so working with people you do not trust, and who have even harmed you, is often part of local survival strategies. Odhis told me that he did not mind that Motion was part of the programme; he just did not want to be part of a loan group with him when starting a micro-business. Kingi, who managed this programme with Monga, shared that he hoped the scheme would "help Motion to change his mentality." Kingi certainly had a somewhat tolerant attitude towards Motion and the others, which probably emanated from the fact that, compared to Odhis, it had not taken him long to recuperate from the post-election violence. The small but consistent salary he received as a social worker at Safi helped him to replace the items that had been stolen and re-open his roadside restaurant. In contrast, Odhis had no steady income, and he and his wife were left with debts with different loans- and savings groups (see Chapter 5). He later lost two older brothers in a short time-span and had to pay for

both funerals. He never recovered, and took up drinking to drown his sorrows. His drinking eventually hindered his progress as a participant in the outreach programme. Motion also failed the first programme and, at the time of writing this chapter, both he and Odhis were part of a second group of gang members involved in the outreach scheme.

The Taliban in Bondeni

The discussion above shows that people in Mathare often drew on dominant discourses on ethnicity to make sense of their own predicaments, imagine shifting boundaries between us and them, and legitimise participation in violence. It also shows that ethnicity on its own is not an adequate trope with which to analyse tensions between people and groups. Ethnicity certainly does not explain why Kingi's neighbour persecuted him, or why Motion attacked Odhis and Kingi. To understand why and how people negotiated dominant discourses on ethnicity during periods of direct violence in Mathare, it is thus crucial to look at the intersections between ethnicity, locality and the notions of natives and visitors, as well as other time and space-bound identifications, narratives and positions. In a similar vein, ethnicity does not explain the ongoing tensions between 4B and Shantit, even if these two ghetto villages were popularly imagined in ethnic terms (Kaberia 2012). Taking a closer look at the tensions between these two villages – and below an area between Shantit and a place in Bondeni called Kambi na Moto (where the Kiharu gang was located) – will enable us to further understand the shifting roles and meanings of ethnicity as a boundary marker, as well as the other factors contributing to violence in Mathare.

Boss, a *mzwaliwa* from 4B who identified as Luo, told me upon my arrival for a long period of fieldwork in Mathare in July 2010 that I could not meet and work with Otiesh, the Taliban leader from 4A (also called Mradi), as I had planned, as tensions were high after Otiesh and his group had been ousted by Shantit and Kiharu gang members. During the post-election violence in January 2008, Otiesh's group (also often referred to as the Taliban) had managed to take control of Vietnam, a distilling site in Bondeni near the bridge. Boss thought that the Taliban had been able to establish itself in Bondeni and take over a distilling site there because the crackdown on alleged Mungiki members and thieves by the police over the past decade (see also Alston 2009; Oscar foundation 2008) had decimated the number of young men in this area. As a consequence, in his words, Bondeni "had no youth to defend their area." The extra-judicial killings of suspected Mungiki members and thieves had led to the deaths of hundreds of youths in Mathare, especially in Bondeni Village and Kosovo, as these had been former Mungiki strongholds. Kingi and many Shantit gang members had also told me that the young men from Shantit had tried to resist Otiesh and his group during the post-election violence, but had been outnumbered and could not prevent this particular Taliban gang from expanding its turf. In the years following the 2007/8 post-election violence, Otiesh and his men established an illegal alcohol distilling site, several illegal electricity enterprises, a video hall and some other businesses in Bondeni. According to local residents, they began to manifest themselves in something akin to the way Mungiki gang members had operated between 2001 and 2006.

Residents watched on with suspicion. A young, male gang leader and bar owner called Kevin recounted the following in December 2010:

After post-election violence [2007/8], Taliban took over this side [Bondeni]. They chased Mungiki with the police in 2006, now they copied them, they came like a flood from Mradi. They ask for tax from businesses, also from me, for security, also from houses. They took houses from Kikuyu that were chased [during the post-election violence]. No rent. The Chief supported the Taliban, he thought they were good guys for security. People [local residents] were happy with them. Then they changed, they ask for tax, grab your houses, collecting rent. Like Mungiki, they became the thieves, they rape.

It took well over a year before the tensions that followed the 2007 general elections subsided to a level of relative normality. In 2008, most residents welcomed the security that Otiesh's group restored in Bondeni, and the chief even supported this Taliban gang as an official vigilante group. In April 2009, the Taliban gang members established their own court near Vietnam to punish thieves and settle domestic disputes. This makeshift court was backed by the chief and his village elders, which gave it some kind of legitimacy. Otiesh's Taliban group was allowed to ask for fees, and would refer the more complicated cases (such as land disputes) on to the chief. What is more, this group was also affiliated to the local MP, Bishop Wanjiru. Gang members had acted as security for her during the campaign period in 2007, and after the general elections that year worked as guards at one of the construction sites of her pet project: the widespread construction of community toilets in Bondeni, which she had initiated with government funds (NTA 2011). This Taliban gang in Bondeni thus had powerful political backing, and nothing seemed to stand in the way of its expansion.

However, at the end of 2009, there were two developments that led to this group's demise. I will discuss the first in this section and the second in a section below. The first of these developments was tied to what was widely held to be the excessive violence that this group increasingly applied in punishing local thieves. According to many residents, Otiesh and other Taliban gang members became too powerful, and people began to openly resent their presence in Bondeni. I have been told many narratives of the Taliban's alleged excesses. Among these, one stood out in particular, as all of the people I talked to mentioned this incident. The date varied according to the narrators, but it probably took place on a day early in November 2009, which was when the Taliban gang members from Otiesh's group burned alive two young thugs from Shantit in front of a large crowd near the bridge. In the weeks that followed, many residents began to shun and spoke ill of the gang. Boss from 4B expounded:

Otiesh, ha ha. He carries a matchbox everywhere, and he doesn't even smoke. That was too much. *Mabani* ('nasty, mean people/informers' in Sheng and

Kiswahili). They killed so many, just putting fire to them. Not just beating, but fire, you can't imagine. For security. They can do that even to their own. But not in the other side. It is like, they kill youth but they are not from there [Bondeni], and people say, no they cannot come here and kill our youth like this. It is in their blood, that violence. I can't agree. Yes I am a Luo, but I am born here, I can't kill people I know.

Boss described the Taliban gangs as security (or vigilante – Anderson 2002) groups that punished thieves with unrivalled ferocity. This assumed ferocity, however, has to be seen in the context of police brutality, mob justice and other everyday instances of violence in the Mathare ghetto. Strikingly, local residents rarely spoke in shock about police brutality, rape or mob justice, even when they wholeheartedly condemned such actions. Yet, violent acts by Taliban and Mungiki gangs, such as beheading defectors or punishing alleged thieves by setting them on fire while still alive, were discussed in utter disbelief and minute detail. This was probably fuelled by the highly sensationalised media attention such incidents received, which represented these acts and groups as exceptionally cruel and barbaric (*see also* Kwamboka 2004; Mutua 2014). Most people in Mathare were staunch followers of the daily news shows, and often drew on media narratives to comprehend local developments. The other reason for the disproportionate attention paid to and discussed by people in Mathare with respect to such incidents was connected to the fact they involved organised groups in Mathare; police brutality, rape and mob justice were not organised by established groups within the ghetto. The police did of course operate inside the ghetto, but were popularly imagined as outsiders. Moreover, these actions mainly targeted people such as individual thieves or young women, whereas the Mungiki and Taliban gangs were highly visible collectives that had emerged partly from within the ghetto, and their operations potentially had an impact on all residents. The fear of most residents in relation to these groups is underscored by the fact that during Mungiki rule in Bondeni (2001-2006), people did not even utter the name Mungiki out loud, but used euphemisms instead such as *wazi* ('rebels' in Kiswahili), the 'local, local government' or just plain 'them.'

The Taliban gang at Vietnam had positioned itself strategically at the foot of the bridge that connected 4B and Bondeni in order to curb crime at what was locally taken to be the hottest crime spot inside Mathare. Supported by other Taliban gangs from 4B, and with political backing, Otiesh and his group expanded their turf and intensified their harsh measures to restore security deep inside Bondeni. As noted, many residents initially condoned what Otiesh and his group did to increase security. Yet resistance grew when the Taliban began to kill suspected thieves rather than just beating them up. Interestingly, the fact that the Taliban members mostly identified as Luo, and many gang members from Shantit as Kikuyu, moved to the foreground in the way people understood the emerging tensions. In the words of a resident to whom I spoke long after the Taliban had been expelled from Bondeni: "We are Kikuyu, most of us here, on this side. Luo, they stay on the other side, they can't come here and kill our boys." In this vein, the word 'our' not only

referred to boys who were born and raised in Bondeni, but also to shared ethnic identifications that intersected with notions of local belonging. Accordingly, these ethnic references helped to articulate and accentuate divisions between us and them, but did not cause them. The dominant reason why these divisions gained strength was linked to the level of violence with which the Taliban gang members took up their role as vigilantes.

Ethnic identifications during conflict

During different volatile periods, such as the 2007/8 post-election violence, ethnic identifications were brought to the fore in political and social relationships in Mathare. This was not a linear process of growing ethnic animosities because, even during moments of violence marked by intensified ethnic identifications, other axes of identification intersected with these positions. During other conflicts, ethnicity did not play any role (see previous chapter). However, media representations and civil society reports took the growing importance of ethnicity in the run-up to, during and in the aftermath of the 2007 general elections at face value and saw it evidenced by the manifestation of 'ethnic enclaves' in Nairobi's ghettos (*e.g.* HRW 2008; KNCHR 2008). It is true that many people with a Kikuyu background were, for instance, violently ousted from 4B, and did not return to this ghetto village after the violence subsided. Yet, 4B and the other similar ghetto neighbourhoods where this violence took place can hardly be called ethnic enclaves given the fact that people with multiple ethnic backgrounds (including Kikuyu) continue to reside there. At the same time, political affiliations did not follow assumed ethnic identifications, as both young men with Luo backgrounds from 4B and their counterparts with Kikuyu backgrounds from Kosovo supported Bishop Wanjiru, the ODM Starehe MP who had a Kikuyu background. The pertinent question, however, is whether (and if so how) people in Mathare experienced the growing importance of ethnic identification as a result of the 2007/8 post-election violence. Furthermore, what role did ethnic identifications play in the gang wars that marked the run-up to the 2013 general elections?

As noted, Boss considered himself to be a *mzwaliwa*, and identified as both ghetto and Luo. He also told me that the post-election violence in January 2008 had made him, as he put it, "realise" his own ethnic background as well as that of others. Interestingly, I had observed him shift between these two positions ever since I met him in 2003, yet after the post-election violence he related these shifts to this period of conflict. In the above, he clearly foregrounded his 'nativeness' by separating himself from young Luo *wageni* from 4B who, in his opinion, were prone to violence. As he brought out, he could not engage in that kind of violence against people with whom, in his words, "he had grown up." Although he now lived in 4B and was deeply connected to the Taliban gangs, he had also lived in Bondeni and had played football and attended school with youths from all over Mathare. Boss told me that he still felt "very comfortable" walking through Bondeni to 4B, even after the post-election violence and the expulsion of the Taliban:

I know all of them on this side. They know me, you see. Yesterday, this woman she came from the market. She asked a man, a Luo, she is a Kikuyu, to help her

carry the *gunia* ('a large sack to carry groceries with' in Kiswahili) down. Two thieves, just here, they came to steal and beat the Luo man. The woman she screamed, so some people came and I was also there. They took one thief and beat him, knocked his head. The Luo man, he was bleeding, and some people say the woman she was part of the thieves so they wanted to kill her. The Luo man he said no, she is not one of them. But they did not listen and started to beat the woman. I stopped it. If I had not been there it could have been a war.

Boss undoubtedly exaggerated his role here, but other sources confirmed to me that he did have strong connections to groups in 4B and Bondeni and he would have been able to talk to the crowd to quell such an emerging clash. What is interesting about this incident and narration is that Boss separated himself from the young men who had crossed the bridge immediately after hearing about the incident. He had also rushed from 4B, but to stop an impending conflict rather than to take part in it. Boss, in this vein, was not so different from many of the other young men I had worked with over the years who identified as Luo and natives. During the post-election violence in January 2008, he had taken part in several looting sprees of 'Kikuyu' owned shops with other Taliban gang members. He had, however, also rescued a woman with a Kikuyu background in Bondeni, namely the mother of Monga (colleague to Kingi, see Chapter 3), who had been his childhood friend. What is more, there were several young men who identified as both native and Luo who had grown up in Bondeni and were members of Shantit gangs, whereas these gangs were generally imagined as Kikuyu. Boss confirmed that these young men had also fought against the Taliban (Otiesh and his group at Vietnam) during both the 2007/8 post-election violence and the clashes that had ousted the Taliban gang from Bondeni in 2009-2010. This again shows that ethnic identifications cannot be taken at face value, and should always be analysed in conjunction with other identifications and in the context of specific time and space-bound conflicts.

Similar to Boss, Kingi likewise explained that he became more aware of his ethnic identification as a result of the 2007/8 post-election violence. He claimed fervently and frequently that he predominantly identified as ghetto, as he put it, and like Boss his first language was Sheng and not the Kikuyu tongue. Both Boss and Kingi recognised the Mungiki control (2002-2006) as a prime cause for the intensification of ethnic identification among many young men in Mathare. During that time, only young men and women who identified with the Kikuyu group were allowed membership. Many people with a Kikuyu background had foregrounded their ethnic identification to access the opportunities offered by the Mungiki. The opposite was the case for Kingi; although he had a Kikuyu background and could have enjoyed great benefits from affiliating with the Mungiki gang, its presence in Bondeni had made him feel somewhat ambivalent about his ethnic background. Mungiki leaders had often tried to recruit Kingi because of his leadership skills and because he said he "did not drink *chang'aa* like most men in Bondeni." Yet, he strongly resisted these recruitment attempts, and avoided Mungiki hangouts for years in his own neighbourhood. He did not approve of the ways the Mungiki gang had

manifested itself in Bondeni, and was utterly opposed to the multiple taxes he and others had to pay this group. The Mungiki presence in Bondeni thus compelled Kingi to foreground his identification with the ghetto pride position and downplay his ethnic background. Yet, his experiences during the post-election violence had made him aware that his Kikuyu background had become increasingly relevant to others and, as a consequence, also to himself:

It is weird. Before, we [young ghetto men in Bondeni] were just ghetto. Eeh, most of us we were Kikuyu, but we only spoke Kikuyu with our mothers. Today, I feel ghetto, but I also feel Kikuyu. My best friends, they attacked me because of jealousy, also because I am a Kikuyu. That is what they say. When you hear: 'Kikuyus are thieves'. 'We must kill Kikuyus'. And they are your own friends. You feel something. It is not good. That friendship ended, there and there. How can you be friends when they attack you, and you have to buy *unga* ('maize meal' in Kiswahili) from them for 200 bob ('Kenyan Shilling' in Sheng)? [...] No, I can't revenge. It is not in me. But your heart changes.

Boss and Kingi both struggled equally with what in their view seemed to be the growing importance of ethnic identification in social interactions and political dynamics in Mathare. The way shifting notions of ethnicity increasingly served as boundary markers between different groups traversed their shared identification with ghetto pride.

The intersections between shifting notions of belonging and ethnicity gained strength as a result of, and also fuelled, consecutive junctures of direct violence over the past decade. During the first decade of the new millennium there were more violent conflicts inside Mathare than during the 1990s. Accordingly, self-proclaimed natives imagined a past of shared ghettoness, and blamed visitors such as Mungiki leaders and young men with Luo backgrounds for, as Boss put it, "injecting ethnic hatred in our people." By "our people", Boss denoted alleged natives who had sided with alleged visitors. The language most people in Mathare drew on in constructing these notions derived from *majimboism*, which is the discourse on ethnicity and citizenship propagated by the Moi government (see Chapter 1). This discourse fixed ethnic groups as belonging to specific regions and as foreign to other areas within the Kenyan nation state. As noted, putative visitors in Mathare did not necessarily affirm this label, but they also imagined boundaries between themselves and those they considered to be real ghetto residents (as brought out by Ouma above). This boundary was first and foremost marked to them by assumed moral standards. The Taliban in Bondeni thus flipped the notion that 'ruralness' equalled backwardness and instead imagined that people from the rural area were the harbingers of morality in order to legitimise their harsh measures against Shantit thieves.

After the Taliban had been expelled, the gangs in Shantit grew in strength, and their actions triggered a series of violent conflicts that marked the run-up to the 2013 elections. A closer look at these conflicts will shed more light on how notions of ethnicity became more dominant in processes of othering by self-proclaimed natives.

Continuous strife over turf

The second development that undermined Taliban control in Bondeni Village concerned the strengthening of the Shantit gangs that were involved in stealing inside Mathare. A new generation of gang members gradually emerged in Shantit during the period of Taliban control of Vietnam. These smaller gangs followed the former Mungiki gangs in setting up networks between different groups in Shantit and with gangs in other ghetto areas in Eastlands. The younger brothers and nephews of the escaped or killed suspected Mungiki members and criminals in 2007 had learned from the Mungiki that power depended on networking beyond the *baze* and ghetto village. One of their leaders elaborated:

These young thugs, ha ha, there is no one to supervise them. They are just there, and the parents, mostly they are single mothers. They are happy to see what they can bring home. You saw them, ha ha ha, they are so young, very young boys. They connect with thugs from D ('Dandora' in Sheng, a ghetto in Eastlands), Bangu ('Kariobangi' in Sheng, a ghetto in Eastlands), even Mlango (a ghetto village in Mathare) and you cannot stop them. They get assistance, and they are strong.

Strikingly, he was one of the leaders, but spoke of Shantit gang members as “they.” I had encountered this many times before, generally among people who did not want to disclose to me that they were involved in activities that were widely condemned by fellow ghetto residents. Networks of thieves across different Eastlands' ghettos were not a new phenomenon. However, it was the young age of its members that especially surprised most of the people with whom I discussed this emerging network. All expressed great concern about this. In the absence of fathers, the loss of a generation of older brothers and cousins had prompted many young (mostly) boys in Shantit to take up what were widely considered to be male responsibilities at a very young age. Indeed, some had only recently been circumcised and were around 16 years old. They took care of their single mothers and younger siblings, and sometimes were already married and had children. To meet the needs of their families, some of these young boys graduated early on from petty theft to armed robbery. In the three years between the expulsion of the Mungiki and the demise of the Taliban in Bondeni, the Shantit gangs became stronger and posed a growing challenge to the Taliban. In response, the Taliban deployed increasingly harsh measures to curb crime at the bridge, protect residents from 4B who passed there daily, and control its own turf.

After the Taliban killed two alleged thieves in plain view and broad daylight by setting them on fire, Shantit gang members went to the Kiharu distilling site for help. One of the Shantit men who had been killed by the Taliban had been the cousin of a member of the Kiharu gang. They took up clubs and machetes and went to Vietnam where, by surprise, they attacked Taliban gang members distilling alcohol near the river. Other Bondeni residents spontaneously joined the clash and set fire to the businesses developed by the

Taliban. Taliban gang members from 4B came to support their peers in Bondeni, but soon the crowd of angry residents overwhelmed this group, and all of the Taliban members fled across the bridge to 4B and Mradi, never to return.²

The attacks and counter-attacks between the Taliban and Shantit gangs reveal that their struggle was primarily prompted by their ambitions to control turfs and resources, and not by ethnic identifications. Ethnic hate narratives were re-imagined to legitimise and understand violence, but did not cause it. Shantit gangs wanted control of the bridge to continue robbing people crossing from one village to the other, whereas the Taliban's aims were to install security at the bridge for a fee and control illegal electricity and alcohol businesses in Bondeni. These gangs both operated in an area the size of a few football fields, which were turfs that overlapped at the bridge. Their close proximity, and the fact that their operations clashed, triggered mounting conflict between them. Strikingly, both Shantit and Taliban members drew on dominant discourses on ethnicity and citizenship to legitimise their actions. A Shantit gang member and self-proclaimed "native" called Morris told me in February 2013:

This violence, it is in them. Luo, they are so proud, they have something in them, they value education and we [Kikuyu] value business. So they are jealous of us because we have money. They want to come to this side to take our businesses. No! They say we steal, not all of us steal. But they attack all of us, so we need to defend ourselves. Sometimes you need to attack to defend yourself. We are ready for them. This time we are ready for them. Last time, they attacked us, and we were not ready. But now we are ready for them. We buy *pangas* ('machete' in Kiswahili), even guns, so we are prepared. Let them come this time, they will see what we can do.

Morris brought to the fore very specific stereotypes that are central to the dominant discourses on Kikuyu and Luo labels. As noted, these narratives cast Kikuyu as 'wealthy thieves and businessmen' and Luo as 'proud', 'prone to violence' and 'highly educated but poor.' Morris did not mind the stereotype that depicted people with a Kikuyu background as wealthy, but resisted the label thief. At the same time, he reiterated the stereotype of the Luo group to legitimise the preparedness of Shantit gangs for potential violence in the run-up to the 2013 general elections. It is quite striking to see that Taliban gang members were never cast as thieves, whereas many were involved in armed robbery. They did, however, operate outside Mathare. This coincides with the popular framing of crime described in

² Boss told me later that one of the leaders, a right-hand man to Otiesh, had been caught by a few residents when he was walking along Juja Road a few weeks after the violence. This was near the Balozi restaurant in Bondeni, where we were enjoying lunch at the time of our interview. These residents had alarmed a few Shantit and Kiharu gang members who had been given weapons by an influential man in Shantit. He was a former Mungiki leader who had stayed in Mathare and now supported the local gangs for his own political gain: he wanted to become a councillor. The young men trapped the Taliban leader near the Balozi restaurant and hacked him to death. This happened during the day, in full view of people walking on the pavement, and only a few metres away from the Moi Air Force Base.

Chapter 2. Although stealing in general was condemned, stealing inside the ghetto was widely considered to be the highest level of crime imaginable.

After their demise, the Taliban gang members crossed the bridge on several occasions between 2010 and 2013 to attack Shantit gang members and try to stop crime at the bridge and regain their former foothold in Bondeni. Yet their efforts were in vain, as the Shantit gangs had grown strong enough in the meantime to successfully resist these attempts. Crime remained high in the area. Indeed, right after Christmas in 2012, the GSU was briefly deployed by the government to stop the clashes between these rival groups from spilling over into other ghetto villages. A critical moment throughout the ongoing tensions between 4B and Bondeni over security and turf arose when Boss was shot dead by a Shantit gang member following a confrontation over a mobile phone in August 2011. Many thought there was more to this incident, and the ghetto was rife with speculation and tension. People on both sides even feared a repeat of the 2007/8 post-election violence. Boss had been a long-term friend of Monga and Kingi, and they organised a big football tournament to raise funds for the funeral and unite everyone from the different ghetto villages who had been friends with Boss. The Taliban from 4B also accepted the invitation and abandoned any retaliation plans. Strife over turf and security continued nonetheless, and even if this rivalry was often understood (both locally and by media representations) in ethnic terms and analysed in relation to political events (such as elections), it primarily derived from competition between groups of young men eking out a living in harsh conditions.

Conflicts between 'natives'

Kingi and Monga were also involved in other initiatives to bring antagonistic gangs together and involve them in peace-promoting activities. They had teamed up with a group of ex-gang members, who now worked as film makers, social workers and social activists in another ghetto area called Korogocho, to organise what they termed “peace dialogues” (or *mazungumzo mtaani*, ‘neighbourhood conversations’ in Kiswahili). They had met each other through me in October 2010 when I had visited Korogocho with Kingi. He had been thoroughly impressed by the work going on there; this team had been able to garner peace between feuding gangs in what used to be the most notorious ghetto in Nairobi in terms of crime rates and the small arms trade. As a result of their voluntary work, Korogocho gradually became a safer place. Even though funds were low, this group of young men was set on testing their methods in another volatile urban setting in Nairobi. For two years, Kingi, Monga and Brayo worked together with these men to implement similar dialogues in Mathare, and in doing so acquired the skills and network among gang leaders to bring opponents together and discuss a way forward. They were aware that this was a long-term project, and focused on the most pressing tensions between Shantit and 4B. The impact of these dialogues in terms of reduced conflicts was hard to measure, as many factors were at play. Nevertheless, the readiness of gangs to participate over and over again urged them to continue this work, even without funds. Kingi hoped that this project would eventually contribute to reducing the frequent flare-ups between groups, and help to avoid another

full-blown conflict around the 2013 general elections. He worked hard on this project, until he became implicated in an episode of violence himself in May 2012.

On a Tuesday in May 2012, Morris, a Shantit gang leader I had met a year earlier, took me by the hand to guide me through a maze of rusted iron sheet houses near Mau Mau Avenue in Bondeni. I asked him whether we were in Muoroto, and he looked at me with a strange expression on his face. He told me that Muoroto was over there, pointing out a few houses near a toilet block. I asked him this question, because I was always curious about where people drew boundaries between one area and another. These almost seemed to differ per person. Most people named the smaller areas that constituted Bondeni after hangouts of active gangs in the area, but boundaries between one turf and another were highly contested and shifted almost daily and per person. We were about 50 metres away from the toilet block, and I was again amazed by the micro-localities that existed within ghetto villages. Even though the Muoroto toilet was so close, the ground we stood on was definitely not part of the Muoroto area, hence the funny look on Morris's face when I had asked him about the name of the locale. At the time, Shantit and Muoroto youths were engaged in a fierce competition over which group should manage the Muoroto public toilet. This competition had intensified existing boundaries, and I asked Morris what name he gave to the area we were standing in. Again, a strange look appeared on his face. "This is Shantit!" he exclaimed. He probably thought it was rather silly to ask the name of the area, because he assumed I already knew as we were waiting to meet Shantit gang members. My problem in Shantit was that there were different gangs and one major distilling site, and apart from this site (which was named Jamaica), all of these gangs and their hangouts were dubbed Shantit. I gradually realised that these smaller gangs all worked together, but initially I was very confused.

We arranged a few wooden benches in a circle, and the 28 Shantit gang members, both young men and women who were all involved in stealing inside Mathare, discussed for an hour or two how they wanted to contribute to ending the conflict with the Taliban in 4B. It was a very difficult session according to Kingi, because they thought the Taliban still worked with the local administration and the administrative police. Most did not believe in reconciliation, and a 17-year-old young man eventually stood up and said:

So many of us are dead. That is unfair. Killed by mob justice, by police...Mabani ('enemies/informants' in local Kiswahili, and by which he meant the Taliban gang). Hah! We have kids, young, so at least we leave our mark, there. Maybe next week, we miss another one, someone who is just sitting here, right now, today. Tomorrow he can be dead. We don't believe in a future anymore. You tell us to change? How? With what? We don't have education.

When he sat back down again, the others cheered him and bumped his knuckles in agreement. A young boy called Wax, who was barely 16, sat next to him, took his hand and

laced his fingers with his. The next night, Wax was brutally murdered by women in Kambi in Bondeni.

That particular night, three young men, including Wax, who were all aged between 16 and 18, were walking back from a successful robbery in Eastleigh at one in the morning. About 500 metres from Shantit in Upper Bondeni, a woman spotted the three youths and saw the loot of a few mobile phones in their hands. She concluded that they had been stolen in Kambi, and thus in- and not outside the ghetto, and started screaming to wake up her neighbours to get them to help her catch the alleged thieves. A few women with machetes in their hands joined her on the street, which was highly lit owing to the big streetlight placed there to contribute to security. They killed Wax while the other two youths escaped to Shantit. The following night, Shantit gangs retaliated by setting houses on fire and raping a few women. Women and young men (including gang members from Kiharu) responded again the following night, and fought long and hard with residents from Shantit. The conflict was spreading quickly, and more and more residents from both areas became involved in the violent nightly clashes. After a few days, the GSU came in and imposed a strict curfew, which was maintained for three weeks. I went to Mathare the day after the first skirmishes and met Morris. His hands were covered in cuts and his knuckles were scraped. He looked exhausted and had bruises all over his face. He took me aside, wide-eyed, and told me:

I can't believe they killed Wax like that. His head was off. His arm...it was just there, hanging. We try and discipline these young boys so they don't steal. That is why I have these wounds. We don't want these boys to steal in our area. Go to the mum, you have to see the mum.

Morris was trying to convince me that he had not participated in the acts of retaliation, but that he had acquired his injuries by disciplining his own gang members. I did not believe him, and felt fear settle in the pit of my stomach. Wherever I was in Bondeni that day, Morris and other young men from Shantit tracked me down and urged me to talk to the family of the deceased. Kingi warned me not to go, because he was afraid they wanted to force me to pay for the funeral. He also did not want me to become more involved, because the situation was quickly getting out of hand, despite the growing GSU presence in the area. The following morning, however, Morris called me, furious:

You tell Kingi we can kill him. He comes to our side to preach peace by day. He comes at night to kill us? No! Eeeeeeeeeeh! Yah, he was part of the group from Kambi, I tell you! Now, we can only trust you, you have to come to talk to these boys. You have to see the mum.

I was stunned, but managed to tell him that I would ring him back later. Straightaway, I called Kingi. His voice sounded shaken when he picked up the phone.

I did not want to scare you. They think I was there, last night. You know it was Mama Don [Kingi's cousin], she was part of the women who killed Wax. Last night, she also went there. I can't believe it is women, they are armed, they have *pangas* ('machetes' in Kiswahili). Now we see everyone is prepared for the elections. And you know Kambi, it is my area, my family, all of them, so now they think I was there. They called me last night, this morning. They tell me to kill me. I was not there. [...] I go to the police to file a report so they know a threat was made. Also, I will call Kinya, he knows so many people in Shantit, he can help me with my case. He can talk to them, tell them it wasn't me.

I wanted to join him during his visit to the police station, but Kingi told me to stay away from Mathare because he also feared for my safety. I called Morris back and tried to convince him that they had made a mistake. Morris rejected my plea, and told me that he had heard people shout Kingi's name, and to him this was evidence enough. To him, Kingi had been there in the dark of the night. The big, bright street lantern had somehow been turned off by residents, and so people had not been able to properly see precisely who had been involved. Most residents in Mathare stayed indoors that day, and Kingi and I called many people to piece together exactly what had transpired the night before. After some hours, we finally concluded that Kingi's nephew, the first born son of his sister, had taken part in the fight. He was also called Kingi. The reason why Kingi had not thought of this possibility earlier in the day was because he had not expected his teenage nephew to take part in such violence. Apparently, his sister and other family members had also participated, and Kingi was devastated by this news.

It took well over six months before Kingi was able to reach out to Shantit gangs and restart the peace dialogues. Nevertheless, tensions between Shantit and the rest of Bondeni remained high in the run-up to the 2013 general elections. Similarly, tensions between Shantit and 4B also continued to erupt occasionally, and Mathare residents began to draw on geo-political references and started calling the young men in Shantit 'Al Shabaab' and Shantit 'Mogadishu' or 'Kismaiyo' after war torn locations in Somalia. However, the conflict between Shantit and Kambi differed from the conflicts with 4B in one significant way. The majority of the people involved in the fights between Shantit and Kambi, on both sides of the conflict, identified as Kikuyu and even shared political affiliations. This conflict was shaped by notions of us and them based on specific intersecting positions (such as gender, age, locality and class), which counter-posed poor young men (and also a few young women) from Shantit with slightly wealthier women (and also a few of their male relatives) from Kambi. This again shows that ethnicity did not always play a role in moments violence between groups.

Conclusion

The main argument in this chapter posits that to understand so-called political violence in Mathare it is important to understand why, when and how ethnic hate narratives resonated with the experiences of people in the everyday, instead of taking these

narratives as cause and effect. However, the term political violence, with its strong ethnic connotations in Kenyan political discourse, remains an easy to use, albeit rather inadequate, singular concept with which to explain violence. It reiterates two fallacies: that all violence in Mathare and other Nairobi ghettos was motivated by ethnic identifications, and that it was mostly instigated by and aimed at boosting certain political players. It has, however, proved to be far more insightful to look at how dominant notions of ethnicity were re-imagined locally in shifting boundary-making projects and intersected with other positions.

This chapter thus showed that political instigation only played a limited role in the 2007/8 post-election violence and other conflicts that were labelled as political violence. Indeed, Motion and his groups were armed by a miller who had political ties to the opposition party. Yet, their motivations for fighting people with Kikuyu and many other, including their own, ethnic backgrounds, emanated more from situational, personal and contextual factors than from national political grievances. Kingi's neighbour, Petero and Motion both had very personal reasons to engage in violence and attack Kingi and Odhis. Omitting these in analyses of such violence risks reproducing hate narratives and concomitant binaries, instead of nuancing and contextualising them.

Moving beyond the lens of political violence, this chapter looked at when, why and how ethnicity played a role in shifting articulations of belonging and processes of othering, and how these were tied to the rise in violence over the past decade. This helped to bring into view the locally forged binary between natives and visitors. At the same time, this chapter revealed that ethnic and local identifications did not intersect neatly with this binary. Indeed, despite the fact that a majority was imagined as having a Kikuyu background, self-proclaimed natives had multiple ethnic origins. Moreover, young men like Boss and Kingi identified strongly with the ghetto pride position. This did not mean that they did not identify with their ethnic backgrounds, but it shows that looking at shifts in these positions was crucial to understanding not just the situationality of, but also the relationality between, such positions.

Furthermore, many natives took newcomers to be tribalists, and as such they too drew on notions of ethnicity in processes of othering, even if they downplayed their own ethnic identifications in relation to their ghetto pride position. The binary of natives versus visitors gained strength at the same time as ethnic identification moved to the foreground of political relations. In this vein, the rise of this binary has to be understood as a mode in which people like Kingi grasped their own sense of unease with the increased emphasis on exclusive notions of ethnicity and belonging. This chapter has shown that shifting notions of ethnicity played unexpected roles in different conflicts in Mathare, and at times such notions did not play any role at all. The contextualisation of these notions by looking at particular cases and basing my analyses on personal narratives was crucial for detecting such contingencies. This has enabled me to shed a different and more layered light on how violence emerged from processes of routine violence in Mathare, that is the drawing up of shifting notions of us and them (*see also* Pandey 2006; *see* Introduction). It also brought into view how such notions shaped, and were shaped by, exclusion mechanisms, and how

people experienced ensuing exclusion in the everyday. Accordingly, the notion of everyday violence adds to the concept of routine violence by highlighting experiences of poverty, exclusion and humiliation (Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois 2004:1; Bourgois 2010). Analysing how working gang members negotiated dominant discourses on ethnicity, and how this intersected with other positions in relation to immediate needs, helped me to approach the experiential level of violence and comprehend the performative power of hate narratives. This also enabled me to tease out how such notions changed meaning in different time and space-bound contexts and among different (groups of) people.