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Enacting the state through security assemblages

Materiality, technology and political subjectification in Nairobi

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Chapter 1

Security Assemblages at Work: Enacting the State and Political Subjects

September 21, 2013 has entered Kenya's collective memory as the day of the attack on Westgate Mall, an upscale shopping center in an upper-middle class area of Nairobi. The attackers drove in with a car loaded with explosives, which failed to detonate only by accident; they subsequently walked the aisles of the mall, firing assault rifles and throwing hand grenades. Al-Shabaab, a Somalia-based group recognized by most governments as an Islamic terrorist organization, claimed responsibility for the attack. Although initial rumors linked the attack to Israeli ownership of the mall, al-Shabaab's twitter account justified it as retribution for the Kenyan military invasion of southern Somalia in October 2011. The attack took place during brunch on a late Saturday morning. After more than 48 hours of siege, the authorities confirmed that 71 people (including four attackers) had died. Over 150 had been wounded.¹

The response and rescue operations, although somewhat disorganized, began almost immediately. Curiously, National Intelligence Service (NIS) agents were already at the mall when the attack took place. While this probably sped up the security forces' response, their presence also fueled the public's distrust of the state security services; rumors spread that they knew about a possible attack on Westgate but failed to prevent it. While the police and army exchanged gunfire with the attackers, representatives of the armed forces argued over who was in charge of the operations.

¹ Fifteen years earlier in another attack, now remembered just as "the blast," the US embassy in the center of Nairobi was levelled by a bomb, leading to over 200 deaths.

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The police and the army were not the only responders on the scene. Present too, for instance, was Ishaq, whom I got to know over the course of my fieldwork. A volunteer in a neighborhood policing organization, Ishaq was at a work meeting when he received a phone call about the attack. He recalled that at first he thought it was the usual “thug on a bodaboda [motorcycle].” But when he grasped the magnitude of the emergency, he excused himself from the meeting, gathered his gun and ammunition, and headed to the mall. Ishaq was one among many civilians who took part in the ensuing gunfight and rescue operations. Private security guards were among the first responders too. According to Felix, an employee of a security company on duty at Westgate Mall that day, private officers did most of the work to help victims from the mall to safe zones in the vicinity. Finally, (unsubstantiated) rumors spread that it was the Israeli Special Forces who ended the siege, airlifted especially for this emergency under a secret bilateral deal between Kenya and Israel.

Criminality, terrorism and security practices thus intertwined in a messy bundle, as Nairobi’s residents had to come to terms with local security and crime issues being entangled with Kenya’s international military involvements and religious and ethnic politics. Billow Kerrow, then a senator from Manderu County, commented on the Westgate terrorists: “these are people who speak in the Swahili language” but “they aren’t ordinary thugs.”² Ishaq’s initial reaction – that this must be just another case of petty crime on a motorbike – was thus not an idiosyncratic response. Like Ishaq, Senator Kerrow interpreted the events through familiar categories of criminality in Nairobi, in this case that of “thugs.” Clearly, terrorists were not the usual type of criminal in Nairobi. Yet these terrorists were not *that* alien as they spoke Swahili, muddying the clear boundaries between foreign and domestic threats, between “us” and “them.” To complicate things further, the police and the military were not necessarily the ones in charge of returning the situation to normalcy, and the involvement of many other actors amplified feelings of uncertainty. Some members of the armed forces were even filmed looting shops in the mall.

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<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2013/09/201392110386655370.html>

The attack reverberated across Nairobi and Kenya, both in the short and long term. In the immediate wake of the siege, the security apparatus of the Kenyan state dove into its usual blame game of who was accountable for the disorganized response. Seven months after the attack, in April 2014, the police and other security agencies launched “Operation Usalama Watch,” which exemplified the collective blaming of Muslim, Somali and Somali-Kenyan residents of Nairobi and Kenya for the Westgate attack. Arbitrary arrests, extra-judicial detentions, extortions, deportations and other abuses followed. While many of these people were refugees or migrants, many were also Kenyan citizens. Nevertheless, the derogatory ways in which they were addressed enacted them as enemies rather than persons who belonged in Kenya and Nairobi. The attack was a boon for the private security sector that managed to consolidate its presence in the city, which had been growing since the 1970s. When the Westgate Mall reopened in the summer of 2015, a large number of private security guards and new technologies were conspicuously present: bullet-resistant glass fences, x-ray scans for customers’ bags, armed police officers, canine units trained to sniff out explosives, CCTV cameras, two-tier metal detecting procedures with walk-through and hand-held devices, vehicle search devices and bomb detectors.

These security innovations became entangled with the socio-material security assemblages already in place, enrolling objects and technologies including the ever-present iron bars, barbed wire and electrified fences as well as human security providers, ranging from the police to private security companies and resident associations. While the presence of security technologies in Nairobi’s commercial, corporate and private spaces has grown rapidly over the past decade, they did not enter a vacuum, but into the city’s quotidian approach to handling security. And although it is difficult to attribute the recent changes in how security is handled in Nairobi solely to the Westgate attack, many of my interlocutors considered it a turning point. In the last few years, entering any large building in Nairobi requires going through some sort of security check.

The Westgate attack and its aftermath point to three issues surrounding the politics of security: questions about state formation, the role of technology,

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and the emergence of specific political subjects. Taken together, these three themes form the heart of this dissertation. *First*, while my interlocutors consistently implicated the Kenyan state in our conversations about security, the diversity of individual and collective actors – from residents to private security companies – that responded to the Westgate emergency challenges any assumption of a state apparatus with a monopoly on providing security. Interestingly, these actors do not position themselves in opposition to state institutions but in ancillary roles.

The anthropological scholarship on the state has extensively explored the relations between “state” and “non-state,” or “public” and “private” actors. In various ways, scholars have come to see “the state” through its processes of formation rather than as a stable, homogeneous entity (cf. Gupta, 2012; Hansen & Stepputat, 2001), and formal state institutions (e.g. the police, the army, the tax office) as one set of governance actors among many (cf. Ferguson & Gupta, 2002; Jaffe, 2013). NGOs, for-profit security firms, private citizens and other collective and individual actors participate in processes of state formation through their everyday activities. When we consider this multiplicity of actors within complex processes of state formation, distinctions between “public” and “private” or “state” and “non-state” tend to lose their analytical purchase. Political anthropological scholarship, however, has showed a marked anthropocentrism and – following its disciplinary tradition – tended to ignore nonhuman entities until quite recently (cf. Hull, 2012).

Second, and following global trends, we see that Nairobi’s contemporary security practices privilege various objects and technological devices. These are not simply tools in the hands of willing operators, or symbolic referents, but contribute to making up the social world (cf. Latour, 2005). When the Westgate Mall reopened, customers had to negotiate various access-control and bomb-detecting technologies – from new security gates to explosive-sniffing dogs – before their vehicles could enter the parking garage. These technologies and objects change what a shopping mall is and who is allowed to enter, and thus they contribute to changing the make-up of the social world. The role of objects and technologies in enacting social relations has largely

been explored within Science and Technology Studies (STS), particularly through approaches that have been labeled Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and material semiotics. The attention to objects and technologies in STS helps me to foreground the social and political relevance of artifacts such as gates, bullet-resistant glass, barbed wire and guns enrolled in security assemblages. STS, however, has not always been directly concerned with state formation, although a recent body of work in the field has explored the politics of scientific knowledge production and scientific technology in relation to security and governance (Neyland, 2008; Suchman et al., 2017; Walters, 2014). Building on the literature and concerns of both political anthropology and STS, this dissertation shows how socio-material security assemblages, which heterogeneously mobilize people and “non-human entities” (Latour, 1996: 369), contribute to enacting the state in everyday security practices.

Third, the response of the Kenyan security forces in Operation Usalama Watch highlights a key feature within security practices worldwide: the routinized distinguishing of threats from non-threats. These labels are often attached to specific social groups, most notably people like “us” and dangerous “others.” As could be seen in the treatment of Muslims, Somalis and Somali-Kenyans³ in the wake of the Westgate attack, security practices dif-

3 A long but necessary note on race and ethnicity in Kenya: at the risk of overgeneralization, Kenyan residents are usually categorized, with exceptions, into three racialized groups: “Wanainchi,” “Wahindi” and “Wazungu.” They literally translate from Swahili as “Citizens,” “Indians” and “Whites.” Although skin color is present in these categorizations, especially in the case of the Wazungu, it is not the predominant factor that articulates race in Kenya. During my fieldwork, I heard my interlocutors use the word “black” only on two separate occasions to refer to skin color and as a clear racial identification. The first identified himself as “black in color” during a job interview to become a security guard, much to the amusement of the guards present who were unfamiliar with this identification in the Nairobi context. In the second instance, Benson (a security guard in a mobile response team) and I were discussing how to recognize dangerous people (see Chapter 5). He said that I would not be identified as dangerous because, among other things, I was not black. Throughout my work, I try to use emic categories of race as much as possible. Sometimes I had to make an ethnographically informed guess over which term my interlocutors would have used. Most of the people I talked to used Mwanainchi (singular of Wanainchi) to refer to Kenyans of African descent and Africans more generally; Wahindi is translated as Indians, Asians or Indian-Kenyans somewhat interchangeably when the Muhindi (singular) is Kenyan-born or naturalized. Muzungu (singular of Wazungu) was used to identify the Eu-

ferentially target categories of people, rendering these practices processes of *political* “*subject-ification*” or “*subject-making*,” as Ong (1996: 737) would put it. Distinguishing between various subjects and treating them differently is part and parcel of modern governance, which in turn shapes how people come to know and apprehend themselves and others. Indeed, the emergence of different subjectivities constitutes an important part of what Trouillot (2001) identifies as “state effects.”⁴ This dissertation traces how groups of people come to be categorized as dangerous or not, and how this translates into (not) belonging in the nation, city, neighborhood or household. I approach the configuration of such differentially belonging subjects as part of socio-material security assemblages, thus emphasizing the political work of objects once mobilized within security practices. Objects and technologies together with people mediate security practices, on which the differentiated belonging of groups is inscribed – with some seen as subjects to be protected and others, as dangerous threats.

This dissertation treats concerns about the state, security objects and technologies, and political subjects together. Based on 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Nairobi’s upper-middle class neighborhoods, I explore how

ropean colonizer and is currently used mostly for Europeans and North Americans. People of Somali origin are often identified just as Somali, thus eluding this tripartite categorization. Apparently, some do not fit the Wanainchi group, suggesting that the translation of Mwanainchi to “African” in the Kenyan context indicates some sort of membership in the nation-state. Kenyan-born ethnic Somalis are referred to as Somali-Kenyans; their “Kenyanness” qualifies them as Wanainchi, although not without various forms of discrimination. Further complicating these categories are the specific and overlapping sub-categories referring to the various ethnic groups present in Kenya. These layers of meaning reveal the complexity of racial and ethnic categorization – in Kenya as elsewhere. I do not aim to solve or even address this complexity to the extent that it deserves in this dissertation. Instead, I assume that these categories are – at a general level – floating signifiers (Hall, 1993) filled with complex meanings in relation to the contexts in which they are used. For a genealogical discussion of racialized markers in Kenya and Nairobi, see Chapter 2. For a discussion about their contemporary use in security practices, see Chapter 5.

4 This concept connects to Mitchell’s earlier work on “state effects.” Mitchell suggests that the state is a powerful “metaphysical effect of practices that make [the state’s] structures appear to exist,” a move that allows scholars to acknowledge “the power of the political arrangements that we call the state and at the same time account for their elusiveness” (1991: 94).

various socio-material security practices contribute to enacting the state and political subjects. I thus approach both the state and political subjects not as pre-existing entities, but as realities achieved relationally through security practices. When I say *security practices*, I mean not only the more or less organized actions and activities of security personnel and police in the discharge of their duties, e.g. patrolling or manning gates and metal detectors. I also consider *all those practices in which security, protection and safety emerge as a key concern* to be security practices. The historical segregation of entire groups of residents to avoid the spread of diseases in colonial Nairobi, the coordination of joint patrols between police and private companies or neighborhood policing organizations, the identification of dangerous people in everyday life or media, the installation of Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) systems in private homes – all are examples of security practices. Drawing on such empirical examples, the coming chapters explore what Nairobi's residents (past and present) deem important to do in the name of security and why; what kinds of knowledge and techniques they draw upon; and the effects of such security practices.

In the rest of this introductory chapter, I set out the analytical scope of my work, connecting insights from political anthropology and STS. In the next section I briefly summarize my intervention. I then move on to a more extensive elaboration of my contribution, discussing in more detail political anthropological debates on state formation and debates within STS on materiality and the technological mediation of social and political processes. I conclude the section with a discussion of processes of political subjectification and its relation to state formation and the role of technologies. In the section that follows I emphasize that an assemblage approach has particular ontological implications, going on to explain my methods and discuss issues related to access. Here, I also introduce the three neighborhoods where I conducted most of my fieldwork. In the final section I outline the structure of this dissertation, presenting the individual contribution of each chapter.

Security Assemblages, State Enactment and Political Subjectification

Security assemblages are heterogeneous socio-material networks of “human” and “non-human” elements that become relevant and are put to work within security practices; the distributed work of the assemblages and their elements contributes to enacting the state and political subjects. I use the term assemblage to question the relevance of unstable and yet prominent dichotomous categories of private versus public, state versus non-state, citizen versus non-citizen, and, indeed, human versus non-human. I emphasize that objects and technologies are often the elements that hold these assemblages together. Depending on the specific security practice, in Nairobi I found that these assemblages enroll police, private security companies and guards, residents and their associations, neighborhood policing organizations and a multitude of objects and technologies.

Security is one among many possible entries to explore how the state and political subjects are formed through the same set of practices. As the reactions to the Westgate Mall attack show, however, security practices can have a totalizing impacts on everyday lives and activities. While healthcare, public transport, education or the provision of utilities could also provide useful entry points to investigate such processes, focusing on security is an especially salient way to learn about the state and political subjectification. This is especially the case given that ideas about the monopoly of legitimate violence have long been central to theories of statehood. In his work on the emergence of European states, Tilly (1985) argues that the ability to provide security and protection allowed for the long-term historical formation of nation-states. Tilly shows that state formation is a process of war making and that the European nation-states are the heirs to gangs and piracy groups that grew dominant over time through violent means. Violence and the provision of security against violence, Tilly argues, remain daily activities for contemporary states. In his historical interpretation, he highlights how security provision is the crucial activity by which victorious groups strive to protect their members, not only from internal enemies but also from external competitors and other contenders for power. Translating

Tilly's historical analysis to an analysis of contemporary states, Davis (2010) speaks of "patterns of commitment." She suggests that, amidst the uncertainty of urban residents about which group is likely to guarantee security or inflict harm, "a wide range of non-state armed actors [have] organized around overlapping and territorially diverse networks of commitment and coercion." These groups, she argues, are both the product and producers "of the changing nature of states and sovereignty" (2010: 399-400). Although policing and protection are historically contingent practices entangled in processes of "doing the state" (Bierschenk, 2014: 240), the state should not be reduced to these functions, with the police seen as the institution that carries out the state's monopoly on force (Bierschenk, 2016: 155). Rather, as Bierschenk (2014: 229) shows for West Africa, the state is a "heterogeneous, if not fragmented, building site."

Through its focus on security, this dissertation contributes to scholarly debates on the formation – or as Bierschenk (2014) puts it, on the "doing" – of the state and its entanglements with processes of political subjectification. I approach these issues from the vantage point of security practices and the socio-material assemblages that they mobilize, and ask the following research questions:

How is the state formed through socio-material security practices? What kind of political subjects are formed through these processes?

To answer these questions, I draw on ethnographic fieldwork, secondary historical sources and media analysis. Between 2015 and 2017, I lived in Nairobi for one year in two upper-middle class neighborhoods in the city's northwestern districts, which informed my way of understanding security. As I describe later on in this chapter, during this period, I conducted participant observations and interviews with police, residents and residents' organizations, private security companies and various other stakeholders. I also "followed" security on various media and in sector conferences and fairs in Nairobi.

Drawing on this material and bringing together debates from political an-

thropology and STS, I argue that the state is enacted, continuously and relationally, through security practices and the assemblages they put to work. In the same process, these security practices enact different political subjects. People are variously categorized as dangerous or in need of protection, and as (not) belonging.

Objects and Subjects of State Enactments

This dissertation focuses on “enactments” of the state,⁵ foregrounding the socio-material assemblages that are crucial to processes of state formation. While my analysis often privileges the role of objects and artifacts, security practices enroll people and objects symmetrically and are socio-materially heterogeneous. In academic debates about the state, scholars who debunk the idea of the state as an a-historical stable entity also often foreground the role of various (state and non-state) actors and of everyday activities as sites where the state is enacted. Here I show how such activities, specifically those that concern security, are not shaped by people alone but that objects and technologies intervene in, and mediate, these processes. Analytically privileging objects as elements of socio-material assemblages highlights the “political work” they do – i.e. their contribution to enacting specific political subjects.

5 When analyzing the “enactment” of the state and political subjects, I draw on analytical language with specific histories. Terms such as “performing,” “bringing into being” or “bringing into existence,” “constituting” and “enacting” have all been used to “ad-duce a form of scepticism about essentialism” and the pre-existence of entities (Woolgar & Neyland, 2013: 261). In the social sciences and humanities, such anti-essentialist sentiments have encouraged thick and diverse theorizations of performativity that foreground the relevance of doing as a way of producing a reality (Butler, 1988; Mol, 1999). Butler, inspired by Foucault, describes performativity as “that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains” (Butler, 2011: 2). In my analysis, I draw on the analytical tool of enactment, as introduced by Mol (1999). This term, while informed by similar concerns as Butler’s “performance,” tries to do away with some of performativity’s problematic theoretical heritage. More specifically, it distances itself from a theatrical understanding of social life divided between a front and a (more real) back stage, where actors perform on the front stage for a specific audience (Goffman, 1959) and where objects

“The State” in Anthropological Analysis

Mentions of “the state” often evoke images of a distant and yet far-reaching, powerful and invasive bureaucratic machine. The state has been imagined as embodied in the sovereign and as a “thing” that can be visualized and located both somewhere and nowhere. In the political philosophies of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, “the state” assumes an idealized status, the only rational way to organize social life. Although with greater nuance, the Westphalian state in the works of Weber and Marx also appears as an a priori of political life. In addition, seeing the state as a homogenous or anthropomorphic entity emphasizes the rights and responsibilities of the state vis-à-vis its citizens/subjects (and vice versa) as well as between states. Politics or the possibility of being political exists exclusively in relation to such states. Conceiving of the state in this way fuels assessments of how well actual states adhere to these normative ideals, whether they are “weak” or have “failed” or “collapsed” (cf. Call, 2008; Helman & Ratner, 1992; Zartman, 1995). As such rankings rely on measures standardized on European or Western experience, many former colonial states, unsurprisingly, do poorly.

Such understandings of the state have been roundly criticized. Ethnographies of the state have sought to understand how everyday activities make the state come to life, both in its social representations or imaginaries and in its practices (cf. Gupta & Sharma, 2006). This has been consequential for understanding the state not as a pre-existing entity but as a process, for foregrounding *how* the state is made or “done” through the activities of everyday practical governance as well as the center of symbolic authority and power. Hansen and Stepputat specify these two dimensions of statehood as “languages of stateness” – distinguishing practical languages of gover-

risk being reduced to passive props in the actors’ intentional hands. By contrast, talking of enactment helps to foreground the socio-material assemblages that are enrolled in the performing (Mol, 2002). Deploying “enactment” as my tool of choice, I use its verbal form in the passive voice (as far as English grammar allows). In this way, I want to emphasize how it is through the diffuse work of the assemblages, i.e. through policing and security practices, that the state and political subjects are enacted, because objects and people never (en)act alone (cf. Abrahamsson et al., 2015).

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nance from symbolic languages of authority – which combine and co-exist in processes of state formation (2001: 5-10). These two languages of stateness combine and co-exist in everyday security practices that mobilize people and objects, achieving those socio-material effects that I refer to as enactments of the state.

Locating the enactment of the state in everyday practices compels us to approach these practices as sites of ethnographic exploration. In calling for an “ethnography of the state,” Trouillot argues that the state *is* a “set of practices and processes” and suggests that ethnographers “need to track down” these sets of practices, processes and their effects (2001: 131). In doing so, scholars are urged to approach their research “*without prejudice* about sites or forms of encounters” and “whether or not they coalesce around the central sites of national governments” (2001: 131, emphasis added). This dissertation builds on Trouillot’s identification of the state with a set of practices and processes producing specific effects. This approach, besides directing attention to the everyday practices of “doing the state” (Bierschenk, 2014: 240), allows for a plurality of sites and actors. The daily security activities in shopping malls or private residences and the meeting of private security officers, police and residents become sites and encounters where the state is enacted.

Gupta’s research in India demonstrates how through encounters between village residents and local government institutions, the state appears “decentralized and disaggregated.” Gupta shows how there is not an “Archimedean point from which to visualize the state” (2012: 104-105), and in his work, narratives of corruption and bureaucratic writing in government offices become everyday forms through which the state is imagined and made to act, although never as a unitary entity (cf. Bierschenk, 2014). Through interpersonal exchanges, for instance between engineers employed in a local district and members of the village council, or between bureaucrats and “lowly office workers” (Gupta, 2012: 146), the state is *made* through mundane activity. In the works of Gupta and other ethnographers of the state, these types of activities and practices become instances of state formation.

Following Trouillot, many political anthropologists now approach the state

without assuming it can only be located in or around national government sites or other state institutions. In their study of a maternal health project in India, for instance, Ferguson and Gupta (2002) illustrate the plurality of governance actors and how statehood is achieved through the work of local and transnational NGOs, and through what the authors call GONGOs (Government Organized NGOs) and BONGOs (Bank Organized NGOs). Although the practices of state formation are decentralized, disaggregated and localized, the state evokes images of verticality and encompassment (Ferguson & Gupta, 2002: 982). These are not mere metaphors but “commonsensical features” (2002: 994) of, and pervasive ideas about, the state as an institution above society, one that is simultaneously present in “ever widening series of circles that begins with family and local community and ends with the system of nation-states” (2002: 982). Much as Ferguson and Gupta’s organizations reproduce state verticality and encompassment, in my work, various types of organizations and people appropriate tasks that are “commonsensical” attributed to the state – i.e. the provision of security. Thus the work of private security officers and residents associations also produces Trouillot’s (2001) “state effects.” In the immediate and longer-term aftermath of the Westgate attack, security practices involving the police, residents and private security companies all contributed to enacting the state.

While the scholars discussed thus far all embrace Trouillot’s suggestion (2001) to shed prejudices about sites and forms of encounters when looking at the state, political anthropologists continue to privilege people, either as individuals or as collectives, as the dominant actors. They are the *makers*, *doers* and *performers* of the state (Gupta, 2012; Bierschenk, 2014; and specifically the nation-state for Buur, 2001), or of sovereignty (see e.g. Diphooorn, 2016a; Hansen, 2006). Although the sites and forms of encounters multiply and go beyond “governmental or national institutions” (Trouillot, 2001: 126), the *agents* of these encounters are consistently human actors. In contrast, I include objects and technologies as able to mediate⁶ processes of state en-

6 The idea of mediation, specifically for objects mediating social processes, has been taken up by various disciplines, at times highlighting important analytical differences that, as Mazzarella (2004) illustrates, come with their own specific concerns. Mazzarella’s

actment, symmetrically to human actors.

This is not to say that anthropologists of the state dismiss the non-human altogether. Objects and technologies appear in their ethnographies, usually for their symbolic meanings but rarely as primary empirical and analytical concerns. Trouillot (2001) begins his programmatic article with Nobel laureate Amartya Sen being refused entrance into Switzerland because his Indian passport did not contain a visa. To the border police, the passport symbolized a specific type of person: a holder who would typically become a dependent of the state. There are other examples. In Hansen and Step-putat's work, "buildings, monuments, letterheads, uniforms, road signs [and] fences" feature in their non-exhaustive list of "*symbolic languages of authority*" as "the materialization of the state in series of permanent *signs and rituals*" (2001: 8, emphases added). Anthropological works on security have likewise considered the symbolic importance of objects. For instance, Caldeira's (2000) study of walls in São Paulo, while acknowledging their physicality, foregrounds their symbolic and cultural relevance as forms of

suggestion is to attend to mediation ethnographically, to understand the process through which "we come to be who we are through the detour of something alien to ourselves" (2004: 356). In debates within STS and ANT (which I detail in the next section), mediation points to the act of changing the social world (Latour 2005: 38-39; cf. Mazzarella, 2004: 357), where the work of human and non-human entities to engender change does not depend on their more or less intentional actions. It is in this sense that I talk about "symmetry" between "human" and "non-human" entities. On this point, Latour warns us that it is not about establishing "absurd symmetry" between humans and non-humans: "[t]o be symmetric [...] simply means not to impose a priori some spurious asymmetry among human intentional action and a material world of causal relations" (Latour, 2005: 76). This underlines the potential of each element in a socio-material network to make a difference, to change the social world. Latour sarcastically argues that a computer (especially when it breaks down) might turn into a "horrendously complex mediator while a highly sophisticated panel during an academic conference may become a perfectly predictable and uneventful *intermediary* in rubber stamping a decision made elsewhere" (2005: 39, emphasis added; cf. Strum and Latour, 1987). Latour here distinguishes between "intermediaries" and "mediators." Intermediaries are "what transports meaning or force without transformation." Mediators are what "transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning of the elements they are supposed to carry" (2005: 39). As I show in Chapter 4 when I explore the work of various security technologies in Nairobi, this work lies not so much in intentions but rather in the capacity to make a difference – engendering a social change – and thus to mediate the enactment of the state and of political subjects.

class distinction that “confer status” (2000: 258) within a cultural-symbolic understanding of Brazilian and Paulistano society. Similarly, Diphorn (2015b; 2015c) focuses on cars, guns and security officers’ bodies, where especially the latter have symbolic capital in the masculinized culture of the security sector in South Africa.

Moving away from an understanding of objects as little more than symbols, recent ethnographic studies of bureaucratic practice have begun to focus on files, documents and maps in order to understand how states work. While he does not fully develop the argument, Gupta illustrates that for the bureaucrats he worked with, if something “is not in the file, it does not exist” (2012: 146), showing how files, bureaucratic forms and registers have the capacity to, indeed, make things exist. In a similar vein, Hull (2012) investigates the role of “graphic artifacts” in the urban planning of Islamabad and shows that artifacts shape the city’s governance. Acknowledging that anthropologists recognize that “things are signs, but until recently they have often ignored that signs are things,” Hull proposes to “analytically restore the visibility of documents” by looking *at*, rather than *through*, them (2012: 13). Borrowing insights from ANT and STS, he argues that maps and reports are efficacious “artifacts entangled in the prosaic documentary practices through which the city is constructed, regulated, and inhabited” (2012: 4). In his ethnography of Islamabad’s Capital Development Authority, Hull shows how tea, chairs and desks in the planning offices are “important mediator[s]” of social relations and hierarchies “not only between officers and ‘guests,’ but between officers and their staff” (2012: 75) and how visiting cards, slips of paper and official petitions “are central artifacts constituting political subjects” (2012: 88).

While the social sciences and humanities have long been interested in materiality, the specific contribution of STS is the notion that objects are as much a part of *the social* as their human counterparts (Latour, 2005). In the following subsection, I delve deeper into this body of work within STS, which can provide us with tools to understand how objects, technologies and what are often termed, as a form of shorthand, “non-human entities” mediate and intervene in enactments of the state and political subjects. I

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draw on these approaches to show that the objects mobilized in security practices – which may include, but go far beyond, formal bureaucratic documents – are not only political in their symbolic significance, but in the work they do in enacting the state and political subjects.

STS, Material Semiotics and Objects as Part of the Social

Following the Westgate attack, many objects and technologies contributed to further securing the mall and other spaces in Nairobi. Alongside the historically ubiquitous iron bars, barbed wire and electrified fences, other technologies entered Nairobi's security assemblages. These artifacts, I stress, not only have symbolic meaning but practical and political consequences. That scientific knowledge and technology have political and social consequences has been amply demonstrated within STS, with Latour's *The Pasteurization of France* (1993) being a crucial contribution. In tracing the emergence of the field of microbiology in France and Europe in the last decades of the 19th century, Latour argues that the "discovery" of microbes and the subsequent development of vaccines were deeply entangled with national and colonial politics, in which the wealth of a nation was linked to the health of its population and of its soldiery. The latter was especially urgent in light of military expeditions in which troops were decimated by deadly epidemics: when Napoleon sent the army to quell revolts in Santo Domingo in 1802, during the Crimean War between 1853 and 1856, and in the Madagascar expedition of 1896.

Latour argues that while Louis Pasteur was considered a scientific genius, his genius lay not so much in his mastery of biology as in his ability to mobilize and move through interests and disciplines. The achievement of the Pasteurians (because Pasteur did not act alone) lay in their ability to synchronize medical, hygiene, economic and military interests by enrolling both permanent and field laboratories, their tools, procedures and lab-cultures where bacilli could be isolated. Alexandre Yersin employed these modes of operating when he was sent to Hong Kong in 1894 to investigate the bubonic plague, which was then threatening to cross the borders into French colonies. His ability (and Pasteur's) to isolate the bacilli was not so

much a discovery as *bringing the microbes into existence* – into a network of people, various disciplinary, economic and political interests, and laboratory and field technologies. It is the mastery of these networks that allowed medicine to change and to do the political work of securing French colonial territories and their populations. This happened through laboratory technologies able to bring microbes into existence. These were instances of colonial state enactments; this state was formed in part through the effects of security practices that enrolled colonial offices, military personnel and hygienists together with microbes, microbiology and laboratory devices.

Central to this literature is the move away from the idea that science discovers realities that are already out there, towards an understanding of science and technology as *producing* realities, objects and concerns. Mol's (2002) ethnography of the everyday diagnosis and treatment of atherosclerosis in a Dutch hospital is a case in point. Mol mobilizes a familiar STS point when she argues that the specific knowledge and technologies involved in the investigation of a reality – in her case, a disease – are not independent of the activity of knowing it. She goes further, however, by showing that atherosclerosis is enacted differently in different settings. In the clinic, the disease often manifests itself as “pain when walking” (2002: 54). Atherosclerosis is also the cracking sound aortas make when artery samples from an amputated limb are cut with the pathologist's surgical scissors. And through the Doppler apparatus, the disease is the sound that the blood makes when it flows at different pressures through the patient's ankle. All of these socio-material practices involve people (doctors, patients, relatives, laboratory analysts) as well as tools, techniques and knowledge that together lead to various ways of dealing with the disease. Mol shows that all these different versions of the disease still hang together as a whole – “more than one, but less than many” (2002: 55) – and that the enactment of reality is a relational and practical achievement that involves a variety of (never pre-determined) objects. Whereas Latour's reality is a stable one (even in light of the processes involved in enacting it), Mol shows that reality is multiple and keeps being done relationally. The state, enacted through socio-material security practices, is such a relational achievement as well: not a pre-existing reality, but one whose enactment is entangled with processes aimed at investigat-

ing it, as I discuss further in the following section on method assemblage.

Translating classic STS concerns to a governance audience, Woolgar and Neyland suggest thinking of governance “based on a form of ontological politics” (2013: 21). Their aim is to highlight “practices and processes whereby objects and entities are apprehended as things of the world, and whereby their identities and attributes would give rise to relations of governance and accountability” (2013: 21). Rather than examining the structure of organizations involved in governing, their understanding sees governance as the co-constitution of reciprocal relations between people and objects. Accordingly, the imaginaries, objects, tools and technological devices enrolled in Nairobi’s security practices not only express or symbolize such governance relations, but *make* them, in the process contributing to enacting the state and categories of people as (not) belonging.

Highlighting the relationality of security technologies and objects means that they are not politically relevant in and of themselves. Rather, their political salience emerges through the assemblages they are part of, where techniques, know-how and ideas about who is dangerous and who is not are mobilized. When I foreground the materiality of objects and technologies, I have in mind a “*relational* materialism” because objects (and people like Pasteur) “never act alone” (Abrahamsson et al., 2015: 15, emphasis in the original).

While objects and people exist before certain categorizations, a specific way of being in the world (in relation to security, danger, etc.) emerges with the socio-material (and historical) networks they are part of. Neyland, writing on how everyday objects become terror threats, suggests that due to the relations mundane objects have with other entities – like a bottle of water passing through an airport security check – they shift “from an ordinary and everyday matter to a matter of concern.” Neyland thus argues that objects’ identities are “the upshot of the network of relationships in which they are entangled” (2008: 35). Similarly, when I talk about *security objects* or *security*

technologies,⁷ I emphasize their association and entanglement with security practices. Thus, objects and technologies become security objects or security technologies once they are mobilized in a security practices. In the next section I turn to how categories of political subjects similarly emerge within the same socio-material relations.

Political Subjectification

Thinking of objects and people symmetrically means that both need to be apprehended through the political work and consequences they entail. Heterogeneous security assemblages and the practices that make them work – the empirical focus of my research – symmetrically enroll objects and people. Similarly to what Neyland (2008) argues about objects becoming a matter of concern, people are enacted as specific subjects in relation to the socio-material assemblages they are enrolled in. As such, the work these assemblages afford is one of subjectification, which involves the state effects identified by Trouillot (2001). Enactments of the state and of political subjects are thus two sides of the same coin.

When Trouillot argues that “an ethnography of the state can and should capture [state] effects” (2001: 132), he identifies four effects, all concerned

7 Fixing an a priori distinction between what is a security object and what is a security technology might be problematic as these two categories depend on the network in which they are enrolled. Yet I propose some (unstable) definitions. With the term “technology,” I aim to highlight an object’s previous associations with security which come from earlier enrollments, for instance in a production network concerned with security provision. An example could be an alarm system or a CCTV camera. When I use the term “object,” I highlight associations with security that are specifically contingent on the security practices I analyze, and in which the object is mobilized. While the same object could be a technology, my emphasis on its object-ness highlights that its associations with security are not derived, for instance, from its design or production process. An example could be the vehicles of private security companies, to which I turn more specifically in Chapter 3. They become security objects once they are bought by and mobilized in the work of – for example – private security companies. Through the process of enrolling a car into a security practice in order to achieve a specific goal (e.g. patrolling large territories), it becomes a security object. I would refer to it as a security technology only if this goal had been “designed in.”

with the emergence of subjects: an “isolation effect,” an “identification effect,” a “legibility effect” and a “spatialization effect” (2001: 126). The first three are concerned, respectively, with the production of atomized and individualized subjects, the realignment of these subjects into collectivities, and the creation of a language of governance as well as tools to classify and regulate collectivities. The fourth effect is the production of spatial boundaries and jurisdictions (2001: 126), for Trouillot the only effect that formal state apparatuses are unlikely to relinquish (2001: 133).

The emergence of specific categories of subjects – how “subjects are gradually, progressively, really and materially constituted through a multiplicity of organisms, forces, energies, materials, desires, thoughts, etc.” is central to the socio-historical work of Foucault (1980: 97). Foucault’s concerns here are picked up by Hacking, who argues that specific categories of personhood, of ways of existing in the world, “come into being” only once certain distinctions are made (2002: 113). For example, categorizing people as “perverts” only became possible after a certain set of behaviors were labeled as “perversions.” While “there have been odd people at all times,” apprehending them as a specific group of “diseased” persons came with the identification of certain actions as a “disease” (Hacking, 2002: 99-100). Latour similarly notes that “there is no relevant group [...] that can be used as an incontrovertible starting point” (2005: 29) for social analysis. He advises the “sociologist of association” to examine *how* groups are “being made or unmade” as there are no a priori groups, but “only group formation” (2005: 27).

Latour’s discussion of Pasteur’s microbes that we encountered above suggests that the interesting question is not whether microbes existed before the Pasteurian revolution, but how they are enacted in specific sites and situations, e.g. through the hygienist movement and laboratory practices as they relate to the social, political, economic and military concerns of 19th-century France. Similarly, my aim is not to determine whether dangerous subjects existed before and independently of specific security practices, but to understand how specific subjects are enacted, and more specifically, how they are enacted as *political* subjects in relation to socio-material security practices.

Calling subjects “political” emphasizes that processes of subjectification are entangled with differences in power and resources, and that differentiated belonging fuels discriminatory practices. By tracing the specificity of political subjects within security practices, I show how enacted ways of (non-) belonging shift across time and space. But the subjects that emerge through the security practices I study are genealogically related to others. Processes of subjectification re-mobilize categories that remind of others in Nairobi’s past or that are tied to specific socio-economic, labor and ethno-racial concerns.

Ong (1996) specifically addresses *political subject-ification*, or subject-making, in her study of how Asian immigrants in the US were caught between culturally specific practices and hegemonic and homogenizing governmental categorizations. Ong’s work on political subjectification is analytically concerned with how these processes relate to citizenship, which she describes as a process of “self-making and being-made within webs of power” (1996: 738). In a similar vein, Isin’s study of citizenship through historical processes of subjectification foregrounds the reciprocal alterity displayed by various subjects. He argues that these engender different forms of belonging, thus giving rise to different *ways of being political*. Isin argues that historical processes such as stigmatization, marginalization, heroization, ritualization, racialization, professionalization and universalization combine in ways that render different categories of people “strangers,” “outsiders” or “aliens” to specific communities (2002: 1-51). Conversely, those who cannot be thus characterized emerge as “citizens.”⁸ Similarly, this dissertation seeks to understand what kinds of political subjects emerge through the daily practices of providing security in Nairobi.

8 Some of the issues that I highlight when addressing processes of political subjectification overlap with concerns discussed in citizenship studies, in which Ong and Isin are key scholars. Another major exponent in these debates is Holston, who talks of “differentiated citizenship” in Brazil (2009): the contradictions between universally inclusive formal membership in the nation-state and massive inequalities in terms of education, property, race, gender and occupation. Holston argues that these two regimes coexist “unhappily and dangerously” (2009: 253), highlighting contradictory modes of being a citizen. The category of “citizen,” then, is not only a specific way of being political, but a collective subjectivity internally differentiated in relation to various socio-material assemblages.

Chapter 1

In the same way that security provides an entry point to analyze enactments of the state, studying security practices allows us to see how the subjects they enact are political. Security practices – from those put in place for the reopening of Westgate Mall to those found across Nairobi and indeed the world – aim to distinguish between people and objects that are dangerous or safe, on this basis granting or denying them access to malls, offices, flights and much else. Constructions of safety and danger thus inform who belongs to a given space and who does not, who deserves protection and who must be excluded and removed.

The influence of material infrastructures and technologies on the security and surveillance practices of large populations has been highlighted by a variety of neo-Foucauldian analyses, within and beyond STS (e.g. Lyon, 1994). In this work, Bentham's notion of the Panopticon often serves to illustrate the socio-material arrangements of disciplinary power (Foucault, 1977; cf. Božovič, 1995) and how these affect the enactment of specific subjects. Recent work on wars, crime, European borders and terrorism foregrounds how tracking technologies are used to identify "legitimate" targets of force and violence (Suchman et al., 2017), how, in the post 9/11 era, transactional data are used to identify "terrorists" (Amoore & De Goede, 2008), or how facial recognition technologies are deployed to identify frequent shoplifters in supermarkets (Grommé, 2012). While case studies often focus on the consequences of highly specialized technologies, more mundane and unspectacular artifacts such as cars, gates and the nightsticks of private security guards – and the socio-material practices in which they are deployed – similarly contribute to enacting political subjects.

Security practices in Nairobi identify individuals as dangerous or not, placing them into collective categories such as "criminals" and "residents in need of protection." But security practices do not point to pre-existing ways of ordering the social world; they produce languages, knowledge and tools to manage, classify and regulate collectivities. Like Hacking's discussion of "perverts" and "perversion," this does not mean that violent people who robbed or killed others did not exist before ways of classifying them emerged. It rather points to the fact that grouping people in specific cate-

gories like “murderers,” “terrorists” or “thugs” is contingent on specific socio-material, historically shaped practices that produce them as dangerous subjects, and that these categories are not natural but relational achievements. As such, they are specific to the socio-material assemblages through which they are enacted, together with other subject positions (like the various categories of victims), objects, technologies, security concerns and their power, economic, social and material relations.

“Knowing” Socio-Material Security Assemblages

Similarly to how microbes were enacted through the work of the Pasteur(ians), enactments of the state and political subjects through socio-material security practices in Nairobi are not antecedent to being investigated. They are necessarily entangled with my own research activities, sensitivities and analytical toolbox, since any form of inquiry *produces* its objects of knowledge (Mol, 2002). In this section, I take seriously the implications of working within an assemblage approach and detail how the process of security practices enacting the state and political subjects emerges as the object of knowledge in this dissertation. My personal ideas about what security practices were before fieldwork and my personal and professional acquaintances influenced where I went to look for “security” in Nairobi. My interdisciplinary academic training and analytical sensibilities prompted me to take security practices as cases of state enactment and political subjectification. Yet this is not to reduce the importance of fieldwork and my learning process about the imaginaries of criminals, cooperation between private security companies and police, or the various technologies that are changing security practices in Nairobi.

My ideas, training, sensibilities and the disciplinary heritage of ethnographic research are part of what John Law calls a “method assemblage” (2004: 13-14). The term implies that any method foregrounds its own “hinterland,” made of pre-existing social and material conditions of possibility. The term assemblage, translated from the French “agencement” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), has seen various interpretations, re-definitions and reductions since its introduction into English-language academic debate (e.g. Abrahamsen &

Williams, 2009; Anderson & McFarlane, 2011; DeLanda, 2006; Latour, 2005). In this dissertation I use “assemblage” as a descriptive tool that helps me grasp a reality that might seem to be independent and prior to the process of knowing it (Law, 2004). By associating the term with “method,” Law tries to reveal its potential of “*craft[ing] complexities and simplifications*” (Law, 2004: 107, emphasis in the original). Like a radio receiver or a gong, a method is scripted to resonate and amplify chosen wavelengths, patterns and fluxes. A method simultaneously produces presences and absences as it *others* something to make something else visible.

In studying security practices in Nairobi, my attitude during fieldwork, my background, interests, white skin and the fact that I am not a native English speaker – together with my interlocutors’ attitudes and interests – all played a role in producing presences and absences, complexities and simplifications. When I approached a community policing group in a largely “Asian” neighborhood, an area I call Forestgrounds, I was denied access to patrol cars at one point because I was not part of the “greater Asian community,” and on another occasion, because of insurance issues. In another neighborhood, the security delegate of the residents’ association and I were both Italian; we spoke the same native language and immediately got along over a familiar Sunday lunch. While I was able to register some of these elements that contributed to producing presences and absences, I know I missed many others. Rather than negating a reality and an “out-thereness” of things altogether (Law, 2004), I want to foreground how my research on state enactments and political subjectification is partial and contingent on my own particular engagements with socio-material security practices in Nairobi.⁹

9 In suggesting this, I am trying to avoid what Haraway calls “the god trick of seeing everything from nowhere” (1988: 581). I seek to avoid the trick of approaching the state as a natural, homogeneous and stable entity, as if it could be seen from nowhere, independent from previous theoretical engagements with it. In Haraway’s reworking of her original text (1991) we find the suggestion that “only partial perspective promises objective vision. This is an objective vision that initiates, rather than closes off, the problem of responsibility for the generativity of all visual practices” (1991: 190). Haraway’s warning connects to Law’s suggestion (2004) that we be wary of approaching reality according to a “primitive version of out-thereness” with its “commitments to independence, anteriority, singularity and defi-

The socio-material security assemblages that I detail in this dissertation take shape through my own research process and its “method assemblage.” As such, they are necessarily *made for* a specific analysis; they have been “distorted into clarity” (Law, 2004: 2) in order to learn about the state and processes of political subjectification. Yet it does not invalidate the suggestion, following scholars like Tilly (1985), that security is an especially salient case to learn about the state and political subjects. In Haraway’s terms, the commitment is not towards a transcendent objectivity that splits the subject and object of knowledge, but towards a “situated knowledge” that “allows us [the researchers] to become answerable for what we learn how to see” (Haraway, 1988: 583). As part of the same (method) assemblage, the analysis of my empirical material and the writing of this dissertation are entangled with enactments of the state and processes of political subjectification.

Research Methods

In the same way that security offers an exceptionally good entry point to study enactments of the state and political subjectification, Nairobi is particularly well-suited to examine security assemblages. Kenya’s private security sector employs between 400,000 and 500,000 security guards, compared to around 90,000 police personnel. Sales managers within private security companies often described the Kenyan market for security technologies as an “empty playing field.” For instance, one of my interlocutors, Jackson, a sales manager at a large security company, was confident that he could propose any technological solution for a handsome price and eventually find a client for it. This offer for security services unfolds in a capital city that in the 1990s was dubbed “Nairobbery,” highlighting the concern among residents and visitors about crime and urban danger. While nicknames such as Nairobbery might associate criminality with the city’s large underclass, recent terror attacks place Nairobi at the center of concerns about security

nitiness” (2004: 140). This assumes a critical realist position as its default, suggesting an external, single – real – reality and an objectivity that, though not necessarily sought after, is still regarded as a good to cherish: a reality prior to the process of knowing it that could, potentially though not actually, be inferred, triangulated and seen from nowhere.

and crime beyond Kenya and Africa, and beyond pickpocketing, carjacking, house invasions and localized violent crimes. The presence of diverse security concerns – beyond pre-existing definitions of what these entail – creates fertile ground for studying how they are addressed.

This dissertation draws mostly on one year of ethnographic fieldwork in middle and upper-class¹⁰ neighborhoods in Nairobi, geographically located in the northwest of the city. The class geography of the city can be seen (with exceptions) on an east-west line. The eastern neighborhoods mainly house low-income African residents; the city center is the business district; and moving westwards there are middle and higher income neighborhoods. Upper-class pockets are surrounded by middle-class areas or are set in the south-western or north-western fringes of the city. Clearly connected to Nairobi's colonial management (see next chapter), ethno-racial categories intersect with class. While the overwhelming majority of residents in the eastern low-income areas are Africans, the middle-class areas house Africans, Asian communities that moved to Nairobi during and after colonial times, and an ever-growing community of “expats” who live and work in Nairobi. I observed wealth to be the key to residing in these upper-class areas.

I conducted participant observation in Nairobi's middle and upper class neighborhoods, focusing on everyday activities concerned with security, policing and/or protection. In general, all these sites involved police, private

¹⁰ In this dissertation I use of the terms “upper-middle class” and “wealthy” or “rich” somewhat interchangeably. I realize that used in this way, “class” is a simplification. In her study of Nairobi's rising middle-class of young professionals, Spronk (2014) argues that “middle-classness” is a signifying cultural practice that mobilizes more than financial resources and economic indicators. Spronk shows how class in Nairobi is connected to ethnic imaginaries negotiated and contested within family relations, education, career choices, urbanity, ambitions, and self-perceptions of being modern, sophisticated and successful young professionals. To these I would be comfortable adding other signifying cultural practices related to the use of and access to private security or, as I show in Chapter 3, the ability to negotiate the presence of police officers in one's neighborhood. During my fieldwork, interlocutors and friends alike referred to the neighborhoods where I conducted research as middle-class or upper-class, wealthy or rich. I realize that these labels might have been provoked by the specificity of my empirical interest in private security companies and their employees, and it is for this reason only that I keep using them interchangeably.

security companies, residents in various capacities and other stakeholders. I consistently relied on more or less formalized interviews, on (new and old) media sources, and official documents addressing issues of security in Nairobi. I concentrated this participant observation in three large Nairobi neighborhoods that I refer to by the pseudonyms of Forestgrounds, Greenwoods and Highsprings.¹¹ I have given these neighborhoods and my interlocutors aliases in order to protect their identities. My twelve months of fieldwork consisted of an initial eight-month stretch in 2015, followed by one month in 2016¹² and three months from late 2016 through early 2017. My main fieldwork activities consisted of regular participant observation in private security patrol cars, through which I got to know the members of Mobile Response Teams (MRT) from three different companies. Before being allowed to follow the teams, I participated in a week-long training that the MRT members usually undertake. I followed them in their 12-hour day shifts and in what felt like even longer night shifts. On these occasions I observed teams responding to alarm activations, which most of the time were false alarms. As I detail further in Chapter 3, some teams regularly hosted police personnel, with whom they jointly patrolled their area of operations. In one neighborhood, I “hung out” with private security guards whose tasks were mostly to open and close gates, allowing wanted visitors in and keeping unwanted people out of apartment compounds and gated communities. I also attended resident association meetings in these neighborhoods, which often focused on security issues.

Living in the same upper-middle class neighborhoods where I did my fieldwork allowed me to go beyond incessantly asking security guards questions about what, how and why (or why not) they were doing what they were doing. Residing in the neighborhood allowed me to go beyond observing se-

11 I will introduce each neighborhood in more detail over the course of the dissertation.

12 During part of this one-month stay in 2016, I was involved with a larger research team in a policy-oriented project on plural security. Conducted within a network aiming to strengthening security for urban citizens by informing policy and practice, its case studies included Nairobi, Beirut and Tunis. More information can be found at <http://pluralsecurityinsights.org/>. For an elaboration on the Nairobi case, see Price et al. (2016).

curity personnel in their daily tasks of taking care of *someone else's* security; they were taking care of my own security as well. My immediate living environment also meant that I absorbed my fellow residents' concerns about the omnipresence of thugs and the trust many put in technological solutions, from barbed wire to digital alarms. Curiously, my reaction was to start "thinking like a thug" or a "terrorist": "What would it take to breach this window and enter the house?" "How could I bring a truck-load of home-made fertilizer explosive into this shopping mall?" Or, less ambitiously, "would I be able to slip into the shopping mall with a metallic object or a small folding knife?" Such questions helped me to think in terms of the material, social and political consequences that follow the various technologies and objects deployed to protect middle and upper class spaces in Nairobi.

Alongside participant observation, I conducted numerous interviews, whose topics list was variously structured in advance. 42 of them took place in settings that could be described as formal. These and many more informal interviews were conducted with guards, residents, police officers, managers and owners of security companies as well as representatives of various organizations such as the national association of residents' associations and the Kenya Private Sector Alliance (KEPSA), whose work is related to security in Kenya and Nairobi. The interviews offered me the opportunity to explore security issues beyond the sites of my participant observation. Neighborhoods, of course, are not airtight containers, with objects, ideas, police, guards and cars, and domestic workers moving between them. Keeping this in mind, my visits to other neighborhoods threw into sharper relief how things were done in the main sites of my fieldwork. Such visits and my daily routines – chatting with security guards manning the gate, interacting with neighbors at the corner kiosk, collecting, reading and analyzing the daily newspapers – proved important methods to learn about the security assemblages in Nairobi and their impact on state enactments and political subjectification. In this sense what I did, what I expected, felt¹³ and experienced; the responses of my interlocutors; and the context where all of this

13 See Diphoorn (2013) for an elaborate discussion of the role of emotion in participant observation.

took place were part of my method assemblage. As such, it crafted complexities and simplifications, produced empirical material that was “distorted into clarity” (Law, 2004: 2) so that I can now talk about state enactments and political subjectification.

The Chapters

In the remainder of this dissertation, I pursue the questions that guided my fieldwork and analysis. In four consecutive chapters, I show how the state and political subjects are enacted through security practices that put to work the dynamic and often unstable elements of Nairobi’s socio-material security assemblage. People, together with objects and technologies, symmetrically contribute to these processes through which some categories of people, past and present, are enacted as not belonging to different if overlapping communities: households, neighborhoods, the city and the nation. To highlight the role of “non-human entities” in enacting the state and political subjects, each chapter foregrounds a particular set of objects and technologies and the political work they do within their relations with other objects and people.

Chapter 2, by focusing on the role of objects and technologies in Kenya’s past security assemblages, provides historical context to my current research and offers a genealogical account of enactments of the state and processes of political subjectification. I ask: *How have objects and technologies in Nairobi’s past contributed to more recent enactments of the state and political subjectification?* The chapter recounts how the coming of the railway enabled the colonization of East Africa, giving rise to polities that had not previously existed as well as a political order where internal differentiations between subjects who belonged and those who did not find genealogical referents in today’s Kenya. The technology of barbed wire, still widespread in Nairobi, was enlisted in the colonial management of an entire ethnic group whose members were collectively detained in their own villages and criminalized as rebels. Passes and other material markers such as skin color and dreadlocks (worn by freedom fighters in the 1950s and some Mungiki members in the 1990s) were repeatedly mobilized in processes that enacted some people

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as in need of protection and others as dangerous. The two processes of state enactment and political subjectification emerge as entangled, showing how contemporary political subjects are genealogically related to those in Nairobi's past. While thinking in terms of genealogy and assemblages helps us to avoid seeing contemporary enactments of the state and political subjects as causally determined by the past, it also warns against seeing these processes as unrelated. In addressing the genealogies of states and political subjects, I point to the logics and rationalities underlying their past enactments, which reappear in contemporary security practices as simultaneously stable and unstable fragments.

Chapter 3 details the cooperation between police, resident associations and private security companies. This cooperation takes shape in joint patrols, with armed police officers riding in private security vehicles on both day and night shifts. I ask: *How is the Kenyan state enacted through policing partnerships that enroll various objects?* I pay particular attention to the political consequences of enrolling these specific objects in these arrangements. Thinking of cars and guns in relation to policing, the state and political subjects, I show how residents' expectations of the state as a security provider must be materially enabled by the residents themselves, in co-operation with private security companies. By analyzing these arrangements, I show how the state and specific political subjects are achieved relationally. The practices that mobilize these elements simultaneously enact the Kenyan state and the residents as subjects who are worthy of extra protection.

Chapter 4 focuses on the technological artifacts deployed in Nairobi's security practices. Alarm systems, barbed and electric wire fencing, cameras and so on often hold specific security assemblages together and inform the everyday routines of security provision. I ask: *What type of threatening and non-threatening subjects are enacted through various security technologies, and how?* The intervention of technologies in processes of political subjectification mediates and translates the enactment of different subjects. Objects and subjects are reciprocally defined in specific security practices that bring together technologies, residents, commercial and residential spaces, technicians, security guards, and implicit assumptions about danger and danger-

ous people. By focusing on the subjects and their relation to technologies and artifacts, this chapter reveals the specific political work that security devices and objects do to distinguish between threatening subjects and what I call citizen subjects.

Chapter 5 turns to how residents and private security officers use material markers such as dreadlocks, skin color and clothing style in order to identify three – seemingly ubiquitous – urban dangerous types: the “inside job,” “al-Shabaab” and “the thug.” While each has its own specificities, these three dangerous types share similarities. I ask: *How do material markers become markers of danger and contribute to the categorization of specific groups of people as criminal?* The certainty that inside jobs, al-Shabaab and thugs abound, lurking and ready to strike, is often in stark contrast to the uncertainty over how to recognize them. Crucially, the identification of someone as a dangerous type usually happens *ex post facto*, after a criminal act has been carried out or someone has been extra-judicially killed or accused as a “suspected” criminal. Those identified as dangerous or criminal tend to be part of certain groups of people: domestic workers for the inside job, African young men living in poor urban settlements for the thug, and Muslim Somalis living in Eastleigh for the al-Shabaab. Through the repetitive identification of the dangerous types with people from these distinct groups, the markers they share shift meaning from an ethno-racial, class, gender or space realm to that of danger and criminality. Through this process, groups of people become collectively criminalized and enacted as not fully belonging to households, neighborhoods, the city or the nation. While they are insiders to each of these communities, they are made to be outsiders, strangers and something other-than-citizens.

The conclusion briefly summarizes my arguments by building on insights from each of the chapters, outlining their mutual relations and their contributions to answering the main research questions. In an attempt at coordinating the various modes in which the state and political subjects are enacted in the different chapters, the conclusion suggests four fields of attention that thread through the entire dissertation: *identification of danger, spatiality and mobility, violence, and labor relations*. Across the substantially

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different cases analyzed in the various chapters, these fields of attention emphasize common patterns and stable recurrences in the enactments of the state and political subjects. In the conclusion's final pages, I tease out the lessons learnt and suggest how my arguments about the state and political subjects as enactments of a (security) assemblage might extend beyond the specific conditions from which they emerged.