Enacting the state through security assemblages

Materiality, technology and political subjectification in Nairobi

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Publication date
2019
Document Version
Other version
License
Other

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Colona, F. (2019). *Enacting the state through security assemblages: Materiality, technology and political subjectification in Nairobi*. [Thesis, fully internal, Universiteit van Amsterdam].

Chapter 2

Genealogies of Danger and Belonging

At the break of dawn of April 24, 1954, British military vehicles rolled into Nairobi and cordoned many of the city's suburbs. As Anderson (2011) narrates,[1] Nairobi's Eastlands, an area that extends eastwards from the city center, swarmed with military, police, the home guard (a British loyalist group of Africans) and King's African Rifle battalions. All public transportation that was scheduled to leave town was suspended, and no Africans were allowed to exit or enter the closed-off neighborhoods. Operation Anvil, the name this endeavor was eventually given, is one of the most notorious moments in Nairobi's colonial past. In this episode the colonial state was made present in its full brutality at the urban scale. In particular, the operation, launched about a year and a half after the declaration of the state of emergency in 1952, gave special powers to the Governor and the military to fight the Mau Mau, a land and freedom movement connected mainly to the Kikuyu ethnic group. Nairobi, and especially the Eastlands of the city, were put under siege by all security forces, while the military and the home guard cracked down on (suspected) Mau Mau members. During the operation, entire neighborhoods were cordoned. Barbed wire surrounded areas with higher Kikuyu populations or considered most sympathetic to the Mau Mau. Armored vehicles were stationed at the main roads together with gun trucks. Residents had to provide five different documents at checkpoints: their employment registration card, history of employment, identity card, poll-tax receipt, and Kikuyu Special Tax receipt. Not being able to provide one of them raised

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1   The episode that I describe in the initial section of this chapter is mainly a reconstruction from Anderson (2011: 200-211). Other sources are original footage from https://www.britishpathe.com/video/operation-anvil-in-nairobi/query/Kenya, historical exhibitions with photographs that I came across during my fieldwork, the permanent exhibition at the Nairobi Gallery and a temporary exhibition at the Nairobi National Museum.

immediate suspicion and often translated into detention without trial. Tens of thousands of Kikuyus were detained, many of whom were moved into the Langata camp, a freshly built mass prison at the southwest outskirts of the city. As historical footage shows, in Langata prison camp barbed wire fences and coils, armored vehicles, and caged trucks created obligatory paths where files of detainees walked through and towards further screenings and interrogations. Informants, known by the name of "gikunia" (Figure 1), advised the British officials in their interviewing process. They were British loyalists, often Kikuyus themselves who lived in the same neighborhoods Operation Anvil targeted. During the consultations they wore a full body hood that concealed their identities while they leaned to "whisper into the ear of European officers" (Anderson, 2011: 202). The material arrangements of barbed wire and military vehicles allowed orderly lines of detainees to walk pass in front of the screening committees where further interrogations took place. This material arrangement allowed the gikunia to single out individuals and express their opinions of individual suspects under the protection of the white hoods that concealed their identities. British officials took their opinions as conclusive, as suggested by the mass arrests without trial.

The short reconstruction of this historical episode raises questions about the various objects involved in events concerning the colonial state, security, and the categorization of specific groups of people as criminals. It highlights the dramatic political consequences of the work objects and technologies do. With these concerns in mind, in this chapter I draw on existing research on specific episodes in Nairobi's history, in some cases supplemented with my own analysis of historical sources. I engage with this historical research, first, to emphasize the crucial role that material arrangements, objects, and technologies – such as wire, cars, and documents – have played in managing security issues across different historicaly periods. Secondly, my reading of these secondary sources illuminates how security practices are and have always been entangled with processes that enact the state and categorize groups of residents as criminal/dangerous or – conversely – as in need of extra protection. In this chapter I ask: *How have objects and technologies in Nairobi's past contributed to more recent enactments of the state and political subjectification?*

Figure 1: Hooded gikunia. *Source: Anderson (2011, 279).*

Chapter 2

The specific episodes I draw on span the 20th century and beyond. I start with the construction of the Ugandan Railway that connected Mombasa to Nairobi and the technology of the train in the early 20th century. While the train was not just an isolated object or technology, but part of a socio-material assemblage, it was this train and the assemblage in which it was enrolled that arguably made the very existence of the British colonial empire in Kenya possible. At the same time it contributed to socially differentiating the various groups of people involved in the railway endeavor. I then move on to analyze a number of instances of urban segregation that occurred from the early 1900s until the 1930s as the products of an heterogeneous assemblage: laws and city bylaws, documents and passes, reports and police all contributed to discriminate Nairobi's residents through urban spaces and put them in ethno-racial categories, some of which came to be considered dangerous. As such, I argue, we can understand these practices and arrangements as processes of political subjectification, i.e. processes that contributed to the enactment of different subjects of the colonial state. During the 1950s, the fear of the Mau Mau rebellion was at its highest, and military operations were carried out throughout the country. I show how during this era, objects such as barbed wire and the dreadlocks worn by the freedom fighters were entangled in the practice of identifying and managing suspected rebels. Finally, I look at postcolonial state assassinations from the 1980s onwards to highlight the genealogical connection with colonial state practices and their relation to the collective criminalization of the Mungiki. Mungiki was a controversial organization that has been variously referred to as either a movement or a violent gang. Once more, dreadlocks became material markers used to identify people as dangerous and constitute them as criminal. I have selected these episodes as they clearly illustrate how heterogeneous socio-material assemblages, which symmetrically enroll people and objects, become instances of state enactment and – necessarily – processes of political subjectification.

Few issues have shaped Nairobi's and Kenya's past so consistently as that of security. The way the police and the military were mobilized in colonial Nairobi connects directly to Tilly's (1985) suggestion to look at state making as war making, given that in Kenya, "policing was part of the foundation of

the colonial state" (Waller, 2010: 525). Through policing, a central element of the colonial state effort, various forms of segregation were enforced. Segregation was often considered a solution to issues framed through (in)security discourses, from urban hygiene to the Mau Mau. These practices, and the objects and technologies they enrolled, configured some subjects as more dangerous than others, as criminal and as non-belonging or even as enemy of the colonial state.[2]

Genealogies of State Enactments and Political Subjects

In attending to how the state was enacted and how some categories of people in Nairobi came to be included in or excluded from various communities, I draw on the concept of genealogies, rather than thinking in terms of linear, comprehensive, or causal histories. In articulating my argument, therefore, I am not presenting a linear causality or a longue durée historical account that seeks to neatly connect past and present. When I point towards similarities between contemporary processes of state enactment and political subjectification and those in Nairobi's past, I foreground a genealogical connection.

The term genealogy was introduced in the social sciences and the humanities through the extensive work of Foucault (1972) on archeology, history, and knowledge. Genealogy, more than a concept, needs to be approached as a method and as an analytical tool. Crowley (2009) argues that thinking in terms of genealogy displaces the primacy of individuals' actions while foregrounding discourses, reasons and rationalities that guide or influence certain practices. As such the genealogical tool highlights "relationship[s] between knowledge, power and the human subject" (Crowley, 2009: 341). It is within these discourses, for instance, that political subjectification takes shape.

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2   M'charek (2013) shows how genetic and forensic science practices, with all their associated technologies, contribute to the emergence of racial markers used to differentiate people. This use of racial markers has become a "preferred tool in the criminal investigation process, aimed at generating a suspect" (2013: 427), which constitutes entire groups of people as potentially criminal. For further discussion on the mobilization of ethno-racial markers in criminalization processes in Nairobi, see Chapter 5.

Genealogies should *not* be understood through a tree analogy, as the tracing of the branches to the roots in a linear direction, but rather as relations between heterogeneous socio-material fragments. The concept relates to assemblage thinking in its attentiveness to both stability and instability across time and space (cf. Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). In seeking to approach state enactments and political subjects genealogically, I identify some of these fragments as "traces of empire [that] are prone to reactivation" (Jaffe, 2016: 47) in contemporary security practices. Genealogy in this way challenges universal or historical necessities. While it highlights how relations between heterogeneous elements are historically contingent and specific to the practice in which they develop, it also allows the mapping of fragments of these relations beyond a specific period. It allows, in other words, for an understanding of contemporary instances of "state effects" (Trouillot, 2001: 126) in relation to their possible entanglements with past practices. Some inclusion and exclusion practices in Nairobi's past left footprints, fragments that at times reappear in different but related guises.

Looking at these processes of state-making and political subjectification in terms of genealogies avoids two opposite extremes. On the one hand, the analysis points towards these episodes in Nairobi's past not as inconsequential precedents, as things *of* the past, but as central to the formation of discourses, reasons, and rationalities that, while changed, are still present in contemporary security practices. On the other hand, it rejects a direct and linear causality from past to present to future. I take my inspiration from a specific genealogical approach employed by Isin (2002), who talks about genealogies of citizenship and traces historically situated ways of "being political." The different types of subjects, which he foregrounds through their reciprocal difference (see Chapter 1), emerge in various historical processes. He coins them "solidaristic, agonistic and alienating strategies and technologies" (2002: 25), and shows that while they are historically contingent. Yet the orderings of subjects they produce share similar characteristics, particularly in relation to their ways of belonging to various communities. For instance, in the early Roman Civitas patrician citizens emerged with the constitution and subsequent othering of "plebeians," "slaves," "clients," and "freedmen." In the ideal city of the 15th and 16th century, the Eutopolis of the

old and new world, "humanists" and "aristocrats" were the citizens who established themselves thanks to their opposition to the emerging categories of "vagrants," "poor," and "colonists" (Isin, 2002). When Isin refers to these categories he does not mean that there were no people living in forced captive labor or poverty before, but, as Hacking argues, "ways of being a person" (2002: 107) within a society is always contingent to historical periods.

Similarly, in Nairobi the association with danger changed over time and with it the categories of people that were thought to embody it. In the first two decades of Nairobi's life, the population was considered dangerous in relation to concerns about hygiene and was forced into urban segregation (Murunga, 2005). Later on, when the Kikuyu ethnic group was associated with Mau Mau and the danger they posed to the colonial state, entire Kikuyu villages became prison camps (Elkins, 2005: Chapter 6). Today the figure of "the thug" (see Chapter 5) is often associated with young African men who often live in poor urban settlements, a category of people that becomes criminalized collectively. These processes, by way of clearly pointing towards the unwanted, the non-belonging, the other, also implicate those who *do* belong, e.g. to the (post)colonial state, Nairobi, or to various neighborhoods.

Bringing the Colonial State to Kenya and Nairobi

Nairobi, compared to other African capitals, is a relatively young city. It was officially founded in 1899 as a supply warehouse post for the Ugandan Railway Company, connecting the Kenyan east coast to Uganda's Lake Victoria. It became the railway headquarters' location soon after. Established as a temporary (and unplanned) logistic settlement, by 1905 it was already the capital of the East Africa Protectorate of the British Empire, and an incredibly busy center with all the characteristics of a colonial town. The perilous and long voyage from the Kenyan coast through the savannas towards Uganda made the train an indispensable tool for the existence of the British colonial empire in Kenya, and a condition for the foundation of the city of Nairobi.

In this section, I look at the building of the railway infrastructure at the beginning of the 19ᵗʰ century between Mombasa and Lake Victoria. I show how the technology of the train mediated the enactment of the East African Protectorate in what is now known as Kenya, which would become the Kenyan colonial state first and the Republic of Kenya in 1963. The socio-material assemblage that this endeavor was part of helped to enact a polity that did not exist before. It also produced different categories of political subjects through the intersection of labor categories – of company and colonial officers, manual workers, policemen, and administrators – with ethno-racial markers. These groups did not belong to the forming colonial entity and its new city in equal ways. In fact, it was their differentiation and hierarchization that was tantamount to the enacting of the colonial state.

The decision to build the Uganda Railway was entangled with colonial concerns for the geo-political security of the empire. In the late 19ᵗʰ century, during the *Scramble for Africa*, the British Colonial Empire held a protectorate over East Africa[3] and wanted to enforce its strategic presence across the continent. Among Africa's politically and military most relevant territories under the control of the British Empire were Egypt with the Suez Canal, the British East Africa comprising the territories of Somaliland and the port city of Mombasa on the Kenyan coast, and Uganda with Lake Victoria. In 1896, the Imperial British East African Company started the construction of the Ugandan Railway from Mombasa to Lake Victoria in Uganda (Elkins, 2005). This enterprise prompted the European colonizers toward the yet unknown (to them) inland of the East Africa territory. To the African populations this train is said to have gone by the name of the Iron Snake (Hardy, 1965), while in the UK it was commonly referred to as the Lunatic Express (Elkins, 2005). While both designations signal lack of appreciation for the train, the ironic British name rested on its reputation as a mad enterprise, with disproportionate human, labor, and economic investments. In the building of Kenya, costly networks of empire officials, various companies and representatives, materials and building infrastructures, and eventually the train, needed to come together.

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3   This territory was officially renamed Kenya in 1920.

Notwithstanding the resistance to and unpopularity of the project on all fronts, the British Empire had a geo-security reason to push the project forward. British officials worried over the rumored expansionist German ambitions from modern Tanzania towards British Uganda. Lake Victoria in Uganda was the source of the White Nile and if the Germans took control of it they could have dammed it, drying up the water source the British Navy needed for a functional Suez Canal (Elkins, 2005: 2). In turn, this would have hindered the possibility for the British Empire to commercially exploit and militarily control the Indian colony, as its fleet would have had to circum-navigate the African continent to reach it.

In light of the interpretation that Elkins offers (2005), the train was not only a technology of mobility, but it became a technology of security for the colonial empire at large. The train *brought* the empire first and the colonial state later in what today are known as Kenyan territories and further towards Lake Victoria. Technologies of mobility were often crucial instruments of territorial conquest and control, they have been deeply implicated in the making and maintenance of national and international power systems (cf. Cowen, 2014). At the time of the East Africa Protectorate, as well as today, such types of technologies are crucial in the labor required for the continuous enactments of the East Africa Protectorate first, and the current Kenyan state later.

The geographical location where Nairobi was eventually built was the ideal place for the Uganda Railway to set up a supply and rail depot, halfway between Mombasa and Lake Victoria. The flat lands south of the Nairobi River were the perfect spot for warehousing and train operations, away from inconvenient slopes. In 1899, the same year the Railway opened its depot, the sub-commissioner for Ukamba Province John Ainsworth moved the administrative headquarters of the East Africa Protectorate from Machakos (a town about 60 kilometers south-east from Nairobi) to Nairobi. Murunga highlights that the authorities of the Uganda Railway Company were not happy with this move since they saw it as the introduction of a rival center of power in the same territory (2005: 105). This required negotiations between different rivalries and claims over the same and comparatively small terri-

tory. Shamsul Alam (2007), who provides a historical-sociological reading of the British presence in Kenya, shows how the establishment of colonial hegemony was never complete. It never became a monolithic and stable power, rather it was always an unstable and ongoing process, and emerged simultaneously with counterhegemonic activities – for instance, the Mau Mau.

Based on the colonial history of Zanzibar and Stone Town, Bissell (2011) similarly notes that the exercise of colonial power on the island was a contradictory, confusing, and chaotic process while the colonial power attempted to create a perfect city. The Zanzibari ambition to perfection, however, was absent in the planning and construction of Nairobi. And it did not change even after realizing that it was no longer just a railway town. In 1908, Winston Churchill, writing of his African travels, described the place as convenient for "assembling the extensive depots and shops necessary to the construction and maintenance of the railway, [but it] enjoys no advantages as a residential site" (1908: 13). Instead, it quickly became crowded with all the workers of the railway and it was taking shape as an unplanned urban center that accommodated manual workers, administration, and managerial staff of the Uganda Railways (Murunga, 2005: 108). To satisfy the demand for labor to construct the "Lunatic Express," the British Empire forcefully displaced and brought more than thirty thousand people from the sub-Indian continent colonies, who were employed as railway workers and later in more and more administrative positions (Elkins, 2005). The headquarters of the East Africa Protectorate, now in Nairobi, was also attracting numerous indigenous people and workers who lived in the same area.

In 1905, the year that Nairobi was declared the capital of the Protectorate, the city already counted 10,000 inhabitants. Of these, 34.1 per cent were "Asians," 60.4 per cent "Africans" and 5.5 per cent "Europeans" (Otiso, 2005: 90). However, while Nairobi in 1900 was considered "more of an Indian than a European township" (Sorrenson in Murunga, 2005: 108), it soon became clear that the European settlers expected Nairobi to be a white city in a "white men's country" (Otiso, 2005: 89). The European population, which never surpassed the 11 per cent mark (Otiso, 2005: 89), dominated the top

of the social and economic pyramid. Asians and, especially, Africans were actively excluded from the government of the city, which was considered a "white men's peculiar creation" (in Murunga, 2005: 102). These three categories of subjects find genealogical referents in today's major ethno-racial differentiations in Kenya. These categories referred to the respective origins and physical features of Nairobi's inhabitants, particularly skin tone, and were associated with specific labor tasks towards the building of the railway and the city. They were thus constituted simultaneously with the East Africa Protectorate and the Kenyan colonial state,[4] and they were enacted as belonging to the city and colonial Kenya in markedly different, hierarchically ordered ways. The train that contributed to the enactment of the East Africa Protectorate simultaneously brought into existence different categories of political subjects. As I explore in detail in Chapter 5, while racialized categories lost the capacity to deterministically differentiate belonging in Nairobi and Kenya, genealogical fragments of their presence and work can be nonetheless traced in contemporary security and labor practices.

The Uganda Railway's case resonates with contemporary entanglements between state and non-state actors in many security practices in Nairobi today. In the late 19th century the railway was the technology that held a large, often unstable, socio-material assemblage together that mobilized both private companies and empire agencies. On the one hand, there was the British East Africa Company and the Railway Company; and on the other, the British colonial Empire in London and its local arm of the East Africa Protectorate. They all worked together and left traces that are visible in what came to be the Kenyan colonial state and the contemporary Kenyan state later. What I highlighted in the previous chapter in relation to ethnographies of the contemporary state applies for this historical case as well. "State effects" do not necessarily coalesce in sites of national government (Trouillot, 2001: 131), and various types of actors are involved in producing them (Ferguson & Gupta, 2002). The train held this time-bound and heterogeneous assemblage together that irreversibly reconfigured, at the same time, the physical

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4   For a contemporary articulation and adaptation of these three categories see note 3, Chapter 1.

and political landscape of East Africa. It introduced a polity and a political order where internal differentiations between subjects find genealogical referents in today's Kenya.

Urban Spaces and Passes as Technologies of Segregation

As Nairobi continued to grow, Africans, Asians, and Europeans were kept segregated within the city. The next historical episodes that are of significance to this dissertation are the urban segregation practices during the first two to three decades after the foundation of Nairobi. At first, the Asian population ended up being segregated in specific neighborhoods, soon followed by the African population who was banned from land ownership and residence in the city. While security concerns were used to justify segregation practices, hygiene and labor issues were often also mobilized to the same end. Though profoundly colonial and imperialist, they were an actual concern for the European settlers, who were perceived as the (potential) victims to be protected from the Asians and the Africans. Conversely, for the African and Asian residents, the same measures constituted outright instances of insecurity. The practices that separated Africans, Asians, and Europeans also enrolled different objects and spaces, from entire neighborhoods and various passes to access residential areas to different forms of legislation. Such practices left traces and fragments that re-emerge and re-assemble in contemporary processes of political subjectification

Murunga shows how at the turn of the 20th century the authorities were mostly concerned with the living situations of Europeans and Asians, while Africans were often left to their own devises, dwelling in self-constructed accommodations at the outskirts of town. He also notes that "class rather than racial differences dominated the *initial* physical and social structure of Nairobi" (2005: 105, emphasis added). The highlands in the northwest sections of the city were the settlement areas for European officials, while the rest of the population lived in the swampy lowlands were White artisans and Asians lived closely together in dormitory-like housing. Soon, however, ethno-racial markers synchronized with class markers and intersected so that in colonial Nairobi, racialized distinctions became the base of differ-

entiated belonging (cf. Campbell, 2012). In contrast to a southern African context, where races are often identified through skin color (White, Colored or Black), in Kenya racial identifications more prominently articulated geographical and continental origin.

The Indian population, in the eyes of the European settlers, was seen as an "inherently unhygienic" (Murunga, 2005: 98), a conception that was consistently used to justify their segregation. In 1901, 1902, 1904 and 1911-13 there were violent outbreaks of bubonic plague that originated in the Asian quarters because of the unsanitary conditions of the neighborhoods (Otiso, 2005). The colonial administration used fire to deal with the first outbreaks and burnt down entire Asian neighborhoods, including the bazaar. In 1906, the British colonial office dispatched George Bransby Williams to report on the sanitary conditions of Nairobi. He personally inspected Asian commercial and residential neighborhoods. In his 1907 report, he suggested racial segregation as a solution to the sanitary problem of the city, reinforcing its status as the official colonial strategy to deal with the "unhygienic races" of the Asians and Africans (Murunga, 2005: 122). As Murunga puts it, "the plague made the goal of socially controlling Indians and Africans easily attainable" (2005: 115) and more strictly racialized partitions of the city ensued and became relevant.

Murunga argues that the intense segregation of the Indian population in Nairobi was entangled with many concerns other than just health and disease control. Particularly, he highlights how these practices were entangled with the dispute over who was supposed to colonize the fertile Kenyan highlands: the European settlers or the Asian forced migrants (2005: 107-109). In the early years of the East Africa Protectorate, this was by no means a settled issue. After the first few years of Nairobi's life, the Indian population was not only composed of manual laborers, but also of clerics and small business owners involved in the commercial enterprises that supplied the railway endeavor. The Asian population thus became an economically relevant group, and hence one to be, to some extent, feared.

By the time of the First World War, European settlers had a consistent ma-

jority on the Township Committee, so their interests were more represent-ed than those of the Asian community. The decision to segregate the Asian population took place gradually and without an overarching plan, echoing Bissell (2011) and Shamsul Alam's (2007) analyses about the messiness and chaotic turns of colonial powers and practices. The different areas assigned to the Asian population were all overpopulated and without infrastructure, such as running water or sewage. Excluded from political life at large, Asian residents retreated into commercial and economic activities, most of which were concentrated in one specific neighborhood: "the Indian Bazaar" (Man-gat, 2012 [1969]). Inscribed in the name of the neighborhood, its inhabitants were enacted in relation to simultaneously racialized and classed forms of belonging. Spaces and infrastructures became a technology that was specif-ically aimed at managing populations perceived as dangerous (cf. Rodgers, 2012). The morphology of the city, with hills, valleys and rivers, provided the material conditions that afforded the physical separation between the different populations of Nairobi. Interactions between the different groups of residents, who lived in different parts of the city, became highly regulat-ed by laws and colonial policies. The deployment of these spatial strategies contributed to early-century processes of subjectification in Nairobi. Simi-lar rationalities towards the control and knowledge of specific subjects are visible in the deployment of various technological devices in contemporary Nairobi (from camera systems to barbed wire), as I show in Chapter 4.

The 1907, Williams's report that advocated for racial segregation swiftly met the strong desire of the European settlers' community to make Nairobi a white city in a white man's country. Similarly to how the train made the colonial presence in Kenya attainable, the plague was the element that sta-bilized a socio-material assemblage that allowed for the segregation of Indi-ans and Africans in Nairobi. The containment strategy mobilized physical borders within the city, and the spaces that contained unhygienic popula-tions became the containers of danger, and dangerous in themselves. Thus the use of destruction and fire was granted, and concomitantly the repro-duction of Indians and African as unhygienic and dangerous groups who could not be allowed to live in any other spaces except those assigned to them.

Concerns about the inherent criminality of Indians were soon added to those of hygiene that initially justified segregation practices. Overtime, they extended from the Indians to the Africans as well. While in Williams' 1907 report, both Indian and African populations were considered inherently unhygienic, the 1919 report of the Economic Commission regards the Indians as the most problematic group. This extended from hygienic to criminal concerns: the Indian population was considered more of an immediate criminal danger while the African population was only starting to appear in Nairobi's geography of criminal danger. In all accounts, the latter were often considered sub-human, childlike, and actually requiring protection from the same Asian peril (1919 Final Report of the Economic Commission in Werlin, 1974: 70):

> Physically the Indian is not a wholesome influence because of his incurable repugnance to sanitation and hygiene. In this respect the African is more civilized than the Indian, being naturally clean in his ways; but he is prone to follow the example of those around him [... the] moral depravity of the Indian is equally damaging to the African, who in his natural state is at least innocent of the worst vices of the East. The Indian is the inciter to crime as well as vice, since it is the opportunity offered by the everready Indian receivers which makes thieving easy.

Crime and security concerns soon appropriated the rationalities and discourses around segregation practices, which were initially techniques concerned with hygiene. Dürr and Jaffe remind us how politics of urban order draw heavily on issues of security and on narratives that want to rid "the city of chaos, crime and violence" (2010: 12). In this respect, Murunga argues that the pragmatic intention of European settlers – of carving a European city in a European-like country in the middle of the African continent – was very well served by the Victorian moral conviction about the insanitary and unhygienic "attributes" of Indians and Africans (2005: 114).

As Europeans and Indians settled in and around Nairobi, the urban center grew, inviting the urbanization of indigenous African populations who previously inhabited the same land. To counteract the influx of African people, the Township Committee passed various laws, some of which implicated

new objects in the management of the African residents, like passes and tax receipts that they had to carry at all times. Already from 1915, land ownership had been restricted to the European population, forcing African people into an exploitative wage economy. They became cheap labor for the Europeans and the colonial government, which started levying a hut tax and a poll tax, together amounting to twenty-five shillings (about two months of African labor) (Elkins, 2005: 16).

In 1922, the non-belonging status of the African population to most urban spaces of Nairobi was legislated in a Vagrancy Act. The Act restricted Africans who did not have a valid pass from exiting or entering exclusively European parts of the city. The white settlers' attempt at knowing and controlling who was in their exclusive zones was materialized and mediated by this document, which non-whites were expected to produce for the authorities, like the police, upon request. Otiso argues that the colonial government used legislation extensively and consistently with the intent to exclude African populations from urban areas altogether (2005: 82). The settlements where they lived, always at the fringe of the expanding city, were kept informal and illegal by the colonial government. Such status afforded regular sweeping and destruction of the makeshift habitations. The underlying rationalities and logic of these techniques did not completely disappear from Nairobi's management of urban space. As Kimari notes in her contemporary ethnography of a poor urban settlement in Nairobi, these spaces are often subjects of an "institutionalized production of informality" (2017: 101), which seems to be consequential for the ease with which people's houses are often destroyed, and their land grabbed.

As the African population grew in size in and around Nairobi, European concerns about the risk this posed to their own security grew accordingly. By the 1930s, Africans, like Indians before, were targeted by a process of criminalization. The European settlers' social imaginary of "the Africans" had changed since the 1919 Final Report of the Economic Commission where Africans were childlike under the dangerous influence of "the Indian." In the 1927 Feetham Commission Report (in Werlin, 1974: 48), they were a danger in themselves that needed management:

> It is unfortunately the case in any Colony with a native population that among those to whom a town naturally offers attractions are idle, vicious, or criminal natives, who seek to avoid tribal control or indeed any control at all. Such undesirables do not come to town to work but rather to live "on their wits," which generally means either begging or stealing, and they become not only a menace to public security but a definite incubus upon the honest working natives from whom they beg lodging and food, relying on tribal custom to preclude a refusal.

From these different documents it is clear how European settlers considered the presence of Indian people first and African people later as an encroachment on *their* city. These reports were part of a socio-material assemblage whose work effectively contributed to enact Nairobi and the colonial state in Kenya as a space belonging to the European settlers and vice versa. Their contents mobilized rationalities and logics that have re-emerged and re-activated over time at a distance of few years, though in relation to two different populations. Either as incurably unhygienic or as naturally idle and vicious, the Indians first and the Africans later were enacted collectively as dangerous subjects who threatened "public security" and the "Colony" at large. At two separate times, two different groups of people were made dangerous subjects and excluded from some spaces in the city and segregated into others. While these groups are different in many respects, the reactivation of similar rationalities and logics shows how they share a genealogical connection through their association with danger.

Similar to contemporary dynamics, practices concerned with the security of some residents were entangled first with hygiene and later, as I explore in more detail in Chapter 5, with labor issues. The intense Indian segregation in the bazaar and the Vagrancy Act restricted Indian and African people from living in and accessing some neighborhoods in general. Through this socio-material assemblage they became non-belonging to certain spaces where their presence was limited and highly regulated. In the case of the Vagrancy Act, access was allowed only for work-related reasons, to be proven by a pass. The plague, in part, afforded the institutionalization of these practices that effectively made all the Indian population dangerous and one to be avoided. Spaces and other objects were not the background of these

criminalization practices, but they were necessary elements of a socio-material assemblage that diffusely enacted Indian and African residents as potential criminals.

Police as Enforcers of Discrimination

Segregation and other discriminatory practices across Nairobi were actively enforced by the colonial police. R. M. Ewart officially founded the Kenya Police Force in 1896. He was the first commander with the rank of Assistant Superintendent in Mombasa when the British foreign office assumed responsibility for the administration of British East Africa. He effectively took over the Indian Police in Mombasa only in 1897, a policing corps that Sir William Mackinnon organized for the security and protection of stores, premises, and staff of his Imperial British East African Company since 1887 (cf. Foran, 1962: 5-10). While the force grew hand in hand with the protectorate, it was only in 1902 that a small police office was established in Nairobi. It counted few Asian inspectors and an Asian and African rank and file, all under the command of a European officer (cf. Wolf, 1973). According to Wolf's (1973) account of police recruitment in Nairobi between 1920 and 1950, a European policeman would always be higher in the hierarchy than an Indian or an African policeman – whatever the official ranks involved. African policemen, however, became the majority of the workforce of the corps and Indian police officers occupied mostly clerical positions to the point that in 1906, "all of the records were kept in Urdu by the Indian police-writers" (Foran, 1936: 103).

The police's work in Nairobi was mostly concerned with the provision of security in European neighborhoods. To achieve this goal effectively, since 1911 African recruits would undergo a six-month training in the Nairobi depot to introduce him – as Wolf summarizes (1973: 408) – "to European standards, so that he would be able to function efficiently in the settled areas." This clearly points towards who was to be protected by the new police force and also that there was "no way to separate the recruitment, training and use of the Kenya police from the total colonial experience" (1973: 412). It suggests that the work of the police was entangled with building a state in

Kenya – as Waller (2010) would put it.

It is with the Europeans in mind that Sempill (1928), the late assistant superintendent of the Kenya Police in charge of the Criminal Investigation Department in 1928, explains what was expected of an efficient and functioning police officer. Social intelligence was as important as military-styled drills during the six-month training of the new recruit. A "finished article" (1928: 672) that is a trained African policeman as opposed to a untrained recruit to whom Sempill would refer as "crude material" (1928: 670) would most probably be drafted to a unit in Nairobi where (Sempill, 1928: 674-5):

> the African constable early learns that discretion may often be the better part
> of zeal. For this reason you may observe him, if there is a group of Africans ob-
> structing the pavement at a busy corner, move them on with all the insurance of
> his authority; but if it is a group of Indian clerks doing the same thing he will, if
> he has any experience, do nothing about it; and if it is a group of Europeans, he
> will again do nothing about it. He is not taught this distinction; he finds it out for
> himself and, more often than not, by bitter experience.

Sempill's remark on how recruits would have to learn to discretionally approach European, Indian, and African residents is a reminder of how policing helped to enact differentiated political subjects in the colonial state in Kenya. The police and its central role in relation to the existence of the colonial state unfolded exactly through the categorization of people as different political subjects. Some of them were enacted as deserving the protection of the police, while others were targeted by the police as non-belonging, as potentially dangerous and criminals. Policing and the police constables, together with various urban spaces, passed the Vagrancy Act deploying logics and rationalities about danger and safety to classify and regulate what Trouillot called "state effects" (2001). All the various elements together afforded and enabled the work of the police, which in part contributed to enacting the state and political subjects in colonial Nairobi.

Barbed wire and the Mau Mau Era

Policing in colonial Kenya possibly reached its apex during the Mau Mau rebellion era. In this section I show how, in the policing practices of that time, some objects were mobilized in the colonial fight against the Mau Mau. Beside its intensive use in rounding up Mau Mau suspects in Nairobi, barbed wire made possible the extensive fencing of prison-villages allowing the incarceration of a large part of the Kikuyu population, as a collective group rather than rebellious individuals. Other objects, like the hoods of the gikunia, or identifying object-markers, like dreadlocks, were entangled in the identification and condemnation of suspects.

In a typically (British) colonial strategy, the divide et impera logic of government went further than what Wolf – in the case of the internal police hierarchy – called a "triracial structure" (1973: 403). Iliffe notes that while "the British wrongly believed that Tanganyikans belonged to tribes, Tanganyikans created tribes to function within the colonial framework" (1979: 324). This echoes Latour's (2005) argument that groups and their boundaries are not natural in any way and are not endowed with inertia, but rather their definition is a "*performative*" one. Groups "need to be constantly kept up by some group-making effort" (2005: 34-35, emphasis in the original), and individual actors are "*made to fit*" in a group (2005: 28, emphasis in the original). As these subject positions emerged they became entangled with colonial state enactments. Ethnic policies and official discrimination were deeply embedded in the British colonial system and proved consequential for the unfolding of the state of emergency – declared by governor Evelyn Baring at the end of 1952 – and the following independence process that culminated in 1963.

During the era of decolonization, from ca. 1950 onwards, the Mau Mau rebellion became a major security concern for the colonial administration. To date, it stands as one of the most controversial sections of British-Kenyan history, where race and ethnicity emerged as central issues. The Mau Mau rebellion was a reaction to the displacement of the Kikuyu people from their fertile farming lands, now colonized by the European settlers. The Ki-

kuyu ethnic group is one among many that historically populated the Kenyan territory, and is the largest in comparative terms. However, whether this movement was a legitimate one or not was a question that nobody thought should be asked.[5]

In 1952 the situation and violence escalated with the murder of Chief Waruhiu on October 7 at the outskirts of Nairobi (cf. Anderson, 2011). Governor Baring, with the approval of the colonial secretary in London, Oliver Lyttleton, declared a state of emergency that would last until January 12, 1960. The state of emergency was declared a few years after the British army had already won the bush war against the Mau Mau, and ended three years before the official Kenyan independence. Chief Waruhiu was a lead exponent of the Kikuyu guard, a British loyalist organization that helped the British authority to identify, arrest, and fight the Mau Mau warriors. Through his political allegiances, Chief Waruhiu earned political status as an appointed local leader, together with alleged economic gains granted by vast rural land tenure: the same land that the Mau Mau wanted to redistribute to the landless. His murder epitomized the coming of the Mau Mau rebels inside Nairobi's urban area. Both geographically and figuratively, they were coming home in what was considered a European colonial capital in the African continent. It is in this context that Operation Anvil, described at the start of this chapter, took place.

As with Operation Anvil, barbed wire proved a crucial technology for the British military throughout the Mau Mau emergency. As Anderson (2011), Elkins (2005), and Branch (2009) have shown, even after the brutal military operations that defeated the Mau Mau, the colonial government kept fighting a civilian war. Intelligence gathered by the colonial authorities suggested that the Mau Mau's oath-taking practices were still widespread and also taking place in Nairobi, although there were no military actions coming from Mau Mau fighters. In the attempt to control this situation, almost the

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5   There are, of course, some exceptions to this rule as for instance General Sir George Erskine who was in charge of the entire Kenya armed forces from 1953 (Elkins, 2005: 52-53).

entire Kikuyu population was detained in one of the numerous detention camps (Elkins, 2005: 149-151) or in detention villages. Barbed wire, here, became a central player in the British management of space. Because it surrounded and fenced entire Kikuyu villages, it allowed the colonizers to effectively detain the residents. The wire made an impossible reconfiguration of the space crucial to colonial power: the villages went from rural residential spaces to detention camps, where everyone was under arrest, young and old, male and female, healthy or sick. While by no means acting alone, it made an important difference in shifting the nature of the entities involved. With the help of the wire, villages became detention camps and residents were (literally and spatially) positioned as dangerous and criminal rebels. Barbed wire, as a material fragment, found its way into contemporary use in fencing the perimeters of private and commercial compounds in Nairobi, becoming a ubiquitous technology that still today discriminates spaces and demarcates lines of (non-)belonging. Much like the cases analyzed by Razac (2002),[6] it is also the materiality of the barbed wire, its lightweight, durability and functional flexibility that allowed the British Empire to quickly transform villages in mass prisons.

The great majority of the Kikuyu ethnic group was criminalized collectively and European officials often found it difficult to discern with certainty who was a British loyalist and who was a Mau Mau member. There were exceptions, however. Some specific Mau Mau leaders concerned particularly the British authorities. Wachanga, Waruhiu Itote (known as General China), Karani Njama were, among others, well known to the British military forces and feared field marshals of the rebellion movement. Besides military actions, the colonial government targeted these leaders with discredit campaigns, depicting them as manipulative leaders and demonic figures.

In their criminalization and in the character assassinations of the Mau Mau leaders, the use of body parts in their rituals was emphasized in particular, to elicit fear and disgust. The Mau Mau had been accused of decapitating

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6   I detail the cases Razac analyzes in Chapter 4, in relation to other contemporary use of barbed wire and other technological devices in Nairobi.

their enemies and slaughtering people to drink their blood and eat their flesh (Shamsul Alam, 2007: 51). Dreadlocks too became part of the collection of materialities mobilized in the colonial "civilization" mission, which often went hand in hand with missionary work. Such rumors over the magical and ritual characteristics of this rebellion facilitated the British into enacting the dreadlocked Mau Mau as savage, evil and barbarians (cf. Elkins, 2005). While in other contexts, dreadlock hairdos have been associated with the Rastafarian religious movement inspired by the Mau Mau, in the Kenyan popular culture, such a hairstyle continued instead to be associated with criminality (Savishinsky, 1998). These narratives reverberated so much that one of the most notorious leaders, Field Marshall Dedan Kimathi, called for an emergency meeting to address these issues.

Kimathi elicited particular fears and legends.[7] Realizing that the British colonial government did not know how he looked, he sent his photo portraying his distinctive dreadlocks (Anderson, 2011: 278). The Mau Mau in fact vowed not to shave their beards or cut their hair until liberation had come (Shamsul Alam, 2007: 215). Dreadlocks, in the Mau Mau era, became a material marker that identified a freedom fighter. Dreadlocks, together with other body parts, were enrolled in the policing practices against the Mau Mau. They thus simultaneously became markers of criminal rebels, and contributed to enacting the Mau Mau as savages and enemies of the empire.

The (Post)colonial State and the Collective Criminalization of Mungiki

In more recent times, logics and rationalities similar to those deployed against the Mau Mau remerged in the case of the Mungiki group, whose (alleged) members were often met with organized and (allegedly) state-led disappearances and assassinations. This modus operandi could actually

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7   Ian Henderson was the British police officer believed to be responsible for Kimathi's capture. He abhorred Kimati, and in his book describing the story of his hunt for the Mau Mau leader (Henderson & Goodhart, 1958) likens the Kikuyu people to the Germans before the Second World War and Kimathi to Hitler, studiously ignoring the similarity between Kikuyu village-prisons and the Nazi concentration camps.

be thought as a trademark of the postcolonial state, under both president Kenyatta and president Moi.[8] Musila (2015) based on a seemingly unrelated homicide, talks about narratives that are usually mobilized around state-led assassinations in Kenya. The 1988 murder of Julie Ward, a young British girl found partly dismembered and burned in the Masaai Mara park seems alien to the string of political assassinations that dotted Kenyan (post)colonial times. Yet, investigations have implicated members of the political elite. Musila talks about "state fictions" to explicitly refer to the official attempts of the Kenyan and British states to "frame the death in a specific light, to suggest certain truths" (2015: 24). Such framings and the suggestion of "certain truths," however, emerge as the simultaneous entanglement of "truth and rumor." In her analysis, these are not mutually exclusive categories of story telling, but permeate each other. It is exactly their blurred demarcation that makes the state emerge in all its complexities. Truths and rumors about state led assassinations and disappearances enact the state, as they simultaneously constitute its social imaginaries in relation to discriminatory and violent practices, which were deployed against the Mungiki and other similar groups in the post-colonial history.

Mungiki is a group that since the 1980s has been variously considered and self-identified as a gang, a religious revival, or a cultural movement. While they were involved in different criminal activities in the 1990s and 2000s, the group started out in the early 1980s as a Kikuyu ethnic, religious, and cultural movement (Rasmussen, 2014; Wamue, 2001). Rasmussen analyzes the narratives that Mungiki members tell about their own movement and he notes how they positioned themselves as the heirs of the Mau Mau. Brand-

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8   The Kenyan declaration of independence took place on December 12, 1963. Jomo Kenyatta became the first president of the Republic of Kenya, who designed Daniel arap Moi as his successor. Both presidents governed under a de facto single party constitution that gave them ample and unchecked powers. The first multiparty elections were held in 1992 and President Moi was reelected. Under Kenyatta and Moi many people disappeared or were found assassinated, with clear clues pointing towards the involvement of state security forces. Among the first and most controversial ones are the deaths of Pio Gama Pinto – a socialist leader who was gunned down on February 24, 1965, outside his house in a residential neighborhood of Nairobi – and the death of a Minister of Finance, Tom Mboya – who was assassinated on July 5, 1969, in the middle of Nairobi central district.

ing themselves as "the true blood of the Mau Mau" (Rasmussen, 2014: 221) is a double-edged statement. On the one hand, it points to the (Kikuyu) family and kinship relations between some members of the Mungiki and former freedom fighters. The founders of the Mungiki group say their own grandfathers – former Mau Mau fighters – prompted them to found this group as an avenue to channel their grievances. On the other hand, the statement about being the true blood of the Mau Mau functions as a signpost that highlights similar cultural and political struggles advanced by Mungiki and Mau Mau in different times, and their oppositional attitude towards the ruling elite.

The word "Mungiki," that in Kikuyu language can be translated as "the people," wants to be a programmatic statement in itself. The struggle that the movement's members advance is one of liberation from the cultural, religious, and economic hegemony of neocolonial forces. For the movement, such forces express themselves in the corruption of politicians in power and the spiritual domination of Christianity, a religion that – according to Wamue's analysis – the members of the movement reject because it does not fit with "African indigenous values" (2001: 461). However, Rasmussen also notes the Mungiki's more pragmatic approach to their cause. Some members described their own movement as a "chameleon" (Rasmussen, 2014) an attitude probably epitomized by religious conversions of their leadership and membership to Muslim and Evangelical faiths at different times. Also, Rasmussen notes how some membership in the group were motivated by economic factors, and how later, Mungiki became involved in criminal activities, up to bloody urban battles against other groups (cf. Anderson, 2002).

TV show host Ross Kemp (2008), in one of his sensationalizing books on the world's most dangerous gangsters, talks about the Mungiki as a "gang" engaged in decapitations and mutilations of their enemies. The emphasis on these elements echoes the colonial narratives about the Mau Mau's modus operandi that were mobilized towards their collective criminalization. While Mungiki members have not openly rejected these specific practices that Kemp describes, Rasmussen highlights that they contested them as demonizing attempts. Decapitations and cutting someone's throat, according to some members, are the obvious way of killing for a poor man who cannot

afford a gun (Rasmussen, 2014: 227). Pledging and admitting to these practices made it easier for the governments in charge to make them a national enemy, much like the Mau Mau during colonial times. These admissions were indeed mobilized in anti-Mungiki campaigns that contributed to depicting them as evil, bloodthirsty and dangerous (again, much like the Mau Mau before independence). In extreme, but not so unusual cases (cf. UN Human Rights Council, 2010), the Mungiki and other similar groups or people considered dangerous in contemporary Kenya, have allegedly dealt with state-led disappearances and assassinations that are reminiscent of colonial praxis. Specific objects, for instance the machetes that some members considered the only tools available to them as weapons, had political consequences. These objects, besides being instrumental in violent acts and possibly murders, became important elements in the criminalization of the Mungiki. The members of this group, even if their individual identities were unknown to the public, were constituted as gruesome, dangerous, and a criminal collective subject.

The case of the Mungiki is especially interesting for exploring these processes, particularly because it highlights some fragments of rationalities and logics, genealogically connected with colonial practices deployed against the Mau Mau. Mungiki members themselves, and scholars alike, have suggested such connections. Among other things, the Mungiki remobilized dreadlocks as a material marker that identified their members (cf. Wamue, 2001). The association between dreadlocks and criminality did not disappear in the Kenyan popular imaginary. The dreadlock hairdo was not just a symbol that materialized the Mungiki's connection to the Mau Mau freedom fighters. They became a marker and an object through which their members could be recognized, identified as suspected criminals, and often killed. As such, they entered into and were publicly deployed by the anti-Mungiki campaigns of the Kenyan state security apparatuses. In Chapter 5 I show how other similar markers become relevant in identifying other types of dangerous people. There I show how various ethno-racial, class, gender and spatial markers shift their meaning and become markers of danger, a reconfiguration that is often entangled with enduring practices of extra-judicial killings by the hands of the police and unsupported criminal accusations.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have focused on a number of key episodes from Nairobi's past, between its foundation in 1899 until the end of the 1990s. In their selection, I have privileged some specific moments in Nairobi's history that showed the relevance of some objects and technologies in enacting the state and political subjects. These objects and technologies, such as the railway, the barbed wire, and urban spaces were not a passive tool in the human hands, but crucially contributed to changing the surrounding social world. Rather than monadic actors, they were constantly entangled in socio-material security assemblages and activated and put to work through security practices. The state and political subjects, then, are relational achievements. Through attending to these socio-material assemblages in which objects and people are enrolled heterogeneously, we can trace how both the state and political subjects are enacted as social, material and political entities.

While the previous chapter analytically distinguished between state enactments and processes of political subjectification, the material in this chapter shows how the two processes unfold together in very practical, tangible ways. Operation Anvil, for instance, imposed a state order in Nairobi through the identification and detention of Mau Mau sympathizers and possible members, while letting the rest go. In that and other episodes the state was enacted through a socio-material assemblage whose work contributed to categorized people as dangerous or not, and as belonging or not to various city spaces and the colonial state. I explore similar processes in the remainder of this dissertation: state enactments necessarily produce political subjects.

In exploring how political subjectification and state enactments emerged through security practices, I showed how some of these processes left behind genealogical referents. Today, security companies instruct their officers to differentiate people, effectively targeting a specific group and protecting another. They expect the officers to base their judgment on their embodied knowledge (see Chapter 5), much like what was expected by the colonial police officers in Kenya. More or less formal partnerships between

companies and the state are another example of such fragments. Private security companies today enter in a directed relationship with the formal state apparatus by hosting police officers in their patrol cars (see Chapter 3). The Ugandan Railway Company and the East Africa Protectorate in the past were similarly dependent on each other. Crucially, in both cases specific technologies of mobility (the train then, cars now) held these heterogeneous assemblages together. It shows how the contemporary Kenyan state, like all post-colonial states, exists in a necessary genealogical relation to the colonial political apparatuses (cf. Mbembe, 2001). Similarly, colonial modes of relating to each other, of being together, and of becoming political subjects, it seems, are still visible today in Nairobi through the fragments they left.