An Ethnography of Moving in Nairobi:

Pedestrians, Handcarts, Minibuses and the Vitality of Urban Mobility

by

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ABSTRACT

This ethnography follows mobile trajectories on roads in Nairobi to investigate how the transformation of transport infrastructure has affected people's everyday mobility. I follow diverse mobile actors, including pedestrians, handcart (*mkokoteni*) workers, and minibus (*matatu*) operators, whose practices and ideas of moving are central to understand the city's ordinary mobility. I also situate their everyday ways of moving in the rules, plans and ideas of regulators, such as government officials, engineers and international experts, who focus on decongesting roads and attempt to reshape Nairobi's better urban mobility. Despite official and popular aspirations for building new roads and other public transport infrastructure, I argue that many mobile actors still pursue and struggle with preexisting and non-motorized means and notions of moving that are not reflected in the promise of and plans for better mobility. This ethnography also reveals how certain important forms of ordinary mobility have been socially marginalized. It explores what kinds of difficulties are created when the infrastructural blueprints of road "experts" and the notions that politicians promote about a new urban African mobility fail to match the reality of everyday road use by the great majority of Nairobi residents. By employing mobile participant observation of the practices of moving, this study also finds important ethnographic implications and suggestions for the study of mobile subjects in an African city where old and new forms of mobility collide.

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1. INTRODUCTION – THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF MOVING

Early in the morning, as I walked outside to take a matatu[1] vehicle, I found street vendors selling bananas and boiled eggs crowding along the stage[2]. Touts[3] hired by conductors were working through the dusky light of the morning and shouting at the crowd to fill in empty vehicles. Conductors hanging from the sliding doors of the minibuses worked on squeezing as many passengers inside their vehicles as possible. Street pastors holding Bibles, preaching the Gospel and praying for traffic safety were both inside and outside the minibuses. Whenever they moved to get in and out of the vehicles, coins they collected as sadaka[4] from faithful passengers made jingling sounds in their bags and pockets. Small children wearing uniforms in blue, green, and brown were walking to schools. Some of them were holding the hands of their mothers or nannies, but most children were walking side-by-side with their friends. Dust and mud on roads often covered their black shoes, which they might have cleaned and shined before they went to sleep.

Matatu vehicles mingled inside morning traffic jams. As early as six o'clock in the morning, Nairobi's roads were congested. Pedestrians shuffled around idling and crawling cars and traversed the roads where traffic signals or crossings were absent.

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[1] Informal, and private, but publicly important minibus system in Kenya. It refers to the transport sector as well as vehicles. *Matatu* is a Kikuyu numeral meaning three in the ethnic language. In the past, the fare was three pennies and the business has been dominated by people from Kikuyu community, the most populous ethnic group in Kenya. The word does not have a plural form although people popularly use '*matatus*.'

[2] In Kenya, "stage" refers to a *matatu* stop.

[3] Informal workers touting for minibuses, making noise and grabbing customers. In the *matatu* sector, they are popularly called *makanga*. This occupation is more specifically discussed in chapter 4.

[4] Religious offering

Even where there was no space for pedestrians, determined walking commuters opened up a way to navigate through the gaps between cars and continue moving quickly. Hawkers, mostly young men, jumped into the pool of immobile cars to sell goods of all kinds, from fruits and bottled water to small furniture and picture frames. In front of the jua kali⁵ workshops lining the roadsides, workers displayed their popular metallic and wooden wares, including bed frames and tables. There were also men and women carrying tattered sacks already full of recyclable plastic items on their shoulders. They likely came out to work at dawn. Other exhausted workers pulled handcarts filled with yellow or blue plastic containers, delivering water around informal settlements. Street corners near construction sites were 'job markets' for desperate men hoping to work as day laborers. Lorries heading to building and road construction sites were often overflowing with countless workers, standing and squeezed tightly together.

Stepping out of a matatu vehicle in downtown meant entering the world of the street economy, where noise and fumes and people and cars are endless. The economy consisted of countless street bookstores, newsvendors, crouching or crawling beggars, and shoeshine men or women who claimed the same spots every day. On the days following rain, there were many more workers, holding clothes and water buckets trying to wash the muddy shoes of people walking in the inner-city crowd. Outside the central area of the town, hawkers selling used clothes and shoes stood and shouted in lines alongside narrow pedestrian ways or on new bicycle paths while getting ready to run just in case city inspectors showed up.

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⁵ *Jua kali* literally is 'fierce (or hot) sun' referring to enterprise businesses handling metal fabrications and carpentry. Many workshops and stores are informally located in open spaces along main and side roads in Kenya (King 1996).

This ethnography explores uneven experiences of moving on the roads of Nairobi. Historically founded as an inland hub of the East African British railway network, the Kenyan capital is now the face of rapid economic growth in the region. The city is experiencing an influx of global investment, and also an extremely congested metropolis. As in many sub-Saharan African cities, both the government and the mainstream public's concerns about the city's mobility have been focused on engineering new roads and related infrastructure in order to move motor vehicles faster. In this context of restructuring urban mobility, this ethnography questions how diverse road users – from people who depend on walking to live to the operators of handcarts (*mkokoteni*) and the informal transport system (*matatu*) – practice their mobility and how ordinary means of moving become dangerous and stigmatized in contemporary road space. More specifically, I ask: 1) What kinds of everyday struggles and challenges are formulated between preexisting ways of moving and infrastructural changes? 2) How do the complex dynamics of moving produce Nairobi's mobility in the era of national development? I closely follow everyday road interactions, including the practices of crossing motorways, the struggles of people to earn mobile livelihoods on the roadsides, and the growing number of fatal accidents. Drawing from observations of these means of moving and surviving through motion, I probe how old and new ideas about moving and ways of moving are formulated, in conflict, and brought together as motorways spread in urban Africa.

Roads in Nairobi were once colonially restricted spaces for privileged motorcar users from Europe. Today, they are infamous for endless traffic jams, potholes, and other

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dilapidated conditions. In news articles and everyday conversations, descriptions of roadways are largely negative and revolve around phrases like "traffic nightmare," "overnight gridlock," and "standstill crowds of motor vehicles." In rainy seasons, aggravated potholes and floods are added to the list of grievances. Expert reports calculating the economic costs of traffic jams are constantly in the news and a large part of public discourses that problematize the roads. Both personal and commercial drivers experience anxiety about encountering traffic jams, and are unwilling to stop their vehicles even if pedestrians are in their path. Operators of *matatu*–the informal, but public transport sector, constantly ponder how to most efficiently avoid traffic congestion. Most commuters leave their houses and work places as early as possible to beat the jams, but still, spend hours immobilized by the traffic conditions while listening to the radio is an ordinary part of their lives. Tired passengers often wake up in *matatu* vehicles after 40 or 50 minutes and find out that the location of their vehicle is still in the same place because the cars cannot move.

Traffic conditions are redesigning the lives of Nairobians who constantly strategize about their mobility in the face of the uncertain conditions that shape daily routines. People keep asking, "Hii jam[6], inatoka wapi? (Where is this jam coming from?)" The scale of traffic jams in Nairobi is smaller than that of cities like Los Angeles and Jakarta, which recently became one of the most congested cities in the world. Most of the congested inner-city roads in Nairobi are smaller dual carriage ways with two or four lanes, although recently constructed new highways and major urban corridors,

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[6] Jam is an English word that people popularly use instead of using Kiswahili word, *msongamano*, meaning a jam.

including Thika Superhighway and several bypasses around greater Nairobi, are of a much larger scale. In recent years, the government of Kenya and the Nairobi City County (NCC) have proudly advertised the 'successes' of development through new and renovated road environments. The new roads have mesmerized many citizens – pedestrians and drivers alike. As one of my interlocutors mentioned to me, "We just came from the green [rural environments]. We would like to see more urban infrastructure like roads."

Figure 1.1 Congested Nairobi
(Source: *Daily Nation*, March 12th, 2014)

As the tarmacked space of new roadways becomes more visible, it does, however, physically limit non-motorized ways of moving. Yet it is continuously 'shared' by them as well. According to a field survey conducted in 2009 for UNEP (United Nations

Environmental Programme) (Climate XL - Africa 2009), 52.4% of the NMT (non-motorized transport) users were pedestrians, 23.2% bicycle users and 10.8% handcart operators. People walking or pulling handcarts or working in the informal transport sector have developed a spatially and socially distinctive practice of moving, and a related system of beliefs around safety and danger in order to make their way in the traffic.

My approach to the people, their experiences of practicing mobility, and road space in Nairobi builds on the work of Certeau (1984) and Lefebvre (1991). Certeau explains tactical ways of moving through the movement by which people appropriate and reappropriate urban space designed and organized by states, governments and technical experts. The official maps of a city are not the maps inscribed in people's minds in terms of walking, driving, and navigating their everyday space. Certeau offers foundational insights into methods for observing and tracing mobility in Nairobi in relation to how users of roadways engage in practices of moving and facilitate their own ways of navigating in the city. I also employ the spatial analysis of Lefebvre, who analyzes how space is dialectically (re)produced through diverse social, political and historical processes. Lefebvre's perspective is crucial for explicating how road space in Nairobi is created and negotiated by political interests, historical dynamics and people who are physically and socially involved in using, designing, and engineering space.

Although Certeau and Lefebvre provide significant theoretical foundations, this dissertation does not simply reiterate their notions with ethnographic material from Nairobi. As explored in later chapters, in urban Africa, spatial and mobile experiences are substantially different from those of the cities in Europe and North America navigated by

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Certeau and Lefebvre. In Nairobi, pedestrians often must claim and create their own spaces and navigational paths where there is not a single pedestrian accommodation, nor any infrastructural support. Handcart workers push and pull their vehicles on the narrow margins of Nairobi's "modern" roads, surrounded and threatened by motor vehicles. Operators of informal minibuses struggle to achieve their mobility while encountering corruption, politics, and the dynamics of different economic interests in and around the transport sector. The mobile practices and spatial struggles described in this research diverge from previous studies and are intensified by economic disparities, outdated or insufficient infrastructure and, further, the engagements of international and local experts of development, who are attempting to radically reorder and redesign urban Africa.

It is also important that this dissertation sheds light on informal aspects and factors of ordinary mobility. Reconsidering the informal systems is not just about the great number of people who are involved in the forms of moving and living. It is more about the mechanism of the informal networks and communities as a sub-structure of "self-help" (Hake 1977) and "formalized precariousness" (Rahbran and Merz 2014), and how they vibrantly function to assist struggling people in the urban space. Mbembe and Nuttall (2008) argue that "the informal is not outside of the formal," and the processes of shaping informality and formality are intertwined, as in the case of early colonial urban planning, which is related with the initial relationship between informalization, and the African majority in the city. In the same regard, Simone (2004) notes that when the state fails, people, as forms of human infrastructure, are crucial for sustaining lives. The informalization, delivered by the people, was a mode of 'planning' their city within

Nairobi, which was 'unplanned' and marginalized from the official framework of planning the capital city (Médard 2010).

This research reveals the informal and uneven routines of moving as formulated by diverse road users in the context of immediate and uncertain developmental changes on roads. The descriptive details contained here demonstrate the cultural contexts and characteristic differences of moving practices in Nairobi. From these contextual observations, the central arguments elaborate emerging risks of certain ways of moving, and analyze the transforming relationships between people and road space – and the resulting marginalization of many ordinary urban dwellers. Through the spatial engagements of Nairobians, this study ethnographically explores the ways in which a particular urban society is confronting the era of new velocity, the political dynamics surrounding transport systems, and ideas of safety and danger.

There are two matters that I would like to address in advance. In later chapters, the descriptions of what is happening on Nairobi's roads demonstrate that many Nairobians are increasingly exposed to dangerous or poor environments in the process of realizing and strategizing their daily mobility. By detailing such difficult conditions, this study attempts to challenge the preexisting stereotypes of people in Nairobi as needing to be 'saved' from the risks or to construct them as 'vulnerable' subjects or as victims in front of Western gazes. For instance, we find that Western charity organizations often use pictures of children in developing countries walking for hours and hours without shoes to go to school to make humanitarian appeals to help them. However, when you walk with these children, the ordinary walks are not necessarily as tragic as depicted in the pictures.

And in fact, the introduction of material 'improvements' like shoes may forge economic unevenness, differentiating children with shoes from those without shoes. My intention is also not to romanticize the impoverished or deficient conditions that people somehow navigate as they move from one place to another in Africa. As much as I do my best to reveal the reality of emerging risks and inappropriate environments on roads, it is also important to understand that these people are active agents in road spaces who, every day, manage the ordinary obstacles of mobility.

I also want to highlight that I write this dissertation by appreciating the ongoing efforts that both national and international transport experts are making to improve mobility in Nairobi. The Kenyan capital needs roads and infrastructure that facilitate better urban transport. However, while development efforts have focused on quantity – more roads, more infrastructure – this dissertation focuses on kind. As one of my interlocutors argues, roads are neither for "moving cars faster" nor for mesmerizing citizens, as in the current approach to building more motorways. The meaning of roads should be reconsidered in order to expand rights to a space that is not widely and fairly enjoyed by most of the people who use the roads today. This ethnographic study, therefore, emphasizes how to transform existing ideas and practices in engineering roads and restructuring public transport by illuminating neglected aspects and actors of mobility in Nairobi.

On Roads: Development, Livelihoods, Danger

> Roads are a good image for conceptualizing how friction works: Roads
> create pathways that make motion easier and more efficient, but in doing
> so they limit where we go. The ease of travel they facilitate is also a
> structure of confinement.

> – Anna Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*

The space of roads is emerging ground for studying mobility by interconnecting the

material and social dimensions of space (Dalakoglou and Harvey 2012). In

anthropological studies, recent research projects examining roads built and intended for

economic development are the examples of exploring this kind of approach (Harvey and

Knox 2015; Klaeger 2013). While roads have recently become popular in the social

sciences, there also exist historical studies of roads, routes, and sidewalks that also

demonstrate how spatial environments and infrastructure for moving are profoundly

entangled with social changes, from ancient Greece and Roman Empire to the motorized

geographies in America (Gregory 1938; Forbes 1964; Sideris and Ehrenfeucht 2009;

Hvattum 2011).

I find that the uniqueness of the recent studies of road space lies in their

ethnographic details. Newer studies are particularly located in the space of a specific road

or multiple roads where concurrent material and social relations are ethnographically

observable. In this context, a road facilitates the ethnographic encounter (Kernaghan

2012), revealing dimensions of mobility/immobility and various political, economic, and

social realities. A newly developed road often generates new movement, but it also limits

or disturbs preexisting trajectories of movement (Dalakoglou and Harvey 2012). A new road also can cement unprecedented relations between emerging communities, but it may also sever existing relations of neighboring villages and communities (Tsing 2005; Harvey 2010). Roads can be paths of state control and market exchange (Fairhead 1992; Knox and Harvey 2011), visible and material manifestations of nationalism and colonialism (Campbell 2010; Dalakoglou 2010), and means of implementing future modernity, national development, and technocratic expertise (Khan 2006; Harvey and Knox 2012). Road space, in this sense, is materially engineered. However, it is also transformable social space and an intersection where micro-level practices of moving bodies encounter with macro-level forces, such as discourses of neoliberal market economy, emerging nationalism, and international development. On roads, spatial practices, modes of movement, material conditions, cultural sensibilities, mobility solutions and expectations of different actors are colliding and interacting.

Here, I present ethnographic observations and analysis of three contextual features of roads in Nairobi: development, laboring and accidents. First, roads in Nairobi are spatial manifestations of national development, which are deeply entwined with international development expertise and interests. In December 2013, when I was still in the early stages of my fieldwork in Nairobi, Kenya was celebrating the nation's 50th year of independence from Britain. Jamhuri Day[7], Kenya's national independence day, was coming up, and three major infrastructural projects were launched in the same week to celebrate the successful performance of the government. At one of the three official

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[7] It is celebrated on December 12th every year. *Jamhuri* is the Kiswahili word for "republic."

opening ceremonies, I was listening to the speech of a former president, Mwai Kibaki,

who praised the launch of these projects as "a milestone moment" for Kenya, now a

nation "with world class infrastructure."

Figure 1.2 A Notice of the Construction of Nairobi Western Ring Roads

The ceremony was for the official opening of the Western Ring Road, which the

Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) funded and managed. Before the speech,

Kibaki and the Japanese ambassador unveiled commemorative plaques along the road

inscribed side by side with Kenyan and Japanese national flags. The road improved the

network between Westlands[8] and several upscale residential/commercial estates, and was equipped with bicycle tracks, pedestrian space, and nicely painted zebra crossings.[9] One international transport expert from Europe said to me in an interview that the road looked very Japanese, with road marks and styles of pavement that made it feel as if it was in Japan. After a Japanese engineer, Mr. Watanuki, passed away in an accident during the implementation of the project, a section of the road was named 'Cotton Road[10].'

JICA is not the only international agency working in Nairobi. In fact, the city has a long history of international assistance in terms of building and regulating the urban space, starting from the colonial legacy of town planning (Nevanlinna 1996). From traditional international donor organizations, such as the World Bank, JICA, and the African Development Bank (AfDB) to, more recently, Chinese state corporations (Klopp 2012), Nairobi has many international development partners and experts that are scrambling to 'save' the congested city with transportation projects. Foreign national flags on construction notices and trucks running around the city with names of Chinese state corporations are now part of the city's roadscape. Sometimes, the whole city seems to be under repair, and the government proudly displays all of the new road infrastructure facilitated financially and technically by the international organizations and foreign assistance. Technocratic and growth-focused development materializes through the increasingly tarmacked space. Road space, in this sense, is a stage for displaying national

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[8] Nairobi's division where many foreigners and upper middle class Kenyans reside and work.

[9] Pedestrian crossings.

[10] *Wata* means "cotton" in Japanese (JICA 2014).

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and international interests in a developing country that aspires to be a middle-income country.

The second feature I find in Nairobi's road space is that it is a site of diverse laboring activities, especially for mobile workers involved in the informal economy. A wide range of people laboring in mobile contexts is one of the most mundane and ubiquitous aspects of roads in urban Africa. In December 2014, on the first day I returned to the United States from Kenya and while on my way from the airport to downtown in Washington DC, I experienced an odd feeling while looking out the window of a shuttle van. The massive road network was certainly very different from that in Kenya. However, the most striking thing I noticed was that the roads were so boring, monotonous, unilinear, and missing something very important. The roads were filled with cars, and with more cars. Endless cars. Sitting in a vehicle and being transported flawlessly within a system of easy mobility and sufficient transport infrastructure in the capital city of the US, I felt dull. "Where", I found myself wondering, "are the people?"

The people I describe here are mobile workers who constantly labor and sometimes even dwell on the roads of Nairobi. The presence of vendors, hawkers, handcart/*matatu* operators in Nairobi and more broadly in urban Africa is hard to overstate. Even in a very congested situation, there are crowds of people moving between standstill cars and alongside the edges of the roadways. From street pastors to garbage pickers, there is a broad spectrum of mobile occupations involved in the informal dimensions of the city's economy. These workers also (re)appropriate available space of roads for their purposes. Hawkers occupy new bicycle paths, and handcart pullers run in

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reverse to operate their old vehicles. These are examples of how people in Nairobi have formulated ways of using and sensing the space that exceed the plans and designs of the new infrastructure (Certeau 1984).

Figure 1.3 A Bicycle Track Occupied by Street Vendors and Hawkers

The last feature I concern myself with in this dissertation is the risks that manifest from encounters between motor-focused infrastructure, congestions, and preexisting ways of moving. In recent years, roads in Nairobi have become fields of recorded fatal accidents. Cars run faster and the velocity that people experience every day is escalating, while more than half of the city's population walks or runs or operates non-motorized vehicles by 'learning' the new speed. The speed is surprising – people do not fully know

its fatal power – but yet increasingly familiar because people face it every single day as they accomplish their ordinary travels to work and school. The conceptualization of safety and danger has been 'slower' than the increasing speed of the motor vehicles. The lack of enough pedestrian infrastructure is also another source of the accidents and ironically, from anxiety related to heavy traffic congestion and fatal interactions between motorists and non-motorists.

Road accidents are not exclusive to Nairobi, and the scale and frequency of accidents in many cities in other parts of the world are much higher than those of the Kenyan capital. The significance of the accidents I found in this particular city is that the fatal consequences are embedded in the ordinary risks created by both motorists and the users of other means of moving. This is different from not being aware of dangerous moments and activities on roads. It is more about people's reactions to the recognizable presence of the chronic and immediate danger. I found interesting that many people respond "Tumezoea (We are used [to this])" or "Wamezoea (They are used [to this])" to risky road interactions. In a way, as I explained above, moving on roads seems to be a kind of game with which people become familiar together. However, the failed attempts of 'playing' this game have resulted in an increasing number of casualties, and many motorways of Nairobi are re-emerging, marked by black spots, sounds of wailing and praying, and another game of mutual blaming.

> We all want a Kenya with a good network of roads that will enhance business within our country.
>
> > – Kenya Vision 2030[11]

> Are you one of the Chinese people who constructed the Thika Superhighway?
>
> > – A Kenyan man I met on a street

Engaging with infrastructure as a social construction is necessary to understand how people's lives are rearranged as a result of infrastructural changes. In recent anthropological research, a growing body of literature focuses on the cultural and political dimensions of infrastructural objects and technologies (Larkin 2004; 2013; Simone 2012; Graham and McFarlane 2014). By examining flows of infrastructural material like water and electricity and constructed environments, such as roads and dams (Schnitzler 2008; Anand 2011; Larkin 2013; Melly 2013), anthropologists explicate how the social and the material are intertwined (Latour 1996; Law 1994; Pinch and Bijker 1984). Studies of infrastructure in this approach have investigated practices of the state (Collier 2011; Dalakoglou 2010; Khan 2006), unexpected appropriations of public infrastructure (Larkin 2004; Mains 2012), and fetishized objects that enforce state inspired modernity (Boeck 2011; Sneath 2009).

My ethnography delves into transport infrastructure, including roads and non-motorized/informal transport systems that are physically and socially linked to the ways

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[11] This statement was retrieved in August 2013 on the official website of Kenya Vision 2030 (http://www.vision2030.go.ke), but it is currently not found.

in which people walk, run, drive, ride, and operate vehicles. Building on the anthropological study of infrastructure as a social and cultural entity (Larkin 2013), I point out the power of transport infrastructure to mesmerize people who witness the material addition in their everyday mobility regardless of the uncertainties and risks that subsequently emerge from their new engagements. From the recently launched light rail system in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to the new highways, railways and Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) systems, large scale transport infrastructure projects have been implemented in many African cities with much acclaim. In Kenya, among other forms of transport infrastructure, including the new commuter rail and traffic lights, new roads are attractive objects that draw people's attention. Many such roads are under construction or repair as official components of the Road Network Expansion Project in Kenya Vision 2030, the country's long-term national development blueprint. This developmental plan was announced in 2006 and launched in 2008 by the president at the time, Mwai Kibaki. It was intended to enable Kenya to become a middle-income country[12]. As a former professor of economics and also a former finance minister, Kibaki's urgent priority was to resume the country's development and growth, which had been dormant for 24 years, since the Nyayo Era[13]. The administration's focus on economic growth is clear in reading

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[12] According to the World Bank, "middle-income economies are those with a GNI (Gross National Income) per capita of more than $1,045 but less than $12,736 […]. Lower-middle-income and upper-middle-income economies are separated at a GNI per capita of $4,125 (World Bank 2015)." Currently, Kenya is already one of the lower-middle income economies. However, the income scale of the economy does not necessarily address conditions of inequality and poverty in the country, and the advance in the economic level could result in a disadvantageous stance to receive future humanitarian assistance.

[13] A popular name referring to the Moi administration. Moi used to use the word, meaning 'footsteps' in Kiswahili, to describe that his leadership was following Jomo Kenyatta (the first president)'s footsteps (Branch 2011).

Vision 2030[14], which is neoliberal both in language and in practice, emphasizing economic growth and competition (Linehan 2007). It also diversified sources of finance for infrastructural projects, expanding from traditional western donors to include Chinese and non-Western countries' investments and public-private partnerships (PPP).

China is an interesting national entity and provider of technical expertise for engineering roads in Nairobi. My ordinary ethnographic encounters in Nairobi often led to comments, such as "You Chinese are doing great work" and "Chinese are building roads everywhere." A *matatu* route I often used regularly passed by a junction of Ngong Road and the new Southern Bypass, which was under construction by a Chinese contractor in 2013 and 2014. I used to see two or three Chinese managers and numerous Kenyan construction workers working on a half-finished flyover structure. Around the gray concrete structure, I could see traces of local red soil and the remains of the forests where baboons sometimes wandered. Not only me, but also most of the passengers in the *matatu* spectated the construction site as if we all were the audience of a play titled "a better urban road network delivered through Chinese expertise." The construction was mostly funded by a loan from The Exim Bank of China, and the China Road and Bridge Corporation (China Wu Yi) was awarded the contract and has been working on the project since 2011. It is not just the Southern Bypass. As road infrastructure in metropolitan Nairobi increases, it is the Chinese that have ushered in a new moment of urban transformation. Chinese engagement in many mega construction projects in Nairobi's road network has been widely known since the famous project of Thika

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[14] Many other African countries announced similar developmental strategies and plans. The examples are Tanzania's Tanzania Vision 2025, Mozambique's Agenda 2025, and South Africa's Vision for 2030.

Superhighway, and heavy dump trucks bearing the sign of "China Wu Yi" have become ordinary mobile objects on roads in the metropolitan area.

Figure 1.4 A Danger Sign Written in Chinese at a Road Construction Site

The Thika Superhighway has been the pride of Kenya's modern transport infrastructure and is considered to be the best achievement of former President Kibaki's administration. It was funded by the African Development Bank and The Exim Bank of China and designed by an Indian consulting company. The construction contract was awarded to three Chinese companies, China Wu Yi Company, Sinohydro Corporation, and Sheng Li Engineering Construction. The construction of the superhighway resolved previously extreme congestion and fixed the longstanding patchwork of holes and road degradation. Its wide and well-paved body stretches from Nairobi to Thika and imparts a modern, even futuristic impression for many Kenyans as one of my interlocutors said, "Thika Superhighway just blew our mind!" The gigantic new highway not only

penetrated the geographical space, but also implanted a kind of fantastic desire inside people's mind.

Figure 1.5 Thika Superhighway

While Kenya's debt to China rapidly grows, 'China,' 'Chinese,' and 'Chinese companies' are deeply ingrained in the popular understanding of who is building roads. During my fieldwork, people conversing about road construction rarely remembered anything about the city government in terms of roads, but they knew the Chinese companies, whose trucks were observed on a daily basis. In particular, as mentioned above, the Thika Superhighway project made a deep impression on Kenyans about the road and construction expertise of the Chinese. China now is a popular name as a development partner, and many Kenyans 'trust' the name because of the fast delivery and success of the Thika Superhighway construction project. Chinese state corporations are involved in more and more transport and other infrastructure projects and have been

selectively advantageous in governmental tendering. The highway, in the end, was not only a physical structure to improve the city's traffic, but also a symbolic 'road' which made way for a Chinese expert presence in the urban landscape. Even though certain construction projects were not overseen by Chinese contractors and had no visual Chinese presence, people nonetheless generally assumed that "Chinese are building roads."

However, a rather complicated reality is that many stakeholders struggle to make road construction projects happen in Nairobi. Along with the city county government, there are other governmental and institutional regulators involved in developing roads. These include the Ministry of Roads, Kenya National Highways Authority (KeNHA), Kenya Rural Roads Authority (KeRRA), Kenya Urban Roads Authority (KURA) and Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS). In these organizations, diverse groups of experts from engineers to social scientists oversee and participate in building and maintaining roads, according to various classifications[15] that are determined by road function and also by designing, planning, and administrating purposes. Budget justifications, design plans, Resettlement Action Plans (RAP) and other documented reports are produced and facilitated by experts working in these organizational bodies, although in some cases, private companies are hired to work for them.

In addition, The National Land Commission and the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development are involved in addressing land issues surrounding the roads are going to be built. Developing partners, formerly known as 'donors,' are also important

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[15] There are seven classes of roads in Kenya.

participants, particularly in terms of financing construction projects. Roads are expensive to build, and Kenya still depends on foreign aid and loans to do so. Currently, in Nairobi, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), European Union (EU), African Development Bank (AfDB), and World Bank (WB) are noticeably involved in many transport-related projects. In addition, as observed by many Kenyans, many projects are awarded to international contractors from China as well as countries like Nigeria. In contrast, Kenyan contractors struggle to secure a big construction project because they lack capacity and expertise.

Road construction in contemporary Nairobi also reflects social and economic changes in the urban life. As of 2014, it is known that more than 700,000 cars were moving in the city every day. That number is growing along with the increasing middle class population, which aspires to private car ownership. Nairobi is a classic case of developing cities in the Global South, in that the focus of urban mobility is on motorization and automobile uses (Klopp 2012), even as the majority of the population still depends on the most common non-motorized means of transportation – walking[16].

In 2010, in the midst of national development as showcased through road construction, Kenya also experienced a historical constitutional reform. This reform replaced the nation's 1969 constitution, which had been established after independence. The new constitution introduced more autonomous county governments headed by governors elected directly by the people. This has resulted in a process of devolution

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[16] Decongesting the urban network by building roads only has a limited effect considering that new roads will attract more and more motor vehicles. According to many Kenyan and international experts I interviewed in Nairobi, decongesting solutions should include not only building more roads and efficient road network, but also promoting non-motorized transport and effective regulations in traffic control.

(Cornell and D'Arcy 2014; Ghai 2008) which restructures Kenya as a state, de-centralizes the previous concentration of power and resources in Nairobi, and incentivizes elected leaders to achieve tangible accomplishments to attract voters in counties. The Nairobi City County government, which replaced the former Nairobi City Council, is one of the 47 counties in Kenya that has experienced the devolution. It has been actively launching new developmental projects, framed around a variety of trendy urban concepts, including notions of the smart, digital, and sustainable city.

Notes on Fieldwork: Mobile Ethnography

This dissertation is mainly based on 15 months of fieldwork from September 2013 to November 2014. When I first visited Nairobi in 2010, my first day of riding *matatu* vehicles and walking along motorways made me immediately consider studying the dangerous yet deeply ordinary activities of moving in the city. In 2011 and 2012, I went back to conduct pilot research for a total of three months, and began thinking about how to investigate the relations between the city's ongoing spatial and infrastructural changes and people's engagement on roads.

One morning in July 2012, I was struggling for several minutes to cross a two-lane road on which many speeding *matatu* vehicles and other motor cars were tackling the rush-hour traffic. All the fumes and dust ruined the fresh air, and a construction project to widen the road occupied part of the space, further crowding the road. I soon recognized that I was the only person unable to cross the road and, indeed, unable to move. Other

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people, including vendors, hawkers, and commuters walking to work, were in the "flow" (Urry 2000) of the morning and moved without any hesitation. A man who had just crossed the road from the other side gave me an indifferent glance, and said, "Just run." I thought, "What do you mean 'Just run'?" He was gone before I could ask.

Figure 1.6 A Road in the Morning

A few weeks later, however, I found myself running all around Nairobi. I was able to cross the same road without hesitation, and the numerous construction sites in the developing city were no longer obstacles. I was performing urban rituals (Lavery 2005) of moving by embodying the man's advice. The simple advice offered an essential baseline from which to get used to being in the city and to observe the people, routine

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activities, and space of Nairobi. I was finding the rhythm of the city through my whole body and with my whole sense—by which I mean that I was relating with the particular space and the specific time of the city (Lefebvre 2004; Amin and Thrift 2002) and "being sensible," about how to play the 'game' in the city (Bourdieu 1986). In the end, I was able to be in the "flow" of Nairobi's workday morning by "just run[ning]."

I learned a lot about Nairobi by moving. I employed mobility as a methodological vehicle in my fieldwork and used mobile contexts (Watts and Urry 2008) to understand the city and people. Above all, my participant observation took the forms of walking and running, riding and pushing vehicles, and yes, experiencing immobility with Nairobians in the notorious traffic jams. In this fashion, I investigated the experiences of informal workers with whom I interacted by walking alongside roads and streets of Nairobi. I participated in their laboring routines and observed their experiences of material and social changes on roads, which manifested spatially on their routes of work. I also took many walks with commuters and slum residents. The walks were not for strolling or for fun, but for showing me how Nairobians are challenged by the lack of adequate infrastructure and by an uncomfortable topography of moving. The ethnographic details presented in my research were mostly gathered and formulated through these walks. Being mobile during my fieldwork was also profoundly related to my investigation of the informal transport mechanism, *matatu*. I rode different kinds of *matatu* vehicles, traced their routes, and observed how *matatu* operators work in motion on daily basis.

There were also several sites at which I stopped moving to observe and interact with people, including markets, *matatu* stages, and houses in informal settlements. I often

began my work from a market (Wakulima), where I met informal handcart pullers and gathered information about mobile labor while talking to people in the market. *Matatu* stages were crucial sites for studying the informal transport sector and interacting with the *matatu* operators. I used one kiosk located in a *matatu* stage as a focal point to learn about the workers and their mobile work. Finally, to investigate informal settlements, I regularly visited people in several slum communities to observe their difficult and ordinary activities of walking. Several official and community meetings related to the living conditions of the slums also helped me find interlocutors and walking companions.

In addition, I met many people to interview by moving, and had conversations with them while we moved together. Moving, I found, pulls out responses and information that might not be available when at a standstill or while sitting. I and my interlocutors experienced the changes of Nairobi's development together by moving on new roads, interpreting unfamiliar structures, and observing changing urban landscapes, particularly roads. Furthermore, some key interlocutors I regularly walked with showed me a lot about the city's informal geography that is not marked on the official maps or online map resources. While interviewing, I used both unstructured and semi-structured approaches. Semi-structured interviews were used for local and international experts working in government and international agencies. Unstructured interviews were conducted in mobile contexts on roads and in minibuses, when I was immersed in the commuting and laboring routes of people who were driving and riding vehicles as well as walking.

I used both English and Kiswahili during my fieldwork. The official language of Kenya, English, is widely spoken in many social fields of Nairobi, but knowing

Kiswahili, the national language of the country, was important for conducting unstructured interviews on roads and in buses, and to establish rapport with many interlocutors. In a similar regard, becoming familiar with greetings and meaningful/popular words in Sheng[17], a street language mixed with Kiswahili, English and ethnic languages, was also essential to delve into the more informal sides of Nairobi.

Lastly, I actively followed news articles, blog posts and other related recent and old documents about urban development, infrastructure, and traffic issues. I collected news articles from popular newspapers in Kenya, including *Daily Nation* and *The Standard*. Magazines related to road construction, *matatu*, and infrastructure were also included in my archival research. Recent blog posts written by many local and international experts and other people writing about *matatu*/bicycle mobility were particularly useful for exploring alternative ways of understanding Nairobi's mobility.

A Korean Anthropologist in Nairobi

Conducting field research in a foreign country or a culturally different community is a common experience for many anthropologists. There are many reflective memoirs and ethnographic essays about doing fieldwork. Some romanticize the experiences of living and interacting with people they study, and some nostalgically remember the time they spent as researchers and as socially accepted members. These research experiences tend to be compelling and even beautiful. However, as much as my memory of doing the

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[17] It is popularly used by *matatu* operators, street workers, and other male/youth populations in Nairobi.

fieldwork in Nairobi is positive in the sense that I enjoyed the work and life there, I also want to emphasize that I had a handful of challenges that substantially transformed my ways of thinking and made me feel very humble and careful as a researcher.

How do I reflect on my experience as *a Korean anthropologist* in Nairobi? If someone asks me what the most challenging part was throughout my fieldwork, my answer would be, "The fact that I was not a tourist, Chinese, or Christian." Nairobi has a long history with foreign populations, from the colonial period to the recent influx of people from China. I was, in Nairobi, a white person, but not the kind of 'white' person of the kind that is historically more familiar to Nairobi. I was not Chinese, but I looked Chinese. I was not a common tourist, but I was not a local nor was I a development worker. Lastly, I was not Christian in a society in which having Christian faith is tremendously important. This positionality had three kinds of implications for my work.

First, as a Korean researcher in an African city experiencing an influx of people from China, I encountered questions, assumptions, and rumors about racial stereotypes and Chinese-ness in relation to my physically Asian face. As in many cities in Africa, Nairobi has many Chinese newcomers investing and working in diverse business sectors, from construction to retail stores and restaurants. It is now common to find names of Chinese companies and commodities in the urban landscape, and if you have an Asian face, the greeting that you would randomly hear on streets or in shopping malls is a Mandarin Chinese greeting rather than that of Kiswahili or English. Taxi drivers and store clerks found it interesting that I did not speak Mandarin Chinese. Every single day, I met people who greeted me with *Ni Hao* when I did not even know how to reply.

My presence in the city was often met with Chinese nicknames, sounds mimicking the Chinese language, expectations that I would deliver news or insight into infrastructural changes like the Chinese experts, and even anxieties, threats, and laughter born of popular rumors about Chinese people in Nairobi. I vividly experienced the ways in which an anthropologist with an Asian face is reconstructed as a Chinese road construction expert through intercultural/interracial encounters in public. This research does not directly focus on the Chinese presence or investment in Kenya, but my experience as a 'Chinese' person created another ethnographic layer. As I describe and examine Nairobi's spatial changes in this dissertation, my ethnographic encounters entangle with my alleged Chinese-ness, demonstrating the new racial dynamics of urban Africa in the midst of deepening ties between China and Africa (Chen and Myers 2013; French 2014).

Secondly, my background as a non-Western researcher, specifically from South Korea, triggered a distinctive perspective on economic development. When I began visiting Nairobi in 2010, I honestly never expected to confront anything profoundly related to my native society. However, there is one large commonality between Kenya and South Korea that is related to this research—*development*. On roads and streets, and in *matatu* vehicles, cafes, and even banks where I was in a line to withdraw some cash, I had countless conversations with random interlocutors asking about how South Korea was able to develop so rapidly despite having, in 1960s, a GDP (Gross Domestic Product) similar to that of Kenya.

In 2013, the 50th anniversary of Kenya's independence, I frequently found myself in many conversations comparing Kenya with South Korea along with Singapore, which had become independent from the United Kingdom in 1963 together with Kenya. When the former president, Mwai Kibaki, gave a public lecture in December 2013, the same logic of comparison came out. "[…] countries such as Singapore, South Korea and Malaysia left Kenya behind when we had earlier been shoulder-to-shoulder in terms of development" (Daily Nation 2013). Many interlocutors read newspaper articles and heard from others saying that the three nation states were very similar in 1960s, but that South Korea and Singapore had accomplished miraculous economic growth and development while Kenya remained underdeveloped. Some people equated me, a person from South Korea, with my home country itself. Some friends were even introducing me to others,
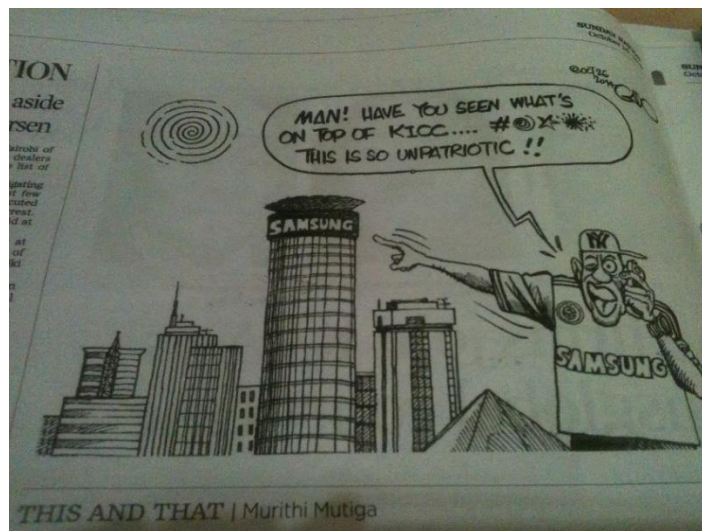
Figure 1.7 "You've Seen What's on Top of KICC?"[18]
(Source: *Sunday Nation*, October 29th, 2014)

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[18] The cartoon is work of the famous cartoonist, Godfrey Mwampembwa, also known as GADO. KICC is the Kenyatta International Convention Center in Nairobi. The building was the tallest structure until the mid-2000s and still a famous landmark in the city.

"She is from the country of Samsung and LG" because smartphones and a lot of home/office electronic products from the companies were becoming popular in Kenya. Other people even asked, "Does South Korea have any poverty like in Kenya?" I felt these questions were unfair to Kenya and defended the country by explaining how South Korea is struggling with what it accomplished 'too fast' in the past. I had to explain that South Korea had a unique situation in Cold War politics and that the society is facing many challenges and different types of poverty because of its 'successful,' but controversial development in relation to its history of military dictatorship.

These experiences led me to look at economic development in Nairobi from a perspective I forged as a Korean, based on South Korea's rapid developing process and its subsequent consequences. Unlike members of my parents' generation, I come from a generation that reflects on what went wrong in the era of national development. The brutal processes of urban renewal and evictions in Seoul, the capital city, marginalized and displaced urban poor (Davis 2006). It is also apparent that although South Korea has a growing GDP, not all South Koreans enjoy the wealth of the country equally. As an example, when I worked with informal mobile workers in Nairobi, the environment and structure of laboring reminded me of the impoverished senior workers on the fringes of Seoul. It is not uncommon to see the old people there struggling to pull their handcarts in narrow driveways to collect recyclable papers and plastics to sell for some small amounts of money to survive. It is said that over 1.5 million senior citizens work in this impoverished business and earn less than $10 per day, in a country where many people

are proud of being part of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

In Nairobi, I found that people imagine development and a more developed future without pessimism. Even people who could lose a lot because of development projects say *maendeleo ni mzuri* (development is good), again and again. However, development is not something to presume to be good or fair. There are processes and purposes to be questioned and reconsidered. I was hoping that Nairobi could have better results in the future than what Seoul has now, but I also could not avoid noticing similar problems, such as isolation of the urban poor and reinforcement of uneven development. Why does a developing capital city prioritize constructing a highway rather than building low-income houses for the half of its residents that live in informal settlements? Why do previous ways of development focused on national growth continue, although we already know their negative consequences and side effects? These were some of the questions I carried with me while walking on Nairobi's *uneven roads*.

My last point is related to both Korean and Kenyan Christianity. I am not a Christian, but I respect diverse forms of the Christian faith. Although I do not practice any particular religion, I grew up in a Buddhist family, went to a Jesuit college in South Korea, and learned to understand religious diversity. However, in a society where Christianity and charismatic Christian leaders are powerful and sometimes have profound influence on politics and daily lives (Sabar 2002), including fatal accidents and other incidents on roads, my non-religious background was a big challenge. Revealing my identity as an atheistic researcher was not an easy thing to do.

Certainly, the strong Christianity in Kenyan society was not new to me, but facing it on a daily basis for 15 months was a totally different experience. I did not know how to pray in properly Christian ways, but I started 'learning' how to pray during my participant observation since many events and meetings in Kenya began with praying. Every morning, I had the ordinary ritual of riding a *matatu* vehicle with a preacher or pastor whose business is mobile preaching and getting *sadaka* (religious offering) from passengers. Since I was a 'unique' and noticeable member of a temporary and mobile congregation, preachers often used me in their preaching and invited me to speak. Telling people that you are not a Christian in Kenya was far more difficult than saying the same thing in the United States or South Korea. I also constantly confronted questions about Christianity such as "Are you Christian?" and more importantly, "Are you baptized?". Some people were very shocked to discover that I was not a baptized person, and several street preachers took me as their 'challenge' that they would eventually convert, though they did not succeed. I was even called a pagan a few times. I often asked myself if I was ethnographically limited in Kenya because I was not a Christian.

Ironically, in my experience with Christianity in Kenya, I found that South Koreans in Kenya were very Christian as well. Korean missionaries in foreign countries have become infamous for the ways in which they attempt to propagate their religious orders and faith, even in Muslim and Buddhist societies like Yemen and Burma. In a similar sense, I found Korean churches in Nairobi and in very remote areas in Kenya. Some of these missionary organizations have humanitarian purposes and contribute to helping impoverished communities. However, Christianity is also a business opportunity

under the banners of churches. As an anthropologist and a Korean, it was difficult to realize that my national identity was closely linked to religious businesses that take and circulate pictures of 'poor' people from Kenya and bring missionary projects to save Africans, while in reality many of these missionaries tend to look down on local people. Once I happened to be in a Protestant fellowship led by a Korean missionary in a famous mega slum of Nairobi. I was terrified by the fact that the pastor was treating people (who are already Christian enough) as inferior and incapable in terms of their religious depth. It was indescribably uncomfortable. My very Christian Kenyan friend who accompanied me in the fellowship told me that "He [the Korean missionary] needs to be retrained."

South Korea is not a Christian country as a whole, but its Protestant communities have strong influences on Korean society and pursue aggressive missionary practices. Competition between different denominations and churches is everywhere. Further, some particularly fundamental and evangelical approaches have marginalized Catholicism, Buddhism, Shamanism and other folk religious traditions at the same time (Lee 2010). Certainly, there are respectable Protestant leaders and lay people, but it is difficult to say that the missionary activities of Korean protestant organizations in foreign countries necessarily benefit local societies. In this context, the face of my home country in Kenya was also a Christian and evangelical one. The second most popular subject that many of my interlocutors noticed about South Korea, after Samsung and its brand new smartphones, was the famous Korean mega churches. People I met in buses and on streets asked me about certain Korean churches having branches in Kenya and about famous Korean pastors.

I definitely do not mean that one has to be a Christian or that being Chinese would be more advantageous for doing fieldwork in Kenya. Frankly, I admit that all the challenges were difficult to process at the moments in which I confronted them, but in the end, I became comfortable with being a Korean or 'Chinese,' and non-Christian at the same time. I was challenged because I interacted with people, and the most challenging interactions became the most valuable ethnographic sources of information. These experiences eventually made me a more flexible and capable ethnographer, better able to meet Nairobi residents and work in Nairobi. The challenges were also something to converse about; they opened up opportunities for useful and meaningful conversations with diverse people, from street pastors trying to convert me to *matatu* passengers curious about the Chinese people who were building so many roads. I appreciate all my interlocutors and friends who provoked and encouraged my intercultural growth as *a Korean anthropologist in Nairobi*.

Roadmap

This introduction is followed by four substantive chapters and a concluding chapter. Chapter 2 concerns the historical and contemporary backgrounds of Nairobi, roads, and moving. As with many cities in sub-Saharan Africa, Nairobi's spatial arrangement is substantially linked to its history as a colonial capital of the British Empire in East Africa. Although Kenya has been an independent nation state since 1963, contemporary conditions of living, laboring, and moving still reflect the historical legacies from the

colonial past. The colonial town planning and racially inspired compartmentalization that framed the city for white settlers and socially as well as physically excluded the African population are still prevalent. Their legacies continue to divide Nairobi into the eastern side (Eastlands) which was allocated to the African residents and the western side (Westlands), which was developed for the privileged white settlers. In chapter 2, I trace the history of the space and moving in the city by focusing on the colonial legacies that still influence the ways in which people formulate their mobility in contemporary Nairobi.

Chapters 3, the first of the three main ethnographic chapters, explores the experience of walking on diverse spatial domains in Nairobi. Four specific situations of walking, pedestrian challenges, and stories of operating the means of mobility while on foot are presented. First, I follow a particular flow of walking commuters from a mega slum to the Industrial Area of Nairobi, where many low-income residents of the city find jobs and seek day-to-day work opportunities. By detailing this commuting process, I depict the landscape of walking in the city and explore how the practice of walking is embedded in the economy of the walkers, who constantly calculate the worth of walking in relation to their limited living expenses. I also explain the ordinary, but dangerous act of crossing highways, and how risks and accidents are socially created through the dynamics of pedestrians, motorists and infrastructure (or the lack thereof). In relation to the uneven conditions of road infrastructure, I move onto roadless informal settlements, and address the difficult pedestrianism within communities that are spatially disconnected from developmental improvement, particularly road development. Lastly, this chapter

follows a group of informal garbage collectors and their everyday walk of laboring. I

vividly describe their ordinary tasks and risks of walking, finding roadless routes, and

crossing motorways and consider how new roads and changing urban environments can

displace walking mobility. Chapter 3 concludes by illuminating the emerging danger of

walking in Nairobi and the lack of pedestrian infrastructure, and provides foundations for

defending the practice of mobility in Nairobi.

In chapter 4, I trace the operation of a local handcart, *mkokoteni*, and the workers

pushing and pulling this non-motorized vehicle in the midst of motorization. As Nairobi

is filled with more and more motor vehicles and car-friendly roads, this 'old' and slower

way of moving goods is losing its space of operation even as its workers continue along

their ordinary routines. There are official discussions about facilitating non-motorized

transport, but they focus on bicycle mobility which is not yet very popularized in the city.

In this context, the handcarts and their operators struggle to make their way in the heavy

traffic of motor vehicles and become subjects that "are not supposed to be there." This

chapter investigates the work and social relations of this marginalized means of mobility,

which include operators, customers, and owners. It reveals the nature of the devalued and

stigmatized, yet socially trusted labor of the people pushing and pulling the handcarts. I

conclude this chapter by highlighting the particular contexts of urban Africa where old

ways of moving and new physical environments collide and question the meaning of

mkokoteni in contemporary Nairobi.

Chapter 5 focuses on the operation of the (in)famous urban transit system in

Nairobi, *matatu*. This informal, but also public transport system is often blamed for and

even criminalized because of its irregular and disorderly practices and a growing number of accidents on roads. For decades, regulations and inspection policies historically have attempted to tame or restructure this transport system. In spite of legal actions and punishments, however, *matatu* vehicles still operate on roads. Informal conditions do not just disappear, even if they become immediate targets for exclusion and renewal. Diverse actors involved in the *matatu* attempt to keep their roles, and social and cultural spirits in this marginalized means of transport, but they also pragmatically and innovatively seek to transform its current features and to collaborate with new developments in the transport sector. Based on my mobile observation and interviews, I demonstrate how *matatu* operators, and other social, political, and business actors participating in the system, such as police officers, owners, government regulators, and civil supporters, struggle with and make opportunities out of challenges, new regulations, and plans for the future of the *matatu* sector. This chapter also relates the position of the *matatu* within ongoing conversations on new public transport infrastructure such as the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system and reveals how the seemingly pragmatic developmental approach inherently marginalizes informal means of moving and elevates elite development circles.

Lastly, chapter 6 is a conclusion of this dissertation that summarizes my observations and arguments on the marginalized forms of mobility in Nairobi. The chapter also answers the central questions on the kinds of everyday struggles and challenges that are formulated between preexisting ways of moving and infrastructural changes and how the complex dynamics of moving produce Nairobi's mobility in the era

of national development. The conclusion also illuminates the contributions of this research regarding studies of mobility and informal sides of urban Africa.

During my research, I met many people who asked me—an Asian woman walking on roads—what I was studying in Nairobi. These people often assumed that I would talk about more 'popular' subjects, such as public health or ethnic communities. I wanted to translate my research into a more approachable form and simply told them, "Ninafanya masomo juu ya mambo ya barabara katika Nairobi (I am studying things about roads in Nairobi)." By responding to my answer, several people summarized my research more effectively and interestingly than I could. One of them said, "So you came to study how you get stuck on roads for three hours and miss your flight to South Korea?" Another person said, "Have you seen any positive change on roads for the last three years you've been coming to Nairobi?"

My study does not neglect that Nairobi's landscape of moving has not improved at all. As advertised and promoted by many governmental booklets and popular news, there are new roads and other transport infrastructure that many Nairobians have never seen before. However, this dissertation attempts to enlarge the stories of moving that cannot be explained with new motorways and modern transport infrastructure, and seeks ideas regarding what kind of infrastructure is needed to allow more citizens in the urban space. Random pedestrians, exhausted handcart workers, and uneducated *matatu* operators do not have any technical knowledge in designing and engineering infrastructure, but they are the *experts* who know what challenges and struggles they face every day on roads to achieve their ordinary mobility in the city.

2. HISTORICAL SKETCHES

On 22nd November 2015, Elvis Ondieki reported a mock journey of a group of Dutch and British people in Kenya in *Sunday Nation*. The journey retraced the expedition of the Scottish geologist and explorer, Joseph Thomson, in the late 19th Century. Thomson's record of his exploration of Maasai[19] land on the way to Lake Victoria, from 1883 to 1884, is considered the first[20] written description of the people and their geography around today's Nairobi (Hake 1977, 19). According to Ondieki's news article, the idea for this trek to memorialize Thomson's route came from a local Maasai resident, Ezekiel Ole Katato, who had read the explorer's book, *Through Masai Land* (1887). Ezekiel says,

> "[…] he passed through my village – and it is mentioned in the book. He mentioned particularly the river which ends with waterfalls somewhere and some water collecting there and it's called Surre. *And that's we take our cattle to drink water to date* […] (Emphasis added)."

Ezekiel rediscovered the space of his community through Thomson's book and decided to trace his footsteps. Although geographical knowledge about Maasai land has passed down within the ethnic community, the information in a European historical document of the place where water was collected provided a kind of legitimation.

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[19] Masai or Maasai. A Nilotic ethnic group traditionally living in Kenya and Tanzania.

[20] There were earlier European explorers who tried to penetrate the interior of East Africa, such as Johann Ludwig Krapf and Gustav Fischer, but Thomson was the first European to enter the highlands and crossed the land of the Maasai people (Mungeam 1966, 2).

Ezekiel is not the only one to have traced the history of Kenya through colonial expeditions and visions. Many writers and commentators view and appreciate the history of today's Kenya through the lenses of the European explorers and settlers who colonized and named places on the land with European names, such as Lake Victoria and Thomson's Falls[21]. The lack of written records could be one reason for depending on the descriptions written by European explorers and colonial officials. More importantly, however, there is a continuing historical projection that reproduces the ways in which colonialists conceptualized Africa's inland as an 'empty space.' The land looked like an empty or bare plain, in the perspective of the newcomers from Europe, where an individual or nation state could claim a particular piece of land by inhabiting it, constructing material structures on it, or obtaining legal documents for it. However, life in East Africa's interior before the colonial expansion did not need any compact settlements or land title. People lived in separate and isolated housing structures, and local communities shared their farms and fields rather than creating clustered built environments. Thus, the imagined emptiness of the land reflected a misunderstanding or ignorance about the preexisting pattern of human settlement (Hull 1976; Hake 1977; Mackenzie 1998).

A similar way of understanding the history of space is found in the case of Nairobi. Previous research and many historical records viewed Nairobi as a "no man's land" before the construction of the Ugandan Railway (Mills and Mills 2013). However, long before the construction crews of the railroad reached the site of present-day Nairobi,

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[21] Joseph Thomson named the falls in Laikipia, Kenya, after his father.

Maasai herders and their cattle were relieving their thirst in the area. It was not Nairobi yet, but the place of cold water, *Enkare Naih'rrobai* in the language of the Maasai people (Hake 1977). Some say that there is also a lost name, *Nakuso Intelon* meaning the decorated (acacia) treetops, and *manyatta*[22] structures were located around the acacia trees in the south of the waterside (Lavussa 2008).

The area of Nairobi in the precolonial era was also a conflict zone for different ethnic groups, including the Maasai and their farming neighbors. There were settlements of Kikuyu farmers who moved down from the Mount Kenya area in the 18th century toward the northwest and the traditional Kamba area was located nearby to the southeast. Kikuyu, Kamba, and Maasai[23] interacted in diverse ways from raiding to intermarrying and, more importantly to trading produce and other goods in which they were specialized. A trading spot between these ethnic groups and Swahili caravans from the coastal area was created by these interactions around the land (Muriuki 1974; Hake 1977; Robertson 1997; Mackenzie 1998). The railway constructed by the British also overlaps the old route of the Swahili caravans crossing the area. It was the northern route[24] passing through the Maasai land, including the area that later became Nairobi, and was developed in the mid-1800s (Janmohamed 1978). The history of how people experienced the space of Nairobi before the railway construction remains mostly unwritten, and the interethnic

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[22] A traditional Maasai house.

[23] Kikuyu or Gikuyu (*Gĩkũyũ*) is the most populous ethnic group among 47 different ethnic groups in contemporary Kenya. The other populous groups are Luhya, Luo, Kalenjin, and Kamba. The Kikuyu-Maasai relation was rather complicated and also hostile throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. For more about the history of the ethnic group, see Godfrey Muriuki's *A History of the Kikuyu 1500-1900* (1974).

[24] Janmohamed (1978, 45) notes that the caravan traders used two major southern routes and a third set of smaller routes passing through the Maasai land in the 19th Century in East Africa.

relations and trading activities were hardly recognized for a long time. It was not a "no man's land," but probably everyone's land until the colonial influx began.

Nairobi before Nairobi

Nairobi was one of the 'new' towns in Africa along with Harare, formerly Salisbury, in Zimbabwe and Lusaka in Zambia. These cities are different from other cities that were previously founded as political centers or trading towns before colonial expansions (Freeman 1991; Obudho 2000; Freund 2007). For example, Mombasa, which eventually became the second largest city in Kenya and a famous port city on the Indian Ocean, was already a popular trading town with a significant population in the 12th century[25]. The land of Nairobi, however, did not have any township structure laid out in the Western archetype of a city before the railway construction camp was established.

  The railroad construction drastically transformed people's experiences of space and mobility in the region. The development and the British expansion in the interior of East Africa were initiated and also represented by the Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC) (Bennett 1963). In 1886, the space that later became Kenya was claimed as the company's land. This move prevented the further expansion of Germany from the south and also strategically secured the route to Uganda, although the British Government was hesitant about occupying the area (Mungeam 1966, 13). When the company handed over the right to the land to the Crown in 1895, it became part of the

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[25] Similar examples are Lagos in Nigeria and Kampala Uganda (Freeman 1991, 4).

British East Africa Protectorate. However, British authorities in the region did not have much knowledge about the space and its inhabitants. The status of the protectorate was still obscure, and even its borders were not clearly defined. Nonetheless, based on the typical colonial mindset, the British Government considered all 'unoccupied' land as Crown land and viewed the native people as not possessing proper land titles (Mungeam 1966; Nevanlinna 1996). At this point, no one imagined that a colonial capital to administer East Africa would be established in this part of the region. The focus of British colonial activities was still on Uganda and Mombasa. The only use for the 'unoccupied' land between Uganda and the port of Mombasa was, therefore, for constructing a railway to facilitate exploitation of resources (Robertson 1997; Myers 2003).

Before the railway established in the region, IBEAC's business depended on caravans and porters using human carriers and draft animals to exploit East Africa's inland, but it was unprofitable due to the unsafe and costly transport conditions[26]. Galbraith (1972) and Hake (1977) detail regarding how IBEAC convinced the British Government to build a railway in East Africa as part of a more efficient transportation network to exploit the region's resources. Rail infrastructure was already becoming the imperial means to colonize vast areas in Africa. Railways were widely popular in the 19th century, and other European colonial powers, such as Portugal and France, were also building or planning rail networks in West Africa to transport minerals and even to move

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[26] The Mackinnon Road and the Sclater Road built by IBEAC partially connected Mombasa and the inland and used by the company before the railway was constructed. The condition of the road, however, was inadequate to satisfy the transport needs (Janmohamed 1978).

troops to expand their control of unconquered territories. The British Empire had also

learned the importance of rail infrastructure from its colonial experience in India, Egypt

and elsewhere (Galbraith 1972; Wolmar 2009).

The construction of the Ugandan Railway[27] commenced in 1896 from the port of

Mombasa, and it reached the area of present-day Nairobi in 1899. There was strong

opposition due to the cost of construction and the difficult environmental conditions[28].

However, this single-track and metre gauge[29] railway connection was eventually

completed in 1901 when it reached Lake Victoria 625 miles away. When this new

railway replaced the manual transport system that depended on human carriers and

animals, it improved the economic benefits of colonial exploitation and trade, and it

contributed to the foundation of the new colonial town, Nairobi.

In many previous studies, the history of Nairobi has been recorded from the point

in which the railway construction headquarters was established. The highlands were a

strategically appropriate point to have the headquarters, given the climate, the flat

location, and the plans to expand the railway to Great Rift Valley. Small houses and

camp structures were built for engineers and construction workers[30] around the railway

and the area of today's Nairobi.

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[27] The name shows the focus of the construction was getting access to Uganda, and the collective entity, Kenya, did not exist at the time of the construction. It was later also called the Mombasa-Victoria Railway and the Kenya-Uganda Railway.

[28] Charles Miller describes the events and details of the construction process, such as man-eating lions, diseases, and conflicts with native communities, in his book, *The Lunatic Express: An Entertainment in Imperialism* (1971).

[29] Metre gauge is the system of narrow gauge railways with a track gauge of 1,000 mm. In Kenya, it is currently being replaced by a new railway using the Standard Gauge (1,435 mm) which is under construction. The construction is funded by Chinese investment and also contracted to a Chinese state corporation.

[30] More than 30,000 workers were brought from British India (Miller 1971). Many of them were poorly paid indentured

According to Hake (1977, 23), the layout of the headquarters was a preview of Nairobi as a racially segregated urban space. The European staff occupied the hillside on the west, the Lower Hill area today, which was geographically advantageous for draining in the rainy season. The quarters for construction workers, however, were built on the lower level near swampy areas with inadequate living conditions that eventually resulted in severe sanitary crises later (Mungeam 1966; Werlin 1974; Nevanlinna 1996). The separate living locations in the era of railroad construction can be considered to be the initial stage of the racial segregation of Nairobi. While Nairobi grew fast out of the camp site and transformed into a town, and much later, a capital city of the colony, the racial division of commercial and residential zones persisted. Although in today's Nairobi, it is no longer about racial segregation so much as it is about a class-based division, the gap in the spatial experiences between the west (Westlands) and the east (Eastlands) in the city is still a prominent geographical feature of the urban space.

Colonial Planning and Moving

> I remember well one afternoon when I was walking with Muchaba who
> had been my chief aide during my *irua* or circumcision ceremony. We
> were in Pangani, one of the sections of Nairobi, when we heard a voice far
> away call "Simama" or "Halt!" […] We looked back and saw two
> policemen hurrying towards us. We suddenly had butterflies in our

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immigrant workers from Kutch in Gujarat – on the other side of the Indian Ocean in India, who were seeking better economic opportunities. Many of them returned to India, but others decided to stay in Kenya and Uganda. They worked as clerks and stationmasters after the construction and their descendants still live as citizens of Kenya and referred to Kenyan Asians (Bennett 1963; Williams 2001).

stomachs. We stopped and waited for them and, as they were approaching
us, I whispered to Muchaba:

"Do you have your Kipande with you?"

"No, I don't have it," he replied.

"I don't have mine either."

"We'll catch hell now," Muchaba said.

– R. Mugo Gatheru, *Child of Two Worlds*

Today, when you enter downtown Nairobi from the west side of the city on Kenyatta

Avenue (Delamere Street[31] in the colonial era), the splendid landscape of the metropolis

is packed with shining skyscrapers, roaring motor vehicles. Jaywalking pedestrians are

rhythmically moving and waiting anywhere they can avoid being hit by cars. Surrounded

by numerous commercial buildings and structures, you will see a small colonial-style

building with a clock tower on your left side. This building, the *Kipande House*, currently

houses a branch of the Kenya Commercial Bank. The financial institution's long green

banner against the gray building structure could be seen simply as a clash of colors, but it

also makes the banner uniquely visible to the eyes of people walking around the area.

When the Ugandan Railway track was located right in front of where the building stands,

it was a warehouse used by railway workers and also the tallest building of the colonial

town. More importantly, it was later occupied by the colonial authorities and became a

registration center where every African male mandatorily received an identification

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[31] It was named after Lord Delamere, the most influential white settler and leader of the setters' community during the colonial time. He was a strong colonial figure emphasizing the supremacy of white settlers in Kenya. His descendent still lives and occupies a vast piece of land in Soysambu, Kenya (Nicholls 2005). Delamere Street was originally 6th Street at the founding of Nairobi, but it was renamed following the name of the first president, Jomo Kenyatta, after Kenya's national independence.

document, the *kipande*[32], in a metallic container until the practice was abolished in 1949 (Mills and Mills 2013).

The *kipande* is one of the key elements to understand the life of the urban majority, the 'Africans' in colonial Nairobi, before the city was subsequently planned by and for white settlers as 'White City' (Myers 2003). It was a colonial device to control the third group of citizens[33] and to restrict their movement and work. In 1921, following the Native Registration Amendment Ordinance, Africans were required to carry their *kipande* with their registration documents in them. The employment data and even personal opinions signed by the employers, and often unfair to the workers, were recorded on a piece of paper along with an individual's ethnic membership and fingerprints[34].

The document was kept inside a small and flat metallic case with a chain, and every man 16 years old or older had to obtain and wear one around his neck[35] (Thuku 1970; Tignor 1976; Rodriquez-Torres 2010). The *kipande* functioned as a kind of pass card because, by law Africans were banned from staying in Nairobi for more than 24 hours at a time unless they were employed by white settlers, something they could only prove with their documents. Africans, then, were substantially banned from the town, and

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[32] *Kipande* is the singular form, and *vipande* is the plural.

[33] They were the third after the European and Indian populations.

[34] Using fingerprints and ethnic/tribal memberships as a colonial practice to control native populations was created in British India before Kenya was colonized by the empire (Cole 2001). Later in Kenya, when the national registration system was implemented for all groups of people in Kenya, the European population strongly opposed and eventually was exempted from fingerprinting (Nevanlinna 1996, citing Rosberg and Nottingham 1966).

[35] Wearing the *kipande* was significantly resented by many Africans because they were the only population to be required to carry it (Thuku 1970; Tignor 1976).

their use of the urban space was only allowed as subordinated and documented workers for white settlers. The mobility of Africans in the space was also limited and even criminalized. If they failed to produce their *kipande* papers, they were detained and punished, or at least harassed, by the colonial authorities (Gatheru 1964).

Racially defined zones in Nairobi also affected how people experienced the town space. The racial division was already established informally and shaping the town's landscape from the time of the railway construction headquarters, but it was solidified around 1905 when Nairobi became the center of British administration in East Africa[36]. Initially, the housing sites for the migrants, especially the Indians and Africans, were not considered, and informal houses lacking drainage and a water supply were irregularly clustered. In 1901-2, and also in 1904, there were outbreaks of plague in these informal settlements. The colonial administration accused non-European populations of spreading diseases, but the fundamental cause of the disasters was the lack of proper housing infrastructure. The sanitary concerns led to the relocation of European residential areas further away from the headquarters and the resettlement of the white population, eventually resulting in the expansion of Nairobi's boundary (Halliman and Morgan 1967, 102). Until around 1920, when Kenya was changed from a protectorate to a British colony, Nairobi grew without any formal planning, but with certain patterns of racial segregation that still remain in contemporary Nairobi. African workers stayed only in the eastern side, and migrants who lost their farms in rural areas also clustered there and started building shanty villages (Rodriquez-Torres 2010).

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[36] The business of the protectorate was transferred from the Foreign Office to the Colonial Office in 1905, and in 1907, Nairobi became the capital of the British East Africa Protectorate (Nevanlinna 1996).

As Médard (2010) elaborates, the division of the east and the west also symbolizes the gap between the planned English garden city and unplanned African villages. The African population was an object to exclude in the early planning, even though the African population was becoming the urban majority. In 1926, when Walton Jameson, the first planner of Nairobi, designed the city's first master plan, he completely neglected and omitted the largest population of the city, urban Africans, and only considered the growing demands of white settlers. His plan had no residential zone for the African population and reinforced preexisting racial boundaries (Myers 2003). Thus, Nairobi was to be a capital of and for the "British imperial endeavor," where white colonizers could enjoy the prosperity and climate (Anderson 2005).
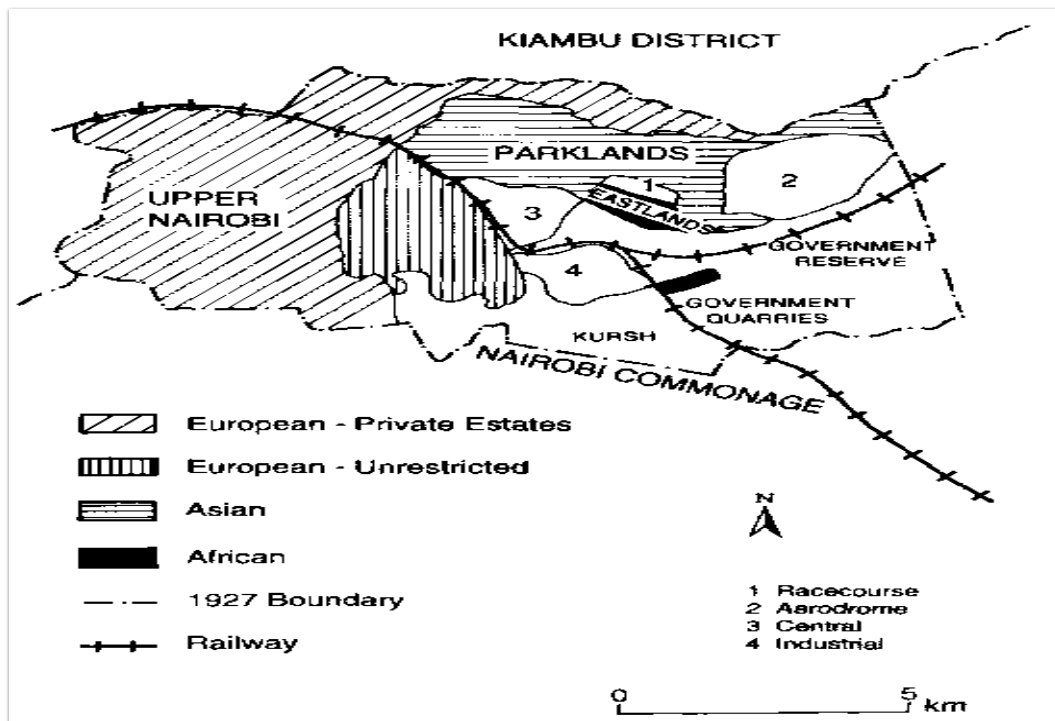
Figure 2.1 The Segregation of Residential Areas in Nairobi, 1909
(Source: Mazingira Institute 1993, 2)

This European-centric approach was still present in the city's second master plan in 1948 (Tiven 2013). Nevanlinna (1996) intensively analyzed the new master plan and argued that the 1948 plan was not racist because it recognized the presence of the African population in the urbanizing colonial capital. The historical background of the 'recognition' was that the colonial authorities changed their view of Africans from migrants to town dwellers, based on their changing patterns of employment. The city was not just a railway depot at this point. It became a center of the British military operation during the World War II and required more local workers. Previously, many African workers eventually returned their rural homes, but now more and more of them settled in Nairobi. The colonial government was unable to ignore the growing African population any longer and constructed more African residential estates (Nevanlinna 1996).

However, this second plan only considered African dwellers as a functionally significant population working for the white population. In other words, it included them as part of the city, but the plan did not adequately address the challenges African dwellers faced, and the focus was still on the white population (Hake 1977). As Nairobi began growing significantly, the eastern side became more densely populated, as the increasing African population struggled and crowded into high-density estates. The urban population "more than doubled between 1930 and 1952," and the African population was already up to 85,000 people while Europeans numbered only 11,000 people and the Asian population 34,000 (Anderson 2005). The colonial town had become a European world inside a growing apartheid city until Kenya's independence in 1963.

The Metropolitan Growth Strategy of 1973[37] was Nairobi's first urban plan intended to guide the development of the capital city of independent Kenya until 2001. However, national independence did not necessarily resolve the unequal urban conditions. Elite-focused development now replaced the racial discrimination in the colonial plans, and Nairobi in the new scheme remained a fragmented urban space with the privileged population in the west separated from the underprivileged majority in the east. Another problem with the 1973 growth strategy was that many projects were not properly implemented according to the plan. In particular, a lot of projects to expand and construct roads were unrealized, worsening the notorious traffic conditions in today's Nairobi (Nevanlinna 1996). Along with the remaining projects, the 1973 strategy officially expired in 2001, and Nairobi continued sprawling and expanding without spatial and infrastructural planning for more than a decade afterward. As the population increased, more people had to shape and rely on informal strategies to survive inside the congested urban space, with informal housing settlements being the most visible example. The size of the physical space never grew, but more people squeezed into the settlements.

Finally, in March 2015, the Nairobi City County (NCC) unveiled the Nairobi Integrated Urban Development Master Plan (NIU Plan), developed together with the Japan International Corporation Agency (JICA). In the words of JICA, it was "handed over" to the county government by JICA (JICA 2015). This new plan is supposed to guide the city's development and transform it into "a globally attractive city that is iconic

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[37] Funded by the Nairobi City Council, the Kenya Government, the World Bank, and the United Nations (Nevanlinna 1996).

for regional integration and sustainability" (JICA 2014) by 2030, which corresponds to the timeline of the national development strategy, Kenya Vision 2030. The history of foreign expertise thus continued with the Japanese technical support, although Kenyan planners were more involved than in the previous cases. The effects of the new master plan are still unclear at this stage, but the ambitious language of the new plan for a 'global city' sounds irrelevant when 60 percent of Nairobians live in slums and even more commute by walking for hours to save on bus fare.

In addition, to implement the planned projects successfully, foreign and private investment is encouraged, although international and profit-oriented interventions would necessarily reorder the urban environments still further through the eyes of outsiders. The new development strategy is also controversial in the sense that many projects and regulations 'collide' with existing informal structures of living, moving, and laboring in the city. However, a growing number of civil organizations advocate on behalf of citizens, and Nairobians are learning to improve their skills to participate in planning for their city as well.

Roads in History

Many people complain about roads in Nairobi. Their ordinary mobility is disturbed, even threatened, by the roads. These issues are not unique to Nairobi. Traffic congestion, which is most frequently complained about is, in fact, very ordinary and even naturalized in other urban areas across the world. Nevertheless, there is something contextually odd

about roads in Nairobi. When people speak of the road space in Nairobi, it is with a sense of damage, delay, and even shame in the context of the city's underdeveloped conditions. At the same time, the road space is a part of the capital city that people aspire to have modernized and developed.

The early road network constructed by the colonialists lacked effective connectivity. The planners of colonial Nairobi did not see any need to build a road to connect the eastern side and the western side, because the township was racially segregated and intended to stay that way. From the 1920s, even when the African population was becoming the urban majority, Africans only settled in the eastern outskirts and were not allowed to reside inside the city (Myers 2003). Their access to the town was denied at the Government Road, which marked the beginning of the European side of Nairobi (Nevanlinna 1996), and no road network connected the east and the west sides of Nairobi.

As explained earlier, the colonial urban plan to maintain Nairobi for European settlers restricted daily spatial movement from the African (the east) to the European (the west) Nairobi (Nevanlinna 1996). In other words, most roads only led to town from the west, although many urban Africans commuted and worked for white settlers in the western side during the day. Determined by racially-charged colonial planning practices, the lack of roads to connect the different sides of the city persists today. Practically, this means that many vehicles must enter the central area of the city to move from the east side to the west side, or the reverse. A container truck traveling to inland cities in East Africa from Mombasa Port or Nairobi's international airport, for instance, cannot avoid

traveling through central Nairobi because of the lack of bypasses. Nairobi's inner city traffic struggles with container trucks and other vehicles that are heading somewhere else are, then, a legacy of colonial practices of racial segregation. Only recently, almost 100 years after the first city plan and 50 years after independence, bypasses, and missing links are under construction to finally achieve connectivity between the east and the west.

The roads that were built for white settlers are certainly not appropriate for today's patterns of movement in metropolitan Nairobi. An international transport expert working in Nairobi, Phillip*[38], tells me, "Engineering urban roads is different from engineering other roads." He points out that the colonialists built roads following the long lines of ridges. That traditional way of engineering is cheaper. It was good enough for the population and the traffic at that time when only colonial officials owned cars, and the maximum traffic volume was only a few hundred vehicles. According to Phillip, colonial engineers did not consider the complexities and networks of urban roads because they never imagined Nairobi as the metropolitan city we see today[39] (Tiven 2013).

In an urban road network, roads should be neatly connected and time-efficiently engineered for the majority of people moving in the space. However, in colonial Nairobi, planners did not see these needs because the movement of the urban majority, the African population, was strictly controlled, and the traffic volume was not heavy at all. However, after independence, with the lifting of racial restrictions, the movement became more fluid, and the western area beyond Government Road, which became Moi Avenue now

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[38] Pseudonyms in this dissertation are all marked with *.

[39] According to Tiven (2013), one of the planners participated in the city's master plan in 1948, Erica Mann wrote in the early 1990s, "The Nairobi you see today is not the Nairobi that we planned."

was accessible to everyone. In addition, both the population and the number of vehicles substantially increased along with the national economic growth and internal rural-urban migration to Nairobi. While the population of the city has grown, the road planning and construction have not kept up. In other words, roads that were never urban have become urban. More people and more vehicles came onto roads that were formerly for white settlers. The urban majority that was excluded from the colonial imagination of Nairobi today walks and drives inside the city's physical and social landscapes.
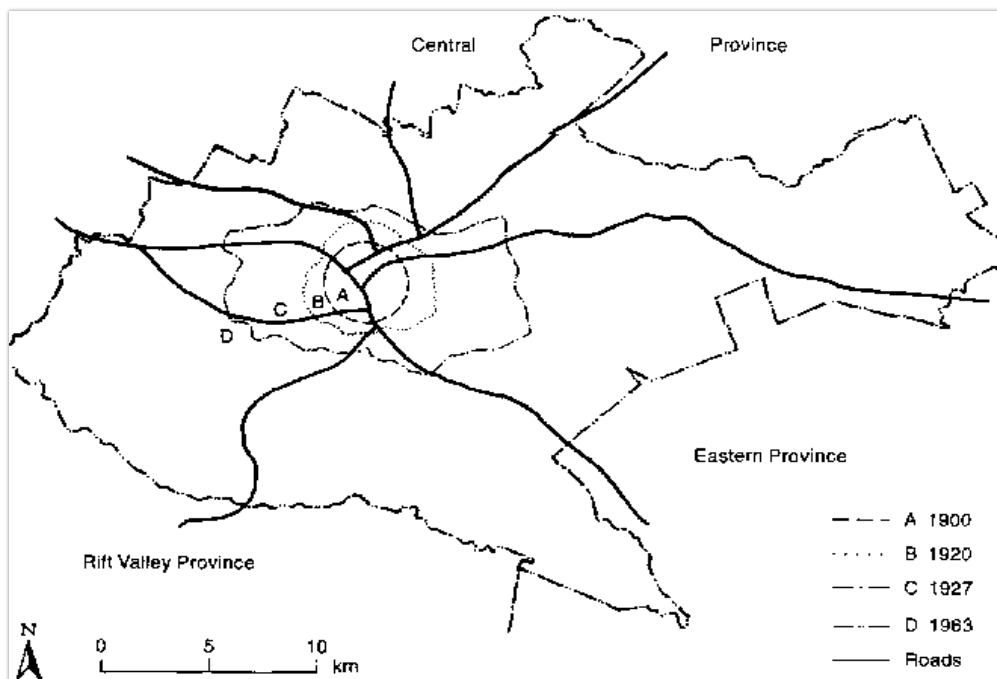
Figure 2.2 Nairobi: Boundary Changes, 1900-1963
(Source: Obudho and Aduwo, 1992, 53)

Moreover, Nairobi's Eastlands now has a different position in the city. During the colonial time, the east side of the city was excluded from the previous urban plans and infrastructural development. These exclusions drew the anger of residents and eventually

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triggered the urban uprisings of *Mau Mau*[40] in Nairobi (Anderson 2005). Even after

independence, this side of the city did not receive proper attention from the government.

Today's Eastlands, however, has a growing middle-class population and an increasing

number of businesses that generate more traffic and movement of people and vehicles.

Thus, building roads in Nairobi can be reasonably understood as a necessary

developmental process, considering the scale of urbanization and motorization that the

city has been recently experiencing. Many people complain about the outdated road

network, and the poor quality of traffic conditions, and Nairobi's urban road network has

become an embarrassing subject for the city in news articles and popular discourses.

It is certainly true that bypasses and inner-city roads that are currently under

construction are needed to resolve traffic jams and the lack of connectivity. In addition,

many of these roads are not completely 'new' in the sense that they were already

imagined in the Nairobi Metropolitan Growth Strategy in 1973. The implementation of

the planned roads was delayed for a long time because of poor governance and prolonged

economic stagnation throughout the previous Moi administration[41]. However, in today's

Nairobi, building more roads is not enough to design the city's mobility. Roads are

fundamentally more attractive for motor car users rather than embracing the majority of

people depending 'old' ways of moving from walking to operating non-motorized

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[40] Kenya's armed uprising against the British colonial suppression mainly organized by Kikuyu people between 1952 and 1960. It eventually resulted in the national independence from the colonial rule in 1963.

[41] The Moi administration was led by the former president, Daniel Arap Moi and human right violations and corruptions were pervasive under his regime. He was accused of detaining and murdering political activists and prisoners, but stayed in the presidency for 24 years from 1978 to 2002 (Branch 2011).

vehicles. In this sense, marginality is reinforced through new road infrastructure which is not readily accessible for people without the private motor vehicles.

In what state would the mobile life of people whose ordinary means of moving be translatable on the new roads and future plans of the city? In following chapters, this dissertation will demonstrate everyday mobile lives of Nairobians in three dimensions – pedestrianism, handcart operation, and the informal-but-public transport system, *matatu*. I will detail the dynamics of moving on roads in Nairobi to explore how people experience marginality in the ordinary practice of mobility. The marginality in mobility has consistently existed on roads from the colonial time in Nairobi. At that time, the lack of infrastructure restricted people's mobility. In the present time, more roads are under construction both in the east and the west sides of the city, and new schemes for developing urban transport network are on the way. However, there is a lack of questioning *what kind of transport infrastructure* is required to be built for the majority of urban dwellers. The essence of facilitating moving in Nairobi is still uneven, not because of the colonial racial segregation but because of overlooking, and even marginalizing, existing practices of mobility.

3. THEY CANNOT HIT US

The matatu[42] stopped somewhere, and the crew wanted passengers to leave the vehicle. It

was not the last stop, but they did not want to get caught up in the deep swamp of

afternoon traffic waiting ahead. No one complained. The passengers quickly got off and

walked away. They knew that walking would be more efficient at that point than sitting

stalled in a matatu vehicle. It was also known that the crew was feeling impatient to

collect money to bring back to their owner before their shift ended. The young conductor

in a tattered maroon uniform did want to make sure that I knew the route to my

destination. He seemed mildly apologetic. It was extra 'customer care' that he could offer

for the only foreign passenger in the trip. I reassured him. It was not my first time being

dropped off somewhere in the middle. I started walking on the side of the motorway.

After walking for a while, I had to cross a road that lacked a pedestrian crossing,

overpass or an underpass, as usual. When there is no formal infrastructure to assist you

to cross a motorway, you must depend on a temporal opportunity by waiting, observing,

and finding a moment to cross a road. There were so many cars just rushing and rushing

from both sides. I hesitated multiple times. My feet kept wandering around the edge of the

road. Then, I heard someone talking to me.

"Let us cross, Madam." It was a young man, probably in his 20s, and wearing

dirty clothes who looked like he had come from a construction site. He looked at both

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[42] Minibus in Kenya. *Matatu* is a Kikuyu numeral meaning three in the ethnic language. In the past, the fare was three pennies and the business has been dominated by people from Kikuyu ethnic group (see Chapter 5 for more details). The word does not have a plural form although people popularly use '*matatus*' in both colloquial and literary ways.

sides of the road and stepped on the road to cross it. I noticed that cars were rapidly

coming from both sides just a little bit away from us. He 'easily' crossed the road, but I

was still there. He yelled at me from the other side. "Why are you still there? Just cross!

They cannot hit you!" I was still frozen for a minute or two, but eventually followed his

'coaching.' He waited for me until I finally crossed the motorway.
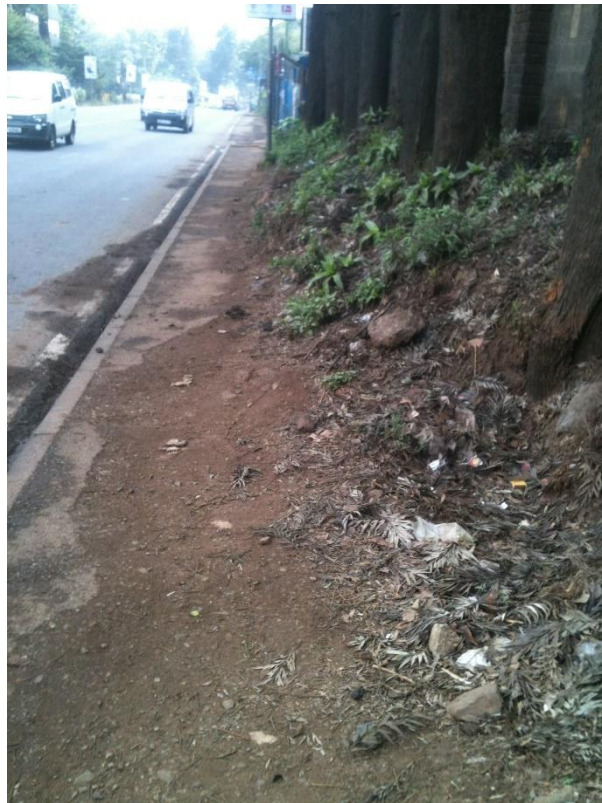
Figure 3.1 The Edge of the Road

"I see you worry a lot. Why? They cannot hit us." He said, after I crossed the

road. I mildly challenged him. "You have to be careful. They can hit us." It was out of my

disciplined sense of moving, which had been inscribed in my mind ever since my traffic

safety education in kindergarten. I knew that it would not be related to the life and the

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conception of safety he had in Nairobi. He did not say anything but smiled. We walked

together on the edge of another motorway and exchanged our names.

After walking a while together, Simon*[43] and I faced another motorway to cross,

again without any pedestrian infrastructure. The road was completely jammed with

motor vehicles and looked like a long parking lot. A lot of pedestrians also were crossing

the road here and there through small gaps between the congested vehicles. In this kind

of traffic, you have to move fast so that you do not get swept up by the endless waves of

bumper-to-bumper vehicles occupying all the space, including on the margins of the

road. Crossing this kind of road is like competing or battling against motor vehicles to

embed your body in the right moment. If there is any space to penetrate, you get in and

move your body as if you are on a conveyor belt of a factory. The most important skill

here is that you have to go through moving gaps created in between numerous vehicles. It

looks like a moving maze constructed with bodies of cars. Cars will not stop for you. In

fact, from the perspective of the driver, to let one pedestrian across could result in a line

of people trying to use the same path and thereby impede one's own progress. If you are

a pedestrian, then you spontaneously calculate or estimate or just jump into the moving

maze and figure your way out.

If vehicles get some speed up until they get stuck in next immobile moment, then

the maze is shuffled, and people face a different, but also a similar maze. To be mobile in

this intense space means to be moving within another layer of moving. It could be

confusing at first because you are not sure whether you need to follow the rhythm of cars

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[43] All names with * are pseudonyms for the informants' anonymity in this dissertation.

or that of people. Surprisingly, people rarely get caught in the tiny gaps and usually manage to move away with tacit skills of walking. The mobile disorder is a chaotic kind of order that people in the city constantly create day by day. It is the art of pedestrian walking in Nairobi.

Simon walked into the maze of the moment without any hesitation. Unlike him, I hesitated for about two seconds but soon followed him. Then, something happened. A shiny black saloon car with a red plate signaling diplomatic immunity coming from the right side hit Simon as he was walking in front of me. He stumbled. For a moment, his legs seemed to be collapsing. The hit was not strong because the car was crawling in the jam, but I was horrified and thought that Simon was hurt. I expelled a short, but sharp scream. I jumped into the small space between Simon and the car. I also tried to hold him stumbling with my left hand and smashed the hood of the car with my right hand. I thought Simon was going to fall on the ground, and I had to stop the car no matter how slow it was in the jam.

I hurriedly checked whether Simon was OK or not. He acted as if nothing happened and slowly kept walking ahead although my heart was still pumping harshly. Then, I looked at the driver. He was not looking at the stumbling man. He was looking at me. My eyes and the driver's eyes met. He seemed terrified and surprised too. I also noticed that he was terrified because of me, a foreign woman holding blaming eyes against him in a city where so many expatriates live in privilege. I did not mean to blame him. I just instinctively turned toward the driver, the one who was managing the big machinery against a pedestrian. He seemed to be a driver hired by an embassy or a

diplomat. The red plate would allow him to run away from a traffic accident, but he might not be safe in keeping the job.

Leaving the astonished driver behind, I hurriedly chased Simon right behind and asked again and again. "Uko sawa? Uko sawa? (Are you OK? Are you OK?)" Then, he said the mantra again.

"They cannot hit us."

I felt speechless. I thought of saying "But you just got a hit!" but the words got stuck somewhere in my throat. Simon kept walking, and I followed him until we reached a crossroad where we said goodbye.

This chapter examines the experiences of walking in Nairobi and how this ordinary mode of transportation becomes an everyday struggle that people encounter on roads, off roads, and other spatial domains in the city. I detail the forms of walking in different urban locations from highways to informal settlements and relate the activity of walking to the urban spatial and infrastructural challenges experienced by people who depend on walking. The chapter primarily draws on observational and mobile data I collected by participating in diverse everyday walking practices and by interacting with my walking companions and interlocutors. I point out the particularities of walking in Nairobi as an urban task that one has to negotiate constantly in relation to poverty, inequality and danger. How do people negotiate limiting and sometimes dangerous urban conditions in order to maintain their mobility through walking? How does walking inform new practices, ideas and identities in relation to changing urban conditions in Nairobi?

Figure 3.2 Pedestrians Crossing a Road on a Rainy Day

Simon's case is one example of how people respond to the ordinary challenges of walking. So many people walk, but there is not enough pedestrian infrastructure. We can easily criticize the lack as a failure of urban planning, but it also means that walking becomes an everyday struggle that people must handle like other urban challenges, such as lack of proper housing and water. Simon's mantra, "They cannot hit us," was, therefore, a kind of collaboration through which he and other people walking in Nairobi constantly manage their moving and survive in the city's thick and unfriendly traffic. Accidents can happen and people get hurt, but most of the time, they collaborate and appropriate with what they have in the space by finding temporal opportunities, being nonchalant about the danger, and depending on or trusting their feet.

Following foundational discussions about walking, this chapter consists of four ethnographic descriptions of walking in Nairobi, from diverse pedestrian experiences to mobile laboring. The first case, under the title of *Calculating Mobility*, follows the routinized walk of commuting workers between Kibera, the biggest informal settlement of the city, and the Industrial Area where many low-income workers of Nairobi find employment. The commuting walk of thousands of Kibera residents has repeated for decades as their way of saving transport expenses. This particular walk demonstrates how people living with financial shortages constantly calculate their cost of moving and how their strategies of living are embedded in the practice of mobility. The second ethnographic case, *Speed Game*, concerns pedestrians who cross dangerous motorways in Nairobi on a daily basis. I detail the diverse road-crossing experiences of people and demonstrate how pedestrians have become victims or are framed to be 'careless pedestrians' of road accidents. I also argue that pedestrianism has become a neglected aspect of the urban mobility in relation to the growing infrastructural focus on transport-elites and their private motorization.

Thirdly, under the title of *Where Roads End*, I consider walking experiences in roadless informal settlements where paved roads do not exist, and significant obstacles of mobility are found. I contextualize the production of inequality through the roadless spatial arrangement on which the most ordinary means of mobility is practiced. The last ethnographic case, *Mama Mary: My work is walking*, draws together all the components of walking in Nairobi explored through the previous three cases in this chapter. It follows a group of mobile workers collecting recyclable waste on the fringe of Nairobi. I explain

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how, in their ordinary activities of mobile laboring, they encounter new roads, roadless routes, dangerous speed, and even the stigma of working along the roads. I also probe how walking as a means of laboring as well as of moving becomes a particular challenge for the informal workers in contemporary Nairobi.

The mobile accounts of my numerous walks in Nairobi collectively illustrate the struggles that one encounters by walking in the city. One purpose of this chapter is to draw the landscape of walking in the Kenyan capital as vividly as possible to demonstrate the tough, but ordinary realities of people who solely depend on walking as their means of mobility. To put this simply, I want to highlight that walking in Nairobi is seriously difficult. The infrastructure and environments of the city do not help many pedestrians who are the majority of the residents. In most cases, the only option they have is to help and save themselves. I also want to be cautious, however, about 'victimizing' pedestrians in Nairobi. It is true that many pedestrians become victims of traffic accidents, and I do not mean to deny their vulnerability on roads. However, motorists are not the only ones responsible for tragic accidents. In the dynamics of road interactions and accidents, walking people unavoidably contribute to fatal outcomes as well based on the lack of infrastructure and structural limits. In this sense, this chapter attempts to pay more balanced attention to what is happening on roads in Nairobi both through the gazes of drivers and regulators as well as of those people who depend on foot.

In February 2013, Enrique Peñalosa, the former mayor of Bogotá, Colombia, who has been working internationally to promote sustainable urbanism, gave a public lecture, "Equity, Mobility, and the Quality of Urban Life," at Arizona State University. In the

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middle of his lecture, he showed photos of diverse sidewalks and pedestrian-friendly

urban environments in many different cities, mostly in Europe. Peñalosa pointed out how

those places demonstrate the egalitarian approach to using urban space for more citizens.

They focused on how more people can walk or use bicycles rather than giving more

space for cars. The practice of walking and the presence of walking-friendly urban

conditions illustrate how equal society is for its citizens. This chapter is rooted in this

kind of perception exploring how mobility experiences are closely related to (in)equality

of the society (Vasconcellos 2001). My ethnographic findings present those aspects of

walking that should be (re)considered to make urban space more equally accessible in

Nairobi, and further, throughout urban Africa where cars and motorways are increasingly

mesmerizing political authorities and cross-societal members.

On Walking

How does walking matter to us? A historian, Joseph Amato (2004) begins his book, *On

Foot – A History of Walking*, with a subtitle, "Walking is talking." With this title, he does

not mean a literal meaning of talking. Amato explains how much and in what ways

walking can "tell" us about social changes in history. In another book about the culture of

walking with the same subtitle, *Wanderlust – A History of Walking*, Rebecca Solnit

(2000) describes walking as more than a physical and bodily movement. She views

walking as a lens for exploring the world from the birth of bipedalism to pedestrian lives

on streets and roads in cities. As a more classical foundation of anthropology and

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sociology of bodies, Mauss (1973[1935]) examines walking, as a bodily technique, which differs from society to society. The techniques are habitually ingrained in the bodies of walking people who share particular social and cultural contexts (Morris 2004). Goffman goes further by placing walking in urban settings and providing lenses for explicating micro-practices of mobility, "pedestrian behavior" (Goffman 1963; 1971).

A more influential figure regarding the practice of walking is Michel de Certeau. Certeau offers an insight to address the significance of everyday practices that are "repetitive and unconscious." In his book, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), he articulates the distinction between "strategies" and "tactics" to probe the relations between institutions/structures of power and individuals in cities. He argues that strategies are invoked by producers, such as governments and corporations who design cities or roads as "planned and readable" texts (1984, 93), whereas the individuals who use the spatial arrangements creatively render and produce their practical tactics. For instance, through the chapter of "Walking in the City," Certeau elaborates that those who walk improvise shortcuts and reorganize their bodily movements in the city. In an expanded sense, Certeau's thinking indicates how 'weak' actors tactically create everyday practices in relation to the strategies of powerful entities and actors, and he shows how those practices help explicate the social and cultural realities of a society.

These approaches to walking demonstrate how a seemingly trivial mobility practice can be significant in terms of understanding diverse layers of societies in their relations to particular cultural subjects, such as embodiment, modernization, and urbanization. For example, the practice of walking has been reinterpreted as a vehicle of

spiritual and reflexive experiences in the history of pilgrimages (Slavin 2003) and a way

of embodying identities and personal differences (Edensor 2000). Similarly, walking can

be a phenomenological tool for questioning the relation of subjectivity and landscape

(Wylie 2005) and an artistic method for unfolding particular/individual experiences of

space (Pinder 2011). In terms of exploring walking, walking environments, and agents of

walking altogether, anthropological and geographic work pays attention to different types

of walking and walking bodies (Urry 2007), including hunter-gatherers and pastoralists

(Ingold and Vergunst 2008). Walking and bodily patterns of young people and

geographies of children are also included (Barker et al. 2009).

In urban settings, as a mode of experiencing the city, walking has to be engaged

with cases of "the production of space" (Lefebvre 1991). More specifically, the birth of

motorized urban transport and the space for the motor vehicles "evicted" and victimized

walkers (Schmucki 2012), and walking became interdependent with the new

technological addition in the space, automobiles (Urry 2006). In other words, walking is

often viewed as a choice rather than a necessary activity to move (Amato 2004). In

addition, the production of pedestrian space switches ordinary walkers into pedestrians

and shapes particular features of urban walking (Goffman 1971; Lorimer 2011; Solnit

2000; Wunderlich 2008). The new elements of public pedestrian space, such as

pavements, potholes, lanes and blocks, transform skills and rules of walking and human

perceptions of an environment through the feet are also changed (Solnit 2000; Ingold

2011).

These previous studies have inspired my research on walking in Nairobi and my observations of walking practices in urban Africa. Nevertheless, I do not use the cases of Nairobi to rearticulate previous work, which is largely based on Western and European cities and societies. The struggles that many American and European cities experience regarding traffic safety and motorization are quite related to the contemporary landscape of mobility in Nairobi. Pedestrians struggle, and for this reason, new ideas and measures about walking are demanded. However, I also emphasize that approaches to the activity of walking in Nairobi and to that of Western cities are substantially and inherently different.

In general, walking has hardly been praised in Nairobi, and it is difficult to find the kind of approach to walking that Solnit (2000) and Amato (2004) describe about pleasures of walking in European cities. In addition, as discussed earlier, the history of *kipande* rules during the colonial time controlled the movement of African residents in the city, and the history of racially restricted mobility still exists through the compartmentalized residential districts of the city. Walking is also seen as something to be avoided at least by those expatriates and upper and middle-class Kenyans who tend to use cars and who do not consider walking as their means of mobility. In the same regard, owning a car is a particular privilege that many people aspire to achieve, while walking is described as the means of people who are poor. The emerging concerns and issues about traffic safety and accidents also reinforce the negativity of walking in Nairobi.

However, walking, especially long-distance walking is a common way of moving for the majority of people in Kenya and elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa (Porter 2002).

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People, including children, in rural areas are experts at walking for hours to get to public offices and schools. Many Nairobians walk a lot for these reasons. It is true that people with low income tend to walk more. However, it also should be emphasized that the seemingly difficult experience of walking is not considered to be particularly negative from the perspective of the walkers. In other words, struggles of walking exist, but they are not something to stereotype as if the people who practice long-distance walking are unfortunate or need to be 'saved' from dangerous walking environments. Thus, this chapter concerns and juxtaposes both the struggles and the everydayness of walking in Nairobi. It details the ways in which people manage their difficult, but also very ordinary ways of walking, and identifies the principal problems that are contextually embedded within the ordinariness of moving.

Calculating Mobility

People were spilling into the road. Their speed of walking seemed faster than the pace of the morning light. It was before 6:00 AM. Under the dusky sky, it seemed like everyone was immersed in the act of walking fast and forward and that nothing else mattered. My original plan was just to start walking from my friend's house, where I had spent the night so that I could join the early morning's stream of moving people. However, my fatherly friend was worried about me going alone outside in the early and dark morning. He insisted that he and his wife could just drop me off with his car somewhere on the

road near his house, and I would be able to join the walk from there. While not entirely convinced, I had to follow his advice.

I soon regretted it. When my friend pulled over his car on the side of the road, I was not even able to open the door because of the endless people brushing against the car. The narrow pedestrian space was already packed with the busy people walking, and there was no space to open a car door. I would have hit some people by opening the door. After a few failed attempts, I managed to open the door a little bit and put my body went through the tiny crack. I hurriedly said goodbye to my friend and his wife and jumped into the train-like human flow. I started walking fast like other people. I wanted to wash out the 'trace' of riding a private car, the privilege of moving in the city, on my body as soon as possible by diving into the stream.

My walk began in the early morning of a cloudy day. The sky, in the end, never got the full morning light, and a light rain began to fall. I walked fast and tried not to fall behind the pace of the walkers. No one even looked at me although I was an unusual member of the stream. Potholes, dangerous gridlocks, broken blocks of pedestrian paths, and sewer holes without covers consistently appeared, but nothing could slow them down. Everyone looked straight ahead and walked as if possessed by a kind of marching instinct. After a while, I found some people, both women and men, urinating at several corners along the roads where old concrete walls stood among some trees and bushes. I noticed the stains on the walls and smells of old and new urine mingled around the area. It was the only time they stopped in the busy walk. As soon as they finished urinating, people hurriedly resumed their walk as if to make up for lost time.

I was interested in this particular flow of people commuting from Kibera[44] to the Industrial Area in Nairobi. Several people, including my fatherly friend, mentioned to me that I should explore this walk, consisting of people trailing other people and starting as early as 4:00 AM. One thoughtful interlocutor described the walk as 'a human train' endlessly continuing every morning along the roads connecting one gigantic slum with an area of the city where many formal and informal jobs were concentrated. In fact, it was not just Kibera. Many other large informal settlements where low-income Nairobians reside are the origins of long lines of walking people in the morning. In the evening, the same streams of walking people flow in the opposite direction from the Industrial Area to the slums. The work of the people is mostly manual labor, such as working in production factories or cleaning and guarding private facilities. Some people walk the long distance for almost two hours to sweep the inside of a building and to prepare chai for office workers.

This walk between Kibera and the Industrial Area was mentioned in a parliamentary debate about minimum wages on June 6th in 2001. Dr. Shem Ochuodho, a trained engineer and a Member of Parliament (MP) at that time brought up the issue in the middle of questioning the Minister of the Ministry of Labour:

> "For example, let us take, for the argument's sake, an employee who resides in Kibera and has family; a wife and three children, and we try to compute the minimum amount that he requires for a living wage. Let us assume that he works in the Industrial Area where the majority of them

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[44] Kibera, which is also spelled as Kibra meaning 'forest' or 'jungle' in Nubian language was originated from the earliest residents, retired Nubian soldiers relocated by the British Colonial Administration from Sudan in the late 19th century. The colonial administration rewarded them with the land, now in Kibera. The descendants of the Nubians have lived in Kenya for generations, but they are marginalized in terms of obtaining Kenyan citizenship and treated as foreigners and stateless people (Hirst and Lamba 1994; Lonsdale 2008). Although Kibera began with the Nubian residents, today it has a collection of many villages with over one million residents with different ethnic backgrounds.

work. […] if you look at the transport this person requires everyday to go to work for 20 days a month and if you look at the meals this person requires together with his family […] let us assume they take one square meal a day […] If the Minister does that arithmetic, he will find that at the very minimum this person needs Kshs 10,000 and that is why we are talking of awarding over 100 per cent increment in minimum salary. So, you would find that, the consequence is that the person cannot afford to board a bus; he cannot afford to buy a bicycle to ride from Kibera to the Industrial Area. Therefore, this person has to wake up at 4:00 a.m. walk to work and walk back home after work. This is what this Government has put Kenyans under."

– The National Assembly of the Republic of Kenya (2001)

Morethi* was one of the people mentioned in the MP's argument. He was a Kibera resident and a worker in a textile factory in the Industrial Area who walked with me that rainy morning. As soon as he heard of my interest in the walk, he started calculating how much money he could save by walking like that for hours in the morning and evening for a week and a month in the end. Morethi was serious about the calculation and raised his voice toward me across the thickening streaks of rain. "50 in the morning, and 50 in the evening. 100 every day. 500 per week. 2,000 per month!" Other people whom I encountered in the walk later also similarly calculated their everyday walk in the sense that they did not have to spend money by walking. Instead, the money would be used to buy another package of *unga* (maize flour) or loaves of bread that they could bring home.

I often found this kind of financial translation of walking in Nairobi. Sometimes, random beggars explained to me the long distances they had walked, by stating the locations from where to where. By doing so, they rationalized their efforts to get some

money from me. If one has walking as the only mode of transportation available to oneself, taking a *matatu*, which is still considered as a means of mobility for ordinary people in Nairobi, is a kind of privilege. A university student who had a similar routine of long walk from another informal settlement in the eastern side of Nairobi to his school in town described the meaning of his daily walk in a similar sense. "It is a matter of choosing between eating your meal or taking *matatu*."

Many of my walking companions fell into this group of people whose only option for moving was walking. They sometimes rode *matatu* vehicles with me, because I was not able to walk any more after walking with them for hours, and I was willing to pay their fares for helping with my research. John*, who is a handcart puller and a central ethnographic character in chapter 4, was one of these companions. We moved together on foot initially, but when we were about to board a very old *matatu* vehicle after hours of pulling and pushing his handcart, the fare was a heavy burden in his mind. Twenty to fifty shillings was not a comfortable amount of money for him to spend given that he hoped to bring daily salary of around 350-400 shillings home to his family of six in the evening. The ride for him was special that day, as he would not even consider taking a *matatu* as his own mode of moving. He was one of the people who hardly spent any money to ride public transport.

The practice of calculation often continues inside *matatu* vehicles and it especially applies to children, ambivalent passengers, because they are not adults. Mothers squeeze in the vehicles with one or more children, and technically they take only one seat although the space they occupy is actually bigger than that. One day, I took a 14-

seater *matatu* with a mother with three girls, two of whom looked like teenagers though they were very skinny. I expected that she would take two seats for her children, but surprisingly and even mysteriously, they occupied only one seat and the girls somehow squeezed their bodies with her mother. I still do not understand how that could have been possible. In 33-seater vehicles, many children are supposed to stand or wobble unsafely in aisles and between seats because sometimes their parents do not want to 'waste' their money for an extra seat or because they do not have enough money to pay. By standing, squeezing against, or even sitting on thighs of adults, who do not even know them well, the children are not numerically counted as 'passengers.'

Achieving mobility becomes an everyday challenge for people struggling with the cost of living. They constantly walk and calculate for saving money. Comparatively, this is a very different kind of calculation in the case of Nairobi walkers with those in South Korea or America, for whom walking is sport or exercise to burn more calories. The mobility of people inside the *human trains* is calculated into their living, and the calculation is a way of handling their mobility, which becomes a challenge in relation to their limited financial conditions. Walking is not just a practice of mobility, but a form of struggle to stretch and survive with what they have.

Speed Game

"I think of my father whenever I hear hooting cars," Joan* a young mother of a baby boy in her 20s told me. Her father died in a car accident about 10 years ago, and it made her

sensitive about traffic safety more than other people. She still lives near Waiyaki Way, the same highway where her father lost his life. It is notoriously congested and also unsafe for people crossing it every day. Settlements were built up along both sides of the motorway. Crossing, what may be comparatively thought of as jaywalking in other contexts, is essential for many people taking *matatu* vehicles heading downtown and coming home. An underpass is located in an obscure place. It is dark and filled with the smell of urine. Walking through the channel is uncomfortable even with Joan. She told me there were rumors around the underground channel regarding crimes and drug users. Many residents, including Joan, do not like using it. She hopes to see a safe overpass and thinks that the city government or authorities could pay attention to building one if she writes an opinion piece in a popular newspaper.

I met Joan in August 2014 after reading a complaint she submitted to a local newspaper. Kenya's largest popular daily newspaper, *Daily Nation*, regularly has an opinion section, which usually contains at least one complaint a day about transportation and traffic problems. Many readers complain about gigantic potholes, extreme congestion, and dangerous road conditions by specifically stating the locations and their contacts. Joan's complaint was about Waiyaki way around which large informal and formal residential settlements were built, and the safety of the people dangerously crossing it every day. I emailed her and asked if I could hear more about her opinion and see the location she pointed out. At first, Joan seemed suspicious about me with a foreign name, but after exchanging a few more emails, we were able to arrange an appointment and finally met in front of a big supermarket built along the highway.

Figure 3.3 The Gap

Accompanied by her younger sister and 2-year-old son, Joan smiled at me. She told me that I was one of three people who had contacted her about her opinion piece in the newspaper. The other two were from the same residential community and also very concerned about the safety of people crossing the highway. Right at the moment of our meeting, groups of people and children were crossing it over the broken concrete structure dividing the highway in the middle. The broken section allowed people to pass and 'rest' for a few second in the middle of the highway before crossing the other half.

The gap people were using to cross the highway was a type of improvised pedestrian 'infrastructure' that made their walk possible. In fact, it was a vandalized public structure of a type commonly found on motorways around Nairobi. A number of similar cases were found along the recently completely Thika Superhighway when the highway was open. Overpasses were constructed later, but the locations did not satisfy

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people crossing the gigantic highway on a daily basis. On the section where the superhighway begins in the city's downtown, the partitioning structure was even made of barbwire instead of concrete, to *repel* people from dangerous crossing.

Figure 3.4 A Line of Barbwire

However, gaps could always be formed along the thick lines of barbwire, and people were crossing the road anyhow. It was confusing. What is more dangerous for people—their crossing or the barbwire hindering their crossing? The location was popularly filled with many street vendors and hawkers. Without the gaps, people whose living activities require moving around the area on foot were not able to move and survive. Sometimes, these broken structures were repaired by the authorities, but soon the gaps reappeared. Some say they were made by people collecting scrap metal, but regardless of the initial reason for them, they oddly provided a way to cross the motorway.

"A mother who had a boy like mine just died there recently." Joan explained why she wrote the opinion piece about crossing Waiyaki Way. Thinking of the young mother's death while crossing the highway and of how the woman's child would survive without his mother gave her emotional pain, especially in relation to her father's death in the past on the same highway. While having a conversation in a small restaurant near the highway and looking over it through the opened window, Joan seemed nervous about observing people always crossing the motorway from both sides. What was scarier was that the highway heading to western Kenya was popularly used by endless freight cars loading containers and large long-distance buses speeding to avoid possible congestion on the route. They never stopped for people. In fact, drivers were more afraid of getting into traffic jams and losing time on roads. Slowing down for pedestrians was not an option to consider. Some 'considerate' drivers just flickered their headlights to warn people. Jaywalking people, including small children in school uniforms, just run and find a way out of the motorway.

There is a strange dilemma surrounding many motor-focused urban corridors like Waiyaki Way in Nairobi. They are notoriously congested[45], but the speed that cars travel on motor-friendly infrastructure is also too fast and dangerous for those people settled around the motorways. Yet, traffic congestion sometimes helps pedestrians to walk safely and freely while cars are stuck and stand still. Both popular and professional concerns focus on the traffic jams and allowing more space for motorists. An expert in a transport

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[45] The traffic congestion in Nairobi is not just caused by increasing motor vehicles and dilapidated road networks. It is also widely related to the poor implementation of urban planning and the increasing housing development in neighboring counties where people working in Nairobi reside and depend on personal motor vehicles.

business told me when he learned about my research on Nairobi's mobility, "So you are studying how you can get stuck in traffic for three hours and miss your flight to South Korea?" If the congestion becomes a central topic of a conversation, people often 'compete' in sharing the most terrible conditions or longest time on the roads: "It took one hour just to get on the main road from my building," "You know what, I was only able to move four kilometers for over one hour," and "Let me tell you. I spent almost three hours on roads to get home yesterday." Some other people talked about the famous story of how Richard Branson, the CEO of Virgin Group, who has been interested in and visits Kenya very often, was stuck in traffic for three hours trying to get from the Nairobi airport to a conference in town after his eight-hour flight from London. People sharing this kind of story were worried that the traffic congestion might scare away foreign investors.

The uneven attention to transport issues that neglects pedestrian needs could be easily explained as reflecting the perspectives of the socio-economically elite, who tend or aspire to be drivers or motor car users using personal chauffeurs. An engineer working for the government told me, for instance, he would rather get stuck in his own car than in a *matatu* vehicle in the same congestion. He was hoping to purchase a personal saloon car as soon as possible. In other words, these people are transport-elites who might be the opposite of the citizens walking for living from Kibera to the Industrial Area whom I described earlier. In addition, from the perspective of the transport-elites, Nairobi is a regionally central city of East Africa, which is supposed to have 'developed' roads. However, the production of this kind of perspective is not just because they use motor-

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cars and do not walk. It is rather, a matter of how to contextualize your walk. Let me

explain, using the example of a walk of the governor of Nairobi City County (NCC),

Evans Kidero. On March 17th, 2015, major newspapers in Kenya reported that the

governor walked along Waiyaki Way. The news reports were based on the governor's

short description and photos posted on his official Facebook page.

> In his posts, the governor is seen walking along Waiyaki Way flanked by
> his entourage. "Today I got stuck in traffic and had to walk to my meeting
> at the Kempinski hotel in Westlands from the CBD […] I will ensure that
> the new raft of traffic measures launched last week by CS Transport and
> Infrastructure Eng. Michael Kamau and myself takes effect immediately to
> reduce traffic and congestion in Nairobi. I think I lost a couple of kilos
> today!" The internet was on fire after this post with some calling it a
> publicity stunt. What do you think, will the Kidero walk get us less
> congested roads?
>
> – Njambi Mungai, "Nairobi traffic forces Governor Evans Kidero to walk
> to Westlands," *Standard Digital*, March 17th 2015

In the photos, the head of the Kenyan capital's governance walks along Waiyaki Way

where no pedestrian space is available. Though he is surrounded by his entourage, other

pedestrians walking around the motorway are also present in the photos. Interestingly, his

conclusion after the unusual walk was that he empathized with the pain of experiencing

the traffic congestion rather with the tiring and challenging walking experience itself.

This particular walk could be just a kind of populist show, like many other politicians and

public figures have similar walks or visits on roads and in slums in Kenya especially of

the time of elections. However, even after a walk of quite a long distance by a public and

famous figure in Nairobi, the governor's attention was still on easing the traffic for motor

cars. In other words, he contextualized the walk as an experience of a congested space rather than of a difficult walking environment. In this context, easing the congestion becomes a moral action to improve the city's urban condition. My argument here is not to blame the individual governor, but to point out how the uneven attention to the different kinds of mobility in the same space could be framed by transport-elites. Having more space for motor vehicles or moving them faster is prioritized over building pedestrian infrastructure. The former would be a popular sign of development, but the latter would be neglected. Congestion is a shame to show foreign investors, but the absence of pedestrian infrastructure is not noticed in the same respect. The challenges that pedestrians face remain for them to need to figure out with their feet.

After I talked to Joan about the unsafe crossing section, I had a chance to ride a long-distance bus passing through the same corridor on my way to Eldoret, a central city of western Kenya. While sitting right behind the driver, I observed all kinds of people, including children, were constantly crossing as if they were moving components of the landscape of the highway. The driver in front of me did not even slow down when encountering only a short distance between the bus and people. He was 'working hard' to make his way, but I was terrified. To my eyes, it often looked like a deadly kind of *game* as I described in the vignette at the beginning of this chapter

About this 'game' I observed on roads in Nairobi, a friend of mine reminded me of a Japanese computer game, 'Frogger,' released in the 1980s. The frogs in the game should be directed to their homes by crossing roads and navigating around dangerous obstacles. They can 'die' by being hit by vehicles, running into dangerous animals or

locations, running out of time, and so on. However, the game on roads in Nairobi is not

the game that you can re-try like the frogs in the computer game. The relationship

between the cars and pedestrians on the motorways was a speed game in which both

drivers and people were dangerously familiar to each other, but the familiarity did not

countervail the real risk. By 2007, the biggest group of victims in road deaths of Kenya

was pedestrians (WHO 2009). Traffic accidents cause one in 50 deaths in the country and

were the seventh leading cause of death in 2014 with the numbers continuing to rise[46].

The government has noticed this escalation of road deaths and the National Transport and

Safety Authority (NTSA) has begun promoting nationwide road safety campaigns in the

country.

No matter how 'familiar' you are with the game, you never know what could

happen in encountering the speed and the moment that you do not control. On Sunday,

April 30th, 2014, the familiar game 'betrayed' or did not work for a pedestrian crossing

Mbagathi Way in Nairobi. While crossing the big motorway hurriedly, a man living

around the area was hit by a Toyota Prado, a luxury land cruiser popular to upper-class

Kenyan drivers. According to a news report, he was carrying a mattress on his shoulders

to help his uncle traveling upcountry with a lot of luggage (The Standard 2014). The man

died at the spot with the mattress lying next to him. What happened after his death was

that angry people around the road surrounded the Toyota Prado and set it on fire[47]. The

terrified driver became another victim who luckily ran away before the fire started. The

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[46] *Nation Newsplex*, December 2015. Accessed January 25, 2016. http://newsplex.nation.co.ke/roaddeaths.

[47] Setting a fire on a motor vehicle that caused a human or livestock death often happens on roads in Kenya.

luxurious car was destroyed. Only the frame of the car remained, still in smoke and flames, appearing on the evening TV news that day. The coal-black traces of the fire were still there when I visited the location a few days later.

One piece of spatial information in this accident that the news article did not mention was that right in front of the location, there was a steep and unpopular pedestrian overpass which was hardly used by people moving around the area. It is not appropriate to 'blame' the man carrying the mattress for not using the overpass and to argue that he brought the misfortune upon himself. In fact, it is difficult to find any pedestrian using the overpass especially people with a lot of luggage like a mattress. I do not insist that pedestrians are just powerless victims on motorways. Pedestrians are definitely victims of traffic accidents, but it is also important to notice that they are unavoidably 'contributing' to their accidents in the course of figuring out their mobility. In this process, they are also framed as 'careless' pedestrians from the perspectives of transport-elites although they have not been provided any adequate or sufficient infrastructure that might make them more 'careful' in using the roads.

I crossed many motorways in Nairobi with companions who walked with me for hours. When we crossed highways or gigantic corridors on which motor cars were running, every single aspect was dangerous, but there was no other option but jaywalking. A lot of times, we nervously held back and wandered around concrete or garden structures in the middle of the highways to cross the other half 'safely' with other people crossing with us at the same time. What was interesting was that everyone knew that it was dangerous and that the road was not built for them. Some people gave critical

opinions, "Kwa sababu ya watu wa important[48] (because of the important people [who drive]" or "We Kenyans are not wise enough [regarding safety]."

Figure 3.5 Pedestrians Trapped in a Traffic Jam

However, the danger was also an ordinary part of their moving which people were oddly accepting. When I questioned about the danger, many replied with statements like "Ni hatari, lakini tumezoea" ([It] is dangerous, but we are used [to this]) or "We are Kenyans" in the sense that they just manage the problems because there is no other option but to continue the dangerous movement. When there were near-accident situations, people who survived usually thanked God, by saying things like "This is why you have to thank God when you get home safely." The only safety they could achieve

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[48] In Nairobi, people mix English and Kiswahili colloquially.

was by praying and also by looking at the approaching motor vehicles from both sides and estimating the 'appropriate' distance. It was an ordinary risk they had to endure and handle for their mobility.

Where Roads End

My first walk in Nairobi was inside the biggest informal settlement of the city, Kibera. There are around 200 informal settlements of diverse scales, so-called slums, in the Kenyan capital, where more than half of the urban population resides.[49] Some of them are internationally famous, or notorious. For instance, Kibera (Kibra), Mathare, and Korogocho[50] have appeared in numerous movies, documentaries, and news reports. People who never have been to Nairobi sometimes know the names of these slums. On my first day in Nairobi in December 2010, a friend took me to Kibera three hours after my arrival. He was eager to show me the realities of Nairobi instead of the well-developed side of the city (Westlands) that was popular to foreign visitors. He carefully led me to the endless tin-roofed makeshift houses, muddy unpaved roads, and open sewerage lines flowing with dark and murky colors and indescribable smell. I stumbled here and there as I adjusted to the uncomfortable topography of the space. It is hard to say that there was any road in the sense of a paved or constructed corridor for walking.

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[49] There are various reports produced by NGOs and UN agencies, and the numbers are also varied from 150 to 200. It is difficult to find the exact number because of the nature of small informal settlements that are sometimes hidden or formulated randomly.

[50] It is a section of Dandora and famous for its gigantic garbage dumping site.

Once I met a slum resident, Peter*, who complained about the roadless condition of his small and not-very-famous slum community. He was frustrated in a public consultation meeting to promote the new urban master plan[51] for Nairobi. After the meeting, Peter was furious and sarcastically raised his voice to me:

> Did you hear how they [middle-class residents of Nairobi who were in the same meeting] complain about sewerages and roads? Let me tell you. At least they have those things to complain. We [the residents of the slum] don't even have sewerages and roads to complain! WE. DON'T. HAVE [any of them]. I am serious!

Figure 3.6 A Friend Walking inside a Slum Community

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[51] The new master plan for Nairobi was funded and consulted by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). It is currently under the official implementation.

Slums in Nairobi tend to be roadless, and it is difficult to find regular lanes of pavement. Walking in that kind of environment is difficult. It also means doing everything on foot to complete the travel from one place to another. When you encounter extreme bumps on the surface, you might need to jump a few times to reach the door of your house. You might need to squeeze yourself against walls of structures to avoid dangerous topographical sections.

Often, you can still walk on surfaces without any pavement although it is very hard and physically demanding. It is uneven and bumpy all over, and you can trip yourself, but still it is 'walkable.' However, this walkability immediately disappears in the rainy season, which lasts more than 3-4 months each year. Walking is not an ordinary activity anymore. It becomes a task that you have to complete with considerable physical and mental effort. A small informal settlement I used to visit to talk to some residents, for instance, looked like a gigantic muddy pool whenever there was a big rain. It was difficult to see the usual crowd of moving people along the unpaved lanes inbetween the small informal structures crammed in the community. An especially noticeable absence was the mobility of children. Many small children usually playing outside were stuck inside houses or stores and looking outside through broken windows. I was often amazed by how those small bodies quickly and freely run and jump around the uneven topography without any proper shoes and even with bare feet, but the muddy surface seemed to disrupt their mobility completely. Only some bigger children wearing colorful secondhand gum boots were walking outside, but the ordinary games and activities of

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playing were suspended because of the muddy paths, their usual playground when there was no rain.

Ironically, paved roads and new highways that facilitate and improve the city's connectivity surround these slum communities of Nairobi. Lawrence*, a passionate young activist working hard advocating for the people of Mathare, another famous mega slum in Nairobi, described his concern about road construction around his home community. "Mathare is becoming like a small island," he said, which is confined by development. Lawrence's observation of Mathare as an *island* in the context of Nairobi's development followed me whenever I went to walk inside slums. Another resident of a small slum community gave me a similar account, "We are surrounded by the richest of the rich people" because of the ambient environment of buildings and roads that were hiding her community.

What I realized through these observations of the people living and moving inside slums is that the slum communities appear where roads ended. Something else begins as well. It could be mud or deep pits. It could also be an irregular array of stone bumps or a heap of garbage. Sometimes, there is a severe slope or raised spot. In a more physical way of feeling the earth, the senses of walking on the surfaces completely changes from the first step into where roads were ending. On pavements or brick roads, there are possibilities that are often established or guided by designers or engineers who built the infrastructure. However, in the space where 'roads' end, the possibilities are significantly created by the users, the walking people, and they have to engineer their paths and routes to get to their destinations.

Walking in this kind of environment is also 'seeking' space for and techniques of moving. It might not be clearly noticeable in the routines that are repeated every day because seeking activities become ordinary, and people just manage the obstacles by improvising with what they have, their senses and feet. However, this does not mean that the difficult routines do not have to be changed just because people are familiar with them. Apparently, people who need roads most are the ones living without any of them. As Peter pointed out, they do not even have any road about which they complain.
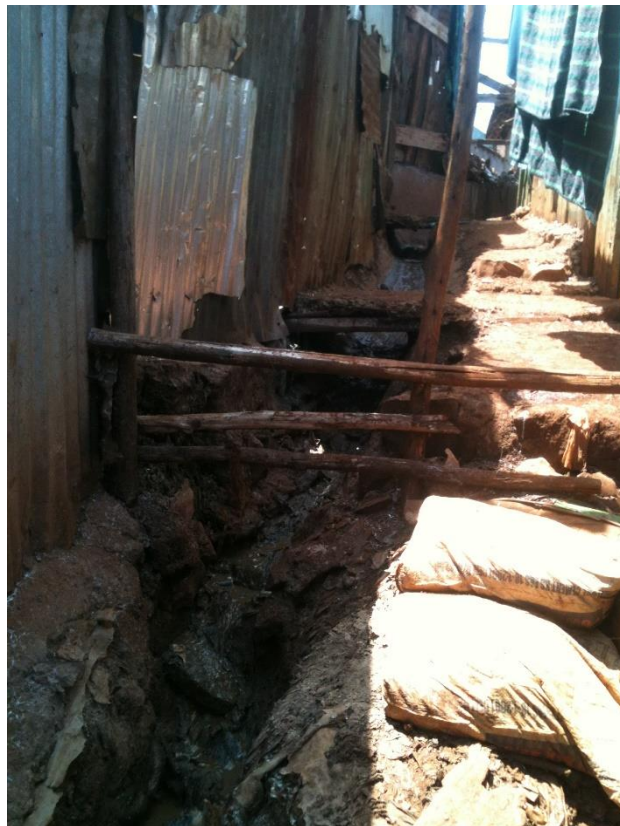
Figure 3.7 A 'Roadless' Path in a Slum Village

In addition, the roadless conditions of walking residents are sometimes intensified by the fact that they have to move out because of new roads. As I explained in chapter 2,

for many local, national, and international stakeholders, implementing a road project aims to effect Nairobi's development, particularly for improving the city's connectivity and also to increase their organizational benefits. However, for the other, relatively unseen participants in this road-building drama, the story is completely different. Many informal settlements are built or have 'encroached,' according to the regulating government authorities, on public lands that are allocated for building roads (road reserves) and other infrastructural facilities. Therefore, for the people whose livelihoods and living depend on the space where the roads are going to be built, new roads are severe threats rather than essential infrastructure to improve their mobility.

The recent construction of the Southern Bypass, penetrating the southwest side of Nairobi is one example. To build the highway, a big chunk of Kibera, more specifically, a section of Raila Village in the slum, was demolished, and the mesmerizing new corridor now stretches right in front of the village. Kibera, the massive urban "island" in the words of Lawrence, with the rusty color of the roofs, became a background of the new highway. According to Beatrice Obwocha in a *Daily Nation* article on December 13th, 2015, within one year since its opening, more than a dozen people living near the highway lost their lives. A child killed by a hit and run vehicle on March 9th, 2015, is one of those whose death infuriated the neighboring residents in Kibera, although the news was hardly reported (Storitellah 2015). As many slum dwellers said, they do not have roads for themselves, but they have to move out for the roads built for others, but that do not help with their own everyday struggles. Ironically, the infrastructural objects for

bringing 'connectivity' deters their mobility and even deconstruct their previously
integrated lives of housing, schooling, and community.

Mama Mary: My work is walking

Roads were quiet. It was the New Year's Day of 2014. I became curious about two small
women right in front of me, carrying enormous sacks on their thin shoulders. They were
walking on a main road through an upscale suburban residential area where one could
find houses of many expatriates and upper-class Kenyans[52]. Whenever the women made
a step forward, there were clattering sounds coming out from the sacks. Each of them was
carrying two sacks tied up with old *kanga*[53] straps across their shoulders. I could not see
their heads hidden behind the stacks of the sacks, and I wondered whether they were
carrying the huge loads or the loads were oddly dragging them. When I caught up with
their pace, I started a conversation with one of the women, Mama Mary*, and found out
that they were collecting recyclable items, mostly anything made of plastic or metal.
They were wrapping up the day's work and heading to a place where they usually
gathered together with their colleagues.

Mama Mary's group consisted of around ten people, but the members changed
daily depending on individual circumstances. If one found a better day-to-day job, then

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[52] The name of the neighborhood is hidden in this dissertation because it can disclose the identities of the garbage collectors that regularly come to this location.

[53] A traditional colorful cloth imprinted with Kiswahili proverbs. Many women in Kenya and East Africa use this for various purposes from dressing to carrying things.

the person would not join the group for picking up recyclable waste. Still, Mama Mary

and four or five other members were regular members. They were involved in a

community neatly integrated by kinship and by living and working in a nearby peri-urban

area. On the outskirts of the Kenyan capital, lives of residents look very rural and

ethnically engaged[54], but their livelihoods are deeply linked to the urban and suburban

sides of Nairobi through numerous manual and informal jobs and domestic staff jobs for

middle and upper-class Nairobians. In the case of Mama Mary's group, the particular

medium that connected their living and upper-class suburban residents was 'trash,' or the

things that wealthy people discard. They throw out all kinds of things from soda or beer

cans to rotten food, and the workers collect anything recyclable and useful that can be

sold.

The workers involved in collecting or recycling trash in urban areas of the Global

South are exposed to external and social stigmatization. In her study of female workers in

the garbage management in Dakar, Senegal, Fredericks (2012) draws on Mary Douglas

(2003[1966])'s theory of pollution and taboo to point out how workers who carry impure

material become symbolically condemned figures within society. Similarly, in Nairobi,

garbage workers are often treated as "social outcasts" (Wacquant 2008) because they are

involved in handling discarded dirty material, which other people would like to avoid. A

more particular aspect to consider is that Kenya has a colonial history of stigmatizing,

controlling, and punishing young people who 'wandered' in public space because they

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[54] Mama Mary's residential community consisted of Kikuyu people and only a handful of non-Kikuyu, but ethnolinguistically related other Bantu people, such as Kamba and Luhya.

were restricted as vagrants (Ocobock 2006). An important Sheng[55] word in this regard is

chokora. *Chokora* literally means "scavengers" (Bosire 2008) in the street language and

is used to address certain people, especially street children and youth, who beg money

from, and sometimes harass pedestrians and drivers/passengers in traffic jams. People

who are involved in dirty or petty jobs and who roam on roads are also popularly

considered in this street categorization. Thus, the term *chokora* is used to despise and

stigmatize the groups of homeless, jobless, and in some cases, doped-up people on

streets.

When strangers look at the mobile workers on foot, walking along roadsides and

collecting recyclable trash in Nairobi, these workers contextually meet some elements of

chokora because of their occupational background with trash and waste. As one of the

workers in Mama Mary's group used to tell me: "Watu wengi wanafikiri sisi ni chokora

(Many people think we are *chokora*)." Numerous times during my walk with the workers,

I observed uncomfortable interactions between the workers and other people who looked

down on them.

Mama Mary and her colleagues began walking and working before they could see

the morning light. When they reached the wealthy neighborhood where they regularly

collect recyclables, they scattered around small access roads and started filling old sacks,

magunia,[56] that carried names of crop businesses and humanitarian agencies, such as

UNICEF and the World Food Programme (WFP). Most of the time, a lot of recyclable

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[55] A street language widely spoken in Nairobi.

[56] *Gunia* is a sack in Kiswahili, and *magunia* is the plural form.

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items were found inside garbage bags and cans outside the numerous front gates of houses. Sometimes, the residents of the houses, especially expatriates working in Nairobi, had returned to their home countries for vacation, and there was little trash to be picked up. Soon, however, each had two and sometimes, even three sacks filled with plastic and metallic items.

Trash was not just trash, and at some point, it is questionable to define trash as trash. In fact, Mama Mary and her colleague rarely used the word *takataka*, which means trash in Kiswahili. The word they used was *vitu*[57], the plural form of *kitu*, meaning "a thing." The usual conversations between us involved, "Leo, kuna vitu vyingi (Today, there are a lot of things [to collect]" or "Vitu si vyingi, siku hizi (Not many things [to collect], these days)." The items categorized as trash are not inherently trash, depending on who counts those items in what context (Strasser 2000; Alexander and Reno 2012).

When I began walking with Mama Mary and other workers, I usually met with them at a gathering place. There, resting and sorting their collected recyclables before leaving for the market, they recharged their energy for the long walk ahead with the heavy loads. After a few months, however, a mansion complex was constructed near their gathering area. The site had become an access road for the complex's new residents, Mama Mary's group could no longer stay there. After that, Mama Mary and other workers had to rest on a corner of a main road in the neighborhood, dangerously exposed to passing motor vehicles. During the dry season, many construction trucks passed and raised endless waves of hazy dust.

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[57] *Vitu* is the plural form of *kitu*, "a thing," in Kiswahili.

The workers remembered the names of the companies, including the one of a Chinese road construction company, which were written on the bodies of the passing trucks. Sometimes, they found the new mansion complexes in the area from property advertisements in newspapers and magazines. They matched the names and the advertisements like they were playing a name-matching puzzle. Sitting around a property magazine or a property section of a newspaper, they talked about where a particular new house is located or where they had seen a new complex with the same name. Inside the thickening and billowing cloud of yellow dust on the roads, Mama Mary and other workers were spectators of a kind of development that was primarily irrelevant to their lives. In a way, the workers seemed disconnected from the space, although they were present there.

When walking, everyone was carrying about 10 kilograms (22 pounds) of collectibles on their shoulders. This might not sound particularly heavy, but the weight was not the only aspect of this labor because of the enormous size of the loads in relation to their own size and physical condition. For example, Mama Mary carried about 10 kilograms of recyclable material, but she weighed only 37 kilograms (81 pounds). One of the sacks she carried was full of plastic water bottles and containers. Even though the weight was only around 4 or 5 kilograms, the size of the sack looked much bigger than her body. Thus, when she carried two or even three sacks of that size on her shoulders, she sometimes even seemed squeezed under the loads that were pressing her. When there were extra things to carry, their hands were also full. On 'lucky' days when there were many things to collect and sell, I could not even see their bodies. From a distance, it

sometimes seemed as if the sacks were moving by themselves and their bodies were hidden behind the loads.

The trash pickers went through the small link roads with no pedestrian space. The struggle with trucks and other passenger vehicles continued and they constantly waddled to avoid cars coming through the roads. A shortcut they used consisted of small trails and bushes over nearby hills. There were numerous traces of people following the small paths inside the bushes. A lot of other pedestrians used this informal road network as well, an interface that connected the world of the wealthy and the other world, where Mama Mary, her colleagues, and others informally worked and lived. The geographical features were very hilly, but human steps gradually flattened the topography.

The workers had their own notion of what they were doing. Above all, trash was not the entire focus of their lives. In fact, the workers were doing all types of day-to-day work (*kibarua*) to continuously push forward (*sukuma*) with their lives, and trash was only one of the objects with which they struggled. Even within the context of garbage collecting, trash did not dominate the whole process. The activity of walking was a more essential and constant part of their labor from the beginning to the end. Mama Mary was especially keen in articulating her labor in this way. She kept telling me again and again, "*Kazi yangu ni kutembea* (My work is walking)."

In Mama Mary's work, this notion of laboring as walking is particularly related to the spatial changes of the area that had forced her group to develop their route in different ways. Lately, a gigantic new highway transecting the area had disrupted the route they had been using. It was another experience of the city's growth and development in their

ordinary life of walking. In fact, the road was steadily being extended from one direction. It would eventually reach the workers and all other people walking in the area. The group first tried to adhere to their previous route by jaywalking on a highway where the color and smell of tarmac became stronger every day. When the thickness of the tarmacked space was too high to climb from the unpaved roadside, Mama Mary and others continued finding *njia yetu* (our way) and *sehemu ya kwetu* (our part or region) along the new road. Walking was their "art" of surviving in their confrontation with the highway (Certeau 1984). As hard as these disruptions were, people rendered a great deal of flexibility and resourcefulness to quickly adjust and adapt.

Figure 3.8 A New Highway under Construction

Nevertheless, the workers eventually had to abandon the route. What really stopped them from using the original route was not exactly the new road itself, but what the road covered with asphalt brought to local pedestrianism – that is to say, speed. The new road was a valid remedy created for decongesting the city's traffic, and it brought a new type of velocity in front of the communities of walkers (Schnapp 2003). When the road was officially opened, so many dump trucks and other motor vehicles began to use it. In the end, it was too dangerous to cross, and even walking on the side of the road did not look safe enough, at least not while carrying heavy loads. They had to change their map of laboring, and the group eventually reconstructed their walk by detouring around or avoiding the highway. Thus, walking in the area was re-defined in relation to the speed of vehicles as a risky form of mobility and pedestrians were now vulnerable in front of auto-mobility (Jain 2004). People who had previously walked now seemed evicted from the space. They were not 'eligible' for the application of the new road which was such a distant reality right inside their ordinary space.

In Defense of Walking

> When I went to San Francisco, I stayed with a family […]. The father told me, "I walk to work." He was proud. But for me, it was like, why? Why you walk? You know, the roads are nice [in the US]. You can drive a nice car. (Laugh) But [for] him, he was proud to tell me he is lucky […] I tell myself, "Tomorrow, I will walk." Then, I can't walk (laugh). Because the facility is not there.
>
> – A government engineer in Nairobi

The activity of walking would be celebrated in San Francisco or New York or Paris. Pedestrian life in Paris has been particularly appreciated by many scholars and artists (Solnit 2000; Amato 2004). If we contextualize walking in Nairobi through the lenses of the European pedestrianism and culture, it is definitely far from something pleasurable. The act of walking, as I described earlier, is more like a tough task; you sometimes may even need to engineer your own path, without anything to facilitate your walk. This ordinary mode of mobility is hence an everyday struggle, although people do not even easily notice it given their overall tough urban lives.

In this chapter, I examined the dynamics of walking on roads in Nairobi as I came to understand them by walking, observing, and talking to people. Many people walk to commute, save living expenses, and labor by adjusting to urban conditions that inherently disrupt their walking. Not much infrastructure help their walking experiences, but people just manage their mobility as if they themselves are 'infrastructure.' They collaborate with what they have, including their feet, senses, loopholes, vandalized structures, and God, most of the times. In the midst of motorization, traffic jams become ubiquitous, and drivers and transport-elites become anxious about their speed. Motorists increase their speed and get more space for driving that is often interpreted as part of national pride and modern infrastructure. The risk of accidents also grows, and pedestrians become victims of these accidents, even as their new identities on roads are framed to be 'careless' actors in the accidents just for practicing their familiar mobility. It is in this context that ordinary mobility meets emerging danger. People manage and figure out their obstacles, but risky chances are embedded inside the familiar ways of moving.

In Nairobi, I observed people walking under many terrible and dangerous conditions that made me feel complicated. I do not mean to present a typical Western perspective on urban Africa by projecting images of people in pain and inappropriate living conditions. As much as I respect the ways in which Nairobians manage their everyday struggles of moving, I also challenge the notion that reduces the fundamental matter of improving lives of urban residents to the notion that "We are Kenyans. We are used [to this]." The ordinary danger is still a danger, the one you might not be able to notice every day. I disagree that ordinariness can rationalize risky pedestrian environments for citizens.

Figure 3.9 A Pedestrian Walking on a Newly Renovated Motorway

The issues regarding safe pedestrianism are not easily resolved even in Western cities, where walking is praised in many respects. However, notions of walking and safety become blurred and sometimes, even marginalized in Nairobi in the name of development and underdevelopment. Highways may make a city look modern and developed. There are more conversations and ideas about motor vehicles that, in fact, intensify unequal experiences on the roads. Walking is still in a kind of blind spot when urban space is framed for moving cars faster rather than giving citizens equal rights to use that space (Brenner et al. 2012). A handful of examples of pedestrian friendly roads that are photographed to advertise governmental achievements are not enough in a city where more than half of people depend on walking. A city itself is not a purpose. It is the means of improving lives of its inhabitants (Amin 2006). It is imperative to generate significant recognitions and discussions for facilitating the daily experiences of the walking citizens in the course of developing the city.

4. WELCOME TO NAIROBI'S HUSTLE

The first thing I saw was slow drips of saliva coming out of his mouth. The long and heavy drips reaching the ground instantly caught my eye. Then, I saw his body shaking in sweat. The man was feeling too much pain to notice that he was drooling. He hardly moved his shaking right hand to hold some coins handed to him by another man who also looked very tired from pulling a heavy hand cart, called mkokoteni (sg.) [58], in Kenya. The drooling man was one of three workers who just finished pushing the cart up along the hilly road packed with motor vehicles. He likely started pushing the heavy cart at the beginning of the steep motorway. Many motor vehicles made roaring engine sounds as they ascended the hill and the smell of fumes and rubber tires filled the air along the road. The color of the air was a mix of gray and brown. It was difficult to breathe, see or speak. If you opened your mouth, the air covered with the uncomfortable color made you feel like you were choking. Looking through the air, my eyes followed the drooling man.

As soon as he reached the narrow walkway on the side of the road, he plunked down on the muddy and narrow space and threw a tattered jacket on his shoulder. He was looking down to the ground. Tired and distressed, the man was panting and sweating heavily. Even breathing seemed to be difficult for him. To my eyes, he was in pain. I felt the pain as if I was hearing his panting sound right next to my ears. Busy pedestrians quickly walked by him. Fumes from numerous motor vehicles collected into a dark smog all around him and the narrow pedestrian way. The scorching sun in the afternoon beat

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[58] *Mkokoteni* is a singular word referring a big wooden cart in Kiswahili (Swahili language) and etymologically related to a verb '-*kokota*' meaning 'to drag,' 'to draw,' or 'to haul' (Seierup 2001). The plural form is *mikokoteni*.

down on his head and heated up the afternoon air in the Kenyan capital. Loud gospel and hip-hop music coming from many matatu vehicles stuck in the traffic filled my ears, but my eyes remained fixed on the man's movement, or rather his stillness.

The handcart worker seemed excluded from the moment and space. His pain seemed excluded from the city's rhythm. He was disconnected from the landscape of the busy metropolis surrounding him. I became afraid that the man might stop breathing while sitting there. I could tell he was moaning because of his pain deeply affecting his muscles and bones. In one moment, I thought the pain touched my skin as well and shivered from it. He could just collapse right there. Soon, however, he rose up and groggily walked away. My eyes followed his back, but the exhausted worker was heading down the hill. I was trapped and squeezed in-between many other passengers in the matatu which was also trapped in the notorious traffic jam of Nairobi's usual afternoon. He finally disappeared from my sight.

It was not my first time to see mkokoteni moving inside the city's motorized traffic and to watch mobile workers pushing and pulling carts along the steep uphill road. However, the drooling man and his obvious pain triggered my exploration of this particular means of living and mobility, something I had not considered in the initial phase of my research. The road toward the Upper Hill area where Nairobi's famous skyscrapers are gathered goes to the largest informal settlement in Kenya, Kibera. Many informal makeshift stores and residential estates are located along the way. Customers, small vendors and kiosk owners wait for farm produce delivered from the city's central area. During my fieldwork, I often saw four or five men struggling to move one cart full

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of heavy sacks and boxes of vegetables and fruits along the motorway. They were surrounded by roaring motor vehicles honking[59] and threatening to push them away from the road. It was a very dangerous and uncomfortable environment for the hand cart workers, but they hardly looked disturbed. Most of the time, they ignored the interruptions and simply moved on their way. In this manner, they claimed their right to use the road and to deliver goods to their customers who trusted the old way of mobility.

This chapter traces the mobility of hand carts (*mkokoteni*) and the mobile workers working with the vehicles in Nairobi. I detail the movement of the *mkokoteni* workers on urban motorways and examine how this object of non-motorized transport from 'old' Africa is sustained through the fabric of social relations, but remains unreconciled with the language of motorization and modern transport infrastructure. The data in this chapter were collected by mobile participant observation of hand cart operators on roads and markets along with interviews of transportation experts in Nairobi. I reveal how this 'old' way of moving and laboring exists in contemporary Nairobi, both as a neglected mode of non-motorized transport on urban roads and as a socio-economically important occupation for operators and their customers. What kinds of social relations and road interactions are involved in the operation of *mkokoteni* in Nairobi? Where does the 'old' mobility fit in the space for contemporary urban transport?

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[59] In Kenya, "hooting" is more common than "honking."

Figure 4.1 A *Mkokoteni* Puller on a Motorway in Nairobi

The drooling man I depicted above is a typical manual worker located at the bottom of *mkokoteni* business. Many of them are not the owners of the carts, but instead rent them on a daily basis. My description of the painful, but also routinized labor, shows how mobile cart pullers and pushers are involved with other forms of transport in Nairobi. The workers are easily stereotyped by others as impoverished workers whose presence on the roads contribute to gridlocks. By accompanying them on their route, however, I found that this difficult and seemingly outdated mode of moving is entangled with webs of social and economic connectedness in Nairobi. The work is hard and *mkokoteni* is blamed for disrupting motorized traffic, but the workers are trusted and

deeply involved into the circulation of material goods in the city. This chapter, therefore, reframes the popular gaze on the use of handcarts on motorways, and delves into the hidden sides of the operation, together with the meaning of this "outdated" means of mobility in contemporary Nairobi.

This chapter is framed by four sections that detail about the movement and social meanings of *mkokoteni* in Nairobi. The first section, *On Carts in Nairobi*, is a short introduction of *mkokoteni*. I briefly explore the local landscape of non-motorized vehicles, by focusing on the different types of handcarts used by many informal operators. The section also provides physical and social profiles of *mkokoteni* in Nairobi, based on my observations.

The second section, *Welcome to Nairobi's Hustle: The Work of Mkokoteni,* details the business side of *mkokoteni* in Nairobi. I describe the roles of owners and operators involved in making deliveries and show that although their working conditions are informal, they are, nonetheless, regulated through social relations within their respective networks. Here, I also emphasize the importance of *hustling* in Nairobi as a particular concept or spirit or strategy of living. Hustling is often embodied through informal and constant struggles managed by many Nairobians with limited resources and those who are dealing with difficult urban conditions. Through the concept of hustling, I show that while *mokokoteni* workers and the outdated mobility they facilitate may have been marginalized, they are also vocationally and socially powerful, in the sense that they configure their livelihoods regardless of the images of poverty and disturbance that surround them.

The third section, *Following John's Route*, closely follows a routine of one mobile worker, John*, a *mkokoteni* operator in his 50s. Every day, he delivers vegetables and fruits from Wakulima, the biggest retail market of agricultural products in Nairobi, to vendors and informal makeshift stores in an upscale neighborhood, about four miles away. He has been pulling and pushing a rented handcart for almost 20 years. Every evening, he returns home with 350-400 KES (about USD 4) in his pocket, after paying to rent the cart and hire colleagues who help him move it. John is also an impoverished urban dweller who lives in an informal settlement with a sick wife and five children. He left his rural home in Kiambu, a neighboring county of Nairobi, almost two decades ago, and has been working with *mkokoteni* ever since. I follow John's usual delivery route to explore the many intersections of his *mkokoteni* labor and Nairobi's changing landscape of mobility. En route to his daily deliveries, he and his colleagues struggle to push and pull their cart on motorways, where they are in an unequal, and at times dangerous, battle with the ongoing motorization of the society. These informal workers also manage to distance themselves from the motorization of the city, so that their own realities become detached from the motorways.

The last section, *Mkokoteni and NMT*, reveals the 'unfit' nature of handcarts in the technical context of contemporary non-motorized transport. As I have explained in the previous chapters, road development projects in Nairobi become fields of implementing development projects that are often framed with popular discourses, such as sustainable transport and green Africa. Here, I contextualize *mokokoteni*, that does not have any room and is excluded from the ongoing discussions of NMT (non-motorized

transport) infrastructure. I compare this unsuitable, as well as neglected stance, with the growing promotion of using bicycles in Nairobi.

As noted in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, the purpose of exploring the mobility of *mkokoteni* is not to argue that *mkokoteni* should remain in Nairobi, or to romanticize the manual labor done by those who operate them. Instead, by reframing this neglected form of mobility on Nairobi's motorways, this chapter sheds light on a particular way of moving goods in urban Africa which is not compatible with contemporary transport development plans. Thus, my ethnographic message in this case is that there are certain aspects that are not going to fit in the mainstream routes of development. The old or informal ways of facilitating urban lives survive through networks and relations of participants, as John and his *mkokoteni* still persist upon my ethnographic observations. However, the results of such incompatibility could displace people and their livelihoods in one way or another, especially in the era of rapid national development, which the Kenyan capital is facing by focusing largely on modernization and motorization for urban mobility.

On Carts in Nairobi

Cars and motorways are definitely the most striking components of the landscape of Kenyan capital. New motorways and new motor cars mesmerize people. News photos depicting contemporary Nairobi show the city's notorious gridlocked roads and bumper-to-bumper motor vehicles. While walking around Nairobi, however, one may notice that

the intra-local movement of the city still depends more on certain modes of transportation that are not motorized. Walking, as explored in the previous chapter, is the most popular way of moving in the city, and it is used by almost half of the urban dwellers. All kinds of moving vehicles without motors are also in use, from small carts like dollies and trolleys, to remodeled bicycles, wheelchairs, and tricycles carrying small storage boxes of ice cream, bottled drinks, and sliced fruits.

Figure 4.2 Popular Small Handcarts in Nairobi

One would find diverse types of carts at the major long-distance bus stations and central *matatu* stages. People encounter a crowd of mobile workers with small and large handcarts. The carts tend to be compact with shapes close to those of dollies and trolleys, so that they can easily navigate in congested and narrow spaces. The handlers of these

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carts mostly stay nearby, to wait for their customers who are busy commuters and travelers with their luggage and loads. Names and phone numbers of the workers are written on their carts. Different kinds of shackles and locks to keep the vehicles safe from thefts are visible as well. The workers mostly are gathered in a group, although many of them work individually. The carts also become their chairs or offices, especially when the workers chat while having cups of chai together. The small carts usually move around pedestrian roads and within relatively short distances. Travelers transferring between various *matatu* routes are particularly common customers of the workers moving the small carts.

The main vehicle character in this chapter, however, is called *mkokoteni* (sg.)[60]. It typically has two rubber tires, one on each side, and a flat wooden body which is of a width similar to a passenger car. The metal or wooden frames fence the flat inner part to keep items loaded on top of its flat body. There are other kinds as well, without frames or with different types of frames and lengths. The front part of *mkokoteni* has a long metal handle-like bar attached to both sides of the body. When they move the vehicle, the pullers locate their bodies inside the handle part, hold the handle with both their hands, and press their waists to the front bar. There is also an old rubber tire attached to the end of the wooden body, cushioning the cart and protecting it from friction or abrasion when it is parked.

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[60] The plural form of this word is *mikokoteni*.

Figure 4.3 Another *Mkokoteni* Operator on a Motorway

In many cases, you can see that the *mkokoteni* has a small wooden or metal sign inscribed with the name of the owner or owner's business, a vehicle number, and even a phone number, like *K. N. Services No. 16* or *John Kamau* 0718004XXX*. Local *jua kali*[61] mechanics mostly manufacture these carts with recycled metals that are relatively easy to reuse (Seierup 2001). Shoddy and hand-made wooden ones from older days are also still found in Nairobi. You can see some of them moving and rattling around small markets and peri-urban areas as their pullers struggle with the old vehicle bodies.

Transport experts or engineers see different types of carts, including *mkokoteni*, as non-motorized vehicles (NMVs) in their technical language, and that would be a factually

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[61] As explained in chapter 1*, jua kali* refers to an informal business sector of handling metal fabrications, carpentry, and mechanic work (King 1996).

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correct category (Sheydin 2010). Before motorization, such vehicles were popularly used and moved by humans or draft animals all over the world. Many of these vehicles disappeared, including Nairobi's rickshaws that were pulled by Indian workers in the colonial time. Still, a wide range of wagons and carts exist and contribute to the heterogeneous traffic environments of urban roads in developing societies, where motorized and non-motorized vehicles, people, and even animals are jumbled together. In the context of heavy motorization, however, vehicles carrying loads which are solely dependent on the "human motor" (Rabinbach 1992) are viewed as marginalized and outdated by motor vehicles. The following two sections elaborate the nature of operating handcarts through the *mkokoteni* business and the work of the cart operators in Nairobi.

Welcome to Nairobi's Hustle: The Work of Mkokoteni

It is easy to find *mkokoteni* on the fringes of neighborhood and markets of urban Kenya. Many water vendors use these carts to deliver yellow or blue jerry cans[62] filled with water to small residential communities and informal settlements. Every morning, one can see *mkokoteni* parked in front of a narrow driveway, where children and mothers come out and queue to buy a can of water from the vendor. When many people relocate to different residential estates at the end of every month, *mkokoteni* workers are hired to move household items on the roads that connect the estates where many low-income

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[62] These plastic jerry cans are mostly recycled containers of cooking oil and are used in many households to fetch water. Some people in urban areas even bring these empty cans back to their rural homes and consider them to be valuable housewares.

residents stay. Sometimes, one slowly moving *mkokoteni* in the middle of a narrow double lane road blocks the flow of motor vehicles and makes them tail behind. Car drivers often honk and yell at the operator to push it away, who, in turn, looks calm and patient until he finds a spot to get out of the way.

Figure 4.4 Mzee Mwangi's Handcarts

The central sites to learn about the work of *mkokoteni* are the conventional markets. One particular place I found was the biggest food retail market of Nairobi, Wakulima[63]. Many *mkokoteni* owners were found there, and each owned anywhere between several to dozens of handcarts. A number of operators, mostly pullers and pushers, were also present and regularly hired by the owners. For these owners, the work of *mkokoteni* is linked to their retail businesses in the market. Mzee[64] Mwangi* who

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[63] *Wakulima* means 'farmers' in Kiswahili, and some people call the market *marikiti,* which originated from the English word, market.

[64] *Mzee* means "an old man" in Kiswahili. It is used like Mr. in English. When it is used independently, without any first or last name, it is the popular nickname of the first president Jomo Kenyatta, who was the founder of Kenya (*Baba*

owns dozens of handcarts, for example, is not just an *mkokoteni* owner, but also a

wholesale merchant selling fruits delivered from Western Kenya in the market for about

30 years. He occupies a small space right outside Wakulima's gates. It is a dead-end alley

between two buildings and is hidden behind makeshift restaurants where people working

in the market have meals and chai on the muddy ground.

Mzee Mwangi's handcarts are parked together and covered with a thick plastic

sheet to protect them from unexpected rain or dust. A small informal structure serves as

his office, and a wide wooden bench next to it is used to sort fruits for selling, to make

juice, or to discard. Three times a week, his *mkokoteni* workers and porters manually

unload sacks of fruit from trucks arriving from rural farms. After sorting the fruit, the

workers deliver it to the stores and small vendors in and around Wakulima. Mzee

Mwangi himself starts work very early in the morning, together with other workers, to

select the fruits for his customers in the restaurants, supermarkets, and juice stores, and

he directs his workers to deliver sacks of fruit to the proper places in Nairobi. Owners

like Mzee Mwangi are also members of a community association within the market. They

have meetings to discuss the challenges related to their businesses and also to collectively

respond to disasters like fire and floods in the market.

Strictly speaking, Mzee Mwangi's business is not entirely informal or marginal,

although the vehicles he uses are stigmatized for their outdatedness and slowness on

roads. His business is regularized by his work with long-term customers and employees.

Thus, his transport/retail business would not disappear easily in a day or within a short

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Taifa – the father of the nation) as an independent nation.

term. At the same time, his business remains informal in the sense that there are no 'contracts' that make his location, hiring, and delivery orders official. In fact, the contracts he has are not made of paper with signatures, but are instead built on the trust and the relationships he and other participants have developed over the years.

The experiences of owners and manual operators, however, are different. The foundation of the difference is certainly the possession of the means of transport, *mkokoteni*. Unless affordable and alternative motorization emerges in this business of delivering goods, the owners of *mkokoteni* will remain in demand and will continue to enjoy the cheap, plentiful, and skilled labor constantly available in and around the market. Working regularly for a specific owner like Mzee Mwangi is definitely much better than just working as one of the numerous individual porters in it. Still, the informal employment structure does not guarantee stability, and a manual worker is easily replaced in the market. Therefore, from the point of view of the workers pushing and pulling the carts, the informal aspects of working in this business are more pronounced.

There are also people who rent carts from owners and use them to deliver loads for their own customers (Seierup 2001). John, the main character in this chapter, is one of them. He does not own any *mkokoteni* in spite of his long involvement in the business for almost two decades in Wakulima. John's association with the handcart business is on a much smaller and more precarious scale than that of Mzee Mwangi. He spends 100 KES to rent one *mkokoteni* and returns it when he finishes his delivery work for the day. Nevertheless, John also has his regular customers who ask him daily or weekly to deliver goods from the market to their stores, which are mostly makeshift structures on nearby

roads and streets. There, regular customers wait for John and his *mkokoteni*. Their

informal stores along the route of his delivery are anchors to his mobile work. John is the

person who knows where their makeshift stores are located, and his delivery work is

something they can afford. More importantly, he has been delivering goods for them for

numerous years and they trust him.

Figure 4.5 A Typical *Mkokoteni* Operator in Wakulima

Although workers like John, who work with rented carts, seem to be located in the

most marginal segments of this business of moving goods, there are other workers who

are, in turn, hired by people like John. These workers would be introduced more

specifically later in this chapter, who help in the course of John's daily tasks to load

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heavy loads and push and pull the rented *mkokoteni*. The drooling man in the opening

account of this chapter was one of them. Once I commented to my Kenyan students about

how these workers painfully pulled and pushed *mkokoteni*. One student in the class

nonchalantly responded to my observation: *Teacher, they are hustlers. Welcome to*

Nairobi's hustle. As a young man who grew up in one of the biggest informal settlements

of the city, the student knew all kinds of painful and resilient ways of living and laboring

and also about the way *mkokoteni* workers were involved in daily Nairobi life.

In Nairobi, workers like John are often called 'hustlers[65]', who hustle to survive

and earn their livelihoods in the city. Hustling is popularly used to describe informal

economic activities and "sidelines," in the sense that one does various tasks rather than

having a regular and formal job. However, using the concept of hustling was sometimes

confusing as well, because it is not equated with any particular informal occupation

(Farrell 2015). Mzee Mwangi and John both are involved in the *mkokoteni* business

informally, but the work of Mzee Mwangi is not really considered to be hustling because

of the relative stability that he has, based on cart ownership. In addition, even if a type of

labor looks like a hustling job to others, the people doing the work may not agree that it

constitutes of hustling. There were self-proclaimed hustlers, like Mama Mary and her

colleagues in chapter 3, but informal workers laboring under a more regular conditions

might not call themselves hustlers.

Previous literature and popular articles detailing hustling or hustlers in Nairobi

have tended to focus on the youth in Nairobi. Many young Nairobians constantly make

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[65] Hustler in this dissertation is different from the common meaning of the word, that is, "con man" or "swindler," in the United States.

efforts to improve their lives and bring changes to their communities, but they are also frustrated by the dire realities they face (Thieme 2013, 2015; Farrell 2015). However, what I found most intriguing about hustling is that this particular mode of surviving in the city is found across different age, ethnicity, gender, class categories and groups. Almost everyone I met, and not just the urban poor, had some stories to tell about hustling in the city. Even people living without extreme poverty or unstable living conditions have something to share about how they constantly 'struggle' to carry out their everyday urban tasks, from commuting with unpleasant traffic conditions to surviving with a high cost of living. After lunging to get into a *matatu* vehicle with a running crowd of competing passengers, a gentleman in a suit covered with dust from the battle would say, "*Tunahustle* (We are hustling)," and a middle-class mother frustrated with the prices in a supermarket could complain, "I am hustling," or "I am a hustler." The everyday nature of hustling is important in Nairobi, as it represents the spirit with which common people in the city conduct their daily lives. Informal workers pulling and pushing *mkokoteni* are mostly considered to be hustling for a living, as my student described. They do not possess any stable means of livelihood except for their own able bodies. Their struggle in the middle of traffic jams also appears to be painful and dangerous. As one of my interlocutors explained, "It is not a 'legitimate way' of making money." The purpose of doing the work is basically "to put something in the stomach at the end of the day," he said.

However, it is also important to be discreet when observing hustlers, to avoid typifying them as the 'poor' people, by framing them through a western gaze on poverty

in urban Africa. In other words, their economic conditions are definitely not stable and rich, but they are not powerless. One example is a program produced by Capital FM, a popular urban radio station in Kenya. In 2015, this station started a program titled *Respect the Hustle* to introduce people in urban areas who have turned their hustling experiences of informal laboring into dream jobs or unexpectedly successful career paths. The video interviews the successful people who show how they transformed through their struggles, for example, from selling t-shirts on streets or repairing electronics to establishing profitable business enterprises. These success stories were portrayed in *Respect the Hustle* and it involved exceptional cases, because it is difficult to say that all hustling could open up similar opportunities for success. The stories of former hustlers also cannot justify the uneven urban conditions that do not create jobs and houses for hustling people. Nevertheless, looking at hustling and hustlers with 'respect,' as the TV program does, reveals that the hustlers manage to do all kinds of things rather than giving up and staying jobless. Their efforts "to put something in the stomach at the end of the day" still means a great deal in a society where many people do not have anything on their dinner tables.

My friends in Kenya who studied or worked in the United States and Europe gave interesting comments on how Westerners look at African poverty through slums and informal livelihoods. According to them, someone from a city in the United States, for example, would assume that working with outdated informal handcarts or living in slums is what makes people impoverished. However, that is not the way to understand poverty in Africa realistically. People may not have permanent houses and formal jobs, but that

does not mean that they are not able to sustain their ordinary lives, which is how they are often tragically depicted in the Western media's images. Informal hardships are formulated through their will and efforts to live and can make their lives 'sustainable' from the local contexts.

At the level of John's informal delivery work and the other people hired by him, the form of laboring appears to be typical hustling. The workers apparently are not regular and formal workers, and their work does not seem to be essential to the function of the city. As mentioned above, it is also popularly described as a slow disturbance on motorways, and something that should be removed from the transportation corridors. However, many of these people pushing and pulling the carts are, surprisingly, 'regular' workers as well. Particular pushing crews assist John and are regularly hired by him. Even if he could hire someone else, he always employs the same regular people, a reflection of what can be seen in the loyal relations he has with them. In addition, handcart crews still move a good deal in the city. Like Mzee Mwangi, many retail sellers own carts and hire delivery workers. Other retailers who do not own any *mkokoteni* also depend on informal handcart operators to deliver things to their customers. Early in the morning, behind hotels, and at the side gates of the restaurants, numerous *mkokoteni* operators are found with their loaded carts filled and ready to deliver. A group of *mkokoteni* full of fish, vegetables, and fruits, pulled and pushed by the workers on motorways may look unfit and dangerous, but their mobile hustle is 'trusted' by long-term customers in many domains of the city, from slums to makeshift stores on roads.

Following John's Route

Countless *mkokoteni* workers load vegetables and fruits in their carts and wait in the dark until 5:00 AM, when the market opens its two big and old metallic gates. In between the carts, porters carrying sacks and boxes on their shoulders are also ready to move. The surface of the area on which both people and carts stand is covered with rotting fruits and vegetables, although it is hard to recognize them in the darkness. As soon as the gates open, making creaking sounds, dozing *mkokoteni* workers raise their heads up and start pulling and pushing their heavy carts. The lines of *mkokoteni* and workers slowly wake up, and, still in the dark, move in waves into the market. An old railway track used for moving produce from Uganda a long time ago still cuts through the market, only to make rattling sounds whenever *mkokoteni* tires cross it. The track is a disturbing bump, and its impact causes sacks or boxes to fall out of carts, while the pullers and pushers try to move their vehicles as fast as they can over it. The market is congested. The morning struggles around the two gates of the market appear confusing and exhausting, but it is just the usual morning at the market and a part of the geography of *mkokoteni*.

"Do you see this? This market has never grown, but more and more people come here to buy and sell," Njoro*, an owner of three *mkokoteni*, complained to me one day. Endless lines of handcarts, dollies, and porters were tangled here and there. Njoro was trying to manage his *mkokoteni* inside the congestion. His dark brown working clothes were already soaked with sweat, and his big black gumboots and callused hands were covered with dirt. An overnight rain had made pools of mud along the road, and it had

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entered the market. It was hard to find any space to take one step forward or backward. I found that I kept hitting someone or something with my body. Still, experienced porters of the market moved fast, without even looking ahead. Instead, they made loud hissing noises to make people move out of their way. While skillfully handling his *mkokoteni* between muddy potholes and heaps of rotten vegetables and fruits, Njoro was trying to answer my questions about his *mkokoteni* business and the people working on the route over the steep hill road. He willingly stopped his work and asked one of his employees to take care of his cart for a moment. "Let's find John. He will show you the way." He quickly led me through the muddy path toward the entrance of the market and walked out to the side of busy Haile Selassie Avenue, which was the busiest inner city road outside the market.

The roadside was jammed with people, big trucks unloading sacks and boxes of farm products, food trash, fumes, and the shouts of people. Some vendors and porters who probably thought I was there to buy food or hire them were trying to get my attention by calling out to me. "Chingchong,[66] I am here for you!" I walked with hurried steps to follow Njoro striding ahead of me. Somewhere in between the big trucks parked to unload vegetables, we finally found John, a tall and spindly man standing next to piles of sacks and boxes. Njoro called out John's name and spoke to him shortly. Then, he introduced me to John and returned quickly to his work.

John wanted me to wait until he was ready to leave. I walked away a little bit from where he stood and found a small and shaky wooden bench to sit on nearby a kiosk.

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[66] A common slang referring to Chinese people and mimicking the sounds of Chinese language.

A young lady in the kiosk who was selling small snacks, cigarettes, and scratch cards for mobile phones looked at me and asked what I was doing there. Soon, some other people, such as porters, *mama mboga*[67], and random buyers, also joined the conversation. Most of them thought I was Chinese, but after I explained, as usual, people wanted to know how Chinese and Koreans are different and why I was sitting there. John sometimes looked at me while standing with the heavy sacks and boxes, as if he wanted to make sure I was fine and comfortable, and I kept nodding to assure him that I was fine.

I wondered why he stood without any *mkokoteni*, but soon he briefly left and came back with an empty and old *mkokoteni*, which I found later that he rented on a daily basis. Again, he waved his hands, signaling that he was not ready. He was also accompanied by an old, skinny, white-haired man. John had hired the man to help load and he would probably earn about 50 shillings for his labor. It was yet another form of hustling which was chained to *mkokoteni* work. John and the old man started filling up in the cart, and the work of filling it soon became that of piling up. John and his helper were experts at piling up, and they put together numerous bags, sacks, and boxes, as if they were pieces of a puzzle meant to fit together. They made the space on the cart appear limitless, especially through the way they crammed everything. Loading continued and the cart's space was gradually expanded by their skillful touches and rope work. While they were thus engaged, one *mama*[68] arrived with two heavy sacks of fruit. The name Kamau* was written with a black marker on the sacks. She was a regular customer of

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[67] *Mboga* means vegetable. Ladies selling vegetables and fruits on streets and markets are usually called *mama mboga*.

[68] I use this word to describe a random female character I ran across in this research, as it is often used in Kenya.

John and Kamau was her son's name. Mama Kamau eyed John fixing her sacks in the vehicle with a straw-rope. She said, "*Tuonane baadaye* (See you later)," and left.

Even after loading the two sacks from Mama Kamau, more customers arrived with boxes and sacks of things and the piles in the cart became higher still. The height made me feel nervous. It was an uncomfortable height to watch, and I was unsure whether I should continue observing or help with the loading. I felt guilty about just sitting and writing, but I also knew that I lacked the bodily skill and ability to help them. Finally, John gave me a hand signal. It was time to move his *mkokoteni*.

Watu wa sukuma[69]

John started pulling his *mkokoteni.* carrying enormous loads by himself. I was confused. Even though I did not know much about the world of hustling with *mkokoteni*, I was pretty much sure that he would not be able to complete the work by himself. I again asked myself. 'Should I help John? Should I push this cart from the back? Would I even be helpful? I am not strong enough to help him. But he is doing this alone. What am I supposed to do?' Multiple questions crossed my mind all at once. I was awkwardly walking on the edge of the pedestrian way on an inner-city road while my eyes chased John's every move as he navigated the motorway.

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[69] This does not refer to the largest ethnic group, Sukuma, in Tanzania. Sukuma means "north" and also refers to "people of north" in the context of ethnic group, but *watu wa sukuma* (pushing people) in this research refers to the people who do the pushing labor in the *mkokoteni* business.

Figure 4.6 A Roundabout in Nairobi and a Traffic Light

Then, all of sudden, a short but muscular young man appeared and took over John's position of pulling the cart. It happened quickly and in the middle of the road, as if there was a kind of deal between John and the young man. I looked at John, and he yelled, "*Huyu ni Maina* (This is Maina)." So, there was a deal. Maina* was a regular puller for John and he had been waiting for him and his cart to come along. There was something firm in Maina's grip and his powerful steps. He was a person who had mastered the art of moving *mkokoteni* with the strength of his young body, together with his experience.

We finally reached the roundabout where the notorious hill road began. The roundabout was supposed to control the traffic, but it was not functioning. As usual, this

legacy of British urban planning was filled with cars unable to navigate the roundabout because of a traffic jam, while pedestrians waited to cross inside gigantic bubbles of smog. Several sweaty and exhausted police officers struggled to control the movement of cars while red and green traffic lights from Nanjing, China[70], were blinking meaninglessly. It was around lunch time, when the traffic volume of the city increased even further.

Following a police officer's busy hand signals, we finally passed the roundabout and headed to the beginning of the hilly road. Then, all of a sudden, four small men came out from the woods. They simultaneously threw their jackets onto the loads and immediately started pushing John's cart. One of them joined Maina in the front and started helping him to pull the cart. Their muscles twitched as the hill became steeper and their bodies seemingly became a part of the *mkokoteni*. I awkwardly followed their labor from behind. John took a moment to rest from pushing and introduced them to me. "*Watu wa sukuma*[71] ([These are] pushing people)." John was regularly hiring them to push his *mkokoteni* past the steepest section of his delivery route.

The sudden encounter with *watu wa sukuma* reminded me of the most common popular leafy vegetable in Kenyan meals, *sukuma wiki*. *Sukuma wiki*, a kind of collard green, literally means pushing or stretching the week. The name is based on the fact that the vegetable is available all the time, and, more importantly, affordable to everyone, including the hustling informal workers who really need to 'push' their livelihoods,

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[70] The recent traffic lights in Nairobi were manufactured by a Chinese company in Nanjing, China.

[71] *Kusukuma* means 'to push' in Kiswahili.

especially if they are to survive. Around noon, a group of manual workers sit on one side of the road or near the makeshift structure of a street restaurant where a *mama* prepares large amounts of *ugali* and *sukuma wiki*. Exhausted workers, still covered with grey dust, crouch on a block of construction material and hold plastic plates of steaming white *ugali* pieces and dark green heaps of cooked *sukuma wiki* sautéed in oil with onions and tomatoes. This is the typical meal of people hustling at construction sites or at other physically demanding jobs. The hungry workers roll a lump of *ugali* and made it softer with the dark green soup from their sautéed *sukuma wiki*, and then put it in their mouths, sometimes hurriedly and sometimes calmly, to get through another day of hustling life.

The encounter with *watu wa sukuma* (pushing people) was literally at the moment of pushing. It was also the moment when I was most confused. It was good to see up close the way that cart pullers and pushers do their jobs. However, in the middle of such painful labor, I was trying to be an ethnographic observer, who, in fact, to the workers, was an idle spectator of their labor. Surrounded by roaring motor vehicles, the workers panted and moaned in pain, and I was following them awkwardly on the side of the road. Then, before I could fully absorb what was happening, one of the workers yelled at me with a face contorted with pain. "*Unafanya nini? Hutasaidia?* (What are you doing? Won't you help?)" My confusion was ended. I quickly sprang to the task of pushing.

For a moment, I thought we were just stuck or that time has stopped. However, we were moving, very slowly, as if we were crawling or climbing up the steep slope of the road. It even felt like we were moving in place forever and pushing against a thick stone wall. It was painful. The pain spread over my whole body through every heavy step

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that I made, and I started breathing roughly. I was asking myself in my mind, 'What the

hell have I done?' I recalled a Korean saying which literally means that "you buy your

hardship [which you do not need to do]" in my mind. I was, however, not able to stop. I

knew my labor was likely seen as clumsy and ineffective, but I was also afraid that the

whole push could be affected by my absence. In fact, at times, the weight of the cart and

its load made it slide backward, and it terrified me. I became concerned that the cart

would slide back as soon as I let go of it.

Figure 4.7 *Mkokoteni* Operators on a Motorway

While struggling with the push, we were surrounded by numerous motor vehicles.

All vehicles were accelerating their speeds to go over the hill. I was frightened that I

could be hit by one of the roaring vehicles, although John and the workers just painfully huffed and puffed in silence and focused on the labor. I was pushing the cart's right edge and made a short and sharp scream whenever a vehicle or a motorcycle passed by my side. Finally, one of the workers pushed me to the inside and took over the dangerous outside edge. Then, he drew a line in the air along the edge with his hand and said, "*Hapa, ndani ni sawa* (Here inside is fine)."

Agitated by the danger, I wanted to yell back, '*Ndani ya nini* (Inside of what)? What do you mean by '*ndani* (inside)' here? There is nothing inside here. We are totally exposed!' Nevertheless, I also knew what he meant by that. He meant that in the space created by the moving body of *mkokoteni*, we would be 'safe' from the speeding motor cars. The space extended from the cart was a kind of bubble or informal comfort zone created through this particular practice of labor on roads. *Mkokoteni* workers, otherwise excluded from the emerging and increasingly motorized urban space, could find relative safety in this zone while pushing their heavy carts along the dangerous margin of the road. It also seemed as if we were in a spatio-temporally different dimension on the road. There was one dimension in which the motorcars were moving, and there was another dimension in which we were pushing the *mkokoteni*. The dimensions looked disconnected, but at the same time, oddly interconnected, through the risk created by the speeding motor vehicles, the slow manual vehicle consisted of the wooden structure, and our bodies.

In the middle of the risky and painful labor, one that made me feel even more conflicted was that the labor into which the workers were putting so much effort seemed

so meaningless and was excluded from the trajectory of the road. The cart was so marginal on the side of a heavily motorized and tarmacked urban road, and the ambient space of the cart created by its mobility was a spatialized marginality on the edge of the growing Kenyan capital. However, in response to my questioning and complaining about the painful labor, the workers kept saying, "*Tumezoea* (We are used [to this])."

When we slowed down after finally passing the steep section of the route, the pushers turn back the jackets they had stuck in between the sacks and boxes in the cart. John took out some coins and ragged bills from his inside pocket. He gave 50 KES (0.5 USD) to each of them. The workers kept the money carefully in their pockets or somewhere inside their clothes. Then, they looked at me panting, sweating, and also surprisingly smiling. They said, "*Kesho* ([See you] Tomorrow)."

While John and Maina were trying to find a way to move through the jam, I stood a short distance behind and stared at the exhausted *watu wa sukuma* walking back down the road. They would rest for a bit and might wait for another *mkokoteni* passing through the hill. Then, the workers would repeat the process like rolling a gigantic boulder from the myth of Sisyphus, and maybe another after that. Each time, they would add another 50 shillings to the money in their pockets, which they would bring home to keep their family together and survive.

The Social Motor of Moving Mkokoteni
After the pushing crew left, it was just John, Maina, and me. The rest of the route was flat enough to continue without the pushing crew, but now, the difficulty was not to push a

heavy cart, but to make way for it. For a moment, the three of us were stuck in the traffic jam from another roundabout. The meaningless traffic signals were again blinking above the circular structure, and exhausted police officers were controlling the flow of vehicles from four directions with their hand signals. I wondered how we were going to pass, as there was *no way* for any handcart and its operators. I became frightened again about diving into the traffic flow.

Then, John and Maina made a sudden move to change the direction of the cart. They turned the cart towards the right side in the middle of the road, right before we reached the roundabout, and we were basically running in the reverse of the lane and against the traffic flow. I kept running with them and pushing the cart, but I also kept screaming whenever we barely avoided a motor vehicle moving toward us. When huge dump trucks, fully loaded with construction trash, approached fast and passed right next, as if they would touch me, I was almost overwhelmed by anxiety. Motorcycles, saloon cars and *matatu* vehicles were running toward us. Cars never stopped, even though the cart was in their way. The only way to get through the situation was to continue running with the cart as quickly as possible.

Running in this fashion was dangerous from every aspect, at least based on my perception of it, but it was a routinized part of the mobile work. More importantly, it was also the only available *solution* they could devise to cope with the lack of relevant infrastructure, just like pedestrians in the previous chapter had to jaywalk to access highways. To successfully handle a handcart on the motorway without any designated space for it, running in reverse was just an ordinary way to survive in the traffic. There

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was no transport planning or road space for handcarts, and as many transport experts told me that in Nairobi, *mkokoteni* was a completely neglected or supposed-to-disappear part of the city's mobility. Even bringing up the subject of *mkokoteni* itself surprised many people, reminding them that it still existed as an important transport mechanism in the city.

After a few more minutes of running in reverse, we reached another main road, one that would bring us to the customers waiting for deliveries. I usually thought of the road as a link to a nearby upscale neighborhood, where many formal businesses targeting diverse expatriates and upper-middle class Kenyan consumers were thriving. However, traveling on the road as a part of John's *mkokoteni* work opened up a very different way to experience this particular urban space through his perspective and practice of moving the hand cart (Alexander 1965). A wide spectrum of people, such as an old man selling roasted maize, fruit vendors, street workers washing cars, and news agents who work there all the time, greeted John. I was standing on the same road, but I was looking at a different human geography, one that has been created over the time John had spent pulling and pushing his *mkokoteni*. Although I assumed the manner in which he would answer, I asked him how he knew so many people along the road. He asked another question as a to reply my question. "*Nimekuja hapa kwa miaka mingapi?* (How many years have I been coming here?)" For over 18 years, he has been laboring with his *mkokoteni* over the hill and pushing it into the thick traffic. Over the years, the number of motor vehicles has increased and choked the channel that connects several upscale neighborhoods and new buildings. Chinese construction sites have emerged on every

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corner, and *matatu* vehicles have changed their numbers, sizes, and colors. John and his *mkokoteni*, however, have continued on as before.

Finally, we reached an alley where two makeshift stores and small tea and food vendors were located side-by-side. Taxi drivers, *pikipiki* (motorcycle taxi) drivers, and other manual workers working in neighboring construction sites were having their meals and taking rest. Some drivers, who thought I was looking for a taxi, came towards us and offered their services. Mama Kamau, the lady I met at the market, was standing next to her makeshift stall on which watermelons, mangoes, and bananas were arranged. She was a fruit vendor in the neighborhood and was waiting to receive a new stock she left to John in the morning. We unloaded the sacks with the name *Kamau* from the heavy stack in the *mkokoteni*, and moved them to her stall. She handed over some money to John while squeezing and shaking his hand for a few seconds. "Nimeshukuru, John. Tuonane kesho (I appreciate [this] John. See you tomorrow)."

Almost a decade ago, a well-known columnist in Kenya, Sunni Biandra, critically commented on the presence of *mkokoteni* on urban roads in a newspaper column (2007).

> [...] If it [using *mkokoteni* carts] is a cost-containment initiative, it is unacceptable to treat human beings like beasts of burden. [...] There is nothing to embrace in jobs that force people to use the methods of centuries past.
>
> Sinews straining to breaking point; sweat pouring off backs; misery etched deeply on faces. That is the reality of the cart. Let us not ennoble or justify or embellish that reality. It is an awful thing to have to do in life, and it should be behind us.
>
> [...] What would happen to all those cart-pullers, though? Of course they would lose their immediate livelihoods if their carts went. But that is what happens in every economy in the world: development changes the nature of work, and old skills and ways of working become redundant.

What Biandra describes about *mkokoteni* in 2007 is still the same discourse on Nairobi's roads in 2016. His vivid description of the exhausting work matches my own observations of the drooling man and the routines of John's daily work. Biandra argues that this old technology should be eradicated because the labor is inhumane and outdated in the contemporary pace of development.

Biandra fails, however, to recognize the established and extensive network of people physically and socially formulating the mobility. One might not expect to see any structure in this system. When people think of the labor in Nairobi, they often witness the exhausted pullers and pushers on the roads blocking motor cars, or they may think that the handcart signifies 'the old' on modernized urban roads. However, like other informal sectors, the world of *mkokoteni* is internally organized with the owners, operators, other workers, and customers involved in the system of transporting commodities in the city. In particular, although they do not participate directly in pushing and pulling the carts, numerous customers, like Mama Kamau, are economically and socially involved in their operation. The relation between them and the operators may be the *social motor* of non-motorized handcarts.

Mkokoteni and NMT

While *mkokoteni* carts and its operators face constant blame, a different type of NMV, bicycle, is being promoted for use in Nairobi under the frame of being more sustainable and a greener mobility solution. It is not that bicycle infrastructure is good or enough in

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Nairobi. As an example in Figure 4.8, the bicycle track is difficult to differentiate from the pedestrian side and the track is sometimes blocked by other infrastructure like utility poles. However, the promotion of bicycle use has been the focus of NMT infrastructure in the recent road construction projects.

Figure 4.8 A Bicycle Track Sign

Ever since my first visit to Kenya in 2010, I observed that road construction would happen in and around Nairobi. The famous Thika Superhighway was under construction in 2011 and 2012, together with several new bypasses to improve the capital city's connectivity. When I went back to Nairobi for dissertation fieldwork in 2013, I found that construction of the Western Ring Road connecting Ngong Road and Westlands was almost complete. Both Thika Superhighway and Western Ring Road were built with bicycle lanes, not commonly found in urban Africa.

What is interesting is that one does not see many bicycle riders using these designated lanes. As far as I observed, the empty bicycle lanes were filled with pedestrians and motorcycle taxis who had appropriated the space for their own purposes. In the case of Thika Superhighway, the space was also dominated by many hawkers and street vendors seeking their own business space.

I attended several meetings to discuss transport issues in Nairobi, sponsored by both local and international stakeholders. The most popular topic in these meetings was decongesting Nairobi's traffic, in turn, this was mostly followed by criticisms regarding the *matatu* sector. In terms of NMT, the focus of conversations usually was on providing more infrastructure to improve bicycle mobility. There was always some experts or non-expert participants bringing up the need to promote more bicycle commuting and appropriate infrastructure. However, in many cases, the topic of bicycle riding appeared to be just a formality. "Lots of studies and talking and talking [about bicycles]. It's just for mentioning, you know? Just to mention," said Julia*, an NMT expert working with a Kenyan NGO. The experts in the meetings discussed matters about using bicycles as a 'proof', showing that "Yes, we discussed NMT issues," rather than implementing realistic NMT solutions. Talking about bicycles was more popular than riding them.

In addition, what the meetings usually missed was that riding bicycles is not an attractive means of transport to promote in Nairobi, at least for now. Bicycle mobility can be contextually different in developing societies. In countries like Vietnam and China, for instance, using bicycles is a part of the existing local transport culture. One sees flows of many bicycle commuters every morning and evening in the cities of these countries.

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However, the story of using bicycles in Kenya is completely different. Upper-middle class bicycle owners tend to focus more on recreational ways of riding in parks and on mountain trails. For low-income bicycle users, purchasing a bicycle and all the associated protection gear, including lights and a helmet for safety, seems unnecessary. There are many users of *black mamba*, a type of utility bicycle in parts of East Africa, but it is also for moving loads and passengers as *bodaboda* rather than for riding and commuting of the users themselves.

Figure 4.9 A Bicycle User Moving Loads in a Traffic Jam

Still, promoting bicycles on Nairobi's roads is the focus of NMT planning, and also, it is popularly mentioned again and again in NMT discourses, as Julia pointed out. In this manner of approaching NMT, the positions of *mkokoteni* and their operators on roads are not recognized in a technical sense by the transportation regulators. Vehicle-

wise, bicycles tend to get the dominant attention, and carts like *mkokoteni* are not really considered to be a part of NMT. In this official picture, *mkokoteni* does not have any official presence.

A transport expert working in another Kenyan NGO described his conversation with a government engineer about the carts running on Thika Superhighway:

> He [the government engineer] said, "These *mikokoteni*[72] are not supposed to be on the road [Thika Superhighway]." But I kept wondering, then, what do you want him [the operator] to do? How would you feel on the road? He has been on this road for years and years.

The expert also questioned, "Which lane should we put *mkokoteni*? Bicycle path or pedestrian path or motorway?" The current context of building motorways and NMT infrastructure do not have any room for *mkokoteni*. It is as if *mkokoteni* is something untranslatable in the language of planning contemporary transport in Nairobi. Nevertheless, the carts are there every day and everywhere. They are pushed and pulled to make way around all the sections of motorways, including the pedestrian space and bicycle tracks, although "they are not supposed to be there."

Another point to understand *mkokoteni* mobility within the dynamics of NMT/NMV in Nairobi is that non-motorized vehicles are often a means of livelihood as well as of movement. Apparently, the foremost function of hand carts in Nairobi is to move goods and loads, such as food, furniture, and water, and the operators earn money by delivering such things. Even bicycles are used in the same fashion (Figure 4.9).

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[72] *Mikokoteni* is a plural form of *mkokoteni*.

Although bicycles are typically used for commuting and recreation in the western

societies, they are widely used to move loads in Kenya. Bicycle users are commonly seen

carrying heavy loads in every available space, and the operators walk and pull their

bicycles in the same manner as *mkokoteni* operators push and pull their carts. In Kenya

and Uganda, bicycles are also used to operate intra-local passenger services, like

bodaboda, a local form of bicycle or motorcycle taxi[73] (Howe and Davis 2002). The

movement of *mkokoteni* in Nairobi, therefore, needs to be understood as a means of

informal livelihood, which, in turn, is closely linked to the lives of their operators beyond

the slow and 'disturbing' presence on motorways.

The Meaning of Mkokoteni

In the city of Chongqing, China, there are people whose occupation is hauling goods by

balancing them with sticks on their shoulders. These workers are called *bangbang*, a term

which means porters or carriers, and they are mostly migrant workers from rural areas

(Zhang 2008; 2011). A recent article in The Economist (2016), titled "Porters in

Chongqing: Bang bang, I hit the ground," reports that this manner of labor is rapidly

disappearing in the city. In the past, the steep topography of the city required porters like

bangbang workers, but as China and the city becomes economically prosperous, the

number of mobile workers has decreased, and the existence of this occupation is

threatened. During the thriving years of the occupation, there were more than 30,000

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[73] In Kenya, it is also called *pikpiki.*

bangbang workers in Chongqing. Currently, however, the population of such workers is becoming older and fewer. The service itself is also not popular any more, especially as the city has more motorized means to transport goods. Workers are being displaced by economic and social changes, and the future of those who are not able to participate in the changes is unclear. The status of *mkokoteni* and the operators on motorways in Nairobi could end up being similar to that of *bangbang* workers in Chongqing. They might disappear and lose their *social motor* in the end. Then, they could eventually be replaced by trucks and lorries, although that is not likely to happen as soon in Nairobi as it has in Chongqing.

Studying and writing about *mkokoteni* has been a lonely task for me as an anthropologist. They seemed to be displaced by both technical and practical considerations from moving in the city, as one of my interlocutors questioned: "In which lane should we put *mkokoteni*? Bicycle path or pedestrian path or motorway?" However, I find the meaning of this 'old' mobility in its very displacement from new urban roads. More specifically, the displaced presence of the carts and the workers show that there are untranslatable values and technologies when it comes to development. It is also important that this seemingly 'disturbing' means of moving goods is still constantly working and being managed through socially motorized forces entrenched in the relations of people.

As I presented in the beginning of this chapter, my purpose of illuminating this mobile work and the mobility created through the manual workers is not to romanticize 'old' Africa in the emerging capital city of Kenya. It is also not to state that these workers are 'poor', and/or are in need to be saved by Western gazes. This chapter instead intends

to shed light on the mobile struggle that the workers themselves might even sometimes forget in their preoccupation to make their ways in the ever-present traffic jams. I also would like to highlight that the case of *mkokoteni* demonstrates a neglected, but fundamental dimension of contemporary life, which urbanizing Africa should consider more carefully in an era of massive infrastructural changes. There are developments that restructure, shift, and even displace the lives of entire groups of people, but unfortunately, there have been few attempts to address, or even imagine what these people face on a regular basis.

5. *BEBA, BEBA*

An old matatu stopped in front of me with rattling sounds. The conductor hanging onto the broken slide door jumped down and shouted at me. "Beba, beba! Simama hapo! (Get in, get in! Stand here!)" I approached and tried to look at any room available, but there was no room. I asked back him. "Simama wapi? (Stand where?)" The young man with an old maroon uniform pointed a small empty space between two seats with his finger. "Hapa, hapa (Here, here)." It was a passageway to reach seats inside the vehicle. The 14-seater mini bus already had about 20 passengers squeezed inside. Some of them were with their big luggage and even small children on their thighs. There was no room available for me.

The conductor, however, insisted and asked people inside the vehicle with an urgent tone of command. "Hebu, songe kidogo. Ndani kabisa! (Hey, move a bit. Deep inside!)" People sitting inside moved even deeper and their bodies crumpled like papers in the vehicle with loud music and rough engine sound. The driver started complaining that I was delaying their operation. A sticker on a window of the vehicle came into my eyes was saying in Sheng, Gari iko poa. Dere yuko smart. Konda ni msawa. Lakini arbiria ni sumbua. Iko nini? (The vehicle is good. The driver is nice. The conductor is OK. But the passenger is bothering. What is the matter?) In the time of morning light, I was the bothering passenger. I knew that I would not get any matatu with a proper seat for me even if I try to wait for another. Even if I find one empty matatu, it would be full of

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people at the end and I would be squeezed deep inside instead of being squeezed near the door.

As soon as I crumpled my body inside next to a passenger, the conductor slapped the roof of the vehicle twice and said in Kikuyu[74], "Tũthiĩ (Let's go)." At the same time, he rapidly jumped in the joggling old vehicle on the road without any shoulder and closed the sliding door behind him. Everyone in the space leaned over side by side. The young conductor bent himself like an arrow, and his hips faced the windows of the not-fully-closed door. Hips tightly contacting a window are a bit funny to see from outside, but it often signified, "This vehicle is full, and the conductor is even standing like this."

The right side of my body was on a seat which I was sharing with another passenger, and the left side of my body was just squeezed next to the door. While a strong draft shot in through the door gap and filled in the rest of the space in the vehicle, the conductor started collecting fares with an arrow-like posture. No one could easily reach where they kept money whether it was in their bags or pockets. People struggled by twisting their bodies in different ways. I carefully twisted my right arm so that I would not bother my fellow passenger and grabbed a twenty shilling coin from my pocket. However, I was not able to hand it over to the conductor because my elbow was stuck between a neighboring passenger and me. Then, the conductor stretched his body, reached his hand toward my hand, and took the small coin. Some other passengers at the back handed over their fares to the passengers in the front so that the conductor could

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[74] One of the major ethnic languages in Kenya widely spoken by *matatu* operators whose ethnic background is the Kikuyu.

get the money, and conductor also handed over some changes back toward passengers.

Chains of handing over coins continued. No one spoke, but everyone was in the ritual of

collecting fares.

Figure 5.1 Inside a Crowded *Matatu* Ride

I was having a cramp in my left leg when the vehicle started rattling all over. I

knew we were passing through the most notorious section of the road where chunks of

potholes were tangled together. The section of the road was almost 'dead.' In the

joggling and squeezed space, there is nothing you can do, but just get rolled over all

directions like a 'thing'. In the worst situation, you may feel that your brain could come

out of your head. After the swamp of potholes, the driver sped up the overloaded vehicle

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running over unexpected bumps and turns. Every aspect of the ride could cause a

disaster—the old vehicle from decades ago with a broken dashboard and rearview

mirror, overloading, speeding, and a kind of tacit collective action of passengers whether

it is called acquiescence or tolerance.

This chapter investigates Nairobi's informal urban transport system, *matatu*. I explore

how this particular local mechanism of moving goods and people has been blamed as

well as appreciated over the course of the urban history of Nairobi. The chapter reveals

the layers of the stigma, vitality and social engagements embedded in the production of

the mobility system. It is based on interviews and observational/mobile data collected in

and around *matatu* by riding vehicles and following the work and related business/social

activities involved. I detail the historical struggles, discursive interactions, and emerging

road accidents related to this transport mechanism involving diverse stakeholders,

including owners, government regulators, operators on the ground, international transport

experts, and passengers. What specific interests and risks of operating and managing

matatu are engaged in the conflicting gazes toward the transport sector? How is *matatu*

marginalized or reinterpreted in contemporary and future Nairobi?

       This controversial transport sector in Kenya is privately owned but a publicly

crucial means of transportation. There are approximately 20,000 *matatu* vehicles

operating in Nairobi alone, and 80,000 vehicles in Kenya although it is difficult to get

accurate numbers (Khayesi et al. 2015). Along with walking, taking *matatu* vehicles is

one of the two most popular ways of moving for people who do not own personal

vehicles in urban areas. The business has also absorbed many young job seekers without

higher education as drivers, conductors, and even touts (*makanga*)[75] in numerous *matatu*

stages. *Matatu* is also highly blamed and even criminalized by media, politics, and public

understanding (Wa Mũngai 2013). *Matatu* operators are infamous for their reckless

behavior on roads and easily accused of traffic accidents and violations by other

motorists even when it is not necessarily caused by their faults. The old and new vehicles

with loud music and graffiti are also often targeted by corrupt police officers for small

bribes called *kitu kidogo*. In this context, *matatu* bears a stigma that consistently makes

them 'wrong' on roads, and it often appears as a problematic subject that the government

must restructure or remove to secure better road space. Kenya has a long and complicated

history of licensing and regulating the *matatu* sector beginning in the 1970s (Lamont

2013). Nevertheless, the informal nature of *matatu* has persisted by evading the

government's attempts to control and inspect their business and operation on roads.

It is apparent that the *matatu* sector has problems of irregularity and rule-

breaking. The *matatu* ride I described at the beginning of this chapter demonstrates some

key aspects of the blamable nature. The movement of the overloaded, speeding and old

unroadworthy vehicles is on the verge of risks and illegality. On the other hand, the

informal sector has worked continuously on roads and pervaded in many dimensions of

urban lives in its relations with public demands as well as political and business interests.

Along with the newly emerging motorcycle taxis (*bodaboda* or *pikipiki*), *matatu* vehicles

are publicly crucial in the ordinary circulations of people and goods in Nairobi. The

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[75] Touts are called *makanga* or *manamba* in Sheng. They are mostly young men who work for promoting *matatu* vehicles in stages. They usually shout out how much fares each vehicle would charge depending on the stages, on behalf of conductors, and get paid by them. In usual, there are regular touts working in different stages.

operators on the ground have actively shaped spatial expertise, distinctive work culture and spirits that are both physically and socially linked to their everyday practice. The owners who seek immediate interests, including the ones who can powerfully affect governmental decisions and mobilize their operators, also reinforce the informal and reckless presence of *matatu* vehicles on roads. In addition, this informal mechanism of moving in the city has been praised in alternative ways of understanding Nairobi's subculture and aspects of urban Africa in depth. Diverse urban actors, such as informal vendors working with *matatu* operators, academics and technological developers employing the mechanism of *matatu,* are positively and necessarily related to this transport sector. In other words, *matatu* transport is oddly much as popular as it is stigmatized in Nairobi. This chapter uncovers the ambivalent details in the production of *matatu* mobility and asks the ways in which a popularized transport system evolves and resists in the midst of reordering mobility in urban Africa.

First, I chronicle the historical and social profile of *matatu* in the first section, *The Ambiguous Profile of Matatu,* and how it has expanded as a crucial means of transport, business and livelihood on roads in Nairobi. The informal public transport has a long historical context entangled with political, economic and social incidents in the postcolonial state. I detail the historical facts that have materially and socially affected the forms and practice of *matatu* in contemporary Nairobi. Next, the second section, *Work in Matatu,* carefully examines the ordinary operation of *matatu* by elaborating the work and roles of operating the vehicles on the ground. As briefly described earlier, the principal operators are drivers, conductors, and touts, who work in and around the

vehicles every day. By focusing on their ordinary practice, partnership, and other social engagements, I demonstrate the nature of this mobility as work, informal expertise, and stigma. The third section, *The Anatomy of Blaming Matatu*, analyzes the social anatomy of blaming *matatu* operation through the cases of bribes and road accidents. I particularly explain how widespread blaming of *matatu* operation are socially interconnected with police corruption and generalized prejudice.

Figure 5.2 Inside and Outside of *Matatu* Vehicles

The fourth section, *(Re)interpreting Matatu*, focuses on how *matatu* is positively accepted, and even celebrated, regarding cultural and technological reinterpretations. By drawing on observations and interviews in a *matatu* stage, a recent mapping project, and other activities of recognizing *matatu*, I reveal the other side of the highly stigmatized form of mobility in Nairobi. Before the conclusion, the last section, *Matatu in the BRT Scenario*, discusses the location of *matatu* in relation to the future implementation of a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), a bus-based mass transport system. *Matatu* is supposed to be replaced by or at least, absorbed into the new operation of BRT in the official blueprint of the city's future mobility. I detail the birth of the BRT project, enabled by the circle of international experts, and probe what this plan of high-tech transport infrastructure means for the social life of *matatu*.

The Ambiguous Profile of Matatu

> […] in a field interview in 2001: "You learn a lot about this country by just sitting in a *matatu* and listening to what people talk and gossip about. It is a microcosm of larger Kenyan realities. Only in a *matatu* can you find flat broke ex-government ministers, thieves, teachers, mad men, school children and nuns sharing the same space. To understand the *matatu* is to begin to understand Kenya."
>
> – Mbugũa Wa Mũngai, *Nairobi's Matatu Men*

The origin of *matatu* goes back to the time before Kenya's national independence. In the 1930s, London's Overseas Transport Company (OTC) started operating buses in both

local and regional routes for African residents around Nairobi. The operation, however, was limited with a handful of vehicles and applied only a few routes that were not enough to meet the transport demand at that time. According to many researchers stating the history of mobility in the colonial time, the lack of motorized means of transport for African residents was informally filled by small passenger vehicles operating around the African residential areas in the 1950s (Mpungu 2010; Khayesi et al. 2015; Klopp and Mitullah 2016). This was the initial form of *matatu* operation. The name *matatu* also came out of the standard fare at that time — three coins (three 10-cent). Some studies of *matatu* find the name's origin from *tatu* (three) in Kiswahili. However, it is correct to see the linguistic root from the Kikuyu numeric term[76], (*ma)tatu* meaning three and which was also used in the Kikuyu phrase, '*Mang'otore matatu* (three 10-cent coins)[77]' (Mpungu 2010; Wa Mũngai 2010; Khayesi et al. 2015).

The national independence of Kenya in 1963 enabled African residents to move freely in and around Nairobi, which was formerly restricted to them because of the racially controlled spatial planning that kept them only in the eastern side of the city. Migration from rural areas to find work and life in Nairobi also rapidly increased. Accordingly, responding to the demand of motorized means of transport, the flows of *matatu* vehicles widely spread all over the city. In fact, there was also an official transportation provider, Kenya Bus Services Ltd. (KBS), a subsidiary of OTC, operated from 1966 based on an agreement with the Nairobi City Council (NCC). The service was

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[76] Kiswahili and Kikuyu are both Bantu languages. The number systems in the two languages are related.

[77] One 10-cent was *king'otore* (Mpungu 2010).

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monopolized for this company and organized with schedules, fixed routes and fares (Khayesi et al. 2015; Klopp and Mitullah 2016). This monopoly, however, did not satisfy the amount and breadth of transport demands. Some of my interlocutors who experienced moving in Nairobi in the 1960s remembered positively about the regulated system of the KBS buses, but also mentioned that it was not enough to move increasing residents in Nairobi. The gaps were rather covered by the *matatu* operations that were more flexible and responsive to the users, particularly around Eastlands. In spite of the popularized function of *matatu*, however, its domain of existence was covert and illegal because it was operating outside the monopolized transport providing system (Hake 1977; Wa Mũngai 2010).

The 'minor' position of *matatu* was officially transformed by the Presidential Decree of 1973. The first president, Jomo Kenyatta legitimized this informal transport sector and allowed the operation without obtaining legal licenses[78]. As Mutongi (2006), a historian of *matatu*, notes, this presidential intervention was established by considering the economic importance of the business at that time. The sector was absorbing the growing number of young workers who were migrating to Nairobi and mid-income entrepreneurs who were seeking economic interests and opportunities in the city. Thus, after the presidential decree, there was a drastic increase in the numbers and routes of *matatu* vehicles on roads. Lobbying and interest groups were also actively organized at this point. The Matatu Vehicle Owners Association was established in 1979, and diverse route associations for managing stages and terminals were followed (Klopp and Mitullah

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[78] It is also well-known that the decree was related to the ethnic background of the *matatu* sector which was dominated by the major and the president's ethnic community, the Kikuyu (Khayesi et al. 2015).

2016). The mobilizing efforts have continued until today, and currently, there are three significant associations in the *matatu* industry: Matatu Owners' Association, the Matatu Welfare Association registered, and the Matatu Drivers and Conductors Association. These organizations have participated in diverse national and local conversations about the *matatu* sector and raised their voices in terms of resisting or negotiating with governmental regulations. They are also involved in political issues and elections by supporting certain political leaders and agendas (Khayesi et al. 2015).

In the daily operation of *matatu*, however, the main organizational actor is the SACCO (Savings and Credit Cooperative Organization). It is a kind of association or guild based on sharing routes, and *matatu* owners are required to organize themselves with SACCOs. By investing in a SACCO, you can purchase your own vehicles, hire operators, and get associational benefits that are difficult to obtain by oneself (Graeff 2009; Khayesi et al. 2015). *Matatu* SACCOs have been significantly influential on the growth of the sector, and some of them are now famous and respected as they appear like brands. Each SACCO has its defined routes, own regulations and even distinctive styles of operation, and people sometimes trust particular SACCOs to commute, as the news media sometimes select best or worst SACCOs in Nairobi. SACCOs also undertake mass strikes by blocking roads, suspending their operation and other protesting actions together and express their political and operation-related opinions on roads.

Despite the organizational systems of management and operation, the position of *matatu* is still ambiguous and appeared to be quasi-legal or inbetween the formal and the informal. Starting from the Traffic Amendment Act of 1984 which is commonly known

as the "Matatu Bill," governmental actions have attempted to control the transport sector in various dimensions, including speed, seating capacity, music sound, and operation practice. Large-scale crackdowns, mass protests and strikes have continued for over 40 years since the Presidential Decree in 1973. The most famous governmental action among others is the Michuki Rules, comprised of a series of legal notices about *matatu* operation between 2003 and 2005. It was officially known as Legal Notice No. 161, and later included Legal Notice No. 83 and 97 of 2004, and Legal Notice No. 65 of 2005 (Kagwanja 2006; Klopp and Mitullah 2016). John Michuki, who was a minister of Transport and Communication of the time, proactively instituted regulations requiring all *matatu* vehicles to carry a specified number of passengers, install speed governors and passenger safety belts, and operate in defined routes. The rules also required drivers and conductors to wear uniforms, be disciplined, and have a clean security record (Graeff 2009).

Overloading or squeezing bodies has been a target of governmental regulation for a long time in Kenya for safety, but Michuki Rules became a milestone in *matatu* history in cracking down the practice and idea of "there is always room for one more passenger." Many operators and passengers I met described their experiences of *before Michuki Rules* and *after Michuki Rules*. "Michuki saved a lot of people suffering from overloading. Imagine, there were always more than 14 seats in Nissans[79], and of course more people were squeezed in [the cars]." Macharia*, a *matatu* driver who was a young conductor in 2003 and 2004 said with a laugh. Similarly, an interlocutor said, "You could find

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[79] The early mini vans used for *matatu* vehicles were Nissan products, and the brand name became a kind of proper noun for 14-seater vehicles. The same case applies to Toyota or Toyotas.

someone was on you and under you all of sudden. You wouldn't know how many people

could get in there. It was endless. In fact, thanks to Michuki, it's much better and more

comfortable now than before."

Figure 5.3 *Matatu* Vehicles Parked in a Stage

However, although the Michuki Rules were substantially effective in

disciplining the transport sector with a draconian way, the practice of overloading is still

observed. In fact, overloading is not just a legal matter. It is a structural matter of urban

economy and life that is reflected in moving. To put it simply, the operators struggle to

pick up as many passengers as possible because they need to collect as much money as

possible in limited time. The operation of a *matatu* vehicle goes with the amount they

should bring back to the owner, and the amount is fixed regardless of any change or

condition that the *matatu* crews might face on the roads. Thus, *matatu* operators, particularly conductors have 'expertise' in using the space 'limitlessly.' They know how to squeeze people's bodies beyond sitting capacity as far as they can avoid inspections and fines. In addition, passengers often are willing to take overloaded vehicles because they want to rush and save money as part of their urban struggles, and do not complain about being stuck in the unsafe and uncomfortable space. They are not sure whether they would get another vehicle because most of the vehicles coming are filled with passengers from the previous stages. You could just put your body inside the vehicle through any way and any posture if you are willing to ride and go with the overloaded vehicle.

Over decades, legal actions and regulations like the Michuki Rules have been constantly announced, and operators and users also have reacted to the governing actions. It is not that the regulations and rules are not effective. However, the actors who are involved in the everyday mobility practice have to accomplish their work and travel by creating their own systems of the day or the moment. In this kind of context, they need to continue or participate in overloading and speeding. There are risks involved; however, the paucity of time and space drive the operators and passengers to make the best of the situation. Operators detour and speed to avoid police inspections and passengers collaborate with the temporarily modified route and the 'efficient' operation that can bring them to their destination faster. If there is no empty seat, a conductor and a passenger can instantly negotiate to have a reduced fare. It is a kind of constant process of shaping and reshaping (Rasmussen 2012). One cannot tell what is formal and informal or even right or wrong to make the public mode of mobility continue running.

Work in Matatu

> There are many traffic laws a *matatu* driver is required to follow.
> However, the only laws they tend to follow are those of gravity and
> inertia. The drivers barrel along at whatever speed the road will allow,
> from breakneck on paved roads to teeth-rattling on dirt ones. They drive
> on whichever side of the road is least potholed and pass other vehicles
> whenever they need to, even on blind uphill curves.
>
> Each *matatu* is a two-person operation […]. He [the conductor]
> leaps from the *matatu* before it stops and gets back on once the bus is
> moving. He yells, screams, whistles and thumps on the side of the vehicle
> to announce their arrival, and to communicate to the driver to stop or start
> the *matatu*, or simply because he is having fun. A conductor is part comic,
> part actor and full-time king of his domain.
>
> – Eric Walters, *The Matatu*

Operating *matatu* vehicles involves diverse types of actors. As discussed earlier,

politicians, police and technocratic bureaucrats are involved in producing and enforcing

rules and regulations. There are vehicle owners, their associations and SACCOs and

managers directing drivers and conductors. Mechanics and *matatu* artists are also

important to make the new and old vehicles keep running on roads with unique visual

designs and bodies. Most importantly, there are drivers, conductors, and touts who

constantly work in and around the vehicles on the ground (Klopp and Mitullah 2016).

This section is about the manual workers participating in the production of *matatu*

mobility every day by driving, conducting and touting. I provide the details of *matatu*

work that is reiterated in road space and becomes responsive to the congested urban

conditions. The section also elaborates how their informal working environments are

highly functional and competitive to move people and goods flexibly and what kinds of micro interactions, risks and challenges are embedded in their work routines.

Drivers

If you want to hire a good driver in Nairobi, find one among matatu drivers! Five ambulance drivers who formerly drove *matatu* vehicles for a living said in one voice and laughed loudly. The drivers had not worked together until they met for driving ambulances in the same agency. However, their memories of working in the informal transport sector were nicely mingling in the conversation as if they had worked together on roads. Although they were happier than before through working in the formally recognized agency of running ambulance vehicles, the conversation about *matatu* flew throughout an interesting nostalgic mood they shared as former *matatu* drivers. The drivers jovially described their past experiences, such as hustling with traffic police officers, overloading passengers, and speeding to make enough money by the closing time at the end of daily operations. They also believe that the expertise they gained through navigating all over the city as *matatu* drivers has helped them as ambulance drivers although they have to fight the stigma they have earned from working as informal transport operators. Unlike many other motorists blaming *matatu* drivers, the ambulance drivers believe that *matatu* drivers are more willing to open up the ways for the patients. In fact, they rather blamed private car users since they tend to suspect that ambulance sirens are used to fake emergencies to move faster on congested roads. One of them told me at the end of the conversation, "They [*matatu* drivers] are still our friends," in the

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sense that *matatu* drivers help them out when their ambulance lights turn on to move patients in traffic jams.

Baba Brian* is one of the 'friends' that the ambulance drivers described. Originally from central Kenya, he has been driving 33-seater vehicles for over ten years in and around Nairobi. He started his driving career by working for KBS, the official bus company allowed to operate on inner-city routes of Nairobi. About five years ago, he found the current job for a *matatu* owner paying him more and making him step on the accelerator more as well to maximize profit. Drivers like Baba Brian are the key actors in the daily operations of *matatu* vehicles on the roads in Nairobi. They grasp geographical details and changes of the routes – from recognizing dangerous potholes to avoiding roadblocks. Links and shortcuts to minimize their travel time in situations of traffic jams are also important expert knowledge they have acquired. I learned a lot by riding Baba Brian's *matatu* regularly and observing how he practiced his *matatu* expertise. He also keenly elaborated on the broader themes that he found on his regular route which include chronic urban poverty and marginalized people like street families begging and moving here and there on the roads.

Drivers tend to be older and more experienced than conductors who are mostly young men or youths and working behind the driving seats. Some drivers started their *matatu* career as conductors and were promoted to drive later. Thus, drivers knew well about how to lead their young partners working together as a unit with one vehicle. When conductors have to change routes and make some decisions about the daily operations, they mostly confirm with their drivers beforehand. If empty seats are not productively or

swiftly filled in the pick-up time of moving people, the drivers sometimes apply pressure

on their younger partners to ask for better performances. In this sense, a driver in a

matatu vehicle often appears to be a figure of authority while the wheels are running.

Although Baba Brian and the other drivers I knew through him were very skilled

and experienced in terms of handling their vehicles, they shared some concerns with me

about younger drivers who tend to be reckless and careless in driving. I sometimes

observed that Baba Brian tried to scold younger drivers when he had a chance to talk to

them over windows while stuck in traffic jams. 'Styles' of operation are varied in

different SACCOs or owners' associations. Some *matatu* owners' associations were

particularly rigorous about hiring their drivers, but there are other associations hiring less

experienced operators. This kind of 'difference' can be noticed by passengers who have

repeated experiences of riding vehicles from certain associations or SACCOs. This is

why some passengers have particular positive or negative opinions about different

associations or SACCOs, such as "I like this SACCO's *matatu*." and "I never take their

matatu. They drive recklessly and the music is so loud."

Conductors

Young men[80] in the *matatu* business are mostly associated with conducting work. The

main tasks of *matatu* conductors are collecting right fares, stopping at requested stages,

and getting/attracting passengers for empty seats as soon as possible in every stage. Once

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[80] Although this research does not address about female operators, there are a small number of female conductors working in the *matatu* sector. See Wa Mũngai (2013) for specific discussions about female conductors working in the *matatu* sector.

a vehicle is full, the conductor of the *matatu* sends a sounding signal to the driver who is usually ready on the driving seat. When the speed of the vehicle gains speed, the conductor slowly starts his 'ritual' of collecting fares by walking down the aisle from the front in the case of 33-seater vehicles[81].

Not many conversations happen between the conductor and the passengers. Sometimes, it is almost silent as passengers pay the fares and conductors gives back the change. While a conductor collects fares, the stack of bills that is folded long in half and kept between his index and middle fingers become thicker and thicker. Along with the uniform, another visual sign to recognize a conductor is this stack of bills inserted in-between his fingers. Most regular commuters know how much they need to pay, but the fares could change depending on the time of riding. Fares in the morning and evening are usually more expensive than those of the afternoon. Operators tend to increase the fares on rainy days as well, considering that they could find more passengers who are willing to pay and ride the vehicles to avoid from getting wet. Passengers who ride shorter distances pay less. There could be arguments between a conductor and passengers regarding too many fares and wrong change[82].

Conductors tend to multitask. In situations of traffic jams, the young operators take actions of gathering information about better routes and how to avoid traffic jams to complete the trip faster. There is also a network of conductors plying the same routes and sharing the information on the phone. They particularly share the newest information

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[81] In a 14-seater vehicle, this fare collecting ritual happens in the small space crammed with passengers. Sometimes, passengers hand their fares over to other passengers to deliver to the conductors sitting up in the front as described in the opening account in this chapter.

[82] The interactions between users and operators will be discussed more later in this chapter.

about any presence of police officers waiting to bust *matatu* vehicles in certain locations, sudden traffic accidents, and gridlocks. When cars get entangled and cause complicated gridlocks affecting their operations, *matatu* conductors could temporarily and instantly direct the traffic and disentangle strings of cars by using hand signals and communicating with drivers. In this kind of situation, they become regulators like traffic police officers who can make the flow of the vehicles resume.

Figure 5.4 Conductors Working around *Matatu* Vehicles

Along with traffic control, there are other miscellaneous 'work duties' that many conductors need to perform during their operations. In terms of communicating inside their vehicles, they are intermediaries between the drivers and the passengers. Conductors often convey passengers' grievances about loud music and rough driving to the drivers and also help resolve questions and concerns of the users although they are not always 'successful' at satisfying them.

More work could emerge if their vehicles are particularly old. In Nairobi, there were very outdated vehicles holding old number plates starting with initials KA. This means they were registered in the 1990s and have been running on roads for over 20 years. Even at a glance, many people could recognize that these vehicles are not roadworthy and in extremely deteriorated condition. The brakes in these cars are not strong enough, especially when they stop in jams on roads going uphill. I used to observe how conductors of these *matatu* vehicles were busy putting and pulling rocks or bricks under their vehicle tires repeatedly.

Conductors also have their own ways of body practices that are often acrobatic and dangerous by hanging and jumping while their vehicles are moving. Many passengers told me the intensity of the acrobatic moves are relatively moderate these days as compared to those of the past. In particular, when the vehicles stay within inner-city areas, conductors tend to show fewer stunts considering the police presence. However, in sub-urban and peri-urban areas, I observed a lot of unimaginably vertiginous activities performed by conductors and also touts assisting the conducting crew.

Once a conductor in a *matatu* vehicle I was riding in started engaging in a lot of dangerous activities when the car got out of the downtown area by holding on to a handle attached to the side of the entrance with only one hand. He looked like he was almost flying next to the speeding vehicle doing that and continued the stunt for a while until passengers started feeling annoyed. However, this case is not even really particular considering that many of them show all kinds of creative and risky body moves. It is also noticeable that different *matatu* owners' associations have different 'cultures' in regulating their operators regarding music sounds and body practices. When Baba Brian's *matatu* was passing by another vehicle filled with loud music and an acrobatic conductor, he proudly told me his company does not allow that kind of practice with its operators.

Partnership, Arrests, and Danger

Drivers and conductors also formulate crucial partnerships. Baba Brian's conductor was Ominde*, a young man in his mid-20s, originally from western Kenya. Their relationship was quite firm although they had different ethnic backgrounds[83]. By the time I was following their daily operation, they had worked in a friendly manner together for about three years. Ominde knew Baba Brian's family and friends well, and Baba Brian also knew Ominde's girlfriend and gave her a free ride from time to time. Like other drivers and conductors, Baba Brian focused on driving and getting to the destination as fast as he could, and Ominde made sure to keep the 33 seats regularly filled by people. They also discussed what kind of detour they would make during rush hours to expedite their

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[83] Ominde's ethnic background was minor in the company.

operation and make more time to have another travel which meant collecting more fares. Baba Brian mostly relied on Ominde in terms of filling the seats at the back. During the rush hours of Nairobi when many *matatu* users would start cramming in stages, he kept loudly asking Ominde who usually was clinging to the outside of the vehicle, "Wangapi? (How many people [do we need more]?)" to find out the temporary statuses.

The partnership between a conductor and a driver is often embodied through their *rhythm* during the operation. A conductor makes sensory signals by whistling and tapping on the body or door of a vehicle by using his hand. Conductors of 14-seater vehicles tend to use a coin to make two tapping sounds on window glasses or a bared part of a ceiling. The signals let a driver know that there are passengers taking on or off. If these rhythmic activities do not go smooth, the operation could be slow and not very effective, and the driver and the conductor could argue about the mismatch. The two-person operation is a kind of *game* in the sense that the players know and get used to doing a particular act or sign in a particular field or moment. Drawing from Bourdieu (1986), the rhythmic partnership can be called "strategy." "The good player" is "continually doing what needs to be done" in the embodiment of the game (Bourdieu 1977; 1986; Cresswell 2002). A driver and a conductor, both have to be sensible with the rhythm in this operation to repeat their travel, and collect enough fares to cover the amount of money as imposed on them every day.

In this informal sector with the long history of police inspections, the occupational expertise could be 'recognized' through the experience of police arrests. Baba Brian told me a few times in an oddly proud tone, "I have been to all the police

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stations in Nairobi!" That means he has been arrested numerous times as a driver for all kinds of reasons imposed on him by police officers on roads. Drivers often get accused of speeding, overloading, loud music, expired licenses, and other circumstantial reasons of which police officers could take advantage at the specific moment and location[84]. Getting arrested by police officers was an ordinary and unavoidable part of being a *matatu* operator on the ground.

However, drivers, along with conductors, develop various tricks or survival strategies because of the constant possibilities of running across police arrests. Usually, the information of the police presence goes through the network of operators working on the same route. Thus, instant route changing or detouring is the most common practice when there are police officers 'waiting' for *matatu* vehicles passing through certain sections to levy fines that can be practically bribes[85]. In this kind of situation, the operation may not cover the regular stages on the original way to the destination. Sometimes conductors give the information of the route change in advance, but passengers themselves often see their alternative stages or ask conductors to stop so that they can walk from a certain point that is missed because of the detouring. If a police inspection or mobile court (a police truck in which drivers and *matatu* operators instantly get fines in the middle of the route), *matatu* operators withdraw their operation completely, and people would not find any vehicle to take. In particular, when a mobile

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[84] The arrests are deeply embedded in the prevailing corruption issues in Kenya that will be discussed more specifically later in this chapter.

[85] This is more specifically explained in the later section about *kitu kidogo*.

court appears, nearby *matatu* stages are transformed to "ghost towns" in the words of my interlocutors, since all the *matatu* vehicles and operators run away from such locations.

Matatu work also can be a dangerous job which is constantly related to speeding, overloading and other risky practices on roads. A friend in Nairobi introduced me to his late cousin's life as a *matatu* driver who was speeding in his vehicle and passed away because of that. His cousin originally drove a car for a tourist company, but he liked earning more money by driving *matatu* vehicles. This cousin indeed earned more money, but also spent a lot of money as a result of him getting arrested by the police. My friend sometimes had to collect as much money as he could from relatives and go to the police stations to help secure the driver's release. His cousin died a few years ago while speeding up in the *matatu* he was driving. My friend finished the story of his cousin by saying, "I sometimes wonder, wouldn't he have lived much longer by driving the car for the tourist company instead of driving the *matatu*?"

Unlike the popular stigma attached to speeding *matatu* vehicles, traffic accidents involving *matatu* are not solely produced by the operators. One near-accident situation I experienced in a *matatu* vehicle, for instance, was because the driver tried to avoid a big pothole that had been there for a long time without any management. The turn around the pothole made by the driver was one way of keeping the passengers from extreme rattling. Another accident which I observed was caused by a sharp turning point of a road which was a combination of speeding and an improper road design.

In addition, risky factors in operating a *matatu* vehicle could be brought about by passengers. I observed passengers complaining a lot about *slow* speed, for example. In

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one case, a lot of passengers in a 33-seater vehicle which was not performing the

expected speedy operation complained and suspected the 'ability' of the driver as a

matatu driver. Someone shouted at the driver, "This driver should go and drive a school

bus instead of *matatu*!" The danger embedded in the *matatu* operation is socially induced

in relation to the road environments/conditions and the demands of users that go beyond

the practices of the workers.

Makanga: The Third Guy

Beside drivers and conductors, the most informal and also marginal participants of

operating *matatu* vehicles would be *makanga*[86] and the informality of this sector appears

to be maximized in their roles and practices. *Makanga* in Sheng refers to touts. These

touting workers are also called "noisemakers" who literally make a lot of noise to attract

potential passengers. The most important job description would be loudly touting, hitting

bodies of vehicles and attracting customers as far as they can. The phrases they shout

usually are fares of the moments[87], names of the destinations, and numbers of empty

seats[88]. Thus, many users of *matatu* vehicles often depend on these workers for the

information about fares and destinations, and the workers also tend to be willing to help

out people with the information. Usually, a group of men takes one stage as a turf of

touting to fill in *matatu* vehicles stopping at the stage. If a stage is a big and central or

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[86] There is another Sheng word for the job, *manamba*, but I use *makanga* to keep it consistent.

[87] Fares can be varied, depending on the time.

[88] The numbers can be real, but also fake if touts try to make people believe that the car is almost full and can leave very soon.

starting point of a route, there could be countless people working as touts. In the case of a

small stage, there might be just one *makanga* or even no one working for touting. The

makanga's time of working can also be varied. At one stage where I regularly observed

them, I saw different members working in the morning, afternoon, and evening.
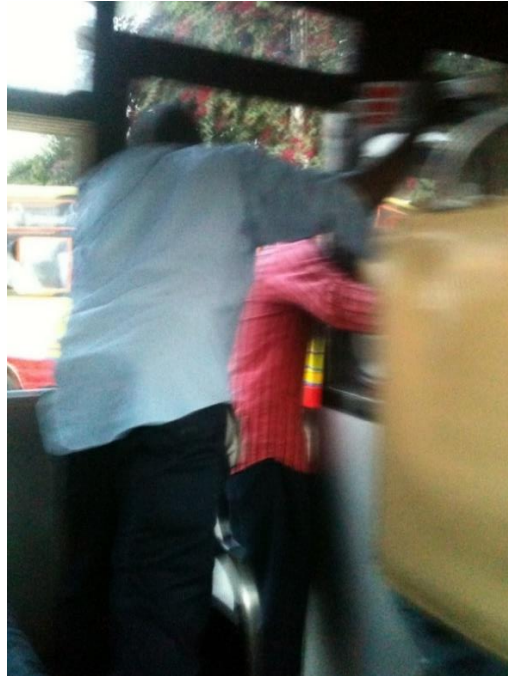
Figure 5.5 A *Makanga* Worker Working with a Conductor

In a way, touts do anything to grab more passengers and provide all kinds of

'customer services', whether users would want them or not. They often approach

standing people who are trying to pick a vehicle and directly persuade them to get into

the cars which they are trying to fill. Individual users standing alone particularly could

get annoyed by this kind of active touting practice. Female passengers can be more

bothered than male passengers. Sometimes, I saw female users stuck and surrounded by

four or five different touts calling them "sister, sister" and trying to grab and lead them to

different vehicles and directions all over. The touting workers also often grab luggage of users who have not yet decided on which car to take. I was once trying to get into a 33-seater vehicle which was moving in a very crowded area while taking passengers. Stopping was not allowed in the location[89]. I had to run to get inside one of the cars, but I also had a large piece of luggage in my hands. All of sudden, one *makanga* grabbed my luggage and pushed me to run toward one moving vehicle. At the same time, I was being pulled into the car by another *makanga* who was loudly touting from inside. In a few seconds, I found myself standing inside the vehicle, and realized that my luggage was thrown into the car through an open window by the *makanga* who had taken it from me. I was 'lucky' because I was in the right car and did not lose my luggage. However, I have often heard a kind of funny rumor about a notoriously crowded *matatu* stage in Nairobi where some not very lucky passengers have had bad experiences. If you went there, you would find a lot of mothers crying because their children and luggage were taken and put in different *matatu* vehicles by different touts working hurriedly there.

The role of a *makanga* inside the informal transport sector does not require any formal employment process, but that does not mean that anyone can do the work. Touting is physically quite a difficult job to do as a former conductor told me, "Your lips become like stones at the end of the day." It is also not allowed for a new person to start touting by himself right away. The regular members working at one stage have their rules, especially in terms of rotating. For example, when a vehicle comes into a stage, the touts in next order start touting. If a car is totally empty, then three or four workers as a group

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[89] There are several locations where *matatu* vehicles are not allowed to stop in the inner-city areas of Nairobi. However, operators slowly move their vehicles around the areas and take as many passengers as they can.

tout together to make the vehicle full, and equally share the money they earn from the

conductor of the vehicle. Sometimes, *makanga* workers are 'hired' by drivers or

conductors who are close to them and get paid for filling in the empty cars or seats. In

fact, it is difficult to know whether these touts really bring passengers effectively. Many

money transactions between conductors and *makanga* appeared to be customary in a way.

Therefore, small and big arguments or fights could happen between conductors and touts

over the payments, and touts often follow the conductors by hanging on doors of running

vehicles dangerously and jump down only after getting paid. It is easy to see a tout run

back to his stage after jumping out of a car for this reason, but this risky jumping also

appears to be a common body practice through which they 'enjoy' feeling thrilled and

show off their masculine physical capability[90] (Wa Mũngai 2013).

Touts sometimes assist conductors on the move who are busy figuring out ways in

traffic and gathering traffic information and get paid by the conductors for keeping the

temporary conducting work. This is 'the third guy' who is usually hired on a daily basis

by a conductor or a driver and takes care of stopping a vehicle to get passengers. Many

owners of *matatu* vehicles say they have no idea about who these third guys are, but they

are aware of them working in their vehicles with their conductors and drivers. For

example, sometimes, it seems to be two conductors working together like they are

partners. When one is not available in the vehicle for collecting information and finding

out the ways to detour, the other one takes care of businesses in the vehicle. In this kind

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[90] This kind of acrobatic practice also attracted other young men in and around *matatu* stages. Mama Mike* who will
be introduced more specifically later in this chapter was concerned with her teenage son Mike, about this matter. Mike
had a *makanga* friend and came to the stage where the friend was working, to chat. Whenever he came by the stage,
Mike tried to mimic the 'masculine' acrobatic activities by following his friend and other touts and made his mother
very worried about his safety.

of situation, the extra person is usually the one working as *makanga* scouted by the conductor. However, the identities of *makanga* and conductors are sometimes blurred. In most cases, the one with a dark blue or maroon or other colored uniform which was imposed by the Michuki Rules, is the conductor, but some 'rebellious' or fashionably sensitive young men prefer wearing nicer plain clothes. They often keep their uniform vests somewhere quickly reachable inside the vehicles and put them on their plain clothes whenever they notice any presence of police inspection on the routes.

In general, people tend to look down on touts in *matatu* stages. When their touting practices contain sexually uncomfortable languages, for instance, female users particularly despise them. I also sometimes observed senior users getting mad at them for making too much noise and using aggressive physical activities like pulling and pushing people toward certain vehicles. A friend who is a mother of grown up daughters told me in a random conversation that she would cry very hard if one of her daughters brings a *makanga* man home as a boyfriend.

The perspectives of despising *makanga* are based on popular assumptions that they do not have any proper education, and they are poor, and probably doped or alcoholic. These assumptions are not entirely groundless considering that one can find several drunk people working in the touting business, and not many of them have completed their secondary or even primary education. Their appearances also tend to be very humble, and their behavior is loud and aggressive while working. However, in a broader sense of surviving in Nairobi, many of these touts are compelled to do this work for their living because of their limited resources and backgrounds to get any formal job

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and also for temporary reasons. For instance, the *makanga* workers I regularly met in one *matatu* stage included an officially certified teacher waiting for his appointment for a long time as well as a young man in his early 20s supporting nine younger siblings and his own newly-born baby. As discussed in chapter 4, the work of *makanga* is a typical way of hustling in Nairobi for men who need "to put something in the stomach" and bring something home at the end of the day.

The Anatomy of Blaming Matatu

> "It [*matatu*] is a very difficult thing and one can give up easily…I wouldn't mind giving away the public service vehicles [to another ministry]."
>
> – Michael Kamau, the former Cabinet Secretary of the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure[91]

Matatu is a very interesting transport mechanism regarding the concomitancy of its popularity and criticism. On the one hand, the transport mechanism is crucial for many users and reinterpreted by technological initiatives, academics, and other activists[92]. On the other hand, there are authority figures like the former minister, Michael Kamau, who thinks the sector is nothing but trouble. Police officers are also the main accusers in the hating and the fighting with the business and operation. Popular discourses tend to construct *matatu* as a main cause of road accidents.

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[91] Quoted from "Matatus my 'worst pain', says minister," *Daily Nation*, November 7, 2013.

[92] The positive ways of recognizing *matatu* are discussed in the next section.

This section examines the details of blaming *matatu* and unpacks the layers of hatred in two directions. The first direction brings up the relation between *matatu* and police officers regarding the culture of bribing and corruption, so called *kitu kidogo*. I attempt to find how the system of enforcement depends on the economy of bribes formulated through the constant tensions and money transactions between *matatu* operators and police officers. Secondly, I turn to the discursive blame game for traffic safety. I particularly explain how the *matatu* operation gets spotlights of criticism through major road accidents.

Kitu Kidogo

Mzee alisema hakuna cha bure	Mzee* said nothing is for free
Huo msema tumeutafsiri kinyume	We have interpreted his saying wrong
Hata shule kuiingiza mtoto	Even to enroll a child in school
Lazima utoe mchoto	You should give something little
Kupata simu ni balaa	To get a telephone is a calamity
Road license bei nafuu utanunua	You will buy a road license at some price
Kupoteza ID ni mashaka	Losing an ID is a disaster
Twaarudisha Jamhuri yetu nyuma	We are letting our country drag behind
Nchi ya kitu kidogo	A country of 'something small (bribe)'
Ni nchi ya watu wadogo	[It] is a country of small people
Ukitaka chai ewe ndugu	If you would like some tea hey brother
Nenda Limuru	Go to Limuru**

– Eric Wainaina, *Nchi ya Kitu Kidogo*[93]

*The first president of Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta.

**Asking tea (*Nipe chai*; Give me some tea) popularly signifies asking a bribe. Limuru is known for large tea plantations and a center of Kenya's tea production industry.

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[93] It means 'a country of corruption.'

"I used to prefer this way when I had to bribe a police officer." Thomas* a former *matatu* driver, now driving an ambulance, took a piece of paper from my note and put it inside the door knob on the driver's side of his vehicle. He enthusiastically continued acting like a police officer and explained, "Then the officer takes out the *mia mbili* (a two hundred bill) slightly like this, and pretends as if he is checking something on the front side of the car, and then lets me go." His colleagues were laughing all over next to him while he was reenacting the 'secret' exchange of *kitu kidogo*, a bribe, which was his ordinary ritual as a *matatu* driver in the past. Another driver said he often used another method of putting a bill inside his license[94] when he had to produce it for the police. In this way, the police officer who stopped him could conveniently take the money while looking at the license. Other tales of the old time when they were arrested and inspected by police officers were spilled out by former *matatu* drivers. When they were arrested and brought to police stations, the money they had to pay was much more and the vehicles were also impounded. In this kind of case, the owners sometimes had to come to the stations and pay more substantial 'fines.' On several occasions, a driver paid one-half and an owner paid the other half to get the vehicle back on the roads.

Kitu kidogo in Kenya means a bribe exchanged between authorities and civilians. The practice of *kitu kodogo* (or *toa kitu kidogo*; give something small) is extremely widespread in many public service domains in Kenya, although the government has been trying to implement anti-corruption measures for recent years. As reflected in the hit song written and performed by the popular musician Eric Wainaina, it is a stressful, but

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[94] A driver's license in Kenya has a shape of a small booklet unlike the common card-type in the US.

'essential' process that many common people face when they have to complete bureaucratic businesses and avoid getting into challenges involving authority figures, especially police officers. It is a common understanding that your applications would stay on someone's desk and get delayed forever without giving 'something small,' but it also means that one could have anything done by paying *kitu kidogo*. However, exchanging bribes in a chronic context is not just a matter of unethical behavior of individuals. As Franz (2010) explains it results in more serious and collateral damages in the society as a whole through increasing social costs, man-made disasters, and constant distrust and disorder on public systems.

Although *kitu kidogo* is prevalent in almost all the fields of public services, the police force is a particularly notorious and well-known player in relation to their everyday interactions with motorists who are 'popular' victims in this economy of bribing and corruption. When police officers catch a driver based on any proper or unfair reason, they offer options of paying a 'small' amount of money or going to a police station and getting through the whole complicated process of waiting and attending the court. It is a kind of 'threat' which pushes the victim into the corner without a choice.

Kitu kidogo is deeply linked to the *matatu* business because of the frequent road interactions between the operators and police officers and the history of regulating the transport sector. There have been mobilizing efforts to eradicate the corruption in the *matatu* sector, such as mass strikes and 'Kitu Kidogo Out Project' (KKOP) (Khayesi et al. 2015). However, enforcing new and old regulations can generate opportunities of

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collecting *kitu kidogo,* and the occupational condition of *matatu* operators carrying a lot of cash also plays a part.

As explained earlier in this chapter regarding the practices of operators, many conductors and drivers have rich experiences of police inspections, harassments, arrests, and escapes. Stories of avoiding and practicing *kitu kidogo* were replete with adventures, mockeries, and sometimes excitements as in the description of the ambulance driver, Thomas. Some of them often proudly present their stories in front of their colleagues. I remember a conductor talking about his 'adventure' of pretending like following a police officer who caught him while his driver took off from the vehicle. He eventually sneaked off from the officer's attention and successfully escaped from the police station. Every single *matatu* operator might have stories about how they evaded or sneaked off from police inspections, how much they paid after getting caught, and how they were detained in which police station.

Passengers also had stories to tell as observers and 'victims' because *matatu* operations could be stopped by police inspections. If there is any possibility to get arrested, drivers and conductors could just run away and abandon their vehicles when police officers showed up. Sometimes, passengers who are just left in the car complain about wasting their fares and losing the change that conductors did not hand over to them on time before running away. When a *matatu* vehicle is stopped by the police, there is a tension among the passengers sitting inside the vehicle. If the suspension gets prolonged, one might hear people whispering "*Anataka kitu kidogo* (He [the police officer] wants a bribe)."

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The money exchanges are completely open secrets. Everyone knows or assumes that there are always some payments involved in the relations with police officers. Even *matatu* touts sometimes pay officers with small amounts of money or offer bribes like cigarettes to avoid getting arrested for whatever reason or to get some benefits and information about future inspections. Rumors about bribes spread on roads as well. For instance, I often heard that police officers would not like to see the new cashless fare system introduced to *matatu* owners because of their access to the cash collected daily, and how they might use M-Pesa (a popular phone banking service) to get *kitu kidogo* directly from owners if conductors do not carry enough cash.

In the economy of *kitu kidogo* on roads, police officers contextually appear to be bullies exploiting motorists and *matatu* operators. However, Baba Brian who knew most of the police officers who were regularly present on his *matatu* route strangely empathized with them in the sense that he understood they would not survive without *kitu kidogo*. This is related to the fact that their activities of collecting bribes on roads are the tip of the profound and widespread cartel of cumulating money within the public service domain. The money collected by a low-ranking officer could end up in the pocket of his/her commanding officer at the end of the day. In fact, it is well-known that the poor working condition and compensation in the police service are 'supplemented' by the sideline financed by *kitu kidogo*. There was also a popular joke that a *matatu* vehicle is a mobile ATM for police officers and they tend to get busier toward the evening to gratify the amount of money they might need for both their commanding officers and themselves. In this context, regulating the informal transport sector becomes a pretext to

perform the economy of bribes. Police inspections practically function for targeting the bribes on the motorways rather than enforcing rules and regulations to tame *matatu* vehicles. *Matatu* seems to be a necessary enemy in the ways in which police officers 'survive with' or even depend on the blamed transport mechanism.

Blame Game

Although it is a crucial means of public transport, *matatu* has been blamed for many negative incidents happening on roads, including the risky body practices of the conductors, loud music, and speeding. The concerns about *matatu* riding and its safety also have been consistently raised. In relation to the safety issues, there have been noticeable controversial discussions after major accidents that are often referred to as *road carnages* in Kenya. Throughout the time of my fieldwork in 2013 and 2014, a series of long-distance *matatu* accidents that killed dozens of people on many highways happened and triggered public and popular admonishing toward the informal transport sector.

One case that was particularly spotlighted in Nairobi is the Mutindwa railway accident. At around 7:40 AM on Wednesday, October 30th, 2013, 12 people were killed and more people were injured after a commuter train rammed into a 33-seater *matatu* vehicle filled with passengers heading to downtown Nairobi. In the usual busy morning, the vehicle was stalled at a level crossing in Mutindwa, a marketplace in Eastlands. The admonishing attention immediately centered on the reckless *matatu* operation and the

driver who survived and ran away from the location in fear. The crashed body of the

vehicle on the railway was repeatedly projected on news images of the accident.

However, the cause of this accident was not that simple. It is rather discursively

composed of multiple layers of danger constantly present around the location. According

to Fred Mukinda in a Daily Nation article on the same day, the disaster was in waiting

and expected because of all many risky factors linked to the accident. The route crossing

the railway was dangerous without any railway crossing sign and alerting system as well

as barrier infrastructure[95] to stop cars when a train approached. In spite of the existing or

expected danger, the crossing was popularly used by *matatu* drivers and other motorists

trying to avoid congestions. In fact, it was a 'good' shortcut to get to the city's

downtown. The loud music of the vehicle and other *matatu* vehicles affected the

performance of the driver working for 15 years without any crash. A lot of illegal

business stalls were surrounding the track, and the approaching train was not visually

recognized in advance. The surface around the path was irregular which made crossing

the railway track point more dangerous. The major criticism regarding the Mutindwa

accident was eventually directed toward the *matatu* SACCO and the driver who was

judicially punished for the death by careless driving and overlapping.

The backgrounds of blaming *matatu* operators is related to their preexisting image

as law-breakers on roads. As in the case of *kitu kidogo*, they are easy targets to accuse of

speeding and violating rules. There is also a kind of social gaze that typifies and

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[95] This is also widely related to the common thefts of scrap metal as well as the neglected management of the public infrastructure.

generalizes young men involved in the *matatu* sector as rowdy mobs. In media, for instance, the operators often are violently and collectively depicted as a group –in protests regarding dilapidated road conditions or frequent police harassments – using stones and fire. In addition, the criminalized history based on the involvement of *Mungiki*[96] makes the young men working in the transport industry carry violent and dangerous images. Originally started as a "neotraditionalist Kikuyu and religious movement" (Smith 2008), *Mungiki* members started working in several *matatu* routes from the 1990s. The group members later dominated certain profitable routes and are still known to work to 'protect' benefits of the business (Rasmussen 2012; Kagwanja 2006; Khayesi et al. 2015). To some degree, therefore, the instant blames on *matatu* operators are based on these generalized and criminalized contexts.

As explored in Chapter 3 in terms of pedestrian experiences of crossing motorways, discussing traffic accidents in Kenya has complicated layers of social and infrastructural negligence rather than a single aspect to blame. Traffic accidents are more than problems of *matatu* driving. However, considering the blames poured over to the *matatu* sector, the fundamental points of arguing about dangerous situations and accidents become blurred. In an accident involving a *matatu* vehicle, the driver of the *matatu* is an easy and primary target to get accused of the fault, whether it is factual or not. Even though other drivers make mistakes, the immediate criticism often turns toward *matatu* drivers. This does not mean that their errors and rule-breaking practices can be

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[96] Smith (2008), notes that the exact meaning of this word is controversial, but popularly translated as 'multitude' in Kikuyu language. The meaning Smith provides is "the activated public/totality." Although there have been governmental crackdowns on the group's activities, it is known that the members are partially still controlling the *matatu* sector in Nairobi.

justified. However, the dynamics regarding traffic accidents has appeared to be a blame game which has the predetermined target to accuse.

(Re)interpreting Matatu

This chapter so far, demonstrated how the *matatu* industry is socially stigmatized and blamed for adverse incidents on roads. Now it turns toward a different direction of exploring *matatu* in Nairobi and provides interesting ways of interpreting and reinterpreting the transport sector. In spite of the common negative projections, *matatu* has been a very popular urban cultural subject and gained a lot of interesting and mixed attention. This section focuses on presenting how diverse people in Nairobi are positively relating their living, expertise, and academic/technological initiatives with *matatu*. I explore the alternative ways of knowing and recognizing *matatu* through examples of personal, social and professional attachments that people have shaped both inside and outside the *matatu* sector.

The first example is based on my observation in a *matatu* stage. While in Nairobi, I spent a lot of time observing one particular *matatu* stage where many people were directly and indirectly involved in the social and economic network of the *matatu* business. I shared conversations and activities with vendors and informal business owners in the stage and followed routines in the everyday economy. One of my regular interlocutors was Mama Mike* who owned a kiosk in the middle of the transport center that was filled with dust or mud in rainy seasons, fumes, and shouts of the

matatu operators. Her kiosk was the most popular one around the area where many

passengers stopped to buy scratch cards, small candies, cigarettes, drinks and snacks.

During rush hours, conductors holding stacks of bills urgently dashed into the window of

her kiosk to make some small changes. Ladies selling tea and food, street vendors and

preachers and other business owners who were working in neighboring makeshift stores

also came to see her for the same reason or to buy small portions of flour, sugar, and

other necessities.

Figure 5.6 Through the Window of Mama Mike's Kiosk

Matatu operators, particularly, the *makanga* usually depended on Mama Mike's

kiosk. Unlike drivers and conductors, they did not have any vehicle to get spatially

attached with during working hours. Thus, the kiosk was functioning as a kind of social

center for them where they could leave things like their jackets and bags, and gather to

share information and meals. For the same reason, it was also an important ethnographic

center for me as well to meet many mobile workers laboring in *matatu* business. Mama

Mike's kiosk had almost all the things *matatu* people needed throughout a day, including cigarettes, drinks, food, and scratch cards for their phones. Although some of the *matatu* operators did not pay on time and bought what they frequently needed on credit, Mama Mike did not blame them for that and cherished her social relations with them. She often said, "They [the *matatu* operators] are my good customers, and they support me," and showed me a picture attached to the wall behind her cigarette display. In the photo which was taken during her father's funeral, I recognized many familiar faces of the *matatu* operators working around the stage who attended the funeral for her.

Mama Mike was not the only person who had a particular attachment to *matatu* and people in the transport sector. In Nairobi, I met a broad spectrum of people, including academic researchers, artists, and activists who were involved in personal and social engagements regarding the *matatu*. Macharia*, who was mentioned earlier in terms of Michuki Rules, was also one of them. I went to interview Macharia in a bed town of Nairobi. During the interview, we were looking down a main *matatu* stage of the area from an upstairs window of a building. Numerous small and big *matatu* vehicles were running on the road connecting the town and central Nairobi. Loud music and flashy moves of conductors were all over the stage and road. Macharia kept chuckling while looking at the performances of the young men working and playing around the *matatu*. About two decades ago, he himself was also one of them struggling to make his daily living and enjoying the acrobatic practice. He was very proud of his *matatu* career which started with conducting work and being involved in the transport sector for decades.

Macharia had a lot of titles: a *matatu* blogger, driver, activist and a former conductor. He had developed expert opinions about *matatu* issues, such as new regulations and strikes. In fact, Macharia was a celebrity when it came to the subject of *matatu,* based on his long experience and famous blog regarding Nairobi's *matatu* society and culture. He was invited to events related to *matatu*, transport and urban Africa, including a high-profile meeting held in Nairobi's UN compound. My trajectory of contacting Macharia was formulated through various people I had previously interviewed who knew him through his blog and the events. Many international journalists also came to interview him about *matatu* issues, and his opinions and photos were reported through major news media. *Matatu* was a kind of social capital for him to develop his fame and career.

In the field of *matatu*, I found other people who were raising voices and shaping expert identities like Macharia. Many of these people were owners who managed and mobilized the transport sector through SACCOs and owners' associations. *Matatu* business generally has been represented by its speeding and jumbling vehicles and stigmatized operators on roads. However, the actors who financially, socially and even politically earn and benefit most from this sector are the owners of the vehicles. The backgrounds of the owners are diverse. The owners I interviewed included a school teacher who owned vehicles in a major SACCO as well as owners who had started their careers as drivers or even conductors. Some of the owners were very proud that many foreign students and researchers like me were coming to interview them to learn more about *matatu*. When I introduced myself to them, they proudly listed names of

prestigious American and British universities and said many students had already come to interview them before me.

One important characteristic of *matatu* owners is that they can formulate socially and politically strong positions in the Kenyan society. Based on the financial resources they can make through the *matatu* operation, some owners and SACCOs diversify and expand their business career into insurance and retail businesses (Jennings et al. 2016). These successful owners sometimes become expert leaders of the transport community. Waitaka*, a middle-aged *matatu* owner who started his career as a teenage conductor many decades ago was one example. He was particularly eager to promote young *matatu* operators to save and invest for their future by developing a financial/insurance program for them. He worried that the young operators tended to waste their daily earnings to be drunk and did not have clear future goals. While in the interview with me, Waitaka proudly presented a pamphlet from his SACCO. It was one of the SACCOs that make operators allocate some of the earnings in savings.

The owners also tend to be or become politically influential in Kenyan society. Above all, politicians and other government-related actors themselves can own *matatu* vehicles to make profits and cumulate their financial resources. In addition, they can mobilize the transport network and their operators for protests resisting governmental actions, or to support certain candidates in elections. In October 2014, when the current president, Uhuru Kenyatta came back from The Hague[97], the chairman of MOA (Matatu Owners Association) was standing right in the first line of the VIPs

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[97] At that time, the president was accused by the International Criminal Court as a suspect of crimes against humanity. during the post-election violence in 2007-2008.

waiting for the president's arrival. The transport sector can be a vehicle of political campaigns and many powerful political figures pay them serious attention to earn their support.

There are also efforts to illuminate academic and technological implications of *matatu* beyond the technical subject of urban transport. In fact, studying *matatu* as an academic subject has been very popular for decades in terms of understanding urban informality and culture. In 1982, Nairobi's Mazingira Institute published *The Matatu Mode of Public Transport in Metropolitan Nairobi* (Kapila et al. 1982) as a synthetic study of the *matatu* system in the capital city. More recently, a well-known *matatu* expert, Mbugũa Wa Mũngai (2013) has focused on studying *matatu* operators and their linguistic and behavioral characters in relation to Nairobi's youth and masculine culture. Meleckidzedeck Khayesi is another academic and professional expert who substantially produces *matatu* research on socioeconomic characteristics and traffic safety issues (Khayesi 1997; 2002; Khayesi et al. 2015). There is also a wide spectrum of academic angles of exploring the transport sector from history to transport engineering that reinforce the importance of *matatu* in terms of social, cultural, and developmental understanding of Nairobi, Kenya, and further, urban Africa (Mutongi 2006; Cevero and Golub 2007; Graeff 2009; Rasmussen 2012).

The most unique recent attempt to shed interesting light on *matatu* in Nairobi is a collaborative mapping project titled the *Digital Matatus*[98]. The map was launched in January 2014 based on years of cooperative work by Kenyan and American graduate

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[98] *Digital Matatus* Website (www.digitalmatatus.com), accessed March 30, 2015.

students and researchers in related fields from engineering to designing. In particular, the

Kenyan students proactively gathered geographical data and vital information, including

locations of stops and notable detours and variations of the routes, by riding countless

matatu vehicles on over 100 routes and communicating with conductors and drivers. The

students I interviewed said the operators helped with the data collection, and the

conversations with the workers on the ground enriched the project, in the sense that it was

their fieldwork for the map.
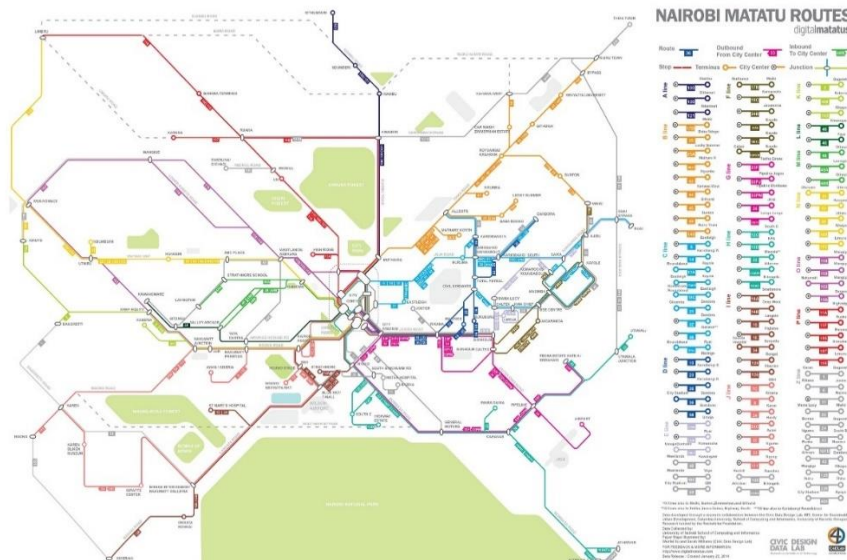
Figure 5.7 Nairobi Matatu Routes
(Source: *Digital Matatus* 2014)

One awakening point of this project is that it visually and clearly demonstrates

that this seemingly informal and fragmented transport system, in fact, has very organized

features and designated routes as other formal transport systems in developed cities. If

one looks at the map (Figure 5.7), it looks just like any formal transport map people

would find in cities with proper public transport systems. In addition, this project was

presented at numerous international conferences and workshops as a successful example of reinterpreting and utilizing informality. The project was one of the new mapping projects in urban Africa along with Dar-es-Salaam and Cape Town (Jennings et al. 2016).

Matatu is the most important and the only means of public transport for many Kenyans. Nairobi, and more broadly, Kenyan society cannot function without *matatu* anymore. When *matatu* operation gets suspended by strikes or protests or regulations, main newspaper articles and photos report endless lines of people walking to commute. The fundamental point of this section is not merely saying that *matatu* should be reconsidered because of its popularity. More specifically, I claim that this transport mechanism has close relations with diverse groups of people and layers of the society, from academics to kiosk owners who recognize and reinterpret the culture, value and function of *matatu*. The connecting links between the transport sector and the other actors are diverse. It can be a type of livelihood and social network or career and business capital or academic and research material. The cases of people living with and cherishing *matatu,* and existing attempts like the *Digital Matatus*, can be strategic foundations to imagine and design the future of *matatu* beyond blames and punishments.

Matatu in the BRT Scenario

Matatu is discussed in a broader context of paratransit studies of sub-Saharan African cities. Similar examples are found with different names in other countries, such as

daladala in Tanzania, *taxi* in Uganda and South Africa, and *tro-tro* in Ghana[99]. As *matatu* is an interesting and important channel to investigate Kenyan society and urban culture, these examples of paratransit systems also have been studied by many researchers for both sociocultural and policy implications (Rizzo 2002; Pirie 2013; Behrens et al. 2016). On the other hand, informal transit systems like *matatu* are often discussed as 'targets' to be restructured or replaced in the field of international development. The popular and fetishized subject involved in the kind of conversation is the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT). A BRT system generally has specialized design, services and infrastructure, including specialized vehicles, designated bus lanes, and fare collecting systems. The fundamental idea of this transport infrastructure is to integrate the capacity and speed of a metro system with the lower cost and simplicity of a bus system. Curitiba in Brazil is known as "the Cradle of BRT." The city now has over 75% of people using the bus system that was first implemented in 1982, and it is now the world's most famous BRT case (Lindau et al. 2010).

My first encounter of the BRT plan in Nairobi was in the middle of an interview with a government officer. I asked what kind of alternate transportation plan Nairobi had, considering building more and more roads is not the fundamental solution for decongesting the city. He then started commenting on how Nairobi will have a BRT system with multiple corridors shortly. My initial reaction to the future plan was how the picture of BRT would be drawn along with the mechanism of *matatu*. When I brought up this issue in another conversation with a government engineer, he mentioned Enrique

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[99] There are many more cases in other countries as well. See Khayesi et al. (2015, 4).

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Peñalosa's lecture in Nairobi in 2008. In the lecture, Peñalosa said that BRT is not an option for Nairobi, but the *only* option for the city. The former mayor of Columbia's capital city has been a 'missionary' of promoting the BRT infrastructure, based on his success with TransMilenio, the BRT system of Bogotá. The Kenyan engineer seemed convinced that Nairobi is also able to do this, if Bogotá was able to do that. "We will talk and talk and talk to convince the stakeholders in the *matatu* sector to reorganize our new public transport system and to end the irregular and unfavorable services. We need properly disciplined operators in good uniforms and with appropriate customer services. We cannot just make the [school] dropouts make easy money in this industry."

Bogotá's success appeared in every transport-related meeting I attended in Nairobi. In a workshop meeting about BRT, I observed a dozen international experts with prestigious engineering and urban planning degrees, discussing how to implement the BRT system successfully in East African cities, including Nairobi, Kenya, Kampala, Uganda, and Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania. Presentation slides in the meeting were filled with green bus vehicles, smart cashless fare systems, fuel efficiency calculations, cost-benefit analysis, and futuristic images resembling the successful BRT cases from Bogotá to Guangzhou. Some people talked about BRT tours to see the previous cases before the actual implementations in East Africa. Other people talked about problems found in the cases of South Africa that were often considered to be 'failed.' A famous BRT consultant gave a lecture about best practices of BRT, and mentioned some possible scenarios of how to make mini bus industries, like *matatu* in Kenya and *daladala* in Tanzania, be part of the implementation. The scenarios were not about just replacing *matatu* with BRT.

Based on the previous cases that happened in Bogotá and Johannesburg, the expert

provided some guidelines for successful BRT implementation and emphasized that it is

important to use the existing systems like *matatu*. The operators would be hired, the

owners would be benefited through incentives, and the market adjustment would happen

gradually as far as the plan properly took place.

One might ask: why is BRT preferred over other modes of public transport

infrastructure, such as light rail and metro? As it is often referred to "surface subway", a

BRT system does not need a massively expensive construction for underground facilities.

The construction only requires significantly lower investments and easy access for users

who already have some ideas about the concept of buses rather than rail systems (Vuchic

2005). In addition, there was a kind of internationally inspired faith that BRT is a 'moral'

project of urban development under the lead of the World Bank. In my interviews with

some European engineers working in Kenya, I heard comments on the relationship

between the World Bank and the BRT infrastructure: "The World Bank loves BRT," and

"It's World Bank's favorite baby." Many notable existing BRT projects, such as Bogotá's

TransMilenio and Istanbul's Metrobüs, were implemented through the support of the

World Bank (Alpkokin and Ergun 2012; Hidalgo et al. 2013). Under the lead, other

development partners, such as the European Union and the Japan International

Cooperation Agency, have already selected which corridors they will take in Nairobi's

BRT scenario in terms of funding and constructing BRT lanes.

BRT experts were the brains of this global network of producing and helping with

the materialization of the BRT infrastructure in many countries. The Institute for

Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP), "a global nonprofit at the forefront of innovation, providing technical expertise to accelerate the growth of sustainable transport and urban development around the world[100]" based in New York City, is one famous example of an expert initiative comprised of the brains. Experts in ITDP have been working a lot in consulting BRT projects in many cities from Guangzhou to Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam. ITDP also publishes manuals and establishes standards for transport systems and policy solutions that are decorated with the popular languages of contemporary international development, such as green, sustainability and efficiency. One of the accomplishments that ITDP achieved in relation to BRT is *The BRT Standard* (ITDP 2014). The recent edition published in 2014, demonstrates standards for the newest BRT systems that are produced by diverse technical experts, including engineers, designers, and planners.

The implementation of the BRT infrastructure in Nairobi might be a political project to promote the government's achievement. Some private transport consultants assumed, "There will be definitely one BRT lane by 2017 because of the election in that year. The government will need it." There was also an impression that the new BRT plan could be a total-package for taming the *matatu* sector. For decades, the government has attempted to discipline and formalize the business and operation through unintegrated and frequent policy changes, including Michuki rules in 2003-2004. There were other macro and micro battles between the operators and the transport authorities, and the recent actions required the installation of a speed governor and cashless fare system.

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[100] ITDP Website (https://www.itdp.org/who-we-are), accessed March 25, 2015.

Unlike the previous separate attempts, the BRT plan is inclusive with all the details that the government imagines for an advanced public transport system which fits in environmental sustainability, customer service, cashless fare collection, and safety requirements. Thus, if the plan could be implemented successfully in the long term, Nairobi would see either the replacement of *matatu,* or a massive transformation of the long-lasting transport mechanism.

Although the conversations about Nairobi's BRT kept bringing up *matatu*, there was a kind of constant alienation of the paratransit system in the landscape of implementing the new transport infrastructure. *Matatu* was still something unknown and dangerous from the gaze of experts, and in a way, people having not much idea about riding *matatu* were involved in the conversations of implementing the new public transport infrastructure. For example, there was a shared idea that international experts were not supposed to use *matatu* for safety reasons. David* was a young European transport planner working in one of the leading international development agencies. He was, in fact, very interested in using and learning about *matatu*, but he pointed out that international agencies tend to advise their employees to avoid taking *matatu* vehicles. Most expatriates working in development agencies also buy cars as soon as they start working in Nairobi. Some of them even get tax exemptions based on their quasi-diplomatic privilege. The experts I met through meetings and workshops did not have enough experience of riding *matatu* transport and seemed to feel uncomfortable to talk about using it. I often felt that I was badgering them by questioning their lack of experience on the *matatu* wheels, and I looked like an alien to them, a foreign person

using *matatu* every single day. I did not mean it, but I often became an 'ignorant' academic researcher who did not understand the bureaucratic system they have to follow.

Firsthand experiences of *matatu* may not be necessary for the experts who are trained with technical knowledge of how to plan and implement public transport infrastructure like BRT. The fundamental issue, however, could be actually the mind of using public transport rather than the problem of *matatu*. In a transport-related meeting attended by both international and local experts, the main speaker of the event, a well-known expert on Nairobi's transportation, asked the audience to raise their hands if they had taken any *matatu* to come to the meeting. A handful of people raised their hands, but most of the people did not. Since he was considering that *matatu* was the public means of transport, the speaker pointed out that the number of hands told us "why Nairobi is congested." As I mentioned in Chapter 3, the mind of the transport-elite is that driving one's own car is an important privilege. These elites are not just famous politicians or rich businessmen. One young government engineer, for example, said, "As soon as I get enough money, I will buy a car. I would prefer to get stuck in the traffic in my comfort zone [the car]." Another European urban planner said, "In my country, owning a car is not a strong privilege and using public means of transport is standardized. But the story in Nairobi is different. People think only poor people walk and ride *matatu*." Thus, another question that arises here is whether a BRT system can make people use the public transport. If the same amount, or more cars are on roads along with BRT buses, then the congestion and problems of moving in the city will also stay together. This is why

promoting public transport needs to consider the mind of people with regard to the growing car ownership and social inequality.

Interface for Matatu

Figure 5.8 My First *Matatu* Ride

On 13th of December in 2010, my first day of studying Nairobi started with one *matatu* ride. My knowledge about Nairobi at that time was very minimal, but *matatu* was an essential piece of information I had at that time along with how to say hello and thank you in Kiswahili. For about half an hour, in the 14-seater vehicle[101] running and navigating on roads full of potholes and bumps, I was captivated by the speed, loud hip-hop music sounds, and a young conductor shouting and acrobatically hanging onto the

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[101] In rural areas, the sizes and models of vehicle used for *matatu* operations are more diverse and older (Wa Mũngai 2010).

sliding door. I glanced at the old dashboard that still had some Japanese characters[102] in front of the driver. Nothing was working, but one needle was jumping around the speedometer. I wondered about how old the minivan would be. Feeling nervous a little bit, I grabbed a crooked iron bar fixed around dented seats in a row. A worn-out seatbelt was dangling on it. A sticker with long straps of green, yellow, and red colors masked the exact middle of the rearview mirror with a message on it: *Peace, love, and harmony*.

Matatu has carried both old and new Nairobi at the same time. The original system of serving passengers informally from the colonial time has continued, but it also has constantly been 'evolving' in ways in which the society experiences new trends, demands, and other happenings on roads. Old vehicles like the one I described above, are disappearing, and new and bigger vehicles with clean seats and fun graffiti are attracting more passengers. Some proudly display signs saying they have Wi-Fi installed inside the vehicles although I have rarely found any of them working. Operators still are stigmatized, but their practice of conducting and navigating the mobile mechanism is responsive to the conditions of the urban space and time. The owners of the vehicles tend to focus on maximizing their profit, but there are mobilizing efforts to improve the service and work as well. *Matatu* also inspires many research projects and technological implementation of the city where informality is an important principle and strategy of living, working, and moving.

In the official conversations of both persecuting the transport sector and implementing new public transport infrastructure, *matatu* usually appears to be a

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[102] Many 14-seater minivans used in the *matatu* sector were imported from Japan.

mechanism comprised of problems. *Matatu* becomes a failure although it has been 'successful' in supplementing the lack of public transport infrastructure which historically goes back to the colonial time and the beginning of the independent Kenya. Therefore, it is difficult to see a real 'partnership' which considers the informal mechanism to be part of the formal (Hart 2005). This is why many operators and even owners in the transport sector have no clear idea about what BRT is or what kind of new transport infrastructure is on the way.

The kind of distance I found between the ordinary road experiences and the expert working environments is not really a new thing that one finds in the field of international development. Many projects that are aided and implemented through the developmental assistance, 'traditionally' lack an understanding of the local needs, as many anthropologists, especially James Ferguson (1990) famously pointed out. What is more crucial is that this kind of distance hardly disappears because the foundation of how the international circle of experts and local regulators experience and imagine their mobility is often privileged. I am not insisting that everyone should take *matatu* or experts should be like anthropologists working in the field by walking and engaging in participant observation. The important part here is that they first need to recognize the gap instead of trusting what is formulated in the elite environment. *Matatu* is not just a form of informality. It is a networked mechanism of living, moving, doing business, and representing the spirits of everyday struggles in the urban space. A kind of ordering should be interlinking *matatu* and the future of Nairobi's mobility without prejudices and with more relational approaches (Simone 2014). Nairobi needs not draconian, but

distinctive rules that match the relationships around the transport sector as livelihoods

and enterprise.

6. CONCLUSION

This ethnography has been an exploration of moving. As I described in the introduction, I started 'running' around roads in Nairobi based on a random pedestrian's advice—"Just run." Until that moment, I was struggling to navigate the city, but with the words "just run", my engagement with the urban space substantially transformed. I joined the mobile fabric of the city by running, walking, riding, and drifting with my regular or random traveling companions. Nevertheless, moving in Nairobi remained painful, dangerous and exhausting. I had to learn new ways of moving and gain the improvisational skills required to survive in the act of transit in the city. The more I honed my skills and mimicked local ways of moving, the more I shared challenges and problems with people. The experience of being in motion created the foundation for my social and cultural insights into Nairobi. I collected ethnographic accounts and cumulated field notes through numerous *matatu* rides, travels with *mkokoteni* workers, and pedestrian adventures on motorways. By following these mobile subjects, I explored effective and useful ways to study mobility in an African city that has ongoing complications between preexisting and newly emerging forms of mobility. In other words, my personal embodiment of the speed, rhythm, and flow of moving became central to my academic investigation of the city's everyday mobility.

My study examined the challenges of Nairobi's mobility and identified the neglected and marginalized forms and environments of moving in the city. I sought to know how ongoing infrastructural development addresses or intensifies the problems of

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everyday mobility in the new frames of structuring and ordering urban mechanisms of moving. Implementing new infrastructure, such as constructing roads and planning a transportation system, is imperative in the contemporary landscape of urbanizing Nairobi, but the compatibility of emerging ways of moving – which are often imagined and implemented from the top down – and the everyday ways in which people move is fraught. I thus sought to address two key questions: 1) What kinds of everyday struggles and challenges are formulated between preexisting ways of moving and infrastructural changes? 2) How does the complex dynamics of moving produce Nairobi's mobility in the era of national development?

To answer these questions, I demonstrated and analyzed three ethnographic domains of moving in Nairobi. First, I examined the most ordinary but challenging means of moving—walking—by focusing on various accounts and routes of traveling on foot, from everyday commuting to roadside laboring. New and renovated motorways in and around the Kenyan capital are proliferating, mesmerizing and spurred by transport elites concerned with ideas of national development. The urban pedestrian experience, however, is a blind spot in the popular transport discourses that focus on resolving the city's congestion and many Nairobians constantly struggle with a lack of safe and adequate walking environments. Pedestrians find themselves running, utilize informal infrastructure that helps their ways forward, and also bear the risks of crossing motorways to get where they need to go. What people can do to walk safely is limited in the ongoing infrastructural setting, and safe pedestrian practices, in fact, do not exist. You are 'safe' when you run and survive at the moments. As explained in Chapter 3,

pedestrians trust temporal and dangerous practices to move every day by collaborating with the road infrastructure framed to make cars faster as if they are playing characters in a speed game. The contested relations between the pedestrians and speeding vehicles generate risky interactions, accidents, and deaths on roads, the ordinary means of moving is both physically and structurally hindered and further obliterated in the engineered space. The nature of pedestrian mobility this research discovered in this context is an everyday task that people have to figure out by battling with the infrastructure.

Next, I traced the movement of *mkokoteni*, a wooden handcart used by many informal delivery workers in Nairobi. *Mkokoteni* is informal and outdated, but it is also an important contemporary method for moving goods in the city considering that many informal and formal businesses depend on the 'outdated' moving mechanism. In the recent move toward building high-speed motorways and reconfiguring the city to support ways of moving that are thought to be more modern, this old and non-motorized vehicle is invisible or ostracized. Official and popular forms of attention paid to non-motorized transport focus on bicycle infrastructure. *Mkokoteni* seems to be unplannable in existing planning perspectives as many other informal sides of urban Africa are neglected or targeted to be removed in official blueprints. This research, however, revealed that there are tacit mobile practices and social fabrics involved in the enduring production of the mobility. In everyday road interactions, the handcarts are pushed away and marginalized, but the workers consistently improvise to open up and navigate their ways. Although no infrastructural support for this old technology is available, the social relationships between customers, workers, and other city dwellers enable the carts to keep moving in

the city. The handcart workers appropriate the motorized space despite the constant risks and threats it poses, and create a socio-spatial layer to move the handcarts.

My last route of investigating mobility in Nairobi turned toward *matatu*, the public but privatized transportation sector used to move people and goods in the city. The fleets of *matatu* vehicles on Nairobi's roads are greeted with both love and hatred. The operation is crucial and flexible in the city where public means of transportation are not officially available, but the embedded dynamics of economic interests and political opportunities complicate the vitality of the *matatu* sector. This research detailed that the seemingly ordinary movement of the informal urban transportation sector is produced through the struggles of operators, owners, users, police, and governmental regulators who are involved in *matatu* with different interests and perspectives. Rules and regulations try to control, punish and even eradicate this transportation mechanism. However, the sector has also evolved as an active social vehicle reflecting urban struggles with the unique nature of moving and working for a long time. Operators are often persecuted as outlaws on roads, but at the same time, they are the mobile experts in producing the crucial mobility for many Nairobians. While international experts and local technocrats draw a new picture of replacing *matatu*, there are people reinterpreting and developing the transport sector by employing it for an international mapping project or improving the working environments for young operators. It is, thus, celebrated through new technological interpretations and activism recognizing *matatu* as an important urban entity that shapes mobile lives in Nairobi.

The material growth and completion of new infrastructure often overlook how people actually use and appropriate the new technical implementations, and to what extent the technical functions influence the society (Larkin 2013). The infrastructural outlook on Nairobi's mobility currently centers on decongesting traffic, rather than harmonizing new and historic forms of mobility. Within this paradigm, thus, moving cars faster and making the motorized traffic flow is considered the most important goal of managing road space. Pedestrians and 'inefficient' ways of moving are marginalized in formal plans for moving and within the dominant paradigm of urban transportation. Similarly, the movement of *mkokoteni* and *matatu*, which depends on complicated social struggles and managing unfavorable conditions, also do not fit in this officially driven landscape of mobility. The tasks of moving become responsibilities of the people on roads. To be able to work and live – you must be able to achieve your everyday mobility, and that means you will have to engage in risky, illegal and unfair ways of moving. I recognized the realities of these different levels of moving by battling or collaborating with infrastructural challenges and illuminated a more holistic picture of the urban landscape in which people play diverse and active roles in producing Nairobi's mobility.

This dissertation aimed to advance anthropological knowledge on mobility and motivate richer engagement with diverse forms of mobilities that have been popular in recent social science research (Urry 2007). Along with recent ethnographic studies of roads (Khan 2006; Dalakoglou and Harvey 2012; Harvey and Knox 2015), my study focused on how materially engineered road spaces are socially discursive and transformable through the dynamic of practices, politics and diverse socio-cultural forces.

I rediscovered road and traffic spaces as new ethnographic sites and explicated mobility as a cultural subject through which to understand a particular society. This dissertation also shed light on the importance of informal aspects and actors of ordinary mobility for better understanding of urban Africa (Mbembe and Nuttall 2008; Simone 2004). My study revealed that informal sides of moving that are often excluded from developmental blueprints can be foundations of how to transform existing ideas and practices in engineering roads and restructuring public transport.

When I came back from my fieldwork, a transport engineer in the United States challenged me what anthropology can do for people by suspecting that the social and cultural studies cannot make any real and practical impact on lives of people. As much as I was offended and also constructively provoked by his comment, I have made efforts to provide perspectives that anthropology can provide that engineering gazes can miss or underestimate. Although they are crucial for materializing urban environments, engineering and technocratic minds often skip the contextual stories of what is really going on the ground. From the pieces of broken road infrastructure to outdated bodies of moving vehicles, I found real voices and practical clues for reimagining mobility in Nairobi. I suggest stakeholders to formulate solutions through moving or transforming their ideas and experiences of moving. More work and better improvement can be delivered when regulators and leaders move beyond the windows of their personal motor vehicles. In a similar sense, inviting diverse hustling Nairobians into the field of engineering the urban space can be a foundation to create an inclusive environment of moving.

My study demonstrated "a vivid Malinowskian description" of informal and practical dimensions (Hart 2008) of moving in the city. Mobility is not an independent element of urban lives. I addressed mobility more broadly as a social and cultural practice that reflects how a society envisions moving and surviving in relation to (under)development. How people move is deeply interconnected with many other dimensions of living in Nairobi including livelihoods, social networks, and uneven spatial dynamics. Therefore, the form of connectivity that we need to pursue is not just the one on roads, but the one in the routines of urban dwellers who are struggling to figure out their ways to move forward every single day.

Epilogue

In Nairobi, where international development agencies and their headquarters are clustered, it is common to see professional events regarding urban Africa. The theme of World Habitat Day in 2013 was urban mobility, and international organizations working on urbanism and development raised issues and challenges that many growing and congested African cities face. High-profile events were hosted in Nairobi to discuss solutions for decongesting and planning cities, and professional workshops and ministerial meetings were attended by international experts in the fields of transport infrastructure and high-rank government officers from many African countries. There was a growing consensus that cities in Africa are facing similar challenges, including the lack of transport infrastructure. The international circle of experts and officers were

producing some standardized remedies, such as encouraging bicycle infrastructure and designing BRT lanes on roads. Every event I attended, I heard some repeating concepts in formulating the future transport—sustainability, safety, and eco-friendly technology. The blueprints displayed throughout the sessions were futuristic and beautiful.

While attending expert conversations on urban mobility in African cities, I reminded myself of crossing motorways, the pain from pushing *mkokoteni*, and my learning of the urban space in the movement. I was questioning myself about what would be my ethnographic point of standing in-between the high-profile information of urban transport and pushing *mkokoteni* which is not even considered in the official realm of urban transport. One day at the end of my fieldwork in 2014, outside a workshop room, there was an exhibition of drawings of Kenyan children in which they visualized how they imagine the future of urban transport in the society. I found gigantic highways, high-speed rails, and even airplanes in their work. The children colorfully drew all kinds of infrastructural objects that are related to mobility. The young imaginations visualized on papers looked futuristic, technologically advanced, and very compatible with the event.

I was not particularly intrigued because they all looked like something expected. However, among others, one drawing which was displayed at the end of the row caught my attention for a long time. This particular young mind depicted pedestrians, a pedestrian crossing, a bicycle user, a traffic signal, *matatu* vehicles, and other motor cars on the ground, an airplane in the sky, and a train on an elevated railway in one piece of paper. Finally, there, at the corner of the picture, was one *mkokoteni* filled with colorful fruits and vegetables was pulled by a worker. The young eyes captured everything one

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would find on roads in Nairobi better than anyone else in professional meetings. It was the only 'blueprint' imagined in harmony that I found in Nairobi.

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APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD HUMAN SUBJECTS EXEMPTION

ASU Knowledge Enterprise
Development

Office of Research Integrity and Assurance

To:	James Eder ANTH
From:	for Mark Roosa, Chair Soc Beh IRB
Date:	07/24/2013
Committee Action:	**Exemption Granted**
IRB Action Date:	07/24/2013
IRB Protocol #:	1307009430
Study Title:	Crafting Mobility in Nairobi - Development, Infrastructure, and the Culture of Moving

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(2) .

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.