BULLETS BEYOND BALLOTS

Margarita Dimova

"Your battles inspired me - not the obvious material battles but those that were fought and won behind your forehead."

~ James Joyce

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*Re-Examining the 2007-2008 Post-Election Violence through
Longer-Standing Youth Mobilisation Patterns in the
Slum Area of Kibera, Nairobi*

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ABSTRACT

Whereas the recent episode of post-election turmoil in Kenya is most commonly framed as politically-mobilised interethnic violence, this thesis seeks to provide an alternative interpretation. By addressing localised processes of violent micro-mobilisation in the Kibera slum of Nairobi, the analysis goes beyond elite-based examinations of political fragmentation and institutional failure. Focusing on longer-standing patterns of everyday street organisation activity reveals the political-criminal violence nexus, as well as the local socio-economic and historical roots of the Kenyan crisis. Both post-election and everyday violence are examined at the grassroots level, as seen by perpetrators or witnesses, with the resulting conclusions based on indigenous conceptualisation. The crux of the argument is that beneath superficial explanations of "tribalism," the 2007/2008 unrest presents an attempt on the part of Kibera youth to overcome, protest, or navigate multi-level insecurity and persisting social injustices through violence. Micro-level findings (livelihood strategies, motivations) are put in relational perspective (political elites, other societal groups), and analysed against the backdrop of the macro context (political economy, globalisation).

Key words: violence, Kibera, post-election, gangs, youth, insecurity, marginalisation, livelihood strategy

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ABBREVIATIONS

AP – Administrative Police, reports to local District Commissioner

DO – District Officer

ECK – Electoral Commission of Kenya

GSU – General Service Unit, paramilitary wing of the Military and Police

KANU – Kenya African National Union

KNYA – Kenya National Youth Alliance

KPLC – Kenya Power and Lighting Company

KSh – Kenya Shillings

NARC – National Rainbow Coalition

ODM – Orange Democratic Movement

ODM-K – Orange Democratic Movement of Kenya, an ODM splinter party

PNU – Party of National Unity

Exchange rate: €1 = 105 KSh

INTROSPECTION

"For the outside world, Kenya is the acceptable face of Africa: a safe destination for a million tourists a year from Europe, Asia and North America to the country of surf and safari; a reliable base, in a tough neighbourhood, for a burgeoning aid industry."

~ Michael Holman, "Kenya: Chaos and Responsibility"

"That morning, you know, I waked up [sic] and I count…seven dead bodies. Can't remember the exact day, but they were lying in the road. You could see how people have really lost, you know, their sense of life, of what life is."

~ Michael, twenty-four-year-old Kibera resident[1]

In the morning of Saturday 29 December 2007, residents of the most-populous slum in Eastern Africa – Kibera in Nairobi – woke to the sound of shooting (All Africa 2008). This time the gunshots were not a by-product of quotidian criminal activity, but the morbid fanfares signalling the onset of the most gruesome episode of violence in Kenya's post-independence history. Three days after the announcement of the results from the allegedly rigged general elections, the controversial victory of the incumbent President Mwai Kibaki from the Party of National Unity (PNU) provoked protests whose brutality called for "police siege" of Nairobi and Kisumu (The Standard 2008a). As flames consumed vehicles, buildings and citizens in several hotspots throughout Kenya, international newscasters scrambled to cover what they deemed an unexpected eruption of violence. The consequences of what is commonly referred to as "the Kenyan crisis" included over 1,000 civilian deaths; 300,000 internally displaced persons (ICG 2008: *i*); and the beginning of a fervent quest to unearth the root cause of the conflict. Motivated by Diamond's prediction that the future of democracy depends on "the performance of at-risk democracies such as Kenya" (2008), journalists, academics, experts from international aid agencies, and policy-makers set off to uncover the rotten foundation of Africa's "bastion of stability" (Khan in Hunt 2008).

Over the years, the upbeat perception of Kenya's political and economic performance had been reinforced by the disastrous fate of its neighbours (Sudan, Uganda, Somalia, Burundi) and by a booming tourist industry that presented the country as the affable face of Africa. For many, Kenya topped the short list of African democratic hopefuls. Yet, the outcome of the flawed elections unleashed a ferocious wave of popular discontent that had been brewing beneath Kenya's superficial image of stability:

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[1] Statement made during focus group C on 24 May 2010.

Nairobi's slums exploded in rage. The poor killed each other. Across the country came a swelling up of tribal violence […]. Police have orders to shoot to kill. There has been looting in Kisumu, riots in Mombasa and pitched battles in Eldoret. Kikuyu hiding in a church near Eldoret were burned alive by a mob (Economist 2008).

THE CLASH OF INTERPRETATIONS

Media

The logical question to follow is: *what went wrong and who was responsible for it?* In major international publications, the depictions of "ethnic massacre" (Le Figaro 2008), "tribal slaughter" (Blomfield 2008), or even "machete safari" (André 2008), were often accompanied by allusions to the ancient hatreds argument. According to *The New York Times*, for example, the Kenyan general elections bared "an *atavistic* vein of tribal tension" (Gettleman 2007, emphasis added). Those that steered clear of casting verdicts saturated with primordialism focused their attention on the role of political elites in pushing their electorates into the bloodshed. Mark Doyle, a *BBC* world affairs correspondent, writes that while interethnic differences had always been a part of Kenyans' lifestyle, tensions were only created through the manoeuvrings of "politicians hungry for power" (2008).

Going beyond the idea of primeval ethnic hatred inevitably entailed embracing an instrumentalist vision of ethnicity. "Ethnicity is nothing but a means, used by certain [politicians] for specific ends," said before *Le Figaro* Jérôme Lafargue, deputy director of the French Research Institute in Africa (IFRA) in Nairobi (2008). Jean-Philippe Rémy, writing for *Le Monde*, stated with similar certitude that the origins of the Kenyan crisis can be pinned down with "precision" to the announcement of the results of the flawed general elections (2008). Even if they went beyond the immediate violence trigger in their reportage of the crisis, journalists still got stuck on play-back along the politicised ethnicity line of reasoning. And rightfully so, since denying the ethnic character of the violent clashes, or the involvement of key political figures in instigating them, would be a denunciation of the obvious. After all, politicised ethnicity has manifested itself as one of the major ailments of democratisation throughout Africa (Forster et al. 2000), while in Kenya, combustible tribalism[2] has plagued national politics since independence.

Academia

The significance of such a highly-ethnicised political culture and its historical foundations has remained in the spotlight of academic work since the episodes of electoral violence in 1992 and 1997 (Ndegwa 1998, Harbeson 1998, Roessler 2005, Smith 2009, Tarimo 2010). While scholarly interpretations of the Kenyan post-election crisis of 2007-2008 converge in

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[2] My use of the word tribalism does not indicate a (racist) belief in an intrinsically barbaric nature of interethnic interaction, but rather – reflects the realities of Kenyan social and political life, as perceived by the citizens themselves. All of the respondents during the fieldwork stage of this research referred to their ethnicity as "tribe" and to discrimination and (violent) mobilisation along ethnic lines as "tribalism."

their refutation of the ethnic savagery frame,[3] they differ in their analytical course thenceforth. At the basic conceptual level, most studies bifurcate in the questions they ask and logically – the answers they search for. In terms of objectives, most authors remain committed to uncover the large-scale historical, political (Branch and Cheeseman 2008, Klopp 2009, Smith 2009) and economic (Holman 2008) determinants of the bloodshed, rather than the more micro-level motives and narratives of the perpetrators, or the socially symbolic designations of the violence in which they engaged.

Mueller claims that most scholars are guilty of focusing exclusively on "the formal aspects of institutions such as parties, parliament, administrative structures, and elections" (2008: 186). Analyses of party system, electoral law, and democratic consolidation, fortified with a healthy serving of instrumentalist logic, are commonly incorporated in the political-science-informed literature on the matter. Nonetheless, many (Chege 2008, Ndungu 2008, Roberts 2009, Githinji and Holmquist 2008) concur that the flawed elections of 2007 were nothing more than an ample opportunity for staging a protest against the structural injustices, corroding the rich fabric of Kenyan society.[4] "The failure of the election was merely a trigger for events that would have taken place at some point in the future," John Githongo, the illustrious former Kenyan anti-corruption tsar, writes in his latest article (2010). Together with Lonsdale (2008) and Elkins (2005, 2008), Githongo identifies land, power and access asymmetries, planted by colonialists and perpetuated by decades of unscrupulous and myopic political leadership, as the roots of societal and inter-ethnic tension. Such an argument clearly alludes to Galtung's idea of structural violence (1996). Its "systemic" (Tilly 2005: 18) macro-frame, however, vests the actual perpetrators of violence with little agency. The citizens who engaged in the violent episodes are projected almost as automatons responding to the social (power) arrangements they have inherited in the course of history. Such an automatic response also implies a degree of uniformity in motivation, which, however, is challenged by what Tilly refers to as "dispositional"[5] accounts of violence, presented in a number of more localised studies.

In his research on election violence in the Kibera slum, de Smedt contends that in the informal settlements of Nairobi the conflict had "its own specific dynamics" (2009: 581), while Lynch's work on Kalenjin[6] mobilisation in the Rift Valley concludes that violence can only be interpreted against the backdrop of "local understandings and interpretations of the past and present" (2008: 541). These relatively few anthropological inquiries (see also Osborn 2008) provide propitious grounds for a more detail- and context-sensitive exploration of the processes of micro-mobilisation. My work also aims to uncover the highly localised dynamics of collective

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[3] It is necessary to point out that some journalistic representations of the conflict did not subscribe to such an interpretation and provided insightful albeit terse analysis of the crisis. See, for instance, the article by *The Financial Times*' international affairs editor Quentin Peel "La Fracture Sociale a Mis le Feu aux Poudres," published by *Courrier International.*

[4] Kenya is a markedly poly-ethnic country, comprised of forty-two ethnic communities. For a visual presentation of Kenya's ethnic composition, see Appendix B.

[5] According to Tilly, dispositional explanations of social phenomena are based on individual motivations and grievances; they "fix on orientations of actors that precede and presumably cause action" (2005: 19).

[6] The Kalenjin are the fourth most populous tribe in Kenya.

violence, without losing touch with broader issues such as political infighting at the national level or the seismic econo-cultural shifts brought about by globalisation.

What is more, a thorough examination of the grassroots mobilisation processes can challenge critically the assumption that post-election violence was a pre-mediated attempt on the part of the opposition (ODM) to stage and sponsor a civil coup.[7] This assumption lies at the heart of the recently sanctioned and currently ongoing investigation of the events of 2007-2008 by the International Criminal Court (ICC). In ICC chief prosecutor Luis-Moreno Ocampo's words:

> They [political leaders] utilised their personal, government, business and tribal networks to commit the crimes. They implemented their policy with the involvement of a number of State officers and public and private institutions, such as members of the parliament, senior government officers, the police force and youth gangs (Office of the Prosecutor 2010).

In this thesis, I will examine the participation of "youth gangs" in the post-election clashes by locally contextualising their activity in everyday life. My interest in this particular aspect of the unrest stems from dissatisfaction with three general trends discussed so far: the prevailing frame of centralised, politically-motivated interethnic violence; the idea of a nation-wide, elite-level master plan for organising the chaos; and the disinclination to explore the individual agency of perpetrators. With this study, by examining organic, localised patterns of collective violence from a multi-faceted analytical perspective, I aim to provide an alternative interpretation of the Kenyan crisis.

CORE RESEARCH PUZZLE

With this objective in mind, the crux of my research lies in answering the following question:

How can the patterns of mobilisation of street organisations in the slums of Nairobi expound the 2007-2008 post-election violence beyond the frame of politically-motivated ethnic antagonism?

The notion of "street organisations" might appear confusing to the reader, but is incorporated in the main research question for the sake of accuracy. Prior to conducting fieldwork I had decided to concentrate my attention on vigilante groups in the informal urban settlements of Nairobi. Grounded research, however, proved that such groups are amorphous, "grow organically in the community,"[8] and do not have a clear structure or tangible

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[7]Also seen as ODM's response to the rigging of the elections, allegedly carried out by PNU in conjunction with the Electoral Commission of Kenya (ECK) (ICG 2008: 7).

[8] Author's interview with Ernst Jan Hogendoorn, ICG Horn of Africa Project Director, on 7 May 2010.

demarcation of their activities.[9] A review of thematic literature brought in Brotherton and Barrios' apt conceptual construct of a "street organisation," which bridges the gap between a criminal gang and a social movement (2004: xix).

The decision to include "youth" as a qualifier for these groups is also a post-fieldwork result. The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) defines youth with the age-bracket of fifteen to twenty-four years, whereas the common Kenyan understanding of a youth is broader, including any person between eighteen and thirty-five years of age.[10] Although frequently referred to as "youth," a substantial fraction of the protagonists in the post-election skirmishes was comprised of what in the West are considered to be adult men[11] in their late twenties or early thirties.

CONCEPTUAL BREAKDOWN AND ANALYTIC FRAMEWORK

The conceptual itemisation of the core research puzzle is a critical step to be taken before embarking on the quest for answers. For the sake of integrated analysis, the choice of analytical framework and sensitising concepts needs to be informed by the constitutive elements of the core research puzzle.

The first cluster of sub-questions I will address in this thesis pertains to the specific dynamics of street organisations: *How do street organisations mobilise in Kibera? What are the similarities and differences in the formation and operation of criminal gangs, vigilante groups and political youth-wingers?*[12] *At what point do these groups resort to violence? How did they engage in the post-election unrest?* These initial questions shape the departure point of my work and thus, the analytical framework I wish to employ for the rest of the study is directly contingent upon them. As the abovementioned questions concern issues of formation and mobilisation, it is useful to place these processes within a certain "opportunity structure" (Tilly 2003: 45). The dimensions of the conceptual opportunity structure (see Fig. 1, p.9), through the lens of which I examine collective violence in Kibera, are based on the threefold analytic framework that Snyder presents in his study on the role of culture in anarchy (2002). Snyder looks for "different ways to integrate [the] material, institutional, and cultural" in a multilevel understanding of his *problématique* (2002: 12). I chose to transform his nodal points respectively into the socio-economic, political and historical/cultural, and insert an additional component (psycho-social), signifying the individual agency with which this study is preoccupied. Such a multilevel approach might appear convoluted at first but proves functional since even at the micro level,

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[9] Author's interview with Simon (key informant) – fifty-one-year old Kikuyu Kibera resident and landlord, also member of local ODM secretariat – on 19 May 2010. An in-depth discussion on street organisation fluidity follows in Chapter One.

[10] Confirmed by all informants.

[11] None of the informants had witnessed or heard of acts of violence during the 2007-2008 clashes to be committed by females.

[12] Those are the broader sub-types of street organisations that I encountered in the course of my fieldwork.

situational constraints and prospects in political, economic, psycho-social and cultural terms facilitate or obstruct the agency of individuals in a very complex manner. [13]

The political

The way political contention influences individuals within street organisations provokes the following questions: *What is the role of (ethnic) conflict entrepreneurs and political big men in planning out, instigating and sponsoring the post-election skirmishes? How does a specific political culture predetermine these undertakings? Why has ethnicity become salient in Kenyan political life?* In order to link the political (institutional) to the psycho-social (individual), I will examine the ways in which state infirmity enables conflict entrepreneurs to foment (and thus, politicise) sentiments of negative ethnicity among their electorates. Wamwere's concept of "negative ethnicity" reconciles scholarly definitions of interethnic tension and indigenous conceptualisations of it[14] (2003). The utility of the concept stems from its purpose to accommodate both instrumentalist scholarly accounts of ethnicity, as well as the idea that "tribalism" is deeply embedded in the modes of social and political interaction. I will examine the political leaders who capitalise (not only literally) on these modes of interaction as conflict entrepreneurs[15] with a strong rhetoric, which has the potential to harness existing grievances, rather than "construct" identities from scratch.

The socio-economic

During fieldwork, I was able to identify two other thorny areas of everyday life in the urban periphery and used them to refine my research questions thematically. In order to understand how socio-economic marginalisation and physical insecurity are important factors in violent micro-mobilisation, we ought to ask the following questions: *How do Kibera youths map their livelihood opportunities and what livelihood strategies do they employ? How do their perceptions of and reactions to socio-economic marginalisation and insecurity determine patterns of criminal gang and vigilante formation? What techniques for social navigation and protection do street organisations offer to the unemployed and idle? To what extent engaging in criminal and political violence is profit-oriented? To what extent is it a response to inadequate policing?* In presenting the answers, I will draw on the concept of livelihood strategy as a means for social navigation in an environment of socio-economic marginalisation. The strong sense of agency in the notion of livelihood strategy (Moser 2004: 4) comes to offset the markedly structuralist poise of the idea of socio-economic marginalisation (Galtung 1996).

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[13] Concepts extracted from the classical structurationist argument (Giddens 1984, Jabri 1996) and given a Tillean twist.

[14] Such indigenous conceptualisations are best summarised by the notion of "tribalism." Wamwere argues that "tribalism" is used by Africans to denote ethnic-based discrimination in political representation and the labour market, as well as collective violent attacks (2003: 20).

[15] Based on Collier's notion of "violence entrepreneurs" (2003: 89), *sans* the exclusive greed overtones.

The cultural/historical

A preoccupation with micro-level agency, however, guarantees a starkly dispositional explanation of the 2007-2008 unrest, which, as Tilly argues, has "the great disadvantage of accounting badly for the [..] relations *among* entities" (2005: 19). That is why I will also examine violent acts as expressions coming from within the individual, but aimed at communicating with larger entities within his/her environment – political elites, ethnic and societal groups.[16] I will attempt to navigate my data outcomes by focusing on the semiotics of violence, inherent in mechanisms of social identification and communication, by posing questions such as: *What is the performative quality of violence? In what way did post-election violence imbue social and political power relations with a new meaning? How are meaningful (collective/ethnic) identities reified through violent processes of othering and belonging? How does the cosmopolitan urban environment shape the personal dignity perceptions of youth in the urban periphery?* In the ensuing analysis, the performative quality of violence will be examined as a means of social communication, aimed at redefining existing (power) relations. Although it remains anchored in primary research, the discussion of such issues phases in a dialectic view on self, identity, and meaning; it also links the micro- (individual, psychological) to the meta- (cultural, semiotic) level of analysis, which can respectively be seen as the top and the base of the pyramid below.
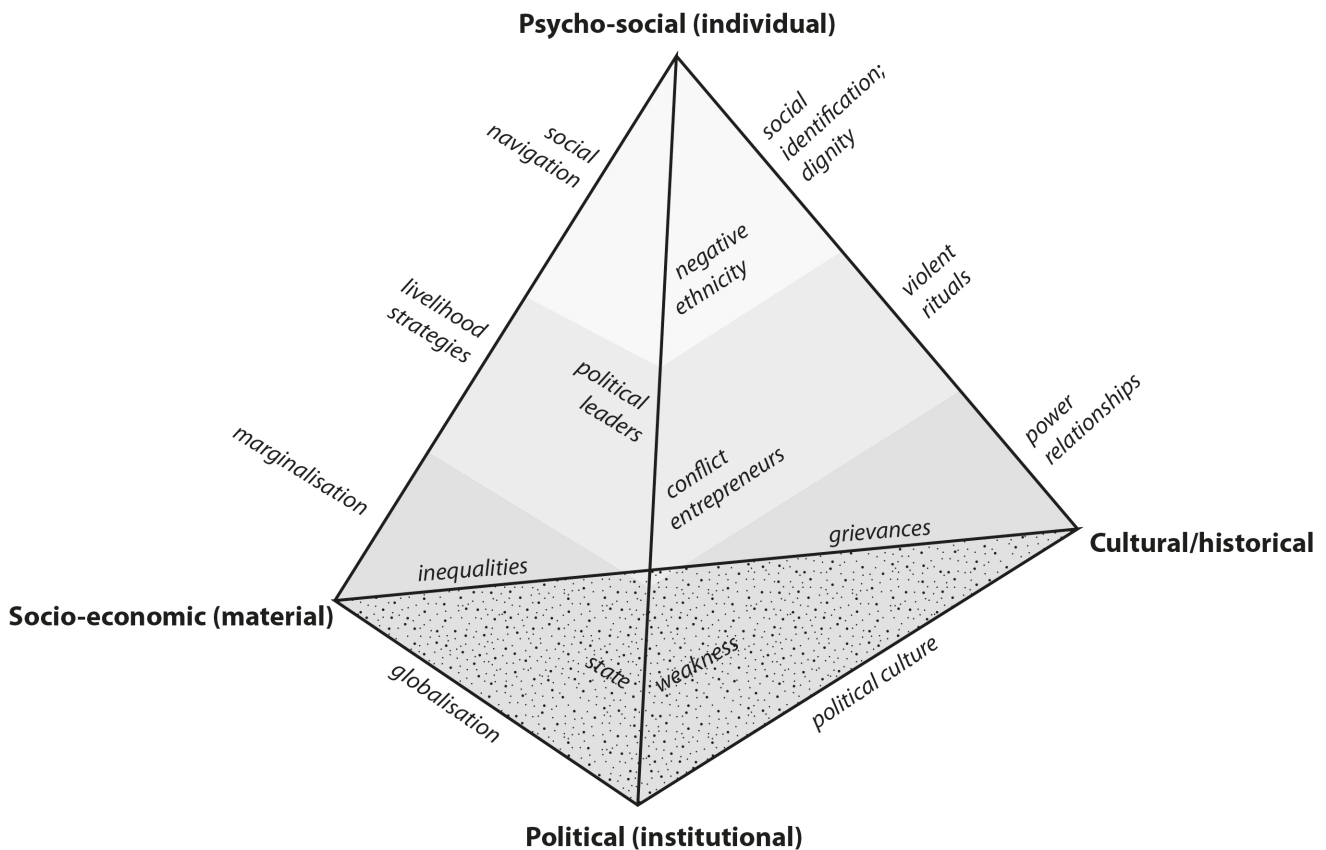

Figure 1. Integrated analytical framework

16 Tilly calls such analysis "relational" (2005: 19).

The analytical framework and research questions presented above create certain methodological issues to tackle: How to capture the personal motivations and the cultural value which Kibera youths invest in their violent practices? How to probe deeply into the micro level without neglecting broader social phenomena? How to provide an alternative view from the position of an external observer? How to be consistent in producing credible findings? While qualitative research ensures that the focus is on "process, meaning and understanding" (Merriam 1998: 8), ethnography as a methodological strategy proves crucial in disposing of alternative frames to examine social phenomena. Ethnographic research recognises the variability of human actions without denying the possibility of researchers reaching consensus on specific issues. According to Wolcott, "[t]he important question is not whether ethnography is feasible in a particular instance, but whether and how cultural interpretation might enhance understanding of the topic or problem under investigation" (1999: 68). In the case of the 2007-2008 clashes in Kenya, an ethnographic examination of youth mobilisation in the urban periphery can go beyond the dominant frame of politicised ethnicity and provide a an account of the events, rooted in indigenous conceptualisation.

Once the broader methodological strategy has been decided upon, the techniques of data collection have to correspond to the operationalising sub-questions and the desired data outcomes, but also be feasible, flexible, and facilitating the translation of empirical findings into textual product.

Sampling

Prior to entering the field, I had embarked on studying the male youths who live in the informal settlements of Nairobi and are also members of some form of street organisation. Given such a "difficult" population as a departure point and beset by certain access insecurities, I decided to employ non-probability snowball sampling. Once on the ground, I frequently made hybrid sampling decisions and tailored the mode of sampling for each data collection technique. Most of the in-depth interviews were based on snowball sampling. The rest of the interviewees, however, were chosen through purposive sampling and in the case of local academics and journalists – expert sampling. The core sample population remained the same throughout the study, but I resorted to external informants for the sake of cohesiveness and triangulation.

Location

Whereas I was originally interested in all slum settlements of Nairobi, in the very beginning of fieldwork I decided to focus on the Kibera slum thrilled by its sheer vastness and idiosyncratic ethnic composition.[17] Still, the decisive factor in choosing Kibera as a setting for fieldwork was its status as an "epicentre" of violence (Makori 2008, ICG: 2008: 9). Nevertheless,

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[17] There are no official statistics on either the population of Kibera or its ethnic composition (de Smedt 2009: 586), but all informants confirmed the clear predominance of Luos in the area.

the slum area proved too expansive to cover in a little over two months' worth of research. That is why I chose to focus my attention on two neighbourhoods[18] within Kibera – Gatwikira and Kianda (see Fig. 2 below) – in order to reach an optimal level of embeddedness. Both areas are notorious for being hubs of everyday and post-election violence. Gatwikira itself has made national news on a number of occasions (Daily Nation 2008a, The Standard 2008c) and is also known to be the base of some of the more popular crime/vigilante organisations in Kibera such as the Siafu (KNDR 2009: 6).

1. Kianda	4. Gatwikira	7. Mashimoni	10. Shilanga	13. Olympic
2. Soweto East	5. Kisumu Ndogu	8. Lindi	11. Soweto East	14. Ayani
3. Raila	6. Kambi Muru	9. Laini Saba	12. Makina	* Bonbolulu subdivision of Kianda
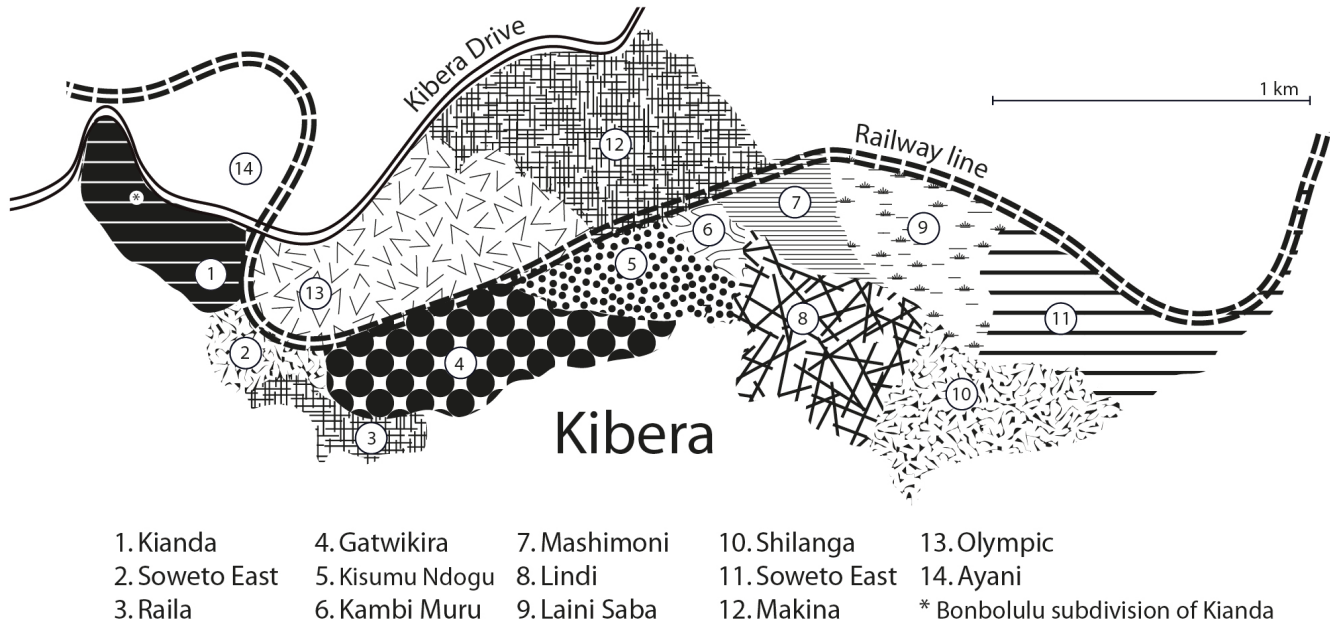
Figure 2. Kibera map[19]

Data collection techniques

Interviews constituted the backbone of my methodology strategy and were used to obtain data pertaining to all the operationalising sub-questions. To a large extent this study is based on an exploration of the way individuals' perceptions, opinions and interpretations of their immediate and broader surroundings determine their behaviour patterns. For me, interviewing presented a direct means of addressing those issues and a pliant, organic way of delving into deeper meaning. The interviews that I conducted can be tentatively put into three categories: in-depth with key informants, semi-structured with Kibera resident informants chosen *a priori*, and semi-structured with experts – academics, journalists, NGO workers – located in Nairobi.

The most valuable data was extracted from repeated interviewing of those who later became my key informants. Through regular in-depth interviews and informal discussions,

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[18] The neighbourhoods within Kibera are usually referred to as "villages" (de Smedt 2009: 588).
[19] Based on a map by Carolina for Kibera (n.d.) and de Smedt's rendition of it (2009: 588).

which naturally metamorphosed into life stories, I was able to refine my research question and put in perspective the findings obtained through other data collection techniques. Findings were also extracted from semi-structured (usually one-time) interviews with Kibera residents, who provided alternative explanations/conceptualisations of certain phenomena. The rest of the one-time, semi-structured interviews were with scholars, journalists and observers, who assisted me in re-abstractising the indigenous conceptualisations of Kibera-based informants. I drew up specific topic guides prior to the scheduled one-time interviews and used projective and enabling techniques (association, tableau) to gauge Kibera residents' perceptions of certain key issues and events (e.g. tribalism or ICC chief prosecutor's arrival in Nairobi).

The collective mapping of the opportunity structure for most youth residents of Kibera was best carried out through *focus groups*, which yielded naturally progressing discussions. I conducted three focus groups with different sets of Kibera residents: one with nine male adolescents who engaged in the violent post-election episodes (focus group A), one with four middle-aged local activists, who run a youth rehabilitation programme (focus group B), and one with five youths who are familiar with or have been part of the crime scene in a specific neighbourhood of Kibera (focus group C). The purpose was to obtain different depictions of the kind of environment from which street organisations in Kibera spring and their standard mode of operation (see sub-question clusters two and three on p.8).

In addressing the sub-questions in cluster one (see p.7) I also relied on *participant observation* of the visible processes of mobilisation and the thresholds at which violence erupts. I looked at specific youth practices that cut across apparently separate activities: a political rally in support of the forthcoming national constitutional referendum;[20] an open-access reggae event;[21] as well as regular weekday and weekend nights at local Kibera bars and *chang'aa*[22] dens.

To complement the sometimes haphazard notes taken during participant observation, once in the field, I added a dose of empiricism to my study by devising a *questionnaire*, which featured some of the central problems raised by other data collection techniques. The survey presented a roadmap of open questions that briefly covered the thorniest areas that I had stumbled upon: from identifying the main frustrations/motivations of violence perpetrators, through mapping dangerous areas within the slum, to defining core concepts such as tribalism, livelihood and violence.[23] Snowball heterogeneity-aimed sampling was used for distribution purposes whereby my research assistant, a Kibera resident, was responsible for handing out and collecting the surveys from the observer-identified sample frame.

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[20] The "Yes" rally (Ndegwa and Lucheli 2010) was held in Uhuru park in downtown Nairobi, and led by President Mwai Kibaki and Prime Minister Raila Odinga on 15 May 2010 and should not be confused with the "No" rally on 13 June 2010, marked by the explosion of several hand-grenades that killed five people and left over seventy injured (Barasa, Njagi and Ngirachu 2010)

[21] The headliner of the event on 30 May 2010 allegedly gathered an audience of 110,000 (Big Up Radio 2010). The audience was almost exclusively comprised of male slum inhabitants from all over Nairobi.

[22] *Chang'aa* is an illegal brew extremely popular among lower-income Kenyans. *The Economist*'s recent article "Kill Me Quick" provides a compact but informative overview of the *chang'aa* culture in the slums of Nairobi.

[23] Respondent statistics and a sample questionnaire can be found in Appendix C.

The very last component of my methodological strategy for primary data collection was *archive research* of local print media, which was conducted on an ongoing basis during fieldwork. I visited the Kenya National Library, as well as the *People's Daily* (national newspaper) library on a weekly basis. I also did occasional archival research at the British Institute in Eastern Africa and subscribed to the online news portal *All Africa*, which catalogues most Kenyan publications. Apart from factual data, local print press archives exposed me to some alternative explanations of the Kenyan crisis (mainly featured in op-eds), daily accounts of criminal activity in the slum estates of Nairobi, as well as contact details of authors, some of whom I later interviewed. I used those interview opportunities to obtain a different, yet local perspective on some of the findings that transpired during fieldwork.

Limitations

Gaining access to specific interviewees, however, often generated frustrations. One of the main limitations that I encountered in my data collection efforts was not in scheduling an interview with an "important" respondent *per se*, but in managing to go beyond the clichés and misleading arguments that certain "illustrious" interviewees (district officers, gang leaders) insisted on presenting. Moreover, many who were implicated in violent mobilisation in Kibera remained reticent, fearing that I was involved in the concomitant ICC investigation. Another shortcoming of my methodological strategy was the reliance on highly localised data, which, due to the disparate dynamics of slum life throughout Nairobi, was bound to produce very location-specific conclusions. The timeframe of the whole study was highly insufficient as I found myself roaming the labyrinths of the core research puzzle nearly halfway into fieldwork. Despite my firm commitment to a highly flexible mode of conducting research, the initial data outcomes were disconcertingly disjointed and called for a somewhat rushed consolidation of my research strategy in order to fill in the numerous data gaps.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

My purpose with this thesis is to show how and why collective violence happened at the very grassroots level, from the perspective of those who were killing, burning and raping during the Kenyan post-election crisis. The micro-mobilisation processes in which youth street organisations were engaging are often neglected in relevant literature for the sake of more elite-based examinations of political fragmentation, state informalisation and democratic deficit. In order to be able to understand the dynamics of micro-mobilisation in 2007-2008 one ought to acquire a firmer grasp of the way street organisations, involved in perpetrating violence, emerge, organise and function in day-to-day life.

Chapter One (FORMATION) will review these mechanisms of formation and mobilisation, as well as their manifestations. I will also briefly outline the broader categories of street organisations and trace their patterns of mobilisation during and beyond the post-election violence. In this way I will be able to investigate more closely the nexus between political violence and criminal violence and argue against a strict differentiation between the two. In

Chapter Two (INCITEMENT), I will gauge the extent to which conflict entrepreneurs (political elites) harnessed the energy of street organisations and, conversely, will also explore the institutional and cultural specificities of Kenyan political life that let them do so. Thus, the prominent question of turmoil orchestration will be addressed, together with the contentious issue of the role of ethnicity in violent mobilisation. Chapter Three (NAVIGATION) will delve deeper into the grievances, upon which the rigged elections touched, and the opportunities for social navigation, protest and retribution that the chaos presented to perpetrators of violence. These opportunities will be examined against the backdrop of the driving concern for livelihood strategies employed by delinquent youth on an everyday basis. In Chapter Four (MEANING), informed by theories of cultural signification and social identification, I will engage in a critical discussion of the symbolism behind the acts of violence committed in 2007-2008. In particular, I will survey the ways in which meaning, identity and social status are attained through violence and place the Kibera case in the broader context of the global urban periphery. I will conclude this thesis with a summary of the main findings, which will then be related to broader, relevant theoretical debates and possible trajectories for future research.

I. FORMATION

"Those rocks are quite hot until they become like porridge. They become liquid and when they get a small way, they want to evaporate, to cool itself [sic.] down, to breathe."

~ Pastor Joshua, forty-one-year-old resident of Kianda[24]

The violence perpetrated by what are commonly termed "youth gangs" (Githongo 2010) during the post-election violence features in some of the most horrid accounts of the turmoil: "[r]oads are blocked with trees, lamp-posts and burning tyres. Young men drunk on booze and blood, armed with Iron Age weapons, paraffin and matches scrutinise ID books to select victims for tribal murder" (Kiley 2008). To be able to comprehend such episodes beyond the merely graphic, an understanding of the regular processes of formation and mobilisation of different street organisations is essential. Although it is usually the infamous Mungiki[25] that is seen as the gang behind the 2007-2008 bloodshed (Daily Nation 2010a, ICG 2008: 9, CIPEV 2008: 37, KNCHR 2008: 20), the participation of other smaller and less centralised street organisations should not be overlooked. With this in mind, Chapter One will firstly provide an inventory of street organisations in the slum, proceed to look into the sometimes overlapping course of their violent mobilisation, and eventually discuss their involvement in the post-election unrest.

GHETTO BIODIVERSITY

Nairobi's slum areas have proven to be propitious grounds for the propagation and diversification of street organisations.[26] Depending on their mode of formation and primary activities, these groups have different profiles. While developing an elaborate nomenclature of the street organisations in Kibera is not among the goals of my study, outlining the broader clusters of groups, as well as their specific internal dynamics, can prove extremely beneficial in completing the intended cross-cutting analysis of common mobilisation patterns. My subsequent description of three often overlapping street organisations – vigilantes, criminals and youth wingers – is derived from a thorough review of all primary data.

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[24] Author's interview on 22 April 2010.

[25] Possibly one of the most widely researched underground organisations in Eastern Africa (Kagwanja 2003 and 2005, Anderson 2002, Wamue 2001, ICG 2008, Rasmussen 2010, Kemp 2008), the outlawed Mungiki engage in a curious amalgamation of criminal, business, ritualistic, and ethno-political activities. Their presence in Kibera, however, is highly sporadic and concentrated in the peripheral area of Laini Saba (see map on p.11).

[26] A report, commissioned by the Kenya National Dialogue and Reconciliation (KNDR) monitoring project, provides a systematised list of the illegally armed groups operating throughout Kenya at the time of the disputed elections. Over a quarter of the enumerated organisations are said to belong to Kibera (2009: 6).

Vigilantes

Sometimes euphemised as "community policing" groups, vigilante organisations present a common phenomenon in the dynamics of public (dis)order in Africa (Ruteere and Pommerolle 2003: 587, Smith 2004, Pratten 2008). Their *raison d'être* in Nairobi – the combination of acute insecurity and inadequate policing in the slums (Anderson 2002: 542, 545; Stavrou 2002: 31-35) – has also encouraged indiscriminate and extreme violent interventions in crime situations. Gimode's account from the beginning of the decade of vigilantes taking turns to watch over neighbourhoods with whistles in their mouths only tells a part of the story (2001: 312). Nowadays, a typical vigilante operation unfolds as follows:

> Once you scream *mwizi* [thief], everyone rises and this guy [the thief] will surely die, probably with a tyre burning around his neck. [...] The few times that the police come, they just say 'Why haven't you finished him yet?'"[27]

The similitude between mob lynching and violent vigilantism is striking. Actually, vigilantes can be seen as the forerunners of mob justice, which, often carried out through necklacing, proves to be long-engrained in the violent repertoires of Kenyan urban and rural communities, and is geared at the resolution of litigious communal affairs.[28] In that sense, when it comes to violent activities, no clear line of demarcation between the crowd and the vigilantes exists: "even *wananchi* - common man – when they find these young boys [thieves]... the issue here is – snatch them, kill them, burn them."[29] Yet, it is up to the vigilantes to signal the offence, but often times the signalling itself is done on a selective basis.

In most accounts of vigilante practice in Nairobi, security fee collection and extortion of *matatu* (public taxi) operators also feature as an invariable leitmotif (Anderson 2002: 544, 538; Kiprotich 2010, Raballa and Kirutu 2009). In Kibera, for example, "[e]ach village has its own gang that protects it against another in the slum" (The Standard 2008c). The problem with rising vigilantism, however, does not only stem from its racketeering undertones, but lies in the rapid growth and transformation of vigilante groups into ruthless perpetrators of violence: "[t]hose formed to carry out noble tasks of protecting neighbourhoods often had their focus skewed to cause them for selfish ends" (Munene 2002). The susceptibility of those selfish ends to political manipulation and collusion with corrupt security organs is another knotty issue to be discussed at length in Chapter Two.

Criminal gangs[30]

The gradual relinquishment of the primary purpose of their activity brings vigilantes very close to the very offenders they are pursuing. The criminal gangs of Kibera do not necessarily operate in the slum: a lot of the more sophisticated, often armed groups carry out

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[27] Author's interview with Francis (key informant) – twenty-nine-year-old resident of Bonbolulu, Kianda – on 31 March 2010.

[28] Author's interview with Terri, born and raised in rural Kenya, currently based in Nairobi, on 15 May 2010.

[29] Statement made during focus group B on 15 May 2010.

[30] While Kibera is a case study that provides a large spectrum of criminal activity for examination, this work does not aim to itemise it in detail.

robberies, hijackings and muggings in affluent residential areas or downtown Nairobi (Gimode 2002: 307-309). Still, when "tough times" strike, even those gangs can bring their activity back to the "motherland ghetto."[31] Therefore, criminal organisations, regardless of their level of structure and discipline, cannot be profiled with precision. What remains constant, however, is the rarity with which a group of criminals would target their own *mtaani* (neighbourhood) within the slums.[32] This reinforces Covey's argument (2010: 230) that the gangs of Nairobi are not only "highly territorial" but also respectful towards their place of origin, which is often the *chuom* (makeshift shared residential units for street children). Here, one of the clearest dividing lines between vigilantes and criminals is visible: while the former operate in their community, the latter mostly do not. Apart from that, common perceptions of criminal gangs tend to be more negative than those of vigilantes.[33]

Youth-wingers

When it comes to popularity it is probably the so-called "youth wingers" that score the highest. Youth wingers are essentially boisterous political devotees, whose campaigning fervour is contingent upon the election cycle and their remuneration. Youth entered Kenyan political life immediately upon independence when both the Kenya Africa National Union (KANU) and the Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU) resorted to campaign support from the younger sections of their electorates (Kagwanja 2005: 55). According to one key informant, who is involved in the political life of Lang'ata constituency,[34] KANU "invented" the notion of a political youth-winger.[35] This suggests that youth wingers are a peculiar hybrid between goons for hire and enthusiastic electorate. With this in mind, Kagwanja encourages an examination of the symbolic dimensions of youth organisations and their involvement in generational politics (2005: 60).

In Kenya, the vast majority of citizens are below the age of thirty-five (Youth Vibe 2008) and at the same time, youth unemployment figures have been soaring to reach the staggering sixty per cent last year (Nyanga and Ayodo 2009). Being chronically excluded from state political and economic affairs, youth wingers take their grievances, disguised as party affiliations, to the streets, reaching levels of territorial slum politicisation reminiscent of

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[31] Author's interview with a member of a criminal gang from Kibera, specialising in hijackings of well-to-do expatriates, on 18 May 2010.

[32] Author's interview with a former member of a criminal gang operating in Kibera on 6 May 2010.

[33] Confirmed by all informants. Nevertheless, vigilantes seem to only be favoured (to an extent) by their fellow slum villagers – one respondent from Kianda who was elaborating the presence of vigilantes along Kamkunji road in Gatwikira referred to them as "terrible, terrible people" (author's interview on 6 May 2010).

[34] Currently Kibera is a sub-division of Lang'ata constituency although for the forthcoming elections in 2012 Raila Odinga has proposed for Lang'ata to be split into three constituencies, Kibera being one of them (Waithaka 2010)

[35] Author's interview with Simon on 7 April 2010.

Kingston.[36] As one respondent aptly put it, "youth fringers are already mobilised pockets of youths simply waiting for an appropriate moment […] some of them are criminals, some just troublemakers."[37]

METAMORPHOSIS AND MOBILISATION OF STREET ORGANISATIONS

The above statement alludes to one of the less expected findings of this study – the high degree of overlap between different types of street organisations and their shared patterns of mobilisation. Not only are youth formations in the slum estates flexible in their range of activities – "depending on the need and task of the day"[38] – but they are quite amorphous.[39] Although some of the members and leaders of the more influential street organisations in Kibera are widely known, new youths join in on a daily basis through a very simple process of recruitment: hanging out in specific spots and exchanging phone numbers. This tendency implies that street organisations are in constant flux and therefore difficult to pinpoint, profile and catalogue with certitude. While vigilantes and criminals seem to be at the opposite ends of the street organisations spectrum, they often come close in terms of mode of operation, some activities and even membership. "They form the same way although for different purposes […] they share features - very dispersed, they don't have a headquarter [sic], they are amorphous, they group very fast."[40] This shared organic nature of formation and development can be clearly discerned through examination of routine street organisation meetings.

During the fieldwork stage of this research, I had the opportunity to observe the establishment of a new, highly localised group – the Shinduve in the Bonbolulu section[41] of Kianda. Although their membership was largely of Luhya ethnicity, the group of around twenty that met every night near a specific local joint insisted that "anyone can join in."[42] When asked about the purpose and nature of their work, one member responded that he is simply "struggling to make ends meet."[43] This notion of "hustling"[44] is actually central to the nature of street organisations in the informal urban settlements of Nairobi. Hence the significance of congregating in a specific spot: a statement that you either wish to meet fellow youths willing to engage in whatever illicit activity is planned for the day, attract someone in need of having a

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[36] In the course of Jamaica's political history, the two main political parties have attained an almost absolute level of control over slum gangs and their "garrisons" (The Independent 2010). The situation in Kibera, an absolute ODM stronghold (ICG 2008: 9), appears shockingly similar.

[37] Author's interview with Kibera resident on 2 April 2010.

[38] Author's interview with Raphael Obonyo – project manager at the Youth Congress, former KCHR analyst, political columnist and also former slum resident – on 5 May 2010.

[39] Author's interview with Simon on 12 May and 19 May 2010.

[40] Author's interview with Simon on 19 May 2010.

[41] Bonbolulu is a lively part of Kianda near one of the major roads passing through Kibera – Kibera drive (see map p.11). Its proximity to street lighting makes it a relatively safe place, but petty crime is still endemic.

[42] Author's interview with a Shinduve member on 18 May 2010.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Author's interview with Gatwikira resident on 12 April 2010.

problem "fixed"[45] or simply deal together with mundane community problems. Since hiring a street organisation or a fraction of it involves payment, there are few "jobs" that the idle poverty-stricken youth would turn down.[46] That is why the range of their activities often seems perplexingly broad.

Claiming that the whole scope of activities street organisations engage in is profit-oriented, however, is rather simplistic. The Siafu,[47] a notorious and sizeable group that is based in the village of Gatwikira, serves as a vivid illustration. On the one hand, Siafu members openly loiter around the district officer's headquarters, manifesting their quasi-legitimate status as benevolent security-providers. "The people in Gatwikira, we don't need the police, we've got the Siafu," explained a neighbourhood resident.[48] Siafu members are known to derive instant gratification from catching and punishing a criminal – "when they fight together, they are happy"[49] – and seem not to require remuneration. On the other hand, members of the organisation have been actively engaged in various contentious political initiatives, including the disruption of councillor elections[50] and the 2007-2008 unrest (KNCHR 2008: 42). A former councillor of the Sarang'ombe Ward, who is known to be affiliated with the Siafu, cited supporting ODM campaigns as the primary function of the organisation.[51] At the same time, some Siafu members are part of a business enterprise – the Eleven Brothers security firm – which, according to its manager's card provides "material, professional workers, security." The multifarious nature of Siafu activities gives insights into the peculiar processes of metamorphosis and mobilisation that street organisations undergo in the course of time.

If street organisations had a life-cycle, one possible delineation of it would go as follows: a group of unemployed youth hang around their neighbourhood in a presumed vigilante capacity; general elections[52] approach and rally-organisers seek out vigilantes to hire as campaigners; elections are over and the political benefactor withdraws, leaving the now more closely connected members to conceive of other (profitable) activities, including crime, extortion or violent intervention in communal disputes (see Fig. 3, p.21).

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[45] Fixing a problem usually means resolving a dispute through violent means ranging from threat to arson. A tenant who is being mistreated by his or her landlord, for example, can hire a group of youths to burn down some of that landlord's property (author's interview with Francis on 6 April 2010).

[46] Author's interview with Francis on 6 April 2010.

[47] In Swahili *siafu* means "ants:" an unambiguous reference to the community-oriented work and the number of the organisation's members.

[48] Author's interview on 17 May 2010.

[49] Author's interview with young Gatwikira resident on 14 April 2010. Also confirmed by another respondent's statement that "some [of the Siafu] get paid, some do it for fun - they feel good in that crowd" on 18 May 2010.

[50] Author's interview with Simon on 19 May 2010.

[51] Author's interview on 19 May 2010.

[52] Provincial administration (local government) is also voted for during general elections.
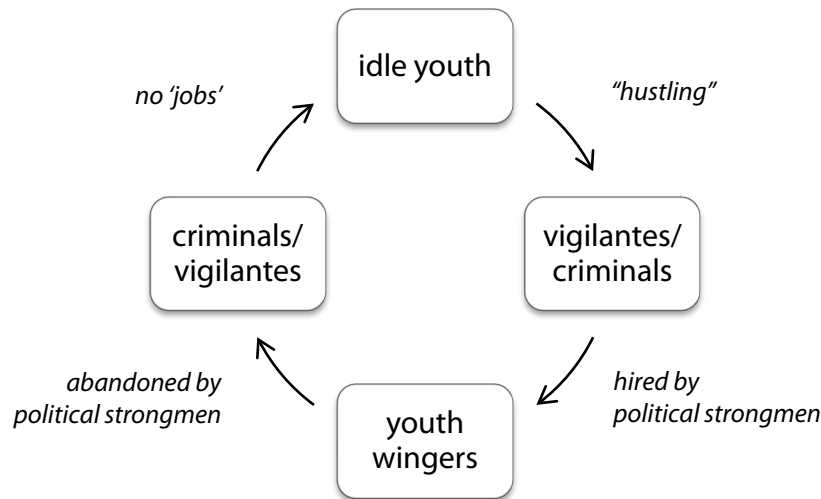
Figure 3. Sample street organisation metamorphosis

The disturbing circularity of this scenario, together with its possible variations, has recently been the focus of media and expert attention: "[p]olitically-organised armed militia are not in place in a manner similar to the early 2008 period [...] the groups have mutated into criminal gangs or are simply idle" (Mukinda 2010b, see also KNDR 2010). The Siafu, for instance, who were engaged in forced evictions during the post-election skirmishes, are now establishing themselves as draconian watchdogs of the housing market (Mukinda 2010b). The idea of collectivity (linked to ethnicity) plays a central role in this constant process of becoming. "Because you were in a group…you already have the contacts, he left you as a group. As a group you need to think, you need to lay out strategy. That's how a gang usually starts – it's good people, organised, wanting to achieve something."[53]

STREET ORGANISATIONS AND THE 2007 FLARE-UP

So how do these broader patterns of group mobilisation relate to the violent post-election clashes? Unsurprisingly, the chaos of 2007-2008 mirrored the multiplicity and fluidity of street organisation life, but did not include established groups only. Political mobilisation, backed by pecuniary incentives, accounted for some of the violent gang interventions and hostility incitement.[54] Still, sundry collectives of Kibera residents – not necessarily with criminal backgrounds – came together, looting, throwing stones, and even uprooting a portion of the railway line that traverses their neighbourhood (Daily Nation 2008a). Describing the actors in the mass violent mobilisation in the aftermath of the 2007 elections, a Kianda-based respondent

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[53] Author's interview with Raphael Obonyo on 6 April 2010.
[54] Chapter Two addresses comprehensively the role of conflict entrepreneurs in inciting violence, while Chapter Three reviews instances of looting.

noted: "we had idlers, people who have nothing to do, we had looters, we had thieves. This group actually consisted of every character."[55]

What he refers to as "this group," however, was not one unified and homogenous entity. After the announcement of the election results by the ECK, numerous pockets of Kibera residents who had already been pre-celebrating[56] the perceived as inevitable victory of Odinga, converged in the streets. "They had no names, no formal organisation, and no plans for self-perpetuation" (KNDR 2009: 6). In fact, some of them were not even violence-prone. A Kianda-based respondent recounted of one night in the immediate aftermath of the elections when people from adjacent neighbourhoods came to warn of a looming Mungiki attack and forced everyone to leave their house and prepare for "a battle" unless they wanted to be beaten up.[57] Such instances of forced mobilisation imply that not everyone who took to the streets on 29 December felt genuinely propelled to riot or burn police vehicles. Some residents joined the maelstrom of mass mobilisation out of fear and/or a perceived need to defend themselves.

Like in the cases of mob justice reviewed earlier, after the announcement of election results, the crowd gained momentum fast: "it didn't even last [...] ten minutes before tens of people were burning houses," recounted one Kianda youth.[58] Another interviewee told me that upon seeing other Kibera residents trying to get to a safe place, those who first flung in the violence would demand that they "turn around, pick something, move." I caught a glimpse of the speed and intensity with which the whole process can unfold during an open-air, free-access reggae concert. At some point the incessant brawls within the crowd transformed into hordes of young slum-dwellers chasing each other back and forth, armed with broken bottles and stones. "It's always like that when a lot of people gather, some […] as soon as they see the others running, they sprint too" commented a member of the audience.[59]

Yet, to avoid reducing such upheavals to irrational mob madness, it is important to grasp the ways in which key actors mobilise. This chapter demonstrated the overlapping nature of the processes of micro-mobilisation in Kibera, discerned in the undertakings of different street organisations – vigilantes, criminals and youth wingers. Although I claim that as organic formations in constant flux these groups and their activities cannot be clearly disaggregated, it is important to refrain from completely homogenising the motivations of their members and seeing them as sharing the exact same dispositions. Mobilisation mechanics may appear similar, but can be propelled by diverging forces.

Despite my reluctance to attribute the 2007-2008 unrest solely to political insinuation, throughout the fieldwork stage of my research, incitement by political elites emerged as one of these "forces." Even if only superficially, a substantial proportion of Kibera residents is undeniably influenced by political figures (e.g. Raila Odinga) and was particularly affected by the 2007 elections denouement. Chapter Two will explain how and why.

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[55] Statement made during focus group C on 24 May 2010.
[56] Author's interview with Simon on 21 April 2010.
[57] Statement made during focus group C on 24 May 2010.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Informal discussion with a Kibera-based spectator on 30 May 2010.

II. INCITEMENT

"A major puzzle in this story is why ethnic publics follow leaders down paths that seem to serve elite power interests most of all."

~ James Fearon and David Laitin, "Violence and Social Construction of Ethnic Identity"

An aggregate analysis of the 2007-2008 unrest cannot overlook the ways in which political strongmen utilised the ecosystem of street organisations in the slum for the purposes of inciting and propagating violent strife (de Smedt 2009: 595, Mueller 2008: 193). In fact, to go beyond this convenient explanation, one has to evaluate it first. *To what extent were the violent clashes orchestrated by fragmented political elites? How did they try to mobilise the perpetrators of violence and why did the latter follow? What catalysed the salience of political leaders' mobilising discourse? What was the role of negative ethnicity in it?* In the quest for answers, this chapter looks at the role (ethnic) conflict entrepreneurs played in planning out, instigating and sponsoring the post-election skirmishes. I also highlight the temporary 2007 situation and the historically significant features of Kenyan political culture (including politicised ethnicity) which facilitated the employment of such tactics.

THE ROLE OF CONFLICT ENTREPRENEURS

The entire ICC case on Kenyan post-election violence is based on the belief that "[p]olitical leaders of all sides, particularly from PNU and ODM […] recruited gangs of youths, transported them to strategic points to unleash terror, killing and destroying property belonging to communities aligned to the rival party" (Namunane and Barasa 2009). While this might have been the case in areas such as Naivasha, Nakuru and Eldoret (CIPEV 2008: 103, Njogu 2009: 273-280), in Kibera there is little evidence of *mass* strategic deployment of goons. I would argue that from those genuinely stirred by political figures, fewer were remunerated and more were galvanised through populist rhetoric or by the course of events in the election aftermath. The use of mobilisation tactics from above, however, does not account for everything that went on in Kibera. Neither were these tactics particularly innovative: a persevering culture of "dirty politics" in Kenya (Rambaud 2009: 79) has rendered them almost mundane.

A meticulous plan: recruiting private militias or hustling youth?
The most popular orchestration scenario revolves around the alleged employment of youth gangs by key political figures. A 518-page report, published by the Commission of Inquiry into Post Election Violence (CIPEV), puts emphasis on the patron-client relationship between the "ethnic" gangs, which engaged in violence during the 2007-2008 turmoil, and the contending political parties (2008: 194). The amorphousness of the street organisations described in Chapter One, however, suggests that the gangs that Kenyan politicians usually resort to (at

least in the slums) are less institutionalised[60] and comprising a shifting group of youths with sundry motivations for perpetrating violence. Their recruitment is often secured through petty payments of as little as 50 KSh (half a euro) per person per day.[61] Due to the fluidity and, at times, ideological promiscuity of most of these organisations,[62] political conflict entrepreneurs might have trouble mobilising the kind of cohesive unit that the term "militia" evokes. What is more, a lot of these youths are casually recruited from street corners and sometimes even paid in food or *chang'aa*.[63] In that sense, the substantial involvement of residents in the violent post-election protests can be attributed more to the snowball effect of grassroots mobilisation than a meticulously planned recruitment of gangs operating as private militia. Does a snowball effect of mobilisation translate as "no plan, just chaos"?[64] No – it implies that there was less planning and more chaos. Were political figures, then, also implicated in fuelling the chaos?

Populism: fuelling the fire with words

Key leaders did heat up the combustible pre- and post-election situation. Raila Odinga himself was openly employing populist rhetoric during his campaigns (Rice and Tran 2008) and even resorted to incendiary speech once the election results were announced and violence had erupted. At a post-election rally at the 30,000-capacity Moi stadium in Nairobi, he addressed the crowd as follows:

> "*Our* people are being killed like dogs but *no amount of bullets and intimidation will stop us* from getting back the seat we won during the elections. […] I know you are very *angry* and you have every *right* to feel so. Your victory was *stolen* by the same people who are now *killing* you" (The Standard 2008f, emphasis added).

At other pre-election rallies held at Kamkunji grounds in Gatwikira, he would often insert the odd phrase in Luo language and make references to the heritage of his ethnic group.[65] Consequently, his populist rhetoric has attracted an almost cult following: one of the current trends in Kibera, for instance, is to have Odinga's voice as a ringtone. "There are people who are ready to do anything for Raila [Odinga]," explained an ODM member based in Kibera.[66] The current prime minister's charismatic persona seems to affect supporters immediately – according to one respondent, in Kibera, Odinga can gather a crowd of 5000 within minutes.[67] An attribution of the turbulent progression of events after the 2007 elections solely to Odinga or any political leader's magnetism, however, is clearly untenable. Even though populist rhetoric seems to generally resonate with Kenyan electorates, an examination of the political underpinnings of

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[60] Possibly with the exception of Mungiki.

[61] Author's interview with Simon on 12 May 2010.

[62] One interviewee claimed that such organisations tend to change "colours like a chameleon" (author's interview on 9 May 2010).

[63] Based on statements made during focus groups A on 13 April 2010.

[64] Interview with former Kibera councillor Opete Opete on 17 April 2010.

[65] Confirmed by several Luo residents of Kibera.

[66] Author's interview with Simon on 19 May 2010.

[67] Author's interview with a Kianda resident on 18 May 2010.

the crisis should also take into account how the immediate post-election situation amplified the impact of such rhetoric.

Flawed elections: a potent catalyst

The build-up to the election results was so intense that even before the results were officially broadcast, "the doors [to chaos] were ajar."[68] Although the announcement of the election results came as a shock to many,[69] premonitions about the potential unfairness of the electoral process were circulating in the public space over a month prior to the scheduled voting day (KHRC 2008: 41, Daily Nation 2007). Yet Kibera – a traditional ODM stronghold – abounded with optimistic prognoses about the outcome of the election. "It was in the heads of the people that he [Raila Odinga] is going to win with a landslide."[70] Making an analogy with the kind of enthusiasm football matches provoke in the slum is difficult to resist: the (Luo) majority in Kibera vested tremendous hopes in the ODM, driven by the belief that Odinga's potential victory would mark a new era of prosperity, or would simply mean that *their*[71] man is finally in power.

The action-packed course of the vote counting fuelled people's excitement to the point of euphoria – "people had started celebrating already: dancing, drinking *chang'aa*, chanting."[72] As tally sheets from different constituencies arrived at the ECK, anxiety rose – the ODM candidate led the vote by a very narrow margin (The Citizen 2007). Possibly one of the major catalysts for the ensuing violent public reaction to the announcement of the election results was the delay with which ECK declared Kibaki's victory – at 5.45 pm the following day (The Citizen 2007).[73] This unprecedented postponement automatically signalled a flawed electoral process, which *post factum* was substantiated by a number of reports (CIPEV 2008, KHRC 2008, KNCHR 2008, ICG 2008). The results suggested that the PNU had meddled with the electoral process and sparked fiery exchange of accusations between the two contenders (Weaver 2008).[74] A violent sense of defeat gripped Kibera – "people felt cheated" and inclined towards retaliatory action.[75] Whether their inclinations *required* external fuelling (in the form of politically-lead incitement) remains ambiguous.

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[68] Author's interview with Simon on 21 April 2010.
[69] Author's interview with Francis on 17 April 2010
[70] Author's interview with a Kianda resident on 22 April 2010.
[71] Odinga was also an MP candidate for Lang'ata constituency.
[72] Author's interview with Simon on 21 April 2010.
[73] For a vivid account of the dramatic denouement, refer to "Countdown to deception: 30 hours that destroyed Kenya," published by Kenyans for Peace with Truth & Justice (KPTJ) coalition, 17 January 2008.
[74] The idea of deception was corroborated by the drastically diverging parliamentary vote results – the ODM won ninety-nine seats, more than double the forty-three that the PNU secured (ICG 2008: 8).
[75] Author's interview with Simon on 9 April 2010.

Still, a conflagration the size and duration of the post-election crisis does not only require fuelling, but sufficient firewood. On the historico-political level that was furnished by an established culture of big men, high stakes, and sabotage (Branch and Cheeseman 2008: 4, 18, 20). In order to understand the significance of such a political (and electoral) culture, it is necessary to briefly examine the regime which followed independence.

Historical continuities

Prior to the first general elections in May 1963, KANU, the party of Kenya's first president Jomo Kenyatta had nationalism, centralism and African socialism at the core of its platform. Despite his expressed commitment to state- and nation-building (Kenyatta 1968), however, the president himself was known to have inclinations towards Kikuyu ethno-nationalism and cronyism (Ogot and Ochieng' 1995: 94). His successor Daniel Arap Moi, over the following twenty-four years, established a regime of neo-patrimonial rule and widespread kleptocracy. Allegedly, Moi strengthened the foundations of big-man politics that Kenyatta had laid and "promoted" the concept of *kitu kidogo*[76] (bribery) in Kenyan political culture (Johnston 2005: 169). Up to this very date, the Kenyan state remains "top heavy" (Branch and Cheeseman 2006: 5) and run through corrupt manoeuvrings, making the presidential post a lucrative attainment.

External pressure targeted at overcoming these deficiencies imposed the introduction of multipartyism in 1991 (Roessler 2005: 214). Yet again, Mueller argues that the fragmentation effects of multi-party politics encouraged infighting, deepening of ethnic cleavages and the atrophying of the nascent central government (2008: 186). Even if multipartyism is a prerequisite for a healthy democracy, according to Throup and Hornsby, in Kenya it led to a decade of "fraudulent national and party elections" (1998: 2). The involvement of political strongmen in cut-throat, high-stake political games has invariably produced a culture of unfairness and ruse, manifested in every election campaign since 1992. The year 1992, itself, was marked by "ethnic clashes," featuring politically-sponsored "raiders" and "private death squads" (Barkan and Ng'ethe 1998: 33). The general elections five years later entailed a sinister dose of *déjà vu* political violence (Anderson 2002: 539-540). Unsurprisingly, in December 2007 reports of killing, torching and youth protests accompanied the ongoing electioneering (Daily Nation 2007).

Two vignettes

The deeply entrenched culture of elite fragmentation, polarisation and muscle politics, together with the ensuing diffusion of the formal monopoly on the use of violence, seems to doom any contentious voting procedure to turmoil. Two recent vignettes from Kenyan political life come as proof. On 13 June, at a rally organised by the opponents of the new draft constitution, several hand grenades killed five people and left over seventy injured (Barasa,

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[76] Michela Wrong's "It's Our Turn to Eat" (2008) presents an enthralling non-fiction account of the extent to which *kitu kidogo*-ism has permeated Kenyan political and social life.

Njagi and Ngirachu 2010). More shockingly, in May, the University of Nairobi had to temporarily suspend all classes due to the havoc, which started during the tallying of the votes from the hotly-contested university president elections (Daily Nation 2010b). Media reports of the situation were disturbingly reminiscent of certain 2007-2008 episodes: "[p]roperty was destroyed in the melee that ensued after an armed gang brought the tallying exercise to a stop" (Daily Nation 2010b), while outside the campus "[r]ioting University of Nairobi students burnt vehicles and caused a traffic snarl up" (Ombati and Orengo 2010). Coincidentally, an informant was among the presidential candidates. He claimed that student elections were also a high-stake political game as the chosen president receives a monthly salary between 50,000 and 80,000 KSh (€500 to €800). "That's why for presidential elections in Nairobi University you also hire goons […] You pay 8,000 KSh [€80] for 800 people to come and cheer when you campaign in a common class [i.e. a well-attended lecture]," he explained as if the whole operation was common sense.[77] His statement comes to show that while political elites were certainly proactive in their attempts to mobilise electorates, no new or particularly gripping techniques of incitement were employed. Hence my conviction that the intensity of the 2007-2008 hostilities, especially in Kibera, is not entirely attributable to the machinations of high-level political actors. Their most significant manoeuvre, I would argue, was harnessing feelings of negative ethnicity.

THE ROLE OF NEGATIVE ETHNICITY

Any debate on the political dimensions of the post-election crisis is bound to boil down to the litigious matter of ethnicity. Indeed, tribalism (negative ethnicity) can be classified as one of the defining characteristics of Kenyan political culture. In order to avoid subscribing to a markedly instrumentalist logic, however, it is necessary to point out early on that the conflict entrepreneurs of 2007-2008 (presumably the leaders of the ODM and PNU) cannot be credited with the introduction of ethnic discourse into Kenyan politics. Tribalism has actually been a key feature of national politics from independence onwards (Ahluwalia 1996: 21). Since social life prior and during colonisation was organised exclusively along tribal lines (Sobania 2003: 30), the alien concept of a cohesive nation-state (Herbst 2000: 11-12) had to be reconciled with existing social identities. In the post-dependency era, introducing an ethnic-based discourse into national politics might have been the only way for the founding father Jomo Kenyatta to lubricate the friction between existing tribal identities and the new national one. It is not my intention to imply that the former is organic, while the latter is artificial – after all, primordialism is a "long-dead horse" still enthusiastically attacked by scholars of ethnicity (Brubaker 1996: 15). Based on impressions of the role of ethnicity in Kenyan (political) life gathered throughout fieldwork, however, I would rather term ethnic identities a product of what Arabindoo refers to as "constructed primordialism" (2005: 39).

It is worth mentioning that the construction of this "primordialism" is not entirely a product of high-level political agendas. Most Kenyans, especially in disadvantaged areas, are

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[77] Author's interview with Sanioul on 20 May 2010.

brought up with prejudice about the ethnic other: "our parents fed us these things."[78] Ethnic divisions are discernable in social life even in cosmopolitan Nairobi. "Kenya is very tribal and it has always been that way," admitted a middle-class resident of the capital.[79] Identifying the origins of negative ethnicity is likely to get one entangled in a chicken-or-egg kind of argument, but it is important to acknowledge its central role in the public sphere. Ethnically-biased jokes, for example, are to be heard in a wide array of environments, while stereotypes based on ethnicity are used as a rule of thumb. "The Kikuyu are hard-working," "Luos are temperamental," "Kambas believe in *juju*" are some of the more common ones.[80] It is only logical that politicians would employ such a prominent feature of social organisation in their fierce contests for power. In that sense, leaders have not constructed, but have simply collapsed ethnic identities with political ones as "it's easy to mobilise people around the tribe."[81] Since politics in Kenya is defined by extreme competitiveness, it is not surprising that the result of such mobilisation is a heightened sense of negative ethnicity.

Yet, that does not come to exonerate political elites from propagating the idea of ethnic "eating,"[82] which was one of the central motifs of the 2007 election campaign and was also one of the grievances I encountered most often in discussions on the topic of ethnicity. According to Raphael Obonyo, "in Kenya it's always about our man who will bring us prosperity."[83] Kikuyus had Kenyatta, the Kalenjin – Moi, now it was the Luos' turn. "Trust me, I will deliver," said Odinga at the launch of the ODM manifesto in November 2007[84] and thereby amplified the expectations of his electorate. Needless to say, those who were mostly concerned about his delivery were also the ones in dire need of it. "In Muthaiga[85] no one threw stones or chanted 'No Raila, No Peace.'"[86]

In short, the role of political elites in fuelling the fire of the 2007 post-election turmoil should not be underestimated, but cannot be given utmost importance as there is little evidence to substantiate theories of orchestration from above or construction of hostile ethnic identities out of thin air. Put simply, certain political figures simply "made good use of what they had"[87]: a political culture tainted by kleptocracy, tribalism, and fraud; a round of general elections that left huge fractions of the electorate in frustrating limbo; and an abundance of historical and socio-economic *wananchi* grievances to play upon. By probing into the origin of such grievances one can gather insights about why certain (marginalised) communities, such as the residents of

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[78] Author's interview with a Kikuyu Kibera resident on 23 May 2010.

[79] Author's interview with Collins on 18 May 2010.

[80] Extracted from author's interviews with Kibera and Nairobi-based respondents on 9 April, 7 and 16 May 2010.

[81] Author's interview with Raphael Obonyo on 5 May 2010.

[82] See Wrong, "It's our turn to eat."

[83] Author's interview on 10 May 2010.

[84] Footage from a respondent's personal archives, retrieved on 29 April 2010.

[85] An affluent Nairobi neighbourhood with ethnically diverse population.

[86] Author's interview with Raphael Obonyo on 10 May 2010.

[87] Author's interview with Kimani Njogu, associate professor of Kiswahili and African Languages at University of Nairobi, founder and CEO of Africa Health and Development and author of "Healing the Wound: Personal Narratives about the Post-election Violence in Kenya," on 29 May 2010.

Kibera, were compelled not solely to follow political leaders in their infighting, but also self-mobilise. With this in mind, the following chapter presents an overview of the context within which the perpetrators of violence (from Nairobi) self-mobilised and an analysis of some of their motivations.

III. NAVIGATION

"Violence [...] understood as a means to reorganise the local social and economic space..."

~ Koen Vlassenroot, "War and Social Research"

Chapter Two demonstrated how, despite its irrefutable impact, exogenous political incitement cannot provide a comprehensive account of the violent episodes of 2007-2008. For the sake of analytical comprehensiveness, the examination of perpetrators as conscious agents, who are also able to self-motivate, is indispensible. What Vlassenroot suggests with the above statement is that such micro-level examination should be informed by the potential violence has to "help" perpetrators in their life struggles, however counterintuitive this might appear to the observer. On the one hand, collective violence proves an efficient means to demonstrate dissatisfaction with the *status quo*, and on the other – to surmount it. In this chapter, after tracing the contours of slum residents' most common grievances and perceptions of their surroundings, I will proceed to assess the ways in which they try to navigate their complex reality – both socially and economically.

I will firstly look at the deeper socio-economic undertones of everyday violence and the recent political strife in the slum (STRUCTURAL IMPERATIVES). In the second part of the chapter, I will take critical issue with the representation of post-election violence only as means of expelling frustration generated by structural inequalities. Put simply, I advance the argument that while violent acts can be grievance-based, marginalised communities can also strategically use violence to communicate and negotiate social relations pertaining to their precarious position (BRINGING AGENCY BACK).[88] Such a stance can also provide credible explanation (not only from an opportunistic-enrichment perspective) of some of the phenomena that accompanied the post-election unrest such as looting and destruction of property. *What were the motivations behind such actions on the part of the young slum residents? To what grievances do they pertain? In what ways is resorting to violence perceived as a means to overcome an existing socio-economic malaise?*

STRUCTURAL IMPERATIVES

"Unequal life chances"[89]

Joe from Gatwikira, unlike most of his neighbours, lives alone in his six-square-meters house and has a full-time job as a receptionist at a hostel in Nairobi. Yet, his monthly wage of 12,000 KSh (around €120) is insufficient for the execution of his long-term plan to move out of the ghetto.[90] "Everyone moves to Nairobi thinking they will make it here, but we all end up in Kibera […] never leaving Kibera," he wraps up. Joe actually turned out to be one of the most

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[88] See Tilly's discussion of "relational" explanations of violence (2005: 19).
[89] One of Galtung's more succinct descriptions of structural violence (1990: 171).
[90] Single rooms in Ayani, the estate adjoining the northwest part of Kibera cost 8,000-9,000 KSh per month.

prosperous Kibera residents I met during fieldwork. With this in mind, discerning the kind of problems that beleaguer youth in slum areas is a task more straightforward than one might imagine: it only requires half-a-day's walk through the slum or a brief chat with any of the thousands of inhabitants, idling in the streets. Poor sanitation, non-existent infrastructure, no tenure of land, forced evictions, rife poverty, joblessness, police negligence, lack of physical security, alcoholism, crime – a dreary list which, nevertheless, is not unique to Kibera or Kenya.

Then what makes the Kibera case special? Since figures on Kibera, its population, income levels, and unemployment rates are often fairly diverging,[91] the qualitative parameters of the so-called "structural violence" that engulfs the lives of most residents prove more illustrative. The two most acute life-chance inequalities in Kibera, cited by all respondents and also judged against the backdrop of the extravagant life in the cosmopolitan hub of Nairobi, are economic marginalisation and physical insecurity.[92] In more specific terms these translate as pervasive joblessness, longstanding land or housing issues, and constantly looming threat of crime/violence. What really confounds the abovementioned problems is that they are experienced and internalised the Kibera youth, who daily juxtapose their bleak future with the possibilities of the global market economy reeling before their eyes in MTV videos and behind tinted SUV windows in the streets of Nairobi. Although estimates do vary, around sixty per cent of all Kibera residents are considered to be youth (UNIC Nairobi 2008). At the same time, eighty per cent of the population in Kibera is jobless or involved in very sporadic informal economic activities (Block and Chawla 2008).

"Too much empty pocket"[93]

Respondents and analysts alike most commonly cite unemployment as the determinant of intensified criminal (and even political) violence in Kibera[94] (Warah 2007 and 2008, Githongo 2010). A comprehensive review of the origins, severity and repercussions of this socio-economic ailment is beyond the scope of my work, but merits mention as a key feature of the opportunity structure within which Kibera youth grow up. A young male informant who grew up in the slum linked delinquency to the limited number of options for securing a livelihood – "you take what comes aboard, no consideration about repercussions."[95] Nonetheless, such opportunities for violent illicit activity do not come knocking on everyone's door. In fact, most unemployed youths while away their days in idle anticipation of someone's offer for a "job."

The hype generated prior to general elections, and boosted by incessant campaign promises for job security and prosperity, drew in these idlers immediately. "It is the season

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[91] See for example, Marras' scholarly attempt to estimate the population of Kibera (2008), where he discusses the huge discrepancies between statistics, published by otherwise credible sources.

[92] Statement based on all conducted interviews, as well as on analysis of the results from the survey, in which I asked respondents to list the "most severe problems that youth in Kibera are currently facing." For a sample questionnaire, refer to Appendix C.

[93] Extracted from a respondent's answer to the abovementioned question.

[94] Statement based on data, collected in the course of numerous interviews, conducted between 1 April and 31 May 2010.

[95] Author's interview with Raphael Obonyo on 10 May 2010.

when idle slum youth find work - as rabble-rousers or disrupters of rallies. Many take on this work because it is the only one they can find," explains Nairobi-based urban risk analyst Rasna Warah (2007). In that sense, the announcement of the election results in December 2007 had a twofold shock effect: it marked the end of temporary employment for those "rabble-rousers" and crushed the expectations of ODM supporters in Kibera for a change in governance, uniformly associated with drastic improvement of their living standards.[96] Actually, according to an opinion poll conducted in the middle of December 2007, Kenyans nationwide vested much hope in the outcome of the general elections as conducive to an amelioration of the unemployment situation (Otieno 2007). "Post election [violence] came because we were seeing light at the end of the tunnel and on the way, someone came and blacked out that light: that is why people went into full-scale war."[97]

Land issues[98]

A grievance-based analysis of the 2007 unrest cannot be complete without an examination of the more obscure, but just as grave, structural inequalities stemming from the peculiar nature of land distribution and ownership in Kibera. In a recent session paper, even the Kenya Ministry of Lands acknowledges the gravity of the matter, manifested in "ways such as fragmentation, breakdown in land administration, disparities in land ownership and poverty" (2009: ix). These disparities are most acute in the hardly regulated urban periphery. Although slum areas are normally referred to as "squatter settlements," Kibera itself is a product of illegal subdivision of government land (UN-HABITAT 2003: 29, 84). Subsequently, ninety-two per cent of the residents pay monthly rent to fictive landlords – in many cases corrupt government officials (Gulyani and Talukdar 2008: 1921, Gathura 2008).

"Post-election violence was just a climax of some "anti-feeling" from the unfair distribution of land […] The first president Jomo Kenyatta favoured Kikuyus in dishing out land. 2007 was now an opportunity for compensation, to reclaim."[99] The "horizontal inequalities" (Stewart 2001) between Kikuyu and Nubi landlords and Luo tenants had been a source of recurring disputes prior to the last general elections, the most notable instance being the 1992 clashes, when an estimated twenty per cent of Kikuyu landlords left Gatwikira and Kisumu Ndogu (de Smedt 2009: 589). At the same time, reports of killings and gang skirmishes over land disputes in Kibera regularly crop up in national media (Korir 2009, Wabala 2009). A former Kibera councillor explained that landlords often hire alternative security forces to collect

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[96] Based on discussion during focus group B on 15 May 2010.

[97] Statement made during focus group B on 15 May 2010.

[98] An interesting analysis of the persisting land appropriation turbulence can be found in Mbaria's article "How the Land Question Fuelled Political Crisis" in *The Sunday Nation* from 27 January 2008. Land disputes in Kibera are often associated with the Nubian community, whose claims to ownership are historically-substantiated. The Nubi were the initial settlers of Kibera (Parsons 1997: 90); as retired soldiers of the British colonial army they were allowed to occupy the territory of what is now Nairobi's largest slum. For a detailed account of the history of Kibera, see "Kibra Is Our Blood: The Sudanese Military Legacy in Nairobi's Kibera Location, 19 02-1968" (Parsons 1997).

[99] Author's interview with Simon on 7 April 2010.

rent and "our party youths try to defend against them."[100] Unsurprisingly, the wave of violence in Kibera targeted the Kikuyu as alleged landlords and small business owners. Although highly localised, land conflicts remain firmly anchored in national politics. Obonyo views land ownership as highly contingent upon the outcome of general elections due to its being "pegged on one's proximity to power" (2008). As seen in Chapter Two, one of the defining characteristics of political leadership in Kenya is ethnic cronyism, which produces grave misrepresentation issues vis-à-vis distribution of power.

Inadequate policing

When asked to map their perceptions of power asymmetries (inequality, marginalisation), most of the Kibera residents I interviewed also told anecdotes of inadequate and at times excessively brutal interventions by state security organs in their everyday lives.

> The other night I was just alighting the *matatu* and walking back home. [...] It was two policemen and a lady in a personal vehicle. She said I was hiding a gun or I had a gun at home [...] they just put me in the car, drove down and then beat me. They beat me really quite good and then left me there [in the forest adjacent to Kianda].[101]

Since the informant is a former gang member, it is possible that the police intervention was part of an ill-conceived anti-crime action. Yet again, his story is indicative of two major flaws in state-mandated security provision in Kibera: its haphazard presence and its heavy-handed ways. "In Kibera, everyone is against the police: because they don't provide security, they are a problem to security."[102] Such inadequacies not only fuel feelings of frustration due to exclusion from basic public services, but open up niches for the propagation of violent street organisations, as outlined in Chapter One. As a matter of fact, state-mandated provision of physical security is criticised by all citizens of Nairobi (Stavrou 2002: 33-34). Those living in more affluent neighbourhoods, however, can meet the expense of having alternative means of protection such as electric fences or armed live security. The protection system that residents of Kibera fall back on is comprised of the numerous vigilante groups, notorious for their volatility and brutality. Bearing that mind, the eruption of violence in Kibera can be viewed as an expression of dissatisfaction with the provision deficits of the state inasmuch the protagonists'[103] gruesome indulgence in the permanent "(un)rule of law" (O'Donnell 1998).

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[100] Author's interview on 17 April 2010.

[101] Author's interview with former gang member from Kianda on 18 May 2010.

[102] Statement made during focus group B on 15 May 2010.

[103] Although police atrocities also constituted a substantial part of the post-election violence, I wish to retain my focus on the civilian perpetrators of violence from Kibera. For a compact account of the dubious police involvement in quelling the riots, see ICG's report "Kenya in Crisis" (2008: 9-10).

Was the violence of 2007-2008 nothing other than a manic indulgence in the state of chaos, or was lawlessness also used for specific purposes? The fact that the relatively few Kikuyu living in Kibera all came under attack during the post-election skirmishes can be interpreted as activism on the part of the majority slum residents (Luo) not only in remonstrating, but in actively addressing perceived injustices. The logic of their means of tackling the problem might appear flawed to the outside observer, but proved functional for the violent protesters. What is more, it helped them make sense of the chaos they were subscribing to. "They [meaning the PNU, which is automatically equated with all Kikuyu people] had gone too far, this [violence] was the only thing we could do" justified his involvement in the bloodshed an adolescent from Gatwikira.[104] Asked about the origins of the anger unleashed against the Kikuyu in Kibera, another interviewee responded that "the Luos did not want to see the Kikuyu rich anymore."[105] According to a Kianda-based Kikuyu respondent, "people saw it as an opportunity to get rich fast by looting from Kikuyus."[106] These statements defy the victimisation of perpetrators as pawns in the hands of unscrupulous political elites and imbue their violent actions with a strong sense of agency. Githongo goes as far as terming the post-election bloodshed "the most significant moment of collective empowerment" in which some of Kenya's disaffected youth have had chance to participate (2010).

Drawing a parallel with the 2005 civil unrest in the marginalised suburbs of Paris, one might conclude that both events, despite their dissimilar backgrounds, present an attempt to demand[107] the fulfilment of the promise of socio-economic integration (Canet et al. 2008: 3). This stance challenges Galtung's supposition that those who are affected by structural violence are unaware of it and therefore unable to confront it (1996: 77). Even though the respondents who were implicated in the 2007-2008 skirmishes would automatically conjure up images of ethnic hostility as the motor behind mobilisation, in the course of discussion they would also elaborate at length the perceived implications of Kibaki's re-election on broader socio-economic issues, with which they were dissatisfied.[108] Once their "battle" for (ethnic) representation was lost at the elite political level, quite logically, the marginalised urban youth attempted to negotiate power relations at the grassroots.[109] As de Smedt aptly demonstrates with his depiction of Luos chasing Kikuyus away from their houses and becoming landlords themselves, the post-election unrest was not an endeavour aimed at completely bringing down "the existing social order," but rather – at making it work for them (2009: 594).

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[104] Statement made during focus group A on 13 April 2010.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Author's interview on 23 May 2010.
[107] By alternative means since legitimate political representation is not an option.
[108] Based on discussion during focus group A on 13 April 2010.
[109] Chapter Four analyses the symbolic aspect of such negotiations in greater detail.

Livelihood strategies

What de Smedt's observation also suggests is that collective violence can be employed as a livelihood strategy, as well as a political one. Navigating the rough terrain of the urban periphery is a task that requires a dose of creativity. By crafting unorthodox or simply illicit strategies for everyday survival, the urban subaltern respond to and challenge the broader social-economic and political processes that affect their lives (Bayat 2000: 553). But how exactly do they go about it? According to one of my key informants, "hustling is the only way to survive here in the slum."[110] In fact, when asked to provide their definitions of several terms in the questionnaire, under "livelihood," some respondents put down "hustling" or "survival." The notion of hustling stretches over a broad spectrum of activities: from simply hanging out, through collecting empty beer bottles for small change, to participating in planned armed hijackings. The most lucrative and relatively accessible mode of hustling, needless to say, is criminal activity. That is how collective action becomes inextricably tied to economic navigation strategies – "you grow up with a hustling mentality" and so do your neighbours, age-mates, and friends.[111]

A hustling mentality, despite echoing the mantra of "we don't know for tomorrow,"[112] proves to be somewhat optimistic: there is always something to win, but nothing to lose. Hence the ease with which many young residents of Kibera slip into delinquency – confronted with the need for survival and physical security, and the limited opportunities to secure it, they look for alternatives either in the *jua kali* (informal) sector or in street organisations. "It's too difficult to struggle on your own because at the end of the day you need to eat," explained a former gang member with reference to the benefits of engaging in violent activity. "When you don't know what to do, you do what's right," he added.[113] In a mini-documentary video from a respondent's personal collection, a Kibera resident described the self-help nature of security in the slum similarly: "if I report to authority, they take no action. So I have to secure myself. If I get a security threat I also threaten others."[114] Moral considerations aside, decisions to get involved in some form of violence present quite a sensible livelihood strategy. A number of problems are simultaneously addressed: feelings of low self-esteem and marginalisation are overcome through a new "vocation," while a degree of economic and physical security is attained.

Although such strategies can become sophisticated enough to gradually transcend the survival mode, most illicit (violent) activity remains confined to less institutionalised modes of operation, dictated by hand-to-mouth principles. "They are very creative - they can cause problems and do harm to people only for money, they want something small to cause chaos."[115] Seen in this light, the events of 2007-2008 gain an almost Collieresque nuance – delinquent youths made use of the opportunity to earn a quick buck by stirring a crowd. A Kikuyu

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[110] Author's interview with Francis on 31 March 2010.
[111] Author's interview with Raphael Obonyo on 5 May 2010.
[112] Extracted from analysis of questionnaire data.
[113] Author's interview on 12 April 2010.
[114] Retrieved on 17 May 2010.
[115] Author's interview with Sarang'ombe Chief Douglas Ouma on 14 April 2010.

respondent confirmed that regardless of political inclinations, at the end of the day "the voter's card is a tool for economic enrichment."[116] Tilly, too, reviews such instances under the rubric of "opportunism," emphasising the role of chaos in opening up new prospects for livelihood strategising (2007: 131). In a perverse way, the post-election turmoil expanded residents' opportunity structure.

A quick glance at the photo stories, published in major national papers as violence unfolded, reveals numerous images of mayhem: youths euphorically jumping on burning cars (Daily Nation 2008b), rolling giant water tanks to block roads with (The Standard 2008d) and lying on the tarmac with guns in their hands (The Standard 2008e). Lawlessness had gripped the country. In Kibera, the chaos reached unprecedented levels, creating the ultimate environment for residents' taking their livelihood strategies to the next level. In his discussion of opportunism, however, Tilly warns that:

> [p]lacing violent incidents in the category of opportunism requires judgements about the motives and social locations of individuals. Such judgements are always risky business in political analysis – and especially risky when the crucial actors are confused, frightened, enraged, drugged, or drunk (2007: 131).

Applied to the case of Kibera, Tilly's warning would imply that not everyone who stormed the streets in December 2007 was driven by opportunistic motives. Bearing in mind the abrasive livelihood strategies employed by the marginalised urban population, however, it is not surprising that one-off opportunities for profit, unavailable in more peaceful times, were quickly absorbed by the adept at navigating economic situations marked by scarcity. Despite my recalcitrance to dabble into Collier's greed-based arguments (2000: 91-111), the contentious question of looting during episodes of violence is bound to materialise on the discussion agenda.

Primary commodity goods

Alongside the ubiquitous burning of vehicles and buildings, looting became one of the emblems of the recent Kenyan crisis. Although it was targeted mainly at Kikuyu businesses, the kind of looting that went on in Kibera can hardly be categorised as ethno-political action. According to a Kikuyu respondent, who temporarily fled his home, a Luo man agreed to transport part of his household items out of Kibera for a small fee.[117] This anecdote provides a very clear refutation of the ethnic animosity argument and furthermore, puts a question mark on the vision of Kibera residents being uniformly driven by political incitement coming from above. In the words of a Kibera chief, "Many people did not care about power-sharing. They wanted the violence to continue so that they can loot and mess people up."[118] With this, I do not aim to reduce the entire episode of post-election violence to a mere opportunistic venture on the part of some residents, but rather – highlight the importance of acknowledging their involvement in certain activities as a means of skilfully navigating the ever-changing

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[116] Author's interview on 5 May 2010.
[117] Author's interview on 23 May 2010.
[118] Author's interview with Sarang'ombe Chief Douglas Ouma on 14 April 2010.

topography of their reality. During a focus group, one interviewee paraphrased this line of reasoning in rather blunt, but accurate terms:

> Looting during post-election [violence] was an opportunity for them. You've been seeing something for a long time and haven't been able to get it [e.g. a TV set in a local bar], and now the opportunity is there, of course you will go for it. When there is lawlessness that is the time to take it.[119]

While the first part of this chapter presented chronic marginalisation as undermining the physical and economic security of Kibera residents, the second part demonstrated how they develop their own coping mechanisms to address this insecurity. On the one hand, beneath the tribalism veneer, the post-election unrest was clearly rooted in persisting social injustices; on the other – "political" violence, just like its criminal counterpart, was strategically used by some who strove to overcome, protest or simply navigate the harsh environment of multiple exclusion. Rather than juxtaposing these two interpretations, I view them as intersecting phases of the same process – while the structural imperatives of marginalisation circumscribe political representation and socio-economic opportunities, they prompt the discovery of alternative modes of social navigation and political expression.[120] In approaching violence as a dynamic process, this proves to be a particularly valuable insight, which also invokes a more relational explanation of social unrest, to be elaborated in Chapter Four.

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[119] Statement made during focus group B on 15 May 2010.
[120] Unfortunately, such alternatives are more often than not confined to the realm of violent activity.

IV. MEANING

"What happens when violence both contributes to, and undermines, the very act of 'making sense' within a community?"

~ Desjarlais and Kleinman, *Violence and Demoralization in the New World Disorder*

A multitude of meaning-trajectories can be drawn through the use of violence. As Chapter Three demonstrated, collective violence can be employed as a navigation strategy to counter marginalisation – both in the short-run (by accumulating material gains) and the long-run (by addressing power asymmetries). In this chapter, I analyse the latter through a dialectic revision of mechanisms of identification, communication and meaning-generation within society. By emphasising the social interaction quality of violence, I attempt to instil another dose of relational explanations (Tilly 2005: 19) into my overall analysis of the 2007-2008 unrest. *What performative qualities did the post-election bloodshed entail? How do violent acts transmit messages across the public space? What meaning can be extracted from the use violence by its perpetrators?* This chapter will scrutinise the post-election turmoil in Kibera through the prism of more esoteric conjectures on the place of violence within psychological and cultural processes of social identification and signification.

PERFORMATIVE VIOLENCE

In their work on violent imaginaries, Schröder and Schmidt argue that by being "highly visible and concrete" violence presents an "efficient way of transforming the social environment and staging an ideological message before a public audience" (2001: 4). Appadurai, too, hints that all analyses of violence should acknowledge the fact that "even the worst acts of degradation [...] have macabre forms of cultural design" (1998: 909). If such suppositions are applied to the Kibera case, curiosity vis-à-vis the message to be transmitted is inevitable. Denigration of the ethnic other? Indignation at the socio-political processes that produce vertical and horizontal inequalities? Triumph over them? Protestation of collective social significance?

Answers were difficult to infer directly from interviews due to the abstract nature of the concept of performative violence. Certain patterns in my respondents' daily exchanges, however, served as tacit reminders of the confluence of various grievances into an often felt but rarely vocalised sense of insignificance. A lot of clarifications made by interviewees would begin with "here in the ghetto...," the word "ghetto" being employed both as a semantic inversion and as a bitter acknowledgement of one's disaffection.[121] A prominent graffiti piece, sprayed onto the remains of one of the public edifices burnt down during the post-election turmoil in Kibera, for instance, reads "GHETTO HEAVEN." While the denotation of the writing remains equivocal, it certainly conjures up images of transcendence through annihilation.

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[121] Based on interviews, informal discussions and observations of Kibera residents.

With that in mind, the 2007-2008 upheavals can be seen as an attempt to overcome feelings of inferiority, generated by power asymmetries within the slum – Luo tenants/customers Vs Kikuyu landlords/business owners; the city – slum residents Vs gated-community residents; the country – citizens Vs ruling elite; and even the world – developing Vs developed. Similar signification can be traced in some of the street organisations' everyday actions such as forced taxation, for example:

> Every stage [*matatu* stop] has got almost ten to twenty youth, hanging around asking money from the *matatu*. […] *Because they can see some other youths working in the matatu, making a little bit of money*, and they themselves they don't have anything. If you don't give out, you get threatened. Your vehicle won't operate on that road" (emphasis added).[122]

In more extreme situations, it is the pugnacious nature of mass violence – rather than petty crime – that can extract power from *real* human pain. Through violence as a performance, the human body and its slayer become part of a grim theatrical re-production of social interaction. With the risk of connecting dots that might be too far apart, I classify some of the atrocities during the post-election chaos as such performative acts: "crudely cut off body parts, attacked civilians with any possible sharp pointed objects -- machetes, poisonous arrows and broken glass. [...] incidents of burning of people alive" (Namunane and Barasa 2009).

Violent rituals[123]

One cannot gauge the symbolic dimensions of the events of 2007-2008 without reference to the numerous cases of arson that became emblematic of the protests. Any visual record from the turmoil strikes the spectator with the ubiquitous presence of fire. [124] In Kibera, protesters were burning stalls, houses, the vast area of the adjacent Toi market, vehicles, and even people. "Burning is a language - it is an expression of displeasure that can be seen and heard," explained a Kianda-based respondent.[125] Seeing that arsonists targeted mainly Kikuyu businesses (stalls), burning as a performance carried the allegory of razing livelihood disproportions literally and figuratively. What is more, fire is a "weapon" accessible to most and representative of what Rossi dubs the "ghetto revolt" (1973: 8): from LA in 1992, through London (Brixton) in 1995 and Jakarta in 1998, to Paris in 2005. In the Kibera case, burning presents a violent ritual with twofold symbolism – it is simultaneously the bludgeon of the incensed (global) urban periphery and of more traditional vigilante practices. Indeed, burning the *mwizi* alive plays a central role in vigilante retribution rites for it is culturally designed as a public execution, which communicates to other potential criminals their possible fate (Smith 2004: 447). As the quintessential vigilante performance, burning the offender also evokes collective claims over the authority to dispense justice.

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[122] Author's interview with *matatu* #8 conductor on 7 May 2010.
[123] Not necessarily in the Tillean sense of the term which suggests high level of coordination between competing entities (2007: 81).
[124] Refer to the cover of this work, for instance.
[125] Author's interview with Pastor Joshua on 12 April 2010.

A more specific, but still saturated with significance protest act that the residents of Kibera resorted to during the 2007-2008 unrest was the uprooting of the railway line that traverses the slum area. Conceived as a violent objection to the ban on a post-election ODM rally,[126] the uprooting was subsequently used by Kibera residents on a number of occasions including a demonstration against the disconnection of illegal power lines by the Kenya Power and Lighting Company (KPLC) (Koross and Dola 2009). As a violent ritual, the uprooting presents a rather raw assertion of power: power to disrupt trade relations with Uganda,[127] to pull out tons of heavy metal with bare hands, to make the whole of Kenya hear the "No Raila, No *Reli* [railway line]" slogan (Makeni 2009). Judged against this backdrop, the uprooting of the railway line emerges as a clear endeavour at re-negotiating power relationships through performative violence. It challenges the axiom that "if you don't have money, you are an idle man, you don't have a right in your country"[128] and establishes a disconcerting new equation of (sometimes even forced) collective empowerment: violence = voice, voice = right.

> If you are passing there and you don't want to lift there, there is no passing, you have to put your energy there…either you join, or you die. You die, where are you going to go? They don't beg you to come pluck the railway line.[129]

SOCIAL IDENTIFICATION

This disquieting form of solidarity comes to prove that violence as a form of meaningful cultural expression also has the potential to reify collective identities (Brubaker 2004: 41). According to Appadurai, even the most repulsive acts of (ethnocidal) violence produce persons and identities from intangible, stretched out labels (1998: 19). While the firmly embedded ethnic divisions in Kenya did not need materialisation, the events of 2007-2008 can certainly be examined as corresponding to the processes of intergroup interaction that social identity theorists delineate (Tajfel and Turner 1986). Brewer argues that in the natural human quest for positive distinctiveness and stability, individuals start attaching their self-worth to the perceived status of the collective. Tumultuous processes of othering fuel overt competition and animosity towards (dominant) outgroups (Brewer 2001: 21, 27). In the case of Kibera, othering was not only carried out along ethnic lines but also *a propos* class and generational[130] differences. Certain Kibera residents (mostly from the notoriously rough Gatwikira) would initiate hostilities against inhabitants from other neighbourhoods, who were reluctant to engage in the mass violence, by

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[126] "We decided to remove the railway because we were told we could not go to the rally," said 30-year old Kibera resident Odongo Obinge before the *Daily Nation* (Querengesser and Namlola 2008).

[127] The line is the only railway connection available for the transportation of goods between the two countries.

[128] Author's interview with former Kibera councillor Opete Opete on 17 April 2010.

[129] Statement made during focus group C on 21 April 2010.

[130] The turbulent intergroup identification processes among the youth of Kibera are illustrated by Simon's statement that during the post-election unrest "you didn't expect an old man running down the streets," made during an interview on 12 May 2010.

disparaging them as "softies" or "ladies."[131] In fact, the derogation of an outgroup as responsible for frustrating life conditions is often the basis for initiating violence – "we want also to be empowered [through access to economy, wealth] but these people are blocking us."[132]

This statement also illustrates that the processes of generating outgroup hatred (toward the Kikuyu in the case of Kibera) stem from individual feelings of insecurity, which do not need to be grounded in a real collision of group interests. Bearing that in mind, it is interesting to consider another railway line uprooting incident that took place in Kibera in April 2009. A largely irrelevant territorial dispute between the governments of Kenya and Uganda over the miniature Mgingo Island in Lake Victoria provoked another vandalisation of the railway line. A Kibera youth participating in the mass endeavour justified his actions as follows, "Ugandans need to know we feed them. They should not try to intimidate the hand that feeds them" (The Standard 2009). Staub traces back the origins of scapegoating namely to such collective acts that establish intragroup connection and transfer blame onto another group (2001: 165). The need to overcome feelings of inferiority is satisfied by aggression that manifests both distinction and pre-eminence (Brewer 2001: 33). In this sense, violence can be seen as the ultimate power tool: boosting self-esteem through outward intimidation. The need among Kibera youth to somehow reify superiority can be seen as resulting not only from the perceived threats posed by other groups, but – as Chapter Three argues – from the general feelings of exclusion that can operate on many levels.

Being someone in "the global city"[133]

The pressure exerted upon the urban periphery of the South by globalisation has been subject to multiple studies on the politics of street violence (Hagedorn 2007 and 2008, Winkler 2008, Pillay 2002, Briceño-León and Zubillaga 2002). Briceño-León and Zubillaga manage to summarise the general line of argumentation as follows, "globalisation is democratic and egalitarian in spreading expectations, but it is inequitable in providing the means to satisfy them" (2002: 28). In that sense not only the actual perpetration of violence, but the symbolic belonging to some form of street organisation, can be seen as a means of integration in the imagined geography of the global metropolis. Imagination can work as a potent social force to provide new resources for identity-crafting. Even faced with a much grimmer reality, many Kibera youths project their violent enterprises onto the cityscape of a brighter future. "A lot of my age-mates have lost their lives. But they think, 'If I come out of it, I'll be a better person, reinstall my dignity,'" commented a twenty-one-year-old former gang member.[134]

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[131] Author's interview with Francis on 16 May 2010.
[132] Statement made during focus group A on 13 April 2010.
[133] Term coined by Dutch sociologist Saskia Sassen and explored in her work *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (2001).
[134] Author's interview on 18 May 2010.

This chapter acknowledged the symbolic designation of political/criminal violence as a means of collective and individual expression, as well as an instrument for making power claims and congealing social identities.[135] With that in mind, Snyder's argument that "[s]ome practices in anarchy that at first glance seem exotic and 'cultural' turn out on closer, examination to serve a [...] strategic purpose" gains a compelling nuance (2002: 21). Through the performative qualities outlined above, violence can be seen as an efficient way of making bold claims in local political historiography and establishing a stable and positive identity in an environment, marked by "brutally truncated opportunity" (Hagedorn 2008: 95). This last relational description of collective violent action ties up the multilevel analysis that I intended to complete in my work.

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[135] This facet of violence Kalyvas logically associates with "expressive" motivations (2006: 24).

OUTROSPECTION

"...one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable."

~ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*

In many ways, the *raison d'être* of this work was to highlight the multiplicity of factors that ought to be considered in any sound effort to analyse even local processes of mobilisation in the 2007-2008 turmoil in Kenya. What Kristeva symbolically refers to as "the threat" (1982: 1, see above) is actually a confluence of forces – from the outside and the inside, the political and the social, the global and the local, the tangible and the abstruse – that presents individuals with different life choices in particular space-time situations. Although I attempted to be comprehensive in reviewing the "forces" listed above, this research remained driven by a fascination with the puzzling ways in which grassroots perpetrators navigate the situations they are faced with by employing collective violence. A long-standing interest in urban peripheral areas and Kenya as a peculiar case of African volatile stability led me to Kibera: one of the biggest African slums and also a hotbed of the 2007-2008 turmoil. While some of the political, socio-economic, historical, cultural and psycho-social dynamics that this study exposes and dissects remain specific to the Kibera context, a lot of the findings can be informative vis-à-vis broader debates on the Kenyan crisis. In fact, sections of this study can be related to non-regional discussions on criminal and political violence in urban areas.

The main goal of my research was to explore patterns of micro-mobilisation of street organisations in the slum estates of Kenya in order to provide an alternative, more comprehensive, and rooted in indigenous conceptualisation interpretation of the 2007-2008 post-election violence. After analysing the data outcomes produced by over two months' worth of fieldwork, the heterogeneity of the processes leading to collective (political) violence in Kibera emerged as a prominent pattern. As one of the authorities in the study of political violence and public disorder in Eastern Africa, Professor David Anderson, aptly put it: "you don't have just one problem, there's dozens of problems – group cohesion, political coalition, personal security – all kinds of dynamics."[136] Nevertheless, in order to eschew the ultimate *faux pas* in ethnography – the delivery of an all-encompassing account of someone's "reality" – I employed a comprehensive yet clear-cut analytical framework (see p.9) to be able to distil more concrete conclusions.

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[136] Author's interview on 6 May 2010.

Street organisations (in Kibera) are highly amorphous and engage in an array of obvolute activities. One of the least expected findings of this study is the substantial overlap between the range of groups that operate in the slum areas on a daily basis and those that were involved in the post-election violence (vigilantes, criminals, youth wingers, conmen, as well as residents unaffiliated with any organisations). Their mobilisation patterns are also very similar. Most commonly they employ violence as a solution to a problem perceived as vital to address: be it crime within the community (vigilantes), personal subsistence (criminal gangs) or lack of political representation (youth wingers). Thereby, criminal and political violence become difficult to disentangle and so do the multifarious motivations behind the perceived need to rectify certain societal malaises.

The unrest was not a result exclusively of political manipulation and was not thoroughly orchestrated by violence entrepreneurs. Key political figures did employ the standard for Kenyan political culture tribalist rhetoric to evoke grievances and incite the grassroots along ethnic lines, but this was not the only process of mobilisation that took place during the unrest. Most of the street organisations are known to engage in political initiatives for petty cash; yet, in Kibera during the 2007-2008 clashes not all perpetrators of violence were remunerated. Some inciters, recruited from the hordes of young men idling on street corners or self-mobilised, created a vortex of chaos, which substantial parts of the grievance-driven population of Kibera joined.[137]

The post-election turmoil was not only an opportunity to vent bottled-up frustration derived from social inequalities, but to self-mobilise as a means of voicing and levelling out those inequalities. Socio-economic marginalisation and inadequate policing in everyday situations have prompted the popularisation of illicit (criminal) activities as an efficient livelihood strategy, widely employed by the idle slum youth. At the same time, longer-standing localised issues such as land and business disputes lent the skirmishes a grievance-based nuance. As a result, once violence erupted, the state of anarchy encouraged certain to violently vent the frustration generated by a life of constant and multiple exclusions, while others put into practice abrasive livelihood strategies.

Some of the violent performances that demarcate street organisations' activities, as well as the 2007-2008 crisis, are imparted with particular symbolism. Violence is a meaningful social act with ritualistic undertones and can be examined as an attempt at renegotiating power relationships and staging the reification of superior group identities. Many Kibera youth resort to such culturally-bound expressions of belonging/othering (through membership in street organisations, for example) in order to overcome dignity ambivalences, generated not only by local horizontal and national vertical inequalities, but by the uncertainty and false expectations that the perceptible effects of globalisation have introduced in their lives.

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[137] Those who were forcefully mobilised (see, for example, p.22, 43) remain a minority.

The multilevel scope of my findings – from the psycho-social processes happening at the personal level to the tectonic post-independence shifts in political organisation – create some ambiguities in positioning this work within broader theoretical debates or even disciplines. Yet, as an ethnographer I felt strongly compelled to uncover the layers of meaning surrounding the 2007-2008 unrest in the slum estate of Kibera, as perceived by the perpetrators of violence themselves (to some of whom I had access). As a result, my research is both highly localised and contingent upon thick description. Similarly conceived are Osborn's study on gossip and post-election violence (2008) and de Smedt's article on big-man politics and grassroots mobilisation (2009).

My commitment to an investigation of the local processes of micro-mobilisation does not make this study irrelevant to research on the post-election turmoil nationwide. In fact, it can be considered as a more illustrative complement to Mueller's analysis of the political economy of Kenya's crisis and especially her discussion of the diffuseness of violence in Kenya beyond the electoral/political events (2008: 187). Apart from furnishing analyses of the recent turmoil with a more grassroots-oriented perspective, this study can add breadth to the very narrowly-focused, but prolific discussion on gangs in the slum areas of Nairobi, which to this date has been dominated by examinations of the Mungiki phenomenon (Anderson 2002, Kagwanja 2003, Wamue 2001, ICG 2008). Seeing that some of the structural imperatives and cultural expressions that underlie the micro-mobilisation of street organisations in the urban periphery are not unique to Kenya, the present work can also be placed within the pan-African dimension of research on street and vigilante organisations (Pratten 2008, Meagher 2007, Higazi 2008, Buur and Jensen 2004, Smith 2004).

Regional considerations aside, some of my findings can be attached to the conceptual field of urban sociology and criminology, which produces research on urban violence and theories of crime. While some of the studies on the former retain a regional focus, there is an (un)surprising overlap in the analyses of the social processes which bring about surges in urban gang warfare, be it in Latin America (Briceño-León and Zubillaga 2002, Moser and McIlwaine 2000), the USA (Brotherton and Barrios 2004), or even of Europe (Thornberry et al. 2006). With that in mind, my research bears significance in broader theoretical discussions on criminal gangs and community policing groups, their status in society, and their role during episodes of political contention (see, for example, Kontos et al. 2003). Although this study is not focused exclusively on disentangling the complex relationship between state power and criminal/political violence, some of the phenomena examined are attributed to the involvement (or the lack thereof) of central authority in the urban periphery (see Chabedi 2003, Moser 2004). Lastly, the explicit concentration on youth and violent practices positions this work within the domain of studies that address the role of youth in the politics of street culture (Hérault and Adesanmi 1997, Frederiksen and Munive 2010).

My preoccupation with the status of slum delinquents as a marginalised community, subject to multilevel exclusion, dabbles in the waters of postcolonial and subaltern studies. This

specific study illuminates a concrete stipulation of those theories: challenging vulnerability through creative survival/livelihood strategies (Okazaki 2002, Bayat 2000). Focusing on the agency of perpetrators of violence can also add useful insights to some of the contemporary theories of crime and in particular – Merton's notion of "anomie-and-opportunity structures" (1997: 519). While the structural underpinnings of delinquency cannot be overlooked, and especially not in the case of urban slum areas, it is important to acknowledge the ways in which those structural alignments provoke residents to make sense of and use their environment through creative (and criminal) encroachment. This goes hand-in-hand with Merton's supposition that any account of violent social behaviour is incomplete before it is furnished with an analysis of individual-level processes, the latter still being induced by "disjunctions between culturally […] reinforced aspirations and access to institutionally legitimate means for realising those aspirations" (1995: 27). My research provides a vivid case in point for this paradigm – the violence voluntarily employed by certain Kibera residents can be seen as both a strategy to realise their livelihood aspirations and a protest against the unavailability of legitimate means to do so. [138]

WHITHER?

Although concluding remarks are known to have a wrap-up function, I could not help but unfurl some of the aspects of my work which might need future elaboration. Kibera and the dynamics of its street organisations proved to be so rich of a microcosm that I often felt compelled to prolong the duration of my fieldwork. Particularly intriguing were the organic networks for distribution of informal justice (vigilantism) and their violent repertoires. How do they challenge the state not only as a security provider, but as a legitimate entity in the public sphere? Can reliance on community-based parallel authority be sustainable or is it bound to result in excessive uses of violence, as demonstrated by vigilante operations thus far?

A significantly smaller, but just as puzzling phenomenon was the forced mobilisation of Kibera residents by their neighbours (see p.22, 43). Does "hustling" tell the whole recruitment story in the case of street organisations or are some members forcefully roped in illicit activity? Were some of the protagonists in the 2007-2008 unrest committing to violence out of fear? Is Kibera really an enclave of traditional solidarity in the midst of the urban agglomeration of Nairobi?

Beyond the territorial boundaries of Kibera, street organisations based in the numerous other slums of Nairobi can be inspiring *objets d'intérêt* for future research. A comparative study of common patterns of violence across the urban periphery, for instance, is likely to produce more generalisable results and also help explicate the compelling case of inter-slum gang confrontations (turf wars?), which remains understudied.[139] How diffuse is violence across the spectrum of slum areas of Nairobi? Which street organisations are in conflict and which in

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[138] The latter can also be subsumed in relational descriptions of violence (Tilly 2005: 19).

[139] Possibly the only comprehensive academic account comes from Anderson's work on the Mungiki-Taliban enmity that culminated in the 2002 Kariobangi massacre (2002).

collusion? What role do security organs play in their interactions? What ignites the sporadic "massacres" in the slums and who is involved in sponsoring, controlling and contesting it? Since Nairobi slums vary substantially in their ethnic composition, such research can also elucidate the role of ethnicity in micro-mobilisation.

Finally, the logical path of evolution for this work would be its application to future violent episodes in Kenyan (African?) political life, which I sincerely hope not to be given the opportunity to address. Whether Kenya starts burning again after the 2012 general elections, discussions of why violence did or did not erupt can certainly by informed by some of the analyses featured in this research. What systemic malfunctions are – depending on one's ontological stance – either challenged by or conducive to ghetto upheavals? What is the place of street organisations in contentious politics? Why and how should they be given more adequate attention by scholars, development agencies and policy-makers?

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APPENDIX A: Glossary

Chang'aa (kill me quick) – an illicit alcoholic drink typical for Kenya

Chuom – an alleyway settlement for street children

Jua kali (hot sun) – informal economy

Juju – witchcraft

Falla [sheng] – a fool, loser

Harambee (all pull together) – a Kenyan tradition of community self-help events

Kamjesh [sheng] – foot-soldiers, gang members; also name of a particular gang

Kitu kidogu (a little something) – a bribe

Matatu – share taxi, the predominant means of public transport in Nairobi

Mtaani [sheng] – one's 'hood'

Mungiki – a quasi-political religious organisation (Kikuyu), the most popular and feared criminal gang in Kenya

Mwizi – thief

Panga – machete

Sheng – Swahili-based patois (mostly influenced by English), originating in the slums of Nairobi
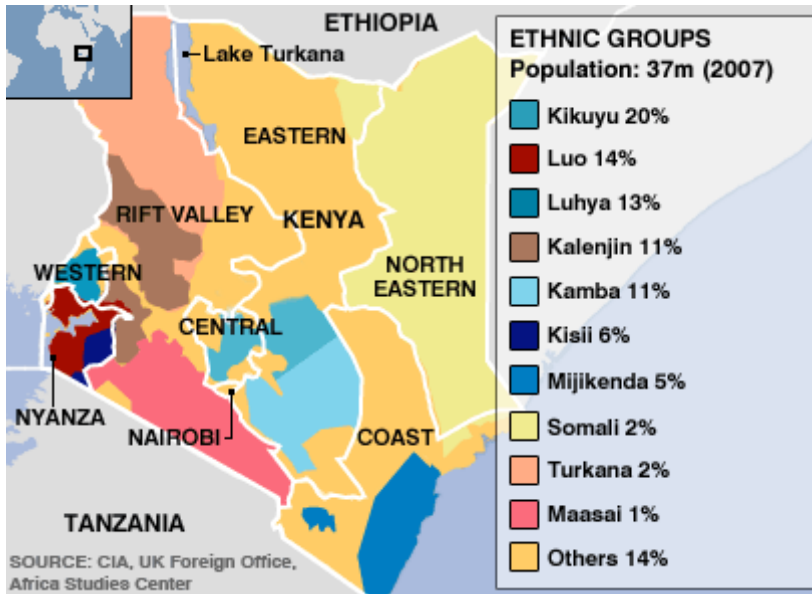
Siafu (ants) – the largest and best known vigilante organisation from Gatwikira

Taliban – a notorious criminal gang operating in the slums of Nairobi ; the Luo 'counterpart' of Mungiki
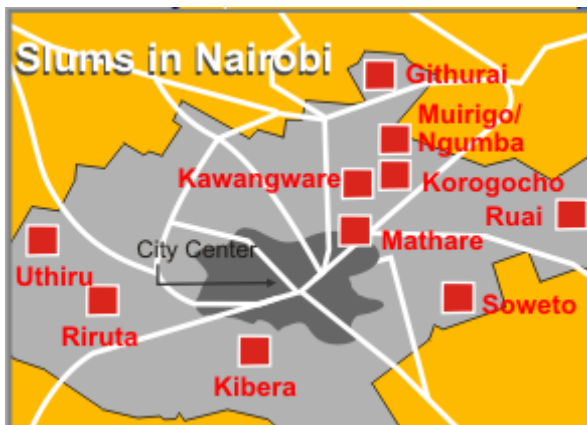
Wananchi – the common people

APPENDIX B: Maps

Source: Mynnot, A. 2008. "Ethnic Tensions Dividing Kenya." *BBC News, Nairobi.* January 5, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/from_our_own_correspondent/7172038.stm (accessed January 20, 2010).

NAIROBI SLUM DISTRIBUTION

Source: Kenya Projects. "Nairobi's Slums: The Biggest 10." http://www.kenyaprojects.com/37.html (accessed March 14, 2010).

APPENDIX C: Survey Respondent Statistics and Sample Questionnaire

Respondent #	Age	Sex	Residence	Tribe
1	23	M	Kianda	Luo
2	25	M	Kianda	Kikuyu
3	27	M	Kianda	Luo
4	28	M	Kianda	Luo
5	27	M	n/a	Luo
6	26	M	Kianda	Luhya
7	27	M	Kianda	Halfcast
8	27	M	Makina	Nubian
9	21	M	Kianda	Luo
10	20	F	Makina	Nubian
11	24	M	Gatwikira	Luhya
12	25	F	Gatwikira	Luo
13	27	M	Gatwikira	Luo
14	28	M	Mashimoni	Luo
15	32	M	Gatwikira	Kamba
16	30	F	Gatwikira	Luo
17	30	M	Gatwikira	Luo
18	30	M	Gatwikira	Luhya
19	31	M	Kianda	Kikuyu
20	30	M	Gatwikira	Luo

Table 1. Respondent statistics

Age: *Sex:*   *Tribe:*

Part of Kibera you reside in:

---

1. What are the worst problems that youth in Kibera are now facing (list in order of importance)?

2. How do these problems explain post-election violence?

3. Was the violence planned?

4. What role did the following play in post-election?
- Poverty

- Greed

- Boredom

- Insecurity

- Grievance

- Tribalism

5. What led to the post-election violence?

main reason	• _____ • _____
complicated by	• _____ • _____
post-election violence	• Skirmishes, murders, looting, chaos

6. Which do you think is the most dangerous part of Kibera?

7. Do you know of any criminal organizations (gangs, vigilantes) that operate in Kibera and specifically – your part of Kibera? Which ones?

8. Why do they exist in your opinion?

9. What motivates their members?

10. What do you think of them? Do you support vigilante activity? Why?

11. Are their activities related to politics in some way?

12. Explain the meaning of the following four words for you:

Livelihood	Security	Tribalism	Violence