Police killings and the vicissitudes of borders and bounding orders in Mathare, Nairobi

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Abstract
This article sets out to explore the ways in which local divisions contribute to and contest "permissive spaces" for police killings in an urban settlement in Nairobi called Mathare. Taking police killings as part of local bordering and bounding draws attention to the underlying social divisions that are implicated in policing these neighborhoods and which enable and contest such killings. As such, it opens up a view on the way police violence is entrenched in local tensions and conflict, which adds to analyses of police killings that explore public concerns over crime, political mechanization, and individual motivations. Hence, the focus on police killings as a bordering practice highlights the interaction between police work and the local vicissitudes of bordering and bounding and how these pertain to the production of city- and ghettoscapes.

Introduction

Police killings[1] have led to the death of thousands of young, poor, and male crime and terror suspects from urban settlements in Nairobi (Van Stapele, 2016).[2] In contrast to dominant views that homogenize and criminalize urban settlements[3] (see Kimari, 2017), police killings are not only contested but also enabled by local positions and divisions. However, the social and spatial divisions that carve up urban settlements are not set in stone as they shift over time and in space. This article sets out to explore the ways in which local divisions contribute to and contest "permissive spaces" (Cooper-Knock, 2018) for police killings in an urban

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settlement in Nairobi called Mathare. The context-bound positions of "us" and "them" pit putative "natives" against ostensible "newcomers" and inform different political projects on belonging to the city that primarily revolve around contesting moral orders. "Newcomers" in this context denote people who recently migrated to the city from the rural area, whereas "natives" indicate people who were born and raised in Mathare. The various police units operating in this and other neighborhoods are deeply embedded within these configurations and as such actively partake in the production of local social differentiation and ensuing spatial borders when policing these neighborhoods.

Taking police killings as part of local bordering and bounding draws attention to the underlying social divisions that are implicated in policing these neighborhoods and which enable and contest such killings. Police killings in Nairobi occur mostly within or near urban settlements and low-income areas such as Dandora, Mathare, and Majengo. They engender temporal and spatial borders not only around but also within urban settlements, effectively creating micro spaces of confinement for especially young, "native," and poor men. Following from the criminalization of residents of urban settlement, young men specifically are widely taken as "thugs" in dominant discourse (MSJC, 2017), and killing them is generally considered an effective strategy to reduce crime in the city.[4] Within Mathare, and in many other neighborhoods like it, this dominant discourse was negotiated to mean young "native" men in particular.[5] Hence, the borders constituted by police killings do not only derive from imagining an "out-" and an "inside" of urban settlements in Nairobi, but also from multiple diffracting outer- and inner-sides within these neighborhoods. Accordingly, these borders are at once reinforced and traversed by multiple bounding orders of morality and belonging within Nairobi settlements that collide, collapse, and conflate, often in rapid succession.

The analysis of the entanglement of police killings in borders and bounding orders from the perspectives of residents is based on long-term ethnographic research (since 2005) in Mathare and many other urban settlements in Nairobi.[6] I also build on ethnographic work on police and policing in different urban settings worldwide (Caldeira, 2002; De Koning, 2017; Fassin, 2013; Goffman, 2014; Ilan, 2018; Kyed and Albrecht, 2014; Larkins, 2013, 2015; Martin, 2007) by bringing into view the interaction between police killings and specific moral orders within Mathare—an urban context where approximately one out five young men has been shot dead by police over the past two decades (MSJC, 2017). Most research on police killings looks at the wider dynamics that shape policing practices and incorporate analysis of broader legitimating discourses that normalize such killings in public debate (Alves, 2014; Linnemann et al., 2014). In Kenya, this is epitomized by the narrative of the "thug" (Van Stapele, 2016). This discourse often reiterates an imagined and faulty binary between a morally upright "outside" and criminal "inside" with regard to urban settlements in Nairobi. Yet such a deeply pejorative, flawed, and dichotomous view does not help to explain how police killings are in part shaped by competing and shifting moral orders inside urban settlements. It also leaves open where, when, and why out- and insides are imagined, practiced, and contested. Hence, far more attention is needed to explore the particular imbedding of police and policing inside these urban settings (see Glück, 2017 on "security urbanism"). Looking at the interplay between policing and moral orders within settlements allows a more textured understanding of processes of bordering beyond the realm of the police, while keeping the police and especially policing practices in clear sight.

The first section provides a discussion on the mutually constitutive relationship between bordering and bounding in the context of police killings in urban settlements in Nairobi. The second section explores the phenomenon of "police vigilantism" (Jauregui, 2015) in Kenya to offer more context and background to such killings in neighborhoods like

Mathare. This is the backdrop against which the third section delves into the local power dynamics and social divisions that engender permissive spaces for police killings. The fourth and fifth sections look at how police killings tie in with contesting positions of morality that inform opposing bounding orders and local border practices in Mlango Kubwa, a neighborhood in Mathare. Accordingly, focusing on police killings not only brings out the underlying "othering" (Morris, 2010; Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988) at work, but also reveals how they produce and transform "bordered spaces" (Popescu, 2012; Van Houtum and Van Naerssen, 2002) not just of but also within urban settlements and how these in turn define the city (De Boeck and Baloji, 2016; Simone, 2016).

Bordering and bounding: Two sides of the same coin

The local borders that simultaneously enable and are enabled by police killings in Nairobi are spatially, temporally, and socially bound. Typically, these borders are experienced by young and poor men and at night. A closer look at the local processes of social bounding underlying these ephemeral borders (Jacobs and Van Assche, 2014) helps to further illuminate the normalization of police killings of young and poor urban men in Kenya (Jones et al., 2017; MSJC, 2017). Killing criminalized young, male bodies has become a structural part of policing practices only in specific parts of the city (see Alves, 2014 on a comparable analysis on police violence and racial alterity in Brazil). Popular analyses of this spatial normalization in Kenya often point at the public imaginary of the "thug." The "thug" is increasingly conflated with "the terrorist" in certain parts of Nairobi (Glück, 2017; Price et al., 2016), but I focus here mainly on Mathare and specifically police killings that center squarely on the criminalization of young and poor men (Van Stapele, 2016; see also Hansen and Stepputat, 2005).

Indeed, the simultaneous "othering" and bordering (Van Houtum and Van Naerssen, 2002) of urban settlements in Nairobi to a great degree converge in the widespread framing of young and poor men as "thugs." Popular stereotypes of young, urban, and poor men as perpetrators of crime and violence continue to inform narratives of fear that fall into fertile soil among wider city publics. Hence, public fear plays a key role in imagining the "thug" and in the normalization of police killings. However, public support for police killings of crime suspects cannot be taken at face value. When urged, most people seem rather conflicted (interviews, personal observations, and experiences between January 2016 and February 2019). During several interviews with an array of Nairobi residents, it was not uncommon to find people expressing what seemed contradicting sentiments. Initially, several people articulated their support for police killings when it concerned crime suspects, but when pressed on the matter they also condemned such excessive and criminal use of force by police.

In light of this ambiguity, the extent to which police killings and ensuing borders are shaped by and shape the complexities of boundary-making (and breaking) within urban settlements helps elucidating the spatial consequences of such shifting positions. Such intricacies are crucial in grasping the production and appropriation (Lefebvre,1996 [1968–1989]: 174) of urban spaces in Nairobi and how these connect to ensuing contestations over "urban citizenship" (Glück and Low, 2017; Holston, 2009), i.e. the struggle over who belongs to the city and who does not. Indeed, the normalization of police killings in Kenya (Jones et al., 2017; MSJC, 2017) cannot be fully understood without considering how such killings are enmeshed in the struggle of belonging to the city among residents of urban settlements. Below, I explore a specific case in Mlango Kubwa (hereafter referred to as Mlango), a ward in Mathare, to investigate how situated micro-dynamics of police killings reflect and

constitute local borders through interactions with bounding orders that revolve around notions of belonging and entitlement to the city. This will reveal how, when, where, and why broader "othering" narratives that legitimize police killings in dominant discourse (MSJC, 2017) acquire new meanings within the imagined outer- and inner-sides of urban settlements like Mathare. The entanglement of borders and bounding orders in Mlango that underlie police killings produce urban spaces not only as part of the city (as the locus of power) but also in contestation to it.

Police killings generate a particular type of border, one that is experienced only during certain moments, in certain parts of the city and only by certain people. Most of all, these borders are only visible, and as such "physical," to some and not to others. Fassin (2011) argues that a combined approach, focusing simultaneously on physical, social, and symbolic barriers, allows for a deeper understanding of the work borders do in societies. While physically demarcated (and demarcating), borders are socio-cultural rather than spatial. They first and foremost circumscribe (and are simultaneously circumscribed by) processes of inclusion and exclusion between particular groups. Nonetheless, these borders do reflect and reproduce specific geographies of inclusion and exclusion, even if temporal and selective. The spatial element is crucial in grasping where for instance young and poor "native" men in Nairobi experience these borders. As will become clearer below, at night, many young "native" men from the lower parts in Mlango do not feel safe to walk up the hill to the main road for fear of police. Hence, the processes of difference-making that both constitute and are delineated and constructed by these borders are also profoundly spatial.

The fact that social boundaries have spatial effects (Newman, 2011, 2008) in neighborhoods like Mlango reveals that processes of bordering and bounding are mutually constitutive. The spatial borders engendered by police killings are to a great measure produced by the way particular policing practices interact with local tensions and how these pertain to emerging collaborations and conflicts between different local actors. To understand these interactions and how these bolster and challenge borders, a closer look at the highly layered, intersecting, and rather fluid boundary-making projects within the urban settlement is pivotal.

However, the notion of "group" should be unpacked first. Central to bounding is the idea of a group with seemingly clear divisions marking who belongs and who does not. This idea has the tendency to invoke fixity, a group as a bounded whole, whereas it is more accurate to speak of variable and contingent "groupness" (Brubaker, 2004). It is this contingent and ambiguous nature of "groups" which invokes a frantic and constant redrawing of boundaries, that is an endless bounding, breaking, and re-bounding an imagined "us" by imagining a "them." People generally do not experience the world around them as of their own making. "Groupness" relays the focus on processes of authentification when considering articulations of belonging, i.e. techniques and resources people have at their disposal to believe them to be true and real (Van de Port, 2004: 12).

The young "native" men from Mlango that mostly fall victim to police violence are subjectivated within this locality not only as poor young men from an urban settlement but also, and sometimes even more so, as "natives." People in urban settlements generally talk about "newcomers" and "natives" as if these are clearly defined categories, but such notions of belonging and entitlement are inherently paradoxical and prone to trigger tensions exactly because they are fluid and highly slippery concepts. The contingency and inconsistencies that hide beneath their apparent self-evidence bring forth great uncertainty (Appadurai, 1999), especially when they are widely deemed to determine access to local resources (such as upgraded houses or title deeds to land but also to government subsidies,

NGO funds, and so on). This may explain to some extent why this uncertainty can lead to violence; a lot is at stake. In times of adversity, scarcity, and heightened competition, the need to define the "other" and demarcate authentic "selves," by unmasking "traitors from inside" becomes most poignant (Geschiere, 2009: 13). Repeatedly smaller and shifting circles are drawn in attempts to define "self" and "other" and to fix what is in flux (Geschiere, 2009: 31). Discourses of belonging are thus constantly contested and new modes of "othering" are brought into being to re-affirm their self-evidence.

Ultimately, killing "others" marks out who belongs and who does not (Appadurai, 1999) in the most physical and brutal sense of the word. When identities shift from in- to exclusive and become predatory (Appadurai, 2006: 52), violence is often legitimized by discourses of belonging. I have adopted from De Vries and Weber (1997) the insight that such violence is often practiced in the name of self-determination. When notions of belonging define an "other," it is actually the "self" that is determined; direct acts of violence legitimized by processes of "othering" are therefore attempts to demarcate the boundaries that separate the self from the other (De Vries and Weber, 1997: 1–2; Willemse, 2007: 145). Such junctures thus arise from profound uncertainty about entitlement and the belonging of "selves." The imagined threats posed by "others" to ostensibly bounded "selves" translate to borders that are ultimately mapped onto their bodies (Whitley, 2015). Attacking these "othered" bodies are (often fleeting) attempts to establish order, gain certainty and control, which in extreme situations may even lead to killing them, thus establishing "death certainty" (Appadurai, 1999).

"Killer cops," "Maspiff," and "Hessy"

Police reforms are currently underway in Kenya, though reluctantly and rather ineffectively (Osse, 2016) seeing that police killings of (mostly) young and poor men are on the increase in recent years in Nairobi (Interviews with MSJC in February 2018). To illustrate, a policeman was filmed while executing two male teenagers in front of a crowd in broad daylight in Eastleigh, Nairobi, on 31 March 2017 (Namwaya, 2017). Two hours later he shot dead another two young men near Mathare, an urban settlement in Nairobi (personal observation and interviews with witnesses, 31 March 2017). In the weekend of 11 August 2017, the same police officer was witnessed killing seven people in Mathare (interviews between 11 and 14 August 2017) during the chaos that followed the announcement by the electoral body, which declared the incumbent president the winner in what were widely considered fraudulent elections (Burke, 2017; Freytas-Tamura, 2017). During that weekend, he was part of a wider police force that violently clamped down on protesters. The people that were wounded, killed, and otherwise violated by police in the weekend of 11–14 August 2017 received some attention, but frustrations abound regarding the lack of attention for crime suspects that are killed throughout. A young man from Mathare shared this with me over the phone on Sunday night 13 August 2017:

> Yah, this week police killed so many, they beat up people, randomly. Young men were dragged from their houses. But we in ghetto, we know this happens all the time, now it is just multiplied by 10. Normally in ghetto, maybe 2 are killed by police in a week, now it is 20. So now people are talking about it. But we should talk about the police violence that is normalized, because that is what made the illegal violence by police during the past week possible!

Many Mathare residents and local activists conveyed to me in February 2019 that the police officer who was filmed has killed over 50 young men since then, and he was still regularly spotted while on patrol, until April 2019 when he went underground for a while after a clash

with residents (Adoyo et al., 2019). The fact that he is still on duty over two years after the video went viral online, on 31 March 2017, shows the impunity with which such "killer cops" can execute young and poor men from urban settlements as part of the "War on Crime" in Kenya (MSJC, 2017; Van Stapele, 2016).

The police officer mentioned here is not the only one. Similar notorious policemen who are known to execute mainly young, male criminal suspect frequently patrol most urban settlements in Eastlands. According to several local activists, these plain cloth police officers, called "killer cops" or *maspiff* by some, are not part of regular police units known to be connected to specific police stations. They told me that these police officers operate under the direct command of the County Criminal Investigations Officer. One of them who knew several officers personally through his work shared in January 2019:

> They [plain cloth police officers] act on intel, then they register at this station or that, to say we work in this area, for today, doing an operation. But they operate outside the normal police. They have their own intel and structures, but we don't know how they operate exactly.

Others claimed that these officers answer directly to the Inspector General Boinnet. A non-state security team in Mathare which works closely with several "killer cops" shared with me in August 2018 that some also receive money from wealthy business owners in Eastleigh. Important here is that the exact operational and support structures of "killer cops" remain somewhat opaque to local activists and residents, but all agreed that these plain cloth police officers enjoy considerable power and are able to kill crime suspects with impunity through their powerful back-up. What also comes out here is that some local groups and activists have close ties to these "killer cops."

When considering the relative opacity of their operations, the public visibility of these police officers in Mathare (and other urban settlements) is indeed rather astounding. For example, I also know several by name and face, and I have witnessed three executions by their hands—on different occasions. For residents in Mathare, this is an all too common occurrence. Their threatening presence in public space also plays out in other ways. In February 2018, I visited a grandmother in Kia Maiko (Mathare) whose grandson had been killed by another infamous policeman two days earlier. Many of the deceased's friends had gathered in the small house, others were hanging together outside. Suddenly, the friends standing outside rushed in and bolted the door shut. The policeman who had been witnessed shooting their friend was posting outside to mark them, as a young man said, "for his death list, because friends of thieves are also thieves."

Police officers and their teams commonly collect information from a vast circle of local informers (some who are widely known) who are paid to provide names and pictures of crime suspects (interviews and personal observations between January 2016 and February 2019). Following a threat, I was not in a position to interview police officers myself to unpack the complexity of police perceptions regarding "killer cops" and police killings, but an encounter between a uniformed police officer from Pangani police station and a friend of mine from Mathare during one of my fieldwork periods offers some insights.

Early 2016, this police officer approached my friend and research participant who has a small kiosk in Pangani (a low to middle income neighborhood near Mathare) and tried to show him a set of pictures to get confirmation on whether the men depicted were actual thieves or victims of a slander campaign. He shared with my friend that some informers from Mathare shared pictures of young men with him and his colleagues because of "personal grudges," as he put it. My friend immediately pushed the phone away and did not want to look because it would bring him in danger. The officer understood this as he

himself felt at danger for showing this to someone outside the usual informers' network. He declared to my friend that he was desperate. He did not want his colleagues to shoot "innocent men," he said. My friend, a staunch social justice activist, tried to explain to him that all of these men should be perceived innocent until proven guilty by a court of law, but the officer waved this comment away by stating that Kenyan courts were corrupt and thieves could easily bribe their way out. The officer also shared his frustration that most officers as a rule were constantly moved from one location to the other and therefore could not build relationships with residents and subsequently relied heavily on informers who could manipulate them through false information. Then he commented, before turning away, that his fellow officers considered all young men in Mathare as dangerous criminals who should all be killed. He added that they often placed a gun to legitimize the killing (this information has been corroborated by MSJC activists who have documented 100s of killings in Mathare). My friend was left stunned, as much by the crudeness of the final remark as by the officer's confessions. The officer had appeared sad and frustrated, conflicted even. Before this brief but eventful encounter, my friend had never considered police officers as human beings, only as "the enemy." He called me directly after the officer had left and concluded: "They take us as thieves, and we take them as the enemy. This is our war, and it continuous because we are deeply afraid of each other." After a pause, he added: "But we are afraid more, because they have more guns."

The imaginary of the "killer cop" gained new strength in popular discourse when in April and May 2017 alleged police officers calling themselves "Hessy" became rapidly famous by posting pictures of suspected "thugs" before and after they allegedly shot them on different Facebook pages carrying this name. Speculations continue to the date of writing this article about who or what "Hessy" really is. Some claim it started with an actual police officer who was shot in the leg and while recovering home in the month of April 2017 started this network of "Hessy's" on Facebook. This is substantiated to some extent by the fact that there is an infamous police officer who is nicknamed Hessy and who is known to kill mostly young male crime suspects in Kayole. Others say that one officer or a group of police officers from different police stations in Eastlands chose this name because of the reputation of this particular police officer. Again, others state that the different "Hessy" pages on Facebook are not created by one or more police officers, but by a team of bloggers that works together with specific "killer cops." The "Hessy" pages soon gained a massive following online and were also a topic of intense debate offline, for instance among residents in Mathare and other neighborhoods in Eastlands. As such, the "Hessy" pages added to the discursive spaces that enable and contest police killings in these settlements.

Permissive spaces for police killings

As brought forward by the uniformed police officer who talked to my friend, "killer cops" rely heavily on information from residents inside urban settlements. This implies that the relationship between police and residents is more complicated than portrayed, for instance, by my friend, the kiosk owner, who prior to this encounter imagined an "us" residents against "them" police. Hence, police power does not only derive from legal mandates, state back-up, or from "having more guns," it also and perhaps even more so comes about through its interaction with local power dynamics which constitute temporal "permissive spaces" (Cooper-Knock, 2018) for police killings.

Police and resident relationships are relationships of power because they produce forms of subjectivity and behavior rather than simply repressing them (Foucault, 1982; Mills, 1997). Power, in other words, is not something abstract that is

imposed on residents by police. Mathare residents are not merely oppressed by police power and police do not own power because social relationships, including the ones that involve state institutions such as police, are fluid and in constant transformation through negotiations of power between all actors involved (Foucault, 1982, 1978; Mills, 1997). When power is a condition of social relationships, and thus conceived as an asymmetrical dispersion that changes over time and in space, then all assertions of power are potentially splintered and open to contradictions. Power is negotiated in each interaction and at each level of social, economic, and political organizing and as result is never fixed or stable (Cooper-Knock, 2018). The notion that repression of acts by those in power simply results in the erasing of those acts is a simplistic model of actions and power structures. Hence, perceiving power as essentially a relationship compels an analysis of the degree of power involved and how power is negotiated between actors rather than an assumption that in any power relation there is simply a powerful participant and a powerless one. This draws our attention to the spatial and temporal configurations of power and processes of negotiation that engender and contest police killings.

Underlying the rise and demise of such spaces in Mlango (Mathare) are popular ideas and practices of "immediate justice" (Hornberger, 2013: 12). Immediate justice in such settlements comprises a vast array of practices (Anderson, 2002; Ruteere and Pommerolle, 2003), including what is often dubbed "mob justice," but also through "community courts" led by local non-state security groups and individual actions. All of these practices run both parallel to and as part of formal justice procedures. The connection between the everyday practices of immediate justice (Buur and Jensen, 2004; Moser and Rodgers, 2005; Pratten, 2008; Pratten and Sen, 2007; Rodgers, 2008) and the type of "police vigilantism" (Jauregui, 2015) carried out by "killer cops" derives partly from a profound lack of trust in the judiciary (Mbote and Akech, 2011). Many residents in Mathare shared with me that in their experience arrested crime suspects are either quickly released from the police cell by way of bribes or a court case would drag on forever while the suspect is free on bond.

However, corruption within and inadequacy of formal justice procedures are only part of the story. Demands for immediate justice often emerge in contexts where threats to lives and livelihoods are acute and all encompassing. Most lives in Nairobi settlements are marked by deep uncertainty about income, shelter, sanitation, food, and physical safety. One middle-aged male vegetable vendor from Mathare shared in July 2018:

> These boys steal, that phone is your life. When you lose that phone ... you lose your income. We do not hesitate to beat these thieves. Nowadays, young boys, they steal with long knives, they stab first than steal. They don't snatch like before, but kill. So, we need to beat them to stop this crime.

The desire for safety and stability in a context marred with uncertainty (Cooper and Pratten, 2014), state neglect, and (threats of) violence shapes a readiness for violence among residents to protect themselves and establish some kind of order. Nevertheless, this type of violence often occurs with some kind of state permission. During most of the instances of immediate justice of suspected thieves that I observed myself, police were never far away. In some cases, police just stood by and watched, while during other incidents police actually paid a few young men to initiate this type of popular punishment (see below). In fact, the convolution of formal and informal practices in almost all interactions between citizens and the state in Kenya, but especially with regard to crime and justice, makes the figure of the "killer cop" possible. What's more, it is precisely the alleged corruption and criminality of the police

(Akech, 2005; Okia, 2011; Omenya and Lubaale, 2012; Ruteere, 2011) in the context of a what is widely deemed a malfunctioning justice system that gives rise to police vigilantism (see Hansen and Stepputat, 2005: 13; Jauregui, 2013, 2015, 2016; Owen and Cooper-Knock, 2014). Many people in Kenya consider "killer cops" a necessary evil to protect "the good side" (similar to Jauregui's "impure police vigilante," 2015; *see also* Tankebe, 2013). The "good side" is often conceived as comprising of hard working Nairobians, both rich and poor. Such notions pit the "hard working Nairobian" against "the thug" who wants "fast money without sweat" (individual interviews and focus group discussion with residents between January 2016 and February 2019).

Accordingly, the spatial borders produced by police killings not only reflect such local tensions, but they are in fact constituted, exacerbated, and diffracted by them. Attempts to understand police killings as a structural part of policing urban settlements in Nairobi thus need to consider how the vicissitudes of borders and competing bounding orders within these neighborhoods tie into the manifestation of such killings.

Outside-in and inside-out

In most urban settlements in Nairobi, like Mathare, notions of belonging and how these inspire groupness are less based on ethnicity than is often maintained in popular opinion (Van Stapele, 2015). Instead, such claims are often more based on envisioned bounding orders which in Mathare, and many other settlements like it, are imagined to be tied up with histories of migration from the rural to the urban area. Many self-identified "newcomers," i.e. recent migrants who grew up in the rural areas, perceive themselves to have a right to belong to the city for they take themselves as "hardworking." Conversely, most self-proclaimed "natives" in Mathare who have been born and raised here claim belonging to this urban settlement through their social entanglement with other "natives." "Nativist" belonging in Mathare is informed by a shared experience of generations of government neglect and oppression (harking back to colonial times—Kimari, 2017), which prompts alternative forms of solidarity, spatial belonging, and social ordering. In the former's view, the urban settlement is imagined as part of the city, while in the latter's view, the same neighborhood, despite its proximity to the city center, is considered a space outside the city but still decidedly urban. This view complicates the notion of neighborhoods like Mathare as the "constitutive outside" of the city (Roy, 2011: 235, with reference to Mouffe, 2000: 12, quoted in Kimari, 2017: 32). Marginalized and criminalized spaces like Mathare are not just "othered" urban geographies, and bordered as such, but they are also traversed by relationships of power that make up the city thus rendering the outside-in and the inside-out.

In Mathare, such boundary-making has visible spatial and class effects seeing that areas with tenement buildings[7] are often perceived as housing "newcomers," whereas areas with iron-sheet shacks are largely considered to accommodate "natives." In Mlango, a ward in Mathare, native and newcomer positions intersect with space, class, and power in ways that have led to years of tensions and occasional flare ups of violence. This neighborhood is located on a slope, starting from Juja road and heading down toward one of the rivers that cut through the valley that constitutes Mathare. The higher grounds have partly been legalized by resident cooperatives during the 1960s and 1970s that later sold the land to private developers who invested in tall, rickety, and densely populated flats. The lower parts, closer to the river, have largely remained government land on which people live mainly in iron-sheet houses as squatters. People from Mlango ya Juu ("Mlango Up" in Kiswahili) are mostly taken (and take themselves) as "newcomers" and people living Kiandaa

("Down" in the Kikuyu language) consider themselves (and are perceived) as "natives." Indeed, several residents who self-identified as "newcomers" explained to me over the years that they saw themselves as different from "natives" who they often described using terms such as "lazy" and "criminal." In return, self-proclaimed "natives" often imagine "newcomers" as the embodiment of "opportunism" and "greed."

Strikingly, experiences of difference between residents who imagine themselves as "newcomers" or "natives" manifest quite similarly in most urban settlements in Kenya,[8] even if in practice such general distinctions are often hard to make. In almost all of these neighborhoods, both putative "newcomers" and "natives" take "newcomers" as more successful. "Newcomers" are widely considered to live in better housing, thrive more in business, and have better access to local authorities and concomitant opportunities. Self-identified "newcomers" often explain their imagined lead by referring to their hard work and focus, and point at the alleged criminality of "natives" to justify their own widely held advantage. One self-proclaimed "newcomer" in Mlango called Mama Debo repeatedly said to me during an interview in January 2017: "natives want quick money, they will do anything to get money quick." Conversely, self-identified "natives" often clarify their putative shared position by taking "newcomers" as "invited by powerful people to work," i.e. work that should have been given to "natives" instead, and by hinting at their "selfishness." Obviously, such dynamics play out somewhat differently in each urban settlement, but the general tenet remains the notion of the "hardworking newcomer" and "criminal native," or vice versa, the "opportunistic newcomer" and "oppressed native." It is important to bear in mind that such imagined binaries constantly shift according to changing power configurations, and therefore they need to be considered in the context of broader historical and political processes and events and in connection to local developments in a particular neighborhood.

However, key to the discussion here is the framing of "natives" by self-professed "newcomers" as criminal, for this resonates with the popular criminalization in Nairobi of residents in urban settlements in general and of young and poor urban men in particular, i.e. as "thugs." Putative "newcomers" are also positioned in this broader discursive framework as residents of urban settlements, but many try to resist this subjectivation by drawing ever-tighter boundaries between the "real" criminals and them. Following these concentric circles of "us" versus "them," the cityscape is not only reproduced within the settlement, for instance through re-defining the ghettoscape within, but it is also produced by the fault lines inside this settlement. Yet, these fault lines do not always follow neat spatial divisions between "Up" and "Down" as is further illustrated by a member of a community policing committee from "Mlango Down" called Mama Maina in January 2019:

> You look at all those plots [the flats 'Up'], but they ['newcomer' residents] only came yesterday. We grew here, raised our children, we went to school here, huh, there . . . where those private developers have grabbed. How can they say they own. Okay, maybe they bought land, but not all land, and they all live in stone houses, while we in Kiandaa ('Down'), we live in ghetto (i.e. iron sheet houses and other types of make-shift housing). How can they own so much and we have nothing but we grew up here? They are thieves, they take all opportunities and leave nothing for us.

In general terms, "Down" in Mlango is widely interpellated as part of the ghettoscape while "Up" as part of the cityscape, which is where people live in stone houses with services such as water, garbage collection, and security (often privately sourced). The recognition of "Up" as part of the cityscape is thus evinced by its inclusion, albeit piecemeal, in government

services and development projects. The imagined borders inside Mlango inform bounding orders among people, for instance illustrated by Mama Maina's use of "us" in the above excerpt. The imagined conflation between class and spatial positions occupied by "natives" and "newcomers" in Mlango reflects visible and invisible ordering principles, with the latter often regarded from the outside as disorder but from the inside as a mode of protection through its labyrinthine set-up. Nevertheless, she also identifies "Up" both as here and there (when referring to the school or growing up) and "Up" and "Down" as both separate and together (when indirectly alluding to an in- and outside with regard to Mlango when saying "here"), which reveals the shiftiness and elasticity of spatial borders and bounding orders. Rows of tenement buildings "Up" are indeed often interspersed with shacks, creating a hotchpotch of putative orders and disorders and as such of ordering and bordering practices and spatial belongings. The spatial intertwinement of all these differences again underscore that in practice such distinctions do not hold, but such imaginaries do bring into effect borders within Mlango, even if rather temporal, selective, and porous. Accordingly, the ensuing bounding orders of "Up" and "Down," of "in- and outside" and of "us" and "them," though punctuated and fleeting, contribute to the permissive spaces for police killings in neighborhoods like Mathare, as further explored below.

Police killings and bounding orders in Mlango, Mathare

During our conversation in January 2019, Mama Maina continued:

> Those private developers (of tenement buildings 'Up'), they work together with the police, against us. They take all opportunities, and when our youth fight this, they can just send a picture to the police [meaning they will end up being killed by 'killer cops'].

Here, she conjures up the widely held notion by "natives" that all local informers to police are "newcomers." This is an interesting evocation by her considering her own affiliation to police and seeing that in many neighborhoods in Mathare and other settlements, police are known to also work with so-called native informers. When I asked her about this, she emphasized that she "is not a *mtihaji*" (one of the words often used locally to describe informers), which she underscored by recounting how she on multiple occasions had used her position to protect crime suspects from "Down" from being killed by "killer cops." The term *mtihaji* can also mean "traitor" or "enemy" in popular use, and as such alludes to immorality, otherness, and threat.

Indeed, police killings in Mlango, and many other settlements, tie in deeply with contesting positions of morality that inform seemingly opposing bounding orders. Despite the fact that informers may come from both sides of the putative divide between "natives" and "newcomers," it is widely maintained by both "groups" that the majority are "newcomers" and that the few "native" informers are anomalous. During interviews, many self-identified "newcomers" who support police killings claimed the moral upper hand by suggesting that, especially, young, male "natives" are criminals and choose to engage in crime because they "do not want to work," see also Mama Debo above, hence they "deserve to be killed" (Kiama, 2017). The juxtaposition of being "hardworking" or "lazy," already noted above, highlights the moral ordering within the "othering" narratives and ensuing bordering practices at play. The enactment of boundaries between "us from Up" as "upright and hardworking citizens" and "them from Down" as purported "thugs" is reinforced by consistent police back-up of residents from "Up" against residents from "Down," and even by cash payments per reported case.

In response, residents from "Down" often imagine alternatives to such dominant notions of morality to meet their local experiences and emphasize "togetherness" as part of their bounding order. The act of informing thus becomes the antithesis of what bounds people "Down." One self-proclaimed "native" young man from "Down" explained in April 2017:

> Watu wakukam ('newcomer' in local slang) did not grow up with us. So they can tell on you, point you out [to police to be killed]. Share your name with police, say you are a thief. They don't have that ghetto bond we, wazaliwa ['natives' in Kiswahili] have. We grew up together, and we can never tell on each other. How? He is my neighbor, he is my friend, he is my cousin, we are very close in mtaa.

Unsurprisingly, such tensions also play out between *bazes* (groups of mostly young men often taken as gangs in dominant discourse) (Githinji, 2006). In fact, young "native" and poor men are disproportionally affected by police killings in Mlango because of the police support for "newcomer" *bazes*. Both *bazes* from "Up" and "Down" in Mlango take themselves as security providers, yet "newcomer" *bazes* tend to work together with police against "native" *bazes*, whereas "native" *bazes* often take "newcomer" *bazes* as much as a threat as they do police.

On 22 March 2016, such tensions climaxed into a violent clash in Mlango of which the ripple effects are still palpable today. On that day, a uniformed and widely known police officer from the Pangani police station nearby allegedly paid members from a local "newcomer" *baze* to mete out what is popularly termed "mob justice" to a "native" young man who was accused of being a thief. This accusation resonated with their views of "native" young men as "thugs," and they burned the suspect to death in front of a growing crowd of people while the police officer watched from the side-line. This instantaneously sparked a revenge attack from a nearby "native" *baze*, which in turn elicited a swift mobilization of several "newcomer" *bazes* to fend off this attack. Within minutes several "newcomer" and "native" bazes were at each other's throats with machetes and clubs, and both received resistance from an ever-growing crowd of other residents trying to quell the fight. The police did not intervene until the night fell and people were finally able to take stock of what had happened. Two more people had died, over a dozen had been seriously wounded, numerous houses had been burnt, and even more businesses had been looted. Since then, security provision by "native" *bazes* has openly become a mode of protection against "newcomer" *bazes* that continued to enjoy powerful back-up by the police, especially by the notorious "killer cop" mentioned above. As a result, some of these groups did not only inform on alleged "native thieves" to police, but also started killing these suspects themselves with police approval. A young man from "Down" called this: "remote control police killings," which led to new conflicts between "Up" and "Down" and in turn new police killings of "native" young men from "Down." Besides killings, young men from "Down" were frequently arrested by police without charge only to be released after paying hefty bribes, which these men felt forced to pay as one of them explained in August 2018:

> They [police] see us as [a mobile bank], they come, put us in the boot [of a car], sometimes too many, you can't breathe. Of course you pay, [20 €, 50 €], you can just lose your life if you don't pay.

Late January 2019, the tensions between "Up" and "Down" in Mlango flared up again after a few months of relative calm. Several nights, plain-cloth police officers patrolled the lower part after receiving rumors of a pending demonstration by young men from "Down." This alleged demonstration was believed to have been organized because these men felt neglected

yet again after a project by the wife of the Nairobi governor called *Ng'arisha jiji na mama* ("clean the village with mama" in Kiswahili) had only involved a particular group from "Up." Such projects often meant short-term work and long-term investment opportunities for *bazes* involved. This had been the umpteenth time, according to some of the young men from "Down," that they had been denied opportunities in favor of groups from "Up." During an interview, one of the self-appointed leaders from "Down" shared:

> You see this line, it is just close, but it is a border. I can't cross it. Just there, that road. If I cross it I am dead. It is just there but it is a different world. I can't pass, I have to take a [motorcycle taxi] and go around it to go to Juja road if I need to take a [minibus]. They (residents from 'Up') take all the projects for themselves, their own people, but we (residents from 'Down') are in ghetto and need it more. They ignore us, exclude us, we can't tolerate this. This war has been going on for…since we grew up. We grew with it. That grudge is deep, we can't solve it. Look at this scar, and this one, and this one. This war, sometimes it is low, but then it picks up again, like now.

The demonstration never happened. After a week of tensions between "Up" and "Down" and heightened police surveillance of "Down," the group of young men from "Up" that had benefitted from the aforementioned project violently confronted young men from "Down" together with several police officers. This attack badly injured several young men from "Down." Nursing their wounds, they stated that they were preparing to revenge, but the police support of the group from "Up" installed great fear among them, hence they resorted to short spurts of attacks. Some nights, they would run up the hill in small groups, armed with machetes and other weapons, to attack the "newcomer" *bazes*. Most nights, they ended up in a police cell because the police were omnipresent, even in the deep of the night. The sub-chief and a few very powerful political brokers had arranged with the governor's office for the group from "Up" to get this opportunity in return for their support during the 2017 election period. Police were summoned to push back the groups from "Down" and at the time of writing this article these tensions were still high.

The Mlango tensions between "Up" and "Down" reveal how the police in many of these neighborhoods make use of local divisions and power dynamics while policing these neighborhoods. Whether this is geared toward improving security or protecting their own criminal interests, or by decree from above remains a question, but as noted by the Pangani officer above, police officers often resort to manipulating local tensions because many are frequently transferred to other areas. Some may even stay in one location for as brief as three months. Following this, forging alliances with "newcomer" informers and *bazes* is one of the few ways police officers can access local knowledge and gain some kind of control of urban settlements, at least at the diffracting borders that simultaneously carve up and enmesh these neighborhoods. Also, many officers come from rural areas and have very little understanding of urban settlements, thus their actions may also be informed by aforementioned stereotypes that are often readily affirmed by the informers and *bazes* they choose to work with.

The imagined fault lines between "natives" and "newcomers" are not stable, as is illustrated by Mama Maina who works together with police to surveil her part of the neighborhood despite identifying as a "native." Hence, she brings out that "nativeness" does not necessarily indicate opposing police. The underlying problem is that borders and bounding orders are hard to maintain and easy to transgress. Deep uncertainty lingers about who belongs to "us" and who to "them." Notions of "us" and "them" based on singular ideas of "newcomers" versus "natives," police versus urban settlements, and "upright and

hardworking citizens" versus "criminals" constantly intersect with and are unsettled by other social ties. This became brutally clear during a police killing I witnessed in Majengo, another urban settlement in Nairobi near Mathare. On 20 February 2017, two young men were killed by an administrative police officer near the edge of the historic Kamukunji grounds and in front of hundreds of witnesses. Minutes after the shooting occurred, another administrative police officer came running toward him. She was screaming, shouting at the top of her lungs and when she reached him she started beating her colleague down to the ground. It turned out he had just killed her brother.

Concluding remarks

To understand the ubiquity and impunity of police killings in Nairobi, it is crucial to take into account the way such practices are implicated in local power configurations and struggles for belonging inside the most affected neighborhoods. The local social divisions that enable and contest police killings have spatial effects that complicate the notion of urban settlements as the "constitutive outside" of the city. The city is reimagined and produced in these neighborhoods through the enactment of multiple diffracting inner- and outer sides, and the shifting borders that ensue are marked by police violence. Looking at the interplay between policing, local borders, and moral orders within settlements allows a deeper understanding of the persistence of excessive police violence in these urban settings. It opens up a view on the way police violence becomes "permissible" through local negotiations between antagonistic actors, which adds to analyses of police killings that explore public concerns over crime and criminal justice, political mechanization, and individual motivations (of for instance police officers).

As developed by Cooper-Knock (2018), the notion of permissive space captures the idea that "those who act illegally must negotiate their impunity with other citizens and the state, so as to avoid repercussions for their actions either within or beyond the criminal justice system" (29). The Mlango case reveals how different and differing spaces of impunity, in terms of scale, discourse, and actors, interact and reinforce or contract one another. The imagined groupness in Mlango of "natives" and "newcomers," though ephemeral and shifting, engendered equally capricious borders and bounding orders that interacted with permissive spaces of police violence at a city-scale (and even nationwide), in part mediated through digital negotiations. Particular forms of police killings were made permissible by some residents through the temporal and spatial negotiations of otherness in Mlango, that fixed other residents as "natives," which were reinforced by broader discourses on the "thug" and the "ghetto." At times, such negotiations legitimized the direct execution of "native" young men by police away from public view but at other times they also contested police manipulation of "immediate justice," as illustrated by the March 2016 clashes.

The positionalities of the different actors in local configurations of permissibility of and contestations to police killings elucidate how notions of "us" and "them" pertain to ideas of criminality and security, and also how these potentially shift. In the aftermath of the March 2016 clash, Mlango residents, "natives" and "newcomers" alike, united as "us Mlango" against "them police" and for some time police killings were not allowed because of the damage done. However, when crime increased, several bazes from "Up" were pressured by many residents from "Up" to revitalize partnership with police, which led to a sharp increase of killings of "native" young men by police and/or baze members in 2018. The February 2019 clash can be read as a response to this increase of violence against "native" young men and to the purported structural exclusion of bazes from "Down" from (government) "projects." The fact that "this war" waxes and wanes illustrates that

permissive spaces for police killings, and the manipulation of local tensions by police and other authorities, to some measure perpetuate because contesting actors lack leverage to close or even collapse them. This lack derives from their dehumanized position in society as "ghetto" residents, which acquires particular meanings in Mlango through the frantic differentiation technologies of residents who position themselves as "newcomer" and thus "not ghetto." "Newcomer" residents and baze members who draw on the dominant "thug"-epithet to mark boundaries between "us" and "them" and legitimize police killings of "native" young men are emboldened by the popularity of the various "Hessy pages" and the lack of a wider public outcry against such unlawful violence by police. Dehumanized "native" young men do not (yet) have such powerful discursive resources at their disposal to contest the localized permissive spaces of police killings.

Accordingly, the othering and ensuing dehumanization of "natives," and of "native" young men in particular, simultaneously echoed broader structures of exclusion, state violence, and exploitation and emerged from a convergence of different localized struggles. The struggle to belong to the city among residents was compounded by struggles over resources (such as the project by the governor's wife), order, and security. At the same time, police struggled to gain control in unfamiliar settings while also reaping rewards. Hence, the focus on police killings as a bordering practice highlighted the interaction between police work and the local vicissitudes of bordering and bounding and how these pertained to the production of city- and ghettoscapes not only within but also without the city, even if still urban. As part of the situated micro dynamics of spatial production, the "killer cop" arose not as a rogue character but as an indication of broader configurations of in- and exclusion that make up the urban in Nairobi. The borders of the city, cutting deep into the ghetto, were thus mapped onto the bodies of young "native" men and made permanent through the act of killing them.

Notes

1. I use the term police killings instead of extra-judicial killings by police because, without legal investigations, it is impossible to define these as extra-judicial, even if nearly all such deaths are widely assumed to be as a result of illegal use of force by police. This assumption is corroborated by the fact that nearly all cases of young men killed in Mathare, as accounted for by the Mathare Social Justice Centre (MSJC, 2017), were shot in the back by police. For more information on the scope and scale of police killings, see Van Stapele (2016).
2. Police killings also occur regularly in other urban and rural areas, but due to the scope of this article, I only focus on police killings in Nairobi.

3. With settlement, I here denote marginalized urban neighborhoods that house the majority of the city's population in Nairobi. Most parts of these neighborhoods are still considered illegal or at least informal by the government and people live here mainly as squatters in iron-sheet rooms and other type of make-shift housing. Other parts are legalized through cooperatives (for instance) and private developers, but residents continue to lack adequate housing, sanitation, water, garbage collection, and electricity provision. Also, these neighborhoods have high crime rates and high incidences of police brutality, especially when compared to other neighborhoods in Nairobi.

4. Focus group discussion with (different types of) Community Policing members and Baze members in Shauri Moyo and Majengo, 18 January 2019. Interviews with residents in different wealthy and marginalized neighborhoods in Nairobi between January 2016 and February 2019.

5. I explore in my other work (see, e.g. Van Stapele, 2016; Van Stapele, forthcoming) why young men in particular are targeted by police killings in Kenya. In this article, I chose to focus on a highly underexplored social division, i.e. between "native" and "newcomer," in which these young men are also profoundly implicated.

6. I have been engaged with community-led organizing in Kenya since 1998 and in academic research since 2005. I combine academic and community-led research with support for local action and organizing (for instance against police killings), and subsequently I have spent three months on average annually in Kenya for the past two decades (ranging from six months to two months per year).

7. The term tenement is used by Huchzermeyer (2007, 2011) to describe multi-story stone buildings in Mathare and other Nairobi low-income neighborhoods that have one and two-room apartments that are generally rented by low-income families and which are privately owned.

8. I have observed similar tensions in Korogocho and Majengo in Nairobi and in Majengo in Mombasa, in Kenya.

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