The Routes of Rule: The Role of Roads in Kenyan Governance and

Popular Evaluations of "Development" and Authority, 1890s-1992

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A thesis in the Department of

History

Presented in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

(History)

at Concordia

University

April 2014

Concordia University
School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

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Entitled: The Routes of Rule: The Role of Roads in Kenyan Governance and
               Popular Evaluations of "Development" and Authority, 1890s-1992

And submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (History)

Complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with
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ABSTRACT

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Emma Park

My dissertation explores the "politics of mobility" over the course of Kenya's colonial and postcolonial histories. Moving between the technopolitical strategies of the state and the quotidian practices of Kenyans, I consider how technologies of mobility have mediated social relationships, turning movement itself into a contested category of political action. In doing so, I track how colonial and postcolonial authorities have used road networks, the rights to mobility, and the circulation of the technologies associated with roads – bicycles, motorcycles, cars, and *matatus* (minibuses) – to reward "loyal" constituencies, thereby variously marking inclusion and exclusion from popular though contested visions of "development" and "modernity."

Combining the insights of cultural studies and anthropology, with those of science studies, this research both tracks how the material and infrastructural routes of colonial and post-colonial governance have been used to extend coercive authority and, concomitantly, how these technologies have been appropriated by populations, becoming rich idioms as well as central material sites for popular expressions of discontent. To this end, this dissertation explores how roads are used as a central organizing theme in Kenyan discussions of the relative "development" of the country, discussions that popularly express regional understandings of the deprivations associated with state and everyday forms of corruption.

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My friend Judy and I met in downtown Nairobi late one afternoon. We agreed to find one another at the Hilton hotel, which functions as a familiar landmark, its un-gated periphery a typical meeting place in the centre of Kenya's capital city. The city itself is a place to which many people feel a rather ambivalent attachment. Indeed, affective attachments to the capital are very rarely articulated. There are moments when it seems that no one lives in Nairobi despite the large "informal" and suburban settlements that compose the city's periphery. The common response to the question: "where are you from?" is reference to one of the regions outside of Nairobi, irrespective of the length of time one's been domiciled in the growing metropolis. Within this context streets, though officially named, are not used as spatial points of reference.

The unused names of Nairobi's streets follow the familiar itinerary of nationalist histories, representing the attempt to inscribe the official story in space - a process of erasure whereby the contradictions and the contentious issues inherent to any history are effaced. The official street names are as familiar as the figures to which they refer: Kenyatta Avenue (first president of independent Kenya), Moi Avenue (second president of independent Kenya), Mboya Street (referring to Tom Mboya, vocal activist in the colonial period and Minister of Economic Planning and Development under Kenyatta, who was assassinated in 1969), and so on. However, it is monuments such as the Hilton, the National Archives, and Government House that operate as points of reference structuring the social space of the city.

Initially, I contextualized Kenyans' ambivalent relationship with the city's road infrastructures against the backdrop of the relative want abetted by the absence of social spending that has by and large characterized the post-colonial period, particularly following the neo-liberal reforms of the 1980s. However, this reading presents a series of problems. In particular, it does not account for practices of "popular" naming, which reflect an appreciation for the importance of marking time(s) and space(s) through appellations. The parts of the built environment whose names are used tell a different sort of story. A story that highlights a history of asymmetries of power as they are effected through the organization of space and the (geo)political regimes that are their conditions of possibility. For example: Kipande Street (a reference to the hated registration system of the colonial period); Vietnam (the name of a region in Mathare, one of the city's "informal" settlements); Katrina Hotel (opened after the 2005 hurricane that struck the Gulf Coast of the United States). The names that stick suggest that the popular readings of space that resonate are those which reference a long history of imperialism and inequality. In other words, as my research continues, I have come to suspect that people's engagement with the space of the city, like the naming of businesses and neighbourhoods, must be contextualized against the backdrop of a longer, specifically colonial, history.

As I argue, this prevailing spatial logic is part and parcel of the history of people's engagement with the urban space of the capital – and its excluded peripheries - as it was shaped by policies of the colonial government, which explicitly and continuously attempted to limit Africans' access to the urban core. These policies functioned to organize social space so as to secure the reproduction of asymmetric social relations, and

have left a legacy which informs popular readings of the role of space in the extension and maintenance of various forms of socio-economic and political marginalization. This complex and fraught history has shaped people's engagements with the urban landscape, as well as the conceptual space it occupies, in critical ways.

I bring up these anecdotes because they touch on some of the ideas and questions that will be explored in what follows: namely, the role of space in popular readings of power and the particular importance of discussions of roads and technologies of mobility in these readings.

And now a return to the beginning – Prelude Part II

Having gone for tea and exchanged books Judy and I decided to go to Kengeles, a bar close to the Terminal Hotel where I was staying at the time. On our walk away from "town" - the eight to ten block radius that composes the financial and administrative core of Nairobi - Judy explained to me how much things had changed since 2002 when Daniel arap Moi was finally removed from power. During Moi-era Kenya, the city streets were not electrified and the city was full of hawkers and parking boys, she told me. During the Moi years the city was marked as a place of insecurity: "There is no way I would have walked at night back then," she explained. In this statement, Judy tapped into a long and powerful discourse on "development" in Kenya; a discourse wherein the passing of time and the changing contours of the political life of the country are popularly expressed through reference to expansions and contractions in the infrastructural life of the country.

When we arrived at Kengeles, we started talking about the political situation in the country in the aftermath of the violence that followed the 2007 electoral race, which led to the eventual power sharing agreement between incumbent President Mwai Kibaki

and now Prime Minister, Raila Odinga. After having ordered Gilbey's and lime cordial conversation turned to Odinga. To me, there was something appealing about this political figure. As a Luo from Western Province he identifies himself with a region and community that widely perceives itself as having been excluded from Kenyan politics – something which is hotly contested - and the various spoils that attend representation in the highest echelons of power. [1] Indeed, it was Odinga's Orange Democratic Movement (ODM), which challenged the arguably defunct Kenyan electoral system, alleging that Kibaki's Democratic Party (DP) had fixed the election, an accusation widely held to be true. Kibaki spilt from Kenya African National Union (KANU), which had been in power since independence, following the 1992 transition to multi-party politics. While both men had occupied roles in government throughout the years of an increasingly venal single-party system, it seemed to me that Odinga was something of an underdog in this race, representing a portion of the electorate that has been marginalized since the country gained independence in 1964. Judy quickly and easily dispelled this perception. "Raila," she challenged, "he's been the MP of Kibera for years and what has he done for them?"- Kiberia being arguably the largest "informal" settlement in sub-Saharan Africa, its estimated population hovering around the million-person mark. Moreover, and this was part of her point, it is composed of a population that, for years, was rendered functionally non-existent – not being included in the official census, this population was effectively denied citizenship. Incredulous, I asked her why people, now included in the census, continued to elect him as their MP – "Because he's a Luo" she said without hesitation. I pressed her to explain this phenomenon, wanting to understand the motivation behind

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[1] David William Cohen and E.S. Atieno Odhiambo, *The Risks of Knowledge: Investigations into the Death of the Hon. Minister John Robert Ouko in Kenya, 1990,* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004).

electing him given his supporters were not benefiting from having a co-ethnic as their

MP. Trying to explain what I perceived to be somewhat idiosyncratic voting behaviour

Judy employed a communicative device that proliferates in everyday discussions in

contemporary Kenya:

> You know, it's like Roads. For years, these roads were in total disrepair, there were holes to the centre. People paid money to have them repaired, a lot of people's money went to that, and where did it go? It's the same in Kibera. Odinga comes and promises that there will be toilets put in, and where are the toilets, where have they gone. He just keeps eating and they keep voting to let him eat. Before, no one said anything, they just kept quiet and kept giving money for roads and nothing happened. Now, now it's not like that. Now people ask what road is going to be built, what road is going to be repaired…They want to know where their money is going, and if nothing is done people ask questions, they protest. The difference now, what I love about Kenyans now, is that they know their rights.[2]

Encapsulated in this simile, in this drawing of likeness through analogy, Judy

communicated a common wisdom and a popular frame of reference through which

various socio-economic and political processes are indexed and debated in contemporary

Kenya.

In mobilizing the language of infrastructural development and accountability,

Judy tapped into a conversation about uneven development as it occurs across space. In

that moment something became clear to me. People's ambivalence toward Nairobi was

not necessarily the result of them having greater attachment to their "home" regions. By

raising this discourse of roads, Judy was pointing to a conceptual link that exists between

the organization of space and the reproduction of those myriad social relations that secure

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[2] These anecdotes are based on a conversation with my friend, Judith Maina, in the summer of 2008 when I conducted my first round of fieldwork in Nairobi. Though this was an oral dialogue, the word "Roads" has been capitalized because, since the 1980s, the generic term has been deployed as a proper noun in the Kenyan print-media, reflecting the important conceptual place "Roads" occupy in postcolonial Kenyan discussions of "development," the location of wealth and value, and social adulthood.

the marginalization of certain populations to the advantage of others. Space, in other words, is not thought by Kenyans as a neutral container within which social relations unfold; rather, its organization is thought to be a critical component in the constitution of those relations. Statements such as Judy's confirm in more potent clarity Edward Soja's observation that: "relations of power and discipline are inscribed in the apparently innocent spatiality of social life, [and that]…human geographies [are]…filled with politics and ideology."[3] Privileging the neutrality of spaces, it seems to me, is a privilege of the privileged. For the majority of Kenyans there is nothing neutral about the organization of space and theorists, as well as historians and anthropologists, ought to follow their lead.

As alluded to, this banal reference to roads could be explained away as a product of the economic difficulties of the postcolonial era, particularly since the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s. Within this temporal framework, these statements appear to be nothing other than everyday expressions of exasperation with the "politics of ethnicity" that have characterized the postcolonial Kenyan political system, or mundane articulations of discontent with the perceived failures of the "promises of modernity" in the context of a faltering economy. There is a good deal to this reading. The Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) implemented at the behest of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, as representatives of the neoliberal world order precipitated the economic crisis of the 1980s, the effects of which were palpable to the population. Following the initiation of SAPs, the standard of living in Kenya declined precipitously for the majority of the population as the county's infrastructures and social services

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[3] Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory,* (London; New York: Verso, 1989), 6.

deteriorated and unemployment rates reached unprecedented levels. To compound the

situation, the venality of the Moi regime was increasingly visible to the struggling

majority, corruption forcing the rate of inflation from 19.6 per cent to 27.5 per cent in

1990. These conditions forced Moi's hand and he begrudgingly conceded to donors'

demands, transitioning the country to a multiparty political system in the same year.[4] In

other words, it is without question that the experiences of the 1980s and 1990s have

shaped Kenyans' relationship with the concepts of "development" and "modernity" as

they are read through and across space.[5] Roads, within this complex political and

economic terrain have come to function as an explanatory device, emerging as a central

indexical tool in popular discussions of corruption and relative development as they are

read through the prism of ethno-regional patterns of stratification in the neoliberal

present.

To understand why this conceptual framework resonates so thoroughly for

Kenyans, however, it is necessary to situate it not simply as a reaction to the conditions

that have characterized the neoliberal era. Such a temporally bounded and narrow

explanation cannot account for why it is roads in particular that have been taken up as a

central idiom capable of expressing such density of meaning. Looking only to the

postcolonial era precludes the possibility of excavating the series of intimately related

and historically resonant ideas and conceptual fields that Judy conjured by mobilizing

roads as idiom. A closer examination of the lexical framework, which attends to the

pointed references to fraught socio-economic and political dynamics, suggests Judy was

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[4] Angelique Haugerud, *The Culture of Politics in Modern Kenya,* (Cambridge; New York:
Cambridge University Press, 1995), 34.
[5] James Howard Smith. *Bewitching Development: Witchcraft and the Reinvention of Development
in Neoliberal Kenya.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

tapping into a much more complex set of interrelated discourses with a much longer history.

In other words, popular discussions of the conditions of roads in Kenya extend beyond the obvious referent – roads proper – and taps into a series of historically deep discourses and practices. The idiom of roads raises questions about differential access to space and resources as they are associated with the rights of mobility. They are stories of where and for who capital is allowed accumulate and, concomitantly, stories of where power is popularly located and how its reproduction is secured. Discussions of roads, then, embody discourses of "development," which link movement through space to socio-cultural and economic mobility.

By linking infrastructural development to the conditions of possibility for individual action, these narratives reveal a reading of power that extends beyond the state. They point to the role of inter-generational conflict and ethno-regional patterns of stratification in the reproduction of inequalities as they are secured by circumscribing access to both literal and symbolic forms of cultural and material capital. If we accept the premise that roads have become an idiom through which power and, equally, its perceived absence is expressed, and accept that roads act as a stand in for both individual and collective "development," equal attention must be paid to the place of technologies of mobility within this popular discourse. Central to roads discourse are the technologies that traverse these arteries – cars, lorries, bikes, *matatus* – which not only facilitate movement, but function as material markers of one's position on both socio-economic and cultural hierarchies.

Crucially, however, roads and their technologies are not simply positively coded, they are equally linked to the extension of the state's tentacular power. It is along Kenya's roads that people encounter semi-official forms of extraction exacted at government roadblocks strategically placed to curtail the mobility (both symbolic and material) of some. Conversely, roads are critical sites of ongoing contestation, attempted appropriation, and confrontation. As such, roads and technologies of mobility - thought as material forms through which power is mediated, circulated, and reproduced - are inherently two-sided, and it is this Janus-faced quality that makes the idiom of roads such a flexible, and itself mobile, discourse.

In order to unpack the density of meaning expressed through popular reference to roads and their related technologies it is necessary to trace their "cultural biographies" from the colonial era through to the present. [6] By approaching these technologies from the perspective of their longer histories, it will be possible to tease out the processes by which these material technologies have informed and structured Kenyan meaning-making in ways that at once complicate power's functioning and yet reinscribe it (though often not in the same register) by speaking in its terms. [7] The thesis to follow explores both how the material and infrastructural routes of colonial and postcolonial governance have

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[6] Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective,* ed. Arjun Appadurai, 64-94 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); See also, Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective,* ed. Arjun Appadurai, 3-63 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); For ways in which some of these ideas have been taken up in historical scholarship see Nancy Rose Hunt, *A Colonial Lexicon of Birth Ritual, Medicalization, and Mobility in the Congo,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); Luise White, *Speaking With Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa,* Berkley: University of California Press, 2000.

[7] For an example of another piece of Africanist scholarship that traces the history of concepts, see Janet Roitman, *Fiscal Disobedience: An Anthropology of Economic Regulation in Central Africa,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005)

been used to extend coercive authority and, concomitantly, examines how these technologies have been appropriated by the populace, becoming rich idioms as well as central material sites for popular expressions of discontent. Over the course of this analysis, I also explore the role of materialities, in this case technologies of mobility, in shaping not only Kenyan readings of what constitutes "development," but similarly in constituting multiply situated "modern" subjects.[8]

Theoretical Orientation: A Roadmap for What Is to Come

A historical unpacking of Judy's statement bears out the arguments of scholars who insist on the importance of a critical investigation of space and materialities in understanding relations of power. While working in a different register, Judy's critique speaks directly to the work of Timothy Mitchell, who observes that technologies and infrastructures, as they are linked to logic of modernity, are too often treated as neutral forces, their proliferation an inevitable process which, he argues, leads to a relatively "restrained understanding of violence."[9] Building on these insights, I have come to understand the extension of road-networks and the circulation of their related technologies as practical strategies of governance; however, strategies which have had unpredictable power effects. Historically, these technologies were both a means of securing productivity and extending the disciplinary reach of the colonial state. They were critical to the process by which populations were arranged "in ways that simplified the classic functions of taxation, conscription, and [the] prevention of rebellion."[10] They

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[8] Timothy Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption, & Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 15.

[9] Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity,* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2002), 14.

[10] James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 2.

were, in other words, critical to rendering the territory and its populations "legible," to borrow James C. Scott's formulation.

Despite the critical insights provided by scholars such as Mitchell and Scott, their analyses remain relatively top down. They do not address how the connections among space, technologies, and governance have been popularly taken up in ways that, I argue, articulate with and yet exceed the parameters of state-centered studies. As we have seen, in the contemporary period there is nothing neutral about popular roads discourse in Kenya. People identify and discuss these technologies in ways that speak precisely to their violence(s). However, they are also powerful signifiers of "development" and "modernity," which goes some way to explaining why technologies of mobility, in particular, are viewed as playing such a crucial role in mediating unequal social relationships. What follows thus situates the organization of space and the distribution of populations within it as critical to the reproduction of inequalities at the level of governance, and yet works to take seriously how these technologies have been taken up and made meaningful. It so follows that this thesis is interested in locating technologies that organize space as materialities that shape affective experiences of space and self. To do so, I explore the processes by which material instantiations of governance – in this case technologies of mobility – have been both taken up in discourse as powerful symbolic forms and the subsequent contestations that have emerged surrounding control over, and access to, these sites and objects.

Working between the quotidian critiques of Kenyans and the academic literature on technologies of governance, this study raises questions about the relative reach of the colonial state in the Kenya colony. Scholars of colonialism have long questioned the

impact of colonial rule on the lives of the colonized.[11] To this end, a number of scholars

have questioned the applicability of a Focauldian analysis of power in colonial spaces.

Typically, these studies argue that in contrast to the European context where modern

forms of discipline acquired the capillary reach that is the trademark of modern power, in

the context of the colony the reach of power was never so complete, knowledge of the

population never developed the thoroughness that typifies modern bio-power, and

discipline never acquired the positive qualities that ensures its seamless reproduction.[12]

While these arguments without a doubt point to significant problems in how a

Foucauldian analytic has been used in colonial contexts in general, and in the African

context in particular, they presuppose the centrality of the state and its subsidiary

institutions in the extension of power, thereby eliding a critical tenet of Foucault's

insights.[13]

For Foucault, the central concern was not directed toward locating the state as the

central locus of power. It was, rather, with identifying the locations where power takes on

particular densities, places he often identified as being external to the state.[14] In pursuing

this research agenda, he suggested studies direct attention toward:

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[11] Claude Meillassoux, *Urbanization of an African Community: Voluntary Associations in Bamako,* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 1968); Georges Balandier, *The Sociology of Black Africa: Social Dynamics in Central Africa,* trans. Douglas Garman, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970); Hunt, *Colonial Lexicon;* John Lonsdale, "The Moral Economy of Mau Mau: Wealth Poverty and Civic Virtue in Kikuyu Political Thought," in *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa. Book Two: Violence and Ethnicity,* (London: James Currey, 1992); Kaletso Atkins, *The Moon is Dead! Give Us Our Money: The Cultural Origins of an African Work Ethic, Natal, South Africa, 1843-1900,* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1993).

[12] Megan Vaughan, *Curing their Ills: Colonial Power and African Illness,* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991); Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995)

[13] Frederick Cooper, "Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History," *The American Historical Review,* Vol. 99, No. 5 (1994), 1533.

[14] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality,* trans. Robert Hurley, (New York: Vintage, 1980).

where and how, between who, between what points, according to what processes, and with what effects, power is applied. If we accept that power is not a substance, fluid, or something that derives from a particular source. Then…analysis could and would [identify]…power in terms of the set of mechanisms and procedures that have the role or function and theme, even when they are unsuccessful, of securing power. [15]

As this deeply historicist passage suggests, in trying to think power, inquiry ought to be directed at practices and the seeming ephemera of discourse rather than state apparatuses or institutions. For it is within discourse – conceived in the broadest sense - that "the positive mechanics [of power] will operate…[in] the full language of everyday, which will constantly reinforce it with new accounts."[16] Despite the sites of his own research, I think this insight demands that we expand our purview in an attempt to locate the disciplining effects of power not simply in the barracks, the prison, the hospital, but equally in the everyday, quotidian practices that confirm it by speaking in its terms.

As Janet Roitman reminds us, the utility of Foucault's method lies in its ability to reveal:

how the organization of knowledge gives rise to certain rationalities and practices, which are considered normal in specific, historical situations… [and it] also demonstrates how the organization of forms of knowledge and rationality structures resistance, certain forms becoming possible while others are not.[17]

These insights critically inform my attempt to elucidate the feedback among material processes of governance, discourse, and popular practice. It is an attempt, in other words, to elucidate the genealogy of roads discourse; a discourse which, I argue, has had just such a disciplining function. This analysis excavates the processes by which roads

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[15] Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France, 1977-78,* ed. Michel Senellart,(New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 2.

[16] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison,* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 112.

[17] Roitman, *Fiscal Disobedience,* 46.

discourse has come to embody a shared world of meaning and common-sense understandings of how socio-economic and cultural exclusions are forged and maintained.

In this regard, this study shares some of the concerns highlighted by Achille Mbembe in his discussion of the functioning of power in the postcolony. Through putting discourse – again, broadly defined - at the centre of analysis, Mbembe demonstrates the ways in which power functions according to a system of signs and, correspondingly, the cultivation of common-sense dispositions that serve to reaffirm power with each successive iteration.[18] In contrast to Mbembe, for whom the reproduction of power in the postcolonial African context is more or less seamless, leading to the mutual *zombification* of the subject and the *commandant*, we will, I hope, be able to see the doubled processes by which power can be rerouted *as* it is reproduced.

To tap into this process of doubling it will be necessary to unravel the historical trajectories that have located this cluster of ideas in roads discourse by placing seemingly mundane practices at the centre of analysis. Scholars have long noted the central place of the politics of the everyday in the construction of meaning. An analysis of the banal, it is suggested, reveals how broader structures of meaning are received and remade at the level of practice.[19] It is in this way that, as Jean and John Comaroff have noted, everyday routine constitutes a: "form of symbolic practice, [which is] part and parcel of the more embracing 'discourses' and 'technologies' that establish or contest regimes of rule."[20] It

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[18] Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony,* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2001), 102
[19] Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff eds. *Modernity and Its Malcontents: Ritual Power in Postcolonial Africa,* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Alberto Arce and Norman Long *Anthropology, Development and Modernities: Exploring Discourses, Counter-Tendencies and Violence,* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000); Raymond Williams
[20] Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, "Introduction," in *Modernity and Its Malcontents: Ritual*

is because roads discourse has been a critical part of discussions of power, inequality, and rights to access over the longer *durée* that makes it a crucial point of entry into broader discussions regarding the appropriate organization of society, politics, and culture.

This study, therefore, is not simply interested in how technologies of mobility function as explanatory frameworks. It is equally concerned with how these discourses have simultaneously operated as popular claims making devices in struggles over access to resources and rights of accumulation - struggles for which mobility is considered a necessary precondition.

In tracing out this history this study builds on recent work on the politics of popular discontent in postcolonial Africa, which has traced the ways discussions of inequality are popularly expressed through idioms that convey localized understandings of broader structural (trans)formations.[21] Though these studies address localized readings of the inequities that characterize postcolonial African political economies - addressing, for instance, discussions of witchcraft, the recent rise of Pentacostalism, and accusations of devil-worship - they focus on idioms that do not speak directly to the material effects of those inequalities. By contrast, my interest in examining roads as an explanatory device lies precisely in its ability to directly confront the concrete structures that ensure unequal distributions of wealth.

Finally, I am interested in tracing out some of the continuities between the

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Power in Postcolonial Africa, eds., Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), xvi.

[21] Peter Geschiere, *The Modernity of Witchcraft: Politics and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa,* trans. Peter Geschiere and Janet Roitman, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997); Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, "Introduction" in *Modernity and Its Malcontents: Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa,"* xi-1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Robert Blunt, "'Satan Is an Imitator': Kenya's Recent Cosmology of Corruption," in *Producing African Futures: Ritual and Reproduction in a Neoliberal Age.* ed. Brad Weiss, (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2004); James Howard Smith, *Bewitching Development.*

colonial and postcolonial eras by tracking the histories of technologies of mobility and their position within the social imaginary. Tracing both the ways roads have been used as a strategy of social control and popular attempts to circumvent that control, this study will address how the experience of colonialism, and the types of material and social inequalities popularly associated with it, continue to have purchase on postcolonial understandings of governmentality, particularly as it is related to socio-economic exclusions that inhibit achieving social adulthood.[22] In sum, the task of what follows is to uncover the historical precedents of, and the conditions of possibility for, the development and proliferation of this popular discourse on roads.

Chapter 1:

(Im)mobility and Colonial Modernity

> *The road is wanted for entirely administrative purposes, the control of a native population, and will not lead to any economic development.[23]*

Beginning in the early colonial period, this study addresses the colonial state's use infrastructural development as a tactic of governance. From its inception, the colonial state viewed these infrastructures as critical routes of rule, a strategy of spatial organization deployed with an eye to creating a disciplined labour force. In order to understand the prominence of discussions surrounding road construction and the distribution of technologies of mobility, however, it is necessary to first address the critical place of these objects in emergent British notions of "modernity."

The technological transformations that were part and parcel of the process of

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[22] Mbembe, *On the Postcolony;* Nicolas Argenti, *The Intestines of the State: Youth, Violence and Belated Histories in the Cameroon Grassfields,* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007).
[23] KNA - RP Armitage, DC Elgeyo District, 1939.

industrialization produced new engagements with space and temporalities of movement.[24]

First railroads, then improved road networks and automobiles, transformed popular

experiences movement and revolutionized the relationship between space and time.

Space, newly compressed, allowed travel at unprecedented speeds.[25] The extension of

these new routes across space, and the deployment of technologies across these

infrastructures, not only brought previously distant regions into contact but also allowed

for the emergence of centralized states, bureaucracies able to control previously isolated

regions with greater efficiency.

These technologies were thus critical to the development of new mechanisms of

discipline whose efficacy was contingent on the organization of space and the

enumeration of populations within it. As Mitchell writes: "overcoming…distances

through the construction of railways, roads, shipping canals, and telegraphs all involved

the creation of surfaces and enclosures, that could be opened, closed, extended, mastered,

and improved."[26]

The control over space and its standardization abetted efforts to regiment people

through the regularization of taxation and the collection of census records. The creation

of these administrative grids rendered populations "legible," a process which, as James C.

Scott has observed, required the simplification of differences on the ground. Through

processes of standardization, populations were thus transformed into data, easily

calculated and categorized; statistics gathered with unprecedented efficiency and stored

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[24] Brian Larkin, *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria,*(Durham: Duke University Press, 2008) ,75-76.
[25] *Ibid.*
[26] Mitchell, *Rule of Experts,* 79.

in central repositories.[27]

However, the creation of legible spaces did not produce a static system where movement was denied. "Modern" governmentality was less concerned with fixing populations in space than it was with ensuring people's "productive" movement *through* space, while simultaneously eliminating the threats such movements engendered.[28] These twin needs: facilitating movement while maintaining surveillance and securing productivity while minimizing resistance worked both to ensure the central state's ability to control its populations and, concurrently, paved the way for capitalist expansion.

Infrastructures of mobility – rail lines and surfaced roads – thus came to stand in for a certain envisioning of the modern. Infrastructures, writes historian Paul Edwards: "function…both conceptually and practically, as environment, as social setting, and as the invisible, unremarked basis of modernity itself."[29] The construction of infrastructures, on this reading, articulates humankind's domination over "nature," a category that emerges out of the very separation between the "social" and the "natural" that infrastructural developments facilitate.[30] As the foregoing suggests, infrastructures and technologies were not simply abstract stand ins for the modern, nor were they simply the material pre-requisites of modern governance, they were equally critical to the constitution of "modern," British subjectivities. As Michael Adas notes, Europeans "came to view science and especially technology as the most objective and unassailable

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[27] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*; Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*
[28] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish,* 65. While Foucault locates this at an earlier moment, these processes were, undoubtedly, shaped by the shifts precipitated by the industrial revolution and the emergence of the "modern," capitalist state.
[29] Paul Edwards, "Infrastructure and Modernity: Force, Time, and Social Organization in the History of Sociotechnical Systems," in *Modernity and Technology,* eds. Thomas J. Misa, Philip Brey and Andrew Feenberg, (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003), 186.
[30] As we will see, however, this seamless separation encountered, and continues to encounter, countless unravelings in spaces in the global south.

measure of their own civilization's past achievement and present worth."[31]

The intimate relationship between subject-formation and infrastructures was not limited to the metropolitan arena but was generalized, leading to the common perception that "modern" subjects could be created through their interaction with "modern" technologies.[32] In a kind of circular logic it was supposed that while human ingenuity was responsible for the invention of technologies, interaction with these selfsame technologies was capable of transforming the populations with whom they came into contact. Harry H. Johnston, leading representative of the colonial party in Africa and colonial official, articulated this common-sense link between the logic of infrastructures and technologies, and the "civilizing mission" when he proclaimed: "There is no civilizer like the railway."[33] In this statement, not only did Johnston express the link between technology and civilizational "uplift" but, in a double move, connected both to the reach of capital. By joining civilization to capitalist expansion, and capitalist expansion to technology, moreover, Johnston positioned technologies as the driving agents in history, thereby eliding the violence of their functioning.

Technologies, of course, are not neutral, but are necessarily "embedded in larger political and socio-cultural frameworks."[34] This insight requires an addendum, however. While technologies embody the ideologies of designers, that ideological content does not necessarily determine how technologies are used once set in motion, nor the meanings ascribed to them. That said there are limits to the ends to which technologies can be put,

[31]Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance,* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 134.
[32] Rudolf Mrazek, *Engineers of Happy Land: Technology and Nationalism in a Colony,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Larkin, *Signal and Noise*
[33] Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men,* 229.
[34] Libby Freed, "Conduits of Culture and Control: Roads, States, and Users in French Central Africa, 1890-1960," (PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2006),13-14.

which inhere in the very materiality of the technologies themselves. It is this vexed and doubled quality of technologies that, as Gabrielle Hecht astutely notes, constitute technologies as a terrain for "transforming, enacting, or protesting power relations within the social fabric."[35]

If we take this as our starting point, it so follows that roads and road-related technologies were as much implicated in the violence of colonialism as those practices that emerged out of more obviously imperial ideologies. Indeed, British readings of the relative advancement of populations were premised on this technologically driven vision "progress," which informed emergent discourses of racial inferiority. As Adas notes, those populations who favored technologies legible to the British *qua* "technologies" were situated as being closer to the British on the technological *cum* civilizational hierarchy. Speaking of road building, in particular, Adas writes: "proficiency [was] vital in winning…favorable assessments of …social development from a number of British travelers and missionaries."[36] Crucially, this method of mapping populations and their relative "development" would continue throughout the colonial period. African engagements with this technologically driven reading of "development" at once complicated and reinscribed the contours of this narrative as it was mediated through technologies of mobility.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

"Modern" infrastructures were thus part and parcel of the Enlightenment faith in the possibility of a "rationally" engineered world.[37] The "transparency" and "legibility"

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[35] Gabrielle Hecht, *The Radiance of France: Nuclear Power and National Identity After World War II,* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), 10.
[36] Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men,* 155.
[37] Mrazek, *Engineers of Happy Land;* Larkin, *Signal and Noise*

achieved through the extension of infrastructural networks in metropoles across Europe became the model (albeit imperfectly applied) for colonial governance. In the case of the Kenya colony, in particular, efforts to direct the flow of Africans' movements along infrastructures of mobility formed the crux of colonial praxis.

In part, this tactic of governance emerged piecemeal as a result of the particular contours of colonial capitalism in Kenya. Without an obvious extractable primary resource, the brunt of the colonial economy fell to the agricultural sector, particularly in the fertile Central Province and Rift Valley. Furthermore, the metropolitan prerogative of colonial self-sufficiency stipulated that all development be financed from within the colony itself.[38] To achieve this, large tracts of African land were expropriated and redistributed to European settler populations, creating large fenced off agricultural estates. In 1926, the administration established Native Reserves which, in theory, would provide for the subsistence of Africans inhabiting them.[39] However, in between these enclosed settlements and the reserves were populations of largely landless peoples who composed the main labouring force on European farms.[40]

Initially, these arrangements appeared to build on precolonial precedents, with *ahoi* (landless "tenants") acting as clients to wealthier land-holding patrons, only now the patrons were white. Whereas precolonial social arrangements were premised on alliances forged between *ahoi* and wealthy householders, an arrangement that was sealed by marriage allowing *ahoi* to claim the "female right to land," during the colonial period these paths to upward socio-cultural mobility were blocked. And *ahoi,* an identity

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[38] R.M.A. van Zwanenberg, *Colonial Capitalism and Labour in Kenya,* 1919-1939, (Kampala: East African Literature Bureau, 1975), xix.
[39] Claire Robertson, *Trouble Showed the Way: Women, Men, and* 14.
[40] Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya & Africa. Book One: State and Class,* (London: James Currey, 1992), 91.

acceptable within the precolonial Kikuyu moral economy, were denigrated. People

became "squatters."[41]

While various African "big-men," notably Chiefs "loyal" to the colonial state,

were able to exploit the new opportunities offered by emergent markets, for the bulk of

landless young men the estate system left fewer options.[42] In a manner that recalls the

processes of enclosure that Timothy Mitchell describes in the context of Egypt, the space

between the estates and the reserves functioned for these people:

> as a sort of prison…Reinforcing the discipline created by the walls and
> gates…was the power generated by the wider arrangements of which it was a part.
> This was the other side of the successful control of labor: the expansion of the
> estate system to eliminate the opportunity of escape to a less coercive
> alternative.[43]

This analysis could be applied to Central Kenya where newly configured social relations

were inscribed in the very process of reordering the territory's geography. Within this

system, the majority of Africans were to serve two intimately related functions. First,

they were to compose the labour force, facilitating the expansion of the productive

capacities of the settled farms and the holdings of local big men. Second, as subjects of

the crown they were to facilitate the "development" of the colony by being transformed

into a taxable body.[44]

The transformation of people into a population, a prerequisite for the creation of a

taxable base, required the extension of an administrative grid, and the development of

mechanisms to control people's movements. Almost immediately, then, these spatial

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[41] Lonsdale, "The Moral Economy of Mau Mau: Wealth Poverty and Civic Virtue in Kikuyu Political Thought," 339-340.
[42] Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley,* 92.
[43] Mitchell, *Rule of Experts,* 71.
[44] Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley,* 87.

arrangements worked to create what Janet Roitman terms "fiscal subjects."[45] The demands of labour ensured that the organization of space would not simply immobilize populations but would fashion spaces that were semi-porous; a strategy variously designed to keep African populations out of the settled schemas except as laborers, within their supposed districts of origin, and yet ensure the movement of some as seasonal laborers.

If the condition of possibility for the colonial economy was premised on attempts to circumscribe the ebbs and flows of populations' movements, unsanctioned mobility emerged as the foremost strategy of evasion. An examination of the events unfolding in the early tens in the Central Province, documented in the Kikuyu District Political Record Book, point to a number of processes that, while mutually constitutive in the broader colonial attempt to render the territory and population legible, remain distinct issues in the colonial record. Throughout the period, District Commissioners reported that headmen, either due to their own obstinance or that of the populations they governed, were unable to collect Hut Tax. In particular, headmen were having difficulty collecting tax from those living outside reserves on settler farms.[46] These "natives," administrators lamented, paid no heed to regulations governing taxation. This "problem," of course, was the direct product of the contradictions of colonial rule. The state required the outflow of migrant laborers and tenant farmers for its economy to function, yet *simultaneously* desired colonial populations be beholden to local "authorities" working at the behest of the colonial government.

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[45] Roitman, *Fiscal Disobedience*
[46] Kenya National Archives, hereafter KNA. PC/CP1/4/1

The Hut Tax regulation of 1901, and later the Poll Tax Ordinance of 1910, ensured that Africans bore the brunt of the costs of administering the territory. These fiscal measures not only ensured the legibility of people in space, but also mass African participation in the settler economy as laborers and tenant farmers, recursively enabling the material expansion of the state.[47] Indeed, in 1923, government revenue was 1.8 million pounds sterling, with African taxation in the same year being half a million pounds sterling; thus comprising nearly a third of total revenue.[48] In itself this might not be surprising, after all Africans composed the majority population. However, when these returns are read against the patterns of reinvestment the role of native-taxation in reproducing an economy dominated by settler interests becomes clear. As R.M.A. van Zwanenberg has shown, only 10 per cent of the taxes collected in African regions were reinvested locally and this revenue was predominantly devoted to paying the costs of future tax collection and the costs of administration. The other 90 per cent was taken out of African districts and redirected to other locations, making it "quite clear that the severity of African taxation was a direct consequence of the financial needs of the European *infrastructure*."[49]

These conflicting desires – required mobility, on the one hand, and enforced immobility, on the other - were in perpetual tension and were further complicated as people in greater numbers engaged in short- and long-term migrancy. "Local headmen," it was reported, "have no authority over them [laborers] and they are rapidly becoming undisciplined and developing the undesirable characteristics of the semi-civilized native,"

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[47] van Zwanenberg, *Colonial Capitalism,* xxi
[48] *Ibid.,* 77.
[49] *Ibid.*, 80. Emphasis mine.

one early Colonial Officer stationed in Central Province reported.[50] Although labour

migrancy was sanctioned, indeed encouraged, it was being deployed by Africans as a

strategy designed to evade the demands put to them by local headmen, undermining

headmen's authority in the process.[51]

For colonial administrators and local headmen alike, physical mobility was

connected to a perceived shift in the minds of the "young," whose travel rendered them

unwilling to concede to the demands of their "elders." These concerns broadly reflected a

colonial logic that linked "tradition" to a land-based stability, thereby positioning the

emergence of "undesirable" qualities as a direct outgrowth of the physical movement of

these laboring men. This, however, constituted a flagrant misinterpretation of the history

of the region, wherein social organization had long been premised on mobility;

movement a strategy deployed in pursuit of trade and alliances, the resulting relationships

secured through the bonds of blood brotherhood and fictive kinship.[52]

Effacing this longer history, headmen began initiating round-ups and meting out

punishments – namely in the form of compulsory labour - to increasing numbers of

"itinerant" persons in an attempt to halt the supposed rerouting of authority, prestige, and

capital achieved by these mobile populations.[53] As these events suggest, fixing

populations was not only critical to the functioning of the colonial economy as it relied

on the appropriation of the authority of "elders," it was equally crucial to colonial

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[50] KNA PC/CP1/4/1.

[51] Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley,* 120

[52] Charles H. Ambler, *Kenyan Communities in the Age of Imperialism: The Central Region in the Late Nineteenth Century,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 83. C.f. Godfrey Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu, 1500-1900,* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1974).

[53] Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley,* 93.

readings of the development of "modern" African subjectivities, something which will be discussed in greater detail in what follows.

While some used the possibility of capital accumulation promised by tenancy as a means of refusing the compulsory labor demanded by headmen, others challenged the state's spatial authority in more direct ways by relocating to spaces beyond the reach of the state's nascent surveillance apparatus. In 1910, the Provincial Commissioner of Central Province was notified that a settlement had been established on the Mau Escarpment, outside of the reserve, and therefore outside the spatial parameters sanctioned by the colonial state for African settlement. The report, which is quite typical, read as follows:

> Thirty-one Kikuyu, including 11 men were found on the hills with huts and shambas which shewed [*sic*] a residence of about 18 months. Each male adult was fined and imprisoned with Hard Labour for one month. All paid their Hut Tax to their respective headmen but as they had left their districts without permission from the latter they were brought back to Kikuyu and had all their huts burnt.[54]

In a gesture that would become increasingly common, people circumvented the demands of labor put to them by the colonial state through its native "proxies" by drawing on long-held strategies of mobility and relocating to spaces beyond its reach.[55] In this instance, even complying with the demands of taxation did not exculpate the spatial transgression represented by the settlement.[56] Though not stated in the report it is likely that the

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[54] KNA – PC/CP1/4/1

[55] Robertson, *Trouble Showed the Way,* 64; Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu, 1500-1900.*

[56] It is worth noting that to speak of indirect rule in the context of Kikuyuland (as elsewhere) is something of a misnomer. Kikuyu societies are acephalous, and the notion of a chiefly class was a foreign import for people in Central Kenya. People's relocation to the Mau Escarpment contra the rules of headmen, in other words, did not represent the breakdown of "traditional" authority but, rather, evidenced the endurance of strategies of immigration in the face of tumultuous social relations that typified precolonial patterns.

punishment for this transgression was roadwork, which comprised one of the main forms of compulsory labour demanded of Africans by the state.

Officially, forced labour on roads was reserved for "criminals." However, the structures of colonial governance provided innumerable opportunities for unsanctioned, but by and large licit, acts of coercion. Indeed, if it was argued (as it often was), that a prospective road would benefit "natives" (a claim that was often questionable) the state, through local headman, could legally call upon compulsory labour. This practice was naturalized by the 1912 Native Authority Ordinance, which provided the legal framework for the government's use of coercion to raise labor for infrastructural projects without remuneration. In this move, the government effectively created a system wherein African populations, particularly those that had been picked up by the nascent surveillance apparatus of the colonial state, were forced to forge the routes of administrative rule. Denied access to unencumbered movement, forced labor on roads must have appeared cynical to Africans, who purportedly resented road labour more than any other form of enforced work.[57] But semi-legal coercion was not the only option open to administrators.

The infrastructures of rule were a constant preoccupation – a near fetish - of the British colonial state, which directed much of the revenue gained through taxation to forging technological networks in the form of roadways. Like tenancy, labor on roads was crucial to creating a taxable base, and numerous Public Works projects were initiated specifically to create positions for wage labourers. Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale estimate that on the eve of the First World War, over 10 per cent of those employed in the wage labour economy were working for either the railroad or the Public Works Department, numbers which were presumably higher in agricultural regions, namely the

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[57] KNA - PC/CP.20/1

Central Province and the Rift Valley. In 1915, acting District Commissioner of Fort Hall, E.L. Pearson, reported that the majority of labourers were, indeed, employed on Public Works projects, specifically road building, where they laboured for 5Ksh and rations.[58]

In regions where remunerated positions were not readily available, populations were unable to pay their taxes. In response, infrastructural projects were created with the express mandate of securing the income required by the colonial state. Provincial Commissioner of Rift Valley Province, D.L. Morgan, made this prerogative clear in his request to the Public Works Department and the Secretariat for the construction of a road from Kabarnet to Baringo District. The road, he argued, would not only increase crop production and function as an administrative artery but, more importantly, its construction would create positions for wage-labourers, and thus increase the state's revenues:

> I would also point out that this year large numbers of able bodied moran have not paid their tax, due to their inability to find employment on European farms, and I do not think I exaggerate in maintaining that at least 60% - probably more - of the money paid as wages to the construction gang would return to the Government in the form of tax.[59]

This road works project was subsequently approved. While it is not clear that the creation of a taxable base was a primary motivation for the approval, it is clear that it was not the possibility of greater accumulation promised by the creation of the routes of trade for, as Morgan admitted:

> It would be many years before a road to the plateau would be used commercially, as the only exports from this district at present are sheep and goats and a small quantity of hides…[Thus,] the immediate justification for the road would be its

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[58] KNA - PC/CP/1/7/1 "Fort Hall District Record Book."
[59] KNA – PC/RVP/GA/8/1

undoubted administrative value and to provide the means whereby large numbers of young men can find their tax.[60]

In the spirit of Johnston (cited above), Morgan expressed his confidence in the changes cutting such a road would effect. The road, he proclaimed, was "of paramount importance for the development of this backward district." While the argument that road building projects would at once facilitate the advancement of a region and fill state coffers was fairly typical, in mobilizing the language of civilizational advancement, the DC justified his demand that the funds come not from the government but from the Local Native Council (LNC). In this case, arguably, this was the condition of possibility for the project's approval. If Morgan's logic was accepted, this particular project would allow for 60 per cent of the wages doled out by the Local Native Council (LNC), to be redirected to the state through taxation. Thus, while the rhetoric of regional improvement may have been the condition of possibility for the project's approval, the main benefactor would be the state.

Communications networks designed to connect "peripheral" regions to the central state, thereby extending surveillance and ensuring the accumulation of wealth in state coffers, clearly had material effects. However, the discursive and rhetorical arguments administrators advanced in justifying the construction of new roads did work of a more conceptual kind as well. For administrators such as Morgan, infrastructural expansion and the ideology of civilizational uplift were intimately related, with the road operating as a symbol of their marriage. Roads not only modernized landscapes but produced modern subjects.

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[60] KNA – PC/RVP.GA/8/1

This rhetoric, linking labour to infrastructural and, consequently, social development was ubiquitous. Indeed, one of the main arguments invoked in justifying the use of forced labor on road works cited the didactic value such labour afforded. Colonial officials argued that coerced labour, particularly on the extension of road networks which were for "the common good," would lead to the cultivation of a loyal, though subservient brand patriotism among colonial subjects.[61] Contact with the central state facilitated by the expansion of infrastructures was part of this calculus, but so too were the perceived disciplinary benefits of hard labour. To a significant degree, then, the road operated as a stand in for the modernizing potential of the colony and its people. The discourse surrounding roads and labour positioned the British colonial government as a "techno-political regime," which Clapperton Mavhunga defines as a system of rule, that is simultaneously: "a political structure that...[does] technical work and a technical structure that...[does] political work."[62]

It is therefore not surprising that forced labour was one of the most resented features of colonial governance, and labour on roads became emblematic of those colonial coercions designed to create a taxable base. Throughout the early colonial period, local headmen routinely complained of the resistance they confronted when trying to get communities to cut and maintain roads within native reserves.[63] While this was often written off as yet more evidence of native "laziness," some colonial officials

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[61] KNA - PC/CENT/2/4/1
[62] Clapperton Chakanetsa Mavhunga, "The Mobile Workshop: Mobility, Technology, and Human-Animal Interaction in Gonarezhou (National Park), 1850-Present," PhD thesis, University of Michigan – Ann Arbor, 2008), 32. The concept of technopolitics has been productively brought to bear by a number of scholars of technology and power. See Hecht, *The Radiance of France*; Gabrielle Hecht, *Being Nuclear: Africans and the Global Uranium Trade,* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012); Mitchell, *Rule of Experts.*
[63] KNA - PC/CP1/4/1; PC/CENT/2/4/1; PC/COAST/1/11/335.

understood people's resistance within the framework of the inequity of the colonial political economy. As the District Commissioner of Machakos summed up in a rare moment of clarity: "The native labourer look[s]…on the road, through his particular portion of the country, as a never ending source of hard work which seldom grows less but rather tends to increase."[64] He went on to explain that labour was not the dominant frustration. Rather, people complained of the asymmetry in the quality of roads serving settled farms versus those serving African areas. Conceding the point, he concluded: "It seems very unfair that quite large sums of money are voted annually for roads which often only serve a very few occupied farms, when not a penny is available for one which taps the majority of a Native Reserve with a vast population."[65] The practice of strategic infrastructural under-development secured the dominance of the settler economy and the comfortable position of often corrupt African headmen was secured, as was labour, which disadvantaged the small-scale, relatively autonomous production of Africans living on the reserves and estates.

> This was increasingly resented by Africans who were in a:
>
> considerable state of discontent …on the whole question of roads and communications in…reserve[s]. He ["the African"] wants roads; and the more advanced native realizes the vital necessity of communications to trade…No money is ever available for any road – if it only serves a Native Reserve.

The desire for roads, as this communiqué demonstrates, was popularly linked in the colonial imagination to the relative development of communities. Importantly, moreover, this passage sheds light on the conceptual space that roads were coming to occupy in the imaginary of Africans living in the Central Province and Rift Valley.

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[64] PC/CENT/2/4/1.

[65] KNA - PC/CENT/2/4/1, Assistant District Commissioner, Machakos to the Chief Native Commissioner.

Like colonial administrators, roads were held to be the routes of development. African entrepreneurs viewed these infrastructural networks as the prerequisite for the expansion of African trade, which would, theoretically, allow populations to avoid labouring on European farms. Absent government investment in roads serving African areas, people took matters into their own hands, cutting secret paths across the colony, linking people to markets.[66] Popular attempts to reorder space, forging routes connecting reserves to points of trade, undermined efforts by the colonial administration to spatially marginalize the entrepreneurs of Central Province and the Rift Valley. As these popular responses suggest - both in the form of resistances and demands for expanded road networks – people living in the "unhappy valley" had equally come to view the road as a modernizing force; however, their definition(s) of the modern were often at odds with the cultivation of docile subjects that colonial authorities had hoped to effect by placing communities in contact with modern infrastructures. While colonial authorities desired advancement in the form of a more efficient and prosperous economy, requiring Africans remain in a servile position as laborers and tax-payers, Africans were demanding that they be recognized as subjects with the same rights to capital accumulation and remuneration that non-African populations were afforded.

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Labour on roads and the extension of road networks were not only emblematic of critical asymmetries between African populations and settler populations. Indeed, the extension of these technologies of rule emerged as the terrain upon which relations between headmen and populations were negotiated. In Central Province, in particular, the tensions surrounding road works entered into ongoing debates regarding legitimate

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[66] KNA - PC/CP1/4/1; See also, PC/NKU/2/25/10; Robertson, *Trouble Showed the Way,* 88.

authority and the passing of generational power embodied in what John Lonsdale refers to as the Kikuyu "labour theory of value."[67] Through labour on the land Kikuyu achieved *wiathi*, "moral agency" achieved through "self-mastery." Private achievement within this moral economy was proof that an individual had realized *wiathi,* the legitimacy of which was contingent on the redistribution of wealth. Wealth was thus a moral as well as material status.[68] Public authority derived from both virtue (wealth) and knowledge (age). In theory, public authority moved between generations, as young men, with access to the land on which they had laboured, worked to achieve *wiathi* and the authority it yielded. The colonial organization of space, premised as it was on the partitioning of the territory and the control of bodies within it, obstructed the ability of many young men to achieve this state of moral adulthood.[69] These problems were exacerbated as appointed headmen, illegitimate authorities in the eyes of many, shored up their status by accruing great masses of wealth. Claire Robertson notes: "Colonialism confirmed the translation of prominence in trade into political eminence."[70] Political authority, once contingent on wealth and redistribution, was increasingly individuated, processes symbolically marked by headmen's use of trucks to transport goods to market.[71] In the minds of many power and virtue, historically two sides of the same coin, had been disarticulated.

Concurrently, headmen played a critical role in the extension of infrastructures of rule. They were "British subordinates, [who, in the service of colonial authorities,] …collected tax on commission, compelled the cultivation of new crops…ordered out

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[67] Lonsdale, *The Moral Economy of Mau Mau,* 333.
[68] *Ibid.,* 337.
[69] *Ibid.,* 326.
[70] Robertson, *Trouble Showed the Way,* 80.
[71] *Ibid.,* 80.

labour on local roads and recruited it for outside employers."[72] Individual District

Commissioners, specifically those working in the settled regions, were explicit on this

point. As the DC of Fort Hall expressed in 1919, it was the responsibility of headmen to

maintain law and order within their boundaries, to "maintain in a decent state of repair all

roads, bridges, Government & Kiama Camps in their locations…to prohibit any act

which might damage any public work or road within their location."[73]

In other words, it was the central responsibility of headmen to secure the free

labour needed to build infrastructural routes through the country, and to ensure that these

routes were maintained and protected against degradation, whether the product of

directed action or not. This was no easy task in the Kenya colony. The heavy rains and

stubborn ecology proved to be an enduring frustration for administrators.[74] Roads were

routinely washed away and creeping ecologies routinely undermined "culture's"

domination of "nature." Road infrastructures in the Kenya colony were never "modern"

in the sense discussed by Edwards. Their materiality was constantly threatened by other,

difficult to tame, materialities. As one DC wrote: maintaining roads was a constant battle

"ever permanent, never to be relied upon and often ultimately abandoned."[75] It thus took

a good deal of conceptual and material labour to maintain these infrastructures, ostensible

evidence of man's mastery over nature, and man's mastery over man. Africans bore the

brunt of these efforts, forced as they were by headmen to cut and maintain these colonial

technologies under siege. Road works were thus linked to inter-generational struggles

over landed status as they were shaped by new rhythms of rule.

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[72] Lonsdale, *The Moral Economy of Mau Mau,* 71.
[73] KNA - PC/CP1/4/1
[74] KNA - DC/NKU/2/27/4
[75] KNA - PC/CENT/2/4/1; KNA - PC/RVP.GA/8/1

Headmen not only severed the connection between public authority and communal wellbeing but also unraveled the links between labour and virtue. Many of these men, wise to the opportunities the system presented them, exchanged the "unproductive" labour of juniors and women for easy wealth.[76] In exchange for labourers, headmen received kick-backs, frequently being "handed…cases of whiskey and brandy for so many recruits produced" from colonial agents and labour recruiters operating within their regions.[77] These informal arrangements provided the framework through which labour could be recruited for private employers and the state while circumventing the legislation that prohibited the state from directly engaging in coercive labour recruitment.[78] It is likely that these incentives for procuring labour led to increasingly violent labour practices in the 1920s.[79]

The violence of the interwar period added a troubling patina to roads discourse in the Kenya colony. In his private papers, Colonial Officer Richard Gethin, recounted recruitment patterns typical of the period. In return for favors chiefs would raise labourers who were subsequently tied together and forced to march between districts along the administrative routes of the country.[80] The forced marches along the colony's arteries not only frustrated young men's attempts to achieve self-mastery and thus social standing but sometimes led to the end of biological life as well. In the mid-teens, settlers of the Central Province wrote a flurry of complaints to the District Commissioner, protesting the sight

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[76] The labour of women and juniors was deemed unproductive because it was not directed toward achieving self-mastery. See Lonsdale, *The Moral Economy of Mau Mau*

[77] Richard Gethin as cited in van Zwanenberg, *Colonial Capitalism,* 111. R. Gethin, Private Papers, now held by Rhodes House, Oxford.

[78] KNA - KBU/64

[79] Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 52.

[80] van Zwanenberg, *Colonial Capitalism,* 111.

of Africans lying dead along main roads. A letter signed by four concerned settlers requested that:

> the police authorities to look into the matter and the manner of death of Kikuyus who are continually to be seen dying or dead in the ditches by the Nairobi Road between the Chania Falls and Nairobi. We, the undersigned, have known of or seen five (5) bodies rotting at the same time in different points of the road…Surely this public disgrace should be removed.[81]

As the correspondence between settlers protesting this "disgrace" and the District Commissioner continued, it was admitted by the acting DC that those dying were Africans engaged in forced labour, and that the deaths were a consequence of malnutrition. Unlike in the metropole where roads were associated with the right to autonomous, unencumbered movement, in 1920s Kenya roads where symbolic of, and the physical site where, autonomy and mobility were denied both through the quasi-legal raising of forced labour and as a physical consequence of the conditions under which Africans worked. Unsurprisingly, the violence of this era led to new attempts by populations to relocate to spaces that were beyond the reach of these various agencies and structures of colonial coercion.

Colonial efforts to reorder space and authority, thus articulated awkwardly with precolonial forms of social organization embodied in the Kikuyu "labour theory of value." Efforts to impose a new administrative grid, designed to serve new relations of power, not only complicated prior systems of land occupation and wealth accumulation but, perhaps most crucially, undermined people's ability to achieve social adulthood. The creation of enclosures designed to accommodate the needs of a growing settler population led to land scarcity for Africans living in the Central Province and Rift Valley. Furthermore, the unique possibilities open to loyal headmen willing to raise labour

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[81] KNA – PC/CP1/4/1, "Kikuyu District Political Record," "Political Records Book – A Protest"

ensured that wealth was increasingly concentrated in the hands of few. As a result, many

young men were relegated to a position of perpetual junior status. Lacking land and

cattle, it was impossible for them to secure the bride wealth necessary for marriage.

The disciplinary abuses of this period, in conjunction with the structural barriers

to adulthood, had unexpected consequences as young men, alienated from power,

increasingly chose desertion over unfair labour practices, leaving their regions of origin

in search of higher wages in the growing urban centers of Nairobi and Mombasa. Wage

labour in the city, it seems, presented unprecedented opportunities for alienated young

men, for whom "poverty was delinquent."[82] Working in towns, these frustrated juniors

labored to buy "freedom from parents by investing the wages of external service in

marriage"[83] City life promised new avenues by which men could attain social adulthood

not through labour on the land but through capital accumulation, thereby themselves

rerouting the criteria defining legitimate authority. Virtue was being disconnected from

landed wealth and new forms of labour were redefining the landscape of value. Tellingly,

headmen and wealthy elders referred to these men and women disparagingly as the

people of "the roadside."[84]

In response to increasing levels of desertion, which undermined the authority of

"elders" and thus that of the colonial state, the administration devised new strategies to

constrain movement outside the reserves. The Natives Ordinance of 1915, implemented

in 1918, required every African over the age of 15 be registered and finger printed. These

registration certificates, or *kipandes,* were to be worn around the neck in metal frames

and could be demanded at any time. Any African found outside their reserve who was

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[82] Lonsdale, "Moral Economy of Mau Mau," 340.
[83] *Ibid.,* 354.
[84] *Ibid.,* 303.

unable to produce the document and evidence that they had permission to be moving

outside reserve limits was punished with hard labour. Critical to this process was the

centralization of knowledge. As article 21 of the ordinance read:

> No matter how many Registration Certificates are issued to any one person
> or in whatever places they are issued, on arrival at Central Records they are
> connected by means of finger impression records and cross referenced. Thus if
> any one person takes out, say twenty different registrations in twenty different
> places throughout the Colony his complete records is known and united at the
> Central Records Office.[85]

The centralization of demographic knowledge, as discussed above, was part and parcel of

the process of modern state formation. Obviously, however, in the context of colonial

Kenya, the population was not regarded as an undifferentiated mass to be counted,

categorized, and disciplined, but as a multiply tiered body. Importantly, the generation

most directly effected by the ordinance was also mission educated and literate, and thus

in a unique position to make claims on both colonial and metropolitan authorities.

Indeed, as early as 1921 the Kikuyu Association of Central Province was

demanding the abolition of the *kipande* system which, to many, had become symbolic of

the abuses of the colonial system. In framing its argument, the Kikuyu Association cited

police abuses, noting that *kipandes* were not only being demanded outside of the reserves

but within the confines of the reserves themselves.[86] While not specifically identified as a

method of surveillance concerned with the organization of people in space at this

juncture, by the late 1920s demands for its abolition were explicitly framed according to

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[85] KNA - "Report of the Sub Committee of the Labour Advisory Board Appointed To Examine
Any Suggestions Submitted to it for the Revision of the Present Native registration System and to
Make Recommendations as to Any Modifications Considered Desirable." Oct 29, 1946.
[86] "Report of the Sub Committee of the Labour Advisory Board Appointed To Examine Any
Suggestions Submitted to it for the Revision of the Present Native registration System and to
Make Recommendations as to Any Modifications Considered Desirable." Oct 29, 1946.

a logic that linked limitations to movement to servility and positioned mobility as the quintessential marker of liberty.[87]

Debates over the limitations placed on people's ability to move through space dovetailed with broader discussions of "development" as they were filtered through the prisms of "tradition" versus "modernity," and linked to questions of legitimate authority. In 1919, the District Commissioner of Fort Hall reported that inter-generational struggles dominated discussions at *barazas* throughout the district, pitting native authorities against young, literate, and mobile men. The younger generation articulated its right to governance by mobilizing a binary that drew powerfully on British notions of modernity. The current generation of elders, they argued, were mired in superstition and tradition, which not only rendered the young who "had the benefit of greater knowledge of the European...powerless to carry out the Government orders of progression" but was also used by elders to justify the unfair demands being put to populations. Elders, in turn, defended their right to retain leadership, arguing that they had paid large sums of money to "buy the country." The mobility of the current generation of young men, "spoilt" by virtue of their movement, elders argued, impeded their ability to recoup the losses of their initial investment.[88] Young men vociferously rejected this claim, arguing that by virtue of their broader experience and education, they were in a better position to hold the reins of governance. Changed circumstances, they contended, had rendered the wisdom of elders obsolete.[89] While this was articulated as a movement in terms of cultural transformation

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[87] KNA - KBU/64 "Correspondence Between the Kikuyu Central Association and the Colonial Office, 1929-1930."

[88] KNA - PC/CP/1/7/1; Mervyn W.H. Beech, Asst. District Commissioner DC, Dagoretti, Memorandum on the Kikuyu point of view, 12 December 1912, Kiambu Political Record Book, PC/CP1/4/2. As cited in White, *Comforts of Home,* 39.

[89] Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley,* 56.

(read "modernization") the rhetoric used to explore and account for these shifts was expressed through reference to physical movement, which contrasted a younger generation that "wished to march with the times," against the immobility and stagnation of elders. In this emergent discourse, physical movement, the technologies that facilitated it, and the opportunities it afforded, were positioned as necessary prerequisites for the cultivation of modern selves.[90]

The cultivation of modern subjects was, of course, something colonial authorities ostensibly supported. However, in this instance, these men were mobilizing the language of civilizational advancement to undermine the present generation of native authorities. The colonial state had produced this quagmire. The mobility demanded by the colonial economy facilitated the emergence of a mobile and increasingly vocal population, who challenged the worst abuses of colonial rule affected through the co-optation of local authorities. In a doubling that continues to shape Kenyan mobility discourse in the present youth, largely excluded from political power, articulated their demands for a greater share of authority by contrasting their mobility – both physical and psychological - against the outmoded and stagnant outlook of "elders." The articulation of the demands of colonial rule with Kikuyu labour theories of value and its spatialized imagining of virtue through labor on the land had produced mobility and generation as the fault lines of conflict.

Symbolically as well as materially, then, these routes had a doubled function in the popular imaginary. Not only did they facilitate export and thus the enrichment of

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[90] Claire Robertson remarks on the connection between trade, virtue, and automobility that coloured the pages of *Muigwithania.* See Robertson, *Trouble Showed the Way,* 82.

settled populations and "greedy" elders and chiefs – routes of commerce often blocked

for use by marginalized African producers - but they also functioned as the material stand

in for the state's tentacular power. The hardest hit, as the foregoing has suggested, were

"youth." Drawing on precolonial strategies of mobility, they were met with a legal

system and structure of governance that pivoted on controlling African mobility. Once

sanctioned movement became unsanctioned, as histories of mobility were being

reconfigured, and the transgression of both "elder" and "colonial" spatial logics was met

with compulsory labour on the routes that secured colonial domination. But roads were

also symbolic of a promise: the possibility of autonomous physical mobility and the

symbolic and social mobility that attended it.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

By the 1920s, conditions had clearly changed, something not lost on all colonial

administrators. If the "development" of the population was to proceed in the post-war

context, the infrastructural development of the colony would have to shift accordingly. In

the 1920s, the DC of Machakos articulated this position. Writing to the executive

engineer, he suggested that roads in reserves be built using remunerated labour, noting

that their main users were non-native populations. While in the period leading up to the

war, the use of unremunerated labour was justified by its pedagogic function the

"natives," he argued, were no longer "raw" and, therefore, the model of labour-as-

pedagogy was no longer appropriate. These two domains of development – civilizational

and infrastructural – were, according to the DC, out of synch.[91] Instead of paying heed to

these arguments, not to mention the evidence embodied in forms of African resistance,

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[91] KNA - PC/CENT/2/4/1.

administrators developed increasingly harsh policies directed at governing the movements of people. The District Commissioner of Machakos had hit on an important shift that would be articulated with increasing poignancy by Africans in the late inter-war period.

Indeed, in 1929 the Kikuyu Central Association for the first time explicitly linked the abuses of the *kipande* system to the forms of marginalization secured through circumscribing the movement of people in space. Writing to the Colonial Office, the KCA argued that the *kipande* was used to "restrict the freedom of movement of the African Native subjects of the Crown and facilitates efforts to keep them in a state of slavery."[92] This sentiment likely underwrote the disobedience campaigns initiated in Fort Hall the same year, which were manifest in the popular refusal to engage in communal labour. The labour they were refusing, as had historically been the case, was likely roadwork. In this same year the DC of Fort Hall noted that unpaid labour on reserve roads was the most unpopular form of labour.[93] He went on to remark: "The dislike of this road work cannot …be very deep considering the innumerable applications which are so frequently made by large communities for new roads to be opened up."[94] While there was, in the main, a good deal of support for an increase in road networks animated by the hope that this would facilitate African trade and capital accumulation, a goal pursued - though for different reasons - by both petty capitalists and those "on the road," these desires were in tension with the reality that most roads were designed to extend the reach of the surveillance state and to increase settler wealth.

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[92] KNA - KBU/64 "Correspondence Between the Kikuyu Central Association and the Colonial Office, 1929-1930."
[93] KNA - DC/FH/1/9
[94] KNA - DC/FH1/9 (1930)

Roads and their uses marked the status of the colonized in both racial and economic terms, something made abundantly clear when the colonial state refused African requests to grow cash crops the postwar period.[95] Given the particularities of indirect rule in the Kenya colony, roads symbolized unfair labour practices and inter-communal, specifically inter-generational, struggles over access to wealth and authority. Road development had become politicized, with forced labour on roads - in light of the relative immobility of populations - increasingly emerging as the terrain upon which conflicts concerning where legitimate authority ought to be located were fought. Roads, as noted by Rudolf Mrazek in the context of the Dutch Indies were, "from the moment of their inception a battlefield and a space" of uncertainty.[96] Within this context, the road itself emerged as a stand in for both colonial governmentality and a certain envisioning of mobile "modernity." Roads were thus symbolic of "progress" and flow and, concurrently, stagnation and blockage. However, the mobility associated with roads had two valances, physical, on the one hand, and conceptual, on the other. The routes of rule were at once the site of violent labour practices, the infrastructures required for the enrichment of rural petty capitalists, and the symbols of a redefined moral economy articulated through popular attempts to rework the criterion by which social adulthood was measured. As we shall see, in the coming decades these imaginings of the road and technologies of mobility would become intertwined in incredibly complex ways.

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[95] Berman, *Crisis and Control*
[96] Mrazek, *Engineers of Happy Land,* 8.

Chapter 2:

Auto-mobility: The (Ambiguous) Place of Desire in British Colonial Practice

> *If a settled area Chief is to do his job, it is essential that he is mobile. This means that…he has a Land Rover available.*[97]

According to the logic informing British rule, the cultivation of desire was one step

toward "civilizing" colonized populations, something the colony's first Native

Commissioner, John Ainsworth, brazenly pointed out. According to Ainsworth, a desire

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[97] KNA - AA/5/36/1 II or OP/EST/1/233

for commodities evidenced the relative progress of populations while concurrently (and conveniently) further implicating them in colonial capitalism. As we have seen remunerated labour was critical to the functioning of the colonial economy but, according to Ainsworth, it was Africans' desires for material goods cultivated through "educating them to the wants of Western civilisation" that would lead Africans to seek out employment. This would, he claimed, render coercion unnecessary, thereby ensuring the reproduction of a labouring force.[98] Colonial officials (despite their anxieties over unsanctioned movement) viewed the desire for technologies of mobility as evidence of the relative development of populations, and as evidence of colonials' relative success as civilizers. However, this logic, which linked the fetishization of commodities and infrastructures of mobility to the emergence of modern subjectivities, had unexpected consequences for colonial governance.

The entrenchment of the wage-labour economy had, by the mid-1920s, produced a subsection of the population possessed of expendable capital. Following Ainsworth's script, Africans increasingly engaged in commodity consumption, reinvesting their wages in the colonial economy, focusing in particular on technologies of mobility.

Luise White notes that by 1928 there were approximately five thousand cars in the colony, the majority of which were located in Nairobi and all of which were owned by Europeans or Indians.[99] However, my evidence suggests that Africans in increasing numbers either owned vehicles or fixed their energies on acquiring them by the late teens. As early as 1924, colonial officers were reporting African car ownership which, when in

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[98] van Zwanenberg, *Colonial Capitalism,* 112.
[99] Luise White citing FS Joelson ed. East Africa Today, 1928 as cited in Hake, 28 *The Comforts of Home,* 74.

the hands of those "loyal" to the state, was reflexively linked to the relative development

of individual owners. In the same year, the District Commissioner of Fort Hall reported

the following by way of indexing colonial achievements in the district:

> Before leaving the subject of the Social and Economic development of the Native area, mention should be made of the fact that the two most enterprising chiefs of the district, Njiri and Muriranja, have bought motor cars, they being the first to do so in the district.[100]

Two years later, the District Commissioner more directly linked development and

civilization to the desire for technologies of mobility, the quintessential emblems of

colonial modernity and authority. In 1926, he reported:

> I have been struck with the general loyalty and desire for co-operation in the great majority of cases. Many of the chiefs are giving an excellent lead to their peoples in things like the purchase of ploughes [sic] and motor lorries and work on roads has been pursued with considerable energy and enthusiasm.[101]

In a self-congratulatory tone, he concluded by noting that there were now 14 native-

owned lorries in the district. Symbols of British superiority, if carefully doled out, would

ensure the colonial hierarchy was reproduced while reinforcing supposed "native awe" in

the face of technologies evidencing British power.[102] These predictions did not bear out,

as technologies of mobility became the objects through which competing notions of

"development" were mediated.

Africans did not simply desire technologies of mobility as markers of prestige.

For many, these technologies were emblematic of movement the colonial state, through

its local proxies, denied. The materiality of these commodities, their capacity to move

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[100] KNA - DC/FH1/4, 1924.
[101] KNA – DC/FH1/6, 1926.
[102] For a discussion of "native" awe in the face of colonial technologies and the production of wonder, see Larkin, *Signal and Noise*

people through space, in other words, was critical to people's evaluation of these colonial things.[103]

In the late teens, the DC of what was then known as Kikuyu Province reported the emergence of an informal transportation system in the area:

> There are now some 52 native owned lorries and motor cars in the Province: but the greatest evidence is to be seen in the numbers of passengers carried by omnibuses which now carry people to all parts of the Reserves. In one centre named Kahumoini in the Fort Hall Reserve, an average daily number of eight to ten lorries assemble to take natives to and from Nairobi. European estate owners near the Reserves are beginning to adopt the practice of daily sending lorries in to the Reserve to collect their labourers.[104]

Out of the 52 native-owned motor vehicles operating in the region, 10 were being used to transport labouring populations. For obvious reasons, the transportation of the labour force was not something the colonial administration bemoaned.

Access to these technologies had, evidently, put some better-situated individuals in a position to access a burgeoning market and the capital rewards such an entry might allow. Cars, whether used to enter into trade networks or used for government work (as was the case for government-employed drivers), were increasingly associated with wealth and a measure of mobile independence.[105] The movement of people in this instance worked to the advantage of colonial capitalism. However, there was no guarantee that Africans would put these re-purposed technologies to the ends sanctioned by the colonial state. Officials did not have the means or wherewithal to ensure that it was the right people who were moving to the right places, nor could they easily monitor the identities of people on the move, their mobility now augmented by technologies of mobility. As we

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[103] Nancy Rose Hunt, *Colonial Lexicon*
[104] KNA - PC/CP/1/1/2, "A Short History of the Kikuyu Province From 1911 to 1926."
[105] KNA - AG/41/110

shall see, when these technologies were in the wrong hands African desires were no longer read as being wholly unproblematic; indeed, the rhetoric would be partially reversed. In the wrong hands, automobility was not cited as evidence of the success of the civilizing mission but as evidence of decay.

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The colonial state looked on anxiously as Africans in increasing numbers turned their energies on acquiring technologies of mobility, putting them to uses that directly challenged the authority of the colonial state. While these actions rerouted authority, they simultaneously reinscribed the ideological patina that these technologies bore, linking autonomous movement to modernity and prestige through the sign-function of the vehicle, as the itineraries of two notable figures in Kenya's history make apparent.[106]

When future president of independent Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta, traveled the country in the 1920s it was by bicycle. In 1948, upon being appointed head of the Kenyan Central Association (KCA), this technology of mobility was "upgraded," the association paying for a motorcycle. Possession of these technologies gave Kenyatta unprecedented access to the colony, enabling him to spread the messages of the KCA and simultaneously acting as material markers of his prestige. According to Jeremy Murray-Brown: "It was how he was remembered by the boys of Dagoretti: a young man, tidily dressed, whose 'piki-piki' bike could be heard a long way off chugging up the hill…He gave rides to some of them on the back of his bike. His prestige rose accordingly."[107]

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[106] The idea that automobiles carry heavy symbolic loads, or "sign-function" is elaborated by Lindesy Green-Simms in her PhD thesis on automobility in postcolonial West Africa. See Lindsey Green-Simms, "Postcolonial Automobility: West Africa and the Road to Globalization," (PhD Thesis, University of Minnesota, 2009).
[107] Jeremy Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta,* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1979), 122.

A similar pattern is evident in the early itinerary of well known dissident, Harry Thuku. Having received a mission education, Thuku moved to Nairobi in search of work in 1905.[108] In the teens, Thuku was earning £4 a month working as a telephone operator. These wages enabled him to purchase a bicycle. His job as an operator, moreover, put him into contact with Indian activists who encouraged Thuku to advocate on behalf of the oppressed majority, which he did, deftly moving information along the colony's arteries by bicycle. In 1921, Thuku formed the Young Kikuyu Association, soon renamed the East African Association reflecting the multi-ethnic coalition he envisioned. By this time, Thuku was travelling the colony by car, extending informational networks across space by connecting nodal points of anti-colonial sentiment. Thuku, like Kenyatta, was a prime example of the detribalized native the administration had come to fear. While the colonial state situated the movement of these men as an expressed threat to colonial rule, citing their active campaigning against the worst abuses of colonial authority and the state's local proxies, the administration perceived mobile Africans in general as a threat to colonial order. And the administration was not wrong in sensing that Africans in increasing numbers were on the move.

Increasingly, it seems, broader publics conceptualized personal "development" as being mirrored in, and marked by, the possession of technologies of mobility. Ainsworth, evidently, had not envisioned African consumers desiring precisely those commodities that, though further implicating them in colonial capitalism, simultaneously allowed them to circumvent the most hated aspects of colonial rule. In particular, those colonial policies

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[108] John Lonsdale, "Thuku, Harry" in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: In Association with the British Academy: From the Earliest Times to the Year 2000*, ed. H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

– of which there were many - that were directed towards tightening the strictures governing African mobility.

Technologies of mobility, as this suggests, were not simply desired for the markets they opened up. If, for Kenyatta and Thuku, these technologies allowed them to spread a political message and marked their prestige, other sections of the population, equally concerned with travel, used them to spread a politics of an altogether different kind. Derek Peterson notes that the history of the Revival in East Africa maps quite neatly onto the history of the bicycle in the region. Carefully saving wages, Revivalists devoted a great deal of energy to acquiring bicycles. In Central Kenya, these men and women would have visited the Province's first African-owned bike shop, which was opened in 1926.[109] These technologies allowed Revivalists to travel, crossing colonial boundaries to attend multi-ethnic meetings and to create and participate in affective networks that transcended the (sometimes) narrow parameters of home. Their mobility not only allowed them to escape from under the thumb of "traditional" authorities but, insofar as they undermined local leaders, their actions posed a direct challenge to indirect rule.

Unable to dictate the uses to which technologies of mobility were put, the colonial state attempted to limit their circulation. As early as 1915, colonial officials were bemoaning the unmonitored circulation of bicycles within the colony. Responding to these concerns, a "Registration and Identification Bill" was passed to stem the tides of mobility. As the Provincial Commissioner of Nyanza Province wrote to the Attorney General of Nairobi: "the increasing introduction of Bicycles into this Protectorate and the

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[109] Derek Peterson, *Ethnic Patriotism and the East African Revival: A History of Dissent, c. 1935-1972,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 70. Citing NMK Dennis papers A/21: Muhoro to Gordon Dennis, 30 March 1926.

spread of their use into the Native Reserves" had upset colonial imaginings of law and order, as "thefts" were "threatening to become common."[110] Metal tickets were to be attached to all bicycles, which would "conspicuously" bear the license number of the bike. All bicycles, moreover, were to be equipped with a "lighted lamp" between "sunset and sunrise."[111] The unsanctioned circulation of technologies of mobility was a technological problem for which there was a technical fix; artificial illumination designed to ensure that technologies were limited to their "proper" uses.[112] Thus while this anxiety was articulated as a fear of increased criminality, it was equally an anxiety that pivoted on the unprecedented possibility for mobility the circulation of these technologies engendered. Indeed, these anxieties were not wholly without merit in the immediate post-war years.

Not only were bicycles and lorries circulating in increasing numbers but cars as well. Indeed, the number of cars in the protectorate increased tenfold between the years of 1922 and 1924 rising from only 134 to 945 in the two-year period.[113] Just as urban migration was emblematic of the untethering of youth from the authority of their elders, a process which directly threatened the colonial state, the possession of technologies of mobility was increasingly situated as a powerful symbol of "youthful" insubordination and criminality.[114] This was not only because of the unsanctioned movement facilitated by these technologies but equally because the circulation of these objects coincided with

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[110] KNA - AG/41/106 (1915-1926).
[111] KNA - AG/41/106
[112] See Mrazek, *Engineers of Happy Land,* on electrification and colonialism.
[113] White, *Comforts,* 94.
[114] White, *Comforts;* For a nice review of the place of "the city" in colonial and postcolonial imaginings of youthful" insubordination, see Richard Waller, "Rebellious Youth in Colonial Africa," *The Journal of "African History,* Vol. 47, No. 1 (2006): 77-92.

the spread of a language of "rights" which called into question the legitimacy of colonial rule.

As Africans in increasing numbers possessed technologies of mobility, they challenged Britons monopoly over quintessential symbols of modernity; symbols that, according to the British, were to be carefully doled out not indiscriminately spread. The relationship between object and meaning, signified and signifier, the administration was learning, was difficult to stabilize and even more difficult to police.[115]

Statements made by the DC of Fort Hall (cited above) reflect the increasing ambivalence colonial officials felt towards the unmonitored circulation of these technologies. In 1925, the DC reported with some anxiety that Mission education had produced a generation of young men who fancied themselves "literary types" and therefore regarded themselves as being above manual labour.[116] That these mission-educated men had developed their own ideas about the place of technologies of mobility in articulating their status as "readers" should not be surprising. The ideology connecting knowledge over, and possession of, technologies of mobility was one engendered in the teachings of Anglican missionaries. A quiz produced by missionaries stationed in the Highlands in the postwar period, for example, led with the following question: "1. Name a modern transport which begins with L." The answer, "lorry." From this initial benchmark, students were asked three further questions related to their knowledge of technologies of mobility, down to some of their basic mechanics.

> Question 7, for example, read: "Part of a Motor-car beginning with C. (clutch, carburettor)" (*sic*).

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[115] KNA - AG/41/106
[116] KNA - DC/FH1/6

Question 8, "Part of a Motor-car beginning with W.? (Wheel, wiper)"[117]

Taken individually the items on this test, assembled and preserved in the papers of Reverend J.L. Beecher do, indeed, appear to be "sundry matters." However, these questions were set alongside questions of a decidedly more theological nature, questions regarding "modern" domesticity, and questions regarding world geography. Reading the list in full, then, suggests the complicated means by which various threads of discourse were brought together, cross-referentially producing a robust image of "development," which placed technologies of mobility at its center.

As Rudolf Marzek writes of late-colonial Dutch rule in the Indies: "the power of colonial culture…was in trivialities."[118] In mission schools, everyday technologies – heretofore out of the reach of many – were intimately bound up with the ideology of "development," and "civilization," states to be reached through hard work and further education. Christianity here operated as a stand in for civilization, which was connected to knowledge of the wider world, and was mediated through knowledge of quotidian technologies, specifically those associated with mobility. To this, Africans added another category of practice – leisure.

It is, then, perhaps not surprising that the DC of Fort Hall made the following observation in 1926 regarding the "danger" of educated men. Attending to the causal connections among commodity consumption, the constitution of "subversive-types," and everyday practice, is instructive here. "Readers," he argued:

> constitute a potential danger as, being averse to unskilled manual labour and lacking employment, they… tend to sell the ranks of the discontented and

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[117] Papers of Reverend J.L. Beecher held at the National Museum, Nairobi. GSSB Folio 10, "Sundry Matters."
[118] Mrazek, *Engineers of Happy Land,* 69-70.

seditious. Some of them, the best of them, become teachers at Missions School or traders but a large number of them rest on their cars and do nothing.[119]

Lindsey Green-Simms has argued that these "technological objects articulated the place that different bodies would hold on the colonial hierarchy and acted as agents in reproducing social orders that were constructed on ideals of difference and exclusion."[120] However, as we have seen, and as the anxieties shaping colonial policies increasingly reflected, these technologies and the authority and prestige associated with them could not be wholly protected against appropriation. In the early colonial period, colonial officials were to a significant degree able to control movement through space; however, they were less able to monitor the purchasing power of Africans whose status as consumers was, in part, a consequence of the state's desire to implicate them in the wage-labour economy.

The mobility of dissent is repeatedly confirmed in the colonial record. Bikes, cars, and lorries evidently operated somewhat differently from other commodities in colonial spaces. While the prestige of these objects constituted an appropriation of British imaginings of modernity, the very fact that they enabled movement placed them in a unique position to challenge the strictures of colonial rule. The "threat" presented by the mobility of these men and women, was not lost on the colonial state, and the circumscription of mobility as a tactic of colonial governance was not lost on African entrepreneurs. Indeed, as we have seen, and with increasing regularity, issues of mobility were the nodes around which anti-colonial activists focused their attentions.

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[119] KNA - DC/FH1/7

[120] Lindsey Green-Simms, "Postcolonial Automobility: West Africa and the Road to Globalization," (PhD Thesis, University of Minnesota, 2009), 40.

Upon Kenyatta's return from London in 1930, where he had worked to draw metropolitan attention to the situation in the colony, the colonial state found its efforts to monitor his movements repeatedly frustrated. Colonial officials bemoaned the difficulty of their task, repeatedly citing what, in their eyes, was his intentionally clandestine movements. His seditious intentions were confirmed for officials by his use of an automobile for transport, the autonomy automobility afforded making him practically impossible to track.[121]

Concurrent to Kenyatta's return from the metropole, disobedience campaigns were an increasingly regular feature of life in Central Province, specifically Fort Hall. As the District Commissioner of Fort Hall wrote to the Provincial Commissioner of Nyeri, there was no doubt that the authority of the local chiefs was being undermined through "an organised campaign of abuse and ridicule."[122] Following a conventional historical script, people were also refusing to engage in labour, which, it was noted, "appears at the moment to command general sympathy from all who are not themselves chiefs or elders." According to the administrator's report, the dissidents were using strategies that evaded the watchful eye of the anxious colonial state. Agitators ridiculed the authority of chiefs, held political meetings under the guise of religious gatherings where the position of the government was misrepresented, and were falsely representing themselves as government tax collectors, using the funds amassed to pay the fines of those who refused to engage in compulsory roadwork.[123]

While the discontent appeared to be general, the organizers of the disobedience campaign were assumed to be members of the Kikuyu Central Association, which was widely held to represent the interests of "youth" (again, socially defined). Officials must

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[121] KNA - PC/CP/8/7/1
[122] KNA - PC/CP/8/7/1
[123] PC/CP/8/7/1

have guessed that Kenyatta's clandestine movements were linked to the coordination of the campaigns in Fort Hall.

The colonial discourse on mobility dovetailed with that of elders anxious to retain the reigns of power. In Central Province, elders' critiques of mobility were framed through the Kikuyu labour theory of value. Young, mobile men were delinquent, their movement represented an affront to landed imaginings of self-mastery and social adulthood. Concurrently, access to the wage labour economy provided unprecedented avenues for self-mastery defined according to different criteria. These men were, as John Lonsdale puts it, "time bandits."[124] Rejecting the spatial logic that linked "self-mastery" to landed labour, these men simultaneously undermined a temporal logic that naturalized the slow, "traditional" path to social maturation. These men and women transgressed normative expectations of the "ethical" occupation of space, thereby upsetting normative readings of "developmental" time.

In light of these unwelcome developments the DC, rehearsing a well-worn colonial script, argued it was of the utmost importance that the "best and most loyal chiefs" be given free reign in terms of their mobility, arguing not that this would effect better surveillance but that it would demonstrate the authority of the chiefs and thus increase their legitimacy in the eyes of the populace.[125] Just as access to these technological objects and the mobility they afforded were used in an earlier era to mark the separation between British colonial officers and colonized populations, it was hoped that in the context of a changing political economy and shifting cultural terrain a similar strategy could be deployed to divide African populations. The dialectics of mobility and

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[124] Lonsdale, "The Moral Economy of Mau Mau," 422
[125] KNA - PC/CP/8/7/1; KNA - AA/5/36/1 or KNA - OP/EST/1/233

immobility were again at play, and the actions of those participating in the disobedience campaigns pointed quite directly to this doubling. People would no longer labour on routes used by colonial officials to effect discipline. Even more presciently, perhaps, they would not labour on the infrastructures of mobility they were not allowed to freely traverse.

As dissidents increasingly engaged in unsanctioned mobility, directing their frustrations directly at the routes of rule, the strictures of colonial policy directed at circumscribing movement tightened. In 1937, there were increasing complaints that *kipandes* were being unfairly demanded along roadways, where the police stand on "road junctions near Native Locations" and demand money as "proof" of "employment."[126] Individuals caught without their placards at unofficial roadblocks were either arrested or were forced to produce bribes. In response to these measures, Africans actively worked to thwart the reproduction of asymmetric social relations as they were mediated through access to technologies of mobility, and to challenge labour policies which coerced Africans into forging the infrastructural routes of rule.

Interestingly, both stalwarts of surveillance and those more sympathetic to the frustrations of Africans invoked automobility in supporting their positions in the face of vociferous critiques of the *kipande* system. Representing the former position, a Provincial Commissioner rhetorically asked whether carrying a *kipande* was any more cumbersome than being asked to carry a driver's licence.[127] The opposition challenged this interesting analogy, arguing that the predations associated with the *kipande* system were more akin to a scenario wherein: "the European motorist would find himself if, instead of being

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[126] KNA - MSS/3/215
[127] KNA - MSS/3/215

summonsed [*sic*] for breaches of traffic bye-laws, was invariably arrested and imprisoned for such offenses."[128] Though likely not aware of the prescience of these comparisons, both analogies, through their invocations of automobility, tapped into sentiments widely held by African critics, who increasingly cited the limits placed on their automobility as evidence of their oppression.[129]

As we have seen, a number of issues coalesced around these quintessentially modern technologies ranging from labour, to struggles over generational rights, to the brass tacks of colonial oppression. In using these technologies, not only was a young generation able to increase their authority among more remote populations for whom the motorbike was "an object of wonder" but, in some cases, the possession of these objects acted to reroute authority away from colonial officials and native authorities, placing it in the service of dissent. Indeed, in the cases of Thuku and Kenyatta, it was by virtue of the mobility afforded by these technologies that the two were not only able to facilitate the circulation of ideas but, more concretely, were able to set up chapters of the KCA among Embu and Meru communities.[130]

To situate these practices as unproblematic evidence of "resistance," however, would be to miss the doubledness of the discourse and practices associated with roads and technologies of mobility. While people such as Kenyatta and Thuku were putting these technologies to uses deemed undesirable by the colonial state, their capacity to acquire technologies of mobility speaks to the success of the colonial state in creating a body of wage labourers, and the ever-deeper implication of African populations in colonial capitalism. Moreover, men like Kenyatta were engaged in struggles of their own,

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[128] KNA - MSS/3/215
[129] KNA - AG/41/110
[130] *Ibid.,* 126.

which ultimately worked to shore up an exclusive vision of masculine adulthood. While in this early period automobility was imagined as a means of circumventing colonial authority, as the colonial period progressed men such as Kenyatta would increasingly appropriate the script shared by colonial officials and "elders," situating the movement of "undesirables" and "loafers" as a threat to constituted authority. Most abstractly, people's desire for, and consumption of, technologies of mobility reinscribed the conceptual link among authority, access to automobility, and modernity. In using these technologies, their symbolic power was reinscribed even as it was rerouted, a doubling that continues to have purchase on postcolonial envisioning of power, authority, and maturation.

Chapter 3:

World War II and the Changing Terrain of Mobility

> *We will not possibly develop this district without better roads. The report seems to put it the other way round – i.e. no money for roads until development has taken place and produced revenue.*[131]

The conditions obtaining during the Second World War provided new opportunities for movement for variously situated Kenyans. In light of colonial rationing, officials were forced to reduce the number of visits made to outlying districts by car, finding themselves in an "extremely awkward position," having to "slow down the tempo in the midst of extremely urgent demands for action."[132] Higher-level officials lamented this inability to monitor popular sentiment due to reduced communications. District Officers were thus advised to make "special efforts during the War to keep in close touch with native opinion, correct any false war rumours and give any possible information to the natives with a view to allaying anxiety."[133]

Concurrent to this contraction in the surveillance capacities of the state were pressing needs to improve communications networks. In particular, infrastructural routes were at a premium during the war years and the Public Works Department (P.W.D.) became the single largest employer in the colony.[134] While much of this labour was remunerated, the colonial administration, strapped for cash as it was, devised a new strategy to reduce the costs of development, effectively combining the prison system with the Public Works Department (P.W.D.). By 1942 the number of people working in road

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[131] KNA - PC/NKU/2/25/10
[132] KNA - PC/NZA/2/1/148
[133] *Ibid.*
[134] KNA - PC/CP.20/1

camps was double the number of people imprisoned in Central Province, and administrators were thrilled with the results. "The road camps have been an outstanding success," wrote the District Commissioner of Nyeri:

> there have been no disturbances and very few escapes, and the standard of work has been high. The experiment is one that deserves to be a permanent feature of the prison system...[with the assistance of] the P.W.S. [Public Works Service]...This is an industry which should be extended after the war.[135]

Given wartime conditions, the administration did not feel the need to justify conscription by invoking the pedagogic value of road labour and the central place of infrastructural networks in achieving "uplift."

Under the guise of the "exceptionalism" of the period, however, more insidious tendons of the politics of mobility were being tethered. Wartime labour practices effectively linked criminality with road labour and, given the number of people who were prosecuted for abandoning labour contracts, linked unsanctioned mobility to coercive forms of labour that functionally extended the state's surveillance apparatus.[136] In other words, transgressive spatial practices were connected to forms of labour that increased the capacity of the colonial state to monitor space, and the movement of people through it. The Janus-faced nature of roads, in both their symbolic and material function, was again reaffirmed. They were both the site of arrest, and the site of punishment. Thus, while roads had become for many symbols of "development," they were ever-present material evidence of Africans' status as subjects. These infrastructures were not unproblematically associated with mobility; they were routes of rule, not be confused with the infrastructures of unencumbered "modern" mobility, a core symbol of the

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[135] KNA - PC/CP.4/14/2
[136] KNA - PC/COAST/1/11/335

achievements of the industrial west. Despite the claims of the DC there was a hitch in the state's efforts to promote this mangled modernity.

If prior to the outbreak of the war, colonial authorities were more or less able to control how African populations were moving by controlling who had access to technologies of mobility (at the very least from the idealized perspective of the state), the demands of the war rendered this strategy moot. The introduction of war lorries manned by African drivers forced the floodgates which, once opened, were impossible for the administration to dam. In 1942 it was reported that Turkana men in large numbers were moving across the colony in lorries without the requisite road-passes, taking routes unsanctioned and unsurveilled by the colonial state.[137] In keeping with the prevailing colonial ideology, officials interpreted these movements as reflecting broader shifts in the minds of those on the move. Indeed, in the same year the Provincial Commissioner of Central Province reported that Kikuyu were developing a sense of "individuality" which, he argued, constituted a palpable threat to colonial authority. Bolstering his claim, the PC noted that Kikuyu men were engaging in unsanctioned trade, and that "a good deal of the export of commodities is done in Kikuyu-owner lorries."[138]

A number of these people on the move directed their attentions toward the capital of Nairobi. The city, for many, represented the possibility for capital accumulation, and an escape from the unfair labour practices and the rapacious chiefs, which together shaped much of rural life. For a "youthful" population increasingly blocked from achieving social adulthood in their home regions, the city represented a space where

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[137] KNA - DC/LPW/21/1/65
[138] KNA - PC/CP.4/14/2

respectability could be achieved by different means, defined according to newly emergent criteria.

By 1943, it was estimated that there were 64,509 Africans living in Nairobi. While the bulk of this population retained connections with family "up-country" many viewed Nairobi as home. The Provincial Commissioner of Central Province, following a conventional colonial script, was unable to reconcile the ideal of a rural African labour force with the "detribalized," urban African. Although the PC acknowledged that the city was viewed by many as being "home," he contended that the number of those that are "completely urbanized is probably not more than 1/15th of the total."[139] The idea of urban Africans challenged the conventional colonial wisdom, which held that Africans were fundamentally rural people. Officials, therefore, understood African settlement in urban spaces as evidence of the disillusion of "traditional" authority. In the face of these threats, whether real or imagined, the colonial state initiated policies that functionally criminalized the occupation of urban space which, as White notes, was the "state's response to a penal code in which most waged and all unwaged work could not be criminalized."[140] It was in this spirit that the state promulgated the "Vagrancy Ordinance" in 1944, which allowed officials to forcibly return undesirable "denativized" Africans to the reserves, marching and sending them by bus along the colony's arteries.[141]

Infrastructures of mobility, however, were not simply symbols and materialities of colonial discipline. They, like other technologies of mobility, were doubled. Technical knowledge of communications networks provided opportunities for subversion. Indeed, 1947 was a watershed for the politics of mobility as Africans who were connected to the

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[139] *Ibid;* KNA - DC/KTI/2/3/1; also Frederick Cooper and other cities stuff
[140] White, *Comforts*
[141] KNA - PC/CP.20/1

mobility sector transformed technical knowledge into a poetics of subversion. In 1947 strikes broke out in Nyanza/Kisumu and Mombasa. In both instances the government assumed the culprits were employees of the Public Works Department (P.W.D.) which, we will remember, predominantly employed Africans in the roads' sector, and Railway employees. Administrators were certain that key trouble-makers were mobile men, but overlaying this generic set of assumptions was the belief that Kikuyu men, in particular, were responsible for the shape of the unionists' politics.[142]

Knowledge and politics, like "youthful" men and women, evidently traveled, and it was the very fact of these unsanctioned mobilities that gave them such conceptual weight in the minds of colonial officials. In the case of the strike in Kisumu, officials were careful to note the presence of Kikuyu men at the site of the trouble in the predominantly Luo and Luhya region, whereas in the case of Mombasa, the administration noted that striking workers were articulating the complaints that typified those emanating from Africans living in Central Province: land alienation, unfair wages, and the inability to accumulate capital.[143] Beyond the anxiety provoked by "Kikuyu participation," strikers' ability to ply the colony's routes and spread their message gave the strikes a palpably threatening hue. As the author of a confidential circular warned: "If the strike has repercussions up-country this may be expected to give a new lease of life to the strike down here, and still more, if the strike down here continues to be successful, it may lead to, or accelerate, events up-country."[144]

Officials were correct in their concern that these men, with technical knowledge of the functioning of communications networks and an understanding of the coordination

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[142] KNA – DC/NKU/5/2, 1947-1960.
[143] KNA - DC/NKU/5/2; KNA - Secretariat/1/12/6, 1947
[144] KNA - Secretariat/1/12/6, 1947

required to render them operational, could grind the colonial economy to a halt. The skills designed to ensure smooth operations were, indeed, the selfsame skills required to create blockage. The complex and mobile itineraries of people and ideas were fearsome things, near impossible to discipline and totally opaque to the surveillance apparatus of the state. The surest solution, officials speculated, was to raise a "non-native" force of volunteers to "keep the Railway and Post-Office working" for should another strike occur, "it is probable that they will do their utmost to stop the railway working and they may even attempt to break telephonic and telegraphic communications."[145]

People were not, in this instance, engaging the politics of mobility by refusing to labour on infrastructural routes of rule. Urban-based Africans, by contrast to their rural counterparts, targeted technologies of mobility over which they possessed a special mastery. These instantiations of colonial governance required skilled labourers and, like the technologies themselves, these skills could be put to unforeseen, "seditious" ends. Colonial authority, from this perspective, was contingent on the structures that sustained it, and this contingency made it vulnerable to subversion.

The increased political activities of urban labourers forced the colonial state to acknowledge that mobile, urbanized Africans were not an aberration. Nor were their networks limited to the urban cores of Nairobi, Kisumu, and Mombasa. Urban workers employed in the mobility sector had networks cutting across the colony and played a critical role in fomenting dissent on a large scale during the 1947 strikes, moving ideas as well as people across Kenya. Within this context, the solution could no longer be to return Africans to the reserves. Rather than containing dissent, rehabilitating "natives" to rural regions might abet the spread urban-based political movements to the countryside.

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[145] KNA - Secretariat/1/12/6, 1947

As the Municipal African Affairs Officer wrote to the Provincial Commissioner of Nyeri in 1946, the recent unpopularity and "odium" with which the urban population viewed the police and the Labour Department would complicate the removal of vagrants. Beyond this he warned that it was:

> necessary to control those Africans who have no other home but Nairobi, and at the same time to prevent the Reserves being troubled by the same conditions under which we are at present suffering through the presence of undesirable Africans.[146]

Perhaps the fact of mobility and the occupation of the urban space had shaped these men, but a return to "traditional" homelands under the supervision of "elders" would not reverse these trends. In other words, administrators increasingly viewed these urban-based Africans as having been "de-nativized" to the point of no return. And yet the administration was unwilling to grant these men and women the status of modern urban, subjects.[147]

The politics of mobility were not limited to urban Africans, and the pitch of colonial anxieties during the strike was likely animated by the developments that had been taking place in "Kikuyuland" since the war's end. The war had set people in motion which spurned their desire for ever-greater access to mobility and the technologies that facilitated it. This was most evident in the demands being put to District administrators by returning Askaris who articulated their rights in a language that linked mobility to capital accumulation mediated through the sign-function of the automobile. These new

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[146] KNA - PC/CP.20/1

[147] Frederick Cooper, "Urban Space, Industrial Time, and Wage Labor in Africa," in *Struggle for the City: Migrant Labor, Capital, and the State in Urban Africa,* ed. Frederick Cooper, 7-50, (Beverley Hills: SAGE Publications, 1983); Frederick Cooper and Randall Packard. "Modernizing Bureaucrats, Backward Africans, and the Development Concept," *International Development and the Social Sciences: Essays on the History and Politics of Knowledge* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1997).

politics demanded new associations, such as the driving association started by returning

Askaris in Kitui, of which the DC wrote:

> It is the ambition of very large numbers of askarix [*sic*] with accumulated funds,
> which were beyond their wildest dreams of wealth five years ago, to either
> purchase a lorry or to set up trade as a means of increasing their resources. For the
> meantime both these ambitions must be restrained and lists of would-be vehicle
> owners are being compiled against the day when a partial fulfillment of their
> ambitions may be possible.[148]

Similar patterns were noted in Meru. Administrators argued for the need to restrain

desires for automobility until the time was right. From the point of view of would-be

lorry owners, however, their service to the Crown ought to be rewarded, and the reward

they desired was the unencumbered mobility and capital accumulation afforded by these

commodities.[149] Technologies of mobility thus occupied important material as well as

conceptual place for returning Askaris. Not only were they perceived to be critical

prerequisites for capital accumulation but also marked their bearers as "modern,"

respectable men.

In both domains – the symbolic and the material – the desire for greater access to

automobility constituted an attempt to reconfigure the topography of power in the Kenya

colony. As the DC of Kiambu reported in the same year:

> There has been brisk demand for lorries for every conceivable trade; in view of
> the difficulties over tyres, spares and petrol applications have not been given
> except in essential cases. All sorts of old scrap iron that was once a box body car
> or a lorry have been retried in attempts to get them on the road. The freight sought
> after is ostensibly fuel, vegetables or charcoal but it is in practice the much
> higher-paying human being. The Kikuyu do not seem to understand the saying 'is
> your journey really necessary? And think nothing of paying a Shs/4 – lorry fare to
> sell Shs 3/- worth of vegetables or eggs and see the sights of Nairobi. Most of the
> trade is in native hands and there would seem to be far too many traders to ever

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[148] KNA - PC/CP.4/14/2
[149] KNA - PC/CP.20/1

hope to make a decent living.[150]

Given the historical premium the state put on the unencumbered mobility of colonial agents in a bid to create a robust surveillance state, and the role of automobiles in shoring up colonial authority and prestige, this statement would have rung hollow for many.[151] While the DC had limited understanding of the myriad economic activities and exchange relationships facilitated by trips to town, the journey itself was likely part of travelers' calculus. For people willing to expend more than they gained on these trips to Nairobi, it seems, the fact of movement often took precedence over the desire to accumulate wealth.

However, there was another, more local form of politics at play here. Though not stated in the report, it is likely that the bulk of town traders were women, who had cornered the market in vegetable sales by the mid-1930s.[153] Just as young men marked their autonomy from the strictures of rural authority by going to the city and entering into the wage-labour economy, now women struck out on their own asserting their relative autonomy from brothers, husbands, and fathers.[154] As this suggests, the desire for technologies of mobility was not limited to the possible markets such movement facilitated but were part of a larger discourse which connected mobility to emergent and alternative imaginings of self-mastery.[155]

Unencumbered automobility and the markets afforded by lorry-ownership were not the only concerns of drivers, as is evident from a survey of the politics of driving associations formed at the war's end. In 1945 two political activists established driving associations. James Beauttah, then head of the Kikuyu Central Association (K.C.A.),

[150] KNA - PC/CP.4/14/2
[151] KNA - JA/25 – Post-War Five-Year Development Plan
[153] Lonsdale, *The Moral Economy of Mau Mau,* 387.
[154] Claire Robertson, *Trouble Showed the Way*
[155] KNA - DC/FH1/11

formed the Kenya African Automobile Association and Francis Khamisi, editor of

"Mwalimu," headed up a group "styling themselves as the Thika Motor Drivers

Association."[156] Beauttah hoped to enlist all African lorry owners as members, creating a

platform from which their interests and the needs of their customers could be protected.

Beauttah, however, was as concerned as elders regarding the mobility of "youth," and the

untethering from traditional authority their movement constituted. His politics, like those

of Kenyatta, looked increasingly like Kikuyu ethnic patriotism in the post-war years.[157]

Khamisi, by contrast, was more broadly concerned with the general plight of

black Africans, and took his own role as organizer a step further than the conservative

Beauttah. In 1945, the DC of Thika wrote of labour unrest in the region, which he blamed

on Khamisi's group. The drivers complained that they were often brought up on charges

related to the road-worthiness of vehicles that they did not own, arguing it was not their

responsibility to maintain vehicles they drove, but the responsibility of the "mainly

Indian" owners. It was on the basis of these grievances that Khamisi had approached the

DC and asked that the association to be registered as a trade union.[158] In the coming

months, the Association demanded that the government produce a list of offenses drivers

could be held accountable for "so that drivers know what is and what is not an offence, as

they complain of unjustified interference and persecution by the Police."[159] The role of

police in impeding movement, of course, had historical precedents. So, too, were people

familiar with officers committing semi-official extortion along the colony's arteries. Read

against this longer history of mobility and roads discourse these statements thus become

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[156] KNA - PC/CP.4/14/2; KNA - PC/CP.20/1
[157] Lonsdale, *The Moral Economy of Mau Mau,* 422.
[158] *Ibid.*
[159] KNA - Sec/1/12/8

legible as a deep and enduring critique of a colonial system that pivoted on controlling

people's movements through space, and reveal an acute understanding of the relationship

between race and the politics of mobility in the Kenya colony.

Indeed, drivers' rights were, for Khamisi, intimately related to the politics of

mobility, writ large. Following the 1945 labour unrest in Thika, Khamisi published a

searing critique of the *kipande* system in "Mwalimu." This critique directly cited the role

of space in (re)producing glaring social inequalities in the Kenya colony.

> We are glad to note in Mwalimu...H.E. The Governor's words that he should have
> impression of his finger prints taken in order to possess the card which is given to
> the Africans in Kenya. If it is true that he is going to get the Kipande then he must
> fulfill its regulations. First of all he must change his colour, he must become a
> Blackman and never again be a white man, because Kipande is for the Africans in
> Kenya only. He will be obliged to walk along the River Road for that is the proper
> road for Kipande people. He must halt, when is ordered by Police, in order to
> produce his Kipande to them when they require it. If possible when H.E. Gets his
> Kipande, he must let us see it, so that we can compare his with ours. The
> Governor must prove the following, Clan, Circumcision age, Nature of Work,
> Sub-locations, Location, Name of Employer, Rate of Wages, If posho given,
> Chief, etc."[160]

Khamisi was well aware of the multiple ways in which structural marginalization was

reproduced and the *kipande* was the core symbol of the colonial state's attempt to

circumscribe mobility. Most immediately, the limitations imposed by the system were

felt in the prohibitive spatial logic they entailed. Those in possession of the *kipande*

clearly understood the system's role in dictating which spaces they could occupy, and

which roads they could move along. River Road, importantly one of the few roads people

refer to by name in the postcolonial context, was the "proper road for Kipande people."

As colonial anxieties over resistance to the registration system reached a new

pitch, Jomo Kenyatta was again on the scene. Like Khamisi and Beauttah, Kenyatta's

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[160] KNA - AG/35/35

politics were deeply connected to the politics of mobility. In 1947, District Commissioners in Central Province bemoaned the inability of the surveillance apparatus to monitor the activities of Kenyatta, who was again travelling across the province by car, this time with Peter Mbui. Despite these frustrations, officials did have intelligence that the two were holding meetings with motor-vehicle owners who had "no recognised association or union of their own." While the content of these meetings was not clear to the administration, the District Commissioner did have intelligence which suggested that "they discussed T.L.B. [Transport Licensing Board] licences."[161]

Kenyatta's concern over the rights of drivers was intimately connected to the politics of the Kenya African Union (K.A.U.), a largely middle-class association of lettered "youth."[162] Within months, meetings were held across the Province. The Superintendent of Police submitted a confidential report to the Provincial Commissioner of Central Province, which documented a meeting held under the auspices of the Nyeri chapter of the K.A.U. During the meeting, Kenyatta gave a speech, which directly linked the structural inequalities that characterized colonial govermnentality to infrastructural marginalization. Over the course of the speech Kenyatta, unsurprisingly, demanded the abolition of the hated *kipande* system. Following this condemnation, Kenyatta immediately turned to roads and cars. Just as the *kipande* system denied the personhood of the possessor, the nature of road-development denied capital accumulation for African automobile owners. "Roads serving European farms," he pointed out, "were always better than Reserve roads. According to him this meant additional expense to African owners of

[161] KNA - Sec/1/12/8
[162] Lonsdale, *The Moral Economy of Mau Mau,* 409.

motor vehicles and the money thus spent went back to the European."[163] If the *kipande* system symbolized the worst abuses of the colonial system, it found a material counterpart in infrastructural (under)development, which prevented the enrichment of rural penny capitalists. Within this context, Kenyatta positioned the dismantling of one form of exclusion as capable of unraveling the other.

Alongside the issue of infrastructural underdevelopment, were problems of everyday forms of extortion. The *kipande* system was emblematic of the circumscription of movement; however, even absent these concerns Africans were marked by virtue of their race as bodies to be blocked and extorted. These connections were made more explicit at a well-attended meeting of the Nairobi Taxi Drivers' Union, where Kenyatta was also in attendance. A number of speakers argued that the Municipal Rules governing taxi-drivers were tantamount to slavery, and the tone was decidedly revolutionary. As one Said from Mombasa put it: "unless the bye-laws [*sic*] were rejected they would be in slavery and that freedom could not be got as a gift from a friend but by blood." A Somali man attacked the by-laws forcing taxi-drivers to wear badges. The badges, he argued, were like "dog collars" and, given the symbolic servitude that inhered in the system of marking, "they [African taxi-drivers] might just as well be called dogs."[164] The reader will be struck by the resonance between these articulations and the critiques that had historically been leveled at the *kipande* system more broadly. Drivers, newly in possession of technologies of mobility, were being denied the movement these technologies held out as a promise. When Kenyatta asked the crowd what they would do

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[163] KNA - Sec/1/12/8
[164] KNA - Sec/1/12/8

if the laws were not abandoned, they responded they would strike, not only in Nairobi but across the colony.

Dismissing the claims made by the Nairobi Taxi Driver's Union as silly, for did these "stupid people" not know that "taxi-cabs in London and New York are very much governed by regulations," a Member for Law and Order was forced to acknowledge the significance of the gathering. "The serious feature of that meeting was not only that they appear to have passed a resolution rejecting the Municipal Bye-laws with regard to taxi-cab drivers, but rejecting also the laws of the Kenya Government generally 'as they contain no freedom for Africans.'"[165] Luise White notes, taxi drivers:

> occupied a position in the world of individuated labor that has sometimes been ascribed to domestic servants: they were for the most part skilled illiterates who worked closely enough to Indians and Europeans to become acutely aware of the political issues and disparities in standards of living.[166]

For these men, politics writ large were filtered through the politics of mobility, and the technologies that formed their core. Anti-colonial sentiment, evidently, increasingly found expression in discussions that pivoted around automobility.

As police exploitation of the *kipande* system reached an unprecedented pitch in the war years, ever more vociferous demands for its abolition reverberated across the colony. It was as though even the flawed colonial logic that informed the registration system had been abandoned as "the lower ranks of the Police...required [Africans] to produce their Registration Certificates...on many occasions [Africans] being fined even when going about on their lawful occasions, or in many cases, while on their own

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[165] KNA - Sec/1/12/8
[166] White, *Comforts,* 162.

premises."[167] It seems that the "lower ranks of the Police" had recognized the system as one rife with opportunities for extortion. The link between government authority, rapacious law-enforcement agents, and (im)mobility was again being inscribed in landscape of the Kenya colony, a legacy that continues to have purchase on postcolonial readings of (il)legitimate authority and the location of power.

In response to the increasingly virulent critiques people were articulating in various registers, the colonial state took the first steps to reforming the hated *kipande* system. These reforms sanctioned the separation of the top and bottom halves of the identification card, the top identifying the individual subject and the bottom their labour history. Though people now had the right to carry the two pieces separately, administrators warned against this by mobilizing a revealing, if cynical, analogy. The PC of Garissa wrote:

> Regarding the lower half of the kipande, it is not compulsory for you to keep it, <u>BUT</u> think carefully before you throw it away…Before you buy a bicycle in a shop, you look at it careful, and want to know where it was made, and all about it. Likewise, your employer likes to know what kind of person he is engaging, and your record of service tells him.[168]

Ignoring the obvious racism of this statement, which likened human beings to manufactured articles, commodities to be bought and sold whose value could be determined by the determining the conditions of their origin, we can assume that the PC was thoughtful in his choice of analogy given the stakes. In choosing his words, the PC must have thought that the analogy would be a compelling one to his audience. Technologies of mobility, as we have seen, were valued objects, objects that had historically reflected the prestige of their bearers. Certainly people would understand

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[167] *Ibid.*
[168] KNA - PC/GRSSA/2/17/1

employers' desire to scrutinize labourers just as Africans scrutinized the commodities their participation in the self-same economy allowed them to consume.

What may not have been clear to the PC, however, was that by likening the *kipande* system to the purchase of a bicycle he was tapping into a fraught discourse of mobility which had a long and contentious history among variously situated African subjects. Even those with expendable capital were not necessarily permitted to own technologies of mobility. And ownership certainly did not entail the right to autonomous and unencumbered movement. These technologies were doubled in their symbolic and material functions. The objects themselves were emblematic of a type of mobility; however, in African hands the mobility promised by these technologies was in no way guaranteed.

The experiences of taxi and lorry drivers mirrored, in microcosm, the oppression of black Kenyans more generally. Indeed, when it came time for Kenyatta to speak, he explicitly linked the fight against the by-laws to the fight against the *kipande* system. The politics of mobility had been a core site of contestation since the early colonial period. Within this discourse, the *kipande* emerged in popular readings of colonial governmentality as the object designed to fix people in place. By the late 1940s, technologies of mobility were well entrenched in the popular imaginary as a means of circumventing the oppressive and exclusionary policies of the colonial state. However, now in possession of these technologies, drivers found their rights to mobility again frustrated, as by-laws materially marked their bearers as subjects. While in theory auto-mobility represented unencumbered movement, in practice the realization of that mobility depended on the identity of the driver. Arguably, it is a result of the theoretically inverse

relationship between seemingly discrete types of objects – the *kipande* and municipal by-

laws as stand ins for stasis and oppression, technologies of mobility and tarmacked roads

as stand ins for movement and a type of freedom - that has transformed technologies of

mobility into such powerful symbols. These seemingly discrete objects and this particular

system of governance shared as their canvas, as their site, roads. It is a function of the

contradictions embedded in these infrastructures and the technologies that traverse them,

that has transformed these objects into core nodes of struggle and contestation, which

continue to shape the politics of the present.

The PC of Nyeri, it would seem, was correct. Controlling the movement of people

and ideas was no longer a feasible strategy for the colonial government. And, as we have

seen, the discourse that linked communications networks and power was not limited to

trade unions and mobility sector workers. Perhaps operating in a different register, the

quotidian politics of mobility during this period nevertheless spoke directly to the

intimate relationships that had developed in the popular imaginary among mobility,

technologies, and the exercise of arbitrary power. Likely contributing to this proliferation

was the initiation of another phase of expropriation, another attempt by the colonial state

to inscribe ideal social relationships into the landscape of the colony. In the face of this

new spatial violence, squatters added their voices to the contentious and multivalent

politics of mobility.

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Following their 1947 eviction from Olengurone, squatters agitated for the right to

return to land they had worked so hard to clear. In the face of settler, official, and "elder"

obstinance, each differently arguing the squatters return to the "slavery" of the Highlands,

squatters began swearing oaths of unity, hoping mass refusal would force the hand of the

settlers and the government. As their discontent reached a new pitch, the squatters

invaded the governor's house.[169] Following the invasion, the Superintendent of Police in

Central Province reported the following:

> A plain-clothes constable...overheard eight Kikuyu talking in an omnibus in Thika
> township. They were discussing the recent 'invasion' of Government House by
> Rift Valley squatters and the death of one of those squatters on the return journey
> due to a lorry-turning. They said that the over-turning of the lorry was due to
> Police motor vehicles 'weaving' about on the road in front of it. They also said
> that the squatters concerned had contributed to a fund to enable the question of
> this man's death to be taken up with the government.[170]

And the gossip was not limited to Thika. The DC of Kiambu similarly reported that this

incident was a topic of heated discussion on the reserve in his district. In Kiambu, rumor

had it that:

> the police had engineered the accident either by bribing the driver of the lorry, or
> by ordering him to drive at an excessive speed, or by putting another vehicle on
> the road so that the driver had to mount the bank to avoid hitting it.[171]

These rumors, it was assumed, had as their source Kikuyu political agitators. Their point

of origin is of less concern to our discussion than the fact that these stories were stories

that circulated. Whether or not they were "true," the shape of the narrative was, evidently,

not beyond the realm of the thinkable for people (re)working these stories as they moved

them across space.[172] The same report noted that a party of 10 men and 19 women had

visited the site of the accident and spent a good deal of time "making notes and taking

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[169] Lonsdale, *The Moral Economy of Mau Mau,* 419-420.
[170] KNA - Sec/1/12/8
[171] KNA - Sec/1/12/8
[172] Luise White, *Speaking with Vampires*

measurements."[173] As the forensic work proceeded the crowd grew, reaching upwards of 100 people who demanded compensation for the survivors of the crash. The most vocal of the group was one Ibrahim Gichirire, a lorry owner and advocate for squatters' rights. Despite administrators' best efforts to quash these emergent politics, meetings continued to be held in the following days, as people gathered at the home of an unnamed lorry owner. The large-scale political mobilizations of the Coast and Western Province, which linked nodes of dissent using technologies of mobility, found more local counter-parts amongst the squatters and lorry-owners of Central Province.

The rumors circulating in and around Thika suggest roads discourse had another patina, pointing to another set of doubled meanings. Police did not only extort people along the colony's arteries. It was also along the roads that police conspired to murder *athami,* "people on the move," using technologies of mobility as their weapon.[174] By the same token, however, technologies of mobility and the conversations that happened in and around them provided people an unprecedented opportunity to circumvent the surveillance state. Indeed, as we have seen, political organization and popular protests thrived around people in the transport sector as owners and drivers used their status (and likely capital) to challenge the security forces' exercise of arbitrary power. Neither wholly positive nor wholly negative, these scenes suggest that, even from this early moment, the motor vehicle occupied a highly fraught, contested, and ambivalent space is the popular imaginary. Just as in the early colonial period roads were both objects of desire and, concurrently, the site where labourers perished, in the post-war period vehicles both represented opportunity for self-mastery and the possibility of violent

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[173] KNA - Sec/1/12/8
[174] Lonsdale, *The Moral Economy of Mau Mau,* 383.

death. In spite of this doubledness in the imaginaries of many Kenyans, one thing was clear to the colonial state, these unmonitored vehicles had become loci of discussion, sites of gossip and, due to the very fact of their mobility, moving containers for talk.

Land scarcity was on the forefront of the minds of many in the postwar years and the discourse surrounding roads remained part of this narrative. Just as the taxi drivers' union linked new by-laws to their relative marginalization in the colonial hierarchy, people living in the reserves continued to view roads as infringing on their liberty. In 1948, Njeroge Kagunda, both a squatter himself and an advocate for squatters' rights, reportedly forbade Kikuyu from undertaking any government work, "such as road repair."[175] Roads in this period were viewed by many as a way of encroaching on the already stretched land that had been allotted to Africans living in the Central Province. This was confirmed in 1948 with the passing of a new Roads Bill. Land alienated to make way for new roads, the Bill stated, would not be compensated. The language establishing legitimate use was equally prohibitive. People were forbidden from erecting thereon: "any building, structure, fence, wall, ditch, drain, furrow, advertisement, traffic sign or other obstacle." Roads, the circular made clear, could not be repurposed as sites of trade and commerce.[176] These were not routes that extended markets.

Resistance, it would seem, did not simply take the form of refusing roadwork. Rather, in this period, people actively worked to dismantle the routes of colonial rule. And Africans resistant to the development of new roads were not wrong in their belief that the building of new roads was a means by which further land would be taken from them, nor were they wrong in the related belief that new roads would not provide access

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[175] KNA - MA/8/111
[176] KNA - PC/RVP.6

to markets. The prohibited practices enumerated in the Bill suggest protest was taking forms which concretely reclaimed these alienated spaces. The report enumerated the acts which could be prosecuted as follows: the removal of any "pegs, marks, posts, poles or other objects used in connection with a survey"; practices that "willfully deface, obliterate, mutilate, break, displace or destroy any such peg, mark, post, pole or other object." Those found guilty were "liable to a fine not exceeding two thousand shillings or to imprisonment not exceeding three months, or to both."[177] The sheer length and specificity of prosecutable offences suggests that these practices were not uncommon and that they took myriad forms.

Writing of the Grassfields region of Cameroon, Nikolas Argenti argues that the destruction of roads in the colonial period was: "something more than an attack against the colonial administration and something less than an anticolonial struggle in the strict sense."[178] In the Grassfields, these practices were as much a reflection of inter-generational conflict and the inability of young men to achieve social adulthood as they were anticolonial in character. The same could be argued of Kenya. Men like Kenyatta were increasingly conservative in their views. As wealthy, landed figures of authority these men viewed roads as being the prerequisite for capital accumulation which, theoretically, would be reinvested in land. For *athami,* by contrast, increased road development simply meant increased alienation of already over-stretched land. The Kikuyu labour theory of value posited landed status as the litmus test of social maturity. As this theory articulated with the colonial economy "junior" men and women were relegated to the status of perpetual marginalization and stunted maturation as structural

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[177] KNA - PC/RVP.6
[178] Argenti, *Intestines of the State,* 170.

constraints blocked conventional routes to self-mastery. The greatest threat to this ideology came from the "time bandits," men and women who eschewed conventional criteria of self-mastery by seeking out new markets and forging new sites of sociality in town.

To say that roads discourse simply pitted colonial populations against the state, then, would be to miss the density of meaning and multivalent nature of the discourse. Discussions of roads and cars tapped into long contested definitions of respectability and challenged conventional criteria of social adulthood. Indeed, it was precisely the fact that roads and the technologies that traversed them occupied such a multivalent and often highly ambiguous conceptual space that made (and continues to make) roads such a resonant and charged political idiom. They were (and are) positively and negatively coded depending on the particularities of the context, and could be (and are) often coded as both simultaneously.

Roads and labour practices, cars and capital, identification placards and badges, it would seem, found in each other mirrors. They were multiply situated refractions of the same "colonial situation," marked as it was by a form of governmentality that materially pivoted on the organization of space and populations within it, but which symbolically depended on the semiotics of prestige in shoring colonial authority in the context of indirect rule. The Janus-faced nature of these technologies and networks, which were at once sources of oppression and markers of emancipation, while beginning to coalesce in the discourses of the inter-war period, have become completely fused in the post-colonial context.

Chapter 4:

The 1950s Revisited and the Place of Movement in the Politics of Dissent

> *When everything goes so splendidly, why cannot I get a permit for my bycicle.'*
> *[sic][179]*

I have no interest in entering into the heated ongoing debates in the scholarship over the origins of Mau Mau nor in its appropriate categorization, issues which have dominated Kenya's historiography. However, I would suggest that Mau Mau, and colonial responses to it, take on a slightly different colour when set against the backdrop of this longer history of (im)mobility.

As we have seen, colonial rhetoric surrounding African mobility, in general, and the discourse surrounding the activities of those Africans in contact with technologies of mobility, in particular, pivoted on the contradictory demands of colonial capitalism and the ideology underwriting development discourse, a tension exacerbated with the revitalization of "development" under the guise of "social welfare" in the post-war period.[180] For the colonial and settler economy to function labour had to circulate but movement had to be measured. Setting a labouring population in motion, however, had unintended consequences. Indeed, the post-war period was a watershed moment in the politics of mobility, as men and women on the move played critical roles in the production of dissent. The colonial state presumed people working in the transport sector

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[179] Papers of Reverend J.L. Beecher held at the National Museum, Nairobi. GSSB Folio 24, Christian Council of Kenya: A Study of Kabare Village in the Embu District (1956) Authored by G. Sluiter

[180] Cooper and Packard. "Modernizing Bureaucrats, Backward Africans, and the Development Concept."

were to blame, and these associational groups were functionally ethnicized. At fault were

mobile, Kikuyu "troublemakers." While in an earlier period, Africans' desires for roads

and technologies of mobility were framed as evidence of their relative "development," by

the post-war period it was clear to the colonial state that these desires, when realized,

could be highly volatile. Thus, while cars and road infrastructures remained signifiers of

development and modernity, the interwar period demonstrated that their function and

meaning could be subject to radical reinterpretation.

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While Mau Mau is typically framed as a Kikuyu conflict that largely broke down

along the lines of generation and status, some of the core issues were generalizable. John

Lonsdale, writing of Mau Mau guerillas, argues they were fighting for *wiathi,* a concept

he glosses as "self-mastery" and "moral agency."[181] As we have seen, young men and

women, blocked from the realization of self-mastery along conventional routes, had long

experimented with methods to achieve respectability according to new criteria. The

realization of self-mastery had, for some, become associated with the unencumbered

movement technologies of mobility signified, even if popular experiences using them

were slightly more problematic. While this experience was not limited to Kikuyu

"youth," due to the proximity of Kikuyuland to Nairobi, many of the men and women on

the road were, indeed, Kikuyu. In the early colonial period, men of Kenyatta's generation

had demanded the right to hold the reigns of power, citing literacy and their broader

experiences of mobility as evidence of their political "maturity." By the 1950s, this

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[181] Lonsdale, *The Moral Economy of Mau Mau,* 326. The story of Mau Mau is framed by John
Lonsdale as being, predominantly, an issue of how notions of self-mastery were tied to land-
ownership as the prerequisite for achieving social adulthood. For my purposes here, however,
attention is trained on the important place of *mobility* in the self-imaginings of "juniors," who
widely held themselves to have been excluded from politics in Central Province.

generation of literate men reaffirmed their positions in a newly reconfigured, but nonetheless normative, generational hierarchy, separating their youthful spatial transgressions from their itineraries as Christian converts, disparaging the former and thereby redeeming the latter.[182] In other words, they used their literacy to affirm their positions within generational and class hierarchies while denying the mobile histories that precipitated these transformations.

These contradictions were not lost on newly disenfranchised "youth," who viewed men of Kenyatta's stature and generation as outmoded, not to mention hypocritical. It was these men, the men of the KCA, who were now impeding members of *anake wa forti,* the "Forty Group" from achieving self-mastery. A radical critique was embedded in this self-designation. They were the "unmarried warriors," who came up in the year 1940, a year by which in an ideally imagined past they should have graduated into social adulthood *via* marriage and propertied status.[183] This name, then, spoke to a perversion of the unfolding of time - interestingly, an accusation invoked by rural patriarchs in their denunciation of the spatial *cum* temporal transgressions of the *anake wa forti.* The once radical KCA had become an elders' association.[184] Recycling and reinvigorating an old script, the KCA now referred to *these* mobile entrepreneurs as people of the "road," "time-bandits," who "mixed up the sequence of personal moral growth…[and] repudiated ancestry."[185]

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[182] John Lonsdale, "Kikuyu Christianities: A History of Intimate Diversity," in *Christianity and Social Change in Africa: Esssays in Honor of J.D.Y. Peel,* ed. Toyin Falola (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2005).
[183] John Lonsdale, "Town Life in Colonial Kenya," in *The Urban Experience in Eastern Africa c. 1750-2000,* ed. Andrew Burton, 207-222, (Nairobi: British Institute of Eastern Africa, 2002).
[184] Lonsdale, *The Moral Economy of Mau Mau,* 413.
[185] Lonsdale, *The Moral Economy of Mau Mau,* 443.

On one reading, then, Mau Mau could be situated as the culmination of a series of historical repetitions. As in the 1920s, the politics of the late 1940s, and 1950s pivoted on the question of social maturation and hinged on explorations of novel paths by which to achieve it. Likewise, the colonial state's response represented an extension of pre-Emergency tactics of governance. In particular, the colonial state quickly mobilized infrastructures and technologies of containment and purification: the general internment of populations in detention camps (which were the emergency era equivalent to native-reserves), the requisite pass-books (which could be read as more constrictive *kipandes*), Operation Anvil which sanctioned the rounding up of all Kikuyu, Embu and Meru populations living in Nairobi (which could be likened to the Vagrancy Ordinance of a decade earlier). The practices of the colonial state during the Emergency, like the insurgency itself, in other words, found models in earlier practices and vexed processes that had historically formed the core of the "colonial situation" in the Kenya colony. And space and mobility, like in earlier iterations, formed the crux of the conflict. What was unfolding was not *simply* a repetition, however. While landed, rural men continued to refer to impoverished and mobile youth as "delinquent," the reality was that by 1950: "more and more Kikuyu were excluded from the means of production and self-mastery by inequality rather than idleness."[186]

Nevertheless, it would be folly to assume that these repetitions did not shape people's responses to the 1950s regulations. The passbooks, like the *kipande,* engendered an incredibly restrictive spatial logic. As though in symmetrical response to the shape of colonial regulations, methods of "passive resistance" were directed toward confounding the technopolitics of the state, and communications networks became a central target of

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[186] Lonsdale, *The Moral Economy of Mau Mau,* 441.

popular actions. In particular, people worked to block the movement of the economy. Strategies included: "Parking vehicles on bridges and refusing to move them...Lying or sitting in large numbers [on] rail tracks, roads, bridges, town centres, airfields etc."[187] If the colonial government was going to revoke the already negligible right to mobility of African bodies, Africans responded in kind, using their bodies and captured colonial technologies to stop of the flow of the colonial economy.

While the emergency measures were by and large directed at Kikuyu, Embu, and Meru (KEM in the colonial shorthand), the administration feared that the uprising would spread, leading to widespread surveillance across the Kenya colony.[188] In response to the increasingly stringent strictures sanctioned by the colonial state, people set to work appropriating infrastructures reserved for the state and repurposing them. In a kind of seesaw logic, the state responded in kind and enacted increasingly prohibitive spatial policies. In 1957, the Emergency Regulations were amended, empowering the police to: "regulate the extent to which any music may be played, or to which music or human speech or any other sound may be amplified, broadcast, relayed or otherwise reproduced by artificial means, on public roads or streets, or at places of public resort."[189]

Strategies developed by union-workers within the transportation sector in the 1940s, it would seem, were echoed in popular responses to the Emergency regulations of the 1950s. These actions not only worked to achieve disruption through creating blockages, but also sought to appropriate spaces which historically evidenced colonial authority thereby subverting their symbolic meaning.[190] Occupying roads and creating

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[187] KNA - PC/GRSSA/3/30/8 – 1950
[188] Lonsdale, *The Moral Economy of Mau Mau,* 449.
[189] KNA - PC/GRSSA/3/30/8, 1950
[190] Brian Larkin, *Signal and Noise*

spaces of amplified critique transformed routes of surveillance and settler trade into sites where colonial discipline was flouted and capital was arrested.

The idioms of flow and blockage, we would do well to remember, are critical to how individual and social wellbeing is conceptualized among many African societies. Like in circulatory systems, "flow" is associated with productive sociality, evidence of social relations aligned. But it always contains as its potential other stagnation, as a clot blocking an artery. These blockages, the result of disequilibrium in the social body, are often associated with anti-social forms of power such as witchcraft.[191] However, the back and forth between blockage and flow operates dialectically. That is, it is in the resolution of blockage that social equilibrium can be restored. Blockage is then not only negatively coded, but can also be productive of critique and resolution. Thus, in blocking the flow of the economy people worked as an anti-social force, inserting themselves into the social body of the colonial state, perhaps trying to find resolution.

Perhaps unsurprisingly sites of mobility, the decided other of Emergency regulations, emerged in this period as critical locations of dissent, as the itinerary of the KBS (Kenya Bus Service) makes clear.[192] The KBS – a metropolitan firm – had ostensibly secured a monopoly on transport from the colonial government in Nairobi in the 1930s; however, the security of its position, as we shall see, was under constant and popular threat. In 1953 Randall D. Warden Jr., a Nairobi resident, wrote a letter of complaint to the company regarding the transformation of bus stages into sites of African sociality.[193] "Dear Mrs. Needham Clark," he wrote:

In January 1952 I protested to the Medical Officer of Health of the Nairobi

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[191] Smith, *Bewitching Development,* 52.
[192] KNA - RN/1/79
[193] Robertson, *Trouble Showed the Way,* 142 & 144.

City Council over the placement of two Country Bus Stops just outside my property located on Mathaiga Road near Limuru round-about. The reason for my protest with the congregation of large number[s] of natives waiting for buses, the noise they made and their habit of leaving refuse and using the adjoining properties as a public toilet. This matter is subsequently understood to have been discussed between the Traffic Control Committee and the Town Council with a view to transferring the bus stop to a point outside the City Council area and apparently the only difficulty would be the construction of adequate bays in order to keep the buses and their passengers completely off the road. However, no action has ever been taken and in view of the State of Emergency and the incipient danger presented by these large groups of natives, it would be greatly appreciated if you would...[direct] your consideration to this matter.[194]

What Warden Jr. read as chaos and potentially uncontainable disorder, however, had another valance. As we saw in the case of the death of the squatter, and the combination of forensic work and narrativizing that followed, points of transit were critical sites where information, gossip, and rumours exchanged hands and solidarities were forged. Bus stages, in particular, functioned as informal but highly organized sites of exchange. Despite the best efforts of the Road Authority, it was nearly impossible to control the appropriation of space by unsanctioned businesses along or near roads, their very impermanence making them near impossible to police.[195]

The Traffic Control Committee visited the site of the Warden Jr., and Vine household where the couple added to their list of complaints. As the Town Clerk reported:

these bus stops in particular encouraged the congregation of undesirable persons, hawkers etc...They want the Country Bus Stops near their houses should be removed to some remote places as they feel that the congregation of Africans mostly Kikuyus is dangerous in these days, when during the day there are no main members of their houses and ladies are left alone. They also complained about the hawkers entering their premises.[196]

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[194] KNA - RN/1/79
[195] Robertson, *Trouble Showed the Way*
[196] KNA – RN/1/79

Beyond the obvious utility of claiming Kikuyu were to blame for the disturbances, other points worthy of note emerged in this exchange. Hawkers, from the perspective of some, were idlers, people without industry, illegitimately using spaces not sanctioned for trade or business. From the perspective of the hawkers themselves, however, as well as the their customers, these people were entrepreneurs, carving out spaces wherein they secured livelihoods through trade while providing essential services and goods to their clients. To accept their designation as "hawkers," then, is to miss the complicated "maneuvering" of "relations between social spaces…symbolic resources, [and] concrete objects" that were being marshaled within this "informal" sites of commerce.[197] The nature of hawkers' businesses, moreover, was premised on a measure of mobility, a set of labour practices contingent on unfixing bodies, creating tributaries in the measured flow of labour the colonial state had tried to secure.[198] As the commissioner of police averred, their position in spaces partially beyond the reach of the colonial state: "constituted threats to security in the heart of the city."[199]

The location of these sites of partial autonomy, partial exteriority, is significant as well. These homes were located on Muthaiga road. A road that, along with Forest Road, marked the line dividing the wealthy population of urban settlers from the growing African urban settlements. On the one side were the neighbourhoods of Muthaiga and Parklands, and on the other side were the technically informal, but even then well established, settlements of Mathare, and Eastleigh, locations which were, and remain, among the poorest in the country. These men and women, evidently, were not limiting

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[197] AbdouMaliq Simone, *For the City Yet to Come: Changing African Life in Four Cities,* (Durham and London: Duke University press, 2004), 105.
[198] White, *Comforts,* 188.
[199] KNA - DC/NKU/5/2

their occupation of urban space to those appropriate to *kipande* people. They had strayed off River Road and were forcefully making their presence felt in neighbourhoods reserved for white settlement. The state and settlers, importantly, were not alone in denigrating these men and women. These mobile entrepreneurs were the resented "time bandits" critiqued by the "ethnic patriots" of Central Province.[200]

If people undermined the authority of the KBS by transforming its stages into sites of commerce and communication, KBS' monopoly over the transportation sector was also vulnerable to seizure. In 1953, the manager of KBS Ltd. reported a precipitous drop in the number of passengers using its services. Between September 23 and September 24 the number of passengers dropped by 30 per cent. The alleged boycott, the manager claimed, was the result of one of the company's "Kikuyu Bus Conductors" telling "a prospective passenger that he was not allowed to travel in the bus." Since the incident, the manager reported: "Some Africans on bicycles have been observed standing at the bus stops and glaring at the odd African passenger in the bus…All the buses to the native locations have now been withdrawn."

As this story unfolded, the lines of the narrative as set out by the manager became decidedly more confused. "The boycott," the manager wrote, "is Kikuyu inspired because all actions taken by Government are thought to be aimed at depricing the Kikuyu of his living and increasing the revenue of the European. They think the Bus Company belongs to the Municipality."[201] Unwittingly, here the manager hit the nail on the head. As we have seen, the contradictions of colonial capitalism in the Kenya colony were manifest in the complicated struggle among the demands of settlers, the demands of Africans, and the

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[200] Peterson, *East African Patriotism*
[201] KNA - RN/1/79

needs of the colonial state to maintain at least a measure of popular legitimacy.[202] What the manager located as a misrecognition i.e. KBS was a private rather than public amenity was, on another reading, an astute and defiant engagement with these contradictions. Thus, while there is no reason to doubt that an African passenger was refused the right to board a KBS bus, a more interesting and complicated topography of power, as it mapped onto the politics of mobility, perhaps underwrote this story.

As we have seen, by the 1920s entrepreneurs living in the Central Province had carved out a niche for themselves in the transportation sector. By the 1950s, these informal transportation networks seem to have been standardized, with African owned lorries plying charted routes. It is against this longer history that the boycott must be interpreted. In the early days of the boycott, the manager of KBS wrote to the Town Clerk, stating:

> We would like to bring to your notice that many buses other than our own are now asking up and setting down the same passengers within the municipal area. We do this officially since such acts are in breach of the Exclusive Agreement between us, and we ask that immediate steps we taken to prevent such infringements.[203]

Despite the Town Clerk's efforts to monitor these unsanctioned transportation networks, African owned vehicles ably evaded the state's security apparatus, which picked up only "two contraventions of the Council's By-laws" over the course of fourteen days.[204] Part of the problem was one of visibility. While police officers trained their attention on unsanctioned Public Service Vehicles (P.S.V.s) plying KBS routes, the bulk of the

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[202] Bruce Berman, *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya: The Dialectic of Domination,* (London: James Currey, 1990).
[203] KNA - RN/1/79
[204] KNA - RN/1/79

vehicles in circulation were not passenger vehicles but repurposed lorries.[205] These ghost

vehicles were likely *komerera* buses*,* a Kikuyu word that translates to "lie low," and a

catchphrase that and characterized the response of many KEM populations in the face of

emergency regulations. Denied their limited paths to market, these secret buses continued

to transport traders and to and from Nairobi during the Emergency.[206] By discouraging

Africans from using the services provided by KBS, then, boycotters worked to wrest the

monopoly over urban transport from the hands of KBS, and it was quite effective. By

February 26, 1954, the KBS reported that the number of passengers using its services had

dropped from 3,000/day to a mere 200-300.[207]

The conflict between the KBS and a group that would later be known as *matatu*

owners was not resolved but, in fact, escalated in the succeeding years. In 1954, the year

of Operation Anvil, the KBS reported that a number of their conductors were attacked

and robbed by "gangs of Maragoli," "armed thugs" who targeted immobile buses idling

at transport terminuses across the city.[208] The KBS noted that these robberies marked the

resumption of a pattern quite common in the pre-boycott days. Concurrent to these

attacks, administrators reported the emergence of a transport service going by the

nomenclature of "Kikuyu Bus Service." The parallel in the acronyms of the two services

should not be ignored here. In a pattern that persists into the present, forms of naming

and the personification of technologies of mobility, reveals deep-seated antagonisms;

popular naming a kind of vernacular politics.[209] This naming was a form of appropriation

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[205] KNA - ABK/18/104, "Annual Report – Transport Licensing Board, 1961" Here we would do well to remember the complaints of lorry drivers in the 1940s.
[206] Robertson, *Trouble Showed the Way,* 136.
[207] KNA - RN/1/79
[208] KNA - DC/TKA/3/12
[209] Mrazek, *Enginneers of Happy Land.*

that imaginatively and aspirationally imbued the Kikuyu Bus Service with the power and

capital the KBS' erstwhile monopoly secured. As in the case of literacy, the appropriation

of technologies of mobility, once the markers of British prestige, was a means of

capturing and subverting "the social value of the colonizers."[210] These technologies were

not, evidently, neutral objects but objects: "appropriated and harnessed to quite a

different political project."[211]

The Transport Licensing Board struggled to protect KBS' monopoly over urban

transport by limiting the scope of the informal transportation sector to "persons who

either boarded or intend to travel to places where there are no bus services." These

provisions, it was hoped, would guarantee that a given "vehicle will not be used in

competition with established transporters." Despite the limitations placed on the use of

transport technologies, the KBS' 1956 Report of Directors complained: "loopholes in the

present Transport Licensing…allow wasteful competition, and fare undercutting…[is] a

daily occurance" (*sic*).[212] The contravention of KBS' monopoly was difficult to police, as

drivers altered routes sanctioned by the government on the officially issued passes

operators were forced to carry. Overlaying the official routes of transport, then, was a

clandestine topography of movement, routes plied by technologies repurposed to serve

the needs of the African majority.[213]

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[210] Smith, *Bewitching Development,* 528.
[211] Larkin, *Signal and Noise,* 82.
[212] KNA - CA/22/25
[213] For an incredibly interesting treatment of alternative spatial topographies in the context of a surveillance state, see Pamela Reynolds, *War in Worcester: Youth and the Apartheid State,* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

In an attempt to thwart the nascent "informal" transport system the government worked to centralize and regulate the colony's transportation system.[214] It seems administrators had learned that people were repurposing war lorries for the transportation of people, and created a body responsible for determining the relative road-worthiness of "all new omnibuses and vehicles converted and intended to be used as omnibuses."[215] This, it seems, did not quell the problem, and competition reached such a pitch that by 1959 the Provincial Commissioner of the Coast Province was referring to it as a "transport war."[216]

In the face of this "transport war," the Town Clerk devised a novel solution. Technologies of mobility serving the public would be segregated, the KBS managing the transport of white populations, and hiring white drivers while other systems of transport would have: "drivers and conductors of other races…[and would be] responsible for omnibuses reserved exclusively for the use of other races."[217] Race would determine how and in what vehicles people were permitted to travel. Technologies of mobility, like physical movement itself, would reflect the structure of the colonial hierarchy.

Competition and the possibility for capital accumulation, it seems, would be allowed but it would reflect the highly stratified social organization of the Kenya colony. As one Provincial Commissioner put it, operators seemed to be doing: "very nicely and a little healthy competition would help the public do a little better; and what are the roads for? Transport means trade and trade means wealth. Indeed, one could argue that mobility

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[214] KNA - DC/FH/3/17/23
[215] KNA - DC/NKU/2/23/13
[216] KNA - CA/22/25
[217] KNA - CS/1/19/76

is the very essence of prosperity."[218] The Provincial Commissioner could not have better captured the arguments being advanced by those variously working in the mobility industry. Attempts to divert social value thus, on one level, succeeded.

Movement was, for many, the means by which respectable adulthood was realized, particularly in a context where other avenues to social respectability and self-mastery had been effectively blocked. The emergence of KBS' double in the form of the Kikuyu Bus Service was a claim for parity and equality, a parallelism designed to make the services provided by the original KBS obsolete. These efforts were thwarted and asymmetry was reinscribed through the segregation of transport. In microcosm, then, the debates over transportation, mobility, and segregation, mirrored the larger and multivalent debates animating politics in Kenya colony in the postwar period. Rather than weakening the symbolic load of technologies of mobility, the experiences of this period further strengthened the associations among vehicle type, mode of travel, and race; a situation which persists in the present, class replacing race as the ultimate determinant.

If in town technologies of mobility formed a pivot around which myriad concerns swirled, the issue of roads in "African areas" was fomenting another set of debates in the 1950s. Mau Mau had raised critical questions regarding "development" in the colony. While presented by many, most notably the British press, as an atavistic throwback, others asked whether blame was better located at the feet of colonial development policies. As one administrator wrote in a document titled: "Report on the Road System in African Areas:" "Recent events appear to have given ample evidence of the folly of allowing communications to lag behind development." Development if unmonitored, Mau Mau powerfully demonstrated, could spin out of control. On one interpretation,

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[218] KNA - DC/KTI13/23/11

then, Mau Mau evidenced the possibility that the straight lines of development, the very modus operandi justifying colonial occupation, could go awry.

Here was the paradox of indirect rule and development policies in the Kenya colony. Over the course of the colonial period, development, as it was mediated through technologies of mobility, was transformed into a powerful discourse, over which administrators did not agree and, more importantly, over which they could not retain a monopoly. Brian Larkin, writing of colonial technologies in the Nigerian context, argues that this tension reflects the "colonial sublime," which encompassed "two distinct modes of colonial rule." One based on "difference and the sharp separation between colonizer and colonized." The other proffering "technology as a mode of development."[219] Through this process, he argues, the sublime is domesticated and destroyed, technologies transformed into banal objects. Destruction through domestication is certainly part of the process, but domestication is also contingent on technologies being integrated into, and shaped by, existing cultural logics. While the development concept, as it was related to technologies of mobility, had been beset by contradictions from the outset, once set in motion, Africans appropriated one envisioning of development – the right to inclusion through "modernization" – and overlay it with an older, and more enduring moral economy – the right to self-mastery and social adulthood. As people tethered together these two teleological registers, development appeared to administrators as a "problem" to be managed. Like the roads themselves, development, a telos-driven reading of human "progress," required careful tending and watchful monitoring.

These contradictions formed only one of the complicated strands shaping popular perceptions in the post-war period. In order to flesh out the vexed place of roads as stand-

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[219] Larkin, *Signal and Noise,* 36.

ins for modernity and development for black Kenyans, it is critical to address their materiality. That is, how these infrastructures were brought into being. As we have seen, colonial development projects rested on a reading of Africans as subjects, a framework wherein Africans materially bore the brunt of the colony's infrastructural expansion. As late as the mid-1950s, district administrators were bemoaning the fact that they were being denied their historic right to compel people to maintain district roads.[220] Without the right to compulsion, so the story went, roads were falling into disrepair. For marginalized Kenyans, in other words, infrastructures of mobility were more routinely experienced as sites of stasis, as evidence of their status as subjects. This experience was reaffirmed during the emergency period as compulsory labour was revived in reserves and internment camps.[221]

The technopolitical strategies of the colonial state, as this period demonstrated, were incredibly flexible when development bled into its important other, "unrest." This created a paradox wherein development was positioned as both the cause of, and solution to, unrest. Expertise gone awry required a greater measure of expertise; technological problems had technological solutions. As John Lonsdale and Bruce Berman note:

> this preoccupation with using 'development' programmes as a means of halting social disintegration reached its greatest intensity with regard to the Kikuyu. The central thrust of administrative politics in the three Kikuyu districts of Kiambu, Fort Hall and Nyeri became reactionary in the most literal sense; it was intended to reverse existing processes of change the provincial administration regarded as destructive.[222]

Development, once evidence of, and reward for, "native" progress became in this period the punishment for subversion and a solution to "backsliding." As the DC of West Suk opined:

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[220] KNA - PC/NKU/2/25/10
[221] Robertson, *Trouble Showed the Way*
[222] Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley,* 245.

It was no surprise to find West Suk at the bottom of the priority list [for development projects], but I view with considerable dismay the thought that not a single shilling is likely to come to the district for new road development or improvement of existing roads for at least as far ahead as the report looks, five years. This district…is ill served for roads, and would not have had the tracks it has, had it not been for the outbreak of D.Y.M. several years ago. Judging by the road development now going on in the Kikuyu districts, it would almost seem that crime pays! I hope that it will not need further lawlessness here before money is forthcoming to extend the road system.[223]

Half threatening, half humorous, the DC hit the proverbial nail on the head. Rural road development, for so long demanded by Kenyans living in the countryside as a means of creating the material points of entry into markets was finally, on the heels of an "atavistic" uprising, being fulfilled. The state's response to Mau Mau, as was the case in late-colonial Dutch East Indies, was an attempt to impose a new angular geometry in a bid to shore up authority as: "reality grew messier and harder to make into a straight line."[224]

These contradictions were not lost on the Embu, Meru, and Kikuyu people most directly affected by the emergency regulations. Operation Anvil was marked by colonial attempts to control the Mau Mau crises through imposing a new and incredibly violent administrative grid over the Kenya colony. In 1954, Nairobi was purged of Kikuyu, Embu, and Meru populations, followed by the widespread internment of Kikuyu. As for the Embu and Meru, new "villages" were designed as containment units that could be easily monitored.

Even in these dire conditions, technologies of mobility remained the idiom of choice, a symbol of the evidently faltering promises of colonial rule in the Kenya colony.

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[223] KNA - PC/NKU/2/25/10
[224] Mrazek, *Engineers of Happy Place,* 99.

Reporting on the reception of government publications in an Embu "village," the Beechers noted the acuity of African audiences, who dismissed government periodicals for what they were, propaganda. Constraints on people's mobility formed the core counter-evidence Embu cited in dispelling government claims that the counter-insurgency was a success. As one astute informant reported: "'When everything goes so splendidly, why cannot I get a permit for my bycicle.' [*sic*]"[225] As we have seen, the state had been concerned about the unmonitored circulation of technologies of mobility and people since its beginnings, concerns which reached a new pitch during Mau Mau. And monitoring technologies of mobility occupied a central place in the government's emergency regulations, which required Africans in Central Province have: "a written permit" from an Administrative Officer to drive buses, lorries, cars, motorcycles. The administration did not stop with automotive technologies. There was even a provision for bicycles, which likewise could only be used with a written permit.[226]

In the past, technologies of mobility were used to shore up the authority of colonial officials. By the interwar period they were held out as a reward for faithful service.[227] More ambiguously from the perspective of the state, however, they had also become core symbols of participation in the wage labour economy, the cultivation of desire a sure sign of *évolué* status. For those most affected by Emergency regulations, it became clear that the promises of modernity and the materialities that operated as its stand in, could easily be revoked. Development was not, evidently, a unilinear process but one that zig-zagged and could change directions. Bikes denied were evidence of this

[225] Papers of Reverend J.L. Beecher held at the National Museum, Nairobi. GSSB Folio 24, Christian Council of Kenya: A Study of Kabare Village in the Embu District (1956) Authored by G. Sluiter
[226] KNA - DC/FH/3/17/23
[227] KNA - PC/NKU3/26/62

schizoid itinerary. Despite state efforts, settlers and government officials continued to report on Kikuyu use of lorries for purposes of trade and human transport throughout Central Province and the Rift Valley.[228] And bikes without lanterns continued to be a favorite mode of transport for guerilla fighters moving through the city.[229]

Development discourse, and paths to social adulthood, both telos driven epistemologies, had become intertwined. As James Smith notes in the context of literacy, new technologies and colonial markers of social capital did not eclipse "traditional" forms but, rather, were incorporated and remade according to existing cultural logics. Literacy, on Smith's reading, was a skill incorporated into Kikuyu rites of social maturation. Most notably, education was imagined by some to be the equivalent of warrior training. A similar process of value transfer is evident in the context of technologies of mobility.

The Emergency, as we have seen, radically called into question the telos engendered by development discourse but equally uncertain were "traditional" notions of individual "development" in pursuit of social reproduction. What, people asked themselves, could be stabilized as "value," in the face of these deeply entangled transformations.[230] As the cash economy transformed the relationship between labour and maturation, livestock as the ultimate and stable unit of value was no longer a certainty. As the Beechers noted both everyday transactions and more important exchanges of value, such as bridewealth, were increasingly mediated by the cash form. Cattle and land

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[228] KNA - DC/FH/3/17/23; Robertson, *Trouble Showed the Way,* 115.
[229] Interview, Richard Ambani, Nairobi. Summer 2010.
[230] Robert Blunt, "Of Money and Elders: Ritual, Proliferation, and Spectacle in Colonial and Postcolonial Kenya," (PhD Thesis, The University of Chicago, 2010).

were no longer the foremost objects people invested in, the uncertainty of the Emergency

rendering people's futures uncertain.[231] The Beechers reported:

> Although many of the inhabitants of our village are firmly convinced that with the
> end of the emergency they will be able to return to their homesteads and graze
> and fatten their goats and cattle again as in the old days, they have at present
> enough difficulties to question the wisdom of accepting goats and cattle, the
> normal currency, as important means of payment, as for instance in the case of the
> brideprice. There is a growing tendency to ask for money also from the non-wage-
> earners, which often results in the sale of live-stock. This is in fact a selling of
> capital which can easily find the impression of added riches, while in fact it can
> dangerously impoverish the owner, especially if the money was not well used for
> other than immediate wishes (Bicycles!).[232]

What the Beechers missed in this assessment were the more deep-seated transformations

at play. If, in the past, cattle payments were critical to social reproduction and key

signifiers of maturation, developments in the colonial economy had, for many, blocked

this conventional path. In a context where cattle were a) increasingly limited in their

circulation and, b) where possession did not guarantee a transformation in status i.e.

warrior to adult, the stability of livestock as backer of value was no longer secure. In their

place emerged technologies of mobility, objects of congealed power, now captured and

deployed as a means of measuring and articulating individual "development."[233] This was

not interpreted, as the Beechers interpreted it, as an investment in the "false security" of

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[231] Papers of Reverend J.L. Beecher held at the National Museum, Nairobi. GSSB Folio 24,
Christian Council of Kenya: A Study of Kabare Village in the Embu District (1956) Authored by
G. Sluiter

[232] Papers of Reverend J.L. Beecher held at the National Museum, Nairobi. GSSB Folio 24,
Christian Council of Kenya: A Study of Kabare Village in the Embu District (1956) Authored by
G. Sluiter

[233] Claire Robertson notes but does not expand upon the interesting place of technologies of
mobility in Kikuyu moral *cum* material economy during the emergency. Officials, she writes,
observed that there were three main types of investment during the period: cattle, bridewealth,
and cars. Robertson, *Trouble Showed the Way,* 127.

"'progress', expressed in material goods."[234] In the context of the perceived greed of a generation of "elders," there was no guarantee that promises of redistribution would be realized. It was this uncertainty, in conjunction with the prestige value of technologies of mobility, which led people to locate the promises of the future in technologies that allowed them to transcend time as they traversed space. In transcending the proscriptive spatial logic engendered in colonial rule, these narratives thus pointed to a potential future where, by contrast to the present, movement – both physical and social - proceeded unmolested.

As people imagined their ideal, post-Emergency futures, they imagined futures filled with bikes and cars, both moving along smoothly tarmacked roads, the prospective routes of individual maturation. These objects, fetishized by the colonial state, and representing in congealed form the power of colonizers, were incorporated into Kenyan systems of value, their power captured and rerouted in the aid of social reproduction. Kenya's post-independence leadership, themselves deeply implicated in these processes, in turn reified these imagined futures as they initiated, though in a different register, a technopolitical regime of their own in the postcolonial period.

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While the Emergency had, by 1960, drawn to a close, politics in the Kenya colony continued to be shaped by the dialectics of mobility and immobility that had characterized the colonial period more generally. And clandestine and unsanctioned appropriation of technologies of mobility, repurposed for the movement of humans, remained a preoccupation. While Emergency regulations had sanctioned incredibly wide

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[234] Papers of Reverend J.L. Beecher held at the National Museum, Nairobi. GSSB Folio 24, Christian Council of Kenya: A Study of Kabare Village in the Embu District (1956) Authored by G. Sluiter

parameters for how police dealt with people on the move, the Emergency's end required that new structures of surveillance be put in place.

The administration again responded by creating centralized government policy on transport. Lorries, now transformed into PSVs were difficult for the administration to monitor and "evasion," the administration noted, had become routine.[235] No longer could vehicles plying for hire be serviced at private garages[236]. Rather, government mechanics would be responsible for ensuring vehicles were road-worthy.

The problem was two-fold. On the one hand, the administration continued to be concerned with unsanctioned mobility, writ large. On the other, however, these small-scale but highly organized entrepreneurs were again squeezing the KBS from its position of preeminence in the field of transport. The KBS, recalling the blow to their returns in the 1950s, worked to secure agreements from private bus owners, who had conceded to standardize fares for service. However, many of the drivers had gone rogue. These "renegades," were not charging the agreed upon Shs 33/-, but fares ranging from Shs 25/- to 35/-. The fares charged by these pirate buses were not simply contingent on distance traveled or baggage transported, but were critically shaped by the identity of the passenger and "government servants" were routinely "charged more than civilians." This competition was not localized but spanned from the Coast through Central Province and the Rift Valley.[237]

The issues that swirled around the politics of mobility during the colonial period did not lose their purchase in postcolonial readings of development and modernity. Indeed, liberating technologies of mobility from the shackles that restrained African

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[235] Annual Report – Transport Licensing Board, 1961.
[236] KNA - DC/NKU/2/23/13
[237] KNA - Annual Report – Transport Licensing Board, 1961.19

capital accumulation critically shaped the policies of the first post-independence Kenyan government. What was different, however, was that men like Jomo Kenyatta were well aware of the historically fraught and politically potent issues that congealed in and around discussions and contestations over technologies of mobility. It was from this insider vantage point that the politics of mobility received a new lease on life in the independence period.

Chapter 5:

Maendeleo, Matatus **and Moi: The Politics of (Re)Generation in the 1992 Kenyan Election Year**

Following the British withdrawal in 1963, colonial restrictions on urban migration were lifted, leading thousands of rural Kenyans to travel to Nairobi with hopes of attaining the material wealth associated with the promises of postcolonial urbanity and "modern" forms of capital accumulation.[238] The status of roads as both symbolic and physical conduits, providing the routes by which people escaped rural poverty and representing the possibility of accumulating urban wealth, gained renewed strength in this period. As James Howard Smith notes, roads were "the means by which people became respectable citizens by liberating themselves from the limitations of the rural…[through] accessing the city."[239] It was out of this longer history that roads emerged as a central metaphor, and a material necessity, in discourses of "development" and "modernity" in the postcolonial period. If roads acted as the conduits between city and country, under Kenyatta's watch the *matatu* became the central symbol of that mobility, linking rural regions to urban centres, and in the process implicating itself in the promises of post-independence prosperity.

These connections were reinforced in 1972 when Kenyatta issued a motor licensing decree that deregulated the industry. Kenyatta argued that the *matatu* (privately owned minibus) industry was emblematic of the type of capitalist entrepreneurship that would enable the postcolonial Kenyan state to achieve "modernity" through capitalist "development."[240] He argued, moreover, that the free and unencumbered movement of the population was an essential precondition for individual and national prosperity.[241] This argument had resonance in Kenya where, as we have seen, memories of British

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[238] Kenda Mutongi, "Thugs or Entrepreneurs? Perception of *Matatu* Operators in Nairobi, 1970 to the Present," *Africa* 76(4), 2006, 549.
[239] Smith, *Bewitching Development,* 106.
[240] Mutongi, "Thugs or Entrepreneurs?," 549.
[241] *Ibid.,* 550.

colonialism were inextricably linked to a colonial praxis that had at its core the circumscription of "native" mobility, both as a strategy of surveillance and as a means of securing labour.[242] Indeed, according to popular memory, supported by the documentary record, the *matatu* industry was started during the colonial period as a strategy to evade the ever-tightening strictures of colonial surveillance.[243] By deregulating the industry in the postcolonial context, Kenyatta was drawing on a historically resonant cultural logic that linked independence to mobility, implicating the industry in both the project of development and the potential for personal, capitalist enrichment. It was, moreover, part and parcel of the process of Africanization that guided much of the policy-making in the early postcolonial period.[244] If road-systems and the *matatu* industry were positioned as vehicles through which to attain the material prosperity of the soon-to-be-realized future in the promising early years of independence, in the context of the perceived failures of those promises they remained at the heart of vernacular discourses of development.

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On December 3, 1991, Kenyan President Daniel arap Moi conceded to the demands of foreign donors, and grudgingly proclaimed the initiation of multi-party politics. The following day he addressed the nation. Placing the relative development achieved under his rule at the heart of his speech, he proclaimed: "We have achieved our national goals of development due to peace that has prevailed on our land. There has been

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[242] Florence Bernault. "The Politics of Enclosure in Colonial and Post-Colonial Africa," in *A History of Prison and Confinement in Africa,* ed. Florence Bernault, 1-54 (Portsmouth: Neinemann, 2003), 34. See also Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa,* (London: James Currey, 1992). The resonance of this sentiment was confirmed by the author when conducting fieldwork in Nairobi in the Fall of 2009.
[243] Based on fieldwork conducted in Nairobi, Kenya. Fall 2009.
[244] Mark Lamont, "Speed Governors: Road Safety and Infrastructural Overload in Post-Colonial Kenya, c. 1963-2013," *Africa* Vol. 83, No. 3 (2013), 368.

considerable development in all areas of human endeavor…But we are not finished yet. A lot remains to be done."[245] In an attempt to shore up public support in the context of the instatement of a multi-party political system and faltering economy, Moi mobilized the rhetoric of development in a form that was recognizable to the citizenry.[246]

Embedded in this statement was a set of interrelated themes that had become common rhetoric over the course of the colonial period. Citizens had to remain loyal to "elders," and wait patiently for "development" – collective and individual, material and symbolic – to materialize. Under Moi, however, a troubling patina overlay this narrative. The issues that swirled around Mau Mau had never really been resolved. Kikuyu communities remained deeply divided and concerns over legitimate authority continued to plague the public sphere.[247] Moreover, under the leadership of Kenyatta, many of Kenya's non-Kikuyu publics felt themselves to have been unfairly marginalized to the advantage of Kikuyu neighbors.[248]

Moi thus drew on an ideology which held that strongmanship was the only means by which descent into "tribal" chaos could be avoided and peace and prosperity secured. For the majority of Kenyans, all of these sentiments had lost any real purchase, simply representing another instance of the cynical politicization of the discourse of development, a materially rooted process increasingly detached from the practices of the state.

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[245] "President Moi's closing address," *The Standard,* Dec. 4, 1991, 12.
[246] Joal Kisongok, "Kanu accepts multi-parties," *The Standard,* Dec 3, 1991.
[247] Lonsdale, *The Moral Economy of Mau Mau.*
[248] David William Cohen and E.S. Atieno Odhiambo, *The Risks of Knowledge: Investigations into the Death of the Hon. Minister John Robert Ouko in Kenya, 1990,* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004).

It was a particularly difficult line to maintain in the context of the 1980s, a decade

of palpable economic decline, during which the county's infrastructure and social

services deteriorated, and unemployment reached unprecedented levels. In popular

discourse, many of these processes were linked to state corruption, which had contributed

to forcing the rate of inflation from 19.6 per cent to 27.5 per cent in the year leading up to

the transition; representing the highest rates since independence.[249] As the economic

crisis worsened, civil liberties and rights of association were circumscribed. Within this

context, Moi's proclamation that Kenya's project of development was nearly complete

was untenable, at best reflecting the hopeful promises of the early years of independence,

and at worst representing an inversion of many Kenyans' experiences of the 1980s. This

is not to say, however, that the discourse of development lost traction in the popular

imagination; to the contrary, during the period discussions of development proliferated.[250]

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This chapter focuses on the various routes Kenyans pursued in articulating their

discontent with the corruption of the Moi state during the 1992 transition to multi-party

politics, using the lens of discussions of roads and the *matatu* industry. This section sheds

light on the various modes of Kenyan political engagement in the context of a repressive

state apparatus, and points to the highly contested political terrain that emerged in the

period, as definitions of what constituted "legitimate" political engagement were again

negotiated. As the sheer proliferation of these narratives in the print media suggests,

repressive state practices initiated under the Kenya African National Unity (KANU)

government and strengthened under Moi, which tried to silence public dissent through

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[249] Angelique Haugerud, *The Culture of Politics in Modern Kenya,* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 34.
[250] See James Howard Smith. *Bewitching Development*

circumscribing the parameters of civil society, led to the creation of alternative spaces of political engagement located outside the reach of the coercive state. In forging these spaces Kenyans of various stripes drew on discursive strategies and a set of metaphors that found their origins in the early colonial period.

A cursory analysis of the politics of mobility in this period suggests three alternative sites of covert politics that functioned as distinct narrative genres. The first addressed the condition of roads proper, the second criticized the "dysfunctional" *matatu* industry, and the third recounted the explicit politics of *matatu* industry workers. Reading these narratives in tandem reveals implicit expressions of discontent with the functioning of the state. Indeed, when these transport narratives, mainly composed of banal discussions of everyday social engagements, are read against the broader socio-economic and political backdrop, seemingly apolitical statements assume concrete political meanings. Apparently benign discussions of road maintenance and mortality in traffic accidents emerge as points of entry into virulent critiques of state corruption as it was associated with the failures of infrastructural development. As this typology suggests, the informal sites of civil engagement embodied in transport narratives, spoke to an emergent politics that was firmly rooted in everyday material realities; exposing the discrete politics expressed through them as critiques originating in expressly materialist grievances.[251] As such, roads and *matatus* functioned both as symbolic sites where discontents with the functioning of the state and its corrupt practices were registered, and as material evidence of those failures. When these narratives are read against one another, however, a much more complicated and contested political terrain becomes visible; one that was marked by a specifically masculine brand of youthful politics that centered

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[251] Haugerud, *The Culture of Politics,* 17.

around *matatu* culture and the anxieties surrounding its potential. Through this analysis it will become evident that two interrelated political discourses were at work: one that criticized the practices of the state through the expression of everyday discontents; and a second, which articulated highly contested, generationally specific, yet historically resonant, (re)vision of social maturity, and political belonging.

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In order to contextualize these narratives they must be read against the backdrop of the feedback between structural adjustment programs initiated under the global regime of neo-liberalism and Kenyan political reforms. The transition to multi-party politics arrived on the coattails of a Western donors' meeting held in Paris in 1991, where it was decided that $328 million in fast distributing aid would be suspended pending the Moi government's liberalization of the country's economic and political structures.[252] This measure was an extreme about-face, Kenya having been held up by the "international community" as a model for postcolonial African development. Indeed, foreign donors had poured millions of dollars into Kenya to encourage capitalist expansion, viewing the country as an important bulwark against the perceived threat of socialist Tanzania. For much of the Kenyan population, however, the World Bank's sudden concern that corruption was impeding capitalist development was viewed with marked cynicism.

The majority of Kenyans, excluded from the spoils of corruption, were well aware that patrons at all levels of the political order had consumed funds intended for development; they experienced it as an everyday reality. The perceived failures of the country's development were so pervasive in everyday discourse that they permeated Kenyans' lexical worlds, refashioning government rhetoric in telling ways. Particularly

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[252] *Ibid.,* 25.

salient to our discussion, the term *maendeleo* or development came to signify self-interested, rather than publicly interested, forms of accumulation.[253] The students of Jomo Kenyatta University spoke directly to this inversion in September 1992 when they boycotted national development courses, claiming their content constituted nothing more than political deceptions.**[254]** This evacuation and subsequent inversion of meaning was critically shaped by the experiences of the Moi era but built on important colonial foundations.[255] As David Cohen and Atieno Odihambo write, on the eve of independence Kenya inherited a legacy of development initiatives that hinged on the idiosyncrasies of individual administrators who often exaggerated potential costs and oversold prospective benefits. This history was one beset by failure, derailment, mismanagement, and the vagaries of personality. As they write: "It was this development apparatus of 'tentacular technicians' and 'district plans about plans' that Kenya inherited at independence. The rhetoric, framework, and principles outlasted the formal end of empire."[256] Against this longer history, the Moi government's claim that single party politics were the only route to *maendeleo* (conventionally defined) appeared farcical.[257] These contextual settings serve as a partial framework for understanding transportation narratives as national narratives with deep historical roots, and which emerged at the intersection of global shifts and the localized frameworks through which they gained their meaning.

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[253] Brad Weiss 2001, as cited in Smith. *Bewitching Development,* 33.
[254] Nancy Kinuthia "Students boycott national development courses" *The Standard.* September 5, 1991. 14-15.
[255] Haugerud, *The Culture of Politics,* 25.
[256] Cohen and Odhiambo, *Risks of Knowledge,* 185.
[257] Robert Blunt, "'Satan Is an Imitator': Kenya's Recent Cosmology of Corruption," in *Producing African Futures: Ritual and Reproduction in a Neoliberal Age.* ed. Brad Weiss, (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2004), 294.

In order to ascertain the politics at work in the mundane, it is critical that we situate everyday practices and perceptions at the centre of analysis. If, as Achille Mbembe suggests, politics in the postcolony are typified by their routine banality what makes these everyday practices surrounding transportation an interesting point of entry into Kenyan political culture during the transition is the very fact of their proliferation.[258] Things that are common occurrences, taken to communicate nothing beyond their initial meaning, lose even that value in their repetition and as such fall out of favor in popular discourse. If, however, their meaning extends beyond themselves, if they act as signposts within broader socio-symbolic worlds, their power is magnified in and through their repetition. It is the fact that Kenyans never tire of discussing the number of road accidents and the state of the country's road system that makes them an essential part of broader social and political discourses.

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As in the colonial period, it is the layered hierarchies embedded in structures of patronage by and large sustain postcolonial Kenyan political culture. These structures also function as central conduits through which citizens make claims and register discontents; providing an essential series of networks that link the majority of those relatively excluded from power and prestige to powerful political and economic personalities. The politics of patronage thus forge a series of linkages, connecting the highest office of the president to the district officer to the citizenry, forming the basis of a

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[258] Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony,* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2001), 102.

"moral economy" within which power held by patrons theoretically translates into material benefits and symbolic prestige for clients.[259]

Critiques of the state of roads, then, function as claims making devices, rendering ineffective political patrons illegitimate and calling them to account for their failure to uphold the principles of the system of reciprocity. Emblematic of this use of transportation narratives was an article published in the *Daily Nation* on November 12, 1992, tellingly titled "Political acrobat send [*sic*] a chill into the enemy,"[260] which is worth quoting at length.

> [Siaya] must rank as the constituency that has produced one of the best known political acrobats. Siaya District headquarters with its dusty roads and unlit streets is located in Alego/Usonga…the town has no sewage system, no storm drains, virtually no tangible infrastructure…That is the constituency…that Mr. Aringo wants to reclaim…others of his stature at the time used their clout to build schools, health centres, roads and other landmarks that would serve as their memory later in life…As a resident of Siaya town, he was expected to use his influence to lobby for the tarmacking [*sic*] of the town's streets. More important, he was in a position to influence the extension of the tarmac to Nyadora to facilitate the transportation of fish and other goods from the hinterland. But he was content with the flag.

As this rich passage suggests, Aringo withdrew his right to a position in politics by failing to meet the expectations of him as the district's patron. This failure was articulated as having inverted the logic of the moral economy embodied in patron-client relationships. This symbolic misappropriation of prestige was directly linked to the material consequences of the inversion. It was positioned as having impeded the

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[259] As one woman succinctly put it in a letter titled "No more chameleons." "We Kenyans cannot tolerate our supreme organ (Parliament) divided, we are very much concerned, we also feel divided when we see our top representatives divided. It must be very clear to every parliamentarian or Government worker that his major task is to serve the Government faithfully. Our Government is our mother, a mother feeds her baby; we get food from our Government and it is certainly true that 'you can't bite the hand that feeds you.'…We no longer want chameleons in our midst!" Caroline Omurwa, Letter to the Editor, "No more chameleons," *The Standard,* December 8, 1992, 9.
[260] "Political acrobat send a chill into the enemy," *Daily Nation,* November 12, 1992., 20.

development of the region through failing to extend infrastructural linkages in the form of an efficient road-network. Through calling their patron to account for his failures in a national daily, this constituency mobilized the familiar language of the politics of responsibility between patron and client.

One of the critical discontents being registered through these narratives, then, was the perceived asymmetry in the investments of patrons and clients, between *wananchi* (citizens) and the state, which complicated and undermined the ostensible relationship between patrons as informal organs of the state and their purported function. However, a more complicated political terrain becomes evident if one looks to the geographic details and rhetorical structure of the narrative.

What made Aringo's behaviour so egregious was linked to his status as a resident of the region. However, the professed discontent was not simply a result of the diversion of public monies into private hands, but pointed to perceived "ethnoregional patters of stratification." [261] The Siaya District, located outside of Kisumu in Kenya's Western Province, is home to a predominantly Luo population who popularly perceive themselves to have been systematically excluded from Kenyan politics since independence, a sentiment that was compounded following Moi's rise to power.[262] Ultimately, then, the critique extended beyond the patron proper and suggested the failure of the patronage system as a whole. In other words, the critique circuitously addressed the perception of broader, specifically ethnic, inequities that characterize the Kenyan politico-cultural terrain. If the routes of patronage had been blocked by ethnic favoritism, the diversion of monies intended to forge the routes of development were its perceived consequence.

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[261] Andrew Apter, *The Pan-African Nation: Oil and the Spectacle of Culture in Nigeria,* (Chicago: The University of Chicago press, 2005), 37.
[262] Cohen and Odhiambo, *The Risks of Knowledge,* 6.

While conforming to the state line of a de-ethnicized political culture – articulating discontent in the language of region – this narrative nevertheless expressed the popular understanding that ethnically determined exclusions from the political realm translated into material exclusions in the economic realm.

As noted by Mikael Karlstrom, the legibility of indirect messages communicated between different strata of society depends on shared understandings of the functioning of their sociopolitical worlds. On this reading, banal critiques of development instrumentalized: "a local discourse of social morality and political accountability that [theoretically provided]…critical leverage against…rulers."[263] This was a particularly effective communicative strategy in Kenya, where regional affiliation is popularly held to be synonymous with ethnic identification; indeed, where regional and ethnic exclusions are perceived to constitute two sides of the same coin.[264]

Attacks targeting ethnic clientelism were particularly pronounced in transport narratives directed at powerful bureaucrats by regional politicians demanding accountability for the expropriation of funds intended for regional development. In part, this narrative flexibility can be accounted for through looking to a broader series of transitions taking place in Kenyan political culture during the period. As the economy faltered, the overlap between the category of the political and the bureaucratic grew increasingly pronounced. Public, bureaucratic offices were held to the same standards of accountability as a politician was to its constituency.[265] Concurrently, forms of illicit accumulation, which had become central to the functioning of the patronage system when

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[263] Mikael Karlstrom, "On the Aesthetics and Dialogics of Power in the Postcolony." *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute.* Vol. 73, No. 1 (2003), 72.
[264] Based on fieldwork conducted in Nairobi, Kenya. Fall 2009.
[265] Haugerud, *The Culture of Politics,* 94.

the state was flush with foreign currency, had palpable material effects in the context of

the faltering economy; transforming illicit but accepted forms of accumulation into

unsanctioned wealth.[266]

The indistinct zone between political and bureaucratic functioning, sanctioned and

unsanctioned forms of accumulation, clearly emerges in the following narrative. On May

14, 1992, *The Standard* published an article titled "Mibei cornered over road," which

recounted the failures of various levels in the patronage pyramid.

> The Minister for Public Works…was yesterday put to task by Members over the
> repair of a tarmack [*sic*] road…The deputy Speaker of the National
> Assembly…who is MP for Kitui North [which is located in a region popularly
> referred to as Kamba Land], informed the Minister that Shs 4 million had been
> allocated to the repair work on the road and urged him to visit the road in order to
> determine 'which route the money took.'[267]

This narrative not only suggested that ethno-regional marginalization was a central

feature of postcolonial Kenyan governance, but pointed to the means by which it was

secured; in particular through the strategic circulation of wealth, specifically as it was

instantiated in development projects. By encouraging the Minister to go "see" the road,

this passage suggested the palpable, indeed visible, impact of ethnic clientelism on

regional development.

Indeed, the increasingly tenuous link between capital investment and material

return was a central preoccupation expressed through these narratives. On July 20 *The*

Standard ran a piece titled "City Hall should repair roads now, " which suggested citizens

had become the victims of coerced but officially sanctioned robbery at the behest of the

state. The journalist wrote: "The state of roads in Nairobi is pathetic to say the least. The

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[266] See Janet Roitman, *Fiscal Disobedience* for a discussion of sanctioned versus unsanctioned
wealth in the context of changing economic conditions.
[267] "Mibei cornered over road." *The Standard,* May 14, 1992., 12.

City Commission collects millions of shillings in [the] form of [a] service charge from the residents yet services in the City continue to deteriorate."[268] As with the other narratives explored, what was at issue here was the inequity of the exchange between the people and the state. Public forms of taxation, ostensibly collected to promote a "national good," were viewed as having no tangible function. Real money in *wananchi* terms became ephemeral when handed over to representatives of the public service sector.[269] By registering these critiques, Kenyans pointed to the concrete ways in which the corruption of the Moi regime had "hastened the process through which the sign of development was unleashed from its referents and came to appear simulacral."[270]

 Standard journalist, Raphel Kahaso, made this point explicit in an article titled "Roads maintenance vital." Kahaso's rhetorical style signaled the root of the grievance pointedly. "The inability of the City Commission to maintain…[the roads] has led to them becoming potholed. This is despite the levying of unpopular tax called service charge."[271] Responsible bodies, unable or unwilling to fulfill their ostensible role, had tricked Kenyans into lining the pockets of civil servants who misrepresented a generic "tax" as a "service charge;" a category of fiscal exchange which suggested a connection between compulsory payment and palpable material improvement. As the patron-client system faltered under the conditions of neo-liberal reforms, demands put to *wananchi* for capital by state officials cum patrons appeared unequal to the symbolic and material benefits received.[272] Speaking to the Kenyan context, Michael Lamont has referred to this

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[268] "City Hall should repair roads now," *The Standard,* July 20, 1992., 8.
[269] It is worth noting that during this period there were numerous stories circulating about the proliferation of fake currency in the Kenyan economy.
[270] Smith, *Bewitching Development,* 34.
[271] Raphel Kahaso, "Roads maintenance vital," *The Standard*, February 20, 1992., 18-19.
[272] Blunt, "Satan as Imitator," 315.

process as the "personalization of infrastructural power."[273] It was not, then, the fact of corruption *per se* that was the predominant preoccupation, but the existence of legal structures that coerced *wananchi* to contribute to corruption without receiving any of the expected dividends. In a manner similar to what Janet Roitman describes in her discussion of the constitution of the fiscal subject in Cameroon, this representation of the fiscal relationship between citizens and the Kenyan state questioned the "the logical bases for fiscal interventions, and the very concept of wealth as a public versus private good."[274]

Importantly, these narratives were but one strand in a broader narrative genre recounting everyday expropriations of *wananchi* achieved through the falsification of identities.[275] In particular, stories recounting robberies committed by men dressed as police officers proliferate in the Kenyan press during the Moi years.[276] What is interesting about these narratives within this broader context is the slippage between the category of criminal and official, between sanctioned and unsanctioned forms of expropriation.[277]

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[273] Lamont, "Speed Governors," 378.

[274] Roitman, *Fiscal Disobediance,* 9.

[275] Specifically, as noted by a number of scholars, witchcraft accusations, though highly mobile, are often articulated in contexts where individuals are perceived to have accrued unsanctioned wealth through clandestine practices; in particular conjuring up forces of the occult. See Peter Geschiere, *The Modernity of Witchcraft: Politics and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa,* trans. Peter Geschiere and Janet Roitman, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997); Nicolas Argenti, *The Intestines of the State: Youth, Violence and Belated Histories in the Cameroon Grassfields,* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007).

[276] Buff Mshama, "City residents warned of police impersonators," *The Standard,* December 4, 1991., 2.; Anset Nyangala Mwakio, Letter to the Editor "Disturbing harassment," *The Standard,* December 11, 1991, 9. Also, others have noted the proliferation of witchcraft accusations under the conditions of neo-liberalism as magic was used to enable forms of unsanctioned accumulation.

[277] See Andrew Apter, "IBB = 419: Nigerian Democracy and the Politics of Illusion," in *Civil Society and the Political Imagination in Africa: Critical Perspectives,* eds. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, 276-308 (Chicago; London: Chicago University Press, 1999); Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, "Millenial Capitalism: First Thoughts on a Second Coming," in *Millenial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism,* eds. Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, 1-56

Criminals dressed as police officers in order to fleece unsuspecting "victims," while police officers were routinely accused of demanding money for invented legal infractions.[278] In popular discourse these acts served the same function, which was the victimization of the highly flexible, but rhetorically powerful, category of *wananchi*.

As these multiple functions suggest, it was the flexibility of transport narratives that made them ideal claims making devices; allowing the population to approach not simply the perceived failures of patrons in fomenting development but the legitimacy of the political system as a whole. Keeping in sight the material, political, and physical dangers of criticizing Moi directly during this period and the vertical structure of patronage networks, critiques of the practices of the Minister for Public Works spoke not only to the corruption of the bureaucratic structure, but lent themselves to critiques of the president himself and the type of politics with which he was popularly associated.

Through articulating discontent with state corruption in the language of infrastructural degradation, and filtering it through a high level public servant, the potency of critiques advanced at the highest levels of political power was tempered. However, as Donald Brenneis suggests in his explanation of indirection in communicative action, there are always multiple intended audiences, for each of whom a statement contains a specifically targeted meaning. Comments: "ostensibly addressed to

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(Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2001) Daniel Jordan Smith, *Culture of Corruption*; Smith, *Bewitching Development*; James Howard Smith, "Of Spirit Possession and Structural Adjustment Programs: Government Downsizing, Education, and Their Enchantments," in *Producing African Futures: Ritual and Reproduction in a Neoliberal Age.* ed. Brad Weiss, 262-294 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2004); Achille Mbembe, "Provisional Notes on the Postcolony," *Africa* 62 (1) 1992: 3-37; Blunt, "Satan Is an Imitator.'"

[278] Buff Mshama, "City residents warned of police impersonators," *The Standard,* December 4, 1991., 2.; Anset Nyangala Mwakio, Letter to the Editor "Disturbing harassment," *The Standard,* December 11, 1991, 9. Also, others have noted the proliferation of witchcraft accusations under the conditions of neo-liberalism as magic was used to enable forms of unsanctioned accumulation.

one party…[communicate messages beyond the primary audience to] one's primary target, the 'overhearer,'[who] is also present."[279] Indeed, the consistency with which Moi attempted to shore up public support through mobilizing the discourse of development suggests that he read these covert expressions of discontent as bold statements that powerfully called into question his legitimacy.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

These everyday discussions of roads and transportation entered into dialogue with and expressed broader discourses of discontent that approached the corruption of the state and the relative development that was its perceived consequence. If we situate these narratives as more and less subtle politics for change, focused specifically on the failures of *maendeleo,* the politics inhered in the practices of *matatu* industry workers emerge as their explicit counterpart. During the period leading up to the election, *matatu* industry workers staged strikes protesting police corruption, demanded to know where funds intended for road repairs had been siphoned to, and called repeatedly for the release of political prisoners.[280] In other words, this body explicitly expressed its discontents along many of the same registers as *wananchi* did in and through transportation narratives. Their critiques and demands pointed to the state's failure to protect the rights of its citizens, the increasingly tenuous link between state organs and their purported function, and the problems of everyday corruption. How then do we account for the simultaneity with which expressions of allegiance and contempt toward the *matatu* industry were articulated in statements such as the following: "Oh yes, I hate and fear *matatus* all right.

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[279] Donald Brenneis, "Talk and Transformation," *Man,* New Series, Vol. 22, No. 3 (Sep., 1987), 506.
[280] Kage Mjoroge, "Riot squad set on matatu men," *The Standard,* May 26, 1992., 3; "Strike threat" *Daily Nation,* Nov 2, 1992., 5; "KBS staff down tools." *The Standard,* December 14, 1992, 1; Kage Njoroge, "Riot squad set on matatu men" *The Standard,* May 26, 1992, 3.

But I won't live without them: I refuse to live in a Nairobi without *matatus*?"[281] I think

the way to approach this ambivalence is to see it as the expression of a unity premised on

alienation from the spoils of state corruption, which was bisected along generational lines

in the context of the re-politicization of the category of youth.

As has been suggested, the *matatu* industry occupied a central location in the

Kenyan popular imagination as a symbol of the prospects of both national and individual

prosperity. As such, *matatus* were not simply a material necessity, transporting *wananchi*

to and from work, but were co-opted into the Kenyan imagination as an everyday marker

of status. At the individual level, then, the *matatu* both pointed to the possibilities of the

future, and were emblematic markers of the present. As Angelique Haugerud argues,

mode of transport in Kenya exposes one's position on the socio-economic hierarchy and

thus one's relative proximity to power. Within this symbolic terrain the Mercedes Benz

signifies those at the top of the hierarchy, while the *matatu* signifies everyday

wananchi.[282] Similarly, discussing the South African context, the Comaroffs observe that

the BMW has become an object of desire because it is symbolic of the material goods

that apartheid denied.[283] These analyses bolster the claims of the present thesis, which has

argued that markers of status have become embodied in technologies of mobility in

Kenya, powerfully pointing to the differences between the "haves" and the "have-nots."

In popular discourse, these objects operate simultaneously as symbols of desire and

resentment, concurrently evoking praise and criticism.[284] As such, the meanings

communicated through discussions that involve these commodity forms extend beyond

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[281] Mutongi, "Matatus," 562-63.
[282] Haugerud, *The Culture of Politics,* 8.
[283] Jean and John L. Comaroff. "Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction: Notes from the South African Postcolony" *American Ethnologist,* Vol. 26, No. 2 (May, 1999), 293.
[284] Based on fieldwork conducted in Nairobi, Kenya. Fall 2009.

the materiality of the forms themselves, gesturing toward broader discourses of social inequity.

Within the context of transport narratives, these symbolic politics were reproduced in everyday engagements.[285] Within the confines of the *matatu,* wealth became the object of critique through routine interactions with its material symbols - BMWs and Mercedes Benzs - a process through which socio-economic inequalities were popularly addressed.[286] Traveling by *matatu* flattened difference by emphasizing socio-economic likeness. As one rider presciently put it: "unless you go about town in a chauffeur-driven Benz, you must deal with…[*matatus*] every day."[287] While this sense of socio-economic solidarity based on exclusion featured in the complicated relationship between *wananchi* and the *matatu* industry during the Moi era, the transformation of youth into a political category substantially problematized an alliance rooted in shared experiences of material alienation.

In order to situate the politics of *matatu* industry workers, it is necessary to address some of the political maneuverings of the period, as they led to the formation of new, particularly youthful political subjectivities. As has been noted, throughout Moi's tenure, the discourse of development became increasingly detached from the practices of the state. Moi and his inner circle were viewed by much of the Kenyan population not as the purveyors of development, but as its antithesis. The style of politics they represented

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[285] Narmk N. Githere, Letter to the Editor "Interesting anecdote." *The Standard,* December 31, 1991, 9.

[286] Reverend George Kimani, Letter to the Editor, "Not all matatu men are rats," *Daily Nation,* September 28, 1992., 7.; Mbugua wa Mungai and David A. Sampre, "No Mercy, No Remorse": Personal Experience Narratives about Public Passenger Transportation in Nairobi, Kenya." *Africa Today*, (Spring 2006) Vol. 52 Issue 3, 67; Raphael Kahaso, "Matatus: Kenyans care about them," *The Standard,* Dec 24, 1991, 18.

[287] wa Mungai, 58.

was viewed as outmoded and increasingly obsolete - in a word, old.[288] This sentiment

was captured in a letter to the editor, which proclaimed: "the age of arguing…is long

gone and the new generation of men and women who not only can plan for a real future

but also who can possibly transform reason into actions [is upon us]. The new blood can

do it and we call on KANU to change now or changes will override it."[289] As this passage

suggests, political change was viewed by much of the population as being inevitable;

however, what the terrain of this "new" Kenya would look like remained highly

contested.

If the politics of the Moi regime were increasingly viewed as anarchic and

backward, the way "forward" was articulated through the rhetorical mobilization of a

series of oppositions. A revitalized Kenya required a "new generation" of leaders to enact

"new," "transparent" and "democratic" policies. Perhaps expectedly, these traits came to

inhere in the category of "youth," something instrumentalized by both Moi and the

opposition. Indeed, the 1992 election year is notable for the wholesale transformation of

youth into a powerful political category.

The Moi regime's actions following the advent of pluralist politics suggests that

critiques which positioned the regime as a gerontocracy, pointing both to the length of its

tenure and the backward (as opposed to modern) nature of its politics, had substantial

political purchase. Following the December 1991 proclamation, Moi expanded the

KANU Youth Wing renaming it "Youth for Kanu '92," in an attempt to revitalize the

regime's image. This initial political mobilization of the category of youth, however, had

unforeseen consequences, which were shaped by the socio-economic climate of the

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[288] Smith, *Bwitching Development,*13.
[289] K. Kiplangat Korir, Letter to the Editor, "KANU has to change" *The Standard,* December 13, 1991., 9; J. Onaya Kirebeyi Letter to the Editor, "Time is ripe for the youth," July 1, 1992., 9.

continent in the late 1980s. As Mamadou Diouf notes: "In its cultural and political versions, the nationalist project sought to…maintain the frontier between elders and juniors that characterized African values, and to put young people at the center of its plan for economic development and national liberation."[290] As the economy faltered, however, Kenyan youth found themselves increasingly alienated power and thus socio-economic and cultural adulthood. As we have seen, however, the politicization of the category of youth had a long history in Kenya. It was this vascillation of rhetoric that variously positioned youth as threat and youth as source of regeneration that had animated many facets of the politics of mobility throughout the colonial period. However, in the neo-liberal context, which "had particularly dreadful effects on young people," the attempt to mobilize youth as a powerful political and economic category, while reinforcing "traditional" deference to elders was an untenable prospect.[291] It was at the intersection of youth as a symbolic category of national regeneration, and as an identifiable and marginalized sector of the population, that the politics of *matatu* industry workers emerged.

The opposition party that most vigorously aligned itself with this new brand of politics was the Forum for the Restoration of Democracy (FORD). Smith notes that the name of the party referred to the industriousness of Henry Ford and thus to modern, capitalist development. Actively linking politics to Ford automobiles, FORD activists drew on a deep seated cultural logic that read politics writ large through the politics of mobility and its associated technologies. It also suggested a new temporal timeline for development. Smith writes:

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[290] Mamadou Diouf, "Engaging Postcolonial Cultures: African Youth and Public Space." *African Studies Review,* Vol. 46, No. 2 (Sep., 2003), 3-4.
[291] *Ibid.*

> This active, transgressive meaning of development [that was advocated by the opposition] was best expressed in the phrase, common during the Moi years, 'we want *maendo…leo.*' Here development (*maendeleo*) was modified to refer to actions (*maendo*) preformed today (*leo*), a urge that cut against the idea of a natural slow development manifesting behind people's backs, for which citizens and politicians had to patiently wait.[292]

Within the context of these rhetorically youthful politics, the *matatu* industry workers emerged as a powerful socially youthful energy to harness, particularly given their history of resistance to state policies.[293]

Importantly, the media positioned *matatu* industry workers as the unofficial youth arm of FORD, as the opposition's counter-point to KANU's youthwingers. Trouble between the two groups began in 1992, when the Moi government charged its youthwingers with the responsibility of collecting a new levy being exacted from *matatu* workers.[294] *Touts* (conductors) and drivers fiercely resisted the policy, astutely refusing to pay the tax. The nature of these refusals articulated non-engagement as a right, pointing to the particular form of political (dis)engagement that would become characteristic of the practices of industry workers. Beginning rather benignly, *matatu* workers simply refused to pay the levy, explaining that as supporters of the opposition (FORD) they had a right to decline payment, for they did not see any reason why they should be coerced into lining KANU's pockets with their shillings.[295] If they were to be compelled to pay

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[292] Smith, *Bewitching Development,* 13.

[293][293] In 1984, Moi pushed through the *Matatu* Bill, which sought to limit the number of passengers permitted in a vehicle and required annual vehicle inspections. In response, the industry went on strike, throwing the Kenyan economy into a state of disarray. Mutongi, 556

[294] Ben Ngemo, "Wingers and touts clash in Machakos," *The Standard,* December 10, 1991, 5; Mwangi Wairindi, "Drivers, Kanu youth clash." *The Standard,* December 11, 1991, 3.

[295] Mwangi Wairindi, "Drivers, Kanu youth clash." *The Standard,* December 11, 1991, 3.

the levy, moreover, they demanded to know how the money was being spent, as they saw

no improvements in the roads or at the bus terminals.[296]

In this way, the workers criticized the indistinct line between the political and

bureaucratic arms of the state, demanding a clear separation between the two, and

claimed it to be their right as citizens to refuse complicity with this form of structural

corruption. In effect, they made claims to non-participation that *wananchi* transport

narratives gestured towards but did not fully realize. Positioning their refusal as a right

they were, in effect, radically transforming "the idea of citizenship" through putting the

new principles of multi-party democracy at the centre of their practices.[297]

It was only when KANU refused to recognize these rights that the conflict

between the two youth groups became violent. On December 16, the press recounted a

conflict that broke out at the Machakos Bus stop:

> During the clash… the kiosks used by Kanu youthwingers for collection of
> parking fees were set on fire and documents inside destroyed. Several people
> were injured in the incident as police arrested others…The touts pelted the Kanu
> kiosks with stones as they loudly cheered FORD *juu* [top or high]*,* FORD *juu.*
> They also set Kanu youth uniforms and berets on fire. Several Kanu youth
> wingers were trapped inside the kiosk and they had to strip naked to avoid the
> charging touts.[298]

This marginalized population chose retreat from conventional politics over engagement

with what was viewed as an ineffective and illegitimate political system. It was in the

context of the perceived failures of this outmoded politics that this youthful population

developed an alternative brand of political engagement, which violently challenged the

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[296] "Matatu body challenges Kanu," *The Standard,* December 11, 1991, 4.
[297] Diouf, "Engaging Postcolonial Cultures," 3.
[298] Ben Nhemo and Amos Marenya, "Touts and wingers fight it out," *The Standard,* December 16, 1991, 4; "Kanu vehicle stoned by touts in Njoro" *The Standard,* January 31, 1992, 5. "*Touts"* as a category is usually used to refer to the men that attract customers, but is sometimes used to refer to industry workers as a whole.

state through its rhetorically youthful proxy. This did not entail depoliticization. Rather, they set about creating their "own spaces of production and recreation…[their] own modalities of politics with which to address the economic and political conditions that…[determined their] plight."[299]

Their practices are perhaps not best read as a retreat at all, but as an instance of selective engagement. By articulating their opposition as a political opposition, they were firmly rooting their critique in the language of multi-party democratic processes; however, their violent expressions of dissent both pointed to the state's tendency to act outside of the prescribed limits of the law – KANU youthwingers being mobilized as an arm of the state – and rejected the prevailing system of politics as a failed one.

The manner in which their politics of disengagement was expressed was further shaped by the relative social positions of the two youth groups. A number of stories ran which suggested that although youthful, the members of KANU '92, were not representative of the youth of Kenya, being children of wealth and privilege.[300] In other words, this group was composed of youth defined by age-set rather than by markers of socio-cultural "immaturity." By contrast, *matatu* industry workers, though many had achieved biological adulthood, were popularly referred to as youth by virtue of their socio-cultural status. These divergent definitions of the category of youth had important consequences for the shape of the conflict between the two groups and were central to informing the climate of inter-generational relations more generally. Indeed, destroying the kiosks from which KANU '92 collected levies communicated the *touts'* perception that state corruption had rendered it illegitimate and simultaneously destroyed the

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[299]Comaroff and Comaroff, "Millenial Capitalism," 18.
[300] Emonyi Wilfred Injera, Letter to the Editor, "YK'92 officials are too wealthy," *Daily Nation,* Sept 28, 1992, 7; Julius Mokaya, "KANU '92 is blasted," *The Standard,* April 18, 1992, 3.

material sites representative of the maintenance of privilege through corruption, their actions constituting a "kind of class warfare."[301] This action, like others, aimed at calling the state to account for its multiple failures to uphold the tenets of a politics that emanated from its own offices and spoke to the desire for a radically transformed socio-cultural terrain.

The failure of the state to conform to its purported structures of legality informed the politics of *matatu* industry workers throughout 1992. Despite government demands for national unity unencumbered by "tribalism," there is substantial evidence that the Moi regime was backing Kalinjin militias to destabilize the country in the year leading up to the election. This was not lost on either the opposition or the press, both of which accused the government of inciting "ethnic" violence.[302] Throughout 1992, these armed groups targeted predominantly Kikuyu areas - the largest ethnic group in Kenya and the population that theoretically posed the greatest threat to a Moi win - leading to the displacement and death of thousands of Kenyan citizens.

Of particular media attention was violence that occurred in the Molo district in March 1992. After the initial attacks, leaflets were circulated calling on all Kikuyu residents to leave the Rift Valley, or suffer violent retribution. In response, *touts* mobilized at the Nakuru parking bay and halted services in solidarity with the victims of the clashes, which resulted in a violent conflagration with the local police.[303] Following these clashes, the national papers ran a number of stories recounting the violent behaviour

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[301] Smith, *Culture of Corruption*, 142.
[302] Haugerud, *The Culture of Politics,"*; Smith, *Bewitching Development;* David M. Anderson, "Vigilantes, Violence and the Politics of Public Order in Kenya." *African Affairs* (2002), 101.
[303] Ngumo wa Kuria, "Crowds dispersed in Nakuru," *The Standard,* March 19, 1992, 4.

of *touts,* who repeatedly targeted customers caught with arrows; a symbol become

emblematic of the ongoing "ethnic" clashes.[304] On April 14 it was reported

> An unidentified man yesterday escaped death narrowly when angry touts set upon
> him and beat him seriously after intercepting him with a bag full of arrows.
> Business at the busy Nakuru main bus terminus was temporary [*sic*] interrupted as
> the men beat the suspect, who was about to board a matatu destined from the Kwa
> Ronda slums south-west of Nakuru town.[305]

Nakuru, though a cosmopolitan centre, has a majority Kikuyu population. Furthermore,

located in the Rift Valley Province – Moi's home province – it was a highly contested

political region in the 1992 election year. The location of this attack, in conjunction with

the perceived political stakes of its geography, suggests that it had expressly activist,

interventionist aims. In a context where the state was perceived to be unable or unwilling

to uphold its own laws, this population forged different routes to ensure regional

security.[306] Although rejecting as false the state's proclaimed commitment to the tenets of

secular multi-party politics, the values inhered in those unfulfilled claims retained

substantial purchase for industry workers and shaped the contours of their actions. Two

weeks later, *The Standard* ran another story titled "Mob lynches bow man." Journalist

Elijah Kinyanjui reported that *touts* and hawkers had set upon the man while he was

trying to board a *matatu,* having found bows in his bag.[307] In the absence of state

intervention in inter-citizen violence, indeed in a context where many believed the state

to be the cause of the violence, alternate practices, which though violent were firmly

embedded in the rules ostensibly governing the new political terrain, were located.

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[305] Patrick Machira, "Man beaten up by touts," *The Standard,* April 14, 1992, 5.
[306] Musambayi Katumanga, "A City under Siege: Banditry & Modes of Accumulation in Nairobi, 1991-2004." *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 32, No. 106, Africa from SAPs to PRSP: Plus Ca Change Plus C'est la Meme Chose (Dec., 2005): 505-520.
[307] Elijah Kinyanjui, "Mob lynches bow man," *The Standard,* April 23, 1992., 4.

Matatu industry workers were in a unique position to engage in "citizens' justice." Located at the nodes connecting different regions of the country, the *matatu* continued to serve as a space within which information, along with human cargo, was transported. Because the *matatu* industry was privatized, moreover, the politics that occurred within the confines of the *matatu* proper, and in its spatial extensions - the parks and stops - were largely outside the reach of the coercive state. *Matatus* thus functioned as moving sites of political engagement, and acted as conduits, spreading information along the country's road system.[308] Like in the colonial period, it was this particular spatial mobility that allowed industry workers to engage in practices that disrupted the smooth functioning of the state and forcefully register a commentary on the socio-economic and politico-cultural climate.

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That this brand of politics was viewed as a threat by the older generation must be contextualized against other discussions of youth that were ongoing in the print media. Concurrent to these more violent enactments of youthful politics, there emerged a more general climate of anxiety surrounding the role of youth in the multi-party context. Rehearsing a familiar script, people were particularly concerned that youthful practices symbolized the untethering of the social category of youth from one of its most important features, deference to elders. This perceived inversion of the moral order produced narratives where the category of youth did not function as a metaphor for a better future, but as a symbol of descent into chaos. Papers ran pieces with titles such as "Let's get serious about the youth," "Youth must obey laws," "Youth rains blows on elders" and,

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[308] Haugerud, *The Culture of Politics,* 36.

most explicitly, "Youth destroying future."[309] These narratives centered on forms of

youthful deviance that were the perceived outgrowth of the politicization of the category

of youth. This development, it was believed, had led to the decay of the important

strictures of generation, which had heretofore bound youth to the authority of their

elders.[310]

Reading these stories from the perspective of their protagonists, however, resituates

youth actions, allowing us to see them as a response to the economic exclusions that grew

out of neo-liberal reforms. Under these altered conditions, particularly youthful

solidarities formed, suggesting that many Kenyan youth viewed their socio-cultural

advancement to have been unfairly blocked by elders. On October 5, 1992, *The Daily*

Nation journalist, Stephan Munyiri, reported a conflict between church leaders and a

group of youth. He wrote:

> Youths wanted to beat the cleric and the church leaders to demonstrate their
> sympathy with four of their colleagues who had been excommunicated from the
> church for allegedly showing disrespect to church elders…The youth soon started
> throwing…musical instruments and shouting 'Thief! Thief!'; with some heading for
> the pulpit.[311]

A similar story titled "Youth rains blows on elders" ran in *The Standard* on June 10.[312]

As in the earlier narrative, the violence was triggered by economic grievances. In this

case elders had demanded youths pay a fine, a demand which one refused. When the

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[309] Clement Njoroge, Letter to the Editor, "Let's get serious about the youth." *Daily Nation,*
October 8, 1992, 7.; Stephen Munyiri "Clergyman forced out of church by youths," *Daily Nation,*
October 5, 1992; Paul Mutua Wanjohi Nderitu, "School closed as students set it ablaze," *Daily*
Nation., September 30, 1992, 1; James Namude, "Youth destroying future" *The Standard,*
September 8, 1992, 8; KNA, "Youth rains blows on elders," *The Standard,* June 10, 1992, 3;
Fanuel Garani Jadevela, Letter to the Editor, "Youth must obey laws," *The Standard,* April 27,
1992, 9.
[310] This discourse itself drew on a long history of anxiety centering on whether youth were a
threat to the moral order or presented the possibility of positive regeneration.
[311] Stephen Munyiri "Clergyman forced out of church by youths," *Daily Nation,* October 5, 1992.
[312] KNA,"Youth rains blows on elders," *The Standard,* June 10, 1992.

elders threatened him with the cane "he turned violent and reversed the situation, turning the hunter into the hunted by administering indiscriminate blows on the elders."[313]

Though elders read this youthful violence as an inversion of the normative functioning of the moral economy, from the perspective of the youth, their actions represented an assertion of their right to determine what material exchanges constituted a fair transaction within that economy. The refusal of youth to defer to the authority being claimed by elders was intimately linked to the perception that elders' claims were illegitimate. Situated this way, it appears that these engagements did not constitute an attempt to invert the moral order, but rather an attempt to reconfigure the relationships that constituted that order in the context of changing socio-economic and political circumstances.

As will be shown, there is a good deal of overlap between the structure of these situations and those practices of the *matatu* industry workers that the older generation so detested. In both instances, structural inequities, which had functioned to marginalize youth, were interpreted through the prism of relationships defined by generation as it was linked to proximity to power. In the neo-liberal context generation had, indeed, become "an especially fertile site onto which class anxieties…[were] displaced."[314]

As Kenyan youth threatened normative expectations of deference to generational authority, *matatu* industry workers emerged as the central symbol of youthful deviance. Importantly, however, it was not the expressed politics of the industry workers that was the most contested domain, but the day-to-day customs of the *touts*. In other words, the strain of politics articulated as most likely to subvert Kenyan youth, uprooting them from

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[313] *Ibid.*
[314] Comaroff and Comaroff, "Millenial Capitalism," 17.

their appropriate location within Kenyan society, functioned at the level of seemingly apolitical routine practice. A particularly heated debate surrounded the volume of music played in the *matatus.* As one disgruntled *matatu* customer wrote in a letter to the editor:

> I congratulate the Commissioner of Police for the decision to ban loud music in matatus. The noise which the matatu people referred to as music is not only harmful to the ears, but is dangerous to victims of heart attack and high blood pressure…What is more disturbing about matatu operators is that if they are asked to reduce the volume, they either laugh or hurl insults.[315]

The central anxiety was not the volume of the music, *per se,* but rather the antagonistic response of the *matatu* industry workers when asked to reform their practices, for the sake of those likely to suffer from "heart attacks" and "high blood pressure." Not only were these irreverent industry workers deaf to the demands of their elders but, most threateningly, the very fact of their mobility allowed these youths to evade the monitoring of the state, and thus to openly reject adult authority expressed through demands based on divergent notions of taste and propriety. This particular spatial advantage was not lost on *matatu* industry workers, who were notorious for turning their music down in the city center in order to avoid confrontation with the police, only to raise the volume when safely beyond its limits. This routine was premised on another logic of taste and distinction. As one *matatu* operator noted: "If your *matatu* doesn't causes [*sic*] a *marurumi* (thunderstorm) while playing the latest hip hop music…no one will enter it."[316] These forms of insubordination in the face of elders, it was feared, functioned to reroute authority, locating it in the hands of the *matatu* youth.

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[315] Regular Commuter, Letter to the Editor, "Matatu music: I salute." *Daily Nation,* September 2, 1992. *Daily Nation,* 7.
[316] Mutongi, "Matatu," 558.

The role of *matatu* culture in shaping the climate of inter-generational relations during the transition period should not be underestimated. Indeed, elders repeatedly alluded to the possibility of contamination, registering the fear that these behaviours might represent the "new" Kenyan youth.[317] These anxieties were not wholly unfounded, for the question of music in *matatus* did break down along generational lines.[318] While elders framed the debate over music within the broader discourse of appropriate inter-generational relations, Kenyan youth refashioned the terms of the debate in a language that suggested the mobilization of their rights, not as stipulated by age or socio-cultural position, but as Kenyan citizens. As one youthful commuter put it when asked his opinion on an attempted music ban: "We've got freedom of everything, we've got freedom to choose the music we want. If these songs are not banned in the country, why should they ban them in the matatus."[319]

The opening of the political system had evidently introduced the language of "freedom" as it was associated with "democratic" reforms into the everyday lexicon of Kenyan youth. In some mobilizations, these definitions of freedom worked at cross-purposes with elders' visions of appropriate behaviour. Particularly as subsections of youth employed this language not to demand their right to inclusion but to assert their right to difference. Kenyan youth, through constructing "new sociabilities whose function …[was] to show their difference," were radically questioning their position within

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[317] Maina Muiuri, "Love machines," *The Standard* July 22, 1992., 13.*; Mutongi, 563.
[318] Mutongi, 558.
[319] Maina Muiruri and Edward Twine, "Loud matatu music unhealthy," *The Standard,* August 11, 1992., 18-19.

Kenya's socio-politico and cultural terrain, articulating new, potentially subversive political subjectivities.[320]

Markers of difference were crucial to the politics expressed by the youth of the *matatu* industry, and taste became one of the central means by which difference was asserted. Elders lamented the new dress code being adopted by *touts,* which consisted of an "expensive printed shirt, baggy black jeans. Reebok shoes and an American…cap."[321] As noted by Fernando Coronil, for populations excluded from the regular routes of power, mode of comportment becomes an important strategy through which to express dissent, for "the body is everywhere a source of symbolic production…[which can] challenge, confirm, or play with existing social hierarchies."[322] The development of a unique sartorial style was part and parcel of broader transformations within *matatu* youth culture, which placed markers of their "outsider-status" at the heart of their communicative praxis.[323] In other words, while debates over music and style might not appear to be politicized discourses I would argue that, particularly in the context of the politicization of the category of youth, these practices emerge as distinctively political. Indeed, these youthful actions provided an embodied political commentary that was enacted in and through everyday practices, which expressed both the right to difference and disillusionment with the cultural politics of an outmoded generation.[324]

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[320] Diouf, "Engaging Postcolonial Culture," 5.
[321] "Love machines"
[322] Fernando Coronil, "Can Postcoloniality Be Decolonized? Imperial Banality and Postcolonial Power." *Public Culture* Vol. 5, No. 1. Fall 1992: 95.
[323] According to popular memory, it was during this period that industry workers developed *Sheng,* a dialect combining Swahili, Kikuyu and English, which was used to evade the authority of state officials and adults alike.
[324] Haugerud claims that the music being played in *matatus* often had explicitly political content, which escaped the surveillance of the state because of their constant mobility. While I did not find any evidence of that in my own research, either archival or ethnographic, if it is true than the

Matatu industry workers, at the very least, viewed these issues as being highly politicized. In response to the music ban they repeatedly went on strike over the course of 1992.[325] Given the reliance of the Kenyan economy on the functioning of the industry, with 70 per cent of Nairobi's residents dependent on *matatus* to transport them to and from work, they were in a unique position to make demands on the government they rejected.[326] As one letter to the editor stated:

> Kenya is certainly experiencing a lot of change since the advent of [the] multi-party era. However, none is more shocking than the recent event of matatu operators marching to see the President…Should the government decide to side with the matatus...then I am afraid we shall create a serious precedent which would see…matatus taking the law into their own hands.[327]

He went on to note the unprecedented power of the *matatu* industry workers who had gone out of their way to repeatedly ridicule and embarrass KANU and the police, mocking their roles as figures of authority. This commuter seems to have recognized a bizarre truth. Due to the economy's reliance on the functioning of the industry, this marginalized socially youthful population had accrued a measure of political power that was unprecedented in the context of Moi era Kenya where organized labour unions had been rendered functionally non-existent.[328] Through publicly challenging the legitimacy of a regime that prided itself on having silenced nearly all forms of dissent, they effectively chipped away at the façade of the dictatorial state dominated by the figure of

older generation's response to the question of music in *matatus* suggests another striking instance of generational mistranslation. Once again, they were unable to recognize the political content emergent within *matatu* youth culture because it was being expressed in unfamiliar and seemingly antagonistic forms, particularly hip-hop and funk.

[325] Odongo Odoyo and Kihu Irimu, "Matatu men march to see Moi," *The Standard,* June 18, 1992; "Loud matatu music unhealthy."

[326] Mutongi, "Matatu," 556.

[327] Motorist, Letter to the Editor, "High handed matatu touts," *The Standard,* June 26, 1992, 9.

[328] Pastor Brian Nyamai, Letter to the Editor, "Phase matatus out of the roads," *Daily Nation,* October 29, 1992, 9.

Moi. It was the integration of these practices into the public sphere that constituted them as real resistances, which though "semiotically imprecise" when read by an older generation, were "all the more potent because of their publicity."[329]

It is worth noting that the politics of industry workers constituted something of a repetition when read against the longer history of Kenya's politics of mobility. In its first incarnation what came to be known as the *matatu* industry had effectively destroyed the KBS' monopoly on urban transport. The networks connecting nodes across the country had then, as in the context of 1992, enabled the communication of messages and the registering of grievances. Only now it was the postcolonial, rather than colonial, government that was viewed as "depricing" people of their wages. This was the new generation of *athami,* who were again struggling under the weight of structural constraints on their social maturity and pushing against the ideology of age that justified their exclusion.

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The December 1992 elections did not see a change in regime for Kenyans. The opposition had fragmented, a process fomented by the corrupt practices of the Moi government, which had lined the pockets of potentially threatening opposition forces, distributing millions of shillings, which were, incidentally, never registered with the central bank. Nor did the country's economy improve following Moi's re-election, indeed, by 1993 Kenya was mired in a fiscal crisis with rates of inflation reaching 100 per cent.[330] While the politics embedded in transportation narratives and the practices of youthful *matatu* workers did not transform the Moi dominated state, they did function to

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[329] Karlstrom, "On the Aesthetics and Dialogics of Power in the Postcolony," 68.
[330] Smith, *Bewitching Development,* 33-34.

complicate the smooth functioning of this faltering and increasingly corrupt regime; in some instances even puncturing its fabric.

Elders viewed the emergent politicized youth culture as a threat to "traditional" forms of authority, revealing a climate of generationally rooted anxiety that was compounded by altered socio-political conditions. To them, the practices of industry workers and youth appeared wholly disconnected from politics proper, rather than as evidence of an incredibly frustrated cultural politics that had at its core a belief in the inefficacy of the Kenyan political system. Ironically, the change desired by such a large proportion of the Kenyan population was subverted by the generational mistranslation of the practices of Kenyan youth as it was symbolized by the behavior of the *matatu* industry workers.

Conclusion:

Scholarship on the politics of dissent in postcolonial Africa has argued for the recent

emergence of youth as a politically salient category, and generation as the fault line of

conflict.[331] Concurrent to these debates, social theorists have repeatedly remarked upon

the relative neutrality of "space" in contemporary scholarship in the social sciences and

humanities.[332] This thesis has worked to generate an analysis that draws on these insights

but, concurrently, pushes both to historicize these claims by turning to the perspectives of

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[331] Filip de Boeck and Alcinda Honwana, "Introduction: Children & Youth in Africa: Agency, Identity & Place," in *Makers & Breakers: Children & Youth in Postcolonial Africa,* eds. Alcinda Honwana & Filip De Boeck, 1-18, (Oxford: James Currey, 2005); Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, "Millennial Capitalism: First Thoughts on a Second Coming," *Public Culture,* Vol. 12, No. 2 (2000): 17.

[332] David Harvey, *The Urban Experience,* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, eds. *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); Soja, *Postmodern Geographies.* For this critique specific to Africanist scholarship, see James Ferguson. *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambia Copperbelt*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

historical actors themselves. In doing so, I have argued that generational conflict and contestations over the matrices of social adulthood has formed the nexus of politics since the early colonial period in Kenya, and that the place of space in shoring up conservative and exclusive political orders has, from the beginning, been critical to these developments.

Colonial rule in the Kenya colony was premised on an incredibly restrictive spatial logic. And circumscribing the movement of Africans formed the crux of colonial praxis. The extension of infrastructures of mobility in the form of roads and railways was part and parcel of this process. It produced the Kenya colony as a mappable territory, making the land and its people "legible."[333]

The reorganization of Kenya's topography radically transformed precolonial social relations wherein mobility was a core feature - a strategy of resistance in the context of inequitable social relations, and a means of reducing pressure in the context of overstretched land. Kenyan "youth" bore the brunt of these transformations, compelled as they were to cut and maintain the colonial government's routes of rule and blocked from achieving the landed status critical to achieving full maturation.

Infrastructures of mobility were thus never "modern" in the sense discussed by Paul Edwards. They were not the unremarked background of social life but constitutive of social relationships in the Kenya colony. As paths to social maturation were increasingly blocked, roads became emblematic of the perversions of this moral economy in Central Province and the Rift Valley. That is not to say, however, that the spatial politics of colonial rule constituted a wholesale rupture in precolonial imaginings of, and itineraries to, social adulthood. Nor that it completely transformed the moral economy of

[333] Scott, *Seeing Like A State.*

the people living in Kenya's Central Province and Rift Valley. Instead, I have argued that the transformations wrought by colonial capitalism in the Kenya colony *articulated* with precolonial imaginings of self-mastery. Through this process of articulation, the routes of "development" and the routes of "adulthood" came to intersect in incredibly complex ways.

Colonial rule, clearly, is never experienced in the singular, and for every avenue to individual and collective "development" blocked, new tributaries were forced open by populations increasingly excluded from realizing full maturity according to precolonial models. Into this heady mix entered technologies of mobility, which themselves became deeply implicated in these incredibly disruptive yet enabling processes. From the early colonial period, surfaced roads and access to automotive technologies mediated relationships between the colonizer and the colonized, but within this general binary, they were equally critical in their capacity to mediate relationships between headmen and the populations over which they governed, between "elders" and putative "youth." It was this: "growing bitterness between the generations that" as John Lonsdale remarks "was one of the most fundamental consequences of alien rule."[334]

However, road infrastructures and technologies of mobility were not simply negatively coded. They were also embedded in the popular imaginary as a promise. They were the avenues by which people could achieve self-mastery according to newly defined criteria. The consolidation of the wage labour economy, and the attendant emergence of a class of Kenyans with capital to expend, provided new opportunities for consumption and led to the emergence of new measures of prestige and power, and the fashioning of new subjectivities, which jostled for preeminence in struggles I have labeled the politics of

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[334] Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley,* 56.

mobility. While the colonial state had wagered that the cultivation of desire was a means to secure a labouring force without the need for coercion, technologies of mobility revealed themselves to be commodities of a different sort. People's ability to own these colonial "things" was certainly evidence of their deeper implication in the wage labour economy. However, the nature of these commodities also enabled users to evade the most hated aspects of colonial rule and the restrictive spatial logic upon which it was premised. As social spaces were reconfigured, older models of migration were drawn on by the increasingly policitized category of "youth." As routes to social adulthood were blocked, youth marshaled technologies of mobility in an effort to reconfigure the social topography and their place within it. In the process, "youth" repeatedly contested the criteria for measuring maturation, putting these technologies to uses unanticipated by the state, local officials, or "traditional" authorities.

In this way, "youth" seized the quintessential markers of British prestige and transformed them into powerful symbols of youthful insubordination. As this suggests, a monopoly over this new political arena, which placed mobilities and their related technologies at the centre of debate, could not be retained by any *one* interested party – the state, district officials, headmen, elders, wage-earners, revivalists – but was continuously debated, appropriated, and repurposed.

Throughout this story, we have seen how seemingly neutral technologies were lashed to these divergent political projects, and how their very materiality, their capacity to move bodies as well as goods, ideas as well as promises, was critical to their interpretive flexibility. It was this flexibility that allowed technologies of mobility to

become central idioms in the political struggles animating life in Central Province and the Rift Valley.

The slow path to maturation was transcended by automotive transport, which offered as a promise an accelerated route to self-mastery, here defined according to newly emergent criteria. It was through this process that the two concepts of "development" were tethered, neither one displacing the other. "Development" and *wiathi,* thus became two sides of the same coin, both mediated through technologies of mobility.

Kenya's postcolonial political leadership drew on these historical precedents in shoring up its ideally imagined capitalist future. In this, it was not so different from its colonial forebearer. Like the colonial state, the postcolonial state worked to secure monopolies over the mobility of its subjects. Like the colonial state it used the circulation of technologies of mobility to mark the prestige of their possessors. Finally, like the colonial state it further worked undo the relationship between material processes and rhetoric of "development."

However, the relationship between sign and signifier in both the case of "development" and *wiathi* has not remained stable. In the minds of many, the matrices for measuring either are uncertain and, at moments, appear to be up for grabs. "Development," in particular, has multiple valences: a hoped for and idealized future, a fraught and contested present, and a violent and overburdened past. In the colonial period the contradictions of "development" were marked by the death of coerced labourers, forced to maintain district and provincial roads. These contradictions were intimately linked to transformations in the meaning of *wiathi* over the course of the colonial period as the relationship among virtue, wealth, and eldership were transmogrified. As land was

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stretched, wealth, and thus *wiathi* was further concentrated in the hands of the few. These "few," importantly, were often the same class of men responsible for calling up forced labourers to work "on the road."

These transformations were brought into full relief under the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s. It was in this decade that the already over-stretched colonial infrastructures reached their breaking point, as the promises of infrastructural postcolonial modernity faltered, their ruins symbolic of the 'instabilities, shortages, constraints, and blockages" that had characterized the colonial period.[335] The politics of mobility have remained central to these struggles as road-related deaths, though a point of popular critique, are also read as the "blood-price" for development.[336] Similarly, the postcolonial era has demonstrated, for many, that eldership as it is linked to political power has retained the link to the redistribution of wealth and the generational transference of power in name only.

The slippage this has produced between signifier and signified has not decreased the powerful way in which roads discourse operates as a political idiom in the postcolonial context. Instead, roads and technologies of mobility operate as the political language of the everyday in Kenya. They are part of the shared world of symbolic meaning uniting the *commandant* and *wananchi.*

By contrast to Mbembe's characterization of the banal in postcolonial Africa, this has not led to mutual *zombification,* to the destruction of the language of critique. Instead, technologies of mobility have operated to reroute power and authority, even while

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[335] Achille Mbembe and Janet Roitman. "Figures of the Subject in Times of Crisis." *The Geography of Identity.* Ed. P. Yaeger, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 171.
[336] Lamont, "Speed Governors," 376.

reinscribing their ideological patina as stand-ins for "development" and modernity. It is the Janus-faced nature of the discourse and materialities of these technologies that have transformed them into sites for: "transforming, enacting…[and] protesting power relations within the social fabric."[337]

Historicizing the these processes over the *longue durée* brings us somewhat closer to understanding the salience of roads discourse and debates over technologies of mobility and the way that they shape the contemporary political scene in independent Kenya. To return to Judy's statement, this everyday political lexicon is used to mark important transitions in Kenyan governance, and to mark important transformations in how Kenyan's engage with their political elite. Its salience, as I hope I have shown, then, is not a product of a shallow history but is due to the fact that technologies of mobility, as stand ins for development, has powerfully overlain an enduring discourse of rights, one with precolonial precedents, that connects virtue, upward social mobility, and respectable adulthood, to the redistribution of wealth and responsible leadership. In the final assessment, in invoking the language of roads, Kenyans are making recourse these historical precedents, working to transform them to meet the pressing issues of poverty and exclusion of the present.

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[337] Hecht, *The Radiance of France,* 10.

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