Private Security in Nairobi, Kenya: Securitized Landscapes, Crosscurrents, and New Forms of Sociality

Nathan Dobson

Abstract: This article documents some of the forms of sociality engendered by the massive and growing presence of private security guards around Nairobi, Kenya. A focus on violence and the logic of an ideal of the use of violence in critical security studies literature obfuscates these networks in a similar way to idealizations of public space and the public sphere in anthropological literature on private security and residential enclaves. By looking at the close ties guards maintain with their homes in rural areas of Nairobi and the associations they make with people such as hawkers, it becomes clear that their presence in the city is creating new sets of valuations and obligations all the time. These forms of sociality are not galvanized by the threat of violence that the guards evoke; rather, they are engendered alongside and at cross-currents to the idealized, securitized landscape.

Résumé: Cet article documente quelques-unes des formes de socialité engendrées par la présence large et croissante d'agents de sécurité privés autour de Nairobi, Kenya. L'accent sur la violence et la logique d'un idéal de l'usage de la violence dans la littérature des études critiques de sécurité ainsi que dans la littérature anthropologique sur la sécurité privée et les enclaves résidentielles, décrit ces réseaux de façon similaire à des idéalisations de l'espace et sphère publique. En étudiant les étroites relations que les gardiens entretiennent avec leurs maisons dans les zones rurales de Nairobi et les associations qu'ils font avec des gens comme les colporteurs, il devient évident que leur présence dans la ville crée constamment de nouveaux ensemble d'évaluations et d'obligations. Ces formes de socialité ne sont pas galvanisées par la menace de la violence

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qu'évoquent des gardes ; au contraire, elles sont engendrées à côté et à contre-courant d'un paysage idéalisé et sécurisé.

Resumo: Neste artigo, damos conta de algumas formas de sociabilidade geradas pela crescente e maciça presença de agentes de segurança privados na região de Nairobi, Quénia. Ao colocar a ênfase na violência e ao aplicar, nos estudos sobre insegurança, a lógica do uso ideal da força, a literatura obscurece estas redes, à semelhança do que acontece com as idealizações da esfera e do espaço públicos, que dominam a literatura antropológica sobre segurança privada e enclaves residenciais. Através da observação atenta dos laços estreitos que os guardas mantêm com os seus lares nas zonas rurais e das associações que estabelecem com os vendedores ambulantes, torna-se claro que a sua presença na cidade está constantemente a criar novos critérios de valorização e novas obrigações. Estas formas de sociabilidade não são galvanizadas pela ameaça de violência que os guardas evocam; em vez disso, elas desenvolvem-se em paralelo e em contracorrente com a paisagem securitária idealizada.

Keywords: security; public; sociality; violence; exchange; urban; migration

Introduction

During the 15 months I spent working with private security guards in Nairobi, Kenya, much of my leisure time was spent with friends in a kiosk in a suburb about twenty minutes' walk from Town, the central business district. Here, "Mungiki," the name of a banned, non-state political group, was whispered between friends in the shadows of the market alleyways, while some of its members jumped onto nearby *matatus* (public busses) and jumped off with a small cash sum from the driver as payment for safe passage. At the same time, the city inspectorate officials chased away hawkers in the name of public security, while an informally-employed private security guard looked after the market stalls at night for a gift of cash, in what people in the area called the *kadogo* (small) economy.

The recognition of the range of different actors involved in providing security in settings like the one just described was one of the factors involved in the development of critical security studies in the 1990s.[1] For critical security studies scholars, the practices of non-state groups such as the Mungiki and private security companies often intersect with the contracts and business of the state, revealing the pluralization and hybridization of security practices made up of both police and vigilantes. Paul Higate and Mats Utas' (2017) recent edited collection entitled *Private Security in Africa*, for example, contains chapters on private security as well as on groups such as the Mungiki. Critical security studies scholars point to the need for localized understandings of non-state security assemblages and advocate analyzing them ethnographically (Abrahamsen & Williams 2011; Diphoorn 2016; Kirsch & Grätz 2010).

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Work in this field cites the essentializations and idealizations of the older state-centered approach, such as a monopoly on the use of violence and the notion of security as a purely public good, separate and untainted by private interests. When applied to African contexts, the encroachment of private security on these ideals is seen by the state-centered approach as a reflection of weak states; for critical security studies scholars, by contrast, private security represents the perfect example of how services such as security have always involved a range of actors even when they are delivered by the state.[2] The work of Charles Tilly is often cited to claim that state-making itself often resembles "organized crime" (quoted in Abrahamsen & Williams 2011:113). This article takes issue with the fact that within this approach, the terms on which the state is placed on an equal level with other groups usually revolve around violence, in that both state and non-state groups are able to claim sovereignty through the threat or use of violence. For example, Tessa Diphoorn, in her ethnography on rapid-response private security guards in South Africa, examines the way in which violence is used for "claims to sovereignty" which are described as being about "creating communities and constructing social borders" (2016:14). The contention in this article is that the focus on violence obfuscates some of the actually existing forms of sociality that the massive and growing presence of private security all around the city of Nairobi engenders. "Violence," for Diphoorn, "is the means by which these borders, and thus communities, are enforced and created: Violence constructs order out of (perceived) disorder" (2016:14). Yet, the neighborhoods and communities described by way of the threat of violence are usually affluent, and usually white, echoing similar work on private security and residential enclaves in anthropology (such as Caldeira 2000; Low 2003). As with Kate Meagher (2012), this study suggests that an assemblage approach focusing on violence is insufficient, in that it is often left describing the kinds of networks that only apply to the monopoly of the use of violence. The idealization of violence in the literature has resonance with other similar idealizations of free, open, and fair association in public squares or the public sphere that private security is said to break down or block, and so in this way the article also approaches the broader topic of civil society in Africa.

Data was collected through ethnographic participant observation on the social networks and forms of sociality created by the massive and growing presence of private security guards around Nairobi. Focusing on the social experience of moving through the securitized spaces of the city and on the lives and social networks of security guards paints a different picture from the stereotype in the literature, which holds that private security is based on, and perpetuates, an ever-present threat of urban violence. As Mirco Göpfert describes for "security in Niamey" (2012), the networks that are documented here disrupt the idealized sections of the city protected through the threat of violence by different groups. This study extends existing work in this field that focuses on the forms of sociality created by networks of security providers (such as Pratten 2010; Hornberger 2017), by offering ethnographic insights from the context of Nairobi.

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The presence of guards around the city of Nairobi is disruptive to the binaries and divisions made by people such as the city inspectorate officials who are tasked with moving hawkers (street traders) from their spots, and constructive of new obligations that stitch the city together in a non-ethnicized manner. The position of the guards is more vulnerable because of the threat of violence that they evoke, but the forms of sociality that are thus created are not, however, galvanized by this violence (Meagher 2012). The guards maintain links to home and associations with people such as hawkers, building meanwhile on the benefits of having a foothold in the city. The networks described here are engendered alongside and at cross-currents to the securitized landscape.

A short history of private security in Kenya

As British influence in Kenya's main security apparatus slowly waned after independence, private security companies were established by ex-police and army officials, securing the property of mainly white settlers who did not trust the police. As a Kenyan-born, white manager of a leading private security company who has been in the business for thirty-five years explained to me: "We decided that there was a niche in the marketplace for rapid response because the police can't do it, because they have limited resources" (Interview, Nairobi, July 10, 2014).

Four of the earliest companies established in Kenya all remain among the highest-earning and well-known companies in the field today, and all were either started by settlers who were ex-police or army officials or were formed from the amalgamation of other companies similarly started. Security Guard Services was established in 1970. Securicor, later to become G4S, began in Kenya in 1969 through the acquisition of three companies: K9 Guarding Company, Night Security Organization, Thika, and the Mombasa-based Guarding Services Company. Security Group Africa was started in 1970 by an expatriate British police officer, and Securex was set up by an ex-policeman of Asian origin in 1970.[3]

Two other companies that are among the leaders today were formed in the late 1970s: Wells Fargo, which bears no relation to the bank in America except the name and a star logo, was started in 1977 when an employee of Securicor (G4S) broke away from that company and took some of his clients with him; and Ultimate Security, a sister company to Security Guard Services (SGS), was formed in 1979.

Bob Morgan, an expatriate from Britain and former deputy commissioner of the Kenyan police, "benefitted from the good will afforded him in the 1982 attempted coup" (Interview with BM employee, Nairobi, July 2014) through acquiring clients, forming his own company Bob Morgan (BM), in 1984. The last company to fill the top bracket of companies today is Kenya Kazi, also known as the KK group of companies, or just KK. This company was originally a small, family-owned, private security company run by an Irish man who had been in the Kenyan police force with about five

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hundred guards in Mombasa. It was bought by a Kenyan who had been working in insurance and was incorporated in 1993.

The growth in the number of private security companies was particularly strong in the 1980s and 1990s, as Nairobi grew and with it the demands of the middle classes. A number of expatriates from Britain in the Kenyan police or army established private security companies upon retirement and then sold them to people who described themselves to me as "local Kenyans." Riley's and Inter Security, two mid-level companies in Kenya today, are spin-offs from a company originally run by a British expatriate policeman. Mac Security, which was later broken into different companies including Marco security in 1999, was also formed in this way. And as indigenous Kenyans started to occupy the top positions in the police and army and retire with honorable discharges, they continued the trend of establishing private security companies. Often known as more "local" companies, these companies form the majority of the mid-level companies in Kenya today. Cobra and 911, for example, were incorporated in 1995, Lavington in 1996, Radar in 1998, and Brinks in 2001. (Like Wells Fargo, Brinks is unrelated to the American security firm of the same name). Some companies, such as Perimeter, started as private investigation units run by ex-police or army officials, serving "private clients and the government itself" (Interview, Nairobi, August 19, 2014) before becoming private security companies with guards.

The number of active, registered security companies in the Nairobi area and suburbs can be estimated at between seventy-five and one hundred twenty-five. "Registered" means they are registered as a business with an operating license. Outside of this group of registered companies there are many different private security arrangements. For example, some guards are attached to a specific property, and when the owner of the property changes, the guard stays. Some guards are attached to families on an informal basis.

Using the criterion that a company, registered or unregistered, has to have at least five uniformed guards, the number of private security companies in the Nairobi area and suburbs increases to between one hundred and one hundred fifty. The signs advertising the location of the offices of these small registered/unregistered companies can be seen sticking out from one or two commercial buildings in most of the main streets of the residential suburban areas in Nairobi, as well as in villages farther away. These companies are likely to only have one or two contracts gained through associations with local businesses and a few guards to fulfill these contracts. A profit can still be made, even if the managers charge a very low rate, by paying the guards even less.

Securitized spaces

In the course of my research, I interviewed over fifty security guards in the Nairobi area. I also carried out participant observation, sitting with guards

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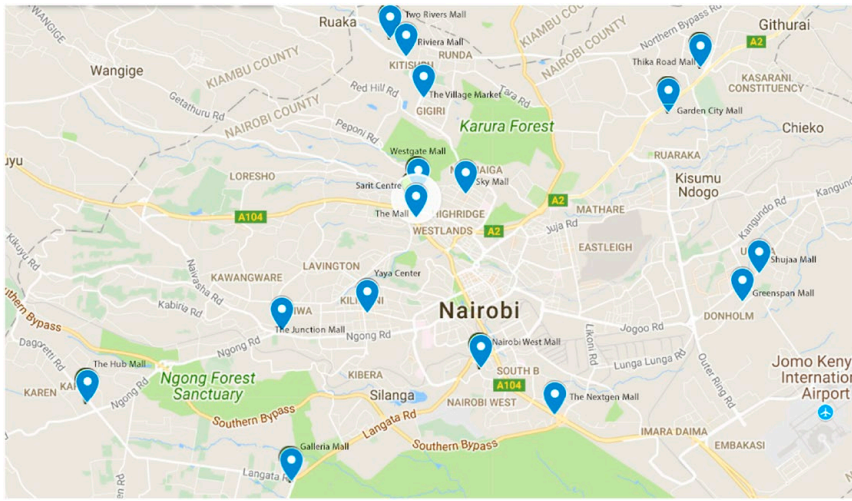
during their twelve-hour shifts and accompanying cash-in-transit (CIT) teams as they delivered cash around the city. What I saw was a securitized landscape backed by the threat of violence. The threat of violence was sometimes very visible, in that armed police were stationed next to the bank or mall that paid them. Cash-in-transit teams always have three armed police officers with them. But I learned that frequently, the threat of violence is hidden behind an alarm, either at the guards' station or worn around their necks, which would summon a rapid response team accompanied by armed police.

For private security, the malls are some of the best clients, as contracts can be won for the whole mall or for individual shops, banks, and businesses inside the mall. Malls often house the important cash-holding branches for the different Kenyan banks. You can find the guards of at least five different private security companies in a mall the size of the Sarit Centre in Westlands (that has around fifty different shops and businesses) and more in Garden City Mall off Thika Road, where there is generally even more space to cover.

Map 1. Malls in Nairobi



Many gas stations in and around Nairobi are mini-versions of malls, in that they are highly securitized spaces with chains of shops or restaurants. There is always a high presence of private security, mainly because gas stations house ATMs for most of the major banks as well as Pizza Inn, Galitos (a chicken fast food restaurant), and an ice cream parlor. Each ATM can have a separate guard from a different company posted to it.

There are a number of malls located all around the West and North of the city and new malls are being built all the time. "Two Rivers" mall is a huge new construction project involving Chinese firms and financed by Centum, an investor listed on the Nairobi securities exchange. It is being built on the Limuru road, where there are already several malls, including the

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long-standing "Village Market." Another new mall that was in the process of being completed in 2016 is "The Hub," which houses Kenya's first Carrefour supermarket as well as many other international chain stores serving the needs of the richer residents of Karen (named after the Danish author Karen Blixen's family). A number of informants corroborated the fact that the member of parliament who built Garden City Mall along Thika Road had promised that he was going to build something for the poor, and instead he built a huge mall with the slogan "Shop differently, live comfortably."

These securitized spaces serve a certain group of people. In this sense, there is a link between the threat of violence of the guards and police, the amount of money that circulates in the malls and shops and banks, and the community they create, just as other scholars have described for residential areas and gated communities (such as Caldeira 2000; Low 2003). The extent to which the malls are important to expatriate Europeans and Indians can be seen by their noticeboards, which are full of advertisements offering services or items for sale that only this section of society could afford or would be interested in buying. They resemble the magazine "www.xpatlink.info" that is freely available in most of the malls, with classified ads for trampolines, French lessons, mobile phones, cars, and of course real estate. These noticeboards allow the more affluent Nairobi residents to communicate and sell to one another informally, away from the hustle of the street, and private security is a major part of making that happen. This is evident in the ways that malls are promoted. On one of the entrances to the Sarit Centre, a sign reads "The Sarit Centre, a city within a city." The sign seems particularly appropriate, as the people I knew that shopped there did not count Town (the central business district) as the city. In the Sarit Centre there is a small post office, banks and ATMs, along with a big Uchumi supermarket, flower stalls, gift shops, a gym, and a cinema. In some of the malls there are also doctors and dentists. The people who visit these places do not need to go anywhere else; for them the mall can be their city. One expatriate friend told me that he no longer likes to go into Town, and that the places he moves are between the West side of Nairobi and sometimes Westlands.

"First victims"

The threat of violence that the guards use to protect these spaces and communities puts them in a precarious and dangerous position. One thing that became very apparent to me as I talked to guards all around the city is their fear of an attack by robbers with guns. Words such as "forefront" and "first victims" were used in interviews to describe the fact that guards are the first people to face a threat. As one guard explained: "When you are trained in security you have to understand that you are the first person in any case, if you are here, anyone can strike… for example a terrorist you are the first thing he makes sure he clears" (Interview, Nairobi, July 18, 2014). I often asked guards about what they understood by the word risk, and the idea of their job being a risk came up frequently: "Let's say when criminals come

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the first people they meet are the soldiers, now that is the first risk, the first people they meet is you, our lives are in danger we endanger our lives" (Interview, Nairobi, July 3, 2014).

But the appeal of coming to the city to earn money outweighs the risks. Most of the guards I met in Nairobi were poor urban migrants who relied on social links to their home villages "back home" in the *shamba*. Shamba is a Swahili word that infuses Nairobi's cultural and political life because so many people in the city are urban migrants who maintain close ties to home. It usually refers to a small plot of agricultural land that is owned or run by a family, but it also includes other rural practices such as the keeping of goats or cattle. Wealthier families can have very large shambas that produce goods for wholesale. This plot is usually "back home" where the urban migrant originally comes from, and so the word is also heavily associated with home in a more general sense.

Despite having been told by the managers of different private security companies that there were strict rules regarding minimum levels of education, when I spoke to guards they explained to me that if you knew someone else in the company and they were looking for more guards, you did not need to show that you had "form four" (acquired at the end of secondary school in the 8-4-4 system, and usually the minimum level of education required for a job). Guards usually hear of a job they might be able to get in the city and come to stay with a friend or relative from "back home" until they can earn enough to get their own place.

Many of the guards I interviewed told me that they were in Nairobi to earn money, that they sent money home, and that they hoped to one day earn enough to be able to return home. One guard that I spoke to envisaged turning the money he had earned in Nairobi into a large enough shamba to sell fruit or vegetables. Another guard, with whom I became a close friend, hoped to buy a motorbike that he would take back to his home in Western province and continue to earn money with by being a *boda boda* driver. (Boda boda bikers transport goods and people for what is a relatively high price compared to other public transport because of the speed in which they are able to complete the journey.)

Betty, for example, is from Meru, a small town over 280km to the north of Nairobi.[4] She left her home to work as a guard when her cousin who works for BM told her of a job in another company. She explained to me that she does not like to tell people that she is a guard, as she is embarrassed by the low pay and the general lack of respect for guards, but that "it is better than sitting around at home."

The presence of guards in the city can be considered a foothold that bolsters their friends and family back home by allowing others to come and stay with them and hawk or look for gifts or jobs in the city. This foothold also allows opportunities to look for gifts from the owners of the property they protect. These networks are a by-product of the demand for private security; they are not related to the threat of violence assumed in models that associate private security companies with non-state groups.

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Large wholesale markets of produce located close to the center of Nairobi sustain huge numbers of urban migrants. Trucks from all over Kenya arrive at what is what is known as *Marikiti* to the south of Town, and all kinds of fresh fruit and vegetables can be bought here for prices that are much cheaper than anywhere else in the city. Both formal restaurants in the center of the city and informal market sellers and restaurants buy their produce at places like Marikiti and sell them for a higher price elsewhere. To feed the many urban migrant workers such as private guards, who are used to not having to pay anything or only very little for their food back home, there are restaurants serving food for 40/50/60 shillings (about USD0.5) all around Nairobi. Even in the heart of Upper Hill (the most expensive real estate area in East Africa) there is a restaurant made of wood and plastic sheeting that serves the many low-paid workers in the area, particularly the private security guards who go every day to collect cash from the headquarters of a bank just next to it. There is another such restaurant in the heart of Westlands, another very expensive area. There are small informal restaurant areas serving *ugali* and *sukuma* for 50 *bob* (shillings). And for regular customers like the guards from the company with whom I spent a large amount of time, payments can be delayed if they are short of cash.

This suggests a new set of obligations that arise from the different networks of private guards. Small gifts are often closely associated with eating; eating from the communal pot is mentioned frequently in Nairobi, as is getting some small amount of money "for chai" (meaning tea), or "for lunch." Police are said to eat well when they accept a bribe that brings with it its own set of obligations depending on the "quality of the bribe" (Hornberger 2017:211). These practices, such as delaying payment on a good, are illegal but not backed by the threat of violence. Such networks thus traverse the physical securitized landscapes that formal banking practices are partly responsible for creating, and private security workers are at the heart of that process. The workers eat in the cheaper restaurants and converse with one another despite its being in the center of Upper Hill. Gifts "for chai" happen in these highly securitized spaces just as elsewhere. They are engendered alongside and at cross-currents to these communities.

Non-coercive association

The ways in which the fragmented and plural systems of private security and non-state groups are described in the literature leave very little room for non-coercive forms of association. One of the reasons for this is Musambayi Katumanga's influential article on the history of Nairobi's "bandit economy" (2005) that is still widely followed and cited (see Rasmussen 2017). For Katumanga, Moi's city commission, which replaced the Nairobi city council, was the start of a massive decline in urban governance (see also Hornsby 2012:444).

There are two major problems with this focus on violence. First, as Jane Guyer (1994) explained for what are similar disputes circling around the

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concept of civil society in Africa, it is particularly difficult to access non-state groups such as the Mungiki because "organizations that have political agendas tend not to welcome the objective outsider, even if, as in a democratic political order, they may have a right" (216), and so the ethnographic depth that critical security studies scholars are looking for will always be left lacking.[5] I spoke with people who were called Mungiki behind their backs and carried out an interview with someone who was at the cutting edge of the matatu industry, but it soon became clear to me that working with this group on a long-term basis through engaged participant observation would be impossible, because gathering data with them would always either incriminate me or my interlocutors.

Second, I believe this work can be accused of using preconceived ideas of how civil society or non-state groups should look in African contexts, and that this tends to obscure "actually existing forms of sociality" (Cody 2011:45). This article focuses on violence, but other similar idealizations of free, open, and fair association in public squares or the public sphere act similarly (Fraser 1990).

A good example of this is the relations that form between private guards and hawkers (street traders) in the city. There is an important connection between private security guards and hawkers that is missed in the focus on violence. In the area where I spent much of my leisure time, people who worked as private guards would relax among people who were hawking. People in Nairobi often explain the issue of hawking in terms of unemployment, but many of the hawkers I spoke to came to Nairobi knowing full well that they will not get a job. There is enough distribution of money and other goods around Nairobi to make even small hawking jobs more attractive than staying in the village, and slums have grown up around Nairobi full of people without formal jobs who are happier to be in the slum than in the village. Given the fact that most people know that there are no formal jobs, urbanization is better thought of in those terms, but also as a chance to make claims on people in the city who have access to more material and wealth.

Hawkers mingle and chat with guards next to the buildings and outside the malls. And if they are lucky, the hawkers may be able to store their goods in the security guards' huts. This is a tactic that is used all over Nairobi with informal market stalls. A very good example is in the central business district around the Nairobi library. The workers of these stalls are forever edging out farther and farther into the main pavement area, the public thoroughfare, before being told to withdraw by a city official. I saw this process firsthand at the shipping container that housed my friend's kiosk. Next to the container, about three meters away, was a small building that may previously have been a guard post, although I cannot say for certain what it was (it had the size of a guard post—a single-standing, two-square-meter space). Sharon and Selma used this as a base from which to store and sell clothes by putting a table outside and sometimes standing inside when it was rainy. My friend Simon, who was a hawker with a regular spot on the stones in front of the container, sometimes used their tables to

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rest his goods. As I regularly visited the container, Simon became more and more established in the area. He was well-liked by people and always had a smile and a joke. Eventually, Simon convinced my friend who worked in his kiosk in the container and other interested parties to allow him to set up his own tables in between Sharon and Selma's stall and the container.

The section that follows describes more about the city inspectorate and hawkers, as they provide an interesting parallel with private guards. The city inspectorate officials also delineate and divide the city in a way that private guards and hawkers disrupt. This poses interesting challenges to the idea that the legality/illegality of non-state groups revolves around the use of violence.

Coercive association

Since the reestablishment of the city council in 1992, the city inspectorate have continued to occupy a controversial position as law-enforcement officers with the power to arrest. Since 2013, they have answered to the county government. One of their main jobs in the central business district is to clear hawkers who have encroached on public land. Denis Linehan (2007) explains how hawkers continue to be the main group targeted in terms of policy when successive governments and, before that, city councils, want to combat crime, but he also shows how they have been embroiled in political corruption and sometimes given more leniency by the government in an effort to secure votes. For example, "when the NARC Government took office in 2002, a campaign to rid Nairobi of hawkers was commenced with great determination by both civic authorities, local business organizations and the Kenyan Police" (Linehan 2007:30). Battles against hawkers from different combinations of groups stigmatizes hawking and makes it the number one issue to attack when in office. As a high-ranking member of the city inspectorate told me:

> The public are very much essential to our work because we are wanting them to walk freely (clap), enjoy life, (clap), and we (inaudible) them with security, that's why we get hawkers away because when you, when hawkers are in town you find there's a lot of mugging and lawlessness, people are doing things without a plan, they are just doing things, littering is all over, but now when you now contain them you find that things are being contained in a way you have planned. (Interview, Nairobi, March 10, 2015)

I spent a day with city inspectorate officials when they executed a major operation to crack down on hawkers in the public bus depot. The bus depot is geographically on the east side of but very close to Moi Avenue, a main road through the heart of the central business district. As with other areas of the city, hawkers' stalls had begun to creep farther and farther from the edges into the middle of this vast open square space.

The operation to destroy the stalls by the inspectorate did not surprise me, because I had already watched city inspectorate officials chase hawkers away from the area where I lived on a number of occasions. As we approached the square, my guide and two other inspectorate officials began talking to a

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disabled man who was selling sweets and other small items on the walkway. They hesitated and discussed the situation with the man before deciding that he did not have the right authority to be there, and they started to pack up his goods and move him along. By the time I arrived in the square, the hawkers had all vanished, as they had obviously been given a sign to run; otherwise they would have been arrested. I watched as the inspectorate officials bundled up the clothes and other goods previously for sale into huge bags or tied bundles. I was told the goods are taken to an auction place on Ngong Road (an arterial road of Nairobi), where the public can buy them back. I asked my guide whether anybody actually did so, and he said that if the goods are more expensive, such as trousers and electrical items, they may try to buy them back.

The inspectorate officials then used crow bars or bars of metal to smash all the wooden structures of the stalls, reducing them to rubble, which they then loaded onto the top of their vans. My guide told me that the hawkers had been given notice: two weeks, and then three days and then a final warning. After the stalls had been smashed and the goods confiscated, we regrouped outside the compound.

Later on that morning my guide showed me what the rest of a typical day was for him. We walked from the city inspectorate compound, and as we walked he talked about the city, completely dividing it along the line of Moi Avenue. To the West of Moi Avenue, he called this the Upper CBD. He told me that there were no hawkers in the Upper CBD, because the workers and businesses there saw the hawkers as a threat and so "they cannot sell there, there is no business, they know it is associated with crime" (Interview, Nairobi, February 3, 2015). We got to the Nation Media Center (one of the two most prominent buildings in Nairobi) and a man who my guide said was a colleague was sitting there, reading the paper next to a newspaper stand. My guide said his friend patrolled that street and that "they have people out looking after certain streets so the hawkers know they can't go there" (Interview, Nairobi, February 3, 2015).

Some kinds of selling are sanctioned in the Upper CBD; there are newspaper and book stalls that gradually accommodate other types of selling such as the sweets and small items and single cigarettes that the disabled man near the bus depot had sold. These stalls pay their dues to the city inspectorate and are allowed in the Upper CBD. Among the other sanctioned types of hawking in the Upper CBD are things associated with businesses such as ink stamps. My guide suggested that we go back down toward the lower CBD, the River Road area, as "there are no hawkers here" (Interview, Nairobi, February 3, 2015).

I spoke with hawkers in the area where I lived, and they told me of occasions when they had been beaten by city inspectorate officials. This violence *did* bring them together. The hawkers who worked in front of the kiosk in which I spent a lot of time worked together, tending their stalls in pairs and discussing whether they could risk stretching the range of their hawking further toward the matatus parked nearer to the motorway. The whole row of hawkers who

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worked all along this road worked together in the sense that if a city inspectorate car approached from one end or the other a whistle would sound over all of the other noise of the busy commuter times of the day, and the hawkers would quickly gather their goods and vanish into the market alleyways.

Guards at the gates

Unlike hawkers, who are chased and stigmatized, the positions of private guards around the city are sanctioned. This section examines how, like that of the hawkers, the presence of guards around the city of Nairobi is disruptive to the binaries and divisions made by people such as the city inspectorate officials, and how their presence engenders new obligations that stitch the city together. This approach echoes the work of Göpfert (2012), who shows how the ideal-type spaces of the city are traversed in practice. The networks created by the guards are at cross-currents to the securitized spaces and communities they protect. It also points to the ambivalence of security and its close association to insecurity in that the position of the guards allows them to steal from those they are supposed to be protecting (see Kirsch 2016).

Because many private security guards receive such low wages, they try to supplement their income by asking other people, people they consider to be wealthy, to give them gifts or tips, as the hawkers do. A major distinction between private guards and other urban migrants whom I spoke to in the city is that the guards work at the homes and businesses of people considered to "have money." This provides them with opportunities to interact with people who are likely to give them money or gifts. But more than that, being close to these people can engender stronger bonds. I spoke to some guards who had built personal relationships with the people whose property they were looking after. Some guards were having their school fees paid for by the property owners or were given donations towards their children's school fees. Others received regular extra tips. I spoke to the guards at the gates of the cluster of houses of the Chandarias, a wealthy business-owning family in Nairobi. On the same street, one that stands out in terms of private security and barriers because it has a checkpoint on both ends of the street with guards who lift and lower the gate all day and night for passing vehicles, I was told by a guard that the owner of the property gives him small cash gifts occasionally.

Guards can make claims on the owners of properties they guard. The owners know that the guards are not paid well, and so if one starts a relationship with the guards, they will expect you to start to give them small gifts or payments. In this case, the claim is being made because the gap between the wealth of the guards and the wealth of the owner is very clear. Because it is clear, making a claim is a normal enterprise. One way in which guards threaten owners is with the question, "how is the apartment?" This is a veiled request for small monetary gifts and a suggestion that they might rob the apartment. The implication is clear: those who guard are also those who can steal.

Perhaps the strongest example of the closeness of insecurity to security is when guards are said to rob directly from the home or business they are

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meant to be protecting. This is a very common story in Nairobi, and it is mentioned in other literature on private security. When I walked around Nairobi interviewing private security guards, I was told on a number of occasions that this or that company had taken over the contract for securing the business or home because the previous guards had stolen from it. This was the case at the Nairobi club, for example. Having said that, sometimes this was used as an excuse for a private security company to win a new contract. The private security company that has the contract for a certain building or business changes often. In the course of my fieldwork I saw a number of changes, and I was told by some business owners that they preferred to regularly change the private security company so that the guards could not collude with criminals to rob from the premises. I heard of particular incidents whereby the guards had been caught stealing or had colluded with thieves to steal, and that this provoked a change of the company having the contract.

Sometimes guards told me that they had to watch their colleagues to make sure that they were not stealing from the business or home; there is a general suspicion throughout Nairobi that guards will use their position to benefit from the thing they are protecting. Guards generally have a negative image because of this. One visiting researcher whom I met in Nairobi explained to me that she did not trust private guards. She explained that in her apartment block, the guards made a note of who had left for Christmas vacations, and they then worked with thieves to rob those apartments. During my time working with private security cash-in-transit teams, the most infamous stories were of times when guards had colluded with their administration police colleagues to steal the money and escape.

Guards are often portrayed as criminals by two groups of people, those who employ them directly outside their homes or businesses, and police and public officials. On a number of different occasions, in conversation with police officers and public officials, private security guards were portrayed to me in a negative light. When I went to speak to public officials working in the city annex building, I was met with surprise when I explained I thought that guards had a role in determining the ways people think about and see publics space and public spheres. “Why talk to them?” I was asked. “They are uneducated,” I was told (Interview, Nairobi, May 5, 2015). I asked a number of police officers about the relationship between private security and the police, and I received different answers. I was told that the police used private security guards sometimes to acquire information about a certain area because the guards are there twelve hours a day, everyday; they see a lot and know a lot about what is happening. But any suggestion that the police might be able to work with private security was also met with the proviso that you cannot always trust them because sometimes they work with thieves, letting them know if and when the police are around or the residents of a property they are hoping to steal from.

These descriptions of the nature of crimes were also often coupled with conversations about how crime had changed in Kenya—that before, people would attack you from behind with a wooden stick along their arm that they

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used to choke you before running away with whatever you were carrying. People said that nowadays there was a lot more crime done on motorbikes, as this provided a quick and easy means of escape.

Guards of residential blocks see when the residents of the block come and go and can trade in this information. Passing guards every day as friends and I entered and left my apartment block or my friend's apartment (inside a house that was divided into apartments), I would feel that I had to engage with the guards and that I should give them something, even if it was only a conversation or a quick joke. I watched other people as they regularly entered and left buildings and compounds, and it seemed that they too felt beholden in some way to the guards at the front. The guards in front of my own building would regularly receive small gifts from the residents. I noticed that if the guards were ignored by one of the residents, they pretended that it did not matter to them, but they would also adapt their approaches to try and get gifts or tips.

I spent time carrying out interviews and participant observations with private guards in a mall in Westgate. The small claims they made on people coming and going were usually dependent on the position of the person involved. A local politician walked past and they made a claim and received a small gift "for chai"; a regular customer of the mall walked past and they made a different type of claim. The manager of the mall, a very regular visitor, received special attention.

Private guards are part of the same history of law enforcement for the colonial regime. Just as the colonial government deliberately employed *askari* (guards, police, or watchmen) from different parts of Kenya against Kikuyu uprisings, and employed people for their different police and army units from certain colonially determined ethnic groups, moving them to Nairobi or elsewhere, private guards usually work far from their home or shamba. They are usually not of the same ethnic group as the people living and working in their area, and yet they spend twelve hours a day or night, six days or nights a week, in that area. Such a situation can lead to Luo guards working and regularly interacting with people in predominantly Kikuyu areas, or Kalenjin guards working with Masaiis. This is particularly the case in some of the above-mentioned residential streets, where the guards are attached to a specific property and its owners rather than to a separate company. Guards share a drink and a chat, and the importance of ethnicity in terms of the association between the guards is greatly reduced.

Some guards are fully integrated into the community of their post and enjoy close relations with the people who live and work in the area. Susan is a guard who works the twelve-hour day shift guarding an ATM in a busy suburb of Nairobi. The ATM is located in a single-story row of shops lining a perpetually busy and dusty (outside of the rainy seasons) street. This street is a side street to a major ring road into the center of Nairobi. The ring road is being reconstructed and is currently full of construction traffic, along with the everyday three or four lanes of traffic. When traveling around with the cash-in-transit company, we would visit this location to top up the ATM. Our jurisdiction here was the cash, but we had to work with the private security guard of the

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other company in order to access the ATM's cash-loading area. Susan sits and chats all day with the women who work at the hairdressing school next door on one side of the ATM or the staff or clients of the multisex hairdressers on the other side, or the guards from the other ATMs in the block.

A guard's level of integration in the local community is an important factor for security, but it also exemplifies the crosscutting and new forms of sociality engendered by the securitization of space. Brian is a Masaii guard informally employed in a local market on the outskirts of Nairobi. He receives a subsistence wage that allows him to live day to day from some of the predominantly Kikuyu people that work along a lane in between two buildings. They give him around 300 shillings (approximately 3 dollars) a night to look after their stalls, where they leave some of their cooking utensils and a pool table. He is given a place to sleep in a corrugated iron shack located down the lane. The lane is between two buildings, but it has been filled in on both sides with wooden structures that act as individual commercial plots. In one of the plots games on the pool table are sold for a small amount; in another there is a woman who makes steaming cups of tea. Two of the plots are restaurants where one can sit, and two are occupied by women who make big pots of food (one *githeri* and the other *mukimo*) which they then sell out in the open of the market area around the time people are going home from work, between 4:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. The guard is also able to earn small tips and gifts from doing odd jobs around the market.

Conclusion

In her article "The Belly of the Police," Julia Hornberger (2017) reflects on how it has taken her fifteen years to use material on policing and food rather than focus on the "questions of violence and justice" on which she says she "proved herself" (203); fifteen years before she "could delve into the cultural nitty-gritty and anthropological particularity and 'otherness' of the police" (203). The ethnographic data presented in this article on the presence of private security around Nairobi brings into question assemblage approaches of critical security studies scholars that focus on violence. Where that approach emphasizes violence to show how communities are formed, this analysis points toward other galvanizing processes that do not fit the typical models of non-state groups in Africa. Guards are the first point of contact for robbers or attackers, but the threat of this violence is not what brings them together with other urban migrants. This study shows how private guards maintain close links to their shamba and how rural life continues to infuse Nairobi. The restaurants that source their food from the shambas of urban migrants such as private guards serve food for lower prices but are in the middle of more expensive, securitized areas. This brings low-paid urban migrants such as private security guards together in a way that creates networks alongside the securitized spaces.

A focus on violence and the logic of an ideal of the use of violence obfuscates these networks in a similar way to idealizations of public space

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and the public sphere in other literature on private security and residential enclaves (such as Caldeira 2000; Low 2003). Private security is often viewed as a static process, one whereby physical walls divide and deny access through a threat of violence, but a private guard's presence on the street in the central business district in Nairobi engenders conversations with others and gifts of money "for chai" in the kadogo economy. Comparing guards, who are sanctioned, to hawkers, who are chased and beaten, shows how processes of sociality in the city are mixed up with moral constructions around violence (see Pratten 2008). The association hawkers make with one another is galvanized by a threat of violence from the city inspectorate. But talk of bandits and violent groups that are inaccessible to ethnographers only perpetuates the stereotype in the literature of an ever-present threat of urban violence. The similarities between private guards and hawkers as they search for tips and gifts in the city and as they share money in the kadogo economy shows that new sets of valuations and obligations are constantly being created, engendered by the presence of private guards around the city. Such networks cross-cut the securitized landscapes when, for example, guards make strong bonds with the owners of the property they are protecting. By looking at the associations private guards make with hawkers and the close ties they maintain to home, the data presented here allow more space for emic understandings of personhood (see also Pratten 2010). Once these guards are in their positions in the city, galvanizing processes such as ethnicity begin to matter less in a person's set of obligations.

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Notes

1. Early work by Bigo (1997) in what is known as the Paris school shows their interest in contesting political constructions of security by looking at technology and policing practices within the security industry in France (see Bigo & Tsoukala 2008). As with work in what has come to be known as the Copenhagen school (Buzan, Waever & Wilde 1998), the focus is often on the definition and uses of the words security and insecurity in different contexts as a form of governmentality. The Aberystwyth school is centered around the work of Ken Booth (Booth 1991). Scholars in all three schools share a commitment to broadening the field of security studies from the narrow confines of statist and military-oriented research (CASE Collective 2006:448).
2. The titles of works in the state-centered approach clearly reflect the idea that countries are forced to use private security because of a failure or lack of government. See MacIntyre and Weiss (2007) and Musah (2002). Avant (2005) attempts to raise all of the possible issues of the use of private security for what she describes as strong and weak states. Her conclusions are guided by what she sees as the control problems of weak states. She explains that most of the benefits that strong states such as the US gain from using private security are outweighed by other costs in weak states. Mills et al.'s (1999) edited collection of essays on private security in Africa similarly situates private security as a response to weaknesses in the state. The rhetoric of the failed state continues into the one major study of private security by people based in Kenya: Mkutu and Sabala (2007) provide a host of statistics showing rising crime levels as a justification for the rise in private security.
3. The term expatriate is a self-appellation used by some immigrants in Kenya.
4. Interlocutor names have been made anonymous.
5. For more on debates around civil society in Africa see Comaroff and Comaroff (1999); Kasfir (1998); Rothchild and Chazan (1998); Rothchild et al. (1994). For a history of the Mungiki and the matatu industry see Muntongi (2017).

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