

## **Crackdown economics**

*Policing of hawkers in Nairobi as violent inclusion*

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# **Crackdown economics: Policing of hawkers in Nairobi as violent inclusion**

## **Abstract**

Crackdowns on illegal hawking by policing authorities are often analyzed as a question of conflict between resistance of the marginalized and repression by an exclusionary urban governance. In this article I argue that we gain new insights about the position of hawkers in urban space by moving into a different analytical register when exploring the policing of street trade. If we understand crackdowns not as attempts to exclude hawkers from the city but rather as central elements in an economy that produces policing as well as political alliances, we can see how violent policing practices offer hawkers a particular form of inclusion into urban space. Employing the notion of ‘crackdown economics’ I approach crackdowns on hawking from a perspective informed by anthropological literature on exchange relationships. In this way, I understand hawkers, officers and local politicians as being mutually engaged in an economy where they seek valuable returns through investments in social relations. The argument is based on an ethnographic study conducted in central Nairobi. I explore regular payments of bribes by hawkers to officers, the making and breaking of agreements between them, as well as seasonally occurring interference by local politicians in the run-up to elections.

## **Keywords**

Street trading; inclusive cities; Nairobi; policing; exchange; violence

## 1. Introduction

‘Have you ever been arrested?’ I asked Samuel. He laughed. Samuel works as a hawker<sup>1</sup> in central Nairobi where he sells second-hand children’s shoes to pedestrians on the sidewalk. ‘Not just once or twice, not even thrice,’ he said. ‘I have been arrested so many times. And my things [the shoes he sells] have been taken by those officers so many times. Here, downtown Nairobi,’ he continued, ‘it is a must that they [officers] come and they make a crackdown<sup>2</sup> at least every day.’ ‘What do you do in that situation, when you are arrested or your things are taken?’ I asked. ‘You see, it’s an issue of finances,’ Samuel explained. ‘You talk nicely to them, tell them how much you have in your pocket. If the amount is right, they let you go. Or they tell you to add some more, and you call your friends to bring the cash. It’s either that [paying the officers] or they take you to Central [Central Police Station] and you sleep in the cell. The next day you appear in court and [get fined] 10.000 [Kenyan Shillings]!’

A large number of hawkers earn their living on Nairobi’s pavements every day and by all estimates County Inspectorate officers in charge of enforcing city by-laws make a substantial amount of money from these hawkers in bribes. In the city of Nairobi with a population of about 4,5 million (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2018) the ‘informal economy’ accounts for about 70 percent<sup>3</sup> of all employment (David et al., 2012:26), and likely 20-25

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<sup>1</sup> While other authors writing on Nairobi use terms such as ‘street traders’ (e.g. Morange, 2015), ‘street vendors’ (e.g. Kamunyori, 2007), ‘informal traders’ (e.g. Egan, 2014), or even ‘informal workers’ (e.g. Mitullah, 2010), I use the term ‘hawkers’ in this article since I found that it was the emic term most predominantly used in the settings where I conducted fieldwork.

<sup>2</sup> The term ‘crackdowns’ in this paper refers to situations where Nairobi City County Inspectorate officers arrest hawkers, confiscate their goods or both. There are many other terms used to refer to these situations, such as ‘clean-ups’, ‘arrests’ and ‘operations’. While clashes between hawkers and officers in Nairobi periodically escalate into more exceptional street ‘battles’ involving stone throwing and police use of tear gas and live ammunition (e.g. Daily Nation, 2006), the present article seeks to explore policing relations from the vantage point of ordinary, routine encounters.

<sup>3</sup> Although referencing these figures, I would caution against taking any specific numbers on hawking in Nairobi too literally. It is impossible to produce reliable statistics on an occupation marked by

percent of informally employed workers in Nairobi are hawkers (Kamunyori, 2007:9).

According to one study, Inspectorate officers in Nairobi make more than half their monthly salary in bribes in a single day (ibid.:27-34). Another study found that hawkers in Nairobi by early 2016 paid 416 million Shillings every month in illegal bribes to Inspectorate officers (Huyo, 2016).

Violent crackdowns on street trading in Nairobi and the associated collection of bribes by Inspectorate officers recently became a major news story in Kenya with the publication of a four-part TV-documentary entitled *Kanjo* Kingdom in April and May 2016; '*Kanjo*' being slang for City County officers (Africa Uncensored, 2017). The documentary was created by a group of investigative journalists in collaboration with anonymous public interest researchers and includes hidden footage of Inspectorate officers demanding bribes and beating up hawkers (ibid.). Weeks after its publication, four Inspectorate officers whose names are mentioned and whose faces are shown on hidden camera in the documentary were suspended by the County government (Star, 2016a). In the run-up to elections for local government the following year, a TV debate featuring the four candidates for governor had each candidate answer how he would address the 'problem of hawking' in the city (Daily Nation, 2017).

The public interest generated by the *Kanjo* Kingdom documentary gives relevance to the question of why illegal street trading persists in Nairobi, despite frequent and violent crackdowns. To answer this question, I would like to propose that we explore ways in which the current policing of Nairobi's streets, especially routine crackdowns, actually work not only for officers and hawkers but also for local politicians. If we set aside the assumption that

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ambivalent legal status (David et al., 2012:24), seasonal participation (Mitullah, 2004:4) and politicized significance in relation to both employment statistics and city management.

the purpose of crackdowns should be to reduce the number of hawkers, other projects and interests come into view. Instead, we can ask about how crackdowns work, and for whom.

Adding to his description of crackdowns in central Nairobi, Samuel whom I mentioned in the beginning of this introduction explained an important seasonal variation: ‘But you know, this time we are in luck,’ he continued. ‘Elections are coming up and those people who want to be elected councilors, they want our votes. They will tell the officers to allow us to work.’ ‘So, there will not be any crackdowns as we get closer to elections?’ I asked. ‘No, crackdowns will happen. But not as many. And the officers will be somehow soft. Maybe they just pass here and ask us to move away a bit.’ Hawkers make up significant voting blocs and during election season, candidates for the local council are eager to present themselves as the protectors of hawkers against arrest by Inspectorate officers (despite the fact that hawkers formally are violating local by-laws). This typically results in a significant relaxation of the policing of hawking in the city center, and local newspapers will speak with frustration about the sprawling of hawkers in the streets of the CBD (see for example Tuko 2018).

In this article, I argue that crackdowns form part of a particular kind of economy based on exchanges (Mauss, 1990[1950]) of bribes in return for non-interference between hawkers and Inspectorate officers, and where local politicians intervene every five years in order to gain votes from hawkers. Employing the term ‘crackdown economics’, I suggest that we see bribe payments from hawkers to officers not as irregularities but rather as central elements of crackdowns, and more broadly of the policing of street trade in Nairobi. Furthermore, seeing the five-yearly intervention of local politicians as a part of the same ‘crackdown economics’, I suggest that we understand political favoring of hawkers less as a step away from the violent policing of hawking than as a form of political alliance that relies on the underlying threat of those same forms of violent policing.

By seeing crackdowns as the driving element in an economy that produces policing relations as well as political alliances, and by seeing hawkers, officers and politicians as participants in a social practice, I offer an alternative analytical approach to the ones predominantly applied in literature on hawking. Here, violent forms of policing hawkers are typically understood as manifestations of an exclusionary urban governance that seeks to push hawkers out of the streets where they work (see for example Roever and Skinner, 2016; Pádua Carrieri & Dutra Murta 2011; Bromley & Mackie, 2009). Along the same lines, a good deal of scholarship is concerned with identifying and describing forms of resistance on behalf of hawkers against such exclusionary urban governance (see for example Stillerman, 2006; Crossa, 2009; Hanser 2016). While not denying that hawkers in many parts of the world are faced with exclusionary urban planning measures, I would like to propose that we can understand violent crackdowns like the ones carried out in central Nairobi as processes through which hawkers are *included* into the city. I believe there is a need for analytical frameworks that allow us to explore the position of hawkers in urban space not only as a result of resistance against exclusion but also as a result of inclusionary processes, especially if, as is the case in Nairobi, those processes entail violence.

The article is organized as follows: First I present the site where I carried out ethnographic fieldwork for this study and describe the methods used. Next, I review relevant regional and thematic literature on hawking and indicate where I believe I make a contribution. I then proceed to develop the main analytical argument over the course of three sections. In the first section I propose that we see crackdowns as a platform for exchange and thereby for the formation of social relationships between hawkers and Inspectorate officers in central Nairobi. In the second section I introduce a spatial aspect by proposing that we see crackdowns as a mode of cultivation engaged in by officers and hawkers as a productive

human infrastructure in the city. In the third and final section I argue that the crackdown economy is expanded in the run-up to local elections with the participation of local politicians.

## **2. The field site: Hawkers and officers in Nairobi's CBD**

The present argument is based on ethnographic fieldwork in the Nairobi CBD, an area of about two square kilometers generally known to be the part of Nairobi that is simultaneously most attractive to hawkers and most tightly policed by the Inspectorate department. Since my analytical interest is in policing and exchanges of bribes between hawkers and Inspectorate officers, the material on which the article is based could be described with methodological terminology as an extreme case rather than a representative one, selected for its potential to reveal particular dynamics more clearly than other cases (Flyvbjerg, 2005: 229). A few unpublished census studies carried out by stakeholder organizations give an indication of the composition of hawkers who work in the CBD and the way in which they conduct their work. According to these studies, there are an estimated 6000 to 14.000 hawkers operating there (NCBDA 2003 in Morange, 2015:250). About 75 percent of them sell on street pavements, while a smaller number are mobile or sell at bus stations. Only 6 percent operate in designated sites (NISCOF 2006 in Mitullah, 2010:188). It is estimated that the majority of street traders in the CBD are between 25-34 years old, and that almost 70 percent are male (NCBDA 2003 in David et al., 2012:26). Most of the street traders sell clothes, bags and other textiles, while a smaller number sell shoes and fresh fruit and vegetables (NCBDA 2003 in Kamunyori, 2007:26). The above studies correspond with my general impression of the composition of hawkers operating in Nairobi's CBD during my fieldwork in 2016 and 2017.

The fieldwork was conducted in three intervals beginning in the month of April 2016, continuing from August 2016 until January 2017, and concluding with field visits in August and September 2017. I mainly engaged in participant observation among groups of hawkers operating on the pavements along different streets in the CBD and, to a smaller extent, among Inspectorate officers patrolling different sections of the CBD. I stood alongside hawkers during different times of the day, during peak selling hours as well as off-peak hours, and I followed them to sit and chat in back alleys during the several daily breaks occasioned by officers patrolling the area. This choice of method meant that I experienced numerous crackdowns first-hand during fieldwork. I also spent time with some Inspectorate officers posted on specific streets, and I talked to other officers at their offices. From these activities, I gained insight into rhythms of work and unfolding relationships between hawkers and officers. My observations were qualified through daily informal conversations with both hawkers and officers. Although difficult to put into numbers, I most likely talked more than once to about two hundred different hawkers while I followed a smaller number of about thirty on a regular basis. I had one or several in-depth conversations with fourteen different inspectorate officers.

### **3. Theoretical implications: From politics of exclusion to economies of inclusion**

The Nairobi CBD as an attractive spot for hawking as well as a tightly policed area has naturally attracted attention from scholars. There is a good number of studies concerned with crackdowns, evictions and violent clashes between policing authorities and hawkers who attempt to sell their wares there (Linehan, 2007; Kamunyor, 2007; Kinyanjui, 2013, 2014; Egan, 2014; Morange, 2015). Some emphasize exclusionary drives in the planning and



management infrastructure of the city ranging from the continuation of colonial-era notions of orderliness through the re-invoking of antiquated city by-laws (Egan, 2014; Kamunyori, 2007; Kinyanjui, 2013, 2014) to the influence of neoliberal concerns for global competitiveness on city planners' aesthetic visions of Nairobi (Linehan, 2007; Egan, 2014; Morange, 2015).

Some are concerned with particular dimensions of hawkers' efforts to gain access to the CBD such as gender specific obstacles and tactics (Kinyanjui, 2013, 2014) as well as the work of hawkers' organizations (Kamunyori, 2007; Morange, 2015). Common to these studies is that crackdowns, evictions and violent clashes between hawkers and policing authorities are placed in analytical frameworks emphasizing struggles for access versus drives for exclusion. In this way, urban space is understood as an object of struggle between opposing interests.

This analytical emphasis on drives for exclusion versus struggles for access by the marginalized is by no means unique to the literature on street trading in Nairobi. It seems to me that a significant portion of the international literature on street trading in urban settings is dominated by a tendency to understand the problem of hawkers as a problem of exclusion. This preoccupation with mechanisms of – and resistance against – exclusion seems to be accompanied by an analytical focus on what Bandyopadhyay (2010) refers to as 'the politics' of hawking, contrasted with a now diminished interest in 'the economics' of hawking (ibid.:299). 'Economics' in this sense refers to an interest in the characteristics of hawking as 'informal' work contrasted with the operation of the 'formal' sector; a type of study associated with Hart's (1973) original framing of the concept of an 'informal economy', the ILO's adoption of the term and what has elsewhere been referred to as the 'Kenya debates' of the 1970s (AlSayyad and Roy, 2004:1). When reviewing the literature on hawking, it seems commonplace to describe a shift away from these initial 'economic' studies towards an increasing focus in the past three decades on the 'political implications' (Cross, 1998:41) of

hawking, and on themes such as hawkers' 'resistance' and state 'repression' (Cross, 1998:41), hawkers' 'subaltern agency' and the 'hostility' of urban renewal projects (Bandyopadhyay, 2010:299).

The literature associated with this 'political' turn offers a rich exploration of themes such as citizenship, urban space, state power and modes of collective action. Often cited theoretical approaches include an interest in the ways in which hawkers as subaltern urban populations make claims on the state and the implications for our understanding of citizenship (Rajagopal, 2001; Chatterjee, 2011; Anjaria, 2011), an interest, in line with Lefebvre's (1991) framework, in the ways in which hawkers who inhabit the city streets contribute to the production of urban space (see for example Stillerman, 2006:512; Crossa, 2009:57), a focus the 'street politics' (Bayat 1997:63) by which hawkers' clashes with authorities are seen as a public dramatization of state power holding particular potentials for resistance (Hanser, 2016; Crossa, 2012; Huang et al., 2014:179; Kinyanjui, 2013:148), and studies of various contests around hawkers' use of public space in the context of neoliberal city management (Hansen, 2010; Rekhviashvili, 2015; Pádua Carrieri & Dutra Murta, 2011; Cross, 1998; Bromley & Mackie, 2009). Although diverse in their approaches, these writings have in common an interest in hawkers as people at risk of being pushed out of the streets in which they work, whether the authors emphasize the mechanisms by which they are deemed unwanted or the acts of resistance by which they manage to stay.

Roy observes about the literature on urban informality that 'While there is a formidable body of work on contours of exclusion, there is less rigorous discussion of the politics of inclusion' (2009:159). I would agree with her. It seems to me that there is a need to explore the dynamics of inclusion by which hawkers are positioned on city streets. There is a tendency in some of the writings on hawkers that the notion of 'inclusive cities' becomes a label for

desirable qualities which the authors call for in urban planning, either as the antithesis of the city management under study or as a celebration of examples to draw inspiration from (see for example Roever and Skinner, 2016; Bromley & Mackie, 2009:1504; Xue & Huang, 2015:164; Lintelo, 2017:77; Mitullah, 2007:120). I believe we need to acknowledge and explore those forms of inclusion that are already available to hawkers but which do not make for poster child cases of any ‘inclusive city’. In her analysis of what she calls the ‘politics of inclusion’, Roy explores from a Foucauldian perspective how participatory initiatives involving civil society organizations take place through processes of discipline and subject formation (2009). My own interest in urban inclusion is less in such explicitly ‘political’ processes and more in the everyday interactions of hawkers with urban authorities. I seek to explore the *economies* of inclusion that shape their position in urban space.

Describing what I call ‘crackdown economics’ in Nairobi’s CBD, I mean to contribute to the hawking literature not only by stressing the need to look at mechanisms of inclusion, but also by challenging the prevailing idea that the ‘politics’ of informality should be more relevant than the ‘economics’. This is not a call for a return to the 1970s studies of an ‘informal sector’ but rather a suggestion for a new theoretical avenue by which to arrive at an understanding of violent forms of policing and their implications for hawkers’ position in the city. In describing Nairobi’s ‘crackdown economics’, I draw on a number of theoretical concepts from economic anthropology. Firstly, by employing the classic notion that exchanges form the basis of social relations between people (e.g. Mauss, 1990[1950]: 10-13; Malinowski, 1922: 96), I see crackdowns and the resulting exchanges of bribes as a platform for the formation of relationships between hawkers and officers. Secondly, drawing on Munn’s (1988) notion of potentialized value in exchange relations combined with an emphasis on how potential value here is situated in space through hawkers as a human infrastructure in the city streets (Simone

2004), I see the conducting and withholding of crackdowns on behalf of Inspectorate officers as a mode of cultivation. Lastly, drawing on Strathern's (1988) notion that participants in an exchange can alter the ways in which relationships are produced, I suggest that politicians alter the workings of the crackdown economics every five years so that it yields political support instead of bribes. Through the lens of crackdown economics, we see that hawkers in Nairobi's CBD are much less pushed out of the city by violent policing practices than offered a particular form of violent inclusion into urban space. I will develop this analysis over the course of the following three sections.

#### **4. 'She knows those officers': Crackdowns as a platform for exchange relationships**

Working as a hawker on Tom Mboya Street in central Nairobi, you can expect to have your goods confiscated by County officers at least a few times in a month. On one occasion, I met with three hawkers, Njeri, Mama Princess and Julia, a few minutes after a crackdown where they had all lost their goods. The piece of sidewalk where the three women usually work was empty except for a few squashed oranges. Groups of hawkers were congregating in doorways and nearby alleys, waiting for the officers to be sufficiently far away for them to resume work. 'Once we saw them [officers], they were already close. I just decided to run. I cannot get arrested over these things,' said Njeri, referring to the stack of second-hand women's blouses which she had abandoned on the pavement when running away. Now the three women were discussing how to go about getting their things back. 'We'll send Mama Princess,' Julia explained to me. 'She knows those officers from one-o-six [the number of the vehicle to which the officers are affiliated]. She can talk well with them.' I was not surprised that they had chosen Mama Princess to negotiate on their behalf. She has been working at that

particular place for longer than most other hawkers, and I have often seen her chatting in a friendly, familiar way with officers if they pass by when she does not have her goods with her. While Mama Princess set off to look for the officers, Njeri remarked ‘Those ones [officers] from one-o-six, they are not bad. They will give us back [our goods] for maybe five hundred. If it had been one-seventy [officers affiliated to another vehicle] – wooh! Trouble. Maybe if you had something nice, you can try to get it back. But otherwise you just leave it.’

Njeri’s and Julia’s comments about the officers from vehicle one-o-six show us that far from taking place as isolated incidents of confrontation between state agents and law breakers, crackdowns form part of an ongoing series of encounters between hawkers and officers. Over time, hawkers build up impressions of the characters of certain officers or groups of officers which guide their ways of engaging with them during future crackdowns. When on fieldwork, I often heard comments about ‘good’ and ‘bad’ officers such as: ‘This officer is good. If you get arrested but you don’t have money, you can talk to him. If you tell him “I have children to feed,” he can let you go for even two hundred.’ Or: ‘That one is very bad. He is the one who beat up [another hawker] so he had to get stitches.’ Sometimes these reputations can even be captured in nicknames assigned to certain officers by hawkers, such as the officer dubbed *Baba Watoto*, meaning ‘father of children’, because of his tendency to beat the street children of the area.

While hawkers operate with notions about the characters of most of the officers who patrol the areas in which they work, it is harder for Inspectorate officers to tell apart the hundreds of hawkers whom they might encounter in a day’s work. ‘They are too many,’ as one officer explained to me. ‘All these young ones, coming and going. But the older ones who have been there for many years, we know them. Some of them we have known since they were youngsters, selling matchboxes.’ In situations such as the one described above, older hawkers

like Mama Princess who are ‘known’ to the officers play a facilitating role and act on behalf of other hawkers when there are negotiations to be made. On another occasion, Mama Princess explained to me that it is important to keep a ‘good relationship’ with officers. ‘If I meet them when I am not working, I greet them. “How are you?” “Very fine.” If there is any problem, I talk to them in a good way. “My boss, I have this problem.” Always talking in a nice way, even if they are rude to me.’

Economic anthropologists in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century proposed the idea that exchanges of gifts between people form the basis for social relationships between them (e.g. Mauss, 1990[1950]: 10-13; Malinowski, 1922: 96). If we understand crackdowns as instances in an ongoing series of encounters through which relationships are built between officers and hawkers, and if we consider payments of cash in return for extra-judicial favors as central elements of crackdowns, we can approach them analytically within this register of exchange and reciprocity. In this way, crackdowns come into view as a social platform allowing for exchanges of gifts between hawkers and Inspectorate officers and generative of policing relations. At this point the reader might feel slightly provoked by my employment of notions such as ‘gifts’ and ‘reciprocity’ to describe relations which are blatantly marked by violence and power inequalities. Certainly, the ways in which equal reciprocity as a benevolent human norm was theorized in the classic literature has been problematized within more recent literature on gift economies<sup>4</sup>. Revisiting the empirical setting of Malinowski, a classic author on reciprocity, Weiner (1992) suggests that we understand exchange relationships not simply as an arrangement between equals where gifts are reciprocated with counter gifts, but rather as a ‘maze of strategies and plays’. Participants in the gift exchanges described by Weiner enter

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<sup>4</sup> Weiner (1992), for instance, argues that the notion of an inherent morality and sanctity of reciprocity is likely to have been part of the Western philosophical baggage of classic authors such as Durkheim, Mauss and Malinowski rather than an empirical finding (ibid.: 28-31).

from different levels of wealth and influence, and the losers who end up with less than they brought are as important to the exchange as the successful participants (ibid.: 141-143).

Accordingly, I do not propose that we see crackdowns as a benevolent social practice. The strength of an analytical approach drawing on notions of exchange as the basis for social relationships lies not in any normative evaluation of the benevolence of exchanges taking place but rather in drawing attention to everyday encounters through which policing relations between hawkers and officers are generated.

I have previously reviewed some of the analytical approaches commonly adopted within literature on hawking. At the risk of glossing over a diverse set of theoretical strands, let me nonetheless attempt to describe how the exchange approach offers a new analytical angle. If viewed from the perspectives of neoliberal critique (for example Cross, 1998), hawkers' resistance through 'spatial practices' (for example Stillerman, 2006) or 'street politics' (Bayat, 1997), the crackdown where Njeri, Mama Princess and Julia had their goods taken would be understood as a manifestation of an exclusionary urban governance which seeks to rid Nairobi of unwanted street traders. The exchange approach, on the other hand, allows us to see the officers from vehicle one-o-six as participants in a violent social practice. This particular crackdown can be seen as one out of many occasions through which Njeri, Julia and Mama Princess build impressions about the group of officers, while Mama Princess in particular reproduces a personal relationship with the officers through her negotiations with them about the return of the three women's goods.

More recent work within economic anthropology concerned with exchange allows us to explore how hawkers and inspectorate officers respectively invest in relationships with one another, and how they engage with one another with an eye to future possibilities and constraints. In her study of a Melanesian community, Munn (1988) describes how people

there judge all acts according to their relative capacities to bring desirable outcomes, and she argues that the value of an act lies in its potential to enhance the actor's influence and access to material wealth (ibid.: 8-9). Value, in this approach, is fundamentally relational, since it denotes a person's relative capacity to gain outcomes out of relations to other people. With inspiration from Munn's analysis, we can see crackdowns on street trading in Nairobi as personal encounters between hawkers and Inspectorate officers which are likely to rest on relational dynamics established previously, and which have implications for future situations. Mama Princess' concern to politely greet and chat with officers, maintaining what she calls 'good relationships', can be seen as continuous investments in her capacity to strike good deals with those same officers in situations such as the crackdown where Njeri, Julia and herself lost their goods. At the same time, the reputation of officers from vehicle one-o-six as 'good ones' with whom you can reach a reasonable agreement can be understood as enhancing their capacity to gain outcomes from the crackdown in question. As Njeri's last comment about the other officers from vehicle one-seventy shows, a bad reputation might mean that hawkers give up before even approaching you for an agreement.

## **5. 'I will keep going back to harvest': Crackdowns as a mode of cultivation**

Not all hawkers run when the white County Inspectorate van approaches. Some do what is called 'paying returns'. When you walk in the streets of Nairobi, you can identify them by the size of their piles of goods. If you see a hawker standing next to a mountain of jackets, tops or jeans which they could not possibly carry on their own, you have found someone who has no need to run during a crackdown. In order to enter into this kind of arrangement, a hawker must approach the right person at City Hall after which she is told a specific place do



business, often hidden out of sight in a back alley. ‘Returns’ in the form of cash payments are then collected regularly by street level officers. Njeri once went with me to one of the hawkers selling from a large pile of handbags in a back alley and asked him casually what she would have to do in order to get the same type of arrangement that he has. ‘He said if I know [a certain senior officer at City Hall], I can just go and talk to him. Then we negotiate the price,’ she told me afterwards.

On one occasion, I was talking to a hawker called Murefu who sells second hand shoes in an area often targeted for crackdowns. I asked him whether he had ever considered doing a ‘returns’ arrangement with inspectorate officers himself. ‘No, I don’t want that,’ he said. ‘Because the way I see it, you become like a project to them.’ I asked him what he meant by ‘project’. ‘A project – like if I have my *shamba* [garden/field] and I plant tomatoes. I will keep going back to my *shamba* to harvest.’ We laughed about that, but Murefu turned serious. ‘Because now they know that they have got you. If one day they are short of money, they will just come. Even if you already paid them. What will you do?’ A few weeks later I learnt of an incident similar to what Murefu described. Matthew and five of his friends had made an arrangement with City County officers to pay them 1000 Shillings each Monday in return for staying on a particular street corner. One day, however, out of the blue, the officers came and arrested everyone. Since Matthew and his colleagues had organized their business according to the returns arrangement, they had huge quantities of expensive shoes and leather boots taken from them, and getting these back came at a high price.

I would like to extend Murefu’s metaphor of the city’s streets as a *shamba* cultivated by Inspectorate officers, and of hawkers as ripe tomato plants to be harvested from, to describe not only returns arrangements but also other modes of policing street trade in Nairobi. Since officers control the city streets, they can allow hawkers to generate profit through non-

interference, and they can collect parts of those profits through the regular performance of crackdowns. Going back to Munn's description of exchange, we can apply her notion of investments in exchange relationships as the building up of potentialities for valuable returns (1988: 8-9). Furthermore, what Murefu's tomato plant metaphor brings into view is a certain spatial aspect to the ways in which potential value is built up and actualized through crackdowns in Nairobi. Simone (2004) has argued that urban residents themselves make up a type of infrastructure in African cities. By making use of bodies and found objects in the urban environment in creative and flexible ways, Simone argues, the combined acts of urban residents engaged in informal economic activities make up a platform for social transaction in the city (ibid.: 409-410). The business of hawking lends itself well to Simone's notion of a human infrastructure. Hawkers rely on creative adaptations of urban space whereby pavements become displays for goods, and their combination of material and social flexibility enables urban residents to conveniently access goods on their way home from work. Combining Simone's notion of hawkers as a productive entity situated in urban space with Munn's notion of the building up of potential value in exchange relationships, we can conceive of Inspectorate officers as cultivators and harvesters of value through their interactions with hawkers. From this perspective, potentials for profits reside in the combination of centrally located pavements and the activities of hawkers. Hawkers as a productive entity in the urban environment generate profits out of the access to customers enabled by a prime hawking location. Officers, in turn, generate profits out of their ability to grant hawkers access to the pavements, and to round them up and lock them into Inspectorate vans on a regular basis.

## **6. 'Campaign season has started': Crackdowns as violent inclusion**

Every five years, established ways of relating between officers and hawkers in central Nairobi are overturned when local councilors begin to campaign for upcoming elections. Since hawkers make up significant voting blocs in local sub-counties, incumbent and aspiring councilors compete to win their favor. Hawkers will tell you: 'Campaign season has started. The next few months we will be selling tax free here,' while Inspectorate officers will tell you that their work is made difficult by 'political interference'. On one occasion shortly before the August 2017 elections, I was walking along Moi Avenue with Ndevu, an Inspectorate officer, when he commented: 'You see? Hawkers, at this time, here on Moi Avenue! This is because of political interference.' Moi Avenue is among the areas which are normally kept clear of hawkers during the daytime. 'When these elections are over, you will not see that anymore,' he told me. 'But for now, we just have to allow them [the hawkers]. Otherwise those councilors will come to us complaining that we are interfering with their votes.'

During fieldwork, I learnt of several areas where hawkers organize among themselves to vote a particular candidate into office in return for promises of improved working conditions. One such area is Mama Lisa's street. In the 2013 elections, the votes of the hawkers there secured the seat of the sitting councilor, Mr. Kuria, she explained. But the hawkers were not happy with his performance once he got into office. 'We supported him last time, but he has not done anything for us. This time we will go for someone else.' She thought about it for a moment and then added: 'Ok, I don't want to say he has never done anything for me, because he has helped me get my [goods] back.' Two months ago, she said, Inspectorate officers had taken the goods of ten people in this street. 'They told us that they cannot give us back our goods, and we have to come to City Hall in the morning, to the court.' The hawkers called Councilor Kuria who came with them to the court the next morning. There were six legal charges against them, Mama Lisa said, and the fines amounted to seven thousand Shillings

each. Kuria had talked to the officers to drop some of the charges: ‘He said to them “These are my people, you must reduce [the fines]. At least give them only one or two [legal charges].” And we each paid five hundred only. So I can say that he has done something for me.’ I asked Mama Lisa if she would vote for Kuria in the next elections. ‘I’m still waiting to hear from others who we will support,’ she said.

Within our analytical register of exchange relations and cultivation of value, we can conceive of the five-yearly interference by local politicians in the ways in which hawking is policed in Nairobi as the participation of another set of actors in the economics of crackdowns. When Ndevu and his colleagues are pressured by incumbent and aspiring councilors to allow hawkers on Moi Avenue during daytime, the politicians could be said to extend a gift to hawkers, hoping that this will be rewarded with political support. However, as the example of Mama Lisa and her colleagues shows, there is no guarantee for the likes of councilor Kuria that their gifts will be enough to sway to bloc votes of groups of hawkers in their favor. The participation of politicians in Nairobi’s crackdown economics takes place at the expense of Inspectorate officers who go through several lean months prior to elections. Profits generated when hawkers are allowed to work which would normally be channeled into bribes to officers during crackdowns are instead channeled into goodwill and potential political support for the most convincing candidate through the withholding of crackdowns. Within a value register (Munn, 1988: 9-11), we can talk of the same entity, hawkers’ profits, going into the production of a different type of value, namely potential votes rather than potential bribe payments. Furthermore, with inspiration from Strathern (1988), we can talk of a change of the ways in which relationships are generated out of exchanges. Describing how items move between domestic and prestige spheres of exchange in Hagen, Strathern suggests that to understand who dominates in a gift economy we should not look for the actor who maximizes

profits but rather for the one who determines how relationships are generated out of the circulation of objects (Strathern, 1988: 166–167). Adopting this approach, we can characterize Nairobi’s ‘election campaign season’ as a time during which politicians place pressure on the workings of crackdown economics in the policing of street trade such that it generates political constituencies rather than policing relations.

Let me once more outline how my line of argument departs from other analytical approaches commonly cited in the literature on hawking. Inspired by Chatterjee’s (2011) notion of ‘political society’, several authors (for example Rajagopal, 2001; Anjaria, 2011) describe how hawkers as people who are working illegally in the city are able to make claims on the state not by virtue of their rights as citizens but by virtue of their voting power. The dynamics described in this article around the withholding of crackdowns in the run-up to elections in Nairobi would lend themselves well to a ‘political society’ type of analysis. However, what comes into view if we employ the analytical notion of crackdown economics are the ways in which political alliances between hawkers and officers rather than being a break from violent forms of policing can be seen as an extension of the workings of those same forms of policing.

## **7. Conclusion**

Why do hawkers keep coming back to the streets of Nairobi despite violent crackdowns? To answer this question, I have suggested that we look at the ways in which violent forms of policing currently work for hawkers and inspectorate officers as well as local politicians. Using the notion of ‘crackdown economics’, I have outlined an economy centered around encounters between hawkers and officers during routine crackdown operations as well as

seasonal alliances between hawkers and local politicians. From this perspective, we can see hawking in central Nairobi as being enabled by virtue of the potential value returns resting, from the perspectives of Inspectorate officers as well as local politicians, in a careful balancing of non-interference and crackdowns. Furthermore, from this perspective street trade defined as hawkers selling goods to customers for a profit comes into view as only one element in a larger economy. The violence of crackdowns can be understood as another element in the same economy, and we can see this potential or realized violence as a mechanism through which hawkers achieve inclusion into the urban space from which they make their livelihood.

In advancing this analysis, I hope to contribute to literature on hawking in two ways. Firstly, I believe that while there is a rich literature on mechanisms of, and resistance against, exclusion of hawkers from urban space it is pertinent to also take an analytical interest in forms of inclusion. I hope my analysis serves as an example that cities can be inclusive of poor urban residents in ways that are problematic and violent and require a nuanced understanding if applied measures are to have any impact. Secondly, whereas the hawking literature currently seems to be preoccupied with an emphasis on the ‘politics’ of hawking, I hope to have shown that there is analytical potential in approaching questions around the position of hawkers in the city by looking at the economics of hawking.

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