

## **Dedication**

To the Mwelu Foundation and the youth of Mathare

*“Somebody needs to teach you how to walk,  
but you should not have them walking with you”.*

- Nelson Onyango -

## **Aknowledgements**

I would first like to offer my deepest gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Tatek Abebe, for his invaluable advice. Thank you for the encouraging comments and for further fuelling my enthusiasm for the field of study.

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## **Abstract**

Since independence Kenya has witnessed rapid urbanisation, with the majority of the population living in cities being young people. This work is based on youth-led research exploring how youth from Mathare “slum” in Nairobi navigate their social and economic marginality. The architects of the research are from the Mwelu Foundation, a youth group from the “slum” that uses photography and filmmaking to document the realities of everyday life in the community. Accordingly, filmed focus group discussions, documentary filming and photo-elicitation are the primary means of data collection.

The work departs from the dominant perspectives of youth as problems and a stage of transition. Rather, it presents “youthhood” as relational, revealing how ethnicity, gender, intergenerational tension, corruption and connection/disconnection, coupled with broader structural transformations, shape and are shaped by youth. The research shows how the youth are using newly created and extended spaces to form identities and realise aspirations, and uncovers the vast array of informal networks, collaborations and connections through which youth are remaking the “slum”. The youth have also built connections and opened up spaces that transcend both local and national boundaries. Significantly, for the youth of Mathare, dependency is not seen as a complete burden that must be off-loaded. On the contrary, it is being strengthened and embraced in different ways. Thus, dependency does not necessarily equate to a lack of ‘modernity’ or a heightened sense of marginality; instead the ability to constructively tap into one’s established dependencies signifies greater ‘modernity’. This is the key to positively remaking the notion of youth as becomings and providing a deeper understanding of youth agency in urban Africa.

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## List of Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
CBSK	Central Bureau of Statistics Kenya
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
GJLOS	Governance, Justice, Law and Order Sector Reform Programme
GLA	Government Lands Act
GoK	Government of Kenya
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KDHS	Kenyan Demographic and Health Survey
KPHC	Kenyan Population and Housing Census
MSCHPR	Mathare Slum Community Health Project Report
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NCIC	National Cohesion and Integration Commission
OHCHR	United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
OIA	Office of International Affairs
UN-HABITAT	United Nations Human Settlement Programme
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
WTO	World Trade Organization



## Chapter One: Introduction

I first came across the Mwelu Foundation while I was working as an intern with UN-Habitat's Partner and Youth branch in Nairobi, Kenya. The Mwelu Foundation caught my attention because of the ways in which its young members use photography and filmmaking to document the various aspects of life in the "slums"<sup>1</sup> of Mathare. I immediately recognised the capacity that their means of documentation has for disrupting and re-working power relations in youth research. The organisation is a model example of youth empowerment and participation in contemporary Kenya, and it promised to provide a unique insight into the lives of youth in the "slum". It was my gateway into Mathare and its young talented leaders and members were the nucleus of the research.

### Reframing the "slum"

Many of the studies on cities in Africa either emphasise their failure to follow some imaginary trajectory of growth and development or they focus on how fast the city centre is modernising and becoming more like western cities. Alternatively, the "slum", or informal settlement as it is otherwise known, is theoretically constructed and depicted as a space of dysfunction. The "slum" is simultaneously included and excluded in the formation of the city. It is included in the sense that it falls under the authority of the state, subject to its laws and polices, but at the same time it is seen as offering little value to the substance and functioning of the polity itself (Simone: 2009). They are perceived as breeding grounds for a wide-range of social problems and as an ever-present threat to the centre. As Mike Davis in his *Planet of Slums* (2004, 13) states, the "slum" has first and foremost been seen "as a place where a social 'residuum' rots in immoral and often riotous splendour". In addition, "slum" communities are heavily stigmatised because people's livelihood strategies are considered unconventional. This is reflected in the ways in which institutions,

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<sup>1</sup>Throughout this thesis the word slum is put in inverted commas because the category is ambiguous. Moreover, the term has negative connotations, which tend to pathologise the community and its inhabitants. As Mel King, a prominent African American activist states: "for me the term slum meant that somebody else defined my community in a way that allowed them to justify the destruction of it" (cited in Angotti: 2006, 961)

academics and practitioners engage and observe the “slum” population as a specific ethnic, political or cultural entity (Simone: 2009). Modernisation theorist Oscar Lewis’s (1968) observation of poor communities in Puerto Rico and Mexico is a typical example. According to Lewis, the “slum” is peripheral because of its inhabitants’ distinct ‘culture of poverty’. He argues that it is not structural transformations that influence the actions of the poor so much as it is intrinsic behaviours and values such as fatalism, traditionalism, inadaptability, criminality and hopelessness that determine and perpetuate their individual and collective marginality (ibid.).

Yet, in discussing the negative characterisations of Africa, Ferguson (2006, 7) states that “such perceptions don’t just misunderstand social reality, they also shape it”. The depictions of the “slum” and its inhabitants described above lead to ineffective solutions such as forced evictions from areas where, despite the difficult conditions, people have forged networks and established connections critical for securing and maintaining their livelihoods. Virtually absent in the descriptions of these communities are details of the dynamic forces, creativity and actions facilitating social change. Hence there is a need for researchers, policy makers and development practitioners to pay greater attention to the skills, resourcefulness and agency of people living in places such as Mathare.

Writing on Heliopolis, one of the largest “slums” in Sao Paulo, Durlak and Frankis (2013, 3) point out that “under the overwhelming weight of negative associations and stereotypes, there is an undeniable richness that exists within this informal space”. Unfortunately we only know a fragment of what is taking place in these communities, especially in terms of how young people acquire knowledge and build agency. Many would argue that accentuating the precarious and insalubrious nature of the “slum” is crucial for advocacy and policy development. However, this designation obscures the significance of the “slum” for young people’s lives, and the critical ways in which youth living there understand and use the spaces around them. Thus, without losing sight of the hardship and extreme living conditions in Mathare, this thesis reframes the “slum” as a generative space, a place full of endeavour, possibilities and new manifestations of resistance. In doing so, the work provides a particular insight into the vast array of informal networks, collaborations and connections through which youth are remaking the “slum” and the city of Nairobi.

## **Misconceived notions about youth**

Another motivating factor for this research is the overall misrecognition of youth. From both a western and a global perspective youth is primarily constructed as a temporary period between childhood and adulthood (Abebe & Kjørholt: 2011). Young people who fit into this category are seen as inert vessels that must be guided by competent adults through the rough terrain that supposedly characterises this stage of life. When they eventually reach adulthood, only then are they fully recognised as social actors. As a result there is a tendency to overlook “youthhood” as a social space in its own right (ibid.) and to undervalue the myriad and significant ways in which youth are historical agents of change. Politicians and policy makers fail to recognise and incorporate the perspectives of youth in decisions that affect their lives, and researchers fail to accurately reflect and maximize the agency of youth (ibid.). In stark contrast this research embraces the critical knowledge that young people carry, extending well beyond the view of youth as passive recipients of expert knowledge. In this work the youth are the architects of the research. This ensures that the work addresses the most pressing concerns of those involved. With the production of knowledge controlled by the youth, this work challenges both “participatory” research *with* young people and also the dominant practice of researching *on* and *about* youth, which is based largely on the dominant view of youth as dangerous or at risk.

The idea of youth as a threat and/or at risk is a recurrent theme in research, international development and the media, especially in regard to urban youth in Africa (Abebe & Kjørholt: 2011). Hence we have a dual myth of youth and the “slum” as urban anomies, an anomie being the lack of the usual social or ethical standards in an individual or group. As a result, like the “slum”, youth are both ignored and the object of excessive attention. Therefore, a key aim of this research is to simultaneously challenge the problem-oriented view of youth and the “slum” by simply switching the focus from what is failing to what is being achieved.

The dominant approaches towards the understanding of urban youth, especially within an African context, ignore the significant impact that broader historical and structural changes have on young people’s lives. Therefore, rather than continuing to individualise young people’s “failures” or “marginality”, research must focus on the interplay of macro and micro-level forces in shaping young peoples lives, especially in terms of their relationships with adults and other groups of youth. Moreover, whilst

it is important to explore young people's experiences of exclusion and marginality, is vital to also examine the various ways in which youth as agents navigate, shape and embrace the process of "growing up". In order to recognise "youthhood" as a space of opportunity and change the misconceptions about young peoples means of navigation, it is important to reconceptualise dependency. Dependency should not be equated with marginality or a lack of "modernity" like much of the research on African urban youth proclaims. Rather, the ability of young people to constructively tap into one's established dependencies should be seen as a sign of greater "modernity". This has particular relevance for shedding new light on the idea of youth as becomings.

## **Research questions and objectives**

Given the problem statement presented above, my initial aim was to conduct research that challenged the long-standing fears and misconceptions of urban youth living in "slums". In addition I wanted the research to fully reflect both the immediate concerns of youth in Mathare and the aspirations they have for themselves and the community. With this in mind, I engaged youth from the Mwelu Foundation in order to identify some key objectives and to formulate a proposal together. After presenting my initial ideas, focus group discussions with the young leaders played a key role in determining what issues were important to them and to the community's youth as a whole. A constant theme was young people's exclusion from decision-making within the community and Kenyan society in general. Thus, one of the main objectives of the research is to explore youth perspectives and experiences of marginality in the context of the "slum".

During the discussions with the youth from the Mwelu Foundation they also told me about some of the important ways in which young people like themselves contribute to life in the "slum". Therefore, another objective of this work is to look at how youth in Mathare are bringing about change in the context of marginality. Moreover, where this knowledge comes from and how they build agency and form identities. In line with the above objectives we formulated a main research question and relevant sub-questions.

Main Research Question:

- How does the youth from the community of Mathare navigate their social and economic marginality?

Sub-Questions:

- What are the immediate socio-cultural, economic and political challenges that youth in the “slums” of Mathare face?
- How are the youth of Mathare exercising power and agency?

## **Overview of chapters**

This thesis consists of seven chapters. *Chapter One: Introduction* presents the motivating factors behind the research, along with the problem statement and significance of the research. It also describes how the research problem was approached and outlines the subsequent research questions and objectives. *Chapter Two: Country Profile and Study Context* provides relevant background information on Kenya, Nairobi, the community in which the fieldwork took place, and the youth organisation that made this research possible. *Chapter Three: Theoretical Perspectives* discusses the theories, which were applied and developed throughout the research process. These include the problem-oriented view of youth, youth as a stage of transition, the idea of youth as relational and the conceptualisation of agency. It discusses dominant and alternative notions of marginality and presents the concept of “extending space”. The political-economy perspective is introduced, along with its relevance for understanding youth and youth marginality.

*Chapter Four* entitled *Research Methodology* gives a detailed account of my field experiences. This includes a description of the collaborative research design and the advantages and challenges of giving the participant researchers ownership of the proposal process. Access and sampling strategies are discussed, followed by an explanation of the chosen research methods and the methodological successes and challenges that accompanied them. The chapter examines the involvement of the

participant researchers in the analysis process and presents the ethical approaches taken throughout the research.

Chapters Five and Six contain the analyses and discussion of the empirical data. *Chapter Five: The Political-Economy of Youth Marginalisation* focuses on the specific political, economic and social conditions underlying the youth's limited participation. It presents the multidimensional nature of youth marginality in Mathare and the main determinants of their positioning in Kenyan society. The core themes include intra- and inter-generational tensions, connection/disconnection and reciprocity, ethnicity, gender and corruption.

*Chapter Six: Navigating Marginality* looks at how youth from Mathare are bringing about social change. The focus is on the youth's practices and forms of participation that have specific value in terms of building and strengthening connections and facilitating recognition and redistribution. The Chapter presents the different and novel ways in which the youth of Mathare are using and transforming the contested space of the "slum" and the wider city of Nairobi. In addition, how in creating meaningful spaces of action through which to navigate confining structures, the youth of Mathare are forming identities and realising aspirations. The chapter provides an alternative view of the "slum" and deconstructs and reframes the idea of youth "marginality" and "marginality" in general. *Chapter Seven: Conclusion* discusses the works contribution to the field, summarises the findings and provides recommendations for future research and policy.

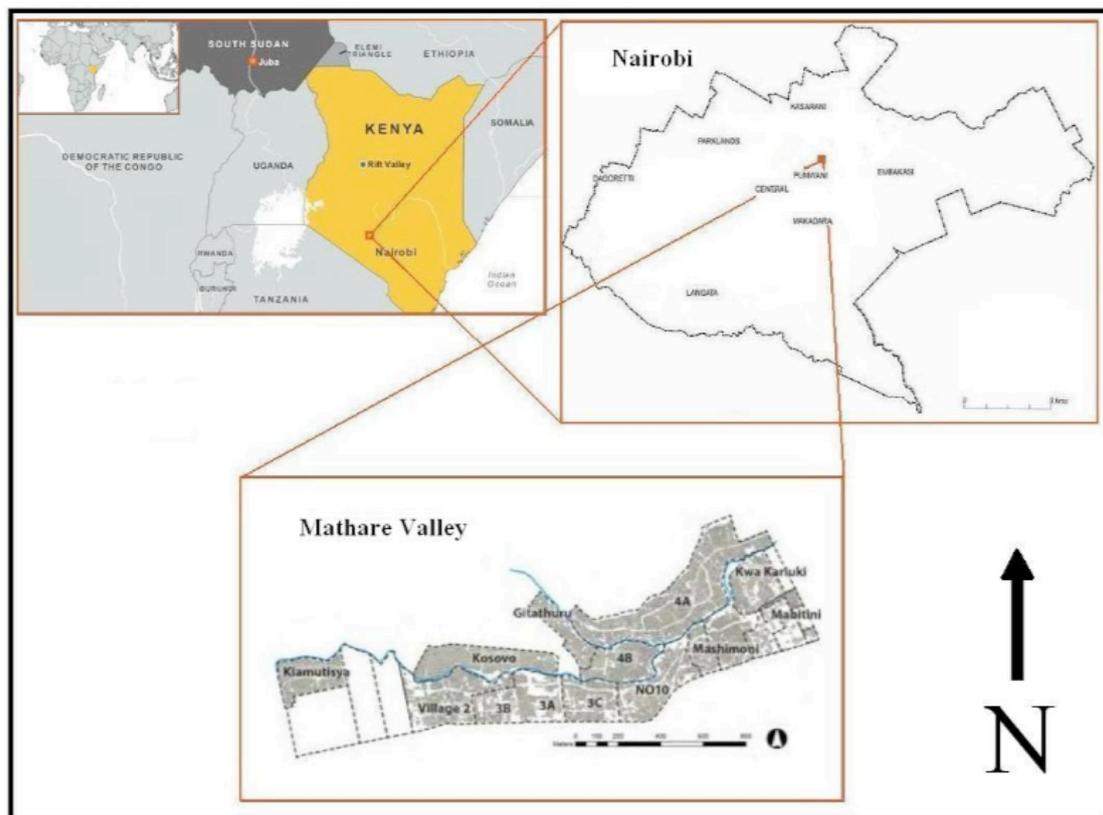
## **Chapter Two: Country Profile and Study Context**

### **2.0 Introduction**

The chapter begins with a description of the geographical and demographical characteristics of Kenya. The chapter then goes on to detail the socioeconomic conditions in Kenya and the specific bearing they have on the country's youth. Thereafter, taking a historical approach I provide the reader with an understanding of the political context of youth-state relationships within Kenya. In doing so, I describe the post-election violence that erupted in 2007 and the precipitating factors that led to its ignition. I present Kenya's rate of urbanisation and a detailed description of the country's capital Nairobi. The historicisation of Mathare is presented, followed by a description of the Mwelu Foundation, its activities and objectives, and its role within the community.

### **2.1 Geography**

The Republic of Kenya (Jamhuri ya Kenya) encompasses 582,646 sq metres of East African land. It is bordered by Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia to the north; Uganda to the west; Tanzania to the south and the Indian Ocean to the east. The country's climate varies from tropical along the coast, to temperate inland, to arid in the north and northeast regions, with the latter regularly witnessing extreme drought. The country is made up of three main geographical regions, namely the Coast, the Interior and the Westlands. Administratively, under the old constitution, the three main geographical regions were made up of eight provinces; Nairobi, Central, Coast, Eastern, North Eastern, Nyanza, Rift Valley and Western, each presided over by a provincial commissioner appointed by the president (KPHC: 2009). Following a referendum and subsequent adoption of a new constitution in August 2010, Kenya is now (on paper) divided into forty-seven semi-autonomous counties (Kwaka et al: 2011). This decentralization is due to be fully implemented by August 2012, in time for the country's first general elections under the new constitution, which are expected to be held in March 2013 (Kariuki: 2012).



**Figure 2: Maps indicating study area**

## 2.2 Demography

Kenya has a population of over 43 million, which is made up of 42 different ethnic groups (GoK: 2010). Each ethnic group belongs to one of three larger indigenous groups: the Bantus, Cushites, or the Nilotes. The Bantus, who comprise 70% of Kenya's population, include the Kikuyu, Embu, Luhya, Kamba, Kisii, Taita and Mijikenda people (ibid.). The Nilotes, which form the second largest group of people in Kenya, include the Luo, Maasai, Pokot, Samburu, Turkana, as well as the many subgroups that constitute the Kalenjin. Finally, the Cushites, which form a significant minority of the population, consist of the Somali, Oromo, Borana and Rendile peoples (ibid.). As well as having their own unique dialects, the groups use Swahili, English and Sheng<sup>2</sup> as the main lingua francas.

A closer look at the ethnic composition of the country shows that Kenya's

<sup>2</sup> Sheng is a Swahili-based slang language, which originated in the early 1970's in the Eastlands area of Nairobi where Mathare is located, and is primarily considered a language of urban youth.

heterogeneity is such that the country's largest ethnic group, the Kikuyu, make up less than a quarter of the total population (CIA: 2012). The Kikuyu represent 22% of the total population, followed by the Luhya 14%, Luo 13%, Kalenjin 12%, Kamba 11%, Kisii 6% and Meru 6% (ibid.). Other smaller African groups comprise about 15% of the population, whilst non-African (Asian, European, and Arab) are estimated to total 1% (ibid.). Notably, the three presidents that have presided over the country since its independence from the British in 1963 have either been a Kikuyu or a Kalenjin.

In regards to youth demographics: approximately 40% of Kenya's total population is aged 15-34 years old (KDHS, 2010). Out of those 14 million young Kenyan's aged between 15-34 years, 26% come from the Rift Valley province, 14% come from Nyanza and another 14% from the Eastern province. The central and Nairobi areas each account for 11% of 15-34 year olds, whilst the Western province, the Coast and North Eastern account for 10%, 9% and 5% respectively (KDHS, 2010).

### **2.3 Socio-economics**

Kenya is a low-income country with a current GDP growth rate of around 5% (CIA: 2012). As a result of the post-election violence and the global financial crisis, in 2008, Kenya's GDP growth stood at 1.7 (ibid.). The economy recovered in 2009-2010, but in 2011, with a GDP growth rate of 4.3%, it suffered once more as a result of inflationary pressures and sharp currency depreciation brought about by high food and fuel import prices, severe drought and reduced tourism (ibid.).

Almost half of Kenya's population live below the poverty line, which is defined here as 1USD a day. Whilst the poverty level is down from 56% in 2000, it has been at its current position of between 44 and 46% for the past six years.<sup>3</sup> Kenya may have the largest economy in East Africa, but it is one of the most unequal countries in the region, with the greatest inequalities found in urban areas. Income disparities in Kenyan cities have increased, whereas those in rural areas have decreased. In 2006 the Gini coefficient for urban Kenya was as high as 0.447, as opposed to a rural coefficient of 0.38 for the same year (UN-Habitat: 2008).

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<sup>3</sup> Source: World Bank - <http://data.worldbank.org/country/kenya>

In 2010 the Kenyan government spent 17.21 percent of its total expenditure on education.<sup>4</sup> In the same year literacy rates for the overall population stood at 87.4%, with male and female literacy at 90.6% and 84% respectively (CIA: 2012). Even though gender parity has been achieved for school enrolment at the national level, huge regional inequalities remain (Unicef: 2009).

In regards to health, Kenya spends approximately 12.2% of its total GDP on healthcare (CIA: 2012). With an estimated 1.5 million sufferers, Kenya is the 4th highest country in the world in terms of people living with HIV/AIDS (CIA: 2012). The country's HIV prevalence reached its peak during 2000, but it has decreased dramatically to currently stand at around 6.3 % (ibid.). At 7% Nairobi has the second highest prevalence rate in the country (Njonjo: 2010). A major factor for Kenyan youth in terms of HIV/AIDS and other health issues is that there is a lack of access to the information and services that would enable them to make better choices about their well-being (ibid.). Notably, young people assign relatively low priority to health compared to the importance they attach to political participation, education and finding employment (ibid.).

One of Kenya's most urgent socio-economic challenges is high unemployment. At the end of 2011, Kenya's unemployment rate was at 40%<sup>5</sup>, with the majority of those out of work being young people. Kenya's young people are either unemployed, underemployed or underpaid with limited prospects for advancement. Employers in Kenya are moving more and more towards the use of casual, part-time, sub-contracted and outsourced workers in order to reduce labour costs and to have greater control over the workforce (Njonjo: 2010). Consequently, this has led to the depoliticisation of hiring and firing, with companies avoiding having to adhere to labour rights such as paid leave, the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) and to the National Hospital Insurance Fund (NHIF) (ibid.).

## **2.4 Post-election violence 2007-2008**

Seen domestically as the "birth of the second republic", passing a new constitution was an essential part of the power-sharing deal that ended the 2007 post-election

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<sup>4</sup> Source: Trading Economics - <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/kenya/public-spending-on-education-total-percent-of-government-expenditure-wb-data.html>

<sup>5</sup> Source: Trading Economics - <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/kenya/unemployment-rate>

violence (OHCHR: 2008). The violence that swept the country left over 1200 people dead and several hundred thousand people displaced (ibid.), most of which have yet to return to their communities. Hospitals also reported a steep increase in the number of sexual assaults and rape cases. However, the precise number is impossible to estimate due to the understandable reluctance to report incidents and the fact that many of the victims were displaced (ibid.). In addition to becoming victims of violence committed by organised gangs, people were attacked by neighbours, fellow workers and others who they considered to be friends.

The violence broke out following concerns that the election results had been fixed in favour of Mwai Kibaki, the sitting President and leader of the Party of National Unity (PNU). Kenya's fourth multiparty presidential election was a close contest between President Kibaki and Raila Odinga, the leader of the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM). Whilst both men enjoy support from multi-ethnic constituencies, their individual alliances are rooted in specific communities. President Kibaki's party relies on the Kikuyu, Embu and Meru communities, whereas Raila Odinga and the ODM draw from the Luo, Luhya and Kalenjin peoples (OHCHR: 2008). Moreover, the ODM enjoys notable support from Kenya's urban youth. Opinion polls indicated that Raila Odinga had maintained a slight lead throughout the whole campaign. However on the 30<sup>th</sup> December the Electoral Commission of Kenya, despite being accused of irregularities, declared Mwai Kibaki the winner (ibid.).

The first outbreak of violence, namely the looting of shops, houses and businesses in the "slums" of Nairobi and Kisumu by groups of youth, seemed to be a spontaneous reaction to their deep-seated marginalisation, exacerbated by what they saw as the theft of the presidential election. However, evidence from human rights organisations and prosecuting lawyers at the International Criminal Court (ICC) suggests that the core of the violence was organised and orchestrated by businessmen, elders and politicians from both sides. Opposition politicians and local leaders allegedly organised ethnic-driven attacks on Kikuyu communities in the Rift valley (Mueller: 2008). The evidence goes on to show that government supporters and militia carried out violent reprisals against opposition supporters in Nakuru, Naivasha, the Central Province and in the Nairobi "slums" of Kibera and Mathare (OHCHR: 2008). Prominent politicians and government officials, who are believed to have been responsible for organising and coordinating the violence, have now been charged with five counts of crimes against humanity. As the violence escalated, the police finally

stepped in, but with a shoot-to-kill policy. A United Nations Human Rights fact-finding mission received witness accounts of excessive force by police officers, which resulted in a high number of deaths and injuries, many including children (ibid.).

Mueller (2008) argues that three precipitating factors had long put Kenya on course for violence. She points to the gradual loss of the states' monopoly on the use of legitimate force, the deliberate weakening of institutions in order to personalise presidential power, and to the inherently clientelistic and ethnically-driven politics that raise the stakes of winning (ibid.).

## **2.5 Colonial Legacy**

The factors discussed above, which not only led to the 2007 post-election violence, but also seem to be at the heart of Kenya's problems, should be understood within the context of colonialism. Kenya officially became a British Colony in 1920 until its independence in 1963, when Jomo Kenyatta became the country's first president (Gatimu: 2009). Upon independence, Kenya was expected to instantly become a modern democratic multi-ethnic nation-state. The quick decolonisation process witnessed in Kenya failed to critically and properly divest colonial power both structurally and psychologically, and thus saw the country inherit the colonial apparatus (Gatimu: 2009). Colonial educated politicians who came to form the new governments retained the non-democratic institutions, systems, and laws that facilitated tyranny and oppression in the colonies (Gatimu: 2009).

### **2.5.1 Land Rights**

The long-standing conflict over land rights is seen by many Kenyans to be at the core of the country's problems. The OHCHR report on Kenya's post-election violence states:

The colonial legacy and mismanagement of land distribution especially in the Rift Valley has generated conflict over what is often perceived as the most important form of wealth and source of political power: arable land (2008: p.3).

Evidence suggests that in the early 1900's, the British colonialists, in creating the White Highlands, evicted the Nandi, Maasai, Samburu and Turkana communities

from their ancestral lands in the Rift Valley (OHCHR: 2008). At the same time the white settlers aggressively recruited Kikuyu agricultural labourers from the Central province (ibid.). Subsequently, between 1904 and 1920, 70,000 Kikuyus migrated to the Rift Valley (Gisemba: 2008). By the end of the 1930's this community of squatter farmers had risen to 150,000 (ibid.). Despite a large number of the community being second and third generation Rift Valley Kikuyus, over 100,000 of them were forcefully repatriated to Central Kenya between 1946 and 1952 (ibid.). This continued removal and forced resettlement led to anger and resentment among Kikuyus within the central province (ibid.).

In the aftermath of Kenya's Independence, the remaining Kikuyu workers bought the land they had worked for the white settlers. British loans provided the funding for land-buying schemes offered by the incumbent president and Kikuyu, Jomo Kenyatta (OHCHR: 2008). The colonial government also passed on an inequitable set of land laws that have remained relatively unchanged since independence. As stated in part two of the Government Lands Act, which regulates the former Crown Lands, the president has *special powers* to appoint a commissioner of lands and in turn grant them power to lease land within the slums for 99 years and (until the recent constitutional changes rendered it invalid) in agricultural areas for 999 years (GLA, 2009).

Land was used by President Kenyatta to build and maintain support (OHCHR: 2008). This enabled members of the Kikuyu community to form several land buying companies. These land buying companies, which also acted as springboards for electoral politics, purchased prominent farms in the Rift Valley and Central Province (Gisemba: 2008). The farms have remained as large-scale parcels of land and are at the centre of Kenya's politically instigated violence (ibid.). Subsequently, during the tenure of Kenya's second President, Arap Moi, many Kikuyu farmers were on the receiving end of violence from the president's Kalenjin people over what the Kalenjin saw as the taking back of their ancestral lands (ibid.). The recent post-election violence can also be understood within the context of this ongoing dispute. The land issue presents Kenya with significant problems, not just in regards to the disputes surrounding the disinheritance of communities from their ancestral lands, but also in terms of the country's skewed urban development.

## 2.6 Urbanisation

Urbanisation can signify the level of the urban populace relative to the overall population, or it can represent the growth rate of the population due to migration to cities (Nabutola: 2010). However, the process of urbanisation is much more than population growth; it is a reflection of the changes in both local and global economic, social and political structures. Since independence Kenya has witnessed the rapid growth of its urban population. At the time of independence 7.8% of the country's population lived in urban areas (Njonjo: 2010). The CIA World Factbook (2012) puts Kenya's urban population at 22% of the total population, while the Kenyan government census from 2009 places it at 32.3% (KPHC: 2010). Nevertheless, the fact remains that the majority of Kenya's urban dwellers are young people, primarily aged between 25-29 years (Njonjo: 2010).

Due to the fact that the networks of the country's medium-sized cities are still relatively underdeveloped, Kenya's industry and public offices are congregated in and around Nairobi and Mombassa. As such, these two cities account for over a half of the urban population (Njonjo: 2010). Consequently, this has led to insufficient urbanisation and unequal and unbalanced urban development, exacerbated by the reluctance of central government to acknowledge and accurately address the extent of both urbanisation and urban poverty (Un-Habitat: 2006).

According to a report conducted by Oxfam (2009), rising birth rates and the natural growth of the urban population account for approximately 55% of Kenya's urban growth. The United Nations predict that Kenya's overall population will reach 46 million by 2015, 57 million by 2025 and 85 million by 2050 (UN: 2007). Rural-urban migration accounts for an estimated 25% of urban growth (Oxfam: 2009), with drought, conflict and rural poverty the main reasons for migration to the cities (ibid.). Most of the rural-urban migrants are young people, who in an attempt to escape poverty set out for Nairobi or Mombassa in search of employment and better opportunities. However, as Kenya's urbanisation is most acutely felt in Nairobi and Mombassa, the increase in youth migration has made finding work in the cities harder, affecting the working conditions and the skills composition in both urban and rural areas (Njonjo: 2010). The influx of young people into urban areas has also put further pressure on the respective municipalities to provide better public goods, education, basic services, housing and infrastructure (ibid.). The figures below show

that young peoples rural-urban migration increases with age. Out of the country's 14 million 15-34 year olds, 61% live in rural areas. Out of those living in rural areas, 70% are aged 15-19 years, 58% are aged 20-24 years, with that number decreasing to 55% for 25-29 year olds (ibid.).

## 2.7 Nairobi

The Kenyan capital derives its name from the Maasai word *enairobi*, which literally means *stream of cold water*.<sup>6</sup> Nairobi was founded in 1899, initially as a supply depot on the British-built Uganda to Mombassa railway line.<sup>7</sup> The site was primarily used as a camping ground for the thousands of Indian laborers and British settlers who were employed by the British to work on the railway. In 1948 Nairobi had 120,000 inhabitants, whereas today Kenya's capital has a population of approximately 3.5 million, with 60% living on less than 1/6<sup>th</sup> of the total land area of the city (UN-Habitat: 2008). Nairobi is Kenya's most ethnically diverse region. With regards to the ethnic composition of city, the Kikuyu are the largest group, constituting approximately 32% of the population, with the Luo making up 18%, the Luhya 16% and the Kamba 13% of the populace (Oxfam: 2009). Notably, the Maasai, who are the original inhabitants of the region, make up less than 1% of the city's total population (ibid.). There is also a significant Asian, European, Somali and expatriate community.

Nairobi is an international, regional and national local hub of commerce. It plays an important role in the local economy, generating approximately 60% of Kenya's GDP.<sup>8</sup> However, despite the capital's strategic position in East Africa, the lack of services and infrastructure restrict its economic development. In regards to the planning of the city, the latest comprehensive plan for Nairobi was developed in 1973 and has since been outpaced by the rate and impact of urbanisation (UN-Habitat: 2006). As well as putting further strain on the capital's capacity to provide basic services, the fallout of rapid urbanisation can be seen in the amount of traffic congestion, pollution, and the city's poor waste management. Moreover, in regards to the provision of basic services, the Nairobi City Council is constrained by central government intervention, lack of funds and corruption (Oxfam: 2009). Oxfam also

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.city-data.com/world-cities/Nairobi-History>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.kenya-information-guide.com/nairobi-business.html>

assert that compared to the rural areas, social capital is weak in Nairobi as people don't have the same support mechanisms in place (2009). Finally, gender-based violence is a major issue in the city, with domestic violence, sexual assault and rapes a common occurrence (ibid.).

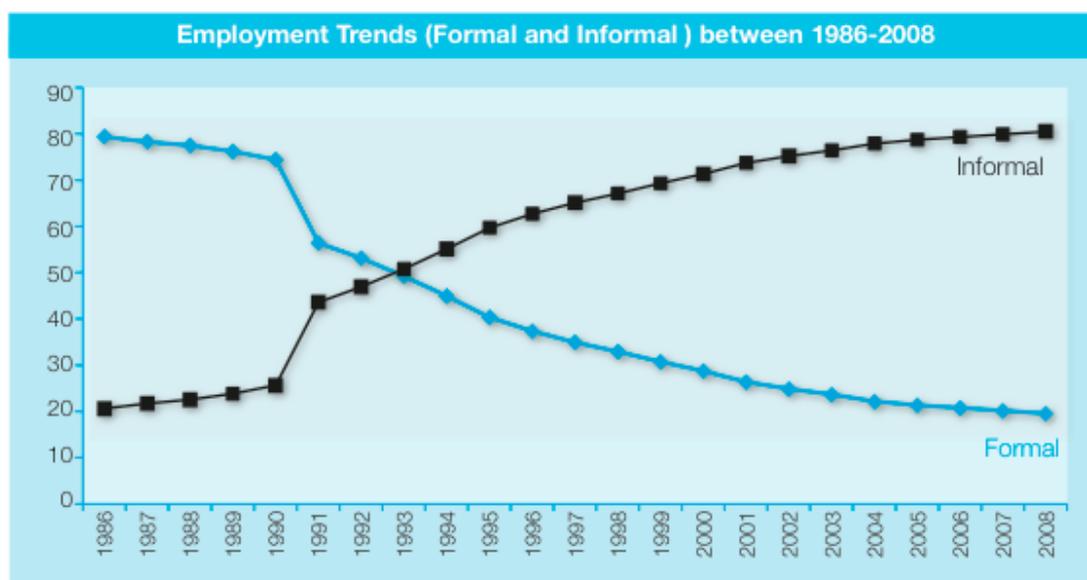
Nairobi is becoming more and more unequal. In regards to disparities in income, the Gini coefficient for Nairobi is at approximately 0.59 (a Gini coefficient of 0 expresses perfect equality, whereas 1 indicates maximum inequality), which is similar to the levels of inequality in Johannesburg in the mid-1990s (UN-Habitat: 2006). Income measures aside, there are also vast inequalities in terms of infrastructure access. If we look at the capital as a whole, according to the most recent census, 75.7% of households have piped water and 52% have electricity connections (KPHS: 2010).

Of the millions of people residing in the city's informal settlements, approximately 22% of the households have electricity and barely 20% of the households have a water supply (World Bank: 2006). The people living in informal settlements are forced to buy their water from commercial street vendors at high prices. Oxfam's (2009) report on poverty and vulnerability in Nairobi found that poor communities were paying eight times as much for water as their wealthier counterparts across the city. There are also great disparities in healthcare between those residing in informal settlements and those living in middle and high-income areas. Whilst the latter group have access to healthcare through private clinics and government-run hospitals, those living in informal settlements have very little, if any healthcare services at all (UN-Habitat: 2006). As such, infant mortality rates in the city tend to be twice as high than in the rural areas (Oxfam: 2009) Inequality in education is also a major factor, especially among girls. Since the majority of schools in Nairobi's "slums" are not officially recognised by the government, most of the students are not able to attain secondary education (ibid.).

### **2.7.1 Nairobi's informal sector**

Kenya's labour market is dual in nature, with the formal and informal sector operating side by side. Recent employment trends in Kenya demonstrate that the majority of the labour force is employed in the country's informal sector (Njonjo: 2010). The informal sector, also known as the Jua Kali, has been growing at an average rate of

17.2% per annum. This is a notable difference from the formal sector, which has an average annual growth rate of around 2.23% (ibid.).



**Figure 3: Graph indicating the growth of the informal sector.**

**Source: Institute of Economic Affairs (2010).**

The data in the graph reveals the constant decline of the formal sector juxtaposed with the significant growth of the informal sector. The most notable increase in informal sector employment took place in 1991. This rapid growth coincided with job losses in formal employment, which were triggered by liberalisation policies and the government’s renewed strategy towards the promotion of growth and development (Njonjo: 2010).

Kenya’s rapid urbanisation has led to a disproportionate spread of the country’s labour force (Pamoja Trust: 2006). This uneven distribution is primarily felt in Nairobi, with 25% of Kenya’s labour force employed in the capital (UN-Habitat: 2010). The greater share of this urban work force is employed in the city’s informal sector. In 2006 1.7 million people worked in Nairobi’s informal economy and by 2010 that number had increased to 2.2 million, of which approximately 68% were women.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.uib.no/geografi/seminar/2011/09/crossing-boundaries-women-in-informal-sector-and-urban-dynamism>

Nairobi's informal sector is very diverse. The many forms of informal sector activities include street trading (35%), Kiosks (25%), artisans (18%) motor repairs (15%) transport operators (4%) and other (3%) (Nabutola: 2010). In the case of Nairobi's street traders, these businesses typically offer services such as transport, shoe polishing, clothing, electronics, watch repair, groceries, newspapers, household items, toys and stationery, to name but a few. However, the majority of these entrepreneurs have no permanent places of trade, with most of their transactions taking place by the roadside or in open spaces (ibid.). Consequently, without adequate support from the authorities, street traders are constantly faced with the uncertainty of eviction from the government, who want to move them as far as possible from mainstream economic activities (ibid.). Nairobi's lack of urban renewal means that the city cannot cope with the prevalence of street trading. As such, kiosks and street traders are primarily seen by the city council as threats to development (ibid.). While the informal sector is successful in terms of its continued growth and resistance to threats of eviction, the lack of services and infrastructure in the city hinder its economic development, especially in "slums" (UN-Habitat: 2010).

### **2.7.2 Nairobi's informal settlements**

It is estimated that between 60-80% of Kenya's urban population live in informal settlements (UN-Habitat: 2009). Out of Nairobi's 3.5 million inhabitants, 60% live in informal settlements. These settlements occupy only 5% of the total residential areas and less than 1% of the capital's total land area (ibid.). The history of informal settlements in Nairobi can be traced back to the colonial period. During colonialism one of the most visible features of urban centers was the segregation of the population, which was based on a disproportionate distribution of land and resources (Pamoja Trust: 2006). Most of the Africans who came from rural areas to the capital in search of work were barred from the city's designated areas, areas reserved for Europeans and Asians (ibid.).

After independence the new government maintained the segregation of Nairobi's residential areas, however, this time the divide was attributed to class difference rather than being based on race (ibid.). With independence came the lifting of restrictions on travel and entry to certain parts of the country. Cities were perceived to have a wealth

of employment opportunities and prospects for a more prosperous life. Subsequently, this led to a new wave of rural-urban migration and the country witnessed the unprecedented rates of urbanisation discussed above (Pamoja Trust: 2006). The new administrations' efforts to settle the landless migrants through land adjudication proved to be ineffective in meeting the demand for settlement (ibid.). As such, this led to an abundance of squatters and the subsequent formation of informal settlements. A lack of supporting policies for effective urban planning and development exacerbated the situation, as existing "slums" expanded and new ones emerged (ibid.). Furthermore, the new independent government failed to put in place formal systems to make affordable serviced land available to the new residents of the city. Therefore the slums in Nairobi are situated on the poorest quality of land (ibid.). Many of the "slum" areas are built around swamps, across railways, under high voltage power lines or on refilled quarries.

## **2.8 Mathare**

The informal settlement of Mathare is itself built on an old quarry. The Mathare Valley area is the oldest "slum" in Nairobi, built in 1954 for African laborers who worked the quarry for Asian employers (MSCHPR: 2011). The Mathare area was originally an Asian-owned village dating back to 1921 (Pamoja Trust: 2006). An elderly male resident explained that when he first came to the area in the early 1970s it was "sparsely populated with only a few iron and mud-built houses". Today Mathare is made up of 24 sprawling villages with an approximate population of 800,000 people (Omwanda: 2011).

Like other informal settlements in Nairobi and around the world, Mathare is ignored by the government. Until recently maps of Nairobi showed Mathare as unoccupied land (Pamoja Trust: 2006). The dominant view of the "slum" is that it counts for nothing in terms of its contribution to society, yet due to its high population density, the slum holds political significance during elections when politicians use the area and its people for political expediency. Unfortunately, in the past this has culminated in heavy violence, the type of violence which residents witnessed following the 1982 coup attempt and the 1997 and 2007 elections (Omwanda: 2011). The young people I spoke to recounted how people's houses were burnt to the ground,

whilst others were attacked with knives and machetes. As result it's not uncommon to see Mathare residents with lacerated bodies and mutilated limbs.

The residents of Mathare face harsh living conditions characterised by overcrowding, an unequal distribution of resources and opportunities, and a severe lack of basic infrastructure and amenities, such as electricity, healthcare and sanitation. On the balcony of the Mwelu Foundation offices, one is instantly greeted with an endless sea of iron, sheet metal, timber and mud houses.



**Figure 4: Overhead view of Mathare. Source: Mwelu Foundation (2011).**

At a closer vantage point you will see flying toilets (faeces in a plastic bag) and children playing on garbage sites. Due to the lack of free space in Mathare, children lack recreational facilities or safe places to play outdoors. Most of the free space is used as garbage dumps or open defecation areas. The lack of proper sanitation is a serious problem throughout Mathare. Residents maintain improvised drainage channels that run into Mathare River, where children swim and women wash clothes. The absence of adequate sewage disposal is most acutely felt during the heavy rains, when the “slums” are at risk of severe flooding. Furthermore, without security of land tenure, most of the residents are in constant fear of being forcefully evicted. Mathare also witnesses heavy landslides and regular fire outbreaks, with situations intensifying due to the absence of proper roads and access, which is essential for disaster mitigation. As indicated above, many of the houses in Mathare are built on landfills or located at the bottom of quarry pits. As recent as April 2012, after a heavy night's rainfall, a huge landslide left nine people dead and several others hospitalized (Mwau:

2012).

In addition to the lack of basic amenities, there is an absence of government security inside the “slums”, which leaves the residents facing added dangers from criminals and gangs operating within the community. During President Moi’s reign, the state exercised a Draconian level of violence against those who opposed his regime. As a consequence, by both design and neglect this led to the institutionalisation of violence outside of the state (Mueller: 2008). Groups that had been created by the state as a means of maintaining its grip on power, could no longer be controlled, consequently, the state began to lose its monopoly on violence (ibid.). A manifestation of this was the emergence of Mafioso type gangs, which operate as shadow states within “slums” such as Mathare. The largest and most prominent of these gangs is the Mungiki. Whilst the origins, values and activities of this predominately Kikuyu group have been widely discussed and disputed, the group reportedly control strategic businesses, run protection rackets and is backed by high-ranking politicians and officials. This passage on Mathare is supported by research undertaken by Eric Omwanda, 23 from the Mwelu Foundation, and in his essay Eric provides an account of a conflict that broke out in 2006 between the Mungiki and an outlawed Luo sect known as the Taliban. The Taliban are an offshoot of a now discontinued group known as the Baghdad Boys. Despite being a Christian group, they took the name from the Islamic extremist group, which ruled Afghanistan from 1996- 2001. George Wambugu, a youth counsellor from Mathare, states, “they just wanted a name that sounded tough” (Gettlemen: 2006). The two groups fought over protection taxes of the local illicit brew Chang’aa.<sup>10</sup> The conflict and the ensuing government crackdown on gangs in the community led to 24 reported deaths. However, the merciless police response saw corpses being “carried from the slums like sacks of Maize” or being thrown into the nearby river, making the identification of friends and relatives difficult (Omwanda: 2011).

While there is no disputing the appalling conditions within Mathare, there is a tendency to paint particularly apocalyptic scenes of “slums” (see also Angotti: 2006). As a result communities in informal settlements such as Mathare tend to be heavily

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<sup>10</sup> For generations, the brewing of Chang’aa has been a major industry in Mathare, serving as a vital source of income for many families. Chang’aa production was legalised in 2010. Local leaders are now faced with the important task of properly transforming the sector from an informal to a formal industry.

stigmatised. But as one navigates through the narrow, raw sewage-filled alleyways, it becomes clear that Mathare is a generative space, a source of innovation and adaptation. It is a grave misconception that people from informal settlements such as Mathare lack talent and creativity. Resolve, collectiveness and entrepreneurial diversity are found on every corner. Moreover, at the heart of Mathare is the community's youth, who are essential for its very survival and more.

## **2.9 The Mwelu Foundation**

The Mwelu Foundation is a registered community-based organisation operating in the Mathare Valley "slum" of Nairobi. Julius Mwelu set up the foundation in order to nurture the untapped talents of young people in Mathare. Julius is originally from Mathare. At 13 he was one of 31 teenagers from the community who took part in Mathare Sports Association's (MYSA) 1997 *Shootback* initiative. The young people involved were given point-and-shoot disposable cameras and encouraged to document their lives over a two-year period. This ignited Julius's enthusiasm for photography, and through sheer passion and determination he is now a world-renowned photographer. He has won various awards, including the transformation category in the 2008 Friends of the Earth international photography competition and now works as a photographer with UN-Habitat. Julius developed the Mwelu Foundation to give others the opportunities and knowledge he has been given.

The organisation's work primarily involves training and outreach programs in film production, photography and journalism. Julius initially received financial support from the Africalia foundation in Belgium, whose funds enabled him to acquire office space and equipment. The Mwelu Foundation is now totally self-supporting. They generate most of their income from exhibitions and the sale of photographs. The organisation's film production program involves teaching young members how to make films, documentaries, docudramas and slide shows. This involves training on camera work, sound techniques, lighting and directing, producing, and basic editing skills. In teaching photography, the foundation starts by providing approximately 40 boys and girls with basic cameras, encouraging them to capture the negatives and positives of life in Mathare. The foundation also has a library, which offers a safe, free place for young people in the community. Amongst other things, this invaluable space is also home to the foundation's Livelihoods

Program, a program that serves an important need in the community by educating young people in reproductive health issues and HIV/AIDS awareness.

Through photography and filmmaking the organisation not only provides an insight into the harsh realities of life in Mathare, but also offers a positive alternative to the dominant negative connotations associated with “slum life”. On my first visit to the Mwelu Foundation one of their budding actresses, a girl called Laila, came up to me and started explaining the important role the organization plays in creating opportunities for the young people of Mathare. She also said that it is her dream to start a similar project. She went on to say that; “people from the outside see the slum in a negative way but really it is a wonder”. The organization is an archetypical example of youth resistance and contestation as it plays an integral part in the transmission of knowledge between various groups of youth.



## **Chapter Three: Theoretical Perspectives**

### **3.0 Introduction**

The concepts that together form the theoretical framework of this research emerged by constantly moving back and forth between the empirical data and ideas attained and developed from relevant literature and from the collaborative research design process. A good understanding of relevant theory is not the same as being burdened with ‘preconceived ideas’. As Malinowski (1922, 9) states: “‘foreshadowed problems’ are the main endowment of a scientific thinker, and these are first revealed to the observer by his theoretical studies” (cited in Hammersley and Atkinson: 2007, 21).

The two dominant discourses on youth, which I discuss first, informed the overall research focus. Then I present the notion of youth as relational, which is the standpoint of this work. Here I also problematise the concept of agency and present its application in this research. Afterwards I critique the concept of marginality used by development practitioners and policy-makers and provide a different theoretical point of view. I offer the political-economy perspective as a key theoretical position for understanding youth marginality, agency and “youthhood” in general. Through this study we see the significance the youth of Mathare attach to space. Chapter Six reveals the various ways in which the youth are extending, diversifying, organising and creating urban space in order to navigating their social and economic marginality. Therefore I also presenting the concept of “extending space” and in doing so I discuss the idea of space applied in this work.

### **3.1. Dominant perspectives on youth**

In this section I present the two main perspectives, which inform most of the research and policies regarding urban youth. These views influence young peoples self-perceptions and determine how other groups in society position youth. These are youth as a problem and youth as a period of transition. In presenting the dominant notion of youth as a period of transition I critically address the being/becoming dichotomy, a topic so vigorously debated in childhood studies. As Lee (2001) points out, the being/becoming division is one of the primary resources available to us in

which to question the wrongs of social order and control.

### **3.1.1. Youth as a problem**

Urban youth are commonly perceived as a problem. From a security point of view, they are seen primarily as a threat that needs curtailing. From a social work perspective they are considered to be ‘troubled’ and therefore in need of adult protection. As Abebe & Kjørholt (2011, 17) assert: “to juxtapose the notions of ‘urban’ with ‘youth’ produces powerful images of young people ‘at risk’ or ‘as risks’”.

The idea of urban youth ‘as risks’ can be seen clearly in public opinion on youth activism and youth unemployment, and is reflected in research, international policy and development approaches. In 1985 demographer Gary Fully coined the term ‘youth bulge’ to describe a demographic phenomenon in which the youth population far outweighs that of adults (Hendrixson: 2004). The youth bulge thesis was originally developed with the aim of providing US intelligence analysts with a tool to predict and uncover potential national security threats (ibid.). In countries that provide formal education and employment for most of their young people, the youth bulge is a “demographic bonus”. However in the South the youth bulge is associated with instability and danger (ibid.). This is based on the premise that youth, particularly young men, are statistically drawn to violence and predatory activity because of their marginalisation and exclusion (Abebe & Kjørholt: 2011). However this is a simplistic approach, which virtually disregards the role of neoliberalism and Western foreign policy in increasing global insecurity (Hendrixson: 2004).

Urban youth in the Middle East North Africa (MENA) region are especially perceived as a threat. This alarmist view is driven and perpetuated by US foreign policy think tanks, which see youth dissatisfaction and the youth bulge as a precursor of terrorism. As shown in the following unclassified CIA (2002) statement:

While we are striking major blows against al-Qa’ida —the preeminent global terrorist threat—the underlying causes that drive terrorists will persist. Several troublesome global trends—especially the growing demographic youth bulge in developing nations whose economic systems and political ideologies are under enormous stress—will fuel the rise of more disaffected groups willing to use

violence to address their perceived grievances. (CIA: 2002, 5 cited in Sommers: 2006, 2).

Sub-Saharan Africa is also closely associated with the ‘youth bulge’ thesis. Due to high levels of youth employment, young African men are predominantly seen as a destructive force. Kaplan (1996, 29) describes the large numbers of unemployed male youth as “loose molecules in an unstable social fluid that threatened to ignite” (cited in Sommers: 2010, 317). This particular notion of youth ‘as risks’ is also reflected in discourses on urbanisation. Shoumatoff (1988, xiv) delineates the large numbers of male youth who have migrated to African cities in search of work as “...detrified young men, lost souls wandering in the vast space between the traditional and the modern worlds...howling in the streets of downtown Nairobi in the middle of the night”. Depictions such as these dehumanise African male youth. Moreover they reflect the general social anxiety about young peoples presence on the streets or in public spaces, which is closely linked to the western model of childhood and the idea that children and youth’s formative years should be spent inside with the family, at school or in some other private and “safe” place (Abebe and Kjørholt: 2011).

The view of youth ‘as risks’ is exacerbated by the popular media, which create moral panics by sensationalising youth sub-cultures or young people’s involvement in mass protest and conflict. They increase hostilities towards young people by portraying them as potential criminals, which leads to public support for punitive juvenile justice policies. As mentioned above, youth are also considered to be ‘at risk’. The media, social workers, teachers and researchers increasingly focus on how to address the problems of youth. By over emphasising the “abnormal” behaviours of youth, the public and institutions promote the medicalisation of “troubled” youth and generate the idea of adolescence itself as pathology (Finn: 2001).

In 1904 developmental psychologist G. Stanley Hall presented adolescence as a period of turmoil and equated this turmoil with the individual (ibid.). In the U.S. where adolescence pathology is now a major growth industry, deeply held beliefs in self-reliance along with religious notions of individual sin and salvation have a huge impact on young peoples welfare (ibid.). The view of youth as the cause of their own “problems” provides justification for the institutionalisation of young people and for the perpetuation of other forms of “care” and control (ibid.). Moreover, youth in other parts of the world are approached and judged against the backdrop of these western

middle class values and moral codes.

Youth living on the streets are especially constructed as ‘at risk’. This is because they are so visibly “out of place” (Panter-Brick: 2004). The emphasis on this particular group as ‘at risk’ heightens the stigma of being on the street and leads to further discrimination and social exclusion. The ‘at risk’ discourse associates street youth with vulnerability, which is problematic because such categories fail to recognise the true nature of young peoples lives on the street. In addition they promote a distorted view of dependency and marginality that serves the socio-political agendas of local and international agencies (ibid.).

Due to the dominant view of youth as problems discussed above, there is a lack of understanding regarding young peoples experiences and very few accounts of their perspectives. As Panter-Brick (2004) points out, the portrayal of street youth as helpless victims of social discrimination leaves little scope for acknowledging their initiative and ingenuity in coping with difficult circumstances. Where there are accounts of young peoples coping strategies or agency they tend to be negative, focusing on activities or livelihoods that transgress moral and social boundaries (Abebe and Kjørholt: 2011). Consequently there is an overall tendency to miss the fact that youth are innovative and creative social actors and for young people to underestimate the potential and capacities they have for facilitating social change.

### **3.1.2. Youth as a stage of transition**

The reluctance to recognise the agency of youth primarily stems from the understanding of youth in relation to adulthood. Youth is seen as a transient or temporary period, a necessary evil on the way to the more “desired” and “acceptable” status of adulthood. This is directly related to the polarising statuses of adults as ‘human beings’ and children as ‘human becomings’ (Qvortrup: 1994).

The dominant framework of developmental psychology and socialisation theory, which focuses on children’s orientation towards the future, has foreground the idea of children as ‘human becomings’ rather than full ‘human beings’ (Qvortrup: 1994). Its influence can be seen extensively in the media, throughout academia and in family and school life. Moreover, the notion that children are fundamentally different humans is reflected in the formulation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Nick Lee (2001) draws attention to the fact that if the Universal Declaration of

Human Rights is supposed to cover all “human beings”, then in essence there should be no need for a separate international regulation for children.

Adulthood is considered to be the final stage of one’s individual development. This widespread belief rests on the understanding of adulthood as a period of stability. Stability and completion are taken to be primary characteristics of the ‘human being’ (Lee: 2001). In contrast, childhood is held in adult imagery as a period of fragility, integration, irresponsibility, incompetence, vulnerability and dependency. In regards to dependency, it is considered to be an inherent feature of children rather than something that they pass in and out of as they move through social life. Thus, children’s participation in society tends to be interpreted through dependence, while adult’s participation is defined through independence (ibid.).

It was through the widespread adoption of the developmental state model that childhood became identified with dependency, laying the foundation from which the idea of children as ‘human becomings’ gained prominence (Lee: 2001). Childhood was identified by the state as a period of preparation and investment for the future, a future nation-states wanted to control (ibid). Seen as investments, children were treated as weak and vulnerable and in need of protection. This led to tighter controls and separation from wider society, which in turn made children even more dependent. For example, in Great Britain state intervention such as the implementation of compulsory schooling and large withdrawals of children from factories became part of the wider political agenda and process of modernisation. Concerns about population levels and health, the morals and level of ‘civilisation’ among the masses, as well as the “desire to breed a race capable of competing in the twentieth century” (Cunningham: 2005, 140), were primary motivations for state action.

The sociology of childhood, which emerged from a strong critique of the dominant framework, has argued for the abandonment of the ‘human becoming’ category. Instead the new paradigm stresses that children’s activities should be taken seriously and calls for the recognition of children as beings in their own right. Qvortrup (1994) maintains that children are both ‘human beings’ and ‘human becomings’. He argues that children must be seen as integrated members of society because they are exposed to the same societal forces as everyone else and their interests and needs are comparable to those of other social groups (ibid.). In demanding a shift away from the idea of adults as subjects and children as objects,

Wartofsky (1981, 199) argues that a child should be seen as both an ‘actor’ and a ‘constructor’:

The child is active in its own right, not simply imitatively, but as [...] an agent in its own construction and as naturally an agent as any adult, in the sense of agency that concerns the initiation of action by choice (cited in Qvortrup: 1994, 3).

Like children and childhood, youth is defined by its subordinate relationship to adults. As such there is a tendency to ignore the significance of ‘youthhood’ as a social space in its own right. Wyn & White (1997, 11) state that “if youth is a state of ‘becoming’, adult is the ‘arrival’”. ‘Youthhood’ is seen as both the essential pre-condition for adulthood and a deficit of the adult state (Wyn & White, 1997). This implies that youth lack certain qualities and leads to young people’s exclusion from full participation in society.

The idea of youth as a stage of progression corresponds with the characterisation of small cities as transitional hermaphroditic landscapes, which are considered neither rural nor urban but a mix of the two (Davis: 2004). The notion of youth as stage of transition also reflects the conventional ways of studying African cities, which as Murray (2006, 579) points out “make use of a “narrative of development” as a benchmark against which to evaluate “success” or “failure””. On one end of the continuum the planned city that allows for the penetration of capital is seen as modern and advanced, on the other is the “slum” which implies backwardness. The Chicago School of Urban Sociology used biological metaphors to delineate the city as a natural organism, which developed independently of human intervention (Angotti: 2006). However as we will see in Chapter Six, like youth, cities should be understood in their own terms. African cities are places without fixed identities or social spaces, and should be understood not as “things” but as a complex set of social relations (Simone: 2004, Merrifield: 2002).

Vigh (2006) describes the transitory phase as a nightmare, a period of stagnation. He uses the term ‘social death’ to explain the fate of a generation of youth who are struggling to create independent and sustainable lives for themselves (ibid.). In the context in which Vigh’s research is based, destructive local politics and grave global inequalities intertwine to make it almost impossible for young people to attain

economic independence, get married and have children (ibid.). Whilst difficulties in realising these expectations and aspirations do indeed create a sense of marginality, to speak of an ‘imminent social death’ implies that this position is certain and irreversible. Moreover, the problem with employing terms such as stagnation, nightmare and social death to describe young people’s lives, is that they tend to exalt adulthood over the other life-stages and portray “youthhood” as an undesired space. However, as demonstrated in Chapter Six, youth view it as more than a period of life to be “over and done with”. Youth are embracing the process of becoming and turning it to their advantage. As De Boeck and Honwana (2005, 5) state on the subject of young people’s agency and place in African society: “if youth is commonly perceived in the process of becoming rather than being, then young people are in a perfect position to navigate and control the new geographies and chronologies of globalization”.

### **3.2. Youth as relational**

Generational categories are brought to the fore not only by biological or developmental processes, but also by specific social processes, cultural understandings and historical influences (Christiansen, Mats & Vigh: 2006). As alluded to above, our understanding of childhood and youth primarily stems from specific socio-cultural and economic conditions that gave rise to the idea of standard adulthood as a period of stability. However, today adult life is a lot less stable than it used to be. The notion of “standard adult” is changing due to the global restructuring of capital and labour (Lee: 2001). We live in an age of uncertainty and unpredictability where people must be willing to adapt and remain flexible both in terms of their work and personal relationships. Therefore we can no longer associate adulthood with completeness. As Lee (2001) points out, the idea of adulthood as the journey’s end is now a convenient fiction. Today in large parts of Africa, processual transformations and rites of passage for young men and women have lost their taken-for-granted status (De Boeck & Honwana: 2005).

Youth as a becoming, is deemed problematic because there is a preoccupation with answering the question of what young people are in themselves and because the idea of becoming is conceptualised in relation to time. Time, understood as chronological

age, is the foundation upon which the dominant framework distinguishes a person as rational-irrational and competent-incompetent (Lee: 2001). However, chronological age can in fact conceal adults' shortcomings (ibid.). In addition, time, understood as the here and now of children's voices and agency, is the basis upon which the sociology of childhood calls for the abandonment of the category of 'human becoming' (ibid.). In an era of rapid global economic, political and social change, it no longer makes sense to talk of adults, children or youth as human "beings". We must consider all humans as incomplete and dependent becomings (ibid.). We are all constantly learning and refashioning ourselves in changing circumstances. Our innovativeness, creativity and our ability to aspire, adapt and reproduce are all part of a constant process of becoming that makes us human. This work aligns itself with the sociology of childhood to the extent that it is concerned with young people's perspectives and agency. However, rather than renouncing the notion of young people as becomings, this work refashions the concept of becoming, highlighting the significance of 'growing up' as a space of opportunity. Once we shift the focus from time and fully grasp the idea that becoming has no end, only then are we able to fully understand the complexity of the position and how youth navigate and transform their lives.

In providing a different understanding of becoming, the attention is therefore on youth as social space rather than on the period between childhood and adulthood. Denoting "youthhood" as a dynamic social space not only "acknowledges the integrity of the person/people's lives and experiences in their own right but also registers that they belong to a particular 'young' age group" (Panelli et al., 2007, 3. cited in Abebe and Kj rholt: 2011, 15). Here I adopt Durham's notion of youth as a 'social shifter', presenting "youthhood" as relational, a social construct, which is highly responsive to broader socio-economic and cultural transformations, and structures of power (Durham: 2000). In Kenya socio-political factors such as gender, ethnicity, familial obligations, responsibility, authority and intergenerational opposition simultaneously play key roles in defining who is regarded as or considers themselves a youth. As is the case in most parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, authority, right and responsibility are achieved rather than being a matter of course (Abebe and Kj rholt: 2011).

For the youth in this research "growing up" is about the extension of networks

and spaces, as well as the incorporation of aspirations into everyday life. Considering youth as relational not only provides us with a better understanding of how youth are positioned by other groups in society (ibid.), but it also helps us to better see what determines their actions, actions which lead to individual and collective change. In Chapter Six the view of youth as a ‘social shifter’ materialises further as we see how youth as agents draw on their surroundings to carve out alternative paths for themselves and their communities, in the process turning marginality into opportunity.

*Agency: the agent as a (dependent) becoming*

In regards to studies on Africa, the primary concern from a Western perspective is that the continent has failed to “develop”. A predominant standpoint is that due to the socio-political and cultural foundations of African societies, the problems within the continent are both inevitable and intractable. The theories upon which this argument is based, which are linked to the legacy of colonialism and the notion of Africa as a dark continent, postulate that agency is directly conditioned by the economic, political and social constraints extant in each particular society (Chabal: 2009). Moreover, it is generally assumed that in “modern” societies the individual is considered more of a free agent than in so-called traditional societies. This assumption implies that Africans lack agency, held back by institutions and traditions ill-suited to the “modern” world. Such notions of agency are key in shaping approaches to development aid, which have immediate consequences for Africa (ibid.).

It is on the above premise that development theorists and policy makers insist that African governments instate the right structures and implement specific policies embracing individualism and the role of the market as the key to political and economic change. The ascendancy of democracy and the market has coincided with, and is based on, a new vision of African agency professing that individuals bear the responsibility for their own-well being. As Chabal (2009, 9) postulates: “in this way agency is the link between democracy and the market, both of which privilege an analysis of society in terms of the empowered individual endowed with social, political and economic rights”. This correlates with the argument that neo-liberalism has an ideological hold over young people’s means of resistance, because rather than becoming engaged in collective action, people are encouraged to develop individual coping mechanisms and seek subsistence on a personal basis (El Mahdi: 2012).

As agents we are understood to be able to bring about change because we are in some way “independent” of convention or the social order, that agency is something we possess inside us (Lee: 2001). The picture of the agent painted above would have us believe that as agents we owe nothing to our social surroundings. However this research sees agency as incompleteness and interdependence instead of being just about autonomy and self-determination. We are all exposed to the same structural forces, and as individuals and groups we are mutually influencing each other in a multitude of different ways. Regardless of whether we consider ourselves an adult, child, youth or elder, we all rely on our surroundings in order to navigate our everyday lives and to “go against the grain”. In describing the actor network theory (ANT) Lee (2001, 129) points out that “the more a person appears to possess agency and the more independently self-present they appear, the more dependent that person is for their powers and identity as an agent on a network of extensions”.

Lee cites the interesting case of Louis Pasteur, the inventor of pasteurisation, who is considered a genius due to his widespread achievements in improving health. The story of Pasteur “the independent genius” is the sugarcoated version; the real story is one of dependencies. Rather than acting as a single agent detached from his social world as we have been led to believe, Pasteur built a network of actors he could rely on (Lee: 2001). Only by establishing a mutually dependent network of equipment, people and political alliances was he able to develop pasteurisation. Lee states that “without this network of extensions and supplements Pasteur would not have been the agent for change we see him today” (Lee: 2001, 130). Likewise, the youth in this research rely on various informal elements, strategies and institutions for building agency. In Chapter Five, and to a much greater extent in Chapter Six, we see that the more extensive their networks, connections and spaces are, the greater the potential for change.

Consequently, it is important to fundamentally change the way we conceptualise dependency. Adults are increasingly dependent on the state, partners and their children for security and identity formation. Yet, when dependency is associated with young people it unfortunately has negative connotations. In the following chapters we will see that while securing economic independence is a top priority for the youth of

Mathare, dependency is not seen as a complete burden that must be off-loaded. On the contrary, dependency is being strengthened and embraced in different ways. As such, this work postulates that dependency does not necessarily translate into a lack of “modernity” or a heightened sense of marginality; instead the ability to constructively tap into one’s established dependencies signifies greater “modernity”. This is central to positively remaking the notion of youth as becoming.

This approach to agency forces us to seriously reconsider the questions we ask about African youth and societies. It goes well beyond the conceptualisation of youth agency as mere coping strategies. Furthermore, it points to the failures of the dominant discourses to explain African youth and their communities. Rather than looking at what Africa and its youth have failed to achieve, this work provides an analytical framework that does justice to the processes of social transformation and diversification taking place in urban communities today.

### **3.3. Marginality**

The concept of marginality is intrinsically tied to the trajectory towards modernity. A clear sign of this is visible in development discourse and practice, where marginality, along with notions of vulnerability, is seen to be synonymous with the absence of modernity (Saad, 2012). The term tends to be used haphazardly to categorise specific groups such as immigrants and to cover a wide range of poverty-related conditions. In this way marginality is considered to be an inherent feature or socio-cultural trait of the poor themselves or of the particular space in which they operate and subsist (Lewis: 1968). Marxist scholars Manuel Castells (1983) and Janice Perlman (1976) argue that marginality, as an attribute of poor people, is a myth. Like Bush (2012), they posit that rather than being simply left on the margins or being excluded, people are actively dispossessed. Therefore, the term denotes a structural process, whereby people and groups such as youth are instead marginalised, meaning they are exploited economically, politically repressed and socially stigmatized.

The use of marginality as a theoretical concept in this thesis goes well beyond the common understanding presented above. Instead this work takes as its point of departure a much wider denotation of the concept and conditions of youth marginality. This is done in accordance with Gist’s (1967, 5) definition of marginality

which “refers to the position of a group as indicated by the interpersonal or inter-group relationships with one or more different groups and to the attitudes and ‘images’ that tend to shape these relationships” (cited in Saad: 2012, 98). However, whilst the definition proves fitting, I expand on it by suggesting that marginality is more than a position of powerlessness; it also serves as an opportunity as it opens up space for resistance. In doing so, this research sees marginal spaces not only as places of survival, but also as sites of transformation, where youth as creative actors exert alternative forms of counter-power.

In regards to the urban poor there is no doubt that survival is an overwhelming preoccupation for many, but as Simone (2009, p.13) points out: “the pursuit of survival involves actions, relations, sentiments, aspirations and opportunities that are more than just survival.” Reconceptualising marginality in this way is not to romanticize places like the “slum” or the poor; the point is that an alternative view of such spaces is necessary in order to provide a more accurate understanding of the historical consciousness of the young people positioned within these landscapes.

In exploring ideas of urbanity that do not fit into general understandings of what urban life should be, Simone (2009) maintains that African cities should be understood as sites of reworking marginality rather than as failed cities, which has been the prevalent view among urban planners and governments. In reframing marginality, I use his work as a platform for revealing elements of the “slum” that cannot be captured when taking traditional Western notions of marginality as a point of departure. In taking such an approach, the focus is on the young people as the infrastructure; “slum life” replaces the “slum”. Turning the table in this way involves capturing the visibility below surface appearances of extreme deprivation (ibid). Accordingly, this means focusing on individual and collective actions, imaginations and aspirations. Moreover, these actions deviate from what is usually considered and accepted as “progressive” or “emancipatory”, critically changing perceptions of young peoples methods of negotiation.

### **3.4. “Extending space”**

As mentioned in Chapter Two, informal settlements in Nairobi, including Mathare, together constitute less than 1% of the city’s total land area. In the previous chapter I

also explained the long-standing conflict over land in Kenya, the country's unequal urban development and the displacement of young street traders from the capitals public spaces. UN-Habitat's *State of the Urban Youth* report reveals how some of the city's young people feel that certain spaces in Nairobi are "out of bounds" to them. Some of the youth's interviewed for the report expressed a concern about the exclusivity of social spaces such as shopping malls. While some didn't even know such places existed, others reported how they were excluded due to their economic situation or that they felt "out of place" among the luxury cars and the rich people (UN-Habitat: 2010). One interviewee vented how in their opinion the guards at the local mall have been trained to visualize people like them because if they stand there for 2 minutes they will be asked to move away (ibid.).

Moreover, In Chapter Five we see the intersecting factors that have lead to the exclusion of youth from mainstream economic and political activity. Their marginalisation is a process of alienation by the established order and by dominant groups in society who position them and their immediate community away form the "centre". Therefore, in counteracting their marginalisation, the youth of Mathare are collectively and individually pulling and pushing themselves and the "slum" in new directions towards the perceived site of power by physically and metaphorically "extending space". This concept aligns with the idea of youth as a social shifter presented above and constitutes not only the extension of space but also the diversification, organization, creation and overhaul of space. In the analysis and discussion sections we will see how through political, economic and cultural engagement with the "slum" and city, the youth's are creating their own spaces for action.

In setting forth the concept of extending space, the idea of space is taken to be both material and a product of people's imagination (Hansen: 2008). Keith and Pile (1993) explain that as opposed to time, which is aligned with mind, reason, masculinity and progressive politics, space is seen to be lacking in value because it is associated with the body, emotion, femininity and nothingness. However, as they point out such a depiction of space leaves no room for the recognition of the progressive alliances constructed through the spatial (ibid.). In contrast, the idea of space presented here is that it is goes hand-in-hand with the political and is linked to the power relations between different social groups. It is taken to be more than the outcome of social relations; it is an active, constitutive and essential component in the

structuring of everyday life (Keith & Pile: 1993, Hansen: 2008). In addition, space here is considered to be more than a flat two-dimensional entity of merely being inside or outside, in the centre or confined to the margins. Accordingly this allows us to move beyond the association of youth marginality with closure and totalities to instead see their socioeconomic and political realities as “urban wounds” (Hansen: 2008) and to recognise the capabilities they have to heal them. As Keith & Pile state “space can be seen to be full of gaps, contradictions, folds and tears. Through these, marginalised communities may be able to inscribe themselves into new geographies” (1993, p. 36). Furthermore, urban spaces should not just be seen as the outcome of expert rational choices but as entities that are constantly generated and reconstructed through matrices of formal and informal rules (Wahdan: 2012). While the youth in this research are indeed “extending space” through both formal and informal channels, it’s the informal rules that hold greater significance here.

### **3.5. The political-economy perspective**

Many of the studies of urban youth have focused primarily on the cultural practices and values that shape their lives. In doing so, the emphasis has been on youth as a cultural entity in itself. However, an over-emphasis on the cultural construction of “youthhood” tends to portray it as an entity that is detached from the surrounding world. Consequently, there is a tendency to address the challenges youth face in relative isolation. A focus on the everyday realities of youth, no matter what the context, must not only consider the particular ideological perspectives and conventional practices, but equally the systems or structures that create the material conditions that inform cultural values and ideals (Hart, 2008). Accordingly, locating the position of youth within the context of broader historical and structural transformations involves a look at the incentives, interests and power of different groups and how relations and tensions between certain groups are played out.

Political economy is also concerned with reflexivity and the importance of becoming aware of how one’s own position in time and space defines one’s perspective on history (Cox, 2002). Therefore, when looking at how youth in the community of Mathare navigate their marginality, political economy emerged as a natural theoretical course to take. In this study political economy serves not only to

identify power structures and struggles but also the agents and sites of change.

The use of political economy in this work involves a critical question about the youth-state relationship. This pertains to the legitimacy of the state. In regards to state-population relationships, conditions range from a population that is broadly participant in political processes and has faith in the state's institutions, to a population that considers political authority and its agents to be exploitative. To look at the range of circumstances between these two extremes is to pose the legitimacy question (Cox, 2002). I consider the legitimacy approach to be a very pertinent approach here, especially in light of the current context of Kenya presented in Chapter Two. Moreover, it is a very suitable approach to understanding a society where connections are more important than formal rules, especially for young people.

Moen and Eriksen (2010) maintain that political, economic and social influence often play out in less visible arenas. Thus, when applying political economy one must not only consider the formal, but also the informal rules, which are rooted in particular customs and practices (*ibid.*). In many post-colonial African states, including Kenya, two parallel systems are in operation. One is the filial system whereby relationships and access to resources are determined and distributed based on kinship and personal connections. The other is the legal/bureaucratic system where political and administrative relations follow a formal course of fixed procedures, rules and laws, and was introduced in Africa during colonial rule (Erdmann & Engel: 2009). These two systems permeate each other: the distinction between the public and the private can be unclear and informal politics can penetrate formal institutions to such an extent that this mix becomes institutionalised (*ibid.*).

This combination of two co-existing, partly interwoven means of domination is often dubbed neopatrimonialism (*ibid.*) and it works in various ways to shape the lives of youth. For example, the lack of youth participation presented in the chapter on youth marginalisation is in part linked to the centralisation of power and the misuse of state resources. In addition, for the youth of Mathare their ability to navigate their political and socio-economic marginality is determined by their position within mutual but unequal patron-client networks.

From a Western perspective clientelism is deemed incompatible with citizenship. However, this is a relatively narrow view, because in Africa clientelism rests on long-established relations of reciprocity, and patrons are in some forms accountable to their clients. Chabal (2009, 101) points out that “the robustness of citizenship is dependent

on the continued commitment to a shared sense of nationality”, which Kenya has severely lacked in recent times. Thus, as I demonstrate in the following chapters, when the nation state fails to provide the prerequisites of citizenship, young people must turn to other means of securing identity, and along with ethnicity, clientelism proves to be an extremely viable option.

### **3.6. International political-economy**

International political economy (IPE) is essentially about power and interests. It is a critical investigation into changes in historical structures. As such it is concerned with issues that transcend national borders and with relations between and among states. The political aspect of this investigation pertains to the social and political processes that determine access to resources: who gets what, when and how in society (Balaam & Veseth, 2001). IPE is about economics in the sense that it is concerned with the economic processes influencing political choices, generating wealth and controlling how resources are distributed (Moen & Eriksen, 2010). Thus, the political and economical processes are intimately intertwined in a network of bargains between and among states and markets, which determine the production, exchange and distribution of wealth and power (Balaam & Veseth, 2001).

There are two types of power through which the bargaining between state and markets are negotiated; relational power and structural power (Strange: 1988). Relational power is the power that one player, be it an individual, group or state holds over another (individual, group, or state). Structural power, on the other hand, is the power that determines the global political-economy framework within which relational power - state actors, political institutions and corporations have to operate (ibid.). Structural power basically sets the rules of the game, with the major players being global institutions such as the World Bank, IMF and WTO, who's policies in turn reflect the influence of leading nations and dominant capital running through those nations (Hart: 2008). As this thesis argues, youth marginality needs to be located within the wider framework of structural processes of inequity and inequality.

Structuralist Susan Strange (1998) argues that the “rules of the game” are exercised through four dimensions; security, production, finance, and knowledge. First, within the security structure, the provision of security by one group for another

necessitates the power that determines one's portion of both the national and international economic pie (ibid.). For example, during the cold war, a nation's production of wealth, rights and privileges were contingent on its alignment with either U.S.-centred NATO or the Soviet bloc (Balaam & Veseth: 2010). The security structure is multilayered with dominant nations such as the US, Great Britain, France, Russia and China at the top.<sup>11</sup> The middle tier is made up of International Organizations such as NATO and the UN, which some would argue serve the interests of the major powers at the top. At the bottom are the countries in the South, the majority of which are labelled as "weak" or "failed" states and are seen by those above them to be lacking the necessary power to protect its territory and citizens.<sup>12</sup> Structuralists see the "helping hand" offered to poorer countries as a pretext for their further exploitation. Indeed critics of structuralists argue that such a view ignores the many different internal conflicts and problems within a particular society. The position of this thesis is that the lives of youth in post-colonial Kenya are shaped through the interplay of external and internal factors.

Second, the production structure is the sum of arrangements that determine who produces what, for whom, by what methods and on who's terms (Strange, 1988). Production is the act of generating value and wealth (Balaam & Veseth, 2001). In their work *Rival States, Rival Firms*, Strange, Stopford and Henley (1991) maintain that states are now vying with corporations for the means to generate wealth within their own territory. They have gone from jockeying for power as a means to obtain wealth to competing for wealth as a means to power (May, 1996).

Third, the financial structure is the pattern of money flowing between and among nations (Balaam & Veseth, 2001). However, the financial structure is not about money per se, but rather its use as a means to create obligations between people or states. For example this occurs through direct investment or the creation of credit (ibid.). In today's political and economic climate those entrusted with the creation of credit, control the economy. They, in turn, gain the confidence of others because of their ability to create credit (in globalisation studies this would be capital) and control the economy (ibid.), Germany's position in the Eurozone being a notable example. The creation of such obligations involves bargaining between political authority

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<sup>11</sup> Source: auknotes - <https://sites.google.com/a/g.rit.edu/auknotes/international-political-economy-ipe/chapter-09-global-security-structure>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

(explicitly, not only states) and the market (ibid.). Today the market is the dominant force in this process, but this is by no means the result of an inevitable or natural shift. Instead, this shift towards the market is primarily the outcome of historical arrangements made by political authorities (May, 1996). As Strange (1988) argues, it is the history of decisions and bargains originating with U.S.' political authority (exploiting its position for its own particular ends rather than for the general welfare) that shapes the financial structure and with it the problems for the global economy (cited in May, 1996).

Fourth, the knowledge structure, which binds all of the structures, pertains to what is believed, what is known and perceived as a given, and to the channels by which these beliefs and ideas are communicated or confined (Strange 1998). What's worth remembering is that power in the knowledge structure stems just as much from the capacity to deny and obstruct knowledge as it does from the transmission of knowledge (May, 1996). There are three central changes within the knowledge structure itself: changes in the control of information - and communication systems, changes in the use of language and non-verbal means of communication, and lastly changes in "fundamental perceptions of and beliefs about the human condition, which influence value judgments, and through them, political and economic decisions and policies" (Strange 1988, 16 cited in May, 1996, 17).

Every individual is in essence tied to one another through these four global power structures. As Balaam and Veseth (2001, 20) maintain: "taken together these four power structures form the international system within which the interdependent relations of individuals and states occur". Therefore, any reflection of one's everyday realities or quest to understand regional or local developments, warrants the need to move beyond purely focusing on the superficial relational manifestations of power to fathom which actors are calling the shots in terms of decision-making and the preservation of the status quo.

The theoretical discussion presented above demonstrates that the international, the political and the economic do not interact outside specific ideologies and culturally informed understandings. Political, economic or social transformations must be understood in relation to the values of the different actors. For example, the neo-liberal dogma of self-sufficiency provides justification for the withdrawal of state support and the imposition of school fees, compelling families to destitution in the name of "democracy" and "freedom" (Hart, 2008).

The tension between states and markets discussed above is seen most clearly in the concept(s) of neo-liberalism. Neo-liberalism is a legacy of the cold war. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, western neo-liberal capitalism triumphed, no longer restricted by the centralised and “socialist” dictates of Moscow (Cox: 2002). This can be seen as a major turning point in the emergence of new structures. Neo-liberalism maintains the belief that the market is the primary force for development. As part of neo-liberal efforts to remove all obstacles to the functioning of the market, nations have been required to open up their economies to western capital and decrease the overall role of government. From what began as an attempt by the Bretton Woods system to strike a balance between the liberal world market and domestic responsibilities of states (Cox, 2002), we now have a situation where states are mere puppets to the agencies and demands of the global economy. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, in order to facilitate the movement of capital across borders, the World Bank and IMF imposed structural adjustment on states in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa. The key components of these programs were privatisation, trade liberalisation, the removal of price controls, and reduced intervention in labour markets and cuts in government expenditure. These neo-liberal policies, originally designed to address the debt crisis in Latin America and Africa, are based on the embedded assumption that wealth “trickles down” from the rich to the poor and that development is essentially economic growth. However, the reality is that they have led to a growing disparity between the rich and poor. This work looks at the neo-liberal strategies that continue to set the framework within which communities such as Mathare operate.



## **Chapter Four: Research Methodology**

### **4.0 Introduction**

Firstly the chapter explains how I gained access to the Mwelu Foundation and my reasons for seeking collaboration with the youth of this organization. This chapter engages with the debate concerning research *on, about, with* and *by* youth. Furthermore, the chapter includes an extensive account of the research design process and the challenges we encountered whilst formulating the proposal together. I introduce the methods of data collection and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using such methods. Other factors discussed are the sampling approaches and how we as a research team gained access to the youth in the field. The strength of this research relied on collaboration continuing throughout the entire research. Therefore, I also describe the ways in which the youth were involved in the analysis of the empirical data. Lastly, I discuss ethical considerations and the ethical challenges encountered whilst in the field.

### **4.1 Access to the Mwelu Foundation**

I made contact with Julius Mwelu, the organisation's founder and artistic director. It must be noted here that as this research is both youth-led and action-orientated, all the young members from the Mwelu Foundation who were part of the research team chose to have their real names published. This is discussed further in the passage on anonymity and confidentiality in the ethics sub-chapter. My first meeting with Julius took place at the UN complex. Over a cup of chai he gave me an introduction to the foundation and organised for me to visit their office. The following Saturday I met Eric Omwanda, one of the organisation's members. We met at the OK gas station on Juja road, with Eastleigh known as "Little Mogadishu" due to its predominantly Somali population on one side, and the Mwelu Foundation's office space at the edge of Mathare "Slums" on the other.

Eric explained more about the foundation and showed me the organisation's workspace and library, and took me around various parts of the "slum". We spent most of this time having a friendly chat, during which he voluntarily told me that he fears more violence in the "slums" come election time in 2013. He also believes that a

majority of the youth he knows in the community will not vote next time around because they felt cheated from the election results in 2007.

As our conversation moved towards a more political nature, it gave me the impetus to mention my interest in doing research with members of the organisation. I put forward my ideas and expressed an interest in engaging with the members and their capacities as photographers and filmmakers to document the lives of youth in the “slums”. Being the manager of the foundation’s library and a budding writer, Eric expressed a desire to provide an essay to support the photography and film data. I was introduced to the rest of the members when they came for their regular Saturday afternoon meeting. I joined the meeting to observe and to show interest in their work. During this meeting I was welcomed and asked to introduce myself, which gave me a platform to introduce the idea of doing research together.

## **4.2 Collaborative research design**

Positivist and post-positivist research emphasises the separation of the researcher and subject, and disregards important contextual dimensions in the pursuit of objective knowledge and one independent truth about the nature of reality (Nieuwenhuys: 2004). These methods are often presented as established facts and the dominant paradigms from which the methods are derived usually go unchallenged. In stark contrast to this “scientific viewpoint”, this work is inspired by the critical approach that has Participatory Action Research (PAR) as its key methodological element. By determining the research problem together through dialogue with the youth from the Mwelu Foundation, this work provides a framework that challenges the status quo in regards to research with young people.

The Mwelu Foundation team is rather large with more than 40 members. To involve all in the proposal process would have been problematic. James and Elijah (two of the organisation’s youth leaders) therefore suggested that the other leaders and myself come up with some ideas for a proposal and then present those ideas to specific members of the team for their input and to gauge their interest in the project.

PAR infers that research which reduces, or better still, removes the distance between researcher and subject can be seen as a more accurate representation of reality (London, Zimmerman & Erbsstein: 2003). Working from the belief that oppression is rooted not only in material conditions but also through the production of

knowledge, PAR critically addresses what constitutes knowledge, how and what knowledge is produced and who is involved (Rahman: 1993). The tradition recognises that those usually researched on harbor critical knowledge. Accordingly it strives to reduce power differences in research relationships by repositioning participants as architects of research and as co-researchers and co-analysts (Torre & Fine: 2006). With regards to issues concerning youth, those with the greatest knowledge on youth are youth themselves.

As Youth-Led Participatory Action Research (YPAR), this work offers an alternative way of doing research with youth. It challenges perceptions of where expertise on youth lies, and dismantles research hierarchies by restructuring power dynamics. In contrast to “extractive” research (whereby the researcher goes into the community with his/her ideas, studies people from a distance and takes the results away to analyse, write up and disseminate without any consideration of how the findings can facilitate further action), this research is *by* local youth, *for* local youth and actively addresses specific issues identified by local youth.

In critical research such as this, the researchers must engage those involved in a mutually enriching dialogue throughout all the stages of the research, from the formulation of problems to the dissemination of data (Nelson & Prilleltensky: 2005). With such active participation and control issued by those usually sidelined in the research process, the traditional position of the researcher as the one who has total control of the research is not applicable. Therefore, the researcher must take on a lesser role (ibid.). Accordingly, I first assumed the role of initiator by “getting the ball rolling”. Thereafter, seeing as the youths involved were the ones with the expertise, my primary role was one of facilitator, constantly reflecting on power dynamics in order to ensure the research remained participatory.

Commitment to genuine collaboration in the production of knowledge starts with defining concepts and problems so that they reflect the experiences of those concerned (Nelson & Prilleltensky: 2005). As a point of departure I posed the tentative idea of doing research that would simultaneously challenge the dominant negative views on urban youth and the “slum”. I expressed that I was interested in finding out about the challenges that young people in the “slum” face, whether it be political, economic or cultural constraints, and also exploring the ways in which youth in Mathare are facilitating change.

After presenting my initial ideas, focus group discussions with the young leaders

played a key role in determining what issues were important to them and to the community's youth as a whole. Critically reflecting on the historical, political, cultural and economic contexts, we defined problems and issues that needed addressing, determined the action that they felt had been missing, framing in terms of issues of power. This led to the formulation of more specific research questions followed by the ways in which to go about collecting the data.

Video and photography were to be the primary means of generating data. The aim was to have filmed focus group discussions and documentary filming, which would constitute the video component, and photo-elicitation to make up the photographic element. The participatory nature of these methods along with the member's level of technical ability meant that the production of knowledge would be controlled by the youth themselves, an approach that challenges conventional ways of doing research with youth. To supplement the visual methods, semi-structured or unstructured interviews, participant observation and essay writing were to be used throughout the research. As alluded to above, Eric Omwanda is a promising writer. His two essays on the history of Mathare and youth empowerment programs in the "slum" add significant weight to the overall data. This is a further example of how this research utilises young peoples particular talents when deciding on the appropriate methods for data collection. Once we had defined the *what* and the *how*, we looked at which of the concerns took precedence in order to make the research proposal even more focused and to avoid looking superficially at too many issues. This process also involved collaboratively working out a time frame and a budget for gathering data.

Giving ownership of the proposal to the youth proved to be challenging. I thought I was properly conveying that I wanted them to tell me what they thought the research should be about. However, when I initially presented them with what I believed were valuable avenues to explore they tended to just agree with me. I think the reluctance to come forward with their own ideas was due to the fact that despite continuously reiterating my intent and motivation for wanting to do the research, there was still an air of scepticism. Even when I thought we were making progress with the proposal and building up a rapport, some of them still questioned what I wanted to get out of it. This challenge was exacerbated by the absence of some of the members when explaining my reasons. In addition, I think maybe my ideas were not tentative enough. In my opinion, rather than introducing my ideas first it would have been more fruitful to begin with a "blank slate", asking them to provide me with ideas on what youth

research in this particular context should be focusing on. By looking for common areas of interest I could have then aligned my own ideas with theirs. Instead my ideas were to some extent restrictive as they influenced what the group were proposing. With our tight schedule in mind, I thought that a “blank slate” approach would have been too time-consuming, however due to the challenges mentioned above, it took just as long.

In regards to reciprocity there is a significant debate over the appropriateness of giving money or other incentives to participants for their involvement in research (Ennew et al, 2009). Skovdal and Abebe (2012) discuss how financial or material incentives provided by foreign researchers can raise expectations, which may hinder local researchers, as they may not have the funds to pay participants. However, while I was mindful of the potential repercussions of paying research participants, a principle of this research was that the research funds must be distributed in such a way that those directing and partaking in the research were compensated for their time, time which they may otherwise have used to generate income.

Location logistics, production costs, and lunch and travel expenses also needed to be accounted for when planning for data collection. Therefore, the latter stages of the proposal process involved collectively working out a budget for the research. The members from the Mwelu Foundation knew the costs of equipment, production and appropriate amounts to give to local youth for their time so they took the lead in formulating the budget. I also contributed but my involvement put a strain on the process. I questioned some of the production costs and we strongly disagreed on the allowances that they assigned to themselves as co-researchers. In hindsight, rather than telling them how much the grant was, I should have just left them to do the budget completely alone, asking them to come up with an amount based on what we had proposed. I could have then looked at it afterwards and told them how much we actually had to work with.

In the name of power-sharing and the desire to maintain respect, researchers may seek to avoid conflict with participants (Nelson & Prilleltensky: 2005). However, to do so can compromise the authenticity of the research relationship (ibid.). Similarly, rather than withdraw from a situation I saw conflict as an unavoidable and normal part of the research partnerships and felt the need to engage it. The youth challenged and criticised me and visa-versa. Such conflicts arise from a collision of experiences and worldviews, and the disagreements that we had throughout the different parts of the

research process were invaluable as they created a space for learning and questioning assumptions. For example, in regards to the dispute over allowances, I questioned whether all of the leaders from the Mwelu Foundation involved in the research should receive the same allowance. The response I got from the youth was that the level of contribution was irrelevant because they were all brothers, and as a team, allowances should be shared out equally.

This disagreement represents a certain degree of naivety on my part and highlights the cultural differences that can arise between co-researchers and between participants. Their reaction was a critique of individualism and an early demonstration of the solidarity these youth have forged in counteracting marginalisation. The group's message echoes Steve Biko's writings on African Culture. As Biko asserts in *I write what I Like*:

We regard our living together not as an unfortunate mishap warranting an endless competition among us [...] but as a community of brothers and sisters jointly included in the composite answer to the varied problems of life (Biko: 1987, 42).

It can be argued that the tendency for researchers not to involve participants in the research design process is due to the limited time researchers have for proposal development. The lack of involvement is also linked to the power imbalances generated by established preconceptions on the part of both the researcher and subjects with regards to knowledge and expertise, and this is especially the case with young people (Robinson & Kellett: 2004). Furthermore, traditional scientists reject the explicitly political and value-based nature of this type of research, arguing that relinquishing power and control over the research design compromises the integrity of the research (Nelson & Prilleltensky: 2005). However, in spite of any time-constraints and any number of different challenges that can arise, working collaboratively with youth on the proposal development is and was imperative, because it is at this stage that the research issues are framed.

### **4.3 Access and sampling**

The youth leaders suggested using a total of 16 people (8 males and 8 females, including myself) to be part of the research team who would collect data within the community over an 8-week period. However, once we had finalised the budget and gone through the methods of data collection in more detail, that number was reduced to 12. The research team was as follows: James Otieno, Eric Omwanda, Elijah Mumo, Nelson Onyango, Raymond Ochieng, Rachael Anyango Ouko, Simon Onyango, Judith Atieno Anyango, James Chemose, Grace Audi Elisha, Rogers Olouch and myself. The ages of the youths range from 16-23 years.

Whilst it was important to have people in the research team with the technical experience to utilise the specific research tools, the selection was also influenced by the fact that the older, more experienced youths were more flexible, seeing as the younger members had to attend school and this would have put limitations on us regarding when we could go into the field and collect data. The initial intent to have an equal amount of male and females involved was also abandoned due to the level of female interest in the project. In my opinion this lack of interest was down to the male predominance within the organisation's leadership. Had it included more young women, female interest may have been higher, as they would have been a part of the research from the very beginning, making the proposal process more fruitful. At the same time I could have built up a better rapport with them.

Manygro, Muoroto Insiders Youth Organisation and Mathare Girls were the youth groups that took part in the filmed discussions. Manygro features heavily in both the filmed discussions and in the documentary. The youth group is made up of 18 males and 6 females, all of whom offer a wide range of community services to the residents of Mathare. Muoroto Insiders Youth Organisation was founded in 2002 and has 25 youths (mostly all over 18 years old) involved in their various projects. These projects include washroom management, community clean ups and HIV/AIDS awareness. Muoroto does not have a formal office; instead the group meets at various bases in the "slum". Finally, but by no means least, Mathare Girls is a small group of young women, advocating women's rights in the community.

Nelson Onyango, a member of our research team, recommended using these groups. Nelson made use of his extensive contacts and his knowledge of community youth empowerment initiatives in order to identify suitable participants for the

discussions and to provide us with access. Similarly, when planning the documentary the youths in the team assigned Nelson, Simon Onyango and Raymond Ochieng to do some preliminary research in the “slums” and to find suitable participants. Once they had identified possible participants and spoke to them to gauge interest, we all went as a team to meet the groups and to find out more about what they did, obtain consent and to explain what I intended to do with the research. Afterwards Nelson, Simon and Raymond individually interviewed one group each to come up with separate scripts. Thereafter the research team met up for script analysis, cumulating the scripts into one larger comprehensive script. This demonstrates how the research was democratised to maximise the participation of those involved. It also shows the extent with which the youth in the team directed the agenda for the research.

The other group that took part in the documentary was the Billian Music Family. The Billian Music Family (B.M.F.) is a non-governmental, non-political, non-religious organisation based in Mathare. 21-year old Billian Okoth, a performing artist from Mathare, founded the organisation after realising there were pools of young talent in the “slum” that were being left untapped. In nurturing these musical talents the organisation also works towards improving the young member’s self-esteem and their sense of individual and collective responsibility. The organisation currently has 25 members aged between the ages of 8 and 15 years old, and receives small recording grants from international collaborators through a project called Mathare Roots, who also provide them with a space to meet.

Some of the Mwelu Foundation members have various “hustles” and endeavours on the side to help overcome the daily challenges and make further advancements on their chosen paths. Of those members I had the closest relationship with Eric, James Otieno and Nelson, therefore I decided to carry out unstructured interviews with them in order to find out more about these expressions of power and agency.

#### **4.4 Participant observation**

Participant observation was a tool used throughout the whole research and went hand in hand with the other methods used in the field. Participant observation involves taking part in the everyday lives of those people one wishes to learn about. The actions of the participant observer are not planned or done with a specific aim, instead

the researcher watches, listens and asks informal and formal questions as events, ideas and new avenues to explore crop up (Hammersley and Atkinson: 2007).

Participation observation was used to get to know the Mwelu youths and to understand their individual and collective perceptions of the social world in which they live. The nature of participant observation allows the researcher to access certain situations or specific places that he or she would not normally have access to or feel completely comfortable doing so (Fine and Sandstrom: 1988). Collaborating with members of the Mwelu Foundation and being allowed into their inner circle enabled me to walk around the “slum” and observe “slum life” in ways that would have been impossible if I was alone. Moreover, when undertaking participant observation the researcher must implicitly or/and explicitly negotiate their role with those involved (Hammersley and Atkinson: 2007). Participant observation was primarily used in the beginning, and it wasn’t until we had formed friendships and gained each other’s trust that we able to work together successfully as a team.

When I first met the youth from the Mwelu Foundation I was completely open about my reasons for wanting to carry out research together. Being an acquaintance of/and gaining access through Julius Mwelu, the organisation’s founder, made it easier for the youth to accept me and see me as a possible friend and confidante. In addition, being of a similar age (both socially and biological I’m considered a youth in Kenya) and the same gender as most of the youths, I believe made them feel even more at ease with me. Moreover, being genuinely comfortable both around the group and in the “slum” as well as being focused on learning from their expertise rather than looking to exert my own authority, made for a good starting point for developing a rapport. By eating together, playing games such as Ludo for small change, and going to each other’s houses, we became closer. In the beginning, “breaking bread” together at our regular spot on the edge of Mathare was great for getting to know each other. Not only did covering the cost of the food help me in becoming accepted, but also swapping personal stories and engaging in politically light-hearted discussions proved invaluable.

The major challenge for me whilst undertaking participant observation was balancing the role of participant and observer. As my relationship with members of the group progressed, I found myself so pre-occupied with participating that I ceased to be an observer. In those instances I was forced to rely on recall, but, as Fine & Sandstrom (1988) argue, this can raise concerns over accuracy. When I was

consciously observing I didn't think it was appropriate to take notes on the spot, to do so I felt would compromise my role(s) in the field. Taking on the spot notes would have been counterproductive in terms of gaining their trust and participating "naturally". It would also have thwarted my efforts to ensure and maintain equal power relations. In those instances I made notes as soon as I returned home from my time with the group. The only time I took notes whilst observing was during the unstructured interviews with James, Eric and Nelson.

Finally, language was also an obstacle when doing participant observation with this specific group of youth. Most of the time we spoke English, but on the occasions when members of the group would switch to Swahili or Sheng, I had to rely on observing body language in order to decipher meaning. However, I found this too challenging, I could not consider any of these observations accurate, thus I discounted them as data.

#### **4.5 Video and documentary as a research tool**

The majority of the data from the "slums" was collected by video. To begin with the filmed focus group discussions that I touched upon in the proposal design section were carried out as part of the investigation into the immediate socio-cultural, economic and political challenges that the young people of Mathare face. Nelson made the necessary arrangements, which included finding various places in the "slum" for filming and negotiating both the fee for the group's time and how many of their group members would take part. Consequently, he was also the one asking the questions. The first of these filmed conversations involved five members of Muoroto Youth Organisation as well as Eric and Nelson, who were facilitating the discussions. The same set up was applied while filming with Manygro. The final focus group, which was with Mathare girls, involved three of their female members and Nelson as the sole interviewer. The rest of the research group, including myself, remained behind the camera as part of the production team, carrying out various jobs such as sound, light and camera work.



**Figure 5: Muoroto members discussing the challenges of "growing up" in Mathare**

Prior to shooting the first of the focus group discussions the research team and I met to determine which language to use and to discuss the role of the interviewers. We agreed that it was better for those in front of the camera to use Swahili and Sheng in order to express themselves freely. I was behind the camera and not asking the questions so it was unproblematic not to use English. Moreover, subtitles were added when the respective members from the Mwelu Foundation edited the footage.

In regards to the role of the interviewers, I emphasised that the questions should be non-directive and open-ended in order to allow the conversation to flow. Nelson opened the discussions by asking the group what they considered to be the main challenges facing young people in Mathare. Our pre-determined list of issues included: generational struggles, development efforts in the “slums”, class, ethnicity and gender issues, and the level of opportunities across different generations. These topics were introduced solely as triggers for stimulating the discussion.

Before filming had commenced we were presented with some minor obstacles that we had to overcome. Nelson had previously agreed the necessary terms with Muoroto youth members, but when we all met on the day of filming they suddenly wanted more money for taking part and other members also wanted to be involved. Members of the Mwelu Foundation quickly resolved the issue without us having to compromise on our original agreement. We encountered similar challenges prior to shooting the documentary. Individuals and groups who initially agreed to take part withdrew because they were uncomfortable at the idea of being on camera. This was a little frustrating, as time had been spent on developing individual scripts with all those

who agreed to take part. However, as it is the right of all participants to withdraw from the research at any time, we proceeded with the participants we had, with the hope of adding more at a later date. Another minor issue while filming in the “slum” was the gathering of curious onlookers. With so many people watching there was little privacy, and this could or may have influenced what those in front of the camera said.

Despite the minor obstacles and setbacks, using video as a research tool proved to be very successful. While this study includes ethnographic elements, the manner in which film is employed here differs from traditional ethnographic documentary filmmaking, the latter being a method where the researcher and filmmaker is considered to be the expert. In contrast, the experts in this research are the Mwelu youth. As such, they decided which details were the most important to include in the film. During the editing they had control over subject description, thus playing a huge part in influencing the interpretation of the research. Having such creative control gave the youth the opportunity to produce research most relevant to the community’s pressing issues, a factor which greatly increases the recorded data’s authenticity. The use of video in this research with a group who have successfully been using filmmaking to put Mathare and its young people on the map, means that this work also differs from the participatory projects that attempt to re-negotiate the role of “expert” filmmaker by providing young people with the technical means and knowledge to be co-producers. In this study the platform for cross-cultural learning was turned upside down, with the Mwelu youth as the teachers and me as the student.

Short filmmaking as a means for conducting analysis, and collecting and disseminating data proved to have various advantages over text-based methods. Rather than the one-off discussions, interviews and surveys that young people are used to when “participating” in research, using video within an action-orientated framework made the research exciting and more youth-friendly. Whilst some of the participants were clearly not comfortable speaking on camera, the majority of those we filmed were very open. As such, film served as an evocative medium, in which the Mwelu youth and those involved in the filmed discussions and documentary could communicate their opinions. Another advantage that film has over text-based ethnographies is that film can reach a wider audience, an audience consisting of filmmakers, scholars, and both young and older generations in the youth’s immediate community, as well as other communities in Kenya and abroad.

## **4.6 Photography: photo voice**

The use of photography in this work is based on photo-voice, a structured method of photography, whereby the images are usually taken with point-and-shoot or disposable cameras and based on a particular question or theme. Implemented as a technique for empowering disenfranchised groups such as children, photo-voice is designed to give interpretive control to the photographer; whose images are used to promote critical dialogue and knowledge through group discussions of the photographs, and with the aim of influencing policy (Wang & Burris: 1997).

While this work embraces the principles of photo-voice, it avoids having to provide lessons on how to take pictures, which is often the case when applying photo-voice. Photography was valued as a research tool because it harbors the potential for renegotiating the power relations between subject and researcher (Luttrell: 2010). Thus it would have been counterproductive for me to assume the role of “teacher”. The young people from the Mwelu Foundation (had already) armed themselves with cameras, using them as empowerment tools in representing themselves and other local youths in an effort to “speak back” to the stereotypical images of youth and the “slum”. Their knowledge of photography is one of their primary forms of capital, so by engaging this particular group of youth I avoided creating any feeling of incompetence that some disenfranchised people may feel when being taught how to use cameras. Moreover, using photography as one of the main research tools fueled their enthusiasm for the project and encouraged them to fully take part in the research.

Simon, Judith, James Chemose, Grace and Roger were the photographers in our research group. They were encouraged to take pictures of what they thought were the challenges of daily life in the “slum”, and the significant ways in which young people are striving to overcome these challenges. Whilst the others and I were at one location filming, the photographers took the organisation’s digital cameras and went to other parts of the “slum” to take pictures. The majority of the time the group of photographers would split up into pairs or go individually. In addition, the photographers already had a portfolio of pictures documenting life in the community so some of these were also incorporated into the research data.

An advantage of using photography in this type of research is that it can provide content and topics that would otherwise be deemed unimportant or poorly understood by an outside viewpoint. This helps to distinguish between normative statements and

those that are closer to young people's views and experiences (Pink: 2001). Moreover, the value of photography as a research method lies in the powerful responses that the images evoke (Luttrell: 2010). During the analysis of photosets the same image can evoke multiple meanings and interpretations for different people. It is during these discussions that the authority of the researcher is reduced, as the photographs raise the voices of the participants and ensure participant-driven focus (Packard: 2008). I planned to set up focus group discussions with the members from the Mwelu Foundation and other youths from the "slum" to analyse the group's images and to discuss old pictures in order to trigger new information and meanings for those involved. I envisioned this would also broaden the participant process. However, from both a time perspective and a practical point of view, bringing those intended people together for photo-elicitation proved nearly impossible.

Digital cameras are in most cases practical and cost-effective as the images can be viewed instantly and easily put onto a C.D or hard drive. However, in this instance using digital cameras proved problematic, as it meant all the images we wanted to analyse were hard-copies, thus we were reduced to sitting around the one available computer in order to discuss them. In addition, being dependent on the computer for photo-elicitation was problematic because our planned meetings were constantly interrupted or canceled by regular power cuts. In the end I only managed to have a short follow-up discussion with one of the designated photographers and to briefly go over previous images with James Otieno.

The photographs collected are accompanied by exploratory text (provided as a result of discussions between the photographer, James and Eric), which provide important context and information. However in my opinion this data lacks in comparison to the information that the intended focus groups could have generated. In this regard, the use of disposable cameras would have been better, as developed pictures would have eliminated some of the challenges faced regarding focus group discussions and the forming of equitable partnerships with the photographers. Instead as the focus group discussions never materialised, the depth of the photographic data is limited.

In order for photography to be a successful research tool in terms of altering power dynamics, it is vital to allow the participants complete freedom in what they choose to take pictures of. By asking the photographers to take pictures based on a predefined theme aimed towards examining predetermined research questions, we

unwittingly encouraged them to produce a particular kind of image. The rigidity of the photographic element was realised when on one occasion some of the photographers came from the field with no images. I could tell they were unsure as to what we wanted. In my opinion, this is primarily because most of the photographers were not part of the initial research design. In order for photography to have really driven the research it should have been a starting point used during the proposal process, with the points of inquiry being generated by the issues brought up through the discussion of images. This could have been achieved by simply asking the photographer to elaborate on why he or she took the picture and what they think it reveals. In addition, given that what a person chooses to take a picture of tells us more about the photographer, it would have provided information on the way power works in their own lives (Warren, 2005 cited in Packard: 2008).

#### **4.7 Unstructured interviews**

As well as having spontaneous informal conversations with the group, and engaging the youth in dialogue prior to and during the research design, I also conducted unstructured interviews with certain members towards the end of the research in order to get a deeper understanding of their daily lives and aspirations. In addition to being members of the Mwelu Foundation, Eric, Nelson, and James Otieno have various “hustles” on the side that are invaluable to them not only in terms of supplementing their monthly incomes from the organisation, but also in their attempts to actualise their aspirations.

The importance of these endeavours became apparent on the occasions when James or Eric failed to show up for a planned meeting because they were “out hustling”, either alone or together. I also noticed that at times the research seemed to be taking up time that Nelson needed to spend tending to his poultry business. Coincidentally, of the Mwelu youth who took part in the research, I had the best rapport with James, Eric and Nelson. This fact provided me with the added incentive to learn more about these individual and collective ventures. Up until this point the other research methods had primarily been utilised with other youth from the “slum”. Therefore, I wanted to use this opportunity to understand more about these particular member’s individual challenges, their coping strategies, expressions of agency and why they chose to join the Mwelu Foundation.

I told James, Eric and Nelson my reasons for wanting to interview them before they agreed to take part and I reiterated this motive at the beginning of the interviews. I did not have a fixed set of predetermined questions in the interviews and I didn't ask the same questions to all participants. Rather, I had a theme for each interview, which involved posing a few main questions that triggered a broad discussion. This flexible approach allowed the interview to flow as naturally as possible.

As James and Eric had joint ventures I decided to interview them together. We went to a cosy Ethiopian coffee house in the Somali district, a place Eric had introduced to me beforehand, and I bought us all coffee and cake. The environment set a relaxed tone; the unavoidable presence of others in the coffee shop was not an issue. Moreover, interviewing Eric and James together made the interview even more relaxed. Having more of a three-way conversation altered the power dynamic of the interview. Sometimes they would answer questions together or prompt one another; consequently this interview was more informative and flowed better than the one-on-one I had with Nelson. While Nelson was forthcoming, the interview with him felt more intrusive. Also, by interviewing Eric and James together I was able draw on the immediate comparisons and differences between their individual challenges and coping strategies. The main trigger questions I used in this interview are presented in Appendix III.

Nelson's interview was conducted at a space used by the Mwelu members for meetings, watching T.V and generally "hanging out". In addition to being an integral member of Mwelu foundation, Nelson is an entrepreneur and has his own urban farming business. For that reason I began by asking him about his business. As the interview progressed I asked him what his aspirations were and finally what the Mwelu Foundation meant to him.

#### **4.8 Involving the youth in the analytical process**

In quantitative research the analysis of data is a well-defined and distinct stage of the research (Hammersley & Atkinson: 2007). In contrast, the analysis of data in this work began during the collaborative research design phase with the youth from the Mwelu Foundation and continued throughout the research. In generating theory and rebutting the dominant theories on youth, this work applied grounded theory analytical

techniques. The fundamental tenet of the grounded theory method is inductive analysis (Strauss & Corbin: 1994). Inductive analysis means that patterns, themes and categories of analysis emerge from the empirical data rather than from conceptual frameworks constructed prior to data collection and analysis (Patton: 1980 in Bowen: 2006). Moreover, there is a greater focus on contextual interpretations and the personal experiences and perspectives that the researcher(s) bring to the task.

In this regard, one of the main reasons for wanting to use image-based methods is that I felt they offered more opportunities to involve participants in the analytical process than conventional qualitative techniques. Liebenberg, Didkowsky & Ungar (2012, p 62) maintain: “grounded theory corresponds with the process in phenomenological image-based methods where participants direct the focus through the images they produce and the interpretation they bring to the understanding of these images”.

A fundamental issue in this research, whereby the youth lead the inquiry and have the authority on the applied research methods, is data ownership. Ownership essentially means that as a distal researcher I should not feel I have a sole right to analyse data generated in a different cultural context without involving local team members. They are not only the experts on the methods used to generate data, but also share the life-worlds and challenges of the other participants (see also Cameron, Ungar & Liebenberg: 2011). Therefore, failure to involve the youth during the data analysis and interpretation could be disempowering and undermine the cultural competence of the project (Skovdal & Abebe: 2012, Mertens: 2009). As well as discussing some of the empirical material while still in the field and later through email, the youths from the Mwelu Foundation had a great deal of responsibility in the interpretation of the data through the editing process. The local research team translated the material into English and added subtitles. They also reflected together on the footage and selected, compiled and grouped the video segments that contained the participant’s perspectives. Thus, through the editing process they identified specific themes that kept arising and required a more detailed analysis later. So when I sat down to do a more detailed analysis of the data they had sent me, I was working from the concepts introduced by the youth rather than from my perspective alone.

By using visual methods the data can be re-visited, opening up the possibility for further analysis and insight from the youth later on in life as adults or parents. It may also serve as a means of comparing the everyday realities of future generations with

the issues raised by today's youth. Moreover, the close contact that I have kept with several of youth from the Mwelu Foundation has enabled me to receive some feedback from them regarding the research process. The relationship also offers the opportunity to gather their perspectives on the published research and on ways in which such research can be improved to enable deeper involvement in the analysis and interpretation process.

#### **4.9 Ethics: considerations and challenges**

The most common ethical approaches when undertaking research with young people are the principlist and ethics of care approaches (Ennew et al. 200). The principlist approach is made up of the principle of respect for people's autonomy, beneficence, non-malificence and justice (Wiles et al., 2008). As such, the emphasis is on the rights to anonymity, the rights of participants to make informed and un-coerced decisions, and on balancing the benefits of the research while at the same time taking means to avoid harm. An ethics of care approach is where decisions are made on the basis of care, compassion and with the aim of benefiting those involved in the research (ibid.). This approach is synonymous with participatory action-orientated research such as this, where close relationships are forged with participant researchers and subjects alike. As a collaborative visual project where young people have both control over the design process and decide which shots to film, this work is in itself a strategy for ethical research.

Collaboration with the young people from the Mwelu Foundation and Mathare required reflexive vigilance. During the research design, data collection, editing, and interpretation processes, the co-researchers and myself had to be constantly aware of our race, ethnic affiliation and negotiate our positions as outsider, insider, male and female, to name but a few. The visual tools employed in this research maximise young people's agency and enable more equitable field relations. These are what Code (1995) terms "vigilant methods" (Cited in Wiles et al., 2008). As such, they offer opportunities for a specific type of reflexivity.

However, before going on to address reflexivity, it is important to draw attention to the fact that despite the benefits of the visual methods outlined above, visual research brings with it ethical issues that are distinct to the considerations attached to

purely textual methods. Guidelines for undertaking socio-ethical research with young people are based on formal protocols within the western medical sciences (Skovdal & Abebe: 2012). These ethical measures appear too rigid for research that seeks to explain subjective relationships (ibid.). Therefore, for those researchers using visual methods, adhering to such principles may render some research impossible particularly when operating within a youth-led participatory action framework. For that reason, the ethical issues were approached with a relative amount of flexibility.

#### **4.9.1 Reflexivity**

As a researcher reflexivity means to be consistently aware of what you are doing, why you are doing it, and the effects of your position in regards to power relations between yourself and the researched (Rose: 2007). However, as Holiday (2004) states, this assumes a stable identity that can be reflected upon. Instead, the relationship between researcher(s) and researched is shaped by discourses external to and in relation to each other (ibid.). As visual methods are the primary tools in this research, the dynamics of this relationship are more visible or open to greater scrutiny than if I was simply reciting the youth's perspectives because the voices and the images of both subjects and co-researchers "talk back". As rose states: "It is as if the veracity of the visual demands that due attention be paid to the research participants" (Rose: 2007, P. 253).

#### **4.9.2 Informed consent**

Informed consent in visual research is just as important as in text-based research and like all other potential participants, young people have a right to refuse or opt out of research at any time. In childhood studies permission of parents and other gatekeepers who provide access to children is also usually sought-after. In this research verbal agreements proved to be sufficient for the production and dissemination of images, for shooting videos and taking pictures in particular places. Given that most of those participants who made up the research team were juggling various projects and moneymaking ventures, and at least one of the team that I knew of had children, we established from the beginning that they could opt out and back in any time they wished. When collecting data in the field as a team, consent was an ongoing process.

During the planning and actual filming of the discussions and documentary, we informed all those taking part that they could opt out at any stage. This proved to be the case with one participant, who after twice agreeing to take part in the documentary, decided to opt out just before filming due to a reluctance to be on camera.

The African Union Youth Charter defines youth as people between the ages of 15-32 years. While the co-researchers and the majority of those in the images and videos fit into this category, the Billian Music Family footage involved young children. Therefore, in addition to gaining voluntary consent from the children themselves, we were granted permission from Billian, the children's mentor and the organisation's founder. He acts as gatekeeper when the children perform in public or record a music video. Like with all ethical guidelines, when approaching the issue of consent it is imperative that the researcher(s) takes the context of the research into account (Skovdal & Abebe: 2012). In this research we did not seek the consent of the children's parents because not only did we consider the children's and Billian's permission to be sufficient, but within the context of the "slum" attaining the approval of parents can be a major challenge. Locating children's parents can be difficult or impossible because they may be absent from their lives. Moreover, parents and children may have conflicting views about participating in the research, especially when using visual methods. Visual researchers have experienced a strong desire from children and young people to have their picture taken or to be on camera (Wiles et al: 2008), and my experience was no different. However, natural caregivers such as parents can suppress their children's desire to have their voices heard (ibid), which can be counterproductive when providing a platform for them to do so is the aim of the research.

In this research both the photographs and filmed data is taken and owned by the participant researchers, which raises different ethical issues. As the photographs and video footage are included in the dissemination of this research, consent had to be obtained from those who have copyrights (Wiles et al., 2008). The Mwelu youth members who took the photographs in the project are the copyright owners, thus through negotiation with the owner I was given permission to reproduce the photos in the publication of this work. Since the making of the documentary and filmed focus group discussions was a joint production, both the Mwelu youth members and I are the copyright owners. As such, I may use the footage where appropriate.

Considering that the Mwelu members were the photographers, I avoided any ethical issues that could have presented themselves were I to go into the “slum” myself and take the pictures. Sharing life histories with the majority of the young people in the “slum” and being recognised for taking regular pictures in the community meant that the photographers avoided any resistance while out shooting. Nevertheless, those in the images may not have consented to having their picture taken, and in many instances this could prove problematic. Like Skovdal & Abebe maintain, “the public nature of photography infringes on privacy and confidentiality” (2012, 84). Therefore, we agreed that the best way to avoid any potential repercussions was for the photographers to first consider the moral implications and potential risks that any shots could have before taking any pictures. Besides, those photographers involved in the project have been taking photographs at public places within the community for sometime now. They are therefore well-aware of what constitutes as morally inappropriate, harmful or potentially embarrassing.

#### **4.9.3 Anonymity and confidentiality**

Anonymity and confidentiality are the main ethical issues that we as visual researchers faced in the field. Anonymity and confidentiality are prominent ethical principles when carrying out research with young people (Alderson: 2004). However, the use of visual materials makes concealing the identity of individuals, groups or places difficult. One of the main reasons for employing visual methods in this research is because in my opinion visual images can reveal more than text alone. Here young people are using visual research methods within a participatory action-orientated framework in order to have their voices heard and their endeavours and the space they inhabit made visible. Young people often want to be fully recognised for the research data they produce and for their views and experiences (Alderson & Morrow: 2011). However, unfortunately young people are usually informed that for their own protection a pseudonym must be used (ibid.).

In the write-up of the research, those from the Mwelu Foundation, along with the founders and the leaders from the two youth groups in the documentary, expressed a desire to be represented by their actual names, since it is their research, after all. For all the other participants involved, they are represented in relation to the youth group they are part of. As for the actual data collection process and the use of visual

methods, we did not pixelate any images in order to hide the identity of participants. The research team, including myself and the participants, felt to do so is not only paternalistic, but is also inconsistent with regards to both the concept of action-orientated research and the use of the camera as a means of empowerment. Therefore, the photographs and footage of both the focus group discussions and documentary is presented in its entirety and in a manner that meets the young people's objectives.

As alluded to above, pixelating the images produced in the field would essentially serve to repudiate an individual or group's involvement in the research process and their role in influencing the outcome of the research (ibid.). However, the members of the research team may wish to use the produced images at a later date and this could present a problem as pictures and videos can end up on social networking forums or other Internet sites. Therefore, when applying the visual tools we considered the possible implications that a particular image could have for individuals, groups and the community as a whole. A key part of this process involved making sure we were aware of the political, social and cultural contexts in which the data will be viewed and interpreted (Young & Barrett: 2001).

When taking issues of anonymity into account, we had to pay as much attention to images of places as we did to images taken of people. Changing the name of a place is done to try and protect the identity of the field site and those who live and work there (Wiles et al: 2008). Images juxtaposed with text can be a lethal combination in reproducing particular representations of places (ibid.). The negative connotations associated with the "slum" means that visual images could be used as an accomplice to power in further perpetuating these stereotypes. In this research there was no need to hide the identity of our locations. Instead, when choosing the locations for shooting, we made every effort to fit the context behind the production to the place and also considered the implications that revealing particular images would have for those with any connection to a particular location.

## **Chapter Five: Political-economy of Youth Marginalisation**

### **5.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents a detailed analysis and discussion of the youths' lack of political and socio-economic participation. The participants consistently anchored different but interrelated, manifestations of marginality in terms of generational opposition and conflict. As such, I present a socio-generational analysis of the youths' perspectives. Also, by referring to the theoretical concepts presented in Chapter Three, I situate this analysis within a historically informed political-economy framework in order to demonstrate the complexity of the generational experience and youth marginalisation in Mathare. The structural, political and ideological factors inhibiting female participation are also presented.

### **5.1 Political participation**

Within African countries, the meaning and significance of political participation varies greatly. For example, within Kenya, the Kikuyu interpret their place as citizens primarily in relation to land, whilst the Maasai do so in terms of cattle (Chabal: 2009). The theme of political participation here is understood as the youth's position within and towards the country's political arena. This involves accounts of their attitudes towards local chiefs and elders and how they interpret the role of politicians and, more generally, the institutions of the state. The exclusion of youth from political and economic processes is the predominant theme emerging from their accounts on the immediate socio-cultural, economic and political challenges of "growing up" in Mathare. Listening to the accounts of the participants' lack of political participation and their complex relationship with those in power, it became clear they and the majority of their peers are simultaneously positioned as subject, client and citizen. Consequently, political participation here is not about youth as weakened subjects, irredeemable clients or disenfranchised citizens. Instead, it is about the ways in which these three forms of identity interact and how this plays out in terms of creating a sense of marginalisation. For young Kenyans, citizenship is central to political

identity. However, as we see below, there are a number of factors undermining this sense of belonging.

As attained in the theoretical discussion on political economy, looking at the level of political involvement in society and the public's view of political authority is part of the (formal) legitimacy question. The ways and levels at which the state engages its citizens in the governing of society constitutes a vital source of its legitimacy (Cox: 2002). Accordingly, the theme of political participation addressed is also about the degree in which young people's concerns are prioritized, their capacities acknowledged and voices heard, both nationally and at a local level.

### **5.1.1 Generational struggle for power**

As indicated in Chapter Four, Nelson Onyango and Eric Omwanda from the Mwelu Foundation were the ones facilitating the discussions:

**Q** Nelson: *Guys, you are aware of Mathare slum, we were born and raised in the slum, can you explain the political challenges that you face?*

Muoroto Insiders, participant 1: *Basically, youths do not have access to government offices; normally you will find the older generation is at the forefront. There are many things that come about, but we are not informed.*

Muoroto Insiders, youth 2: *Politicians have ranked themselves. Youths from the slum have their own leaders, but our youth leaders face challenges getting into government positions because they don't have the support.*

These two accounts from the Muoroto members show that young people in Mathare are excluded in the planning and implementation of programmes and policies affecting them and the community at large. Perspectives from focus group discussions conducted with youth by UN-Habitat for the *State of the Urban Youth* report, add further weight to what the youth from Mathare were saying about not being informed. When asked about the recently launched Nairobi Metro-2030 plan, which ministers argue will enhance the quality of life and increase levels of inclusiveness in the city (UN-Habitat 2010), the youths replied:

Vision 2030 is supposed to be for us but we don't know the details. I know they are talking about it in the media, but they do not ask us about it (2010, 83).

The politicians in Kenya are selfish. They don't listen to anybody except themselves. Even if young people have opinions about something, we sometimes don't bother, as we wonder who will listen to us anyway (ibid.).

These examples demonstrate a clear lack of political participation among youth, and must be understood within the context of the hostile generational battle for power in Kenya. The comment from the second Muoroto member that "politicians have ranked themselves" along with the latter statement that "the politicians are selfish" and don't "listen to anybody except themselves" indicate the interests; incentives and power at play here. In this sense, "youthhood" is shaped by the struggle for influence and authority within almost every society (Bayart: 1993, in Christiansen, Utas & Vigh: 2006). In order to fully understand youth in Mathare, it is vital not to dismiss the importance of indigenous inputs, and generational conflict as a socio-cultural phenomenon has long been a part of Kenyan society (see Nsamenang: 2002). However generational principles that existed in pre-colonial societies have been profoundly shaped by the colonial apparatus and rapid processes of change related to globalisation (Mwangola: 2007). Today, these generational principles underline the politics of youth participation and youth-state relationships in Kenya.

In Kenya, the life phases that determine one's social responsibilities, rights and level of political participation continue to be: childhood, youth, adulthood and elderhood. Traditionally, it was the older generation's responsibility to ensure that the younger generation was capable of assuming higher levels of responsibility once the time came (ibid.). Another significant feature of this indigenous socio-political tradition is that the advancement of the whole generation takes precedence over individual progress, with the commitment to an agreed vision serving as the key factor in determining generational affiliation, not age (ibid.).

This latter principle manifests today in those generations most politically active since independence, namely the Lancaster House Generation (LHG), the Lost Generation (LG) and the Uhuru Generation (UG) (Mwangola: 2007). Those affiliated

with the LHG and LG, respectively, were born before Kenya's independence. As such, the UG is considered to include the first people to be born Kenyan. Due to the politicisation of ethnicity during colonialism, those comprising the LHG and LG were either members of their ethnic "nations" or British subjects (Wambugu: 2012). As the Lancaster House Generation emerged politically in the final decade of British rule, their specific historical mission is associated with the gaining and consolidation of Kenya's independence (ibid.). However, the generation next in line has been prevented from achieving or even finding their mission by the LHG's desire to maintain their grip on power at all costs, which they have successfully managed to do for the first four decades of Kenya's independence.

The Lancaster House Generation used the first years of independence to strengthen its grip on power by first gradually shifting the ultimate socio-political authority, traditionally associated with elderhood, to adulthood (Mwangola: 2007). In doing so, they effectively removed any influence from the preceding generation (ibid.). Since then, it has remained resolute in its refusal to transfer power to its juniors and in maintaining its strategy of suppressing any attempts by the country's young people to lead a generational transfer of power (ibid.). Even today, as its members age physically, the LHG has gone back on promises to transfer power to the next generation. In its attempts to maintain its grip on power and retain the ultimate socio-political authority of the nation, the LHG has attempted to resurrect the division between the social categories of elderhood and adulthood (Mwangola: 2007). In doing so, under the leadership of current president Mwai Kibaki, LHG members advocated for the inauguration of a council of elders, which would see them become the ultimate moral authority over the nation even after they had left government (ibid.). This is in line with the comment from a young female participant that the "old guys" in power "want to be leaders forever." The proposal was eventually overturned on the basis that instituting such a council of elders would, in effect, allow those very leaders Kenyans were trying to get rid of to return to power "through the back door" (ibid.).

The concentration of power by the Lancaster House Generation was achieved with the assistance from and in collusion with bilateral and multilateral lenders (Murunga, 2007). Therefore, the exclusion of today's youth from decision-making processes must, in part, be understood within the context of the relations between the LHG and multilateral lenders in the 1980s and 1990s. Kenya's relationship with the World Bank and IMF was characterized by technocracy and technical fetishism

(Murunga, 2007). In pushing through their structural adjustment programs, donors depoliticised the reform process in Kenya by ignoring the wider public in favour of an undemocratic process in which negotiations were limited to a few technocrats who had little actual knowledge of the realities of daily living (ibid.). During the country's period of structural adjustment lending, World Bank and IMF policies were presented as sacrosanct and were passed with only the approval of technocrats and the president (ibid.). This approach contradicts donor rhetoric of participatory development, democracy and good governance, and significantly sets the tone for the lack of youth input in policies that inevitably have the most profound impact on their wellbeing. As El Mahdi states:

The modus operandi of the neoliberal technocratic approach is the insulation of decision-making, whereby policy-making becomes the realm of technocrats and 'experts', distancing it even further from different sectors of society. It is an approach that by definition excludes the less powerful from any possibility of directing public policy to their advantage (El Mahdi: 2012, 137).

The above discussion provides an early indication of the interplay of endogenous and exogenous forces in the construction of the Kenyan post-colonial state and the ramifications of this interaction for the country's youth. In this context, the term exogenous is used to describe the external forces at play, and the term endogenous refers to those influences that are distinctly internal. In this case, international aid and foreign capital has fuelled and transformed generational politics within the country. Both the foreign and the indigenous now coexist, conspiring to offer elder politicians countless opportunities, while at the same time severely limiting opportunities for youth.

All the youth groups who took part in the discussions are striving for more influence in matters that affect both theirs and the community's well-being. However, due to entrenched power dynamics and exploitative social relations that characterise the community, they are being strategically undermined. As such, youth groups are becoming increasingly disenchanted with so-called participatory processes. As Esther, Pauline and the participant from Manygro state on the factors shaping their involvement in politics and urban development initiatives:

Manygro member: *It's a challenge because we have the ideas, but since the elderly guys have the money, they grab your ideas and implement them as their own, so that's why we tend to keep the ideas to ourselves.*

Esther: *I may decide to vie for the youth leadership in 2012, but the old guys and the chairmen around will start fighting me, saying that I cannot make it. Instead of giving me the post to see if I can do it or not, and to look at how well I do before making their conclusions, they will just keep on fighting me.*

Pauline: *The youths have been undermined. If you want to become a leader, the old guys will say that youths don't have the quality and the wits to become leaders.*

Esther and Pauline's comments show how the older generation position youth as a vulnerable, incompetent and subordinated group, which is best co-opted by adults. Rather than acknowledging their capacities and being given responsibilities and a platform to prove their abilities, their voices are not taken into account and instead they are treated as trainee citizens. Such notions of "youthhood", while grounded in culturally informed understandings of childhood, have been shaped by the wider historical and social process associated with colonialism (Droz: 2009). Without going into the exact nature of colonial rule in Kenya - an analysis that is well beyond the scope of this work - it is important to recognize how the idea of the young subject imposed by colonialism has remade intergenerational relations and tensions in Kenya.

In addition to reinforcing the false association of young people with immaturity, colonial authorities foreground the idea of youth as *watu wa mkono* (handymen), "to be used to actualise the purposes of others" (Mwangola, 2007, p. 146). Given the reproduction of colonial hegemonies in the post-colonial state and the failure of the newly independent government(s) to properly divest the inherited political structure, youths have continued to be seen in this way, but with their position adjusted to fit the realities of post-colonial rule. This view of youth as handymen ties in with the above quotations where youth are equated with incompetence, or taken advantage of by elders with the political influence and resources to put plans into practice. It is also reflected in the formation of public policies such as the National Youth Service (NYS) and the presence of youth wings and politically backed gangs such as the

Mungiki (ibid.). The National Youth Service was established in 1964, and has since basically been charged with carrying out instructions ‘from above’ (GJLOS). As the NYS Act chapter 208 of the Laws of Kenya states, the function of the NYS is the “training of young citizens to serve the nation and the employment of its members in tasks of national importance and otherwise in the service of the Nation” (ibid.). Here we see a correlation to the development of European nation states from the seventeenth-nineteenth centuries (Lee: 2001), in the sense that like its western counterparts, the Kenyan state sees young people as investments, to be nurtured for state purposes and ambitions.

### **5.1.2 Connection and reciprocity**

Mwangola (2007) describes how aside from being “handymen”, the only other viable means of gaining access to the post-colonial political arena has been either as a “political son” or apprentice of an influential older political heavyweight. Evidently, this is the background of current Prime Minister Raila Odinga, his deputy Uhuru Kenyatta and other ‘Young Turks’<sup>11</sup> who, during the multiparty era, made their mark supporting the agendas of elder statesmen (ibid.).

The position of youth presented so far demonstrates how young people in Mathare and Kenya in general continue to be subjects. As Chabal (2009) states, the main characteristics of subjecthood are the combination of dependency, arbitrariness and violence that is conveyed in relation to a political master. For the young people of Mathare, political participation is precarious and characterized by manipulation and, at times, violence. This is especially the case during elections, when politicians looking to serve their own ends use the lower classes as mere political pawns. As the following accounts from the Muoroto member and the young voice from UN-Habitat’s *State of the Urban Youth* report affirm:

Muoroto Insider member: *These politicians nowadays they play mind games. They know if they come with money to the slum, they will buy people’s votes, but*

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<sup>11</sup> The ‘Young Turks’ were actually not that young. Their ages ranged from between 40 and 50 years of age at the onset of the multiparty era in 1992. However, they were considered as ‘youth’ in a cultural hierarchy, which deemed them to be the continuation of a political tradition that defined them as the legitimate heirs of those ‘political fathers’ whom they served, and from whom they seek approval in future political careers (Mwangola: 2007).

*after the elections, the politicians forget what they promised.*

Young Voices from Nairobi: Politicians are interested in young people only at election time. They give 500 shillings each, and we believe it is the best thing ever. It is for young people to realise the power they can have. The things the politicians promised during election campaigns they have not yet delivered on them. We must find channels to hold them accountable (UN-Habitat: 2010, 84).

One participant voiced how the “culture of selling votes” started with the older generation and now young people have become “assimilated into this system”. Again, this perspective points to the interplay of external and internal factors in shaping the lives of young people in contemporary Africa. Kenyan politicians gain power through the use of ethnic arithmetic and clientage, whether articulated openly or not (Mueller: 2008). This has been termed as neo-patrimonial. During colonialism, traditional patrimonial networks interwove with western legal-rational bureaucratic institutions. With decolonisation came the de facto institutionalisation of informality, with politicians seeking legitimacy through clientelism. However, Chabal (2009) argues that clientelism has become divorced from pre-colonial moral attributes; instead, for politicians it is now more about the need to appropriate and appease as large a clientele as possible.

The notion of a “political son” or “apprentice” mentioned above is in line with the participants’ argument that political participation is highly dependent on connections. While young people in Kenya may indeed still be subjects, they are, at the same time, clients. Young people seek a solid commitment from the state to better include them in political processes. However, given that they have little confidence in politicians and the institutions of the state, they must seek other avenues for securing identity and expressing political opinion, with patron-client networks proving the most viable. The young people I met find themselves in a Catch-22 situation. They are cynical towards the informal systems of power, yet these systems are essential in providing them with a sense of belonging, for protection, gaining access to resources and in determining their social status. As I will demonstrate further in the discussion on socio-economic participation, in the absence of state legitimacy, patrons provide young people with the necessities of citizenship. As the comment below reveals, disconnection deepens one’s sense of marginalisation and can mean the youth agenda remains relegated to

the periphery of public attention.

Manygro member: *The person who has the money is the one the people will vote for. But the person with the vision to build the community and for the youth will be pushed aside because they don't have the money. I hope this time around we will make a change!*

### 5.1.3 Ethnicity

Nelson asked the participants how social class and ethnicity affect young people in the community. They revealed that, because of an inherited distrust of other ethnicities, community youth groups are forged along ethnic lines. This makes it almost impossible for them to build the type of intra-generational solidarity needed to find and fulfil their generation's historical mission. As the two participants below state:

Muoroto member: *That's (ethnicity) what has been the source of our problems and lack of peace. Even the groups that the youth form are based on tribalism. You will get that 90% of group A is Luo and Luhya and the next group is 90 percent Kikuyu, and the other group is Kamba, that's what causes tribalism. Another thing: our parents will ask us not to associate with certain people so you grow up knowing that a certain tribe is your enemy, which is not true.*

Muoroto member 3: *Just the other day there was a guy from the other ethnic group, people wanted to stone him to death but we stepped in and even though he was not from our tribe, we fought for him and they stopped.*

Manygro member: *Even when you look at the way we live, the set-up of Mathare, you will find that one area is dominated by the Luo tribe, another Kikuyus, another Kamba, these things are there.*

This distrust in other ethnic groups has its roots in colonialism. In Kenya, the British used a policy of divide and rule as a means of gaining and maintaining power. In implementing the divide and rule practices, colonial authorities produced deep-seated

tribalism, legitimizing distrust among different ethnic groups as a tool to suppress any potential uprisings (Mamdani: 1996). The actions of Kenyan politicians in the run-up to, during and after the 2007 elections, mirror the divide and rule strategy. Ethnicity is perceived to be paramount in determining the distribution of national resources. A winner takes all view of political power ignites amongst all groups the fear of losing and missing out on their turn to eat (Mueller: 2008). This is why politicians are able to use ethnicity negatively in the run-up to elections and why supporters are willing to use any means to get their respective leaders into power. However, from my informal conversations with the youth from the Mwelu Foundation it became even clearer that having one of “your own” in power does not necessarily lead to a transformation in fortunes.

#### **5.1.4 Participation in a “mans world”**

In regards to female participation, Eric asked the young men from Muoroto what the situation is like in the community. Nelson posed the same question to the female group for their perspectives:

*Q Eric: When a lady wants to become involved, as a community how do we take it?*

*Muoroto Insiders member 4: When a lady comes to talk to us many youths will not listen to her. I have heard many people saying that no lady can lead us in Kenya.*

*Muoroto Insiders member 3: We have many youth groups around, like Muoroto Insiders (them), which don't have ladies and this shows that the ladies are reluctant for change. They take themselves to be inferior.*

From the second response we can discern that the lack of young women's involvement in youth groups has created the impression among some male youth in Mathare that women are reluctant for change. However, I would argue that rather than being reluctant for change, women's apparent silence and lack of action is a reflection of their scepticism about becoming involved in groups that have predominantly male values. As Fatton and the female perspectives on the capacity to organise in a male-

dominated environment show:

This is not to say that women fail to resist and protest, but that their resistance and protest are easily co-opted or suppressed by the structural, political, and ideological powers of male supremacy (Fatton: 1989, p. 54).

Mathare Girls member 3: *When new youth groups are set up, it is said that we ladies can't participate much or come up with important ideas, so males are given more opportunities compared to us.*

Mathare Girls member 2: *Boys say that girls are lazy [...] that's why the boys take the advantage and say that it is hard to work with girls.*

In addition, in situations of economic restructuring and deep-seated inequality; the burden of household poverty is borne mostly by women, a phenomenon referred to as the *feminisation of poverty* (UNIFEM: 2005). As such, women's struggle for "daily bread" takes precedence over everything else, leaving little time and resources for political participation. This runs parallel with young women's own perceived lack of education, knowledge and political awareness. In Kenya, education has primarily been reserved for males. As such, the disproportionate access to education is a key factor explaining young women's under-representation in political processes. To put this under-representation into context, at the time of writing women's representation in parliament stood at just 9.8%, ranking Kenya 118<sup>th</sup> in the world.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, it's the type of education girls receive that severely undervalues their role in society. Gender inequalities become entrenched through the major institutions of society. For Kenyan girls, the school curriculum is structured around their future roles as mothers and wives and the acceptance of male power as the norm (Nasong'o & Ayot, 2007). As both the participant from Mathare and Wanja the barmaid in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* reveal:

Mathare Girls member 4: *Just to add further to that, you may find that if we*

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<sup>12</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union: <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>

*come together and form a group, some of us may feel that we are not well educated like the others, so what common thing can we talk about, maybe the things that they are talking about I won't understand. Others are too busy, maybe because they have a child, so they end up looking for something else to do so that they can get food for the child, rather than sitting there, which they see as wasting time.*

But boys were always more confident about the future than us girls. They seemed to know what they wanted to become later in life, whereas with us girls the future seemed vague [...] it was as if we knew that no matter what efforts we put into our studies, our road led to the kitchen and the bedroom” (Thiong’o: 1977, p. 37).

The above discussion and perspectives on female participation demonstrate that while youth share common challenges as members of the same social category of “youthhood”, experiences of one’s affiliation to this generational location differ greatly. Entrenched gender dynamics present young women with their biggest obstacle to a greater sense of belonging and agency within this generation’s mission. The systematic political marginalisation of young women in Mathare reflects the gendered nature of the post-colonial state and again must be understood within the context of the historical transformation of indigenous practices and values by external processes. The social division of labour, which leads to the cultural perception that the role of women is primarily to be wives and mothers, the rigid increased dichotomisation of the public and private spheres that confines women to domesticity, and the social construction of politics as a man’s game, are all legacies of British colonialism actively perpetuated by the post-colonial political elite (Nasong’o & Ayot, 2007).

While a sexual division of labour did exist in pre-colonial Kenya, the roles were more complementary than hierarchical. Women were politically involved on both a formal and informal basis. They had their own political, cultural and economic institutions and were greatly respected as mothers, wives and breadwinners, as well as creators and disseminators of indigenous knowledge (Kandiyoti, 1998 cited in Nasong’o & Ayot, 2007). Not until the introduction of capitalism and the penetration of Victorian notions of women’s role in society was the idea of public men and

private women established (ibid.).

Women were also heavily involved in the nationalist struggle. Independence would not have been achieved were it not for the active participation of women (Kinyatti, 1997 cited in Nasong'o & Ayot, 2007). However, despite being an integral part of the uprising, women were not included in the negotiations for independence. All negotiations took place between the British authorities and elite male politicians (Nasong'o & Ayot: 2007). This prevented women from having a vital say in redefining the political structure. The independent constitution provided the ideal framework for the establishment of a political system based on authoritarian over-centralised state structures, which engendered male dominance in all aspects of society and made it almost impossible for women to secure a visible political voice (ibid.).

## **5.2 Socio-economic participation**

Unemployment, unequal distribution of employment opportunities and resources and work itself, all dominate the lives of youth in Mathare as they seek to obtain economic independence and the social mobility that goes with it. For example, almost all of the images taken by the team of photographers were of young people involved in some kind of informal work. The pictures of the alternative sources of income for youth include: the cooking and selling of mandazi (a form of fried bread), young cart pullers, the repair and sale of second-hand shoes, a carpentry workshop, the recycling of waste, and, the brewing of Chang'aa. The selling of *Githeri*, (a maize and bean mixture), shown top left in Figure 6, is a familiar job in the "slums" of Mathare. It is mostly women who sell this staple but due to a lack of work opportunities more and more young men are becoming involved in this income-generating activity. This points to the urban transformation of economic behaviour. The images presented below also reveal the diversity of young people's livelihood strategies and the importance of these strategies for identity formation, which is discussed in more detail in Chapter Six.



**Figure 6: Different forms of informal employment in the “slums”.**

**Source: Mwelu Foundation**

Staying with the socio-psychological significance of work for youth, Nelson told me that he established a poultry business because he wanted “clean money” rather than “doing negative things”. This demonstrates the feeling of self-worth that work gives young people in overcoming low self-esteem and the negatives connotations associated with living in the “slum”. Nelson says he gained his business acumen and knowledge of how to raise chickens from his mother and from helping relatives with their work. This demonstrates that while there are generational tensions and power struggles that seem to keep youth on the margins, there also exists strong and positive reciprocal relationships and patterns of knowledge and skills transmission, which enable young people to overcome certain challenges and get ahead.

However, the general perception among the youth in Mathare is that job opportunities are usually for the “old people” and that urban development initiatives

are primarily a means for the chiefs and elders in the community to acquire wealth and power. The participants revealed how an unequal distribution of state resources and the failure of resources to “trickle down” to the youth through patronage networks reinforce the interests of those with power in the community. The youth’s condemnation of how their elders obtain wealth and opportunities is clear to see in the fascinating response to Eric’s question on generational power struggles:

*Manygro member: For example in regards to the toilets constructions, you will find that the village elder is the store man, he is also the guy who employs people to work, and at the same time he is the watchman (Nelson laughs). So if he takes everything, what are we left with! When you want to object, you have to go to the chief and by then they have already divided what it is they have with the chief (Nelson and other youth’s laugh). Sometimes the government releases maize to help those who are poor in the slum but you will find that the maize helps the chief and the chairman. The food that the children’s homes require is taken by the chief, he will take it to his home, and also to the chairman’s (Nelson laughs again). So it seems the government cares for them a lot. The government should establish strategies that offer the youth groups such kind of opportunities.*

In 2005, the Kenyan government set up the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports in order to better include young people in national development (UN-Habitat: 2011). In 2009, in response to the post-election violence and high levels of youth unemployment, the ministry launched the ‘Kazi Kwa Vilana’, work for young people initiative (ibid.). The scheme focused on providing young people with work in community projects such as harvesting, road repair, cleaning of informal settlements and planting trees (ibid.). However, the majority of Kenya’s youth are disillusioned with the programme due to its poor implementation, corruption and lack of accountability (Thieme: 2010). The work is temporary, with no prospect for skill-development and it is characterised by low and late pay. Moreover, the work is labour-intensive, leaving many young women at a disadvantage. Therefore most of the country’s youth today refer to the programme as Pesa Kwa Wazee, which means work for youth-money for old (ibid.).

The participants from Muoroto emphasise the community's failure to provide young people with a "humble environment" and spaces with which to start their own businesses. Moreover, they explained that in some cases, both elders and their peers within the community use their power to destroy what little space they have to generate an income. For example, an elderly woman who, despite owning several business ventures and buildings, tried to burn down the toilets that Muoroto maintain and take an income from. The participant's put this down to greed, jealousy and power:

Muoroto member: *she came from a distance and tried to burn the toilets because she is wealthy and capable of doing everything.*

Manygro member: *A young person can start a business, but then his peers will come and destroy all his hard work, not because he is your enemy but because this guy fears that you will be successful.*

The anger from this particular group of youth is line with Comaroff and Comaroff's argument that many young men in Africa situate their most pressing challenges in the greed of their elders. As Vigh cites in his discussion of young men's life chances in Guinea-Bissau:

The hardening materialities of life have placed youth in an especially marginal position, and as a result rather than the more familiar axes of social division - class, race, gender, ethnicity - the dominant line of cleavage here has become one of generation (Comaroff & Comaroff: 1999, 284, cited in Vigh: 2006, 38).

James was proud to tell me how he has been completely independent for 2 years now. Furthermore his claim to adult status is strengthened by the fact that he earns extra money in order to support dependent family members, both young and old. This again reflects how "youthhood" is intertwined with issues of power, authority and social worth. Also, how young people can be simultaneously positioned as youth and adult, just as adults and children can move - and are moved - back and forth between different generational positions and expectations (Christiansen, Utas & Vigh: 2006).

Similarly, despite his slight regret of having to go back to his parents for meals,

Eric is also proud to have acquired his own place. However, the lack of employment opportunities is one of the main reasons for the deep sense of exclusion and inequality among many youth in Mathare and Kenya in general. Due to the lack of employment prospects, many young Africans find themselves unable to fulfil social adulthood: marry, set up a household, start their own family and have children. My first visit to Africa was 7 years ago. I had just turned 26, and I distinctly remember a group of young South African men offering me their condolences after I had told them I wasn't married and didn't have children. To them I was not yet a man. Marriage and having children is considered to be the foundation for masculine identity in Africa. As Manuri states in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood*, "your first act of manhood was to impregnate a woman" (1977, 94).

For many young men in Ethiopia, widespread urban unemployment has meant the social category of youth has been greatly extended and is no longer considered a transitional stage (Mains: 2011). In Guinean Society the word *blufo* is used in reference to young men who are symbolically stuck in the position of youth with no possibilities of "ever becoming someone" (Vigh: 2006). When structural changes make the transition from childhood to adulthood almost impossible, then one's existence as a youth has the potential to become indefinite (Cole: 2005). As Vigh (2006, 32) states, this state of being "forever young" "is the nightmare of any young man in Bissau yet close to being the predicament of a whole generation".

Like with political marginality, the socio-economic marginality of youth is an outcome of socio-cultural representations of young people as trainee citizens, incompetent and in need of adult supervision. Moreover, like with political participation, connections and the ability to negotiate the informal systems of power determine employment and socio-economic mobility.

*Q Nelson: We've talked a lot about the political, what about the economical bit? The youth are idle in the streets and they are equipped with knowledge, what's your take on this?*

*Manygro Youth Member 2: In Kenya, if you don't have a godfather you won't find a job. Your father or cousin or any relative has to be well-connected for you to get a job. You have the required skills and you are also a graduate, but you won't get a job if you don't have someone up there holding your hand. And*

*if you don't have the money to bribe people with, it will be hard for you.*

Participant 1 from the young voices project: *“It depends on a whole lot of issues, like what type of school you go to and who you know. I feel it is about who you know or who you are connected to. The biggest problem is awareness and if you know certain people, you get to know about certain things. (Employment opportunities) are really influenced by your background (UN-Habitat: 2010, 47).*

For many youth in Mathare their social and economic situation is contingent on their ability to mobilise support from a wealthy patron or “godfather” to whom they have some kind of affinity. Such connections are central to making it and getting ahead in the “slum”. As Vigh (2006) points out, even though this relationship maybe unequal or exploitative, negative reciprocity at least provides youth with the opportunities to improve their lives and acquire social capital. As the comments from the Manygro member shows, the education system develops and fuels specific economic expectations among youth, but without the right connections the avenues of opportunity can be extremely difficult to navigate or seem completely blocked. As Mains (2011, 9) points out on the socio-economic experiences of youth in Ethiopia, “hope is cut when the realities that youth encounter after graduation differ from their expectations”.

It can be argued that there is a link of causality between the neopatrimonial state and the creation of spaces of exclusion for both educated and uneducated unemployed youth. For some organisations, neopatrimonialism is seen simply as corruption. Transparency International defines corruption as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain<sup>13</sup>. As part of an investigation on corruption in Kenya, Transparency International Kenya shows that 67% of Kenyans surveyed revealed that interactions with public officials required bribes, and that 75% of those considered to be the most vulnerable said they were forced to pay bribes (Sheehan: 2002, 13). The toll of the constant necessity to pay bribes is the heaviest to bear for those who are the most vulnerable. As Isaac Mburu, a resident of Nairobi’s Mtumbu “slum”, states: “when you take a complaint to a local authority employed by the government, if you go

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<sup>13</sup> [http://www.transparency.org/whoweare/organisation/faqs\\_on\\_corruption](http://www.transparency.org/whoweare/organisation/faqs_on_corruption)

without cash, you won't be served" (ibid.).

An independent fact-finding mission to Kenya in 2000 concluded that the "land and housing situation is characterized by forced evictions, misallocation of public land and rampant land grabbing through bureaucratic and political corruption" (ibid.). In response to Nelson's question on the differences in opportunities between the past generation and urban youth today, the participants were categorical that nepotism and corruption are among their greatest hurdles to gaining employment. These perspectives, shown below, correspond with findings from UN-Habitat's research (2010) on equal access and equity in Nairobi.

*Q Nelson: The older generation had their opportunities, we have ours, so what's the difference do you think between the two generations?*

*Mathare Girls Group member 1: These old guys are used to being bribed. Maybe you have gone innocently to look for a job, they will expect you to give them money after talking to them and maybe you don't have it [...] there is a lot of corruption.*

*Manygro member 2: In the past, people were forcefully recruited into the army whether they liked it or not. These days, people go with bribes amounting to KES 200,000, but they still don't get the opportunity. They bribe to get the job...*

*Manygro member 1: ...and you might get arrested for bribery and get jailed.*

*Manygro member 2: You forge all the papers, you have given out bribes and at the last minute you get arrested.*

Youth from Kawangware "slum": "There have been several cases where qualified people were denied the chances and incompetent people with no experience were hired because of corruption. Some girls with college educations are sometimes forced into sexual relations with their bosses to get jobs. Boys are not exempt either. A neighbour of mine wanted to get a job. The manager was a lady and she said she wanted to invite him somewhere. Sometimes you are asked to bring bribes. Things are not cheap in Kenya. The government

should provide a place where young people can go for help” (UN-Habitat: 2010, 47).

These accounts reveal the disdain young people have for the system. Moreover, the comments demonstrate just how firmly entrenched corruption is in Kenyan society and the level at which it determines the conditions in which young people live. The youths we spoke to, argued further that corruption and ethnicity intersects to act as a means of legitimate exclusion. They assert that whether a young person is successful in finding employment is determined by their ethnic affiliation and the ability of non-insiders to be able to offer a bribe:

*Mathare Girls member 4: You can go to look for a job, then people who are responsible for the management may demand a bribe because of ethnic difference. If you don't bribe them they will offer the job to his or her tribe.*

*MANYGRO member 1: I was in a banking hall with my friend and I was wondering how come everybody working here is a Luo. The Person serving you is Luo, the next one is also Luo, and they are all talking Luo in the office. I was wondering, is every employee here a Luo? Is this co-operative branch for Luos? If you go to Equity (bank), you will get a different tribe. So this situation is deeply rooted, it's deeply rooted.*

This latter comment corresponds with results released in 2011 from the first audit of ethnic composition of Kenya's civil service; the five largest ethnic groups (Kikuyu, Kalenjin, Luhya, Kamba and Luo) occupy 70% of all civil service jobs (Kwaka et al.: 2011). This review, carried out by the NCIC claims that “political patronage and ethnocentric leadership has reduced the civil service into a reserve of the big communities at the expense of the so-called small communities” (Kwaka: 2011, p.13).

## Chapter Six: Navigating “Marginality”

Navigation is centred on both the near and far, a here and a there. When navigating we imagine and actualise a path through unstable terrains, simultaneously moving across the next obstacle or wave and negotiating the many more to come on one way along an envisioned course (Vigh: 2006, 54).

### 6.0. Introduction

In looking at how youth in the community of Mathare navigate their social, economic and political marginality, this chapter shifts the emphasis from struggle and youth as victims, to youth agency and their manifestations of power. Drawing on the empirical material from the field the chapter elaborates on three key perspectives: a) the concept of extending space, b) an analysis and discussion on aspirations, recognition and identity formation, and c) the notion of youth “marginality” as opportunity.

### 6.1. Extending space

As discussed in the sampling section of the methodology chapter, one of the groups that feature in the documentary is Manygro. Their activities include waste management, urban farming initiatives, community cleaning services and the provision of basic amenities such as water and toilet facilities. The other group is the Billian Music Family, which engages young people in what the leader of the group calls “doing positive music”. Dennis Otieno and local artist Billian Okoth are the founding members of Manygro and the Billian Music Family respectively. Interestingly, after describing the activities, role and stature of their respective groups, without being prompted by a specific question and the discussions taking places at different times, Dennis and Billian concluded with almost identical sentiments, of which follow:

*Dennis Otieno: I cannot say that I can leave this job for any other because so far all the other jobs I haven't seen. I like this job I'm doing because it gives me the time to do other things. It also gives me an income, which sustains me and it*

*also gives me exposure, whereby we go for exchange programs. At these exchange programs we meet many people and we exchange ideas.*

*Billian: I can never leave this job for another job, unless its adding value to what I'm doing now, I can never leave this.*

These statements reveal that while there is a lack of formal employment opportunities for young people in Nairobi, rather than simply being forced into informal or self-employment, young people are actively choosing an informal mode of life. This mode of life opens up space for possible work, is more flexible and allows them to navigate opportunities that arise. In African cities where the majority of the residents work in the informal sector, the young people who appear to be loitering on the streets are in fact discussing moneymaking strategies or the prices and availability of specific commodities. As Sommers (2010, 8) states: “this is not idle chat – it is crucial information in a changing and extremely competitive economic environment”.

Mlango Kubwa from Mathare Environmental Youth Group states that “self employment is freedom. You are not someone else’s donkey, enriching someone else’s enterprise. You work for yourself and treat your own workers (the guys you grew up with) as partners” (cited in Thieme: 2010, 349). Youths like Dennis and Billian choose an informal way of life in order to extricate themselves from limiting spaces such as the “modern” work place and from the restrictions and norms imposed by the state and their elders. Their comments do not imply a lack of and disengagement from “modernity”. They are keeping their options open, keeping themselves open to new connections and sources of information. It is part of a strategy to create what Hooks (1983) calls spaces of radical openness. As Simone’s work on youth circulation in Cameroon indicates, it points to a set of tactics that youth employ to try to free themselves from a range of political controls “whose purveyors are often content to maintain youth in a state of developmental suspension so as to better manipulate them” (2005, 520).

Eric Omwanda from the Mwelu Foundation writes voluntarily for Liberation, a quarterly newspaper that is part of an independent media production and skills exchange project between Liberation Cooperative Organisation (LCO) in Toronto and LCO in Mathare. Eric calls it “independent media for the community by the

community”, with the young contributors giving their perspectives on both world and local issues. This alternative space of political expression grew out of youth disenchantment with mainstream media. The newspaper has a local audience, but is also distributed in Canada. Thus, through their writing these youths are effectively building alliances and extending the space of Mathare across boundaries.

Eric aspires to become an established writer and start his own newspaper. He cites Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong’o as sources of inspiration and says his work for liberation enables him to network and reach people in society. Like Eric, James Otieno also has his own side endeavours. Away from the Mwelu Foundation he does camera work and editing for Slum TV in Kibera, Mathare and Sinai slums. In addition, Eric and James undertake “independent jobs” together. Using the Mwelu Foundation as a platform Eric and James do the “commercial beat”, shooting events such as weddings, birthdays and funerals. They told me that in order to obtain the jobs they use “the women technique”, which involves going to church and speaking with women in order to get them to “spread the word” about what they do and offer. Eric and James’ orchestration of this specific technique is representative of the “ritualised” performances among marginalised urban youth in sub-Saharan Africa. However, in this particular context, ritual should not be understood as the aimless repetition of fixed, inflexible patterns of action, but rather as a formula of performances through which spaces are fashioned and new states of feeling and connection are created (Appadurai: 2004).

Based on the previous chapter’s analysis of the exclusion of youth from major political and socio-economic processes, it would be easy to assume that the youth from Mathare occupy a trapped space, stuck in “no man’s land” between childhood and adulthood, “traditional” and “modern”. Moreover, that they are socially incapacitated on the account of their financial status, which prevents them from acquiring a house, getting married and having children. As De Boeck and Honwana state:

For many young people in Africa, the possibilities of becoming seem constantly curtailed by cultural, political, and economical constraints that work hegemonically to pin them down to localised place and imprison them in a precarious and fragile state of being (2005, p. 7).

In places that are considered unhealthy or dangerous like “slums”, it is generally assumed that people establish small spaces of order as a means of coping with the insalubrious or insecure conditions that surround them (Simone: 2005). As such, the everyday realities of urban youth in Africa are commonly perceived to be a tedious routine of incessant improvisation required to make ends meet. Furthermore, it is believed that in their attempts to overcome their marginality they strive for a fixed and manageable space of operation (ibid.). However, we can discern from the above narratives and perspectives that they actually strive to free themselves from such constrictive spaces.<sup>14</sup>

Within Mathare itself, young people are extending the “slum’s” space through a number of innovative ways. For example, in pursuing their overlooked claims to public space, services and resources, the youth from Manygro are reclaiming misused land for the cultivation of various crops. They use a method called multi-storey gardening in order to further utilise and rework the limited space. As reflected by the number of urban farming initiatives among the 2011 applications for the UN-Habitat Urban Youth Fund, urban farming has now become an obvious means of action for marginalised groups of youth. Through multi-story gardening, youth in Mathare are not only diversifying space but also forming “new spaces”. Through these newly created spaces they connect with the wider community by providing essential goods and also enhance their social and economic mobility by extending the possibilities for engaging in productive forms of economic activity. As one member states in describing the group’s agricultural project:

*Initially this was a dumping site and we decided to reclaim it and beautify it and make good use of it. We have a variety of plants; we have sugarcane, kales, onions, spinach and some indigenous crops. They help us a lot as members and also the residents of this area both for the selling of food and as our food.*

Manygro’s urban farming project also involves the controlled cultivation, management and production of chickens and domestic rabbits. In addition to providing a steady source of income, their raising of poultry and domestic rabbits exemplify the vast possibilities that micro-livestock husbandry offers for increasing

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<sup>14</sup> These constricted spaces of operation in which youth strive to free themselves may also include adulthood. This is discussed further in the sub-chapter on marginality as opportunity.

meat and food production in poverty-stricken urban areas such as Mathare. The chickens produce meat and eggs at a low cost and provide the community with a crucial nutritional resource. Furthermore, due to the rabbits' high reproductive capacity, a single male and four females can produce up to 3,000 offspring a year, which translates into 1,450kg of meat - as much as an average sized cow (OIA: 1991). With land at a premium within the "slum", the group's choice of animals demonstrates their efficient use of space, as the handling and feeding of the rabbits and chickens requires small physical space. Economically, micro-livestock such as these require little financial investment and offer minimal risk. They are easily transported, provide flexibility and offer the group a fast return on their investment.

Manygro is also involved in the acquisition, management and provision of basic services such as water. Two local women interviewed for the documentary stressed the important role the youths play in providing these necessities, which were either too expensive or unavailable in that particular part of the community. In Nairobi access to clean water is extremely unequal, with only 3% of slum-dwellers having access to public taps.<sup>15</sup> The lack of municipal services in areas such as Mathare means that the poor pay up to eight times more for unsafe water purchased from informal vendors (known as the "water mafia") than the middle-class pays for clean water obtained from the utility companies.<sup>16</sup>

The lack of access to toilets in informal settlements presents inhabitants with significant dangers and health risks. The high incidence of open defecation in "slums", especially among children, remains one of the key issues of concern in contemporary urban development and the health status of the population (Thieme: 2010). In Kenya 69% of the total population lacks access to a safe and hygienic toilet or latrine.<sup>17</sup> Such numbers are symptomatic of the diarrhoeal diseases that globally kill more people than AIDS and malaria combined (George: 2008). In an attempt to mitigate this problem, the Manygro youth group have set up a public toilet, providing the community in which they are active with their only source of public convenience. The group charges 3 Kenyan shillings (KES) per use. This may seem like a lot considering that the average income of the residents in Mathare is between KES 100 and KES 300 a day (Thieme: 2010). However, members of the group argue this is a

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.wash-united.org/countries/kenya.html>

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

nominal rate considering the costs of maintaining the toilet.

Another way in which Manygro is “extending space” in Mathare is through garbage collection. Solid waste is highly visible in and around Mathare. Piles of refuse (and excrement) provide a space for children to play, defecate and search for bits of food. Manygro collect the garbage in and around Mathare every Sunday for a fee of 10 Kenyan shillings. They also unblock and clean the “slum’s” overflowing open-drainage channels and once a week they involve other youth groups and the wider community in a major clean-up, which is usually free of charge. One of the groups involved in the weekly clean-up is Mathare Ghetto Transformers. The group crochets handbags and purses from strips of recycled plastic bags, which they find in abundance during the weekly collection of refuse. The finished product displays the group’s initials and is sold locally and nationally. Like Manygro, Mathare Ghetto Transformers are “extending space” by reclaiming and organising misused spaces in such a way that they produce added value. The project is also another example of the economic and political avenues through which the “slum” and the concept of youth is being constructively brought back into the consciousness of urban life. As Simone states on the possibilities of urban life in Cambodia:

Residential territories get to be known as the sphere of a particular identity. So in addition to the wide diversity of livelihood practices relied upon by residents (and typical of low-income and poor urban communities), certain symbolic economies come to the fore that have particular constraints, values and possibilities in terms of the relationship of a specific locality to the larger city (Simone: 2008, 7).





**Figure 7: Mathare Ghetto Transformers turning waste into value.**

**Source: Mwelu Foundation.**

It can be deduced from the examination of these day-to-day activities that youth agency in Mathare, and “slums” in general, is a combination of enterprise, politics and service. Through the urban farming initiatives, community-cleaning services, garbage collection and the provision of clean water, the youth of Mathare are engaging with the broader politics of basic services. As well as offering a sustainable livelihood, these grassroots initiatives are a form of environmental consciousness, a critique of “modernity” and they fill a huge vacuum left by the state (see also Thieme: 2010).

## **6.2. Aspirations, recognition and identity formation**

The newly created and expanded spaces of engagement presented above, through which dominant discourses of power are being challenged, overlap with cultural spaces where young people are fashioning identity and belonging (see also Hansen: 2008). In refuting the idea that culture is a hindrance to development, Appadurai (2004) asserts that it is through culture that aspirations are embedded and nurtured. The different ways in which the youth imagine their own future and apply vision to their strategies and endeavours is central to navigating their socio-economic and political marginality. As Appadurai (2004) maintains, a culture of aspiration is a ‘navigational capacity’ in that it provides a map of norms leading to future success.

Eric Omwanda from the Mwelu Foundation stresses the need for youth to envision their own potential in their quest to secure economic independence (Omwanda: 2011). However, the analysis and discussion on female participation in the previous chapter shows that due to unequal opportunities, a lack of resources and their relative positioning in society, many urban youth find themselves in an

*aspiration trap* unable to foresee the potential unfolding of their ambitions. A large proportion of the Youth in the “slum” have a negative perception of themselves because of where they live and therefore try to hide their identity. Exacerbated by “peer pressure from all over”, which I also take to mean the ever-increasing speed of commodities, images and cultural changes associated with globalization, 22 year-old Billian Okoth explained how many of the local youth struggle to balance the desire of wanting immediate money, status and material possessions with the need for patience. Furthermore, that upon finding themselves caught in an *aspiration trap* many of the local youths begin to lose focus and therefore end up not knowing what to do, resulting in a heightened sense of marginality. For that reason, various young actors such as Billian are individually and collectively creating and nurturing organisational spaces to provide other youths with a sturdier social and psychological anchor with which to resist and address the challenges of exclusion and marginalisation. As one member states:

*I joined the Billian Music Family at the beginning. I have benefited in terms of management instead of loitering in the streets, which comes with negatives. When we go there it is always all about training. I urge the children who are talented to join us because the Billian Music Family nurtures talent.*

Nelson Otieno told me that he joined the Mwelu Foundation because in his opinion the organisation provides a stepping-stone towards broadening one’s knowledge and gaining exposure. During our interview he stated that: “somebody needs to teach you how to walk, but you should not have them walking with you. That’s why it’s about leaving the foundation and giving others a chance”. The statement encapsulates his and the other participant’s notion of progress and development. It is a critique of their supervision by elders and also the supervision of Kenya and Africa by the West.

Nelson’s statement also points to the desire for recognition among young people in Mathare. Eric expressed that many youth groups and projects in Mathare do not receive any recognition from the authorities. He argues that youth-owned projects will only bear fruit if they receive full recognition from “the older people” (Omwanda: 2011). Changing the terms of recognition is part of enhancing the overall capacity to aspire among youth in the community. Attaining better cultural recognition gradually enhances redistribution (Appadurai: 2004). Changing the terms of recognition is what

the Mwelu foundation, the Billian Music family, Manygro and other like-minded groups are doing. They are progressively rearranging the socio-cultural framework. As Dennis Otieno from Manygro states on the generational struggles in Mathare:

*The old guys had a negative perception of youth, that they always “mess” and do bad things in the streets. But of late this culture has changed gradually. The old guys have started to accommodate the youths in their activities like peace forums where people talk and reconcile, and also involve different youth groups in working together on things such as clean ups. We organise them with the old guys so we can co-ordinate.*

The community is both welcoming and supportive of the various activities that Manygro are engaged in. Dennis told me that the group’s client base is an “expression of acceptance” of certain activities such as waste-management, which in the past has been laden with social stigma (see also Thieme: 2010). All of these factors are testament to the progress they are making in terms of recognition. The activities of youth groups such as Manygro are no longer tied to traditional morals. Rather they operate within their own ethical frameworks. Consequently, the lines between “formal” and “informal” economy, “legitimate” and “illegitimate” work, and “employment” and “entrepreneurship” are blurred and contested (ibid). Thus these young actors are setting precedents. It is through this precedent setting that recognition is enhanced and the capacity to aspire is strengthened. The marginalised (youths) use newly created and extended spaces to set precedents and show authorities, donors and other young actors the value of these precedents. Appadurai (2004, 75) calls this a “politics of show and tell”. As Mike’s explanation of Manygro’s urban agriculture project shows:

*We have transferred the information to the community, everybody liked it (urban agriculture) and it is now done all over Mathare. We were the ones who initiated this programme in our community here, to our mothers, to our fathers and to our friends and neighbours.*

The Mwelu Foundation, whose members took the lead in this research, have not only managed exceptional individual achievements but are pioneers and models for other

youth in Mathare. Through photography and film exhibitions they draw an audience of their peers, the state, NGOs, and foreign funders like Africalia and critically negotiate new terms of personal and collective recognition. This is a particular politics of visibility, which upends the conditions of civic invisibility that characterise marginalised groups (Appadurai: 2004).

As demonstrated above, Billian Music Family is another group whose actions are paving the way for other youth in the community. Eric, James, Nelson and the rest of the Mwelu Foundation all share a common aspiration in what that they do, be it writing, photography or making documentaries, because they want to tell Mathare's "untold story". In the same way, members of the Billian Music Family are using their talent as musicians to change the stories told about the contested space of Mathare.

Music reverberates from every corner of the "slum" and throughout the whole city of Nairobi. At any time, day and night, music blasts from kiosks, workshops, bars and matatus (minibuses), much of it addressing the hardships of poverty. Billian's desire for better recognition and conditions for young people and the community in which they inhabit is encapsulated in his song *Birth of Hope*, where the line *I wanna see you high high high, I wanna see you fly fly fly, I wanna see you shine shine shine* has particular significance here. On the topic of popular music in Western Kenya, Prince points out that:

Popular music, like other forms of popular culture, is not only expressive of sociocultural reality, but creative of it. It is a site where different imaginations are aired, new identities suggested, which may resonate with young audiences and listeners and be taken up and used to shape the socio-cultural or political landscape (Prince 2006, 126).

In the previous chapter we saw the factors that impede the ability of young Kenyans to give "voice", which is to express their opinions and influence key decisions affecting their lives. Billian explains that he considers "music the loudest voice you can use to pass a message." Therefore the group is creating and cultivating "voice" among young people in the community.

In order for voice to have an impact it must engage social, political and economic issues and be expressed through actions and performances that have local cultural force (Appadurai: 2004). Billian categorises what the group do as positive music that

has a transformative message for the community. Their videos attract worldwide attention through the Internet and they have performed at big events like the United Nations World Habitat Day, on that occasion singing the song: *we are the nation...we need attention*. This is an effective form of political negotiation. By performing at such events they capture the attention of politicians and call on them to make public commitments to expand the resources and opportunities available to urban youth. This also shows that as well as representing young people's experiences of everyday life in the "slum", the group also has global aspirations. Their quest to strengthen the capacity to aspire goes well beyond the immediate community. As one 11-year-old artist comments: "I come from Mathare, me and my friends from Billian Music Family we bring back hope to our community and the rest of the world". Similarly, for youths in Zambia the music scene provides a cultural space in which to strive for recognition and the actualisation of aspirations (Hansen: 2008).

### **6.3. Marginality as opportunity**

In this study we have seen the various and complex ways in which youth in the community of Mathare experience social, economic and political marginality. This chapter has demonstrated further the multidimensional nature of youth marginality. From the analysis and discussion above it can be deduced that marginality acts as a catalyst and a main determinant of social transformation. Mathare is a space of exclusion where young people are constantly squeezed by relational and structural power. However, it is also a site of opportunity and possibility where the excluded and self-excluded challenge the established order. The analysis presented above, of the various ways in which the youth of Mathare navigate their social and economic marginality, shows that as much as the "slum" is a place of deprivation it is also a site of innovation, versatility and a source of inspiration. It is a space where social change dynamics are extremely active and where young people are the key agents of this social change. As De Boeck discusses in his (2000) work on youth in DRC:

Young people are frontier characters eking out their living in marginal areas (both geographically and socially) by generating power and wealth from

reconstructions of the social, the cultural and the resourceful and even the apparently barren (cited in Christiansen, Utas and Vigh: 2006, 21).

In his work 'Human Migration and the Marginal Man', urban sociologist Robert Park (1928) suggested that marginal man was a cultural hybrid – “a man on the margin of two cultures and two societies which never completely interpenetrated and fused” (Bayat: 2012, 15). Similarly, throughout this research we have seen numerous examples of youth as a social hybrid on the margin of two socio-generational categories. Youth as marginal man is a migrant to adulthood who still belongs in part to the social location of childhood and is not quite integrated into the “new society”-of adulthood.

Other scholars such as Stonequist (1935) have described marginal man as someone who displays a “double personality” and “double consciousness” (Bayat: 2012). It is in this regard that the immigrant and the rural migrant have come to epitomise marginal man. For example, the immigrant is understood to simultaneously carry both “traditional” and “modern” attributes and in this state of in-betweenness is characterised and positioned as someone who is confused and lost, acting neither truly “traditional” nor “modern”. In the same way, youth are seen to embody a consciousness and personality that harbors both child and adult attributes, perceived as a “stranger”, a social type that navigates between detachment and attachment. Like with the immigrant or the migrant living in the city, as in-betweeners, youth are imbued with anomie and alienation, understood as a lost generation. However, in contrast to this dominant perception, the examination of the ways in which youth in this research are exercising power and agency reveals that this in-betweenness is far from negative. It can be argued that this “marginal” state in fact offers an unparalleled window of opportunity.

Billian Okoth from the Billian Music Family displays a double consciousness in terms of being in tune with the aspirations and needs of the younger generation and exhibiting adult attributes through the responsibility and authority he has within the group. Billian says he knows his work is having an impact because the kids he teaches music to are being accepted positively in the community. Popular culture can provide a public space through which to build bridges between people of different generations (Christiansen, Utas and Vigh: 2006). As an in-betweener, Billian has a specific grasp of popular culture that enables him to connect with the kids in the “slum” and use

music to address issues which are not only relevant to their social position but also to the community as a whole. In doing so, he facilitates a closer connection with older people in the community in terms of gaining their respect and appreciation. As Prince (2006: 124) writes on popular music and Luo youth in Western Kenya, “young people do not only occupy a marginal space in-between, but are actively negotiating and re-creating these spaces, producing new cultural and social forms”.

The examination of the immediate socio-economic and political challenges of youth in Mathare reveals that like youth in Guinea Bissau (Vigh: 2006), youth participation in Kenya is hindered by a generationally asymmetric control over resources. Vigh (2006) argues that this means youth in the South have less agentic potential than their Northern counterparts. However, this is an oversimplification and consistent with the notion of Africans as victims, introduced in the theoretical chapter. In my opinion there is a tendency for people living in areas of “plenty” to rest on their laurels and the current political and economic climate can punish those who are unaware of the necessity to be adaptable. On the other hand it favours those who are ready to be flexible. In this chapter we have seen the extraordinary ways in which the youth of Mathare adapt to local and global pressures and processes of “modernity”. It was theirs and the “slum’s” extreme deprivation that led the young people in the community to undertake the urban farming and waste-management ventures discussed above. Moreover, their agency is much more than mere responses to social, economic and political challenges. In his work on youth in Guinea Bissau, Vigh (2006, 52) draws attention to the word *Dubria*, which locally represents movement and dynamism: “it is both the praxis of navigating the road through shifting socio-political and economic circumstances and the process of plotting it. Yet for the young men and women who took part in this research, becoming is associated with dynamism for they are taking charge and pushing African urban life into new directions (see also Hansen: 2008, Diouf, 1996).

Wulff (1995) maintains that because in richer parts of the world youth is seen as a period of freedom and a primary space of social and cultural creativity, young people make concerted efforts to stay in the social category (Vigh: 2006). In contrast, it is assumed that in the South the social position of youth loses its positive connotations and that young people feel confined to the category (*ibid.*). However, in stark contrast, the concept of “extending space” and the analysis and discussion on young people’s aspirations, reveals that for young Africans “youthhood” is an extremely creative and

innovative space. In my opinion, the type of vision and enterprise shown by youth from Muoroto, Manygro, Mathare Ghetto Transformers, the Billian Music Family and the Mwelu Foundation surpasses the levels of creativity shown by youth in the “developed” world. Marginal spaces like Mathare foster alternative norms, and livelihoods. The waste management initiative is an archetypal example of how marginality permits individuals and groups such as Manygro and Mathare Ghetto Transformers to deviate from normative practices, and by doing so they are in a unique position to facilitate change.

Billian Okoth’s penultimate statement in the documentary counters the constraining perspectives that view youth as an urban and generational anomie, showing that while young people in communities such as Mathare face significant challenges, “youthhood” is not a desolate space.

*I try to make good use of any opportunity or any space I get to pass a strong message to the community because sometimes what happens on the ground and what is portrayed in the media are two different things. So when I get a space like this I tell the truth, and the truth is we are not suffering, we have what it takes to be the best. So for me ill never “cry” to the camera, we are blessed like anyone else and we have the potential just like any other person.*

For the participants of this research, their boundless ingenuity stems from a determination to change their situation. As Lee (2001, 122) writes, the youth “gain confidence from their experiences against the backdrop of standards that are built to exclude them”. Having first-hand experience of its transformative potential, young Africans like Dennis, Billian, Eric, James and Nelson also strive to stay in the social category by keeping themselves free from the rigidity of a formal mode of life and actively delaying full responsibilities of adulthood. Thus, urban youth in Africa do not necessarily long for the age that will give them authority and rights currently denied (Vigh: 2006, and Chabal and Daloz: 1999), rather they seek and are successfully creating better opportunities that will make “youthhood” a much more desirable and productive structural segment of society.

The youth’s strategic actions and means of negotiation and survival may seem parochial but they are in fact “modern”. The previous chapter highlighted the vulnerability of young people’s relied-upon connections. Yet through reciprocity,

trust, connection and the “extension” of space, urban youth are creating new opportunities. Young people such as those who took part in the research are looking beyond the established associations and institutions, which have failed them to new forms of identity that prove more valuable. Their strategies of negotiation are part of what Chatterjee calls an alternative site of political society. Such an alternative site is useful for re-thinking and understanding youth and the “slum”. Chatterjee conceptualises political society as a domain of institutions and activities where several mediations are carried out (Chatterjee: 1998). However, as Gudavarthy & Vijay (2007, 3051) point out, this is “not in the classical transactions between state and civil society but in a much less well-defined legally ambiguous contextually and strategically demarcated terrain”. Through their activities the youth of Mathare are constructing unique pathways and links to the broader city. They have developed their own systems and modalities, which operate within a less visible, informal and interdependent space that is full of possibilities for new collaborations. It is on this basis, along with Billian’s above reflection on the realities of “youthhood” in Mathare, that youth’s marginality can not only be seen as opportunity but also even refuted.



## Chapter Seven: Conclusion

### 7.0. Significance of the research

This youth-led study has examined how youth from the community of Mathare navigate their social and economic marginality. Methodologically, despite the limitations of the photographic element, the work provides significant insights into re-working power dynamics and making youth research truly participatory. It heightens the visibility of young people's endeavors and spaces and demonstrates how researchers can engage youth to ensure that research better reflects their immediate concerns and aspirations. Crucially, the work departs from the dominant perspectives of youth as problems and anomies and the view of youth as a period of "life on hold". By simultaneously deconstructing youth dependency and the notion of youth as becomings, it shows "youthhood" as a dynamic social space and reveals the importance of "growing up" as a space of opportunity.

The work provides a deeper understanding of how youth acquire knowledge, build agency and form identities in "marginal" spaces such as "slums". Moreover, the work provides a better understanding of how urban youth from places such as Mathare are positioned in Kenyan society and also the various ways in which they are transforming their immediate and imagined spaces. Furthermore, by stressing the capabilities of youth and focusing on the innovative ways in which the youth from Mathare adapt to and facilitate change, the research provides an alternative to the dysfunctional view of the "slum", instead showing that it too is a dynamic space.

To summarise the findings from the inquiry into how youth from the community of Mathare navigate their social and economic marginality, I will now return to the sub-questions set out in the introduction, namely, the immediate socio-cultural, economic and political challenges that the youth in the "slums" of Mathare face, and second, how they youth of Mathare exercise power and agency.

## **7.1. Multifaceted manifestations of youth marginality**

The youth of Mathare crave more authority, recognition and greater access to resources, space and employment opportunities. They are economically exploited, politically repressed and socially discriminated against by the state, local politicians and leaders within the community. This work demonstrates that the position of youth in Kenyan society must be understood within the context of the interplay between local values and practices and broader historical and structural changes. Significantly, the colonial apparatus and rapid transformations within the global political economy have profoundly shaped generational principles, ethnicity and gender dynamics, all of which underline youth participation and youth-state relationships in Kenya. The interplay between the neo-liberal technocratic approach adopted by Kenya in the 1980s and 1990s and socio-cultural representations of youth as incompetent, trainee citizens is central to understanding why youth are uniformed and excluded from decision-making. Moreover, the neo-liberal discourse with its emphasis on personal advancement has largely served to reinforce the wealth and power of politicians and elders whilst at the same time undermining youth efforts to build and maintain collective action.

Youth participation in Mathare and Nairobi in general is determined by connections. Despite a young person's skills and education, without the right connections and/or the ability to offer a bride, they can find their opportunities severely limited. Moreover, due to the larger ethnic groups dominating the formal employment sector, youth from smaller ethnic groups or minority groups find that the avenues of opportunity can be extremely narrow and difficult to navigate.

Since the experiences and roles of youth in the wider political arena tend to be characterised by empty promises, manipulation and tribalism, the youth from Mathare have little confidence in politicians, institutions of the state and participatory development discourses. Young women in Mathare are even more disillusioned with so-called participatory processes. Gender inequalities in schools and the feminisation of poverty conspire to exclude female youth from participating in groups and having a vital say in decision-making. Moreover, due to entrenched gender dynamics within Kenyan society, when women are involved, their needs and capabilities are overlooked; instead actions tend to reflect male values. Again this should be

understood within the context of the interplay between endogenous and exogenous forces in the construction of the Kenyan post-colonial state.

## **7.2. Leading the Way**

As indicated above, intergenerational dynamics and power struggles are at the core of the challenges that youth in Mathare face. However, while generational tensions underpin the unequal access to resources and the lack of youth participation, intergenerational relationships are also the foundation for knowledge transmission and agency-building in Mathare. Youth groups in the community are strengthening this avenue. By setting precedents through projects such as waste-management, youth groups are gaining better recognition from elders, which leads to stronger intergenerational collaboration and subsequently redistribution.

Through “ritualised” performances and techniques, as well as initiatives like urban farming and the provision of basic services, the youth of Mathare create new spaces and connections. The productive quality of these rituals and entrepreneurial activities are positively shaping society’s perception of “youth” and the “slum”. Moreover, the youth from Mathare have built connections and opened up spaces that go well beyond the local spectrum. The newspaper set up by Eric Omwanda and other young writers is not only a local means of resistance and crucial for consensus building in the “slum” but it also a vital tool for developing a range of networks through which they interact with young people across the globe to demand social justice.

As well as building intergenerational solidarity and capturing the attention of politicians and international organizations, the youth from Mathare use the newly created and extended spaces to “show the way” for other young people in the community. The work of the Mwelu Foundation and Billian Music family shows how photography and popular music serve as both an avenue to address social, political and economic issues and as a cultural space through which to develop and realize aspirations.

For the youth from Mathare, flexibility and connections are essential for acquiring knowledge, building agency and facilitating socio-economic mobility and change. This is why youth choose an informal life and strive to extricate themselves from the rigidity of the “modern” work place and other constrictive spaces such as adulthood.

Hence urban youth in places such as Mathare are not trapped between childhood and adulthood nor are they lost or confused. Rather “youthhood” is space of opportunity and possibility where the excluded and self-excluded challenge the established order.

The inquiry into youth agency and their manifestations of power reveals that conceptualising youth as becomings does not translate into a lack of understanding of youth as actors in their own right or as integrated members of society. Rather delineating youth as becomings means simultaneously accounting for their immediate challenges, and acknowledging their modern means of negotiation and the significance of their established and nurtured dependencies. Moreover, it means fully recognising the importance of their aspirations, because as social actors, imagining the future and applying vision to strategies and endeavours is central to navigating everyday life.

### **7.3. Recommendations**

This work demonstrates that young people are the experts on their own lives. Therefore, research concerning urban youth must be youth-led and action orientated. In order to maximise participation and increase the authenticity of research, youth must have ownership of the research design process. Moreover, researchers must utilise young people’s particular talents when deciding on appropriate methods for data collection and involve youth in the analysis of empirical material.

It is important for research regarding urban youth in African to focus on the connectedness of youth. This work established that in African cities youth agency is determined by connections. Young people’s informal networks are central to creating sustainable livelihoods, gaining access to resources and linking with the larger city and beyond. Crucially, research must explore the informal connections of youth without equating these modalities with backwardness. In addition, as the findings of this research revealed, connections can be unstable or unequal. Thus, a key question is: how do youth remake and build alternative, more productive means of exchange? Moreover, what is the significance of the interplay between informal connection and formal disconnection and, or alternatively, the interplay between formal connection and informal disconnection in shaping young people’s lives? Furthermore, this work

highlights how youth are at the centre of social transformation both locally and globally. Accordingly, an inquiry into the connectedness of youth must look at the spaces and connections, which young people have created outside their immediate localities, and how these informal relationships are shaping the socio-cultural, political and economic framework in other cities.

Participatory research that explores the connections of youth and the constructiveness of dependency is vital if institutions that promote sustainable urban development are to incorporate young people's informal activities into planning and policy. At the same time, international organizations need to take a different approach to working with civil society. They must depart from the conventional practice of primarily engaging with well-educated male youth leaders in mainstream civil society, who tend to have little understanding of the experiences of marginalised individuals and groups whose activities and strategies of negotiation operate within a much less well-defined and morally ambiguous domain. Moreover, programmes and opportunity funds aimed at urban youth-led development must depart from the overemphasis on legality and formal association as prerequisites for eligibility, because it tends to reinforce unjust social structures. Rather, in order for these initiatives to reach the under-engaged dynamic groups within the alternative site of political society, the informal affiliations of youth groups must be incorporated into eligibility and quality assessments.

It is also critical that research on the "slum" looks at it as a generative space. This is vital for changing government policies that place stringent controls on informal economies and limit access to land in "slums", which hinders youth efforts to start their own businesses. Moreover, local authorities need to engage with and recognise informal settlements and the rights of people who live there. Concurrently, youth groups must continue to work towards building stronger alliances across ethnic and gender lines in order to make urban development practices such as "slum" clearance less politically feasible.

This research demonstrates that "youthhood" in places like Mathare is not simply a period of life to be "over and done with". Therefore, rather than continuing to look at how youth in Africa seek to escape the "marginal" position of youth, it would be interesting to look at the efforts that urban youth in Africa are making to stay in the

social category of youth. This could involve youth perspectives on adulthood as a period of stability, the incompleteness of adulthood and/or the dependencies of adults and elders in comparison with those of youth. This could also take the form of a comparative study incorporating both the perspectives of youth (preferably young women) in African cities and (female) youth in the west on the idea of “youthhood” as a social space of freedom and creativity.

Finally, research must focus on the gendered nature of youth marginality, in particular perspectives on female aspirations and the grassroots movements led by young women. Such research is needed in order to improve young women’s participation in decision-making and to transform the structures and cultural values, which have determined their life-course, such as gender inequalities in schools. In addition, local authorities, government agencies and international organisations must hire more young women from communities like Mathare and work on essential capacity building.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix I – Essay 1.**

#### **MATHARE: A FUTURE HISTORY**

##### **Eric Omwanda**

According to donor-funded organizations, Mathare is home to about 800,000 people, although the 2009 census report conducted by the Kenyan government puts the population at a much smaller figure of about 250,000 inhabitants. Regardless of the exact numbers, Mathare is a place where many thousands of people live, struggle, and aspire to a better future. Looking at the history of Mathare can help us understand where this community has come from, and maybe where it is going.

The Mathare slum started as a quarry<sup>3/4</sup> a place where stones were carved and later sold to buyers around the Nairobi area. With time, people thought that the area was good for human habitation. However, most of the people who ended up living in this informal settlement were low-income earners who had come to the city from various parts of Kenya in search of work.

Since then, Mathare has been characterized by its clear geographical bounds within the Mathare Valley and its unfair distribution of not only natural resources, but also economic and social possibilities. From Mathare 3C, 4A, 4B, and Kosovo through to Kiamo, we must recognize the serious hardships that slum-dwellers undergo.

Historically speaking, I think the challenges faced by the inhabitants of Mathare result from political and economic injustices inherited from the time of our ancestors. It is rather absurd that one individual can own about four acres of land, while ten others do not own even a portion of it. What is more sickening is that, since from the time of Independence, only certain ethnic communities own large areas of land.

Tracing back through the history of the Mathare slums, we are without any doubt forced to swallow the good, the bad, and the ugly. One elderly man who moved to Mathare in the early 1970s explained that when he initially arrived in this place, it was sparsely populated with only a few iron and mud-built houses. He also stated that by the time he had arrived in the slum, influential people including representatives in the

government and the community had grabbed most of the land.

“It was pretty much hard to have access to privileges that were given to the community,” said this 60-year-old man. According to an old man by the name of Richard Amadho, most of Mathare’s well-constructed houses were at one time occupied by colonial masters. Upon Kenya’s independence as a politically sovereign state, most community leaders came forward to make prudent choices for their cohorts. What did these leaders, known as chiefs, do? They mobilized their communities and vowed to chase the colonial masters from their land. Since the colonial masters knew that their time in Kenya, and more specifically in Mathare, had come to an end, they decided to leave peacefully. They departed either for their own countries or to other welcoming states around the globe.

Personally, my intimate knowledge of, and experiences with, the Mathare slum are not an ordeal but an honour. My parents raised the fourth and fifth-born members of our family in Mathare 3C, and they agree that it was not an easy task. They were forced to travel long distances to get basic commodities<sup>3/4</sup> an experience they did not want their children to repeat, hence why they shifted from this area to another more enabling environment.

In relation to this story, the hardest-hit group of people in the slums are women and children, since women are mostly the ones to take care of the homes while men have gone out to look for daily meals. In real-life cases, women have been seen carrying their babies on their backs while at the same time carrying heavy water containers over long distances and hilly terrain. It has also become evident that children in Mathare are exposed to unhealthy behaviours, such as going many long hours without meals. As a result, their nutrition is jeopardized.

What can be done to curb these issues? Who is responsible for Mathare’s problems? Does the community itself have a role in resolving the historical and present-day happenings in the slum areas that cause so many to suffer? What can the community do to make the government take responsibility? When we develop a strong understanding of these questions and begin to build effective answers, we as dwellers will be able to move forward as a common people.

For a long time, Mathare has been characterized by its social challenges outclassing the small daily triumphs of its people. Some of these problems have very negative implications for the coming generations. From the colonial era to the present day,

prostitution, crime, drug abuse, and child trafficking have been among the core unhealthy behaviors that continue to impact the majority of slum-dwellers.

According to a slum-dweller who lived in Mathare from the late 1970s to early 1980s, the Mathare area became engulfed by people who were not only landless and jobless, but soon became hopeless as well. Difficult living circumstances made it appealing for them to drown their troubles in Mathare's illegally-brewed alcohol, commonly referred to as chang'aa. Chang'aa production is a major Mathare industry and provides a vital source of income for many Mathare residents.

In 2006, a war broke out in the slum between the outlawed Luo sect known as the Taliban (not to be confused with Islamic extremism or the former government of Afghanistan) and Mungiki, a banned group that mainly comprised people of the Kikuyu tribe.

What put these two groups at loggerheads? Local chang'aa brewers had become discontented with Mungiki when that group increased the "protection taxes" collected from brewers. As a result, brewers sought the sympathy of the Taliban. This saw a very explosive fight between the two groups, since each had its own economic and ideological interests at stake. It was difficult for brewers, since the government itself was opposed to the illegal alcohol business. On the one side, the Mungiki saw that raising the tax would improve its economic independence, although it might also reduce the number of chang'aa brewers and consumers. The Taliban, on the other hand, believed in the need to empower themselves economically at any cost. They justified this view through their claims about liberating people from oppression.

In total, this conflict led to ten reported deaths. As is so often the case, women and children suffered the traumas of a lifetime as they were sometimes forced to lie down on the ground to avoid being shot. Shots in the air turned toward people's bodies. The brutality with which the police forces responded to the violence saw corpses being carried from the slums like sacks of maize. After some time, military forces were deployed to the war-torn Mathare area in an effort to bring "normalcy" back to the community and its members. As much as many searched for peace, slum-dwellers killed two police officers to avenge what they believed were crimes committed against innocent people.

After the 2006 war, all was not settled. On 08 June 2007, the Kenyan government was hunting through Mathare for the Mungiki sect, which was believed to be responsible

for murders, rapes, violent robberies, and sedition against the state. According to that Friday's Standard newspaper, fourteen people were killed on that particular day, most of them shot at close range or in the back, either having surrendered or simply been cornered by police. Only the police themselves knew the formula for who was to be shot and who lived. The operation forced women to leave their small businesses and attend to their killed or injured children and husbands. In some cases, dead bodies were thrown in a nearby river, making identification of loved ones and relatives difficult.

Most of these political wars have resulted in the demise of many people. According to a man in his sixties, the 1982 coup d'état, the 1997 post-general election crises, and the recent 2007 post-election violence have led to a migration of people away from the slums and into other areas. During such violence, he was once forced to carry a wounded person on the edge of death while also taking some photographs<sup>3/4</sup> this being his profession.

When humanity is at stake, men and women are forced to do the unanticipated. With all this history in mind, we are bound to ask ourselves questions. Specifically, how are slum-dwellers responding positively to the historical and current crises that have pushed people so far to the wall? Crises that have hindered development, crises that have limited people's access to crucial services?

In the 1970s, the Mathare community did not have very vibrant community-based organizations. Today, the scenario has changed. Most people are involved in community development issues in one way or another. Evidently, there has been a cultural shift away from passivity and idleness and towards a very aggressive and development-oriented mindset among today's communities and their leaders.

Mathare people come together for noble purposes to address community issues that affect humanity as a whole. The kind of engagement existing in this new generation is an indicator that a quiet social revolution is taking its course. The trajectory chosen by the community members themselves has inspired people to have a positive response to pressing social issues. Where once our community believed that poor political leadership was the cause of its failure, today there is a growing consensus that social participation, leadership, and economic freedom are the responsibilities of everyone together, regardless of what challenging circumstances we may face.

Believe you me; the current involvement of the youth in development programs is

commendable. Today we have community organizations that are youth-managed and have as their core beneficiary the community at large. Efforts such as community clean-ups, tree plantings, educational projects, and youth cooperative businesses all have their advantages for Mathare as a whole.

In addition to youth groups, we cannot leave out the efforts of community movements that have created important changes in the last few years. The Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA) a community development project that empowers youths through sports<sup>3/4</sup> has made positive developments in the slums of Mathare and their environs. This organization has created employment for more than a hundred people, and imparts important life skills and services to about 25,000 members. That is something to smile about, for a big difference becomes clear when we compare this situation with the state of affairs before 1987, the year that MYSA was established.

Interestingly enough, most other organizations based in Nairobi's Eastlands, such as the Mwelu Foundation and Mathare Roots Youth Group, have some connection with MYSA. Personally, I think that building solidarity between community groups is one of the main ways people can begin to liberate themselves from oppression. Urban people living in informal settlements have very tangible credentials and skills developed through the projects they manage. From urban farming to garbage collection programs, community members learn they can accomplish far more than what is expected of them.

If these projects and their participants could be brought closer together, to work cooperatively for common objectives and benefits across the whole of Mathare and beyond, there is no question that we would achieve even greater successes than dreamed of until now. Despite all the real problems associated with the Mathare slum, and slums generally, hope still beckons us onward. We are not yet there, not even almost<sup>3/4</sup> but in a real sense, we are moving in the right direction.

## **Appendix II – Essay 2.**

### Youth Empowerment Programs

Eric Omwanda

In Kenya a youth is any person between the ages of 18 to 35 according to the Kenyan constitution. Youth programs that uplift their living status have been left at apathy by the government. It's not a matter going through the issue of youth empowerment at a shallow level but rather tackling it in depth. In slum set up it is very common to find youth in positive community initiatives that do not receive any recognition from the authorities. It is also a pity that most of community groupings rely heavily on foreign aid to spearhead their projects while the government does to even pay any single attention to such programs. What makes youth going is the zeal that they have in implementing community programs. In a slum like Mathare where there is without any doubt more community cohesiveness than other high-class places like Westland.

Youth programs are what have made people to move at a very considerable rate development wise. Traditionally the youth were coined to be villain by the communities that they come from. It was until very recent that youth have decided to make positive moves in providing solution to social problems. In real life situation youth have proven to be part of the solution but not part of the puzzle. Starting up community programs such as awareness on drugs and health related issues, sensitization on agriculture, environmental awareness, and skills empowerment through sports, media and providing life skills lessons. All these stated programs have been made successful by the youth.

In the slums of Mathare different community organizations have core programs that make them to be easily identified by the community members. One very good example of a very outstanding group that has made the Mathare environment to be somehow appealing is the Manygro group, they do collect garbage from households and they charge the clients affordable fee on the same. Apart from garbage collection they have other programs that include chicken keeping, awareness on drugs and HIV/AIDS and growing of kales. In my own opinion this is a viable way to reduce unemployment among the youths. Why should we put in place such programs for the youths? Who is really responsible for making sure that youth programs are done and the end results match with the aim of the project? Do we recognize the need of insuring that youth projects are owned by them? To answer these thorny questions, we

ultimately need to envision the potential of the youths in their quest to secure economic independent status.

At some point we have experienced the political class coming to play mind games to the youths but all in all they have been using the youths for the wrong reasons. Issues like youth funds to commence income generating activities was a plan initiated by the government to help the youths in terms of reducing unemployment rate, reducing crime rate and also to a large extent finding a lasting solution in bridging the gap between the rich and the poor youth in different areas of Kenya. It is been a target for the national and international organizations to help out in bringing programs that will benefit the youths in disadvantaged and underdeveloped, on the same note the youths have responded positively in the campaign of creating job opportunities through these philanthropic organizations.

The beauty that exists in youth programs is the determination and persistence that these groups have. They are ready to see a viable lasting project that will address a social problem amicably. For instance sports programs that exist among youths in the slums of Mathare was an initiative that was started for the youths and nowadays it is managed by them. The program, which started back in the dark period of 1987, has changed the lives of many young people and to date it has a membership of over 25,000 youths countrywide. The Mathare Youth Sports Association having employed more than fifty staff members and also getting a back up of over 500 volunteers is a very big plus to youth empowering programs. Imagine providing football skills to a number of such magnitude, empowering over 15 youths on media work through their shoot back program and promoting arts and culture through the Haba na Haba project. The most interesting one exposing the youths is the arranging of international travel for 100 youths to attend international competitions annually is something worth mentioning.

From such statistics what do you think is the ultimate way to curb unemployment rate and improving skill levels for the youth in the Mathare slum? The answer is one, establishing viable community organizations that will follow its vision and mission statement to the very end. An organization that recognizes the beneficiaries need and work with them for the common good. The assumption is that in these organizations there are challenges and propaganda but these are internal affairs that can be worked out.

In very many practical cases youth programs have proven to be the most viable way of making sure that generation power struggle is addressed since if we have a vibrant youth program in our communities this means that it creates a very smooth power transition from older people to youths. A situation where projects owned by the youths will be for the good of the all society is possible but only if these projects receive full recognition from the older people from the past generation.

Radical changes must take place in youth empowerment programs and this will mean that youth program will have some sense of directional change since the programs will be geared towards solving social challenges. With this in place programs that are for empowering youths in different activities be it in the sports arena, arts and culture or media programs we are certain we are going to win the battle. Ultimately as much we say that we want to increase the skill levels, the main issue here is how can youths programs promote economic independence among the youths? Not to forget the efforts of activism of youth groups that form groups of tens and do monthly contributions to help out individual start small-scale businesses, over time this has also played a pivotal role in combating the inadequate employment issue among youths.

As I conclude it is time that youths take responsibility and take vehement move in solving social problems once and for all. I am also certain that the youths cannot be an impediment to development since they have all been ambassadors of change in empowerment programs. And very few words in this youth programs we should also recognize that excellence no gender so that all the sexes are equally empowered in youth programs. With this in place we are going to move at the same pace and we will definitely go places.

## **Appendix III – Unstructured Interview Themes**

### Trigger questions: Eric and James Interview

- 1) Tell me about the “hustles” you do on the side.
- 2) Tell me about Liberation (this is the newspaper that Eric writes for, so
- 3) And what about you James, what “hustles” do you do on the side?
- 4) Why did you join the Mwelu Foundation

### Trigger questions: Nelson Interview

- 1) Tell me about your business
- 2) What are your aspirations
- 3) Why did you join the Mwelu Foundation