The Politics of the Capital: Development and Devolution in Nairobi

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Abstract

The chapter charts some of the key characteristics of the capital, particularly those considered directly relevant for how we may imagine Nairobi as a city (and increasingly, county) of politics. Two big historical dimensions of particular significance include city development and governance (especially following devolution), which are adopted as overarching themes. The aim is, first, to provide an overview of the key issues that have an important bearing on contemporary politics, such as the historical geography of the capital’s divided urban space and the enduring politics of the majority’s exclusion through control over and through space. Second, the chapter then moves on to briefly explain the latest developments in the context of devolution, and what difference, if any, it has made to local politics in terms of addressing and/or exacerbating existing issues. While recent events may show that politics is livelier than ever, in Nairobi it is far from clear whether devolution is actually delivering development or democratisation.

Key words: City, Politics, Slums, development, Devolution, Nairobi,

Introduction

‘If it [Nairobi] had style, it also had numerous fears. From struggles to shake off old beliefs to tensions over political affiliations and state power, to continuing struggles over the right to be seen, heard and to belong – the history of the city, just like that of the nation, is truly one of fears. It is a history of frustrated dreams and outright reversals that are occasionally deflected by sheer revelry and optimism’ (Nyairo, 2015: 329).
Nairobi is simultaneously Enkare Nyorobi, meaning the place of cool or sweet waters, where the Maasai still bring their cattle in times of drought and it is the racially segregated and exclusionary outpost of the ‘Railway Town’ of colonial rule. But it is also a ‘city of arrival’, in which rapid urbanization led to tremendous demographic changes, as well as, a ‘city of exclusion’, slums and inequality, with a large squatter population inhabiting the ruins of Nai-shanti (Kimari, 2016). Other ‘faces’ include Nai-robbery, the ‘city of crime’, an historically enduring characteristic of African urbanisation; and, more recently the ‘bandit city’ in which state restructuring and privatisation opened up new avenues of corruption as insecurity increased (Anderson, 2002).

Moreover, in addition to these more pessimistic readings, Nairobi has also had its optimistic visionaries. There have been attempts to plan the city in fantastic – some might say, unrealistic – ways, such as creating the East African ‘garden city in the sun’, with model council estates for civil servants. A more recent (hyper) modernist impulse was to launch and recast Nairobi as ‘the world class city of 2030’, replete with quotations from Walt Disney, therefore rendering it as Nai-Disney (Jones 2018; Myers, 2015). This may never take place, but Nairobi has rapidly evolved into an increasingly important regional commercial, transport, and developmental hub, with the headquarters of two UN agencies and multinational corporations. And it is, currently, experiencing a boom in infrastructural development. Finally, the increasing proportion of the population now born and bred in the capital has led to fresh initiatives to move beyond the ‘city of fear’ and isolated neighbourhoods, through attempts to raise awareness around identity and belonging to the city, with initiatives such as the Nai Ni Who? festival.

The starting point for this chapter is that Nairobi is not, of course, reducible to any single one of these dimensions or viewpoints. Much like De Boeck’s (2006) Kinshasa, Nairobi reflects
multiple mirror images, and is best thought as being all of them at the same time, both the visible and less visible city. These different faces are not wholly separable from reality of course, and one of the most significant aspects of Nairobi is the combination of its economic importance and ethnically diverse population, which has raised the stakes for those seeking political control.

The chapter charts some of the key characteristics of the capital, particularly those considered directly relevant for how we may imagine Nairobi as a city (and increasingly, county) of politics. The two big historical dimensions of particular significance are: city development (Nai-shanti vs Nai-Disney) and governance (especially following devolution). The aim is to provide an overview of how Nairobi’s urban formation both shapes and is shaped by the enduring politics of exclusion. The chapter then moves on to briefly explain the latest developments in the context of devolution, and what difference, if any, it has made to local politics in terms of addressing and/or exacerbating existing issues, or in introducing new dynamics. A key consideration is therefore to trace the role of Nairobi as not merely a passive container of events but instead whose political imagination is intimately entwined with making, containing and controlling urban space. And because these struggles occur at different spatial levels: whether in the challenges and competition between national executive and city level administrations, or within Nairobi and its local settlements, each of these scales also contributes its own agency to politics.

**Historical and Contemporary Fault lines**

*Demographics*

One of the key characteristics of the capital’s demographics has been the political and developmental implications of rapid urbanisation. By 1945, the population was 100,000; but by
1965 was growing quickly at over 10 per cent per year, from approximately 250,000 at independence, and doubling to 509,000 in the late 1960s (Hornby, 2013). Population growth then ‘steadied’ at 4 per cent per year, reaching 3.1 million inhabitants in 2009 – a figure that is expected to rise to 4.2 million in 2017 (Nairobi County Council, 2014). Unsurprisingly, living conditions could not keep pace with the influx, and high levels of poverty and very poor living conditions meant an estimated 60 percent of the capital’s population lived in informal settlements. The unplanned nature of much of this increase has led to wide discrepancies in population density, which stands at 1,274 people per square kilometre in Langata in the west and over 87,000 in Mathare on the eastern side of the capital. Another key feature is the youthfulness of the population, with over 50 percent of those living in Nairobi County being less than 29 years of age, and 15-29 year olds accounting for 39 percent of the total population and 56 percent of the labour force. Nairobi county is also the most populous of all Kenya’s 47 counties and, therefore, has the highest estimated number of eligible voters.

The capital is also notable for its ethnic diversity. Though there are settlements characterised by large concentrations of one or other ethnic group, the overall ethnic composition is very diverse and recognised as ‘cosmopolitan’.¹ With ethnic affiliation closely associated with political parties, Nairobi’s large multi-ethnic population makes it hard to ignore, and, arguably, has become an even more contested political prize under devolution. It is therefore a city of considerable tension and pressure, as population growth has put tremendous pressure on public services, which have been historically denied to the urban poor (Hake, 1977).

*City of Exclusion/City of Politics*

Overall political objectives of colonialism (policies of inclusion and exclusion) and the post-

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¹ See the Kenyan Election Database, http://kenyaelectiondatabase.co.ke/?p=1711.
colonial denial of universalistic citizenship rights have all relied upon the production of space, that is, actively using and shaping space for political ends in Nairobi. This began with the ‘enframing tactics’ of the colonial state and the exertion of control through urban planning and control of space, initially excluding Africans, although reliant on their labour. Then, the construction of native locations, like Pumwani, was designed to contain the uncontrolled African population, producing a highly racially compartmentalised city premised mainly upon continuing exclusion of Africans. The pattern of the settlement layout that took shape in those early colonial years determined the character of the city. On one side of the railway tracks were European, higher-income houses; on the other side of the tracks were the other races with lower incomes. The workers’ quarters were laid out in lines at the foot-plains of the hill, on the site of the future City Square, where the level ‘black cotton’ soil was criss-crossed by ditches that were never, according to one observer (in Hake, 1977), wholly effective in moderating the impact of rains. Another eye witness in 1903 suggested that the contrast between the ‘sticky morass of the subordinate railway quarters’ and the ‘palatial residences of the Railway officer ... had awakened a sense of injustice in the hearts of men that no plausible speech can eradicate’ (in Hake, 1977:23).

Other historical continuities can also be observed. By the early colonial era, Hake (1977) had presciently observed key characteristics in the initial shaping of Nairobi: land speculation was one, which became endemic, offering vast returns. This was structured by the Crown Lands Ordinance of 1915 and the evolving informal apartheid, which, according to Guguyu, has fed an insatiable appetite for land as ‘something embedded into the national psyche and passed down generations’ (Guguyu, 2017, no page). A related phenomena, ‘landlordism’, also took root in the early colonial period:

‘Some landlords worked on the principle that if they could huddle as many buildings as possible into one corner of their plot, the value of the unoccupied part would rise and could be sold at a
great profit … In this way, some European and Indian families made considerable fortunes. *Landlordism was established in Nairobi as the express lift to the top income brackets.*’ (Hake, 1977: emphasis added by author).

Thirst for land, for speculation, or, for landlordism, enriched a tiny minority, while social control functions and containment of the masses remain enduring features of inequality seared on to the social and political fabric of the capital. In terms of building the city and its physical infrastructure, then, plans for the original “Railway Town” had an enduring impact because, according to Klopp (2012), it meant that African residents had to manoeuvre outside the existing planning framework that excluded them. Africans had to live mainly in low-value, semi-arid areas, away from the trunk road, in informal unregulated settlements, characterised by lack of freehold land, and poor quality housing. As urbanization increased after the Second World War, Africans continued to move into low rental areas, characterised by limited or no services, which as conditions deteriorated further, became known as slums (Klopp, 2012).

This process left a problematic legacy of deep inequality and uneven provision of infrastructure. Historically ignored, and despite a brief political period of ‘improvability’ (Hake, 1977), slum areas were rendered invisible in urban planning (Mathare Zonal Plan, 2012). There was a practice of slum clearance during the colonial era, which continued post-independence. This was sometimes politically motivated, for example, through targeting removal of slums thought to show support for political opponents. Though it was mainly justified on the basis that the market would supposedly cater for the slums, thus absolving government (though enriching bureaucrats and politicians partaking in speculation and landlordism) from making improvements.

An important flip side to the exertion of control over and through space, has been the relationship between large demographic shifts, repression and changes in political
consciousness, particularly from 1920-30s, leading to Nairobi’s ‘most significant urban experience’ (Myers, 2004: 38-39). These dynamics have led to the city being regarded as a cauldron of political dissent and struggle. This was evident in support for Mau Mau in the 1950s to early 1960s, which resulted in the colonial government’s persecuting Operation Anvil, the citywide arrests of 30,000 people and the raising of Mathare slum to the ground. It is also visible in the use of urban space by nationalists and trade unionists, with areas such as the Kaloleni estate used for political rallying.

In the early post-colonial era, national leaders were therefore astute enough to keep an eye on political shifts in the capital, despite suggestions that ‘cities were no great source of political power’ (Branch, 2012: 72) and were under represented in parliament and generally ignored by local authorities. Nonetheless, one early indication of the emergence of Nairobi as a political lever in state affiliations and politics is the rise and fall of Charles Rubia. Rubia was a Murang’a businessman who became the first African mayor of Nairobi, from 1962 to 1967 – the first of many from that area to seek a role in the politics of the capital. When Rubia tried to control the ruling party in the city, and blocked Kenyatta’s daughter, Margaret, from being mayor, he antagonised the President and fell from grace. In turn, this episode confirmed the executive’s suspicions regarding the dangers posed by city politics, and hardened Kenyatta’s determination to prevent Nairobi being used to mobilise support against him.

In many cases, the political intrigues of elites have been played out at great expense to city’s poor, most notably slum dwellers. The council burning of Kaburini slum in 1970, with residents moved to Huruma, and a further seven additional slum clearances, was justified under the old colonial era pretext of hygiene. In reality, it was politically motivated. The demolition was designed to undermine the support base of Rubia, who by this time was MP for Starehe. However, such actions did not go uncontested, and led to growing tensions between central government and Nairobi City Council (NCC). Indeed, the mayor at the time, Isack Lugonzo,
insisted that as a specifically ‘Nairobi problem’ any discussion about evictions should be held in City Hall (see Hake, 1977). Only ten days later, Lugonzo was appointed by Jomo Kenyatta as a member of the National Assembly, reflecting executive political interference in the administration of the capital.

Slum politics was also significant from another point of view. Given the ethnic intrigues integral to politics, it is striking that Lugonzo was also the last non-Kikuyu mayor until 2002. This reflected a period of Murang’a and Kikuyu dominance of local politics, something that was not lost on ethnic minorities. Indeed, similar tensions continue to underpin contemporary struggles to control Nairobi County. An advisor to prominent Luhya political leader Musalia Mudavadi, for example, recently declared that Kikuyus have long dominated local Nairobi politics and that it was time for the Luhya to stop being ‘played like fools’ and organise their vote to prevent this happening in the next election.² Although this statement was clearly a deliberate attempt to mobilise the Luhya vote, it also reflected the perception of many citizens that members of the Kikuyu community held a sense of entitlement towards Nairobi politics. Ethnic perceptions are reflected in a mental ethno-spatial map that exists among some non-Kikuyu, in which the city’s development is believed to have been deliberately skewed towards Kiambu and the Kikuyu heartlands to the north. As part of this image of this spatial imagination, land grabbing and strategic purchases to the south are also understood to be controlled by and for Kikuyu benefit. So, though unevidenced, this strand of thought again reveals the existence of a perception that the capital is ‘for’ the Kikuyu.

Despite these intrigues over state power, in general, urban planning was a low priority after independence and whatever plans triumphed were poorly implemented. Executive interest appeared to focus more on the containment of political rivals than long-term planning. Over

these years, the administration of Nairobi had shifted from the former colonial Nairobi Urban District Council, to the post-independence NCC, which had an executive and also policy branch. The clamour for land heightened, and government land became a particular target for accumulation and patronage, as well as an important tool in political control. For decades, NCC became notorious for land grabbing. Even back in the 1960s, there was already evidence of dubious tendering processes and tensions between elected council officers, which would continue for decades. At least in that era there was cash and therefore investment available for infrastructure, including building some low-cost houses and estates. Corruption grew as the NCC became even more incompetent than central government (Branch, 2012:314), and, in 1977, there was an investigation into maladministration.

Partly as a result, there was a gradual decline in its capacity to delivery, especially from 1984 to the early 1990s. By 1983, the Minister responsible for urban administration, Moses Mudavadi (Musalia’s father), suspended and then dissolved the NCC. Despite probes into tribalism, corruption and malpractice committed by NCC, by the 1990s ‘virtually every open space or public institutions, including parks, bus stations, mortuaries and road reserves, was now ‘privatized’, often without payment of any sort’ (Hornsby, 2013:585). While these developments created new opportunities as other actors came in to replace the functions of local and national government, it was undoubtedly the urban poor who suffered disproportionately due to the rising costs of food, the introduction of user fees, and repression.

This period was followed by Moi’s policy of anti-urbanism and political violence. In the 1990s, the Nairobi City Commission was appointed by the president to administer Nairobi for the next nine years, purportedly to clean up corruption, which had plunged to even greater depths. However, these efforts were thwarted by dubious political appointments to the Commission. For example, Fred Gumo, appointed as chair, rewarded himself handsomely during a period of
rapid decline in service delivery. One estimate suggests that the NCC and then the Commission lost over 20 billion shillings in two decades (Katamunga, 2010).

In addition to clear waste and neglect, political tensions and fears were stoked by further land grabbing, clientalism, political opposition and, once again, slum demolition. This time Muoroto was the slum in question, which the Nairobi City Commission vigorously set about demolishing because residents tended to support Rubia and Kenneth Matiba, who emerged as the main voice of opposition to KANU’s dominance (Klopp, 2008). Indeed as Klopp argues, throughout this period evictions and demolitions – which resulted in 30,000 people being displaced and seven killed – were intricately associated with struggles over democratic space.

As in the past, this oppressive climate saw Nairobi become a space for vibrant political opposition. By the 1990s, the capital was considered the ‘political pulse’, the central nerve of the political system (see, for example, Medard, 2005), and location for the ‘golden age for political activism’ in the country. This was embodied in the 1990 Saba Saba protests for multi-partyism which were situated in the capital. Even more recently, the weekly protests held by CORD supporters since late 2016 to campaign for the replacement of electoral commissioners reconfirmed the prominent role of the city in Kenya’s political geography.

Central to this political struggle in the city was land redistribution, and resistance to eviction and the reallocation of land, that centred around the spoils of politics and the multi-ethnicity of informal settlements. Both sides were guilty of land grabbing and intimidating ethnic groups to relocated. For instance, following his election Moi notably rewarded supporters with Muoroto land, for example, and withheld it from opponents while opposition MPs pushed to get Luo voters registered elsewhere. By the time multi-party elections were introduced, Moi had

3 Years later, Gumo is still embroiled in land scandals, see http://nairobinews.nation.co.ke/news/former-minister-gumo-entangled-loresho-land-dispute/.
embarked on a policy of ‘internal repression’ in which the form of politics was strongly shaped by fomenting ethnic differences, linked to both overt and covert support to ‘ethnic’ militia, many of which operated in Nairobi. Moi, for example, either enabled, or, covertly supported some when he thought it politically opportune, such as occasionally using the Mungiki (Jones and Henningsen, 2013) to cause disruption and so discredit the opposition’s control of (the then) NCC post 1992. This form of extra-state or shadow state politics extended to almost all politicians, including suggestions that Raila Odinga’s, then, National Development Party was supporting Luo militia, such as the Taliban and Bagdad Boys, in order to strengthen support in slum areas of the capital (Kagwanja, 2013). The concentration of significant political and ethnic politicking in Nairobi’s Kibera and Mathare slums culminated in the 2007/8 post-election violence. Both settlements were scenes of intense violence in which the appearance of ethnic conflict was also based on underlying socio-economic grievances and party politics that had activated such violence (Van Stapele, 2015).

Yet, for all the social ills, including poor housing, sanitation and health, and seasonal outbreaks of diseases, such as cholera, slums in Nairobi are still excluded from planning. Like the capital itself that had originated somewhat accidentally, so too did the growth and permanence of slums. And planning was skewed to formal areas, as Ngau (2014) regards the dialectic of the ‘good’ city versus the ‘actually existing’ cities. So, whereas the current model of development is premised on a developmental path to create a World Class City (Vision 2030) – as a foreign investment, especially real estate, hub4- conversely, and somewhat contradictory, 80 per cent of the city’s population remains employed in the jua kali or informal sector, and 60 per cent of total Nairobi inhabitants, as mentioned, live in the informal residential spaces of the city. These are fissures underpinned also by a distinct spatialized political economy of post-colonial cities,

4 http://www.nation.co.ke/lifestyle/smartcompany/Nairobi-darling-of-top-investors/-/1226/3106796/-/gshbvwz/-/index.html
like Nairobi. While the pursuit of ‘world class metropolis’ (Government of Kenya, 2008) perhaps provides much needed impetus and to some extent planning frameworks, this model suffers from key challenges that the Metro 2030 report (2008) highlights:

‘Metro economy not competitive enough; inadequate infrastructure and utilities; poor mobility and connectivity due to ineffective transportation; poor quality of life in the region; metropolitan region not a preferred place of choice; crime and insecurity adversely affect investment location decisions and; ineffective governance.’

Yet, none of these challenges are experienced to the same extent across Nairobi, and solutions would not necessarily be a win-win for the city’s slum dwellers. Often such urban development privileges hyper-modern infrastructure for a small elite, not only for the ultra-wealthy but also for an emerging middle class, as well as diplomats and NGO employees, and perpetuates further privatized underdevelopment in the city’s margins that is of critical concern (Jones, 2018; Kimari, 2016; Manji, 2015; Myers 2015). Myers (2015), for example, sees these grandiose planning schemes as a reinvention of elitist, modernist visions for metropolitan development that disconnect formal state initiatives from informal settlements. It is striking how little discussion of informal settlements there is in the 2030 vision.

Consequently, the colonial logic of urban governance persists; the alienation of the masses from formal planning is exacerbated by postcolonial neglect, and in more recent decades, neoliberalism (Van Stapele, 2015; Kimari, 2016). Nairobi reflects developments common in many other cities, what Harvey (2008:63) calls ‘[T]his lopsidedness in urban development along class lines is in fact a global issue. It is currently arising in …. innumerable cities around the world where there are emergent concentrations of marginalized populations alongside high-modernist urbanization and consumerism for an increasingly affluent minority’. A key
consideration then in such contexts like the Nairobi slums, becomes the extent to which such institutional solutions ensconced within the neoliberal framework (like devolution) exacerbate rather than alleviates the political problems of integrating excluded and marginalized groups that constitute the majority in most countries and capitals.

**Devolution and the Capital**

“This time round, *liwe liwalo, jiu chini, kushoto kulia, mbele na nyuma, lazima tupate hii kura ya gavana wa Nairobi!* (let come what may, up-down, left-right, both sides, we must get Nairobi’s governor vote)”

(William Ruto, 2016).

This section briefly looks at the ways in which devolution has played out in the context of Nairobi’s political and socio-economic faultlines – the bitterness and intensity of Nairobi politics, that arguably confirms the capital’s established importance in national affairs (Majisu, 2015). Broadly speaking, is devolution heightening accountability, deepening governance and therefore delivering more inclusive development at sub-city scales?

*Devolution closing the gap?*

Klopp (2012) identifies four interrelated factors determining policy decision-making in Kenya: the disproportionate influence of external actors; the fragmentation of institutions, policy and projects; closed and top-down planning; and, especially, of note here, ‘the absence of mobilization for policies and projects that serve the majority of city residents, especially the poorer segments’. The tendency to exclude poorer sections in aspirations for building a world city may stoke the fires of fragmentation and dystopia (Myers, 2015), or may instead cause the more mundane everyday displacement of slum dwellers to make way for the city of tomorrow (see Jones, 2018). But neither is inevitable but more in spite of:

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‘...a considerable degree of readiness, primed by political activism, for residents of poor, informal settlements to engage in transformative, democratized planning at the grassroots, but these grassroots are disconnected and estranged from much of the formal state-led planning, left out of the vision for Nairobi in 2030 which appears in the 2008 master plan’ (Myers, 2015:16).

This disconnect blocks more substantive politics of rights and democracy and supports the ongoing historical failure of elites to champion popular interests. Holmquist’s (2005:213) keen observations concerning the ‘gap’ between national level policy interests and those of popular demands, still remain relevant. The 2010 Constitution intended to close this decision-making gap has widened potential for accountability.\(^6\) Such practices were to be enacted through the 2013 elections, that devolved responsibility for political, fiscal and administrative powers to 47 counties. Such significant realignment of key areas of service delivery and power and decision-making should, in theory, bring resources and power closer to the people. This includes a number of petitions aimed to protect citizens’ socio-economic rights in Kenya.\(^7\) But considerable political discretion still exists as there are no binding or ‘clear mechanisms of governance and programmes of action from the county and national government.’\(^8\) One recent study shows that it is in fact historical patterns of corruption, patronage and exclusion, that have been devolved; in other words, it is now about ‘Everyone’s turn to eat’ (D’arcy and Cornell, 2016). We should also add how economic interests inform key political decision-making, and thus may serve an even narrower group of private interests.

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\(^6\) Not least participation features several times: e.g. in relation to: s.10, national values and principles of governance; s.69, obligations in respect of the environment; s.118, access to parliament; s.174, articles on devolved government; s.184, which provides for, ‘participation by residents in the governance of urban areas and cities’; s.196, relating to public participation and county assembly powers, and many other provisions.

\(^7\) Petition 239 of 2014, Kepha Omondi Onjuro & others v Attorney General & 5 others [2015], in which residents and NGOs tried to prevent eviction from Railway line in Kibera and Mukuru, which though petitioners petition was unsuccessful, it invoked socio-economic and other rights concerning evictions, some of which were upheld, including alternative secure accommodation. See, http://kenyalaw.org/caselaw/cases/view/105457/

\(^8\) https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2000169469/law-on-social-economic-rights-form-kenyans-overdue
Yet, devolution has also heightened political competition and the stakes raised concerning control of Nairobi. This has had clear implications for local politics within formal settlements as well as development agendas. The election of Nairobi’s first county governor, Evans Kidero on a ODM ticket, along with roughly half of the total MCAs, associated with certain clear ethnic favouritism in the provision of resources. And Nairobi is regarded as a ‘CORD zone’ by many in the national opposition. In response, renewed calls from Jubilee’s leadership, notably, William Ruto, aim to ‘do what it takes’ to win back Nairobi. Such political contestation culminated during the 2016 elections with physical confrontation and verbal slandering erupting between then governor Kidero and then senator, Mike Sonko, who was vying (ultimately successfully) to be Jubilee’s governor candidate.

Unsurprisingly, key informal settlements, notably Kibera and Mathare, that had seen fierce competition between Jubilee and NASA (previously CORD) at the national level were the political arena for the governorship. This included confrontational campaigning regarding primary nominations. Jubilee’s plans to hold rallies on the same day and in the same areas - Masinde Muliro, Huruma - of Mathare as ODM and Kidero, were ultimately thwarted but indicated the intensity of political competition. Locally, activities surrounding MCAs - as well as MPs, governors, senators, and women’s representatives - seeking re-nomination, or, new candidates seeking selection, have mushroomed around Nairobi and come with certain promises and policies.

Policies by the Jubilee government included recruitment of the National Youth Service (NYS) to facilitate development in slums that mainly involved an army of youth despatched principally to clean up, unclogging drainage and removing garbage, as well as providing some income-generating activities. In return, youth were given a nominal but consistent wage in the lead up

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to the elections that was reported by locals to have reduced levels of crime and even promoted investment schemes. In addition, nascent development improvements, notably in infrastructure, included the tarmacking of roads in both slums. The ‘Mau Mau’ Road in Mathare, for example, received its first ever covering, as well as mast lights, pylons and lines installed to formally electrify the settlement, although still unfinished with evidence of poor planning and poor quality of work.

What may have appeared to be genuine development, was primarily cosmetic given its political purpose, and proved not to have the longevity to support transformation post-elections that required addressing historical patterns of neglect, political exclusion and vulnerability to eviction. A corruption scandal that had engulfed the Ministry of Devolution and Planning (under which the funding NYS took place), meant that many youth are still awaiting the remainder of their salary. In addition, the schemes to clean-up rubbish had failed to deal with the more endemic underdevelopment of sanitation infrastructure. At a structural level, a key issue is the continuing subordination of slums to the influence of area Chiefs, rather than any fresh democratising impulse being felt by election of MCAs. And these unelected local authorities are critical to implementing executive demands. In reference to one example, Jones (2018) demonstrates how the EU funded ‘missing links’ road infrastructure project (that would tarmac road going from Juja road, through Mathare, and up to Thika Highway) had gone astray. Although under the formal auspices of the Kenya Urban Roads Authority, it was regarded as President Uhuru’s project, and powerful political interests exacerbated by a failed community involvement component, saw the road instead bulldoze its way through the shack settlement of Mlango Kubwa and made 1000 people homeless, many of whom did not receive compensation.

The limited evidence of infrastructure development was offset by the reproduction of land grabbing and forcible evictions. Short-term national level planning is thus worsened by political intrigue and the dominance of strong interest groups in Nairobi County.
Some blame the inefficacy of MCAs, which should provide vital links between local and county level, but seem mainly motivated to impeach governors. Many locals in Mathare indicated uncertainty about the role of MCAs, while more cynical residents suggested that being an MCA is attractive for nothing other than the salary and associated benefits, such as housing allowance. In Nairobi, however, Kidero has been applauded for MCAs’ proactive oversight of the Nairobi County Executive Committee (Majisu, 2015). And certain political uncertainty brought by devolution could prove positive for areas previously disconnected (from their area MP or city-wide politics) and serve to close the ‘gaps’ identified earlier by Holmquist and others. But uncertainty in a country prone to political violence, elite and communally-driven, is not necessarily a solution for stability. What is more certain is that devolution appears to be highly politicised in a way that is not necessarily consistently coupled with more inclusive development, nor with the delivery of tangible and visible gains.

*Party Primaries*

Nairobi also became the scene of political crescendo, at least pre-election, during the protracted party primary nomination process. Chaotic scenes included missing candidate names on ballots, vote-buying and intimidation, with evidence that ballot boxes were either being stuffed, or ballot papers destroyed. This resulted in violence in places, such as Pangani, where the Starehe MP nomination was hotly contested. There was also the storming of ballot centres, with the arrest of one candidate, Margaret Wanjiru, who had been aiming, unsuccessfully, for nomination as Jubilee candidate for governor in Nairobi. The intensity of political tensions had not diminished post-devolution and the 2013 elections, which did not necessarily provide any indication of potential trouble in the August 2017 elections but spoke to the high stakes within primaries in ‘one party’ areas (see Cheeseman, 2017) that in effect made the selection process
the election. Older characteristics, such as malpractices and bribery, still featured prominently in the primaries with such institutional solutions not abetting deep-seated politics of impunity. As stated by Lynch (2017), those representing and supporting their candidate who were rigged against, may now be less likely to support better performance standards next time around. The overall character remains, as well stated, again by Lynch, concerning the fundamental democratic deficits in the institutional political landscape:

‘In short, the 2010 constitution and associated legislation sought to encourage the emergence of parties that would provide a disciplinary structure for political action and thus change the nature of Kenyan politics. The aim: to end the pattern of ‘big man’ clientalist politics and to usher in a new period of popular involvement in determining party policy. This simply has not happened…(and) points more to a politics of continuity than of change’ (Lynch, 2017).

While some political habits die hard, several more positive newer dynamics were at play. Key allies of party leaders did not always win though, which suggests some non-interference by party elites and ability to select more popular choices. For instance, some selections had been overturned in recognition of rigging (Lynch 2017). But in other cases, candidates were imposed by foul play and intimidation, and/or with use of financial resources to gain nomination. This was certainly the case for the selection of gubernatorial candidates for Jubilee in Nairobi (which will also have some bearing upon the 2022 general election). It was ultimately Mike Sonko’s significant support from the slum areas that won out against old Murang’a political involvement rejuvenated by Peter Kenneth’s candidature backed by influential Kikuyu politicians and businessmen. His decision to contest was also linked to preventing Deputy Ruto’s allies and his own considerations for running as President in 2022. Sonko’s populism and his connection to the common Wananchi was pitted against, and proved triumphant over, the company-executive stiffness of ODM’s Kidero. Indeed, an extremely intriguing side-show to the 2017 elections
was whether Sonko’s populism can cut through ethnic cocoons and provide more multi-ethnic class based support, or, if voting will continue to reflect ethnic loyalties. As one of the most urbanised and least ethnicised politicians, Sonko’s election victory is potentially very significant. That Sonko received more votes than those for Uhuru Kenyatta in the capital’s respective Governor and Presidency elections, suggests that he received considerable non-ethnic appeal: most people who voted for Raila Odinga for President also voted for Sonko despite being a candidate of the ruling party. Could this herald the start of the emergence of an urban based cross ethnic politics rooted in anti-elite populist demands for service delivery? (Chome, 2017).\(^{10}\) It’s a very positive and intriguing development, one in which the emerging political culture of the urban space enjoins devolution to inject dynamism and less political certainty at different spatial scales.

**Conclusion**

While devolution has changed much, the changes it has brought have been refracted through existing political culture. There is so much energy being expended on political competition, manoeuvring, intrigue and personal one-upmanship that could be used to strengthen infrastructure and empower citizens. It can only be hoped that in the years to come the heat of devolution can instead be harnessed for the white light of more substantive democratisation and with it, tangible and appropriate developmental benefits delivered on the ground. For Nairobi, though the wait continues, perhaps the kernels are there in the dynamic political uncertainty brought about by devolution and emerging cross-ethnic understanding that more inclusive urban development is a demand and not a favour.

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