

# **A Genesis of Street Communality: With Special Reference to the Political Culture of Street Violence in Nairobi**

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Diogenes  
2022, Vol. 63(3–4) 62–71  
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DOI: 10.1177/0392192117740035  
journals.sagepub.com/home/dio



## **Abstract**

The aim of this study is to elucidate the genesis of communality in the urban street. Although in the modern world cities have long been seen as research laboratories, in today's context of globalization they are becoming more radical and dynamic; they are becoming experimental theatres of social change. Since the end of the twentieth century, the political and economic reorganization of the world order is producing dramatic changes in various societies throughout the globe. This is bringing about changes which tend to standardize society and atomize individual subjects. These changes are seemingly connected, but they do exist alone, separately. In this complex situation, we are confronted with the fundamental question, how can people construct communality transcending differences among them? The present study looks for an answer to this question, paying special attention to collective violence in the urban street, where 'emergent but real' norms are constructed among the rioters and the communality genesis mechanism is activated. In order to make a case for this urban communality, the analysis focuses on events in the streets of Nairobi at the time of the Second Liberation of 1990s and during the Post-Election Violence of 2007–2008. People with different political and religious affiliation and ethnic identity were involved in violent urban riots. They were originally strangers, but they generated new social order and norms. In the street, they constructed and shared a provisional communality, which was emergent and fluid but also real and firm.

## **Keywords**

street, communality, riot, Kenya

The aim of this study is to illustrate the genesis of communality in the urban street. Although cities have long been viewed as research laboratories in the modern world, under the influence of globalization they are now becoming dynamic theatres of radical social change. Since the end of the

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twentieth century, a political-economic reorganization of the world order has produced dramatic changes in various societies throughout the globe. This is bringing about transformations which standardize society and atomize individuals.

Today, the sight of young people using internet cafes and cellular phones has become commonplace in cities all over the world. However, the changes caused by globalization are not so simple that they can be reductively seen in terms of mere standardization. Globalization incorporates heterogeneous elements that sometimes conflict with each other. It impacts individuals in terms of cultural identity, religious faith, political ideology, economic status, and sexual orientation. It may also reinforce notions of traditional and closed community. Today urban society can be seen as a social research laboratory in which such diverse forces are contested, articulated, and become entangled.

In this complex urban situation, we are confronted with a number of some fundamental questions. How can people construct communality and solidarity, transcending differences among them? Is the foundation of communality totally dismantled, and each individual disassembled, only mechanically connected with other individuals? When they exist, are feelings and practices of communality based on traditional forms of consciousness, such as ethnicity, nationality, class, or religion? Are we faced, instead, with a new, emergent kind of communality that does not require a fixed identification? The question whether the kind of communality found in the city is just a revival of old-style human categorization or draws on a postmodern-style fluid identity has been actively discussed in urban anthropology. This study will examine a third possibility, paying special attention to collective violence in the urban street, where emergent norms and order are constructed among the rioters and a genesis of communality is activated.

In order to make a case for this kind of urban communality, I will examine events taking place in the streets of Nairobi at the time of the Second Liberation in the 1990s<sup>1</sup> and during the Post-Election Violence (PEV) of 2007–2008.<sup>2</sup> Kenyan PEV took a heavy toll of more than one thousand human lives. In a short period of time, 125 Nairobi residents were killed in the streets, the urban street thus becoming the setting for collective violence in a chaotic State. People with different political and religious affiliation, ethnic identity, and economic status were involved in the violent urban riots. Originally strangers, they created a sense of social order and norms in the street. They constructed and shared a provisional communality, which was both emergent and fluid but also real and firm.

Uncertainty, instability, and disorder may be social characteristics of the urban street, but this does not necessarily mean that those gathering there are disconnected and atomized, nor that they become blind masses with a herd mentality. Instead, the urban street can produce a genesis of communality through which the participants create real forms of social solidarity.

## Streets as stages

In Kenya's recent history urban streets have been the major stage for political violence. Following the controversial presidential election of 27 December 2007, Kenyan society was unprecedentedly tumultuous for two months. Collective PEV erupted just after the incumbent President Mwai Kibaki was declared the winner. Supporters of Kibaki's opponent, Raila Odinga of the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM), alleged electoral manipulation and took to the streets of the capital city of Nairobi in protest. According to the Waki Report,<sup>3</sup> the first street violence in Nairobi occurred immediately after the announcement of the Presidential election results on 30th December and continued into the New Year as police prevented ODM supporters from holding a 'million people' protest march to Uhuru Park in Nairobi's Central Business District.

At first glance there appeared to be a political standoff between the Kikuyu youth, who supported the incumbent candidate, Kibaki, and the ethnic Luo, Luyia and Kalenjin, who supported

the opposition party candidate. The direction of the violence was extremely fluid. The violence took a variety of forms that diverged from a standard idea of conflict. For example, violence escalated periodically even among the Luo and Luyia and among the Luyia and Kalenjin, who all supported Raila Odinga. On some occasions, the Luo and Kikuyu youth, who were supposed to be enemies, ‘joined forces’ against the riot squads that patrolled the ‘slum’ districts. These dynamics point to the fluid and deconstructive character of urban streets.

The present study does not aim to provide a detailed report on the reality of violence in Kenya’s post-election riots. More specifically, the discussion brings out the potential of streets in modern society through the empirical examination of what is created and deconstructed in streets where violent uprisings take place.

Urban streets became theatres of social and political change in Kenya during the early 1990s. At that time, Kenya was under the paternalistic, single-party dictatorship of President Moi, who had ruled with an iron fist since 1978. It was small-scale merchants peddling in the streets of Nairobi who first started to challenge the hard-line Moi regime. On 26 May 1990, the Muoroto open-air market next to Nairobi’s long-distance bus terminal was cleared by the Nairobi police and then bulldozed. The government justified these actions saying that they were made necessary by the expansion of the bus terminal and, more generally, by the needs of local development, adding that the open-air market was an illegal ‘menace to the development plan’.

Over several hours from the start of the operation, the bulldozers knocked down the market stalls, also destroying people’s personal belongings in the process. Demonstrating residents hurled stones at the police, but their protest was suppressed by riot police squads. As a result, more than a dozen people, including ten children, were hospitalized in a serious condition. One child died, trapped under the rubble.

This violence triggered frequent anti-government riots in the streets of the ‘slum district’. In defiance of government prohibitions, on 7th July, just over a month after the Muoroto incident, a large-scale mass demonstration demanding multi-party democracy took place in Nairobi’s Kamukunji Square, resulting in fierce clashes. On that day, fifteen people died and close to a hundred were seriously injured. This rioting, which continued unsuppressed for several days, was named ‘Saba’ for, in Swahili, ‘saba’ means seven. As it spread to major cities throughout Kenya, the entire nation fell into a state of paralysis.

These incidents inspired a style of mass anti-government protest where people were called out into the streets. This marked the birth of a new political culture in Kenya. Until then, major political, social, and economic decisions were made by top élite groups operating at the heart of the regime. Such decisions were made in a manner profitable to these groups, and a legal basis for them was fabricated after the fact. Political and civic leaders and international organizations opposed to the regime would protest by lodging rational and logical criticism of these government policies. Stronger kinds of protest were limited to sporadic student riots. In contrast, following the violent events that I have briefly described, attempts began to be made to call people out into the streets and protest with intense animosity against unjust government decisions in order to overturn them. Naturally, this animosity in the streets could not always be channelled as the organizers wished. In some cases, anger would swell beyond the organizers’ expectations; in other instances, demonstrators would criticize or expel the organizers from the movement. Although marked by uncertainty, this anti-regulatory nature of street demonstrations was the driving force in the Kenyan political culture of the time.

## **Collectivity and communality in the streets**

‘Uncertainty’ is the keyword distinguishing action in the streets. Nevertheless, the people gathered there are not severed from their individual identities, nor do they necessarily create a community.

The streets possess a unique mechanism for creating communality. Advancements in globalization have alienated individuals and have created a system of human governance known as market integration. Opposing these processes requires an endeavour to reintegrate these alienated individuals in a way other than the revitalization or restoration of the former ordinary community. We could say that the development of community in the streets around social and political issues suggests one such possibility.

A more detailed explanation is needed. First, when powers of control and authority are challenged, a countermeasure is brought to bear. This countermeasure consists in redrawing communality in order to recreate community; it fragments identities lying at the core of human communities and breaks the categories to which people feel naturally they belong. However, this countermeasure is fraught with difficulties, the greatest of which is that the restoration of the community (or its representation) retains several problems. One such problem is embodied by dubious romantic ideology that represents traditional communities as harmonious utopias. Moreover, as stated earlier, the community to be revived is strategically designed by the very power which perpetuates globalization, and is created to suit its needs. Many cases of reterritorialized cooperation are marked by such influences.

Attempts to practise cooperation that escapes such pitfalls have been made, trying to pursue cooperation without subscribing to a rigid identity. Some of these attempts overlap with communities that bring to mind the ‘inoperative community’, as defined by Jean-Luc Nancy (1991), or with what Alphonso Lingis (1994) called ‘the community of those who have nothing in common’. These are artificial and provisional communities created by people with no connection to one another, who are estranged from ‘natural communities’, intended in terms of human descent, such as family, class, and rank. Naturally, the inclination towards communities unmediated by issues of identity or towards communities that exclude categorization may be a starting point when communities in the modern world reimagine themselves. This starting point may be seen to be in line with Butler’s idea of communality created in an ad hoc, performative fashion. This idea emphasizes the possibility that ad hoc communities may be formed without relying on firm individual identities, taking into account the limits of solidarity based on the a priori categories that inform people’s identity (Butler, 1990: 13–16; Matsuda, 2004: 247–270). Focusing on the potential of such communities has emerged as a model countermeasure in resisting the fragmentation and standardization brought about by globalization.

In the context of globalization people’s identities are severed from their communities, and new governance methods that utilize the fragmentation and fluidity of people’s identities are being implemented. However, even when attempts are made to revive traditional communities, it becomes evident that they are designed to structuralize the revival process itself. People seeking the potential for community in such a design focus on the emergent solidarity and ‘inoperative’ communities born from urban riots. Yet, these trends also have their problems, for these communities are disconnected from the realities of human experience. Communities in which social life takes place are relevant, real, and firm entities that powerfully appeal to people’s ordinary sense of belonging; they ensure solidarity, as opposed to disconnected, ‘inoperative’ communities that come and go in an ad hoc manner, like bubbles.

Certainly, communities are not the fixed and substantial entities that modern society attempts to regulate. Also, communities have been imagined and constructed historically, and have unmistakably been transformed by societal forces. However, it is important to recognize that communities that have arisen in such a manner, through a process, that is, of constant legitimization and essentialization (naturalization), have given people a firm reality and a stable identity. In this sense, communities are by no means amorphous processes that appear in an ad hoc manner; rather, they are received by people as ‘essential’ entities that have real presence and clear boundaries and that continually appeal to their members.

Communities created in the streets appear to have the clearest supply of this ‘essential and real’ community characteristic. There, different individuals gather, who do not share such attributes as a common understanding, principles, origins, or culture. When a will to violence channelled in a clear direction and a sense of resistance are shared, people in the street may be ‘inoperative’ and disconnected from each other but they feel an ‘essentially real’ communality, and they rely on it to take collective action. This is key to understanding the kind of community born in the streets. It is not, simply, a phenomenon propelled by globalization, nor does it appear to arise only in situations of crisis and it is not as a revival of traditional utopian communities. It is created, and thrives, in places where people gather as an ‘essential and real’ community.

## Culture of violence in the streets

A question to ask is, how does collective action focused in one direction become possible in the street? This issue is likely to be linked to the formation of norms in the street, intended as a collective space. The knowledge gained thus far through research on urban riots and mob behaviour serves as a point of reference in addressing this question. We shall now examine the Kenyan urban riots of the 1990s as a case study.

Urban riots are often accompanied by mob behaviour, such as lynching and looting. Thus far, such behaviour has been regarded as irrational, marked by raw emotion and anarchy. From Le Bon and Tarde onwards, sociological theories of coercive mob behaviour have understood riots as impulsive and irrational actions that differ sharply from ordinary group norms and behavioural patterns. Rioters are believed to be incited by an abnormal psychology that deviates from social control, and their actions are regarded as mere imitation or as driven by emotional contagion.

However, since the 1960s, this view of rioting has undergone a process of reassessment. It has been observed that various groupings are formed within a mob which includes violent rioters. Furthermore, considering that within a riot certain group behaviours are accepted while others are rejected, the attendant behaviour cannot be simply dismissed as abnormal. Such criticism has led to the view, formulated as the ‘emergent norm theory’ by Turner,<sup>4</sup> that rioters create ad hoc norms suited to their individual circumstances. Turner first defined as ‘differential expression’ the diverse feelings and behaviours of the individuals who are part of a crowd. In reality, many such individuals marked by different expressions do create and share new values which define particular circumstances. These are emergent norms. It is through obeying these norms, that rational, cooperative action among people becomes possible. This view has clearly demonstrated that the phenomenon of violence, which may appear abnormal at first glance, is in reality a part of social life – a continuation of normal, everyday life.

For example, a semi-unemployed Maragoli<sup>5</sup> participant in the Saba Saba riots in his 20s told me in detail his experience as a participant in blocking a road in an informal settlement area in the western part of Nairobi, hurling stones at passing cars and starting fires. At the time, he had no steady employment, and eked out a living doing odd jobs in the city. He belonged to a class of people denounced by the government as ‘drug-addicted punks’ in a statement issued immediately after the Saba Saba riots. This young man sustained injuries to his arms as a result of scuffles with the police. What follows is his description of the mood at the scene:

First, I threw rocks at the cars that passed by, one after another. It almost felt like I was going to a disco. It was a real thrill to see their windshields smashed to bits. At any rate, the guys riding these cars had looted money from somewhere, no mistake. Next, I let them go after they stopped their cars and showed me the ‘V’ sign. Showing the ‘V’ sign meant they were my allies. Of course, I mercilessly pummelled police cars with rocks and set them on fire. It’s not like there was a leader or anything. Everyone just did as they pleased. (OG, 20s, male, Maragoli, interviewed on 16 August 1990)

The 'V' sign requires explanation. In the 1990s, when the movement demanding multi-party democracy peaked, the act of holding up two fingers acquired new meaning as a symbol of support for that movement. As this V sign gained meaning, government supporters protested by creating the 'one finger' sign as a symbol of the single-party government. During the riots, the norm of not damaging cars displaying the V sign formed naturally, and spontaneously, in the districts where the rioting occurred. This was not just limited to OG's area. There were similar reports from the Eastleigh and Pumwani districts, among others.

From OG's narrative it is evident that the riots were not held entirely in a state of anarchy and abnormal psychology; rather, the participants themselves defined their circumstances and created norms suited to their circumstances. This reinforces the 'emergent norm theory', which rejects the view that rioting is a manifestation of pure anarchy recognizing a certain kind of norms and culture in the riots. Interestingly, a similar viewpoint was developed in social history research on the moral economy of peasant revolts in England (Thompson, 1971). The masses who participated in the food uprisings developed emergent norms and shared morals. As in the case of the Saba Saba riots, it is not as though those protesters engaged in anarchic destruction and looting; while their hostility was primarily directed toward property, they engaged in carefully selected attacks on the lives or bodies of their enemy. Norms and morality were not imposed by a specific leader. They were created in an ad hoc and emergent fashion. The totality of such rules of conduct, which brought a certain degree of order to the street riots, can reasonably be seen as the culture of street riots.

## Creation of order

The street-riot culture that I have described could be observed in the recent PEV disturbances in Kenya. As in the case of the norm emergently formed during the Saba Saba riots, whereby the V sign served as a symbol that spared its displayer from violence, new norms appeared during the PEV disturbances and new symbols of solidarity averted violence. This issue emerged in an interview with OG, who was now in his mid-40s, on the PEV unrest. An ODM candidate, who was a Luyia like OG, stood for election in OG's constituency in Nairobi. OG became actively involved in the election campaign in his 'slum' district. In the presidential election he supported Odinga. The majority of people in his 'slum' are lower class migrant workers from western Kenya, such as the Luyia and Luo. It was as a consequence of the huge demographic increase in Nairobi after independence that the agricultural fields where the Kikuyu originally farmed maize became a 'slum' district. So even today landlords and property owners are Kikuyu, and in the election they were, naturally, Kibaki supporters. OG said:

As we heard of the irregularities in the ballot counting, my friends and I gathered on the main street in our area. Heavily armed police officers immediately arrived, and the people assembled were hit on the head by police batons and were chased away. We immediately got out of there. Then, once the police were gone, we went back and shouted that there was election rigging. When the police came back, we went to war, throwing rocks at them. We were with the Luo, who this time were our brothers. Among us, there was also someone who looked Kikuyu and who joined us in throwing rocks at the police. The Kikuyu also hate the police and those who ride around in Mercedes and Toyotas. That's why they joined us. I hate Kibaki and the rich Kikuyu. But, here the poor don't see everyone as an enemy. There are some who hate them, and there were those who took this opportunity to try to attack the homes of their landlords. But, my landlord is not a bad person. That's why I greeted him in a friendly way even during the riots. I said, 'The situation is really bad, huh'. In January, I participated in a demonstration rally called by Raila (Odinga) in town. But hardly anyone listened to his speeches. We thought we could meet our friends, and maybe get a little spending money, but the rally wasn't interesting. That's why I haven't gone since. It's more interesting here. (OG, 40s, male, Maragoli, interviewed on 22 August 2008)



OG's narrative seems to imply a variety of things. First, during the violent confrontations in the 1960s and in the early 1980s, the Luo and Luyisa were fierce rivals. There were also frequent incidents of sexual violence where the Luyia together with Kikuyu, who have a culture of male circumcision, forcibly circumcised members of the Luo, who did not have such a culture.<sup>6</sup> However, in the recent events describe above, they joined together as 'brothers'. In OG's 'slum' in Nairobi, Kikuyu landlords and low-income tenants of Luyia, Luo, Masai, and other ethnic origin organized a voluntary multi-ethnic patrol system to protect their world throughout the PEV disturbances. This confirms that there exists a fluid sense of solidarity unrelated to any fixed ethnic hatred. Furthermore, in those circumstances the basic confrontation scheme whereby the Kikuyu supported Kibaki and the Luo and the Luyia supported Odinga simply fell apart. Here the durability of everyday relations and a rule for determining enemies became visible. More precisely, even in the midst of the rioting, it appears that participants emergently created and shared rules regarding who was deemed an enemy, preventing total indiscriminate violence. At the same time, it is also clear that they did not unconditionally obey the instructions and orders issued by the organizers and the power élites. The latter advance their personal agendas by using ethnic consciousness to mobilize the masses; however, in the streets and public areas where the masses swarm and disperse, these élites do not have absolute power, and it is not unusual on occasion to observe actions and attitudes that contradict their intentions.

## Escaping control

The power élites who attempt to manage and subjugate people see street action as an effective means of violence; at the same time, the elusive quality of street behaviour that I have described is for them an extremely dangerous time bomb. Thus, they have created a variety of schemes to pacify the streets and place them under their control.

These methods for managing and controlling street violence could be observed in the Kenyan riots of the 1990s. The Kenyan government issued statements claiming that the participants in the riots that frequently broke out on the streets of Nairobi were not local residents. The statements blamed disruptive elements who sneaked in from outside – such as 'drug-addicted punks', which I mentioned earlier – and declared that they would be forced out and peace would be restored to the streets.

This response was straight from the state's manual on street-violence management and control. However, the recent Kenyan street riots developed in a manner that defied that manual. As places embodying boiling points for uncontrollable violence, the streets are double-edged swords for the power élites. When a power élite group is in a minority in parliament or in the government, they can call people into the streets and use violent and explosive force to turn conditions in their favour. Such methods have indeed been frequently used by leaders of minority élite powers in Kenyan political history since 1992 in order to drive the government into a corner. Conversely, it is also possible for the government to use such circumstances as a way to stay in power by controlling and managing violence in the streets.

Several management and control mechanisms are ready to be implemented, since the élite at the core of state power are wary that the power of the streets can turn into violence against them. In the case of the recent post-election turmoil, the state authorities not only attempted directly to suppress the street demonstrations by deploying armed police forces; they also tried to justify the use of excessive force against the protesters, claiming that they were social misfits – potheads, moonshine drunkards, and gangs of street thieves – taking advantage of the political chaos to engage in illegal acts detrimental to civil society, like looting, robbery, and murder. This strategy was similar to that used in the 1990s.

On the other hand, for the ODM leadership the explosive power of the streets was the driving force needed to break through the situation from below. So, they attempted to attract people supportive of street action. The January protests produced numerous casualties as the demonstrations were forcibly stopped on some occasions, and forcibly carried out on others. However, not all the participants gathered in these street protests acted in a collective, unified manner. In some cases, calls for unity were ignored and gatherings dispersed, while in other cases political leaders making speeches were heckled. There were instances, when the gathering did not go as the organizers had planned, in which the organizers responded in line with the state's management and control manual; they claimed that the chaos was caused by 'government spies', who had infiltrated the gathering posing as opposition party supporters.

This is the original way of managing and controlling the streets. 'Contaminants' are created in the street space and anything that does not obey authority is branded as a 'contaminant', with the anti-social connotations of spy or hoodlum, and then expelled. However, in the PEV turmoil in Kenya, numerous instances were observed where this technique was circumvented, regenerating the anti-control character of the streets. This became the defining feature of the recent street violence. During the PEV, there were no elite groups, leaders, or organizers to channel the violence in the streets. Also, while there were common slogans making accusations of electoral fraud and calling for the immediate resignation of the president, there was neither a pretence of ethnic culture nor a ringing declaration of political principles. Moreover, the young people labelled by power élites as contaminants – described, we have seen, as hoodlums, potheads, and drunkards – and marked as 'anti-social' people and public nuisances in the city centre's business district were, in fact, ordinary residents in the 'slum' districts. Under these circumstances, the techniques for managing and controlling street violence were entirely dysfunctional. The more attempts were made from above to remove 'contaminants' from the streets, the more the streets rebelled and increased their resistance.

## **Conclusions: emergent norms on the streets and living communities**

Until 2007, Kenya enjoyed unprecedented economic growth and political democratization. Men and women in business suits driving Japanese cars and carrying briefcases with computers and personal digital assistants were a common sight in Nairobi, and in the suburbs numerous homes and luxury apartments targeting this new well-to-do class appeared. On the other hand, the adjoining 'slum' districts swelled with massive numbers of unemployed people unable to secure steady jobs and leading a precarious, day-to-day existence. Formerly, it had been possible for them to make a living doing odd jobs as day labourers; for example, doing construction work or peddling goods. Now, these unemployed people are unable even to find a place in the informal sector; so, in most cases they give up living in the city and find refuge in the farming villages where they were born.

This kind of social divergence and polarization was the problematic product of the neoliberal social reforms introduced in the late 1990s and actively promoted by the Kibaki government since 2002. The government attempted to attain stability in the social order by selectively weakening and dismantling various categories and communities that had guaranteed a sense of communality until that point; individuals were thus automatized and set adrift in a setting marked by market principles. On the one hand, such style of governance has rapidly expanded the affluent middle class; on the other hand, it has created an enormous underclass with no chance whatsoever of improving their lot in life.

People who resist this style of governance try to recover the communality that has been dismantled by the neoliberal drive. In the 1990s, this attempt took the form of a reconstructed ethnic identity. Tradition and ethnicity became a joint symbolic medium to convey people's frustrations



and discontent, at times expressed through acts of violence. For example, people's resentment over land issues, created by colonial control and further aggravated by post-independence African-led governments, found expression in the form of interethnic opposition to the integration of ethnic communities. By adorning themselves in traditional costumes, wielding traditional weapons, and singing war songs, people reaffirmed their community and became agents of collective violence. In the streets of Nairobi, the accepted norms during the rioting drew on faith in the continuity from the past, not on the state's moral prescriptions imposed on them from above. The activities of the 'traditional soothsayers' during the Nairobi riots, and the revival of folk songs sung at funerals, can also be understood within this context. By using 'tradition', street violence was redefined in a symbolic context that was consistent with the past, and it was in this context that people were able to create bonds.

However, in the latest PEV street riots in Nairobi, the tendency to stand up to the authority of the popular government through the creation of community via the media of ethnicity and tradition disappeared. In today's Kenyan society, where disparities are worsening and becoming entrenched, people in the underclass turn their discontent and anger directly at the authority of the state. The streets are the very location where these dynamics take place. In order to seek communality and secure solidarity, people have started to use not ethnicity or traditional culture but the labels of 'social misfit', 'hoodlum', and 'flake' that have been imposed on them by the state in order to implement their exclusion. Under a neoliberal regime the foundations for their survival have been dismantled and the possibility of rising up has been taken away from them. So they remain in the 'slums' where they just barely manage to get by, leading a precarious everyday existence. These people were called out onto the streets as enthusiastic supporters of the power élites in the majority and minority parties, as they were taken in by these élites' mobilization strategy and their use of undisguised ethnic sentiments. Ultimately, however, this worked only on the surface. As we have seen, while gathering on the streets, people do not act as puppets obeying the instructions of the power élites. At times, they have ignored or ridiculed these élites; at other times, they have defied their intentions and have taken collective action, activating relationships based on their own life-worlds and creating communality. In the midst of the diverse and fluid conditions in the streets, they rely on their community at the bottom of society in what are known as 'slums', and lay the groundwork for emergent but real solidarity to develop. This constitutes an open pathway to the outside that has the hidden potential to overcome the aporia of having real and fixed or emergent and fluid tendencies in the genesis of communality in urban streets.

## Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

## Notes

1. Since independence, in 1963, Kenya was a *de facto* and *de jure* one-party state under the KANU (Kenya African National Union). However, in the early 1990s some politicians, and religious and civic leaders demanded multi-party democracy, setting up the Forum for the Restoration of Democracy (FORD). They finally pushed the Moi government to hold multi-party elections in 1992. This political movement is called the Second Liberation (Thrup and Horsby, 1998).
2. In the 2007 national elections, Kibaki's PNU (Party of National Unity) and Odinga's ODM (Orange Democratic Movement) were in a head-to-head competition. Kibaki was from the largest Kikuyu ethnic group and Odinga was ethnically a Luo. The top leaders of ODM are Luyia, Kalenjin, and Coast-Arab. As Kenyan national elections since independence were seemingly characterized by ethnic arithmetic, political campaigns turned into ethnic conflict (Kimani, 2009).

3. Philip Waki, a Court of Appeal judge, was appointed to the Chair of the Commission of Inquiry on Post-Election Violence. The Commission was established to investigate what, how, and why the clashes erupted and who were the most responsible perpetrators; his Report was published online on 4 November 2008.
4. Turner and Killian's Emergent-Norm Theory addressed vague and changing norms that emerge on the spot (Turner & Killian, 1972; Turner, 1964).
5. The Maragoli is a sub-ethnic group. Together with sixteen other Bantu-speaking groups, it constitutes Luyia, the second largest ethnic group in Kenya.
6. The first direct confrontation between these groups in the streets of Nairobi took place in July 1969, just after assassination in broad daylight of Tom Mboya, a political rising star among the Luo. Angry Luo youths rioted and clashed with the police. But, together with Luyia youth, the Kikuyu violently attacked Luo men and openly circumcised them by force.

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