African Markets and the Utu-Ubuntu Business Model. A perspective on economic informality in Nairobi

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Part Two

The Making of an African City
In the previous chapter, I noted that African economic logic, norms and values remain deeply rooted in Nairobi. The resilience of the city’s traders and artisans has created a subtle and subliminal indigenisation process that has been integral to the evolution of the city. This process of indigenisation has seldom been grounded in official policies, and has largely been driven by ordinary citizens.

In this chapter, I first describe some of indigenisation policies implemented in postcolonial Africa and specifically in Nairobi. I then show how these policies conflicted with other planning and economic imperatives and were shelved by the authorities. Since the 1990s, a range of individual and community initiatives have gradually brought indigenisation back into the spotlight in Nairobi, albeit not officially and with little backing from the city authorities.

Postcolonial urban planning in Africa

As they achieved independence in the mid-1960s and began trying to claw their way back to economic health, most African governments started searching for a planning paradigm that would affirm their Africanness in political and economic terms, both locally and globally. They seem to have explored three options for achieving this: using state resources, attracting foreign investment
and foreign aid, and reverting to an indigenous or traditional African model of doing business.

Different countries were effectively coerced into adopting different combinations of the first two options even though they might have preferred the third. As president of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah called for a unified Africa that would share infrastructure to address the legacies of underdevelopment. Julius Nyerere, while president of Tanzania, implemented ujamaa, a social policy intended to uphold African values of solidarity and communality. He encouraged the formation of village cooperatives based on equal opportunity and self-sufficiency. Kenneth Kaunda, as president of Zambia, proposed a form of humanism that places the good of humanity at the centre of all state activities.

However, it was not easy for Africans to find a balance between adopting Western values and retaining African ones. In the late 1950s and well into the 1960s, development thinking recommended that the rest of the world catch up with the industrialised nations through modernisation rather than indigenisation. Scholars such as Lewis (1954) recommended that the dual nature of traditional and non-traditional economies be dealt with and McClelland (1961) argued that tradition held back development.

Kenya, like many other African countries, faced major problems as it tried to recover from massive economic, social and cultural damage done by decades of colonial exploitation. Development policies that emphasised the need to catch up with Europe and North America in terms of urbanisation, education, economics and politics were initiated through five-year plans. As African governments pursued this catch-up agenda, they progressively abandoned African values.

By the early 1970s, scholars such as Rodney (1972) began to point out how trade relations with Europe were reinforcing Africa’s economic dependency and exploitation. African countries seemed hell-bent on using the industrialisation to chart their development path but were massively constrained by their lack of financial and technical resources. While Rodney (1972) suggested that Africa sever ties with Europe, Mazrui (1986) demonstrated the complexity
of what it means to be African. Mazrui argues that it is not practical to claim Africanness on the basis of geography alone, observing that Africans are heirs to a triple legacy – African, Islamic and Western. He suggests that the legacies of these three civilisations are so entrenched in Africans’ everyday lives, perceptions and negotiations that they can no longer be disentangled.

Kenya has had four presidents since 1964, when the country achieved independence: Jomo Kenyatta (1964–1978), Daniel arap Moi (1978–2002), Mwai Kibaki (2002–2013) and Uhuru Kenyatta (2013–). Kenyatta initiated a brand of African capitalism that combined self-reliance, group investments and private ownership of property. He initiated the spirit of *harambee* (pulling together) as the basis of the country’s great transformation. Moi’s regime promised to follow in Kenyatta’s footsteps but actually did little to disrupt the status quo. Kibaki entrenched classical neoliberalism in Kenya, prioritising individualism and economics. During his reign, the notion of *harambee* was replaced with state-sponsored projects run via his Constituency Development Fund. Unfortunately, the economic policies pursued during the three different administrations benefited only certain sections of the community, fostering a culture of political patronage and corruption that has become key to the dynamics of the national economy (Hydén 1994; Leys 1975).

As Hydén (1994: 85) observes,

[Kenyatta’s] strategy was to create a number of parastatals, notably the Industrial and Commercial Development Corporation (ICDC) and the Kenya National Trading Corporation (KNTO) to provide credit and other forms of support to budding entrepreneurs. Much of the demand for these services came spontaneously from the entrepreneurially minded Kikuyu, but the skewed distribution of these benefits was further reinforced by the fact that these bodies were controlled by Kikuyu appointees. With the benefit of hindsight, it is easy to see that this approach led not only to the rapid Africanisation of certain sectors of the economy, notably the retail sector, but also strengthening of Kenyatta’s political base.
This observation may hold true for some of the political and educated elite from the Agikuyu community who were close to the regime. Today, the elite are more diverse in terms of ethnicity and manifest spatially in different parts of the city. For example, some parts of Nairobi’s built environment might be considered to have ‘caught up’ with what the global elite aspire to. Estates such as Karen, Westlands, Lavington, Spring Valley, Nyali and Gigiri are very similar to those found in parts of high-income Western or Asian countries. However, for the majority of the city’s inhabitants, including traders in markets such as Uhuru, Wakulima, Gikomba and Ngara, this catching-up process has hardly begun. In 2014, the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics estimated that over two million people work in Nairobi’s markets (KNBS 2014).

The idea of incorporating indigenous values and practices into urban planning has received some attention in the contemporary era of globalisation. In 2007, the UN began promoting the rights of indigenous communities via its Declaration on the Rights of Marginal and Aboriginal Communities. Subsequently, Australia introduced additional legal rights for indigenous people. In Latin America, the University of the Autonomous Regions of the Nicaraguan Caribbean Coast is connecting students and grassroots community organisations into wider discussions of modernity, colonisation and decoloniality (Sidaway et al. 2014).

Along similar lines, Iyam (2013) has investigated the persistence of certain indigenous traditions even as communities embrace change. Using the example of the fattening rooms linked to marriage traditions in south-eastern Nigeria, Iyam notes that far from being abandoned, such traditions are being integrated with contemporary practices. Iyam suggests that both continuity and change are evident in such cultural practices, and that they help to create a degree of harmony between Western and African norms.

A similar form of integration is reflected in Kenyan marriages, where both African and Western rituals often take place. Usually, a Christian ceremony occurs after the traditional African rites are celebrated. Among the Agikuyu, for example, these include *ruracio*...
(the paying of bride-price when the groom’s family is invited to the bride’s family home) and itara (the bride’s family’s reciprocal visit to the groom’s home). The reality that these indigenous institutions remain so prevalent among Kenyans suggests the need for wider conversation about how African cultural practices might be better integrated into business and urban development.

Planning in Nairobi from the mid-1960s

Making Nairobi a truly African city was a key objective for the Kenyan government in the first two decades after independence. In 1964, then-minister for local government Ayondo, addressed one of the city council’s monthly meetings and advised the council to make Nairobi a truly African city by including all inhabitants of the metropole in their plans. He argued that, up to this point, Nairobi had been a city of the rich that favoured those fortunate enough to have formal employment. He encouraged everyone to look beyond racial, religious and tribal prejudices and urged the council to make everyone feel part of the city.

Imbued with the spirit of liberation, Kenya’s newly independent government tried to base its development planning on African logic and values. This was expressed in Sessional Paper 10 of 1965 entitled African Socialism and its Implications for Planning (Republic of Kenya 1965). In the paper, the state advocated a political and economic system that was ‘positively African’; that is, not overly influenced by foreign blueprints but still capable of accommodating useful models from elsewhere. Key principles were: to draw from the best African traditions; to make the system adaptable to new circumstances and rapid change; and to avoid depending on any country or group of countries for success (Republic of Kenya 1965: 3). African socialism was thus seen as being rooted in African traditions, independent of foreign influence, and based on the universal human values of equity, social justice, human dignity, freedom of conscience as well as freedom from want, disease and exploitation. Political democracy and mutual social responsibility were put forward as key tenets of the system.
According to the sessional paper, African political tradition recognises that individuals are born free and equal and discourages community domination by powerful interest groups. In a traditional context, an individual’s voice or counsel is respected regardless of their economic status. ‘Even where traditional leaders appeared to have greater wealth and hold disproportionate political influence over their tribal or clan community, there were traditional checks and balances including sanctions against any abuse of such power’ (Republic of Kenya 1965: 3). African leaders were seen as trustees of communities in that their modes of administration and management were controlled by religion and customary laws while age and maturity were determining factors for participation in political life (Republic of Kenya 1965).

The critical role of African traditional religion in regulating political behaviour was the main difference between African socialism, communalism and capitalism. African socialism differed from communalism because every mature citizen was seen as having equal political rights. The irrelevance of citizens’ personal economic power differentiated the system from capitalism. In addition, social responsibility in African socialism involved the incorporation of the African family spirit in the project of nationhood. Members of society were expected to do their best for each other on the understanding that if society prospered, everyone would benefit. To facilitate this, the state undertook to work towards providing equal opportunities and equal access to social services, such as education, health and social security, as well as to eliminate exploitation and discrimination (Republic of Kenya 1965: 4).

Since every member of African traditional society has a duty to work, the state would try to ensure that every member of the society was gainfully employed. Those who wrote the paper argued that this duty would be acknowledged and willingly accepted by Kenyans as long as mechanisms for sharing the accrued societal benefits were established. Society’s reciprocal response to individual contributions was assumed to be definite, automatic and universally accepted (Republic of Kenya 1965: 4).
The sessional paper was heavily criticised by some as unAfrican, socialist and a poor blueprint for development (see Ghai 1965; Obama 1965). Nevertheless, some aspects of the programme were implemented. Nairobi’s first mayor, Charles Rubia, was an ardent adherent of African socialism. He was committed to the independence-struggle ideals of self-governance and racial equality. Endeavouring to implement city policy in this spirit, he attempted to Africanise the city administration by employing more Africans. He also made schooling more accessible to Africans, provided decent housing for Africans in the city by opening up new areas such as Kariokor and Madaraka, and made space for African markets. Rubia was often at loggerheads with other councillors over the issue of Africanisation, especially in relation to the treatment of hawkers and beggars. He wanted everyone in the city to be treated with dignity and given access to the means of making a living. First, he made provision for hawkers to sell their goods from designated spaces in the city all day rather than having to keep moving to avoid harassment from police and other city officials. Later, the council decided to construct buildings in these spaces.

Not everyone followed Rubia’s example. Instead, some chose to thwart the spirit of African socialism expressed in the sessional paper, taking advantage of their positions in the city or national administrations to enrich themselves. Some allocated themselves large parcels of land in the distribution and settlement projects. Gitu Wa Kahengeri, secretary-general of the Mau Mau War Veterans Association, attributes this to the fact that relatively few of the people who occupied administrative positions after the colonial period had been involved in the independence struggle. Part of the reason for this is that the Africanisation of the civil service, as well as the public and private sectors, began when many of the freedom fighters were still in detention. Recruitment processes also tended to favour those who had been educated in missionary schools (athomi). Few of these people had any real respect for traditional African values or even for the values and ideals of self-rule, which might have encouraged them to seek
economic justice. They also lacked any loyalty to the aims of the freedom struggle (Interview 2015).

**Conflicts between indigenisation and planning**

The government’s failure to incorporate African values into Kenya’s legal system has since fostered conflict. Ideally, each community’s own moral fabric should have been integrated into a national moral code of ethics capable of guiding the nation. As Richard Gitau, a farmer and former member of the Mau Mau liberation movement, observes, stark differences exist between how Western jurisprudence and African customary laws are applied in Kenya. For example, Gitau sees the Cooperative Societies Act (No. 2 of 2004) as actually protecting those who swindle and steal from farmers’ cooperatives. In African tradition, social rules and regulations dealt with such lawbreakers and made sure that victims were compensated (Interview 2015).

The implications of the deep cultural conflict between the *athomi* (missionary-educated elite) versus the *acenji* (illiterate) for the evolution of indigenisation must not be underestimated. The *athomi* were socialised to disregard African indigenous practices. They were encouraged to reject their parents’ values and taught their children to turn their backs on African culture. The distinction between the *acenji* and *athomi* was sharp and their worldviews were virtually impossible to integrate. The division between them played out in the interactions between the city administrators, who were professionally trained, and the city councillors, most of whom were illiterate and had been elected to their positions by local citizens.

In an unpublished report compiled in 1973, Gilbert Njau, a planning officer in Nairobi’s city council, made the following observation about urban planning:

> Planning on a comprehensive basis is relatively new in this country. The public therefore must be prepared … to appreciate the problems and the remedies that are to be employed in order to guide development. Where planning is an alien concept, there is a danger of it being rejected. Even in countries where planning has
been in operation for a long time, there are tendencies of regarding it as a negative exercise and therefore dreaded. (Njau 1973)

In addition, it seems that few if any of the city administrators were fully confident that they could plan for the city. Evidence suggests that they relied instead on experts from outside the country. Senior economists from the UN technical assistance programme were consulted and an urban study group was established. This consisted of UNDP personnel, consultants and was chaired by the provincial commissioner for Nairobi (Njau 1973).

Difficulties that plagued Nairobi's city planners in the 1970s included the lack of planning policies, inadequate financial resources, strong conflicts of interest in the community as a whole as well as opposing priorities within government. The complexity of the planning dilemmas facing the city and the frustrations that planners experienced in trying to implement the relevant legislation are evident in the following extract from Njau's (1973) report:

The city council has functions given to it to perform but we have suffered from general lack of guidelines on policy, for example, on housing. In Zambia, there is a definite policy. We tend to lay our own standards which sometimes conflict with what other people feel is desirable. We operate within financial resources available, not without much opposition in other respects. Markets for example were said to be too elaborate. Some called them white elephants. There is free land in our planning and we have been at loggerheads with some ministries. With regard to development control, this is not usually welcome. Any developer would like to do what he likes. We insist on standards laid down for example on density of population, road thickness, drainage, etc. In this respect, we are unpopular. Considerable pressure is brought to bear but we hide under the law. Many architects are now getting used to principles.

In 1975, conflicts in urban planning and implementation impacted on the authorities’ handling of a cholera outbreak. One of the measures taken by the health authorities was to close kiosks used
by traders and artisans, thus preventing trade to a large extent.\textsuperscript{49} Elected members of parliament who represented ordinary people were up in arms about this. Writing to the city council, Kenya’s then-permanent secretary for health, a Mr Boit, decried the fact that the health sector was starved of funding. He also observed that the closure of existing kiosks for traders had created significant political repercussions and asked that ‘hygienic’ kiosks be built.

Mwangi Mathai, member of parliament for Langata at the time, expressed his frustration with the city planners’ inability to acknowledge the role played by traders in reducing the number of people who would otherwise be forced to rely on food welfare.

My only regret is the fact that recently this sound policy seems to be undergoing some adverse changes that are not in the interest of our people. I certainly take pride in the fact that in Nairobi, cases of those who would seek help from the administration in form of food etc. have reduced due to the fact that our people are able to earn a living this way. There are virtually no beggars to talk about. I was rather perturbed by the latest attitude of the council when recently hawkers were harassed under the pretext of the presence of the cholera epidemic. I was delighted when His Excellency the President intervened and saved what was going to be an explosive situation. I would strongly suggest that your council reconsider as an urgent matter of policy the future security of these hawkers. To allow such a large group of Kenyans to exist under fear and insecurity is tantamount to betrayal of human rights especially when there are reasonable alternatives.

Finally, I would like to refer to the unnecessary requirement by your council that only licensed hawkers themselves should operate their kiosks and be barred from using relatives or employee assistants. This is unfair since these hawkers leave their kiosks closed while in town for normal supplies. This results in loss of revenue to them that is certainly unnecessary. I would suggest that your council re-examines this requirement with a view to easing the situation for these wananchi. In fact, some hawkers could employ a number of people to ease unemployment.\textsuperscript{50}
Cultural conflict also had an impact on indigenisation. The work of Mazrui and Gatheru is instructive here. In *The Africans: A Triple Heritage* (1986), Mazrui describes the impact of Islamic, Western and African values on the continent’s environment, built infrastructure, religions and economies. In *A Child of Two Worlds*, Gatheru (1966: 2) describes the Agikuyu encounter with British colonialism and the dilemma he faces in juggling his African cultural identity with Western values and norms:

> My people, the Kikuyu are being hammered, beaten, and drawn, too, by the great forces that I have now learned, after my college, to call urbanisation, industrialisation and acculturation. I have learned, too, that I am what the sociologists call a ‘marginal man’ – a child of two worlds.

Of Nairobi, he writes that there appeared to be two groups in the city, one that regarded the city as a place for making money. The other group seemed to see Nairobi as belonging to Asians and Europeans, and as a place that no African could regard themselves as part of. Their real home was in the rural areas. Africans therefore seemed to see the city as a place for migrants and as ‘a means to an end’ (Gatheru 1966: 95). These perspectives had significant ramifications for the way the majority of Africans behaved in the city.

The result was that after working for a considerable number of years in Nairobi, these people would eventually return to the rural area with some money returning to the city only to replenish their income. Some would continue working for a long time but their feeling and security were always in the countryside where they might have owned a small piece of land. Some men had left their wives working on their small holdings in the reserves while they were working in Nairobi. (Gatheru 1966: 95)

In a similar vein, fiction writers, such as Chinua Achebe in *Things fall Apart* (1958), Ngugi Wa Thiong’o in *The River Between* (1965) and Okot p’Bitek in *Song of Lawino* (1966), have documented
the clash between African and Western culture, ethics and socio-political institutions. The obliteration of African values portrayed by these writers is symbolised by the deaths of protagonists who represent African tradition (Muthoni in *The River Between* and Okwonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*).

The implications of these cultural conflicts on the spatial organisation of communities in emergent cities, especially with regard to the built environment and different forms of livelihood, remain unexplored. Under colonial rule, the failure of Africans living in Nairobi to lay claim to urban citizenship was attributable to their lack of economic mobility, job insecurity, poor housing conditions, pass laws and the fact that women were prohibited from living in the city.

By the 1980s, this had changed but was still highly contested. A protracted legal battle that took place over the burial of SM Otieno, a prominent Nairobi lawyer, is illustrative of this. Otieno’s widow wanted her husband to be buried in Nairobi, in the suburb of Upper Matasia where they had lived. Her husband’s side of the family, who were from the Umira Kager clan, wanted him buried at his rural home. A key argument in the legal battle was that individuals have houses *not homes* in cities, and Otieno’s clan maintained that his true home was in the rural area.

It remains true that many Africans who die in Nairobi have their bodies transported back to their rural homes of origin as they believe this is where they belong. As I explain in a later chapter, the spatial manifestations of this dual citizenship and identity have an important bearing on the nature of investments that Africans make when they have surplus resources and on where they make these investments. The same issues also have a bearing on emerging businesses and the impact these have on the metropolis.

Between 1963 and 1970, government-initiated efforts to indigenise the city involved building houses with shared courtyards where neighbours could gather if they wanted to, but this project was gradually abandoned. After the first decade of independence, indigenisation seems to have been neglected in both policy and practice. This partly explains why most of the infrastructural and
housing development that has occurred in Nairobi since 1970 serves so few of the city’s inhabitants. Despite this, however, African logic, norms and values continue to shape the city, and especially the less affluent communities.

**Indigenisation by popular demand**

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, a revival of interest in African culture began in Nairobi. Among other things, this involved the promotion of African culture, values and architectural forms in parts of the city that were still largely European and Asian in character. This took various forms. For example, in several hotels and restaurants, some enterprising individuals from the village of Rwathia obtained permission to set up Makuti restaurants. These were grass-thatched wooden buildings, some of which were round like African huts, in which African cuisine was served with a range of locally brewed beers. Roasted meats, bone soup and dishes such as *ugali* (corn meal) and *mukimo* (a mash of potatoes, corn and other vegetables) became popular, and several similar restaurants were opened. Since then, other upmarket restaurants, such as Carnivore in Langata, have taken this concept further, hosting ‘African nights’ and inviting different ethnic groups to showcase their culture. At the time of writing, Osewe’s restaurant on Kimathi Street specialises in *ugali* (cooked maize meal) and fish; Watene’s on Monrovia Street specialises in *mukimo*, *githeri* (maize and beans), *njahi* (black kidney beans) and *matoke* (cooked bananas). In addition, *ngwaci* (sweet potatoes), *nduma* (arrowroot) and *ugali* now feature on the menus of almost all the cafés and restaurants in the city.

Nelson Wakajuma has a somewhat similar story. In the 1990s, he spent some time in the US, where he saw how people in American cities flocked to flea markets. On his return to Kenya, Wakajuma organised a series of flea markets in Nairobi’s city centre (Kinyanjui 2014). These were so successful and so similar to existing African markets that the concept was quickly adopted by other hawkers and traders who, by then, had largely been relegated to trading in the city’s outlying suburbs. Traders rented buildings and subdivided
them into stalls to such an extent that the entire CBD is sometimes described as one large African market (Kinyanjui 2014).

Another example of neo-traditionalist activities permeating contemporary life is evident in Roman Catholic masses. African melodies and instruments, such as drums and *kayamba* (tambourines), enrich the services; priests wear vestments made from African cloth and some of the newer churches have been designed to resemble the round buildings found in traditional African homesteads. Even some of the multinational corporations have recognised the importance of including African traditions in their marketing programme. A Coca-Cola advertisement, under the slogan ‘A billion reasons to believe in Africa’, invokes the ethos and principles of solidarity, sharing and reciprocity. The Maasai beadwork adorning sandals and baskets in Kariokor Market is another example. Maasai markets are also held in upmarket malls such as the Yaya Centre and the Village Market.

These examples of indigenisation affirm that African ethics, institutions and values did not all die off in the flood of modernisation, neoliberalism, digitisation and Chinese imports. Some have survived and are part of the contemporary African metropolis. Neo-traditionalists are trying to revive and reinstate African logic and ethics within urban culture (Kinyanjui 2012, 2014).

The protagonists who have actualised this cultural renaissance in Nairobi include clergy, traders, artisans, authors and intellectuals, many of whom have called for the decolonisation and (re)membering of African society. Urban planners, architects and economists have been slow to embrace this cultural renaissance but African logic, values and norms are gradually being entrenched in the city. Since their inception, Nairobi’s marketplaces have been vibrant wellsprings of these values and norms. They are spaces in which African culture and business practices are consciously encouraged and transmitted. As I will show in later chapters, the entrepreneurialism practised by traders and artisans, which is based on solidarity and combines group agency with individual initiatives to gain entry to the urban economy, has proven more effective than any state policy in the Africanisation and indigenisation of Nairobi.
Exploring Nairobi’s informal side

In every city, various class, cultural, historical, local, global, ordinary, elite and generational forces carve out their identity. In Nairobi, where little exists in the way of writings and memoirs, the names of places, neighbourhoods and businesses can tell us a lot about the identities, activities, values, meanings and aspirations of the people who live there. Place names also carry the memory and history of an area, of different regimes of accumulation and loss.

This is certainly true for Nairobi where a wide range of names describe and give identity to various aspects of the city. Some names are formally recognised while others are used informally by locals to express the value and meaning of the spaces or the activities carried out there. Many of the names given to residential estates that were built in the 1960s and 1970s (the first two decades after independence) express the aspirations of the time. Such names include Starehe, Umoja, Harambee, and Madaraka Estate. Areas named Mwihoko (trust) and Wendani (love) signify different regimes of accumulation. On the other hand, names such as Kosovo and Bosnia, given to slum localities, suggest the hardships residents face. Similarly, bus stops given names such as ‘Kona Mbaya’ (bad) warn commuters of the likelihood of muggings. Others, such as ‘Civil Servant’ in the Dandora area, describe the people who typically get on and off the bus at that point or who live in the surrounding streets.

These names are also revealing in the context of interactions between African, Western and East Asian cultures. Juxtaposed against Western and Oriental cultural forms, Africanness tends to be more fluid and ephemeral.

Without doubt, interaction between African, Western and Oriental cultural forms is evident in the formation of other African cities. Alfred Ndi (2007), for example, describes how labourers migrating from rural areas impact on West African cities by introducing indigenous practices. However, in my own earlier research (Kinyanjui 2012, 2014), I attempted to show that African logic and urban institutions are not necessarily contradictory or opposed to modernity. Instead, in some instances, they blend with...
the Western business ethos to create viable means of accessing markets and acquiring space in the city centres.

Although much urban theory remains silent or ambivalent about the role of African cultural forms in urbanism, many attempts have been made to ‘rescue’ traders and artisans or to ‘revitalise’ their dwelling places. Geared towards uprooting traders and artisans from their cultural environment and experiences, these initiatives often fail and sometimes leave people worse off. Such interventions seldom acknowledge the logic embedded in the ways that traders and artisans operate or bother to find out anything about the values and norms that they cherish. For example, in 2007, I facilitated a seminar on entrepreneurship for artisans. I was surprised when one of the participants expressed the need to ensure that the younger generation had access to quality education at school so that they would have other options besides working in a market. Since then, I have discovered that a good number of women traders in Nairobi define their success in terms of their ability to educate their children up to university level (see Kinyanjui 2014). What this helped me realise was that our needs and aspirations influence the way we negotiate our livelihoods, and our values and norms determine how we perform.

**Nairobi’s markets**

Nairobi has 45 indigenous African markets. Several of these are located in large halls subdivided into stalls; others are comprised of separate cubicles arranged in rows. Over time, many of the markets have outgrown the space allocated, leading traders to occupy any available open spaces in the immediate surroundings.

Nairobi’s oldest marketplaces are Burma and Kariokor. After Kenya achieved independence, new marketplaces were built as part of a strategy to address unemployment and provide places for new migrants and hawkers to work. The city council (now known as Nairobi County) owns the land on which most of these markets are located and rents the stalls to traders and artisans. In a few cases, traders and artisans own their own stalls.
Initially, most of the marketplaces were open-air and the construction of stalls and other infrastructure was forbidden. Traders were expected to bring their goods each morning and take them away every evening. Since moving goods is cumbersome, traders soon started leaving their wares behind in makeshift structures which could be used in the day to provide protection from the elements. The council routinely demolished these shelters raising tensions between the city council and the traders. In 1974, a delegation of traders and artisans met Jomo Kenyatta at his home in Gatundu and requested that roofed stalls be built from which they could trade. The president agreed and ordered that markets and stalls be constructed. This was actualised with the support of several Scandinavian countries. Traders were then allocated stalls for which they paid a fee to the council.

By building permanent structures in what had been open-air markets, the city legitimised the presence of traders and artisans for the first time. It also became a matter of city policy that marketplaces would be provided in all new residential estates in the city. Newer areas such as Githurai, Karen and Magiwa all have marketplaces. Since then, however, African markets in Nairobi have been neglected in terms of urban policy and planning. The marketplaces are unkempt and dilapidated. Little or no maintenance or development has taken place since they were first introduced. Despite this, traders have managed to maintain their foothold in the city through grit, solidarity and entrepreneurship, building their own networks to facilitate their entry and access to trade.

The traders’ own resilience has been a major factor in the survival of the markets and the concentration of labour and capital that they represent. This has, in turn, contributed substantially to the evolution of the city. The markets enable workers in the public and private sectors, such as clerks, security guards, domestic workers, cleaners, waiters, hairdressers, shop attendants, factory workers, drivers, teachers, care givers, traders, and so on, to access a range of goods and services that would otherwise be unaffordable or difficult to obtain.

Prag (2010) coined the term ‘nests’ to describe marketplaces...
he studied. The term can usefully be applied to those in Nairobi as well, as it conveys something of how traders and artisans plan, hatch and nurture new businesses, while raising the capital that facilitates their claim to urban citizenship. The nests contain and sustain traders and artisans in urban spaces, providing work for some while allowing others to invest in urban housing and land. From within these nests, traders and artisans engage in competitive and collaborative politics, while the impact they make, and the culture they sustain, feeds into the city and beyond.

The role of markets in job creation and migration

Nairobi’s markets are the spatial manifestation of traders’ and artisans’ drive and vision. The nests they create determine many of the relationships they form and how long they stay in business. They enhance traders’ interdependence and encourage them to help their children or siblings to achieve more than they have. Their efforts to maintain their communities enhance their own agency and work to sustain not only the market but Nairobi’s and, to some extent, Kenya’s economy as well.

The ability to create jobs is a significant aspect of Nairobi’s markets. As a result, the markets grow and new products are introduced. Naturally, this impacts on the evolution of the city as a whole. In general, migration patterns shift as people move to where they can find work, and the nature and quality of available work becomes an overall indicator of the quality of urban life. Where jobs are precarious, urban lifestyles will be poor. This in turn affects housing and consumption patterns as well as the supply of other services in the city. All these factors combine to shape the ways in which cities evolve.

An interesting development among Nairobi’s traders and artisans is the hiring of labour. In capitalist enterprises, workers’ wages are generally determined by their level of education – the higher the certificate, the higher the pay. In African tradition, if people work together on a project, any benefits that accrue are equally shared. According to King (1996), this tradition continues in Kenya’s
In our study, 155 (55.2%) of the artisans surveyed employed others. Very few indicated that they pay a monthly wage to people they employ. Instead, they pay a fee per task, and have workers carry out specialised tasks such as measuring, cutting, folding, welding or painting. According to the secretary of Kamukunji Jua Kali Association,

In jua kali, most of the work done passes through many hands. Manufacturing a wheelbarrow involves somebody fetching raw materials from the hardware shop [and bringing this] to where the artisan is. Since the wheelbarrow is composed of many parts, its parts are produced by different people. The work of the tyre of the wheelbarrow is subcontracted to someone who earns a commission while its bowl or container is marked and cut by another artisan. Fitting and assembling is given to a welder who is charged with the work of monitoring the whole job of assembling. After all parts have been assembled, the final work is given to a painter. After this, the item is taken to the market. Specific tasks are done by different workers. (Interview 2015)

Some traders and artisans are thus also employers (see Table 3 for additional survey data on employment practices).

Of the workers interviewed, most were recent migrants and lived in slums and other low-income neighbourhoods. The relatively low numbers of traders who said they employ people who live in their own residential area imply that economic informality is contributing to the evolution of lower-income areas. It could also be argued that the fact that employers and employees live in different areas might be creating two communities that are polarised in terms of income levels, which might eventually evolve into stratified classes of owners and workers.

In reality, however, these artisans and traders have not shed the principle of compensation whereby workers and the owners share the proceeds of their labour in equitable ways. In most instances,
workers are paid according to the number of products they make. In other instances, workers receive a commission on sales in addition to a basic wage. Thus, unlike in the formal sector, workers in economic informality are compensated on the basis of their output. As one worker we interviewed put it,

If I am paid on a monthly basis and during a particular month there is no work, the owner experiences a loss. However, if there is a lot of work and I am paid on a monthly basis I do not gain from the boom. The owner gains from the boom but I do not gain. To ensure we both gain, payment here is based on the number of products one makes. This also explains why some workers are able to transit to become business owners because of the savings they make during boom time. (Interview 2015)

If this mode of remuneration practice were to be extended and mainstreamed, it would undoubtedly create more economic equality.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment practices</th>
<th>Traders</th>
<th>Artisans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of businesses that employ workers</td>
<td>127 (33.7%)</td>
<td>155 (55.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of workers employed</td>
<td>1–11</td>
<td>1–10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of female workers employed</td>
<td>1–5</td>
<td>1–6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of male workers employed</td>
<td>1–23</td>
<td>1–24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of employment</td>
<td>1–24 years</td>
<td>1–18 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of workers who become self-employed at the market after being employed by a trader or artisan</td>
<td>83 (72.2%)</td>
<td>132 (89.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of employees trained by their employers</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>69 (54.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number who employ relatives</td>
<td>30 (25.2%)</td>
<td>20 (13.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number who employ people from their own tribe</td>
<td>61 (51.3%)</td>
<td>58 (38.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number who employ people from their own faith</td>
<td>16 (13.6%)</td>
<td>15 (10.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number who employ people from their own residential area</td>
<td>24 (20.3%)</td>
<td>28 (18.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number who employ people of their own age</td>
<td>21 (16.7%)</td>
<td>27 (16.1%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This information suggests that economic informality is creating a class of workers in Nairobi who might follow a different path to
self-reproduction than the traders and artisans they work for, who own the means of production. This class of workers is comprised of both females and males who are recent migrants and slum dwellers. The majority have some secondary education and learn their trade through on-the-job training. Some share family ties with their employers but not always. Some traders and artisans hire workers from ethnic groups other than their own. This is interesting because it means that the communities are becoming more cosmopolitan, and this too will have significant implications for the evolution of the city.

Conflicts with planners notwithstanding, Nairobi’s traders and artisans have contributed much to the evolution of Nairobi by creating a labour pool in and around the markets. Relations between market workers and employers are creating communities that are organised in non-hierarchical ways. Employers are not seen as bosses or workers as servants. Instead, each acknowledges their need for the other in ensuring the survival of the marketplace.

To sum up, it is time to rethink, reconstruct and redefine the notion of informality in ways that enable African business owners to engage effectively with global economic trends. The energies and loyalties nested in Africa’s urban communities need to be tapped into as a source of economic dynamism. In the next chapter I highlight some of the key elements of those energies and loyalties and show how they contribute to shaping space in Nairobi.