LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

An Afrofuturistic Reading of Nairobi in Tony Mochama's *Nairobi: A Night Guide through the City-in-the-Sun*

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Abstract:

This paper explores how narrative performs both a mapping and a dis-mapping of cities through attention to infrastructure. Here, mapping is used metaphorically to refer to the representation of infrastructure through narrative prose. Tony Mochama's *Nairobi: A Night Guide through the City-in-the-Sun* is a narrative that through the persona of the night runner, dis/maps, contests and envisions alternative identities of Nairobi's infrastructures. I argue that through a creative spatio-temporal reflection on infrastructure Mochama offers counter-imaginaries of the city, weaving an image that transcends the concrete. The night runner's Afrofuturistic gaze on Nairobi's infrastructure complicates the way urban infrastructures are thus mapped and the potentialities within them. The night runner's exploration of pasts and presents of city-infrastructure produces a map of futures that contest the limits of the gentrified city and offer beginnings of trajectories into Nairobi as both space for travel and dwelling.

Keywords: Infrastructure; Nairobi; City; temporality; futures; Tony Mochama.

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Infrastructures as a process, not a thing: a thing-in-motion, ephemeral shifting, elusive, decaying, degrading, becoming a ruin but for the routines of repair, replacement, and restoration (or in spite of them). (Gupta 2018: 62)

This essay approaches narrative as a potent means of thinking about infrastructures, especially in the African context where infrastructures take up many forms and are appropriated in multiple ways. I examine narrative as a site for re-imagining the productivity of infrastructure which in turn enables a redefinition of the city where the said infrastructure exists. This approach to infrastructures is very useful in the African context where infrastructure is always in a state of ruination as well as becoming. Akhil Gupta imagines infrastructure in the global South as consisting of complex temporalities that in themselves are technologies that invite multiple consequences (2019). I think about infrastructure as existing in non-linear terms where functionality is shaped by the sociality of form. To this end, I examine Tony Mochama's *Nairobi a Night Guide through the City-in-the-Sun* as a narrative whose exploration of infrastructure in Nairobi enables a particular shape of the city to emerge. Mochama's narrative is particularly useful as it documents the narrator's engagement with different forms of urban infrastructure that he encounters in his journeys around the city. Following Keller Easterling, I take Mochama's narrative as an 'active form' which has the capacity to 'inflect disposition in infrastructure space and can be deployed with spatial intent' (2014: 118).

In this paper futurity is taken to refer to the possibilities within the sociality of infrastructure that make it possible to imagine what and how it may become. Futurity brings into perspective the significance of time in mapping forms of productivity. Futurity allows us to imagine the nature of infrastructure as always being in a state of becoming as possibilities are re/imagined. In the African context, this is more urgent considering the fact that repair and rehabilitation always occur concurrently with ruination and abandonment, creating a continuous state of becoming within infrastructure that manifests possibilities beyond those imagined at any moment. Infrastructure is a complex concept. Brian Larkin notes that infrastructures are 'material assemblages' that also operate aesthetically (2018: 175). His derivation locates the materiality of built infrastructure as a presence, a tangibility of, say pipes, roads, buildings; at the same time, the form of infrastructure suggests a multitude of political, economic and other functions which may be traced from it. Larkin enables us to think of both the form and the materiality of infrastructure as part of its defining complexity.

Until the late twentieth century, most studies on infrastructure centred on its built and architectural aspects. In 'The Evolution of Urban Infrastructure in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,' Joel A Tarr notes that urban infrastructure is propelled by commercialism (1984: 7-8). In colonial Africa, infrastructural developments were tied to the commercial needs of empire. For instance, in Kenya, the rail system was laid to facilitate the movement of colonial officers and labour into hinterlands as well as the transportation of agricultural and other valuable produce from the hinterlands to the coast, where they would be transferred to the imperial centre. Infrastructure served as a means that ensured the empire's success. In the post-colonial period, infrastructure is still taken as something that facilitates progress and development, hence the association of infrastructure with modernism.

To date, the materiality of infrastructure is still thought of as a signifier for development and progress. This is manifested in African contexts through the many cases of economic recovery proposals and strategic plans. In Kenya, the obsession with linking

infrastructure with progress and development is currently seen through the Vision 2030 economic plan and its intersection with the government's Big Four Agenda, which foregrounds things like rail, road and technology. A survey of the Vision 2030 website reveals a strong anchoring of this idea of the future of Kenya within infrastructure, especially material infrastructure. This obsession with material infrastructure as defining futures is inadequate as it downplays or ignores the significant role the interplay between subjects and infrastructure produces, which has the potential to open up infrastructure to a multitude of functionality and futures. This notion of the sociality of infrastructure is what this essay examines. Sociality of infrastructure has only recently gained interest both in the social sciences and humanities.

AbdouMaliq Simone expands the understanding of infrastructure when he urges us to consider people as infrastructure. People in African cities interact and connect in very flexible, unpredictable, and mobile ways that incorporate 'complex combination of objects, spaces, persons, and practices'; these interconnections or collaborations inform how people become framed as infrastructure (Simone 2004: 407-08). People as infrastructure refers to the 'process of conjunction which is generated by social compositions across a range of singular capacities and needs (both enacted and virtual) and which attempts to derive maximum outcomes from a minimal set of elements' (410-11). The assumption here is to consider the strenuous circumstances that people living in African cities are forced to overcome, which they do through manipulating networks of connections with others.

If both people and materiality are forms of infrastructure then it is clear that 'infrastructure is a terrain of power and contestation' (Anand, Gupta and Appel 2018: 2). Exploration of the sociality of infrastructures within the African city must consider the dynamic interplay of the form and materiality of infrastructures, how they inform the way subjects negotiate and utilise them, and how subjects reinvent and refashion them, or themselves, for political, aesthetic, economic, or social ends. Anand, Gupta and Appel (9) affirm this when they note that '[d]iscourses, narratives, and language give form to infrastructure as much as concrete, wires, or zoning regulations.' In a sense they provide an avenue for thinking about the language through which infrastructure assumes a sense of power or is empowered.

I wish to explore the way narrative and discourse shape and are shaped by infrastructure. In this regard, I find Larkin's distinction of form and materiality useful. I especially wish to foreground his delineation of the form of infrastructure as:

> a set of properties a thing possesses -- rhyme, rhythm, stress, and metre in poetry; chiaroscuro lighting and oblique angles in film noir; minimalist aesthetics and lack of iconic representation in abstract art and so on. And it is about the sensory effect of those properties on the readers and viewers who engage them. (Larkin 2018: 178)

The form of infrastructure is the structure or the appearance as well as the sensory effect this structure evokes in the readers. In this paper, I explore *Nairobi: A Night Guide through the City-in-the-Sun* as a text that locates infrastructure as central to the way the city is imagined and encountered. I explore how narratives about infrastructure define the relationship between subjects and infrastructure, presents and futures. At the same time, I

examine the means through which narrative discourse inscribes a transgressive politics that subverts and contests formal assumptions regarding the workings and the being-in-place of infrastructure. Lastly, I argue for a reading of the technologies of circulation of narratives as forms of infrastructure that enable multiple applications to emerge redefining opportunities for purposing of infrastructure presents and futures. To do this, I concentrate my discussion on spaces and the way the narrator negotiates and re-imagines the spaces/subjects to offer possible futures that expand the possibilities for said infrastructures in the city.

The Night Runner: Framing Marginality within the Narrative Voice

Nairobi: a Night Guide through the City-in-the-Sun takes the form of 134 vignettes initially appearing as a column in *The Standard,* a Kenyan Daily Newspaper. These brief narratives document the journeys the narrator, who identifies as the night runner, makes across Nairobi in the night. The night runner undertakes a series of activities: from observations of crowded bars and opulent parties, observations of the city from the top of well-lighted skyscrapers, wanderings in dark pathways and hidden corners of the city, to conversations with friends, tourists, and strangers. This travelogue represents Nairobi's infrastructure as complex.

This is an autobiographical text that locates Mochama as the night runner. Through Mochama's alter ego, the night runner, the narrative accesses the deep invisible recesses of Nairobi that are outside of the institutional zoning and architecture of implied modernity therein. Nairobi, like many African cities that aspire for modernity, has in place important infrastructural symbols that produce and propagate a discourse of progress. Its major infrastructures such as roads, sky-scrapers and businesses within the central business district attest to this aspiration as well as a promise of a particular future. However, this impression does not accord any room to the periphery, which is where interesting counter-discourses that contest this official image exist. The night runner, a marginal figure, thus emerges as an important subject/narrator that affords the narrative access to the marginal spaces that are outside the official modernistic gaze which is focused on the ideal functionality of the city.

Mochama draws the inspiration for his alter ego from the occultic practice of night running. Ethnographic studies locate the night runner as a mysterious character that 'run[s] and danc[es] naked during the night with an aim of causing evil' and disturbance (Middleton and Winter 1963: 62, 225). In calling the narrator 'night runner,' Mochama invites an extra-textual connection between the narrator and the mythographic figure, one that illuminates a reading of how this mobile subject navigates the city. Due to the modernisation of society, the night runner, like other occultic figures, has been forced to operate on the fringes of society (Middleton and Winter 1963; Comaroff and Comaroff 1993: xxviii). Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (1993) extensively discuss the process through which witchcraft becomes considered marginal. They argue that with time witches become 'signs and ciphers with which others make meaning' (xxviii). Mochama's appropriation of the night runner as an alter ego serves as a signifier for a particular

engagement with the city. He calls into play the mysticism of the night runner as well as his depth of seeing in the dark in his navigation of the city.

Mochama's claims of affiliation between his alter ego and the occultic figure of night runner draw attention to both a transgressive intentionality and a particular approach to seeing the city. He confirms this when he writes, '[t]o be a Night Runner, you have got to rebel against the order of nature' (Mochama 2013: 35). Translated to the urban space, to night run is to have the sensitivity to 'stop seeing [urban spaces] as geographical locations and rather interpret them as lively expressive archives of urban realities' (Quayson 2014: 129). This is only possible when the traveller interprets the city as a layered space, offering more than that which is given by the structures and formal order in place. This echoes Simone (2010: 4) who notes that the city by night may reflect the usual official order, but darkness invites alternative ensembles that may have different orders to operate. With the veil of darkness, alternative visibilities, most probably peripheral realities, become visible.

The night runner proves useful as he is exempt from what is considered the normal order of perceiving things in the world. As a marginal figure, the night runner is a vulnerable gaze that is unassuming, hence a potent node that initiates a fracture from the judgemental and ordered sight of Mochama. In framing the narrative through the contradictions in the persona's shifting identity, this narrative draws the reader to question the representation of Nairobi given at every step. If we think of the city as one filled with different layers of fictions embodied in the urban architecture of places, then the shifting narrative persona serves as the perfect figure to explore the intricacies of the city (de Certeau 1984: 92). What I am saying is that, if the city is complicated by different layers of masking, then what better figure to trace its character than one riddled with similar complications like the night runner?

Temporal fluidity and transgressive politics in Nairobi's built infrastructure

Mochama injects a multi-temporality in the descriptions given of built infrastructure in Nairobi. The buildings emerge as more than material and form, but also things in the process of becoming. Infrastructures do not necessarily operate in a linear time-frame but are cyclic and contested, always in the process of becoming (Appel 2018: 47-58). In this case, by examining the narration of the buildings as texts in their own right, a realisation that they are 'characterized by multiple temporalities, open futures, and the constant presence of decay and ruination' emerges (Gupta 2019: 62).

The night runner's navigation of Nairobi involves both a top and bottom view. The top view of the city provides what is called the 'postcard city illusion' (Mochama 2013: 18). Mochama defines this view as an illusion that presents an aspiration capturing an idea of modernity:

> The city of Nairobi is spread before one's eyes like a painting -- or a picnic spread if, metaphorically, you're more culinary inclined in your choice of imagery -- Chester House, on Nairobi's Koinange Street…. The sun scintillates off Lilian Towers, making the building sparkle like bubbles in a champagne glass. Off-right is Ufundi Co-operative Building. Its architects must have had mad dreams of Istanbul and

swimming pools when they built it, for it looks like an empty swimming pool that was somehow inverted then erected against the sky.

Beyond it the city seems awash with trees so that pink buildings in Parklands, like Stima Plaza, seem to peer like a child's eyes between fingers out at the city. Red-bricked Norfolk Apartments too, is swathed in trees, at least from this eagle-eyes' point of perspective. The spire of St. Paul's, also tree-cloaked, looks like the proverbial red needle in the haystack.

The glassy cluster of city buildings: View Park Towers, Anniversary, Posta Sacco, in the area nicknamed Goldenberg Corner, may be rumoured to be unsafe in case of earthquakes but they do add to the grandeur of the city of Nairobi. (Mochama 2013: 18)

This description is, at face value, a mapping of the official discourse of Nairobi as a city that is modern. The narrative adds that this bird's eye view of Nairobi is an illusion available in 'post-cards and tourist brochures' (Mochama 2013: 19). This impression markets Nairobi as a city that has achieved the aspiration for modernization because of the presence of a multitude of skycrapers. The narrative language further creates an aesthetic image that paints Nairobi as fulfilling the desires of progress and development. Appel (2017) argues that the future is most often imagined in terms of economic developments. At the centre of these economic developments are infrastructures in all forms. When governments invest in high rise buildings, the assumption is that they will catapult the economy of the nation both in the present and in the future. At the same time, these impressions are taken as physical symbolisations of achievement.

Appel (2018) exemplifies this symbolisation of progress and promise for the future through built infrastructure in her case study of Equatorial Guinea. She observes that for many subjects that attended the second national economic conference of Equatorial Guinea in 2007, infrastructure was an obvious representation of the economy and by extension, infrastructure became a metaphor of development and progress (50). Larkin (2016: 48) remarks that this phenomenon of equating modernity with visible infrastructures occurs all over the world. Elsewhere, Larkin (2018: 186) adds that the politics of progress is most often linked to the notion of visibility and invisibility of infrastructures. Within this discourse, Nairobi measures up and, even if for the locals it may not necessarily have equated to anything, there is promise in the idea the built infrastructure presents of progress. Mochama's lively narration of Nairobi's built infrastructure gives an impression of progress and futurity. The grandeur suggests that Nairobi has caught up with other cities in the world such as Istanbul and is ideally in the process of catching up with the most advanced ones.

However, when close attention is paid to the terms of narration, we can read Mochama's sarcasm in his reference to this image as an illusion. Visibility and invisibility are political tools of power; 'invisibility and visibility … happen as part of technical, political, social and representational excesses' (Larkin 2018: 186). Mochama's 'postcard city illusion' can be likened to Michel de Certeau's image of Manhattan from atop the World Trade Center. The view of the city from the top is a fiction propagated by the architectural plan and its pretences of modernity. In reading the city through the top view, one runs the

risk of flattening the city and erasing its identit[ies] as well as the identities and struggles of its occupants (de Certeau 1984: 91-2). This view suggests a totality; a panopticon where the postcard illusion becomes a powerful means of ordering the city to fit the official intents of government.

Mochama inscribes a criticism of this totalitarianism when he makes note of a section of this grandeur having been nicknamed 'Goldenberg Corner.' In the history of Kenya, Goldenberg is considered one of the biggest scandals to have shaken the Kenyan economy in the 1990s. The Goldenberg International Company was accorded exclusive rights to export diamond and gold. Maina (2019) opines that as Kenya did not have extensive deposits of gold and diamond, Goldenberg International was used to export gold smuggled in from the Democratic Republic of Congo. The company was also paid for 'ghost exports' (Africog 2011: 7). The company siphoned billions of dollars out of Kenya, sanitized through their legally acquired bank. The key perpetrators of the scandal survived because of weakened judicial systems and having protectors in positions of power within government. It is estimated that approximately 158 billion shillings (2.8 billion US dollars by the exchange rate then) was lost (Maina 2019: 201). The scandal crippled the economy of the country in more ways than one. In referring to this built infrastructural space as 'Goldenberg Corner,' Mochama signposts illegality sanitised through the formal systems of law and government. He suggests that the symbolisation of development and modernity through the grandeur of built infrastructure is a fallacy that hides massive illegalities that disenfranchise city dwellers and the whole nation. Measuring development and progress through visible infrastructure is but an illusion.

Mochama's subtle hint at the Goldenberg scandal acts as a signification of the disconnect between infrastructure as development and the reality of the everyday lives of urban people as well as the futures of the city. This forces us to contemplate Larkin's (2016) idea that the disconnect between modernity and structural adjustment is a crisis. Larkin (49) intimates that the complexity between modernity and desire demands we consider the uneasy relations between 'what is stable, what is disrupted, and what is resolved.' I see Mochama's reflection of this impression of the city against the crisis of state capture as an intentional location of crisis as an everyday reality of the city dweller. His argument is that city dwellers are forced to make do with the fact that the government is only concerned with the big picture. Thus, subjects are forced to make sense of their pasts, presents and futures, which while tied to the institutional realities of the state, have the capacity to blossom outside of this node of officiality.

It is obvious that underneath the order achieved by the fiction of the architecture of the city lies a magnitude of disorder emanating from the 'plurality of the real' (de Certeau 1984: 94). Infrastructure's purposes in the city is contingent on the lived experiences of the subjects and their active interaction. This demands an interrogation of the invisible networks of belonging and survival that manifest within infrastructures in the city. The night runner as a marginal figure enables an active engagement with these invisible recesses which lie underneath the official image. African cities always defy the institutional view grounded in the architecture, and Mochama's narrator actively engages in this transgressive remapping.

The top-view of the city is defined by a geometric exactness that implies an ordered totality suggesting a knowability. On the other hand, the bottom-view of the city is defined by an active encounter which always subverts the subject's intentions to know it. Navigating the city is thus an experience imbued with unexpected surprises and not obvious knowledge. The night runner argues that '[t]he reality on the ground is, of course very different….. Between the reality and the illusion lies a chasm, as wide as day and night' (Mochama 2013: 19). The narrator here signals the nature of infrastructure to be defined by use which initiates a sense of plurality of identities. Any time one assumes a grasp of the city, it disrupts this notion via the many layers of infrastructure use that shape and reshape its identities and by extension the identities of the city. At every encounter, the city is always making, unmaking, remaking itself forcing the assumption of material totality to be a fallacy. This is the force of the sociality of infrastructure-- to demystify and reorient our assumptions of a city with every encounter we make of it.

The night runner's view of this disruptive nature of the city is represented in the bottom view of the city defined by interaction rather than dominance. We can see a contrast between the illusion from the top with the street-level view:

> [I]t is a relief to get out of the dusty, dusk streets and into Modern Green, on its 8,532nd night of business.
>
> To get in there, a man (a woman too), brushes past a net-lace curtain that was probably washed 8,532 days ago. And the ambience in MG, as it is called, wouldn't be referred to as relaxing. Maybe because, perhaps, MG used to be a morgue, according to city records. (Mochama 2013: 10)

This infrastructural space qualifies the view of the city as a hybrid space that is multi-layered with contradictions, a situation that makes interpreting it all the more complicated. The city is 'a text in itself' and Mochama is grappling with interpreting this text (Odhiambo 2005: 55). The histories of MG suggest a layered sense of space where pasts congeal onto the present as well as any imagined futures. The narrator remarks, '[t]he Night Runner does not smile back, the grotesque thought occurring that he's in a morgue-turned bar' (Mochama 2013: 11). MG's previous life as a morgue hovers over the present within those that identify this connection. During the early days of Nairobi developing, having a morgue situated here might have made sense, but with the changes that made Tom Mboya street one of the busiest in the city, it does not make sense to have a morgue here. This might aid in explaining the shift.

Granted, MG encompasses 'ruins of the past' which haunt 'the futurity of the present' (Appel 2018: 55). The reclamation of a morgue in the present as a pub suggests a cyclic temporality in the way subjects in Nairobi manipulate and appropriate infrastructures. I consider ruins as infrastructures that have been abandoned or passed on to other uses due to economic in-viability or challenges of modernization. The reality of infrastructure in the global South is that they have a complex temporality (Gupta 2019: 63). They do not follow a linear pattern involving a beginning and an end. Rather, they are always in a constant state of brokenness, refurbishment, renovation and transference, all acts that suggest 'ruination with a very particular temporal structure: they are ruins not of

the past but of the future' (69). Mochama makes a nod to this complex interrelationality through the observation of the lives, temporalities and socialities of the morgue and its afterlife, MG. At the same time, the decrepit state of MG provides an anticipation for what it may become in the future.

What is not at doubt is the resilience of subjects in refashioning the 'afterlives of infrastructure' (Gupta 2019) to alternative histories and socialities. The morgue, while a metaphor of loss and dystopia, gives way to the pub which symbolises the inventiveness of subjects surviving in the urban centres. Both productivities imagine a sense of continuities that shape lives in the city. The connection between MG and the morgue enables Mochama to locate urban subjects in MG and material infrastructures such as MG as characters that intentionally transgress the norm. Can a morgue be seen as a place of leisure? What of the subtle dalliance in the naming that re-inscribes the notion of the morgue in the present MG? The city is a site where a multitude of cultural codes, languages, and realities intrude, inform, and challenge each other.

Through this reading of infrastructure, it is clear that Mochama's intention is to subvert the formal logic of the way such infrastructures are read and imagined in the city. While drawing our attention to the illegalities within the official/formal governance of the city, Mochama also foregrounds the ingenious capacity of city-dwellers to create resilience through refashioning ruins for self-fulfilment. What this suggests is not only the complexity of navigating and living in the city, but also the promise within ruins which can be managed for both futures and pasts to be re-imagined.

People as infrastructure: Nairobi's night infrastructures

As noted in the introduction, cities cannot be imagined devoid of the subjects and their everyday lives. At the centre of re-imagination and re-orientation of the promise of the African city is the subject in the city. To examine this idea, I wish to draw from MG. As a site of transgression, MG frames subjects that are outside the reach of the institutional order of service delivery. These subjects are forced to fashion alternative forms of collaboration that produce survivability in the city. The night runner's observation of the subjects in MG reveals an alternative economy at play:

> If the scurrying crowds outside are in a rush to get home, the people in here give the impression of dusk-mark timers waiting for night-fall for them to emerge onto the streets. …. Half of them are prostitutes in short skirts or that trashy way of dressing that was last fashionable in the 1980s …. The barman is literally caged behind the counter, the wire-mesh stretching to the roof. His waiters hop about like vultures, and an old man with a sly face, adjusting liquor prices by the odd five or ten bob based on how inebriated a patron seems to be [sic]. The characters in MG almost all seem to be living on life's fringes. I notice an office-worker, a young man in a cheap suit, […] drinking cheap gin. It turns out he's just been fired for unilaterally extending his New Year's Holiday by a week …. That's why he has bought all the day's papers—to check for job vacancies … both in the wanted sections and the obituaries. (Mochama 2013: 10-11)

As the narrator observes, these peripheral figures have not been accounted for by the city's organs of governance. The city draws subjects into 'a cycle of material deprivation, social and cultural alienation and general moral degradation' (Odhiambo 2005: 47). Narratives of urban life capture the successes and failures of subjects navigating the city, while at the same time, such narratives explore the reality of the postcolonial nation (Kurtz 1998: 45). While I agree with Roger Kurtz and Tom Odhiambo regarding deprivation and immorality, I argue that such marginalised subjects, identify a means of survival emerging from contingency in networks and collaboration. In turn, they rise above the limits the city places on them and emerge as powerful figures with the possibility of reinventing themselves and their connections to forms of infrastructures.

The subjects in MG have formed afterlives from the ruins of city life which has pushed them to the peripheries. MG has become a mini 'rough town' (Simone 2016: 141) that has been modified to become a site of cooperative interventions. The subjects have formed collaborations from the bare minimum at their disposal. MG in this case has become the technological channel, or to borrow Easterling's terms, 'an operating system' where subjects, goods, and services are actively organised, purposed, and circulated (2014: 18). The prostitutes linger to provide a service to would-be patrons; the bar man, the waiters and the old man provide necessary liquid action; and the patrons are a necessary addition that enables the different actors to fulfil the different temporary agreements. All these are invisible subjects negotiating a livelihood through the exacting conditions framing MG as a site for the invisible economy to thrive.

The subjects engage in one form or another of illegality. The old man exploits the patrons through the adjustment of the prices he demands for the drinks; the prostitutes manipulate the patrons into accepting a service; the office-worker exploits the dead and the convicts; and the night runner exploits the realities of the subjects in MG for a story. The night runner's observation of this economy that has largely been invisible is an act of demonstrating the lively 'shadow economy' at the centre of which is a promise for futures of those living on the fringes of the city (de Boeck 2016: 156-9). Those living in the shadows are 'forced to think differently about dimensionality and relationality' (159). While Filip De Boeck is essentially examining Kinshasa, the same can be said of the character of Nairobi's peripheral regions where, from the description given, MG is located. In such sites, where there is a lack of service provision by the institutions of government, subjects identify alternative rhythms of life. The lack of formal order produces an environment where parasitism thrives forcing subjects to manipulate the pragmatics of the moment in an attempt to rise above their deprivations (Simone 2016: 147). Instead of thinking of the subjects as exploiting each other, I think of them as using each other and in the process enabling each other to do something or make something out of the cards the city has dealt them. People as infrastructure thus involves an everyday negotiation of becoming as the circumstances and realities of this invisible corners of the city are unstable and uneasy.

What promises of the future are seen in such a site? The instability of the invisible sites of the city demand an ingenuity and an awareness of its ephemeral nature. When people are produced as infrastructure the inherent reality of their circumstances maps their terms of relations with each other as well as with built infrastructure. Simone's (2004) elaboration of this kind of infrastructure intentionally insists on collaboration, contract,

and conjunction as key in the emergence of this form of infrastructure. Contingency marks this kind of infrastructure, and when the common ground that determines collaboration ceases to exist, the collaboration also ceases. However, if Mochama's delineation of MG is anything to go by, the character of 'shadow people' is one of a sensitivity of sight (based, in this case, on the urgency to identify nodes of collaboration or the invention of these nodes) which ensures a continuing survival.

The promise of the future in this infrastructure lies in the imaginative and flexible nature of the invisible subjects. They are aware of their disenfranchisement in the city and therefore are always seeking ways of collaborating and building nodes of exchange which ensure survival. To survive is to see the future; it is to imagine tomorrow as a reality. Mochama demonstrates a consciousness of the re-purposing of ruins in the city as a form of subjects redefining their belonging in the city.

What does it mean when infrastructural afterlives resemble previous lives? What forms of continuities and discontinuities does this reveal/ produce? To elaborate on this, I wish to draw from Mochama's exploration of pubs that are redesigned as new pubs within the city. In one case, the narrator describes Psys:

> Inside, Hooters is empty -- save for a few discarded soccer orphans and the odd couple. This place, being the end of May, is home to very little. The unforgettable memory from Hooters (Psys now) is from eleven years ago: the World Cup opening game where Senegal beat France with a single, unforgettable goal.
>
> After the game, we all raced into the streets —some of us as far as Mama Ngina, chanting "Se-ne-goal!" and earning those nine seconds of fame on KTN that one can only get when running amongst an incorrigible throng. Today, as the English take on Paraguay, I can bet my last rouble that Hooters will be full to the roof. (Mochama 2013: 52)

The night runner here examines how infrastructure enables sociality and in the process, a multi-temporality. He maps a temporal landscape of soccer culture within Nairobi in his description of Psys. The narrative's dialogic interplay of forgetting, remembering, and becoming, provides the depiction of the club through a historical trajectory which foregrounds its many faces. In the exposition of multiple, fractured temporalities, the conjunction of space and subject as infrastructures is foregrounded. The present is defined by absences marked by the noun 'empty.' The emptiness implied here is both in terms of subject and ambience. In foregrounding emptiness, Mochama opens Psys to a historical time which invites alternative imaginations of the pub's pasts. One level of the past is the framing of the pub as Hooters. Memory thus becomes a valuable source of making the sociality of infrastructure to be manifested in the present. The noun 'empty' acts as an antecedent that enables interpolation of the past in the present moment of navigation of Psys. Thus, Psys becomes a site for negotiation of different temporal encounters with the soccer culture.

What is obvious in this incident is the fact that infrastructural spaces are defined by the moment of encounter. It is interesting to note that in Psys a multi-level layer of time is suggested. First, there is the narrated time which positions the narrator within Psys, the

club that was formerly known as Hooters. The time of narration enables the narrator to transcend the present into the historical past of the same space in order to carve out a different but distinct reality of the space. The past carved out involves the Senegal-France world cup opener in Seoul. This is the narrated time, which is in the past when the club went by a different identity and name. Contrasting the then of the club being filled with the audience watching the match with the now of the narrator facing an empty club define the club as manifesting a heterogeneity. To add onto these distinct time zones is the present time where it is noted   that this particular pub was closed down in 2017 and the space taken up by a coffee house (See Silas Nyanchwani's article "12 Nairobi clubs that died but still in our memories" in *Nairobi Cool* for an elaboration on the transformation of Psys into a coffee house). Infrastructures in this African city do not have a distinct culture and functionality that is in stasis, rather, infrastructural spaces are always in a state of flux. From the name changes, the event specificities, to total overhauls, city infrastructures are fluid and narratives enable an archiving and a mapping of this fluid character.

Mochama's navigation of the different timescapes within the description of Psys (Hooters) captures the unstable nature of infrastructure and its publics. This foregrounds what Appel (2018) considers as infrastructure time. Appel observes that infrastructure landscapes have multiple lives where when they echo ruins elsewhere, and advance towards becoming ruins. In essence, we can talk of ruins of the past, ruins of the present, or ruins of the future depending on the infrastructural landscape of the present and the echoes they conjure of elsewheres. Mochama's reflection of Hooters hints at pasts which have been abandoned but evoked in the present of Psys that is speeding towards a particular ruination that leads to the coffee house. Infrastructure is always in a state of becoming with different forms of ruination and rehabilitation.

This narrative suggests a particular infrastructural politics in Nairobi, and Kenya by extension; the same is true of the global South, where ruins are reinvented and repackaged to imagine alternative futures. Gupta (2018) talks of roads being expanded, roads being broken down to make room for super-highways, flyovers, electricity pipes, sewerage pipes etc., in order to imagine a different sense of modernity. The typicality of this in the global South is the way in which mid-use/mid-building, infrastructures get re-purposed. In all the descriptions given in the text about built infrastructure as well as people there is a sense of continuity indicated by their pasts and presents, which provides potential for the readers to imagine futures for the same. Even in cases where the buildings, or subjects suggest a sense of ruin, there is a hope for futures in them. These rehabilitations do not just serve the needs of this significant counter-publics, they also imply a complexity in the way buildings as texts have multiple readings, socialities and functions.

The idea of repurposing ruins is also seen in the structure of the narrative. The narrative emerged out of a weekly column by Mochama which ran from 2006 to 2012 in the pull-out magazine 'Moments' in *The Standard*, a Kenyan Daily Newspaper. The newspaper is a form of infrastructure as it operates as 'matter that enable(s) movement of other matter' (Larkin 2013: 329). The newspaper enables the circulation of Mochama's narratives about infrastructure across Kenya. It creates a link between the city and the margins via the narratives which fashion fictions of the city in the minds of both urban and rural readers. In the transference of the narratives from the newspaper to book form

the newspaper becomes a ruin from which the book is fashioned as an afterlife. In this case, the book becomes an afterlife that has a larger circulation channel and links. *The Standard* as a national newspaper is limited to circulation within the boundaries of the nation. It builds on and crafts particular kinds of Kenyan publics who are aware of the circulating myths around the night runner tag and enables them to revise and reimagine the night runner as an urban night traveller. On the other hand, the book's international reach creates new systems of circulation, reception, and translation of both the narratives about infrastructure that Mochama weaves, as well as the areas of productivity and reimagination of the purposes of infrastructure now and in the future.

Conclusion: Futures of infrastructure in Nairobi

As demonstrated, in African cities, infrastructures do not operate in a linear form where there is a beginning and a completion when the functionality takes place. Ideally, even when infrastructures turn into ruins, these ruins are accorded afterlives where they are reinvented for other functions. Gupta (2018) observes that when infrastructures are explored in linear form, the assumption is that once completed, they become dead. Mochama's narration of different kinds of infrastructures reveals the creative ways through which infrastructures are re-purposed. The morgue is transformed in to a pub, MG; Hooters is refurbished into Psys and post narrated time into a coffee house, Mochama's column in the newspaper is refashioned into a book. City dwellers mould themselves differently depending on the constraints on survival that they face. This suggests that the city is not just mapped by the institutional organs and the government. City dwellers also re-map the city depending on their specific needs to survive the complicated urban space.

These creative interventions and re-imaginations that exceed beyond the text reveal the reality of continuities in infrastructures. Infrastructures have to be thought of in terms of continuities from which a sense of promise and a futurity that is not just limited to the present but also incorporates futures yet to come is imagined. The labour that ensures such continuities exists in the ruination, rebuilding, transgressing, rehabilitation, and conversion that takes place to offer such infrastructures futures. If the examples explored in Mochama's narrative are anything to go by, futurity exists in the anticipation of the becomings that the ruins of infrastructures enable. The uncertainties that exist in futures can be made certain by a looking back at, and forward to the various afterlives that infrastructures have. Possibly, the futures of these infrastructures are here with us in as much as they are anticipated. Mochama's narration of infrastructure suggests that a pathway for the future lies in the capacity of subjects to form collaborations and re-invent ruins for the future even in the face of government failure. In essence, the future of infrastructure lies within the capacity of citizens to improvise and create alternative modes of resilience and sustenance in the face of failures by the government.

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