

ARTICLE

Goats, materials and uncertainty in Nairobi

Joost Fontein

University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa
Email: jfontein@uj.ac.za

Abstract

Kiamaiko in Nairobi hosts one of the largest goat markets in East Africa. The goats come from across Kenya and the region, as do many of the people there, illustrating how regional movements of human and animal bodies are part of Nairobi's becoming, and making Kiamaiko an extremely diverse part of the city. Through a discussion of the working lives of people involved in Kiamaiko's goat meat industry, this article explores the material flows and blockages, and processes of containment and transformation, that entangle lives and livelihoods in Kiamaiko with those of the city as a whole. These flows and processes are marked by uncertainties and contingencies that can both be full of potentiality for (re)forging regimes of order, social relations, subjectivities, mobility and livelihood aspirations, and entrench inequalities, social hierarchies and exclusions, as well as undermine the safe containment of material forms essential for liveable lives. Since the mid-2000s, city authorities have repeatedly failed to impose planning and public health-related regulations and relocation on Kiamaiko's goat industry. These efforts and their repeated failure reflect the emergent but productive excessivities of the material, corporeal and bodily flows that constitute cities, which both demand and yet often defy formal mechanisms of regulation, containment and order.

Résumé

À Nairobi, Kiamaiko est l'un des plus grands marchés de chèvres d'Afrique de l'Est. Les chèvres viennent de tout le Kenya et de la région, tout comme beaucoup des personnes qui s'y trouvent; les mouvements régionaux de corps humains et animaux font partie de l'évolution de Nairobi, et font de Kiamaiko un quartier extrêmement divers. À travers une discussion du travail des personnes impliquées dans le secteur de la viande de chèvre, cet article explore les flux et les blocages matériels, ainsi que les processus d'endiguement et de transformation qui mêlent les existences et les moyens de subsistance à Kiamaiko à ceux du reste de la ville. Ces flux et processus sont marqués par des incertitudes et des aléas qui peuvent être pleins de potentialité pour (re)forger des régimes d'ordre, des rapports sociaux, des subjectivités, de la mobilité et des aspirations de subsistance, et peuvent consolider des inégalités, des hiérarchies sociales et des exclusions. Ils fragilisent également le bon endiguement de formes matérielles essentielles à une existence vivable. Depuis le milieu des années 2000, les autorités de la ville n'ont pas réussi, à plusieurs reprises, à imposer au

secteur de la chèvre de Kiamaiko des règles d'urbanisme et de santé publique, et une relocalisation. Ces efforts et leur échec reflètent les excès émergents mais productifs des flux matériels, physiques et corporels qui constituent les villes qui à la fois exigent et pourtant souvent défient les mécanismes formels de réglementation, d'endiguement et d'ordre.

Resumo

Kiamaiko em Nairobi acolhe um dos maiores mercados de caprinos da África Oriental. As cabras vêm de todo o Quênia e da região, tal como muitas das pessoas que lá vivem; os movimentos regionais de corpos humanos e animais fazem parte do devir de Nairobi, e fazem de Kiamaiko uma parte extremamente diversificada da cidade. Através de uma discussão sobre a vida laboral das pessoas envolvidas na indústria da carne de caprino, este artigo explora os fluxos e bloqueios materiais e os processos de contenção e transformação que enredam vidas e meios de subsistência em Kiamaiko com os do resto da cidade. Estes fluxos e processos são marcados por incertezas e contingências que tanto podem estar cheias de potencial para (re) forjar regimes de ordem, relações sociais, subjectividades, mobilidade e aspirações de subsistência, como podem enraizar desigualdades, hierarquias sociais e exclusões. Também minam a contenção segura de formas materiais essenciais para vidas habitáveis. Desde meados da década de 2000, as autoridades municipais têm repetidamente falhado em impor regulamentações em matéria de planeamento e saúde pública e deslocalização à indústria caprina de Kiamaiko. Estes esforços e o seu fracasso reflectem os excessos emergentes mas produtivos dos fluxos materiais, corpóreos e corporais que constituem as cidades, que tanto exigem como desafiam frequentemente mecanismos formais de regulação, contenção e ordem.

Introduction

Soon we come to a small opening between *mabati* [corrugated iron] houses. A small trench carries sewage and black water, and there are four or five groups of people working around fires, scraping the hair off a pile of goat heads and legs. It's quite a visceral experience. F. explains that the people are preparing goat heads and feet for sale, for making soup ... We walk on ... soon the small dust path between *mabati* houses opens up to a larger tarmac road, with tall blocks of flats on either side, shops along the pavement. It is busy here ... We come to a slaughterhouse. Its front is wide open, there are about fifty dead goats hanging on hooks. On one side ... there is a huge pile of intestines. The ground is covered in a mixture of blood and goat shit. People gather around us, and after we explain what we are here to do, a man called Ade explains how it works ... As we talk a goat on a tether is slaughtered ... It is laid on its side next to a drain on the concrete floor. The slaughterman cuts its throat with one foot on its neck, as the animal bleeds out and shakes. Its very quick. After a short while the still-shaking animal is taken to the side and left for a few minutes ... a man in a boiler suit comes and hoses down the floor. The blood, shit and bits of flesh all wash down the drain ...

A few streets down, through some very narrow dusty paths between *mabati* houses, we come to an open area, descending to a stream. The area is surrounded by pens, and dotted with small herds of goats eating hay. In the

distance, between mounds of different coloured soil, we see several trucks. Some are being swept clean. F. explains how goats arrive every day in the afternoon, from all over the country, and are kept in pens or herded nearby overnight, before they are sold early the next morning, and usually immediately slaughtered.¹

Focusing on Kiamaiko goat market in Huruma, Nairobi, this article explores the material and corporeal flows and the processes of containment and transformation that make and unmake different kinds of bodies and lives in and with the city. Between 2,000 and 5,000 goats are traded at Kiamaiko every day. This makes it one of – if not *the* – largest goat markets in East Africa. Most goats are slaughtered almost immediately at one of seventeen slaughterhouses nearby, to be consumed in Nairobi, or for export to the Middle East.² The goats come from across the region (Tanzania, Ethiopia and Uganda), from the arid areas of north-western and north-eastern Kenya (particularly Turkana, Marsabit, Wajir and Garissa), and from Ukambani and Maasailand in southern Kenya – as do many of Kiamaiko’s people. An extremely vibrant, diverse part of the city, Kiamaiko reveals how regional movements of humans and animals are part of Nairobi’s emergent becoming. While this urban migration is in part a reflection of livelihood and other insecurities across the region, it is also the contingent possibilities of Nairobi’s unruly urban expansion that have enabled Kiamaiko’s goat industry to thrive and draw people to it. Here, the movement of bodies and of bodily materials is intertwined, entangling human and non-human corporeal and material flows. These flows are marked by deep uncertainties and contingencies that can both be productive – full of potentiality for forging regimes of order, social relations, subjectivities, mobility and livelihoods – and entrench inequalities, social hierarchies and exclusions, as well as undermine the safe containment or stabilization of material forms that are essential for liveable lives. Since the mid-2000s, city authorities have repeatedly tried to impose planning and public health-related regulations on Kiamaiko’s goat industry, including attempts to relocate the market and its slaughterhouses to other parts of the city. These efforts, and their repeated failure and delay, reflect the excessivities of the material, corporeal and bodily flows and blockages that constitute cities.

The material processes involved in Kiamaiko’s goat industry take diverse forms. These range from the changing topography of the market itself, as every lorry delivering goats deposits a new layer of soil from their point of origin (the soil is carried to protect the animals during long journeys, or to protect the lorries from corrosion from goat urine³), thereby constantly reshaping the landscape with the substances

¹ Fieldnotes, visit to Kiamaiko, 8 October 2017. Ethnographic research was carried out in 2017 by a team of researchers: Joost Fontein, Mercy Gitonga, Lucy Wairimu, Stefano Pili and Yayo Zhang. Some material featured in the ‘Remains, Waste and Metonymy III Kikulacho Nairobi’ exhibition at the British Institute in Eastern Africa (Nairobi) in February 2018 and at the National Museum of Kenya in September 2018, curated by Joost Fontein, Craig Halliday and Doseline Kiguru. It has also been discussed at conferences, including the ASA (African Studies Association) USA, 2019, and some material appears in Fontein *et al.* (2023).

² Interview, Muktar Mohammed Omar, Nduru Abdi and Abdifalah Dugow, Tawakal, 8 December 2017.

³ Interview, Edwin Mwangi, truck sweeper, 6 November 2017.

of other places, to the transformation of goats into diverse meats and by-products consumed across the city. Here, the stuff of goats becomes the stuff of food, and in turn the corporeality of human bodies which contributes to the city's waste outflows, mingling with uncontained leakages of hazardous waste from slaughterhouses and dripping into Mathare River below Kiamaiko. This multiplicity of material flows and blockages in Kiamaiko resonates with other forms of material mobility in Nairobi, from watery infrastructures (Schramm and Ibrahim 2021; Kimari 2021), waste and detritus (Thieme 2013; Smith 2018; 2019) to food, animals and disease (Fontein 2022b), from architectural materials (Fontein 2017) even to *mitumba* (second-hand clothes). Such work shows how cities are constantly formed through complex assemblages that emerge from the (human and non-human) bodies and substances that inhabit, make and are made by them.

This article uses Kiamaiko's goat industry to explore the productive contingencies that can emerge from such inflows and outflows, leakages and blockages. Although aligned with notions of urban 'metabolism', 'ecology' and human-animal relations, my approach differs in seeking, first, to foreground the *literal* (rather than metaphorical) co-constitution of different intersecting bodies and lives with the incomplete becoming of the city. Second, I emphasize the productive contingencies – for the making of new (or entrenching existing) socialities, politics, subjectivities and livelihoods – that derive from the excessivities of these material and corporeal flows. The wider point, linking to other contributions in this issue (see Fontein and Smith 2023), draws on what Pinney (2005: 270) calls 'torque': that urban materialities are not just excessive to the attempts at stabilization, regulation and ordering that they provoke; they are also productive in the potentialities they call forth. It is from the uncertainties of material properties and flows that the potential for entrenching or generating socialities, economies, subjectivities, politics or liveable lives ultimately emerges. Far from being wholly knowable, containable or plannable, these potentialities constitute the grounds of possibility for the city yet to come (Simone 2004).

We begin with Nairobi's unruly expansion, which laid the groundwork for Kiamaiko's emergence. This is followed by discussions of human-animal relations, urban ecologies and metabolism in order to clarify the productive contingencies that derive from intersections of human and non-human bodies, corporealities and material flows in the becoming of cities. We then turn to the working lives of Kiamaiko's migrants, who come to Nairobi with the goats, and the nexus of uncertainties and trust in the social connections they forge, which often turn on recurring tensions of visibility and invisibility. This is discussed in the context of literature on hustling in order to suggest that notions of agency as action ('agencing') might be more useful for exploring the productive contingencies that stem from the excessivities of bodily and material flows. We then turn to the city authorities' repeated attempts to regulate, order and relocate Kiamaiko's goat industry. These failures to impose regulatory authority illustrate how the potentialities of material and corporeal flows both animate Kiamaiko's dynamic vibrancy, drawing people to the opportunities it offers, and also create the conditions from which demands for its regulation and containment emerge. The failures and delays of these governmental efforts are reinforced by the excessive uncertainties – the refusal to be contained – of the very corporeal and material flows on which such attempts are predicated.

Kiamaiko goat market

Questions of uncertainty and contingency at Kiamaiko arise in multiple ways. Conditions of uncertainty and insecurity at the margins of Nairobi, and the informalization of the economy that accompanied structural adjustment (Murunga 2007), allowed a group of Somali traders ('the Tawakal') to create the thriving goat market in the 1990s. They did this, we were told, by imposing security guards to control the site, then a well-known danger spot for petty criminals.⁴ Tawakal control included supervising delivery lorries, the disposal of soil and dead goats from them, and management of the market in general. This, they claimed, provided confidence to traders delivering goats from across the region to its rapidly proliferating slaughterhouses.⁵ It also drew traders from other sites across the city where goat trading was taking place, such as Dandora and Kariobangi, beyond the Outer Ring Road, and where others later attempted, without success, to create an alternative goat-trading and slaughtering centre.⁶

Yet, it was also the security of Muungano Women's Cooperative's occupation of the land where Kiamaiko market is located that made the site attractive initially. Muungano Cooperative had been granted the land, then a *shamba* (farm), in the 1960s by President Jomo Kenyatta. But as the city expanded eastwards through the proliferation of semi-formal residential construction, their hold on the land became increasingly tenuous, reflecting recurring land insecurities across Kenya (Manji 2020). Cooperative representatives sought to formalize their presidential grant by securing title deeds and a slaughtering licence.⁷ For these reasons, they welcomed the Tawakal's rental of the land, even though their own slaughterhouse was increasingly outcompeted by the growing number of more professional, better-connected slaughterhouses nearby. In 2017, in hushed tones, they indicated that they were now seeking to sell the land as the cooperative's members were no longer interested in managing it, farming had not been an option for a long time, and their slaughterhouse was not profitable. Aware that premiums on open land in Eastlands were high, members wanted to cash in, but they bided their time and resisted efforts by politically connected investors (suspected to be linked to slaughterhouse owners) to crowd them into a shady deal.⁸

With Tawakal securing the market, more goats came from the region, as did more people, particularly Borana and Burji from northern Kenya and Ethiopia, Somalis from the north-east, and Maasai from Tanzania, drawn to the opportunities for wealth and social mobility that came with the goats. The remarkable diversity of Kiamaiko links people, geography, goats and meat in surprising ways, as the physical characteristics of different goats are believed to determine the quality of their meat, the forms of cooking to which they are best suited and the clients most likely to purchase them.⁹ Tall, leggy, lean white goats come from the northern dry lands with Somali, Borana

⁴ Interview, Muktar Mohammed Omar, Ndur Abdi and Abdifalah Dugow, 8 December 2017.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*; interview, Muhidi Abdi Boshe, Umoja Goat Centre Society, 6 December 2017.

⁷ Interview, Jessica Odhiambo, Muungano Women's Cooperative, 13 October 2017.

⁸ These fears were not unfounded: in early 2018, a senior ward official tried to persuade one of the research team to invest in the purchase of the cooperative's land. Fieldnotes, 3 August 2018 and 9 February 2019.

⁹ There are also ethnic and religious dimensions: for example, blood products are rarely consumed by Muslims but form the basis of *mutura*, a blood sausage and Kikuyu delicacy.

and Burji traders; their meat is said to be best suited to long, slow cooking. Short, black and brown ‘chubby’ goats come with Maasai traders from Tanzania, central and southern Kenya, or from as far away as Uganda, the soft ‘sweet’ meat ideal for *nyama choma* (roast meat). As the market expanded, so did slaughterhouses, butcheries and other goat-product outfits (processing skins, blood, intestines, heads and feet), eateries offering Ethiopian, Borana, Burji and Somali dishes alongside the *nyama choma* so prevalent across Nairobi, as well as hotels offering cheap accommodation for traders coming and going every week.

Aside from Nairobi’s capacious appetite for goat meat, it was the lack of effective regulation, expanding residential building (Huchzermeyer 2008) and increasing geographical mobilities that enabled the market to flourish. But these factors also worsened security, and street crime in Kiamaiko (but not in the market itself) became common. Early on in the fieldwork for this article, a Nairobi member of the research team was mugged, so we employed local ‘fixers’ to assist our visits. This created another wage opportunity among the many available in Kiamaiko that derive from the productive contingencies of its goat industry. Later, the Tawakal guaranteed our security, but, tellingly, only within the market. While the diversity of people and goats makes Kiamaiko vibrant, it can also stoke ethnic and religious tensions, as in May 2019 when ‘traders ... were ... forced to shut their businesses as police engaged two religious groups fighting over the right to conduct prayers in the area’.¹⁰

Not a metaphor: human–animal relations, urban ecologies and metabolisms

Much of the literature on human–animal relations and animal husbandry (Haraway 2008; De Heusch 1985; Broch-Due 1990) emphasizes animals as ‘social actors’, the co-constitution of human and animal subjectivities, and the intertwining of ‘both affective and instrumental concerns’ in animal production (Finan 2011: 81). Kiamaiko’s workers and goats rarely have much opportunity to develop the kinds of relations extolled by such studies; most goats are slaughtered within hours of arrival. Once at the market, their significance is less as life forms coexisting with (and co-constituting) humans and the city, and more as bodies that contribute to the city’s corporeal and material flows, creating multiple opportunities for making a living. This is not to say that there are no significant cultural, political or affective matters involved in how goats are transported, sold, slaughtered and butchered. Care is taken in how goats are handled, herded, fed and turned into meat. The skills involved in *halal* slaughtering, which Kiamaiko’s slaughtermen perfect, are often understood as being about minimizing cruelty as well as the dangers of contaminated meat.¹¹ Working with goats is part of how Kiamaiko’s workers make themselves, yet this is more about processes that turn goats into meat products than relationships with goats as living beings.

The ‘productive contingencies’ of material and corporeal flows emphasized here share more with the growing literature on urban ecologies (Barua 2021; Robbins 2004; Kaika and Swyngedouw 2011), particularly as this literature embodies ‘a shift from *animating urban geographies* towards ... how other-than-human geographies

¹⁰ ‘Chaos in Kiamaiko as groups fight over right to hold prayers’, *Daily Nation*, 18 May 2019.

¹¹ Interview, Ephantus Njogu Njeri, Veterinary Public Health Department, 13 November 2017.

are *constitutive of urban worlds*' (Barua and Sinha 2022: 1). Notions of 'non-humans as infrastructure' (Barua 2021) – examining Kampala's marabou storks as waste infrastructure (Doherty 2019) or intersections of pigs and precarity in Delhi (Gutgutia 2020) – have obvious resonances with Kiamaiko's human/non-human entanglements. But so does work examining microbiotic flows between humans and animals: for instance, bird flu pandemics in Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan (Keck 2020) and Covid-19 infected chickens in India (Barua 2020). Such examples resonate with concerns about microbiotic leakages, failing sanitation and endemic cholera elsewhere in Nairobi (Fontein 2022b); and, in Kiamaiko, with how slaughterhouse leakages justified city authorities' attempts to impose regulations and relocation of its goat industry (see below).

There are also resonances with older ideas of cities as metabolic systems. Such 'organistic conceptions' of cities as bodies made up of flows between 'different elements which correspond to different organs of the human body' (Gandy 2005: 28; 2004: 363) emerged from a nexus of nineteenth-century medical sciences, industrialization and early twentieth-century 'municipal managerialism' and planning. Although criticized for its Cartesian basis – seeing in 'nature' an 'external blueprint' for urban planning to be imposed by rational 'human will' – such conceptualizations have had remarkable tenacity; they reappear, for example, in recent 'neo-organistic' ideas about the 'critical networks or "neurons" that sustain the relationship between the body and city' (Gandy 2005: 29–30). Some studies recognize the 'blurring of boundaries' between bodies and cities, and the productive potentialities of indeterminacy, so that 'chaos is no longer seen as . . . anomalous . . . but [as] a rich vein of social and spatial interaction' (*ibid.*: 33, 31). This aligns with a core assumption here: that uncertainty, contingency and incompleteness are productive (Cooper and Pratten 2015; Guma 2022). Yet we should remain wary of metabolic metaphors beneath such approaches. An overemphasis on urban fluidities risks obscuring entrenched structures of capital, expertise, and political and economic exclusion. This is particularly true in colonial and postcolonial contexts where, for example, water supply (Bourblanc and Blanchon 2019) and waste infrastructures were often 'only ever partially completed, with disastrous consequences for public health' (Gandy 2004: 368). Indicative here are the structural inequities behind Nairobi's bubonic plague in the early 1900s (Ogot and Ogot 2020: 64–6) and behind other more recent disease outbreaks, both in Nairobi's low-income areas (Fontein 2022b) and elsewhere (Briggs and Mantini-Briggs 2004).

There is no space here for a substantive history of the ways in which flows of human and animal bodies and materials have long intertwined with Nairobi's becoming. Suffice to say that, although always trailing behind its settlement (Ogot and Ogot 2020), urban planning in Nairobi, as in many colonial cities, was about enabling the movement, security and livelihoods of *some* bodies and the containment or exclusion of others from the beginning (Fontein *et al.* 2023: 23; Ogot and Ogot 2020; Smith 2019; Lonsdale 2001). In many ways, using 'the body' as a metaphor for urban processes has had real material effects, transforming the fabric of cities and notions of moral citizenship (von Schnitzler 2008). But such totalizing visions are never entirely comprehensive. They are always incomplete and have trouble accommodating complex histories, not to mention the excessive properties of stuff that 'can never be assimilated to a disembodied "linguistic-philosophical" closure' (Pinney 2005: 270).

My main concern with notions of ‘urban metabolism’ is how often ‘bodies’ appear only as *metaphors* for urban processes. This echoes diverse anthropological work exploring how ‘emic’ bodily processes intersect with social and political life (e.g. Warnier 2007; Geissler and Prince 2010; Salpeteur and Warnier 2013; Solomon 2016). I seek to be more *literal* than that. I am concerned with how the movement, leakages, blockages, control, regulation and containment (or not) of flows and transformations of Kiamaiko’s human/non-human bodies and materials are imbricated in Nairobi’s ongoing emergence, and in the lives and communities within it. This is not a metaphor. Bodies and cities are directly related through these material processes. Like cities, bodies don’t just exist. As they emerge, they are materially, politically and socially constituted and *made to do* through processes afforded and constrained by the productive contingencies that derive, at least in part, from the excessivities of materials and their properties. This is exemplified by the ways in which Kiamaiko’s migrants train and shape their bodies to create new livelihoods and futures through entanglements with goats and material flows, and by the city authorities’ attempts to impose regulations on them (discussed below). The material processes binding the becoming of the city with that of its bodies and lives may be highly ordered – or they might defy all attempts at ordering. Although subject to technocratic interventions, more often these processes emerge in incomplete, fractured and contested ways. This reminds us of the resistance of the real and the productive contingencies that derive from the ‘torque of materiality’ (Pinney 2005: 270), and the properties (Ingold 2007) and excessivities (Fontein 2014: 130; 2022a; Filippucci *et al.* 2012: 204) of stuff. Just as cityscapes are never blank spaces awaiting imposition of a totalizing order, so human–material relationalities are rarely ‘smooth’ but are usually marked by disjunctures, uncertainties and incoherence from which potentialities for new (or the entrenchment of existing) political, social and economic orderings and livelihoods emerge.

Kiamaiko’s working migrants

Many of Kiamaiko’s migrants come looking to escape livelihood insecurities and political oppression or to fulfil aspirations unavailable elsewhere.¹² Like ‘informal’ workers elsewhere, many scratch out meagre, hand-to-mouth livelihoods. But many do so successfully and some become wealthy, especially if they are able to build stable connections with higher-end hotels and butcheries and those transporting goats to the city. Many are involved in different trades, deals and micro-tasks simultaneously: organizing goat transportation at the same time as supplying meat to particular clients, for example. We asked people in Kiamaiko to keep daily diaries for several weeks, which provided an insight into the routines, trials, adversities and successes that people in the goat trade constantly experience. This revealed the multiple ways in which everyday lives and livelihoods in Kiamaiko are shaped by the uncertain flows of goats and their associated materialities.

Today was a market day. When I went to sweep the trucks at the goat market, I was the fifth person to arrive. The trucks were many. Everyone . . . was able to

¹² ‘The goat slaughterhouse that drives a Kenyan slum’s economy’, Reuters, 4 January 2017.

get a job today. The truck that I was sweeping had two dead goats ... I took the dead goats to where we normally burn dead goats ... there were other dead goats there ... eight goats in total. You cannot burn those goats without the presence of our leader. I called him ... When he arrived, we burned all the goats. After burning them, I went home to wait for the evening jobs.¹³

Born in 1998, Edwin Mwangi,¹⁴ of Kikuyu background, had been working as a lorry sweeper since 2013, when he was still at primary school. His mother also worked in Kiamaiko preparing goat hooves for sale. He was one of fifteen young men (working under a 'leader' called Kim) who queued up every evening to be assigned lorries to sweep the next morning when goats are offloaded for sale and slaughter. After sweeping his lorry, or two in a busy period, he would either assist in burning any goats that had died in transit, at a spot by the river – a task for which Kim would be paid by the Tawakal – or he would seek additional wages by 'pulling' sold goats to a nearby slaughterhouse on behalf of purchasers. For each lorry he received 300 Kenyan shillings, and for bringing goats to the slaughterhouse an additional 100 or 150 shillings. In Kiamaiko's myriad of micro-tasks and cash jobs, Edwin did not wish to become a slaughterman ('I don't like killing animals') or prepare goat hooves for sale ('I cannot do the same job as my mother'), but trading goat meat did appeal to him, as did becoming a driver.

Ismael Ibrahim¹⁵ (born in 1993) also began working in 2013 when still at school, assisting his parents (from northern Kenya) in buying goats from delivery lorries and retailing them at the market. After completing school, he began his own business collecting blood for resale in return for bringing sold goats to slaughterhouses, before specializing in goat skins. He operated around two specific slaughterhouses (AB and Al-Mumin). Like others, in between his different 'jobs' he also traded meat to particular clients.

It is around 4.30 a.m. when my alarm rings ... I went to wash and then to the mosque for morning prayers. After I went to help my mother. I got to the shed, got the goats and drove them to the market ... at 5.40. My mother ... came very late, at 6.30 a.m. I left her there selling the goats, to go to the slaughterhouse ... there were many people so I decided to collect blood to sell. I collected ten cans to sell at 30 shillings per can, then stood there looking for customers. Later a young man came looking for blood to make *mutura*, I informed him that I had ten cans, [which] he bought and paid me 300 shillings. At 7.30 I left for the skin store, took my record book to record the skins. Thereafter my colleague Abdul and I went ... to pick up more skins. We bought thirty-eight skins from a regular customer called Buno, with each skin costing 180 shillings. Later we proceeded to other slaughterhouses to look for more skins, I had collected 500 skins when I ran out of money ... hence I had to ... close my work for the day.¹⁶

¹³ Diary extract, Edwin Mwangi, 17 January 2018.

¹⁴ Interview, Edwin Mwangi, 6 November 2017.

¹⁵ Interview, Ismael Ibrahim, goat, meat, blood and skin dealer, 13 November 2017.

¹⁶ Diary extract, Ismael Ibrahim, 25 January 2018.

The next day, Ismael took part in the more lucrative job of supplying goat meat to a regular customer:

[I]t turned out to be a good day. One of my regular customers called ... he wanted one and a half goats. I ... went to my mom and asked for two affordable goats [for which] I would pay after selling the meat. Unfortunately ... all the goats had been bought. I had no option but to try my luck elsewhere. Luckily I got one goat for 3,200. I led my goat to the slaughterhouse and slaughtered it. The meat weighed 15 kilos. I packed it in a bag, thereafter decided to look for another half of goat which I bought for 1,300. I packed it separately and took the meat with me. Maina lives in Mlolongo. When I got there I found Maina busy in his butchery ... he paid me 5,000 shillings [for the meat]. I made a profit of 500. I went back to Kiamaiko ... around 8.10 a.m. ... to the slaughterhouse, recorded the skins we had and accompanied my colleagues ... to collect more skins.¹⁷

Mulo Dalacha¹⁸ has a different story. Born in 1975 in Ethiopia, he had no family ties in Kiamaiko. A refugee fleeing violence between Oromo rebels and the Ethiopian government, he came to Kiamaiko in 2015, having been tortured and losing his farm after being accused of supporting the Oromo Liberation Front/Army. When we met him he was busy arranging for his wife and five children to come from Uganda, where they had been sent from Kakuma refugee camp in northern Kenya by the United Nations Development Programme. Incredibly, within only two years, while attending English and Swahili language classes at a local Ethiopian church, he established his skills and work as a slaughterman in Tula slaughterhouse, before building a business supplying goat meat to Somali clients in nearby Eastleigh and to higher-end customers such as Nairobi's Railway Golf Club. Sometimes he bought goats at the market; at other times he travelled as far as Lodwar in north-west Kenya to source goats directly. Having first arrived knowing nobody, with no slaughtering skills and no experience of the goat business, he had learned on the job, watching others closely, initially buying two or three goats for slaughter and resale, then slowly increasing his trade. 'Customers noticed that I was selling quality meat,' he explained, so 'they chose me to supply them [regularly] and ... pay me monthly by cheque.' In early 2018, he estimated that he was buying 100 goats every day and was thinking of investing in land in nearby Kayole. Like many, a typical day in Mulo's life was structured around prayers.

This day I went to the slaughterhouse where I bought 30 kilos of Somali goat to sell at 350 per kilo. I supplied the meat to my customers by 5 a.m., came back to Kiamaiko, changed my clothes and went to the mosque until 6 a.m., when I ... left to the market. I bought 200 goats, marked them and gave [them] to one of the boys to graze. At 9 a.m. I went to the slaughterhouse. I took 40 kilos of goat meat. I sold 10 kilos at one place and supplied 15 kilos to a different place, 10 in another place and the remaining 5 in a different place and finished my order. Thereafter I had a cup of tea. Shortly after a friend of mine from Buruburu

¹⁷ Diary extract, Ismael Ibrahim, 26 January 2018.

¹⁸ Interview, Mulo Dalacha, goat trader, 16 October 2017.

called because he wanted to sell me a piece of land at Kayole. We discussed it and agreed I should pay him on Monday and then parted our ways. At around 11 a.m. I came back to Kiamaiko ... took a shower and went to the mosque, thereafter ... had a nap. At 3 p.m. I attended a meeting held by the village elders to discuss ... measures of dealing with thieves since they are making our business unbearable ... we might lose customers which is not good ... At 7 p.m. I went to the mosque ... I stayed there for three hours after prayers, talking to my friend. Afterwards I left ... to look for food.¹⁹

Like Mulo, Abdi Hussein also regulates his daily activities around visits to the mosque.²⁰ Born in Moyale on the Ethiopian border in 1983, Abdi migrated to Nairobi with his parents and siblings when he was two, and grew up in Korogocho. He, too, learned his skills as a slaughterman and goat dealer from working with others. He described the skills required to 'cut the head' and skin goats according to *halal* rules. He employed a younger man to clean the intestines – a tedious task – and others to collect blood for resale, because 'the Muslim will not allow it but the other maybe is not a Muslim [so] they can take it'. Mainly a slaughterman, he also traded goats and meat – where quick money can be made – including sourcing stock from Moyale when few deliveries were arriving in Kiamaiko. His longer-term ambition was to own a petrol station in Nanyuki, in the Rift Valley, but he was having trouble saving the capital needed. In January 2018, he went 'upcountry' to source goats but ended up incurring losses as prices dropped due to drought, which had affected the quality of the goats.

When I got to the market ... there were very few goats. I decided to travel to my rural home to look for goats. I managed to get at least 150. It was a very long journey ... When I got [back] to Kiamaiko I managed to sell at least fifty goats for 8,500 per goat ... The customers did not want to buy at more expensive prices because ... the goats were skinny ... We did not have much choice other than sell at what we were offered ... we incurred some losses at the end. Selling your goats or meat at low prices, mostly during looming drought, is a huge challenge ... and it is easy for them to die during transportation, hence we incur losses.²¹

The mixture of quotidian, routine and skilled tasks for often miniscule earnings, alongside opportunities for wealth creation, social mobility and surprisingly large financial exchanges, entangle labour with the possibilities, challenges and risks of Kiamaiko's flows of non-human bodies and materials. These challenges and opportunities – exemplified in the diary extracts above – are compounded by changeable market rates. These can fluctuate enormously within a day, but also according to more predictable weekly, monthly and seasonal rhythms linked to religious calendars and festivals such as Eid and Christmas. Fluctuations are also weather-related. During droughts, goat prices drop as pastoralists upcountry sell more stock due to the lack of grazing, and buyers in Nairobi pay less for 'skinny' goats. To become successful, or

¹⁹ Diary extract, Mulo Dalacha, 19 January 2018.

²⁰ Interview, Abdi Hussein, goat dealer and slaughterman, 17 October 2017.

²¹ Diary extract, Abdi Hussein, 28 January 2018.

even just to secure enough to progress through life stages (marriage, children, etc.), often requires years of work, learning trade skills and how to read the market, and building up social and financial capital. Risks can be high because margins are low. If daily fluctuations are misread, people can find themselves out of pocket quickly, reducing their ability to participate in the market the following day. As Adimew Girasa described:

[T]his business is like a dollar, it fluctuates. Sometimes it is up, other times down. In the morning you might get a customer buying 1 kg of meat for 250 shillings, but later the same 1 kg might go for 400. The price can shoot up. You can assess how the day will be and how yesterday was ... Mondays and Tuesdays are bad days ... because the business is really down.²²

People who have just arrived often negotiate adversity for a long time before climbing hierarchies of specialized micro-tasks and piecework – from young boys cleaning lories, grazing goats or securing them overnight, who eventually become skilled slaughtermen and even slaughterhouse foremen, to those who become independent goat skin dealers or specialize in heads, feet, blood, intestines or other goat products. Muciri Maina described how he came to specialize in goat heads and feet:

I started by carrying goats ... Then I moved into preparing goat meat ... Now we prepare goat heads and feet ... No one teaches you. One day you watch what people are doing and the next day you try it yourself. For four years I was doing this with a man called Peter Patel Jugwa ... until he passed on. He was Kikuyu ... When he died we began to work by ourselves ... I started with three people, then others came, and now there are twenty of us. I am their leader. We take orders for goat heads and hooves, sometimes intestines. Then we get them from the slaughterhouses. One goat head we buy for 200 shillings, then we prepare it, sell it and make about 50 shillings for that.²³

Some tasks appear to be gendered, although not necessarily strictly. While men specialize in slaughtering, women predominate in selling goats on behalf of transporters. People across both genders aspire to become meat dealers for Nairobi's high-end restaurants and hotels but may dabble in a diversity of tasks on any day of the week.

Adimew Girasa arrived from Ethiopia via Moyale, in 2001, aged nine or ten, hitchhiking a lift on a truck. 'I went to school in Ethiopia, up to class 6 [but then] for lack of money had to stop school,' he explained. He came to Nairobi alone because he had heard that it 'is a good place to earn a living'. Initially earning a few shillings carrying goat intestines or hooves for other people, over ten years he became a meat dealer and slaughterman, enabling him to marry and support children. It was a tough journey. When asked where he hoped to be in ten years' time, he struggled to hold back tears.

²² Interview, Adimew Girasa, 11 October 2017.

²³ Fieldnotes, 10 October 2017.

I have a family here now, a wife and kids ... My wife she is Kenyan ... of Oromo origin ... She does not work. I support the family ... the Sakuu slaughterhouse is where I started ... I am still there. Everyday I buy goats ... I bring them here, slaughter and sell the meat ...

In the next ten years I will look for another job. If I get some money, I might start another business. I have been doing this a long time and am tired of this job. I would like to own a *matatu*, and my own house. Maybe buy some land to build a house ... I would like to get my parents out of the problems they are in, maybe buy them a house ... Somewhere where I can do business ...

I don't want them [his children] to do this job ... to have the problems I am facing. I want them to have a good education and a good life.²⁴

Adimew's story exemplifies how opportunities to make money and forge new livelihoods draw people from across the region, and the time and effort it takes to learn new skills, training their bodies to create new lives and futures in engagement with Kiamaiko's entanglements of goats, migrants and material flows. Like the disciplined self-making involved in boxing in inner-city Chicago (Wacquant 2003), slaughtering is a skilled, embodied, disciplined job to do efficiently and safely, and with minimum cruelty. For many, like Adimew, learning the skills of Kiamaiko's goat trade is understood as a drawn-out step in longer cross-generational journeys. As with Chicago's inner-city boxers, many in Kiamaiko's goat industry have different hopes for their own children.

Social connections, trust and (in)visibility

Apart from developing slaughtering skills, learning how to identify the softest meat and the meatiest goats, learning the market's fluctuations and accumulating capital, a key aspect of success is establishing social capital and connections and building trusting relations with other dealers and clients (see Carrier 2016). Better connections mean more opportunities for successful trading. These connections depend on trust. Money is often advanced, from one's own pocket or from clients, to purchase goats in return for promises of so many kilograms of meat to be delivered later, or to order goats directly from transporters upcountry or across borders. Clients often want particular kinds of goat or cuts of meat, and with fluctuating prices and availability it can be hard to deliver on earlier promises, as Abdi Hussein's diary above illustrates. Dealers are constantly on their phones, communicating with suppliers and potential clients. The scale of deals varies vastly, from one or two goats sourced for a particular client to lorries of over 200 goats at a time. Building trusting connections with clients takes time, and short-term losses are often incurred for promises of longer-term gain. Goat and meat trading can be capricious; trusting relations are more easily lost than established and require constant work to nurture and stabilize.

Trust – and its social connections – turns on tensions of visibility and invisibility, which, as Smith (2023) highlights, often have a material character. Negotiations around the purchase of goats on the market are conducted in secret, yet once concluded are publicly marked by a highly visible, exaggerated handshake, so everyone

²⁴ *Ibid.*

can see that a deal has been struck.²⁵ Goats might then be marked with particular colours or symbols indicating their owners. In Kiamaiko's seventeen slaughterhouses, slaughtered goats are hung where they can be easily seen by clients and dealers, but also by state-employed 'daktari' ('doctors', veterinary inspectors) who visibly stamp meat to certify that it is safe for consumption. That stamp matters. Condemned meat cannot be sold; along with dead goats from the lorries, it is supposed to be burned at defined spots on the market grounds or taken away to specified 'condemnation pits'.²⁶ Undoubtedly, it is sometimes sold secretly, in backstreets or sacks, away from plain sight. Yet this state-sanctioned approval, made visible by vets' stamps, is what makes slaughterhouses key players, because inspections take place only within them.²⁷

Everybody is involved in such relations of trust and the tensions of visibility/invisibility they produce, but they have more significance in some relationships than in others. Relations between meat dealers and butchery and hotel clients are particularly valued. Traders might hesitate to share contacts for fear of having clients poached. Yet clients rely on dealers not only to supply meat directly, but also to source it from others when those dealers are unable to do so themselves. If competing dealers cannot always be trusted, the same is true of clients, who might fail to pay for orders purchased with dealers' own funds. Dealers might hesitate to provide cash upfront unless they are flush and ready to take a risk, or unless they are particularly confident about their clients.

Relations between slaughtermen and slaughterhouse 'foremen' are subject to similar uncertainties, especially as slaughtermen sometimes work 'freelance' or have side deals with clients. Part of a foreman's role is to formally record all slaughters (and thus the work of the slaughtermen) within a slaughterhouse. This is to make the work of turning goats into meat transparent (visible) to veterinary audits and inspectors, but also, perhaps, so that the slaughterhouse owners can monitor the foremen. While slaughtermen, meat dealers and goat traders are all visible in Kiamaiko's goat industry, the larger business interests behind goat transportation and especially the slaughterhouses (the owners of which, rumours suggest, include influential politicians) are hidden and difficult to identify. As with other sectors in Kenya, such as land or housing, the invisibilization of powerful influence is often a crucial part of its political economy (Smith 2023; Manji 2020). Yet the ethnic or religious affiliations of slaughterhouse owners – many are Burji or Somali – are often visible in the names of slaughterhouses displayed above open street-side entrances.

Hustling but not hustling

In some sense, perhaps, the quotidian activities, struggles and social relations that Kiamaiko's workers face, as well as their risks, precarities and opportunities, share much with what is often described as 'hustling' by Nairobians, and increasingly by researchers writing about them (Thieme *et al.* 2021; see also Lockwood 2020; Gaibazzi 2015). The everyday challenges faced in Kiamaiko do reflect a precarious

²⁵ See 'Mbuzi za Nairobi [goats of Nairobi]', YouTube, February 2018 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HAXs0ifpSy0>>, accessed 28 June 2019.

²⁶ Interview, Ephantus Njogu Njeri, 13 November 2017.

²⁷ Fieldnotes, 11 October 2017.

'urban condition' that we could call 'the hustle', and perhaps amount to 'a practice' that can be described with the verb 'to hustle' (Zollmann 2021: 4). Yet, although there are resemblances, I hesitate about the relevance of 'hustling' for understanding Kiamaiko's goat industry. In Kiamaiko, the term rarely surfaces as an emic 'identity marker' ('to be a hustler') (*ibid.*: 4). This is in contrast to Nairobi's 'slums' (Thieme 2021; Van Stapele 2021) and peri-urban margins (Lockwood 2020), where many people self-identify as hustlers. Hustling has also been co-opted among politicians²⁸ or in the inverse snobbery of Nairobi's wealthier classes seeking streetwise acumen. Conversely, 'hustling' is not a widespread lexicon among the city's migrants, whose aspirations for social mobility and respectability, and their understandings of the discipline and skill their work demands, are better echoed in older notions of propriety associated with *jua kali* 'informal sector' craftspeople acclaimed during the 1980s and 1990s by Daniel arap Moi's regime (UNESCO 1998; King 1996). Even if the language of *jua kali* was not prevalent in Kiamaiko either, the prospect of being a skilled artisan certainly resonated more closely with migrant aspirations than 'hustling'.

Beyond its lack of emic salience in Kiamaiko, however, my unease with the trope of 'hustling' has to do with the notion of 'agency' that its use often implies. The recent 'hustling' literature gains much of its traction from its 'redemptive aura', stressing the 'agency' of people too often rendered silent or invisible in academic texts and urban planning. The claim that hustling's 'integration into the urban vernacular of *sheng*' is both an assertion of autonomy and 'a form of theorization' (Zollmann 2021: 1; Thieme *et al.* 2021) speaks to this redemptive quality. Yet in moving from emic term to analytical category, such approaches may foreground the agency of ordinary Nairobians at the expense of addressing the deeper structural conditions that create informality in the neoliberal African city (Rizzo 2017). It also prioritizes human action and diminishes the place of non-human, material participation in processes of urban becoming.

Perhaps we should adopt a different stance to the issue of 'agency'. Building on anthropological critiques that have emerged from studies of materials (Ingold 2007; 2013; 2016) and ethics (Laidlaw 2002), this involves seeing 'agency' as neither synonymous with 'freedom' nor a 'mystical' quality of people (or of animals, objects or materials) to be celebrated or denied. Instead, 'agency' emerges more like relational action, or 'agencing' as Ingold (2016) puts it, within contingent assemblages of people, bodies, technologies and materials, and the potentialities for thought and action they present, rather than as a predetermining force. This is useful for recognizing how the excessive qualities of bodies and material flows generate potentialities that drive Kiamaiko's vibrant dynamism and the (failed) attempts of officials to regulate them. Here, bodies and people never just *exist*, nor simply *do*; rather, they move along 'lifelines' in 'correspondence' with each other, 'doing undergoing', 'agencing', and attentive within the world's becoming (Ingold 2016: 9). In this way, they are constituted through processes of self-making and other-making, afforded and constrained through 'interweavings' or 'meshworks' (*ibid.*: 10). Such meshworks may be generated by inflows or outflows of materials, animals, things and technologies, as well as by practices, gestures, habits and performance, in attentive correspondence

²⁸ In his successful presidential campaign for Kenya's 2022 elections, William Ruto cast his party and his supporters as a 'hustler nation' and himself as the 'hustler in chief', primarily to gain popular urban support.

with geographies and architectures of movement, containment, discipline and control.

If Ingold's vision tends towards the smooth and coherent, then the excessivities and uncertainties of stuff (Pinney 2005: 270), particularly corporeality (Fontein 2014: 130; 2022a; Filippucci *et al.* 2012: 204), remind us that, like all human–thing relationalities, such 'meshworks' are rarely straightforward and are usually marked by politically and historically consequential disjunctures, fractures and incoherence. It is from this open-ended messiness, and its resistance to order and containment, that the productive contingencies of Kiamaiko's goat industry emerge. These form the basis from which livelihoods are forged, and from which city authorities' stalled efforts to regulate and relocate the goat industry have repeatedly emerged. This, then, is how the excesses of Kiamaiko's bodily and material flows, and the incomplete, contested attempts to regulate and contain them, are entangled in the unfinished becoming of the city.

Attempts to regulate

Unlike Burma market in Nairobi's Eastlands, which is owned by the city council and has its origins in older (colonial) attempts to control the meat industry,²⁹ Kiamaiko's goat industry emerged in a context of minimal city regulation. This created opportunities that migrants, the Tawakal and slaughterhouse 'cartels' exploited with great effect. This has happened even as government authorities, over the last two decades, have repeatedly tried to assert their regulatory control. As the city expanded east- and northwards, Kiamaiko was re-zoned as a residential area and a proliferation of new high-rise flats began to surround the open field of the market, its goat pens and *mabati* housing. The women's cooperative's decision to sell its land in the late 2010s might have inevitably resulted from this urban expansion, but it was also spurred by the city's repeated attempts to relocate the market and the slaughterhouses.

With many slaughterhouses, butcheries and eateries occupying ground- and first-floor levels of high-rise blocks, environmental officials' worries about slaughterhouse leakages and animal waste contaminating the nearby river coagulated with food safety concerns and city planners' angst about the incongruity of animal trading within designated residential areas. Deepening intrigues surrounding the secretive business interests lying behind the slaughterhouses caused further unease. Unsurprisingly, slaughterhouses were cagey about our efforts to interview or film within them. Disputes with city authorities also meant that slaughterhouse rebuilding works were often done at night to avoid detection.³⁰ In early 2018, city authorities finally activated long-held plans to demolish the informal *mabati* housing lining Kiamaiko's dusty streets and encroaching on the defined boundaries of city residential planning maps. These actions affected the poorest residents, street traders and small eateries much more than the slaughterhouses themselves, perhaps because the latter – with their powerful connections – held more sway.³¹

²⁹ Interview, Ephantus Njogu Njeri, 13 November 2017.

³⁰ Fieldnotes, 11 November 2017.

³¹ Fieldnotes, 3 August 2018.

Around 2010, a rival slaughterhouse in nearby Umoja was established, which still sits unused. This was part of wider official attempts to relocate the goat industry – and gain control over it in the process. Hedging their bets, some Tawakal members were among the Umoja project’s investors.³² Its failure to attract significant interest from traders illustrates how dominant interests in Kiamaiko were able to maintain the status quo.³³ Since the 2000s, an area of vacant land off Kangundo Road has been officially demarcated for relocating the goat market, but attempts to implement this long-discussed move have been unsuccessful. Rumours abound that influential interests behind the slaughterhouses have managed to delay the authorities. Much remains uncertain about Kiamaiko’s future. Until now, its ‘invisible cartels’ have prevailed. In February 2018, Moses Oruma, a commissioner for Huruma ward, stated that he was doubtful that Kiamaiko’s goat industry could be moved, because of the challenges posed by existing business interests. He described efforts to close Kiamaiko’s slaughterhouses in political terms rather than in relation to the environmental concerns of the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA).³⁴ Yet only weeks later NEMA suspended Kiamaiko’s slaughterhouses, citing dangerous leakages into the river.³⁵ During this month-long stoppage, trading at the market continued but goats were sent for slaughter elsewhere. Four weeks later, amidst rumours that political pressure had been applied, Kiamaiko’s slaughterhouses reopened and business was back to normal.

By the end of 2018, NEMA intervened again, giving ‘Kiamaiko goat market traders one year to find an alternative site’ because ‘the popular market is not suitable for hygienic slaughter’ as it ‘lacked water, lavatories and lights’ and ‘county health offices’.³⁶ A Nairobi County assembly report also raised questions about the lack of tax payments by traders and about a ‘pending court case concerning the ownership of the market’. The two issues were intertwined because, as Tawakal had explained earlier:

The government says they want to tax every goat per head but we tell them this land is not theirs, it is private property therefore we are not going to pay anything, if a problem emerges we go to a court of law. Right now there is a pending case against the government over taxation because it is illegal to tax the businessmen who sell goats.³⁷

A year later, ‘an interim ruling’ gave ‘the county ownership of the land, pending outcome of the case’.³⁸ What this will mean for Muungano’s land claim, Tawakal control

³² Interview, Muktar Mohammed Omar, Ndur Abdi and Abdifalah Dugow, 8 December 2017; interview, Muhidi Abdi Boshe, 6 December 2017.

³³ Some suspect that ethnic tensions between the Borana-dominated Umoja project and the Somali-dominated Tawakal were involved. Interview, Muhidi Abdi Boshe, 6 December 2017.

³⁴ Interview, Moses Oruma, Huruma, 9 February 2018.

³⁵ ‘NEMA orders Kiamaiko slaughterhouse shut for polluting Nairobi River’, CapitalFM, 23 April 2018 <<https://www.capitalfm.co.ke/news/2018/04/nema-orders-kiamaiko-slaughterhouse-shut-for-polluting-nairobi-river/>>, accessed 28 June 2019; ‘NEMA orders relocation of Kiamaiko slaughterhouses’, *Business Today*, 24 April 2018 <<https://businesstoday.co.ke/nema-orders-relocation-kiamaiko-slaughterhouses/>>, accessed 28 June 2019.

³⁶ ‘Kiamaiko goat market to close over hygiene, ownership issue’, *Star*, 12 December 2018.

³⁷ Interview, Muktar Mohammed Omar, Ndur Abdi and Abdifalah Dugow, 8 December 2017.

³⁸ ‘Kiamaiko goat market to close over hygiene, ownership issue’, *Star*, 12 December 2018.

of the market and Kiamaiko's many workers remains uncertain, as do NEMA's efforts to relocate the industry. In May 2022, Kiamaiko's slaughterhouses again received notice to move to the new site, but this was successfully challenged in court.³⁹ At the time of writing, the case remains unresolved and goat slaughtering continues in Kiamaiko. Nothing is certain; this reflects exactly the productive contingencies that have long been part of the meshwork of bodies and material and corporeal flows that constitute Kiamaiko's goat industry, the politics it affords, and the livelihoods of those who come there from across the region.

Conclusions

Kiamaiko's goat industry illustrates how the politics of life and death – of biopolitics and necropolitics (Mbembe 2003) – are intertwined. While official anxieties about uncontained outflows of slaughterhouse contaminants echo long histories of microbial struggles with cholera and other diseases elsewhere, here it is the unruly movement of diverse bodies (human and non-human) from across the region, the mass daily death of thousands of goats and their transformation into meat that afford Kiamaiko its vitality and diversity, making certain kinds of lives, livelihoods and politics possible. The uneven intersection of human and non-human life and death in Kiamaiko reminds us that not all bodies – human or animal – are equally constituted or constituted as equal. The meshwork of human and non-human 'lifelines' (Ingold 2016) that constitute the city, and the bodily, corporeal and material flows they involve, are always already differentiated, even before the work of fixing, containment and regulation begins. Yet alongside hard work, meagre daily earnings and the quotidian struggles faced by many, there are also genuine opportunities for making livelihoods, for creating wealth and for social mobility.

Kiamaiko's goat industry illustrates the productive contingencies that can emerge from the material and corporeal inflows and outflows, leakages and blockages that constitute cities. This is not a metaphor: the approach adopted here highlights both the *literal* co-constitution of different intersecting bodies and lives with the incomplete becoming of the city, and the potentialities that derive from the excessivities of these material and corporeal flows. To fully grasp the significance of what Pinney (2005: 270) calls the 'torque' of urban materialities, it is necessary to move beyond older, redemptive notions of agency, as some kind of predetermining force or quality of people (or of animals, materials or things), towards an appreciation of its relational and active emergence from within contingent assemblages and the potentialities for thought and action they present. It is these potentialities that constitute the grounds of possibility for the city yet to come (Simone 2004), underscoring the profound but productive contingencies of bodies, flows and materials for understandings of African cities.

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Joost Fontein is Professor of Anthropology at the University of Johannesburg. Previously he taught anthropology at the University of Edinburgh (2007–14) and worked as director of the British Institute in Eastern Africa in Nairobi (2014–18). He has conducted extensive fieldwork in Zimbabwe and more recently in East Africa. His third monograph, *The Politics of the Dead in Zimbabwe 2000–2020: bones, rumours and spirits*, was published in 2022 by James Currey.

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