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CHAPTER 19

SATIRE, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND CULTURES OF RESISTANCE

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INTRODUCTION

A video game titled "Play Election 2017" appears on a large television screen in front of five Kenyan politicians, including 2017 opposition leader Raila Odinga and President Uhuru Kenyatta, who is wearing a crown. Odinga and Kibaki contemplate the video play options: rigging, bribery, post-election violence, or a coalition government, in a cartoon image created by Kenya's prize-winning and widely syndicated editorial cartoonist Godfrey Mwampembwa (pen name Gado) (see Gado 2017). One person who commented about the cartoon on Gado's public Facebook page said he was "spot on" for depicting what another agreed was "a very dirty game," while a third argued for a grand coalition with "no bloodshed in our beautiful country."[1]

Presidential election hopes and anxieties galvanize cultural politics—a lively domain in which leaders are caricatured or disparaged through rumors, jokes, songs, graffiti art, cartoons, street protest slogans, television news satire, theatre, and more. Cultural politics encompasses imaginative expression, sentiments, symbols, and everyday tussles over meanings that can affirm the status quo or—like Gado's cartoons—challenge or lament it. Such cartoons, and cultural politics more broadly, may express open secrets, break public silences, or expose what Herzfeld terms "cultural intimacies"—"forms of rueful

[1] Gado's cartoon was posted on his Facebook page on Feb. 26, 2017. In addition, the cartoon is available here: http://buff.ly/2mrlWom?fbclid=IwAR1mjENcihjgjM7opk3S58voJfAdrYvLXawkzV31HFSGVLfU21eDoRUfoc.

[1] The quotes from Gado's public Facebook page were all made on Feb. 26, 2017.

self-recognition" or "aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality" (Herzfeld 2005: 3). Thus, the video game options in Gado's cartoon, however uncomfortable they may be for Kenyans to contemplate, are unlikely to surprise them. Nor do they signal uniquely Kenyan or African susceptibilities. These uneasy cultural intimacies that elites and ordinary citizens share sometimes "erupt into public life" (Herzfeld 2005: 5). They animate serious political mobilizations as well as critical popular discourses laden with ironic humor.

This chapter focuses on Kenya's cultural politics, in particular how Kenyans have creatively engaged political issues outside of formal institutions since the 1980s—a period that saw political liberalization and rapid uptake of new communication technologies. Electoral politics, of course, does not consume citizens' everyday lives. Daily life is mediated, as Nyairo (2015: Ch. 8) puts it, by "popular creative forms and idioms, which occasionally provide the tools with which citizens engage officialdom and its institutions." Neither is cultural politics dominated by dark episodes of violence. Instead, like popular expressive forms more broadly, cultural politics often is a domain of wit, vitality, joy, and playfulness that offers glimpses of how citizens imagine the nation and the state. Furthermore, popular artists do not always convey resistance; they sometimes "endorse state institutions and... popularize official discourse," or shift between critical and supportive stances at different times in their careers (Nyairo 2015: chs 2 and 3). Here we concentrate, however, on cultural expression that plays with or questions dominant political practices.

What themes appear in Kenya's post-1980s cultural politics of dissent, and what is the impact of social media and new information and communication technologies? Popular communication via today's digital technologies echoes the *radio trottoir* or street talk of earlier generations of Africans who found, as Nyamnjoh (2011: 29) put it, ways "to obtain information, share it and create possibilities where normal channels were beyond their reach." The vitality of such talk persists, whether it travels electronically among Africans in the diaspora or happens in Kenyan bars, matatus (Kenya's ubiquitous privately owned public-service mini-buses), sports stadiums, shopping malls, nightclubs, or internet cafes in town and countryside. The creative expression of Kenyan musicians, graffiti artists, television satirists, and cartoonists is significant, partly because, as Joyce Nyairo (2015) observes, gossip, rumors, matatu inscriptions, Facebook posts, and tweets can quickly become civic engagement.

FROM WHISPERS TO SHOUTS

Rather than treat culture and politics as separate categories or cultural politics as epiphenomenal, here we emphasize how profoundly cultural politics both expresses and shapes political processes in relatively stable periods as well as in unsettled times. During historical periods of tumult, cultural production intensifies, its "heightened imagery" commanding wide attention (Smith 1991: 182, 202).

In post-1980s Kenya, such periods of agitation or cultural-political reimagining include struggles over the return of multiparty politics in the early 1990s, civic mobilizations led by Green Belt founder (and later Nobel Peace Prize laureate) Wangari Maathai, and ethnicized political violence in the 1992 and 1997 elections (precursors of the wider violence of the 2007 election).[2] Then there were large state corruption scandals such as the Goldenberg scandal in the mid-1990s and the Anglo Leasing (a fictitious company popularly termed "Anglo Fleecing") scandal in the mid-2000s, Mwai Kibaki's 2002 election to the presidency on an anti-corruption platform following 24 years of rule by Daniel arap Moi, voters' rejection of a proposed new Constitution in 2005 that excluded provisions for devolution and restraints on presidential power, voters' approval of a new Constitution in 2010 that included devolution, and the International Criminal Court (ICC) indictment of six prominent Kenyans for roles in the 2007/2008 post-election violence. Later moments of heightened political uncertainty in this period include Uhuru Kenyatta's election to the presidency in 2013 (despite his indictment by the ICC), the tragic terror attacks in some parts of the country, and high-level corruption scandals and familiar anti-corruption rhetoric in the presidential campaign of 2017. These events ricocheted not only through the high politics of the state but also through popular culture and what Lonsdale (1992) terms "deep politics"—realms where rulers and ruled engage one another through historically inflected moral claims, reciprocities, and discourses of accountability.

Potent symbols of dissent and solidarity in deep politics, as well as in displays of state power, today circulate ever more widely and quickly via digital technologies in Kenya. Now one of Africa's most internet-connected countries, Kenya since the 1980s has seen the rapid spread of mobile phones, internet cafes, and social media, along with multiplying television and radio networks. Mobile phone ownership, mainly a luxury for the rich in the 1990s, grew quickly in the early 2000s. In 2015, 39 percent of Kenya's population used the internet and nearly 72 percent of all people in Kenya were mobile telephone subscribers (one-fifth of them owners of smartphones) (Pew Research Center 2015). The telecommunications sector was deregulated in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and today information and communication technologies (ICTs) constitute a robust growth sector in Kenya. Text messaging, email, blogging, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Tumblr, MySpace, WhatsApp, and "citizen journalism" (see Ogola 2015) have multi-generational reach. Such technologies vastly expand political communication beyond what was possible when some of the first cartoons depicting national politicians appeared in the early 1980s in print media such as Hilary Ng'weno's journal *Weekly Review* and the Nairobi *Daily Nation* newspaper.

Kenya has a reputation for a spirited press, though its record on internet and press freedoms is mixed according to global indices (whose limitations we recognize). A 2016 Freedom House report on Kenya notes arrests of bloggers and social media users who criticized the government, along with "increasing concerns over government surveillance

[2] For analyses of these historical shifts and others mentioned in this paragraph, see Branch, Cheeseman, and Gardner 2010; Branch 2011; Cheeseman 2015; Hornsby 2012; and Kanyinga 2016.

powers." Waxing and waning repression, and accompanying legal battles between the government and Kenyan journalists and artists, have persisted for decades.

Whatever the risks of retaliation, Kenya has seen a surge in so-called citizen journalism, and in political satire and other critical artistic expression, since the return of multiparty politics in the 1990s (see Nyairo 2015; Ogola 2015). Moi's repression, Morris Kiruga (2016: 28) argues, "inspired new forms of defiance and the satirist became a social experimenter and the political barometer of the times." Furthermore, government censorship has sometimes backfired, enhancing political resonance and circulation of art with oppositional messages. That was the case with the popular songs *Unbwogable* and *Nchi ya Kitu Kidogo* in the early 2000s (as discussed further below), the work of cartoonists such as Gado in the 2010s, and so-called "seditious" music cassettes in the early 1990s (Haugerud 1995; Nyairo and Ogude 2005; Nyairo 2010).

By comparison with the 2000s and 2010s, social and political criticism during the Moi regime's repressive years was often softer or less direct, as in Wahome Mutahi's popular columns in the *Sunday Nation* and *Standard* newspapers, starting in the 1980s. In his weekly column "Whispers" (1992–2003), Mutahi subtly satirized his own everyday domestic life as well as wider societal challenges (corruption, police harassment, electioneering). In discussing sensitive issues that could only be "whispered," Mutahi became what Branch (2011: 176) terms the "alternative chronicler of the Moi years and a master of satire and deft criticism of public authority." He brought cultural intimacies into the public domain by "making legible the silent stories that the mainstream media could not cover for fear of state repression and prosecution" (Ogola 2015: 76). Accompanying the "Whispers" columns in the *Nation* were cartoons by Paul "Maddo" Kelemba, who included sly images of a black cat meant to evoke politician "fat cats." Gado succeeded Kelemba in the early 1990s as *Nation* cartoonist. During the next several decades, political corruption became an ever more explicit theme for such artists and for a wider cultural politics of dissent.

Corruption

Corruption—a label that can too easily stereotype Africa while downplaying similar practices in the global North—has long been a focus of everyday conversation in Kenya. Public critiques of corruption became ever more salient in the 1990s, and in recent decades Kenyan news media have often mentioned the country's low rank on Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (145th out of 176 countries in 2016). The publicity of country rankings (which of course occlude corruption's transnational dimensions) has contributed to recurrent anti-corruption promises in presidential campaigns since the 1970s. Each major leadership transition sparked optimism and raised hopes of reform, before succumbing to "factional splits, nepotism, and corruption" (Branch and Cheeseman 2010a: 8). As Gupta (1995: 386) argues is the case in India, Kenyan discourses of corruption not only shape political party electoral

competition and "help to define 'the political' but also serv[e] to constitute 'the public' that was perceived to be reacting to corruption" and demanding accountability. Thus, Kenyan politicians hail ordinary citizens (*wananchi* in Swahili) as they promise transparent governmental institutions that will improve roads, land administration, access to water, education, and healthcare. Discourses of corruption also infuse more intimate domains of kinship and ethnicity, where social norms may diverge from legal codes as individuals engage with contested distinctions between moral obligations to kin and co-ethnics on the one hand and corruption or nepotism on the other (Mahoney 2017). Discourses of accountability and corruption—and their attendant distinctions between public and private—are contingent rather than fixed, and they travel through intersecting local, national, and transnational pathways.

While official corruption was not new, in the mid-1980s a kleptocratic state became entrenched in Kenya, Branch and Cheeseman write, and they link that "turning point" to President Moi's "informalization of the political process—such as overseeing the looting of the public purse, the subcontracting out of political violence to private militias, and the manipulation of elections" (2010a: 10, 15). Such practices did not end when Moi left office, though members of the Kibaki regime condemned their predecessor's corruption and promised reforms. Failure to reform generally followed from processes of elite fragmentation along personality and ethno-regional lines, erosion of intra-elite trust, and state informalization. Consequently, decades-old grievances in the countryside "finally exploded to threaten political order" in the 2007–2008 post-election violence (Branch and Cheeseman 2010b: 250).

Such grievances had long been embedded in jokes, rumors, gossip, sermons, and songs—some of which leapt to a national stage and beyond, such as Eric Wainaina's award-winning song *Nchi ya Kitu Kidogo* (literally "the country of something small," *kitu kidogo* being a popular idiom for a small bribe). Nyairo suggests that Wainaina's lyrics in that 2001 song and others on the same album (titled *Sawa Sawa* or "It Is Alright") belie the idea that citizens complacently accept corruption as part of everyday life (Wainana 2010). Such popular cultural forms, Nyairo writes, "provide the space for constant debate over leadership and national identity... visions of a people's history, politics and aspirations" (2010: 176).

Invincibility and resistance were the message of a more dissonant melody in the beat of youth rap, which became the inspirational soundtrack for the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) political party during the 2002 presidential campaign, as Nyairo and Ogude (2005) analyze closely. Gidi Gidi Maji Maji's song *Unbwogable* ("Unbeatable"), they argue, began as a morale-boosting statement of individual defiance against music piracy and the financial and creative struggles of young musicians before (inadvertently aided by the Moi government's censorship) the word morphed into a political declaration, signifying for some a spirited opposition to the autocratic Moi regime. It eventually became a patriotic slogan in state ritual under President Mwai Kibaki, after he defeated Moi's preferred successor, Uhuru Kenyatta, in 2002. The song invoked shared pasts—historical memories and emotional meanings that bind community or nation, and younger and older generations—even as it took on new counter-hegemonic meanings

during Kibaki's presidency. *Unbwogable* brought the Swahili-based, rapidly shifting mixed codes known as Sheng into national political discourse (Nyairo 2015). The song jumped into official public culture from nightclubs and broadcast media, as well as from matatus—cars that convey not only passengers, but also the music, sociolects, and graffiti-like inscriptions that catch the pulse of Kenyan cultural politics (see Ference 2016; Mutongi 2017; Nyairo 2015). Meanwhile, national and local politics, as Morris Kiruga (2016) observed, had been "churn[ing] its own satire, requiring little or no mediation." Political humorists took the cue.

The Redykyulass Generation

Comedian and cartoonist John Kiarie (known as "KJ") produced a one-page comic strip called "Head on Corrishon with the Youth" (later shortened to "Head On Corrishon"), which was published during the 2000s in the *Sunday Nation*'s popular-culture insert "The Buzz." Kiarie's weekly comics page explicitly targeted young Kenyans, veiling political messages in youthful language codes (such as *vile 2naifeel* or "how we feel [about] it"). Regular rallying cries in the series included *vijana tugutuke* and *hii ni time yetu*, or "youth rise up" and "this is our time" (Kiarie 2006). A 2006 comic about corruption in the Uchumi supermarket chain mentioned that many families and shareholders were now broke while the real thieves were off enjoying themselves. It included the phrase *Mwizi ni mwizi! Mwizi afungwe na asoteshwe!*—"A thief is a thief, and a thief should be made to go broke!" (Kiarie 2006). Before beginning his *Sunday Nation* cartoons, Kiarie had acquired fame as an actor in the televised political comedies *Reddykyulass* and *Red Korna*.

Once the government's monopoly on Kenyan television ended in the early 1990s, political humorists developed their own shows. Programmes such as *Redykulass*, *Red Korna*, *Bull's Eye*, *Churchill Live*, and Gado's television puppet satire *The XYX Show* have been popular in recent decades. The latter features puppets playing the roles of the president and his close associates. The puppet caricature of Deputy President William Ruto, Kiruga writes, "often appears with a roasted maize cob in his breast pocket, a snide call-back to the maize scandal that happened when he was minister of agriculture" (2016: 30). Some of these shows, such as *Churchill Live* (created by Daniel "Churchill" Ndambuki, cocreator of *Red Korna*), spoof ethnic accents, class accents, or ordinary citizens' everyday social and livelihood struggles, such as attempts to apply for bank loans. Others, such as the comedy trio *Redykyulass* (Walter "Nyambane" Mong'are, John "KJ" Kiarie, and Tony Njuguna), impersonated presidents and Members of Parliament in their television satire. The very survival of *Redykulass* during the final years of the Moi regime "signaled the shifting borders of Kenya's democratic space" and helped to inspire newly critical music and artwork (Kiruga 2016: 28).

The *Redykulass* trio's influence led investigative journalist Parselelo Kantai and writer Binyavanga Wainaina (founder of the literary journal *Kwani?*) to label an entire

generation of "creative young people" as "the *Redykyulass* Generation" (Musila 2010: 280). The *Redykyulass* comedians, as Grace Musila (2010) discusses, helped to mobilize Kenyan youth to register to vote in the 2007 election, and one of them (John Kiarie) ran for office himself. After a couple of unsuccessful attempts, he was elected to Parliament in 2017. *Redykyulass*'s television satire, argues Musila (2010), invited Kenyans to reflect on their own complicities in sustaining the status quo, even as it "unmask[ed] power" and helped to reduce the influence of the Moi regime through critiques that echoed earlier writings by Kenyan intellectuals such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and historian E. S. Atieno Odhiamo. Ngũgĩ's 1982 novel *Devil on the Cross*, for example, depicts politicians as thieves who celebrate corruption, and his 1977 novel *Petals of Blood* includes an MP whose Kikuyu name (Nderi wa Riera) means "vulture of the air" (his two henchmen are named "Insect" and "Big Stomach"). Street artists, writers, and everyday users of social media have kept the politician-as-vulture motif alive, building on the success of predecessors such as *Redykyulass*, as they indirectly address prominent leaders and escape the limitations of more formal political dissent.

Vulture Politicians

As Kenya's 2017 election approached, political cartoons in daily newspapers, magazines, and social media depicted ordinary citizens in patched or tattered clothing as victims of gluttonous, wealthy politicians vying for office in order to use public resources and cronyism to become even richer. The popular idiom *system ya majambazi* (Swahili and Sheng for "system of thugs") merged political corruption with the idea of "gangster" cronyism. Youthful music amplified that theme in late 2016, as news media exposed corruption scandals in the national youth service and ministry of health. In the latter scandal—dubbed "Healthgate"—an alleged KES11 billion (about US$109 million) were misappropriated (Houreld 2017). The popularity of the phrase *system ya majambazi*—the title of an early 2000s song by rap duo Mashifta—surged in 2016 and 2017 as a Twitter hashtag and also appeared in print and major broadcast media, including a widely viewed 2016 video on the national media outlet Nation TV (NTV).

As the Mashifta song *System ya Majambazi* plays in the background during the NTV video broadcast, the camera focuses on yellow crime-scene tape while the lyrics censure "gangster" or "thug" government officials, lawyers, and pastors—subverting the idea that it is necessarily the youth in poor neighborhoods who are gangsters. The Mashifta musicians heard in the video had emerged during Kenya's 1990s and 2000s florescence of *genge* or "gangsta" rap and had collaborated with hip-hop groups such as Kalamashaka (pioneers of Swahili and Sheng rap) and a wider coterie of musicians called Ukoo Flani Mau Mau ("Some Mau Mau Clan"—a play on both Kenya's anti-colonial 1950s land and freedom movement and the American hip-hop group Wu-Tang Clan). These musicians, most of them from poor urban neighborhoods, produced highly charged political songs about corruption, the struggles of the poor, and betrayals of post-colonial ideals—in

albums such as *Dandora Burning* in 2006 and *Kilio cha Haki* ("A Cry for Justice," which is also the title of a 1981 book by Alamin Mazrui) in 2004.

The predatory politician theme also appeared in the Nairobi musical group Kalamashaka's 2014 video "Moi Avenue," which features political candidates as vultures. Downtown graffiti art in the video depicts a Kenyan man struggling to drag a vulture by a rope tied around its neck while thinking to himself: "Power to the people. I will be the change I want to see. My voice, my vote, our future." The video, which was shot entirely in black-and-white in well-known public areas in Nairobi's central business district, visually contrasts poverty and wealth while making explicit connections between a colonial past and a post-colonial present, returning repeatedly to the statue of Mau Mau freedom fighter Dedan Kimathi, near Nairobi's Hilton Hotel. The song's lyrics refer to the "other side" of Moi Avenue (*pande nyingine ya Moi Avenue*), displaying a divide between haves and have-nots, formal and informal economies. In addition to vulture politicians, the video invokes contested claims to urban space—a wall with a large sign reading "No Posters," followed by a corporate Safaricom mural advertising Kenya's successful mobile money transfer system M-Pesa. Such images are intercut with panhandlers, street vendors, shoe shiners, and a break-dancer whom the camera follows throughout the video. While attracting stares from passers-by, the dancer himself is reclaiming public space.

During the previous year's national election campaign, the vulture-politicians motif turned up in cartoons and street art and graffiti in Nairobi. One weekend in early 2012, an artistic team headed by activist and award-winning photo-journalist Boniface Mwangi stenciled "vote the vultures out of Parliament" (in Swahili) in about 40 locations across Nairobi (Chonghaile, 2012). "Bald-headed, big-beaked vultures in suits appear on the wall of a public toilet in central Nairobi," Chonghaile (2012) writes in *The Guardian*. The graffiti targets ordinary voters as well as corporate leaders and the middle class, urging them to oppose "tribal politics" and asking "middle-class Kenyans... [to] get off Twitter and Facebook and do something positive offline"—echoing similar critiques of social media armchair activists in the United States and elsewhere (Chonghaile 2012). In 2017, Boniface Mwangi, who had been featured in a December 2012 *Time Magazine* article on "Africa Rising," launched his own new political party (*Ukweli* Party or Party of Truth), intended to be a grassroots movement with a focus on parliamentary and county council elections rather than the presidency, under the slogan "Power to the People."

After a television interview about his parliamentary candidacy in May 2017, comments on Boniface Mwangi's public Facebook page included a comment from a skeptic who said that he had "lost interest in Mwangi's work as an activist when he expressed interest in politics (mpigs)." The term "mpigs"—a play on MPs (Members of Parliament)—is a form of ridicule that implies pig-like filth, greed, and corruption.[3] It is a familiar term of derision that others also used on the candidate's Facebook page.

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Mwangi responded that he is willing to take a 50 percent pay cut if he is elected to Parliament, and stated, "I am not in it for the money, my work as an activist speaks for itself." Another Facebook commenter talked about hunger and unaffordable prices of flour and basic commodities (a salient political issue for ordinary citizens in 2017), explaining that he was "sick of politics." Others expressed support for Mwangi, writing on his Facebook page, "Peter, we want courageous people who we can send to tackle mpigs in parliament instead of us crying from outside," while yet another wrote, "we have decided to send you to parliament to go face-to-face with [these] vultures and bring power back to the people." Another termed Mwangi "Kenyan Bernie" (referring to the 2016 US presidential candidate Bernie Sanders).

Kenyan politicians who embrace a left-leaning civic populism similar to that of Bernie Sanders, however, have fared much worse in electoral and legislative politics than have those who stoke a reactionary ethno-nationalist populism. Civic populism, like that of Boniface Mwangi (who lost his 2017 bid for Parliament), confronts institutional hurdles that may be as difficult to overcome in Kenya as they are elsewhere in a post-Cold War era dominated by varieties of economic neoliberalism. Presidents (Jomo) Kenyatta, Moi, and Kibaki, Branch states, resorted to ruthless tactics to "silenc[e] champions of redistribution in formal politics, so the demands for it moved to the informal political sphere and became angrier and more indecipherable"—contributing to the mobilization of Mungiki and other political violence (2011: 296; see also Anderson 2002).

Downplaying redistribution, dominant Kenyan political rhetoric instead emphasizes hard work and entrepreneurialism as pathways to upward economic mobility. The safe way for public figures to talk about wealth inequality is not to focus on institutional obstacles or structural violence but to emphasize wealth acquisition as the reward for strivers—or "hustlers" (see Thieme 2017). Yet the poor who struggle to earn a living in the "informal" economy have long claimed the label "hustler," and some resent elite appropriation of the term, especially when those elites reject economic reforms that would lessen inequality and more fully reward hard work by the poor. The "hustler" label now not only connotes hard work in a variety of jobs, but also the labour required to find work itself in a tight job market. "We were all becoming hustlers," wrote Binyavanga Wainaina (2007), in his widely read essay "Generation Kenya." The term is popular among youth, and some 2017 political candidates embraced it in campaign slogans and promised to represent hustlers' interests. Attorney Karen Nyamu's slogan for her (unsuccessful) 2017 candidacy for women's representative in Nairobi was *Wakili wa Mama na Hustlers* ("The Representative of Mothers and Hustlers"), and her campaign posters included a Sheng term: *Wakili wa MaHustler* ("The Representative of Hustlers").

When more established, wealthy politicians such as cabinet officials label themselves as hustlers, that term reminds ordinary citizens that the politicians' "hustle" may involve corrupt practices that hurt the most vulnerable—such as farmers and pastoralists who are "hustled" out of their rights to land and legal recourse. Deep institutional reforms are needed in matters of land access, tenure, and administration. Here, cartoonists have been recruited to educate as well as entertain.

#LandToons

"Hallo *Mheshimiwa* (Your Honor), I've given her the fake title deed... you can come for the original!" A land registry official speaks those words into a mobile phone as he peers around the tall back of his chair behind a desk bearing the words "corrupt land officials." He watches the exit from his office of a smiling rural woman who wears a headscarf and patched, ragged dress, and carries a baby on her back and a land document in her hands. The cartoon (signed "MuneneArts") appears on the #LandToons website of the Land Development and Governance Institute (LDGI) in Nairobi.[4] LDGI, a non-profit advocacy NGO, invites cartoons through its association with the East African Cartoonists Society (Katuni), which was established in 2014 to "promote art as a medium of communication, expression, entertainment and education."[5] The cartoons spotlight ordinary citizens' struggles over what should be routine land transactions, and illustrate how everyday practices of the state (here agents of land administration and reform) subvert official norms and objectives. Though not all bureaucrats in land offices conduct themselves in the manner satirized in the cartoons, the bureaucratic practices captured here are common enough to have generated widespread public critique.

Land Toons are intended as tools of civic engagement and education about land laws and reforms, which remain pressing concerns following the 2010 constitutional referendum. Irregularities in allocating public land—and problems of dispossession, eviction, dispute settlement, subdivision, title deed updates, and transfers—have been especially intractable. The land cartoons are most helpfully understood, not as privileged windows on the truth of social life, but as quasi-ethnographic glimpses both of what land officials actually do (bureaucratic practices) and of popular discourses of corruption through which, as Gupta puts it in his analysis of India, "the state, citizens, and other organizations and aggregations come to be imagined" (1995: 376). Land Toons, as crowd-sourced contributions, give voice to the marginalized and display effects of state practices on ordinary people's lives. Land cartoon categories include Environment Protection, Land Governance Challenges (by far the most populated category, with more than two dozen cartoons), Land Reforms, Land Rights, Large-Scale Land Acquisition, and Oil Exploration and Mining. Two of the six cartoons under the latter category directly refer to Turkana people and debates surrounding the ownership of oil in their region. Several cartoons address the challenges of women's land rights. In one, a woman who looks worried walks behind a smiling man as both look at papers. The man's document clearly says "resources control and decision making", while the woman's says, "access to ownership to land," but this phrase is overlain with a big red "X" and she is dragging

[4] The cartoon originally was available at: http://landcartoons.co.ke/toon-corrupt-land-officials-munene/. In 2019, the cartoons were retrieved from archives, so they can be accessed again through the Land Development and Governance Institute (LDGI): https://www.ldgi.org/index.php/scorecard-program.

[5] As stated on as its website (katuni.org) in 2016.

a ball and chain labeled "cultural issues." Gado's style appears to have inspired many of the cartoonists.

The Land Toons initiative fosters what Herzfeld (2005: 3) in a different context terms the "creative irreverence" of the disenfranchised, even though public displays of such cultural intimacies can also invite official intimidation. Cartoons, like music and other creative political expression, can be supple forms of cultural engagement that include self-stereotypes or self-deprecating humor that dissolve easy conceptual polarities between state and people, or between elites and ordinary citizens. At the same time, what Herzfeld (2005: 4) terms the "always uneasy" cultural intimacies between officialdom and other citizens, animate not just humor and satire but also serious political mobilizations, solidarity, and reforms. An influential channel for such camaraderie and mobilization is the hashtag "Kenyans On Twitter." Participants address both national and international audiences, sometimes with surprising impact.

Kenyans on Twitter, #KOT

Kenyan Twitter has developed a global reputation for wit and for winning. Tweets that are popular within the country range from alerts about the location of political protests and traffic jams[6] to complaints about electrical blackouts, matatus, bank fees, and surging prices of everyday commodities, as well as commentary on elections, political accountability, and international news media representations of Africa. Twitter hashtags, Kiruga (2016: 31) writes, "often emerge as organic, crowd-sourced forms of political satire"—such as #IsUhuruInKenya, in response to the fourth president's frequent travel abroad. That hashtag, and its associated website, angered government censors, but "public outrage brought it back" and citizens sensed a victory when "the next month, the president's itinerary included month-long stopovers in different parts of the country" (Kiruga 2016: 31). A teasing joke about foreign travel also was directed at former Prime Minister Raila Odinga via social media, with the hashtag #BabaWhileYouWereAway," which generated satirical comments on things that happened in Kenya while Odinga was in the United States for several months in 2014 (e.g. "Baba while you were away, all tinted vehicles were banned").[7] More seriously, hashtags can express a sense of community or solidarity in times of tragedy, as with the hashtag #WeAreOne that trended after the September 2013 terror attack on Nairobi's Westgate Mall.

Although Twitter in principle enables broad citizen participation and debate, it can just as easily reproduce rather than subvert power relations and hierarchies of individual visibility and influence. It may replicate patron–client relationships (the followed

[6] For example, @Ma3Route and #BeatInconvenience.

[7] The following public Facebook page (May 30, 2014) is dedicated to the "Baba while you were away" phenomenon: https://www.facebook.com/280454552071584/posts/baba-while-you-were-away-they-sold-us-to-the-chinese-ochieng-isnow-o-chi-yeng-we/562928990490804/.

and the followers online). Furthermore, only a small number of Twitter users who are outside of dominant media organizations actually reach vast audiences, and overall, users tend to interact most with those who already share their views. Nonetheless, Twitter does provide a platform for political conversations that are "often too controversial to be covered by mainstream media" (Ogola 2015: 74). The effects of tweets on national debates both online and offline, Ogola argues, are significant, partly because social media discussions that influential individuals or celebrities initiate or popularize are often eventually picked up in national news media.

Kenyan Twitter's global impact is illustrated by a witty 2015 campaign mocking CNN's (Cable News Network) online and broadcast descriptions of Kenya as a "hotbed of terror" a few days before President Barack Obama's visit to Kenya (Ma 2015). Within 24 hours of that CNN story, more than 120,000 tweets had been posted with the hashtag #SomeoneTellCNN (which had first surfaced a few years earlier). Kenyan commentators noted that terrorism is a global issue and that terror incidents in Kenya have originated elsewhere. Their tweets offered clever alternative tags that showcased Kenya's economic dynamism and its beautiful cityscapes and wildlife, posed ironic questions about violence in the United States, shared a *Daily Nation* cartoon with the caption "CNN, The Error Hotbed" (by @Gathare), and invited Kenyans on Twitter to go to the @CNN account and report it for posting spam. Kenya's minister of the interior called on CNN to apologize, and soon a CNN executive (Tony Maddox) flew to Kenya and did just that, as announced in a press release from the office of President Uhuru Kenyatta. The hashtag #SomeoneTellCNN lives on in tweets about topics such as CNN's coverage of Ghana's 2016 election, Donald Trump's "fake news" label for CNN, and male-dominated CNN panels about the January 2017 Women's March. Kenyan tweets about CNN's international news coverage offer just a glimpse of the country's vibrant, globally engaged cultural politics. Another example is Kenyan journalist Joseph Warungu's (2016) post-Brexit satirical column inviting the United Kingdom to join the African Union if it is unhappy with the European Union.

Conclusion

The cultural politics of dissent in Kenya and elsewhere in Africa has not only been transformed by new communication technologies, it has also become "more open and more daring" since the return of multi-party politics in the early 1990s (Nyamnjoh 2009: 99). Though setbacks and self-censorship occur as repression waxes and wanes, the vibrancy and reach of the innovative forms of political critique discussed here are unmistakable.

In contrast to this chapter's focus on satirical dissent, cultural politics also includes the symbolic displays or staging of state power, political ritual, and spectacle-making that undergird routine operations of power (Bayart 1993; Haugerud 1995; Mbembe 2001). We have highlighted instead creative expression that disrupts the political messages of those familiar displays and that offers politicians and officials what Nyamnjoh (2009:110)

terms an "unflattering mirror." Political humor in post-1980s Kenya does not simply toy with power or inadvertently reinforce it in ways Mbembe (2001) so brilliantly dissects in a different context. Instead, the Kenyan case affirms cultural ideologies of satire that value it as subversive or potentially liberatory—even though humor's effects are often subtle, unquantifiable, and gradual. Through satirical dissent, political categories or assumptions are destabilized, debates get reframed, and citizens are inspired to become politically active as voters, protesters, reformers, or candidates for office. Kenyan leaders cannot ignore the sting of political messages in popular music, graffiti art, television satire, and editorial cartoons that venture where others dare not.

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