Chapter 5
Living in a Cosmopolitan "Small Town" in Africa
Urban Space, Individual Trajectories and Everyday Practices in
Marsabit, Northern Kenya

Erika Grasso

Introduction

> [Marsabit] is a cosmopolitan town. It has all the tribes, even Kalenjin and Jaluo ... the tribes from down Kenya, too. In our county we have fourteen tribes and nowadays all the faces of the fourteen tribes are in Marsabit town and this is true also for other Kenyan groups. We have all other communities. There are forty-two tribes in this town, even if in small number. It is a cosmopolitan town.[1]

Sitting across from me in his office, this is how a public official described Marsabit, the capital city of Marsabit County (Eastern Province, Kenya). Part of the wider Kenya urban system, Marsabit plays a pivotal role among the northern regions, yet it seems little more than an overgrown village. It has a population of about 20 000 inhabitants (County Government of Marsabit, 2017) and, along with the border town of Moyale, it is the only urban centre in Kenya's largest county.[2] It is a place of much ambiguity and ambivalence: a multi-ethnic space and a connection point between centre and periphery. Furthermore, from the point of view of its residents, Marsabit has a cosmopolitan nature.

Marsabit County, like all northern Kenya, is often perceived and described as underdeveloped and as a place of tribalism, religious radicalism

---

[1] A.D., interview, Marsabit, July 2014.
[2] Marsabit County covers 70 944.2 km² and has 459 795 inhabitants (KNBS, 2019). The whole area is scarcely populated (6 inhabitants per km²) and just about 22% lives in urban contexts (in the centres of Marsabit and Moyale).

and "blind" tradition. [3] Recent devolution processes, infrastructural improvements and new private and public investments have initiated a slow change that challenges these narratives. The effective distance between the centre of Kenya and its peripheries has been lessened, and Marsabit has been transformed. Despite that, though, the town is still perceived as small and remote, just as the region that gave birth to it appears to be shaped by and a victim of "remoteness" and tribalism. This stereotypical image is the result of a myopic understanding of urban space. Between two poles of attraction (centre/periphery), Marsabit represents a good example of those "small towns" (Baker, 1990) that constitute the African urban system and that are impacted by substantial processes of change and growth (Hilgers, 2012).

Compared with Nairobi and other cosmopolitan centres that have dominated the literature on cosmopolitanism, Marsabit is "small", "dusty" and "lost in the middle of nowhere", as I have been told many times in Nairobi. Despite that, Marsabit County's own citizens' definition of the town as cosmopolitan and multi-ethnic is appropriate to better understand the urban centre. Actually, Marsabit is a place of "super diversity" (Vertovec, 2007), inhabited by (individual and collective) subjects from various national, cultural and economic backgrounds. Nevertheless, it offers services, opportunities and connections with other national and international centres. In this sense, in order to comprehend this secondary centre role, it is essential, on the one hand, to take into account processes and elements apparently peculiar to "global cities" as defined by Saskia Sassen (2005) and, on the other, to explore global processes in smaller and less wealthy centres (Myers, 2003). Moreover, beyond the scarcity of services and the delayed development of infrastructure which characterise the town and region, Marsabit has a peculiar history. It is a history that preserves meanings which need to be investigated and understood through its inhabitants' terms (Mbembe, Nuttal, 2004; Pieterse, 2010). I argue that Marsabit's multi-ethnic and ambiguous nature (both central and peripheral at the same time) makes it a "marginal centre" (Remotti, 1989) or a "critical centre" (Wood, 2009). It is a definitive point and a resource for Marsabit

---

[3] Northern Kenya has been historically neglected by central governments in both colonial and post-colonial times (Anderson, 2014; Carrier, 2016; Lochery, 2012; Schlee, 2007). Stereotypes about northern regions and pastoralists are still widespread in Kenya as the result of a history of marginality, perceptions, policies and state perpetrated violence (Carrier, 2016; Oded, 2000; Schlee and Shongolo, 2012; Whittaker, 2014). They are grounded in a common and historically rooted understanding of pastoralists and Muslims as "alien" within the Kenyan nation (Carrier, 2016).

County's citizens. Calling it "cosmopolitan" enables them to circumvent ethnic and moral boundaries and the constraints that shape it and, through the urban space, to cope with marginality and insecurity. In particular, those who occupy precarious positions from an economic, ethnic and gender point of view find in Marsabit a space in which to experiment with possibilities that would otherwise be impossible.

This contribution proposes to investigate the Marsabit urban space and its sociality from within, attempting to overcome the short-sighted narratives that have often involved African urban centres and their inhabitants, especially those centres considered "small" or "secondary". The ethnography conducted in Marsabit allows us to acknowledge the urban space as a repertoire of performances and practices (Fabian, 1978; Barber, 1997) and as a place of "everyday cosmopolitanism", using Asef Bayat's terminology (Bayat, 2009). Practices and relationships inexorably transform the space of the city, a "place" made meaningful by those who inhabit it and a site where vulnerable subjects are able to better affirm their self-determination, experiencing an agency not even thinkable in the "traditional" spaces of households or rural villages.

Therefore, it seems necessary to give voice to those practices through which places take on their meaning (Feld, Basso, 1996). From this perspective, Marsabit is a junction of connections and inter-connections in which northern Kenyan inhabitants' "activity spaces" (Schöfelder, Axhausen, 2010) intertwine, shaping the urban space in its *ville* and *cité* dimensions (Sennett, 2018). Marsabit is shaped by subjects' experiences; it is useful, then, to take into account that their agency is strictly connected to creativity and change (Rapport, Overing, 2000; Lavie, Narayan, Rosaldo, 1993) and that ideas and practices are part of an ongoing process through which subjects shape the world they live in:

> The essence of the process of social life is that it is continuous. People did not create their society once and for all, for everybody else born afterwards to be born into a predetermined world. By learning the world into which they were born, and by continually thinking and acting in it, people continually create and change it (Holy, Stuchlik, 1981, p. 16).

In the Marsabit urban space, individual and collective subjects find much more than just facilities. The town allows them access to an essential space, full of the relationships that allow them to navigate perceived and real marginality and remoteness, and that often empower their social agency. In this context, it is possible to observe "tactical cosmopolitanism" practices and

rhetoric (Landau, 2010; Landau, Freemantle, 2010). Like the migrants in Johannesburg studied by Loren B. Landau and Iriann Freemantle, Marsabit County dwellers "practically and rhetorically draw on various, often competing, systems of cosmopolitan rights and rhetoric to insinuate themselves, however shallowly, in the networks and spaces needed to achieve specific practical goals" (Landau, Freemantle, 2010, p. 380). The ethnographic gaze allows us to grasp the daily practices and discourses that give life to places, indissolubly linked to the ordinary, and to the individual and collective experience of the subjects, as proposed by the perspective of "ordinary ethics" (Lambek, 2010; Das, 2010; Fassin, 2012). I presume that this approach is helpful in overcoming the widespread narratives that describe Marsabit as "only" the capital of a remote, dangerous and underdeveloped region. Seen from its inner urban space, Marsabit is far more than that.

The "impossible things market"

In a café in the heart of the town, Guyo and I were chatting, surrounded by customers of all sorts: women in long, colourful dresses, children, and men in elegant suits or traditional dress. Drinking *chai* and eating *sambusa,* Guyo is a Burji in his fifties, born and raised in Marsabit, and has retraced the history of his home. "It's a small town, an accidental town that grew by accident" he says to me, with a wink.[4]

Sitting on a volcanic mountain covered with forest and surrounded by arid and semi-arid lowlands inhabited by groups of nomadic pastoralists, Marsabit looks like a quirk of history, "an accident" to use Guyo's words. The British colonial administration founded it in 1907 as an administrative centre and trading post in the Northern Frontier District (NFD) of the British East Africa Protectorate (Witsenburg, Wario, 2008; Brown, 1989). At that time, the arid lowlands that divide the green central Kenya highlands from high Ethiopian plateaux appeared on colonial maps as an empty, blank and unmarked region (Brown, 1989), yet it soon became a pivotal buffer zone for the maintenance of the protectorate's northern and eastern borders (Oba, 2013; 2017).

Urbanity began to appear in northern Kenya soon after the colonial territories, resources and people were taken over. In the beginning, Marsabit was nothing more than a small outpost that began to grow thanks to the presence and the initiatives of various groups of people other than the pastoral and nomadic groups that historically inhabited the region. For a long

---

[4] W. G., interview, Marsabit, May 2015.

time (at least until the 1930s), the pastoralists (namely the Gabra, Rendille and Borana) were forbidden to settle in the town. The town first developed and matured thanks to the presence of colonial officers, Goans, Somali and Indian traders and some groups of refugees, as well as Burji and Konso farmers from southern Ethiopia.[5] In the early twentieth century, the new-born colonial outpost showed a clear division between neighbourhoods – those inhabited by European colonial officials, military corps, Goan or Indian employees and the farmers from Ethiopia. In the centre, called the Boma, Somali and Indian traders gave life to the market area, setting up commercial and artisan activities. Nomadic pastoralists had access to the Boma where they found facilities and products from outside the pastoral economy. British, Somali and Indian merchants founded the "impossible things market"[6] in the very centre of the "only" town of the region. Since its inception, Marsabit has been a place where different worlds encounter each other; urban spaces have been imagined and "created" by "others" who founded and inhabited it, and it began to be a significant place, intrinsically linked with "otherness" (Grasso, 2020a). Bit by bit, Marsabit became essential to both the colonial power, to establish a market economy and tax system (Berman, 1990), and to the local population to better navigate change, as well as social and ecological crises.

Nowadays, the "impossible things market" still offers ideas, goods and services that cannot be found outside the town, making Marsabit a cosmopolitan "small town". In this sense, Marsabit's centre maintains its "other" nature, hosting traders, public officials and a large number of individuals from different ethnic backgrounds. The centre of Marsabit is a place inevitably different from the ecological and social environment of the local nomadic pastoralist groups, but equally essential to their survival. In this area, first occupied by the Somali and Indian "impossible things market", shops, carpenters' and artisans' workshops are operated by people mostly from the central and southern regions of Kenya or from other African

---

[5] In the late nineteenth century, among the first settled inhabitants of Marsabit mountain were Gabras who had escaped the aggression of the Abyssinians during Menelik II's expansion attempts southwards (Witsenburg. Wario, 2008; Oba, 2013). After the foundation of the town, British officials encouraged Burji and Konso farmers to move to Marsabit from the border town of Moyale to start farming to supply the administration (Witsenburg. Wario, 2008).

[6] I draw the concept of "impossible things market" from Alberto Salza who kindly shared with me his years experiences and reflections about northern Kenya's pastoral societies in long and fruitful conversations in his house in Turin.

countries such as Ethiopia and Somalia. The surrounding parts of the town are organised into "substantive" areas that, while not openly declared, are ethnically demarcated and disputed (Grasso, 2020a). The urban centre is a site of alterity and super-diversity and is connected to other spaces navigated by nomadic pastoralists, namely the lowlands, to Nairobi and other political and economic centres, and to other African regions (Somalia and Ethiopia). Since its inception, the Marsabit urban space has embodied an ambivalence due to an ongoing negotiation between "there" and "here", "modernity" and "tradition", "Kenyan" and "un-Kenyan".

One afternoon I was passing by the Catholic mission in the very centre of Marsabit to greet some friends. In the kitchen, Patricia – a woman from central Kenya – and Darare – a Gabra woman – were arguing heatedly about female circumcision. Patricia was furious; she could not convince her friend that that type of ritual should no longer be practiced for the sake of girls and women: "It is no longer legal in Kenya. We are in Kenya. Marsabit is in Kenya and mutilations are illegal here too".[7] Darare was quietly sitting at the table, firm in her convictions: "I know it is not good, but we do like that, it is our tradition. Nobody will marry my daughter if she won't".[8] The negotiation between the "there" and "here" takes place thanks to the everyday interactions between people who come from different backgrounds. These encounters are less frequent in rural spaces and are the basis of Marsabit's cosmopolitan and ambiguous nature. In the urban space, subjects can choose to fulfil or to question economic, gender and ethnic lines, depending on the contingencies. Boundaries and feelings of belonging are questioned, or reaffirmed, through contact with "others". Facing Darare's "traditional" convictions, Patricia underlined their common national identity. In a different way, when she talked about Meru, her home place, she usually referred to it as "Kenya" reproducing the idea that "Marsabit is not Kenya" as I have often been told during my stay in the country. The urban environment allows both to reaffirm this belief and to question it. Aid workers, students, farmers, artisans and employees from local communities and from "elsewhere", in fact, inhabit the urban space and act in it, often overcoming local ethnic lines and contributing to bring about change in the city streets.

Western tradition associates the ease with which one comes into contact with otherness and strangers with urban life and cosmopolitanism (Sennett, 2018). In this sense, the "impossible things market" is the true heart of

---

[7] A. O., conversation, Marsabit, April 2015.
[8] G. G., conversation, Marsabit, April 2015.

Marsabit urbanity. It is the area occupied by formal and informal trades and artisan activities, cafés, restaurants and offices on the main streets of the old Boma. The goods and services it offers appear as "impossible" because they are somehow extraneous to the rural and pastoral world. The heart of the city offers access to opportunities that are unthinkable outside the urban context and allows subjects not only to think, but also to try to create a "good life" (Teppo, 2015). In the region, the "impossible things market" is a peculiar feature of the urban phenomenon. It makes Marsabit a cosmopolitan centre where different subjectivities can relate, offering spaces for ethnic, economic and gender coexistence apparently not possible in other centres.

Marsabit's cosmopolitan image is strongly connected to the multi-ethnic nature of its urban space. In the region, sub-counties and settlements are ethnically characterised according to lines that reproduce colonial mapping. The town is the only space in which conflictual relations between groups that compete for resources apparently do not preclude their spatial coexistence and in which violent conflict rarely breaks out (Grasso, 2020a). In this sense, the Marsabit urban space plays a pivotal role in individual and collective subjects' trajectories. Its cosmopolitan image is nourished by narratives that depict its nature – a place inhabited by all ethnic communities – ignoring the actual political competition and conflict among the major ethnic communities (Gabra, Borana and Rendille) and their allies. I argue that, when ethnic conflict is endemic, ethnic identities have a strong spatial dimension (Watson, 2010) and by not openly declaring and underlining the tensions that exist, the town is able to make its space "open" and accessible to all.

Ethnicity, as it is possible to observe in northern Kenya, has its origins in the colonial past. The colonial power took advantage in the NFD, mapping and defining "tribal grazing areas", limiting shepherd communities' movements and controlling access to resources. As evidenced in other African regions, in the colonial past these identities were more fluid and flexible. In northern Kenya, ethnicity acquired a spatial nature: "The most important form of change, and the root of other changes, has been the territorialisation of ethnicity. Groups that did not have bounded territories now have them" (Schlee, 2013, p. 858). This is the case, then, in the presence of "substantive areas" in the Marsabit centre. The urban space reproduces the county's ethnic polarisation and embodies colonial and post-colonial understandings of identities and power. Nevertheless, it is something that emerges from everyday practises and is never openly declared. The silence around ethnicity that I experienced in the town made

me think, at first, that it was possible to consider Marsabit sociality as going beyond ethnic narratives that all too often monopolise discourse on northern Kenya. Urbanity took time to reveal itself fully to me, but I discovered that it is not possible to comprehend Marsabit and its inhabitants' life experiences without considering their relationship with alterity and their ethnic feelings.

Ethnic belongings are multiple and fluid, although they are rarely declared in everyday speech and narratives. They are a complex and multiform expression of the peculiar experience of modernity, based on market and state, of actual and changing realities. Like other African societies, Kenya experiences fragmentations dictated by ethnic and religious affiliations in which the ethnic discourse is closely linked to the political one (Berman, Eyoh, Kymlicka, 2004). In their everyday life, subjects are entangled in an ongoing negotiation and re-definition of self that is strictly connected with ethnic belonging, in both the private and public (individual and collective) dimensions. The complex relations between power and individual agency are nourished by diverse narratives and speech that refer to two distinguished forms, namely "moral ethnicity" and "political tribalism" as defined by John Lonsdale (2004). Marsabit County has seen an ethnic configuration and endemic ethnic conflicts that are rooted in the colonial past, but which are also expressions of post-colonial power relations between diverse institutions (local and national), marginality as experienced among pastoral and Muslim Kenyan communities, and the competition for natural, economic and political resources.

In northern Kenya, as demonstrated by Elizabeth E. Watson (2010), the engagements with space are implicated in the construction, performance and experience of identity and in the way in which relations are constructed and negotiated. In this sense, the Marsabit urban space is conceived and informed by lines of ethnicity and local affiliations and, at the same time, connected and stretched out towards elsewhere. Ethnicity is something that strongly affects the everyday life of Marsabit's residents and that has a spatial and urban dimension that, while never openly declared, contributes to the construction of urban space in its material (*ville*) and social (*cité*) dimensions (Sennett, 2018). Space is linked to social relations in the construction of subjectivities and relations to others (Massey, 2005; Ingold, 2007). In the urban space, Marsabit's residents engage in relations not only shaped by ethnic rhetoric, but which are potentially open to new and different ideals and expectations (Grasso, 2020b; Zingari, 2020). They are an inexhaustible source of control, sharing and conviviality (Bjarnesen, Utas, 2018). In this sense, the town enables Marsabit County citizens to reaffirm

their belonging and to take part in ethnic competition and, at the same time, to access national and international connections and to feel closer to the Kenyan national community.

Returning to Guyo and the words that opened this chapter which defined Marsabit as an "accidental town", it is possible to say that Marsabit is a quirk of history, given the exceptional nature of the urban space in the region. In a context ideally dominated by the culture and ethnicity of nomadic pastoralists, Marsabit is an exception, a place built on movements, words, sounds, histories and practices that have a generative power (De Boeck, Jacquemin, 2006) and that constitute an infrastructure (Simone, 2004b) that enables subjects to interpret and act despite uncertainties (Mbembe, Nuttal, 2004; Trovalla, Trovalla, 2015; Hoffman, 2007). In the following paragraphs, I will explore how the "accidental" and "other" nature of Marsabit affects the trajectories of its subjects, enabling them to navigate marginality and to affirm their agency. In particular, women's voices are worth listening to in order to see that Marsabit is a place where gender and ethnic lines are produced and reproduced, but also questioned and negotiated. In this sense Marsabit is a site of "condensation, acceleration and intensification" (Dilger et al., 2020, p. 9) that connects subjects and spaces and questions the rural-urban, tradition–modernity dichotomies as well as the despondency theories on African urbanity. Far from being just an overgrown village or only the capital city of the one of the poorest Kenyan counties, Marsabit is a place in which the dimensions of the *ville* and the *cité* produce new imaginaries and new hopes for the future. Marsabit is a place where it is possible to think of and to give meaning to the idea of a "good life" (Teppo, 2015).

Movements, connections and self-affirmation: Women in the centre

Marsabit, and in particular the market at its heart, is meaningful, not just for the economic and functional value of its services. The Marsabit centre (and its market) is a place in which subjects test their social existence through the relations that come into being (Guingane, 2001). Nevertheless, the market is the result of the society of which it is an expression (Aime, 2002) and, although defined as "cosmopolitan" and egalitarian, it reproduces ethnic and gender lines and relations that are rarely openly expressed. At the same time, it is an "[...] infrastructure [...] capable of facilitating the intersection of socialities so that expanded spaces of economic and cultural operation become available to residents of limited means" (Simone, 2004b, p. 407).

In the market area, Turu sits every day at her stall where I often stopped to buy scarfs, incense or perfume and to chat with her.

> I am happy to have this place at the market. Now my son helps me a little – you saw how good he was giving you the change – and the baby can stay here with me. And with what I earn here, I pay school fees and we can eat. I kicked my husband out of the house! He has married a second wife ... You know what? He is free to stay with her all the day. My businesses make me independent! This is important! Look, we're all women here...[9]

In Turu's words the urban space emerges as a place where economic independence and self-affirmation become possible. The young Burji woman briefly mentioned her husband, emphasising that her place of informal trading, at the heart of the Marsabit market, gives her the possibility to overcome her subordinate position. Turu belongs to that part of the population not involved in the county pastoral economy and not even part of the urban bourgeoisie that in recent decades has established itself by navigating the tumultuous waters of ethnopolitics and the arrival of huge external investments in the region. In this sense, and being a woman, Turu occupies a position of substantial marginality in the panorama of economic development and political competition in the region, but actually finds in the urban space a site in which to affirm her own subjectivity and to try to achieve her expectations for the future. Her story is common in Marsabit and mirrors the experience of Arbe. Like Turu, Arbe conducts some activities in the Marsabit centre. Her little shop opens every morning in the heart of Soko Gabra,[10] a place of meeting and trading often frequented by the Gabras. Arbe belongs to the Gabra household where I lived for many months during my fieldwork in Marsabit. At home, it was possible to see that her position was vulnerable. She usually sat in her room taking care of the children. I often noticed her silences upon her sister's husband's arrival and her exclusion from dinners in the main house. Her everyday life practices and movements

---

[9] M. T., interview, Marsabit, October 2014.

[10] Between 2005 and 2006 the violent clashes between Borana and Gabra affected Marsabit County and Marsabit urban space. In 2005, after the attack on Turbi village where Borana men killed 95 Gabras (Mwangi, 2006), the tension in Marsabit increased and Gabra merchants, no longer feeling safe to share the market space with other groups, founded a Gabra Market (*Soko Gabra* in Kiswahili). Today, on the northern side of the urban centre, Soko Gabra is the urban space reference area of all Gabras who live in town or who pass by Marsabit. It is one among the "dense" or "substantive" areas that shape the urban commercial hub.

in the private space of the household greatly clashed with her attitude outside home. I took time to understand Arbe's role within her family. She appeared to me to be both independent and submissive at the same time. Although the Arbe's family belongs to the urban bourgeoisie and takes part to the continuous exchange of ideas and capital between the pastoral and urban world and involved in the ethnic competition of economic and political resources, the young woman, like Turu, places herself in a position of vulnerability in urban sociability.

Framing Arbe's individual experience within the context of her daily movement allows us to glimpse how her ambivalent attitude was the results of a non-linear life trajectory with the urban space playing a great role in it. When I met her for the first time in the early 2000s, Arbe was a young unmarried mother of a baby girl. We met again ten years later. She was a woman in her thirties who had given life to two children outside of marriage and was about to become the second wife of a Gabra man through a traditional wedding. Arbe was moving along a life trajectory that did not fully comply with ethnic and religious gender roles and family expectations. This puts her in a precarious position in comparison with the other women within the family. Visiting Arbe in Soko Gabra and following her movements, I saw I was not observing the whole picture. Marsabit's inner space offered her a meaningful counterpart to her everyday life experience. In fact, Arbe is a true entrepreneur. From her small shop she is able to connect travellers to northern areas of the county, to organise meetings and to entertain her customers selling fruits, snacks and whatever is needed for a long journey in the desert. Travelling with her from Marsabit to her small village of origin, I observed the woman, whom I thought shy and modest, taking the lead in the group of women with whom we were travelling. On this occasion, Arbe proved to be an integral and active part of a wider ethnic network. Leaving her family courtyard, Arbe accedes to a social and relational infrastructure that connects urban and market spaces with those of rural and ethnic communities (Grasso, 2020b). Following Arbe's everyday trajectories between her house, Soko Gabra and the northern villages, it was possible to glimpse the complex relations between spaces, objects, people and practices and subjects' attempts to navigate them. Multilevel conjunctions make the urban space a real "infrastructure" that attracts the subjects and, at the same time, expands their possibilities of accessing wider economic and cultural spaces even when in marginal conditions (Simone, 2004b).

Assuming the entanglement between space and relations, subjects move between and across spaces that not only reproduce the power relations of

their specific context, but that are also gendered and imbued by symbolic meanings (Massey, 1994). Although it is hard to find gendered lines in terms of space occupation or commercial specialisation, in Marsabit, women's engagement with the urban space often translates to self-affirmation and likely to power and control of resources. Marsabit's urban core is frequented by women whose trajectories unravel between the private spaces of households and families, and the public urban space of the market. The latter emerges as an essential infrastructure that makes "other" spaces, ideas and imaginaries available to those who accede to households and courtyards. Allowing them to retain strong ties with families' rural and pastoral backgrounds and, at the same time, being closely connected with urbanity. Subjects find in the spaces that constitute Marsabit urbanity in its public and private dimensions arenas in which to affirm, negotiate and question gender, ethnic and generational lines and identities (Grasso, 2020b).

Arbe's ambivalent position in her household and in her small shop in Marsabit centre allows us a glimpse of what will become clearer in the next section where I will deepen the connection between urban space, individual agency and ethnic belonging. The Marsabit urban space is a site of great ambivalence. It is an infrastructure that allows individual and collective subjects to get away from the town "lost in the middle of nowhere" and, at the same time, to keep alive closer ties with rural spaces, "moral ethnicity" and tradition. Individuals like Arbe and Turu navigate this ambivalence, finding in the urban space a place in which to affirm agency and fulfil their expectations. In this sense, Marsabit is shaped by individuals' experiences and relations. Its urban space and its neighbourhoods and households, "like voices, are local and multiple. For each inhabitant, a place has a unique reality, one in which meaning is shared with other people and places. The links in these chains of experienced places are forged of culture and history" (Rodman, 1992, p. 643).

Although women's presence and their role in the private domain of family and household grounds in traditional gender roles is more evident, their engagement with the urban space is less visible yet undeniable, as outlined by Mary Njeri Kinyanjui, for women involved in the informal economy of Nairobi:

> Women are important in both production and reproduction spaces. In production spaces, a good number of women are engaged in small-scale manufacturing and trade, mainly in the informal sector. They also work in factories, offices, hotels or households. Women's role in reproduction

entails renewing the labour force through birth and the nurturing of young ones. Thus, they contribute to the growth and expansion of contemporary cities (Kinyanjui, 2014, p. 45).

The women I met in Marsabit were involved in the production and reproduction of spaces through their trajectories' ongoing movements within, across and outside of the urban space. Ongoing movements keep connections alive between the urban and rural spaces, questioning classical dichotomies that depict the first as the site of development and modernity and the second as static, traditional and underdeveloped. Goods sold in Marsabit come mainly from Moyale, Isiolo, Meru and Nairobi, places where Turu constantly goes to supply her trading activity. Dansa, Arbe's sister, is a Gabra woman involved in local politics and development projects. She constantly moves between Nairobi and other centres of the country on one side, and small villages scattered in the northern area of Marsabit County, on the other. During her journeys she finds materials and inspiration for the creation of costume jewellery and handcraft produced by the micro-credit groups that she manages among the Gabra community. From her small shop, Arbe also participates in the movements of people, ideas and objects through the town. Her little store in Soko Gabra is not just a fruit and vegetable shop, but a real reference point for those who need to travel to the north of the county or who come from that area. For Turu, Dansa and Arbe, as for many other women and men, the "impossible things market" and the urban space are a fundamental junction in life's trajectories.

Talking with Marsabit's inhabitants one may wonder if the nomadic attitude to movement still pervades subjects' understanding of self and still affects everyday life and ordinary practices. Turu told me her story, working on her old sewing machine under the market canopy that today has been replaced by a "modern" mall. Turu's family, as well as many of the Marsabit families, has Ethiopian origins. The memory of the migration of groups such as Borana, Burji and Konso from southern Ethiopia to Marsabit mountain survives thanks to the transnational connections – cultural, political and commercial – between subjects who recognise themselves as originating in other regions of the Horn of Africa or part of the wider Oromo nation. Turu often travels, crossing the closer international boundary with Ethiopia looking for goods and affordable prices on the other side of the border. Like many others, Turu's experience of space is grounded in the apparent ongoing movement and shift between "here" and "there", between her household, the town and "other" spaces. Subjects' "activity spaces" – their spatial and so-

cial references – reach vast distances that extend from the Marsabit centre
and stretch across the region and beyond. Turu recalled her brother emigrat-
ing to the United States and her relatives in Ethiopia. The fruit that Arbe and
other women sell on the streets of the "impossible things market" comes
from the Meru region at the foot of Mount Kenya. The incense and perfumes
that Turu and Stefania display and the fabrics they sew under the market
canopy, as well as most of the livestock marketed in the county, arrives in
Marsabit after crossing the Ethiopian border. The stories told by the Marsa-
bit inhabitants bring out interesting connections. Marsabit is a centre par ex-
cellence, no longer just amongst the nomadic routes of pastoral groups, but
also among the existential trajectories of the inhabitants of the county of
which it is the capital. The next section will show how urban space is closely
related to ethnic belongings and appears as a site in which they are affirmed
but also questioned.

Rumours, ethnic lines and trajectories

In less than a century Marsabit has become a "cosmopolitan" town in which
recently a shopping mall, "just like ones in Nairobi"[11] has replaced the old
market hall (Grasso, 2017). Individual trajectories confirm that subjects'
movements, imagination and expectations embody Marsabit ambivalence.
Being the political and economic hub in a wide and marginalised region,
Marsabit is a pivotal junction of a wide range of movements of people,
goods and ideas that connect the peripheral centre, not only with the rural
space that surround it, but also with Nairobi and other national and
international centres. The town and its inhabitants navigate a marginal
condition in which they move from the "far away" dimension to the
"cosmopolitan" in an ongoing negotiation between the "pastoral world" and
"modernity" through which they try to achieve their expectations and
desires.
    Arbe's family finds its roots in the arid lowlands that surround Marsabit
Mountain and divide it from the Ethiopian border. Arbe and her sister Dansa
were born in a small village north of Marsabit from nomadic pastoralists.
Thanks to the Catholic Church, which was very active promoting welfare
policies among nomads between the 1970s and 1990s (Grasso, 2019), they
attended the high school in Marsabit, like many of the children of the no-

---

[11] A. O., interview, Marsabit, May, 2015.

madic communities. They established themselves in Marsabit as part of the first generation to have had access to education, to settle and to engage in activities outside of the pastoral economy. Marsabit is an essential element in understanding the changes that have affected the individual and collective stories of the members of the pastoral communities of northern Kenya. The urban space is the place of the "impossible things market", of those services and the connections that link the rural periphery to the centre of the country. This is evident when we look at the trajectories of Dansa and Arbe's family members. Dansa says: "Roobe will finish his studies in Europe and then who knows ... Oba will graduate soon and he will help me managing my development aid projects, D'iba wishes to become a pilot, next year he will start the courses in Nairobi." Following Marsabit inhabitants' "spaces of activity" it is possible then to draw lines that connect northern Kenya to "other" spaces apparently far and unreachable.

As mentioned above, the town's essential role in individual and collective experiences is due to its capacity to make possible a dialogue between the rural and "nomadic" world of the villages and its urban space. Furthermore, it is worth considering the cultural meanings of spaces and resources (Wood, 2009), as well as the history of the town and the local sedentarisation processes (Fratkin, Roth, 2005). Rather than the classic dichotomies of urban/rural and nomadic/sedentary, it shows how pastoral contexts, such as that of northern Kenya, are characterised by flexibility, vocation to change and "plasticity" – dimensions through which nomadic and sedentary groups move and give meaning to places and territories (Semplici, 2020).

Marsabit is at the centre of a network of villages that have been ethnically connoted since the colonial era (Grasso, 2020a) and affected by processes of ethnic territorialisation (Schlee, 2013) in which the domains of space and ethnic belonging overlap. In this context, "primary identities" connect, not just subjects' self-definitions, but also political and economic dimensions besides those of space and environment (Bassi, 2011). In different and complementary ways, in urban and rural space, multiple and changing identities overlap at multiple levels and on the basis of diversified classification criteria (Bassi, 2010).

Dansa and Arbe's household often hosts relatives and acquaintances who share the family's pastoral background and ethnic belonging and who need access to the urban space. The private spaces of courtyards emerge as a place to reactivate bonds of "moral ethnicity" that refer to those processes through which cultural identities, common affiliations and leadership are acknowledged by subjects placed within a complex network of social obligations that

protect individuals when they are most vulnerable or in need (Lonsdale, 1994).

In a different way, the Marsabit urban public space offers different considerations (Grasso, 2020b). Defined as open and egalitarian, it conceals the ambiguous nature of the "marginal centre" (Remotti, 1989). The urban space, even when it maintains and reproduces ethnic lines and constraints – as in the case of Soko Gabra where Arbe operates – makes it possible to better navigate marginality and subaltern positions. Marsabit town is a crucial junction also in Dansa's trajectories. Due to her political activities among her ethnic community, she constantly moves between Marsabit, small Gabra villages and Nairobi, connecting the remote desert areas inhabited by Gabra and the capital city. Marsabit, even in this case, is the essential hub that makes this possible. Arbe operates mainly in Soko Gabra – the Gabra "substantive" area – and among Gabras, while Dansa's political activities are closely related to her connection with the Gabra elite. Ethnicity intrinsically shapes the trajectories of the two sisters within and across the Marsabit urban space and makes clear that urban infrastructure is closely related to ethnic belonging. The ambiguous discourses that describe the Marsabit centre as an open space unaffected by ethnicity embody the ambivalence of urban space. The narratives that define the town as "cosmopolitan" hide the truth that relations shape the urban space and that ethnicity has a great role in it. Nevertheless, to refer to Marsabit as an "open – and cosmopolitan – space" makes the "impossible things market" accessible.

At the very beginning of my fieldwork in Marsabit, a rumour drew my attention to the market space. A friend of mine heard whispers that a Borana woman had been assaulted in her home by some men from her own clan. Apparently, the reason was that she had shopped at a Gabra shop. It was the post-electoral period at the end of 2013 and the region was affected by an escalation of the conflict between the Gabra and Borana communities. "Tribal politics" had acquired violent dimensions in the town of Moyale and on the Ethiopian border. Marsabit was apparently immune from this violent conflict. At the same time, it had real consequences in the practices of its most open space, the market. Nobody talked openly with me about that episode. Marsabit inhabitants agreed that the town was the safest and freest space in the County. Nonetheless, through certain indiscretions I learned the opposite, like when talking with Kame.

Kame is a good friend of Arbe. Like her, she runs a small shop in Soko Gabra. Kame started her business in the central market area and after a while she moved to Soko Gabra. When I asked why she moved, she replied that in

Soko Gabra business was better: "our clans know that this market is for the Gabra, that we have the fabrics for the Gabra". Kame let it slip that there were also Borana and Burji among her customers. However, despite that, she insisted that: "Here all the shops are Gabra".[12]

Walking through its streets it was easy to grasp how ethnicity affects the Marsabit urban space in its *ville* and *cité* dimensions. The built space of the centre – the *ville* – reproduces ethnic lines that only a trained eye can recognise. The road that divides the market signifies a line between the "impossible things market" and the streets crowded by buildings and shops, owned and run by subjects closely linked with local ethnic communities. Here the signs and the names of the shops, both in the Borana language and in English or Swahili, refer to toponyms (local and not), as well as Arab-Muslim traditions and nomadic ones.[13] On the other hand, the *cité*, the way people act and interact in the urban space, is shaped according to substantive areas to which subjects refer for their movements in and out of the town and for their encounters with each other. Soko Gabra is among these areas that appear "dedicated" to the community, even if it is hardly openly declared (Grasso, 2020a).

Cosmopolitanism and ethnicity concur to shape not only the Marsabit space, but also its ambiguous imaginaries and the narratives and practices of urban space, as the experience of Liza illustrates. Younger than Turu and Arbe, Liza, a young woman born in a peripheral neighbourhood of Marsabit, is a further example of the extent of the role of urban space as infrastructure. Yet Liza's experience also demonstrates its ambivalence. When I met her, she was in town after temporarily interrupting her university studies in Nairobi. Daughter of a "mixed couple", her feelings of ethnic belonging were less strong than those usually expressed by inhabitants of northern Kenya. Following the traces of this family history, one gets lost in the grey areas of the unspoken. Despite her appearance as an independent and strong woman, she seemed to me vulnerable. The Marsabit centre offered her some opportunities to overcome marginality through social networks that elude ethnic

---

[12] A. G., interview, Marsabit, November 2014.

[13] The toponyms lead back to specific places in the county or in Ethiopia: Moyale Modern Hotel, Kargi Investment, Forole Hardware, Keisut Building, Badassa Hotel, Chalbi Bar and Restaurant, Sagante Shine Shop, Yaballow Whole Saler, Abyssinia Collection, Dire Dawa Shop. Other signs lead back to the Islamic religion and to the Arab world: Al Subra, Al Nasser, Al Miinawar, Gaza Trade, Al Haji Electronics, Al Amana, Taqwa. The last reference appears to be that of the pastoral world and nomadic life: Gala Building, Dadacha Enterprise, Aleso Zone, Jaldesa Shop, Malle's Retail Shop, Nomads Hotel, Wato General Retail Shop, Oasis Hotel, Ibse Cafè.

belonging. At the same time, finding a place in urban sociality seemed almost impossible to her: "I had that interview yesterday. They made me wait for hours with no reasons. The guy treated me in a very creepy way. Nowadays in Marsabit it is not possible to get a job if you are not a Gabra or a Rendille".[14] On some occasions she had been a victim of men's harassment and cat-calling, an unusual phenomenon in the public spaces of the town. She moved to Nairobi trying to navigate a wider and more complex urban marginality. Not having a clear ethnic affiliation, Liza's family and position in Marsabit sociality were not traceable. Her way to challenge the dress codes and gender roles in the open space of the town exposed her to a greater precariousness and excluded her from the networks of "moral ethnicity".

As Liza's history shows, to access the urban "infrastructure", subjects deal with social and cultural diktats that usually refer to the pastoral tradition and ethnicity. If Marsabit is, as highlighted above, a pivotal junction and resource in individual life experiences, in navigating it, it is essential to negotiate individual positions in a wider sociality that account not just for the urban space but also rural and "ethnic" spaces. Although Marsabit rarely forgives individuals' "mistakes", its multi-ethnicity and its connection to elsewhere offer its inhabitants wider and freer spheres of agency. It is not a case that "un-linear" trajectories pass through the town, a junction for those who leave villages to settle down or head to Nairobi, central Kenya or other places "elsewhere". Arbe's case is an illustrative example. As a teenager in town, she met the soldier who seduced and later abandoned her and her firstborn. In the same "cosmopolitan" space she is experiencing ways to self-affirm, otherwise impossible within the limits of her household. Like Arbe, Turu also held a subaltern position in her family sphere of influence. Her shop in the market and the connections and interactions with other women and subjects enable her to challenge this.

Thus, cosmopolitanism and ethnicity appear to be both part of a shared vision of the urban space and, in a subtle game of signing and countersigning, open up the city as a site of negotiation of feelings of belonging (local and national) that facilitates access to wider and diversified trajectories. The town not only enters into a relationship with the rural spaces that surround it, but also acts as infrastructure that connects those same spaces with other places and other imaginaries, allowing the citizens of northern Kenya to navigate the actual and perceived precarious and marginal positions within the national panorama.

---

[14] P. L., conversation, Marsabit, September 2014.

Conclusions

My subjects' experiences of the urban space, their individual trajectories, show how urban space is the result of social relations. It is a repertoire of performances and everyday encounters that crystallise and circumvent cultural and ethnic constraints. They include but are not limited to relations between urban and rural (Ferguson, 1999) and between local and global (Weiss, 2005). Marsabit is the result of a collective history and of individual lives. In its space, individual and collective trajectories intertwine, making available individual expectations and opportunities.

The public official's words with which this contribution opens and that define Marsabit as cosmopolitan, acquire meaning in the light of the sociability within the urban space. Marsabit satisfies the definition of a cosmopolitan centre because it hosts subjects and relations that come from diversified backgrounds and that, since its foundation, make it a place of diversity and an essential hub that connects northern Kenya's rural areas with "other" spaces and "other" subjectivities. This condition of "super-diversity" makes the town a place of "everyday cosmopolitanism", "a place where various members of ethnic, racial and religious grouping are conditioned to mix, mingle, undertake everyday encounters and experience trust with one another" (Bayat, 2009, p. 13). In this sense the urban space emerges as a place that simultaneously fulfils and circumnavigates social and ethnic dictates. In its centre, Marsabit sees people with different ethnic and economic backgrounds interact and create a place of much ambivalence (Grasso, 2017). As Neil Carrier argues for Nairobi's Somali neighbourhood East Leagh, to understand the Marsabit urban space you need to take into account the different dimensions (local, national and global) that intertwine in intricate ways (Carrier, 2016). In this sense, it is interesting to give attention to the cumulative experiences of the town that contribute to its collective history (Di Nunzio, 2019). Since the town's inception, its collective history is made by subjects who can easily be considered "cosmopolitan". In particular, it seems possible to affirm that those that occupy a more vulnerable position – women, for example – emerge as able to navigate the ambiguous nature of the urban space. They interact in the "impossible things market" as if they were "indifferent to the difference" to use Ash Amin's terms (Amin, 2012). In this sense, the urban core emerges as a site in which we glimpse the "acceptance of mixity and mobility, [the] ties with distant and different others, and [the] care for worlds beyond the familiar and the near" (Amin, 2012, p. 15). The "impossible things market" is the counterpart of other urban spaces – both in

the Boma and in other urban neighbourhoods – in which ethnic lines are more evident. Urban space emerges then as the arena in which different worlds come into contact and are involved in an ongoing dialogue.

The sociality of the centre of Marsabit shows that the urban space is an essential resource for city dwellers, as it also is for the inhabitants of the whole county. I argue that access to the urban space and to its facilities is a priority for individual and collective subjectivities. They accede to the space of the centre, according to their relative position in the highly complex and entangled networks of social relations. In fact, while the dimensions of "moral ethnicity" and "political tribalism" (Lonsdale, 1994) are at the core of the everyday life experience of individual and collective subjectivities, urban space is nevertheless built and experienced according to ethnic belongings (Grasso, 2020a). Despite this, the "impossible things market" offers to individual and collective subjects ways to overlap social and cultural constraints in terms of ethnicity, gender and age. Urbanity condenses local and global discourses involving subjects like Turu, Arbe, Dansa and Liza. In Marsabit urban space, those subjects who occupy a vulnerable and precarious position in the local sociality (in terms of ethnic, economic or gender belonging) are those who better can be defined as "cosmopolitan". Urbanity allows them to question the narrative of local community constraints affirming their agency and achieving their expectations. Individual trajectories and movements not only show the economic and political role of Marsabit, but also that the town is both a place and a particular kind of experience (Simone, 2004a) by which to navigate marginality, ethnic constraints and the hidden sense of "remoteness" of northern Kenya. Everyday practices emerge as a space to reproduce, shape or circumvents structural constraints (Bayat, 2009; Meth, 2010) and could be a good lens through which to observe the transformative and political potential of ordinary spaces and encounters (Iveson, 2013; Simone, 2006; Watson, 2009). For these reasons, I propose to integrate the relational approach to power and space (Massey, 2005; Ingold, 2007; Allen, 2016; Darling, 2009) with deeper reflections on individual trajectories and ways to navigate marginality.

The voices of Marsabit's inhabitants, therefore, appear appropriate and useful as a change of lens with which to look at the town, enabling to us to overcome the stereotypical vision of small African towns and, in particular, of northern Kenya. If we stop thinking of Marsabit as a small town and start to recognise its deeply cosmopolitan nature, it allows us to access the complexity of the urban experience that characterises the place. The cosmopolitan outlook of the urban experience in Marsabit should therefore be recognised as a system

of broad skills acquired through experience and, above all, through travel (Vertovec, Cohen, 2002). The trajectories of the inhabitants of Marsabit are thus seen to be informed by cosmopolitanism, understood as practice and competence, as suggested among others by Vertovec and Cohen (2002). Recognising this gives back to the town of Marsabit all the complexity that characterises it and reveals its true nature as "other" and as a "resource".

References

Aime, M. (2002). *La casa di nessuno. I mercati in Africa occidentale*. Turin: Bollati e Boringhieri.

Allen, J. (2016). *Topologies of Power: Beyond Territory and Networks*. New York: Routledge.

Amin, A. (2012). *Land of Strangers*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Anderson, D. M. (2014). "Remembering Wagalla: State Violence in Northern Kenya, 1962–91". *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 8(4), pp. 658–676.

Baker, J. (Ed.) (1990). *Small Town in Africa. Studies in Rural-Urban Interaction*. Uppsala: The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies.

Barber, K. (1997). "Introduction". In K. Barber (Ed.), *Readings in African Popular Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 1–12.

Bassi, M. (2010). "The Politics of Space in Borana Oromo, Ethiopia: Demographics, Elections, Identity and Customary Institutions". *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 4(2), pp. 221-246.

Bassi, M. (2011). "Primary Identities in the Lower Omo Valley: Migration, Cataclysm, Conflict and Amalgamation, 1750-1910". *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 5(1), pp. 129-157.

Bayat, A. (2009). *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Berman, B. (1990). *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya. The Dialectic of Domination*. London: James Currey.

Berman, B., Eyoh, D., Kymlicka, W. (Eds.) (2004). *Ethnicity and Democracy in Africa*. Oxford: James Currey.

Bjarnesen, J., Utas, M. (2018). "Introduction. Urban kinship: The Micro-Politics of Proximity and Relatedness in African Cities". *Africa*, 88(1), pp. 1–11.

Brown, M. (1989). *Where Giants Trod. The Saga of Kenya's Desert Lake*. London: Quiller Press.

Carrier, N. (2016). *Little Mogadishu: Eastleigh, Nairobi's Global Somali Hub*. London: Hurst.

County Government of Marsabit (2017). *Revisited First County Integrated Development Plan*. Marsabit: County of Marsabit.

Darling, J. (2009). "Thinking beyond Place: The Responsibilities of a Relational Spatial Politics". *Geography Compass*, 3(5), pp. 1938–1954.

Das, V. (2010). "Engaging the Life of the Other: Love and Everyday Life". In M. Lambek (Ed.), *Ordinary Ethics: Anthropology, Language and Action*. New York: Fordham University Press, pp. 376–399.

De Boeck, F., Jacquemin, J. P. (2006). "La ville de Kinshasa, une architecture du verbe", *Esprit*, 12(79), pp. 79–105.

Dilger, H., Bochow, A., Burchard, M., Wilhel-Solomon, M. (2020). *Affective Trajectories: Religion and Emotion in African Cityscapes*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Di Nunzio, M. (2019). *The Act of Living. Street Life, Marginality, and Development in Urban Ethiopia*. Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press.

Fabian, J. (1978). "Popular Culture in Africa". *Africa*, 48, pp. 315–334.

Fassin, D. (Ed.) (2012). *A Companion to Moral Anthropology*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.

Feld, S., Basso, K. H. (1996). *Senses of Place*. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press.

Ferguson, J. (1999). *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Fratkin, E., Roth, E. A. (Eds.) (2005). *As Pastoralists Settle. Social, Health, and Economic Consequences of Pastoral Sedentarization in Marsabit District, Kenya*. New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publisher.

Grasso, E. (2017). "Marsabit dalle carovane al centro commerciale. Storia e sviluppo di una città accidentale". In A. Gusman, C. Pennacini (Eds.), *L'Africa delle città. Urban Africa*. Turin: Accademia University Press, pp. 275–287.

Grasso, E. (2019). *Incontri con l'altro. Missionari "in cammino" tra i Gabra del Kenya*. Turin: Meti Edizioni.

Grasso, E. (2020a). "Mapping a 'Far Away' Town. Ethnic Boundaries and Everyday Life in Marsabit (Northern Kenya)". *Africa*, 2(2), pp. 25–46.

Grasso, E. (2020b). "Etnografia dal cortile. Storie, traiettorie e pratiche a Marsabit, piccola città del Kenya settentrionale". *L'Uomo*, 10(1), pp. 115–136.

Guingane, J.-P. (2001). *Le marché africaine comme espace de communication. Place et fonction socio-culturelles du Marché Africain*. Conférence–Débat, 7

May 2001, Montpellier. Retrieved from: http://afrique.cauris.free.fr/guingane.html (9/11/2021).

Holy, L., Stuchlik, M. (1981). *The Structure of Folk Models*. London: Academic Press.

Hilgers, M. (2012). "Contribution à une anthropologie des villes secondaires". *Cahiers d'Études africaines*, 52, pp. 29–55.

Hoffman, D. (2007). "The City as Barracks: Freetown, Monrovia, and the Organisation of Violence in Postcolonial African Cities" *Cultural Anthropology*, 22(3), pp. 400–428.

Ingold, T. (2007). *Lines: A Brief History*. London: Routledge.

Iveson, K. (2013). "Cities within the City: Do-it-Yourself Urbanism and the Right to the City". *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 37, pp. 941–956.

Kenya National Bureau of Statistic (KNBS) (2016). *Economic Survey 2016*. Nairobi: Republic of Kenya.

Kenya National Bureau of Statistic (KNBS) (2019). *The 2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census*. Vol. 1, Population by County and Sub-County. Nairobi: Republic of Kenya.

Kinyanjui, M. N. (2014). *Women and Informal Economy in Urban Africa: From the Margins to the Centre*. London: Zed Books.

Kochore, H. H. (2016). "The Road to Kenya? Visions, Expectations and Anxieties around New Infrastructure Development in Northern Kenya". *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 10(3), pp. 494–510.

Lambek, M. (Ed.) (2010). *Ordinary Ethics: Anthropology, Language and Action*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Landau, L. B. (2010). "Passage, Profit, Protection, and the Challenge of Participation: Building and Belonging in African Cities". *Urban Forum*, 21(3), pp. 315–329.

Landau, L. B., Freemantle, I. (2010). "Tactical Cosmopolitanism and Idioms of Belonging: Insertion and Self-Exclusion in Johannesburg". *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 36, pp. 375–390.

Lavie, S., Narayan, K., Rosaldo, R. (1993). *Creativity/Anthropology*. Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press.

Lochery, E. (2012). "Rendering Difference Visible: The Kenyan State and its Somali Citizens". *African Affairs*, 111(445), pp. 615–639.

Lonsdale, J. (1994). "Moral Ethnicity and Political Tribalism". In P. Kaarsholm, J. Hultin (Eds.), *Inventions and Boundaries: Historical and Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism*,

Roskilde: Institute for Development Studies, Roskilde University, pp. 131–150.

Lonsdale, J. (2004). "Moral and Political Argument in Kenya". In B. Berman, D. Eyoh, W. Kymlicka (Eds.), *Ethnicity and Democracy in Africa*. Oxford: James Currey, pp. 73–95.

Massey, D. (1994). *Space, Place and Gender*. Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Massey, D. (2005). *For Space*. London: Sage.

Mbembe, A., Nuttal, S. (2004). "Writing the World from an African Metropolis". *Public Culture*, 16, pp. 347–372.

Meth, P. (2010). "Unsettling Insurgency: Reflections on Women's Insurgent Practices in South Africa". *Planning Theory and Practice*, 11(2), pp. 241–263.

Mwangi, O. G. (2006). "Kenya Conflict in the 'Badlands': The Turbi Massacre in Marsabit District". *Review of African Political Economy*, 33(107), pp. 81–91.

Myers, G. A. (2003). *Verandahs of Power: Colonialism and Space in Urban Africa*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.

Oba, G. (2013). *Nomads in the Shadow of Empires. Contests, Conflicts and Legacies on the Southern Ethiopian-Northern Kenyan Frontier*. Leiden-Boston: Brill.

Oba, G. (2017). *Herder Warfare in East Africa: A Social and Spatial History*. Winwick: White Horse.

Oded, A. (2000). *Islam and Politics in Kenya*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.

Pieterse, E. (2010). "Cityness and African Urban Development". *Urban Forum*, 2, pp. 205–219.

Rapport, N., Overing, J. (2000). *Social and Cultural Anthropology: The Key Concepts*. New York, Routledge.

Remotti, F. (1989). "Introduzione". In F. Remotti, P. Scarduelli, U. Fabietti (Eds.), *Centri, ritualità, potere. Significati antropologici dello spazio*. Bologna: Il Mulino, pp. 11–44.

Rodman, M. C. (1992). "Empowering Place: Multilocality and Multivocality", *American Anthropology*, 94(3), pp. 640–656.

Sassen, S. (2005). "The Global City: Introducing a Concept". *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 9, pp. 27–43.

Schlee, G. (2007). "Brother of the Boran Once Again: On the Fading Popularity of Certain Somali Identities in Northern Kenya". *Journal of Eastern Africa Studies*, 1, pp. 417–435.

Schlee, G. (2013). "Territorializing Ethnicity: The Imposition of a Model of Statehood on Pastoralists in Northern Kenya and Southern Ethiopia". *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 36(5), pp. 857–874.

Schlee, G., Shongolo, A. A. (2012). *Pastoralism and Politics in Northern Kenya and Southern Ethiopia*. Oxford: James Currey.

Schönfelder, S., Axhausen, K. W. (2010). *Urban Rhythms and Travel Behaviour: Spatial and Temporal Phenomena of Daily Travel*. Burlington: Ashgate.

Semplici, G. (2020). "Clotting Nomadic Spaces: On Sedentism and Nomadism". *Nomadic Peoples*, 24(1), pp. 56–85.

Sennett, R. (2018). *Building and Dwelling: Ethics for the City*. London: Penguin Books.

Simone, A. (2004a). *For the City Yet to Come: Changing African Life in Four Cities*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Simone, A. (2004b). "People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg", *Public Culture*, 16(3), pp. 407–409.

Simone, A. (2006). "Pirate Towns: Reworking Social and Symbolic Infrastructures in Johannesburg and Douala". *Urban Studies*, 43(2), pp. 357–370.

Teppo, A. (2015). "Moral Communities in African Cities". *Anthropology Southern Africa*, 38(3/4), pp. 284–289.

Trovalla, E., Trovalla, U. (2015). "Infrastructure as a Divination Tool: Whispers from the Grids in a Nigeria City", *City*, 19, pp. 2–3.

Vertovec, S. (2007). "Super-Diversity and its Implications". *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30, pp. 1024–1054.

Vertovec, S., Cohen R. (Eds.) (2002). *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism. Theory, Context and Practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Watson, E. E. (2010). "A 'Hardening of Lines': Landscape, Religion and Identity in Northern Kenya". *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 4, pp. 201–220.

Weiss, B. (2005). "The Barber in Pain: Consciousness, Affliction and Alterity in Urban East Africa". In A. Honwana, F. De Boeck (Eds.), *Makers and Breakers: Children and Youth in Postcolonial Africa*. Oxford: James Currey.

Whittaker, H. (2014). *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Kenya: A Social History of the Shifta Conflict, 1963–68*, Boston: Brill.

Witsenburg, K. M., Wario, R. A. (2008). *Surviving Pastoral Decline. Pastoral Sedentarisation, Natural Resource Management and Livelihood Diversification in Marsabit District*, Northern Kenya. Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press.

Wood, J. C. (2009). "Roads to Nowhere: Nomadic Understandings of Space and Ethnicity". In G. Schlee, E. E. Watson (Eds.), *Changing Identifications and Alliances in North-East Africa, Volume II: Ethiopia and Kenya.* New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, pp. 225–240.

Zingari, G. N. (2020). "Parentele urbane e configurazioni marabuttiche: vite quotidiane nella città di Mbacké Baol (Senegal)". *L'Uomo*, 10(1), pp. 207–228.