

## **Insecurity, Social Navigation and Displacement Cultures: The Impact of Enduring Insecurity on People Living in the Mathare Ghetto, Nairobi, Kenya.**

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Mathare, a ghetto in Nairobi, Kenya, has a long history of war and political insecurity. It started during the colonial era when Mathare became the birthplace of urban resistance against the government. Today, Mathare has acquired worldwide recognition as one of the hotspots of the political violence that followed the 2007 General Elections and for, allegedly, harbouring ‘ethnic’-based and politically motivated ‘gangs’ such as the Mungiki and Taliban. Beyond these highly sensationalised images of Mathare an ongoing war is fought between the state and people living in this ghetto.

In my paper I zoom in on how political insecurity has become part of the everyday life of people and of specific groups, such as ‘gangs’, in Mathare. My aim is to look at the underlying social predicaments, dilemmas, contradictions and possibilities in relation to conflict. I use the concept of ‘social navigation’ with which I mean, following Henrik Vigh (2006), the way in which people as agents construct and enact strategies to increase social possibilities and opportunities in shifting and violent spatial, social and temporal contexts.

Using this concept I analyze ethnographic data of shifts in power relations in the ghetto over the past 60 years to explore how changing political insecurities impacted individual lives and group formations, such as ‘gangs’. With the life history of a grandmother, who was displaced from a ‘white’ settler farm in the 1940s and subsequently joined the urban resistance in Mathare, I shed light on how Mathare’s political culture from its inception has been informed by displacement, violence, fear, survival and resistance. I also analyze the life history of her grandson who resisted recruitment by different ‘gangs’ but was drawn into violence when his house came under attack during the post-election violence. This historical perspective on the impact of enduring insecurity in Mathare on particular social groups, and on how it shaped people’s choices, senses of belonging and construction of selves, enables me to grasp social navigation among different generations and social groups and how they related differently to (shifts in) enduring insecurity. I conclude with exploring the term ‘displacement cultures’ and whether we can use this term to conceptualize local dynamics of endemic political insecurity as lived experiences by people.