

“Eyes, Ears, and Wheels”

Policing Partnerships in Nairobi, Kenya

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■ **ABSTRACT:** Research on policing in Africa has provided tremendous insight into how non-state actors, such as gangs, vigilantes, private security companies, and community initiatives, increasingly provide security for urban dwellers across the continent. Consequently, the state has been categorized as one order among many whose authority is co-constituted through relations with other actors. Drawing on our ethnographic fieldwork in the past two years, we highlight how the state police dominates security arrangements in Nairobi and asserts itself not just as one order among many. We show how, in various policing partnerships between police, private security companies, and residents’ associations, the state police acts as a coagulating agent of such practices. In order to elucidate this relationship, we utilize the “junior partner” model from the criminology literature and expand based on the community policing initiatives that in Nairobi act as the “eyes, ears, and wheels” of the police.

■ **KEYWORDS:** authority, Kenya, Nairobi, policing, private security, urban

Nairobi—like many other urban centers across the globe—is marked by a pluralized security landscape, where numerous state and non-state actors provide various security services to its residents. During the past decades, anthropological studies on non-state policing in Africa have proliferated, including the works of Bruce Baker (2008, 2010), Lars Buur (2006), Tessa Diphooorn (2016b), Steffen Jensen (2008a), Helene Kyed (2009), and David Pratten (2008), to name but a few. One of the major fruits of these studies has been a growing recognition that the state police is not the sole actor engaged in the provision of security, but rather that various forms of hybrid, plural, or “twilight policing” practices are performed by a range of actors who are not (directly) encapsulated by the state, and in some cases, operate in a certain degree of isolation, away from state oversight and authority. Several studies based in Kenya (e.g., Anderson 2002; Rasmussen 2010; Ruteere and Pommerolle 2003; Skilling 2016; Smith 2015; van Stapele 2015) have also identified this role taken up by central role of non-state security providers.

Based on such studies, we started our fieldwork in Nairobi, Kenya, by primarily focusing on non-state policing bodies, and we aimed to flesh out their security performances, albeit in relation to the state police. Soon enough, we were both confronted with an empirical realization that the state police in Kenya is far from obsolete, absent, weak, or simply one order among many. Rather, the state police, we argue, often functions as a *coagulating* agent within diverse security arrangements. In the context of a hybrid and pluralized policing in Kenya, the state police dominates security narratives, experiences, and practices, although it does not single-handedly own



them. Non-state security bodies see and position themselves as the “eyes, ears, and wheels” of the Kenyan police.

However, these non-state actors cannot be neglected altogether. They are not insignificant agents making a quick appearance within a state-centric analysis, and by treating them as such, we would fall prey to much of the critique bestowed on research on policing in Africa. Our empirical material shows that the state police is a dominant and prominent actor whose power is constantly harnessed and domesticated by private security companies and residents’ organizations. These practices allow us to foreground the ontological question of the state and point to the relevance of a relational approach in the analysis of policing and security provision. The arrangements we investigate interfere with how the state is performed and produced in daily (security) practices throughout Nairobi. They span from neighborhood-specific partnerships to national legal documents and become the base from which to further question the analytical relevance of the public-private divide.

This article draws on ethnographic fieldwork conducted by both authors between 2014 and 2016 in the rather affluent area of northwestern Nairobi, including neighborhoods such as Runda, Gigiri, Muthaiga, Parklands, Westlands, Spring Valley, and Loresho. We recognize that our focus on these geographical areas inherently excludes various actors who are prevalent in other parts of Nairobi, particularly the lower socioeconomic neighborhoods (see Price et al. 2016; van Stapele 2015), and acknowledge that the security arrangements may be fundamentally different in these areas. Yet, because of the scope of this article and the focus of our research, we will not explore that dimension further. Both authors joined the patrols of the mobile response teams of different private security companies, both during the day and night shifts. This included patrols with or without police presence in the vehicle, either informally or formally arranged. In total we interviewed more than 40 relevant actors, and five interviews were conducted together by both authors. The reflections on these interviews, as well as field notes of particular events, were shared and compared.

In the next section, we present an episode from the first author’s ethnographic fieldwork, a vignette to empirically introduce the article and ground our main argument. Successively, we discuss and present our conceptual contribution to both the fields of policing and authority in Africa and criminology-inspired models of policing. We then offer more empirical material and its respective analysis, highlighting the roles and the mutual relations between the police, the private security companies, and the residents. In this section we also examine the new Private Security Regulation Act. In the last section, we conclude by reevaluating the approach of criminological models and argue that analyses on policing partnerships should also include other actors, such as resident associations. We show how the dynamic and unequal relationships between these three collective actors resist dominant claims about African states as essentially “failing” and “weak,” and instead we suggest that the security arrangements in middle-class Nairobi allow for the state apparatus to be a necessary actor—albeit not the only one—in security provision.

“Give Me 500!”

In August 2015, the first author joined a patrol in an upper-class neighborhood of Nairobi (neighborhood A) with James and Tom, two private security guards from Maximum Security.¹ In the car, owned by the private security company, two police officers are hosted during night patrols. These police officers are each paid 250 Kenyan Shillings per shift, on top of their regular salary, and in this particular case, the residents’ association from neighborhood A sponsors such payment.

We drove to the local police station to pick up two officers for the joint patrol. At the station, a sleepy policeman opened the freshly painted gate in the colors of the Kenya Police flag, a stark contrast to the generally run-down aesthetic of the place. We drove past the offices right next to the gate and headed to the back, where the police canteen offered food and other entertainment to off-duty officers. James, the driver, pulled the handbrake, and Tom, who was sitting in the back, opened the rear door of the van, stepped outside, and leaned on the seat. He lit a Sportsman cigarette and looked toward a vegetable stand a few meters away. There, an out-of-uniform policeman grabbed an orange and pretended to throw it at us. Instead he, who I later found out is called Kimani, approached us and immediately came over to my window. He knew we were there to pick up two of his colleagues for the night patrol routine.

Kimani leaned on my door and started regurgitating all his frustrations and grudges against Maximum Security. I could smell the alcohol on his breath, and his cigarette waving in front of my face seemed very unstable between his fingers. Burned ash was building up, and I was worried that my legs would soon become his ashtray, but I didn't say anything. "Let me tell you one thing," he yelled very close to my face, "I will never ever come with this car for 250 [Kenya Shillings] when NW Security gives me 500." With a closed fist he continued: "Give me 500!"² He repeated these exact words 10 or more times, as a mantra.

Meanwhile, James, who was sitting in the driver's seat next to me, was trying to keep his cool. He told Kimani that I was only a researcher, a guest, and not a white manager of the company, as the officer might have assumed. Hoping to stop Kimani's rant, James also reminded him that before this joint arrangement started a few years back, the team of Maximum Security had worked quite well, also without the police. He was suggesting that he and his crew were not in dire need of police officers in their patrol car and that it would not change much in their daily operations, which he later further explained to me. He wanted to suggest that if this arrangement were to collapse, the police officers would be the ones not getting the sought-after extra income, while for him and his colleagues, things would be pretty much the same.

This threat, however, sounded empty as it came out of James's mouth, and Kimani kept his rant going. When James—trying to get him off our backs—reminded him that this extra money comes not from his company but from the residents' association, Kimani sprang back, waved his hand, and shouted, "Then go! Then go!"—putting up an inflexible and authoritative facial expression. Now a reluctantly confrontational James reminded Kimani that the same association had also built and painted the gate of the station and that this was merely one of the gifts they had donated to the police station. Yet Kimani didn't back down, and one of his colleagues who had been observing the scene from afar came over, took him by the arm, and pulled him away from the car while he was still shouting at us. When he got a bit farther away James exploded in fury: "This is Kenya Police!" and he started the car to drive off without the two officers.

On our way out, just before the gate, another police officer stopped the vehicle and jumped in, ordering James to drop him off at his post. He too started complaining, albeit in a more diplomatic tone compared to Kimani, adding some other grudges against the company alongside the same money issue. When he also left, James's frustrations exploded. According to him, the police officers always complain about every possible thing during the joint patrols: "too much light here," "too dark there," "only one door in the back of the van," "no national radio," "no VHF police radio," and "no mattress in the back of the van," to name but a few. Yet it became clear to me that James could not really express these frustrations to the police directly, and that night after night, he returned back to the same station to pick up two officers.

This vignette shows the coming together of different actors—two security officers working for a particular security company, two police officers at a certain police station, and the residents of this neighborhood and their association that supports the joint patrol scheme. This partnership mainly aims at supporting the police in their daily tasks of patrolling and policing in general by providing them with a vehicle. It is in these regards that private security companies and residents’ organizations alike often referred to themselves as the “eyes, ears, and wheels” of the police.

From such arrangements, the police service comes out as a *coagulating* agent of these security provision partnerships. The police are preeminent actors, but they do not single-handedly dominate security practices. Only through the relations between the police and the other security actors with their assets can such arrangements actually take place. Conversely, such practices would not be possible without the police’s contribution in terms of authority and firepower.

Policing and Authority in Africa

Policing and security in Africa have received significant scholarly attention throughout the past decades. Studies within anthropology in particular have provided insight into the everyday security practices across the continent. Although some of these studies have examined the everyday workings of state armed forces (e.g., Beek 2012; Göpfert 2012; Hornberger 2011; Owen 2016), most of the research on policing in Africa has empirically centered around non-state actors, which broadly refers to actors who are not (directly) aligned to or working within the larger state apparatus. These studies have focused on gangs (Jensen 2008a; van Stapele 2015), vigilante organizations (Buur 2006; Pratten 2008), political and traditional authorities (Buur and Kyed 2006), community policing initiatives (Kyed 2009), and recently the work of private security companies (Diphoorn 2016b).

Within this body of work on non-state policing in Africa, two themes seem to dominate the field, namely, violence and authority. More specifically, a main focus is how the use of violence by other actors influences and shapes the authority of the state police. In doing so, much of the anthropological work on policing in Africa has debunked and challenged state-centric assumptions.³ Largely drawing from Philip Abrams (1988) and Timothy Mitchell (2006), anthropological works—often referred to as the “anthropology of the state”—have suggested that the state does not solely comprise institutions and officials but is made up of particular ideas and representations of the state as well. State practices and ideas of “stateness” are not solely performed and created by state entities such as the state police. On the contrary, the enactment of “unstatey stateliness” (Lund 2006: 677) also constitutes how citizens perceive and experience the state, and it is performed (Blom Hansen 2006) through daily practices and “everyday policing” (Jensen 2008b) by state and non-state actors.

In concurrence with Olly Owen and Sarah Cooper-Knock (2014), we believe the non-state focus of policing in Africa has often neglected and downplayed the crucial role that state institutions play in everyday security practices. By drawing from our empirical material in Nairobi, we argue that the state apparatus (and the state police in particular) is not only a form of authority that non-state policing bodies draw from, but also the entity that coagulates security performances in middle- to upper-class neighborhoods of Nairobi. As the coagulating agent of security partnerships, such as the one highlighted in the vignette, the police allows the coming together of a variety of different actors to implement security provision arrangements that would not be viable without the presence of the police officers.

Within this line of thinking, concepts such as “hybridity” or “twilight” are used to describe how various actors exert and claim authority, as well as how different people recognize and

acknowledge different sources of authority (see, e.g., Jaffe 2013; Meagher 2011, 2012). In these contexts, the production of such authority highlights the in-between-ness and interconnections between different actors at various levels in jointly performing stately authority (see Lund 2006).

Francesco Colona and Rivke Jaffe (2016) analyze the cases of a community policing group that organizes patrols and hosts police personnel in their private vehicles in Nairobi, and gangs who provide security and dispense justice in Kingston, Jamaica. The authors show how the boundaries between different security actors are increasingly blurry and highlight a hybrid form of (security) governance. Diphoorn (2016b) presents the idea of “twilight policing,” which refers to performances of security that simultaneously undermine and support the state apparatus in Durban, South Africa. Diphoorn argues that armed response security officers are increasingly taking over roles traditionally assigned to the state police. At the same time, however, they are mimicking the state, enacting statist practices, and thereby drawing from the state as a means of ascertaining authority.

A common assumption underpinning the studies engaged above is the debunking of ideas of a “weak” or “failing” state (see also Abrahamsen and Williams 2011; Diphoorn 2016b; Hoffman 2011). Although the notion of a “failing state” has received ample criticism, the state police (and often the state apparatus as a whole) is still described with terms such as “absent,” “scarce,” and “weak.” One important consequence of labeling “the state” as weak or failed is the reification of the state in one single, internally homogenous unit (Menkhaus 2010). Therefore, a judgment of weakness or failure is often totalizing and does not allow for the emergence of contradictions and complexities. Although many of our informants in Kenya described the state police as unreliable, inefficient, corrupt, and understaffed, many also used words such as “repressive” and “controlling,” which we believe refer not to weakness and absence, but rather to an extant, strong, and influential role that the state often takes. In this article, we highlight these contradicting elements that make up the state in its ideas and apparatuses.

Among other consequences, such labeling standardizes state apparatuses to Westphalian norms. Modes of thinking about the state as the sole sovereign entity coming from European and North American experiences do not match the diverse realities of state models around the globe, especially in the so-called postcolonial world (Call 2008; Comaroff and Comaroff 2006; Hansen and Stepputat 2005). The contemporary Kenyan state is, therefore, certainly different from Western state apparatuses, yet these two types share important similarities as well. The transition from a “colonial” to an “independent” Kenyan state in the early 1960s was in fact modeled on ideal Westphalian standards,⁴ making the archetypical Western state, the colonial one, and the newly independent state genealogically related (Mbembe 2001). Thus, the current Kenyan state apparatus cannot exist outside the complex and time-specific relation with its colonial predecessor.

It is on these premises that an analytical argument based on work conducted on policing partnerships in Europe and North America (primarily from criminology) can be fruitful. Although these criminological tools help us understand the traces of the Westphalian state in Kenya, we need to avoid the danger of directly reproducing Eurocentric perspectives on policing in Africa (see, e.g., Baker 2010). Departing from the empirical specificities of the Kenyan state and the security partnerships that unfold in Nairobi and inspired by the anthropological insights explored above, we aim to amend and expand such criminological models to the Kenyan context.

Concepts such as “hybridity” and “twilight” provide us with an analytical understanding of the larger sociopolitical context within which Nairobi policing partnerships take place. The analysis of the actors, their mutual relations, and the objects involved will benefit from a relational approach to policing and security provision in order to understand how authority and order are constituted by a plurality of actors who collaborate, compete, and enroll each other (Kyed and Albrecht 2015). Peter Stenning’s (1989) classical criminological model of policing individuates

six stages of partnering between the private security industry and the police alone. In light of our empirical material, we expand this model in order to account for other relations and actors that play important roles, such as residents’ associations, which in turn highlights the hybridity, the twilight, and the in-between-ness of these arrangements in performing stately practices.

Based on the fifth stage of Stenning’s classification, Trevor Jones and Tim Newburn (1998) proposed the “junior partner” model. This model concerns an active partnership, both officially and unofficially, that contains a strict hierarchical structure. It has been identified in many situations when analyzing the relationship between the private security industry and the state police (see Button 2007; Rigakos 2002). This model assumes a partnership wherein the state police is the “senior” partner and the private policing bodies are the “junior” partners “whose role is to give the public police whatever assistance they can to help them do the job of ‘real policing’” (Stenning 1989: 180).⁵

This model aligns with the thoughts expressed by Adam Crawford (2006) and Ian Loader and Neil Walker (2004: 225), who repeatedly argue that the state “structures the security network both in its presence and in its absence, both in its explicit directions and in its implicit permissions.” Despite the pluralized landscape of policing, state-centered approaches, which propose a more dominant role of the state in security governance, continue to reign in understanding public-private partnering, particularly in the European and North American context. We believe this speaks to our empirical findings in Nairobi, where we observed how non-state security providers define themselves as a “junior” partner and enact a supportive role by acting as the “eyes, ears, and wheels” of the state police. Although this hierarchy is not always clear-cut and is often negotiated and challenged, as we will show later, there is a rather apparent mutual understanding of the different roles and expectations among the various actors. While we emphasize the prevalent demarcation of tasks between the different actors of Nairobi’s policing partnerships and we argue that the “junior partner” model allows us to capture this, we do not argue that entanglements and interconnections are absent, as in fact the terms “hybrid” and “twilight” suggest.

Accordingly, we want to expand the “junior partner” model in two specific ways. First, the “junior partner” model does not encapsulate multifaceted forms of partnering and tends to regard interactions as rather clear-cut and concise (Diphorn and Berg 2014). We want to include complexity by showing that there is room for negotiation in the implementation of policing partnerships in Nairobi. Second, the model is based on two actors—the private security industry and the state police—while we include diverse forms of community policing, such as active residents’ associations. We therefore widen the dual-actor approach to a formation that includes the police, the private security, and the residents. We hold that this multi-actor formation does not seek to be airtight (see also Diphorn and Berg 2014), and we acknowledge further possibilities in terms of which actors can enter such arrangements. Even though the category of residents is the one we analytically foreground because of our empirical material, others (some of which are mapped out in the next section; see also Ruteere and Pommerolle 2003) are also important though underexplored in this article. It is in the fluidity and potentialities of these arrangements that the blurry demarcation lines between the different actors, and between the realm of the state versus the non-state, come to light.

Nairobi Security Landscape: Police, Private Security, Residents, and Law

“Eyes, Ears, and Wheels”

Throughout our fieldwork, we noticed how non-state security providers, such as the private security industry and community policing initiatives, acted as the “eyes, ears, and wheels” of the

police. They took on—in their own narratives—a subordinate and supportive role toward the state police. In this section, we discuss how this role was expressed during our interviews with security personnel and community policing participants, as well as throughout the observations we made during meetings of organizations within the private security industry and joint patrols with the private security companies and the state police.

The term “eyes, ears, and wheels” is an emic one that emerged during the first interview with an active member of a community-based policing initiative in a middle-class neighborhood of Nairobi (neighborhood B).⁶ While the phrase resurfaced in several interviews later on, this community policing member repeated it frequently and stressed the “wheels” element by saying that “we take them [the police] there.” During an interview with the security chairman of a resident association of another upper-class neighborhood of Nairobi (neighborhood C), he explicitly stated, “Security in any nation doesn’t belong to private security companies, but to the police,” and he then discussed how the association was geared toward assisting the police in maintaining that role.

The idea of a supporting role surfaced also during our interviews with the owners and managers of private security companies. Although many were quick to criticize the state police, all of them highlighted how their work “supported” the state police. This was evident at both the organizational and operational level of the industry. While attending some of the meetings organized by two associations of the private security industry, the members clearly looked at the state police for permission and guidance. When particular issues and procedures were discussed, phrases such as “We need to check with the commander of police station X” were common. This was especially the case regarding the use of several objects, such as sirens, bulletproof vests, and uniforms.⁷ Thus, at an organizational level, we see that the private security industry posits itself in subordination to the state police, looking to them for permission and authority.

If judging only on the basis of our interviews, we would conclude that the original “junior partner” model is present in Kenya, both with the private security industry and members from community policing initiatives, who position themselves as such. However, during our joint patrols with these actors, we encountered a more complex reality that also demonstrated some room for negotiation for how this supportive role takes shape. This was evident in the vignette presented above. Although numerous elements can be analyzed from that episode, we will limit ourselves to an unpacking of the term “eyes, ears, and wheels.”

The usage of “eyes and ears” is a common phrase that is heard globally in the policing realm. It alludes to the role of the private security industry, community policing organizations, and citizenry at large in a widespread and diffuse surveillance apparatus or network providing intelligence to the police. Yet the addition of “wheels” in Kenya is interesting and requires further analysis. The first point is the necessity of mobility, which is reaffirmed by the phrase “we take them there” by the community policing organization member. In the vignette from neighborhood A, we clearly see how the security company and the residents’ association come together to provide the operational and physical “wheels” (a car). Patrolling is widely assumed to be one of the core tasks of state police, to show visibility and provide reassurance to the public. By providing the “wheels,” the non-state policing actors are assisting the state police in carrying out one of its essential tasks. In fact, this is even more so with the community policing group of neighborhood B, which conducts patrols in privately owned vehicles and thus also supplies the actual “wheels.”

A second reading of “wheels” has a more figurative interpretation: private security companies may provide the “wheels” and literally drive the vehicles, but this does not mean they fully control them. In the vignette above, James, a security officer, automatically inhabits a subordinate position to Kimani, the police officer. Furthermore, later on, he feels forced to assist the other

police officer as well, despite his reservations and frustrations in doing so. Even more so, James feels compelled to suppress these emotions in front of the officers, thereby respecting the hierarchical division of labor standing between the two. However, at the same time, James reminds Kimani that the residents’ association sponsors the partnership, both through payment for the officer and other gifts previously donated. Therefore, although we clearly observe an authoritative role of the police, we also see how other actors are not shy to remind the police who are enabling them to perform their core tasks. The relationship among these three actors is thus far from straightforward, and there is room for the other actors to emphasize or accentuate their respective roles as well. Nevertheless, it is the police who determine whether these patrols occur, yet under what exact conditions these decisions are made seems to be negotiable. For example, the differing payments by various companies points toward an ability to negotiate the financial price paid for officers, and leads to our next point.

The third issue concerns a financial dimension: we contend that the idea of “wheels” refers not only to an operational and physical assistance, but also to a financial contribution, an element that has been identified elsewhere (Diphorn and Grassiani 2016; Dupont 2004) as one of the main ways in which non-state policing bodies, particularly the private security industry, support state policing efforts. This is particularly crucial in countries such as Kenya where financial resources are often lacking: police stations in Nairobi are known to be extremely under-equipped, and vehicles and fuel are among the scarcest resources. In our cases, the financial contributions take different shapes and formats. For example, in neighborhood A, the residents’ association provides an extra daily income for the officers on duty and regularly provides gifts to the local police stations, such as the building and painting of the station gate of the police station that James reminded Kimani of in the vignette. The provision of “gifts” to police officers and police stations is a practice we found to be quite common in upper-class neighborhoods in Nairobi. In neighborhood B, volunteers personally host police officers in their own cars, often pay for the fuel, and regularly provide refreshments during the shifts.

What these instances point at, then, is the very peculiar role the police play in security provision partnerships throughout middle- to upper-class Nairobi. The police are a coagulating agent of all these arrangements. This is to say, they are the element that enables these practices to take place. Although this is, clearly, a preeminent role the police play, it is not one of straightforward dominance. Its authority is harnessed by others such as the private security industry and the residents, who, however, recognize that these partnerships would not run without the police presence. Conversely, the police would not be able to do such capillary policing without the intervention of private security companies and residents’ associations.

The Police, the Private Security Companies and the New Private Security Regulation Act

Similar to other British colonies, state policing in Kenya emerged under British colonial rule, and the corps was divided into two originally independent sectors: the administrative police (AP) and the regular police (RP).⁸ Since the establishment of the new Kenyan constitution of 2010, the state police have undergone numerous reforms, of which many are still being implemented. One of the main changes is that the two branches—the AP and the RP—have been brought under the overarching command of the Inspector General (IG) of the police and are together part of the Kenya Police Service. The police force is often in the midst of highly politicized controversies, such as the current vetting of numerous officers in relation to different nationwide cases and the issue of the 2014 recruitment of 10,000 new police officers that was deemed unlawful by the Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA) (Diphorn and Kagwe 2015). The state

police, as a whole, are generally considered ineffective (Musoi et al. 2013), lacking capability to deal with crime in the city, in regular collusion with criminals (Omenya and Lubaale 2012), and generally corrupt, ill trained, and underequipped. Such sentiments were also voiced during our fieldwork, where research participants provided countless depictions of an inefficient and untrustworthy police force that demanded bribes during face-to-face encounters.

This poor perception of the state police is one (but not the only) reason for the growth of the private security industry in Kenya since the 1960s. Experiencing a continuous trend since, the industry particularly grew after the high-profile Westgate shopping mall attack in September 2013 (Soy 2014). Estimates suggest that more than two thousand private security companies operate in Kenya, of which only nine hundred are registered, and with an annual industry turnover of 32.2 billion Kenya Shillings, or about \$43 million (Wairagu et al. 2004). The industry accounts for more than 300,000 employees, compared to 40,000 police officers (Mkutu and Sabala 2007). At the time of writing, most private security industry personnel repeatedly used the figures of 400,000 (and more) security personnel, 3,000 security companies, and 80,000 police personnel. All of these were presented and accepted as reliable amounts. Among the wide range of security services provided, such as cash-in-transit and electronic monitoring, guarding services constitute the majority, with 47 percent of the industry (Wairagu et al. 2004: 29). Until recently, the private security industry in Kenya lacked formal state regulation and was primarily organized along self-regulatory mechanisms, namely, two employee associations: the Kenya Security Industry Alliance (KSIA) and the Protective Security Industry Association (PSIA) (Diphhoorn 2016a). Generally speaking, the KSIA comprises the larger, internationally owned companies who consider themselves “elitist.” The PSIA, on the other hand, generally consists of Kenyan-owned companies that primarily target government contracts.

Yet this situation changed on 20 May 2016, when the Kenyan Parliament finally approved the Private Security Regulation Act of 2016, after more than 20 years since its first drafting. All sides of the industry have applauded the passing of the act, as it entails a formal recognition of the industry by the state, and a constitution of an Authority governing the industry and its relation with the state apparatus. Furthermore, it commences a formalized system to control and “clean out” the industry by eliminating illegally operating companies, often referred to as *juakalis* and briefcase companies.

Despite the general approval, many industry personnel also shared apprehensions about the act. A few examples that were voiced during interviews conducted in the summer of 2016 concerned the process of actually implementing the Act and the budget to do so, the proposed training standards of the security officers, the withdrawal and renewing of licenses, the delay in appointing the members of the board’s Authority, and the fear among the industry personnel that the Authority is regarded as a “state affair” that will “totally act on behalf of the state.” However, two issues in particular stand out in relation to the focus of this article, namely, the relationship and the potential partnerships between the industry and the state.

The first main concern addresses the issue of firearms: the Act categorically forbids private security providers from using firearms. Before the Act was passed, this was a highly debated issue in Kenya (see Diphhoorn 2016a), with some companies demanding armed security personnel and others insisting on the opposite. With the passing of the act, the debate seems to have ended, although many individuals still hope there will be room for amendments to alter this. Regardless of whether this will occur, the result is that private security companies remain dependent on the state police for armed protection of their clients, as the vignette from neighborhood A has shown.

The second and perhaps most complicated problem concerns section VI, article 45 of the Private Security Regulation Act, titled “Cooperation with National Security Organs,” which states:

- (1) Whenever called upon by a national security organ, the Inspector General of the National Police Service or the Cabinet Secretary, a private security service provider shall cooperate in the maintenance of law and order or in any other manner as may be provided for in the instrument of request.
- (2) The Cabinet Secretary in consultation with the Inspector General and the Authority shall make regulations generally to provide for any matter relating to the cooperation, scope, mechanism and command in the case of cooperation with the private security service provider.

Primarily because of its rather vague description, many industry personnel are exceptionally worried about what this will operationally entail. More specifically, there is concern that the state armed forces will abuse this and call on companies to regularly assist them: “I fear that they will draft us, our officers, for any situation, any state of emergency and conflict, to join the army or other armed forces. But this is impossible! We cannot always be there, at their disposal! And who will pay for this?”¹⁰ Therefore, although the general attitude of the Act formalizes the private security industry as a sector that is relevant for security matters, it does so by formally relegating it to a minor role versus the police.

The reforms the police force is undergoing and the Private Security Regulation Act underline a moment of change in which the Kenyan state is trying to reconfigure its security landscape. Although it is difficult to predict where this is headed, it shows how the police force is neither the sole dominant actor concerned with security nor obviously an irrelevant one. Conversely, the size of the private security industry, compared to the police, demands a serious recognition of the potentialities of this sector. It is within the context of these tensions that policing partnerships are taking place in Nairobi.

The issues of firearms and cooperation with national security organs present in the Private Security Regulation Act reinforce both ideas of the private security industry as the “eyes, ears, and wheels” of the police, and the police as the coagulating agent of security partnerships in Nairobi. In a double-binding movement, the Act forces the private security industry into a junior position vis-à-vis the national police yet leaves the police operationally dependent on the private security industry. While the stipulations in the Act keep the private security vehicles patrolling the streets of Nairobi dependent on the police officers’ firearms (and the symbolic authority that comes with them), it also normalizes the need for the police service to use vehicles and other assets of the private industry to effectively conduct policing work.

Residents’ Initiatives

Throughout the article, we have already mentioned different initiatives undertaken by residents of three particular neighborhoods and how they organize security provision partnerships. These forms of citizen-based protection were scarcely acknowledged until a few years ago yet are currently on the rise. Among the most famous in Kenya is the Nyumba Kumi¹¹ initiative launched by the national government in October 2013 (after the Westgate mall attack). Imported from a Tanzanian experiment, it tries to formalize initiatives of self-provision of security already taking place in Nairobi. It is unevenly enforced, especially in lower-income neighborhoods and poor urban settlements, and our informants suggested in several conversations that it was a state surveillance tool against poor urban—and often criminalized—communities. This state initiative thus also positions the state police as the responsible actor that intervenes, monitors, and controls the situation, and residents as aiding partners that provide assistance and intelligence. At the time of writing, the entire scheme was still being set up, making it too soon to conclude how it will be implemented and received.

In addition to this government-implemented scheme, we observed other forms of security provision where residents themselves initiate and champion a variety of security practices. We particularly focused on three different initiatives. Neighborhood A, an upper-class residential area where politicians, diplomats, and generally wealthy families live in compounded villas, is where the episode described in the vignette took place. The residents' association here is active and often negotiates with the municipality regarding urban planning of the area and with private contractors for the upkeep of the streets that they privately support. They consider "security" a fundamental docket of their association, and hence they decided to sponsor the presence of two police officers in the patrol car of a private security company on a regular basis during the night shift. In neighborhood B, residents promote a quite different initiative. As a much older (and better organized) community policing group, they operate an active 24/7 hotline and conduct patrols every evening with their own (private) vehicles and two police officers from the local police station. It was during an interview with a member of this initiative that we first heard the reference to "eyes, ears, and wheels." In neighborhood C, another middle- to upper-class residential area, the residents' association went a step further and became a semicorporate institution. The association bought a service provider company through which they can also manage security and other services in the area. For instance, they installed CCTV cameras, and acquired the permit to a shared radio frequency specifically for the private security companies operational in their neighborhood. One of these security companies is also directly employed by the residents' association to carry out patrols with police officers from the local police station. These initiatives in neighborhoods A, B, and C are merely three examples of the myriad of initiatives, categorized here under the label "community policing," that make up Nairobi's security arrangements that usually involve police, private security companies, residents, and/or commercial actors.¹²

All these arrangements revolve around the exchange of a particular object that the police possess, namely, the firearm. The institutional monopoly on the use of firearms¹³ of state security apparatuses is not only a symbolic (re)source of authority reinforced by the Private Security Regulation Act, but it becomes a resource that can be translated in cash,¹⁴ both for the constabularies on patrol and for their superiors who allegedly receive a share of such payments. The firearm then becomes the crucial object that facilitates the role of the police as the coagulating agent of security partnerships, and in the process restates the imaginary of a monopoly of violence—to use a Weberian reference—of the Kenyan state.

A particular formal arrangement that the second author closely analyzed is one between seven private security companies and the Diplomatic Police Unit (DPU), a particular police unit that serves the diplomatic community of Kenya. Through a formal memorandum of understanding (MoU), the companies engage in joint patrols with DPU officers in neighborhoods with a high level of diplomatic and UN personnel, and have monthly meetings to share crime intelligence. As the DPU officers have the primary mandate of serving diplomatic personnel, these patrols occur in the areas where the offices (such as embassies) and residences of the diplomatic personnel are located. Even though not formally part of the arrangement, representatives from community policing initiatives and residents' associations attend these monthly meetings and often support the arrangement financially through sporadic donations.

First, this arrangement was also a case where non-state actors supported the operations of the state police: they provided the "wheels" and financial payments to assist the state police in executing one of its core tasks. Second, the DPU officers were fully in charge, both during the meetings and the patrols: they determined which sites would be checked on, which route would be taken, and the entire sequence of the patrols. Although the company owns the vehicle and pays the driver, the DPU officers determine and manage the entire procedure. Last and most import-

ant, we see some space for negotiation concerning the conditions of the patrols; the companies decide among each other who is allotted which night, and the amount of the payment is also unfixed. Therefore, although the arrangement with the DPU is more formalized compared to other ones—such as the patrol from the vignette that relies more on “gentlemen’s agreements,” as one of our informants put it—the rules of the game are the same. In both cases, there is an exchange of payment for firepower. The companies provide the “wheels,” and the commanding police officer of the local police station in question decides which police officers (armed) will be assigned to the private security vehicle.

This negotiable space comes further to the fore if we contrast our empirical material with the legal dispositions of the Private Security Regulation Act. All the arrangements except for the Nyumba Kumi are initiated and spearheaded by the private security companies and/or the clients and their residents’ associations. Yet, this does not seem to be taken fully into account in the Act, which instead implicitly assumes the initiative to be of the national security organs (section VI, art. 1). Article 2 of section VI, however, leaves room for national authorities to regulate scope and mechanism of other kinds of cooperation, where the resident-led arrangements find a legal space to be taken into consideration. This emphasizes the dominance of national organs vis-à-vis the private sector, but also allows for negotiation in the decision-making process and strengthens the police service¹⁵ as the coagulating agent of policing partnerships in Nairobi.

A last note on the dominating role of the police in security narratives comes from a quick reference to other neighborhoods of Nairobi. The role we attribute to the police service as the coagulating agent of security provision partnerships is specific to those relatively wealthy neighborhoods we conducted our research in. However, a general dominance of the police is visible throughout Nairobi, albeit in markedly different ways. In some poor urban settlements, for instance (Price et al. 2016), security provision by the police is acknowledged and at times strategically sought after, but police are also considered a threat to personal security (van Stapele 2016) because of extortion practices, extrajudicial killings, and violence perpetrated in these neighborhoods.

Concluding Remarks

In this article, we have tried to understand the role of the state police in policing partnerships in Nairobi, Kenya, in relation to private security companies and residents’ associations. We have detailed the state police as a coagulating agent, an actor that congregates policing partnerships in particular areas of Nairobi, and we base this assertion on the ethnographic fieldwork we conducted in Kenya between 2014 and 2016.

By drawing from work on policing partnerships outside of Africa that generally stresses the presence of a centralizing and steering state apparatus, we argue that several non-state security providers take on a “junior partner” role during their encounters with the Kenya Police Service. However, this is not a straightforward relationship. As an underequipped armed force with limited resources that is often considered corrupt and ill trained, there is also room for negotiation with the police in setting the conditions of the various security arrangements. In fact, our empirical material shows how the relations are not smooth and unproblematic but rather characterized by friction and frustration.

In our research, we therefore identify signs of the “junior partner” model, yet we offer two propositions for further (conceptual) expansion. The first is for the model to allow for multiple actors who are able to influence the partnerships between the police and the private security

companies. In our case, the residents and their associations and assets are weaved through the various policing partnerships, both directly and indirectly. Residents of middle- and upper-class neighborhoods can tap into their economic resources to effectively supplement the police officers' salaries and provide infrastructure to the police stations. By doing so, residents essentially "buy" more attentive and extra security services for their neighborhoods, both from the private security companies and from the police. This process reinforces the junior-senior distinction between private security companies and police, yet it also further complicates the original dyadic relation that the "junior partner" model suggests by showing the police's need for operational support.

Second, we argue that the three collective actors we focused on in this article are all in a mutual and dynamic relationship, yet not in an equal one. In the context of Nairobi, the modern state, both as a system and as an idea (Abrams 2006), remains as a crucial actor and not simply as a source of authority among many. Its relevance is paramount for the security officers and the residents of the city, making the security state apparatus, and the police in particular, a key actor. Here we do not want to reproduce Eurocentric policing models; instead, we situate the Kenyan state—with its specific peculiarities—within a genealogical relationship to the archetypical Westphalian model. Thus, we highlight that policing partnerships in Kenya are not the result of a "failing" and "weak" state, which often still is the dominant explanation in the literature on African policing. Rather, we have identified the state as a coagulating agent that must be supported to perform its primary role of security provider through assistance from other non-state actors, a position that is being reinforced by the recent Private Security Regulation Act.

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NOTES

1. The names of neighborhoods, companies, and informants are all anonymized.
2. In Nairobi, the fist is often a hand gesture for the number five.
3. Although there has also been tremendous insight from other scholarly disciplines, this article primarily engages with anthropological studies.
4. Such efforts are still visible in the contemporary Kenyan state, as the recent Private Security Regulation Act of May 2016 seeks to reaffirm the state apparatus as the dominant actor of security narratives in Kenya. This Act also confirms the state security apparatuses as the sole institution allowed to carry firearms. See later in this article for a detailed discussion.
5. This idea is also aligned to David Osborne and Ted Gaebler’s (1992) usage of the metaphors “rowing” and “steering,” whereby the state “steers” other bodies to “row” in a particular direction.
6. Interview, 14 March 2015, conducted together by both authors.
7. Before the mid-2000s, companies were allowed to use sirens and bulletproof vests. This rapidly changed when the then Inspector General of the police, Major General Mohammed Hussein Ali, banned their use for private security companies and dictated that their uniforms had to adhere to a particular format and color.
8. The AP replaced in 1958 the “tribal police” (originally established in 1929), regarded as a political tool to support provincial administrations and chiefs. Currently it consists of three different units (and thus three core tasks): the Rapid Deployment Unit (RDU), the Rural Border Patrol Unit (RBPU), and the Security of Government Buildings (SGB). The RP, which has acted as the main state police agent, has always been engaged in more traditional policing duties, such as crime prevention and investigations. Currently, the RP comprises numerous units, such as the General Service Unit (GSU), the traffic police, the Diplomatic Police Unit (DPU), and many more, each with a different mandate.
9. Interview, board member of one of the employers’ associations, 26 July 2016.
10. Interview, 3 August 2016, owner of a private security company.
11. In Swahili, this literally means “10 houses” and is based on small operational units of few houses.
12. Again, we recognize here that in other neighborhoods of Nairobi, such as Mathare, Kibera, or Eastleigh, other non-state actors are also operative. However, we did not identify such actors in the neighborhoods where we conducted our fieldwork (for a more detailed discussion on these, see Price et al. 2016).
13. We are excluding from this account individual firearm holders, which, albeit low in numbers, are on a steep increase.
14. During our fieldwork, we also heard many accounts of police personnel “hiring their guns out” to criminals and thugs.
15. Article 2 of section VI of the Private Security Regulation Act provides that this decision will be made by the cabinet secretary, the inspector general of the Kenya Police Service, and the Authority. Such Authority is a body corporate established with the Private Security Regulation Act and is mandated to govern the private security industry and the its relations with the state apparatus.

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