2 The habitat of the subject: exploring new forms of the ethical imagination

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Abstract

This chapter discusses ethics as a form of problematization for the urban, which is a way of approaching the urban and constituting it as an object of study. It explores why this form of problematization has emerged and what it has to offer. It also sets out how we might rethink the character of the ethical through a focus on the ethical imagination as I have developed it elsewhere. It takes African cities as the context and space of enquiry and explores how we might imagine the ethical imagination operating for residents of those cities, and how they deploy it. The chapter provides a critique of "ethics talk" or the deployment of an ethical lens in both urban studies and anthropology. Through theoretical reflection on the work of the ethical imagination it seeks to lay out a more robust understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of an ethical approach.

The city as a form of life

African cities are often portrayed as places of impoverishment, deepening inequality and exclusion (Pieterse 2011), but they are also sources of aspiration and hope. The great, gleaming, glass towers of contemporary Nairobi, Accra, Addis Ababa and Kinshasa are home to visions that transcend the limitations of contemporary circumstances to usher in a future that can be more perfectly realized. Even in the earliest days of colonial rule, these cities were envisaged as places of hope, freedom and self-realization. Such projects of self-transformation persisted despite exclusion, immiserization and political inequities. "Going to town" has long held a particular lure.

The urban has frequently figured as the source of the good life in many different historical periods and for various reasons. The new materialities of urban living bring forth new potentialities for being and for personhood, quite literally, new ways of living, of being oneself. Urban worlds are made and unmade. Africa's modern cities have little resemblance to their

colonial forbears (cf. Edensor and Jayne 2012), even if many remain indelibly marked by the restrictions on movement and residence of their majority black populations. Contemporary cities bring new questions about difference and diversity, practical interrogations about how to get along with others. The consequence is a series of embedded ethical repertoires that are shaped not only by local context and urban form but also by translocal and international connections and dislocations of various sorts.

Africa's rapid urbanization, where more than 50% of the population will be urban by 2050 (UN Habitat 2010), is characterized by high degrees of informal employment, fragmented infrastructure and weak urban governance. Recent commentators on African urbanism have emphasized the importance of understanding African urban form and process in their own terms and not as a failed variant of western models of urbanization (Parnell et al. 2009; Parnell and Pieterse 2014; Pieterse 2011; Robinson 2006). This is part of a broader critique that sees dominant theoretical frameworks rooted in Euro-American exceptionalism and unable to analyze the rapidly burgeoning cities of the Global South (e.g., Robinson 2013; Roy 2009; Watson 2009).

Many commentators emphasize the fluidity of contemporary African cities, where residents inhabit urban spaces as a means to access local economic and social advantages, a gateway to further opportunities or even a mechanism for providing for a longer-term future envisaged elsewhere (e.g., Landau and Freemantle 2016). These subjective understandings of the city, with their particular forms of interconnected agency, spawn different modalities for managing difference, different ways of envisioning what the city is for and how to live with others and variable mechanisms for building relations, networks and institutions. However, one shared

feature is the persistent nature of a series of queries: "what is a city for", "of what does it consist" and "what forms of life are properly urban?"

Such queries are always locally and historically embedded, but they press upon the larger question of what it means to live with others, and whether and how it is possible to live well with them. These practical concerns are matters of ethics in the largest sense of bearing on relations with self and others. Whilst context – historical, built environment, politics, economics – are always paramount, relations with others are never constrained to the immediate, the material and the known. It is a feature of social life that our most intimate relations are animated by visions of the world outside them, just as our connections with the global and the intricacies of international capitalism take form within the specifics of daily history, work, intimacy and leisure. Making sense of the urban and those who inhabit it is, therefore, always a question of what academics – in a probably mistaken set of binary terminologies – have come to term the local and the global (Moore 2011).

The fact that local context is enlivened by distant dispositions and invocations reminds us that there is no easy overlap between the local and the cultural. If this is the case, then what are ethical debates about? They cannot be simply about shared moral frameworks. In this chapter, I propose that ethics are indeed about the self in interaction with others, but that we need to approach this terrain through what I term the ethical imagination (Moore 2011). The ethical is never just a matter of voluntarism or of the determinations of historical and cultural formations. Consequently, an exploration of the ethical must proceed via circuitous routes through discursive forms and consciously motivated reflection, as well as through sets of practices, fantasized interconnections and objects, and emerging institutions. What holds these topographies and scales together is the ethical imagination, the thread of the self living in interaction with others.

Delving into the ethical through the ethical imagination opens ethics up to the possibility of change and transformation. Such transformations are historically situated but more powerfully driven by interactions with and within the matrices of subject formation that such interactions drive. In this chapter, I explore how the ethical imagination develops as a response to certain challenges and, most specifically, to the challenge of the urban as a form of living.

The ethical imagination and problematization

The ethical imagination may be minimally defined as the forms and means through which individuals imagine their relations to themselves and to others. Consequently, it can be envisioned as both the mechanism and process through which individuals produce different kinds of knowledge of and specific ways of connecting to the world, themselves and others. New relations and forms of knowledge produce, in their turn, new forms of desire, hope and satisfaction, as well as new forms of failure, pain and trauma. The ethical imagination – understood as ways of experiencing, feeling, thinking and living the relation to self and of self to others – works to animate the fantasies, practices, ideologies and institutions that organize people's world. However, the ethical imagination should not be taken as a fixed mechanism, process or structure but rather as a form of engagement, a lived relation, that may be very explicitly worked out or labile, inchoate, partial and temporal. It inheres in both affect and cognition, in performative agency and in institutions. While it is engaged with normative practices and distributions of power and resources, it is also open to possibilities, new encounters and new ways of thinking and feeling, simultaneously reliving old histories and producing new fantasies. It is the fundament of subjective, social and political transformation (Moore 2011, Ch. 1).

Ethics always has a history, and one which is embedded in time and space. The ethical is not a matter of individual subjectivity or voluntaristic orientations but is part of deeply sedimented ways of acting and being that are widely shared. Key to ethics is the question: "how should I live," and within that, a further inquiry which we might gloss also in the form of a question: "who am I for myself and for others?" However, ethics is not about living up to a given exemplar or set of ideals, although it is very often presented as a matter of adherence to moral codes. It is, rather, a labor that seeks to address the query: "how should I live" with myself and with others? Any life, whatever it consists of, is necessarily a shared one, and the self in its relations to others is the "very stuff" of ethics (Foucault 1997, 300).

The question of how we deal with each other is part of a larger problematic about how we understand what it means and entails to share the world with others, both those close to us and those very far away, our intimates and those we will never know. Foucault argues that ethics involves a relation with self, not merely self-awareness, but a regard for self-formation and attention to the ways in which it is possible and desirable to constitute oneself as an "ethical subject" (Foucault 1984, 28–30). Foucault envisages a certain freedom for the subject through and within this process of self-formation. This form of freedom is best understood as a series of possibilities and potentialities. The acting subject, while engaged with the normative and distributions of power, is never fully bound to identities, forms of the self or external powers, cultural conventions and historical determinations. What remains open, connects to the contingency of the present (Foucault 1984, 46, 88) and the alterity of the future, and is often most fully present in the moments and structures of daily encounters and engagements (Moore 2011, 22–9).

Consequently, the ethical imagination is one of the primary sites of cultural invention precisely because it deals with the self in its relationships with others, both proximate and distant, and with the historical potentialities for social transformation that are thrown up in our many and varied encounters. In such contexts of encounter, the ethical imagination is brought into play by the advent of new information and ideas, new ways of being and acting, new forms of representation and their mediation. However, it does not always involve conscious thought and is not always based on a privileging of language and ostensible meaning. While we must always have regard for the kind of interpretive talk the ethical imagination makes possible – for example, new languages of description or new frameworks – we need to attend equally to the importance of affect, performance and the body, and its engagement with the nonhuman, the machinic and the organic. Attachment, identification and fantasy are vectors of the ethical imagination and often proceed through forms of unknowing and types of incomprehensibility.

It is a paradox that forms of unknowing can engage the ethical imagination every bit as much as explicit ideologies and well-worked out theories. Forms of identification inevitably vary, but hopes, desires and satisfactions work most often through the relays and connections they establish between pleasure and identification. Fantasy plays a key role in creating and maintaining forms of identification and belonging through establishing new possibilities for connection. These connections do not need to be based on language or on explicit meanings. In any event, cultural meaning is necessarily underdetermined. It is meaning's ambiguity and indeterminacy, its debt to affect and unknowing, which provide the core conditions not only for subjectification, fantasy and identification but for self-other relations, the making of connections, cultural sharing and, ultimately, social and political transformation. If cultural meanings were fixed, not open to interpretation, without ambiguity, then subjectification would not be possible.

Human beings would be too overdetermined to become human subjects. It is a feature of human subjectivity that we are born into and make ourselves under conditions that we may then choose to transform. In this sense, culture provides for historical possibilities; it is the radical potentiality within subjectivity. The ethical imagination links human subjectivity and agency to the forms of the possible, and it does so primarily through a refiguring of self-other relations – where others are not just other humans but also aspects of the object world, the nonhuman and the inhuman (Moore 2011, 19–21).

Self-formation necessarily takes place in historically given contexts, where specific ethical problems arise and provide the conditions for the "problematization" of self. Such problems or difficulties pose challenges for both politics and self-formation and self-understanding. Consequently, the experiences we have of ourselves at specific historical conjunctures always involve certain forms of problematization that "define objects, rules of action, modes of relation to oneself" (Foucault 1998, 318), and bear on the question of how we are constituted as subjects of our own knowledge, the kinds of selves we are for ourselves and for others. Foucault's overall interest is in how particular forms of knowledge or problematization involve necessary intersections between the development of a specific politics, a form of government of the self and the elaboration of an ethics in regard to oneself and others. This provides the basis of the tripartite elements of his analysis: Knowledge, power and ethics. Key to the notion of problematization is that it emphasizes where, when and how something begins to stand out from the general terrain of human life and experience, how and when it emerges as an object of thought, the whys and wherefores of questioning "its meaning, its condition and its goals," and the necessity of reflecting on it as a problem, a challenge or a conundrum (Foucault 1998, 117).

In order for something to be problematized, a constellation of factors must have come together to provoke queries, anxieties, explorations or difficulties in relation to it. Such factors will inevitably be the result of specific social, economic and political processes; but while these factors may initiate or provide the conditions for the initial problematization, they do not and cannot determine its form and character. This is because problematizations are never simply the direct consequence or expression of socioeconomic and political determinants or events but rather a series of historically specific responses that take a variety of forms and are frequently contradictory and conflicting. What makes this variety of responses possible is the general terrain or character of what is problematized and the way in which it actively nourishes various responses in their diversity and in spite of their contradictions.

> It is problematisation that responds to these difficulties, but by doing something quite other than expressing them or manifesting them: in connection with them, it develops the conditions in which possible responses can be given; it defines the elements that will constitute what the different solutions attempt to respond to.
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> (Foucault 1998, 118)

So, while problematizations are certainly instigated by social, economic and political changes, they cannot be reduced to or seen as a direct expression of them. One of the reasons for this is that people's own theories of change, self-formation and self-other relations, their ethical imaginations, play a major role in developing the very conditions in which their possible responses to the challenges and difficulties they perceive can develop and find form. A second reason is the issue of diversity. Problematization works through what Foucault terms the politics of truth, the manner in which the truth of any matter comes to be understood at certain historical moments and in certain places, by certain people. Any such truth will inevitably be contested,

and it is the diversity of response that signals the emergence of problematization. In simple terms, one could say that without diversity and contestation there is no problem. A third reason is that problematization militates against closure; it works to signal the limits of the ethical. It allows for multiple mechanisms for subjectification and objectification, creating a cross-spectrum of knowledgeable subjects and, as such, it has the capacity to expand, alter and transform the parameters of subjectification and world views or perspectives (Faubion 2001, 99). Problematization, however, is always more than a work of thought or reflection. It also involves affect, emotion, the placement of the body, fantasy and relations with objects, technologies and the material world (Moore 2011, 19–21). While it works to present the world anew or sometimes merely to offer new possibilities and potentialities, it is not in itself a necessarily ethical practice (Faubion 2001, 97). What problematization does is to open up a space for the ethical imagination, repurposing existing spaces with new ethical imperatives and desires and sometimes creating new spaces for the ethical.

In the broadest sense, ethics is about the relationship of a social self to its environment, including the others (humans, as well as materials, objects, the nonhuman and the inhuman) who inhabit that environment. In what follows, I suggest that the urban as a form of living has emerged as a problematization itself, as a way of being that is an object of thought, and around which a politics is coalescing and taking shape. This is most particularly the case in the context of massive inequalities, fragile livelihoods, immiserating growth, and anthropogenic and demographic change, accompanied by the accelerating speed of urbanization all around the world but most particularly in the Global South. The key questions here, as I suggested earlier, are "what form of life is proper to the urban" and "how can we live well with others?"

What might I mean by suggesting that the urban is a problematization? The first point would be to emphasize that there are several thematic complexes within the broad terrain of the urban which shape it as an ethical terrain: how should we share with others; how much inequality is tolerable; how should people be provided for; what level of consumption is compatible with moral life; how should we respond to climate change; what are the moral responsibilities proper to sustainability? From one perspective, we could just say that these are the challenges of contemporary living, of being alive at this time on this planet, and they are not particularly urban in character. However, to respond in this way misses the point, for the urban is already one kind of response to these challenges, one set of intersecting materialities within which humans try to formulate and enact their responses, one mode of living which performatively engages not just with conceptions of being and personhood proper to a performative response but also with sensations, affect, experiences, material forms, spaces and temporalities.

To speak of the urban as a problematization is already to refer to the diversity of understandings, lexicons, activities and experiences that constitute the phenomenon. It marks not so much a known terrain of action, thought and affect, as a thread or vector connecting scale, form and topos. In such contexts, it is not surprising that one form which the problematization of the urban has taken is an academic one based on the ethicization of the urban realm. This – along with many other engagements and maneuvers – allows the repurposing of ethical imperatives regarding knowledge and knowledge acquisition, perhaps even a new space for the ethical. It is also one way in which an analytics of the urban engages the ethical imagination, and how the latter produces the former as a space for the ethical.

This reflects, in many ways, a turn to the ethical that is not just about academic life but is also about a particular form that the ethical imagination is taking in the contemporary moment, with

discussions on everything from planetary politics and environmental degradation to consumption and trade, and how to build sustainable cities. These ideas about how to formulate ethical responses to global challenges are connecting agents across many different spheres from science policy to governments, trade activists, property developers, car manufacturers, producers, consumers and other social economic and political actors across huge distances. This ethical turn is often less about saving the planet and ethical consumption, and more about how to refigure consumption, ecology and the planet as spaces for the ethical. We all recognize that unless we refashion these spaces as objects of our ethical concern, we will very likely not make any progress in tackling the huge challenges ahead of us.

Imaging others: livelihoods and inequalities

Cities are, of course, one solution to the question of how we live with others. They are heterogeneous landscapes with many categories of others and many modalities for managing the forms of difference they contain and shape, and out of which they are fashioned. When we explore what shapes encounters with others, it is evident that the material circumstances of urban life, the political economy within which these materialities are set, and the fragility and uncertainty of navigating these complex terrains shape both livelihoods and the inequalities through which they are constituted.

African cities currently face low productivity, dismal job creation, high informality, huge infrastructure and service gaps, and increasing inequalities. They are also vulnerable to climate change, cause significant environmental damage and have weak institutional systems and forms of governance. What to do about this situation is compounded by many challenges, but one of them is the inadequate nature of our theories of development, structural transformation and urbanization. What is now abundantly clear is that Africa is not following the historic path of the

Global North, and growing urbanism is not fueled and propelled by growing industrialization and large-scale formal employment. While significant gross domestic profit growth has been recorded for several African countries in recent years, this has not meant better quality of life for the majority of residents. Starting in the 1980s, the International Monetary Fund strictures and World Bank structural adjustment loans disproportionately affected the poor and deepened inequalities. Privatization of health care and education and paying for transport, food, housing, water and energy have made survival extremely difficult for low-income city dwellers. The jobless growth of recent decades has only intensified the problems of how to make a living. The urban is a challenge to living for many people, and the politics of the relationship between livelihoods – ways of living – and social inequalities maps out the possibilities of encounters with others. This is often captured well by popular music in Africa. It is well recognized that hip-hop embraces issues of inequality, corruption, housing, unemployment, political critique and more (e.g., Koster 2013), and there is a considerable body of work on the relationships between music and identities (e.g., Ntarangwi 2009; Wanjala and Kebaya 2016; Weiss 2009). However, music also provides a soundscape of the city. It demonstrates how residents alter urban spaces and make the city work for them, providing a space within which to make sense of the urban and the others who inhabit it. This is more, however, than a form of narrativization, a way of reflecting the realities of social and economic inequalities. It is also a space for ethical judgment, and a sensory and affective form of engagement with the urban, an instance of engagement with the ethical imagination.

Sasa ni lunch time, tufunge makazi

Twende kwa chakula, tuje tena saa nane

Wengine wanakwenda kulala uwanjani

Kumbe shida ndugu, njaa inamwumiza

It's now lunch time, let's take a break

Take a meal and return at 2PM

Others go to sleep in the parks

Because of problems brother, hunger is ravaging him.

<div align="right">Gabby Omolo: Lunch Time (Ogone 2014, 184)</div>

The song depicts the public park as a place for those who cannot afford to eat lunch to go and sleep, and to try and assuage both the pains of hunger and the larger problems within which it is embedded (Ogone 2014, 184). Music is part of the experience and effective negotiation of urban life, and it effectively ties forms of subjectivity to lived engagement with the materialities of the urban form.

Watu wa Industrial Area, watoroka maharagwe

Waenda hotelini, kwa chapati na ng'ombe

Na wengine nao, wale mishahara juu

Siku hiyo wote, kwa hoteli za wazungu

The people of the Industrial Area abandon beans

They go to hotels for chapati and beef

And others who earn high salaries

The industrial laborers in Omolo's song eat beans, except at the end of the month when they get their salaries and go to eat beef. Those with larger salaries go to European establishments. The spaces of the city, and movement through them, are marked out by inequalities of work and consumption. In Kenya, the phrase "they have eaten" always refers to the benefits of proximity to power and most often to a particular understanding of the nature of the political. The idiom of food, thus, ties livelihoods to political economy and to politics.

Intersections between infrastructure, work, public welfare and urban poverty within African cities are leading to new forms and ethics of the self. New modes of self-care, self-governance and self-stylization are shaping the possibilities for subjective agency within the newly emerging forms of urban politics. Specific configurations of inequality, responsibility, mobility, care and competitiveness emerge and remerge, some of them reprising older versions and some inclining to the shifting nature of ongoing uncertainties and new dispositions. People need cash to get by, and a culture of entrepreneurialism, fend for yourself, everyone can be a business person, has long been a form of self-realization and self-stylization crucial to people's efforts to turn to informality and petty business to manage joblessness and poverty, combined with insecure living.

Ama twende ghetto tufungue kibanda

Tuwauzie kahawa, nakuonyesha itawabamba

Si dalasini, si karafuu

Tutawachanganyishia zote waskie nafuu

Kisha ikishawabamba, si unjaua nini itafuata

Kuwasanyia njumu na mambota

Washindwe ni mogoka imeshika ama ni kuota

Wakishika ujanja, car wash tunaanza

Kwa ile hali ya kuosha, rim inapotea

Side mirror inapotea, tenje inapotea

Makarao wakikuja, gari inabembea

Or we go to the ghetto and open a kiosk

To sell to them coffee, I tell you it will please them

Not cinnamon, not clove

We mix for them all so that they feel "relief"

Then after it has taken effect, you know what will follow

Collecting their shoes and watches

They will wonder if it is *khat*

that made them high or they are dreaming

When they become wise, we open a car wash

In the process of washing, the rim disappears

The song creates the familiar figure of the hustler, who is both creative and cunning, knowledgeable about how to operate in the urban realm and who knows how to handle the city by dreaming up different ways of scamming others (Ogone 2014, 188). The space of the ghetto is reported in the song as outside the space of governance, a place forgotten by the authorities and rarely visited by the police. This is sometimes portrayed in the academic literature as an actual example of the hustler outwitting the police through a series of moves, where power is wielded by those who can turn their hand to any job, recreate their identities at will and become as changeable as the city itself. This rather overstates the case. This is much more a form of self-stylization. It both emphasizes a form of neoliberal subjectivity in the guise of heroic resistance and provides an attempt to characterize the nature of subjective engagement with the urban, and to reflect on the way relations of proximity with others are both actual and fantasized. The hustler – allied to his original American roots – is an acknowledged form of self-creation and aspiration: A figure acting as a means to garner respect but also for commenting on the selves of others, and on the networks of connection and interaction that make the city work, the relation of self to others.

In this sense, music provides an embodied and sensate means of engaging the ethical imagination, scoping spaces for social critique and critical reflection (Ntarangwi 2009). Songs often work by reworking the rhythms of the city, as in the Zimbabwean artist Synik's description of how the city of Harare got its name in *Hamurarwe* (there is no sleep).

The very name of the city reflects its restless and unreasonable demands. While music can often be about resilience, aspiration and hope in trying conditions, it is not the only ethical space that engages with the relationship between informality, vulnerability and entrepreneurship. Personal aspirations and self-understandings for the poorest in African cities are frequently engaged with a series of more developmentally oriented discourses that once again tie subjective experience to others who are both proximate and very distant. In its broadest sense, development has always been about the inculcation of new regimes and practices of self-government. However, in the absence of formal employment opportunities in African cities, current development efforts are focused on how to draw the poor into economic growth and poverty reduction via business and microenterprise (e.g., Meagher 2016). This shift from employment to entrepreneurship makes much of conjuring individual entrepreneurial talent out of economic and social disadvantage (Dolan and Rajak 2016, 514).

The trajectory of much policy and scholarship in relation to the bottom of the pyramid – as this group of youths, women, migrants and urban poor have come to be known – focuses on breaking

down the barriers between formal and informal employment, and striving not toward redistribution but toward inclusive markets. Aid agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international organizations and multinational corporations have rolled out distribution systems not only for consumer goods but also for development goods, such as water filtration systems and financial services. There has undoubtedly been benefit here for some, but this new capacity to deliver profits under the cover of social purpose has seen many social enterprises and NGOs pulled into last mile distribution systems that, in the powerful words of Catherine Dolan and Dinah Rajak, recast geographies of poverty as unmet consumer needs (Dolan and Rajak 2016, 518; Thieme 2015). This repurposing of entrepreneurship is not only remaking capitalism but reworking subjectivities and agency for the people it engages, turning their personal assets and capabilities into income-generating possibilities, and creating new practices of self-governance and self-realization.

The remaking of the agents of development has a long history in Africa but has always been powerfully shaped by notions of poverty and vulnerability arising in policy and academic domains. Many African countries have rolled out social safety nets and forms of public welfare in recent decades designed to support the poorest and most vulnerable in society. The evidence suggests that these can make a significant difference to the quality of life, health and education (e.g., Fisher et al. 2017), but even when they are unconditional, they may still have a powerful impact on practices of self-formation and self-governance (cf. Beegle et al. 2018; Devereux et al. 2017). Part of this connects to the way that beneficiaries perceive possible requirements, such as punctual behavior, monitoring and evaluation, and continuous behavior, including immunization and primary school attendance for children in participating households. Self-formation and self-stylization can be the unintended consequences of participation in schemes where beneficiaries

are acutely aware of the practical necessities of conforming to conceptual and practical distinctions demarcating the vulnerable from the non-vulnerable, the extreme poor from the poor. This is often made most evident by the fact that members of the local community, such as healthcare workers, headmen and NGO employees, may be the ones conducting surveys, gathering evidence for inclusion and monitoring compliance (e.g., Rohregger et al. 2018). In Kibera, Nairobi's largest slum, for example, cash transfer programs support vulnerable children, and reimagining the self through the notion of vulnerability becomes a source of potential support and employment. The result is that local networks of support and/or resource allocation can be repurposed and shot through with ideas and demands that impact people's intimate lives and, yet, arise in very distant locations. Even locally implemented national welfare and social support schemes may engage the ethical imagination, reworking the interconnections between self and others in ways that inflect local relationships with distant requirements for specific types of agency and self-management.

Accessing resources is key to survival in the city, and this applies to the newly emerging middle class of African cities, as well as the very poor. Insecurity, the threat of not managing, of losing traction, is the shadow hanging over the young professionals, the data engineers, software developers, journalists, cultural managers and others who have emerged in the city in response to new types of knowledge and work, new technologies, and a huge globalized aid and development industry. Nairobi, for example, is the home to many international institutions and agencies, religious organizations, local NGOs and international donors, as well as philanthropists of all kinds. Poverty amelioration is not only an urgent necessity but also a source of huge funding and employment. For deliverers and beneficiaries alike, the causes, consequences and costs of poverty are linked to particular forces, agencies, materialities and subjectivities in the

world. It is also one of the most frequent and familiar ways in which ordinary people's lives are affected by global flows of knowledge, technology and finance. In such contexts, new practices of self-governance emerge.

The urban face of organizations such as UN Habitat – ironically enough – is part of this production of new forms of self-stylization: Individuals who govern themselves in the name of freedom, choice, making good and getting on. Such individuals are also engaged in intimate relationships with many of their fellow citizens who depend on them for forms of care and sustenance. Their employment in the industry of aid and development and its many offshoots may involve them in delivering benefits to those less fortunate than themselves, as I have already suggested, reimagining their co-residents in terms of vulnerability, poverty and need; or they may employ them directly as gardeners, nannies and home helps. A particular relationship to politics and livelihoods shapes both the actual and the imagined nature of inequalities. The character of self-other relations shifts as older ideas of kinship and responsibility give way to ideas that are global in their circulation about the challenges of poverty, climate change, food insecurity, public health and well-being.

Middle-class Kenyans are generous donors to charities that support those in need in Kenya and beyond. Being a donor is a powerful aestheticization of self. It is also a very good example of the interconnection between ethics and forms of governmentality, as well as a fine exemplar of the ethical as "the strategies that individuals in their freedom can use in dealing with each other," as Foucault would put it. The ethical imagination here produces a new form of urban politics based on forms of subjectivity that create new forms of self-governance and new relationships of care for self and others but are not necessarily shaped by any particular political outlook or project. Rather, they create spaces for self-realization that shape day-to-day interactions at the very local

level but are also animated by imagined forms of subjectivity and forms of social collectivities that are not only distant but also very abstract. These imagined relationships to others are connected to fantasized relationships to such things such as the global economy, new technologies, self-enterprise, skills development and a world where international institutions, like the UN, are both mysterious actors and local employers. This produces individuals who not only make a living out of helping others, but who are also invested in their own "development." Urban politics is located and newly purposed in these new forms of subjectification. Differentiated access to employment and other forms of support reworks the way belonging and identities are imagined in the city, setting up new answers to the questions "what is a city" and "what forms of life are properly urban"?

Livelihood strategies of various kinds connect individuals and communities divided by class and location and the relationship between production and consumption is a powerful space for the ethical. Fair trade and several other initiatives to monitor and limit the impact of well-off consumers on producers less well provided for have a long history in terms of Global South–North relations (e.g., Dolan 2005, 2007). However, ethical consumption is an emerging space for middle-class consumption in African cities, where it is associated both with a class-based aestheticization of self, and with various mechanisms for demarcating new spaces for ethics and care that signal local class distinctions, as well as participating in global discourses and international connections (e.g., Hughes et al. 2015; McEwan et al. 2015). Recent research with shoppers in informal craft markets and trading spaces in Cape Town found that shoppers – many of whom were white – understood craft production as a survival strategy, while some liked the idea of supporting what they termed local talent, initiative and creative capacity. "I like to support craft producers … I feel I'm contributing to livelihoods by buying these products – the

money goes straight to the producer" (Daya 2016, 131). Some shoppers reported a sense of shared responsibility, locale and solidarity in the context of disadvantage in South Africa. This extended to incorporate a larger sense of Africanness and shared African identity. The value of these encounters for purchasers came not just from the intrinsic nature of the objects but from a wider sense of the human connection of production and the sense of skill, achievement and aesthetics. Craft producers themselves recognized these forms of appreciation, and both sides were engaged in forms of mutual recognition and care based on attentiveness to others that did not necessarily involve conscious reasoning and motivation (Daya 2016, 132–3). This does not imply these forms of recognition and care were always or necessarily progressive, good or benevolent, nor that they stood outside politics. They were clearly shot through with relations of power and particularly with that specific form of violence that underpins all forms of philanthropy and ethical benevolence in the context of the operations of racial difference. What is important about the self-other relation here is that consumption provides the space for the ethical imagination to emerge as a form of care, and its potency is derived both from intimate face-to-face interactions and from imagined relationships, such as nationality or shared Africanness.

The future urban

As an object of thought and a site of practice and attachment, problematization can be seen at work in reflections, images, cultural forms, scientific theories and political engagements. It is a feature of problematizations that they often work across domains and involve various kinds of objects, rules of action, modes of relation to oneself, materialities and affects (Foucault 1998, 318). They are made up of conscious and unconscious forms of reasoning, encounter and

attachment, as I suggested earlier, and involve elements of the human and nonhuman worlds (cf: De Boeck and Plissart 2014).

One aspect of the problematization of the urban that is particularly pressing is its futuricity, its visions of the new, the transformative, the hopefully technologized, all the promises of modernity and more. Such visions are always shot through with their opposites – decay, death, destructiveness – and this is inevitable, because the urban has now become the space par excellence where we question our ability to survive the anthropogenic threat we pose to the planet, ourselves and others. The urban is more than a built environment or a set of infrastructures and livelihoods; it is also an experience to be lived, enjoyed and/or suffered. But more than the actuality of experiences, it is also an experience of what is yet to come, what is hoped for, aspired to and imagined as possible. The experience of the urban is here and now but also one of anticipated futures, possibilities and relationalities. It is a space where a lot of people congregate with different ideas, beliefs, interests and behaviors. It is a place full of others and their fantasies. It is inherently familiar and unstable, a place of escape and rekindled hope.

Kijana amekatia mama

Mama mzungu, sasa anaishi majuu…

Kila mtu kwa mtaa anasaka

Hata five years old

Anauza Karanga

Mimi sihitaji visa

Mimi ni vulture

Natumia tu mabawa

A young man seduces a woman

A white woman, he now lives abroad

Everyone in the estate is a seeker

Even a five-year-old

Sells peanuts

I do not need a visa

I am a vulture

I just use wings.

<div align="right">Colonel Mustafa: Mtaani dot com (Ogone 2014, 191)</div>

Filip De Boeck writes of how the inhabitants of Kinshasa disbelieve the future being developed for their city but are nevertheless drawn in. They do not trust the government, and they know that they will never have rights to this future world, but they dream: *C'est beau quand-même, ça fait rêver!* [It is so beautiful, it makes one dream] (De Boeck 2011, 320); just as others dream of a visa for Europe, of making good and turning out a success. The dialectical interplay of internalization and objectification through which subjectivity is constituted plays out in the heterogeneous space of the urban made up of a range of competing identities, modes of self-fashioning and complex desires for pleasure, fantasy and freedom. The ethical imagination is a space where the self is at risk, where the engagement with others and their fantasies and desires

offers – however fleetingly – a space where the self reflects on itself, imagines itself as other and engages with a world of possibilities.

In addition to access to jobs, housing, education, infrastructure and opportunities, the imagined cityscapes of Nairobi and other African cities raise issues about the social, ethical and material entities, experiences and affects these cities of the future are thought to harbor. What kinds of thought, action and behavior will be proper to them (Van den Broeck 2018, 211–2)? The uncertainties of these envisioned spaces are unsettling, even anxiety producing, but they are also exciting, animating and vital. They hold out a future for living, however imperfectly realized. Jan Van den Broeck has written about Konza Technology city, a proposed master-planned new town some 60 kilometers from Nairobi on the Nairobi–Mombasa highway. It currently exists as a series of fenced-off grasslands and billboards over which a series of court cases are playing out over land ownership. The urban is a promise, both anticipated and delayed. Local people imagine that they will be excluded from this new world when it arrives, but the lure of possibilities still works its magic and possibilities are familiar territory. Current housing in the area is made up of different types of dwellings in an oscillating state of completion, renovation and decay, as families strive to make their life circumstances more durable, stable and comfortable with the few resources at their disposal. When the new technology city arrives, it will not be made up of such flimsy structures. It will make a definitive claim in its materiality for the future of the area (Van den Broeck 2018, 215–7). For the moment, however, the future has not arrived.

The materiality of the built environment and even future versions of that environment intersect with affective experiences both real, hoped for and fantasized. Fantasy, in this sense, has both a materiality and a history. It is the product of social, economic and political circumstances but not determined by them. It is a functioning aspect of problematization that allows for anticipations to

drive forward engagements across several modalities and spatial and temporal scales. Narrativization is a key element but not the only one. From the process of house building for local residents to the imagined towers of a technological future and everything in between, the built environment acts as an instantiation of the present and the anticipated forms of the future. The urban is one way to cultivate the future, to elicit the forward nature of what could be (Van den Broeck 2018, 220). These forms of the future conditional connect – without specifying a particular trajectory or a set of distinct goals that make up a world view (Van den Broeck 2018, 220) – to the practices of interrogation, engagement and elicitation of the ethical imagination: who am I for myself and others; what do I want; what can I hope for; what must I do? Simone's argument that urbanism is "not a destination but always a work in progress" partakes of the same future conditional (2013, 245).

The urban is made up of not only specific cities, places and spaces, with their particular demographies and histories, but also disparate circulations, fragmentations of ideas, images, affects, soundscapes, theories, spheres of action and longings. What the anthropologist Aihwa Ong has called in the context of Asia "the worlding of cities":

> This art of being global ignores conventional borders of class, race, city and country. There are promiscuous borrowings, shameless juxtapositions and strategic enrolments of disparate ideas, actors and practices from many sources circulating in the developing world and beyond. We identify urban modelling, inter-referencing practices and new solidarities as the flamboyant features of worlding cities.
>
> (Ong 2011, 23)

Whatever the criticisms of this particular argument about Asian urbanism may be, the phrase "the worlding of cities" is a felicitous one for exploring the problematization of the urban and the

specific forms it takes in certain places and spaces. The urban as problematization is not a theorization of the urban but a critical reflection on how engagements with imagining, enacting, reworking, decoding the urban through the ethical imagination are shaping the urban itself, through the actions of city dwellers and those of diverse others. New forms of the urban and of urban coexistence are coming into existence alongside the urban as a new site of problematization. This is shaping new forms of urban politics for a whole variety of actors, entities and institutions, and most certainly for scholars, policy makers and ordinary citizens of every kind. It is also widening the sources of inspiration for theorizing the urban and questioning the privileging of certain forms of urbanity, modernity and ways of living (Robinson 2013, 660). These new forms of the ethical imagination stretch across power hierarchies and wealth distributions, linking the dynamic, provisional, precarious worlds of ordinary citizens with transnational capital, donors, traders, religious organizations, governments and academic theorists.

The academic literature has already played a very significant and distinctive part in this process by creating, exploring and initiating new relationships between urban life and ethics. The move to ethicize the domain of the urban, as part of the larger turn to ethics in the social sciences and humanities, has been truly formative. This has been driven in part by social, economic and political changes that have highlighted the impact of immiserating growth, inequality and precarity on the lives of ordinary people in cities across the world. It has also been driven by the logical developments of theorizing in and around political economy, feminist theory and postcolonial scholarship. However, the problematization of the urban does more than merely express or represent these conditions, determinants and events. It provides, through the ethical

imagination, the conditions under and through which diverse responses to these externalities can be posited, developed and interrogated.

The problematization of the urban connects forcefully to the new forms of subjectivity and care for the other that are emerging in the context of major planetary challenges, including climate change, environmental degradation and new forms of vulnerability for humans and nonhumans. These new forms of subjectivity and self-other relations are beginning to reshape the urban as various actors seek to improve climate change adaptability, resilience, energy and water management, and the urban agriculture of cities, alongside smart and eco-transport systems, retrofitted housing and much more. It is sometimes mistakenly imagined that such concerns and actions are features predominantly of the cities of the Global North, but this is not the case. Discussions on food quality, human rights, water and land access, energy rights and pollution are reworking the relationship between urban life and ethics, creating new forms of the possible and of politics. The super diversity of cities in Africa raises pressing issues around migration, ethnicity and the alternative lifestyles of diverse others who are exploring and developing ideas about religious affiliation, ecology and urban food security. These explorations may engage with specific ideologies and life projects, but, on a more general level, they are driven by the new demands of living together at scale and the necessity of finding ways to live well together.

Ethics as a diverse form of knowledge production – including academic discourse – takes shape through the ethical imagination creating both new subjectivities and new spaces for the ethical. The ethical imagination works to govern the forms of self-other relations through which subjects come to govern themselves. This is as true of academics as it is of all other city dwellers. It does not mean that there is a single ethics specific to urban living or that the purpose of ethicization is to arrive at consensus or even accommodation. The ethical imagination can also be used

effectively to exclude others, narrowing the spaces of self-other relations and renationalizing sentiment. The ethical imagination is not, in and of itself, necessarily a morally good project. The work of the ethical imagination, in its engagement with the urban, is to create spaces within which the limits of the ethical can continue to be contested and developed. The problems of human societies are increasingly made intelligible as ethical problems, as they should be, as individuals and communities around the world struggle to make sense of how it is possible to live together on a single planet and how it might be possible to reimagine the relationships between selves and others, to open them up to new possibilities and to the alterity of the future.

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