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The Impact of Drug Trafficking on Informal Security Actors in Kenya

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Abstract: The Kenyan state is currently under pressure from two sides: First, numerous non-state armed groups have taken over the provision of security in areas where the state is practically absent. Second, drug-trafficking organizations are gaining ground as the country is increasingly being used as a major transit hub for narcotics. This article investigates the relationship between drug trafficking and informal security provision in Kenya and draws analogies from comparable experiences in Latin America and West Africa. Field research in Kenya has demonstrated that profit-oriented, informal security actors in Mombasa work for drug lords, while their counterparts in Nairobi are more likely to be hired by politicians. Moreover, faith-based vigilante groups in both cities appear to be less susceptible to external manipulation by drug traffickers. The article concludes by considering the potential consequences of an expansion of the drug trade in Kenya.

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In recent years, a number of Kenya's top politicians and high-ranking public officials have been prosecuted or sanctioned by external actors based on two distinct, yet interconnected charges: The first is the widely discussed trial before the International Criminal Court against President Uhuru Kenyatta, his deputy, William Ruto, and other current or former government officials who are accused of crimes against humanity relating to the funding and arming of non-state armed groups such as Mungiki and their involvement in the 2007/2008 post-election violence (Waki Report 2008). The second sticking point, to which less international attention has been paid, is the designation of Kenyan MPs – including former assistant minister John Harun Mwau – as "drug kingpins" by the US government (Githongo and Wainaina 2011). Taken together, the two charges point to a dangerous combination of factors that have had serious consequences in comparably fragile settings in West Africa and Latin America: first, the emergence of Kenya as a transit hub and destination country for narcotic drugs and, second, the existence of a plethora of non-state armed groups acting as informal security actors in areas where state security provision is absent or insufficient.

Research from Central America, Mexico, Colombia and Brazil has shown how non-state armed groups which had initially been formed for protection purposes have been corrupted by drug lords and have come to present serious challenges to human security. Moreover, recent developments in West Africa suggest that increased drug trafficking throughout the region has led to the criminalization or capture of state institutions by sophisticated drug-trafficking organizations (DTOs) with financial capacities that outshine those of entire countries. The most prominent example in this regard is Guinea-Bissau, which has been called "Africa's first narco-state" (O'Regan 2012).

In the context of Kenya, numerous studies have revealed how politicians use non-state armed groups to commit violence against political rivals, particularly in the context of the 2007/2008 post-election violence (Klopp and Kamungi 2007/2008; Human Rights Watch 2008; de Smedt 2009; Okombo and Sana 2010; Jacobs 2011; Ndung'u and Wepundi 2012). Moreover, informal security providers such as Sungusungu vigilantes (Heald 2007) or the Mungiki militia (Kagwanja 2003; Servant 2007; Ruteere 2008) have been studied in depth. Concerning the impact of drug trafficking on Kenya, research has been limited to the health implications of drug consumption on the local level (Deveau et al. 2006) and the consequences of narco-corruption for formal state agencies (Gastrow 2011b). No literature is available on the impact of the international drug trade on informal security providers in Kenya. This is all the more surprising given

the sheer prevalence of informal security actors and considering that the country is becoming ever more affected by DTOs.

Drawing upon both secondary sources and my own field research in Kenya, this article attempts to close this gap in the literature on Kenya and to put the findings into the broader context of comparable experiences in other regions. Concepts of state fragility and alternatively governed spaces are used as common points of reference in order to bridge both the analytical gap between drug trafficking and informal security provision and the regional gap between Latin America and Africa.[1]

Informalization of Security

One important dimension of state fragility is the decay of administrative, political, judicial and security institutions (Ezrow and Frantz 2013), which results in the loss of what Weber (1946: 78) famously termed the "monopoly on the legitimate means of violence". The weakness of the Kenyan state and its incapacity to provide security have been traced back to both external and internal factors. Externally, structural adjustment programmes – imposed on Kenya by international financial institutions in the late 1980s – forced the government to implement the neoliberal agenda of economic liberalization and privatization (Katumanga 2005; Wamucii and Idwasi 2011). This, it is argued, led to rapidly increasing unemployment in urban areas, the expansion of informal settlements and the loss of the state's ability to provide security (Abrahamsen and Williams 2005). Internally, former long-term president Daniel arap Moi deliberately weakened state institutions in order to both thwart attempts to erode his power and cover up the looting of state resources by his regime (Southall 1999; Mueller 2008). In this respect, Katumanga (2005) refers to a "twin strategy" of privatizing public violence and appropriating private violence. The privatization of public violence during the 1990s involved deploying off-duty security forces and vigilante groups against regime enemies (Roessler 2005). Simultaneously, economic conditions led to the emergence of militias which were soon co-opted for political motives (Servant 2007; Branch and Cheeseman 2008). In the long term, however, transferring the capacity to commit organized violence to informal actors backfired, and the political leadership lost control over the use of violence (Branch and Cheeseman 2008).

Closely correlated to institutional decay and the informalization of security is another dimension of state fragility: the erosion of state legitimacy caused by violations of the rule of law by formal security providers (Stepputat et al. 2007). In Kenya, a mix of corruption, lack of resources and fear deters state security agencies from adequately exercising their duty within slums, which tarnishes their reputation among the urban poor. To begin with, corruption and impunity are rampant among all ranks of the Kenyan police force. For instance, a main distributer of cannabis in Nairobi discloses that police are well aware of the depot where his product is stored, but do not intervene as they are on the payroll of traffickers.[2] Moreover, although the US has officially designated four Kenyan MPs and an influential businessman as "drug kingpins",[3] Kenyan police did not properly investigate their involvement in organized crime (Githongo and Wainaina 2011; Mwivano 2011). Furthermore, a civil society representative explained to me that "police normally don't go into slums, they normally just patrol on the roads. Because at some point, they could be overwhelmed by the people. It has happened that the police have been beaten up and [had] guns taken away from them."[4] This leads to lethargy and demoralization among policemen, who have been accused of extrajudicial killings of urban youth, reportedly with the authorization of the government (Kenya National Commission on Human Rights 2007). This is why police are perceived as a source of insecurity and a tool of political repression among the urban poor, whereby vigilantism is seen by many as an acceptable form of community policing (Anderson 2002; Ruteere and Pommerolle 2003; Scheye and Andersen 2007). As a result, more and more inhabitants of poor urban areas depend on non-state armed groups such as vigilantes, militias and gangs for a certain degree of security (Mutahi 2011; Ogada and Mue 2010).[5]

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2   Drug wholesaler; personal interview, Nairobi, July 2012.
3   Under the so-called "Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act".
4   Representative of a civil society organization; personal interview, Mombasa, July 2012.
5   In this article, the term "informal security provider" is used in reference to any such non-state armed group carrying out security-related tasks, including those initiated or supported by the state. In addition to vigilantes, militias and gangs, this includes state-led paramilitaries; formal non-state armed groups such as private security companies are excluded.

The Impact of Drug Trafficking

Institutional decay and violations of the rule of law through formal security providers in fragile states are cause and effect not only of the emergence of informal security actors, but also of the advent of drug-trafficking organizations. Weak states lack the financial and institutional capacity to control their borders or to tackle transnational criminal activities within their boundaries, especially in areas with limited state presence (Buxton 2006; Mandel 2011). What is more, DTOs turn to states characterized by a weak rule of law in expectation of opportunities to penetrate state institutions and the political system (Jordan 1999; Thoumi 2007; Carrier and Klantschnig 2012).

Nonetheless, it has been argued that collapsed or failed states with a high degree of political instability present a more challenging environment for drug traffickers than weak states with stable leaders who are susceptible to corruption (Csete and Sánchez 2013). Transnational drug trafficking necessitates a certain degree of sophistication in terms of infrastructure and financial services, which is more likely to be found in "weak but functioning states" such as Kenya than in more fragile contexts (Patrick 2011). In this respect, Koonings and Kruijt (2004) suggest that the terms "hidden" or "partial" state failure are more appropriate in the context of Latin America, where the provision of public security has collapsed only in some areas.[6] Moreover, concepts of failed and fragile states have been criticized as misleading and culturally biased towards the ideal type of liberal Western democracies. According to this emerging school of thought, it would be more appropriate to speak of "areas of limited statehood", which "lack the capacity to implement and enforce central decisions and a monopoly on the use of force" (Risse 2011: 2). It has been made clear, however, that far from being "ungoverned spaces", such "black spots" or "brown areas" are under the control of "alternative authority and governance structures" (O'Donnell 1993; Stanislawski 2008; Clunan 2010). This became apparent during my fieldwork in the slums of Nairobi and Mombasa,[7] where I found that numerous informal

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6   Arias (2010: 119) confirms that Latin America is characterized by "medium-strength" states rather than by "the classic 'weak' state found in Africa".

7   I conducted 29 semi-structured interviews with law enforcement officers, youth leaders, community leaders, religious leaders, social workers, civil society organizations, vigilantes, gang leaders, recovering drug addicts and drug traffickers in Nairobi, Mombasa and Malindi between June and August 2012. In order to increase the validity of the research, I triangulated the data by carrying out overt observation within informal settlements in Nairobi and Mombasa during the same period of time. However, it has to be kept in mind that my presence

security providers are in competition to fill the gap left by an absent state. At the same time, it is precisely in such "no-go zones for government and law-enforcement agencies" (Cockayne and Williams 2009: 10) where drug-trafficking organizations have taken over public security functions in some countries in Latin America (Inkster and Comolli 2012). In order to better understand the potential impact of drug trafficking on informal security actors in Kenya, it appears invaluable to provide an overview of the Latin American experience with this concern.

Experience from Latin America

The most detailed micro-level analysis in this respect is Dennis Rodgers' account of how the relationship of a Nicaraguan street gang vis-à-vis their community transformed from protective to predatory as a result of the arrival of cocaine at the turn of the millennium. When first conducting research in a barrio of Nicaragua's capital, Managua, in the 1990s, Rodgers (2007b) observed that local gangs were largely viewed positively in their community because they protected inhabitants from other gangs. However, due to tightened anti-drugs efforts in the Caribbean and the improvement of infrastructure in Nicaragua, more and more Colombian cocaine was shipped through the country on its way to North America (Rodgers 2007a). As gangs in Managua consequently became enmeshed in the local drug economy, the security situation in the barrio deteriorated significantly (Rodgers 2007b). Instead of protecting their own community, gang members started to provide their "security services" to drug lords and "imposed a predatory regime of terror that served [their] new drugs-related economic interests" (Rodgers 2006: 290).

A comparable development on an even larger scale has been reported from other Central American countries with a considerable presence of *maras* – politicized, internationalized and sophisticated "third-generation" gangs (Sullivan 2006).[8] The *maras* were formed in Los Angeles by immigrants who had fled from the civil wars in Central America in order to protect their communities against other well-established gangs (Dudley 2010; Valdez 2011). Mass deportations of gang members from the US to their Central American countries of origin (Zilberg 2011) and

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might have influenced the object of observation, particularly since the period of fieldwork was too short for me to become effectively immersed.

8   Rodgers and Muggah (2009: 305) distinguish between the "more localized, homegrown" *pandillas*, which are still the most common type of gangs in Nicaragua, and the *maras*, which have "transnational roots" and are the predominant type of gang in the Northern Triangle (El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras).

massive incarceration of alleged gang members as part of harsh *mano dura* ("firm hand") anti-gang policies in the region contributed to the expansion and institutionalization of the *maras* (Hume 2007; Jütersonke et al. 2009). Since the drug trade from Colombia to North America is increasingly passing through Central America, they have undergone "a change in motivation, shifting towards a more sustained use of instrumental violence for economic purposes" (Cruz 2010: 393). While their activities were initially based on "solidarity, respect and mutual support" (Cruz 2010: 393), *maras* have recently been found to work as local "subcontractors" for Los Zetas and other Mexican DTOs (Inkster and Comolli 2012: 97).

Among Latin American countries, Mexico is currently the most severely affected by drug-related violence and insecurity. Since the "pax mafiosa" between organized crime and the Mexican state ended at the beginning of the new millennium, the country has experienced an outburst of inter-cartel and cartel–state violence, particularly after former president Felipe Calderón launched a military offensive against DTOs in 2006 (International Crisis Group 2013). One of the DTOs, called La Familia Michoacana, had been formed in the 1980s as a local group of vigilantes "with the stated purpose of bringing order to Michoacán, emphasizing help and protection for the poor" (Logan and Sullivan 2009). Ironically, the group transformed from a self-declared crusader against drug abuse into the leading manufacturer of crystal meth in Mexico, the Mexican attorney general subsequently calling it "the most dangerous cartel in the country" (Finnegan 2010). In 2011, the cartel known as the Caballeros Templarios emerged as the successor to the now disbanded La Familia, using the same rhetoric of social justice and community protection while specializing in methamphetamine production and heroin trafficking (Guerrero-Gutiérrez 2011; Beittel 2013). In response to atrocities committed by the Caballeros, farmers and former soldiers formed self-defence groups to take back cities and regions under the control of DTOs (Grayson 2014; Archibold and Villegas 2014). After shoot-outs between soldiers and vigilantes led to civilian deaths, the government decided to legalize the self-defence groups and to incorporate them into existing Rural Defence Force units (Cawley 2014). However, the inclusion of former gang and cartel members (Tuckman 2014) and accusations that the vigilantes were linked to the Jalisco Nueva Generación cartel raised concerns that the "self-declared protectors may end up becoming predators themselves" (Archibold and Villegas 2014). Consequently, a number of commentators compared the state-sanc-

tioned self-defence groups in Michoacán to right-wing paramilitary forces in Colombia (Cawley 2014; Kinosian 2014).

The Colombian paramilitaries have been traced back to "small private vigilante groups" formed by rural landholders in order to protect their assets from left-wing guerrillas fighting for land redistribution (Rozema 2007). Indeed, the Colombian state authorized the creation of heavily armed civilian groups in the 1960s (Mazzei 2009). While some scholars have argued that the weakness of public institutions urged the Colombian elite to resort to non-state armed groups to counter the insurgency (Pizarro Leongómez 2004), others have pointed out that it proved to be a highly convenient strategy for the government to delegate the "dirty work" to paramilitaries (Giraldo 1996; Hristov 2009). In any case, the government soon lost control over the militias as they became enmeshed in the growing drug trade (Inkster and Comolli 2012). Paramilitary groups such as the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) controlled more than half of Colombia's trade in narcotic drugs and were responsible for the death of more civilians than the guerrilla army they had been created to fight (Mazzei 2009). On the local level, the paramilitaries took control over youth gangs and vigilante groups which had been formed for self-protection purposes in Medellín's poor neighbourhoods (Salazar 1990; Rozema 2007). All in all, through their involvement in the drug trade, Colombian paramilitary forces transformed from defensive vigilantes into offensive and ungovernable armed actors with political ambitions including the goal of "destabiliz[ing] the state itself" (Pécaut 1999: 153).

A comparable case can be found in Brazil, where a prison-based self-protection group transformed into one of the main DTOs in Rio de Janeiro. During Brazil's military dictatorship, political prisoners and common criminals who were put in the same maximum security prisons banded together to form a group called "o coletivo", which established itself as a vigilante group within Rio's prison system (Dowdney 2003; Penglase 2008). Later, o coletivo came to be known as the Comando Vermelho and started to become a major player in the burgeoning drug trade (Gay 2009). This happened in the first half of the 1980s, when Brazil was undergoing a period of democratization and as tougher anti-drug measures in Colombia turned Rio de Janeiro into South America's foremost transit point for Andean cocaine on the way to Europe and North America (Perlman 2009). Eventually, the Comando Vermelho split into rival factions, whose tough competition over the control of the drug market led to what Gay (2005: 55) calls "a period of intense and bloody civil war for control of the favelas". At the same time, drug gangs

imposed themselves as informal security providers in the favelas (Leeds 1996; Goldstein 2003; Alves and Evanson 2011). Over the last decade, however, a growing number of Rio's favelas have been taken over by militias made up of off-duty and retired prison guards, police officers and firemen (Perlman 2009). The heavily armed militias typically invade favelas, force out drug gangs and "demand" protection fees from the residents (Misse 2007). However, their rule turned out to be so harsh and all-dominant that it has been described as a "reign of terror" even worse than that formerly imposed by the expelled drug traffickers (Cano 2008; Ribeiro and Oliveira 2010). What is more, a number of militias are cooperating with drug gangs and have established themselves as another violent actor fighting for both territorial control and a market share of the lucrative drug trade (Perlman 2009; Gay 2009).

Drug Trafficking in Africa

Because of decreasing consumption rates in the US and stepped up interdiction efforts in Mexico and the Caribbean, South American DTOs have recently refocused their attention on Europe (Cockayne and Williams 2009). The European drug market is highly profitable thanks to rising consumption rates and the higher value of the euro compared to the US dollar (Cockayne and Williams 2009; UNODC 2013b). At the same time, European law enforcement activities along northern transatlantic cocaine routes are pushing South American DTOs to seek southern routes to Europe via West Africa as an alternative (Wyler and Cook 2009). There, well-established Nigerian and Ghanaian drug networks with a strong presence in other West African countries and longstanding links to other parts of the world serve as "local partners" for Latin American traffickers (Ellis 2009: 192). West Africa is particularly vulnerable to penetration by drug traffickers due to poverty, widespread corruption, weak state-security agencies and poor border-control capacities (Cornell 2007). This has raised concerns that the region might follow Latin America's experience of skyrocketing drug-related violence committed by powerful non-state armed groups (O'Regan 2010; Alemika 2013). Yet, in contrast to the rich literature on informal security providers in Latin America outlined above, most research on drug trafficking in West Africa has focused on its impact on fragile and corruptible formal security actors.[9] Building on the work of Bayart et al. (1999),

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9   There are exceptions – for instance, concerns raised about "the possibility that trafficking through the region could provide income to non-state armed groups,

endemic public corruption and the penetration of state institutions by drug traffickers have been described as evidence of a "criminalization of the state" (Ellis 2009; Bybee 2012). Most attention in this respect has been given to Guinea-Bissau, whose countless islands off of its coastline, institutional decay and rampant corruption "create fertile conditions for the flourishing of the cocaine trade" (Madeira et al. 2011: 1). Yet, the UNODC (2013b) reports that cocaine seizures have actually been dropping since an all-time high was reached in 2007. In this respect, it has been argued that the country is in fact too politically unstable for drug traffickers (Patrick 2011).

In contrast to Guinea-Bissau, Kenya belongs to the category of "weak but functioning states", the environments in which DTOs prefer to carry out their operations (Patrick 2011). This might explain why Kenya is reportedly playing an ever more important role as both destination and transit country for cocaine trafficked by West African drug networks (UNODC 2013c). Indeed, a unique combination of favourable factors make Kenya particularly attractive for drug traffickers: staggering levels of corruption within the political and criminal justice systems; insufficient law enforcement capacities; efficient financial services; a solid communications infrastructure; and relatively reliable transportation facilities (Gastrow 2011a). Because of these characteristics, Kenya has been a point of entry for Afghan heroin destined for Europe and South Africa for more than three decades (UNODC 2013c). Sharply increased heroin seizures off of the coast of Mombasa since 2010, however, suggest that domestic consumption and the importance of the region as transit hub have both increased (UNODC 2013a).

One potential explanation for this development would be disruptions along the so-called "Balkan route", which has traditionally linked Afghanistan to Europe via Pakistan, Iran and Turkey. This possibility has raised concerns that East Africa might become "the new 'Balkan route'" for heroin, which could have a regional impact "similar to [that] of cocaine in West Africa" (UNODC 2013a: 22). Since the vast majority of drugs transported to and from East Africa come by sea, the areas most affected by the drug trade are located along the Swahili coast, most notably around the major ports of Mombasa in Kenya and Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. To a lesser degree, drugs are also trafficked by air via the international airports in Nairobi and Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, which serve as regional transportation hubs (UNODC 2013a). In contrast, notori-

especially the various rebel forces in the Sahel and the terrorist group Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)" (UNODC 2013b: 4). See also Alemika (2013).

ously unstable Somalia is less affected by international drug traffickers, apart from trade in light drugs across the border with Kenya (Menkhaus 2004; Shay 2008).

As far as Kenya is concerned, a number of studies have highlighted the consequences of rising drug consumption for public health (Deveau et al. 2006; Mwivano 2011). Still, little has been written on the impact of drug trafficking on security providers. A notable exception is Gastrow's assessment of the implications of organized criminal activities for the functioning of state institutions in Kenya. According to the author, in order to minimize the risks for their business operations, DTOs recruit Kenyan politicians, high-ranking government officials and businessmen as "agents of influence or access" who "provide political protection and information" (Gastrow 2011a: 24). Apart from that, however, no research has been conducted on the impact of drug trafficking on informal security providers in Kenya. Based on fieldwork in the slums of Nairobi and Mombasa, the following sections attempt to close this gap in the literature.

Informal Security Actors and Drug Trafficking in Kenya

One of the numerous vigilante groups operating in the Kibera slum in Nairobi is called the Kamukunji Pressure Group.[10] It is comprised of approximately 800 members, each of whom pays a small weekly membership fee. Like other groups in the area, Kamukunji organizes audiences for political rallies and provides security for politicians during electoral events (Mutahi 2011). As its present leader explained to me, the group started as a political forum fighting for multiparty democracy in the early 1990s. At a certain point, however, the group transformed and began to undertake security-related activities.[11] According to Dennis (2012), Kamukunji can be hired by politicians to disturb and intimidate their opponents. The chairman of the group admits that politicians do take advantage of financially vulnerable members of the group by hiring them "to do certain things in return for cash".[12] Some members of the group are in prison because of drug-related crimes, including drug trafficking.

In general, however, informal security actors in Kibera are only marginally involved in the drug trade: They can be hired to secure trans-

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10   *Kamukunji* means "forum" in Swahili.
11   Leader of a vigilante group; personal interview, Nairobi, July 2012.
12   Leader of a vigilante group; personal interview, Nairobi, July 2012.

portation of cannabis and *chang'aa*[13] or to provide security at dens where the illicit goods are consumed.[14] Still, as cases of collaboration with dealers are isolated and limited to light drugs, informal security actors in Kibera do not seem to be instrumentalized by DTOs. This can partly be explained by different consumption patterns between informal settlements and more affluent neighbourhoods. In Kibera, the drug market is hugely dominated by *Cannabis sativa* and illicitly brewed alcohol, which are regarded by many as "drugs of the poor".[15] As these substances are very cheap, they are widespread within deprived communities and trafficked and sold by a small network of individuals.[16] The trade with hard drugs such as cocaine and heroin, on the other hand, yields far more profit and is usually controlled by sophisticated transnational trafficking networks (Gastrow 2011b). As hard drugs are more expensive, they can almost exclusively be found in Nairobi's middle-class neighbourhoods.[17]

The situation is different within informal settlements around Mombasa, which are littered with heroin and, to a lesser degree, cocaine. Apparently, drugs have spilled over from wealthy neighbourhoods into slum areas. Unlike in Nairobi, which is a less important transit hub for drugs than the coast, heroin has been rampant on the streets of Mombasa for over 25 years (Deveau et al. 2006). Although hard drugs were initially consumed by wealthy coastal inhabitants and tourists, they gradually infested less affluent sections of the coastal population (Gastrow 2011b). When drug users and dealers were chased from the centre of Mombasa by police and faith-based vigilantes, they moved to surrounding low-income areas such as Likoni and Kisauni.[18] Accordingly, many addicts from more affluent parts of town go to slum areas in order to purchase drugs.[19] Simultaneously, hard drugs have spilled over from

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13 Strong, illicitly brewed alcohol. *Chang'aa* literally means "kill me quickly" in Swahili.

14 Programme officer with Open Society Foundation; personal interview, Nairobi, July 2012.

15 Community leader; personal interview, Nairobi, July 2012.

16 Transnationally operating drug trafficker; personal interview, Nairobi, July 2012.

17 Youth leader; personal interview, Nairobi, July 2012. It has been estimated that heroin users in Kenya spend between 4.80 and 10.80 USD every day on their addiction (UNODC 2013a).

18 Recovering heroin addict; personal interview, Mombasa, July 2012. In the context of Latin America, such a "displacement of criminal networks from one city/ state/region to another […] in search of safer havens and more pliable state authorities" has been coined "the cockroach effect" (Bagley 2012: 11).

19 Director of a rehabilitation centre; personal interview, Mombasa, July 2012. Representative of a civil society organization; personal interview, Mombasa, July 2012.

Mombasa into other coastal towns such as Malindi and Lamu (Deveau et al. 2006).

The expansion of the drug trade on the coast has led to an escalation of violence between rival DTOs. A senior police officer reveals that a recent increase of homicides in Mombasa has been caused by fights between rival DTOs, between DTOs and police, and even between different factions of the police.[20] One such incident reportedly occurred in Mombasa's Kisauni slum. Referring to the testimony of the officer in charge of the anti-narcotics unit, a trainer for drug control reports how the attempted arrest of a drug lord led to heavy fighting between police and members of a vigilante group. According to the source, vigilantes on the payroll of a drug lord attacked the anti-narcotics police with crude weapons and firearms in order to save their boss from being detained, as he was their primary source of income. After a shoot-out that caused serious injuries on both sides, the police finally managed to arrest the drug lord.[21] This incident illustrates how deeply involved vigilante groups are in drug trafficking and to what extent they are ready to protect their patrons.

The case of a vigilante group in the Soweto area of the Likoni slum in Mombasa reveals the strong connection between drug traffickers, political actors and informal security providers. A former vigilante leader reported to me that he led a group of 15 local youths who took over the provision of security within their area in cooperation with police and local administration.[22] However, in the end a number of the group's members were working in various ways for the local drug lord, who took advantage of the pre-existing organizational structure of the group: Vigilantes abused the relationship they had with the police and warned drug lords about planned raids. They also acted as personal bodyguards for dealers and provided security around the drug dens.[23] In addition, they were used to find new clients in other parts of town and escort them to the drug dens in Likoni. Finally, feeling highly protected in their position as security providers, vigilantes started to sell drugs themselves.[24]

In addition to paying vigilantes, drug traffickers in Likoni also have police officers on their payroll. Moreover, they act as an important source of funding for politicians, and some of them are even running for

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20   Senior police investigator; personal interview, Nairobi, July 2012.
21   Anti-drugs activist; personal interview, Mombasa, July 2012.
22   Former leader of a vigilante group; personal interview, Mombasa, July 2012.
23   Anti-drugs activist; personal interview, Mombasa, July 2012.
24   Former leader of a vigilante group; personal interview, Mombasa, July 2012.

office themselves.[25] In order to consolidate their power, drug lords have hosted social events in conjunction with politicians and provide financial assistance in times of need. This has led to a complicated "love–hate relationship" between drug gangs and the affected communities (Mutahi 2011: 15). Altogether, certain neglected areas of Mombasa seem to be *de facto* ruled and controlled by drug lords.[26] A senior police investigator confirms that parts of the coast are under the control of sophisticated drug gangs which are armed with AK-47s and use helicopters to transport their illegal goods.[27]

As the above cases suggest, financial vulnerability and lack of accountability make non-state armed groups particularly vulnerable to manipulation by external actors (Baker 2007).[28] A youth leader from Nairobi[29] and a community worker from Mombasa[30] agree that most people join informal security providers for material reasons and can be hired for any activity.[31] Reminiscent of "violent entrepreneurs" in countries like Italy (Gambetta 1996), Russia (Volkov 2002) and Colombia (Bedoya 2010), many informal security actors "subcontract" their violent services to the highest bidder (Abrahamsen and Williams 2011: 198). In Nairobi, the centre of political power, informal security providers have been found to be hired primarily for political purposes. Politicians use these groups to provide security during rallies in slum areas, to work as a mobilizing platform, or to act as goon squads to intimidate or eliminate political opponents. In Mombasa, the epicentre of the regional drug trade, drug lords have been found to hire vigilantes as scouts, bodyguards or peddlers. In an environment of extreme poverty and high rates of unemployment, individual informal security providers themselves are in many cases actively – sometimes aggressively – competing for "employment" by external actors. As a youth leader and peace activist in Kibera explains:

> Here in slums if I want to stand for an elective post, people will know about it. So whenever they see you, they come around to

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25   Anti-drugs activist; personal interview, Mombasa, July 2012.
26   Former leader of a vigilante group; personal interview, Mombasa, July 2012.
27   Senior police investigator; personal interview, Nairobi, July 2012.
28   In this case, "external" means outside of the community, not necessarily outside of the state as it would normally be defined in the context of international relations.
29   Youth leader; personal interview, Nairobi, July 2012.
30   Community worker; personal interview, Mombasa, July 2012.
31   This is confirmed by a recent survey on youth formations in Kenya (Dennis 2012).

praise you and follow you. Even the youths themselves, they want you to give them something. If you make a deal with them and buy them some drugs and alcohol, they will definitely do whatever you want them to do for you.[32]

Likewise, a former vigilante leader in one of Mombasa's slums points out that poverty and lack of opportunities have led to an outright competition among vigilantes to work for drug lords. If there are not enough positions to accommodate all members of a vigilante group, "there is [an internal] fight over the commission from the drug barons".[33] If the source of funding runs out – for instance, when the election period is over or a drug lord is imprisoned – the group might turn into a predatory gang which provides for itself through illegal activities such as extortion and robbery (Njonjo 2011).

Contrary to the abovementioned cases, it has been found that a number of faith-based security providers are more resistant to being instrumentalized by drug lords – for instance's Kibera's Al Safa, which apparently has not been co-opted by external actors and did not turn predatory. Starting as an environmental group made up of Nubians, Al Safa's initial task was to collect rubbish off the streets in exchange for a small fee. When crime and insecurity escalated in 2005, the group extended its operations to security provision in the form of nighttime street patrols.[34] However, Al Safa was banned later that year along with other vigilante groups and – unlike many others – actually ceased their security-related activities. Subsequently, the group refocused their attention on environmental protection. It can be argued that it was the ownership of the community over the group and its strong religious and cultural foundations that prevented its members from transforming into criminals for hire. Nubians form the oldest community within Kibera, and their community ties remain strong (Jacobs 2011). As one analyst put it, "the Nubian Council of Elders literally knows all the youths who are [part of Al Safa]";[35] by contrast, other parts of Kibera have been "invaded" by vigilante groups from outside. At the same time, the strong standing of their Islamic belief against drugs and other vices might also discourage the vigilantes from engaging in such criminal activities. Simi-

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32   Youth leader; personal interview, Nairobi, July 2012.
33   Former leader of a vigilante group; personal interview, Mombasa, July 2012.
34   Programme officer with Open Society Foundation; personal interview, Nairobi, July 2012.
35   Programme officer with Open Society Foundation; personal interview, Nairobi, July 2012.

lar behaviour among faith-based vigilantes has been observed in Mombasa, as the following cases reveal.

Out of 200 drug traffickers and dealers brought to trial in Mombasa in 2010, more than half were arrested by an anti-narcotics vigilante group established by the Council of Imams (Kitimo and Muyanga 2011). This vigilante group operates in the Old Town section of Mombasa, a relatively prosperous and predominantly Muslim community. Having realized that they cannot capture powerful drug lords, the group systematically targets drug addicts. In this context, the director of a rehabilitation centre recounted to me that a number of addicts who had received treatment in his facilities were lynched after having been caught committing petty crimes such as mobile phone theft. Carrying out public lynchings, the vigilantes announced, "This is how [we] will be dealing with drug users that are stealing."[36] Even though they are breaking the law by way of the extralegal killings, the group seems to have remained incorruptible within their own narrow context, and so far they have avoided transforming into a more predatory protection racket. This might be attributed to the strong leadership, relative wealth and financial independence of its members, ownership of the community over the group, and the unifying Muslim faith which strongly condemns drug abuse. A recovering heroin addict and community worker explains the roles unemployment and religion play when comparing vigilantes in Old Town to those in slums on the periphery:

> Sometimes the communities on the outskirts form their own vigilantes. But they turned and started to take bribes and steal from other people, because they were unemployed. This happened in the outskirts. But in town, majority are Muslim. So the vigilantes in town are based on faith and therefore it is difficult to bribe them. The problem is they use excessive force. They can beat someone to death, just for selling or for using.[37]

The member of a Muslim vigilante group in the coastal town of Malindi justifies the use of excessive force when expressing his frustration over police involvement or inactivity in relation to drug trafficking: "When we take [the drug dealers] to police they are free after few days. So you have to do something better. To kill them."[38] He further explains that his group lynches their victims publicly to set a precedent: "When we kill them, we [put] a tyre around them, add gasoline and burn them. So the other ones

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36 Director of a rehabilitation centre; personal interview, Mombasa, July 2012.
37 Recovering heroin addict; personal interview, Mombasa, July 2012.
38 Member of a Muslim vigilante group; personal interview, Malindi, July 2012.

who see it will not sell drugs anymore. We make it public."[39] Comparably radical punishment of drug users and sellers has been reported from regions in Somalia under the control of al-Shabaab, where shari'a law has been implemented (Shay 2008).[40] Al-Shabaab is exerting considerable influence on Muslim youth on the Kenyan coast – for instance, through a local militant group in Mombasa called al-Hijra (Botha 2013).

The strong stance of the Muslim community against drugs might also be explained by anecdotal evidence that most drug users at the coast can be found among the indigenous population, which is predominantly made up of Muslims.[41] The chairman of the Supreme Council of Kenyan Muslims in Mombasa underlines how seriously he takes drugs: "Drugs have been at the centre of everything. All kinds of theft, all kinds of insecurity, and all security threats are caused by drugs."[42] However, faith-based vigilantes can also be externally manipulated. One member of a Muslim vigilante group in Mombasa's Bondeni area – considerably less wealthy than Old Town – discloses that although he is personally against collaborating with drug traffickers, he has to obey his boss' orders. Accordingly, whenever the vigilante leader strikes a deal with drug lords, the group is told not to interfere with the business of a certain person or not to patrol in a particular area during a given period of time. Nevertheless, despite admitting to smoking cannabis himself, the vigilante assured me that a member would immediately be punished and kicked out of the group if it was found he was selling drugs: "For Islam, we do not deal with drugs. We follow the rules of Islam."[43]

Conclusion

Based on secondary data and fieldwork in Kenya, this article has illustrated how and to what degree informal security providers in Kenya are under the thumb of transnational drug traffickers. In Nairobi, which is

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39 This particular way of killing – popularly referred to as "necklacing" – was a common practice to punish alleged government supporters and criminals in South Africa during Apartheid rule. Recent news reports suggest that the practice is being reintroduced by vigilante groups in Cape Town's townships.

40 Unlike other jihadist terrorist groups in Africa such as AQIM, al-Shabaab is not considered to be linked to drug trafficking (Thornberry and Levy 2011; Williams and Felbab-Brown 2012).

41 Representative of a civil society organization; personal interview, Mombasa, July 2012. Former leader of a vigilante group; personal interview, Mombasa, July 2012.

42 Chairman of the Supreme Council of Kenyan Muslims in Mombasa; personal interview, Mombasa, July 2012.

43 Member of a Muslim vigilante group; personal interview, Mombasa, July 2012.

less affected by the drug trade than the coast, informal security actors are only marginally involved in drug-related activities and do not have links to more sophisticated DTOs. Instead, non-state armed groups are hired mainly by political actors for their own protection during rallies in slums, but also to intimidate and attack political opponents. In Mombasa, by contrast, drug lords involved in the international and highly profitable heroin trade have both formal and informal security providers on their payroll. This discrepancy can be explained by different consumption patterns in the slums of the capital as compared to those in Coast Province. In Nairobi, hard drugs are limited to wealthier neighbourhoods, whereas cheap, illicitly brewed alcohol and cannabis are widespread within the slums. By way of contrast, drug traffickers and their customers in Mombasa have been chased away from the city centre and pushed into slum areas, which now serve as dens for drug users from all socio-economic backgrounds. At the same time, a number of faith-based informal security actors in both cities have been found to be less susceptible to manipulation by drug lords.

As the Latin American case studies have shown, the control of informal security actors by powerful DTOs can have considerable consequences for affected communities. In Mexico and Colombia, large parts of the country have been under the control of armed actors who are deeply involved in drug trafficking. In Central America and Brazil, homicide rates in major cities have skyrocketed as a result of armed confrontations between drug gangs, militias and state security forces, all of which are involved in drug trafficking. By way of comparison, the corruption of informal security providers by drug lords in Kenya has not reached such alarming proportions. However, if global trafficking patterns were to change, the security situation in Kenya might deteriorate. Should East Africa really become the new "Balkan route" for the heroin trade from Afghanistan to Europe, drug lords in Mombasa would become even more powerful and turf wars between subcontracted informal security actors might escalate. Moreover, cocaine trafficking has already deeply compromised security actors in West African countries such as Guinea-Bissau. Should concerns that Kenya is becoming another main transit hub for cocaine from South America to Europe prove true, hard drugs may very well proliferate in Nairobi and spill over into the city's informal settlements. Once drug lords have taken control over these areas, they will most likely hire local informal security actors for protection. This, in turn, might lead to armed confrontations between rival gangs or between gangs and police even worse than those observed in Mombasa. In 2006, a gang dispute over an illicit brew market in Nairobi's Mathare slum

caused several deaths and displaced more than 9,000 people (Daniels 2009). This incident provides a glimpse into the consequences that Nairobi's most vulnerable communities might suffer if vigilantes, gangs and militias fight on behalf of drug lords over the control of the far more lucrative market in hard drugs.

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Drogenhandel und informelle Sicherheitskräfte in Kenia

Zusammenfassung: Der kenianische Staat gerät derzeit von zwei Seiten unter Druck: Erstens haben zahlreiche nichtstaatliche bewaffnete Gruppen in Gebieten, in denen der Staat praktisch nicht präsent ist, den Sicherheitssektor übernommen; zweitens gewinnt der Drogenhandel immer mehr an Boden, weil das Land zunehmend als bedeutender Drogenumschlagplatz genutzt wird. Der Beitrag untersucht die Beziehungen zwischen Drogenhandel und informellen Sicherheitsstrukturen in Kenia und zieht einen Vergleich zu ähnlichen Entwicklungen in Lateinamerika und Westafrika. Aufgrund seiner Feldforschungen in Kenia kommt der Autor zu dem Schluss, dass profitorientierte informelle Sicherheitsakteure in Mombasa für Drogenhändler arbeiten, während entsprechende Gruppen in Nairobi eher von Politikern angeheuert werden. Zudem scheinen glaubensbasierte Gruppen in beiden Städten weniger empfänglich für Manipulationsversuche von Drogenhändlern zu sein. Abschließend skizziert der Autor die potenziellen Konsequenzen einer Ausweitung des Drogenhandels in Kenia.

Schlagwörter: Kenia, Westafrika, Lateinamerika, Drogenhandel, Organisierte Kriminalität, Paramilitärische Verbände