



ALIENATING “DEAD CAPITAL,” EATING MORAL PRINCIPLE: Patriarchal Obligation, Land Sale, and Desires of Abandon on Kenya’s Urban Frontier

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Mguu’s burial was poorly attended. He was in his mid-fifties when he died in 2019; I had met him two years before at the Motel, a drinking haven for residents from the neighborhood of Ituura. It was March 2017, and I was three months into my fieldwork among its homesteads and hedgerows. Situated in Kiambu County, Ituura was a pocket of smallholder households wedged between the tea estates of the highlands and the urban sprawl emanating from Nairobi to the south.

Like most weekends, I had gone to the Motel with Mwaura, the nineteen-year-old son of my host family, to watch Premier League football. Taking a seat across from us, Mguu was halfway through a large bottle of Kenya Cane (a popular local spirit) and greeted us. He welcomed me to Kenya and expressed his happiness at our presence with him that day. “You are all my sons!” he exclaimed in a slur, a reference to his quasi-paternal relationship with Mwaura as a youth from his own neighborhood. He explained he was an age-mate of Mwaura’s fifty-five-year-old father Kimani, that they had attended the same school, and that he was therefore like another father to Mwaura. “Feel free [in Kenya],” he said, welcoming me. We shook hands; “I can call you my son!”

Mwaura, however, was far from impressed and continued drinking his beer while ignoring the man. Outside the Motel later that evening, he drew attention

to Mguu's unkempt appearance, remarked that he was hardly the elder he presented himself to be, that he had no job and was not "serious" about his life. I was encouraged not to speak to him in the future.

In mid-2019, returning to Ituura after some time spent in the United Kingdom, I would find out that Mguu's fate was to die childless and practically landless. After selling his land to a buyer from outside the neighborhood, he had descended into a state of destitution, using the proceeds to fund his drinking. As Roy, my twenty-three-year-old neighbor recounted the story:

After the money ended, he started selling the iron sheets of his house one by one just to find the cash to drink. Then later on, he came to die poor as fuck, since even where he was sleeping he was given only a small part [of land] by the one who bought the land just for a small house.

Roy drew attention to Mguu's lost legacy. "He didn't leave anything back, children to continue with his name, so he just went to waste."

* * *

Mguu's fate draws attention to the changing landscape of peri-urban Kiambu County, where Nairobi's expansion is transforming the lives of smallholder farmers living in a peri-urban economy marked by deprivation and economic struggle. New infrastructure projects have driven this growth, not least the construction of enormous ring roads orbiting the city to the north. The effect has been to cause the value of land to ratchet up across the city's hinterlands, influenced by infrastructure-led speculation (Gillespie and Schindler 2022; Leitner, Nowak, and Sheppard 2023). In 2016, a one-acre plot of land in the Kiambu town of Ruaka cost 59,600,000 Kenyan shillings (KES) (587,000 USD). In 2022, it had risen to 92,000,000 KES (780,000 USD) (HassConsult 2021).¹ Most Kiambu residents work in the informal economy, and they struggle to reach the monthly average of 23,900 KES (184 USD) within a combined household (Mukere 2025). In areas close to these roads, the consequence of this gulf is the sale of smallholdings and the transformation of central Kenya's farmland into a landscape of densely packed high-rises (Gillespie and Mwau 2024).

In Kenya's public sphere, commentators welcome this transformation in developmentalist terms, celebrating the sale of inherited, "ancestral" land held by smallholder patrilineal families and its conversion into income-generating housing. "Those that just sit and wait to inherit ancestral land and are not prepared to take the risk to develop it, thus creating a livelihood, are bound to end up with dead

capital" (Kiereini 2020). Such perspectives consciously invoke [Hernando de Soto's \(2001\)](#) famous words on "the property of the poor," indicating that idle rural land meant as a retirement home amounted to useless collateral. These figures encourage Kenyans to turn "useless" stock into flows of wealth for productive reinvestment.

But as Roy's words suggest, in areas that remain to some degree countryside, where urban sprawl is still arriving, these new liquid possibilities of "releasing dead capital" are highly contested within the terms of a rural moral economy of landholding premised on patrilineal obligation. Land retention, and provisioning through wage labor *from* the vantage point of land, constitutes the cornerstone of masculine identity in Kiambu. This is a region of Kenya where living and landowning is organized through ostensibly patrilineal households—where male title deed holders pass land and homesteads across generations, subdividing them among children. Senior men in their forties and above insist that family land is thoroughly inalienable ([Weiner 1992](#)), that it must be kept off the market and within the patriline. They think of themselves as providers, driven by an ever-present sense of their obligations to give their children better lives. In public, such men claim virtue by avoiding the fates of those like Mguu, showing that they have not given up and continue to work diligently for their families. Masculinity in Kiambu is grounded in this articulation between land ownership and wage labor. Land anchors obligation, pursued through labor, and inter-generational property relations give patriarchal authority temporal depth. People say that one should never sell land for which one's father and grandfather had surrendered their sweat (*thithino*) to maintain.

However, these moral (and moralizing) ideas are themselves becoming unstuck by the sheer power and temptation of selling land for more money than one could earn in several years of work. I chose to start this essay with Mguu's death because it illuminates the profound contradictions that a land market is creating in a rural, peri-urbanizing setting where land ought to be retained, in ideal terms at least, within kin relations. My long-term ethnographic fieldwork in Kiambu revealed a significant divergence between moral thought and actual practice. Senior men sell ancestral land, sometimes at the direct expense of their children, depriving them of their full inheritance. Such acts stand in contrast to the ideas of passing on land that underpin a patrilineal moral economy of household reproduction ([Abrahams 2011](#)).

On the one hand, land sales were the consequence of an economy of dead ends, as it were. Kiambu is, as [Amiel Bize \(2020\)](#) has described similar settings in rural Kenya, "post-agrarian" (cf. [Bryceson 2019](#)). It is a peri-urban periphery

where farming livelihoods and piecemeal wages from the informal economy no longer support the making of good lives. Across this terrain, younger, destitute men in their twenties and thirties are losing hope that work will provision the middle-class futures they desire and choose instead to abandon their futures in binge economies of drinking (Wilk 2014; cf. Lockwood 2020a). Others sell to cover arrears in their household budgets, ones often created by contingent calamity, such as medical costs in a state that does not provide adequate social security (Prince 2023).

Land sales are driven not only by desperation, however, but also by opportunity. Skyrocketing land prices confer on senior men, title deed holders, the capacity to wield the power of sale money, much more than they could ever hope to earn through their working lives. Their power is, of course, the consequence of historical convergence—that they had inherited their land’s freehold title deed from parents at the critical moment in Nairobi’s urban expansion, allowing them to turn limited, piecemeal plots into large “chunks” (as they are called locally) of cash.

My argument is that desires to engage in a lifestyle of conspicuous consumption are powerful vectors of opportunity for Kiambu’s senior male land sellers and that, in turn, these desires drive the urban frontier forward through the alienation of land to fund them. Desires to “eat” (*kūrīa*),² and thus enjoy, money, range from the mundane to the extravagant; to eat goat meat openly, to pursue romantic relationships with younger women, to drink alcohol in excess. They emanate from the looming shadow of Nairobi and the unmet promise of incorporation into its rungs of middle-class living. *Frustration* is a word one hears in English to describe the predicament of Kiambu inheritors—especially the young, but senior men too. These are men who live near the city and its images of wealth and abundance, not least the nearby lifestyles of Kenya’s nouveaux riches living in nearby gated communities, consuming grilled goat and drinking beer on weekends. For Kiambu men, selling land was a way of accessing desired lives of consumption by alternative means without the drudgery of work (Lockwood 2020a). For them, land sale created material, though temporary abundance, but also sheer experiential enjoyment, something palpably understood by their children whose inheritance they sold.

These “desires of abandon,” as I describe them, were thus twofold—they meant *abandoning* patrilineal obligation for a lifestyle of consumption, *itself* defined by *abandon* in the form of unrestrained spending drawn from asset sales. Insofar as they are generated by a capitalism that “constantly raises expectations,” creating “promises that once would have been unimaginable,” even as

it "undermines lives and livelihoods that were once safe and certain" (Schielke 2015, 227), these desires are also *of* abandon, premised as they are on imaginations of luxury and abundance otherwise seen as the privilege of Nairobi's wealthy upper class.

In Kiambu, I theorize these desires for abandon through the lens of a changing moral economy of landholding premised on patriarchal obligation. By "moral economy," I refer to ideas and principles to which modes of economic reproduction are tethered—in this case, those embodied by a hardworking and productive patriarch. The sale of ancestral land for consumption subverts the moral ideas that hold this economy in place—those of working for wages and retaining land for the future of the family. Through sale, these principles were not only abandoned but utterly subverted, "envisioned under the sign of [their] own destruction" (Munn 1986, 3). Nancy Munn's foundational work on value, community, and consumption in Gawa, Papua New Guinea, provides the foundation for these observations, writing as she does that witchcraft embodies a palpable threat to Gawan reproduction. Witches pursue a destructive individualism, one that breaks from hegemonic logics of food sharing oriented toward creating social ties that guarantee the communal future. In the context of a small-scale society, Munn is realistic about the temptations of witchcraft. For the mainstream, witchcraft constitutes destructive "negative value," undermining solidarities. However, for those witches who break away from the mainstream, all manner of new pleasurable possibilities are unlocked—from consuming food individually and privately, to seeking revenge on former relations that previously withheld food and happiness. These acts stand for a completely alter short-termism that runs consciously counter to mainstream ideology of reproduction (Day, Papataxiarchis, and Stewart 1999).

Set in time, and in relation to a political economy of an expanding urban frontier, eating provides a way of thinking about the way moral economies are undermined by new, emergent desires. In Kiambu, desires for consumption utterly subvert the moral principles that land retention signifies; first, when senior men, exemplars of this moral economy (Robbins 2018; Humphrey 1997), convert land into cash, and then spend that cash on drinking. Commentaries about the dangers of short-term transactions have been documented the world over (Bohannon 1955; Parry and Bloch 1989; Shipton 1989; J. H. Smith 2001). Insofar as consuming denotes the enjoyable destruction of value, land sales consume the land's capacity to produce food, and its status as an economic asset. But sales also consume *values* insofar as they signal to others in the same milieu the destruction of the moral order that underpinned land's retention. For kin and

dependents deprived of their inheritance, land sales represented a stark betrayal of everything these senior men had professed to uphold: the guardianship of land and lineage through dogged wage work and land retention. By trading their legacies for money's potential, land sellers embody the upending of a moral economy premised on obligation, and the emergence of a new one oriented toward private, destructive consumption.

In making these points, this article explores the process through which land and the moral economies of landholding become “disembedded” (Polanyi 2001) on the urban frontier. Like other capitalist frontiers across the globe (Li 2014), land in southern Kiambu is being rapidly revalued not merely as a commodity but also as a rent-producing asset that will gain increasing value through claims of exclusivity in a wider context of land scarcity (Gillespie 2020; Christophers 2020). Scholars have long recognized that these processes of revaluation are highly uneven and contested. Capitalist frontiers are spaces of “friction” (Tsing 2005), not simply determined by the onward march of capitalist processes of commodification and assetization but also extant as complex and uncertain spaces where capitalist and non-capitalist modes of valuing resources collide and intersect. The writing of Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing and others has encouraged a nuanced approach to capitalism's consequences on frontiers, suggesting that commodification remains unfinished (Ouma 2017).

Scholars of urban frontiers across the so-called global South have been sensitive to these calls and to the heterogeneity of these new environments—noting that the conversion of agrarian land into real estate is an uneven process, one that creates new forms of inequality and exclusion in what were already deeply stratified rural contexts owing to settler-colonial histories (Cowan 2022; Gillespie and Mwau 2024). In Kiambu, urbanization proceeds plot by plot (Karaman et al. 2020), gradually, and on the basis of individual decisions by senior men to alienate land. As Mguu's story at the beginning of this article might therefore suggest, there is more to say about the frictions created in the lives of those who experience the changing value of their inherited land—the opportunities and risks of cashing out of the peri-urban economy. Speaking to this work, this article emphasizes the role of desires for consumption in producing economies of sale that not so much drive the urban frontier forward but cause landowning post-peasant patriarchs to retreat from their status as guardians of the land. Emergent and alternative orientations to value—consumption over reproduction—make this disembedding process possible.

This article is informed by my long-term fieldwork in Kiambu County, Kenya. I lived on the farm of my hosts between January 2017 and July 2019,

returning in August 2019. This constituted a long period of immersion in neighborhood life (Lockwood 2023) that I had not predicted. I began my stay as a way of learning the Gikūyū language spoken across central Kenya, but my research was transformed by my growing appreciation of the tensions wrought by Nairobi's approach. Eventually, I decided to stay for the remainder of my fieldwork. Conscious of my positionality and of exoticizing tropes about African thought, my intention has been to frame these tensions as contradictions of capitalism, playing out in central Kenya against the backdrop of colonial history and mediated by local moral economy. Undoubtedly, my status as a *mzungu* (white person) outsider shaped the actual paths I took in my fieldwork, not least my friendships with other youths, sons and daughters from neighboring families close to my age (twenty-seven at the time). Knowledge flows along gendered lines, but it was also my emplacement within a household that allowed me to gain perspectives on the travails of older women supporting their children (Lockwood 2023). Insofar as my fieldwork was mediated by my emplacement within a household, knowledge of land sale was transmitted through gossip and other commentary on it by figures I knew. Their words, and their insistence on retaining land, drew my attention toward the moral meanings of land sale.

Crucially, it was my friendship with Mwaura, the son of my host family, and his father Kimani that shaped the perspectives set out in this article—my focus on the desires of senior men for conspicuous consumption as a critical mechanism of urban expansion and rural retreat. The article's unfolding parallels the unfolding of my fieldwork itself. A temporal divide exists between my doctoral research (2017–2019) and subsequent trips to Ituura in February–March and July–August 2022. As we shall see by the end of the article, it was my hosts' experiences of land sale at the hands of their father that have informed my arguments here. Recent returns to Ituura in 2024 and 2025 inform the closing of the article and its unfortunately sad story.

"THEY DIED LIKE DOGS": Land Sale and the Urban Frontier

Like the environs of cities across the global South, the region of southern Kiambu is being dramatically transformed by Nairobi's expansion. Nowhere is this more this evident than in Ruaka town, eleven kilometers away from Ituura, which sits on the county border of Kiambu and Nairobi. Twenty years ago Ruaka was a landscape of coffee farms belonging to members of Kiambu's ethnic Kikuyu peasantry, farming families who had embraced the cash crop in the aftermath of colonial rule as a route to prosperity. Today, it is a bustling township. "It all started with one person," said James, a forty-five-year-old man from



Figure 1. A large house built by a Nairobi businessman stands behind the sold land of a Kiambu man, still living and rearing chickens next door. Photo by Peter Lockwood.

Ruaka who had moved to nearby Chungwa town to start a farming business. “A developer to come and buy someone’s land, to build rental accommodation,” he explained, evoking a domino effect of self-expropriation.

Across Kiambu, landowners are adjusting to a landscape of speculation. Smallholder families are “autoconstructing” private rental accommodation in their gardens, provided they can leverage the capital (Gillespie and Mwaui 2024). Others wait, speculating on their land’s future value. But many families, and especially their senior male heads of household, are cashing in on their land entirely, and the changing landscape of Kiambu speaks to a massive amount of individual land transfers—from smallholders to housing developers and private individuals, sometimes at the behest of male landowners.

When we met in the center of Chungwa, itself rapidly densifying through new high-rises constructed, James framed Nairobi’s growth not as a process of expansion but as one of mass alienation—of voluntary land sale by foolish farmers seeking to make a quick return. His was a familiar perspective to me, one that evoked broader discourses I had heard from the early days of my fieldwork about the failure of Kiambu’s smallholders to capitalize on their contingent ownership of extremely valuable land close to the city. “Ruaka’s poor millionaires: They boozed and whored their birth right away,” stated one newspaper headline (Kamau 2017). This was no mere sensationalism. When first I met James in 2017, he explained to the fate of those he had left behind in Ruaka:

Many of those guys who sold were my age-mates from primary school and they've been wasted [shakes head]. Those people had never seen half a million shillings before, now they had a million shillings. A lot of them started to . . . [PL: Drink?] Yah! And when that starts, what follows is getting sick. Many of my age-mates from Ruaka went that way.

As one of my interlocutors from Chungwa town put it, these men "died like dogs." Like Mguu, they had become men without homes, wandering the streets, relying on the generosity of relatives.

When I first moved to the neighborhood of Ituura, where I conducted my doctoral fieldwork between January 2017 and July 2018, I heard many such stories. Ituura was thirteen kilometers from Ruaka, further north and into the highlands of central Kenya, but by no means outside of the expanding urban sprawl. On my first afternoon there, I was shown around by Mwaura, the then nineteen-year-old son of my hosts. He began remarking on a neighbor, a widow who had sold land and constructed some basic wooden rental buildings on her land. "If you're selling land, are you really serious?" Mwaura asked me. I did not quite know how to answer. "My dad always likes to talk shit about the people who sell their land," he continued. "He says, 'My father was poor, and he had ten children and never sold his land. And I am poor and I have only two [children], so why should I sell my land?'"

After beginning my fieldwork in Ituura, when I moved into a small, corrugated iron building on Mwaura's family's homestead, I came to understand the pride placed in landownership. I had almost insulted Mwaura's father when we first met, asking if he had bought the *shamba* (land) that he lived on. "This is my ancestral land!" he yelled in English. Kimani had inherited his land from his father, Gatheo, who had died in the 1980s, having lived his life as a farmer growing maize and rearing sheep on what had been a much larger piece of land, subsequently subdivided between the many children of his three wives. Born in 1965, two years after Kenya's independence, Kimani led a life similar to other men of his generation—they worked for wages to support the family, typically in Nairobi. Kimani himself was a long-haul truck driver and often went absent from the homestead for long stretches. The small patches of land owned by men in the neighborhood made such work a necessity. Kimani possessed a little less than an acre. A number of other men, neighbors and kinsmen, owned 50x50-metre plots, only enough land to construct a house, leaving no space to farm for partial subsistence.

In March 2018, Kimani stopped at home for an unusually long time. His truck was in a state of disrepair, and he had struggled to put enough cash together to pay for the school fees of Mwaura's younger sister, Njoki. But it offered a chance to sit down with the old man (*mzee*) and ask him about the history of his father's land. For an hour, Kimani lectured me on the risks of selling inherited land.

"His land is meant to raise the children of his children's children, but not to be . . . ?" (*Shamba yake ni ya kulea watoto wa watoto wa watoto wake, lakini isiu . . . ?*). Kimani waited for me to finish his sentence, and, as usual, I was too slow. He got in first. "Not to be sold!" (*isiuzwe*), he barked, answering his own question. "Are you listening to me [*unasikia*], Peter?"

Kimani explained that his father had laid down a curse" (*kĩrumi*) that his piece of land should never be sold by his children, lest they suffer the consequences. Pointing to several men from the neighborhood, including some from his own family, other sons of Gatheo, he remarked how the money made from such sales tended to get spent quickly, rarely bringing "blessings" (*irathimo*), good fortune, to its users. He gestured in the direction of a neighboring plot (*shamba*) where a block of rentals, cheap cinder-block apartments, now stood. "He sold his land over there," Kimani explained, referring to its former owner. "I don't know for how much. He ate until it was finished. It didn't even last a year!" (*Akauza hapo. Akaona sijui hii pesa. Akakula ikamalizika. Hata hakumaliza mwaka*). In his experience, land sale practically guaranteed such misfortune.

DEFENDING DEAD CAPITAL, CLAIMING VIRTUE

Moral imperatives to retain land reflect its deep imbrication with the reproduction of family lineages, the fact that it is considered ancestral, meant to be passed on to children and enable their social future. Attachments to land as the vital foundation of kinship's continuity have remained a prominent theme in the history and anthropology of Africa (Shipton 2009; Lonsdale 1992; Fortes 1967). Even amid conditions of labor migration and land reform, land remains irrevocably tied up with ideas about the good life lived through rearing future generations (C. Smith 2023; Lockwood 2026). As a consequence of such deeply held attachments, those who do sell, like Mguu, risk dying a social death. Mguu was reduced to the status of a landless pauper, though he also represented something of an extreme, a childless man dying alone, his future "going to waste" with no one to continue his line.

Kimani's insistence on the pitfalls of selling land recalls ethnographic writing about the dangers of generating fungible cash across Africa and the perils

of consuming its generative potential, a recurrent contrast "between the powers that create social prosperity versus powers that destroy it" (Ferguson 2006, 72–73; Blunt 2019; Hutchinson 1992; Meiu 2015). Such discourses evoke tropes of greed and the destructive desires of luxury pinned to witches, variously seen to exploit and undermine others to generate their own, private wealth (see, e.g., Wilson 1951; Geschiere 2013; Comaroff and Comaroff 1999). All these ethnographies hinge on the dangers of consumption as a defining element of economic life. In a survey of its use as a moral discourse, David Graeber (2011) has observed that "consumption" is "almost always synonymous with waste: it meant destroying something that did not have to be (at least quite so thoroughly) destroyed" (see also Lockwood 2020b).

Such ideas about dangerous desires for consumption are reflected in anxieties about alienating inherited assets observed in farming families across contexts (see, e.g., Abrahams 2011; Gregory 1997). In the anthropology of Africa, this has emerged as an especially powerful theme. Parker Shipton's (1989) classic thesis on "bitter money" famously emphasized that the primary means of generating such morally dangerous cash was through land sale, explaining that this bitter quality emerged from the economic error of turning durable and value-producing land into fungible and easily spent money. Borrowing from Paul Bohannan (1955) and James Ferguson (1992), he framed these as mutually exclusive commodity pathways to be kept apart. Land sale represented the substitution of long-term reproduction for a one-off, short-term gain (cf. Parry and Bloch 1989). In the perspective of conservative senior men, the recognition of land's vitality—its capacity to grow and provide a home for future generations—informed its precious status, a knowing understanding of its critical role in the social reproduction of the household.

As Elizabeth Hull and Deborah James (2012) have pointed out, transactions rarely "mystify" people—they form part of a "popular economy" in which people debate economic practice. Kimani's criticism of land sale was underpinned by an ethics of self-discipline, of patriarchal responsibility and economization, a breaking of the ascetic principles of the informal economy wage worker typical of a Weberian petty capitalist ideology (Parkin 1972, 99). For Kimani, it was not only the non-human agency of ancestral curses that drew his criticism, nor the problematic money itself. The cause of such destitution caused by land sale was a distinctly human and, as he saw it, a decidedly immoral desire for personal enjoyment of those who sold—that it allowed them to buy into local economies of conspicuous consumption where they could "eat money" at the expense of passing land on to their children. "When you see people selling farms here," he explained, "it's like a person decides to sell to get money, to go and drink alcohol

or [do] other bad things.” His was a story about “bad people” driving their families into destitution through illicit and ill-advised consumption, the opposite of what fatherly obligation meant in an economy of lack. “On our side,” he insisted, “we cannot sell.”

In Kenya today, however, economists and other public voices are encouraging Kenyans to abandon their “cultural” attachment to rural land and to become “creative” in their investment choices. Writing in the *Daily Nation*, [Bitange Ndemo \(2020\)](#), a professor of Entrepreneurship at the University of Nairobi's Business School, courted controversy by suggesting that “no matter how poor Kenyans are, they will still invest in an unproductive asset.” Ndemo argued that “culture dictates the emotional attachment Kenyans have to their rural investments that are of practically no productive value at all.” Criticizing desires to be tethered to the countryside, to have a place to be buried at one's rural home, Ndemo wrote that “Africa is preoccupied with death, when the living cannot feed themselves.” He instead advocated the productive use of rural land, not its idle retention.

Ndemo's diatribe consciously evoked [de Soto's \(2001\)](#) famous imperative that land held by the poor ought to be recognized legally, so that it can be leveraged or exchanged for capital. [Shipton \(2009\)](#) explored this insistence in western Kenya, showing how Luo suspicion toward mortgages turned on their deeply held attachment to land as a family heirloom. Turning land into collateral amounted to gambling with the ancestors, “against kinship and the social fabric itself.” “Land is life,” his senior male interlocutors insisted. “It feeds the unborn, it feeds the living.” Land, in other words, was no “dead” capital, but essential to the vitality of family patriline, allowing their future nourishment as a place to be raised ([Shipton 2009](#), 176). Since the colonial period, in central Kenya, too, land has been thought of as a provider, the material basis of achieving upstanding morality by possessing well-tilled fields, multiple wives and children, and herds of goats. Before the full arrival of British colonial rule, notions of the good life were images of abundance on an unforgiving forest frontier, provisioned by “great men” or leaders ([athamaki](#)), “those who left wealth behind” ([atiga-irĩ](#)) to future generations ([Lonsdale 2005](#); [Kershaw 1997](#); [Kinoti 2010](#)).

Even within central Kenya today, where land is owned by smallholder families via freehold title deeds held in the names of individual men, ideas about land's generativity for the family remain powerful. The Swynnerton Plan, a vast titling process begun in the 1950s enacted under British colonial rule, narrowed ownership to singular persons. Ituura is a typical post-Swynnerton neighborhood in Kiambu, a patchwork landscape of “localised patriline” ([Moore 1986](#)). Yet as [Fiona Mackenzie \(1989\)](#) has shown, titling has not ended attachments to

land, but rather intensified them—rooting families to these precious plots of land. Under these conditions, attachments to land still have a sentimental quality as inalienable possessions associated with the continuity of the family lineage, rather than operating as purely tradeable commodities (Shipton 2009, 227–28). Residents describe family land as a “nursery,” a *type* of land, distinct from land purchased on the market, to be purposed for the raising of the following generation of the patriline.

In central Kenya, ideas about land’s vitality deeply intertwine with the obligations of wage-laboring masculinity to provision the family’s social reproduction and social mobility through returning wages—so-called off-farm income (Kitching 1980), to the homestead. Such wages are often invested in education, reflecting wider aspirations for middle-class lifestyles that exist across rural central Kenya, where farming families are intent on their children finding white collar work (Verkaart, Mausch, and Harris 2018). In Kiambu, where families rely on cash to support these aspirations, the maintenance of home and the pursuit of upward mobility is conceptualized through a language of struggle (*kūgeria*)—of working for wages. These narratives have attuned to the region’s economic history over decades. When the British colonial state alienated land to European and Boer farmers at the beginning of the twentieth century, it led to a crisis of overpopulation in the newly demarcated “African reserves,” earmarked territories where central Kenya’s Kikuyu people were allowed to farm outside of white-owned land (see, e.g., Anderson 2005; cf. Lonsdale 1992). Land conflict and land poverty in the reserves set in during the following decades, and households were forced to look to the emerging towns and cities for cash wages, becoming “part-time proletarians” (Peterson 2001; see also Njonjo 1981) and beginning a pattern of economic life that has changed little since Kenya’s independence.

In Kiambu, men of all ages confront the challenge of “wageless life” (Denning 2010), where jobs are low paying and hard to find (Lockwood 2025). In this context, patriarchal obligations are lived not only through narratives of struggle but also through the asceticism of “self-denial.” In early 2018, I spoke to Kimani not long after he had returned to the homestead to pay the fees of his seventeen-year-old daughter Njoki. Kimani had delivered a shipment of goats from Tanzania to Nairobi, and had finally paid off some of his debts in the process. He was feeling positive and remarked on his commitments as a father.

You see people like us For example, I or my brother Murigi. People from the neighborhood normally say we have progressed a lot because of denying ourselves [*kujinyima*] things like those cigarettes, alcohol, *bhang* [cannabis], something called *shisha* that we use, and that is why [we are

ahead]—not to praise ourselves too much. Mwaura is finishing university, Njoki will go to university too because of denying myself that kind of fun of alcohol [*raha ya pombe*] and what not. You know, it finishes a lot of money [*unajua inamaliza pesa sana*].

In this context, the father claims virtue by protecting land through labor, refusing to realize the former's exchange value. Kimani represented to me what he described as his own, conscious self-restraint from living a life of what he called "fun" (*raha*), of drinking alcohol and spending money, something he had "denied himself" (*kujinyima*). Kimani pointed to his own father's dogged determination to hold on to the land, a commitment that encouraged him to follow suit, passing it on to his son in turn. In spite of his own father's apparent "love" of cash, Kimani emphasized his father's restraint.

My father even himself loved money. Wouldn't he get money from selling? Why didn't he sell? So that I should be the one to sell it or Mwaura?

Kimani's adherence to the morality of work recalls the observations of [Hannah Dawson and Liz Fouksman \(2020\)](#) who have shown that in South Africa, in spite of the state's introduction of universal basic income policies, notions of a productivist masculinity persist. Wage labor remains central to masculine self-understandings and, indeed, the judgement of others. At the heart of these practices is a mode of asceticism attuned to the need to save money and accrue capital for household projects of social reproduction and mobility, especially children's education ([Hunter 2014](#); [Bähre 2020](#); [Comaroff and Comaroff 1987](#)).³

Such claims, professed to me throughout conversations with senior men during my fieldwork, regularly emphasized their inherent possession of moral agency—that struggling and striving for low wages was a choice, though one they embraced and redeemed in the value of reproduction and its achievement. Such ideas were articulated through a discourse of ethics rather than the following of normative rules—they emphasized personal virtue through the supposition of moral agency. The endeavor to persevere with labor becomes a source of virtue *in contrast* to known alternatives. Kimani's self-denial evokes consciousness of the paths not taken. It is because responsibility is chosen—or a proper version of responsibility by meeting obligations to children—that it can be valorized, as Kimani's words of borderline "self-praise" (*kujivuna*) suggest.

Professing self-denial elevated moral freedom as a virtue within a context of constraint, a self-asserted insistence, as [Hadas Weiss \(2015, 245\)](#) has put it, on the virtue to be achieved from doggedly working for others' flourishing. [Andrew](#)

Walsh's (2002, 453) useful formulation captures this understanding of possible alternatives that a morally valued type of responsibility assumes, of the “freedom” people have “to do otherwise”: “to be responsible for an act . . . one must have the option not to do it.”

When I left Ituura and returned to Cambridge to complete my doctorate in 2019, I thus sought to frame Kimani as an exception to a landscape of destitution and desire for land sale. I embraced his claims on account of his virtue that emphasized his determination to resist the grain of land sale by not “giving up” and working for his family’s future (Lockwood 2020b). Consider, by contrast, how other men in their late forties and fifties understood their predicament. At burial diggings, I witnessed how they contemplated selling their land and abandoning their obligations to their wives and children, framed as ungrateful recipients of their sacrifices (Lockwood 2026, 127–28). Such men turned the hopelessness of their situation into a reason to “cash in” on their land. “We are not going to last much longer,” claimed one Ituura man, a mechanic in his forties known to be a heavy drinker at local pubs. The words struck me for their hopelessness, even though they were delivered with a laugh. “I’m telling him to sell his land for 3 billion,” he told me, gesturing toward his friend, a farmer of the same age. “We take the SGR [standard gauge railway] to Mombasa. We start spending!” These men chose an ironic tone for their statements, but it was starkly black humor. They argued that it would be better to live a few weeks of luxury than repeat years of labor.



Figure 2. Men gather round to dig a grave in Ituura. Photo by Peter Lockwood.

These men had not yet sold land like Mguu, but their voices ought to be seen as part of the broader conversation taking place in Kiambu about the value of land in a context where labor cannot provision futures, let alone social mobility. In such a bind, it seemed to make sense to “enjoy money” by “eating” it (*kūaria mbecca*), instead of pursuing one’s supposed legacy by leaving land and wealth to children. In such all-male spaces, Ituura men expressed the feeling that their legacies would be hollowed out regardless of their struggles, that there was little more left as an option in life than embracing immediate consumption.

While undoubtedly hopeless, these discourses evoke not only economic desperation but also a desire to enjoy earnings, to live for the moment and reject obligation as a known and knowing orientation to the present (Day, Papataxiarchis, and Stewart 1999). Yet these acts differ in important ways from the machismo “binge economies” that Richard Wilk (2014) describes among gang laborers in the Belize logging industry who see drinking as a “release” from exploitation. Kiambu men, by contrast, had a strong notion of themselves as landowners and patriarchs, men with economic assets and a degree of agency in spite of their obligations (from which they, too, undoubtedly sought a form of release). However, Wilk’s writing prompts a discussion of how periodic “bingeing” becomes an all-consuming orientation toward the short-term, produced by a sense of futility. Here, I want to once again emphasize the changing status of Kiambu as a region where smallholders became moderate successful coffee farmers after independence. A collapse of coffee prices in the 1990s and shrinking plots of land due to subdivision have undermined commodity production, forcing a reliance on low-paid work in the informal economy. Unlike their fathers, Kiambu men today are closer to virtual paupers than crop-producing peasants (Lockwood 2026).

The motivations and mentalities that emerge from this “de-agrarianising” (Bryceson 2019) setting can also be helpfully differentiated from the writing of Kevin Donovan (2021) on the east African coffee boom. Donovan has shown how coffee smuggling across the Kenya-Uganda border during the 1970s made young men newly wealthy, allowing them to escape the authority of their fathers and marry early. He found that ideals of household harmony survived this dramatic moment and were merely accessed faster, disturbing temporalities of ageing through which men only gradually accrued authority and became respected elders (cf. Meiu 2015). By contrast, in Kiambu we see men approaching elderhood realize that their efforts have been a thankless task, making them look back on their struggles with irony and regret. These realizations provoked profound questions about the meaning and purpose of their work and assets in a capitalism that flaunts luxury while denying it to the majority, where household legacy was

already compromised. “What should it be for, if not to enjoy oneself?” the logic went. There were, evidently, other ways to live.

DRINKING DEAD CAPITAL, EATING MORAL PRINCIPLE

While demoralized, “wasted” men struggled to imagine their futures, landed men with work and pensions had room for maneuver, even when economic crises hit. If some men were financially ruined through failed business ventures funded by land sales, other men made no secret of the fact that they enjoyed the windfall money made from sale, seen as their rightful fruits of retirement. One of these figures was Maina, a seventy-nine-year-old man who had sold half an acre of land in 2010. He had done so to pay for the untimely death of his firstborn son who had passed away unexpectedly after illness in Sudan, where he worked. Quite suddenly, Maina needed to pay for his son’s medical costs, forcing the sale for an immense amount of 8 million KES (101,000 USD).

Maina was keen to stress that amid the sale he made appropriate arrangements for his children’s inheritance. He mentioned that others in the neighborhood “couldn’t fail to gossip” (*matiagaga kūaria*) if he did not. He drew a distinction between himself and his brothers who he claimed had “ruined themselves” through drinking. Even with such arrangements made, however, his narrative could not account for the entirety of the 8 million KES he claimed to have made from his sale.

Maina was open about having found a new girlfriend in the wake of his wife’s death in 2018. He was now financing her two younger children’s education. Maina explained that he had “enjoyed” (*tūkīrīa*; literally, “we ate”) the rest of the proceeds together with this much younger girlfriend who was in her late thirties. He referred to her as a *gacungwa* (“little orange”), a Gikūyū term often applied to the mistresses of older men. Maina’s use of the word *eat* to describe his enjoyment of the money is also telling, an admission that this money was consumed for enjoyment—not invested as the other proceeds were. In the knowledge that others might judge him, he tacitly defended his right to enjoy life having reached old age, that it was what he had earned from working when he was younger and for providing his children with an inheritance. In his view, as an old man, he deserved a retirement of sorts.

The capacity of older men to pursue younger women was shaped by established practices of senior men “sponsoring” them in relationships outside of marriage. Some of the women courted by land sellers were already single mothers, searching for patrons (Lockwood 2026, chapter 6; Schmidt 2024). In the neighborhood, these relationships were grasped in moralizing terms. Another

neighborhood man, Njuguna, had sold a portion of his land to begin what he called his project of becoming a pig and poultry farmer, constructing wooden pens next to his corrugated iron house. According to neighbors, his younger new wife had “influenced” him to support her older children at school and college. “He didn’t even build a house. His house looks like it’s collapsing,” one remarked.

How should we understand this late-in-life pursuit of consumption and enjoyment when they run counter to the principles of economization so moralizingly espoused by the senior men we have already met in the present narrative? One port of call is [James Ferguson’s \(2006, 161\)](#) classic writing on desires for “the political and social rights of full membership in a wider society,” claims to the kinds of modern, middle-class living standards available in the West, the imaginations and fantasies denied to those living on a global periphery ([B. Weiss 2004](#)). The projection of status through consumption is a theme revisited by [Sasha Newell \(2012\)](#), whose arguments about alcohol drinking among youth in Côte d’Ivoire emphasizes that desires which appear “wasteful” can prove productive, generating reputation and economic possibility in an alternative way to the mainstream moral emphasis on work, earning, and saving.

Land sales certainly had a similar effect for the sellers, allowing them to project status through heavy alcohol consumption at places like the Motel, as we saw with Mguu. But as with [Munn’s \(1986\)](#) witch, there is further to go in emphasizing the allure of enjoyment, even short-termist enjoyment ([Wilson 1951; Day, Papataxiarchis, and Stewart 1999](#)). Desires to partake in local binge economies of what Kimani called *raha* project status, but crucially, they also constitute experiences of what I have elsewhere called “dwelling in abundance”—feeling that money will never run out ([Lockwood 2020a](#)). As well as “fun,” *raha* implies a sense of peace and contentment afforded by the “big money” my interlocutors associated with land sales. With such wealth, one of my interlocutors explained, one could “get any lady he wants, eat and drink anything.” These rapid windfalls allowed men to avoid the slow and arduous journey of working toward “making it” (*kuomoka*) that would otherwise deny the achievement of such a life of consumption in any meaningful material sense.

In Kiambu, the trappings of *raha* varied, but they were characterized by the experience of new pleasures denied to those without money—from eating meat whenever one desired or trying to use one’s money to court younger women and begin new relationships. My interlocutors observed how the young lives of these patriarchs had never allowed for such possibilities. Their own had been ones of work. Foi, the twenty-six-year-old wife of Mwaura, whom he had married in 2022, explained to me how:

These guys were raised by strict parents and didn't get everything when they were little. Then, boom: married at a very young age. They didn't enjoy [life] when they were young, you know, dating and stuff young guys do at a certain age. So you would come to find them doing it now that they are older. Like, they want to try different women, and young too. And then they realize they are old, [with] no better jobs, and they want to make easy money to keep the women and enjoy food too. So they will only think of selling their land.

Her words evoke desires to escape the drudgery of work and to consume without concern. Indeed, for senior men like Kimani, work had done little to change their fortunes. Rather, it had frustrated them. Self-praise underscored his pride at having retained a life of land and labor in the unfavourable terms of an ailing rural economy. But it obscured vulnerability to the types of emergencies that could have forced him to quickly raise large amounts of money via land sale (Prince 2023). His unfinished stone house—little more than a concrete shell throughout my fieldwork—testified to his economic failure and an incapacity to develop his plot, constituting a source of shame for his son Mwaura.

Kimani's "failures," as Mwaura sometimes saw them, were underscored by the successes of neighborhood women who had rooted themselves in their family homesteads and found well-paying jobs in Nairobi that they used to build rental accommodations and become landlords. Mama Nyambura was one such woman. Unmarried and in her forties, she had inherited a plot of land from her father, a neighborhood notable who had passed away in 2018. In the wake of his death, she had begun constructing rental plots in the back garden of her house, fomenting a growing sense among Mwaura's family and others that they were "falling behind," while Mama Nyambura went "ahead" (*mberere*) of them in domestic prosperity. Such evidently middle-class construction projects became visible signifiers of social stratification in Ituura, marking the creation of generational wealth (Lockwood 2025). And while neighborhood residents like Mama Nyambura were constructing on their land, wealthier Nairobians were using much larger amounts of capital to build mansions among the homesteads.

In contrast to these successful figures, my interlocutors stressed how empty the appearances of abundance from land sale really were. Mwaura stridently criticized older men who sold land to drink Tusker at the local motel, sharing tables with businessmen who had earned their wealth properly, as he saw it, by finding "connections" in Nairobi and becoming entrepreneurs in farming and construction. For all the *raha* sales made possible in the short term, the mainstream consensus remained that they could never prove productive, since those who



Figure 3. Rental ‘plots’ under construction in Ituura. Photo by Peter Lockwood.

sold to binge ran into its material limits, becoming ruined by their own actions. As [Sophie Day, Evthymious Papataxiarchis, and Michael Stewart \(1999, 20–21\)](#) emphasize, living in the “transcendental present” has consequences. Mguu’s fate stands as a case in point.

The reader must therefore understand how, in 2022, Mwaura’s criticisms of “selfishness” and illegitimate “enjoyment” would turn on his own father. On my return to Ituura that year, with the COVID-19 pandemic having somewhat abated, I found out that Kimani had proved hardly immune to the “bad desires” to sell land. In 2022, he had convinced Mwaura and Njoki to give him permission to sell a piece of land for 3.5 million Kenyan shillings (\$27,000 USD). Kimani promised to share some of the proceeds with Mwaura, but ultimately pocketed them himself, having sold the land via a broker. “That money just disappeared,” Mwaura would tell me in 2024. “No one knows where that money went.” He had previously observed his father’s desires to be “on a level,” as he described it: his jealousy of other local families whom he saw as doing better than him. Now it appeared that Kimani was using sale money to live what his wages could not entail. In the aftermath of the sale, Mwaura’s wife Foi observed how Kimani now spent more money than ever before on consumption. “He could buy *nyama choma* [grilled goat meat], *kuku* [chicken] for us just to enjoy.” She remarked that he had “spent the money on *raha*,” and that he was even trying to court the nineteen-year-old house help of his daughter Njoki.

For Mwaura, the effects were devastating. The sale came in the wake of his mother's death the year before (Lockwood 2023), as well as the discovery that Kimani had a secret second wife, and another young son, "another Mwaura," as Mwaura put it.⁴ Mwaura began to doubt his status as an inheritor now that his father's attentions had turned elsewhere.

In December 2024, I returned to Ituura and visited Mwaura in what was now his own house, situated on his father's land. We ran into Kimani, looking exhausted, sitting on his *shamba* that he was still trying to sell. "He doesn't look good," Mwaura remarked to me privately. He wondered if it was the effect of the *kĩrumi*. Let down by his father, Mwaura no longer banked on his inheritance, and had begun a life as a transport driver, contemplating his landless future. "I just start from zero," he angrily told me.

CONCLUSION: Economies of Abandon

What drives Nairobi's rapid expansion is not simply the commodification of land, nor the destitution that forces land sale, but also a binge economy (Wilk 2014). While economic desperation forces land sale, and cash is reinvested in new livelihood opportunities, this article has shown how senior men—empowered by ownership of now-valuable land—alienate their land on the market to pursue lifestyles of consumption. Skyrocketing land values provide an opportunity to skip ahead and enjoy the *raha* (fun) otherwise denied these men due to a lack of liquidity. Consuming dead capital, of course, ensures its destruction—it cannot be made productive or be passed on to children. Behind the kinship politics lies a deeper, colonial-era process of land titling (Sorrenson 1967) that has empowered title deed-holding men to alienate land by personal fiat. Dispossession plays out not "out there" in the market, as it were, but within the relations of the family (Lockwood 2026). As such, land sales are experienced and understood in archly moral tones, as the consequence of selfishness. Mwaura's criticism suggested the morals he felt were "really" meant to govern patriarchal obligation.

These dynamics require a theory of changing moral principles at critical turning points when consumption as an orientation toward pleasure and the present override longer-term economic considerations, such as when senior men decide to cash out of patrilineal obligation by cashing in on their ancestral land. As I explained at the outset, Munn's exploration of how witches embody and pursue what are—from the mainstream view—destructive social principles, can inform such a theory of change based on consumption itself—if properly set in time and against the backdrop of a changing political economy. As Munn's theory of negative value transformations explains (1986, 227, 233), witches

consume the very possibility of social reproduction, destroying relationality by eating food otherwise meant for sharing. Crucially, it is not only that witches destroy value-producing goods in brute economic terms that is significant, but that they eat the *values* for which these goods stand: sharing, reproduction, creating the social future. This is a theory not only of value destruction, but of the destructive “eating” of those very moral principles that underpin the social organization of reproduction itself.

In Kiambu we are not dealing with “witches” per se, but people who are seen to turn their backs on the principles of dutiful reproduction for which they once stood. As [Joel Robbins \(2018\)](#) has argued, after [Caroline Humphrey \(1997\)](#), moral principles are not mere abstractions, but are embodied and enacted by people, visibly acting in ways that conform to them. But what happens when the economy no longer supports such principles, encouraging one to give up on them when other tempting options enter the picture? What happens when supposed exemplars begin to act against the grain of a hegemonic morality? In Kiambu, the exemplars we have seen invert the moral terms of their own exemplarity by converting durable land into fungible cash ([Elliott 2022](#)), already viewed as a mistake, and then consume the proceeds, and their children’s social future on the land. My suggestion, however, is that, when ancestral land is sold for consumption, not *only* does it constitute the “eating” of the very moral principles that are associated with land’s retention, but *also* that this “eating” tendency is gathering momentum as a way of thinking about *what value is* within the economy of Kiambu’s urban frontier, where liquidating assets provides an immediate, if somewhat flawed alternative to the toils of working for cash.

This constitutes a process of moral change characterized by exemplarity inverted, as the option of short-termism becomes ever more attractive in the context of post-agrarian destitution. Other Kiambu men, as we have seen, weigh up the possibilities of sale, inspired by the lives of sellers. As land prices rocket beyond wages ([Piketty 2014](#)), land’s use-value status as ancestral and inalienable loses ground to its exchange-value in the imaginations of its owners. If witches have a known pariah status, instances of once exemplary men selling-up ancestral land confound expectations, generating a shock-like effect on the moral economy of landholding and eroding confidence in its capacity to endure. Sales send a powerful signal that one economy—of patrilineal landholding—has ended, while another is emerging. Consumption, as an orientation toward the immediate, pushes its own case as the best way to live in an economy of dead capital and economic dead ends. The result is a one-way ratchet effect of self-dispossession driven by unmet aspirations for consumption.

The ethnographic episodes presented here proffer small installments in a wider story of regional change, as Kiambu becomes urban sprawl. But they are windows onto how acts of consumption—the enjoyment of wealth through its destruction—become logical options to those living lives of economic drudgery within a capitalism that recruits desire and promises luxury, encouraging debt-financed consumption (James 2015), other exit fantasies about escaping a life of labor, such as living off passive income (Davies 2025; Lockwood 2025, 2020b), or perhaps simply “lying flat” and “quiet quitting” work (Davidovic 2022). These desires take shape against the backdrop of a profound sense of futility regarding the future and are by no means particular to central Kenya. This problem speaks to a capitalism that places pressure on individual accumulation to a degree that even normative teleologies of middle-class accumulation appear impossible, shaping not only ideologies of endurance (H. Weiss 2022) but also economies of abandon. In a world where nothing feels permanent, it is logical that some might give up on the future and enjoy what little they have in the present (Day, Papataxiarchis, and Stewart 1999), even at the expense of their immediate dependents, as we have seen here.

Such “economies of abandon” evoke the writing of Elizabeth Povinelli (2011) on the “zones of abandonment” that define late liberalism. And along the lines she writes, Kiambu smallholders, too, have been abandoned by the forces of capitalism that hardly require their labor (Li 2010). But while Povinelli anticipates new potentialities for living that might emerge from such zones, the new ethics of abandon in Kiambu is by no means compatible with the moral economy of patrilineal landholding. If desire for something better has survived the exhaustions of post-agrarian life, it now undermines the genres of masculine endurance that might keep that moral economy in place. The solution to economic stress, proponents argue, is rather to turn inward and consume dead capital. On Nairobi’s urban frontier, these desires for consumption—denied Kiambu’s post-peasant poor—see the lineages rolled back and the sprawl draw closer, paving the way for new buyers and brokers putting up rental buildings on what was once someone’s ancestral land.

ABSTRACT

North of Nairobi, the city’s sprawl enters a landscape of impoverished smallholders, causing land prices to skyrocket. Kenya’s economic commentators urge these part-time proletarians to sell their land—deemed unproductive “dead capital”—as an antidote for rural poverty. Senior men from the region insist this ancestral land cannot be sold, because retaining it while working for wages constitutes the cornerstone of

masculine personhood. However, in a world of peri-urban destitution, where wages cannot provision desires for middle-class lifestyles, masculine principles of land retention are being abandoned for experiences of abandon. Male landowners alienate family land to fund lifestyles of conspicuous consumption, especially in alcohol. The consumption of dead capital to furnish desires of abandon suggests that Nairobi's urban expansion is made possible by such binge economies of land on its peri-urban peripheries. The conclusion proposes consumption as a theory of changing moral orientations to the short term when people encounter economic dead ends. [abandon; consumption; land sale; binge economy; urban frontier; kinship; Kenya]

MUHTASARI

Kaskazini mwa Nairobi, kuenea kwa jiji kunaingia kwenye maeneo ya wakulima wadogo maskini, jambo ambalo linasababisha bei ya ardhi kuongezeka kwa kasi. Watoa maoni wa uchumi nchini Kenya wanahimiza wafanyakazi hawa wa muda kuuzwa ardhi yao-inayochukuliwa kama "mtaji mfu" usiozalisha- kama suluhisho la umaskini wa vijijini. Wanaume wazee kutoka eneo hilo wanasisitiza kwamba ardhi hii ya urithi haiwezi kuuzwa, kwa sababu kuimiliki huku wakifanya kazi za mshahara ndicho jiwe la msingi la utambulisho wa kiume. Kando na hayo, katika ulimwengu wa umaskini wa pembezoni mwa miji, ambako mishahara haiwezi kukidhi mahitaji ya maisha ya tabaka la kati, misingi ya kiume ya kuhifadhi ardhi inaachwa na nafasi yake kuchukuliwa na maisha ya "raha". Wamiliki wa ardhi wa kiume wanaitenga ardhi ya familia ili kufadhili mitindo ya maisha ya anasa yanayoonekana wazi, hasa katika ulevi. Matumizi ya "mtaji mfu" ili kutimiza tamaa za kujiachia yanaonyesha kwamba upanuzi wa jiji la Nairobi unawezeshwa na uchumi wa kuachana na ardhi kwa njia ya kupindukia katika maeneo yake ya pembezoni. Hitimisho linapendekeza matumizi kama nadharia ya mabadiliko ya mwelekeo wa maadili kuelekea muda mfupi wakati ambao watu wanakumbana na magumu kupata njia za kiuchumi. [kujisahao; matumizi; uzaji wa ardhi; uchumi wa matumizi yakupindukia; pembezoni wa miji; ukoo]

NOTES

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1. The depreciating value of the Kenyan shilling relative to the US dollar after 2017 must also be noted.
2. Throughout the article, terms in Gĩkũyũ, the language spoken by Kikuyu, are underlined. Terms in Kiswahili, a lingua franca, are italicized.
3. These commitments are hardly specific to Kenya, nor Africa, and reflect global middle-class ideologies (H. Weiss 2019) premised on investment and distinction (see, e.g., Howe 1994; Willis 1977).
4. Kikuyu naming conventions have first-born children named after their grandfathers, regardless of the mother’s name.

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