Hustling for Rights: Political Engagements with Sand in Northern Kenya

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Hustling means, like... it's not only about money; you hustle even to get rights here in our area.

Young man from Laikipia North, May 2014

In the arid and semi-arid lands of Northern Kenya, young people are struggling to establish sustainable livelihood strategies in a context of prolonged and more frequent drought periods reducing pasture productivity, and a growing pressure on land due to new political and economic interests in the region (see, e.g., Fratkin 2013). Such altered livelihood strategies often constitute novel ways of relating to the environment, and sometimes catalyse altered forms of environmental agency. To people belonging to sedentary pastoralist communities in Laikipia North, one of the few possible livelihood options, apart from livestock rearing, is the harvesting and selling of sand from communally owned sand deposits in dry riverbeds. In this chapter I discuss how a group of young people trained as paralegals engage in negotiations regarding the management and use of sand. They call their way of operating 'hustling', signifying a political practice characterized by improvisation, drawing on eclectic forms of knowledge, doing things in a 'young' and 'urban' way, the bending of rules and the use of a multiplicity of tactics, the intertwinement of personal and communal interests and the constant negotiation of ambiguous positions of autonomy and dependency. Through an exploration of the empirical term 'hustling' and its use in relation to negotiations over sand management, I aim to shed light on young people's experiences and conceptualizations of their political agency with regard to the environment.

In Kenyan national discourse, young people's environmental agency and political participation is often phrased in negative terms. Young people in general are considered active participants in environmental degradation (e.g.,

Republic of Kenya 2007, 25), and young men from pastoralist communities in Northern Kenya are seen as initiators of environmental conflicts such as cattle raids and fights over pasture and water, and as actors who are easily manipulated into ethnic political violence.¹ Based on anthropological contributions to the study of the environment, politics and youth, I suggest a more nuanced way of exploring and understanding how young people engage politically with the environment and natural resources.

As a natural resource whose status and exploitation occupy the minds and time of a large group of young people in Laikipia North, sand provides an interesting window into young people's environmental agency. I approach sand with inspiration from newer anthropological contributions to the study of natural resources and materials which regard the properties of materials as processual and relational rather than "objectively determined" or "subjectively imagined" (Ingold 2011, 30; see also Richardson and Weszkalnys 2014). In Laikipia North, sand occupies an ambiguous position, sometimes dealt with as a natural resource or "commodified nature" (Richardson and Weszkalnys 2014, 10), sometimes as part of a wider natural and cultural landscape. This ambiguity releases a range of political negotiations of social relations touching upon gender, generation, community and state. My approach to politics is based on an anthropological tradition which focuses on politics "beyond the boundaries of the state" (Curtis and Spencer 2012, 173) and as situated in the practices of everyday life (see, e.g., de Certeau 1984; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991; Scott 2008). I approach everyday life politics from the viewpoint of phenomenologically inspired anthropology (e.g., Jackson 1996), thus attempting to capture how young people in a particular place and time period experience their political engagements. However, as suggested in Tsing's writings, local environmental struggles link up to trans-local and global ideas and practices (e.g., Tsing 2005, ix). With inspiration from Tsing's ideas on travelling knowledge, I suggest that the everyday life political practices of young people in Laikipia North involve drawing eclectically on global ideas and practices. Understanding how such ideas and practices are brought into use in relation to specific environmental issues requires attention to young people's contextual positioning. Contemporary African youth research points out that local understandings of a young person in Africa seldom refer to actual age, but to a person in a life stage where he or she possesses little or no power and authority, and is socially dependent on adults (see, e.g., Christiansen, Utas and Vigh 2006; de Boeck and Honwana 2005; Durham 2000; Vigh 2006). As opposed to, for instance, much policy discourse, which depicts young people as individuals with

1 Personal communication with various government officers and NGO representatives, see also Greiner 2013.

rights or problems, the approach of these studies highlights the relational and contextual aspects of youth agency as situated within social relations, fluctuating positions and wider societal processes related to, for example, the economy and politics. The ambiguity of these relational positions shapes young people's agency and social navigations towards adulthood (see Christiansen, Utas and Vigh 2006; Vigh 2006).

The theoretical perspectives discussed above draw attention to the processual, relational and contextual aspects of environmental materials, everyday life politics and youth agency. I will bring these perspectives together in an exploration of the empirical term 'hustling' and the way young people use it in relation to their political engagements with sand.² The concept of hustling has travelled from black American ghettos to African cities through hip hop culture (Di Nunzio 2012, 441), but the contact with a new context appears to have changed the meaning of the term slightly. In Kenya, hustling is used quite widely for non-formal livelihood strategies, not necessarily based on cheating, manipulation or other shady activities characterizing American ghetto-hustling (e.g., Venkatesh 2002; Wacquant 1998). Hustling as economic practice is a manifest concept in Kenyan popular culture. For instance, a well-known Kenyan musician, Royweed Di Xtasy, sings about hustling, and even William Ruto, the current vice president, described himself as a hustler during the 2013 election campaign. The practice of hustling as an economic strategy has been explored in recent studies of the economic navigations of urban youth in Africa (e.g., Di Nunzio 2012; Munive 2010; Thieme 2013). According to Thieme, among self-employed entrepreneurs within the informal waste management sector in the Nairobi slums, hustling signifies short-term or "last resort" survival mechanisms, as well as more long-term livelihood strategies. However, Thieme also notes that hustling is related to the contestations of different structures of authority, including generational (Thieme 2013, 390).

My empirical material from Laikipia North suggests that in Kenya the concept of hustling has travelled from urban areas and city culture into the small town centres in rural areas and out of the economic realm. Young people in Laikipia North have adopted the term hustling so as to be able to express, first and foremost, the experience of becoming something other than a herder: someone who has to survive without livestock or formal employment through improvisation, navigating obstacles and making the most of any available opportunities for gaining a bit of income (Jørgensen 2015; see

2 Young people usually make use of the English word hustling, even when speaking Swahili, but in these situations conjugating the verb according to the Swahili language structure (e.g. *tunahustle* – we are hustling).

also Thieme 2013, 391). Still, for the young people discussed in this chapter, it also makes sense to use the term to refer to a way of moving and operating which is conceptualized as political more than economical. I suggest that this idea of political hustling illuminates central aspects of young people's political engagements with the environment.

The analysis presented here is based on empirical material gathered during six months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2012 and 2014 in the Kenyan Laikipia North sub-county. Discussion draws in particular on interviews with young people who have participated in paralegal NGO training (see further description below), and observations of their actions in community activities. Additional sources include interviews with NGO representatives and government officials, policy documents, media clippings and discussions on social media. In the following sections, I first provide a brief contextual background of young people's involvement in sand mining in Laikipia North. Subsequently, I unpack hustling as political practice by exploring what kinds of social and environmental arrangements young people address and hope to change when they hustle for their rights, and what characterizes the way they do this. Lastly, I propose that attention to hustling illuminates how locally situated political engagements with the environment draw on various trans-local ideas and practices.

Sand and Youth in Laikipia North

In Laikipia North, due to the special history of colonial land expropriation, and to complex and competing contemporary land usages, livelihood transitions are more advanced than in other parts of the northern Kenyan region (Letai and Lind 2013). Increasing demand for sand (a main component in concrete, filler and in the foundation of roads) in the Kenyan construction industry has made the sale of the resource quite a lucrative business, and in 2014 local observers suggested that at least 1,000 tons of sand were ferried out of Laikipia North every day to city centres in the vicinity.³ Sand is harvested in permanently or temporarily dry riverbeds situated on group ranch land.⁴ The hard work of

3 Personal communication with various government officials and people in Laikipia North with knowledge of the sand trade (May 2014).

4 Group ranches were introduced in Kenya as part of the post-independence land adjudication process with the Land (Group representative) Act in 1968. The group ranch system enables a group of people to hold the title of a piece of land.

loading the sand onto big old lorries is carried out by young men organized in groups. Some young people engage with sand as brokers, mediating between people with sand deposits on their private land and sand buyers, while others are involved in discussions and negotiations regarding how the sand exploitation is managed on communal land and the profit distributed. According to community agreements and guidelines from the National Environment Management Authority (National Environment Management Authority 2007), the funds generated by sand should primarily be used for local “development projects”, and in particular to pay school fees for secondary school students. Nevertheless, according to many, the trade is marred by corruption at all levels.

The status of sand in Laikipia North is ambiguous and indefinite. Some of my interlocutors, in particular elders, argued that sand is part of the land (*enkop* in Maa), and that selling it is against tradition and destroys pastures, thereby threatening pastoral livelihoods. This view in some cases led to the perception (shared by both old and young) that the sale of sand was cursed, and that the business therefore affected community relations and individual lives negatively. Others, and in particular young people with school education, talked about sand as a resource and likened it to gold or cash crops. As a resource, sand offered them a way to earn their daily bread and the community possibilities for supporting education as well as connecting with other, more ‘developed’ parts of Kenya, but its exploitation also resulted in environmental problems such as erosion and reduced availability of water in the area. Sand has only relatively recently been recognized as a resource in this area, and its ownership and user rights are therefore more uncertain than, for instance, in the case of pasture and livestock (although access to these resources may also be disputed). The contested nature and ambiguous status of sand positions it in the centre of a variety of social negotiations about influence, access to resources and visions of the future.

The young people I observed engaging in such negotiations were primarily secondary school graduates, some with further education, who had received paralegal training from NGOs. According to my informants, the first paralegal training in Laikipia North was offered by the local NGO Osiligi in the 1990s but has since been carried out by a number of different organizations. Among other topics, the paralegal training programmes introduce young people to human rights (in particular the rights of women and children), the content of the new Kenyan constitution (Government of Kenya 2010), and advocacy and conflict management methods. The young men and women trained as paralegals used the training in many different ways during the course of their everyday lives: discussing and reporting abuses of children’s rights, sharing their knowledge

with other people in informal ways, negotiating their positions within the family or community or when taking part in community meetings. While some of the young paralegals I met during fieldwork had short-term employment contracts with NGOs, most of them did not have long-term jobs. When talking about their livelihoods, they said they were hustling: “running up and down”, earning a little cash here and there. Often rushing up and down the main street in Dol Dol on their way to some kind of meeting or workshop, the paralegals stood out from those of their age mates without school education. The Western clothes and plastic sandals of male paralegals thus constituted a quite marked difference to the clothing of the *moran*, the young men (or ‘warriors’) herding cattle who wore the characteristic red blankets (*shuka*) and beadwork. Female paralegals also wore Western clothes, sometimes with the addition of a decorative kanga (a cotton cloth with printed proverbs and designs worn by women in East Africa), and had their hair done – *relaxed* (straightened), extended, braided, but seldom just close-cropped like many other women in the area. These clothing practices illustrate that the paralegals considered themselves different, more ‘modern’, than people in the community without secondary schooling. Still, they did not see this modern status as being in opposition to the ‘Maasai culture’ in which they took pride.

While many other young people in the community gained their daily bread from the sand, the paralegals were mainly involved in negotiations regarding the management of the resource and the profit generated by selling it, primarily seeing their role as making sure that things were done in the ‘right’ way. As one of them told me: “When the paralegals come in, there is development. They are the right defenders. Where there is no transparency, they will shift in.” The actions of the paralegals often sought to bring about some kind of social change or to negotiate social relations evolving around the practice of extracting and selling sand. This could be in relation to gendered and generational community hierarchies, intra-community power relations or the practices of state representatives. Several of the paralegals referred to these political activities as ‘hustling’, or “hustling for your rights”, as one of them put it. In the following I will explore three forms of political hustling in the context of sand harvesting.

Hustling for Voice in Gendered and Generational Hierarchies

We have a problem with the group ranch management, because of these *wazee* [elders]. He [the chairman] is 89 years; it’s a man from

independence.⁵ They have overstayed... Now it's digital!⁶ There is a generational war. ... This generational war is between the youth and the *wazee* Their [the elders'] understanding is local. If you compare their thinking capacity with ours, it is now different. The way it was the previous years, now everything has changed, mentally, the environment ... So they must accept, *ni vijana tu* [it is just the youth]. But they don't want [to]. You cannot talk with them, they will say "you lack respect, I will curse you". If you are with the youth, you can say that they are taking us backwards, but with the *wazee* you can't because it is like your father, even your grandfather. The gap is very wide.

Paralegal from Laikipia North, 8/5/2014

In generational negotiations, sometimes described as the 'generational war' as in the quote above, sand was often at the centre of the debate. In Ntim group ranch,⁷ the group ranch chairman had been in the seat for many years, and most young people who had gone to school blamed him and the other elders on the group ranch committee for a lack of understanding of contemporary conditions and for holding back development. In informal discussions without the presence of elders, the paralegals criticized the old men for not being able to manage the resources generated from the sale of sand effectively, and challenged the idea that the exploitation of sand was cursed. Sand should be seen as a natural resource, these young people insisted in such discussions, referring to school knowledge about resources and wealth creation (taught in social studies in primary school and geography in secondary school, see Jørgensen 2016), stressing that the benefits of the resource should be distributed 'fairly' within the community. Young female paralegals disputed the fact that decision-making on sand management was a male domain as sand harvesting provided money for children's education (a key concern of women) and had an impact on the availability of water in the dry season and thereby on the workload of women. "We were trained as women to know our rights," a young female paralegal said, relating how the paralegals had pushed to get a woman onto the sand management committee.

5 That is, belonging to the generation which accessed new positions of power after the Kenyan independence in 1962.

6 In his election campaign in 2013, President Uhuru Kenyatta promoted himself as the choice of the "digital generation".

7 The name of the group ranch is a pseudonym.

I suggest that the ambiguous status of sand harvesting – as a widely coveted source of cash with uncertain ownership and user rights, and as a new livelihood practice pointing towards future wealth and development as well as towards cultural and environmental decay – opened up negotiations of social structure and cultural values based on generational and gendered hierarchies. School education came to play an important role in these negotiations. As is well documented in the regional anthropology of East Africa, generational hierarchies have been a central feature in the social structure among pastoralists in East Africa, including Maa-speakers in Northern Kenya, placing young men, and young women to an even greater degree, in structurally marginal positions within social, economic and political hierarchies (see, e.g., Spencer 1965). The actual political role of young people in different historical periods, as well as the inherent patriarchal ideology of the social system, has, however, been a matter of some debate (see, e.g., Hodgson 2000; Hughes 2006). Burgess, arguing for the need to historicize the study of youth (Burgess 2005, xiii), highlights how generational relations are “subject to revision and adaption according to changing political and economic conditions” (Burgess 2005, xi). My empirical material indicates that in Laikipia North today, while most power holders are still male elders, increasing education levels (encouraged by a strong global and national interest in Education for All), development activities, better access to media and changing government policies on youth⁸ have all contributed to giving young people opportunities to challenge generational and gendered hierarchies. In particular, school education has served as an important asset for young men and, to a lesser degree, young women in gaining a stronger position in decision-making processes at the community level. Young men and women with schooling are thus increasingly allowed to share their opinions in public meetings and become involved in informal political discussions about decision making and power structures in the community. Still, this kind of political participation demands that the young people strike a balance

8 Following the national elections in 2002, when the NARC government came into power, and the 2008 post-election violence, youth have become increasingly important in political discourse. A Ministry of Youth Affairs (later Youth Affairs and Sports) was inaugurated in 2005, initiating several new youth programmes focused in particular on employment creation, and in 2007 a National Youth Policy was launched. In their campaign for presidential power in 2012 Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto presented themselves as “youthful leaders” able to understand the problems of Kenyan youth and representing the “digital generation”. Setting up a new government, Kenyatta incorporated youth affairs in the docket of the Ministry of Planning and Devolution, making youth affairs part of the Office of the President and introducing several new youth initiatives (personal communication with officers in the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports in 2012, and the Department of Youth Affairs in 2014).

between using the knowledge gained from their schooling and demonstrating a respect for their community's cultural values. As such, in their attempts to ensure that the benefits of sand were distributed fairly within the community, the paralegals referred to ideas based on national law, human rights or school knowledge, while also emphasizing their knowledge of certain community values and practices, and making use of embodied registers of showing generational and gendered respect related to, for example, language use and gestures.

Hustling for a voice in generational and gendered hierarchies was thus a political practice which attempted to install a new kind of authority without openly challenging the elder generation and which required the young people to be constantly alert and on the look-out for opportunities and openings. When young paralegals said they 'hustled' to be heard in community affairs such as sand management, the implication was that, rather than assuming prescribed generational and gendered positions, they took their cue from the dynamic ways of operating of young Kenyans in the big cities. This celebration of doing things in a young and urban way, made possible by their positions as 'learned' youth, drew on a relatively new national attention to youth as manifested in Laikipia North through, for instance, the activities of the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, NGO attention to youth participation and popular culture. As such, travelling ideas and practices were brought into generational and gendered disagreements about sand. In other situations, however, the conflict lines emanating from the sand lay elsewhere, dividing neighbouring communities.

Hustling for the Rights of the Marginalized

Today we are basing our arguments on the constitution. So, we don't just say rights for the sake of saying that, but [because] it is articulated in the constitution. Secondly, we also want to [know], if selling the sand is not a right [for our community], why is it a right to the others? Why is it that when [Ntim] is harvesting [sand], it [the riverbed] is becoming a water catchment area? ... [The sand] is a communal resource. Every member of the community has the right to use that resource; people cannot be denied to use a community resource. So, when we talk of our rights, we basically base them on our constitution. When we talk about the environment, the constitution says in article 56, it talks about minority rights, hunters and gatherers have the right to live on their ancestral lands. And the Yaaku ancestral land is this forest [the Mukogodo Forest]; it's their home.

Paralegal from Laikipia North, 3/5/2014

The majority of the population of Laikipia North describe themselves as Maasai belonging to one of five sub-sections with different ethnic histories (see Herren 1988). In the Mukogodo sub-section, many people are descended from the Yaaku, a former hunter-gatherer and bee-keeping community living in and around the Mukogodo Forest which, in the first part of the 20th century, shifted to a Maasai identity and was included in the Maasai group (Cronk 2002). While recent decades have seen a revival of Yaaku identity (see Carrier 2011), the community occupies a low-status position in the area and is considered by its own members, as well as others, to be lagging behind in terms of development due to historical and contemporary low levels of formal education, ethnic history and the limited resources available for generating funds on group ranch land. The five Maasai subsections in the area inhabit 13 group ranches, and large scale sand harvesting is carried out on four of them. In 1979 these four group ranches founded a cooperative society (Loata Sand Dealers Cooperative Society) which regulates the extraction of sand through a rotation system which is supposed to ensure that the resource is not over-exploited. At the time of my fieldwork, there were no easily accessible bigger sand deposits in the group ranches inhabited by the Mukogodo community, and the cooperative society had denied membership to the Ntim group ranch. However, the group ranch committee had been allowed to cooperate with a few buyers to sell sand from a deposit owned by the county council. Some members of the group ranch maintained that they should also be permitted to harvest sand from the river which, they argued, formed the boundary between their group ranch and the neighbouring ranch. As the exact position of this boundary was contested, some paralegals (as well as other community members) claimed that their community was being discriminated against. They explained that when people from their community tried to harvest sand from the river bed, government officers who had been bribed by the neighbouring community would order them to stop, arguing that the river is a water catchment area and that sand harvesting is not allowed in that particular area. The paralegals in Ntim, in cooperation with the group ranch committee, addressed this problem by holding meetings, sending letters and negotiating with government officials. When negotiating access to sand and relations to the neighbouring communities, the paralegals thus toned down the generational war and instead switched to talking about the disadvantaged, 'historically marginalized' position of their community. They brought in the constitution, in this context referring to Chapter 4, the Bill of Rights, and in particular article 56 about the rights of minorities and marginalized communities, and to Chapter 5 about land and environment (Government of Kenya 2010).

Young people had particularly encountered globally travelling ideas (see Tsing 2005) about the environmental rights of marginalized, indigenous

communities in the paralegal training sessions. When indigenous communities all over the globe started mobilizing in struggles against historical injustices in the late 20th century, Maasai activists from Kenya and Tanzania were among the first African groups to join (see, e.g., Hodgson 2009). In Laikipia a key actor was the local NGO Osiligi (Organization for the Survival of Il-Laikipiak Indigenous Group Initiative), which became well-known all over Kenya in the 2000s in connection with its campaign for Maasai land rights, with the organization receiving praise in Laikipia North for introducing paralegalism to the area. Although Osiligi was disbanded by the Kenyan government (see, e.g., Kantai 2007), in the wake of its struggle several other local organizations emerged and continued the paralegal training programmes, including organizations focusing on Yaaku culture and rights. With the new constitution, the attention to minorities and marginalized groups has been further inscribed in the national legal framework, offering new 'tools' for this political struggle. The political ambition of the organizations working with paralegalism was articulated as securing the rights to land and indigenous culture, and the use of this articulation in relation to sand has made sand harvesting a question of land and belonging. However, to the paralegals in Ntim the language of the constitution and the globally travelling idea of rights also offered ways of talking about everyday life conflicts with people from neighbouring communities, and possibilities for exploring individual political ambitions.⁹ Their description of their political negotiations as 'hustling' rather than, for instance, 'advocacy' conveyed the mundane character of the political practice, and in particular the way in which community political interests were entwined with individual interest. Hustling for the rights of the marginalized in the context of sand was thus a way of emphasizing community belonging as well as exploring individual interests by drawing on the global rhetoric of indigenous rights. Furthermore, the question of rights was central to negotiations with the state.

Hustling the Law

At least you use all means and methods to get your rights. Because to confuse all those government leaders, and they have power, they can arrest you for making even... for confusing them you use a lot of methods. You shout, make noise, go with the number, you shout, *bwana* [man], you

9 The new prospects for political representation of marginalized communities potentially open up new political positions.

sing, write posters, you call the press; that is hustling. We hustle the law, we bring the press.

Paralegal from Laikipia North, 3/5/2014

In the minds of most of the young people from Laikipia North with whom I interacted during my fieldwork, their area was primarily a peripheral place with few opportunities for employment, 'development' or political influence, disadvantaged in terms of climate and natural resources and forgotten by both national and regional power holders – not part of the 'real' Kenya. The Kenyan state was mostly talked about as a negative force which had failed to secure their land, overlooked their development needs, and only entered their lives from time to time: for instance to clamp down on cattle raids.¹⁰ Pastoral communities on the Greater Horn of Africa have often been described as 'borderlands' or 'margins' in which the populations practice "the art of not being governed" (see Scott 2009) by repelling "incorporation, avoiding taxation, resisting external imposition, and maintaining an apparently war-like stance in relation to state efforts" (Catley, Lind and Scoones 2013, 12). The picture in Laikipia North, however, appears more messy. While many people pronounced their community to be in constant political opposition to the government, the young paralegals also aspired to closer incorporation into the Kenyan state and its development schemes. Their practices of challenging the role and corruption of government officers in the sand trade bring to light ambiguous relations to the state.

While state and community perspectives on the value of livestock and pastoralism have often been at odds in Kenya, the political negotiations between paralegals and government officers regarding sand were based on something of a consensus about the value of the material, which was seen by both parties in monetary terms. The political question was thus not the status of the sand but the distribution of benefits, and the paralegals described their negotiations as aiming to secure their rights to 'development' and 'citizenship'. Sometimes the paralegals attacked government officials openly by engaging in somewhat confrontational activities, as described in the quote above; that is, by organizing demonstrations and calling the press. One example was a demonstration in 2013 which (among other things) accused the state administration, and in particular the police, of being involved in corruption in relation to the sand trade.¹¹ In other cases political activities were more peaceful, focusing on

10 Cattle raids have a long history in the pastoral societies of northern Kenya. See, e.g., Greiner 2013 for a discussion of the contemporary role of cattle raids in the region.

11 I did not personally witness this event, but was told about it in interviews conducted in 2014.

negotiations, such as when the paralegals in Ntim had approached and pressurized the District Commissioner to ensure that civil servants at lower levels kept their hands out of the sand business. “We pressured him by the powers granted by the new constitution. I thank God now we have the new constitution in place,” a paralegal told me, referring (indirectly) to Chapter 13 in the 2010 Constitution of Kenya (Government of Kenya 2010) about the values and principles of public service. In this way they framed their political negotiations within the structures of the state rather than attacking it from outside. In addition to the constitution the paralegals also made use of technology, proudly describing themselves as part of the “digital generation” as proclaimed by President Kenyatta (see note 6). In community meetings, often organized by the local chief (a government official, but from the local community), they usually brought along cameras and tape recorders. As one of them explained: “When I attend the chief’s *baraza* [meeting], they see a problem, because they cannot do things in the way they are doing. Me, I do things transparently, because I take the minutes, I even tape the sounds and everything.” In situations like these, technologies were primarily employed as representations of ‘transparency’ and doing things ‘straight’ or ‘in the right way’, with the secondary function of producing documentation.

Attempting to challenge the corruption of government officers, the paralegals drew, eclectically and situationally, on their knowledge of the new constitution, advocacy methods such as demonstrations and media liaison, and the workings of digital technologies. While making use of state ‘vocabulary’, they were reformulating or reframing ideas, practices or technologies to suit their own purpose. The reason that this way of operating was conceived of as hustling was its use of “all means and methods”: a way of improvising which corresponds to hustling in the economic realm. Hustling for a livelihood means bending rules and using multiple techniques for earning the daily bread, and hustling as political practice shares these characteristics. A tactician in de Certeau’s sense (1984, xvii), a hustler is not in control of the situation, but is still able to act and push things in certain directions, exploiting openings and possibilities. This means that hustling involves constantly negotiating positions of autonomy and dependence – of belonging to and standing out from the community, and of being in opposition to and integrated within the state.

Hustling as Political Agency

In this chapter I have suggested that the rise in the exploitation of a natural resource, sand, has played an important role in opening a new political space

for young people with school education and experiences of NGO training. My exploration of young people's talk about hustling in the context of their involvement in negotiations of sand management indicates that the term is used as a metaphor, designating political practices which challenge authority and contest different kinds of social arrangements, such as gendered and generational hierarchies, community relations and state power. The negotiation of such power hierarchies is an improvisational political practice, requiring one to be constantly alert and on the lookout for opportunities and openings created by the situation of social change in the community. Hustling suggests a way of operating politically characterized by drawing impromptu on eclectic forms of knowledge, doing things in a 'young' and 'urban' way, the bending of rules and the use of a multiplicity of tactics, and the intertwining of personal and communal interests. Hustling is not a political practice of youth rebelling against conservative social structures; rather it is the political navigations of youth in times of change and uncertainty (see Vigh 2006) involving young people who, paradoxically perhaps, target short-term social change in order to obtain a more stable and settled position in the future. Sand inspires political hustling because the social rules regulating its management are less settled within the community than the regulations regarding, for instance, the use of pasture and the management of livestock. Furthermore, the sale of sand creates connections to distant places, necessitating negotiations with outsiders in which young people with language skills and the knowledge of national conditions obtained through schooling are able to become mediators.

Using the empirical term 'hustling' as a window onto young people's everyday political engagements with the environment provides insights into how political engagement is experienced as experimenting with different means in an improvisatory manner, or moving in "uncertain circumstances" (Vigh 2009: 419), but also points to the ways in which political practice links to economic interests in terms of access to material resources. Operating politically in this way implies situational and improvisatory negotiations of established assumptions about the status of environmental materials and the nature of relations between people and the environment, enabled, in particular, by drawing on globally travelling knowledge. Thus, in Laikipia North, the paralegals introduced school ideas about natural resources and global practices of youth participation when negotiating old men's claims to the proceeds from the sale of sand. They referred to global concepts concerning the rights of marginalized communities when challenging community boundaries, and they made use of ideas in the Kenyan constitution and technological practices when challenging the corruption of government officers. As such, while acknowledging the structural constraints on young people's political agency, a focus on hustling draws

attention to the ways in which knowledge travelling in global connections (Tsing 2005) is put to use by locally situated youth in creative political action.

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