

Part I

Conclusion: Technocapitalism – An Affective Economy of Promises and Performances

The Part I chapters show that the innovation imperatives *Do! Make! Innovate!* could be extended by adding *Tell!* I analyzed daily practices at innovative workplaces that, while at first glance did not seem to be a part of an innovation process, are, in fact, essential to it, namely public relation practices. Hence, I showed why “stories matter” (Cameron 2012: 586) by delving into the storytelling practices of guiding visitors through technology development workplaces, writing stories for newsletters and social media, and the marketing of technology made in Kenya. Stories matter because they serve as a tool to acquire funding, gain accountability, and present one’s work to the global tech community, and, as such, their telling is an equally important daily life practice as innovating itself. Stories matter because, by working at an innovative workplace in Nairobi, one has to produce stories that show, contrary to widespread assumptions, that places situated ‘outside’ of Silicon Valley also have success stories to tell and role models to exhibit. Further, stories matter because they performatively materialize beliefs in societal progress through technoscience, reproduce colonial expectations of a place in Africa, and affectively build empowering and caring collectivities.

I argue that technocapitalism is an affective *economy of promises and performances* about technologies and positionalities yet to become. It valorizes anticipating promises about technological futures, so that Kenya’s tech actors need to tell promissory stories in order to build alliances with as many (influential and affluent) stakeholders as possible. As shown in the previous chapters, merely promising technoscientific progress is not enough for Kenyan technology developers to gain global accountability and convince investors. The doubts about the adequacy of technology from a postcolonial context seem almost in-

superable. Places, bodies, and machines that hold a peripheral status in Western dominated technocapitalism additionally have to perform their work in a tangible and bodily perceivable way according to the audiences' expectations.

These differing requirements hint at a racial bias in investment: tech developers and startups in Kenya do not benefit equally from the high investment in the country's tech scene. Instead, startups with white expat founders or CEOs receive the most money in Nairobi (Disrupt Africa 2021: 20). In this vein, race was a continuous topic in the conversations with my research partners: for example, when they used whiteness to explain why certain sentences, motives, and actions of a person were perceived as awkward or when scrutinizing manifold white privileges. In that context, I was even asked if I would become a fake CEO (I did not), so that a startup could use my whiteness to gain international investors (Research Diary, April 24, 2017).

As storytelling is embedded in the neoliberal (and racist) making of technology, I have argued that it is an ambiguous practice. Narrative work is, on the one hand, a tool for empowerment. As such, communities of tech developers create international attention in order to scrutinize the colonial stereotypes still lingering in imaginations of African contexts and to overall re-script Kenya's positionality. In this vein, the guiding of visitors is used to make technology development tangible and shareable, the writing of media stories serves to empower Kenyans to become technology developers, and the technologies 'Made in Africa, for Africa' care for local communities by solving their context-specific challenges. Nevertheless, tech developers also have to tell stories to gain investment for their technological ideas and startups. In this regard, visitor tours transform media stories and imaginations about Kenyan tech into touristic performances through which affluent visitors should be convinced to invest. Media stories repeat the same innovation story to hide daily life deviations from global technoscientific norms, and the 'Made in Africa, for Africa' marketing reproduces the investors' essentializing and exoticizing imaginations of African contexts by performing poverty.

In depicting the effects and affects of storytelling practices prevalent in Nairobi's tech scene, I show that storytelling is emotionally strenuous work. The guiding of visitors, writing of media stories, and marketing of technologies are all shaped by postcolonial (capitalist) power asymmetries and, as such, these practices are affective negotiations over representations and positionalities. These negotiations include the possibilities to shift the "meanings, presentation, effects, and affects of race" (Faria and Mollett 2016: 81), but also the stabilization of race "through mundane, naturalized, and everyday language

and performance” (ibid.). The Part I chapters show that these negotiations take place in the invisible background of public relations work and involve weighing up the tech developers’ own visions and daily life circumstances against hegemonic norms of technoscientific progress and global coloniality. These norms set the high expectations for stories from Nairobi’s tech scene: they should be quick to read, easy to understand, and center on a hero who innovated a technology that has social impact by solving a context-specific problem of the poor. In general, the performative work of storytelling creates and contests norms of how to be innovative and what – and what not – to build, while at the same time stressfully searching and caring for ‘suitable’ story content, feeling objectified by (white) visitors, and being frustrated by the realization that the tech developers’ business goals are considered to be less important than those of the funders.

Overall, these chapters have shown the difficulty of storytelling amidst racial capitalism (Robinson 1983/2021). Thus, there is no easy answer to the question of whether the storytelling practices in Nairobi’s tech scene resemble decolonial endeavors or capitalist market logics. Will technology development in Kenya lead to epistemological and economical independence from the Global North and a change of the country’s peripheral positionality? Alternatively, are the storytelling practices simply tools to market Kenya’s tech development sector and integrate it into global technocapitalism? I claim that the current paradigm of technology entrepreneurship in Kenya is a perfect illustration of the entanglement of market logics with political endeavors in which emancipatory moments often succumb to capitalist requirements.

However, I have also encountered storytelling strategies in Nairobi that deliberately do not fulfill technoscientific storytelling norms or exoticizing narrations. One of these narrative strategies is to write stories for people living and working in the same context as the story is set in. In this vein, one technology journalist interviewed said that he had decided to “just tell stories to each other” (Interview, April 2017) by not writing “for the international audience, but someone who lives in Nairobi” (ibid.). He explained his target audience further:

They could be of any nationality, but they understand what is happening here. So, it’s more of a localized thing. So, they understand what’s happening here. If I’m doing that, there is no way, there is no freaking way, I’d sit down and [use the] phrase ‘There are more mobile phones in Africa than toilets’. (ibid.)

To challenge the discriminating stereotypes in stories about Kenya's tech scene, this interviewee tries to circumvent the alleged need to use colonial stereotypes so that people are able to imagine Nairobi's tech scene. His decolonial endeavor wants to "build Kenyans' own confidence" (ibid.) without constantly referring to Western imaginations to tell stories. As such, the narrative work to build communities around technological visions seems to be the antithesis of the colonial project of establishing dichotomies. In the case of Nairobi, storytelling establishes a community that takes "locality, specificity, and plurality not as a problem to be compiled away but as a consideration to be celebrated and retained" (Dourish and Mainwaring 2012: 137). Telling stories that are embedded in daily life and not in imaginations is also what the scholars Marlen de la Chaux and Angela Okune (2017: 286) advise Kenyan technology developers to do: they (the Kenyan technology developers) should more explicitly articulate "the specificities and visions associated with technology entrepreneurship [in Kenya, so that] nonlocal actors [are able] to root their expectations and perspectives in local realities rather than in unexamined hopes and expectations".

Some of the internationally well-known actors in Nairobi's tech scene are already resisting the expected story. Serial founder Juliana Rotich, for example, told me that she was eager to explain to the female representatives of the *Women20 Summit 2017*, who included amongst others, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Christine Lagarde of the International Monetary Fund, and Anne Finucane of the Bank of America:

that there are now second and third generation services built on top of M-Pesa. ... The point is, it's 2017 and we've seen a lot of progress and now the narrative needs to incorporate these second generation and third generation services. That's why I talk about them, I don't talk necessarily too much about BRCK and Ushahidi. Instead, I try to push the new generation of young entrepreneurs. That's a tougher story for the media to eat up. (Interview, April 2017)

Rotich uses her success and visibility to support Kenya's tech community by speaking about less visible startups. This example shows that power asymmetries do not only exist between well-travelled investors from the Global North and local technology developers, but also between the storytellers of Nairobi's tech scene. Only specific voices, such as those of successful and well-known companies and individuals with social and financial security, are able to do narrative work that fights against discriminating clichés. The majority

of storytellers who are responsible for performing Kenya's tech scene must tell a scripted story which follows the technoscientific and colonial norms, as they lack the agency to contest them, while waiting and hoping for shared knowledge and investment.

Instead of putting the onus on Kenyan technology developers to resist and fight hegemony, actors in the Global North, too, should work to change post-colonial power asymmetries. As such, development practitioners should scrutinize their taken-for-granted assumptions about development interventions and think about the fruitfulness of including “indigenous and collective ways of knowing and living” in innovation processes (Schwittay 2014: 43), while, in regard to private investments, Zenia Kish and Madeleine Fairbairn (2018: 584) demand that “new discursive spaces of dissensus and political levers for contestation must be opened up to hold the ... investors accountable to the populations impacted by their work”.

