

## THE INSTITUTE OF AFRICAN STUDIES PRESENTS

### **“The Story of a Pump: Life, Death and Afterlives within an Urban Planning of 'Divide and Rule' in Nairobi, Kenya”**



WITH  
**Wangui Kimari**  
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**York University**

**Wednesday, November 2, 1:00- 2:30 pm**  
**433 Paterson Hall, Carleton University\***

**Wangui Kimari** is a final year PhD candidate in the Department of Anthropology at York University. Her larger project historicizes urban planning in Nairobi from the vantage point of ‘slum’ residents and this work draws attention to the connections between formal urban spatial management and police violence in the city.

**Abstract:** Through a narrative that connects the rhizomatic trajectories of Nairobi, I show how the continuities of an imperial urban spatial management become territorialised in a pump used in a ‘slum’ called Mathare. These events highlight the assembling of empire through ideas about politics, ecology, economics and culture that come together to produce the city in the *longue durée*. Notwithstanding the persistence of a ‘divide and rule’ spatial management, I show here how residents of slums make incremental changes in their abandoned spaces and through events that connect life and death, but also render afterlives of tragic possibility. In choosing to dwell in these marginal and minor stories, this work also interrogates the mainstream marketing of Nairobi as a hyper-modern ‘world-class’ city ruptured from a colonial past. Rather, I argue that the colonial city persists and principally in poor urban settlements—its ruins. The most visible imperial novelty, however, is that the police are used more frequently to enforce city divisions and in ways that see them become both urban managers and infrastructure. Notwithstanding the persistence of empire, I also call attention to the important and imperfect work of slum residents, which, I argue, potentiates other possibilities for Nairobi.

**This is part of the African Studies Brownbag Seminar Series**  
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