



Get on a Boat! A Photographic View from Lake Naivasha

by Gerda Kuiper

Over the course of the past century, Lake Naivasha in Kenya has attracted diverse groups of people. These groups include pastoralists with their herds, European settlers during colonial times; large-scale flower and vegetable farmers in more recent years, and thousands of jobseekers from other parts of Kenya who followed in the wake of these firms; domestic as well as foreign tourists, and researchers. Much could be said about water as a contested resource in this dense environment. However, here I would like to draw attention to a very pragmatic, methodological advantage of the presence of watery environments in a field site.

In February 2014, I arrived in Naivasha to conduct research within flower farms and in workers' settlements around the lake. After a few weeks, I got on a boat and took a ride on the lake – an activity which is also popular with tourists. This resulted not only in pretty pictures but also provided complimentary perspectives on what was going on around the shores of the lake: from the water, one has an unrestricted view of many of the premises. These are often fenced off from one another and are barely visible from the public road. A view from the road therefore gives the impression that there is little interaction between the different groups of residents of Naivasha. However, pictures that I took during this boat ride show the proximity and convergence of different economic activities and lifestyles around the lake. 'Sightseeing' from the water thus proved to be a fruitful method during the explorative phase of my fieldwork.



A tourist camp with boat operators.



On the hill in the background lies Kamere, one of the privately developed settlements where migrant workers of flower farms find rental houses.



A flower farm water pump.



The abandoned house of the former owner of a flower farm that got into financial trouble. The house was constructed at a time when lake levels were lower.



A group of hippos floating in front of greenhouses where flowers are grown.



Naivasha is a favourite destination of birdwatchers.



Mount Longonot is another major tourist attraction.
The lakeshores in front of it are dominated by greenhouses.