Matatu Afterlives

What happens after life in the matatu workforce?
Meghan Ference is a researcher of matatu workers in Nairobi.

Her writing has appeared in peer-reviewed journals in Anthropology and African Studies.

She is currently an Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Brooklyn College, CUNY

She is writing a book about how technology and urban planning initiatives are transforming matatu sector livelihoods.

This presentation draws on ethnographic research methods with matatu men and women.
Although matatu work is associated with youth, more people working in the sector could be considered wazee. As worker demographics shift in the face of increased regulation, workers are spending longer periods of time in the sector. As more women join the sector and stay in it longer, what comes after? Is there a possible future where they can continue to work in the sector, even when they can’t run after matatus or jump on and off the vehicle? This presentation asks questions and provides some possible answers for life after matatu work?
Women and Matatu Ownership
From ethnographic interview 2021

“We could have a SACCO, a SACCO of Women in Transport. We can be saving a little by a little. We take buses, we own buses, each woman would own a bus. So that as you get older, you’ll be now a boss. You see? Having that matatu. So even if you are not working in the industry, you wouldn’t be the conductor but you’ll be having your matatu in the industry. So you can bring even your kids to work in the industry and we’ll still be moving on.”
Women and Matatu Ownership

Other ideas include:

- Forming a Union
- Securing a garage
- Using a representative
- Own buses on other routes
- Provide child care
Many Thanks!