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Article

‘Our Changes’? Visions of the Future in Nairobi

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Abstract

In Kenya, the Vision 2030 masterplan is radically reimagining Nairobi as a ‘world class’ city of the future. This has generated dramatic digital imagery of satellite cities, skyscrapers and shopping malls. For tenants in rundown public housing, these glossy yet speculative visions are enticing, but also provoke anxieties of exclusion. Yet so far, little has materially manifested. This article explores the effects these future vistas produce in the present, in the gap between the urban plan and its implementation. It argues that the spectacle of official planning has generated anticipatory actions, as Nairobians’ engage with the future promised by such schemes. These actions are characterised by dissonant temporal experiences, in which local residents experience the future city as both near at hand and forever out of reach.

Keywords

Kenya; megaprojects; Nairobi; temporality; urban planning; visual culture

Issue

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1. Introduction

New urban fantasies have been flourishing across Africa in recent years. Rwanda, Ghana, Angola, Tanzania, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo and Kenya have all seen their governments launch urban megaprojects that promise to radically reshape African cities. Typified by spectacular infrastructural projects and new satellite cities, these schemes are also envisioned as gateways for global capital, forming a new node in a network of hub cities that include Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Dubai and Hyderabad. This article focuses on such visions of the future in Nairobi, Kenya, and in particular the disconnect between the government’s ‘Vision 2030’ initiative and the lives of ordinary citizens. Fantasies of the city’s future form are already visible in Nairobi, through advertisements, billboards and computer-generated imagery that circulate in the present. But the actual realisation of such plans has been slow to materialise. Yet even though little may have materially manifested on the ground, nevertheless the spectacle of official planning has set in mo-

tion many kinds of anticipatory actions, as Nairobians engage with the future promised by such schemes. In the temporal and spatial gap between the plan and its manifestation, I argue, Nairobi residents experience the future as simultaneously close at hand and impossibly far off.

2. Vision 2030 and the ‘World Class’ City

‘Vision 2030’ is the Kenyan government’s development blueprint for the country’s future (see Linehan, 2007; Manji, 2015; Myers, 2014). Launched in 2007 by the then President Mwai Kibaki, Kenya Vision 2030 mobilises the now-familiar vocabularies of neoliberal development, emphasising competition, management, performance and accountability as it seeks to create an ‘issue-based, people-centred, results-oriented and accountable democratic system’ (Kenya Vision2030, n.d.). Nested within this larger vision is ‘Nairobi Metro 2030’, a strategy to reinvent Nairobi as a ‘world class African metropolis’ and ‘an iconic and globally attractive city’ oriented towards

ICT services, global corporations and business investment (Government of Kenya, 2008). In 2008, the Kenyan government launched a new ministry, the Ministry of Nairobi Metropolitan Development, tasked with implementing this vision for the city. The flagship projects of Nairobi Metro 2030 are not located in the existing city, but are two satellite cities planned for Nairobi's periphery: Tatu City and Konza Techno City—dubbed 'Silicon Savannah' by the Kenyan and international media. To be financed by conglomerates of private capital and developed and managed through private partnerships, such urban plans exemplify 'the spread of neo-liberal ideology that brings state and national governments into close collaboration with corporations' (Moser, 2015, p. 31).

Vision 2030 presents a hyper-capitalist, technologically futuristic vision of Nairobi as a model 'global city' (Sassen, 1991). Far from developing an urban strategy that would enhance the distinctive qualities of Nairobi, Vision 2030 conforms to the spatial logics and aesthetics of a certain brand of global city masterplanning. In a process Bunnell and Das have described as 'urban replication', a small but seductive set of visions, policies and templates have duplicated the same spectacular skylines, neoliberal structuring and corporate management systems in multiple city plans across Asia and Africa (Bunnell & Das, 2010, p. 278). This process has had the effect of producing an aspirational uniformity; a placeless urban morphology that is at once nowhere and everywhere (Moser, 2015, p. 32). Such imitative practices are in part a consequence of the promise of spectacular technological and infrastructural transformation. In the eyes of many regional leaders, the perceived success of early adopters of the 'world class' approach made them worthy models for emulation. The global reach of cities such as Kuala Lumpur, Dubai and Singapore has validated a set of urban planning approaches rooted in economic liberalisation, corporate-led urban development and management, and gleaming, high-rise architecture.

But urban replication is not just emulative from a distance; it is also rooted in specific corporate practice. Notably, a small network of experts and consultants have been involved in the masterplanning of many of these 'world class' cities. Kenya's Vision 2030 strategy was developed in conjunction with the international consultancy firm McKinsey and Company, who over the last few decades have been at the heart of this trend (Linehan, 2007). Before arriving in Kenya, McKinsey previously worked in India on 'Vision Mumbai', also framed as a 'world-class city' (McKinsey, 2003) and on 'Andhra Pradesh 2020', which centred on the revisioning of Hyderabad through the construction of 'Cyberabad', a high-tech, IT-dominated satellite city. Earlier, in the 1990s, McKinsey had already set the standard for the new 'world class' city with the 'Malaysia 2020' strategy. Based not only on spectacular infrastructure but strategic imaging and brand management, this heralded the rise of the 'Asian tiger' economies and reinvention of Kuala Lumpur as a node for global investment. A new IT city called

Cyberjaya was conceived, along with a 'Multimedia Super Corridor' and the Petronas Twin Towers: the iconic skyscraper of the new Asian order (Bunnell & Das, 2010, p. 278).

In this way, the re-imagining of Nairobi as a gleaming hub for global capital is another iteration of a limited range of transnationally circulating urban policies and architectural aesthetics which are restructuring cities in ways that suit the interests of multinational corporations and affluent, global elites (Murray, 2015, p. 92). The official websites of Konza City and Tatu City present dramatic, glossy visions of skyscrapers, lakes, parkland and shopping malls, with promises of 'exclusive urban living' that will 'redefine the quality and scale of urban development in Kenya' with the 'potential to become a benchmark for Africa' (Konza City, n. d.; Tatu City, n. d.). Such imaginings bear little relation to the congested, polluted, densely populated city of Nairobi of today; instead they present an idealised 'capsular' city, sealed off from a much messier urban reality (De Caeter, 2004). Often advertised as a 'city within a city' or 'self-contained', this enclaved existence is regarded as one of the attractions of such a plan (Watson, 2013, p. 229). For those with the economic and social capital to gain access, Konza and Tatu promise insulation from the supposed disorder and chaos of existing Nairobi life. Following a mode Roy has described as 'worlding', this is a typology for a future city that abandons the perceived failures and decay of the extant city, seeking to begin afresh on vacant land, creating new enclaves for a hyper-connected global elite (Roy, 2011). Such 'city doubles' are often privately operated: spaces where companies act as proxies for civic administration, managing urban security, infrastructure, waste management and other facilities for urban elites, whilst ordinary, lower income citizens make do with an increasingly decrepit urban landscape elsewhere (Murray, 2015, p. 99). In this regard, these urban megaprojects reproduce the spatial logics of colonial cities, perpetuating segregated urban landscapes underwritten by the languages of neoliberal capital that privilege 'world class' status over the spatial and economic justice of local inhabitants (Moser, 2015; Myers, 2014; Watson, 2013).

3. Visions and Realities

Yet despite its sweeping vision, pervasive imagery and presence in Kenyan public debate, very little of Vision 2030 has tangibly materialised in the ten years since it was launched. Many Kenyans now jokingly refer to it 'Vision 3020' to reflect the rate at which implementation has been proceeding. Konza City is little more than an enormous fenced-off site in the Ukambani plains; the same grass growing on the inside and the outside of the fence. Both Tatu and Konza have been plagued with political infighting, accusations of land grabbing and community tensions (Kamau, 2016; Nzuma, 2014). As Manji has noted, there are overlapping and sometimes contradictory external and internal factors that shape how infras-

structural development proceeds in Kenya (Manji, 2015). Some commentators question whether the political will at the highest levels is even there: these were projects launched by the last president, and current President Uhuru Kenyatta seems to have little taste for them.

In addition to Konza and Tatu, Nairobi Metro 2030 also works as an umbrella for other fragmentary and less high-profile infrastructural plans in the city. These include a new mass transport strategy, the Nairobi Integrated Urban Plan (NIUPLAN) and the Nairobi Metropolitan Improvement Programme (NaMSIP). Far from being streamlined, these projects are often in competition with each other. Often launched under the aegis of different political factions, there is considerable confusion over institutional responsibility. Analysing the mass transport strategy, Klopp has outlined several factors behind its inadequate implementation that also speak to complications in realising Vision 2030 more broadly:

No single agency or institution deals with all transport matters for the metropolitan region...The current fragmentation and lack of a public focal point works to allow the existing decision-making network a great deal of leeway to operate. It also allows decisions to be made in ways that favour interested parties within networks of politicians and bureaucrats linked to key ministries, while defusing responsibilities. (Klopp, 2011, p. 11)

Indeed, the Kenyan Anti-Corruption Commission has reported 'rampant corruption in the road construction contracts and collusion between contractors and government' (cited in Klopp, 2011, p. 11). In such a fragmented and murky climate—and in the wake of a global financial downturn that has undermined the investment of corporate capital—it's perhaps unsurprising there is little of Vision 2030 to be seen on the ground.

Nevertheless, despite its lack of implementation, delays and issues of corruption, Vision 2030 has still had a significant impact. The utopian vocabularies and visualisations of Nairobi as a world class city that are currently in circulation are powerfully affective in their own right. Several scholars have observed how these 'technologies of seduction' have been as crucial to developing the global brand of cities such as Kuala Lumpur, Shanghai and Hyderabad as any physically tangible infrastructure projects (Bunnell & Das, 2010, p. 281; Brosius, 2010; Jansson & Lagerkvist, 2009). In Nairobi, glossy digital simulations of brand new cities, billboards showing desirable homes, elaborate websites promising a 'competitive and prosperous nation' and 'middle income status by 2030' are aspirational and enchanting (Konza Techno City, no date). They influence not only policies but also everyday lives in the city, exerting a seductive hold over ordinary Nairobians and producing important material and imaginative effects. In the following sections I argue that rather than seeing the absence of infrastructural transformation on the ground as indicative of Vision 2030's

failure, its visual and linguistic culture is materially and temporally significant in its own right. Attending to the digital, virtual and visual realm of Vision 2030 can also help to recalibrate scholarship on the efficacy of urban masterplanning, away from notions of success or failure based on the realisation or not of a specific plan, towards a more speculative, open-ended approach which recognises how digital simulations, consultancy reports, billboards and images of the future city act in the world. They are part of the 'stuff' out of which urban lives are remade and futures are reoriented—technologies of seductive power that become enmeshed in the fabric of urban life (Bunnell & Das, 2010, p. 282).

4. Image, Word, Form

Nairobi is far from the only place to experience a breach between urban dreams and their materialisation as physical realities. Discussing the reconstruction of central Berlin after the end of the wall, Andreas Huyssen noted the dazzling power exerted by visualisations of architecture in a mediated cultural economy. He observed that the monumental effect of architecture can be just as easily—possibly better—achieved through a 'totalising image of architecture. No need even to build the real thing' (Huyssen, 2003, p. 47). Instead of demonstrating a future that is to be made actual, 'the very image of the city itself becomes central to its success in a globally competitive market' (Huyssen, 2003, p. 60). A similar process can be seen in the restructuring of Shanghai, where spectacular digital imagery, promotional videos, and graphics-heavy websites have turned the city into a 'visual sign', the production of which is increasingly a political project (Jansson & Lagerkvist, 2009, p. 26). Branded, packaged urban panoramas are not simply or even necessarily premonitions of actual built space to come, but achieve monumental seduction in themselves.

In Kinshasa, capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo, the urban techno-fantasy *Cité du Fleuve* imagines a vast new satellite city, to be built on artificial islands in the middle of the Congo River. An improbably huge leap from Kinshasa's current chaotic reality, *Cité du Fleuve* is more 'spectral' and 'chimerical' than convincing urban morphology (De Boeck, 2012). So vast is the gap between disintegrating urban present and futuristic megalopolis that the otherworldly skyline 'escapes from the real order of things', and 'it almost doesn't seem to matter whether the new city is physically built or not' (De Boeck, 2012, p. 323). Whereas for Huyssen or Jansson and Lagerkvist, it is the seductive power of imagery that constructs the future city without the need for actual materials, in Kinshasa, De Boeck argues, it is words: 'the only place where the city is constantly being built is in language, in the architecture of words' (2012, p. 324). Rather than expecting these fantasies to produce actual built forms, De Boeck argues that we should focus instead on 'the sheer force of the word' and accept that it is words that offer 'one of the most important building

blocks with which to conquer, alter, and erect the city over and over again' (2012, p. 324).

In Nairobi, the words and images of Vision 2030 are indeed erecting the city afresh, without seeming to advance towards tangible materiality. But this is not the only form of urban envisioning at work. The fantasies of Vision 2030 intersect in important ways with ordinary residents' own modes of imagining and constructing the future. Far from remaining in the distant future, the dazzle of these promised scenes, I argue, can have very powerful imaginative and material effects in the present. During fourteen months of ethnographic research in Kaloleni, a low-income, public housing project in the Eastlands area of Nairobi, I investigated how local residents are engaging with the radical re-envisioning of their city (see Smith, 2016). I found that, though they may live far from the proposed sites of Konza and Tatu, residents are nevertheless caught up in their swirling image trail. These urban fantasies become entangled with the mundane actualities of ordinary life, in a process Jane Bennett has described as 'the marvellous erupting in the everyday' (2001, p. 8).

Kaloleni is one of several surviving colonial-era public housing estates in Eastlands, a diverse quarter of Nairobi to the northeast of the city centre. Kaloleni was built in the 1940s as part of a colonial masterplanning initiative to reinvent Nairobi as an orderly, segregated 'city in the sun' (Thornton White, Silberman, & Anderson, 1948). As well as designing dramatic boulevards and monumental city architecture, this masterplan was intended to improve housing conditions for Africans in the city (Anderson, 2001). Following garden city principles of urban planning that were popular across the empire at the time, Kaloleni was designed as a model urban neighbourhood that would inculcate colonially-sanctioned values and produce amenable urban subjects. There are a number of continuities in rhetoric and practice between Nairobi's colonial masterplanning and the current discourses of Vision 2030, not least regarding the perceived dangers of the pre-existing urban fabric and the need to plan secure, self-contained neighbourhoods on empty land (see Smith, 2015). Colonial concern about public health and morality feared informal settlements as unchecked breeding grounds not only for disease, but also vice and degeneracy (White, 1990). Such fears find their echo in current commentary about the rampant growth of slums, overcrowding and urban crime (Moser, 2015, p. 33). More specifically, in an early case of urban replication, the architect of Kaloleni was A. J. S. Hutton, formerly senior colonial architect in the British colony of Malaya (now Malaysia). He was seconded to Nairobi Municipal Council in 1942 to help reconceive the city's form, following his experience of designing new urban neighbourhoods in Malaya—an intriguing historical reverberation of McKinsey's role in the 'world class' re-visioning of both Kuala Lumpur and Nairobi (Bunnell & Das, 2010).

Today, decades of mismanagement by city authorities have left Kaloleni dilapidated and decayed. Houses

are rundown, water no longer runs in the pipes and infrastructure is at breaking point. Despite being public tenants, residents no longer receive services from the council. As in other public housing estates in Eastlands, such as Jerusalem, Jericho and Shauri Moyo, the original housing of Kaloleni is now interspersed with informal settlements, while stretches of public land have been grabbed and illegally developed. After decades of neglect, Vision 2030 promises long-awaited urban renewal of the Eastlands public housing. The project, titled the Nairobi Metropolitan Services Improvement Project (NaMSIP), is a less ostentatious constituent of Nairobi Metro 2030, and is intended to combat 'urban decay' in the city. However, exactly what this strategy will mean in practice is hard to tell: announcements and documentation are riddled with contradictions, and exactly what will be demolished, what will be built, and how residents might be affected remains unclear (Smith, 2016, ch. 1; Waitatu, 2013). For example, some news coverage has suggested that new housing will be for sale rather than rental, but the government has also stated that residents will not be displaced, despite the fact that very few would have the capital needed to purchase property (see Wanga, 2014). NaMSIP is partly facilitated by the World Bank in conjunction with both the Nairobi city authorities and the national Ministry of Nairobi Metropolitan Development. These different units all have different agendas and are also highly politicised, leading to considerable delays and hiatuses with the scheme. Their various tiers of intersecting and sometimes competing authority do not shed much clarity on the direction of the strategy (see Myers, 2014).

Unsurprisingly, such uncertainty has caused much consternation in the affected communities. Local residents remain ambivalent about what regeneration might mean: on the one hand urban renewal might offer a brighter future if it means increasing employment, raising living standards and reducing poverty, but many are anxious that it will happen at their expense. One professional Nairobi architect predicted that the scheme will be 'the biggest gentrification [project] in Africa', bringing the displacement of thousands of poorer households in favour of high net-worth renters and buyers' (personal communication). In Kaloleni, the uncertainty surrounding Nairobi Metro 2030 and its proposals have sparked endless discussion and debate. In De Boeck's terms, residents' words—in the form of verbal approvals, evaluations or castigations—do indeed 'erect the city over and over again', as Boniface, a Kaloleni resident, made clear:

There's been stories. There's a time [I heard] they'd secured contractors to come down and build these structures but it was only politics. It fades away, some other stories come. So nobody knows. Nobody knows for sure.

But these promised futures do far more than simply generate words and debate. The gap between the dream of

the plan and its realisation is full of action: new ways of being and doing, of grasping the future and trying to make it real.

5. The Not-Yet

One of the counterintuitive aspects of Vision 2030 is just how popular the imagined vistas are across all sectors of Nairobi's population. The 'world class' visions of capsular, enclaved futures—though they would seem intended to exclude Nairobi's low-income residents—are regarded as desirable, 'beautiful', 'smart'. This is something that scholars of fantastical masterplanning have noted in other cities. In Baku, capital of Azerbaijan, Bruce Grant observed the popularity of exclusive imagery among poorer residents: 'whether there is an actual place for them in these new structures or not, this new spate of building has had a profoundly inclusive effect' (Grant, 2014, p. 503). In Kinshasa, De Boeck noted how even those struggling to get by 'revel as much in this dream of the modern city as the ruling elites' (2012, p. 323). In Georgia, Pelkmans has suggested that it is the prospective nature of plans that makes them attractive; the fact that these scenes remain unbuilt, unpeopled, is significant. Their emptiness and potentiality affords the possibility of a future of fulfilled aspirations, and the lack of implementation in fact enables the maintenance of that dream: 'they belonged to the realm of the future and therefore remained potentially accessible to everyone' (Pelkmans, 2006, p. 207).

Whilst this has certain resonances with the popularity of Vision 2030 in Nairobi, I think a slightly different form of engagement is at work. As I explore further below, local residents *are* concerned about their potential exclusion from the seductive vision, but they nevertheless agree that the future it imagines is desirable. Even when the promises of Vision 2030 start to appear fragile, their instability exposed by lack of implementation, political wrangling, corruption or abandoned projects, the expectation and seductive weight of Vision 2030 still seems to hold fast. In a different context, Harvey and Knox have argued that it is not despite the disorderly excesses of planning but *because* of them that infrastructural schemes are able to maintain their capacity to enchant: 'It is through an articulation with the lived, material encounters of stasis, rupture and blockage that infrastructural promises become reinvigorated and recast' (Harvey & Knox, 2012, p. 534). This fragility leaves space for residents to enact their own interpretations of promised futures, to reconfigure them and make them anew.

Temporally speaking, residents also hold on to the forms of linear development that Vision 2030 proposes: the unfolding of processual time that is inherent to governmental planning (Abram & Weszkalnys, 2013). Even where residents fear their capacity to reach it is being thwarted, they still aspire to the destination of Vision 2030. The question of why people might approve of mod-

els that would appear to exclude them is a tricky one. Of course, we should not assume that everything people say need be fundamentally coherent; ideas and opinions are worked out in the process of discussion and encounter. Furthermore, across a whole neighbourhood like Kaloleni—inevitably shot through with factions and conflicts, like any community—many different perspectives will be in circulation. Nevertheless, I suggest, residents' approval of the fantasy of Vision 2030, even as they fear exclusion from it, is based on particular disjunctive temporal experiences in which present and future become entangled in important ways. As residents try to anticipate and live towards the future, they inevitably do so from the present—a present in which fantastical images of the future are in circulation. By embedding the 'not yet' into the 'now', these juxtapositions create disconcerting temporal simultaneity. The schemes of Vision 2030 are based on linear developments and project timelines that envisage a future-perfect city as a destination that will be reached within a specific timeframe. But in their anticipation of this destination, the imaging strategies also give the impression of the future having arrived already (see also Lagerkvist, 2007, p. 160).

Nevertheless, the gap between the plan and the future it envisages is filled with discrepancies (Abram & Weszkalnys, 2013, p. 21). Multiple temporalities are in play: the idealised orders imagined in the plan are often disrupted, not only by obstinate landscapes or political reappraisals, but by the anticipations, speculations and anxieties it invokes through its potentiality, its status as 'not-yet' (Elliott & Smith, 2015). Thus planning may compel other types of action in the present, upsetting processual time with recursive eddies of social, material or political consequence, which in turn may initiate new judgments of the plan, as well as recalibrations of aspiration and ambition (Abram & Weszkalnys, 2013, p. 22; see also Kracauer, 1995). For residents in Nairobi, this has considerable import for temporal experience. In one of these eddies, the future appears to be receding ever further into the distance, seemingly out of the reach of ordinary citizens, whilst in another eddy, time is experienced as compressed and the future already at hand.

6. 'Our Changes'?

On 11 December 2013, a new advertisement appeared on a huge billboard just outside Kaloleni, along the main road running through Eastlands (Figure 1). The billboard came with no warning, and was not accompanied by any public meeting or distribution of information to explain its meaning or presence. The image it presents is of a digital rendering of high-rise apartment blocks arranged around a large multi-lane highway. In the foreground, in the centre of a landscaped roundabout, is a circular grey sign that reads *Karibu Kaloleni: Welcome to Kaloleni*. The text emblazoned across the billboard states *Mabadi-liko Yetu, Our Changes*, as though this is the promise of an inclusive future. The thirteen-floor high-rises are uni-



Figure 1. The billboard showing the architects’ rendering of a ‘New Kaloleni’. Jogoo Road, Nairobi, December 2013. Photo by the author.

formly coloured cream and rust-brown, and arranged in orderly rows that recede into the distance. In the foreground, tiny pedestrians—dwarfed by the scale of the project—can be seen walking along yellow footpaths under mature trees. Cars move unimpeded along a smooth tarmacked highway, the speed of their movement indicated by digitally rendered blurring. Later that December, the image from the billboard appeared online on Jambonewspot, an informal news blog, along with other images of the same project. These were even more fantastical than the billboard. One was a radical reimagining of the infrastructure along Jogoo Road, featuring futuristic geometric glass and steel skyscrapers, palm trees, and a large highway. A sign saying ‘New Kaloleni’ directs traffic into the reimagined estate.

These digitally rendered visions are in stark contrast to the present reality of Kaloleni: a neighbourhood of decaying bungalows interspersed with corrugated iron informal dwellings. Previously tarmacked roads have turned to dust, broken streetlights lean precariously at awkward angles, rubbish is no longer collected and lies piled up around the estate. The contemporary experience of Jogoo Road is also drastically different from the

vista that appeared online. Jogoo Road is the main artery of Eastlands, but it is usually clotted with a tight mass of barely moving traffic, thick clouds of fumes choking the atmosphere. The edges of the street are a mishmash of dirt paths, broken streetlights, thickets of informal hawkers, verges clogged with rubbish and more corrugated iron. The disjunct between image and reality is vast. The fanciful panoramas certainly do not seem oriented towards the current life of the area, a place where unemployment is high and those in work are concentrated in a miscellany of jobs in the informal economy. The strategy behind these images was never made clear—there were no related public announcements—but it would seem highly unlikely that they would be available or affordable to current residents, even if subsidised.

And yet the images were generally regarded positively. The billboard and associated images generated intense discussion both within the estate and on social media after photos were uploaded to Facebook. Online, many comments were favourable, from straightforward ‘Wow! Great project’ and ‘This is amazing!!!’ to ones flavoured with the language of development and progress, including ‘This is what I see in the first world’

and—in an echo of colonial masterplanning—‘The real city in the sun’. Such approval also characterised discussions with local residents. In comparison to the extant housing, with its rundown infrastructure and piles of rubbish, the clean, orderly vision on the billboard seemed attractive to many. The image was described as ‘smart’, ‘beautiful’ and in Kiswahili ‘*poa sana*’—very cool. ‘These places are very modern. Who wouldn’t want a new kitchen?’ one man asked rhetorically.

7. The Future Now

The futures anticipated in Vision 2030’s plans have not yet been realised, and may well never manifest at all. But though they are digital imaginings, they are also of the present. They circulate via billboards, advertising hoardings, on websites and in newspapers, giving them a physical presence in the everyday city and thrusting them into people’s lives. By capturing the imaginations of a whole range of Nairobians, these images set in motion hopes, anxieties and speculations, influencing lived experiences of the city, as well as personal horizons for the future. As such, the images work to reveal the potentiality of the ‘not-yet’ in the present: the productivity of its enchantment, as well as its disenchantment.

In a discussion about the scene on the billboard with a young man named Eric, the conversation quickly turned towards his own domestic aspirations. Born and brought up in a crumbling house in Kaloleni and earning a meagre income working in a small café, Eric was nevertheless ambitious: ‘I want to build my own house’, he said, ‘Imagine coming home to a house that is yours’. He frequently imagines the kind of place he will build, he told me: a three-bedroom detached house on its own plot. ‘There is nothing like the feeling of coming home from work to a house that is yours, that you do not rent’, he anticipates. In his mind he fills the rooms with new furniture, making sure everything is organised and colourful. In particular, he longs for a modern bathroom. In Eric’s imagination, all the bedrooms are en suite, the running water is reliable and he can shower any time. ‘Just in your house, relaxing, taking a shower, feeling it’s yours...’ he mused. Eric was quite clear that his dreams of the perfect house are in part shaped by the sleek images of urban panoramas he sees all around him. ‘You see all this real estate up there [indicating the billboard]. You know it’s expensive, but of course you want’, he told me simply. His fantasies of a particular material future are intimately entangled with the visual culture of digital architectural design that enters the marketing machine of property development and circulates throughout Nairobi.

The types of anticipatory actions provoked by Vision 2030 are not always so positive. Previous urban renewal projects in Nairobi have been far from transparent, and claims of land-grabbing, corporate intrigue, elite capture and removal of sitting tenants have been rife (see Rigon, 2014). Given such precedents, residents fear Eastlands renewal may mean exclusion and eviction, and are set-

ting in motion other forms of action. Hassan has lived in Kaloleni all his life. He has raised his own sons, now in their twenties, in the estate, but he now fears for their future. He plans to pre-empt the renewal project by moving out of Kaloleni:

...So even our worries are there ‘cause when they bring these houses down, they’ll build modern houses...we won’t get and we cannot afford. This Vision what-what. So even our children are thinking ‘so, we move. We move now or we wait and we cannot afford’. You know, cost is rampant in this Nairobi. Up, up, up. So we say better [to] plan now.

In Hassan’s plans to move his family from the estate, we see how an uncertain future inserts itself into the present and compels new types of actions. Vision 2030—even if it remains immaterial—creates new ‘economies of anticipation’ as local people recalibrate their aspirations and try to predict what horizons will remain open to them (Elliott, 2016, p. 512).

Hassan is far from alone in trying to live towards an uncertain future. In May 2014 near the railway line that runs through Eastlands, I met two men constructing a corrugated iron lean-to; an extension to a small, timeworn house. When I asked what the structure was for, one of the men stopped hammering and looked up. ‘This is Vision 2030!’ he laughed. ‘We have waited so long for investment in this place, but still it is not coming’. He explained that his house is overcrowded—his children have to sleep on the floor. ‘So now we can’t wait any longer, that is why we are doing it’, he continued. ‘We are doing our own urban renewal!’. Rather than seeking to pre-empt Vision 2030, as Hassan intends, these residents are trying to surmount the gap between the plan and its implementation by taking it on for themselves. The future as imagined in schemes like Vision 2030 is not thirteen years away, but understood as available—up for grabs—in the present.

8. There’s Nothing We Shall Get!

Though the spectacular imagery of Vision 2030 represents a desirable future, for many Kaloleni residents this enthusiasm is tempered by their fears of exclusion from such schemes. The gap between the material present and the future envisaged in digital renderings can feel impossible to overcome. Many interviewees caveated their endorsement of the billboard with doubts about the practicalities: how could such a project be built without displacing sitting tenants? Would the apartments be for rent or for sale? For how much? Wasn’t it likely that current residents would never benefit?

In their discussions about the billboard, residents often simultaneously evoked fantasies about what the vision might bring, and fears about what it might take away. Boniface said, ‘I for one would like to get a bigger house. This billboard, yes, it can be good. I would like to get a

house that gives me a big living room'. But he also added 'Let me tell you for a fact, when things become practical, a lot of guys who have money will be the ones benefiting from this'. Monica was fairly typical when she said, 'I'm on the side of change. If they can take us to a modern system it can be good', and then qualified this with doubts about the implementation:

...if those who are going to do it are genuine people, if they are transparent, [if] they are trustworthy is when it will be ok. In Kenya there's a lot of corruption. You can't say it will be good. It might have some problems with maybe those who are going to build houses, the tenders...those who are going to get tenders and how the tenders will be, you know, will be given. You never know.

Such ambivalence also tinted Maggie's comments as she summed up the shades of local opinion:

Some of us are happy because we might get these modern houses and it will be good...some people say we don't know. Even if they are to be built, they have to allocate [properly]...Some of us are even saying no [to the billboard]. Maybe those houses when they'll be built, maybe it might go to the big people, and we'll be left with nothing. Peasants, there's nothing we shall get!

As Kaloleni residents described their fears of exclusion, that the future would be 'for the big people' and not for the likes of them, they expressed frustration at being left behind, where they felt that time seemed to stand still, or even to go backwards. This was apparent in the views of Dolly, another local resident. Dolly's council house is very worn, the furniture tired and tatty, the walls engrained with dust and grubby finger marks. The old concrete floor is bare and no repairs have been undertaken for many years. Dolly expressed her frustration about life in Nairobi, of the failures of its governance and of waiting for things that never come:

We are left behind. We used to have water, [today] there's no water. The roads—you see how they are. We used to have footpaths, they are no longer there. These houses are just like [a] museum anyway. But people are still living in them!

In her assessment, a museum is not a positive comparison: the implication is that the houses are static, stuck in place and time, while the city moves on around them. 'They say we are going to Vision 2030, but we are going back', she concluded.

How could residents feel so invested in the 2030 visions whilst concurrently also deeply suspicious that they will never benefit from its promises? In their work on infrastructural projects in Peru, Harvey and Knox take up the notion of enchantment to understand how such

schemes retain their lustre and promise 'even in the face of specific circumstances in which they are acknowledged as having failed to deliver' (2012, p. 523). Following Bennett (2001), they take enchantment not as superstition or belief in the supernatural, but as a 'visceral, affective form of relating to that which is sidelined or cast out of formalised, rationalised descriptions of material and social phenomena' (Harvey & Knox, 2012, p. 523). The billboard image was enchanting because the future it seemed to promise offered the possibility of transcending existing social and material arrangements. But it was also precisely this promise that made it dubious in the eyes of many residents. One interviewee, a man in his forties named Duncan, expressed this clearly when he told me, 'No one can be for that image', explaining that because it was so enticing, because the apartments looked so expensive and exclusive, 'definitely they will be out of our league'. This is a future indefinitely out of reach. Even as residents seek to anticipate the future, they simultaneously describe a sense of temporal inertia, of living in an endless present.

9. Conclusion

The experiences of ordinary Nairobi residents do not match up with the panoramas and new beginnings envisaged by Vision 2030 and its promises of 'achieving middle income status' (Government of Kenya, 2007, p. 3). Residents' anxieties about being excluded from such visions show how the material conditions of their living and dwelling seem to make the fantasy of Vision 2030 both more alluring and more out of reach. Rather than experiencing the steady progress of developmental time, where one thing comes predictably after another, I have suggested that many in Eastlands feel themselves to experience a dissonant coexistence of temporalities, where multiple temporal experiences are felt concurrently. This dissonance is deeply influenced by the seductive power of Vision 2030's visual culture: the image trail that circulates in the city is not immaterial, rather it is part of the 'stuff' of the city, entangled in the reconfiguration of urban spaces and urban lives (Bunnell & Das, 2010, p. 282).

In the particular terrain of Eastlands in Nairobi, where Vision 2030 is reorienting temporalities and aspirations, I have shown how fantasies of an enclaved 'world city', though they might seem far removed from Nairobi's current disintegrating materialities, nevertheless have become enmeshed in the everyday lives of ordinary citizens. This has important implications for scholarly approaches to the current spate of spectacular master-planning. Rather than dismissing spectacular simulations or cookie-cutter urban replication, it enables instead a more open-ended approach that attends to ways that seductive imaging and utopian language can have tangible effects.

As critics of Vision 2030, Kaloleni residents cast themselves in the role of catchers-up on a road where the destination seems to be slipping further and further away.

Or, as Dolly tells it, ‘we are left behind’, living in a museum where time stands still. And yet, the enchanting digital vistas give the impression that the future has arrived already. Living among the dream images of Vision 2030 has set in motion new types of actions, as people plan alternative futures or take up new construction practices, seeking to remake the city in ways that go beyond De Boeck’s ‘architecture of words’. The spatial and temporal gap between the dream of Vision 2030 and its implementation has left room for anticipatory actions that try to make the future more knowable. In so doing, residents in Eastlands seek to upset the exclusivity of a dazzling, capsular future Nairobi. But at the same time this gap can feel vast, even insurmountable, as their own experiences have bitterly revealed. Even as they work to make it present, the seductions of Vision 2030 are entwined with exclusionary forces that keep them at arm’s length. The future-perfect city remains an exclusive mirage always just out of reach.

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