Chapter 4   Does Africa not deserve shiny new cities?' The power of seductive rhetoric around new cities in Africa

Abstract

This paper explores the emerging new master-planned city-building trend on the African continent. Situating our research within urban policy mobilities literature, we investigate the 'Africa rising' narrative and representation of Africa as a 'last development frontier' and 'last piece of cake', an imaginary that provides fertile ground for the construction of new cities. Building upon research on the practices of 'seduction' that facilitate urban policy circulation, we argue for the relevance of critically examining elite stakeholder rhetoric to understand the relative ease with which the new city development model is being promoted in Africa. We investigate the enablers, advocates and boosters of new cities, represented mainly by states, corporations, non-profits and consultants to render visible the complex networks of relations and private interests that support and enable the creation and circulation of the new cities model in Africa. We also analyse the pervasive 'right to development' argument among African elites, which precludes criticism of new city ventures and circulates problematic assumptions about modernity and development. We conclude by discussing how stakeholder rhetoric limits the range of urban visions that are put into circulation and mobilized for Africa's urban future.

4.1 Introduction

In the last decade, Africa's rapid urbanisation rates and growing metropolises have attracted the attention of foreign and local business elites in search of 'emerging' markets (McKinsey Global Institute, 2010) with high risk, high return investment opportunities (Grant, 2015; Pitcher, 2012). In the midst of the 2008 world economic crisis, the representation of African states as 'lions on the move' (McKinsey Global Institute, 2010), in reference to Asia's 'Tiger' economies, attracted a surge of private capital from foreign entities in search of alternative investment opportunities (Watson, 2014). In 2010, the appeal reached Wall Street and the first wholly African fund, the Nile Pan Africa Fund, was created (Grant, 2015). International private equity firms have turned their attention to Africa and increasingly involved local corporations in their investment portfolios, while many Africa-based private equity firms have also started to emerge (Pitcher, 2012).

With this newfound international interest in the 'last development frontier' (Watson, 2014: 216), new urban residential developments and new master-planned cities have begun to spring up across Africa,[31] as part of a phenomenon that has been spreading across the Global South since the 1990s (Moser, 2015). Initially more concentrated in Asia and the Middle East, plans for new cities are now proliferating in Africa. Unlike post-independence new capital city projects, the new city visions produced over the past 15 years are part of broader strategies to 'leapfrog' economic development. They are sustained by corporate–government partnerships, which promote the projects as a one-size-fits-all solution to varied urbanisation challenges (Moser et al., 2015). In many cases, the proposed cities reflect ambitions of 'smart' and 'green', technology-driven development where corporate digital and network technologies are included in the master plan and leveraged in the city's branding (Bunnell, 2002; Datta, 2015b; Koch, 2014b; Rapoport, 2015).

These 'holistically designed' new cities (Murray, 2015b: 505) are examples of 'fast urbanism' (Bagaeen, 2007) and constitute ever-more radical urban interventions, marking a break with traditional planning practices focused on implementing piecemeal changes in existing urban settings. New cities have been characterised as extreme examples of entrepreneurial urbanism (Moser et al., 2015) and speculative urbanism (Marcinkoski, 2015), created to boost the competitiveness of national or regional economies, often leading to new forms and degrees of urban 'splintering' (Graham and Marvin, 2001). While some scholars define and emphasise the diversity of these new developments through a typology of new city forms and functions (Van Noorloos and Kloosterboer, 2018; Watson, 2014), we suggest that it is productive to probe the discursive constructions of new cities. New developments that define themselves as 'new cities' use this characterisation both ideologically and for marketing purposes, to advance a new vision of modernity and urbanity.

Over 40 new city projects are planned or are underway on the African continent. Although many of these cities are, and may remain, at the conceptual stage, construction has already begun on well over 15 projects (Moser, forthcoming). There is a small but growing body of critical scholarship on these new cities (Buire, 2014b; Cardoso, 2016; Carmody and Owusu, 2016; De Boeck, 2011; Grant, 2015; Herbert and Murray, 2015; Marcinkoski, 2015; Murray, 2015a, 2015b; Pitcher, 2012; Smith, 2017; Van Noorloos and Kloosterboer, 2018; Watson,

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[31] See Van Noorloos and Kloosterboer (2018) for the phenomenon's geographic distribution in Africa.

2014). The promised new cities rely on the validation of powerful international and private interests in states where a 'compliant juridical regime' (Murray, 2015a: 98) rarely requires that cities' touted benefits be supported with empirical evidence. Throughout the article, we examine some of the macro-level dynamics involved in the circulation of the new city-building imaginary across the African continent to better characterise this phenomenon.

We begin by positioning our research within the policy mobilities literature and outlining how we expand on this scholarship through the analysis of elite stakeholder rhetoric on new cities in Africa. Second, we interrogate the 'Africa rising' discourse, a dominant narrative that underpins new city projects. Third, we turn to the enablers, advocates and boosters of new cities in the Global South and examine the complex networks that support the creation of new cities and facilitate the circulation of this development model, using examples from the African context. Fourth, through an analysis of the 'right to development' assumption held by many African advocates of new cities, we examine the absence and active rejection of robust criticism of new cities among many African elites, another factor facilitating the circulation and normalisation of the new cities' model. Finally, we unpack assumptions associated with this rhetoric and examine the problematic implications of elite stakeholders' uncritical discourse for urban Africa.

This article contributes critical insights on how visions of new urban developments are assembled and circulated through their discourse and supporting networks, to set an agenda for further study of new master-planned cities in Africa and the Global South more generally. The elite stakeholder rhetoric examined in this paper is similar to optimistic discourses that underpin new city projects in other regions of the world, but the sense of Afro-optimism and the 'Africa rising' narrative currently provide fertile ground for new city development in Africa and constitute a particularity of the trend on the continent.

4.2 New city models on the move

Departing from other studies of African new cities, our focus is not on what differentiates or characterises individual city projects (c.f. Van Noorloos and Kloosterboer, 2018) but rather on what connects them to form a broader trend. We situate this paper within studies of urban policy mobilities and assemblages, which are concerned with the way urban policy 'moves' through space, altering both places and policies in the process (McCann, 2011a). Urban policies are

(re)shaped and put into circulation by human and non-human agents, influenced by cultural contexts, power dynamics and institutional frameworks, and do not follow a linear departure–arrival path (Jacobs, 2012). Responding to McCann and Ward's (2012b: 325) call for researchers to examine 'how, why and with what consequences urban policies are mobilized', our research focuses on the agents circulating new city imaginings, as well as their motivations, modalities and consequences. As such, we draw a broad picture of the trend and its defining characteristics, rather than focus on local-level applications of the new city-building phenomenon, which should be addressed in future research.

Building upon nascent research on new cities in the Global South, this article expands on various works investigating 'the role of seductive projections of various forms in shaping urban policy and material realities' (Bunnell and Das, 2010: 277). While much of this scholarship sheds light on how digital simulations, images, consultant reports and marketing material shape urban spaces and their imaginary (Bunnell and Das, 2010; Murray, 2015a; Rapoport, 2015; Watson, 2014), we expand on this knowledge by analysing elite stakeholders' rhetoric as another key factor impacting the mobilisation of urban models. Through this discursive approach,[32] we focus on the rhetoric of elite actors involved in the creation of new cities, and analyse how these actors, through the reinterpretation of dominant narratives on development and the construction of a seductive discourse around new cities, circulate normalised assumptions about modernity and progress that pave the way for the implementation of lavish new city projects. In this article, we examine 'what underpins and constitutes the envisioned futures of African cities in the twenty-first century' (Cardoso, 2016: 96) and conceptualise the widespread optimism regarding new cities and development as one of the defining features and influences of the African city-building trend.

This paper has been developed as part of a broader project on new city creation, and employs textual analysis methods, drawing from political speeches and statements, official reports produced by corporations and consultancies, participant observation and elite interview data collected between 2013 and 2017[33] at seven international conferences[34] on the topic of new

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[32] We draw on approaches taken by Koch (2014) and Childs and Hearn (2017).

[33] Over 50 interviews were conducted with elite stakeholders over this period.

[34] The Cityquest KAEC Forum (2013, 2014, 2015); the International Conference on Chinese and African Sustainable Urbanization (ICCASU, UN-Habitat, 24–25 October 2015, University of Ottawa); the New Cities Summit (21–23 June 2016, Montreal); the UN-Habitat III meeting (October 2016, Quito); the International conference on 'The Path to a Prosperous Future for Africa' (3 November 2017, Dar Al Maghrib Center, Montreal).

cities and African urbanisation. The content of these interviews is primarily engaged with through our reflection on the current climate of discussions surrounding new cities in Africa, as well as our characterisation of the views of powerful individuals and organisations advocating for new cities.

The conferences attended constitute examples of what policy mobilities scholars have referred to as 'mobility events' (Clarke, 2012: 27), or 'situations' (McCann and Ward, 2012b: 329) of policy circulation and mutation. In relation to urban policy, such events represent 'instances of persuasion and negotiation, ranging from the formal and institutional to the interpersonal persuasive politics through which individual actors conduct themselves and seek to shape the conduct of others' (McCann and Ward, 2012b: 329). Drawing on Cook and Ward's (2012: 137) study of conferences as key spaces for the mobilisation and 'embedding' of urban policies, we suggest that these conferences are important nodes in the circulation of ideas and policies related to the new city strategy (Moser, 2019).

Our analysis takes a 'global' approach to 'doing' urban research. We follow Bunnell and Das's (2010: 282) suggestion that an analytical focus on transnational connections can supplement conventional urban research approaches, which rely on the analytical unit of the bounded place and ontologies of immersion associated with traditional ethnographic research (Roy, 2012). Our focus is on the relational flows of ideas and models, and the rhetoric of political elites and stakeholders that reveals how new cities are imagined as global or universal urban models and put into circulation (Roy, 2012) through a variety of modes including media statements, interviews, official reports and discussions at agenda-setting conferences.

4.3 'The last piece of cake': Framing the new city-building agenda through the 'Africa rising' narrative

The conferences we attended featured discussions on Africa's outlook in the coming decades, and the views of African elites in these discussions provided crucial insights into the dominant discourse on development and urbanisation that underpin mega-projects and major investments on the continent. During a panel about current urbanisation in Africa, emerging markets were referred to by an African presenter employed as a United Nations consultant as the 'last piece of cake' (ICCASU Conference in 2015; see note 4), in other words the ultimate untapped investment opportunity that promises to yield attractive profits. The representation of

the African continent as a lucrative business venture is in line with a broader sense of optimism about the continent's economic potential and is an iteration of the 'Africa rising' narrative. Moving away from previous dominant narratives associating Africa with poverty, vulnerability and a state of dependency, the 'Africa rising' narrative, supported by major international financial institutions[35] and popularised through international media,[36] is based on the (perceived) recent revival of African economies, and the assumption that African markets are poised for unprecedented growth.

As part of this glowing rhetoric of growth opportunity, new cities are represented by elite stakeholders as a testament to a 'rising Africa' (Watson, 2014) where the new cities act as '"natural" embodiments of progress and development' (Murray, 2015a: 99). The 'Africa rising' narrative of growth serves as a backdrop to the discourse around new city developments, framing these massive resource-intensive and high-risk planning interventions as necessary investments in Africa's bright future. In her analysis of Africa's new city plans and corporate websites, Watson (2014: 215) shows how the developers' stated ambitions are often to create 'world class metropolises' and to join the 'World Class city leagues'. These observations were echoed in private industry conferences we attended, such as the Cityquest KAEC Forum (2013, 2014, 2015) in Saudi Arabia, the only conference in the world that focuses on new cities (Moser, 2019).

In many cases, new city developments are rationalised by enthusiastic national governments and business elites as key ways to mitigate issues associated with chaotic and unplanned urbanisation. The guiding assumption parallels the bulldozer approach taken by urban renewal advocates in the 1960s in North America: that it is impractical to work on improving existing cities as their messiness, pollution, informal housing and overpopulation make them a lost cause (Grant, 2015). As such, plans for new cities emerge in opposition to a 'failed urbanism' inherited from colonial powers, and are erected as 'city doubles' (Murray, 2015a: 92), or mirror opposites to Africa's existing cities and their challenges.

In contrast to this dominant discourse, scholars characterise the proposed projects as 'fantasy' and part of idealised imaginings of Africa's urban landscape and economic possibilities

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[35] The Institute of International Finance, the World Economic Forum, and the International Monetary Fund (see Bond, 2014, for a more extensive list).

[36] Both Time Magazine (3 December 2012) and The Economist (1 December 2011) published an issue with an 'Africa Rising' cover.

(Grant, 2015; Murray, 2015a; Watson, 2014). For many scholars, accounts that portray Africa as an 'emerging' market gloss over the fact that the vast majority of the continent's population is still severely affected by material poverty (Bond, 2014; Watson, 2014). Along with questions relating to land acquisition, affordability of housing (Adelekan, 2013), as well as dispossession and resettlement procedures, scholars and activists fear that the new developments will only exacerbate existing gaps between rich and poor (Cities Alliance, 2015; Lumumba, 2013; Van Noorloos and Kloosterboer, 2018; Wamsler et al., 2015). Although some scholars have published rather optimistic and uncritical accounts of new city plans (Ede et al., 2011; Olawepo, 2010), others critique the new projects for disregarding sustainable development ideals (Adeponle, 2013; Watson and Agbola, 2013), resulting in increased vulnerability to climate change for slum populations displaced to make way for the new developments (Adelekan, 2013).

These critical accounts of the new city projects and their support for more incremental reforms have little traction with political elites, who prefer to support faster, bolder and more profitable development schemes. Accordingly, new city project plans are announced with increasing regularity across Africa (Moser, forthcoming). Although concerns over the new city ventures have been voiced by a handful of African and non-African scholars, these voices are being drowned out by builders of new cities and their advocates who often have vested interests in the projects.

4.4 Enablers, advocates and boosters: Facilitating new cities in Africa

The main actors in new city developments are well known in a general sense: states and the private sector. However, there is a dearth of scholarship that investigates in detail who these actors are, how public and private actors collaborate and how their interests are often intertwined and overlapping. The following sub-sections outline the broad categories of actors involved, and provide examples from new cities in Africa to reveal the complex ties between new city advocates, their particular investment in the 'Africa rising' narrative and their stakes in new city projects and circulating visions of development.

4.4.1 States and governments

National governments are main actors in the new city developments, yet they increasingly collaborate with the private sector to varying degrees. Governments that enable and

facilitate new cities illustrate effectively the shift from states' managerial and service provider roles to ever-more entrepreneurial roles that take a business-centred and profit-driven approach (Pitcher, 2017). Forging public–private types of partnerships to enable the creation of these cities is also presented as a way for states to outsource some of their development goals (Murray, 2015b: 512). In the creation of new cities, states function primarily as facilitators, supplying land and crafting legislation that will attract investment and corporate actors, and enforcing the protection of corporations' assets and private property (Pitcher, 2012). This type of relationship is often encountered when new administrative capitals are built, or when new cities are part of broader nation-building or national economic strategies. Examples include Morocco's Villes Nouvelles (New Cities) initiative launched by the Moroccan government in 2004, India's '100 Smart Cities' mission launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2015, Saudi Arabia's state-initiated four new 'economic' cities and Indonesian President Jokowi's 10 Kota Baru Publik, a plan to build ten new cities. In Angola, Mozambique, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Ghana, new city development accompanies the boosting of extractive industries through rhetoric promoting the 'new' developmental state in Africa (Childs and Hearn, 2017). New city projects thus become more formally integrated into wider national development agendas and influence policy.

In other cases, the state is not only the initiator of the project but also its primary financing actor. As Pitcher (2012: 168) emphasises:

> […] these are entrepreneurial states. They are relying on sovereign wealth funds, the pension funds of government employees, or development finance institutions to invest alongside the private sector in shopping malls, office complexes, banks and tourist resorts.

These types of new 'public investment vehicles' from new African 'investor states' (Pitcher, 2017: 45) redefine the usual distinction between public and private actors due to an important overlap in the form and function of both types of entities. On this point, our interviews with actors involved in new city building revealed widespread confusion regarding the status of actors involved in new city building, the same entities being variably characterised as both public and private.

New cities are generally employed as state strategies to reposition a country onto the global stage, and as a way to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) and expertise to increase the

country's international status and reputation. The ICT and Innovation associate for Konza Technology City, a state-initiated project in Kenya, for example, saw this as a main motivation behind the plan for the new city, which was propelled by:

> the need to provide smart infrastructure that will attract private sector tech companies, universities, and research facilities. This in turn was meant to encourage new investment of venture capital and nurture an incubator for innovation. (Interview, 2017)

Similarly, the head of real estate development for Morocco's new Benguerir Green City explained in an interview that new cities in Morocco and elsewhere are emerging as part of 'national ambitions to restructure cities and to give them a new economic, futuristic, ecological and sustainable impetus, to improve countries' economic standing on the global stage' (Interview, 2016).

4.4.2 Multinational corporations and the private sector

A common feature of new cities in Africa and elsewhere in the world is the increasingly dominant role played by private-sector firms and multinational corporations. These corporate entities are involved in African markets through FDI, which, since 2009, accounts for a more significant economic flow than overseas development assistance (Pitcher, 2012). Multinational corporations are key actors driving Africa's new cities and are leading players in designing, building and selling the idea for new cities. Rendeavour, an Africa-focused subsidiary of the Moscow-based investment firm Renaissance Group, has, for example, made new city building a core component of its business agenda. The major real estate development corporation owns more than 30,000 acres of land on the continent and is involved in the creation of at least seven new cities in sub-Saharan Africa (Rendeavour, 2015).

Multinational companies from the tech and energy sectors are also involved in new city development in response to many new cities' or states' aspirations to showcase 'smart', 'green' or 'eco' urban development ideals. Siemens, Ericsson, and IBM, notably with its 'smarter cities challenge' initiative, are examples of corporations that have embraced the 'smart cities' rhetoric and business strategy, and have positioned themselves as the leaders in 'smart' development, seeing the potential for 'unprecedented growth in emerging economies in Africa' (Interview, 2014). IBM, Cisco and General Electric are additionally involved in many new city projects concentrated in the Global South, such as Kenya's Konza Techno City where all three firms are

investing partners (Daily Nation, 2015). New cities in Africa and worldwide represent ideal investment opportunities for tech giants who aim to become the main supplier of network technologies and 'smart' infrastructure. Anil Menon, Global President of Cisco's Smart + Connected Communities initiative, states that new cities represent a US$400 billion market for their products (Interview, 2013). This number provides a sense of the financial opportunities tech companies see in new cities and explains their scramble to foster relationships with new cities and promote the model that will lead to sales.

4.4.3 Private foundations and non-profit organisations

New city projects in Africa have increasing support from major non-profit organisations and foundations. These organisations are primarily involved in new cities through their promotion of urban development initiatives, their endorsement of specific projects – often with the help of public personalities or political figures – and their provision of networking opportunities for tech companies, investors and managers of new cities.

The Clinton Foundation's involvement with Eko Atlantic, a luxury new city project in Nigeria, is one such example of a foundation using its ties and networks to influence Nigeria's new city-building agenda. Bill Clinton delivered a speech at the city's dedication ceremony in 2013 in which he commended the Nigerian state's efforts to mitigate the effects of climate change in dense urban areas. This endorsement by a major public political figure in the capacity of his well-respected global foundation, embedded within a 'boosterist' narrative (McCann, 2013), functions as a stamp of approval not only for Eko Atlantic but for other new cities in Africa, while legitimising the project's contested rhetoric on climate change mitigation.

Clinton's optimistic endorsement contrasts sharply with criticism of the project published in local and international newspapers denouncing botched environmental impact assessments (Oluikpe, 2015), population displacement (Awofeso, 2011) and the exclusionary resource-intensive luxury development (Lukacs, 2014). Bill Clinton's validation of Eko Atlantic influences the new city's representation on the global stage where, before any rigorous analysis has taken place, it is announced as an 'ingenious engineering feat' (Eko Atlantic Milestones, n.d.: 13) and a praiseworthy effort for African development.

Other more recent non-profit foundations have started to spring up without such ties to political figures. The New Cities Foundation, created in 2010, does not directly fund urban

projects; rather, it functions as a networking platform. Through the organisation of several annual events, the New Cities Foundation brings together new city leaders with business executives, particularly from technology corporations and real estate companies such as Rendeavour. These conferences are important nodes in the transnational circulation of urban models and ideas, where the global non-profits constitute links between new cities and opportunity-seeking corporations that see new markets in the new city ventures (Moser, 2019).

The two foundations share common sponsors including multinationals such as Cisco, Ericsson, Toyota and Citigroup, while the Clinton Global Initiative also counts General Electric and Microsoft amongst its important donors (Clinton Foundation, 2016; New Cities Foundation, 2016). There is an inherent conflict of interest in the rather incestuous relationship between foundations, donors and new cities. The foundations endorse the new city projects that are created by companies that sponsor their own non-profit activities. It is thus in the best interest of foundations to promote a particular type of urban change from which their sponsors, and ultimately they themselves (in the form of future sponsorship), can benefit. It is no coincidence that the New Cities Foundation's main event in 2016 had an 'urban tech' theme, with sessions showcasing the role that Cisco and other big technology companies can play in urban change (http://www.newcitiessummit2016.org/).

Clinton's presence in Eko Atlantic at the city's dedication ceremony and his public endorsement of the project also takes on a different light when one learns that the Chagoury Group, the city's development company through its subsidiary Southenergyx, is a major donor to the Clinton Foundation. Gilbert Chagoury, the Lebanese-Nigerian founder of the Chagoury Group, has given between US$1 million and US$5 million to the Clinton Foundation (Clinton Foundation, 2016). Clinton's speech in Eko Atlantic takes on the form of a 'returned favour', where it appears that a public endorsement of a highly controversial project was 'bought' through donations. The example of Eko Atlantic highlights how foundations such as the Clinton Global Initiative and the New Cities Foundation enable networks of actors, which help fund specific interests and advance, normalise, as well as circulate, particular tech-focused urban agendas.

4.4.4 Global consultant firms

Reports produced and circulated by global consultant firms that depict urbanisation as an opportunity – such as the McKinsey Global Institute in their report *Lions on the Move: The Progress and Potential of African Economies* (2010), and prominent financial institutions such as the World Bank – play a significant role in shaping and circulating positive perceptions of new city projects. These reports construct a compelling narrative of Africa as the world's next big venture, which fuels a broader 'optimism industry' (Lay, 2011) and substantiates the seductive 'Africa rising' narrative.

In some cases, these global consultancies are directly involved in the creation of new city projects, advising private actors on aspects ranging from urban planning to the development of 'sound' economic master plans (Bunnell and Das, 2010; Smith, 2017). McKinsey & Company's 'Capital Projects and Infrastructure' branch, for example, mentions helping a private client in the development of a new African city (McKinsey & Company, n.d.). Discussing a prominent new city project under development in Morocco during an interview, the CEO of the city, without being prompted, mentioned that 'we worked with great firms to benchmark our city … McKinsey, BCG [Boston Consulting Group], Roland Berger … we worked with the best in the world' (Interview, 2016). The repeated reference to global consultancies throughout interviews with various elite stakeholders in African city projects underscores how they derive a sense of validation from being connected with these renowned firms, which are often involved in new city projects elsewhere (Bunnell and Das, 2010; Datta, 2015b; Smith, 2017). Through the perceived 'expert' authority of global consultancies, and the prestige associated with their name and organisation (Cook and Ward, 2012; Rapoport, 2015), recommendations produced by firms such as McKinsey & Company are enthusiastically adopted by builders of new cities and shape discourses that legitimise new city projects.

Similarly, a senior bureaucrat working on a new city project in North Africa recounted an influential conversation he had with the founder of a global consulting agency, during which the founder confirmed that the city (which is not yet built) represented a good model to replicate elsewhere. This comment at once legitimised the new city-building approach to urban development while encouraging its broader circulation (Interview, 2016). The founder's firm was later hired to consult on the project and the marketisation of its model. Beyond the ability of consultant firms to create hype and generate attractive accounts of economic opportunities, the

representation of new city projects as appealing cure-alls has a persuasive effect on policymakers and officials and serves to validate and normalise mega-projects.

4.5 'Deserving the new city' and 'right to development'

As we have demonstrated, actors involved in new city projects actively benefit from them and thus have a strong incentive to promote them, at once fuelling the 'Africa rising' narrative and using it as a priori justification for their ventures. Beyond the endorsement and promotion of the projects, we contend that the use of a moralising rhetoric by stakeholders and political elites, further facilitates the circulation of the new city model by bypassing and actively rejecting critique. In this section, we examine the 'right to development' assumption held by African political elites and stakeholders in new cities, as observed in media statements, conference discussions and interviews. We begin by providing a sense of the widespread use of the 'right to development' rhetoric in public discourse on African urbanisation and development, and examine how this argument is deployed to effectively suppress criticism and shut down debate around new city developments. We then provide further insights from participant observations at international conferences and from interviews to show how critique is similarly avoided and repressed at these agenda-setting events.

Accompanying the discourse on Africa's rise, the 'right to development' argument is a powerful statement on Africa's growth capacities, supported by the sense that something is 'owed' to the continent, implicitly referring to reparations for the lasting widespread damage caused by colonialism. Used by prominent African political figures to justify particular development agendas such as the development of brand new cities, this rhetoric conveys the idea, as expressed by Senegalese President Macky Sall, that 'Development has gone around the world, to Europe, to America, to Asia. It's Africa's turn now' (Sall and Reid, 2013: 8). The framing of development as a 'right' and the notion that it is 'Africa's turn' to access these opportunities repositions debates on Africa's future solely as a moral-ethical dilemma rather than being conceived also as a political issue. Through this framing, new city ventures are presented as a form of compensation for missed opportunities under colonialism. It is in this vein that Ghana's Minister for Communications, Edward Omane Bohama, legitimised state investment into Ghana's new ICT hub, Hope City, stating that 'Ghana could not take advantage of the industrial revolution; the ICT revolution should not pass us by' (thebizcouch, 2014).

Several media statements made by political elites in Africa outline how the 'right to development' narrative is a prevalent rhetoric deployed to fend off critique of new cities as well as avoid discussion on Africa's approach to urban development altogether. When questioned about Egypt's plan for a massive new capital and the mounting scepticism surrounding the project, President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi, for example, recently commented: 'Isn't it our right to have a dream? Is it wrong to have 13 cities like this or what? Don't we deserve it?' (Laub and Associated Press, 2017). Referring to Eko Atlantic, Gbenga Oduntan, a law professor (University of Kent, UK), similarly shifts focus away from discussion on current problems in Africa's cities to a more attractive 'dream' of Africa's urban future:

> There is no shortage of doubters and critics of the initiative, which is seen as an exercise in runaway neoliberalism by a country that cannot even ensure 30 days of continuous power supply to its citizens. The truth, however, is that Lagos *deserves* [emphasis added] its dream Eldorado […]. (Oduntan, 2015)

Such responses bypass critical discussion and divert attention to optimistic depictions of Africa as the 'continent of promise', 'continent on the rise', and to the achievements of the 'African lions', such as they were referred to during interviews and conference discussions. As new cities become symbols of national identity and pride that embody the 'Africa rising' narrative, (African) critics are accused of not believing in a country or region's potential or of being 'doubters' and unpatriotic. At the groundbreaking ceremony for Konza Techno City, then-President Mwai Kibaki told the press that he was 'telling the doubting Thomases to open their eyes wide and see what we are going to come up with' (Odalo, 2013). Using a biblical reference, Kibaki adopts a moralising stance to discredit critics for their lack of faith in the project, while avoiding explanations, for example, on the allegations of fraud and corruption related to land procurement, generating much of the scepticism over Kenya's new city (Mumo, 2014).

At a conference co-organised by UN-Habitat and the University of Ottawa, a young female African scholar was confronted with this type of defensive rhetoric when she presented on Eko Atlantic, arguing that it was an elitist project that produced a variety of social exclusions. Her critical analysis was challenged in a hostile manner by senior African business and political elites in attendance, including a UN-Habitat representative. After her presentation she was asked repeatedly by senior African elites, 'does Africa not deserve shiny new cities?' without being given a chance to respond. Further remarks were made by several attendees about it being

'Africa's turn' to access modern development, revealing that members of the African elite present felt that development in any form – including new cities – was 'Africa's right' (ICCASU conference in 2015; see note 4). The rejection of the young academic's critique was compounded by the power imbalance existing between the largely older, male political elite members in attendance, and the junior researcher. This power structure was visually apparent in the name plates featuring the affiliations of important members of the audience and contributed to the dynamic of intimidation that was created during the question period throughout which the researcher was repeatedly interrupted and targeted by accusatory remarks on Africa's 'right to development'.

As part of our broader research on new cities, we attended five private industry conferences and two UN conferences, which shed light on the way that new cities are perceived by political and business elites and various new city stakeholders. As 'mobility events', conferences represent spaces 'where encounters with specific ideas have the potential to set agendas and provide direction and impetus for policy' (Temenos and Ward, 2018: 71). Although conferences are often assumed to be spaces for open discussion and intellectual exchange, these events acted more often as spaces of seduction and persuasion to support the new city model of development, where intimidation and a moralising rhetoric were used to shut down critical discussion on the projects, as shown in the example above.

With the exception of the two UN conferences attended by policymakers, academics and planning professionals, private industry conferences such as the New Cities Summit and Cityquest are invitation-only events also attended by entrepreneurs, CEOs of new cities, representatives from technology companies and various visionaries and 'thought-leaders' (Moser, 2019). Both at Cityquest and the New Cities Summit, guest lists are curated by organisers, ensuring only supportive voices are welcomed to the events.[37] Attendees are given a sense of importance by being told they belong to a 'global elite' who will 'change the future' (Moser, 2019). Referring to Cityquest, several executives working on new city projects communicated a similar sense of importance conferred to these exclusive agenda-setting meetings:

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[37] The micro-level interactions and the powerful performative aspect of these conferences are the focus of a paper by Moser (2019).

We were all trying to reflect on the same issues. It was a very rich exchange … especially when you realize that in new cities around the world, whether in Morocco, in the United States, in India or in Africa: everywhere we face the same problems, issues, and the same ambitions. It's great when we can converge and share experiences. (Interview, 2016)

This comment also underscores the pervasive framing of the new city model, encouraged through a particular 'global-universal' rhetoric, as a scalable urban solution, transferable anywhere in the world, regardless of context. With the omission of critical voices, which are prevented access at these key industry events, the new city model is presented in an echo chamber of like-minded elites and stakeholders as inevitable, uncontested, unproblematic and universally approved, making the seduction all the more powerful for the elite actors in attendance (Moser, 2019).

This is compounded by the fact that, with the absence of freedom of the press in many African countries, alternative views are underrepresented (Freedom House, 2017). Various African panelists at a recent conference on Africa's future expressed that 'Africa is taking back the place that is hers', that 'Africa is raising her head and looking up' and that the continent is 're-taking charge of its destiny' (Dar Al Maghrib Center conference in 2017; see note 4). This discourse glosses over troubling elitist aspects of urban change in Africa, and avoids broader critical debate over what kind of development is promoted, by and for whom.

As outlined in the previous sections, supporters of new cities often have stakes or vested interests in the projects. Far from disrupting power hierarchies and addressing embedded inequalities, new cities further entrench them to the benefit of the small African elite empowered after independence (Mbembe, 2001; Myers, 2011), the same elite who publicly advocates for the projects and fends off critique on the basis of Africa's 'right' to 'shiny new cities'.

4.6 'Africa Rising' and problematic assumptions on modernity and development

In recent years, new cities have found a particularly receptive audience among African political and business elites, who rationalise them as a necessary strategy to jump-start economies and re-brand countries as modern and progressive (Murray, 2015b). The emergence of brand new cities across Africa is presented as a testament to Africa's growth and development capabilities, and a refutation of persisting assumptions of Africa's 'backwardness'. During an interview, the senior manager of a North African new city stated: 'new cities are the living proof that high-tech and "eco" development is possible in Africa … that this is feasible in Africa …

this is really big'. In this section, we unpack some of the assumptions circulated with the new city imaginary and perpetuated through the moralistic argument on the 'right to development' and the pervasive 'Africa rising' narrative as used to gloss over criticism of the new city projects. In doing so, we address their problematic implications for Africa's urban development.

Several assumptions on the new cities model emphasise its indispensability for urban development, a view that is rooted in pessimism about the existing city. Elite stakeholder rhetoric on new cities relies on the assumption that existing cities are a lost cause and that new cities are the optimal solution to address rapid urbanisation (Watson and Agbola, 2013). One CEO of a new Nigerian city stated that the country's capital city was 'totally full', 'scared away investors,' and that 'a new city was needed to attract business … and provide a modern environment for modern people and activities' (Interview, 2015). Although framed through an optimistic discourse on modernity and future-oriented development for the greater (economic) good of the nation, this assumption often excludes resident populations of the 'hopeless' cities who are unlikely to move to new developments, implicitly positioning them as 'outside' of Africa's urban future. As expressed during an interview with an elite stakeholder involved in the creation of a new city in Morocco: 'New cities are the affair of the state, not of the citizen' (Interview, 2016), and the new cities' 'indispensability' justifies radical actions, such as widespread expropriation in the name of 'public utility'.

Embedded in this assumption is the related belief in a superior model of urbanity: new cities. This belief is tied to a narrow elitist reinterpretation of Africa's rise and 'right to development' as the materialisation of shiny new megaprojects. The commitment to new cities as the optimal model for 'modern' urban development and the scramble to erect the new projects echoes colonial-era logics (Moser, 2015) and an understanding of development as a linear process (Childs and Hearn, 2017), in which some actors are more 'advanced' and others must catch up. Imagining alternative 'low-tech' and environmental modes of transportation in one new African city, based on existing networks and the widespread use of horse-drawn carriages, one senior manager recounted in an interview how his ideas were vehemently opposed by his colleagues and how he was accused of attempting to 'take the country back to the middle ages' (Interview, 2016). Such comments reveal how major stakeholders have a narrow definition of modernity, imagine few alternatives for Africa's development, and are deeply influenced by techno-utopian solutions. In interviews, African political elites repeatedly expressed their desire

to promote the new city development agenda in their own country, motivated by the anxiety of being 'left behind' in this new trend for urban development. This assumption discredits and erases alternative visions and versions of urbanity, reducing the diversity of potential 'urban futures' and instead paving the way for one form of urban change broadly framed as Africa's only way forward.

The framing of new cities as solutions also rests on skewed assumptions about the 'problem' to which they are responding. This came out strongly during interviews and through multiple conference discussions, in which new cities were frequently presented as rational 'technical' solutions to 'technical' problems. Framing Africa's urbanisation challenges solely through the lens of overpopulation and lack of infrastructure positions the new city model as an ideal response, but provides no solutions for – or even space for discussion about – other issues including social injustice, corruption, financial mismanagement, weak legal frameworks for territorial organisation, as well as unresolved land tenure issues. These deeply rooted and complex socio-political matters are likely to be transferred to new cities if they are not more meaningfully addressed and engaged with in the definition and framing of the 'problem' that new cities are attempting to solve.

4.7 Fostering a diversity of African urbanisms

This article does not seek to cast doubt on the potential of African societies to transform and expand their economies and improve their urban environments. Rather, we focus primarily on 'what forms and informs the creation of such urban visions' (Cardoso, 2016: 100) by examining the power and circulation of seductive rhetoric about 'shiny new cities' through the vested interests of their enablers, advocates and boosters. Positioning our research within the broader urban policy mobilities literature, we suggest, through examples of new cities in Africa, that elite stakeholder rhetoric is a key way through which visions and ideas on urban policy and urban models are (re)shaped, normalised and circulated. Although similarly optimistic rhetoric on new cities and complex networks of actors are found in other projects across the Global South, we argue that the 'Africa rising' discourse provides a common narrative facilitating the circulation and supporting the adoption of the new city model in Africa.

Our contributions to the growing body of research on new cities and policy mobilities literature are threefold. First, we identify the broad categories and interconnected networks of

actors involved in new city ventures in the Global South. Grounded in examples from the African context, we highlight the private interests that support the projects, and the role elite actors play in producing an optimistic view of new cities in Africa. This provides a starting point to explain the motivations driving the mobilisation and dissemination of the new city model. Second, we draw attention to the widespread rejection of critique through the pervasive 'right to development' assumption held by numerous stakeholders and political elites and the omission of critical voices at key industry events. We contend that the resulting lack of engagement with robust criticism on the new projects further facilitates the circulation and mobilisation of the new city model in Africa. Related to this point, our third contribution sheds light on the normalised ideas on progress, modernity and development circulating through elite stakeholders' rhetoric on new cities, and reinforced through the adoption of a moralising argument. This rhetoric and its assumptions limit the range of visions of urbanity that are put into circulation and mobilised for Africa's urban future.

The networks and dynamics explored in this paper signal several trends in African urbanisation that can be addressed in future research on new cities in Africa and the Global South more broadly. The seductive narrative about new cities, its assumptions on modernity, the lack of critical voices, and the representation of 'progress', primarily through aesthetic and material innovations, depoliticises conversations on Africa's urban development and mode of urbanisation. According to Bhan (2014: 235) this depoliticisation 'challenges the possibilities of urban citizenship and belonging' and 'creates regimes and hierarchies of valued and unvalued spaces and, in the end, of the citizens that inhabit them'. The elite stakeholder rhetoric on new cities we examined uses progressive language and buzzwords to advance often exclusionary and socially regressive urban development models and growth agendas. Despite the optimism they exude, new cities in many cases perpetuate unequal configurations of power and colonial ideals of modernity. We suggest that critically examining elite stakeholder rhetoric on new cities can draw attention to how urban policy circulation is a politically and socially produced phenomenon, an aspect of policy mobilities that is still under-theorised to date (Clarke, 2012).

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