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The Dubai of Africa? Exploring the role of aesthetic representation in the construction of Eko Atlantic City, Lagos

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Abstract

The number of new cities in Africa is rising, with over 70 existing and planned across the continent. Largely characterised in the academic literature as exclusive enclaves emerging from processes of speculative urbanism and inter-urban competition to become a “world-class” city, there are few grounded studies which look beyond the structural to the distinct use of aesthetic practices that exert powerful effects on the lives of ‘ordinary’ urban residents. Drawing on the work of Rancière (2004) and Ghertner (2015) in the context of the newly emerging satellite city of Eko Atlantic, Lagos, Nigeria, this thesis provides new insights surrounding the role of aesthetic representations in the support for and growing dissent towards such developments. A multi-methods approach was taken, including the analysis of 30 CGIs, Instagram posts, YouTube videos and interviews with individuals more critical towards the project, finding merit in their intertextuality and ability to expose the networked qualities of digital media. The images and wider narrative frequently cast the existing city aside, presenting a blank canvas onto which a startling vision for the future “world-class” modern Lagos is projected. Such an aestheticization ignores a distinctive history of environmental and labour flows converging around the site that make it virtually impossible to separate past and present from imagined future, especially with respect to coastal erosion and displacement, a prospect that is expected to worsen with looming climate threats. Many commenters indicated concern for this and the ability of all to access the benefits promised by the project but continued to express hope and aspiration towards the city for attaining a better life in common with similar studies elsewhere. However, the contradictions embedded in the aesthetic, including the evocation of national belonging and pride, were found to create instances of ‘aesthetic dissent’ (Gastrow 2017). Along with an analysis of several different counter-representations produced by artists and architects, these were found to create the growing means for critique, disrupting the existing ‘aesthetic order’ or ‘way of seeing’, that may yield a more positive effect on the eventual outcome of the project.

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Commonly used acronyms

EAC – Eko Atlantic City

CGI – Computer Generated Imagery

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1. Introduction

He tells me a story of a client who paid for a plot of land and showed up to discover that his piece of real estate still lay beneath the Atlantic. “When they show you on the drawing, you can’t tell that it’s water. It’s when you come to take a look that you realise its ocean [you bought].” (Ventures Africa 2012)

Now more than ever in an era of highly speculative and mobile capital, aesthetic representations and images of city futures have significant power in catalysing investment decisions and the redevelopment of areas considered “ugly” or “undesirable”. As the opening quote demonstrates, many scholars are calling into question the importance of the material form if international clients are able to invest money purely on the basis of hyperrealistic representations and guarantees of a good return, without even stepping foot on site (De Boeck 2011; Herzog 2013). Desirability, in the form of developments that enable individuals to become “world-class” citizens and emulate the success of elsewhere (Roy & Ong 2011), is often valued more than their real ability to resolve problems including housing shortages and neglected infrastructure. Worse still, they can easily displace ‘imaginings of other more egalitarian urban futures’ (Bhan 2014: 235), in the creation of a ‘community of sense’; shaping what individuals see, what they are able to say and who has the capacity to speak (Rancière 2004; Ghertner 2015).

Various presented as ‘eco’, ‘smart’, ‘sustainable’ or ‘future’ cities utilising extensive slick branding, more than 70 existing and planned proposals for new cities are emerging across all areas of Africa, including Egypt, Ghana, Angola, South Africa and Nigeria (van Noorloos & Kloosterboer 2018: 1226; Watson 2014). A response to a number of urban challenges including sustainable development and climate change, they are considered by many to be the latest in a long line of colonial and postcolonial building projects. These sought to resolve similar problems, imposing the order and rationality associated with modernity, but largely resulted in well serviced enclaves for the few (Datta 2015; Moser 2015). With the neoliberal restructuring imposed on many African states during the 1980s, they have since taken on a different character, being largely privately led and managed, cities privileged as sites of capital

accumulation and speculation in the interests of international investors, developers, engineers and architects (Watson 2014; Goldman 2011).

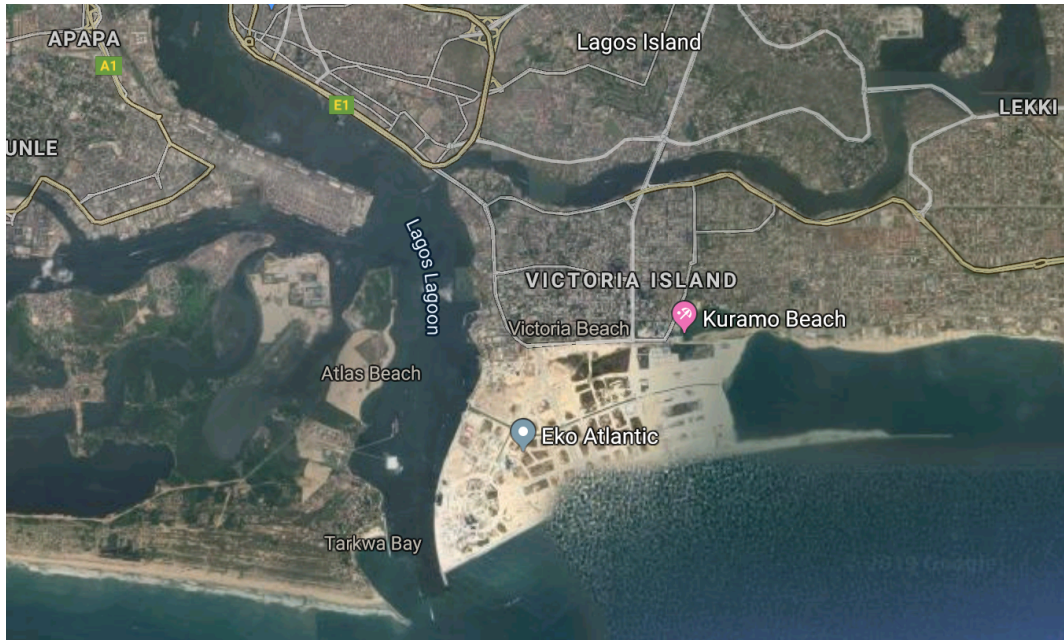


Figure 1: a satellite image showing the location of Eko Atlantic City within the rest of Lagos and the extent of reclamation works as of 2019 (Source: Google Maps).

Lagos, Nigeria, as the largest city in Africa with a population expected to double in the next 15 years, features the large and ambitious development of Eko Atlantic City (EAC). Established in 2008 as a public-private partnership between the Lagos State Government and South Energyx Ltd, with the backing of several banks, work began to dredge and reclaim 10 square kilometres of land from the Atlantic Ocean surrounding Victoria Island (Eko Atlantic 2012; see Figure 1). Originally conceived as a method for financing the construction of a sea wall to protect Victoria Island and parts of Lekki from increased erosion and flooding by producing developable property, its ambitions have since grown to become the '*future financial capital of Africa*' (Eko Atlantic 2012). With a housing deficit of over 17 million in Nigeria, it aims to accommodate 250,000 inhabitants and 150,000 commuters in a mixture of high-rise towers within several districts surrounding a marina and canals, of which two named Eko Pearl Towers are currently complete (South Energyx 2014).

EAC has received much attention in the media as a form of ‘climate apartheid’ (Lukacs 2014), displacing existing communities and intensifying environmental processes elsewhere, yet scholarly interest has been limited beyond its inclusion as another example of the ‘speculative urbanism’ (Goldman 2011) or ‘fantasy plans’ (Watson 2014) discussed earlier. These often ignore the complexity of engagements with the global as a project in ongoing formation, with uncertain outcomes that cannot be reduced to solely political or economic concerns (Roy & Ong 2011). It is difficult with a development like EAC to determine who is on the side of power and who is on the side of resistance, especially when viewing from the perspective of ‘ordinary’ urban citizens. Accordingly, a more grounded approach that accounts for the different actors involved, their motivations and desires is helpful in uncovering these more neglected viewpoints.

Since aesthetics and images are central to how individuals relate to such new cities (De Boeck 2011), and their performance on both a global and local stage, they provide the ideal entry point to understand how the as-yet incomplete EAC operates. The following study employs Rancière’s (2004) concept of the politics of aesthetics to understand how urban dwellers interpret what is represented and what is obscured by the Computer-generated Imagery (CGIs) and other depictions of the EAC project in news articles and social media. It frequently generates a complex relationship between acquiescence and dissent that can be mobilised to critique or disrupt the ‘community of sense’ (Rancière 2004) emerging from official accounts, advanced through the consideration of artistic responses.

The remainder of this thesis is divided into four main sections. The first provides a review of the existing literature relating to new cities in the context of Africa, together with the role of aesthetics and visualisations to suggest how urban residents may respond to critiques of exclusivity and dispossession, ending with the key research questions that motivated the study. This is followed by an overview of the methodology which included the analysis of CGIs, social media posts and news articles, before the presentation and discussion of results. The concluding section details the implications of the findings for the future of the city, while considering limitations and suggestions for further research.

2. Literature review

Despite its size, scale and prominence in the media, Eko Atlantic has thus far received limited critical attention in the academic literature beyond featuring in larger surveys of new city projects (see Côté-Roy & Moser 2018; van Noorloos & Kloosterboer 2018; Murray 2016; Watson 2014 for examples). Two notable exceptions are Mendelsohn (2018) and Ajibade (2017), who each take a political ecology approach to understanding the development based on a review of news coverage, and in Mendelsohn's (2018) case the consideration of wider colonial history and the literature of writers such as of Chris Abani and Nnedi Okorafor. In doing so, he makes a compelling case for the repeated attempts over time to control the coast and the people that inhabit it through dredging, evicting and privatising, never entirely successful, which he predicts will prove to be a facsimile for EAC (Mendelsohn 2018). Utilising Barnett and O'Neill's (2010) pathways to maladaptation framework, Ajibade (2017) finds little evidence to suggest the long-term sustainability of the project, especially for marginalised communities who are disproportionately affected by ocean surges along the coast. She concludes by stating that 'despite the planners' win-win rhetoric, the Eko Atlantic City may turn out to be a zero-sum project that will increase social inequity and create an unsustainable adaptation trajectory' (Ajibade 2017: 91).

In seeking to build on some of these insights and to address current gaps in the literature surrounding the use of aesthetic practices in new city projects, this review first draws on some of the wider structural and economic trends integral to their development. It then turns to some of the more grounded and context-specific insights gained from analyses of the everyday and 'ordinary' urban citizens that frequently evoke the visual, before utilising the findings from existing anthropological and cultural studies to illustrate the importance of aesthetics in building popular support for and resistance towards such developments.

The 'new city', its precedents and critiques in the context of the Global South

The emergence of large-scale mega-projects and satellite cities as a global phenomenon largely began as part of a wider structural shift commencing in the 1980s away from the public provision and management of services and facilities to public-private partnerships and inter-urban

competition (Harvey 1989). As a result of neoliberal globalisation and the imposition of structural adjustment policies on much of the Global South, the liberalisation of the economy, a decrease in state spending and privatisation of key industries were encouraged; including real estate or property. Cities became key sites for capital accumulation and the attraction of transnational corporations, creating an artificial hierarchy of 'global-cities'; those recognised to execute these functions particularly well becoming command and control centres in the global economy (Sassen 2001; Goldman 2011). Many governments across the Global South have sought to emulate these ambitions to make their cities "global" or "world-class", prioritising certain investment decisions, primarily those that increase 'connectivity, innovation and institutional flexibility' (Borja & Castells 1997: 14). Within the Southeast Asian context, this form of urban development has been termed 'bypass-implant urbanism' (Shatkin 2008), characterised by privately led, envisioned and managed projects. New spaces for the production and consumption of goods complete with their own support infrastructure are created or 'implanted' to facilitate the flow of goods and capital, 'bypassing' the existing congested and decaying spaces of the public city (Graham & Marvin 2001), elements of which can be observed in EAC.

Unlike earlier smaller-scale projects completed in reference to Euro-American models, today in many parts of the Global South, much larger privately funded developments at the citywide scale, often labelled 'instant cities', are growing (Murray 2016). Rather than incrementally improving the physical landscapes currently in existence, they provide a 'quick fix' to the problems that plague the current city including neglected infrastructure, overcrowding, traffic and crime, looking towards the Persian Gulf for inspiration, with cities such as Dubai and their model of 'super-fast urbanism' (Bagaeen 2007). Reminiscent of colonial-era planning and development (Datta 2015; Moser 2015), they are 'connected both physically and symbolically to the leading metropolitan centres of global power but delinked from their immediate surroundings' (Murray 2016: 32), containing all the facilities and infrastructure necessary for both living and working.

Emerging African new cities

Considered the 'last development frontier' and a 'rising' economic power (Watson 2014; Côté-Roy & Moser 2018), Africa is fast becoming the latest site for these new satellite cities which

promise quick returns and 'endless demand' for investors from a growing middle class. In common with Goldman's (2011) work in Bangalore, Watson (2014: 216) suggests that this new search for markets and 'spatial fixes' for capital (Harvey 1982) post- the 2008 financial crisis is part of a growing process of 'speculative urbanism'. In a broad survey of new city plans, she finds numerous examples that are either proposed, planned or currently under construction from across the continent, including Konza Techno City (Nairobi), Hope City (Accra), and Cité le Fleuve (Kinshasa). These have much in common from showing links to other cities such as Dubai, Shanghai or Singapore to the use of 'smart' or 'eco' branding, with the majority of the 'fantasy plans' adjoining an existing larger city (Watson 2014).

In a similar vein, van Noorloos & Kloosterboer (2018) draw out a typology based on a review of existing and planned African new cities. Instead of assuming all are driven by the goal of becoming the 'next world city', they take a relational approach, paying attention to financing and governance regimes, recognising the geographies of 'actually existing neoliberalism' (Brenner & Theodore 2002). The purposes of such cities range from being political or administrative centres to residential and commercial hubs, while they can also be classified according to spatial character and relationship to the existing city; from those totally independent to restructurings of what already exists (van Noorloos & Kloosterboer 2018). Various modes of financing are also identified including state-to-state funding and public-private partnerships. They highlight the role of Chinese investment in particular, Angola receiving extensive oil-backed loans in return for the development of new satellite towns (*novas centralidades*), and the new capital city in Egypt built in partnership with China State Construction Engineering Corporation (van Noorloos & Kloosterboer 2018; Cain 2014). Another Chinese construction and engineering firm, China Communications Construction Company, are also involved in the dredging and reclamation works for EAC.

Within the African context, multiple land governance arrangements exist, particularly in peri-urban areas where there is often a combination of formal and informal or customary land rights that are infrequently upheld (van Noorloos & Kloosterboer 2018; Watson 2014). Given their perceived importance nationally for resolving urban crises and bringing "progress" and "modernity" (Côté-Roy & Moser 2018), these developments are frequently fast-tracked without adequate citizen participation, enabling large-scale displacement, often through extra-legal tactics with the aid of local government (Murray 2015). Elites are also encouraged to move from

their existing locations in the city, increasing infrastructure spending budgets and leaving areas of land or buildings unoccupied (Brill & Reboredo 2018). The urban poor are unequally targeted as a result of these processes, receiving inadequate compensation for the loss of assets and livelihoods that are difficult to regain, as has already occurred in the case of Cité du Fleuve, where many fishermen have been evicted (De Boeck 2011).

Many authors dispute the fact that this is an entirely new phenomenon, being rooted in earlier attempts at post-independence state building through the construction of new capital cities (Cain 2014; Abubakar & Doan 2017). While the driving forces are different to today's new cities, being public-sector driven and inspired by symbols of national pride, they help to reveal lessons for future development and echo similar concerns. In their analysis of three postcolonial capitals, Abubakar & Doan (2017) find all lack adequate housing and basic urban services, segregating the poor from the wealthy, and have become undermined by rapid urbanisation and informality, while many burdened generations with debt (Cain 2014). More incremental, decentralised planning that is context-dependent and driven by local knowledge and participation, along with a diversity of people and the insistence on providing affordable housing are suggested as effective ways to improve the plans of new cities today (Abubakar & Doan 2017).

Context-specific factors and drivers

Given the diversity of contexts and developments considered in these papers, there is equally a need to examine the consequences and outcomes of individual city projects in-depth. Rises in oil prices due to increased demand and lower interest rates since the end of the civil war in 2002 has encouraged increased investment in large-scale mega-projects and new cities in Angola thanks to Chinese involvement, chiefly in the Cidade do Kilamba project completed in 2012 (Cain 2014). It gained a reputation for being yet another 'ghost town' with apartments that were unaffordable even for senior civil servants and so the cost was heavily subsidised by the government, leaving a reduced budget for truly affordable housing (Cain 2014). Many privately funded projects such as Kilamba appear to be financially unviable without extensive state subsidies and concessions, becoming expensive vanity projects that can easily fail to meet their original objectives. They perhaps overstate the arrival of a middle-class able to afford such high property prices, particularly as an exodus of higher income, educated individuals is occurring in

countries like Nigeria, with more moving abroad to Canada and Australia in search of better jobs and lifestyles (Quartz Africa 2019). Nevertheless, they can still prove to be profitable for developers in contexts where real estate becomes the 'safest bet' for investment. As Goodfellow (2017) observes in the smaller cities of Kigali and Addis Ababa, this process of speculative urbanism is becoming the driving force for urban change, producing an oversupply of high-end residential and commercial property that remain largely empty to the detriment of the urban poor.

Unpacking the processes and impacts of Modderfontein New City outside Johannesburg, Brill & Reboredo (2018) find, contrary to Watson (2014), that a strong state can intervene and challenge the developer in response to concerns over integration into existing transport systems and the provision of affordable homes. This ultimately led to the collapse of the project, the developers unwilling to adapt to the conditions laid down by city officials. In contrast, another new city development near Johannesburg, Waterfall City, has gone ahead. Working outside planning regulations and with a single developer (much like EAC), Murray (2015: 506) characterises the venture as 'operating outside the reach of public oversight', adopting its own modes of governance as an 'extraterritorial self-governing enclave'. These include development controls that ensure buildings conform to strict guidelines, rules around commercial conduct and the desire to operate outside municipal service providers through private subsidiaries (Murray 2015; Herbert & Murray 2015). This has additional profit-making advantages for developers along with avoiding the corruption and inefficiencies seen to curse many African states. In doing so it precludes public accountability and returns, having much in common with what Easterling (2014) terms 'extrastatecraft'; forces operating both outside of and in addition to the state in the creation of infrastructure, incorporating the Special Economic and Free-trade Zones structuring many city projects including EAC.

Lived realities and citizen perspectives

Looking beyond the structural to the lived realities and theories from the South (Parnell & Robinson 2012; Robinson 2006), it is important to explore the role of 'ordinary' citizens in the emergence and interpretation of these visions. These make up the majority of the 70% or more residents living in informal settlements, and as seen generally stand the most to lose (Wragg & Lim 2015). Poorer residents of Kinshasa were found to be hopeful for the better future

embodied in the 'irresistible' images of the Cité du Fleuve project, despite many being aware that they will have no right in the new city (De Boeck 2011). It offers citizens 'a new heterotopia' (De Boeck 2011: 278), an imagined space of possibility to escape from the socio-political realities of everyday life. Similarly, in Lusaka residents expressed positive comments around visions for African cities, producing a sense of national pride and desires for the conditions of modernity (Wragg & Lim 2015). However, these were found to relate more to daily challenges of accessing livelihoods, services and transport. Groups from across the income spectrum were well aware of the consequences if such visions were to go ahead, with questions around affordability and potential eviction and displacement that has occurred previously in peri-urban settlements and the CBD (Wragg & Lim 2015; see also Grant 2014 on Baku, Azerbaijan and Smith 2017 on Nairobi).

It is in this context that what De Boeck (2011) terms 'spectral politics' begins to dominate, referring to the spectacular yet highly speculative and unstable visions and images for the future that capture the aura of a new continent, yet obscure the lived reality. This is the main means through which people relate to new cities before they are implemented in reality, the 'sheer force of the word' being 'the most powerful heterotopia through which the city speaks, imagines, invents, and inhabits itself' (De Boeck 2011: 279). Beyond a few buildings and roads, Eko Atlantic only exists as a series of visualisations, yet already attracts considerable media and investor interest. For this reason, it is important to engage with the role of images and aesthetics in the construction of megaprojects and new cities to which this review now turns.

The role of aesthetics and visualisations in the creation of new city projects

Images are recognised to be an essential component of contemporary capitalism as an 'aesthetic economy' that, rather than addressing basic needs, exploits desires as a 'staging value' within the scope of exchange (Böhme 2003). Debord (1994) in his seminal work *The Society of the Spectacle*, argues that we are consumed by the spectacle of commodities which have become mere images or representations in late-capitalist society, alienated from the conditions of their production as passive consumers. Likewise, Bourdieu (1989) in his theorisation of 'symbolic capital', shows how images and symbols conceal the mechanisms through which the established order (class) is reproduced. These can be mobilised to produce a particular kind of community or built environment (Harvey 1987), through logics of seduction and desire (Acuto 2010),

enabling developers to attract considerable interest and support for projects even before they are built while depoliticising or obscuring the consequences described previously.

CGIs are now recognised to be the most common type of media to visualise and market future urban developments (Degen, Melhuish & Rose 2015). In her work analysing the role of international master planners or the 'Global Intelligence Corps' in globalising sustainable urbanism, Rapoport (2015a; 2015b) refers to such CGIs as 'cappuccino pictures' where 'the sun is always shining, and the children are always playing' (Rapoport 2015b: 321). These become essential in selling the vision by representing a model of what sustainable urbanism is in the absence of tangible examples or a clear definition and can be taken around the world as a 'bundle or menu of options' (Rapoport 2015a: 114) to be applied in different contexts.

Taking an actor-network orientated approach in studying the production of digital visualisations for the large-scale urban redevelopment project of Msheireb Downtown, Doha, Qatar, Melhuish, Degen & Rose (2016) find such CGIs should be approached as 'interfaces' in a network rather than static images. They are highly mobile involving multiple actors, offices, technologies and places, and similarly to EAC which employs architects based in Abu Dhabi, are rarely produced by staff in the local context (Rose, Degen & Melhuish 2014). As digital images, they are highly malleable, being modified along the way to produce different atmospheres and sensory experiences. These include changing the light and colour, luminosity and hue to give them a particular intensity and definition (Degen, Melhuish & Rose 2015). Critically, this needs to be 'both place-specific and transcendent, to speak to a local and international audience' (Melhuish, Degen & Rose 2016: 240). Elements of nostalgia for the past in the right dress and street design while also taking examples from Western models create a 'post-colonial urban aesthetic' (Melhuish, Degen & Rose 2016: 239). This reinforces the status of the elite by omitting other cultural identities that do not fit the favoured re-imagining of the city.

These designs enable what Lauermaann (2019: 3) terms, 'strategic simplification' in urban politics, where agendas are generalised to help 'articulate rhetorical arguments about the future of the city'. Through a study of speculative designs, blueprints, renderings, maps and models produced for previous failed Olympic bids, he finds four main simplification strategies at work. These include the erasure of the surrounding urban landscape, insertion where images of the city are altered to include the proposed project, integration which emphasises the connectivity

to the surrounding city, and modelling best practice as a showcase for sustainable techniques (Lauermann 2019). Collectively, they help build support for investment and can be used as 'spatial products' (Easterling 2005: 2), providing a measure of legitimacy to advance political ambitions and leadership, but equally 'structure the scope' of what is possible and seen as natural or self-evident (Lauermann 2019: 14). The 'architectural rumour' of being 'more spectacular than feasible' (Harris-Brandts & Gogishvili 2018: 74), can make these images profitable for elites regardless of their failure to actually materialise, conforming to Abu-Hamdi's (2017) notion of architecture itself as a significant agent within neoliberalism through logics of speculation.

The 'aesthetic order' and the "world-class" city

As already alluded, in addition to their profit making activity, these 'spatial products' have real power in producing a distinct 'aesthetic order', shaping 'how individuals see and what they can say, what gets recognized as speech and what is heard as mere noise' (Ghertner 2015). Following Jacques Rancière (2004: 13), aesthetics here are understood as the 'system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience'. This forms what he calls the 'distribution of the sensible', a demarcation in space and time of the visible and the invisible, beautiful and ugly and who has the ability to speak about such practices (Rancière 2004). A 'community of sense' revolves around the aesthetic order where established visual codes and aesthetic norms are used to determine what is deemed good or bad (Pow 2018).

Pow (2009: 375) studies how the rise of gated communities in Shanghai is accompanied by a 'spatial/class politics framed by aesthetic concerns and appeals.' Such an aestheticization is maintained by design criteria and private security that contains or excludes social difference, obscuring the political nature of such projects that seek to maintain the hegemony of certain groups (Pow 2009). This can have tangible effects in the dispossession of whole communities in the name of "world-class" city making in what Ghertner (2015; 2011) terms 'rule by aesthetics'. In this governance regime (based on the authors experience in Delhi), what looks "world-class" is considered planned and therefore legal, and if it looks polluting or unsightly then it is deemed unplanned and therefore illegal. The logic, deemed easier and less time consuming than assessing land ownership through surveys and mapping, has led to the destruction of numerous informal settlements for the construction of large mega-projects, even if these themselves

contravene established planning regulations (Ghertner 2011). For Mbembe (2001: 103), this is characteristic of the postcolony where power is established through 'a distinct set of cultural repertoires and powerfully evocative concepts' that structure what is considered 'common sense'. The urban poor frequently seek to become part of this collective process to imagine a better future and become "legitimate" subjects despite being the ones who stand the most to lose, as suggested previously in relation to Kinshasa and Lusaka. This becomes the paradox at the heart of the "world-class" city, that increasingly its survival actually depends on the urban poor rather than the middle-class or elite (Ghertner 2015), which may offer some emancipatory potential.

Confronting the 'aesthetic order'

More than just contributing to the conditions of alienation and dispossession, Rancière also suggests that within the 'community of sense' lies the potential for its transformation, being prone to internal contradictions and dissensus. He disputes Debord and Bourdieu's theories of deception and superficiality, seeing the potential of the image and audience to modify the realm of the 'visible, sayable and possible' (Rancière 2007: 259; Papastergiadis 2014). The capacity of images to 'go beyond mere reflection and mystification' (Papastergiadis 2014: 11), and precisely because they remain demarcations in space and time, brings the potential to reconfigure and transform the 'community of sense' or 'aesthetic order'. Applying Rancière's notion to the study of aesthetics, art and the slum, Jones (2011) finds examples of activist art in Project Morrinho, a model based on the favelas of Rio de Janeiro that was originally conceived as a social exercise but was soon exhibited around the world. By working as an 'interface of knowledges' with what is play and performance, what is real and fantasy, it challenges the 'visibility and intelligibility' of what people think of as a slum (Jones 2011: 704).

Attention must also be paid to the 'myriad ways ordinary people guide, deceive, and toy with power instead of confronting it directly' (Mbembe 2001: 128), the postcolonial state being one of compromise and plurality (Mbembe 2001). With projects like EAC existing in the liminal space between conception and incompleteness, current power relationships can last, but they remain precarious and fragile in the face of practical realities' everyday residents face, often producing resentment and disenchantment with the vision or narrative presented (Laszczkowski 2011). This provides opportunities for citizens to produce their own interpretations of the vision in the

present to bridge the temporal gap (Smith 2017), offering a way to affront and push back against the current political-economic system in what Gastrow (2017) terms 'aesthetic dissent'. The concept emerged from the reactions of residents in Angola who expressed dissatisfaction with the design of new buildings being more open to foreigners, undermining their feeling of urban and national belonging and identity, becoming a means to reject the political regime through the language of aesthetics (Gastrow 2017). Although there are clearly more than just aesthetic circulations structuring the outcome of such developments (see Cardoso 2017 on Luanda), it does offer a way to understand how 'urban planners, policy-makers and community organizers might intervene to shape what is happening' (Murray 2016: 47) and respond to earlier critiques of exclusivity and dispossession.

Given the lack of empirical literature that connects the important themes discussed of new cities, their distinct use of aesthetic practices, and the potential for resistance in the context of citizen and artistic responses, the following study helps to address this gap through an examination of the following research questions:

1. What type of meaning and aesthetic is represented by the CGIs and other promotional discourse relating to the Eko Atlantic City project?
2. How do 'ordinary' urban citizens interpret this and what is being obscured?
3. How can the dominant meanings inscribed in them be disrupted or challenged?

3. Methodology

This study recognises the material agency of images and their ability to act on our bodily capacities in powerful ways, influencing perception, mood and state of mind as a 'real social power' (Böhme 1993: 125; Mitchell 2005; Biehl-Missal 2013; Bissell & Fuller 2017). Accordingly, a primarily qualitative methodology was adopted, influenced by an interpretivist epistemology that recognises subjective and mutually constructed meaning (Silverman 2014). The image or text itself has the equivalent agency in shaping our opinions and experiences as the viewer or observer themselves, and the particular 'way of seeing' they bring along with their context or location (Rose 2016a).

According to Rose (2016a), there are four main sites at which the meanings of an image are made: the site of production, the site of the image itself, the sites of its circulation and the sites where it is seen by various audiences. Each has three different modalities: technological (the apparatus used to look at or enhance natural vision), compositional (material qualities of the image or object), and social (economic, social and political relations, institutions and practices that surround an image through which it is seen and used) (Rose 2016a). It is also important to recognise the intertextuality of images; they are generally always reliant on the meanings embedded in other images and texts (Hand 2017), and so these connections need to be explored in order to understand their meanings more fully. Therefore, this research considered both the images themselves and the textual information that surrounded them. With the site of production already receiving great attention from Melhuish, Degen & Rose (2016), the primary concern was that of representation, interpretation and meaning. Given this, it investigated the site of the image itself and how these circulate online as a digital object taken up by different audiences in different ways, necessitating the use of a multi-methods approach that could unpack the different modalities present.

Compositional analysis of the 30 CGIs taken from the official EAC website (Eko Atlantic 2018) considering content, colour, spatial organisation and expressive content (Rose 2016), was undertaken first in order to understand the type of vision and aesthetic represented. Lauermaann's (2019) simplification strategies were also utilised (erasure, insertion, integration, modelling), along with some of the criteria used in his content analysis including the dominant

visual components of each image, design strategies used for emphasis, and practices of inclusion and exclusion. Since these frequently appear within documents, reports and articles relating to the project, a collection of 40 news articles were sampled from 2008 onwards from reputable news outlets in Nigeria and internationally including Vanguard, The Nation, Pulse, PM News and The Guardian. Relevant brochures and newsletters from the developer's website were also studied. These predominately focussed on the progress of the project, particular milestones and events, providing a useful overview and history of the development as well as revealing the "official" interpretation and meaning, along with other opinions.

These images largely exist online, being highly mobile, and 'circulate between different screens as part of their production, distribution and circulation' (Rose & Willis 2019: 414). Being 'interfaces' in a network rather than static images (Rose, Degen & Melhuish 2014), they invite movement (Rose 2016b), especially on screens that encourage the involvement of an audience by scrolling, zooming, tapping and commenting, flowing across multiple media channels and sites (Jenkins 2008). Social media sites provide the ideal platform to understand how, in such a vast and complicated web of interaction, people produce or take meaning from images beyond the usually static traditional news media. It also highlights the techniques or devices used by the creator of the images to produce a particular 'atmosphere' (Biehl-Missal 2013), or 'affective intensity' (Dean 2015). With engagements likely to be 'quick and distracted rather than slow and attentive' (Rose & Willis 2019: 414), these are essential to capture user attention in an otherwise endless scroll or stream of images.

Being two largely visual social media platforms that also incorporate commenting functions, Instagram and YouTube present a useful basis on which to examine all four sites where an images meaning is produced, in particular of circulation and audience (Hand 2017). With over 1 billion users sharing 500 million stories daily (Instagram 2019), Instagram is now more popular than Twitter or Facebook and enables users to post images by location, add filters, upload short videos and add hashtags or tag other accounts (Laestadius 2017). As accounts are made public by default, it offers researchers large volumes of accessible content, while each post must include an image or video, creating 'constant decisions about aesthetics' (Laestadius 2017). Research conducted using the platform is usually either big data orientated to understand usage patterns such as hashtag popularity (Highfield & Leaver 2015); cultural analytics, using image processing and computer vision techniques to create interactive visualisations and determine

patterns (Rose & Willis 2019; Hochman & Manovich 2013); or smaller samples (boyd & Crawford 2012). The smaller data approach was adopted for this study, allowing 'a granularity of detail that might otherwise be lost in dazzling large-scale data visualizations' (Losh 2015: 1650). Posts are considered as a unit (image, caption, comments, tags, hashtags and likes), so the context of each image is not lost (Laestadius 2017).

Likewise, YouTube has over 1 billion users with one billion hours of video watched daily (YouTube 2019) on a vast diversity of topics posted by amateurs to professionals, enabling users to like or dislike videos, make and reply to comments. In a large-scale study of most favoured, viewed, discussed and responded videos posted to YouTube over six days, Burgess & Green (2009) were able to understand the relationship between these categories and types of media producers, user-created videos being the most discussed and responded compared with traditional producers. Smaller sample investigations have sought to understand public responses or opinions on events or particular issues through analysing comments on videos, YouTube providing the ideal platform to understand 'competing claims, divergent representations, and various strategies of persuasion in public debate' (Raby & Raddon 2015: 169).

Following Salmons (2017), an extant method was used for collecting both the Instagram images and YouTube videos by collecting posts and other user-generated content independently of the researcher. For the Instagram posts, the Digital Methods Initiative open-source Instagram Scraper tool (2015) was utilised to scrape 867 posts¹ from the developers official account (@ekoatlantic), generating a tabular file with post metadata. Obtaining posts according to hashtags was considered but discounted after an initial investigation found there to be too many posts unrelated to the project that were utilising hashtags such as #ekoatlantic for advertising products or services. With over 60,000 posts it would have placed a strain on the tool's server and researcher in processing and analysing the results. Preliminary analysis was undertaken for the frequency of recurring hashtag use within the posts. As the primary mode by which posts are organised and collected on the platform, the hashtag offers a methodological source to filter and sample texts to construct grounded categories through which their content can be analysed (Caliandro 2018). After assessing their frequency, four were chosen based on interest and within these a systematic sampling strategy adopted to capture any potential changes over time,

¹ The tool was run at 14:50 on 11 June 2019 and so does not reflect any posts made since this time.

selecting every tenth post to study the combination of hashtag use within each more closely along with the image and comments posted by users. One limitation of the tool is that it does not download the images or comments associated with each post, making a larger sample less practical as manual screenshots had to be taken.

Table 1: the sample of YouTube videos chosen.

Title	Author	Date published	Views	Comments
<i>EKO ATLANTIC 2018 / THE AFRICAN DUBAI IN LAGOS NIGERIA 2018</i>	M skid: vlogger from Nigeria	1/4/18	47,740	329
<i>Eko Atlantic City / Dubai of Africa / Visit Nigeria / Being Nigerian</i>	Being Nigerian: promotional video from developers	22/10/18	344,211	815
<i>EKO ATLANTIC Lagos Nigeria. Whats Inside??</i>	Tayo Aina: vlogger from Nigeria	13/5/18	147,937	566
<i>The Vice Chairman of Eko Atlantic answers all your questions</i>	Eko Atlantic: promotional video from developers	2/4/19	19,134	202

A similar method was adopted for the YouTube videos, except a smaller sample of four videos was purposively chosen to account for both professional and user-generated content given the differences acknowledged previously by Burgess & Green (2009), and to capture a variety of different content, responses and opinions (Table 1). The researcher first watched each in full, making notes on composition alongside content. Comments were then extracted from each video with Rieder's (2015) YouTube Data Tools 'Video Info and Comments Module' as a tabular file, with 1,912 comments being obtained across the four².

² The tool was run at 11:14 on 29 June 2019 and so does not reflect any comments or views made since this time.

To gain an insight into unanswered questions emerging from an examination of this data and to understand the role of such representations for key actors and stakeholders in the project, requests for interview were made to both the developers, South Energyx, and MZ Architects, who produced some of the key designs and masterplans. No response was received from either after repeated attempts to contact. After exploring other projects or campaigns related to EAC, largely those that sought to critique or counter the official narrative presented, two were found from the environmental foundation Henrich Böll Stiftung, and local documentary photographer Christopher Nelson. The contact details were found for the lead co-ordinator (Bukky) of the Code Green campaign that had received support from Henrich Böll, and Christopher, who were both happy to be interviewed about their work and consented to the use of their real names. This resulted in a semi-structured interview lasting approximately 1 hour over Skype with Bukky, and a structured email interview with Christopher, who did not have the time available for a call. The complete list of interview questions and responses can be found in Appendix A.

There is some division within the literature as to the ethical considerations that need to be addressed with the type of social media research conducted. Some argue that since all of the data is available to anyone and is so vast, consent from all individuals involved is not necessary or possible (Raby & Raddon 2015). Others such as boyd & Crawford (2012: 672) argue it is 'problematic for researchers to justify their actions as ethical simply because the data are accessible'. Even if images or comments are uploaded on one platform privately, they can easily be shared publicly on another and may not have been intended for use in a different context. Since users have a chosen level of anonymity through online pseudonyms (Raby & Raddon 2015), it was decided that their inclusion within comments was appropriate. Informed consent was achieved for both interviews by providing a detailed participant information sheet and consent form. This outlined the research objectives, what was expected of them and how the information provided would be used and stored, along with providing the opportunity to ask questions before conducting the interview (see Appendix B).

Without being fully immersed in the actions and experiences of those commenting and contributing to the project, it was possible to maintain a level of detachment through observing rather than participating. This brought its own challenges in terms of understanding what might motivate someone to hold certain beliefs or opinions, and the 'insider lingo' (Baym 2015), used by particular groups. Those from the different ethnic groups in Nigeria for instance such as the

Yoruba and Igbo, each have their own language and distinctive histories. Rivalries and conflict are common online and offline, some of which were observed but are difficult to fully apprehend without further investigation, the interviews helping bridge this to an extent. Of course, any research also involves choices about what to include, exclude and focus on, being influenced by preconceptions and our own 'ways of seeing' (Rose 1997). Throughout, a conscious effort was made to remain open to other opinions, recognising their legitimacy alongside the author's interpretation, along with the power relations that pervade each site of the image (Rose 2016a).

There are also distinct caveats to some of the data collection methods that undermines their representativeness. Despite their size, both Instagram and YouTube have a limited user base in terms of demographics, with over 70% of Instagram users being under the age of 35 (Worthy 2018), and men more likely to post videos or comments on YouTube (Molyneaux et al. 2008). Equally, social media data 'are not a transparent window into people's imaginations, intentions, motifs, opinions, and ideas' (Manovich 2012: 466), with posts and comments unlikely to be reflective of someone's true identity and more a performance of their social media personality. With global reach, it is extremely difficult to determine the audience for such images or videos; where they are from, their socioeconomic background and age, all of which may affect their opinions and perceptions of EAC. Algorithms also have a silent role to play in continually (re)structuring content (Gillespie 2014), highlighting the difficulty in making sense of such a dynamic system in a static way such as this, especially when some argue that the 'networked image' is now more important than single images (Rubenstein & Sluis 2008). As yet, there are few methods or tools freely available to address these concerns, the use of different methods in this case offering a degree of triangulation to overcome some of these weaknesses.

Table 2: a selection of the most frequently occurring themes emerging from thematic analysis of the data and their respective sub-themes.

Broader theme	Sub-themes
Coastal erosion	Land reclamation 'Great Wall of Lagos' Mastery of nature Effect on neighbouring areas Climate change and rising sea levels Environmental Impact Assessment
Sustainability	Ecosystems Transport Self-sustaining
Investment and economic development	New economic capital/financial hub Multiplier effect Employment International interest Prime real estate Housing speculation
Wealthy enclave	Ultra-rich Exclusivity Eviction and displacement
'World-class' aesthetics and inter-city comparison	International standards New York Dubai 'othering' and aesthetic dissent
Problems of existing city	Poor infrastructure provision Housing deficit Traffic Corruption and poor governance

All of the data collected was imported into NVivo, a qualitative analysis software package, in order to conduct thematic coding of the news articles, project documents, Instagram posts, YouTube comments and interview transcripts. Rather than adopting a content analysis approach, where codes are exhaustive, exclusive and replicable (Rose 2016a), a thematic strategy allowed for a more open and fluid engagement with the data and what emerged from it, rather than imposing theories directly from the outset (Silverman 2014). Numerous descriptive codes emerged based on a close reading of important words, phrases or features, an exploration of the relationships between each allowing these to be organised into higher level analytical codes identifying specific themes understood in relation to the wider literature (Strauss & Corbin 2015). Shown in Table 2 are a selection of the most frequently occurring broader themes along with their respective sub-themes that emerged across the data which will be utilised in the following results and discussion.

4. Results and discussion

An analysis of the main visual materials including a selection of CGIs, Instagram posts and YouTube videos is presented first, informing the latter discussion of key themes present in the news coverage, user comments and interview data, considering throughout the theoretical literature explored earlier.

4.1 Visual analysis

4.1.1 CGIs of Eko Atlantic



Figure 2: a night view of the Business District from above (Source: Eko Atlantic 2018).

Visual compositional analysis of the renderings or CGIs produced of the project revealed approximately 60% (18) to be taken from an elevated perspective, being largely figureless, emphasising the sense of scale through height and disappearing boundaries. Figure 2 for instance as a night view of the Business District shows the main commercial skyscrapers on both sides of the main transport corridor lit up in dazzling blue or white light. The buildings surrounding them copies of one another, fading into the distance as a never-ending patchwork of yellow light, possibly marking them out as residential. They are given less emphasis in this space of connectivity and flow, with no sense of human scale, the cars abstracted red lines, the ocean in the distance the only real signifier of its location.



Figure 3: a similar night view around a central canal (Source: Eko Atlantic 2018).

A more detailed night view looking down a central canal (Figure 3), contains a greater mix of architectural styles with a prominence of nature including many trees. Some small figures exist in the foreground on the street and in the buildings, giving signs of life after dark, but are generally dwarfed by the scale of the structures and perspective used to emphasise distance, the two tall towers at the apex forming the focal point of the image.



Figure 4: Eko Esplanade Marina District (Source: Eko Atlantic 2018).

The majority of the other renderings make use of the eye-level or first-person perspective to put the viewer in the frame and give greater immersion in the social life of the city. As a result, they appear to be predominately based around the Marina District with greater public space, people dining out and shopping, connecting with the developer's desire to produce a '*live, work and play*' destination (Eko Atlantic 2012). One of the few CGIs to feature clearly distinguishable people is shown in Figure 4. The rather cosmopolitan mix presented in the scene is notable, with friends, families and individuals of different ethnicities, but all still seem relatively well-heeled carrying bags and shopping, a sense of purpose and movement being implied. The intensive golden hue of the sunlight rippling off the water around the walkway gives the impression of warmth or a desert type environment, the shadows of the people producing a realistic yet transcendent feel.



Figure 5: Marina District residential complex (Source: Eko Atlantic 2018).

The same area of the Marina District from a different perspective looking from a balcony in a residential complex (Figure 5) again attempts to add an element of realism with the lens flare of the sunlight refracting off the building. The small figures below and exaggerated proportions of the other towers continues to stress scale, the cool blueness of the sky and smooth glossiness of the surfaces presenting an almost frictionless view of the space that is devoid of context.

All the CGIs make use of the erasure technique in the removal of any context or setting in the surrounding city beyond the ocean (Lauermann 2019). This emphasises the disconnected nature of the project inserted into a pristine landscape, with no distinctive architectural style to link it to the rest of Lagos. It portrays spaces of mobility and the free-flow of capital in a cool blue hue, which Rose & Willis (2018) characterise as ‘anticipating smart’ and a sense of futurity compared with images of people or leisure that tend to be shown in orange, existing in the present. The buildings and skyscrapers themselves are the dominant visual component in almost every CGI, perspective utilised to give the feel of limitless size and scale that dwarves anything below. Lighting, reflection and shadow create a hyperrealistic feel, making it difficult to distinguish what

#naija, a term frequently adopted by the country's youth in reference to a new beginning for Nigeria (Labaran 2010), were also used in a number of posts. The attempt to appeal to a younger audience with these particular tags is perhaps deliberate given they represent Instagram's main user group, helping gain greater following and publicity. More than just descriptive words, they are emotive, tapping into users dreams and desires, projecting a vision of what the future of Lagos and wider Nigeria should be.

The four chosen for further analysis included #aspiration, #future, #naija, and #newcity (see Appendix C for a more complete list). These rarely exist in isolation, with many tags being used simultaneously in each post to gain maximum coverage in advertising the project to a wider audience beyond those who follow the official account. The majority either feature the CGIs, photos of ongoing construction or events and visits held at the site, of which the following provide a sample.

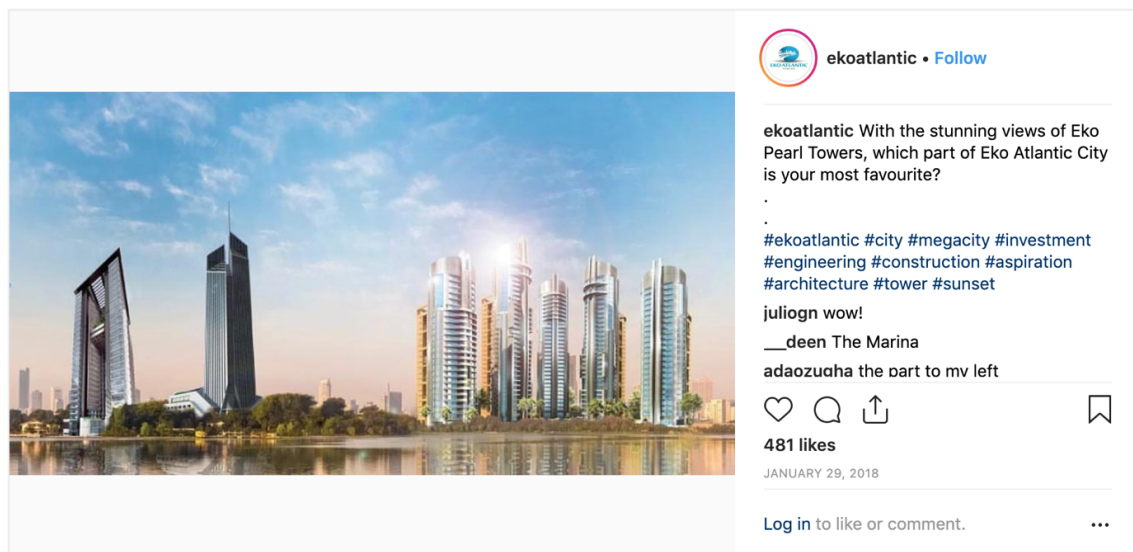


Figure 7: an Instagram post with a CGI of the Eko Pearl Towers (Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/BejVUKmntgR/>).

The post in Figure 7 has 10 hashtags, some generic and some that relate more specifically to the content of the image, a rendering of the Eko Pearl Towers. In contrast to the CGIs shown previously, it appears to have been directly inserted into a real image of the existing city from the water. Buildings and trees are visible in the background, the shiny and futuristic towers looking distinctly out of place as if landed out of nowhere in this context, especially given their

size and the sun reflecting at an artificial angle. This does not seem to bother the commenters though, with a positive response to the question posed that encourages participation but assumes some prior knowledge by asking which is their favourite part of the project.

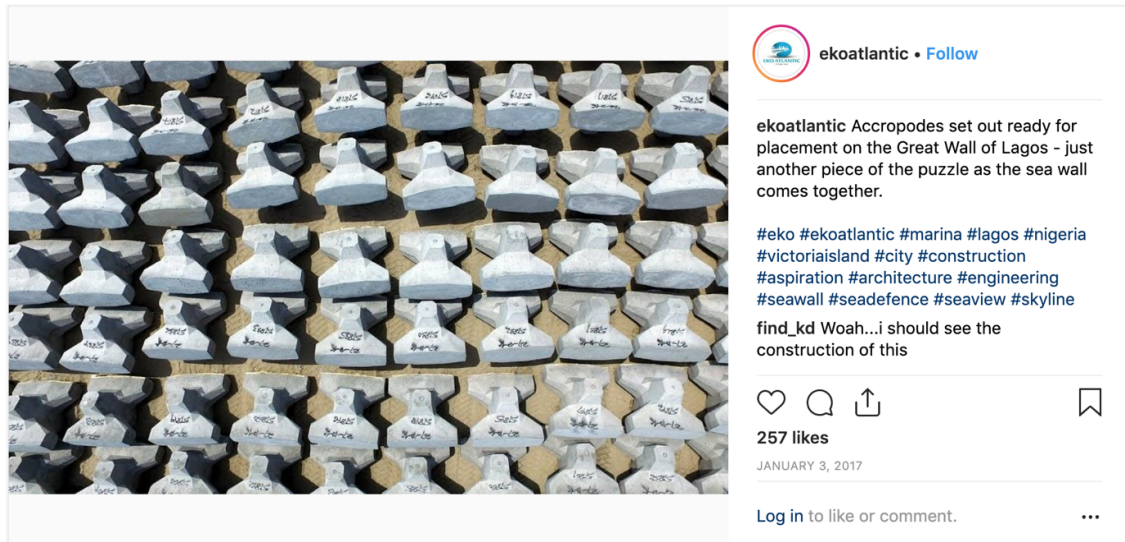


Figure 8: an Instagram post showing progress in construction with an image of the accropodes making up the ‘Great Wall of Lagos’ (Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/BOzk8czj_U/).

A large proportion of posts show images of the construction process from a raised perspective, particularly the infrastructure networks including roads, canals, and sea wall termed the ‘Great Wall of Lagos’. Often these are carefully curated to seem like artistic pieces, the accropodes for the sea wall in Figure 8 lined up meticulously as a repeating pattern, attaching a certain aesthetic of precision and order to what would otherwise be an unremarkable image. Notable here is the use of hashtags such as #seaview and #skyline that bear no resemblance to the image itself, becoming emblematic of what the project as a whole is attempting to represent. Therefore, images like these can never be understood purely in isolation and must be considered as networked and related to other images in order to make proper sense of them (Rose, Degen & Melhuish 2014).

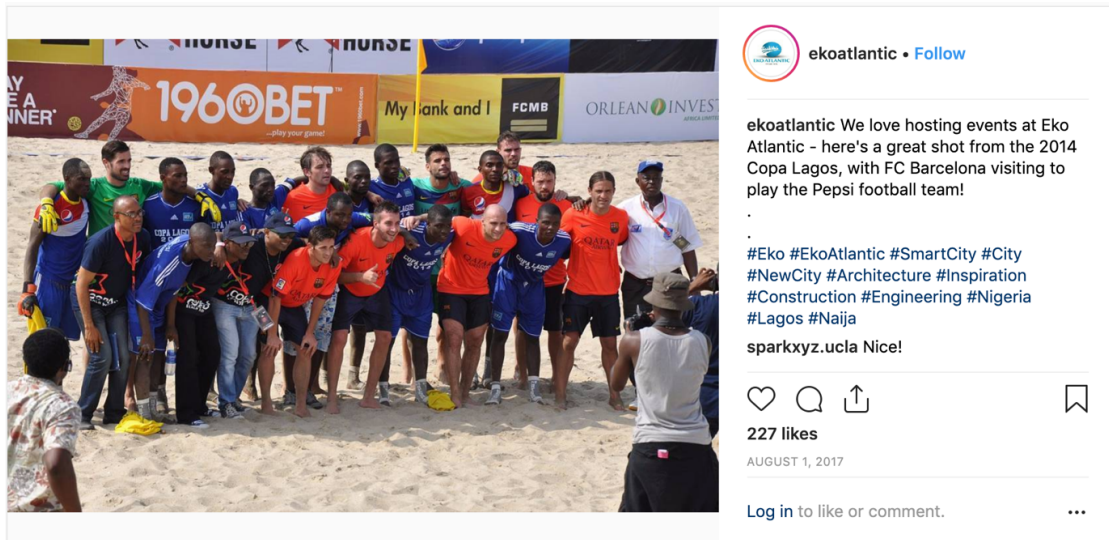


Figure 9: an Instagram post showing a football tournament held at Eko Atlantic in 2014 (Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/BXP0O9IB_SR/).

Likewise, Figure 9 contains several tags unrelated to the main image of a football tournament hosted on the Eko Atlantic site. There are many such posts that utilise large events such as music festivals and polo tournaments or celebrities as a marketing strategy. They demonstrate life in an as yet incomplete city and give greater meaning and legitimacy to the otherwise superficial use of tags such as #aspiration or #naija yet remain inaccessible to all but the middle and upper classes.

Many of the descriptions attempt to project an imagined future onto something that does not yet exist, encouraging people to imagine in a particular way what abstract and difficult to define concepts such as the smart city or naija should look like. As discussed previously, images on social media platforms in particular need to be spectacular to produce an 'affective intensity' (Dean 2015) that encourages users to stop, look and interact. It is no surprise that the images studied of both the renders and Instagram posts make use of the large scale rather than the intimate, exaggerating proportions and particular colours and hues, with a generic architectural style that could be located almost anywhere. Interestingly, and similar to the image in Figure 8, many of the CGI posts use the hashtag #conceptart. By elevating to the higher status of art, it confers greater aesthetic legitimacy and authority that may preclude other, alternative visions despite having little basis in actually existing reality.

4.1.3 YouTube videos

All of the YouTube videos studied present a markedly positive impression of EAC, utilising similar shots and panoramic camera angles to take in sweeping views and emphasise scale, two making use of the CGIs juxtaposed with the reality of existing progress.

The two unofficial videos produced by young Nigerian vloggers M Skid (2018) and Tayo Aina (2018), arguably part of the growing aspirational middle-class, present a more intimate view using handheld cameras, and in the case of Aina also a drone, taking viewers on a tour inside the Eko Pearl apartments. The place appears largely empty and devoid of people except construction activity with a dominance of concrete roads and canals. Yet M Skid (2018: 4:28) imagine themselves living there already, eagerly gesturing at a piece of land saying, *'this is going to be my house next to Davido [a famous Nigerian singer/songwriter]'*. Frequently referred to as the *'future of Nigeria'* that you can *'just come and start living in'* (Aina 2018: 4:04), it presents the view of an *'instant city'* (Bagaeen 2007), despite being 20-30 years away from becoming the *'full blown Manhattan'* (Eko Atlantic 2019a: 13:43).

The temporal narrative collapsing past and future into the present is given further emphasis within the promotional video by Being Nigerian (2018). Time-lapses of the reclaimed land along with interviews and archive footage displays progress made, the flythrough of the CGIs fading into drone footage of the current site presents the future existing now as a *'coexistence of temporalities'* (Smith 2017: 38). According to the video, *'if seeing is believing, Eko Atlantic has it all'* (6:10), demonstrating the semblance of the image that even extends to growing 200,000 trees early in a nursery so that the *'cosmetics'* (9:54) of the city are in place even before the buildings. It is all to maintain a certain aesthetic of *'beauty'* and an established city that is somehow natural despite being visibly manufactured.

The final video (Eko Atlantic 2019a) features an interview with the Vice Chairman of Eko Atlantic, Ronald Chagoury, by a *'high-end'* Nigerian real estate magazine owner and developer. Interspersed with panoramic drone footage of the site featuring some of the emerging towers, the interview stresses the credibility and standards of the city, in particular towards sustainability and the environment – *'consuming locally'* (10:22) and *'energy efficient buildings'* (12:45) being cited as two examples.

Having considered the type of aesthetic and meanings embedded within these images and videos, the discussion now moves to the themes emerging from analysis of the textual data (including news articles, reports and comments) to determine how others interpret this aesthetic and its potential consequences.

4.2 Thematic analysis

4.2.1 Coastal erosion and land reclamation

Within media and official accounts, the EAC project has largely been justified by the need to *'reclaim and restore the geographical territory of Lagos State and by extension the Federal Republic of Nigeria'* (Fashola, former governor of Lagos State, cited Vanguard News 2011). The erosion of land that *'simply vanished'* (Eko Atlantic 2012), has supposedly been brought under control as a result of the 'Great Wall' project. The land reclamation taking place in effect becomes more than just for the creation of a new city, but a whole state building exercise through extending territory out into the ocean, giving the project heightened importance nationally and defending the use of extra-legal measures. The 'land lost' narrative essentially erases what was there before, Bar Beach; a popular waterfront area for friends and family (Christopher, interview), a thriving spot for businesses and home to many residents (Nigerian Tribune 2018). The estimated 80,000 people occupying the area were forcibly evicted by the police in 2008 to take back possession of the federal government owned land because of safety concerns, including fire and the threat of erosion, apparently not to advance the building of EAC (Vanguard News 2012a). What could have been maintained as a public space for the whole of society was instead *'sold off to private interests'* (Bukky, interview), the *'hustle and bustle'* of the former beach having disappeared (Nigerian Tribune 2018).

Despite the rhetoric surrounding the 'Great Wall' protecting land and property on Eko Atlantic and Victoria Island against erosion and severe flooding, it has according to many, created the reverse effect for neighbouring communities further along the coast. Residential areas such as Alfa Beach and Goshen Beach Estate in the Lekki Peninsula have been threatened with increased coastal erosion and displacement. The draft Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) recognises a *'shift in the erosion of Bar Beach eastwards with major adverse effect 3km to the east and*

moderate effect up to 10km to the east' due to offshore dredging increasing the energy of the waves diverted to the eastern coast when hitting the 'Great Wall' (Heinrich Böll Stiftung 2012a). The community of Okun Alfa, whose main occupations include fishing and farming, were affected by a severe ocean surge in 2011 that destroyed the health centre and access road, sea water contaminating drinking water and farmlands, since claiming the market where women used to sell goods (Heinrich Böll Stiftung 2012a; 2014a). This has left many unemployed, with limited help from the government to defend their land, forcing residents to relocate further inland where housing availability is sparse given increased developer interest and speculation.

The EIA itself was only submitted three years after dredging began, contravening the government's EIA Act of 1992. Its purpose is therefore void with no baseline data to compare before reclamation began (Ventures Africa 2012; Vanguard News 2012b; Heinrich Böll Stiftung 2012a; 2012b). A court case was made against the developers in 2015 by the Legal Defence and Assistance Project to stop the dredging and declare the EAC project unlawful for not submitting the required EIA before commencing work (Premium Times 2015). With the majority of the dredging works now complete, the case was unsuccessful. Given the strategic importance of the project for securing investment and protecting the existing financial centre of the city, it is no surprise that such extra-legal practices took place, producing a 'state of exception' (Agamben 2008), the government acting outside the rule of law. They turned a blind eye to the developers, while insisting on the removal of residents and providing little to no protection for those threatened by increased ocean surges and erosion further along the coast.

The aestheticization and advanced engineering rhetoric of the 'Great Wall' has masked many of these concerns. Specifically tested according to 'international standards' at DHI, *'the world-renowned Danish hydraulic research centre...to show that the Great Wall could withstand the worst expected storms over 1,000 years'* (South Energyx 2014: 13; Being Nigerian 2018), it has been given intense publicity in news articles around its size and apparent strength. Former US president Bill Clinton said during a visit to the site that *'people will come from all over the world to study the wall'* (South Energyx 2014: 13), becoming an emblem of human's mastery of nature that will be able to control the ocean for decades to come. As others such as Mendelsohn (2018) have commented, this is not new. During the colonial period, moles or stone jetties were built to make an easier passage into the harbour for shipping traffic, contributing to greater erosion of Bar Beach and Victoria Island. Since this period, continual cycles of dredging and beach

replenishment have taken place, never entirely resolving the problem. EAC merely 'inherits and extends upon this legacy' (Mendelsohn forthcoming: 14), while also reproducing colonial practices of dispossession and separation.

Within individual accounts, there is a strong suspicion of these attempts to control nature and the long-term ability of the wall to withstand ocean surges, undermining the official narrative. One YouTube commenter said the following of the project:

'You couldn't pay me to live there. Mother Nature will reclaim this land back over time'
(Zeeqtee Prn, Being Nigerian 2018).

This echoes a similar remark made by Christopher:

'In 2014 when I first began this project, I had a conversation with some of the workers who are helping build this city. They would love to own homes here due to the financial benefits but will not like to live in it because they fear the water will take over in a couple of years' (Christopher, interview).

Despite claims made by the developers of being able to withstand a once in a thousand-year storm, even the construction workers do not believe this will prevent severe flooding in the future. Often reflective of superstitious or spiritual beliefs that reclaiming this amount of land is working against nature, making the ocean 'angry' by disrupting its regular ebb and flow (Freedom Online 2017; Oyedeki 2014), it will inevitably be taken by the sea once more. With rising sea levels as a result of climate change and greater flooding experienced recently in parts of the gradually sinking Lekki, this is not so unbelievable, but as stated previously is more likely to affect the areas surrounding EAC having increased their susceptibility to flooding.

4.2.2 Sustainability and the 'eco-city'

Linked to the threat of coastal erosion and the 'Great Wall', EAC also utilises environmental sustainability narratives that are frequently at odds with what the project has achieved so far. Like many other new satellite cities (see Watson 2015; Rapoport 2014; 2015b), the desire to be 'smart' or 'eco' is used extensively in marketing and promotional materials. EAC will be 'an

environmentally conscious city, built with nature' (Ventures Africa 2012), with a low carbon footprint employing *'environmentally-efficient construction methods and locally sourced materials where available and appropriate'* (Eko Atlantic 2012; Eko Atlantic 2019a).

There is little to support these claims beyond the planting of *'over 100,000 trees'* and the manufacture of concrete accropodes for the 'Great Wall' and other infrastructure on site (Eko Atlantic 2019a). The CGIs feature roads prominently as one of the main modes of transport, with no obvious signs of a public transport network or renewable sources of energy. Rather the word 'sustainability' generally appears relating to the long-term viability of the economic investment and self-sufficiency of EAC from the rest of the city with independent power, water and telecommunications networks (Eko Atlantic 2012). The fact that one of the first buildings has been reserved as the headquarters for a major oil company (South Energyx 2014), goes further in demonstrating the level of internal contradictions in this regard. Without a clear and critical definition or international standard relating to environmental sustainability or the 'eco-city', it is possible to shape the narrative around a range of different objectives (Rapoport 2014; 2015b). The economic dimension in this case is at the forefront and can be utilised as a branding tool or buzzword to make a more unique prospect for investors and the general public.

The Code Green campaign, established in 2013 by a group of Nigerian architects with the support of environmental foundation Henrich Böll Stiftung (2014b), found:

'no definite commitment to the implementation of sustainable design strategies that can also help resolve ecological and socio-cultural challenges (such as air pollution and housing for low-income earners) which are prevalent in Lagos'

They feel it is likely to create a *'parasitic relationship'* with the rest of Lagos generating increased traffic and amplifying erosion further along the coast, as well as the destruction of ecosystems and wetlands that formed a natural barrier to ocean surges before dredging began (Henrich Böll Stiftung 2014b).

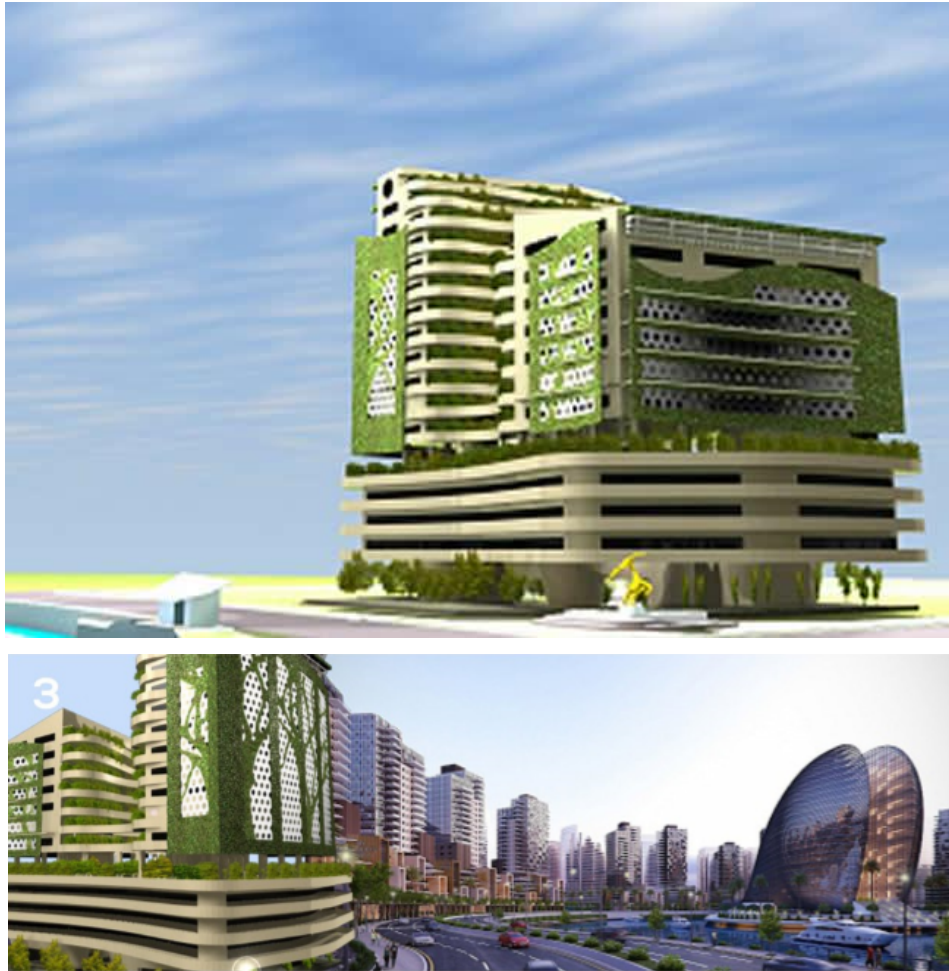


Figure 10: CGIs of the ‘Agbolé’ building design produced by Code Green, including the view from the Marina Circular Road (Source: Henrich Böll Stiftung 2014b).

Realising that the economic component of sustainability was highly important for investors and developers and that they were too late to redesign the whole city (Bukky, interview), the campaign adopted a pragmatic approach for including greater environmental self-sufficiency and social mix. Designs were produced for a new building termed ‘*Agbolé, the spirit of the neighbourhood*’, a more context-specific design response that seeks to learn from the existing environment while keeping the economic imperatives in mind. It utilises available space efficiently to maximise investor return, incorporating a vertical urban farm, solar energy, natural ventilation, and a mix of residential and commercial units to cater for different incomes (Henrich Böll Stiftung 2014b). CGIs were also produced (Figure 10) and placed in the context of the existing images to show how it could be integrated into the current design without drastic changes. Despite these efforts, there has been no real take up among South Energyx or real

estate companies. The intervention may have come too late in the process, with design guidelines for developers (Eko Atlantic 2019a), that may restrict the building aesthetic to the type of tall, sleek glass towers represented in the original CGIs. The co-ordinator of the campaign also recognised that there was little done to market the idea widely beyond Henrich Böll, but that it had encouraged the team to rethink what architecture meant in the context of sustainability, influencing future projects (Bukky, interview).

Other criticisms and recommendations over the sustainability of EAC were observed in comments given by YouTube users who mention:

'Surprised there is no talk of solar like Dubai's Sustainable City' (MrPCT007, Eko Atlantic 2019).

'PUBLIC transport is what will make this city thrive, particularly Trains, try and replicate a train system similar to Hong Kong London or Singapore' (Jamal Lawal, Eko Atlantic 2019).

These suggest an awareness of other projects internationally as travelling planning ideas or models (Healey 2013; Roy & Ong 2011); the first comment made in reference to The Sustainable City in Dubai. This is a much smaller community of 500 residential villas that consume 50% less energy than similar homes utilising a 10 MW solar array and urban farming, accounting for local culture and architecture in the design (Diamond Developers 2019). Given the difference in context and scale it is not possible to compare with EAC directly, but it does suggest how a measure of environmental, social and economic sustainability might be achieved. It also reveals how such projects become bound up in a 'global economy of images' (Melhuish, Degen & Rose 2016: 225), that vie with each other for attention and influence perceptions over what can be considered a 'model' to be transferred elsewhere to the same effect. As suggested previously, this prevents individuals from considering projects in isolation from one another as there always remain inter-referencing effects that influence judgements around environmental or aesthetic qualities, explored in greater depth in later themes.

4.2.3 Investment and economic development

In common with Watson's (2014) observations, one of the other key selling points for EAC is the 'huge' potential for investment (South Energyx 2014). Nigeria's resource wealth, rapidly expanding population and strong anticipated future economic growth will help EAC to become the 'new economic capital for Africa' (PropertyPro 2017; South Energyx 2014; Vanguard News 2011), backed by a string of statistics and infographics. This extends to the use of neocolonialist discourse; 'harvesting the potential of Africa' (Eko Atlantic 2012), exoticizing and reducing the continent to an asset plundered by a few international investors. Some of the earlier CGIs also represent this to a certain extent with the erasure of the existing city and other architectural styles, as well as the golden hue creating an artificial portrait of the city as may be imagined by outsiders.

Against a backdrop of corruption, with previous involvement of former Lagos state governor Babatunde Fashola and president Goodluck Jonathan, both alleged of financial impropriety, the project has sought to create a more credible investment environment (Vanguard News 2016). Undoubtedly assisted by being a privately led initiative, it also relied on concessions being granted for the land (or ocean) and the creation of a Free Zone as a lower-tax environment (Eko Atlantic 2019a; 2019b). It somewhat contradicts the statement made by former Lagos governor Ambode who described EAC 'as one of the 'sure outlets' the state government planned to achieve its goal of growing its IGR [Internally Generated Revenue]' (The Nation 2016). If taxes are lower in EAC compared to the rest of the city then it is hard to see how this is the case, leaving more money in the hands of privately-owned multinationals than the local government for use in providing basic infrastructure and housing for the wider population.

Figures ranging from 150,000-350,000 are cited for job creation, with '90% of the work in Eko Atlantic done by companies in Nigeria' during the construction process (Business Insider 2018). There is no clear signification of the type of jobs that will be created, arguably those higher skilled, and does not account for the loss of livelihoods and previous employment in Bar Beach where 'huge commercial activities' (Nigerian Tribune 2018) took place. There is also the potential that existing employment on Victoria Island and Marina, where a number of banks are headquartered, will merely relocate to EAC (Heinrich Böll Stiftung 2012a), leaving vacant buildings that could otherwise be used for affordable housing. Evidence of abandoned and

under-occupied structures can already be found in this area (Christopher, interview), with rent too high, maintenance low and a lack of demand following financial downturn (Ventures Africa 2018). Others recognise that these areas will *'always remain desirable parts of town'* due to their historical significance (Bukky, interview).

Many positive comments around investment and economic development emerge from YouTube users:

'How else do you lift the poor but by creating OPPORTUNITIES? Africans are sick and tired of so-called aid. They want business and trade. Eko Atlantic will provide millions of jobs for those "people living in slums", meaning they will move to better housing. That's how you build a country - with infrastructure and jobs' (ross meroe, Being Nigerian 2018).

'It's for the economy of Lagos... People from the mainland might not afford a house in the city... But can work there and get better salary... Victoria island was built... Today a lot people on the mainland work there in a more structured environment' (olayemi hazeem, Being Nigerian 2018).

The first comment speaks for the poor in a negative and reductive way by overemphasising the number of jobs that will be created, the idea that simply greater employment will allow people living in poor conditions to access improved housing when this is frequently not the case. People often remain where they are due to the unaffordability or unavailability of formal housing and services close to employment and jobs (van Noorloos & Kloosterboer 2018). As the second comment realises, many will probably struggle to afford a place to live in EAC, but could work there, perhaps as service workers to sustain the lifestyles of the urban elite. This is likely to make existing problems of traffic congestion worse if more people are forced to commute in and out of the city without sufficient investment in a public transport network and affordable housing to live nearby (Oputu 2019; Abubakar & Doan 2017).

Strong criticism of the project comes from this angle, with vastly unaffordable land and housing prices deemed to create a 'wealthy enclave' for the few ultra-rich members of Nigerian society or overseas that can afford to live in EAC (The Guardian 2015; Henrich Böll Stiftung 2014;

Ventures Africa 2012). Land prices stood at US\$1,800 for an inner-city plot on EAC in 2015 (The Guardian 2015), 40% higher than neighbouring Victoria Island (PropertyPro 2017). It is not surprising that many believe the project to be widening the gap between the rich and poor, producing *'a haven for everybody but Nigerians'* (Thelma Williams, Aina 2018). Added to this are the private security measures in place, visitors *'subject to security screening and queried about their mission to the place'* (Nigerian Tribune 2018). This likely keeps certain kinds of people that do not meet the idealised consumer or family out, creating a self-governing space beyond public accountability and oversight (Murray 2015). Lukacs (2014), in linking with the threats of erosion and flooding, likens this to a 'climate apartheid':

'a vision of privatized green enclaves for the ultra-rich ringed by slums lacking water or electricity, in which a surplus population scramble for depleting resources and shelter to fend off the coming floods and storms.'

Hodson & Marvin (2010) detail a similar occurrence of 'premium ecological enclaves.' These are able to bypass existing infrastructure, utilising technology to produce autonomous developments that further the economic reproduction of a small elite, rather than encouraging the retrofitting and adaptation of existing urban environments to provide a lower-carbon pathway or protection against looming climate threats for the majority. More than just being an enclave, given what has been stated previously surrounding erosion and increased flooding, it is not hard to see how EAC extends beyond its boundaries to the destruction of other land, remaining intimately linked to ecological processes despite imagined independence (Mendelsohn 2018).

The photographer Christopher Nelson has taken a similar precedent as the focus for his work *No City for Poor Man*. It documents the EAC project as an exclusionary practice where *'capitalism can be used to control the Lagos economy'* (Christopher, interview) and has been exhibited widely at the Fotohof gallery in Salzburg and Lagos Biennial. It appears as a more intimate view of the construction process, featuring the workers usually excluded from official images and of a future stake in the city itself. By unveiling the social relationships involved the production of the city behind the shiny, pristine façade of the CGIs, it disrupts their aesthetic order to an extent (Ranci re 2004), undermining the idea of an 'instant city' that can ever be detached from its existing context. He also believes that in the future, *'the city will be submerged by water as a*

result of climate change and recent incidents of rising sea levels' (Christopher, interview), connecting it with the work of Jeff Goodell (2017), examining how rising sea levels have inundated other cities on the Atlantic coast such as Miami. Similarly to the Code Green campaign, Nelson has not sought the attention of the developers, instead operating largely independently, believing the work to have provided greater insight about the negative consequences of the project to a wider audience through exhibitions and discussions (Christopher, interview).

Interestingly, despite an awareness of these critiques, there still remains hope and anticipation of future economic growth that will trickle down to the wider population as a result of such projects:

'It will be a playground for the rich not the everyday Nigerian or Lagos locals. But I do want to see Nigeria along with other African nations' cities reach their height and everyone capture a piece of economic pie to live their dreams in reality' (Alana Weaver, *Being Nigerian* 2018).

In an informal survey conducted over Facebook, the co-ordinator of the Code Green campaign also found that most people, including young professionals and other architects, regarded EAC as a sign of progress, creating new jobs and projects (Bukky, interview). Often it offers the type of 'heterotopia' De Boeck (2011), Laszczkowski (2011), Wragg & Lim (2015) describe in creating an imagined space of possibility, one that complements and allows individual desires or dreams for personal advancement to be projected onto such realistic yet transcendent CGIs. Despite many being far from reaching middle-class status or obtaining a stake in the "world-class" city, it continues to produce a level of agreement among urban residents. The hopes and dreams surrounding EAC can become what Berlant (2011: 1) defines as a 'cruel' form of optimism when 'something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing'. Largely influenced by the 'affective atmospheres' of the object or subject in question rather than their actual content (Berlant 2011), it enables people to navigate their everyday lives in situations of precariousness and incoherence. In the absence of alternatives, it legitimises present forms of inequality, exclusion and dispossession by 'extending the future hope' of inclusion (Pettit 2018: 1051). Notions of past and future become tied up in these spaces and contrasted with one another, the future as Laszczkowski (2011: 87) states 'lies at a distance yet to be reached', frequently

contained abroad in a 'transnational collage' of different influences that will be explored during the remainder of the discussion.

4.2.4 "World-class" aesthetics and inter-city comparisons

'This is chaos at its ugliest, deadliest and most colossal: a malarial megalopolis mostly built of driftwood, tin and cardboard, with precious little running water, electricity, employment or law and order, where the ground is filled with garbage, the water with sewage and the air with the noise and smog from a million unmuffled exhausts.' (TIME 2011).

The above quote from a TIME magazine article relating to EAC describes the '*chaos*' present in the rest of Lagos in unsavoury and sensationalist terms, likening to a state of '*anarchy*' later in the piece. For many, especially those from the wealthy elite or outside Lagos, this represents the normative reality or aesthetic that belongs in the past, which for one developer and YouTube commenter means:

'They're going to need to destroy what they had before and rebuild it, which will take a long time' (Developer Michel El Chemor cited The Wall Street Journal 2013).

'Honestly, I think they need to destroy their shantytowns and dirty looking buildings and replace them with tall modern glass-like ones' (Black Girl, Being Nigerian 2018).

Implicit within these comments is a judgement over what constitutes "good" aesthetics and modernity; the '*tall modern glass-like ones*' exist in contrast to the '*dirty looking*' buildings made of '*driftwood, tin and cardboard*' that must be destroyed in order to resolve problems of pollution, overcrowding and lack of services. For the developers of EAC, their project provides the ideal antidote to these concerns by offering '*the best in urban design*' (Punch 2017), with explicit comparisons to a future that lies elsewhere in cities abroad, offering justification for their choice of aesthetics as archetypally "world-class" and "modern".

Frequently portrayed in official documents and the media as '*Africa's answer to Dubai*' (CityMetric 2015) or the '*Manhattan of West Africa*' (Eko Atlantic 2012), with a '*central boulevard to match Paris' Champs-Élysées*' (Eko Atlantic 2012), EAC is a complete mix-match of

eye-catching references considered models and visual reference points worldwide. In trying to emulate these places however, it removes any sense of both the context in which they developed and that into which they will be inserted, while contributing further to the 'community of sense' that revolves around such images (Rancière 2004). This certainly appears to be having an effect on the way people recognise and interpret the rest of city through the "world-class" lens, with previous remarks and the following from another YouTube comment:

'Looks some careful and long term planning went into this. Very impressive. At least it will give Lagos and Nigeria a face' (Tonny Okello, Aina 2018).

EAC giving Lagos some kind of brand and landmark is seen as a way of selling its image to the rest of the world and boosting global recognition, perhaps as a new tourist destination. It implicitly regards the current Lagos as not having a face if it is represented by some of the "backward" and "chaotic" descriptions given earlier. All of this has a very real effect in providing justification for the government to remove settlements and activities not deemed to represent this 'aesthetic order' (Ghertner 2011). Similar judgements were made around Bar Beach, regarded by many as a space of 'miscreants' (The Nation 2017) and the 'public executions of drug barons, armed robbers and coup plotters' (Ventures Africa 2012). For informal workers, it has meant widespread removal from public space in the name of cleanliness and orderliness, both associated with modernist cities in the West. Street trading is criminalised as an example of environmental abuse and 'uncivilised' activity, while numerous communities have been evicted along waterfronts elsewhere according to a similar rhetoric (Lawanson & Omoegun 2018). It often becomes easier and quicker to frame such actions according to aesthetic concerns (Ghertner 2011), obscuring the true reasons that are largely for private gain and profit, unequally impacting the poorest in society.

Some accounts, however, suggest evidence of Gastrow's (2017) 'aesthetic dissent' in creating the means to express discontent and disenchantment with both the design and wider political-economic system:

'why not build it in an African style with beautiful work bamboo..why always look to the white man?' (Lawrence Enga, Eko Atlantic 2019a).

'africans love not having original thoughts... "the dubai of africa". How about just, EkoAtlantic, Lagos. everthing is the other countries landmark of africa' (Tu51ndBl4d3, M Skid 2018).

As Gastrow (2017) found in the case of Angola, these appear to be immersed in feelings of urban and national belonging and pride that are tied to material aesthetics, expressing strong anti-colonialist feeling for always being the “developed” world’s “other”. Defining Eko Atlantic in reference to places like Dubai and New York echoes this sentiment, finding criticism in the lack of original thinking or design. It is neither a complete rejection or embrace of the project but does undermine the developers attempts to create their own feeling of national pride as a “landmark” or “economic hub” of Africa, which could be a means to take up more context-sensitive alternatives such as the ‘Agbolé’ concept.



Figure 11: one example of Olalekan Jeyifous’ ‘shanty megastructures’, large vertical informal settlements expanded into the existing spaces of the city (Source: Jeyifous 2015).

Artist Olalekan Jeyifous draws on ideas related to Afrofuturism; science fiction from the perspective of Africa and the diaspora, re-imagining the Lagos of the future with large vertical informal settlements, which he terms ‘shanty megastructures’ (see Figure 12). Usually *‘materialising in the voids or negative spaces...between, or at the periphery of more affluent*

developments' (Jeyifous cited Cheang 2016: 420), here they appear among some of the most central and expensive real estate in Lagos, creating a '*visual conversation*' (Jeyifous 2015) between the two. In utilising the same CGI technique as the renderings of EAC, they provide greater visibility to these marginalised communities by (re)appropriating and (re)configuring their existing form. This challenges viewers to think differently about the aesthetic and the extent to which they are valued in supporting the majority of the urban population. In a similar vein to Project Morrinho in Rio de Janeiro (see Jones 2011), they become a means to both undermine and potentially transform the existing 'community of sense' (Rancière 2004) that defines such spaces as necessarily "dirty" or "chaotic". Jeyifous recognises his work to be a combination of '*practical and speculative design strategies*' (Jeyifous cited Cheang 2016: 421), that are not intended as architectural solutions like the 'Agbolé' concept. However, they may yet become somewhat of a reality if the service workers required for the functioning of EAC cannot afford to live there and so establish their own communities encircling the city to assist with commuting and associated costs.

These sorts of characterisations surrounding the aesthetics of the "slum" described are situated in time and in relation to wider changes in "the city". Rather than being fundamentally separate, both are co-constructed relationally as 'one formation' (Gastrow 2015). The waterfront community of Makoko, partly destroyed in 2012 in efforts to "beautify" the area, collaborated with the urban planning and design firm Fabulous Urban and Henrich Böll to develop a regeneration plan in 2013, encouraging the government to reconsider their original position. It was preceded by the Makoko Floating School, designed by Nigerian architect Kunlé Adeyemi, achieving international acclaim for building on the community's existing auto-constructed methods (Holston 2008) to produce an inexpensive and sustainable building design for coastal populations adapting to rising sea levels and flooding (Collins 2015). The plan includes an infrastructure roadmap, economic development strategy for tourism and land titling framework to provide security of tenure, working within existing government strategies to address practical challenges faced by the community such as waste management (Oshodi 2014). It was presented to the Lagos State Government in 2014, receiving a positive response, with some elements of the plan having been implemented in the form of biogas community toilets and a business incubator (Fabulous Urban 2017).



Figure 12: examples of the social and pro-profit business opportunities contained within the Makoko Regeneration Plan that make use of CGIs (Source: Fabulous Urban & Heinrich Böll Stiftung 2014).

A different vision of the future to that of EAC, it demonstrates how communities can live with rather than trying to tame the water, maintain and enhance existing livelihood activities and auto-constructed architecture. Equally, there remains a measure of similarity between both. In order to be recognised as legitimate or legible to the authorities, it employs a similar discourse or rhetoric of promoting the future Makoko as a *‘world-class tourist destination offering a unique experience of water front life’* (Oshodi 2014), and *‘worldwide showcase of sustainable and flood-resilient lifestyle’* (Fabulous Urban & Heinrich Böll Stiftung 2014). There are even CGI representations of the intended benefits complete with Western tourists (see Figure 13).

The idea that the city is divided between ‘walled off middle-class beneficiaries of capitalist development inhabiting a distinct city from the masses who increasingly live “informally”’ (Pettit 2018: 1050), is therefore not the case. The “slum” is not immune from similar “world-class” desires and aspirations of “the city” (Ghertner 2015), which as considered earlier should be viewed less as an ‘imposed vision’ and more a ‘mass dream’ (Roy & Ong 2011). These may take different forms but can fulfil similar functions for ‘ordinary’ urban citizens searching for hope and everyday survival. Regeneration projects like this offer some space to experiment with their own visions of the “global” expressed by EAC and draw such imagined futures closer to the present, but can lead to similar effects such as market-led eviction (see Desai & Loftus 2013), if allowed to proceed unchecked.

5. Conclusion

Visual representations and the rhetoric surrounding them are essential in the creation and material existence of urban development's today, guiding perceptions and decisions and offering the means for transformation (Herzog 2013). In linking Eko Atlantic's distinct use of aesthetic practices and the potential for resistance in the context of citizen and artist responses, this thesis has attempted to further the earlier more generic conclusions made by Watson (2014), Murray (2016) and others on the 'nightmares' that beset such new cities. Many of these are of course true, especially with regard to its exclusionary nature, reliance on inter-city references and 'eco' or 'smart' branding, but there remain greater nuances to the debate than can be first observed when studying 'the real lives of urban fantasies' (Bhan 2014).

The images and wider narrative presented give the impression of a city entirely independent and separate from the existing one, erasing the past and providing a "blank canvas" onto which a startling vision for the future, modern, "world-class" city can be presented. One that solves all the "ills" that make Lagos a "chaotic" and "ugly" metropolis but are devoid of all context. As with many similar new city projects, this goal can never be entirely realised, being both the product of wider political-economic changes and located within a distinctive history of environmental and labour flows. In a lagoon setting like Lagos, 'processes of inscription and erasure are simultaneous' (Mendelsohn, forthcoming: 9). It is virtually impossible to create new land without entailing its destruction somewhere else along the coastline, especially given EAC's scale and unresolved colonial legacies. This expands to the dispossession and redevelopment of informal settlements according to a similar "world-class" rhetoric, which may yet appear within EAC if the people required for its functioning are prevented from both working and living there or become displaced as a result of increased erosion and looming climate threats.

Many 'ordinary' urban citizens are of course suspicious of these intentions and outcomes, particularly the ability of all to access the benefits promised by the project. Despite this, they often express hope and aspiration towards EAC in allowing improved prospects at attaining 'the good life' (Berlant 2011) that extends to enacting their own versions of this future in the present. Undoubtedly it is assisted by the 'heterotopia' (De Boeck 2011) and affective intensity offered by the realistic yet transcendent CGIs, allowing individuals to project their own aspirations and

desires for future advancement against difficult odds. The developers also intend to evoke a feeling of national belonging and pride through rhetorical devices that emphasise the importance of becoming the '*new economic capital of Africa*', looking outwards to attract international attention and investment. However, it is equally interpreted by citizens in neocolonialist terms when the aesthetic presented, largely in reference to Euro-America and Dubai, does *not* correspond to these feelings, creating instances of 'aesthetic dissent' (Gastrow 2017) and the growing means for critique.

By framing the preceding discussion of aesthetics around Rancière's (2004) notion of the 'community of sense', it offers new perspectives on how the 'aesthetic order' (Ghertner 2015) established by the CGIs and other images might be disrupted or challenged through counter-representations. These include the Code Green campaign and 'Agbolé' concept, proposing a more constructive engagement with the existing vision by redirecting it towards explicitly sustainable objectives. The work of Christopher Nelson suggests how the narrative might be reframed to account for what is obscured by the 'distribution of the sensible' (Rancière 2004) created by the visuals. Unlike Code Green, he is not seeking to redesign the city but critiquing what it will become; an enclave for the few that will eventually be reconquered by the ocean's waves. Finally, Olalekan Jeyifous' 'Shanty Megastructures', employing a similar visualisation technique to the CGIs, switches the aesthetic perspective, disrupting what is considered "ugly" or "beautiful" by directly confronting viewers with the prospect of informal settlements expanding into sites of premium real estate. All operate outside the bounds of the project and may have little influence on the development of EAC directly but suggest how, in an ongoing state of emergence, such alternative 'ways of seeing' along with aforementioned contradictions internal to the project could make for its eventual unravelling.

5.1 Limitations and suggestions for further research

Without the resources to adopt an in-depth ethnographic approach, the ability to gain real insight into the feelings and motivations of key stakeholders and 'ordinary' urban citizens has been limited. Conclusions surrounding instances of 'aesthetic dissent' or 'cruel optimism' are therefore necessarily tenuous, but such theorisations may be appealing to examine in other new city contexts, especially where the boundary between architectural styles or visions is less

pronounced. As van Noorloos & Kloosterboer (2018) attest, new cities have very different purposes and origins and so the observations made here surrounding ecological processes and colonial legacies in particular cannot be assumed elsewhere without prior examination.

In utilising two different social media platforms as a digital method alongside more traditional media sources and interviews, this study has only partially been able to apprehend the vast network of competing inter-city references. There is much work that could be done within this area to examine how people draw meaning and judgement between other new city projects that may require larger-scale cultural analytics methods, such as Rose & Willis' (2019) work on the smart city. However, as has been observed, using such methods does not yet fully allow the potential effect of demographics such as class on the acceptance or rejection of visions and ideas.

Eko Atlantic remains an incomplete project and this study a snapshot in time of the development thus far, albeit an interesting point where much is yet to be determined. A lot may change between now and the final form, should there ever be one. Any future predictions are thus inherently speculative, creating much potential for research that examines the change over time and what influence these earlier counter-representations may have over what the city becomes.

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