Executive Summary

Forced Evictions and the Creation of the Lagos Mega-City: Estimating the Room for Manoeuvre

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On the 9th of October 2016, the Lagos State government re-stated its intentions to demolish all waterfront settlements in the city. While forced evictions have been re-produced over time as a planning mechanism in Lagos since the colonial period, the current waterfront settlement evictions are part of a wider strategy to develop Lagos into Africa’s model mega-city. This neoliberal project seeks not only to attract global capital but to sell a new cosmopolitan experience (Paul, 2004). Despite the frequency and scale of forced evictions in Lagos, detailed studies and city-level analyses of forced evictions and displacements are lacking (Onyebueke, et al., 2020). There is also an insufficient amount or level of theorisation on the process of dispossession in African cities in the literature. Understanding of this process requires theorising the nature of how capital encloses, and requires a critical analysis of the spatial mechanisms of dispossession (Sevilla-Buitrago, 2015). In this dissertation, I view dispossession not only as a means to accrue capital but to resolve the problems posed by the urban commons to the preservation and reproduction of capital (De Angelis, 2007). In particular, I focus on the process of forced evictions and the social conflicts inherent in them with the aim of opening the ‘room for manoeuvre’ in creating and implementing anti-eviction strategies.
This dissertation seeks to contribute to the discourse on the topic of forced evictions in the Global South through a case study of forced evictions of the Makoko waterfront community. Creating the Lagos mega city requires opening up urban space to create profitable opportunities for capital. However, this process is hindered as cities are the site of intense contestation with various actors seeking to appropriate space for their own needs. In response to this, the state employs extra-economic means to enclose urban space and to achieve its aims of urban (re)development (Gillespie, 2015). In Lagos, the enclosure of urban space takes the form of forced evictions, demolition and clearance, the removal of hawkers from the streets and the subsequent displacement of these communities (Emordi & Osiki, 2008) (Badmos , et al., 2018) (Agbola & Jinadu, 1997) (Ezema, et al., 2016).

The recent scale of forced evictions, however, despite the worsening state of housing conditions and biased provision necessitates an assessment of this urban process.

A review of forced evictions across Nigeria from 1973-1995 revealed that two-thirds of the 36 cases had occurred in Lagos, affecting an estimate of 460,000 people owing to urban redevelopment and beautification projects as well as the clearing of illegal settlements (Agbola & Jinadu, 1997). Forced evictions of waterfront communities are a gross violation of human rights and deprive many urban dwellers of the right to adequate housing. Thus, exacerbating the housing crisis in Lagos. In many instances, evictions are enacted without applications of adequate guidelines including consultation and reasonable prior warning resulting in the displacement of communities. The UN pledge to ‘leave no one behind’ reinforces the importance of housing, not as a tool for commodification but as a right. Slater (2009) argues that housing be reframed as a question of social justice.
– with adequate and affordable housing being a human right and basic human need. The need to re-frame housing in terms of basic human rights stems from the denial of housing rights to people on the basis of race, sex, class, income. In addition, it provides an opportunity to re-assess the response to the inadequacies of housing provision and policy.

Makoko, a waterfront settlement has been the subject of evictions and demolitions since 2005 – a process which seeks to homogenise urban space by creating a unitary identity of a clean and modern mega city. These evictions seek to undermine the strategies which the residents employ to reproduce themselves by expropriating the land and spaces they occupy. In line with this, I argue that the case of Makoko provides a unique opportunity for the government to employ alternative and adequate solutions to the housing question and to estimate the ‘room for manoeuvre’. With regards to Makoko, these possibilities lie in the areas of participation and collaboration of state institutions and local residents which can enable the development of context-specific and in re-prioritising the goals and strategies of urban development. This is in line with axis 3 and 4 of the UCLG cities for housing declaration which identify the role of anti-eviction strategies and the co-production of urban planning tools as key to developing inclusive and sustainable cities.

The analytical framework of this dissertation is based upon Safier (2002) four-dimensional model of the “action space” of practitioners and planning agencies in promoting sustainable and equitable planning practices. Safier identifies these four areas as concerning extending institutional and inter-organizational reforms, ‘Improving technical-professional; extending institutional and inter-organizational
reforms; expanding social interaction and mobilization and enlarging the scope of strategic analysis and tactical response to the dynamics of urban development in time and place.

This case study reveals how the Lagos State government engages in practices of accumulation by dispossession in order to fulfil the goal of transforming Lagos into a model mega-city. Furthermore, it displays how the government carries out these evictions through the use of force and discourse. The latter was intended the reinforce the mega-city ideology and paint the people of Makoko as an obstruction. Thus, justifying the use of forced evictions as a response to the housing question. The current approach to the housing question has encouraged the accumulation of resources in the hands of the elite through the dispossession of the Makoko community. In opening up the room for manoeuvre for developing anti-eviction strategies, it is imperative that the governments re-strategizes and questions the premise of scarcity and land allocation in Lagos which privileges the elite at the expense of the poor. This, however, also requires identifying the current capabilities with regards to finance, institutions and policies. The dimensions discussed above are interrelated and as such have overlapping themes – some of which are mutually reinforcing as such, approaching the development of anti-eviction strategies requires a holistic and multi-sectoral approach.

Works Cited


