

Evictions for development

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DOI:

[10.1016/j.polgeo.2022.102671](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2022.102671)

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Document Version

Peer reviewed version

Citation for published version (Harvard):

Di Nunzio, M 2022, 'Evictions for development: creative destruction, redistribution and the politics of unequal entitlements in inner-city Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), 2010–2018', *Political Geography*, vol. 98, 102671. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2022.102671>

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EVICTIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT: DISPOSSESSION AND THE POLITICS OF UNEQUAL ENTITLEMENTS IN INNER-CITY ADDIS ABABA (ETHIOPIA), 2010–2018

DRAFT MANUSCRIPT

Published as Di Nunzio, Marco. 2022 “Evictions for development: dispossession and the politics of unequal entitlements in inner-city Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), 2010–2018”, *Political Geography* 98: 102671

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ABSTRACT

Accounts on “accumulation by dispossession” show how, globally, corporate and government seizure of urban space has been fundamental to the production of circuits of values under capitalism. This paper adds another layer to the scholarly understanding of dispossession and evictions. Drawing on long-term ethnographic research on the economies of Addis Ababa’s inner city and the politics of city building in Ethiopia’s capital carried out between 2010 and 2018, I explore how evictions not only helped make room for private investments and urban regeneration, they reshaped the very terms of poor people’s adverse incorporation in Addis Ababa’s development through a political and moral economy of unequal entitlement. Evictions are not just functional to the production of circuits of accumulation and profit, they also help codify hierarchies of worth and entitlement.

EVICTIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT

Mulatu,¹ the general manager of a *kebele*, the local government office in an inner-city neighbourhood of Addis Ababa, explained why evictions should be understood as development interventions. Very soon, he told me in 2010, he and his neighbours would have to vacate the houses where they had lived for decades. “The aim of the government,” he said, “is now to improve the standards of the city; the houses where these people [including himself] live are below those standards.”²

Mulatu was describing an urban development intervention he deemed legitimate. In his view, evictions were motivated by a developmental concern with replacing old shanty houses with more comfortable, better-serviced housing. Other residents of inner-city Addis Ababa, however, were less enthusiastic. “They want to get rid of the poor in the city centre,” Ibrahim, a former street hustler in his thirties, told me as we walked around what remained of Arat Kilo, one of the oldest settlements in the Ethiopian capital, a year after a wave of evictions hit the area in 2012.³

For government officials, policymakers and planners, evictions, or “resettlements” as they are more neutrally termed, do not necessarily cause dispossession or serve the logic of capital accumulation (Harvey 2010; Smith 1996). Clearing poor neighbourhoods deemed unhygienic, dangerous and the realm of criminals and slumlords, has long been seen as a “progressive act” (Swanson 1977). Such resettlements clean the slate to plan cities that embody ideals of economic productivity, morality and order (Scott 1998)

¹ The names of the people who appear in the text have been changed to protect their privacy.

² Interview, *Kebele* General Manager, Addis Ababa, October 2010

³ Interview, Urban resident, Addis Ababa, May 2013

Mulatu's views fall within a global tradition of urban policy that has long regarded evictions as a necessary steps towards "reform" and "progress" (Hall 1988; Mabugonje 1990). A recent phase in the tradition has been distinguished by a plethora of reports on how to turn African urban growth into an opportunity for progress and abundance. A widely-acclaimed World Bank report, titled *Africa's Cities. Opening Doors to the World* (Lall, Henderson, Venables 2017), argues that urban sprawl and high levels of "informality" damage the prospects for economic growth. The authors contend that African cities are crowded, "informal" and disconnected from circuits of economic value, investment and productivity at regional, continental and global scales. African cities must change, the report states: they must formalise the economy, regulate the use of urban land, "make tough political decisions" (*ibid*: 28) and open their doors to the world.

Even though such reports do not openly argue in favour of evictions, the language of "tough decisions" and the categorical imperative to regulate land use and formalise the informal points in that direction. Within this narrative, poor neighbourhoods, especially in "strategic" urban locations, are liabilities. They occupy valuable land which, if given to investors, could yield higher returns, benefiting the city and its population. Thus, evictions become possible development solutions. A report authored by leading economists Paul Collier and Edward Glaeser (2019), among others, states: "Given the unplanned nature of existing development in many cities, there is likely to be some need for resettlement of informal residents."

By discussing the case of inner-city Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, I explore how evictions shape the politics of development. Accounts on "accumulation by dispossession" show how, globally, corporate and government seizure of urban space has been fundamental to the production of circuits of values under capitalism (Harvey 2010; Smith 1996). This paper adds another layer to the scholarly understanding of dispossession and evictions. In what follows, I explore how evictions not only made room for private investments and urban regeneration, but reshaped the terms of poor people's adverse incorporation (Phillips 2011) into Addis Ababa's development through a political and moral economy of unequal entitlement. I examine how evictions, or as David Harvey and Schumpeter might put it, moments of creative destruction, do not just produce circuits of accumulation and profit; they also codify hierarchies of worth and entitlement.

The notion of "creative destruction" was popularised by David Harvey (2010) as a way to explore the relation between dispossession and accumulation, in particular the way evictions and cycles of dislocation are central in the making of circuits of speculation and profit. While this connection has been thoroughly examined, I use the original Schumpeterian understanding, with its more celebratory definition of "creative destruction", not to endorse it but to critically examine the relation between dispossession, accumulation and entitlements. For Schumpeter (1976 [1943]), creative destruction unleashes the potential of the entrepreneur, clearing out existing constraints to the market and creating new prospects for growth and market creativity. By unleashing the potentialities of the market, creative destruction helps reinforce the "market" as the main engine for growth, abundance but also for justice. As Foucault (2008) put it in his critical exploration of liberal economy, the market is not just a site of exchange, but a terrain where the distribution of entitlements and reward is defined and enforced. As such, for Schumpeter himself, creative destruction is just, as it enables the principle of market-led redistribution.

For critical studies of capitalism and the city, such justifications are mere propaganda, covering up the real concerns of capitalists and their allies in government (Harvey 2010; Peck, Theodore, Brenner 2009). However, building on Gupta's examination of the making of structural violence in India (2012), I argue that seeing how government and corporate citizens intentionally produce subjugation

and oppression is not analytically helpful. Going further, I argue that we need to explore how the production of inequality and oppression are embedded in corporate and government market-led ideas of justice, fairness and equity. With this approach, I seek to account for the morality of “creative destruction”, and so to critically examine it.

Building on Butler and Athanasiou (2013), I examine how dispossession is a founding moment in the making of a governmentality of entitlement which, while it contributes to economies of accumulation, also enforces a politics of unequal entitlements as the terms of poor people’s membership in society. As we will see, this process does not simply speak the language of justification, but the moral speech of development, redistribution and the public good. Similarly to Tania Murray Li (2007), I seek to prise apart the awkward embrace of accumulation and development, not to see development as a *consequence* of the logic of accumulation and growth, but to explore how ideas of redistribution, inclusion and the public good are *made commensurable* with this logic. This is not intended as a critique of development as inevitably linked to capital, or to make an argument for de-growth and anti-development. Paraphrasing Spivak (1993: 45-46), I contend that development’s promise of incremental improvement is something “we cannot not want”. Yet this does not excuse development from being an object of a critical enquiry on how the promise of a better future enables political and moral economies of unequal entitlement in the present.

I situate this research as an exploration of Ethiopia’s recent urban history. Drawing on participant observations and interviews with residents of inner-city Addis Ababa, as well as building professionals, including architects, urban planners, real estate developers and contractors, carried out between 2010 and 2018, this paper analyses the development of Addis Ababa during a period characterised by the political dominance of the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) – a coalition of ethnic parties led by the Tigray People’s Liberation Front. An appreciation of the developments following 2018, especially with the appointment of Abiy Ahmed as Prime Minister that March, informs this analysis. However, the impact of events such as the disbandment of the EPRDF coalition, the establishment of Abiy Ahmed’s political vehicle, the Prosperity Party, and the military confrontation with the Tigray People Liberation Front – which had refused to merge with the Prosperity Party – are not the immediate focus of this paper.

With such a focus, this paper will show how “creative destruction” and visions of market-led urban development unfolded in concert with a statist and developmentalist political ideology, the trademark of the EPRDF coalition, which in principle opposed liberalism and free-market economics (Vaughan, Tronvoll 2003; Lefort 2012). As we will see, market-led development and a statist developmentalism were not in contradiction. Indeed, they were complementary. While the EPRDF’s statism granted the leadership of the party and the state sovereignty and dominance over the development of Addis Ababa, and the country at large, the embrace of the market economy was the terrain where hierarchies of worth and entitlement were codified and enforced.

Secondly, I explore how the wave of evictions that hit the city, particularly between 2009 and 2015 and involved the dislocation of over 20,000 households mostly from the inner city (UN-Habitat 2017), was a critical juncture in the governance of the urban. Ethiopia has a long history of political authoritarianism (Clapham 1988; Aalen, Tronvoll 2009; Pausewang, Tronvoll, Aalen 2002; Vaughan, Tronvoll 2003). Especially from the mid-2000s, the EPRDF built a pervasive apparatus of political surveillance, mobilisation and control that reached into the grassroots of urban society. This consisted of a web of “mass associations”, small-scale enterprises and cooperatives, neighbourhood committees, and a growing party membership which exceeded 4 million in 2008. Although these programmes failed to open avenues for economic and social empowerment, they fostered the

expansion of the EPRDF's apparatus of control and political surveillance (Author 2019; Emmeneger, Sibilo Keno, Hagmann 2011; Human Rights Watch 2010; Lefort 2012) and increased the number of people who were directly or indirectly dependent on the ruling party for survival.

EPRDF's authoritarian politics made evictions possible. Yet, as we will see in this paper, they were not simply a consequence of the EPRDF's politics of control and surveillance. Evictions also entailed a dislocation of the same regime of apparatus and mobilisation the EPRDF had built, at the cost of millions of Ethiopian birr spent on employment opportunities, entrepreneurship programmes and neighbourhood committees (Author 2019; Eyob Balcha Gebremariam 2018). By dislocating entire communities, the EPRDF wittingly or unwittingly disrupted its own topographies of control and political. This appears paradoxical, considering the EPRDF's concern with grounding its power firmly in the grassroots of urban and rural societies as a way of preventing dissent. In what follows, I show that the widespread use of evictions cannot be explained by arguing that the EPRDF was simply willing to dismantle its structures of control for the sake of private investment. Instead, I suggest that the embrace of market-led development was coherent with building regimes of control, this time not much with a focus on *dispositifs* of surveillance and repression, but by codifying regimes of unequal entitlement, worth and citizenship.

ADDIS ABABA'S CONSTRUCTION BOOM

When the city's light rail, the LRT, began running in September 2015, Addis Ababa was praised as being at the forefront of urban infrastructural development in Africa.⁴ A year later, the Grand Housing programme celebrated its tenth year. Launched in 2006, ostensibly to promote home ownership and provide affordable housing, the project fundamentally transformed Addis Ababa (MWUD 2010). New neighbourhoods, with hundreds of thousands of residents, were built in the city's outskirts, housing both inner-city evictees and prospective homeowners. Since its inception, Grand Housing has delivered over 270,000 housing units (CAHF 2018), making densely concentrated yellow, red and orange "condominium" buildings a feature of urban life.

The condominiums and the LRT are only two, though substantial, components of the broader construction boom that has transformed Addis Ababa in the past three decades. Already by the early 1990s, developers had begun building new settlements, particularly to the east of the city, to accommodate the upper-middle classes (Himmelreich 2010; Yeraswork Admassie 2008). Since then, real estate ventures have multiplied, with housing units that cost between USD 50,000 and well over USD 500,000. Meanwhile, high-rise buildings and landmark corporate and government headquarters have reconfigured the skyline. A business district has emerged in the western part of the city and luxury hotels sprouted from the rubble of Kazanchis, a neighbourhood in the east of the city centre. In the southeast, the district of Bole embodies the new Addis Ababa, with rows of luxury apartments and shopping malls.

For many, Addis Ababa's construction boom has been an unalloyed success story. The construction sector accounted for 15.9% of the country's GDP in 2015/2016 (AfDB 2017: 5), driven by Addis Ababa and the construction of multi-billion dollar hydroelectric dams on the Nile. The sector is

⁴ "Modernizing Ethiopia Opens \$475-million, China-built Urban Rail", Bloomberg Business official website, September 21, 2015, accessed March 16, 2021 <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-09-21/modernizing-ethiopia-opens-475-million-china-built-urban-rail>

deemed to employ over 1.8 million people.⁵ Over 3,000 contractors operate in Ethiopia,⁶ including a small but significant number of international companies, particularly from China. Moreover, the construction sector offers local and international investors a “second circuit” (Harvey 2010; Lefebvre 2003 [1970]), in which to reinvest profits from other sectors, in particular import-export and commercial services (see also Goodfellow 2017a). In a country where the financial sector is mainly a service, not a site for speculation, and the movement of capital abroad is highly regulated, the construction boom provides a means of generating profit and capital.

Images of new roads, condominiums, and the LRT feature on government posters throughout the city. Building the new Addis Ababa holds the promise of a future of abundance and progress. Yet, while the city’s construction boom is rightly regarded as a pillar of economic growth, greater prospects of inclusion, empowerment and urban justice are yet to emerge.

Certainly, the large numbers employed in the construction sector attest to job creation, one of the touted benefits of Addis Ababa’s development. At the same time, labour conditions at construction sites do not inspire visions of abundance. Most construction workers experience low salaries, lack of protections against hazards at work, and the possibility of being fired suddenly and at any time (Author, in progress). Labour unions have limited bargaining power and membership gives rise to dismissal.

Meanwhile, condominiums remain unaffordable for a fifth of the city’s residents (UN Habitat 2017). Housing units are allocated by lot, enrolment is conditional on having a savings account in which a fixed amount is deposited monthly towards an initial down-payment. The amount is based on the mortgage scheme the applicant has applied for: 10% deposit and 90% mortgage, 20/80 or 40/60. Only those in the 40/60 scheme are allowed bigger houses; those with 20/80 can get 1–2 bedroom apartments, while those in the 10/90 scheme are only eligible for studios. Housing cost is a challenge, *Ato Mulugeta*, head of Public Relations at the Addis Ababa Housing Project Office, admitted to me in 2013 and again in 2016. The cost of building condominiums in Addis Ababa increased from 1,000 to 3,000 birr per square metre between 2005 and 2014 (UN-Habitat 2017). As a result, prices have skyrocketed. Between 2006 and 2013, monthly mortgage payments increased by 183–274% depending on apartment size (UN-Habitat 2017).

The LRT has also triggered divergent reactions. It was originally planned with foresight: to provide cheap transport for a burgeoning first generation of urban commuters from their new homes in the outskirts to the city centre where most employment opportunities are still found. Fares are low but with limited capacity, overcrowding and long waits, commuting has improved only marginally, especially for those travelling from the outskirts (Nallet 2018). The inefficiencies of the LRT have only deepened experiences of spatial injustice. The scheme has failed to counterbalance the dislocation that many of its potential users experienced by moving – forcibly or voluntarily – to the outskirts. Within four years of its inauguration, government officials were ready to admit that the LRT, while good for the city’s image abroad, was not the most efficient use of government money. At a 2018 conference in Addis Ababa, a senior city government figure said that it had turned out to be very expensive. “We have learnt a lesson,” he said. In the future, the city administration would focus on expanding Addis Ababa’s bus system, he added.

⁵ “Ethiopia: Transforming Construction Industry”, The Ethiopian Herald , AllAfrica official website, March 28, 2018, accessed March 17, 2021 <https://allafrica.com/stories/201803280594.html>

⁶ Construction Proxy official website, accessed March 17, 2021 <https://constructioninethiopia.com/contractors-in-ethiopia/>

EXPANSION BY DISPOSSESSION

The shortcomings of development interventions, and their limitations in furthering inclusion and empowerment, are only one aspect of the transformation of Addis Ababa. The expansion of the city's built-up area itself, both within and beyond Addis Ababa's administrative boundaries, has depended on forms of exclusion.⁷ Government officials described this expansion as inevitable, even necessary. Tegegne, a former city manager and government advisor on urban issues, contended it was, in fact, natural. Cities are like organisms, he explained. They are born, they fail, they thrive and expand. Planning, Tegegne argued, can guide expansion, transforming the inevitable into an opportunity for long-lasting abundance and inclusion.⁸

Comparing urban development to an organism, with planners as the biological engineers shaping physiological growth, obfuscates both the power dynamics and spatial directions of this transformation. Addis Ababa has not expanded from a nucleus to occupy empty space. Instead, development has been characterised by dispossession and dislocation. Transport infrastructure and real estate ventures in the outskirts come at the cost of existing farmland and farmers (Feyera Abdissa, Terefe Degega 2010). At the same time, the city centre, the alleged nucleus, has also changed. This area, home to over 400,000 people (CSA 2007), is slowly being emptied. According to a 2017 UN-Habitat report, 23,151 households were evicted in 2009–2015.

The dispossession of farmers in the outskirts of Addis Ababa triggered a major political crisis. In 2014, and more dramatically in 2015–2016, demonstrations erupted in the peripheries against attempts to include parts of neighbouring Oromia region in the city's expansion. Protesters feared that this would dispossess Oromo farmers to the advantage of investors wanting land near the capital. Demonstrations snowballed, triggering countrywide protests that cost Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn his job. He resigned his post in March 2018.⁹

While evictions in the city centre did not trigger similar protests, discontent simmered under the surface. After Arat Kilo was bulldozed in 2012, graffiti appeared on surviving buildings: "Since they were jealous of us, they tore down ours".¹⁰ Yet, while dispossession in the outskirts and the inner city of Addis Ababa had different political effects, they were deeply connected. Eyasu, a senior official in the city's government planning commission, told me in 2013 that inner-city evictions had intensified as space for construction in the outskirts began filling up.¹¹ To begin with, the density of the inner city had discouraged developers. "The right of way," an international contractor who had built roads in the city centre told me, "can kill you."¹² Instead, since the early 1990s, large real estate ventures in the city's peripheries had been testing grounds for the construction industry (Himmelreich 2010). They enabled the expansion of the sector, made investors more technically and financially capable, and showed that building Addis Ababa could be profitable. The development of the outskirts made investing in the capital possible.

⁷ Between 1999 and 2014, the built-up area in Addis Ababa increased from 134 to 200 km² (UN Habitat 2017: 73).

⁸ Interview, Former city manager, Addis Ababa City Government, Addis Ababa, May 2016

⁹ "Ethiopian Prime Minister Resigns after Mass Protests," *Guardian*, February 15, 2018, accessed March 17, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/15/ethiopia-prime-minister-hailemariam-desalegn-resigns-after-mass-protests>.

¹⁰ "Jealous City", Addis Fortune, official website, December 23, 2012, accessed March 18, 2021 <https://addisfortune.net/articles/jealous-city/>

¹¹ Interview, Senior government official, Addis Ababa City Planning Project Office, Addis Ababa, May 2013

¹² Interview, General Manager, foreign contractor, Addis Ababa, June 2013

As thirst for land deepened, investors turned to the inner city. In 2016, *Ato* Bruk of the Land Development and Urban Renewal Agency quantified the pace of development: “you have got to understand that my office deals with the redevelopment of 306 hectares of land and the relocation of 10,000 people per year.”¹³ With evictions intensifying in the city centre, inner-city residents had to go somewhere. That “somewhere” became the condominiums in the outskirts, even though the Grand Housing Project was not initially designed to serve this purpose. The destinies of inner-city residents and farmers on the outskirts converged. Farmers were dispossessed to make room for city-dwellers who had, in turn, been forced out of their homes because their ways of living had been deemed incompatible with new visions of the city.¹⁴

DISLOCATING CONTROL

We must be careful to avoid stereotyping evictions and dispossession as the quintessential example of the struggle for the city (Cooper 1991), as one between the rich and powerful with their skyscrapers and productive economies of capital and exchange on one hand and, on the other, the slums and “informal” economies of survival. Images of inner-city Addis Ababa before the clearances reinforce this stereotypical view. Photographs appear to show quintessential “informal settlements” or even “slums”: places that are impossible to control, map, regulate and develop. Yet the neighbourhoods that were bulldozed were far from sites of abjection or disorder.

Long before evictions, state regulation, taxation and an ever-expanding apparatus of control, surveillance and mobilisation pervaded the lives of those who work and live in inner-city neighbourhoods. As such, inner-city neighbourhoods targeted by evictions were not “informal” settlements but highly regulated urban spaces. Even economic practices that fell into the broader category of the informal reveal that the “formal” functions of state control, regulation and taxation have been far more pervasive than is immediately apparent. This is due to a long history of interactions between the Ethiopian state and the urban poor, and is a result of three major events in Ethiopia’s politics: the nationalisation of urban land in the mid-1970s, the concurrent establishment of *kebelles* (now called *woreda*), the lower administrative unit of the Ethiopian state, and the implementation of entrepreneurship schemes from the mid-2000s.

The government’s ability to seize land had its institutional foundation in the nationalisation of urban land by the socialist Derg regime (1974–1991) which preceded the EPRDF. The fact that the land was owned by the state gave residents of the inner city limited room to contest eviction. At the same time, the nationalisation of urban land in 1975 (PMAC 1975) had a deep impact on the relations between the state and the urban communities. Land- and homeowners were allowed to keep their primary residences but additional properties were confiscated. As the state gained ownership of urban land, many, especially the urban poor, received stable housing at low rents and became “formal” tenants of the government.

Concomitantly with taking ownership of urban land, the Derg and, after 1991, the EPRDF, built an efficient state machinery that came to pervade urban everyday life, especially for the poor, and revolved around the work of the *kebelles*. Initially established to collect rents from tenants of expropriated houses and land, *kebelles* became central cogs in the bureaucratic and political machine of the Ethiopian state (Clapham 1988; Vaughan, Tronvoll 2003), and played a key role in the political

¹³ Interview, Senior government official, Land Development and Urban Renewal Agency, Addis Ababa, June 2016

¹⁴ “Ethiopia’s farmers forced off land for housing”, BBC official website, April 12, 2018, accessed July 24 2021
<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-africa-43676159/ethiopia-s-farmers-forced-off-land-for-housing>

work of the ruling party and its structure of grassroots control and mobilisation. *Kebelles* issued identity cards and managed access to basic services. *Kebelle* officials called people to meetings and rallies, connected the work of the government office to the local branches of the ruling party and its affiliate women and youth “mass associations”, and monitored the activities of opposition members and activists through a network of informers and “peace-keeping” committees (Aalen, Tronvoll 2009; Author 2019).

Forty years after nationalisation and the establishment of *kebelles*, in the mid-2000s small-scale entrepreneurship programmes reorganised inner-city economies and further expanded the reach of the state in inner-city neighbourhoods. These schemes were implemented after a period of intense urban discontent which culminated in mass youth protests against the 2005 election, believed by many to have been rigged by the ruling EPDRF (Abbink 2006). The government responded with heavy-handed repression, but the stick was followed by a carrot of sorts. In 2006, the government allocated over 5 billion birr (USD 300 million) towards entrepreneurship schemes for over 1.2 million beneficiaries (MWUD 2006). These programmes were intended to address what the EPDRF government believed to be the main reason for unrest: youth unemployment. By providing employment, it sought to tackle the predicaments of Addis Ababa’s marginalised youth and thereby co-opt them (Author 2019; Eyob Balcha Gebremariam 2018).

In the inner city, this involved establishing small-scale enterprises, from groups of women selling spices to cooperatives of parking attendants, to producing concrete blocks. These created employment opportunities with ambiguous results in terms of inclusion and empowerment. While they offered opportunities for people who were already engaged in these businesses and used government connections to expand them further, those who began from scratch either failed within months or eked out meagre incomes, no more than USD 50–75 a month, which was insufficient to break out of poverty (Author 2019).

Whilst these initiatives had only limited success in their ostensible purpose, they did help the government expand its reach at the bottom of urban society. Firstly, they triggered the “formalisation” of niches in inner-city economies that had until then either been informal or licit yet illegal, such as trading in foodstuffs, or the economies of hustling and gang life in which the parking attendants, for instance, had been embedded since the 1990s (Author 2019). Secondly, they increased the number of people who were directly or indirectly dependent on the EPDRF for survival and who understood that if they wanted to keep their jobs they were expected to act as party supporters. “You know, our job depends on the outcome of the next election,” a parking attendant told me on the eve of the 2010 election. That year, and again in 2015, the ruling party won overwhelming electoral victories, even in inner-city neighbourhoods where the opposition had been successful in 2005 (Author 2019).

This machine of control and mobilisation proved invaluable to *kebelle* officials during evictions. Local government offices were actively involved in so-called “land preparation”: giving eviction notices and demolishing houses on government land. The capacity of the government to control and mobilise the local population gave government officials the tools to enforce and implement land clearance on a large scale (Ezana Weldeghebrael 2020). However, given this recent history, evictions seem discontinuous with long-running state efforts to control and regulate inner-city neighbourhoods. Moreover, reshuffling urban geographies and creating unpredictable new communities on the outskirts undoubtedly appear risky for a government so concerned with political control. Nevertheless, evictions make sense if we consider how visions of the future affected city governance. Inner-city neighbourhoods were crucial sites of governance and control, yet were increasingly seen

as a challenge or even a constraint to government plans. Their very presence at the city's physical centre impeded the future that government and business elites had begun to visualise.

Whilst challenging from the perspective of political control, reshaping the very spaces of urban living was appealing because it provided opportunities to develop an all-encompassing vision of the urban. It allowed urban politics to be imagined not as exclusively concerned with governing neighbourhoods and regulating small-scale economies, but as a platform for reshaping the broader spaces, image and economy of the city. Evictions were a development solution because they enabled the EPRDF government to imagine an economic governance of the future. In this regard, the transformation of Addis Ababa was not merely about the accumulation of capital. It was a process of re-engineering, regulating, governing and controlling urban space, but with a view to shaping lives and livelihoods to become commensurable with economic and, relevantly, aesthetic visions of Addis Ababa's future (Roy 2011; Ong 2011; Harms 2012).

In the city centre, high-rise buildings embodied aspirations to economic success. They signalled that Addis Ababa was a global city which had its doors open to the world, as a 2017 World Bank report (Lall, Henderson, Venables 2017) recommended. Steel-and-glass architecture told observers (and investors) that Addis Ababa had emancipated itself from the small-scale, informal and unproductive economies that burdened African cities, and that it had realised a large-scale, productive and capital-intensive economy (Biruk Terrefe 2020). For government officials and investors, high-rise buildings were beautiful because they brought home imaginaries of global wealth (Harms 2012). "The city administration's vision is to transform this city, to make it like New York, Brussels, Geneva, whatever," *Ato Mulugeta* of the Addis Ababa Housing Project Office told me.¹⁵

Condominiums were beautiful for the same reasons. Government officials told me that condominiums are built and imagined as both embodying and inducing orderly modern living. As *Ato Mulugeta* put it, living in a condominium changes how people inhabit a city: "You know, they do not urinate in the streets. They do not put dirty things on the streets. They are transforming."¹⁶ The "beauty" of condominium housing was not just about orderly modern living, however. Condominiums reconfigured the very terms of participation in the urban economy, making it compatible with economies of speculation and financialisation (Planel, Bridonneau 2017). One objective of the housing programme was to encourage home ownership by providing urban residents, particularly the poor, with an asset that could be used in future as collateral for loans or capital for economic activity. This arrangement, government officials argued, was changing people's behaviours, emphasising saving and responsible spending, and contributing to the growth of the domestic financial industry.¹⁷

However, the effects of these aesthetic visions cannot be appreciated by simply juxtaposing inner-city neighbourhoods with the high-rise buildings that replaced them. The power and resilience of these visions can be seen in the way the Ethiopian government was willing to displace not only its own structures of control, but also to disrupt urban economies. Indeed these aesthetic and financial visions of the future hinder, not empower, productive commercial and economic ventures, especially in the inner city.

¹⁵ Interview, Senior government official, Addis Ababa Housing Project Office, May 2013

¹⁶ Interview, Senior government official, Addis Ababa Housing Project Office, May 2016

¹⁷ The path to home ownership is through mortgages and debt. As described earlier, a criterion for entering the condominium housing scheme is to have a bank account and to save towards a down-payment and mortgage instalments.

The inner city was not just a place of cheap government-owned housing and small-scale enterprises. Since the 1880s, this area has been an important site of commercial and economic activity (Bahru Zewde 2005). Kebelle 70,¹⁸ for example, was filled with vibrant commercial ventures: video parlours, restaurants, cafés, butchers, clothing shops. At the time of my research in 2016, Kebelle 70 had already been designated to be cleared.

Commercial activities in Kebelle 70 were regulated by a combination of arrangements that cut across the formal and the informal, and ultimately emerge from the long history, sketched out earlier, of relations between the state and the inner city. Commercial activities took place on government land. Some shop-holders were long-term government tenants or rented from those who retained ownership of their houses after nationalisation. A newer generation of shop-holders comprised those lucky enough to live in a house rented from the government and facing the street (where a small shop may be carved out of the front); those who rented from government renters; or had taken over (“bought the key”) from other shop-holders who had previously rented from the government. The latter two options reflect the many types of arrangements that were off the books. However, whether they were “formal” or “informal”, all commercial activities in Kebelle 70 had to go – unless they could comply with the government’s visions of the future.

Businesspeople could stay in Kebelle 70, said *Ato* Bruk of the Land Development and Urban Renewal Agency, if they have the capital to redevelop their plot according to the new planning regulations.¹⁹ During my stay in Addis Ababa, resourceful businesspeople were preparing for that future. They had created an association and pooled resources for a land lease from the government and to cover the cost of building a high-rise shopping mall to which they would eventually relocate.²⁰ Whether building yet another shopping mall alongside countless others would actually have benefits is hard to say. What the shopping mall would transform, however, is the “look” of Kebelle 70’s business community, bringing it in line with the government’s vision. Building a shopping mall was the “tribute” they would pay to the government to stay in Kebelle 70, whether or not it was beneficial for their businesses.

The fact that productive commercial enterprises must pay this “tribute” to stay in the inner city is one of the clearest indications of how urban development can lead towards an insidious form of authoritarianism. It shows how the realisation of aesthetic and economic visions of the urban future is pursued by challenging how generations of urban residents have built their place in the city. In doing this, urban development does not just eradicate established “senses of place” (Feld, Basso 1996; Baxstrom 2008), it repeals the grounds on which citizens claim the right to the city (Lefebvre 1996) while giving government and developers a free hand to codify new visions of aesthetics, economics and urban citizenship. Those who can afford to pay their way into the urban future – through “tribute” to government visions or a mortgage in the condominiums – can claim their right to the new city. Those who cannot are destined to face even more precarious futures.

One such was Gizachew, the manager of an informal video house. I first met Gizachew in 2010 and then followed his life and business trajectory for the following eight years. Gizachew sub-rented from a government renter, paying 1,000 birr (USD 50) a month, and showed movies for a 3 birr entrance fee from early morning to 10 pm. Gizachew and his wife, Fatima, had two “side businesses”. Fatima sold *khat*, a mild narcotic, in front of the video house, but prohibited her customers from chewing it during film screenings. Gizachew also ran a public toilet. “It was very smelly. Now I clean it everyday

¹⁸ The name of the neighbourhood has been changed to protect the identity of my informants.

¹⁹ Interview, Senior government official, Land Development and Urban Renewal Agency, Addis Ababa, June 2016

²⁰ See also the case of Merkato in Addis Ababa (Emanuel Admassu 2015).

and I take 0.25 cents for each person who goes to pee there. [...] This is creating your business... day by day.”²¹

Gizachew and Fatima’s entrepreneurial activities sat at the crossroads of formal and informal regulations. While Gizachew’s earnings from the video house and the toilet might be off the books, the couple’s commercial activities were recognised and visible to the government. Fatima paid taxes on the *khat* she sold and issued receipts on request using a cash register. Yet, when the time comes, Gizachew and Fatima will have to go. This is not because Gizachew and Fatima are under-regulated or verging on the illegal, but because their business is incompatible with the aesthetic and financial standards of the government’s vision of Kebele 70.

When I visited Gizachew in 2017 and again in 2018, he did not hide his concern. Government officials were telling people to get ready to leave and he did not know what to do. The couple had lived in Kebele 70 since they were very young. He lacked the financial capacities to join the shopping mall association or to rent space in new developments in the outskirts. His entrepreneurship skills were embedded in the economic and social fabric of the inner city and without it he would be lost. “When Kebele 70 is gone, what is Gizachew going to do?” a loyal customer of the video house asked me, and himself.²²

UNEQUAL ENTITLEMENTS

Gizachew’s concerns about life after eviction were not unfounded. Out of 323 of those relocated from the inner city and surveyed by UN-Habitat, “92 (41.3%) had their business in the inner city and only 12 (3.7%) could sustain their businesses in the resettlement area. For 88 households (29.1%) the resettlement area cannot provide income opportunities” (UN-Habitat 2017: 73). Evictions are not simply about moving to the outskirts. For those like Gizachew, their livelihoods, their place in the city, and their ability to ground their action in the present and the foreseeable future is radically questioned and violently shattered (Baxstrom 2008).

There are two possible interpretations of the processes occurring in Ethiopia’s capital. One is a critical analysis of the making of neoliberal urbanism (Fassil Demissie 2008; Peck, Theodore, Brenner 2009). Evictions are classic examples of “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey 2010). This interpretation seems even more appropriate when we consider that due to land nationalisation in the mid-1970s, many evictees were former renters who paid nominal rates to live on government property (Clapham 1988). The evictions not only removed the urban poor from their homes, they marked a radical break from how the state catered to its poorest citizens. They signalled that if the urban poor want housing, they would have to pay for it.

A second interpretation aligns with the narratives of development capitalism championed in particular by the late Meles Zenawi (2006), the long-time prime minister, ideologue and chair of the EPRDF. Under his leadership, the EPRDF combined a belief in the state’s role in delivering growth with a pragmatic embrace of the market economy (Vaughan, Tronvoll 2003). The state guaranteed inclusion and justice, with the market as the “necessary evil” to deliver a better future (Kelsall 2013; Leftwich 2007). Within this framework, evictions were seen to be for the good. They enabled the developmental state to attract investment and finance interventions for the people, especially the poor: infrastructure and “affordable housing”.

²¹ Interview, Manager of informal video house, Addis Ababa, April 2010

²² Interview, Urban resident, Addis Ababa, December 2017

Many observers hailed the EPRDF's developmental state for transforming the country into an African success story²³ and for offering an alternative to the neoliberal orthodoxy of the market (Kelsall 2013). However, the developmental state is not necessarily in opposition to neoliberalism (Fine 1999; Lefort 2012), just as neoliberalism is not necessarily anti-statist (Wacquant 2012). Neoliberalism is best understood as a set of ideological moves, policies and assumptions that are employed and instrumentally evoked, often in combination with government practices and rationales embedded in different and sometimes opposing political visions (Ong 2006; Collier 2012). In this regard, EPRDF's experiment was not an "alternative" to neoliberalism *per se*, but an elaboration of the visions of economic growth held by political elites, combining their political and ideological concerns with ideas drawn from international development. True, informed by Marxist-Leninist ideas of political centralism, the EPDRF ideologue Meles Zenawi opposed liberalism. Yet his own writings combined multiple opposing ideological principles: the idea of development as a political process, the dream of making Ethiopia into a collectivist society, and acceptance of the free market (Meles Zenawi 2006).

Moreover, the existence of a "statist" alternative to the neoliberal mantra of the market has not been a guarantee of a more just society. The state's ability to influence the economy was grounded in the same apparatus of control that enabled evictions and helped the ruling party to systematically repress dissent (Human Rights Watch 2010). Meanwhile, inequality deepened, especially in cities (UN-Habitat 2008, 2010, 2017). In urban areas real incomes increased, but only for the wealthiest households did they rise significantly. While goods and services became widely available, the ability of the poor to access them decreased (Solomon Mulugeta 2006).

However, government officials I interviewed were adamant that development was for the good, even though inequalities were on the rise. They argued that the ultimate objective of development policies was redistribution. This was sanctioned in the legislation that regulated access to urban land. In 1993, two years after the downfall of the Derg, the EPRDF issued the Urban Lands Lease Holding Proclamation (TGE 1993) which replaced its predecessor's formulation that "all urban lands shall be the property of the Government" (PMAC 1975). The new proclamation maintained state ownership of urban land but established a leasehold system to enable investors' access to land, often through public auction, for 60–99 years (TGE 1993).

Leaseholds offers security of tenure, which is key to attracting investment but, as the former city manager Tegegne reckoned, the legislation was not just about investment but also redistribution. As the pace of investment increased, in 2002 and again in 2011, the government issued new proclamations (FDRE, 2002, 2011). Tegegne pointed to the 2002 proclamation which quoted Article 40 of Ethiopia's constitution: "the land is the property of the State and the peoples of Ethiopia". The addition of "peoples", he said, was an important change from prior proclamations and entitled "peoples", not just the state, to benefit from land. The leasehold system was implemented, he said, to mediate between potential uses of land in a booming city, and to balance between attracting investment and ensuring inclusion. Through lease payments investors add to city budgets, he concluded, and significantly contribute to services and infrastructure to the benefit of the "people" (see also Goodfellow 2017b).²⁴

Tegegne and the drafters of the land legislation drew on the widely-held belief that serving the "public good" – delivering better services and infrastructure – would inevitably trickle down to the poor.

²³ "Forget the BRICs; Meet the PINES," *Time*, March 13, 2014, accessed July 20, 2021, <http://time.com/22779/forget-the-brics-meet-the-pines/>

²⁴ Interview, Former city manager, Addis Ababa City Government, Addis Ababa, May 2016

However, this is not always the case (McFarlane and Rutherford 2008; Harvey and Knox 2015). As urban theorist Susan Fainstein (2010:38–39) writes, the “public good” narrative hides how economic growth and infrastructural development can produce inequalities. Instead, an analytical distinction between “material gains” and “diffused benefits” enables actual impacts on the urban poor to be assessed. For instance, while poor residents of Addis Ababa might generally benefit from a better-serviced city, material gains alone can trigger trajectories of social improvement. One could argue that a job on a construction site is a material gain delivered by urban development. But when low wages, lack of job protections, and poor safety measures are taken into account, the gains are minimal relative to the 30–40% profit margins construction companies enjoy from multibillion birr contracts (Author, under review).

The imbalance between “material gains” and “diffused benefits” becomes even clearer with forced evictions to make for room for elite construction. True, evictees were not simply forced out of their homes, but the government’s system of compensation and relocation was incommensurate with the damages they experienced. The few families who owned land outright were allowed to remain if they redeveloped their plot by building a high-rise. Otherwise, they were compensated for the cheap construction materials of their houses, but not the considerable value of the land. Those who rented were offered two options: relocate to government-owned houses wherever they were available (and from where relocation remained a possibility if those sites were also targeted for urban development), or resettle in a condominium for which they would need a down-payment and mortgage.

Government officials opined that enrolment in the affordable housing programme was not just compensation, it was a change for the better. However, for many, the new homes were a burden rather than a compensation, let alone a “material gain”. Out of 1,181 condominium unit owners surveyed by UN-Habitat in 2016, 52% had defaulted on their mortgages (UN-*ibid*). “We live in these new houses, but there is not much change! Now we have to pay thousands for the mortgage. Then your salary is cut, first by taxes and then by transport costs. It is not fair!” I was told by Eden who moved to a condominium after being evicted from the city centre.²⁵

From this perspective, the leasehold system has failed to reorganise urban development along principles of compensation, redistribution and reciprocity. It has, however, been effective in creating a synthesis between infrastructural development and private investment. While delivering only diffuse benefits to the urban poor – a better-serviced city and an improved urban landscape – the leasehold system offers direct material gains to investors: it clears the way for land capture and speculation.

The way land was made available to investors, especially in the early 2000s, is revealing of this logic. “Land was plentiful”, Gio, an Ethiopian-Italian architect-turned-developer, told me. Having worked in London for over a decade, he learned the motto: “location, location, location”. When he returned to Addis Ababa, he was determined to apply that lesson. He picked a plot next to the United Nations compound to build luxury apartments – the project of his life, he told me.²⁶

Gio’s relatively easy access to land was not an isolated case: he had benefited from a campaign of large-scale land allocation between the early and the mid-2000s – a complex, under-documented part of the city’s recent history. Caleb, the manager at a longstanding real estate developer, admitted that his own company, SYSTEM, also benefitted from these allocations. The owner of SYSTEM, Caleb recalled, had no previous involvement in construction but was allocated substantial land in the

²⁵ Interview, Condominium resident and inner city evictee, December 2017

²⁶ Interview, General Manager, real estate developer, October 2015

outskirts. “Was it a bid?” I asked. “Not really,” he replied with a cheeky smile. Back then, he continued, land was just allocated and the government did not care about companies’ financial and technical capabilities.²⁷

Some of the building professionals I interviewed over the years argued that the government’s move was motivated by genuine concern with developing the city. By turning to the country’s largest investors, it aimed to trigger construction activities and alleviate housing shortages. However, many investors had no prior experience in real estate development, let alone construction. Moreover, many of the largest happened to be affiliated with the EPRDF. Giving land to party-affiliated businesspeople-turned-developers-overnight had clear political objectives, some amongst my interviewees argued. One was to distribute resources and business opportunities to key allies. Another was to keep a grip on the city. In the early 2000s, opposition parties had begun to enjoy increasing support in the capital (Pausewang, Tronvoll, Aalen 2002). Land allocations prior to the 2005 election were, some interviewees believed, intended to maintain a foothold in the capital if it was lost to the opposition.

Eventually, the EPRDF did not lose control of Addis Ababa in 2005 (Abbink 2006), but the land allocations did not produce the expected development outcomes. A senior city government official told me that the real estate companies were simply unable to step up to the challenge. Some built too little and too slowly, or did not build at all. What they did build was expensive housing, malls and hotels, which did not address the housing shortage. With hindsight, an architect who had been critical of the city’s development said, “if you look at what happened then, the government itself was cheated”.²⁸ Eventually the state stepped in, a senior city government official said. The Grand Housing programme was launched in 2006, a *de facto* recognition that the industry was unable to fulfil the government’s development plans.

Thereafter, city and national governments regarded real estate developers with suspicion (Frew Mengistu, van Dijk 2018). The business models of some developers were far from clean; many were straightforward pyramid schemes.²⁹ Waves of arrests periodically engulfed them, though the charges, some among my interlocutors in the building sector reckoned, were often “politically motivated” and tended to leave EPRDF-affiliated businesspeople untouched. By and large, however, governmental suspicion towards real estate developers did not result in a questioning of the role of private investors in the city. Corruption and fraud scandals in the building sector were seen instead as disruptions, demanding repression or more regulation, but not as symptoms of an economy of speculation. Even though the government had to step in to “correct market failures”, as civil servants put it, and build condominiums, the pressure to clear land for private investment only deepened. Evictions continued and speculation intensified.

Government leniency towards speculation might be interpreted as mere pragmatism. Development depends on investment, and lease payments can support infrastructure and housing. In this regard, the government’s approach was both pragmatic and developmentalist. However, this pragmatism also reveals an underlying moral justification of profit and accumulation and, ultimately, the prioritisation of investment and capital over the purported aims of government development policies in the city, i.e. inclusion and redistribution.

²⁷ Interview, Manager, real estate developer, Addis Ababa, June 2016

²⁸ Interview, Architect and university lecturer, June 2016

²⁹ “Ermias’s Failures Leads to Snatching of Shares of Michot Real Estate”, July 12, 2016, accessed July 22, 2021 <http://addisfortune.net/articles/ermias-failures-leads-to-snatching-of-shares-of-michot-real-estate/>

“We do not use space equally,” Tegegn, the former city manager, argued.³⁰ Government policies, he continued, cater to the multiplicity of land uses shaping the development of the city. While poor people might need a small plot to satisfy their needs, investors require bigger strategically-located plots to recoup their investments. The recognition of such differences in use was, for Tegegn, a form of equity. At the same time, arguing that “we do not use space equally” also bears witness to how the legitimate use of space is *unequally* distributed in the city. Wittingly or unwittingly, Tegegn’s response shows that, in the eyes of government officials, real estate development had priority over low-income homes in a plot of the same size and in the same location.

This was not just a consequence of an underlying alliance between the government and the business community. It was the result of the fact that, while speaking the language of redistribution, government policies and discourses effectively made the logic of accumulation the criteria against which the *extent* and the *purpose* of policies of redistribution and inclusion are defined. Citizens were seen as deserving more or less depending on their contributions to the realisation of government’s aesthetic and economic visions of the future. Within this framework, rich people did more and therefore deserved more. By building luxury hotels, shopping malls and real estate developments, they gave Addis Ababa that facelift that government officials wished to see. This contribution to the city’s development was worthy of government support.

In comparison, poor people did nothing and so deserved less. Their dilapidated houses were seen as a wasteful occupation of urban land and a liability to development. Anything they received in exchange for the loss of their homes or their labour, some of my interlocutors in government argued is a “gain”. Hence, people should stop complaining, *Ato* Mulugeta of Addis Ababa Housing Agency told me when I recounted complaints from condominium-dwellers about expensive mortgages and distance from employment. Instead, they should be grateful for what the government had given them. Similarly, speaking of low salaries, Eng. Said, the business manager of GRAND Construction, argued: “if the workers just think about themselves and not the financial situation of the company, we will all fail together.”³¹

CONCLUSION

The appointment of Abiy Ahmed as Prime Minister in 2018 held the promise of a radical positive change. The first Oromo in history to lead the Ethiopian state, dubbed a reformer and appreciated for his eloquence, Abiy was viewed as one who can address demands for political openness. Following his appointment, members of opposition parties were released from prison and restrictions on media and civil society lifted. Abiy Ahmed fulfilled many of his promises. He lifted the ban on opposition parties that until then had been designated “terrorist groups”, showed an eagerness to amend restrictive laws on media and civil society, and signed a historic peace agreement with Eritrea that won him the Nobel Peace Prize in October 2019.

Soon after taking power, Abiy Ahmed signalled his intentions for the economic future of Ethiopia. In a 2019 interview with the *Financial Times*, he declared himself a capitalist,³² alluding to the possibility

³⁰ Interview, Former city manager, Addis Ababa City Government, Addis Ababa May 2016

³¹ Interview, Business Manager, Contractor, Addis Ababa, June 2013

³² “Ethiopia’s Abiy Ahmed: Africa’s new talisman, *Financial Times* official website, July 12, 2019, accessed March 19, 2021, <https://www.ft.com/content/abe678b6-346f-11e9-bb0c-42459962a812>

of further economic liberalisation. Some commentators welcomed Abiy's liberal intentions while others considered them as undermining his promise of reform and justice.³³

Three years after his appointment, the political situation has dramatically deteriorated. Increasing ethnic violence and political friction – first with Oromo nationalists and then the military confrontation with the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front, the former lead party in the EPRDF, and which had refused to merge into Abiy's political vehicle, the Prosperity Party – has created a climate of volatility. With members of opposition parties and critical media imprisoned, and street protest violently suppressed, political space is once again closing.

In the city, evictions have continued under the watch of Abiy Ahmed's administration. In November 2018, Abu Dhabi-based real estate developer Eagle Hills and Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed launched *La Gare*, a new development with shopping malls, luxury hotels and over 4,000 high-end residences. *La Gare* will replace Kirkos, one of the oldest neighbourhoods in the inner city.³⁴ A few months later, in April 2019, Abiy Ahmed announced another milestone in his plans for the regeneration of Addis Ababa. His riverside project – “Beautifying Shegher” – will be supported by the Chinese government: a 12-kilometre redevelopment bulldozing its way through densely populated parts of the Ethiopian capital (Biruk Terrefe 2020)

In 2016, in the midst of the street protests that led to the resignation of Abiy Ahmed's predecessor Hailemariam Dessalegn, Solomon Kebedde, university professor and one of the country's leading architects, warned students and building professionals about the challenges of present times at a major conference at Addis Ababa University on architecture and urban planning. He said “change shakes the foundation of citizenship”. Recent developments, Solomon argued, have not only brought the excitement of the new, they are disrupting old ways of living while creating new political, economic and social tensions. Development has produced a complex and troubling relation between the actuality of the city and its potentiality. It has shaped the imagination of the urban future as the delivery of something that is not there, but may be realised by producing the absence of what is there now. As Solomon put it, this process of removal is shaking the foundations of citizenship in Addis Ababa. It is undermining citizens' ability to claim ownership of their urban present and future.

Poor housing and unsanitary conditions are undoubtedly a reality in inner-city Addis Ababa (Netsanet Teklehaymanot 2009). However, the evictions have had little to do with upgrading housing stock, enforcing regulatory frameworks or enhancing the city's economic productivity. Evictions have targeted the “stubborn” presence of communities – their ways of being and occupying space – that are deemed to obstruct the visions of the city held by governments, investors and experts (Baxstrom 2008; Harms 2013, 2016; Ghannam 2002). Evictions have given investors, developers and government officials an opportunity to shape Addis Ababa along architectural visions of the global city of high-rise buildings and glass curtain walls (Roy 2011; Ong 2011; Harms 2013; Grant 2008). This process is deemed to be necessary, just and beautiful. It is thought to be necessary because it is a condition for that better future the government seeks to deliver for its citizens. It is regarded as just because it enables the city to thrive and the government to fund services and infrastructure that will

³³ William Davidson. “From Meles' ‘Dead End’ to Abiy's ‘New Horizon’”, Ethiopia Insight official website, July 12, 2019, accessed March 20 2021, <https://www.ethiopia-insight.com/2019/06/10/from-meles-dead-end-to-abiy-s-new-horizon/>

³⁴ The government promised that the 1,600 households targeted for eviction because of this project would be relocated to “affordable houses” in the new development. Some celebrated this as a break from the past. Others doubted it would happen and despised it as a PR stunt.

benefit the general population, including the poor. It is seen as beautiful because it helps to realise imaginaries of global wealth and plenty in a country with a long history of famine and chronic poverty.

Visions of urban aesthetics, economic justice and necessity have constituted the terrains of the “development” of Addis Ababa and the moulding of authoritarianism. They have helped prioritise the logics of investment and capital accumulation in the city and made those the criteria against which the extent of redistribution and inclusion have been defined. Ultimately, evictions have shaped urban futures in Addis Ababa. They have helped deliver development through a governance of dispossession and promoted ideas of redistribution that justify speculation and inequality as inevitable and necessary. In doing so, development has not only opened “landscapes of accumulation” (Searle 2016). It has produced an insidious form of authoritarianism that defies the classic binaries of redistribution and dispossession, statism and neoliberalism, formality and informality, the symbolic and the economic, profit and the “public good”.

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