

# Investigating the African City: Rem Koolhaas, Jacques Herzog, Pierre de Meuron, and Others

**“Globalization, I want to suggest, must always begin at home.”**

—Homi K. Bhabha

## INTRODUCTION

The African continent and its manifestations appear in international exhibitions of art, receive broad coverage in prominent international magazines, and have become an established topic of scholarly research across fields of study.<sup>1</sup> Especially in spatial disciplines, such as architecture and urban planning, the sub-Saharan metropolis has occupied a special position as laboratory of Western ideas about urban space. Recently, Rem Koolhaas, Pritzker Architecture Prize Laureate in 2000, has focused his interests on the city of Lagos, in Nigeria, as part of his Harvard Project on the City (HPC). Following his example, numerous other European and American architects have developed courses on the African metropolis, among them Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron, Pritzker Architecture Prize Laureates in 2001, who have concentrated their attention on the Kenyan city of Nairobi.

In the last decades, the efforts of these leading theorists, practitioners, and educators towards the African metropolis have been applauded by many members of the architectural community, but at the same time incited fierce criticism. The debate focuses on foreign designers' ability to improve life and conditions in the African city: critics question the legitimacy and methodology of outside interventions in the continent. In several architectural publications, scholars have charged Koolhaas, Herzog, and De Meuron's visions to be partial and emphasizing congestion. Understanding African cities as laboratories of Western urban theories, they perpetuate a mode of “colonial paternalism.”<sup>2</sup> For some of those contributing to the debate, these architects' focus on the African city is inherently suspect and produces what some critics call a (post)colonial “impulse” typical of cultural imperialist perspectives.<sup>3</sup>

In what follows, I examine the methodological and pedagogical work on the African city of Koolhaas, Herzog, De Meuron, and their collaborators. I consider the well-established criticism of their investigations, and place it in dialogue with the emerging literature on post-colonial urban studies, which promote creative ways of thinking about the African city, its cultural diversity, and complexity.

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### THE HARVARD PROJECT ON THE CITY: REM KOOLHAAS'S INTEREST IN LAGOS

In 1995, Koolhaas embarked on a “pure” research project with his students at Harvard University. The purpose was to investigate issues and conditions surrounding the “urban mutations” taking place throughout the world in the 1990s.<sup>4</sup> Two volumes reviewed his investigation of the city, *Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping* and *Great Leap Forward: Harvard Design School Project on the City*.<sup>5</sup> A third, never-published volume, *Lagos: How it works*, should have been focused on the city of Lagos.

Located in Nigeria, Lagos is its most crowded city. For several decades the metropolis has expanded into overcrowded slums and, by contrast, ostentatious mansions. For Koolhaas, its extremes provide a clear example of what urban growth looks like in an African city. Koolhaas's interest in Lagos developed through his research on the city conducted between 1998 and 2001. As Professor in Practice of Architecture and Urban Design at Harvard, he developed a course on the Nigerian city initially planned to be a collaborative design effort between the HPC and the University of Lagos (UNILAG).<sup>6</sup> In 2001, together with the HPC, he published some initial findings in the volume *Mutations*.<sup>7</sup> The chapter on Lagos included a collection of essays representing the rapidly accelerating phenomenon of urbanization, the characteristic of Lagos that most fascinated Koolhaas. His Harvard students explored Lagos' urban growth using four categories—“property,” “line,” “wall,” and “bottlenecked”—which also composed the sections of the Lagos chapter in *Mutations*. A dedicated section at the end of the book describes the Alaba electronics market, the biggest market for electrical appliances, electronics, and accessories in Nigeria. Rather than depicting Lagos as an isolated center, the Alaba section demonstrates the city's connection with other megacities such as Taipei, Moscow, Mexico City, Sao Paulo, and Dubai, where vendors travel to buy secondhand electronics.

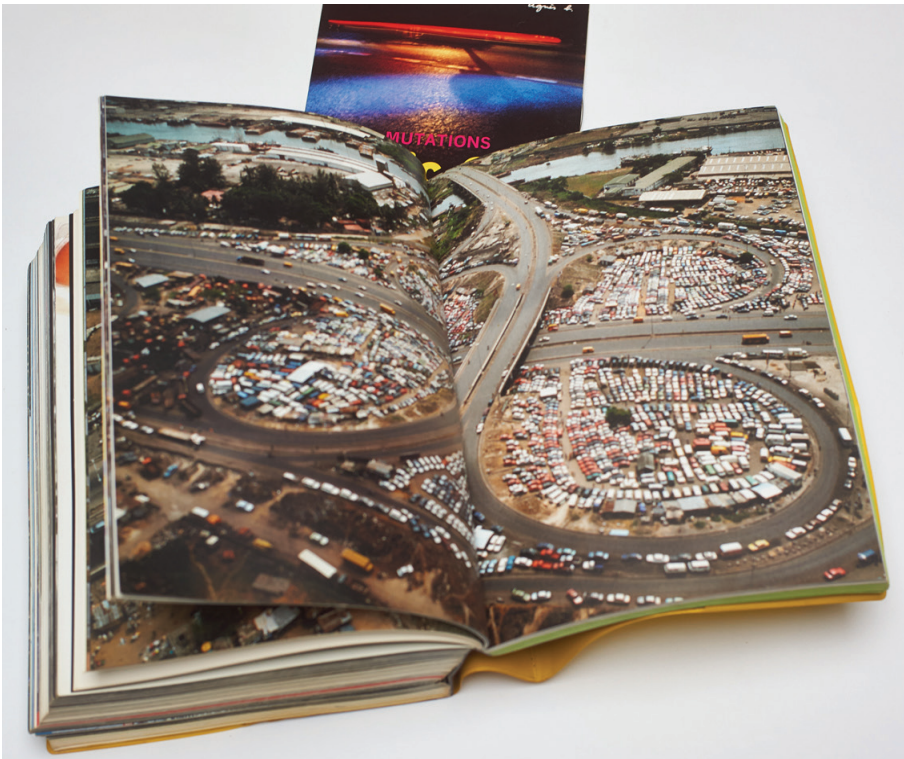
The HPC analysis of Lagos also resulted in Koolhaas's short essay “Fragments on a Lecture on Lagos,” published in the book *Under Siege*, edited by Okwui Enwezor, occasioning of the eleventh “Documenta” exhibition in 2002.<sup>8</sup> The article is based on a lecture given in Lagos that year during one of Koolhaas's field trips to the African metropolis. Under the direction of Bregtje van der Haak, Dutch documentary filmmaker and journalist, these travels provided the material for two full-length documentary films.<sup>9</sup> *Lagos/Koolhaas* and *Lagos Wide and Close* present Koolhaas's view of the metropolis: an “icon of West African urbanity [that] inverts every essential characteristic of the so-called modern city.” Pushing the point further, Koolhaas describes Lagos as the extreme and pathological form of the West African city, arguing that “to write about the African city is to write about the terminal condition of Chicago, London, or Los Angeles.”<sup>10</sup> According to Koolhaas, Lagos provides an illuminating “paradigm” for the city of the future, a global ideal that needs to be intensely explored and discussed.

Koolhaas's interpretation of Lagos produced clamor and anxiety. Critics by turn laud and criticize the HPC and the literature and filmography produced after Koolhaas's analysis of Lagos.<sup>11</sup> As Enwezor recalls of a 2002 conference in Lagos: “the full room was evenly divided between opposing camps of supporters (mostly enthusiastic young students) and detractors (older observers, less sanguine about his theory of Lagos).”<sup>12</sup>

### ETH STUDIO BASEL: HERZOG AND DE MEURON'S ANALYSIS OF NAIROBI

After Koolhaas's investigation, several renowned architects became interested in the African continent. Excited to test their ideas on the city focusing on rapidly urbanizing centers, they developed courses on the African metropolises. Among them are Herzog, De Meuron, and ETH Studio Basel, the institute of urban research set up in 1999 as part of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich.

ETH Studio Basel, led by the architects Roger Diener and Marcel Meili, together with Herzog and De Meuron, developed a research program exploring the processes of urban



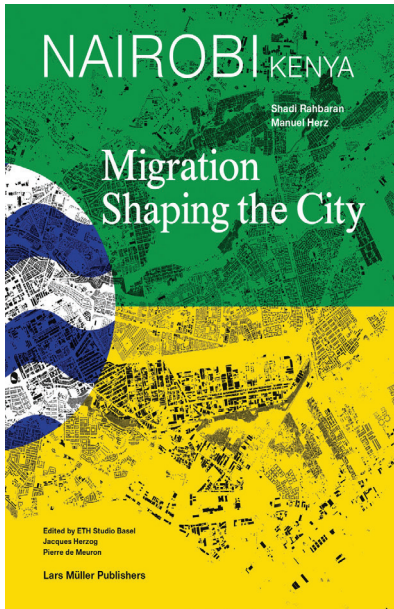
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transformation on an international scale. The project focused on urbanizing centers in the MetroBasel region and the Canary Islands, and in cities such as Belgrade, Havana, Casablanca, and Hong Kong. According to the institute's mission statement, ETH Studio Basel investigates urban regions that the group considered "ambiguous" in their development.<sup>13</sup> According to Herzog and De Meuron these cities "maintain a constant momentum without ever exploding or collapsing onto themselves, since they are connected to international energy flows that continue to evolve."<sup>14</sup>

As part of this program, in 2007-2008, Herzog and De Meuron concentrated their analysis on the city of Nairobi, capital of the eastern African country of Kenya. They described Nairobi as one of the most international cities in the world; in an article published in *Lotus International*, they affirmed that the metropolis "possesses the infrastructure to become a focal point of global exchange of ideas and communication."<sup>15</sup> Like Koolhaas, Herzog and De Meuron were interested in the phenomenon of rapid urbanization occurring in the African city, of which Nairobi, just over a hundred years old and "thoroughly tied into a global network of policy-making, diplomacy and governance," becomes the perfect example.<sup>16</sup> The Kenyan capital "has experienced one of the highest urban growths rates worldwide, mostly based on rural-urban migration," they noted, to become the largest metropolis in eastern Africa with approximately three to four million inhabitants.<sup>17</sup>

ETH Studio Basel performed its study in the capital in cooperation with the School of the Built Environment at the University of Nairobi. The project was coordinated with a complementary research carried out at the Harvard Graduate School of Design (GSD), where Herzog and De Meuron have been visiting professors for several years, alongside their assistant and GSD lecturer Manuel Herz. In the attempt to construct an initial "Atlas" of the city, the ETH course proceeded with a series of investigations of African geography, climate, and history, Kenyan economy and society, and Nairobi urban development.<sup>18</sup> Afterward, students embarked on a more focused research programs. In order to develop specific themes and agendas, they traveled together with their professors to Nairobi for a two-week fieldwork, where they conducted their projects in groups with local students.

Figure 1: Koolhaas Rem, Harvard Project on the City, et al., "Lagos," *Mutations*, (Barcelona: ACTAR, 2001), pp. 678-79. Reprinted with permission of ACTAR Publishers.



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As shown in the publication resulting from the project, *Nairobi, Kenya: Migration Shaping the City*, some students worked on Kibera, one of the largest informal settlements in Nairobi; others focused on Nairobi's waste network and management; and another group analyzed modern architectural legacy from the 1960s to the 1970s.<sup>19</sup> Edited by ETH Studio Basel, Herzog, and De Meuron, and authored by Shadi Rahbaran and Manuel Herz, their assistants during the EHT Studio Basel Nairobi project, the book focuses on globalization and migratory flows occurring in the city. It includes graphic drawings, layered maps, diagrams, and analyses developed by students, with interviews, architectural portraits and urban biographies advancing different scenarios for the future of the city.

More recently, Herzog and De Meuron have included the analysis of Nairobi in a new publication, *The Inevitable Specificity of Cities*.<sup>20</sup> As in *Nairobi, Kenya: Migration Shaping the City*, they focus on the new modes of transnational and transcontinental relations occurring in the contemporary city. "Seen as a place of potential, offering economic possibilities," Nairobi occupies a fundamental place in the publication, which focused on how the Kenyan capital has developed a specific way of dealing with the global turn, both being affected by the adverse repercussions of globalization and shaping its expansion.<sup>21</sup>

#### A PROBLEM OF METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE

According to Herzog and De Meuron, previously established research methods in the fields of architecture and urban planning, such as precise observation and mapping tools, are not appropriate for research in the African city. ETH Studio Basel seeks to challenge the predominant way of approaching the African city, "which focuses mostly on disparate temporalities, issues of development, and polarities of formal / informal."<sup>22</sup> In order to register the complexities of Nairobi and avoid "repetitions of clichés" and "(post)colonial standpoints," they instead investigate city functions by looking at how people live, work, and move in Nairobi, and concentrate on the simultaneity and dependencies of parameters, tracing basic human activities and analyzing the space where they occur—the so-called "activities on the local scale" declared in their ETH course syllabus.<sup>23</sup>

As Winnie V. Mitullah, Professor at the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi, points out, Herzog and De Meuron's analyses effectively convey the incongruities of the Kenyan capital.<sup>24</sup> Using several pictures and maps, *Nairobi, Kenya: Migration Shaping the City* effectively describes urban differences and conflicts. However, Mitullah also claims that it fails to present "coherent arguments for embedded contradictions" as it ignores underlying economic and social dynamics connected with city development and Kenyan migratory flows.<sup>25</sup> The Italian scholar Tomà Berlanda expresses a similar concern when he affirms that "the text [edited by Herzog and De Meuron] leaves unanswered many of the questions the authors themselves asked [...], for example, 'why has aid failed to have a significant impact on [Nairobi] urban quality?'"<sup>26</sup>

Indeed, Herzog and De Meuron provide an important view of Nairobi. However, their analysis does not convincingly convey the deep complexities of urban development. Herzog and De Meuron's exemplifying cases—Kibera, the UN Blue Zone, etc.—offer partial views of the city. Minimally exploring relationships among different powers, they depoliticize the role played by migrating groups and local government in urban development. For example, Eastleigh, a district of Nairobi, is home to Somali refugees, as explained in Herzog and De Meuron's text. But the suburb is also home to indigenous Kenyan Somali and non-Somali groups, a fact they silence. Analogous ideas of erroneous homogeneity have guided the Kenyan government and its discrimination policy for decades. During the suburbs development of the 1920s, the British colonial state developed Eastleigh as a South-Asian isolated territory; nowadays, the Kenyan government perpetuates a similar idea of Eastleigh as a "ghetto," where Somali refugees controlled by the state have replaced South-Asians confined by the British rule.<sup>27</sup> As

Figure 2: Rahbaran Shadi, Herz Manuel, Herzog Jacques, De Meuron Pierre, *Nairobi, Kenya: Migration Shaping the City*, (Zürich: Lars Müller, ETH Studio Basel, Contemporary City Institute, 2014), cover.





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a result Eastleigh’s community experiences a constant harassment from the Kenyan police force, whose abuse of power is destroying a potentially cosmopolitan hub through the use of indiscriminate arrests, roundups, beatings, and extortion. In this case, a more accurate study of the colonial history of the city and a more careful listening of the contemporary voice of residents would have probably changed the outcomes of Herzog and De Meuron’s research on the topic.

Similarly, in 2005, Matthew Gandy, an urban geographer at University College London, published an article charging Koolhaas with both dehistoricizing and depoliticizing Lagos.<sup>28</sup> Unlike Herzog and De Meuron’s analysis of Nairobi, however, Koolhaas treats Lagos with a “neo-organicist” approach and draws on “cybernetic metaphors of urban space as a multiplicity of networks ‘rapidly expanding, transforming, and perfecting’.”<sup>29</sup> According to the HPC, Lagos provides solutions to evolving problems illuminating self-regulated processes of innovation, replication, and mutation.

Koolhaas refuses the historical perspective on urban development; like Herzog and De Meuron, he disregards the role played by political forces and colonial and post-colonial legacy in the development of the contemporary African city, which instead describe the origins of Lagos’ urban congestion. As an example, we can consider the development of markets and motor parks, contested places of power in the city since the beginning of the twentieth century and symbols of self-regulated spaces in Koolhaas’s analysis.<sup>30</sup> In Lagos, the sustained politicization of urban space—that is, the use or misuse of places for political advantages—characterizes not only the contemporary city, but defined its development in its early colonial period. In its commercial center, called Lagos island, the British colonial administration tolerated urban market institutions that were beyond its control in exchange for money for decades. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the number of merchants and street traders progressively increased, occupying the main avenues, while residents of inner Lagos illegally turned their ground floors into shops and their fronts into stalls. As a result, markets have developed as places of illegality and congestion where local rulers tolerating negligence

#### ENDNOTES

1. This research evolved in the course of a recent postdoctoral fellowship under the People Programme (Marie Curie Actions) of the European Union’s 7FP (FP/2007-2013, REA grant agreement n.327261), which I gratefully acknowledge.
2. Robinson J., *Ordinary Cities: Between Modernity and Development*, Questioning Cities Series, (London ; New York: Routledge, 2006), p.5.
3. Varley Ann, “Postcolonialising Informality?”, V. Brunfaut and V. d’Auria (ed.), *Proceedings of the N-Aerus XI Conference: The Production, Use, and Dissemination of Urban Knowledge in Cities of the South*, (Brussels, 2010).
4. Koolhaas Rem, Harvard Project on the City, et al., *Mutations*, (Barcelona: ACTAR, 2001), p.117.
5. Chung C.J. , Inaba J., Koolhaas R., Leong S.T. (eds.), *Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping*, (Köln: Taschen ; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Design School, 2001); Chung C.J. , Inaba J., Koolhaas R., (eds.), *Great Leap Forward: Harvard Design School Project on the City*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Design School, 2001).

Figure 3: Rahbaran Shadi, Herz Manuel, Herzog Jacques, De Meuron Pierre, *Nairobi, Kenya: Migration Shaping the City*, (Zürich: Lars Müller, ETH Studio Basel, Contemporary City Institute, 2014), pp.10-11.

6. On the proposed collaboration see: Okoye I.S., "Architecture, History, and the Debate on Identity in Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol.61 NO.3, September 2002, pp.381-96.
7. Koolhaas Rem, Harvard Project on the City, et al., "Lagos, Harvard Project on the City", Koolhaas Rem, Harvard Project on the City, et al., *Mutations*, (Barcelona: ACTAR, 2001), pp.651-719.
8. Koolhaas R., "Fragments of a Lecture on Lagos," Enwezor O. et al. (eds.), *Under Siege: Four African Cities—Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos: Documenta 11, Platform 4*, (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2002), pp.173-183.
9. Van der Haak B., *Lagos/Koolhaas*, (The Netherlands: Sylvia Baan for Pieter van Huystee Film, 2002); Van der Haak B., *Lagos Wide and Close: An Interactive Journey into an Exploding City*, (The Netherlands: Bruno Felix and Femke Wolting for Submarine, 2005).
10. Koolhaas Rem, Harvard Project on the City, et al., "Lagos, Harvard Project on the City", Koolhaas Rem, Harvard Project on the City, et al., *Mutations*, (Barcelona: ACTAR, 2001), p.653.
11. On Koolhaas's documentaries on Lagos see, for example: Godlewski J., "Alien and Distant: Rem Koolhaas on Film in Lagos, Nigeria", *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review*, Vol.21, No.2, spring 2010, pp.7-19.
12. Enwezor Okwui, "Terminal Modernity: Rem Koolhaas's Discourse on Entropy," Véronique Patteeuw (ed.), *What is OMA?*, (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2003), p.110.
13. ETH Studio Basel, "A research on Urban Transformation," <http://www.studio-basel.com/eth-studio-basel.html>
14. Ibid.
15. ETH Studio Basel, "Kibera as a City, Nairobi Project, Nairobi, Kenya, 2007-2009," *Lotus International*, vol.143, Special issue "Favelas, Learning from," Milano, August, 2010, p.23.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. ETH Studio Basel, "Atlas of Nairobi," <http://www.studio-basel.com/projects/nairobi/atlas/>
19. Rahbaran Shadi, Herz Manuel, Herzog Jacques, De Meuron Pierre, *Nairobi, Kenya: Migration Shaping the City*, (Zürich: Lars Müller, ETH Studio Basel, Contemporary City Institute, 2014).
20. Diener Roger, Elliott Fiona, Schelbert Catherine, Lindberg Steven, Herzog Roger, Meili Marcel, De Meuron Pierre, Herz Manuel, Schmid Christian, Topalović Milica, ETH Studio Basel, Contemporary City Institute. *The Inevitable Specificity of Cities: Napoli, Nile Valley, Belgrade, Nairobi, Hong Kong, Canary Islands, Beirut, Casablanca*, (Zürich: Lars Müller, 2015).

periodically collect bribes through officials. Similarly, Lagos taxi and bus drivers are obliged to pay illegal fees to union officials. The fruitful business of drivers' exploitation has led to the proliferation of motor parks all over Lagos, and—as officials have generally been positioned along major roads, close to markets or crossroads—the exploitation has increased congestion dramatically.

By depoliticizing the discourse on Lagos, Koolhaas inverts the teleological conception of Africa as lagging behind Western advancement, and declares Lagos the future laboratory from which we can learn. However, by refusing to recognize corruption and exploitation as forces affecting urban development, he also refuses to take ethical stances on social and political issues. As a result, deprived of their colonial past and legacy, Lagos—and, indeed, Nairobi—become abstractions and Western laboratories of urban experimentation. In the case of Koolhaas and the HPC, Lagos represents the paradigmatic, and effectively generic, contemporary city: without history, enormous, exciting, multiracial, and multicultural. Koolhaas sets it "against the artificially preserved traditional European city, such as Paris and Zurich," differentiating the contemporary city by its hybridity.<sup>31</sup> As Esra Akcan clearly explains, his depiction of Lagos becomes a broader theoretical statement "on the transformation of the concept of [the] city as the result of globalization's complex forces," as well as a statement on the differences between the global and the traditional city, rather than sustained analysis of urban development in Lagos itself.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Herzog, De Meuron, and ETH Studio Basel proclaim Nairobi the paradigm of the "specific" city.<sup>33</sup> In opposition with Koolhaas's theory, they believe that Nairobi does not develop towards a common vanishing point—Koolhaas's generic city—but rather consolidates, transforms, and adapts its specific traits shaped by localities, historical traditions, and global forces. Yet in both cases, rather than describing Nairobi and Lagos and proposing new solutions for their futures, ETH Studio Basel and Koolhaas's theories serve better to illuminate the "intellectual fight" between different Eurocentric interpretations of the metropolis, where Africa has unexpectedly developed as the paradigmatic battleground.

#### ARCHITECTURAL PEDAGOGY AND IMPERIAL IMPULSES

As Esra Akcan remembers, during his trips to Lagos, Koolhaas sought confirmation for his preconceived ideas about the global metropolis.<sup>34</sup> In Nigeria, the phenomena observed sustained his theory on the generic city, but did not influence his established epistemology. Showing "the basic symptom of all imperial impulses," voluntarily or not, Koolhaas imposes his foreign perspective on the city with no confrontation with the Nigerian urban environment.<sup>35</sup> The architect applies the portable and packagable essence of "metropolitanism" seen in Manhattan years before and described in his *Retroactive Manifesto* to Lagos.<sup>36</sup> As a result, the Nigerian city becomes the paradigm of the compact, conflicted, decadent city, defined by hidden services and made coherent by a shared culture. Full of drawbacks of exoticism, the project describes Lagos and the African city as an ontological "other."<sup>37</sup>

In order to avoid similar Western epistemic hegemonies and better embrace cultural diversity, ETH Studio Basel tried to conduct its project in close collaboration with experts from Nairobi, specifically with representatives of UN-Habitat, and other local research institutes. The work presented in the course website is extensive. ETH students likely developed it with ongoing external contributions from the Harvard GSD and the students from Nairobi. However, it is difficult to understand the role of Harvard students, acknowledged at the beginning of the book. Even less clear is the "generosity and openness" of the Department of Architecture at the University of Nairobi, whose students seem only to "have guided" European and US graduates and undergraduates in their discovery of Nairobi.<sup>38</sup>

As regards the HPC course on Lagos, it remained a Koolhaas-Harvard achievement, failing to develop in a collaborative design effort with the University of Lagos (UNILAG) as

intended.<sup>39</sup> In the chapter published in *Mutations*, the absence of a dialogue with Lagosian actors results in a sort of “collection” of semi-disparate short texts, graphics, and aerial pictures of the city, especially images of congestion.<sup>40</sup> Koolhaas does not showcase urban poverty and lack of infrastructure to propose a formal system—a plan—that would address or solve deficiencies. He mainly photographs and collects random statistics and piquant details to shock, amaze, and serve his representation theory of the generic city.

ETH Studio Basel collected numerous pictures and images of Nairobi; in particular, students developed several aerial photographs into layered maps. Reproduced in the city “Atlas,” they focus on housing areas and typologies and become the main project outcome. However, they appear more a simple redesign of Nairobi than a critical apparatus on the functioning of the city. While they transform a great amount of data into images, these are unfortunately not supported by written texts of the same accuracy. In the “Nairobi Atlas,” the presence of graphics, maps, and diagrams is overwhelming, and finds a coherent solution only in the books published years later, which, however, do not develop consistent social and historical investigations, as previously explained in this article. Pictures and layered maps surprise the unfamiliar reader, stressing the high density and compressed morphology of the urban tissue of Nairobi. However, the initial intention to focus on the activities on the local scale does not shine through them, while the role and mutual relation of services in the cultural development of the city is silenced.

In the attempt to understand the “unknown”—the African city of Nairobi—ETH Studio Basel tried to order, label and quantify the metropolis. However, by silencing the African voice and perspective, Herzog and De Meuron fail to describe the historical development and cultural richness of Nairobi. Their maps and timelines illuminate fundamental moments of city development, but belittle and undervalue the complexity of the African metropolis, giving students the impression that they know everything about Africa, but actually offering only a superficial understanding of it.

#### IN CONCLUSION: A NEW METHOD

Koolhaas, Herzog, and De Meuron’s work has had significant merit. It has made the African city visible and worthy of study. The celebrity status and institutional mechanisms behind these architect-teachers, the HPC, and ETH Studio Basel have successfully produced interest in the African city: their analyses have laid the groundwork for a broader discussion between architects, urban planners, sociologists, anthropologists and demographers all over the world. The resulting discourse, by turns laudatory and critical, has begun to fill a gap in the literature about these cities, at the point that architects and planners’ perspective is slowly changing from previous analyses on the African urban realm, while several European and American universities offer courses on African architecture and the global South.

However, as AbdouMalik Simone observes, Koolhaas, Herzog, and De Meuron’s investigations, like many others’, “have not examined the ways in which [African] economies and activities themselves might act as a platform for the creation of a very different kind of sustainable urban configuration.”<sup>41</sup> Developing from the critic of Western preconceived ideas of African “dysfunctionality,” recent post-colonial studies are instead working on new architectural and urban approaches, more focused on the rehabilitation of sub-Saharan cities as metropolis that work, considered at the vanguard of a globalizing modernity.<sup>42</sup> Unlike Koolhaas, Herzog, and De Meuron’s research, they re-engage with the African city and reveal what, in the supposed chaos, works, thanks to local strategies and systems that go beyond mere survival and rigid Western dichotomies of power, such as poor-rich and informal-formal.

As architects and teachers working with “non-Western” countries, Koolhaas, Herzog, and De Meuron have been faced with the dual challenge of preventing exoticism and Eurocentric

21. ETH Studio Basel, “Kibera as a City, Nairobi Project, Nairobi, Kenya, 2007-2009,” *Lotus International*, vol.143, Special issue “Favelas, Learning from,” Milano, August, 2010, p.23.
22. Ibid.
23. ETH Studio Basel, “Nairobi 2007,” <http://www.studio-basel.com/projects/nairobi/student-work/>
24. Mitullah Winnie V., “Review: Nairobi, Kenya: Migration shaping the city,” December 15, 2014, <http://www.urbanafrika.net/review/review-nairobi-kenya-migration-shaping-city/>
25. Ibid.
26. Berlanda Tomà, “Publications: Nairobi, Kenya: Migration shaping the city,” Abitare, 2014, <http://www.abitare.it/en/research/publications/2015/01/29/migration-shaping-city/>
27. See, for example: Jansen Willem J. E., Wandera Joseph, Peter C. B. *Mapping Eastleigh for Christian-Muslim Relations*, (Limuru, Kenya: Zapf Chancery Africa, 2013).
28. Gandy M., “Learning from Lagos”, *New Left Review*, NLR 33, May-June 2005, pp.37-52.
29. Ibid., p.39.
30. On the topic see: Fourchard L., “Lagos”, Bekker S., Therborn G., *Capital Cities in Africa: Power and Powerlessness*, (Cape Town, South Africa : HSRC Press, 2012), pp.66-82.
31. On Koolhaas’s generic city, see: Akcan Esra, “Reading “The Generic City”: Retroactive Manifestos for Global Cities of the Twenty-First Century,” *Perspecta*, Vol.41, Grand Tour 2008, p.147.
32. Ibid., p.148.
33. “We can state that the phenomena that we observe in Nairobi have a general quality, in the sense that they represent urban processes that have become characteristic or paradigmatic of the contemporary city.” Rahbaran Shadi, Herz Manuel, Herzog Jacques, De Meuron Pierre, *Nairobi, Kenya: Migration Shaping the City*, (Zürich: Lars Müller, ETH Studio Basel, Contemporary City Institute, 2014), p.172.
34. Akcan Esra, “Reading “The Generic City”: Retroactive Manifestos for Global Cities of the Twenty-First Century,” *Perspecta*, Vol.41, Grand Tour, 2008, p.150. On Koolhaas-traveler to Lagos, see also: Ockman J., “Bestride the World Like a Colossus: The Architect as Tourist,” Ockman J., et al., *Architourism: Authentic, Escapist, Exotic, Spectacular*, (Munich; New York: Prestel, 2005), pp.158-185.
35. Akcan Esra, “Reading “The Generic City”: Retroactive Manifestos for Global Cities of the Twenty-First Century,” *Perspecta*, Vol.41, Grand Tour, 2008, p.150.
36. Koolhaas Rem, *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan*, (New ed. New York: Monacelli Press, 1994).



37. On the topic, see: Fourchard L. , "Lagos, Koolhaas and Partisan Politics in Nigeria", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol.35, No.1, January 2011, p.40–56.
38. Rahbaran Shadi, Herz Manuel, Herzog Jacques, De Meuron Pierre, *Nairobi, Kenya: Migration Shaping the City*. (Zürich: Lars Müller, ETH Studio Basel, Contemporary City Institute, 2014), p.6.
39. On the proposed collaboration see: Okoye I.S., "Architecture, History, and the Debate on Identity in Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol.61 no.3, September 2002, p.381-96.
40. Koolhaas's role of collector, manipulator, and projector of images is well known, and "has led to something that is both his brand and his critical signature at the same time." Betsy Aaron, "Rem Koolhaas: the Fire of Manhattanism Inside the Iceberg of Modernism", Patteeuw Véronique (ed.), *What is OMA?*, (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2003), p.27.
41. Simone, A. M., *For the City Yet to Come: Changing African Life in Four Cities*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2004, p.9.
42. See, for example: Chabal Patrick, Daloz Jean-Pascal, *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument*, (African Issues. Oxford, [England]: Bloomington: International African Institute in Association with James Currey ; Indiana University Press, 1999.)
43. Interview with Rem Koolhaas, in Van der Haak B., *Lagos Wide and Close: An Interactive Journey into an Exploding City*, (The Netherlands: Bruno Felix and Femke Wolting for Submarine, 2005).
44. Enwezor Okwui, "Terminal Modernity: Rem Koolhaas's Discourse on Entropy," Véronique Patteeuw (ed.), *What is OMA?*, (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2003), p.116.
45. Simone A. M., *For the City Yet to Come: Changing African Life in Four Cities*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).
46. Boeck Filip De., Plissart Marie-Françoise, *Kinshasa : Tales of the Invisible City*, (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2014).
47. Mbembe Achille, *On the Postcolony*, (Studies on the History of Society and Culture ; 41. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
48. Comaroff Jean, Comaroff John L. , *Theory from the South: Or, How Euro-America Is Evolving toward Africa*, (Boulder, Colo. ; London: Paradigm Publishers, 2012), p.18.

presumptions. The HPC and ETH Studio Basel tried to study the development of the African city out of Western models and control in order to escape from developmentalist inclinations toward the "Third World." However, both fail and end promoting the aestheticization of congestion, Eurocentric tropes, cliché, and stereotypes. Koolhaas, Herzog, and De Meuron's descriptions of Lagos and Nairobi as "unbelievably intelligent and creative part of the world" bolster the image of the African city as the exotic alternative to the conventional European city, in the case of Koolhaas, or the fascinating substitute of the generic city, as in the example of Herzog and De Meuron.<sup>43</sup> Both the HPC and ETH Studio Basel recognize Lagos and Nairobi as a sort of original and primeval urban entity that escapes human programs and conventional logic. In Okwui Enwezor's words, "there is a sense that the attentiveness to these conditions in Lagos [and—we can add—Nairobi] tend to focus less on a principle of empathy and more on the erotics of chaos and gigantic flux."<sup>44</sup>

The work of numerous theorists, practitioners and educators has proven that to avoid cultural imperialist perspectives and implications, multiple engagements and multiple disciplines must be activated. AbdouMaliq Simone, urbanist, teacher, and advisor to local NGOs and African governments, contends that African cities work on multiple levels and function largely through fluid, makeshift collective actions running parallel to small-scale enterprises, proliferating decentralized local authorities, and community associations.<sup>45</sup> Filip De Boeck, anthropologist of Africa, confronts the social and anthropological complexity of Kinshasa, in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Investigating its urban culture, he affirms that Kinshasa's postcolonial identity, historical legacy, memory, popular culture, and processes of accumulation-expenditure typical of informal economies are connected in shaping the urban realm.<sup>46</sup> Achille Mbembe, historian and philosopher, investigates the faults in modern universalism, especially when confronting its colonial history in Africa. Through an inquiry into Western epistemology, he illuminates the mechanisms that have nurtured Western critical perspectives of Africa and its cities.<sup>47</sup>

As these examples reveal, to promote the study of the African city, architects and teachers need to adopt new methods that do not marginalize the African metropolis nor remove African agency from what has always been a relational process throughout history. It is imperative to consider African urban realm not solely as the result of structural and (post) colonial acts of aggression, but as a core site of alternative theories grounded in those actions that are "producing and exporting some ingenious, highly imaginative modes of survival—and more."<sup>48</sup> New researchers must study the histories of Lagos, Nairobi and the other African cities in order to understand their contemporary creative processes producing alternative systems of relations and urban cultures. Without learning from this profound and localized archive of knowledge, future solutions will always consist of external models, imported into the city from elsewhere, and negatively impacting local assets and global systems.

In the effort to overcome the inexperience of outsiders, top-down power relations, and the risk of giving new life to old stereotypes on Africa, it is crucial that architects and teachers from the so-called "global North" work in closer collaboration and cooperation with the people living in the African city. Multiple engagements, communities' embeddings and the immersion in the African metropolis will reveal unexpected gaps and openings to future negotiations and provocations. If cities are to be imagined in equitable and creative ways, urban and architectural theory must so too overcome the two framing axes of urban modernity and development with their Western bias, while their resources must become at least as cosmopolitan as cities themselves. Architects and teachers must acknowledge cultural diversity and conceive the project as part of the production of a common public sphere sharing between Africa and other countries.