ANTIPODE

The Making and Unmaking of a Megaproject: Contesting Temporalities along the LAPSSET Corridor in Kenya

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Abstract: In this paper, we show how communities in Northern Kenya proactively engage an unfolding megaproject and the temporalities it evokes—the Lamu Port South Sudan Ethiopia Transport Corridor (LAPSSET). We argue that the latitude communities have in contending with megaprojects is broader and more dynamic than passive reception of or outright resistance against the futures promised. By introducing the concepts of entangling and fraying, we emphasise the agency communities create for themselves by appreciating their strategies and expressions of stabilising or troubling the "megaproject". While entangling refers to practices through which communities attach additional features to an otherwise rather stable vision of its "meganess", fraying, in contrast, describes the strands that splice off towards different spatio-temporal imaginaries. We discuss these practices in four instances of engaging LAPSSET: constructing temporary homes at project sites; engaging in land reform; disputing land acquisition at oil exploration sites; and contesting a planned resort city.

Muhtasari: Kwenye jarida hili, tunaonyesha jinsi jamii kaskazini mwa Kenya wanajihusisha na mradi wa muundo msingi unaojulikana kama Lamu Port South Sudan Ethiopia Transport Corridor (LAPSSET). Tunaonesha kuwa uhusiano kati ya jamii na miradi ya miundo msingi ufanyika kwa njia mingi na sio tu ati hao huikubali ama huipinga. Tukitumia dhana mbili amabazo ni *kujihusisha* na *kukabiliana* tunaonyesha jinsi jamii huwa na ushawishi mkubwa na uwezo wa kutumia mbinu tofauti ambazo zinaweza kustahimilisha ama kuvuruga mradi huo. Katika dhana ya *kujihusisha*, tunaangazia jinsi jamii huambatanisha matakwa yao na mipango maalum ambayo hutarajiwa kutoka kwa miradi "kubwa" ya miundo msingi. Dhana ya *kukabiliana* nayo inaashiria maoni tofauti ambazo haziambatani na fikira za wapangaji wa miradi. Tunafanya hivi kwa kuzungumzia matukio nne ambayo jamii wanajihusisha na mradi wa LAPSSET. Matukio haya ni ujenzi wa makaazi yanayodumu kwa muda mfupi kwenye maeneo ya mradi; mikakati ya jamii kusajili ardhi yao; pingamizi za ardhi kuchukulia kwa miradi ya mafuta; na pingamizi juu ya mipango ya ujezi wa mji mpya wa mapumziko.

Keywords: megaprojects, infrastructure, temporalities, Kenya, fraying, entangling

Introduction

This article contributes to the burgeoning literature on infrastructural megaprojects by exploring how communities across Northern Kenya engage in stabilising or unsettling a megaproject and its spatio-temporal imaginaries. The question, "what makes a megaproject?", has been investigated from a plurality of positions: megaprojects have been discussed in connection to risk (Flyvbjerg et al.

2003; see also World Bank 2019); future-making (Müller-Mahn 2020); capitalist expansionism (Kanai 2016; Zhang 2017); colonial legacies (Aalders 2020; Enns and Bersaglio 2020; Kimari and Ernstson 2020); peace- and state-building (Bachmann and Schouten 2018; Stepputat and Hagmann 2019; Uribe 2019); and reconfiguration of state spaces (Demissie 2017; Mayer and Zhang 2020; Ong 2003), to name but a few. In addition, critical scholarship has pointed to the constellations of capital and state interests that drive the current rush of large infrastructure projects across the global South, and have in addition exposed the severe forms of exclusion and dispossession that they produce (Li 2018; Tsing 2003; Uribe 2017).

While taking inspiration from these important interventions, we aim at complementing these views in two respects. First, critical geography tends to regard megaprojects as top-down ventures; something that is inscribed into landscapes and the biography of people, and centrally planned by assumedly powerful but often unspecified "agents of circulation", as Stepputat and Hagmann (2019:794) put it. However, as scholarship informed by Science and Technology Studies (STS) has demonstrated, it requires sustained work by a multitude of actors to align different interests, imaginaries and material components and mould them into a megaproject (Latour 1996). Second, we seek to expand the common view that affected social groups have limited capacity to engage with large infrastructure as well as land acquisition ventures. While the participation of rural populations in internationally financed and centrally steered megaprojects may often be limited, we demonstrate that, particularly in contexts where the planners' work of aligning visions and infrastructural components has not yet fully succeeded, there is substantial leeway to mould megaprojects in ways not necessarily intended by the planners. The common focus on "expulsion-resistance" (Borras and Franco 2013) is not only unable to cognise multiple cleavages across society but also fails to identify the wide-ranging registers social groups draw on in their encounters with grand projects (cf. Hall et al. 2015; Lind et al. 2020; Scott 1985). By accentuating the capacity of infrastructure to evoke aspirations and even open up new spaces for political collectivity (Appel et al. 2018; Chome 2020; Collier et al. 2016; Harvey and Knox 2015), we aim to show that the way affected people engage with promises, legacies and manifestations of megaprojects often inadvertently contributes to the latter's consolidation or destabilisation.

Taking our theoretical cues from STS, the anthropology of infrastructure as well as critical geography, we introduce the two practices of *entangling* and *fraying* in order to carve out the dynamics of this engagement. By entangling, we refer to practices through which actors contribute to mega-project alignment by attaching new features to a supposedly unalterable set of infrastructure components and visions. With fraying, we hope to make visible the unruly centrifugal forces that threaten to unsettle key elements of the corridor by pointing at alternative spatio-temporal imaginaries. In our example of the Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) Corridor in pastoralist Northern Kenya, we demonstrate how some practices along the corridor may augment the "megaproject", while others may render the trajectory of the megaproject brittle.

We start by a brief discussion of some of the existing literature on infrastructural megaprojects in order to situate the LAPSSET Corridor, before taking up the argument that the "making" of a megaproject requires hard work, not only in terms of the material construction of concrete infrastructures but also in terms of coherently aligning different "futures". We then introduce the categories of entangling and fraying, particularly in relation to the power of infrastructure to project specific temporalities, followed by a discussion of four episodes centring on contestations related to land, which all illustrate how the hard work of aligning megaprojects faces challenges through *entanglement*—building temporary "many-attas" (traditional forms of settlement) at corridor sites in Isiolo and engaging with land reform in Turkana—and *fraying*—contesting land acquisition in Turkana as well as in Isiolo (see Figure 1 for geographical reference). The paper's main conclusion is that while pastoralist communities encountering megaprojects such as LAPSSET share an experience of invisibility and exclusion, they also take up
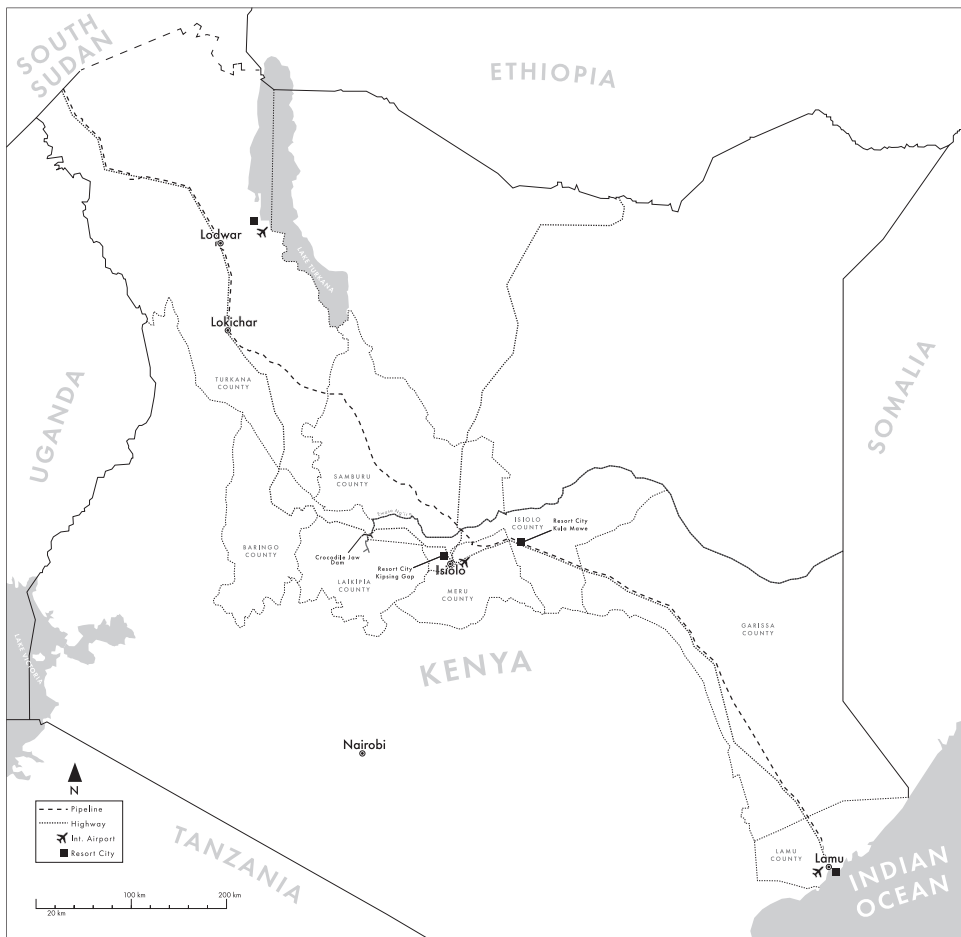

Figure 1: Map of Kenya indicating the planned route and location of various LAPSSET elements

active and differentiated roles in navigating as well as shaping a complex landscape of different spatial and temporal visions.

Aligning Megaprojects

While the main body of this article will be concerned with the ways that the aligning of megaprojects is locally consolidated or challenged, we first give a brief overview of different ways to define and understand megaprojects in general and LAPSSET in particular.

Governments across the global South often identify uneven and insufficient connectivity as one of the primary impediments to economic development, including a fairer distribution of opportunity and welfare. No wonder then that megaprojects are commonly branded as key vehicles for change; for megaprojects signal prowess, opportunity and transformation. Annual infrastructure spending in "emerging economies" in the last decade has exceeded $2 trillion. In the five years between 2004 and 2008, China spent more on infrastructure than in the entire 20th century; and most of it went into projects that can safely be considered "big": dams, highway and railway networks, ports as well as urban development schemes (Flyvbjerg 2014). The number and scope of both envisioned and realised megaprojects on the African continent are extraordinary and outshine earlier modernist aspirations of transcontinental connectivity (AfDB 2019; Herz 2018; Vhumbunu 2016). The Central Corridor connecting Tanzania to Uganda and the Great Lakes region, the Southern Agricultural Growth Corridor in Tanzania, the Gibe III dam in Ethiopia as well as the Standard Gauge Railway project in Kenya are but a few that join LAPSSET on the list of ongoing—and contested—megaprojects in East Africa (Chome at al. 2020; Mosley and Watson 2016; Wang and Wissenbach 2019; Wiig and Silver 2019).

Despite being analytically elusive, the term megaproject has gained considerable traction, primarily within business management and development studies. In what is probably the most parsimonious definition, Bent Flyvbjerg (2014:6) considers megaprojects to signify "large-scale complex ventures that typically cost $1 billion or more, take many years to develop and build, involve multiple public and private stakeholders, are transformational and affect millions of people". In the global South, we would add, megaprojects are typically tightly steered by governments and hinge upon accessing international capital. Measured against these indicators, the LAPSSET Corridor is a formidable megaproject. Clearly envisioned as a transformational or "Game-Changer" (LCDA 2017:iii) project, LAPSSET investors and planners aim at connecting the land-locked countries of South Sudan and Ethiopia to the Indian Ocean as well as integrating the vast and historically marginalised Northern parts of Kenya into the fold of the Kenyan state. It includes a new 32 berth port at Lamu, approximately 2000 km of highways and roads; crude and product oil pipelines; interregional standard gauge railway lines; international airports as well as resort cities in Lamu, Isiolo and Turkana counties; a multipurpose dam along river Tana; and a number of supporting, associated projects including electric power supply, land survey and acquisition, environmental assessments, and security installations (LCDA 2015; see Figure 1 for a spatial

overview of the corridor). Furthermore, an economic area for industrial investments is envisioned to extend up to 50 km on each side of the 500 m wide infrastructural corridor.

From the beginning, LAPSSET has been a megaproject "in search of a rationale" (Browne 2015:5). While the idea of a second Kenyan deep-water port is some 50 years old, it did not gain traction until 2005, when the post-war southern Sudan was looking for a new outlet for its projected oil exports. Simultaneously, the Ethiopian government showed an interest in an alternative transport corridor to the Indian Ocean. However, soon after the ostentatious launch of the project in Lamu in 2012, South Sudan reached an agreement on oil exportation with Khartoum before sliding into a civil war in 2013. With the potential substitute, Uganda, opting for another oil export route, the scope of LAPSSET shrivelled. However, the conveyance of crude remained pivotal for the political economy of LAPSSET thanks to the discovery of oil in Turkana in North-Western Kenya. The Kenyan government frames the corridor primarily as a regional transportation and trade link, instrumental to the country's industrialisation policy.[1] Due to the lack of commitment from foreign investors however, the government has been forced to cover the lion's share of the investment costs of the multi-billion dollar project (Kabukuru 2016).[2]

By weaving spaces hitherto considered peripheral into the centre of capitalist relations, grand infrastructural schemes are therefore prime conduits of land enclosure (Enns and Bersaglio 2020; Lesutis 2020; Scott 1998). What for the state authorities means valorisation of resources and augmenting the gaze of the state, spells exclusion and dispossession for distinct parts of the population (Harvey 2003; Kanai 2016). While zeroing in on the different forms of exclusion that many megaprojects entail is a much-needed intervention, we need to be careful not to regard megaprojects as implemented at the full discretion of their planners. Instead, their "success" is contingent upon solving controversies by stabilising conflicting expertise, actor interests and material frictions as scholars within STS have long argued (Callon 1984; Latour 1999). In practice, new knowledge about economic feasibility, challenges of terrain, glitches in assuring interoperability of different components, contestations expressed in courts or on the streets, to name but a few examples, constitute strong intervening forces that can unravel or alter parts of a megaproject. Hence, in order to retain an uncompromised notion of "coherence", alignment workers must conjure un-breakability as well as the "illusion of 'friction-free'" and stable mobility flows (Sheller 2018).

So far, LAPSSET's coherence primarily appears where its promises are formulated: in boardrooms, public forums, on government websites, or at international business meetings. It is here that the rather loosely affiliated components of the megaproject are assembled into a "single unitary package" (Salet et al. 2013:1985). And it is here that legal procedures, government promises, technical standards and stakeholders' interests are fitted into the narrative of a game-changing corridor that is promised to radically transform both economic and social conditions. In fact, many of the components that the Kenyan government lays out to ensure connectivity and effective flows exists so far only in planning documents, impact assessments and on maps. The LCDA (LAPSSET Corridor

Development Authority) has published several maps in which the corridor is drawn with almost exaggerated bold and confident lines. Such boldness and confidence do however hide the inherent fickleness and controversial nature of the corridor's components, which are subject to disruption by a wide range of forces, including the forming of publics and court decisions. The work of alignment therefore tends to be directed towards managing contradictions—not only between bold plans and unstable political alliances, but also between different movements that are expected to be enabled or hindered by the corridor. The project's "meganess" remains aligned in presentations, maps, and reports by occluding the fact that it will only create frictionless mobility for some, while others, including many pastoral communities, will be excluded from its ability to facilitate physical movement through space, and consequently from its promise of modernity.

While acknowledging the material dimension of assiduous alignment efforts, we propose that a good deal of conjuring the "meganess" of an infrastructural project is about aligning something else: the *temporalities* the project creates, encounters, and modifies. One aspect frequently overlooked outside the anthropology of infrastructure that we try to capture by focusing on temporalities is how affected communities mobilise, align or attach their own aspirations, hopes, fears and memories in their encounters with megaprojects. In the context of this paper, the concept of temporalities does not only refer to anticipated futures, but importantly also to memories of the past (Appadurai 2013:288). A megaproject such as the LAPSSET Corridor does not only connect the drill sites in Lokichar with a port in Lamu, but also connects a particular past defined by marginalisation, division and destitution (for a more elaborated account of the historical trajectory of colonial as well as post-independence marginalisation of northern Kenya, see for example, Jabane 2016; Kochore 2016) with a particular future of seamless connectivity, unity, and economic potential of capitalist production (Aalders 2020; Enns and Bersaglio 2020). By nourishing the "fantasy of rationality and new beginnings" (Bach 2011:100), megaproject visions point at a future radically different to the present, be it a future marked by alleviation of hardship, or of increased opportunities. What is more, such promises are tied to the past as a redress to past injustice or as a condition to be preserved in light of the radical changes the future will bring about (RoK 2012). While aligning temporal perspectives is crucial in conjuring a megaproject, those processes are met with wide-ranging aspirations by people who encounter the project on the ground. An emphasis on the aspirational power of infrastructure requires a nuanced description of which hopes, fears and imaginaries communities mobilise in their interaction with megaprojects. Scholars within STS and wider social theory conceive the human capacity to both imagining "good life"—as well as eliciting ways to realise such—as a universal practice (Appadurai 2013; Jasanoff 2014; Müller-Mahn 2020). At the same time, such a "capacity to aspire" is anything but distributed evenly across society. The privileged may be more routinised in packaging their future ambitions in layers of justification, in embedding their wants in norms and, in addition, may be able to identify shortcuts from aspiration to outcome. For the marginalised, instead, the future may "present itself as a luxury, a nightmare, a

doubt or a shrinking possibility" (Appadurai 2013:299; see also Appadurai 2013:186–188). What kind of temporality a megaproject produces—that is, what particular past and future it points at—is therefore a highly contested and often unequal struggle.

A telling example of the difficulties involved in the hard work of aligning different temporalities into one megaproject is provided by the ceremony on the occasion of Kenya's first Oil Shipment Flag-off (Project Oil Kenya 2019). Meant as a performance of the alignment of different state and private actors in a joint celebration of Kenya's common dream of becoming an oil-producing country, the speeches illustrate how hard it is to align different temporalities of hope and anticipation in this context. Turkana's deputy governor Peter Lotethiro first stressed the "alignment" of the people of Turkana who now finally (after decades of marginalisation) felt like they were "part of Kenya" (Project Oil Kenya 2019). He then added that his county only demanded a small part of the project's profits, "only the goat's leg" (goat is a popular local food). This image was then referenced to in many subsequent speeches during the ceremony: for example, the governor of the neighbouring County of West Pokot added that the people of his County "are waiting for just the ribs [of the goat]" (ibid.); and the chief executive of Tullow Oil, Paul McDade, added that "having spent $2 billion, the joint venture partners will be able to get a bit of that goat" (Akwiri 2019). The image of people coming together in a celebration of commonly shared imaginaries of the future, while at the same time ripping "the goat" apart before it is even cooked, is suggestive: the promise of infrastructure does not necessarily or mainly refer to the general success of the entire project, but rather to the particular interests of the parties involved in the project.

Cracks in the Megaproject Alignment: Practices of Entangling and Fraying

Based on the acknowledgement of the "hard work" of aligning megaproject temporalities accounted for above, we now shift our attention to the ways people encounter and manage the (often powerful) ambition of large infrastructures to make futures (Flyvbjerg et al. 2003). In this section, we will introduce two principal ways through which local actors engage the LAPSSET Corridor: entangling and fraying, with a particular focus on how these practices refer to temporalities.

One of the challenges facing the LCDA are alignments that are too successful and not only consolidate all the elements of the corridor that are mentioned in information brochures and official planning documents, but also additional features that break in and get entangled into the megaproject. This is particularly pertinent when extremely comprehensive visions of modernity and the future of Kenya are mobilised to contextualise and justify the LAPSSET Corridor. If the corridor is ultimately about "Infinite possibilities. Endless opportunities", as its official website proclaims (LCDA 2020), it becomes difficult to argue that a particular thing does *not* belong to it. We chose to call the dynamic of elements attaching to megaprojects that exceed the original intentions of the planners *entangling*. While we draw broadly on STS in our inquiry we specifically zero in on how

people affected by the corridor through their practical engagement with LAPSSET add alternative lines of memories and anticipation to dominant imaginaries. By doing so, they de facto contribute to an alignment of "external" elements into the cohesive LAPSSET package. The difference to the way we understand the work of alignment described above is the power relations that define their respective positions: while alignment is work done by a political and economic elite, often in the form of a centralised authority, entanglement happens when people with limited official authority seek to impress their own ambitions onto the megaproject. This means that people who feel excluded from the allegedly universal vision of the future produced by the planning authority insert themselves into this vision. Unlike alignment, the aim is not to stabilise the project, but to use it in accordance with their own aspirations for the near or distant future.

The cohesiveness of LAPSSET is not only troubled by attempts to attach additional elements to original visions and plans, but also by forces of fragmentation and disruption—a practice we term *fraying*. Infrastructures are furthermore mired in frictions between movement and fixity as they allow for smooth mobility and flow only as long as they are stable, and create pauses and immobilities (Hannam et al. 2006). This tenuous condition of infrastructure provides an opening for people settling along the corridor to intervene into megaprojects in a way that points at, or even leads to, other trajectories and futures than the ones laid out by planners. In contrast to *entangling*, which describes how those excluded from LAPSSET's visions of development and modernity seek to gain from that vision, *fraying* describes a rejection of and separation from the latter. While having family resemblance with practice of everyday resistance (cf. Scott 1985), our interest is in the diverging temporalities by following how strands of the project disintegrate and articulate different pasts and futures.

As the remainder of the paper will demonstrate, the roads to the future that the Kenyan government is attempting to pave are appropriated and challenged by practices of entangling and fraying as politicians, local elites and groups that live along the corridors engage the megaproject in variegated ways. As much as the work of entangling and fraying looks marginal and ordinary, often pointing to the limited agency to translate aspiration into tangible improvement, such work is nonetheless an expression of collective visions of desirable futures that diverge from and challenge the master narrative put forward by the LCDA and the government. Thought in this way, large technical interventions become part of how people embellish the canvas of personal and collective futures (Jasanoff 2014:5–10). By bringing forward four empirical episodes of what may seem as marginal practices of entangling and fraying along one of the most expansive infrastructure corridors in Africa south of Sahara, we demonstrate how different pastoralist groups, in their engagement with the megaproject seek to gradually "change the terms of recognition" within wider society (Appadurai 2013:293).

We base our account of entangling and fraying practices on mixed-method, qualitative research conducted in person by the authors along the planned LAPSSET Corridor between 2016 and 2019, including several separate but thematically related empirical studies: a "walking ethnography" (Ingold and Vergunst 2008) during a total of three months from Isiolo (one of LAPSSET's nodes) to Lokichar

(the geographical focal point for Kenya's oil exploitation) carried out by Aalders; almost 30 semi-structured and in-depth interviews with representatives of a broad range of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society organisations (CSOs), and community-based organisations (CBOs) in both Isiolo and Turkana counties conducted by Knutsson and Kilaka; approximately 30 individual and focus group interviews performed by Kilaka, targeting different sections of communities based in and around Lokichar in Turkana; and a content analysis by Knutsson of LAPSSET-relevant judicial documents, government and civil society reports, and local as well as national media reports (see Figure 1 for geographical reference). The majority of the interviews were conducted in the native language of the respondents (Turkana, Borana or Samburu, depending on the site of research) through the assistance of local research assistants, while a smaller number of interviews (notably with representatives of county governments, CSOs and NGOs) were conducted in Kiswahili and English.

Entangling Practices: Temporary Manyattas

The tools used by the LCDA and other agencies involved to align pastoralist communities with the megaproject are not always accepted, and many of the respondents we talked to felt "forgotten" or "left behind", despite being officially framed as the primary beneficiaries of LAPSSET. In some places along the corridor in Isiolo County, individuals have marked ownership of pieces of land by putting up rudimentary fences, marking trees with paint, or even built small houses along the anticipated route of the corridor. At first glance, this makes little sense: if people are concerned about being evicted from their homes, why would they deliberately demarcate land or build a house in a place where they know that the corridor will pass? In fact, nobody lives in the newly constructed houses; nobody has or ever will, because that was never their purpose. One interlocutor described the situation like this:

> You know, to be compensated you have to be in that area of demarcation so everybody comes now and lines up there, like you will see it in this area when you go this way, where the demarcation is. People-- you will get these temporary manyattas [traditional form of settlement]. People just shift and line up there to wait for the compensation. (Interview, 26 January 2018)

The temporary "manyattas" answer to and make a parody of an important precondition to receive compensations for being evicted by the corridor. Most of the pastoralist drylands that are intersected by the corridor are "held in trust" by county governments for the benefit of the pastoralist communities who use them. Rather than formal and documented ownership of land, pastoralists rely on customary and locally negotiated user rights. However, in order to be eligible for financial compensation for land lost to the LAPSSET project, one needs to prove such customary user rights. As the LCDA on several occasions has referred to the pastoralist drylands as unused and unexplored (e.g. LCDA 2015), people who would need to relocate are anxious that they will not qualify for appropriate compensation. The "temporary manyattas" therefore constitute a strategy to deal with the fact that on the ground the LAPSSET Corridor does not, in fact,

exist in the comprehensive, universal and unambiguous way in which it is presented elsewhere. In anticipation of being "left out" once again, the architects of these "temporary manyattas" prove their own existence by putting up moorings (see Hannam et al. 2006) that are expected to force authorities to recognise their rights for compensation. This practice does not only add odd foreign objects into the way of the corridor that will be demolished sooner or later. More fundamentally, it adds another way of anticipating the future. The benefits promised by the LAPSSET Corridor are not necessarily contested or resisted. However, many do feel sceptical whether these benefits will actually become accessible to them. The expected material exclusion or expulsion from the project corresponds with an expected exclusion from the dreams, imaginaries and promises that hold the megaproject together. As a group of Samburu[3] elders complains when the discussion touched upon on the role of the government in the area:

Person A: They promise, they promise but nothing.

Interviewer: So they say a lot?

Person B: *Eeh*.

Person C: Empty promises.

Person B: They will do this some day, they will do that; and this is what "your father" is going to do for you [*baba yenu* or "your father" is a common metaphor for the government].

Person D: Many promises but all of them are empty lies. They make many promises but they are false. (Focus group discussion, 4 April 2018)

The "temporary manyattas" recognise the emptiness of the vocabulary of the all-inclusive LAPSSET imaginary and attempt to fill it with their owners' own dreams and hopes: using the compensation to send one's children to a good school; to buy a motorbike; more cows; medicine. Far from an attempt to block the future promised by LAPSSET, the architects of the temporary manyattas try to hitch a ride on them. The material contestations of entangling these "temporary manyattas" into the braid of the corridor may appear modest, but the contestation these counter-structures express do challenge the very mega-ness that LAPSSET builds upon.

The temporary Manyattas also illustrates the unequal distribution of the capacity to aspire within "local communities". The aspirations expressed by people owning businesses in larger settlements along the corridor, and/or living a sedentary life in permanent stone buildings on land registered through an official title deed, aligned more naturally with those spelled out by the LCDA. This does not mean that local elites in a more privileged position within affected communities are passively embracing LAPSSET visions and plans. In contrast, they appropriate this future vision of modernity by entangling their hopes and anticipations with it.

Entangling Practices: Engaging with the Community Land Reform

Providing an important economic rationale for the LAPSSET Corridor, the Ireland-based company Tullow Oil has since 2012 found 30 oil wells in the South Lokichar Basin in Turkana County, located on communal land held in trust by county government on behalf of the Turkana community. Land for oil exploration and exploitation has therefore been leased to Tullow Oil by the Turkana County government. Similarly to the case of the temporary manyattas above, people in and around Lokichar fear that they in the end will be dispossessed of indispensable grazing land without being adequately compensated (for similar cases of corporate land enclosures, see Gingembre 2015). However, instead of spontaneous acts of land demarcation as a way of claiming rights to financial compensation, elected leaders of the Turkana community (holding customary rights to land that hosts three oil wells), supported by a well known national NGO, took advantage of the judicial provisions entailed by the recently introduced Kenya Community Land Act in order to obtain a share of the anticipated revenues from oil exploitation. The new land act provides novel, legal means for communities to register land designated as "trust land" in the form of communal land titles as a proof of ownership. When the 2016 Community Land Act finally became operational in 2019, the community had already made the necessary preparations and managed to file an application for community land registration at the designated national government office in Nairobi. To date, the registration of the community's land has yet not been approved. According to the elected community representatives, the reason is the inability of the community to afford the unrealistically high cost required for the registration to be completed.

As with the manyattas, the aim of the registration of community land was not to bring the megaproject to a halt but to entangle the community's claim for compensation for land lost to oil exploration with it, and in so doing, potentially alter the "terms of recognition" of rural communities drawn into large infrastructure projects:

> Before Tullow came we did not realise there was value in our land. We noticed that if we had titles for the land even Tullow could have been more cautious. They used the national and county governments, the legislators etc. and we realised that we were excluded. There were those who even claimed to represent the community. When we asked they told us that the community had already agreed to land use. Who is the community? We realised the county government was gaining at our expense. Job opportunities, tendering and so on. We realised that the only way was to register our land. Once we get the papers we would do away with the county government and negotiate on our own so that whoever wanted the resource would come directly to us. That is what influenced us. We have three oil wells in our land. We have heard that there is a one million shilling fee for one well. The county gets three million each year but in our land there are no schools, nothing. (Interview with community leader, 29 November 2019)

The entangling of the provisions of the community land act and oil exploitation as a strategic LAPSSET component is not only about the concrete exclusion from oil revenues, but also about a more abstract concern about being excluded from

the LAPSSET vision of progress and economic development. Community leaders therefore decided to mobilise people around the land reform as a possibility to attach their own hopes for a better life to the promises of LAPSSET's modernisation project. This position was clearly formulated by the Member of Parliament for Loima Constituency. Rather than resistance of the temporal alignment that holds the LAPSSET Corridor together, it constitutes a demand for better inclusion of Turkana priorities in project planning and implementation:

> So let's not talk as if development is a bad thing. Let's talk this way: let's say to LCDA, if you want to come to construct this road and railway in our land, come talk to us about it first and we will know what to do to you. They should ask us so that we can direct them and show them where to construct all this. Chasing them away won't bring development to our land. Let's ask them about the size of land they want from us. If they think Turkana is the community with free land, let's tell them the size we can offer, not for them to dictate to us what they want. If they don't want, we tell them they better go back. (Speech by Member of Parliament, 9 March 2019)

The two examples from Isiolo and Turkana outlined here illustrate how entangling practices work in mundane rather than radical ways by weaving in undertones of protest and unjust trade-offs into a vision that is dominated by promises of a win-win scenario. The diverse entangling practices, employed by different communities and civil society organisations along the corridor to claim their right to compensation for dispossession of land resources, have recently been cited to illuminate the failure of LAPSSET to align the interests and aspirations of its claimed beneficiaries (Olingo and Wafula 2020). Entangling practices also direct our attention to the complex landscape of temporal contradictions and ambiguities that people have to navigate as they engage with megaprojects. On the one hand, the LAPSSET Corridor promises a path out of marginalisation for Northern Kenya that existed since colonial times. On the other hand, people are anxious about new forms of exclusion that the project may bring about. As the above quote by the Member of Parliament already suggested, in case entangling with the megaproject will be of no avail, that is, if LAPPSET turns out to reproduce rather than break with the national government's exclusion of Turkana values and aspirations, then "they better go back." Threatening to unravel alliances, then, points to the second dynamic that characterises the engagement of many pastoralist communities with the LAPSSET Corridor, a dynamic we call fraying.

Fraying Practices: Land Acquisition in Turkana

Through the lens of *fraying* we want to make practices visible that threaten to unsettle what appears as an inevitable trajectory of the LAPSSET Corridor by pointing at alternative pasts, presents and futures. In this section, we therefore turn our attention to actions of emergent alliances that have not only delayed and disrupted land acquisitions in Turkana and Isiolo Counties, but which can also be read as responses to the particular ways that LAPSSET reconfigures pastoralist drylands and identities through powerful spatio-temporal alignments.

In February 2019, the Kenyan government issued plans to compulsorily acquire land for the LAPSSET Corridor (The Kenya Gazette 2019). Suddenly confronted with the possibility of losing large tracts of land other than the already existing exploitation of oil, different segments of the Turkana society, namely elected leaders across the political divide, the influential association of Turkana professionals, as well as community elders and other community representatives, have joined forces to express their discontent with the process (General observation during fieldwork in both Lodwar and Lokichar, 2018–2020). In contesting the move, the county government (especially through its governor) has managed to galvanise the support of different fractious Turkana elites and the community, thereby emerging as the principal spokesperson and gatekeeper for the Turkana in engagements with the national government as well as investors. Seemingly, this mobilisation constitutes a well-crafted strategy to reinforce Turkana identity against the Kenyan national government in Nairobi.

It is on this basis that the county government, by invoking the support of Turkana leaders and communities, has put up a spirited resistance against the LAPSSET land acquisition process that threatens to disrupt the hard work that policy makers and planners have invested in bringing together separate LAPSSET components into a coherent socio-technical imaginary. In fact, a recurring theme in the Turkana resistance against LAPSSET is that its fabric can be *frayed*, despite its proclaimed inevitability and cohesiveness.

The ongoing contestations have found tangible expression in the form of court action by the county government[4] as well as more situated acts of protest by local groups. The most prolific incident took place in Nakukulas Village in March 2019 where irate villagers violently chased away national government officials to stop them from undertaking a LAPSSET sensitisation workshop. These reactions against the materialisation of LAPSSET in terms of demand for land not only illustrate the fickleness of the megaproject as such, but also point at the mounting challenges that policymakers and planners have to surmount as they try keep the integrity of LAPSSET intact through the journey from plans and maps into concrete socio-ecological landscapes.

The disruption of a workshop hosted by the national government to promote LAPSSET, effectively points at fundamental cracks in megaproject alignment and the necessity to address them in order for the infrastructure to materialise. At the core of this particular act of *fraying* are the fundamentally different temporalities invoked by the planners in contrast to those who are living in the project's vicinity. To more or less all Turkana we have talked to, the way the mega-project is currently envisioned and argued for by the government serves to prove that LAPSSET will entrench past legacies of marginalisation by failing to take in account the socio-economic realities of the majority of the residents in Turkana. This stands diametrically opposed to the temporality produced in Kenya's Vision 2030 for Northern Kenya, which promises to "turn history on its head", i.e. ending the entrenched marginalisation of pastoralist groups, to which infrastructure and indeed LAPSSET are framed as pivotal (RoK 2012:7).

Turkana political leaders, as well as members of the public, have on a number of occasions decried the well-established pattern of neglect and discrimination

against the Turkana that they see national government officials continuing to pursue in relation to LAPSSET. For example, the County Governor has lamented the complete disregard by the national government in general and the LCDA in particular of local inputs regarding the location of key LAPSSET components.[5] More specifically, the county administration has repeatedly petitioned the LAPSSET planners to shift the location of the airport from the currently designated location near the shores of Lake Turkana at Eliye Springs, to the outskirts of Lodwar Town, where the county had already earmarked land for an airport. Although the contestation of the location of the airport may seem to be a matter of place, it simultaneously expresses conflicting temporalities. The proposed location of the airport near Eliye Springs is closely aligned to another key LAPSSET component: the Lake Turkana resort city, which projects a fundamentally different future trajectory than an airport located close to the biggest town in Turkana county. While a new airport in Lodwar points at the provision of increased mobility and connectivity for Turkana (or at least the more well-off part of it), the spatial alignment of the airport and a resort city rather suggests a line of connectivity that through an expansion of the tourist industry will primarily benefit the national economic elite.

The emergent alliance of diverse Turkana stakeholders on the one hand stresses how LAPSSET decision-making processes threaten to reify Turkana's historical marginalisation. On the other hand, it reasserts who is supposed to project a desirable future for them. Indeed, to many Turkana, the current plans and designs for the LAPSSET Corridor are far from being settled. The issue of contestation here is not only a perceived exclusion from the vision of modernisation that the LAPSSET Corridor is supposed to embody but a disagreement with its fundamental temporal alignment. The political mobilisation therefore does not primarily aim at making sure that the Turkana are considered in the LAPSSET vision but instead challenges the project's fundamental claim that it signals a departure from past marginalisation and not its continuation.

Fraying Practices: The Isiolo Resort City

Just as the Turkana contestation over the spatial alignment of an airport and a resort city can be read in terms of the intimate connection between the temporal and spatial alignment of the corridor, the following example of negotiations over the location of the Isiolo resort city stresses the mobilisation of different pasts, presents and futures and their inscription into the landscape.

The main rationale behind locating one of the resort cities projected by LAPSSET in Isiolo is that the region offers "one of the most unique tourist menus in the country that can be exploited and harnessed to create positive economic impact" (LCDA 2017:7). In 2011, a feasibility study identified Kipsing Gap (located approximately 20 km north of the town of Isiolo) as the ideal site for the resort city (The Standard 2011). Shortly after, the Kenyan government issued a formal request to the County Council of Isiolo to set aside 6500 acres of land at Kipsing Gap (Daily Nation 2012). Kipsing Gap was considered ideal due to its proximity to Isiolo town and its newly built airport, as well as its strategic location in relation to both the region's national parks and many private nature and

wildlife conservancies. Furthermore, supply of water to the resort city would be solved through a parallel infrastructure project: the construction of the Isiolo mega dam (nicknamed "the Crocodile Jaw Dam") on the Ewaso Ng'iro river (see Figure 2 for geographical reference). The choice of location for the resort city in Isiolo therefore forms part of the strategic spatial alignment of two key LAPSSET components.

However, the decision about the resort city's location was immediately met with contestations among a diversity of national, regional and local stakeholders, citing the risk of land rights conflicts, negative impacts on nature and wildlife conservation, the location's importance as a grazing land, as well as its close connection with the dam project and subsequent fears of a decrease in access to scarce water resources in downstream areas of Isiolo county (Guyo 2018; Kanyinke 2015; Mulehi 2018). A local chief of a community close to Isiolo town expressed such a critique in the following way:

> The people behind LAPSSET are trying to change us. The resort city will finish us! Before we will see a resort city there will be a dam on Ewaso river, and for us the Ewaso river is the main thing for us! You know, our name for our homeland is Waso. The dam will destroy us, not helping us. (Interview with a Borana[6] chief, 10 January 2019)

In parallel with increasing voices of public concern, a recent Strategic Impact Assessment of the whole LAPSSET project acknowledged the claimed social importance and ecological fragility of Kipsing Gap and suggests that the area of Kula Mawe, located approximately 80 km east of Isiolo town may be a more feasible location (LCDA 2017). Also, similar to the political mobilisation in Turkana, Isiolo members of the Kenyan parliament have joined the emerging alliance by protesting against attempts by the national government to acquire land for LAPSSET infrastructure in Isiolo County. While most representatives of Borana civil society-
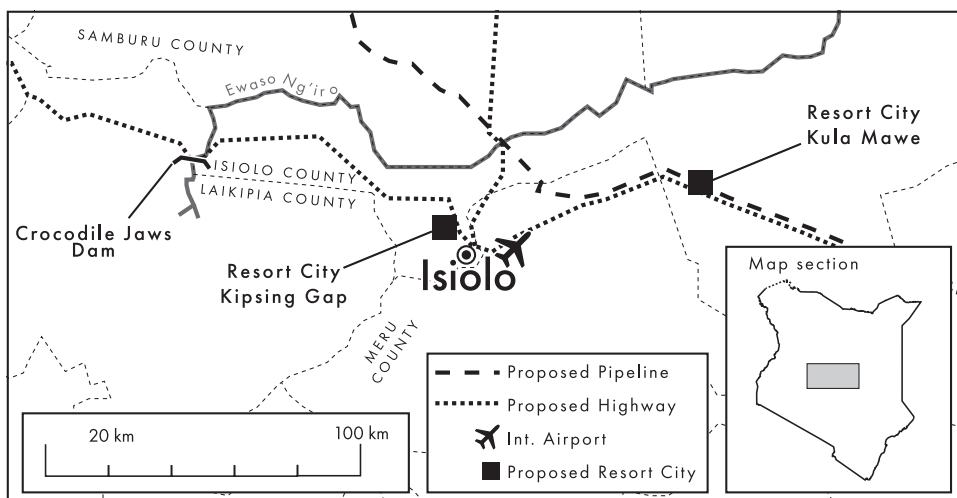

Figure 2: Map providing an overview of LAPSSET elements in Isiolo

and community-based organisations expressed a preference for Kula Mawe as location for the resort city, two representatives of more rurally based organisations stressed that it is primarily in the interest of the urban elite in Isiolo to push for this alternative as they regard eastern Isiolo County as "unused land" (Interviews with CSO representative in Isiolo, 9 and 10 January 2019). However, while acknowledging a friction within the Borana community about the location of the resort city, we also want to highlight a clear thread of consensus in more or less all of our interviews, namely that for many the resort city in particular, and LAPSSET in general, point towards a future of reinforced expansion of the interests of the Kenyan economic and political elite resulting in an increasing marginalisation of the Borana. It is an alternative temporal alignment that draws a straight line between the persecutions of the "Shiftawar" during the 1960s and the persistent post-independence marginalisation of pastoralist Borana by the Kenyan government, to the perceived exclusion and disregard of pastoralist ways of life and identities in LAPSSET plans and visions (Whittaker 2015). According to this narrative, the resort city and the Crocodile Jaw dam projects are poorly aligned with Borana aspirations, and are instead designed to open the drylands for other groups and interests:

> We have been told about the resort city and LAPSSET. That it is a government plan. It will come with things that are not Islamic. Lot of people will come. We will get lost. People of Meru[7] are already claiming 50 km of land. If asked about the resort city, then we don't want it. We are not ready. It's the same with Crocodile Jaw. It will cause a big water problem, we will not have water for seven months. You have to go back to the Shifta war, to independence. That experience makes us fear the Kenyan government. You know, the settlement of Meru along the Isiolo border towards Kula Mawe, that is the government, not the Meru. The government don't want to solve the border dispute. They want a bigger Meru for political reasons. Meru have two million votes. (Interview with a leader of a Muslim faith-based organisation in Isiolo, 11 January 2019)

Local media reports suggest that the dispute around the resort city has provoked the LCDA to instruct the Isiolo County Council to also set aside 10,000 acres of land in Kula Mawe for the resort city, but an official decision on the location is still pending (Nkirote 2017). Nevertheless, the story of the resort city is not simply one of a seemingly successful resistance against a specific and limited infrastructure project. The dispute around the location of the Isiolo resort city also highlights how attempts to break out a core component from the spatial alignment of a megaproject, the resort city, makes the rationale of another component, the mega dam, almost obsolete. In addition, and echoing the Turkana case of fraying accounted for above, the practices of fraying on behalf of new political alliances in Isiolo work to expose cracks in LAPSSET alignments by questioning that the connectivity generated by LAPSSET will benefit everyone and significantly contribute to the realisation of Kenya as a unified modern nation. And through such cracks, alternative pasts, presents and futures—alternative temporalities—become visible.

Conclusion

In this article, we have traced some of the complex and often ambiguous ways in which people directly affected by the LAPSSET Corridor interact with the attempts of central authorities to align the corridor's components and imaginaries in a way that conjures a coherent megaproject. In order to grasp the ways in which people gauge their relation to the corridor—e.g. as refusing, appropriating or adapting to the pathways sketched out by large infrastructure projects—we have suggested the figures of entangling and fraying. What is more, we have demonstrated that such engagement with megaprojects has ideational and material dimensions. The contestations around LAPSSETT are directed towards the specific spatial and temporal relations that the LAPSSET authorities project into the future. They are at the same time, as for example the cases of the "temporary manyattas" or the Isiolo resort city have shown, inscribed into the landscapes traversed by the corridor.

In the empirical examples discussed in this paper, the contestations express a fundamental gap between an underlying imagination of how the LAPSSET planners open up space they consider "un-used", and the values and rights that communities attach to particular places within that space. The contestations also highlight the gap between the imagination that LAPSSET brings a future of connectivity and new economic opportunities to an area historically framed as "underdeveloped", and the fear among communities that the benefits of LAPSSET are not for them but for the elites. In so doing, communities that reside along the corridor point to the very continuity of political and economic marginalisation that the LAPSSET project officially set out to end. The frictions between different ways to remembering the past and anticipating the future can be interpreted as attempts to add to—or break out of—the temporal alignment intended by the planners.

This paper thus makes a case for recognising the aspirations and engagements of the ones affected by a megaproject. Geographers and anthropologists have demonstrated how infrastructure tends to devise specific futures regularly attached to frictionless mobility and an inclusive modernity (Appel et al 2018; Harvey and Knox 2012; Jasanoff 2014; Müller-Mahn 2020). Resonating with recent critical inquiries into contested temporalities of large infrastructure projects in the East African region (Chome 2020; Hönke and Cuesta-Fernandez 2018; Kochore 2016) we show that the way local populations encounter megaprojects —as a plan in which they have no say, as a force displacing people from their home, as a reminder of entrenched injustice, as a disconcerting future—potentially subverts its careful spatial and temporal alignment. However, as this and similar studies on the "infrastructure scramble" in East Africa also reveal, local practices of engagement with infrastructure projects and their subversive agency are highly diverse as they are situated within particular contexts of political as well as economic relations. Notwithstanding this acknowledgement, the multiple ways affected populations engage with megaprojects point to how infrastructural expansion affords new alliances and sites where hegemonic futures are disputed. Considering these sometimes subtle contestations reveals their radical implications in challenging the promise of a linear path towards "progress" that motivates and justifies megaprojects.

Acknowledgements

Endnotes

[1] In contrast to other corridor projects in Africa, emphasizing its contribution to an economic transformation of the historically marginalised arid and semi-arid lands in Northern Kenya, particularly in terms of leveraging pastoralist economies, is a rather recent development (RoK 2017).

[2] The government's spending on ambitious infrastructure in the last decade has caused a public stir. Having borrowed nearly nearly $10 billion between 2006 and 2017 from China, primarily for infrastructure ventures, Kenya has become Africa's third largest recipient of Chinese loans (Deutsche Welle 2019).

[3] The Samburu is the dominant ethnic group in Samburu county, but also constitutes a minority group in the neighbouring county of Isiolo.

[4] Jackson Ekaru Nakusa and 32 Others vs National Land Commission, the Attorney General, and the Turkana County Government; Environment and Land Petition 2 and 3 of 2019 (Consolidated); http://kenyalaw.org/caselaw/cases/view/173744 (last accessed 30 June 2020).

[5] Statement by the governor during the extractive week conference in Lodwar, 27 February 2019.

[6] The most numerous indigenous pastoralist community in Isiolo County.

[7] The neighbouring county and ethnic group south of Isiolo, with which the Borana are having a long-standing border dispute. The alternative location of the resort city, Kula Mawe, is situated close to the disputed border between Isiolo and Meru.

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