

Collapse: Grey development and failed buildings in Nairobi

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INTRODUCTION

In Nairobi, capital city of Kenya, the speed of urban growth is producing risks of architectural failure. The city has recently experienced a spate of devastating apartment block collapses in which many have tragically died.

Most of these failed buildings are examples of 'grey development' – a legally opaque process in which land grabbing, unenforced planning regulations, poor-quality construction and property speculation come together to produce fragile architectures at risk of collapse.

This project investigates the political economy of grey development and its collapse, analysing both its drivers and socio-spatial consequences.



Collapsed building in Huruma estate, Nairobi, 2016.

AIMS

The Collapse project uses the built environment as a pathway for understanding the distribution of power and resources in Nairobi.

It aims to examine how collapsed buildings can expose the spatial injustices and opaque commercial networks that shape the city.

But it also explores how collapse can reorder urban politics, economies and structures: residents remake their lives, new forms of civic activism emerge, new economies of salvage and reconstruction take shape.

Collapse can reveal the networks that shape urban life whilst also acting as a catalyst for its transformation.

FIELDWORK

Field research follows two trajectories:

- 1) A site-specific ethnography of collapse in everyday life. Participant-observation with affected residents as they rebuild their community and make plans for the future
- 2) A multi-scalar study of grey development, from casual labourers and procurement to investors, political disputes and property markets. Examination of local ideas about risk and safety, techniques and materials

OUTPUTS AND IMPACT

In addition to academic outputs, such as publications and a conference, the Collapse project will engage wider public debate in Nairobi and in Manchester through two key outputs:

An **exhibition** developed with a community who have experienced a building collapse, using participatory photodiaries.

A **podcast** featuring in situ audio and interviews, documenting the personal stories as well as the global challenges of architectural collapse.



Grey development in Majimbo estate, Nairobi, 2015

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