African urbanization has accelerated the reality of mega-cities. These cities with their multi-storeyed mixed-use 'mega-projects' are an attempt to improve upon the sprawl of apartheid township models and reduce subsequent distances to business centres. Although these peripheral developments attempt at mixed-use and mixed-housing within a 'garden city' environment, policy makers see the alternative high-densification strategies through an economic, technical and functional lens. Furthermore, these designs continue ideas of peripheries and centres, albeit within the periphery itself. Moreover, mega-housing devices exchange the one-house-one-plot for one-block-one plot, which arguably exacerbates socio-economic, racial and generational divisions.

To promote these schemes, advertising mediates an urban mythical future based on past suburban paradisiac images. Historically such images were political and contradictory to archetypal myths. Ironically, media has normalized these urban models. Informal occupation of land with shack settlements sprawled out on grided plots exemplifies this. Yet in their research agenda, developers have not included the actual underlying socio-cultural narratives that inform an ‘African dream’. This paper enquires whether past
associations with land can be reconciled with images of belonging to mega-housing. Within the urgency of housing shortages, this research postulates that in order for society to appropriate and developers to make mega-housing, an alternative urban reading is required. Researchers will need to ground such a theory in archetypal myths, lessons of urban pasts and society’s own informal attempts at resolving housing demands.

Firstly, the exploration critically analyses mega-cities and their mega-projects in relation to their portrayal in advertising images. Then particularly in South Africa, the paper identifies the physical (utopian and political) and non-physical (archetypal and narrated) representations that disseminate societal housing. Thereafter, the paper highlights the repercussions of housing myths. Finally, an alternative urban ‘myth’ is proposed.

Keywords: advertising, archetypal, mega-cities, mega-housing, myths, periphery, representations, sprawl. African urbanization has accelerated the reality of mega-cities.

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Derick de Bruyn is a South African architect and academic. He commenced his career teaching art and architecture in the Mamelodi Township near Pretoria during the final years of apartheid. In 1983, he graduated with a BArch undergraduate degree from the University of Kwa-Zulu-Natal in Durban, South Africa. In 2005, he qualified with a MA (Architecture) from the University of Kingston, London. He is currently completing a PhD from the University of Pretoria that re-considers a ‘silent subversive’ post-world war cohort in the 1950s and 1960s that the hypothesis suggest ‘sowed the seeds’ for the counter-cultural revolt against the status quo of the late-1960s. The dissertation investigates the contribution made by this neglected generation towards housing densification. He has worked for several large practices in South Africa and London and been in private practice since 1994. Most of the projects undertaken, respected local and international architectural journals and books have recognized through publications. Several projects have received merit awards from approved Institutes and organizations. He is currently a Senior Lecturer at the University of Pretoria and coordinates the cross-disciplinary second year architectural program and second year design studio. He coordinates the school’s competition programme and serves on the Theory committee.