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# Maputo, the divided city: fragmentation and (re)qualification

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## Keywords

Urban  
Growth  
Segregation  
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## Abstract

Maputo - the Mozambican capital - has expanded itself vertiginously in the midst of the late independence process (1975). Its population has been multiplied about twelve times during the decades from 1950 to 2020, reaching more than 1.1 million inhabitants. The political, commercial, and financial center of the country, the urban fabric of the capital is the stage for complex processes of economic growth and spatial segregation triggered in recent decades. The central region, known locally as the "cement city", concentrates on modern and widely diversified infrastructures. Squares and parks, luxury condos surrounded by modern offices, international standard hotels, shopping, and a set of pharaonic constructions - built at a cost of billions - set the landscape tone of progress induced and concentrated in favor of a small elite. However, beyond this "stronghold", around 92% of the population lives in the peripheral part of Maputo, popularly known as the "reed city". These, however, are located in very precarious housing, produced informally by the residents themselves, and subjected to the complete absence of infrastructure and public services. These issues contribute directly to the fact that Mozambique has the ninth-worst Human Development Index (HDI) on the planet. In this way, the present article - elaborated from fieldwork, interdisciplinary discussions and dialogues undertaken within the scope of an international scientific project between universities in Brazil and Mozambique - seeks to present and interpret the set of urban connections that make Maputo a fragmented and complex city, full of continuous socio-territorial transformations in which multiple clashes emerge linked to segregation, gentrification, real estate speculation, among others.

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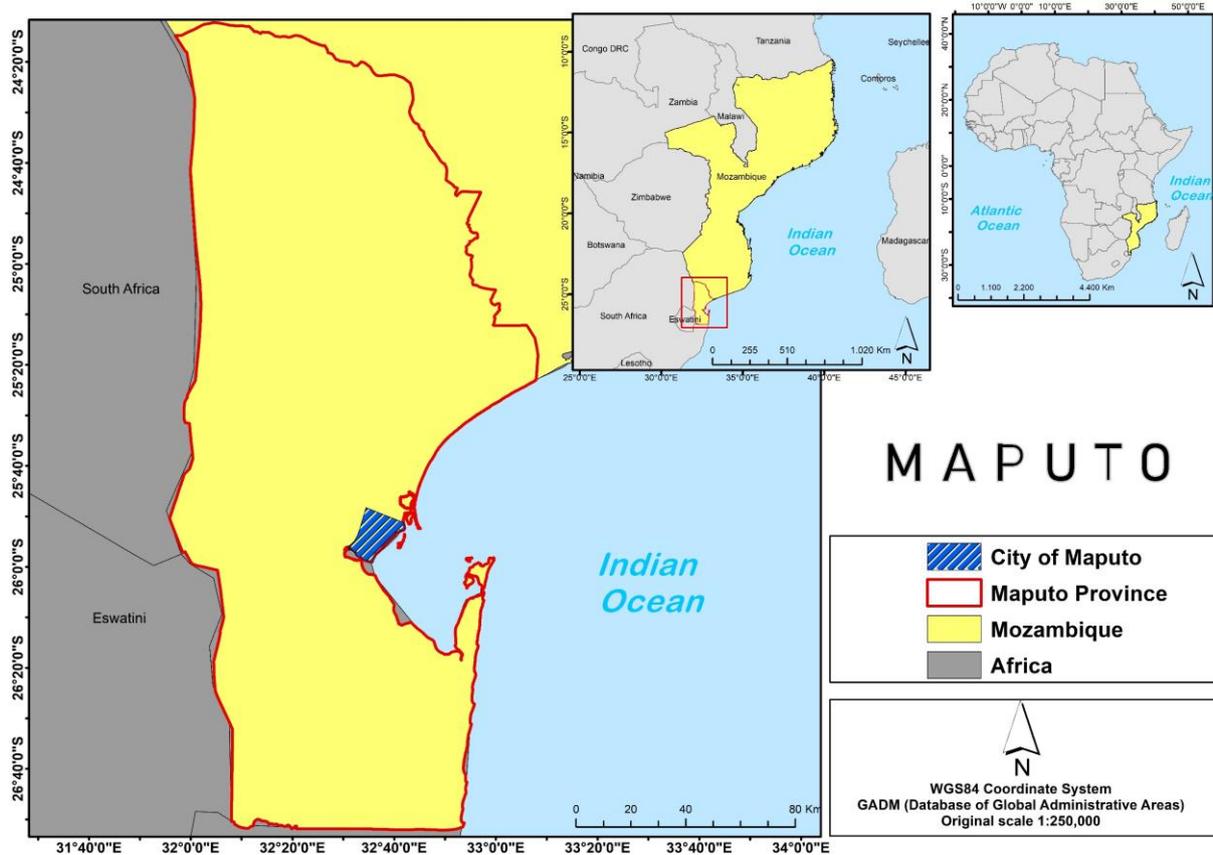
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## INTRODUCTION

The Mozambican territory is permeated by structural ambiguities. Rudimentary capitalist relations have become intertwined with large geopolitical projects. Multinational enterprises for the use and appropriation of territory - mineral, agricultural, and industrial - conflict with the great difficulty of reproducing the primary needs of local inhabitants (FREI, 2017; MACARINGUE, 2018; MUACUVEIA, 2019).

Therefore, thinking about the Mozambican capital (Maputo) from a "divided city" perspective implies approaching the complexity of the themes that involved the growth of this metropolis (JENKINS, 2000; ANDERSEN et al., 2015; MALOA; NASCIMENTO JÚNIOR, 2019). Different phenomena, such as cultural, social, economic, political, and environmental, have all contributed and have materialized in the morphology of urban space that today "gives life" to the multiple landscapes and interrelationships that develop in it.

Figure 1 – Maputo's location, Mozambique and Africa



Source: The authors (2022).

Historically, Mozambican cities emerged and grew in the midst of the Portuguese colonial system (MELO, 2013). The territory was organized to facilitate the flow of exploration and exportation of natural resources. The urban spaces aimed to meet the desires of the settlers who controlled the state administration, while the colonized, the slaves, the blacks, and the assimilated, orbited this center, living in precarious housing in the peripheral regions. For the Mozambican researcher Joaquim Miranda Maloa, Professor of Geosciences at Rovuma University, the genesis of long processes of segregation and socio-spatial exclusion dates from here, later popularly

recognized by the binomial "cement city" versus "reed city" (MALOA, 2019).

The political, normative, and institutional transformations related to the process of "late colonialism" (1930/70) have contributed to a great expansion of the urbanization process in Mozambique - especially of its capital, Maputo. In a short interval, between the 1950s and 1970s, the population was multiplied by a quarter, going from 93,000 to 378,000 inhabitants (INE, 2017).

In the post-independence period (1975), Mozambique experienced a significant destructuring of the political-organizational sector. With the departure of the Portuguese colonizers and "leaders", the country went

through a brief socialist experience, where housing, urban land, and infrastructure were socialized and became State property in the service of the population.

However, the precariousness of techniques, along with historical problems of agricultural production, made the rural environment extremely repulsive, contributing to a large contingent of "miserable" people arriving in Maputo, while looking for new opportunities. The result was a veritable frenzy in the capital city, which, under strong growth rates, was home to 1.1 million inhabitants in 2017, about twelve times the number of people living there in the 1950s (INE, 2017).

Currently, Maputo is not only the capital and largest city of Mozambique, but it is also the main political, financial, corporate, and commercial center of the country, responsible for a significant portion of the national GDP. Maputo is home to essential infrastructures for the organization and management of national demands, such as the port of Maputo, being the second largest on the African continent, and the international airport, which handles approximately 900,000 passengers annually (AMZ, 2022).

However, this economic diversification and political importance coexists closely with the expansion and densification of the peripheries. Socially and spatially segregated, they are (re)designed in their own dynamics of self-production, and most of them are established far from the public eye. In contradiction to the luxurious commercial buildings and residential buildings complexes

These historical inequalities are reinforced and amplified even more in the neoliberal context, resulting in the materialization of emblematic landscapes in Maputo, a truly "divided city," fragmented and unequal.

### THE "CEMENT CITY": organization, infrastructure, and economic centrality

The central region of Maputo concentrates most of the economic activities of the upper circuit (SANTOS, 2008). Very distant from the national reality - a country with one of the lowest HDI on the planet - moving through this portion of Maputo's urban territory brings numerous references to landscapes found in other cities of more economically fortunate countries.

Result of a colonial urbanization project and home of these up until a few decades, the central portion of the city continues in a constant process of structuring and qualification (figure 2). This fraction of space is endowed with a vast offer of infrastructure. Paved and geometrically distributed streets, electricity grid, piped water, modern telecommunications networks, wide commercial diversification, well-developed service centers (health, education, and culture), and a rich tree planting - which extends from the streets to the exquisitely beautiful parks and squares - are among the attributes that attract attention and offer "comfort" to those who pass through there.

Figure 2 – Organization and infrastructure of the “cement city”



Source: Rodrigues (2020) and MMFF (2019). Elaborated by the authors (2022).

Popularly referred to as the "cement city," this fragment of the city occupies approximately 8% of the municipal territory of Maputo (JORGE; MELO, 2014). In addition to parks and squares, there are also hospitals, schools, shopping malls, globally known fast-food chains, modern sports centers, cinemas and clubs, among countless other options available to the small portion of the population that can afford them. Jorge and Melo (2014) indicate that such landscape and cultural diversity, to a great extent, are inspired by and refer to the "westernized" standard of living.

A significant part of the verticalization in the central region houses offices, banks, and corporations from strategic sectors for the development of Mozambican capitalism. Surrounding residential neighborhoods, whether or not verticalized, are intended

(although not formally) for residents with greater purchasing power. These are generally businessmen, high-ranking civil servants, bankers, or other positions linked to the organization of the country's economic and bureaucratic machinery.

The horizontal condominiums of privileged location and structure have parking lots, swimming pools, gyms, noble furniture, and differentiated finishing standards (figure 3). In a scenario of inequality, landscape elements aimed at protection emerge. Walls, fences, safety cabins and security guards contribute as "physical barriers", while other more subjective elements, such as the ideals of meritocracy, present not only here, but in much of the contemporary world society, guarantee the maintenance of the pro-normalization "status quo" of the situation of inequality.

Figure 3 – High-end residential condominiums and luxury hotels located in the privileged region of Maputo



Source: *Real Estate Imobiliária* (2021) and Rodrigues (2020). Elaborated by the authors (2022).

Luxury hotels with exuberant amenities and views welcome foreigners visiting Maputo, a public ranging from business executives to tourists in search of sightseeing and entertainment. While the depreciation of the exchange rate favors international tourism, labor deregulation and low remuneration of Mozambican labor attract businessmen (STACCIARINI; STACCIARINI, 2020). These elements contribute to investments in export-oriented industries or even activities that work with the international public, such as tourism, having high liquidity and financial return.

Surveys conducted by the "Instituto Nacional do Turismo (INATUR)", which is the federal agency responsible for tourism in the country, and presented by Teixeira (2017) have pointed out that Mozambique has been successively expanding the volume of incoming tourists over the past decades, peaking at 1.6 million in the last annual survey (2017). Data obtained from the government report "Estatísticas do Turismo Moçambicano 2016/18" (ETM, 2018), report that collects data related to tourism in Mozambique,

have revealed that the capital hosts 41% of all domestic travelers and 69.1% of international travelers.

Therefore, the hotel industry has an important position within the "economic development project" induced in partnership between the government and multinationals in the country. The report "The Top 100 Companies in Mozambique", for example, revealed that the three largest multinational hotel companies operating in the country - *VIP Actividades Hoteleiras*; *Hotéis Polana S.A* and *Turvisa Empreendimentos Turísticos Lda.* have netted more than US\$ 60 million from developments in Mozambique during 2015, when the last report (TTCM, 2015) was published.

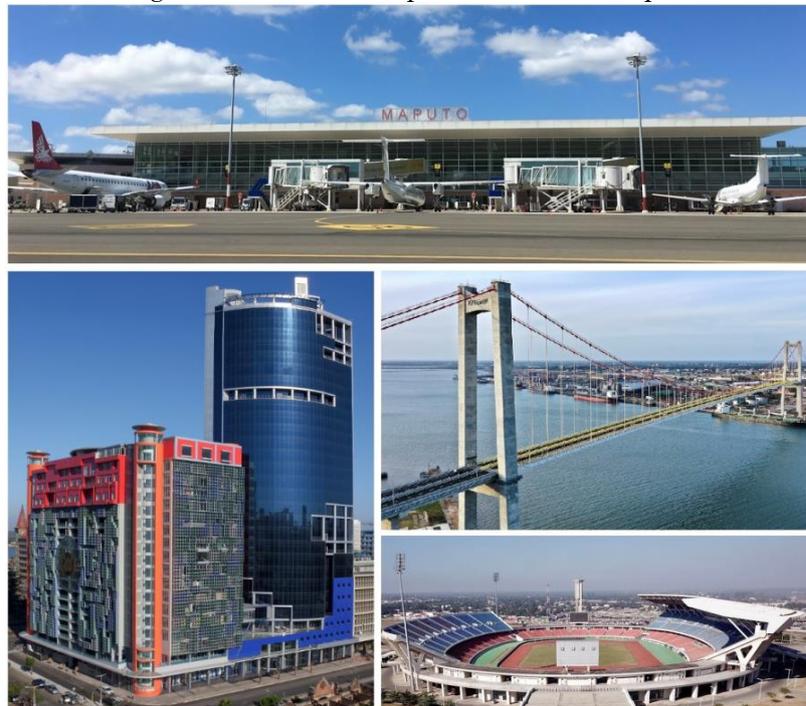
Another symbolic scenario that arouses curiosity is the rise of "pharaonic public works" in the capital (Figure 4). Located in and/or aimed at meeting the demands of the population living in the "cement city," the construction works, which are financed by the government through significant international financial support, establish a great contrast with the

landscape of the peripheral regions, as well as with the lifestyle of most Mozambicans.

The National Stadium, the Maputo International Airport, the new Central Bank of

Mozambique building, and the Maputo-Katembe Bridge are important examples. The four developments have respectively cost 70; 75; 231 and 785 million dollars (BDM, 2022).

Figure 4 - "Pharaonic" public works in Maputo



Source: Rodrigues (2020). Elaborated by the authors (2022).

Although quite astonishing, the execution of these projects was permeated by contradictions involving protests linked to feasibility, functionality, indebtedness, and corruption. The international airport was expanded with the intention of receiving teams that would compete for the "Soccer World Cup" in the neighboring country (South Africa, in 2010), a situation that did not materialize. The national stadium - built to host the "Pan-African Games 2011" and with a capacity for 42,000 spectators - is very rarely used.

The Central Bank megastructure, built in the "heart" of Maputo, had 90% of its materials imported. In addition to the difficulty of replacement and little movement of industry and domestic economy, the building now consumes energy equivalent to 100,000 Mozambican inhabitants (BDM, 2022).

The connection provided by the "Maputo-Katembe Bridge" has made the crossing process easier - traditionally done by ferries. However, the status of one of the most expensive works in the history of the country, in addition to the immense debt (with interest) to be paid over 20 years to the Chinese government, raises serious questions about its real effectiveness. Complementing the concerns is the fact that the crossing is a toll road. The fees are currently

described as "suffocating and prohibitive" by many Mozambicans, a factor that contributes to the fact that the movement of vehicles is lower than previously thought by the National Road Fund (CARTAMZ, 2021).

### THE "REED CITY": segregation, unemployment and misery

Even though Maputo is the richest and most important city in the country, the "satisfactory" level of quality of life offered by the set of infrastructures of the "cement city" is restricted only to the enjoyment of a very small portion of the population, 8% of the territory of the capital (JORGE; MELO, 2014). For the other inhabitants, the conditions of existence are much more precarious, as it was presented below.

This process of "urban duality" has strong roots in the period of "late colonialism" (1930 - 1970), intensifying in the post-national independence (1975) and becoming even more emblematic with the advance of the neoliberal ideology arising from the process of opening to the market economy and economic liberalization of the 1980/90s (MALOA, 2019). As a result, one

notices a systemic expansion of urban segregation and degradation of the quality of life - which materialize, progressively, from the center to the periphery (VIANA; SOUSA, 2013).

The dense peripheral mass that surrounds the center of the Mozambican capital is popularly referred to as the "reed city," a place where poor working class, unemployed, and excluded people of all kinds live. The precariousness (or even the complete absence) of many public infrastructures and services, such as transportation, health, education, and security systems; water supply, electrification, paving, basic sanitation, lighting, and garbage collection, has characterized this portion of the municipal territory and reveal the difficult reality that agonizes the lives of a large portion of the Maputans.

In the work conducted by Roque, *et al.* (2020) it is pointed out that, although this portion of the urban territory has been (re)produced in an informal way, by the inhabitants themselves, the municipal government insists on seeing it as

an expression of an incomplete (or inadequate) urban. This conception has historical roots in the colonial reality, when the "reed city" was considered a "land reserve" for future expansions of the "cement city". Buildings could only be feasible by using temporary materials that would facilitate eventual removals/displacements - such as reed, a plant from which a fiber similar to straw is extracted.

The hegemony of housing produced from precarious low-cost materials, such as wood, tin, reeds, and huts, sets the tone for the landscape of large horizontal neighborhoods of an informal constitution (self-organized) (Figure 5). Amidst the disorderly geometry, environmental concerns, such as sanitary sewage, are practically non-existent.

In the most precarious regions, the population consumes water from wells and wood fuel as a source of energy. Most homes do not have toilets inside. "Pits" (holes dug in the ground) accommodate human excrement, making soil and water contamination rates around the residences high.

Figure 5 - Daily landscapes of the "reed city"



Source: Authors' fieldwork (2018), NRV (2020) and ZUG (2020). Elaborated by the authors (2022).

The randomness of the peripheral occupation, in conjunction with the neglect by the public authorities, substantially hinders mobility in the "reed city". Many access roads to the center are not connected, which impairs the flow of vehicles. To make matters worse, buses are still very scarce. They run on limited timetables and routes and only go through a few peripheral neighborhoods, failing to serve a considerable portion of the population.

The "*chapas*", the Mozambican designation for private vans of public transport, is the main element of the commuting system in Maputo, covering more regions and public than buses.

However, most of them are in a precarious state of repair - coexisting with systemic irregularities and informality (STACCIARINI; SILVA, 2018b).

Schedules and routes are often disrespected, leading to long lines. Overcrowding is visible and embarrassing (Figure 6). It is common to notice *chapas* with a 15-person capacity, transporting almost twice as many people. Passengers are crammed on each other's laps; they travel lying down or with parts of their bodies sticking out of windows and doors. Accessibility, as you can imagine, is non-existent.

Figure 6 – Precariousness of the "transport system" on the periphery of Maputo



Source: Chares (2020). Elaborated by the authors (2022).

The landscape of the "reed city" is essentially shaped by informality. Mozambican history has revealed that a series of internal episodes have contributed to the collapse of the, which is already weakened, organizational and economic structure of the country. In a span of only three decades (1970/80/90), Mozambique has faced crises of internal shortages, falling agricultural and industrial production, civil war, independence struggle, short experience with the socialist regime, liberalization of the economy, introduction and intervention of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) programs, among others (SILVA, 2002; CHIVANGUE, 2014; ROQUE *et al.*, 2020).

Given the lack of formal jobs, a significant portion of the population has joined informal market activities - a way out found in an attempt to escape the social pressure that pushes individuals into generalized misery (STACCIARINI; SILVA, 2018a). For Silva, the

growth of these activities is materialized as a reaction to the aggravations triggered "by a neoliberal economy, which produced the increase of unemployment, exclusion, and vulnerability and, at the same time, the search for an answer to fill the void created by the absence of public social policies" (SILVA, 2002, p. 86).

Thus, in a short walk through the streets of Maputo's periphery, it is possible to observe hundreds of pedestrians, called informal "entrepreneurs" and consumers of street commerce, appearing at every corner and going in the most different directions (Figure 7). The intertwining of cars, people, and cargo, which mix amid the confusing Maputo traffic, generates emblematic and visibly intriguing landscapes in the eyes of those who are not from there. Streets and avenues become true "open-air (precarious) shopping malls", linear markets that host countless variety of products and services (VIANA; SOUSA, 2013).

Figure 7 - Informal labor occupies a prominent place in the Maputo's peripheral landscapes



Source: authors fieldwork (2018), Chares (2020) and Rodrigues (2020). Elaborated by the authors (2022).

Legitimizing the situation presented in the streets of the capital, the Mozambican government itself, in its institutional portal, has acknowledged its fragility in terms of stimulating and regularizing the informal sector. In 2017, this sector was responsible for the occupation of 80% of Mozambicans and the movement of approximately 60% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (PGM, 2022). However, despite its importance in the national economy, informality is no longer seen as an efficient way to break the high levels of poverty that afflict a significant portion of the population.

To expand the picture of structural problems, data provided by the “Instituto Nacional de Estatística” (INE, 2017), which is the federal agency responsible for statistical information in the country, and the “Folheto Estatístico da Cidade de Maputo” (FECM, 2019), official statistical document of the Mozambican capital, have revealed that in the year 2018, 135.7 thousand inhabitants (12.6% of the population) were living in the capital with Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS). Outbreaks of tropical diseases, such as malaria, are also recurrent and affected 50.3% of the population in the interval of the last four years with available data (2015/16/17/18). The infant mortality rate is among the highest in the world context and attempted the lives of 46.4 per thousand children in 2018 (FECM, 2019).

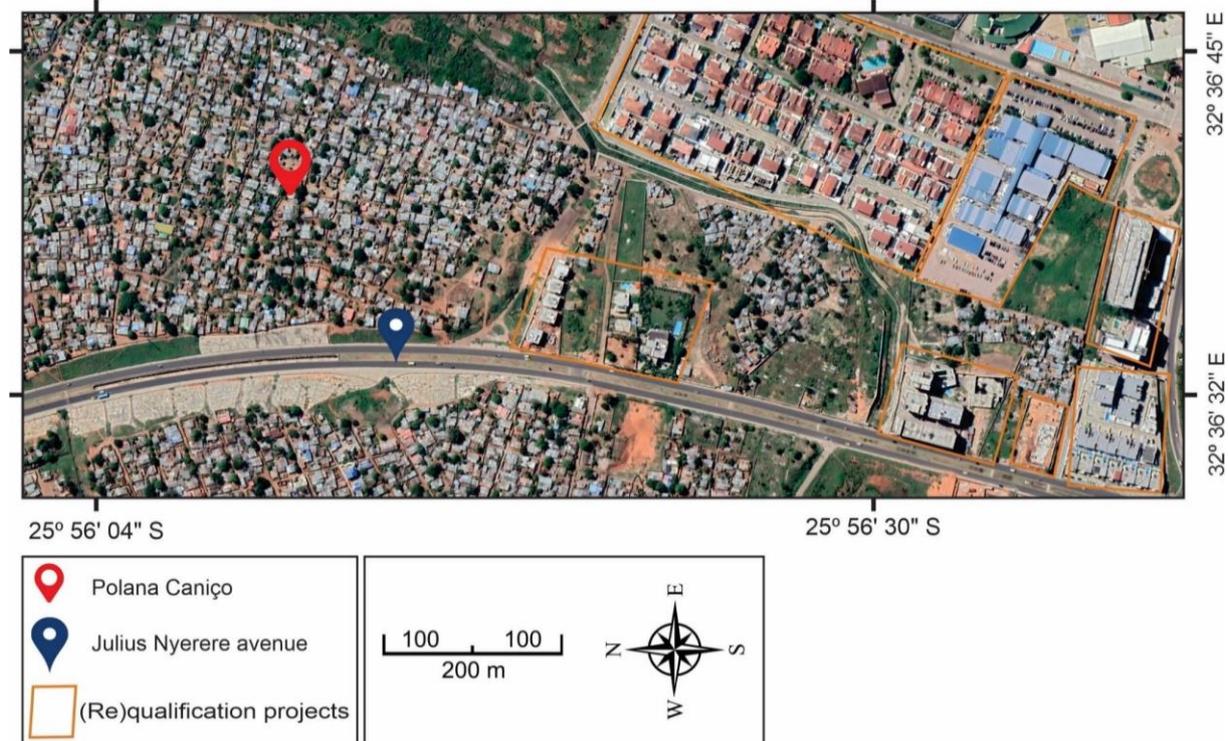
## (RE)QUALIFICATION PROJECTS, REAL ESTATE SPECULATION AND THE INCOMPLETE URBAN

Maputo's urban territory is also in constant transformation regarding qualifications, gentrifications, and the "speculative game" of real estate capitalism. In Mozambique, the state is the landowner. The citizen does not have the right to sell it, only to use it, guarding the property over improvements made on it. However, constitutional revisions in recent decades have transformed public policy possibilities into benefits for a hegemonic political-economic elite. Using the premise of "development of the national economy" (preamble of the Land Law) and "knowledge, inventorying, and valuation" (article 102 of the Constitution of the Republic), government agents have subsidized the interests of the people in favor of national and foreign investors (JORGE, 2016).

The concept of an "incomplete urban", of temporary housing built in unstable materials, has sometimes been applied from a "hygienist" perspective. Narratives of disorder, illegality, and pollution are constantly used to legitimize eviction or relocation actions that enable the implementation of new projects (ROQUE et al., 2020).

Interventions for "(re)qualification" of spaces close to the center, such as the "Polana Caniço" neighborhood (figures 8 and 9), exemplify this process. Enticed, coerced, or simply expelled from their residences; land that once sheltered precarious housing, now gives way to wide avenues, modern drainage systems, and luxurious condominiums (horizontal and vertical) designed to meet the demands of the more favored classes, revealing the gentrification processes (ATKINSON; BRIDGE, 2005) and the perverse nature of real estate/state pressure on the poor.

Figure 8 - On the margins of the "Julius Nyerere" avenue, the "Polana Caniço" neighborhood has given way to numerous (re)qualification projects



Source: Google-Earth-Pro (2022). Elaborated by the authors (2022).

In some portions of the urban space, this process is marked by the coexistence of new and modern housing with rudimentary buildings. Progressively, valorization and real estate speculation are replacing former occupations and "pushing" the poorest families to regions even more distant from the center.

Parallel to the process of qualification and expansion of the "cement city," a land "market" is gaining strength in Maputo. Neglected and even encouraged by the state, the commodification of land is driven by the liberalization of the Mozambican economy, which confronts the expansion of wealth production (GDP) with the pauperization of significant portions of society.

Grounded on the possibility of transferring the *Direito do Uso e Aproveitamento de Terra - DUAT*, which means Right of Land Use and Exploitation in English - which allows for the commercialization of improvements - it is not uncommon to see advertisements for "land for sale". Mandamule (2017) revealed that this "improvement market" includes many variables in the "final price," such as the location and dimension of the land, the presence or absence of a registration title, and activities to be performed in the space. Although this land movement, often carried out by state officials

and investors, is more frequent in areas of strategic interest, it is also replicated, even more informally (orally, for example), in remote regions on the edges of the urban periphery.

To enable and boost sales, appreciation, and speculation in the real estate sector, new forms of "Housing Credit" have been undertaken by government and private agents. Access to this financing is still restricted to privileged segments of society, especially those linked to the growth of the tertiary sector, such as multinational companies, banking services, consulting firms, and tourism, among others (SILVA, 2011). However, it is already working as an important driver of the growing real estate market and the advance of financial capitalism in Mozambique.

While the (re)qualifications are transforming the space and the landscape, by introducing new housing forms, infrastructure, and services, a significant part of the population remains unaware of the improvements and is kept segregated. Modern houses (figure 9) built with imported materials (priced at costs far from the vast majority of the Mozambican population) contrast with the absence of a housing policy and urban planning for social and community interests.

Figure 9 - Requalification of the "Julius Nyerere" avenue and new office complexes



Source: NRV (2020). Elaborated by the authors (2022).

Amidst this diffuse conjuncture, numerous agents have been involved in this complex "construction" of the Mozambican territory. Many qualifications and enterprises are executed by multinationals working in partnership with the state. International institutions, such as the World Bank, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), or even religious entities, have a strong influence on the government and are also involved in the process. As a result, several parts of the territory appear to be more tied to external logic and interests than the local reality and national legislation.

To add to the interpretive challenge of Maputo's complex urban space, thousands of homes in the farthest regions of downtown have backyards devoted to agricultural production and small animal farming, giving life to an "urban blot" that spreads over tens of kilometers and making it difficult to differentiate urban-rural spatially.

This characteristic comes from a process described as "rurality in the urban" (ARAÚJO, 2003). As Mozambican urbanization is still underdeveloped and the country is experiencing severe socioeconomic problems, a significant portion of the "low-income" population that migrates from rural to urban spaces ends up carrying with them rural habits as a way to overcome the difficult living conditions during the adaptive process.

Often living in "*palhotas*", which are housing units built from predominantly vegetable materials, such as reeds, grass, straw, palm trees, and bamboo, these families have their lives governed by a logic very closely linked to the traditional ways of living in Mozambican rural spaces. Subsistence agriculture, along with the trade of small excess products in the informal urban market, is the central activity of (re)production of work and existence for most of the inhabitants of these regions.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Understanding Maputo as a dual, complex, fragmented metropolis full of continuous transformations has required great effort. It was seen that its colonial past, which ended only in June 1975, is deeply linked to the genesis of a long process of socio-spatial segregation. The scars of a bloody pro-independence struggle were joined by a brief immersion in the socialist experience and, later, by new market economy nexuses, triggering a broad process of liberalization.

The set of political transformations, increased by demographic growth and an intense process of rural flight, has contributed to the significant urbanization of the Mozambican capital, which increased its population approximately twelve times during the decades from 1950 to 2020. In turn, the economic growth experienced in recent decades has not managed to change the harsh reality of Mozambique, which remains among the countries with the lowest Human Development Index (HDI) in the world.

It is true that the production of wealth is visibly materialized in the center of the metropolis, popularly known as the "Cement City". However, even in the central part, physical barriers, such as walls, fences, and sentry boxes, denote an inequality that is progressively more disturbing as it moves toward the urban periphery.

Popularly known as "Reed City", a region that occupies approximately 92% of the urban territory of the Mozambican capital, we are taken by an immense landscape conflict revealed by an "endless sea" of very precarious dwellings, (re)produced informally by the residents themselves, and sometimes subjected to the absence of many infrastructures and public services.

Historical conceptions of an incomplete (or inadequate) urban have forged a false sense of future progress. In the eyes of the state and private agents, the fragility of housing produced from wood, tin, reeds, and huts gives easy access to removals/displacements.

In this context of extreme social and economic vulnerability, it has become virtually impossible to talk about urban mobility. Sanitary standards and environmental concerns have no place either. With a very weakened and restricted internal economy, huge informal markets are spread over most of the periphery. Avenues become open-air "linear markets", welcoming a true "informal entrepreneurship" that emerges as an attempt to escape from the generalized misery that pressures a large part of the population.

Among these landscape conflicts and the remarkable urban duality, numerous (re)qualification projects, especially in the peri-central areas (surrounding the cement city), are gaining strength. The possibility of profit in the "speculative game" of real estate capitalism has led government agents to subsidize the interests of the people in favor of national and foreign investors. Expropriations, followed by (re)qualification and the rise of modern urbanistic projects, such as lots, buildings, condominiums, and commercial establishments, have triggered strong criticism regarding the "hygienist" and "gentrification" character resulting from the exclusion of residents.

It is amidst this set of variables that Maputo, the divided city, is (re)produced. The state's history of normative, political, and institutional disarticulation (aggravated by the distant colonial period), the very high rates of economic and social vulnerability faced by the population, and the additional search for profit by various agents (national and international) have all contributed to making the production scenario of the capital's urban network even more tense and challenging.

The fragmentations of the present highlight the challenges and the need for macro-planning that breaks the center-periphery dichotomy (Cement City versus Reed City) and allows residents of Maputo's suburbs to enjoy a more equitable future, letting them enjoy full conditions of dignity for the reproduction of their existences.

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## AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

All stages of the text – readings, research, data collection and processing, fieldwork, map preparation, writing and revisions – were prepared jointly by the advisee (João Henrique Santana Stacciarini) and advisor (Professor Eguimar Felício Chaveiro). Professor Helsio Amiro Motany de Albuquerque Azevedo collaborated with research, fieldwork and reflections on Mozambique.



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