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What is This?
Engaging, transcending and subverting dichotomies: Discursive dynamics of Maputo’s urban space

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Abstract
Historically, while cities such as Mozambique’s capital Maputo have been analysed as divided into ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ spaces, contemporary approaches tend to emphasise the heterogeneity and plasticity of African urbanities. Drawing upon original ethnographic material gathered from fieldwork in 2012/2013, we reframe the analysis of such cities through recognition of novel forms of urban imaginaries, emergent narratively, that may take the shape of dichotomies or trichotomies reconfiguring hegemonic notions such as formal–informal, centre–periphery or urban–suburban. In conclusion, it is suggested that this citywide ongoing process highlights the importance of appreciating dynamic discursive engagements with urban space, which not only are at odds with hegemonic definitions of the city but also, crucially, impinge on people’s own urban strategies – in Maputo as well as elsewhere.

Keywords
anthropology, imaginaries, Maputo, Mozambique, narratives

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Introduction
It has been a mainstay of research on African urban situations to point out their ‘diversity’, ‘complexity’ and ‘heterogeneity’, which are often analysed in relation to such factors as colonial heritage, incomplete central planning and capitalist transformation (Jenkins, 2012a; Myers, 2011; Pieterse, 2008). Further, African cities are increasingly...
approached not merely in terms of their empirical richness but also cast as sites where futuristic imaginaries are expressed— as, for instance, de Boeck (2011) has shown for Kinshasa, or as Nuttall and Mbembe (2008) argued for Johannesburg. Similarly, Mozambican sociologist Carlos Serra observes that Maputo is both ‘a kaleidoscopic centre for cultural mestizoisation’ and, at the same time, ‘the habitat of the Africa of tomorrow’ (Serra, 2012: 192–193; our translation).

While recognising the inescapable fact of empirical diversity—a dimension central to all urban forms—the present paper critically addresses dichotomies that are frequently employed in analyses of urban contexts such as Maputo. These include the oft-repeated distinction between a bairro (part of the city) of canicxo (lit. reed)—a reference to the materiality of houses in the so-called African parts of the colonial city—and the bairro of cimento (lit. cement)—the cadastralised quadrature with brick or cement housing—in reference to the city’s central administrative and commercial areas (see also Costa, 2007; Penvenne, 2011). Although born out of the colonial administrative apparatus’s terminology and becoming part of also how many urbanites viewed their city in the late colonial and postcolonial period, a rethinking of this dichotomy is necessary, however, given the recent rapid transformation of Maputo’s spaces. First, we are concerned with the increasing complexity of several central bairros that are experiencing contrasting developments of enhanced affluence alongside an exclusion of the middle-class. In addition, we look at former suburban bairros that are undergoing adverse processes of gentrification that produce increasingly marginalized inhabitants who are attempting to hold on to their land and dwellings in a situation of rising costs and increasing violence. Second, we are also concerned with the dramatic expansion of the city’s built environment, wherein a number of spaces are being transformed from village-like and peripheral zones into densely built bairros that are being integrated into the administrative infrastructure of an expanding Maputo and, moreover, how such an uneven centrifugally expanding urbanization affects imaginaries.

Both developments, of making central bairros more complex and peripheral suburban bairros more integrated, indicate an increasingly problematic applicability of simple dichotomies—exemplified by the canicxo–cimento distinction, above— as Maputo’s urban order and the ways in which it is imagined are changing. A primary site for the analysis of such developments is to look beyond self-evident urban diversity in order to scrutinise changes in, challenges to and appropriations of the dominant dichotomous discourses on and in the city itself. Based on data collected during collaborative and individual fieldwork in Maputo in 2012 and 2013, this paper maps what we term the ongoing discursive dynamics of the city and analyses them in relation to the aforementioned developments on the ground. The notion of discursive dynamics seeks to capture the intersections and tensions between highly fluid (and sometimes volatile) imaginaries of frequently impoverished inhabitants and the historically derived and cadastrally and administratively reproduced urban distinctions found at the central municipal level and locally by heads of various sections and subsections of the bairros. While these intersections illustrate, then, also Mbembe’s analysis of the postcolonial (urban) order as characterised by a distinct convivial relationship between subjects and the administrative and bureaucratic powers (Mbembe, 2001), in opposition to his claim of this intimacy rendering both powerless (mutually zombified), we argue that engaging, appropriating and redeploying officialese dichotomic terms by
bairro inhabitants potentially transcend, subvert and open up the terrain of the urban imaginary and, thereby, also the domain of the political.

This focus has further been rewarding in two key ways: first, such insights into discursive dynamics provide a privileged view of the way in which symbolic and material boundaries of various urban spaces are creatively engaged, appropriated and, ultimately, sometimes transcended to create novel and semi-novel ambiguous and fluid semiotic configurations. We argue that while these configurations sometimes reproduce and sometimes expand hegemonic notions of the urban – from dichotomy to trichotomy, for instance – through being endlessly reproduced and, thus, skewed in relation to their officialese definition, this creates a process of oversignification of notions such as ‘urban’ and ‘periurban’. This oversignification effectively and simultaneously destabilises or subverts such terms, reflects heterogeneous desires of urbanity among our interlocutors and amounts to a form of political intervention beyond conventional channels (see also Boyer and Yurchak, 2010). Second, and given the increasingly challenging task of governing urban spaces – in Mozambique, Africa and elsewhere – coming to terms with how people imagine and engage with spatial categories of social and political differentiation is instructive in terms of perceiving both urban developments and spaces of desire (i.e. which areas are seen as desirable, ambiguous, etc.) and in terms of exploring how views about Maputo inform such engagement.

The urban order and its discursive formations

Anthropology’s exploration of the African urban spans at least half a century and includes the seminal works of Gluckman (1961), Mayer (1961), Mitchell (1969), Friedman (1991) and Ferguson (1999) and where, in particular, the so-called Manchester School’s scrutiny of the urban social, political and cultural complex order made a significant impact on anthropological approaches (see Werbner, 1984, for an overview). More recently, rapid urbanization has been seen as the most dramatic development on the African continent, often yielding starkly contrasting images of affluent business and residential districts alongside sprawling shantytowns or slums (Davis, 2006; Simone and Abouhani, 2005).

We follow the gist of such assessments, and note also an increased tendency to approach the African urban as intrinsic to a global significance placed on ‘southern urbanisms’ where, if we follow Pieterse (2012), we need to situate the political in relation to new and often exclusionary forms of urban governance and urban planning. From a different angle, recent work on African colonial architecture (Demissie, 2012) looks at the material affordances inherent in the colonial origins of the physical forms of the city and its grid – and the impact this frozen past has on current narratives and understandings of space. A third approach to the urban comes from phenomenologically inclined anthropology and includes de Boeck and Plissart’s (2004) narratively experimental and multivocal account of Kinshasa, which they term ‘an invisible city’ composed of an immaterial architecture and infrastructure.

While various other current approaches could also be invoked (e.g. Simone, 2004), the works above, in different ways, suggest a need to explore the narrative streams and fertile plains of imaginaries beneath, above and beyond the physicality of the African city – imaginaries understood here in Castoriadis’s terms as the perpetually unstable constellations of meaning (imaginaries) that are the result of the human capacity to create, vis formandi (Castoriadis, 1987).
Hence, in recognising the force of urban imaginaries and undertaking this exploration, we apply the distinction made in anthropological approaches to landscape between the *actuality of place* – with clear subject positions (‘what we are’) – and the *potentiality of space* – with non-subject positions (‘what we might become’) (Hirsch, 1995). This tension – between the physical, experienced landscape (the urban order of the everyday) and the discourses and imaginaries of (and in) the urban (dynamics that may reveal simultaneously the political, the colonial past in the present, and the desired – the invisible, hidden areas beneath the city) – is approached analytically in seeking both to transcend increasingly problematic and long-sustained dichotomies between the various *bairros*, and to identify other potential analytical approaches in recent theorisation.

In the analysis that follows, then, we employ a version of Hirsch’s ‘spaces of potentiality’, namely, the discourses that constitute or even create the non-physical spaces of the city. As well as reflecting both recent (see, for example, Činar and Bender, 2007) and more classic concerns with the imaginary urban or urban imaginary (see, for example, Lefebvre, 2003 [1970]), we follow contemporary anthropology’s preoccupation with the urban and its narratives, desires and imaginaries. We also recognise, as Comaroff and Comaroff (2012) have recently argued, that there is a need to address global transformations of urban governance, its formation and dynamics beyond hegemonic sites of Euro-American cities.

We intend here neither to provide examples of misrule and chaos, as in some of the more politically charged and analytically problematic ‘failed state’/‘bad governance’ literature, nor to view African cityscapes as mimicking dominant urban formations (or unsuccessful replicas of the colonial urban order). Rather, our presentation of diverse imaginaries and layered dichotomies and tri-chotomies demonstrates that reproducing simple cadastral and colonially derived dichotomies (such as *caniço–cimento*) has brought us to a dead-end, while also drawing attention to the creative and dynamic forces of innovation and re-organisation that are fuelling the growth of cities such as Maputo.

### Historical trajectories

At the beginning of the 1870s, Lourenço Marques was a slow-growing, malaria-plagued trading post. Also known as Xilunguine, the ‘white man’s place’ (Penvenne, 1995, 2011), it was where Asian, African and only a few European traders and hunters were established alongside a much larger population of Ronga-speaking people (Penvenne, 1995, 2011). However, the settlement was soon to experience a dramatic change sparked by the rapidly expanding South African mining industry (following the discovery of diamonds and gold in 1870), the colonial scramble for Africa, and the Portuguese colonial power’s need to secure control over Mozambique and, particularly, Lourenço Marques (Newitt, 1995).

Leading the change was the construction of a railway line linking the Transvaal to the port of Lourenço Marques and the initiation of landfills and other major public works that drained the *paˆntano* (marshland) surrounding the city’s small trading area and enabled the construction of significant urban infrastructure (Penvenne, 1995). While these actions transformed the city physically they also profoundly changed its socio-political landscape as the population increased significantly as a result of labour migration and an increasing number of European immigrants (Penvenne, 1995). The turn of the nineteenth century was a period of Portuguese colonial consolidation, which led, among other developments, to the establishment of *Indigenato*, a policy based...
on the statutory division of the population into *civilizados* (civilized) and *indígenas* (indigenous). However, while white peoples ran no risk of being classified as *indígena*, black peoples and *mestiços* needed to demonstrate their *civilizado* status through a humiliating ‘assimilation’ process making them ‘honorary civilized’ or *assimilados* (Newitt, 1995). These changes had significant social, political and economic impacts and deeply altered the city’s spatial structure well into the 1900s, with most residents living in its lower part – the *baixa*. The landfills and infrastructural development allowed for expansion from the *baixa* to the nearby hills, but also for an even stricter social and racial differentiation of urban space, to the extent that ‘different residents experienced different cities’ (Penvenne, 1995: 33). Fátima and Joana, now in their late 60s, who in colonial Lourenço Marques lived in Bairro Mafalala, still remember that they feared and rarely visited the *cidade*, ‘where whites lived and blacks were neither well accepted nor respected’. Other interlocutors recalled a ‘beautiful and very clean *cidade*’ from which they were excluded. Frates (2002: 110) describes an east–west differentiation by the middle of the twentieth century, in which the eastern areas of the city (Polana and Ponta Vermelha) were predominantly occupied by the white population, the central neighbourhood by Asian people, while *mestiços* and a few *assimilados* lived mainly in the Alto Maé area (see also Jenkins, 2012b). Beyond the Avenida da Circunvalação, previously seen as the boundary between what would be known as the *cidade de cimento* and the *cidade de caniço*, lived the vast majority of the urban population, mostly classified as *indígenas*, and whose access to *cimento* was restricted under the Indigenato regime (in effect until 1962).

Similarly to other colonial cities, conceptions of health, hygiene and building standards were tools used to relegate black residents to the city’s outskirts (Roque, 2009; Salm and Falola, 2005). For instance, legislation passed just before 1900 prohibited urban *palhotas* (huts) and, later, structures built from wood and zinc were also banned. Only construction in masonry was permitted within the city limits, which, being expensive, effectively forced most of the population of African origin out to *caniço*. Like many colonial towns, then, Lourenço Marques evolved into a dual, fractured spatial structure in which *cimento* represented cleanness and order and *caniço* its antithesis. Lourenço Marques grew significantly after World War II: 30.2% of the centre’s cement buildings were constructed between 1960 and 1972 (Frates, 2002: 132), and from 1940 to 1970 its population increased from 68,000 to almost 400,000 and the percentage of Europeans from 5.4% to 10.4% in the same period (Penvenne, 2011: 256) – increases that emphasised *cimento–caniço* boundaries and intensified urban segregation and inequality. The emerging duality, however, was not absolute: a few *assimilados* families – among them some of our interlocutors – could afford to live in *cimento*, albeit in intermediate or ‘transition’ areas such as Alto Maé, and a growing number of Europeans lived beyond the Avenida de Circunvalação.

The end of the colonial regime in 1975 brought about sweeping changes, in particular as a result of the exodus of most of the Portuguese colonial population of approximately 190,000 people (Castelo, 2007). Until 1974 *cimento* had been a ‘white city,’ but in 1976 the postcolonial Frelimo government[^1] initiated nationalisation of the abandoned urban estate properties. Further, in particular in the early 1980s Frelimo also sought to purge the cities of ‘unproductive’ elements including those categorised as unemployed or individuals such as traditional healers that were now seen as undermining the urban, Socialist and revolutionary modernity that
the Party struggled to instate (for details on this so-called ‘Operation Production’, see e.g. Jenkins, 2006). Frelimo’s radical politics and its transformation of structures of governance of the bairros profoundly changed the city’s social and spatial structure, as well as the relationship residents had to the city now renamed Maputo: by mid-1976 most of the cimento residents were black.

Mr Machava is 69 years old, has worked as a driver all his adult life, and has lived in a total of five different bairros ending up in 25 de Junho 15 years ago. He recalls that:

after independence [the division of the city] changed, and everything became part of the city. Today, the government says that everything is city space – as if everything should be respected.

Machava’s words seem to mirror Samora Machel’s, Mozambique’s first post-independence president (1975–1986), when he proclaimed: ‘the people will be able to live in their own city and not in the city’s backyard’ (Machel, 1976, cited in Morton, 2013: 241).

However, despite Frelimo’s radical post-independence urban politics, several factors prevented former caniço residents from ‘living in their own city’ as envisaged. For some, there was a remaining uncertainty as to the outcome of the nationalisation process. For others, although the rents in the cimento were state-established and lower than in the colonial past, they were still comparatively expensive especially in affluent bairros such as Sommerschield and Polana (Morton, 2013). Families from the suburbios settled mostly in bairros such as Alto Maé, Malhangalene or Bairro Central. For Francisco, for example, who is today in his mid-60s and currently lives in Bairro Luís Cabral but who, in 1977, was seeking to establish himself in the cimento, an apartment in Polana was far too expensive and so he settled in Bairro Central. Thus, for many caniço dwellers, the cimento still remained out of reach (Morton, 2013), particularly certain neighbourhoods. At the same time, as migrants from the country’s southern regions arrived, whose numbers increased in the 1980s as a result of the war (1976–1992), the outlying suburbs continued to expand rapidly (Jenkins, 2012b). Although Maputo is no longer Lourenço Marques, it is still struggling with its colonial legacy: it remains socially and spatially fractured, as new forms of class-based differentiation settle in place of old ‘geographies of exclusion’ (Myers, 2011: 29).

**Representing urban space – and its actualities**

In present-day Maputo, hegemonic perceptions of urban space and urban development are the combined outcome of the historical trajectories analysed above, Western ideas about urbanism, and the current (seemingly unrestrained) urban development undertaken by both the Mozambican government and private capital. Taken together these aspects illustrate the supremacy of state, money and market in hegemonic representations of the urban and is, crucially, reflected cadastrally in official statistical oversights on spatial differences between Maputo’s urban spaces in poverty and wellbeing, inequality, physical infrastructure and access to basic social services (Instituto Nacional de Estatística (INE), 2009, 2010; see also Paulo et al., 2011). Maputo and its 1.1 million inhabitants has a formal urban structure that includes a mayor and municipal assembly; a municipal government with aldermen (vereadores); seven urban districts; and 52 ‘neighbourhoods’ or bairros. There are between 20 and 75 ‘quarters’ (quartéis) in each bairro, and between 50 and 100 ‘blocks’ (dez casas) in each quarterão (see Figure 1). All these structures and areas are
governed through a hierarchical political order that is, as in the radical early postcolonial era described above, still based on Frelimo party membership or affiliation: from the formal municipal management to chefes at the lowest units who are formally elected by the local population but in reality ‘screened’ by the Party.

Despite its complex historical trajectory and the current heterogeneous urban development, municipal planning documents, policy statements and maps (Conselho Municipal de Maputo (CMM), 2009, 2010; World Bank, 2010) still envisage the city in terms of the dichotomy of ‘formal’ and ‘informal’, which overlaps significantly with the old cimento–canico boundaries. As a result of this division, understandings of what constitutes ‘urban development’ are established in a vernacular that reflects formal planning procedures. This can be seen in variations on the theme of ‘formalisation of the informal’ in issues ranging from land, housing and physical infrastructure to credit schemes and transportation needs.

Hegemonic perceptions of the potential of Maputo’s urban space – ‘what we might become’ (Hirsch, 1995) – are also pursued by international and national capital, which are conspicuously represented in the cityscape with posters up to 40 m long adorning the walls of high-rise buildings; they...
advertise banks, housing, furniture and other commodities. In more subtle form, the globalised aesthetics of the urban architecture of condominiums, shopping centres, amusement parks and discotheques are imposing in their exclusiveness. In this way, dominant discourses and representations of what the city ‘might become’ not only link ‘urban development’ to notions of formality and ‘modernity’, but also reflect an increasing gulf between the lives of a small political and economic elite and the city’s large poor majority. Effectively, then, hegemonic notions of Maputo fail to capture (or effectively disregard) its complex urban realities; they are a reminder of the need to understand African urban formations on their own terms, and not as chaotic and poor replicas of Western cities (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2012; Pieterse, 2012; Simone 2004).

Of course, policy makers, municipal politicians and development workers are well aware that Maputo is undergoing rapid spatial transformation, and they are also continuously reminded that its spaces are intimately connected. Recent powerful examples of such interconnections have included the floods of 2000, which affected most of Maputo; two explosions (which, of course, transgress all boundaries) in the Malhazine army depot in 1987 and 2007; and the urban riots in 2008, 2010 and 2012, which involved spontaneous, popular disruption of traffic, large-scale looting and several deaths. The riots, particularly, also demonstrated the city administration’s fragile control of many bairros and neighbourhoods.

When passing through the city’s spaces, the changing urban landscape is immediately evident: parts of cimento (such as Bairro Central and Bairro Alto Maë) are currently marked by crowded, decaying high-rise buildings, informal markets, streets where formal shops compete with street vendors for customers, a vibrant nightlife and widespread crime and prostitution. The neighbouring bairros of Polana Cimento and Sommerschield are characterised by rampant high-rise construction, new fashion shops, world-class restaurants and hotels, embassies, enormous villas and mushrooming gated communities, although the streets here are virtually empty outside office hours, except for the omnipresent security guards (see also Paasche and Sidaway, 2010).

In addition, the once informal caniço now exhibits dynamic variation, such as can be seen in Mafalala, with its mix of brick houses and shacks, narrow, criss-crossing alleyways and trenches clogged with rubbish. In glossy brochures marketing ‘walking tours’ for tourists, Mafalala is presented as an intriguing culturally rich ‘classic slum’ which is dangerous at night and full of drug-dealers. At the other end of the city is the Laulane bairro, in what is usually known as the peri-urban section of Maputo. It appears to be a model of urban planning, with a flawless grid of straight roads, houses protected behind neat walls or hedges, and hardly any street vendors to be seen. This order has been created despite a lack of formal planning and development and is, rather, a result of what Nielsen (2011) terms the dynamics of ‘inverse governmentality’ where the population has ‘mimicked’ urban design and implementation to enhance the options for de facto acceptance from the municipal authorities.

People relate to these variations and changes in the urban landscape according to their own subject positions within the social structure, which recalls Lefebvre’s (2003 [1970]) notion of the relation between ‘representations of space’ (constellations of power, knowledge and spatiality) and people’s own ‘spaces of representation’ (counter spaces of spatial meanings and understandings that emerge from local social life) (see also Bank, 2011). For people in the bairros, the material and symbolic markers of spatial differentiation
take on various forms with reference to both historically generated classificatory schemes and to their own immediate experiences and perceptions of what urban life means and should be about (Hirsch, 1995).

**Spaces of representation – and its potentialities**

When we systematically examine the perceptions, discourses and imaginaries of symbolic and material spatial markers among people in the *bairros* of 25 de Julho, Inhagoia, Maxaquene B and C, Alto Maé and Malanga (see Figure 1), it seems clear that these vary according to location in what is sometimes described as a spatial trichotomy of the city (*cidade*), the suburb (*suburbio*) and the periurban (*peri-urbano/periféricos*) – as expressed in the extract below from an interview with an elderly lady now living in 25 de Junho but with a history in a number of *bairros* as a domestic servant:

You have the city [*cidade*] where there are big buildings and people with money like in the areas of Coop, Polana, Julius Nyerere, Ronil; and the new periurban zones like Urbanização, Khongolote, Zimpeto, CMC, Magoanine and Gueva; and in the middle you have the old [suburban] *bairros* of reeds like Mafalala, Chamankulo, Maxaquene, Choupal, Bagamoya, Benfica and Alto Maé.

A number of subthemes will also become apparent as they relate to personal experiences of spatial history, current location, socio-economic position, age and gender, for example, making up a discursive dynamic where hegemonic distinctions as to what is city, suburb and periurban take on novel meanings. These individual experiences result in systematic differences concerning material and symbolic spatial markers as they touch on the periurban *bairros* (25 de Junho, Inhagoia), the suburban *bairros* (Maxaquene B and Maxaquene C) and the *cidade* (Alto Maé and Malanga). Thus, people’s discourses on the potentiality of Maputo’s urban space are the outcome of a sometimes perceived and sometimes appropriated or rejected notion of an overarching spatial trichotomy of the city informed by experiences of a more immediate ‘actuality of place’ which again fuel ‘imaginaries of the urban’.

**Inhagoia and 25 de Junho**

Inhagoia and 25 de Junho (see Figure 1) were established in the late colonial era but have different characteristics in terms of physical layout and socio-economic characteristics; their inhabitants’ ‘representation of spaces’ also vary, and these differences rest in part on the history of Inhagoia as organised (*parcelado*) and 25 de Junho as an orchard that was spontaneously occupied after independence.

In relating to the overarching city spaces, people in both *bairros* make distinctions among the trichotomy of the central city (*cidade*), the suburban *bairros* (*suburbio*) and the periurban *bairros* (where they live). While the *cidade* is seen as a wealthy, expensive and unattainable part of the city, with people ‘who have fixed salaries and manage to have three meals per day’ (female resident, 58 years old), the suburbs are regarded as congested, hectic and at times dangerous, with people who have fixed salaries and manage to have three meals per day’ (female resident, 58 years old), the suburbs are regarded as congested, hectic and at times dangerous, with people who are ‘illiterate, badly educated, marginal and violent, and dedicate themselves to petty trade and banditry’ (female resident, 34 years old). The periurban *bairros* are seen as mixed (*bairros mistos*), with poor people who are not in a position to move closer to the city living alongside wealthier people who have moved out of the city centre for more space and a quieter life.

While perceptions about the larger spatial constellations tend to be quite generalised, there are differences that reflect people’s own experiences of urban space. For
example, it was confirmed by 69-year-old Muianga who is a retired railway worker that in his time, ‘the city was a place that was respected, like Ponta Vermelha and Sommerschield, where the important people lived, with large avenues, everything fenced in, protected entrances and police’. Providing a contrasting assessment of city spaces, 44-year-old Mr Mussassane, who worked for the Municipality but now runs a small shop, used to live in the city, but ‘sold the flat in Bairro Central and decided to move to Chopal [25 de Junho], which I think is a calm neighbourhood. Here everybody knows each other, as opposed to the city where everyone lives isolated, people don’t know each other and hardly greet, and there are many thieves who even steal on the minibuses [chapas].’

Isabel is 58 years old – a widow, an informal trader and living with three daughters and a number of grandchildren. For Isabel, living in the suburbs is a struggle: ‘People have to be fighters, and those who do not fight will not survive’. She contrasts her own bairro with the dense suburbs and people’s anxious existence in them. She acknowledges that there are areas in Maputo where people do not have to struggle, but talks about bairros in the cidade, such as Polana Cimento and Coop, as if they belong to a different world.

People also have perceptions about the spatial divisions inherent in the dominant historical dichotomy and the contemporary trichotomy. Neighbouring bairros 25 de Junho and Inhagoia are considered by outsiders as equal, and as part of the same informal periurban space, but for people living there, 25 de Junho is seen as developed and ‘urban-like’ while Inhagoia is regarded as underdeveloped and ‘slum-like’; ‘In Inhagoia the families are big, and children tend to marry and stay in the bairro, contrary to 25 de Junho where people have education and ambitions’ (André, 30 years old, married with six children, Inhagoia).

Contemporary distinctions are primarily expressed in dichotomies that speak to the perception that 25 de Junho is well organised and parcelled out and that Inhagoia is crowded and chaotic; that the houses in 25 de Junho are large and built of bricks while Inhagoia’s have shack-like concrete walls and zinc roofs (casas precárias); and that people in 25 de Junho are employed, ‘and go to the city’, whereas people in Inhagoia are unemployed and primarily involved in informal economic activities in the bairro itself. Additional dichotomies given by the residents themselves for 25 de Junho and Inhagoia, respectively, are well-off/poor, shops/market stalls, educated/non-educated, and few children/many children.

While there seems to be agreement around the characteristics of the bairros as urban spaces, however, people are not in equal agreement as to the implications of this for their bairros as ‘actuality of place’. Residents in 25 de Junho consistently express satisfaction in relation to living here (with the Secretary of the bairro even insisting that it is part of the ‘city’ with reference to its formal structures). Meeting people in the narrow alleyways in Inhagoia, however, the residents here emphasise that despite not being parcelado and formal there is a strong sense of community in their bairro: ‘In the city everyone is by themselves [cada um fica no seu canto], but here it is different. Everyone knows and greets each other, and not one day will pass without a neighbour looking in to see what happens – we care about our relations with others’ (Anita, 39 years old, single mother and one of the few female heads of a quartarão, Inhagoia).

Despite a common perception that they are part of the periurban space and also commonly contrasting this to urban and suburban areas, people in 25 de Junho
experience the ‘actuality of place’ and the ‘potentiality of space’ differently to those in Inhagoia. Bairro 25 de Junho is experienced as the fulfilment of urban ideals, while Bairro Inhagoia is perceived as inferior to its neighbour because of its informality and crowded living. However, very few people express ideas about crossing the spatial boundary from periurban bairro into suburban or cidade areas. At one level this reflects perceived problems of transgressing such boundaries, for both economic/cultural (cidade) and security/social (suburbio) reasons, yet the desire to remain in their own bairro – despite such areas being at odds with the hegemonic perception of urban life – reflects the importance of community and belonging in dense, complex urban settings such as Maputo.

Maxaquene B and Maxaquene C

Maxaquene B and C are neighbouring bairros and are part of the urban Kamaxakeni section (see Figure 1). Their inhabitants frequently distinguish among urban spaces in terms of a series of opposites irreducible to formal versus informal or canico versus cimento: urban versus peripheral zones, organised versus disorganised areas, and calm versus dangerous communities, for example. Across gender and age, for most interlocutors these opposites reflect a sense of historical development from tightly governed and relatively peaceful bairros to places where tension, crime and lack of urban development dominate the ‘actuality of place’. These perceptions of what we might term urban desires harbouring the ‘potentiality of urban space’ arguably fall into three different categories: the colonial or immediate postcolonial past (often discursively construed as harbouring possibilities that inhabitants are currently inhibited from realising). These categories – all reflecting potentialities (irrespective of their ‘realisability’) – are exemplified in some detail below.

In the words of 65-year-old male Maxaquene B resident Paulo, a widower originally from the rural areas south of Maputo and a former book shop clerk:

The colonial era here was good for me. I cannot talk for others but it was good here. As long as you paid your taxes it was good. It was also much cheaper – with 50 meticais [Mozambican currency] you could provide the family with three meals a day. There was also much more space here – houses were not so close to one another. And there was order at that time – the youth respected the older people; not like now.

Interestingly, Paulos’s recollection does not only imbue the colonial urban regime with a rosy hue but is also extending his experience to the thrill of the early postcolonial era. Having grown up in the bairro and worked for a Portuguese trader in the late colonial days, Paulo experiences his bairro having been taken over by problems of crime, poverty and social disintegration. Anita’s account contrasts Paulo’s: Born in Manhiça in southern Mozambique in 1953, she moved to Maputo’s Chamankulo and then to Maxaquene B before independence. She became a widow in 1980 and with six children in total is getting by through selling vegetables and other products in the Carimbo market in Maxaquene B. She recalls: ‘There was order during the Portuguese – that was good. But it was better when Frelimo came in – we became ‘house owners’ [donos da casa]. That time after independence was a good time. Things have changed now – they are more complicated’.

Second, and in contrast to this somewhat nostalgic perception of the urban bliss of
yesteryear, many inhabitants observe that the bairros ‘are full of people’. This idea that the space is cramped is also reflected in a general perception that the bairros are seen as suburbanos. In this context, ‘suburban’ does not reflect a spatial position in the urban planning cadastral sense but rather suggests being ‘sub-urban’: that is, lacking the qualities and objective features of urbanity. Three young women in their early 20s – all attending school and having lived their whole life in Maxaquene C – expressed this in the following way in January 2013 when heavy rain had seriously disrupted life in the bairro:

This is not urban – it is not supposed to be like this. Don’t you see the water entering all the houses, as there is no system to anything? There is also no lighting in the streets although all the houses here pay their own electricity. Instead of proper streets we have roads made of mud and sand. And at night you cannot walk around because of all the bandits that will assault you. It is not part of the city [cidade].

What is evident in this statement is that the notion of the urban being a well-lit, organised, secure and paved space is repeatedly conveyed as the antithesis of Maxaquene B and C and their congested spaces of often ramshackle houses, narrow alleys and absence of sanitary and other infrastructure. Interestingly, young women are not the only ones conveying the sense of Maxaquene as not being part of the city: bairro authorities, such as secretarios do bairro, who are almost universally Frelimo-affiliated, complain that bairro conditions do not qualify as urban for the same reasons as voiced above. Urbanity in this context, then, is an elusive promise: it exists only as potentiality, in stark contrast to actual conditions.

Third, there is a desire among the majority of the inhabitants to leave, a desire fuelled by seeing their bairros as congested, volatile and detached from the real cidade of well-built houses, formal employment, and cars and restaurants, as well as from the areas periféricas that are located far from the city’s opportunities for employment and income. Perhaps paradoxically, however, virtually no one encountered during fieldwork in 2012 and 2013 expressed the wish to move to bairros that are perceived as successfully urban, such as high-income Sommerschield or middle-class Alto Maé. Instead, Maputo’s western fringes were repeatedly mentioned as potential spaces for realisations of the urban, in particular Bairro Marracuene. José, a self-taught, self-employed electrician of 35 living in Maxaquene C and working mostly in the bairros, represents such a view: ‘Marracuene has a lot of space – you can build a big house there and it is calm [tranquilo]. It is not like in Maxaquene B, full of alleys, water everywhere and full of criminals’. However, in addition to notions about spaciousness, there was also an idea – again given in a part-nostalgic, part-hopeful tenor – that particularly Marracuene had retained a sense of community that many perceived as lost in Maxaquene B and C. Marracuene, then, is consistently narrated as a particular space for the potential realisation of both a desired urban lifestyle and an imagined, sought-after space of sociality that, in the eyes of many (but not all), contrasts starkly with a sense of fragmentation in Maxaquene B and C.

However, the above three-pronged discourse of desire also has its Other, which is embodied in areas of Maputo experienced and narrated as being beyond the reach of its inhabitants. Tellingly, this relationship – or, rather, non-relationship – is what characterises depictions of, for example, neighbouring Bairro Sommerschield. When mapping which areas are frequented, and despite distances being merely 4 km, most people interviewed claimed they never went to the centre of the city (with the exception of the
The aforementioned baixa area known for its inexpensive shops and markets. Moreover, when discussing Maputo’s bairros, its central and wealthy areas were hardly ever mentioned: they comprise spaces that are exempt from both discursive and actual engagement. Benjamin is a 47-year-old former soldier with the Mozambican army and a veteran of the civil war. He is now working as a security guard where he is given the national minimum monthly pay (approximately US$90 per month). Embittered by poverty, he explained in a slightly aggressive fashion to one of the authors why Maputo’s central areas were not visited: ‘Why should I go there? To do what?! It is not like before when we could go there to go to the cinema. Now – ah! – we do not have any money. If you do not have any money—why should you go there? This creates only problems and headaches’. This pervasive sense of experiencing a loss of access to the city is crucial: it points to high-income Sommerschield becoming a space that the disenfranchised and urban poor see themselves as expelled from. These zones of urban affluence and modernity, business and luxury housing, are unattainable sites of the urban project for Maxaquene inhabitants – except as locations for petty commerce, domestic work and other low-income generating activities. They represent a restricted ‘right to the city’ to which the acutely experienced disparities in wealth translate. Moreover, in many places in Maputo (and elsewhere) the current realization of a neoliberal urban policy ‘... marked by the proliferation of various forms of state-mediated market rule, by privatized and contractualized governance, and by widespread subordination to competitive logics ...’ (Theodore and Peck, 2012: 20), contrasts starkly with Mozambique’s early postcolonial period that bairro inhabitants sometimes recall as a time of hope and promise. Alberto, a man in his sixties and chefe do quarterāo in Maxaquene C, recounted: ‘When Frelimo came in after 1975, everything changed! The whole city was reorganized – we took over the city. We could go everywhere and it was very good. No – ah – it depends on money. I stay mostly here’.

Alto Maé and Malanga
In a city that has long been perceived as embodying a stark duality, Alto Maé is regarded as the epitome of the transition area, between the cimento and the suburbio. Its built environment contains both high-rise buildings and the more modest houses of Malanga, Chamanculo and Mafalala; racially and socially, from the colonial period Alto Maé has been where an emerging black middle-class has lived among middle-class mestiços and lower middle-class whites.

Including part of the baixa and intersected by Av. 24 de Julho and Av. Eduardo Mondlane, two of Maputo’s largest and busiest avenues, Alto Maé today is perhaps even more strongly perceived as a place of transition, change and shifting patterns. As some of our interlocutors expressed it, in a city that has clear demarcations of ‘rich bairros’ and ‘poor bairros’, Alto Maé, together with Malhanganale and Malanga, are perceived as bairros mistura (mixed neighbourhoods).

Many of Alto Maé’s families seem to be linked to formal employment or are owners of, or workers in, small businesses – they are hairdressers, carpenters and house builders. Alto Maé also contains considerable commercial activity. In addition to a great diversity of shops, restaurants and bars, the area hosts several markets. Mercado Estrela Vermelha is something of a landmark: people of different origin and from different areas of the city come to sell many kinds of goods – food, clothes, cars, car parts, phones, building material, or even drugs. Alto Maé is thus perceived as a place of great activity.
and dynamism. Fernando, in his late twenties, said, ‘in Alto Maê you never remain still, you can always find things to do and never get bored’. It is also a place of opportunities, or as Eurico, another young man who has lived in Alto Maê his whole life and who has currently several small businesses it the bairro put it – ‘in Alto Maê, you can always get by, you can always make businesses and find ways to make at least some 30 Meticaís a day’. However, the great movement and animação (animation) of Alto Maê is not always well-received by all residents. Older people, and especially women, find this animação rather a grande confusão (big mess): in this lack of ‘order’ they discern signs of Alto Maê’s ‘falling’ urbanity.

Walking westwards on Av. 24 de Julho, we reach Malanga. Although Malanga boasts high-rise buildings and old colonial houses, other areas in the post-independence period were occupied by war-displaced and rural migrants. Here, houses of canico and zinc intermingle with houses made of cement bricks; pot-holed streets end in narrow alleys where cars cannot enter. Malanga thus shows greater diversity than Alto Maê in both built environment and social composition. The parts of the bairro that border Alto Maê are in general inhabited by relatively well-off people, while there are also several areas where residents are visibly poor. As several of our interlocutors said, ‘one may find a very rich house next to another made of tin’.

Malanga also has great commercial activity. However, some of the informal trade in Malanga is more explicitly associated with illegal businesses than it tends to be in Alto Maê, with many interlocutors referring to drug dealing and to an active market of stolen goods – in particular car parts and goods stolen from trains in the CFM railway station, which is close to Alto Maê.

On the whole, in their discourses about Maputo, residents of Alto Maê and Malanga tend to have a dual perception of the urban space, differentiating the cidade from what they call the suburbio, bairros suburbanos or áreas periféricas; or, they establish a trichotomy that spatially differentiates within the cimento. Some residents of Alto Maê and Malanga structure Maputo into bairros organizados – that is, neighbourhoods such as Sommerschield, Polana, and Ponta Vermelha, sometimes including Bairro Central, where there is a clearly established grid-like street structure, high-rise buildings, and services; bairros desorganizados – such as Alto Maê, Malanga, and Malhangalene, where space is structured similarly to Bairro Central but where infrastructure is run down, abundant rubbish is visible on the streets and there are numerous informal traders; and, finally, the suburbio – which comprises the rest of the city outside the cidade de cimento. Other residents, especially young people, refer to the cidade de cimento as simply cidade, and highlight within this area a smaller part that they denominate ‘town’ using the English term which, according to them, has been adopted from popular American television series of the 1990s and which also serves to underline the urban, affluent and global. ‘Town’, according to these younger people, corresponds to the wealthier neighbourhoods of Maputo, located in particular around what they also call the Museu area (Ponta Vermelha and Polana). Influenced still, they say, by the same television series, at times they also use the term ‘ghetto’ or ‘mato’ (bush) to refer to the areas they associate with suburbio. Residents of Alto Maê and Malanga tend to perceive urban space as being outside the cidade de cimento, as undifferentiated suburbio – although things seem to be changing, as discussed below.

Although Alto Maê and Malanga residents often adopt a trichotomy to describe Maputo’s urban space, then, the trichotomy they use differs from that of the residents
from Inhagoia, 25 de Junho, and Maxaquene B and C, analysed above. Rather, Alto Maé and Malanga’s residents introduce nuances into the idea of the cimento in which they live, with which they have greater familiarity and whose dynamics they know more intimately. Perceptions of the urban space are linked to the subjects’ positions, after all, and to experiences and practices of their urban space (Bourdieu, 1979).

Residents of these areas also seem to adopt modernist urban conceptions – ‘representations of space’ (Lefebvre, 2003 [1970]) – derived from a colonial and postcolonial history of urban development, and that associate (proper) urban space with geometric structure, order and strict cleanliness (Bank, 2011; de Certeau, 1990; Roque, 2011). Thus, we find the ‘falling’ urbanity of these areas in the eyes of some of their residents, as expressed here by Suzy, a 19-year-old student, who lived previously in Bairro Central before she moved to Alto Maé with her parents a few years ago:

when I came to live in Alto Maé, I thought I was living in the cidade. But that was only apparently – too much disorder and rubbish around, too many decaying buildings and informal vendors on the streets. A true city ... needs to be organized, and Alto Maé lacks organization; a true city needs to have restaurants that close at established times ... and there is too much noise until very late into the night; and barracas [informal stalls] should be allowed only in the market.

Although residents of Alto Maé and Malanga may have modernist ideals of what urban space should be like, and many may seem harsh when assessing the urbanity of their neighbourhoods and can dreamily describe the beauty, calm and order in the Museu area (the town, the proper city), they must also deal with the reality of their lives, its energy, joy and the struggle to get by and make do. Many Alto Maé and Malanga residents are also aware of the rapid changes that Maputo is undergoing, transforming neighbourhoods and twisting the lines of historically built spatial divisions. They refer to improvements in bairros as far apart as Chamanculo and Zimpeto, where the cidade is arriving. They also see wealthier areas encroaching on what was until recently suburbio, and they can point to expensive houses, with big cars, high walls and TV antennas that show rich people are also now living in the suburbio. Perhaps the perception and the experience of the changes that Maputo is undergoing will allow for value and legitimacy to be conferred on a multiplicity of (actualised) urban forms, for a diversity of ‘scripts for citiness’ (Myers, 2011: 81) to be recognised and for new imaginaries of the urban (potentiality of space) to emerge, which may change the relationship between what is perceived as formal and informal and therefore to novel conceptions of urban space to take root.

Discursive dynamics engaging, transcending and subverting dichotomies

People in Maputo perceive urban spaces in a multitude of ways in the context of historically constituted and hegemonic distinctions between the ‘city of cement’ and the ‘city of reeds’. As we have shown, interlocutors from various bairros actively relate to and, in effect, engage, appropriate and transcend these and other distinctions producing multisemic novel constellations intimately connected to their lived experiences of Maputo. These constellations may take the shape of describing Maputo as a trichotomy of urban, suburban and periurban zones largely centred around spatial organisation, housing, employment opportunities, security and violence (see also Bertelsen, 2009). However, more than comprising analytic models, the
particular trichotomies described here exemplify possible configurations that have emerged from the ongoing layering of distinctions along which the material and symbolic markers of space become more specific and elaborate the closer one gets to one’s own urban place. For some bairro inhabitants, the hegemonic link between formality and modern urban living, while placing them at the antithesis of ‘what it is to be urban’, is also evaluated against their sense of community and security in the bairro in which they live. Experiencing Maputo in this way, as a simultaneous actuality and potentiality of space, many opt for staying in their bairro despite its informality in order to pursue what one interlocutor called ‘realistic dreams’, which refers to an increasing tendency to see the formal city and the new peripheral bairros as unattainable urban spaces.

For others, in bairros within the cidade de cimento, hegemonic representations of space have been at least partly appropriated and forged to shape (personal or collective) urban ideals. For these people, the urbani ty of their bairros has decayed and declined, leaving them with a nostalgic sense of loss and a perception that a project remains unfulfilled. But this feeling is also countered in practice by an active engagement with everyday urban life and space, which may change ‘what it is to be urban’.

Thus, hegemonic discourses, which bisect the city into ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ areas, and prescribe ‘formalisation’ as a panacea, feed into the urban imaginaries of Maputo’s residents and are interchangeably engaged, transcended and subverted in ongoing discursive dynamics. However, a lack of progress towards such ‘formalisation’ in many areas, and the fact that Maputo is changing rapidly, undermines these hegemonic approaches to the city’s spaces with people in the bairros developing their own notions and imaginaries refuting or skewing officialese discourses – as in the people in Maxaquene quoted above who claim that their bairro is not part of cidade.

Henri Lefebvre observed that the urban form in general is revolutionary in the sense that its spaces produce an openness to political change and other forms of being (Lefebvre, 2003 [1970]) and similar observations are also regularly made by thinkers on revolutionary change, such as Badiou (2012). Further, Mozambican radical post-independence politics spearheaded by Frelimo was, as noted above, also geared towards fundamentally changing the urban order – imposing novel organisational, political and social structures of mobilisation, vigilance and control. This paper supports such an understanding of the urban predisposition to change but also shows how this may also be captured through analysis of the varied discursive dynamics in different Maputo bairros, which themselves express (and perhaps also produce) the increasingly accepted diverse forms of being urban. If we agree with Lefebvre that the urban form is revolutionary, then perhaps the diverse discursive dynamics and the different forms of being urban that are emergent in rapidly changing Maputo may over time impact on the production of urban policy in a way that will put less emphasis on what is perceived as formal and informal urban space and be more sensitive towards what urban life really is.

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**Notes**

1. **Frente de Libertação de Moçambique** (Front for the Liberation of Mozambique).

2. One of the few remaining signs of the abrupt transition following Independence (in 1975), from a socialist ideal to the laissez-faire capitalism promoted by the IMF and the World Bank from the late 1980s onwards, has been the government’s decision to retain street names that honour old heroes such as Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and Rosa Luxemburg – ironically names adorning streets in Maputo’s most affluent bairros.

3. As if to counteract the continued colonial administrative order, the names of the seven urban districts were in 2010 changed from the rather dreary ‘Urban District Nr. 1, 2, 3’, etc., to historical names taken from the first chiefs (régulos) of each district such as the District of KaMubukwana, KaMpfumu, etc.

4. Other ‘trichotomic distinctions’ have also been used to describe other African postcolonial cities. See Myers (2011: 92) for Dar-es-Salaam, and Roque (2009, 2011) for Benguela and Luanda.

**References**


