Othering the State: On the Delegitimization of Formal Urban Governance Structures Through Spatial Insurgencies in Maputo, Mozambique

Morten Nielsen[1]

[1.] Aarhus University, Department of Anthropology and Ethnography, Aarhus, Denmark

etnomn@hum.au.dk

Similar to many other post-colonial nation-states in sub-Saharan Africa, Mozambique has been incapable of creating a viable urban governance system with sufficient capacities for accommodating the rapidly increasing informal populations living on the cities' fringes. In Maputo, the country's capital, newcomers gain access to plots of land through illicit transactions with local-level officials and former land-owners who parcel out and sell off entire sections of peri-urban neighbourhoods which subsequently appear to imitate state-defined urban norms, e.g. regarding plot size and street width. Hence, considering the weak administrative capacities, informal occupancy is generally accepted provided it physically resembles what the state *might* have done. In many instances, however, public construction projects are being drafted for areas hitherto occupied by informal residents. In this paper, I consequently explore how state intentions interweave and clash with informal planning schemes. Although the Maputo Municipality has frequently attempted to remove informal residents with force, these strategies tend to fail. According to state and municipal officials, forceful resettlement equals an eradication of the only visible trace of functioning urban governance which is, paradoxically, its many scattered imitations. Hence, in a peculiar inverse manner, the state becomes its own other when confronted by its physical realization through illicit parcelling schemes. The paper is based on ethnographic case-studies of two violent conflicts where the Maputo Municipality attempted (and failed) to construct a primary school and an elder's home in a neighbourhood on the northern outskirts of the city.