

Landscapes of Conflict and Movement – Violence and Belonging in Northern Mozambique

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In September 2005, following contested local elections, there were riots in the town of Mocimboa da Praia, in Northern Mozambique. I will use these violent events as a means to understanding some of the strains and transformations (demographic, political, religious) that affected Cabo Delgado during the twentieth century. I finish by discussing the relevance of the study of long-term movement patterns and their spatial expression, to understanding intergroup tensions that can be the result of or result in sudden violence. The riots of 2005, though isolated events, are nevertheless telling of local population dynamics and illuminate issues of identity and belonging and especially the ongoing construction of difference, in this part of Mozambique. The northern districts have been characterised by constant movement during the last century, and have been termed by some as 'areas of transit'. This paper will explore the diverse forms of movement and its consequences for present day social relationships.

Based on fieldwork conducted in Mozambique between 2005 and 2007, drawing in particular on participant observation, and extensive interviews, I will discuss changes in the social landscape of the north of Mozambique and the ways these relate to displacement caused by two wars (1964-1974; 1976-1992) and the following period of peace. I will analyse the ways in which the change in population dynamics affected local relationships between different ethnic groups (Makonde and Mwani) inhabiting the area and how these have been used politically.