The Routledge Handbook of Henri Lefebvre, The City and Urban Society

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Still burning

Publication details
Oscar Olivier-Didier
Published online on: 05 Dec 2019

How to cite: - Oscar Olivier-Didier. 05 Dec 2019, Still burning from: The Routledge Handbook of Henri Lefebvre, The City and Urban Society Routledge
Accessed on: 03 Aug 2023

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Introduction

Maputo, the capital of a country considered one of the emerging economies in Africa (see, for instance, United Nations 2013), as a result of the discovery and exploitation of strategic natural resources, is crossing what Rolnik (2015: 15) describes as a ‘colonisation of the urban land and housing by the global finance’. Following the language of finance and economics, the territory is reduced to its exchange-value and to the prospective of future capital gains, serving the relations of ownership or property more and more to define – or block – rights, such as the right to the place or, in a general way, the right to the city, as understood by Lefebvre ([1968] 2012). The Mozambican government, as a condition for being granted loans by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, as happened with many of the neighbouring countries (Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Zambia and Zimbabwe), was forced to adopt a program of structural adjustment in 1987, under the umbrella of ‘international aid’, setting the stage for the neoliberal paradigm.

Regardless of the particularities of each historical-geographic context, the great role played by governments in the conduct of this process, the generalised increase of the insecurity of occupation or possession by lower income groups, the advance of forced evictions and, consequently, the violation of human rights tend to be recurrent. The demolition of extensive areas for megaprojects of infrastructure and urban renewal (see Figure 8.1) represents, in this sense, one of the main intervention strategies driven by the ongoing commodification and financialisation of urban spaces in Southern Africa. Any of these actions in inhabited spaces proves to be particularly violent when it occurs in the territories whose tenure is indefinite or read, by the new legal-urbanistic instruments, as illegal or irregular. More easily therefore appropriated by the local governments or private investors, these spaces, much of them self-produced, represent a vast territory waiting for the ‘right moment’ (Rolnik 2015: 174).

Immersed in the neoliberal paradigm, particularly in its expression in Maputo, this chapter is born of a set of questions and concerns about the present and the future of what Lefebvre designated as ‘prohibited places’ ([1974] 1991: 332, 366): spaces that, by their strategic location...
Silvia Jorge

Prohibited places from a market point of view, are reduced to the one-dimensionality of their exchange-value and fall into a situation of increasing vulnerability. With a focus on the pericentral self-produced neighbourhoods of Maputo, which have attracted a growing number of private investors and promoters in recent years, we analysed the new city model, the urban interventions and the everyday practices, as well as the interactions established between the different agents involved in their transformation, starting from a recent larger investigation about these places (Jorge 2017).

Within the tradition of critical theory about the socio-spatial inequalities generated by the capitalist mode of production, we follow Lefebvre’s perspective on the production of space ([1974] 1991) and on the right to the city ([1968] 2012), crossing his vast work with other authors with a similar perspective. Starting from his dialectic approach, we seek to perceive and to analyse how the double movement of centralisation and fragmentation develops in the context of Maputo, understanding the contradictions formed between use-value and exchange-value, as well as the possibilities of resistance and social change. Taking into account global trends, we put forward the hypothesis that the pericentral self-produced neighbourhoods constitute ‘prohibited places’ due to the one-dimensionality of their exchange-value, but also ‘interdicted places’ to this same commodification, when voices and practices of resistance increase their use-value.

‘A deurbanising and deurbanised urbanisation’

(Lefebvre 2012[1968]: 17)

The Mozambican capital, today with more than one million inhabitants, about 70% of them living in self-produced spaces, is a creation of capitalism, a result of the unequal relations of exploitation that marked the colonial period, not a ‘beautiful oeuvre’ in the sense attributed by Lefebvre to some cities prior to industrialisation ([1968] 2012: 17). As in other African cities,
but also in many other regions of the world (see for instance Davis 2006), their periphery expresses what Lefebvre described as ‘a deurbanising and deurbanised urbanisation’ ([1968] 2012: 30).

In the Maputo case, the city expands around the old planned centre, of colonial origin, drawing a periphery progressively more distant, that ends up finding other neighbouring agglomerates and forming what some authors define as the Metropolitan Area of Maputo (Jenkins 2012) or Greater Maputo (Macucule 2016). Although we may consider the existence of new small centralities, such as Zimpeto, Xiquele or Xipamanine, the KaMpfumo district – the old planned centre – persists as the city centre par excellence. It concentrates the economic activities of greater volume and capital, the head offices of big companies and (multi)national agencies, the main services and administrative buildings, as well as a greater number of social equipment and infrastructures, as a result of public and private investment in their maintenance, recovery or reconstruction over time (Raposo 2007). In line with Lefebvre ([1968] 2012), the centrality assumes here its dual character: the place of consumption and the consumption of place. That means that, on the one hand, it is established as a centre of consumption and decision, wealth, information and knowledge, and, on the other hand, parallel to the concentration of relations of consumption and power, it fragments the space, generating ‘recommended places’ and ‘prohibited places’ (Lefebvre [1974] 1991: 332, 366).

Following this double movement of centralisation and fragmentation, the spaces around the KaMpfumo district assume a clear and defined socio-economic character: to ensure the continuity of ‘abstract space’ described by Lefebvre. In other words, the instrumentalisation of space, expressing the strategies of capital reproduction and the perpetuation of the social relations that constitute it, expels those who threaten its purely economic function ([1968] 2012; [1974] 1991). In this sense, the pericentral self-produced neighbourhoods reflect simultaneously the incapacity of the complete subordination to hegemonic rationality, which Santos ([1996] 2008: 309) calls ‘anti-rationality’ – and which generates the place of the poor and excluded – and the incessant demand for production of ‘abstract space’.

Although these places have always occupied a strategic location (see Jorge 2017), it is in the neoliberal context that the production and transformation of space by capital tends to become more expressive in the pericentral self-produced neighbourhoods. At the end of the 1990s, Araújo (1999: 178–179) warned of their ‘rapid process of transformation’, particularly intense in the vicinity of Sommerschield, one of the city’s noblest neighbourhoods. More recently, other authors, such as Vivet (2012) and Jorge (2015), emphasise the intensification of renewal and gentrification actions, both near Sommerschield, as well as along the coastline and the main access roads to the city centre. The pressure on the pericentral spaces therefore increases, especially in this new millennium, as a result of the consolidation of the neoliberal policies adopted since the late 1980s.

A hegemonic model of abstraction

The adoption of the structural adjustment program marks the beginning of a set of deep economic and political changes with a strong impact on the territory, enabling the establishment of networks of multinational companies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) which today operate in the country and with whom the State has shared the responsibility of urban planning and management. In a first phase, its implementation focused mainly on monetary and financial instruments (devaluations, fiscal restraints) and the basic economic framework (privatisation, liberalisation of markets), contributing to rising levels of unemployment and poverty (Oppenheimer and Raposo 2007). Nevertheless, the program also triggered the passage from a
‘Populist State’ to a ‘Democratic State’ (see Serra 2013), reflected in the constitutional amendments introduced in 1990 and 2004. While the 1975 Constitution enshrined a single-party system and a planned and centralised economy, the 1990 Constitution introduced a democratic regime and recognised the market economy, encouraging private initiative and the freedom of enterprise and investment, even though the land remained as State property. In turn, the 2004 Constitution reaffirmed the guidelines enunciated in 1990, reinforcing the dimension of land value and the decriminalisation of its speculation.

According to Francisco (2013), the new function attributed to the State, apparently regulatory, allowed for the conversion of public policies into a new form of interventionism in economic activity, created and fomented, in large part, by the political party Frelimo, which has been in power since independence. Controlling the State, the party controls the natural resources, which are globally strategic and have a high market value, as well as the main productive asset of the population – the land – also the target of a valorisation process, particularly intense in the pericentral self-produced neighbourhoods. Some authors, such as Francisco (2013) and Waty (2011), consider that the current Constitution subordinates political power to economic power through the control of access to land, a fact perhaps related to the increase of corruption and conflicts of interest in the neoliberal context (see, e.g., Hanlon 2004). Following Lefebvre’s reflections ([1968] 2012; [1972] 2001), the State and capital are allied in the creation of the unitary system and total urbanism, inducing a technological and technocratic rationality.

Indeed, under the influence of international agencies, Mozambique, like other African countries, has incorporated in the last decades, through deep legal reforms, new models of access, planning and management of urban land, distinct from pre-existing spaces. Although these models are presented by some academics and international agencies as essential for the resolution of urban problems, they have had a perverse effect. According to authors such as Souza (2011) and Maricato ([2000] 2013), the positivist and technocratic view of urban planning underlying these models ignores the incapacity that they have revealed over time in solving the socio-spatial inequalities and masks the conflicts and real causes of urban problems. In the 1970s, Lefebvre went further in considering that in ‘the transparent air of functional and structural legitimacy’ lay the technological and technocratic rationality of ‘abstract space’ ([1974] 1991: 317–318). The notion of planning as an instrument of political and economic power is reinforced by Sposito (2011), who considers that it is mainly the result of the adoption of these recent models that in the last decades have spread capitalist relations of production, domination and property on a global scale, as well as the idea of a unique society – the occidental one – devaluing other specific societies with different values, practices, ways of living and of producing space. This occidental ethnocentrism represents, in line with Lefebvre, ‘a hegemonic model of abstraction’ in the sense of ignoring concrete ‘social space’ and, consequently, everyday practices.

The new constellation of powers, responsibilities and interests reignited the market logic (see Jorge 2017). The city centre, already urbanised, gathered most of the interventions assumed by the government and private investors and promotors. Meanwhile, the role of the NGOs was strengthened in self-produced neighbourhoods, especially at the level of local urban management, but, as Raposo and Ribeiro (2007) reveal, their action tends to be occasional and of a charitable nature. The continuous population growth and the inoperability or inability of response by the entities responsible for urban planning and management led to: the extensive development of the territory in the 1990s, characterised by an increase of the average growth rates in the more peripheral districts; the densification of the pericentral neighbourhoods through the progressive subdivision of plots and the occupation of environmentally sensitive areas; and the deterioration of living and housing conditions, mainly as a result of overcrowding and the absence and/or deterioration of basic services and infrastructures (Oppenheimer and Raposo 2002).
Zones of natural risk

The large floods of 2000 represented a turning point in the way that technicians, politicians and civil society in general perceived the pericentral self-produced neighbourhoods, particularly affected by the heavy rains that were felt in February of that year and, already before, in 1998. Many families were resettled in different peripheral neighbourhoods and, from then, the pericentral ones were considered ‘zones of natural risk’. This general classification has served as support for some actions of urban renewal, but it has not prevented the reoccupation of the same spaces by groups with greater resources, following on the idea that the land and nature are inexhaustible and that the risks are always acceptable as long as economically profitable.

Since then, urban renewal has assumed increasing preponderance, being associated with most of the partial urbanisation plans proposed for the pericentral self-produced neighbourhoods, with the (re)construction of structural roadways and megaprojects that imply the total or partial demolition of houses, as well as various projects launched in the city centre, where some buildings of historical interest gave way to high towers. The preference for this kind of intervention is due to the real estate interests involved and the primacy of the urban model in which they are inscribed, as well as, in the particular case of the pericentral neighbourhoods, to the negative image that accompanies them (Jorge 2017). This urban renewal has therefore implied the removal and resettlement of the families affected by these actions to peripheral districts through expropriations for ‘public interest’, compensated at best with the attribution of a land plot and some money, usually far from the legally defined ‘fair compensation’ (Jorge 2017).

However, in most of the peripheral neighbourhoods, the local government’s engagement in the division of land, urban upgrading and land regularisation reveals another perception of the territory and other interests and strategies (see Melo 2015). Although the basic infrastructures and equipment are slow to arrive and environmentally sensitive areas are being occupied (for instance Chihango), the perception of these territories tends to be more positive, mainly due to their morphological characteristics and the rural nature that, in some cases, they maintain. The factors that determine or influence these different intervention proposals range from a more or less positive perception of a particular space to its location and commercial valuation. These factors denounce the ambiguity and arbitrariness that surround the current legal framework and the State’s action, which legitimises some occupations and not others, depending on market logic (Jorge 2015).

Nevertheless, despite the strong investment in planning, the implementation of the so-called partial urbanisation plans is rarely concluded, unlike the megaprojects and the improvements in the road network, such as the (re)construction of the Great Circular of Maputo and the Julius Nyerere avenue, which have been achieved through partnerships with private investors and promotors, other countries and/or international alliances. Generators of expropriation, urban renewal, valorisation and gentrification processes, these large-scale interventions foster the parallel real estate market along the intervened spaces, taking into account the same unspoken objectives of the renewal plans: the expansion of ‘abstract space’ described by Lefebvre with the resulting expulsion of those who threaten its economic function. Considered as a company, the city tends to be conceived and thought of as an economic agent, which operates for the (global) market, considering planning as a mere accessory, resorted to or dispensed with according to the dominant interests and the market dynamics. This does not imply a renunciation of planning, but rather an elimination or reduction of the long-term rules, norms and limitations that could prevent or delay capitalist accumulation, favouring ‘informal’ agreements and procedures that facilitate and benefit this accumulation, within the spirit of negotiations and partnerships.
of circumstance (Souza 2006). It is what Harvey (1989) designates as ‘entrepreneurship’, characterised by an uncritical submission to market interests and an obsession with attracting new investments.

‘The ideas out of the place and the place out of the ideas’

\[\text{Maricato [2000] 2013: 121}\]

As in so many other contexts dominated by the neoliberal paradigm, the State assumes an economic role, producing, as Rolnik (2015: 14) underlined, its urban margins, to thereby ‘unlock its territorial assets’ and ‘to increase the market frontiers’. In the case of the strategically located pericentral self-produced neighbourhoods of Maputo, the local government: (i) does not guarantee the safeguarding of acquired rights by occupation in good faith, as foreseen by the law; (ii) encourages the elaboration of partial urbanisation plans inscribed in the market logic, preventing or hindering the formulation of alternative interventions; (iii) uses expropriation for ‘public interest’ and subsidises the construction of infrastructures and megaprojects in order to attract companies/agents interested in investing and locating there; and (iv) ignores the parallel market, denied by law, and subsequently assigns titles of land use to the new occupants, denied to the inhabitants who lived there, in many cases, for several decades (Jorge 2017). On the one hand, we are witness to the (in)voluntary displacement of a growing number of inhabitants to more and more peripheral neighbourhoods, and on the other hand, to the conversion of self-produced spaces into commercial and residential spaces destined to groups with greater resources, strengthening ‘the ideas out of place and the place outside the ideas’ that Maricato ([2000] 2013: 121) alludes to.

This play on words refers to the gap between the matrixes that substantiate the urban planning and legislation and the local reality and specificity of self-produced neighbourhoods: ‘the ideas out of place’ enunciated in the greater part of the current legal-urbanistic instruments correspond to nothing and, simultaneously, ‘the places outside the ideas’, which are the self-produced neighbourhoods, have no presence in the city model advocated by the dominant class. Underlying this reading are the two dynamics of space enunciated by Lefebvre ([1974] 1991) – the ‘abstract space’ and the ‘social space’. The first, as we referred to earlier, is associated with strategies of capital reproduction and with the perpetuation of the social relations that constitute it, while the second is forged from everyday practices, translating the plurality of life modes and appropriated forms of the space.

In a context where the land, from a legal point of view, is the property of the State and cannot be sold, mortgaged or pledged, the everyday practices are far removed from the principles set forth in the Constitution and in the reigning legislation (see Jorge 2016). As Jorge demonstrates (2016, 2017), the analysis of the transformation of the pericentral self-produced neighbourhoods reveals that not only is the access to land and to housing hostage of market logic, but also that the local, district and municipal structures are involved in the parallel real estate market, facilitating contact with private investors and promotors. A strong alliance between the political power and economic power is also present in the (re)construction of structural roadways and megaprojects and, finally, in the elaboration of the partial urbanisation plans. The use of expropriation for ‘public interest’, a concept coated with contradictions and ambiguities (Habermas [1973] 2007), aims at the improvement of the accessibility and, with it, the promotion of the parallel real estate market, opening new ways and possibilities for business. Furthermore, the existence of a plan, beyond legitimating market logic and the ongoing transformation, reiterates the intention of the local government to extend the urban renewal and gentrification actions to other spaces, consuming, at the limit, the whole extension of these neighbourhoods in the name
of the ‘public interest’. In this sense, there are many inhabitants, with different aspirations and perceptions of their rights, that choose to sell their houses, moving away from the city centre, that is, from the main work opportunities and means of survival.

Another face of the ‘prohibited places’

Although it is difficult for there to be any type of individual or collective mobilisation against dominant interests and practices, in the face of intimidation, lack of information and the individualisation of the processes of acquisition, it is possible to identify some practices and focuses of resistance (Jorge 2017). At the level of inhabitants, we highlight: (i) the refusal of any kind of negotiation by inhabitants that, instead of the exchange-value, privilege the use-value of the neighbourly relations built over time, and the pleasure of living in the neighbourhood; (ii) the setting of very high sales prices by inhabitants to demotivate the purchase and pushing away potential buyers or intermediaries, thereby impeding or delaying their removal from the neighbourhood; and (iii) the denunciation, to the media, of forced evictions and of situations of discrimination and socio-spatial exclusion, in an attempt to prevent the continuation of some particularly violent actions, some of them realised with the consent of the municipal, district and local structures.

In addition, among technicians and members of NGOs involved in these processes, despite the many contradictions, we highlight those who: (i) confronted with partial urbanisation plans based on the tabula rasa of pre-existing urban fabric, criticise and deny the underlying market logic imposed by the local government; (ii) continue to create and implement awareness-raising projects on the right to housing and the right to the place after the approval of the renewal plans; and (iii) seek to counteract the risk of gentrification inherent in a future intervention proposal and to defend that which they consider to be the interests and needs of the current inhabitants, reflecting critical and reflexive thinking.

These are micro-resistances – forged in everyday life, in a situation of confrontation or professional practice committed to the inclusion and democratisation of the urban space – capable of reversing or contradicting, even if occasionally and often in a silent way, the relations of power and domination (Certeau 1998). In some cases, especially in those promoted and conducted by the inhabitants, it has been possible to prevent the expansion of the borders of commodification and financialisation of the urban space. In others, it has not been possible to go beyond good intentions and sweet words. However, the risk of a more extensive action of resistance or revolt by inhabitants, before the possibility of a total renewal of these places, can be one of the factors that justifies the delay or refusal by the local government to implement the renewal plans in full. Simultaneously, this same risk promotes the use of other strategies by the local government, namely ignoring the urban plan and closing their eyes to the parallel real estate market, while investing in infrastructure, which enhances market dynamics and triggers gradual renewal actions. Implicitly or explicitly, the practices and foci of resistance of the inhabitants show that, despite their limited room for manoeuvre, the iniquities of the dominant system continue to generate opposition and its contradictions continue to be exploited, revealing that another future is possible.

Conclusions

The pericentral self-produced neighbourhoods of Maputo reveal a market dynamic which seeks to generate ‘prohibited places’ and fomenting gentrification processes, simultaneously destructive and indifferent to the local realities, by supporting the tabula rasa of the pre-existing fabric
and by imposing a city model far removed from local necessities. As we saw, the processes of renewal and gentrification are both inscribed in several of the urban plans, but also in the parallel real estate market and in the ambit of megaproject construction, implying in turn massive resettlements. Transversal to all of these processes is the recourse to violence, dissimulated by the exchange-value – especially when the associated transactions involve values never before imagined by the inhabitants – or evident in the use of force and coercion or by the more or less silent defence of the use-value.

However, in a context where the political party Frelimo and the State fuses and, more recently, in which emerges a strong alliance between the political power and the economic power, the self-produced neighbourhoods of Maputo also constitute ‘laboratories’ of resistance. Here, new ways of solidarity and critical discourses are engendered, and the consciousness of rights, ideas, strategies and new organisational structures germinates. Although everything tends to become a ‘product’ and is conducted by the language of commodities, the use-value resists irreducibly against the centralisation-fragmentation movement that marks the current transformation of these places. Practices and foci of resistance emerge among inhabitants, but also among technicians and members of NGOs involved in these processes. Far from triggering a collapse of the dominant system, the moment is now one of experimentation and learning from the praxis, even though the resistance is territorially circumscribed and, at a first sight, modest. Following the ideal of the right to the city, we are present before a struggle, in and through space, centred on the appropriation and collective achievement. Rescuing the hypothesis proposed, the ‘prohibited places’ carry a double meaning: the one-dimensionality of their exchange-value, but also the voices and practices of resistance that raise their use-value.

References

Prohibited places


