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Circumventing the investor-friendly city and displaceability in Maputo's street economy space

Vera Polido Baeta, Beacon Mbiba and Georgia Butina-Watson

This article explores how street economy workers are resisting the condition of 'displaceability' imposed upon them via exclusionary market-led redevelopment and state-municipal practices in Maputo, Mozambique. In particular, it focuses on how street and market workers engage in forms of 'street politics' to build their rights to produce, to inhabit and to work in public spaces from which they are being excluded. Drawing on Yiftachel's notion of 'displaceability' and adopting a spatial perspective, we describe and discuss the main exclusionary aspects of current market-led redevelopment in Maputo's peri-central area, including municipal and state practices and the (non)use of planning laws. Against this background, we examine the circumventing tactics of street and market vendors. We construe these tactics in the terrain of social legitimacy—or actual rights—as forms of challenging market-driven state practices of demolitions, resettlement, forced zoning, and social banishing of street economy workers.

Keywords Maputo, displaceability, street economy, urban redevelopment

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Introduction: displaceability and counter forces

Since the 1990s, land speculation and market-driven urban redevelopment have churned out a new wave of ‘accumulation by dispossession’ across the globe (Harvey 2004). The increase of forced evictions, involuntary displacements and poorly compensated demolitions continue to make way for upscale redevelopments and city beautification operations with renewed dynamics of tenure insecurity (Rolnik 2019). Across many African cities, forms of accumulation by displacement of the poor have been recast on and from the divided cities inherited from the continent’s colonial past—in short, as Abahlali baseMjondolo (2016) argue: “post-colonial elites have aggressively adapted racial zoning to class”. These processes of spatial-class conflict are underpinned by what Yiftachel calls ‘gray spacing’ (2009) and the ‘displaceability’ (2020) of the working classes. Yiftachel (2020, 154) refers to the material, spatial and social conditions of a temporary, vulnerable living notably pertaining to housing and work but not limited to this nexus—i.e. conditions of “being susceptible to involuntary distancing from rights and resources” within urban areas. ‘Displaceability’ is an apt lens to look into the spatial conflicts brought by the advance of exclusionary redevelopment in Maputo and elsewhere. It offers a spatial-political frame to reveal the many forms of ‘dispossession by displacement’, but also to expose—to dismantle—the rationales behind institutional practices that directly or indirectly dispossess low-income urbanites from rights, resources, and means of production.

Spatial conflicts over the city’s physical transformation can also be construed as ‘moments of territorialisation’ (Melé 2008) in which both the penetration of capital and the resistance of the local population reproduce and transform the urban space. Indeed, new or unforeseen spatial and social relations of power ensue from conflict and dispute, including the emergence, upholding and advancement of ‘actual’ and statutory rights by those fighting against ‘displaceability’. We refer to actual rights as socially legitimate rights within a street politics that produces the city in everyday life dynamics. This notion concurs with Morange and Spire’s (2019, 13) definition of ‘actual rights’ which are built at the interface of state policies and the practices of city dwellers. Such rights emerge from a process made of diverse struggles as steps towards a larger political process of emancipation. Often, obtaining legal rights is not the end per se. This notion of rights presupposes the primacy of politics over policy because collective struggles have shown to actualise abstract rights, which is to say, rights are never given.

The struggles of street-workers vis-à-vis exclusionary market-led redevelopment have been the object of consistent analyses in critical urban studies (Lindell 2019). Seeing from Maputo, this article presents the drivers and the counter forces to the ‘displaceability’ of street economy workers. This is done by interrogating how Maputo’s street economy workers push back involuntary displacement and the ways they leverage their ‘actual rights’ in dismantling state practices of ‘displaceability’ of the poor. The article draws on fieldwork developed in Maputo in 2013 and 2019. A mixed method of qualitative research was used combining a spatial analysis (main redeveloped areas involving mass demolitions of the residential fabric and/or marketplaces

between 2013 and 2019) with interviews with various actors. Transect walks across the Costa do Sol area, daily travels in the city's 'chapas' buses, early contact with neighbourhood chiefs of blocks and, later on, personal contact with residents in the Polana Canico A and B neighbourhoods allowed to find willing interviewees and conduct a number of open in-depth and/or short in-situ interviews with street vendors and market stallholders operating in the Xikhelene hub and Julius Nyerere Av. in 2013 and in 2019. Chiefly among our interviewees in 2019, the current and also the former leader of the Xikhelene Market committee who we interviewed in the quality of head of the union of informal sectors workers (ASSOTSI) alongside the union's executive secretary and the chief of section in Baixa. In this article, we draw on their accounts in particular and highlight their views. The first section presents key underpinnings of current market-led urban redevelopment in Maputo highlighting the use of planning law and the implications of the spatial typology of private redevelopments within class-based neocolonial logics of differentiation and separation. In the second section, the focus is on empirical findings in the (peri)central area and in the Xikhelene hub in particular. We conclude by highlighting how on-the-ground tactics by those at risk of being displaced and dispossessed continually shape the city.

Market-led redevelopment and the displacement of the poor in Maputo: context and dynamics

Coinciding with the demise of the proto-socialist government after Independence (1975-1986) and after a Cold War proxy war, the Mozambican state was reshaped under the auspices of the International Monetary Fund (see Plank 1993). A new '*comprador*' class emerged around IMF-led widespread privatisation and foreign investments (Hanlon 2017). Steadfastly, the country returned to a natural-resources economy of extraction inserted in global corporate capitalism (Massarongo and Ossemane 2014). However, as Mbiba (2017) has shown in Zimbabwe, these neoliberal policies have spawned diverse land dispossession dynamics depending on local contexts. In Mozambique, land conflicts and land dispossession are mounting in rural and urban areas (Hanlon 2004; Matavel et al. 2011; Mandamule 2016). Struggling to make ends meet amidst de-regulated food prices, the vast majority in Maputo relies on traditional networks of mutual support and a relatively 'informal economy'—from cross-border export-import to small home-business models. Mosca (2010, 84) notes, the governing-business elite has been cushioned by the deprivation of informal workers whilst accumulating more wealth ripped from the '*remediado*' (the bearably poor) and the '*xiculungo*' (the utterly destitute).

In lockstep with the global trend of land commodification and speculation (Rolnik 2019), real-estate developers are now the main drivers of land purchases in peri-central neighbourhoods in Maputo—where low-income residents are effectively pressured to leave their houses and communities. Since at least the early 2010s, land investors have sought, and succeeded to some extent, to purchase the residents' land use titles (DUATS).¹ In tandem, state-led

demolitions and resettlements attached to large infrastructure works—the Circular ring road and the Maputo-Katembe Bridge—also displace the poor to the peri-urban region (see Melo 2016). In the peri-central area, the advance of high-end private developments upon the levelling of low-income home-spaces and neighbourhoods hinges on a web of factors (see e.g. Jenkins 2002; Jorge 2017), of which we highlight the paralegal land market and the contradictory legislation in urban areas.

Moreover, land commodification and speculation, via a paralegal land market, is on the rise despite its clear contradiction with the Constitution and Land Law, with land developers now easily buying several house-plots for little money thus amassing swathes of well-located land for upscale residential and commercial developments. The phenomenon is propitiated by the *laissez-faire* approach of the city council (CMM) and the state, leaving ‘market forces’ to work freely by practising ‘non-planning’ (Kamete and Lindell 2010). Another key factor is the legal contradiction between the national Land Law (*Lei de Terras* 1998) and the Constitution on one side, and the recent Urban Land Law (*Lei do Solo Urbano* approved in 2010) and the Urban Land Regulation (*Regulamento do Solo Urbano* 2006) on the other. The Mozambican Constitution and Land Law recognise customary and a 10-year occupation of the land in good faith (*‘usucapiao’*) as consuetudinary land rights (see e.g. Kihato and Raimundo 2013; Melo 2016). This progressive principle is challenged by the specific land law and regulation for urban areas which stipulate the approval of formal plans by the CMM as a precondition for the issuing of DUATs to urban residents (Forjaz et al. 2008, 167; Andersen, Jenkins, and Nielsen 2015, 340). Conflicts emerge from the ability of private investors, often state and CMM top officials, to use the formal planning route, thus gaining legal, statutory rights over occupied urban land.

Consequently, those living in the largely self-built neighbourhoods, albeit protected by the national Land Law, have been at a disadvantage when trying to secure their legal rights over their house-plots and, importantly, over the neighbourhoods they themselves built (see e.g. Home Space 2012). Beyond the legality, they have the social legitimacy of city-making, otherwise recognised for decades by the neighbourhoods’ secretaries which are decentralised state administrations (see Jenkins 2002). Overwhelmingly, the process of semi-forced displacement hinges on households’ financial vulnerability and the lure of developers’ cash proposals (see Jorge 2017, 190). But this is not a straightforward trade-off as conflicts run throughout due to forceful tactics used by investors to swiftly clear the land of any residents—including forced evictions and demolitions legalised with questionable court orders against many dwellers that refuse to sell their house-plots below market price.

Some aspects of recent state-municipal planning have helped real estate investors to legally grab swathes of well-located land. In the city’s master plan (*Plano de Estrutura* 2010) many of the low-income self-produced neighbourhoods in the peri-central area of Maputo have been classified as ‘unplanned’ (*‘desorganizado’*), i.e. areas of irregular morphology and sub-standard housing. Such classification means that they are not seen as fully legitimate occupations even when dwellers have been there for more than 10 years. Such classification has been used by the CMM to justify a ‘clean slate’ approach

(Jorge 2017), clearing the path for investor-designed redevelopments and the construction of a totally different urban fabric.

Planned or not, the advance of private redevelopments largely proceeds in an ad-hoc fashion through the paralegal land market. Across the sub-urban area of Costa do Sol, it includes land use conversion with construction advancing on marshes and crops. Reportedly, between 2010 and 2013, the conversion also involved municipal initiative with the CMM proposing to take up 30% of communal crop lands to be put in the real estate market or reserved for the resettlement² of people displaced due to state-led operations. Overall, land use conversion and ad-hoc land grabs by investors are practiced first by purchase, only later legalised by the CMM via planning law. In state or CMM planning initiatives, as in the processes in Polana Caniço (PC) and Maxaquene analysed by Jorge (2017), physical planning is handed over to the private sector alone while the city authority assumes the responsibility for dwellers' resettlement [*'reassentamento'*]. As put by a member of the municipal assembly:

the CMM is now specialised in the 'resettlement' of the poor far out of the city particularly when the idolatry of capital can be practised, and in those occasions the population is always invited to make way for the world of first-class citizens. [opposition council member quoted in the press]³

Current private redevelopments in the peri-central area advance through the specific spatial typology of gated communities aka *'condominios'*, imprinting a strict class-based differentiation in Maputo's territory. These are the secluded spaces of diplomatic staff, corporate cadres, and the Mozambican elite. Most prominent across Costa do Sol, *'condominios'* come to materialise the old colonial dream to expand the Portuguese-planned 'City of Cement'. Heavily secured, the residential walled compounds stem from the perception of a 'criminal outer' city to be kept at bay through the voluntary seclusion of the rich and active exclusion of the 'black-poor':

In South Africa the apartheid mentality left deep roots, the perception that every black African is a criminal... houses and cars are secured 24/7, and this mentality is being brought to Maputo. The Portuguese built a different city... of course the [racial] separation was real, but the typical white-South African mistrust was absent, there were neither walls nor condominiums, security was minimal, plot walls were short to the knee. But this 'open city' is disappearing.⁴

Adding to the spatial-class ordering right after Independence between the colonial 'City of Cement' and the African 'City of Reed' (see Morton 2013), the new schism builds on the physical *destruction* of the low-income neighbourhoods followed by the physical *enclosure* of the elite from the rest. Such '*destruction-enclosure*' in the redevelopment pattern renders a colonial subtext to officially-endorsed plans and CMM measures.

Amidst the continual removal of the poor, 'gray spaces' (Yiftachel 2009) of temporary, precarious living and labour emerge. In Polana Caniço A East (see Figure 1), the gradual demolition of the southern-eastern part of the

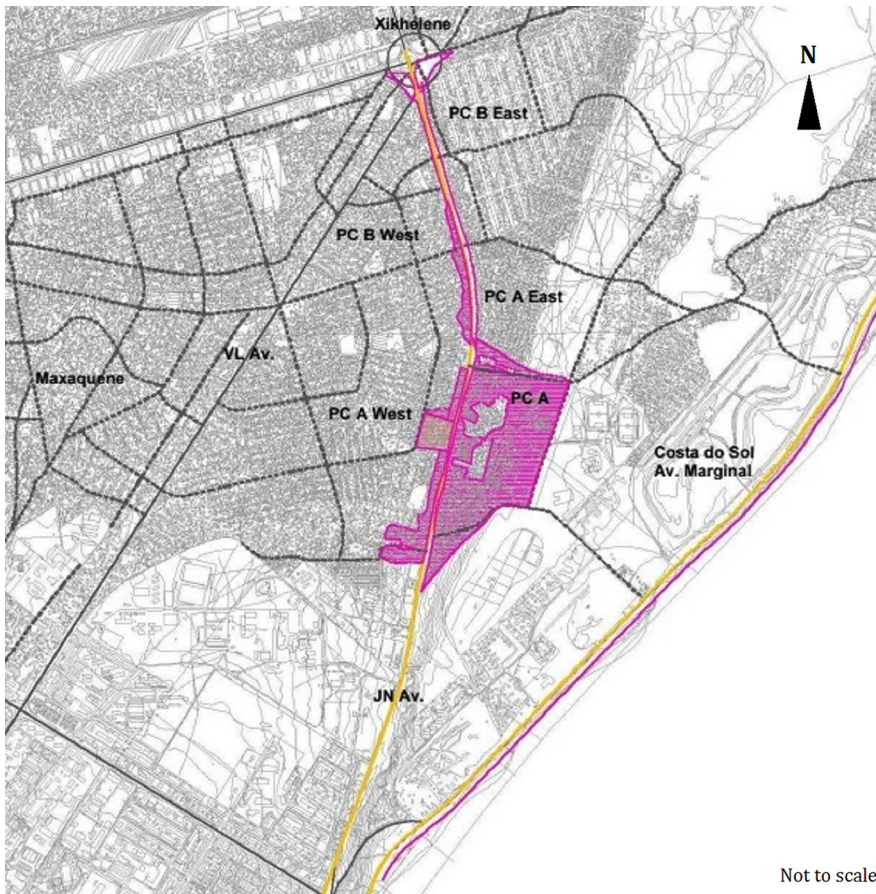


Figure 1: Demolished area in Polana Caniço over a period of 19 years [as of May 2019]. First along Julius Nyerere Av., demolitions have advanced westwards toward Maxaquene and northwards toward PC B and the Xikhelene hub. Source: authors' modification of city map [CMM 2010].

neighbourhood (initiated after the landslides of 2000 to present) means that the pre-existent residential fabric and public spaces have disappeared almost entirely. In their place, the high-end *condominios* along JN Av., clustered side-by-side, have effectively built an urban wall. As a result, through the fragmentation of the street-network and curtailed mobility, streets connecting to Polana Caniço A West are now virtually non-existent except one recently opened.⁵ Despite the reopening of Julius Nyerere Av. to traffic, as of August 2019, there are no 'chapas'⁶ routes or stops, the only artery for public transport being Vladimir Lenine Av. Active surveillance around the condominiums is a deterrent of public use as evinced along the walled fronts of JN Av. with its pavements now barren (see Figure 2). For pre-existing residents of Polana Caniço A East, these compounding forms of 'gray spacing' heightened a sense of 'displaceability' over the years ultimately leading many to semi-voluntary displacement—as told by some of the last residents, they cannot live 'fenced in', surrounded by rubble and houses they will never afford. The same applies to street workers and small business owners given that the absence of clients has resulted in them avoiding the area entirely.



Figure 2: A display of second hand clothes at Julius Nyerere Av. The stand signals the home business of one of the remaining residents in PC A East. Source: authors, July 2019.

Street vending and Maputo's market-transport hubs: resistance to demolitions, resettlement, 'cleansing', and 'enclaving'

Street workers often offer relentless resistance to the neocolonial thrusts of redevelopment that continually displace the poor. As in other African cities, vendors' resistance to demolitions and involuntary displacement in Maputo ranges from offering no opposition but gradually returning to their selling spots ['retreat-and-return'], to organised collective actions through vendors' associations. Street-vending in Maputo is not prohibited per se but restrictions of place apply (CMM Ordinance 53/AM/2006 and Ordinance 20/AMM/2014). Depending on type of trade and the city area, registered street vendors pay municipal levies as per each linear metre occupied. Given the restrictions of place, retreat-and-return is a tactic used by both unregistered and registered street-vendors, generally known by '*dumbanengue*' or '*informais*'.⁷ A well-known issue of tensions with the municipal police (PM) and state police (PRM), paradoxically, retreat-and-return also involves in-situ agreements and bribing of officers tasked to control vendors:

The vendors have it sorted, know where to drop their stuff and run a bit, then turn to the police officers and say "here's some money". In minutes, it's all crowded again and we can see the officers leaving with a smile on their faces! [J.T.]⁸

Daily tactics and street actions, including strikes and refusal to pay municipal levies, have consistently sabotaged municipal 'cleansing' operations for years.

As a result, the CMM has deemed it a lost battle and now concentrates its efforts in particular areas. But street-vending is also maintained by a combination of organised engagements with the city authorities via the Association of Informal Sector Operators and Workers ASSOTSI⁹ (see Cruz e Silva 2003). The continuum of official actions and street workers' tactics and representation are presented and analysed below with case illustrations where appropriate.

Police clampdowns, street-vending bans, and the vendors' collective organisation

As operators of the class-based urban cleansing processes in Maputo, enforcing legal expectations, the police have relentlessly tried to remove street vendors from crossings and roadsides on the grounds of traffic and pedestrian safety, and public health. Actions go from PM officers' daily rounds to the so-called 'raids' in which the PRM confiscates vendors' products and tools. These legally protected practices lead to tensions and distrust in the city authority. Many vendors accounted how they have been constantly harassed by officers who try to extract money or products from whoever happens to be selling in the 'wrong place'. Frequently reported in the local media, police action has become a well-known issue to vendors, ASSOTSI, and residents.

Between 2012 and December 2018 various PRM raids took place across all the major transport-market hubs, particularly in Junta, Benfica, Xikhelene, and Malanga. In March 2017, local media reported how vendors took over a roundabout in the largest transport hub of Junta, and also how the municipal police were planning to 'clear' the area. In Benfica/George Dimitrov, in June 2016, police action and confiscation of products ensued after CMM officials and municipal officers failed to convince vendors to leave the EN1 road crossing and halt their expansion into tributary side streets. At the Xikhelene hub, vendors kept returning to the roadsides of the renovated Julius Nyerere Av/ Dos Combatentes Sq. junction despite regular PRM raids and the CMM's renewed commitment in 2018 to 'clear' the pavements from '*dumbanengue*'

Street-vending bans—clearing the streets, or 'organising the 'informals', in CMM's parlance—are most prominent in the colonial-era's 'Cement City' and main arteries. To be sure, bans spanning whole city areas precede the recent wave of upscale redevelopments and large infrastructures. It dates back to 2001 when the CMM issued an ordinance prohibiting street vending stands in general along the Marginal Av (art. 6 of CMM's Resolução 47/2001), the city's sea-bank avenue where institutional, corporate and flagship luxury compounds are located. These spatially-based restrictions for the low-income street economy have been put in place not so much to harm street vendors' livelihoods and their right to work but to facilitate an investor-friendly environment—in selected city areas, the 'displaceability' of the poor is assumed *ex ante* because real-estate investors need "class homogeneity within the public space" (Harvey 2005, 5).

Nonetheless, the number of street-vendors in the old city centre (Baixa) increased considerably over the last few years and the CMM is now particularly focused on this district. Anticipating the implementation of a regeneration plan for downtown Baixa, once again the CMM plans to enforce a full street-vending ban in the old city centre.¹⁰ But given the fast encroachment of vendors and hawkers in that area, this seems unlikely to succeed unless the CMM resorts

to a state-police clampdown risking city-wide upheavals. Eventually, in March 2020, the CMM took the repressive route. The PRM crackdown violently fired tear gas and rubber bullets at groups of vendors who, protesting against the ban, rallied up to block the city centre's avenues for hours. The CMM promptly agreed to hear vendors' complaints and a solution is underway largely due to the action of ASSOTSI, the association of workers of the informal sector. ASSOTSI spokespersons note that the CMM's recourse to police clampdowns reveals a lack of proper planning, and also the unequal use of force across the city. Recent events in 2020 confirm the spatial focus of those measures as ASSOTSI's secretary put it¹¹:

police repression is uneven, now even more so, they target different activities and city areas, for instance, much more in Baixa and the Marginal and less in the periphery of Maputo (...).

ASSOTSI has been prominent in organising street-vendors and marketplaces for decades. Since its inception in 1999, the organisation avoided many conflicts while also adopting an 'educational' approach with police officers. As explained by the organisation's head:

The police was set to repress, not to organise people. (...) The officer goes there, armed, so it seems he's after a criminal. He is pounding on people who lack proper employment. A vendor once said: "we're not the problem, we are the consequence of the problem". I say, then we have to discuss 'the problem': the armed conflict, the issue of lack of jobs (...) We want the PM to understand why that person is outside of the market. Why is he/she selling in the street and not inside? And why are vendors abandoning those markets? [RVM, ASSOTSI, August 2019]

Addressing the underlying socio-economic problems, ASSOTSI claims, is thus the solution rather than simply banning vendors and destroying marketplaces which are investments worthy of protection and respect from city officials.

Maputo's market-transport hubs: demolitions, street-vending bans, and collective contestations

The trend for street vending rather than vending in formal markets located outside major arteries or far from transport-hubs has become widespread in recent years (mostly, pavement vending, trestle tables, pushcarts, etc). Recurrently narrated in the local press, the trend is prominent in peri-central arteries and Baixa. In the peri-central area, street-vending occurs in two dynamic patterns: (i) spread into secondary streets and junctions of main avenues, and (ii) encroachment around market-transport hubs, particularly Junta, Benfica, and Xikhelene. Recent demolitions of whole market places might be contributing to the spread of street vending in the peri-central area and in Baixa—the 'cause and consequence' dynamic consistently pointed by ASSOTSI. Between 2010 and 2018 at least two popular markets were totally dismantled, both were located in important city-hubs or arteries: Nwamakana in Malanga/24 de Julho Av (in 2017) and two blocks of market shops and workshops at Dos Combatentes Square in the Xikhelene hub (in 2009 and 2017). Around Malanga's demolished Nwamakana market, retreat-and-return occurred at great risk. Former street vendors and stallholders tried to sell on the same site regardless of the CMM

warning of a likely crackdown by the PRM. At Xikhelene, encroachment ensued as well as police raids until April 2019.

As to market vendors, their claims to market sites are strongly attached to the legitimacy of being self-produced and self-managed spaces. Only recently brought under the CMM as municipal structures, all the main popular markets with few exceptions, were built, upgraded and maintained by the vendors themselves. Some have their own economy including a banking system, security teams, and urban services often delivered in the surrounding areas. Market vendors have dismissed the CMM's legitimacy in any decision-making by highlighting how they have their labour and money invested whereas the CMM has not. In June 2013, a common complaint from various stallholders pointed how the CMM hindered key infrastructure, such as water supply, in most of the 'informal' markets keeping these sites in precarious conditions, all the while sending in officials to collect fees. As one of the vendors at Nwankakana put it¹²:

The council has done nothing here, this is all ours.

Market vendors have become a powerful group, particularly when opposing CMM's 'cleansing' operations as in past attempts to remove marketplaces and, more recently, during the dismantling of Nwankakana—here the protracted negotiation for fair compensations led to vendors directly confronting the state company Maputo Sul eventually disallowing the mediation of the CMM altogether. The state-led demolition and involuntary resettlement operation in the Nwankakana market site came after a larger mass-demolition of vast swathes of low-income housing in that area (Malanga and Luis Cabral). As found by NGO Centro Terra Viva's legal team, generally, the state's meagre monetary compensations did not factor in the "loss of means of production" and the "disruption of social cohesion" (José and Manuel 2016), both aspects provided for in the national laws regulating territorial distribution.¹³ Serious failings were also detected in terms of protection of people's rights (see Kiambo 2016) as determined in the regulation for state-led resettlements resulting from economic activity (RM 2012).

In marketplaces, when contestation is not taken up by the markets' committees, it is by groups of vendors or individuals who feel that monetary or material compensations cannot make up for the destitution, more so when their houses are also at risk. State and CMM-led demolitions involving full displacement of residents and their livelihoods were publicly brought to the fore with a paradigmatic case in Malanga. As spotlighted in the media throughout 2018, a family's refusal to leave their house-plot and business in Malanga's Nwankakana market site halted the opening of the Maputo-KaTembe bridge. Other instances of individual and collective contestation did not receive the same attention or lacked leverage to oppose the CMM or negotiate a fair compensation, possibly due to their small-scale or connivance of the market administrators. This was the case of a small, long-standing marketplace at the Marginal Av demolished in June 2013. Vendors swiftly blocked the road after the unannounced demolition of their shops by the road contractor:

Yesterday some of us blocked the road with blazing tires. We'll do it again if needed. On top of that, the money we pay monthly (to the town council), 280 MTZ per month, in 12 months that's 3,360 MTZ. They will give us 2,000 ... this is robbery!" [...] "The [market] administrator ... he misled us. He receives the money from us every month and now does this on our back. Not even a word from him."¹⁴

Vendors argue that, at a variety of levels, they have invested more in the city than has been done by the city authorities hence vendors have legitimate claims to the spaces they occupy. Implications of this legitimacy are covered in the next subsections.

The typical measures by the CMM regarding the demand of public spaces for vending and other low-income street economy activities

Recognising the legitimacy of street-vendors to make a living¹⁵, the CMM adopted a 'legalisation' approach, alongside regulations to control the spatiality of street-vending by defining the type of spaces where it is interdicted or restricted (Article 10, CMM 2014). Resettlement of market vendors to faraway areas—Zimpeto, Mavalane, Magoanine and, more recently, Laulane—is the template solution followed by the CMM since at least 2007. Such a resettlement approach is similar to official policies and practices elsewhere (e.g. in Zimbabwe see Mbiba 2017). The CMM is also trying to redirect vendors to inner-neighbourhood markets. Measures include the upgrading of some inner-neighbourhood markets in order to attract vendors. During the demolition of Nwankakana in 2016/17, a number of vendors agreed to move to a new structure at Malanga market inside the neighbourhood upgraded by Maputo Sul for that end. However, most vendors refused to relocate, insisting on monetary compensation instead. Also in this instance, the CMM's design to relocate Nwankakana's shop and stall holders was to place them in a landlocked market out of sight of the main avenue. Whilst upgraded, the landlocked Malanga market fails to attract vendors and clients alike as it is far from the road and bus stops—business-wise, the sort of 'bound-to-fail' location as pointed out time and again by ASSOTSI.

At the closing of fieldwork in Maputo in 2019, it was unknown whether the General Plan for Markets and Fairs would include the upgrading of peri-central market-transport hubs. What was possible to conclude from a CMM-issued document from 2014, statements in the press (2012–2018), and from the CMM deputy for Fairs and Markets interviewed in 2019, is that upgrading was planned for structures in the city-centre (e.g. Museu), also Maguiguana (in 2017), and in the more recent peri-urban markets such as Mavalane market renovated in 2018 and the planned extension of the Zimpeto retail market. Later, in June 2020, and as part of a COVID19-related sanitary shutdown of markets for three days, the CMM started an operation to re-organise and remove vendors from central streets' pavements including around Maputo's largest and historical market of Xipamanine and also Estrela. Demolitions of stalls and barracks ensued during the night.¹⁶ Vendors should operate only inside the designated municipal markets, the CMM stated. Health concerns and freeing pavements for pedestrians were main reasons pointed by the city authority—notwithstanding, many of Baixa's 'cleared' pavements are now occupied by parked cars.¹⁷

The council is seemingly set to reshape central and prime city areas to a more palatable image attractive to investors and a purchasing upper middle-class. Relocating vendors to faraway sites or ‘bounding’ them inside the peri-central neighbourhoods accords to the unspoken policy of ‘displaceability’ of the poor. In official language and discourse in the media, the encroachment of ‘informals’ is often equated to hotpots of criminality and ‘undisciplined behaviour’.¹⁸ In its attempts to ‘contain’ the presence of street-vendors in the city centre, the CMM even tried to restrict vendors to their own areas of residence. The street-workers’ union are well aware of this:

In March [2019] the CMM was putting forward this operation, informing with some leaflets, of its intention to change some rules about who should sell in the city centre: vendors who reside in Matola should only do business in Matola, those residing in x only sell in x... The question I put: are we creating xenophobia then?! Are we to go back to ‘regionalism’? And what about the Nigerians¹⁹? Send them all back?! Now, the policy should be this: each person is free to choose where they want to make their business in the city. It cannot be forced by imposing [a location] on him or her. The Constitution of the Republic states clearly: each and every Mozambican is free to live wherever according to his or her wish. [RVM, ASSOTSI, August 2019]

The spatial relocation and containment measures by the city authority are often enacted in combination with one or more interventions. Below, the case of the Xikhelene hub illustrates the combined responses of market and street vendors.

The Xikhelene market-transport hub

The Xikhelene hub comprises the two main activities that make up Maputo’s urban centres—a self-managed marketplace and a taxi-bus terminal. Both were of informal origin and only recently turned into official municipal structures. Currently operating in the Xikhelene market proper and adjacent areas, ASSOTSI estimates 2,500 daily workers excluding itinerant hawkers. The evolution of the hub (between 2000 and 2019: see [Figure 3](#)) reveals additional aspects to understand the concrete conditions of displaceability faced by street economy workers but also their advances in long standing claims as legitimate occupants and producers of many of the city’s public spaces—these can be seen as claims for ‘actual rights’ to the city.

The process of demolition in 2017/2018 of a block of shops by the west side of the roundabout signals a slight advance with regards to compensations in state-led resettlement operations. Particularly, if compared to a previous, highly contested demolition of a commercial block in 2009 (see [Figure 3\(B\)](#)), cleared to make way for the municipal bus Terminal (see [Figure 3\(C\)](#)). Shop and warehouse owners were not compensated then and forced evictions were implemented, following the CMM’s vision at the time: that those occupying municipal land outside the designated areas need to be treated as invaders of private property, liable of eviction without compensation. Albeit contrary to legal protections, this reasoning is still endorsed by key officials in the CMM in the present.²⁰ However, the reasoning is now aimed at street vendors per se and less at business owners operating in built premises.

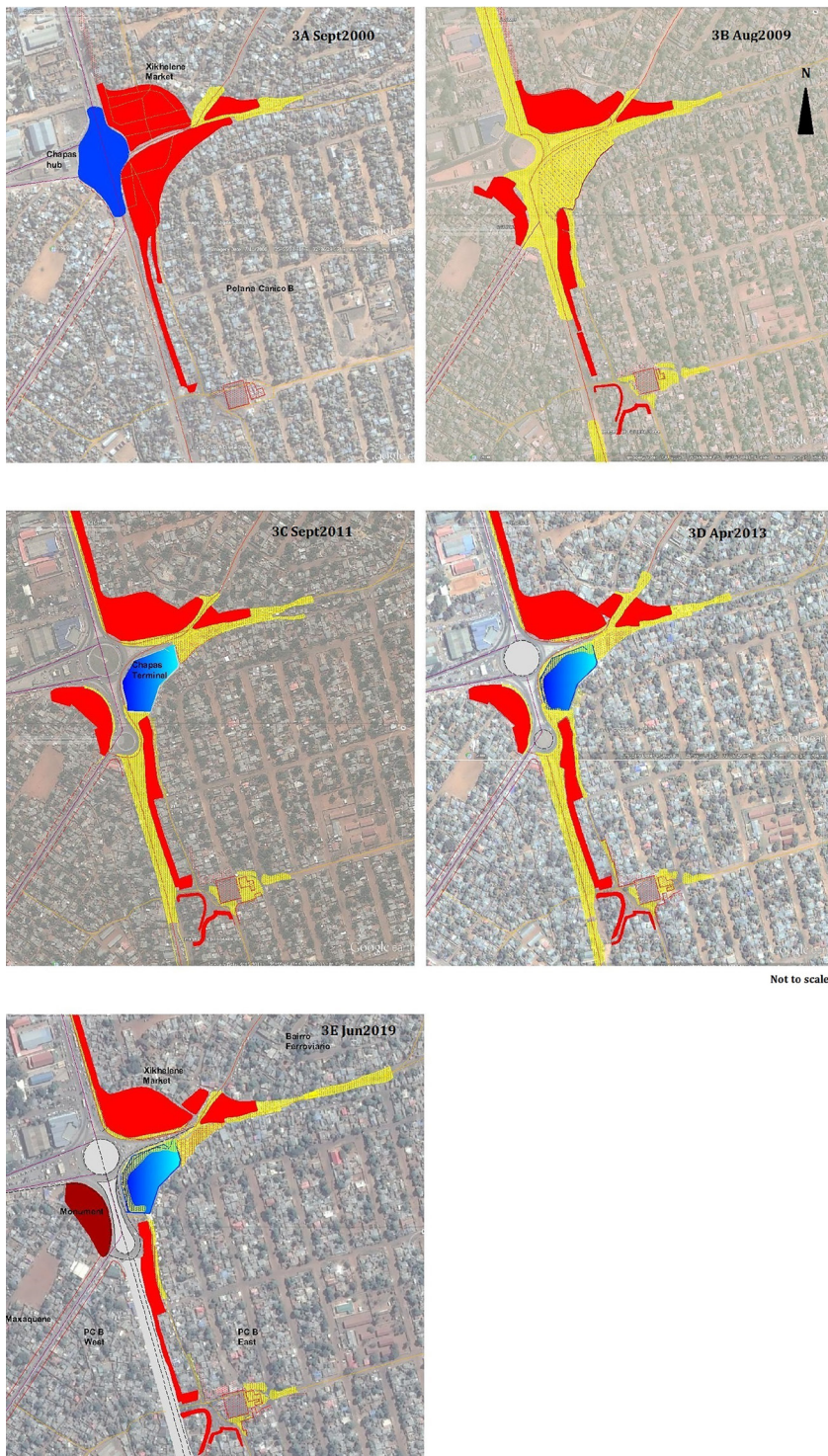


Figure 3: Evolution of the Xikhelene market-transport hub. The commercial built-up areas consolidated around the originally informal chapas hub (3A). A municipal bus terminal was built upon the levelling of a large commercial block demolished in 2009 (3B/3C) and street-vending spread onto the roundabout and JN Av road completed in 2016. As of June 2019 (3E), many street-vendors have joined the street market off Xikhelene expanding eastwards (see [Figure 4](#)). Source: Google Earth images reworked by the authors.

This slight advance might relate with popular contestation during recent demolitions.

According to Xikhelene's Market chief, for the 2017 removals, and to avoid the upheavals and violence of the demolition in 2009 or as in Malanga in 2017, compensation of vendors was on the table from the outset. Initially against the demolition and resettlement, shop-owners later agreed with the terms for monetary compensations settled at 400,000 MZN (approximately £5,100) on average per business-owner.²¹ However, street-vendors were not involved nor was ASSOTSI called to participate. Invariably, these workers were affected and now resort to retreat-and-return tactics or have encroached on the fringes of the street market East off Xikhelene (see Figures 3(E) and 4) while many others moved out to Baixa. ASSOTSI's view is that demolitions should not take place until vendors agree with the terms of resettlement and the new site has the adequate infrastructure in place for all types of vendors:

But why is that? That [increase of street-vendors] is the result of some recent interventions. If there's an intention to transfer shops or vendors from one place to another, we have to first prepare a proper place to house those vendors. Now, if there's a demolition of street stalls and shops, and the CMM did not prepare an alternative place beforehand, then as in Xikhelene most directly, that [encroachment] results from the lack of CMM's preparation to set alternative spaces. [RVM ASSOTSI, August 2019]

The CMM officially maintains that all shops and businesses were resettled to Zimpeto market area but local information diverges from this. According to vendors, the Market's administrator, and ASSOTSI²², many are still trying to rent and sub-rent small spaces near Xikhelene—up JN Av, on the north side of the roundabout in Bairro Ferroviário (Figure 3(E))—hoping to keep their business networks which take years to reproduce somewhere else, as explained by ASSOTSI's head:

Many have settled nearby selling what they used to sell there, mostly furniture. They try to stay, understandably: suppose I have a shop and my clients in a place, clients who I trust and pay by trust, e.g. "I don't have the total sum now but can come over the weekend and pay the remainder"—these are long term clients. If I move to a faraway area I will lose them, a huge damage to my business, I'll have to build that all over again, to get hold of new clients ...

To start, these vendors had no space in the main Xikhelene block or in PCB/JN Av side, already fully occupied. Now they are left placeless or otherwise need to move far away, to remote areas. As a standard practice, the CMM only started to identify a possible relocation site after the demolition—according to ASSOTSI, in the Mahotas peri-urban neighbourhood. In this instance, 'displaceability' is evinced not only as a predicament of concrete dispossession felt by workers and business owners in the aftermath of demolitions. It also emerges as a pre-conception held by the state and city council—this much can be concluded from the way the authorities carried out the demolitions without a prior planning of resettlement sites with the participation of those affected.

A second aspect to highlight in the Xikhelene's case regards street vendors' claim to settle in main arteries and transport hubs in conflict with the CMM's intention to 'contain' them in isolated, inner-neighbourhood built premises. The recently upgraded Mucoreano market, inside PCB neighbourhood, is known to fail in attracting both vendors and clients due to its location (see Figure 3(E)). Its unattractiveness intensified prior to the renovation of JN Av. when even former stallholders settled along the road, forming a large outdoors market over the years (see Figure 3(A–D)). Dismantled by roadworks in 2016, successive police raids and vendors' retreat-and-return continued until April 2019.²³ After much upheaval and forced removals, some street-vendors are tolerated inside the Chapas Terminal overseen by 'chapas' operators and the local police station (see Figure 3(E)). The 'enclaving' of street vendors in isolated market places, far from bus terminals, is opposed by ASSOTSI because:

When the market is near the terminal that makes it easy: the client gets in [the terminal], buys something and then leaves on his way to the bus; also the likelihood of being robbed drops: he buys something, carries some money in the wallet or whatever and he hoops on the bus right there. Whereas if he needs to walk some distance [between terminal and market] he or she puts himself or herself in a situation to be mugged. [RVM ASSOTSI, August 2019].

People will keep buying goods along the main streets [where 'chapas' circulate and stop] because it's handy and besides things are much cheaper than inside municipal markets or shops [chief of section in Baixa, ASSOTSI, August 2019]

ASSOTSI has put forward a proposal to tackle this issue: bus terminals should be inside street market places. The union has reached an agreement with the CMM to implement this in one resettlement site in peri-urban Laulane. *"If that happens, business will go right (...) then these municipal markets will never be empty"* (RVM). In market-transport hubs in peri-central areas, this should include safeguarding the areas adjacent to shops in main arteries to accommodate extant street-vending and eventual build extensions of pre-existent markets. Their proposal is based on a comprehensive understanding of the particular practices of street trade—business wise, the need to be located along major flows of people and also encroachment of vendors are key—and the culture of purchasing goods in the street. It is also based on a deep knowledge of the territory, notably, the importance of conjunction of the two main uses from which urban hubs in Maputo originated—the taxi-bus node and the outdoor marketplace. It can thus be said that ASSOTSI's perspective reconciles street workers' actual and statutory rights with the cultural, economic and spatial conditions that make up the city in the present:

Realising that if there is not a suitable place to take vendors from the streets for the moment, and if there is no feasible solution that meets people's needs, then it's best to leave it and manage it as it is. We are saying something very simple: we have to adapt to, and work with the current reality, everyday life as it is now—what the reality dictates in this moment. [RVM, ASSOTSI, August 2019]



Figure 4: Street market, East of the Xikhelene hub. Source: authors, 2019.

Concluding notes

'Displaceability' seems to underpin current institutional practices to cast away the poor to peripheral invisibility in an imagined investor-friendly city of Maputo. Until recently, the social legitimacy of dwellers and workers who have produced the actual city seemed undisputed by the state. That compliance has been shifted towards the corporate class in general which gains statutory rights to the city by purchase and under the umbrella of formal planning. Formal plans may well never materialise the image of a 'Western-global' city that the state and city council seemingly pursue. However, said plans, the ad hoc developments, the paralegal land market, and state-led resettlements now combine to displace a poor majority from prime city areas to make way for the elites. In Maputo, those gaining ground upon the displacement of the poor are also black Africans and, even if reproducing a colonial-racial based dynamic, it cannot be said that the conspicuous gated communities and redeveloped avenues are sought to cater to a white population per se. But in this process however, state and city authorities are selective in their reading of the Constitution and national Land Law with regards to a just access to the nationalised land for all. The state and CMM's laissez-faire approach to investor-led redevelopments

and the policy of involuntary resettlements as a *modus operandi* contradict that constitutional principle. By legal means, the displaceability of the poor supersedes constitutional rights established in the nation-building context of decolonisation of the socialist period—a form of ‘forgetting from above’ as poignantly put by Pitcher (2006).

‘Gray spacing’ is hence facilitated by contradictory legislation and legal loopholes. However, it becomes a reality in the concrete undertakings of investor-led redevelopments. The upsurge of gated condominiums has helped the CMM’s intention to clear the city’s main avenues and ‘prime’ areas from low-income occupancies without prolonged recourse to law enforcement by the CMM. Indeed, the advance of the condominiums upon the levelling of low income areas renders a sense of finality to the process of displacement—a *fait accompli*, they offer the image of the ‘proper’ city as an inescapable end that justifies the means i.e. the ‘displaceability’ of the poor.

The spatial-political transformations summarised above have been met perforce by the circumventing tactics and contestation of those at risk of being displaced and dispossessed of their right to work and livelihoods. Maputo’s street and market workers show that their command of street politics often overrides the CMM’s attempts to ‘clear’ street-vending from the ‘visible’ city areas. Tactics include retreat-and-return, adaptable encroachment around market-transport hubs, resistance to be ‘enclaved’ in inner-neighbourhood markets, and encroaching in the historical city district or in intra-neighbourhood routes as shown in the Xikhelene hub. Market workers bring in the legitimacy of self-production of Maputo’s urban centres. Today, their long-standing organisation affords market collectives the capacity to oppose or guarantee compensations in demolitions/resettlements and other interventions. Popular upheavals have played a role in the intersecting claims and tactics of the propertied and non-propertied street economy workers alike, thus stepping forward in the shaping of the city.

Their combined tactics occur first in the realm of social legitimised practices and collective claims in response to state and municipal interventions. But also preemptively, given street and market workers’ accumulated knowledge of the authorities’ ability to enforce city regulations or lack thereof. Two steps back and one step further, their advances can be said to embody what was here referred to as ‘actual rights’. Moreover, it is through on-the-ground tactics that current statutory rights in Mozambican law become a reality: when vendors encroach into the old city centre or turn against vending bans and block roads as a way to lay their claims, they are reminding the state of its duty to prevent disruptions to the ‘social cohesion’ and to people’s ‘means of production’ as established in the law. The eventual increase of demolitions, involuntary resettlements and semi-forced zoning might lead to cross claims and legal actions against the state and the CMM through so-called ‘popular action’. In rural Mozambique, communities-led litigations against land dispossession and forced displacement in state concessions to extractive companies are already leading the way.

The struggles of Maputo’s street workers also show that to counter the idea of the ‘displaceability’ of the urban poor held by state and municipal decision-makers requires more than the law of courts. It requires the dismantling of the materiality of ‘gray spacing’ and official discourse. Protests with disruptions of

the city's traffic are a direct contestation of the elite's unspoken belief that the poor can be displaced at will or 'bought' hence exposing the ideological provenance of the state and CMM's practices. All this has been historically pushed by notions of the rule of law and law enforcement. Notwithstanding, co-related to the tactical retreats and advances and popular protests, organised engagements with the authorities have been key. ASSOTSI has been actively pushing back against the official discourse of social banishment and criminalisation of street-vendors in particular. Also, by proposing practical ways to organise street markets along the main arteries and hubs, they are challenging the image of the city forcefully pursued by the CMM. The workers' association is also set to make the CMM follow through its own planning directives, e.g. to consolidate Maputo's transport-market hubs (recent operations in 2021 point in that direction). The circumstances described in this article, suggest that Maputans are not merely coping with the 'displaceability' imposed on them to make way for the investor-friendly city. They are effectively disputing and pushing back involuntary displacement and the imposition of a neoliberal spatial order.

Notes

- 1 Direito de Uso e Aproveitamento da Terra (DUAT) is a title of land use (Land Law 1997).
- 2 Architect A. Mazembe (Eduardo Mondlane University), interviewed by the corresponding author in June 2013.
- 3 [Free trans. from the original in Portuguese] An opposition council member at the municipal assembly in 2014 as quoted in the media. Source: *A Verdade online*. <https://paginaglobal.blogspot.com/2014/11/mocambique-edilidade-de-maputo-esta.html> (last visited 22 January 2022).
- 4 Maria de Lourdes Torcato, Portuguese-Mozambican journalist, interviewed by the corresponding author in 2013.
- 5 Secondary road proposed and built by local residents, a project by ILO/Casa Minha Nosso Bairro.
- 6 'Chapas' is the term for most used city transport system of privately operated vans and minibuses.
- 7 'Dumbanengue' [lit. 'trust your feet', meaning vendors have to run swiftly at the sight of police officers.
- 8 J. Tique, architect-urban planner [School of Architecture, Eduardo Mondlane University] interviewed by the corresponding author in June 2013.
- 9 ASSOTSI is an autonomous civil society organisation run by informal sector workers, created with the support of the women's labour committee (COMUTRA) from the national labour union of Mozambique (Sindicato Nacional dos Trabalhadores Moçambicanos, OTM, Central Sindical).
- 10 CMM measures are an effort to "improve the image of the city" in "the noble areas of Maputo" (the CMM deputy for Markets and Fairs, in interview with the corresponding author in August 2019).
- 11 Arlindo Chembane, personal email communication with the authors in 2020.
- 12 see e.g. report by TVM. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2lFfgCpmmoQ> (last visited 22 January 2022).
- 13 Lei do Ordenamento do Território; Regulamento da Lei de Ordenamento do Território; Regulamento do Solo Urbano.
- 14 Vendors' statements recorded in-situ by the corresponding author in June 2013.
- 15 The Mayor's statements in the press, and the CMM deputy for Markets and Fairs interviewed by the corresponding author in August 2019.
- 16 Demolitions and city police actions can be seen in a video report by media blog *VoaPortugues* in July 2020 available at <https://www.voaportugues.com/a/a-organiza%C3%A7%C3%A3o-do-mercado-desorganizou-as-nossas-vidas-dizem-vendedores-de-xipamanine/5521186.html> (last visited 28 January 2022).
- 17 Personal communication with residents, August 2020.
- 18 CMM press note in its facebook page (November 18, 2018): "Comunicado Ocupação Informal de Espaços e Mobilidade na Ponte Maputo-Katembe".
- 19 a reference to recent migrants from Nigeria who manage many of the dingy warehouses and container-shops across the city.
- 20 CMM deputy for Markets and Fairs, interviewed by the corresponding author in August 2019.
- 21 According to the elected chief of the Xikhelene Market, in interview with the corresponding author in August 2019.

- 22 ASSOTSI's head was formerly the Xikhelene's market chief since the early 1990s.
- 23 30 April 2019, end date of the CMM ultimatum urging vendors to clear the pavements voluntarily.

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