Urban transformation, family strategies and ‘home space’ creation in the city of Maputo

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Abstract

The spatial and demographic configuration of today’s Maputo – with one million people living in the city and about 1.8 million in the metropolitan area - is more the creation of those who inhabit the city than of those supposedly in charge of it. Attempts at imposing zoning regulations are invariably thwarted by private interests – business, commerce, and families who put their savings and earnings into building homes in the different areas of the existing and emerging city. As the result of complex, often obscure processes of monetary accumulation, or merely the fulfilment of the “put a little by every day” method of saving, these homes range in size and standard from modern apartment blocks and luxury villas to the thousands of more modest (and often unfinished) dwellings that spread for miles across the city. Inherent to this dynamic process of “independent” building is a mesh of conflicts of interest, with the attendant power struggle waged in a context in which there co-exist different, and contradictory, legal interpretations of the possession, appropriation and use of land and property.

This paper questions the relevance of certain dichotomy-based theoretical models (dual city, tradition and modernity) for the analysis of this exceptionally dynamic and constantly changing urban context. It does this by relating previous author’s research findings on the lives of Maputo families to the main ideas guiding ongoing research into the nature of the emerging forms of ‘urbanism as a way of life’ in the African city of Maputo, and by investigating the nature and impact of the creation of ‘home space’.
Introduction

The study of social and cultural change processes in families has been my research in Maputo since 1992 (Costa, 1995, 2006, 2007) and last year I have joined a research project that focuses on the emerging forms of ‘urbanism as a way of life’ in Maputo by investigating the nature and impact of the creation of ‘home space’.¹

A group of architects and urban planners, together with three anthropologists (myself included) and Mozambican university students started last December fieldwork for a built environment dwelling and household socioeconomic survey in a sample of 100 sites north of the university campus to near Marracuene. This fieldwork is one of the three components of the Home Space² project and takes place in a representative section of the large peri-urban areas of Maputo city³.

All of these neighbourhoods belong to the part of town that was known as Bairros de Caniço (reed) (nowadays most houses are not made of caniço and this part of the city is called Bairros). But these Bairros – as explain further on - are interlinked with the Cidade de Cimento (Concret City) and cannot be understood using dual theoretical categories that classifies these parts of the same town as opposite realities, labelling one as formal and modern and the other as informal and traditional. These bairros and the cidade de cimento are both informal and traditional as well as formal and modern. And above all, an

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¹ Research implemented by Royal Academy School of Architecture, Copenhagen: School of Architecture (Prof. Jorgen Eskemose Anderson); Edinburgh School of Architecture & Landscape Architecture / School of the Built Environment, Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh (Prof. Paul Jenkins); Centre of African Studies, ISCTE-IUL, Lisbon (Ana Bénard da Costa Phd) ;Faculty of Architecture & Physical Planning, Eduardo Mondlane University, Maputo (Prof. Julio Carrilho and Arq Mario Trinidad). Funded by Danish Research Council for Innovation.
² “This concept, developed by the research team in a speculative sense, refers to the spaces within which the majority of African urban residents dwell - dwelling being both a place and a process. Creating ‘home spaces’ thus involves spatial and social practices, but conceptually ‘home’ is above all else a culturally defined concept”. (Anderson and all, 2009)
³ Part of the sample drawing from previous surveys (1990 and 2000), and partly following the trends in urban expansion and morphology.
increasing number of people and families living there circulate in both spaces or have moved from one place to the other throughout their lives.

The anthropologist’s team involvement in this survey allowed to have an overall view of the home spaces in order to choose a limited number of cases for the ethnographic study which will take place in May/June 2010. The guidelines for this ethnographic study will be based on guidelines given by home space project that will be interlinked with author’s guidelines in previous researches, and related to the practices and strategies that are organized and implemented by Maputo families in their endeavors to preserve their cohesion as social units and to cope with major political and economic changes.

This paper compares author’s previous findings regarding the way Maputo families lived and created their city, with some ideas that came out of a first and still incomplete analysis of data collected in December of 50 home spaces (half of the sample) from Urban District number three (Bairro Polana Caniço A e B) to Urban District number four (Bairros 3 de Fevereiro, Mahotas and Laulane).

Why Families

The reason the author’s research was concentrated on families and not on households is that by studying the households by themselves does not allow us to understand the survival and reproduction strategies deployed at household level. In order to understand those strategies it is necessary to consider all those family members who live in a home-space unity and all those who live in other home-spaces but have existing relationships of interdependence that are significant to the household. These relationships can be identified through observation and informant’s description of their relationships with other family members residing in the same house,

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4 These cover areas in of the above mention previous surveys and thus constitute an important (and fairly unique) longitudinal study opportunity embedded within the Home Space project. (Jenkins 1991 and 2001).
the same neighborhood or elsewhere. The real size of the family is therefore “limited in practical terms by the obligations of reciprocity that a person develops and maintains in the selection of his/her relatives” (Cohen 1981:64-5).

In the present research project where home-space is the main analysis unit, the project data has so far confirmed that family analysis was relevant in explaining the way residents created their home-space and defined family boundaries. Also, in the survey many interviewees expressed in different ways and in different matters, the importance that other family members, besides those living with them, have in the creation of their home-space. So, in this sense, family is as circular arguments: it exists because relationships between its members enables survival and social reproduction strategies to be put into action – and residential strategies are one of the most significant ones - and these, once put into action, preserve – and possibly develop and create – the different ties (and space) on which the family is founded.

However it is not always possible to determine all types of relationship (and the power relations involved), their frequency and importance, which exist between different members of the family – especially when the family is divided into two or more geographical areas and home space members change all the time – and simple questions – to whom the house belongs to? Who inherits? Who provides resources to build the house? Who decides what to do, how to do it and when to do it? – Don’t have, as confirmed once more in this last survey, easy answers. And even when they have, they can change through time or according to the person that answers them.

In this research it was also consider particularly important to understand the meaning of notions that ownership and belonging have for different family members and also to establish that in the social and cultural context where this research is carried out,

5 For example, the priori assumption that legal minors belong to the family of their parents, even when they actually live with other relatives, is questionable. These families belong to different ethnic groups and came from different geographical provenance and they are living in the same urban environment in a context of social change. These families are “traditionally” included in kinship systems which are not only different from the Western system but also differ widely among themselves. And, as Geffray (2000:23) notes, there is an “error” and an “ambiguity” in the “use of Western kinship labels to describe the kinship of others, as though our words – unlike the words of all other societies – were endowed with a universal value”.

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there are sometimes fundamental relationships of reciprocity between relatives that live faraway based on common symbols and identity factors (name, land of origin, common ancestors) and, it is also vital to consider the "presence" of a wide chain of ancestors in the daily life of the family.

In Maputo, family types, structures and relationships, home space creation and organization are inter-related issues. Different family types and changes in family structure and family relations, result from, and simultaneously create, different home space construction possibilities (or ideals). Both processes are dynamic, constrained by social, cultural, political and economic micro and macro contexts and also by social reproduction strategies that always relate individuals to specific, but not necessarily unique, social unities. In this social and economic context both, family types and home space creation are, above all, ongoing process of change paradoxically anchored in ideals of permanence and durability.

Maputo families: origins, types and networks

All these families live in Maputo, the political, administrative and economic capital of a vast country but most of the studied family members were (and still are) natives of the rural provinces of southern Mozambique or descendants of families from that region. It’s interesting to notice that in the 50 cases analysed in the December survey, about 63,8 heads of family were born outside Maputo metropolitan area. Nevertheless, if in the previous author’s researches it was possible to conclude that all families had more or less regular links with the homeland, this situation now seems to have changed (this information needs a more in-depth study to be conclusive). For instance, only 23% of families claim to have a machamba in their homeland and only 29,7% said they consider their place of birth (or the place of birth of their husbands) their homeland.

Apart from that, differences in family types of those who have lived for longer or

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6 Here its followed some of the types proposed by the typology employed in the 97 census for different kinds of household: monoparental families consist of father plus children or mother plus children; nuclear families consist of father, mother and children or childless couple; the extended family denotes a family whose composition differs from all those listed above. Most extended
shorter periods in the city – are still not significant: most were and still are enlarged families\(^7\) with an extremely heterogeneous composition involving relatives (at least one) from both descendent lines and different generations. Also, some of the interviewed had sons or daughters living with close relatives somewhere in Maputo or in the countryside. On this subject, one woman said: “I give my sun to my sister, she couldn’t have children”.

This type of family, different from the traditional southern extend families and from the modern nuclear family, may emerge from the need to create and maintain ties of solidarity which enable mutual assistance to occur, from an inability to survive on a single source of income and from an awareness that the greater its isolation and the fewer its members the higher the risk that the family will fail to survive and reproduce. But this type of family is also the product of a specific context where space is a scarce and precious resource and house building a huge and expensive project that very few can not only do, but also, start, alone.

Another important issue concern family relations between kinship members that live in different houses and/or neighborhoods in Maputo. In previous studies was noticed that the same family has different nucleus in completely different economical and social neighbourhoods in the city and/or has changed from neighbourhood to neighbourhood during the last 30 years. The importance of family networks still seems to explain and allow this mobility, and families still move to the city and in the city. In this last survey only 17% lived to the house where they are now before the independence, others arrived during the last three decades (almost in equal number for each decade). The majority of members (59%) interviewed had lived in other neighbourhoods of Maputo before they moved to their present house and the remaining either had arrived directly from the countryside (10,6%) or was born in that bairro (17%). The importance of family networks is also visible in the relatively high number of interviewees (21, 2%) to whom the plot families comprise members from the mother's and the father's side, and are not necessarily organized around the "oldest" members. Flexibility is the common denominator, and the extended family can take many different forms.

\(^7\) This information coincides (insofar as is possible, as different units of analysis are used) with the findings of the 1997 census, which indicated that there most of households are composed of extended families in Maputo (Instituto Nacional de Estatística 1998).
where they now live was given (*cedido*) to them by other relatives. Finally, it was also possible to see the importance of family networks in the even higher number of interviewees (72%) who said that when they needed help they would ask their relatives (from both descendent lines).

**Mobility process in Maputo**

This mobility process across Maputo that inter-related different parts of the city are dependent (house buildings and architectural styles associated with it) of complex family strategies that are also an answer to different economical changes occurred in Maputo during these last decades.

The reasons for families to move from house to house and spread throughout the city are related to economic changes in family budgets, change of working activities of different family members and where they work, change in house rents and land prices associated with administrative laws and with the informal and formal market that regulates (not always in the same direction) urban transactions and major urban projects. These movements are also connected to other urban transformations, for instance, localization of markets and streets with more or less circulation, better or worse communication between the different areas, new rich and poor neighbourhoods that are built or are a result of auto-construction and *spontaneous* land occupation.

For all those reasons, families move through the city and many of them to places far away from the city centre. The most fortunate ones, fulfilling their dreams of big houses with nice sea views or big gardens, where they can have their rich *machambas* (it is interesting to see how persistent is the rural imaginary among elites), and the others, the big majority of the urban population, trying to make the best possible articulation between different priorities: distance from places where their different income activities take place (markets, *machambas*, urban centre and distant neighbourhoods); land prices and renting; profits they could have in transacting well situated houses (and sometimes a good spot is *per si* an economical resource – can be for instance a restaurant, a shop, a
I want to rent this house, most of the time my mother and stepfather are in Nampula and I’m building my house in Albasine. That house is mine and I will keep it for my grandsons (Case 60).

In some cases, we observed that families had built a second house in the backyard renting it to other families, or built extra rooms with an independent door for renting.

Because of all that, houses have a fundamental importance in family strategies and most of them, rich or poor, save to have one or to improve the one they already have. Day by day, week by week, month by month, year by year, depending on their economical revenues, they save for one more concrete bloc, to build one more room, to fix the roof, to paint a wall, to adapt to the new fashionable architectural style. But they will also sell or rent the house if a good opportunity to earn money comes along. Sometimes these transactions end badly and one woman told us her incredible story of when she owned a big plot with trees, machamba and when her husband died she began to sell parcels of that plot to have money to live and also to be able to buy concrete blocks to change their caniço house into a concrete house (case 4).

This contradiction between, in one way house investments and in another way land or house selling, can also be analysed in social actors representations regarding the future of their houses. Many of them didn’t answer when this question was asked (25%), a few said they would like to rent and others that they would like to keep the house for their children and grandchildren. This contradicts other information regarding the number of houses families own in Maputo. Almost half of the interviewed said they have another house and/or plot, or are in the process of building another house. Most of these new houses are in distant neighbourhoods as far as Marracuene district. And one of the
explanations for this mobility was that in Marracune it was easier to have the DUAT (Direito de Uso e Aproveitamento da Terra). This contradiction between saving and selling it is quite strong and is related to other major contradictions that are also interrelated and occur at all levels of family life and are explicit in the different strategies they develop.

The first major contradiction closely connected with the aforementioned urban movement is between the family need to preserve unity (dependent of the combination of different revenues and products, earning or produce by different members in different economical sectors and activities) and the economical and spatial dispersion that simultaneously threatens and supports this social unity. Another important contradiction is the need people have to be included in solidarity social networks, the family being one the most important ones; and the impossibility of survival if they don’t develop “selfish” practices that allow the satisfaction of material needs. This contradiction involves a complex articulation of values (trust, truth and solidarity side by side with calculation, mistrust and sheer material interest) that social actors try to articulate the best way they can. When that articulation is impossible, it originates the breaking apart of some social commitments on which the previously mentioned networks were based (e.g. families) leading to broken alliances that would tend to perpetuate this social unit. However, this process is not necessarily irreversible, there’s always the possibility of “circulation” between solidarity networks and it is possible for individuals and families to establish new alliances with other social units (new matrimonial alliances, for instance) and to develop dynamic and versatile processes of social reproduction.

All these contradictions in the social actors attitudes explain why the different nucleus of the same family in Maputo are together and apart and why families strategies can join different city neighbourhoods in a complex network that is built upon flexible economic and social relations between different houses of the same family. These relationships involve different kinds and levels of change that are not necessarily reciprocals

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8 Document provided by the Conselho Municipal of each city, as proof that someone has the right of use of a specific plot of land. In Maputo (city center and neighborhoods) it’s very difficult to obtain and very few people have it. Most of the interviewed said they don’t have it and some explain all the legal and difficult bureaucratic process they were involved in order to try to get it.
in time and in kind, or regular, but all of them contribute to preserve and reinforce family

ties in all possible aspects (economical, emotional, symbolic).

This kind of information regarding family networks and mutual obligations between
relatives cannot be obtained in short surveys with one-hour interviews. It’s necessary to
spend more time with the families in order to understand the importance of the
relationships between relatives that live apart from each other when considering residential
or home space related strategies. We hope the ethnographic research will give answers
regarding these issues and all other issues that will allow to have a clearer understanding of
social and cultural change processes in home space related matters.

**Home space changes**

There is no doubt that family relations are changing and this is shown physically in
the architectural styles people use when they are in the ongoing process of building their
houses. Some years ago (1998, 1999) there are many houses built with caniço, usually with
different independent constructions spread throughout the yard alongside trees and little
machambas. With few exceptions, the houses now are made of concrete blocks and many
of than occupy the whole plot leaving no space for trees and shade. Families live together
under the same roof and only a few have more them 10 members (4,2%; 57,2% have
between 5 and 10 members).

These modern construction models, which tend towards an increasing concentration
of various rooms under the same roof is visible everywhere: from new and ostensibly rich
houses to new and poor unfinished ones leaving projected houses a figment of the owners
imagination. In these modern house models when some outside space exists, the tendency
(or the desire) is to cover it with concrete because “sand is dirty”. From December’s data it
is difficult to analyse to what extent this modern construction model reflects a change in the
family structure and existing relationships and/or causes these changes at family level⁹. To

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⁹ It was observed in the author’s previous research, that this modern urban model of spatial
concentration makes polygamy even more problematic even if in urban contexts — Maputo and
other cities in sub-Saharan Africa — polygamy does not always imply the co-habitation of the various
what extent this model reflects a trend of smaller families or the nuclearisation of families is something that is difficult to conclude at this stage of the research as mentioned above. But there are no doubts that this modern models and all the furniture and other objects associated, represent what these families consider to be a modern house and what they consider that a modern house must have.

The existent house for a few and the dream house for all, has all rooms under one single roof including bathroom, toilet and kitchen, it also has a living room with sofas, a dining room, bibelots and so on. What will be interesting to analyze is how families will use their modern house, modern furniture and objects. How will they occupy the different rooms and to do what?

From the author’s previous research it was possible to ascertain that in some cases the only person that eats at the dining table is the head of the family and also that, even when families have their bathroom inside the house, they keep another one outside and that is the one they use, because they say the bathroom inside the house consumes more water (toilette flush and taps with running water). In the December survey, the team project found that family members spent most of the time in the outside space sitting on mats or chairs, preparing food or just being there. With few exceptions, it was outside that interviews took place. All of this led to the hypothesis that these modern house models coexist and are interlink with traditional forms of home space use and are related to the way families organize relationships between different family members and the outside world. The continuance of some traditional behaviours and the way tradition interlinks with modernity at home space level reflects the suitability of the tradition and therefore its "modernity"(Bastos 2001).

These changes are expressed by family members when simultaneously they argue that they rely on help from their relatives but these ones do not necessarily help them. These changes are patent in the following words:

Help is complicated. I was in the hospital and I sent a sms to my older brother asking him to buy me some medicine. When he read the word “buy” he never showed up. Who helped me then was my younger brother but then I had to pay him back. (Case 20)
Families are changing, the city is growing and people move or wish to move as far away as the neighbourhoods of Jafar and Guava in the Marracuene district (35 km from the city centre) or further away, but they still have relatives living in more central neighbourhoods and if life conditions change (divorces, death of parents, husband, wife) they also have the opportunity to move to their house or plot.

“My brother-in-law is renting his house and now is coming to live with us. He is building a house in our backyard” (Case 61)

**Conclusion**

Within the city and between the various neighbourhoods in the different municipal districts, mobility continued and still continues, because changes that since the independence until today have accompanied the political, social and economic process of Mozambique and particularly Maputo have originated different economic and social reproduction strategies and spatial mobility (urban-urban, rural urban and urban-rural) is an integrant part of those strategies. In moving from place to place – because they choose, because they are forced to… –, Maputo families earn money, lose money, earn social prestige or lose social prestige, destroy and create, build and rebuild social networks, religious beliefs and also relatives. The houses they can afford to build the houses they own or the houses they are forced to sell or are unable to maintain are the mirror of this social mobility. Social mobility that the rich hide and simultaneously show with the high walls they built around the plot and the poor have to show because they can’t afford to build the concrete wall around their houses to replace the “ugly espinhosa that doesn’t keep the burglars way”.

All this mobility happened in this last 30 years in most of Maputo families’ lives, no matter from which side of the city our research was focused on. Land, and specially urban land and houses are resources and complex businesses and trades are made by the rich and the poor that tried to profit or to protect themselves from the different laws (and
law systems) that during these last 30 years regulated transactions, constructions, propriety and rental markets in urban and peripheral areas of Maputo.

Maputo’s population growth during these last decades was not uniformly distributed between the “cidade de cimento” and the “bairros de caniço”. It is mainly those that are growing in area and population density. This growth is not supported, except in the odd case, by urban planning and investment that would allow for maintenance or implementation of infrastructures.

This periphery increase in population is carried out in two ways: through geographic expansion of the periphery that extends for several miles; and through the densification of the occupied space in the different neighbourhoods. The relative distance from the various municipal districts to the city centre determines population density, which is lower in the districts that are further away from the centre, even though these were precisely the ones that suffered the higher density growth during the nineties (cf. Oppenheimer and Raposo 2002: 24). At the same time, in these areas, we can see some rich weekend houses with their well-cared gardens and machambas.

In the cidade de cimento there was also an increase in population and construction. Lands that were left without buildings during colonial times -, because they are unsuitable for construction (former swamps, barreiras) agricultural areas or mangrove areas (Zones Verdes in Costa do Sol)– are now occupied by expensive private houses or huge buildings (hotels, shopping centres, multinational offices) or are in the process of being built. Some areas that were bairros de caniço are being replaced by rich condominiums and new and modern buildings have emerged. But this urban prosperity is only for the very few and most of the population lives in the Bairros. Most of these Bairros only had running water and electricity installed a year or two ago and some parts still don’t have it and, apart from some interesting new initiatives regarding garbage collection, basic sanitation continues to be practically non-existent.

But beside these obvious differences separating these two parts of the city (cimento and bairros) and the fact that urban prosperity and poverty tends to move the bairros further away, it is also important to notice, as this paper demonstrates, that this
same prosperity and poverty creates complex bridges between different neighbourhoods and these bridges need to be studied in order to understand the people that live and shape this dynamic and changing African city.

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