Shifting Registers of Leadership: An Ethnographic Critique of the Unequivocal Legitimisation of Community Authorities

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Leadership is a product of stable relations of trust. In order for a leader to lead, s/he must be capable of convincing her/his followers that certain objectives can be realised by giving the leader the mandate to lead. This, however, can be a nerve-racking experience, as followers have no certainty whether the leader can, in fact, fulfil their desires. Thus, loyalty to a leader is conferred on the basis of the future fulfilment of promises. For people living under highly unstable socio-economic conditions, such unequivocal support for one leader is a bold move. When subsistence depends on the ability to adjust strategies continuously to shifting circumstances, trust becomes a scarce resource allocated only temporarily. As will become apparent, rather than relying on one officially sanctioned leader, people therefore 'shop around', giving their mandate to the leader who might be capable of realising short-term objectives.

In order to question the unequivocal legitimisation of local authorities, I analyse how community leadership is perceived and enacted in a peri-urban setting in Maputo. Since its liberation in 1975, Mozambique has been in a state of constant political and administrative reform that radically alters national and indeed local systems of governance. From its inception, Frelimo, the ruling party, implemented a centralised one-party system, which sought to eliminate the political structures used by the Portuguese colonisers. This entailed the establishment of local party units, the *grupos dinamizadores*, which, although ultimately unsuccessful, were to organise and control activities within each area and oversee implementation of politically driven initiatives through dialogue with the population (Boucher et al. 1995; Grest 2003; Jenkins 2000). A second wave of reforms began in 1987 when Mozambique joined the World Bank/IMF and adopted a structural adjustment plan, known as the Programme for Economic Rehabilitation (PRE) (Abrahamsson and Nilsson 1995; Hanlon 1991). In a short period of time, centralised planning gave way to economic market-driven thinking, emphasising a gradual pull-back of the state to facilitate the frictionless functioning of the private sector (CIRESP 2001). A crucial element of PRE was an emphasis on popular participation and decentralised planning, later carrying over into a nationalised political conceptualisation of decentralisation as a "means of making the state more efficient and responsive to local needs" (Alexander 1997:1).

With the introduction of the new Constitution in 1990, Mozambique entered a final reform phase aiming to modernise and decentralise the public sector and consolidate on-going socio-economic initiatives (Helgason 2002). Recent initiatives reflecting this objective include not only the 2003 *Lei dos órgãos locais do Estado* (known as the LOLE-law), but equally importantly the public sector reform strategy adopted in 2001, the Land Law of 1997 and the first Action Plan for the Reduction

of Absolute Poverty (PARPA I) (Ministry of Planning and Finance 2003; Negrão 2002). Decrees 15/2000 and 80/2004[137] constitute recent attempts at decentralising the Mozambican state by legitimising *community* authorities, which hitherto functioned without such recognition (Decreto 15/2000; Decreto 80/2004). Not only do they emphasise the significance of traditional authorities; they might equally facilitate actual implementation of broader legal frameworks, for example the Land Law, which, for the first time, introduces community as potential stakeholder and caretaker of land (Tanner 2002). In sum, we might see these recent endeavours as guided by an overall assumption that "there is an intrinsic link between popular participation at local level, better government at local level and the mobilisation of potential for local development which [has] been stifled hitherto by the rigid control exercised by centralised bureaucracies" (Bierschenk 2005:1-2).

It would, however, amount to a gross simplification if we saw these processes as unique to Mozambique, as donors throughout the world in recent years have looked to decentralisation as primary means of establishing local development and furthering democratic governance (Bierschenk 2005). We might even raise the level of abstraction and argue that the current focus on decentralisation borrows its moral legitimacy from a worldwide trend towards "doing good" (Sampson 2002:6), where not only decentralisation and its participatory corollary but also public and civic codes of conduct stand high on international political agendas, as witness the anti-corruption campaigns currently sweeping the globe (Danida 2003; Michael 2004; Riley 1998, 2000). However, what is often absent from these development discourses is an understanding of dynamics inherent in local socio-cultural universes where such political measures are realised. Thus, in Brazil, participatory programs initiated by international lending institutions have run counter to local understandings of public participation created through prolonged struggles against authoritarian regimes (Nielsen 2002).

Reality rarely reflects discursive intentions, as illustrated by Gupta (1995). The search for cause and effect is an empirical and analytical dead-end. We can therefore rarely explain the variables of local realities simply by analysing conditionalities stated in development and decentralisation projects. Such governmental programmes always encounter populations who have already been integrated within political systems in various ways (Nuijten 1998:23), the result nearly always being an array of unintended consequences, which might or might not benefit overall political objectives. Furthermore, in regimes with "low steering capacity on the part of the state" (Bierschenk 2005:3), as is the case in Mozambique, smooth implementation of state-driven projects is unlikely, as local contexts often display high levels of autonomy; either intended or by need. Inspired by the recent introduction of decrees 15/2000 and 80/2004, I shall discuss how local-level authorities, situated at the perimeters of state functioning where formal scripts for its constitution are lacking, evolve through processes which apparently contradict governmental rationalities by circumventing officially sanctioned media of legitimacy. As contextual basis for the discussion, I analyse illegal yet legitimate appropriations of land through which certain residents rise to significance, ultimately

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[137] Decree 80/2004 is equivalent to 15/2000 but refers specifically to urban areas under municipal (and thus not state) administration.

occupying positions as informal but widely accepted leaders with rights to intervene in socially created disputes within the community.[138]

This discussion takes its departure from the general argument that externally driven political projects, such as the ongoing process of legitimising and recognising community authorities, must be calibrated with local socio-cultural realities in order to fulfil overall objectives. Hence, I will show that the creation and enactment of local leadership in fact comprises complex and contingent socio-cultural processes that gain impetus from the micro-settings wherein they occur. Depending on situational requirements,[139] needs and socio-economic constraints, different perceptional registers are applied for the understanding of leadership. Consequently, it is never given in advance who or what constitutes local authority. This fact cannot but seriously challenge the ongoing endeavours of legitimising local authorities through relatively unequivocal processes (see also Buur and Kyed 2005).

The article will, firstly, describe the empirical setting for this analysis. The study concerns Mulwene, a peri-urban neighbourhood of Maputo, which rose to significance as an emergency zone after the violent flooding in 2000, with crucial consequences for the enactment of community leadership in the area. Secondly, I present three vignettes that depict the diversity and ambiguity of community authority when analysed from an actor-oriented perspective. This section is followed by an introduction of significant theoretical ideas, primarily the Aristotelian concept of prudence (phronesis), which directs our attention towards the *contingent* moral character of everyday practices, as *prudence* is the agent's ability to act skilfully and in accordance with shifting moral requirements in a variety of unforeseen settings. Subsequently, I discuss analytical consequences for the understanding of the relationship between state and citizen through a problematisation of an overemphasis on 'neo-patrimonial' aspects of sub-Saharan realities. Finally, through the notion of trust, I conclude by discussing potential pitfalls in the current attempts at legitimising traditional authorities given the co-existence of both informal and formally sanctioned scripts for the enactment of community leadership.

The Emergence of a Community

In 2000, Mozambique was hit by the worst flooding in the country's history. Seven hundred people died and innumerable families lost their homes (Christie and Hanlon 2001). Maputo, the country's capital, was severely affected by the rains, not least certain peri-urban areas, such as Polana Caniço. Prior to the flooding, the municipality had constructed a North-going highway through the area. Realising the potential danger of erosion, eucalyptus trees were planted alongside the road, but these were removed by newcomers needing land, who constructed informal houses in their place. Thus, when the flooding intensified, Polana Caniço came to be

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[138] Purchase of land has been illegal in Mozambique since the 1975 liberation when Samora Machel and the Frelimo party nationalised all land (Grest 1995).

[139] I take 'situational requirements' to be those historically contingent variables, inherent to the local context, which guide and to a certain extent determine practice. Regarding conflict resolution, this could entail the widespread necessity of using familial networks as mediating capacities. As situational requirements acquire their immediate strength from the particular contextual setting, they invariably change over time and space (Foucault 1980; Nielsen 2003, Rabinow 2003).

traversed by a gorge 15 to 20 meters wide and 15 meters deep where the highway had been. Faced with the problem of finding shelter for the afflicted, the municipality chose to resettle large numbers of homeless families in Mulwene, an area on the outskirts of the city hitherto inhabited by small-scale farmers and *nativos* [natives],[140] who initially refused to cede their lands, even greeting municipal surveyors and civil engineers with cutlasses. Eventually, however, deals were made where *nativos*, in compensation for the ceding of their lands, were allocated plots (15 by 30 meters each) according to the size of their extended family. Ideally, the newly acquired plots should be laid out within the area previously owned by the *nativo*. However, if municipal urban plans dictated otherwise, the *nativo* and his/her family were relocated to other areas within the neighbourhood, but not necessarily near their former lands.

Before proceeding further, it is important to pause at the concept of 'native'. The dictionary tells us that a native is a person either born in a specified place or associated with a place by birth (Concise Oxford English Dictionary 2001). Although this reading is echoed in conversations with residents in Mulwene, thorough scrutinisation reveals the concept's ambiguous local character. My research has repeatedly shown that the great majority of residents initially defined as natives are, in fact, newcomers arriving as late as the mid-1980s. It appears, furthermore, that the concept gained significance only after the flooding. Needless to say, during negotiations with municipal officials, it was of vital importance for local residents to be actively defined as natives, as this label was paramount for any subsequent allocation of land. Later on, a successful classification as native facilitated further land transactions as several plots intended for extended families were resold by heads of households, now enjoying status as informal distributors of land. Whenever potential buyers entered the area, they would look up the local authorities, which did not always mean officially sanctioned leaders, but rather residents believed to distribute land given their attachment to the place by birth. I elaborate on this important aspect in the sections below.

In some ways, therefore, we might argue that the flooding ignited a series of creative inventions of traditional categories, akin to Hobsbawn's much debated "invention of tradition" (Hobsbawn 1983). Gaining impetus from concrete conflictual processes over land between municipality and residents of Mulwene, the *nativo* gradually emerged as a potent marker of identity for agents attempting to invoke legitimate authority both within and beyond the perimeter of the local community. As a result, the status of officially sanctioned community authorities was displaced and eventually reconfigured in accordance with shifting situational requirements. In most urban Frelimo-controlled neighbourhoods, the administrative focal point is the *secretário do bairro* [neighbourhood leader], which has been the case since the initial introduction of *grupos dinamizadores* shortly after liberation. Each neighbourhood is further subdivided in *quarteirões* [quarters] where appointed cadres associated with the grupo dinamizador work as *chefes de quarteirões* [quarter chiefs]. It is important to note, however, that since the late 1980s,

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[140] Several of the agents involved told me later that this decision was marked by short-term thinking, as the chosen area is actually located on a huge sand dune, making house construction problematic as the soil supposed to secure the foundation gradually drifts away.

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articulation between neighbourhood party units, such as the *grupos dinamizadores*, and municipality is significantly weakened, as resources for maintaining stable informational channels have been progressively withdrawn. During interviews, both state and municipal officials recognise that, until recently, neighbourhood authorities worked in relative autonomy, lacking both funding and supervision. Consequently, the intention is for decrees 15/2000 and 80/2004 to eliminate this articulatory deficiency between neighbourhood and municipality.

Until the flooding, Mulwene functioned as a sub-area of Magoanine, which was divided in A, B, and C. *Chefes de quarteirões* of the sub-areas should ideally respond to the *secretário do bairro* of Magoanine, but depending on strategies, personal affiliations and location, the quarter chiefs sometimes acted autonomously, or, when it seemed more profitable, collaborated with neighbourhood leaders in bordering areas. This arrangement eventually changed as a consequence of the flooding. As more transportation was provided and electricity and water became accessible to some extent, more people moved to the area, prompting the municipality not only to redefine neighbourhood borders but also to reconfigure the administrative structure. Thus, instead of having only a handful *quarteirões* [quarters], 56 new *quarteirões* were constituted (of approximately 150 to 200 households each), a corollary being the nomination of 56 *chefes de quarteirões*. To lead these quarter chiefs, a new *secretário do bairro* was elected among members of the steering committee organising the resettlement process.[141] Although the initial election of the *secretário do bairro* was unanimous, he was not, in fact, elected by residents of Mulwene, but only by fellow members of the steering committee. The legitimacy of his standing within the community consequently remains contested, not least by *nativos* dissatisfied with the increasing municipal monitoring of their activities.

Knowledge about rights and duties is distributed unequally among *chefes de quarteirões*, a consequence of, among other factors, the limited information given by the *secretário do bairro*. Thus, without publicly defined codes of conduct, rights and duties and lacking any kind of monitoring, *chefes de quarteirões* continue to enjoy relative autonomy, allowing for highly idiosyncratic understandings of how community leadership should be enacted. In some quarters, chiefs augment their scope for income strategies by collecting illegal fees among residents, arguing that the money is for funerals, aid to widows and orphans and so on. In a situation with great demands on urban land, some quarter chiefs have established themselves as informal distributors of plots, nowadays frequently in collaboration with prior owners, actual or invented. In tandem with and often overlapping this process, plots of land allocated to *nativos*, after protracted struggles with the municipality, had realised rapid increases in value by the time their new owners arrived.

Summing up, in this particular peri-urban area we have a situation where low-level community leaders partake in and often promote illegal transactions, without necessarily losing legitimacy. In fact, my research confirms that the opposite dynamic is equally frequent; quarter chiefs acquire stronger standing precisely by allocating land to incomers in need. As we shall see shortly, officially sanctioned leaders are not alone in laying claim to community authority, as some *nativos*

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[141] This committee was constituted by community leaders from afflicted areas arriving in Mulwene with their people.

involved in illegal land transactions subsequently rose to significance as informally constituted leaders with rights to intervene in social disputes.

Informal Planning

The new 1997 Land Law did not distinguish urban from rural land, despite prior discussions that clearly showed a need for regulations on urban use (Jenkins 2001). Thus, in 1998, a report from the Technical Secretariat of the Inter-Ministerial Commission for the Revision of Land Legislation pointed out that "occupation in urban areas was often not in accordance with urban plans [...], and the vast majority did not have a construction licence" (cited from Jenkins 2001:13). My research supports these conclusions. The 1997 Land Law (article 1) defines urbanisation plans as "documents which establish how areas within the urban boundary should be organised, their design and form, parameters for occupation, building use, assets to be protected, location of social facilities, open spaces and the schematic layout of the road network and main infrastructure" (República de Moçambique 2004:9) By this definition, planning in Mulwene has occurred on an *ad hoc* basis without adhering to a general urbanisation plan. An engineer at DCU (Construction and Urbanisation Directorate) described how the flooding created a situation in which planning was guided simply by a need to parcel out plots for habitation. Although the issue has been regularly debated since the inundations, no final plan has been drafted. Buur and Kyed (2005:10) describe how in rural Mozambique the civil war created a situation of "decentralisation by default" with governmental tasks taken over by non-state actors.

A similar line of thinking might fruitfully be applied to peri-urban areas of Maputo, where the lack of functional urban management has facilitated pragmatic uses of territories. Thus, in the absence of overall guidelines for urban planning, we must ask what stands in its place. As I shall argue, it is through local processes of informal urban planning that residents of peri-urban area define, reconfigure and enact what counts as legitimate community leadership. Put differently: through dialectic ongoing progressions, informal urban planning and community authorities create interdependencies whereby they become mutually reconstituted and buttressed – or rejected. Below, I present three small vignettes, which show how local authorities are created and enacted in highly idiosyncratic ways depending on situational requirements, socio-economic constraints and individual strategies.

Vignette 1: Desiring the State

Parts of Mulwene had been relatively untouched by the immediate influx caused by the floods, but as facilities improved, more people wanted land in these zones. However, without urban plans to designate official layouts and clear divisions of plots, *nativos* found it difficult to negotiate with potential buyers. According to an engineer at DCU, groups of *nativos* therefore hired a surveyor to outline a map that could be used to identify plots for sale. As this occurred during a period when the municipal reach was still fairly limited, the new map was never contested by official institutions. In fact, as it is the only existing map of this particular section of

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Mulwene, it is currently used by municipal surveyors initiating the troublesome process of legalising existing land use.[142] On the map – which literally redefined the area – the surveyor outlined sections intended as 'industrial reserves', meaning that residents cannot inhabit these zones.

However, as the pressure on land continues to increase, *nativos* and neighbourhood leaders have individually or in collaboration distributed plots in one of the reserves to 'needy' families. Surrounding areas have already been parcelled out with individual plots (15 by 30 meters) separated in blocks of approximately 16 plots, between which run 15-meter-wide sandy roads, thus dividing the quarteirão into rectangular squares. The industrial reserves were initially left out of this process, but residents in one of the reserves took upon themselves to parcel out the area using state-defined norms: 15–meter-wide roads and 15 by 30-meter plots. Headed by a former quarter chief who still enjoys local legitimacy, an informal commission was set up and restructured the reserve in order to maintain general urban norms and to ensure access to all houses. Subsequently, the project caused heated disputes as some residents were relocated and several plots were diminished due to the informally designed roads. Keeping in mind that all settlements in the zone are officially illegal, residents had to seek resolution among themselves, a still ongoing process involving *chefes de quarteirões,* informal leaders, *nativos* and residents.

Vignette 2: Rejecting the System

On June 5, President Guebuza visited Mulwene for the inauguration of a new market place. As always when visiting local communities, the president took his seat on a portable platform, accompanied by important officials and the neighbourhood leader. Unlike his officials, Guebuza sat in a huge high-backed wooden throne, emphasising his particular status. Suddenly, during the mayor of Maputo Eneas Comiche's speech, two serious-looking men near the fence shielding officials from the masses raised large posters, firstly showing them to the speakers at the platform and later to the crowd listening quietly. The silence, however, ended abruptly, as people started to cheer and clap as they read the messages: *"Estamos a pedir nova estrutura no bairro"* (We ask for new administrative structure in the neighbourhood) and *"Estamos cançados dos corruptos"* (We are tired of the corrupt). This was my second encounter with Tembe and Boaventura, the two leaders of a group of 14 families in direct conflict with municipal and neighbourhood officials over disputed land.

In 2001, as a continuation of their involvement in the post-flood relief activities, *Igreja Metodista Unida* (the United Methodist Church) sent a request to the municipality, asking for land in Mulwene for the construction of a handicrafts school intended for local youth. The municipality responded favourably, and so it fell upon community authorities to indicate vacant lands. In April 2002, the *secretário do bairro,* in collaboration with a local DCU engineer, decided to allocate the project two blocks (approximately 120 by 120 meters) in a quarter not yet officially parcelled.

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[142] I came across this map by coincidence one day, at the secretário do bairro's office just as the municipal surveyor arrived. He had a copy of the map, but did not know where it came from. I later confirmed with engineers at DCU that it did not exist officially.

However, as the area had been inhabited informally for some time by 14 families, the community administration decided to relocate this group to another quarter at the Northern edge of Mulwene, a good 45-minute walk from their present location. This move would obviously have huge consequences for the population, most of whom survived on odd jobs procured through constant maintenance of personal networks. Headed by Tembe and Boaventura, the 14 families consequently refused to be moved, arguing that for resettlement to occur, the *secretário do bairro* had to find vacant lands in the vicinity. Refusing to accept these demands and simultaneously feeling constant municipal pressure to proceed with the project, the *secretário do bairro* and a group from the local police squad entered the quarter in May 2003 with the intention of demolishing all houses within the two blocks intended for the project. However, after they had torn down only one reed house, the growing crowd demanded to see some documentation to prove the legality of the procedure. As the secretário was unable to demonstrate legal backing, people became infuriated and threatened to kill him. The police fired several warning shots to disperse the crowd, and the secretário quickly withdrew to a police car.

Tembe and Boaventura continued as the legitimate representatives of the 14 families during negotiations with community authorities and municipal officials, totally rejecting the local *chefe do quarteirão* as an intermediary, as they argued that he was "part of them" (the community administration). In response, community authorities argued that there were no vacant plots available for all families nearby. The dispute made any immediate solution appear unlikely, leaving the project's prospects somewhat hazy. The group of donors behind the church eventually responded to this unforeseen development by withdrawing all funds, finally eliminating any remaining hope for the project's actual realisation. Since the final collapse, interactions between the 14 families and community authorities have faded to a minimum. During conversations in 2005, Boaventura argued that neither the secretário nor his accomplices dare enter their quarteirão, as they, the community authorities, will probably be attacked. Furthermore, speculations circulate as to the secretário's corrupt activities; a widely held assumption among residents of the two blocks is that the actual reason for attempting to resettle the 14 families is that the secretário is trying to sell off their plots, not only to the church but also to richer individuals (who remain nameless) associated with the community structure. On the other side, the secretário maintains that all squatters will be removed, by force if necessary, as the final decision regarding resettlement is still pending. Curiously, he argues that the project is still in progress, despite the pastor of the *Igreja Metodista Unida*'s statement confirming that all funding has, in fact, been withdrawn.

Vignette 3: Conflict Resolution Gone Native

In 1998, José was living in Mulwene with his brother and sister-in-law, but tensions arose as José's fondness for his brother's wife grew beyond a platonic friendship. Before this, José had lost his first wife and now his life was apparently going awry. As an attempt to avoid further complications, Célia, José's sister-in-law – and object of his desire – asked around for available land where José could live on his own. Fortunately, the sister of Célia's next-door neighbour had a small plot, which she had

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acquired in 1997, intended for her family's next generation. As the children were still minors, Gilda, the proprietor, agreed to lend the plot to José until he could find a place of his own.[143] Time passed and José married his second wife without, however, showing any intention of leaving. This situation remained unchanged until 2003 when Gilda wanted her land back. She approached José, demanding that he left the plot immediately. As José explained that he was in the process of buying a plot in Kongolote, a nearby neighbourhood, Gilda agreed to wait for him to reach agreement on the purchase.

A year later, things had apparently changed, as José approached Gilda asking for permission to build a concrete house, something she flatly refused, once again demanding that he leave the plot immediately. As a counter-strategy, José agreed to move – if only Gilda would reimburse him for the time he had guarded her property! This proposition was also rejected, but Gilda went even further. In what she describes as an "act of stress", Gilda and her son entered the plot one night while José and his wife were away and demolished the fragile base of concrete blocks. At this point, dialogue between the two ended, so resolution had to be found elsewhere. José summoned three *nativos*, of whom two were, in fact, newcomers. Although one was a former quarter chief, all three were involved in illegal land distribution, even prior to the flooding, which is when Mulwene first became known as regular urban neighbourhood. In the local community, the *nativos* were regularly consulted as an informal, but legitimate 'resolution council' primarily for land disputes, due to their allegedly superior knowledge of the ownership histories of different plots.

The first meeting was held on José's plot, with the participation of all the involved parties. José maintained that he was willing to leave if reimbursed. Gilda, backed by several family members, once again refused, claiming that José knew that he had borrowed the plot only temporarily, without ever being assigned with the task of guarding it. After protracted and heated discussions, a deal was struck. Gilda would compensate José for the demolished bricks as she had no right to destroy another person's possessions. The 'resolution council' refused to make a decision on José's demand for reimbursement, claiming that this matter was for the *secretário do bairro* to decide. Afterwards, José proclaimed that 150 million MZM (6,101 USD) would be a fair reimbursement, but after negotiating with the three *nativos*, he settled on 50 million MZM (2,033 USD). Although this equals the current price for a 15 by 30 meter plot, Gilda argued that she did not have that kind of money, and so refused to pay, instead arguing that "it is that old quarter chief [actually meaning one of the *nativos* who has never held position as leader] who 'agitates' José so that they can split the profit afterwards." Later, a meeting was held at the *secretário do bairro*'s office, but did not reach an agreement as the neighbourhood leader transferred the case to the district administrator's office, where it still awaits resolution. At some point during this process, Gilda sold the plot to a newcomer, who, after the meeting on José's plot, piled up blocks for a future house on the land. This, however, did not speed up José's departure and he stills lives on the plot, awaiting the administrator's decision.

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[143] Although Gilda argues otherwise, it appears that she never actually bought the plot; she merely borrowed it from an old nativo who was not capable of using it herself. When the nativo died, no heirs claimed the plot and so Gilda continued as owner. Furthermore, the plot is both informal and illegal as it is located in an area designated 'public reserve', meaning non-residential.

The Moralities of Everyday Practice

Through these descriptions of the enactment of community leadership, I have tried to emphasise the creativity and lack of definite stability that are apparent when different agents attempt to master their own fate. Rather than maintaining a fixed line, people seek to gain a sense of control by steering a course between self and other as needs, socio-economic constraints and interests make certain possibilities available while sifting out others. Thus, following Michel de Certeau, we might fruitfully analyse local agents as 'walkers', who follow the thick and thin of spatial settings without the determination of irreversible routes (1984). Through their various practices, the agents described in the three vignettes invariably position themselves morally in relation to their surrounding world. Depending on situational requirements, positioning and interests, momentary decisions are made as to the distinction between good and evil, as when Tembe and Boaventura decided that their quarter chief was unsuitable to handle their case.

As it is such moral considerations that guide agents' practices as they 'shop around' for potential leaders, we must analyse this aspect carefully. I suggest that we turn to the Aristotelian reading of the concept of *prudence*. In "The Nicomachean Ethics", Aristotle defines prudence [phronesis] this way:

We may grasp the nature of prudence if we consider what sort of people we call prudent. It is thought to be the mark of a prudent man to be able to deliberate rightly about what is good and advantageous [...] But nobody deliberates about things that are invariable [...] [Prudence] is concerned with *conduct*, and conduct has its sphere in *particular circumstances* (Aristotle quoted in Flyvbjerg 2001:56, italics added).

Prudence is the ability of the moral agent to choose between conflicting value-orientations in situations where no *a priori* universal standards can be invoked (Ferrara 1987:251). In the absence of general guidelines or criteria, the agent makes their value judgments based on their interpretation of the context. Prudence focuses on what is variable and therefore requires consideration, judgment and choice (Flyvbjerg 2001:57). It is the ability that enables the agent not only to act, but to act well by choosing between good and bad things *in situ* (Ferrara 1987:259). This means that prudence is a virtue that allows the agent to make moral judgments in situations where a certain degree of vagueness prevails regarding the outcome of the action. When there is no question about the outcome, prudence becomes irrelevant. Following Aristotle, we might therefore argue that depending on the context, the agent defines a framework *in situ* for the moral interpretation of the situation.

Obviously, the outcome of action is never totally pre-given, as moral interpretations shift according to emotional sensations, strategies and socio-cultural positions. Hence, in order to explore an agent's doings, we must follow the different 'rhythms' and 'modulations' by which s/he oscillates between socio-cultural limitations, behavioural patterns and emotional states. However, following Jackson, we can argue that socio-cultural attachments and practices carry the seeds of their own negation (Jackson 1998:14) as moral 'trajectories' (de Certeau 1984:115-130). They become cross points, which appear to be mutually incompatible. And yet, it is exactly because of such modulations, which imply changing locations 'in between' fixed positions, that agents derive some sense of control over their destinies.

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Overlapping Moral Registers

If we accept these theoretical arguments as premises for the discussion of leadership, it is clear that we cannot depend on a petrified, state-defined conceptualisation of "true traditional authorities" (e.g. Buur and Kyed 2005). Rather, the enactment of leadership depends in many instances on a constant tension between contrasting moral trajectories or registers, such as those between current pragmatic considerations and long-term fantasies of urbanisation and concrete housing. It is thus during ongoing conflict resolution that moral registers are invoked, which guide the prudent individual towards certain temporarily fixed perceptions of what legitimate leadership might be. Notions of legality/illegality are consequently of lesser importance when the media through which conflicts are resolved are considered momentarily legitimate. A socially accepted leader may therefore arise through illegal yet legitimate appropriations of land, through which reciprocal ties are established between contributor and buyer.

In Mulwene, the broader state-initiated urbanisation process creates desires and fantasies about future developments, such as electricity and water installation and, most importantly, secure tenure rights. When such fantasies fail to materialise, accusations of corruption are uttered regularly, in recent times drawing on state-initiated discourses, predominately regarding "*o espírito de deixa-andar*" (the spirit of apathy). In the process, residents might successfully manage to bribe public officials, and so other registers are invoked. Rather than considering the illegal act as corruption, it is perceived as a manifestation of *desenrascar*. The verb literally means to 'disentangle' but is used to express how a person struggles to achieve a certain goal and is therefore considered a positive concept. Hence, when conflicts over land arise, different moral registers are conflated and superimposed in a unique process constantly shifting in motion and by which perspectives and objectives are gradually transformed.

It is in this context that understandings of leadership are produced and realised. Depending on situational needs, strategies and social constraints, leadership is defined and acted upon in idiosyncratic and highly creative ways, as when José (vignette 3) circumvented officially sanctioned ideas of leadership, instead opting for three *nativos* who managed to invoke authority among the parties involved. Likewise, when resolving disputes in the industrial reserve (vignette 1), the quarter chief was bypassed by his assistant who was a key player in the informal distribution of plots. Tembe and Boaventura (vignette 2) went even further, rejecting widely held notions of community leadership, and proceeding instead as leaders themselves. As the conflicts evolved, mutual accusations of corruption were uttered, especially in situations with a certain lack of clarity (vignettes 2 and 3). However, these interpretations were apparently negated by contrasting moral trajectories, as when Gilda (vignette 3) accused José of conspiring with one of the *nativos* to gain a profit, while simultaneously attempting to sell the plot illegally, which Gilda legitimised by saying that the transaction was merely an attempt to augment their meagre income, as they no longer needed the plot.

It is now clear that the different agents' practices cannot be explained simply by reference to officially sanctioned norms or, in contrast, some kind of traditional ethics. In their everyday practices, individuals act in most instances as 'poachers'

(de Certeau 1984), constantly drawing advantages from arising opportunities without the illusion of challenging or even altering dominant systems, as in vignette 2 where the neighbourhood authorities were contested in front of President Guebuza, but only to demand new leaders within the same system. Hence, the prudent agent manages to appropriate and manipulate the incessant "murky ambiguities" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993:xxii-xxiii) inherent in most everyday practices, as when the absence of urban norms function as catalyst for creatively reconfiguring meanings of space (vignette 1).

Concluding Remarks

As discussed in the introduction, trust means believing in events that have not yet occurred (Sørhaug 1996:22-23). As Mauss (Mauss 2000[1923-24]:61) argues, it is trusting that a given gift actually will be reciprocated that drives gift-giving. Putting trust in a leader is therefore a bold action, given the lack of any tangible guarantee of getting the desired outcome (Sørhaug 1996:22). Furthermore, trust is paradoxically its own precondition: to trust a person you have to believe that he is worth trusting (ibid. 23). This belief, however, is not based on actual guarantees of any benefits. Community leadership consequently acquires an almost religious status when the resident unconditionally puts trust in the neighbourhood leader. Given the contingencies of everyday life in areas such as Mulwene, the object of trust inevitably changes in accordance with altered situational requirements, socio-economic constraints and individual strategies. The leader trusted today might not be capable of fulfilling general demands during the next conflict and so other media are momentarily defined as legitimate. Most agents are constantly 'in between' multiple trajectories; some are determined by urgent contingencies while others get their impetus from long-term fantasies. Thus, media for conflict resolution change accordingly, making local perceptions of legitimate leadership a constant variable, which remains contested in its deviations from any stable state of equilibrium as the prudent agent outlines and attempts to follow a feasible trajectory into the future.

Early 2005, the municipality in Maputo distributed documents to all neighbourhoods, explaining in detail the process of legitimising community authorities. Not only is the process of choosing the (singular) local leader spelled out, but also every step of the inauguration ceremony. Among various interesting points, it stipulates that "the elected leader shall in few words show his gratitude to the community for the confidence they have vested in him". Shortly before my departure, I discussed these procedures with the current *secretário do bairro*, who is supposed to function alongside the new community authority as a kind of minor official handling all state affairs. Although sceptical about the prospects of sharing his privileged status, he already had an idea of who will be elected. According to the neighbourhood leader, it is most likely that either a former *régulo*[144] or a *nativo* who collaborated with the steering committee relocating flood victims to Mulwene would be elected.

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[144] Local leader inserted by the Portuguese colonial powers to manage the articulation with residents in a given area. The régulos were primarily found within already existing structures of leadership, so although the regulo was in fact linked with the colonial system, the Portuguese attempted to reproduce an image of traditional leadership (Newitt 1995).

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In the light of this analysis, I believe that the nomination of a singular leader calls for attention. It is, of course, difficult to formalise informal codes of conduct, such as local agents' mediations between various types of legitimacy. However, if people are to 'trust' a leader and consequently allocate authority to him or her, it is essential that the realisation of leadership corresponds to situational requirements inherent to particular settings. It is therefore of the utmost importance to broaden our understanding of the complexities of community leadership. In his analysis of witchcraft, Evans-Pritchard (1937) holds that its occurrence is explicable only with reference to its particular pragmatics, and we might put forth a similar argument regarding community leadership. I hold that a first step is to analyse the processes through which people pragmatically enact and negotiate notions of leadership. In other words, we must start with everyone else except the leader, as legitimisation of community leadership may turn out to be fruitless unless rooted in local moral understandings of what this concept entails. Leadership is in fact a verb disguised as a noun and it is the process rather than the person that constitutes actual leadership.

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