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What is This?

Futures within: Reversible time and house-building in Maputo, Mozambique

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Abstract

In this article, I introduce an anthropological approach to time and temporality which suggests that anticipatory actions are not always guided by futures separated from the present through a linear chronology. Whereas time is conventionally understood as a chronological series of succeeding moments, I argue that different temporalities might converge to create durations which cannot be gauged using a linear scale. I consequently explore anticipatory action as it pertains to durational time. As I will show, when temporal succession is discontinuous, linearity may be turned around so that (assumed) effects are revealed to be causes. Rather than functioning as the dominant temporal trope, linear sequentiality thus emerges as an effect of reversible time. I build my argument from an ethnographical examination of house-building practices in peri-urban areas of Maputo, Mozambique. According to house-builders, they build houses which will never be completed. Still, by pre-figuring the end-point as a likely failure, anticipatory action is turned inwards through a series of internal reversals. House-building is guided by seemingly incompatible social principles and through a series of temporal reversals, these tensions are momentarily resolved.

Introduction

In an important overview article on the anthropology of time written nearly 20 years ago, Nancy Munn claimed that 'futurity is poorly tended as a specifically temporal phenomenon' and that anthropologists viewed the 'future in "shreds and patches" in relation to the close attention given to the "past in the present"' (1992: 115–16). During the last decade, her call for a balanced anthropology of time with

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equal value given to past, present and future has found a receptive audience among a growing number of scholars who have published a rich and nuanced body of work on how people orient themselves in relation to unknown futures (Appadurai 2004; Crapanzano 2003, 2004; Guyer 2007; Hodges 2008; Maurer and Schwab 2006; Miyazaki 2004, 2008; Robbins 2007; Strathern 2005). Most importantly, these studies add to an anthropology of time by shedding new light on anticipatory action. Through detailed ethnographic accounts they unfold how the future emerges as anticipations inscribed in the present (Hage 2003; Simone 2006); how hopes and aspirations reorient individual life trajectories (Appadurai 2004; Miyazaki 2004, 2006; Pedersen, forthcoming); the imaginative potentials of unknown futures (Crapanzano 2003, 2004, 2006); how physical artefacts form 'anticipatory infrastructures' as materializations of desired futures (Fehérváry 2002; Miller 2005; Nielsen 2008; Thrift 2005); and how political transformations affect subjective capacities for future orientation (Bourdieu 2000; Guyer 2007; Vigh 2006). As pointed out in several of these studies, when people act upon ideas of the future, they become stretched out, so to speak, between different moments in time. According to Strathern, people's actions are all the time informed by possible worlds which are not yet realized (2005: 51). The present thus becomes a function of an imagined future moment which is extended backwards in time to ground the current act. In 'The Economy of Dreams' (2006), Miyazaki unfolds this counter-intuitive movement by describing how the hopes of a Japanese trader affect his actions here and now through a reimagining of 'the present from the perspective of the end' (2006: 157). What many of these studies suggest, then, is that anticipatory actions connect otherwise detached temporal moments and potentially establish a meaningful relationship between the present and the future by making the latter a function of the former (or vice-versa).

This article builds on the recent body of work on time and temporality and argues for a view on anticipatory action which takes seriously those 'possible worlds' which, although not yet realized, inform people's everyday actions. I wish to extend our analytical understanding of time, however, by suggesting that anticipation is not always oriented towards an unknown future which is fixed to the present through a linear chronology. Many of the studies above seem to be based on a temporal imagery of the present as related to its past and future through distance. Each moment is consequently exterior to all other moments and any occurrence can be fixed to only one temporal location. It seems to me, however, that not all temporal phenomena can be grasped using this chronological conceptualization. Might we not imagine prolonged flows of time which cannot easily be fixed to particular temporal locations? Take, for example, Veena Das's illuminating description of the Indian Partition (2007). She writes that,

> although the Partition was of the past if seen through homogeneous units of measurable time, its continued presence in people's lives was apparent in story, gesture, and conversation. ... The sense of the present then was marked by a fearful *anticipation*. The survivors in the locality were living not only with memories embodied in the walls

of houses, on the charred doors, in the little heaps of ashes in the street, but also with threats embodied in words and gestures. (2007: 97–8, emphasis added)

As Das makes clear, such temporal phenomena cannot be examined through a chronological categorization of events according to past, present and future. Rather, we need to consider how time erupts as 'durations', i.e. convergences of different temporalities within one rhythmic configuration (Bergson 1965; cf. Ansell Pearson 2002: 202). In a much-cited passage on time, Bergson writes how 'the flowing of the water, the gliding of the boat, or the flight of a bird, the uninterrupted murmur of our deep life, are for us three different things or a single one, at will' (1965: 52). Bergson here guides our attention towards the ability to appropriate different temporalities without dividing into distinct entities, thus being both one and many (Deleuze 1988: 80). We find the same phenomenon in many quotidian events, such as waiting for the water to boil or the sugar to dissolve where impatience might constitute a crucial part of duration (Ansell Pearson 2002: 10). In these instances, the convergence of multiple temporalities creates an 'incommensurable island of duration... with its own rhythm' (Bourdieu 1972: 105) which lasts for as long as it is able to elicit durable effects. Hence, given the constant permeations and convergences whereby they 'imperceptibly organize themselves into a whole' (Bergson 2001: 121), durations cannot be seen as quantifiable entities which can clearly be distinguished from each other, and so it makes little or no sense to try to measure or compare them, not even on relative scales like 'more or less', or 'before and after' (Ansell Pearson 2002: 13; Deleuze 1988: 20).

Still, we need to ask ourselves whether the distinction between linear and durational time is, in fact, a confrontation between incompatible concepts. Surely, Indian citizens whose anticipatory actions are formed by the Indian Partition are perfectly capable of distinguishing between discrete moments. And yet, their overall 'time-map' (Gell 1992: 236) seems to be pervaded by a relatively homogeneous logic by which they orient themselves in relation to the future. What the future might be, however, is *not* necessarily that which lies ahead on a linear scale. If duration is considered as a co-existence of intersecting temporalities, succession is logically discontinuous (Deleuze 1988: 37). Consequently, the internal relationship between separate moments is one of qualitative (and simultaneous) differentiation rather than quantitative (and linear) sequentiality. In this sense, time cannot be seen as a series of detached moments which follow each other like pearls on a string. Rather, time may fold upon itself (Latour 2005: 201) and thus create unique durations which swell as they advance (Bergson 1913: 6).

Based on this reading of linear and durational time, I propose the hypothesis that when time operates in a durational manner, the progression of past, present and future may be internally reversed. The surprising result is, I will argue, that linearity is potentially turned around so that (assumed) effects are revealed to be the causes; e.g. occurrence 'A' is made possible by occurrence 'B' even though the latter chronologically follows the former. In other words, although my claim is that durational flows liberate time from any assumed dependence on chronological

linearity, this does not *ipso facto* imply a dissolution of sequentiality nor that individual moments necessarily lose their distinct qualities. To be sure, time 'folds' in multiple ways and the durational flow is but one possible configuration which allows for non-linear progressions to emerge within relatively delimited temporal wholes.

I build my argument through a detailed ethnographical examination of house-building practices in Maputo, Mozambique.[1] As a temporal phenomenon, house-building on the outskirts of the Mozambican capital presents us with a peculiar conundrum. According to house-builders, they build houses which will never be completed. With insufficient economic capacities and confronted by a weak urban governance system, the prospects of eventually concluding a building project are considered to be quite gloomy. What I will argue, however, is that the significance of house-building is not simply a reflection of the relationship between the ideal and its impossible but constantly attempted realizations. This would imply that the significance of the construction process was purely a refraction of a clearly defined objective. Rather, house-building needs to be understood as a reflection of the temporal idea of 'trying to make a life' (xiChangana: *kuzama utomi*).[2] Nelson Machava,[3] my close friend and assistant who lived in Mulwene, a neighbourhood on the northern periphery of Maputo, succinctly described how building a house is a potent way of 'trying to make a life'.

> The idea of, say, a finished house is fixed [*fixa*], but we don't know whether we will ever see its conclusion. We've got an idea ... but what's an idea? We might make a blueprint with three rooms, but this does not give us the idea that we might conclude the house because the [necessary] money doesn't exist. But as soon as there is an idea, we start on the house [*a gente começamos a casa*]. In other words, I don't know what it will bring, but, hey, I'm trying to make a life.

The ontology of *kuzama utomi* is complex. By pre-figuring its end-point as a likely failure, anticipatory action is turned inwards through a series of internal differentiations. If we consider house-building as a crystallization of *kuzama utomi*, it brings together two otherwise incompatible principles which come to co-exist in a state of constant tension. These tensions, however, are momentarily being resolved through a series of reversals by which each (retrospectively) precipitates the other. In the following, I refer to these principles as *construção* (construction) and *parcelamento* (parcelling-out). Whereas the former indicates the need for the house-builder's relational outreach during the construction process, e.g. through ties with neighbours, community leaders and local-level civil servants, the latter outlines how individual house-builders may be defined detached from such reciprocal relationships with others, e.g. when positioned as heirs to land or through the allocation of official property rights. As such, the relationship between *construção* and *parcelamento* constitutes a conceptual confrontation between 'alliance' and 'filiation' (*pace* Viveiros de Castro 2006) where the former implies relations based on difference (e.g. secure occupancy through ties with local chiefs or

former owners), and the latter implies relations based on similarity (e.g. secure occupancy through inheritance or citizenship). As we shall shortly see, however, their concatenation through house-building processes establishes a unique connection through difference – what Viveiros de Castro coins 'disjunctive synthesis' (2006, 2007; cf. Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995: 8) – between these apparently incompatible principles so that relations of alliance come to precipitate relations of incorporation (and vice-versa). Considered as a durational assemblage, then, house-building processes connect different temporal flows which crystallize either relations of difference or relations based on similarity. And conversely, it is through this momentary conjunction that seemingly doomed construction projects acquire social significance among residents on the outskirts of Maputo.

Building a 'casa de raiz'

Most residents in Mulwene strive to build a *casa de raiz* (original or well-rooted house). As people in the area have told me, a *casa de raiz* is a cement house built with durable construction materials in a parcelled-out plot. Buttressed by a cement foundation below ground (the 'shoe' or *sapato*), the *casa de raiz* is built using 15 centimetre blocks for the walls below the windows with traversing concrete girders on the 'shoe' and also on top of the windows in order to secure the stability of the building. Corrugated iron sheets are placed as roof before the entire house is plastered with cement and wooden doors and windows are inserted. During the last phase of the construction process, all interior and exterior walls are painted and entries are secured with iron gating and, if possible, a cement wall is erected along the boundary lines which encircle the plot. Finally, in order not to contradict municipal regulations on land parcelling, the location of the *casa de raiz* is always three meters from the boundary line towards the street in a 15×30 meter parcelled-out plot.

I first heard the phrase *casa de raiz* when I went to Mulwene with Mucavela, my boastful landlord, in his beat-up 4-wheel drive Toyota, to inspect the house I was going to rent. Just passing the last corner before descending towards the street where I was to live, Mucavela slowed down and looked past me: 'How did they afford that house?' His otherwise harsh voice was softened by the overt admiration for the impressive house to our left. It was quite huge, probably with five or six rooms, plastered and elegantly painted in dusty green with a cement roof and a colourful mosaic terrace. Encircling the house was a two-meter high wall complete with curved interweaving ornamentations and brass lamps at each corner. Mucavela shifted his attention back to the bumpy road ahead, speeded up and concluded with a sigh: 'That is truly a *casa de raiz*!'

Later that day, I discussed the significance of the *casa de raiz* with my two closest neighbours, Daniel and Celso:

> Daniel: A *casa de raiz* has a solid foundation and a plan. It has electricity installed, pillars, indoor toilet, it has everything.

Morten: Why is it called *casa de raiz*?

Daniel: Because it has roots, a trunk, branches ... The house starts with the foundation so you need to make a cement mixture which functions as the 'shoe' (*sapato*).

Celso: My house could become a *casa de raiz*. It's what gives form to the style ...

Daniel: But it's used in everyday language. If you take the constructions here, we don't really have *casas de raiz* ...

Celso: There are *casas de raiz* in Bela Horizonte. ... I could make my house beautiful, but it would still be nothing. You can't make a *casa de raiz* without a civil engineer who measures the weight of the house.

Morten: So, is the *casa de raiz* an ideal for you?

Celso: ... here, it's only Charles [a close neighbour] who has one.

Daniel: For us, it's just about hiding our heads [*esconder as nossas cabeças*] ... But it [i.e. a *casa de raiz*] also has to do with the location. It has to be close to the road. Celso's house was intended as a *casa de raiz* because it's close to the road. It has to be allocated a formal number, and therefore it can't be too far away from the road. It's a question about order.

Celso: It's about aesthetics ...

Daniel: Yeah, the rule is three meters from the plot boundaries.

Daniel and Celso commence by explaining that the *casa de raiz* is an aesthetic and functional imperative to build the house with all mod cons. Although recognizing that only a very few people are capable of building a *casa de raiz*, Daniel suggests that even Celso's house potentially aspires to this status; not because of its building style, however, but – surprisingly – because of its particular location within the parcelled-out plot. As Daniel tells us, the 'rule' is that houses have to be built three meters from the boundary line in order to be officially registered. Adherence to this 'rule' is, in other words, a *sine qua non* when building a *casa de raiz*. It is therefore quite interesting that no such 'rule' exists. Let me briefly explain.

During the Portuguese regime, the right to urban residency was a prerogative for the white elite (Jenkins 2009: 87), whereas the indigenous African population was forced to live in 'unhealthy area(s)' on the outskirts of the city (Mendes 1988: 220). Given that the sprawling squatter settlements (*caniços*) would ultimately be removed, there was little political incentive to establish an urban governance structure which could accommodate the indigenous population. Until the end of

Portuguese rule, few resources were invested in creating housing conditions for people living in the 'informal city' (Jenkins 1999: 9–10). Consequently, at Mozambique's independence in 1975, the Frelimo government inherited a fragile administrative system which was completely incapable of controlling the housing situation in the expanding periphery which encircled the city centre (the so-called *cidade de cimento*) (Mendes de Araújo 1999: 176). Consistent with its overall ideological orientation pivoting around a nationalist version of Marxism-Leninism, Frelimo initially sought to cope with the crisis through an all-embracing nationalization of land including both urban and rural areas (Dinerman 2006: 50). As was soon apparent, however, the already existing weaknesses were further aggravated by Frelimo's over-reliance on socialist models which explicitly privileged rural production (Hall and Young 1997: 84). No longer a symbol of civilization, the city was envisaged as a hatching place for 'idlers, parasites (and) outcasts' with no productive value to the emerging socialist society (Trindade 2006: 42; cf. Jenkins 2006: 120). Although this ideologically driven anti-urban stance was significantly softened when Mozambique made its 'turn towards the West' in the mid-1980s, the subsequent implementation of a series of IMF-sponsored structural adjustment programmes brought the state apparatus to complete paralysis (Devereux and Palmero 1999: 3; Hanlon 1996: 16). As a consequence, civil servants, including architects and land surveyors, began to moonlight in order to secure a viable level of subsistence. Today, the effects of a weak state apparatus are apparent everywhere: dilapidated public buildings occupied by civil servants without the necessary qualifications manage a state administration that is incapable of carrying out even the simplest tasks and services (Nielsen 2007a). Consequently, without a functional urban governance system, the uncontrolled swelling of the city continues unabated. Currently, more than 70 per cent of Maputo's 1.5 million inhabitants occupy land illegally and approximately 75 per cent of all access to land occurs through informal channels, i.e. local leaders or civil servants illegally parcelling out and selling plots to needy newcomers (Carrilho et al. 2005: 4; Jenkins 2000: 145).

To be sure, the dysfunctionality of land management mechanisms in both urban and rural areas has remained a seemingly incurable headache for the Frelimo party. Pressured by national civil society organizations and international donors, in 1997 the Mozambican government passed a new and surprisingly progressive land law which marked a decisive shift towards an explicit rights-based approach. Although it reiterated that land continues to be the property of the state (Art. 3), it also recognized acquisition of the right of use and benefit of land through occupancy and established the use and benefit of land as a vested right (Art. 10). In other words, whereas previously individual rights were limited to the mere physical occupation of a piece of land subject to the state as owner, the 1997 Land Law recognized the right of land use as a 'limited property right' (Garvey 1998: 10). According to Article 12, rights of land use can be acquired by 'occupancy by individual persons and by local communities, in accordance with customary norms and practices which do not contradict the Constitution'. As argued by Tanner (2002: 19), by acknowledging the right to occupancy through customary

or traditional channels,[4] the new juridical framework sought to incorporate within the legal domain what was hitherto beyond the realm of the law. This ambition has, however, proved more difficult to achieve than anticipated. Despite the initial intention of giving equal rights to the three different forms of occupancy defined in Article 12 (i.e. occupancy in accordance with customary norms; in good faith; and through authorization of submitted requests), the fact remains that for all practical purposes, an authorized document weighs far more than any oral or verbal testimony, even though the latter should be sufficient to prove individual rights to the use of land (Art. 15). Furthermore, although the 1997 Land Law was envisaged as an all-encompassing instrument for guaranteeing 'access and security of land tenure' throughout the national territory, the lack of spatial distinctions has made it virtually impossible for urban residents to actively make use of legal instruments. The Land Law Regulations that regulate the procedures for obtaining the right to use and benefit from land apply only to areas outside those under municipal jurisdiction with cadastral services (Art. 2). Hence, no regulations were ever defined for urban areas in cities, such as Maputo, even though the need for such instruments has been recognized at least since 1982 (Jenkins 2001: 13).

Consequently, when Daniel refers to the 'rule' of building a *casa de raiz* three meters from plot limits, he is pointing to an overt effect of a prolonged political neglect to prioritize low-income housing. According to current legislation on urban land, parcelling-out needs to comply with an elaborate urban plan which is integral to a wider hierarchy of spatial planning devices, ranging from national plans to the Detail Plan (*Planos de Pormenor*) which 'define in detail the occupational typology of any specific area in the urban centre' (República de Moçambique 2006). Still, because of the lack of capacities to establish functional urban planning, these regulatory instruments have little or no practical significance in those areas outside the small city centre which are already occupied by residents having accessed land informally. What is striking, however, is the structured spatial organization in some peri-urban neighbourhoods, such as Mulwene. When I first visited the area, I was immediately struck by the homogeneous planning with evenly parcelled-out blocks consisting of 16 15 × 30 meter plots divided by straight 10-meter-wide roads. A similar aesthetic homogeneity characterized the buildings, most of which were located three meters from the boundary line towards the street. Although interspersed by occasional reed huts, nearly all houses were cement buildings in the process of being constructed.[5] I was therefore quite surprised when I realized that the larger part of the area was *not* parcelled out by central planning agencies and that the majority of residents had *not* acquired land through formal channels. Throughout the last two decades, architects and land surveyors acting either on their own or in collaboration with former land owners and local community leaders informally parcelled out the area and sold individual plots to newcomers who proceeded to build houses without proper construction permits.

One may rightfully ponder how the illegally built houses came to reflect such a strikingly urban aesthetics. As I would find out, provided that house-building

projects visibly reflected a form of orderliness which the state *could* have established (but which it lacked the capacities to actually create), they would most likely never be removed irrespective of their lacking legality (Nielsen, in press). As Senda, the former head of the municipal urbanization department poignantly put it, urban management is, in fact, 'administration ad hoc (*gestão ad hoc*)', functioning simply to secure a 'minimum of urban order'. In this regard, the possible illegality of a construction project was of lesser importance. Sambo, a municipal architect, made this abundantly clear. 'We are a poor country', he explained. 'Therefore it doesn't make much sense to remove a cement house which could easily stay there'. I asked if this also applied to houses erected illegally. 'Exactly!', Sambo nodded eagerly, 'often, the city council doesn't have the money to remove a house'. Hence, when building a *casa de raiz*, residents adhere to a set of 'rules' which have emerged through a series of illegal transactions as a way of imitating some official standards which only exist as their own realization. Despite the lack of legal anchorage, however, given that residents build *as if* they are realizing official standards, they come, in a sense, to create those norms. Without a proper original to imitate, the only real original is the copy.

Having thus outlined the urban aesthetics of the *casa de raiz*, I will now examine the anticipatory orientations which guide house-building projects on the outskirts of Maputo. I start by outlining the temporal cosmology of 'making a life' (*kuzama utomi*) through house-building projects before proceeding to explore how the durational flow of a construction project pulls anticipatory actions towards itself.

Preserving the future

Whereas the ideal of constructing a *casa de raiz* is clearly defined by present and prospective house-builders alike, it is less frequently achieved. In fact, during my stay in Mulwene I saw only one house which residents themselves considered as being a completed *casa de raiz*. When perceived in relation to its eventual but unlikely completion, the construction of a *casa de raiz* thus seems like a project prone to failure. However, as I indicated in the introduction, the building of a *casa de raiz* needs to be seen in relation to the temporal idea of *kuzama utomi* (trying to make a life) which highlights the tendency to commence particular projects even when knowing that they will most likely fail.[6] Nelson was showing me his half-built terrace constructed as a gaily coloured mosaic when he suddenly reflected on the reasons for commencing a building process which he did not have the financial resources to conclude. 'We are a people who don't have any money', Nelson explained while fiddling with some loose quarry tiles. 'We don't have the certainty that on a particular date we're going to have a certain amount of money. So we count on a bit of luck... and we like to start things up...'. Nelson nodded towards the terrace before continuing. 'We like to start things up just to incite ourselves (*ganhar mais ânimo*)'. A few days later, I was discussing Nelson's statements with Campos Ferro who owned the biggest though still only half-built cement house in the southern part of Mulwene. 'Yeah...', Campos looked at me with a huge grin on

his face. 'Nelson is really trying to make his life... *Kuzama utomi* is seeking an opportunity where there aren't any. It's about preserving the future (*preservando o futuro*)'.

It undoubtedly appears to be an oxymoronic conjunction that something as uncertain as a construction project 'preserves the future' of the house-builder. Indeed, when seen in relation to its unlikely completion, a house-building project seems incapable of establishing a viable future for its owners. As Bourdieu argues, 'below a certain threshold of objective chances, the strategic disposition itself, which presupposes practical reference to a forth-coming, sometimes a very remote one... cannot be constituted' (2000: 221). If we compare the amount of money needed to realize a house-building project (at least 100 million MZM [US$4,200]) to, say, Campos's monthly income (approximately 3 million MZM [US$125]), we might argue that the projection of a completed cement house is surely lacking any 'practical reference to a forth-coming'. In order to understand how such seemingly utopian projects 'preserve the future' of the house-builder, let us therefore briefly explore the kind of anticipatory orientation implied by this statement.

The anticipatory orientation which guides a house-building project is conceptualized in slightly different terms when speaking xiChangana and Portuguese. Whereas in xiChangana the widely used phrase is '*urunguisela a mundzuku wa wana wa mina*' (I am preparing the future [literally 'tomorrow'] for my children), the Portuguese equivalent is '*estou preservando o futuro para os meus filhos*' (I am preserving the future for my children). Hence, the conceptual difference lies in the distinction between 'prepare' and 'preserve'. In most everyday conversations, however, both phrases are used to conjure the same temporal imagery of a future which is cultivated like a *machamba* (a small cultivated garden). In fact, both concepts derive their temporal significance through a metaphorical shift from the domain of gardening where they are used to describe the obligatory cleaning of uncultivated land in order to control the forces of nature and manifest a human presence (Menezes 2001: 58–60; Nielsen 2008: 132–6). When a garden has been swept (*varrer*), the house-owner physically controls the space and fills it with his or her presence. In an analogous manner, the preparation and preservation of a future is a way of controlling its unknown forces by already inhabiting it. In other words, when building a *casa de raiz*, Campos Ferro is not oriented by a utopian illusion which eventually reveals itself as a failure. Rather, he is preserving a future *which is already there*. As a temporal phenomenon, the process of building a *casa de raiz* constitutes a (durational) swelling of time rather than a linear progression of different moments following each other like pearls on a string. Following Bourdieu, I will therefore argue that the cement house 'offers itself as a quasi-present in the visible, like the hidden faces of a cube, that is, with the same belief status... as what is directly perceived' (2000: 207). Irrespective of its current material form, the *casa de raiz* asserts itself *here and now* as a real entity with the capacity to condition current activities.

A series of recent anthropological and sociological writings have creatively explored the dynamic relationship between insecure urban conditions and changing cosmological imageries in different sub-Saharan cities (Ashforth 2001, 2005; Englund 2007; Geschiere and Nyamnjoh 1998; Honwana 2003; Menezes 2001). From Ashforth's vivid account from Soweto, South Africa (2001, 2005), we learn how people live with witchcraft as a constant and latent possibility where a person's spirit is continuously exposed to harmful intrusions by witches secretly lurking in the vicinity (cf. Stewart and Strathern 2004: 79). Similar to the ambiguous 'world of witches' in Soweto, many people in the southern part of Mozambique live in a cosmological universe where 'the boundaries between good and evil are not clear-cut' (Honwana 1996: 83). Not everything is known, and what is known is that power works in hidden and often capricious ways. As succinctly argued by West, all phenomena contain both constructive and destructive potentials, and it is always uncertain whether they operate in beneficial or malevolent ways (2005: 78, 193; 1996: 25). In order to engage with important but potentially destructive forces, it is consequently of paramount importance to organize the environment and establish durable distinctions separating order from chaos, e.g. through propitiatory rituals, house-building projects and everyday cleaning of land (Feliciano 1998: 159).

In an unstable socio-political setting, such as Mulwene, things in the world come together in 'areas of more and less clarity and obscurity' (Williams 2003: 76) which makes uncertainty a general premise for social life per se. Through processes of house-building, people therefore try to 'make their lives' by proportioning otherwise capricious forces in the world. In this regard, the *casa de raiz* essentially constitutes a temporal organization of a world 'whose every crevice potentially conceal(s) peril' (West 2005: 28).[7] It proportions ongoing activities through a distribution of its interior properties, e.g. when illegal squatters acquire use-rights to land based on the urban aesthetics of projected building projects (Nielsen 2009, 2010). As such, the building project may fruitfully be considered as a qualitative tendency guiding multiple and often contradictory actions. In the following, I substantiate these arguments through an extended case study of a dispute over rights to land in Mulwene. As we shall see, the *casa de raiz* is the durational form through which series of temporal reversals are created between otherwise incompatible principles (i.e. *construção* and *parcelamento*).

The ungrateful nephew

Malaquias was the sister's son to Foliche Tembe, a deceased *régulo* in Mulwene. Throughout his youth, Malaquias lived in Mulwene on his mother's land which was initially donated by Foliche.[8] In 1972, however, things changed when Malaquias had a brief but intense romance with a local married woman. When he realized that Malaquias was having more than just a platonic relationship with his wife, the cuckold threatened to kill Malaquias, something which apparently prompted the latter to move to the neighbourhood of Malhazine, where he

has lived ever since. According to Malaquias, however, he 'never abandoned Mulwene' and has continuously returned to keep his deceased uncle's lands clean.

When the Maputo municipality officially parcelled out a small section of Mulwene, known as 'The Teachers' Zone', former owners who had been living in the area with their extended families all their lives (the so-called *nativos* [natives]) were allocated 15 × 30 meter plots in compensation for the lost land which many of the *nativos* used not only for habitation but also as *machambas*. Foliche's widow, Marta Sitôe, was allocated eight parcelled-out plots based on the fact that she was the only remaining relative to the original owner. According to Marta Sitôe, she was soon approached by Malaquias, who requested land for his children, and he was allocated four 15 × 30 meter plots. Although Marta Sitôe assumed that the future physical proximity of her nephew would strengthen their kinship ties with one another, she was sorely disappointed:

> I gave the plots to my nephew because I thought that if he lived close by, he would bring me water. But he cheated me . . . he sold the plots. ... I then asked him to give me some of the money in order for me to rebuild parts of my house, but he didn't want to listen to me. He said that he had already used the money to buy a car. So I resolved the matter by selling the plots which were given to me. ... If he had only given me some of the money, I would never have sold the other plots. He never helped me with anything . . . he never gave me anything.

According to Malaquias he was the real heir to Foliche and not Marta Sitôe, who was the late *régulo*'s third wife and who had not produced any children.[9] Hence, despite being allocated four plots, Malaquias become furious when he realized that Sitôe had sold the remaining plots to unknown newcomers. He immediately approached several of the newcomers, claiming to be the legitimate owner of the plots. One of these, Augusto, was already in the process of building a cement house when Malaquias showed up. Despite feeling threatened, Augusto ignored Malaquias's claim and continued to build his house. Shortly afterwards, Malaquias and his son invaded Augusto's plot and started erecting a cement house behind the latter's building, thus preventing access to it by the backdoor. Suspecting that Malaquias might, in fact, be the actual heir, Augusto decided to postpone further building activities until the dispute had been properly resolved and proceeded instead to rent a house in 25 de Junho, a nearby neighbourhood. For the next four years, Augusto remained there before finally being able to return to his interrupted building project in 2004 when a viable solution was found. Previously, Marta Sitôe's sister owned a large piece of land which she later donated to the Anglican Church. Marta Sitôe therefore approached the pastor and explained that Malaquias had built a cement house in a parcelled-out plot to which he claimed to be the rightful heir but which the municipality had allocated to her. Fortunately, the pastor quickly acknowledged the untenability of the situation and thus agreed to cede four 15 × 30 meter plots to Malaquias in order to resolve the dispute.

  Despite the implicit recognition of his claims, Malaquias remained dissatisfied. Not only had the dispute postponed his own construction plans indefinitely; he had furthermore paid a considerable amount of money for cement to build the incipient cement house in Augusto's plot. As Malaquias perceived the matter, since Augusto would now be the only beneficiary of the blocks, he (Malaquias) ought to be compensated. As a provisional conclusion to the dispute, Augusto therefore agreed to pay for the cement which had initially been used to prevent him from accessing his own house. Although they will probably be of no use to Augusto, the walls erected by Malaquias and his son are still standing as a physical reminder of this bitter conflict.

Reversible time

I begin this section by sketching out the two seemingly incompatible principles (*construção* and *parcelamento*) which are being activated during the process described above. I then return to the dispute in order to explore the temporal reversals by which *construção* and *parcelamento* continue to supplant each other. I conclude the section by arguing that it is through these interior reversals that residents seek to establish a momentary balance between incompatible principles which otherwise threaten to disrupt anticipatory orientations.

Construção

According to Augusto, the informal transaction with Marta Sitôe was made possible by Jeremias Tembe, Augusto's colleague, who had previously bought a plot from Sitôe. As a newcomer, Tembe was morally indebted to Sitôe, who would subsequently legitimize his presence in the local community, e.g. if Tembe's claim to land was disputed by neighbours trying to appropriate the plot. Hence, in order to reciprocate Sitôe's hospitality, Tembe found a trustworthy buyer whereby his own status was significantly improved (and Sitôe earned 5 million MZM [US$181]). While discussing a particular incident when a buyer failed to show the former owner proper respect, Salvador Guambe, a local resident, outlined the kinship-like relationships that are being established through such transactions. 'He [the new owner] has to show some respect because Mphumo [the former owner] is his father; he arranged the plot, so he has to be respected as a father'. From the household survey I conducted with all 131 household heads in a quarter (*quarteirão*) in Mulwene, it appears that relational ties were, indeed, crucial when accessing land. Whereas only 24.4 per cent (32 respondents) had been allocated a plot by the municipality, 64 per cent (84 respondents) had acquired land through informal channels, such as friends, former owners and quarter chiefs.[10] In other words, although there was at the neighbourhood level an administrative structure to which all requests for land should be directed, actual land transactions were based on personal ties.

During the process of building a *casa de raiz*, relational ties continue to be of paramount importance. As we saw in the case study above, individual rights to land are constantly being disputed, and in these instances contestants need former owners, neighbours and quarter chiefs to corroborate their claims. Current owners constantly seek to reproduce such reciprocal ties, e.g. by helping neighbours during intense building processes, by finding potential buyers when someone wishes to subdivide and sell off parts of their land or by bringing *sumo de nkanhu* (nkanhu juice) to the quarter chiefs after the yearly harvest. Furthermore, after having sold a plot, the former owner continues to be considered as the 'original' owner of the land and is entitled to all harvested fruits from trees standing on the ground in the parcelled-out plot. It is, however, the newcomer's responsibility to observe this obligation and also to ask the former owner's permission before cutting down trees in the plot. As frequently occurs, when a newcomer fails to respect these moral codes, his or her claim to ownership right might be questioned and ultimately revoked.

In sum, when building a *casa de raiz*, residents engage in reciprocal encounters with important others in order to 'extract or elicit from others items that then become the object of their relationship' (Strathern 1992: 177). A resident might agree to cede some of his hitherto unregistered plot to a quarter chief (who subsequently resells it to another client) in return for an assurance of continued secure occupancy, which is, so to speak, absorbed through the chief. As the subdivided plot returns in a form which is different from what was initially extracted, the traded item (now in the form of secure occupancy) becomes an objectification of the reciprocal relationship, what Gell describes as an *index* (1998: 13–15) through which interacting parties read the identity of the other.

Parcelamento

To all residents in peri-areas such as Mulwene, parcelling (*parcelamento*) is paramount. Unless a plot is parcelled out by an appropriate authority and registered in the municipal cadastre, the occupant is perceived by state and municipal authorities as an illegal squatter. Ideally, *parcelamento* occurs when a need for habitation is formulated by either the local administrative structures or a municipal entity. Physical planners from the municipal department of urban planning, DMCU,[11] then proceed to survey the area before topographers mark out individual plots whose allotted numbers are registered in the municipal cadastre. To parcel out a plot is at the same time to transform the urban landscape and must therefore occur in accordance with the planning devices created for the particular context. As already argued, the problem is that legal devices, such as comprehensive urban plans, do not exist. 'The plans don't exist', Sambo, the municipal architect, told me while tapping rhythmically on the table with his pen. 'That's the problem... And that's why *parcelamento* is all there is'. Despite its lack of legal basis, however, *parcelamento* was generally what residents in Mulwene strove for as it would catapult them towards building a *casa de raiz* without fearing that they would be

forceably removed. When an area was parcelled out and new occupants started building cement houses, it was very unlikely that they would ever be removed. As Senda, the former head of the municipal urbanization department told me, the municipality was not at all interested in how a person acquired access to a plot; what mattered was whether the (illegal) building project was erected in accordance with prevalent urban norms regarding construction aesthetics.[12] If it was, the resident remained. Thus, despite the likely informal acquisition through civil servants or community leaders and a consequent lack of cadastral registration, residents and officials agreed on the practical legitimacy (i.e. relatively secure occupancy) that was obtained through *parcelamento*.

Hence, as a reflection of this socio-political situation, a cement house built three meters from the boundary line in a parcelled-out plot has become the spatial medium for manifesting a resident's claim to ownership right. As we saw in the case study above, it has acquired a dual function of simultaneously expressing the right of inheritance and ownership rights acquired through informal land transactions. To be sure, in an unstable socio-political environment where official agencies lack the capacities to realize comprehensive urban planning in neighbourhoods on the fringes of the city, a *casa de raiz* built in a 15×30 meter plot is a potent medium for stabilizing the ambiguities which surround informal occupancy. This was, indeed, abundantly clear to Malaquias when he attempted to prevent Augosto from erecting a cement house. If Augosto had succeeded in completing the construction project, the physical materiality of the house would undoubtedly serve as its own legitimization and thus eliminate the authenticity of Malaquias's claim to hereditary rights.

Let me now briefly sum up the overall characteristics of *construção* and *parcelamento*. *Construção* indicates the regularized patterns of reciprocal interactions which are instigated by house-building projects and through which individuals legitimize their residency in the area. In contrast, *parcelamento* confers on the resident a minimum sense of stability through the imagined protection and control that derives from an individually owned plot. Individuals thus need to be acknowledged based on the individual rights which accompany possession of a piece of land. While the former prompts an active outreach, the latter secures active protection. We thus have a latent tension between power as relation (*construção*) and power as possession (*parcelamento*) in which the plot constitutes the public expression of the latter while the house is the public expression of the former. Following Viveiros de Castro (2006, cf. 2009: 244), we might see this as a confrontation between two sets of structuring principles, i.e. alliance and filiation, where the former refers to relations based on difference (e.g. relationship between former and current owner or between owner and community leader) and the latter refers to relations based on similarity (e.g. right of inheritance or recognition of occupancy based on citizenship).

During my stay in Mulwene, the incompatibility between *construção* and *parcelamento* was probably the one issue which more than anything else provoked heated debates and caused new or dormant conflicts with neighbours and local

authorities to flare up. As previously mentioned, while 24.4 per cent of all residents in one quarter in Mulwene were allocated land by the municipality, 64 per cent acquired land through informal channels. Whereas the former group entered Mulwene as newcomers with few or no ties to residents living there, the latter group had from the outset relatively strong relational ties to former owners and quarter chiefs in the area. Although these differences were not particularly pronounced during most everyday encounters, when conflicts did flare up, residents' relationships to land proved to be of paramount importance. Without urban plans to indicate the formal layout of the area, conflicts continued to erupt when individual plots were 'invaded' by neighbours putting up plot markers and thus attempting to appropriate what was presumably not theirs. Depending on how land was initially accessed, the disputing parties would refer to different and often contradictory rationalities. If a plot was acquired, say, through a quarter chief, the personal relationship would be used to legitimize the claim. In contrast, if a building project had already been initiated in a 15×30 parcelled-out plot, the claim would most likely focus on rights of occupancy based on citizenship. Although this argument would clearly strengthen the position of the claimant, the relationship with the former owner was potentially jeopardized as citizen-based rationalities essentially bracketed or even annulled the value of personal ties (cf. Holston 2008: 22, 240ff.). Still, depending on the institutional setting of the conflict (neighbourhood, regional or municipal level) and the parties involved (residents, former land owners, neighbourhood administration, municipal officials), the argumentation might oscillate between contradictory rationalities and thus emphasize relations of difference during meetings with former land owners and members of the neighbourhood administration while relations of similarity might be emphasized during encounters with the district administrator. What I wish to explore in the final part of this section is consequently how the *casa de raiz*, through a series of temporal reversals, creates a 'disjunctive synthesis' (Viveiros de Castro 2006) between these two seemingly incompatible principles.

Disjunctive synthesis and temporal reversals

In Lévi-Strauss's writings on the house as a social institution (1983, 1987), he argues that houses combine a series of irreconcilable principles, such as filiation/residence, patri-/matri-lineal, close/distant marriage. In 'house-based societies', neither of these principles manages to establish the group on their own. Hence, 'the house... gives an appearance of unity to opposing principles made equivalent to each other' (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995: 8). Whereas Lévi-Strauss focuses on the house as a hybrid form which fuses kin-based and class-based social orders (1987: 151) and thereby conjures an image of an evolutionary development from elementary into complex social structures, I wish to emphasize how incompatible principles (*construção* and *parcelamento*) precipitate each other through a series of temporal reversals. As a durational flow, the *casa de raiz* creates and is created

by this sequence of transformations which produce an internal 'swelling' of time rather than a linear differentiation of succeeding moments.

Following Roy Wagner (1979, 1981, 1987), I take this sequential transformation to constitute a series of temporal figure-ground reversals where each structuring principle comes to permeate and relativize the other as they shift status from figure to ground and back. According to Wagner, figure-ground reversals emanate from images which contain other images as implicit potentialities. When an image is elicited (e.g. the plot as individual property), it obviates another (e.g. a cement house as an effect of relational efficacy) as an unfolding of the former from the latter. It might therefore be argued that the process of reversing figure and ground exceeds the anthropological convention that 'images are open to multiple interpretations, affording different tropes' (Strathern 1991: 113). Each image being elicited figures as a unique singularity set against the unmarked background from where it was originally cut. Hence, although figure-ground reversals require an alternation of viewpoints, the images being transplanted are essentially carved from the same fabric (Strathern 2006: 91–2). As Strathern tells us, this logically implies an inversion of conventional scaling orders. If subsequent grounds are in fact everted figures, we might also imagine spaces as within places or even parents within their offspring (2006: 105–6; 1998: 141). Figure and ground are therefore not distinct phenomena which are gradually added up. Rather, they constitute a process of self-scaling – 'not two perspectives, as it were, but a perspective seen twice, ground as another figure, figure as another ground' (Strathern 1991: 113; cf. Wagner 1991: 166).

Perceived as a series of figure-ground reversals (see Figure 1), the transactions with the parcelled-out plots constitute an initial point of obviation ('A') which, so to speak, is equivalent to its own transformation as it carried the potentials for both relational outreach and individual right. When commencing to build what seemed like a *casa de raiz* ('B'), Malaquias actualized the latter (right of inheritance) which apparently 'grounded' Marta Sitôe's impulse to contact the priest of the Anglican Church ('C'). However, if we bracket the proclivity to arrange the sequence of events chronologically, it is clear that Sitôe's act ('C') actually created the conditions for Malaquias's initial construction activities (i.e. an inverse cause-effect relationship when perceived as linearity). On the basis of the image of Malaquias's cement house, Marta Sitôe persuaded the priest into ceding four 15×30 meter plots to her recalcitrant nephew who was immediately cast as heir to the land. Consequently, his previous invasive act was legitimized in the same instance. In a nutshell, Malaquias built his house because Marta Sitôe subsequently defined him as legitimate heir. A similar counter-movement occurred when Malaquias enforced upon Augosto a reciprocal relationship obligating the latter to compensate him for cement and sand used when erecting the building behind Augosto's house ('E'). When Malaquias was eventually allocated four 15×30 meter plots by the Anglican Church, he was obviously no longer a potential threat to Augosto; Malaquias was in fact the (relational) *cause* which enabled Augosto to commence building a *casa de raiz* in the first place. Consequently,
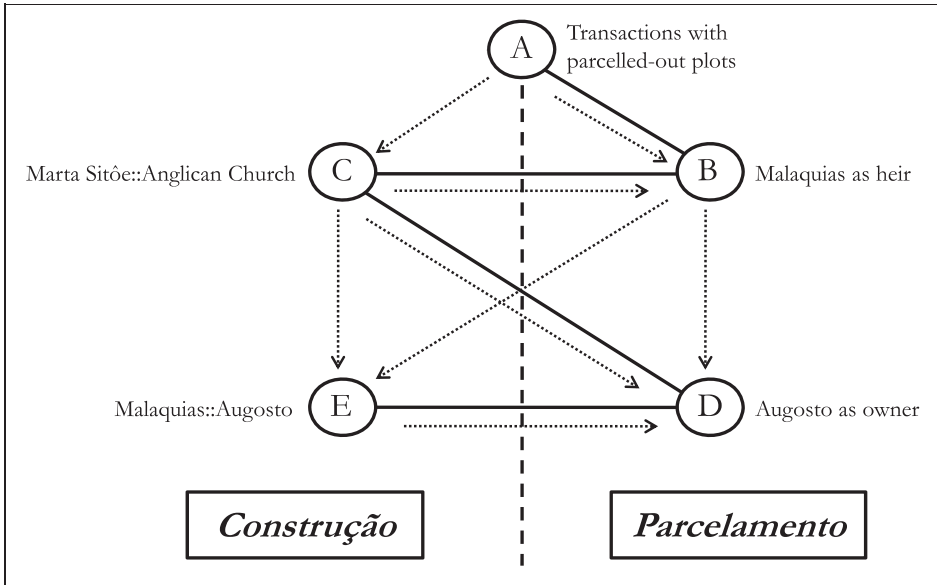
Figure 1. Figure-ground reversals elicited through the process of building a *casa de raiz*. The black line connecting the circles shows the linear sequence. The arrows indicate the (partially) counter-moving production of cause-effect relations. The vertical dotted line defines the obviational transformation.

the cement construction erected behind Augosto's house served as an 'index' of this relationship and ought to be properly recognized as such by the new owner. We might even argue that this relationship is an exact continuation of those ties mentioned above which exist between a former and an actual owner of land where the latter is obligated to give all fruits harvested on their land to the previous owner, the only difference being that this seller::buyer configuration is established only when the object eclipsing the relationship is returned.

From the diagram it clearly emerges that 'C' is a particularly significant point in the sequence. To be sure, it is the turning point where ambiguities regarding (relational) positions are most pronounced. Marta Sitôe compels the priest of the Anglican Church to perceive her as the cause of a debt by emphasizing her relationship to the area through her sister. When extracted, however, the desired object (four 15 × 30 meter plots) serves to position Malaquias as legitimate heir. Hence, from 'C', the movement splits up into two figure-ground reversals with distinct characteristics. Whereas the linear forward-moving reversal (C > D) confirms a relational attachment between Marta Sitôe and the new owner which is obviated in the latter's claim for ownership rights, the counter-moving reversal (C > B) becomes the condition for Malaquias invading the contested plot in the first place.

When bracketing the idea of linearity (A > B > C > D > E), it thus becomes possible to imagine other sequential progressions which contain counter-moving

figure-ground reversals. One version is $A > C > B > E > D$, which elicits how Malaquias is the legitimate heir to the land. He can therefore easily enforce a reciprocal relationship upon Augusto through which the latter acquires individual possession and potentially property rights to the parcelled-out plot. A simultaneous progression can be established between $A > C > D$, which positions Marta Sitôe as the natural heir who legitimately sells a plot to a needy newcomer. It is, of course, equally possible to imagine movements which are not obviated. In this regard, $A > C > E$ creates a succession of eclipsed relationships where former exchanges remain implicit though latent in succeeding ones (Josephides 1991: 150; Strathern 2005: 121). The initial relationship (Marta Sitôe::The Anglican Church) is thus configured as the origin of the subsequent relationship between Malaquias and Augusto. Recalling Marta Sitôe's disappointment with her nephew's disloyal conduct, her suggestion that Malaquias should give her 'some of the money' which he received from Augusto was, indeed, a clear indication that she considered herself as being the 'origin' of the subsequent relationship and ought to be reciprocated as such.

In sum, it is through the reversible time of the *casa de raiz* that opposing sequential progressions may co-exist in a momentary 'disjunctive synthesis' (Viveiros de Castro 2006). Similar to certain Barok verbal images studied by Wagner, the *casa de raiz* 'condenses whole realms of possible ideas and interpretations and allows complex relationships to be perceived and grasped in an instant' (1987: 56). Transformations and elicitations of contradictory meanings are inherently interior eversions which constantly destabilize the equilibrium of the building process. The gradual creation of a *casa de raiz* is thus a kind of self-scaling which produces its own imperfection (Wagner 2001). There is, in a sense, only one temporal duration (the *casa de raiz*) which is created as the two incompatible principles (*construção* and *parcelamento*) continue to supplant each other. The figure-ground reversals can therefore be understood as characterizing shifting momentary states rather than a linear sequence.

In Wagner's own work, he focuses on the elicitation of new meanings in Daribi myth where figure-ground reversals exhibit a unique temporal structure by continuously obviating causal antecedents. When a myth returns to its point of departure, the opening premise collapses whereby the temporal trajectory can be seen as having rewritten itself (Weiner 1995: 37–8). In a similar vein, the 'durational pull' of the *casa de raiz* was sufficiently strong to establish 'futures within', so to speak, which emerge through a peculiar kind of playfulness where different temporal projections continuously supplant each other. As we saw in the case-study above, through the oscillation between *construção* and *parcelamento*, new meaningful configurations emerge which suggest a momentary integration of otherwise incompatible principles of difference and similarity manifesting themselves as a non-linear sequence of events. Among the Barok, the supplanting of images through figure-ground reversals is considered as a primary form of power as it makes people aware of their own capacities in creating the images of which the world is composed. As Wagner notes, a figure-ground reversal 'does not simply

negate, it consummates its denial by demonstrating also that the inversion makes as much sense as the order it inverts' (1987: 61). In Mulwene, the process of 'trying to make a life' (*kuzama utomi*) by building a cement house in a parcelled-out plot suggests a comparable (albeit not similar) power of imagery. It brackets the proclivity for linear chronology and charts instead a series of non-linear trajectories that essentially cancels out conventional causality and suggests instead a unique reversible time. Rather than present and future being connected through distance, the former is cut out from the latter as an unfolding of its interior qualities.

Conclusion

In *Creative Evolution* (1913), Bergson tells us that '[d]uration is the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances. And as the past grows without ceasing, so also there is no limit to its preservation' (1913: 4). Here as elsewhere in his work (1965, 2001, 2005), Bergson reveals the peculiar workings of time as a medium for internal differentiations which cannot be separated according to a linear chronology. Whereas Bergson emphasizes how a durational flow creates a prolongation of the past into the future, I have suggested that an inverse movement is equally likely. To paraphrase Bergson's famous quote, I have described duration as the continuous progress of the future as it gnaws into the past and swells as it advances.[13] As Grosz tells us, we have to 'acknowledge the capacity of any future eruption... to rewrite, resignify, reframe the present' (1999: 18). In this article, I have consequently argued that particular durations, such as the process of building a cement house in a parcelled-out plot, might establish a unique temporal flow which pulls anticipatory actions towards itself. Time is thus inflected rather than stretched out in a linear succession of discrete moments. As previously emphasized, this does not imply that individuals somehow lose their capacity to distinguish one moment from another. It does, however, suggest that an effective durational 'pull' may bracket chronology by making discrete moments function as momentary states in a broader temporal configuration.

House-builders living on the fringes of Maputo 'make a life' (*kuzama utomi*) by building cement houses which might never be fully realized. Still, as I have emphasized throughout this article, the building project cannot be gauged simply by relating its current status to its possible but unlikely completion. As an outcome of Mozambique's recent socio-political history, the *casa de raiz* has emerged as a potential medium for creating a momentary 'disjunctive synthesis' between incompatible principles which otherwise threaten to paralyse anticipatory actions.[14] When house-builders commence erecting cement houses in parcelled-out plots which resemble an urban aesthetics which the state *could* have been promoting (but which it was incapable of doing), they are simultaneously eliciting a unique aesthetic form which secures their continued occupancy. However, because of the instability of the current socio-political situation, the *casa de raiz* is also an ambiguous aesthetic form which attaches itself to two different and apparently incompatible principles (i.e. *construção* and *parcelamento*). During house-building

processes, they remain in a state of constant confrontation which is resolved momentarily as they supplant each other through a series of figure-ground reversals. The significance of the *casa de raiz* is thus remade in the very act of creating it. We might argue, then, that within a durational flow whose end-point is pre-figured as its failure, ambiguity becomes a potent resource as it enables several simultaneous trajectories to be made which are then projected both back and forth in time.

Recent anthropological and philosophical studies of time and futurity present the future as the site of potentiality *par excellence* which continues to inform actions in the present (Crapanzano 2004; Fehérváry 2002; Grosz 1999; Strathern 2005). In this article, I have taken seriously the call for an increased emphasis on the 'possible worlds' (Strathern 2005) which guide individual and collective future orientations. I have suggested, however, that anticipatory projections might not always be cast into an unknown future. When people orient themselves within particular temporal durations, such as the process of building a cement house on the outskirts of a sub-Saharan city, anticipatory orientation may revolve around the possibilities for carving out reversible times within an already known temporal universe. Indeed, as argued by Munn, 'people operate in a present that is always infused, and which they are further infusing, with pasts and futures' (1992: 115; cf. 1990: 13–14). For house-builders in Mulwene, it is by making a *casa de raiz* that different temporalities intersect to create a momentary swelling of time. As we have seen, this opens towards a co-existence of multiple futures which are enacted and re-created as people strive to find stable social positions during uncertain urban times.

Acknowledgement

Notes

1. This article is based on 14 months of fieldwork in Mulwene on the northern outskirts of Maputo, Mozambique. The primary fieldwork was carried out between September 2004 and August 2005. Additional data was collected from September to October 2006 and again in February 2009.
2. Although Portuguese is the official language, it is the mother tongue of only 0.25 per cent of the population, and only 39.6 per cent know how to speak it. The most widely spoken language is Emakhuwa (26.3%), followed by xiChangana (11.4%), the most widely used language in Maputo (www.ine.gov.mz).
3. Names of people and places are pseudonyms except for the national capital, Maputo.
4. These include inheritance, marital arrangements and allocation by local chiefs.
5. Although house-building as described here relates to the process of constructing a cement house and not a reed hut, this does not mean that people do not live in reed huts in Mulwene. Indeed, from the survey of all households in a quarter in Mulwene, it appears

that although 55.8 per cent (63 respondents) currently live in cement houses, 36.3 per cent (41 respondents) have reed huts. However, given the status of cement house-building and its temporality, this process is privileged here. Building a reed hut is fundamentally a less comprehensive process. Whereas it easily costs more than 100 million MZM to build a cement house, the costs of erecting a reed hut rarely exceed 10 million MZM

6. Literally, *utomi* designates either life or health, while *kuzama* connotes an act of trying or experimenting (Sitoe 1996). There are consequently two different meanings of *kuzama utomi* which are distinguished by inserting an 'a' in front of *utomi*. If a person is ill or fears being bewitched by an opponent or rival, he or she will likely describe the situation as *anizama utomi na mina*, i.e. 'I am trying to save my life'. In contrast, when a person is trying to make a life – what in its broadest terms is described as 'trying to find the means to define a future life' – the phrase would instead be *mina nizama automi*. Hence, by inserting an 'a' in front of *utomi*, the significance shifts from a focus on physical bodily survival to the act of living.

7. See also Bertelsen (2009) and Paasche and Sidaway (2010) on the intersection between social insecurites and cosmological imageries in Mozambique.

8. During Portugal's colonial rule, strategically selected leaders (*régulos*) were installed as community chiefs. Depending on the size of the area governed by the *régulo*, he had a number of land chiefs who controlled access to land (Nielsen 2007b).

9. In the southern part of Mozambique patrilineal marriages are prevalent, i.e. women become circulating elements between male-dominated groups and families (Andrade, Loforte et al. 1997: 28; Arnaldo 2004: 145). Hence, when perceived from a traditional patrilineal perspective, Malaquias is without a doubt the legitimate heir. This claim, however, is refuted by operational national laws.

10. At the neighbourhood level, the administration is headed by the *secretário do bairro* (neighbourhood secretary). According to decree 15/2000 (the first legislation in post-colonial Mozambique to formalize 'traditional authority'), local leaders should be elected by their populations. In Mulwene this is not the case, as Magalhães, the *secretário de barrio*, was appointed by the Maputo municipality in 2000. From the outset, Mulwene was divided into 56 *quarteirões* (quarters) managed by 56 individual quarter chiefs. Whereas the neighbourhood secretary has a legitimate position within the municipal hierarchy, the quarter chiefs are informally nominated by the neighbourhood chief and therefore cannot carry out formal tasks, such as allocate land. The juridical framework notwithstanding, the majority of plots in the area where I carried out fieldwork were parcelled out and sold through quarter chiefs rather than formally allocated by the neighbourhood administration. Besides the administrative unit set up by the Maputo municipality, there is a traditional leader in Mulwene, i.e. 'the queen' (*rainha*) Adelina Nguetsa, who is the daughter of the *régulo* who collaborated with the Portuguese administrators during colonial rule. According to Graça Nhacale, a department head at the Ministry of State Administration (MAE), Nguetsa is the proper leader in the area and should therefore be integrated within the local administration. This, however, is not the case. Nguetsa heads the yearly propitiatory rituals to honour the ancestors (and original 'owners') of the area but has no daily administrative tasks. Like everywhere else in the state administration, the boundaries between party and state are vague. Thus, the local party representative participates in all public meetings and administrative tasks where the representative's position seems to be on a par with members of the neighbourhood administration.

11. Municipal Department for Construction and Urbanization (*Direcção Municipal de Construção e Urbanização*).
12. I deliberately phrase this informal 'urban rule' in very vague terms as the point is precisely that it lacks any legal foundation.
13. Hence, the idea of 'preserving the future' while building a *casa de raiz*, widespread among residents living on the outskirts of Maputo, may fruitfully be seen as an exact inversion of Bergson's idea of the preservation of the past.
14. See Nielsen (2008) for a detailed historical analysis of the emergence of the *casa de raiz*.

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