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# A wedge of time: futures in the present and presents without futures in Maputo, Mozambique

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A series of recent anthropological studies on time emphasize the crucial importance of the future as a guiding trope in the present. Although located beyond an immediate temporal horizon, the future is consequently taken as connected to the present in a meaningful way through a sequence of chronological moments and hence potentially accessible. This paper takes its point of departure from the growing body of anthropological work on time and futurity, but challenges the inherent assumption of linearity characterizing the relation between present and future. Based on fieldwork carried out in Maputo, Mozambique, it examines the non-linear temporalities of house-building. According to house-builders living on the fringes of the city, the future constitutes a temporal position from where the present might be properly illuminated. However, when seen from the present, the future surprisingly seems to reflect its own inevitable collapse, thus making it crucial to maintain appropriate distance between the two. Whereas the imagined perspective from the future suggests an immediate readability of the present, the inverse temporal gaze (i.e. from the present) reflects the radical uncanniness of the future. Still, although prefigured as a failure at the end-point on a linear scale, the future asserts itself by opening up the present. It wedges itself within the present moment and establishes temporal differentiations without indicating a progressing trajectory. In a peculiar inversion of conventional linearity, the present becomes the effect of the future rather than vice versa.

Anthropological studies of time often seem to be caught by an insoluble paradox. As Roy Wagner tells us, '[T]ime could never be perceived without the distinctions we impose upon it' (1981: 73), and so the devices we use to predict time (calendars, rituals, etc.) also produce its particular characteristics. 'We know time', Wagner continues, 'by its stealthy habit of creeping up on us. We *make it* creep up by assuming that we are able to predict and prepare for it' (1981: 74, italics in original). Classic anthropological studies, such as E.E. Evans-Pritchard's explorations of ecological and structural time among the Nuer (1940) or Clifford Geertz's analysis of punctuated life in Bali (1973: 391-409), suggest that temporal succession may be understood as a relationship between inherently exterior moments following each other like beads on a string. In *The Nuer*, Evans-Pritchard describes how structural and ecological time both 'refer to successions of events which are of sufficient interest to the community for them to be

noted and related to each other conceptually' (1940: 94). Succeeding events are registered in terms of a yearly calendar that structures the mutually dependent relationship between a cycle of activities and a conceptual cycle, where the latter derives its meaning and function from the former. As if commenting directly on Evans-Pritchard's analysis of time among the Nuer (which he probably was!), Wagner reminds us that,

We create the year ... in terms of events and situations that make them significant and worthwhile, and we do so by *predicting* them and then seeing how the events and situations impinge upon our expectations. Calendars, schedules, time-tables and seasonal expectations and routines are all 'predictive' devices for precipitating (and thereby predicting ourselves with, and not *predicting*) time. They are a means of setting up expectations, which in their fulfillment or nonfulfillment become 'the passage of time' ... (1981: 73-4, italics in original).

By allowing the devices we use to predict time also to account for its particular modalities, time is recognized only to the extent that it presents itself in the geometrical forms afforded by (invented) time-reckoning devices (cf. Gell 1992: 235). This doubling of time was recognized already in Émile Durkheim's seminal treatise *The elementary forms of religious life*, where it is suggested that '[a] calendar expresses the rhythm of the collective activities, while at the same time its function is to assure regularity' (1965 [1912]: 23). As such, time-reckoning devices afford a regulatory mechanism by which any social occurrence will find its natural location in a series of unrepeatable moments (Meyer 2012). In his influential studies of changing temporal orientations in eighteenth-century working-class England, E.P. Thompson (1967) unpacked how this synchronization of time involved a fundamental transformation in the work ethic and the orientation to labour. Although initially orchestrated as concerted ways of organizing work tasks, new systems of time-discipline came to function as internal regulatory mechanisms for the structuration of social life as such.<sup>1</sup> Time became spatialized, as it were. Hence, as a crystallization of what the editor of this special issue of *JRAI* aptly coins 'modern times', the planning and synchronization of a wide variety of human activities does, indeed, constitute a primary technology by which time has been made present in social life (cf. Abram & Wieszkalnys 2011). Even so, as I will shortly argue, the (quantitative) planning of social life made possible through linear chronology makes it difficult – if not outright impossible – to capture the (qualitative) temporal modulations and rhythms that give to social life its different forms of directionality and pace.

As if heeding Johannes Fabian's succinct critique that 'much of the study of "cultural transformation" of human experience remains sterile because it is not capable (or unwilling) to relate cultural variation to fundamental processes that must be presumed to be *constitutive* of human Time experience' (1983: 42, italics in original), a recent body of work has challenged the 'spatialization of time' by emphasizing the fluidity of socio-historical change. Inspired by social philosophers, such as Henri Bergson (1913; 1965), Alfred North Whitehead (1978), and, particularly, Gilles Deleuze (1988; 1994; 2005), this work examines how time erupts as 'durations': that is, convergences of different temporalities within one rhythmic configuration (Das 2007; Hodges 2008; Kapferer 2005; Nielsen 2010b; Turetzky 2002). In *Art and agency* (1998), Gell examines the temporal 'thickness' of Maori meeting houses. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Maori found themselves no longer capable of engaging in combat using traditional warlike methods. Instead, Maori communities tried to outdo each other through the construction of elaborately carved and painted meeting houses

designed to serve as objectifications of their wealth, technical skill, and ancestral endowment. Although, as Alfred Gell describes, to enter a meeting house was to 'enter the belly of the ancestor', its physical space was equally filled up by the anticipated future moment when the efforts invested in its construction would eventually materialize as a 'political triumph' over an opponent. The Maori meeting house therefore did not belong to a 'now' as the datable moment on a chronological scale when it was constructed, but to an extended temporal field (*durée*) 'reaching down into the past' while 'probing towards an unrealized and perhaps unrealizable futurity' (Gell 1998: 258).

In Nancy Munn's work on Gawan value creation through long-distance kula-shell exchanges, we find parallel accounts of 'extended temporal fields' that seem to defy conventional chronological linearity (1983; 1986; 1990). Through transactions with valuable shells, Gawans engage with a wider milieu beyond that of the present, which is both spatial and temporal. All high-valued kula shells are potentially of interest to more than the persons involved in a given transaction. Reciprocal exchanges therefore involve not merely the actual transfer of valuables but, equally, the possible (albeit unrealized) pasts and futures which were *not* activated through the event. If, say, a person's illness is believed to be caused by witchcraft attacks associated with ongoing transactions, the cause might be elicited by searching backwards from the presently visible (negative) signs towards a past which was hitherto only a dormant potentiality (e.g. rather than the activated transaction  $A \leftrightarrow B$ , the unrealized transaction  $A \leftrightarrow C$  emerges as the possible cause of the present problems), while simultaneously unfolding a 'negative future', as it were, implying the death of the unfortunate person having fallen ill (Munn 1990: 4-8). Hence, although Gawans obviously make connections between discrete moments and events, these procedures cannot be understood as entailing linear time (Munn 1990: 14). As the temporality of social life 'is developed from the action of situated agents who are actively creating the relations of particular events at various moments, that is, in a given "present"', the meaning of the event is contextualized as 'of the moment' while the moments themselves emerge gradually through the ongoing and intermittent assembling of discrete events (Munn 1990: 14).

By emphasizing the coexistence of different events within one durational configuration, time is treated not merely as a series of discrete moments following each other like beads on a string but, rather, as a continuous multiplicity. This qualitative conceptualization of time as 'duration' (*durée*) was first formulated by the French philosopher Henri Bergson and subsequently served to orientate the seminal work by Gilles Deleuze on virtual multiplicity and becoming as univocity (Bergson 1913; 1965; 2001; 2005; Deleuze 1988; 1993; 1994). Inspired by the mathematician G.B. Riemann, Bergson distinguishes between a discrete (quantitative) and a continuous (qualitative) multiplicity or manifoldness. Discrete multiplicities are those that contain their own metrical principles (denumerable), whereas continuous multiplicities are those in which the metrical principles are located in the forces that act on them from the outside (non-denumerable). Given that a multiplicity is distinguished by a mark or boundary, we are therefore essentially dealing with a certain form of 'quanta'. As Keith Ansell-Pearson explains in his insightful discussion of durational flows, '[I]n the case of a discrete magnitude we make the comparison with quantity by counting and in the case of a continuous one by measuring' (2002: 16). Taking as a point of departure Riemann's elaboration of the geometrical principles of space, what Bergson did, then, was to transform the distinction between the two multiplicities by linking the continuous with the sphere of duration:

[F]or Bergson, duration was not simply the indivisible, nor was it the nonmeasurable. Rather, it was that which divided only by changing in kind, that which was susceptible to measurement only by varying its metrical principle at each stage of the division ... In reality, duration divides up and does so constantly: That is why it is a *multiplicity*. But it does not divide up without changing in kind, it changes in kind in the process of dividing up: This is why it is a nonnumerical multiplicity, where we can speak of 'indivisibles' at each state of the division. There is *other* without there being several; number exists only potentially. In other words, the subjective, or duration, is the *virtual*. To be more precise, it is the virtual insofar as it is actualized, in the course of being actualized, it is inseparable from the movement of its actualization (Deleuze 1988: 40, 42-3, italics in original).

In order to explain how different durations are mutually implicated, Bergson (1913) gives the example of mixing a glass of water with sugar and waiting until the sugar dissolves. Although it is perfectly possible to calculate how long it would take for the sugar to dissolve, this 'mathematical time' coincides with an impatience that constitutes a crucial segment of the duration of the person doing the mixing of sugar with water and which is impossible to protract or contract at will. The experienced duration is therefore not really singular but always implicated with others; it is one and many at the same time.<sup>2</sup> As such, duration constitutes the virtual coexistence of time with itself. It is, as Deleuze describes, a becoming that endures by incessantly differing from itself (1988: 37).

This paper builds upon this recent body of work that seeks to go beyond the 'spatialization' of time and argues for an approach to the study of social transformations that takes seriously their durational fluidity. Rather than merely outlining the linearity of a particular process, we need also to pay attention to the ways in which a given temporal configuration may come together as a 'radical plurality of durations' (Deleuze 1988: 76). Still, despite the obvious benefits of broadening the analytical scope, we should not throw the proverbial baby out with the bathwater, and it might therefore be relevant to consider how temporal moments assert themselves as differentiated singularities even when erupting within durational flows (cf. Grosz 1999: 28). Returning to Munn's work on Gawan exchanges, it could be argued that the past and future occurrences being actualized through an event in the present maintain or even acquire their discrete qualities (i.e. they can be distinguished from other coexisting temporal moments) precisely because they erupt within a durational flow. Although we might concur with Deleuze that any temporal moment asserts itself as a provisional contraction of the durational flow as such (1988: 51-72; 1994: 70-6), its singular qualities are immediately recognizable as being different from those of other coexisting moments, say, as the datable cause leading to a person's current illness. Hence, in contrast to the (calendric) differentiations, which, Wagner told us, in their fulfilment constitute progressive linearity, we have here a radically different form of temporal singularization. As a way of addressing the 'praxial requirements of the present', certain pasts and futures connect and come to constitute a durational flow that has no ground outside itself. Whereas time-reckoning devices, such as the chronological calendar, essentially establish a quantitative 'spatialization' of time, durations give rise to qualitative expansions of time simply because the repertoire of images and moments is increased and intensified (Ansell-Pearson & Mullarkey 2002: 17; Deleuze 1988: 63).

In this paper, I shall consequently focus on the process of durational differentiation as a 'becoming without ground, without foundation' (Colebrook 2002: 50). As I shall argue, by focusing on the singularization of time that is established through durational flows, it becomes possible to challenge conventional understandings of time as a

forward-moving progressive chronology without, however, having to give up the idea of temporal differentiation (i.e. that different moments might be distinguished from each other). I will therefore suggest that durational differentiations may manifest themselves in non-linear ways, and I qualify this perhaps counter-intuitive argument by analysing the significance of the future among house-builders living on the outskirts of Maputo, Mozambique. Although prefigured as a failure on a linear scale, the future asserts itself by opening up the present. It wedges itself within the present moment as a transversal movement and establishes temporal differentiations without indicating a progressing trajectory. In a peculiar inversion of conventional linearity, the present becomes the effect of the future rather than vice versa.

### Presents without futures

According to residents living in Mulwene on the outskirts of Maputo, the future exists as an unstable transformative potentiality which needs to be concealed from the outside world. Any exposure of desired things to come is considered as an unwanted premonition which threatens to collapse the distance between present and future and thus make the properties of the latter accessible to outside forces. While interviewing a local healer (*curandeiro*), I asked whether she had discussed her plans of extending her house with some of the nearby neighbours. 'Ihhh! Do you want me to hand over my life to another person? You really can't do that!' She shook her head several times before continuing: 'It's not a good thing to expose what is at the bottom of your heart ... here we wish for bad things to happen to others (*nós desejamos mal de outras pessoas*)'. Unless the 'content' of the future is properly concealed, it will eventually be appropriated by some malignant force in the outside world. During a conversation on inherited land, Boavida Wate,<sup>3</sup> a stout-hearted former community chief in Mulwene, warned against the excessive exposure of desired future gains: for example, by purchasing farming equipment based on expectations for the coming harvest. 'We can't take our riches outside (*não podemos levar a nossa riqueza para fora*)', Wate told me. 'Other families will try to take possession (*apoderar-se*) of my belongings', agreed 'Old' Guambe, Wate's friend for more than four decades: 'We are constantly worried about what the reactions might be. Therefore we act with caution (*andar com cuidado*) and don't tell much about what we'll be doing next'. Apparently, concealing the 'content' of the future was a widespread strategy even within the highest political echelons. During the campaign for the 2004 national elections, I noticed that the candidate for the governing Frelimo party, Armando Guebuza, only sparsely advertised the location and precise time for upcoming campaign activities. I asked Gabriel, a municipal architect working in Mulwene, what might be the reason for this lack of information. 'Today (*hoje em dia*) you don't trust anyone. So Guebuza will make it publicly known that he will show himself but not when it will happen ... he won't tell the exact time because someone might take advantage of that information'.

It thus seems likely that concealed or even negated plans serve as exterior surfaces, as it were, protecting those desired futures which so easily become appropriated by malevolent outside forces. As temporal buffers, they deflect unwanted attention while simultaneously enabling the experimentation with alternative temporal trajectories. Still, although this is undoubtedly true in many situations, the relationship between negated and desired futures should not be seen merely as a distinction between form (negated future) and content (desired future). Paradoxically, by actualizing that which should not be realized, the former serves as a vehicle for the coming into being of the

latter. In Paulo Granjo's lucid account of divination practices in southern Mozambique (2012; see also Granjo 2011; Honwana 1996), he thus describes how alternative futures might be accessed by manipulating the probabilities for the likely, albeit unwanted, (future) outcomes of current actions. Through divinatory practices, the productive potentials of the future are elicited by actively altering the conditions (in the present) for what lies ahead. Desired outcomes therefore cannot be seen as detached from the unwanted but likely future from which they emerge almost as excrescent temporalities. In a peculiar inverse manner, the transformative potentials lodged in the future are accessible only through a reversal of its form: that is, by initially acknowledging its inherent impossibility as an end-point on a linear scale. Indeed, among residents living in Mulwene, future scenarios are typically unfolded through definite (rather than subjunctive) statements while also indicating that they will most likely never happen (Nielsen 2011a).<sup>4</sup> In order to have effects, the future has to manifest itself in particular ways, and this requires an initial inversion of its form that is then turned inside out so that the actual desired future effectively becomes an effect of the premonitioned but unwanted (future) reverberations of current acts. As we shall see below, without risking unwanted exposure, the 'inside' of the future could thus be publicly elicited precisely because it was brought forth in a negated form.

After this brief introduction to the dynamic relationship between presents and futures in the southern part of Mozambique, let me now turn to a case study which outlines how a particular collapsed future wedges itself in the present among house-builders on the outskirts of Maputo in order subsequently to discuss non-linear and non-progressive temporal differentiations.

### 'The unfortunate bricklayer'

'Is it them?' Alberto's question hung in mid-air without a proper addressee. I followed his eyes as he looked past me towards the white four-wheel drive Toyota crossing the square some fifty-odd metres from where we were standing. I replied by asking who he thought it could have been. Alberto started walking before responding: 'I don't know'; his voice was barely audible; 'someone who's coming to resolve my problems'.

During the last few months prior to our brief exchange at the square on 11 April 2005, Alberto's already difficult situation had taken a rapid downward-spiralling turn. For many years, Alberto and his family had rented his aunt's small plot in Mulwene, but after meeting Mafuiane, a local quarter leader,<sup>5</sup> it seemed likely that they would soon get their own piece of land in the neighbourhood. In return for building a cement house for Mafuiane, Alberto would be allocated a 15 × 30 metre plot by the community leader. In fact, a vacant plot had already been identified and, according to Mafuiane, Alberto could start building the much-desired house as soon as he had the necessary materials. After having informed his aunt of their imminent departure, Alberto bought as many stacks of reed and wooden pegs as he could afford and placed them in the vacant plot, where he would soon commence making a reed hut (*casa de caniço*) to serve as their temporary home while saving up for and gradually building a permanent cement house. Equally enterprising, his aunt proceeded to sell her plot and told Alberto (who was still living there) that he had to leave before 1 April 2005.

As Alberto soon was to discover, he was unfortunately not the only one having been allocated the vacant plot. In February 2005, Marta Mucavela, a primary school teacher from a nearby neighbourhood, acquired legitimate property rights to the plot through the Ministry of Education, which had parcelled out this section of Mulwene during the



late 1990s in an attempt to provide land for the many landless teachers in Maputo. During a small ceremony in front of her new plot, Mucavela signed the formal transfer documents and immediately began contacting local bricklayers to arrange the building of a small one-room cement house. Before long, however, the propitious situation was radically changed and Mucavela was again potentially without a piece of land in Mulwene.

Although Alberto initially hoped that the prospects of a prolonged conflict would keep Mucavela from realizing the projected construction plans, the building materials being continuously unloaded by Mucavela's bricklayer suggested otherwise. Accompanied by Mafuiane, Alberto tried several times to convince the neighbourhood leader that the allocation had been both unfair and unjust, but without avail. The start of April was rapidly approaching, and as Alberto's frustration increased accordingly, he began thinking of alternative strategies; perhaps complaining to the Mayor's Office or even contacting the local media, as some neighbours had suggested to him. Come 1 April there was still no resolution. Fortunately, the new owner of his aunt's plot would not commence any building activities before the middle of the month, and so she allowed Alberto and his family to stay for a few days longer. Soon afterwards, however, on 10 April, her patience was apparently used up and Alberto was instructed to leave the plot within twenty-four hours.

Early next morning, my neighbour told me that Alberto had invaded the disputed plot and that he was already making his presence visible. I immediately went to see Alberto, and it was clear he had been busy. Along the left side, a reed hut had been erected on a stamped raised platform held in place by a row of cement blocks. Additional blocks were positioned on the zinc roof, and in the back left corner a small radio antenna was pointing towards the sky. Starting a few metres from the boundary line, a rectangular furrow had been dug reaching about halfway across the plot, and cement blocks had been placed along its edges. Nearly half of the plot had already been cleared, but the area right at the back was still covered by grass and wild thorny bushes (*espinhosa*). Alberto returned shortly after my arrival. He had been in the city centre trying to arrange a meeting with the municipal ombudsman (*provedor*), but after hours of waiting in a damp corridor outside his office, Alberto returned home empty-handed. I sat down outside the reed hut together with Alberto and his wife, Célia, to discuss recent developments in the dispute.

I built a house because that's what the government wants. The neighbourhood leader came today to inform me that I have to stop the building project. But I really didn't start making the foundations to construct a house but, rather, to prevent her [Marta Mucavela] from building a house here. It's my land, but it's been usurped because I'm poor.

Célia nodded and said: 'She [Marta Mucavela] was the real intruder because we were the ones planting the *espinhosa*. She even tore up some of the plants. It's a lack of respect!' Alberto had to leave soon afterwards to go talk with Mafuiane about the situation and I followed along. We had just left the disputed plot when Alberto spotted the white four-wheel drive Toyota and asked, 'Is it them?'

### **Making a 'model neighbourhood'**

Before continuing with the discussion of Alberto's invasion, we need briefly to contextualize the process. As I shall subsequently argue, by digging out a rectangular

furrow, Alberto essentially wedged a particular but already collapsed future in the present and thus opened towards a reconfiguration of the social landscape.

Mulwene has grown significantly since 2000, when it was used as resettlement zone for the many disaster victims after the devastating flooding which hit Mozambique in the first three months of the year (Christie & Hanlon 2001). Prior to the flooding, the area had a population of less than 2,000, which consisted mainly of small-scale farmers and a small group of newcomers. A continuous influx of people reached its momentary peak in 2005 when the neighbourhood had 30,813 registered inhabitants (Nielsen 2010b). From the outset, the city council made it their overarching ambition to plan and built Mulwene as a 'model neighbourhood' (*bairro modelo*). In a municipal report on administrative and political aims concerning the resettlement process, it is stated that 'the city council intends to make Mulwene a *bairro modelo* with all the requirements that constitute adequate habitation'.<sup>6</sup> As is clear from this and other reports drafted during the initial resettlement phase, the making of a *bairro modelo* would entail that land parcelling and house-building projects were realized in accordance with a set of well-defined urban standards: for example, that cement houses had to be placed 3 metres from the boundary line towards the street in 15 × 30 metre plots. It was consequently envisioned that residents in the area could be allocated legal use-rights to formally acquired plots of land in correspondence to a legitimate urban plan comprising the entire neighbourhood. And, indeed, not long after the first families had been installed in tents in a section of Mulwene, the initial steps were taken towards actually creating the *bairro modelo*. Twenty-five donor organizations were active during the first months of 2000 building a total of 1,088 basic cement houses, making 460 drillings for individual and communitarian wells and constructing 1,100 latrines, a football field, 300 'precarious houses' (*casas precárias*) (i.e. reed huts), and two primary schools. The immediate result was impressive. After only a few months, rows of cement houses with corrugated iron roofs began to appear where previously tents or reed huts were the only housing possibilities (Nielsen 2008: 40–58). Although still unpaved, access was facilitated by the 12 metre-wide dirt road that connected Mulwene to the main EN1 highway, and in several sections of the neighborhood, rows of wooden pylons revealed that electricity was gradually being installed.

Despite the initial success, however, it was soon apparent that neither state nor international agencies were fully capable of realizing the ambitious project of creating a *bairro modelo*. Soon after the flooding victims had been transferred to Mulwene, the majority of international donor agencies began to lose interest in the project, and so it was up to state and municipal institutions to secure viable housing conditions for the growing number of residents coming to the area while also creating an adequate administrative structure that would respond to the needs of an emerging urban neighbourhood. With a weak state administration incapable of carrying out even basic urban development schemes, the project of creating a *bairro modelo* from scratch revealed itself as a utopian mirage whose ideological and practical weaknesses soon became apparent.<sup>7</sup> From the very beginning, architects and land surveyors in collaboration with members from the neighbourhood committee illegally parcelled out plots of land which were sold off to needy newcomers, who have subsequently acquired access to basic infrastructure, such as electricity and water, through informal transactions with local-level officials within state or municipal agencies. In this regard, the situation in Mulwene is similar to that of many other peri-urban neighbourhoods in Maputo and urban areas elsewhere in the country, where a burgeoning informal land market has



been growing since the mid-1980s as a consequence both of the government's insufficient administrative capacities and of the increasing liberalization of access to land, which often contradicts national legislation (Assulai 2001; Jenkins 2001a; Negrão 2004). Since Independence in 1975, all land has been nationalized and therefore cannot formally be transacted.

Considering the overt illegality of many occupations in the area, its physical homogeneity is striking, with evenly structured blocks each consisting of sixteen  $15 \times 30$  metre plots and laid out in a uniform grid separated by straight 10 metre-wide roads. From the outset, I consequently imagined that the physical environment reflected the initially stated ideal of creating a *bairro modelo* that adhered to a set of fixed urban norms. Based on the firm belief that some 'master plan' surely did exist, for several months I went from one municipal office to the next in order to find the document in which the evenly structured physical organization of the neighbourhood originated. As I would come to realize, however, the structured appearance emerged almost entirely through overlapping processes of informal parcelling authored by local leaders in collaboration with public officials (Nielsen 2007; 2011b). As transport facilities and basic infrastructure were gradually improved, people who were in no position to obtain land closer to the city centre took advantage of the opportunity to acquire a plot in the emerging neighbourhood. Through informal transactions, they were able to buy plots in Mulwene, which, although they had been informally parcelled out by civil servants, nevertheless imitated the 'fixed urban norms' associated with the *bairro modelo*. In many situations, then, the (formally) illegal residents acquire a form of pragmatic legitimacy through imitative building practices that might potentially be converted into legitimate property rights to their plots.<sup>8</sup>

In sum, people access land and build houses in Mulwene by imitating the aesthetics of an urban ideal that has already revealed its own collapse. According to current legislation on urban land, newcomers who occupy vacant land informally are considered as illegal squatters and can potentially be removed with force by the government. However, by having their plots parcelled out and subsequently building their houses in accordance with the 'fixed urban norms' associated with the initial idea of making a *bairro modelo*, their status is potentially transformed from illegal squatters to legitimate citizens. As state and municipal officials working in the area often told me, urban governance tends to be guided by what is locally known as 'administration *ad hoc*', functioning simply to secure a 'minimum of urban order'. Provided illegal settlers build something which the state *could* have done, their occupancy is therefore generally accepted (Nielsen 2010a; 2011b). In this regard, the planning ideals associated with the initial aspirations of making a *bairro modelo* serve as an apt medium for securing property rights by informal residents coming to or already living in the area.

### Futures in the present

In his discussion of the ritualized use of masked figures among the Foi people of Papua New Guinea, Weiner tells us that 'it is through the focusing of vision, through, say, the putting on of a mask, that the world *as a whole thing* in all of its analogic potentiality is made visible' (1995: 36, italics in original). In other words, the vision is expanded by narrowing the perspective in particular ways, such as when gazing at the world through a mask. Although the medium is radically different, I wish to suggest a similar line of reasoning regarding the case study introduced above. Indeed, it was by digging out a rectangular furrow 3 metres from the boundary line towards the street that Alberto

suddenly found himself gazing at a potentially transformed world; a world where he might be seen by some outside force capable of disentangling his seemingly insoluble situation.

Let me begin to unpack the temporal layers of the process by returning to Alberto's statement that 'I built a house because that's what the government wants ... But I really didn't start making the foundations to construct a house but, rather, to prevent her [Marta Mucavela] from building a house here'. Seemingly a self-contradictory statement ('I built a house ...' and later 'I really didn't start making the foundations to construct a house ...'), it guides our attention towards the significance of the future as negated form in the present. In a nutshell, Alberto sought to actualize the full potentials of a future cement house (i.e. status as legitimate citizen in the neighbourhood with formal property rights to the plot) without converting its virtual reality into physical materiality. To be sure, Alberto was not at all interested in pre-empting the actual realization of a future house, as this would undoubtedly have exposed him to the erratic manoeuvres of outside forces. However, by wedging the future within the present and thus manifesting something that was already defined by its eventual collapse, it became possible to act on the inherent virtual potentials and thus carve out alternative socio-temporal trajectories. In many ways, Alberto's house was therefore surprisingly similar to those premonitioned futures elicited through divinatory practices described earlier that opened towards new temporal horizons through their eventual collapse. In both instances, the potential danger associated with excessive exposure was momentarily controlled by eliciting the desired future in a negated form. What the case study fleshes out with particular clarity, then, is how an active transformation of the conditions (in the present) for a premonitioned future occurs alongside the continued existence of the latter: that is, a collapsed future in the present – say, the ideal of a *bairro modelo* – constitutes the continued premise for carving out new temporal trajectories.

We find the perhaps most elaborate anthropological account of how differentiation – or discontinuity – is inserted into a continuous domain in Lévi-Strauss's seminal studies of myths (1955; 1963; 2005; see also Schrempp 1992). In *Totemism* (1963), he considers Firth's data on Tikopia and calls particular attention to the story of Tikarau. In ancient times, Lévi-Strauss recounts, gods and mortals were alike, with the gods functioning as the direct representatives of the clans. Tikarau, a god from a foreign region, visited Tikopia, and the local gods arranged a splendid feast for him that would take place after a series of organized trials of speed and strength. During one race, Tikarau slipped and declared that he was injured. While pretending to limp, he suddenly rushed towards the provisions, stole a heap, and ran to the mountains in an attempt to escape the hosts chasing him. While being chased, Tikarau fell, so that the clan gods were able to retrieve some of the foodstuffs: one coconut, one taro, a breadfruit, and a yam. In the end, Tikarau managed to return to the sky with most of the foodstuffs for the feast but four vegetable foods were saved for men (Lévi-Strauss 1963: 25–6). Hence, in this case:

Totemism as a system is introduced as *what remains* of a diminished totality, a fact which may be a way of expressing that the terms of the system are significant only if they are *separated* from each other, since they alone remain to equip a semantic field which was previously better supplied and into which a discontinuity has been introduced (Lévi-Strauss 1963: 26, italics in original).

Discreteness is here introduced into a hitherto continuous system by eliminating certain fractions of the continuum. Foodstuffs were originally indeterminate in



Figure 1. Degrees of divisibility (adapted from Lévi-Strauss 1970: 54).

number, but after the reduction, a smaller quantity may spread in the same space, ‘while the distance between them is now sufficient to prevent them overlapping or merging into one another’ (Lévi-Strauss 1970: 52).

Although to claim an equivalence between the case study presented above and the Tikopian myth analysed by Lévi-Strauss would be taking the analogy too far, a tentative comparison nevertheless opens towards an exploration of temporal differentiations in a non-linear and non-progressive way. I will argue that Lévi-Strauss’s succinct account of the transition from continuous to discrete reveals how an intensive flow may be differentiated in a qualitative manner. Essentially, the continuum maintains its limitlessness but it is now held in place by a series of differential segmentations (see Fig. 1).

In the Tikopian account, it is the act of the stranger god that differentiates what was hitherto an undifferentiated virtual state of coexistence (*pace* Deleuze 2004: 176–7). In the case study described above, the differentiating act occurred through the negated future (manifested as a rectangular furrow) that wedged itself in the present and thus produced new temporal differentiations within a durational flow. At the moment when Alberto stood in the square and watched the white four-wheel drive Toyota pass us by, he was potentially (virtually!) a legitimate citizen.<sup>9</sup> With the furrow functioning as an imitation of the ‘fixed urban norms’ associated with the initial aspirations of creating a ‘*bairro modelo*’, a future moment erupted in which Alberto was configured as having formal occupancy to the plot. Although its actual realization (in the future) was considered as being unlikely, it suggested a temporal horizon which defined a possible past (first meeting with Mafuiane, the quarter chief) and a consequential future (formal occupancy). In other words, with the suggestive future scenario of a cement house, past and future occurrences seemed to find their appropriate form *in the present*. No wonder, then, that Alberto believed it likely that some unknown outside agent would be aware of his existence and, he hoped, actualize what was already an existing (albeit virtual) reality.

Keeping in mind that we are here exploring how time erupts as a singular durational flow at the moment when Alberto watched the white four-wheel drive Toyota pass by – what was initially described as a convergence of different temporalities within one rhythmic configuration – it follows that the temporal differentiations being produced do not constitute a linear succession of moments. If we limit the discussion to the moments already mentioned (‘first meeting with Mafuiane’ and ‘formal occupancy’), they may be understood in a non-linear manner as a confrontation between two contradictory terms, where the former implies relations of difference (i.e. informal access to land through ties with a local chief) and the latter implies relations based on similarity (i.e. formal access through citizenship).<sup>10</sup> This confrontation is, however, both actualized and momentarily resolved by the negated future wedging itself in the present. As a trace left in the present of that which will never be, the rectangular furrow both assembles and separates the two contradictory terms. Because the future is already prefigured as a failure, it operates in the present entirely as an intensive capacity for

differentiation that persists across the diverging lines separating the two moments. Analogue to the trickster who is halfway between two polar terms and thus retains some of that duality (Lévi-Strauss 1955: 441), the future wedging itself in the present is identical to the differentiated moments while also maintaining an exterior quality by mediating their momentary assemblage. Paradoxically, the meeting with Mafuiane and the future acquisition of formal property rights seem to acquire significance through the making of the furrow. Whereas the present cannot serve as condition for the future, the inverse relationship is therefore more likely. In that sense, the temporal differentiations being produced here and now may be considered as what Cooper designates as 'the apparition of the after-effects of future possibilities in the present' (1998: 128).

### Reverberations

It logically follows, then, that the effects of non-linear and non-progressive temporal differentiations cannot be gauged in terms of causal linkages. As Grosz tells us, durational time is 'braided, intertwined, a unity of stands layered over each other' (1999: 17), and so we need to examine how future eruptions in the present open towards new unfoldings of time without the former serving as a tool for anticipating a final destination. Let me therefore return once again to the occurrences that followed the encounter at the square in order to examine how the virtual coexistence of different pasts and futures in the present actualized a particular form of differentiation (or becoming) through which new social positions potentially became accessible.

Despite never having approached neither state nor municipal agencies regarding his housing situation, during the following days and weeks Alberto kept returning to the district administration in order to resolve the untenable situation. I was present at several meetings between Alberto, Mafuiane, Marta Mucavela, the neighbourhood chief, and Ussene, the district administrator, and the issue that was consistently brought up was the digging out of the rectangular furrow. On 18 April 2005, the district administrator made her first visit to the disputed plot and immediately noticed the furrow. 'This is wrong!' Her characteristically gruff voice made the exclamation sound almost like a threat. 'It's a lack of respect for the government that they have already made the foundation'. This statement is, of course, interesting particularly as no physical foundation had actually been made. According to local bricklayers, the foundation to a house consists of five layers of blocks poured in cement and all Alberto had done was to dig out a 30 centimetre-deep furrow and placed blocks along its sides. It is therefore, I suggest, as a (virtual) after-effect of the future in the present that it came to have considerable effects.

The after-effect of the future in the present was perhaps most forcefully expressed at a meeting between Alberto and the district administrator a few days after the initial invasion of the disputed plot. As he told me before the meeting, Alberto hoped for the administrator to acknowledge the legitimacy of his occupation and consequently allocate use-rights to the current plot, or, alternatively, relocate Alberto and his family to another plot in the vicinity. Without entering the debate on the possible legitimacy of Alberto's occupancy, the administrator stated that Marta Mucavela had been allocated the plot simply because Alberto had waited too long with commencing his construction project. When we were about to leave the administrator's office, however, Alberto gave a strong indication that his status might already have been transformed. Standing in front of Ussene while staring at the floor, he asked if she had considered the issue regarding the name for his still-unborn child. Ussene's response was brief, and it was

apparent that her answer was negative. Outside the administration building, I asked Alberto what their brief exchange was about. As Alberto told me, he had previously asked Ussene if she would consider giving her name to his unborn baby. Although the administrator had originally agreed, for some reason she now declined the offer.

In the southern part of Mozambique, most living persons have a spiritual namesake (Portuguese *xará*; xiChangana *màb'izweni*) (Junod 1962: 38). Name-giving constitutes an extension of the living person (xiChangana *nàvâlâlâ*), whereby his or her personhood is formed in a dialectical relationship between the living person and the deceased ancestor. Similar types of relationship are established between living persons with slightly different dynamics. If the child of A is given the name of A's uncle (B), the latter is, so to speak, reconfigured as A's child, whereby implicit reciprocal power relations between A and B obviously change accordingly. In other words, if the district administrator had agreed to share her name with Alberto's baby, she would, in a symbolic sense, be (inferiorly) positioned as Alberto's daughter. Needless to say, if Alberto had succeeded in establishing this reciprocal relationship, problems regarding the plot would probably have become immediately manageable.

Although the brief exchange at the district administration seemed to indicate little change in Alberto's status, the ensuing encounters suggested otherwise. At the final meeting with all parties involved in the dispute, the district administrator commenced the discussion by lecturing Alberto about his wrongdoings. 'If you had only made a formal application instead of starting to build a cement house. The state cannot accept that!' In a subtle and oblique way, the negation of the house-building project here opens towards a consideration of Alberto as a legitimate citizen. To be sure, no illegal squatter would dare approach the district administrator with any application, formal or informal. Alberto therefore had to be (at least potentially) a legitimate citizen. And so, after many more meetings, Alberto was in fact allocated formal property rights to a piece of land located only a few blocks from where he initially invaded Marta Mucavela's plot. The rectangular furrow was soon covered and before long Marta Mucavela was busy making foundations for what is now a three-room cement house.

## Conclusion

In Mulwene on the outskirts of Maputo, people engage with futures that will never follow the present. Through the recognition of its impossibility, the future moment is liberated, as it were, from its fixation on a linear scale while still maintaining the capacity to inform ongoing practices. As it wedges itself in the present, it effaces the boundary between the actual and the virtual, and that which will never be is already there. Past and future thus coexist in the present as interpenetrating singularities that destabilize or even bracket progressive chronology. What seems to emerge in its place is a cascade of virtual becomings that might be actualized as concrete possibilities, such as the described transformation from illegal squatter to legitimate citizen. It is therefore by approaching time as duration that we come to understand how social transformations might occur in non-linear and non-progressive ways. In this paper, I have examined this seemingly counter-intuitive process by outlining how an already collapsed future wedges itself in the present and through series of divisions and bifurcations has ramifying spatial and temporal effects. In a sense, its collapse produces an internal doubling so that the future not only exists as failure on a linear scale but also serves to open up the present in potentially productive ways.

In *A thousand plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari discuss the significance of being in-between positions. They consequently argue that:

*Between* things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one *and* the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle (1999: 25).

Through the analysis of the case study presented above, I have suggested that a collapsed future in the present may exhibit such transversal properties. It opens up time, as it were, and inserts itself within the differentiated moments without becoming completely equivalent to them. Not unlike the differentiation of intensive flows in the myth of Tikarau's visit to Tikopia, durational time thus maintains a virtual multiplicity while still undergoing continuous differentiations. Although moment 'A' might be identified as being radically different from moment 'B', the distinction does not imply directionality from one to the other. In a sense, durational time is movement without prediction; direction without destination. Returning again to the central question of how time is made present in social life, durational time in Mozambique might therefore be taken to afford a particular kind of planning scheme that brackets linear chronology without at the same time dissolving temporal differentiation. Here, the planned future does not necessarily constitute a promise of a forthcoming moment (Abram & Weszkalnys 2011: 9), but operates perhaps rather as a potent medium for differentiating the present in novel and potentially productive ways.

#### NOTES

This paper is based on fifteen months of ethnographic fieldwork carried out between 2004 and 2011 in Mulwene, a peri-urban neighbourhood on the northern outskirts of Maputo. I thank the Danish Research Council for Culture and Communication (FKK) for generously funding the three-year Ph.D. research project on which this paper is based. A first draft was presented at the ESRC 'Conflicts in Time' workshop in 2011, and I am grateful for the invaluable comments and suggestions given by the participants. In particular, I need to thank Laura Bear, the organizer of that workshop and the two anonymous reviewers for their challenging critiques and insightful comments.

<sup>1</sup> According to Thompson, this transformation dates from the end of the eighteenth century: 'Indeed, a general diffusion of clocks and watches is occurring (as one would expect) at the exact moment when the industrial revolution demanded a greater synchronization of labour' (1967: 69).

<sup>2</sup> For an ethnographic discussion of the qualitative (non-denumerable) aspects of numbering, see Strathern (1992: 11-13; cf. Verran 2001).

<sup>3</sup> All names used in this paper are pseudonyms.

<sup>4</sup> In this regard, the elicitation of futuristic potentialities among house-builders in Maputo may be seen as an analogue to the inversions of mythical images among the Salish-speaking people living along the Columbia River in Washington and Oregon. As described by Lévi-Strauss in 'How myths die', mythical images maintain their signficatory fullness when adopted by other tribes by being inverted 'rather like a pencil of light rays passing through a pinpoint into a camera obscura, and being made to cross over by this obstacle – in such a way that the same image seen the right way up outside is reflected upside down in the camera obscura' (1974: 272).

<sup>5</sup> At the time when I was researching this case (2004-5), Mulwene was divided into fifty-six quarters (*quarteirões*) headed by individual quarter chiefs (*chefes de quarteirões*). All quarter chiefs referred to the neighbourhood leader (*secretário do bairro*) in charge of the local administrative unit co-ordinating official activities in the area.

<sup>6</sup> *República de Moçambique: 1 draft do projecto de reassentamento das populações em Mulwene* [Mozambican Republic: first draft of the resettlement project for the populations in Mulwene] (April 2000). Document in municipal archive, Mulwene.



<sup>7</sup> As argued by Jenkins (2000: 209), since Independence, urban land management has not been a political priority, and so the informal areas have rapidly expanded. Between 1990 and 1999, forty-eight plot layouts (smaller urban plans) were developed by the state and other institutions without overall co-ordination or land registration (Jenkins 2000: 209). Many of these plot layouts were subsequently used for illicit transactions between individual civil servants and different private agents. Finally, out of the 86,300 new housing units built from 1980 to 1997, it is estimated that as few as 7 per cent were provided by the state or private sector (4,000 and 1,500, respectively). The remaining more than 80,000 housing units were built without state assistance (Jenkins 2001b: 637).

<sup>8</sup> In 2009, the municipal department for management of urban land (Municipal Department for Construction and Urbanization [Direção Municipal de Construção e Urbanização]) initiated a process of allocating legal use-rights to residents having formally occupied land illegally in selected areas of Mulwene.

<sup>9</sup> The concept of the virtual is, so to speak, a designation of the process of *becoming* detached from any physical actualization. In order to unpack how Alberto's utterance might be taken as a reflection of a virtual transformation, two brief discussions of coronations might be used as apt illustrations. First, Shields (2003) argues that the historical importance of the virtual can be detected from the various records of ritual events and ceremonies: for example, coronations of kings and queens. Thus, royalty were historically understood to be 'god-like beings', which is still apparent regarding the Japanese Emperor. Therefore 'coronations *actualize* the virtual, bringing the idea of "the King", for example, down to Earth in the form of an actual individual' (Shields 2003: 36, italics in original). Secondly, in Žižek's complex reading of Deleuze's work, the author describes the coronation scene at the beginning of Sergei Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible*, where Ivan's two closest friends pour gold coins on to his newly anointed head. As Žižek writes, 'Is it not the excess of the pure flow of becoming over its corporeal cause, of the virtual over the actual?' (2004: 3). In other words, it is at the precise moment of the crowning that the virtual potentials of the King's position are revealed in all their splendour. In the short time it takes to pour the golden coins over the anointed head, the King is connected to everything; or, rather, he *is* everything. Although it may seem far-fetched, I will nevertheless argue that the occurrence in the square bears more than a passing resemblance to the coronation scene described above. As the Toyota four-wheel drive passed by without the identity of the driver being revealed, its opacity, so to speak, connected with the furrow in Alberto's plot. Like the crowned King who is connected to everything at once, when connected to the passing Toyota, the rectangular furrow allowed for a series of (virtual) becomings that indicated a multiplicity of potential futures for the house-builder.

<sup>10</sup> The oppositional pair might fruitfully be described as a confrontation between 'alliance' and 'filiation' (Jenkins 1999: 23-4).

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## Temps imbriqués : futurs dans le présent et présents sans futurs à Maputo au Mozambique

### Résumé

Une série d'études anthropologiques récentes consacrées au temps met l'accent sur l'importance cruciale du futur comme trope orientant le présent. Bien qu'il se situe au-delà de l'horizon temporel immédiat, le futur est considéré comme lié au présent d'une manière signifiante par une suite de moments chronologiques qui le rendent potentiellement accessible. L'auteur part du corpus de plus en plus conséquent de travaux anthropologiques sur le temps et la futurité, mais remet en question l'hypothèse de linéarité inhérente qui caractérise la relation entre présent et futur. À partir d'un travail de terrain à Maputo, au Mozambique, il examine les temporalités non linéaires dans la construction d'une maison. Selon les constructeurs de maisons qui vivent aux marges de la ville, le futur constitue une position temporelle à partir de laquelle on peut jeter un éclairage approprié sur le présent. Vu du présent, toutefois, il semble refléter son propre et inévitable effondrement : il est donc essentiel de maintenir entre les deux une distance adéquate. Bien que la perspective imaginée dans le futur suggère une lisibilité immédiate du présent, l'inversion du point de vue (à partir du présent) reflète l'étrangeté radicale du futur. Pourtant, alors même qu'il est envisagé comme un échec au bout d'une échelle linéaire, le futur s'affirme en ouvrant le présent. Il s'intercale dans le moment présent et établit des différenciations temporelles sans indiquer une trajectoire de progression. Par une inversion particulière de la linéarité conventionnelle, le présent devient l'effet du futur, et non le contraire.