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MOBILE URBANITY
TRANSLOCAL TRADERS AND THE CITY
IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

To all women who move the world
through their incessant, tiring,
obstinate movements

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FOREWORD

Marcello Balbo

In a world where change is so rapid and new issues emerge unremittingly, this book contributes to make things even more complex. The research resulting from the in-depth investigation realized along and on the 'in-between' space that the *mukheristas* travel from Maputo to Johannesburg and to Maputo back again to sell the goods bought in Johannesburg, adds to the multiple facets of the urban space in Africa.

The research perspective adopted by the author spotlights the city "as a fragmented and transient landscape", questioning the well-established paradigm of the city as a place of permanence. Though the idea that the two notions of 'settlement' and 'city' can no longer be treated as synonymous in a world where the urban and urban growth take multiple, sometimes previously unknown forms, has been stressed by different authors (Brenner and Schmid, 2015, Brenner, 2014), mobility as an element for a different type of urbanity has only started to be explored. The book takes this viewpoint and drives the reader into the consequence deriving from it, on the assumption that planning is a 'sensible practice of knowing and learning'.

Urbanization in Sub-Saharan Africa has experienced rapid growth since the end of colonialism. However, in the past two decades the trend accelerated impressively. The number of people living in cities has grown from 200 millions in the year 2000 to 425 in less than twenty years, and is expected to reach the 1 billion mark in twenty years more, adding 20 million new urban residents per year on the average. The 'middle size' cities, those from 300.000 up 1 million inhabitants that have more than doubled in the past

two decades, will continue to experience most of the demographic surge (United Nations, 2018).

This rapid growth of the urban population is coupled with an utter scarcity of permanent jobs, that is a demand for labour falling under the heading of 'formal sector'. Since it was 'discovered' in the early 70s, the informal sector has been looked at as a sort of incongruity African cities had to overcome, though deeply entrenched in the way their economies worked. As the book recollects, massive research has been conducted on how best to regularize informality without damaging its capacity to provide cheap goods and services as well as to employ large part of the lower segments of urban labour. Yet, the global economic context, as well as the internal conditions of most African cities, has made policies to funnel the informal sector into more 'modern' conditions unsuccessful.

There is sufficient evidence that since the beginning of the millennium a new middle class or, most likely, a 'consuming middle class' (Balbo 2013) has emerged. This might represent an increasing share of the total population likely to shape attitudes, values, lifestyles and consumption patterns of society as a whole (CFAO 2015). However, it is widely accepted that informality will remain the likely condition that most of the urban population will experience in the next several decades. According to the International Labour Organisation, in sub-Saharan urban areas the informal sector provides two-thirds of total employment, making most employed persons highly vulnerable (ILO 2015). Unsatisfactory as it may be, in the African city the informal sector is the only choice most youth and women have for their survival and livelihood.

The research on the *mukheristas* deals with the collection of 'practices', by

definition informal, of those who travel trans-locally concocting to earn their lives, and of the consequences on the spaces and territories of such practices. As in other parts of the Global South, in Africa the 'informal city' represents the essence of the city, the rule rather than the exception, based on, and producing it. The specific urban way of life that stands on and results from the informal city can no longer be regarded as a temporary condition that economic development will replace with well-organised modern urban spaces. In the past years a growing number of scholars has stressed the need for a shift of perspective, moving from what planning policies can do to 'regularize' the informal city to what they can learn from it as a mode to strengthen stronger relational ways of life, including those for the Global North (Simone, 2001).

The book falls on one side into the recently proposed 'mobilities paradigm' (Sheller and Urry, 2006), where mobilities are seen as key perspectives for different fields of studies, ranging from sociology to urban, gender and technology studies, and economics (Merriman et al. 2013; Büscher, Sheller, and Tyfield, 2016) where movement permits to explore 'the power and politics of discourses and practices of mobility in creating both movement and stasis' (Hannam, Sheller, Urry. 2006). On the other side, it is in line with the post-colonial studies perspective, according to which the African city has to be looked at by adopting a more global approach opening up to different theoretical and methodological practices. Accordingly, as paradigmatically stated by Parnell and Pieterse (2016) "either Africa must be ignored or the theory, method and data of urban studies must change", since the idea that the African city should look at the ways cities in the North change and 'develop' is intrinsically erroneous, if not an impossible path. Robinson (2006) argues that each city is an 'ordinary city'. For this reason, it must be apprehended through how it is specifically linked to globalisation focusing on the

contextual elements of the local - no matter whether in the South or in the North - rejecting all models or general analytical frames.

This locally grounded approach clearly calls for an ethnographic oriented research methodology, necessary to identify the practices adopted by the *mukheristas* in their traveling between Maputo and Johannesburg, and their impact on the urban as well the territorial spaces. By highlighting the roles of the different actors who interfere with the trans-local mobility, the book offers an exciting account of the intricate economic, social and spatial connections that materialize in and between the two cities. The nodes of these connections are the *mukheristas* themselves, whose experiences of traveling along the Maputo Corridor provide unequivocal evidence of how space plays a crucial role in their daily resolve. Every journey *mukheristas* embark on is a complex and continuous decision-taking exercise that implies how to negotiate with different actors as well as to pay bribes when convenient, selecting the most effective ways to surmount unexpected obstacles and putting up with hardly tolerable impositions. Under these circumstances, decisions must be taken according to the social and cultural codes of the 'different contextual manifestations of the geographically non-contiguous sites' the journey goes through. The account of the experiences the author shared with the *mukheristas* during the several trips she carried out between Maputo and Johannesburg provides a powerful description of the countless social practices *mukheristas* have to resort to in the different non-contiguous, in-between spaces.

At the same time, though, the book is conscious of the need for a critical attitude to avoid drifting towards the descriptivism ingrained with ethnography, no matter how multi-sited, offering, instead, a number of aspects for consideration. In the first instance is the attempt to look at the social and spatial

practices of *mukheristas* as learning tools for planning, as well as core components of the interplay between mobility and power. In the African city the organisation of urban space is increasingly tied to the movement of people, at different scales, and how this takes place. As mentioned before, in the African city informality is no longer one trait among others but a dominant feature affecting the way of life of the majority of the urban population, the way it makes a living, its housing, the urban services it gets, the transportation it can afford. However, the informality of the *mukheristas* is simultaneously the evidence of a globalisation from below that concerns all African cities. How this globalisation from below affects the city in Africa, but for that matter in Asia, Latin America and Europe, as it is the case with globalisation from above, is still a subject of research. Yet, in many cities around the world the impact of *mukheristas*-type practices is manifest and is affecting space, at the urban and the territorial levels. The unresolved question lies in what the text puts forward towards the end. In fact, the transactional space is the product of the built environment it intersects as well as (and possibly mainly) of the 'spatial context' it surfaces, i.e. the specific conditions of time and space.

It is well known that the informal economy intrudes into the urban by occupying vacant land, occupying empty buildings but also creating new space of exchange and relation. However, the book makes evident how the *mukheristas*' 'globalisation from below' adds a different level of spatial impact on urban space that has hardly been explored in the literature, neither from the informal sector nor from the urban planning perspectives. Through their activity *mukheristas* are significant actors in the transformation of Maputo, where new market infrastructure (buildings and open air markets) have appeared to provide the space for the exchange of goods. Thus, trans-local space affects and sometimes sets the scene for the city spatial growth, raising no simple issue to urban planning. In fact, though there is no doubt that the

trans-national activities of the *mukheristas* affect local urban space (particularly but not only in Maputo), it is quite challenging to craft planning tools (including governance tools) that reflect their complexity, non-linearity and uncertainty. It looks even more difficult to design policies based on the acknowledgment of the territorial impacts generated by practices like the *mukhero*, as most support measures for the informal sector have failed, due to their inescapable inherent regulatory power.

The emphasis on the intricate networks and at times casual system of relations *mukheristas* rely on to carry out their trans-local practices, 'the multiple and hybrid histories of translocal spaces and places, their politics and social constructions, their material geographies and their connections to other scales and places' (Brickell and Datta 2011), point to the almost insurmountable difficulty to design 'appropriate' planning policies. To address informal urban processes, even more so when these unfold at a regional trans-local scale as it is the case with the *mukheristas*, is a major challenge for planning. The distributional outcomes of these processes are hard to assess, given the variety of paths they follow and the intertwined effects they have on different people and territories. Though within different claims and often-harsh conflicts among interest holders, planning is meant to be a tool urban politics employs to reduce inequalities, a highly difficult task in any urban environment, particularly where different social and economic contexts coexist and evolve continuously. All cities must be looked at as 'ordinary cities', but the economic, social and cultural construction deriving from present conditions as well as past history, make the degrees of governability different.

The book confronts the idea of mobile urbanity, 'the empirical ubiquity and multiplicities of movement of social, political, and economic organisation' (Adey, 2006), as a useful conceptual category to analyze its effect on the ur-

ban rather than a descriptive approach of limited capacity to unveil the interplay between mobility and power (Söderström 2013). That, as the book states, 'the transactional planning approach identifies transactional spaces as knots where contrasting or collaborative uses come off the territory and 'dysfunctional or unequal relationships between individuals/networks are contrasted or limited' is an interesting perspective, but it is definitely a challenge with respect to the forms of government transactional planning needs to rest on. The issue raises more than one question about the idea that African urban societies can envision their future based on the idea of 'people as infrastructure' (Simone, 2004).

As noted by Amin and Thrift (2016), taking into due account the 'urban socio-technical systems' may be quite useful for the African city, but it is no guarantee of equitable distributive policies. It seems rather hard to think that African cities (and societies) can envisage their future based on the idea of 'people as infrastructure' (Simone, 2004). The notion of 'people' – as much as that of 'community' – is an encompassing word that hides differences in culture, habits, attitudes and, most of all, power. As the text underlines, the notion of people as infrastructure may represent the key to explain the *mukhero*, but it hardly provides directions as to how the African city can vie in a world where the competition exists and takes place at the urban level.

The entrepreneurial *mukheristas* who make their living and even prosper by travelling between Maputo and Johannesburg are one specific feature of urbanization in Africa (exactly, the 'mobile urbanity' proposed by the author). As the book stresses urban mobility 'opens up new ways of thinking the spatial dimensions and the agency embraced in human mobility'. Recognizing the centrality of informality and the complex hybrid practices of trans-local mobility in shaping cities and territories in Africa, though, should not con-

ceal the deep causes of inequality and the 'networked individualism' that lie behind them. In this sense, the book has the great value of opening more questions than giving responses.

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INTRODUCTION

'The world is like a Mask dancing.
If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place'
(Achebe's 1974 [1964], In Nyamnjoh 2012)

This book is the result of an action-research carried out in South Africa and in Mozambique between 2014 and 2015, as part of the doctoral program undertaken by the author. Burgeoned from the deep will of contributing to the urban theory on the Global South, the work has endorsed the grounded theory (Meagher 2009) approach to understand the interplay between informality, economic and urbanity in today's sub-saharan Africa. The book draws on the close examination of the *mukhero*, the informal cross-border trade between Mozambique and the surrounding countries, as an entry point to interpret how evolved habitual practices were incorporated in and has contributed to shape contemporary African urbanity. By recounting a dense and peculiar microcosm like that of *mukheristas*, observed throughout months of ethnographic observations and travels along the Maputo corridor, 'Mobile urbanity' not only unveils important urban dynamics diffused over the continent, but also points to what mobile practices can tell us about urbanity, especially in contexts where cognitive frameworks and researches on the two phenomena are in most of the cases fragmented and separated.

Driven by the inescapable need of 'thinking across different urban experiences' (Robinson 2011), the investigation illustrated in this book developed as an experiential learning[1] within, in-between and through, different, but interconnected urban realities, starting from a Mozambican hairdresser salon in Rosettenville (Johannesburg)[2] and ending up to Maputo's informal

markets. Hairdresser salons in Johannesburg's suburbs function as a sort of "co-working spaces" where immigrant workers pay the rent for a chair and a mirror to a single owner and attract customers of different African nationalities according to the hairstyles and fashion. They are perfect spots for 'shadowing'[3] migrants in the city. In one of them, halfway along the district's arterial road of Prairie Street, I came to hear about *mukhero* for the first time by the young Lionel from Maputo: <<*Mukhero* is what we do to realize our dreams when all the rest lacks. We carry stuff up and down between here and Mozambique. Few years ago I carried products for shops like this one. Now I run my own one. If you wanna move on, you gotta move!>>.

The idea of these sort of carriers of good and dreams moving between cities before being able to stabilise in the city hit my imagination as the symbol of the struggling migrant not ceding to hurdles, bur rather finding in mobility his/her own strength.

Mukhero immediately appeared as a crucial entry point to understand the interplay between mobility and spatial appropriation in a South-South context. However, in order to be able to trace the relationship between individuals, objects, and spatially non-contiguous, but substantially continuous places, *mukheristas* had to be followed 'across sites and scales' through multi-sited ethnographic explorations[4] (Marcus 1995). These came out as not only natural – what else than a mobile method to study mobile objects? – but also as a very effective way to track such peculiar mobility practices in the urban space, and at the same time grasp the most minute and individual aspects related to them. Nevertheless, the engagement with *mukheristas* was unavoidably incremental and required an increasing capacity for inventiveness, improvisation and adaptation, due to the informal and mobile character of the investigated practice.

Within the overall fieldwork articulated in two main phases[5], the first one

in Johannesburg was mostly based on observations (lately become participant observations) and semi-structured interviews with thirty subjects, who were not only cross-border traders, but also drivers, employees at the station, owners of transport companies, hoteliers, receptionists, business intermediaries, customs officials, street vendors and dealers met in the CBD of Johannesburg, in the area around Kerk Street in 'Town' (as people calls the downtown in Johannesburg), in Rosettenville, Ellis Park, Fordsburg and Park Station (all areas making up the nodes of the *mukhero* circuit in Johannesburg). Getting in touch with the widest possible number of subjects playing different roles in cross-border transit was crucial to unravel the intricate ramifications of the assemblage that they form. Subsequently, snowball sampling (Silvermann 2000) brought to the identification of ten privileged individuals between Johannesburg and Maputo who were open to in-depth interviews and narrative inquiries. The latter, in particular, was the method chosen to exemplify the multiple frames present in mobile lives[6]. Collected narratives revealed a landscape 'in-between' (Kihato 2013), conquered and re-shaped by mobile subjects. This could only be fully unpacked by accompanying *mukheristas* in their travels, as done with Ernesto, a former *mukherista* who was working for the Mozambican National Government when we met, and Antonia, a *mukherista* carrying dogs from Johannesburg to Maputo.

The method of following the people, that is 'perhaps the most obvious and conventional mode of materializing a multi-sited ethnography' (Marcus 1995) in migration and diaspora studies, is little applied in urban studies. It is a way of proceeding that involves many challenges. It is drawn on the capacity to constantly renegotiate commitment to the ever-changing, expanded landscapes in which it takes place, thus implying a topological, rather than a topographical approach to space (meaning by this a major interest to the relations between localities, rather than to their absolute location in the

space). Nevertheless, the topographical specificities of the explored sites cannot be disregarded, especially when one is immersed in the practicalities of the fieldwork. Being aware and, at the meantime, able to muddle through the different contextual manifestation of the geographically non-contiguous site under study is fundamental per se and to offer a deep sense of the space(s) of the field. This requires the researcher a rare ability to use it as both a theoretical lens and a methodological tool to interpret selected phenomena, with far from irrelevant consequences for the physical sphere and logistics.

Six and a half trips along the corridor between the two cities were accomplished, for a total of more than 3500 km, plus the several hundreds kilometers travelled in the smaller (yet intensively covered) areas of the three sites studied more in depth (Johannesburg, Maputo and the Ressano Garcia border post). The most diverse means of transport were taken, going from regular busses, to 'informal' busses, minibuses and *mukheristas*' private cars. Each of these traveling conditions corresponded to different degrees of comfort and exposition to risk – exactly as it is for people who are to use them accordingly to their possibilities – not to talk of the physical stress, that is anything but a simply mundane component of doing multi-sited ethnography[7].

Nevertheless, multi-sited ethnography proved to be essential to get the embodied experience of movement and deduce relevant issues for urban research drawn on ethnography at large.

In a 'de-territorialized world' where the idea of fieldwork is inevitably pushed from bounded fields to shifting locations (Gupta and Ferguson 1997b), a wisely conducted multi-sited ethnography drives us beyond our limits. In my case, limits were pushed on different levels, starting from that of deep contextual understanding, as to follow people always implies to deal with very different contexts, encountering and finding oneself amidst diverse worlds.

The antithesis between the 'I' of the researcher and 'them' of the 'other world' gets diluted in favour of a multiplication and pluralities of cultural assemblages. Moreover, the researcher's linguistic competences get expanded as a consequence – and not only a precondition – of multi-sited research. Such a fact represents in itself an act of post-colonialisation of urban studies. Alongside to this, multi-sited ethnography brings about an 'enhanced challenge of translation' (Marcus 1995; 2005). Translating what interpreted in other urban worlds (while they keep changing at different speeds in the grip of contemporaneity) demands a considerably effective and quick capacity to 'give back' the core elements of the picture, as well as all the nuances and shades. Though, it has to be drawn on the willingness to get immersed in the other culture. This also means, sometimes, to travel in precarious conditions, to spend time and share meals with the accompanied subjects, to find a common linguistic terrain of communication, all practices that are not undertaken for mere love of adventure[7], nor just for the will to take a stab at ethnography, but simply as the unescapable way to analyse and interpret the realm of mobilities and related aspects in an uneven, unequal world.

Accounting for mobilities in urbanising Africa as the complex, dynamic and relational phenomena that they are makes unavoidable to push the limits of *homines academici* of any researcher (Nyamnjoh 2012) and to explore forms of empirical flexibility to improved paradigms of understanding and new research avenues.

For, this book is just the beginning of a long journey.

Notes:

1. In experiential learning, theoretical learning is distilled from experience while maintaining a radically critical and self-reflective approach. This brings into play a chain of actions based on the continual coming and going between practice and theory, action and critical reflection, through a self-generative spiral. Things gradually take on their burdens and borders within an initially indistinct overview and a never-ending conclusion.

2. Rosettenville, located in the southern periphery of Johannesburg, is one of Mozambican settlement areas in the city, connected to anglophone immigration from Madeira and Mozambique occurred between 1924 and 1972. Most of Mozambicans living in Rosettenville settled permanently in Johannesburg after having left Mozambique in the 1980s because of hunger and civil war.

3. Shadowing is a 'methodology of ethnographic observation consisting in the researcher's intrusion into a foreign environment, making use even of the difficulties and accidents that such intrusion causes' (Sclavi 2005). As Sclavi (2005) points out, unlike participant observation, in which the researcher stays aside as much as possible and tries to present comments as objective, in the shadowing the researcher neither can nor want to be unnoticed, but rather repositions him/herself in the observation field for a mutual recognition and avowed exchange with the informants.

4. Multi-sited research retrieves constructivism's malleable manner of defining its objects (Marcus 1995) by following the relationships between things, metaphors, story, lives and conflicts that are on an over-time-adaptable-to-contingencies baseline (Falzon 2009).

5. One between May and July 2014 and the second between October and December 2015 in Johannesburg, Maputo and along the Maputo Corridor,

6. By telling their stories, individuals learn to express themselves and make sense of the external world. Quoting S., a young lady met in the De Villiers Market: "Our life is tough but we need to tell it".

7. Hage (2005) ironically emphasizes the importance of taking properly into account the limitations of the researcher's body when embarking in multi-sited approach, above all when it is supposed to be fairly geographically extended.

THINKING THE MOBILITY - INFORMALITY - URBANITY NEXUS

CHAPTER 1.

1. Intersecting epistemologies on contemporary urbanism

Cities have changed. They appear more than ever as complex entities, challenged by articulated and often conflicting needs, uses and aspirations, crossed by diverse populations, many of which variously in transit. The result is a fragmented and transient landscape, which undermines the idea of the city as a place of permanence and all interpretative paradigms based on it. If the fact that the city has changed is not a great piece of news, the question of how to try to understand in order to better govern it in the wake of the running transformations remains open. As Sudjic wrote about twenty years ago, the new configuration taken by the metropolis are fundamentally different from the city as we know and the tools on tap to interpret it appear backward compared to changes modifying the city (Sudjic 1992). In a recent paper published in 2015, Brenner and Schmid argue that the unfolding forms of urbanization all around the world 'challenge inherited conceptions of the urban as a fixed, bounded and universally generalizable settlement type'. In doing so, they pose a fundamental question for the contemporary epistemology of the urban (Brenner and Schmid 2015).

The 'urban question' (Lefebvre 1970; Castells 1972,1977), anything but new, is still open and 'burning' as ever, since the urban is the 'episteme' of our time. As such, it constitutes the lens to read major aspects of contemporary economic, social and political transformations (Lefebvre 1970; Brenner and Schmid 2015). Much more complex than the way we still think it, the city has broken its boundaries and taken a plurality of new urban configurations that are still largely to be conceptualized.

Since Robinson's (2002) call for a post-colonialisation of urban studies exhorting to practice a 'sophisticated urban sense' in order to unfold the wide range of circulations and connections amongst cities in the world, heterogeneous orientations1 have been engaging with new phenomena in ways that revisit classical themes and approaches in urban studies. Following on Brenner and Schmid (2015), the prevalent orientations range from the opposition to mainstream global urban ideologies, replaced by historical and spatial analysis of globalisation, to a focus on contextual particularities and local experiences rather than universalizing knowledge claims about the urban experience, to, finally, a translocal perspective on urban development, employed both as a study of inter-place relations or 'worlding' processes, and as exploration of transnational circulation and implementation of urban models and concepts2. However, the orientation toward a collective project of 'global urban theory' (Robinson 2014, Roy 2014), that should engage any scholarship regardless of geographic origins in a common effort of interpretative production appears the most compelling and productive one to the scope of the present work. Such a long-term project constitutes the horizon within which to decipher the constantly changing forms of globalisation across the North/South divide through a cosmopolitan approach, in order to conceptualize the entanglement of processes impacting and forging cities in the South as much as in the North and to enrich urban inquire as a whole.

Taking up this challenge, the book adopts a vision of urbanism and planning as 'sensible practices of knowing' (Davoudi 2015) and 'learning' (McFarlane 2011), able to firstly understand and to subsequently imagine solutions starting from urban practices.
Such perspective abandons the claim to ensue a total view or to operate generalisations of urbanity in favor of a phenomenological interpretation

of the city as a place of mobility, flow and daily practices. In this frame, the urban ceases to be considered as a universal form or a bounded unit, to be rather envisaged as a 'multi-scalar process of socio-spatial transformation' (Brenner and Schmid 2015), consistently shaped by mobility. Mobility as a key aspect of the contemporary urban condition becomes the lens for reading cities. Looking at the space through mobility presupposes a different understanding of city, based on the distanced and spatially extended nature of urban life (Amin and Thrift 2005). The mobility and the spatial turn are so welded together, producing a different understanding both of the city and of mobility. By deciding to intersect different theoretical frameworks and epistemologies through the human mobility-urbanism nexus, this work unfolds key aspects of the contemporary urban condition.

2. Cities-on-the-move

Global migrations and accelerated, multiple forms of mobility are amongst the main factors of complexity producing heterogenous outcomes in the cities. Their socio-spatial consequences have been the object of different theoretical and methodological elaborations. From the theories on the world and global cities, to the notions of transnationalism and trans-localism to, finally, the recent emphasis on mobility, social sciences and urban studies have developed increasingly finer frameworks to explore the interplay between cities and movement. Accepting the risks of simplification, it is possible to generically summarise the assumptions underpinning these theories as ranging from an accent on migration in the city to one on mobility and cities. This evolution is orderly retraced hereafter.

In Friedmann's 'world city hypothesis'3 (Friedmann 1986) and Sassen's global cities theory (Saskia Sassen 1988, 1991, 2011), migration is mainly conceived as a phenomenon characterised by a demand-driven nature within industrial and post-industrial societies that is functional to their continue growth and development. Applying a mainly historical-structural analysis to migration, these two theoretical frameworks regard migrants and especially immigrants as 'little more than passive pawns in the play of great powers and world processes presided over by the logic of capital accumulation' (Arango 2004). What is remarkable about these two theoretical approaches is that they both tend to deny the agency of migrants, especially in their initial elaboration.

It is with the spread of the concept of transnationalism4 that migrants begin to be taken into consideration as active urban agents. Scholars of transnationalism, in fact, investigate the relationship between migration and cities by refusing the traditional approach based on cities as blank backgrounds for ethnically distinguished and problematic migrants. Rather, they show how migration plays an important role in the process of urban life reconfiguration and cities repositioning in the global system, concerning all cities in the world and not only those at the top of the world theory's 'global hierarchy'. The notion coined by Smith (2001) of 'transnational urbanism'5 contributes to further shift the focus on migration from the analysis of uniquely economic factors to migrants' practices and everyday life having an impact on cities. Smith targets the societally evolutionist discourse of the global cities theory, underlining how this focusses 'resolutely on structural transformations while giving scant attention to the discursive and material practices by which people create the regularized patterns that enable and constrain them' in the urban environment (Smith 2001). Criticising the assumption that 'globalisation is a structural force operating behind people's backs and

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inexorably determining their futures', Smith moves from social constructionism and treats globalisation as 'an unfinished product of politically and culturally constructed social practices' (ibid). It is so proved how, alongside migrants subject to exploitation, there are others who make progress and succeed. More importantly, while this happens, societies and cities get transformed.

If the transnationalism concept has opened the way to the mutual impact between migration and transnationally located urban fields, the notion of 'translocality' definable as 'situatedness/groundedness during mobility' (Brickell and Datta 2011) has pointed to the importance of considering material and embodied practices of migrants to grasp the translocation geographies6 they can simultaneously bring to life in different spaces, places and scales.

Translocality opens up the traditional perspective on migration, expanding it not only towards and across other spaces and scales (such as rural-urban, inter-urban and inter-regional) but also by incorporating into it 'the movements of those supposedly 'immobile' groups who do not fall under the rubric of a transnational migrant but who negotiate different kinds of local-local journeys' (Brickell and Datta 2011). The translocal approach facilitates the understanding of the role of mobility in connecting and transforming places, that may be 'interstitial spaces [as] part of the itinerary of movement, sites from where movement and migration in other spaces and places are organised [,] or even the [bodies] which move across spaces' (ibidem). This way, it poses both a theoretical and a methodological challenge. The theoretical challenge consists in paying attention to the multiple and hybrid histories of translocal spaces and places, their politics and social constructions, their material geographies and their connections to other scales and places (Brickell and Datta 2011). The methodological one resulting from it implies

in turn the effort to deploy a wide range of tools that can capture not just the economic exchanges, political organisations or social networks across sites of departure and destination, but also a 'wider range of spaces and places in between' (ibidem), related to the local-local connections across transnational spaces, as well as to mundane spaces of public transport, residential mobility, bodily and sensory perceptions, negotiated in everyday movements. Such a 'place-based' rather than 'place-bound' comprehension of the local clearly boosts an 'agency oriented' approach to the experience of mobile subjects, as translocality itself is explicitly defined 'a situated mode of human agency and mobility through variegated spaces and places across nations, regions, cities, neighbourhoods, buildings and bodies' (Brickell and Datta 2012). It thus opens up new ways of thinking the spatial dimensions and the agency embraced in human mobility.

More recently, mobility rather than migration has been indicated as the most 'suitable trope for our time' (Tiessen 2008), given the increased and plural forms of movements proliferated under current globalisation regime. The 'new mobilities paradigm' spread out in social sciences since the Urry and Sheller's namesake paper of 2006 has generated new understandings of migration and movement seen through the lens of the all-encompassing mobility concept (Urry 2007; Cresswell 2006, 2010, 2011, 2012; Cresswell and Merriman 2011; Adey 2006, 2010; McCann 2011; McCann and Ward 2010, 2011). The 'mobility turn' (Urry and Sheller 2006) stands opposite to the tendency of reading movement either as a static entity tied to specific urban contexts or as a nomadic attitude. It also goes against sedentarism and deterritorialisation to rather analyze movements against their broader social implications. The language of mobility allows more attention to the larger contexts in which people move together with objects, capital, ideas, technologies and other living beings.

The 'new mobilities paradigm' has so had the merit to connect the theoretical production on migration and that on movement, at the same time providing better interpretation of both phenomena. Mobility works better than migration to encompass the various dimensions of human movements (circular, unidirectional, trans-local and so on), as well as the different temporalities they follow7. At the same time, it has extended the analysis of movement far beyond the traditional concerns regarding exclusively transportation to that of the experiences, practices and politics of mobile subjects and objects (Miller and Ponto 2016). Indeed, while in the 1920s and 1930s the School of Chicago used to integrate mobility in its urban analysis, approaching it as a vector for change, at the dawning of the Second World War and after the study of the phenomenon was divided between sociological research and transportation science (Kaufmann 2012). This division coincided with the distinction between mobility as a change of position, role or social status as considered by sociology and mobility as flows in space as seen by transportation science.

The mobility concept retrieves an integrated approach considering both its social and spatial aspects with the works of Michel Bassand. The book 'Spatial Mobility' (1980) by Bassand and Brulhardt redefines this as a 'total social fact', in the sense that any movement implies 'a change of state in actors or in the system' (Bassand and Brulhardt 1980). With this definition, mobility gets back all the richness of being a socio-spatial phenomenon, entangling both movement through space and social change. Ceasing to be treated in an exclusively functional way, it so comes to be recognised as an inherently dynamic, social and political realm of meanings, values and desires attached to movement (Cresswell 2006, 2010). Cresswell, more than anyone, has been particularly effective in substituting the 'cold fact of movement' (Latour 2005) deployed by transportation researchers with the rich meanings or embodiment of mobility, emphasizing how mobility has to be understood as

a knot of physical movement, embodied practices of movement and socially shared meanings ascribed to movement (Cresswell 2006, 2010).

At present, the definition of mobility is very wide and plural8. In his 'post-societal' elaboration as the ontological principle9 of contemporary society, it has reached such an extent at to provoke criticism. This arises from the fact that mobility has become a too-broad, all-inclusive concept (Kaufmann 2008). Adey, who is keen to admit his belief in a mobile-everything, remarks that 'if mobility is everything, then maybe it is nothing' (2006). Faist (2013) ironically points out how the 'mobility turn', as the latest of a long series of turns (i.e. the linguistic turn, the cultural turn and the spatial turn) generalises one aspect of contemporary society to detriment of other features. In a more constructive way, Söderström (2013) calls for a critical approach to mobility studies as the only way to avoid the risk of a useless descriptivism to rather bring out its potential of unveiling the interplay between mobility and power. Mobility in whatever form it takes, in fact, never occurs in a seamless or isotropic global space, nor along frictionless routes. Instead, it follows from the interplay between a set of structural conditions and constraints and the agency of mobile subjects/ objects (Söderström 2013). As Massey (1994) explains, 'mobility, and control over mobility, both reflects and reinforces power'. At the same time, it is constructed as a means with an emancipatory power (Cresswell 1997), helpful in transgressing power structures through both material and metaphysical domains. Any analysis of mobility cannot skip the assumption that it is an inherently power-laden practice, influenced by a diversity of regulations and relations. Thus, to study the first without examining the latter would miss the unescapable challenge of unmasking actual disparities, as well as proper forms of agency connected to mobility.

The present work assumes that the production of mobilities is related to the

production of space. Mobility is conceived as a practice requiring socio-spatial moorings to happen (Hannam et al 2006) and implying the ability to negotiate space within physical and social environments (Cass et al 2005). Being inextricably bound up with other spatialities, such as space, place and territory (Miller and Ponto 2016), only a critical analysis of the relation between bodies-on-the-move and spaces can provide useful insights to dynamics pertaining to contemporary urbanity, including inequalities, constraints and escape happening in it. According to such a perspective, mobility and space are so inextricably interwoven that any analysis of mobility cannot disregard space. Thence, mobility (including migration among the other mobile feature of contemporary social life) turns out as an useful 'analyser' for contemporary society (Bourdin 2005). Understanding mobility, in fact, means grasping the diversity of spaces that shape and are shaped by contemporary societies on the move.

Consistently, the approach to the territory proposed in this book overlooks the ontological foundation of mobility to rather seize on its 'ontogenetic' potential (Pucci 2016), as it aims at understanding how space and urbanity are continually brought anew through material and social transformations imbued with mobility. So it is not mobility itself that constitutes the object of investigation, but the socio-spatial realm 'through the realities of mobility' (Bourdin 2005; Pucci 2016). Such an approach is also of a 'relational-territorial' kind (Collins 2011) as it looks at the ways in which mobility and territory are mutually shaping. Following on Massey's call to 'think space relationally'(2004)10, here urban territories are put in relation to practices of mobility11 experienced by people in different ways and revised through their embeddedness in the context in which they take place. The perspective offered by practices is particularly insightful because it recognizes the agency of migrants and mobile subjects as their everyday engagement with different

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structural environments. The observation of mobility practices in their daily and contextualised happening not only brings about the link between action and social structures (Pasqui 2008), but also reveals the manner in which 'the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgement, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by challenging situations' (Morawska 2007). Such an approach to the study of urban territories, that falls within that strand of research defining the territory according to human practices (Lefebvre 1958, 1961; Giddens 1984; Crosta 2010), focusses on the repetitive actions through which people form and transform the urban space. Paying attention to 'the city [as] the way we moderns live and act, as much as where' (Donald 1995) is the way pursued here to grasp pieces of present cities-on-the-move.

3. Informal, Mobile Urban Modes from Below

In a world of not just diverse, but differentiated mobilities due to uneven opportunities of access, signposting and taming of places, the present work chooses an object of observation so far neglected by the mobility turn by focusing on 'underprivileged mobilities' (Nyamnjoh 2013). Developed within late capitalist urban societies, with a limited application outside the Western world, the mobility turn has mainly developed 'a homogenizing discourse anchored in a male, middle-class perception of the world, subscribed to a one-dimensional and mono-directional notion of abstract space and time' (Simonsen 2004). It is in emerging economies and developing countries, though, that mobility poses the biggest challenges at the theoretical, policy and governance level. A focus on mobility outside Global North settings is, therefore, necessary to open up new questions and concerns about its

impact in different urban environments. This work contributes to this by pushing forward the research hitherto produced on mobility on three fronts: first, the geographical level, by focussing on mobility in Africa; second, the class, by dealing with subjects in social ascent but mostly coming from low class; finally, gender, by looking at mobility from the perspective of women.

In Africa mobility under the most varied times and forms (from nomadism to pastoralism, craftsmanship and trade) has always been a constitutive aspect of the livelihood system, both in urban and in rural areas, and as such a privileged lens to observe social life. Nevertheless its relationship to urbanity is under-articulated and overlooked by the mainstream scientific production upon the two concepts.

Aiming at unravelling aspects of the interplay between urbanity and mobility in territories 'off-the-map' (Robinson 2006) as a response to the post-colonial urban studies' call to go beyond narratives of underdevelopment and 'othering' commonly associated to cities outside Europe and North America, the work develops an empirical reading of ordinary urban realities in Sub-Saharan Africa. It applies a 'view from below' that follows the 'practices of mobility' of Mozambican women informal cross-border traders to understand the urbanity they produce.

Looking at them means to look at urbanity from a point of view close to the 'human scale', in which the act of walking, moving and trading over long distances 'writes and rewrites urban space' (De Certeau 1984), as well as our understanding of it. The practices of mobile subjects generate new ways of urban incorporations different from long term stay and contribute to large-scale urban transformations on which the wisdom of urban studies has yet to be spent.

The choice of a 'view from below' responds to at least two main reasons. One is the belief that a city is not simply a string of infrastructures and technologies, but also a place of bodies, aspirations and rhythms. It does not

mean to endorse the juxtaposition between the 'built city' and the 'lived city', but rather to show, through people's ability of 'maneuvering' space, how the two constitute a continuum that must be accounted for as a whole in any theoretical discussion of urban life. The other one is the reversal of the starting point for understanding urban processes in order to propose a re-presentation of the city that makes count of its real essence, beyond both exclusively normative visions proposed by policies and regional planning and the Westernized approach, 'shipwrecked by developmentalism' (Robinson 2006). It is, thence, an attempt to sew up top-down narratives with in-depth empirical research and analysis, in order to capture the complexity, variety and ambiguity of urban actors in Africa and to let a broader range of themes and topics emerge (Pezzano 2016).

Notes:

1. The most important among this can be considered the post-colonial urban studies, actor network theory, and critical urban theory,

2. Such orientations have been pursued with different degrees and kinds of commitment to the 'southern' positionality, going from those claiming the epistemological otherness and uniqueness of southern cities and perspective, to the most radically post-colonial ones, which refuse any category, including the Global South, and 'wordliness' of cities (e.g. Watson 2009, Roy 2009, Mbembe and Nuttall 2008, Robinson 2006, 2011).

3. The work by Saskia Sassen (1988, 1991, 2011) connects the reproduction of migration in cities to the reproduction of the global capital system. Following on from Friedmann's 'world city hypothesis' that distinguishes cities on the base of their role in the new spatial division of labour, with the result of a hierarchy of cities produced by the global capital, Sassen argues that the world economy in the post-industrial era is managed by a small number of cities (precisely the 'global cities') in which banking, finance, corporate headquarters, administration, professional and producer services tend to cluster (Sassen 1991), generating a strong demand for services from unskilled workers. These services coincide with low-end jobs (such as bus-drivers, waiters, hotel workers, domestic servants) that are mainly undertaken by immigrants from poor countries.

4. The term 'transnationalism' is defined for the first time in a paper by Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller and Cristina Szanton Blanc entitled 'Transnationalism: A New Analytic Framework for Understanding Migration' (1992), as 'the process by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement' (Glick Schiller et al., 1992). The transnational paradigm, further developed in the two foundational works 'Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration' (Glick Schiller et al. 1992) and 'Nations Unbound' (Basch et al. 1994), as well as by other influential voices, including Portes (1999; also Portes et al. 1999) and Vertovec (1999, 2004), responds to the need for a new paradigm to address migration studies. It helps to overcome the traditional emigrants-immigrants binomial constrained on an exclusively national level of analysis, as well as to highlight the multi- stranded social relations built up by migrants across geographic, cultural and political borders (Basch et al., 1994).

5. The term merges transnationalism and urbanism to allude to 'a cultural rather than a strictly geographic metaphor', able to capture the wide range of possibilities for social change associable with urban life (Smith, 2001). 'Transnational urbanism' is 'a marker of the criss-crossing transnational circuits of communication and cross-cutting transnational social practices 'that come together' in particular places at particular times' (ibid.).

6. As Brickell and Datta explain in their fundamental book 'Translocal Geographies. Spaces, Places, Connections', translocality provides an understanding of different faces of globalisation through its grounding in the local and, at the same time, a way to understand the local as situated within a network of spaces, places and scales where identities are negotiated and transformed (Brickell and Datta 2011). Brickell and Datta show how translocality goes beyond the simple notion of 'grounded' transnationalism, highlighting the volume in which it exists across a variety of scales and locales.

7. Instead of assuming that people only leave one place to settle in another, mobility permits to see also how they leave and return and start all over again. Moreover, it allows a new temporal perspective for which people may either be continually moving or move and settle at a much quicker pace, staying a few months or a year in one place and then moving on.

8. According to Kaufmann, for instance, mobility is a compound idea concerning individual and collective actors who are liable to move following their intentionality (Kaufmann 2012). This perspective excludes goods and ideas, which are instead present in Urry's theoretical elaboration. Urry clearly argues for a sociology of mobility concerned with the diverse mobilities that are transforming society, including travels, objects, images, information and wastes (Urry 2000, 2007, 2010).

9. The ontological status of mobility, opposed to the idea of a rigidly ordered sedentary world, affirms the mobile essence of everything: objects, things, buildings, landscapes, information, ideas are viewed as made up of thousands, millions, billions of movements that interact with one another in many different ways. Even space is never still, but composed by mobilities. Thrift calls it 'movement-space', a 'perpetually mobile space [...] open-ended rather than enclosing' (Thrift, 2004). The scholars affirming the ontological status of mobility assert that the world, including the very concepts and cate-

gories through which we comprehend it, is mobile (Miller and Ponto 2016).

10. The urging to 'think[ing] space relationally' (Massey 2004) has had a profound impact on the most recent elaborations in urban geography, producing very different and often incompatible outcomes. The emphasis has been on a better understanding of the ways in which cities are networked, and how these relations shape their trajectories of development (Jacobs 2012). However, this produces heterogeneous approaches, from the one acknowledging a certain definiteness to the urban entity, albeit in a network of cities, to that considering cities as networks (rather than in networks), characterised by varying degrees of virtuality or eventfulness (Smith and Doel 2011), to, finally, the idea of the 'city as assemblage' (Farias and Bender in 2009, Madden 2010) or of the 'city as agencement' (McCann and Ward 2011).

11. By 'practices of mobility' it is meant the everyday 'embodied and habitualized' experience of mobile subjects (Miller and Ponto 2016) through trans-locally extended distances and criss-crossing networks.

UNDERSTANDING THE SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN CONTEXT

CHAPTER 2.

1. The African Urban Transition

In the last years, the common representation of Africa as dominated by rurality is being replaced by the recognition of a progressively urban continent. Official reports and scholars point out to the unprecedented levels of urban growth that Africa is rapidly undergoing (Locatelli and Nugent 2009), with 40% of African population today living in cities and estimated to increase up to 50% by 2025. This, translated into figures, means that the number of African urban dwellers is projected to go from 400 million to 1.26 billion between 2010 and 2050. Although in absolute terms Asian cities still remain the world's fastest growing (Potts 2013), Africa seems launched into an urban future. Over a quarter of the one-hundred fastest-growing cities in the world lie in Africa, that hosts fifty-two cities exceeding one million inhabitants since 2011, as well as the three mega-cities of Cairo (7,8 million), Lagos (5,3 million) and Kinshasa (10 million). If the current growth trends persist, other African cities such as Johannesburg, Dar er Salaam, Luanda, Khartoum and Abidjan will reach mega-cities' standards by 2050.

The 'urban transition' that has occurred among other economic, demographic and technological 'changeovers' (UN Habitat 2014) since the 2000 has been transforming in depth the continent outline and determining a repositioning of Africa in the world. In the face of such a consistent shift, statistics are barely sufficient and sometimes even misleading to easy generalisations, that impede to grasp the nature of urban processes currently taking place in Africa.

Indeed urbanization is a multifaceted concept that does not simply refer to the growth of population in towns, but also to the urbanization speed and the extent to which this is accompanied by structural shifts in the economy.

A focus on the structural aspects of urbanization, rather than on headline statements about urban population growth is thus fundamental to interpret the actual trends. 'Big picture' analyses may automatically make one infer macro-economic changes from statistics, this way leading, for instance, to positive predictions about fast structural improvement in African economics as a result of urban growth. Conversely, African urbanization is associated with accelerating globalisation (Kraas 2007), but not with economic growth.

The improvements in GDP growth across many African countries since approximately 2003 have created some economic changes, but these are generally associated with natural resource exploitation and not with urban-located forms of employment (Potts 2009). In other words, African urbanization is taking place amidst widespread economic stagnation.

This makes African cities to be characterised as chaotic, decaying and hopeless places, cut off the map of global inter-connection, a depiction falling within an even more misrepresenting generalisation of contemporary Africa. Be the image of a problematic world area troubled with inequality, poverty, crime and weak institutions as conveyed by institutional frameworks, international organisations and NGOs (Kihato 2013), or the 'other-worldly' of Africa transversal to functionalist, neoliberal and Marxist approaches in scholarship (Mbembe and Nuttall 2004), a finer analysis of African urbanity, able to account for the innovative strides happening on the ground, seems to be still largely missing. The necessary examination of actual on-going processes requires to progress beyond reassuring categorizations or developmental obsessions and to adopt both a contextualised and global perspective of urban phenomena in Africa. The same study of contemporary patterns of poverty or conflictual relations for the control of space and resources in

Africa should dig up historically analyzed local peculiarities, as well as the relationship between them and the global scenario.

Africa is concretely affected by globalisation and neoliberalism as the rest of the world it is fastened to. The effects of these phenomena unfold in cities, where the differences, inequalities and contradictions produced by globalisation tend to materialize patently. The consequence is the 'transformation of organizing social relations and transactions' (Held et al. 1999) in ways that some times have been already experienced elsewhere, whereas other times turn out to be anticipatory.

Understanding them solicits a theoretical approach grounded in the field in order to condense micro-systemic and macro-systemic dynamics, beyond narratives of homogeneity and exceptionalism on Africa that have prevailed so far. Rather, it is time for a cosmopolitan urban theory that gives account of the social, spatial and political transformations shaping post-colonial African cities and their interconnection with the rest of the world.

Since 'On the Worlding of African Cities' by Simone (2001), a clear understanding of how African 'ordinary cities' develop trans-local interactions and elaborate complementarities within larger regional areas appears to be still largely increased. This is paradoxical when we think that cities in Africa, as arenas for the consolidation of colonial powers, have always been oriented towards a somewhere else.

In order to exploit city's endogenous strength of wealth and power accumulation site, colonialism has produced a form of 'urbanization for engagement', 'instrumentally [spent] on African bodies and social formations' (Simone 2001). Thus, the 'worlding' is a process inherent in the very formation of African cities and urbanity, which on the other hand are imbued with a peculiar form of preparedness, manifest in the tension and disposition of

cities to 'switch gears, focus and place' (Simone 2001) as the opportunities come and go.

African preparedness (ibid.) is fundamental to understand how urbanity in Africa is both shaped by vulnerability and proactivity and simultaneously intertwined with non-local/non-African worlds. A forced doing 'in place of the city' (Simone 2001) while staying in the city due to burdensome socio-economic and political situations has trained African residents, and cities themselves, to be much more creative than what common generalisations about them report. This has gone hand in hand with a historically constructed being 'here-and-elsewhere' of African urban dwellers. African cities work, thus, as 'platforms for trans-local and transnational forms of urban engagement' (ibid.) shaped by the interplay between transforming cities and people. The comprehension of such a multi-layered dynamic, barely presented in normative or developmental representation, is the key to catch the city-making process in Africa in all its complexity. African cities constitute laboratories for urban present and future. As such the challenges they pose should be addressed as matters of universal concern. To this purpose, however, only an historical approach can help to avoid superficial, simplistic or ineffective solutions with no link with the context. For, this book adopts a documented approach to the study of peculiar urban dynamics which by tracing out their roots and nexuses unravels and illuminates the historically formed complexity of the present African urbanity.

2. Linking Mobility, Informality, and Urbanization in Africa

In the last 30 years, the diffusion of neo-liberal modes of thought and action within the global economy spread out also in the Global South, including Africa (Söderbaum and Taylor 2008). Neoliberalism as the season encouraged by Western powers in contrast with the failing socioeconomic policies attempting development and growth for the economically left-behind, new African states is at the moment the hegemonic discourse orientating the political and economic policies for Africa (Söderbaum and Taylor 2008). The spread of neoliberalism in Africa, with its emphasis on de-regulation and privatisation, has resulted in a further reduction of the already scarce work opportunities, and in large-scale retrenchments (Lindell 2010), which pushed people into informal economies, as a way to secure a minimal form of self-employment for survival (Hansen and Vaa 2004; Bryceson 2006; Lindell 2010). In 2007, the informal economy accounted for 60% of Africa's urban labour force and provided over 90% of new jobs, so that Africa was the region with the highest share of informal activity (Meagher 2007).

It can also been said that Africa has been one of the main cradle of conceptualization around 'informality', since Gutkind's announcement on the emergence of an informal sector in his famous report on unemployment in Kenya and Hart's (1973) article on income generation among the urban poor in Accra. However, the 'thing' was somehow in place before its elaboration. What today is simplistically called 'informal sector' was generated by the entrance of Western capitalism in Africa as the negative residential and professional category resulting from what it could not incorporate or encompass in its normative orders. To belong to the informal sector were all those not

allowed to entry the official urban market of labor, 'because they were not directly useful as producers or auxiliaries, serving the dependent order' (Co-query-Vidrovitch 1991). South Africa offers the earliest picture of this, given the exceptional advancement of its imported Western capitalism during the colonial period (Iliffe 1984).

However, already Africanist research from the '80s proved how informality in Africa was an old reality, deeply ingrained in the continental forms of societal organisation and eventually uplifted by colonialism (Iliffe 1987). In this sense, capitalism did not create informality, but transformed its nature and dimension.

In like manner, the most recent neo-liberal evolutions of the local and global socio-economic processes have been modifying its structure again. At the turn of the millennium, the ILO (2002) notes that 'in sub-Saharan Africa, the informal sector accounts for three-quarters of non-agricultural employment, having increased dramatically over the last decade from about two thirds'. The post-2008 financial crisis and the recent global trends have even exacerbated the employment in the informal sector and livelihood strategies, producing their rapid growth (Watson 2009).

While informality expands and changes, the attempts to define it multiply. In general, it is used with reference to small scale activities (including income-generating, servicing or settlement practices) undertaken by socio-spatially marginalised people that are relatively unregulated or uncontrolled by the state or formal institutions. As some authors pointed out, 'there are almost more definitions of 'informal sector' than are the writings dedicated to it' (Xaba et al. 2002) and there has also been who proposed the abolishment of the term 'informality' or 'informal', for its implicit and misleading meaning of antithesis to 'formality' or 'informal' (Holston 2008),

whereas it has long been known that the contact thresholds between 'formal' and 'informal' are multiple and frequent. Informality is thus not only ever-changing, but also ambiguous and characterised by multiple forms of polarisation (Watson 2009) which make it hard to be harnessed in definitions.

More interestingly, a close observation of contextualised manifestations helps us to define contemporaneity.
Indeed we are currently witnessing a spread of the informal economic sector accompanied by spatially contingent restructuring of the modes of life matched to the emergence of new economic, political and cultural forms of engagement. Urban economies have become informal to such an extent that most residents derive their livelihoods from informal activities (Potts 2013). Informality in Africa - as elsewhere in the global South - is no longer just an economic sector but a complex urban mode of living that, rather than being the exception to the norm, is the norm itself (Watson 2009).

Roy (2005) has been the first to introduce the concept of 'urban informality' as a generalized mode of metropolitan urbanization. In the article 'Urban informality' (2005), she proposes the concept as a new hinge for policy epistemologies starting from the cities of the developing world. What Roy argues is that urban informality, seen as a mode and not as a sector, can foster urban epistemology not only for "Third World" cities, but more in general for urban planning concerned with distributive justice (Roy 2007). The value of such a conceptualization consists in shifting the focus from the objectification of informality (intended as a 'state of exception' in the Agambian case of order suspension from planning control) to the inner working of informality as a way of 'making' and 'being of' the cities spread over most of the world. As 'mode' or 'manner', urban informality becomes the trace to follow in order to innovate our epistemology of contemporary trends of urbanization.

Therefore, the point is not anymore how informality can be corrected by planning/policies, but what planning/policies can learn of new from informality as 'associational life' (Simone 2001)

This enlarged perspective appears much more useful than the barren debate on the most accurate definition, as it relaunches to new epistemologies of contemporary global urbanism inferred from the interpretation of contextualised manifestation of informality and its inner mechanisms. This cannot be pursued than through a grounded-theory approach, interested in capturing the historically evolutions and multiple factors underlying informality, in opposition to normative approach of international financial institutions and western planning (such as 'good governance' or 'order' promoted by predominant) that proved to be ineffective and inappropriate.

In the last two decades, an empirical shift has occurred in the literature that echoes the 'anti-structural emphasis on micro-behavioral process' promoted in the 1960s (Southall 1976). Numerous fine and detailed ethnographic accounts of urban informality have been produced, but often missing the link to more comprehensive interpretative frameworks, necessary to unmask the dynamics underlying contemporary 'glocal' processes.

An analysis of contemporary informality able to escape the risk of dead-end descriptivism is able to merge specific phenomena to broader interpretations of the new arrangements taken by power relations. Any close observation of informality highlights the emergence of new competition over resources and control of space, as well as new struggles for survival. Only by projecting local peculiarities of informality to the global background it becomes possible to truly understand them and, at the same time, unveil relevant dynamics concerning the whole world nowadays. This implies both a transcalar and a relational perspective, incorporating - rather than isolating - the several dynamics contributing to global urban manifestations. Among

this, mobility surely takes an eminent position, being also one of globalisation's main feature.

Mobility appears a crucial, though overlooked, aspect of both African social life and urban informality. Just like informality, mobility has been historically engrained in African societies, while changing over time. In the pre-colonial period, 'population movement aimed at restoring ecological balance and (…) individuals in search of subsistence, food, better shelter and greater security' (Adepoju 1995). The pre-colonial movement of peoples gave way to labour migrations in the colonial period, when mobility, in the form of migration and displacement, was largely determined by the labour requirements for plantations, mines, industries and the administrative apparatus. Colonial mobility, thence, was usually short-term and dominated by the male presence.

This shows how mobility in Africa has always had an ambiguous, double-faced nature, being alternatively an instrument of control and manipulation (in the form of forced migrations and displacements by colonial regimes) as well as a means for survival, escape and autonomy through rural-urban, interregional and international migrations (Simone 2011; Chabal 2009).

In the current post-colonial phase, mobility has adapted to changing political and socio-economic situations: it is characterised by a consistent female presence and is mainly directed towards resource-rich areas and urban centres (Adepoju 1995; Amin 1995). What contemporary forms of mobility show is that this has turned into a strategy to connect economies and carve out as many opportunities as possible from urban environment, not only locally but also inter-locally (Simone 2011). Being essential for the identification of spaces and niche markets left by formal economies, it is so a constitutive aspect of informal economy. It is not without a reason that mobile

entrepreneurs not rarely represent the majority of the individuals operating in informal economies.

Where mobility and informality intersect, the sphere of informal cross-border trade (ICBT) comes out. This refers to trade in processed or non-processed merchandise, which may be legal imports or exports on one side of the border and illicit on the other side and vice-versa, on account of not having been subjected to statutory border formalities such as customs clearance. It is a common feature of African landscapes, present everywhere on the continent. The table below provides a synthetic overview of the types of merchandise traded informally across the different border areas of the continent.

REGIONS	NON-PROCESSED GOODS	MANIFACTURED GOODS	RE-EXPORT	VALUE OF GOODS
Eastern Africa, including Horn of Africa	Foodstuff and non-food stuff, livestock	Low quality manufactured and processed goods	Low quality goods from Asia contraband, counterfeits and substandard goods	US $50–US $1,000
West Africa	Foodstuff and non-food stuff, livestock			
Central Africa	Minerals, jewelry, forest products, food and non-food stuff			
Southern Africa	Handcrafts, food stuff and non-food stuff			

§ Goods carried by informal cross-border traders in Africa. Source: Informal Cross-border Trade Report, 2014.

The 'informality' of the practice is usually attributed to three main features:

      1) non registration of the traders or firms, that operate entirely outside the formal economy;

      2) full evasion of trade-related regulation and duties of formal (registered) traders or;

      3) partial evasion of trade-related regulation and duties of formal (registered) traders by resort to illegal practices, such as under-invoicing.

For these reasons, informal cross border trade is generally labelled as illegal. Notwithstanding, cross border trade constitutes a source of income to about 43% of Africa's population (AfDB 2012), in so consistently contributing to the continental economy and food security. Estimates indicate that some three million metric tons of staple food commodities were traded informally in East Africa in 2013, and that several hundred thousands cross Southern Africa's borders via informal routes every year.

The Economic Commission for Africa has recently recognised the extent and importance of informal cross-border trades in Africa, noting that 'informal trade, (...) as old as the informal economy (...) is the main source of job creation in Africa, providing between 20% and 75% of total employment in most countries' (Crush, Skinner and Chikanda 2015).

Informal cross-border trade, as one kind of informal economic practices chosen as a means of employment where other economic opportunities are limited, originated as a survivalist activity. However, it can not seldom overcome the survival threshold and offer the possibility for greater income returns than formal wage labour, as well as greater freedom and flexibility. Interestingly, this usually happens when informal workers are mobile. Being mobile, in fact, represents the possibility to carve out opportunities where they open up, so allowing more self-determination. When scaled up from

the individual to the collective sphere, moreover, mobility 'influences people's choices, produces specific decision-making processes and leads to the formation of certain social institutions' (De Bruijn, van Dijk, Foeken 2000).

A long-term movement among the most diverse locations of the continent has historically constituted a vehicle for urbanization in Africa. It gave shape to African societies, cities and regions (Simone 2011). As Chabal (2009) explains, populations' movements in search for work, new lands and resources has actually determined the distribution of settlements in Africa, particularly in the Southern and Western regions of the continent. This continued during the colonial occupation and even after it, despite the establishment of the colonial boundaries, eventually become national borders (ibid.). Marking the way 'with their feet', Africans have intensified the connection between different African urban locations, as well as between Africa and cities in the rest of the world (Simone 2014). If rural-to-urban migration appears decreased today, the circulation of populations within metropolitan regions, across primary and secondary cities endures along increasingly elaborated transnational circuits of movement (Simone 2011).

By building urban and inter-urban linkages across national boundaries, mobility constitutes then a crucial feature impacting urbanity, which makes necessary to engage the issue of how mobility articulates the urban. Africa constitutes an exceptional 'working device' (ibid.) to consider the ways in which mobility articulates connections among diverse locations and actually 'makes city'.

The practices of informal cross-border traders offer an unusual perspective in this regard. Despite the relevance of the economic mechanisms involved in informal cross-border trade, less attention has been paid to the way in which it re-articulates the spatial dimension between cities. Among the several an-

gles from which it can be approached, going from the demo-economic evolution to the trade zones organised around large trading networks, yet, the spatial dimension of cross-border trade has been little investigated. Looking at the spatialization of the practices performed by informal cross-border traders represents, instead, a valuable opportunity to investigate the interesting three-fold 'meshing' of mobility, informality and urbanization, in which each element influences and is influenced in return by the others and also reflects current global trends.

3. Translocal Traders between South-Africa and Mozambique

The close-range observation of the ICBT practices permits to grasp important aspects pertaining the formation of regions occurring all over the world and becoming more and more cross-border in nature (Söderbaum and Taylor 2008). The Southern African Development Community Countries (SADC) falls within this trend.
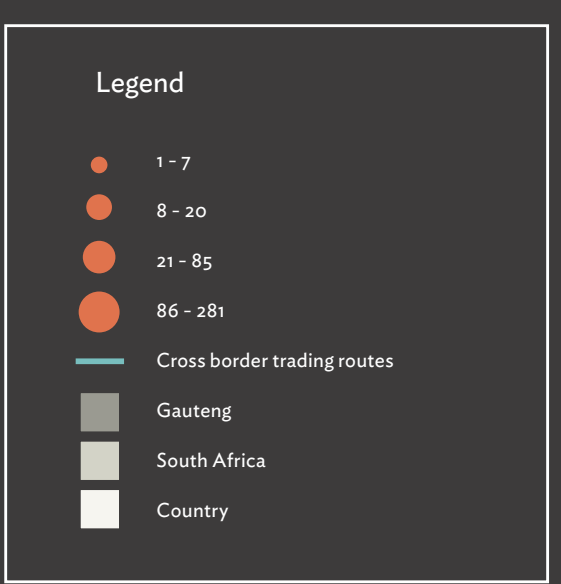
The SADC has its roots in the season of experiments in regional integration carried out in different parts of the world since the Second World War. These experiments found a reference in the neo-functionalist theory by Ernst Haas, which established the need to integrate politics and economics for achieving European integration. The theory argued that trans-border exchanges and transnational interdependencies would have produced functional spillovers able to lead to the creation of an economic and political union (Saunders, Dzinesa and Nagar 2012). The idea was intertwined also to transitional and continental movements for Africa independence: the African continental unity was seen as the overall strategy to defeat both colonialism and underdevelopment. However, after the independence, this did not translate into a easy reality. The leaders of the state that achieved independence preferred to consolidate their force within the state. Regional integration was only partly realized through the establishment of the so-called regional economic communities (RECs).

The RECs were founded with the objective of boosting trades, free movements of people and resources, eventually leading to the attainment of peace, security and political cooperation as secondary effects.
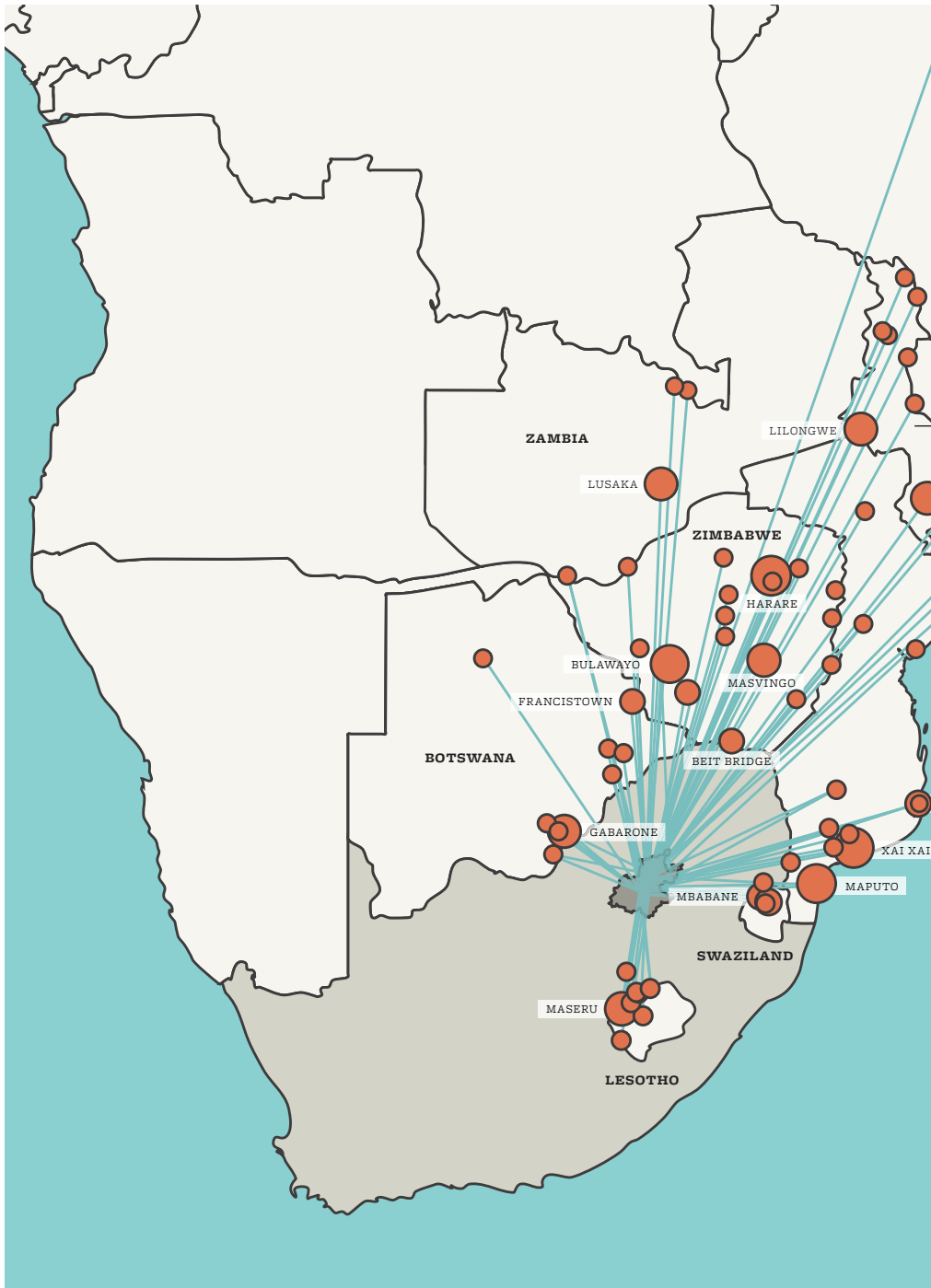
ZAMBIA

LILONGWE

LUSAKA

ZIMBABWE

HARARE

BULAWAYO

MASVINGO

FRANCISTOWN

BEIT BRIDGE

BOTSWANA

GABARONE

XAI XAI

MBABANE

MAPUTO

SWAZILAND

MASERU

LESOTHO

MOZAMBIQUE

PEMBA

MALAWI

CUAMBA

BLANTYRE

INHAMBANE

Legend

● 1 – 7

● 8 – 20

● 21 – 85

● 86 – 281

━━ Cross border trading routes

◼ Gauteng

◼ South Africa

◻ Country

KILOMETRES

0   150   300   600

The decade between the 1970s and in the 1990s see the creation of several economic communities, namely the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Economic Community of the Great Lakes, the East African Community (EAC), the Eastern and Southern African Preferential Trade Area (PTA), then become the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC). The latter was initially formed by the independent southern African states that formed the Frontline States (FLS), and fought against apartheid: Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. South Africa could join them only after its first democratic election in 1994, when the SADCC had been meanwhile restructured into the Southern African Development Community (SADC)1.

However, the spillover effects of regional cooperation predicted by Haas have been very limited for the SADC, and this for a number of reasons. First of all, the diffused difficulty of most of the Southern African countries to fulfill their core functions and maintain an internal stability, which is a fundamental capacity for regional integration. Furthermore, internal fragmentation and lack of coordination between the fifteen member states continuously hinder the aspiration to regional integration. An overlapping of regional economic groups, with many states2 belonging to more than one of them, makes the situation even messier. The belonging to different RECs, in fact, means to be subjected to various negotiation protocols, complicating the implementation of new or already existing protocols. Finally, crime, insecurity and conflicts (such as the prolonged wars in Angola and in the DRC) complete the picture.

All this results in a situation in which the initial philosophy of 'development regionalism' has been actually replaced by 'neoliberal regionalism', with the market, and not the state, orienting the economic evolution of the area. Structural adjustment programs in the RECs are nowadays largely missing or weak (Nyamnjoh and Mususa 2012), with the result of a strong polarisation between the different SADC members, hegemonized by South Africa, that is responsible for about 70% of the region overall trade.

This is realized through a diffused 'porosity' at the African borders, the litmus test of the arbitrary splitting up of the continent by colonial powers at the Berlin Conference in 1884. The lines of superimposed national borders, in fact, cross regions inhabited by groups sharing many similarities. Crossing national borders turns so out to be relatively easy, which partly explains the high numbers of ICBT circulating within the SADC.

The African Development Bank estimates that informal cross-border trade constitutes between 30% and 40% of intra-SADC trade with an average annual value of USD 17.6 billion (Afrika and Ajumbo 2012). This absolute value corresponds, on average, to 41% of national GDP in all Sub-Saharan countries, according to data compiled by ILO in 2014.

In a SAMP border-monitoring survey, Peberdy et al. (2015) define three main trading types: the most diffused one comprises the purchase of goods in foreigner countries for sale in the home countries; another kind consists in the purchase of goods to sell in another country; finally, there is a minority of two-way trades, with goods bought and sold both in countries of origin and destination. Johannesburg is the main destination of informal cross border traders, with people coming from all over the rest of southern Africa to shop in it (Peberdy 2015). This makes the Gauteng Region a giant urban estuary (Landau 2015).

The map at page 36 offers a representation of this estuary, just providing data about cross border trading routes in Southern Africa.

ICBT comprises a significant part of small, micro and medium enterprise activity in sub-Saharan Africa and have a significant impact on formal and informal retail markets. It produces large volumes of trades that exceed often those of the formal sector and cumulatively contribute in a significant way to the national GDP (Crush, Skinner and Chikanda 2015). It plays a role in both alleviating poverty and growing local economies, as produces not only low-cost goods and services consumed by the poor and middle class but also high-end goods and services used in the formal economy.

Moreover, informal cross-border traders play a significant role in linking urban nodes in the region (Peberdy 2002). In order to really grasp the inter-urban and inter-region connections in the SADC, it is therefore necessary to observe it from a reversed perspective than top-down rhetoric on sub-regionalism: exactly, the perspective of the African people building it up with their bodies and personal stories over time and vicissitudes.

Yet, these dynamics at the transnational scale occur simultaneously to others of opposite sign at the national and urban level.

In the last years, in fact, the countries belonging to the SADC have been tightening controls on the movement of people, demonstrating that the neoliberal idea of free movement is more open to capitals than to people.

The most advanced economies in the region have been producing worrying discourses against the 'foreigner' in the last years, with a constant and frightful reproduction of xenophobia. A 2008 Southern African Migration Project (SAMP) study attributes the highest ratings for anti-foreigner views in southern Africa to South Africa, followed by Namibia and Botswana. These discourses reached dreadful peaks, resulted in the 2008 and 2015 xenophobic attacks against migrants, including cross-border traders, in Johannes-

burg. Between 2010 and 2014, about 200 foreign nationals, mainly African, were killed (Spitz, 2017).

On 12 May 2008 a series of riots, started in the township of Alexandra, in the north-eastern part of Johannesburg, and then spread to the rest of the country, resulted in locals attacking migrants from Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi, with some dead and many injured. In the following years several xenophobic episodes kept occurring in different regions of South Africa, getting to an upsurge throughout the country in 2015, when the attacks started in Durban and spread to Johannesburg. Between March and May 2015, several people were killed and about 5,000 others displaced in a wave of violence against foreign nationals. Target of the attacks were mainly foreign business owners and traders, as well as immigrants in general, assaulted with cries of 'going back to their countries'. Hundreds and hundreds of people were forced to relocate to police stations across the country.

Such a xenophobic violence suggests the latent and always-there potential for scapegoating mobile Africans by black South Africans who have stayed at the margins despite the end of Apartheid. The very idea of South African citizenship has historically been shaped by preoccupations with mobility, regulated with yardsticks such as official status, lawfulness and residence (Nyamnjoh 2013), which endures today. Southern African poor are distinguished by the other poor, in a way that produces unequal citizenship in terms of material possibilities and service. This situation on the one hand hinders the mobility of foreigners, on the other hand fosters it as an escape from an inhospitable and xenophobic environment in it (Peberdy 2015).

4. The Transnational Space between South-Africa and Mozambique

The bottom-up perspective this book assumes focusses on the micro-region between South-Africa and Mozambique. This area constitutes a 'historical transnational space' (Vidal 2010), that has been shaped by migration and extensive informal cross-border trading.

Migration between South Africa and Mozambique is a long-established tradition, which has been documented by a voluminous literature. Many authors showed how the region has always been a crossroads of mobilities and exchanges between different communities. According to Newitt (1995), 'the Tsonga3 of Delagoa Bay4 and its hinterland had always interacted with the Highveld communities, with whom there were strong ties of culture and kinship', while the elephant hunting and ivory trading stimulated the movement of people along the traditional trade routes as early as the 1850s (Newitt 1995).

The labour migration in the region, instead, began at the time of the death of the Gaza King Soshangane (1858) and the subsequent reign of the chief of Maputo, Nozingile, as Harries (1994) suggests. It started with the employment of the freed slaves in the sugar plantations of Natal colony in the 1850s to meet the growing demand for labour and then spread to the diamond fields, which attracted labour from across the sub-continent. The discovery of gold on the Witswatersrand led to the institutionalization of the migrant labour system through various inter-stage agreements from the early 20th century (Grest and Nhambi 2007).

Since then, the transnational space across the Transvaal border was constructed though alternate historical events connected to the shifting economic and political systems in effect during and after apartheid. The young male adventurer, usually coming from rural areas of Mozambique and working in South African mines, represented the predominant social archetype in that transnational space. It was a transient figure as the political system of apartheid forced migrant workers to go periodically back home in the attempt of preventing their self-organisation, in so producing temporary migration.

The cross-border connections between South Africa and Mozambique developed through an asymmetrical and subordinate relationship, based on white South African capital exploitation of black labour through migration (Söderbaum and Taylor 2009)
This prevalent migration pattern has progressively incorporated flows related to other migration factors. From the '60s onwards, the economic sectors of import-export and investments went to join the migration system, constituting a further link between Mozambique and South Africa. In a short time, South Africa became the second largest trading partner of Mozambique after Portugal. Finally, in 1980s, the civil war in Mozambique produced a different flow of Mozambican migrants in South Africa, that of asylum-seekers. Approximately 300/400,000 people expatriated to South Africa (Crush, Skinner and Chikanda 2015).
After the demise of apartheid and the independence of Mozambique, with the establishment of formal democratic institutions in both countries, migration from Mozambique to South Africa continued in another form: that of community of temporary staying (De Vletter 1998).

Pretoria

CITY OF JOHANNESBURG

EMALAHLENI

Kruger Park

MOZAMBIQUE

NELSPRUIT

BORDER POST
KOOMATIPORT | RESSANO GARCIA

METROPOLITAN
CITY OF MAPUTO

SWATZILAND

What was once a difficult and dangerous journey to South Africa is now far easier thanks to South Africa's automatic 30-day-visa policy. A greater ease for the acquisition of passports and the adoption of the devaluation of the visa policy for emigration in SADC member countries has improved migrants' lives in Johannesburg and eased cross-border trades (Covane 2001). The result is that between 2004 and 2013, cross-border traffic from Mozambique to South Africa has increased from around 400,000 documented entries per annum to nearly 1.8 million (Peberdy and Crush, 2015).

The possibility of entering is not matched by the discovery of a welcoming environment. People are so pushed to a constant coming and going.
Informal cross-border trade constitutes the way to positively overturn such a bustle. In fact, ICBT between Maputo and South African border towns as well as cities such as Johannesburg is one of the primary motivators for entry in South Africa. Informal cross-border traders represent the new transnational figure of the transnational space between South Africa and Mozambique. They are called '*mukheristas*'.

Notes:

1. Over the years, other states have become part of the SADC, which nowadays counts 15 members: Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, United Republic of, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe. None of them had to pass a test of readiness for membership, differently from the EU.

2. The Democratic Republic of Congo is also member of the ECCAS and of the COMESA, which also Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius,

Seychelles, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe belong to. Angola is also part of the ECCAS, while Mauritius of the IOC (Indian Ocean Commission) and Tanzania of the EAC

3. Bantu-speaking ethnic group of about 2 million people who live in the border region between Mozambique and South Africa

4. For those who are unfamiliar with the region, the Delagoa Bay is the Maputo's Bay (a Baía de Maputo).

FOLLOWING MOBILE-LIVES-IN-BETWEEN

CHAPTER 3

1. Travelling with Antonia, *mukherista* between cities

Trying to closely examine the daily practices and embodied experiences of *mukheristas* led me to a series of journeys on their tracks along the route Johannesburg-Maputo. At the beginning it was quite hard to engage with them, given the conditions in which their lives unfold. Although smuggling is a widespread and somehow obligated practice, accessing to it requires the construction of an area of mutual trust and some luck, which in my case was called Antonia.

When Antonia and I met, she was working as a mukherista specialized in trading dogs between Johannesburg and Mozambique. After numerous meetings and long conversations we did several journeys together, in which I accompanied her over the routes she usually takes for job. The following paragraphs report about the journeys we did.

It is a muggy Thursday of mid-October. I am waiting for Antonia at the Sasol gas station in Malhapsene (Matola), where she arranged the meeting. I asked to accompany her on one of the trips she does from Maputo to Johannesburg to do the *mukhero* and she agreed. She made the appointment at 12, but she is late. At 12.40 a text message announces her arrival by indicating the coordinates to her car, a white Toyota. After twenty-two years spent carrying stuff from side to side of the border, Antonia got used to spell out the numberplate of her car immediately after her name. It is the way she identifies herself. When she arrives, I face a middle-age woman with a brisk beauty faded from fatigue. She is colored and one of the first things she will tell me is that in South Africa she pretends to be Portuguese to make better deals.

THE CAR

The market niche carved out by Antonia is the trade of dogs. She buys puppies in the farms around Johannesburg and resells them in Maputo. At the border everybody knows her as "the lady of the dogs". She has raised three kids alone with this job since when she separated from her husband ten years ago. The car is her second home. It has shaded windows marked by the traces of Antonia's incessant traveling. Antonia got into debts to buy it and then had to make dozens of trips between Maputo and Johannesburg to repay the debt. The van is now on sale. Antonia needs money for an operation and a new car with automatic drive. She can not strain her left arm since an incident happened two years ago, when she was traveling with two fellows at night and a volley of bullets sent them off road into the guardrail. "Ladrões!" - Antonia exclaims laconic - "They recognize Mozambican number-plates and in no time get an idea of the commodities, sales and money carried. You are on file! If they want, they pick on you".

One of Antonia's fellows died on the spot, the other one survived. Antonia came out with half of the face burned, a broken arm and a mangled ear.

THE BORDER (OUTWARD)

We take no more than an hour to arrive at the border of Ressano Garcia. Upon arrival, Antonia heads to the private cars entrance and parks right behind the building for passport control. She is perfectly at her ease in the area and I realize that what for me is just a line - the boundary to cross from one side to the other - seems to be her natural territory. In the hundred meters between the gate and the parking lot she greets almost everyone with familiarity.

At some point she encounters an old acquaintance, Dona Azira, a mukherista with whom she used to travel in the past. Dona Azira is going to Komatipoort to buy goods for the breakfasts she cooks and sells to workers every day in her small loja in Benfica. She is without a car and asks us for a lift.

At passport control Antonia releases fingerprints joking with the policeman and proceeds quickly to the car. She gestured for me to hurry up, as we have to repeat the procedure in the South African side. When we get in the car, I hesitantly sit down on the front seat, while Dona Azira stretches into the space without seats in the back. I invite her to take my seat and she says: "Don't worry, filha. I used to travel this way when I was at the ninth months pregnant. Imagine now that I am not anymore!", it is how she replies to my invitation to take my place. In no more than two hundred meters we get into South Africa. It is a ridiculous distance, but everything changes: Antonia changes name and becomes Mary like she is known here. I realize that she strives to keep a low profile while responding in Zulu and Shangana. Even here, however, she knows people behind the glass of the

visa control and in a few minutes we get back into the car and head towards the centre of Komatipoort.

KOMATIPOORT

Just 5 km far from the border and 8 km far from the south-western edge of the Kruger Park, Komatipoort is located at the confluence of the Crocodile River and the Komati River, which takes its name from the mountain pass of the Lebombo Mountains. Between two rivers and two countries, it is a transit place since its origins. It rose in the late nineteenth century as a camp connected to the railroad being built from Lourenço Marquez. Since then, Komatipoort has always been the place of possible and terrible salvation in the stories of illegal immigrants from Mozambique setting forth to South Africa. Today it looks like a typical border town, though suddenly overwhelmed by global investments: South African and Chinese companies are opening new stores here, taking advantage of the greater proximity to Mozambique, notoriously the main importer from South Africa. Every day a diverse crowd of small, medium and large cross-border retailers goes to buy in these stores. They generally depart from Maputo by the most various means of transport and buy products ranging from groceries to clothing and household furniture in Komatipoort. They slot the products in the vehicles they took to get there – in so proving the falsity of the rule of impermeability - and go back to Maputo, where the day after they will distribute the goods to their customers and retailers in the endless formal and informal markets of the entire metropolitan area.

Antonia and Azira are here for the same reason. Azira comes to Komatipoort, the only place where she shops in South Africa, from three to five times a month, whereas Antonia usually shops in Johannesburg, except for urgent orders bought in Komatipoort or in

Neilspruit. The journey from Maputo to Koomatiport is short, which makes the profit higher. We take three minutes to get to the main avenue of Komatipoort, a tree-lined road in the middle of two parallel strings of stores and warehouses with English, Portuguese, Chinese and Afrikaner signs. It is 15 o'clock, Antonia loudly says that she is hungry and parks right in front of a seemingly modest butcher's. The entrance reveals an immense space messed up by a sequence of counters, cases and fresh and dried meats hanging from the ceiling. The multitude that crowded it moves at the rhythm of North African bazaars: people order pounds of fresh meat in Shangana and Afrikaans, pay and go, leaving a ruled mess behind. Antonia and Azira do the same and set out to the backyard. Here, a large open space, half covered by a rusty awning and sparsely equipped with a grill and some tables, is equipped for informal braai of buyers and sellers on the days of negocio. We share the spot and the meal with strangers, convened here for our same reason. When we finish, Antonia and I leave temporarily Dona Azira and go to buy fifty boxes of Italian shoes, 30 kg of food for dogs and some other products for animals. On the way back, we pass by a stopping point for chapas. Three minibuses are stationing there. They are almost completely hidden by a group of people busy in arranging some drinks under layers of packaging for eggs. "That's how they hide liquors. Alcohol and tobacco are among the smuggled goods"- Antonia explains to me.
We park and Antonia resolutely sets off a small group of women sitting under a porch, looking absent and eternally bored. They are currency changers, their time marked by the rustle of Meticals and Rands banknotes, that they exchange without saying a word. Antonia changes her Meticals, goes into another butchers and immediately after enters a Chinese magazine where we meet Azira again. She and Antonia take a shared cart that in ten minutes is loaded with a hundred packs of eggs, a dozen large parcels of flour and rice,

fifty liters of oils and innumerable polystyrene containers for food takeaways. A shop boy helps them to load everything in the small space left in the van. His patience proclaims him the new champion in the 'Tetris-for-*mukheristas*' sport discipline. He keeps a little space for Azira, who slips in and goes to roost over a stack of boxes. Finally, the guy arranges the last two packages on my knees.

Through my half-covered visual, I observe the surrounding landscape made of storekeepers, shoppers, cross-border traders, customers, vendors and money changers dwindling as we pass by.

"That's how *mukheristas* travel!" Antonia says "Many women do not like the word mukherista. They feel offended by it because it is a calão standing for 'malandra', a person who illegally carries goods. Anyways, sometimes it rather seems that goods carry us!"

THE BORDER (RETURN)

At five o'clock we are at the border again. The passage through the South African border offices is fast, but when we set foot in Mozambican territory, time becomes endless. Antonia's car stops for twenty minutes. She stands up in the middle of a knot of officials. I try to reach her, but she stops me with a tight smile. "I am super busy now!", she warns me. She comes back after twenty minutes and whispers, "I'll explain you everything later. In the meanwhile, go ahead with Azira. I'll see you in 500 meters from here, so that she can get on board without any problem."

I set off with Azira along the stalls of street vendors and money-changers and the traffic of travelers, buses and minibuses. I look at the landscape, a bleak jumble of objects: over the crowd in transit, there are rows and rows of trucks stacked in parallel lanes, fragments of markets and settlements, a desolate cemetery, a church, a mosque and a recently built school. Everything has been thrown

here as provisional, the only certainty is the road in-between. This is Ressano Garcia!

The border is a liquid, strange space with a geographical and temporal depth, forged by eternally repeated and always identical passages. It is a repository of despair and hope, where the mass of people in transit runs alongside those who never succeed to move from there. My thoughts last 500 meters, the distance to find Antonia's car, squeeze back in the van and leave again.

HOMEWARD

We speak little on the way back, weariness is in the air. I ask Antonia how they manage to do this a dozen times a month. "This is not life" – she replies- "As soon as you can, you give up. But until you can't, you have no alternative than carrying on".

Antonia measures her life in travels. When there is much demand she gets to do even eight trips a month, three from Maputo to Johannesburg and five to closer destinations as Komatipoort and Neilspruit. Obviously, the number of trips also depends on the economic needs. "When my daughters were at home, my life was very stressful. Once, the second one broke her external hard disk. I had to make three trips to be able to pay a new one".

I ask her how she manages to avoid control on the goods she carries. She explains that she always manages with a different excuse. The customs police know the truth, but they let her cross. At the price though of a 'small' bribe: 300 Meticals/40 Rands (that is equal to about 10 Euros) today, due to the reduced amount of products. For larger quantities the bribes start from 1500 Meticals (33 Euros) and it usually corresponds to 15% of what bought.

That is always better, however, than 47% of taxes that should be paid by law. But Antonia explains that it is not so simple. Usually there are

three controls, two at the border and one along the way, and one is often charged at each of them, thus exceeding the amount demanded by legal taxes.

So far Antonia has always managed to pay small bribes, but she knows that it is just a matter of luck.

I ask her how one gets to become an important mamana. She explains that also this is a matter of luck. Mamanas usually start from scratch but they are lucky in finding an important client, such as the owner of a hotel under construction, who ask them to supply his hotel. The next step is to find a capital to pay the products. They often resorts to xitique or, more rarely, to bank loans, which they manage to obtain presenting a financially reliable contact as guarantor. The initial capital is used mainly to rent the car to travel to South Africa. Earlier journeys happen weekly, in rented cars. But if the customer pays well and regularly and the mamana manages not to get stuck with controls and high bribes at the border, within six-ten months she will be able to buy her own means of transportation and within a couple of years a new house and a private car. At the fourth year she gets her personal driver making trips instead of her! At that point, in theory the mamana does not need to evade taxes any longer and she would be in the position to totally pay the customs fees, which is something she is now able to do as the amount of money she moves has increased tenfold in the meantime. However, it is all a question of a chain of fortunate events and it is often the case to go back to the starting point.

THE HOUSE AND THE LOJA

At the sign indicating a 20 km distance from Maputo, Antonia leaves the highway and takes a dusty road on the left. We arrive in front of a white wall, on which I read the writing "Loja Kadcri". That is Antonia's shop, so called merging her son's and grandson's names, Kadu and Cristina. "So one day it will be theirs".

The shop is adjacent to the house, a modest building on a plot of sqm 1,200. Antonia bought it twelve years ago, when it costed 3,000 Meticals. Today the prize has decupled. She built the house with the help of a worker and moved in last year. Dona Azira, that is reminiscent of Antonia's sweltering apartment in Alto Mae, observes the area admired. Antonia proudly invites me to get in the house. The kitchen is an external equipped space with a cover sheet. The dining room, the bedroom and the bathroom are sheltered inside the building, cluttered with objects in a sense of suspension, as if they were there only temporarily. "When I'll have more money, I will build a bigger house on the bottom of the ground and this will be the dependência for guests", Antonia says, confirming my impression.

We unload the goods from the car and leave again soon with a new passenger, Kadu. We drop Azira at the stop of chapas to Benfica. She nimbly slips out of the car and starts pulling out of the van all her new goods. In a few minutes, she is surrounded by towers of confections, in the middle of an impromptu street market. We leave her negotiating the transport cost for herself and her goods with the driver and leave again.

AT DONA TERESA'S

After a few minutes we are at Dona Teresa's, Antonia's adoptive mother.

As I will be told soon, Antonia was born to a mother girl who made a living by selling potatoes and onions in the central streets of Maputo. Antonia helped her when she was a child. She used to go to the market everyday to buy and sell food after school. She always passed by Donna Antonia's house, until one day she invited her to enter and stay.

The house of Dona Teresa is a detached single-floor adjacent to a

group of similar constructions in front of the Fajardo market, the most important food market in the city centre. Antonia enters and immediately starts to cook. After a while we all sit around the table ready to have dinner. The television is on. It broadcasts Amor à Vida, the Brazilian soap opera watched by everybody in Maputo. From salespeople to doormen, anyone who has a TV in Maputo is tuned on Amor à Vida at 9 p.m.. The city stops. And so does Antonia.

THE MARKET FAJARDO

We wake up in the night. The television is still on, our backs ache for the uncomfortable positions on the sofa. We just laid our bodies down thinking that the waiting time of the trucks coming every night to supply the market Fajardo would be short. It instead turns to be interminable. We fell asleep in a silence that is surreal for this part of the town, usually among the most chaotic ones. During the day, the Fajardo market looks like an exploded anthill, crossed by swarming and clashing flows. The traffic of chapas descending toward the central districts from the north and the commuters working in the area intertwine the eternal crowd of the market, made up not only of sellers and buyers, but also by the diverse humanity that eternally flood in here in search of opportunities. More than trading places, here markets are mainly places of circulation of information and opportunities. Mukheristas feed them. Tonight, though, they are late. Antonia takes me to the street, where a white van has just arrived. There are two mamanas that she knows on board.

"The border is slow today!" the older one grumbles under a white synthetic bearskin fur blazing in the night. They are chatting half-sleepy with their chauffeur while waiting for their trucks to download the crates of fruit and vegetables bought in Gauteng. But the trucks are stuck at the border. Shortly thereafter we see the first one ar-

riving, followed by a row of vans, cars and motor vehicles. The so far silent market lights on of voices and furtive movements.

The road on which Dona Teresa's house overlooks is filled with towers and walls of boxes and pyramids of sacks, temporarily erected around mukheristas and mamanas, who direct the work with slow and precise gestures. They look like strange nocturnal birds, wrapped in heavy blankets and colorful capulanas. Dreamlike visions, they dissolve before dawn, just before the masses of street vendors pour out on stalls and cabins and the market starts to pulse again. "Come on," Antonia says, "I have many things to do. Tomorrow it's gonna be my turn again!"

The journey here reported in the form of an ethnographic narrative reveals the 'multivocal and multifocal dimensions of everyday negotiation and navigation' (Nyamnjoh 2013) that not only Antonia, but most of the women and men in constant motion like her experience. Antonia's story tells much of mukheristas' everyday life, as well as of their being, belonging and becoming in-between the different worlds they bring together while in transit. As other mukheristas, Antonia has been carrying on a life-on-the-move for years. Theirs is not just getting repeatedly from A to B, nor a ceaseless movement among different spaces. On the contrary, mobility is a usual practice to mukheristas, throughout which they tend to develop their whole lives. The constant, back and forth and crisscrossing movement between Johannesburg, Koomatiport, Neilsprut, Maputo and other urban localities forges a transient reading and living of the city, which is valid not only on an individual but collective level. Such an experience has developed over time alongside the evolution of the mukhero practice, meantime incorporating dynamics of diffused and accelerated mobility at the base of African urban life today. In order to understand more then it is necessary to follow a double kinetic trajectory: on the one hand, the historical development of the mukhero from its origins to today, on the other its geographic development. The next paragraphs follow this thread.

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EAST GATE (JOHANNESBURG)
Arrival: 1.30 p.m.
Main purchases.
Antonia prentend to be Portuguese in order to edite the closing of the affairs in the best possible way

Lunch break in a Mozambican Pub

NELSPRUIT
Arrival: 10 a.m.
Quick stop for a break

KOOMATIPORT
Soth African Border Post
Arrival: h. 8.15 a.m.
Departure: 8.25 a.m.

KOOMATIPORT CENTRE
Arrival: 8.35
change of money (from MZN to ZAR) and first purchases

CBD (JOHANNESBURG)
Arrival: 4.00 p.m.
Last purchases in Kerk street.

Departure back to Maputo: 5.00 p.m.

KOOMATIPORT
Arrival: 9.20 p.m.
Departure: 9.30 p.m.

RESSANO GARCIA

Mozambican Border Post
Arrival: h. 8 a.m.
Antonia's van is empty,
the bording procedure is
fast

MATOLA

Antonia's house
Departure: h. 7 a.m.

RESSANO GARCIA

Arrival: 9.32 p.m.
Departure: 10.30

Now the van is full. After
the passport control
Antonia takes about 1
hour to leave the border
post.

MATOLA

Arrival: 11 p.m.
Departure: 11.20 p.m.

Antonia drops some
stuff at her *loja* and
re-starts to go to her
mom's

**MERCADO FAJARDO
(MAPUTO)**

Arrival: 12 p.m.

Dona Teresa (Antonia's
foster mom) lives in
front of the Fajado
Market, the most
important food market
in the city centre.

6 a.m.: Antonia delivers
the good she carried
from Jo'burg to the
Fajardo Market

68

2. The *mukhero* practice: revelations from the underworld

> *My name is S. C. and I am a mukheristas, I do the mukhero. Many*
> *women in Africa, in Mozambique are doing this business. (…) We cross the border*
> *to go to another country to buy some stuff and sell here and sometimes we buy here*
> *and sell outside the country. It depends on the kind of business the person is doing.*
> *It is not only our job, it is our way of living!*
> (S., interview taken in July 2014)

This presentation comes from a member of the '*Associação das Mukheristas*', the official association of Mozambican small importers established in 2000 by Mr. Sudecar Novela, a former cross-border trader himself.
«We chose to baptize the association referring explicitly to the word "*mukhero*" as it is how cross-border trade is called here [in Mozambique]. The reason why we decided to found the association is that it was the only way to sort some problems we had been facing at the border with imports. In few years we got 10,500 members from all over the country, but mainly based in Maputo. Before we were scattered and did not have a face. Now that we are organised and recognisable, *mukheristas* are well known also at the institutional level» (Sudekar Novela, July 2014).
The headquarters of the association is located right in the heart of the Mercado do Xipamanene, in a strategic position: the one-storey, pale blue building hosting it is camouflaged right where the geography of the market is denser, but the road remains easily accessible by shortcuts through stalls and kiosks. Although the number of cardholders reported by Mr. Novela differs considerably from the active members of the association, the formalisation of the practice into an institutional body fighting for its defence gives an idea of the

mukhero's scope in Mozambique. In this terms, it is true that *mukhero* gives a job to thousands and thousands of people in the country.

The term *mukhero* is a Portuguese-Anglo-Bantu neologism composed by the particle "mu", that marks the singular or individual in the local language, the English verb "carry" and the Portuguese termination "o". It comes from the corrupted English phrase «May-you-carry this bag to the other side?» referring to the procedures at border facilities, that in Shangana and Ronga Mozambican national languages sounds precisely like '*mukhero*' (Chivangue 2007; Raimundo 2005). Hence, the "*mukheristas*" are the men and women involved in cross-border traffics.

The word is also often used as a derogatory expression standing for contraband. As an import-export activity, it is usually performed outside 'formality', as it is carried out through full or partial evasion of trade-related regulations, like the non-possessing of legal license (Cruz and Silva 2005). It may sometimes even encompass proper illegal practices, such as misclassification, under-invoicing and/or bribery of customs officials.
The disparaging use of the term, "frequent and intentional, when engaging with the state" (Peberdy, interview October 2015) in oder to lead to associate the phenomenon with illegal economies, should not deceive. In the *mukhero*, the smuggling concerns legitimately produced goods, ranging from staple food commodities to low quality consumer goods such as clothes and shoes, to pieces of furniture and electronics. Moreover, it is incorrect to see it as alternative and separated from similar activities belonging to the formal sector as the thresholds or contact are numerous, as explained by E.:

«You know, *mukhero* is like strategy. If you need ten boxes of inks, for example, you can call an import-export company, such as the TSTE. It will send

you the invoice and you will have to deposit the money in three or four days. But you will also have to pay for the transport and for the goods declaration. Mozambican people don't like being overcharged, they don't buy this war! But if they do not buy, nobody will make the business. So what do we *mukheristas* do? We work with the TSTE! The TSTE trusts us! Even if I say: 'my friend, I cannot pay you right now, but tomorrow morning ask your driver to send ten boxes of ink to Grand Hotel. You will find Carlota there, I've already spoken to her long time ago and she will give you the money'. In the time Carlota anticipates the money to the TSTE in Jozi and I send my taxi driver from Maputo to fetch the goods she's taken delivery of. My taxi-driver is familiar with everyone at the border and knows well how the border works. He knows when to pass in order not to get charged. I will be sleeping when he crosses the border with no trouble. This way the TSTE has not overcharged our clients, we collaborated with it and three other people's got money.»

(E., excerpt from the interview in Portuguese done in October 2015 and translated by the author)*

Despite its informal character, the *mukhero* should be rather associated to an import- export activity that satisfies the demand for missing goods by leveraging on economic differentials between Mozambique and the neighbouring countries.

It constitutes a proper job for people that would otherwise struggle in the country, as well as in the rest of the continent. The transit of goods and people across large distances and borders is, in fact, common and widespread throughout Africa (Chabal 2009). Moreover, it has old roots sunk in the past. The notion of 'informality', thence, can be capitalised as the way in which traditional, usual procedures intersect contemporary phenomena. Assuming an historical perspective on the *mukhero*, thence, permits, to understand

the dynamics behind modern configuration of traditional phenomenon.

The origins of the *mukhero* go far back way before the demarcation of the borders between African states as we know today. It arose as a survival practice consisting in small-scale trading supported by analogous ethnic networks. The embedded element of mobility had initially limited range. In the early stages, the geography of *mukhero* was limited to the supply routes between the countryside and the towns, some of which eventually became border-towns. With the establishment of the colonial boundaries, the *mukhero* did not disappear but developed. Borders came to divide areas inhabited by people who had shared languages and cultural habits for ages and this aspect facilitated the transactions across the border. So, what nowadays in Sub-Saharan Africa is known as cross-border mobility actually depends on the fact that it began in transnational regions before the demarcation of the borders (Arraujo 2015).

Interestingly, such interplay between *mukhero* and borders is of mutual impact spatially and economically. Some border-towns have developed in relation to *mukhero* as a cross-border economic activity: «Initially, *mukhero* involved many economic activities in the border-villages, fostering the establishment of other commercial activities. This way, the informal activity of *mukhero* gave rise to several 'formal' patterns of spatial occupation, such as new shops and small economics activities complementary to the *mukhero*». (Professor Arraujo in an interview by the author in 2015).
As time passed by and the colonial boundaries got consolidated, the border, as the gateway to geographical entities under stronger economies having available staples turned out to be the only chance to guarantee food security in Mozambique.
Food emergency has steadily gripped the country since the decolonization,

as both a consequence of more than 20 years of war – first, the Mozambican War of Independence (1964-1974) and, then, the civil war (1981-1994) – and of the structural policies put in place.

Neither the FRELIMO's program for collective agricultural production succeeded in boosting the country. The apparently promising projects of the Aldeias Comunais and the Machambas Colectivas on which the party's initial agenda was based were collapsing already in the early '80s, plunging Mozambique into a severe shortage of basic food supplies. This heavily affected Maputo, that between 1974 and 1976 drifted right into the midst of a double exodus: on the one hand, the escape of Portugueses back to Europe and other countries; on the other, large waves of immigrants coming to the capital from the countryside. Against the political isolation of the country – on good terms only with Tanzania, among the neighbouring countries – the people had no alternative to survive but smuggling, as through the *mukhero*.

After the end of the war, with the complete abandonment of the initial socialist project and the gradual disappearance of the old safety net provided by the state, the *mukhero* flourished (Söderbaum and Taylor 2008) and so kept to do until the present days. In a country that was 'once considered a virtually peerless pioneer in forging a socialist pathway in Africa' (Dinerman 2006) and that today represents a flagship of neoliberal principles for international institutions (such as the IMF and the World Bank), informal cross-border trading keep providing a lifeline against a dramatic situation of poverty, food insecurity, inadequacy of social and physical infrastructure, growing unemployment and insufficient minimum wage (Pitcher 2006; Heltberg and Tarp 2002).

It is so especially for women, who dominate the *mukhero*. Only between South Africa and Mozambique, women represent 80% of the total amount of informal cross-border traders (Chivangue 2007). The figure resonates

data collected by a large range of studies on informal trading in sub-Saharan Africa and throughout the continent. According to a 2004 ILO study, in fact, the informal sector in sub-Saharan Africa constitutes 74% of women's employment (not including agricultural work), in contrast to 61% of men. Among the informal economic activities, trade stands out for women, providing them 60% of non-agricultural self-employment. Other studies on the rest of the continent, such as that by Brenton and Isik (2012), instead, on the Great Lakes region, the one by Njiwa, et al. (2011), on informal cross-border traders between Malawi and Zambia, as well as the calculations made by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (2005), report similar figures to that attributed to Southern Africa. Women dominate informal cross-border trades, with a presence of 75-80% in it.

Informal cross-border trade represents a fundamental source of female employment in Africa, with hundreds of thousands of women crossing borders every day to deliver goods from areas where they are relatively cheap to areas in which they are in shorter supply. Female employment in informal cross-border trades has progressively resulted in a specialisation and clear prevalence of women in the field.

Female movement and professionalisation in Africa falls within the phenomenon of 'femigration', that is the increase on a global scale of women choosing to move to other countries for work opportunities, in most of the cases independently, rather than accompanying or joining husbands in host countries (Faith D. Nkomo 2011).

Femigration has been highly impacting urban and social habits in Mozambique in the last couple of decades. In the colonial time, a rigid division of roles based on gender has relegated women to the domestic space, whilst mobility was an exclusively male privilege. Specific laws forbade women to move from the countryside to cities, even only for short periods (Casimiro

2015). Until the last years before the independence (1975), the migration of lonely women from rural areas to the city was still far from a simple trajectory (Sheldon 2003): a married woman from the patrilineal society in the south of the Zambezi River was not able to make any decision on her own, including business and travel, without the authorisation of the husband, whom she belonged to in accordance with the institution of the lobolo, namely the bridewealth. Likewise, free mobility was not easily accessible either for women in the northern Mozambique, which was conversely based on a matrilineal society (Raimundo 2009). Nevertheless, many women joined the FRELIMO's guerrillas during the liberation war (1964-1974), in so giving a boost to women's independence through movement.

In the last two decades, this has become more and more common in Mozambique, especially in the south of the country. *Mukhero* has played a strong role into this, representing a ground-breaking source of freedom for women - which also partly explains their significant presence in the sector. If female involvement in the practice started in colonial times, when women used to migrate with their husbands, it escalated considerably during the civil war (1981-1994): the women, who were not enrolled in the army, used to go to the border zones in quest for food for their children and people (Covane 2001; Feliciano 1998). So, the role played by women *mukheristas* in saving 'Maputo and the country in its hungry years' (Raimundo 2005) is engraved in the local memory.

After the civil war, the female component in the *mukhero* has increased to point to get predominant (Chivangue 2007, Manganhela 2006). Women's mobility has helped to scatter the rigid division of roles in the Mozambican society, marking the exit from female confinement within the household space and the possibility of engaging with other socio-economic spheres.

Among all the informal economic activities providing job opportunities to women – who otherwise have two times less opportunities than men in the formal public sector (BIRD 2010 quoted by Mondjane 2011) – *mukhero* represents a crucial way for female emancipation and empowerment, as well as a particular driving force of socio-cultural change, especially in urban contexts. Whereas the informal economy reproduces the same significant gender gap of the formal sector, the *mukhero* exceptionally allows women to accumulate more capital than men and it is not rare that women employ other men, with implications on gender relationships (Barreau-Tran 2011). This makes it a truly attractive job, that is being more and more chosen for reasons not exclusively dependent on survival.

The historical reconstruction traced up to this point shows how women's empowerment, informality and mobility have impacted and moulded each other over time in the *mukhero*. What was initially a survivalist practice, drawn upon traditional resources such as locality, kinship and ethnicity, appears today as a commonly acknowledged, customary 'institution', with patterned and recurring procedures and interactions (Rose 2000).
In the process of becoming an institution, the *mukhero* has gradually become more and more complex. The flows of small informal trades, initially conducted on a daily base between towns and the countryside or from one side to the other of the border, have spread transnationally. The former structure made of limited segments has branched out, taking an international breadth, which links Mozambique not only to the neighbouring countries, but also to Brazil, Thailand, Hong Kong, Dubai and China.
The geographical extension of the practice has proceeded in parallel with the increase and the differentiation of the goods being traded, while the networks' proliferation has gone on simultaneously with their one specialisation.

Whereas the trades with the neighbouring countries concern mainly food, clothes and household furniture, a new trend extended at the global scale has arisen in the last years. The purchase of synthetic hair and cheap cosmetics in countries like Brazil and China to be resold in Mozambique, as E., a former *mukhero* guy, explains:

«The business in Brazil, China and India is about this artificial hair. They go to buy in these countries. They get too much profit from this. You see, these "heads": you pay about 7,000 Meticals. It's about 200 Rands. But in India or in China or in Brazil it can cost about 1,000. Usually are the youngest to do this. They are from 20 to 35 years old. They are the young generation of *mukheristas* working on a global scale. Because the hair... you can transport in a bag like this, you can transport 5 or 7 cages here and then you pay nothing but you can carry 100,000/200,000 Meticals in a small bag like this. That is where they put it, they squeeze it. Transport is about 25/20.000. You go and you come. Because if you take straight flight from Maputo is expensive. But what they do is to take bus to Johannesburg and then straight to China, straight to Brazil. The flight is cheap. If you find promotions is about 25,000 Meticals (10,000/8,000 Rands), you go and come».
(E., former Mozambican *mukheristas* -June 2014, Johannesburg).

The long lasting *mukhero*'s tradition allows an intergenerational comparison between younger (around 25 years old) and older (around 55 years old) *mukheristas*. This comparison highlights the changes occurred in the *mukhero*, from the first generations of women doing traffic between the city and the countryside, to the latest generation of young *mukheristas*, who have extended their trading range to the global scale.

Formerly, to become a *mukheristas* was a sort of Hobason's choice, especially when induced by traumatic biographical events (such as husbands' unemployment or death, as well as separation or abandonment by partners) overlapping pre-existing conditions of poverty. *Mukhero* was the strategy for 'brides on the run' ('epouses emballement'), as Penvenne (2003) has defined women's migration/mobility in Mozambique. Mobility allowed women to survive and support their families, but not without exposing them to the burden of heavy social stigma. The frequent commuting and large displacements required by trading were seen as a renounce to a conventional family life and, as such, as deserving contempt. If migrant men have already been highly regarded in the traditional Mozambican society, women *mukheristas* have always been considered dissolute and hardly honorable (Tvedten 2007). Nevertheless, women continued to choose the *mukhero*, so letting the social stigma dim. Thus, *mukhero* has soon become a job transmitted from mother to daughter, as many of the *mukheristas* I interviewed referred:

«I started in the '90s, when I was a girl. At the beginning, I worked with my mother who was doing the same job. She did the *mukhero* in Swaziland. She brought things from here to Swaziland and I was always with her. After some times, I continued to do it on my own. I started with 1000 R, it was 2002, 2003. I traded food, chicken, eggs, from here to Komatipoort. Then I also started buying clothes in Johannesburg to resell them here in Maputo. I bought them wholesale in the Chinese store in Fordsburg and resell them at retail. This way the gain is greater».
(A.B., from a focus group held in October 2015)

«My mother used to do the same. I started alone and after that two of my sisters followed me. One sells clothing, the other food».
(S., interview taken in July 2014)

*Aspiring youth, Maputo 2015 © Paola Piscitelli

Following on their mothers' steps, women tended to choose *mukhero* as 'their life's job' due to a better chance to independence and emancipation it seemed to give.

«I began this work when I was 20 years old. It was my dream to do the negocio. I wanted to get to open a fashion boutique. I started doing the *mukhero* with the money my husband gave me. He did not want me to that at the beginning, because I was still young and beautiful. He said 'Let me do everything'. But it was what I wanted to do and I started to import clothes from Johannesburg to Maputo. I did it from 1991 to 1998. I bought clothes them at Trouz, Edgar's, they were big shops in Johannesburg. Today there don't exist anymore, have been supplanted by the Chinese malls, the *mukheristas* who trade in clothes go there today. I used to go there and took brand clothes, such as Nike's, Rebok's, Puma's. I carried clothes, shoes, bags and retailed them to single clients. But I had to change because people asked and did not pay and I was losing a lot of money. I switched to household items (freezer, chairs, sofas, tables...) and household appliances. I bought them in Johannesburg and I sold them in supermarkets and home appliance stores in the centre of Maputo, such as Adam's. I didn't succeed in opening my fashion boutique, but I built a house near here and. I am going to open a bakery. I just started the construction works in a store not too far from here. It's on the road which goes to the beach, the Costa do Sol. This is a good area, there are no shops, it is a good investment. I opened it because I'm tired of going back and forth. Even if it costs a lot. When I finish the works, I'll put some 'empregados' there to work for me. € 40-50000 to open it. But the bread is worthwile, people needs it every day».
(S., interview taken in October 2016)

As a matter of fact, the *mukhero* has allowed and allows many informal vendors to move forward in their life, from selling goods in local markets bought by other women in faraway markets to becoming long-distance traders themselves, as it emerges from S.'s words:

«At first I was selling potatoes and onions in the Fajardo market with my mother. We use to sit down on a board on the ground, as you can still see today. I saw often those women who supplied us with the goods to sell at the market. They seemed so bold and respected. In 1996 I decided that I wanted to become like them. I made the first from Maputo to Pretoria with other people. We filled an entire truck of onions. The canvas that covered the truck had a hole and it was raining that day. Onions took so much water along the whole trip.... But when I got to the market here, I downloaded 800 sacks. Then I decided that I wanted to do this. Instead of asking, I wanted to go directly to procure what we needed»
(S., interview taken in October 2016)

S's words give a clear idea of the consistent potentiality for social mobility implied in the *mukhero*, which actually has played an important role in fostering social change in Mozambique. This has resulted into the widening of the choice options for women. Despite the fact that over time the *mukhero* has become a work mainly done by women (and, as such, often considered a purely women's activity), as a matter of fact today the youngest generation of *mukheristas* can choose it as one of the possible forms of self-employment and not simply like their only choice. For this reason, the younger *mukheristas* do different jobs and often practice the *mukhero* as a 'inherited' but side activity, able to guarantee them a secure income.

«(*Mukhero*) is my mother business. When she got sick, last year, I started to buy stuff in Maputo and sell it here. I started because I am the oldest (I am 27). I have one brother, he's 25, he's a student at the Universidade Eduardo Mondlane. And I have a son, 5 years old, who is now in Maputo. His father didn't want the child, so we stayed with my parents. My mother now is better, but she had a surgery and can't drive long distances. I took her business. I do it during the weekend, because I go to the university during the week. During the weekends I sell veggies, like salad, casava leaves... and during the week I study veterinary»
(L., interview taken in July 2014)

The *mukhero* appears far from even today. On the contrary, it is a world involving diverse kinds of traders, following different rhythms and trajectories. Peberdy (2002) distinguishes them in 'shoppers-women', who travel to South Africa for one to four days to buy goods to sell in their country, and 'traders women', who travel from one week to two months, sometimes across several countries. Usually, the further the trading area is, the more the *mukheristas* is economically successful. From what observable on the field, *mukheristas* can be broadly divided between 'survivalists' and rich. The formers managed to secure decent living conditions and support themselves and their families through the *mukhero*. The latters ended up building viable and usually informal business enterprises, possessing trucks and managing large sums of money and properties.

The prominent position achieved by 'rich' *mukheristas* in the Mozambican economy was revealed in the accounts of my respondents, among whom many referred of *mukheristas* getting to earn 'up to $ 90,000 per month'. The conspicuously exaggerated figure is obviously hard to verify, given the unregistered character of the business. However, it outlines how the institution of *mukhero* encompasses both poor and middle class people. The definition

of the African middle class is difficult and controversial. It can be defined and subdivided on the basis of the data provided by ILO into three categories, named: "near poor" (2-4 USD/day), "emerging middle class", (2-13 USD/day) and "middle class and above" (> 13 USD/day) (Mazzolini 2014),).

If for survivalist *mukheristas*, cross-border trade is a hard and arduous way to earn a livelihood through risks and harassment, for middle class women linked to more global networks, it represents upward mobility and profits (Desai 2009). Among these, there are the 'mamanas', the oldest *mukheristas* called in this way as a moniker implying dutiful respect for the age and the fortune accumulated over years of hard work, as they usually come from conditions of extreme poverty and basic educational level. The economic success depends on a mix of elements, including luck, economic and cultural starting conditions and individual agency.

If the access to the practice of *mukhero* takes place via recurring strategies, the careers of mukheritas are highly subjective. To actually start, everyone needs a loan for purchasing raw goods and paying the transport. This can be pulled together in different ways. Many *mukheristas* resort to the xitique*, an informal system of loan or savings practiced among members of a given community, in which the contribution is fixed through mutual consent and delivered rotationally to each member in fixed periods. Other *mukheristas* prefer to turn to governmental or non governmental credit societies, in order not to have any kind of constraint and to develop their relations solely on economic negotiations.

Thus, the *mukhero* encompasses both strong and weak ties with the social networks, that are essential to support the practice. These social networks are of several kinds: there is one for getting credit to enter into the trade, that

is usually composed by relatives or friends; another for transportation and border crossing (drivers and gate keepers); a third one for maintaining a client base (the retailers in the countries where the goods are sold) and a last to support the business in the countries where the goods are bought (hoteliers, warehousemen, porters…)

The more one moves away from the social network or origin, the more the tie gets weaker. Weak ties are established with national/ethnic groups different from that of origin and are a result of the *mukheristas*' own initiative. Kin networks tend to be more demanding than non-kin, so much that often women move away from kin networks, as soon as they get enough power. However, both strong and weak ties with 'kin and non-kin' social networks are necessary to *mukheristas* in order to carry out their trades and transact their border crossing (Desai 2009).
Through a complex geometry of social networks, the organisational process revolving around *mukheristas* is so fluidly conveyed across national borders and links trans-local urban territories.

3. Assembling the city across localities and scales

Mukhero, as smuggling based on the exploitation of differences in price and availability of goods between two sides of a border, has been mainly addressed by two perspectives: on the one hand, the economic and political one, that frames it exclusively as an informal economic activity carried out by poor or marginalised people, which has to be condemned or regularized; on the other hand, the approach of the border studies, in which it seems to fall typically.

JOHANNESBURG

NEILSPRUIT

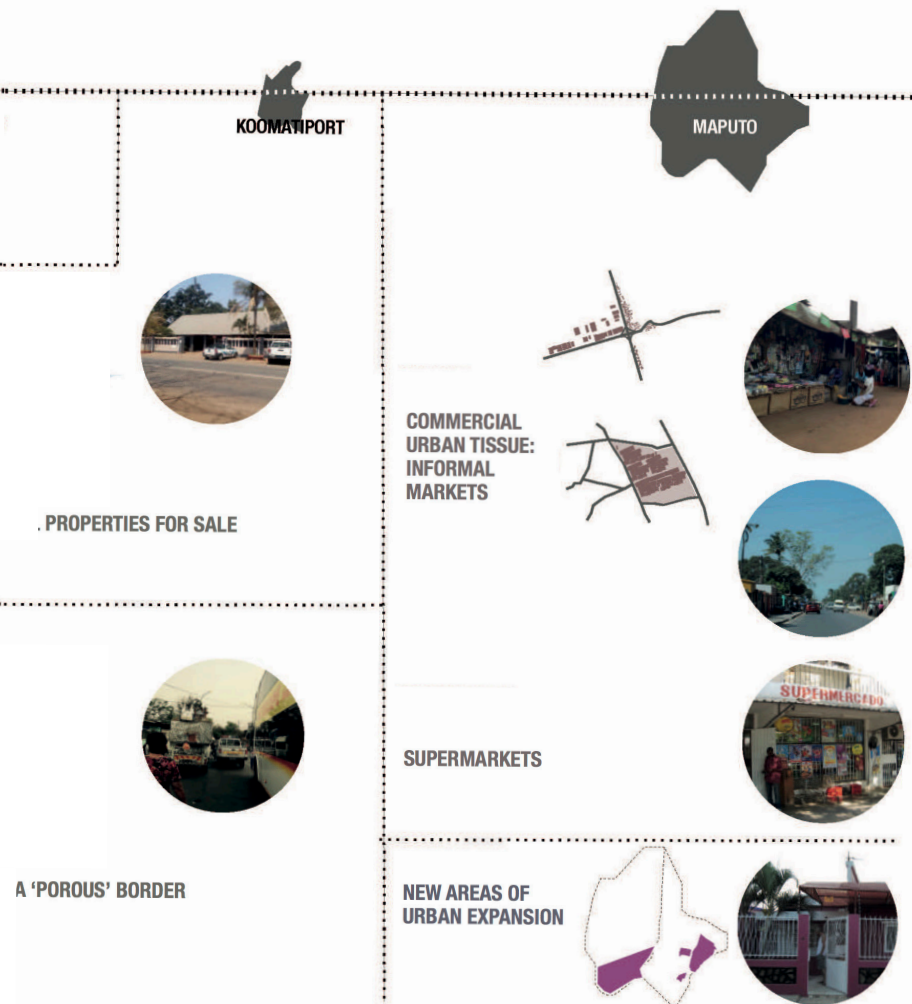CHINA MALL

DRAGON CITY

STAZIONE –
PARK STATION

NEW COMMERCIAL

KERK STREET

GERMINA'S

ORIBI HOTEL

KOOMATIPORT

MAPUTO

PROPERTIES FOR SALE

COMMERCIAL
URBAN TISSUE:
INFORMAL
MARKETS

SUPERMARKETS

A 'POROUS' BORDER

NEW AREAS OF
URBAN EXPANSION

Border studies have produced in the last years a large body of work that, shifting from the study of frontiers diffused in the '90 in the wake of Kopytoff's seminal contribution on the internal African frontier, has recently been concerned with boundaries and borders either in terms of flows of goods and people, cross-border transactions and cooperation, or of ethnographic study upon the social construction of borders.

The perspective fostered by the present work differs from both of the above approaches. While bearing in mind the salient patrimony of literature and surveys produced by the border studies, the conceptualization of the border here proposed falls within a network of transnational and trans-local spaces moored in urban nodes. The boundary is thus analyzed dynamically within the network of places related to the *mukhero*, or in other words in the light of its urbanity within transnational and trans-local processes.

In this way, the practice of *mukhero* is read relatively to its geographically widespread 'place effects', rather than being limited exclusively to the border area, with the purpose of investigating how it intersects multi-nodal urban spaces. The analysis of how *mukheristas* use, occupy and intersect a wide network of places which includes, but is not uniquely limited to the border, operates in fact a reversal of perspective useful to examining the role of movement and translocal connections to the city.

Considering *mukheristas* not simply as informal workers or cross-border traders, but as urban actors who consistently contribute to support the urban infrastructure unveils a whole new view on concealed and often elusive urban dynamics. It is a panorama made of heterogenous 'materialities' (including stalls, shops, commercial malls, hotels, temporary shelters, markets, supermarkets, bus and minibus stops, train stations, collective and private means of transport) which uncovers a stretched urban structure.

Loading and Unloading, Johannesburg 2015 © Paola Piscitelli

Jozi-Maputo, Johannesburg 2015 © Paola Piscitelli

This specialized infrastructure of places assembled across localities and scales constitute the 'city of *mukheristas*'. The multi-situated ethnographic explorations carried out by this book's author between Johannesburg and Maputo has allowed to map out some of the landmarks and main reference points of this city. Hereafter it is offered an overview of it.

THE ORIBI HOTEL

The Oribi hotel is the first stop that the 'L. L. Coach' - one of *mukheristas*' favorite bus company - does in Johannesburg, due to its position. Indeed, the hotel is located right at the edge of the city centre, on Commissioner Street, not too far from the Ellis Park shopping malls where *mukheristas* use to stock up. It hotel is run by a Portuguese man who rents a large space to the 'L. L. Coach' company for temporary storage. The idea came to the owner when he realized that the hotel was not yielding enough. Fortunately enough, though, it was on the way haunted by some transport companies 'specialized in supporting *mukheristas*' (E., former *mukheristas*). Thus, the 'L. L. Coach''s owner and the hotel owner made a deal convenient for everybody: bus drivers would have a space where register and upload/ download passengers and goods; the hotel owner could earn a good extra and the *mukheristas* would finally have a decent place to safely deposit their goods and have a rest before taking the bus back to Maputo.

The Oribi is just one of the various hotels housing informal cross-border traders in Johannesburg. Usually, those who can pay for a night in a hotel belong to the intermediate category of *mukheristas*, namely that made of neither poor who can not afford "the luxury" of staying in Johannesburg, nor rich enough to delegate the transport to personal drivers. The infrastructure of accommodation for traders and their goods is dense and produces a large incomes usually concealed in recurring rhetoric on foreigners who 'come to steal the job to South Africans'.

THE CHINA MALLS

The first China mall, called "China City", was opened in 1995 and located in a pre-existing building and office tower converted into shopping facilities close to Ellis Park (on the eastern side of Joburg's downtown). The Chinese businessman who purchased the area, started to rent out retail space to Chinese merchants. The business operation turned out to be successful, so much that less than ten years later, in 2004, the commercial area was expanded. Today, China City is one of the biggest Chinese products market in Johannesburg, with about 500 shops selling the most varied products, from washing machines, including clothing, household appliances and electronics. If Chinese wholesalers opened their businesses in warehouses located in the former industrial areas of the city (such as Isando, Kempton Park, Selby) in the 90's, the negative image of the inner city persuaded following developers to move elsewhere in the 2000s. Fordsburg and the Crown Mines (west of downtown), whose economy once related to the mining industry was declining, offered a convenient location, visibility and proximity to several motorways, have attracted both local and Chinese distribution centres. The boom happened in the 2010, when the South African currency was particularly strong and beneficial for low cost importing from China. Nowadays, the former mine dump of Crown Mines, Fordsburg and the area around Ellis Park are the new hubs to purchase affordable Chinese goods, both for end consumers and especially for wholesalers. Whereas initially the *mukheristas* stock up clothes, groceries and households in South African stores, in recent years they shifted to Chinese malls, where products are numerous, easily accessible in concentrated areas and much cheaper. China malls allow *mukheristas* to get higher revenues.

*Mukheristas in Park Station, Johannesburg
Winter 2015, © Paola Piscitelli

*Street vendors in Kerk Street, Johannesburg
Winter 2015, © Paola Piscitelli

KERK STREET

After the massive supplies from Chinese malls, *mukheristas* usually head to the inner city to complete their purchases. Johannesburg's inner city became a sort of magnet for migrants coming from all over the rest of Africa and the sub-continent (Matsipa 2014) attracted from the buildings of the '70s abandoned by the higher-income residents and white people who moved to the northern suburbs of the city, such as Sandton. The region is inhabited today by an unknown number of people, which hovers around 200,000 individuals according to official estimates, although it is likely to be much higher as many are illegal, unregistered immigrants. Even larger (around 800,000) is the crowd of daily commuters who pass through the inner city every day, as it is here that Johannesburg's main railway station, bus terminal, and minibus taxi centre are located and all major arterial roads originate from. Although it is a wide and internally diverse area, the whole inner city functions as a regional shopping node, a giant market where all sorts of things is sold from the numerous shops and shopping centres to the countless informal markets rigged in the streets. The street level is the view point to really understand the multiple, spontaneous and apparently chaotic dynamics gearing the inner city, where the interests of diverse social groups converge and collide.

If the CBD symbolizes the fractured urbanism of post-apartheid Johannesburg, made of 'a braided montage of kaleidoscopic and scattered, yet coexisting and mutually interdependent, fragments' (Murray 2008), Kerk street offers a special perspective to this, as it reproduces on a smaller scale dynamics present in the CBD. It runs across the heart of the inner city from east to west and is chock-full of stalls and street vendors coming from all over Africa. Being enclosed between the railway station and the main road to Mozambique, it is the main gathering area for Mozambican vendors, traders and transporters in the inner city. These tend to mass around the corner

between Eloff Street and Kerk Street, where the stop of buses and minibuses to Maputo is located. Just in front of it there is the Germina's kitchen, which, more than a simple tavern, is a reference point for *mukheristas*: it is the place in 'Town' where they use to stop for a meal and a refreshing break before and after travels, but also a crucial place for information and money exchange.

THE BORDER

"In the border (...) sometimes they don't cross if it's 10 o'clock p.m. You know why? At 10 o'clock p.m. the border is still fresh and the customers are still fresh... By the time they are about to close, that is a good moment, as border officers can't wait to close. At 11.30 p.m. it is when they go like caravans. They are so busy that say to customers: 'this bus... give me 1000 Rands, my friend, and go. This bus...oh, you have too much things, give me 1000 Rands'. Pah! in their pocket. But still you can pass to the other side without problems. The *mukhero* is like that. No problem at the South African border post, instead, they even don't charge you this. The problem is in Mozambique due to corruption. Border officers always make you pay.
At midnight, the South African border closes, the Mozambican does either, but if you have money, even only 30 minutes after, they open. As long as they see big stuff, they open the gates". (E., interview taken in October 2015)

The extract above provides a particularly effective summary of how the border works. It is the fulcrum of the *mukhero* system, but is not a homogeneous space. On the contrary, it has areas and margins of different porosity. Made of a double customhouse (the South African and the Mozambican), it is regulated by highly variable times. These, that are usually short in the South African side, expand often dramatically in the Mozambican one, where customs agents, well haunches of the ongoing traffic, try to exploit it for their personal benefit. The formal and the informal market fed by the practice of

MERCADO DO ZIMPETO

MERCADO DO XIQUELENE

MERCADO DO XIPAMANENE

MERCADO DO FAJARDO

MERCADO DO MUSEU

Some of the main markets in Maputo
Graphic Elaborations by Paola Piscitelli

Mukheristas at the Mercado Fajardo, Maputo 2015
© Paola Piscitelli

*When the market lights on, Maputo 2015
© Paola Piscitelli

the *mukhero* are woven together at the border, where the tax system is in the hands of officials who tax as much as they like and also ask for bribes on the goods.

MAPUTO

Mukheristas supply particularly the Mercado do Xiquelene, the Mercado do Xipamanene, the Mercado Fajardo, the Mercado do Museu and the Mercado do Zimpeto. These markets are getting specialized because of their geographical locations and potential customers, and the *mukheristas* furnish them accordingly. Xiquelene gathers customers and vendors coming from poor wards and is specialized in foods and second-hand clothes, similarly to the Fajardo, where mainly vegetables and groceries are sold. The position of the latter, on Avenida do Trabalho, a road quickly connecting to the EN2 (the motorway that goes out from Maputo to Matola and the Gauteng), makes it the first stop in the city of *mukheristas* supplying food. Museu, instead, provide a more selected clientele. Located in the cidade de cimento, it is used by people coming from the homonymous neighbourhood, as well as Polana and Sommerschield (all relatively wealthy areas). The Xipamanene market, on Avenida Robby Brothers, is one of Maputo's oldest markets, particularly crowded on Saturdays. It is specialized in curandeiros, the traditional African medicines, but, as my interviewed liked saying, in Xipamanene 'you can purchase really anything, from capulanas to weapons!'. It comes with an intricate, apparently disordered, structure, that actually has its own specific organisation. On the edges along Avenida Julius Nyereire and Avenida Dos Mocambique the stalls selling the most bulky goods (furniture, households and appliances) come in succession, whereas the texture of pieces composing the inner part becomes gradually denser and somehow proportional to the goods sold. The traditional African medicines, in the form of herbs, roots

and powders, are just in the heart of the market. The two streets along the perimeter of the market area are perpetually traffic congested, reason why many *mukheristas* prefer the Zimpeto market, far more peripheral, but larger and more easily accessible. The Zimpeto market is the largest (about 3500 sqm) Maputo's wholesale market, where articles are brought in by trucks, mostly from South Africa and sold in large quantities. It is the main trading post of *mukheristas*, who come here early in the morning to sell in bulk. It opened in 2007 in the outlying suburb of Zimpeto, for decision of the Maputo municipal director for markets and fairs, Jose Matavele, who ordered the transfer of the wholesale agricultural trade from the Malanga residential area (ramped and entirely inadequate, according to him) to the Zimpeto area.

Mukheristas do not supply only these markets – which do not even correspond to the totality of the urban informal markets, as several important others such as the Mercado do Estrela Vermelha and the Mercado do Mandela were left out by the research – but also many supermarkets in the city, thus proving to be the engine of the urban commercial infrastructure.

Through their businesses, *mukheristas* interconnect assorted places and networks dispersed over long distances. By interacting with all the different people they meet along their journey, they operate constant negotiations which allow to cross physical, social and inter-personal boundaries, at the same dismantling and reconstituting them. Spatial mobility, in fact, often is a medium for social mobility and ascent, as in the case of the mamanas. It is also an opportunity to women for free movement forging a special form of cosmopolitanism, which was precluded until just two decades ago. At the same time, however, movement can represent a trap for survivalists, somehow forced to never stop their constant coming and going because it is the only way they know to make a living.

In one case or another, transit is the normal way of life of so many people, that it cannot defined a liminal or marginal condition at all. In *mukheristas*' traveling between and across cities is such a generalized condition, that mobility shapes the space and the urban life. Space is used, made and remade through transitory practices and the city is experienced trans-locally and in transit. In the 'city of *mukheristas*', it is movement to generate places (Malaquais 2004). The 'trans' takes precedence over fixities in single localities, shaping a kind of city deeply grounded in the diasporic experience of transnational crossings. External and internal borders of such a city are in constant flux, expanding and, on occasion, shrinking. They do not disappear, as well as historic structures of power do not get dismantled. All persist, but yet they are constantly put in discussion by the daily reinvention of 'new pathways for living, for personal and collective visions (...)' (Dear and Leclerc's 2003).

*Mercado Xipamanini, Maputo 2015
© Paola Piscitelli

LEARNING THE CITY FROM TRANSLOCAL TRADERS

CHAPTER 4

1. Learning from the *mukhero* practice

If we conceive urban planning as the practice concerned with the effort to understand how to make more inclusive socio-spatial regimes, it has a lot to learn from ordinary people like *mukheristas*, who have the agency to realize changes in their lives and environments. Reading the territory through the *mukhero* and the practices of people doing it highlights issues concerning informality, mobility, urban spaces, and gender that are remarkable both taken singularly and in relation the one to the others, as reviewed hereafter.

INFORMALITY

The *mukhero* shows once more how the notion of informality intended as 'out of order' or 'out of the norm' is interpretatively useless in contexts where it represents the norm rather than the exception. To dismiss Western lens means being able to interpret and refer about the fundamental dimensions of other kinds of order.

In the case of the *mukhero*, such aspects can be summarised as follows. First of all, the links between informal cross-border trading and the equivalent or related activities falling within the so called 'formal sector' are so numerous that they demonstrate how the boundaries between the formal and the informal sphere are in fact nuanced and convoluted. Second, the informality of *mukhero* negates the classical equation that makes it correspond to poverty, given the various power and economic conditions it encompasses. Successful business men and women coexist with survivalists and they are all constantly subjected to changing fortunes. Though, a deep understanding of the conditions that determine one path or another is fundamental to 'correct the fortune' of people strenuously carrying out practices that are fundamen-

tal for the everyday functioning of entire urban regions and give them the support they deserve as actual city makers. Informal cross-border traders, indeed, have been straddling globalisation by inserting extended mobility in a traditional economic activity. Through their capacity of smartly navigating structural constraints and opportunities, they behave as proactive social agents able to co-constitute globalisation, rather than being impacted by it (Desai 2009). The international circuits of *mukheristas* who go to procure synthetic hair in Brazil, as well as those connecting made-in-China goods sold in Johannesburg to the informal markets in Maputo show how the *mukhero* has blended with global logics becoming global itself.

Informal cross-border traders are undoubtedly agents of what is called 'globalisation from below' (Portes, Guarnizo e Landolt 1999; Portes 1997), that can be defined as the transnational flow of goods and people involving relatively small amounts of capital and informal, semi-legal or illegal transactions opposed to great economic, financial and political institutions (Mathews and Alba Vega 2012; Ambrosini 2008). Interestingly, the concept of globalisation from below originates from the same notion of informal economy coined by Keith Hart in 1973 as the wages of formal employment in the developed countries were conceptually opposed to those earned through self-employment in businesses carried out 'under the radar of the law', such as the purchase and transport of used or copied products across borders and countries of the 'the developing world' (Lee 2014; Mathews and Alba Vega 2012). In today's world in which a single global economy has taken over national economies, keeping to analyze the so called informal economies as geographically isolated, rather than looking at their global expansion and links is simply anachronistic. Transactions via personal connections within a cash economy represent the prevalent way in which globalisation takes place (Lee 2014). Therefore, globalisation from below should be taken seriously just like globalisation from above. Instead, informal cross-border

traders uncannily disappear in the analysis of regional and global trades. Data concerning African regional economic communities (RECs) are focussed exclusively on either transnational corporations (TNCs) male managers and investment bankers moving huge sums of money and goods across borders (Desai 2009).

In the SADC REC, informal cross-border traders have been largely under-recognised by the formal policies and programs implemented in the last years, such as the Maputo Development Corridor (MDC), that is the mid-1990s government's showpiece of regional development planning for the micro-region between western South Africa and southern Mozambique (Peberdy and Crush 2001; Söderbaum and Taylor 2008). This aim of fostering regional development and economic cooperation in the borderland between the two countries, in fact, has ignored informal cross-border traders, barely mentioning their role and impact on regional trades in the official policy documents related to the SDI program, as Peberdy and Crush have pointed out since 2001. More than fifteen years later, the SDI keeps leaving out informal cross-border traders. Significant financial resources have been devoted to large investment and infrastructure projects (such as the toll road between Maputo and Witbank) but only small amounts went to local development and community participation, none of which has targeted the informal cross-border traders, as if they were simply invisible. Paradoxically, neither *mukheristas* nor informal economic actors in general, who surely posses a far deeper understanding of how African urban markets actually work, have never been involved in the design and implementation of regional policies.

The documents produced by the SADC tend to neglect their role and to ignore the spaces composing the functional regions they produce, thereby demonstrating a serious gap between the level of the practices occurring in reality and that of the policies written on papers.

The detachment between written policies and actual reality leaves room to the high degree of vulnerability and danger for informal cross-border traders, going from xenophobia to insecurity and crime. Women, in particular, are the most exposed to abuses and harassment over the travel and particularly at the border.

A kind of planning actually concerned with collectively sustainable regional and urban spaces should never neglect the people who concretely make them. *Mukheristas* should be acknowledged for what they are: active agents of transnational globalisation from below and territory makers whose practices, routes, spaces and connections get to be concretely incorporated in the implementation of the regional integration project.

THE CITY AND THE WOMEN

Mukheristas are not simply economic mobile actors, but territory-makers and inter-local urban dwellers performing new of forms of urbanization and modes of urbanity to be incorporated in the urban theory. In order to grasp the relevant, as usually overlooked socio-spatial impacts they produce through movement across borders, it is necessary to assume a combined, relational perspective on mobility and informality. Overcoming the common approach that tends to consider unofficial economies and new ways of spatial occupation as two separated issues by looking, instead, at the entanglement between them, the multiple 'place effects' of unofficial cross-border activities across trans-local territories come to the fore.

Mukheristas do not limit to move their bodies in the space. They mobilize resources and capitals, such as goods and money, as well as aspirations, possibilities. At the same time, they produce new space by re-using spaces, setting up commercial spaces in the street, opening new shops and building new houses. In the hostile and xenophobic Johannesburg, where they have to deploy a range of 'tactics of invisibility' (Romania, 2004; et al.) to defend them-

selves from risks and threats, *mukheristas* lean on the infrastructure of spaces already put in place by the ethnic group of origin, in this way revitalizing it, or occupy liminal spaces in the city where they can conduct their business without much trouble, so silently making new spaces. In Koomatiport and Ressano Garcia they fuel the local economy of a border town contributing to shape the landscape of warehouses, depots, money change gazebos and all related services and structures described in the previous chapter. In Maputo, where the traces of their passage are more evident, *mukheristas* actually feeds and glue the city's 'market infrastructure', made of markets, supermarkets and spots for transactions. Moreover, those realizing social ascent through the *mukhero* invest their profit in new economic activities and houses. For this reason, the *mukhero* constitute an underestimated agent of urban expansion and social differentiation, contributing to the emergence of new urban forms of consumes in Maputo which characterize the uprising middle class. The important agents of such a city dynamism are mostly women. Nevertheless, they result to be strongly disregarded. Figures on informal economies are very rarely desegregated by gender, although women often constitute the prevalent presence in them, and the limited analysis of the female role in African cities tend to reproduce the imaginary of women as victims (Potts 1995). Most of the studies on women focusses on gender inequality, which undoubtedly constitute a serious threat (Chant 2013; Chen et al. 2004: COHRE 2008; UN HABITAT 2006). The same involvement in economic informal sectors depends on the lower chances women have compared to men when trying to enter the labor market. Most of the women encountered during the present research started the *mukhero* because it was one of the few work opportunities they had and potentially the best option to gain some independence. When they enter the sector, women keep facing numerous constrains, ranging from the lack of start-up capital and information to family bonds, as they are considered those in charge for children's

care and house maintenance. Even when they manage to combine domestic duties and professional realization, providing fully for the livelihood of their families, women-headed households are often more deprived and subjected to social stigmatization than male-headed ones (Kinyanjui 2014). Women encounter the hardest face of the African city in their everyday livelihood negotiation (ibid.).

Nevertheless, the case of *mukheristas* has shown how women have been striving, and often succeeding to overcome all these hindrances through mobility, entrepreneurialism, forms of solidarity and collective organisation. They have proved to be able to handle duties just like, and often better than their male counterparts and this has brought about gains for the younger generations. Younger *mukheristas* are more free and less stigmatized in doing the *mukhero* or - as they like calling it - becoming business women.

Nowadays, especially younger *mukheristas* have more space and opportunities for better living standards for themselves and their children than their mothers. They have been asserting themselves in the domestic, social and urban space, thus changing the city scenario. Such a process of claiming positions in the city is so relentless in Maputo, Johannesburg, as well as many other African urban regions, that it has been written of city's feminization (Kinyanjui 2014). Whether this is consciously performed by women or not, it is undoubted that women are as exposed as active agents on the urban scene, strongly contributing to city-dynamism and transformation.

This calls urban scholars to drop gender blind urban theory and practice to rather assume an attentive perspective on how women contribute to the city-making and development process, like this work has tried to show. Such a cultural effort of investigating and incorporating women's bodies, practices, needs and aspirations through a gender-oriented approach in urban planning cannot be further postponed in face of a global need for more inclusive and socio-spatially sustainable cities. This is valid not only in North-

ern contexts, where a greater cultural awareness seems to be present due to more advanced studies, but also especially in the Southern ones, where it is probably less theorized but daily and strenuously practiced.

MOBILITY

The *mukhero* practice challenges the quite common dichotomy between mobility as typical of qualified people and migration as attributable to poor people, proving that such a sharp distinction is much more blurred and variegated in the reality. *Mukheristas* are not migrants, but commuters between long trans-local distances. Their mobility constitutes an additional thread in the web of transnational links between Mozambique and South Africa and, at the same time, an evolvement of the migratory relationship that tied the two countries together in the last century. *Mukheristas* draw directly and indirectly (though not exclusively) on the forms of capital accumulated by members of their same ethnic groups migrated to South African cities in the past, thereby bringing out the nexus between migration and mobility that can be disentangled only adopting a historical perspective. For *mukheristas*, ethnic networks in South Africa have constituted a resource on which they have drawn their instrumentalization of the border as a way for life chances accumulation (Beck 2007). Although the bonds with transnational networks have often loosen over time, *mukheristas* have managed to maximize the legacy of migratory attachments and to avoid permanent displacement through mobility. Most of the *mukheristas* have no interest nor aspiration to settle in Johannesburg, which is felt as an unwelcoming urban environment. Similarly, among the factors that pushed them to start their mobile lifestyles, there is the need and the desire of escaping entrapment in contexts marked by unbearable socio-economic inequalities.

Mobility in the *mukhero*, thus, is clearly a consequence, even a product of socio-spatial disparities in the globalized world (Beck 2007; Faist 2013; Glick

Schiller and Salazar 2013; Borja Courty and Ramadier Thierry 2012). However, it is also its potential antidote. In a world where local roots and stability can constitute features of insecurity (Boltanski and Chiapello 1999), mobility helps escape the pitfalls of locality. By deploying mobility to avoid whatever form of capture – be it resulting from a non-inclusive urban environment, economic precariousness or social insecurity – *mukheristas* use it as a a capital. Indeed, mobility is one of the main resources on which they rely in order to realize their projects of social uprising, thus constituting a well for social differentiation (Moret 2017). Despite the various economic and social costs it implies, informal cross-border traders strain mobility as an asset to produce other assets. The capital inherent in the mobility is so both a prerequisite and a consequence of movement: performed as a long journey through disparate adversities, the mobility of *mukheristas* represents a capital not only for the propensity to move it expresses, bus also for the capacity it manifests. While moving and being on-the-move for years, *mukheristas* accumulate a bunch of complex competences that constitute the hard core of the asset they put in place over long trading routes. They learn to negotiate their access to socially, politically and economically diverse contexts, to navigate them and manage multiple forms of uses and belonging in order to carry on their activities and lives of themselves and of their families. They learn to cross not only the borders between two countries, but the innumerable boundaries of which cities are made of, thus moving, redefining and transforming them. The mobility capital of *mukheristas*, thus, implies not only a mobile savoir-faire (made of peculiar tactics, strategies and skills) but also a mobile savoir-être (Moret, 2017), appropriated over time and transmitted to the other social groups bundled around the *mukhero* practice. Such a capacity has been built through historical legacies, and is likewise transmitted to the following generations, as the collection of interviews to *mukheristas* of different generations in the previous chapter has showed.

The mobility capital implicit in the *mukhero* helps to understand what comes and will be likely to come in the future from such practices of mobility. To put the emphasis on the mobility's outcomes enlarges the value of mobility beyond the individual sphere to the social and spatial one. Mobility capital, in fact, shows how mobility constitutes a factor of change in people's life by permitting access to goods, places or services (Canzler et al 2008). Moreover, and even more remarkably to the scope of the present work, it mobilises, circulates and interconnects places and resources, producing unforeseen spatial and territorial effects. This aspect enlarges the common notion of motility – i.e. the combination of social mobility and spatial movement (Kaufmann, Bergman, and Joye 2004) – unquestionably implied by the *mukhero* practice: not only the competence to move up while moving in and through the space brings about new values pointing to the forward-oriented disposition of the mobility capital, but it also generates outcomes that, overcoming the individualistic sphere, are generative and transformative for the space itself.

2. The Mobile Urbanity of *mukheristas*

The *mukhero* shows how mobility is increasingly becoming a way of life constitutive of processes underpinning urban formation in Africa and lying on informality meant as a 'generalized mode of metropolitan urbanization' (Roy 2005).

Regarded as a socio-spatial practice, rather than a simple economic activity, *mukhero* becomes a prism highlighting the outcome of mobility, informality and urban space pulled together, that is the capacity of connecting. Once assumed that 'the territory is the use made of it' (Crosta 2010) and such use

is becoming increasingly intertwined with practices of movement and mobility, albeit with different courses and extensions, the trans-local view becomes essential to understand how people, materialities and economies are interconnected.

Looking at mobilities in-between distant but interrelated urban environments helps to reverse what Doel (2003) calls 'pointillism', namely the attitude to render the space as a container. Practices like the *mukhero* examined in the light of their diffused impacts on urbanity show, instead, how nowadays here and elsewhere are increasingly interconnected and power spills within open and unbounded territories. Thence, governance should be conceived reflecting its operating across states and scales in complex and non-linear ways (Allen 2004) and policies should be designed based on explicit acknowledgments of both positive and negative territorial impacts generated also by informal cross-border practices like the *mukhero*.

The theoretical framework of 'mobile urbanity' is therefore of heuristic value as it helps to understand the new forms of urban of the 21st century, within which 'new[ly configured] organizing principles' (Landau 2018) challenge urban scholars, planners and policy makers to renew their interpretative and governance paradigms.

Urban planning and policies, instead, tend not to pay enough attention to the circulation and re-spatialisation of resources and possibilities through movement, in other words to the 'urbanity of movement' Simone (2011) talks about. This reduces the comprehension and capacity of managing contemporary urban life, especially in geographical contexts like the African one where mobility as the engine linking people and localities is, as seen, a constitutive force. In this sense, it can be said that mobility actually makes cities. Such a fact calls for new avenues of policy design in order to appraise, enhance and 'make use' of the function of mobility. But first, it needs a new conception of planning, as proposed in the following chapter.

3. Transactional planning for transactional spaces

An articulated system of transfers is at the origin of *mukhero* and makes the space of the *mukhero* eminently transactional. It has been shown how this structure has developed over time, reaching extended distances and networks that have had a multiplier effect of the transactions put in place. Transactions as transitions, passages among different singularities, are plural by their very nature. In the case of the *mukhero* they have to do with the fact that not only money and goods but also needs, skills, aspirations and interests are conveyed, passed on, circulated and transmitted between cross-border traders, wholesalers, retailers, street vendors, drivers and customers. The value of transaction thus takes on a broader scope than the exclusively economic one: it corresponds to the opening of spaces where resources are mobilized and put in connection. In this sense, transactions are not simple transfers, but manifestations and realization of potential.

As Smas (2008) points out, seen from this perspective, transactions become something in between what Simmel considered the narrower concept of economic exchange and the broader concept of human interaction (Simmel 1971). They can be regarded as projects of different kinds, ranging from monetary transfers and shopping, to places and building consumption, as well as to individual or social experiences. For instance, the agreement between the *mukheristas*, the bus company transporting them and the Oribi Hotel proprietor for the storage of the goods in the hotel is a transaction that accords to and satisfies different projects: the *mukheristas*' project of trading, the bus drivers' project of making their business out of cross-border trades and the hotel owner project of recovering his economic activity, that would otherwise fail because of its disadvantageous location for tourism. All these

might seem purely economic projects, but actually involve various kinds of purposes, such as meeting family needs, breaking free from hardship or even experiencing the autonomy that comes from being-on-the move.

The heterogeneity of compositions making the city from below through transactions lies on principles that are different from solidarity and friendship, whereas they are mainly regulated by convenience. To this regard, Landau (2018) speaks of 'communities of convenience', meaning by them the communities formed on the basis of shared values and interests achievable through collaboration. The communities of convenience tend to eschew friendship because of its binding potential, to converge occasions based on use more than belonging. All the social networks pulled together by the *mukhero* are driven by this principle, regardless the socio-spatial environment and the different regimes of inequality characterizing it. Yet, interest creates opportunities and rebalances social roles, such as allowing trajectories of autonomy to women. This is not to deny that relationships based on more binding ties may also exist, but that they exist together with other tactics that enable a fluid slippage among different worlds.

This calls for a rethinking of the 'co-' particle in social relations among African urban dwellers, which is fundamental to interpret the kind of urban society emerging in Africa.

Transactions, however, have not only a social relevance, but also a spatial importance. As (more or less) 'fleeting moments of encounter and bundling' (Smas 2008), transactions are projects situated in space and time.

The relationship they set up between 'organisms' and the environments is mutually constitutive and dynamic (Sullivan 2001), made of a 'stability that is not stagnation but is rhythmic and developing' (Dewey 1958). Once transactions happen, in fact, they tend to be reproduced, though in different forms, times and spaces. Routine are the bedrock of transactions and the

latter ones happen exactly because they are routinized practices or, in Dew-
eyan terms, a 'habit' (Dewey 1922). If regarded as 'shared practices of negoti-
ation of the world [,] accumulated by layers of learning activity over the life-
course', transactions form 'a disposition, an active orientation to the world'
(Bridge 2013). Therefore, their significance is not so much about repetition,
but about disposition and, thence, will, consistently with Dewey's argument
of 'habit as will' (Dewey 1922).

Through the habit of the *mukhero*, *mukheristas* realize their will and give
their action oriented response to problematic situations shaping the envi-
ronment in which they are immersed. More importantly, the environment
itself comes out as transactional, suggesting the idea of 'transactional space'
(Bridge 2013).

The 'transactional space' is a metaphor to conceptualize the urban space
in a way that, endorsing the Lefebvrean notion of socio-spatial construct,
stretches its extension beyond spatial and time boundaries. Transactional
space is the event in which objects and people, materialities and networks,
are assembled by and in occasion of transactions. In it, co-constitutive net-
works of people and objects, humans and non-humans, are bundled together
in space-time pockets.

The transactional space is chiefly relational, being the outcome of the rela-
tion established by the entities that populate it time by time. It is not a con-
tainer of activities like in the notion of absolute space, but the activity itself,
its happening and the possibility to experience it. Neither it is the space of
the Cartesian isotropic plain, but a fluid plane made of 'multiple spaces that
can be regarded as 'the connective tissue of interpretation across disparate
situations' (Bridge 2013). The transactional space is the result of connection
and intersection between multiple social worlds.

Like synapses in the nervous system, the transactions fostered through mo-
bility accomplish the 'gap junction between networks, thus guaranteeing the

reproduction of urban life'.

The nature of the transactional space is complex to be grasped as it is not thought in exclusive relation to the built environment and the urban design, but as corresponding to the created and recreated 'spatial situations' (a word chosen for its capacity of holding together the two dimensions of time and space).

In order to catch it, it is necessary to reset the usual 'coordinates' we rely on when we think of space on a different element: the network. Networks play a crucial role in the coping strategies of *mukheristas*, such as of African urban dwellers in general, by helping to face situations of crisis, insecurity and vulnerability (Lourenço-Lindell 2001).

It is on networks that the *mukhero* bases its development, while permitting, in turn, the maintenance and reproduction of the networks themselves. Networks are the structural parts that serve critical functions within the trans-local practice of the *mukhero*. They convey a fluid organisational process through complex and shifting geometries and geographies. What emerges is the same informal and shadowed infrastructure made of people that Simone (2004) calls 'people as infrastructure'. In the *mukhero* case, more than the Maputo corridor and the N4 highway, it is the complex 'combinations of objects, spaces, persons and practices' through 'constantly shifting connections' and conjunctions' (Simone 2004) to set up the fundamental platform for the reproduction of the practice. People and all what they circulate are the fundamental elements of these infrastructures. Interpreting the *mukhero* as an infrastructure made of people highlights the relevant 'process of conjunction' between very diverse individuals, needs and capacities it puts together in the case of miserable urban conditions, that are not taken over by governments but react to their same faults and lacks (Simone 2009; De Boeck Plissart 2004). At the same time, it brings about the unleashed potential radiated from a minimal set of elements. Without romanticizing people's

self-organisation nor giving for granted its creativity, the 'notion of people as infrastructure' (Simone 2004) is the key to explain the *mukhero*.

As it has been shown, different networks are pulled and held together within the *mukhero*,, i.e. traders, custom officials, border guards, drivers, sellers, money-changers, but also hoteliers, private warehouse holders, and even associations. For any actor belonging to these networks, the deal of fortuity involved in the possibilities of accumulation is great. However, transactional relationships are not devoid of rationality even if they are contingent and fragile. They are based on a vantage calculation corresponding not as a composite of individual decisions but as a system based on complementarities.

Some individuals and networks involved in the 'system' might also be considered competitors, when they trade the same goods and have the same economic strength. Complementarities, meant as demands, extractions, profits, prices, fees and favors, have to be calibrated carefully in order to keep being implemented and entwined into the overall efficacy of the movement. This allows the peculiar infrastructure – or, rather, composition of infrastructures – coinciding with the *mukhero* not only to hold up, but also to keep running and, while running, to sustain trans-local urban territories.

Drawing value from the transactional spaces of communities of convenience assembled by *mukheristas*, thence, means to acknowledge not only their instability, but also their potential.

In this way, the simultaneously precarious and generative value of transactional places emerges as an issue that cannot be further ignored in a 'neo-liberal post-modern' urban era (Landau, 2018).

Despite the elusiveness of 'associational life' like that of *mukheristas* (Tostensens et. al 2001), due to low degree of formalisation, high instability, invisibility and constant change, the programmatic endeavor of understanding how it actually reproduces is the entry point to understand how contemporary

cities are developing, in Africa and not only. Webs of relationships facilitate people's access to market niches and/or places in the urban environment (Lourenço-Lindell 2001). They are the structure underpinning urban life, although informal and grounded in people's agency.

It is for this reason that we argue that the agency of trans-local urban dwellers lays open to a novel idea of city, where the line between 'domestic' and 'foreign' gets blurred (Parnreiter 2011) by ever-changing transactional interrelations between diverse and distant social worlds. The question of how to handle such an entity goes far beyond local, specific configurations. Being the manner enabling the social and economic life in cities, transactions imply 'forms of reasoning that deal intelligently with the world but are not reasoned out as such' (Bridge 2013).

They create spaces for very diverse and in many cases conflicting claims, that demand a fine capacity of identifying and tackling the issues of concern they set forth.

Transactional organizing principles (or 'transactional rationalities') can only be addressed through a likewise 'transactional approach' from planning, meaning by it an inquiry in the domain of transactions along at least three lines: the kind of the spaces produced; the kind of the relations reiterated; the wills behind transactions as performed habits.

The transactional planning approach is sensible to spatial multiplicities and aware of the necessity of never dismissing a 'contextual wisdom', as part of a relational perspective. It is simultaneously a horizontal and a vertical perspective, trans-local but also transcalar. Although the agency implicit in the translocal urban practices like *mukhero* is patently multi-scaled and able to jump from one context to another – thus unveiling the falsity of the dichotomy between globalisation and locality – it is also subject to different domains of control. Therefore, it cannot be addressed via a generalized and even ap-

proach, but rather through differentiated interventions according to the different 'transactional spaces' it creates, in the sense of overlapping terrains of 'issue formation' (Marres 2007).

The transactional planning approach, thence, is a 'pragmatic audit' (Bridge 2013) of transactional spaces, which identifies in them the privileged spaces for intervention. Equitable to platforms where claims and needs are set forth, transactional spaces emerge as knots where contrasting or collaborative uses of the space and the underlying representations come off the territory, 'intersectional potential' (i.e. the composition of heterogeneous needs and skills) can be enhanced and dysfunctional or unequal relationships between individuals/networks are contrasted or limited.

Notes:

1. As a Spatial Development Initiative (SDI) project, it fell within the job creation strategy of those years, consisting in identifying key geographical zones with proven economic potential for new investments and, thence, fast-tracking private sector capital formation and investment. At its inauguration, the Maputo Corridor was declared to be a long-term vision aimed to value borderlands and transform borders from 'barriers' to 'bridges' through several measures, such as the facilitation and speeding up of goods and people's circulation or the increase of bilateral cooperation and agreements in tourism and industry between the border towns.

2. This is to respond to Jayaram's critique about the lack of clarity on the nature of this specific capital (Jayaram 2016. Jayaram (2016) has drawn his critique to the use of the term 'capital' within mobility studies on the work of Marx by arguing that 'ascribing the word capital to something can only occur after observing and analysing the result of the exchange where a thing is consciously entered into a process for the explicit purpose of generating a profit by internalizing surplus value' (Jayaram 2016). For Jayaram, there is a lack of empirical check of the theoretical elaboration around the concept.

The present work seeks to oppose this trend.

3. Motility is 'the capacity of entities (e.g. goods, information or persons) to be mobile in social and geographic space, or as the way in which entities access and appropriate the capacity for socio-spatial mobility according to their circumstances' (Kaufmann, Bergman, and Joye 2004). As the link between spatial and social mobility, it is proposed as the synthesis between 'mobility as a form of capital' and 'movement capital' as 'the potentiality of movement' (Kaufmann et al. 2004). In other words, it is the totality of a person's propensities for mobility, be it geographical, economic or social. Its distribution and characters may vary from one individual to another, but joint to the other forms of capital, motility supports social practices and social agents', positioning them in the field. The notion of motility rejects both substantive and epistemological arguments against the use of the term capital beyond its exclusively economic form by following a constructivist perspective, focussed on the social constructs that guide social agents' interests and through which power is maintained or distributed.

4. The word 'transaction' comes from the Latin verb 'trans-àgere', that means 'to push/lead beyond'. The etymology contains the dual action inherent in the verb: on the one hand, an action performed by someone/something; on the other hand, the transfer towards someone/something else. 'Trans-àgere' is the action by someone/some-thing to someone/something else and, therefore, a composition between parties. In the art of rhetoric, it is also an 'artifice by which one passes smartly from one situation to another' (Italian Etymological Online Dictionary 2016). This meaning is better expressed by another word, 'transition'.

5. Mobilizing another concept, Landau talks of 'tactical cosmopolitanism' (Landau 2009), referring to the various and often competing tactics deployed by mobile people to shallowly insinuate themselves in the networks and spaces needed to achieve specific practice.

LIST OF FIGURES

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TAB. 1. Goods carried by informal cross-border traders in Africa, SOURCE: INFORMAL CROSS BORDER TRADE REPORT 2014.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

SADC - South African Development Countries

SAMP - Southern African Migration Project

FRELIMO - Frente de Libertaçao de Moçambique

RECs - Regional Economic Communities

ECOWAS - Economic Community of West African States

ECCAS - Economic Community of Central African States

EAC - Economic Community of the Great Lakes, the East African Community

PTA - Eastern and Southern African Preferential Trade Area

COMESA - Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa

SADCC - Southern African Development Coordination Conference

FLS - Frontline States

ILO - International Labour Organisation

ICBT - Informal Cross-Border Traders

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As many translocal and cross-border traders, mukheristas cover thousands of miles every week to supply urban markets, thus feeding themselves, their families and the cities they connect.

After an intensive field work travelling with mukheristas between Maputo (Mozambique) and Johannesburg (South Africa), the author shows the role of complex hybrid practices of trans-local mobility in shaping cities and territories in sub-saharan Africa.

A "research on the road" to reflect on the political relevance of informal mobile practices in troubled urban societies, but also on new theoretical concepts and empirical research approaches.

In a world where change is extremely rapid and new issues emerge unremittingly, 'Mobile urbanity' opens up new ways of thinking the spatial dimensions and the agency embraced in human mobility.

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