POPULATION IDENTITIES AND URBANIZATION: Reconciling identity of spaces with Spatial Development; The case of Luenha, Mozambique

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Resumo:

This paper seeks to question the rationale of urbanization in rural precincts of Mozambique; with a closer look at the case of Luenha settlement. The discussion revolves around the theme of population identities which discusses ways in which identity, culture and the general way of living is disregarded in the urbanization process. Development is mostly presupposed by global models that at times overlook the particularity of an area; the specific identity of an area that is part and parcel of the production of spaces through the urbanization process. The paper dwells on the local perspectives of what 'going' or 'being' urban means to the local community compared to global constructs of what urban is. It is an invitation to try and look for ways in which urbanization can occur in tandem with socio-cultural traditions, so as not to lose the identity in new produced spaces within settlements that already had a well-developed identity. As an entry to the discussion, the paper looks at how population identities are embodied in Luenha landscape, how population identities can inform on the design and planning of new spaces; and planning projects are designed threatening to destroy and change population identities. At last, initial discussion points are given to invite all professionals to think of how urbanization should be perceived and how to ensure existing population identities are included in the design of urban development plans. The paper comes as a post-reflection of a paper carried out as part of a Master's Thesis on Population Identities in Luenha: "Population Identities: A Look the Settlement of Luenha in Tete, Mozambique" at KU Leuven in 2018. For the paper, a fieldtrip was done under the umbrella of the Urbanism Studio and, for the current paper, observations made on site, interviews and conversations with the local population were revisited and well as the revision of literature regarding identity and theories regarding the problematic of the development of settlements and resettlements of the global South and their inability to accommodate the identity of the places of intervention.

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INTRODUCTION

Human race has, since the agricultural revolution, settled in places and established relations amongst themselves and with nature that gave these settlements uniqueness. Over time and as empires expanded, communities expanded, taking in and influencing each other in terms of beliefs, habits, culture and the use of space.

As settlements expand, whether in urban or rural areas, the dynamics of identity are felt, and the specificities of places as socio-spatial landscapes are threatened. As suggested my Kaymaz (2013, p.739), there is an increasing need to include "the concept of identity on the agenda of planners and designers" for urbanization and global processes "have caused a rapid change on our environments." This need to answer to this is to ensure "the sustainability of place identity." (Kaymaz, 2013, p.739). Place identity was, for a long time, one of the least studied subjects when speaking of urban development/growth and this neglect has led many planning projects to fail due to the inability of adaptation of communities to these new produced spaces.

Understanding population identities revolves around the understanding of how a community behaves socially, how their ethic and cultural background shapes their behavior and how these are translated into the space they occupy, from social roles to the forms of occupation of the territory and their relation with nature. These traits can be very dynamic and are influenced by many forces. However, some traits take longer to dissipate, and these are the ones which are considered as permanent traits that make a certain group unique.

Place identity is a manifestation of the population identities on the landscape. It's the meaning people ascribe to the space they interact with as their way of life. The spatial morphology of the settlements they inhabit is a result of how the space is perceived, how habits and traditions are carried out and how the communities have adapted to the surroundings which they live in. It is "an important dimension of the social-cultural life in urban areas. The continuity of place identity is strongly linked to place attachment and sense of belonging." (Kaymaz, 2013, p.740). According to Kaymaz, humans only adjust and accept an area once a sense of belonging has been attached to it. This includes aspects of environmental psychology, which are crucial to developing "an emotional and cognitive bond" as well as a "feeling of security and a sense of community". Therefore, no place that has been occupied for long periods of time exists without specific traits brought and shaped by the people who occupy it. Within the rural context, the identities are developed and translated based on three main domains namely: the social, the spatial and the natural. These forms can be understood through the reading of the settlements in terms of how the settlements are shaped, how the public spaces are conceived and how the inhabitants interact with nature.

As settlements undergo development especially of physical infrastructure, the identification, recognition and translation of the population identities that bring place identity to the affected area are often neglected, solely focusing on bringing universal models of planning to try to, as SANTOS (2010) stated "catch up" with the remaining world, which follows modernist models. Little attention is given to the fact that many modernist

planning projects have failed along the way (the city of Brasilia, Pruit Igoe, etc.) and that cultural dependence is particularly important analyze and study the materialization of cities. The author then suggests the use of the term "ecology" as to mean hybrid understandings of reality and the diversity of the world as well as the plurality of the heterogeneous knowledge.

This means that looking at designing of spaces should go beyond care for environmental sustainability; it is crucial to accommodate the social sustainability of places: the respect and continuation of perceptions of space, which equate to the identities of the population residing in the areas to be affected by the projects.

Instead of promoting urbanism as what is seen in the cities, as Roy (2011) discusses in her text regarding Subaltern Urbanisms, it is time to look at the peripheral (also considered in-between spaces, by Simone (2010), gray and informal areas from a different lens: it is time to give such places with such a strong identity and dynamics a category of study and intervention of their own, which brings value and teaches the rest of the existing urbanized spaces a new approach of intervention.

Simone (2010) calls out for the need to look at peripheral spaces as places that are in-between rural and urban spaces, which is the case of Luenha, a city that has the status of an urban space but functions within a rural context. These peripheral spaces are still rich in culture and identity and this should not be lost as they are exposed to development projects.

THE LANDSCAPE AS A REFLECTION OF POPULATION IDENTITIES

To study population identities, it's necessary to understand what builds a settlement: social and built environments and understand how these identities are manifested within the settlement. Bearing this in mind, and knowing that it is important to look at the territory through multiple lenses, three main elements that compose the landscape of the settlement were taken into observation: *the social identity* (usually resistant to manipulation and change), which focuses on the psychological attributes acquired by a group and are historical, value-laden and self-defining; the *ethnic and cultural identities*, which only differ on the scale(whole society or groups that compose the society), but are both regarding cultures and traditions; and *the urban identity* of the settlement, which was read through the many layers of the materiality of the settlement, the places and non-places as defined by Augè as well as how space is explored and exploited, thus making it unique in character, image, etc. .

With the lenses of social, ethnic/cultural and urban identities in mind, Luenha can be seen, indeed, as unique. Based on fieldwork and conversations with the population throughout the settlement, it was possible to understand the local perceptions and relationships developed amongst the residents and how the main three elements that make

up the settlement are carefully intertwined and have found a dynamic of its own: the social, the built and the natural landscape.

The social landscape.

It is constituted mostly by locals, immigrants from surrounding regions and foreigners from Zimbabwe. Luenha faces no clash between cultures but shows continued change and adaptations: there is an increasing number of school children, women work on more than domestic affairs and men, who by tradition did not accept such changes, accept and welcome them, going as far as allowing for women to travel for periods of time due to work-related responsibilities. Socially, the tribe which is most present in the settlement, the Nyungwe, also demand that respect is taken to its highest levels, and the public space is a space for all: children, adults and elders; there is no social segregation.

The built landscape.

The built landscape is translated into how the space is occupied. Besides the development made along the road, which has been previously discussed, the remaining space has three different ways in which it presents itself, even though the most common feature is that they work as solid units which turn their backs on the existing infrastructure, only reaching into the "urbanized" area for specific purposes. The first, is through the most traditional form of the settlements the Nyungwe tribe follows, where the house is a homestead and is intrinsically merged with nature: the tree functions as a social space for the house and most activities are done under their shade.

Figures 1 & 2: Built Identity according to traditional conceptions of space
Source: Mavie, E. Population Identities: A Look the Settlement of Luenha in Tete, Mozambique. MaHS Thesis Paper, Studio Urbanism. Spring 2018 and Source: MaHS, Studio Urbanism. Spring 2018

The homestead is the house unit and it presents itself fragmanted. The house increases within the space defined for a determined family as the children grow and hit puberty. In general, the main house which faces the road belongs to the parents and every other construction is made surrounding the main construction. Various trees can be found throughout the compound and serve as complementary rooms to the house.
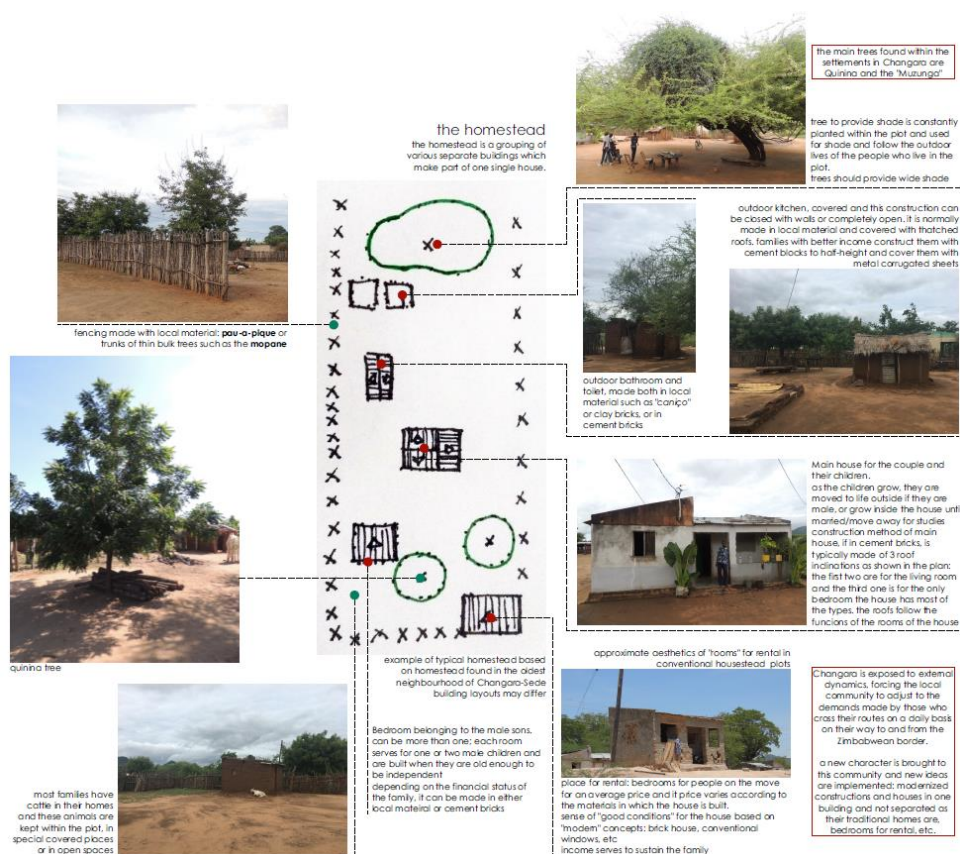
Figure 3: Example of a Homestead
Source: MaHS, Studio Urbanism. Spring 2018

The second space is what, in the paper about population identities was defined as an in-between space. A space that shows traces of a need for the physical delimitation of plots. Here, the traditional homestead is also found, but some inhabitants also start to move towards the urban perception of the house as a single unit.
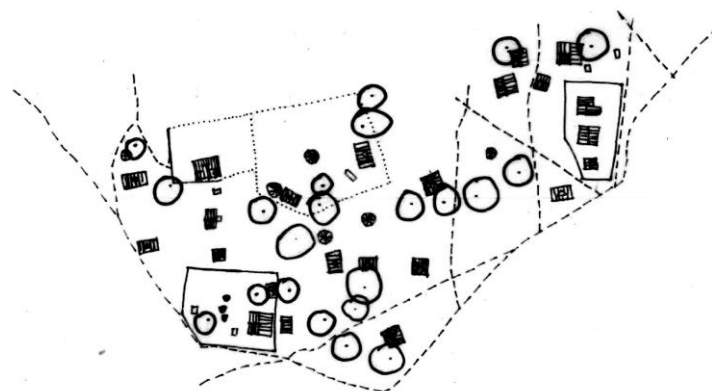

Figure 4: Built Identity according to mixed population identities
Source: Mavie, E. Population Identities: A Look the Settlement of Luenha in Tete, Mozambique. MaHS Thesis Paper, Studio Urbanism. Spring 2018

The third and final space is located within the area designated for expansion of the settlement, following a planning project. In this area of the settlement, traces of both types of morphology can be found. In conversations with both government officials and local

population, a general acceptance of a tendency to defy the proposed mesh imposed by the government was identified. Like in the area that functions traditionally, footpaths are found crossing numerious plots and used by all, dismissing the project which redefines what private and public spaces should be.
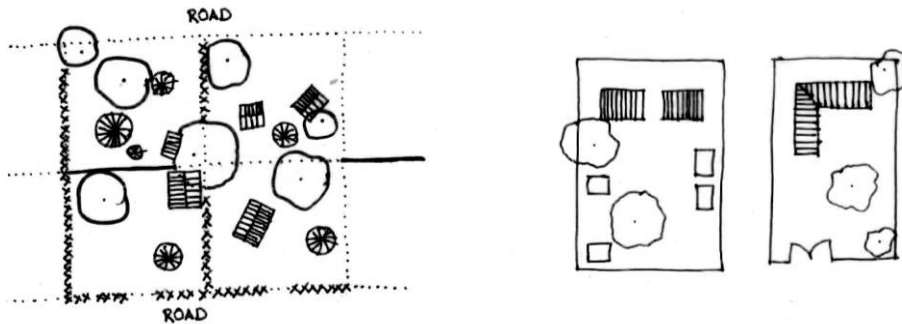

Figure 5: Built Identity according to expansion plan approved and implemented in 2011
Source: Mavie, E. Population Identities: A Look the Settlement of Luenha in Tete, Mozambique. MaHS Thesis Paper, Studio Urbanism. Spring 2018

The perception of common space in Luenha differs from that of urban spaces: every public shade provided by trees is seen as a public space. The private space, on the other hand is delicately delimited with elements which are not visible to the eye, but respected by all.

Figure 6: Built Landscape: various use of materials
Source: MaHS, Studio Urbanism. Spring 2018

Within these three typologies, one external influence that cannot be denied is the change in the materials used for the housing. Cement bricks and metal sheets have replaced the clay walls and the thatched roofs.

The natural landscape

This landscape, as shown on the map below, is present throughout the settlement. The natural landscape is highly regarded within the settlement and many local trees can be found. Additionally, the population uses the vegetation for multiple uses, from curing diseases to creating shade.
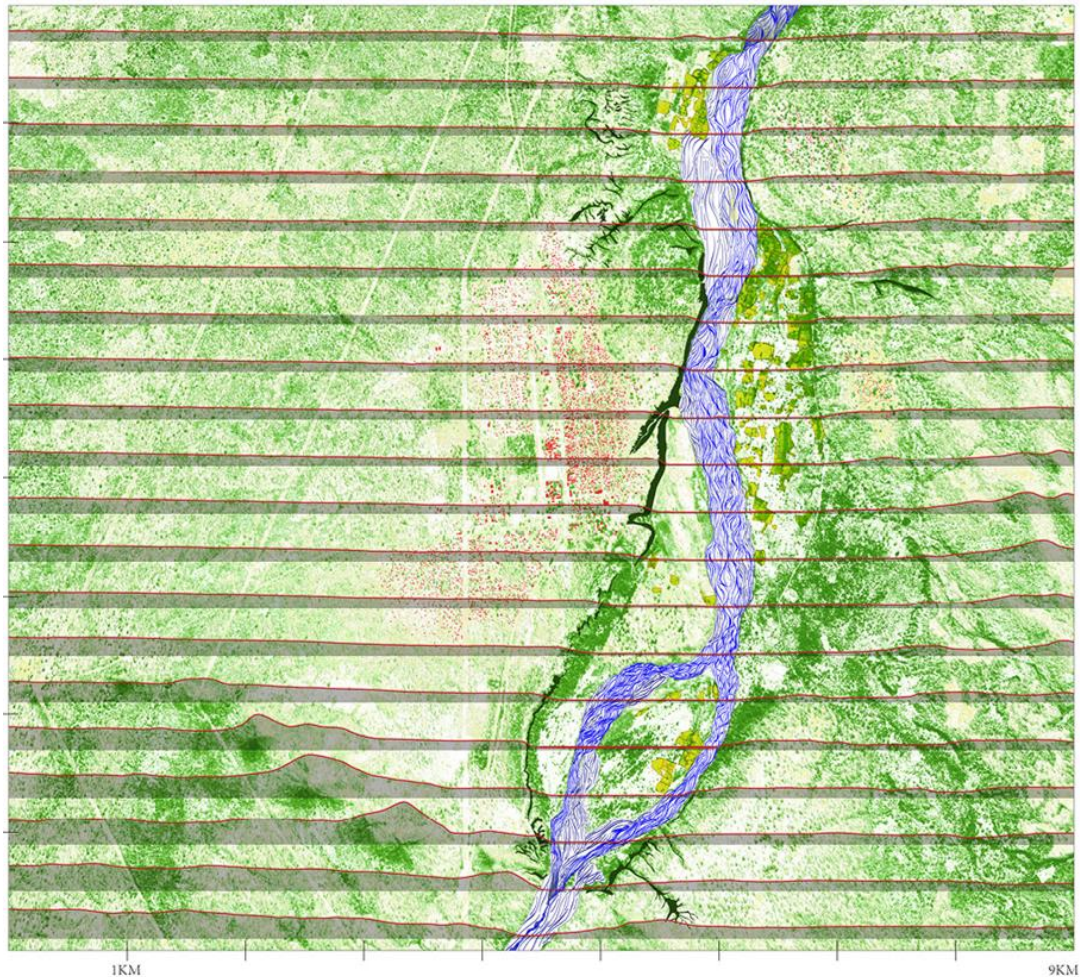

1KM   9KM

Figure 7: Natual VS Anthropogenic Occupation of the Territory
Source: MaHS, Studio Urbanism. Spring 2018

The river and the forest are seen as the main sources of support of this community. Intrinsically connected to both, the river is the main source of water and fertile soils, and the forest the source of wood, wild fruits, grazing for the cattle, etc.

The population commutes daily to both extremes of the settlements seeking both and this is physically reflected through the footpaths which head in both directions, within the settlements. However, the need they find to stay close to the river is evident, despite the advanced case of erosion that can be observed.

Additionally, the manipulation of the existing natural elements such as trees ensures the overall environment within the settlement is liveable and appreciated by all.

Figure 8: Manipulation of natural elements to create functional spaces underneath
Source: MaHS, Studio Urbanism. Spring 2018

UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM OF USING UNIVERSAL MODELS OF DEVELOPMENT IN OTHER CONTEXTS: THE CASE OF LUENHA

 "Many parts of African and Asian urban regions are considered uninhabitable. They are the homes of marginalized black and brown bodies that cannot really be homes because their environments are incompatible with what normally would be required for human sustenance. Because these regions are, in the end, the "responsibility" of those who inhabit them, the fact that they appear as uninhabitable also renders their inhabitants fully human. (…) …thus becomes an almost unspoken poof of the normality of spatial inequality that either will not be overcome or, alternatively, requires an almost unfathomable deployment of effort and resources to undo. This view also suggests that a definitive and unyielding image of urban efficacy and human thriving exists and should be the object of aspiration by those living in supposedly uninhabitable spaces." Simone (2017, p-60-61)

But people live in "uninhabitable" spaces, and they thrive, and deserve the respect for it. They find ways to manipulate the existing and secure their lives, attenuating the harsh conditions and even creating success stories that involve specific social, cultural and spatial landscapes. Areas outside urban centers show the world successful stories every day, be them a slum, a periphery or a rural area, demanding from scholars inclusive studies such as subaltern urbanism to be included and re-thought as stories with potential from which to learn from, and where universal, pre-defined models of development prove to be

unsuccessful. These spaces demand for "recognition on spaces of poverty and forms of popular agency that often remain invisible and neglected in the archives and annuals of urban theory" (Roy, 2011, p.224).

Due to the need to develop or expand (for the case of Luenha) these "particular" areas, countries like Mozambique find themselves designing planning projects which go in accordance with modernist concepts, which are the ones being followed by the rest of the world, and are more easily accepted and recognized as "urban" and "developed." However, they fail when they neglect the need to include not only the population's needs, but also the manifestations of their cultures in such projects, reflecting their perceptions of, for example, public spaces and their need for living within nature.

> Governments tend to choose to not pay attention to the details of what actually happens on the ground, seeing these as interferences and "preferring to remain at of broad policy survey, pronouncement and one-size-fits-all regulation." These details "are also evidence in their own right. The task is how to re-describe them, not in terms of best practices, but in vernaculars that can convey their singularities and also their possible relevance in relation to the other settings. For details constitute a medium through which links among supposedly disparate places, people, histories and materials within specific regions can be interwoven and reworked." Details "are like wildcards that can bring out or complete something unfinished and point everyday experience in other directions beyond the repetition of routines." Simone (2017, p. 64)

The ability to translate what is surveyed and classified as population identities into 'development projects' or 'urbanization programmes', is what is considered by many as "perfect planning". As discussed by Simone (2017) in Re-descriptions, the secret to successful and inclusive planning projects is including the details many governments choose to keep from use, to hide, to pretend does not exist in strategic planning projects, taking it away from the "governmental fetish" and turning it into "another tool to render particular intersections and potentialities of the city more explicit and desirous without succumbing to the conceit that the strategy is all that is going on, or needed." Simone (2017, p.94)

However, due to the constant need to "catch-up" with the rest of the world, countries such as Mozambique many times find themselves forced into universal planning solutions, ignoring the population identities of whole settlements in order to assure a development that goes according to western perceptions. Development, however, should be redefined. Due to this misconception, social, cultural and urban identities are ignored, going against what sociologist Santos (2010, p. 36), inspired by Faleto, Cardoso and Waisman, refers to as the importance of cultural dependence in the concepts of materialization of cities (or rural settlements, for this particular case).

Luenha did not escape this. From a settlement within a rural context that, as previously said, turns its back to the "urbanized" area (the formal development made along the main road that cuts the settlement into West and East) and created an environment and

dynamics of its own for the majority of its activities such as the search for water and animal grazing places, it was faced with a development plan which forced the community into a universal planning model, which has proved itself hard to adapt.

Looking at the notational drawing of Luenha below, it is seen that the eastern side of the settlement presents itself as very organic and with no grid-like structure. Here, the built landscape reflects the population identity of the majority of the population of the Nyungwe tribe that resides there. The urban space is perceived as organic and permeable, allowing for circulation throughout the settlement with very few physical barriers. In this built landscape, the social space is defined by the trees with the biggest shade and there is a clear distinction between public and private social spaces: one easily understands which trees are used as outdoor kitchens for the families and how many are public.

Figure 9: Notational Map of Luenha
Source: MaHS, Studio Urbanism. Spring 2018

Figure 10: Example of Mopani tree used as extension of private space
Source: MaHS, Studio Urbanism. Spring 2018

Because the eastern side of Luenha was increasingly threatened by the ever-expanding erosion, the district government proposed a new expansion plan on the Western side of the settlement, aimed at reshaping the existing occupation. This project was carried out by the community and many men carried out the task of cutting down the main element which turns their living conditions bearable: the native tress, in the forest area which had been reserved for the expansion of the settlement area.

The plan aimed to distribute DUATs (official document which gives rights to explore pieces of land) to the resettled families and so, defined plot sizes for the resettled families as well as the ones left behind in the risk zone. Addionally, the plan defined parks and other open spaces for the inhabitants to benefit from.

The result was a grid-oriented urban mesh which subdivided the land into regular plots, with a few native trees which were able to provide social space, be it private or public. The natural landscape suffered massive destruction, giving space to the families to be resettled. Due to their need and dependence on trees for shade and fruits, the resettlements ensured the reforestation of the place with species known for being quick-growing.

Figure 11: Development Plan for Existing and New Expansion Area in Luenha, 2011
Source: District Department of Planning and Infrastructure, 2018

The refusal to incorporate the existing spatial occupations in the plan and the rigid, grid-like mesh clearly demonstrates the tendency to ignore what happens on land and the tendency to impose universal models, in the search for modernist-inspired urban spaces, whether in urban or rural contexts. As stated by Kaymaz (2013, p.757), "the mutual relationship between people and their environments should be well understood and interpreted in order to create and maintain liveable places."

Santos (2010) discusses the refusal found in projects imposed by modern rationality, and, through the term "ecology", advocates for hybrid understandings of global reality and diversity as well as knowledge and inter-knowledge and the recognition of the "plurality of heterogeneous knowledge". This allows for design plans of development to incorporate

more than the usual variables: economic and environmental sustainability. By incorporating social sustainability through the acceptance of population identities that influence the use of space and particularities specific to the place ensure that plans can be successfully implemented and have people relate to them due to a feeling of belonging.

The Luenha Expansion Plan has failed to be fully implemented or accepted by the local population. In the areas that were densely occupied, few have managed to build formal, rigid plot limits. Otherwise, the inhabitants continue to live as before, according to what they identify themselves with. In the resettlement area, Luenha lives a miscellaneous reality: while the expansion plan on the Western side of the main road was carried out, the population ignores the newly installed concepts of public and private and the conception of plots as well as the idealized proposal of houses as one single unit and not dispersed rooms within the family plot, and newly carved out paths across plots towards their main destinations: the market (within what is considered part of the urban structure and with a strong relation to the main national road), the river and the forest.
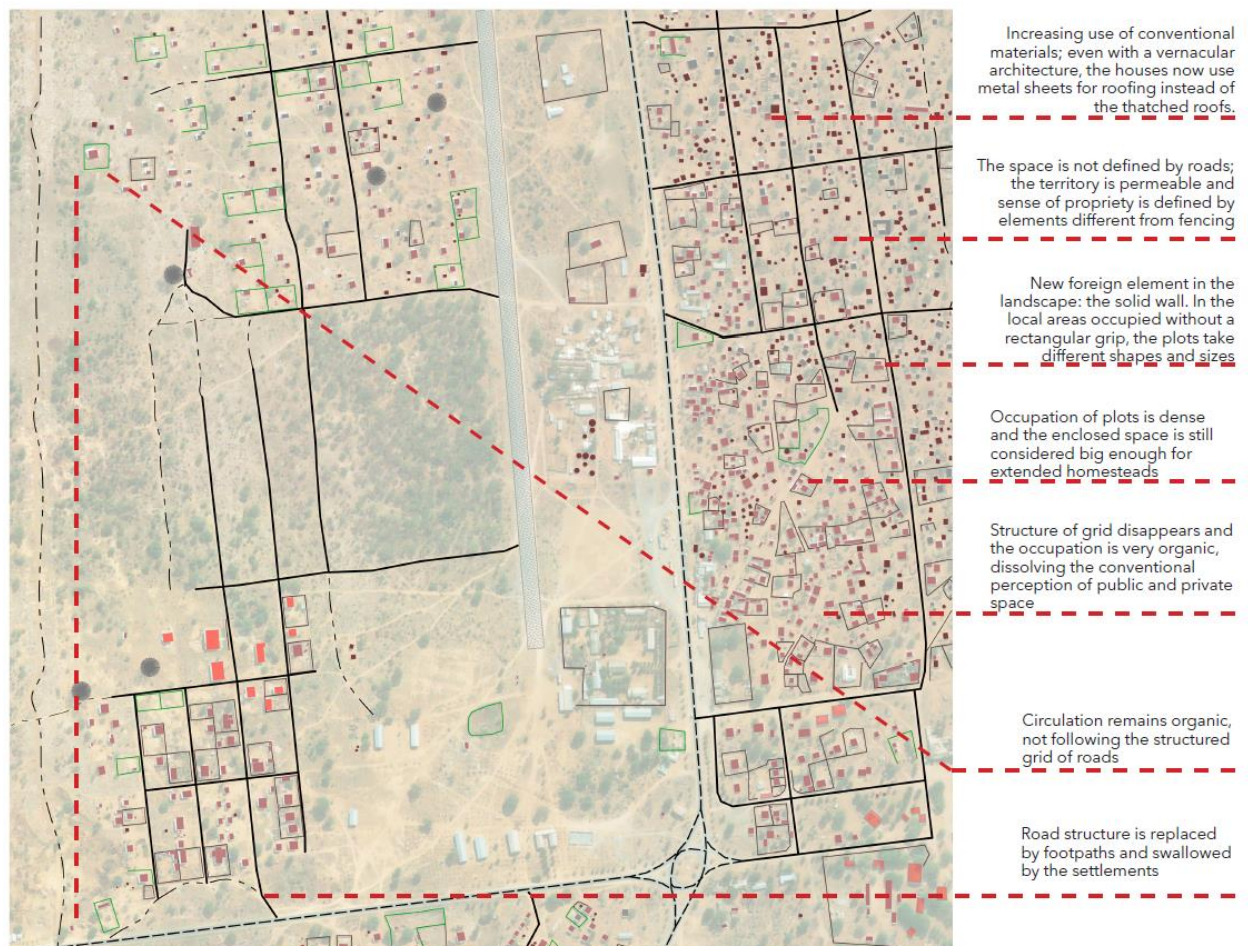

Increasing use of conventional materials; even with a vernacular architecture, the houses now use metal sheets for roofing instead of the thatched roofs.

The space is not defined by roads; the territory is permeable and sense of propriety is defined by elements different from fencing

New foreign element in the landscape: the solid wall. In the local areas occupied without a rectangular grip, the plots take different shapes and sizes

Occupation of plots is dense and the enclosed space is still considered big enough for extended homesteads

Structure of grid disappears and the occupation is very organic, dissolving the conventional perception of public and private space

Circulation remains organic, not following the structured grid of roads

Road structure is replaced by footpaths and swallowed by the settlements

Figure 12: Current occupation of Luenha, since the 2011 Expansion Planning Project
Source: Author, MaHS, Spring 2018

RE-DEFINING DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING APPROACHES IN RURAL SETTLEMENTS

> "Urbanization involves complex relay systems, including the relationships of people to specific places and functions, the relations among specific production activities and sectors, and the distribution of commodities, services and information across variously composed spaces." How can these be brought together and made to function as a whole? SIMONE (2017, p. 64)

Not just urbanization, but development as a whole. Development is one terminology which constantly causes friction within urban, suburban and rural areas due to its primary perception: development equates to urbanization. But are all areas to become urban over time, or can the rural remain rural after undergoing development projects?

Like Boaventura de Sousa Santos in his work "*Um ocidente não ocidentalista?: a Filosofia à venda, A douta Ignorância e a Aposta de Pascal*", this is an invitation to propose alternatives in dealing with diversity and heterogeneity. To discuss the need for interventions which include identities and the need to advocate for plans which are made to fit a context; not to follow western models. It is needed to bring to the table, once again, the need to go beyond the planning that is heavily influenced by modern science, which was developed for specific contexts and does not fit every reality. Even with the pressing need to grow and fit into what a city is considered to be, there needs to be an acceptance of the existing for this can contribute to fruitful, functioning settlements both in urban, suburban, rural and resettlement areas. By accepting notions of form, chaos and landscape, planning products and cities can become inclusive, unique and lived and accepted by all, having the morphology of the settlements not only reflect the population identities of the place, but also its aspirations.

Abdoumaliq Simone also calls for new ways of looking at the urban environment for how they are made, managed and how their economies function may be different from what it appears. He makes an invitation to look at how, sometimes, instead of improving the conditions of the affected communities, planning instruments bring uncertainty and, in "'wild' attempts, turn the city into something that it is not (yet)…". This aspect brings Luenha back into the question. Is this city ready to become a new urban centre?

There is a need to accept diversity within planning models, adjusting universal approaches to the various contexts in which these projects will be implemented, originating heterogeneity and hybrid spaces; layers of knowledge and a rejection of many planning projects do: the rejection of the existing. This, however, does not mean every plan should include every aspect that defines a certain community. There are numerous traits that can be overlooked while designing, bearing in mind that the communities themselves will not fail to carry them out. Other aspects, however, need to be taken into account. The main one is how many communities understand space: public, private and how they live it and how the natural landscape is brought into the settlements: is it an element to be left in the

background and is subtle or is it essential that it is active and included in the morphology of the settlement? This enables the territory to be lived and to have the least non-spaces (as defined by Augè).

With all the existing rural planning models, why attempt to turn a rural context into an urban one? Is there no other way to intervene in rural areas without disrupting or corrupting the local identities of the place? And if there are, how to we approach them?

As for Luenha, it has developed within a rural context. Should it become urban? Is there no other way of developing it and improving the living conditions of the community without turning it into a rigid, grid-like settlement that does not differ much from the cities living in urban contexts?

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