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Being in-between "to return or to stay": exploring the experiences of urban displaced people in Mozambique's Pemba

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Abstract

The province of Cabo Delgado, located in the north of Mozambique, has been inflicted by the conflict and terrorist actions since 2017. The threats they pose, and the unfolding fragility of the security situation have forced over 1.4 million people to flee their homes and communities. While thousands of displaced people are reluctant to risk their lives and return, over five hundred thousand displaced people made their spontaneous way back "home," and the country continues to struggle with such a reality. In the face of violent disruption and displacement, this paper offers an exploratory review of return from the perspective of encountering and giving meaning to places. Leaving culture (reflexivity again) a bit out, the paper closely looks at the (social and economic) experiences people have developed and carried with them through their displacement (and return) narratives as the main factors influencing the decision to or not to return. This article would then have a twofold purpose. On the one hand, it contributes to the existing debate on conflict, displacement, place and place-making. On the other hand, it would be beneficial to enrich the ongoing research further.

Keywords Displacement · Decision-making · Return · Place and place-making

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1 Introduction

A new form of conflict took place in Mozambique, particularly in the Cabo Delgado province. The province is located in the north of Mozambique, bordered by Tanzania to the North, Niassa Province to the West, Nampula Province to the South, and the Indian Ocean to the East. Cabo Delgado Province is divided into seventeen Districts.[1] According to the most recent national census (2017), the province is the fourth most populated in the country and has a total population of 2,333,278 people. The electricity access rate is approximately 14.90%, the second lowest in the country. The province has 2,914 km of roads, with only 14% of them being primary roads and the majority being tertiary roads. A large percentage (73.6%) of the roads are unpaved, which could affect ground transportation during the rainy season. The province's economy is dominated by subsistence agriculture. A few of the cash crops include cashews, sesame seeds, and cotton. Small-scale fisheries are the most significant contributor to the sector. Artisanal fishers' households consume and sell the surplus locally. Industrial and semi-industrial fishers focus on shallow-water shrimp, deep-water shrimp, and line fishing. Industrial tuna fishing is also present in Cabo Delgado. Tourism fishing is an important contributor to the provincial economy. Other important activities include livestock production, manufacture, and trade. Concerning the extractive industry, the province is home to a graphite operation in Balama District, and large reserve of natural gas. Many of the natural gas discoveries in the Rovuma Basin have placed Mozambique amongst the top ten countries with the most natural gas reserves in the world (SNV n.d).

The conflict has been, arguably, branded as terrorism (US Department of Sate 2022, 2023). In August 2023, this conflict forced over 1.4 million people to flee their communities (International Organization for Migration 2023). It was estimated that hundreds of people displaced by the attacks in Palma, Quissanga, and Macomia districts had found temporary refuge in transit centers and with host families in Pemba City and other neighbouring districts. The city of Pemba is the capital of the province of Cabo Delgado. The conflict brought profound changes to the city, from a demographic explosion and increased pressure on public services to an increase in informal businesses and the cost-of-living expenditure. While many displaced persons were reluctant to risk their lives and return to their place of origin or wherever they used to live, the United Nations Agency for Migration estimats that over five hundred thousand had spontaneously returned to their villages and communities without assistance or a promised assistance, due to pulling and pushing factors, including those related with protection and the lack of funds. This two-behaviour tendency (stay and return) is influencing and will continue to influence the lives of the displaced and displacement, thus undermining policies and plans for reconstruction and rehabilitation at macrolevel; and impacting the lives displaced, at microlevel.

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[1] Ancuabe, Balama, Chiúre, Ibo, Macomia, Mecúfi, Meluco, Metuge, Mocímboa da Praia, Montepuez, Mueda, Muidumbe, Namuno, Nangade, Palma, Pemba, Quissanga and five municipalities: Chiúre, Mocímboa da Praia, Montepuez, Mueda and Pemba. (SNV n.d)

This paper examines the beliefs and decision-making emerging from the experience of being displaced and whether these particularities influence the decision to or not to return. How do people who are displaced by conflict and living in host families make a place for themselves? How do they perceive that the conditions affect their everyday lives and the notions of place and place-making? These two overarching questions provide the basic organizational structure for this article. The first part looks at issues of the general context of the displaced persons in the city of Pemba: the roots of displacement, and the second gives the predicaments of the displaced, the choice of returning or resettlement, and the relationship between people and place.

2 Methods

In June 2022, the author worked with the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) to conduct field semi-structured interviews with the displaced and their hosts living in the city of Pemba. Those interviews built a working paper that seeks to bring evidence and raise awareness of the myriad ways the displaced people cope with their displacement (Sturridge, Feijó and Tivane 2022). This article is built upon ODI's unused interviews which contain considerable raw materials that were not included in ODI's paper. Using them, the author would contribute to the ongoing academic debate on conflict, displacement, and place and place-making. The research represents a new dimension in the current debate in Mozambique. This article would then have a twofold purpose: to contribute to the existing debate and further enrich my ongoing research, focusing on the (changing) perceptions of risks in conflict-related displacement areas (Fig. 1).

The interviews themselves were semi-structured. Almost all were conducted in the local language by a local former colleague from the university, except those that the author managed to conduct in Portuguese. All were then translated into Portuguese. It was at this point that I became aware of an unforeseen Hunt and Trotman's dilemma: to let the interviews speak for themselves or to appropriate them. Following their example, the author decided to appropriate them (Hunt and Trotman n.d), whenever it was necessary for two reasons: First, the author assumed that the translation of the interview from one language to the other occurred with some minimal changes in the original content. Second, the intention is to raise public awareness about the experience of displaced people and the implications of integration or return — which the author believes might contribute to addressing the challenge of reconstruction; and inform decision-makers, development practitioners, and humanitarian actors.

The interviews aimed to gather in-person and direct lived experiences from displaced people and their hosts throughout displacement. A total of thirty-five displaced people and five host families were interviewed. These respondents are residents from different neighbourhoods in Pemba who fled the districts of Mocimboa da Praia, Palma, Macomia, Muidume, and Quissanga. Additional interviews were conducted with four key informants. These data were supplemented with other
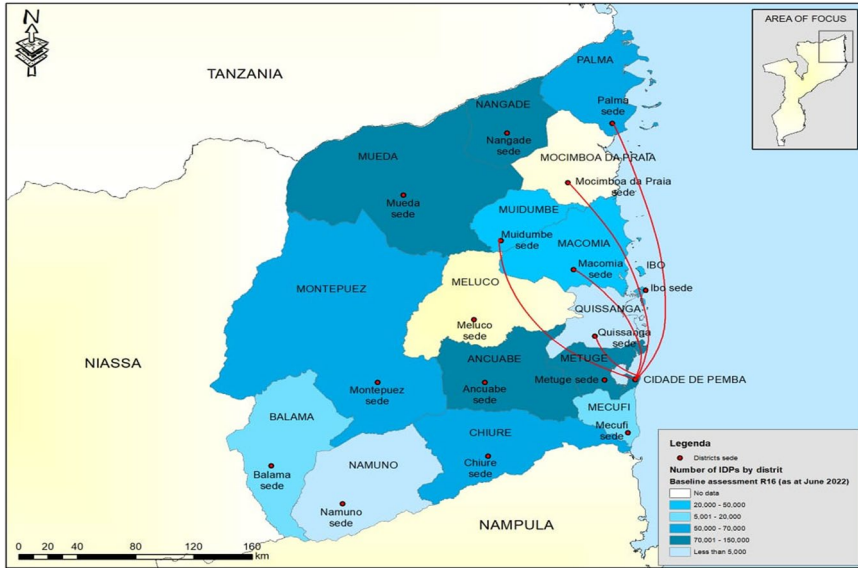
Fig. 1 Cabo Delgado recorded movement and origin of the displaced who live in Pemba according to our interviews. This map was elaborated based on information available on DTM/IOM's baseline assessment R16, from June 2022| Creation date: 03 November 2022 | Created by: Nickson Rafael Amos

information collected through observation on the ground and informal discussions with local community leaders (secretários dos bairros).

This paper also uncluttered other authors' concepts, references, and insights from geographical to philosophical and anthropological studies about place and place-making and refugees as secondary data, drawing on that research in Pemba, including the author's fieldwork background in several displacement camps.

3 Results and discussion

3.1 The memories of displacement: a perspective from the urban displaced people in Pemba

"After the ordeal [the attack], when the bandits had entered Palma, we left around 4 pm on 24 March [2021]. We walked past some villages, some of which I cannot remember the names. There's a village called Quionga … we walked past all these villages and went to an island in Palma called Suavo, where we stayed for three days. Afterward, we had to go to Tanzania and then return to our country. So, we left Suavo, went back to a village called Quionga, and then took these sailing boats to the Tanzania-Mozambique border. I don't know what it's called, but right on the border." [female interviewee]

The nature and root of the conflict and its respective consequences have been widely documented (Feijó and Maquenzi 2019; Hanlon 2021). From the perspective of our interviewees, this conflict is indeed a result of economic changes, lack of economic inclusion and youth unemployment. Due to the lack of inclusion of local processes and mechanisms for negotiation and mediation, these factors led to communities' grievances, which were expressed in attacks that escalated into violent conflict. They all observe that it is the government's responsibility to end it. As it is largely argued, Hanlon (2021) pointed out that aspirations of jobs and access to schools and hospitals have failed to materialize. The implementation of investment dragged on for years with periods of absence of reliable and timely information, upsetting the population's expectations and creating grievances. Local fundamentalist preachers began to argue that the economic problems in Cabo Delgado were due to a corrupt form of Islam, and that only Sharia law[2] would bring equity and a fairer share of the province's wealth. As of June 2022, violence and conflict were up sevenfold, spreading to southern Cabo Delgado, Niassa, and Nampula.

This conflict also expresses acts of terror, which they now must run from to save their lives:

> *"When we left Mocimboa, we came in a very large boat, but the owner of the boat could not make it with us here because he was killed in the middle of the sea. His throat was cut, and we were told by those who killed them ['terrorists'] to go and tell the others how he died."* [male interviewee]

Most of the victims of these attacks have their own stories and memories of how they have managed to escape and found refuge in the city of Pemba.

From our sample of interviews, the vast majority are women. They have their views on the origins of this gender imbalance. Those whose husbands are not with them believe that they were killed, detained, or joined the insurgency. As for the percentage of children, many women fled with 5 or 7 children. There are situations of unaccompanied children who somehow have managed to escape the conflict and violence. They left their houses in search of safety and now live with *adoptive* families. These children and adults are subjected to *hosting contributions*, whether in money, work, or food for daily living onus. These contributions starts to be demanded *after 3 or 4 months* of them living with a host family. One of the hosts interviewed explained that the high cost of living in Pemba and limited livelihood sources restrict host families' willingness to absorb more displaced people for longer periods.

There are uncountable cases of those who reported having arrived by boat, bus, foot, or airplane (in some cases — from Palma). Those who arrived by bus were the ones who walked long distances, spending between 3 to 7 days or even

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[2] Sharia law is a religious law derived from the precepts of Islam, particularly the Koran and the Hadith. The fundamentalists who lead the insurgency are Koranists who do not accept the Hadith and other Islamic precepts. Their version of Sharia law is different from that of other Cabo Delgado Muslims. In general, the Islamic approach has been to foster a society based on generosity and cooperation, values which are antithetical to greed, while accepting a free-market economy. (Hanlon 2021).

a month in the bushes, and therefore could not bring anything with them, aside from a few clothes and their children. Some had two or three stops in different districts or villages, either to get to the city of Pemba or to find transport (boat or car) to the city of Pemba. Other people had to walk miles to a place where they could find a boat or a vehicle to take them to villages. Vulnerable groups, such as the elderly, people with disabilities, and children, struggled the most while fleeing and walking. Many interviewees reported opportunistic charging for transport fees. The tariff of private operators raised from 50 to 1000 MTN for a single person, including children:

> *"It was a difficult situation. Very difficult. Then, the transporters were charging a lot of money … we used to pay 200 MZN to come here to the city. But they started to charge 350 MZN, 900 MZN…"* [male interviewee]

They say these circumstances prompted them to decide to abandon their communities. In districts where information about planned attacks came early, some households discussed within their family where to flee. In districts or villages where the attacks came by surprise, in the middle of the night or daylight, the circumstances moved decisions, and these households would try to save whatever they could:

> *"…In fact, on that day, I only managed to leave with my wallet and my documents, and that was it. I picked up the children, and we left the house around 5:00, soon after the shooting started. From there, it was every man for himself and God for all, and we couldn't take with us any clothes, bed, or anything…"* [male interviewee].

During an interview with a local authority of one of the neighbourhoods where this research took place, he affirmed that for those who came to the city of Pemba, it was their destination. When the Mocimboa da Praia, Macomia, and Palma attacks happened, most displaced people found refuge in Pemba and Nacala. People knew where to go and why. These people migrated to the islands to build their lives twenty or thirty years ago. They have families, relatives, or acquaintances in Pemba who were born around the city or in the districts under attack but moved to Pemba. There are relatives hosting more than 40 displaced people in just one house.

Some of these displaced people moved from Pemba to the island in search of a job in the 1990s and are now forced to return because of the violence. All interviewees confirmed these mobility patterns and dynamics in the affected region, each with particularities. For example, a 74-year-old man, born around Pemba (in 1948), moved from Pemba to Mueda (in 1982) to work in a formal job as a mason. He could not be precise, but he said he continued working as a mason during the civil war (between the former rebel movement RENAMO and the ruling party: Frelimo), which found him in Muidumbe. They would move from the villages to build water pump systems in the countryside. Then, he moved to Mocímboa, where he married and had eight children. Some of his children went to school around the city of Pemba. Like many others in Mocímboa, his family

fled from conflict and violence. He has lived in Pemba for two years in the same house he used to live in before moving to Mueda. While living in Mocímboa, he used to come to Pemba to visit family members or when there was a situation of decease and ceremony — but just for a week or less. He also used to practice agriculture. During the harvest, his family from Pemba would go to Mocímboa to help him and bring goods to Pemba.

In the city of Pemba, there is a strong sense of social network. It is estimated that 71.1% of displaced people live in houses of relatives and acquaintances and rented houses, 21.5% in resettlement neighbourhoods, and 7.3% in accommodation centers (UNICEF 2022). Our interviewees live in host families who are their families, relatives, or acquaintances of those they have fled with from conflict zones. Some have rented houses, borrowed rooms, or houses. Those borrowing houses are also protecting and taking care of these houses. Foreign business actors (from Tanzania) also give their houses on the same terms — lending for security or charity. In addition, local authorities in the neighbourhoods are helping to identify empty or abandoned houses and host the displaced, particularly in the neighbourhoods near the coast.

In Pemba, all the displaced live in urban or peri-urban settings — slums. Except for *Paquitequete*, these slums emerged from and were once called communal villages (*aldeias comunais*). They are a result of the post-independence urbanization policy, and the local power structure is still working and having a vast influence in supporting the displaced to (re) build their social network through the distribution of aid and identification of vulnerable groups. Mozambique has a long history of resettlement where these local (structure of) authorities were used for the same purposes: supporting the population resettled in communal villages or settling in new compounds, distributing local agriculture production, controlling people's movements in the context of civil war, and more. During the 1970s and 1980s, FRELIMO opted to create communal villages to rebuild the country's economy. The concept of communal villages emerged in 1975, partly as a reaction to the crisis in the countryside in the immediate aftermath of the Portuguese settler exodus from Mozambique in 1974–1975. The first communal villages were built in Cabo Delgado soon after independence. The dynamic of population mobility in Cabo Delgado reflects the dichotomy of practice and theory of development. These historical processes of human mobility result from a traumatic collective memory of forced or voluntary resettlement, invariably and negatively affecting the local socio-economic structure (Coelho 1993).

3.2 Displacement and livelihood: discourses of a "revolving door"?

"I think the conflict is to blame if it wasn't because I'd be there now and I wouldn't even need to stay here in this difficult life… the life I lived there was normal, I didn't have any concerns… I am not happy with my income. Where I came from, I used to get more than that, yes. Here, the situation has changed. There [in Palma], I used to do my business and get 10,000 MTN a month. Here I'm getting 5,000, which is a loss for me." [male interviewee]

When those forced to abandon their homes arrived in Pemba, some felt alienated by the strangeness of overcrowding, but others saw nothing bizarre because they could relate to some familiar faces of those who were also forced to leave from the outbreak of the conflict and attacks in their communities. After making it safely to the city of Pemba, they face a common reality: a new environment, but familiar for some of them who had lived in Pemba for around 20 years apart. Upon finding shelter or a house to stay in the neighbourhoods, they all feel disoriented and confused by the decisions they must take regarding the jobs, famine, and fear (associated with the traumas of fleeing death). These bring memories.

The cost of living in Pemba is too high. Hence, the economy in Pemba is mainly informal, and job opportunities for those who were forced to flee are limited. There are few opportunities outside the gas sector. However, non-farming activity tends to rely on resource exploitation, which demands skills and labour experience. According to data from the micro-census data from the National Institute of Statistics, there has been an 8.7% increase in illiteracy rates, soaring from 52.4% in 2020 to 61.1% in 2022. Concurrently, employment rates in the province have declined by 6.6% from 79.9% in 2020 to 73.3% in 2022 (CIP 2023). Many of the informants have seasonal jobs (*ganho-ganho or biscato*) of digging latrines and building them, farming one's field or plot (*machamba*). These would be the basis of income for immediate family consumption. Some of those (in Bilibiza) used to be fishermen, practice agriculture, and run a small business. In Pemba, they said, it is difficult to find these *biscatos* because they are not from there and must compete with the locals who know where to find these types of (informal) jobs and customers. The impact of these struggles reflects on their coping strategies. Children are highly involved in child labour and child marriage. Most of them work in informal settings (markets, roads, and more) on behalf of their parents, relatives, and host families to obtain some money and food for themselves or to pay for their living costs. Child labour and marriage, however, cannot be seen as a direct consequence of conflict, climate, and displacement, but these events have worsened the phenomena.

Subsistence agriculture and fishing are the primary sources of income for most of the population in the province, including Pemba. In the province, over 86% of the population relies on agriculture. It is estimated that the conflict has resulted in a 30 percent drop in production compared with the previous agricultural season. In drought-affected areas, multiple natural disasters, conflict, poor harvest, depletion of food reserves, and limited income-generating opportunities led to the persistence of food crises (IPC Phase 3) and stresses (IPC Phase 2).

The fishery sector contributes significantly to poverty alleviation and socio-economic development. Around 20% of the population relies on fisheries for part of their income, and a more significant proportion relies on fishing for subsistence and food security. Nevertheless, development-induced displacement led to limited access to the sea. The extensive reserves of gas and other minerals discovered in Cabo Delgado and the beginning of their exploitation changed the structure of (artisanal) fishing. Production has been falling in the last three decades (Blythe et al. 2014). For most displaced people who live in or around the city—particularly near the coast, storms, cyclones, or floods would rapidly exacerbate many of the problems they are

already facing. Within this scenario, coping and adaptive mechanisms to encounter livelihoods are rare.

The fact that humanitarian funding is concentrated in rural (camps) settings suggests that the urban displaced are seen as having greater livelihood prospects and that they tend to have better access to key social services and (economic) opportunities. The findings in this article cannot confirm or deny these assumptions, nor can these findings state that the displaced living in resettlement centers receive more assistance than the urban displaced in Pemba. They do receive food assistance from the UN agency (World Food Programme), but not all of them, and when it happens, there will be between two to four months of waiting in line. Those who have managed to register their names to receive food (in the voucher) complain about the rationale and criteria of selection and distribution, and some end up losing hope of receiving assistance.

A growing conflict starts between the memories of the past and the economic and social experience of displaced people, ultimately deflating their reintegration. Here, their perception of livelihood has multiple constructions of (personal) experience, where social construction and spatialized experience emphasize individuals' agency.

In the slums of the city of Pemba, displaced people have been living between coping and adapting for the past three to five years. In their attempt to build a sustainable source of livelihood, most displaced people rely on assistance from the government, humanitarian actors, relatives (kinship), acquaintances, and host neighbours. This is based mainly on whether (i) the displaced are equipped with (level of literacy, skills, and other resources to acquire livelihoods) and willing to be integrated or to "imagine" themselves as being part of host societies; (ii) host populations accept or "imagine" the *displaced* as their members; and (iii) "the structural factors are favourable enough to enable the displaced to work towards self-sufficiency" (Kibreab 1999). The memories of fleeing war sustain the former. Nobody would return to violence or a place that brings memories of deaths and graves by choice:

> *"For how long [will I stay in Pemba?], I cannot say because nobody knows when this [conflict] will end. I'm not returning to Palma while I don't know the [security] situation."* [male interviewee]

3.3 "Where and when is home?": place and place-making in conflict-affected areas of Cabo Delgado

> *"For someone to live in a place, the first thing we want is peace, so if we happen to be living this life of conflict every day, it won't do any good. We'll always remain like this, moving from place to place. The important thing is to end this war if, by any chance, there are mechanisms to end it. The only thing we want is to end this thing. Just end it. Everyone will go on with their lives, and we'll be fine… It is not safe, it is not safe here, but hey, it's a bit safer because it is not like [what] we've seen there. I'm not saying it's safe here, but hey, I intend to stay here."* [male interviewee]

These expressions, Lems (2016) would say, "draw attention to the complex interplay between emplacement and displacement as lived and felt in people's everyday lives. *They* [also] raise questions about the links between place and memory, … place and movement, and place and the larger world."

What does it mean to call a place home? This is the central question in the book titled *Belonging: A Culture of Place*, written by Hooks (2009). Here, she turned her attention and focused on issues of land and land ownership (including race, gender, and class) and discussed how migrants who lived in an agrarian society, committed to local food production and organic ways of living had to confront with funding comfort after being forced to flee (Hooks 2009). Answering the question she poses can easily lead to the idea of home as a *thing* that is or can be everywhere because "nothing we do is unplaced" (Casey 1997), and the knowledge of places comes from a simple fact of experiences (Relph 1976). Can this be applied to those running from death?

Casey (1997, 1993) wrote that place is perceived as a home when experience lived in roots gives meaning (of belonging) to a place. Thus, the place becomes the most fundamental form of embodied experience — the side of a powerful fusion of self, space, and time (Basso and Feld 1996). Lems (2016), while narrating Halima's story of being displaced, says that displacement memories have much to say about the force of displacement and how it enters bodies and minds, about the inescapable power of place and of the ways being in and out of place intersect, mingle and merge, to the point of it becoming almost impossible to distinguish the one from the other.

These notions of finding a place intersect with an existing conducive environment and culture where, for instance, their variation in fishing skills (Ingold 2000) would grow and integrate. When an enabling environment exists in resettlement and rehabilitation (part of the entire cycle of displacement), one will live pulling (not pushing) experiences to the point of not perceiving the difference between and in places. Resettlement is an economic initiative. Rehabilitation, on the other hand, involves replacing the lost economic assets, rebuilding economic systems weakened by displacement, and preparing to encounter a new society qual to their previous one (Asif 2000). These notions also imply that if the province of Cabo Delgado or the country of Mozambique itself is a place, then whoever is displaced can encounter and give the meaning of "home" to a certain place. Cataclysmic events, such as wars, have acted to undermine any secure sense of abiding place or destroy it altogether (Casey 1997).

Home-place is a center of meaning and field of care —— where we feel safe, secure, and loved (Tuan 1977; Cresswell 2009), in an ideal world. There have been changes in Cabo Delgado, including those of safety. "*It is no longer a safe place to stay and live in there*," our informants stated. It has also become a more industrialized province where the massive volume of investment and the rising cost of living brought a different concept and relation with "money." These investments may have meant even less immediate and complete relationships with place insofar. The industrialization of that province (resulting from the expansion of natural and mineral exploitation) fragmented people's time–space relations, as they retained less local control over their physical and social landscapes. For people who lived in Palma,

development-related displacement meant "selling" their land and being subjected to a reallocation in a different space, where all of them were "forced" to re-construct their lives: economically, socially, culturally, relationally, and practically. It meant they were "forced" to choose between cultural ties and the need for "money" and survival. A case study of development-induced resettlement in India has suggested that whenever people were confronted with this neat choice, they opted for monetary resentment and then used the money to resettle themselves in some urban slums, even when these resettlement programs offer relatively better facilities than what the displaced can achieve through self-resettlement (Asif 2000). Asif (2000) argues these choices come as they (the displaced) perceive resettlement as an expression of political power over their living system and bodies, but also because these programs have been one of the main causes of deprival of livelihoods. Ultimately, this also suggest the importance of cash and cash assistance in a context of conflict-related displacement.

Suppose we accept that places are not inert containers. They are politicized, culturally relative, historically specific, local, and multiple constructed (Rodman 1992). This would infer that any space can gain the meanings of place — from the experiences lived in time, routes, social and economic relations within a given space. As firmly appointed by Cresswell (2009), space becomes a place when used and lived. Experience is at the heart of what place means.

Places are continuously enacted as people go about their everyday lives: going to work, doing their shopping, spending leisure time, and hanging out on street corners. The sense I get of a place heavily depends on practice and, particularly, the reiteration of practice regularly. For people displaced and living in Pemba, their everyday struggles —— including those whose monthly income has been reduced or failed to find sources to "get money" — confront their memories and concept of well-being in the past and present and choose to locate themselves in a known (enabling) environment where their creativeness found ground to express and materialize itself with others. The center of this is that we cannot deny fragments of a sustained nostalgia for the feelings and emotions a place evokes. These meanings can be individual, or they can be shared — based on mediation and representation.

Nevertheless, "while meanings are shared, they are never fixed once and for all, and always open to counter meanings produced through other representations" (Cresswell 2009). These representations are the results of practice and construction (of place). "People do things in a place. What they do, in part, is responsible for the meanings that a place might have" (Cresswell 2009).

Allen and Turton [1996, cited in Kibread (1999)] did postulate that the "primary concern" of the displaced populations in poor countries, particularly those affected by conflict, "is to find a relatively secure *space* in which to begin working towards rebuilding their life, often irrespective of where they located to." Needs, such as security and access to livelihood, determine the sense of attachment. In Cabo Delgado, people flee from North to South within their borders. Some were resettled in Nampula province (because the vast majority were from the districts of that province but migrated to the islands, which are now under attacks), which culturally and ethnically does not sustain a distinct territorial location. However, the author cannot avoid standing with Kibread (1999), affirming that "how people

feel about their place of habitual residence is also inextricably linked with the cause of displacement."

If those who, twenty years ago, moved to the islands (voluntarily) and found "(un)territorialized places" that were readily available for establishment without unfolding social conflicts, there was no reason to return (to Pemba, Nacala, and so on). However, in this case, conflict forced them to flee —— abandoning their place of origin against their will. To move to Pemba, where they cannot claim entitlement to land or access to means of livelihood, the desire to return to one's place of origin is invariably powerful. It is unsurprising that they perceived their displacement as temporary and their ability to return to their homelands as a success. The yearning to return home, perhaps not surprisingly, is stronger when the displaced cannot engage in economic activities. Kibread (1999) stated and continued affirming that "the key variable which determines how people perceive displacement and return to places or countries of origin is dependent, on the one hand, on the conditions under which they leave their places of origin; and, on the other hand, on the treatment they receive and opportunities existing at the destination." When the displaced are treated on equal footing with the host or at least found an enabling ecosystem to integrate into "imagined communities," return is not per se an option. However, contrarily, it is instead a means to an end, i.e., a "means of ridding oneself of spatial confinement, enabling opportunities by being spatially anchored" (ibid). To paraphrase Gupta and Ferguson (1992), it is here that it becomes most visible how imagined communities (Anderson 1991) come to be attached to imagined places, as displaced peoples cluster around remembered or imagined lands, places, or communities in a world that seems increasingly to deny such firm territorialized anchors in their actuality.

In the case of the urban displaced in Pemba, although they believe that it is not safe to live either in Pemba, they were not convinced to return when these interviews were conducted:

> "I went in January of this year. I went to see the environment itself but so far, [it] still hasn't convinced me to go back...but if things calm down, I intend to go back. If they don't go down, I'd rather stay here. I don't say it's safe here, but hey, I intend to stay here." [male interviewee]
> "I will not go back to Mocímboa, while the Government does not give them a guarantee that the violence is over, clearly over." [male interviewee]

Nowadays, out of few limited options for coping strategies, they are spontaneously returning to their place of origin to access means of livelihood (agriculture and fisheries), while putting themselves at risk:

> "There are many people who are leaving … going to Macomia, Quissanga, and they fish for a few days, they stay hidden there [and then] they come back here… that somehow guarantees that their family is safe, children, wife, mother-in-law, cousin … In other words, they are taking the risks of looking for money in their traditional sources." [Key Informant Interview]

These lines of struggle suggest one more significant common point: changes in the perception of risks, which again emphasizes the need for further research

on the importance of livelihoods and income generation in complex emergencies, such as the active conflict in northern Mozambique.

4 Conclusion

To conclude, first, while studies of conflict and displacement in Mozambique tend to dominantly focus on discourses of and tangled up in the causes of conflict, displacement, government response, and poverty, this study moves beyond, towards a focus on people's everyday engagements with their surroundings: their experience, and what they tell us for progressive rehabilitation or reconstruction policies. This paradigmatic shift — from stable and rooted to fluid, transitory identities and forced mobility phenomena — is not new within the sphere of displacement and refugee studies, but in Mozambique. Here, for instance, resistance to development-induced displacement has been largely linked to the idea of the natural rootedness of people to place. However, due to the massive investments in rural areas, people are now thought of as moving continuously through flexible, open-ended, and contested spaces rather than being bounded by a timeless and unmovable place.

Secondly, this essay started with the social and economic experience of urban displaced people, let alone culture. However, then, culture could not be dissociated from the experiences of those uprooted people. It is embodied in their everyday lives, traditional livelihoods, memories, and thus in their sense of place, which could partially explain why people do return to their place of origin to fish, assess safety and security or whether or not their assets were vandalised. Nevertheless, the article also brings questions about human dispositions, capacities (to adapt), and needs that culture may emphasize or distort. One way forward would be to ask the question: "what is culture" (for those who were forced to flee to be alive) and how those notions interplay with policies and programmatic agenda of reconstruction, and humanitarian response, in its entire sphere. Looking at these embodied lengthy lived experiences, the author found two existential and essential factors in deciding whether to stay or to return: safety and economic struggles. These become central to how these uprooted people can encounter places, perceive them, and invest in them with significance, owing to the nature of their livelihood and their perception toward the means to manoeuvre their livelihoods.

Pemba is not where only its *natives* live, nor is Cabo Delgado where only people born and raised there live, and so on. Whoever the displaced person is can encounter the meaning of place in Pemba (or elsewhere), within our borders, at least if they are safe and can easily manoeuvre and use their creativity to encounter livelihoods. Well-designed programs and coordinated responses can mitigate the risk of returning (to places in conflict) and reduce the pressure from the affected communities in deteriorating circumstances.

Lastly, some displaced people living in the city no longer see themselves as a "community in exile or refuge". These people used to live in Pemba and have managed to rebuild their social networks and inter-support channels, easily. In contrast, there are those "others" who, in their attempt to encounter livelihood, ended up in a circle of a revolving door, i.e., they employ a very different strategy of place-making:

they perceive the risk but continue to see their displacement as a temporary condition, longing for a return to the "homeland". The weight of their frustrated socio-economic aspirations forces them to return to their place of origin — not to resettle primarily, but to assess the safety issue and sustain their decisions and possibilities to return. The corollary of this assertion is that where conflict persists, the economic structure, security, and safety create an enabling environment for socio-economic integration; and returning would not even be considered a possibility or option.

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Comments