

Article

# Who Controls the City in the Global Urban Era? Mapping the Dimensions of Urban Geopolitics in Beira City, Mozambique

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Received: 16 January 2019; Accepted: 16 February 2019; Published: 21 February 2019



**Abstract:** In recent years, a new era of interventionism has emerged targeting the development of African cities, manifested in ‘fantasy’ urban plans, surging infrastructure investments and global policy agendas. What the implications of this new era will be for specific urban contexts is still poorly understood however. Taking this research agenda as a starting point, this article presents findings of in-depth empirical research on urban development in Beira city, Mozambique, which has recently become the recipient of massive donor investments targeting the built environment. Informed by current debates on urban geopolitics, the article unpacks these mounting global flows while locating them alongside pre-existing struggles over urban space. By doing so three distinct yet inter-related dimensions of urban geopolitics are identified, relating to the workings of the state, so-called ‘informality’ and international donors. Far from representing homogeneous categories, these dimensions each represent contradictory practices and interests which are shaping Beira’s urban trajectory. The article concludes by arguing that the inflow of donor resources has exacerbated pre-existing struggles over urban space while contributing to new contentions in ways which have undermined social equity targets of contemporary global development agendas. In doing so it provides important contributions to current debates on urban development in Africa

**Keywords:** African urbanism; African urban development; urban geopolitics; international development; urban land governance; urban planning; infrastructure development

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years the topic of African urban development has been taken out of shadows of development policy and the global-political-economy, manifested in new masterplans, investments in infrastructure and housing and progressive development agenda’s, thus opening historically neglected regions to a range of new global flows and interests [1–8]. The scholarly response to these dynamics has ranged from concern to careful optimism, depending on the specific modalities under scrutiny. Despite the diversity and contradictory nature of these modalities however, taken together they are representative of a new era of interventionism targeting African cities which will likely change the nature of African urbanism. What these global dynamics will ultimately mean for specific urban contexts is still poorly understood however. How and if this new era will actually translate into any real urban change remains to be seen.

Just as the implications of this new era are poorly understood, so too are the regions targeted by it. African urbanism has only recently emerged as a topic of serious intellectual scrutiny within the context of urban debates. Despite this novelty, it has become increasingly apparent that African cities are shaped by profound inequalities and overlapping power structures [9,10]. The diffuse nature of urban governance suggests that there is an extremely high degree of uncertainty with regards to the impacts

of urban development flows in these contentious urban contexts. So far however, debates on African urbanism have been guided by calls to ‘theorise African urbanisms on their own terms’ [11], p. 217 which has resulted in an inward focus where ‘the global’ has rarely featured. As a result, an analytical divide has emerged between those interrogating the global interest in African urban development and those investigating the nature of African urbanism. It is within this context that a new and urgent research agenda has emerged focusing on the entanglement between the global and the local which will likely occur as the emerging era of urban interventionism begins to take shape.

Taking this research agenda as its starting point, the following article presents an in-depth empirical interrogation of such local-global entanglements which have occurred in Beira city, Mozambique. Propelled by a charismatic leadership and 100’s of millions of USD in donor finance, this strategically important port city has recently emerged on the frontline of urban interventionism in Africa, representing an unprecedented effort at restructuring the city. Whereas Beira city is among many other African cities undergoing large scale (re)development, it is set apart from other cases due to the heavy presence of international donors [4]. How these new claims to urban land are located within the context of pre-existing governance relations and trajectories of urban change is unclear; however, it is an urgent consideration with regards to the social equity targets of contemporary global agendas. It is against this background that this article explores the following question; How do donor investments in urban development relate to pre-existing struggles over urban space in Beira city?

The article begins with a concise discussion of contemporary debates on African urban development and urbanism, leading into a framework of ‘urban geopolitics’ centred on the everyday struggles over urban space [12,13]. This is then followed by a historical analysis of Beira’s city, detailing an urban trajectory shaped through the rise and fall of (hostile) state regimes and broader global geopolitical shifts. This section is then followed by an in-depth analysis of contemporary struggles over urban space in Beira which is approached analytically as a ‘relational site’ [13]. Focusing on the different actors and practices which make up these relations, three distinct yet interrelated dimensions of urban geopolitics are delineated, pertaining to the state, ‘informality’ and international development. By unpacking the inner working of these geopolitical struggles, the article demonstrates how Beira’s emerging era of development has given rise to new contentions and complexities which have served to contradict social equity targets of contemporary urban development agendas. In doing so the research aims to contribute to emerging debates on urban development, land governance and social equity in urban Africa.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. *A New Era of Interventionism in African Cities*

For decades postcolonial African cities have been relegated to the margins of development policy, urban theory and the global political-economy [10]. In recent years however, scholars from various corners of critical theory have observed an unprecedented interest in African cities from a range of global actors and policy circuits, cumulating in global policy agenda’s such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and New Urban Agenda (NUA) [1–3,6–8]. Taken at face value these agendas represent a notable breach with the economic reductionism which has historically characterized development policy, in favour of progressive social equity targets. Among other things, this has resulted in a strong emphasis on inclusive governance, urban land rights and equality. Elsewhere however, scholars have also pointed to a range of contradictory dynamics which are clearly at odds with these progressive goals. Consequentially, the growing global interest in African cities has been responded to differently by various scholars.

Focusing on the growing interest of international private firms in African urban development, scholars such as Watson and Noorloos & Kloosterboer have noted how these actors have been pursuing highly exclusionary ‘urban fantasy’ as seen in the new city developments in Kenya, Rwanda, Angola and elsewhere on the African continent [1,4,7,8]. These initiatives span various scales and

developments, ranging from satellite towns, gated communities and entire capital cities. Based on utopian visions of high modernity and market-based governance models, these developments have been hailed as a coming-to-Africa of 'speculative urbanism' as witnessed previously by Goldman in India [1,14]. Due to their anti-poor and authoritarian nature, these initiatives are clearly at odds with progressive agendas of social equity and empowerment. So far, these developments have been driven predominately by global capital and Chinese state finance, with only a minimal presence of 'traditional' development institutions [4,8]. According to Goldman however, global development institutions have played a crucial role in nurturing the market-centric epistemologies behind these such exploitative dynamics [15]. From the perspective of Goldman therefore, the current era is one 'in which the global South city itself becomes the marketable commodity, under the guidance of global development' [15], p. 15.

Offering a decidedly more positive evaluation of the emerging era, are the contributions of several influential scholars of African urbanism, who have focused on recent global policy shifts and its implication for African urban development. For these scholars, the emergence of a 'global urban agenda' provides a well-overdue opportunity for the plight of Africa's urban poor to be recognized by policy makers [3]. Far from rejecting global development institutions, these scholars have argued for closer engagements between research and policy as a strategy for advancing progressive urban change [16]. In doing so they have argued against the 'rather conspiratorial' critiques which have often been levelled at development institutions by other critical scholars [17], p. 527, see also [18]. For Parnell for instance [3], the SDGs and NUA are evidence of a notably progressive urban policy paradigm due to their holistic conceptions of development. Thus, although these scholars are also wary of exploitative interests engaging in urban development [3,10], they offer a decidedly different take on the emerging era of urban development than Goldman [15].

More recently an additional perspective has emerged with regards to the growing global interests in African cities, which has sought to centre debates on the issue of urban land governance. Taking cues from the global (rural) land rush, these scholars have argued that the growing interest in urban development will have far reaching impacts for pre-existing land claims [2,5,19]. This argument is based on the basic premise that urban development is inherently dependent on the availability of land, which in the context of African cities is always *someone's* land. From this perspective the emerging era of interventionism is expected to be associated with increased (forced) displacement and conflict. As a result, these scholars have argued for an analytical shift within urban debates towards land governance and urban land rights in particular [2,5]. Although the relevance of land governance has been recognized by the scholars mentioned earlier [1,20], it is only through the perspective of the global land rush that it has now begun to emerge as an issue of analytical priority.

Contemporary urban research has been the subject of heated debates, whereby the emphasis has often been placed on theoretical and analytical differences [13,21,22]. The three perspectives discussed above however, can essentially be understood as relating to distinct facets of urban development which are by no means mutually exclusive. For instance, there can be little doubt that the African continent has seen a sharp rise in exploitative masterplans [4] or that contemporary global policy agendas are more holistic than previous iterations [3], nor can it be denied that urban development is often based on (forcibly) changing land-use practices [5]. What remains to be seen however is what these dynamics ultimately mean for specific urban contexts, as evidence of real urban change is still extremely limited [2,5].

How the emerging era manifests itself in specific urban regions will inevitably be closely related to the pre-existing institutional arrangements and political struggles through which 'development' is negotiated and defined. It is here where a second knowledge gap looms on the horizon, for it is not only the emerging era of interventionism which is poorly understood, but the specificity of African urbanism as well [10]. It is only recently that African urbanism has emerged as a topic of serious attention in the realm of urban and development knowledge, and the picture which has emerged is a concerning one. Terms such as 'clashing rationalities' and the ubiquitous concept of informality point

to the fact that African cities are shaped by deeply unequal and overlapping power structures [9,10,22]. Due to the relative infancy of African urban research however, there is still much work to be done with regards to the ways in which these dynamics manifest themselves in specific urban contexts.

## 2.2. From Development and Urbanism to Urban Geopolitics

Urban theory has traditionally been marked by a dualism between frameworks favouring the global or the local as analytical reference points [23]. As it currently stands, debates on African urban development and African urbanism have been divided along similar lines. While the drivers of development interventionism have been sought in the global realm (capital, policy etc.), the dynamics shaping African urbanism have generally been sought in the local (i.e., provincial) realm. The main argument put forward here however is that, in cities targeted by global flows, development and urbanism will likely be co-constituted processes. Indeed, urban development is by definition aimed at changing urbanism, while 'the urban' itself serves as the political and historical context through which such change is negotiated in the first place. Instead of furthering analytical dualism therefore, there is an urgent need to unpack the engagements between the global and the local as they appear in concrete contexts to bring about urban change. How are global flows negotiated through pre-existing struggles and what are the local conditions which attract such global interests in the first place? What are the new political dynamics brought forth by these engagements and what do they ultimately mean for the social equity goals of contemporary development agenda's? These are the types of urgent questions which currently appear on the nexus of the global and the local.

Analytically this implies moving away from the analysis of specific urban and/or development modalities and scales, towards a more open perspective of urbanism as a 'relational site' shaped through the engagements of different actors and claims making practices [13]. It is here where the novel framework of 'urban geopolitics' is particularly well suited, which has recently been put forward by political geographers Rokem et al. and Rokem & Boano, which have sought to centre urban debates on everyday struggles over urban space [12,13]. The basic premise of urban geopolitics is that the control of urban space is inherently contentious and that these contentions should be brought to the foreground. Indeed looking at the different perspectives on African urban development and African urbanism discussed earlier, if one thing is apparent then it is surely that city making is a deeply contentious matter. Thus, taking urban geopolitics as a starting point, we now turn to the contemporary struggles over urban space in Beira city.

## 3. Research Location

Beira city is the coastal capital of Mozambique's central Sofala province which is home to circa 500,000 denizens and often described as Mozambique's 'second most important city' after the capital Maputo [24], p. 324. A strategically important port city, Beira has historically played a crucial role in national and regional economies, linking them to international markets through the broader Beira Corridor. Due to the city's low elevation and proximity to the Indian ocean and nearby Pungwe river, Beira is also known for its extreme vulnerability to flooding and tropical storms, earning the title of Mozambique's most climate vulnerable city. Beira's greatest relevance however, is arguably due to its status as an opposition stronghold, which has produced a unique culture of political contestation towards the central state. To understand the context of contemporary struggles over urban space in Beira, it is necessary to reflect on the city's historical trajectory which has shaped it into the strategic opposition stronghold it is today.

### 3.1. The Historical Trajectory of Beira City

Beira was initially established as a coastal port settlement at the end of the 19th century by the Mozambique company, a private charter company which had concessions to central Mozambique under Portuguese colonial rule [25]. In the years that followed the construction of rail, road and pipeline infrastructure between Beira city and Rhodesia would see Beira emerge as a crucial logistical

node in what would eventually become known as the 'Beira corridor.' With the rise of the fascist New State regime of Salazar in Portugal, the concessions held by the Mozambique company would eventually be handed over to the Portuguese state in 1941.

Under colonial occupation Beira was characterized by a dual governance regime which applied to Portuguese settlers and native Mozambicans respectively, each producing distinct social-spatial categories known as the 'cement city' and the 'cane city.' The cement city was planned and administered by the colonial regime, comprising Portuguese style residential and commercial zones. The cane city was inhabited by native Mozambicans and was not formally planned, falling under the administrative control of traditional chiefs which had been incorporated into the colonial regime [26,27]. The cane city consisted of precarious housing and agricultural plots [28]. Since the city's establishment urban agriculture has been a distinct feature of Beira's urban condition, practiced throughout the city by women in particular.

After the war for independence and subsequent fall of Portugal's fascist regime, Mozambique gained independence in 1975, soon becoming a single party socialist state under the FRELIMO regime. FRELIMO would implement far reaching institutional reforms, which included the abolition of the racialized dual governance regime. Following independence, Mozambique soon attracted the ire of neighbouring white minority regimes in Rhodesia and South Africa, with the former establishing the paramilitary group RENAMO aimed at disrupting the Mozambican state [29]. Clashes between RENAMO and FRELIMO would see Mozambique become plunged into a bloody destabilization war between 1977 to 1992, resulting in an estimated one million deaths.

During the initial independence era, Beira went into a state of rapid decline. Beginning with FRELIMO's adoption of sanctions against the Rhodesian regime, Beira's economy came to a standstill. This was further exacerbated when the Beira corridor emerged on the frontline of the war of destabilization, resulting in a massive influx of displaced persons into Beira city [30]. Fighting a losing battle and facing increasing international pressure, FRELIMO eventually abandoned the socialist experiment with the adoption of a Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) in 1987. Although FRELIMO's turn the West resulted in a surge in Western donor support into Beira, this support was targeted narrowly towards the rehabilitation of the port and corridor infrastructure. For the average denizen in Beira therefore, SAP's were translated into rising food prices and wage cuts, exacerbating the hardship which had followed independence.

War and SAP's saw formal land administration and planning coming to a standstill, meaning that urban expansion was structured predominantly by 'bottom-up' governance practices which continue to be the majority practice to the present day. After the war ended in 1992 and was followed by the subsequent installation of multi-party politics in 1994, FRELIMO went on to win all subsequent national election. As was the case during the war, FRELIMO's rival in multiparty politics was RENAMO, which had evolved from a foreign destabilization tool to a legitimate political movement in Mozambique. In the years that followed, Beira emerged as a stronghold of RENAMO support, with the city becoming widely known as a symbol of resistance towards the central state [24,30]. Due to the antagonist relationship between central state and Beira, the is widely considered to have suffered further neglect and underinvestment in the post-war years.

As the 1990's progressed, the state-roll back associated with SAP's gradually made way for institutional reforms under the good governance paradigm of international donors. In Beira this resulted in two major changes to the city's territorial control. The first involved the privatization of the city's port management in 1997, which was contracted to a consortium headed by the Dutch port company Cornelder [31]. The second resulted in the implementation of decentralization reforms which paved the way for municipality elections in 1998. Ownership of the port assets remained with the central government however, effectively splitting th administrative control of the municipality and the port. After boycotting local elections in 1998, RENAMO won the municipal elections of 2003, striking a major blow to FRELIMO's consolidated power. Beira's new mayor under RENAMO Davis

Simango, would go on to run as an independent candidate in 2008, eventually establishing his own party called MDM with which won subsequent municipality elections in 2013 and 2018 [32–34].

### 3.2. *A New Era for Beira?*

MDM's rise to power in Beira came at a time when Mozambique had become increasingly trumpeted as a post-conflict success story by international donors, thanks to growing volumes of FDI and the discovery of massive off-shore gas reserves. This led to a growing number of international actors seeking to secure a foothold in the fabled 'emerging market' of Mozambique. The growing international attention towards Mozambique, also resulted in a growing interest in the formerly neglected city of Beira, which had emerged at the centre of various national economic developments, such as the country's recent coal boom and the Beira Agricultural Growth Corridor (BAGC) [35]. Taken together with the city's extreme vulnerability to flooding, Beira emerged as an ideal candidate for international donors increasingly oriented towards economic development and climate change adaptation. At the same time Beira emerged as a showcase of the MDM party, which used the city as a springboard for national political aspirations.

## 4. Materials and Methods

### 4.1. *General*

The research findings are based on data collected within the context of an ongoing PhD research on international development cooperation, urban development and land governance in Beira. Data collection was supported by the Maputo based land rights organization Centro Terra Viva and the Catholic University of Mozambique in Beira. Research in Beira was further supported by 1–2 research assistants who provided support with translation and knowledge of community customs and institutions

Data collection was undertaken in Mozambique (Maputo and Beira) and the Netherlands Between May 2015 and May 2018. Research in Mozambique was undertaken in three separate phases namely; (1) June–December 2015, spanning 2.5 months in Maputo and 3 months in Beira, (2) July–December 2016, spanning 2 months in Maputo and 3 months in Beira and (3) a 5-week period spanning 1 week in Maputo and 4 weeks in Beira. The initial phase was exploratory in nature, aimed at identifying the various actors, projects and experiences of those involved professionally in urban development in Beira city. The second phase was centred primarily on the process and impacts of household resettlement within the context of three recent infrastructure projects which had been identified in the preceding phase. The third phase was used to undertake additional data collection with regards to the municipality, district and provincial government, as well as the issue of farmer displacement.

### 4.2. *Primary Methods and Materials*

Qualitative semi-structured interviews constituted the primary data collection method, with the majority being undertaken in Beira during each research phase. Respondents were recruited based on one of the following two criteria; professional involvement in urban development or household resettlement within the context of the above-mentioned infrastructure projects. The first category of respondents consisted of executive staff of the municipality, staff of the district, provincial and national government involved in Beira, donor staff, project contractors (consultants, engineers etc.) civil society, private sector actors and university staff. Respondents from this category were generally recruited through snowballing on an appointment basis. Interviews were generally undertaken in English and occasionally in Portuguese and Dutch. Interviews in Portuguese were undertaken in the attendance of 1–2 research assistants who supported translation where necessary. A total of 80 respondents were interviewed from this category with sampling continuing until data saturation was achieved.

The second category of respondents consisted of representatives from resettled households who had been displaced within the context of the three infrastructure projects. The projects included the

development of a Special Economic Zone (SEZ), impacting 110 households in the peri-urban area of Mungassa, a river rehabilitation project in the downtown Chiveve area impacting 34 households, and a linear urban drainage project spanning several neighbourhoods leading to the resettlement of 21 households and the displacement of a further 490 farmers. The SEZ was associated with three different resettlement locations and the drainage project with one, whereas the Chiveve households were relocated throughout the city. All the projects had occurred between 2013 and 2016 and involved different funding donors. The respondents were recruited through convenience sampling by means of door to door visits and occasionally snowballing. Several local chiefs which had also been resettled where included among the respondents. In accordance with local practice, written permission was provided by the municipality for undertaking the interviews with resettled households. A total of 80 interviews were taken among these respondents, with sampling continuing until data saturation was achieved and at least half of the households involved in each residential resettlement were represented in the sample population. Interviews were undertaken with the involvement of 1–2 research assistants and were done in Portuguese and to a lesser extent in Sena and Ndau.

The interviews were structured by a protocol introducing the research aims, institutional context of the research and interview topics. Informed consent was determined as a minimum requirement for commencing with interviews. To minimize coercion through power asymmetries and uphold the dignity of respondents, consent was required to be given verbally and reaffirmed visually throughout the interview. In several instances this led to interviews with resettled respondents being aborted when they appeared visibly apprehensive after giving verbal consent. Interviews pertaining to professional respondents were centred on their involvement and experience with urban development in Beira, typically including topics such as ‘nature of involvement,’ ‘relationship with other development actors’ and ‘most significant challenges in Beira’s development.’ These interviews also included topics tailored specifically to their area of expertise, such as government relations, resettlement and donor coordination. The interviews with resettled households were structured around the resettlement process and impacts, but also focussed on land governance practices in general. These interviews included topics such as ‘past livelihood practices,’ ‘acquisition of former property’ and ‘current land holdings.’ Interviews were always finished by providing any time necessary for respondents to raise additional issues or questions with regards to the research topic or the aim of the research itself. Interviews generally took 30–90 min. Due to the sensitive nature of the research it was decided against recording interviews in favour of extensive note-taking on paper during interviews, which were transcribed electronically later on the same day.

#### *4.3. Secondary Methods and Materials*

Additional data on land use and displacement impacts among urban farmers specifically was collected by means of structured interviews among 22 displaced farmers within the context of drainage resettlement discussed earlier. The interviews were based on predetermined questions with regards to livelihood impacts of displacement and (informal) land value, generally spanning 10–15 min.

Extensive observations and informal interviews were also undertaken throughout Beira, as well as the attendance of various stakeholder meetings and public fora. These included negotiations surrounding the Beira masterplan in the Netherlands, the Beira investments conference and a civil society workshop in Beira. Such observations and participation were systematically reported providing an additional source of qualitative data.

Finally, secondary data in the form of project documentation and policies was extensively analysed in order to triangulate and corroborate the qualitative findings. This included a range of project documents which were rarely publicly available, such as tenders, scoping studies and impact assessments, which were systematically collected through interviews with professional respondents.

#### 4.4. Data Analysis

Data analysis was broadly informed by an iterative grounded approach whereby preliminary analysis of findings served to steer the further selection of respondents and respective interview topics. Analysis of the transcribed data (interviews, observations and field reports) and project documentation was undertaken with an initial phase of open coding based on the interview topics and additional categories which emerged inductively. This open coding was undertaken in parallel with the data collection. Once data collection was complete the open codes were abstracted into relational clusters which were synthesized into the three conceptual categories discussed in the findings. This iterative analysis process was simultaneously informed by deductive categories derived from various bodies of critical literature.

### 5. Mapping the Dimensions of a Contested City

#### 5.1. The Bifurcated State and 'Going It Alone'

The first dimension of urban geopolitics distinguished here relates to the working of the formal state. In Mozambique the post-colonial state is widely known for being structured as a conduit for FRELIMO interests, blurring the lines between the party and the state. Indeed, the state and the party have often been understood to be inseparable in the eyes of FRELIMO leaders [24]. This raises important questions about the politics of decentralization, particularly in an oppositional stronghold challenging those elites which have become intertwined with state structures.

State governance over Beira's territory is comprised of a patchwork of mandates held by various state entities which can broadly be distinguished between municipality level institutions and central state institutions. The central level is referred to here as the administrative bodies appointed through the national government. This includes national, provincial and district level bodies, the latter being a particularly contentious issues in Beira's governance which will be discussed shortly. The central level is mandated with various responsibilities in the realm of urban development, including the yearly imbursement of municipality funds, the development and maintenance major public infrastructures and large-scale lending from development banks. During urban planning and development, a particularly prominent role is played by the provincial department of the ministry of Land, Environment and Rural Development (MITADER, formerly MICOA) which is tasked with environmental licensing, resettlement planning and the ratification of urban plans.

The municipality on the other hand, is comprised of an executive council, appointed by a locally elected mayor and a legislative assembly. The municipality administration has extensive duties in the realm of land management through its cadastre and registry, which is tasked with allocating formal land use titles (DUATs) and licensing. Municipality land management is underpinned by urban planning as DUATs can only be allocated in zones which have been planned in accordance with Mozambique's top-down urban planning system. Urban planning is therefore a prerequisite for the formalization of urban land use rights. While the municipality also has extensive responsibilities in the realm of urban planning, as stated above (certain) plans must be ratified by MITADER in order to assure regional integration and compliance with national regulations.

The municipality is further comprised of a decentralized administrative structure which spans several administrative zones, with each zone being further subdivided into several neighbourhood-level secretaries. Neighbourhood secretaries constitute the lowest level of the formal municipality administration and play a crucial role in administering local urbanization dynamics. Beneath the neighbourhood level there is an additional hierarchy comprised of several levels of locally appointed community chiefs. Although these chiefs are not part of the formal municipality, in practice they work closely with neighbourhood secretaries. As a result, municipality and community institutions often function as a single governance structure, allowing for a notable degree of monitoring by the municipality's executive body of local dynamics.



Thus, from a formal perspective, urban development in Mozambique is premised on close cooperation between the central and municipality levels. In reality however, urban governance in Beira is strongly divided along the lines of political factionism. Interviews with respondents revealed widespread accounts of central state institutions being used to frustrate efforts of the municipality government. These included the systematic delay of yearly payments of municipality funds and routine foot-dragging in instances requiring coordination and/or cooperation with the municipality. Elsewhere FRELIMO interests have accused of instigating community unrest for political purposes by the municipality leadership. In 2015 for instance, municipality land surveyors were met with violent protest in the urban expansion zone of Chota by households fearing expropriation of their land. According to the municipality leadership, no such threat existed however, arguing instead that the protest had been instigated by a local advocacy organization working for a UK funded civil society program in Beira. Suspecting FRELIMO interference, the municipality leadership subsequently suspended the organization from the UK funded program.

Whereas the motives behind these contentions often remain in the realm of speculation, the FRELIMO regime engaged in a particularly overt effort at reducing the municipality's power after MDM secured a landslide victory in the 2013 municipality elections. Based on a new legal amendment in accepted in 2013, the central government presented a plan in 2014 aimed at establishing a district level government in Beira, which would see more than half of Beira's neighbourhoods come under the control of central government. The move was met with fierce protest from Beira's leadership. Although the controversial reform was not followed through by a territorial division of Beira, it did result in the staffing and funding of an overlapping district level administration with an ambiguous mandate, which broadly perceived as an attempt at frustrating the municipality's mandate.

These contentions are illustrative of the extent in which factionism has come to shape urban governance in Beira, manifesting in a deep distrust of the central state on behalf the municipality leadership. To overcome the dependence on the central state the municipality leadership has undertaken various strategies, one of which has been to court international donors whose finance and political clout have been used to leverage investments into the city's development. More generally however, factionist divides have resulted in a municipality management culture which can best be described as 'going it alone,' whereby formal mandates of central state are often circumvented by the municipality.

A notable example of such a 'going it alone' strategy was the recent development of a city-level masterplan with support from the Netherlands, which detailed a modernist vision of 'formal' middle class urbanism in Beira. This vision was premised on extensive land management reforms and top-down residential developments by property developers. From the perspective of Mozambican planning regulations however, no provisions exist for such a masterplan, thus allowing the municipality to bypass the formal ratification duties of MITADER. Through this strategy, the municipality leadership was able to adopt a strategic development vision, which was widely publicized throughout Mozambique and beyond, without the involvement of the state institutions commonly mandated with urban planning. At the same time, this meant that the development vision laid out in the masterplan did not have any formal institutional basis, constituting little more than a political manifesto of the municipality's leadership.

In practice however, the masterplan was wielded as an authoritative development tool nonetheless, with far-reaching implications for pre-existing claims to urban space. In the masterplan vision for instance, urban agriculture was assumed to be systematically displaced from the city. This vision is reflective of MDM's modernist stance, whereby urban farming is considered to be a backwards practice. This ideology has seen urban farmers being recast as temporary place holders in the city, reversing decades of institutional support to farmers by the central government since the early 1980's. According to leading land rights experts however, this policy of systematic displacement is a legally ambiguous one. To complicate things further, this is a strategy which has been fiercely contested by Beira's district government, who stated their intent to continue technical support and

land regularization efforts for urban farmers in Beira. As a result, urban land use in Beira has become subjected to two incompatible policies at the hand of competing political regimes.

Strategies of 'going it alone' have also appeared within the context of resettlements associated with donor funded infrastructure projects in Beira. During the research two such resettlements were observed involving 110 and 34 households respectively, which were overseen by the municipality and associated project staff. The formally mandated central state institutions had not been involved however, nor were the resettlement associated with formal resettlement planning as required by national regulations [36]. Due to the limited municipality resources, the resettlements were undertaken in an extremely ad hoc manner, resulting in widespread conflict and livelihood loss. In a third case, involving the resettlement of 21 households and 490 farmers, the project was in fact coordinated in accordance with Mozambican law. However, the resettlement plan was premised on the allocation of replacement agricultural by the municipality to displaced farmers, thus contradicting the municipality's policy of total agricultural displacement. Not surprisingly, when it came to implementation, the majority of farmers were compensated informally with 5000 meticals per plot (circa 80 US dollars at the time of writing), instead of receiving replacement land in the zones identified in the resettlement plan. As a result of state bifurcation therefore, resettlements have been undertaken without compliance to national laws and (where applicable) international standards. As we will discuss in more detail later on, these dynamics are closely related to the role of donors in Beira's urban development.

The contentious governance dynamics in Beira have been further enabled by the relative absence of professional land rights organizations operating in the city. This was illustrated by the aforementioned UK funded civil society program which found that 'interaction between local stakeholders and the municipal institutions was nearly non-existent.' [37], p. 1. Indeed, respondents from national NGO's based in Maputo, argued that engaging in Beira's civic politics was extremely challenging and contentious due to suspicions of 'Southern' (i.e., FRELIMO) interference on behalf of the municipality leadership. The municipality's 'going it alone' strategy can therefore be understood as extending well beyond the state and into the realm of civic engagement more generally. As a result, the threat of FRELIMO interference has simultaneously served to keep outside actors at a distance whose interest may not be aligned with those of the municipality leadership.

However warranted the distrust of the central state may be, state bifurcation and 'going it alone' poses clear challenges to social equity. Not just by impacting negatively on pre-existing claims to urban space but by doing so in a manner which has undermined formal regulations and civic rights. Paradoxically therefore, the pursuit of Beira's modernist development vision has been associated with practices more closely resembling 'state-informality' than formal bureaucratic consolidation [38].

## 5.2. Bottom-Up Urbanism

For the majority of urban denizens in Beira the municipality's development efforts are still of marginal relevance however within the context of everyday urbanism. From the perspective of the urban majority, the formal state has historically been absent and/or hostile. As a result, urbanization has continued to evolve largely outside the channels of the formal bureaucracy through the further evolution of the 'cane' city (although bricks are now the norm). It is with the actors and practices of these bottom-up dynamics where the second dimension of urban geopolitics can be distinguished in Beira.

For the average household in Beira, land is acquired and secured through a specific set of practices and institutional arrangements, beginning with negotiations between a buyer and seller. As the vast majority of housing in Beira is built incrementally, these negotiations generally concern 'undeveloped' land without any pre-built structures. Such negotiations over land are overseen by community chiefs, who are often the first point of call for potential buyers seeking land in a given neighbourhood. Once a price is agreed upon by all parties, the new ownership is registered with neighbourhood secretary. New denizens generally file for a declaration of occupancy with the neighbourhood secretary,

which serves as an affidavit which is required for various purposes, such as opening bank accounts and engaging in formal employment. In return for the services provided, these land transactions are generally associated with the payment of fees to the local chiefs and neighbourhood secretary.

These institutional arrangements are similar to those observed in the capital city of Maputo, which have been credited with providing a substantial degree of oversight and tenure security in the absence of the formal state [27,39,40]. From a formal perspective however, these practices are illegal, as they are premised on the sale of land which is forbidden by the Mozambican constitution. They are nonetheless practices which are monitored and profited from by formal municipality representatives in the form of neighbourhood secretaries. Due to the hybrid and socially legitimate nature of these institutions' scholars have referred to them as modes of 'alternative formality' and 'twilight institutions' [27], p. 424, [39,40]. According to respondents of the municipality leadership and donors however, these practices are understood simply as 'informality'. The pivotal role played by municipality institutions in these processes does not appear as part of this developmental discourse however, resulting in the systematic misdiagnosis of the institutional dynamics underpinning urbanization.

As with urban expansion undertaken by the municipality, these bottom-up processes are premised on land-use change, for which agricultural land is a crucial resource. The displacement of agricultural land has therefore been an inherent feature of urbanization in Beira. Whereas the municipality acquires land through coercion in return for marginal compensation however, bottom-up transactions generally occur between a willing buyer and seller. Moreover, as argued by various (former) owners of agricultural plots, the price of land on the 'informal' markets is generally significantly higher than the compensation provided by the municipality. In addition to being a source of household subsistence therefore, agricultural land is an important resource which can be sold or transformed into accommodation for rental or housing purposes. Due to its strategic relevance and increasing scarcity in Beira, land is often acquired for small-scale speculative purposes in urban expansion zones.

Whereas most of these practices occur under the radar of so-called formality, certain affluent minorities can formalize their claims through the municipality cadastre, which is a notoriously corrupt institution in Beira. In these instances, land is acquired through the bottom-up governance arrangements and then subsequently formalized through DUAT registration, without complying to formal laws and regulations. Once such a DUAT has been allocated illegally, the use rights can be sold to the highest bidder on the 'formal' market, where titled plots are much higher still than land on the informal market. According to one respondent's account of land prices in the expansion zone of Mangalene, untitled plots can generally fetch 10,000–15,000 meticals (circa 160–230 USD at the time of writing), while titled plots in the same area are sold for 150,000–200,000 meticals (circa 2400–3100 USD). For those with the resources and connections to access the cadastre therefore, the 'formalization' of untitled land can provide for massive windfalls.

These findings demonstrate that land is at the basis of an urban economy from which various social strata derive an income, ranging from local chiefs to small scale speculators and well-connected elites. This economy can be distinguished from other land-related livelihoods such as urban agriculture, due to the fact that it is premised on land use *change*. In fact, it is within this transition from 'undeveloped' to developed land that a much broader array of urban livelihoods come into play. Incremental housing for instance, which is often mistakenly referred to as 'self-build,' is predominantly undertaken by day laborers in Beira, serving as a major sector of employment for men in particular. The building materials fuelling Beira's urban expansion are similarly premised on an extensive sector of sand/gravel harvesting and brick production, which is undertaken in numerous sites throughout the city while generating income for those involved. Consequentially, 'informal' urbanization is a major economic sector in Beira, premised on the continuous production of urban space.

Although municipality institutions partake in bottom-up urbanism in various ways, it is a dimension which is fundamentally at odds with modernist development agenda of the current municipality leadership. It is not surprising therefore that encounters between these two dimensions

routinely result in conflict. From the perspective of the municipality leadership, such conflicts are often described as the result of 'informal' encroachments into designated formal expansion zones. Such 'encroachment' is generally framed as an intentional strategy aimed at eliciting compensation from the municipality. From the outside however, it is very hard to distinguish such speculative practices from the usual incremental housing associated with bottom-up urbanism. This was illustrated poignantly within the context of a contentious resettlement associated with the development of a SEZ in Beira. In this case, circa 60 households were initially refused compensation on the grounds of being 'opportunists' intentionally encroaching into the project site. According to various household respondents among this group however, many were not aware of the pending project. Indeed, some respondents argued that they had received a declaration of occupancy from the neighbourhood secretary, pointing again to the institutional basis underpinning 'informality' which is generally overlooked in the accounts of municipality leaders and donors.

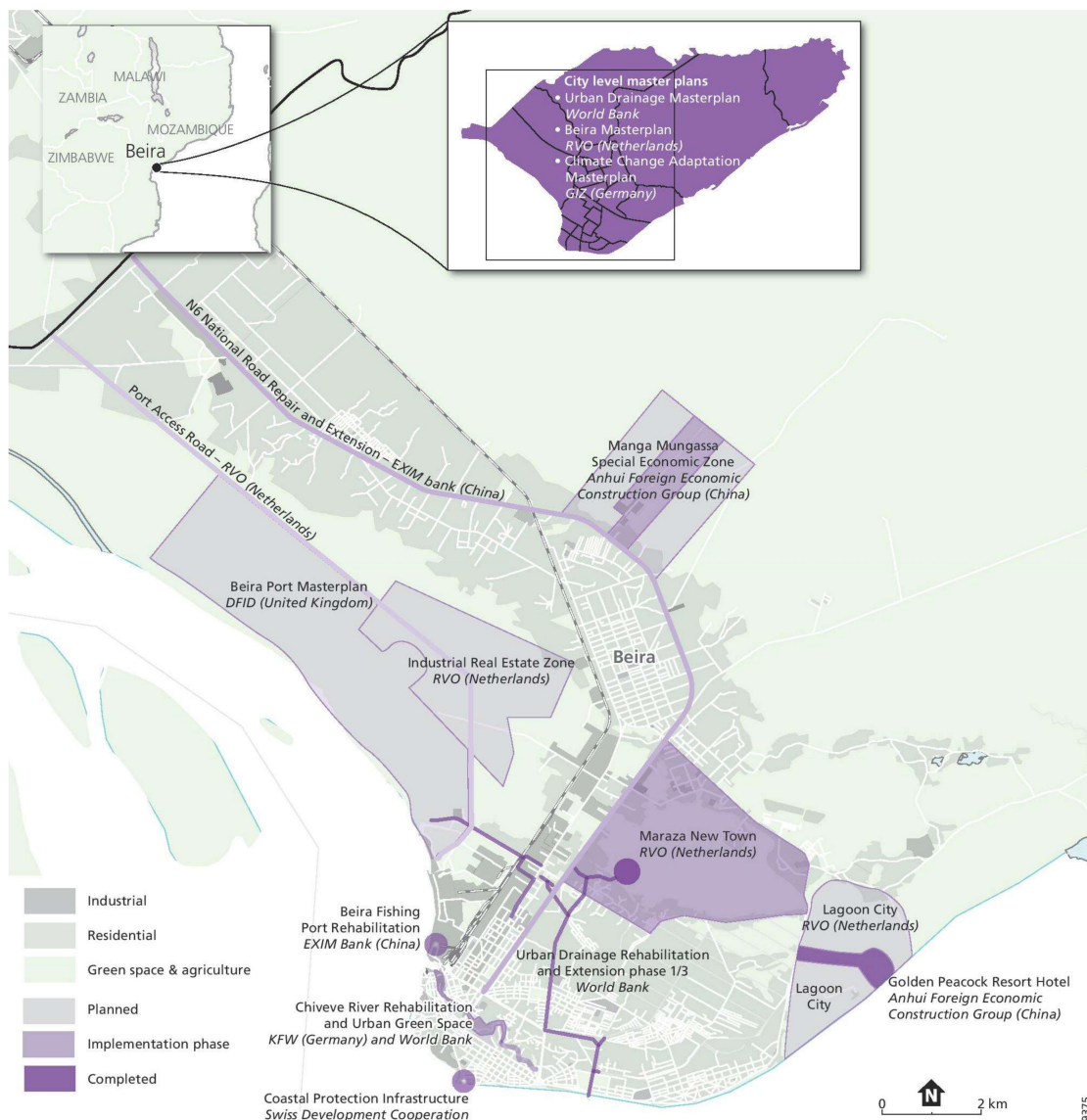
This is not to suggest that speculative encroachments do not occur however, as it was a widely reported phenomenon among municipality and household respondents during the research. In addition to the outright acquisition of land for speculative purposes, such strategies can also be undertaken pre-emptively by land owners facing displacement. Indeed, it is widely recognized that residential properties are eligible for higher compensation than agricultural plots, providing ample rationale for poor households to convert their 'undeveloped' plots into makeshift housing. In a similar vein, news of pending evictions can serve as a motive to sell plots to unsuspecting newcomers at a higher price than the compensation provided by the municipality.

With Beira's development vision currently centred on middle-class modernity it can be expected that bottom up urbanism will continue to be a major urban condition for the foreseeable future. Due to the unprecedented effort at restructuring Beira, conflicts over land will likely continue as municipality and bottom-up claims collide. At the same time, it is likely that new household strategies will begin to emerge on the nexus of bottom-up urbanism and municipality consolidation, centred on the control of land. Indeed, the growing amount of resettlement houses throughout the city serve as a visible reminder of the potential benefits to be accrued by poor households caught up in this nexus. This is particularly true for those denizen looking at resettlements from a distance, seeing what appear to be significant improvements in living conditions and household assets, while being unaware of the conflict and hardship associated with resettlement.

### *5.3. Tender Politics and the Donor City*

The dimensions of urban geopolitics discussed so far have been based on longstanding legacies in Beira, evolving out of the city's historical antagonism towards the central state and the marginal presence of the formal bureaucracy. In recent years however, the city has become host to an inflow of international donor resources which has altered and complicated pre-existing struggles over urban space in the city. It is through the engagements of international donor that a third dimension of urban geopolitics has begun to emerge in Beira, which closely related to the other dimensions yet distinct in terms of the practices and actors associated with it.

Donor engagements in Beira have amounted to 100's of millions of USD which have predominantly targeted the built environment. These have included several high-profile infrastructure interventions, such as an SEZ, urban drainage and river rehabilitation, and public green space development, costing a reported 500, 45 and 31 million USD respectively. For Beira such a concentration of international donor investments has been unprecedented, as large-scale investments by international donors in the past have narrowly targeted the city's port. Figure 1 provides a tentative overview of the spatial implications of these interventions, all of which have been initiated after MDM came to office in Beira in 2008. These interventions encompass a range of urban planning, land management and infrastructural interventions in various stages of implementation, all of which are premised on land use change and (often) forced displacement.



**Figure 1.** Land use patterns and the spatial implications of recent (proposed) interventions in the built environment in Beira with funding from international donors.

All the projects depicted in Figure 1 have been financed in some way or other by foreign states, either through bilateral modalities, multilateral development banks or state-owned companies. The financial flows behind these interventions are considerably more complex than the Figure 1 reveals however, as it only depicts the spatial implications of these interventions, not the individual projects associated with each intervention. In reality, these spatial interventions are generally comprised of multiple distinct projects, spanning various planning and implementation phases. The Maraza New Town intervention for instance, which consists of the development of flood resilient neighbourhoods, is in fact comprised of a slew of projects in the realm of cadastral reform, urban design, engineering and resettlement (among others). Although some of these interventions may never actually make it to the implementation phase, they are nonetheless part of a complex donor funded development industry in Beira, centred on restructuring the city's land use.

Beira's development industry is made up of aid-bureaucrats, consultants, engineers and government staff, who are loosely strung together into project-specific actor-constellations through contracts and formal mandates. In many instances these development actors come from abroad, drawn into project constellations through international tenders put out by funding agencies or

the Mozambican government. The content of projects is therefore highly contingent upon the conditionalities imposed during tendering processes, which differ from donor to donor. Chinese investments for instance are tied to Chinese firms while World Bank investments are subject to competitive bidding. Other donors, such as the Netherlands, employ a variety of 'informal' techniques for securing the preferential involvement of Dutch firms.

A particularly salient feature of these actor constellations is the general absence of NGO's or any other impartial professionals with the capacity to legally represent communities and oversee project implementation. As a result, donor interventions do not provide any provisions to offset the limited presence of civil society in Beira. Without any such representation or oversight, issues of social equity are generally relegated to specific temporal slots within project management frameworks, such as impact assessments, which are often undertaken by foreign consultants with little in-depth understanding of urban land governance in Beira. This means that project governance is dominated by actors whose primary interests lie with the rapid and 'successful' (i.e., technical) implementation of projects. Consequentially, there is generally little incentive for incorporating issues into project governance which may frustrate this goal, such as politically sensitive issues of community participation and mobilization.

Whereas many project-specific interests are short term in nature and limited to the procurement and implementation of specific projects, some are notably long term and aimed at establishing a continued presence in Beira. The Manga Mungassa SEZ for instance, funded by the Chinese state-owned company Anhui Foreign Economic Construction Group (AFECG), saw AFECG continuing with the management of the SEZ after it was developed. In a similar vein, the Netherlands has recently sought to establish a so-called Land Development Company (LDC) in partnership with Beira's municipality, aimed extracting revenues through 'formal' urban expansion. Initially based on a 50% buy-in by the Dutch development bank FMO, of which the Dutch government is a majority shareholder, the LDC represented an effort to secure a long-term presence of Dutch institutions in Beira's governance. In both the SEZ and LDC cases therefore, we see donors pursuing strategies aimed at institutionalizing a presence in Beira's urban (land) governance.

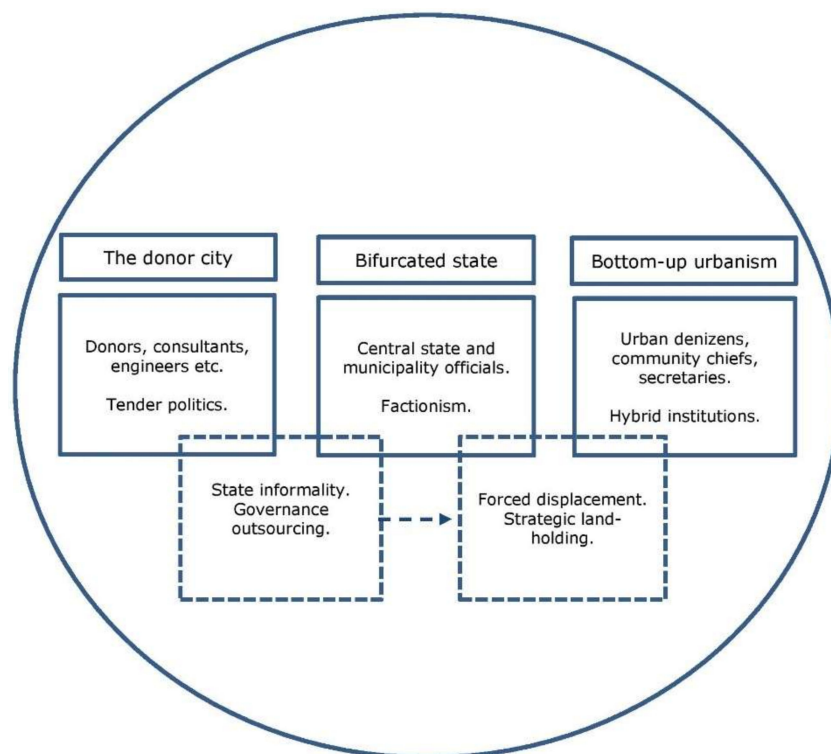
The dependence on resources from abroad has resulted in Beira's urban development becoming a highly outsourced undertaking, largely contingent upon the 'tender politics' of (private) non-state actors. These engagements are also characterized by a high degree of secrecy and fragmentation, particularly between different projects. The three city-level masterplans depicted in Figure 1 for instance, served as a particularly salient illustration of these inter-project politics. For despite occurring within the same timeframe, these initiatives were undertaken in mutual isolation, eventually resulting in the creation of three incompatible urban plans containing contradictory recommendations with regards to Beira's spatial development. Respondents mentioned various institutional reasons for the fragmented nature of donor interventions in Beira. For instance, contrary to the national level in Mozambique, there is no formal donor coordination platform at the city level in Beira. Moreover, aid allocations are often negotiated from afar, only touching ground in the city once projects have already been designed. Other respondents pointed to more political causes behind donor fragmentation in Beira. As argued by a senior donor staffer with regards to inter-donor dynamics in Beira; 'we have become each other's competitors.' Indeed, donors such as China and the Netherlands have now explicitly placed the pursuit of domestic self-interest at the centre of their current development agenda's.

These contradictory tender-politics are particularly problematic against the background of state-bifurcation in Beira, which donors inevitably encounter and influence during their engagements. In fact, the municipality strategies of 'going it alone' described earlier have been closely related to donors interventions. The masterplan for instance, used to lay claims to Beira's land by circumventing national planning regulations, was developed and overseen by Dutch actors. In a similar vein, the contentious resettlements discussed earlier have occurred within the context of interventions financed and overseen by China, Germany and the World Bank. As a result, donor engagements have

facilitated and contributed to processes of state-informality in Beira, further undermining urban rights and the checks and balances on state power outlined in national laws and regulations.

#### 5.4. Dimensions and Encounters in Beira's Relational Space

Figure 2 provides a tentative conceptual representation of the urban geopolitical dimensions identified in the research. Each of the dimensions represents a distinct set of actors and organizing principles which have shaped the production and control of urban space in Beira. As demonstrated by the research findings, these dimensions are by no means reflective of coherent interests and are highly contentious. Beneath the three dimension two additional spaces have been depicted representing new contentions which have emerged in the encounters between these dimensions. The space on the left shows how donor engagements with the (bifurcated) state have produced new forms of state-informality, while simultaneously leading to the outsourcing of urban development. These encounters have served to further exacerbate the ambiguity of urban governance and the associated roles and responsibilities. Depicted on the righthand side are the encounters between the state (i.e., the municipality) and bottom-up urbanism which have produced dynamics of forced displacement as well as strategic land holding on behalf of urban denizens. As demonstrated by the connecting arrow, the second space is closely related to the first, with donor engagements giving additional momentum to the consolidation efforts of the municipality.



**Figure 2.** Conceptual model of the dimension and spaces of encounter in Beira's contemporary urban geopolitics.

## 6. Discussion & Conclusions

The findings provide a tentative exploration of what an urban geopolitical perspective looks like when applied to the context of African urban development. By taking contentions over urban space as an analytical starting point, along with the actors and practices associated with them, we are provided with a more open and exploratory perspective of urban change than if we were to restrict our analysis to specific predetermined urban modalities (such as informality, neoliberalism etc.). Such a perspective also allows us to avoid the common pitfalls associated with discussion of scale and the implicit power

hierarchies often contained in them [41], focusing instead on the multiple engagements unfolding in the 'relational-site' of the city [13].

The research findings confirm growing concerns with the role of African states with regards to facilitating elite developments which are detrimental to the urban majority. So far however, the state has often been discussed (implicitly) as a coherent entity in terms of the interests it represents in the existing literature on this topic [4,7]. As demonstrated by the research findings, the state is itself an extremal contentious arena comprised of rival bureaucratic factions. As seen in Beira, the role of 'the state' is highly dependent on the bureaucratic faction in question, with engagements in day-to-day politics ranging from facilitative to obstructive with regards to urban development. Thus, what is depicted as a single state in formal laws and regulations, appears in *practice* to resemble two rival states competing over the same territory. This points to a deeply contentious aspect of urban development which will likely become more pronounced in other authoritarian countries as development becomes increasingly centred on decentralized urban management [3], bringing forth new fissures and contentions within established state and elite structures.

The growing emphasis on urban decentralization is based on the assumption that it can facilitate more accountable and inclusive urban governance, an assumption which is shared by leading African urbanists such as Parnell [3]. The findings discussed here bring into light new complexities with regards to this agenda however. For one, the politics of state-bifurcation as seen in Beira have served to undermine the (fragile) civic rights and checks and balances on administrative power outlined in formal laws and regulations. This could of course be argued as being a symptom of *partial* decentralization, not decentralization itself, serving as an argument for greater municipality autonomy. At the same time however, the findings provide very little evidence that municipality leaders are committed to greater responsiveness and accountability, particularly where it might compromise the agenda of political and territorial consolidation. As a result, 'state-informality' appears to be both an inevitable consequence of current institutional arrangement and a deliberate urban management strategy of the municipality [38].

In contemporary debates on African urban development, international donors have generally not featured as the subject of scholarly critique, with the exception of China [4,8]. As demonstrated by Noorloos Kloosterboer's analysis of African new city development, there are clear empirical reasons for this, as international donors have had a marginal presence in the realm of African urban development [8]. On the other hand, there are also normative considerations at play, as demonstrated by Parnell & Robinson's rejection of 'conspiratorial' neoliberal critiques which have often been levelled at global development institutions by urban theorists [17]. As demonstrated by the research findings however, international donors are now beginning to make a mark on African city making. At very least, this points to the need for greater scrutiny of the politics of international development and its implications for urban development, an issue which has been a major focus of Southern urbanists working outside of Africa [14,15].

At the same time, the research findings suggest that these politics are more complex and contradictory than those observed by Southern urbanists such as Goldman in India [14,15]. For instead of appearing as a homogenous set of interests, development actors appear in their day-to-day engagements as a notably secretive and fragmented dimension of urban geopolitics, which is neither coherent nor predictable. In fact, donors are but one of several categories of (private) non-state actors which are temporarily contracted into projects governance, drawn in from afar through arbitrary tender-politics. It is the outsourcing of urban development which is the major issue here, together with its implications for accountability and social equity. These donor politics resemble the contradictory dynamics which have repeatedly been observed at the national level within the context of 'traditional' development [42]. In the urban era, we see that these dynamics are now shifting to the city scale. These trends serve to further compound the ambiguity of urban governance which is already highly informal. Indeed, the overwhelming emphasis on technical expertise suggests that issues of inclusion and empowerment are not part of the development toolkit of funding agencies at all. Instead urban



development as seen in Beira is understood as a quality of the built environment only, which is clearly at odds with the holistic targets of the SDG's and NUA [3].

This article has also underscored the growing understanding that urban development is fundamentally about competing claims to urban land, as argued by land governance scholars such as Zoomers et al., Steel et al. and Noorloos et al. [2,5,19]. For whether it be modernist masterplans or uncoordinated infrastructure developments, 'development' is premised on (forcibly) displacing pre-existing claims to urban space which, more often than not, are considered 'informal.' By unpacking the actors and practice associated with so-called informality the findings have revealed a hybrid governance practice premised on the involvement of formal administrative units, similar to the 'alternative formality' observed in Maputo by Anderson et al. [27], p. 424. But so-called called informality is not just an issue of housing and (relative) tenure security however, but the production of urban space more generally and the socio-cultural and socio-economic practices associated with it. Consequentially the displacement of 'informality' as envisaged by modernist plans will have much further implications than issues of tenure alone.

That being said, it remains to be seen what the long-term implications will be of massive investment flows targeting a highly informal urban context like Beira. Indeed, from a historical perspective, contemporary urban development has appeared as the latest in a succession of 'formal' regimes which has been indifferent and/or hostile towards the interest and practices of the urban majority. At very least therefore, the findings point to a continued disconnect between modalities of state governance and international development on the one hand, and the urban majority who they are intended to serve on the other. As a result, it is unlikely that the historical dominance of bottom-up urbanism will cede any time soon. In reference to Pieterse therefore, the findings further emphasize the need for a progressive agenda which puts the energies and ingenuity of those who build the real city at the centre of development efforts [43].

**Funding:** This research was primarily funded by LANDac, with complementary data collected within the context of research funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

**Acknowledgments:** We would like to acknowledge Amilton Cesar and Pedro Zacharias for their tireless assistance and Sérgio Niquisse at the Catholic University of Beira for his support. We would also like to acknowledge Alda Salomão at Centro Terra Viva for her continued support and knowledge, as well as Alberto Magaia for providing an introduction to the city of Beira. Finally we would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their constructive input to the final version.

**Conflicts of Interest:** Complementary data collection was undertaken and financed through a project commissioned by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs within the context of the Netherlands engagements in Beira, aimed at analyzing the politics of resettlement and displacement in Beira. Publishing rights to data acquired during this project was secured contractually by the author. The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript and in the decision to publish the results. The author therefore declares no conflict of interest.

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