

through its hollow shell I discern a half-dozen water towers. Wooden technologies, post-industrial spaces and mid-century urban renewal thus stand amid the jackfruits of Bloombergian wealth, evidence of urban uprisings, and a high-rise future that, for now, remains on hold. This author-less vista is totally incoherent, yet obviously New York. I have looked out this window every day for years, but I have only come to see it this way – truthfully, to see it all – after reading Williams' book. Rather than a designed cityscape, I see processes all around me – the ultimate tribute to this witty, perceptive and transformative new book.

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**David Morton**, *Age of Concrete: Housing and the Shape of Aspiration in the Capital of Mozambique*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2019. 336pp. 72 illustrations. \$90.00 hbk. \$32.95 pbk.  
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Cities have primarily been sites of struggle in the historiography of Africa. The scholarship of the 1980s and early 1990s, focusing most sharply on the 1930s–1950s, emphasized the struggles between the state and a proletarianizing African urban class, with the bulldozer representing the primary vehicle of state power. David Morton's *Age of Concrete* advances the discussion of African urbanism in innovative directions, presenting a history of Maputo, Mozambique, through the structures, homes and neighbourhoods that Mozambican city-dwellers built and maintained, sometimes in defiance of the state, but in other cases by successfully utilizing the levers of municipal governance.

Although the book follows a chronological order, spanning late Portuguese imperialism through the era of FRELIMO rule in the 1970s and 1980s, each chapter is thematically distinct. The first chapter underscores how colonial Maputo lacked the 'buffer zones' of South Africa, Kenya and Rhodesia that maintained 'great distances between predominantly African neighborhoods and predominantly European neighborhoods' (p. 30). Although Europeans maintained a separate quarter in the cement city, Africans lived in proximity with Europeans, sharing close interactions and spatial intimacies. The following chapters underscore the interplay between residents of the *subúrbios* and municipal authorities, as residents pursued their aspirations for (what they saw as) better housing, with concrete becoming the preferred construction material. Residents who built concrete structures risked eventual eviction, demolition of their homes and devastating fines. They eluded the state through different methods, such as using zinc to mask the concrete construction of their homes. Residents, though, also pushed the state for legitimacy, even if it meant inviting the gaze of state planners into their communities. The final chapters focus on Maputo's transition to post-independence, particularly how the built environment 'mediated the emerging relationship between Mozambican citizens and Mozambican authorities' (p. 153). The efforts

of the revolutionary FRELIMO state to nationalize the 'concrete city' and improve the conditions of the *subúrbios* mostly took the form of 'triage and vacillation', with ordinary residents asserting their rights to shape these processes (p. 154).

Morton's work, which integrates history, urban geography and architecture, contributes to a growing renaissance in scholarship on African urbanism, which is emphasizing cities as not only places of hardship and toil, but as spaces where Africans could fulfil aspirations for mobility and domestic respectability. Residents' aspirations for concrete houses resulted in engagements with the state, giving, as Morton puts it, 'substance to what governance was and what governance should do' (p. 11). Residents of the *subúrbios* engaged both the colonial and post-independent states to achieve better housing and access to municipal services. In doing so, they worked to make their neighbourhoods visible to the gaze of municipal planners (p. 187). This point provides a contrast to the general breadth of scholarship, which has largely emphasized how urban residents eluded the state. Morton thus posits new approaches to understand urban politics in both colonial and post-colonial Africa, particularly concerning how African city-dwellers engaged the institutions of municipal power to advance their aspirations.

Although Morton successfully weaves social history and the study of built forms, the book would have benefited from a stronger delineation of the identities of the residents, particularly their place within the evolving class structures of colonial and post-colonial Maputo. How did the processes of class formation and social differentiation inform residents' pursuit of concrete houses? What were the avenues in which residents acquired capital for concrete construction? My second critique stems from the author's treatment of modernity. As Morton asserts, the stake of residents' engagement in the politics of housing and infrastructure was 'not just a vision of what a "modern" city should be but also a vision of modern society and what it meant to belong to one' (p. 11). It was not necessarily clear, however, how residents shaped broader discourses about the meaning of modernity through their struggles for better housing and legitimacy; rather, these pursuits seemed to convey an intellectual pulse of their own, reflecting their personal aspirations for security, dignity and mobility. The concept of modernity, in this respect, did not contribute much in terms of giving understanding to these engagements.

Morton's *Age of Concrete* nonetheless portends intriguing and important directions in the study of urbanism in Africa. African cities were not just sites of struggle, but socially intricate spaces where residents explored new possibilities for identity and mobility. Africans' endeavours to make cities places where they could fulfil these aspirations required new avenues of politics. Morton's work consequently underlines the importance of home and the built environment to these political formations.

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