

Shoes from the pavements by Berry Bickle

There are many shadow people in this city, the raggedy crazy men that roam the traffic, talking or singing themselves into the world of others. There is one man, a sort of beacon on our street, his patch is a precise square next to a pile of rubbish. He means to survive in his vagrant's outpost, sweeping right to the edges of that noxious heap. Defying our judgment between what is sanity and his survival. The sweeper lives in the extremity of spaces claimed by the marginal peoples of this city. What makes his existence somewhat normal is that he appears as a textural extension to the congested pavements. He is meters away from an ancient Mercedes truck that will never see the roads again; this is shop front to a tailor, a shoe repair and an electrician. The pavement is a patchwork of vegetables on offer, steps to the entrance of a school are the prime location for women who offer snacks of roasted nuts. This is in a side road adjacent to the commercial heart of the city.

Avenida Maguiguana, no bairro do Alto-Mae, nesta cidade de Maputo.

Capital city of the Republic of Moçambique, longitude 33 latitude 26. This is the busy, dense, modern city of Maputo, a port city on the Indian Ocean. Like all cities in Africa. Maputo has in the last decades seen a massive immigration from rural to urban. Statistically the world's population live in cities, the African cities being one of the fastest growing populations where the extremes of modernity are played out in both the success and struggle for survival. From visitors who venture beyond the confines of luxury hotels or business addresses there are no compliments for the conditions that house the ever increasing populations of the contemporary African city. Dirty, dangerous and shocking are the predominant deflative descriptions of this urbanity. They are right, the urban decay and all the realities of urban poverty are the existence of the majority of Maputo's inhabitants. What has brought waves of people to this city is not a vibrant economy offering employment in a productive sector, as there are few factories or large employers, but rural hardship. Be it war, drought or floods, Moçambique in its recent history has had all three plagues in their extremes. A 15 year civil war, floods that were some of the worst seen on the continent and excruciating repetitions of drought all making rural peoples increasingly vulnerable. So people turn to the cities and once here seldom if ever return to a rural existence. Once here they must live, so trade is the obvious and sustainable method of surviving in yet an other harsh landscape.

The cities in Africa have their colonial past as the trajectory of modernity that established urbanity, urban commerce and urban community. They were created as the nerve centers through which the administrative European power and commerce flowed. From European capitals modernity was duplicated by proximity, serving particular needs and interests of colonial powers. The 'native' inhabitants were a labour class, their right to live in the city strictly controlled and segregated to serve the commercial and administrative powers of the times.



From the *Africa Oriental Portuguesa* publication of 1929 are a few statistics and descriptions of this city then.

...lourenço marques which has a population of 9,000 europeans...the asiatics nearly number 3,000, but naturally the number of natives is greater...

...this town of lourenço marques is now a modern town in Africa, which is endeavoring hard not to feel like Africa.....it is a splendid town, one can use this expression without reservation, the trees along its avenues, some of the latter being nearly four thousand meters in length in one straight line running through the town from one end to the other, and amongst which acacias are predominant and covered with blossom during the correct season, all combine to give the streets a cheerful healthy and hygienic appearance.

...the lower town, the town of labour built up in an irregular style with its simple buildings for the purposes of commerce, the local commerce of the natives, is not the same as it was a few years ago, as its old buildings of wood and zinc have been transformed into beautiful edifices of stone and suiting the times, especially in the cultured center of this town of Europeans.

An historical view is useful in understanding the contemporary destructural process of this African city. The bias of the 1930's' *endeavoring hard not to feel like Africa* with it's notions of exclusion by segregation no longer exist. Built from within the historical urbanity are changed city spaces. Alongside the formal economy is an other economy that occupies the city at pavement level modifying the pavement spaces from their original functional notion. To look to the heart of this city is to view an organic occupation, from what was historical exclusion to contemporary occupation. There is the commercial ingenuity of pavement trade that creates an atmosphere of actively flowing market space amongst the cars and pedestrians. Commodities from suitcases to shoes are on offer everywhere, each city block is layered with goods and their vendors. At night the pavements empty of all but vegetable sellers catching the last trade as the city contracts and breathes out, relief from all the day's frantic activity. The impermanence of goods being there and then disappearing to reappear the next day is indicative of a people in flux, not yet having taken root or formed permanent structures. These being people recently arrived in the city from a rural elsewhere to remake their lives.

Shopping from Maputo's pavements is best described if one thing is chosen and actively shopped for. Shoes as they are plentiful and poignant for any one who lived through the hard war years will tell of the unavailability of a pair of shoes. Types of shoes are sold in relation to where you are in the city.

We begin in the Biaxa, or down town, the low-lying central business district. The density of office blocks and banking headquarters establishes it as the economic heart of the city, here is the same commercial modernity found in any international city. Computer generated advertising billboards run commercials from the latest in cellular technology to a holiday destination. It is also the location of the civil departments that run the national bureaucracy and an army of secretaries in its employment. It appears almost mandatory that these officials wear smart black shoes defining their working status. On the corner of the busiest intersection is a neat and forthright display to match the need of the prospective office working clients.





From the sophistication of the formal economic heart of Maputo the Avenida 25 de Setembro will bring you directly from the Baixa to the contrast of open market commerce. The central market and surrounding streets are a haphazard framework of street trading. Rest your eyes on any spot and something is being offered, the list could fill a house hold, but here again shoes are the chosen commodity to narrate a story for the city. What appears chaotic is actually carefully allocated spots for each trader.

Women dominate market trade, their choice of dress is *capulanas* being clothes tied at the waist, a blouse and flip flop sandals. Economical, light and like the black shoes of the business districts are uniformly worn. From the pavements piles of plastic flip flops are sold. It is a utility buy and then move on for there is nothing to choose but red or green or blue repeated from pile to pile. There is no authoritative attempt to maintain these few streets of the central market district, the pavements are teetering on extinction. The streets are pot holed and avoided by vehicles leaving even more space for selling, a pedestrian takeover by default. So full of traders are these streets that any attempt to renovate would displace the most established pavement economy in the city. On these decaying streets the flexibility of flip-flops will see you over the pitted terrain where a pair of heels would stick in the cracked pavements. Flip flop sandals flow on to the streets, being the most in demand item, as the majority of custom is from the women traders.

Being nearly four thousand meters in length in one straight line running through the town from one end to the other of 1929 is today Avenida Eduardo Mondlane extended to nearly seven kilometers. It is the busiest artery of the city as it moves all traffic headed north, south and in terms of commerce could be called the high street. The post-war era of the 1950s saw a wave of European immigration to Moçambique. High-rise apartment blocks and shops replaced what had been graceful residences of the original town. The grid layout is all corners and straight lines, an architectural equivalent can be found in many European cities that had urban expansion in the same era. Mini Bus taxis move thousands of people through this Avenida, their pick up and drop off points being prime trading spots. Being demographically mixed and constantly moving, it is fashion that dominates the trade. T-shirts and jeans supporting famous, if pirate logos are desirable to a fashion conscious youth. Here young men are the shoe vendors. The amount of traffic engenders aggressive pressure, so it is hard and fast selling to the constant flow of people moving between the taxis. There are an abundance of shoes on offer, with only one of a pair in view. Strung together, a shoe fitting must be negotiated while your shoe is still attached to a string of others. Only on agreement of sale is the shoe cut loose and matched. The line by line strings of shoes narrow the walking spaces, you are forced to walk through a pathway created by shoes. A clever strategy as one is made conscious of your own shoes reflected in the new shoes a space away. Equivalents of the latest in fashion can be found, while customers are courted and competed for with a flowing commentary on the benefit to one's image of a new fashionable pair of shoes.





Shoes coming out to occupy the pavement spaces of this city have the gritty realism of needs meeting enterprise. The link between shoes, the pavements and economic enterprise is direct. Approached as the obvious space to place the obvious commodity. It tightens the tension of the streets as commercial activity is not recessed in shops but physical and visual. Redefining urban commerce by occupying open city spaces for trade. In the hard civil war years of the 1980s shoes were impossible to find in Maputo, on the busy congested streets of today there almost too many shoes to be sold and bought. This is a sign of relative prosperity and freedom to make a living without restriction or regulation. The pavements are a free trading zone and vital life line for a transient population.

It can be argued that the informal economy, in this case pavement economy, is a result of the failure of formal or structural economy to employ urban communities and the occupation of pavement spaces puts pressure on an already decaying urban infrastructure. Market type structures could be created as an alternative to the pavements, but a certain character would disappear from the streets, that of the unspoken yet obvious right to occupy the city to meet the economic needs of the ever increasing population.

If the black shoes of the Baixa or the plastic sandals the Market were not the shoes one desired or needed the trade in second hand shoes is an option. Back on Avenida Maguiguana, the sweeper's street, here piles of shoes can be looked through. These shoes saw their previous life somewhere in the first world and arrive as charity bundles. How they come to be sold on the streets is an inexplicable fact of third world economics, but for a reasonable and negotiable price a good pair of shoes can be bought. Repaired and polished, there is no shame in the second hand.

There is an optimistic determination of newly arrived people to survive in this city. Contemporary Africa must look at its urban situations where the majority of future populations will find shelter and employment. Perhaps future generations will find an equitable existence and more security than pavement vending. The vibrant trade is for the present a strategy that serves to sustain thousands of homes across the city, and in the case of shoes make a once unobtainable commodity freely available.

