Closing Remarks
Urban Entanglements as Blind Fields

Maputo, and even more to the point, Johannesburg, have long been and continue to be treated in the academic literature as *divided cities*, characterised by divisions resulting from a legacy of segregation inherited from colonialism and apartheid, as well as experiencing new forms of segregation invoked by neoliberal city building and the anxieties of urban elites around crime. That these two forms of segregation exist and shape Maputo and Johannesburg is uncontested, and the ethnography thus presented reaffirms this. The chapters have even focused on extreme cases of spatial segregation, namely, an urban area divided into an affluent suburb and a poor township in Johannesburg, and an urban area divided into a wealthy elite neighbourhood and a poor *bairro* in Maputo. What the book fundamentally questions, however, is the idea that these spatial segregations are accompanied by absence or at least irrelevance of the social relations crossing these spatial boundaries, like the notions of *divided city* and *cities of walls* seem to imply.

Although the urbanites lead different lives in these adjacent yet separate neighbourhoods, their lives are fundamentally entangled in many ways: through the politics of land in the changing urban areas, through the mutual dependency in the sphere of domestic work, through relations formed by praying together and charity in religious spaces, and through the new forms of sociality emerging in shopping malls. Obviously, there are many more ways in which these urbanites are connected, some involving direct interactions, others related to larger social processes like globalisation and digitalisation. It is impossible to "recognise, let alone to take up and respond to, all those threads by which any individual, or any place, is connected to the world" (Massey 2006: 93). *Cities of entanglements* hence emerges as an analytical perspective, rather than as a type of city.

The shift from *divided cities* to *cities of entanglements* also entails a shift in the theory of space, namely, moving from understanding space as a container to a relational and processual approach. The way how we think about space is "of fundamental importance" (ibid: 90). Spaces in Maputo and Johannesburg only come into being as real urban spaces when urban dwellers integrate them in their everyday routines, when they link them through their spatial practices that take them across the city. It is also impossible to grasp the power of spatial and social boundaries without following urban dwellers who try to cross them, without analysing what happens at the intersections. If we understand neighbourhoods, malls and churches not only in terms of themselves but also in relation to other spaces, we can grasp what makes them urban,

namely, their meanings, functions and connections to each other and to the broader urban society.

Cities of entanglement understands space as always in the making, never finished and never *whole*, and, based on Lefebvre (1996 [1974]), it assumes that space becomes constituted through the interplay of three dimensions, namely *material*, *conceived* and *lived space*. In terms of *material spaces*, the possibilities for urban encounters are deeply shaped by the allocation of places across the urban geography, the transport possibilities urbanites have, walls and access restrictions, but also practical aspects of urban life, like household care, food, consumption and work. Space thus raises one of the key social, political and ethical questions, namely: How we are going to live together? It is through space that we are confronted with the existence of others (Massey 2006: 92). Because of the increasing scarcity of well-located urban land residents from adjacent neighbourhoods become entangled. By driving wedges into material space, urban elites aim to disentangle themselves. The politics of neighbourhood space is therefore a key realm where urbanites attempt to shape their city according to their own visions. Arranged around belonging and exclusion, spatial politics becomes a locus of power struggles between entangled lives. In the *politics of loss* in Johannesburg and the *politics of proximity* in Maputo, urban dwellers aim to influence these material conditions for living together and living apart by trying to keep the *others* out. This manifests in Johannesburg in the opposition to public housing by property owners, and in Maputo in the elite residents' attempts to erect a road closure. The ethnography, though, also shows that wealthy suburbanites fail to realise their fantasies of secluded lives in the fast-changing cities: cities which are drawing them more into multiplex relatedness than into accepting the defence of their walls.

In terms of *lived space*, urban entanglements have a fundamental impact on subjectivities, on the constitution of urban milieus, and on the way people see their own social position in urban society. Urban milieus do not precede the entanglements between them; it is rather through entanglements that urban milieus become constituted. The book shows that in these cities recovering from segregation and confronted with neoliberalism, public spaces are not the most central in organising urban life. It is in spaces of encounters – homes, places of prayer and malls – where entanglements across spatial divides and social distance become shaped, that urban society in the making can be observed. In suburban homes, patron–client relations between employers and domestic workers create a precarious balance between proximity and distance, exploitation and mutual support. In religious formations, urbanites deal with inequality by forming paternalistic ties, a form of entanglement which allows for positive feelings, if at the cost of hidden tensions. Paternalistic ties lie at the foundation of sociality, emerging in these spaces characterised by inequality. While religious spaces like charismatic churches or local mosques promise new, prophetic communities of equal believers, they are urban spaces shaped by the same structural inequalities as the rest of the city; hopes for encounters and change are met with disappointment. Shopping malls in Maputo and Johannesburg are not merely spaces of meaningless consumption and sites of exclusion and control; they are appropriated by urban dwellers in diverse, often subtle ways and transformed into spaces of urban public life where lives become entangled through chance encounters, competition and fantasies.

Space is always shaped by a contemporaneous multiplicity of processes (Massey 2006: 92), which reveals itself in the ethnography by the co-presence of multiple actors

with diverse and diverging interests, visions (hence *conceived space*) and strategies for the future of neighbourhoods. The interplay between these multiple actors is fundamentally shaped by power differentials between them, be they affluent and poor urban dwellers, property developers, mall designers, politicians, activists, academics and the like. Looking back on colonial and apartheid urban planning, both Maputo and Johannesburg have become shaped by the desire of powerful actors to separate, to keep apart. Nevertheless, both societies were based on the exploitation of African labour by colonial enterprises and by colonial households, and hence always entailed fundamental entanglements and interdependencies between the colonial citizens and subjects (Mamdani 1996). Domestic work in Maputo and Johannesburg today is probably the urban sphere where there has been most continuity since the colonial past, because in these intimate interactions colonial patterns become relatively easily repeated. Despite the omnipresence of domestic employees working and, in the case of Johannesburg's suburbs, living in affluent neighbourhoods, this urban reality is seldom recognised and remains invisible. Entanglements can hence be seen as what Lefebvre calls *blind fields*: we tend to see urban spaces incompletely, we tend to have a "a blind spot on the retina", we are blind and do not even know it (Lefebvre 2003 [1970]: 29). According to Lefebvre, blind fields emerge when one epoch (in the *Urban Revolution* he talks about the replacement of the industrial epoch by the urban epoch) becomes replaced with another, and one tries to understand the new epoch with the ways of seeing developed in the old epoch:

> What does our blindness look like? We focus attentively on the new field, the urban, but we see it with eyes, with concepts, that were shaped by the practices and theories of industrialization, with a fragmentary analytic tool that was designed during the industrial period and is therefore *reductive* of the emerging reality. We no longer see that reality; we resist it, turn away from it, struggle against it, prevent its birth and development. The urban (urban space, urban landscape) remains unseen. *We* still don't see it. Is it simply that our eye has been shaped (misshaped) by the earlier landscape so it can no longer see a new space? (ibid: 29, italics in original)

The metaphors and typologies used to speak about segregated cities, like divided city, suburb–township, *bairro–cidade*, originate from a different period; in Southern African cities the periods of colonialism and apartheid. Looking at these cities today through these terms creates *blind fields*, things we do not see because they lie outside our perspective, of what is epistemologically imaginable to us, and what the past epoch did not want to see. The fact that entanglements remain often unseen and invisible is not only about a lack of knowledge or education, not only a question of a *wrong lens* for looking at the urban. It is also about refusing to see, about pretending not to see (ibid: 31) and, hence, about power and ideology.

It is no coincidence that claims to recognise the fundamental connectedness of urban worlds have been raised by urban dwellers living in both Alexandra and Polana Caniço, urbanites who usually stand on the less powerful side of the entanglements. There was for example Thabo Mopasi, field assistant from Alexandra, pointing out how Sandton City mall was built by workers living in the township. Senhora Aurora from Casas Brancas in Polana Caniço raised the issue that the elites living in Sommerschield II who wanted to close off the road are those who come to ask for their votes during

election campaigns. There was the waiter Alfonso working at Café Sol in Sommerschield II, who asked rhetorically how he and others would get to work if there was a road closure. Especially blind towards entanglements are the more powerful urban dwellers. The affluent majorities at the malls, be they the Indian elite in Maputo or the suburbanites in Greenstone, exclude the present poorer minorities from their social formation by never looking at them and not becoming aware that they are there, too. The property owners engage in manifold practices that render their domestic workers socially invisible, for example by prohibiting them from hosting family in their rooms or by closing down and controlling the shebeens, their spaces of leisure and public life. There was the property owner Mandy, who explained that she knew most people in Linbro Park but merely listed the names of other white property owners to illustrate this. The property owners' emic notion of 'divided community' referred to a conflict between more business-oriented property owners and those who wanted to keep the area purely residential, and not, as one might think, to a division between property owners and tenants, or employers and domestic workers. Being blind to or not seeing entanglements is not a state but a process, which demands many social practices of invisibilisation. Urban elites like to conceive of their lifeworld as homogeneous and disconnected from the surrounding city; many of their practices aim at disentangling them from others or at least allowing them to believe that they are disentangled. Their segregationist practices are nevertheless confronted with resistance expressed in diverse forms, ranging from violent acts to subtle forms of appropriation. In Maputo, residents from nearby Polana Caniço resisted the road closure and rose up to take the newly constructed barrier down. Domestic workers gossip or take unauthorised breaks as hidden forms of resistance. At the mall, poor urban dwellers appropriate urban spaces, playfully participating in the world of consumption despite having little or no money, although mall planners like to sell malls to investors as enclaves designed for users to consume maximally. The change of perspective from *divided cities* or *cities of walls* to *cities of entanglement* is thus also a change from not only looking at the city from the perspective of urban elites who desire to withdraw themselves from connectedness to also looking at the city from the perspective of the urban poor for whom connectedness is an indisputable urban reality, and also a way of surviving socially and economically in a city marked by inequality.

(In)visibility and recognition or denial of entangledness has a fundamentally moral and ethical dimension. When explaining that the Sommerschield II elite come to ask for their votes, Senhora Aurora made a political claim; not only are the politicians accountable to them, but they also stand in a dependency relationship with each other, and they are hence responsible towards each other. In Linbro Park, when domestic workers refer to their employers in familial terms like 'aunty', they make claims that the employers have a responsibility towards them, which goes beyond the mere payment of a salary. In both cases, this invocation of responsibility by less powerful urbanites succeeded. The elite in Sommerschield II gave up their desire for a road closure. In Linbro Park, some property owners have sold up and moved away but still continue to support their former domestic workers, for example by employing them in the households of their children who remained in the city, or by building a house for their employee in her rural home. When urban elites, politicians or other powerful actors try to keep entanglements invisible, this is also deeply political. It serves to ignore the less powerful urbanites' claims to the right to the city or to the neigh-

bourhood. It allows the elite to live in affluence in a poor city with little guilt, and it helps to suppress feelings of responsibility for others beyond gift-giving. Because this is what the recognition of entangledness is about: it is a recognition that we stand in relationships with others, that our actions have an impact on others, and that we therefore have a responsibility towards them. This entails a very different ethics from the ethics of neoliberalism, which claims that actors are only responsible for their own well-being and maximising their own profits, even at the expense of others and at the expense of nature. It also demands a different ethics to the one invoked by the Linbro Park property owner Kacy, who said that "people like to group together", claiming that the desire to be with like-minded people is a legitimate reason for segregation. Instead, what we need is an ethics and "politics of interrelation; a politics which, rather than claiming rights for a rapidly multiplying set of identities, concerns itself more with challenging, and taking responsibility for, the form of the relationships through which those identities are constructed, in which we are individually and collectively positioned and through which society more broadly is constituted" (Massey 2000: 246). Taking responsibility for others, even though I may not know them, may have never met them and may not have an immediate link to them, is the ethics we need in order to create an urban world where it is possible to live together in difference and where urban dwellers work together to reduce structural inequalities. How we deal with and shape our entangled positions in the contemporary world is the key ethical and political question of our times.