



Since March 2019, Mozambique has been in the media spotlight due to the destruction caused by cyclone Idai. The current situation is forcing the government to act. Not only are investments in coastal protection, sewerage systems, and other infrastructure pressing, but the situation in the country is also burdened by long-smoldering conflicts. More than 40 years after independence, Mozambique still seems far from political stability and peace.

At the local level, major projects by international companies result in social conflicts and isolated terrorist attacks, especially in the north of the country. Additionally, there is a division between the south, dominated by the former Liberation Army Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (FRELIMO), and central parts of the country, ruled by the opposing Resistência Nacional Moçambicana (RENAMO). A policy of repression through mismanagement and neglect of large parts of the population characterizes the country, with a considerable amount of international aid funds seeping away into the capital. Journalists and demonstrators for the rights of young Mozambicans are also increasingly obstructed and threatened.

In her ethnographic research project »Spatial Planning in a Divided Society: Production and Appropriation of Conflict Spaces in Mozambique,« Estefania Lopez-Granados examines the recurring conflicts in their spatial dimensions. Spaces are always connected with time—and often with a historical past, as when streets are named after socialist leaders and dictators, public squares are decorated with statues of almost-forgotten freedom fighters, or architectural styles increasingly tell of a colonial past that continues to occupy a strangely unbroken territory. But what if this past no longer serves a young generation in identifying itself?

In Maputo the construction industry is booming—but what is being built? A new capitalist age? An emerging magnet for tourism?

Public spaces have the potential to mobilize collectives of individual people—but how can they be designed to function as interfaces between overcoming a paralyzing past and actively building a new future? City squares, serving as meeting places for discussions or even protests, can become symbols and places of negotiation for a jointly designed future. Oftentimes, they unleash such potential during an interaction of digital and physical spaces in which discussions are held and political alliances formed.

At the center of Estefania Lopez-Granados' research project is the notion of space as an expression and strategy of social and political practice—the question of how internal and external actors reproduce a split spatial construction through cultural practices of remembering and how these routines can be disrupted to promote peace in Mozambique—an atmosphere in which new knowledge, new dreams, or even revolutionary ideas for social coexistence can emerge.