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Article

The Indifference of Transport: Comparative Research of “Infrastructural Ruins” in the Gauteng City-Region and Greater Maputo

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Abstract

States in the Global South have consistently invested in large-scale, vanity infrastructure projects, which are often not used by the majority of their residents. Using a mixed-method and comparative approach with findings from Greater Maputo, Mozambique, and the Gauteng City-Region exposes how internationally-supported and expensive transport projects do not meet the needs of lower-income urban residents, and meanwhile, widespread, everyday modes of commuting such as trains, paratransit, and pathways for walking deteriorate. State-led development thus often generates an infrastructural landscape characterised by “ruin” and “indifference.” These choices are anachronistic, steeped in a desire for a modernist-inspired future and in establishing narratives of control. In the cases of Gauteng and Maputo, whether or not the infrastructure is “successfully” implemented, these choices have resulted in a distancing of the state from the majority of urban residents.

Keywords

Gauteng; infrastructural ruins; Maputo; Mozambique; South Africa; transport infrastructure

Issue

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1. Introduction

As we meet here today, it is reported that the minibus taxi industry transports sixty-seven percent (67%) of commuters nationally, but receives estimated at R1 [R1 is equivalent to £0.043 and \$0.052 as of October 2023] per passenger trip—the lowest form of financial support from government. The taxi industry is followed by Metrorail that transports about twenty-one percent (21%) and receives R35 per passenger trip. This is followed by buses that transport eight percent

(8%), with the Bus Rapid Transport system transporting two percent (2%) but receiving almost R200 per passenger trip. According to these figures, we have an anomaly that as government we provide little support to the industry that, beyond any shadow of doubt, constitutes the core and backbone of our transport system. (Mamabolo, 2019)

This speech by Jacob Mamabola, the South African Executive Council provincial political representative to the Transport Department, effectively characterised the

paradox of the South African government's attitude to paratransit, seen as less formal but still socially and often legally regulated forms of privately provided transport for commuters. The South African state provides relatively large subsidies to so-called "formal" modes of transport, while simultaneously acknowledging how paratransit—"the core and backbone of our transport system"—has largely been ignored. Over two-thirds of the population in South Africa and almost three-quarters in Mozambique use either walking or paratransit, such as mini-bus taxis or *chapas* and MyLoves (which are "open-backed vans and small trucks in which passengers are carried in the rear. They get their name from the need for passengers to frequently grab on to other passengers to stay upright or to avoid falling out" (Arroyo-Arroyo & Kumar, 2021) to move through these large urban regions. The South African taxi industry is composed of individual owners and drivers, who operate within "associations," yet whose "vehicles are old and poorly maintained....The business is volatile, insecure and sometimes violent for both the passengers and players" (Hook & Weinstock, 2021). However, despite their extensive use, major investment in Gauteng City-Region and the Greater Maputo Metropolitan Area—the two most densely populated and economically significant areas in South Africa and Mozambique—has gone towards elaborate capital infrastructure projects. This includes the Maputo–Katembe Bridge, spanning Maputo Bay; the Gautrain, a rapid rail link connecting the airport to the Johannesburg Central Business District (CBD); and buses and bus rapid transit (BRT) systems. Paratransit systems, informal taxi ranks, passenger trains, and many roads have not received this level of attention or investment. The consequence of these actions is a cityscape characterised by "infrastructural ruins": unused monuments, falling into disrepair, removed from daily life, designed by the elite for the elite, and largely indifferent to most people's everyday needs.

Bringing together "infrastructural ruins" with the concept of indifference gives us insight into the state and allows us to understand why states in the Global South remain wedded to the provision of transport infrastructure programmes that are expensive and often far removed from the everyday needs and lives of their residents. Our research indicates a persistent enchantment with outdated and colonialist conceptualisations of modernity and a set of political narratives focused on control and performance, rather than meeting the needs of the urban majority drives decision-making on where and how states invest. As such, this article makes three contributions: two conceptual and one empirical. The first is to expand the idea of ruins to consider modern infrastructure that is monumental but unused and therefore largely irrelevant to the majority, as obdurate and obsolete. The second theoretical impact is to think about the intertwined nature of "infrastructural ruins" and "infrastructural indifference." The empirical contribution expands the burgeoning literature on the disjuncture

between the macro-scale of large state investment and lack of use by lower-income households (Amin & Thrift, 2017; Anand et al., 2018; Butcher, 2021; Jirón, 2010).

These findings come out of a mixed-method comparative study between the city-regions of Gauteng, South Africa, and the Greater Maputo-Motala region in Mozambique. The study was conducted by researchers in both countries and intended to understand which transport modes were used by less-privileged residents of these regions, as well as to see how everyday lived experiences are related to government transport investments, plans, and policies. Using material from interviews, focus groups, and document analysis, this article proceeds in several stages: The first provides the scaffolding for our arguments by engaging with the literature on ruins and infrastructure and connecting them to the concept of indifference. Second, we critically discuss undertaking comparative empirical research and the challenges of doing so during the Covid-19 pandemic. Third, we present a set of empirical accounts of the indifference of the infrastructure that people do or do not use in Greater Maputo and the Gauteng City-Region. This empirical evidence is intended to demonstrate the many ways in which the "formal" provision of infrastructure—in this case, the Maputo–Katembe Bridge, the new bus system in Maputo, Gauteng's BRT, and the Gautrain—as well as the "informal" paratransit *chapas* and minibuses are in ruins as a result of infrastructural indifference. Finally, we consider the explanatory power of thinking through these infrastructures as ruins, and what this tells us about the nature of the state in the Global South.

2. Infrastructure, Indifference, and Ruins

There is a significant body of literature on infrastructure since its "turn" in both the Global North and Global South (Caldeira, 2017; Coutard & Rutherford, 2016; Graham, 2010; Jaglin, 2015; Lawhon et al., 2018; McFarlane & Rutherford, 2008; Ranganathan, 2014; Simone & Pieterse, 2017). Following Graham and Marvin's (2001) seminal work on "splintering infrastructure," there is also broad consensus on the "paradox of infrastructure," considering how thinking about infrastructure can reveal "the relational and ambiguous elements of infrastructure to produce contradictions and unevenly felt consequences in the lives and places they contact" (C. Howe et al., 2016, p. 549). Thus, the reality of infrastructure provision is that it is as often a "cruelty as well as promise" (Amin & Thrift, 2017, p. 6). Despite the "promise" of infrastructure and its links to modernity, infrastructure provision is deeply paradoxical in many places in the Global South. Where it is ambiguous, simultaneously, intended to be used for inclusion and development but ultimately leads to both further social differentiation and the entrenching of social striations and political clefts.

"Ruins" is the second and arguably the most central framing to our line of argumentation. Dawney (2020,

p. 34) writes the memorable line: “Geographers are no strangers to the melancholic pleasures of modern ruins,” intimating the robust literature on the topic. Stoler (2008, p. 194) further notes: “In its common usage, ‘ruins’ are often enchanted, desolate spaces, large-scale monumental structures abandoned and grown over. Ruins provide a quintessential image of what has vanished from the past and has long decayed.” Thus, ruins are seen as leftovers, remnants of a previous era and way of life or political regime, and elicit a nostalgia for a time past (Van Huyssen, 2006). However, more contemporary writing on ruins and infrastructural ruins in particular has moved past a romanticisation of ruins, seeing within them political projects of preservation (Bueno, 2016; Stoler, 2016) and erasures of colonial destruction.

Scholars such as Stoler (2008), Wakefield (2018), and Woodson-Boulton (2018) are clear to articulate that ruins are highly political; their narratives are constructed to perpetuate specific, often partisan ends. They do not sit neutrally on the landscape but instead are carefully curated to tell specific stories of nations, states, and people. In some cases, they bolster current political tides, offer revisions to uncomfortable historical truths, or are simply purported to attract tourism. Highly mobile international travellers, keen to collect “authentic” experiences of places, are willing to pay for them. Whatever the intention, ruins very rarely “just are,” and encapsulate both the politics of the present as well as some sense of the future trajectory (DeSilvey & Edensor, 2013).

There is a further reading of ruins as relics of a possible future, as a set of fantasies about what the future may look like, especially in regard to industrialist and post-industrialist ruins. Van Huyssen (2006, p. 8) argues that the ruins of the near-past constitute a nostalgia “for the ruins of modernity because they still seem to hold a promise that has vanished from our own age: the promise of an alternative future.” In a sense, ruins embody a past that is inaccessible but encapsulates the promise of a future. Lazzara and Unruh (2009, p. 1) argue that ruins can be seen “as a merger of past, present, and future.” As such, ruins are caught temporally between an inaccessible history and a potential future that may never be realised.

However, the pursuit of a fantastical future can result in the production of ruins. The relentless speculation of capitalist production has been blamed for the construction of landscapes of ruins. These are “buildings [that] don’t fall into ruin after they are built but rather rise into ruin before they are built” (Lorimer & Murray, 2015, p. 61). Examples can be found across the world. Built on the promise of lucrative sub-prime lending, these projects have never been finished, and rise up incomplete and deteriorating across a variety of landscapes (Simone et al., 2023).

Using this writing as scaffolding, we would like to extend and expand on the understanding of ruins. We see them as monuments, although not necessarily those of a distant past, but rather to a contemporary

moment that is disconnected from the context in which it operates. This aligns with how Velho and Ureta point to “a breakdown in the relations between the infrastructure and the domain of activity it is expected to sustain” (Harvey et al., 2017, p. 5, in Velho & Ureta, 2019, p. 432) and is thus both obdurate—enduring on the landscape—as well as hard to change. They simultaneously remain obsolete while functionally indifferent to people’s needs. These artefacts are also monuments that encapsulate past and present politics as well as a nostalgia for a future that will never happen. These “decontextualised monuments” are also often designed by an elite for an elite audience. We would also like to propose that this idea of “ruin” can do two pieces of work: It can explain the indifference of infrastructure reflected in the landscape, and it can also help us understand the actions of what seems like an indifferent state.

We understand indifference in two ways. The first is as “having no particular interest or sympathy; unconcerned” as well as “neither good nor bad; mediocre.” We think that using “infrastructural ruin” as a way of conceptualising large infrastructure projects in Mozambique and South Africa provides a way to understand both why the transport infrastructure—as we demonstrate below—is largely uncomfortable, unsafe, and the opposite of ergonomic. It is not designed for people or their needs and does not seem concerned with or interested in the requirements of the majority of users. It also provides us with a way of understanding what seems to be an indifferent state, one that does not sufficiently care for the needs of its citizens. Using indifference and ruins thus provides a way of thinking through the motivations and choices that the South African and Mozambican states have made in terms of transport infrastructure.

3. Mixed Methods and Southern Comparisons: Productive Conversations and Practical Challenges

Recent debates on “new comparative urbanisms” posit the idea of “the development of new methods and approaches to comparison...to support different ways of working across diverse urban experiences” (McFarlane & Robinson, 2012, p. 765). Our approach takes seriously the prospect that there is value in conducting Global South comparisons, seeking to make comparisons between contexts and cities that have traditionally neither been found in conversation with one another nor considered valid sources for the construction of new knowledges outside of the traditional canon of theory (Robinson, 2022). We used an approach similar to what Söderström (Institute for Urban Research, 2021) calls a “radically inductive” approach, in which comparison means “taking each site as an individual case and using inductive reasoning to find similarities and differences as data collection and analyses unfolds.” Comparison is thus seen as a creative endeavour “through which hypotheses are generated and tested” across and between contexts (Brill, 2022, p. 253).

Given our objective of understanding how poorer people related to large infrastructure investments, Greater Maputo and the Gauteng City-Region were productive choices to compare, due to their similarities as well as their differences. Both cities have experienced significant investment and the building of large infrastructure projects and both cities have large populations of lower-income residents and high unemployment rates. As an indication, UN-Habitat (n.d.) estimates that 54% of Maputo City's residents live below the poverty line of \$1.50 per day and 70% live in informal settlements, with unemployment at about 32% for both areas. In Gauteng, 18% of dwellings in the province are informal dwellings, and a further 24% are unplanned-for backyard structures; 30% of the population lives under the poverty line (Gauteng City-Region Observatory, 2018). Although the urban region of Maputo is smaller than Gauteng, both contexts have sprawling morphologies, in which underprivileged residents are often located on the geographical peripheries whilst economic nodes are more centrally situated. This builds on existing colonial and apartheid geographies. However, there are also significant differences between the two cases, meaning that we could see whether or not different kinds of infrastructural investment were being used, as described later in the article. This meant that we could also look at questions of governance and their relationship to choices around provisioning and policy-making. Along with a theoretical commitment to Southern comparative urbanisms and grounded practices, the comparison allowed us to consider practical concerns related to different interventions in these

respective environments. The long-standing institutional relationship between the two main research partners and the choice of two Southern African contexts within 600 km of one another provided ease of engagement.

Within each region, six sites were chosen. Three were in Greater Gauteng in South Africa—Denver, Westbury, and Thembisa (see Figure 1)—three were in the Greater Maputo-Motola region in Mozambique—Albasine, Chali; Katembe; and Txumene II, Matola (see Figure 2). Sites with poorer populations in close proximity to state infrastructure were our criteria for selection (see Table 1 for further details regarding each site).

Our research attempted to use a mixed-methods approach of focus groups, complemented with in-depth interviews coupled with a mobility tracking app (cf. L. B. Howe, 2021) and combined with analysis of state-published documents, newspaper articles, speeches, and public statements. Despite the well-designed research method, the project faced three significant challenges. The first was the Covid-19 pandemic, which broke out two months into the project, along with the subsequent pandemic restrictions of the “state of emergency” in South Africa and the “state of calamity” in Mozambique. In addition, lockdown meant there was less movement and fewer transport options than usual. Much of the movement our research design recorded was exceptional and did not typify people's daily routines. Finally, there was often insufficient network coverage to provide the data that was needed for the mobility tracking app to fully function, so we collected unanticipated incomplete data sets.



Figure 1. Map of Gauteng showing all three case study sites. Map by Yashena Naidoo, 2023.

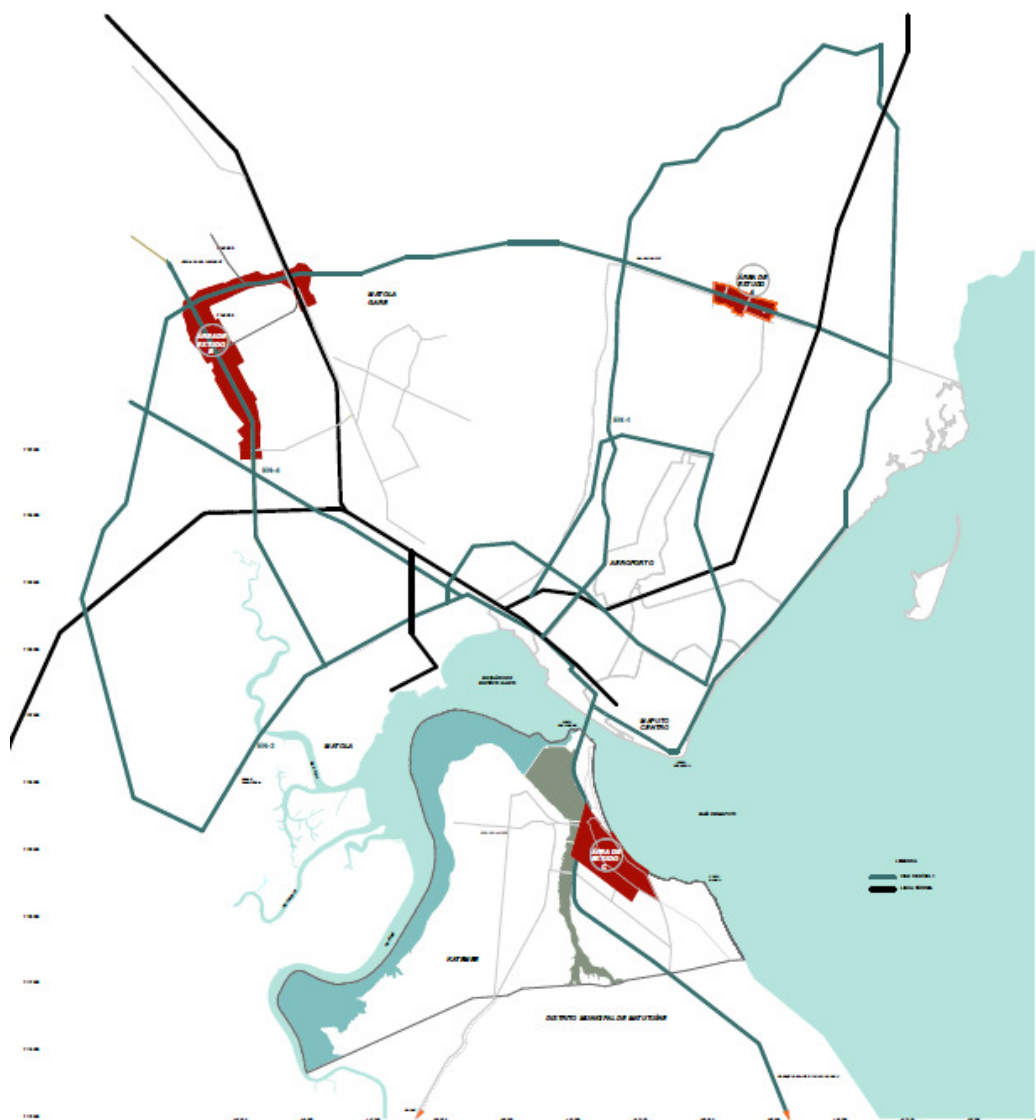


Figure 2. Map of all case study sites in Maputo.

The team provided all respondents with mobile phones and data packages. However, as a consequence of the challenges mentioned above, the team relied on limited focus groups (two were undertaken with 10 people in each of the sites in Maputo, along with two in Gauteng; we could reach Westbury and Tembisa, but not Denver. WhatsApp groups were set up for each research site and used to communicate any project-related issues and participants were invited to share photos, audio files, videos, and messages about their experiences using transport in their city-regions. Given the circumstances, we also had to pivot and conduct qualitative interviews by phone or online or, where possible, in person. Nevertheless, participants were selected to represent a range of household compositions, sizes, ages, and genders, as well as access to a variety of state and non-state transport infrastructures (see Table 1). In all, there were 29 participants in Maputo (13 women and 16 men) and 36 in Gauteng (21 women and 15 men), ranging in age from 18 to 72 years.

The second component of fieldwork focused on transport policy and policymakers. The project team conducted a desktop review of transport policy and recent transport infrastructure investments in the regions. Following this, we conducted a series of interviews over the phone or by video call with key informants involved in transport at the provincial as well as municipal levels. In total, eight respondents from provincial and local transport organisations from the largest taxi association in South Africa, the South African National Taxi Council (SANTACO), were also interviewed. Most interviews were undertaken online in South Africa and in person in Mozambique (see full list in the Supplementary Material) between March 2020 and November 2020. Portuguese interviews were translated using online translation services and quality-checked by team members.

There were some challenges in conducting comparative research, not least of all during a pandemic, that required flexibility and an ability to rapidly adapt. There were also challenges of working across a number

Table 1. Summary of research sites.

Case study site	Settlement typology	Household income per month	Percentage of monthly household income for transport	Proximity to transport infrastructure
Denver	Older industrial area, with two informal settlements	\$130–145	0–34%	Industrial area wedged between major arterial roads and railway line
Westbury	A former “coloured” township: Formal state-supplied and privately built housing	\$208–1,560	2–13%	Close to BRT routes and has recently seen other forms of infrastructure investment in the area; it is also close to existing railway services
Tembisa	Mix of housing types including some informal settlements, state-supplied housing, and privately built housing	\$166–702	10–35%	Served by the minibus taxi industry and rail services and is not far from one of the Gautrain rapid rail stations
Albasine, Chali	Recent transition from rural to peri-urban, most housing is informal or traditional in design and construction	\$0–348	17–36%	The new Circular Lote III, Avenida Dom Alexandre, and the railway
Katembe	Unregulated and informal, single-family housing, self-built housing	\$0–3,163	<1–40%	Maputo–Katembe Bridge and bus services
Txumene II, Matola	Mixed settlement, mostly self-built units	\$0–158	10–80%	Two large public transport terminals for road and rail and circular road

of languages as well as academic traditions. However, there were also numerous benefits, including using the “radically inductive” approach that allowed us to ask why, given the differences in history, language, and socio-economic positioning, we saw so many of the same processes like massive investment in infrastructure remain unused by the urban majority. We were continually struck by the similarities in these two contexts. This was especially true when coding the transcripts: As we worked inductively across them, similar themes kept arising. Some included a sense that there was something “ordinary” in the experiences of residents in both cities and inspired the teams to think beyond their conceptual and geographical borders and to consider larger questions of governance, how ideas travel across global contexts, and the post-colonial preoccupation with formalisation.

4. Infrastructural Ruins and Infrastructural Indifference

The aforementioned theoretical framing was used to explore and explain conjoined ideas of indifference and ruins. The empirical evidence below shows how residents in the three neighbourhoods of Maputo and

Gauteng live amongst infrastructure that largely does not touch their lives and is indifferent to their needs. Moreover, it is monumental in nature and is largely reserved for urban elites, or, alternatively, it has not been invested in and lies shabby and uncared for.

4.1. Current Transport Investments and Plans

Both Gauteng and Maputo have seen significant investments in transportation over the last decade. In Maputo, a suspension bridge joining Katembe, on the south shore, to the Maputo CBD, was officially opened in 2018; the Maputo Ring Road (*Estrada Circular*) launched by the Mozambican government in 2011 was constructed by the China Road and Bridge Corporation and funded by the Chinese Exim Bank (Cezne & Wethal, 2022). Since the inauguration of the Maputo–Katembe Bridge (see Figure 3), the Katembe District has added a fleet of 1,000 new buses distributed throughout the capital. Significant institutional and policy investment has been seen with the advent of the 2014 municipal Comprehensive Urban Transport Master Plan for Greater Maputo (2014), prepared by the Japan International Cooperation Agency. The Greater Maputo Metropolitan Transport Agency



Figure 3. Maputo–Katembe Suspension Bridge over the Maputo Bay. Source: Club of Mozambique (2017).

(MTA) was also developed as a coordinating entity in 2017.

Gauteng has also experienced significant investment. The first was the creation of the Gautrain, an underground rapid rail service connecting key nodes to the north, south, and east of Johannesburg, built largely to support the 2010 FIFA World Cup. This was followed by the construction of a BRT system across central areas in three of the province's main cities: Ekurhuleni, Johannesburg, and Tshwane. One of the main ring roads around Johannesburg was upgraded and made into an (unsuccessful) toll scheme (Khatleli, 2022). The province has also planned to revitalise the rail system, which has largely fallen into disrepair and disuse due to a sustained lack of investment. Aside from these major schemes, there has been limited investment in mini-bus taxi ranks. From a governance perspective, there are some real challenges in coordinating across the various spheres of government. As a consequence, the Transport Authority of Gauteng was supposed to have been established by the end of 2020, with the intention of facilitating "effective and efficient mobility of people, as well as that of goods and services" (Liedtke, 2020). However, the Covid-19 pandemic has led to severe delays; at the time of writing, the Transport Authority of Gauteng had not been fully established. In addition, the South African state, after years of promoting the BRT as the answer to many of South Africa's transport woes, "has stopped completely, and the department is under political pressure to water down the program" (Hook & Weinstock, 2021).

Interestingly, the use of Maputo–Katembe Bridge, BRT stations, and Gautrain is relatively low. In Maputo, participants (named using anonymous identifiers that were created by the research team) in each neighbour-

hood through which these large-scale investments such as the Maputo–Katembe Bridge and Ring Road pass classify them as positive. However, they emphasise that they cannot see direct personal benefits from them. The BRT, or Rea Vaya in Johannesburg, has consistently demonstrated very low ridership figures (less than 3% take up in some areas of the poorest areas according to a recent study; Webster, 2019). The reasons for the lack of use were largely pragmatic: formal transport provision (BRTs and metrobus) do not cater to the actual routes that people took on a daily basis. A resident of Denver, which is one of the older industrial adjacent to the Johannesburg CBD, noted that "I have never [used the BRT], but I'd say that our challenge as people who live in Denver is that you'll never find the BRT travelling around here." A lack of coordination between routes led a father from Matola in Maputo to state that using the buses was "a huge challenge" because you had "to fight and make connections to reach your destination" (FE, Matola). There was an additional problem with the infrastructure surrounding payment and boarding seen as not user-friendly and even quite intimidating.

Buses in Maputo and Gauteng have tried to switch to cashless systems so that commuters cannot pay for their journeys on the bus but load cards with credit: Famba cards, encouraged by the World Bank, have been hailed in Maputo as modernising cashless technology that was supposed to be put in place in all *chapas* and buses but have largely failed (Sebastião, 2022a). The card machines constantly break down and are seen as generally unusable and the system requires "two machines on the bus, one for payment and the other for validating the trip." This is often problematic for users, because "it [is] easy for people to forget to validate it at the end of the trip,

which causes the entire balance on the card to be lost” (Sebastião, 2022b), meaning people easily lose money by accident.

From discussions with Gauteng respondents, the move to cashless technology has meant additional journeys to sites where one can load cards, as this often cannot be done on the bus nor at most bus stops. These additional trips are layered onto already quite far walks with bus stops and termini in all of the sites and are seen as sparse because residents have to walk two or three kilometres to be able to access metro buses or BRTs. According to RB from Motala, the dispersed bus stops affected daily life: “It’s very difficult to leave the house because everything is far away, even the bus stop.” Many respondents spend a third or more of their household income on transport (see Table 1) and this includes walking and using paratransit. Whereas some forms of formal transportation, such as the metrobuses and the Rea Vaya in Johannesburg, are actually the same price or cheaper than paratransit, others such as the Gautrain and the Maputo–Katembe Bridge are far more expensive. Their use is seen as far beyond the reach (even if it were desirable) of most of the households we interviewed.

Interestingly, one of the most direct engagements of residents in Gauteng with the BRT has been through acts of vandalism (Mosalkwe, 2021). Protestors have consistently vandalised BRT stations when demonstrating against the state. As one of the key pieces of visible state infrastructure, they have been symbolically useful in registering people’s unhappiness with government actions (see Figure 4). In addition, disgruntled taxi drivers have also played a part in the decay of bus shelters and BRT facilities, barricading them with stones, and even reducing some to rubble. As such, this infrastructure lies in ruins on the landscape.

Aside from BRT stations that have been vandalised, there are numerous BRT stations that have never opened.

In Johannesburg, stations along the major north–south arterial route have been bedevilled by highly localised politics between the city council and political party affiliates, who want some kind of benefit from the BRT; further delays are the result of corrupt procurement processes of bus companies to run the routes (Perlman, 2021). As a consequence, multiple stations that the state has spent millions of dollars on lie unused, wrapped in caution tape, and protected by security guards but without any benefit to the majority of commuters.

4.2. *The Indifference of Existing Infrastructure*

The previous section (Section 4.1) showed some of the challenges that contribute to low ridership and the use of large formal transportation systems, despite significant capital investment. The following section illuminates the day-to-day experiences of “informal” systems including walking, cycling, and paratransit and how here too there is a lack of investment by the state or the private sector into the modes that are used by the urban majority. As such, these also manifest as ruins in a slightly different way: under-invested roads along which people walk, liminal spaces in which commuters congregate to catch paratransit, the taxis, and taxi ranks, as well as public transit termini that are dilapidated and deteriorating.

When asked about their average journeys, respondents often mentioned in interviews that they do not feel considered. For example, there are few shelters at taxi ranks, “there is nowhere to sit, there are no chairs, you stand” (KD1, Denver). Others agreed, noting that “there are no comfortable places” (GW1, Westbury) and that “you’ll stand and burn and get wet waiting for a taxi. There’s nothing [no facilities]” (LW1, Westbury). Respondents also said there was no appreciation of differences or different needs, with elderly people justifiably complaining:



Figure 4. Reya Vaya station in Noordgesig, Gauteng allegedly vandalised by protesters. Source: Timothy Bernard/African News Agency in Mosalkwe (2021).

It is difficult to stand especially for old people....You must remember that the city is not travelled by young people only, even grannies that get their social grants...when she gets to the rank, maybe the taxi hasn't arrived, and she's standing now. (KD1, Denver)

Sixty-eight-year-old JZ from Motola expressed similar sentiments: "I've already felt insecure on the way to the [bus] stop because of my age, I feel vulnerable. The authorities also do not help and remain indifferent in the face of our challenges [the elderly]". Women who have multiple care duties and household errands such as going to the market, taking children to hospitals, travelling for leisure, and visiting family also face transportation challenges. This is because routes often only connect two points and require payment for each individual leg, disregarding women's typical "trip-chaining" patterns, making transit unaffordable and inefficient for low-income urban residents.

Men and women also expressed anxiety related to fear of robbery, rape, and general bodily risk when walking on the roads. One participant noted:

I've already felt insecure on the way to the stop and on the public transport itself....I don't even want to imagine with children, with loads, at night....I must walk with them [my daughters] because I cannot expose my daughters to risk. (CZ, Matola)

Another woman from Motola agreed: "I already felt insecure in the transport and also on the way to the stop. Fear of assaults, rape, those things" (LN, Matola). Respondents also mentioned the dangers of using paratransit; A young mother from Denver described how the taxis are not safe and that the doors do not "close prop-

erly" (SD2, Denver). All of the respondents mentioned that the taxis drove too fast and that there was no way of getting the drivers to slow down. "Even if [the taxi driver's] speeding, you can't just tell him 'oh dude you're speeding...how about my life there'" (TH, Thembisa).

In Gauteng, many of the residents used to take the trains in and around the province. However, over the Covid-19 lockdown, thieves have mined the railways and stations for cables, metals, and other recyclable goods, disrupting services and destroying their ability to function (see Figure 5). One participant who previously used the trains extensively to get to work reported:

The problem is that now there are no more trains. Since lockdown...[t]hese Nyoape guys [drug addicts] just stole everything from the railway stations. They've taken cables and now they have to start over to reconstruct everything. That's what caused me to stop using the train. (KN, Denver)

Nevertheless, even before the trains effectively shut down, users argued that they were overcrowded and unsafe, noting:

A taxi doesn't get packed like a train and there is less criminal activity at the taxi rank than by the trains. In a taxi, I can say stop [at a] sign or after a robot [traffic light]; a train however takes us to Johannesburg and we are squashed; next thing you know your phone or your bag is gone. (DD, Denver)

Both state-supplied transit infrastructure and alternatives like walking, cycling, and paratransit all seem to indicate an apparent indifference to people's needs. Aligned with scholarship on the "negotiated" nature of African



Figure 5. Kliptown train station in Johannesburg. Source: Shiraaz Mohamed in Patel (2022).

urban governance (Cirolia & Berrisford, 2017), investment is spent on infrastructure used by a minority of urban elites. In Gauteng, for many, the alleged flagship BRT stations and the Gautrain remain almost totally disconnected from their lives. As people neither use nor engage with them, they have become an artefact in the landscape that bears witness to a specific historical and political period (Harrison & Rubin, 2020). In addition, BRT stations have been burnt and vandalised—in a sense, ruined—as a political act of contestation against the state that has effectively ignored the needs of residents (cf. Lemanski, 2020). The trains and railways in and around Gauteng have historically been well-used, but since the pandemic have largely been abandoned by the state. Although the new bus routes in Maputo are far more widely used than in Johannesburg, the most visible infrastructural investment is the Maputo–Katembe Bridge, which stands idle as a monument to international geopolitics rather than investment in local residents’ needs (Carolini, 2017).

5. Reading the State’s Indifference

The apparent indifference so visible on these cities’ landscapes should not be read as a state that does not care, a type of institutional indifference; rather, it reflects a state concerned with a set of priorities that differ from the majorities. Here, thinking about transport infrastructure as ruins is generative, and the ways that we have used the idea is when thinking of this infrastructure as relics of a past way of thinking and acting; as using infrastructure, especially monumentalist infrastructure, to construct and control a narrative; and as enchantment with and a nostalgia for possible futures that are unlikely to occur; and finally, an overarching preoccupation with a modernist enterprise that itself is a relic of colonial legacies. It also demonstrates that, despite these desired narratives of control and modernity, these states are unable to deal with the “messiness” and challenges of complex and sophisticated systems like paratransit that do not fit within their paradigm.

5.1. Disconnected From the Present

One of the key ideas about ruins is that they are remnants from a bygone age or remnants of a previous era. The South African state has, for example, recognised the important role of the taxi industry, yet has dealt with it with extreme ambivalence. On the one hand, they have held annual summits with the taxi industry and the “associations” in which it is organised; on the other, these actors have actively been excluded from planning and engagement processes. SANTACO has said that the summits amount to little more than “talk shops” and has been publicly critical of them. Johannes Mkhonza, SANTACO Gauteng chairperson, said: “In 2016 we had the same summit [annual taxi summit]. We took resolutions in the same summit and 90% of the resolutions [taken

at this event]...but none of those declarations were implemented—maybe less than 1%” (Mthethwa, 2019).

The SANTACO Gauteng spokesperson, Mr Mali, further revealed that the relationship between the taxi industry and government “wasn’t that much at a level whereby it’s healthy,” and that historically, “there was no proper communication...with government. So things will just happen without us not knowing what the processes are, what is it that we need to participate...because of that lack of a proper channel” (Mali, personal communication, 2020). There has been a very top-down approach, as became evident in 2020 when one of the main taxi alliances chose not to attend the annual summit. The Minister of Transport at the time announced: “We will take decisions on their behalf and they will be binding” (Mkentane, 2020). SANTACO has implored the government to allow them to take responsibility for the taxi ranks such that:

Those facilities used by us are also conducive to be used by the public as a whole....We want to upgrade and see us at the level of the airports as well. So that it should be infrastructure [that] is user-friendly to our commuters. (Mali, personal communication, 2020)

At the time of writing, there had not been any further progress on these ideas. Thus, rather than considering hybrid systems and including taxi associations’ perspectives, engagement has remained limited. Much of the advice sought and used by the state in both South Africa and Mozambique has been at the behest of multi-lateral and bi-lateral organisations. The BRT was adopted largely from engagements with Bogota and the politics of South-to-South engagement (Wood, 2015), whilst current transport plans for Maputo have been developed with the support of the Japan International Cooperation Agency and the World Bank. As such, local voices have largely been drowned out in favour of top-down international expertise and “best practices.”

The Gautrain and the Maputo–Katembe Bridge are prime examples of this top-down logic. According to representatives from the MTA:

The Maputo–Katembe Bridge project, which allowed a quick connection to the Katembe Region, also allowed people to easily go there using cars and even heavy vehicles...but probably because of some measures that were taken [such as tolls too expensive for the average family in Maputo], it ended up inhibiting the expansion or growth that was expected for the Katembe region. (MTA, personal communication, 2020)

In Gauteng, the Gautrain Rapid Rail fares are six or seven times the price of a minibus taxi or a bus. As such, this infrastructure, although sometimes used, is generally oriented towards the city’s elite, along with tourists and visitors.

5.2. The Enchantment of Infrastructure

There is still a large degree of emotional investment in the conjoined ideas of infrastructure and the promise of modernity (Harvey & Knox, 2015). The South African and Mozambican states seem enchanted by these ideas, resonating with the premise that:

Roads and railways are not just technical objects then but also operate on the level of fantasy and desire. They encode the dreams of individuals and societies and are the vehicles whereby those fantasies are transmitted and made emotionally real. (Larkin, 2013, p. 333)

In the case of Maputo, these fantasies were, according to Adriano Nuvunga, a professor of political science and civic activist in Maputo, “truly lunatic” (as cited in Kedem, 2022) and included a plan for an automated transit system of driverless trains. Things took an even weirder turn when the “Futran megaproject hatched in 2021 envisaged a swarm of cable cars suspended on rails above the city” (Kedem, 2022) for a construction cost of \$250m. Fortunately, the proposed “automated guideway transit” and cable car idea were tabled, as neither was able to raise sufficient funding (Kedem, 2022). However, both city-regions persist in the pursuit of BRTs, as encouraged by the World Bank and Japan International Cooperation Agency. This goes against transport experts stating:

Experience in Sub-Saharan Africa and in some instances within the Global South has shown, however, that there is little prospect of replacing paratransit *in toto* with BRT. The established interests of incumbent paratransit operators are powerful, and the financial and regulatory capacities of responsible government agencies are often weak. In all likelihood, Sub-Saharan cities will depend, for decades to come, on paratransit modes. (Jennings & Behrens, 2017, p. 6)

However, in Maputo, although increasingly less so in Gauteng, the fantasy of ridding the city of *chapas* in favour of a fleet of shiny new buses and a car-dominated city holds sway. A senior transport consultant from the MTA made this position clear by saying that “the agency [MTA] is very focused on motorized transport, and in particular on public transport, and on...buses” (personal communication, 2021).

Similarly in Gauteng, a senior Gauteng Transport official (personal communication, 2021) remarked:

The only planning that was done [for taxis] was probably for intermodal facilities, taxi ranks. But if you look at the number of formal taxi ranks, compared to informal ones, you can see that there has been quite a lot of lag.

Investment still goes into large-scale projects and the state still dreams of big, infrastructure that is linked to ideas of modern cities.

5.3. Political Narratives and Political Intentions

Underlying the desire to use buses, incorporate paratransit into the formal transit system, and rid cities of *chapas* and minibus taxis is steeped in what McFarlane and Rutherford (2008, p. 367) call “a moral urban politics based on the enrolment of subjects into ‘civilized’ behaviour.” “Civilised” behaviour was a literal intention to ensure that paratransit is replaced by “safer” and “better” modes of commuting, and to tame what former South African Transport Minister Jeremy Cronin described as “a Wild West blend of impressive entrepreneurial initiative and warlordism” (Hook & Weinstock, 2021). The state, with extremely limited capacities, has made significant efforts to formalise the taxi industry, initially through a taxi recapitalisation project and incorporation into the BRT, both of which failed. As a result, the state has resorted to regulation rather than planning for the industry: “You know, paratransit...has been a huge problem for the province. There has never been any type of plans for paratransit, only in terms of regulation” (Gauteng Provincial Official, personal communication, 2021).

The state also wants to capture the revenue made from paratransit into the formal system. A senior MTA transport consultant argued that the development of buses and bus systems in Maputo shows how “the state has effective control over how much money circulates in the transport system...as at this moment the state loses a lot of money that is not declared or taxed through that type of public transport service [paratransit].” Thus articulated, the South African and Mozambican states are trying to provide a political narrative of control, modernity, and the power of the state over a sector that has consistently demonstrated its ungovernability and autonomy.

6. Conclusion

The state of transport infrastructure in the Gauteng City-Region and Greater Maputo has received large investments but much of it is unused by the majority of residents. Conversely, the infrastructure that is used by the majority is chronically under-invested and subject to regulation and planning. The consequence is a state of indifference to people’s needs, with large-scale transport infrastructure that is obdurate and obsolete: barely used by the majority since it is too far too expensive, unwieldy and in some cases, vandalised and never restored. As such, these transport infrastructures appear as ruins, monuments that are detached from people’s lives and largely irrelevant to the landscapes in which they are embedded. However, they are also ruins as a symbol of nostalgia for a future that is unlikely to ever occur, designed for elites and politically constructed.

The infrastructure that is used—paratransit, trains, and roads—has not received sufficient attention. Even the taxis themselves sometimes lie in ruins.

Utilising a comparative approach allowed us to look at broad macro-processes that affect the region, such as the influence of modernism, the enchantment of infrastructure, and the impact of multi-lateral organisations on state transport decision-making. When coupled with granular engagements through interviews, focus groups, digital platforms like WhatsApp, and Söderström's (Institute for Urban Research, 2021) "radically inductive" approach—engaging with people's everyday experiences at the micro-level—we were able to grasp the impact and effect of these decisions. We thus demonstrate both how ordinary indifference and ruin have become in our cases, and what it meant for navigating around these city-regions.

As such, the comparative and transcalar methods provided an opportunity to understand transport infrastructure provisions as a collection of indifferent ruins in the Gauteng and Maputo cityscapes. They are relics of states locked into outdated modes of thinking, anachronisms, and the production of objects far removed from the realities of people's lives. The consequence is not just a landscape of ruins but also a missed opportunity to engage with democratized and functional—even if problematic—transit systems, and potentially states that move increasingly away from the daily realities and needs of the majority of urban residents.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited).

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