

FROM A GEOSTRATEGIC POSITION TO AN URBAN NODE: THE CITY OF NAMPULA, MOZAMBIQUE

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ABSTRACT

In the 19th century in the aftermath of the Berlin Conference (1885) the Portuguese colonial administration changed its approach to territorial occupation in its African colonies. Until then, and besides a few exceptions, the colonization of African territories was mainly coastal. Each city was intended as a large warehouse in a strategic location, both for the commerce with the African hinterland as well as a supply for the long-range vessels that connected Lisbon to India, in the Portuguese territories of Goa, Damão and Diu.

It changed when European powers were compelled to build a network of towns in all the parcels of the African territories that they claimed. In Mozambique the territorial limits of this colony were in dispute between some European colonial powers, questioning its dimension and the Portuguese ability to control its inhabitants. In 1907 a military force occupied the plateau and built a military base to secure the region. It became one of the most important military bases in the territory and a key-factor to the pacification of the region during more than half a century and, later, had a key-role in colonial war. The city of Nampula urbanization and their essential morphology structure, namely the urban traced, was determined by the military and defined according with a strategic vision for the region.

Keywords: urban morphology, colonial cities, Nampula, Mozambique.

INTRODUCTION

In early 20th century, Portuguese colonial influence and human power was put to test: territorial limits of its colony of Mozambique were in dispute between some European colonial powers, questioning its dimension and Portuguese ability to control and “civilize” its autochthonous inhabitants. In Mozambique north-western central plateau, a strong resistance movement was fighting Portuguese forces. In 1907 a military force occupied the plateau and built a military base to secure the region. It became one of the most important military base in the territory and a key-factor to the pacification of the region during more than half a century and, later, had a key-role in colonial war.

Soon after the construction of a military settlement it quickly spawned to a city where its strategic military importance derived to an important economic node to all north part of Mozambique and Austral Africa hinterland.

Nampula’s urbanization and morphology is consistent with those military and economic dynamics: a city within the limits of the military axis, where simultaneously coexisted an urban zone determined by the military compound, another zone influenced by the railroad, airport and warehouses, and an internal area built according with garden cities principles.

In the outskirts, an apparent chaotic informal urbanism: the areas where population from all over the region established in different waves; in some periods seeking job due to the city economic growth, in other periods seeking shelter from military uprisings during colonial war and, later on, during civil war.

BACKGROUND

The geostrategic position in the *plateau*

The complete occupation of the African hinterland occurred during the first quarter of the 20th century. Portugal, the European power with the earliest presence in Africa, guided its territorial occupation along the African coast. In fact the Portuguese colonial possessions in Africa were no more than trading posts between Europe and India, and were territorially unstructured.

Only from 1880 onwards, with the scramble of Africa from the European colonial powers after the consolidation of the effective occupation doctrine, that meant a *de facto* human settlement of the *hinterland* along with the military capacity to occupy the claimed territorial areas that Portugal – and the other colonial powers – left the coastline to the heart of Africa.

It was as an imperative of national prestige that Portugal occupy and had structured the vast areas that were claimed as the colonies of Angola and Mozambique, strategic for its wealth. Therefore there were large areas in dispute among neighboring European powers, especially with the UK. In Mozambique, the progression of the Portuguese into the African *hinterland* was slow, due to the small number of the Portuguese military contingent and the actions of the hardened Mozambican opponents kingdoms within its sphere of influence.

In military and commercial terms the regions of Mozambique Northwest plateau were strategic and essential to the Mozambican colonial project. Its pacification was urgent, as well as its occupation and human settlement.

It took nearly thirty years from the start of Portuguese occupation campaigns in the African territories until the Portuguese were able to control the central African plateau. Only in 1907, Portuguese military forces succeeded in submitting king N'wamphula, and to establish a military camp - which soon evolves into captivity - and soon became the basis for the Portuguese military occupation of northern Mozambique (Araújo, 2005). It was this military camp that served as the basis for the creation of the city of Nampula and would gain a geostrategic importance that even nowadays it's important in the Mozambican context.

Nampula has a privileged geo-strategic position. Located in the Mozambican central plateau at the confluence between the north and the center of the country, as well as from the interior and the coastline of Mozambican territory, it was a key area for the stabilization and security of all the North and an highly sensitive position for its fierce opponents of Portuguese occupation¹.

With the outbreak of World War I and consequent escalation to the African continent, Nampula assumes greater importance given the ambitions of the Germans that, from Tanzania, on the northern border of Mozambique, aspired to shred the Portuguese colony integrating it in its sphere. It was essential to "review its [Portuguese] territorial management strategy in order to better make its presence felt on the ground, submitting indigenous people for their purposes" (Rui Paes Mendes,

¹ From 1907 to 1913, Portugal pacified 44 local kings.

2012) not only to ensure territorial stabilization but also to reduce any potential support for Germany as well as to demonstrate strength and military capability to enemies and allies.

The so-called "pacification wars" ended in 1921 and at that time a territorial restructuration was managed transforming military districts into civilian ones. However, given the geostrategic importance of the Nampula territory and the embattled characteristics of the peoples from the region, a military garrison with a considerable number of militaries was assigned with the mandate to maintain peace and ensure the safety of the Portuguese in the region. At the shadow of this military garrison an urban center developed².

The primacy of the military structures on the surrounding urban fabric remained throughout the 1920's. The civilian area were mainly for administrative staff homes and buildingd (Boletim Geral das Colónias, 1950). Despite the privileged geo-strategic position, the area was unhealthy for life and human activity; around the plateau it was "surrounded by swamps infested by mosquitoes and many other diseases normally affecting those who sought to establish there" (Rui Paes Mendes, 2012). The military settlement concentrated in itself a number of radial roads (Fig. 1) that allowed the rapid response to any emergency to all regions of the territory; the most important was the road from the coast (Nacala) to the border with Nyasaland (current Malawi).

It's in the 1930s, that Nampula starts to grow, as a factor of the expansion of the railway. This infrastructure enhances the region's strategic importance, because it becomes an important trading post giving "competitive advantage to the city and region as well as the domain all over the territory that the military would not neglect, making [of Nampula] a key city in the political and military context of the colony with a decisive role during the colonial war" (Rui Paes Mendes, 2012). It was the company responsible for the railway that begun draining the swamps and planned the guidelines that have allowed the development of the city. The urban structure was phased in time and had two structural axes: the area for the military equipment and the area devoted to railroad infrastructure. The first phase consisted in draining the marshes responsible for countless deaths that delayed the human occupation of the settlement (Boletim Geral das Colónias, 1950). It was then urgent to face health issues that caused a very high mortality rate³ whose principal factor were in the surrounding swamps. Then the avenues and other main roads were draw within the limits imposed by the military roads, and the electrification was developed.

Driven by economic growth achieved with the railroad and the agricultural potential of the region, workers from across the colony and metropolis joined the military personnel, administrative staff and workers of the railway and houses were built, the commerce developed and a number of many other services appeared, such a fast an high growth that an observer states "that Nampula is the best and the fastest occupation [produced in the colony of Mozambique]" (Boletim Geral das Colónias, 1950)

² At that time Nampula was named Macuana.

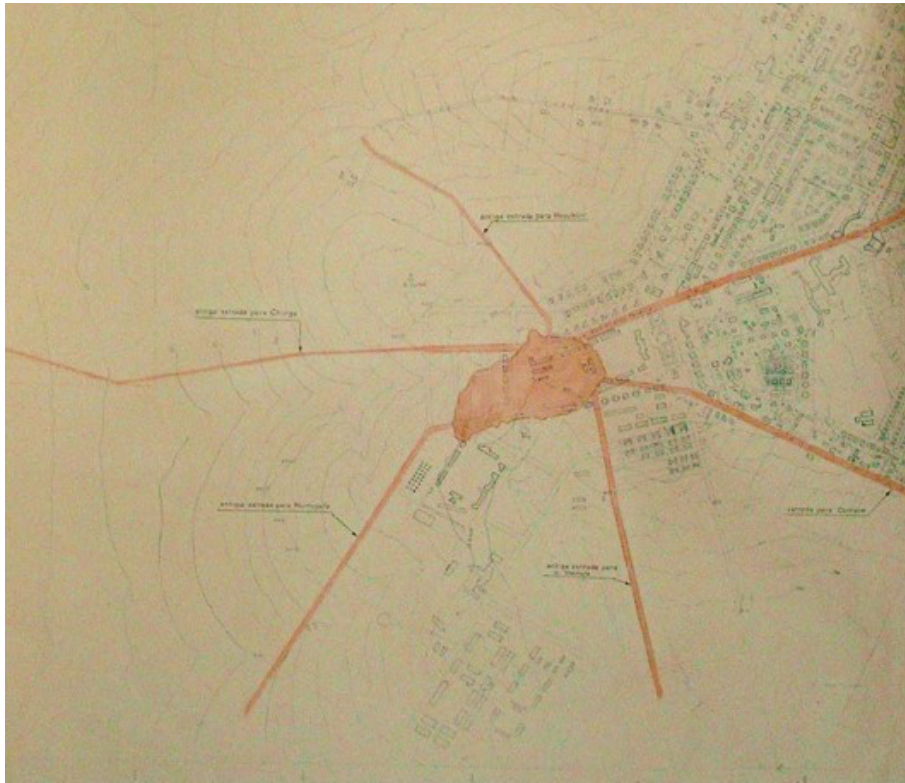


Fig. 1 – Urban Plan from the city of Nam 1. Source: Arquivo histórico de Moçambique, 2011

In 1934, Nampula achieves the administrative *status* of village and capital of the entire northern region - a land area of 275 042 km² - accentuating the urban development and the functional specialization of the city. Despite the administrative *status* of the city, Nampula did not have a plan. It is in the 1940's that profound changes were implemented in the village and its structure, in a compromise among the military areas and the railroad structures, drawing new avenues, a fast urbanization with several new residential areas, schools, shopping and services (particularly in the urban core), recreational and sports facilities and, on the outskirts of Nampula, there were industries related to agriculture, as well as infrastructure related with the power and water supply were then developed.

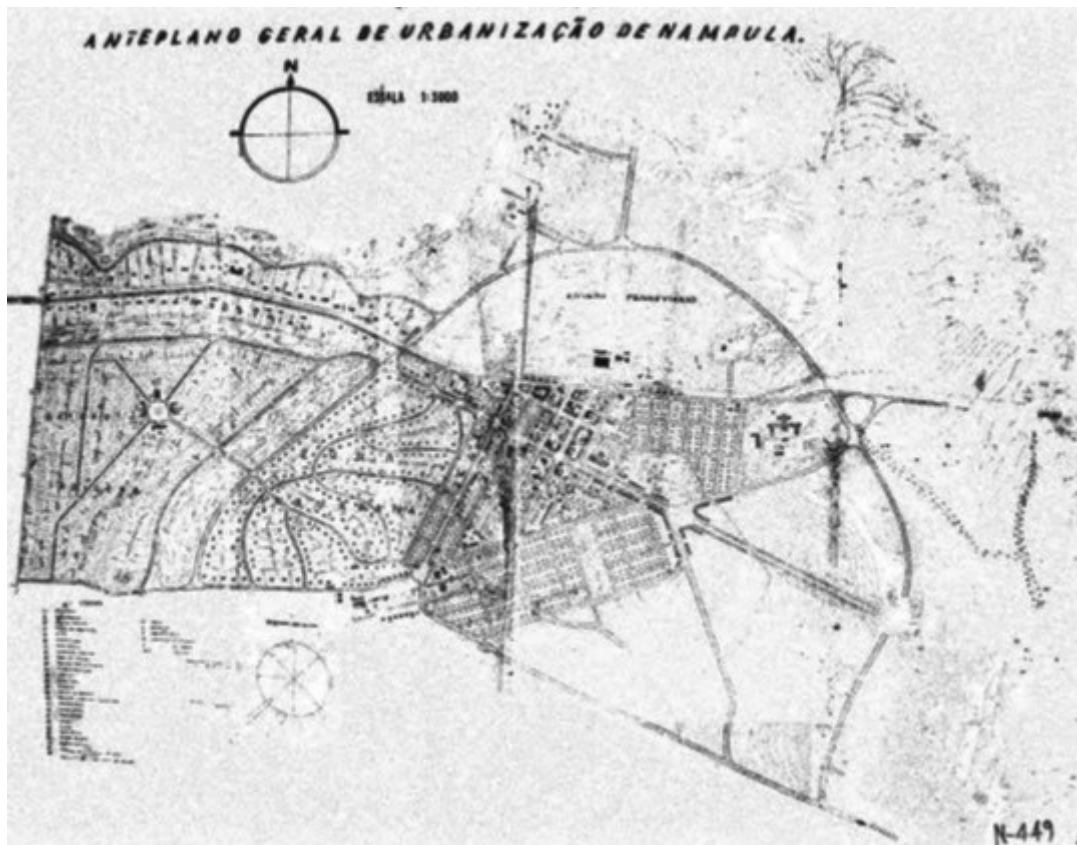


Fig 2. Nampula Urbanization Plan 1940 1 In Bruschi, Sandro, Lage, Luís, 2005, p. 46

The options in the urban area of Nampula were very similar to those taken in other cities of the colony, clearly influenced in the "garden city, where beautification of the city, translatable in the design of its neighborhoods and afforestation of its three large avenues - which incidentally structured the city - replace the absence of symbolic buildings and monumentality " (Rui Paes Mendes, 2012) and through this artifice, emblematic and iconic structures were built in the urban landscape of the city. The option for the garden-city style was justified by a rational economy of the benefits cost-monumentality, and promoted a zoning and effective racial segregation (Fernandes & Mendes, 2012).

In the next fifteen years, Nampula becomes a city of considerable size in Portuguese African colonies. It is an urban structure characterised by its low volumetry and density, in an orthogonal grid (limited by the military roads), broad avenues and gardens.

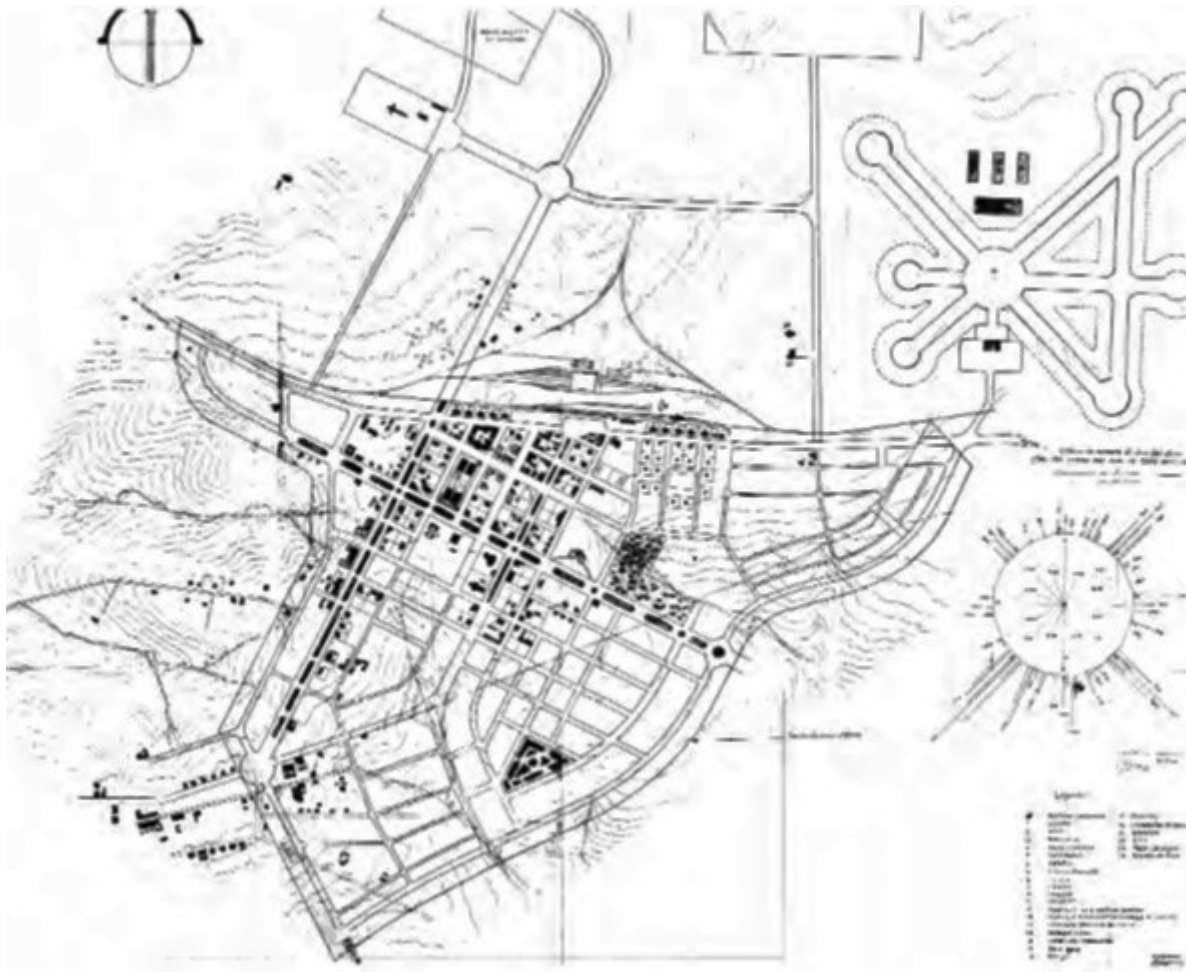


Fig. 3 – Nampula Plan – including the airport ampliation project – late (19)40's In Bruschi, Sandro, Lage, Luís, 2005, p. 46

In the 1960's, is hired by the City Hall, the architect Bernardino Ramalhete, a renowned architect in Mozambique to design the Urban Plan for Nampula.

From 1964 onwards Nampula played a key role in the colonial war in Mozambique, creating an important military complex. From the urban point of view, the military area is in contact with the urban area, and consists in a series of infrastructures beyond the barracks, including the Command of the Military Police, Military Hospital, cinema, football field and other sport areas. A considerable area is for the military housing, that follows an architectural style based on Portuguese nationalist regionalism (Joaquim Vicente, 2005), that reinterprets and transposes traditional Portuguese architectural features for its entire territory.



Fig. 4 – Nampula, aerial view Private Collection of Fernando Gil

The strategic position, in the axis of important transport routes in the northern colony context conferred to Nampula an unique strategic military importance, because here has its node the "Nacala corridor" "through an important railroad that links the port of Nacala with Malawi. Also the road axis Center-Northeast, of vital importance to the development to the north of the Zambezi, crosses the district and city of Nampula, hence continuing to Northeast towards Cabo Delgado, and branching out to East and West, towards the coast and Niassa" (Lopes, L., Araújo, M., Hermind, 1995).

The colonial Nampula is a "typically Western city, with an orthogonal plan, structured in wide avenues with residential areas and well demarcated services" (Araújo, 2005) this colonial city, the city of cement, currently corresponds to an administrative post of the metropolis "morphologically explicit in the three broad avenues that structured the city, has much of the residential districts clearly a garden-city inspiration" (Fernandes & Mendes, 2012). It was during this period that the city has grown demographically and densified without, however, "the volumes of the building suffered any significant transformation, it is predominant the large, gardening spaces with housing in Portuguese regionalist style" (Fernandes & Mendes, 2012). The current Nampula consists of six administrative posts, corresponding five to the informal city, known as "reed city", which were incorporated in the urban area in 1986. In the reed area, "the planning is incipient or non-existent, spontaneous and anarchic occupation dominates, development is horizontal and are scarce or nonexistent urban infrastructure" as in all other Mozambican cities (Lopes, L., Araújo, M., Hermind, 1995).

Currently the city is "hostage" of the military-zone and the reed city - bequeathed by the Portuguese during the colonial period - an area in which growth is very low, and the informal or reed city dominates most of the urban landscape; the cement area is stagnating demographically due to size but also because of the low economic resources of most of the population. The military area remains largely unchanged from the colonial period and just the Military Academy was

included and some of the structures opened for the service of the people (Joaquim Vicente, 2005). While the cement city is built at the area of the plateau, the reed neighborhoods are "built on sloping terrain which presents an increased risk to safety in case of intense rainfall" (Rui Paes Mendes, 2012).

After decolonization urban life changes substantially, due to a rundown of most buildings due to diminished investment capacity and, only in the late (19)80's, the Mozambican state, with the support of the World Bank carries out urban interventions in order to correct some of the problems that the city suffered particularly in the construction and rehabilitation of social housing (Baia, 2008).

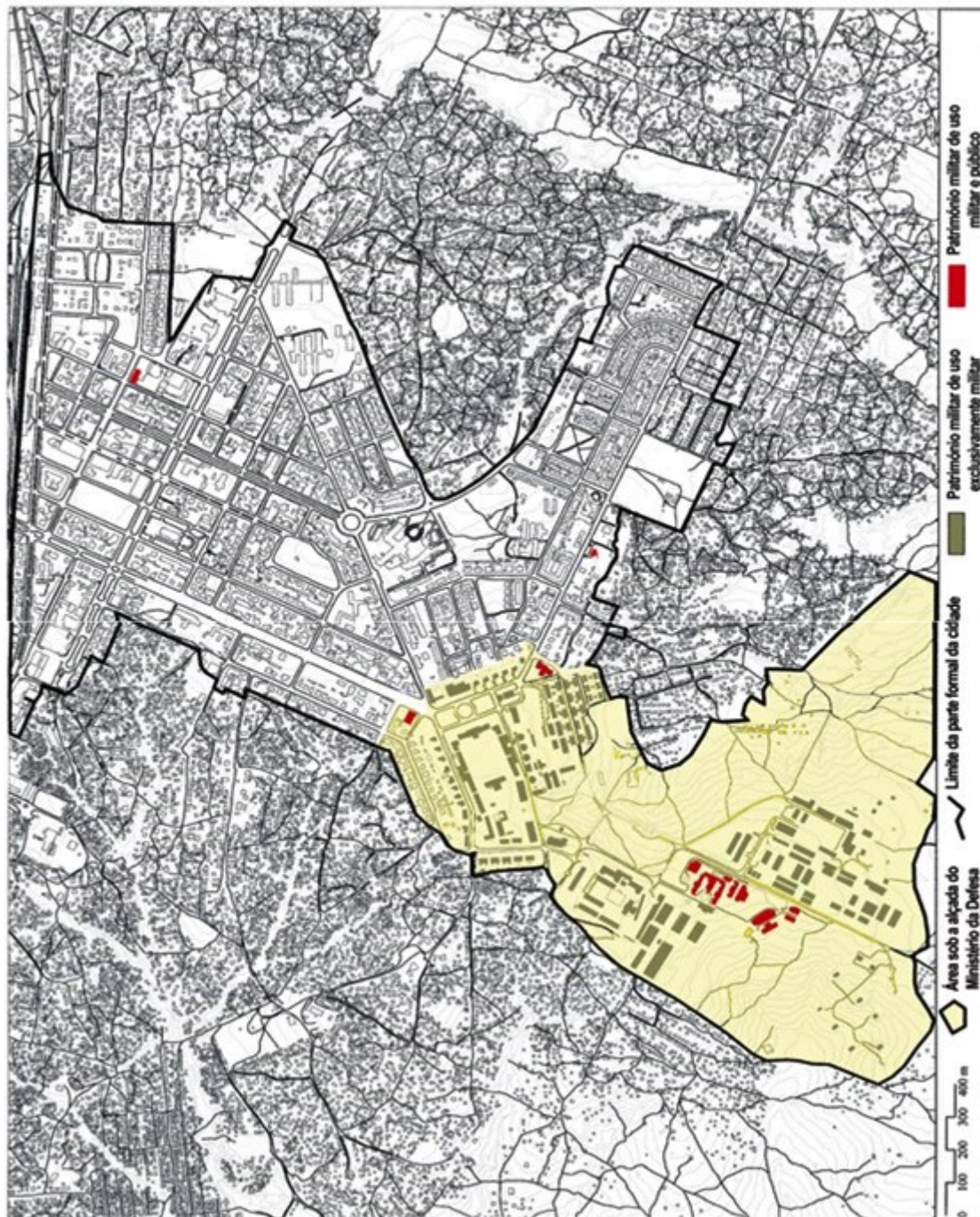


Fig. 5 – Nampula Urban Plan (2005) In Joaquim, Vicente, Spina, Maria, 2005

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