A WALK THROUGH THE CITY:
STORIES AND HISTORIES OF LUANDA 1575-1975

Cécile Fromont
Harvard University

Mu'xi ietu ià Luuanda… is the "once upon a time" of Kimbundu-speaking storytellers. In the capital of modern day Angola, the phrase "In this our land of Luanda…" is where one always begins. The story I am about to relate is the tale of that city's life through the centuries, an account of its birth and its growth, of its weaknesses and its strengths. Equally importantly, I will reposition the multiple discourses dealing with its history into the larger socio-political relationships of power that determined their enunciation. Most of the documentation at the disposal of the researcher on the topic has been written by Europeans for the purpose of colonial administration. Yet, a careful analysis of such documents allows one to read, if moving beyond their prejudice and their slanted perspective, the multiple voices at play in the construction of Luanda's colonial society. Alternative voices are also to be deciphered in non-textual documents. The organization of the city and the use of its urban space are evidence of a constructed perception of the social landscape that, though not expressed through written rules is a structured form of discourse of and about the city.

The aim of this paper, which draws on multiple theoretical and narrative approaches to the city, is to grasp, through a series of snapshots and cameos, not only the façade features of Luanda, but also the substance of the city, from its creation in the late sixteenth century to the dawn of its independence from Portuguese colonial rule in the 1970s. The history of Luanda is made of a succession of moments experienced from a multitude of viewpoints. I chose three episodes to illustrate the nature and evolution of Luanda from early Portuguese overseas settlement in the age of great "Discoveries," to strategic colonial center in the Atlantic slave trade era, to finally a turbulent African city at the dawn of its independence. Three questions will guide me in this

study: What are the intended purposes of Luanda? How is the urban social and material space experienced? What are the discourses constructed about it?

Episode I: Genesis of the City: 1460-1575

A city never stands by itself. Rather, it is the nodal point of a larger physical and ideological network, worldview and civilization that it both embodies and perpetuates. When in 1574 Paulo Dias de Novais embarked from Lisbon in possession of the 1571 Donation Charter from King Dom Sebastião, the *vila* of Luanda was already founded, even if only on paper, and its locus in the nascent Portuguese overseas empire was already determined. From the first decades of the fifteenth century, the monarch of Portugal had titled himself "King of Portugal and of the Algarves on This Side of and Beyond the Seas in Africa" (Albuquerque 70), thus stressing the role of overseas expansion as a defining trait of the Portuguese Crown's identity. The aims of the royal house's maritime enterprises were stated in a 1460 document, the Zurara manuscript. This founding text was presented beside a small portrait of Henry the Navigator, the emblematic figure of the age of great "Discoveries" in Portugal. The prince wished to find the "realm of Guinea," that is to say to explore Africa, for a number of reasons. He not only wanted to know the extent of the Moorish threat and to find the Eastern Christian kingdom of Preste João, the mythic ally of the European Christian kingdoms beyond the Muslim world. He was also eager to increase trade. Henry wished to contribute to the expansion of knowledge, to further promote the proselytizing of Christianity and to "comply with his destiny" (Albuquerque 71). The rationale behind the enterprise of the great "Discoveries" as enunciated in the manuscript was a complex blend of politico-economic planning, military strategy and rather chimerical metaphysical concerns.

The political and diplomatic environment of Dias de Novais, living a hundred years after Zurara's text was written, is both intrinsically anchored in and radically

different from the worldview exposed in the document. What separates the two moments can be summarized in a date: 1492. Three events had happened that year that would leave the Iberian Peninsula, Europe and the world radically changed. In 1492, the Catholic Kings of Castile captured Granada, the last Muslim kingdom of Spain, thus concluding the century-long struggle of the Christian Kings of Northern Spain to expand their influence over all of Iberia, the so-called *Reconquista*. The same year, Antonio de Nebrija published the first grammar and vocabulary of the Castilian language (Nebrija, Quilis and Alvar). The third event for which 1492 would be remembered was the official entrance of the American lands into European history, a result of the travels of Christopher Columbus. These factors are important to mention in this discussion for they have had long-lasting consequences in the shaping of Portugal's overseas endeavors. They illustrate the rise of the Castilian primacy over the other kingdoms in the peninsula, the birth of a modern state apparatus based on the use of vernacular linguistic hegemony as an instrument of domination, as well as the dislocation of the Iberian expansion frontier from European lands to overseas.

The *Reconquista* momentum had been sustained by the permanent effort, turned into a doctrine, to push the limits of Christianity's realm always farther. Spanish-born pope Alexander VI revolutionized the early modern world order by granting the Iberians complete rights over the regions they would discover. From that moment, and in contrast to the prior practices, new-found lands would no longer be conquered on behalf of the papacy, but rather for the benefit of the crown patronizing the expedition. The 1493 papal bull, which also divided the world between Portugal and Spain to the favor of the latter, heightened Spanish-Portuguese rivalry. A landmark of international relations was the subsequent 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas that amended the papal text. For the first time, two states agreed on the terms of a bilateral contract without the intercession of Rome, inaugurating modern diplomacy. The agreement settled the monopoly of Portugal over Africa and granted it control over

the easternmost part of South America. The context herein was created for the Portuguese to claim the South Atlantic as a *mare nostrum*.

Economically, the early modern world functioned under a set of practices known as mercantilism which is based on the accumulation of precious metal according to short-sighted principles equating money and wealth.[1] As a result, participation in the race to new sources of ore became critical. This political, diplomatic and economic worldview, established at the turn of the 1500s, remained vivid throughout the next several centuries. Such was the background for the project of the great "Discoveries." The 1502 Cantino planisphere, commissioned by the Duke of Ferrara in Lisbon, summarizes the Portuguese vision of their world. On the map, the Tordesillas line is highlighted and labeled "this is the mark between Portugal and Castile." Among other things, Brazil's size is exaggerated, its resources of precious red wood receive specific mention, and the promising *Montes de Luna* in Central Africa are represented.

In this context, Paulo Dias de Novais, the first governor and conquistador of the Kingdom of Angola, along with dozens of followers guided by Jesuits priests, set foot south of the great Zaire-River delta to found the *vila* of São Paulo de Luanda. They landed at the periphery of the powerful Kingdom of Kongo on the border with the N'dongo territory ruled by the N'gola dynasty. The choice of location was dictated partly by the Charter of Donation's instructions "between the rivers Zenza and Coanza," (Amaral 34), partly by the belief that there were fantastic silver mines in the nearby *Montes de Luna*, but mostly by the predilection of the Portuguese for a safe and protected harbor. Before its first stone was laid, Luanda was strongly defined by its purpose to serve as the apparatus for the exploitation of local resources in order to increase the wealth of the King of Portugal. In the context of the turn of the seventeenth century, the word resource was soon to become synonymous with the seemingly endless profits of the Atlantic slave trade.

Episode 2: The First Centuries: 1575-1836

Luanda was a nodal center in the Portuguese network of maritime domination. The form and organization of its urban space was both an expression of the Portuguese worldview and the apparatus for its diffusion. From its very foundation until the 1836 abolition of the slave trade, Luanda shaped itself as a mercantile, Christian city, turned towards its capital, Lisbon. These three prominent characteristics serve as a guideline to an analysis of the city through its first three centuries. Because this discussion concerns a long period of time, a thematic rather than chronological approach is preferable to capture the key aspects that structured the city through the centuries.

Unlike their Spanish counterparts, the Portuguese *conquistadores* did not obey in their city planning extensive legislation passed in the metropolis.[2] Nonetheless, a comparison of the cityscapes of overseas Portuguese urban planning reveals how the settlers often turned to the example of their capital city for a model. Portuguese overseas towns as distant as Macao or Salvador da Bahia follow the same blueprint. A hilly seashore location is chosen, dividing the city between high and low. The lay and commercial city with buildings such as warehouses and stores is located by the shore while the noble settlements of the Church and the army, strategically and symbolically located at some height, overlook from a distance everyday activities. Although this layout may echo local examples, such as the location of the mighty capital of the Kongo Kingdom Mbanza Kongo in present northeastern Angola, built on top of a cliff, the intention of the settlers was not to reference such autochthonous precedents. Macao in South East Asia and Salvador da Bahia in Brazil are other examples of the referencing of Lisbon in overseas Portuguese city planning. This is not however to be read necessarily as shortsightedness or lack of imagination on the part of the *conquistadores.* Cities are not only an ensemble of architectural features, but also the product of an imaginative, deeply phenomenological experience. The idea or mental image of a town is as important to

the shaping of the urbanscape as the architecture itself. In Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, we are introduced to this vital quality of the city which lies outside architecture, sociology and mapping. Through a multitude of portraits of the same urban space, Calvino captures how cities are perceived, conceived, experienced and remembered. Marco Polo, the main character of Calvino's novel, describes to Emperor Kublai Khan the many cities he has visited on his travels. After Khan asks Polo about his home town, the traveler reveals his conception of how cities are perceived and understood:

> And Polo said: "Every time I describe a city I am saying something about Venice."
>
> "When I ask you about other cities, I want to hear about them. And about Venice, when I ask you about Venice." [answers the Khan]
>
> "To distinguish the other cities' qualities, I must speak of a first city that remains implicit. For me it is Venice." (Calvino 86)

It is easy to transpose Marco Polo's relationship to his hometown and other cities to the early settlers of faraway colonies. Even having left the metropolis and traveled half the globe, the Portuguese explorers simply created and settled in a city that had never left their minds, in a town corresponding to their conception of urban space, that is to say their "first city" of Lisbon. To the traveler, cities, unlike other spaces, are never completely foreign because they can always be seen through the lens of one's native, implicit city. No matter how distant a city is, it still can be recognized as such and thus is deciphered through the set of knowledge acquired in the implicit town that one carries within oneself. The social relationships, divisions of space, disposition of buildings, proportions between built spaces and areas of void are understood and interiorized as being not only characters of one type of urbanization but also features which other cities will simultaneously conform to and depart from. Consequently, the city one builds tends to become the city one has imagined precisely as the city one visits resembles the city one is already familiar with. The location of Luanda's fort at the top of a hill most likely held resonance to the local population accustomed to see, in the broader

region, hillside constructions of prestige. Similarly, for the Portuguese, the site echoed older European examples.

To complicate Calvino's perspective, the city of one's mind does not have to be the city one has known. For the Romans from all corners of the Empire, for example, there was no city but the City, to the point that the common word for *urbs* itself became synonymous with Rome. In early modern Europe, the mental image of the city was in turn shaped by Saint Augustine's *City of God*, around the idea that there can be no real city without the real (i.e. Christian) God, and no viable law other than the divine law. This conception goes back to Aristotelian understanding of the city as the place where man could fulfill his *telos* or purpose as man.[3] From this comes the importance of the city in Western thought as the place where civilization and urbanity happens. This understanding of the city has had consequences in the conception and perception of urban spaces and in turn in the relationship of European travelers to African precedents of urbanization. From a European viewpoint, the long-lived prejudice that equated Africa with the non-civilized has impeded the perception of even large and perennial settlements of population as a city or locus of civilization. The dichotomy between civilized/European versus non-civilized/ African took a central role in the definition of African colonial city. For example, the material used in the construction became in the colonial context a visual marker of racial discrimination; for one group stone and mortar, symbols of civilization and strength, for other groups ephemeral material, standing for the superficiality of their society.

In Luanda, these conceptions have had several visible consequences. They explain the discrepancy between the importance given by the Portuguese to buildings of stone, even at the cost of a general neglect of basic infrastructures such as paved streets or trash management, and the priority given to the erection of churches, as necessary elements of the urbanscape. The first buildings to be built in the newly founded city of Luanda were the Fort of São Miguel and the Jesuit church, in the upper city. Later rebuilt in more noble

material, they would become landmarks of the city, protected by its fort and blessed by the presence of many churches. The churches as they stand today are the result of rebuilding after the Dutch occupation and destruction of the city from 1641 to 1648 and many have also been largely reshaped one or several times since. These churches are numerous, monumental and richly decorated in the Portuguese Baroque style. They mark Luanda's urban space as primarily Christian and their style, echoing the metropolitan architecture, inscribes the terrain as Portuguese.

A case study of the interior decoration of Nossa Senhora da Nazaré reveals the intentions of the settlers not only to locate the new town in the larger Portuguese world but also to establish visual signs of their local domination. Inaugurated in 1664 and located in the outskirts of the city, the Nazaré was a lower-town church; its decoration program did not address the elite but rather the local population. Built in front of a large plaza towards which open two second story balcony-like windows, it belongs to the type of mission churches (Fig. 1). The church's most interesting feature, however, is the decoration program found on its interior walls. The single-aisle basilica is adorned with a sophisticated ensemble of *azulejos*, blue-painted ceramic tiles, landmarks of Portuguese decorative art. In the nave, the tiles cover the walls from floor to shoulder height with vegetal motifs. The wall separating the nave from the chancel is entirely covered with a mix of religious scenes and decorative friezes (Fig. 2). The main chapel, however, is adorned with two panels presenting renderings of a historical event. On October 29 1665, the battle of Ambuila took place, a violent confrontation between the army of the King of Kongo and Portuguese troops from Angola. The outcome of the combat was the rout of the Kongo army and the death of their king, whose crown and scepter fell into the hands of the Portuguese. On the left of the Nazaré altar is a depiction of the famous battle (Fig. 3). The Portuguese, largely outnumbered and circled by a crowd of Kongo men, with the miraculous help of the Virgin Mary appearing in the sky, keep rank and resist the assault. The pendant panel, at the

right of the altar, illustrates the outcome of the encounter (Fig 4). In a somber landscape of ruins and sparse vegetation, lays the severed head of the ruler of the Kongo, next to the crown and scepter he had receive from Pope Innocent X. The dreadful message conveyed by the two panels to the local population is reinforced by the physical presence of the Kongo king's head, which was buried in the wall behind the painting.[4] After the battle, the Portuguese decided to bring back to Luanda, their central African stronghold, the symbol of their victory over the powerful Kongo nation. The purpose of the Nazaré is therefore multifold. On the one hand, it serves as an outpost for the evangelization of the local population at the periphery of the city. On the other hand, it is a sardonic mausoleum, and bearer of a heavy political message. Both functions combine to serve as markers of Portuguese domination over the space it occupies, in the city and its hinterland.

Beyond the theoretical superstructure that led to its creation and shaping, the most prominent feature of Luanda was its mercantile nature and the concentration and specialization of its efforts in the slave trade. At the state level, as well as at the individual level, the purpose of the *vila* was to produce wealth that could be repatriated to Portugal. The main demographic trait of the resident population was its instability. A flux of settlers came and went constantly and few of them felt the need to invest in the city beyond the wants of its immediate profit. C.R. Boxer, a British scholar, remarks, "The two main factors which stultified the healthy development of Angola were the concentration of virtually all efforts on the slave trade, and the use of Angola as a penal settlement for the *degredados* of Portugal and Brazil" (120). Interestingly, the second factor identified by Boxer, the use of Angola as a penitentiary settlement, is never overtly stated by scholars from the area, who convey a vision of the life of their forefathers in a radically different way. In their view, to use the romantic words of José de Almeida Santos, the first centuries of Luanda were "the times of unbridled luxury, of gambling and libertinage, when Luanda was the cursed paradise of adventurers that sunk their hands

in the gold of the trade and displayed court-like galas and crass jewels in the fetid streets of the town" (103).

Both descriptions nevertheless agree on the main features of the city: underdevelopment and deprivation. Luanda was a place where money was easy to make and easy to loose, a situation leading residents to rarely invest in the future of the town. The *Palacio* of Dona Ana Joaquina, a female slave trader, remains a key landmark of this era. Half warehouse, half palace, the building, built thanks to the slave trade and in order to sustain it, expresses wealth and prestige by simple and efficient architectural devices. It is elevated from the street by a platform and two flights of stairs. Its monumental size is reinforced by the multiplication of windows and doors arranged symmetrically on the façade, and the presence of a third floor emphasizes even more the importance of the building in comparison to the lower constructions typical of the city. Yet, the building remains an austere and functional construction in which no practical aspect was compromised for the sake of sophistication.

The nature of the documentation published on Luanda demands a historiographical approach. A range of works sponsored by the Portuguese colonial government offers insights into Luanda's architecture and planning during the period, the majority being from the *Câmara Municipal* (mayor's office of Luanda) or in the case of Amaral's *Luanda (Estudo de Geografia Urbana*) from the Office of Overseas Investigations of the central government in Lisbon. These are largely twentieth-century histories of the city, with a mission to emphasize the importance of Portuguese colonization.[5] In such narratives, localized history and the native presence receive virtually no attention, even though Luanda was inhabited predominantly by Africans. At the outset, it should be underlined that these documents are problematic. As historical studies, they are discourses of ambivalent nature and should be used not only as scholarly texts of importance for the study of the topic but also as primary sources documenting the bias of their authors and the political line of the institutions that sponsored them. This specific point is manifest in various ways, including the

range of materials that are left out. The lack, both iconographic and textual, of documentation of the African presence in the city shows this particularly well and illustrates eloquently the power relationship at play. What is included tends to have an emphasis on colonial achievements. In such works, Luanda is portrayed as a city made by Europeans for the use of Europeans. Africans and African life are absent of the texts and images; yet, a cautious reader of colonial literature knows that their presence is the necessary condition for the existence of the town. The region in which Luanda was founded was not a bare land before the arrival of the Portuguese. Peoples, kingdoms and empires occupied and utilized the space, in an intricate network of trade and political alliances that the Portuguese hoped to use to their advantage.

Late colonial literature recorded the ubiquitous presence of the African population, although in an oblique, unintentional way. Maps and views of the city found in such literature infer the existence of the Africans as the condition for a coherent urbanscape. Churches were erected to christianize them; the port was made for the exportation of their wealth and bodies. Within this realm, the Africans and their labor are the *sine qua non* economic condition of the wealth and pomp of the city. The Africans are present in the books metonymically, by the fruit of their alienated labor: their arms carried the stones of the houses, their work made possible the luxurious life of the Portuguese, their bodies, as a subject of trade, produced the wealth of the city and the means for their own exploitation. In other words, the Africans are everywhere in the images but are nowhere to be seen. They have no social visibility. The products of their labor are not only taken away from them but used to exploit them further.

A notable exception to the rule of invisibility is the presence of Africans and African architecture in postcard photographs of the early twentieth century as illustrations or *couleur locale* in the dominant stories of Portuguese endeavors. The purpose of these images is to bring to the European drawing room snapshots of the exotic yet they

convey important information on the local experience in the city. Such views from turn-of-the-century Luanda document the *musseques*, or African neighborhoods named after the red earth of the region, that are situated at the periphery of the city. Related structures include rectangular dwellings composed of cob walls, arranged along rectilinear alleys or cone shaped buildings suggesting the heterogeneity of local architecture. Aspects of the every day life of Luanda's African residents are rendered through scenes of sidewalk trade, or picturesque renderings of mundane activities such as the toasting of manioc flour or riverside laundry. These photographs are nevertheless sterile documents presenting African activities out of their context, only to set the stage for their primary purpose of delivering news, in word and image, of exotic travels to a visitor's home.

In contrast, David Birmingham gives life to the walls of the town in his short study of popular culture centered on carnival and festivals, *Carnival at Luanda*. Carnivals have been part of Luanda's life since its beginning, as manifestations of domination, and displays in which power relationships are marked on the social space. Birmingham gives a succinct account of one such 1620 festival. The lines of divide in the event's organization hint at the socio-political construction of seventeenth century Luanda, as well as of that of the later period as "the tradition carried on down the centuries" (Birmingham 97).

These festivals were orchestrated around the rivalry between different social and ethnic groups. For example, the setting of the date at a given time of the year underlined the current amount of influence possessed by each entity. Whether the date followed the Catholic liturgical calendar, celebrated lay Portuguese landmarks or honored a local tradition, gave a hint of the state of the power relationships between the different groups. In 1620, the occasion for the festival was the canonization of Saint Francis Xavier of the Company of Jesus. Several groups were anxious to finance the festivities. The Jesuits themselves "contributed richly ornate floats to the procession," the Jewish governor "ordered naval salutes and night illumination throughout the

city," and the army paraded through the streets (Birmingham 96). In the procession itself, the groups competing for the attention of the public were composed around socio-racial divides. The Portuguese presented a group of traditional sword fighters and young women dressed as shepherdess; São Tomé, representing the overseas tradition of Portugal had also sent a dance troupe. "The central float of 1620, and the one indigenous to the sea folk of Luanda, was a Neptune-like god who was the local saint and worker of miracles" (Birmingham 96). Birmingham's short account of the event points to the wealth and complexity of the multicultural life of Luanda made of encounters, competition and exchanges between a number of cultures and traditions.[6] "All in all," he says of the 1620 carnival, "the procession represented a complete syncretism of pagan rituals from the Mediterranean pantheon, of Christian rituals from the Iberian Church, and of Mbundu and Kongo rituals designed to foster fertility and prosperity and to overcome the disasters of colonial conquest" (97). More specifically, the "Neptune-like god" was probably a manifestation of the cult to the water-spirit *Kianda*, autochthonous to the area.[7]

In the colonial city, conflicting interests and ways of life cohabitate. Raymond Gervais's idea of "real space" versus "mental space" is a useful tool to conceptualize the dynamics ruling the relationships between the various groups constituting colonial society. The real space corresponds, in Gervais's Marxist analysis, to the infrastructure of the city, or the city as it can be seen materially. The mental space, however, is the phenomenological experience of the real space that is determined by culture, in the broad sense of the term. Real space, in the colonial enterprise has been the "object of an often violent mode of appropriation and therefore has been created-organized-designed thanks to a historically determined/determinable relationship of power" (Gervais 113). Mental space is at the origin of the shaping of the real space, as I have outlined in my discussion of the origins of Luanda, but also changes and evolves when exposed to the real space, as in the case of the urbanization of a rural population. Gervais summarizes the tension

inherent to colonial space as the tension within each group "to create a real space to the image of their mental space" (Gervais 114).

The real space is the deliberate creation of the city as it should be in the eyes of the dominating "class." Those dominated, although they do not have institutional power on the projection of the real city, are nevertheless trying to equate their mental space into the real space, and in doing so gain agency over the city. The constant negotiation of the space between diverging if not conflicting mental spaces is the motor, the dynamic of urban development in Luanda as elsewhere. The shaping of the city is both a process and a dialectic. In this dialectical process neither of the two poles remains unchanged; the colonial city is different from the European city and the local population adopts, appropriates and adapts foreign practices, and turns them into practices that are meaningful for them.

Episode III: The Late Colonial Period: 1836-1975

As the early period of European occupation came to an end at the turn of the twentieth century, the face of the city had hardly changed. Although the prosperous presence of the Portuguese on the site of Luanda graced the city with numerous and often luxurious buildings, the lack of investment in the infrastructure of the city by the Europeans was conspicuous in its unpaved streets. After 250 years of Portuguese presence, and the end of the slave trade in the mid-nineteenth century, the city of Luanda had to reinvent itself and its purpose, as a colonial city negotiating between metropolitan and local culture. Until the twentieth century, the Portuguese settlements in Angola followed a logic of trade-post exploitation. The city was an interface between the resources of the hinterland and the metropolis, and there was not *stricto sensu* a colonial situation. The widespread occupation of the land and direct control over its population by the European powers that define colonialism is a specific phenomenon that, in contrast to the American precedents, took place in Africa only in the nineteenth century. There, it

took the specific form of colonial imperialism, and was shaped around international competition between European powers. Economics, nostalgia for the past Empire, and the alliance with Great Britain are the main factors for the renewed interest of Portugal for Angola, their "Third Empire" that came to prominence chronologically after India and Brazil, and was destined to be "a shelter land for the Portuguese emigrants and capitals, territories participating in a decisive manner, through their mines and their plantations, and if needed with the recourse to servile work force, to the prosperity of the metropolis" (M'Bokolo and Le Callenec 286).

In this context of colonial rule, the city of Luanda developed in the twentieth century from a trading-post town to a nodal point of the colonial systematic exploitation of a territory. It would become, in the words of sociologist Joel Frederico da Silveira, "the concretization, in space, of a political and economic power foreign to preexisting African societies" (Frederico da Silveira 75). He adds, "The phenomenon of urbanization in colonial Africa can be considered as the translation of a process of extravert modernization representing the spatialization of a specific dependence relationship that is determined by the colonial fact" (74).

Though urban centers existed in Africa before European domination, colonial urbanization on the "dark continent" resulted in the imposition of Western conceptions of the city on African material and social space. The encounter/opposition between the two systems of living is crystallized in the architectural differences between the stone city of the European and the African, poor quarters, known in Luanda as the *Musseques*. *Musseque* as a term first referred to the indigenous neighborhoods of the city built in traditional architecture but evolved to be a euphemism used in the twentieth century by the colonial administration to name the shantytowns where the Africans newly emigrated from the countryside found refuge as the rural exodus grew exponentially.

Rather than studying the *Musseque* and the other parts of Luanda through their walls, I would like to consider the

spatial stories told by the individual's use of the built city, or as de Certeau suggests "the transhumant, or metaphorical, city [that] steals into the clear text of the planed and legible city."[8] Cities are made of buildings and people, they are both *urbs* and *civitas*, but they are also made of the ensemble of the trajectories that they offer, through time, space, and social hierarchy, to their inhabitants. The same physical space can be constituted, in fact or by law, of a variety of social spaces, in which people behave in a certain, pre-determined way. In the words of Bourdieu, people's behaviors follow the pattern of the *habitus*, i.e. of a structuring structure that is to practice what language is to speech: an area of possibility by which social behavior is contained and pre-determined. Social relationships are ruled and regularized without needing rules: if one does something it is because that is "what one does."[9] In this concept lies the key to the understanding of what is called, for lack of better name, the "informal" life of African cities. Practices do not need enunciated rules because "they tend to reproduce the objective structures of which they are … the product" (Bourdieu 175). Practices produce the rules which they obey. Rules may not be enunciated or perceived consciously but they exist and people live by them. Just as there is no communication possible outside the boundaries of language, there is no social practice outside the structuring structure of the *habitus*. The informal economy may be compared, using the same analogy with linguistics, to a pun. If a pun can be understood, it is because the possibility of its existence was contained in the ensemble of possibilities of language. Similarly, informal economy exists because and if the conditions of its existence and mode of operation are possibilities inside the given social situation.

Let us now turn to Luanda in the 1950s and 1960s. What are the narratives that articulate the different experiences of the city? On the side of the European experience, I will draw on a letter written by Portuguese immigrant Henrique Paço d'Arcos to his friend and fellow colonial Manoel, remembering in 1966 their arrival and life in the city in the 1930s and communicating their point of view on the

situation of the city in the 1960s.[10] For Henrique, Luanda is a city made of exotic practices, entertainment and social interactions, as well as professional developments. At the time of the letter, Luanda had received a large colony of Portuguese settlers, and had become a significantly white city. In 1960, 85% of the white population had been born in the metropolis (Messiant 132). "The years went by," writes Henrique, "Luanda is today a wonderful city that can rival, on this side of the Atlantic, that other city of the Brazilian song. Angola, in spite of its high and low tides, is a confirmation of vitality, in a world in perdition." Henrique also mentions briefly the 1961 uprising against colonial rule as an "accident of local politics." His point of view undoubtedly reflects the perception of the situation by the Portuguese in the 1960s: Luanda is a city in development, dear to their heart and the possibility of its loss to their rule is deemed impossible. In Henrique's personal communication, we recognize the same discourse as in the government-sponsored writings I referred to in the first part of this essay. Even more significant is the publication of this letter, in 2003, in *O Estudante* the internet-based magazine of the association of former students of the elite Portuguese high-school of Luanda, testifying to the vivacity and longevity of the state of mind of the Portuguese, still relating after 30 years to the narrative of a time when Luanda seemed to be indisputably theirs. In fact, the city that appears in this narrative is radically different from the other city that was experienced from an African viewpoint. The different paths taken by the inhabitants of a town and their many trajectories map out the city as the sum of all possible practices that it allows. However, although European and African paths might have physically crossed, they never really intersected, in the sense that there was no real interaction between the different groups which were responding to totally different logics.[11]

Where can one find a counter-point to the Portuguese narrative of the city? Where can one see a response to the story told in the letter, but also to the one recorded in scholarship about Luanda sponsored by the colonial

administration? Where, paraphrasing Aimé Césaire, might one find the voice of voiceless misfortune? (Césaire 32). One such place is in the works of Lusophone African literature. The novels of Luandino Vieira, for example, take us through their tales of hunger and grotesque, pathetic misery into the Luanda that the official voice ignores. Vieira, born in Portugal, is one of the few white settlers who, living in an African neighborhood, shared in their absolute indigence the misfortunate life of the *musseque* dwellers. A child of the *musseque*, he renders with humor and kindness the life of the shantytown, while disturbing by his poignant accounts the precarious order of the Portuguese colonial rule. In 1957, his first book of short stories *Childhood and the City* was seized by the colonial authority days before its release (Chabal 20). From 1959 to 1972, after an unfair trial, he was jailed for his political opinions in favor of the independence movement. It is in the exile of his Cape Verdian prison cell that he wrote most of his works. Along the pages of his stories, Luanda, or rather Luuanda as it is pronounced by the Kimbundu majority of the region, becomes a different city. Here, the *musseques* take flesh as concrete places.

Vieira describes one of these poor neighborhoods as the first rain in more than two months arrives:

> When the first big thunderclap burst above the *musseque*, shivering the weak walls of mud and wattle and loosening boards, cardboards and straw mats, everyone closed their eyes […] By noon the rain became lighter even though the sky was still ugly and sneering, all black with clouds. The *musseque* seemed like a village floating in the middle of a lagoon, with canals made by rain and the shanties invaded by the red, dirty water rushing towards the tar roads downtown or stubbornly staying behind to make muddy pools for mosquitoes and noisy frogs. Some of the shanties had fallen down and the people, not wanting to drown, were outside them with the few things they could save. Beneath the grey sunless sky only the blades of grass were shining a prettier colour, their washed green heads peeking out from the pools of water (Vieira 3).

In a few lines, Vieira brings to life the *musseque* with a wealth of concrete but also psychological details. He describes the material aspect of the shantytown. The dwellings are made of temporary materials, some in the tradition

of local architecture such as earth or wattle and others attesting to the total destitution of the inhabitants: newspaper and cardboard. The conditions of life are precarious among "mosquitoes and noisy frogs" and the basic struggle is the one for survival, leaving everything behind might be necessary for "not wanting to drown." In the space of these few lines many who had close to nothing lost in one morning the little they had as "some of the shanties had fallen down." The author also subtly suggests the state of mind of the *musseque* dwellers, by personifying elements of nature such as the stubborn water or finding beauty in the new born grass in the midst of the worst adversity.

Vieira later takes us to the center of the city through the eyes of Zeca Santos, a young man from the *musseque* looking for a job to calm his and his grandmother's hunger. Not having been able to eat in two days, he finds himself begging for a job in a European firm:

> But at the entrance he stopped, the old fear once again in his heart. A huge glass door faced him, letting him see inside where everything was shining, threatening. In a glimpse he saw himself in the glass and the yellow flowered shirt […] his old blue trousers too many times washed white at the knees, and he felt the sharp cold from the black stone of the entrance through the holes in his ragged shoes. Every bit of courage fled from him now, even the words he had dared to think up to tell his will to work, and in his belly the beast began to work again, gnawing, gnawing (Vieira 18).

After gathering his courage and entering the building, Zeca is given a short interview that ends in an avalanche of insults from the white boss as he discovers that Zeca was born in the *musseque*. Vieira describes here the world of the Europeans in stark contrast with the *musseque* world. The city center is made of cold, hard material, a glass door, black stone, shiny metals. To the young man, this world is strange and threatening to the point of debilitating him from speech, even from hope. The gap between the two men in the scene is so deep, and prejudice so strong, that communication between the men is impossible. The two faces of Luanda here cross without meeting.

Later in the novel, as the *musseque* is shaken by a tragic-comic rivalry between two women about the ownership of a hen and an egg, the military police makes its entrance in the quarter. The sergeant imposes his own rule in the women's yard:

> Since you didn't come to any conclusion about the hen and the egg, I'll resolve it. […] You were disturbing the public order in this yard, you noisy gossips! More than two people were together here, that's prohibited! And furthermore, with this crazy idea of deciding your own disputes you were trying to take justice into you own hands! The hen goes with me as evidence and you start moving! Let's go circulate! Go on home! (Vieira 107).

Comedy here turns in the space of a paragraph into a heavily charged political discourse. Vieira whimsically put in the mouth of the arbitrary military police sergeant, who arrogantly comes into the scene, the claims of the population and the prophecy of independence to come. They are not allowed to demonstrate, yet they do. The law is officially coming from the Portuguese yet the *musseque* decides of its "own disputes." Step by step, the Africans are taking "justice in [their] own hands" a phrase coined by the author to suggest the possibility and strength of collective action against colonial administration.

The weight of four-hundred years of oppression and exploitation of the Angolan population, and the force of its latent revolt explode in the words of the Angolan authors of the mid-twentieth century. Contemporary to the sublime and grotesque stories of Vieira, the poems of Agostinho Neto render in a different genre and somewhat more learned style the same feelings of revolt. A medical doctor educated in Portugal, and a member of the African middle class, his poetry is also the product of exile and imprisonment. Agostinho Neto writes his entire work during the period of time in which he is under arrest for his political opinions in favor of the independence of Angola. Later liberated, he would become soon after November 1975, the date of independence, the first president of Angola. "Aspiration" is one of his most famous poems, and probably the most

evocative of the material and psychological condition of Angolan Africans.

ASPIRAÇÃO

Ainda o meu canto dolente
e a minha tristeza
no Congo, na Geórgia, no
Amazonas

Ainda
o meu sonho de batuque em
noites de luar

Ainda os meus braços
ainda os meus olhos
ainda os meus gritos.

Ainda o dorso vergastado
o coração abandonado
a alma entregue à fé
ainda a dúvida.

E sobre os meus cantos
os meus sonhos
os meus olhos
os meus gritos
sobre o meu mundo isolado
o tempo parado.

Ainda o meu espírito
ainda o quissange
a marimba
a viola
o saxofone
ainda os meus ritmos de ritual
orgíaco.

Ainda a minha vida
oferecida à Vida.
ainda o meu desejo.

Ainda o meu sonho
o meu grito
o meu braço
a sustentar o meu Querer.

E nas sanzalas

ASPIRATION

And still my aching song
and my sadness
in the Congo, in Georgia, in the
Amazon

And still
my dream of moonlight
drumming

And still my arms
And still my eyes
And still my cry.

And with the back whipped
the heart abandoned
the soul surrenders to faith
even the doubt.

And over my song
my dreams
my eyes
my cries
over my isolated world
the time that stopped.

And still my spirit
and still the *quissange*
the *marimba* [12]
the violin
the saxophone
and still my rhythm of orgiastic
rituals.

And still my life
offered to the Life
and still my desire.

And still my dream
my cry
my arm
feeding my Love.

And in the villages

nas casas	the houses
nos subúrbios das cidades	the suburbs of the cities
para lá das linhas	there beyond the lines
nos recantos escuros das casas ricas	in the dark corners of wealthy houses
onde os negros murmuram: ainda	where the blacks whisper: still
O meu Desejo	My desire
transformado em força	transformed in force
inspirando as consciências desesperadas.	inspiring the desperate consciousnesses.[13]

(Agostinho Neto 68)

In the verses of Agostinho Neto, the inner voice of an Angolan native represents the entire people, wondering how long the exploitation is going to last as it is already impossible to fathom how it could possibly have endured so long: "and still," "and still." However, in spite of these long centuries, his will, his strength, his desire are intact, "still." The confrontation in the poem of these two contradictory sets of feelings shows the path to rebellion. What starts as resignation in the first verses, becomes determination and menace in the last lines. The African Angolan with his apparent docile and resigned obedience to Portuguese rule is present in all corners of the country, in "the wealthy houses," in "the suburbs," "beyond the lines." The feelings of injustice will not remain quiet, and soon the "desire transformed in force" will turn acceptance into upheaval. Agostinho Neto plays on the polysemy of the word "*ainda*" (still) that functions both as a temporal phrase and a logic coordinator, to infer the necessary relationship between frustration and its necessary, logical consequence: uprising.

This article has identified and addressed the key faces of the city of Luanda, through time and social space. Describing four-hundred years of a city's life is an impossible task, but through the features discussed and the diverse approaches used, I have shed light on central aspects of the Luanda cityscape. An aim of this paper has been to identify and deconstruct the agendas of the documentation published on the topic. As I suggest here, some books are better read between the lines. Used as primary sources rather than

scholarly works, they can be eloquent documents of a socio-political climate and their content can, ironically, complete our knowledge of alternative discourses. "My tale. If it's pretty, if it's ugly, only you know. But I swear I didn't tell a lie and that these affairs happened in this our land of Luuanda" (Vieira 109). In many ways, this is also how nearly every story ends, with respect to the city of Luanda.[14]

Notes:

1. Mercantilist thought is not considered as an economic theory because it does not constitute a system accounting for the ensemble of economic relationships. Its main shortcoming is to consider abundance as wealth because it does not understand monetary mechanisms as being independent from quantitative variations. Inflation, for example, is not part of mercantilist thought.

2. In 1573, Philip II of Spain promulgates the Population Ordinances, a set of rules by which to create and organize a new settlement in the Americas. "On arriving at a place where a new settlement is to be founded—which according to our will and disposition shall be one that is vacant and that can be occupied without doing harm to the Indians and natives or with their free consent—a plan for the settlement is to be made, dividing into squares, streets, and building lots, using cord and ruler, beginning with the main square from which the streets are to run to the gates and principal roads and leaving sufficient open space so that even if the town grows, it can always spread in the same manner" (quoted in Crouch, Garr and Mundingo 13).

3. Kagan insisted on the influence of the Aristotelian conception of the city on the Iberian world (26).

4. Gabriel 122. I also had multiple confirmation of this fact during fieldwork in Luanda. The powerful anecdote is still present vividly in the oral tradition of local knowledge.

5. See for example the works published by the Group of Overseas Investigations such as Amaral, or the series published by the Municipal Chamber such as Santos.

6. Unfortunately, his study is an exception in the scholarship about Luanda and it is unclear whether the primary sources he used in the Municipal Archives still today exist.

7. There is to my knowledge no in-depth study of the *Kianda* phenomenon. It can nevertheless be related to Africa-wide cults of the water-spirits witnessed in urban contexts and known as *Mami Wata*. Birmingham's account seems to indicate strong local sources to the phenomenon. *Kianda* is today largely associated to the western image of the mermaid. It also appears frequently in fiction literature. See Pepetela or Carvalho.

8. My translation of "La ville transhumante, ou métaphorique, s'insinue ainsi dans le texte clair de la ville planifiée et lisible" (Certeau 142).

9. In French, "ce qui se fait" in reference to the phrase "cela ne se fait pas" used mainly in child education to delimit the boundaries of acceptable social behavior.

10. Letter edited by Helder Ponte for *O Estudante—orgão dos antigos alunos do Liceu Salvodor Carreia* at:
http://www.carlossaraiva.com/estudante/200310LoandaAntiga.html

11. Of course, it is a simplification to reduce Luandan society to two groups, other intermediary situations such as the "*assimilados*," assimilated Africans granted some of the rights of the Portuguese, complicate the social landscape. However, the two categories represent the overwhelmming majority of the population.

12. *Quissange* and *marimba* are African musical instruments.

13. My translation.

14. I wish to thank Mr and Mrs Teboul-Bonnet and the Conseil Général de la Martinique for their support.

Works Cited:

Agostinho Neto, António. *Sagrada Esperança: Poemas.* 2nd ed. Lisboa: Livraria Sá da Costa Editora, 1975.

Albuquerque, Luís de, et al. *Portugal-Brazil: The Age of Atlantic Discoveries.* Lisbon; Milan; New York: Bertrand Editora; F.M. Ricci; Brazilian Cultural Foundation, 1990.

Amaral, Ilídio do. *Luanda; Estudo De Geografia Urbana. Memórias Da Junta De Investigações Do Ultramar*. 2a. Sér., No. 53. Lisboa, 1968.

Birmingham, David. "Carnival at Luanda." *Journal of African History* 29.1 (1988): 93-103.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Esquisse D'une Théorie De La Pratique: Précédé De Trois Études D'ethnologie Kabyle. Travaux De Droit, D'économie, De Sociologie Et De Sciences Politiques.* No. 92. Genève, Paris: Droz, 1972.

Boxer, C. R. *Portuguese Society in the Tropics: The Municipal Councils of Goa, Macao, Bahia, and Luanda, 1510-1800.* Paul Knaplund Lectures, 1964. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965.

Calvino, Italo. *Invisible Cities.* San Diego: Harcourt, 1974.

Cardoso, Manuel da Costa Lobo. *Subsídios Para a História De Luanda. Publicações Do Museu De Angola.* Luanda: Edição do Museu de Angola, 1954.

Carvalho, Ruy Duarte de. *Ana a Manda: Os Filhos da Rede: Identidade Colectiva, Criatividade Social e Produção da Diferença Cultural: Um Caso Muxiluanda*. Lisboa: Instituto de Investigação Científica Tropical, 1989.

Certeau, Michel de, et al. *L'invention Du Quotidien*. Collection Folio/Essais; 146, 238. Nouv. éd. Paris: Gallimard, 1990.

Césaire, Aimé. *Cahier D'un Retour Au Pays Natal*. Paris: Présence africaine, 1983.

Chabal, Patrick. "Aspects of Angolan Literature: Luandino Vieira and Agostinho Neto." *African Languages and Cultures* 8.1 (1995): 19-42.

Clarence-Smith, W. G. *The Third Portuguese Empire, 1825-1975: A Study in Economic Imperialism*. Manchester, U.K.; Dover, N.H.: Manchester University Press, 1985.

Crouch, Dora P., Daniel J. Garr, and Axel I. Mundigo. *Spanish City Planning in North America*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1982.

Frederico da Silveira, Joel. "La Spatialisation D'un Rapport Colonial. Bissau (1900-1960)." *Bourgs Et Villes En Afrique Lusophone*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1989. 74-97.

Gabriel, Manuel Nunes. *Angola, Cinco Séculos De Cristianismo*. Queluz: Literal, 1978.

Gervais, Raymond. "Espace Réel, Espace Mental: La Contradiction Spatiale Dans La Ville Coloniale." *Histoire Des Villes Et Des Sociétés Urbaines: 2. Villes Coloniales Groupe Afrique Noire*. Vol. Cahier 6, 1982. 112-26.

Hull, Richard W. *African Cities and Towns before the European Conquest*. New York: Norton, 1976.

Kagan, Richard L., and Fernando Marías. *Urban Images of the Hispanic World, 1493-1793*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.

M'Bokolo, Elikia, and Sophie Le Callennec. *Afrique Noire, Histoire Et Civilisations*. Universités Francophones. Paris: Hatier: AUPELF, 1992.

Messiant, Christine. "Luanda (1945-1961): Colonisés, Société Coloniale Et Engagement Nationaliste." *Bourgs Et Villes En Afrique Lusophone*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1989. 125-99.

Nebrija, Antonio de, Antonio Quilis, and Manuel Alvar. *Gramática De La Lengua Castellana*. Madrid: Ediciones de Cultura Hispánica, 1992.

Pepetela. *O Desejo De Kianda*. Lisboa: Publicações Dom Quixote, 1995.

Pinto da França, Sofia. A*quarelas De Luanda E D'outros Lugares De Angola*. Luanda: FINA petroles de Angola, 1992.

Santos, José de Almeida. *A Velha Loanda, Nos Festejos, Nas Solenidades, No Ensino. Páginas Esquecidas Da Loanda De Há Cem Anos*. 4th ed. Luanda: Câmara Municipal de Luanda, 1972.

Vieira, José Luandino. *Luuanda*. African Writers Series. London: Heinemann, 1980.

FIGURE 1: Igreja da Nazaré
Photo: B. Bonnet

FIGURE 2: Igreja da Nazaré, interior view.
Photo: C. Fromont

FIGURE 3: Igreja da Nazaré: Battle of Ambuila
Photo: C. Fromont

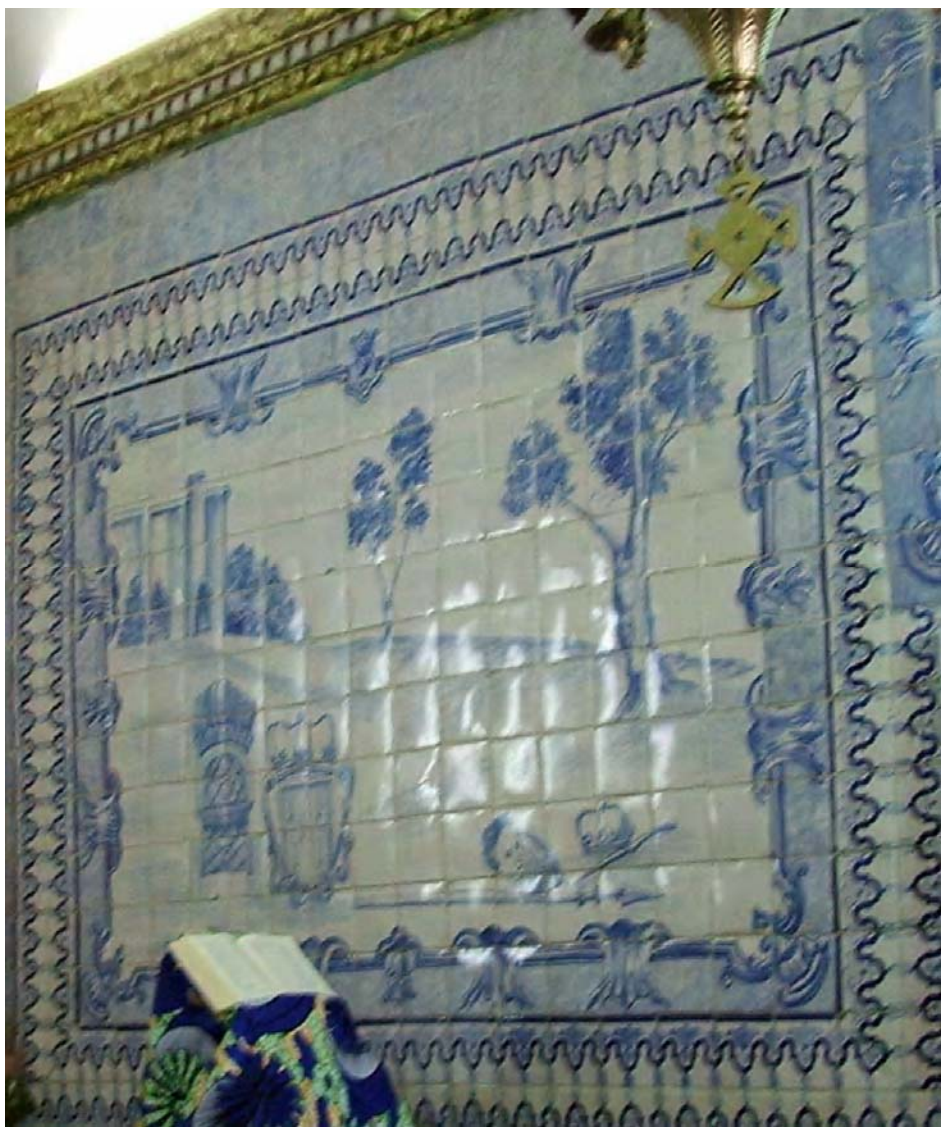

FIGURE 4: Igreja da Nazaré: Head of the King of Kongo
Photo: C. Fromont