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The Dream and the Ordinary: An Ethnographic Investigation of Suburbanisation in Luanda

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After 27 years of civil war, Angola entered the 21st century as one of the most dynamic economies in the world. In a context of 'infrastructures for resources' policy, Luanda, its capital city, has been the first beneficiary of a veritable boom in the construction sector. This article explores the production of new housing patterns in the periphery of the city through the study of two housing projects located more than 20 kilometres from the central business district. Panguila is a relocation settlement for impoverished people evicted from the city centre; Kilamba City is marketed as a 'New Centrality' aimed at the emerging middle class. While of incommensurable scale and quality, both settlements illustrate the contradictions of the new forms of suburbanism produced in Luanda nowadays. Built on ethnographic material, the article reads the aspirations of Panguila and Kilamba City inhabitants against the official view on these settlements propounded by the National Reconstruction Programme. It shows that individual dreams of home ownership meet top-down attempts to discipline urban behaviours, while demonstrating that neither is reconciled with the pragmatism of practices on the ground. The article eventually suggests that new suburbs in Luanda represent less a rupture with previous urban patterns than they continue the production of a certain socio-spatial order.

Key words: Angola, Luanda, urban identities, periphery, suburbs, urbanism, discipline

According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Angola reached a staggering average annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth of 11.1 per cent in the decade 2001 to 2010 (White 2012). The booming oil sector has been driving the whole economy as barrels of crude oil are used to secure foreign loans. This model of development is generally referred to as 'resource-for-infrastructure (R4I)' but has also come to be called 'the Angola Mode' (Foster et al. 2009), an indication of how structural it has become to the country's economic development. The construction industry has been the first to reap the fruits of this economic growth with new buildings competing over Luanda's skyline, while new roads and entire settlements are mushrooming in the periphery. Whereas international news regularly report on the paradoxes of the 'most expensive city in the world', human rights activists collect stories from the 76 per cent of urban dwellers that are said to be living in slums.¹ The tremendous gap between the rich and the poor nourishes fascination, incredulity and sometimes anger. Having said that, besides the awes and wonders about Luanda post-war society

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in the media, very little is actually known about the political economy of the city. This article aims at fleshing out abstract figures and distant fascination for the extraordinary with ethnographic material collected in the new peripheries of the city. Following Jennifer Robinson's (2006) call for a post-colonial approach to cities in the south beyond developmentalism, it intends to look at Luanda as an ordinary city, where people build their life, win their challenges, lose their battles, are disappointed and sometimes deceived. Where people struggle, live, and dream.

More specifically, I present two case studies of recent urban developments in the periphery of Luanda. On-site observation, in-depth interviews and lengthy immersion provide the main source of information for this investigation.² The qualitative material gathered through ethnographic fieldwork has been corroborated with newspaper articles, consultation with broader academics and popular accounts of urban life in Luanda collected both online and in personal conversations.³ On the one hand, Panguila, a relocation settlement built to house displaced inhabitants from the city, is an example of the pragmatic approach to reconstruction adopted by the government under the National Reconstruction Programme adopted at the end of the war in 2002. Panguila started with a thousand houses and gradually expanded over the years, a few dozen houses at a time, following the needs for relocation due to the city's reconstruction.

On the other hand, Kilamba City⁴ is a gigantic development equally endorsed by the National Reconstruction Office but handed over to a semi-private company belonging to the powerful national oil company, Sonangol. The first phase of the project, estimated around 3,800 flats, was built in less than 18 months and completed in 2010. Kilamba is geared to become a New Centrality (*Nova Centralidade*), an independent city autonomous from the old urban fabric. The Chinese company in charge of the project presents Kilamba as the 'biggest EPC [Engineering-Procurement-Construction] project amongst similar overseas projects undertaken by Chinese contractors' (CITIC 2009).

Despite their differences in size and vision, both case studies are challenging many assumptions about what is understood to be the city *versus* what is the periphery, about concepts of 'social housing' and 'the middle class' and about 'local government' and 'urban governance'. Following the works of Jon Teaford (2008), Jamie Peck (2011) and Alan Walks (2013), I use these discussions to explore the notion of 'suburbanism': is there a specific way of life attached to the urban periphery? Do we find in Luanda examples of 'suburbanisms' not only as forms of 'subordinate urbanism' but also as dynamics 'subversive of the urban' (Walks 2013:1476)? More concretely, if we consider urban fringes as 'social frontiers, where networks and institutions, too, must be built' (Harris 2010), then what kind of society is being invented in Panguila and Kilamba and what does it tell us about the governance of the city at large?

The article explores how visions for an urban future oscillate between, on the one hand, expectations of the state and dreams of the inhabitants, and, on the other hand, between these plans and the reality. After presenting the urban

fabric on which Panguila and Kilamba are inscribed, I will question how the two neighbourhoods are being lived by their inhabitants. What do ordinary dwellers actually do in/through these new territories? In both cases, uniform houses and standard apartments are transformed into particular homes, and homeownership becomes a point of departure for the affirmation of new social statuses based on youth, formal employment and a sense of being urban. Nevertheless, a closer look at what the government says of these settlements reveals other ideals that tend to reinforce social order and political discipline over self-achievement and independence. To conclude, I argue that the emerging lower-income suburbs of Luanda might be as much a trace of a new way of living the city as the result of an old agenda of political control through the production of space. They constitute a telling example of the dialectical flows that feed the production of space, in the constant tension between suburban ruptures and urban continuities (Lefebvre 1974; Walks 1973).

Cidade and Musseques: A city of peripheries?

A fundamental cut, a fundamental division within the urban space, a heritage of its colonial past: on the one hand ‘a centre’, blocked in its growth, confined to a reduced space, centre of main city functions (administration, commerce, industry, etc.) surrounded by a modern residential area, with a good social and collective equipment; on the other hand the musseques, populated areas of the periphery, still expanding, with a non-planned habitat, with predominance of self-built precarious housing, with no hygienic conditions, no sanitation, mainly residential. (Colaço 1992:8, quoted in Roque 2011)

Angolan cities are often described through the classic dichotomy of colonial cities divided between the city centre, planned for European settlers following western urban standards, and the unplanned peripheries, result of the urbanisation of Africans (O’Connor 1983; Freund 2007). In Luanda, the assumption of an irreducible opposition between ‘the formal’ and ‘the informal’ is best captured with the terms *cidade* (city) and *musseques* (place of red sand) in kimbundu. The historical core of the city built by the Portuguese colonisers mainly between the 1940s and 1970s is locally referred to as ‘the city’, a *cidade*, while the surrounding neighbourhoods that developed massively since the 1950s without ever being part of any master plans are called *musseques* (Robson & Roque 2001; Jenkins, Robson & Cain 2002; Oppenheimer & Raposo 2007; Udelsmann Rodrigues 2009). By asking city-dwellers what it means to live in the city or in the *musseques*, Sandra Roque (2011) shows that the idea of *cidade* as the only ‘urbanised place’ is not only related to the material assessment of infrastructures but goes with a profound disdain towards life in the *musseques*.⁵

‘I never thought it looked so disorganized from above!’ said Gilson,⁶ the local resident who had guided me uphill. Seen from above, his neighbourhood looked just as any *musseques*. The streets, the yards and the little plazas he was so familiar

with had disappeared in a sea of undistinguishable dusty roofs. Gilson's reaction indicates that the division between the city and the *musseques* is not as much a formal one, based on the sole quality of the environment, as a social one, based on the estrangement of the *musseques* as a place of lower social status that is always attributed to the Other.

Figure 1 shows the stereotypical view of Luanda: self-built houses anarchically flocked together in an impenetrable urban fabric. At first sight, one would qualify this view as a *musseque*. But this picture, taken less than a kilometre from the historical centre of the city, actually depicts neighbourhoods that were originally built by Portuguese families following municipal regulations, though they were not part of the colonial master plan for the city. The large road that curves into the area today is the first stage of a massive renovation project meant to transform the residential area into a brand new administrative and political centre. This urbanisation process reminds us that the distinction between centre and periphery is a social construct that is constantly re-defined as located places are given new meanings within the ever-growing urban fabric. What was first built as an extension of the centre during colonial times then turned into a *musseque* during the civil war but the area is now given a new value and the popular neighbourhoods are destined for demolition.



Figure 1. Stereotypical view of the unplanned city
Source: Author, Luanda, September 2013.

In this context, the very possibility of calling Luanda ‘a city’ is constantly challenged by both local and theoretical assumptions of what a city is. Luanda is a remarkable example of the tension between unplanned sprawl resulting from auto-construction from below and attempts to regulate from above through eviction and demolition (Amnesty International 2003; Human Rights Watch 2007; Gastrow 2014). In that regard, the Angolan capital illustrates the contradictions of what Ananya Roy (2009) has called ‘informality as an idiom of urbanisation’ and challenges ideas of ‘informality’, ‘marginality’ and ‘periphery’ beyond the dichotomy of European centre *versus* African peripheries. If ‘the periphery’ (the *musseques*) is where the majority lives as is the case in Luanda, the so called ‘centre’ becomes the exception rather than the norm. This argument is widespread in the analysis of the cities of the global South (Simone 2005; Roy 2011), my hypothesis here is that we can use it in conversation with recent debates regarding the notion of suburbanism.

The common sense definition of the suburban in the North American context is the quality of what is peripheral to the urban, not-fully or less-than urban. Following this almost tautological definition, most of the estimated six million inhabitants of Luanda then live in ‘sub-urban’ peripheries. But if we consider that these suburban peripheries actually represent the dominant trait of urbanism in Luanda, they certainly speak to the idea of suburbs as a new ‘frontier space’ (Peck 2011), rather than to the mere stereotype of a world of dwellers profoundly ‘selfish, materialistic, exclusive, and indifferent to the problems of the nation and the world’ (Teaford 2008:xiii). Panguila and Kilamba are examples of the response developed by the government to address a housing backlog estimated around 170,000 units in 2004 (Portal do Governo 2011). They aim at housing those who cannot afford one of the most expensive real estate markets in the world. In that perspective, they can be read not merely as ‘subordinate to the urb; but [as] *subversive* to the whole concept of the urb’ (Teaford 2008:xii). Figure 2 shows that this type of settlement, officially labelled ‘social housing projects’, despite its limited spatial extension at the scale of Luanda, holds a greater political significance than any other kind of urban development. It is today one of the main forms of redistribution formally conceded by the central government towards the citizenry.

The typology proposed by Development Workshop can be broken down into four main types of settlements: (1) the old city planned by the Portuguese that includes the Old Urban Centre and its ‘indigenous’ counterparts called *Bairro Popular*; (2) the dominant mosaic of *musseques* that are distinguished depending on their level of consolidation and follow a concentric pattern with the old *musseques* surrounding the centre and the more recent ones that stretch in the periphery following the main access road to the city; (3) the semi-planned expansions that grew since the late 1990s and include both the ‘new suburbs’ (private settlements, often inspired from South African gated communities), and the more modest ‘owner-built’ sites where the state only provides basic cadastre; and (4) the limited Social Housing Zones that constitute eventually the only settlements

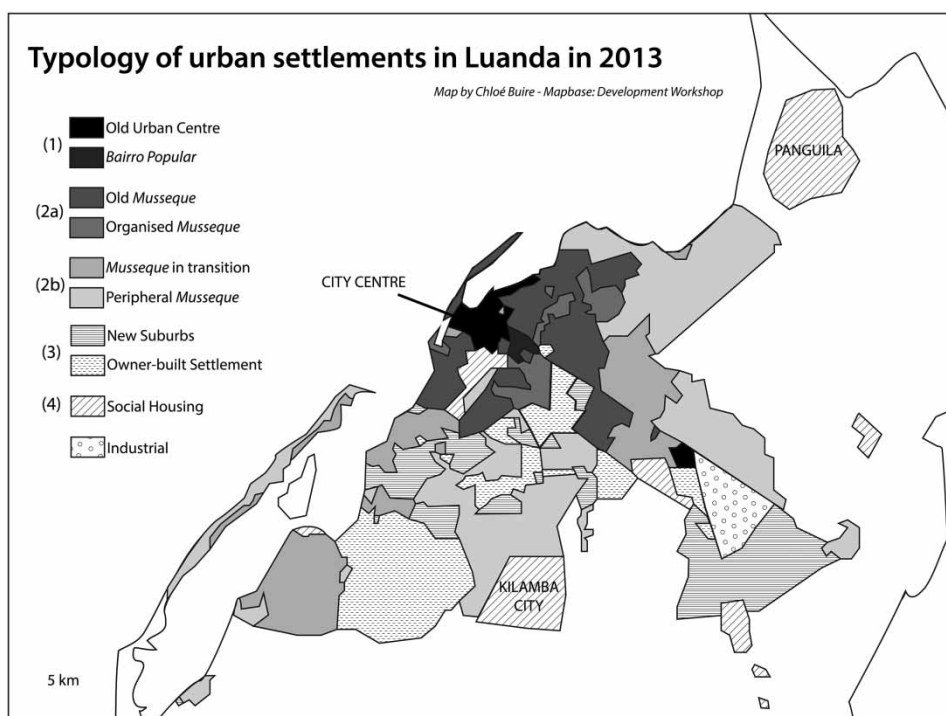


Figure 2. Typology of urban settlements in Luanda: social housing as the notable exception
 Source: Mapbase by Development Workshop, re-worked by the author.

fully planned by the state itself. Panguila and Kilamba City belong to this last category.

Panguila: From an Emergency Relocation Site to a Social Housing Settlement⁷

When they took us out, oh I cried ... I really cried, I lost weight. I didn't want to stay here.

Bush (Mata)! Bush, bush, bush! Up to the entrance of the street!⁸

In January 2003, Angolan president José Eduardo dos Santos inaugurated Panguila, some 30 kilometres to the north of Luanda. At that time, Panguila consisted of one thousand houses, aligned along sand streets, located well beyond the urban fringe. They were destined for families evicted from the city following various infrastructure works (drainage canals, widened roads, roundabouts, bridges, etc.). Testimonies from the first inhabitants forcibly removed to Panguila are tales of despair and isolation. Helena, who moved in 2003, after her father lost his house in the construction of the road pictured in [Figure 1](#), told me stories of depressions, thrombosis and even suicides. Her father died a few years after the move and she is inclined to attribute his death to the fundamental shock of the relo-



Figure 3. Outcast? A view of sector 9, Panguila
Source: Author, March 2012.

cation. In 2003, the only road that linked Panguila to the city had not been maintained since the beginning of the civil war in 1975. It took at least two hours to reach the historic core of the city. Psychologically, the distance was even bigger, as for many people leaving the urbanised area of the capital was still seen as a risky adventure into war-ridden provincial territories. In every aspect, the new settlement appeared as a remote rural area, a negation of urbanity. The *imbondeiro* (baobab tree in the background) and the *motoqueiro* (motorbike taxi, by opposition to the minibuses taxi that deserve the city) that appear on [Figure 3](#) are symbolical markers of this rurality.

Nevertheless, as new projects were booming in the city, the government started to extend Panguila on an ad-hoc basis. Here is how one of the inhabitants explained the process to me:

If a ministry needs some land in the city, they gonna ask to displace let's say a hundred families. The person in charge (*quem está a frente*) goes to the Ministry of Construction and says 'I need 150 houses in Panguila', his plan is to give 100 houses to the people who are evicted and keep 50 for him to sell and give to his family and friends. But the guy at the Ministry is doing the same thing: instead of asking for 150 houses as requested, he is going to say 200, so that he can also make his profit (*candonga*) out of it etc. And now Panguila is like this.⁹

This account reveals that Panguila is primarily framed as a project of public housing, entirely controlled by the central authorities. The settlement indeed started under the National Reconstruction Programme, and was managed by the Ministry of Public Works (today Ministry of Construction and Planning). The actual construction was handed to foreign constructors. A Chinese company

built the first one thousand houses. As the years passed, more contractors got involved. Nowadays, residents distinguish between different sections, following the chronology of the construction ('sector 1', 'sector 2', 'sector 3' etc.), the nationality of the contractors ('the Brazilian project') or the style of the houses (the 'red roofs' refer to a zone of prefabricated units built by an Israeli company). A decade after the completion of the first houses, Panguila is now divided into ten different sectors and count over 60,000 inhabitants if we believe the register held locally by the residents' committee. The discourse of the residents has totally shifted:

I will never move out from here. Even if my husband says that we now have enough money to live in the city, I don't want to go!¹⁰

When I meet guys and I tell them that I have got my own house, they don't believe me. Once, one of my colleagues drove all the way to Panguila to see if it was true.¹¹

For the residents, the growth of Panguila means 'the city is coming to Panguila' (*a cidade está a chegar*). When I first went to sector 9 in March 2012, there was only one booth selling bread in the morning and two or three home-based tuck shops or *cantinas* (canteens) selling basic items. Street vendors – the famous *zungueiras*, 'the ones who stroll/wander' – would also walk through the neighbourhood in the morning, carrying a basket full of perishable products on their heads and shouting the names of their products to call the customers (eggs, sausages, beans, fish, different kinds of leaves etc.). Residents had to take a moto-taxi to get to the wholesale market located on the road to Luanda. A year and a half later, more shops have opened in sector 9 and sector 5 has become a vibrant node in the middle of the settlement. There is now a butchery, some hairdressers, phone and computer shops, etc. Streets have not been tarred yet; electricity and water provision remains highly unpredictable; waste collection is still a problem – and a growing one, as more people are moving in. At the extreme end of sector 9, the last houses have now been distributed and the new owners are undertaking important remodelling works. Pedro, who lives there with his wife and two children, says that most of his neighbours are high-ranking officials from the Party.¹² Pedro is confident that his block will be quickly embellished since his affluent neighbours have the means – both financially and politically – to undertake significant work on the houses and to better the whole street. As a matter of fact, it falls on every resident to fence up his or her plot. A poor resident might just erect recycled planks or old wires to symbolically mark his property, but Pedro's rich neighbours have already built up plastered walls decorated with mouldings and lanterns that make his street quite special compared to other areas.

By saying that Panguila is becoming 'the city', the residents are also implying that it is being kept out of the bad habits of the *musseques*. Without valuing the bare streets and uniform houses that were initially delivered, many recognise that the grid model is in itself a sign of order and a guarantee against unlawful

occupations. This point was made very clear by Helena, an old-term resident of Panguila explaining why she had hopes to see the settlement becoming a 'real urban area': 'This empty land that you see here, it is being reserved for the future hospital'. As I was expressing some doubt as to the realisation of the project, Helena carried on:

But you see, nobody can come here and build his own house or business. You have to speak with the administration and to stick to the plan. And if you want to build a residence, you have to respect the pattern, to follow the model of the houses *because here it is a condominium*.¹³

In Angola, the word *condominium* refers to private housing estates that, without being necessarily gated, represent a certain disconnect from the rest of the city as service provision, maintenance and common facilities are managed by a private body; as such, they are certainly the best colloquial equivalent for the notion of US-American *suburbs*. This idea of Panguila being a 'condominium' despite its serious planning failures may seem quite cynical at first sight but it is actually an ubiquitous discourse in the area, notably defended by the representative of the ministry in charge of Panguila:

The project works like an embassy. It is in foreign territory but there are more rules, more laws. The municipal administration has to go through me when they want to develop a project. *It is as if it was a condominium*. Here the people don't have the culture yet. They don't know how to live as a community. They want everything for themselves; they don't want to do anything together. They don't agree with many of the norms.¹⁴

Panguila, the distant relocation site that was once a sign of outcast and minimal living conditions is now called a condominium. Interestingly enough, this unexpected trajectory is not the result of good planning – the area still lacks the most basic services – or of transparent and fair redistribution to people in need of housing – rumours of ill-distribution are widespread, though they rarely make the news.¹⁵ The requalification of Panguila is rather due to small-scale material improvements made by residents themselves and to their assertion of pride and dignity against social prejudices. Being a homeowner, even if it is in Panguila, is seen as a more desirable position compared to the life in the city because it offers a long-term future. As rough as the conditions might be at the beginning, a house in Panguila can be remodelled or even razed, allowing the owner to build his or her own dream house, on his or her own plot. In comparison, the overcrowded neighbourhoods of 'the city' are virtually impossible to alter; there is simply no space to build a better house.

Edna gives the example of one of her friends, who, like her, grew up in the city, but refused to move to Panguila: 'She only wanted city, city, city. Benfica, Talatona, Maianga. Until today, she's still staying at her parents' place'. With this anecdote, Edna suggests that it is only when moving away from the hopeless conditions of 'the city' that a young person like her can have the opportunity to start her own independent life. She also dismisses the prejudices many people from 'the city' have against

Panguila. Panguila, located to the north of the city is seen to be a dumpsite for the poor, as opposed to southern developments like Benfica or Talatona, where life is perceived to be of a better standard because of the presence of gated-communities, reminiscent of a South African or even US lifestyle.

The social perception of Panguila eventually tells the strong hierarchy established between the old city and the new suburbs on the one hand, and between different types of suburbs on the other. In the old city, positive change is only imagined through radical 'renovation' (i.e. razing the old *bairros* to build new shiny buildings for the elite and international visitors) from which only a minority benefit. In the new peripheries on the other hand, hard work, patiently accumulated capital, and a personal sense of entrepreneurship might get you where you want to go, but comes at a certain social cost in terms of social status. Making a home in Panguila eventually means overcoming the fate of a state-dependant evictee and building the image of a self-made entrepreneur living in a suburb.

In Luanda, as arguably anywhere else in the world, the suburbs are sites endowed with strong ideas of social status, orderliness and personal achievement. The next section of the article looks at Kilamba, which is a pilot project to be reproduced in all 18 provinces of the country, 'a pearl that marks the history of Angola', as titled in the magazine published by national oil company Sonangol (da Rosa 2011). In that regard, Kilamba represents the specific urban vision of the Angolan government for post-war urbanisation. In the words of President Dos Santos himself, it is 'the biggest housing project ever built in Angola and constitutes, at a global scale, a profound example of the social policies engaged in the country to address the housing backlog' (inauguration speech, quoted in da Rosa 2011). As I argue below, such a vision embodies the idea of 'suburban governance' described by Ekers, Hamel & Keil (2012) as the combination of a dominant presence of the state, multiple processes of capital accumulation, and a tendency towards private authoritarianism.

Kilamba City: The *Tabula Rasa* Dream of a New Centrality¹⁶

The creation of Kilamba City responds, indeed, to the modern way of imagining the city and is part of the effort of the Executive to face the continuous growth of the capital, the infrastructures of which are not ready to handle more than its actual population of over five million.¹⁷

President dos Santos inaugurated the New Centrality of Kilamba in July 2011. Unlike the opening of Panguila that did not hit the headlines at the time, Kilamba's inauguration speech was circulated widely and took on great political significance. The president presented Kilamba as a significant step to address the dramatic housing shortage of the country. It is important to note the context of this inauguration. The urgent reconstruction agenda that dominated immediately after the war had now evolved into a long-term quest for legitimation. During the 2008 electoral campaign, the president promised to deliver one million houses before 2012. Kilamba, planned to accommodate half a million inhabitants after final com-

pletion,¹⁸ was politically crafted to be the shop-window of the Angolan miracle. It would provide affordable housing to those who despite having formal employment could not enter the private market, and eradicate informal housing practices such as the ones that flourish all around the city, including in social housing projects like Panguila. The government strictly monitored the distribution of Kilamba's apartments, first through the National Reconstruction Office, a powerful institution run by the president's closest advisors, then through the private company Delta Imobiliaria – in the hands of these very same advisors.¹⁹

The idea of 'affordable housing' rests on a rent-to-buy scheme that breaks away from local practices where mortgages don't exist and where even rental arrangements rely on six to 12 months upfront payments, in cash and in US dollars. However, with monthly rents initially starting around US\$600, a flat in Kilamba was largely overpriced for *musseque* residents. Moreover, access to the scheme was restricted to public officers backed by their employers, i.e. by the state itself, as no banking system was able to provide private mortgages. As a result, more than a year after its inauguration, Kilamba remained virtually empty and the procedures to buy a flat were so unclear that international media started (see Figure 4) to denounce the edification of a 'ghost city' disconnected from local needs (Redvers 2012; BBC 2012; Le Figaro 2012).



Figure 4. A view of Kilamba City before its opening to public purchase
Source: Author, September 2012.

The situation dramatically shifts in February 2013, when the selling procedures change again and new prices are published. The smallest flats that were worth US\$125,000 were now being sold for US\$70,000. Without cancelling Delta Imobiliária's take on the distribution, SONIP, which is Sonangol's branch for real estate, is called in.²⁰ The limitation regarding state employees is waived. Any formally employed person can now access the state-subsidised mortgage. A personal ID document and a payslip are all it takes to register a new resident. The keys to a fully-equipped flat are given for a cash deposit into the SONIP bank account covering one year of the rent-to-buy scheme (starting around US\$6,000). Hundreds of applicants queue for several days in front of the SONIP office in Kilamba. A few weeks later, the company claimed to have sold over 18,000 new apartments and had to suspend the sales, as it could not cope with the pace of the demand (Angonoticias 2013a). Many applicants were left without receiving the keys they had paid for. After six months, SONIP announced that the four-bedroom flats (a model called 'T3+1') were sold out and those who had registered to obtain one would now have to pay an extra US\$8,000 to receive keys for a five-bedroom flat instead (Angonoticias 2013b).

The lack of transparency regarding real actors, facts and figures should not come as a surprise in a context where urban planning is not centralised, where local authorities are virtually inexistent while private brokers are flourishing and where foreign investments are protected by business secrecy. Even with partial data available, Kilamba quickly became a test for the regime trying out its new international legitimacy after 27 years of war. The project is under the scrutiny of many local and international analysts. Tracking the political influences that have flawed many tenders in the project, Rafael Marques sees Kilamba as a 'real model of corruption in Africa', where 'the use of Chinese loans destined to social projects ... becomes another avenue, without obstacles, for the Angolan leaders to enlarge their fat fortunes' (Marques de Morais 2011). Other commentators look at it as the perfect example of 'the Angola Mode' and wonder whether it is a symbol of the efficiency of the Angolan model of development or of its failure (Redvers 2012; Croese 2012).

In Kilamba, just like in Panguila a few years earlier, the new inhabitants make home despite all the critics denouncing the aesthetic of the so-called New City, its disconnection from Angolan cultural habits or its role in enforcing a new kind of urban segregation.²¹ The general feeling amongst residents is that even if Kilamba is the cheap product of Chinese constructors only interested in their own enrichment and in the wealth of their Angolan political allies, it still offers a quality of life that could not be found anywhere else in Luanda for that price. In less than a year, the new city has become a real social phenomenon amongst a specific generation of urbanites. The typical resident²² is male, between 25 and 35 years of age, long-term inhabitant of Luanda, who has some kind of higher education, has possibly even studied abroad, and has now been employed in the formal sectors for several years. He eventually lives with his girlfriend / fiancée / wife and if they have children, it is only one or two under five years old, who they

intend to send to a private school. For them, Kilamba was simply the best option and they did not hesitate to invest their savings to secure a flat there. In practice, many are still reluctant to move in though because of the distance to the city. On a Sunday, it does not take more than 40 minutes to cross the 30 kilometres that separate Kilamba from the city, but on week days, the outward trip lasts at least an hour and a half because of traffic jams. To avoid being stuck for hours, many residents depart before six in the morning and wait until eight or nine at night before heading back home. Some come to their flat only on weekends, others sublet it to relatives or undertake heavy interior work to personalise the basic plan before moving in.

Nevertheless, Kilamba is filling-up, a few shops have opened in the dedicated ground-floor commercial facilities, sports grounds are used by school children in the afternoon and adult basket-ball players at night, parking lots are packed on weekends. The threat of a 'ghost town' has vanished. Living in Kilamba is now a cause of pride and popular discourses emerge regarding how people should behave in the new city. The following 'post' made soon after the opening of the sales to the public by an anonymous user on Facebook went viral in a few days:

It is good that the new inhabitants of the centrality of Kilamba be educated and reeducated. We don't want a new 'city' with old habits. They have to have the consciousness before moving out there. Like throwing the cooking water and the fish scales in the street, like throwing down bin bags from the top of the building, like leaving your waste in the staircase, writing on the walls, and many other habits that some people have, don't bring them please! To those who like living like a pig, please give it a stop. Oh, and I was about to forget about it, brushing your teeth it's in the bathroom, not on the street!²³

As a matter of fact, popular expectations about Kilamba prove to be very mundane. A first set of comments insist on the higher quality of life linked to the fact of being far from the dense and disorganised city: 'If you live in an apartment at the top of one of the towers, you have a nice view, pure air. There's no noise and when it rains, you don't have these problems of floods that we have in the city'.²⁴ In an article detailing the discourses that justified the edification of new cities in the periphery of Cairo in the 1990s, Bénédicte Florin notes that newness and geometrical order were lauded as promises of a quiet environment breaking away from the overcrowded metropolis. She quotes a local newspaper in 1998: 'these beautiful apartments, lined up, with pleasant colours, are an ideal solution for young couples' (Florin 2005:46). The description perfectly captures the perception of Kilamba in public discourses today. In a similar line, the monotonous geometry of the landscape, which was an argument of dismissal when Kilamba was still empty, has now become a positive asset for those who have moved in, and anything that disrupts this clean image is vigorously condemned. A group called *Moradores do Kilamba*, which was created on Facebook soon after the first residents moved in, announces the following objectives:

The main objective of this group, is to divulgate inappropriate actions / behaviours, that aim at degrading and altering the order of this Centrality. We want Kilamba to remain a Postal Card for Luanda, but this will only be possible with the collaboration of everyone.²⁵

Facebook has become an important medium of diffusion for the ideal lifestyle people are seeking in Kilamba. Various groups have been created on the social network and one of the most active, started in May 2013, now counts almost 7,000 members. Here again, members regularly publish pictures of irregular behaviour observed in the city, such as cars parked outside the delimited bays, overflowing refuse bins, alteration works, non-compliance to the rules, etc. But the main objective announced in the group's description is 'to help the inhabitants of the new centrality of Kilamba to find the best services, prices, pieces of advice or words of mouth'. Members post pictures of their interiors, sharing the contacts of a carpenter, a plumber or an electrician but also of a babysitter, a cleaning employee, or a hairdresser. It took just a couple of months for this page to become a vibrant virtual community and to be the site of debates regarding the formalisation of residents' committees, the justification of *condominium* taxes or the question of security and safety on the highway that links Kilamba to the city. Members of the page also post pictures of their latest decoration. There are four different types of flats in Kilamba, ranging from two- to four-bedroom units. It is forbidden to alter the structure of the flat (opening a wall, widening a window etc.), the reason why many residents resort to false ceilings and decorative plastering like here to personalise their interior. Facebook then is a useful forum to share comments on the works done by others, where residents express how much they like it, eventually asking for the price and the contact of the entrepreneur.

The use of Facebook eventually shows that the suburban ways of life, which are developing on the urban edge of Luanda, are as much about social status and self-representation as about the built environment. In that sense, being a 'suburbanite' primarily refers to one's aspiration to belong to a new middle class that defines itself against the older urban practices of Luanda. I began this article by asking if there were any specific traits of urban life on the periphery, I hope to have shown that Panguila and Kilamba reveal that the most salient novelty observed is the will to break-away from the 'mussequized city',²⁶ but is that really new? And what does it say about the imagination of the city for the future?

***Suburbia* Dream in the Post-war City: Taming Diverging Visions for the Future**

Panguila and Kilamba are examples of the new urban forms developing on the Luanda urban edge since the end of the war. Together, they embody the suburbanisation of Luanda, defined as a type of urban development that relies on operations planned by the state, located at the edge of the city, encouraging lower-density settlements compared to central areas, and dedicated to residential needs before any other uses. The two settlements nevertheless responded to two

very different political needs of the regime at two distinct times of the post-war period. While Panguila was first conceived as a relocation site for people who had to be displaced from the inner city's most valuable lands, Kilamba was intended to create an alternative market to the private real estate market of the older city. Despite their differences, and beyond their specificities, I argue that Panguila and Kilamba tell a lot about the imagination of the city in general. In both cases, we have seen residents strongly articulating their new urban life to a rejection of the *musseques*. Everything that is lauded in Panguila and Kilamba seems to come from a negative evaluation of the older neighbourhoods of Luanda, depicted as foreclosing any forms of self-development. Being suburban often seems to be a synonym of belonging to a 'new generation', breaking away from 'the old habit' of the city.

Further research would help establish the gender dynamics at play. I gave various examples of the importance of homeownership for women in Panguila, who see themselves as more empowered than their female friends who remained in the city. Quantitative data also backs the general perception of a generational phenomenon, especially in Kilamba, where the majority of buyers seem to be under 40. Associating suburbanism with a new generation breaking socially accepted boundaries would nevertheless be too quick a conclusion. In Panguila and in Kilamba alike, we have seen the circulation of quite conservative social values. Residents express their will to keep their environment under tight control. Their vision of development is usually based on an individualistic aspiration directed to their own families, emphasising hard work and a classic capital accumulation strategy aimed at securing the value of their property. In that regard, being a suburbanite in Luanda reflects the dream of an urbanism under control, by opposition to what is seen as the disorderly city. My argument here is that the apparent novelty of the suburban dream embodied in Panguila or Kilamba is actually core in the social reproduction of the mechanisms of social disciplining and political silencing that have characterised Luanda long before the so-called 'liberalisation' of the state in the 1990s. The appropriation of the settlements by their inhabitants might then tell us more about the 'anatomy of political domination' (Hibou 2011) than about a radically new way of building urban governance in contemporary Angola.

At first sight, both Panguila and Kilamba seem to have been able to capture the urban dream of their residents. Both seem indeed strongly appropriated by their residents. In all the interviews, people have affirmed their pride in their home and their will to keep living in the settlement despite the distance to the city. An important point that was often mentioned is that it was not an easy move, that residents had struggled to get where they are and now feel a certain duty to defend their home and their new status as homeowners. In Panguila, the trauma of the forced removal is still present for many of the residents, even if according to a study directed to the World Bank, only a small majority of the residents may actually have received their house from the state as the direct compensation of their eviction (Development Workshop 2011). In Kilamba, acquiring a flat was

not easy due to the opacity of the rules and the fact that many residents still struggle to understand what they are paying for in their monthly fees. (What are the services included in the rent-to-buy scheme? What are the taxes paid for the building compared to the one paid for the whole settlement? etc.) Panguila and Kilamba eventually illustrate that access to housing in Luanda is not only a question of financial means but implies a cautious navigation both within the state and between institutions. In the case of Zango, the third main project of social housing in Luanda (see [Figure 2](#)), Sylvia Croese shows how the housing market is ‘shaped by the complex relationships between government officials and citizens’ (2013:151).

Whilst officially governed by laws and regulations, in daily life these relations are characterized by a large degree of complicity as state officials may act as enforcers as well as violators of the law. The poor central regulation of the law contributes to the emergence of informal rules and arrangements on the ground. (Croese 2013:151)

What matters here is that building thousands of new habitations is not enough to transform the political economy of a city profoundly structured by informal arrangements and clientelistic networks (Messiant 2008).

The second point I want to make regarding what Panguila and Kilamba mean for the imagination of the city relates to the material aspirations of inhabitants. Both settlements are presented as a response to worsening conditions of life in the older city. In the inner city as well as in the *musseques*, quality of life is seriously diminished due to general overcrowding, informal service provision, dilapidated public facilities and minimal domestic comfort. Building brand new neighbourhoods outside the city is seen as the most efficient way to establish a fully controlled urban environment preventing the general urban informalisation or *mussequisation*. If Panguila and Kilamba both advocate a form of *tabula rasa* urbanism, the latter undoubtedly offers a better environment than the former. The quality of public commodities and the finishing of the flats in Kilamba is clearly superior to the rawness of the houses delivered in Panguila. The flats comprise many elements of comfort that do simply not exist in Panguila: floors are tiled, there is a ceiling under the roof, bathrooms and kitchen are furnished, main doors include a double locking system and a battery-powered bell, etc.

Nevertheless, in both cases, residents make a real effort to transform the existing structure into a personalised home. Paradoxically, in that regard, Panguila houses can actually be seen as more desirable as they allow more flexibility for entire reconversions. While Kilamba’s administration only allows superficially finished works, in Panguila, one can raze the whole house and build a four-storey building if one feels like it. In practice, many building projects remain modest for obvious financial limitations, but some double-storey buildings have been erected and in many instances an extra room has been built in the yard. Eventually the ‘microbian’ practices (De Certeau 1990) of the new homeowners, who, bit by bit, convert their anonymous house into a unique product, are not as mundane as they might seem. They actually reflect the re-introduction, within

the supposedly 'new' urban forms, of the very elements that characterise the older urban fabric of the city. The first sector of Panguila shows that in just a decade, the residents have deeply altered the bare grid initially delivered, just as the modernist structures that marked the development of Luanda in the 1960s have been transformed by post-independence occupations. Michel de Certeau (1990) suggests that these 'tactics' are the core of a popular resistance to plans imposed from above.

The second lesson we can learn from Panguila and Kilamba then touches on the invisible power of the residents who, by their mere physical presence and affective appropriation of an urban product, endlessly play with the forms proposed to them and remake them into unexpected social spaces. The question remains open though as to whether these superficial forms of resistance are actually directed to the state – as an external locus of authority; or if it is rather the expression of a more vague and diffuse sense of moral constraint that applies to the anonymous 'us' of the neighbourhood. Be it through the model of the *condominium* expressed in Panguila or of the 'postal card' for Kilamba, order and discipline are guiding principles in the daily life of the residents and lead to individual self-control and a generalised surveillance of one onto another. In a foucauldian perspective, and it will be my third and last point, I argue that a very specific governmentality eventually stems from the new housing projects.

My last hypothesis embraces the social discipline that is being performed in Panguila and Kilamba. In both settlements, residents clearly distance themselves from 'the city' and defend an ideal social life based on the model of the *condominium*. I mentioned earlier the comments made by the representative of the Ministry of Construction and Planning in charge of Panguila. He explained that residents were expected to go through him for any works they wished to undertake; furthermore, he affirmed that they were neither able nor willing to obey his rule. On the one hand, he affirmed his position as a central leader in charge of the whole settlement; on the other hand, he discarded any possibility of balancing his top-down approach with public participation. His position even expressed a certain paternalistic disdain towards the residents: 'these people cannot take decisions,' he said, 'they are people who don't have great ideas; they would just delay the project. So we decide for them'.²⁷ As a matter of fact, despite an official announcement made in June 2011, the ministry has not handed over the management of the settlement to local administration until now and still applies its own taxing system. Panguila being officially located in the rural municipality of Dande, whose population may not reach a third of that of Panguila alone, works, *de facto*, like a *condominium* since its operating budget is totally independent from local government. In the case of Kilamba, the intention is clearer:

Kilamba City represents a pilot experience regarding the model of administrative management adopted, which can inspire the process for the gradual implementation of local authorities [*autarquias locais*]. For that reason, it is led by a president, who has the responsibility to create the management of the new centrality, through the

intermediary of a specific organizational and administrative regime.(Angonoticias 2011)

From the beginning, the idea of a 'New Centrality' sought to create a new form of urban management that would alleviate the provincial government of the costs of housing. Privatised management and urban enclaves are certainly not specific to Luanda. For at least 20 years, urban analysts have commented on the growing fragmentation of mega-cities (Davis 1992; Soja 2000; Caldeira 2001; Navez-Bouchanine 2002; Harrison, Huchzermeyer & Mayekiso 2003). Without entering the many debates that surround the notion of urban fragmentation, the new settlements built outside Luanda undoubtedly bear similarities to what have been observed in Los Angeles, São Paulo or Johannesburg. More recently, planners and geographers elaborated on the threat to democracy posed by this new form of urban governance by suggesting the emergence of a 'post-political' (Swyngedouw 2011) or 'post-democratic' (MacLeod 2011) city that preclude emancipatory and democratic claims. Peck (2011) explicitly locates the suburbs at the core of these debates. The management of Kilamba City promises to be an interesting research topic in the coming years as it directly raises the question of who is accountable for the well-being of the citizens. Panguila and Kilamba eventually call back haunting questions for the future of contemporary metropolises around the world.

Concluding Thoughts

Suburbanism, it follows, should not be understood as a static characteristic of particular places and spaces, but as a multidimensional evolving process within urbanism that is constantly fluctuating and pulsating as the flows producing its relational forces shift and overlap in space. (Walks 2013:1472)

In an inspiring paper building on Lefebvre's dialectical urban theory, Walks proposes to theorise 'suburbanism as a subset of urbanism, with which it is in constant productive tension' (2013:1471). Walks draws upon notions of centrality, difference and functionality to define a pool of 'ideal type properties' that help to seize the complementary forces of urbanism and suburbanism. He reads, for example, 'centrality' first as a physical dimension that can define urbanism (concentration, clustering) as well as suburbanism (dispersion, formlessness); and second as a social dimension that might lead to overt control and authority (ideal-type of urbanism) or on the contrary to marginalisation and dependency (ideal-type of suburbanism). By insisting on the flows and ruptures, Walks builds a theoretical framework where 'urbanism and suburbanism are therefore conceptually separate from the grounded areas of settlement known as cities and suburbs' (2013:1485). A settlement like Panguila can then be understood both as a case of suburbanism for its physical formlessness, and as one of urbanism for the overt control that central authorities try to retain on-site. In Walks' words: 'the interaction of these multiple suburbanisms (and urbanisms) are then productive of new urban realities' (2013:1478).

The conclusion of this article is a call to interrogate what ‘new urban realities’ Panguila and Kilamba might produce for Luanda in the future. My contribution here merely suggests that the apparent novelty of suburban discourses and ways of life in Luanda cannot be separated from older discourses of urban order and disorder. To deepen this hypothesis, further research is needed to explore the multiple forms of suburbs and suburbanisms emerging in Luanda nowadays. If I showed that Panguila and Kilamba both capture the dream of a suburban life that would break away from an urban situation perceived as hopeless, I also intended to unveil the ambiguity and complexity of such a move at different levels.

Practically, the very materiality of the new houses largely constrains the realisation of the dream. It will be interesting to see how Panguila and Kilamba will bear the physical marks of their appropriation by the residents in the coming years. Symbolically, an abstract ideal of urbanity remains at the core of the aspiration of the suburbanites. The very appellation of Kilamba as a ‘New City’ is telling of the underlying models of urbanisation in Luanda. Here again, interrogating the production and circulation of labels like ‘New City’, ‘New Centrality’ or ‘Urban Modernisation’ could feed future research agendas. At a broader socio-political level, Panguila and Kilamba also need to be mapped onto the attempts to legitimate the post-war authority of the MPLA. Walks’ theorisation of dialectical flows suggests that a highly centralised government, privatised governance and local governmentality are all complementary dimensions within a matrix that connects new suburbanisms to older forms of urbanism, but further research is certainly necessary to analyse *how* these modes of urban management are tied together. Eventually, Luanda promises to be an engaging terrain for those interested in inscribing African cities onto the map of world urbanisms.

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Notes on Contributor

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Notes

1. In 2012, Mercer, one of the agencies responsible for these rankings, had placed Tokyo on top of the list. Luanda has been in the top four for several years in a row, mainly due to the informalisation of the market that accompanied the civil war (Messiant 2008) and to the proportion of expatriates living on living allowances paid by their company (figures from homelessinternational.org). Human rights activism in Angola is represented by local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) occasionally supported by international networks like Human Rights Watch or Amnesty International (Development Workshop, Omunga, SOS Habitat), and by the work of activists like Rafael Marques de Morais (makaangola.org) or the collective of youth called 'A Central' (centralangola7311.net).
2. After preliminary fieldwork in June 2009 and February 2011, I spent a total of nine months doing ethnographic fieldwork in Luanda between 2012 and 2013.
3. The method used here does not intend to provide a quantitatively representative sample of the inhabitants of a city whose population, estimated between five and eight million, has not been officially counted since the last colonial census of 1974.
4. Following local usage, I will refer to 'the New City of Kilamba' simply as 'Kilamba' in the rest of the text.
5. Roque notes the use of the word '*atraso*' to qualify the *musseques* by opposition to the 'development' associated with the city. *Atraso* means both a delay (*estar atrasado* means being late), hence a certain developmental backwardness, but can also be said of someone with a mental disability (*ser atrasado* means being retarded).
6. All names have been changed.
7. A note on methodology: I spent four months following a family whose members are divided between a main family house close to the inner city and various new houses in Panguila. Living with them in the city, I regularly visited the relatives in Panguila on week-ends, getting to know the place, its history, and the way it was appropriated on the ground. I eventually spent a week in Panguila, interviewing residents, community representatives and the representative of the Ministry of Construction and Planning. My observations were complemented with an unpublished report submitted to the World Bank by the Angolan NGO Development Workshop (Development Workshop 2011).
8. Helena, Panguila, ITV, 29 October 2012.
9. Cecilia, field notes, November 2012.
10. Edna, in a relationship, two children, moved to Panguila around 2006 and bought her own house with her partner in 2011, ITV 30 October 12.
11. Ana, single, two children, her brother bought her a house in Panguila in 2011, 15 September 2012.
12. Despite the establishment of a multi-party democratic system in 1992, the MPLA that was in power at the time of the one-party regime and remained so since then is still commonly referred to as 'the Party'.
13. Field notes, 29 October 2012.
14. Representative of the Ministry for Panguila, ITV 29 October 2012.
15. A notable exception to this general silence around housing scandals in Panguila is the online newspaper *O País*, which published various stories where three or four families are forced to share a single house or where a person evicted from the city receives the key to a house already occupied (Sérgio 2010; Anonymous 2012; Bambi 2012a, 2012b).
16. A note on methodology: My work on Kilamba remains preliminary and is essentially based on informal conversations with the target-group of the project, i.e. young Angolan professionals well integrated in Luanda social fabric but without the means to own their house yet. These discussions took place both before and after the opening of Kilamba to public sales (2012–2013) and part of them happened through social networks like Facebook when I could not physically be present in Luanda.
17. JE dos Santos, Kilamba City inauguration speech (Angop 2011).

18. All figures regarding Kilamba are to be read as uncertain indicators. While the figures may be contested, the very fact that they are untraceable and the general confusion around the procedures are eloquent about the lack of transparency of the process to access the flats to this date.
19. See Marques de Moraes 2011 for an insight into the intertwined networks that link Delta Imobiliária to the national oil company Sonangol and other magnates of the regime. On the role of Sonangol and its branches in Angolan contemporary politics, see Soares de Oliveira 2007.
20. SONIP was created in 2011 to distribute houses on behalf of the Ministry of Construction and Planning. Its internal management has been re-organised in 2013 to face the pressing needs of Kilamba City.
21. These critics are widespread on the streets of Luanda even if not always published in the local media. They received a particular voice during the 7th Architecture Forum held at University Lusíada de Angola in October 2012, when the president of the Architects' Society and the President of Kilamba City were invited to present the project that was still empty at the time. For a general overview on re-segregation processes in Luanda since the end of the war, see Udelsmann Rodrigues 2009.
22. This stereotypical portrayal is not based on quantitative inquiry but on the crossing of informal discussions both in Kilamba and in other parts of Luanda. I hope to be in a position to strengthen this account through further research in Luanda in the years to come.
23. Publication on Facebook, 21 February 2013.
24. Ibid.
25. Facebook page *Moradores do Kilamba*, description of the group.
26. Local authors indeed talk of *mussequisation* (see Udelsmann Rodrigues 2009; Roque 2011).
27. ITV 29 October 2012.

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