CHAPTER 9

Africa's new Dubai? Intersections between the global and the local in the redevelopment of the Bay of Luanda¹

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Introduction

Ten years after the end of nearly three decades of civil war, in 2012 then Angolan President José Eduardo dos Santos inaugurated the first phase of the redevelopment of the Bay of Luanda. Hailed internationally as a successful waterfront redevelopment project (*PR Newswire* 2013) and widely promoted as the 'new face' of Luanda (Lopes 2011),² critics see in the redevelopment proof of the capital city's increasing 'Dubaiification' through the emulation of an architecture that is marked by the construction of skyscrapers (towers), but also ultra-modern and distinctive airports, trade centres, office blocks and retail centres (Elsheshtawy 2013).

Indeed, according to Power (2012: 15), 'Dubai has become both a critical reference point and a model of the city's future.' Vanin (2015: 166) in turn speaks of 'Dubai-like aesthetics' as a driving paradigm behind most new constructions in Luanda, while Blanes (2015) refers to the 'botox real estate' that underpins the becoming of 'Dubanda'.

Such voices echo a growing critique of the increasing emulation across the African continent of new models of urbanism represented by cities such as Dubai. Previously

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2 For promotional videos see the YouTube channel of the Bay of Luanda: <https://www.youtube.com/user/baiadeluanda>

seen as part of the 'Third World,' Dubai, and cities such as Singapore and Shanghai, have now joined the world city hierarchy in which, for decades, cities have been ranked according to their place in global capital, service and knowledge production (Hall 1966; Friedmann 1986; Beaverstock et al. 1999; Sassen 2001; Taylor 2004). In doing so, they have become models of global cities in their own right and examples for (plans for) the redevelopment of African cities ranging from Khartoum and Nouakchott (Choplin & Franck 2010) to Kinshasa (de Boeck 2011), Kigali (Goodfellow & Smith 2013) and Nairobi (Myers 2015). In these cities, urban redevelopment is characterised by iconic high-modernist architecture, as well as large-scale urban renewal or restructuring through the construction of new satellite cities and close links to global circuits of finance and property construction (Watson 2014; Murray 2017).

While post-war urban redevelopment in Luanda mirrors global world-class city-making elsewhere, efforts to revive modernist colonial architecture as part of the redevelopment of the Bay of Luanda show that alongside Dubai-like futuristic aesthetics, internal and historical considerations equally play an important role in shaping the city's built environment. Based on the case of Luanda, the chapter seeks to provide a better understanding of the variegated and inherently local drivers and dynamics involved in world-class city-making in Africa or the ways in which global plans, models and visions of the urban are shaped and adapted at the local level.

Research for this paper was conducted from 2015–2016 as part of a comparative research project on urban governance in African cities and involved the review of relevant historical and academic literature, as well as grey literature such as government policy and research reports, legislation, online media records and archived newspaper articles. In addition, interviews and informal conversations were conducted with government representatives (central, provincial, municipal/district government level), representatives of the private sector and civil society, as well as ordinary residents of Luanda.

The chapter will start by outlining the main tenets of the quest for world-class city-ness as it has unfolded in Luanda over the first decade after the end of the war. It then offers a brief overview of the history of the Bay of Luanda and its post-war redevelopment, before turning to the elaboration of the central argument. It concludes by reflecting on the usefulness of the case of Luanda for thinking about world-class city-making in other African cities and the Global South more generally.

World-class city-making in Luanda: Africa's new Dubai?

The city of Luanda offers an interesting case study of world-class city-making in Africa as, unlike places such as Kinshasa or Nairobi, many urban development plans have actually been translated to reality (see Cain 2014 in response to Watson 2014).

In the decade that followed the end of the war in 2002, Angola became known as the posterchild of the 'Africa rising' narrative. From a war-torn and failed state, it rose up to being Africa's second largest oil producer, one of Africa's fastest growing economies and an Eldorado for foreign investors (Soares de Oliveira 2015).

Central to Angola's rise have been the government's post-war reconstruction efforts, which have been largely financed through oil-backed loans from China. While the construction and rehabilitation of basic infrastructures and services have covered

the entire country, they have been concentrated in the capital of Luanda, turning the city into a permanent construction site. As such, Luanda has been at the centre stage of the post-war economic boom, with the city accounting for two-thirds of the national GDP which grew at double digit rates in the period between 2002 and 2007. At the height of the boom in 2007, 55% of all companies were established in the capital, generating 77% of jobs in the private sector and 27% of jobs in the public sector (Alves da Rocha 2010).

Yet, more than simply rebuilding the city's infrastructures and services, such as roads, schools, hospitals, water and energy networks, reconstruction efforts have been underpinned by the desire to transform Luanda into a modern 'world-class city' (Croese 2016). Perhaps the most (in)famous illustration of this desire is the construction of the new city of Kilamba, a USD 3.5 billion project financed with an oil-backed loan from China and contracted out to the Chinese state-owned company CITIC. Other mega projects include the construction of a new port and international airport, the latter (still under construction) promoted as 'Africa's largest airport,' a Special Economic Zone, (plans for) the creation of a Bus Rapid Transit system and major real estate, office and commercial development. All of this changed the city's landscape and skyline, sparking numerous references and comparisons by critics as well as admirers to the city as 'Africa's Dubai' (e.g. *Sonangol Universo Magazine* 2008).

As in other aspiring world-class cities, world-class city-making in Luanda has also been accompanied by its fair share of urban boosterism or city branding: 'strategies intended to distinguish cities as part of interurban competition which include advertising, sloganeering, and marketing tactics' that construct aspiring world-class cities as a commodity to be marketed (McCann 2013: 6). This includes extensive media campaigns to advertise the governments' investments and efforts which are broadcast on public television, radio, newspapers and billboards, as well as on international channels such as CNN. In addition, government documentaries such as *Made in Angola*³ and promotional videos by the Angolan National Investment Agency (ANIP) contribute to an effort to rebrand and promote the country, all with a particular focus on Luanda. Over the course of the first post-war decade, Luanda also hosted a number of mega sporting events, such as the Africa Cup of Nations in 2010, as well as international and regional events and summits, all of which have been accompanied by the construction of stadiums and hotels to host visitors.

These campaigns and events have been implemented against the backdrop of the adoption of a number of development plans which, like city development plans adopted elsewhere on the continent (Myers 2015), position Luanda as a future regional and global hub that is 'open for business.' The first one, dating from 2007, is the country's long-term development plan, *Angola 2025: Angola a Country with a Future: Sustainability, Equity and Modernity*, which outlines the country's vision for the future and in this regard speaks of the aim of turning Luanda into a 'modern, efficient, creative and unified metropolis' that connects the country to the outside world (GoA 2007 – part III: X-46). The National Development Plan adopted in 2012 for the years of 2013–2017 in turn refers to the metropolitan region of Luanda as a

3 See the *Made in Angola* channel on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/MadeInAngolaTV/>

'platform of internationalization' (GoA 2012: 86). This idea similarly formed the basis for the Provincial Development Plan for Luanda for the years 2013–2017, which refers to Luanda as already 'one of the most dynamic and diversified cities of the African continent and a leader of great initiatives in its community' (GPL 2014: 22).

The new master plan for Luanda launched in December 2015, which was to be implemented over the following 15 years, in turn identifies three pillars of change which are to transform Luanda into a 'liveable', 'beautiful' and 'international' city. This last pillar foresees the establishment of Luanda as 'a future economic, touristic and service pole in Southern Africa' by 'keeping its international profile' and 'creating world standard infrastructure'. More specifically, Luanda's new port and airport hubs are set to 'bolster Luanda's regional and global profile, as a centre for services and logistics, manufacturing and as a market for agricultural produce to diversify Angola's economic base in a world-class capital city environment' (GPL 2015: 10). This aim was reiterated in Angola's most recent National Development Plan for 2018–2022 (GoA 2018).

In this context, the redevelopment of the Bay of Luanda represents the epitome of efforts towards the positioning of Luanda as a world-class city and a typical illustration of the type of imaginary and development usually associated with global world-class city-making. Before challenging this initial impression, the next section provides a brief overview of the history and redevelopment of the Bay of Luanda.

Redevelopment of the Bay of Luanda

Until independence the Bay of Luanda was known as *Avenida de Paulo Dias de Novais*, after the Portuguese explorer who founded the city of Luanda in 1576. Like waterfronts elsewhere in the world, the Bay of Luanda has traditionally been a place of 'flow', connecting the city/state to the world (Dovey 2005). For centuries, the Bay represented the heart of the city, where goods such as rum, food, clothes, sugar and tobacco, as well as hardware came into the country from across the Atlantic in exchange for slaves, ivory, wax and seeds (do Amaral 1968: 43).

Until the first half of the 20th century, boats would dock at the entry of the bay, along a strip of sand referred to as the *Ilha* or Island of Luanda (see Figure 1), with the connection to the shore made by smaller boats. The construction of a new port, with its own wharf, under the urbanisation plan for the waterfront of Luanda (*Plano de Urbanização da parte Marginal de Luanda*) of 1943 and subsequent construction works under the Colonial Urbanisation Department, created in 1944 for the design and execution of architecture and urbanisation projects in the Portuguese colonies (Vaz Milheiro & Dias 2009), shifted the main focus of the city's movements from the centre of the bay to 2km north of the city (do Amaral 1968: 27).

In a context of rapid economic growth, fueled by a coffee boom, and increasing investments in and growth of the city, during the 1950s and 1960s the Bay of Luanda became a place of leisure, the symbol of the city's transformation to modernity and the postcard of the jewel of the Portuguese colonial empire (Fonte 2007: 184). According to Rossa (2016: 109–110), city-ports like Luanda served to concentrate the political, military, and administrative importance of Portugal's colonial territories and boost their economic activities and cultural development, thereby becoming important centres of cosmopolitanism.

Figure 1: Bay of Luanda

Source: Produced for author by Jhono Bennett

After Angola achieved independence in 1975, the name of the waterfront was changed to *Avenida 4 de Fevereiro*, which refers to the date of the start of the armed struggle against Portuguese colonial rule in 1961. During the years of war that followed independence, the waters of the bay started to become polluted as sewerage and drainage systems stopped working as a result of a virtual standstill of public investment in urban infrastructures. By the end of the war, raw sewerage continued to flow into the bay, roads and buildings were frequently flooded and a substantial volume of contaminated sludge was built up in the bay along most of the waterfront and traffic on the waterfront was increasingly congested (Booyens 2013).

In 2003 plans were commissioned by the Ministry of Public Works for the redevelopment of the bay. A Portuguese businessman, José Carlos Moreira Récio, who had been working in Angola since the late 1980s, in collaboration with his Angolan partner, António Mosquito, a business man with ties to the ruling party, presented a proposal for the redevelopment of the Bay to the government in October of the same year in a ceremony assisted by President dos Santos (Nexus 2003).

The proposal included, amongst others, plans for the dredging and cleaning of the bay, the extension of the waterfront road and the construction of parking lots and green spaces. According to the proposal, these works would be financed with private funding to the cost of about USD 76 million. In return, the promoters asked the government to compensate this investment with land, which would be reclaimed using dredged sand of the ocean, in order to create two artificial islands with an area of 900m² in the bay of Luanda parallel to the Island of Luanda to be used for private real estate development with a projected investment of USD 462 million. The proposal was subsequently scheduled to be discussed at the next Session of the Council of Ministers, which took place on 30 October 2003 (Nexus 2003).

However, concerns soon arose regarding this plan (Mukuna 2003). A group of prominent citizens, including the first prime minister of Angola, Lopo do Nascimento, a number of famous Angolan writers and intellectuals, but also professionals such as doctors, businessmen, teachers and university students, sent a series of signed petitions to President dos Santos expressing their concern with 'a private project of this nature and size' which went 'against the traditions and identity of the people of Luanda' and threatened to destruct 'the soul and mirror of the city of Luanda and its ex-libris, its Bay, considered to be one of the most beautiful of the world'. The letters furthermore expressed a fear that the project had not sufficiently taken certain essential issues into account, such as the environmental, ecological, cultural, geo-physical and socio-cultural impact of the project. Finally, they stated that, for a project such as the redevelopment of the Bay of Luanda to be approved, prior consultation and a wide and public debate was required.⁴

Notably, decisions regarding the project were delayed while an 'awareness raising campaign' was launched by the Luanda Waterfront Corporation, the company set up to implement the project, reportedly upon the request of the minister of public works at the time, Higino Carneiro (*Semanário Angolense* 2003). This involved the organisation of special meetings aimed at journalists and 'opinion makers' (Guerreiro 2004), as well as the publication of a number of advertisements in the daily state newspaper *Jornal de Angola*.

Eventually, the initial plan was reformulated and the creation of the two artificial islands scrapped and substituted by the reclaiming of land along the waterfront and Island of Luanda. After its approval by the Council of Ministers in 2005, followed by further studies, the completion of the final design and the licensing process, construction works under the first phase of the project eventually began mid-2008 (Angop 2005).

The works under this first phase were largely completed in August 2012 and inaugurated on the 70th birthday of President dos Santos on 28 August, three days before the country's second post-war elections. With a total investment of USD 376 million (almost triple the amount initially projected), the new bay of Luanda now had a 3km upgraded promenade with over 2 000 newly planted palm trees, 147 000m² pedestrian spaces, about 3km of cycle lanes, ten new open spaces along the beachfront, three playgrounds, three sport fields, five basketball courts and five spaces for cultural

4 Letters signed and dated 28 October 2003, 26 November 2003 and 19 January 2004. Copies kindly made available by Associação Kalu and in possession of author.

events, in addition to a new waste water system, a six-lane road (three-ways each), a fuel station and a fly-over connecting the waterfront to the Island of Luanda (*Expresso* 2012; SBL 2015).

In return for the investment made, Sociedade Baía de Luanda (SBL), the holding company set up to finance the project, received a 30-year concession for all publicity outdoors along the waterfront; a 30-year concession for all retail spaces along the waterfront; and a 30-year concession for access to all newly built 3 100 parking spaces along the waterfront, in addition to 60 years' land development rights of three plots of land of 38 hectares that had been reclaimed during the process (Resolution 51/05 of 26 October).

Office and residential development on the three plots of reclaimed land on 'prime locations' along the waterfront and Island of Luanda started in 2013 as part of the second phase of the project (Interview SBL, 9 July 2015). In addition, this phase included the installation of kiosks at strategic points along the promenade to function as restaurants, snack bars and shops, introducing the concept of 'open air shopping' and turning the waterfront into a 'point of reference within the capital for internal and foreign tourism' (*Angola Today* 2016).

Retrospective city-making: Backward into the future⁵

As outlined in the previous section, references to modernity and the future are rife in the numerous plans that underpin Luanda's post-war redevelopment. These reflect an overall desire to do away with the past and the poverty, informality and disorder associated with it, a common feature of urban planning in the Global South (Watson 2009). Similar references can be found in the promotion material produced in the planning phase of the redevelopment of the Bay. Advertisements refer to the project with the slogan: 'the future starts now', while the start of construction works was marked by a billboard which alerted those passing that 'the future is arriving to our Bay'. In various magazines and publications promoting the project, the redeveloped Bay has been referred to as the face of the 'new Angola' and the symbol of Angola's efforts to construct 'a bold new country'. Promotional material published for the occasion of the 440th anniversary of the city in January 2016, in turn celebrates Luanda as 'a city turned towards the future' (see Figure 1). According to Vaz Contreiras (2013: 126), this is part of a process of starting anew: by 'giving the postcard image of the City of Luanda – its Bay – a new face it claims a new post-colonial originality and can therefore claim a new history'.

However, more seems to be at play as the image accompanying the promotional material of 2016 includes an image of the Bay of Luanda taken in the early 1950s. This illustrates a recurring pattern in which references that portray the Bay as a symbol of modernity and the future are almost systematically accompanied by references to the past and the need to restore the Bay to its 'original' state.

5 I draw here on the title of the conclusion to John Friedmann's (2005) book *China's Urban Transition*.

Figure 2: Luanda: a city turned towards the future

Source: Sociedade Baía de Luanda, 2016

Other examples include promotional material on the project published in the daily state newspaper *Jornal de Angola* when the redevelopment was still in its conceptual stages, explaining that:

This project was conceived to meet the need to give back to the bay its natural splendour, upgrading *Avenida 4 de Fevereiro – Marginal*, turning it into the unequivocal signifier of the city of Luanda. [...] This is our dream, the dream of revitalizing the image of our capital, the dream that will celebrate its unequalled beauty and energy.

According to an architect from the Portuguese firm that was involved in the design of the project, conscious efforts were made to ensure the continuity of the new design of the Bay with its original state.

The design was based on the idea of the city as a place of encounter. The *Marginal* is not a new place, it was already heritage of the city, what was attempted was to turn it into something closer to current times, something

more contemporary, allowing for a more universal use. [...] The strategy was to create a spatial structure of continuity, not of rupture (Interview architect Costa Lopes, Luanda, 4 December 2015)

With reference to the completion of the first phase, SBL's business development manager in turn highlights the way in which the project has achieved the almost impossible task of reviving the historical image of the Bay as it was known in the heyday of colonialism:

There is the environmental aspect, because the project cleaned the bay of Luanda, which is, [...] a symbolic area of the city. In all the pictures of the city, even the old ones, the bay of Luanda appears as a postcard of the city. It was a shame that this postcard had become polluted, its image had become worn out. So, this image was cleaned, the waters were cleaned, and today we can for instance see dolphins in the bay, something once unthinkable (Interview SBL, Luanda, 9 July 2015)

References to history and heritage in contemporary urban development projects are not new and especially common in projects involving urban waterfront regeneration. Projects across the world, ranging from the redevelopment of Zanzibar's Stone Town (Hoyle 2002), to the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront Development in Cape Town (Ferreira & Visser 2007), or waterfront development in Singapore (Chang & Huang 2011) mobilise history and heritage in different ways. However, these references usually function to attract outside heritage tourism or investment or serve as a way to pay lip service to local heritage lobbies or global sustainability agendas and sources of funding.

These motives may not entirely be disregarded for the case of Luanda, as we have seen that initial plans for the creation of artificial islands in the bay were reformulated in response to resistance from a group of prominent residents of the city. However, the way in which the redeveloped waterfront subsequently was planned to mirror its original colonial design goes beyond paying lip service to these demands, but rather is reflective of a more deep-seated and structural way in which post-war urban policies and planning are informed by the country's colonial past rather than a clear vision of the future. This kind of retrospective city-making in turn extends beyond the revival of a certain historical aesthetics to the mobilisation of associated notions of grandeur, allowing for the creation of 'spaces of power' (Mabin 2015).

Indeed, the redevelopment of the bay of Luanda does not stand on its own but forms part of a wider project of urban redevelopment and renewal of the city's politico-administrative centre and associated public buildings and infrastructures that surround the bay, with the aim of allowing for the return of the country's President and political power to the city centre after years of absence.

Ever since proclaiming the country's independence in 1975, the ruling Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) party has been based in the capital of Luanda, from where it waged a war with the forces of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) in the countryside. However, during most of the war, President dos Santos (in power from 1979 to 2017) operated from a presidential

compound located outside the city centre in an area called *Futungo de Belas* (see Map 1). According to the Angolan anthropologist António Tomás (2012: 97), in colonial times *Futungo de Belas* was the summerhouse of the governor, while the *Cidade Alta* (High City) was his official residence. In 1975, Agostinho Neto, the first Angolan president, transformed the governor's palace into his presidential palace, but a few years later he established his official residence in Futungo de Belas. His successor, dos Santos, in the context of cold and civil wars, transformed the entire area of Futungo de Belas into a military compound. During these years, the state and people became increasingly disconnected, with the state failing to fulfil even basic state functions.

When the war was seen to be coming to an end in the mid-1990s, preparations started to move the seat of the president back to the *Cidade Alta*, the part of the city which overlooks the Bay and Island of Luanda and the traditional headquarters of political power ever since the foundation of Luanda. In the following years, works developed under this project consisted of the rehabilitation of some of the main buildings in the politico-administrative centre, such as the presidential palace, and the completion of a memorial centre around the mausoleum containing the remains of President Neto. Works also included the expansion of the area with road works, laying a new main road southward called the New Marginal or *Nova Marginal*, as well as the construction of a new High Court and a new National Assembly. In line with the colonial continuity sought in the design of the redeveloped waterfront, the new building of the National Assembly, inaugurated in 2015, is modelled after the National Bank of Angola, another symbol of the neoclassical architecture of the Portuguese *Estado Novo* which was concluded in 1956 and which has since been a landmark of Luanda's skyline.

Moreover, since the conclusion of the initial works in the politico-administrative centre and the first phase of the redevelopment of the Bay of Luanda, the area has served as the primary location for the realisation of key events such as President dos Santos' inauguration after his first official election as President in 2012 and military marches which display the state's power on the day that marks the anniversary of the start of the country's armed struggle for independence. More recently, plans were presented to extend the site with the construction of a new neighbourhood, called the *Bairro dos Ministérios* or Neighborhood of Ministries, which would link the new National Assembly to the Presidential Palace in the *Cidade Alta* and house 28 ministerial buildings, including a building for the Council of Ministers, a convention centre and an exhibition space (*Jornal de Angola* 2019).

Hence, while in cities such as Dubai the 'technology of symbolic power' or the development of world-class infrastructures and the construction of iconic buildings primarily serves to 'seduce a global audience' (Acuto 2010: 276), the redevelopment of the Bay of Luanda forms an important part of a wider project that serves to convey a political message about the nation-state, not just to an international but also to a domestic audience. From this perspective, the redevelopment of the bay – while incorporating some elements of global plans and models of 'world-class' urban development – forms part of an effort to project political power onto the physical landscape, a common feature of capital cities in postcolonial Africa, especially in the early years of independence (Bekker & Therborn 2011). In doing so, the city becomes a vehicle for the national government to convey messages about the state and invoke

global imaginaries of modernity and development, even in the face of pervasive levels of widespread urban poverty and deprivation.

Indeed, while the waterfront is widely used as a public space for leisure, it is largely disconnected from the rest of the city and inaccessible for most of Luanda's nearly 7 million residents who inhabit the vast informal settlements spread out in the city's periphery. The costs of products sold in the waterfront shops also mean that most of its patrons are among Luanda's most well-off residents. Hence, while branded as a landmark to attract foreign investors and tourists, the bay is mainly visited by locals. Similarly, the main investors in both the first and second phase of the redevelopment have been Angolan. Following the drop in oil prices and the ensuing economic crisis of 2014, during which much real estate construction and development ground to a halt, the Angolan government intervened and nationalised the bay by assuming all rights to the exploitation and development of the waterfront and surrounding areas, leaving no doubt as to who was in charge all along.

Conclusion

Luanda represents an example of increasing attempts across the African continent towards world-class city-making in the image of new global city models represented by cities such as Dubai. Futuristic and iconic architecture and aesthetics mark (plans for) the construction and redevelopment of waterfronts, shopping centres and entire new cities across Africa.

However, the case of Luanda also shows that alongside these global and futuristic imaginaries, historical models and legacies continue to influence aesthetic preferences in seemingly contradictory ways. Numerous other plans have emerged in Luanda's post-war years which involve the revival or restoration of unfinished ambitions dating from late colonial times, such as plans for the development of the Island of Luanda and the area of Futungo de Belas and architects, contractors and companies involved are often from Portugal (Fonte 2007). At the same time, such efforts go hand in hand with the demolition of icons of colonial modernist architecture, such as the Kinaxixe market, and their replacement with new and shiny shopping centres.

Projects such as the redevelopment of the bay are then indicative of the ways in which utopia and nostalgia intersect in the remaking of a postcolonial city such as Luanda (Siebert 2014). While problematic in terms of the selective mobilisation and appropriation of colonial memories of grandeur and modernity for political purposes and the uncritical reproduction of a misplaced sense of colonial nostalgia, such tendencies do not necessarily have to be seen as oppositional. Instead, they should be seen as a reflection of the ways in which global models of urban planning are provincialised through local histories, interests, politics and laws (Datta 2015).

Hence, the case of Luanda contributes to an understanding of the variegated local drivers and dynamics that may be involved in practices of world-class city-making in postcolonial as well as post-conflict contexts. The study of the different dynamics of city planning, development and renewal as they are currently arising and developing across the African continent may in turn prove useful for re-thinking notions and practices of world-class city-making across the wider Global South.

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