

Agency in an African City. The various trajectories through time and space of the public market of Kinshasa.

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Abstract: Kinshasa, the former Léopoldville, developed in less than one century from a few pre-colonial settlements into a metropolis of almost ten million people. In the city, the marketplace has always been at the centre of contemporary debates on public space and, therefore, its various trajectories through time and space reveal much about the origins and forces that shaped the city.

Drawing on published material, archival documents from both Belgium and Congo, and fieldwork, this paper not only tells the history of one of Kinshasa's most important places, it highlights the multiple and often intricate processes of agency between local and foreign actors that are at the core of Kinshasa's urban identity. Through the micro-study of the marketplace different issues are touched upon such as the limits of colonial and post-colonial planning, the contestation and appropriation of colonial and post-colonial rule by local actors and the role of intermediary population groups in the production of space of African cities.

Keywords: Kinshasa; market; colonial planning; post-colonial planning; local actors; foreign planners; agency.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Today, Kinshasa's central market can be considered as one of Africa's largest marketplaces, accommodating more than 30,000 merchants – almost ten times its planned occupancy. Although the marketplace nowadays has a rather eccentric position vis-à-vis the city, as Kinshasa keeps expanding into its periphery, it remains by far the most important crossing point of interests, lifestyles and cultures and the major place of exchange and encounter of the city and even the country. To understand the multiple and intricate forces that shaped the marketplace and its surrounding district, we have to trace back its history. By confronting planning projects that were proposed for the marketplace and its surrounding district with a variety of sources, such as archival documents, photographs, journals, literature, etc., this paper tries to establish a richer understanding of the mechanisms and limits of (post-)colonial planning as well as (post-)colonial policy in general. Moreover, this micro-study of the marketplace shows that Kinshasa's marketplace is not only the product of top-down (post-)colonial planning, but also of several processes of agency, such as the contestation and appropriation of colonial and post-colonial rule and the role of intermediary groups or middle figures in the production of space of African cities.

'UN MARCHÉ QUI N'EST PAS À SA PLACE'¹

Prologue

During the colonial era Kinshasa, the former Léopoldville, was highly segregated along racial lines. However, the binary structure of the city came into existence rather informally, since before 1930 no racial building or town ordinances that, in explicit terms, dictated segregation amongst people on racial grounds existed. It was, in the first place, the colonial order (with its underlying notions of white supremacy) that induced a social and economical stratification of the city and, *de facto*, resulted in a residential separation of coloniser and colonised

1 See below: footnote 14.

by an undefined 'no man's land'. Originally, the market of Léopoldville, one of the first public facilities of the city, was situated in this 'no man's land' between the African and European quarters, as it was one of the rare public functions that was shared by both communities² (Figures 1 and 3).

Due to the limited available space in the city centre from the 1920's onwards, the European town gradually extended into the 'no man's land' and as a result neutralized the railway as physical barrier between both communities.³ Tradesmen followed this expansion of the European town in the direction of the African quarter and established a new commercial district on the boundary of both quarters, the most favourable position for trading. In 1925 a new market building was constructed in the middle of the new commercial district, by a Jewish businessman from Rhodes, based on the model of the old market of Rhodes⁴ (Figures 2 and 7). As a consequence, the new commercial district was gradually being transformed into the main city centre of Léopoldville. Many of the tradesmen in the surroundings of the market were from Portuguese, Greek and Italian descent and due to their willingness to speak the local languages and their slightly darker skin in comparison to Belgians, they occupied an intermediate position in the colonial city, spatially as well as sociologically.⁵ The diversity of nationalities around the public market gave the city centre a cosmopolitan character and weakened the physical barrier between the European and African quarters on a micro level.

Colonial policy and planning in the interwar period

In the beginning of the 1930's, this blurring of boundaries between the African and European quarters became a major concern of the Public Health Service (*Service d'Hygiène*) because of a, sometimes assumed, fear of epidemics. According to the Public Health Service a neutral unoccupied zone (*zone neutre*) or *cordon sanitaire* of 800 meters had to be implemented to avoid the transmission of malaria from the African quarter into the European town.⁶ At that time, this concern with sanitation and hygiene by medical services and colonial governments was not specific for Léopoldville alone. Indeed, in many other colonial African cities a *zone neutre* had already been implemented as a result of the 'sanitation syndrome' that often served as a means and pretext for local governments to strengthen racial segregation.⁷ In Léopoldville, only around the 1930's, racial segregation evolved from an improvised practice into an institutionalized policy. A major motivation for the establishment of a neutral zone in Léopoldville was the anxiety of the small European community being overwhelmed by the growing influx of Africans from the hinterland, especially since a physical barrier between both communities no longer existed.⁸

The segregationist policy was translated into urban planning policies, most explicitly by the Belgian architect René Schoentjes, who in 1931 while working for the Colonial Office in Brussels, developed a scheme for an ideal Congolese city.⁹ Projecting this scheme onto Léopoldville in 1933, Schoentjes proposed to implement a neutral zone of 500 meters by reinstalling the former no man's land between the African quarter and European town (Figure 4) Schoentjes legitimized this neutral zone and racial segregation by referring to the modernist functional zoning principles, which were at that time at the heart of the contemporary urban planning debate in Europe. Schoentjes, who did not live in Léopoldville, failed to assess the actual situation of Leopoldville, ignoring that the city council (*Comité Urbain*¹⁰) would never demolish the newly built commercial quarter and market because of local interests. As a consequence, the plan of Schoentjes remained to a large extent unexecuted and served only as a guiding principle for the implementation of a neutral zone in Léopoldville.

2 This market was situated on a roundabout next to the railway, in front of the current Post Office. Information provided by Antoine Lumenganeso, head of the Archives Nationales du Congo, June 2008.

3 In 1932 the railway was moved to the African quarter and replaced by the Boulevard Albert I, now Boulevard du 30 juin. Archives Nationales, Kinshasa, GG 7/54.

4 The new market building was located on the Place du Marché; the exploitation of the market was in the hands of the bank Crédit Foncier Africain. Africa-Archives, Brussels, GG 10.008.

5 Africa-Archives, Brussels, GG 7.341, plans with notes (1933). Contemporary sources on these middle figures: Moulaert (1939); Balandier (1955); Denis (1956). More recent sources on these middle figures: Antippas (2008); Giordano (2008); Rahmani (2008).

6 Africa-Archives, Brussels, GG 7.052; article "Au Comité Urbain" from the journal *Le Courrier d'Afrique*, 19 mars 1931.

7 The term 'sanitation syndrome' was first used in 1977 by M.W. Swanson in the South African context (Swanson 1977:387-410).

8 Jaarverslag over het Beheer van de Kolonie Belgisch Congo / Rapport Annuel sur l'Administration de la Colonie du Congo belge, Brussel, 1930.

9 Schoentjes (1933:528-572); Africa-Archives, Brussels, SPA 17913 (Schoentjes). Kinshasa's colonial urban planning is well-elaborated in the work of De Meulder (2000) and Lagae (2007).

10 All the members of the *Comité Urbain* were designated by the Governor General and not elected. The *Comité Urbain* was chaired by the *Commissaire Urbain*, who represented the Governor General. See: Mulumba (1968:449-457).

European town African quarters public market no man's land

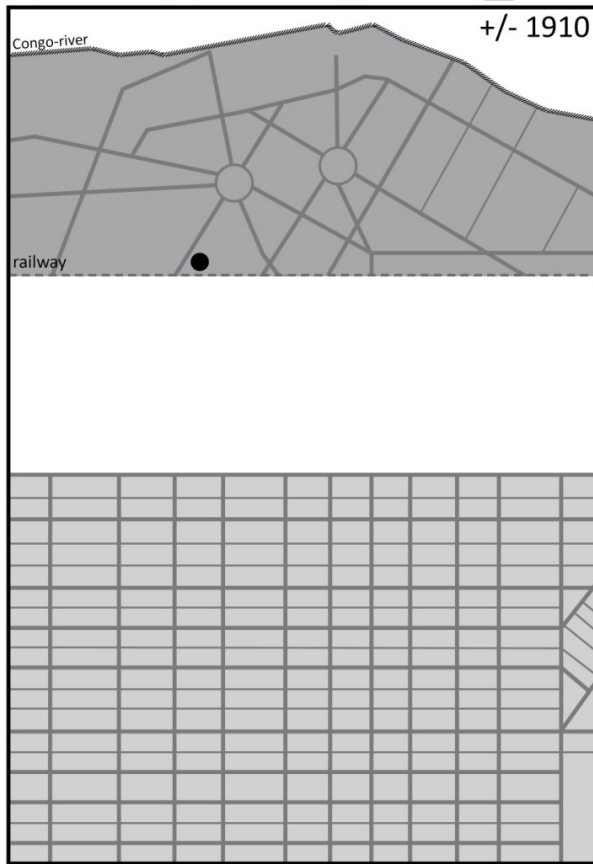


FIGURE 1: Kinshasa around 1910.

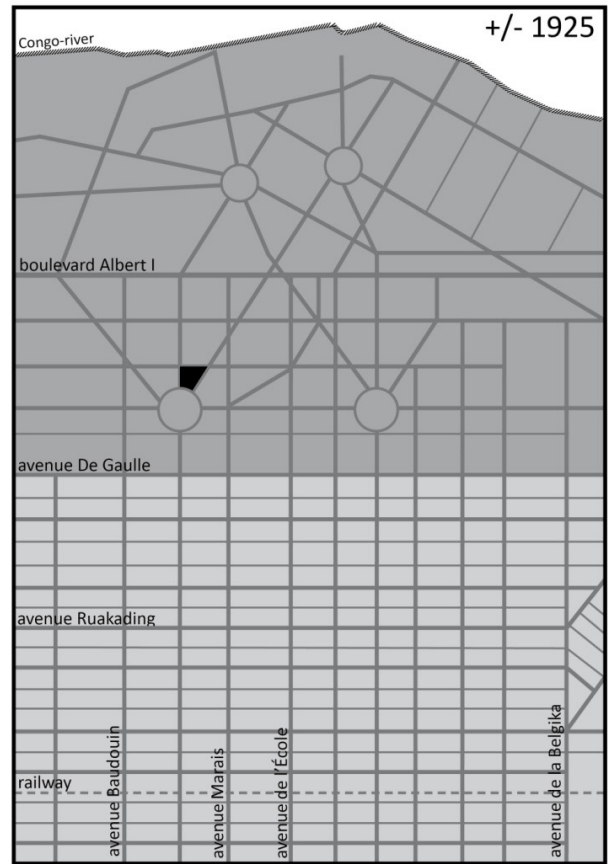


FIGURE 2: Kinshasa around 1925.



FIGURE 3: Kinshasa's public market around 1910.

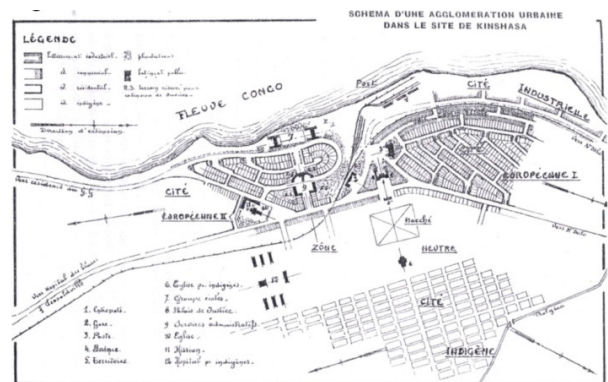


FIGURE 4: Schoentjies' plan for Léopoldville in 1933.

Implementation of colonial planning & processes of agency in the interwar period

In the interwar period the urban planning of Léopoldville was mainly in the hands of the *Comité Urbain*, as no town planning department existed. In the *Comité Urbain*, different services were represented, such as the Public Health Service, Public Works Service and the Services of the Governor General. In 1933, the *Comité Urbain* began, at the demand of the Public Health Service, the implementation of the neutral zone by the expropriation of the upper part of the African quarter and the establishment of a series of recreational facilities for Europeans, such as a zoo (*le Jardin Zoologique*), a park (*Parc De Bock*) with botanical garden and in 1936 a golf club (*Léo Golf Club*).¹¹ Although the expropriation of Africans was relatively inexpensive, it proved very difficult because no accommodation was prepared by the *Comité Urbain* for the Africans who were to be relocated. In addition to this the implementation of the neutral zone was obstructed by the presence of a small garden town for

11 Whymys (sine anno)

Europeans who were reluctant to move and obtained the permission from the *Comité Urbain* to stay. As a result, only a small strip of 300 meters, instead of the preconceived 800 meters, of the neutral zone was completed¹² (Figure 5).

Yet, from the beginning of its creation, this spatial segregation was challenged by the passage of Africans to the public market of Léopoldville, still located in the European quarter. Moreover, parts of the neutral zone were gradually being appropriated by Africans in order to establish new markets that were more in the vicinity of the African quarters. One of these new markets was the *Marché de Tabora*, which was established mainly by West and East Africans (Figure 5). Due to activities that were being generated by the new marketplace, the commercial district extended into the direction of the *Marché de Tabora* and this way obscured further implementation of the neutral zone. Although the *Comité Urbain* wanted to monopolize commerce and trade and strictly restrain market activities to the public market, it tolerated this unofficial market out of economical interest and fear of resistance.¹³ Therefore, while Africans were barely involved in urban policy and planning, the ambivalent choices of the *Comité Urbain* regarding the public market, allowed them to establish informal markets and to escape to some extent from the segregationist restrictions.

Meanwhile, the presence of African tradesmen and customers around the public market in the European town was considered unhygienic and inappropriate by many Europeans, causing protest and complaints.¹⁴ The European community proposed to erect two separate marketplaces, one in the European town and one in the native quarter, and, as an example, put the twofold market system of Elisabethville to the fore. The *Comité Urbain*, however, reluctant to establish public functions in the African quarter, moved the market to the neutral zone in 1943 to remedy the situation¹⁵ (Figures 6 and 10). This replacement of the market could not please the European community, which regretted the disrespect of racial segregation shown by the local government.¹⁶ Yet, the design of the new market building seemed to be a good compromise, as it was totally closed towards the European town and this way avoided visual and odour hindrance for the Europeans.¹⁷ Although this decision of the local government to position the market, a proven space of encounter, in the neutral zone, which by *definition* was intended as a space of segregation, out of practical and economic concerns may seem very contradictory, it may be considered as a logical choice to restore the original position of the market, namely in contact with both the African and European community. This relocation of the market to the neutral zone hindered further implementation of the neutral zone, as it would only cause additional passage of Africans into the neutral zone. Consequently, although all members of the *Comité Urbain* agreed on the principle of the neutral zone, local interests, pragmatic considerations and a quest for immediate remedies seemed to prevail in the implementation process. Because these local interests, often of economic character and concern for public order, were frequently in contrast with the segregationist purposes of the neutral zone, they obstructed its implementation.

12 Africa-Archives, Brussels, GG 10.008, GG 7.052, GG 7.341, GG 16.262

13 Africa-Archives, Brussels, GG 7.341, lettre du 20 avril 1933 du 'commissaire urbain' au 'medecin hygiéniste': "Il serait indiqué pour les motifs d'ordre public et économique de conserver la Place de Tabora, marché important, autour lequel sont groupés, outre la mosquée, quelques industries indigènes importantes." See also: Africa-Archives, Brussels, GG 10.008, GG 7.052, GG 7.341, GG 16.262.

14 Africa-Archives, Brussels, GG 10.008; Archives Nationales, Kinshasa, 'Lettre d'un plaignant blanc', C.A.E./Léo, D 51, 1928; Article 'Un Marché qui n'est pas à sa place' from the journal 'Courrier d'Afrique', janvier 1942: "L'administration a pris grand soin de fixer les limites de la ville européenne et de la cité indigène. Elle a imposé, à juste titre, le respect d'une large zone neutre, qu'elle a pris soin d'orner de parcs et de jardins du plus heureux effet. Mais, après avoir fait tout ce qu'il fallait pour que les noirs restent chez eux et ne viennent pas encombrer les rues de la ville européenne, la même administration a magnifiquement installé le marché indigène en plein centre européen, faisant de la zone neutre, non plus une séparation mais une voie de communication, un lieu de passage intense et obligé pour les noirs allant acheter ou vendre leurs vivres."

15 Africa-Archives, Brussels, GG 10.008, GG 5.367; Whyms (*sine anno*); Capelle (1947).

16 Article 'L'inauguration du nouveau marché de Léo' from the journal 'Courrier d'Afrique', 1/2/3 janvier 1944: "D'aucuns envisageraient, paraît-il, d'établir le marché dans la zone neutre à l'emplacement de l'ancien jardin zoologique. Demi mesure qui ne fera que créer des nouveaux mécontents. Tout d'abord elle empêchera encore une fois la zone neutre de remplir son rôle de séparation entre la ville européenne et la ville indigène; ensuite elle gênera fatalement les jardins qui ont été établis à cet endroit et qui sont l'un des jolis coins de Léo."

17 Article from the journal 'Courrier d'Afrique', 1/2/3 janvier 1944, 'L'inauguration du nouveau marché de Léo': "Du côté du quartier européen, le marché est strictement fermé de façon à éviter tout inconvénient pour les voisins les plus proches, de l'autre côté du parc. Par contre, l'ensemble est largement ouvert vers la cité indigène pour permettre un accès facile à toutes les échoppes et une extension éventuelle si besoin en est."

European town African quarters public market neutral zone

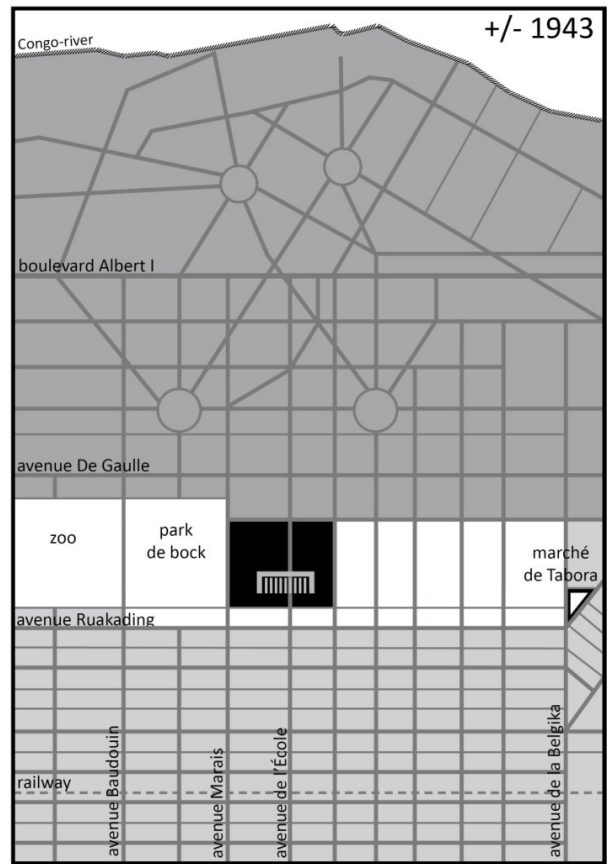
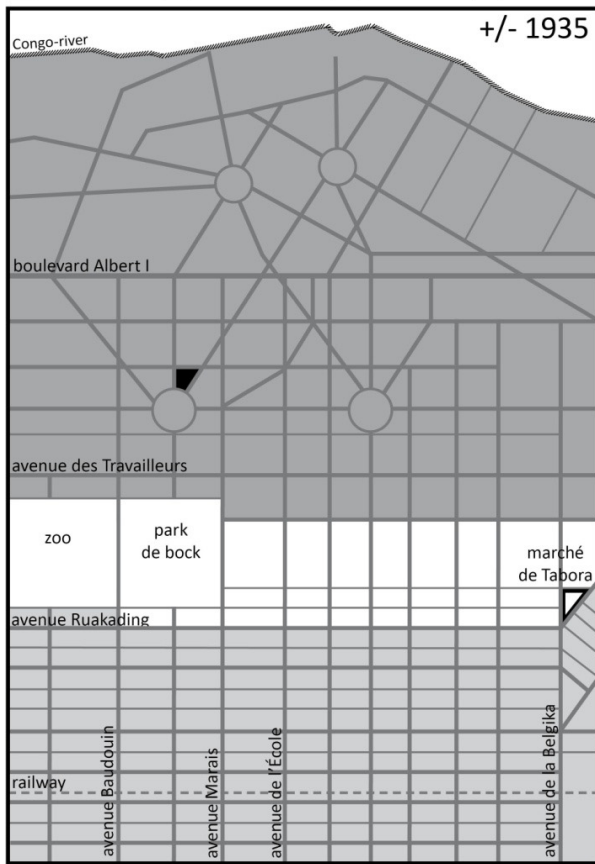


FIGURE 5: Kinshasa around 1935.

FIGURE 6: Kinshasa around 1943.



FIGURE 7: Kinshasa's public market around 1928.

ENCOUNTER IN THE “ZONE NEUTRE”

Colonial policy and planning after WWII

In the post-war era, the colonial state became a lot more interventionist and set up huge development plans to organize the growth of Congolese urban centres.¹⁸ Although these plans were aimed at improving the welfare of the African people, and meet the terms of the United Nations, they were highly segregationist in nature, injecting new life into the idea of a *cordon sanitaire*. To develop these plans, the central colonial government in Brussels asked the architect Georges Ricquier to design a masterplan for Léopoldville, while at the same time, a local town planning department was set up in Léopoldville under the direction of the architect Maurice Heymans. Following the normal course of events, Heymans had to locally implement the plan made by Ricquier in Brussels. Ricquier devoted a lot of attention to the monumental restructuring of the European town and, among other things, proposed a huge neutral zone around the African quarter and separate markets for the European and African community¹⁹ (Figure 9). To transform Léopoldville into a majestic capital city, the so called *Le Grand Léo*, Ricquier argued that several expropriations would be required.²⁰ It was exactly because of these massive expropriations that the plan of Ricquier was not well received on the local level.

During the public inquiry that followed, 60 objections were submitted by Europeans.²¹ In addition to this, the *Comité Urbain* contested the plan because of its reservations regarding the practicability and affordability of the plan.²² Heymans, who, unlike Ricquier, lived in Léopoldville and could respond directly on the plan of Ricquier, tried to influence the *Comité Urbain* by putting forward several disadvantages of the plan of Ricquier, in particular the many expropriations needed to establish the huge neutral zone, arguing that: “*en pratique, le respect des zones neutres à Léopoldville fut et reste inexistant.*”²³ Moreover, Heymans commented on what he regarded as the old-fashioned and irrational planning approaches used by Ricquier.²⁴ Heymans concluded that Ricquier was totally ignorant of and oblivious to the local dynamics in the contemporary Léopoldville.²⁵ Although Ricquier was given the chance to submit a second proposal, the *Comité Urbain* was determined to reject the plan of Ricquier and designated the local town planning department, under the direction of Heymans, to design a new development plan for Léopoldville and this way confined town planning to the local level.²⁶ Oddly enough, in the same year of its rejection, the plan of Ricquier was presented by the Ministry of Colonies in a luxury publication.²⁷

From 1951 onwards, Heymans started developing a new plan for Léopoldville, paying little attention to the implementation of the neutral zone. Since both architects subscribed to different schools of architecture and displayed different planning approaches, the plan made by Heymans differed a lot from that of Ricquier.

18 Tienjarenplan voor de sociale en economische ontwikkeling van Belgisch Kongo / Plan décennal pour le développement économique et social du Congo belge, Brussel: Les Editions De Visscher, 1949.

19 Ricquier (1951); Africa-Archives, Brussels, 3e DG, 195 (Ricquier).

20 Ricquier (1951:67): “*Il va de soi qu’il est exclu de vouloir urbaniser sans procéder à quelques expropriations.*”

21 Article from the magazine ‘l’Anversois’ by Jean Luck, “Le plan d’urbanisation de Léo est rejeté.” 17 februari 1951; Africa-Archives, Brussels, Press release from Belga, 8 februari 1951.

22 Africa-Archives, Brussels, GG 7.205, Extrait du Compte-rendu du Comité Urbain en sa séance du 25 août 1949: “*Le plan primitif de Mr. Ricquier prévoyait des expropriations assez conséquentes, difficiles à réaliser sur une période de 15 ans maximum, tel que prévu à l’article 17 du décret sur l’urbanisme.*”

23 Africa-Archives, Brussels, GG 7.205, Note Urbanisme, Maurice Heymans, 13 septembre 1949. Heymans added to this quote: “*Par exemple: avenue de Tabora, les constructions européennes et indigènes sont mélangées; avenue Van Eetvelde, la distance est de moins de 200 mètres et diminue chaque jour; à Léo-II, le long du rail, la distance est de moins de 100 mètres; etc. Mieux eut valu ne pas créer de telles situations. Il est bien tard, à présent, pour encore se montrer draconien.*” Heymans’ neglect of the neutral zone did not make his plans less segregationist, since he proposed to segregate the different communities of Léopoldville by a system of satellite towns.

24 Africa-Archives, Brussels, GG 7.205, Maurice Heymans, lettre du 23 février 1949: “*Les plans partent d’idées trop préconçues d’une volonté trop arrêtée de modification, le tout suivant des formules esthétiques assez périmées. (...) Dans le cas qui nous occupe, le grandiose acquit des proportions gigantesques, démesurées, sans souci du coût, ni de la manière de les réaliser.*”

25 Africa-Archives, Brussels, GG 7.205, Maurice Heymans, lettre du 23 février 1949: “*Celles-ci témoignent d’une trop profonde méconnaissance des réalités de la vie Coloniale.*”

26 Africa-Archives, Brussels, GG 7.205, Urbanisation Léopoldville, lettre du vice-gouverneur I. de Thibault, remplace le gouverneur général au Ministre des Colonies à Bruxelles, 24 août 1949: “*Mes services ont procédé à un examen minutieux des deux versions du plan d’aménagement présenté par Monsieur l’architecte Ricquier. Cet examen permet de conclure à l’impossibilité et à l’inopportunité de réaliser ces projets. Il m’a paru nécessaire de charger l’urbaniste attaché à mes services d’une nouvelle étude urbanistique de Léopoldville. Je vous prie de trouver ces propositions en annexe. Elles rencontrent mon entière approbation de principe.*”

27 Dequae (1951)

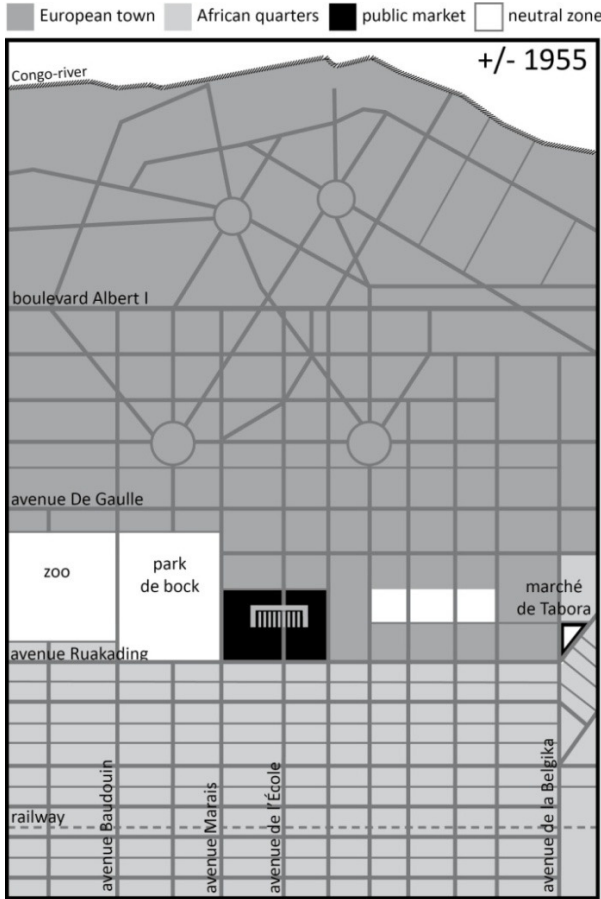


FIGURE 8: Kinshasa around 1955.

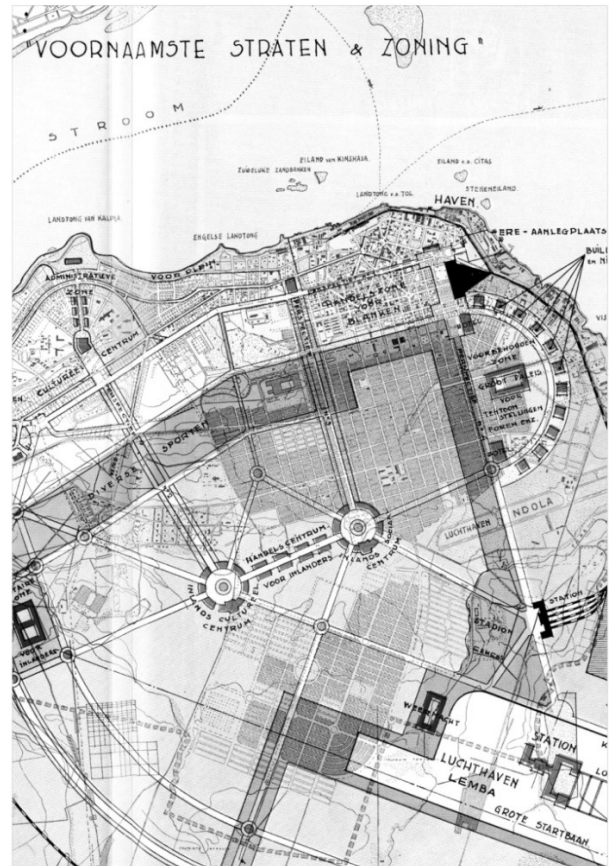


FIGURE 9: Ricquier's plan for Léopoldville in 1949.



FIGURE 10: Kinshasa's public market around 1943.

Heymans concentrated his designs almost completely on the housing of the increasing African population through a system of separated and self-contained satellite towns towards the east of the city and left the existing commercial district and marketplace of Léopoldville untouched.²⁸ However, only one year later, Heymans was dismissed by the Ministry of Colonies on the accusation of favouring his own interests, which seemed to be an act of vengeance on the side of the Ministry for the refusal of Ricquier's plan.²⁹ The result of the ongoing disputes between the two levels of administration was that the department of town planning in Léopoldville lost its driving force, whereas in Brussels no other architect was appointed. In the following years, Henrard, Heymans' successor, implemented elements of both masterplans, but without comprehensive or long-term objectives, leading to improvised decisions, uncoordinated choices and an overall *laissez-faire* policy on urban planning.³⁰ Consequently, the introduction of a comprehensive urban planning practice in the Belgian Congo, although envisaged in the development and welfare plans of 1949, was being accomplished only on a very modest scale.³¹

Implementation of colonial planning & processes of agency after WWII

The reason for the breakdown of the neutral zone in the post-war era can be attributed to an internal dispute within the colonial planning apparatus itself. This dispute between proponents and opponents of two Belgian architects, representing each a different level of institutional power, not only visualized the dual administrative structure in the Belgian Congo, with the Ministry of Colonies in Brussels and the *Gouvernement Général* in Léopoldville, but also revealed the resentments and disagreements between them. Based on the discussion, it can be argued that the existence of a neutral zone between the African and European quarters was estimated of higher importance by the central government in Brussels than by the local administration, who did not always seem to recognize the need for a neutral zone.³² The dispute paralyzed the planning apparatus for many years and as a consequence, intermediary population groups, mainly tradesmen of Portuguese, Greek and Italian descent, were able to settle down in the vicinity of the market. This way, these middle figures in the colonial society gradually changed the neutral zone from a separating device within the urban structure into an area of exchange and encounter (Figure 8). This massive appropriation was to a large extent left uninterrupted by the *Comité Urbain*, which showed an ambivalent and undecided attitude towards these intermediary population groups. Moreover, the local government was unwilling to damage the economic interests of these tradesmen, in particular because they provided Léopoldville of luxury goods and commodities that would otherwise be unavailable. The, whether or not deliberate, policy of tolerance by the local administration resulted into a remarkable conversion of the neutral zone to the extent that it was called 'the Portuguese quarter' in the late colonial years.³³

The increased pressure from real estate agents on the neutral zone from the beginning of the 1950's onwards can be considered as another reason of its evaporation.³⁴ Because the commercial district of Léopoldville was literally squeezed between the European town and African quarter, where commercial and public functions were not permitted, the city centre did not have many opportunities to expand other than into the neutral zone. From the late 1940's onwards, several supermarkets, shopping arcades and parking garages were being erected in the neutral zone by private and public investors.³⁵ In 1956 some of them were being transformed into a large Sarma shopping complex by the architect Claude Laurens.³⁶ This gradual occupation of areas surrounding the marketplace by real estate agents, often in the hands of intermediate population groups, was further made

28 Heymans (1949, 1951); Africa-Archives, Brussels, 3e DG, F321 (Heymans).

29 Africa-Archives, Brussels, 662 SPA, 'Dossier Heymans'.

30 Henrard (1959a, 1959b)

31 See above, footnote 18.

32 The same argument has already been elaborated by Comhaire in 1950: "A strong color bar exists in many fields but, as the highest officials in the colony have often shown their disapproval of it, the responsibility for this system must be traced to clumsy interference from the 'ministère des colonies' in Brussels, whence legislation is issued in blissful ignorance of local conditions" Comhaire (1950:395-396).

33 La Fontaine (1970); Mutombo (1954:164)

34 Article from 'La Métropole', 6 juillet 1950, 'Léopoldville: capitale moderne et plaque tournante du commerce africain': "*Léopoldville s'est muée en un immense chantier de construction et aujourd'hui, émergeant du fouillis d'échafaudages, de matériaux entassés et des palissades, se dessinent les lignes générales de la future grande cité et apparaissent les premières réalisations obtenues.*"

35 Archives Nationales, Kinshasa, Section 'Travaux Publics de Léopoldville', GG7/98: Marché Public de Léopoldville.

36 In 1950-1951 Ricquier had already completed a first design for the Sarma shopping mall. However, Ricquier's proposal has never been executed for reasons that are unknown to the author. Yet, it is remarkable that Ricquier proposed this Sarma complex exactly at the same location where he planned the neutral zone in his masterplan of the same year. In connection with the Sarma complex designed by Claude Laurens, see: Lagae, Laurens & De Kooning (2001). Concerning the Sarma complex proposed by Ricquier, see: Archives d'Architecture Moderne, Brussels: Fonds Ricquier.

possible by the *laissez-faire* politics of the colonial administration.³⁷ The huge amount of construction works and the erection of several modernist looking buildings, especially in the commercial district, transformed Kinshasa during the beginning of the 1950's into a bustling city, often called *Kin-la-belle*.

FROM "KIN-LA-BELLE" TO "KIN-LA-POUBELLE"

Post-colonial policy and planning

Although the Belgians kept exercising influence on the urban development of Kinshasa to some extent after independence in 1960, they were chiefly replaced by new foreign actors.³⁸ Due to the disintegration of the state machinery in the years after independence, many public services and ministries were taken over by foreign technical assistants and external consultants. In 1964, at the request of the Congolese government, a French urban planning mission (MFU) arrived in Kinshasa.³⁹

Two years after the MFU started its activities, the MFU proposed to erect a new city centre, a *Futur Centre Ville*, next to the popular heart of Kinshasa⁴⁰ and in the former zone that separated two native quarters⁴¹ (Figure 11). This way the MFU wanted to move Kinshasa's administrative and commercial district, which had become peripheral for the majority of people because of the rapid urbanization since World War II, more to the geographical centre of the city. As a consequence, in the years after independence in 1960, the market's location was again challenged, as the MFU wanted to decrease its dominant character – and with this solve the congestion towards the city centre – in favour of the new city centre. In collaboration with several architectural offices, private investors and foreign building companies, a masterplan was elaborated for an ambitious city centre considered appropriate for an international city as Kinshasa, at that time the second most populated city of sub-Saharan Africa after Lagos.⁴²

This proposal for a new city centre was part of a broader masterplan for Kinshasa⁴³ that, while being a product of the postcolonial era and inspired by the New Town-planning principles that were amply applied in Europe and its former colonies at that time⁴⁴, in many respects followed and expanded the proposals of the Belgian post-war colonial planning apparatus. The anti-urban attitude in housing newcomers in clearly separated satellite towns rather than in the city itself; the use of modernist zoning principles resulting in a clear division of residential, industrial and commercial functions; and even the expansion of the city to the east,⁴⁵ illustrate that in the field of planning Congo's independence did not engender a radical rupture. Nevertheless, before the MFU even started thinking about the implementation, the masterplan of 1967 was already outdated due to the immense urban growth and was abandoned in 1969. Although the MFU masterplan of 1967 indeed became obsolete the moment it was published, there were other reasons that may explain its failure. Firstly, the implementation of this masterplan seemed largely unaffordable for a developing country. Secondly, there simply did not exist any legal or institutional framework to implement the masterplan, while the Congolese authorities had promised to work out such an institutional foundation for urban planning.

37 Concerning the inconsistent and *laissez-faire* politics of the Belgian administration in Congo, see, among others: Brausch (1961); Stengers (1989); Ndaywel è Nziem (1998); Jewsiewicki (1992): "*La ligne politique officielle fut appliquée localement à des degrés très divers, en fonction des rapports de forces à l'intérieur du bloc colonial et en fonction des sociétés envers lesquelles elle fut appliquée.*"

38 After independence, several public services and the *Office de Cités Africaines* (OCA) remained administered by Belgians.

39 The *Mission Française d'Urbanisme* (MFU) started its activities in Kinshasa under the direction of architect and urban planner Barrière-Constantin in 1965. Initially, the technical assistants of the MFU would work under the supervision of the Public Works Service of the Town hall of Kinshasa and the Department of Public Works. This, however, quickly turned out not to work and a direct connection between the MFU and the services of the Congolese president Mobutu was established. See: Gerard (1975).

40 Matonge is situated in the municipality of Kalamu and can be considered as the popular heart of Kinshasa from the post-war years onward.

41 This second neutral zone separated the native quarter Kasa Vubu from the native quarters Kinshasa, Lingwala and Bumbu for controlling purposes of the Belgian coloniser.

42 In 2009, Kinshasa is still the second most populated agglomeration of sub-Saharan Africa with 9,518,988 inhabitants, after Lagos (11,400,000 inhabitants) and followed by Johannesburg (7,350,000 inhabitants).

43 This masterplan was prepared by the French engineer-architect Auguste Arsac. See: Barrière-Constantin (1970).

44 For instance, to house the fast growing population of Abidjan, the urban planners aimed to establish a number of 'new towns' in the periphery of the existing city, often combined with industrial zones. By introducing the American inspired New Town-planning principles in Abidjan, the urban planners situated themselves in the European urban planning traditions, where the New Town-doctrines already became influential in the late 1930's, first in Great Britain (London) and later in France (Paris).

45 The proposal for a new city east of the existing one reminds clearly of the post-war colonial segregationist town planning, in particular proposed by the Belgian architect Maurice Heymans.

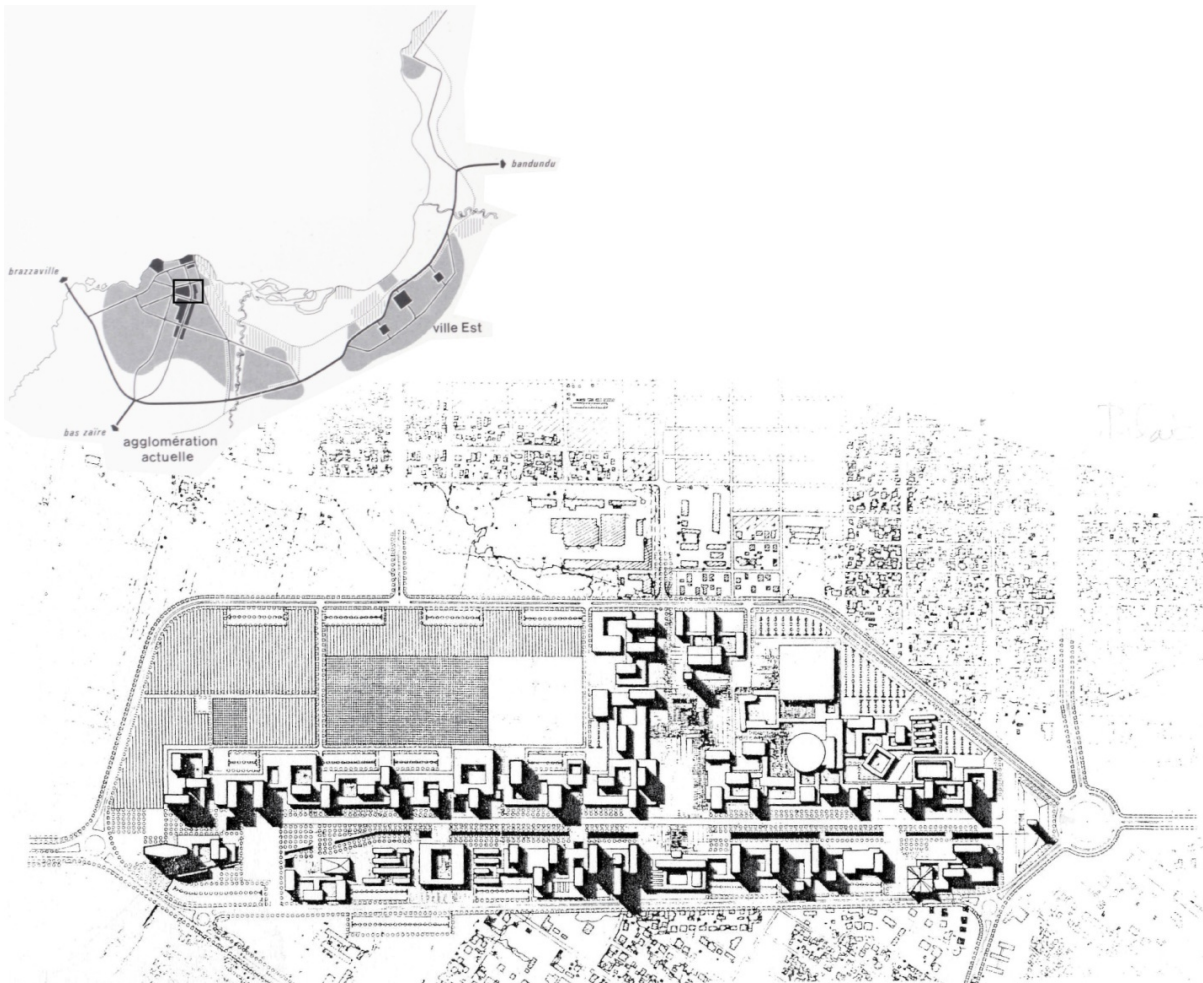


FIGURE 11: MFU's plan for a new city centre.

In the years after the failure of the first masterplan, a new team of French geographers, sociologists and anthropologists developed the 'Atlas of Kinshasa', published as a lavishly edited book in 1975.⁴⁶ Although it drew on a socio-spatial analysis of exceptional depth and involvement, the second masterplan presented in the atlas differs only slightly from the first. Putting large emphasis on infrastructure, proposing among others a huge ring road around the city and a bridge across the Congo River to Brazzaville, the masterplan failed to respond to the needs of the daily consumer of the city, the average Kinois.

Implementation of post-colonial planning & processes of agency

After more than ten years of MFU activities in Kinshasa, by the year 1975, the Atlas of Kinshasa was a profound diagnosis of the city produced by the MFU, but no urban planning was implemented at all. In the same period of the MFU-presence in Kinshasa, the city grew from 700,000 people in 1965 to 2,500,000 in 1977. This urbanization process took place in the total absence of urban planning and through massive appropriation of space by the inhabitants of Kinshasa.⁴⁷ Moreover, the city planning apparatus and the masterplans served only as façade, the government (and president Mobutu in particular) only showing interest in urban interventions that served their own, personal agenda.

46 The 'Atlas of Kinshasa' contains 44 panels which were complemented, under the direction of Marc Pain, by 22 more panels in 1978. See Flouriot, de Maximy, Pain, Kankonde & Van Caillie (1978).

47 President Mobutu provoked, somehow involuntary, the Kinois to this massive appropriation after inciting the Congolese population and the government to such *laissez faire* by saying: "*Chaque famille doit pouvoir trouver à se loger convenablement. La construction de nouveaux logements, pour héberger les jeunes ménages est une condition absolue de la solidité des liens familiaux aussi bien que de la valeur de l'éducation des enfants.*" Lieutenant Général J. D. Mobutu, Président de la République, Manifeste de la Nsele, 20 Mai 1967.

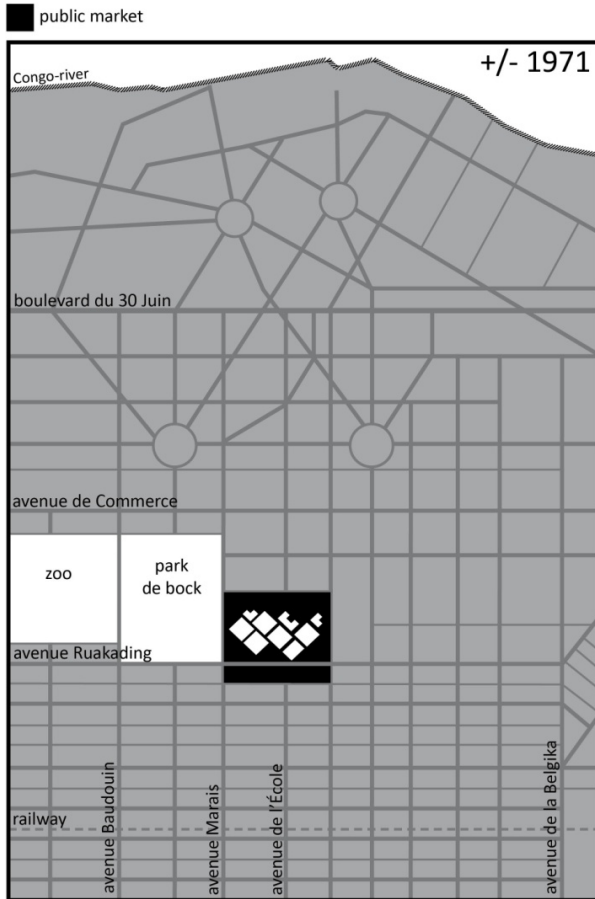


FIGURE 12: Kinshasa around 1971.

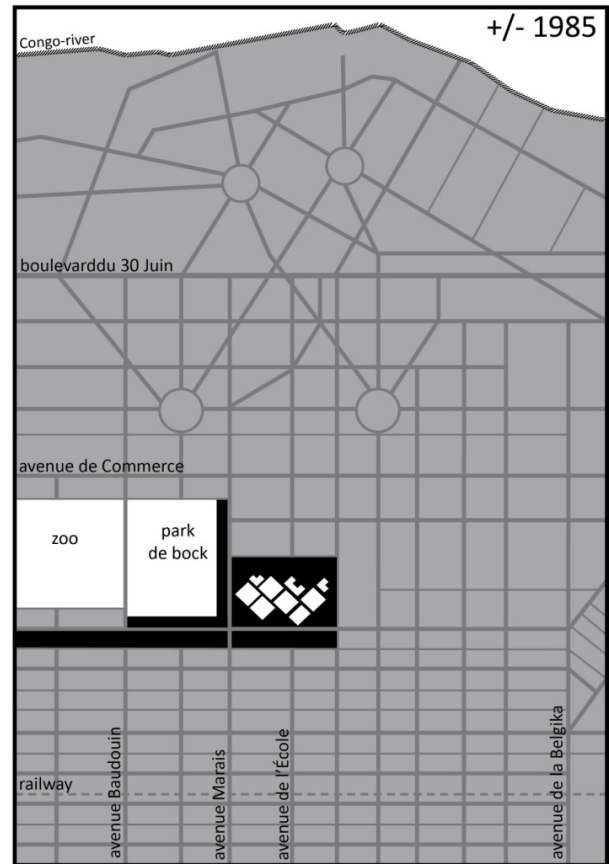


FIGURE 13: Kinshasa around 1985.



FIGURE 10: Kinshasa's public market around 1985.

One of the buildings that illustrates this populist strategy of president Mobutu well is the new, modernist looking market building which was erected between 1969 and 1971 on the site of the original marketplace in the former neutral zone⁴⁸ (Figures 12 and 14). By erecting this new market building, president Mobutu wanted to enhance his popularity and represent his power in built form. Although this project was in contradiction to the MFU-masterplan, which wanted to decrease the dominant character of the existing market building in favour of the proposed city centre, the MFU contributed to the cost.⁴⁹ The market building, designed as a grouping of several concrete shell-shaped pavilions and constructed by two Belgian contractors, was initially intended to accommodate 3 500 traders.⁵⁰

During the 1970's, due to the unforeseen and serious consequences of 'zaïrianisation'⁵¹ and the international oil crisis, the number of people employed in the informal economy, especially in trading, increased drastically. Only three years after the new market building had been completed, the number of traders was already double the number of available places.⁵² Although most Greek, Portuguese and Italian tradesmen left the country after 'zaïrianisation' of the 1970's ruined their businesses, they were quickly replaced by merchants from the Middle East and Asia who started to occupy the marketplace and especially the shops in its immediate surroundings.⁵³ The pressure of the real estate business – often in the hands of people from the Middle East – on the marketplace and the adjacent parks, only increased. During the 1980's large parts of the marketplace and the *Parc de Bock* were transformed into retail functions, often with the silent approval of government employees⁵⁴ (Figures 13 and 14). In 1985 the marketplace accommodated more than 10,000 merchants, of whom the majority were women, a new phenomenon for Kinshasa at that time.⁵⁵

During the construction of the new-market building, a temporary marketplace was established in the zone where the MFU projected its *Futur Centre Ville*. Due to its proximity to several densely populated quarters, this temporary market became very popular and after the re-opening of the central marketplace, around 5 000 tradesmen remained on the spot. The result was that, by the time the MFU projected to build the new city centre in the neutral zone in the beginning of the 1970's, the site had been fully appropriated by squatters who were subsequently removed in a quite aggressive way to prepare the site for construction.⁵⁶ Here the MFU built some prestigious and over-dimensioned building complexes out of the masterplans for the new city centre, but left the greater part of the area untouched.⁵⁷ These massive construction projects provided a huge benefit to the French private sector and a substantial return on the development aid to France, but were of no value for the Congolese people, as most of them were never brought into use or only served the Congolese elite.⁵⁸ To construct these high-priced buildings, the French received great support from the Congolese authorities, in particular from president Mobutu and his entourage. Although these costly projects had severe consequences for the Congolese national debt, the president hoped to erase the traces of colonialism and represent his sovereignty in the built space by erecting these complexes. In this way a solid alliance was concluded between the MFU and the Congolese president and as a result both partners would support each other's interests and at the same time

48 To enable the construction of the market building, the market was temporarily replaced to the zone where the MFU planned the new city centre and where Chinese investors built the Palais du Peuple and the Stade des Martyrs de la Pentecôte.

49 See the chart showing the achievements of the MFU and the Public Works Department of the City Council of Kinshasa in: de Maximy (1984:192).

50 Data provided by the *Superviseur principal en charge de l'assainissement*, assistant of the *Administrateur du Marché Central*, Chantal Mboyo, Kinshasa, June, 2008.

51 Nationalization of the Congolese land and natural resources in 1973.

52 Pain (1983:204) and figure 6 in Kanene (1990:33).

53 This information is based on a detailed investigation at the Land Registry in Kinshasa, June 2008. See also Kanene (1990).

54 Pain (1983:204)

55 Bouchard (2002:193-210); also see Shidi Ihemba (2005).

56 In particular the removal of the market of Kasa Vubu, that temporarily replaced the central market during its renovation, occurred to have been quite aggressive, several people putting themselves on fire to resist the expropriation. Based on interviews by the author, June 2008. See also: de Maximy (1984:201).

57 On the same site, president Mobutu erected with the support of the Chinese government the Palais du Peuple in 1979 and Le Stade des Martyrs de la Pentecôte in 1990.

58 Because of this, these over-dimensioned buildings are often referred to as *éléphants blancs* by the Congolese people.

prevent the MFU from being a transparent instrument for urban planning and a key to local planning expertise.⁵⁹

Epilogue

Due to the deficient implementation of the proposed *Futur Centre Ville*, and in contradiction to the objectives of the MFU, the central market of Kinshasa never lost its dominant role as main distribution centre of goods in the city, and even in the country. The position of the marketplace became more and more eccentric, as the city remained expanding into the periphery, and the flow of persons and goods completely overcrowded the few available roads to the market causing long traffic jams towards the city centre. Since the looting in the beginning of the 1990's and the total collapse of public services and administration that followed, the congestion of the marketplace and the surrounding commercial district of people and goods resulted in a serious degradation of the market infrastructure. Today the roofs of the market building are being appropriated by gangs of street children, who live by doing small jobs for market traders and remnants of food they find in the market.⁶⁰ Only recently, the pressure on the city centre was further augmented through the construction of stores at the marketplace by currently omnipresent Lebanese real estate agents.⁶¹ The pollution of the marketplace and the absence of garbage services, sewer and drainage systems, has resulted in inhabitants nicknaming the city as *Kin-la-poubelle*, referring to the modern and sanitary *Kin-la-belle* that is missed and detested at the same time.⁶²

GENERAL CONCLUSION

Kinshasa's marketplace can be considered as one of the most significant places of the city, a micro-cosmos, which in a very condensed way, represents many aspects occurring in the city in general. As the public marketplace has always been at the centre of contemporary debates on public space, our mapping of the many trajectories through time and place of this market revealed much about the origins and forces that shaped the city. In this paper, particular attention has been given to the discrepancies between the planning models, often formulated abroad, and the urban landscape that was actually realized. It was shown that the tension between planning practice and implementation was often the result of different point of views on the institutional level. In addition to this, we argued that the gap between plan and implementation was to some extent linked to the agency of local actors. While the participation of local actors in the urban planning process was indeed rare throughout the century, local actors have to a certain degree been able to direct its implementation and appropriate urban places. Up to now, this role of local actors in the production of space of Kinshasa has often been neglected. A possible reason for this could be the many difficulties researchers have to face while trying to unveil the agency of actors, as these processes are very difficult to retrace directly from primary sources such as archives and manuscripts. Because of the rich variety of actors accumulating at the market and the legibility of place in terms of segregation and encounter, the micro-study of the marketplace through time and place can be considered as a possible and accurate tool to reconstruct these intricate processes of appropriation and resistance in Kinshasa's urban space.

59 In 1977 the French development program FAC, and with it the MFU, withdrew from Kinshasa and the French flow of money to Kinshasa stopped. France understood that its planning mission in Kinshasa had come to a standstill and feared a loss of face. Because of the withdrawal of the French development program FAC, the MFU, that already in 1973 changed name into *Bureau d'Études d'Aménagements et d'Urbanisme* (BEAU), was put under the direction of the Congolese Department of Public Works. As a result of this decision the BEAU lost its operational department and was reduced to an office for urban planning studies. In 1978, for the first time, a Congolese, the socio-economist Kankonde Mbuyi, who was trained by the MFU in France and already worked at the MFU for several years, was appointed and still is head of the BEAU. In the following years the masterplan of the MFU/BEAU of 1975 was further elaborated without real concerns for possible implementations. As such, the masterplan of 1975 and the BEAU itself, like many of the Congolese institutions, only served as a façade. The remarkable continuity of the 1975 proposals in current debates on Kinshasa's future is very symptomatic of the working of Kinshasa's urban planning apparatus today. See Beeckmans (2010).

60 This information is based on several interviews with street children at the Marché Central with the support of the anthropologist Kristien Geenen (KUL), Kinshasa, 2008. For more detailed information, see: De Boeck & Plissart (2004).

61 No records of these new buildings on the market site were found in the Land Registry and it was said that the Lebanese investors (Congo Futur) obtained the permission to erect these shops directly from the president.

62 Bateko (2008): "*La capitale de la RDC, autrefois citée parmi les villes africaines les plus attrayantes du monde, est devenue 'Kinshasa la poubelle'. La 'sauté' y est présent partout, tant et si bien que les places publiques, les chaussées et les caniveaux ont été transformés en dépotoirs des immondices.*"

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Figures 1, 2, 5, 6, 8, 12 and 13: diagrams drawn by Luce Beeckmans.

Figure 3: Postcard, Kinshasa, sent in 1931.

Figure 4: Schoentjes (1933)

Figure 7: "Jaarverslag over het Beheer van de Kolonie Belgisch Congo / Rapport Annuel sur l'Administration de la Colonie du Congo belge", Brussel, 1928.

Figure 9: "Tienjarenplan voor de sociale en economische ontwikkeling van Belgisch Kongo / Plan décennal pour le développement économique et social du Congo belge", Brussel: Les Editions De Visscher, 1949.

Figure 10: Whymys (*sine anno*)

Figure 11: Barrière-Constantin (1970) MFU (BEAU-Archive, Kinshasa)

Figure 14: Rahmani (2008)

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