

# MODERNISM VS CAPITALISM IN THE CITY OF RED SAND AND BLACK GOLD CONTEMPORARY PARADOXES IN LUANDA, ANGOLA



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PANORAMA OF LUANDA'S BAY, showing current landfill works. The \$2 billion make-up project in the city's 'front window' will create an offset of boulevards and spaces for public use



AERIAL PHOTO OF LUANDA, Google Maps 2009. It is visible how the 'city of asphalt' is sharply contrasting with the 'city of red sand'



LUANDA'S BAY, 1961



LUANDA'S BAY 2011, photo by RC



Baixa Operária THE CITY OF ASPHALT vs THE CITY OF RED SAND



KINAXIXE MARKET, 1990-92



KINAXIXE SHOPPING CENTRE 2012, photo by RC

Angola suffered from armed conflicts for over four decades: first, the colonial war opposing the Portuguese to pro-independence movements (1961-1974), and later the civil war between those ideologically opposed movements (1975-2002). During this period, the territory had been 'forcibly urbanised'. In fact, an estimated sixty per cent of the population is now living in the cities, three-quarters of them in the *arruzaqueos* (which means red sand). These informal settlements of social and economic misery were built by literally displaced people who during the war years had been attracted by the capital, mainly because it promised stability and economic security after the colonial war began in 1961. They initially occupied areas surrounding the city centre, but as the population war continuously growing, the *arruzaqueos* were spreading to more peripheral areas.

Mozambique, the so-called 'city of asphalt' served as a stage performing some of the most innovative Portuguese architecture of the 20th century. During the late colonial period, some architects and urban planners adverse to the Regime decided (or were pushed) to live away from homeland in search of more freedom to realise their experiments. Co-habitational blocks started emerging in the city using the same elements tested in avant-garde European countries, such as *Viena da Costa's* *Kinaxixe Market*, which followed the five points for a new architecture. It is one of the most relevant testimonies of modernism's achievements in Africa. Of course, as recently it has been demolished and it will be replaced by a commercial and residential development.

In 1974 a serious political change occurred: Portuguese *Estado Novo* was overthrown and the process of independence started. Decolonization began, 'a program of complete disorder' (Ferreira). From one day to the other, literally, the settlers left Luanda and the 'city of asphalt' was 'squatted' by the urban dwellers. Deep African lifestyles collided with modernist architecture: large animals could be seen on the balconies of multi-storey buildings, bonfires inside apartments, lifts transformed into dumps. In the meantime, the *arruzaqueos* kept growing and surrounding the modern city, while the civil war (1975-2002) kept bringing more and more people to the capital.

Since 2002, the oil-fueled boom that followed the war brought billions of foreign investments. The Government embraced pro-business policies and offered major land concessions to commercial developers, mostly to international companies willing to create a new Luanda for the 21st century. An increasing demand for residential and business sites in the city centre is forcing the urban poor to sell their plots and migrate to the outskirts where land is cheaper. But there is still a huge gap between supply and demand of convenient housing and office space for accommodating these kinds of foreign workers: among to Luanda, and that is the main reason for current dramatic rise of real estate making it one of the most expensive cities in the world.

The current policies of literally bulldozing the slum areas and re-locating the urban poor in low-cost housing blocks is a superficial decision, as it doesn't help the people who can't afford to pay for basic facilities such as electricity and running water. In the process, the extensive humanitarian work taking place in Angola could possibly conceal a complicity of architects in moderating a social injustice for which the government avoid taking responsibility.



PERSPECTIVE OF LUANDA CITY, in 2008, showing the demolition of Kinaxixe Market designed by Vasco Vieira da Costa. It was considered to be one of the most relevant testimonies of modernism's achievements in Africa. It will be replaced by a commercial and residential development.

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