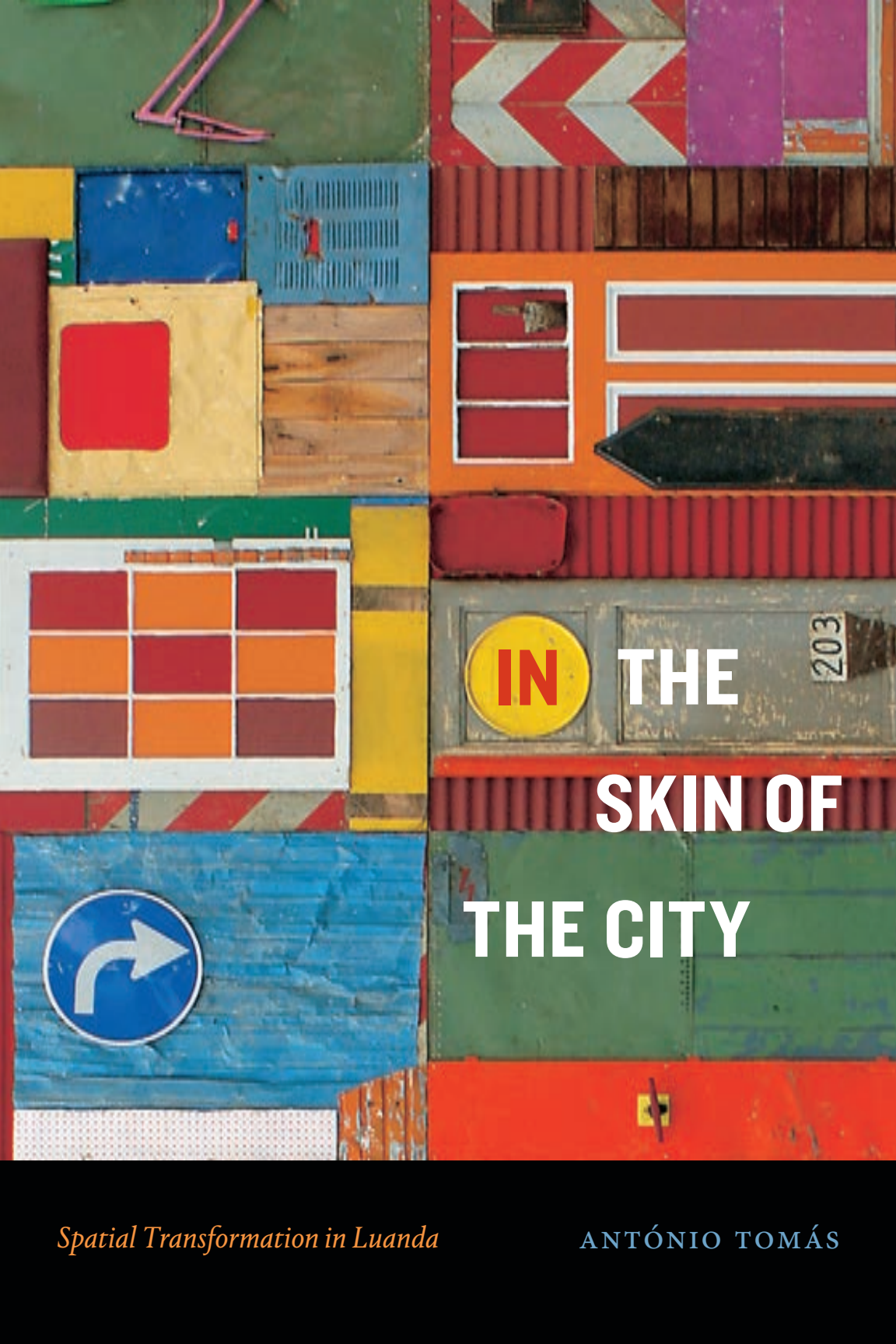




IN THE SKIN OF THE CITY

Spatial Transformation in Luanda

ANTÓNIO TOMÁS

In the Skin of the City

BUY

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A THEORY IN FORMS BOOK

Series Editors: Nancy Rose Hunt and Achille Mbembe

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In the Skin of the City

*Spatial Transformation
in Luanda*

ANTÓNIO TOMÁS

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DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Durham and London 2022

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Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞

Project editor: Lisa Lawley

Designed by Courtney Leigh Richardson

Typeset in Knockout and Portrait by Westchester Publishing Services

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Tomás, António, [date] author.

Title: In the skin of the city : spatial transformation in Luanda /
António Tomás.

Other titles: Theory in forms.

Description: Durham : Duke University Press, 2022. | Series: Theory in
forms | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2021043750 (print)

LCCN 2021043751 (ebook)

ISBN 9781478015529 (hardcover)

ISBN 9781478018155 (paperback)

ISBN 9781478022763 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Urbanization—Angola—Luanda (Luanda) |
Urbanization—Angola—Luanda (Luanda)—History. | Urban renewal—
Angola—Luanda (Luanda) | Ethnology—Angola—Luanda (Luanda) |
Sociology, Urban—Angola—Luanda (Luanda) | Luanda (Luanda,
Angola)—History. | BISAC: SOCIAL SCIENCE / Sociology / Urban |
HISTORY / Africa / South / General

Classification: LCC HT384.A52 L836 2022 (print) | LCC HT384.A52
(ebook) | DDC 307.7609673/2—dc23/eng/20211130

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2021043750>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2021043751>

Cover art: Detail of *Township Wall/Margem da Zona Limite* (On the
margins of the borderland), 2004. © António Ole. Courtesy of the
artist, André Cunha, and Nadine Siegert.

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To my family

SYLVIA, LUCAS, *and* OSCAR

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CONTENTS

Maps and Figures • ix

Abbreviations • xi

Acknowledgments • xiii

Introduction: The Frontier Within • 1

Part I. Formation

1. Un-building History to Build the Present • 29
2. Ordering Urban Expansion • 59

Part II. Stasis

3. A Place to Dwell in Times of Change • 91
4. A City Decentered • 119

Part III. Fragmentation

5. Reversing (Urban) Composition • 147
6. The Urban Yet to Come • 175

Coda: Is Luanda Not Paris? • 204

Glossary • 215

Notes • 219

Bibliography • 241

Index • 261

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MAPS AND FIGURES

Maps

- INTRO.1 • Angola • xvi
- 1.1 • Luanda circa 1647 • 28
- 1.2 • Luanda circa 1862 • 40
- 2.1 • Luanda circa 1928 • 58
- 3.1 • Luanda in 1960 • 90
- 4.1 • Luanda in 1970 • 118
- 5.1 • Luanda in 1992 • 146
- 6.1 • Luanda in 2015 • 176
- 6.2 • Luanda and Reservas, 1970 • 185

Figures

- INTRO.1 • António Ole's *Edge of the Border Zone* installation • 2
- 1.1 • Artist intervention at Elinga Teatro • 30
- 1.2 • Palácio Dona Ana Joaquina before renovation • 49
- 1.3 • Marginal de Luanda, viewed from Cidade Alta • 52
- 2.1 • Settlers on board the ship *João Belo* departing Portugal for Angola • 66
- 2.2 • Portuguese troops marching along the Marginal de Luanda • 77
- 3.1 • A *musseque* in Luanda • 93
- 3.2 • Agostinho Neto in Luanda circa 1974 • 97
- 4.1 • Kinaxixe Square after the destruction of Kinaxixe Marketplace • 129
- 4.2 • Armed guard in Luanda • 141

- 5.1 • Apartment resident fetching water in Luanda • 149
- 5.2 • Memorial Dr. António Agostinho Neto, under construction, as viewed from Bairro da Samba • 161
- 5.3 • Banco Nacional de Angola and the Assembleia Nacional, viewed from the Marginal de Luanda • 167
- 6.1 • Aerial view of Luanda • 179
- 6.2 • Chinese worker during the construction of Kilamba • 180
- 6.3 • Street in Kilamba • 197

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x • MAPS AND FIGURES

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ABBREVIATIONS

BNA	Banco Nacional de Angola (National Bank of Angola)
CDA	Companhia de Diamantes de Angola (Angola Diamond Company)
CEICA	Centro de Estudos e Investigação Científica de Arquitectura (Center for the Study and Scientific Research of Architecture)
CFB	Caminho de Ferro de Benguela (Benguela Railway)
CFL	Caminho de Ferro de Luanda (Luanda Railway)
CIF	China International Fund
CUDL	Comissão de Desenvolvimento Urbano de Luanda (Luanda Urban Development Commission)
DNIC	Direcção Nacional de Investigação Criminal (National Directorate for Criminal Investigation)
EDURB	Companhia de Desenvolvimento Urbano (Company for Urban Development)
FNLA	Frente Nacional para a Libertação de Angola (National Front for the Liberation of Angola)
GATEC	Grupo Técnico
GOE	Gabinete de Obras Especiais (Office of Special Works)
GPL	Governo Provincial de Luanda (Provincial Government of Luanda)

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GRN	Gabinete de Reconstrução Nacional (Office of National Reconstruction)
GUC	Gabinete de Urbanização Colonial (Office of Colonial Urbanization)
IUUP	Institut d'Urbanisme de l'Université de Paris (Urbanism Institute of Paris University)
MPLA	Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola)
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
OSL	Odebrecht Serviços no Exterior (Odebrecht Services Abroad)
PDGML	Plano Director Geral Metropolitano de Luanda (Metropolitan Plan for Luanda)
SONIP	Sonangol Imobiliária e Propriedades (Sonangol Estate Company)
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNITA	União Nacional para a Libertação Total de Angola (National Union for the Total Liberation of Angola)

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book would probably not have been written without the encouragement of Gordon Pirie, who invited me to join the African Centre for Cities as the Ray Pahl Fellow. As such, I am deeply indebted to the generosity of the Ray Pahl Fellowship, which provided me with the luxury to spend an entire year working on this book project, and during which I conducted research in Luanda, wrote two draft chapters, and designed the book's general concept. I am grateful for the opportunity I was given at Columbia University to be instructed, to be mentored, and to work with some of the brightest minds in anthropology and African studies, such as Rosalind Morris, Brian Larkin, Mahmood Mamdani, Beth Povinelli, Michael Taussig, David Scott, John Pemberton, and Partha Chatterjee. Informal conversations with colleagues in coffee shops, at parties, or in seminars on anthropology and the craft of ethnography have also been of consequence for me in finding my own voice. I would like to acknowledge these interlocutors with whom I have had formative exchanges: Jun Mizukawa, Christina Carter, Michael Fisch, Antina Von Schnitzler, Patience Kabemba, Juan Obarrio, Natasha Nsabimana, and Fatima Majaddedi.

Research for this book was completed through various short trips to Luanda, where I have been privileged to count on the help and support of my extended family and many friends, such as Makassamba, Cristina Pinto, Ângela Mingas, Agbessi Cora Neto, Ilídio Daio, and Miguel Dias. I have also benefited from the knowledge of colleagues and friends who have done substantial research in Luanda and elsewhere in Angola—namely, Marissa Moorman, Claudia Gastrow, Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, Jon Schubert, Ricardo Cardoso, Chloé Buire, and Aaron di Grassi.

Chapters of this book and parts were presented in different formats at several events at the University of Cape Town; Columbia University; the University of Michigan; the University of Notre Dame; Emory University; the University of California, Berkeley; Sciences Po; the École des Hautes Études en

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Sciences Sociales; the Instituto Universitário de Lisboa; Basel University; the Universidade Nova de Lisboa; the Universidade de Coimbra; and the Center for African Studies at Harvard University. I thank those who attended, asked questions, and made comments. I am particularly grateful to the following colleagues and friends for the invitation to speak at their institutions and, in some cases, for visa arrangements and accommodation: Filip de Boeck, Mariana Cândido, Anne Pitcher, Teresa Caldeira, Ana Catarina Teixeira, Pedro Oliveira, Maria Paula Meneses, Miguel Vale de Almeida, Kenny Cupers, Emmanuelle Kadya Tall, Rémy Bazenguissa-Ganga, Ilana Van Wyk, Étienne Smith and Jean Comaroff.

During the writing of the various versions of this book, I have benefited from the comments and criticism from several colleagues such as Steven Robins, Fazil Moradi, Aaron di Grassi, Deborah Thomas, and Kristin Peterson. Substantial editorial work was done by Caroline Jeannerat and Karen Press. Comments provided by the anonymous reviewers have been of great importance, and errors are entirely my responsibility. At Duke University Press, I would like to thank Elizabeth Ault, who has been the kind of editor authors dream about, with constant engagement and support throughout the various stages the manuscript has been through. Special thanks are also due to Benjamin Kossak; the editors of *Theory in Form*, Nancy Hunt and Achille Mbembe; the book's designer, Courtney Leigh Richardson; and the project editor, Lisa Lawley, who so patiently guided me through the sometimes exasperating phase of book making.

The last stage for the completion of this book was accomplished through two fellowships in South Africa—namely, at the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study (STIAS) and the Johannesburg Institute for Advanced Study. At both institutions, I would particularly like to acknowledge Edward Kirumira, Christoff Pauw, and Nel-Mari Looock at the former, and Tshilidzi Marwala, Bongani Ngqulunga, and Sivuyile Momoza at the latter. At STIAS, I not only presented the book's coda, where listener comments helped me to come to terms with my theoretical contribution, but also had the chance to spend time and engage in various informal conversations with generous and committed academics such as Anne Pitcher and Martin Murray.

This book was generally written during the least stable period of my life, and a substantial part of it was produced while working multiple jobs. For this, I cannot help but state my eternal gratitude to the various colleagues and friends who facilitated my recruitment to the various positions I have held since the beginning of this project, at institutions such as Stellenbosch University, the University of Cape Town, and the University of Johannesburg.

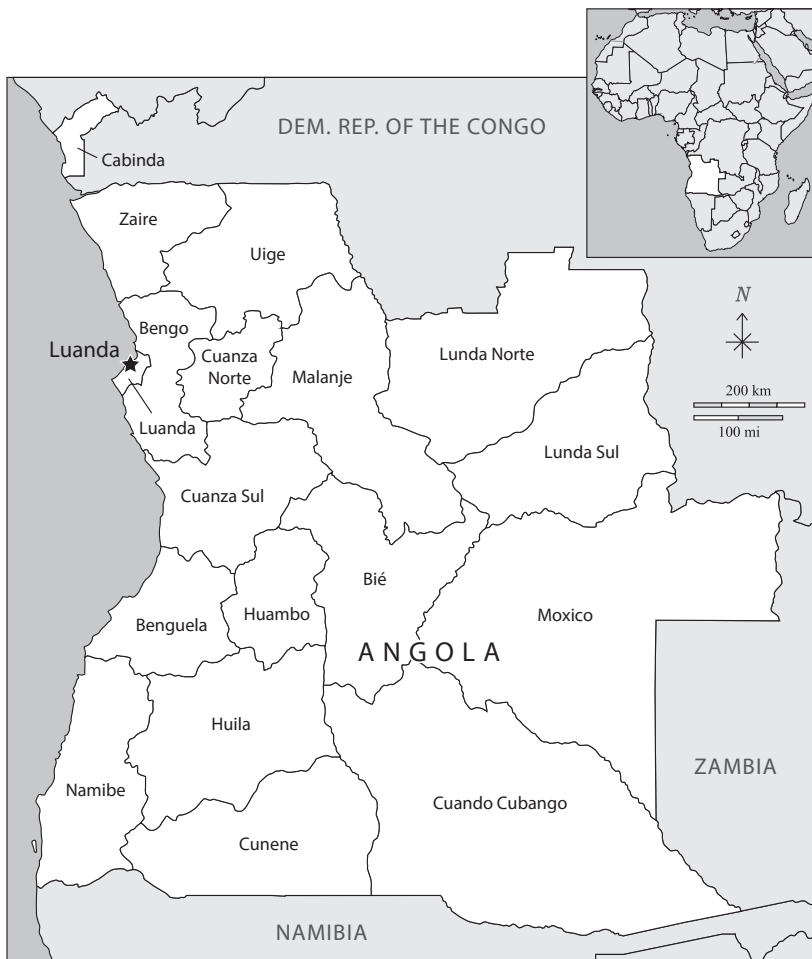
Thanks are due to Bernard Dubbeld, Thomas Cousins, Edgar Pieterse, Tom Asher, Clara Carvalho, and Lesley Lokko. I would also like to thank my colleagues and students in the African Centre for Cities, University of Cape Town, and the Graduate School of Architecture, University of Johannesburg, particularly Finzi Saidi and Mark Raymond.

Special thanks are due to assistants in various institutions, from countries including Angola, South Africa, and Portugal, as well as, particularly, Adriano Mixinge, who facilitated my access to the documents on the construction of the Memorial Dr. António Agostinho Neto. Being based at African institutions means that bibliographic resources are not always easily accessible. Therefore, I am deeply indebted to the commitment of several librarians at Stellenbosch University, the University of Cape Town, and the University of Johannesburg. At the latter, my special thanks go to Roedina Desai. I would also like to thank those who have helped me locate materials on Luanda, such as old documents and maps, as well as those who allowed me to reproduce, or design, the graphic materials in this book—namely, Gerald Titus, Ngoi Salucombo, Kiluanji Kia Henda, Patricia Hayes, Jessica Liebenberg, Joseph Liebenberg, Indira Mateta, Rui Pinto Afonso, Elsa Peralta, António Ole, Nadine Siegert, André Cunha, Rui Sérgio Afonso, the Ferreira de Almeida Arquitectos, the Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, and the Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino.

While I was in Johannesburg, where I do not have any close relatives, my family has been a deep source of joy and encouragement. My wife, Sylvia Croese, has not only taken on more responsibilities during the times I needed to keep up with deadlines, but she has also read, commented, and edited substantial parts of this book, in its various versions, and her knowledge of the topics addressed in it have made my life easier. I dedicate this book to her and to our children, Lucas and Oscar, who have learned since a very tender age that Papa is writing a book on Luanda, the place where he was born.

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Map Intro.1. Angola.

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Introduction: *The Frontier Within*

Hoje muitos edifícios foram construídos. As casas de pau-a-pique e zinco foram substituídas por prédios de ferro e cimento, a areia vermelha coberta pelo asfalto negro e a rua deixou de ser a Rua do Lima. Deram-lhe outro nome.

Today many buildings have been built. Shacks have been replaced by iron and cement buildings, the red sand has been covered by black asphalt, and the street is no longer Lima Street. They have given it another name.—Luandino Vieira, *Cidade e a infância*, 1960

...

The substance of this book can easily be grasped through an illustration. Imagine a circle and its different elements, such as the interior and the line that forms the edge. Most writing on cities, from a whole range of disciplines, concerns mostly what is inside the circle.¹ In this book, my interest lies elsewhere, for what constitutes the thrust of this book is less any particular aspect of the city of Luanda than how certain notions of physical and social boundaries, or the lines that denote limits and edges in the city, came into being. It is this set of elements, which figuratively compose the edges of an imaginary circle, that I will be referring to as the skin of the city. I will do so, primarily, by hailing Luanda as a singular city and by bringing back singularity as a fundamental precept to understanding the formation of the modern urban condition.

The concept of skin has a deep currency in architecture, being defined in many ways, particularly as the exterior of a building or, more specifically, its façade. But the way I am using the concept in this book derives from the work of António Ole, himself a student of architecture in Luanda in the late 1960s and early 1970s.² It was during these years that he started taking a series of photographs documenting houses, particularly the walls and façades of shacks in the burgeoning urban shantytowns of colonial Luanda, the so-called *musseques*.³

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Figure Intro.1. António Ole's 1995 installation *Margem de Zona Limite/Edge of the Border Zone* (wood, metal, and glass) from the First Johannesburg Biennale in South Africa.
Source: António Ole.

Throughout his long career he used these photographs for different artistic projects, such as the exhibition I saw in Luanda, in 2009, at the Centro Cultural Português, called *In the Skin of the City*.⁴

This exhibition made a huge impression on me, because of Ole's attempt to perform several different things through it. First of all, it is a treatise on form. Although the walls and the façades of the city have been a central topic in his work, *In the Skin of the City* was not simply about this content; it was also, for the most part, a reflection on framing—on how to frame particular gestures of the imagination. Ole has worked on this project for many years, navigating a variety of means of representation. At the core of the project seems to be the assumption that the content of a work of art can be expressed in different artistic media and can inhabit, or be inhabited by, different forms. For instance, a wall in Luanda can be captured in pencil or watercolor, on handmade paper or in acrylic on canvas. The representational trajectory of the exhibition ranged from realistic photographs of walls (in color or in black-and-white) to abstract images (such as in paintings), to elaborate reproductions of whole façades that mimicked the manner in which houses are built on the periphery of the city. Some of the installations were painted in bright colors, reminiscent of pop art, and as such more a revelation of the author's artistic inclinations than an echoing of popular taste, as I will discuss below. As one analyst of Ole's work succinctly put it, these “fragmentos da paisagem urbana de Luanda, designadamente dos bairros pobres (musseques) não poderá (sic) ser encarados apenas na sua dimensão puramente visual mas integram-se numa reflexão mais ampla em

torno da história do país e da sociedade que inevitavelmente foram moldando o espaço da cidade, deixando impressos na sua epiderme os vestígios da passagem do tempo e da ação humana” (fragments of the urban passage of Luanda, namely the poor neighborhoods [*musseques*], should not be seen in their purely visual dimension, they are part of a larger reflection on the history of the country and the society that inevitably molded the space of the city, leaving on its skin the marks of the passage of time and human actions).⁵

More important, the body of Ole’s work I am concerned with is a profound reflection on urban Luanda, particularly one of its main components, the skin, or the set of interior and exterior borders that constitute it. Representing a culmination of more than three decades of work, *In the Skin of the City* had, as its initial impetus, Ole’s photographs of houses and shacks in the 1960s and early 1970s, when the city was growing at a rapid pace on account of two interrelated migratory processes: the movement of Portuguese settlers to Luanda from the mother country and the movement of Angolans from the countryside to the capital city in search of better living conditions. These migratory trends were taking place against the backdrop of the anticolonial war that had started in Luanda in February 1961, when a group of nationalists attacked the prisons that held their *campagnons d’armes*.⁶ Rather than constructively engaging with the nationalist appeal to negotiate the terms of independence, as other colonial powers were doing, the Portuguese chose instead to deepen colonization through the facilitation of massive migration to Angola. In order to accommodate newcomers to the city, housing had to be built on an unprecedented and massive scale, which was done according to the production techniques championed by the architect Le Corbusier.⁷ Behind this urban revolution taking place in Luanda in those years were a handful of colonial architects, trained in architectural schools in Lisbon and Porto, who were proposing sometimes expedient, sometimes more creative and artistic ways to accommodate the waves of migrants and the services and amenities they required. However, an especially relevant feature of this process was that urbanization was taking place through the formal expansion of the urban grid and through the juxtaposition of the new architecture on the setting of previous eras. Very little planning was being done or implemented, nor was housing being built, for the Africans coming to Luanda from the rural areas; they were left to their own creative strategies, to collect materials (pieces of wood, scrap, old tires for the roof, etc.) and resources to build their houses, as Ole documents so well. As a result, the city that was coming into being during these years and up to independence, in 1975, was marked by a stark and sometimes visible line between the planned and the unplanned—between the consolidated core and

the *musseques*, the formal and the informal. It is the setup of these borders that divided bodies in the city during colonialism, and how they were overcome or supplemented by the postcolonial state, that I analyze in different registers throughout this book.

This sometimes extremely physical separation between, on the one hand, the built-up and well-serviced historical city stretching toward the ocean and, on the other, the squalor and sprawling shacks of the *musseques* further inland is what at the time was called the *fronteira do asfalto* (the asphalt frontier).⁸ This invisible line was manifesting itself through, on the one side, the city per se, extensively reproduced in pictures, postcards, and other forms of colonial propaganda, with its high-rise buildings of glass and concrete, manicured parks, and green spaces, only available for the Portuguese settlers. On the other side were the *musseques*, formed by houses built on sand and inhabited by people coming from the countryside, whose living conditions and stratagems to cope with the urban did not concern the colonial government and the body of professional architects, planners, and urbanists in general. The internal migration of which they were part was for the colonial authority transitory and ephemeral, on the often-criticized assumption that Africans belonged to their homeland in the rural areas. In this vein, what Jørgen Eskimose Andersen, Paul Jenkins, and Morten Nielsen have written about Mozambique also applies to Angola: “Despite some attempt at population control, the Portuguese colonial state had a relatively laissez-faire attitude to urban in-migration of indigenous Mozambicans, who constituted a much-needed labor force, albeit without rights of urban citizenship.”⁹ As such, they were left on their own to build their houses outside the formal urban perimeter, until they were removed and the land their houses had occupied was used for the expansion of the formal urban grid.

Central here is the way in which the colonial state dealt with difference, particularly racial difference, and how this mindset was reflected in housing policies. For the colonial state, there were two major categories of people: on the one hand, the civilized, formed by the settler population and a few Africans, and, on the other, the large majority of Africans, who were thrown into the category of the uncivilized, or more specifically the Natives.¹⁰ These anthropological precepts were codified in law, in the early 1920s, in the infamous *Estatuto do Indígena* (Native Statute), which, at the more practical level, turned the Native population, those who were not deemed civilized, into the target for conscription as forced labor for public works. With the growth of the Black population in urban or peri-urban areas, the design of cities had to accommodate such distinctions. The expansion of the urban grid of Luanda from

the early 1940s onward was an expression of such a social arrangement, which was dubbed the *fronteira do asfalto*. The instantiations of colonial paranoia Ole reveals are also present in the work of many other artists whose crafts were conterminous with the unfolding of these processes. The Angolan writer Luandino Vieira is perhaps the one who most forcefully has attempted to make sense of these social and racial divisions and their impact on the fabric of the city. In his collection of short stories, *A cidade e a infância* (City and childhood), written in the late 1950s, he cogently describes the *fronteira do asfalto*:

Virou os olhos para o seu mundo. Do outro lado da rua asfaltada não havia passeio. Nem árvores de flores violeta. A terra era vermelha. Pit-eiras. Casas de pau-a-pique à sombra de mulembas. As ruas de areia eram sinuosas. Uma ténue nuvem de poeira que o vento levantava, cobria tudo. A casa dele ficava ao fundo. Via-se do sítio donde estava. Amarela. Duas portas, três janelas. Um cercado de aduelas e arcos de barril.

(He turned his eyes to his world. On the other side of the asphalt road there was no sidewalk. Let alone trees with violet flowers. The sand was red. Agaves. Reed houses in the shadow of *mulemba* [figus] trees. The sandy streets were sinuous. A thin cloud of sand raised by the wind covered everything. His own house was located toward the end. He could see it from the place where he was standing. Yellow. Two doors, three windows. A fence made of jambs and barrel arcs.)¹¹

In this passage it is clear what this frontier line represented for Vieira. On the one hand, the planned city, with its amenities and infrastructure. On the other, the slum, with its precarious architecture and all the social ills associated with it. This is not particularly different from other colonial situations.¹² However, what made the existence of such a frontier more pungent, as one can infer from the quotation, was that these different worlds were in many segments of the city not separated by railway lines, or green parks, as in many cities in apartheid South Africa, or by the many other devices (stone fortresses, security rings) that compound what Wendy Pullan has called “frontier urbanism.”¹³ In most cases, the role of separation was performed by a simple road, behind which, more often than not, there was not any deliberate planning intention. Therefore, the *fronteira do asfalto* was enacted through very particular repertoires for enforcing difference. On the one hand, circulation was allowed across the road, particularly during daytime. On the other, the *musseque*, which was on the other side of the road, was not considered a place as such but rather a temporary problem, something to be dealt with through public or private investments that would

eventually allow for the removal of its inhabitants and the expansion of the formal city. This book is, then, about the ways in which these lines of division in the city came about, contracted, and expanded through history. I will demonstrate this process by extrapolating the view of Ole and others on the formation and enactment of borders within the city, to discuss the ways in which the social—largely understood as Luandans, or Luanda’s residents—has been enclosed, cut off, encircled, or removed from the various urban units that I use to make sense of the skin effects, or agents of separation: the fort, the street, the apartment, the *bairro* (neighborhood), and, in the national reconstruction lexicon (after the period 2000–2010), *urbanização* (urbanization), *centralidade* (centrality), and the Reserva (land reserve). I will come back to these units later in this introduction.

As has become abundantly evident, I have drawn from Ole’s conceptual work several insights discussed above. However, I should point out that my use of the concept of skin is also strategic. Here, skin is not simply that which divides or protects and envelops something; I am also using it in the bodily sense of the word itself: skin as a thin layer that, more than encapsulating something, arbitrates the relationship between interior and exterior. It allows fluids to leave the body, but it does not constitute a particularly strong protection against exterior invasions. More important, skin self-regenerates and can recede or expand. The notion of skin I am elaborating here takes its cue from Roberto Esposito’s concept of *immunitas*—so deeply imbued in Western political thought, and, consequently, in Western rationales for colonial expansion—as the operation through which the “other from which immunity would have secured us, still constitutes merely the ‘other,’ that is the foreign and the exterior. It is thus ‘excluded’ from the privilege that only the ‘exempted’ one enjoys, namely, the immune.”¹⁴ Colonial city making in this sense has always been about the protection of a class of humans, the privileged, from the aggression of the outer world.¹⁵ The replacement of these regimes by the postcolonial order does not necessarily abolish the category of the immune altogether. It rather creates new systems of segmentation, new modes of separation. In the following chapters, I will be amplifying such a view in two ways. First, I will engage the notion of skin as a narrative device to make sense of how the city of Luanda has been formed and transformed throughout its history, and particularly from 1975 onward. Second, I will focus not so much on very specific processes relating to the city—on its construction or regimes of governance—but on its edges and limits, particularly on the ways in which these urban elements came into being and how they have been transformed, reconstituted, and negotiated in the course of history.

Part of this book, particularly chapter 2, engages with the dualities, and their derivatives, of colonial urbanization, which several scholars of urban Africa have examined.¹⁶ David Morton, in a book on Mozambique, traces this dual description back to Frantz Fanon's urban typology, in which the colonial city is divided into, on the one hand, the "white folks' sector" and, on the other, the shantytown.¹⁷ In his attempt to move away from such a duality, Morton criticizes the "historians of the built environment" in Africa for limiting themselves, particularly "when they address only how cities were split unequally between colonizer and colonized and, relatively, the role of European administrators and professional architects and planners in doing the dividing."¹⁸ As such, he proposes an alternative history based not only on the formation of the *cidade de cimento*, the cement city, but also on the *subúrbios*, the peri-urban areas in the city of Maputo.

I am inclined to agree with Morton that such a framework, which sets aside the unplanned from the planned, the formal from the informal, obfuscates more than it illuminates the myriad ways in which such divisions are hard to maintain. In the case of Luanda during colonial times, for instance, there were sections of the city that resembled the *musseques*, and there were whites living in the *musseques*, which countered a stark ascription of race to place. Sandra Roque has written an illuminating article on the legacies of such colonial partitions—based on her research in Benguela but with application to most cities in Angola—on how, still today, many of Luanda's inhabitants cling to the colonial-era designations *cidade* (city) and *bairro* (neighborhood) to make sense of their relation to the city.¹⁹ Having this in mind, I am less concerned with identifying the particular categories of people that belong to specific places, or even how these places came into being, but rather with the notion of borders, or how these divisions between the city center and *musseques* emerged, how they were negotiated, and how they have expanded, receded, or melted away. Ultimately, this book is concerned with the social dimension of geopolitical formations and how behind the recalibration of frontiers lie the inclusion and more frequently the exclusion of certain classes of human groups. Putting it differently and, perhaps more emphatically, the chapters that follow are an attempt at writing a description of a city through the notion of the margin itself rather than through what such a margin separates.

For what interests me most in this book, and what in fact drives the narrative, is the notion of borders, in their more sociological constructs, such as race and class, and the corresponding topographical descriptions that anchor such differences. As such, I will not be approaching Luanda as a static reality whose borders and limits can be easily and unproblematically pinpointed

and determined. Rather, the thrust of the argument throughout the book lies on the malleability and, somehow, the undecidability of these borders. For instance, chapter 2 deals for the most part with the modernist intervention, or how colonial architects and urban planners have attempted to separate the city center from the surrounding *musseques* by what then was called the *fronteira do asfalto*. Chapter 3 discusses the collapse, with the country's independence in 1975, of the norms that sustained the Portuguese colonial order and its effect on the city and how, with the flight of hundreds of thousands of Portuguese settlers, the city center was progressively occupied by those Luandans who during Portuguese rule could not afford, and were not allowed, to live in the so-called consolidated urban core. Here, the notion of the border, or the city's skin, no longer pertains to the separation between the city, as the consolidated urban, and the expanding and sprawling *musseques*, but instead relates to how occupants of the apartment concocted ways to keep the city's anomy at bay. Here, the kind of separation that is examined is between the apartment, as the sphere of an illusory and fleeting intimacy on the one hand, and the city as the realm of the public on the other—not a colonial and bourgeois public, but a characteristically African public. I am particularly interested in how the culture of those who come to occupy a space exerts a transformational effect on it.

At the heart of this book and key to understanding the various regimes of separation that Luanda has been through, and the systems that have arbitrated such separations, is the notion of the *bairro*. I will be purposefully using the word in Portuguese to convey a concept that is not easily translated into the English word *neighborhood*. Luanda was subdivided into Junta de Freguesias (Civil Parishes), by the time continental Portugal, and by extension the empire, adopted such a subdivision of municipalities in 1916. However, while the old *bairros* in the city center went on to be designated as Juntas de Freguesias, the new ones, built in the periphery—and to where the Portuguese sent the Africans removed from the city center—were simply called *bairros*, such as *bairro indígena*, and then *bairro popular* and *bairro operário* (which were on this account integrated into Civil Parishes). There is also enough evidence to conclude that the difference between these types of settlements was not only in their names but also in the ways in which they were administered, along the lines that Mahmood Mamdani has argued in his famous *Citizen and Subject*.²⁰ Whereas Mamdani seems to push aside the pertinence of how the distinction between the categories of citizen and subject might have played out in African urban settings during colonialism, it is quite evident that in Luanda the Juntas were governed by elected bodies, while the *bairros* were controlled by local authorities appointed by the colonial state. Interestingly enough, by the time the country became

independent, Juntas de Freguesias were erased from the postcolonial governing order, and the *bairro* became the single unit of urban subdivision. Reforms of 2016 turned the *bairro* into a “nonadministrative unit,” and the city came to be subdivided into urban districts. Losing its political claim, the concept of *bairro* was reduced to the meaning by which it is for the most part understood in Luanda: it pertains to belonging. As such, the *bairro* is still the topographical description that squatters use when land they have built on is seized and its location needs to be named. But for governmental authorities, new areas of expansion, such as the ones I discuss in chapters 5 and 6, are hardly conceived as *bairros* but rather as *urbanizações* or *centralidades* (urban growth areas), thereby perhaps reflecting the scale on which urban transformation is unfolding.²¹

Of Singularity, and a Singular City

Proponents of Southern urban theory have made a name for themselves by insisting that the major tenets of mainstream urban theory do not hold much significance for understanding cities in the Global South. They have rightly argued that classical urban theory was shaped in order to explain and account for urban processes in the cities of the North, particularly Chicago, around which much of the urban conceptual armature came into being.²² Cities in the Global South, the argumentation goes, have come about mostly through uneven relations between North and South and, accordingly, perform a very subaltern role in the global economy, mostly as producers of primary commodities and as reservoirs of unskilled labor. As such, their trajectories do not conform to the evolutionary schemes proposed by the Chicago urban scholars, who viewed cities as, among other things, spaces for the performance of citizenship. But Southern urbanists do not merely interrogate the shortcomings of urban theory on historical grounds. They have forcefully made the case that some of the principles for understanding cities sketched by classical urban theory still pervade the tool kits deployed to grasp the indeterminacies of cities in the South. Chief among these is the concept of cityness, or the proper form of a city.²³ The sometimes rigid and inflexible definition of what should count as a city has for the most part been used as the yardstick through which countless geographic locations in the South are reduced to a non- or quasi-city status.

In a more recent attempt at theorizing the city otherwise, the charge against the work of Christian Schmid and Neil Brenner is a case in point for several reasons. Schmid and Brenner have proposed the notion of planetary urbanization, gleaned from the work of the French philosopher Henri Lefebvre, to

grapple with urban processes that are no longer city-centric, or driven by the city, and imply the eclipse of a range of dichotomies, particularly the one between the urban and the rural. More specifically, planetary urbanization theorists have relentlessly attempted to put forward the understanding that an emphasis on the single city framework is no longer theoretically pertinent, for, to simplify the argument, city demarcations can no longer be taken for granted. For them, “conceptualizations of the urban as a bounded spatial unit must thus be superseded by approaches that investigate how urban configurations are churned and remade across the uneven landscapes of worldwide capitalist development.”²⁴

Responding to the, most of the time, vituperative criticism of postcolonial urban theorists, Schmid and Brenner contend that “in politico-epistemological terms, we share much common ground with many of our critics who work in feminist, queer and postcolonial traditions of critical theory.”²⁵ For they also “insist upon the social constitution of political mediation of all knowledge formation,” “reject the positivist/technoscientific contention that knowledge can be constructed from some disembodied Archimedean point exterior to social relations, power hierarchies, spatial politics, and political struggle,” and, more important, “connect all essentializing, transhistorical knowledge-claims to formations of power, domination, exclusion, and normalization.”²⁶ Convincingly, they have made the case for the similarities between both schools of thought. Both Southern urbanism and planetary urbanization theories take major cues from the invectives of the so-called LA school against classical urban theory. For LA theorists of the 1980s also vigorously claimed that the theoretical elaborations and methodological approaches proposed by classical urban theory failed to capture the richness and formal complexities of conurbations such as Los Angeles.²⁷ As such, there is a more immediate commonality between both theories, which consists of the inclination that stems from the attempt to carve out alternative spaces for theory making within classical urban theory. Both schools tend to approach the margins of global theory as, according to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, “abstract machines of over-coding.”²⁸ They were obviously referring to power, and particularly the State apparatus, but there are nonetheless inferences to be made about the ways in which theory is produced and the truths it reveals or conceals. In this way, any urban phenomenon can be explicable through the theoretical frameworks they propose. Crudely put, for theorists of the planetary urbanization persuasion, the “city is dead,” and any fact that emerges out of the ashes of the city can be explained through the selected precepts that they have been refining throughout the years.²⁹ Southern urbanists have taken as a principle the notion that

only specific urban phenomena produced in the South may count as theory, and they have done so mostly by stressing the comparative method. For instance, scholars such as Garth Myers have maintained that the “Global South approaches give us tools to see the making of globalised cityscapes differently, from the margins and shadows that run parallel to, connect with or contest Northern understandings of urbanism and urbanisation.”³⁰

However, none of these theories has been able to present a solid and robust body of work that provides an alternative to the impetus of the Chicago School. Mostly because one sees in many of these attempts at theorizing the city otherwise, particularly those that engage with the comparative framework, an insistence on elaborating episodic engagements and making problematic generalizations with cities of different scales and with divergent histories. On this critique, I will have more to say in the coda.

The chapters assembled in this book mainly rebut some of the major premises of both theoretical positions. I will do so partially by taking issue with the notion that the trends and contours of modern urbanization supersede the pertinence for an engagement with the city-centric paradigm. Key to my reformulation for “seeing like a city” is David Wachsmuth’s injunction that “the city is an *ideological representation* of urbanization process rather than a *moment* in them.”³¹ In my own terms, the city is that which allows the urban to unfold by obviating the conditions for the urban to emerge, as discussed in chapter 6. More specifically, throughout this book I will be showing the extent to which the urban in Luanda is not a modern process. There was already an urban process underway by the time the Portuguese were busy expanding the consolidated core, or the cement city (chapter 2), as there is an urban process taking place in modern Luanda that has taken the form of an etiolation of the (mostly colonial) city-periphery dialectics. To put it in slightly different terms, the task I will be undertaking in the chapters that follow pertains to an examination of Luanda’s urban expansion and more specifically to how such an urban process has taken place through the articulation, or dearticulation of boundaries from the so-called *fronteira do asfalto* to its various historical derivatives and reconfigurations. Particularly relevant to my argument is that even though these boundaries—and what they enclose: the *bairro*, the *centralidade*, or the *urbanização*—are endowed with their own scalar properties, they have as a common denominator the faculty to articulate within them dichotomies such as inside and outside, which, on their own terms, arbitrate over regimes of inclusion and exclusion of various social categories. In brief, by examining urban expansion through the lenses of what it encloses and what it does not, I hope to come to terms with an ethnographic description of the

myriad repertoires for inhabiting Luanda. I will do so without losing sight of how these repertoires speak to urban theory in general.

On a metatheoretical level, the following chapters have been written as a corrective, or at least as an alternative, to another problematic aspect of social theory in general and urban theory more specifically: metaphysics. My thinking regarding this question is influenced by Jacques Derrida and the philosopher Kojin Karatani, who in many ways have denounced and attempted to dislodge the metaphysics that looms large in social and urban theory. In his famous reading of Claude Lévi-Strauss's theory of myth, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Social Sciences," Derrida not only reveals the metaphysical residue that lurk behind Strauss's structuralism but also conveys the difficulty at moving beyond them. For even when this gesture is attempted, more often than not, as in the case of Strauss, what happens is the reinforcement of outdated categories such as the distinction between nature and culture. Part of the problem, for Derrida, is that "we have no language—no syntax and no lexicon—which is alien to this history; we cannot utter a single destructive proposition which has not already slipped into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest."³² In the same vein, building on Derrida's critique, Karatani deconstructs the metaphysics implicit in the work of the architect and planner Christopher Alexander, particularly the unconvincing distinction between natural and artificial cities.³³ Whereas natural cities are those that have "emerged over the course of many years," artificial cities are those "deliberately created by designers and planners," lacking, consequently, the "ingredients of natural cities."³⁴ For Karatani, then, Alexander's methodology is profoundly marked by what he calls "the Platonic will to architecture," which "rather than resorting to the illusion of nature as exterior to the man-made, it reveals the exterior as a negative figure at the heart of the man-made."³⁵ Putting it differently, for the sake of my argument, the concern of Karatani lies with the tendency in social theory to conceive of the man-made as a representation of a perfect and superior order, or what Max Weber called the "ideal-type."³⁶

Throughout this book, I will be implicitly proposing a way out of these residues of metaphysics imbued in social sciences in two ways. First, in regard to cityness: the intention behind the following chapters is not positing the somehow incompleteness or disorder of Luanda against the backdrop of what things should look like. For the question I am mainly concerned with is not what the city is, or to what extent the concept of city is universal and applicable to other locations, but whether such a notion—the city—may not particularly coincide with any given physical location and is merely an ideal type, a thinking model,

or an exemplary center. As such, my insistence on referring to Luanda as a city, in its various historical incarnations and iterations, is not to come to terms with or to propose any other usable definition of a city. My intention is more basic, for what I want to foreground, as mentioned before, is the ideological underpinnings of the notion of city itself. Such a stance precedes from a basic anthropological teaching, the one according to which anthropologists need to take seriously the concepts deployed by those they attempt to understand: the so-called Natives. To put it crudely: if Luandans have referred and refer to Luanda as a city, I will refrain from deconstructing it as a city.

A second rebuttal of metaphysics concerns the question of land and land rights: particularly how land has recently been articulated in relation to citizenship in significant segments of urban scholarship. Under the rubric of the rights to the city, the vague and abstract right that for Lefebvre should be claimed by Parisians—the right to centrality—has been appropriated and used by an increasing number of urban scholars as a rallying cry to address land distribution in many parts of the world. For Edésio Fernandes, for instance, this concept should be “understood from a combined philosophical and political perspective providing substance to the formulation of both [a] general discourse of rights and social justice and a more specific rights-based approach to urban development.”³⁷ His contention that countries such as Brazil have “already formally incorporated the ‘right to the city’ into their national legal system” has become the natural corollary, or the horizon, of much of this theory.³⁸ On Luanda specifically, the right to the city has also been evoked, directly or obliquely, by scholars such as Sílvia Viegas and Claudia Gastrow, so as to make the connection between land occupation and claims on citizenship. Analyzing autoconstruction in contravention of the law, for instance, Gastrow states emphatically that “by insisting on the value of *casa de bloco*, they were shaping the ground through which claims to rights could be made.”³⁹ I partially sympathize with Gastrow’s argument that there might be a sort of claim for political incorporation in how Luandans build their houses on land under the control of the state and, in doing so, carve out their place in the city. However, to equate such a gesture to a claim on citizenship renders the notion of citizenship itself unproblematized. Moreover, such a formulation speaks more directly to the currency, or excessive use of this concept in urban scholarship, than any particularly specific examination of how it has been locally apprehended and mobilized.

To bypass the universalizing, programmatic, and metaphysical categorization of citizenship, I will historicize the land question, so as to bring forth the notion that citizenship (in the crudest sense of the relationship between

the city's structures of power and the status of those who live in the city, the citizens) dovetails with the shifting regimes of the state-society apparatus. These regimes are conjectural, purely assemblages, having their own historical significance before being superseded by other regimes, not particularly in any teleological way. Putting it differently, land-based claims on citizenship only make sense in the context of specific state-society relations at particular historical moments. Chapter 1 will show that land was not an issue at a time when the whole economy gravitated toward movable commodities: slaves. Chapter 2 discusses the expansion of the modernist urban grid that came hand in hand with the migration of settlers and Angolans from the countryside to Luanda, people who were allowed by colonial urban authorities to squat on public land. The tacit calculation was that the wages of the African labor force could be kept low if the costs of reproduction of the same labor force were also low. Chapters 3 and 4 cover a moment in Luanda's history when the notion of the right to the city becomes applicable, because, after the flight of the settler population, the socialist government nationalized built property to distribute it to the citizenry. Chapters 5 and 6 demonstrate how the city became increasingly fragmented through the alienation of state property—as if pieces of the city were being sliced up and distributed to the population—a process that further intensified with the emergence of gated residential communities. These two chapters also reveal how this process needs to be understood as part of a shift to authoritarianism, promoted by former Angolan president José Eduardo dos Santos, with ripple effects on urban expansion and land rights. I use the term *bifurcation of the urban* to make sense of the conditions through which Luanda has been transformed as the consequence of the direct intervention of central power, which has manifested itself through the split between citizenship and land-based claims. Citizens may be given houses by the state in the new *centralidades* and *urbanizações*, but for the most part they do not own the land on which their houses are built. Social housing in this sense dilutes property and turns the beneficiaries of these schemes into the target for the government's operations.

Chief among the resources I will be deploying to destabilize the universalist penchant of citizenship, and therefore its metaphysical claims, is the figure of the squatter. I will elaborate further on this notion in the coda, but for now, it suffices to say that squatting is that which renders the act of living in Luanda contingent. Squatting is a universal phenomenon, as Mike Davis has so painstakingly shown.⁴⁰ But squatting in Luanda is also contingent because it brings together a myriad of practices (of building houses), repertoires (what kind of house in which part of the city, using what kind of materials), and regulatory

apparatuses (under which terms of the legislation, regulation, or constitution). On this, I could not agree more with Roque when she concedes that building a house does not translate into tenure, since the house is susceptible to being destroyed by the state and invites us to think of squatting in more nuanced ways. For, she writes, land occupation “provokes a particular relationship with the law and to what is legitimized by the law as being ‘urbanized’: people desire to be included in the urban and in what is legitimized by the law; but they are in reality excluded as they cannot afford to do so.”⁴¹ In sum, it is not because of its sheer materiality that the structure erected by the squatter is precarious; it is precarious because of its relation to the law.

Hence, the notion of squatting that pervades this book is one in which squatters are not simply the subjects who refuse to comply with sacrosanct ideologies that sustain private property, nor are they those who occupy land in defiance of state principles, rules, and regulations regarding land use; rather, they are those who stand on the margin, or the skin, for they always arbitrate and negotiate the boundaries, not only physical boundaries but legal ones as well: the ones who can simultaneously exist inside the government and outside the law, as Sylvia Croese has so aptly and succinctly put it.⁴² More important, it is because of their sheer presence and existence and the challenges they pose to the state-enforced order that the boundaries and frontiers within the city come to be drawn and redrawn. I will be showing this not only ethnographically but also historically.

In sum, this book is written from the perspective of someone who, instead of walking within the city, decides rather to take a stroll along its edges and limits. My point, in doing so, is not to contrast this perspective with a top-down description from the point of view of the government and the urban authorities; nor will I take the corrective position of writing from the bottom up, focusing on the perspectives of the urban poor and their legitimate struggles. I am interested, rather, in taking a more “sideways” approach, one that enacts a sort of “lateral thinking” as defined by Stefano Boeri in his concept of the “Eclectic Atlas.”⁴³ For, as Boeri adduces, it is this sort of lateral gaze on the city that “may help us not only to see how individual tremors change the territory, but also to understand the strangely evolving assonance that binds these tremors together.”⁴⁴ Accordingly, I will not be providing detailed anecdotes or full descriptions of particular individuals, the ways in which they eke out a living, or even transcriptions of interviews, as anthropologists are expected to do. Instead, this book is an attempt at coming to terms with the formation, transformation, and fragmentation of Luanda from the standpoint of its border, or the skin. As if the city’s skin could speak.

What follows in the various chapters of this book is, therefore, an attempt at producing urban theory without relinquishing the insight one can draw on by engaging with the singular city paradigm. Instead of asking what the city is, I intend to ask: On what ground, and through whose action and desire, is the idea of the city produced? I will do so by finding my way through the tenets of modern urban theory, by bringing a basic lesson in social theory to the fore: the same causes can generate different and sometimes contradictory effects. Luanda's historical trajectory from the highly concentrated urban core into a sprawling polycentric urban metropolitan area (and not necessarily decentralized, as I will show in chapter 6) fits into the teleology of urban theory. However, to fully understand the ways in which this process has historically unfolded, one needs to pay close attention to and engage with conceptual tools such as singularity and contingency.

An Ethnography of Tracing Associations

It has been more than ten years now since I started thinking about this project and, in a way, unconsciously writing this book. Back then the focus of my research focused on the dollarization of the Angolan economy that forced most citizens to carry, and use interchangeably, on an everyday basis, both American dollars and the national currency, the kwanza. However, the beginning of my anthropological investigations in Luanda, which took place in 2008, coincided with two events whose full magnitude I would only later begin to understand. The first was the oil boom, which provided the government with unprecedented means to buy dollars elsewhere to subsidize the kwanza. This drastically diminished the mundane operations in dollars I had found worth investigating. For during the time of my doctoral research in Luanda, there was not much to observe in terms of the repertoires Luandans were using to navigate the double exchange system. It was during the reflections that always come with the prospect of failure that I was taken to Roque Santeiro market by a Brazilian photographer, André Vieira, and met Makassamba, who became my main informant for the research I would start doing later on. In the next six months or so, I became a regular of Roque Santeiro and documented my experience.

The second and more important for the argument in this book was that during these years the Angolan government embarked on a comprehensive overhaul of urban Luanda. The oil boom, and more specifically the oil-backed loans from China, created the conditions for deliberations over the building of housing and infrastructure through contracts with a myriad of construction and consultancy companies whose work aimed at tackling the dysfunctionality

of Luanda. Only later on, back in New York, in the early 2010s, did I realize that during the time I was busy trying to understand Luanda's economic anthropology, a book on Luanda's urbanization was practically writing itself in my head, a book that cobbled together my research interests, sporadic participation in political commentary for Angolan newspapers, my flirtation with architecture (first as a student at Columbia University and more recently as an anthropologist in a department of architecture), and, most important, the experience of being born and raised in Luanda.

In chapter 4, I will discuss the emergence of Roque Santeiro and the role it played in Luanda's urban transformation more thoroughly. Here it suffices to say that Roque Santeiro was a gigantic informal marketplace that came about around 1985 when informal traders and operators chased from other informal selling points in the city congregated in a waste dump and opened their businesses. By spending a great part of my time in the market—meeting sellers, interviewing public officers, riding with taxi drivers through the city, and becoming familiar with places that I would not have any interest in visiting or have access to were I not doing research—I was forced to ponder the importance of two interrelated questions. The first one pertained to the craft of anthropology, when anthropologists are locals or natives. The second one pertained to notions of networks, particularly when anthropologists themselves are not exterior to the networks (kinship, for instance) they are trying to describe, and they are able to engage and mobilize them to advance their research. Finally, and more important, it also seemed to me that my interrogations of monetary circulation would become irrelevant if I failed to take into account the physical places I was trying to grapple with in their own terms.

Roque Santeiro and the zone where Roque Santeiro stood was not simply a place I was approaching as an anthropologist for the first time. As mentioned above, I was born and raised in Luanda. Part II of the book, or chapters 3 and 4, even if not written from an autobiographic point of view, are infused with the emotional and psychological demeanor of someone who was a participant in the events he describes. I moved to Baixa (downtown Luanda, close to the Provincial Government of Luanda), in the late 1970s, when my parents squatted in an apartment. There I spent a great part of my childhood and adolescence, and I still stay there when I visit Luanda. From these years, I remember the almost deserted city, the times when the children of the neighborhood could play soccer on the frequently carless roads. The site of Epic Sana, now one of the most expensive hotels in town, was a wasteland, for us, the kids of the Baixa, a mere shortcut to the slopes of São José de Cluny School—where we used to go for birdwatching.

However, my involvement with Roque Santeiro is of a different nature, which cuts through the very argument of this book. The colonial *fronteira do asfalto* was not abolished with independence; it was simply nationalized, as discussed in chapters 3 and 4. In the early days of independence, people like my parents, who managed to secure apartments in the city center, had an easier way into upward social mobility in contrast to several of my relatives. Living in the Baixa meant that we had access to better equipped and better staffed hospitals and schools, compared with other parts of the city. Being from this section of Luanda where in the late 1970s and early 1980s one could conduct an entire life within a radius of less than one mile (for all the facilities one needed to attend such as school, church, and the sports clubs were in close reach), I saw, not without bewilderment, that the city was growing at its margins, in the area of Roque Santeiro, a place that during my childhood was beyond what was then considered the limits of the city, or the frontier between the urban and the rural. In those years, my father was a worker at a glass factory, Vidrul, and my brother and I would accompany him to the factory on Saturday and Sunday mornings. A fifteen-minute drive to the north of the city was enough to experience the change of the landscape. There were the buildings and the cement city, which was then replaced by the shacks and cobbled roads of Sambizanga. A little farther on, the city was left behind, and the rural area of Cacucaco started to dominate the landscape, with agricultural fields, animal husbandry farms, and salt pans interposed sometimes by factories, the port infrastructure, and warehouses. These sections of Luanda were at that time only very scantily populated.

The structure that upholds this narrative on Luanda, from the center to the periphery, from Baixa to Kilamba, is then more than a storytelling device. It is also personal, for this structure is in all earnestness shaped by my own experiences in and with Luanda that preceded the moment I decided to pen a book about it. Accordingly, this book follows this very personal trajectory from the known to the unknown, from the familiar to the less familiar. Despite the form, it is still an ethnography, but one of the kinds that is aptly described by Walter Benjamin. Writing on photography and quoting Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Benjamin writes: "There is a delicate empiricism which so intimately involves itself with the object that it becomes true theory."⁴⁵ This is also a question the anthropologist Paul Rabinow has taken on in his more recent writings, particularly around the works of the painters Marcel Duchamp and Paul Klee and the historian and literary critic Hayden White. Rabinow suggests that there is a relationship between the shape of the problem and the form, or style, of ethnography that addresses this particular problem.⁴⁶ Accordingly,

the shape of my research for this book, and the form of this book itself, stem from the *problématique* of the topic. It is not a coincidence then that I have started this introduction with a discussion of the artistic, abstract, and current work of Ole, whose original photographs of Luanda's shacks in colonial times constitute a kind of dialectical image, in the sense that Benjamin has defined this term.⁴⁷ Being not only a form of "presenting history in which the principle of construction is montage," it is also a "heuristic principle whose structure sets up systems of co-ordinates for plotting out the relation of the present to the past."⁴⁸ The geographical trajectory the following chapters revisit, from Baixa to Zango and Kilamba, is a historic-ethnographic description of Luanda's urban transformation: one that captures the shacks, the dwelling of the squatter, as a dialectical image; one that allows for an engagement with the present by finding alternative coordinations that are specific and contingent. As such, I could not help but write a book on city form, or city formation, that brings to the center the craft of research and the style of writing itself. I will come to this question in the coda.

On following this route, my intention diverges considerably from that school of anthropology, native anthropology, which posits the question of identity at the heart of ethnographic insight.⁴⁹ Conversely, I am using my Caluanda (those who are from Luanda) experience, not as a badge of identification with those I write about but rather as a methodological device. It was my experience in the city, the places I know or don't know, that allowed me to grasp urban transformation in a particular way. This book represents an amplification of such an insight, which I am tempted to call an ethnography of tracing associations. I obviously follow Bruno Latour, who, in *Reassembling the Social*, demolishes the supposed disciplinary coherence in the social sciences that prevents social scientists from working in a truly interdisciplinary domain. For him, "[the] social does not designate a thing among other things, like a black sheep among other white sheep, but a type of connection between things that are not themselves social."⁵⁰ Sociology for him, and by extension anthropology for me, is a form of academic inquiry concerned with the tracing of associations.

By taking seriously Latour's injunction, what lies behind the ethnographic premises of this book is not an attempt at describing Luanda through the lenses of Actor-Network Theory (ANT). I concur with Latour, and with many other contributors to this theory, that objects as much as humans may be imbued with agency. And central in my argument in this book is the suggestion that enclosures and other forms of spatial delimitations are agentive in many ways. They involve various forms of expertise, they are shaped by the production of

legislation, and, more important, they constrain, inhibit, or enhance human action. Moreover, ANT's antimetaphysical approach, its attention to the singular and the contingent, pervades my engagement with urban theory. Central to the descriptions and discussions that follow in these chapters is a genuine attempt at understanding networks and their interconnections. For instance, the gist of chapter 5 is an attempt at understanding the interconnection between Cidade Alta, the precinct of the presidential palace, and the emergence of the southern expansion of the urban grid. However, the way I organized these assemblages diverges considerably from the premises of ANT. Instead of simply explaining the formation and interconnections among these networks, synchronically, I also take pains at tracing their diachronic dimension. Elinga, the house of the theater company targeted for demolition, which is the starting point for discussing Luanda's foundation, in chapter 1, does not only epitomize the disjuncture between cultural heritage and urban speculation. Elinga, being a relic in which slavery and other forms of extraction were themselves the *raison d'être* for the formation of Luanda, opens up ways in which one can devise networks at work. This shows the ways in which history, or the history of the city, becomes itself a network through which action is undertaken in the name of cultural preservation.

To bring the interplay of all these networks together, and, in this way, to convey the uniqueness of Luanda's urban process, my own methods have for the most part deviated from what is taught in anthropological schools. Most of this book is not the result of a well-prepared and articulated research project, but it has behind it a curiosity instigated by the question of how to follow associations to understand the recalibrations of the borders that constitute the idea of the city itself. Chapters 1 and 2 are based on archival work, for they deal with the history of the city. Chapters 3 and 4 are the most ethnographic because they are for the most part based on my own experiences and field-work notes. Behind the structure of chapters 5 and 6, even if they also provide some ethnographic details, is a collage of disparate bits of information. These chapters, which form part III of the book, convey much of the transformation that took place after the removal of Roque Santeiro, which has deserved a fair deal of attention from numerous urban scholars.⁵¹ But my approach diverges significantly from many explanations of Luanda's urban expansion. The idea of urban expansion as a manifestation of the late capitalist and neoliberal forces that have contributed to flatten the world is not far-fetched. But such an interpretation should be considered in conjunction with the local agency behind transformation. By saying this, I do not aim to retrieve the old debate over the primacy of structure versus agency. My goal here is more modest. If reality is

formed by the disjointed elements that Latour and many others have called assemblages, then those assemblages have their own historicities. This book is then an attempt at a contextualization of these assemblages.

There are numerous ways in which the singularity of cities has been approached in urban theory. Some of the precedents I am working with, and whose discussions are in a way distilled in this book, range from urban modernism in James Holston's *the Modernist City* and crime and segregation in Teresa Caldeira's *The City of Walls* to various regimes of informality, as in Filip de Boeck's *Kinshasa* and especially the collective project edited by Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe on the worldliness of the African city of Johannesburg. What I have tried to do here, contrary to the propositions advanced in most of these books, is to write not simply on a specific aspect of Luanda—say, on the city's informal economy—but on a topic or a set of issues that could be taken as defining urban principles of the city itself. I focus on the question of the *fronteira do asfalto*, or how to approach the urban process through separation rather than agglomeration. I have taken this cue from Ole and other Angolan artists who have mused on this question, but in doing so I am also revisiting a trope more central to architecture than to urban planning, a trope whose very condition, according to Pier Vittorio Aureli, is to separate and be separated.⁵² Or, to put it differently, architecture is always about this dialectic between interior and exterior, inside and outside. The major concern in this book with the units of living (the apartment and the single-family detached house) and with the units of urban organization (the *bairro* and the Reserva) stems directly from this postulate. Ultimately, the concern that is carried throughout this book pertains to the skins of the city, even if those skins may take on different names throughout the chapters.

To sum up, at the center of this book is an attempt to go beyond the dualities that have been used to deal with African colonial and postcolonial cities in most of the literature by evoking a kind of dialectical thinking. I see dialectics, along the lines proposed by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, as a useful methodological tool, one that helps us to get critical purchase beyond the false dichotomies in which most of the urban studies scholarship is caught up. More than coming to terms with the calibration of what is formal and informal, or what is the center and the periphery, what moves me throughout the book is a desire to understand the ways in which these categories came about, how they provide ascriptions and regulations for society and space, how people understand these categories, how they negotiate and navigate them, and ultimately, how these categories recede or are transformed by mostly those in power but not rarely by the powerless too.

The Structure of the Book

In one way or another all the chapters in this book attempt to make the case for how social or physical boundaries came about in the city and how they were pushed farther or receded as the city went through the growth and expansion of the urban grid. The structure of the chapters, and how they relate to each other, can easily be described as a series of maps, for each chapter presents a given stage in the geographic development of the city. To flesh out this argument, the book is divided into three parts, titled “Formation,” “Stasis,” and “Fragmentation.”

Part I, “Formation,” is subdivided into two chapters. Chapter 1 is titled “Unbuilding History to Build the Present,” and it has two aims. First, it provides a historical overview of the city, which is the oldest settlement founded by Europeans below the equator in Africa. It describes the early urbanization and demographics of the settlement and discusses in detail the role of the slave trade in Luanda’s formation. Trade in slaves, and other economic ventures associated with it, not only made the implementation of state-led projects possible by providing significant financial resources levied as taxes but also brought about an enduring social taxonomy in the city. For most of Luanda’s history, the population was divided into the enslaved and enslavers, and the city space was deeply influenced by the social and racial dichotomies that arose from this division: they created a distinction between those who could claim land, and build their houses accordingly, and those who languished in the *quintais* (backyards), which were the antecedents of the informal settlements that would later be called *musseques*.

Chapter 1 begins with a description of modern-day battles to preserve an old building, occupied by the theater company Elinga Teatro, to foreground and set the stage for the rest of the book, since several dynamics have historical resonances. It notes the irony that the Elinga Teatro was at the center of a social mobilization, not because it had also become a shelter for dozens of squatters (and since its occupation is against the law, it is now a squatting site itself), but simply on historical grounds. The second aim of this chapter is thus to introduce the notion that squatting is not only a modern-day tool used by the disenfranchised to claim a place to live but also an expression of the historical conditions under which Luanda has always been inhabited.

Chapter 2, “Ordering Urban Expansion,” narrates the process through which Luanda passed from a derelict settlement by the end of the nineteenth century to a fully-fledged African city by the end of the 1960s. At the heart of this process was how the Portuguese approached modern colonization. The

proclamation of the republic in Portugal in 1910, and later on, the formation of Estado Novo, led by António Salazar, were behind a fresh approach to the colonial question. A natural resource-endowed colony such as Angola was, according to colonial thinkers and policymakers, expected to contribute to the development of Portugal through intense extraction. For this to take place, the colony itself had to be developed. During this time, then, major infrastructure projects such as ports, an airport, and dams were implemented, alongside the construction of hundreds of thousands of kilometers of roads and railways. Of utmost importance was the arrival of a considerable number of Portuguese settlers in Angola, particularly in Luanda.

The expansion of the modern grid of Luanda, through the work of modernist architects, came about in response to profound changes in the city's demographic makeup. Not only settlers were moving to Luanda but so too were many Angolans who for many reasons were leaving their land in the countryside to find better opportunities in the city and, as such, joined the population that languished in the *musseques*. The Estatuto do Indígena played an important role in the social and physical differentiation that separated the settlers from the Native population because it contributed to the enforcement of segregation. Whereas whites lived in the booming city center, the Natives were deprived of land-ownership rights and were forcibly removed and relocated to the *bairros indígenas*, later renamed the *bairros populares* (people's neighborhoods), for whose construction the city struggled to secure funds.

Modernist intervention, then, marked the most successful attempt at creating borders and boundaries between different social and racial groups by using the built environment. Whereas by the 1960s the lower echelons of the settler population lived shoulder to shoulder with Africans in the *musseques*, the city center was for the most part occupied by white settlers. These years corresponded to the thickening of the city's skin, to the times when the so-called *fronteira do asfalto* attained its highest level of effectiveness. Most of the post-colonial process of city making, I will be arguing, is contingent on the terms on which the city of Luanda was transformed in the last decades of Portuguese presence.

Part II of the book, "Stasis," also has two chapters; it covers mainly the first decades of postcolonial Luanda, when the city's authorities and central government were struggling to find their feet in terms of governing the city. By stasis, I mean those times in the city's existence during which, in terms of both physical expansion and demographic composition of the population, very few developments of note were taking place—even if the city was bustling with new ways of using and relating to it. Chapter 3, titled "A Place to Dwell in

Times of Change,” focuses on the most dramatic period in the city’s history. It narrates the end of the Portuguese empire through the coup that ousted the inheritor of Salazar’s Estado Novo, Marcelo Caetano. Colonial power quickly disintegrated after that, and the national liberation movement that controlled Luanda, the MPLA (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola [People’s Movement for the Liberation of Angola]), did not show any inclination to protect the lives and property of settlers. As such, the Portuguese government was forced to organize Operation Air Bridge to evacuate the more than 300,000 settlers who were living in Luanda (out of half a million living in the whole country).

This chapter is concerned, then, with this political change and the power vacuum that ensued, as the city of Luanda lost the population for whom most of the urban facilities had been built. The central government started to distribute the vacant houses to the general population, but several houses left by the Portuguese were simply squatted in. The chapter brings to the fore the role played by squatting in the production of the postcolonial urban.

Chapter 4, “A City Decentered,” discusses the physical collapse of the city, on the one hand, and, on the other, the rules and norms that had allowed the colonial administration to keep the formal city functioning and which no longer worked under the independent government. Of central importance in the creation of an informal economy in Luanda was the creation of Roque Santeiro, the informal marketplace at the margin of the formal city. Roque Santeiro was the quintessence of the frontier economy, the place people turn to when the formal economy no longer works. However, more than extolling the virtues of the informal economy, I will be concerned here with the ways in which Roque Santeiro contributed to the decentering of Luanda in the late 1980s and early 1990s, since a great deal of the economic life of the city that passed through the market and the system of public transportation now had Roque Santeiro as its epicenter, allowing Luanda’s residents, for the first time, to commute from one point on the periphery to another without transitioning through the city center.

Part III, “Fragmentation,” deals with the ways in which the Angolan government attempted to regain control over the city. The government was then trying to respond to, on the one hand, the urban collapse that affected the city center and, on the other, the alternative strategies for urban survival that were being developed by the social outcasts, such as the traders, customers, and neighbors of Roque Santeiro. Chapter 5, “Reversing (Urban) Composition,” is concerned with the progressive fragmentation of the urban through the demise of holistic approaches to urban design. This chapter discusses the

implementation of major policies for reorganizing the city—namely, the privatization of the housing stock and the introduction of legal mechanisms such as surface rights, which opened the way for land ownership and consequently urban fragmentation.

Of particular importance to the processes discussed in this chapter is the place of the presidential palace in relation to the city. In the late 1990s, the presidential palace was moved from Futungo de Belas to the city center, Cidade Alta, vacating a significant tract of land that was then used for the expansion of the urban grid to the south, Luanda Sul, which allowed for the construction of various gated communities. From then on, Luanda could no longer be defined through the tension between *cidade* and *musseque*, or center and periphery. Luanda Sul not only provided an alternative way of living but also created the conditions for the expansion that followed, particularly after the end of the civil war, in 2002.

Chapter 6, “The Urban Yet to Come,” engages with the unfinished business of Luanda’s urban expansion. It examines the growing role the president of the republic played in the city’s transformation, roughly from the country’s shift into a neoliberal market economy and the promulgation of the Angolan Constitution in 2010. The chapter discusses the construction of several government-led developments to accommodate either war veterans and civil servants or residents of demolished informal settlements. The big picture here is that these processes of accommodation have become possible only under the new legal dispensation pertaining to land, which allows the government to clear informal settlements, sometimes without compensation, and move residents to newly built social projects such as Zango.

Central in these developments is the place that the former president of the republic, dos Santos, claimed in the process of urban transformation. It was not enough to form agencies under his own control to overhaul Luanda’s urbanism, which entered in direct competition with local bodies such as the Provincial Government of Luanda. In the end, the key for Luanda’s transformation was not an urban solution but a political one. It came through the approval of the constitution, in 2010, which on the one hand furthered presidentialism and on the other proclaimed the right of the state to create land reserves, within which citizens could not make any claim on land.

The concluding chapter of the book, the coda, focuses on the contributions of this book to the literature on cities, particularly on Southern urbanism. It takes as its starting point a stroll through Paris whose purpose is not particularly to compare this city with Luanda but rather to emphasize the extent to which one can produce insights on the urban in more general terms. It does so in

two major ways. First, it acknowledges that the singular framework does not occlude the possibility of deriving critical understandings from other cities, apprehended in their own singularities too. Second, it suggests that a possible comparison between Luanda and Paris should consider a methodological approach rather than a simple epistemological and ontological one. By asking why, contrary to Luanda, Paris is for the most part a walkable city, the coda engages with the figure of the squatter to propose a more attuned method for grasping the contingencies of the African urban condition.

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Introduction

- 1 For a critique of such a trend in anthropological urban studies, see Low, "Anthropology of Cities."
- 2 António Olé, personal communication, December 2009.
- 3 The term *musseque*, etymologically, refers to the red sand that characterizes much of the soil in Luanda. During colonial times the term came to signify the "residential configuration typical of Luanda's peripheries" (Carvalho, *A câmara, a escrita*, 133). For a sociological and historical discussion of *musseques*, particularly in relation to the formation of Angolan urban culture, see Moorman, *In-tonations*, especially chapter 1, 28–55.
- 4 Some of the metamorphoses in the work of Ole have arisen through its exhibition in various parts of the world, including Chicago (2001), Venice (2003), Düsseldorf (2004), and Washington (2009), and under titles such as *Township Wall*, *The Structure of Survival*, *Limit Zone*, *Domestic Landscapes*, and *Personalities Revisited*. For an account of Ole's artistic trajectory, see Siegert, *Na pela da cidade*.
- 5 Pereira, "A cidade visível," 182.
- 6 Oliveira and Tomás, 1961.
- 7 In the 1920s, Le Corbusier suggested mass production as the solution to the housing shortages in Europe. He advocated that houses should be produced in the same way as any other industrial item. See, for instance, Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*.
- 8 Vieira, *A fronteira de asfalto*. Vieira's "frontier" has both social and morphological implications. On the one hand, it indicates how colonial society was marked by racial and class divisions. On the other, it refers to the physical difference between the formal, built-up historical city and the sprawling and unplanned slums of the *musseques*. For an understanding of how the *musseques* were discussed under late colonialism, see Monteiro, *A família nos musseques*; for a more contemporary discussion of the enduring consequences of colonial urbanism, see Amaral, "Luanda e os seus 'muceques'."
- 9 See Andersen, Jenkins, and Nielsen, "Who Plans the African City," 336.
- 10 For a comprehensive discussion of how the colonial state came to use these categorizations, see the seminal work of Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*. For a more specific

discussion of Portuguese colonialism regarding this issue, focused on Mozambique but also applicable to Angola, see O'Laughlin, "Class and the Customary."

- 11 Vieira, *A cidade e a infância*, 40.
- 12 See Home, *Of Planting and Planning*.
- 13 Pullan, "Frontier Urbanism," 17.
- 14 Donà, Comparone, and Righi, "Immunity and Negation," 58.
- 15 It is not a coincidence that city making in the colonies used several medical metaphors, such as the cordon sanitaire. For a relationship between immunology and city making in Africa, see Bigon, "History of Urban Planning."
- 16 For illustrative examples, based on less theorized African cities such as Kinsasha, see de Boeck and Plissart, *Kinshasa*; Devish, "'Pillaging Jesus.'" See also Abu-Lughod, "Tale of Two Cities."
- 17 Morton, *Age of Concrete*, 13.
- 18 Morton, *Age of Concrete*, 13.
- 19 Roque, "*Cidade and Bairro*."
- 20 Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*.
- 21 The various Facebook conversations I had with the Angolan urban planner Miguel Dias were fundamental to understanding this point. Dias, personal communications, June–July 2020.
- 22 See, for instance, Dear and Dishman, *From Chicago to LA*; Wachsmuth, "City as Ideology"; Abbott, "Of Time and Space."
- 23 See Pieterse, "Cityness and African Urban Development."
- 24 Brenner and Schmid, "Toward a New Epistemology," 166.
- 25 Brenner, "Debating Planetary Urbanization," 571.
- 26 Brenner, "Debating Planetary Urbanization," 571.
- 27 Dear and Dishman, *From Chicago to LA*.
- 28 Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 223.
- 29 See Schmid et al., "Towards a New Vocabulary."
- 30 Myers, "African Problem." See also Robinson, *Ordinary Cities*.
- 31 Wachsmuth, "City as Ideology," 77.
- 32 Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences," in *Writing and Difference*, 351–71.
- 33 Alexander, *City Is Not a Tree*.
- 34 Karatani, *Architecture as Metaphor*, 29.
- 35 Karatani, *Architecture as Metaphor*, 37.
- 36 Even though Max Weber made the "ideal type" an ubiquitous concept with his seminal book *Economy and Society*, his apt elaboration on it appears in the essay "The Objectivity of Knowledge in Social Science and Social Policy." He writes: "It [an ideal type] is obtained by means of a one-sided *accentuation of one or a number of viewpoints* and through the synthesis of a great many diffuse and discrete *individual phenomena* (more present in one place, fewer in another, and occasionally completely absent), which are in conformity with those one sided, accentuated viewpoints, into an internally consistent mental image" (Weber, "Objectivity of Knowledge," in *Collected Methodological Writings*, 125; author's italics). My contention

here is simply that contemporary urban theory is still critically infused with this sort of Weberian idealism. See Weber, *Economy and Society*; Weber, *Collected Methodological Writings*.

- 37 Fernandes, "Constructing the 'Right to the City,'" 202.
- 38 Fernandes, "Constructing the 'Right to the City,'" 202.
- 39 Gastrow, "Cement Citizenship, Housing, Demolition," 10; see also Gastrow, "Negotiated Settlements."
- 40 Davis, *Planet of Slums*.
- 41 Roque, "*Cidade and Bairro*," 340.
- 42 Croese, "Inside the Government."
- 43 Boeri, "Italian Landscape."
- 44 Even though Boeri is particularly interested in European cities, I find his approach useful for explaining Luanda. See Boeri, "Eclectic Atlases," n.p.
- 45 Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, 252.
- 46 Rabinow, *Anthropos Today*.
- 47 I am indebted to Michael Taussig for the courses he taught on Walter Benjamin at Columbia University, and for his guidance in helping me understand the mausoleum and the embalming of Agostinho Neto's body in light of Benjamin's writings.
- 48 Cvorov, "Dialectical Image Today," 92.
- 49 See, for instance, Narayan, "How Native," and Panourgia, *Fragments of Death*.
- 50 Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 5.
- 51 There is a considerable body of literature that addresses urban transformation after the removal of Roque Santeiro. These works will be discussed in subsequent chapters.
- 52 Aureli, *Possibility of an Absolute Architecture*.

Chapter I. Un-building History to Build the Present

- 1 Joseph Calder Miller describes *sobrados* as "large multistoried townhouses." According to Miller, *sobrados* "became symbol[s] of local aristocratic pretensions at Luanda. Some Luso-Africans lived with their families on the second stories of the *sobrados* in the upper part of the city, where large balconied windows opened on the sea and brought a measure of comfort and, it was fondly but vainly assumed, also of health from onshore daytime breezes that lessened the oppressiveness of the humidity." See Miller, *Way of Death*, 295.
- 2 As famously discussed by Marcel Mauss. See, Mauss, *Gift*, 7–8.
- 3 Abbas, "Building on Disappearance," 443.
- 4 Miller, *Way of Death*. See also David Eltis, who writes: "Although Whydah, on the Slave Coast, was once considered the busiest African slaving port on the continent, it now appears that it was surpassed by Luanda, in West Central Africa, and by Bonny, in the Bight of Biafra. Luanda alone dispatched some 1.3 million slaves, and these three most active ports together accounted for 2.2 million slave departures." Eltis, "African Side of the Trade." <https://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/essays#interpretation/a-brief-overview-of-the-trans-atlantic-slave-trade/the-african-side-of-the-trade/5/en/>.