



ARQUIMEMÓRIA 6
SALVADOR-BAHIA-BRASIL 2024

HOW PUBLIC SPACES IN CONTEMPORARY DOWNTOWN LUANDA REFLECT INDIGENOUS CULTURE IN WESTERN IDEALS SPATIALITY – THE CASE OF THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER’S MONUMENT SQUARE.

*COMO OS ESPAÇOS PÚBLICOS NO CENTRO URBANO DE LUANDA REFLETEM VALORES
CULTURAIS NATIVOS EM ESPAÇOS PRODUZIDOS COM IDEAIS OCIDENTAIS NA
CONTEMPORANEIDADE. – O CASO DO MONUMENTO DO SOLDADO DESCONHECIDO*

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Thematic axis 4 – Reflections on Heritage

Abstract: The literature on African public spaces often overlooks the integration of indigenous cultural values and historical context, focusing instead on Western ideals introduced during colonial times. This paper aims to address this gap by examining public open spaces in planned urban Luanda through the lens of both Western design influences and indigenous African values. Specifically, it analyzes the Monument of the Unknown Soldier in downtown Luanda, exploring how this iconic site has evolved over time and how it reflects both Western urban design principles and local interpretations of political and administrative authority in independent Angola. This evolving site serves as a microcosm of Luanda's broader historical trajectory, from colonial legacy through independence to contemporary modernization.

The paper highlights how colonial urban interventions were often seen as repressive to indigenous cultural practices. Similarly, recent changes to the Monument of the Unknown Soldier reflect a top-down approach that mirrors past authoritarian practices. However, this modern intervention also incorporates elements of traditional black African urban layouts, where central spaces were sacred and facilitated access to authority figures. The monument's austere design underscores its role as a site for contemplation rather than social gatherings.

The paper is organized into three sections. First, it revisits the origins of public open space (POS) studies and highlights their importance in the field of urban design. Second, it examines the lack of understanding about public open spaces (POSs) in the African context. Finally, the Unknown Soldier's Monument in Luanda's city center is used as a case study to illustrate the suppression, alteration, adaptation, and evolution of cultural values and customs. It is concluded that future research should build on this analysis by exploring additional public open spaces in Luanda and comparing them with analogous spaces in African and non-African contexts.

Keywords: Public Open Spaces, Indigenous cultural values, Urban Planning, Urban Design



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Resumo: A literatura sobre os espaços públicos exteriores (do inglês PUBLIC OPEN SPACES) em países africanos no contexto do Sul Global é escassa e tende a ignorar o contexto histórico e a integração dos valores culturais nativos, concentrando-se nos modelos urbanísticos ocidentais introduzidos durante o período colonial. Este artigo tem como objetivo examinar os espaços públicos exteriores no contexto urbano formal da cidade de Luanda, Angola, através da perspectiva tanto das influências do desenho urbano ocidental quanto dos valores africanos nativos. É analisado, especificamente, o Monumento ao Soldado Desconhecido localizado no centro histórico de Luanda, explorando como este local icônico evoluiu ao longo do tempo, refletindo tanto os princípios de desenho urbano ocidentais quanto as interpretações locais da autoridade política e administrativa na Angola independente. Este espaço serve como um microcosmo da trajetória histórica mais ampla de Luanda, desde o legado colonial, passando pela independência até a modernização contemporânea.

O artigo destaca como as intervenções urbanas coloniais eram frequentemente vistas como repressivas às práticas culturais indígenas. Da mesma forma, as mudanças recentes no Monumento ao Soldado Desconhecido refletem uma estratégia TOP DOWN em que o processo de decisão espelha práticas autoritárias do passado. No entanto, essa intervenção moderna também incorpora elementos dos arranjos "urbanos" tradicionais da África negra, onde os espaços centrais eram sagrados e facilitavam o acesso a figuras de autoridade. A atmosfera austera do monumento ressalta o seu papel como um local para contemplação, e não de encontros sociais.

O artigo está organizado em três partes. Primeiro, revisita as origens dos estudos sobre espaços públicos exteriores e destaca sua importância no campo do desenho urbano. De seguida aborda a reduzida informação sobre os espaços públicos exteriores no contexto africano do sul global. Finalmente, apresenta o Monumento ao Soldado Desconhecido em Luanda, como um estudo de caso, para ilustrar a supressão, alteração, adaptação e evolução dos valores e costumes culturais. Conclui-se que pesquisas futuras explorando diferentes espaços públicos abertos em Luanda e comparando com espaços análogos em contextos africanos e não africanos são necessárias.

Palavras-Chave: Espaços Públicos Exteriores, Valores Culturais Nativos, Planeamento Urbano, Desenho Urbano



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HOW PUBLIC SPACES IN CONTEMPORARY DOWNTOWN LUANDA REFLECT INDIGENOUS CULTURE IN WESTERN IDEALS SPATIALITY – THE CASE OF THE UNKNOWN MONUMENT SQUARE.

INTRODUCTION

In Angolan indigenous settlements, vernacular public spaces, i.e., spaces of gathering and conviviality, served the same purpose that public open spaces (POSs) serve in contemporary Angolan cities. The nature of use has evolved over time, beginning with indigenous practices, and further developing with the introduction of urban ideas and practices from Eastern cultures that were brought in during Portuguese colonization. These morphologic and social evolutions are worth looking into, as they elucidate how citizens in cities such as Luanda use and perceive POSs today.

This article explores the transformation of public open spaces in Luanda's city center, exploring how Western urban ideals from the colonial era have shaped these areas. Users, particularly those of African descent, continue to practice and perceive these spaces through the lens of both historical cultural values and the legacies of colonization. By analyzing Luanda's Monument of the Unknown Soldier, the paper aims to contribute to provide a comprehensive perspective on the morphology and usage of POSs in former colonial Lusophone cities, shedding light on the intersection of indigenous cultural values, colonial legacies and contemporary urban practices.

The paper starts by revising the origins and significance of public open space (POS) studies, emphasizing their role in urban design. Then it addresses the gaps in understanding POSs within the African context, highlighting the need for more comprehensive research in this area. The Monument of the Unknown Soldier in Luanda's city center serves as a case study to illustrate the complex interplay of colonial legacy, independence, and modernization, as well as the evolution of cultural values and customs within public open spaces.

This site, situated in a historically significant area, reflects how colonial influences have shaped urban spaces and how these influences have been reinterpreted in the context of Angolan independence and modern urban development. By examining its evolution, we can trace the historical shifts that have impacted the use and significance of POS in Luanda, highlighting how colonial-era designs and symbols have been adapted or redefined in response to post-colonial identity and societal changes.

It is suggested that future research on other POS in African and non-African contexts is needed. Comparing these spaces with their counterparts will provide deeper insights into urban and sociocultural dynamics. Such comparisons will enrich our understanding of how different historical and cultural influences shape the development and perception of public spaces, offering guidance for more informed and inclusive urban planning and management in the future.



EXPLORING THE ORIGINS OF PUBLIC OPEN SPACES: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON URBAN STUDIES

Public open spaces (POS's) have been integral to human settlements since ancient times. In ancient civilizations such as Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Greece, central squares, marketplaces, and communal gathering areas served as vital hubs of social, economic, and cultural exchange. These spaces not only facilitated trade and commerce but also provided venues for public gatherings, religious ceremonies, and political events.

Goitia (2014) explains that cities that stem from Greco-Roman paradigms allocate emphasis on the sociological importance of the plurality of ideas and the conviviality that emerges from the opportunities to meet and socialise in streets, parks, and piazzas in other words, in the public realm. Furthermore, in cities of Anglo-Saxon civilisation origins, such conviviality happens indoors as well. These cities preserve an agrarian rationale of the towns, derived from the archaic English *tun*, meaning enclosed space as a part of the prairie belonging to a household. In a context of raised density, these cities create the "common" not as a piazza or an Agora but as a nostalgic remembrance of the prairie, which is no longer on the horizon but completely out of sight. Goitia (2014) defines the *tun* as a domestic city.

On the other hand, in cities with strong Islamic influence, such conviviality happens indoors in courtyards and other enclosed meeting spaces except for the market which is open and public. In the Islamic city, streets become crowded alleys, conduits that connect the spaces where "life happens" (Goitia, 2014). In this city, the souk or market is a place of active interactions and socialisation, not so distinct from African cities of the past and contemporaneity. The domestic and the public concepts of city experience overlap in the Islamic city because city life happens indoors but not necessarily in domestic realms. For the Islamic, the domestic space is sacred, a religious space. However, though walled, the courtyards of harems and mosques are spaces of socialisation. Roads and streets are mere conduits from one indoor space to another, and façades are not communicative of the socio-economic status of what they hold on to the inside, rarely revealing prosperity or poverty, private or public uses, which is very distinct from the discernible façades of the Latin and Greek city.

The literature dedicated to the history of POSs identifies corresponding social values between the ancient Greek Agora and the democratic political function of open spaces because the Greek Agora is considered the symbol of the public sphere (Madanipour, 2003; Stanley et al., 2008; Goitia, 2014; Carmona et al., 2022). Roman-planned forums and religious plazas represent other iconic ancient public open spaces cited (Goitia, 2014). During the Roman Empire, the forum emerged as a prominent public space, serving as the heart of civic life and governance in urban centers.

Often, these Greco-Roman narratives jump to medieval Europe, where plazas were usually paired with Christian churches where socio-economic and recreational activities took place (Stanley et al., 2008). Medieval European cities featured town squares and marketplaces that played essential roles in community life. Similarly, The Renaissance period saw a renewed interest in urban planning and design, leading to the creation of grand plazas, parks, and gardens in cities across Europe. These spaces were often designed as symbols of power and prestige, reflecting the aspirations of rulers and nobility.



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Renaissance and Enlightenment emphasised secular and private values, reflecting urban open spaces. Urban squares for exclusive residential use appeared in some areas, such as Place des Vogues in Paris, the Bloomsbury Squares in London and downtown Philadelphia (Carmona et al., 2008). Additionally, on the use of space for social utility or well-being, dedicated urban parks specialised for recreational purposes proliferated in the 19th century, like Birkenhead Park and Central Park in New York (Jordan, 1994; Carmona et al., 2008).¹

In the 17th and 18th centuries, the emergence of public parks and promenades marked a shift towards more inclusive and recreational public spaces, accessible to people of all social classes. The industrial revolution brought about significant changes to urban landscapes, as rapid urbanization and industrialization transformed cities. The concept of POS's continued to evolve throughout history, influenced by various cultural, social, and technological factors. In the late 19th century, the study of public open spaces became an essential focus of urban planning and design disciplines. Camilo Sitte's seminal work in 1889, *The Birth of Modern City Planning*, laid the foundation for typological studies of public open space. Since then, urban theorists and designers explored the social, cultural, and environmental dimensions of public spaces, seeking to create more inclusive and sustainable urban environments.

Kevin Lynch (2018), in *Good City Form*, states that the prevailing motives to build cities can be summarised in five points. Firstly, the need for symbolic stability and order; secondly the need to control others and express power, thirdly determine levels of access and exclusion, followed by the development of economic functions, and lastly, to establish the capacity to control resources.²³

¹ Birkenhead Park was designed by gardener and architect Joseph Paxton at a time when public parks became an intentional part of public policy in England, reacting to rural-urban migration trends and population congestion of cities during the industrial era. This park was visited by Frederick Law Olmstead, who was well impressed by the design and intensity of use in the park. Back in his hometown, New York, also living at the peak of population urban growth and its social tensions, Olmstead realised the need for breathing open spaces for relaxation and exercise in nature-like urban spaces in his hometown. Amidst a growing stratified society, Andrew Jackson Downing, a contemporary of Olmstead, feared that social classes in America had fewer spaces, allowing them to co-mingle with each other and believed that New York needed a place devoid of social class exclusions and return to America's egalitarian roots, proposing a People's Park. Similarly to utilitarian reformers in England, Downing believed that the lower classes would be uplifted and influenced by this interaction with the elite while addressing public health concerns by providing large green spaces within the city's urban grid (Jordan, 1994; Cranz, 2008).

² Examples of the first motive are the early cities such as Ur, established between 5000 Ac and 3500 Ac, which developed following agricultural revolutions and commercial activities. These early city manifestations soon evolved into stratified societies based on class hierarchies of enslaved people, farmers, soldiers and forepersons at the bottom and state servants and clergy members who owned the land at the top, giving birth to city-states and the need to control and express power.

³ Boston's history is a testament to the various motives for building cities. Initially, the city was a commercial port, with the wealthy living in the centre and the less fortunate on the peripheries. However, economic and political changes in the city led to a shift from a port city to an industrial hub in 1857. This change, coupled with the discovery of the steam engine and the availability of an Irish labour force, transformed the city's social structures. The need to maintain proximity between production, transportation, food markets, labour force residential areas, and financial services changed the city centre's shape and spatial distribution. The intensified industrial activities led to increased congestion and a critical health crisis in the late 1850s. To address this, the city cleared residential sites for the working class, accommodating additional commercial structures and expanding the city centre. The lower end of society, the labour force for the industrial sector, was sent away from the city centre, creating new residential areas that became sites of poverty. Boston's evolution demonstrates that the functions and cultural values of the community it houses impact the city's shape and form, transcending morphological characteristics.



Lynch's exploration of POS's traces their evolution from functional thoroughfares to social gathering spaces, highlighting the importance of connectivity and accessibility in urban design. He identifies two contrasting paradigms in urban development: the concentration of POSs to create cohesive urban forms and their dispersion to enhance accessibility and proximity. These paradigms reflect differing perspectives on the role of POSs in urban life, from providing respite from the built environment to serving as integral components of everyday urban living.

The benefits of social interaction and liveable cities were reinforced by liveable public open space pioneers Jan Jacobs (1961) and David Whyte (1980), who rescued POS's when cities were designed for cars and not for people or pedestrian movement. Jacobs and Whyte testified that high-quality pedestrian-friendly neighbourhoods can prompt beneficial social interactions and interpersonal connections, thus creating liveable cities. Additionally, the Garden City movement established the ideology that access to green open spaces within the context of a congested city has beneficial health outcomes for humankind (Howard, 1898), which links to current discussions of sustainable development (Saunders, 2010) with emphasis on environmental and governance values for sustainable urban development (Amado, 2010; Poggi & Amado, 2024). Finally, equitable access to public space, especially the proximity to parks, is increasingly addressed as an urban and environmental justice requirement (UN, 2023; Wolch et al., 2005). Furthermore, participatory processes also dominate public open space production in the dialectic of top-down and bottom-up forces at play where the supremacy of state power is challenged but not levelled by civil initiatives nor the responsibility equally shared; the dialectic feeds discussions about the privatisation of private spaces allowed by the state which is increasingly disinvesting in public open space interventions for the demise of lower end socio-economic classes.

Today, the study of POS's continues to evolve in response to changing urban dynamics and societal needs. Jan Gehl's functional approach and the co-participation model advocated by the Project for Public Spaces, have contributed to the understanding of POS's. Carmona's detailed study of POS's integrates both morphological and functional analyses, incorporating contemporary concepts such as participatory place production, spatial flexibility, and social inclusivity. By considering the temporal dimension and socio-cultural values, Carmona's analysis provides a comprehensive framework for assessing the role of POS's in meeting the needs of diverse social groups. Similarly, Jan Gehl's approach emphasizes direct observation and user-centered design principles, ensuring that POSs are responsive to the needs and aspirations of their users.

Beyond typologies and historical analyses, the importance of public spaces in fostering social interaction and cohesion cannot be overstated. The revitalization of POS's presents an opportunity to address urban challenges and promote sustainable development. By prioritizing equitable access, participatory processes, and user-centered design principles, urban designers can create public spaces that meet the needs of diverse communities and contribute to the creation of vibrant, livable cities.

Consequently, grassroots initiatives forge their recognition by local administrative institutions, securing a space they need to access and enjoy. In Luanda, historical and socio-cultural placemaking heritages dance around the city-beautification paradigm of state visions inherited from colonial administration ideals securing political hegemony and the need for spaces that accommodate lower and upper classes eager to breathe, rest, play and enjoy quality outdoor spaces in this congested city. This dance is still finding a rhythm.



NON-WESTERN URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN ANCIENT AFRICAN CITIES

The literature about POSs in the context of non-western urban development is less populated than its global north counterparts (Shema et al., 2023; Madanipor, 2003). Narratives about POS's usually focus on the trajectory from Mediterranean antiquity to modern Western European city models and contemporary African urban development paradigms (Buire, 2020; Croese, 2021; Gastrow, 2016).

The study of the urban development of ancient African cities, pre- and post-European colonial administration remains under-explored in the literature (Batalha, 2008; Real, 2011; Falola & Heaton, 2008), especially in Lusophone cities such as Luanda. Nevertheless, some studies, such as Madanipor's (2003), noted his attention to urban spaces in Asian and Middle East contexts such as China, Iran and Islamic cities Coquery-Vidrovitch (2008) studies on the History of African cities South of the Sahara and Simon (2004, 2015), Immerwahr (2007) studies of post-colonial urban developments are worthy efforts to fill the void of the meagre information available about ancient and contemporary African cities' transformations. Other authors such as Falola and Heaton (2008) and Shema (Shema et al., 2023) also dedicate attention to urban developments, state formation and the spatial heritages of African social structures pre-colonial influences mainly focused on Islamic Africa. In Angola, researchers such as Redinha (1964), Montecúccolo (1965), Medina and Castro Henriques (1996) and Weimer (2014), most of them concentrating on residential architecture rather than on the set up of the native "villages". Amaral (1968; 2000a) work poses a great contribution to the study of the African cultures and socio-politic organisations of pre-European contact period, delving into the spatial manifestation of territory occupation, valuable for the current work.

It is interesting to note the recognition that early African civilisations date pre-colonial arrival (Shema et al., 2023; Falola, 2008). Closely related to the Islamic city rationale that Goitia (2014) describes, early African urban settlements evolved into contemporaneity as a courtyard-based architecture (Shema et al., 2023; Steyn and Roodt, sd; Winters, 1983). Some authors relate African and Mediterranean villages as climatic responses to their environment where the courtyard is a social space for the family to cook, serving as a children's playgrounds and visitors' reception spaces with levels of privacy ascending from public to private (Ibid). This analogy is translated out to the larger dimension of the village as can be seen in Zaria's city layout, in Nigeria where the centre is the sacred space accessed and populated by the ruling kingship, the royal families and traditional title holders, the second circle inhabited by the wealthy and religious leaders of the community while the third and last layer the third circle the residential quarters of ordinary people occur. Thus, class spatial segregation is not new to African communities. Despite this spatial stratification, people from all three layers share common socio-cultural values such as religion, culture, and language.



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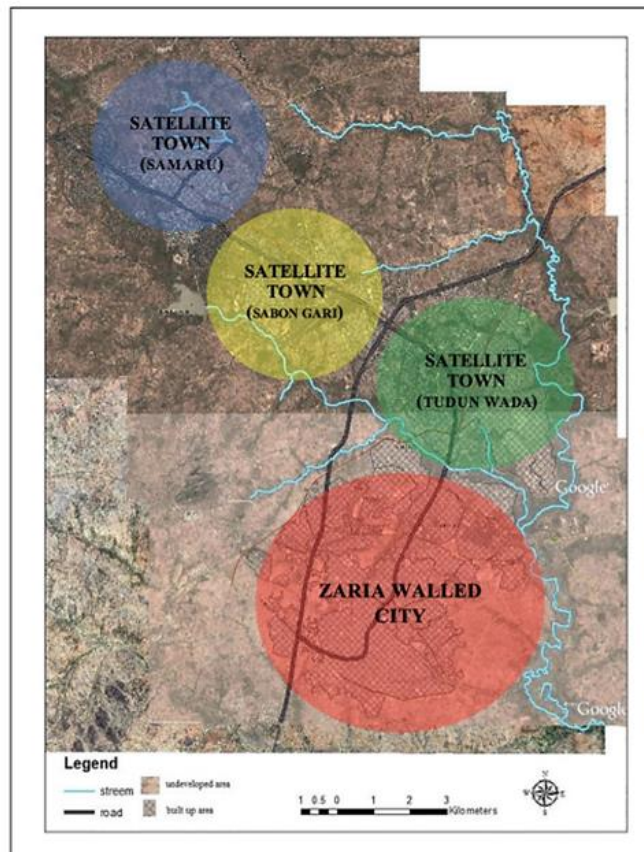


Figure 1: Map of Zaria City showing the primary axis of circulation and the secondary axis of circulation of the walled city (Google (2021) satellite accessed from <https://goo.gl/maps/LJ5DoFLKQRB5keYn8> on 06th September 2023).
Source: Shema et al (2023, p. 7)

Regarding public spaces, the market square, religious and other administrative buildings were at the centre. Immigrants in Zaria were attracted by economic opportunities and lived in what we could call "satellite cities" (Figure 1) in Howard's Garden City urban expansion principles. Indoor spaces are mainly sleeping spaces, and life happens outdoors because the climate allows such use.

There is also a correlation between the African social evolution from hunter-gatherers to agricultural and commercial activities and the emergence of craftsmanship as seen in global north societies (Falola, 2008; Goitia, 2008; Lynch, 2018). Furthermore, the spatial segregation of social classes is also a reality in African contexts that precedes European influences (Shema et al., 2023). In reality, much needs to be done to uncover the origins of early African urban history, hidden until the 1950s under the resistance of European scholars to accept that the continent had a social structure (Winter, 1983) and some efforts to acknowledge such facts in literature are emerging from African and western scholars (Winters 1983; Falola, 2008; Sneyden and Roodt, sd). Studying pre-colonial African urban history facilitates understanding the reactions of native urban dwellers to the imported western urban layouts inherited from colonial administrations and the consistent reproduction of native villages spatial heritage in spontaneous unplanned urban setups. Additionally, these studies can feed into understanding why some public space layouts are prone to work better due to their somewhat enclosed setting than others that exhibit less visual containment other than the veil of



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darkness at night. Indigenous gathering spaces were naturally enclosed spaces (Figure 2) where access was differentiated from public to private spaces and within the private realm according to gender (Figure 3). The acknowledgement of African vernacular history is not to say that Africans need to relapse to the point colonialism interrupted native African urban evolution but to establish a grounded way ahead.

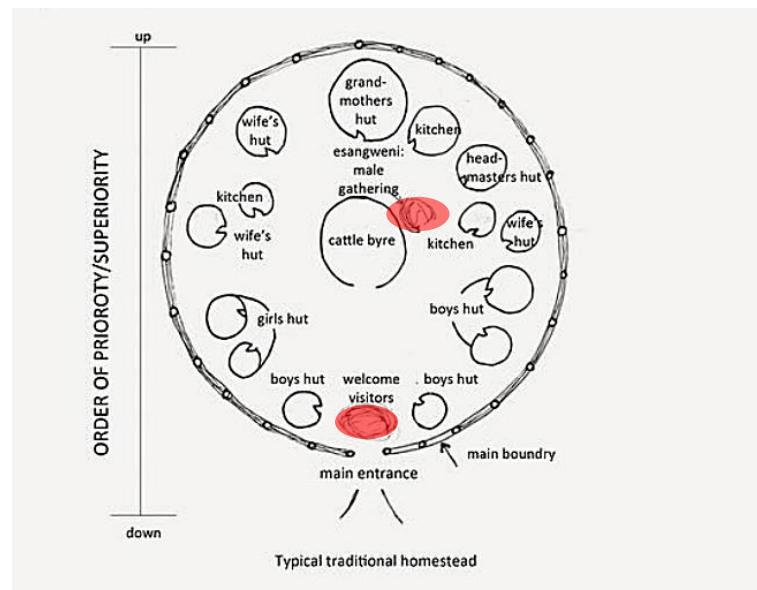


Figure 2: Emmanuel Nkambule's 2023 Venice Architecture Biennale design presentation was inspired by a sub-Saharan African homestead spatial layout. Gathering spaces in red.

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1894636610951705&set=pob.100012161529640>

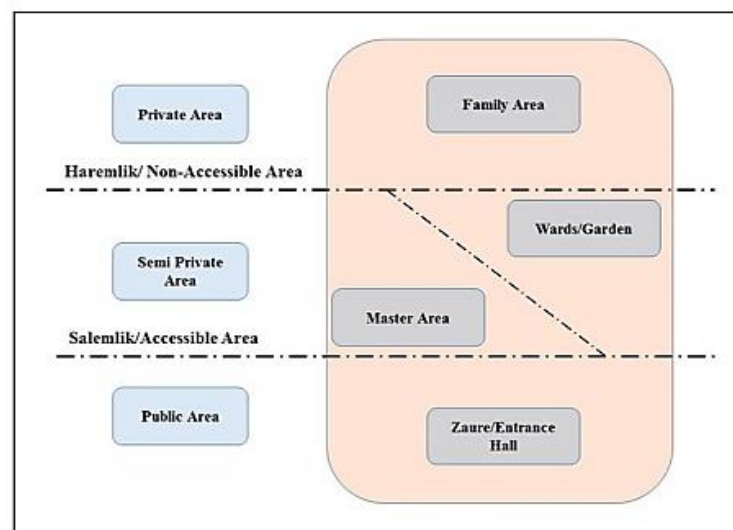


Figure 3: The spatial layering of spaces in a Hausa residential dwelling in Nigeria, according to level of privacy. This configuration relates to the homestead spatial configuration in South African as described by Emmanuel Nkambule's diagram above.

Source: Shema et. al, (2023, p. 6)



VERNACULAR PUBLIC OPEN SPACES IN ANGOLA

In Angola, researchers like Redinha (1964), Montecúccolo (1965), Medina and Castro Henriques (1996), Weimer (2014), Amaral (1968; 1996; 2000a; 2000b), and Gonçalves Custódio (2000) are notable non-African references for studies on native ethnic groups, their cultural values, and socio-economic organizations. Hearing perspectives from native Angolan researchers could significantly enrich the depth of available information. Angolan scholars such as Kukanda, Cruz e Silva, and Coelho (1997), as highlighted in the proceedings of the II Seminar on the History of Angola ("*Construindo o passado angolano e a sua interpretação*") have made valuable contributions to the study of native Angolan socio-political organizations and cultural identities, which deserve attention.

However, compared to the detailed spatial analyses found in studies of native villages in former Anglo-Saxon colonies, such as Nigeria and South Africa, the research on Angolan native villages lacks comprehensive descriptions of spatial layouts, particularly regarding the hierarchy of privacy from public to private spaces. Much of the available literature consists of accounts from European explorers who visited and lived among native Angolan communities. Amaral's studies (2000a; 2000b) provide visual documentation of typical family households and extended family compounds.

Despite this, Amaral's rigorous work (1996; 1997; 1999) offers valuable insights into the cultural background and spatial organization of native settlements at different scales and their interrelationships. Although these studies do not provide specific details on privacy hierarchies within Angolan native settlements, the diagrams suggest patterns similar to those found in Nigerian and South African communities. For instance, these settlements feature meeting open spaces with varying levels of accessibility based on social hierarchy, with "sacred spaces" typically located at the center and distinct social spaces for visitors, resident men, and resident women. Roads, much like in Islamic cities (Goitia, 2014), serve primarily as conduits between spaces rather than as areas for socialization.

Amaral's studies (1997, 2000a) also reveal that pre-colonial markets existed where communities, living 75 to 100 kilometers apart, engaged in commercial transactions. These markets were complex, involving both wholesale and retail trade practices, which challenges the idea that indigenous Africans were incapable of long-distance commerce before European contact.⁴

Some commonalities between the Nigerian and South African examples, are perceived from the depictions found in the literature (Redinha, 1964; 2009; Medina & Henriques, 1996; Weimer, 2016) such as the different huts for the head of the family and his different wives (Figures 4), which in repetition constitutes a *MBanza* (a housing compound of large scale where the soba, a high chief or kings lived and administered the social, economic and political life of their territory) or a *Mbata* (a housing settlement of lower scale and population density compared to the former without the administrative "urban" functions of the latter), usually under the authority of a superior kingship

⁴ Amaral (1997, 2000a) notes that these markets were temporary, varied in size, and were more common locally than those involving distant merchants. They were supervised by a representative of the king to ensure order and safety for vendors, buyers, and visitors, as these events also served as social gatherings. Additionally, markets functioned as "courts of justice" for resolving homicide cases. Thus, it is reasonable to draw a connection between these pre-colonial markets and the traditional markets found in "westernized" Angolan cities like Luanda, which have persisted from the colonial period to the present.



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authority (Weimer, 2016; Medina & Henriques, 1996; Amaral, 1999). Kingship gathering spaces were dimensioned and designed to accommodate meetings and celebrations and are significantly larger than homestead ones, as seen in the 17th century depictions and descriptions of Priest Cavazzi about Queen Njinga Mbandi's "New City" (Amaral 2000:124). Another similar trace is the enclosures at different levels (residential and village levels) and the narrow paths from one household to another the lines of communication (equivalent to the streets in contemporary urban setups) of these compounds almost as the medieval fortified cities of western old cities in Europe.

In terms of vernacular public spaces, what is significant is that in traditional native settlements, "citizens" were connected through bloodlines or relationships based on seniority or serfdom (Alexandre, 2016). Today, some *musseques*⁵ still retain aspects of this traditional social structure, with a chief or *soba* who helps resolve conflicts and disputes among residents. Important meetings often take place in designated open spaces under trees or within courtyards, similar to practices in historical native villages.

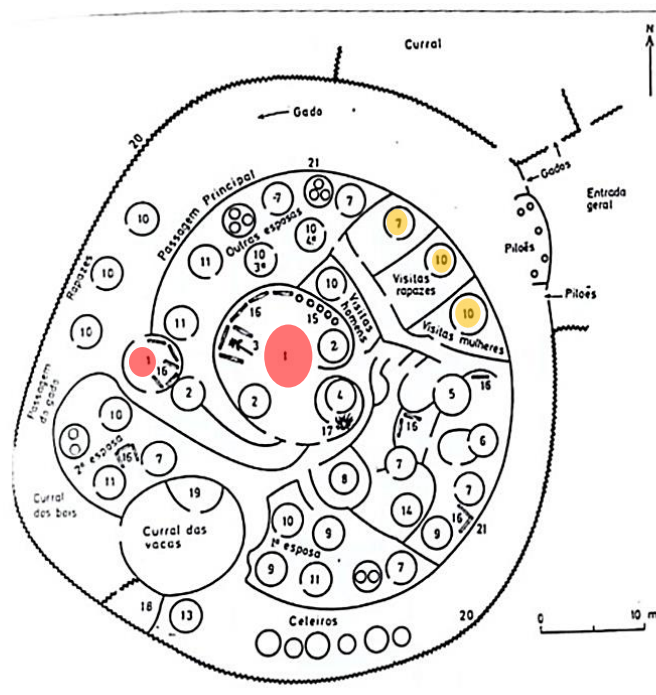


Fig. 4: Drawing of an *eumbo*, the family setting of a chief and his four wives from a *Cuanhama* man (from the south of Angola) authored by Edwin Loeb. Visitor's gatherings spaces in red and domestic gathering spaces in yellow
Source: Original drawing in Amaral (2000, p. 157)

- 1) Main Lupale; 2) ;3)Coverd ;4)1st Wife's sleeping house; 5)Small Lupale; 6) Household head sleeping house; 7) Storage; 8) Butter covered ; 9)Kitchens; 10) Sleeping House; 11)Sleeping House eventually; 12)Kitchens 13) Security's House;14)Beer's storage; 15)Logs cut crosswise for seats;16)Trunks lying for seats;17)Bucranium easel;18)Garrote enclosure;19) Calf enclosure; 20)Hawthorn palisade; 21)Palisade of wattle and daub

⁵ *Musseques* is a term used in Angola to describe informal or unplanned settlements

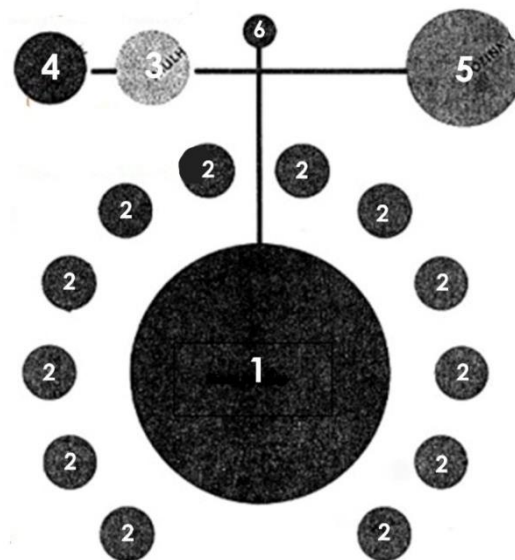


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Moreover, homes in *musseques* are organized around courtyards (Figures 6 and 7), reflecting the traditional settlement pattern that has been overlooked in modern city planning. Alongside these spatial changes, there are also shifts in the socio-cultural landscape; residents no longer always share bloodline connections, work relationships, or ethnic backgrounds. While some spaces continue to support gatherings, whether these gatherings are truly inclusive is another issue.

It is worth noting that Portuguese planners did attempt to incorporate elements of indigenous village layouts into their designs for native Angolans. This intention is evident in some drawings by architect Vasco Vieira da Costa (Figure 5), which reflect an effort to replicate aspects of traditional spatial arrangements.



- 1. Gathering
- 2. Houses
- 3. Women Washroom
- 4. Men Washroom
- 5. Communal Kitchen
- 6. Water

Figure 5: Diagram illustrating the spatial organisation of a proposed "indigenous village" by Vasco Vieira da Costa.
Source: Maria da Fonte (2007, p. 87)

However, the literature on colonial urban development in former Portuguese colonies primarily comes from Portuguese architects who practiced in these regions (Milheiro, 2012, 2016; Maia, 2019; Bonito & Tostões, 2016; Marat-Mendes & Sampaio, 2016) and academic research produced by Portuguese universities (Martins, 2000; Fonte, 2007; Matos & Ramos, 2006; 2007). In addition, critical postcolonial studies on the Portuguese colonial era have proliferated since the 2010s



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(Correia, 2018; Croese, 2016; 2018; 2021; Buire, 2022; Gastrow, 2017; Cain, 2014; Leite et al., 2016; Silva, 2016).

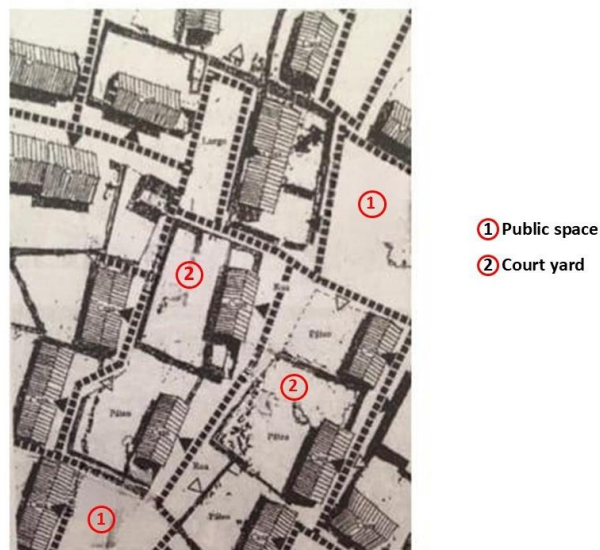


Figure 6: Drawing of a *musseque* in the 1970s, illustrating the construction of domestic dwellings on the margins of the plot and open "public spaces" within the settlement.
Source: Fonte, (2007, p.162)

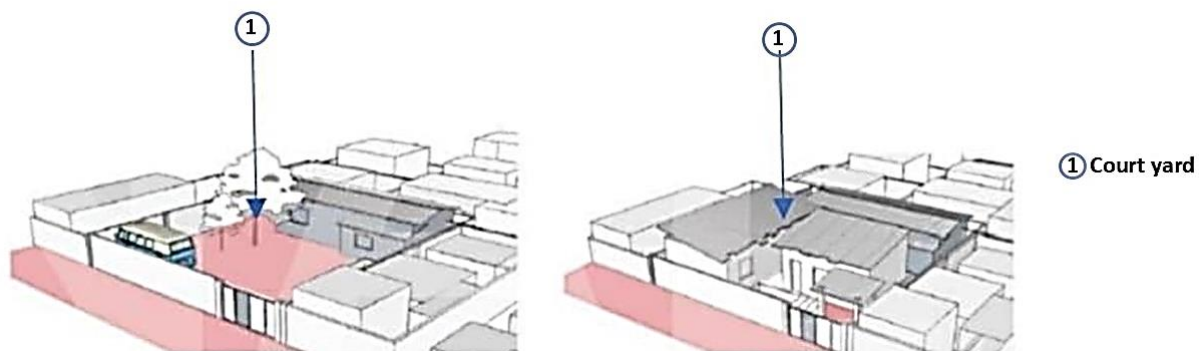


Figure 7: Depiction of the densification of a *musseque* in Luanda from a domestic dwelling plot perspective. The main house is built on the margin of the plot and incrementation happens sideways preserving the centrality of the courtyard. Added houses serve for renting or the adult offspring.
Source: PDGML, (2015, p. 69)



ARQUIMEMÓRIA 6
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THE CASE OF THE UNKNOWN SOLDIERS' MONUMENT IN LUANDA

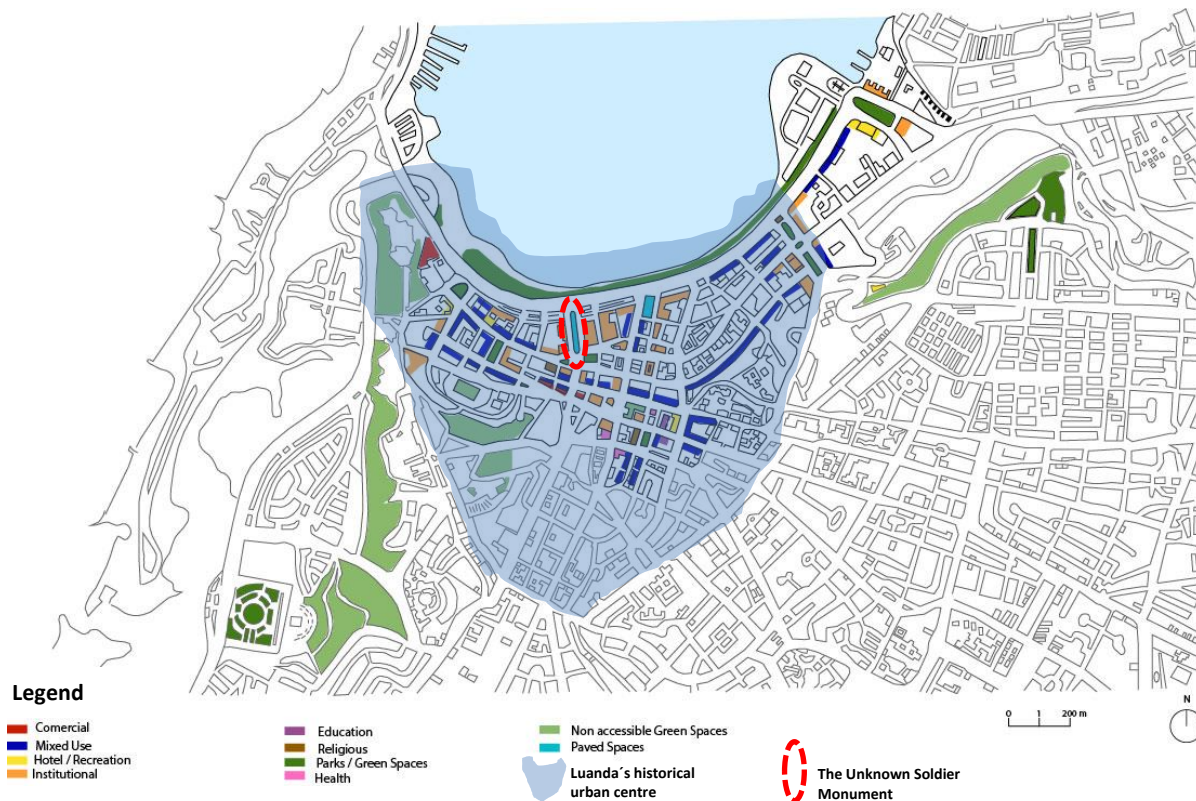


Fig 8: The location and context of the monument within Luanda's Historical City Centre 17th century

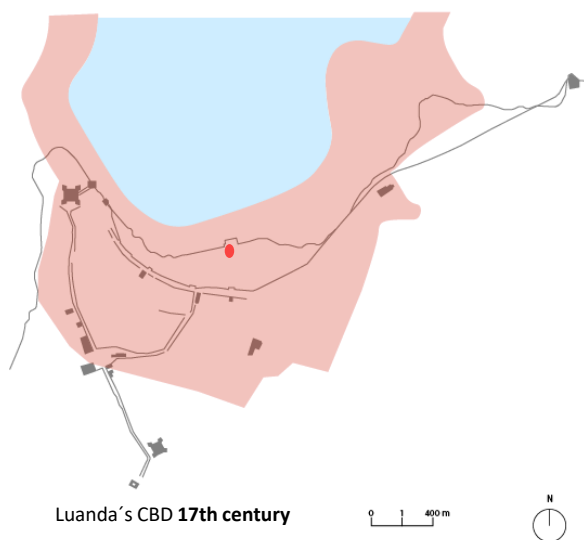
The Unknown Soldiers' Monument is located in the historic city center of Luanda, positioned between 4th of February Avenue, which separates the Bay of Luanda from the inner city, and Rainha Jinga Road. (Figure 8). Historically, the Kongo kingdom protectorate used this site as a beach for the zimbo gathering⁶. The area was a sea bank, restricted for settlement and residential purposes. The Portuguese arrival and the slave trade led to the occupation of Luanda's coastline, gradually pushing the seashore from once bathing Nossa Senhora dos Remédios's church further down to its current location (Amaral, 1968; Mingas, 2011).

⁶ The zimbo was a seashell and served as a form of currency (Amaral, 1996; Wheeler & Pélissier, 2016).

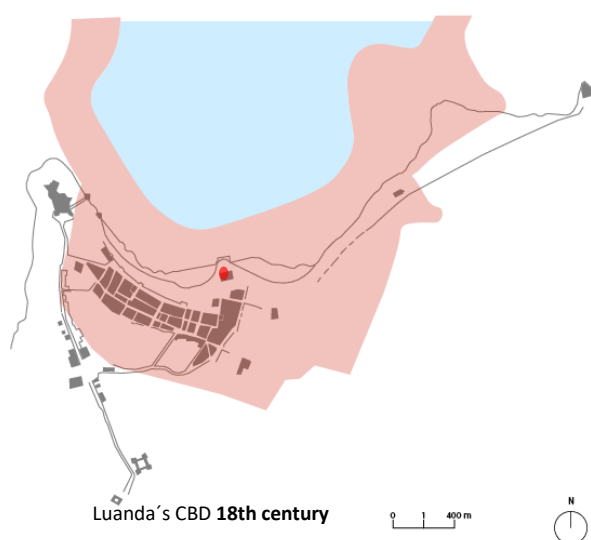


ARQUIMEMÓRIA 6

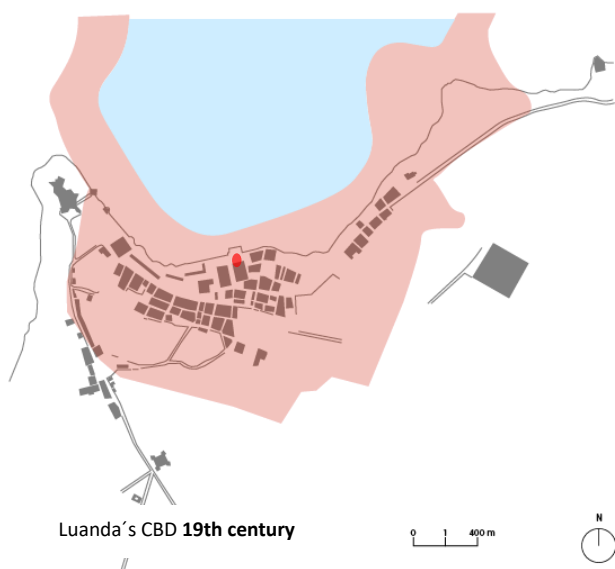
SALVADOR-BAHIA-BRASIL 2024



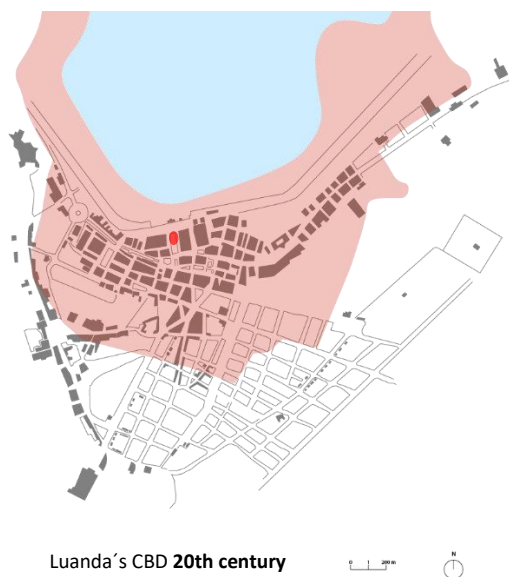
Luanda's CBD 17th century



Luanda's CBD 18th century



Luanda's CBD 19th century



Luanda's CBD 20th century

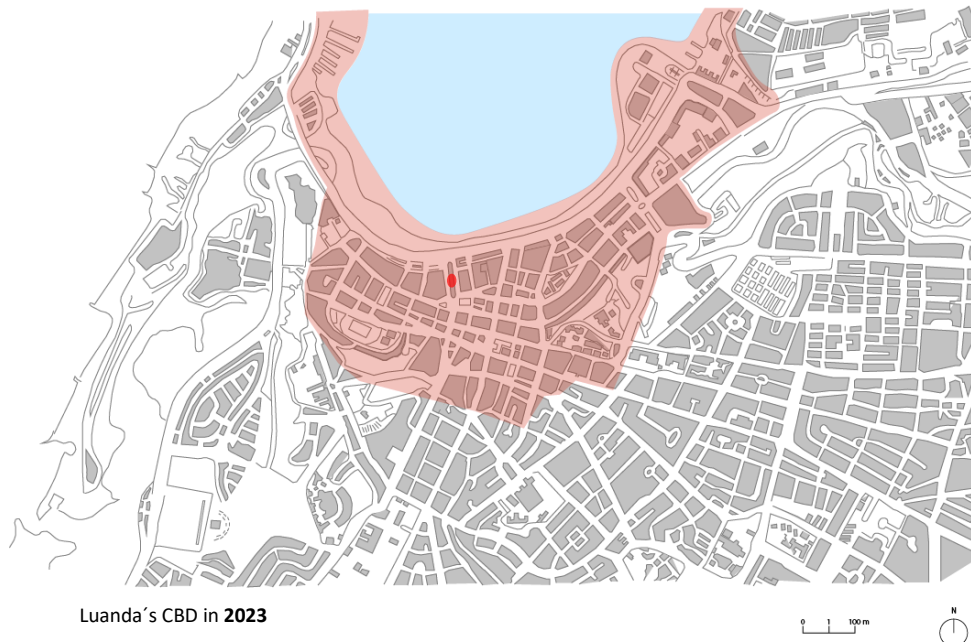


Fig. 9: Sequence of the author's map interpretations of Luanda's CBD chronological growth from the 17th century until 2023 based on Martins et al, 2010, Amaral 1968, and Google earth maps of 2023. The Unknown soldier's Monument location is marked in red on every chronologic map. The maps focused on Luanda's Central Business District which is part of the city's Historical Centre.

Amaral (1968), Mourão, (1996), and Santos (n.d.) provide evidence of the early Luanda's urban development trajectory, explaining how the seaport set in front of this site served for embarking and disembarking of goods and for slave trade purposes from the 15th until early 19th centuries, when slavery was abolished and Luanda's urban development took a different significant turn for improvement interrupted with World War I and II. From the 1940s to the early 1970s, a new wave of intervention took place as the liberation struggle hindered colonial administration. These operations ceased on November 11th, 1975, when the MPLA declared the country's independence (Croese, 2018; Ferreira, 2001). The site thus became a city landmark, sitting in a very institutional setting between the Central Post Office headquarters, the National Police headquarters, and Sonangol's (the national oil company) headquarters. The chronological evolution of the site is shown in Figure 9.

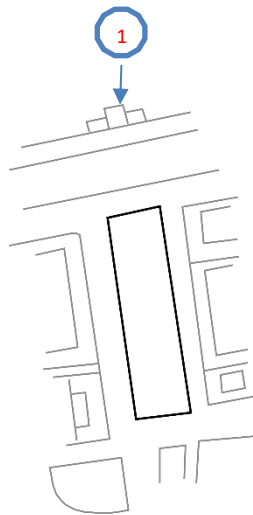
According to the 1926 city map of Luanda (Amaral, 1968), the site appears as vacant land, with the city's primary commercial district under colonial administration facing the square (Figure 10). Amaral (1968) notes that around the site and throughout Luanda, there were informal markets primarily run by women, known today as street vendors or *zungueiras*⁷. These markets represented a significant commercial force in the city. In 1965, the site was transformed into a parking facility to accommodate the increasing number of cars in the city, with surrounding buildings primarily serving as offices (Figure 11).

⁷ In Luanda there are traditional street vendors. The term "*Zungueiras*" originates from the Kimbundo word "*zunga*," signifying "walk around". Kimbundo is Luanda's most spoken mother tongue.



ARQUIMEMÓRIA 6

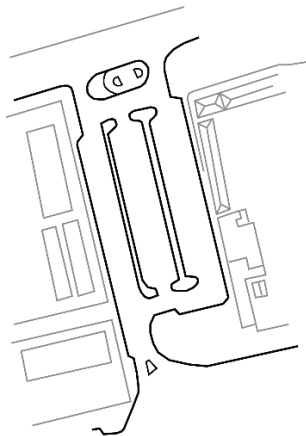
SALVADOR-BAHIA-BRASIL 2024



0 1 40 m



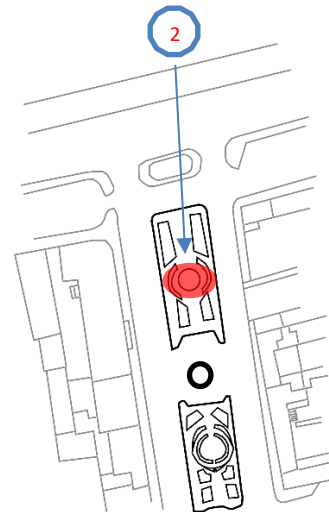
Figure 10: The site in 1926
1 – Old Port (Portas do Mar)
Author's drawing



0 1 40 m



Figure 11: The site in 1965
Author's drawing



0 1 40 m



Figure 12: The site in 1974
2 – The site of the Unknown Soldier's
Monument
Author's drawing

Although the most recent map from the colonial administration in Luanda's provincial archive dates from 1974 (Figure 12), testimonies from elders and findings by Santos (1970) suggest that the last major transformation under colonial rule occurred earlier. During this period, the colonial administration converted the square into a roundabout, adding seating in the surrounding gardens. An extension near the bay featured a bar named Rialto, which became a popular meeting spot on Fridays and a place where office workers could have meals during the week (J. de A. Santos, 1970). In the center of the roundabout, a statue was erected in honor of Pedro Alexandrino da Cunha (1801-1850), a Portuguese Captain and Administrator. This design remained in place until 2016, with the site, particularly the restaurant and its outdoor areas, serving as a hub for social gatherings and interactions.

In the 2010's the independent government of Angola decided to once again intervene on this site, and on September 23rd, 2017, President Dos Santos inaugurated the monument on this iconic site in memory of all soldiers who fought for the liberation from Portuguese colonial rule and maintenance of the country's sovereignty against the South African apartheid government (Figure 13). This initiative, which was drawn and executed hermetically without public consultation, was a declaration of political and administrative authority and supremacy from the top down. Residents expressed resistance when Luanda's provincial government announced the new project to alter the site. According to *Jornal de Angola*⁹, the institutions in charge of the conception and execution were the Ministry of Public Works, the Ministry of Culture, and Luanda's Provincial Government.¹⁰

⁹ *Jornal de Angola* is the country's institutional public newspaper

¹⁰ <https://www.jornaldeangola.ao/ao/noticias/detalhes.php?id=389359>.



A source at Dar Angola, a private company specialising in architectural and engineering projects clarified that *“the project was conceived by a group of Angolan professionals essentially from the Ministry of Public Works, Twon Planning and Housing, the Ministry of Culture and Dar Angola¹¹. Dar’s role was to develop the engineering project based on the ideas developed by the Ad-Hoc group¹²”*. Omatapalo¹³ was the company in charge of the monument’s construction. The monument occupies an area of 260 meters long and 60 meters wide, it has 16 interlocking pieces of 8.8 tons each and the structure is 23 meters high with a beam whose flame rises from a golden star¹⁴. The interlocking pieces symbolize the union of the soldiers fighting for a common cause and the flame the highest decoration for the fallen soldiers. During the visit to the monument in January 2023, the flame was not lit. It is worth noting that the flame and the austere atmosphere resemble, implicitly, the secluded spaces where the sacred flame was kept lit on indigenous settlements as seen before. This site encapsulates ancestral cultural values in a western urban design layout.

Despite the austere atmosphere caused mainly because of the institutional set-up (Figure 14), a market stands less than twenty meters away from this square on Rainha Jinga Road. The vending structures, thought to provide an organised and clean image to this informal commercial site, are part of Do.Lado.B¹⁵’s initiative (Figure 15), that envisages the revitalisation of the road on its entire length. The project goes by the name *Nossa Jinga*.

Nonetheless, the presence of this commercial area nearby, reflects ongoing efforts to balance historical preservation with contemporary urban needs. The continued evolution of this site thus represents a microcosm of Luanda’s broader journey through colonial legacy, independence, and modernization.

¹¹ Dar Angola is based in Luanda and is the nationalized offices of the multinational Lebanese company Dar Al-Handash.

¹² Clarifications made by Architect Ricardo Henrique an Angolan Director at Dar Angola.

¹³ Omatapalo is the nationalized offices of Omatapalo Portugal, a construction, engineering and public works company based in Lubango, Huíla, in the south of Angola.

¹⁴ <https://www.verangola.net/va/pt/092019/sugestoes/16364/Monumento-ao-Soldado-Desconhecido.htm>

¹⁵ Young Angolan architects and urban designers who studied abroad own Do.Lado.B, a private architectural practice, and are passionate about revitalizing public open spaces in downtown Luanda.



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LEGEND

Mixed Use
Hotel / Recreation
Institutional

Education
Religious
Parks / Green Spaces
Health

Non accessible Green Spaces
Paved Spaces
The Unknown Soldier's Monument
Market intervened by Do.Lado.B

Fig. 13: Building uses surrounding the site in 2024
Author's drawing.



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Fig. 14: A photo of the monument facing the bay.
Photo taken by the author, Jan 2023.

CONCLUSIONS

Research on public open spaces (POS) in Angola remains limited, with a predominant focus on built architectural heritage and the social impacts of urban interventions in post-independence Angola. The role of POS in community life is often undervalued, reflecting a continuation of the neglect of sociocultural values that were disregarded during the colonial era in Angolan cities. This ongoing neglect contributes to current authorities overlooking the contemporary urban needs.

This paper aims to address this gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of the morphology, evolution, and sociocultural significance of a specific POS in Luanda - the Unknown Soldiers' Monument, illustrating the ongoing tension between preserving historical significance and addressing present-day urban demands.

The case study reveals how the Monument of the Unknown Soldier embodies the transition from colonial rule to an independent Angolan state, showcasing how public monuments and spaces have been used to assert national identity and political authority (Figure 14a). It also demonstrates the ongoing negotiation between traditional cultural values and contemporary urban practices, as the space has evolved to reflect changing social and political priorities.

In Luanda, some public open spaces have benefited from interventions and public participation that promote socially inclusive activities and gatherings. Conversely, spaces like the Unknown Soldiers' Monument have been transformed into more austere environments designed for brief visits and contemplation. This recent change can be viewed as suppressive to cultural expressions and social



interaction. However, historical records offer a different perspective. In indigenous communities, central spaces were considered sacred, and access was carefully regulated as happens on the monument's site today. The monument's evolution — from a traditional market to a colonial port, then to a circular square with seating and a restaurant, and finally to an iconic city landmark — reflects a complex interplay of historical, social, and political forces.

This analysis highlights the evolution of POS in contemporary urban Luanda, blending indigenous and Western influences. Some scholars have criticized urban development initiatives in Luanda as "urban fantasies or utopias" (Cain, 2014; Buire, 2022) or the creation of "a new city for new citizens" (Buire, 2019). These critiques often emphasize socioeconomic disparities and the misalignment of foreign urban development models with the needs of African cities, particularly Luanda (Croese, 2018; GPL, 2015). Such approaches may conflict with the economic and sociocultural realities of the residents.

The lack of attention to the specific needs of diverse communities, including marginalized groups, can lead to the inadequate provision of essential services and amenities. This oversight impedes the development of inclusive and functional urban environments, ultimately affecting the quality of life for residents and hindering the city's ability to adapt to modern challenges. Addressing these gaps is crucial for ensuring that urban planning and development are responsive, fostering a more equitable and dynamic urban landscape.

Future research should expand the analysis to encompass other public open spaces (POS) in Luanda, comparing them with those in both African and non-African contexts. By deriving insights from these comparisons, researchers can enhance their understanding of urban and sociocultural dynamics and propose strategies for improving and managing these spaces more effectively.



Fig. 15: The market in Rainha Jinga Road.
Photo taken by the author, Jan 2023.



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