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Private condominiums in Luanda: more than just the safety of walls, a new way of living

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ABSTRACT

Since its independence in 1975, Angola's capital Luanda has been going through deep processes of demographic, economic, social and physical transformations. In this article, apart from introducing the case study of private condominiums in the general discussion on urban studies in the Global South, we focus on the dynamics of transformations regarding housing for the mid/upper strata, providing the background for the emergence and recent expansion of gated communities/condominiums, a phenomenon that has acquired major importance in the recent decades in Luanda. The specialised literature relates the demand for and multiplication of these residential structures in Africa with issues such as the search for safety associated with demonstrations of exclusive lifestyles. In the case of Luanda, the authors found—through a case study and qualitative data collected among residents and non-residents of condominiums—that, contrary to the results from other studies, condominiums in Luanda are essentially sought after primarily for functional reasons such as access to infrastructure and better living.

KEYWORDS

Condominium; gated communities; infrastructure; urban safety; urban stratification

Introduction

The studies on cities of the south, especially those focused on their specificities, only became more abundant at the turn of the twentieth century. Moreover, despite the intensification of global economic integration since the 1980s, the studies on urban realities in regions such as Africa, Asia or Latin America were basically centred on problems which were not exclusively urban but had become more visible in city contexts (Pieterse 2008), namely those related to poverty, the growth of peri-urban areas and the urban impacts of structural adjustments (Durlington 2009; Kuppinger 2008; Miao 2003). Still, these studies were viewed as special cases with few potential contributions to the dominant urban theory, systematically resorting to analytical frameworks used for the modern cities of developed countries (Parnell 2016; Pieterse 2008). This fact contributed to the postponement of a broader theoretical reflection on these realities and the overcoming of dominant paradigms, maintaining the “standardisation” (Peck 2015) of the Euro-American schools, apparently resisting the search for a perspective capable of dealing with the diversity of new places and their

circumstances. It was only in the late twentieth century that the post-colonial and post-structural discussions (Peck 2015) began to lead to more solid controversy regarding the dominant perspectives on urban studies. Research on cities of the Global South, and most particularly the African cities, had to face several challenges to defend the need of these cities to be examined on their own terms and, on the other hand, to bring the findings into the core of the urban studies' knowledge (Robinson 2016). Significant conjunctural changes taking place in some cities of the south, such as their higher and faster demographic growth compared to the cities of the north, were for instance not taken into account for a long time. This shift, highlighted by Parnell and Robinson (2012), necessarily calls for a "readjustment" of urban approaches, practices and decision-making in order to accommodate the transition and the development of a new geography as far as theoretical production is concerned (Roy 2009).

Along with this demographic variation, the big cities of the south have, in the latest decades, also been affected by processes of expansion of economic and ideological neoliberalism, which has dragged them into globalisation. The "worlding cities" (Roy and Ong 2011) now include unequivocally the African cities, too (Myers 2011; Peck 2015), allowing space for new interpretations of the urban, moving towards a true de-concentration of urban theory. Some authors like Parnell and Robinson (2012) insist, however, that theory is still frail and the concepts scarce, despite the progresses already made. In the Global South in general and particularly in African cities, urban change is extraordinarily rapid and challenging, suggesting the development of what Mabin, Butcher, and Bloch (2013) call an immense variety of urbanisms. In this article, we seek to bring the study of residential condominiums in Luanda to the broader discussion, encouraged by this increased recognition of the importance of studying new varieties of urbanisms in the Global South. Aware of the risks of probably being over-ambitious, the article aims at providing a reading on Luanda's gated communities, exploring this subject in its global context and, at the same time, showing its specificities since it articulates aspects related to the local and the global, the urban and the peripheral, contributing to a more comprehensive reading of the dynamics of transformation regarding urban reconfigurations. The purpose of this article is to explore Luanda's housing modalities for the mid/upper strata, providing the background for the emergence and recent expansion of what is normally named in the literature as gated communities—closed condominiums or just condominiums, as they are known in Luanda, a phenomenon that has acquired major importance in the last three decades. Capital city Luanda has been subject to great transformation in these recent years, which has a strong impact on spatial reconfigurations and, at the same time, increasingly reveals its worldliness and a particular way of building it.

When the Angolan civil war ended in 2002, decades after its inception at independence (1975), the city rapidly became a business and investment centre, sustained by the country's oil production and by the appetite of global capital (Melo 2016; Udelsmann Rodrigues and Frias 2016). Political stability transformed the country but especially its capital city, which became a business hub particularly attractive to foreign investments in construction. The city initiated a fast trajectory of unprecedented change and urban growth and opened up to free alliances with investors in several business areas. Currently with around 6.5 million residents (Census 2014),

Luanda has grown and reconfigured itself over the last years, mainly due to significant rural exoduses caused by the civil war which has led to overcrowding and infrastructural degradation. Until the mid-2000s, when a severe economic crisis caused by the drop of the oil price started, the urban transformation had been increasingly sustained by financial urban investment. Both the country's great wealth and global capital investments channelled to urban reconstruction turned real estate businesses into an important element in the transformation of the city (Cain 2013). Big entrepreneurs, building companies and realtors started to see Luanda as a city with not only a favourable location but also enough ambition to compete with other global cities. The municipal government in particular became interested in investing in it, moulding and reconfiguring the urban landscape according to international urban standards (Croese 2012; Soares de Oliveira 2015), creating new urban, peri-urban and suburban configurations (Buire 2014). The new world references include the construction of modern housing and of new spaces and leisure areas, like malls, outstanding sport facilities like the 11 November stadium in Camama, the new "centralities" (which are practically new satellite cities) and, increasingly, condominiums, projecting the city towards global urban status (Sklair 2005).

This article aims to analyse the dynamics of implementation and expansion of condominiums by providing elements of interpretation of several logics that permeate these dynamics, particularly those of the residents. Therefore, research is based on different types of data obtained through observation, documentary research, questionnaires, interviews and informal contacts, mainly focusing on expatriates of different origins who live in condominiums, other residents in condominiums, and a wider universe of urban population, selected through a "snowball" process, i.e., through successive new indications and contacts provided by those interviewed. Initially, the research planned for the use of 50 semi-structured questionnaires per category of resident previously defined by the research team. However, the response rate was lower than expected and in total only 132 questionnaires were collected and analysed. The questionnaire was more focused than the interviews and was released to a group of people within three targeted groups considered relevant to the study of condominiums in Luanda: (i) expatriate residents in condominiums (83 in total, 38 living in Condomínio Projecto Nova Vida and 45 in different Talatona condominiums); (ii) Luandans non-resident in condominiums (37); (iii) Luandan owners (resident or not) of homes in condominiums (12). The questionnaire asked, for example, to characterise positively and negatively the city of Luanda, the condominiums or the pros and cons of choosing to live in a condominium. The open questions referred either to the residential experience (for the residents) or to respondents' representations with respect to condominiums.

The presentation and discussion of the research results start with an overview of the processes and evolution of the city, on one hand, and of the condominiums, on the other, providing an outline of the city and of its main trends. The analysis seeks to explain the dynamics and logics of the condominium life through the relevance, in the context of Luanda, of the interconnections between the centre and the suburb, and the maintenance of active connections with the centre, which is extended to the family and social spheres, that call for a contextualised notion of condominiums as a suburban model. This is followed by a brief analysis of the leading motivations and factors of expansion of the closed

condominium model in Luanda, also integrating the discussion of the singularities of Luanda regarding the demand for security by means of isolation and enclosure.

Gated condominiums: a new urban form in Luanda

More recently, after the end of the war in 2002, a strong focus and investment in the recovery of Luanda intensified the ongoing urban changes. The result is a habitat in physical, social and economic recomposition, which gives rise to particular residential models, unprecedented in the country and interesting from a sociological point of view, which are the (gated) condominiums. These structures have emerged as responses to the residential needs of specific social strata in different contexts of the recent urban history (Atkinson and Blandy 2013). In their genesis, they were mainly a response to the needs for accommodation and safety of expatriate workers of multinational companies operating in Luanda, in particular those related to the oil industry within a post-independence context of increased insecurity and urban overcrowding. More recently, and as a result of the expansion and multiplication of such types of housing, issues related to the demand for better housing and infrastructural conditions by the growing middle and upper-middle classes constitute the main reason for the increased demand for condominiums.

The Angolan case is somehow different from the other southern African trends, amply described in the specialised literature. In current urban Africa, the middle and upper classes tend to settle far from the crowded, unhealthy and noisy districts of the city centres (Coquery-Vidrovitch 2014, 8), particularly looking for safety. In Angola, the gated condominium also represents a certain disconnect from the rest of the city (Buire 2014) but they are much more a solution for the generalised lack of functional living conditions in the city than a quest for apartness (Lara and Bekker 2012). The specificity of urbanisation in Luanda via private condominiums is also original vis-a-vis other examples of suburbanisation. The logic of location of the condominiums in areas outside the dynamic central interconnections, in less accessible areas and therefore apparently more protected, is not the underlying feature of the organisation and dynamism of the city of Luanda and its suburbs. The very term “suburb,” which refers to this type of isolation and detachment, is inadequate to understand the city and its peripheries, which strongly operate in a logic of interconnections, commuting, and social and business relationships with the centre, which do not fit the spatial dissociation of the gated communities, and that partly explain the slow and timid development of services and trade in the peripheries.

As will be shown, despite the worlding that Luanda condominiums represent, which makes them similar to other cities, the issue of urban violence, recurrently referred to in other African and in South American cities, has become insufficient to fully explain both their multiplication and the increased demand in Luanda. This highlights the Luandan specificity compared to other well-known global contexts where the fear of crime has become central as a justification for the construction of gated communities (Lemanski 2004; Durlington 2009). The “global city” has built its own originality, as a result of the global and local interactions that characterise the cities of the Global South as well (Shatkin 2007; Myers 2011), building at the same time its own segregated spaces which are “part of the global drive” (Lemanski 2004, 459) in an original style. Here, too, the balance between the globalised circuits of capital that are particularly interested in

the emerging African real estate markets and the existing extended precarious slums are part of the urban concerns (Ferguson 2006; Pieterse 2008; Pitcher and Moorman 2015). They do, however, combine and interconnect in particular ways. Gated communities are, in the context of generalised urban violence in Brazil or South Africa built as “private alternatives to crime prevention and control” (Landman and Schönteich 2002), along with other dedicated urban constructions (Bénit-Gbaffou, Didier, and Peyroux 2012). While some analyses show the entwinement between arguments for safety and segregation (Jürgens and Gnad 2002), other perspectives have moved beyond the discussion based on violence and security, namely in African urban contexts. Gated communities are at times seen as “real estate products tailored to care for the middle classes” (Morange et al. 2012), particularly emphasising the social dynamics underneath (Lemanski 2011) and the importance of infrastructure to the urban life and how it shapes the city (Simone 2004; De Boeck 2012).

Although one can situate the existence of the first gated condominiums in Luanda in the 1980s, the fact is that their construction began to take particular expression in this century, and the dynamics of this construction, expansion and demand were clearly increasing from the mid-2000s on. The colonial city, planned for less than a million people in the 1970s, went on to host a million and a half inhabitants at the beginning of the 1990s, when the civil war intensified and forced an enormous number of people to the safety of the capital, away from the conflict in the rural areas. A decade later, the population of the capital was approaching an estimated total of 3 million, increasing to around 6.5 million by the time of the last census (Census 2014), in less than 15 years. With this growth, which was not associated with an investment in urban development given the constraints of the war, the city was quickly depleted of housing and other facilities, as well as of services for the population.

The condominiums of the 1980s were in practice small, restricted residential areas, fenced and guarded for reasons related to the lack of security that characterised Luanda in the first years after Angola’s independence. In Luanda, at that time, the first condominiums were made up of a set of single-storey houses (villas), organised within a walled space, for security reasons. The earliest references to these structures are the condominiums known then as “the Italian condominium,” located in the Ilha de Luanda, and the “Swedish condominium” (M65, engineer, 2014),¹ both very central within the city. Further away from the centre at that time, towards the south of the city, two other condominiums were built, one of them owned by the powerful state oil company Sonangol and the other, Vila Gamek, situated in Morro Bento, Samba municipality. The first one housed Sonangol employees while the second housed especially technicians of GAMEK (*Gabinete de Aproveitamento do Médio Kwanza*), a firm based on an important international partnership. Both were intended to house mainly expatriate aid workers and foreign staff (although less so in the case of Sonangol which also housed nationals), who were living in Luanda as *cooperantes* (expatriate workers). The condominium Vila Gamek concentrated mainly a population of Brazilian technical assistants linked to the Brazilian construction company Odebrecht (F62, teacher, 2014). Later on, the company invested in the construction of condominiums throughout the province. The best known of these ventures is their condominium called the Atlântico Sul, built in the late 1980s.

In the late 1990s, following the opening of Angola to global capitalism, and after identifying the area south of Luanda as the direction chosen for a first stage expansion of the city, investment in building gated condominiums began to increase, albeit timidly. These new constructions were already called closed condominiums then and were mostly located in areas relatively distant from the city centre, towards the Belas municipality. Namely Projecto Nova Vida condominium--one of the first and most emblematic Luandan condominiums--was located there while another major part of them were located in the neighbourhood of Talatona, still in the direction south/southeast from the city centre (Figure 1). However, it was only with the end of the war in 2002 and the political-economic focus on national reconstruction, that Luanda started to see a wider dispersion and a true multiplication of these residential structures, mostly of foreign construction, particularly Chinese, Brazilian and Portuguese.

While after independence, existing condominiums welcomed especially the international cooperation contingent of expatriates coming to Angola, and continued to be used for the housing of a growing population of foreigners, professionals and investors, they also began to house a growing number of wealthy Angolan families, who had a standard of living comparable to that offered by large companies. There are still a considerable number of expatriates in Luanda, a population essentially composed of technical staff and executives, sent specially by multinationals to work in Angola for predetermined periods. They still make-up the majority of the population living in gated condominiums in Angola today.

Gated condominiums have also begun to spread to other cities in Angola, though more hesitantly. Nowadays there is a substantial diversity of condominiums, some more

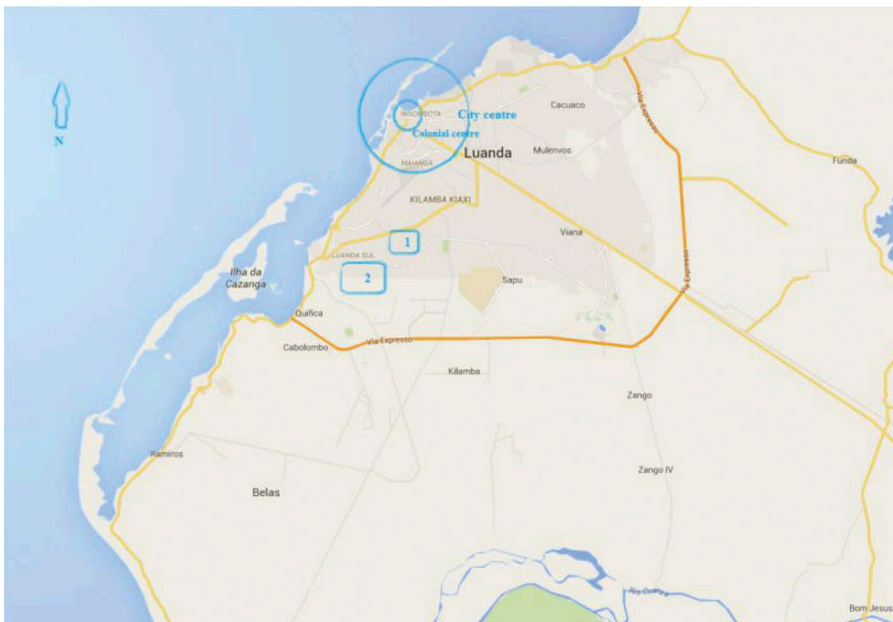


Figure 1. Luanda with Nova Vida (1) and Talatona (2) condominiums, colonial centre and today's centre. Source: Google maps and authors.

luxurious than others. They coexist with an equally important set of new residential arrangements like self-built houses for relocated people under the government construction programme *One Million Houses*, which targets the poorest social strata (Croese 2012; Gastrow 2014); or the new centralities--whole new “cities” of tall buildings, such as Kilamba City, in the wider area of Luanda--aimed mostly at the low and middle class (Udelsmann Rodrigues 2017; Cardoso 2016).

Why are condominiums sought after?

Lodging for expatriates

Expatriates seek mostly this kind of residential structure for practical motives. One of the main reasons is that there are many more houses available in the condominiums than in the city centre; others are linked with the housing infrastructure and amenities, especially regular access to water, electricity and internet; with the comfort of the dwellings and the ease of access to common leisure spaces (especially gyms and swimming pools). The demand for homes in the city centre is significantly high--in addition to the houses being old and needing much rehabilitation--and rents can be much higher than those in many condominiums. In addition to the degradation of the houses in the centre, there is a clear deterioration of sanitation facilities and continuous failures in water supply and electricity. Nevertheless, expatriate respondents all emphasised the idea that they would prefer to live in the centre of Luanda if the city had properly functioning basic amenities that condominiums have, such as access to water, electricity and internet. Interviews and questionnaires are particularly clear regarding the latter as better access to the internet allows communication with their families in the countries of origin. When asked to characterise a gated community in Luanda in general terms, respondents of the expatriate population focused mainly on issues of greater efficiency and guaranteed provision of water and electricity and internet, with some additional references to easier access to facilities such as gyms.

On the other hand, the price of housing in the city centre of Luanda has become unaffordable even for large foreign companies. This trend has continuously increased since the first years after independence, when the big international companies, especially oil companies, were willing to pay “just about any price” (M36, Luanda resident, 2013) to house their staff in a city where new construction had ceased. This led to continuous inflation in real estate prices in the city centre, which persists to the present day. Most expatriates are installed locally by the company they are affiliated to and therefore are not involved in choosing the place of accommodation assigned to them. Companies, in turn, try to lodge their employees in the same condominium--or in different types of condominiums, when it is important to distinguish between different hierarchical levels.

The new needs of the new middle and upper-middle classes

If for expatriates housing conditions and infrastructure have always been one of the most important advantages of life in the condominiums, this has also become an important issue for the new wealthy socio-economic strata inhabiting Luanda’s condominiums. The emergent upper classes, from the political elites to the new wealthy

business people, are the new clients of these private exclusive neighbourhoods. A significant portion of these elite families buy expensive houses in these exclusive residential areas but do not live or intend to live there and use them only occasionally for parties and other social meetings: “We actually live in the city during the week, but sometimes, on weekends, we come here; it’s just to get out of the city. We invite friends, use the pool, listen to music, and have fun” (F42, housewife, 2014).

Housing prices in condominiums, although generally very high, are variable. For example, in August 2014 a new four-bedroom villa cost around US\$600,000 and would require a 30% deposit on the total payment by the time of purchase, sometimes even before the house was ready to be inhabited. The average monthly rental for a dwelling of this type was about US\$3,500. In the context of Angola, these prices are enormous where 64% of the population is poor—living on less than two dollars a day—contrasting the “magnificent” and the “beggar” (Soares De Oliveira 2015), representing the Angolan socio-economic disparities.

Buying one or more houses became increasingly considered a social investment, related to the exhibition of wealth and prestige for the political elites and wealthy business people. This became a different situation compared to previously when living in condominiums in Luanda constituted mainly a functional option. Fieldwork data show us that this group of residents in closed condominiums in their answers valued the conditions for entertaining friends, referring clearly to the availability of leisure facilities and the existence of large balconies that the apartments usually have that facilitate the gathering of friends and/or the organising of parties. Better houses of the villa type have such facilities as swimming pools, either private or shared by the residents. Some of the respondents of this group also underlined the value of a house in a condominium as a place of refuge, away from the crowded city centre:

Buying this house was mainly an investment. This is far from where our family and friends live. Once we used this house to offer a dinner to some foreign friends. We use the house more for these kinds of situations. It is a nice house, modern, with more conditions, our house in the city is old. (F55, entrepreneur, 2014)

Nevertheless, an overall reading of the answers and particularly of the in-depth interviews shows that residents in the condominiums explicitly focus on more practical and functional issues than on those related to social self-exclusions. While the social translation of the new residential distributions reveals new segregations and exclusivities (Udelsmann Rodrigues 2009), these aspects emerged clearly in the interviews but less prominently than the references to access to infrastructure. In contrast, prestige is a much-stressed aspect in the analyses regarding various global contexts where condominiums proliferate. In other contexts such as in China (Pow 2009; Miao 2003), these residential structures can be considered physical manifestations in space of particular lifestyles, displayed by an economically affluent population segment, related to an aesthetic of luxury and concerns with status associated with housing. Rather than issues related to, for example, crime or xenophobia, recent specialised literature gives great emphasis to factors related to the display of wealth, the demand of a wealthy population segment that is reflected not only in the exclusionist separation—or residential *ghettoisation*, if preferred—but in the valuation of real “golden ghettos.”

Although only one group of residents clearly valued closed condominiums in the survey and interviews because of status and their association with social symbolism, this perspective also crosses the ideas associated with this type of residential model by either expatriates or those of the less affluent classes not resident in condominiums. “The nouvelle riche are buying these houses like they buy their cars, i.e., by the dozen. They have this need to show off their money” (M44, engineer, 2013).

The set of all these issues refers, in its substrate, to matters relating to condominiums while inducing elements of inequality or social fragmentation between the various urban groups. In the first instance, it refers mainly to the ongoing urban socio-economic reconfiguration, which is taking place with an accelerated rapidity in Luanda and in Angola in general. The main ideas resulting from the analysis of data from the questionnaires and interviews also highlight something that can be—and is sometimes—called “psychological comfort,” particularly among expatriates, among them the Portuguese and Brazilians. Housing in gated communities is associated with an idea of comfort in the pursuit of daily domestic life experience as close and comparable as possible to the one they led in their places of origin. The literature on the adaptation of expatriates elsewhere values issues such as connection to the family (Andreason 2003; Black, Mendenhall, and Oddou 1991) and intercultural adjustment of expatriates is clearly associated with the degree of psychological comfort (Oberg 1960; Winkelman 1994). But while the social aspects are constantly referred to, Luandan residents and non-residents in condominiums emphasise an objectively new way of life. As many come from the degraded and/or non-infrastuctured areas of the city centre, more emphasis is placed on infrastructure, detachment from the bustle and confusion of the rest of the city, together with greater security. Luandans in general, even those who are non-resident in gated condominiums, consider them particularly modern, clean, comfortable, organised, and good quality homes.

(Relative) security and protection

Most of the technical literature on gated communities in other regional contexts pointedly refers to the demand and multiplication of this model of residential structures to be associated with a visibly defined set of issues such as fear of crime, demand for security and the manifestations of exclusionary and self-exclusionary lifestyles. Others focus more and more on political issues related, for example, to the privatisation of public spaces with an impact and consequences in terms of aggravated social exclusion. In South Africa, for example, gated communities even take the designation of security-parks and, according to the literature, are distinguished by being highly secured residential areas, motivated by a widespread fear of crime and of strangers (Hook and Vrdoljak 2002; Jürgens and Landman 2006). Mostly in South Africa—but also referred to in cities like São Paulo in Brazil (Caldeira 2000)—residential anxieties regarding crime prevention have reached unprecedented levels and for this reason security-parks can be considered as the culmination of the anxiety of a safety culture. They are, as a rule, strongly walled and equipped with state-of-the-art surveillance and security systems. Often, the residents themselves completely close access to their condominium or residential complex, to the point of, for example in the north of

Johannesburg, hiring armed guards (Landman 2004). Like in those security-parks, many Brazilian condominiums could be defined as spaces where people would combine what Blakely and Snyder (1997) called “separable lifestyles,” a type of prestige and security areas where residential insularity is ensured by the use of barbed wire, cameras, iron gates, and intercoms, beyond the electrified walls. According to Hook and Vrdoljak (2002), in some South African gated communities self-sufficiency has reached the point of inhabitants in gated communities having their own post office and zip code. Many work as true suburbs of the North American kind, if it were not for the fact, as Kuppinger (2008) points out, of being downright impenetrable to outsiders and only very tenuously connected to residential areas nearby.

Despite the specificities and differences of perspective, most of the specialised literature continues to associate gated communities with security issues. The study on its validity to the Luanda context, however, notes that while reasons and explanations relating to safety and prestige clearly stand out, they are not as prevalent as suggested in other contexts. Luanda today also combines a complex and rapid urbanisation with high socio-economic disparities, a situation which, as in other cities of the world (Lemanski 2004), has created new security issues and urban violence. These factors are not, however, decisive or even preponderant judging by the survey and fieldwork and according to some of the scarce literature about this subject in Angolan cities (Udelsmann Rodrigues 2009). The analysis of the responses reveals that the three groups surveyed have a very similar picture of Luanda, embodied in the idea of a chaotic, labyrinthine city; disorganised, corrupt, dirty and noisy. Note that the adjective “violent” was not used by any of the groups. Violence can of course be associated with or implied in replies like “chaotic” and “corrupt,” for example. It was not possible, however, during the research, to collect exact references to the issue of violence—in the sense of street crime, danger, or fear of bodily harm—as a particularly strong threat that would give rise to the demand for closed condominiums, more crucial than any other.

This is also apparent in the condominiums themselves. Unlike the gated communities of the other cities mentioned as examples, in Luanda there are no examples of condominiums bearing particularly sophisticated or ostensible surveillance devices. Most of the entries to condominiums in Luanda are marked by a small building, which is often the post of a guard hired by the residents, usually with no specific training, and not from a security company. In some of the most luxurious closed condominiums, entry is escorted by a receptionist while the guards are usually hired to carry out surveillance and possibly night rounds around the site. In most condominiums, guards, rather than watching, give particular assistance to incoming and outgoing traffic, taking care of opening and closing the gates. Contrary to what occurs in some security-parks elsewhere, surveillance is not carried out by constant armed security and firearms have been restricted. Thus, the separation that the condominium foresees in other contexts does not have a direct translation in Luanda. Coordination and relationships with the surrounding neighbourhoods and broadly with other urban dynamics also make them a unique case among this type of residential model.

Interconnections and maintenance of the linkages with the centre

Inhabiting the centre and inhabiting the suburb

Given the concentration of, initially, the foreign population in Talatona (Belas municipality) and the demand for housing there, the whole area turned out to be an emblematic neighbourhood of Luanda, although distant from the (old) town centre (Figure 1). It is today a modern reference and an area of prestigious residential status. Being sought after by a heterogeneous population of expatriates, it has more recently also attracted the emerging upper-middle class of Luanda, and even the wealthy from other provinces. Although the highest concentration of condominiums is in this neighbourhood and in the surrounding areas, an increase in this type of construction in other neighbourhoods and areas of the city is also visible—Camama to the interior, the new Luanda East, Cacuaco to the north, among others—and the growing investment in luxury buildings in the downtown area is also worth highlighting, especially in the highly prestigious and revitalised Marginal (the coastal boardwalk).

In their responses about the major disadvantages of residing in a closed condominium, expatriates living in Talatona neighbourhood—but also in other condominiums such as Projecto Nova Vida condominium—were unanimous in identifying the distance to the city centre as the main drawback, which was followed by answers such as isolation and detachment “from reality” (F42, senior executive, 2013). It is interesting to retain here the idea of isolation considered as a disadvantage, contrary to the views of the above mentioned residents of gated communities in Brazilian, Chinese and South African cities, to whom gated communities are popular precisely because they provide this idea of (guarded) isolation and separation, designed as protection mechanisms against fear and insecurity (Caldeira 2000; Hook and Vrdoljak 2002; Jürgens and Landman 2006; Zhang and Ong 2008; Ruiu 2014). The responses of Luandan owners of properties in condominiums, resident or not, also converged on the idea that gated communities have the great disadvantage of being far from the centre and its increasing number of leisure facilities.

It is interesting to underline that in Luanda, with very few exceptions—such as the project Nova Vida, discussed in this study in detail—most closed condominiums are, in terms of territorial occupation, confined to relatively small urban plots. Several of them, especially in some areas of Talatona, are separated by a shared single wall and some do not even have a garden area. In almost all the different sorts of condominiums studied in South Africa (Jürgens and Landman 2006; Hook and Vrdoljak 2002; Lemanski 2004, 2011) or in Brazil (Caldeira 2000), gated communities come to occupy vast territorial areas, away from each other, walled and downright impenetrable.

The differences in terms of the demand for a certain residential insularisation, to live apart from other social groups, often do not correspond to the reality and the way of life in a condominium in Luanda. A large majority of the condominiums are in fact surrounded by precarious poor *musseques* (slums) and even by extensions of the oldest slums. Porosity in such a neighbourhood makes condominiums places where the residents of the *musseques* can potentially find jobs as guards, gardeners, domestic workers or as part of maintenance teams. Gated condominiums are also seen as places that support the expansion of many business vendors, doorstep sellers of fruit,

vegetables or fish. This is allowed by a certain freedom of circulation inside the condominiums.

In their dynamics of expansion, condominiums of Luanda initially followed a model of location in the suburbs, the “American type,” outside the city centre and inaccessible except to those who possessed the means to do so, like a private car, since the city is characterised by the absence of organised and accessible public transportation. At the time of the emergence of the first condominiums in Morro Bento, the area was considered too far away from the centre and difficult to access, which is not the case today when it has become quite central (see [Figure 1](#)). This logic of spatial apartness has never been fully appreciated by the Luandans that started inhabiting these areas and therefore, they maintained active social, economic, and family connections with the town centre. While poorer citizens in the resettlement projects far from the centre complain principally about the loss of economic opportunities with the dislocation to the more peripheral areas ([Gastrow 2014](#)), the residents in the condominiums also complain about the lack of interconnections between downtown and the “suburban” neighbourhoods but are able to afford a regular connection between the residential areas and the work/socialising spaces, mainly located in the centre. Networks and family relationships between the centre and the peripheries remain, in most cases, quite active among Luandans scattered in different peripheral areas, and include strategies of support for school children, work or business. Among expatriates, connection to the centre is mainly maintained due to their work. In both cases, the fact that most economic activities as well as the private schools the middle- and upper-class (and the expatriate) children attend are concentrated in the centre keeps the interconnections very active and intense.

Living in the condominium: the Nova Vida project in its various phases

The description of the gated condominiums of Luanda refers to a variety of configurations and types, which derive from and, at the same time, display the change experienced by the city, its rapid expansion and spatial dispersion over the past decades. Most of the condominiums of Luanda have a mixed typology, consisting of blocks of vertical buildings and of single-storey or two-storey houses for one family. Many, as mentioned, offer common spaces, especially leisure facilities such as swimming pools, gyms and tennis courts.

The Condominium Project Nova Vida (CPNV),² one of the best known in Luanda, may be taken as a reference since it was one of the first condominiums to be built. Despite being designated formally and informally as condominium, the larger area is only partially walled so it does not fit the classic definition, although in practice it corresponds to a clear demarcation of residential spaces. It bears witness to the changes that have taken place over time in terms of trends and new proposals regarding the designs and organisation of condominiums. It expresses not only the course of residential modernisation but also modernisation of urban Luanda itself. It began to be built in the late 1990s/early 2000s and occupies a relatively large territory in the municipality of Belas, south of Luanda. The CPNV allotments were built in three different phases. The CPNV phases I and II are managed by an entity call IMOGESTIN SA, who is also responsible for the administration of condominiums and for the management of common structures such as streets, gardens, the existing

fences, etc. as recommended by the Condominium Act (Number 141/15) (see also Tomás 2014 on the legal aspects). The project's first phase consists of two separate zones: a zone of single-storey, villa style houses, and one of apartment buildings, which correspond to another common typology of condominiums in Luanda. The single-family villas are mostly the residences of upper-middle class Angolan families—university teachers, government staff, etc.—and there are also some Portuguese and Brazilian expatriates living there. The houses are separated by high walls and contacts between neighbours are discreet. In the area of tall buildings, they are all of equal size, as well as the apartments that compose them, being distinguished only by a greater or lesser number of rooms; the buildings are separated by small bush fences, which also delimit the garden areas. The streets are organised and residents' parking spaces are numbered. The CPNV phase II was already completed in the beginning of the 2010s and is also referred to in some documentation (advertising and news) as Project Nova Vida Re-launching. The undertaking of the second phase, although more recent, is in practice an expansion of the first, with buildings of an architectural style completely identical to the previous stage, only higher—from four to six floors—and with a more modern layout and more modern and better quality finishings. The organisation of everyday life for residents appears to be very similar to that of the first phase residents, although the Luandan families residing in CPNV II are younger on average, according to the interviews and observations made. More recently, since the transition to the 2010s, a new condominium cluster (phase III) has been built within the vast CPNV area, this one considered “top level,” more luxurious and more clearly insulated within the territory of the extended Nova Vida by walls, which makes it distinct in practice and symbolically in relation to the other areas of the project. It is owned by Sonangol—the major national oil company—and contrary to projects from phases I and II, it has autonomy with regard to the supply of water and electricity. It also has its own name, Cajueiro, which adds a dash of distinction in relation to the construction and organisation of the previous two residential clusters. It has its own entrance, staffed by a guard/receptionist and other features identical to the other most luxurious gated condominiums in Luanda: modern homes, the highly sought after leisure facilities and autonomy regarding the provision of water and electricity to its residents.

On the whole, except for Cajueiro, the CPNV is not completely walled or barbed nor does it have special monitoring or safety devices. The entrance is marked by a small construction similar to a cabin, a simple barrier post, most of the time unguarded, with only two cement speed bumps serving as barriers to control the entrances and exits. At the time of the survey, no stores (or, in fact, any businesses or formal services) were located here, which is a trend in almost all the new neighbourhoods where local businesses are slow to take off, even though spaces created for such businesses exist. Only drinks, beer, biscuits and home-made pastries were sold from an informal small wood and zinc hut, run by individuals residing in the *musseque* adjacent to the condominium, who circulated among the neighbourhood through a torn-down passage in the wall. In addition to these activities, other street-vendors circulate in the streets throughout the day: greengrocers selling fruit, fish, and some young boys, also residents of nearby *musseques*, gather to wash and guard cars: “I like to sell here. I sell fruit, potatoes, tomatoes and other products. It is calm here; I do not have to run in the

middle of the cars. I enjoy selling in places like this [referring to condominiums], they are nice and clean. I already have fixed clients.” (F29, street vendor, 2013).

In the homes of phases I and II, contrary to what happens in the Cajueiro, basic needs in terms of supply of electricity and water, as well as access to other facilities do not fully meet the aspirations of residents:

I like to live here. Houses are not bad, although sometimes ... almost every week [laughs] we suffer with water scarcity. Sometimes even electricity fails. But the houses are cheaper than those in luxury condominiums in Talatona. The only bad thing is that if anything happens, it takes us a long time to get to a hospital or a clinic. We don't have transports here and to find a taxi you have to walk a long distance up to the main road. (F38, nurse, 2013)

A study conducted recently in the Nova Vida Project, through a questionnaire, showed that dissatisfaction is significantly higher for apartment residents than for house residents, particularly regarding residential space and access to shops, medical, entertainment and recreational facilities (Lara and Bekker 2012). Many repeatedly state in the interviews that, while housing in the condominiums meets the housing needs of the residents more fully, the provision of basic services like water and electricity could be improved. References to unmatched expectations of infrastructure and services in new housing projects in Luanda have also been indicated in other recent studies (Croese and Pitcher 2017). On the other hand, certain facilities like swimming pools or gyms would be warmly welcomed. Although the security issue is not highlighted by these residents, the fact that spaces are managed in the condominium and that guards and security are present and noticed, are attractive features for life in a condominium or in similar organised neighbourhoods, which distinguishes them from the chaos and “confusion” of the city. In a very particular way, residence in any of the Nova Vida ventures refers to a prestigious social condition—though with its own internal hierarchy—meaning not only an above average economic capacity but also a socio-spatial integration in the spaces of and residence of these higher social strata.

In the Cajueiro too, the linkages to the centre were not eliminated by the move to the new quarters. Most of the inhabitants maintain employment and economic relations with the centre and daily commuting involves most family members in journeys between the centre and the neighbourhood, as the vast majority of children attend schools located in the centre. In many cases, according to the interviews, families maintain strong ties of mutual support especially with regard to young children and students. Many continue to count on a family member (or more) who resides in the city centre and close to schools, and who becomes part of the daily commuting dynamics:

in the morning, my two sons bring the grandsons too early to the city because of the traffic and so they stay with me until it is time for school; then, I pick them up in the afternoon and stay with them until their parents can go back home, when there is a bit less traffic. (F58, teacher, August 2014)

Future developments in these areas regarding education infrastructure or businesses are expected to bring important changes to the centre/periphery dynamics (Croese and Pitcher 2017).

The intense circulation and connections between the centre and these new suburbs, with residents commuting daily and developing strategies that entail maintaining active and dynamic relations between the centre and the suburb, is worth highlighting. This constitutes one of the main features distinguishing Luanda condominiums from others across the Global South. Moreover, access to infrastructure constitutes the central concern of residents, and non-residents also see it as an important asset.

Conclusion

Despite the multitude of issues raised in relation to condominiums in Luanda, only some of which have been explored here, it is important to stress the idea that gated condominiums may be more than an expression of phenomena such as insecurity, segregation or discrimination, or even simply a spatial consequence of urban restructuring fostered by the economy, rapid globalisation and the dynamics of socio-spatial reconfiguration. The analysis shows, on one hand, that the issues now raised in cities of the Global South such as Luanda, despite their specificities (Peck 2015), are part of a global context of transformation that calls for an integrative approach within global urban studies (Robinson 2016). Simone underlines that African cities are characterised by “incessantly flexible, mobile, and provisional intersections of residents that operate without clearly delineated notions of how the city is to be inhabited and used” (Simone 2004, 402). Luanda is in a process of deep renewal and therefore strong transformations at the level of society and urban identity have begun, almost inevitably, to be unleashed within the new context (Simone 2004; Tomás 2014). These transformations are inevitably beyond the concerns that used to characterise urban studies in the south for decades (Pieterse 2008) and, given Angola’s intended projection internationally, place the city and its urban features and transformation within a spectrum of worldwide comparable case studies. Consequently, new theoretical approaches need to be mobilised and new and regular contributions need to be made to the corpus of the urban studies research.

The study, contrary to what is stressed on the matter by studies in other contexts, places emphasis on the demand for gated condominiums for very functional reasons, like access to infrastructures and services, the ease of installation for multinational expatriates, and the high demand from middle and upper classes. Rather than looking for security conditions or moving away from the “chaotic” city centre, residents are concerned about the organisation and cleanliness of spaces—as opposed to the chaotic and degraded city centre—and the possibility of accessing basic infrastructure like water and electricity. Another distinctive feature is the maintenance of intense relationships with the centre and other peripheries. In this sense, Luanda’s condominiums are not disconnected from the city as a whole, as in other urban contexts of the Global South where gated communities exist. The whole symbolic status and economic power sought by the upper/middle classes who inhabit the condominiums, which is increasingly gaining preponderance, places the Luanda case in its world context and although here, too, condominiums are closely related to social status, objective, infrastructure related reasons seem to prevail.

Notes

1. Abbreviations to interviews provide a simple characterisation of the interviewee, indicating sex (M/F), age, occupation and year of interview.
2. Condomínio Projecto Nova Vida (CPNV) is the name commonly given to this extensive parcel of urbanised territory within the administrative area of Belas Municipality. It is sometimes called Housing Complex Nova Vida or Urbanisation Project Nova Vida.

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