Dear reader

Many thanks for taking the time to read the paper. As suggested below, this is the very initial entrance into trying to bring together information I have gathered over the years about land, local politics, and housing in socialist Angola. At present I have a feeling the paper should perhaps more specifically just focus on the question of local governance and leave other questions of housing distribution etc for another paper, but given that I arrived at the question of residents committees through the question of the materiality of the city, breakdown and housing distribution, I am at present still hanging on to some of that information. If it needs to be cast out, I am happy to do that if that makes more sense.

I would be especially grateful for any suggestions regarding secondary literature and any additional sources people might like to see. Unfortunately written records are fairly hard to come by as only one newspaper existed in the country from 1977 until the early 1990s. However, I am working on trying to access some of the relevant legislation mentioned in newspaper sources and am hoping to interview more people about residents committees in the 1970s and 1980s.

Many thanks

Claudia

Introduction

My research in Luanda in 2011 and 2012 was both heavily circumscribed and at times facilitated by neighbourhood governance organisations known as the Comissões de Moradores (CdMs) roughly translated as “residents’ committees” ¹. While not equally present in all areas, these organisations, at the time not officially gazetted as units of governance ²,
were usually the central unit of neighbourhood administration. People came in and out of residents’ committee offices to request help in resolving disputes, to ask them to help them register land, and to ask for a proof of residence document which was needed to open a bank account and apply for an identity document. The existence of these committees, Croese (2015) has argued, questions the ongoing focus on top-down political analysis as the primary means of studying the Angolan state, and provides a lens into understanding the unofficial mechanisms through which the MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) has managed to enforce its power among the population. They also, I would argue, point to a more general question, namely the ways in which party power has both shaped and been shaped by the historical struggles over housing, land and renovation in the capital city, Luanda.

On 11 November 1975, Angola declared independence. Infamously, the country was already at war, torn between three liberation movements, the MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation for Angola), UNITA (Union for the Total Independence of Angola) and the FNLA (National Front for the Liberation of Angola). In its own sphere of influence, the MPLA soon began implementing a socialist programme of national reconstruction as a means, it claimed, to combating of “tribalism”, racism, disunity, and economic underdevelopment. Its policies included a comprehensive remaking of the educational system, political education, the nationalisation of industry, collectivisation of former colonial farms, the nationalisation of much of the housing stock, and the official adoption of Marxist-Leninism at the MPLA’s first congress in December 1977 (Hodges 2001, Somerville 1986, Wolfers and Bergerol 1983).

Despite these actions, scholars have also been quick to point out that Angola’s socialism was at times a reluctant one. Private ownership of property and business was still allowed, and the parallel market was just as significant as the state’s planned economy (Dos Santos 1990, Wolfers and Bergerol 1983). Simultaneously, even in those areas where socialist
reforms were undertaken, state institutions were often unable to implement them effectively or control those people who flouted them. By the 1980s, socialism appears to have become a system of social, political, and economic inequality centred on the ruling party. At the upper echelons of society, access to privileges, currency and goods were contingent on relationships to key individuals in the Presidency and the Party, while at the lower levels, the population scrounged for survival in Luanda’s extensive informal economy, often relying on those closer to power to access favours (Messiant 1992).

What emerged was a society both highly dependent on and yet to a certain extent abandoned by the socialist state. As Messiant (1992: 23) argued, the “system of extreme inequalities is moreover at the same time a system of strong social control…. In the absence of citizen’s rights, when nobody can live from his work and the monetary salary it brings, when all riches or positions depend on the party-State or the links or ‘relations’ with it or its members… it is through the insertion in the various circles of privileges that the standard of living of those groups, strata, and individuals is assured.” This outcome, which echoes similar trends across African countries in the post-colonial period, raises questions as to whether socialism was in fact in any way decisive in shaping Angola’s past and present politics. At a macro-level, Angola’s political-economy suffers from the same tendencies towards extroversion, primary commodity export, clientalism and internally repressive politics as many other Central and West African countries regardless of socialist histories or not. However, a closer look highlights, as Christine Messiant’s work has shown that socialist structures of centralisation, the blurring of state and party, and of course the war context were fundamental in shaping political tendencies and everyday life in Angola, especially in Luanda. In addition, in order to see beyond increasingly oversimplified narratives of the movement from centralised to liberalised economies in Africa, it is necessary as Hatzky (2015) has argued to take African socialisms seriously on their own terms, rather than reading
them against some kind of ideal type socialism embodied by the USSR. This enables the scholar Askew and Pitcher (2006: 3) have highlighted to more productively track the “institutional and discursive legacies” of socialism as well as the “idioms and symbolic frameworks, collective strategies, and individual practices” mobilised by discrepant actors to shape their worlds in the past and the present. The result would be a richer understanding of African histories than provided by the framing of neoliberalism, which often implies a sudden break with previous practices and trends rather than the subtleties of continuities.

This paper, an early version of a more comprehensive planned piece which would place Angolan socialist housing and land policy in a comparative framework with not only other African socialist countries, but socialist countries in Eastern Europe, tracks how urban policies and politics were shaped by socialist-orientated politics in 1970s and 1980s Luanda. As Pearce (2015) has argued, the MPLA understanding of the state was a thoroughly urban one, and it is within the urban sphere that it most arguably undertook the symbolic propaganda which positioned it as a superior alternative to its rival UNITA (Union for the Total Liberation of Angola). In exploring in detail, however, how urban policies were implemented or ran beyond the control of official state institutions, the paper argues that a focus on urban politics shines light into the contradictory nature of the Angolan socialist state – that it both managed to centralise incredible power in the party while having a fractured presence on the ground – while at the same time showing how arguments of the need to “modernise” the urban population and make them more responsible for the upkeep of the city, played a key role in the institutionalisation of party power ranging from youth organisations, to the residents commissions.
As an initial foray into Angolan socialism, this paper explores the workings and understandings of state institutions and political belonging through a focus on housing and urbanism in the early years of independence. In doing this it makes two arguments. Firstly, that in Luanda, Angolan state institutions were fundamentally unable to exert significant official control over important aspects of urban life such as housing. Secondly, despite or perhaps because of this, urban decay was often portrayed as product of a lack of collective civic behaviour from the population, while generally absolving the state of responsibility. This in turn allowed the question of breakdown to take on particular power in bringing the MPLA into people’s everyday lives in the form of campaigns to clean the city, and the creation of residents commissions. What remains to be explored is what kinds of political identifications emerged in this situation of very schematic state management of the city in a context in which socialist ideology in the form of political rhetoric, aesthetics, media, education, and official policies were nevertheless so influential. In this way, the paper attempts to move beyond the more general macro-accounts of socialism in Angola to a more quotidian understanding of what socialism entailed.

Independence

The MPLA declared independence on the 11 November 1975, besieged by South African troops and the FNLA on the borders of Luanda, which it fought back with the assistance of Cuban troops. While the MPLA’s initial commitment to socialism has been a topic of much debate, there is no doubt that it quickly began passing laws that indicated an orientation towards socialist principles and mobilised a language of international solidarity as

3 This paper is predominantly based on interviews, and archival work conducted in the Luanda Municipal Library’s holding of the Jornal de Angola, Angola’s only daily newspaper, which is also state-owned. I am hoping to conduct further archival work and oral histories with people in Luanda later in the year.
a defining feature of its rule. The MPLA promoted an inclusive nationalist vision that aimed to build a unified country through socialist development. While initially there appeared to be a promise of a broad-based socialism rooted in what was glossed as “People’s Power” (*Poder Popular*) a reference to the establishment and mobilisation of MPLA-aligned neighbourhood and work-based groupings and mass institutions to represent the general population up the party-ranks, this hope was cut short in 1977 when an uprising led by the previous Minister of Interior Nito Alves against the Neto government was crushed. ¹⁴ Thousands are suspected of having been killed during the purges that followed and the political power of grassroots organisations was subsequently significantly curtailed. At its 1st Congress in December 1977 the MPLA formerly adopted Marxist-Leninism as its official ideology and declared itself a vanguard party. The state was to be subordinated to the party. Socialism would begin to fissure in the late 1980s and then be officially abandoned in 1991 with the coming of peace talks with UNITA and the theoretical embrace of multi-party democracy. Its long-term impact on urban policies and divisions would be notable however, even into the present.

*Housing Occupation:*

During the chaos leading up to November 1975, Luanda’s housing become one of the most iconic symbols of Angolans’ claims to independence. At the time, an oppressive colonial state security apparatus was in the process of being displaced even while fighting between the rival liberation movements marred the lead up to independence culminating in the MPLA eventually driving UNITA and the FNLA (National Front for the Liberation of Angola) out of Luanda by the end of July 1975. Fearing the growing violence, and what life in an

¹⁴ The exact nature of this uprising is extremely contested to this day and a clear account of what took place is difficult to find. Recent accounts of the day include Mateus and Mateus (2007), and Pawson (2014). For accounts more sympathetic towards the MPLA see Wolfers and Bergerol (1983).
independent Angola might herald for them, approximately 340,000 settlers fled to Portugal, Brazil and South Africa leaving their empty residences behind (Hodges 2004:9). However, the abandoned houses did not stand empty for long. Slowly but surely, Angolans began to occupy the vacant buildings. Although the Transitional Government in theory attempted to manage the process, in actuality it was ad hoc and beyond its control. Through personal connections, luck, and at times, bravado, Angolans began to invade and occupy the quality housing in the colonial core which had been off limits to all but the very wealthiest of them during the colonial period.

The routes to occupation were many. José, who, until 1974/1975 had lived in a wooden house in Cazenga, a working-class industrial zone of Luanda, explained that as independence neared, a friend had offered him the keys to a council house in a different part of the area. The friend had briefly occupied it, but was abandoning it to move into an apartment he had identified in the more desirable city centre. José accepted and remains in the council house to this day. While José’s occupation happened by chance networks, in many cases, settlers handed over the keys to their properties to employees. Some left with the notion of coming back, but others left for good and formally transferred ownership. In other cases they sold houses and furniture to Angolans. Walter, a primary school teacher, purchased his home in Cazenga from a Portuguese man for 20,000 escudos with the furniture included. The Junta de Habitação, the colonial institution in charge of state-owned housing, published alerts in the daily paper that such sales would not be recognised, but ultimately they were, as the post-colonial state often viewed dislodging people from housing they had claimed as a politically contentious issue. In other cases, people simply invaded housing. Dona Lili, who

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5 In May 1975 the Transitional Government passed Decreto-Lei No. 38/75 of 10 May. This allowed it to appropriate abandoned housing for the purposes of rehousing people who had been displaced by fighting in Luanda and the provinces.
6 I have used pseudonyms for all names.
7 José. Cazenga. 12 July 2011.
8 Walter. Cazenga. 26 September 2011.
had worked as an assistant in a dental practice, told me that her aunt occupied a house in a peripheral neighbourhood that had already been abandoned and offered her a room. A few days later the owner returned, begging them to pay him for the furniture so that he would have something to take back with him to Portugal. She claimed that they bargained over the price, but eventually paid him something.\textsuperscript{9} As independence arrived, these occupations continued, becoming a key site of contention between the state and the citizenry.

\textit{Socialist Housing}

One of the MPLA’s initial significant socialist policy actions was to nationalise the city’s formal housing stock and bring an end to what it saw as the “anarchic” occupation of housing. By late 1975, people were not only occupying residential buildings, but offices and schools. In response, the MPLA established the Rehousing Intervention Brigade (BIR)\textsuperscript{10} tasked with registering abandoned housing, collecting the keys of these properties, and distributing them to needy people.\textsuperscript{11} By mid-1976, the MPLA-state had passed two laws to facilitate the state’s control over urban property. The first, passed in March 1976, was Law 3/76, which allowed for the expropriation of goods, companies and properties that had been abandoned or belonged to a \textit{persona non grata}.\textsuperscript{12} The second, known as the Confiscation Law\textsuperscript{13}, specifically focused on property, allowing the state to confiscate without a right to compensation any property whose owner has been absent from the country for more than 45 days.\textsuperscript{14} In 1978 and 1979, the state also established set rents.\textsuperscript{15} Although rents were set

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{9} Dona Lili. Kinaxixe. 20 March 2012.
\item \textsuperscript{10} \textit{Brigada de Intervenção de Realojamento}.
\item \textsuperscript{11} Former Angolan civil servant. Alvalade. 9 February 2012.
\item \textsuperscript{12} Abandonment was classified as the owner having been absent from the country for anything other than working on behalf of the Angolan state, or for medical or educational reasons. Persona non grata were defined as adherents of the FNLA and UNITA, or any other MPLA opponents, and previous members of the Portuguese secret police, the PIDE.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Law 43/76 of 19 June. \textit{Diário de República}. I Series, No 144.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Again, subject to the same definition of 45 days of absence as that for Law 3/76.
\item \textsuperscript{15} The laws determining the rents of Luanda’s state-owned residential properties were: 1978 Decreto Executivo 11/78; Despacho Conjunto 57/79 and Decreto Executivo 11/79.
\end{itemize}
according to numbers of rooms belonging to a property, the legislation also stipulated that rent could not exceed 20% of a household’s income enabling people who had occupied large properties which they otherwise would not be able to afford to remain in them.\textsuperscript{16} These laws should in theory have established a system of cheap public housing for Angolans. However, in practice, nationalisation and housing distribution were not so straight forward as different state institutions, and residents themselves, came into conflict.

\textit{The difficulties of nationalisation}

While properties did make their way to \textit{“o Povo”} (the people) this appeared to rarely be in the way envisaged by official structures. In fact, the very processes of occupation and distribution, revealed the fractured nature of Angola’s state. The distribution of abandoned properties did not wait on the BIR or its replacement the National Institute for Housing (INH). Rather, much of the monitoring and registration of formal housing was already being undertaken by the People’s Neighbourhood Commissions (CPB)\textsuperscript{17}. The CPBs were MPLA-aligned neighbourhood committees that arose during the liberation struggle along with myriads of other grassroots organisations associated with \textit{poder popular} (people’s power), which included civil defence organisations and student groups (Mabeko-Tali 2001). They were not initially controlled by the MPLA, having not been directly formed by it, but were aligned with it in their political orientations and were central in its garnering support from the large populations living in Luanda’s \textit{musseques} (slum areas). By early 1976 the MPLA had formalised the CPBs’ status through the Law on People’s Power, which defined them as the smallest unit of planned democratically elected organs of \textit{poder popular} that would communicate the will of the people to the upper echelons of the government.

\textsuperscript{16} “Regulamentado o pagamento das rendas de apartamento” \textit{Jornal de Angola}, 15 July 1979, p1.
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Comissões Populares de Bairro}.
Established throughout the city in 1975 and 1976, they quickly began taking charge of the abandoned properties in their neighbourhoods. On a daily basis, CPBs published announcements in the state newspaper, the *Jornal de Angola*, for meetings in which owners of abandoned properties as well as people who had “illegally occupied” housing were expected to participate. Owners were warned that if they did not appear, their houses would be distributed in accordance with the needs of the neighbourhood. These distributions were often, however, undertaken without the knowledge of the BIR or INH. Although the Ministry of Internal Administration issued a statement explaining that it was “forbidden” to occupy abandoned houses without the consent of both the BIR and the relevant CPB, people continued to occupy either without permission or without consulting the BIR. Some CPBs were even thought to be collecting rent. The CPBs nevertheless often called on residents to legalise their situation, although if that simply meant registering with the local CPB or actually with the BIR/INH was unclear. Nevertheless, the CPB enjoyed considerable power on an everyday level with people not being able to move house without receiving permission from them in the form of “Guia da Transferencia” (Transfer Pass) and water and electricity companies being forbidden from cutting people off without the permission of the CPB.

CPBs not only appeared to be more active than the BIR in most “formal” neighbourhoods, they were also one of the most significant institutions in Luanda’s musseques. In these areas, CPBs not only distributed housing, but also land to those who hoped to build their own homes. The central government railed against what it referred to as “clandestine construction”, but, given the absence of any significant low-cost housing policies and the unmet demand for housing, it was perhaps inevitable that people would begin to build their own homes. In areas where CPBs were present, they often managed land occupations,

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19 “Prossegue em bom ritmo a construção de moradias” *Jornal de Angola*, 30 December 1977, p1 and 9.
either selling the land themselves or approving sales.\textsuperscript{21} Given the lack of any formal land registration system, existing residents or members of CPBs acted as witnesses to transactions or gave testimonies in the case of conflicts.\textsuperscript{22} In some cases however, people simply occupied land and built, waiting for state institutions to catch up with them. In the words of one of my interlocutors, “governance is something which evolved”.

If some CPBs were problematically selling land and collecting rents, the BIR and later INH did not appear to be doing much better. Firstly, political and personal connections increasingly played a significant role in housing distribution. A civil servant admitted to me that when requests were made from people whose origin was outside Luanda, the BIR would assign them housing in less desirable areas as they assumed the person would not know the difference.\textsuperscript{23} High up members of the MPLA were sometimes provided with more than one residence.\textsuperscript{24} As it became ever harder to access housing, accusations were made that only those with “friends” were able to be officially granted housing. Secondly, the INH was simply unable to keep up with demand, especially in the face of on going ad-hoc occupations. In an interview with the head of the INH in December 1977, he stated that 12,000 requests for housing had been filed just that year, but there were simply not enough houses to go around. This was partially because priority was being given to international volunteers (cooperantes), members of the state, and diplomats, but also, he argued, because evicting people legally was difficult. The previous distribution system had involved someone occupying a residence and then legalising it afterwards. This had led to clashes between multiple claimants and people occupying houses that the state considered to big for them, but at the same time, eviction was considered politically undesirable. Even when court orders demanded eviction, these were simply ignored as the police were hesitant to evict, and the INH lacked will and capacity to

\textsuperscript{21} Nito. Cazenga. 5 July 2011.
\textsuperscript{22} Toni. Cazenga. 2 September 2011.
\textsuperscript{23} Former Angolan civil servant. Alvalade. 9 February 2012.
\textsuperscript{24} Former Angolan civil servant. Alvalade. 9 February 2012, and Tomás (2015)
enforce the orders.\textsuperscript{25} It was evident that occupying first and trying to deal with the legality of it later, still remained the most effective means of accessing housing.

However, very quickly, housing in the historical centre did become harder to come by. By December 1977, the INH was no longer accepting requests for housing. By May 1978 they had suspended the legalisation of housing until a citywide survey was conducted, although this seems to have been reinstituted at some point.\textsuperscript{26} By the 1980s, however, an interviewee told me, there was very little chance of managing to receive a house from the INH through any straightforward method, and houses were generally accessed through denunciations which usually involved reporting to the INH or the police that someone had been absent from their home for more than 45 days, or that someone was occupying a residence that was larger than they needed. In such cases, contingent on the political power of the resident being denounced, they might potentially be evicted and the house given to the person who denounced them.\textsuperscript{27}

The system of housing distribution therefore, as with many other sectors of society, eventually did turn on privilege and state connections, but not necessarily through formal state channels, even as it revealed the inability of the state to control the city, even as the party presence was solidified. People could apply for housing, but the implementation of policy was anything but straightforward.

Recasting Responsibility and the Rise of the Comissões de Moradores

“To steal taps from standpipes is a crime against the people”\textsuperscript{28} stated the headline to an article bemoaning what it described as the lack of discipline on the side of the population. Lamenting that some people forgot to spare water and electricity, and even stole taps, the article, as with many others from the time period, cast Luanda’s gradual breakdown as a

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{26} “Escravos os Leitores: Ocupação Ilegal de Moradias” \textit{Jornal de Angola},13 May 1978, p2.
\bibitem{27} Kianda. Coqueiros.16 November 2015.
\bibitem{28} “Água: Roubar torneiras dos fontenários é crime contra o povo” \textit{Jornal de Angola}, p3.
\end{thebibliography}
product of a failure of civic ethos, rather than mere state incapacity. This incivility was notable, the argument was often made, in the refusal of people to legally register their residences, and in musseque areas, in autoconstruction. These failures meant they did not pay rent, water, or electricity and impeded plans for national reconstruction. In one article, the papers even referred to autoconstructors as “divisionistas e fracionistas” (splinterers and factionalists). This was extremely charged language in a context in which such descriptions were usually reserved for the supporters of the 1977 attempted uprising against the leadership structures of the MPLA. Civic failure in this case, rather than the war or a lack of state capacity, was portrayed as the primary obstacle to the implementation of socialism. Discussions of civility became a means of apportioning blame for the city’s condition, generally exempting the state from responsibility by focusing on the assumed poor civility of the population.

In one sense it is not inaccurate to suggest that the failure to register with the state did contribute to the breakdown of buildings. Leila, a woman in her early thirties, told me that her childhood home, an apartment in a block near the very centre of the city had never been officially nationalised, nor, however, had any private entity claimed responsibility for it. The residents had therefore never paid rent and minimal attempts were made to maintain the building. Over the years, the plumbing broke, resulting in sewerage from the floors above spilling into her parents’ apartment. Similar stories were published in the Jornal de Angola. Thus, for instance, the newspaper reported that on Avenida Comandante Valódia, 120 families were living in a high rise that had not had water or electricity for two years. Despite this, the families refused to register with the state, which was now threatening to evict them. With no one maintaining the building, the plumbing was had become clogged and the water

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29 “Comissariado de Luanda: Comunicado sobre a construção clandestina” Jornal de Angola. 14 July 1977, p3
30 While the war, the difficulty of receiving imports for the purposes of maintenance, and a lack of trained technicians were also raised by the state newspaper as contributing reasons for urban decay, the primary focus was on urban residents’ behaviour.
31 Leila. Ingombota. 2 November 2015.
ceased to function. People had cemented up their toilets to prevent the stench from entering apartments, and had to walk to a public water source 80 metres away, to then haul buckets up the stairs of the ten-story building. However, the CPBs claimed that the problem was not the lack of water and electricity, but rather, the residents’ refusal to register because that might result in them getting evicted. The implication was that they preferred to let the building collapse than risk the state moving them somewhere else.

While state institutions may not have been entirely incorrect in some of their pronunciations, these statements clearly ignored the obvious chaos that existed in the housing sector. They also ignored the fact that many buildings whose occupants had registered with the state were also in a process of decay. Instead, they encouraged the notion that it was the duty of the people to care for state property, rather than vice-versa. This was usually achieved in two ways. Firstly, state institutions tended to promote a discourse that people could best solve their problems amongst themselves at a local level rather than waiting for the state to get involved. Thus, in a series of articles about various health, housing, rubbish, and education problems in Luanda’s neighbourhoods, the Jornal de Angola, suggested that the area of the “Bairro Ilha do Cabo”, did not have many problems because, “with a little effort and collaboration from the population, [problems] can be easily solved.”32 In contrast, another article, after claiming that many people who had occupied buildings did not concern themselves with “the collective situation of the buildings” went on to argue that as a result, “little by little, the elevators broke down, the plumbing burst, the fuse boxes were illegally opened, the rubbish containers disappeared, and the buildings landed up in a lamentable state.”33 No mention was made that the problems they faced could possibly be the result of state neglect. The second means through which responsibility for the state of the city was subtly shifted to the theme of civic duty rather than state duty was through constant reminders

32 “Zona 1: Bairro Ilha do Cabo só tem pequenos problemas” Jornal de Angola, 11 Aug 1977, p3
33 “Registo: Os deveres elementares de habitação” Jornal de Angola, p3.
that the city was a collective good. Newspaper announcements often called on Luanda’s residents to participate in cleaning campaigns, report on people who constructed illegal water and electricity connections, and in general asked them to comport themselves in a way that benefitted the city. Thus, for example, in requesting Luandans to participate in a large urban cleaning campaign the *Jornal de Angola* stated, “we forget that the city belongs to us and will be that which we will be: a type of mirror of the collective comportment of those who live in it.”

The above discourses and actions could arguably be framed as legitimate attempts to mobilise the population in the name of building socialism. However, they also, it turns out, became the basis for instituting new forms of political control over the urban population.

*Comissões de Moradores*

Since independence, as discussed above, Luanda’s neighbourhoods at a local level have been managed by the Comissões Populares do Bairro (CPB). These organisations were not originally formed by the MPLA itself, rather having their roots in the popular neighbourhood organisation in the later colonial period when various critics of the colonial state formed independent *comités* (committees) to mobilised neighbourhoods and peers round anti-colonial sentiment. Leading into independence, tensions continued to exist between the CPBs and the centralised structures of the party, which sought to subordinate them to party control. This tension came to a head in the 1977 uprising, when numerous CPBs in Luanda were accused of supporting and sympathising with Nito Alves, and were subsequently disbanded, effectively destroying popular representation at a grassroots level. Even though the CPB were subsequently reinstalled, it was evident that there remained an unease regarding their presence. At the same time, the question of urban breakdown continued to grate in public discussions.

34 “A Câmara de Luanda (Continuation of Todos Devemos Penser ser o Lixo Problema Colectivo” *Jornal de Angola*, 13 May 1976, p2.
On the 8 November 1977, the *Jornal de Angola* published an article titled “Comissões de Moradores” calling for the establishment of residents’ commissions in the city’s highrises that were distinct from the CPB as a means of addressing urban breakdown. Arguing that the occupation of highrises by the population represented the crushing of urban elitism, it stated that this achievement had to be protected by conserving the buildings. Conservation should be the responsibility of residents rather than the state, not only because residents were immediately on the ground to recognise problems as they arose, but because “It is not fair to demand that state structures, already burdened with numerous problems of a human nature, should also have to concern themselves with problems which residents should be resolving on their own.”

The article was conveniently written only a month before the MPLA’s First Party Congress and in the midst of the purges of the CPB.

The *Jornal de Angola*, the state’s mouthpiece continued to publish the occasional article suggesting that the urban population was favourable towards the establishment of CdMs in the city. In December 1977, the National Housing Institute announced that it was working on a new housing policy, which would include regulations governing the establishment and workings of CdMs, including their official relations to other organs of Poder Popular. By May 1979, CdMs had been formed and were being introduced by to various neighbourhoods by high ranking state officials as new organs of People’s Power. This appeared to be People’s Power implemented from above. The exact relationship between CPBs and CdMs is unclear from the newspapers, what is clear is that the CdMs appeared to both be duplicating the roles of the CPB, as well as supplanting them as an official connection

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36 “Ecrevem os Leitores: Comissões de Moradores” *Jornal de Angola*. 13 December 1977, p3. I have not managed to find these regulations, but am hoping that further research might result in my locating them.
38 I am hoping to conduct more research on this.
to party structures, whereas CPBs were increasingly being described as one of many mass organisations. Paper reports suggested that the CdMs were the link between the party and the CPB and that future CPB would have to be elected from members of the CdMs. At the same time, the constant justification for the CdMs lay in the reference to urban breakdown, that somehow, this was the only way to rescue the modernist imagination of the city that MPLA political ideology rested upon. In the midst of the inability to regulate the actual occupation and use of housing in any strict sense then, it was urban breakdown, which became, it appears the means for the production of a new level of party intervention in the city, one which continues to this day. If housing distribution and access was increasingly determined by party connections, so the everyday management of the city and the population shifted increasingly away from the state companies that should have been maintaining buildings and registering residents. Instead, CPBs and CdMs became the most visible presence of party rule in the housing sector, the move from one to the other an indication of how the materiality of the city provided the grounds for the increasing depoliticisation of grassroots organisations.

Most accounts of the CdMs have seen them as having replaced the CPB in the early 1990s with the transition to the multi-party democracy and the forced disbanding of the CPB as obvious instruments of party power at a local level (Croese 2015, Meneses et al 2013). The transition is therefore considered to be more of a change in name and a rendering unofficial of previously recognised party-state structures, than a substantial change in function. In reality, CdMs were established in the city centre in the late 1970s, existing side-by-side with CPBs, suggesting that their citywide adoption in the 1990s was not only a change in name, but involved a depoliticisation of grassroots as the always present danger of the CPB was swept aside in the name of democracy.

Conclusion:
This paper has presented the initial findings of my research into thinking through the urban politics of socialism in Angola, and how the experience of the MPLA party-state was significantly shaped by the urban conditions, especially housing and breakdown. My conclusions are still in their initial phases, but as of yet the evidence suggests not only that the state lacked serious capacity to manage the occupation and distribution of housing in the city, but that in turn, this incapacity became the grounds for enabling the introduction of new political organisations in the form of the *comissões de moradores*. Thus the language of breakdown and chaos became central in both attempting to shift responsibility for breakdown away from the state, while simultaneously becoming a means for cementing party presence at a neighbourhood level. I have yet to interview people regarding the workings of the CdMs during this period, and so the extent to which they interacted with party structures on an everyday level remains to be understood. But, an increased attention to local politics and shared understandings of the ownership, urbanism and belonging, might, I argue, provide an insight into teasing out of the workings of African socialism in Angola and other African countries.

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