

ECAS 2013

5th European Conference on African Studies (Lisbon)

June
27-29



African Dynamics in a Multipolar World

ISCTE - Lisbon University Institute

ECAS 2013

5th European Conference on African Studies

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ISBN: 978-989-732-364-5

BUILDING THE "BLACK" CITY: APPROACHES DEVELOPED BY PORTUGUESE ARCHITECTS IN COLONIAL AFRICA

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Abstract

In the final period of Portuguese colonization (1945-1975), architects faced a challenge: to build the city for the local populations. This paper intends to explain the process of discovery of the native settlements and how its study contributed to develop a "black" city planned by architects. From the late 1950s on, the urban space and housing for the African populations is one of the main architectural and urban programs carried by Portuguese architects in Africa. Facing the fact of being economically impracticable and culturally undesirable to build neighbourhoods for the "native" population in a European canon, architects start to survey the African habitat in missions. The African house is one of the most studied subjects.

Keywords: African habitat, African house, native settlements, Portuguese colonial Africa, architecture, urban planning

With the end of the Second World War, we can see an increase in the independentist movements' strength. Portugal is internationally pressed to decolonize, but resists until the 1974 revolution. One of the arguments for keeping its colonial Empire, particularly the African territories, is the development rates that are provided to the native populations, namely in the education and health fields, equivalent or even superior to the UN demands to African Habitats.

Part 1. Approaching the African habitats – studies on the African house and settlements and first undertakings

One of the most influencing studies on “native housing”, dated from 1948, is made in Guinea Bissau. Led by A. Teixeira da Mota and M. G. Ventim Neves, *A Habitação Indígena na Guiné Portuguesa (Native Housing in the Portuguese Guinea)*, published by the local Research Centre, is a systematic survey of the buildings produced by the most important ethnic groups of Guinea, with these survey parameters: “way of life; importance of farming; building materials; safety conditions, etc.” (Tenreiro, 1950, p. 13).

The first undertakings follow a regulated urbanism, as we can see in some plans. At this moment, architects had a diagrammatic interpretation of the native settlements, as exemplified by the Nova Lisboa Plan (João Aguiar, before 1952), by the site plan of the Bafatá Mixed Infirmary complex, Guinea (João Simões, 1946), and by the studies for Luanda's satellite city no. 3, by Vasco Vieira da Costa, 1948, former intern in Le Corbusier's office.



Image 1 - Nova Lisboa's Urbanization Plan, João António Aguiar, GUC, before 1951 [Aguiar, 1952, s.p.]

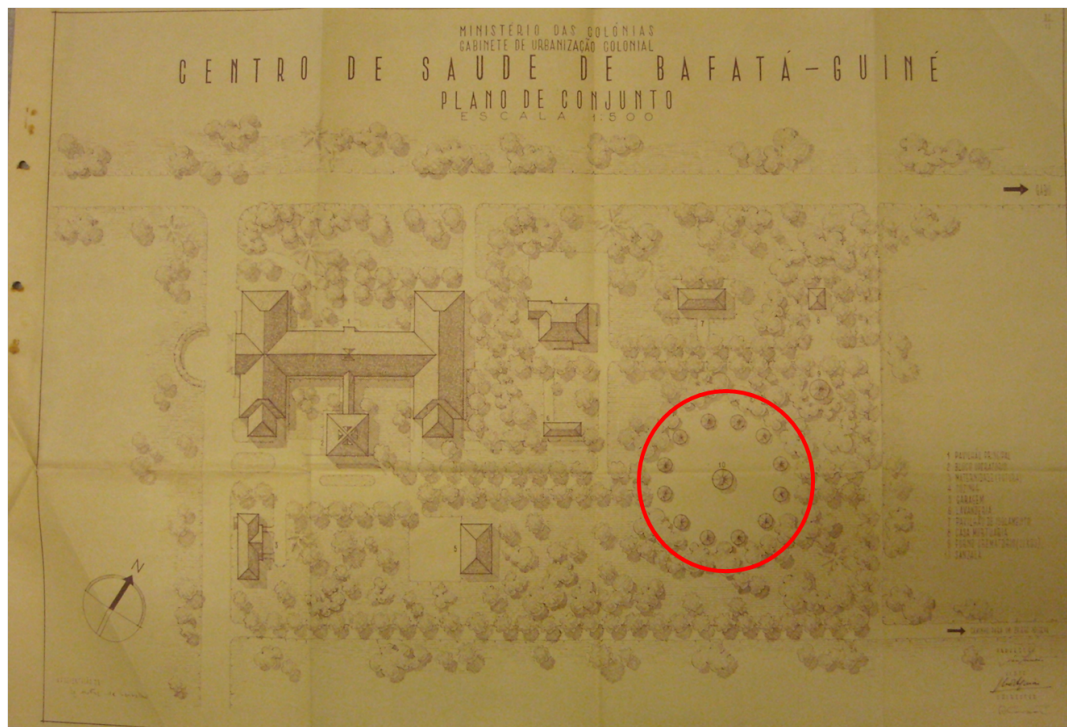


Image 2 - Bafatá's Healthcare Centre, João Simões, GUC, 1946, trab.32

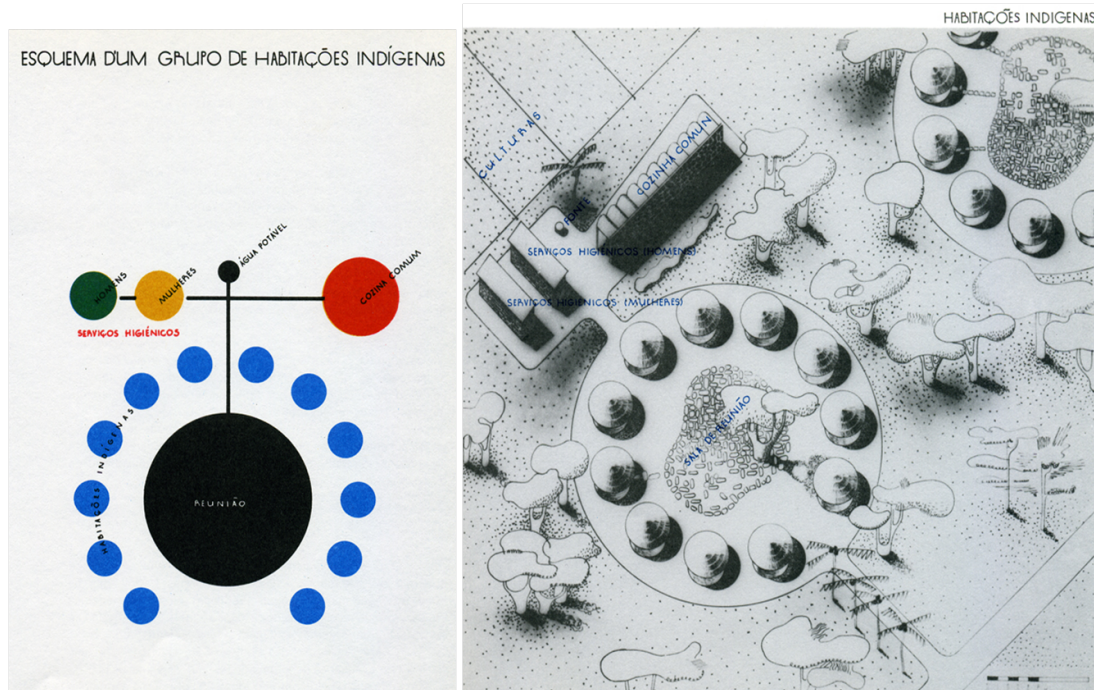


Image 3 - Luanda: Satellite Town no. 3, Plan, Vasco Vieira da Costa, tender for architect's diploma, 1948

Bissau, the case of Santa Luzia Neighbourhood, before 1948

The first experience of “native” urbanity openly promoted by the Portuguese State in Africa is seen in Guinea, and it is described in the already mentioned *A Habitação Indígena na Guiné Portuguesa (Native Housing in the Portuguese Guinea)*. It is referred the study for the construction of the “native” neighbourhood of Santa Luzia in the periphery of the Guinean capital city, which in 1948 has already 15 units concluded for renting “exclusively to native Bissau residents” (Mota, Neves, 1948, p. 107). In the same book it is referred an “experiment of the kind” that is “planned for Bafatá”, except, however, that the case here is the “construction of a neighbourhood with native materials, the project of which is already been designed by the Colonial Urbanization Office” (Mota, Neves, 1948, p. 111-112). Of the project for the Native Neighbourhood of Bafatá it was found (at the present state of this research) the proposal for the

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communal sanitary facilities (trab. 40/GUC), signed by architect José Manuel Galhardo Zilhão. The Bafatá experience is thus different from the Bissau one, where the building materials of the new houses are “modern”. The “modernity” of the materials does not compromise, however, the “ancestrality” of the plan and the Santa Luzia housing follows a plan of orthogonal inspiration.

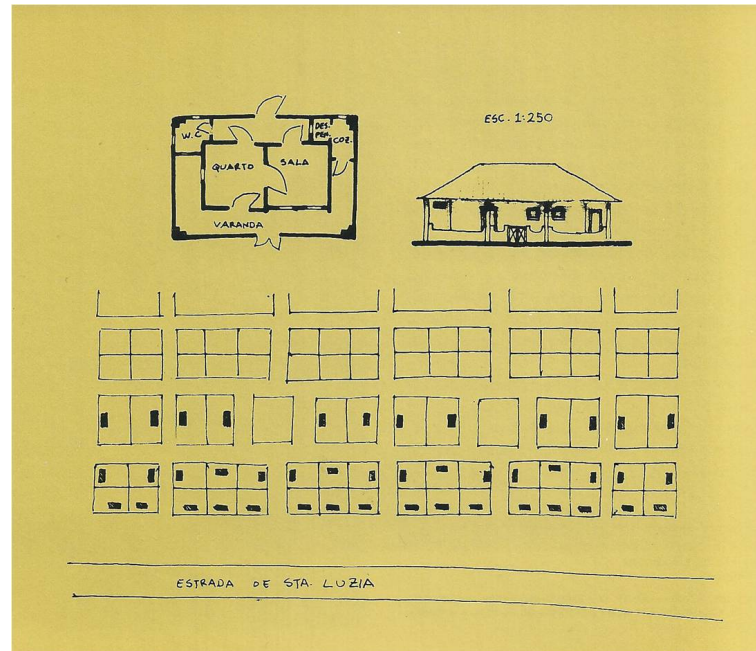


Image 4 - Santa Luzia's neighborhood, Bissau, Guinea, c.1948 [Geographica, ano 4, no. 15, Julho 1968]



Image 5 - Santa Luzia's neighborhood, Bissau, Guinea, c. 1948 [Photo: Ana Vaz Milheiro, 2011]

São Tomé and Príncipe, 1940s - Lemba and Pantufo

Also in the 1940s there are some experiments in São Tomé that simulate small urban settlements in a predominantly agricultural colony. The structure of these settlements is linear, frequently following the coastline, like Lemba and Pantufo.

In Pantufo, for instance, "a small fisherman village, 2 km from the city, is made of wooden shacks" and "some masonry houses [are built], according to the urbanization plan with a limited scope" (Valente, 1958, s.p.). Despite the criticism of engineer Manuel Neto Valente, the result is an urban "proto-structure", implanted along the coastline, with the church as the central element, and houses that obey to a model design of 1942.

At the same time, model housing for fishermen is developed, in a similar fashion to the ones in Lemba, in Vila das Neves, showing here the housing investment destined to the underprivileged population. In this case, an arrangement of six houses with minimal floor area – the main elevation being formed by a door and a window – ends in a square, open to the sea, comprising a church, a multifunctional building (Post Office, Alderman's Office, Sanitary Post) – today Lemba's Town Hall – and an old maternity hospital – today a private residence. This kind of procedure suggests the growing importance given to infrastructures in the São Tomé territory by public promoted actions.

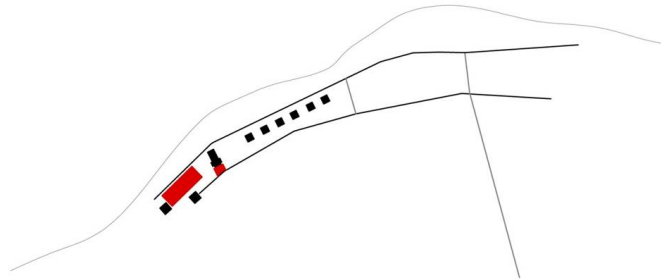


Image 6 - Schematic representation of Lemba, S. Tomé [Drawing: Filipa Fiúza, 2012]



Image 7 - Schematic representation of Pantufo, S. Tomé [Drawing: Filipa Fiúza, 2012]

Munhuana Neighbourhood, Maputo, c. 1939

The Munhuana Neighbourhood, in Maputo, stands out for a more “culturalist” approach. This includes the existence of patios, and it is built in a radial structure and it has a public square with a potential representation vocation. The neighbourhood also has relevant facilities, such as the native maternity hospital and the Munhuana catholic mission. The houses have equally value, with a design of “deco” affiliation. It was then predicted an easier integration of these populations in the colonial society.



Image 8 - Native residential unit, before 1952, Urbanization Plan of Lourenço Marques, João Aguiar, GUC, 1952-55

Part 2. Studies on the informal city and its consequences in the design of the new popular neighbourhoods

Guinea becomes an exemplary case, in part due to the way traditions symbolized by the popular house would establish a residential pattern surveyed by Portuguese architects with a more real knowledge of the region. This information will be used to find efficient housing solutions in the economical and cultural levels. The capacity of the local populations to correctly

site their neighbourhoods is admired, and some of the housing typologies built by the different ethnic groups are praised for its aesthetic and salubrity principles. The growing importance given internationally to the local habitats meets the Portuguese will to solve the strong housing deficiencies in Guinea – that are aggravated with the colonial war – with solutions that integrate the native traditions. It should be noted that in 1961, as it is known, two volumes that synthesize the survey on Portuguese regional architecture are published – *Arquitectura Popular em Portugal (Popular Architecture in Portugal)*.

The architects advise that the alterations go together with the “civilizational” evolution of the communities themselves, “stimulating and inciting the native people to understand the problems of hygiene and culture” (Oliveira, 1965a, p. 68).

The guinea native house is also integrated in the thinking and in the projects of the architects of the Colonial Urbanization Office from the late 1950s onwards, associated with the problem of the popular neighbourhoods (although it is subject to surveys since the 1940s with Orlando Ribeiro, Teixeira da Mota or Ventim Neves). The architects act through preoccupations of salubrity, hygiene and regional planning. The goal is to find a model of housing unit suitable to the local populations, built with ancient materials and techniques, and adaptable to the different cultural traditions of Guinea.

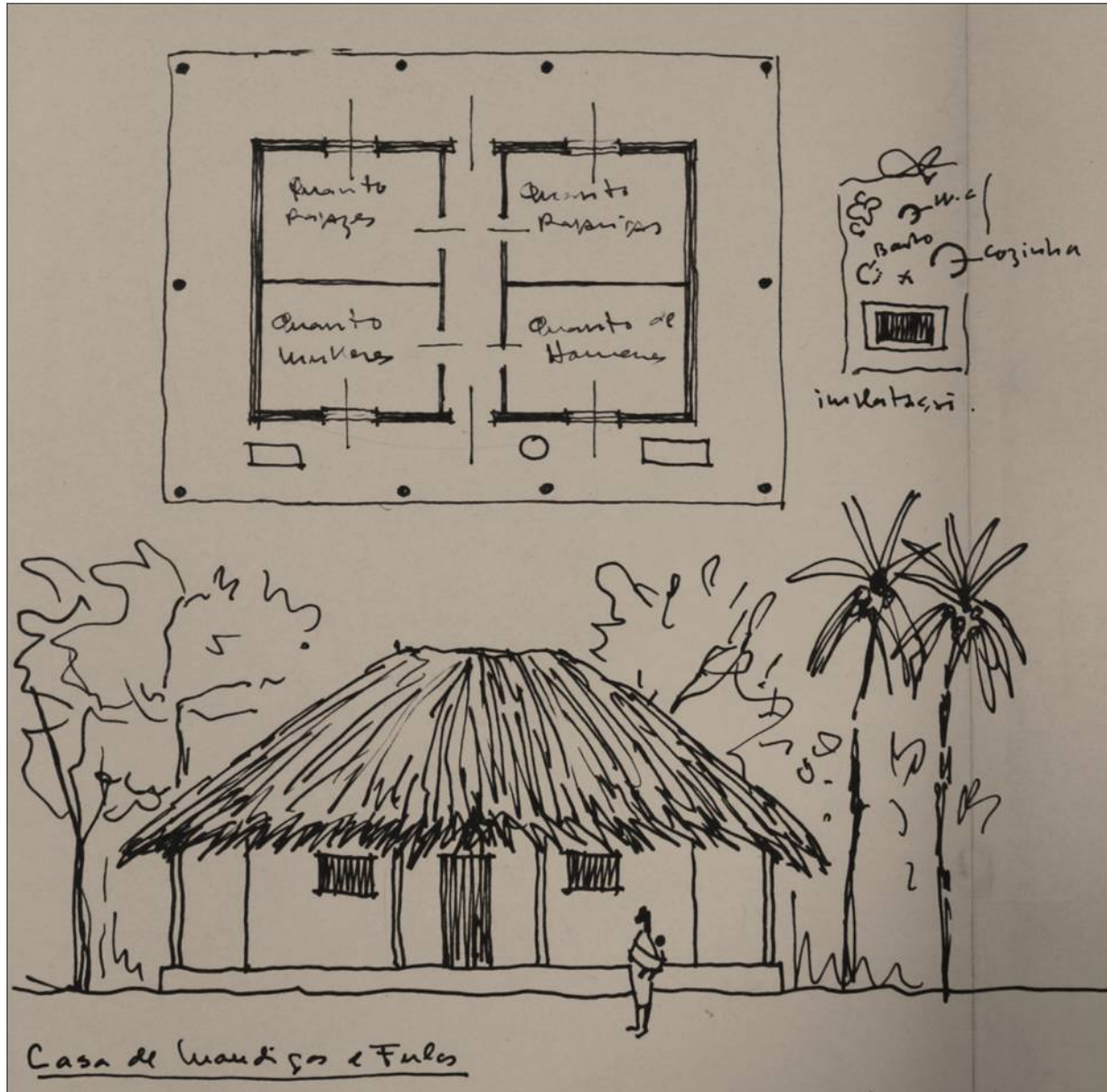


Image 9 - "Mandigas and Fulas' house", Report of the journey to Guinea, architect Mário de Oliveira, DGOPC-DSUH, 1958

Mário de Oliveira and the Urbanization Plans

Architect Mário de Oliveira (1915-2013) works in the Colonial Urbanization Office since 1948. This office is part of the Ministry of the Overseas Territories, created in late 1944 by the

Colonies Minister Marcelo Caetano and responsible for the urban and public facilities projects destined to the then Portuguese colonial territories. This office is headquartered in Lisbon.

In his visit to Guinea, Mário de Oliveira surveys the settlements of the different ethnic groups established around Bissau. He observes that although the traditional “straw huts” are inhabited “in the worst conditions”, the neighbourhoods are “generally located in cool places and with vast forestation” (Oliveira, 1958: 2). The circular plan of the houses, more common, it is however in disuse in the Bissau periphery. The majority of the inhabitants that want to settle in the urban areas aim for a “well-built straw hut in a rectangular way and a backyard for growing crops” (Oliveira, 1958: 2). The traditional house of the Fula-Fula, with earthen walls decorated with geometrical motifs, is the “most interesting (...) for its artistic way (...) and hygiene” (Oliveira, 1958: 3).

Bissau, 1959

In the Bissau master plan of 1959 and interpreting the wish of the native populations, that totalize about 9.000 people (while the “European city” houses 4.000 inhabitants [Oliveira, 1959:1]), Mário de Oliveira proposes three types of houses (detached houses, semi-detached houses and townhouses). The model houses should be sited in respect to the orientation of the prevailing winds, and adopting the traditional system “with some construction improvements”, and should “be built by those interested” (Oliveira, 1959: 3). These houses occupy three new neighbourhoods (A, B, C) distributed by the peripheral zone of the city, and organized within a rational spirit and keeping the sector logic of the earlier plan. The neighbourhoods, that take advantage of the pre-existing spontaneous settlements, are equipped with commercial and assistance zones, police station, bathhouses, fountains, incinerators, schools and chapel or

mosque schools, according to the practiced religion. Some of these facilities are already accessible. It is also intended the construction of sports and green areas “forming (...) a belt through the residential zones” (Oliveira, 1959: 14). It is designed with densities of 70 to 75 inhabitants per hectare, and it is considered “excellent” the density of 71 (Oliveira, 1959: 10). These principles are exposed in *Urbanismo no Ultramar (Urbanism Overseas)*, an opuscle published by Oliveira in 1962 where he introduces the Urbanization Plan of the popular neighbourhoods of Bissau, of his authorship, as a case study. In 1960, “two [of these neighbourhoods] are already implanted in order to start opening streets” (Possolo, 1960: 3).



Image 10 - Bissau's Urbanization Plan, Popular neighborhoods, architect Mário de Oliveira, GUU, Overseas Ministry, proc.603, 1959

São Tomé, 1960-1969

The Pre-Plan of Urbanization of the City of São Tomé (DSUH-DGOPC, trab. 685, c. 1962) materializes the paradigm shift within the urban strategy practiced by the architects that work in the official entities. These changes are anticipated in the opuscle that Oliveira publishes in 1962, dedicated to the *Essential Problems of Urbanism Overseas (Problemas Essenciais do Urbanismo no Ultramar)* and where his project for the Popular Neighbourhoods of Bissau

(1959) is presented as a case study. It is now demanded that the new neighbourhoods promote the settlement of multiracial populations, following the law alteration of the Estado Novo. The pre-plan is prepared through surveys to the populations and analysis to the existing conditions. The grid pattern is abandoned, present in the plans of the generation previous to 1958, in favour of an approach based on the definition of big sectors. It is in the sequence of the plan to the city of São Tomé, that Oliveira designs the proposal for the residential unit of Quinta de Santo António (trab. 685/5), destined to the underprivileged population and obeying a more organic and less orthogonal implantation. He then designs six typologies (three to be built in masonry and three others with wood, a traditional system in São Tomé). The houses are designed from direct consultation to the populations, the reason that takes him into not considering these projects of his sole authorship, as he explains in the annexed report of the new visit that he fulfils in 1964 to establish the definitive Plan (Oliveira, Anexo, 1964, p. 3).



Image 11 - S. Tomé's Urbanization Plan, with Santo António's neighborhood, architect Mário de Oliveira, DGOPC-DSUH, 1960

Quelimane, 1963-64

Between 1963 and 1964, Mário de Oliveira travels to Mozambique to collaborate in the pursuit of a series of urban projects in smaller cities. From that journey it results an article published in 1965, in the magazine Geographica, written from the experience of the master plan of Quelimane. In Mozambique, Mário de Oliveira introduces the concept of “habitat”.

When we studied the Urbanization Plan of Quelimane – and its suburban zones – we were careful to make a distribution of spaces plan in harmony with the local habitat, because man is not a mechanized being, he is before and totally, a sensitive and living being, that has an habitat itself and that only in it can he develop in proper conditions suitable to the environment.

(Oliveira, 1965a, p. 66)

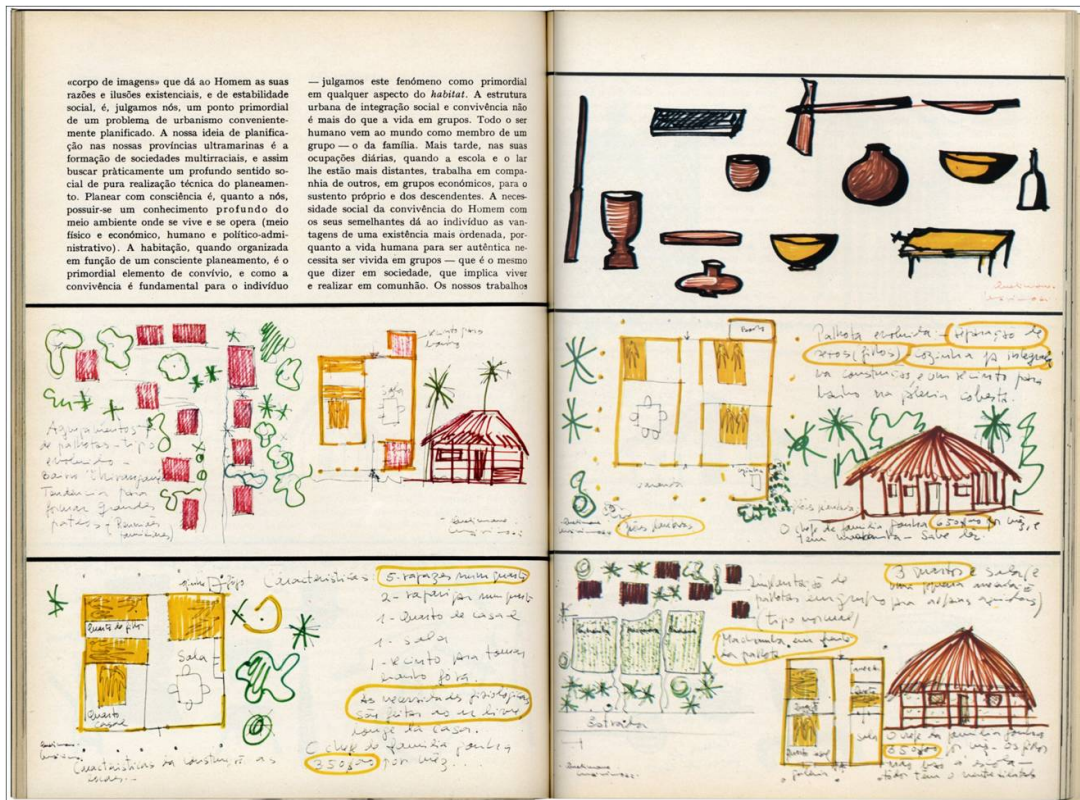


Image 12 - The «Habitat» in the suburban areas of Quelimane: a good example of the shaping of multiracial communities, architect Mário de Oliveira [Geographica, ano 3, no. 3, Julho 1965]

Fernão Lopes simões de Carvalho and the Fishermen Neighbourhood, Ilha de Luanda, 1964-65

Architect Fernão Lopes Simões de Carvalho, born in Luanda 1929, former intern in the Colonial Urbanization Office and in André Wogenscky's office, designs between 1964 and 1965, with José Augusto Pinto da Cunha, the project of the fishermen neighbourhood for Ilha de Luanda (Milheiro, 2012, p. 359). The new neighbourhood arises from the knowledge gathered, by the architects, of the pre-existing settlement, that included demographic studies, surveys to the socio-economic conditions of the resident population, photographic records, video recordings of the everyday life, and the drawn survey of the houses to replace (Carvalho in Anselmo, 2011, p. 176). In the solution found by the architects, where the plan is kept and the industrial techniques coexist with the traditional ones (Milheiro, 2012, p. 361), the doors are the space for creative freedom, and may be "decorated" by its inhabitants.

The site plan, still grid-like, contradicts the studies of Simões de Carvalho himself, that for the Board of Settlement of Angola develops, from the 1960s onward, more organic implantations that originate from the African tradition.

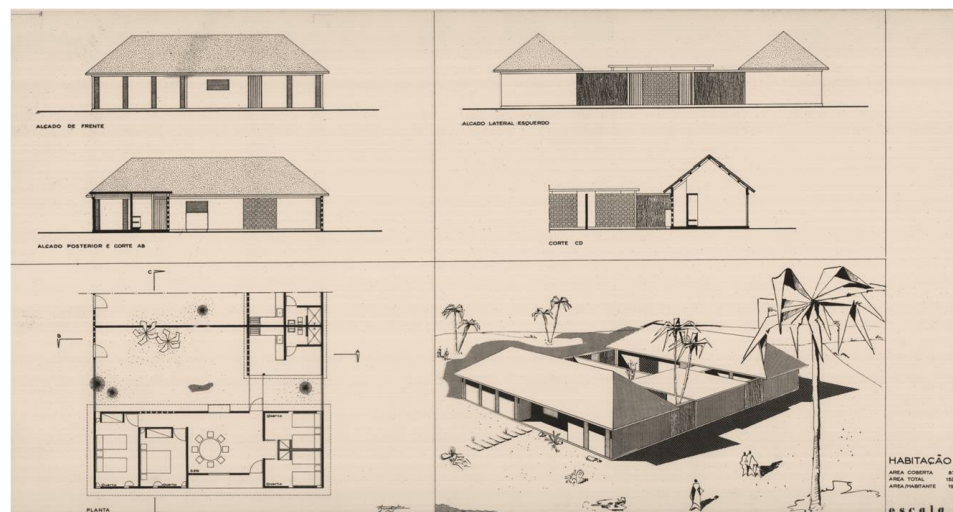


Image 13 - Fishermen's houses type D, Luanda's Island, Angola, architects Fernão Lopes Simões de Carvalho and José Pinto da Cunha, 1963-66

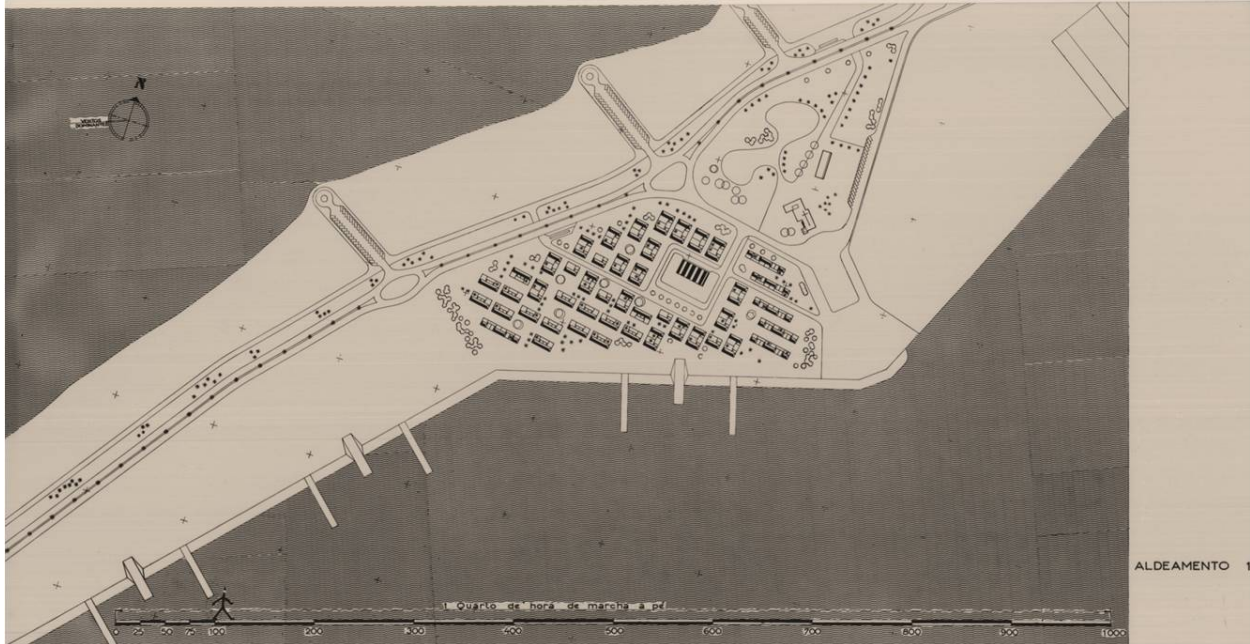


Image 14 - Fishermen's Neighborhood, Luanda's Island, Angola, architects Fernão Lopes Simões de Carvalho and José Pinto da Cunha, 1963-66

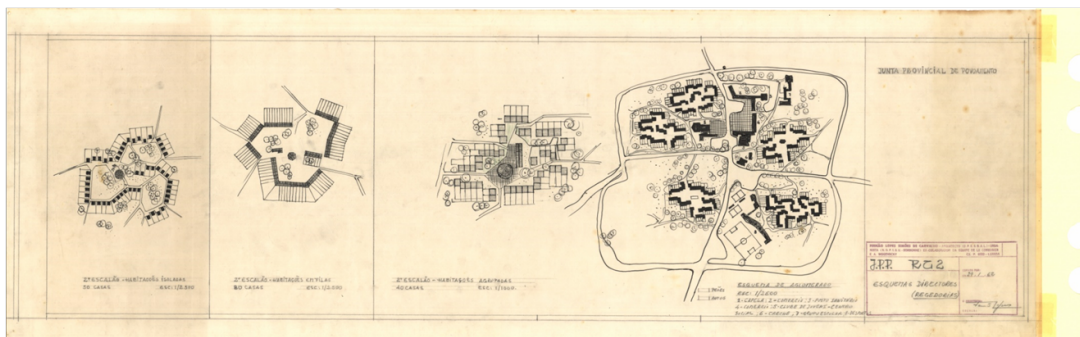
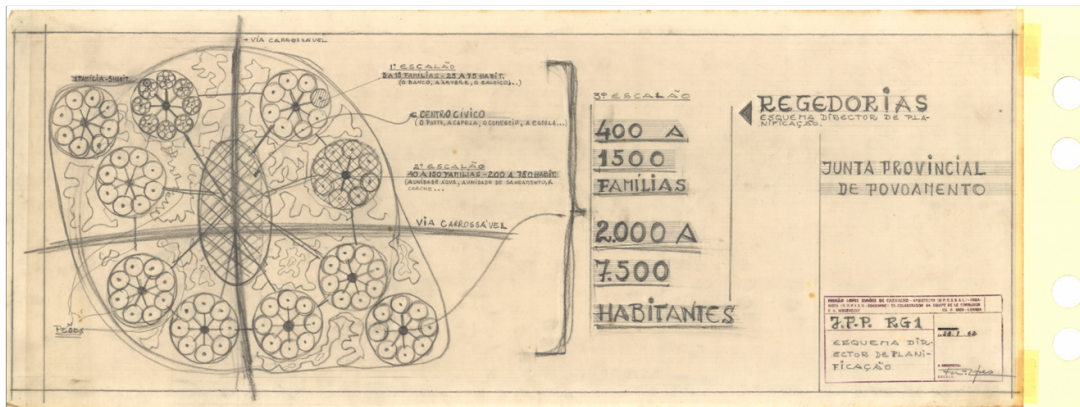


Image 15 - Native Neighborhoods Studies, Angola, architect Fernão Lopes Simões de Carvalho, 1960's

Cidade de Santo António – Dr. Bruto da Costa Neighbourhood, 1958

The Dr. Bruto da Costa Neighbourhood in Príncipe, from 1958 onwards, had initially ten houses for the underprivileged populations. It is an elementary urban structure, located in the town exit. The houses are described as minimal and based on the residential typologies developed by the architects of the Colonial Urbanization Office that resume the vernacular themes. The workers move from São Tomé to Príncipe to build the neighbourhood. The building materials are imported. Herminio Augusto Fernandes of the Public Works Division of São Tomé is the technician in charge.

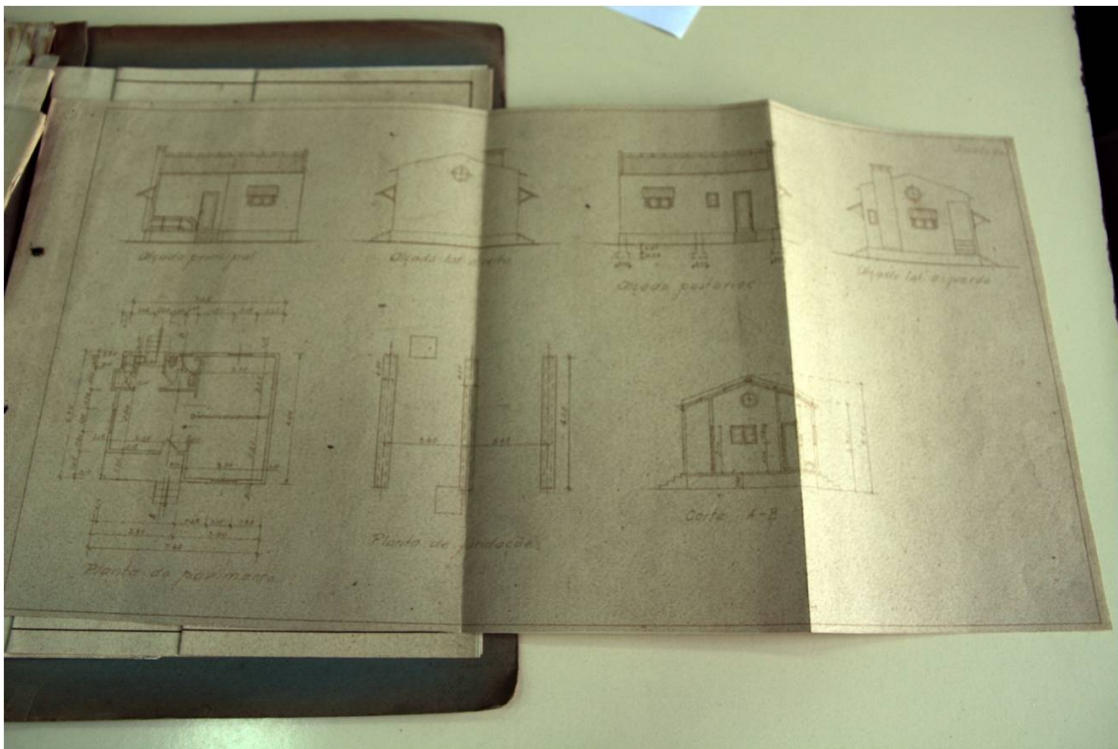


Image 16 - Dr. Bruto da Costa Neighborhood, Santo António, S. Tomé and Príncipe, Hermínio Augusto Fernandes, ROPSTP, 1958-59



Image 17 - Popular Housing, Santa Catarina, São Tomé [Photo: Ana Vaz Milheiro, 2012]

Ajuda Neighbourhood – Bissau, 1965-68

Although architects develop more organic tendencies from the end of the 1950s onward, field embodiments follow orthogonal layouts. This pragmatic approach is proved by the fishermen neighbourhood of Ilha de Luanda and the Ajuda Neighbourhood in Bissau, built with help from the military between 1965 and 1968, and reproducing a simplified model-version of the traditional African house.



Image 18 - Ajuda's neighborhood, Bissau, Guinea, 1965-68 [Photo: Ana Vaz Milheiro, 2011]

Part 3. Guinean house developed by architect Moreira Veloso and the model-cells

From 1970 on, the Overseas Urbanization Office is reorganized and its architects search for new answers for the concretization of settlements and urban neighbourhoods for the African populations. Guinea, battered by colonial war and by the advance in the field of the independentist movement led by Amílcar Cabral, arises again as a pioneering case. In this context, architect António Moreira Veloso, serving the Overseas Ministry, carries on several service commissions to Guinea, starting the last cycle of master plans of the colonial period. Bissau grows exponentially and the presence of military operations alters the logic of the rural settlements.

Population rearrangements are generalized and carried out by the army in order to protect the populations of the interior regions. These relocations are done through the massive

construction of “model-houses” developed by the military, and sited in grid layout settlements. These solutions, although “resourceful” (Veloso, 1970: 5), are far from the architectonic culture practiced by the professionals at DSUH since the formation of the Office. With the purpose of study alternative solutions, it is requested by Moreira Veloso the creation of the Urbanization Work Group, formed by architect and army captain Fernando Morgado, and by student architect Alda Tavares, among others. The team seeks to develop a new model-house, appropriated “for the habits and mores of the diverse ethnic groups”, maintaining the efficiency and economic viability of the military solutions (Veloso *et al*, 1970: 5). One of the functions of the Work Group is to ensure the “technical cooperation, between the Overseas Ministry and the Province” (Veloso, 1971: 2). It is also proposed the creation of an Urbanization Office of the province with more operability. It is nonetheless admitted that “while the state of war is maintained (...) the urbanization studies will have to attend (...) to the military objectives” (Veloso *et al*, 1970: 7). During 1970, the Work Group produces several reorganization, urbanization and zoning studies (the cases of Gêba, Pirada, Contuboel, Sare Bacar, Binar, etc. were located). The reorganization plan of Empada, dated 14th March 1970, e.g., is a classic case of the approach made by this team. Here we find principles of zoning, with layouts easily adopted by the army and introducing the concept of model-cells, formed by 16 houses. Regarding the basic services facilities, it stands out the primary school, the schools of fast formation, the sanitary post and the maternal and child centre, in addition to the military installations.

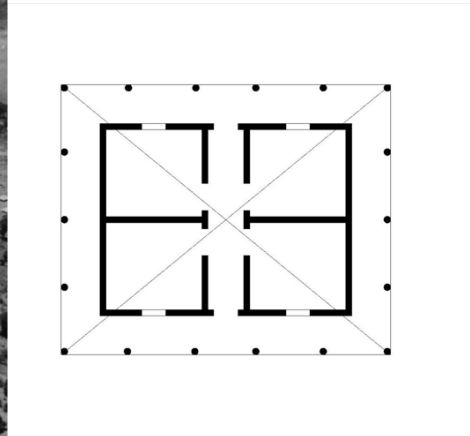


Image 19 - Army relocation of Nhabijões, 1969-72, Guinea-Bissau / House typology adopted by the army relocations, 1970 [Drawing: Bruno Ferreira and Débora Félix, 2011]

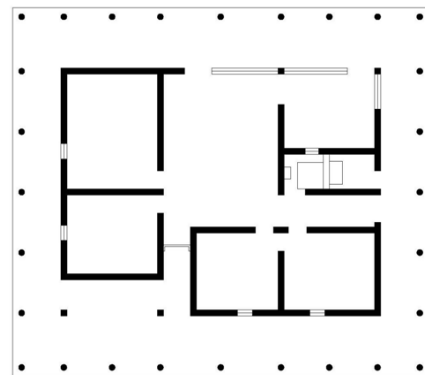


Image 20 - Model-House, Guinea-Bissau, architect António Moreira Veloso, DGOPC-DSUH, 1970 [Drawing: Bruno Ferreira and Débora Félix, 2011]

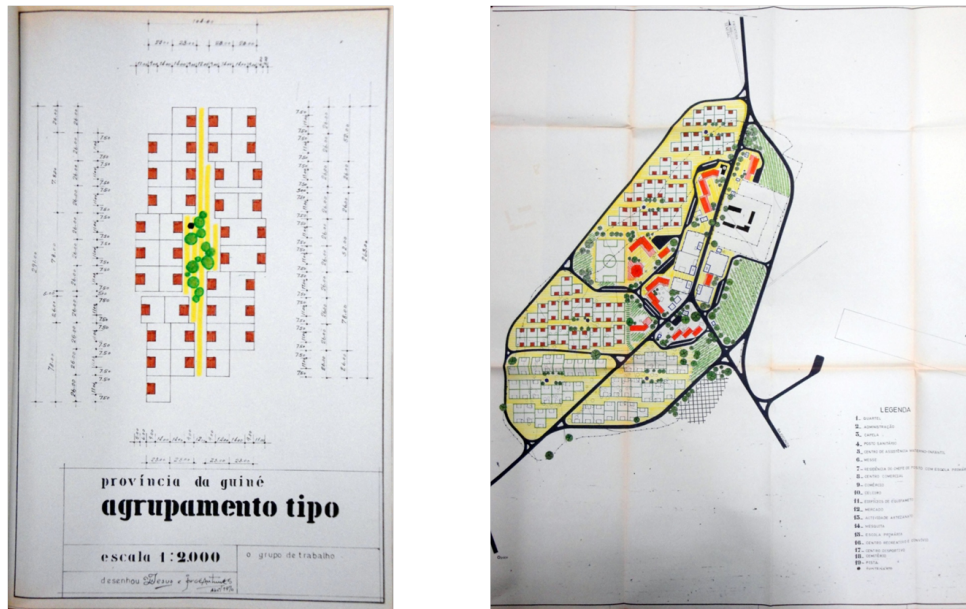


Image 21 - Reorganization plan of Pirada, architect António Moreira Veloso, DGOPC-DSUH, 1970

Final considerations

From the late 1950s on, the urban space and housing for the African populations is one of the main architectural and urban programs carried by the Portuguese architects in Africa. Facing the fact of being economically impracticable and culturally undesirable to build neighbourhoods for the "native" population in a European canon, architects had to study the African habitat in missions, like the ones they conduct in the former Portuguese Guinea. The African house is one of the most studied subjects. The architects analyze the plans, describe its functions and study the traditional constructive systems. They are mostly interested in designing a "new African house typology", that, as Moreira Veloso writes, has "the minimum hygiene and comfort conditions and that contribute to the social promotion of those populations" (Veloso, 1970, p. 10). This house serves as a module to the new urban spatial organization, forming low density neighbourhoods, equipped with healthcare, education and sports programs, placed in organic layouts. These neighbourhoods are still found in the contemporary African city, although its less

rigid structure has allowed its disappearance more easily than the traditional, European-inspired "white" city.

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