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Entre casas con porteros y habitaciones de criadas: formas de vivir en una Lisboa cambiante *Between Doorkeeper Apartments and Housemaid Rooms: Ways of Living in a Changing Lisbon*

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Resumen

Considerando que la ciudad es un repositorio de diferentes formas de vivienda, que reflejan la heterogeneidad social en lo que se refiere a la clase, poder económico y estatus social, la casa, como espacio primario de la vida privada y familiar, es aún el reflejo más fiel de esas mismas formas de vida, y de sus cambios, a lo largo del tiempo. En este artículo se propone abordar procesos de transformación social y arquitectónica que marcaron el espacio doméstico y las formas de vida de Lisboa a mediados del siglo XX. Uno de los objetivos es mostrar cómo las casas –la arquitectura, su vivencia– no sólo reflejan los valores sociales, culturales y simbólicos de una época, sino también como ciertas figuras históricas, muchas veces subestimadas, como criadas y porteros, pueden asumir mayor importancia en la comprensión de la cultura del hogar y de las formas de habitar.

Palabras clave: Lisboa, transformaciones sociales y arquitectónicas, porteros, criadas

Bloque temático: Arquitecturas de la casa: el espacio domestico a través de la historia

Abstract

If the city is a repository of different ways of dwelling that reflect social heterogeneity in terms of class, economic power and social status, the house, as the primary space of intimate and family life, is still the most faithful reflection of these same ways of living and their changes over time. This article proposes to approach processes of social and architectural transformation that marked the domestic space and the culture of living in Lisbon in the mid-20th century. One of the objectives is to illustrate not only how the houses –their architecture, their living– reflect the social, cultural and symbolic values of an era, but also how certain historic characters often underestimated –such as housemaids and doorkeepers– can assume greater prominence in the understanding of the home culture and ways of inhabiting.

Keywords: Lisbon, social and architectural transformations, doorkeepers, housemaids

Topic: Arquitecturas de la casa: el espacio domestico a través de la historia

Introduction

The relationship between architecture and cultural studies seems to be essential to observe significant changes that naturally occur on the cultural and social dimensions of dwelling and everyday life, in order to confront housing models of reference of certain representative periods that mark the history of territories and its communities. Several authors have studied the strong relationship between households and cultural practices,¹ exploring the link between domestic architecture and social change, demonstrating how strongly one is connected to the other, since ancestral times. In the particular case of Lisbon, Portugal, the morphological composition of the houses allows to reconstruct and better understand some changes that occurred in terms of ideologies of private life, family, social classes, lifestyles, and how the architectural dynamics were followed and adapted to these changes.

The Lisbon architectural context of the mid-20th century has been particularly challenging in terms of an articulated analysis of the social transformations and small changes operated in domestic spaces and its ways of living. The start of this interest is an urban renovation guided by the principles of modern urbanism and strongly committed to provide answers to various problems identified in the city. Among them, the scarcity of housing, the poor conditions of comfort, health and safety of many of the buildings for housing, or even concerns about the issues of circulation and functional distribution.

Before this modernist renovation, many of the rental buildings constructed in the city in the first decades of the 20th century were mainly guided by three principles:

- a) A clear functional differentiation, both in the common spaces of the buildings and in the internal structure of the dwellings.
- b) A hierarchy of the various levels of privacy within the dwellings and corresponding clarification of the different roles carried out by the family members.
- c) A domestic space formally and socially hierarchical, connected to the social structure.

These principles were particularly evident in the model of buildings and houses intended for bourgeois families. The clarification of the different spaces that integrated the house not only reinforced the social hierarchies coexisting within it, making an effective separation between the family and employees, but also complicated the functional spaces for employees.²

As examples, it can be mentioned the existence of service doors on the building facades (sometimes sent to the rear facades) and service stairs inside buildings for the exclusive use of domestic servants, merchants or other service providers. As shown by Cieraad,³ answering the door was an important activity in domestic life, as the daily door to door delivery of basic goods was an important part of the city life, both because it was crucial in the pre-refrigerator era and

¹ Irene Cierrad, "‘Out of My Kitchen’ Architecture, Gender and Domestic Efficiency", *The Journal of Architecture* 7, n.º 3 (2002): 263-79; Irene Cieraad, "Dutch Windows: Female Virtue and Female Vice", in *At Home: An Anthropology of Domestic Space*, ed. by Irene Cieraad (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 31-52; Céline Rosselin, "The Ins and Outs of the Hall: A Parisian Example", in *At Home: An Anthropology of Domestic Space*, ed. by Irene Cierrad (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 53-59; Orvar Löfgren, "The Sweetness of Home: Class, Culture and Family Life in Sweden", in *The Anthropology of Space and Place*, ed. by Setha M. Low and Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 142-159.

² Sandra Marques Pereira, *Casa e Mudança Social: Uma Leitura Das Transformações Da Sociedade Portuguesa a Partir Da Casa* (Casal de Cambra: Caleidoscópio, 2012).

³ Cieraad, "Dutch Windows..." and Cierrad, "Out of My..."

because it played an important role between the public life and the privacy of domestic organization. Another example is the inside division of the houses according to the three functions - reception and social spaces, intimate spaces and service spaces. As also the differentiation of circulation and action spaces within the house in accordance to the social roles of men and women, being women confined to their roles of housewives, mothers and responsible for the domestic servants. The men stayed in the social and private areas, never entering the service areas, while the women, although having access to the whole house, also did not interfere much with the spaces reserved for the employees, being these confined to rules of access and circulation inside the house.

In general terms, this short portrait of the bourgeois Lisbon apartments of the first decades of the 20th century reflects the doctrinal presuppositions of a dictatorial political regime, that reproduces in the architecture and domestic ways of life the same hierarchical, distancing and discriminatory vision of the society from that period.⁴

By mid-century, the same political regime was still in place. However, the Portuguese architects slowly embraced the influences of the Modern Movement and promoted the transfer of some significant social changes to urban architecture, confirming a modernity that shyly became established in Lisbon.⁵ The modern house proposed to shorten the distances, both social (between masters and employees), or familiar (between genders and different members of the family). It also proposed a greater opening of the semi-private spaces to the visitors, as well as a greater versatility of the functional spaces by simplifying its fractionation and seeking a better use of the same. Nevertheless, the rationality of modern architecture would still find strong resistance to its implementation in collective housing in Lisbon, both by real state promoters and their lack of interest in architecture movements and by consumers, who continued to identify themselves with complex domestic spaces and with obvious social and functional hierarchies within the dwellings.

The apartments in Lisbon, in spite of their shy modernist inspiration, ignored the feminist movements that led, in other countries,⁶ to architectural experiences of domestic efficiency. This happened partially due to a conservative State (government), but also because of the abundance of cheap female labor as domestic housemaids. As a result, housemaids were an important part of the city life until the late 60's, when the country started its late industrial growth, widening the job opportunities for the rural exodus, both for men and women. Eventually, this working class gained such an importance that it became present in architectural regulations and in building practices after the 1930's.

1. Doorkeeper's apartments – alternatives to a mandatory existence

In this period, the persistence of doorkeepers and housemaids in the architecture of the new buildings was not only in line with the specific regulations that were dedicated to them within the

⁴ Pereira, *Casa e...;* Ricardo Agarez, *O Moderno Revisitado. Habitação Multifamiliar Em Lisboa Nos Anos de 1950* (Lisboa: Câmara Municipal de Lisboa, 2009).

⁵ Margarida Acciaioli, *Casas Com Escritos - Uma História Da Habitação Em Lisboa* (Lisboa: Bizâncio, 2015); Ana Tostões, *A Idade Maior: Cultura e Tecnologia Na Arquitectura Moderna Portuguesa* (Porto: Faculdade de Arquitectura da Universidade do Porto, 2015).

⁶ Cierrad, "Out of My...".

framework of urban building regulations,⁷ but also with resistance to a modern life matrix that began to show signs of wanting to settle. In 1951, the General Regulation of Urban Buildings (RGEU) assumed a clear regulatory and disciplinary function on the construction sector in Lisbon, while it moralized the expansion of collective housing and, through it, the transformations that were operating at the level of domestic spaces and ways of inhabiting. In line with international trends, this Regulation defined standards regarding the salubrious and habitable conditions of buildings, as well as their constructive and aesthetic requirements. These new legislative requirements would mark not only a new constructive and expansionist moment of the city, but above all, a different way of conceiving the exterior and interior architecture of the collective housing buildings.

The publication of the doorkeeper's Regulation (Regulamento das Porteiras) in 1950 by the Lisbon City Council, extended the obligation of this service in buildings for six or more tenants and regulated the activity itself, in terms of rights and duties. One of the main duties of the doorkeeper was to look after the building upon a salary (paid by the owner of the building and supplemented by contributions from the tenants), which involved not only cleaning issues and maintenance of common spaces, but also a tight control over tenants' behaviour. The doorkeepers were entitled to water, light and sometimes their own clothing. However, the highlight was the accommodation inside the building, a solution that attracted mostly women of low socio-economic status. The apartment reserved for the doorkeeper should have at least one bedroom, a kitchen, a bathroom with a shower and located as close as possible to the entrance of the building, in order to control the entrances and exits.

This social control exercised by the doorkeepers over the interior spaces of the buildings gave rise to frequent conflicts, both with the tenants and especially with their housemaids, with whom they shared similar (and sometimes competitive) conditions of subalternity. If the insides of the dwellings were intrinsically complex, the common spaces of the buildings also replicated this complexity, due mainly to the spatialities that were reserved for doorkeepers, housemaids and other service personnel. In the small world of the building, everything had to go through the door and through the doorkeeper. As such, their privileged access to several kinds of information could both serve landlords, tenants, or housemaids, and it was not convenient for any of these characters to enter into open conflict with the doorkeepers or contest their short authority.

This reality would also have contributed to a hidden game of forces between real estate promoters and city council regulations regarding the location of the doorkeeper's apartment. In order to have a better economic advantage of the building's ground floors, the promoters began to relocate the doorkeeper's apartments in the most unsuitable areas, as is the case of the building's last floors. In response, the regulations insisted on the location near the main entrance, otherwise the doorkeepers would not be able to perform their duties properly. However, an expedient way of circumventing these rules was by interposing alteration projects at the time of construction, so many city buildings would continue to include the doorkeeper's apartments, but depriving her of a more effective social control over all its occupants.

⁷ Regulamento Geral das Edificações Urbanas (RGEU), a document approved in 1951 and which replaced the Regulamento de Salubridade das Edificações Urbanas (RSEU), the only national instrument for controlling urban construction that was in force between 1903 and 1951.

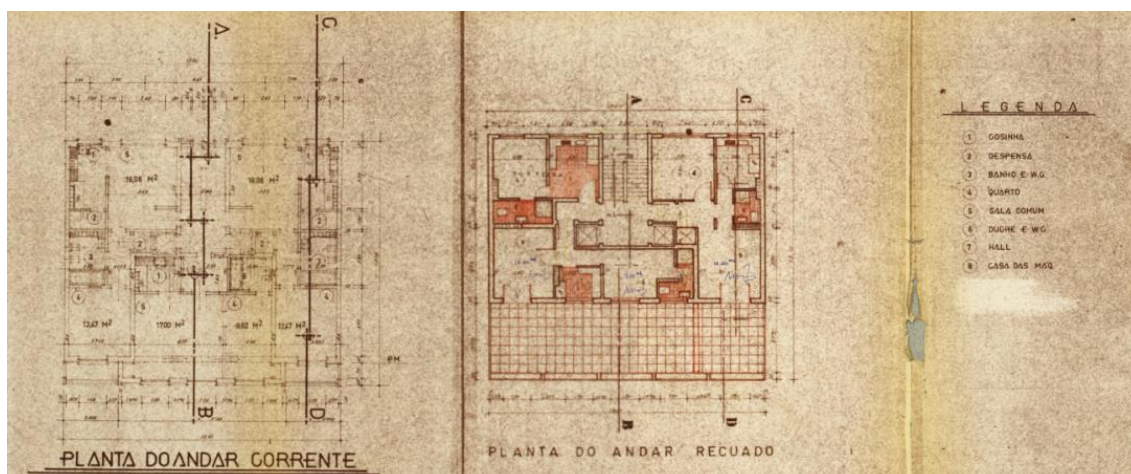


Figure 1: Doorkeeper apartment relocated on the roof top, with minimum dimensions (1965), Lisbon
Source: Arquivo Municipal de Lisboa

2. Housemaid rooms – architectures for a persistent social condition

Following the example of the doorkeeper's apartments, the housemaid rooms also received special attention from public regulation.⁸ This regulation would insist on extending the traditional functional structure of the dwellings and transposing into the domestic space the old social hierarchies, despite the contradiction with the modernist logics that began to frame the architecture and urban production of this time. Even the housing designed for the middle classes continued to maintain the housemaid bedroom and bathroom, despite the modernist features pointing to the rationalization and optimization of the interior space of the dwellings, through the reorganization of the different areas and functions.

In social terms, this is due to the easy and almost socially transverse access to domestic maids by many families in the city. Most of these maids from rural areas of Portugal and originating from families in severe economic need, (mostly adolescent girls, with few or no scholar education), were brought to the great city to grow up in the house of their masters, performing all the domestic tasks assigned to them, sometimes in exchange of meagre wages, sometimes in exchange for gratitude and survival. According to Brasão⁹ the northern districts of Portugal lost as much as 28% of their female population between 1950 and 1970 – and although it is not possible to distinguish how many of them were housemaids, it is possible to affirm that it should be a significant part, since in 1950 the population of female domestic servants was of almost 200 000, in Portugal (with a much lesser number of male housemaids of 40 000).

Regarding the structure of the house, the new regulation (RGEU, 1951) required the sanitary installation next to the smaller room (housemaid room), which would end up having definite implications in the constitution of the dwellings from this period. In this way, not only the area for service functions gained a misguided and misleading weight in the housing as a whole, but also

⁸ According to RGEU, houses with more than four compartments (including living room and kitchen) would also have to include sanitary facilities for maids next to the respective room.

⁹ Inês Brasão, *O Tempo Das Criadas: A Condição Servil Em Portugal (1940-1970)* (Lisboa: Tinta da China, 2016).

out of the socioeconomic conditions of more modest families.¹⁰ Nevertheless, having an internal housemaid was common. In upper class houses, their functions were mainly to take care of the cleaning, while the cook and the external housemaid had other tasks. Laundry could be taken care of outside. In middle class contexts, the housemaid was expected to take care of all the chores, 6 days a week. Housemaids (unlike doorkeepers) usually had no formal contracts with the employers and their job security was strongly dependent of their personal relationships with the inhabitants of the house.

In general, the effective separation of the reserved space of the maids inside the dwellings ended up meeting a certain dignity of their life conditions, considering previous situations of lack of healthiness, comfort and hygiene in which many would live before the RGEU Regulation of 1951, often having no private facilities of their own, sleeping in the pantry or in the kitchen.¹¹ At the same time, this spatial separation would also contribute to a greater clarification of the social roles between employers and employees, both within the dwellings and in the common spaces of the buildings.

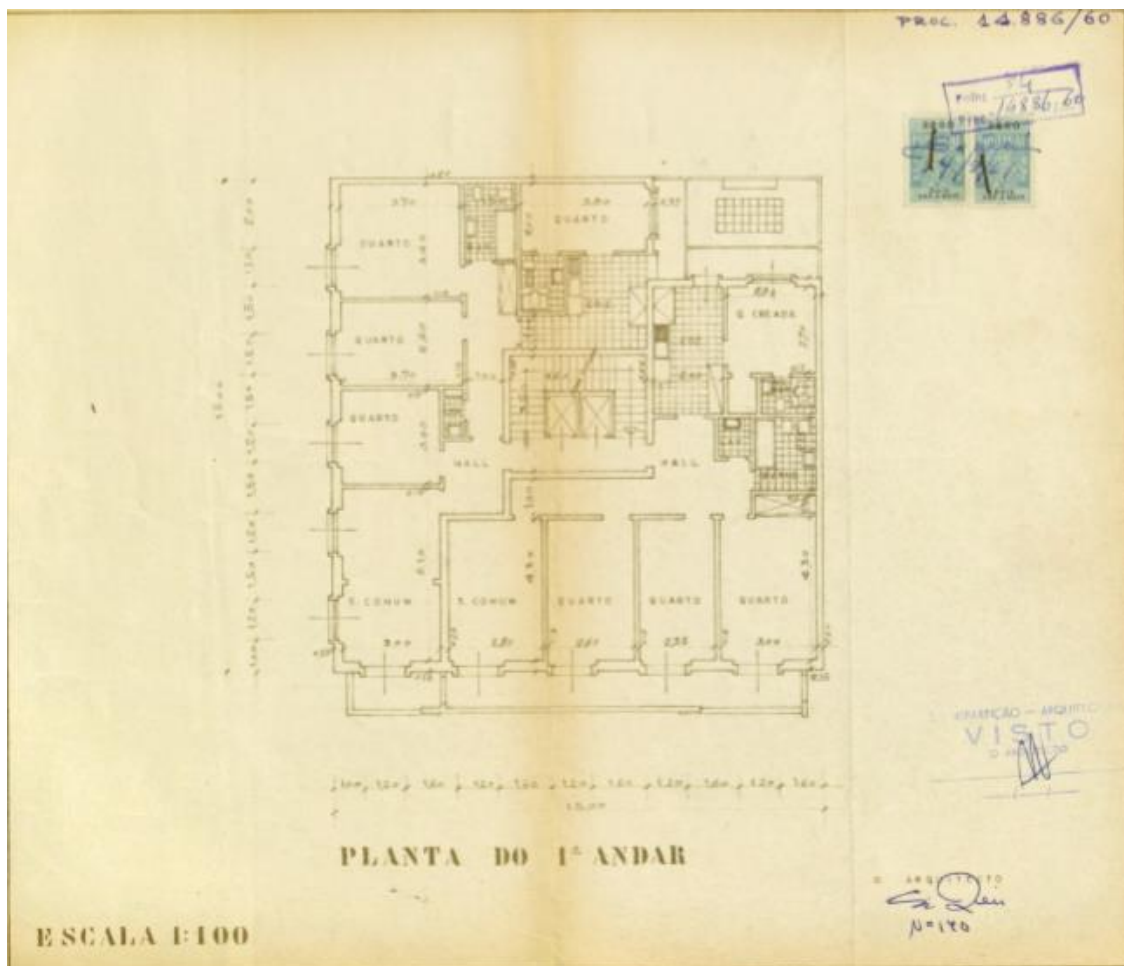


Figure 2: Blueprint of a Lisbon apartment, including housemaid room with bathroom (1960)
Source: Arquivo Municipal de Lisboa

¹⁰ Agarez, *O Moderno...*

¹¹ Brasão, *O Tempo...*

According to Acciaiuoli¹² in the 1950s, the “old-fashioned way of life” still remained in Lisbon in houses that were gradually being modernized. There was not only a strong resistance to house appliances, but also a difficult access to them due to its high prices. Domestic work was reserved for housemaids, who continued to have rooms in apartments, even within families of more modest economic condition. However, the multiple transformations that contextualize the urban society of these decades have also affected the housemaids, as well as the physical and social space that they would gradually cease to occupy within the dwellings and their respective families to whom they served.

The growing conflicts between maids and masters were indicative of changes in the Portuguese society that would be more vast and complex than a simple labour or corporate crisis. While the maids presented new demands - for better wages, domestic service constraints, schedules and leisure time - the masters complained about the great difficulty in finding housemaids who were decent, trustworthy and competent as they used to be.¹³ This scenario contributed to the fact that much of this servile labour had moved into the industry. At the same time, housewives were gradually claiming different social roles, and were leaving home to work, taking on various everyday tasks with the increasing help of home appliances.

Once freed from the maids, the small rooms inside the dwellings gained new uses and users in families who, in due time, adopted renewed customs and new lifestyles, despite the formal and conceptual regulations referring to old role models.

3. Concluding Notes

There are historical periods whose social, economic, cultural and political dynamics are particularly relevant to the understanding of domestic life and to all the relational complexity that surrounds the home and the culture of inhabiting. As far as architecture and domesticity are concerned, the mid-twentieth century is especially important, since it reflects a Lisbon in transition. A transition that, in the meantime, is slowed down by new regulations reproducing old social logics in traditional ways of dwelling, remaining on hold the new architectural inspirations that bring the ambition to transform much more than just the way of perceiving and living the domestic space.

Through this paper, we intended to show how social transformations regarding the living of Lisbon's domestic life in the 20th century greatly influenced domestic spaces and architectural regulations and practices. If living in a city is also taking part in an ongoing construction process of physical and symbolic spaces, living in a residential building is also to share the complexity of these physical, social and symbolic spaces that, in a certain way, reproduce a city that can almost be seen under a magnifying glass.

By looking into the internal organization of buildings and homes, we can better understand some social dimensions that are often devalued, as they are hidden in the privacy of domesticity.

The reference to the doorkeeper's apartments and housemaid rooms, although briefly, tried to bring some light to these subjects and drawing attention to the fact that the domestic space

¹² Acciaiuoli, *Casas Com...*

¹³ Adelaide Carvalho, *As Criadas de Servir e o Serviço Doméstico* (Lisboa: Edição de Autor, 1958); Acciaiuoli, *Casas Com...*

corresponds to an ongoing change process, made and remade by all the characters, their social contexts and own idiosyncrasies.

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