# AFRICANICITY AND COLONIAL ARCHITECTURE:
## THE RESPONSE OF THE COLONIAL PLANNING OFFICE (1944-1974)

**Ana Vaz Milheiro**

*Lisbon University Institute, Portugal*

Portugal's colonial policies during the *Estado Novo* regime from the Second World War onwards began to incentivise emigration to the Portuguese African territories. The resulting concentration of new arrivals from Portugal made the housing shortages in the colonies more visible. The responses by the regime up to 1974, the year of the revolution that put an end to the dictatorship, were to evolve in accordance with international policies (which tended towards advocating the formation of new countries) and the architectural culture of the period (which was to become increasingly permeable to local cultures).

Up until World War II, the homes occupied by European settlers in Sub-Saharan Africa, where the Portuguese colonies were located, were similar in form and conditions of salubrity to local traditional housing. In an initial phase the regime began to address this situation for reasons of both morale and public hygiene. The increase in the number of civil servants transferred in the 1940s to Angola and Mozambique in particular accelerated the construction of State-developed housing, introducing questions of the rationalisation of resources. The strategy applied included distinguishing between the building of housing for civil servants working in the diverse sectors (health, the judicial system, administration and the military) and the housing designed for working settlers and the indigenous populations, who were later referred to as 'economically weak' (or similar terminology).

Generally speaking, the strategy committed to the single-family home set in new residential neighbourhoods that were peripheral to the urban centres, reflecting influence by the Garden City theories and promoting low-density built complexes.

Backing the policies outlined in the metropole, the colonial governments likewise began to implement measures aimed at resolving the housing problems. It was recognised that 'economical housing – which in Europe and America has given rise to vast and complex legislation […] – possesses special characteristics that would be advantageous to define in greater detail'[1]. Even if the definition of standard designs was accepted (Fig. 1), diversity was still favoured as a response to regional specificities.

In an initial phase that continued the territorial occupation begun during the First Republic (1910-1926), the stylistic options included establishing a colonial house inspired by traditional Portuguese styles. One of the earliest reports of houses 'decorated in the Portuguese style'[2] dates from 1926 and refers to the new city of Huambo (Angola, later called Nova Lisboa and now renamed Huambo). In 1940, at the Exhibition of the Portuguese World in Lisbon, a prototype for a colonial house (designed by Vasco Regaleira) was shown in the colonial section. At the same event, which celebrated Portugal's isolation at a time of world war, two nuclei were exhibited: one of Portuguese villages and another showing African indigenous villages. In this context, the imaginary of the popular architecture of the Portuguese village was crossed with the proposal for the future Portuguese settlers in the African colonies. The Regaleira house was considered appropriate for both the African continent and southern Portugal. In the re-creation of the indigenous settlements, a certain figurative primitivism was favoured, including a reproduction of the *cubata* hut, that was based on the colonial experience of many Portuguese settlers from the late nineteenth century onwards. Earlier, at the Angola Fair in 1938, the Indigenous Art Pavilion had featured a precise reproduction of a *typical* African construction, thus establishing a *type* that was to become well known in the metropole and colonial societies.



Figure 1. [left] Projeto Casas para Funcionários África, 1944 (source: P35vol100-proc98.2.1 Arq. Histórico Ultramarino, Photo: Hugo Coelho)

Figure 2. [right] Mário de Oliveira. "O "Habitat" nas zonas suburbanas de Quelimane: um caso positivo de formação de sociedades multirraciais", in *Geographica*, ano 3, n. 3, Julho de 1965, Lisboa: Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa, 70-71.

It was the responsibility of the Gabinete de Urbanização Colonial (GUC, Colonial Planning Office), which began operating in January 1945, to define housing typologies in accordance with the profiles of the population groups they were meant for. The early experiences of this team, which reported to the Colonial Ministry, were compiled by one of its leading architects, João

António Aguiar, in 1952 in his publication, *L'Habitation dans les pays tropicaux*. A year before the office's name had been changed to Gabinete de Urbanização do Ultramar (GUU, Overseas Planning Office) and the ministry was also renamed Overseas Ministry.

Aguiar's book compiles documentation on the housing produced in the overseas provinces until then.[3] This knowledge is used to define more refined models, be it in terms of the programme and materials, the formal aspect or climate-appropriate solutions. Three conferences were held at the 21st Congress of the *Fédération Internationale de l'Habitation et de l'Urbanisme* in Lisbon. The *Organisation des communautés* conference dealt with the design of 'indigenous residential units' for 5000 to 15,000 inhabitants that served as 'satellite cities' to the main consolidated urban centres. The second conference, *Disposition des logements,* looked at the dwelling's internal organisation. Parallel to this, the problem of housing for Africans and European was considered from the perspective of building materials and methods, orientation, costs, aesthetics, etc. It was here that distinctions were made between residential programmes for working settlers, civil servants (single and multiple-family housing), weekend housing and housing for the indigenous populations (detached houses and collective housing blocks). Each programme was demonstrated on the basis of standard designs. The final part, *Considérations d'hygiène dans les logements*, looked at climactic factors: protection from the sun through shade-providing elements in the façades, natural and artificial cooling, etc.

The Portuguese began to consolidate their own specific housing programmes in the fifties, achieving homogenous production in terms of functional structure and building materials even where diverse stylistic inspirations were followed. There was a general preference for an *African Portuguesism*. However, in most new neighbourhoods, the designs continued to result from a reworking of the traditional colonial house, making use of the exterior veranda and the steep and overhanging roof, where ventilation and cooling elements, applied to both the roofs and the spans, became new common features.

After publication of the book, a competition was launched in 1953 for the housing of rural families transferred from Portuguese rural environments to the overseas territories by the Direcção Geral de Fomento do Ultramar (Directorate General for Overseas Promotion). The aim was to find a functional and aesthetic solution for the house of the Portuguese settler. The development of two typologies was required, 'whereby we would recommend a decidedly rustic and traditional composition ideally adjusted to the settler's character and personality'[4].

Most of the participating architects had links to the GUU and were therefore familiar with tropical territories and the image that was to be defined in projects developed by the State. The proposals were meant for immediate use by the technical brigades in Limpopo (Mozambique) and Cunene (Angola). The conclusions assessed the designs on the basis of the area/comfort ratio and the use of traditional tropical architectural elements, such as verandas. While the capacity to transfer stylistic identification with the metropole to the African terrain was praised, the peculiarities of the location had to be taken into account[5]: 'Portuguese house? Yes, but characterised by having its material function totally adjusted to new conditions… Portuguese house? Always! But overseas Portuguese. Thus we choose welcoming and cool, safe, proper, where every nail's in the right place and every soul finds repose'[6].

In his submission to the Overseas Minister at the time[7], one of the participants, the architect Mário de Oliveira, explained that in his proposal 'the architectural characteristics are not distant from those in which the settler developed his character and personality'[8]. To him this was the 'adjustment of the settler to the environment' by means of an architecture with which he was familiar.

The architects were therefore involved in reproducing in Africa metropolitan housing models as a way of maintaining a strong emotional link between Portugal and its overseas territories. Nevertheless, it was the principles of adaptability to the climate that influenced the main design decisions, while respecting requirements of economy and good sense and taking the colonial reality into account (resources, labour, etc.).

Those same principles dominated the work carried out locally by the Juntas Provinciais de Povoamento (Provincial Settlement Boards) set up in 1961 by Adriano Moreira. The philosophy followed by the board for Angola, for instance, was based on the idea that it was 'important to give settler families a house that was not only a shelter but also a powerful element in their fixation'[9].

The settlers were not exclusively European. The immigrant communities also included populations from other regions under Portuguese administration, such as the Cape Verdean emigrants who were encouraged to spread across the African territories. Designs (most of them already implemented) were divulged that could be reproduced, as in a good practice manual. These designs shared the same pragmatic approach based on economicist ideals (in form and content). Policies making the beneficiaries of the housing responsible for conservation and improvement were implemented. Quality proposals with a strong modernist expression were also published.[10] However, designs that revealed a certain 'non-Corbusian' modernity dominated and gave greater specificity to the projects sponsored by the Portuguese State, the result of the singularity of the experience of the architects in public service.

During this process of *tropicalisation* one witnessed a significant shift in paradigm in stylistic terms. A very specific typology – housing for members of the military – took on particular importance in this decade because of the outbreak of the colonial wars.[11] This was a parallel programme to which the architects of the Direcção de Serviços de Urbanismo e Habitação da Direcção Geral de Obras Públicas e Comunicações (DSUH/DGOPC, the housing and urban planning office of the public works and communications department), which succeeded the GUU after the latter was deactivated, also dedicated themselves. They responded to the new organicist demands that revised the modernist discourses, preferring L-plan organisation and the use of local materials.[12] The influence of the publication of *Arquitectura Popular em Portugal* in 1961, which presented a comprehensive survey of regional constructions in Portugal, was now making itself felt.

Together with the promotion of housing for European settlers, there also emerged the house designed specifically for indigenous communities; here the Africanisation process became more patent in the architectural expression. By the end of the fifties this was one of the central programmes for architects working for the official *Estado Novo* organs. The approaches evolved from figurative, and literal, interpretations to the introduction of industrial materials in the designs. The general arrangement of the indigenous house was crossed with the vernacular consciousness of modern thought, which encouraged the architects to gradually take note of its existence. Interest in the topic derived from the descriptions of the traditional African house and began to emerge in areas of study that were marginal to architecture, such as anthropology, ethnology and geography.

Portuguese Guinea is generally considered a forerunner in this development, not only thanks to the pioneering studies of Orlando Ribeiro (1947), but also for the publications sponsored by the Centro de Estudos da Guiné Portuguesa. Particularly noteworthy is *A Habitação Indígena na Guiné Portuguesa* (Indigenous Housing in Portuguese Guinea) by A. Teixeira da Mota and Mário Ventim Neves (Bissau, 1948), which presented a survey of the main types of native housing. It also included a study on hygiene by the physician Fernando Simões da Cruz Ferreira, which confirmed that traditional housing did not provide protection against endemic diseases.

Parallel to these studies, the indigenous housing scheme of Santa Luzia was erected on the outskirts of the Guinean capital as the result of a State-sponsored initiative. The development's grid-like structure already reflected the desire to regularise the local settlements. The house represented a simplification of the traditional residence, based on a rectangle with an outside veranda.

In 1958 the realisation of a new urbanisation plan for Bissau brought Mário de Oliveira to the Guinean capital. During his stay there he surveyed the 'main native urban concentrations' (Oliveira, 1962) and studied and characterised the traditional housing of diverse Guinean ethnic groups living on the city's periphery. His studies were reflected in the Urbanisation Plan for the Popular Neighbourhoods of Bissau (1959), which proposed the regularisation of the design of three residential schemes based on existing structures, complete with social, commercial, educational and sports facilities. The layout was an approximation to the Garden City ideals, and a distancing from the orthogonal composition of Santa Luzia, opting for a more organic design. Three new housing types were offered (detached, semi-detached and terraced houses) based on a quadrangular module with one side roughly eight metres long in plan and having four rooms and an axial corridor. They were surrounded by a veranda and had a four-sloped roof. The kitchen was outside. Once again, the typology was a simplification of the functional plan of traditional houses. The houses were to be built by the future residents using local techniques and materials. This was the first time a typology was developed that interpreted the elementarity of the ancestral model.

When Oliveira published his *Problemas Essenciais do Urbanismo do Ultramar* (Fundamental Problems of Urbanism in the Overseas Territories), based on his Bissau experiences, the Statute of Indigenous Populations[13] had already been abolished. This was reflected design-wise in the application of ideas of multiracialism in the colonial cities. The objective was taken to the extreme during the elaboration of the Master Urbanism Plan for the Mozambican town of Quelimane, also drawn up by Oliveira. It recognised the existence of a housing problem amongst the 'economically most fragile living in the peripheral urban zones'[14]. The argument was made that 'each habitat should slowly evolve as the cultural-economic process develops'[15], thus ruling out the possibility of rapid transformation of modes of dwelling. This approach made it possible to value certain compositions of traditional settlements, leaving it to the State to "produce hygienic housing – of the *palhota* (thatched hut) type – allowing for the provision of comfort in the space of each habitat, and stimulating and incentivating the natives to understand the problems of hygiene and culture"[16] (Fig. 2). Without losing its primitive elementarity, the house took on the role of civilising environment and there was commitment to the idea that it served as a vehicle for initiation of the African populations in the western lifestyle.

Housing for populations living outside the urban agglomerations was another side of the problem. Here one sought to act pragmatically, involving the future beneficiaries in the building of their houses and encouraging the use of local materials (economical, available and easy to use). The circular plan was reintroduced, "inspired by the cylindrical form of the gentilic dwellings in many villages […] and taking into account the traditional housing aspect"[17].

While changes were being introduced in African architecture itself, owing to the adoption of *more progressivist practices*

introduced by colonisation, other studies also proliferated, such as that conducted by the ethnographer José Redinha in *A Habitação Tradicional em Angola – aspectos da sua evolução[18]* (1973). The research focused on the urban milieu, on Luanda's *musseque*, which represented the 'ultimate ethnical cycle of the native house'[19]. The ideal dwelling in the 'current phase of the housing problem' should be limited to the 'ground-level building with its yard and annexes'; solutions built over height were not recommendable given that 'multi-storey building (…) [was] contrary to the native lifestyle"[20].

The building of elementary single-storey dwellings to house the local populations was adopted as a preferred programme by the *Estado Novo*. In Portuguese Guinea, the implementation of a standard house with a rectangular plan developed by the military that competed with models designed by the architects coincided with the outbreak of the colonial war.[21]

The direct inspiration from the indigenous house was one of the solutions developed by the DSUH/DGOPC architects. In 1964 three low-cost housing types were developed for São Tomé and Príncipe from traditional house models.[22] They favoured the use of wood and pre-fabricated elements (spans, doors and windows). They were slightly elevated on stilts and accessed via a veranda. The structure was studied so as to make it possible to add on new programmatic modules. Detached and semi-detached units were possible.

The decade, however, favoured the introduction of new technologies, and so one witnessed the updating of the indigenous house through alterations to the building systems. In Angola, Fernão Lopes Simões de Carvalho and José Augusto Pinto da Cunha carried out a similar experiment for the new Ilha de Luanda neighbourhood. In the new patio houses for Luanda fishermen's families, the local flavour is an abstraction to which both traditional and contemporary contributed. The neighbourhood followed an orthogonal plan respecting the prevailing winds, although Simões de Carvalho later developed more organic schemes closer to indigenous layouts, making it implicit that, in this field too, it was important to learn from tradition.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

With the establishment of the *Estado Novo*, the new housing needs in Portuguese Africa required a rethinking of the housing strategies. The *indigenous* populations were to be given housing developed by the State. Initially, the State followed the example of the large corporations operating in the colonies that built housing for their workers. The experimentations resulting from the diverse readings of traditional African houses (in Cape Verde, Guinea, São Tomé, Angola and Mozambique) progressively led to an architecture of compromise that was *Africanised*. Beyond the necessary realism, there were also ideological motives that the *Estado Novo* designs could not ignore, given that the house served as a civilising vehicle.

For the "civilised" populations, the elevations of the houses designed by architects working for the GUU maintained a certain stylistic unity that indicated the transfer of a Metropolitan imaginary to the colonies. Traditional components, such as porches and tiled roofs, were *tropicalised*. The designs met the minimum functional requirements for being built in these regions: protection of façades against the sun and cross ventilation. Housing complexes were laid out in accordance with the prevailing winds, a common strategy in urban planning for the region.

Parallel to this, in the house for the working settler, which was designed for rural population groups transferred from the metropole to the overseas colonies, the traditionalist repertoire was highlighted despite the search for a solution that could accentuate the "settler character". Even at this tardy stage, the aim was to establish an overseas model analogous to the *Portuguese House (Casa Portuguesa)*.

## References

Aguiar, João. *L'Habitation dans les pays tropicaux*, Lisbonne: XXIe Congrès, Federation Internationale de l'Habitation et de l'Urbanisme, 1952.

Carneiro, Ruy de Sá. *Projecto de diploma legislativo elaborado pelo governo de Moçambique com o objectivo de promover a construção de casas económicas nos centros urbanos da referida colónia, à Direcção Geral da Fazenda das Colónias*, 17 de Junho de 1941 [Processo nº 53191 – 1, Colónia de Moçambique, Moradias para funcionários públicos – pessoal da missão] Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino.

Cavaca, Rogério. *Necessidade de constituição de uma Brigada para a construção de moradias para funcionários públicos em Lourenço Marques*, 20 de Janeiro de 1944 [Processo nº 53191 – 1, Colónia de Moçambique, Moradias para funcionários públicos – pessoal da missão] Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino.

*Concurso para trabalhadores colonos*, Comissão júri, eng. Mário José Ferreira Mendes; arq. Fernando Assis, eng. Ilídio Barbosa (Limpopo); eng. Viriato da Fonseca (Cunene) [1953] [processo 03196 - Concurso para trabalhadores colonos] Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino.

Junta Provincial de Povoamento de Angola. *A habitação em núcleos de povoamento*, Luanda: Edição da Junta Provincial de Povoamento de Angola, 1964.

Junta Provincial de Povoamento de Angola. *Reordenamento rural e desenvolvimento comunitário*, Luanda: Edição da Junta Provincial de Povoamento de Angola, [1966].

Machado, Carlos Roma. "Início e Fundação da cidade de Huambo", in *Boletim da Agência Geral das Colónias*, Ano 2, Janeiro 1926, nº7, 30-59.

Oliveira, Mário de. *Carta ao Ministro do Ultramar*, Lisboa: 27/10/1953 [doc. dactilografado] [processo 03196 - Concurso para trabalhadores colonos] Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino.

Oliveira, Mário de. *Urbanismo no Ultramar*, Lisboa: Agência Geral do Ultramar, 1962.

Oliveira, Mário de. "O «Habitat» nas zonas suburbanas de Quelimane: um caso positivo de formação de sociedades multirraciais", in *Geographica,* ano 3, n. 3, Julho de 1965, Lisboa: Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa, 65-75.

Redinha, José. *A Habitação Tradicional em Angola: aspectos da sua evolução*, 2ª edição, Luanda: Fundo do Turismo e Publicidade de Angola, 1973.

## Endnotes

1. Ruy de Sá Carneiro, *Projecto de diploma legislativo elaborado pelo governo de Moçambique com o objectivo de promover a construção de casas económicas nos centros urbanos da referida colónia, à Direcção Geral da Fazenda das Colónias* (17 de Junho de 1941), unpaged.

2. Carlos Roma Machado, "Início e Fundação da cidade de Huambo", *Boletim da Agência Geral das Colónias* (Ano 2, Janeiro 1926, nº7), 56.

3. Housing developed by the Portuguese State and complexes built by large Portuguese companies with bases in Africa to house their workforce.

4. *Concurso para trabalhadores colonos*, Comissão júri, eng. Mário José Ferreira Mendes; arq. Fernando Assis, eng. Ilídio Barbosa (Limpopo); eng. Viriato da Fonseca (Cunene) [1953], 1.

5. 'The participants interpreted, successfully, traditional composition, not as the transplantation of a Trás-os-Montes house or an Algarvean house (which would be absurd and was never requested) and they merely suggested a type of local house that would resolve, with local materials and processes, new problems and requirements that were also local (…) now closer to their future condition of resident settled in a rural settlement on the banks of the Cunene or Limpopo' (*Idem*: 8).

6. *Idem*: 9.

7. The Overseas Ministry was then held by Manuel Maria Sarmento Rodrigues.

8. Oliveira, Mário de. *Carta ao Ministro do Ultramar*, Lisboa: 27/10/1953, 2.

9. Junta Provincial de Povoamento de Angola. *A habitação em núcleos de povoamento* (Luanda: Edição da Junta Provincial de Povoamento de Angola 1964), unpaged.

10. Six houses by Fernão Lopes Simões de Carvalho for Quilunda (Angola, 1964).

11. Angola (1961), Guinea (1963) and Mozambique (1964).

12. Residential complexes for lieutenants, sergeants and officers and housing blocks for privates (European and indigenous) at the *Estação Rádio-Naval* that Luiz Possolo designed for Maputo (then Lourenço Marques) and Luanda (1959-1960). António Saragga Seabra designed a similar programme for Mindelo, Cape Verde in 1961-1963. These projects were carried out within the DSUH/DGOPC.

13. The Statue of Indigenous Populations (*Estatuto do Indigenato* in Portuguese) was a legal code that formalised a racial hierarchisation that served to structure the political and moral order in the colonies.

14. Mário de Oliveira, "O «Habitat» nas zonas suburbanas de Quelimane: um caso positivo de formação de sociedades multirraciais", *Geographica* (ano 3, n. 3, Julho de 1965, Lisboa: Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa) 65.

15. *Idem*, 67.

16. *Idem*, 68.

17. Junta Provincial de Povoamento de Angola. *Reordenamento rural e desenvolvimento comunitário* (Luanda: Edição da Junta Provincial de Povoamento de Angola, [1966]) unpaged.

18. Translation: The Traditional Dwelling in Angola – Aspects of its Evolution.

19. Redinha, José. *A Habitação Tradicional em Angola: aspectos da sua evolução* (2ª edição, Luanda: Fundo do Turismo e Publicidade de Angola, 1973) 36.

20. *Idem,* 42.

21. In 1970, a work group led by the architect António Moreira Velosa produced a model that updated the indigenous lifestyle, bringing it in line with international standards. Based on a rectangle measuring 12.80 x 12.20 m, the house was more permeable and presented areas of transition between the interior and the exterior that sought to rework African lifestyles.

22. Alfredo Silva e Castro, a young architect working for the DSUH/DGOPC, designed the proposal developed in 1964. A small number of houses was actually built but has since been demolished.