

Programmatic Microcosms: Modern Referential Buildings from the Urban Landscapes of Mozambican Colonial Cities¹

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Abstract

The investment of the Portuguese central government in the infrastructural development of its former African colonies took a wider dimension during the period raging from the end of the II World War and the start of the colonial or liberation war. This process led to a growth in the programming and construction of infrastructural buildings meant for solving the continuous increase of the local population.

What brings unity to this big-scale architecture relies on the training and practice of its authors on the Modern Movement principles, methods and architectonic syntax. The wide diffusion of the modern architecture in the African territories results, on one hand, from the freedom allowed by the official authorities and by the private entrepreneurs on the use of this new syntax and, on the other hand, on its capacity to serve the programmatic, economical, climatic, technological and productive demands of territories going through accelerated growth.

Along this paper, two case studies of Mozambican buildings of large scale, great complexity and representativeness will be analyzed: the branch office of BNU, Banco Nacional Ultramarino (Overseas National Bank), in former Lourenço Marques, nowadays the city of Maputo, and the Montegiro Commercial, Touristic and Housing Complex, in Quelimane. Both constituted programmatic microcosms, comprehending spaces of collective use and of private housing; both acted as reference elements in the continuous urban landscapes, symbolizing the modernity, progress and permanence values proclaimed by the Estado Novo fascist regime and expressed by the local colonial societies.

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Keywords: Mozambique; Estado Novo; Modern Movement; Banco Nacional Ultramarino; Montegirol Complex

Paper

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BRANCH OFFICE OF THE BANCO NACIONAL ULTRAMARINO IN FORMER LOURENÇO MARQUES

The BNU, a private institution founded in 1864, was the sole Portuguese bank to obtain an authorization to issue paper money in the Portuguese former colonies. In Mozambique it was simultaneously the issuing bank, the government's treasurer bank and the main commercial bank. Between 1913 and 1958 the branch office of BNU was set up in a building with a Beaux-Arts facade located in downtown Lourenço Marques, on a site opening towards two of the main arterial routes of the 19th century colonial city. It occupied almost half of a transitional city block between the primary urban structure of Lourenço Marques and the orthogonal grid proposed by the military engineer António José de Araújo for the expansion of the city.

The design for a new building on the same site was commissioned to José Gomes Bastos (1914-1991), a Portuguese architect established in Lisbon. In 1954 he presented a first draft of the

main functional layout and a foreground plan of the building, its limits conditioned by the irregular shape of the site. In 1955 a different project was presented and approved, establishing the architectural principles that the later stages of the design would follow. In the start of 1960 the final project was delivered. The construction began in the end of 1958 and the inauguration took place on July 25, 1964.

The volume of the BNU branch building has the form of a rectangular ring, with three urban fronts and one blind facade. The volumes of the Complex are formally unified by the concrete slab porches that connect the three urban fronts, by the design of the ribbon windows and by the repetition of two constant dimensional modules, materialized by the rhythm of constructive elements that vertically subdivide the external openings.

The front facing 25 of September Avenue is the one with the biggest height and volumetric autonomy. The display of lights and shadows of the deep *brise-soleil*, between the glazed ground level punctuated by *pilotis* and the recessed top floor terrace, emphasizes the representational character of the main facade. The front facing Consiglieri Pedroso Street establishes the transition between the ring-shaped mass of the Complex and the narrower scale of the urban route. On this facade a prismatic volume proclaims the institution's presence on the surrounding urban context.

The centre of the ring constitutes a vast patio for illumination and ventilation of the internal spaces. In this patio the different heights of the four sides of the ring are formally articulated with the horizontal slabs hanging over the terraces, the cylindrical volume of the helix-shaped main staircase and the curved surface of the vaulted ceiling that covers the public and working spaces.

Each floor of the building, limited by the variable contours of the external volumes, dimensioned by the structural and compositional grid displayed on the external facades, and conditioned by the fixed infrastructural elements constitutes a *plan libre* or an open matrix, divisible according to different functional needs. The documents consulted reveal the functional layout and the spatial composition of the several floors of the building at the time of its opening:

- The basement floor contained the staff changing rooms, technical spaces, renting safes and strongholds rooms;
- The ground floor was entirely occupied by two entrance lobbies, unified by a mural displaying the narrative of the conquest of Tangier, and by the main public hall. The later was subdivided in two areas: the public space and the central working space, the later covered and illuminated by a translucent vault. The representational character of the internal spaces on this floor was also emphasized by the main helix-shaped staircase that linked all the public access zones of

the building;

- The third floor was subdivided into public attendance and service spaces;
- The fourth floor, occupied by the working spaces of the administration and the superior staff, was centralized on the large representational lobby that was qualified by the main staircase and by the wide canvas that covered the full extension of its southeast top wall;
- The fifth floor contained the support spaces for the working staff of the branch: medical and social centre including billiards, events, ping-pong and table games rooms, library, kitchen, bar, etc.;
- The sixth and seventh floors were subdivided in two areas physically separated: the housing zone for superior staff members and the internal services zone;
- The eighth floor comprised the administration reception area that opened into a vast terrace detached over the Northeast skyline of the city.

Including activities that surpass its strict institutional function, such as the social and medical centre in the fifth floor or the housing in the sixth and seventh floors, the BNU branch could be characterized as a programmatic microcosm – a multifunctional Complex or an involuntary social condenser.

The building also constituted an example of the synthetic integration of works of art in the architectonic design. The following artists contributed to this *Gesamtkunstwerk*:

- Querubim Lapa (b.1925), with a mural of polychromatic ceramics on the exterior wall of the main public entrance;
- Manuela Madureira (b.1930), with the sculptures displayed on the background wall of the main public entrance lobby on the ground floor;
- Francisco Relógio (1926-1997), with the mural carved on marble displaying the conquest of Tangier, fully covering the southeast wall of the public attendance hall on the ground floor;
- Estrela Faria (1910-1976), with the design of the glass tiles revetment of the walls of the main helix-shaped staircase;
- Rolando Sá Nogueira (1921-2002), with the oil canvas covering the southeast wall of the public attendance hall on the third floor;
- and Malangatana Ngwenya Valente (1936-2011), with the mural covering the background wall of the events room of the Employees Association on the fifth floor.

By initiative of the local administration of the bank a competition amongst artists residing in the former province for the painting of an oil canvas to cover the southeast wall of the administration lobby, was held in 1962. For this competition were invited Bertina Lopes

(b.1924), Antero Machado (b.1934), José Freire, João Aires (1921-2001), João Paulo (b.1929), José Pádua (b.1934) and Jorge Garizo do Carmo (1927-1997), who won the competition.

The formal semantics displayed by the BNU building show the articulation of two different moments of the Modern Movement's architecture: while the central volume, with its mass balance, formal depuration and utilitarian expression can be referred to the architectonic production of the interwar period, the compositional freedom that informs the design of the two main fronts must be related with the architecture of the post war era.

The undertaking of the design and construction of the branch office of the BNU in Lourenço Marques was subjected to an essential programmatic request: to give its architecture the capacity to monumentalize the functional plurality and the institutional role represented by the institution within the economical and ideological surrounding contexts.

MONTEGIRO COMMERCIAL, TOURISTIC AND HOUSING COMPLEX AT QUELIMANE

The Montegiro Commercial, Touristic and Housing Complex was built in Quelimane to house the main facilities of Monteiro & Giro, a commercial and agricultural firm that had economical interest spread across the Mozambican territory. The Complex was designed in the Oporto studio of the architects Arménio Losa (1908-1988) and Cassiano Barbosa (1911-1998), from 1954 on. The construction started in 1956 and was almost completed by March 1966.

In the Urbanization Plan of Quelimane, designed in 1950 by the Colonial Urbanization Bureau, the city was displayed as an approximately orthogonal grid composed of northeast-southwest and northwest-southeast orientated streets. The Montegiro Complex, that occupies the full extension of one central block of the city, is located in the back of the former cathedral of Nossa Senhora do Livramento, facing two main urban spaces of Quelimane. Its layout adapts an independent proposal to the irregular contours of the surrounding context defining, through a continuous mass of nearly rectangular construction, one city block with four different street facades. Its general volume suggests a continuous base three floors height, occasionally broken by the warehouse and hotel patios and interrupted by the opening towards the lateral street, where four rectangular blocks with different heights stand.

The Complex displays an architectural unity conferred by some formal constants: similar resolution of the commercial spaces urban fronts, ordering of the main facades according to structural concrete grids, hierarchic detailing of external openings, use of the same materials and graphic motifs on the cladding of the external surfaces and climatic protection of the back facades with a concrete *brise-soleil* superimposed to the horizontal circulation galleries.

The four blocks of the Complex served different functions required by the economical activities of Monteiro & Giro:

- Commercial establishments on the ground and mezzanine floors of the four urban fronts, connected between themselves and with the warehouse in the centre of the block, defining a layout similar to a department store;
 - Office spaces to let and to house the main facilities of the firm and of the hotel, located on the third floor of the Complex;
 - Housing on the two top floors of block C (sixteen one-room apartments) and on the four top floors of blocks A and B (twenty two duplexes, each with three bed-rooms). The circulation inside these two latter buildings was zoned according to racial segregation principles, informally imposed by the municipal authorities: external staircases, water closets, service galleries of low ceiling height and service entrances to the apartments where intended for the African *indígenas*, the indigenous servants; internal helix-shaped staircases, elevators, floor lobbies, waiting rooms, main galleries of high ceiling height and main entrances to the apartments where of exclusive use of the European inhabitants and visitors;
 - Touristic facilities in Hotel Chuabo, a representational building ten floors high set along the former Oliveira Salazar Avenue, and in the semi-autonomous Snack-Bar Côco, located on the ground floor of the hotel block. Each floor of the hotel contained the following main spaces and functions:
 - On the ground and second floor (mezzanine) a double-height atrium, with the start of the sculptural helix-shaped staircase;
 - On the first floor the living and playroom, a vast polyvalent space spread over two levels and three distinct areas - a meeting place of the Quelimane's colonial society -, at the top of which a set of bedroom suites for special guests was located;
 - Between the second and the fifth floors five suites and fifty five double bedrooms, the latter ones having the bedroom space separated from the lobby by a pivot door of fine design;
 - On the seventh floor the dining-room and the staff's facilities, where the spaces for the African servants were separated from the spaces for the European ones;
 - On the eight floor the bar with a small kitchen, opening to a veranda leaning over the marginal and the Bons Sinais River, and a nightclub complete with stage, dancing floor e Hi-Fi booth.
- The Hotel Chuabo included works of art that, stressing out its monumental character, contributed to the completion of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, such as:
- The sculptural panel designed by the architects of the Complex and built in concrete, limestone

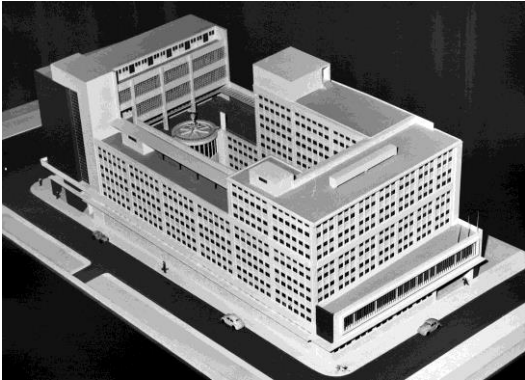
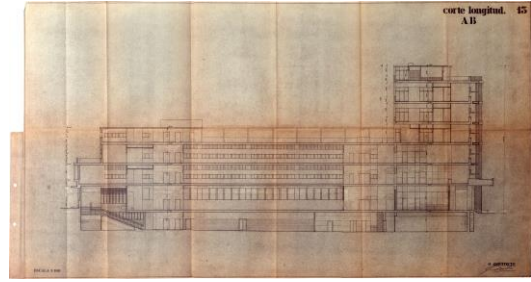
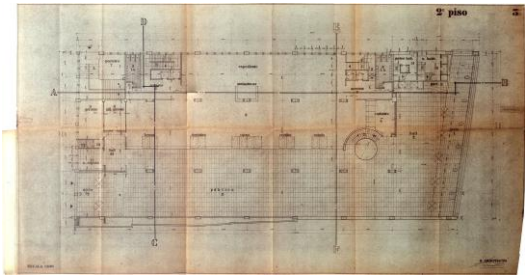
and colored glass, enclosing the southeast side of the main entrance atrium;

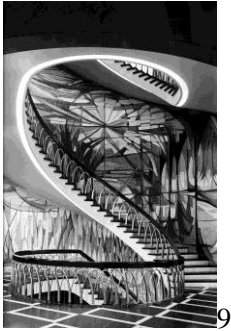
- The sculpture of a bronze nymph by José Rodrigues (n.1936), suspended on the northwest wall of the same atrium;
- And the three murals painted by five amateur local artists using construction paint.

While the formal cohesion of the Complex is guaranteed by the use of a syntax affiliated with the architecture of the Modern Movement of the postwar era, the hotel building displays some formal themes and materials related with the architecture of the sixties: solid wood paneling, textured plaster, artificial leather and draperies, cylindrical and hexagonal lightening spots made of plaster or metal, etc. Arménio Losa and Cassiano Barbosa also designed some of the equipment, furniture and graphic elements of the Complex, such as the Montegiro logo.

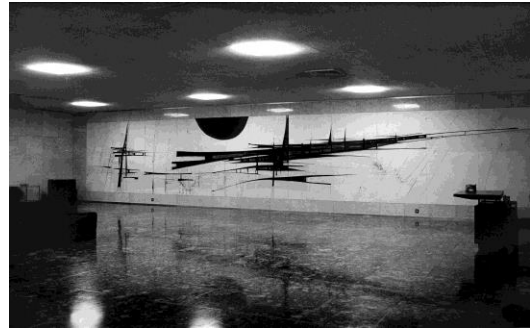
Aggregator of daily economical and social activities – somehow replicating the hybrid nature of the Zambezian *prazos* -, milestone of the Mozambican modern architecture and iconic monumental reference, the Montegiro Complex establishes, along with the neighboring Church of Nossa Senhora do Livramento and the BNU agency, a representational triangle of buildings of patrimonial quality, symbolically detached over the skyline of the city of Quelimane.

The BNU branch office and the Montegiro Complex, expressions of an architectonic modernity only episodic in the Metropolitan territory of Portugal, were built in the former province of Mozambique as part of a development process regarded as a civilization undertaking and a utopian social construction. Both constituted programmatic microcosms, comprehending spaces of collective use and of private housing; both acted as reference elements in the continuous urban landscapes, symbolizing the modernity, progress and permanence values proclaimed by the Estado Novo fascist regime and expressed by the local colonial societies.





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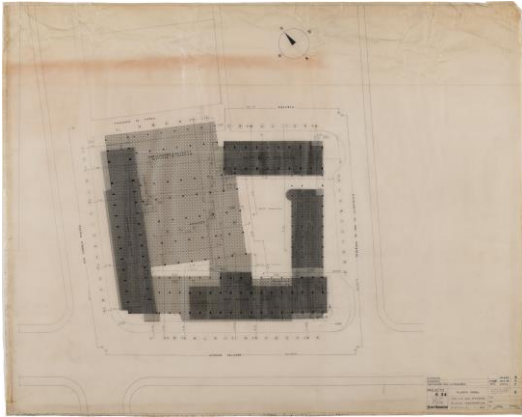
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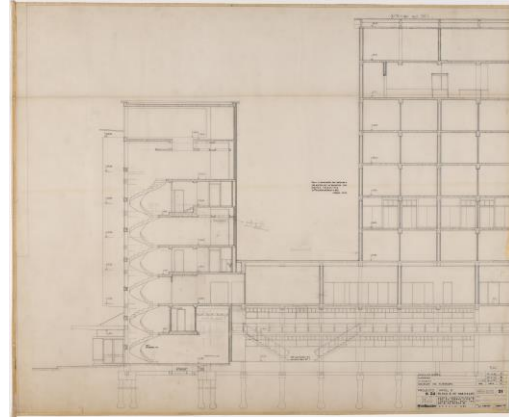
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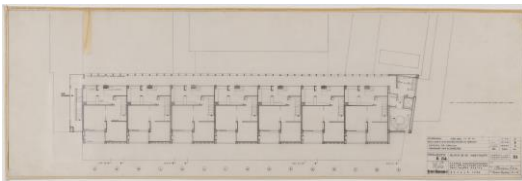
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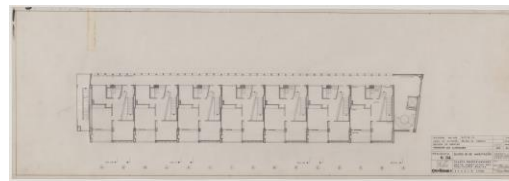
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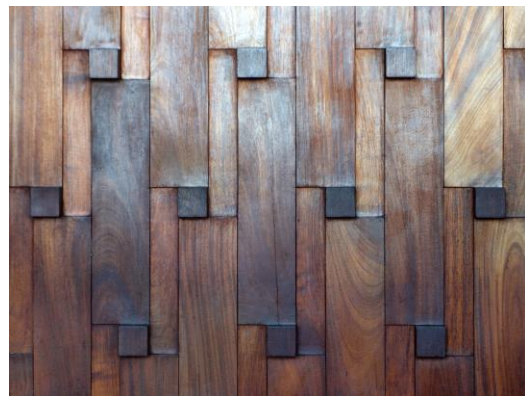
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LEGENDS:²

Image 1 - BNU - Project, 1955, ground floor plan

Image 2 - BNU - Project, 1955, longitudinal section

Image 3 - BNU - Model by João de Barros?

Image 4 - BNU - Aerial view

Image 5 - BNU - Main facade

Image 6 - BNU - Inner patio

Image 7 - BNU - Ground floor, public attendance hall with mural by Francisco Relógio

Image 8 - BNU - Ground floor, public attendance hall

Image 9 - BNU - Ground floor, main staircase with revetment designed by Estrela Faria

Image 10 - BNU - Fourth floor, administration lobby with oil canvas by Jorge Garizo do Carmo

Image 11 - BNU - Fifth floor, treatment room of the Medical Centre,

Image 12 - BNU - Fifth floor, events room of the Association of Employees with mural by Malangatana Ngwenya Valente

Image 13 - BNU - Fifth floor, reading room and library of the Social Centre,

Image 14 - BNU - Fifth floor, games room of the Social Centre,

Image 15 - BNU - Sixth and seventh floors, kitchen in the housing zone

Image 16 - BNU - Sixth and seventh floors, double bedroom in the housing zone

Image 17 - Montegiro - Project, General Plan, March 1956 to June 1960

Image 18 - Montegiro - Project, section through hotel and block A, March 1956 to September 1960

Image 19 - Montegiro - Project, plan of fourth and sixth floors of block A, February 1956 to April 1961

Image 20 - Montegiro - Project, plan of fifth and seventh floors of block A, February 1956 to April 1961

Image 21 - Montegiro - Church of Nossa Senhora do Livramento, Hotel Chuabo and Quelimane's BNU agency

Image 22 - Montegiro - Quelimane's BNU agency and Hotel Chuabo

² Images 1 to 16 were photographed by the Author in 2010 at Arquivos Históricos da Caixa Geral de Depósitos. Photographs 3 to 16 had no date or authorship. Drawings 17 to 20 were photographed by Arménio Teixeira at Centro de Documentação de Urbanismo e Arquitetura da Faculdade de Arquitetura da Universidade do Porto, under the scope of the research project: *EWV_ Exchanging Worlds Visions* (FCT Reference: PTDC/AUR-AQI/103229/2008). Photographs 21 to 32 were taken by the Author in 2009.

Image 23 - Montegiro - Block A and Hotel Chuabo

Image 24 - Montegiro - Blocks B and A

Image 25 - Montegiro - Hotel Chuabo, blocks C and B

Image 26 - Montegiro - Inner patio, roof of the warehouse, Hotel Chuabo and block A

Image 27 - Montegiro - Block B, sixth floor, service gallery for African servants

Image 28 - Montegiro - Block B, seventh floor, lobby and waiting room for Europeans

Image 29 - Montegiro - Snack-Bar Côco

Image 30 - Montegiro - Hotel Chuabo, seventh floor, dining-room lobby

Image 31 - Montegiro - Hotel Chuabo, eighth floor, nightclub with mural by amateur local artists

Image 32 - Montegiro - Hotel Chuabo, eighth floor, bar, detail of wooden paneling

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