



## Typology in Transition: Modern Housing and Postcolonial Urbanism in Luanda

### Abstract

The architectural patterns of Luanda show how buildings survive political divisions and take on fresh ideological meanings throughout the urban past. The CTT district, developed between 1968 and 1974 by Fernão Simões de Carvalho and Lobo de Carvalho, combines the ultimate aims of Portuguese colonial modernism by seeking to strike a balance among logical planning, social diversity, and climatic adaptation. Emerging after CIAM's internal discussions and the criticism of a universal modernism, the project converted these changing ideas into a colonial setting characterised by entrenched racial hierarchies and demographic pressure. Though only partially completed, the CTT complex served as a laboratory where post-CIAM issues with flexibility and urban identity were refracted through the managerial rationale of the *Estado Novo*. Following independence, the typological concepts employed in CTT reappeared in the twenty-first century "new centralities", including Kilamba and Sequele. Created through Sino-Angolan collaboration and entrenched in neoliberal and post-socialist programs, these vast satellite cities recycled modernist superblock urbanism as a tool for state-led development, market creation, and socio-spatial control. Looking at the CTT complex in conjunction with its postcolonial legacies shows not only the tenacity of modern spatial logic but also the contested development of postcolonial identity, government, and labour, as revealed in typological continuities in Luanda. Hence, the CTT neighbourhood becomes a key hinge connecting late-colonial modernism to modern urbanism in Angola.

### Keywords

Luanda, Urban Typology, Modern Housing, Postcolonial Identity

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[Cover] CTT Neighbourhood, Fernão Simões de Carvalho and Lobo de Carvalho, Luanda City Council, 197?. Fernão Simões de Carvalho, personal archive.

### Introduction

From a small colonial port to a megacity of more than eight million people, Luanda is characterised by a long history of conflict and negotiation between architecture, politics, and identity. Between periods of great planning ambition and prolonged times of unconstrained expansion, between the universal goals of contemporaneity and the pragmatism dictated by poverty, strife, and fast social change, the city's landscape evolved and changed over the final decades of Portuguese colonialism. This occurred not only as a practical response to housing needs but also as a political tool through forms of governance and belonging. Typology was at the centre of this transformation.

Following the Second World War, architects realised that the functional city outlined in the Athens Charter did not address the social and cultural peculiarities around the globe and started to doubt the universalist claims of the *Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne* (CIAM). This internal criticism resulted in CIAM's dissolution at Otterlo in 1959 and the formation of Team 10, whose re-examination of community, association, and metropolitan form found worldwide resonance, including in the late-colonial world. Their arguments echoed those used in Africa, where the tension between modernist abstraction and local realities was evident. Architecture became a site, as well as a tool, where and through which conflicting ideas of modernity and identity were tested, challenged, and reshaped as the colonial structure collapsed, and new countries emerged.

In Angola, these international architectural discussions crossed with the rigid hierarchies of the *Estado Novo*, Portugal's long-standing authoritarian regime, and the upheavals of the colonial war (1961–1974). Architects such as Vasco Vieira da Costa and Fernão Simões de Carvalho interacted concurrently with the administrative principles of colonial administration and worldwide modernism. After their post-graduate studies at the Institut d'Urbanisme de l'Université de Paris (IUUP),<sup>1</sup> and a simultaneous internship at Le Corbusier's studio,<sup>2</sup> Vieira da Costa and Simões de Carvalho returned to Angola to work in the Urbanisation Office of Luanda's City Council. Modernist

planning thus found fertile ground in Luanda, where European-trained architects sought to implement functionalist and post-war ideas within an African colonial context marked by deep socio-spatial inequalities.

Within this transitional framework, the CTT neighbourhood (1968–1974), designed by Simões de Carvalho and Lobo de Carvalho, stands out as the last major urban project of Portuguese colonial rule. Conceived on the threshold of independence, it sought to reconcile late-modernist planning principles with climate adaptation, social diversity and post-CIAM ideas of flexibility and urban identity. Although only partially built, the CTT complex operated as a typological laboratory, revealing the contradictions of late-colonial governance: progressive architectural ambitions coexisted with racialised and class-based restrictions on access to housing. The neighbourhood thus emerges as a paradoxical artefact, simultaneously progressive experiment and a material expression of late-colonial governance.

The relevance of the CTT project extends beyond the colonial period. After independence, its typological principles resurfaced in Angola's post-2000 "new centralities", such as Kilamba and Sequele, developed under new political and economic conditions associated with post-war reconstruction, oil-funded growth and Sino-Angolan cooperation. While these large-scale satellite cities recycle the spatial vocabulary of late-colonial modernism, superblocks, modular housing and functional zoning, their ideological meaning has shifted from colonial integration to market-driven urbanism. Analysing the CTT neighbourhood in relation to these postcolonial developments allows us to trace both continuity and rupture in Luanda's urban form, positioning CTT as a critical hinge between late-colonial modernism and contemporary Angolan urbanism.

Methodologically, this study draws on varied sources, including archival materials, planning reports, drawings, field observations, interviews with locals,<sup>3</sup> and the students direct engagement.<sup>4</sup> This multi-layered approach enables an understanding of the CTT neighbourhood as a transitional typology. The project's afterlife, specifically the ways inhabitants have adapted and altered the building over the decades, shows how contemporary architectural forms are constantly redefined through daily living.

1. IUUP: Vasco Vieira da Costa (1945-1948) and Fernão Simões de Carvalho (1956-1959).
2. Vasco Vieira da Costa collaborated in the Le Corbusier's Studio between 1945-1948, onde participou em projetos como a Unidade de Marselha (1946.1952). Fernão Simões de Carvalho internship in André Wogenscky's studio (1956–1959), collaboration in the Unité d'Habitation in Berlin, the Unité Brazilian Pavilion - Cité Universitaire de Paris, and the Convent of La Tourette.

3. The interviews to the CTT's residents were conducted under the research project Middle-Class Mass Housing in Europe, Africa and Asia by the Angolan researcher Filomena Espírito Santo [PTDC/ART-DAQ/30594/2017].
4. Maria Alice Correia Students MAC: UAN, third class: "History of Architecture and Cities III", 2024-2015.



Figure 1. Fernão Simões de Carvalho, “Contribution à l’étude du renouvellement des groupes d’habitations des pêcheurs de l’île de Luanda-Angola”, IUUP, 15th December 1965. Fernão Simões de Carvalho, personal archive.

### From CIAM to Team 10: Modernist Debates and Colonial Urbanism in Luanda

Since its foundation in 1928, CIAM aimed to define a universal grammar for the modern city. The Athens Charter (1943), with a functional division of dwelling, work, recreation, and circulation, offered a technocratic vision that resonated with colonial administrations and supported spatial regimes of control, segregation, and labour management. However, by the early 1950s, Europe’s post-war reconstruction, welfare-state politics, and decolonisation exposed the limitations of this abstract functionalism.

Criticism became explicit at CIAM 9 (1953) and CIAM 10 (1956), where younger architects, such as Alison and Peter Smithson, Aldo van Eyck, Georges Candilis, Shadrach Woods, challenged rigid zoning and advocated approaches centred on community, everyday life and human association.<sup>5</sup> These debates culminated in the dissolution of CIAM at Otterlo in 1959 and the emergence of Team 10. Concepts such as cluster, stem and growth network reframed modernism as a relational and adaptive system rather than a fixed spatial formula.<sup>6</sup> While often presented as an internal European debate, they carried heightened significance in colonial contexts, where the disjunction between universal models and local realities was most visible.

In North Africa, the work developed by Michel Écochard and by Candilis, Josic and Woods within ATBAT-Afriqué demonstrated how typological experimentation could respond to climatic conditions, vernacular practices and shifting labour patterns.<sup>7</sup> Likewise,

Yona Friedman’s “Mobile Architecture” and “African Proposals” envisaged the city as a dynamic structure shaped by migration, climate, and informality.<sup>8</sup> Working in peripheral settings greatly helped to re-evaluate modernist doctrine and highlight the political charge implicit in typological choices. These experiences highlighted the political charge embedded in architectural form and contributed decisively to the re-evaluation of modernist doctrine in peripheral settings.

In the Portuguese colonial context, such debates unfolded under the authoritarian framework of the *Estado Novo*, which upheld strict racial and bureaucratic hierarchies, while also promoting modern architecture as a symbol of imperial progress. Architects such as Vasco Vieira da Costa and Fernão Simões de Carvalho were trained within this dual condition. After studying at the School of Fine Arts in Porto and Lisbon and completing postgraduate training at the *Institut d’Urbanisme de l’Université de Paris*, where they were exposed to post-war debates on neighbourhood units, urban sociology and climate adaptation, both architects returned to Angola to work at the Urbanisation Office of Luanda City Council. Their brief collaboration with Le Corbusier’s studio further reinforced their engagement with evolving modern ideas.<sup>9</sup>

By the time Simões de Carvalho defended his thesis *Contribution à l’étude du renouvellement des groupes d’habitations des pêcheurs de l’île de Luanda-Angola*

in 1965,<sup>10</sup> CIAM had already dissolved and Team 10 had consolidated its influence. Modernist planning in Luanda thus emerged at a moment of doctrinal transition, shaped simultaneously by late CIAM functionalism, post-CIAM humanist critiques and the constraints of a racially stratified colonial society. These tensions would be fully articulated in the CTT neighbourhood, conceived shortly afterwards as the last major urban experiment of Portuguese colonial rule (Figure 1).

The application of modernist planning in Luanda nevertheless unfolded within a deeply unequal, racially stratified environment. Driven by both European colonisation and African immigrants displaced by the colonial war or attracted by the growing urban economy, the city’s population more than tripled from about 140,000 to almost half a million by 1970.<sup>11</sup> Infrastructure designed for a compact coastal town quickly proved insufficient, prompting new planning instruments that aimed to modernise the city while simultaneously consolidating colonial authority.

Under Simões de Carvalho’s leadership (1962–1966), the Urbanisation Office of Luanda City Council developed neighbourhood plans based on the European post-war neighbourhood unit. This was a sustainable urban settlement model that had three basic principles: hierarchy, zoning and racial integration, inspired by the Athens Charter and the notions of “cluster”, “unit”, “neighbourhood”, or “sector”.<sup>12</sup> To build the “Luanda do Futuro”,<sup>13</sup> these initiatives sought to stabilise growth, provide public services, and implement a hierarchical circulation network. Yet rhetoric of “integration” concealed segregation: access to new collective housing largely favoured Europeans and the mixed-race middle classes, while African residents were confined to single-family plots or excluded entirely. The musseques continued to expand through self-construction, with minimal infrastructural provision, becoming the most visible expression of urban precariousness.

Simões de Carvalho and Luis Taquelim da Cruz first designed the urban plan for the Neighbourhood Unit No. 1 in Prenda (1963–1965), for 5,500 residents categorised as “poor, middle-income, and bourgeois”,<sup>14</sup> combining vertical blocks with single-family houses. As Osten argues, modernists did not just talk about city planning for the wealthy people moving to cities. Instead, modern designs in architecture were intended to improve city life and establish completely new communities.<sup>15</sup> In Luanda, framed in contemporary planning terms, these neighbourhood units also served to stabilise certain labour groups, particularly skilled African workers considered “assimilated” or financially trustworthy.<sup>16</sup> The typology went beyond a simple, practical solution, calling for interaction with the surroundings and for city expansion. Generally, the neighbourhood unit achieved a high level of modern form, coherently and logically, thereby being suited to a particular way of living. However, it had a dispersed formalisation due to a lack of systematisation in the development of the urban location<sup>17</sup> (Figure 2).

Legislation reinforced this stratified urbanism. DecreeLaw no. 40.333 (14/10/1955), applied in Angola with minor changes (6/10/1956), introduced a horizontal property regime that stimulated private investment in multi-storey buildings for the colonial

14. Milheiro & Rodrigues, “‘Neighbourhood Units’”.
15. Marion von Osten, “In Colonial Modern Worlds,” *Colonial Modern: Aesthetics of the Past, Rebellions for the Future*, eds. Tom Avermaete, Serhat Karakayali and Marion von Osten (Black Dog Publishing, 2010), 19.
16. Maria Alice Correia, “O Modelo do Urbanismo e da Arquitetura do Movimento Moderno, Luanda – 1950/1975” (PhD. diss., Universidade de São Paulo, 2018), 182.
17. Rodrigues, “Cuando la vivienda colectiva hizo ciudad,” 147.

10. Fernão Simões de Carvalho, “Contribution à l’étude du renouvellement des groupes d’habitations des pêcheurs de l’île de Luanda-Angola,” (diss., IUUP Paris, 1965).
11. Ilídio do Amaral, “Luanda e os seus ‘muçiques’: Problemas de Geografia Urbana,” *Finisterra* XVIII, no.26, (1983): 299.
12. Inês Lima Rodrigues, “Cuando la vivienda colectiva hizo ciudad: El caso de la Luanda moderna [When collective housing made the city: The case of modern Luanda]” in *La modernidad ignorada: Arquitectura moderna en Luanda*, ed. Ricardo Prado and Paz Núñez (Universidad de Alcalá, 2011), 155–159.
13. Fernão Simões de Carvalho, “Luanda do Futuro,” in *Ronda pelo Ultramar, Angola Terra de Portugal* (Edições Tapete Mágico, 1963): 27–29.



Figure 2. “The encounter between the ‘white city’ and the slums.” Neighbourhood Unit No. 1, Luanda. Ilídio do Amaral, 1968, 128.

5. Michel Écochard, “Habitat pour le plus grand nombre,” *Techniques et Architecture* 14, 2 (1956): 25–34.
6. Alison Smithson and Peter Smithson, *Team 10 Primer* (Studio Vista, 1962).
7. Écochard, “Habitat pour le plus”.

8. Yona Friedman, “African Proposals,” *L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui* 82, 1959.
9. Ana Vaz Milheiro and Inês Lima Rodrigues, “‘Neighbourhood Units’ in Colonial Africa: Controlling the Musseque through an Urban Model from the Global North” in *Colonial and Post-Colonial Landscapes II. Architecture, Cities, War in Africa. ArchWar researchers’ Book*, coord. by Ana Vaz Milheiro (Dinâmica/CET-Iscte, 2026).

middle classes.<sup>18</sup> In line with the Estado Novo's promotion of public-private partnerships, it enabled companies such as PRECOL<sup>19</sup> to become central actors in the production of standardised housing. The resulting urbanism was simultaneously bureaucratic and entrepreneurial, rooted in modernist planning but shaped by commercial interests and the hierarchies of colonial power.<sup>20</sup>

Labour constituted an additional, often obscured dimension. Industrialised construction, prefabrication, modular systems, and concrete frames relied on a racially hierarchical division of work: European technicians oversaw planning and coordination, while African labourers performed most manual construction without formal training and under precarious conditions.<sup>21</sup> The modern city thus emerged as both a technical product and an archive of social inequality.

#### Typological experimentation, social uncertainty, and labour in the CTT neighbourhood

The CTT neighbourhood in Luanda, Caixa de Auxílio dos CTT, designed by Fernão Simões de Carvalho and Lobo de Carvalho between 1968 and 1974, is one of the most important, yet highly incomplete, late-colonial housing experiments. Designed for personnel from the postal and telecommunications services, this project combined the rationalist principles of CIAM with evolving, more human-centred concepts from post-CIAM and Team 10. Even though only one block was built, the CTT neighbourhood symbolises a significant development in Luanda's change from a colonial urban order to postcolonial modernity, acting as a typological hinge connecting the two systems.

Influenced by the work of Candilis and Woods, Simões de Carvalho's project comprised semi-duplex apartments, modular construction, and spatial patterns intended to promote new forms of community.<sup>22</sup>

Although under different colonial regimes, Simões de Carvalho, Candilis, and Woods' relationship is particularly pertinent given the resonance of their work in postcolonial settings. As Serrazina observes, these housing projects describe a modern lifestyle driven by industrial labour, shifting consumerism, and redefined home roles.<sup>23</sup> Angola thus became, like several other African territories, such as Ghana, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Zambia,<sup>24</sup> a crucible for innovative architectural experimentation. While working at different moments, all three architects collaborated with Le Corbusier, and their shared references and approaches are evident in the ambition and conceptual scope of the CTT project.

Designed to accommodate population demands and support the city's planned eastward expansion, the neighbourhood was strategically located on the eastern fringe of Luanda. Its location was not accidental; the CTT neighbourhood was developed as part of a larger municipal vision for decentralised, self-sufficient units connected by hierarchical road systems. In this sense, it represented the convergence of three ideas: a global architectural discourse that increasingly challenged the universal assumptions of high modernism, the fixed hierarchies of the colonial administration, and fast population growth.

#### 2.1. Urban Structure, Material Logic, and Social Ambiguity

The master plan for the CTT neighbourhood comprised three residential clusters organised around a central commercial and social area. The northern section of individual plots was dedicated to single-family houses, while the western and south-eastern sectors had four-storey collective blocks to accommodate denser populations. A sequence of eight to fifteen-storey towers was planned for the southern perimeter to give the neighbourhood a metropolitan presence and signal its role in shaping the city's expansion and landscape. This calibrated hierarchy of densities illustrates a concern with balancing privacy, collective life, and the distribution of services, in line with post-war European models of neighbourhood planning (Figure 3).

One of the project's most distinctive innovations was its departure from strict orthogonality. The residential blocks were rotated to optimise climatic performance, improve sun exposure, and respond to the natural topography. This gesture marks a clear shift away from schematic zoning, aligning the project with Team 10's

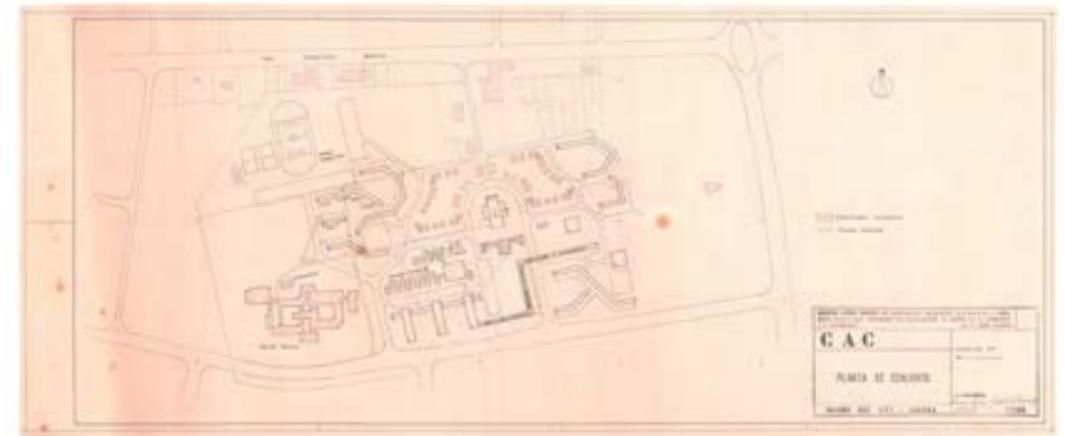


Figure 3. Site Plan. CTT Neighbourhood, Fernão Simões de Carvalho, Luanda City Council, 1968. Fernão Simões de Carvalho, personal archive.

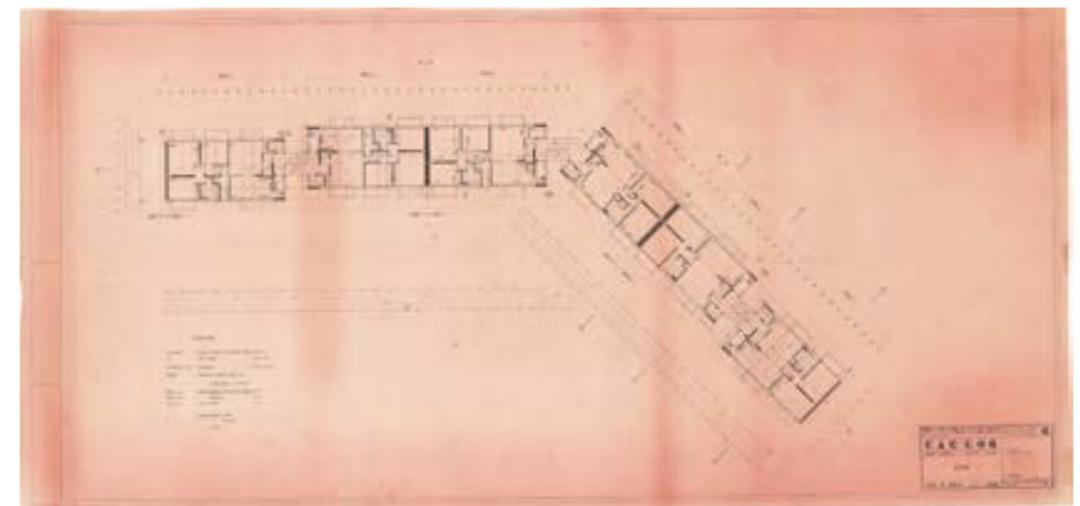


Figure 4. Plan Built blocks Lots 3, 4 and 5, CTT Neighbourhood, Luanda. Simões de Carvalho and Lobo de Carvalho Fernão Simões de Carvalho, personal archive.

spatial sensibilities, particularly its emphasis on lived spatiality, environmental adaptation, and the relational organisation of neighbourhoods. Although the central part of the district was never built, the entire plan envisaged 846 dwellings consolidating the existence urban fabric, the church, the sports club, shopping areas, and schools such as the Manolo Potier Technical School (now the Ngola Mbandi School).<sup>25</sup>

Despite adhering to the principles of the Athens Charter (street hierarchies, housing with amenities, green spaces, etc.), the dominance of straight lines and linear blocks from the modern movement was replaced by a fluid public space with blocks of different orientations, offering a more organic vision of modern

architecture.<sup>26</sup> The open ground floor and the vertical circulation cores, which access homes at various levels, encouraged neighbours to meet while still maintaining their privacy, and promoted sociability in daily life. These plans mirrored Team 10's idea of the "street as a room", a place for daily routines and community interaction. For Tom Avermaete, such strategies represent a definitive change in architectural thinking beyond the factional division between CIAM's "old guard" and the next generation.<sup>27</sup>

The interaction between the typological and constructive systems of the project is evident in the constructed block with 32 flats across Lots 3, 4, and 5

18. Inês Lima Rodrigues, "The Role of Construction Companies in Modern Housing: Precol's Footprint in Late Colonial Angola," *17th International Docomomo Conference: Modern Design – Social Commitment & Quality of Life* (Docomomo International, 2022), 282.

19. Predial Económica Ultramarina (PRECOL).

20. Rodrigues, "The Role of Construction Companies," 284-285.

21. Inês Lima Rodrigues, "Luanda Under Construction: Visual Ordering of Colonial Building Practices through the RTP Media Archives," *Film & Construction International Seminar* (accepted, 2026).

22. Fredson Victor Cruz da Silva, "Blocos Residenciais Modernos da Unidade de Vizinhança n.º 1 do Bairro Prenda em Luanda." (master diss., Universidade Lusíada de Lisboa, 2015), 176.

23. Beatriz Serrazina, "Utopia Moderna em África: O Bairro Prenda na Luanda do Futuro." (master diss., Faculdade de Arquitetura da Universidade de Lisboa, 2016), 98.

24. Manuel Herz, (ed). *African Modernism. The Architecture of Independence Ghana, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Zambiam* (Park Books, 2023).

25. Inês Lima Rodrigues, "When Modern Housing Built Optimistic Suburbia," *Urban Planning* 7, no. 3 (2022): 136.

26. *Ibid.*, 137.

27. Tom Avermaete, *Another Modern: The Post-War Architecture and Urbanism of Candilis-Josic-Woods* (NAi Publishers, 2005).



Figure 5. Built blocks Lots 3, 4 and 5, CTT Neighbourhood, Luanda. Simões de Carvalho and Lobo de Carvalho. Fernão Simões de Carvalho, personal archive.

What remains today is an isolated yet significant section, that became an architectural monument to late-colonial aspiration thwarted by political rupture.

Thanks to its incompleteness, the CTT is arguably a monument to interrupted modernity. It represents the last articulation of Portuguese planning goals at the moment of their disintegration. Still, paradoxically, the project also anticipated many traits of post-independence housing, such as industrialised construction techniques, tiered densities, linked services, and strategic exploitation of peripheral land as a test ground for novel typological models. As mentioned, these characteristics would reappear years later in state-sponsored satellite cities built following Angola's post-war reconstruction.

Following independence in 1975, the block became home to a diverse community including former CTT staff members, internally displaced families, and newly arrived urban migrants. Over time, informal changes, such as covered balconies, rooftop additions, and small commercial annexes, turned the block into a living palimpsest of postcolonial urban life. Fieldwork conducted for the MCMH research project suggests that locals place great importance on the peace, accessibility, and strong sense of community found in the neighbourhood<sup>29</sup> (Figure 6). These attachments demonstrate how architectural constructions acquire new significance through ongoing interpretation in daily routines.

(Figure 4). Built via a repeating wedge-shaped module, the building's slanted front functions as both a defining architectural statement and a climatic instrument. Recalling Le Corbusier's Modulor, the 1.40 x 1.40-metre structural grid enabled effective prefabrication and a sensible distribution of apartment types within the interior. Materials were deliberately sparse, with exposed concrete and brick infill creating a subdued yet consistent modernist look. Interior layouts embody the discipline of late modernist housing design: outward-facing living areas, inward-facing service areas, and minimal circulation. In line with the climatic plan, alternating balconies and vegetation improved shading and cross-ventilation.

Although architecturally complex, the CTT neighbourhood remained firmly rooted in the socio-spatial disparities of colonialism. Income restrictions and bureaucratic obstacles excluded Africans living in the surrounding musseques. The neighbourhood, therefore, represents a form of segregated modernism: an urban design project that conceptually invoked integration yet physically mirrored colonial separation.<sup>28</sup>

## 2.2. Incompletion, Transformation, and Typological Legacy

The area of lots 1 and 2 is central to the historical significance of the CTT neighbourhood. This area was intended to complete the quarter and define the neighbourhood's southern boundary but was never constructed. The broader arrangement of streets, public spaces, and collective facilities also remained unbuilt.



Figure 6. Interviews to the residents of the CTT's neighbourhood, 23.04.2021. Filomena do Espírito de Santo, MCMH.

29. Fieldwork conducted by Filomena do Espírito Santo, "Report on Analysis of the Interviews with CTT's Building Dwellers," 2021, Project MCMH, coordinated by Ana Vaz Milheiro and Inês Lima Rodrigues, [PTDC/ART-DAQ/30594/2017].



Figure 7. The relationship between the centre of Luanda and Kilamba and Sequele. Urban fabric of Sequele and Kilamba. Google earth, 20.02.2026.

### Identity and the New Centralities: Postcolonial Continuities and Ruptures

Although profound political changes followed the end of colonial rule in 1975, Luanda's built environment remained deeply influenced by its colonial heritage. Independence came amid rapid urbanisation and significant population migrations, followed soon after by almost three decades of civil war (1975–2002). Planning agencies deteriorated considerably with the breakdown of colonial control and the rapid departure of skilled professionals; hence, informal expansion became the primary means of urban development.

Against this backdrop, the typological vocabulary of late colonial modernism, including housing blocks, shared units, and hierarchical road systems, still defined urban output. These forms were retained in the institutional memory of state and local entities, as well as in the training of architects, engineers, and technicians who helped to construct the city during and after the conflict. Labour patterns changed: the collapse of official wage employment during the civil war drove people into the informal economy. The construction sector, formerly organised by racialised colonial hierarchies, turned unstable, characterised by sporadic work, short-term contracts, and, later, state-led reconstruction. Reflecting erratic employment arrangements and more general economic instability, workers often switched between formal and informal tasks.

With the end of the civil war in 2002, a new phase of aggressive state-led urban development started with the construction of satellite cities called *novas centralidades*. Originally developed under the Gabinete de Reconstrução Nacional (GRN) and later under the

Programa Nacional de Urbanismo e Habitação (PNUH, 2009–2012), these extensive projects sought to solve severe housing shortages, urban expansion, and project an image of national modernity. Designed as self-sufficient urban centres on state-owned peri-urban land, new centralities, like the mentioned Kilamba and Sequele, brought back the modern vision that shaped Luanda's colonial expansion (Fig. 7).

The satellite-city model, rehearsed in European interwar planning, shaped post-war Portuguese ideas for the eastward and southward expansion of Luanda. The twenty-first-century centralities arguably arose as reinterpretations of earlier spatial concepts, such as prefabricated housing blocks, orthogonal designs, rigid zoning, and the aim of creating orderly, disciplined metropolitan outskirts. According to Viegas, these initiatives perfectly represent a paradigm of *expansão urbana mercantilizável* (mercantilisable urban expansion),<sup>30</sup> in which state interference, private-market dynamics, and foreign building companies combine to turn land into an urban commodity.

Architecture evolved into a symbolic language of power within this context. Presented by the Angolan government as evidence of national development and postwar reconstruction, Kilamba was primarily designed and built by Chinese companies, including

28. Ana Vaz Milheiro, "Modernity and Colonization in an African Megacity: The Case of Luanda," in *The Routledge Handbook of Planning Megacities in the Global South*, Deden Rukmana, ed. (Routledge, 2020).

30. Sílvia Leiria Viegas, "Luanda, Cidade (Im)previsível? Governação e Transformação Urbana e Habitacional: Paradigmas de Intervenção e Resistências no Novo Milénio." (PhD. diss., Universidade de Lisboa, 2015), 191–202.



Figure 8. Kilamba Neighbourhood, Luanda. Works by Third Year students. Academic Year 2024-2025 MAC, AUN.

these investments, the absence of a Plano Director Geral Metropolitano (PDGM) meant that Luanda's growth continued through fragmented interventions rather than coordinated metropolitan planning. This resulted in limited job creation within the centralities, weak public transport connections and persistent infrastructural shortcomings.

At the same time, these contemporary urban environments produce a contradictory sense of identity. For many Angolans, residence in a new centrality represents social mobility and a rupture with the gradual, precarious urbanisation of the musseques. Ordered, vertical and formally regulated living projects an image of progress through uniform façades and controlled spatial arrangements. Yet this symbolism also generates ambivalence: the same uniformity that signifies modernity often accentuates division, exposing tensions between imposed urban models and lived experience (Figure 9).

### 3.1. Typological Continuities: Between Colonial Logics and Postcolonial Aspirations

The rise of the new centralities prompts a rethinking of typology as a tool for urban planning and politics. Whether in Prenda or the CTT neighbourhood, typological studies in colonial Luanda served as social engineering tools meant to stabilise racial hierarchies while also accommodating demographic strain. Neighbourhood units, prefabricated structures and modular constructions organised populations, while exacerbating spatial inequality. Similar formal approaches are used in post-colonial Angola to project state capacity, attract foreign investment and formalise real estate markets. The underlying architectural form remains consistent, with typology still governing populations within the space. However, the locations of the new centralities, which are more than 40 km from the city centre, have paved the way for significant practical differences that must also be considered.



Figure 9. Sequele Neighbourhood Luanda Maria Alice Correia.

CITIC.<sup>31</sup> Its repeating superblocs, landscaped avenues, and enormous scale recall late-modernist design (Figure 8). While late-colonial communities such as the CTT complex attempted to create social integration, at least on paper, the new centralities reflect a market-oriented modernity aimed at middle-income households. Initially, most Angolan families could not afford Kilamba's sale and rental rates, leading to high vacancy rates that became symbolic of speculative development.<sup>32</sup> It was only after considerable price reductions that the houses were slowly absorbed into the housing market.

Following the same reasoning, Sequele is located around 40-45 km outside of Luanda. Developed through public-private initiatives coordinated by Imogestin,<sup>33</sup> the project comprises around 10,000 housing units, alongside administrative services, water and electricity networks, schools, markets, retail outlets, banks and recreational facilities. Despite the scale of



Figure 10. Kilamba, Type floor plan, Block E. Works by Third Year students. Academic Year 2024-2025 MAC, AUN.

City of Kilamba represents the most emblematic case of Angola's post-war new centralities and illustrates the political ambitions underlying this model of urban expansion. As analysed by Guedes, Kilamba was conceived not merely as a housing estate, but as a state-driven urban device intended to operate as an autonomous city with its own administrative framework, infrastructure and public facilities.<sup>34</sup> Promoted under the Programa Nacional de Urbanismo e Habitação (PNUH) and developed through Sino-Angolan cooperation, the project sought simultaneously to address Luanda's housing deficit and to project an image of national modernity and post-conflict reconstruction. Its scale, peripheral siting and initial pricing strategies, however, resulted in slow occupation, reinforcing early perceptions of Kilamba as a failed or unfinished city. As Guedes emphasises, this condition should be understood as part of a phased and contingent process shaped by political decisions, economic cycles and access to housing.<sup>35</sup> From this perspective, Kilamba's subsequent occupation reflects

not the failure of the model, but its gradual realisation through everyday use.

Early critical readings described the new centralities as "ghost cities", highlighting their initial lack of population, economic activity and urban life.<sup>36</sup> This diagnosis, however, captured a specific temporal moment, strongly conditioned by economic constraints and limited affordability. Over time, these developments have demonstrated a marked capacity for social adaptation, as residents progressively appropriated and transformed the planned environment. As Milheiro et al. argue, large-scale housing infrastructures grounded in modernist planning logics tend to persist beyond their original political and economic frameworks, remaining structurally open to informal adjustment and long-term transformation.<sup>37</sup> In this sense, the apparent failure of the new centralities was not intrinsic to their form,

31. CITIC Group Corporation Ltd., formerly the China International Trust & Investment Corporation, is a state-owned investment company of the People's Republic of China.

32. Viegas, "Luanda, Cidade (Im)previsível?", 283.

33. Imogestin, a real estate company responsible for managing urban centers, new urbanisations, and public housing, including the Kilamba and Sequele projects such as KK5000. In 2018, the government transferred management of these urban areas to the Ministry of Territorial Planning and Housing, removing Imogestin's oversight.

36. Viegas, "Luanda, Cidade (Im)previsível?", 290.

37. Ana Vaz Milheiro, Filipa Fiúza, Rogério Vieira Almeida and Débora Félix, "Radiuse Peripheries, a comparative study on middle-class housing in Luanda, Lisbon and Macao," in *Post-war Middle-Class Housing. Models, Construction and change* coord. Gaia Caramellino, Federico Zanfi (Peter Lang, 2015), 240.

34. Juliana Guedes, "A Cidade do Kilamba – Expansão Metropolitana de Luanda" in *Optimistic Suburbia 3 – Researchers' perspective. Mass-Housing Infrastructures: Lisbon, Luanda, Macao* coord. Ana Vaz Milheiro Milheiro (AMDJAC, 2018), 141.

35. Ibid.

but rather the result of a temporal mismatch between political planning, economic conditions and lived urban experience.

Regarding housing typology, Kilamba is predominantly composed of repetitive apartment blocks based on standardised floor plans that prioritise efficiency, density and formal regularity (Figure 10). These compact, modular layouts clearly separate living, service and circulation areas, reflecting a late-modernist housing logic rooted in rational planning and functional zoning. This typological grammar recalls earlier modernist models deployed in late-colonial Luanda, particularly in its reliance on repetition, vertical stacking and controlled access, while translating them into a contemporary context of large-scale, state-led production. At the same time, everyday occupation reveals a capacity for adaptation, as residents modify domestic spaces through informal adjustments, demonstrating how these standardised typologies remain open to re-signification through postcolonial inhabitation.

These continuities can be further understood through Aldo Rossi's notion of the "permanence of form",<sup>38</sup> according to which urban artefacts outlive political regimes and endure as frameworks for new meanings. In the case of Luanda, as Milheiro argues, modernist planning infrastructures forged under colonial rule continue to shape postcolonial urbanisation, revealing the enduring entanglement between modernity and colonisation.<sup>39</sup> The similarities between the CTT neighbourhood and Kilamba, linear slabs, hierarchical circulation systems, peripheral placement and calibrated densities, are therefore not coincidental, but indicative of a deeper structural inheritance in which modernist spatial reasoning becomes the default language for large-scale intervention. While the form persists, its ideological content has shifted: what once served colonial governance now supports a postcolonial developmental state seeking legitimacy through construction and visibility.

Yet this persistence of form also conceals enduring inequalities. Despite substantial investment in mass housing, access to the new centralities remains regulated by income thresholds and administrative mechanisms. Informal settlements continue to grow near these developments, exposing the widening gap between designed modernism and lived urban reality. Typological continuity thus masks a transformation in social exclusion, from colonial racial categorisation to market-driven socio-economic differentiation. Labour relations further reinforce these continuities. Construction in the new centralities

remains hierarchically organised, echoing colonial arrangements in which African labourers built the city under precarious conditions directed by European specialists. Today, Angolan workers carry out most manual labour, while Chinese companies provide managerial and technical expertise. As noted by Anthony King, such configurations spatialise authority and structure labour relations in ways that remain largely invisible in architectural narratives.<sup>40</sup>

The new centralities also reveal conflicts between local cultural practices and state-led modernity. Imported typologies, towers, enclosed blocks, and monofunctional public areas often lack traditional domestic approaches such as incremental extensions, mixed-use ground floors, and the collective courtyards typical of the musseques. Inhabitants respond through unofficial modifications such as expanding balconies, creating tiny stores, or changing interior arrangements. These changes reflect postcolonial appropriations seen in the CTT block and confirm people's agency in determining their surroundings. They also highlight the limits of top-down modernism in settings where daily existence rests on flexibility rather than rules.

Finally, the new centralities raise a central question: how is postcolonial urbanism's typology related to identity? The CTT neighbourhood expressed a late-colonial desire to establish order and to manage assimilation, yet the new centralities reflect a globalised modernity connected to national construction and economic aspirations. In response, residents introduce informal modifications, enclosing balconies, creating small commercial spaces or reconfiguring interiors, that mirror earlier postcolonial appropriations observed in the CTT block. These practices confirm the agency of inhabitants in shaping their environments and highlight the limits of top-down modernism in contexts where everyday life depends on flexibility rather than regulation.

#### Final Remarks

The entanglements between the CTT neighbourhood and the new centralities in Luanda reveal both the tenacity and change of modernist types across very different political circumstances. Architecture has been used in every instance as a tool of governance, identity formation, and territorial control, late-colonial experimentation and post-war reconstruction. While the formal configurations of these projects display notable similarities, the ideological meanings embedded within them differ substantially. Whereas the CTT block emerged from a colonial order seeking to stabilise racial hierarchies through planned modernisation, the new centralities are products of a

postcolonial state that mobilises large-scale housing as evidence of development, independence and economic ambition.

Typology functions as a structural register across these historical moments. Its resilience is not merely technical but reflects the capacity of architectural forms and planning models to endure political rupture and acquire new meanings over time. First articulated through colonial neighbourhood units, principles such as modularity, repetition and regulated circulation reappear decades later in the satellite-city layouts of Kilamba and Sequele. This continuity demonstrates how spatial ideas, once embedded within colonial governance, continue to inform bureaucratic procedures, professional practice and institutional memory.

Yet continuity of form does not entail continuity of purpose. In the colonial context, typology was deployed to manage social difference and to enforce racial segregation under the rhetoric of integration. In the postcolonial period, it became a means of constructing national narratives, attracting investment and guiding accelerated urban growth. Although the terms of exclusion have shifted, from racial classification to market-based criteria, from legal status to purchasing power, their effects persist. The modern apartment, once conceived for a restricted middle class, is now commodified as a marker of upward mobility, while remaining accessible only to limited socio-economic groups.

The material history of these urban projects also foregrounds the role of labour. The construction of both the CTT neighbourhood and the new centralities relied on hierarchised workforces that often remain marginal within architectural narratives. In the colonial period, African workers contributed to the production of Luanda within unequal and frequently precarious labour regimes overseen by European specialists; in the postcolonial era, urban construction similarly depends on Angolan and foreign labour operating within Chinese-led contractual frameworks. Recognising these continuities complicates celebratory accounts of modernity and situates architecture within broader networks of economic dependency and transnational expertise.

Despite these structural constraints, the lived realities of both environments demonstrate a remarkable capacity for social appropriation. The postcolonial occupation of the CTT block illustrates how residents transform rigid modernist forms into places of belonging through incremental change and informal practices. In the new centralities, inhabitants similarly reinterpret top-down urban models by establishing micro-economies, adapting ground-floor uses and reshaping domestic spaces to better accommodate

social and cultural needs. Such practices challenge deterministic readings of modernist typology and instead reveal a negotiated urbanity produced from below.

Taken together, these observations suggest that Luanda's urban history is best understood as a palimpsest of modernities, colonial, socialist and neoliberal, layered over time without ever being fully erased. Typology thus operates as an archive of competing aspirations, capturing both the utopian ambitions of planners and the pragmatic improvisations of residents. Rather than a linear outcome of policy or a simple reflection of global models, Luanda emerges as a hybrid landscape where divergent temporalities and political projects intersect.

Looking forward, Angolan urbanism confronts not only the challenge of producing new housing and infrastructure, but also the need to reassess the social meanings embedded in inherited typological forms. Rather than replicating established models, future approaches might treat typology as an open framework capable of accommodating diversity, enabling participation and expanding access to urban life. This entails recognising residents' agency, supporting incremental transformation within formal planning, and diversifying housing solutions beyond rigid modern paradigms. A typological reading of the CTT neighbourhood and the new centralities thus offers more than a historical account: it provides a critical lens through which to understand how architecture mediates power, identity and belonging in a rapidly changing urban context, and how alternative forms of metropolitan citizenship might yet be imagined.

38. Aldo Rossi, *The Architecture of the City* (MIT Press, 1982 [1966]).

39. Milheiro, "Modernity and Colonization".

40. Anthony King, *Colonial Urban Development: Culture, Social Power and Environment* (Routledge, 1976).

### **Acknowledgements**

We appreciate the comments from the Chair, which helped improve the article, and from our Angolan colleague Helder da Conceição José, who enriched it with specific material from his region.

Funded by the Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT) in the scope of Inês Lima Rodrigues' research "Beyond Modern Housing Heritage of Portuguese Influence, an Optimistic Architecture for Living. Comparative and Multi-Situated Perspectives on Modern Dwellings and Surroundings" (2022. 00268.CEECIND/CP1750/CT0007). Supported by the European Union (ERC, ArchLabour, 1101096606). Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Council. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.