

Flirting with Ford, reverting to race? Housing, urban planning and the making of an economic and social order in Portuguese Timor in trans-colonial perspective, 1959-1963

Alex Grainger

Abstract

This chapter examines two transnational ideologies—Fordism and Lusotropicalism—in the context of late-colonial public housing provision in Portuguese Timor. It seeks to understand the extent to which planned housing in the colony was informed either by an economic ideology of mass production or a colonial ideology through which housing was racialised. It highlights the perceptions of Portuguese architects regarding the ability of residents to ‘adapt’ to indigenous housing. This issue was raised during a housing study tour of Southeast Asia and northern Australia by the architects who wished to investigate possibilities for such housing in Portuguese Timor. The chapter highlights the issues of social conflict which resulted from changes in housing, land use and labour provision in colonial and postcolonial cities; and examines the extent of cooperation among colonial officials to realise shared goals in these contexts.

Keywords: Housing; urban planning; Fordism; Lusotropicalism; Portuguese Timor; Southeast Asia

This chapter examines a housing study tour of Southeast Asia and northern Australia, conducted by two Portuguese architects in the late-1950s. The tour was intended to inform planned indigenous housing in Dili, the capital of Portuguese Timor, which they also later toured and reported on. The two architects, Sousa Mendes and Almeida, were commissioned by the Overseas Ministry’s (*Ministério do Ultramar*, formerly the Ministry of Colonies) Directorate-General of Public Works, based in Lisbon, to visit neighbouring colonies and countries where they sought to learn lessons for public housing in Timor.

The architects expressed an apparent preference for ‘economic housing’ with vernacular features, over mass-produced housing, associated with Fordism, a post-war regime of accumulation intended to ensure economic growth. Apart from Fordism, throughout the chapter I attempt to account for this preference by

looking at two further sets of influences. The architects' preferences were informed by Tropical Architecture, a school of architecture that emphasises the role of ethnographic fieldwork and local materials on vernacular house design. Another possible influence addressed throughout is Lusotropicalism, a colonial racial ideology, officially promoted by the Portuguese state throughout the 1950s and early 1960s.

The chapter is structured into three sections. Section one provides an introductory historical sketch, outlining the underlying social and economic objectives of colonial urban planning and housing and also elaborates briefly on Fordism, Tropical Architecture and Lusotropicalism. Section two describes the study tour; and section three assesses the influence of the study tour and ideological influences on attempts to create a socio-economic order via urban planning and 'economic housing' in Dili. Whereas other contributions to this volume examine resistance to colonial attempts to regulate Timor's society (see Chapters 1 and 2, this volume), this chapter emphasises potential convergences and divergences in certain late-colonial societies in the region.

Creating socio-economic orders through late-colonial urban planning

Colonial urban planning and public housing involved deliberate attempts to order socio-economic spaces and to control social reproduction of indigenous households. From the beginning of the twentieth century, colonial cities were increasingly made into places where commodities extracted from rural areas were traded. Despite the increasing importance of consumption in colonial cities, they remained largely un-industrialised and peripheries of the world-economy. In the same period, colonial cities were increasingly designed to absorb labour on a limited scale from rural areas. As part of this process, urban areas were segregated along racial lines, with indigenous populations gradually admitted into circumscribed zones according to labour requirements. This was a relatively common phenomenon in colonial Southeast Asia, it has been argued (McGee 1967 quoted in King 1990, 57) and key to this was the introduction and enforcement of private property rights and the colonial state's ability to appropriate land.

Consistent with these patterns of planning, colonial and some post-colonial governments conceived of socio-economic ordering taking place in terms of the operation of both small- and large-scale dynamics with the following elements in mind: design and construction of public housing and its adaptation to the tropics; urban planning and land-titling; and the mass-production of housing and urbanisation alike which may be partly seen as attempts to produce stable social and economic orders. These were combined with strategies such as "welfare colonialism" (Scott 1998, 97), and the control and reproduction of labour.

Meanwhile, and beyond this colonial context, standardised, mass-produced housing was constructed after 1945 in various settings outside the Portuguese empire. Mass production was also often associated with the term 'Fordism', originally associated with the assembly-line techniques of the Ford Motor Company. Later it came to describe a particular regime of accumulation associated with mass production techniques and its coordination with consumption; a wage policy and urban planning to facilitate communication; and transport between housing, and places of work and consumption (Aglietta [1979] 2000). These conditions had developed in the United States and after 1945 began to expand globally as a capitalist regime of accumulation (Harvey 1989). Fordism entailed coordinating labour and production in the service of producing not only capitalist development but also a social and spatial order allied with these goals (Jessop 1992). In other words, mass-produced housing was a key part of ensuring a stable social and economic order. An example of this integrated approach to economic and social planning was seen in Singapore (see section below).

In contrast, some late-colonial or post-colonial public housing projects were informed by Tropical Architecture, a school of architecture which emphasised that indigenous housing should be subject to ethnographic study to ascertain the practices of its inhabitants. Such housing could be adapted accordingly, so the thinking went, using local materials as far as possible and based on considerations of ventilation, heat and light (Baweja 2007). Tropical Architecture, with its emphasis on ethnographically-informed design, clearly influenced the perspectives of Sousa Mendes and Almeida.

Less clear is the extent to which the two architects were influenced by Lusotropicalism. Lusotropicalism was an official ideology, adopted and implemented throughout the Portuguese empire in the 1950s which posited that the Portuguese colonial relationship with its subject peoples was exceptional. It emphasised fraternisation between coloniser and colonised based on Christianity and, rather than racial segregation, alleged racial mixing (miscegenation) (Castelo 1998).¹ In contrast to the underlying principles of Tropical Architecture, the Portuguese colonial authorities were influenced by a racial perspective that both diluted its relevance to Portuguese territories and also made it a governing concept, albeit to varying degrees in different territories and at different times. For example, some colonial anthropologists of Timor were less influenced by Lusotropicalism's miscegenation thesis rather than set on promoting the exclusive racial origins of Timorese (Roque 2019).

While the ethnographic study of 'tropical' housing as a basis for public housing was not novel in the period, potentially injecting the same study with 'race', in the context of Lusotropicalism, implied Portuguese exceptionalism. But the study tour itself seemed to underscore not exceptionalism, I argue, but rather trans-colonial

cooperation. The control and concentration of indigenous labour in colonial cities involved the authorities “... exchang[ing] information on standards, costs, and design [of economical housing] with other European powers ...” (King 1990, 52-53). Portuguese authorities seem to have been no exception to this pattern and engaged in cooperation with other European colonial powers in the field of colonial urban planning (Silva 2016). However, bringing such a trans-colonial perspective to bear in relation to Timor has been a relatively neglected area (Jerónimo and Costa Pinto 2015, 52).

Timor was far-removed from the emergent circuitries of global capital on the periphery of the world's economy (in contrast to, for example, Singapore). It could therefore be viewed as an ‘inappropriate’ candidate for mass-produced housing. However, when accounting for the choice of more vernacular housing, other factors also need to be considered. For example, did ‘Fordist’ urban planning and housing seen on the tour influence designs for indigenous housing in Timor? How far did Lusotropicalism provide a restraint on the realisation of this rational model of urban planning and standardised housing? In relation to this, how far did trans-colonial cooperation indicate, in Benedict Anderson's words (2016, 153), a “... typical ‘solidarity among whites’, which linked colonial rulers from different national metropolises, whatever their internal rivalries and conflicts”? I examine these considerations, along with addressing the extent to which ‘indigenous housing’ was viewed by colonial authorities as requiring adaptation to house occupants, or, in contrast, whether occupants were viewed as having innate capacities (or otherwise) to adapt to housing.

The study tour

Singapore

By the time of Sousa Mendes and Almeida's visit in 1959, Singapore was in a state of rapid change. Its economy was still fundamentally connected with that of Malaya (which had become independent in 1957) and was based on its ‘entrepot’ status, of processing primary products for export, especially petroleum and rubber. Before handing over power to the People's Action Party (PAP) government in 1959, the colonial authorities sought to ensure ‘stability’ through creating manufacturing jobs, welfare reforms, and to attract investment through special concessions to foreign business.

The centrepiece of ‘social development’ was housing, which was to be integrated with an economic agenda which included increasing manufacturing jobs. After 1945, Singapore became the subject of the largest public housing programme

in the British Empire and “one of the largest in the world” (Seng 2013, 7). The Singapore Improvement Trust (SIT) was the authority responsible for alleviating ‘overcrowded’ central areas of the city. With a new emphasis on planning in the post-war period, rather than housing *per se* as in the pre-war period (Seng 2013), the SIT began constructing housing on a large scale. Closely modelled on Britain’s own post-war state public housing including the establishment of new towns, SIT set about constructing 4,336 houses between 1948–1950 to accommodate a quarter of the population, a target it missed by about 5 percent (Yeung 1973, 45).

Between 1947 and Singapore’s independence in 1959, 20,000 houses were constructed by the SIT (Siew-Eng and Savage 1991, 327–328). Most were built in Queenstown and Kallang, planned new towns where Sousa Mendes and Almeida were taken on a tour.² As guests of the SIT and Public Works department, they were shown apartments three or four floors high. They noted that there was a great dependence on concrete with no natural materials used. However, they were interested in incorporating design features which provided “good protection against the rain” and the architects saw flats with verandas coated with rubber and synthetic paint to make them impermeable.³ Prefabricated concrete grillages covered walkways and offered some protection from tropical downpours.⁴

The SIT houses were, the visitors concluded, more likely to make use of “walls rather than spaces”. This reflected a taste for European, “even, we would say, English [architecture]”, producing “strange” results “for the country and its human content”. While this strangeness was partly the result of few concessions to “traditional” styles, incorporating such styles would be complicated, since, they asserted, Singapore was composed of “an amalgam of races”.⁵ The issue of race was a consideration in the architects’ thinking on the question of housing in Singapore where, they believed, “less evolved races”—by which they meant Malay and Indian people, as opposed to the Chinese population—had difficulty adapting to public housing. It is of course possible that the architects had drawn their own conclusions about the existence of such a hierarchy of races from their own brief experiences in Singapore, or from Timor. It is equally likely, however, that they were repeating views put forward by their British official hosts in which the notion of a hierarchy of races originated from the need to assert political and economic dominance, subsequently constructed as “an inevitable reflection of inherent “racial” differences” (Hirschmann 1986, 348; Tajudeen 2011, 229).

The visitors noted the immediate surrounds of the flats they saw, with large lawns between the apartment buildings and a wide extent of forests to the rear and these features seemed to have left a positive impression. However, there was little remaining evidence by the time of their tour of the resultant changes to the surrounding areas to make way for Queenstown. In the previous few years, the area on which it was built contained many ‘Attap’ (from the Malay for the type

of leaves used in roof construction) houses, constructed mainly from wood, with reed walls and grass roofs. The visitors saw examples of Attap houses, but a brief description of the houses' most common location in the city "suburbs" and the local materials used in their construction suggests that they may not have fully comprehended their political, social and cultural significance.

Attap house residents were farmers engaged in agriculture who were referred to by the authorities as "squatters", who comprised about a quarter of the population in 1957.⁶ Squatters were defined by the British authorities in Malaya in the post-war period as those living on rural land without title and had fled urban areas during the Japanese occupation (1942-1945). After 1945, pre-war legislation was reintroduced under which wartime settlers were again defined as squatters and were to be moved off land earmarked for development. However, eviction rates were low partly because squatters challenged decisions with the support of unions (Wah 1988, 63, 83, 90). Many such unions were associated with the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) which organised a wave of strikes in order to challenge the legitimacy of the returning colonial authorities. In 1948 the British authorities mounted a counter-insurgency campaign in Malaya, the 'Emergency', moving more than a million rural labourers and squatters to 'New Villages' with the avowed aim of separating the MCP from its base of support among the population (Hack 2012, 212) which was completed by late-1951.

In Singapore, the Emergency's regulations had effectively halted open communist-supported labour movement activity after 1948 (Liu and Wong 2004, 175) but strikes continued.⁷ However, squatter claims to land in Singapore were not only connected with the actions of an urban working class, but also agrarian small-holders. Having organised an "Attap Dwellers Association", 266 families resisted removal and by 1954, construction of Queenstown had "come to a standstill". By 1955, the authorities reported that it was "practically impossible to find sites for public buildings that were not encumbered with clusters of Attap dwellings or agricultural settlers" (quoted in Clancey 2004, 39). As Clancey notes, Communist supporters of Attap dwellers could not object to housing reform promoted by the People's Action Party (PAP) government, elected alongside other parties in 1955, since the provision of public housing was a socialist mainstay. Moreover, certain techniques of the 'New Villages' program in Malaya were practiced in Singapore from the early 1950s. Although no New Villages were established in Singapore, colonial administrators that worked on the program were increasingly drafted in to work on housing reform in Singapore.

The construction of new towns required the evictions of Attap dwellers and this served as a formative stage of producing an economic order which was continued after independence in 1959 and which was centred on planned manufacturing industries, foreign capital, social welfare, and relatively high wages. This

organisation primarily complemented a global Fordist regime of accumulation by occupying an intermediary position of processing and trading extractive commodities. The visiting architects rejected Singapore-style mass-produced housing for Timor because they viewed it as inappropriate for the tropics, lacking aesthetic value, and believed themselves able to make it more cheaply. And as their report also made clear, these factors had served as obstacles to the ‘integration of races’ into public housing.

Jakarta

Jakarta was an arena of fluid politics between Indonesia’s unilateral declaration of Indonesian independence in 1945 and full recognition of independence in 1949 (Cribb 1991; McVey 1971) and the abode of different classes and several ethnic groups. This pattern of fluid politics continued into the 1950s. In contrast to late-colonial Singapore, in post-colonial Indonesia President Soekarno directed campaigns against ‘neo-colonialism’. In 1957 Dutch assets were nationalised and parliament suspended in favour of rule through presidential authority. Under this arrangement, the military gained economic power by taking over Dutch plantations and increased its authority in urban areas and constrained the movements of the Indonesian Communist Party, (*Partai Komunis Indonesia*—PKI), which thereafter worked more closely among the peasantry (Mortimer 1972, 10). Colonial rule had also left a legacy of land ‘dualism’, whereby most of Jakarta’s dwellers were resident on unregistered land and very few houses were built on registered land (Leaf 1994).

The largest planned public housing development was the *Kebayoran Baru* project started by the Dutch. The Indonesian authorities continued this satellite town of modernist inspiration to the southwest of Jakarta, on which 4,630 houses were built between 1950–1953 (Silver 2008) dispossessing about 10,000 fruit growers. *Kebayoran Baru* was originally intended to have a mixture of lower and middle-class inhabitants. However, in the event this intention faded and the development became mostly inhabited by the middle and upper classes (Lubis 2018, 67). Indonesia lacked construction materials and according to some accounts, the houses that were constructed were “ornate ministries...” with “...practically no building of houses for poor people” (Wright [1994] 1956, 109). Instead, the government pursued ‘monumental’ public buildings.⁸ Sukarno intended to clear slums and build Singaporean-style modernist public housing, but difficulties in implementing the plans meant that they were never realised (Abeyasekere 1990, 201).

Other factors contributed to Jakarta’s lack of affordable public housing such as the interplay of regional planning, domestic politics and international aid. Jakarta’s Master Plan was co-authored by international consultants and US-trained Indonesian planners. In an early iteration in 1952, Bogor, Tangerang and Bekasi (collectively

presaging the so-called ‘Jabotabek’ or greater Jakarta region) were designated as sites of future housing developments but under the plans, the state was to play no role in their construction. Housing co-operatives (*Jajasan Kas Pembangunan*—JKP) were set up but few functioned since household savings had been eroded by inflation preventing further investment in them (Columbijn 2010, 341). ‘Self-help housing’ was touted by international donors (UN, US) which the JKP was to spearhead, in the manner of “top-down” development aid (*ibid.*, 350); these too failed.

The two-day visit to Jakarta by Sousa Mendes and Almeida was the shortest of all on their tour. It appeared to make the least impression on them which may be explained by the fact that unlike Singapore and Darwin, they were not accompanied by the authorities and were therefore left to locate housing by themselves. For example, they made no reference to *Kebayoran Baru*. Instead, they found single-story houses with large soffits that provided shade and which were “copied from the Dutch”, with downpipes and gutters to channel monsoonal rains. Of greatest interest to the visitors was the colonial hill town of Bogor, with landscaped gardens and the presidential palace, some 50 kilometres to the south of the city. They observed that like Singapore’s ‘green belt’, Bogor represented an attempt to integrate a ‘natural’ aspect which provided respite from heat and crowded conditions but was administratively and geographically separate from the city. As in Singapore, the visitors paid attention to the presumed race of the intended inhabitants. They asserted that Jakarta’s society was culturally monolithic with a “unity of people and race”. But they also photographed and commented on the roof of a Minangkabau (Sumatran) house. This is significant since Jakarta had been very diverse in character for several centuries (Gelman-Taylor [1983] 2009).

The Portuguese architects undertook a fleeting overview of a limited number of houses. The relative lack of construction of formal public housing in Jakarta after Indonesia’s independence may have deterred them from delving more deeply into the matter, but their observations were no less informed by a preoccupation with the suitability of different ethnic groups to public housing as in Singapore and as shown below, in Darwin.

Darwin

After 1945, Australia had a shortage of 300,000 homes (Greig 1995, 1). The government set out extensive plans to stimulate housebuilding in a *Commonwealth Housing Commission Report* (1944) (Bunning et al. 1947, 7). The solution was to use “mass-production” (i.e., Fordist) techniques and local materials. However, rather than taking a direct coordinating role, the government aimed to provide the incentives to large private companies to produce thousands of affordable houses (Greig 1995, 67). The housing shortage was spatially unevenly distributed, with the

Northern Territory less well served by construction companies than southern and eastern states of Australia.

To redress this imbalance, the Federal Government took a larger role in providing housing in Darwin, capital of the Northern Territory, than elsewhere in Australia for two reasons. First, on the back of economic activity, Darwin's population grew by 300% between 1947 and 1957 (Dewar 2010); many 'new' arrivals were also returnees who had no permanent dwelling on their return. Second, the territory was home to a large transient population of bureaucrats and soldiers which required temporary housing. There was a stark contrast between housing policy for this transient population and that of the indigenous population which must be viewed in the context of broader socio-economic dynamics. On the one hand, the departure of many soldiers from Darwin after the war marked a decline in the local pastoral industry, a key part of the economy (Wilson 2015, 186), before mining replaced it by the end of the 1950s (Powell 1981, 220-225).

On the other hand, the pastoral industry relied heavily on Aboriginal labour (Drakakis-Smith 1983, 7). The stations on which Aboriginal people worked encompassed large tracts of land allotted to white settlers or 'grantees'. By law and in practice until 1943, grantees were not required to remunerate Aboriginal labour with money if they "maintained the relatives and dependents" of the worker (Berndt and Berndt 1987, 13). Government policy on Aboriginal housing in Darwin, a hub of a declining pastoral industry, shifted from the 1920s when the main concern was to house cheap indigenous labour in Darwin, to the 1950s, whereby the focus of indigenous housing had shifted to a more ambitious programme of assimilation, partly involving socialising labour in compounds.

The visiting architects did not take into account that there were, in essence, two housing policies, one for European Australians and one for indigenous Australians. Rather, they concentrated on prefabricated ('prefab') housing for European Australians. Prefabs were of great interest to the visitors since they provided uniform sets of houses and architectural styles. The main source of prefab houses in Darwin up to 1956 were 'Hawksleys', built and assembled in Britain and exported to Australia (Dewar 2010, 129). The houses cost 260,000 Portuguese *escudos*, a much higher figure than Singapore, where a SIT apartment cost 50,000 *escudos*. This problem of price could be overcome in Timor, the visiting architects believed, by a "judicious use of [local] materials". Like Singapore's SIT accommodation, the Darwin prefab houses "[left] much to be desired" in terms of aesthetics. In comparing housing in each location, moreover, the visitors also continued to exhibit their pre-occupation with race, believing that Singapore families inhabiting SIT accommodation were of a much 'lower level' than in more racially 'homogeneous' Darwin. Yet here, as in Jakarta, they appear to have misread the local context: Darwin was home, as we have seen, to Aboriginal and Chinese communities who

were the main permanent settlers, while those of European origin were most likely to be transient. Indeed, they favoured Darwin's houses above those of Singapore and Jakarta despite what they perceived as its 'racial dissimilarity' to Timor.

The policy on Aboriginal housing in the 1950s must be seen in the context of an official policy of assimilation that was in force in Australia from 1951. Assimilation, it was believed, could be partly achieved through the government's construction of four 'reserves' throughout the 1940s and 1950s including the relocation of an existing reserve (Kahlin, renamed Bagot and relocated in 1938). Bagot had as a central aim the 'detribalisation' of its inhabitants and was aimed to provide employment to inhabitants through 'horticultural production'. Thus, while Kahlin during the 1920s had explicitly economic aims, i.e., to house an Aboriginal workforce who lived segregated from the white population "... outside the town boundary", by the 1950s it was viewed as promoting assimilation (Wells 2000, 73). A centrepiece of assimilation was later the "extensive" welfare provisions beginning in the 1950s which saw Aboriginal people live not in "official settlements" such as Bagot but in "fringe settlements and small towns" (Drakakis-Smith 1981, 41).

The architects admired some aspects of Darwin's urban planning—for example, its botanical gardens. But they harboured doubts about the aesthetic qualities of prefab housing and its high cost. Yet they preferred the possibility for Timor of Darwin's relatively expensive prefab houses to those of Singapore since, they asserted, integrating European Australian occupants had been easier than in Singapore. The architects therefore promised both that cheaper housing could be achieved in Timor with local materials but also that the houses would be better adapted to their indigenous occupants. But as we have seen in the cases examined above, they also perceived barriers to occupants being able to adapt to houses. Affordability and adaptation are addressed together below.

Timor

As we have seen above, what is at issue in the architects' account are two considerations: the planning and provision of housing based on economic factors; and the appropriateness of housing to 'characteristics' of the population. While colonial public housing could be seen as a deliberate effort to ensure social reproduction and control, it must also be seen in the context of urban planning, which had the objective of creating social and economic orders based on spatial organisation. While investment in urbanisation in the late-1940s was very low, the largest aggregate investments in urbanisation in any colony by the Portuguese metropolitan state during the period 1946-1972 were made in Timor and São Tomé e Príncipe (Madeira 2008, 414). The value of these investments was not recouped from the colony: the authorities had hoped for a windfall following oil exploration but by 1963, such

hopes had been repeatedly frustrated (Grainger 2018). Hence, in this last section, I show how the project of designing economical dwellings (*moradias econômicas*) must be seen in the context of the allocation of capital and land to urbanisation projects in the 1950s; and in a context of issues that the architects encountered with reconciling the design of economical dwellings to Timor's indigenous population.

Dili was severely damaged during the Japanese occupation of Timor between 1942 and 1945. The returning Portuguese colonial authorities saw reconstruction as an opportunity to conduct urban planning. This was carried out initially under the direction of the *Gabinete de Urbanização Colonial* (GUC, Colonial Urbanization Committee) formed in 1944 and operating until 1947 under the Ministry of Colonies. The GUC (after 1951, GUU or *Gabinete de Urbanização de Ultramar*, Overseas Urbanisation Committee) was highly centralised, meaning that its personnel were largely sent from Lisbon, which consequently restricted its capacity to act in far-flung colonies such as Timor (Vaz Milheiro and Costa Dias 2010, 84). The metropolitan government's priorities also lay elsewhere: the GUC's head, Rogerio Cavaca described plans for the urbanisation of Timor as "unduly vast", and therefore they were subordinated to plans for Portugal's African colonies.⁹

In 1951 the GUU created an urban plan of Dili which contained 13 separate land use zones. Zoning is significant for two reasons: first, it allocated land usage to distinctive areas; and second, it laid claim over land and consequently permitted or circumscribed uses and property claims to it. The centre of Dili was to contain a Civic Centre where commercial activities took place. Outside this central zone, there was a residential zone (for Europeans), a Special residential zone (a superior zone for Europeans based in the present-day Farol neighbourhood); a Natives' residential zone; and a Chinese residential zone.¹⁰ The native zone was in the same area of the city where, it was observed, the indigenous population had already settled. By the early-1950s they constituted an ever-greater number of Dili's population in the east of the city (in present-day Becora and Bidau). Many of their number were "*moradores*" or soldiers (reservists) employed by the state but who also possessed their own means of subsistence in the form of smallholder cultivation and keeping poultry and pigs. In summary, the commercial centre of Dili would see "... individuals of all races and nationalities" admitted, while a series of residential zones were to be circumscribed along the lines of race.¹¹

Further plans for economic dwellings emerged again in 1958 when the Dili Municipal Council (*Câmara Municipal de Díli*) discussed commissioning 'showcase' economic dwellings.¹² Reporting on the Municipal Council's discussions, Sousa Mendes favoured only limited production of "standard type" (*projectos-tipos*) houses on a large scale because they would require "careful study". In his view, the priority lay with 'adapting' housing to its inhabitants and it would be better if the metropolitan government, rather than the *Câmara Municipal de Díli*, executed this

project.¹³ His audience at the Directorate-General of Public Works in Lisbon agreed, because they wanted control over the direction of the projects and land rather than any “future proprietor, or even the *Câmara Municipal de Díli*”.¹⁴ The metropolitan state thus played a primary role from the early stages of the ‘economical dwelling’ project, indicating its importance in securing control over land and consequently an interplay between housing and urban planning, and as we have seen, a study mission to other cities.

The zoning of areas requiring the setting of geographic boundaries closely reflects ethnographic debates surrounding Timor. Such debates saw attempts to attribute racial boundaries based on geography, biology and ethno-linguistic groups which shifted over time and were a matter of dispute (Roque 2010). Mendes-Correa’s study (1944) attributed racial and ethno-biological categorisations to the Timorese population partly with reference to ethno-linguistic categorisations. The MAT (*Missão Antropológica de Timor*) study mission in 1953-1954 under the direction of Antonio de Almeida had the “... ultimate aim [of] draw[ing] the Portuguese Timor ethno-linguistic map” (Castelo 2017, 634). Mendes Correa’s later work suggested that Timor was a source site of *Homo Sapiens* who had thereafter mutated without being subject to significant racial mixing—a liberal reinterpretation of Freyre’s Lusotropicalism (Roque 2019). These studies point to how professional ethnographic work in Timor developed gradually, and that there was a tradition of considerable ‘overlap’ between anthropological work and such ‘bio-ethnographic’ study and, to some extent, colonial policymaking.

This context is significant since Mendes-Correa’s study (1944) was referenced by Sousa Mendes and Almeida when writing their report on Timorese house designs. In light of their study tour of Timor, the architects cited in their report four supra-racial categories set out by Mendes-Correa, on top of more numerous linguistic groups, extracted from the study. With both these racial and ethno-linguistic categorisations in mind, the architects then went about assessing indigenous housing. They were directed by the scholar and colonial administrator Rui Cinatti, who had a deep and abiding interest in Timor’s flora, fauna, and human societies, and who advised them on what regions to visit to study housing arrangements. Cinatti also had an interest in “study[ing] the main types of ‘native housing’ and its relationships with the natural and cultural environment”, an interest which chimed with that of colonial urban policy as described above (Sousa 2020, 143). The architects set about their task by seeking out archetypal house designs based on each region, insisting on adopting a ‘mode of classification’ for the populations that they would observe. To provide a typology they observed the ways in which forms of housing changed (or otherwise) “... according to diverse dialects”, with the least spoken ‘dialects’ in the interior and in the east, while the most spoken were on the coast with Tetum having the greatest tendency to spread.

They explained differences in housing by reference to two principal elements: the ‘various racial origins’ of their inhabitants; and ‘climatic conditions’. It became clear, however, that they could not reconcile climate-adapted house design with ‘race’. For example, they noted that upland house constructions (where the same cooler climate prevailed) were similar despite being built in different regions of Bobonaro and Maubisse. Likewise, ‘raising’ native-ancestral housing or *uma lisan* was neither universally practiced, nor exclusive to ‘racial origins’. For example, houses in coastal areas which were at opposite ends of the colony—Oecussi, Viqueque and Suai—were all raised off the ground by between one and one-and-a-half metres. In short, they were able to adduce more examples of the practicality of pre-existing house types based on climate, by observing that in upland, cooler climates, roofs extended to the ground to provide more insulation, than with reference to putative commonalities of house design based on occupants’ ability to adapt to houses.

The one kind of house in Portuguese Timor that Sousa Mendes and Almeida identified which was observably different from all other houses was that of ‘assimilated’ Timorese. Such housing, mainly inhabited by *liurais*, was not constructed with wood, bamboo and ‘*palappa*’ (dried leaves of palm trees) but constructed with ‘European’ materials “using the most economical methods”, for example, glass windows and zinc sheet roofs. Where these were unavailable, local materials were fashioned into European styles. Such styles also included housing with a raised ground floor, “definitive walls”—the prevalence of which they had frowned on in Singapore—and sometimes a latrine.¹⁵ The architects did not directly broach the question of how or whether the inhabitants of ‘traditional’ houses were to become ‘assimilated’.

In 1963, Sousa Mendes alone produced plans for two prototype houses for indigenous soldiers in the colonial military. They consisted of two buildings—a main building with an entrance hall and two bedrooms, and an ‘outbuilding’, with a pantry, kitchen and bathroom. The cost of the houses was 40,000 *escudos*, 10,000 less than Singapore’s SIT apartments. The houses were raised 1.15 metres, for unspecified reasons. This was a costly adjustment to previous plans that caused the land area on which the houses were built to be reduced by 10 percent to stay within the total budget. Otherwise, the costs appeared to have been kept to a minimum, as Sousa Mendes and Almeida promised four years earlier by using local materials.

The flooring in the entrance area of the main building was constructed with wood, as were the entrance’s ceilings. Elsewhere in the main building, the roof was made from grasses or *palappa* leaves bound with cord and connected to the joists with cane (*cana brava*) and *casuarina* wood. The house was not ‘entirely’ constructed with local materials as claimed, however. The roof was supported by iron pillars. The second ‘outbuilding’ had concrete screed floors and wainscots;

and walls made of concrete and a zinc roof. The kitchen was built around a hearth, constructed with three stones, a feature of 'native' houses, Sousa Mendes indicated. Indeed, the division of the house into two buildings seems to have been a Portuguese interpretation of an 'assimilated' Timorese house.¹⁶

Twenty-eight years after the study tour and 12 years after Indonesia had occupied the territory formerly known as Portuguese Timor, Cinatti, Sousa Mendes and Almeida published *Arquitectura Timorense* (1987), an extensively-illustrated book based on their overview of Timorese housing. Some of the book's chapters expanded on and followed the principle around which the Timor section of their report was structured, i.e., a review of the habitats of the territory's ethno-linguistic groups. However, absent from the work was any reference to their foreign tour but one section briefly detailed city housing of 'assimilated' Timorese and Europeans. On one level, this omission is not surprising since in some respects the foreign tour may have simply served to confirm the architects' existing beliefs that ethnographically-informed housing was preferable to mass-produced housing and deemed unworthy for inclusion. Furthermore, the book's audience, an educated, Lusophone public, may also have found traditional houses a more compelling subject. After all, the publication presents a view of Timor's ethnic groups largely untouched by colonial rule, whereas the project to design and construct economic dwellings involved the colonial state's attempts to create and sustain a social and economic order in an urban environment. The building of economic dwellings continued until decolonisation in 1974, with discrete but small clusters of houses appearing in some of Dili's neighbourhoods.

Conclusion: affordability, adaptation, anxiety

During their study tour, the architects had observed large-scale urban planning and public housing in the service of creating distinct socio-economic orders in late-, settler- and post-colonial contexts. They flirted with this model but ultimately rejected it because they preferred their own hybrid 'economical houses' with vernacular features. Yet in the end, their own model, embedded in a larger urban planning experiment, was not so different. Furthermore, the study tour, the architects' dependence on official hosts, and the zoning of Dili reveal rather colonial cooperation and to some extent, a commonality of approach. This did not stop the architects leaning on a model of Tropical Architecture grounded in pragmatism, albeit one seemingly preoccupied with the 'integration' of occupants. Indeed, while the architects' approach was influenced by questions of affordability, they also made assessments of the perceived ability of occupants to live in houses, thereby relying more on a biologist's view of 'species adaptation' to habitat (cf. Clancey 2006, 86).

At the same time, this perspective appears to have been arrived at largely through contingency rather than based on an unswerving adherence to racial ideology. For example, the architects noted the work of Portuguese anthropologists concerned with demonstrating a view of Timor's 'races' but they did not adopt it to be a predominant criterion for their house designs. The architects' designs of economical houses may have been partially influenced by the colonial ideology of Lusotropicalism, but equally, late-colonial regimes *in general* had begun to emphasise that colonial rule could cede some authority to indigenous elites (whether through French 'associationism' or British 'indirect rule'). In both this broader context and in the context of Timor specifically, the houses and the planned urban socio-economic order in which they were situated may also be a manifestation of colonial anxieties (see Introduction, this volume) as both migration from rural to urban areas and colonial expenditure on urbanisation increased in the years before 1974.

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Notes

- ¹ These ideas were those of the Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre who also espoused strong views on urbanisation and housing. Like the originators of Tropical Architecture, Freyre had predilections for vernacular architecture, and wanted to "...reconcile international modernity with local tradition" (Burke and Pallares-Burke 2008, 113, 148-149).
- ² The SIT houses that they saw "differ[ed] considerably from the normal run of privately-designed houses" (Swee 1956, 62); given their "large average household size, of 5.9. This is no doubt due to the system of allocation of Trust dwellings which gives preference to large households" (ibid., 64).
- ³ Sousa Mendes, A. and Almeida, L. 'Missão de estudo de Habitat Nativo de Timor. Relatório Síntese das visitas de estudo a Singapura, Djakarta, Darwin, e à província de Timor' 4 March 1959, in AHU ICP MU DGOPC DSUH (MU T Cx.22,1), 1.
- ⁴ Sousa Mendes, A. and Almeida, L. 'Missão de estudo...', 14.
- ⁵ Sousa Mendes, A. and Almeida, L. 'Missão de estudo...' 17.
- ⁶ In 1957 the population of Singapore stood at about 1,440,000 (Chua and Singapore Department of Statistics 1964, 43) of which squatters comprised about 360,000 (Kahn 2006, 9).
- ⁷ Singapore's ethnic Chinese population was strongly represented in organised labour activity but 'housing poverty' (Aljunied 2009, 237), unresolved by the construction of a planned modernist residential area for Malays (Kahn 2006), had contributed to discontent with colonial rule more widely.

- ⁸ For an attempt to “discern concretely” the meaning of such public monuments see Anderson 1990, 174.
- ⁹ AHU IPC/MU/T/DGOPC/DSUH (MU/T/ Cx.22,6) ‘Projecto de moradias economicas’. Cavaca, ‘Informacao no.33 A/46’, 6 November 1946.
- ¹⁰ AHU ICP MU CTFC (MU/T) Cx. 22,5 Localização da Colonia de Timor. Aguilar, JA, ‘Plano Geral de Urbanização do Ultramar’, Localização da Colonia de Timor’, 30.
- ¹¹ AHU ICP MU CTFC (MU/T/ Cx. 22,5) Aguilar, JA, ‘Plano Geral...’, 9.
- ¹² AHU IPC/MU/T/DGOPC/DSUH (MU/T/ Cx.22,6) ‘Projecto de moradias economicas’. Antes de Megré to Director dos Servicos de Urbanismo e Habitacao, 8 July 1958.
- ¹³ AHU IPC/MU/T/DGOPC/DSUH (MU/T/ Cx.22,6) ‘Projecto de moradias economicas’. Sousa-Mendes to Direcao de Servicos, Obras Publicas, 14 July 1958.
- ¹⁴ AHU IPC/MU/T/DGOPC/DSUH (MU/T/ Cx.22,6) ‘Projecto de moradias economicas’. Sanches de Gama 17th July 1958.
- ¹⁵ AHU ICP MU DGOPC DSUH (MU T Cx.22,1). Sousa Mendes, A. and Almeida, L. ‘Missão de estudo...’, 62.
- ¹⁶ AHU ICP MU DGOPC DSUH (MU T Cx. 4,1) ‘Habitações para praças Nativas...’

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