

Modernity as a Transcontinental Process

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More than ever, it is urgent to expand the new emerging consciousness focused on the need to include other territories in our efforts to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the “modern diaspora” (Scharp, 2000). Recently, the development of concepts such as “hybrid” or the “otherness” has been promoting historical analysis on architecture and politics in the 20th century beyond a Eurocentric vision, sustaining the idea of a transcontinental modernity. To further understanding the worldwide modern diaspora, it is essential to document and analyse the sub-Saharan Africa heritage in its relationship with other peripheral universes: Portugal and Brazil.

The formal, technological and ideological principles of the Modern Movement emerge through the 50s in the Portuguese African colonies (Angola and Mozambique) as a cultural stimulus articulated by geographic and climate specificities promoting modern vocabulary in acquiring new expression and scale. Those territories were geographically distant from the repressive control of the metropolis, representing a new world whose dimensions and need to be inhabited sponsored a vast field of experimentation and innovation in the areas of urban planning and construction. The lexicon of modern architecture seemed especially appropriate for dealing with the tropical climate: influenced by the Brazilian modern architecture, followed by Fry and Drew, or Koenigsberg’s researches, this architecture witness a serious concern with the adjustment to the particularities of the hot and humid climate of the tropics.

The recognition that a widespread awareness of the Modern Movement architecture has always been serving colonization (Kulterman, 2000) involves rethinking the basic principle of the modern welfare society while practising architecture as a mission. The paradox lies on the fact that Modern Movement architecture deals and stresses a special moment of political affirmation, freedom expression and democratic values, leading us to the question: how could this modern expression be a vehicle of colonisation? I believe that the answer may be sought through concepts of identity, memory and exchange (Carlos, 2007), never forgetting that, as Anatole Kop argued, modern architecture is not an aesthetic but the proposal of a better life.