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THE CONSTRUCTION OF A COLONIAL TROPE:  
MODERN ARCHITECTURE IN BEIRA AROUND INDEPENDENCE

Lisandra Mendonça  
*University of Coimbra, Portugal & Sapienza University of Rome, Italy*

ABSTRACT

The most common analysis of the urban plans and the architectonic heritage of the so called 'city of cement' of Beira, tends to identify that 'contact zone', during the colonial period, as a place of importation of a so-called 'Eurocentric' urbanism and urbanity. Understanding and evaluating the character, meaning, and relevance of colonial urban heritage implies, first and foremost, the study and analysis of colonial and postcolonial society: architecture and urbanism are inextricably linked to the needs, demands and possibilities of these societies. In the specific case of the city of Beira, the various constructive phases of modernist and modern architecture were sequential or concomitant with urbanization plans and corresponded to specific periods in which social, economic and administrative changes occurred practically in parallel. The postcolonial appropriation mechanism led to a natural process of 'refunctionalisation' and to the abandonment of many urban infrastructures (developed for a particular cultural, social and economic ambience, which find hard adequacy in the contemporaneous condition). The densification of the 'informal' occupation of the urbanized areas was accompanied by ruptures in the urban customs, or in other words, by the 'ruralisation' of the city. The physical aspects of the city reflect the social and cultural agency of intricate urban and rural livelihoods and the urbanity of its residents. The analysis was conducted by the author during her PhD field research and tended to interrogate Beira' extraordinary architectures and urban space as the embodiment of colonial constructions in order to unveil the postcolonial condition of its material heritage.