

## Suburbanization of house form and gender relations in a rural Portuguese agro-town

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### Summary

This paper examines changes in house form and gender related spatial behaviour in a rural agro-town in southern Portugal. Mediterranean societies are often characterized as rigidly dichotomized by gender in the use of space. As recent new forms of housing have been introduced into the community, the traditional male/female role patterns have been significantly altered. These changes are observed in domestic and extra domestic uses of space and have implications for roles within the household and community. An historical approach is used to describe and analyze built form and spatial patterns. The study finds that some changes in behaviour are linked to larger societal role changes while others are more directly influenced by built forms themselves.

### Résumé

Dans cet article, nous examinons les changements subis par les formes d'habitat et les comportements spatiaux liés aux rôles sexuels dans une petite ville rurale du sud du Portugal. Dans les sociétés méditerranéennes, une dichotomie rigide caractérise souvent la manière dont les sexes utilisent l'espace. Plus récemment, et à mesure que de nouvelles formes d'habitat étaient introduites dans la communauté, la structure traditionnelle des rôles féminins/masculins s'est transformée de manière importante. On peut observer cette évolution dans l'utilisation de l'espace - domestique ou non; elle a des conséquences pour la définition du rôle occupé par l'individu au sein de la famille et de la communauté. Nous utilisons une approche de type historique pour décrire et analyser les formes construites et la structure spatiale. Notre étude met en évidence le fait que certains changements de comportement sont liés à une évolution des rôles au niveau sociétal, alors que d'autres sont plus directement influencés par les formes construites elles-mêmes.

### 1. Introduction

During the last twenty years, a rapid transformation of rural Iberian landscapes has altered not only the physical images of traditional communities but reflects profound sociological changes. Land formerly reserved for agricultural purposes has been gradually converted to accommodate the inhabitants' expanding housing needs and demands for an improved standard of living. Parts of many traditional communities have

now acquired a suburban appearance characterized by the sprawl of detached and semi-detached houses and increased consumption of land. The suburbanization of built forms has implications for corresponding changes in behaviour and, in particular, for men's and women's relationships inside and outside the home (Young & Willmott, 1962; Wright, 1981; Saegert, 1980). Since social behaviour is inextricably linked to and mutually interacts with the physical environment (Ardener, 1981; Rapoport, 1985), built forms can be the cause or the result of behaviour. Changes in both housing forms and behaviour, however, are also linked to larger social processes. This paper examines changes in gender related spatial behaviour in a small rural town in southern Portugal.

Gender differences in social status and spatial organization are often described as particularly pronounced in southern European communities. The identification of women with a private sphere centered around the home and neighbourhood, and men with public areas of the town or village square, seems ubiquitous (Pitt-Rivers, 1954; Silverman, 1975; Friedl, 1967; Brandes, 1981; Cutileiro, 1971). Women gather in the neighbourhood but individually maintain networks of kin relations extending throughout the community. Men form cohesive groups at the cafe or tavern, as well as in the work place. Men are said to feel quite unwelcome at home while women scurry across public squares, dashing in and out of cafes to make purchases, largely because neither sex 'belongs' in the territories associated with the other. These separate spheres of activity, however, are not equal. Women's status is invariably rated lower than men's and men enjoy many more formal economic, legal and political prerogatives than women. Although men may hold formal positions of authority, women often have much informal power (Friedl, 1967, 108). In the Mediterranean, an elaborate moral code of honour and shame, ostensibly based on controlling women's sexuality, has provided the traditional rationale for these behaviours (Schneider, 1971).

Some theories of gender make reference to, or hold as a central underlying principle, a spatial dimension. One early theory argues that sexual asymmetry is greater in societies where women's private, home-centered sphere was separated from men's public domain. This notion is partially supported by the observation that 'distance' helps males achieve effective authority over females (Rosaldo, 1974, 26). Reiter argues that the 'sexual geography' and corresponding differential social status found in many Mediterranean communities is related to the formation of the state (1975, 273). In order for the state to consolidate and centralize power, male dominated kin groups had to be broken up and control transferred. By spatially segregating family and household functions from politico-economic activities, and by relegating each to a different sex, the state succeeded in disempowering each, although women lost more than men (Reiter, 1975, 278).

Through the construction and reconstruction of domestic spaces, built forms and settlement patterns have gradually evolved to accommodate and support traditional sexual asymmetry in rural Mediterranean communities. Densely nucleated settlements, initially constructed for mutual protection, and homes with limited domestic spaces fostered an intense but sexually segregated public and private social life. To provide for new housing needs, younger residents have introduced modern versions of vernacular house forms. These suburban style homes are associated with two distinct changes in gender related spatial behaviour. One change concerns familial patterns within the household itself, while the other is focused on neighbourhood relations. Although the

residents have pursued the newer house forms to attain certain goals, some effects may not be entirely intended.

In order to understand the relationship between changes in house form and spatial behaviour, it is essential to examine the development of both over time. Roderick Lawrence (1987) argues that because society is constantly changing, the use and meaning of domestic structures cannot be understood without employing an historical approach. Built forms are designed and used by diverse actors so that the patterned spatial behaviours and values, norms and affective meanings interact in multiple and complex ways (Lawrence, 1987, 51). In addition, since gender relations are embedded within entire role systems, the examination of changes must also be explored within the context of more general behavioural expectations and activity patterns. It cannot be decided *a priori* to what extent changes in gender related behaviour are associated with a particular built form or shifts in the role system; each must be disentangled through diachronic analysis.

## 2. Background

Vila Branca (a pseudonym) is a rural agro-town in the Alto Alentejo region of southern Portugal, with a population of roughly 800 people. Vila Branca was once a centre of important social, economic, governmental and religious functions; today the town retains its status as the parish seat (*sede de freguesia*). A typical Mediterranean climate of hot, dry summers and cool, mild winters supports an agricultural economy based on the production of wheat, olives, cork, and pigs. The traditional latifundist landowning pattern, evolving out of successive Roman and Moorish occupations and feudalism, concentrated the control of land in the hands of a few. Until the 1950s, the majority of the population engaged in agriculture as members of one of three distinct classes: landowners, sharecroppers and landless labourers. A small class of merchants and tradesmen often combined their occupations with agriculture for subsistence reasons.

By the end of World War II, the rural economy was in serious trouble. Agricultural production had declined and increasing mechanization of production further exacerbated unemployment problems (Cutileiro, 1971). Many young men and families migrated to the rapidly developing areas around Lisbon, or moved, initially through military service, to the African colonies of Angola and Mozambique. The tremendous exodus of ambitious younger residents has left Vila Branca with a concentration of elderly and relatively unskilled poor. Numerous vacant homes, however, are held by former residents living in the cities who visit Vila Branca on vacations and make retirement plans to return. Young people who stayed in, or moved or returned to Vila Branca since the 1960s, and especially those who returned from Africa, have found employment in the expanding nearby marble quarries, construction, civil service, and independent entrepreneurial activities. These jobs take residents outside the local community on a daily basis, and, in contrast to traditional agricultural work, they provide a steady source of income at salaries exceeding those of common labourers. This non-agricultural working and middle-class group has recently helped to raise living and consumer standards.

The basic economic and social unit in Vila Branca is the nuclear family household, comprised of husband, wife and unmarried offspring. Each nuclear family ideally occupies its own home, establishing a new residence at, or soon after, marriage. Wid-

owed parents continue to live alone rather than move in with married offspring in town. Of 191 households surveyed in 1976-77, 40% were occupied by a married couple and their unmarried offspring, 33% were occupied by couples living alone, and 16% were single residents; the average household size was 2.68 (Lawrence, 1979, 38). The appropriate roles for men and women are complementary: a man is expected to work outside the home to support his family while his wife is in charge of managing the household. The expectation that women will work for wages varies according to socioeconomic status. Sexual geography in Vila Branca is marked. When not employed, women spend their time around the home and the neighbourhood, except for trips to shop, do laundry or visit kin. Men dominate the central, public areas of town around the park and main streets, and congregate in the cafes and taverns.

The following three stage evolutionary scheme describes vernacular housing forms and related changes in social behaviour in Vila Branca. Data were collected in 1976-77, using anthropological techniques of participant observation and documentation of built forms; changes have been tracked during return visits in 1979, 1981, 1985 and 1987. Two aspects of residential morphology are described and analyzed: 1) domestic spaces of specific house forms, including numbers, types and arrangements of interior spaces, their orientation to exterior spaces, and characteristics of materials and facade; and 2) extra domestic spaces, or linkages between houses found in the town plan, including street systems, plot arrangements, and block plans.

### 3. Town Plan and Early Housing

The town plan of Vila Branca is, today, divided into two basic parts: *em cima* ('up above') which includes the oldest, most traditional town centre; and *em baixo* ('down below'), built more recently and holding the position of a new commercial centre. By the turn of the last century, most of the housing in Vila Branca clustered on a large hill protected by a 12th century Reconquista castle. Houses took two basic forms. The earlier, 'traditional' house had evolved over hundreds of years of successive Roman, Moorish and Christian occupation and adaptation to an agricultural way of life. These are the familiar white-washed, humble homes found in rural communities throughout the Iberian South. A more recent, 'urban' home was also established by the end of the 19th century. The formal classical facades of these structures are derived from Portuguese Renaissance architecture and its Italian influences. These forms found their fullest development in the nearby towns of Estremoz, Évora, and Vila Viçosa (Kubler, 1972).

Development of turn-of-the century Vila Branca's urban forms occurred incrementally through construction, renovation and infill. The plan of the traditional old town takes the form of an irregular grid with the *Rua Direita* ('Main Street') connecting the castle with the *igreja matriz* ('main church'), and secondary streets curving around the sides of the hilltop. On the *Rua Direita* are many of the grand facades of the urban style homes as well as the now abandoned Misericórdia chapel and hospital, together with former centres of business and government. Alternating with houses are the front entrances of a bakery, butcher shop and dry goods stores, most of which are located beneath or to the front of the owners' residences. The *Rua Direita* is the location of the government's *Casa do Povo* (literally, 'People's House') which provides social and medical services to the local community; nearby are the headquarters of the *Junta da Freguesia* (local government). The older part of town is also the site of two social clubs established during the last century by local elites. One club continues to

serve members as a men's tavern in the evenings and activity centre for teens and families on weekends and holidays. Before water and electricity were installed 20 years ago, two fountains at the top and base of the traditional town supplied Vila Branca with its primary sources of drinking water.

The traditional hilltop town was built for pedestrians and slow moving mule and horse-drawn carts. The quiet, narrow streets (approximately 15 feet wide) were originally paved with large marble chips from the nearby quarries, but in 1980 they were 'modernized' with an asphalt coating for automobile use. The streets of the old town have always provided gathering places for women, but not for men, because of their immediate proximity to the household and shops. Women are also likely to gather inside shops, sometimes spending hours gossiping and visiting with women from all over town. Men, on the other hand, rarely gather in the old part of town, except for an occasional elderly pair at the church square. Those too old or disabled to work, and the unemployed, gather daily *em baixo* where the major highway passes through town. During the late afternoons landowners and merchants stop to chat along the main thoroughfare, and in the evenings most men can be found in the taverns or club, sharing drinks and talking about politics.

### 3.1 Traditional Housing

Traditional homes of stone, rubble and/or tamped earth construction, plastered and whitewashed, are found in town and as farmhouse versions <sup>1</sup>, on the isolated *montes* ('hills') in the countryside. Wooden doors with openable windows provide ventilation and light, but very few windows punctuate the stark white walls. A single contrasting band of colour, often blue <sup>2</sup>, ochre, red, or grey-black, is used to outline the openings and to paint a 'splash' at the foundation. Tile roofs and slate floors are traditional, although concrete floors have been added in recent renovations. Although none of these houses were originally equipped with water or electricity, since the 1960s most have had these services added. Water is supplied by a single spigot located near the front door. Sewer lines were installed in the early 1970s, but not until the late 1970s did some residents begin to construct bathrooms.

The attached single family town houses have one storey and a second floor loft (*sotão*), and range in size from two to seven rooms (Fig. 1) <sup>3</sup>. The larger homes were owned by sharecroppers or small and medium landowners, while the smaller homes were occupied by landless labourers or poor sharecroppers. Today, most of the elderly, disabled, and poorer labourers own or rent these homes; a few are rented by younger working class families.

The interior consists of the central living space, or *cozinha* (literally, 'kitchen'), which combines kitchen, dining and living room functions. This space is where most family life traditionally took place, but it was also used for butchering and preparing

<sup>1</sup> The farmhouse is usually one storey but the plan is different from its counterpart in town. Because many of these houses were originally occupied by the landowners, they contained formal sitting rooms in which to entertain guests who had often traveled from some distance away. Today, the farms are occupied by managers who are landless themselves but are employed by the owner.

<sup>2</sup> Blue paint is often used in the Mediterranean to encircle openings such as windows and doors as a device to prevent the entrance of evil spirits or ward off the evil eye (Dionisopoulos-Mass, 1976).

<sup>3</sup> The author wishes to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of Daniel Lawrence in taking field measurements of houses, and Daniel Lawrence and Scot Ferguson for preparing final drawings.

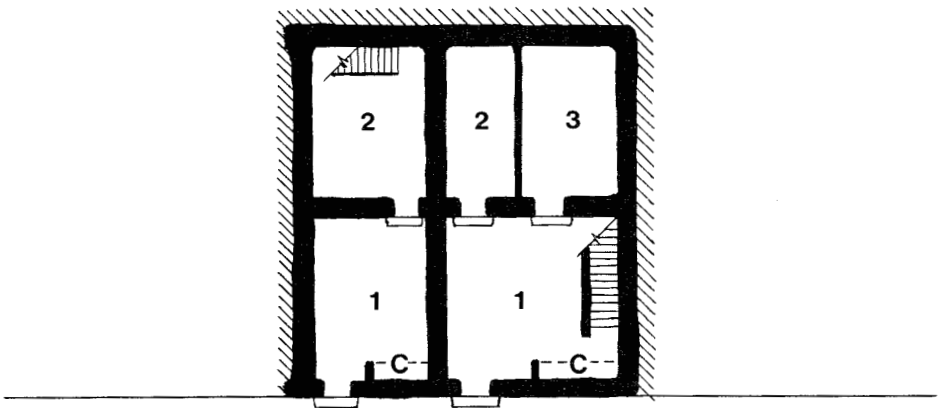
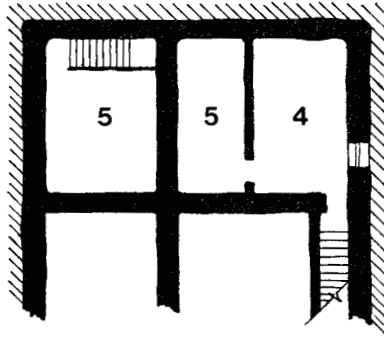


Fig. 1 Layout of two traditional houses in a rural agro-town in the Alto Alentejo region of southern Portugal. 1 - *cozinha*; 2 - *quarto de dormir*; 3 - *quarto de dormir*, formerly a *cavaliariça*; 4 - *sala*, formerly a *quarto de dormir*; 5 - *dispensa*; C - *chaminé*

Plan de deux maisons traditionnelles dans une petite ville rurale de la région de Alto Alentejo, au sud du Portugal. 1 - *cozinha*; 2 - *quarto de dormir*; 3 - *quarto de dormir*, ancienne *cavaliariça*; 4 - *sala*, ancien *quarto de dormir*; 5 - *dispensa*; C - *chaminé*

sausages from the family's annual pig slaughter. The *cozinha's* primary feature is the *chaminé* ('chimney') which is a large, white plastered hood that extends into the room and stops roughly four feet over the *lume* ('hearth'). The interior of the *chaminé* is four feet deep with about thirty feet clearance inside and, in addition to providing space for cooking and smoking sausages, it serves as the main source of household heat. To warm themselves during the cooler months, household members gathered around on small chairs under the hood of the fireplace which traps the heat. To the rear of the *cozinha* are one or more bedrooms (*quartos de dormir*) and storerooms (*dispensas*) which may be also, alternately, located in the loft. Until about 20 years ago, many residents used at least one storeroom (*cabana do macho* or *cavalariaça*) to house farm animals.

Today's uses of interior household spaces are generally consistent with what we know of the past; gender patterns have not changed radically. Although the house is said to belong to all nuclear family residents, in practice it is the exclusive domain of the wife<sup>4</sup>. As manager of the household, she controls the budget and takes primary responsibility for the care and maintenance of the house interior<sup>5</sup>. Husbands may make repairs on the house, but they never help, nor are they expected to help, with daily household tasks. Men generally take their meals, sleep, bathe and dress in the house and are present for family ritual events. Men do not spend leisure time at home with their families, but are most often found with friends at the tavern or, on weekends, hunting or fishing. Husbands and wives typically share a bedroom and double bed while children ideally have their own bedrooms. Because of the small size of these houses, however, children most often share with a same sex sibling or sometimes sleep in the parents' bedroom. Although household sizes are smaller than in previous times, and therefore less demanding on space, even today a child can rarely claim a bedroom for him/herself.

The central domestic space is considered the most representative of family life itself. A dining table with numerous chairs and a breakfront showing valued family possessions (china, souvenirs, photographs and awards) are standard furnishings; occasionally a family has room for a sofa. A prominently displayed television and radio or stereo are recent additions, as are the refrigerator and stove. Numerous small chairs for sitting in the *chaminé* or out-of-doors also line the walls. Aside from cooking and eating, the primary activities that occur around the dining table include visiting with family, children doing homework, women sewing or knitting, reading and, more recently, watching television. On cold evenings, family members sit in the *chaminé* but must turn their heads uncomfortably to see the television across the room. Reading,

<sup>4</sup> It is important to keep in mind that the current residents of these homes tend to be the older, poorer, and therefore more traditional, members of the community.

<sup>5</sup> Women's work inside the home includes all food preparation and serving; women clean the house and are responsible for the care of clothing. Two strategies are used for laundry activities: traditionally, women took their laundry to the river where they met in groups and spent the day; today, with a household source of water, women are likely to launder clothes in the *quintal* and only occasionally visit the river to wash. Women are also responsible for child care which involves women with pre-school children in constant supervision at home and, after children enter school, requires the preparation of lunch and after school care. Thus, a typical day for a woman with children in school involves awakening all the family members, preparing breakfast for them and making certain they leave on time. At lunchtime, husband and children return for lunch, and in the afternoon children return home to work on homework. Dinner is prepared and served when the husband returns from the cafe, after which he leaves the children and his wife at home for the evening; they often retire before he arrives home. Aside from sleeping and dressing which takes place in bedrooms, all activity takes places in the *cozinha* as a joint family activity.

for the literate, and other tasks are also accomplished in the *chaminé* by hanging a bare lightbulb inside the shaft.

Because the *cozinha* opens directly onto the street without a formal entry, the interior domestic space first encountered is private. Entry without invitation is the privilege only of household members and close kin (families of origin and married offspring and their children). Guarding against the unwanted or uncontrolled flow of household information to the outside is ultimately the responsibility of women while, by comparison, individual privacy within the household is of secondary importance. Precautions are taken in granting access to others and husbands defer to their wife's judgment when uncertain (Lawrence, 1982). Women keep a comfortable chair next to the front door to keep an eye out for passers-by and other street activity while completing household tasks. Visiting between households involves primarily women and their neighbours and female relatives; it most often occurs in the late afternoon or evening after dinner when men are not at home. Entertaining at home occurs only on special occasions and involves family members exclusively.

Traditional attached dwellings usually fill the entire lot, directly fronting the street and sharing common walls with neighbours on three sides. Many homes, but not all, have a *quintal*, a small kitchen garden, to the rear or side, or across the street. The *quintal* is also considered an extension of the household, although it is not typically used as living space. Husband and wife are jointly responsible for its maintenance and may work there together. It is the only home-related space in which men may spend considerable time working, if any. Control of the *quintal* is less stringently observed because it is physically difficult to completely secure its privacy, and casual visiting with neighbours and passers-by occurs 'over the wall' between houses or directly from the street.

Because traditional homes are small and windowless without a setback from the street, household living space easily extends into the street. In fact, the street is the most important social space in the neighbourhood linking families together in daily coexistence. A neighbourhood is defined by the space that is actively shared by small blocks of about ten contiguous households<sup>6</sup>. So important is women's participation in the street that neighbours expect to see one another during the morning hours as household chores are completed. To fail to appear invites suspicion and gossip about laziness or family troubles, so women appear daily, even if they are ill. As in the interior of the house, a wife is responsible for maintaining the facade, white-washing it at least twice a year, and personalizing it with colour trim. In addition, she keeps the street in front of her house clean by sweeping daily, washing often, and removing weeds.

Socially, a woman controls the street in front of her house. Almost every afternoon during fair weather a woman pulls a chair from the house to the street to prepare food for the evening meal or knit a sweater. One woman is joined by another, each in front of her own house, or a group may cluster together, and children gather on the stoop near their mothers to eat a snack or do homework after school. Soon a lively conversational group forms. Passers-by often stop to chat with the seated women as they pass on their way shopping or home. None will stay, however, unless invited by one of the resident neighbours who offers a chair (see Hirschon, 1982).

<sup>6</sup> People retain their status as neighbours even after they have moved away. Being a neighbour means that an individual can simply call into the house from the door to gain permission to enter.



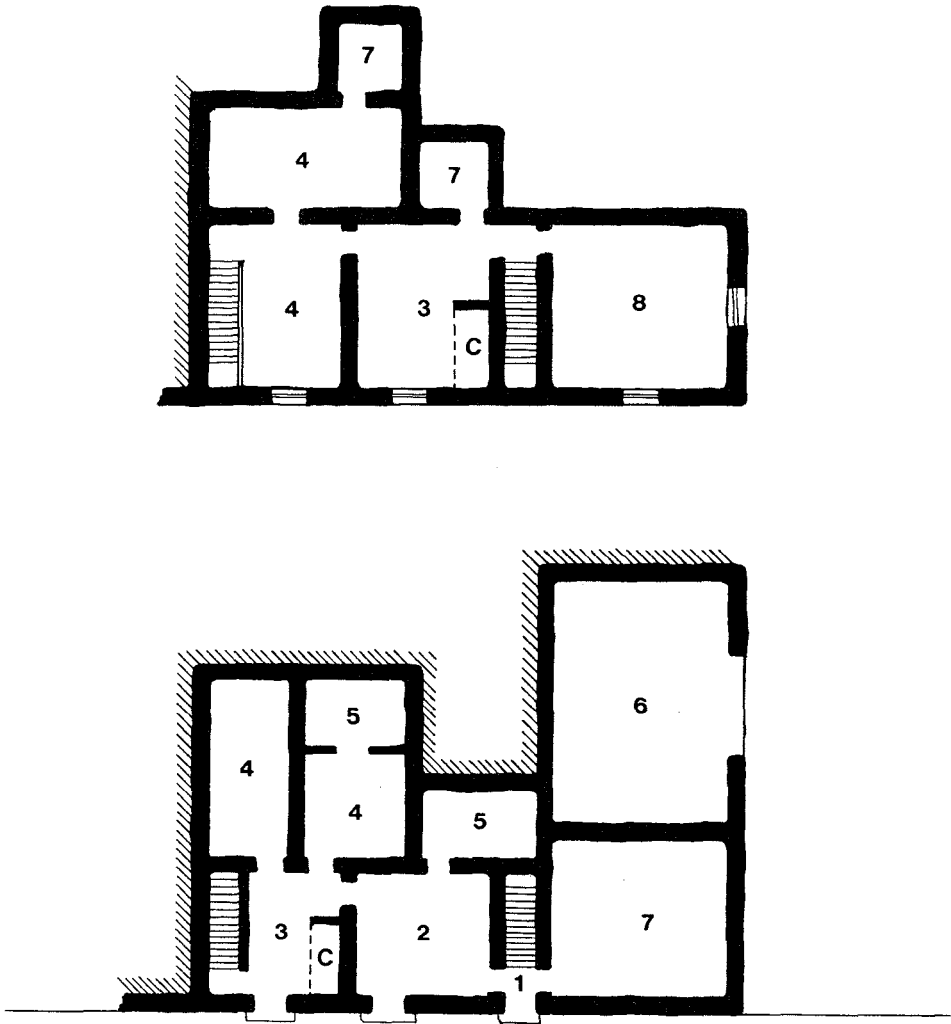


Fig. 2 Layout of an urban house 'brought' to a rural agro-town in the Alto Alentejo region of southern Portugal. 1 - *casa de entrada*; 2 - *loja*; 3 - *cozinha*; 4 - *quarto de dormir*; 5 - *dispensa*; 6 - *garagem* (garage, formerly a *cavaliariça*); 7 - *armazem* (store-house); 8 - *sala de visitas*; C - *chaminé*

Plan de deux maisons traditionnelles dans une petite ville rurale de la région de Alto Alentejo, au sud du Portugal. 1 - *casa de entrada*; 2 - *loja*; 3 - *cozinha*; 4 - *quarto de dormir*; 5 - *dispensa*; 6 - *garagem* (garage, ancienne *cavaliariça*); 7 - *armazem* (magasin); 8 - *sala de visitas*; C - *chaminé*

### 3.2 *The Urban House*

The more recent 'urban' house, derived from classical architectural styles, was brought to Vila Branca by the local landowners. These homes were always two-storey with symmetrically placed front door and numerous windows. Although constructed of the same humble materials, marble was often used for stairs, thresholds, balconies, and window sills; and decorative elements including wrought iron grills and painted plaster window and door moldings were added. These were the homes of wealthy landowning families who affected a life style of urbanity associated with the more prestigious nearby towns and cities.

The urban house introduces an important new room, the *sala*, for entertaining guests: a *sala de visitas* ('parlor') for formal visiting or *sala de jantar* ('dining room') (Fig. 2). In addition, a *casa de entrada* ('entry') or *corredor* ('hallway') permitted residents to conduct business with visitors discreetly, away from inquiring eyes of the street, but without intruding into the family's private living area. The dining room, where the family ate together, and parlor were sometimes combined as the *sala comun*. Family, and non-family guests of the same or higher social status, could be entertained in the *sala*. Heating the upstairs was accomplished by using braziers of burning charcoal or, occasionally, by an additional *chaminé*. The *cozinha* and storage areas were usually located on the ground floor along with storage facilities for farm equipment. In addition, many landowning families also operated a store (*loja*) on the ground floor, selling produce and butchering livestock for sale. While the owners lived upstairs, the hired help worked and sometimes lived below.

Although the wives of large landowners were expected to maintain the household, they did so with the assistance of servants who ran errands and performed most domestic tasks. While wives managed their activities, they were able to play a more secluded role, dabbling in domestic arts and crafts and indulging children in constant attention. Landowning husbands controlled the more substantial household budget, and often conducted business in the *sala* at home. Nevertheless, they made regular evening visits to the private clubs.

The original pattern of life and use of domestic space in the urban house have almost disappeared in contemporary Vila Branca. Most wealthy families have moved to the cities, leaving their houses behind to be subdivided into rental apartments for working class families. A few elderly landowning couples still residing in Vila Branca live conservatively, hiring local help on an occasional basis. Their urban style houses, however, function primarily for visits from family, especially during community celebrations.

## 4. First Expansion: 1900-1950

The houses built during the first expansion of Vila Branca resulted from sales by 19th century Liberal and Republican governments of ecclesiastical and crown lands, and the redistribution of portions of the town commons (*balديو*). Many enterprising sharecroppers and landowners were able to increase their holdings and become rich; they formed a new bourgeois class. By the middle of the 19th century, transportation and communication networks had improved considerably and migration to the cities increased, intensifying contacts and facilitating the importation of urban housing styles.

During the years of the First Republic (1910-1926), construction of houses and businesses expanded beyond the original hilltop site and spread in a linear fashion along roads leading out of town in three directions. The land on which homes were built had been part of the town's commons that was subdivided and purchased by newly affluent agriculturists and an ambitious class of merchants. The new *Rua das Casas Novas* ('Street of the New Houses') was thirty feet wide, more than double the width of the *Rua Direita*, and could easily accommodate automobile traffic. Other houses were constructed along the major highway that runs through town and were built by merchants who combined a shop in the front with living quarters to the rear. Lot sizes were generally larger than in the old part of town with ample space in the rear for the traditional *quintal*. Linearly arranged clusters of houses, sharing common walls, were built without any setback from the street.

Some of the houses that first appeared resembled traditional houses with the characteristic *chaminé* in front. Later structures, however, began to imitate the urban style which had also become popular in a modified form in nearby towns. The new house forms expressed the aspirations of an affluent bourgeoisie who wished to import the conveniences and style associated with the upper class and city life within a rural context. Thus, facade treatments of symmetrically placed windows, wrought iron and raised, painted moldings are commonplace. Although most houses are white-washed and have contrasting trim, some have recently been painted with commercial tints in deep colours such as rose, brown, or green. Today, many of these homes are owned or rented by young and middle aged families; the husbands are steadily employed in some form of skilled agricultural or manual labour or in civil service or professional occupations.

Most of the houses along the *Rua das Casas Novas* are one storey. The traditional *chaminé* and *cozinha* have shifted to the rear of the house next to a backyard *quintal* (Fig. 3). The primary organizing feature of the house is the formal entry or the corridor that extends from front to rear, off which all other rooms are located, either to one side or symmetrically. The first room off the hall, with windows facing the street, is the *sala de visitas/jantar* which serves as a formal space for entertaining guests. Numerous bedrooms and storage rooms are located between the *sala* and *cozinha*.

Perhaps the most obvious overall change over the traditional house is the increased opportunity for family and individual privacy. The *quintal* is now relegated to an enclosed backyard area; although visiting may occur over the fence to either side, it is restricted to immediate neighbours. In addition, because the streets are wide and often busy with traffic, women do not gather in groups to gossip as they do *em cima*. Now and then, a solitary housewife pulls her chair to a sunny street location, but generally the streets are empty except for occasional pedestrians. Inside the house, opportunities for privacy have increased with the number of rooms. With more bedrooms, children and parents are more likely to have private rooms. The addition of the hallway permits visiting or business to be conducted at the door without invading the family's privacy. The creation of the *sala* for formal visiting allows the family to put its best face forward when entertaining at home. Today, the television may be placed in the *sala*, which is heated by electric or gas heaters, but more often is placed in the *cozinha* even though the family must huddle in the *chaminé* and twist their heads to watch.

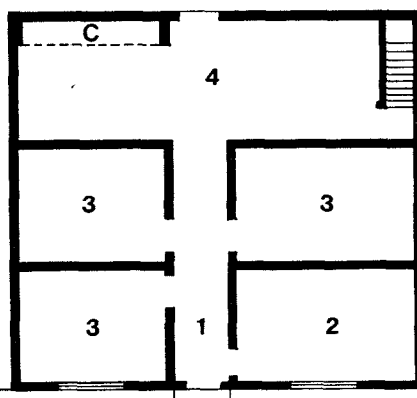
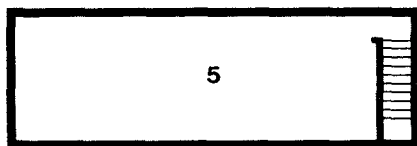


Fig. 3 Layout of a 'first expansion house' (period 1910-1926). 1 - *casa de entrada* and *corredor*; 2 - *sala de visitas / jantar*; 3 - *quarto de dormir*; 4 - *cozinha*; 5 - *dispensa*; C - *chaminé*

Plan d'une maison datant de la 'première période d'expansion' (1910-1926). 1 - *casa de entrada* and *corredor*; 2 - *sala de visitas / jantar*; 3 - *quarto de dormir*; 4 - *cozinha*; 5 - *dispensa*; C - *chaminé*

While the form of housing in this phase began to imitate upper class and urban styles, social behaviour did not make a radical change. No full-time servants were provided for or hired, although occasional day help might be arranged. Women were not secluded but still retained primary control over and responsibility for the home. Their husbands, by and large, still spent their leisure time at the café. While these homes today are inhabited by a mixture of classes whose lifestyles vary, the original house form represented a transition between a predominantly two-class rural agricultural life style and an emerging middle-class model.

## 5. Recent Infill and Expansion: 1950 to Present

Although migration has drastically depopulated Vila Branca, it has not eased the shortage of housing because many migrants retain their rural homes. In 1976, the new democratic government began subdividing and selling plots remaining in the town commons to young, working and middle-class families for single family homes. Suburban style siting was imposed through the *urbanização* ('urbanization') programme by engineers in the district's public works department<sup>7</sup>. Grid-like street layouts were designed to accommodate automobiles, and simplify the location of utilities and delivery of public services. Lot sizes varied but were generous, giving each house a front and back yard and, because most houses are detached, side yards as well.

The use of prefabricated building materials such as hollow clay blocks, standard size reinforced concrete beams, and aluminium doors and windows gives houses everywhere in Portugal the same 'modern' appearance. Perhaps the most highly valued universal addition is the modern bathroom (*casa de banho*); a modern kitchen is also prized. Conveniences such as hot and cold running water are provided, but no heating systems other than portable electric or gas heaters, or the traditional brazier, is included. Houses are one or two storeys. The decorative use of marble and tile on asymmetrically arranged facades, however, betrays both traditional and urban styles. The internal organization of space has also changed to elaborate alterations introduced during the previous period (Fig. 4). The *cozinha* is placed to the rear of the house, next to the *quintal*, but the *chaminé* is now only expressed as a vent for the stove<sup>8</sup>. A typical plan includes a T or L shaped entry and central hall that connects a *sala (de visitas, jantar or comun)*, *cozinha*, *quartos de dormir*, and *casa de banho*.

Interiors of the new houses represent a style of life to which many of the upwardly mobile families aspire. New furniture and modern appliances are prominently displayed, even though they may be infrequently used. Parents and children have secured more privacy with their own bedrooms but children spend more time in their rooms playing with friends and studying. Family leisure centres around the television which may be placed in the kitchen, *sala comun*, or the new *sala de estar* ('living room'). A sofa is placed wherever the television is located. By setting aside a space for television viewing, families self-consciously attempt to encourage changing life styles. Rather than visit the café each evening, men tend to stay at home. Women are especially eager to have their husbands help with child care. Men, however, are also more likely to assert authority over their wives and children at home, demanding service, or ordering the children to play quietly or go to their rooms. When women spend evenings with their husbands and children, they generally stop receiving visitors or visiting family members in other parts of town.

<sup>7</sup> To usefully employ the numerous architects and engineers who returned from Angola without jobs, the government hired teams to design the expansion of rural towns and villages that were experiencing a housing shortage. The first designs developed by the office in nearby Estremoz were not grid or linear plans at all, but showed some sensitivity to the creation of neighbourhood spaces. Because these returnees from Africa lacked sufficient political clout, however, the plans were not approved by the district office. Only after a suitable gift was paid to the district office was the new grid-like plan developed, approved and implemented.

<sup>8</sup> Many new houses have added a *casa de matança* ('slaughter house') to the *quintal*. It is equipped with the traditional *chaminé* to accommodate the preparation and smoking of sausages from the family's annual pig killing. Frequently, these *cabanas* are used during the cool winter months for heating and cooking as a means to conserve on the high costs of energy.

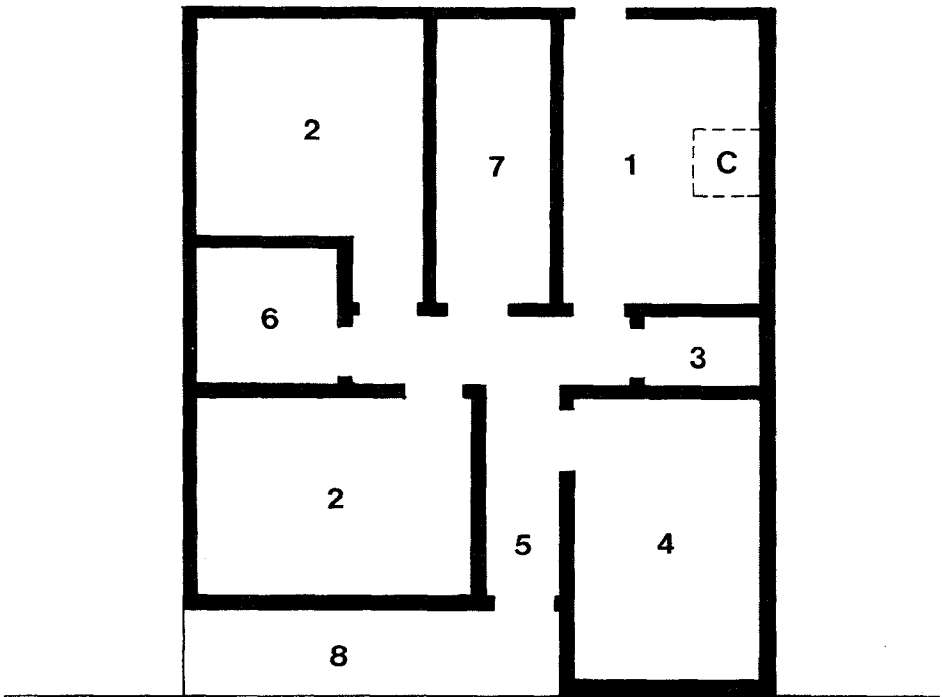


Fig. 4 A recent suburban house in a rural agro-town in the Alto-Alentejo region of southern Portugal. 1 - *cozinha*; 2 - *quarto de dormir*; 3 - *dispensa*; 4 - *sala comum*; 5 - *casa de entrada and corredor*; 6 - *casa de banho*; 7 - *sala de estar*; 8 - *varanda (porch)*; C - *chaminé*

Une maison périphérique récente dans une petite ville rurale de la région de Alto-Alentejo, au sud du Portugal. 1 - *cozinha*; 2 - *quarto de dormir*; 3 - *dispensa*; 4 - *sala comum*; 5 - *casa de entrada and corredor*; 6 - *casa de banho*; 7 - *sala de estar*; 8 - *varanda (vérande)*; C - *chaminé*

Because planned *urbanização* density is not as high as in other parts of town, and because only a third of the project has been completed, neighbourhood social life is sparse. The low density reduces fears about the lack of privacy for conducting business or personal matters out-of-doors. Even so, front facades are usually shut forbiddingly tight and most circulation flows out the rear through the *cozinha*. Residents spend most out-of-doors time in the *quintal* behind the house rather than in front yards or on the street. No chairs are pulled to the exterior and no social groups form, despite the absence of automobile traffic. Now passers-by circulate anonymously, while visitors must make a commitment to pay a formal visit by entering the front yard and stopping on the front porch. Women feel little sense of responsibility for the upkeep of the streets and weeds have invaded in cracks and crevices throughout the new development. In the *urbanização*, spaces seem to take on absolute dimensions - either they are entirely public and anonymous, belonging to an invisible neighbourhood, or private and associated with the single family dwelling; there is little in-between. With the increased consumption of land, residents have secured their exterior privacy at the expense of traditional neighbourhood sociability. Many residents regret the loss.

## 6. Conclusion

Two major gender related changes in spatial behaviour have co-occurred with the appearance of the suburban house form; one is a function of larger societal changes and shifts in roles, while the other appears to be directly linked to changes in house form itself. Men have shifted their evening activities from the community focused café to their homes and, in particular, to a room or area set aside for family television viewing. Women, on the other hand, have been the most directly affected by new house forms and suburban siting configurations, by withdrawing from traditional neighbourhood and visiting patterns.

The men who live in the new housing are primarily those who spend more time at home, although some exceptions occur among younger families in other parts of town. Thus, house form itself does not necessarily generate the new behaviour, though certain interior spaces may support it. Further, acquiring a television and providing a viewing space is not sufficient to cause males to shift leisure time participation to home. Cafés have long had televisions and many men visited the cafés for that purpose before they purchased their own. More important are the changes in traditional male roles which have been occurring within and outside the community. The traditional family man spent time at the café maintaining social, political and economic ties with peers and patrons. He represented his family to the community, defended its honour, and sought to preserve and increase its economic base. Evening appearances at the café, like women's appearances on the street, were essential indicators of a family's standing within the community and helped maintain informal networks of family security.

Among the younger, more upwardly mobile families, men hold steady non-agricultural jobs outside town that do not depend on the maintenance of community ties. Café life has therefore changed and, although some old haunts are still dominated by older men, few young married men spend their evenings there. If they go at all, they may take their wives out to one of the newer cafés. These findings are consistent with observations of urban working class families who moved to new towns in England (Young & Willmott, 1962). Bott argues that conjugal segregation, inside and outside the nuclear family, is related to the lack of geographic and social mobility and that as mobility increases, segregation decreases and families become more "home-centered" (Bott, 1971, 258). Rather than move to totally new communities, however, Vila Branca families have acquired some of these new behaviour patterns within their own community.

The suburban house form has had its greatest direct, but not necessarily intentional, impact on women. With the increased consumption of land and acquisition of privacy, the highly sociable neighbourhood spaces have disappeared. The siting of the suburban house, however, expresses changes that have been gradually evolving over time. Yet, the opportunities for groups of women to collectively control and dominate their special territory seem suddenly gone, and the use and meaning of neighbourhood is more fragmented.

While the sexual division of labour has not changed radically, men's presence at home and women's withdrawal from the neighbourhood will certainly put pressure on traditional roles. Women have lost informal power and autonomy, and the support of neighbourhood solidarity. The question women ask is whether men's presence at home can be converted from mere presence to real help. On the other hand, maintaining local festivals and community leadership traditionally depended on café life. As extra-

domestic roles shift, men's withdrawal from the café may signal an overall decline in community involvement.

Over time, the residents of Vila Branca have gradually increased the exterior and interior privacy of the nuclear family household through spatial means. Residents have also added more spaces for specialized uses such as formal entertaining and, more recently, modern bathroom conveniences. While these changes generally reflect shifts in behaviour, it is important to note that built forms are more conservative than non-material cultural forms. Built forms may continue to represent and support behaviour that has long since changed, as people can often adapt to an awkward situation. The introduction of new built forms may also have unintended effects, as in the case of Vila Branca's new neighbourhoods. The analysis of any change in spatial behaviour, however, can only be viewed with a longitudinal view of role systems and their cumulative interactions with built forms.

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