

## PARALLEL PATHS

Alexandra Cardoso, Maria Helena Maia and Alexandra Trevisan

CEAA | Centro de Estudos Arnaldo Araújo (FCT uRD 4041)

Escola Superior Artística do Porto (ESAP), Portugal

### Abstract

*This study focuses on the work produced during the first three decades of the 20th century by four architects, who were born and lived at the two ends of Southern Europe: Greece and Portugal. They belonged to two successive generations – Raúl Raul Lino (1879-1974) and Aristotelis Zachos (1871-1939) belonged to the first generation; Carlos Ramos (1897-1969) and Dimitris Pikionis (1887-1968) belonged to the second generation – and they all shared the same ability to dialogue with modernity while remaining close to local tradition. Therefore, they allow us to rethink the role played by their projects in the architectural culture of their time beyond the habitual reading of the binomial centre/ periphery diffused by historiography.*

**Keywords:** Modern Architecture, Portuguese architecture, Greek Architecture, Vernacular Architecture, South

This study focuses on the work produced during the first three decades of the 20th century by four architects, who were born and lived at the two ends of Southern Europe: Greece and Portugal. They belonged to two successive generations – Raul Lino (1879-1974) and Aristotelis Zachos (1871-1939) belonged to the first generation; Carlos Ramos (1897-1969) and Dimitris Pikionis (1887-1968) belonged to the second generation – and they all shared the same ability to dialogue with modernity while remaining close to local tradition. Therefore, they allow us to rethink the role played by their projects in the architectural culture of their time beyond the habitual reading of the binomial centre/ periphery diffused by historiography.

Both Portugal and Greece were affected by identity crises during various periods of their modern history, with some specific moments of national humiliation in both cases – the English *Ultimatum* to Portugal<sup>1</sup> and *The*

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<sup>1</sup> The British demand for the African territory located between Angola and Mozambique and that corresponds mainly to Zimbabwe culminated in 1890 in an ultimatum in which Portugal either retreated or faced war with Britain. The Portuguese government's acquiescence to British demands led to an internal movement of opposition and revolt which significantly advanced the republican cause, as well as intensified nationalism.

*Catastrophe* to Greece<sup>2</sup> – with impact in a subsequent emergence of nationalist and identity impetuses, with which the recovery of vernacular architecture is closely linked.

The subsequent demand for *Greekness* and *Portugueseness* in both countries architectural culture corresponds to a demand for national roots to support it. The search for both a *Portuguese house* and a *Greek house* constitutes the more visible aspect of this aspect common to the two countries.

In Portugal, this incident originated an outbreak of nationalism in the press that resulted in the emergence of appeals for the nationalization of art and architecture. As concerns the latter, these appeals lead to a large extent to the investment in creating the *Portuguese house* that would constitute an alternative to imported architectural models.<sup>3</sup>

In the Greek case, the effects caused by *The Catastrophe* are very similar to the Portuguese case, however with some nuances related to the definition of boundaries. The Greeks were compelled to redefine their “own spiritual and intellectual origins into a search for the components of a self-generated cultural identity” (Giacumacatos, 1999: 27). The demand for Greekness led to the reconstruction of the national self-esteem that had been deeply fractured. But this demand also acted as a political and cultural weapon, essential to search for autonomous cultural references that could reconstruct an identity of a people, anchored on its own geographical and cultural territory, and achieve their recognition as a nation.

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<sup>2</sup> This historical episode has its roots in the expansionist political ideology that was diffused as *Megali Idea* by the Greek State, almost immediately after the international recognition of its frontiers in 1831. The idea was to create a big state as a revival of the Byzantine empire that would assemble all regions inhabited by Greeks in their multi-ethnicity, and that encompassed not only the area within the national borders, but also in Ottoman territory, where most of the Greeks actually lived. After advances and retreats from its original premises, this attempt ended as a complete failure in 1922 (a defeat by the Turkish and loss of territory as Smyrna) and had such humiliating and traumatic consequences (about 1,3 million Greeks were deported from ottoman territory) that it is denominated by the Greeks as *The Catastrophe*

<sup>3</sup> The stylistic scenography-like combinations and the fashion of the chalet, which had spread in the outskirts of Lisbon and were described as “an hybrid and hallucinated confusion of the Swiss chalet, the English cottage, the Norman fortification, the Tartarian minaret and the Muslim mosque - were considered a stain and outrage in the Portuguese (Ortigão, 1896:115) and were particularly criticized.

The “discovery” of vernacular architecture in both countries provided a new universe of reference in this exploration of possible paths. The examples that could be found in poor and rural milieus were given special importance and were, therefore, understood as the most genuine representative of national culture.<sup>4</sup>

However, the vernacular reference is not the only one present in the formal invention of the *Portuguese* or *Greek house*, which must be understood within the framework of the general movement to nationalize architecture. Various contradictory suggestions, criticisms and compliments were made to the architects in charge of this task.

Architectures of different styles disputed the place as the main holder of signals both in *Portugueseness* and in *Greekness*.

In the Portuguese case, one argued that the *Manueline* formal repertory should be adopted as reference<sup>5</sup> and it was used in some of the first attempts to execute the *Portuguese house*.<sup>6</sup> An alternative was seen in the first projects by young Raul Lino, or in the projects with a *rural taste*, such as the house of Conde Aroso in Cascais (Maia, 2012).

In the Greek case, there were some militants' currents in defence of a pure style to replace the cultural memory of the New Greek State to their cultural roots, after a “dark” period of more than three hundred and fifty years of Ottoman dominion.

At the first moment of post- independence, the rebirth of Classicism was very comfortable because it was completely integrated into the European architectural culture trend of the time. The fact, the neoclassicism “was not

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<sup>4</sup> This approach resulted, to a larger extent, from a still existing Romantic view of the people as “situated outside progress, regarded as a bastion of archaism and tradition, immutable entity faithful to itself, prime emblem of a «domestic» alterity that shall demonstrate rather than be demonstrated.” (Branco & Leal, 1995: 5)

<sup>5</sup> Thus, one shall not wonder that in 1895 the partisans of Manueline ranked preferably among those demanding the nationalisation of architecture. In concrete terms, the architects were advised to search for inspiration in, and copy parts of, the Mosteiro dos Jerónimos as “present buildings for present uses.” (Pereira, 1895: 26)

<sup>6</sup> For some authors of the late 19th century/ early 20th century, the scenographic compositions of Francisco Vilaça, which were dominated by image values and were strongly marked by Manueline reference, constitute a possible way. See: the O'Neill/Castro Guimarães House, in Cascais that was then appointed as one of the examples of the “absolutely satisfactory solution” to the problem of the *casa portuguesa*.

only considered an 'international' architecture but an architecture that also returned to its 'birthplace'" (Tsiambaos, 2014).

However, that connection with a glorious past that one attempted to recover, albeit artificially, was the very basis of a gradual loss of adherence to neoclassicism, which was becoming increasingly strange and uprooted in face of more genuine cultural values that Greece aimed to recover at the end of the century as is the byzantine or the vernacular culture.

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With distinct degrees of success, the four architects in study share, the same "perspective of particular balance between a local critical conscience and an international critical influence", as it was already argued by Pedro Vieira de Almeida (2013: 52-53), with regard to the two Portuguese architects. We can also accentuate the complicity of the two Greek architects with cultural values that are closer to the East than to the West.

Both the understanding of the potential cultural complexity of modernity, in which to be modern wouldn't imply the rejection of the tradition, and the effort to translate this conviction into pedagogical and architectural terms constitute further characteristics in common.

Their inherent motivations for the local traditions as well as the specific way how influences of vernacular architecture were understood by each one, reflected in a constant self-reflexion and in a critical stance towards their cultural and professional milieu, constitute a remarkable contribute in the ever present and lively debate between regional and international.

These four architects were somehow pioneers, at different moments, on the paths outlined from vernacular culture, which we believed, may have acted as a critical filter through which to read architectural currents coming from abroad.

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Raul Lino and Aristotelis Zachos have in common the fact that they studied architecture in Germany. Lino studied also in England (Pimentel, 1970: 8).

It is precisely, in Germany, that they enter in contact with the international debate on the detached house of the bourgeoisie, born with the English *domestic revival* and promoted in Germany by the work by Muthesius (1904).

Thus the concern shown by both Lino and Zachos regarding the detached house and search with a traditional foundation to reconvert it, in order to equip it with the comfort demanded at the time, has an absolutely modern character. Moreover, based in their respective countries, Lino and Zachos concerned themselves with a problem that occupied a central place in the contemporary discussions taking place in the Anglo-Saxon world, and created original solutions in order to solve it. "Their common feature was that all constituted original syntheses of innovative and traditional elements. They have got all the modern amenities without the stylistic homogeneity of modern homes". (Fessas-Emmanouil, 2001:84)



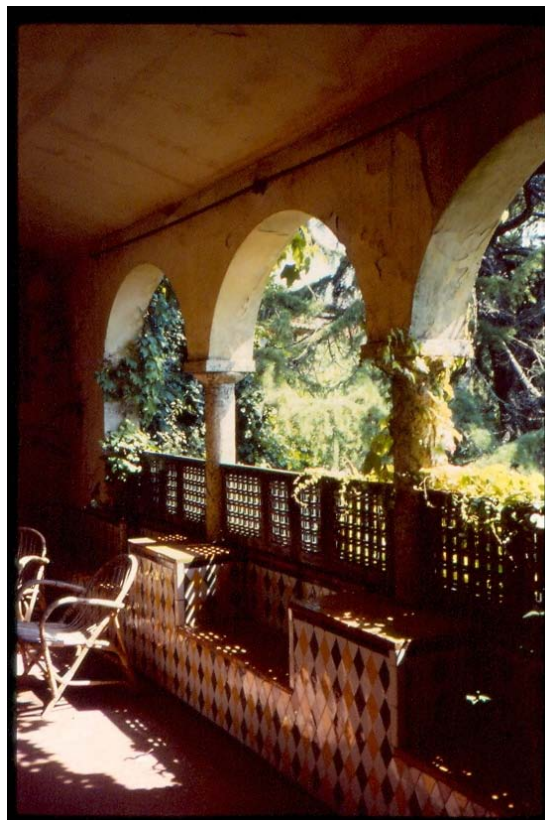
**Figure 1.** Aristotelis Zachos, Angeliki Hatzimichali's house, 1924-27

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Here, it must be observed that, in the two cases, the solutions suggested by both architects adapted their own traditions, developing them in a nationalist cultural context. Lino also refused, similar to what has already been said about Zachos, “the new trends that downgraded the relationship between architecture and the environment, culture and history” (Fessas-Emmanouil, 2001:84)

The two architects also share an evident interest for the traditional architecture of their respective countries.

Lino’s informal trips around Portugal in 1900 enabled him to understand the “formal values of an architecture of the sun, the subtleties of clear-dark, of transparencies and reflections on whitewashed walls, and, in a more responsible way, the living values defined by this vocabulary” (Almeida, 1970: 138). His taste for the *azulejo* (painted tiles), that he uses in order to stress “the volumetric and the thickness of the walls” or “to punctually raise the plastic tension of a part of the construction” (Almeida, 1970: 142), may also have the same origin.



**Figure 2.** Raul Lino, Cypress house, 1907-1012

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Zachos made systematic surveys of Greek vernacular architecture, especially in the Macedonia region, and defended the importance of its study and its diffusion in the seminal article *Vernacular Architecture* (1911). There, he expressed the fundamental character of those studies “if we would like to have a really genuine contemporary Greek style of architecture with a purely Greek aesthetic”.

Zachos also pleaded for the valorisation of vernacular forms and the manner in which they are experienced. In his opinion, this recognition was fundamental “in order to rectify our architectural taste, which has been so warped by imported styles alien to our own customs and traditions”. (Zachos, 1911)<sup>7</sup>.

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Carlos Ramos and Dimitris Pikionis belong to the next generation. In contrast to Lino and Zachos, Ramos and Pikionis studied in their native countries, at a time when the French influence was dominant. However, both travelled in Europe, at the final stage of their formation. Ramos visited Spain, France and Belgium whereas Pikionis went to Germany and France. Both of them also taught architecture for many years, and were interested in vernacular architecture.

Dimitris Pikionis himself started a set of field surveys focused on vernacular tradition that he always considered as valuable work instruments in the natural process of making architecture. He carried out his first field research with his study of the house that had been built by peasant Alexis Rodakis, circa 1880 in Messagros, on the Island of Aegina. This house constitutes an almost mythical reference both for the ethnologists and for the architects, as it represents the genuine character of the relationship between a *simple* man and the surrounding nature.

Still during the same year, Pikionis collected graphic information (1912-1918) in order to illustrate one of his authored publications – *We and Our*

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<sup>7</sup> Article published in *Through the Lens of Aristotelis Zachos 1915-1931*, Neohellenic Architecture Archives – Benaki Museum, 2007

*Vernacular Art* (1923) – where he reflects upon the values of vernacular tradition. Simultaneously, he shows a deep interest for traditional architecture in Aegina (1918-21) that he developed during the various trips to the island he made, initially alone, and from 1921, with his students of Architecture<sup>8</sup>.



**Figure 3.** Rodakis House: Survey by D. PIKIONIS. Messagros, Aegina, 1912  
Benaki Museum Neohellenic Architecture Archives

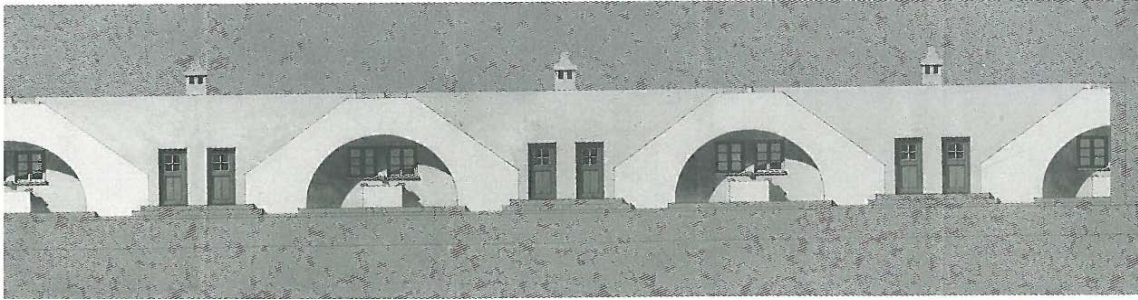
In Oporto, Carlos Ramos became the director of the Escola de Belas Artes, commonly known as “Escola do Porto”, and gave it an international reputation. He invited geographers, such as Orlando Ribeiro and anthropologists, such as Jorge Dias, to give lectures. He accepted to supervise students wishing to prepare theoretical dissertations on architecture, at a time when nobody did it. He encouraged the students to participate in anthropology campaigns and in surveys of folk architecture. (Filgueiras, 1986, sp). He played a role of relevance in the natural

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<sup>8</sup> For the various surveys conducted by Pikionis to vernacular architecture, we researched the Neo-Hellenic Architecture Archives Benaki Museum (July 2014). In this collection, we would like to thank every assistance given by Polina Borisova.

architectural culture, and, in simultaneous, kept always the international contact.

Ramos belongs to the 1927 generation, which he called *generation of compromise*. He was responsible for combining the different currents that existed in Portugal at the time and his work is especially useful in order to exemplify a new use of vernacular as a vehicle of modernity.



**Figure 4.** Carlos Ramos, project for a working-class neighborhood in Olhão

Dimitri Pikionis covered a parallel path. In his opinion, the foundations for the construction of “a new contemporary architecture, appropriate to local building materials, climate, and cultural life” (Theocharopolou, 2010: 112) could exclusively be found in a clear understanding of “vernacular language” in its *placeness* meaning.

Pikionis is, above all, “a refined interpreter of his time. Although observing it from an apparently distant time, he demonstrates that he understands in its own reason, which is the Greece that goes on living”. (Furlenga, 1999: 10)

It must be stressed that Pikionis absorbed the Greek vernacular naturally and constantly as a source of modernity throughout his career. On the contrary, the way that very same architectural universe was absorbed by international architectural culture, was neither natural nor acceptable for him.

In Pikionis exists, apparently, a negation to the uncritical internationalisation of the regional values that cannot be standardised by using formal criteria. This reaction may have arisen, firstly by the concern that his students would begin to move and “to reconnect with the architectural vision of the Bauhaus” or their common conviction on “form

follows function' or 'less is more'" (Papageorgiou-Venetas, 2002), and secondly, by the fascination of his professional colleagues as concerns the "innovative" guidelines presented by the CIAMs.

Indeed, Pikionis vigorously opposed to the CIAM IV<sup>9</sup> that would take place in Athens in August 1933,<sup>10</sup> probably because he was afraid that the Greek architects could be influenced by the presence of international stars eager to have a place where they could test their proposals.

The need to house c. 1,3 million people, *i. e.*, the Greeks repatriated from the Turkey, and the uncritical application of imported models could lead to the destruction of the Greek landscape, a sensitive subject for Pikionis, who always argued that "Man took nature as his teacher on his way, in his life." (Pikionis, 1925).<sup>11</sup>

This warning of Pikionis is specially legitimated by the fact that, at the beginning of his trajectory, he adopted some principles of the Modern Movement, *i. e.*, "its organic simplicity" and by its promise "to become the embodiment of organic truth" (Dimitris Pikionis).<sup>12</sup> However, after the construction of the Elementary School of Lycabethus (1930/1932)<sup>13</sup>, he feels unsatisfied with the same principles, because it occurs to him that "the universal spirit had to be coupled with the spirit of nationhood" (Dimitris Pikionis)<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, Carlos Ramos, who actively adheres to UIA, will stay away of CIAM. Maybe, because, as already noted (Almeida, 1986, sp), albeit Ramos defined himself a *modern*, he used in many of his works "a language that could be considered 'traditionalist', in the uncertain sense, in which the term was used at the time, due a certain lack of formal conviction, and an

<sup>9</sup> For more details about this meeting, see Eric Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928-1960*, First MIT Press paperback edition, 2002

<sup>10</sup> Theocharopolou, I. (2010). Nature and People. The Vernacular and the Search for a True Greek Architecture. See footnote 21

<sup>11</sup> Apud Giacumacatos, A. (1999). From Conservatism to Populism, Pausing at Modernism: The Architecture of the Inter-War Period.

<sup>12</sup> Autobiographical Notes in AA, VV. (1989). Dimitris Pikionis, Architect 1887-1968 'A Sentimental Topography', Architectural Association London

<sup>13</sup> See [docomomo](http://www.docomomo.com) - International working party for documentation and conservation Minimum Documentation Fiche 2003

<http://rlicc.asro.kuleuven.ac.be/rlicc/docomomo/Registers/2007%20Education%20Fiches/Greece/GR%20Pikionis%201930/GR%20Pikionis%202007.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Autobiographical Notes ...

evident lucidity in owns' limits to elaborate an alternative proposal in this field".

Pedro Vieira de Almeida (1986: sp) has already drawn our attention to Carlos Ramos's speech about architecture in 1933, when he quoted Emile Schreiber's statement that "international penetration, national interpretation *voilà* the whole secret of harmony in the world of tomorrow".

Finally, we refer to the capacity to play with the modern *moves* that were happening in an international context and local tradition, thereby reinventing a modernity that, albeit its geographical periphery, is equally valid and original.

These architects, who were reactive to the formulary offered by the CIAM, somehow, anticipated the combination of *critical regionalism* (Lefaivre & Tzonis, 1981; Frampton, 1982) with *critical internationalism* (Almeida, 2005), that will characterise the best of contemporary culture.

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## Author identification

**Alexandra Cardoso.** Architect (FAUP, 1994). Integrated researcher and board member of Centro de Estudos Arnaldo Araújo (CEAA), R&D unit 4041 (FCT); Director of CEAA (2003-2010). Researcher of the projects: *The "Popular Architecture in Portugal." A Critical Look* (2010-2013); *Southern Modernisms* (2014-2015); *Photography, Modern Architecture and the "Escola do Porto": Interpretations on Teófilo Rego Archive* (2014-2014), and *Portuguese Participation in CIAM X* (2014). Last related publications, include the books *To and Fro: Modernism and Vernacular Architecture* (ed.) and *Dois Parâmetros de Arquitectura Postos em Surdina. Leitura crítica do Inquérito à arquitectura regional. Cadernos 3 and 4* (all with M.H. Maia and J.C. Leal, 2013).

**Alexandra Trevisan.** Graduate (FLUP, 1986) and MSc in History of Art (FLUP, 1996) and PhD in Architecture (ETSA/UVa, 2013) with the thesis *International Influences in Oporto Modern Architecture between 1926 and 1956*. Assistant Professor/Theory & History Department at ESAP (since 1986) teaching *History of Modern Architecture (Architecture MA)* and *History of Art*, among other curricular unities. Researcher of the *Architectural Studies group of Centro de Estudos Arnaldo de Araújo (FCT uRD 4041)*. Currently is PI of the research project *Photography, Modern Architecture and the "Escola do Porto": Interpretations on Teófilo Rego Archive* and researcher of the project *Southern Modernisms*. Co-editor of the books *Ler Le Corbusier* (2012) and *Apropriações do Movimento Moderno* (2012). Last papers: *On Modern Architecture, photography and city readings: Teófilo Rego and the "School of Oporto" with M.H. Maia e Miguel Moreira Pinto* (Athens, 2014); *Photographer and architects, a professional collaboration with M.H.Maia* (Berlin, 2014); *A Travelling Theatre* (Porto, 2014); *Primeira aproximação às arquitecturas do Sul: instrumentos possíveis de leitura with A.Cardoso, M.H. Maia and J.Couto* (Lisboa, 2014).

**Maria Helena Maia.** Graduate in History/Art and Archaeology and PhD in Modern Architecture and Restoration. Professor at ESAP and president of its Scientific Board. Director of CEAA, FCT R&D unit 4041 and principal researcher of its *Architectural Studies research group*; Researcher of the projects *Photography, Modern Architecture and the "Escola do Porto": Interpretations on Teófilo Rego Archive* (2013-2015), *Southern Modernisms* (2014-2015). Last related publications, include the books *To and Fro: Modernism and Vernacular Architecture* (ed.) and *Dois Parâmetros de Arquitectura Postos em Surdina. Leitura crítica do Inquérito à arquitectura regional. Cadernos 3 and 4* (all with A. Cardoso and J.C. Leal, 2013). Prizes: (1) *José de Figueiredo 2008 of Portuguese National Academy of Fine Arts*; (2) *Ignasi de Lecea 2007-2008 of Public Art & Design Observatory –Universitat de Barcelona* (with M. Acciaiuoli and J. C. Leal).