Staying with Modernity?
(Dis)Entangling Coloniality and Architecture

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Jaap Bakema Study Centre

STAYING WITH MODERNITY? (Dis)Entangling Coloniality and Architecture

Eleventh Annual Conference
November 2024

Staying with Modernity? (Dis)Entangling Coloniality and Architecture

Brinkman & Van der Vlugt, Van Nelle factory, Rotterdam, 1931. Factory built for the processing of tobacco, coffee, and tea. Photographer unknown. Image source: Collection Nieuwe Instituut, archive TENT p1.

Dirk van den Heuvel

Archival Ambivalences: Modernity, Coloniality, Architecture

The combination of the three terms—architecture, coloniality and modernity—has turned out to be a most productive research field. Among its results it counts a growing library of new and innovative research, which aims to re-assess established histories and theories to open the discourse for hitherto unheard and overlooked voices, as well as new conceptual frameworks and methodologies. Scholars in the field know that such reassessment is easier said than done. Despite this productivity, the structures of our institutions are also quite tenacious, even when one can observe signs of change. The struggles around those terms are not just related to power and the control over the discourse. They are particularly sensitive, since they concern issues of historical and archival justice, and who decides about that. Next to identity issues, value systems are brought into the equation; neutrality is neither possible nor accepted. More than before, positionality and relationality have become key aspects of research practices regarding their validity and criticality.

In terms of self-positionality, it is important to underscore that in Delft and Rotterdam, at the university and the museum, we are working from within the systems themselves. From academic and cultural institutions, with their libraries, exhibition spaces and archives. Despite the rigidity of the institutional context, this awareness also comes with the realisation that people can be agents of change, if they know how to create space for renegotiation and rebalancing. These issues aren't exclusively limited to abstract structures, it is also about actors and their agency. This is one of the goals of the conference: to share experiences and lessons about how one can successfully redirect one's activities with an impact on research and institutional routine, a matter of practicality, and one of empowerment. The experience gained thus far with such a project of redirecting has also made clear that everyday practice within those institutionalised places comes with feelings of ambivalence. In the first place this ambivalence stems from the need to relentlessly work with the stubborn logic of the archive and the wider institution, while simultaneously countering it. This touches every aspect of institutional work, from staffing and funding to acquisition policies, inventorising and metadata, research conventions, organising public access, and exhibition programmes. The whole 'apparatus' all too often underlines the Foucauldian idea of a discipline indeed, where knowledge and power are closely intertwined in a proverbial knot, impossible to untangle.

AMBIVALENCES

Such ambivalence also sits at the heart of the programme of the Jaap Bakema Study Centre, with a special focus on topics related to architecture and modernity, including welfare state policies, the related notions of democracy and planning, and the way architecture accommodates and shapes social relations. Against this background, Bakema himself raised the question of how architecture can contribute to an open society, not as a recipe or simple solution, but as a project which remains unfinished. Considering today's reassessment of contested histories of modern architecture, one might—and should—ask: open to whom exactly? And at what or whose costs? How democratic and liberal can a welfare state be, if it is—for instance—built on economic extraction of the Global South or the Majority World, including former colonies?

Bakema's ideas for an open society, shared with Team 10 members and many other contemporaries, arose from the experience of the Second World War. In the discussions on the future of architecture and planning thereafter, architects and planners had to come to terms with a new global condition, not only marked by the geopolitics of the Cold War, but also by an accelerating modernisation, of growing cities and urbanising regions. Complete countries, even continents were replanned. Along the decolonisation of the old European empires, a new wave of extractionist and exploitative economics went hand in hand with both welfare state policies as pursued by the new nations and the occurrence of neocolonial practices, with architecture and city planning as crucial tools and vehicles giving direction to this mid-twentieth century global condition. How then to assess the claims made by modern and modernist architects for progress and emancipation, their promise for a project of enlightened universalism?

This ideologically charged criticism of modernism is not new as such. Within the Western world, neo-marxists and liberal postmodernists alike have highlighted the close interrelations between late capitalism on the one hand and modern architecture and planning on the other. Their names are quite familiar, with Manfredo Tafuri, Colin Rowe and Charles Jencks among the best-known authors. Through Marshall Berman's work *All that is Solid Melts into Air*, and Hilde Heynen's interpretation of it for architecture, modernity became the key term to reframe the history and theory of architecture, not as a call for action, but as the descriptive denominator of an inescapable societal condition.

INTERSECTIONALITY

The current debates around coloniality, architecture and planning reignite those older discussions with a vengeance. Today, decolonising theory seems more impactful than the earlier postcolonial discourse, which largely left the architecture debate untouched. Decolonising debates have gained poignancy among others by their connection with new theories derived from Black femininist intersectionality. Intersectionality—famously introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw—recognises multiple specific systems of exclusion and marginalisation simultaneously at work, beyond universalist Marxist analyses of economy and class, and it has become a powerful tool to expose the gaps and deficiencies of what one in the Western world considers a democratic, egalitarian and just society.

When deployed in the archive, the tool of intersectionality is sharp as a razor. Architecture itself is already an index of unequal power distribution, the architecture archive even more so. It is therefore also a self-defeating, negative tool: looking for lost voices trying to salvage other stories, one might get overwhelmed by the silence in the archive and the way it resonates with past and present power relations. Such experience of how the archive is a document of absence constitutes another element of the ambivalence surrounding the calls for compelling institutional change and archival justice. It can be argued that after postmodernism in the 1970s and '80s, today, the combination of coloniality and intersectionality theory once again brings a profound revision of the history of Western modern architecture and planning, including their tenets.

When furthermore combined with the issues of climate change and ecology, including new and other epistemological traditions from these fields, a perfect storm seems to have gathered over western modernity and assumed progressive values. So where to begin? How to start countering this and make such ambivalence also productive? How to reverse the colonial gaze and how—indeed—to open the archive and achieve a more inclusive and regenerative approach?

COLONIALITY IN THE ARCHIVE

For the Jaap Bakema Study Centre and its activities, the urge to shift one's perspective comes among others from the ongoing research into the collection of the Nieuwe Instituut, most notably recent histories of Dutch Structuralism, and related archives, especially the Aldo and Hannie van Eyck archive. The Van Eycks together with important figures like Herman Hertzberger and Bakema already attempted to shift the colonial gaze away from Eurocentrism, to expand the horizon of Western thinking based on rationalism. Anthropology and the first postcolonial critiques redirected their thinking. Their libraries included key works by Franz Boas, Frantz Fanon, Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, Claude-Lévi Strauss and many more. At the same time, from today's point of view the conclusion seems inescapable that forms of exoticising remain prevalent in their conceptualisation of the non-Western contributions. For instance, Van Eyck's famous account of the Dogon people and their achitecture and culture in Mali—as beautiful and poetic as his interpretation is—can also be considered a form of cultural extraction, in which the Dogon and the journey to Africa serve as an

idealised, even fictionalised, example of human culture in service of a form of self-criticism of Western thinking at home.

The conference therefore locates the questions of modernity and coloniality in architecture within the archives and institutional memory, and seeks to acknowledge the inherent ambivalences to arrive at a new productivity. In the Call for Papers, we proposed three approaches to discuss ways of countering the power logic of archives and institutions: to embrace, to dismantle, and to pluralise.

First, it is crucial to stay with the problems of modernity, and their messiness. We are keen to learn from exploring the inherent paradoxes of open societies and welfare state arrangements in relation to the emergence of global economies as part of (neo)colonial networks, Cold War geopolitics, liberal world trade systems and their concomitant flows of exchange and migration. More speculatively, what role can archives and institutions of knowledge and of culture play in the future to address the ongoing legacies of colonialism which constitute the fabric of contemporary societies? We'd very much like to make the ambivalences of the archive and of the contested modernities productive here, to understand what was at stake at the time, to reflect on what can and should be done today.

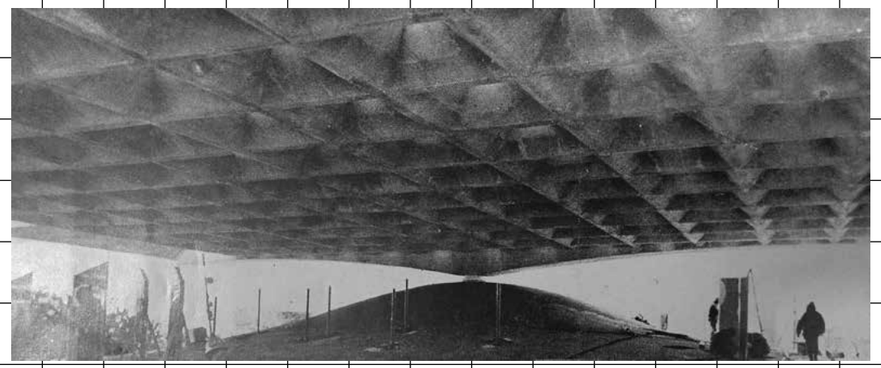
Second, it is necessary to insist on the dismantling and reassessing of established histories. How might the history of modernism in architecture, its aspirations and legacies, be re-read and re-written? Such a practice of re-reading—time and time again—of the discipline of architecture and its histories and theories from the perspective of colonialism remains adamant, all in order to recharge the ongoing struggles for emancipation and justice. Such scrutinising of architectural archives aims to shed light on the often neglected spatial and material dimensions of colonial processes, as modernism is reassessed with due regard for its role within the colonial matrix of power. It is this sort of consistent and critical re-reading, which will advance the unfinished modern project. Paradoxically, it is only through such acts of de- and reconstruction, that central tenets of modernity—justice, equal rights, knowledge and how to use knowledge, and so forth and so on—can regain new power and proper validity.

Third, we need to pluralise history and theory beyond Western epistemologies. A multitude of histories might build up into what Arturo Escobar called the pluriverse. Decentring and 'provincialising' the Western gaze will help to rewrite shared histories, bring out new epistemological frameworks, and their interconnectedness. By advocating for a diversity of ways of thinking (and feeling and doing), we seek to resituate archives and institutional practices, to rebalance discursive power, knowledge production and evidence validation.

THE PLURI-ARCHIVE

What one sees in the papers developed for this conference is a vast range of possible responses to these questions. Author-based approaches are traded for network analyses, human-centred discourse makes way for tracing material cultures and agencies, established canons are amended and complemented with participatory and activist heritage practices. Clearly, one common insight shared by the participants is to rethink the archive not as something static, but as dynamic and alive. The archive is not just the objects sitting in the depots. We need to think of the archive itself as something relational and performative: it is the ways how we work with the archive and its objects and documents, that will bring out the change we seek, how we connect one archive with another, one practice with many more, one voice with a multitude of voices. History becomes recharged, one history turns out to hold a multitude of histories. It is in this way that the archive won't remain an index of oppression, or even its tool, it becomes a connector, from one history to other histories, broader and richer. The archive becomes a layered pluri-archive, source and resource for regeneration of a spectrum of knowledges and experiences.

Welfare State Projections



Brazilian Pavilion in Osaka World Expo 1970 under construction, Paulo Mendes da Rocha.
Image source: Acrópole journal n.372, 1970.

Victor Próspero (University of São Paulo, Princeton University)

Paulista Architecture and Ambivalent Modernity: Brazilian Dictatorship and National Representation in Osaka (1970)

Brazil lived under a far-right military dictatorship from 1964 to 1985. This regime had a twofold impact on the architectural field. On the one hand, it persecuted intellectuals, professors, and politically active professionals. On the other, the number of contracts for architectural firms had unprecedented growth, responding to a vast set of commissions that went from bus terminals to bank branches, from hydroelectric plants to business towers. Like previous governments in Brazil, that dictatorship promoted images of a unitary national identity through the propaganda of the ongoing modernisation process, now with a particular emphasis on technocracy. Architecture was inevitably deeply entangled with it.

The Brazilian Pavilion at Osaka World Expo, 1970, designed by architect Paulo Mendes da Rocha, is a prolific case to inquiry on what uses that regime made of modern architecture. The architect and his team were close to left-wing circles—in opposition to the dictatorship—and their architecture was politically charged by discourses and hopes of social transformation.[1] The case of the Pavilion, however, shows how discursive practices of right-wing dictatorship and left-wing architects had meeting points in which they overlapped; an encounter made possible through a common ground in the epistemologies of modernity and coloniality that underpinned both political cultures at that time. Some aspects of Brazilian architectural and political history are fundamental to understanding that episode and must be briefly addressed here before presenting a reflection on the Pavilion itself.

THE POLITICS OF *PAULISTA* ARCHITECTURE

Paulo Mendes da Rocha was trained as an architect during the early 1950s, being part of a generation that followed or took part in Brasília's plan competition as well as in its construction process. From their perspective, there was a whole new country to be built. In such an optimist framework, underpinned by hope in a nation-building process to come. The political culture of progressive architects at that period was closely related to the

1 Composed of architects Julio Katinsky and Ruy Ohtake, engineer Shiguero Mitsutani, artists Carmela Gross and Marcelo Nitsche, and art historian Flávio Motta.

Brazilian Communist Party and their global connections.[2] This approach fostered a new architecture underpinned by anti-imperialism and national development ideology.

The Communist Party guidelines established internationally after Joseph Stalin's death were crucial to redefining the weight Socialist Realism had in the approach to art and architecture fostered by the Party, as well as the promotion of rationalisation within the discipline's agenda.[3] Those political facts were critical to one of the most distinguished architects and professors in São Paulo's professional milieu, João B Vilanova Artigas, who was an active member of the Party and published several articles reflecting on the role of architecture facing imperialism, international modernism and its institutions, as well as the possible paths for the discipline to respond to the social contradictions of Brazilian reality.[4] Artigas and Mendes da Rocha worked together and influenced one another coming up with building design solutions deeply connected to current political demands. The notions of 'constructive ethics' and structural expressiveness were central to their architecture. Large waffle slabs and prestressed reinforced concrete beams sheltered whole building programs, defining the building exterior through simple procedures and creating rich and vast generous spaces in its interiors. Openness and austerity were claimed as singular characteristics of this new architecture produced by São Paulo (*paulista*) architects, in opposition—besides many similarities—to Rio de Janeiro (*carioca*) architects such as Oscar Niemeyer. The Architecture School at the University of São Paulo, designed by Artigas (1961–1969) was a milestone of such an approach.

A central characteristic of that School and other projects of the 1960s was the procedure of defining the building's whole through a single great shelter—a 'waffle slab'—in dialogue with recent projects like Mies Van der Rohe's Bacardí Pavilion (1959, unbuilt) and the central Pavilion built for the UIA Conference in Havana, 1963, designed by Juan Campos.[5] Brazilian architects were enthusiastic about that event and presented a thesis on the Urban Reform project under negotiation with Congressmen and President João Goulart at that moment.[6] The political relevance and optimism of that moment in the national scenery were also expressed in architecture in different ways. On the one hand, it appeared strongly in the debate on prefab structures. On the other, it appeared in the framing of heavy concrete structures, like those large concrete shelters created by Artigas and Mendes da Rocha's works of the 1960s. Considering the Miesian reference, there was the necessity for a change from steel structures to concrete ones, which represented a fundamental shift considering architecture's role in development in Latin American countries where the steel industry was not established.[7] The investments in concrete were a central characteristic of architecture's will to promote national development and economic independence from imperialism.

Large concrete structures hosting a variety of programs were brilliantly represented by *paulista* architects. There was a relevant disciplinary shift during the 1960s, with a central role of Artigas, Mendes da Rocha, and other architects close to them.[8] Their architecture brought rationality and austerity to the centre of architectural discourse, at the same time as it was radically defined by the buildings' structural expressiveness. Structural design and calculus promoted a formal dialectics between heaviness and lightness. Raw materials and structural tension were central characteristics of those new buildings. Through the combination of discursive practices and architectural design, their buildings gained a strong political charge.

ARCHITECTURE AND DICTATORSHIP: AN AMBIVALENT RELATIONSHIP

In April 1964, a civil-military coup established a dictatorship that lasted for twenty-one years in Brazil. This regime put its agenda forward through a singular combination of political repression and an economic model. The labour unions' control and the institutionalized violence against any opposition guaranteed a free way to the regime's economic agenda, which controlled inflation through wage lowering. The state-led finance structure was focused, rather, on promoting a construction industry boom with loans directed to middle-class apartment buildings or infrastructure enterprises throughout the country, guided by a territorial integration agenda underpinned by the National Security doctrine of the military ahead of Brasília. In that ideological orientation, investments in roadways, power plants and mining were taken to occupy strategic regions—considered by the regime as 'populational voids' in the country's territory—preventing opposition uprisings in local communities and areas with a lack of political and military control.

If that was the content that animated the dictatorship's infrastructural projects, the same planning and building opportunities were dear to architects. The anti-imperialist and developmentalist ideologies also advocated for territorial integration and infrastructure construction, although aiming in the opposite political direction. Therefore, despite the deep frustration the military coup represented to progressive architects, the established regime implied a considerable growth in contracts for public and

2 Serge Bernstein, "L'historien et La Culture Politique," Vingtième Siècle, *Revue d'histoire*, no. 35, 1992: 67–77.
3 Important episodes of such transformations were the 20th Congress of the USSR Communist Party in 1956, and Nikita Kruchev's speech in the International Union of Architects Conference in 1960.
4 João B Vilanova Artigas, *Caminhos da Arquitetura*. Eds. José T. C. Lira, Rosa Artigas. (CosacNaify, 2004).
5 Jorge Francisco Liernur, "Menos es Misero: notas sobre la recepción de la arquitectura de Mies Van der Rohe en America Latina" in *Trazas de Futuro: episodios de la cultura arquitectonica de la modernidad en America Latina* (Ediciones UNL, 2021).
6 Nabil Bonduki & Ana Paula Koury, "Das reformas de base ao BNH. As Propostas do Seminário de Habitação e Reforma Urbana", in. *Arquitextos*. São Paulo. Ano 10. N.120.02. Vitruvius. Maio 2010.
7 It is important to note that this was also part of a geopolitical dispute, and the US blocked the development of this technology in Brazil during Brasilia's construction, as shown by Elcio G. da Silva & Danilo M. Macedo, "Estruturas metálicas no concreto de Brasília", *Revista Thésis*, Rio de Janeiro, v. 2, n. 5, 2019.
8 Amongst whom were Pedro Paulo de Mello Saraiva, Fábio Penteado, Ruy Ohtake, and others, but also colleagues who drew another path to politicizing architecture, such as Mayumi Watanabe and Rodrigo Lefevre. Another path in the national milieu during the 1960s, directly connected to the *paulista* but with a strong vein of prefab experimentation was developed in the newly inaugurated Brasília University.

private buildings, infrastructure, and planning commissions. A great number of professionals lived under the threat of an anti-leftwing dictatorship, and were, at the same time, working for the regime directly or not. Such a difficult situation is a seeming contradiction. Despite the necessity of architects to keep working, what is of interest here is how the very opposite political beliefs at play had relevant overlaps and common ground investments.

The architectural procedures rehearsed by *paulista* architects in the early 1960s, especially the great concrete slab defining the building's unity, were in fact multiplied and spread all over the country during the dictatorship. Architecture served less in creating singular symbols of the state — as in previous periods — but rather in multiplying representations of a technocratic system that should appear in every small city throughout the country. Therefore, the regime showed its modernisation outcomes through buildings and infrastructure, and architects could exercise technical and aesthetic procedures they once believed to be politically charged as promoters of social transformation. Such a dystopian scenario is telling of the ambivalence — or maybe weakness — of architecture's political role. The episode also tells about the ambivalence of historical subjects, who should be understood in their nuances, contradictions, deadlocks and agency, facing complex historical moments.

BRAZIL IN OSAKA 1970: ALLEGORIES OF AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL DEADLOCK

The Brazilian Pavilion at the Osaka World Exhibition in 1970, designed by Mendes da Rocha and team, brought about some of those architectural procedures in broad circulation during the 1970s, while operating at the same time a disciplinary shift that characterised it as a kind of manifesto building. A large rectangular waffle slab defined the perimeter of the Pavilion, creating an open area with no doors and no walls. This operation was described by the architects as being the Pavilion ground 'the same as Osaka's'. The cover followed the design of the recently opened building of the School of Architecture in São Paulo, by Artigas, which defined a translucid shelter. The only structure of the Pavilion was, therefore, overpassed by light. In three of the four support points, the roof was laid directly in the landform ground, and the last of the four points was made by two crossing arches which created a 'virtual dome'.[9] While this dome referred to the traditional cities or a place-creation procedure, being called 'Largo do Café', the landform seeming-moving ground made clear reference to nature. The heavy and solid concrete structure, thus, laid delicately up on the 'natural environment', at the same time the clear two-element operation was a statement on the opposition between technique and nature. As the speeches of Mendes da Rocha unfolded during the next decades, the project represented architecture's "second geography" character.

9 A deep formal analysis of the Pavilion was made in: Ruth Verde Zein & Izabel Amara, "Feira Mundial de Osaka de 1970", *Arqtexto*, 16 (2010) pp.108–127

Mendes da Rocha's team counted with art historian Flavio Motta who organised an exhibition proposal to be set up within the Pavilion. The show would trace Brazil's history through relevant artworks from different moments, presenting a narrative of the country's technical progress framed by 'humanist' concerns.[10] Although not presenting any 'subversive' content, the team's proposal was refused by the government, and another exhibition plan was hired. Such censorship — parallel to the building's approval and construction — was telling of the difference between literal narratives organised in an exhibition and architecture as an abstract object that could be well adapted to the regime's political and symbolic means, despite the architect's expectations.[11]

The Pavilion represented the design procedures in circulation at the period and their ambivalence between developmentalist hopes and conservative technocracy very well. The project, however, did it through strong authorship traces and was still charged by some weight of national identity. The competition jury used that as an argument for the project's choice, opposing its 'national character' to the 'technologically exhibitionist' entries.[12] The exhibition discourse proposed by the winning team adds important layers to that. While territorial integration and the role of the cities are central topics of Brazilian history told by Motta in the proposal, the notion of social harmony — underpinned by one of racial democracy — is also present. The notion of social and racial harmony was also central to the discourse of the Brazilian government as a means of hiding its authoritarian basis. Mendes da Rocha's discourse throughout the years made increasingly clear the search for 'building the territory' through architectural thought, a trace which was associated by some of his colleagues since the 1950s to the *paulista* colonial character of pioneering and conquering the country's backlands, what brings us to a flagrant example of the modernity-coloniality complex.[13] It is important to note how such a longue durrée narrative configures one of the meeting points between architects and the regime's policies in territorial integration. The different political backgrounds, however, would approach that agenda through opposite framings.

This territorial approach present in the pavilion's architecture was also highlighted in the exhibition proposal. In the show's storytelling, technical progress and architecture were fundamental to the processes of establishing human settlements and connecting the country's regions. Different engineering enterprises were shown as relevant historical

10 This approach appeared in the project description and in the exhibition proposal boards sketched by Motta, and it was reproduced in the newspapers when the project was selected to represent Brazil. The notion of a balanced technical progress responded also to the general theme of Osaka Expo 1970, "Progress and Harmony for Mankind".

11 It is well known that Mendes da Rocha was withdrawn from teaching in the University in 1969 and won the Osaka Pavilion competition weeks later. A fact that represents another seeming contradiction, but actually a didactic example of how the regime worked and of the political limits of architecture.

12 Juliana Braga Costa, "Ver não é só ver: dois estudos a partir de Flavio Motta" (Master Thesis, University of São Paulo, 2010)

13 Victor Próspero, Arquitetura Paulista e Ditadura Militar (1964–1985) (PhD diss. University of São Paulo, 2024); and Arturo Escobar, "Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise: The Latin American Modernity/Coloniality Research Program" *Cultural Studies* 21, n. 2–3 (2007): 179–210

achievements. This framing of territory had relevant meeting points with what was being undertaken by the regime. The outcomes of the dictatorship's extensive infrastructure interventions, roadways crossing the Amazon, and enterprises with high social and environmental impact, have to be taken into account in what it had of a common ground shared by the architects. The simple notion of 'building territory', is frequently underpinned by deterritorialisation processes.

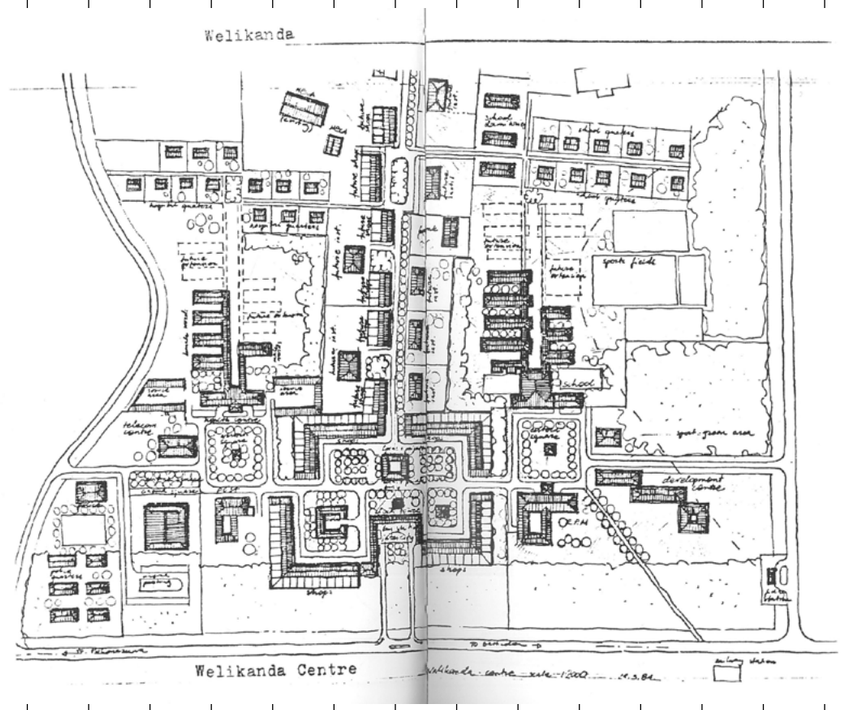
A fundamental difference was marked by the architects through the use of the word 'humanism'. This was an attempt to refer to a specific and Eurocentred past, once Motta mentioned the Renaissance in opposition to the 'primitive' settlements of indigenous populations of Brazil. At the same time, the use of that notion was clearly connected to the search for an alternative framing of technical progress.[14] Although vague and flexible—as well as socially problematic—the 'humanist' approach to progress was what seemed to sustain a breach of hope and a margin of interpretation that separated Brazil's representation in Osaka from the country's technocracy-based authoritarian and conservative political reality.[15] Both the concepts of 'territory' and 'humanism', therefore, mark the ambivalent character within the very core of progressive hopes in modernization under dictatorship at the period.

This episode, like other cases of *paulista* architecture, is a good example of the historiographic challenges of reading subjects beyond the self-built social memories of professionals under an authoritarian regime, which are fundamental in revealing State violence, but are also usually based on erasement or the creation of binary oppositions between heroic resistance and corrupt collaboration. This is a central challenge especially when it comes to the complexity of a regime in which insertion and accommodation processes are inevitable.[16] The political contradictions seen in these processes, moreover, reveal contradictions inherent to architecture itself as a discipline. So it is for the contradictions revealed within modernity and its epistemological basis and investments, as well as for the histories of the search for overcoming underdevelopment and dependence in the Global South.

14 Another relevant aspect of the reference to "humanism" is related to the presence of the Economy and Humanism Movement in São Paulo, led by the French Priest Lebret, and which created important groups of experts in planning and analysing data. The most distinguished one was the *Society for Graphic and Mecanographic Analysis Applied to Social Complexes* (SAGMACS, Portuguese). This group responded to commissions for governments and institutions, delivering highly qualified technical work guided by a notion of humanism, in a search for affirming its social role.

15 An analysis of the Pavilion with special focus on the discursive contradictions assembled by team's exhibition and the relationship of both show and project with the broad political cultural in which architects were embedded was developed by the author in the article "The Shade and the Land: A Critical Approach to the Brazilian Pavilion in Osaka 1970", *JSAH*, forthcoming in 2025.

16 Victor Próspero, Arquitetura Paulista e Ditadura Militar.



Master plan of Welikanda new town.
Image source: Plesner Architects.

Dorian Bianco (Centre André Chastel, Sorbonne University)

Western-based or Decolonised Welfare Planning? Ulrik Plesner's Town Design for the Mahaweli Development Programme in Sri Lanka (1982–1987)

INTRODUCTION

The Danish architect Ulrik Plesner (1930–2015), not to be confused with his homonymous uncle (1861–1933), has received little scientific attention until now.[1] He first lived in post-independence Ceylon from 1958 to 1967, and later returned to Sri Lanka (contemporary name of Ceylon since 1973) from 1982 to 1987. There, he assisted in the design of six out of the twelve new towns planned for the Mahaweli Development Programme (MDP). The MDP is an agency-driven project of spatial planning initiated with a pre-investment survey carried out by the United Nations Development Programme in 1963, and then supported by the Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Bank. The programme included the building of dams to double electricity production, the improvement of flood control and the irrigation of rice production in the North-Eastern dry zone of the Mahaweli River drainage basin. Motivated by developmentalist goals of self-sufficiency, endogenous economic development and welfare housing, the MDP originally envisioned the resettlement of one million workers into new towns equipped with low-cost housing and located near workplaces.

Legitimised by a nationalist narrative and praised as a new chapter in the Sinhalese 'hydraulic civilisation', its centralised, vertical integration was modelled after the Tennessee Valley Authority, a federal American corporation focused on comprehensive energetical and spatial planning, and the Central-Place Theory, a theoretical explanation of the spatial distribution of human settlement. Its implementation reflected the contradictory tension between the influx of Western technical expertise and a 'bottom-up', vernacular-based approach to housing and town design. By focusing on Plesner's career and role in the MDP through the lens of his Danish background and the narrative taken from his own memoirs,[2] this paper examines his critique of architectural modernity and his ambivalent stance toward Sri Lankan decolonisation and welfare planning.[3]

1 Vibeke Andersson Møller, *Dansk arkitektur i 1960'erne*, (Forlaget Rhodos, 2020), 486–490.
2 Ulrik Plesner, *In Situ: Arkitektoniske Erindringer fra Sri Lanka* (Aristo, 2012), 452.
3 This presentation will be developed in: Dorian Bianco (editor), *Planning as a Welfare Project*, Peter Lang Verlag: 2025

THE MAHAWELI DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME AND WELFARE PLANNING IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY CEYLON

The history of Sri Lankan social welfare dates back to British Ceylon and has been closely intertwined with spatial planning.[4] The Donoughmore era (1931–1947) encouraged land resettlement in the northeastern dry areas in 1935 after the recovery of tea prices (1933).[5] After gaining independence, Ceylon focused on boosting electricity production and reducing food imports by promoting agriculture in the dry zones. In 1953, the Gal-Oya Colonisation Scheme was launched by the centre-right government of Dudley Senanayake (United National Party) which involved resettling workers to rural farms, 'semi-scattered villages'.[6]

The Sri Lanka Freedom Party brought the socialist Solomon Bandaranaike to power (1956–1959). His administration implemented comprehensive programmes of social welfare with the increase of agriculture capacity and the redistribution of incomes,[7] however criticised for insufficient industrial investments.[8]

The socialist government of Sirimavo Bandaranaike (1960–1965), Solomon's daughter, envisioned the MDP in 1963.[9] Like the Tennessee Valley Authority, the MDP sought to double electricity production by constructing dams on the Mahaweli River. The MDP incorporated the Central-Place Theory to guide the settlement pattern and replace flooded towns, establishing a hierarchy of disseminated town centres near production sites. Two to four 'area centres' providing basic services were subdivided into village centres, each comprising several hamlets. Each of these was designed to accommodate three hundred to six hundred households.[10] Representing nearly a quarter of national expenditures, the MDP was initially planned in two stages (1968, 1974) with a thirty-year master plan. In 2006, one-hundred-and-fourty-four thousand families had been relocated on the Mahaweli farms.[11]

After the socialist-oriented Sri Lanka Freedom Party government (1970–1977), which employed mixed central planning and protectionism, the

4 Laksiri Jayasuriya, "The Evolution of Social Policy in Sri Lanka 1833–1970: The British Colonial Legacy," Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka, New Series 46 (2001): 1–68.
5 De Silva, Kingsley Muthumuni, *A History of Sri Lanka*, (Penguin Books, 2005) 570–589.
6 Nirodha Kumari Meegahakumbura Dissanayake, "Evaluating New Towns in the Context of Mega Projects: A Case Study of the Mahaweli Architectural Unit, Sri Lanka (1983–1989)". (Master thesis, School of Architecture and Built Environment, The University of Adelaide, 2016), 161.
7 Nagalingam Balakrishnan, "The Five Year Plan and Development Policy in Sri Lanka: Socio-Political Perspectives and the Plan," Asian Survey 13, no. 12 (1973): 1155–1168.
8 Satchi Ponnambalam, *Dependent Capitalism in Crisis, Sri Lanka Economy, 1948–1980* (Zed Press, 1981), 2.
9 Dissanayake, Nirodha Kumari Meegahakumbura, "Evaluating New Towns in the Context of Mega Projects: A Case Study of the Mahaweli Architectural Unit, Sri Lanka (1983–1989)", 3.
10 Nirodha K. M. Dissanayake, Katharine Bartsch and Peter Scriver, "Designing Sustainable Settlements in the Context of Megaprojects: Lessons Learnt From the Mahaweli Architectural Unit, Sri Lanka (1983–1989)." in *Fifty Years Later: Revisiting the Role of Architectural Science in Design and Practice: 50th International Conference of the Architectural Science Association 2016*, edited by J. Zuo, L. Daniel, and V. Soebarto, (The Architectural Science Association and The University of Adelaide, 2016), 189–198.
11 Nihal Perera, "When Planning Ideas Land: Mahaweli's People-Centered Approach," In *Crossing Borders: International Exchange and Planning Practices*, ed. Patsy Healey and Robert Upton (Routledge, 2010), 144.

election of the United National Party led to the liberalisation of the Sri Lankan economy, opening the MDP to Western investments, aid and expertise.[12] An Accelerated Mahaweli Programme was implemented from 1977 with extensive foreign financing, including Sweden for the Kotmale Dam and the Danish International Development Agency (Danida), which funded Plesner's first year of stay.[13]

PLESNER'S NEIGHBOURHOOD DESIGN FOR THE MAHAWELI ARCHITECTURAL UNIT (MAU)

In 1981, Plesner was invited by the MDP minister Gamini Dissanayake to participate in the new town program. Plesner reviewed the master plans and surveyed the Mahaweli area with Nihal Perera, a young Sri Lankan architect. Leveraging his connections with political and economic elites, he successfully negotiated the creation of the Mahaweli Architectural Unit (MAU, 1983–1989), a specific agency aimed at integrating architectural, landscape, environmental and social concerns into the new town programme.[14] The MAU was responsible for low-cost housing and urban design, with Nihal Perera as Chief Architect-Planner and Plesner as Acting Director.[15] Before, the two main agencies driven by engineers and officials only handled financing (Mahaweli Economic Agency) and building (Mahaweli Engineering and Consultancy Agency).[16]

Plesner gathered a team of five architects from the MDP Water Management Department. His leading role inside the future MAU contrasted with his weak position compared to engineers, largely due to difficulties in recruiting assistant designers. Once he settled his office in a former tea factory in Digana near Kandy, Plesner conducted job interviews with relatively inexperienced architectural students.[17] The salaries offered were poor. Only Plesner received a higher income, provided by the World Bank. He expressed to foreign agencies his concern that aid programs were failing to strengthen a local and national middle class of graduates, including architects, engineers, and officials.[18]

Plesner's first role was to establish guidelines for town design. His memoirs display the Welikanda master plan (1987), realised by the Danish architect Dan Vodek Wajnman, in which a central square organises the civic, commercial and social life of the town.[19] The central square is framed by

12 Naveen Wickremeratne, "The Rationale of the Accelerated Mahaweli Programme" in *The Blurring of a Vision: The Mahaweli: Its Social, Economic, and Political Implications* ed. Hans-Peter Müller and Siripala T. Hettige (Sarvodaya Book Pub. Services, 1995), 24–70.
13 Dissanayake, Nirodha Kumari Meegahakumbura, "Evaluating New Towns in the Context of Mega Projects: A Case Study of the Mahaweli Architectural Unit, Sri Lanka (1983–1989)", 25.
14 Shanti Jayewardene, "Mahaweli Development Programme, Sri Lanka" In *Mimar 28: Architecture in Development*, ed. Hasan-Uddin Khan (Concept Media Ltd., 1988), 33–39.
15 Nihal Perera, "When Planning Ideas Land: Mahaweli's People-Centered Approach,", 159.
16 Nihal Perera, "When Planning Ideas Land: Mahaweli's People-Centered Approach," 151.
17 Ulrik Plesner, *In Situ: Arkitektoniske erindringer fra Sri Lanka*, 378.
18 Ibid., 380–381.
19 Ibid., 414–419.

four L-shaped buildings of two-storey height. The buildings host shops on the ground floor, with bedrooms for shopkeepers on the upper floor and kitchens in a backyard building. This core of the urban centre is surrounded by a series of municipal welfare infrastructures: schools, dormitories for pupils, hospitals and phone centres. The dense-low morphology of attached, one- or two-storey infrastructures combines the centrality of services and shopping areas with a rural townscape. The street layout forms a T-shaped network, with two secondary, square plazas bordered by service buildings arranged in both attached and detached layouts. While the Sinhalese rural settlements were usually scattered, less built and greener, Plesner opposedly advocated for high density in town centres.[20] He rejected the planned developments of Ampara and Anuradhapura of the postwar Gal-Oya scheme, where scattered urban settlements with wide streets were intended to support an increase in traffic with modern means of transportation.[21]

The examination of Girandurukotte, Dehiattakandiya and Welikanda master plans interrogates the indirect contribution of Western models of neighbourhood design. Plesner aimed to separate the towns from the jammed main roads. Inhabitants were supposed to walk from the dwellings to the central services (post office, shops, banks, hospitals, schools, and bus station) without crossing roads. In Welikanda, trees are planted along the centre of the streets and shaded arcades provide protection from the sun for pedestrians.[22] The urban functioning and zoning resemble neighbourhood units with community centres. The garden city model is absent in Plesner's narrative, but the planning guidelines imposed by the MDP followed the TVA model based on the rural implantation of small planned communities designed as a network of garden towns.[23] The neighbourhood unit concept was first introduced in India, during the late British colonial rule, and passed on by Indian officials and planners, notably in the Bhubaneswar neighbourhood unit designed by German architect Otto Königsberger in 1966.[24] Plesner was acquainted with Indian architecture and the transnational circulations of models within the Sub-Indian region. He designed a dormitory town for boys in Madurai (South India) in 1966, planned as a small self-contained village comprising a chapel, a school, an orchard and dormitories for sixteen boys in each house.[25]

While the design of half-pedestrian areas was uncommon in Sri Lanka, Plesner's settlement choice, apart from major roads, was inspired by the remote location of ancient Sinhalese rural towns.[26] This model aimed to combat the tendency of towns to cluster around major roads, which often became congested and required the recurrent construction of bypasses. In postwar Sri Lanka, urban expansion led to ribbon development of shops along main roads, gradually splitting small towns in two and blurring urban boundaries by generating small conurbations.[27] The Mahaweli towns aimed to create an alternative model of urban centrality.

LOW-COST HOUSING AND THE CRITIQUE OF TROPICAL MODERNISM

Around those service centres, zoning designated plots for single, detached homes.[28] Plesner's team was in charge of designing low-cost housing typologies for those developments. They were pragmatic in using local contractors and masons, assisted by architects at the first stage and then gradually self-built and implemented without further help. These guidelines were not strict regulations, but rather encouragement to continue the building methods introduced by the architects, such as the use of tiled roofs instead of metal sheets. Plesner drew several building prototypes (temples, shops, welfare infrastructures), which he described as being inspired by Sinhalese vernacular architecture.[29] The homes featured pitched roofs on rectangular buildings, similar to rural housing. Inspired by the 'walauvas' (feudal manors), the service buildings are designed with a covered passageway on the ground floor for the store displays and cantilever wood-beam roofs on the upper floor.[30]

Architectural design plays an essential role in Plesner's long-term critique of modernism. Perera's accounts and Plesner's memoirs suggest that his critical position originated in his Danish architectural education, especially the contribution of his step-father Kaare Klint, the architect and designer who accommodated Ulrik during the Second World War.[31] He taught him the careful use of plants and materials, and the contractual cooperation with craftsmen to design reproducible typologies.[32] The improvement of local skills in architectural design was a core goal of MAU and Plesner's main concern.[33]

During a trip to India in 1963, Plesner blamed Le Corbusier for ignoring local crafts during the construction of Chandigarh. He especially criticised his fellow Danish Arne Jacobsen for his proposal for Parliament House in Islamabad (1963). The assembly room is placed within a cylinder inserted in a rectangular building on piles with an inner courtyard. No device of natural ventilation is used for upper-floor rooms covered with facades of curtain walls. Plesner pointed out the out-of-touch design, directly imported from a drawing office in Copenhagen rather than from a field understanding of

20 Ibid., 387.
21 Ibid., 387.
22 Ibid., 387.
23 Dissanayake, Nirodha Kumari Meegahakumbura, "Evaluating New Towns in the Context of Mega Projects: A Case Study of the Mahaweli Architectural Unit, Sri Lanka (1983–1989)", 249.
24 Sanjeev Vidyarthi, "Reimagining the American neighbourhood unit for India", 56.
25 Ulrik Plesner, *In Situ: Arkitektoniske Erindringer fra Sri Lanka*, 336–341.
26 Ibid., 387.
27 Ibid., 386.
28 Ulrik Plesner, "The Mahaweli Buildings" *Living Architecture*, 1986, 5, 84–88.
29 Ibid., 84–88.
30 Ibid., 4–88.
31 Nihal Perera, Critical Vernacularism, Multiple roots, cascades of thought, and the local production of architecture. 78–93. Perera, N., & Tang, W.-S. (Eds.). (2012). Transforming Asian Cities: Intellectual impasse, Asianizing space, and emerging translocalities (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203093894
32 Ulrik Plesner, *In Situ: Arkitektoniske Erindringer fra Sri Lanka*, 35.
33 Shanti Jayewardene, "Mahaweli Development Programme, Sri Lanka", 33–39.

material conditions due to the high risks of regular blackouts in Pakistan.[34] In contrast, the Mahaweli towns would reproduce vernacular bioclimatic design, such as cross ventilation to naturally cool down interiors.[35]

His sensitivity to vernacular-based design viewed as design resources, inherits his extensive surveys of vernacular building typologies in Ceylon with his partner Geoffrey Bawa in the early 1960s.[36] The enforcement of protectionist measures during the SLFP government (1960–1965) sought to promote contracts with local industries, for which Plesner envisioned the use of local materials to mass-produce vernacular-inspired building components.[37] His assistance for the MAU was to provide a second chance for his vernacular-based approach to building and planning.

Plesner expressed several times his opposition to Fry and Drew's 'tropical modernism', a scientific adaptation of International architecture to tropical climates.[38] He criticised it as a Western, technocratic engineering practice, that disregarded local social conditions. Plesner considered his profession as a counter-model to the modern architect. The good architect must learn vernacular architecture, conduct on-site observations and then design building typologies to assist local craftsmen and masons. However, Plesner shared with tropical modernism the investigation of vernacular bioclimatic design and low-cost prototyping for energetic and economic sustainability. Close to United National Party officials, he commissioned a series of modernist infrastructures and houses for officials in the 1960s.[39]

Relating his experience with Plesner, Perera further criticised tropical modernism for its Western-centred, climatic reductionism and opposedly praised Plesner for his attempt to create a Sri Lankan 'critical vernacularism' as a counter-model to Chandigarh and Brasília.[40] Perera retrospectively formulated the 'people-centred approach' to describe the involvement of inhabitants' needs and habits in the design process during the later years of the MAU.[41] In this period, Plesner was less involved and rather acted as an intermittent consultant. At that time, Perera viewed his own 'people-centred' approach as a vector of a decolonising, unplanned approach against the postcolonial, Western expertise, and the MDP 'irrigation bureaucracy'.[42]

34 Ulrik Plesner, *In Situ: Arkitektoniske Erindringer fra Sri Lanka*, 151.
35 Nirodha K M Dissanayake, "Katharine Bartsch and Peter Scriver, Designing Sustainable Settlements in the Context of Megaprojects: Lessons Learnt From the Mahaweli Architectural Unit, Sri Lanka (1983–1989)", 194.
36 Ulrik Plesner, "Gamle Bygninger på Ceylon." *Arkitekten*, August 1965, 16, 317–323.
37 Ulrik Plesner, *In Situ: Arkitektoniske Erindringer fra Sri Lanka*, 130.
38 Atkinson, Fello. "The Genesis of Modern Tropical Architecture." *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 117, no. 5156 (July 1969): 546–561
39 Ulrik Plesner, *In Situ: Arkitektoniske Erindringer fra Sri Lanka*, 87–107.
40 Nihal Perera, Critical Vernacularism, Multiple roots, cascades of thought, and the local production of architecture. 78–93. Perera, N., & Tang, W.-S. (Eds.). (2012). Transforming Asian Cities: Intellectual impasse, Asianizing space, and emerging translocalities (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203093894
41 Nihal Perera, "When Planning Ideas Land: Mahaweli's People-Centered Approach,", 141.
42 Naveen Wickremeratne, "The Rationale of the Accelerated Mahaweli Programme", 9.

CONCLUSION

The MDP new towns can be retrospectively considered as a half-success. Several studies have pointed out the undermining of socialist welfare ideals, due to the strengthening of productivity in the 1980s by top-down expertise rather than social sustainability, the degradation of ethnic conditions and the pauperisation of farmers.[43] The planned town centres became partly devitalised due to the displacement of shops from the urban cores to the peripheral main roads.[44] The use of foreign aid and models for economic decolonisation represents a typical paradox of post-independence developmentalism.[45] In the case of the Mahaweli, it succeeded in achieving near self-sufficiency in rice production by the mid-2000s.[46] Plesner's position towards welfare planning was ambivalent. Opposed to Bandaranaike's socialist and protectionist policies, Plesner praised liberal investmentswhile at the same time criticising the MDP for its top-down bureaucracy and tropical modernism.[47] Decolonisation was a socio-cultural stance rather than a purely economic one. Yet, his idealistic recreation of indigenous architecture and his work for the Mahaweli towns significantly contributed to the architectural culture of Sri Lanka.

43 Naveen Wickremeratne, "The Rationale of the Accelerated Mahaweli Programme", 25.; Birgitte Refslund Sørensen, *Relocated Lives: Displacement and Resettlement within the Mahaweli Project, Sri Lanka* (VU University Press, 1996), 247.
44 Nirodha K M Dissanayake, Katharine Bartsch and Peter Scriver, Designing Sustainable Settlements in the Context of Megaprojects: Lessons Learnt From the Mahaweli Architectural Unit, Sri Lanka (1983–1989).
45 Łukasz Stanek, *Architecture in Global Socialism. Eastern Europe, Africa, and the Middle East in the Cold War*, 1–34.
46 Nihal Perera, "When Planning Ideas Land: Mahaweli's People-Centered Approach," 144.
47 Ulrik Plesner, *In Situ: Arkitektoniske Erindringer fra Sri Lanka*, 343.

Aerial view of the ‘Golden Shoe’ financial district, Singapore, c.1975.
Image source: Urban Redevelopment Authority Annual Report 1974-5, Urban Redevelopment Authority.

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Architecture of the ‘Property State’: Public Ownership of Land and the Production of the Modern Built Environment in Postindependence Singapore

THE ROLE OF LAND

Singapore’s rapid urban development since its independence in 1965, is a story well chronicled. Once a colonial port city characterised by an eclectic commercial core, districts of dense shophouses, and informal *kampong* village settlements, it had emerged by the late twentieth century as the modernist city par excellence. Today, Singapore is synonymous with Corbusian public housing estates, housing over seventy-five percent of the resident population, and a financial centre of skyscrapers in the International Style.

How can this rapid transformation from a colonial port city to a modernist metropolis be understood? While conventional architect-author-focussed histories of modernism in Singapore have targeted individual agents operating within a coherent ‘nation-building’ endeavour, central to the thesis of this paper is that the production of the built environment in postindependence Singapore was both predicated on, and shaped by, structural shifts in land ownership and property rights. In recognising that, under an ongoing condition of modernity, land forms the dominant system of social relations that govern our interactions with the physical world. It thus constitutes both the physical and socio-economic ‘ground’ upon which architecture is constructed. This paper suggests land as a productive lens through which to assess the diverse social, political, and economic values imbued in the production of modern architecture, particularly in the context of newly-independent postcolonial states.[1]

Singapore forms an instructive case in this regard. Less well-known than accounts of Singapore’s rapid social, economic, and physical development, is the programme of effective ‘land reform’ through which they were realised. Between the mid-1960s and early 2000s, the government acquired upwards of ninety percent of land in the city-state, through a combination of inherited British Crown Land, compulsory acquisition, and extensive land reclamation.[2] As elucidated by Anne Haila, Singapore’s land reform

1 Florian Hertweck, “The Question of Land Reloaded”, *Architecture on Common Ground—The Question of Land: Positions & Models* (Lars Müller Publishers, 2020), 8.
2 Sock-Yong Phang, *Policy Innovations for Affordable Housing in Singapore* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 13.

was regarded as ‘the most important Georgist in the world’. In her seminal, 2015 study *Urban Land Rent: Singapore as a Property State*, she described its land reform was not homogeneous, but constituted a diverse system of parallel ‘land regimes’.[3] These land regimes, key among which include the redistributive use of state-owned land to provide mass public housing, and the state-capitalist ‘sale’ of leaseholds for collection of land rents, both enabled and shaped different forms of architectural development, while embodying the complex political values that shaped Singapore as a postcolonial ‘developmental state’.

Thus, while it has been generally recognised that land acquisition ‘empowered state agencies… to remake Singapore into a comprehensive planned modernist built environment’, this paper posits that the production of modernist architecture in Singapore—rather than interpreted as the work of individual form-giving authors or as part of a coherent ‘nation-building’ endeavour—may be more critically assessed as entangled with diverse land regimes and thus social, political, and economic values.[4]

To illustrate this, the political, ideological and juridical roots of land reform in postcolonial Singapore will first be briefly recounted. Following this, two case studies—the Toa Payoh New Town and ‘Golden Shoe’ financial district’—will be highlighted as examples of the production of modernist architecture in Singapore under contrasting land regimes, characterised as the ‘modernism of redistribution’ and ‘modernism of state-capitalism’, respectively.

THE ROOTS OF LAND REFORM IN SINGAPORE

When the socialist-leaning and anti-colonial People’s Action Party (PAP) acquired full internal self-government from the British in 1959, it was elected on a platform of affordable mass housing construction, economic growth, and redistribution. At the time, property ownership was concentrated among a small number of absentee landholders, comprising less than ten percent of the population: a legacy of colonial inequities in economic opportunity and land distribution.[5] Like many other newly independent, postcolonial governments, the PAP saw the need for radical transformations in property relations.

Following Singapore’s full independence in 1965, the constitution was thus amended to exclude the hitherto sacred ‘right to property’, while the sweeping 1966 Land Acquisition Act was enacted the following year. Replacing ‘onerous’ colonial-era eminent domain laws, the wide-ranging Land Acquisition Act permitted state acquisition ‘for any public purpose’.[6]

3 Anne Haila, *Urban Land Rent: Singapore as Property State* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 15–25.
4 Jiat-Hwee Chang, Justin Zhuang, Darren Soh, *Everyday Modernism: Architecture & Society in Singapore* (NUS Press, 2023), 72.
5 Centre for Liveable Cities, Urban Systems Studies—Land Acquisition & Resettlement: Securing Resources for Development (Centre for Liveable Cities, 2014), 8.
6 Centre for Liveable Cities, Land Acquisition, 14.

Avenues for contestation were limited to remuneration and not acquisition itself, decided not by the courts but by a quasi-legal Appeals Board.[7]

Further, conscious of the potential for speculation driven by large-scale acquisition, the government affirmed that ‘no private landowner should benefit from development which had taken place at public expense’.[8] Informed by a belief that land was a national asset and that uplifts in land value are created through public investment and should thus rightfully accrue to the state for public expenditure, land costs were fixed at statutory dates, providing both the ideological and economic bases for mass-acquisition at below-market prices.

Both scholars and politicians recognised this system as a direct infringement upon liberal private property rights.[9] In ideologically justifying Singapore’s severe land acquisition laws in the name of the redistributive ‘greater good’, remedying colonial injustices, and the exigencies of postindependence nation-building, Lee Kuan Yew, founding Prime Minister and a British-educated lawyer by training, overtly admitted that ‘[the PAP] took overriding powers to acquire land at low cost, which was in breach of one of the fundamentals of British constitutional law: the sanctity of property.’[10]

In summary, Singapore effectively reformed colonial-era property rights, to consolidate property relations in favour of a strong—albeit ‘benevolent’—and redistributive state. As. The following case studies will show however, these newly consolidated property rights were deployed toward diverse ends, with direct implications for the production of a new, postindependence built environment.

PUBLIC HOUSING: MODERNISM OF REDISTRIBUTION

In 1959, Singapore faced a chronic housing shortage. Laissez-faire planning by the British, absentee landlords, and a handicapped colonial public housing programme had created squalid living conditions for a large proportion of the population. Many lived in overcrowded and subdivided shophouses in the city centre, while others lived in city-fringe *kampong* villages of freestanding timber dwellings. The PAP viewed these conditions as impediments to both moral and physical health, as well as an opportunity to secure popular political credibility through housing provision.[11]

7 Kong Chong Ho, “Land and Housing: Three Conversations with Anne Haila”, *American Journal of Economics & Sociology* 80, no. 2 (March 2021): 336.
8 Bryan Chew et al., “Compulsory Acquisition of Land in Singapore: A Fair Regime?”, *Singapore Academy of Law Journal* 22, (2010): 168–9.
9 Beng Huat Chua, “Disrupting Private Property Rights: National Public Housing Programme”, in *Liberalism Disavowed: Communitarianism & State Capitalism in Singapore* (NUS Press, 2017): 74–97.
10 Centre for Liveable Cities, Urban Systems Studies—Urban Redevelopment: From Urban Squalor to Global City (Centre for Liveable Cities, 2016), 10.
11 Centre for Liveable Cities, *Urban Redevelopment*, 10.

With housing deemed ‘one of the gravest and most pressing problems’ faced by the new nation, the state Housing & Development Board (HDB) was founded in 1960. Uniquely, the Housing & Development Board Act vested in the HDB the total scope of public housing provision, including land acquisition, clearance and resettlement, town planning, housing design, estate management, and the provision of home financing.[12]

To successfully enact the scale of mass-housing construction envisioned by the HDB, large quantities of land for intensive redevelopment were required. Thus, while the earliest public housing construction took place on inherited British Crown Land, large-scale provision of housing began in earnest with the construction of centrally planned ‘New Towns’ on tracts of land newly acquired by the state. Between 1959 and 1984, a hundred-and-seventy-seven square kilometres, or approximately thirty percent of Singapore’s total land area, was newly acquired by the state, of which half was used for public housing.[13] Only ten years after the HDB’s establishment, thirty-six percent of the population lived in public housing flats, rising to over eighty percent by the mid-1980s. As scholar Chua Beng Huat has argued, the HDB had by this point formed an effective monopoly and become the country’s de facto universal housing provider.[14]

In architectural terms, comprehensive land acquisition enabled the state to undertake sweeping top-down redevelopment and author a modernist ‘total environment’. For example, in Toa Payoh, Singapore’s first postindependence New Town constructed between 1966–70, thirty-five thousand flats housing up to two-hundred thousand people were envisaged for a six-hundred-acre site acquired and cleared of kampongs, squatters and farmers.

Here, the smallest ‘cell’ of urban form—the individual plot, shophouse unit, or freestanding *kampong* dwelling; products of fragmented private property ownership—had been amalgamated into overtly collective modernist blocks. The realisation of the modernist dream of large-scale, tabula rasa housing provision through standardised and industrialised production, was realised here on an unprecedented scale. The replacement of private dwellings with public housing blocks as the dominant architectural scale of the New Town, revealed the shift toward centrally planned, rather than private, authorship of the built environment, contingent on state ownership of land. Architecturally, the sole authorship of the HDB, together with an ethos of cost-efficient construction through economies of scale, led to a centrally planned landscape of modernist slabs, towers, and communal facilities.

The production of Singapore’s now ubiquitous modernist housing landscapes on land acquired by the state can be understood as a product of Singapore’s postindependence socialist politics and a powerful,

12 Beng Huat Chua, *Public Subsidy / Private Accumulation: The Political Economy of Singapore’s Public Housing* (NUS Press, 2024): 20.
13 Centre for Liveable Cities, *Urban Systems Studies—Resettling Communities: Creating Space of Nation Building* (Centre for Liveable Cities, 2019), 12.
14 Chua, *Public Subsidy / Private Accumulation*, 23.

redistributive state: a modernism of redistribution. As Haila notes, large-scale public housing provision by the HDB was contingent not only on the supply of state-owned land but a commitment to redistributing hitherto privately owned lands for the ‘public good’.[15] Likewise, the centralised design and planning of public housing landscapes within the state institution of the HDB constitutes an elevation of ‘built environment professionals’ to central roles in spatial policy that was characteristic of the postwar welfare state.[16]

While Singapore’s early public housing estates may thus be interpreted as representing a modernism of redistribution, other parallel land regimes were present in Singapore, informed not by the PAP’s early socialist politics, but by a state-capitalist leveraging of newly globalised economies and networks of capital to attract investment in the built environment. Unlike the homogenous, ‘collective’ modernism of public housing landscapes, the process of ‘urban renewal’ produced a heterogeneous, privately authored, corporate modernism, that sought to secure both Singapore’s position and physical image as a ‘global city’: a modernism of state-capitalism.

URBAN RENEWAL: MODERNISM OF STATE-CAPITALISM

Just after independence, Singapore’s urban core comprised a dense mix of overcrowded and often dilapidated low-rise shophouses, mid-rise offices, and colonial-era institutional buildings, with highly fragmented private land ownership.[17] After accounting for the most pressing housing needs through peripheral New Town construction, the state thus embarked on a city-centre ‘urban renewal’ programme through the formation of the Urban Renewal Unit (later renamed the Urban Renewal Department) in 1964.

The Urban Renewal Department’s (URD) role involved acquisition of sites, resettlement, amalgamation of plots to create efficient land parcels, clearance of existing buildings, and packaging sites for ‘sale’ of leaseholds to private developers through public tender: a process known as the Sale of Sites programme[18]. Sale of Sites tenders were advertised both in Singapore and abroad, in newspapers and construction journals, to attract a new class of multinational developers—and their investment capital—from states including Japan, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Indonesia.

As Haila has noted, ‘sales’ of leaseholds involved the state acting as an effective landlord, to which developers paid long-term market-determined land rents. A combination of state ownership of land and market forces.[19] Scholars have assessed this system as an approximation of the ‘single tax’

15 Haila, Urban Land Rent, 87.
16 Mark Swenarton, Tom Avermaete, Dirk van den Heuvel eds., *Architecture and the Welfare State* (Routledge, 2015), 14.
17 Centre for Liveable Cities, *Urban Redevelopment*, 58. See also Chua Beng Huat, *The Golden Shoe: Building Singapore’s Financial District* (Urban Redevelopment Authority, 1989).
18 Centre for Liveable Cities, *The Government Land Sales Programme: Turning Plans into Reality* (Centre for Liveable Cities, 2021): 41.
19 Haila, *Urban Land Rent*, 216–7.

form of land value capture proposed by social reformer Henry George.[20] The profitability of this form is attested to by the fact that some scholars estimate that land-related sources comprise upwards of fifty percent of annual government revenue.[21]

As private developers who bought previously state-owned land enlisted private-sector architects, these sites produced diverse urban and architectural outcomes, unlike the centrally planned redevelopment of public-housing on land that remained in the hands of the state. In the 'Golden Shoe' financial district for example, numerous sites were acquired by the state and parcelled for sale throughout the 1960s-80s. These were purchased by private developers and given form by emergent, local architectural practices such as Tay Joo Teck Architect, Yang Tai Tye Architects and K K Tan & Associates. Each of them grew extensive portfolios of Sale-of-Sites-projects.[22]

In contrast to the institutionally authored, low-cost, and industrially standardised modernism of Singapore's public housing, this private modernism—enabled by higher budgets and particular patronage—was typically characterised by formal expressiveness, corporate symbolism, and the influence of the postwar International Style.[23] Likewise, unlike the 'redistributive modernism' of public housing estates, this privately authored, heterogeneous 'podium-and-tower' modernism of state capitalism, embodied liberal economic values, an openness to global capitalism, and a commitment to private wealth accumulation through the built environment.

CONCLUSION: LAND REGIMES AND MULTIPLE MODERNISMS

In the historiography of modernism of post-colonial nation-states, there is often an impulse to homogenise and conflate the interpretation of diverse modernisms within the framework of 'nation-building' and the progressive values associated with decolonisation. In contrast to this approach, this paper has advocated for a more nuanced reading of modernism within postcolonial states, through the epistemological framework of land.

Based on an understanding of land as the dominant system of social relations that governs our interaction with the built environment, and as both the literal and figurative 'ground' upon which architecture is constructed, we may see property relations as a site where political, economic, and social values are brought to the fore. As the physical manifestation of these values, the production of modernism in postcolonial states can be interpreted not with a retroactive and easily misappropriated nostalgia for 'nation-building', but a critical understanding of the values and structural conditions in which these landscapes were produced.

As the brief case of Singapore has shown, the epistemological framework land provides for the identification of multiple modernisms within the post-colonial state. Particularly in the case of 'developmental states', wherein state intervention and market capitalism exist simultaneously within complex economic relations, the elucidation of different 'land regimes' shows that the modernism of post-colonial states cannot be interpreted as homogeneous or static. Rather, modernism in the postcolonial state should be recognised as pliable and multiplicitous, as deployed to serve different values under various conditions, and therefore deserving of contemporary critical appraisal beyond existing architect-author-focused, or nationalistic narratives.

20 Phang, Sock-Yong, "Economic Development the Distribution of Land Rents in Singapore: A Georgist Implementation", *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 55, no. 4 (October 1996): 489–501.
21 Andrew Purves, "Economic Rent, inequality and public revenue - The Singapore Model", PhD diss., (University College London, 2023): 202.
22 Urban Redevelopment Authority, *Chronicle of Sale of Sites: A Pictorial Chronology of the Sale of Sites Programme for Private Development* (Urban Redevelopment Authority, 1983).
23 Ironically, it is this private, rather than the public modernism of the state, that has become most often associated with 'nation-building' values in contemporary Singaporean heritage discourse.

‘Site Concept’ from Auraria Higher Education Centre: Proposal for a Landscape Design and Implementation Study. Image source: Denver Public Library Special Collections and Archives Department.

Leen Katrib (University of Kentucky)

Subverting the University Archive: A Decolonial Revision of Miesian Modernism

To name colonialism is to engage with a formal practice, a finite timetable, and Eurocentric colonialisms. To name coloniality, on the other hand, is to recognise the constantly mutating but enduring machineries of power underpinning all forms of Western colonialism and its reincarnations.[1] As provoked by Aníbal Quijano and further shaped by Walter D. Mignolo, coloniality is intricately entangled with modernity; the reality of the former’s violent instrumentalisation in a colonial matrix of power is masked by the fiction of the latter’s promises of progress and salvation.[2] To name coloniality and its dyadic constitution in modernity is an inherently decolonial act; it is to delink from—and unmask—modernity’s myth of emancipation and Eurocentric hegemony of knowledge. It is through the modernity/coloniality/decoloniality triad that we uncover ‘what the rhetoric of modernity and the logic of coloniality prevent us from doing’ to put name to the violence that underpins modernity’s achievements and to ultimately disrupt the coloniality of knowledge as an instrument of modernity.[3] Since the sixteenth century, the university has served as such instrument, implementing an ongoing colonial grammar that stealthily evolves its terms of engagement in response to resistance to coloniality as modernity’s darker underside.[4]

In the United States, the coloniality of higher education institutions endures through permutations of their colonial foundations: from a settler colonial architecture that literally and figuratively concealed enslaved labour, to fictions of terra nullius driven by campaigns of land privatisation that predicated on indigenous dispossession.[5] Since the decolonial turn, scholars have been increasingly challenging modernity’s promise of higher education’s public good, by naming the colonial violence undergirding embodied forms of progress and Enlightenment ideals in the typologies of the colonial university and the land-grant university. In contrast, the emergence of the modern urban university in the twentieth century is hardly ever unpacked through the coloniality that endures in two formations of nation-building that reinforce fictions of tabula rasa: a post-WWII pattern of campus expansions, paralleled with the formalisation of the University Archives as a technology of power.

1 Walter D. Mignolo, “Coloniality and Globalisation: A Decolonial Take,” *Globalisations* 18, no. 5 (December 2020): 724.
2 Mignolo, “Coloniality and Globalisation: A Decolonial Take,” 730.
3 Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis. On Decoloniality* (Duke University Press Books, 2018), 151.
4 Mignolo, “Coloniality and Globalisation: A Decolonial Take,” 723.
5 As in the case of Thomas Jefferson’s slave-built University of Virginia campus.

Since the postwar period, urban universities across the U.S. have been constructing and expanding their campuses through a matrix of federal-state-municipal coalitions that have strategically erased Black and Latinx neighbourhoods under the guise of progress and the rhetoric of educational inclusion; all the while excluding from institutional archives the very material records, narratives, and racially dispossessed people that counter the myth. As the pattern of expansions rapidly altered the urban landscape, the urgency to manage institutional memory—and by extension, national history—necessitated archival awareness and governance. The establishment of the College and University Archives Committee of the Society of American Archivists (SAA) in 1949 precisely served such purpose as the committee concurrently surveyed universities to monitor the founding and management of university archives across the nation. A 1949 survey reveals many institutions' intentions to establish archives with the guidance of the committee, while surveys conducted in 1972 and 1979 indicate a meteoric growth of university archives between 1960 and 1979.[6] Though such growth in institutional archival repositories does not explicitly correlate with the expansion of urban campuses, their parallel formations during the post-WWII golden age is not by chance, and a comparative view of urban universities and their archives presents an opportunity to trace patterns in the construction of national histories that are decidedly severed from colonial nation-building operations. As historian Laurence Veysey notes, 'any university archive is an archive of at least national scope' that contains local material records as 'the stuff of which national social and institutional history is later constructed'.[7] Clifford K. Shipton, a founding member and later president of SAA, reinforces the national capacity of the university archives when he notes that 'any college archive is… as rich a source for history as a State archive; and there, in truth, is half its justification' to prevent historians from following in the footsteps of early twentieth century progressive historians who deconstructed the U.S. Constitution through economic interpretations of the Founding Fathers' motivations.[8] To scrutinise the modern urban university and its archival repositories through the modernity/coloniality lens, is to change the terms of the conversation: from isolated notions of postwar progress and social mobility that perpetuate the myth of modernity, to a mutating continuum of coloniality across time: from the university's nation-building tactics of the past, to its national city-building strategies of the present.[9]

One such myth is Mies van der Rohe's modernist legacy on the American academic and urban landscape, perpetuated by institutional repositories that regurgitate discussions about form and architectural ideology. In engaging institutional archives in Chicago, architectural historians have unpacked Mies's master plan for Illinois Institute of Technology's (IIT) postwar campus expansion into Bronzeville through various frameworks:

6 Nicholas C. Burckel and J. Frank Cook, "A Profile of College and University Archives in the United States," *American Archivist* 45, no. 4 (Fall 1982): 411.
7 Lawrence R. Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (University of Chicago Press, 1965), 84–85.
8 Clifford K. Shipton, "College Archives and Academic Research," *The American Archivist* 27, no. 3 (July 1964): 396.
9 Sharon Stein, *Unsettling the University: Confronting the Colonial Foundations of US Higher Education* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2022), 51.

unravelling the coordinated alliances during Chicago's larger urban renewal project that enabled the erasure of a Black neighbourhood;[10] discerning the linguistic nuances in institutional documents that painted the narrative of a neighbourhood in voluntary rather than orchestrated decay;[11] and highlighting the individuals whose contributions to the campus master plan were dwarfed vis-à-vis the vast literature dedicated to Mies's role as the architect/planner.[12] Yet, such accounts have either overlooked Mies's averted gaze from racial and contextual realities or framed it as a detachment from the human condition, and in so doing have reinforced the narrative of an architect/educator who was intent on creating an apolitical architecture, pedagogy, and modernist order for higher education. Such framing detracts from uncovering longer shadows of erasure across the American landscape that can be traced back to the architect's practice and pedagogical exercises at IIT.

The inherent archival bias at IIT's university archives reflects the institution's keen interest in controlling the narrative of its campus, where the absence of records that challenge the myth—such as documentation of Bronzeville's community, built environment, and resistance efforts prior to demolitions—is met with comprehensive record-keeping that reinforces institutional memory. But to read against the archival grain and stop at this obvious conclusion, is to isolate the impact of this chapter of Miesian modernism in a temporally and geographically finite place that ultimately prevents us from tracing the stealthily enduring and national evolution of its nation-building capacity. Instead, working subversively from within the site of the university archive, *along* the archival grain, presents a new avenue to revise the influence of Miesian modernism on the American landscape at large.[13] One such unlikely and overlooked starting point, are the university archives dedicated to Mies van der Rohe's disciples, at the Auraria Campus in Denver, Colorado.

In the 1970s, against the backdrop of a growing liberation movement that resisted the oppression and racial dispossession of the Chicano community in Colorado and across the nation, a group of Mies's former students and second-generation disciples from IIT took part in, and in some cases led, the design and planning of Denver's Auraria Campus expansion: a masterplan that united the University of Colorado Denver, Denver Metropolitan College, and the Community College of Denver, in the erasure of a Chicano community. In 1972, Jacques Brownson, who studied under Mies from 1946 to 1950 and later went on to teach at IIT from 1956 to 1960 during Mies's tenure, moved to Denver to become the Director of Planning and Development for

10 Sarah Whiting, "Bas-Relief Urbanism: Chicago's Figured Field," in *Mies in America*, ed. Phyllis Lambert (Harry N. Abrams, 2003), 643–91.
11 Daniel Bluestone, "Chicago's Mecca Flat Blues," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 57, no. 4 (December 1998): 382–403.
12 A recent storytelling exhibition by Michelangelo Sabatino, titled "A Living Room for Bronzeville," expands the narrative to note the overlooked role of landscape architect Alfred Caldwell, who was hired by Mies van der Rohe to develop the landscaping plan for IIT's campus expansion and whose contribution was dwarfed in comparison to the vast literature dedicated to van der Rohe.
13 I borrow this concept from Ann Laura Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance," *Archival Science* 2 (March 2002): 87–109.

the Auraria Higher Education Centre (AHEC)—the administrative body that led the design, planning, and construction of the Auraria Campus. Brownson would go on to recruit other IIT graduates into the project: John Kreidich, Jr., who studied at IIT after Mies's retirement but still under the influence of his curriculum from 1968 to 1973 and his office from 1971 to 1973, was hired as Brownson's architectural assistant at AHEC;[14] Helmut Jahn, who studied under Mies's curriculum from 1966 to 1967, was hired to design the Auraria Library; and IIT graduate Robert D. Phillips who accompanied Jahn as part of C.F. Murphy Associates, later known as Murphy/Jahn, where Brownson used to work during his time in Chicago.[15]

As an architectural case study, Auraria Campus has not merited the same scholarly attention as IIT's campus expansion into a predominantly Black neighbourhood; yet the project necessarily provokes the question of influence as Mies's disciples coalesced to explicitly cite and adapt Miesian principles onto a Hispanic context. In 'The Anxiety of Influence', literary critic Harold Bloom proposes a theory of understanding the flow of influence between a precursor master and his later disciple through six revisionary ratios: 'clinamen', 'tessera', 'kenosis', 'daemonisation', 'askesis', and 'apophrades'.[16] This paper proposes to read the directionality of influence from precursor to disciple, to ultimately enact the uncanniest of all revisionary ratios from disciple back to precursor: a revision of Miesian modernism. Such reversed comparative study between two institutions and their repositories emphasises their national, rather than local, scope of nation-building.

Archival traces reflect Brownson's burdened relationship to Mies's influence—of trying to distance one's contribution while still doing so in relation to the precursor work. In one instance, Brownson had cautioned an IIT graduate against working for Mies, as it 'was not good for a young architect, since Mies's influence was just too strong'.[17] Brownson was conscious not to work for Mies to establish his own independence and was sure to frame Mies's sublime as greater-than-Mies by drawing a precursor

14 Auraria Higher Education Centre: Proposal for a Landscape Design and Implementation Study, January 1974, box 6, folder FF29, Edward D. White Jr. Architectural Records (WH1753), Special Collections and Archives Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, CO.

15 Robert D. Phillips, n.d., folder 40, Auraria Library Building Collection, Auraria Library Special Collections, Auraria Campus, Denver, CO.

16 Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 14–16. *Clinamen* is the disciple's creative misprision of the master to swerve from precedent and cast something relational yet anew; *tessera* is the disciple's antithetical attempt to complete the master's work as though it failed to go far enough; *kenosis* is the disciple's attempt to be original by breaking off of the precursor's continuity at the disciple's expense, whose ebbing ultimately affects the precursor's Sublime; *daemonisation* is the disciple's framing of the precursor's Sublime as greater-than-precursor to produce a Counter-Sublime that undermines the uniqueness of the precursor; *askesis* is the disciple's keen attention to add a contribution that stands apart from the precursor in the quest for solitude, but in so doing truncates the precursor work; *apophrades*, or the full circle return of the dead, is the uncanniness when the disciple consciously holds open his work to the precursor rather than helplessly responding to its influence, and in so doing suggesting that we see the precursor work through the disciple's work, rather than the other way around.

17 The Mies Experience: An Autobiographical Account of Working for Mies van der Rohe and with his key assistants (1960–1969), 12 August 2012, 032.04.04, folder 2, Mies van der Rohe Society Collection 1951–2011, Paul V. Galvin Library University Archives and Special Collections, Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago, IL.

connection back to Peter Behrens.[18] Yet, he couldn't escape his former professor's influence—particularly as it pertained to his perspective on racialized contexts, organisational grids, representational strategies, and materiality.

In his oral history, Brownson acknowledges the astonishing parallels between Mies's narrative at IIT and his at Auraria. Recalling the very first time that Mies walked around Bronzeville before expressing to then-IIT president Henry Heald how the neighbourhood can't get any worse, Brownson describes having a similar reaction to his walkthrough in Auraria, referring to it as 'Denver's preserve for the brown rat population' because of a nearby meat packing company.[19] Beyond narrative, the construction of the campus had an enduring influence on Brownson and his team of IIT recruits. When Mies arrived in Chicago in 1938, beginning that Fall semester in a fourth-year design studio and until his retirement, he would give students a version of the same design problem: design a new university campus.[20] The pedagogical frame—a new campus—mirrored the design problem through which Mies was simultaneously designing IIT's campus expansion into Bronzeville. While it is not clear whether Brownson enrolled in that studio during his time as a student, he notes that taking recurrent field trips throughout the campus during its construction became part of the pedagogy and classroom discussions to observe its planning and how steel and large glass windows were being erected.[21]

Almost twenty-five years later, Brownson would present a physical master plan to AHEC's Board of Directors that displays white linework of a thirty-square-foot organisational grid printed on transparent film and superimposed onto an aerial photograph of a densely populated Hispanic neighbourhood; the angle of the aerial perspective aids the linework of the grid to progressively flatten the realities of the context without question.[22] Brownson acknowledges his grid as a mutation of Mies's twenty-four-square-foot grid that imposed order at IIT,[23] itself a mutation that finds its origins even further back to a Palatine chapel in Germany that Mies frequented throughout his childhood.[24] Tracing the mutating continuum of the grid across time and geographies—from a Hispanic Auraria, a Black Bronzeville, and back to a European chapel—casts an enduring Eurocentrism of imposing so-called order onto a context deemed as chaotic. Such so-called chaos is addressed in the master plan document compiled by Brownson, where an Existing Site Map shows the outline of the existing

18 Oral history of Jacques Calman Brownson / interviewed by Betty J. Blum, 5 December 1994, 720.973 B8852o, Chicago Architects Oral History Project, The Ernest R. Graham Study Centre for Architectural Drawings, Department of Architecture, the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL.

19 Oral history of Jacques Calman Brownson, Chicago Architects Oral History Project.

20 Kevin Harrington, "Mies's Curriculum at IIT," in *Mies Van Der Rohe: Architect as Educator* (Illinois Institute of Technology, 1986), 60.

21 Oral history of Jacques Calman Brownson, Chicago Architects Oral History Project.

22 Auraria Higher Education Centre Master Plan 1973–1976, 7 May 1973, WH1974 Don and Carolyn Etter Papers, OVFF 1, Special Collections and Archives Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, CO.

23 Oral history of Jacques Calman Brownson, Chicago Architects Oral History Project.

24 Sherry Jean Tierney, "Rezoning Chicago's Modernisms: Ludwig Mies Van Der Rohe, Remment Koolhaas, the IIT Campus and its Bronzeville Prehistory (1914–2003)" (M.A. thesis, Arizona State University, 2008).

streets and city blocks; notably missing from the drawing is any indication of existing buildings in the context, the residences of and businesses by the Chicano population. Such representational erasure is reminiscent of Mies's conscious decision to make Chicago's Black Belt absent from photomontages and drawings of IIT.

The influence of materiality is also notable, as Brownson indicates that 'it has been said that a lot of people at IIT were under the influence of Mies—I cannot imagine a better influence… Mies's buildings in steel and glass are only the beginning, not the end of the road. The possibilities are endless—he has opened up a horizon for us'.[25] At Auraria, Brownson was keen on building a glass and steel curtain wall campus, to the opposition of AHEC's Board of Directors who favoured a masonry curtain wall system and brick veneer panels as a unified solution for the campus because of cost and performance. His insistence on a glass and steel campus was seconded by Helmut Jahn, who presented a cost analysis as it applied to the Auraria Library to convey the long-term mechanical/electrical operating cost savings of his proposed sunshade on a steel and glass building.[26] Such strategic alliance nevertheless failed, as the Planning Board and Institutional Executives ultimately favoured the aesthetic of brick, and Jahn's Auraria Library today stands alone as the only glass and steel building on campus and the only campus building in Auraria to be widely published in architectural journals as an extension of Miesian modernism. At IIT, Mies was able to realise the transparency he desired and viewed it as a technology of modernity and absolute truthfulness shaped by Enlightenment ideals.[27] But as Jasmine Rault argues, the mobilisation of transparency as a medium in modernist architecture finds a throughline in Enlightenment roots and settler colonial tricks of violence disguised as justice.[28] The fixity of a transparent modernity and truthfulness and fictions of progress across Auraria and IIT disguise the respective violence enacted on Latinx and Black neighbourhoods at the hands of higher education.

The overlooked narrative of the Auraria Campus provides a productive avenue for further analysis of the national impact of Mies van der Rohe's pedagogy and practice at IIT. Isolating the scope of IIT's historiography to Bronzeville and Mies prevents us from recognising its inherent coloniality and nation-building capacity. To unpack the flow of design influence—and traces in institutional repositories—backwards from the later disciples to the precursor modernist master is to challenge and revise the very historiography of Miesian modernism to point to its longer shadows of influence on racial geographies and national histories in the United States.

25 Oral history of Jacques Calman Brownson, Chicago Architects Oral History Project.
26 Jacques Brownson and Helmut Jahn to the Board of Directors, 5 June 1974, in Auraria Higher Education Centre Board of Directors Minutes, 1973–1974, Auraria Library Special Collections, Auraria Campus, Denver, CO.
27 Fritz Neumeyer, *The Artless Word: Mies van Der Rohe on the Building Art* (MIT Press, 1991), 99.
28 Jasmine Rault, "Window Walls and Other Tricks of Transparency: Digital, Colonial, and Architectural Modernity." *American Quarterly* 72, no. 4 (December 2020): 937–960.

Coloniality at Home

Photograph of field research during the workshop ‘Dissecting the Colonial House’.
Image source: Photograph taken by Kurniadi Widodo, Semarang, June 4, 2024.

Paoletta Holst (Ghent University)

Dissecting the Colonial House

> “This house is alive.
>
> It may not seem like it, but it is.
>
> In fact, it is more alive than it was before. It accompanies humans, animals, plants, and memories.
>
> And just like in life, when some things are overlooked, others take over.
>
> She is not visible, but not less present. She is trapped between the present and the past, just like the house is.”[1]

The colonial house is much more than a spatial remnant of the past; it exists as a living entity, shaped by the complex interplay of memory, human presence, and history.[2] Within its walls, it holds the lived experiences, struggles, and stories of the people who inhabited it, serving as a constant reminder of the legacies of colonial power, subjugation, and exploitation. Archives are often central to understanding these legacies, but the traces they contain cannot be taken for granted. Especially when researching the colonial past, colonial archives seem like a dominant and unavoidable source of information. Yet, they are also a product of the very colonial systems they document. Their presumed authority, systems of taxonomy, classification and categorization bring to the fore a body of codified and standardized beliefs that cluster and testify to the links between controlled cultural and moral values, secrecy, law and power.[3] Over the years, and in line with current scholarship, my attention has shifted from viewing archives as simple sources of knowledge retrieval to considering them as contested sites of knowledge production.[4]

I would like to argue that the colonial house itself also functions much like an archive, offering visible and invisible traces of the past that need to be interpreted with care. During the workshop ‘Dissecting the Colonial House’, which I organized in partnership with the architecture department of Universitas Diponegoro and Hysteria Collective in Semarang, Indonesia,

1 Part of the script for a video work produced during the workshop *Dissecting the Colonial House*. Semarang, Indonesia, June 2024

2 This paper is part of a broader PhD research supported by FWO (project nr. 3G090522), and titled “Interior(ized) Frontiers. Spatializing colonial housing politics and domestic cultures in the former Dutch East Indies through a mobilization of the ‘colonial archive’,” supervisors: Johan Lagae (Ghent University), Wouter Davidts (Ghent University), David Hutama Setiadi (Universitas Pelita Harapan (UPH), Indonesia). Duration: 2022–2026.

3 Ann Laura Stoler, “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance,” *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 87

4 Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain, Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton University Press, 2009)

in June 2024, this idea of the colonial house as an archive became the focal point of an in-depth exploration of colonial architecture. The collaborative workshop drew together twenty participants – students, architects, cultural practitioners, and artists – to investigate the colonial house. Over the course of a week, participants used a variety of strategies to dissect and uncover the layers of and ideas behind the colonial house, focussing on the hidden lives of its inhabitants, particularly the marginalised native servants whose stories are often left out of the colonial narrative and the ghosts that inhabit abandoned spaces. This paper reflects on the work conducted during that week and expands on the role of art in uncovering different narratives and reclaiming spaces of colonial oppression. Through the process of 'dissection', we discovered that the house is alive, not only as a space of (collective) memory, but also as a site where colonial histories continue to shape contemporary realities.

POSITIONALITY: ARE WE SEEING THE SAME THINGS?

The strategies and methodologies I use in working with the archive are embedded in and part of my artistic practice. Through artistic practice I try to occupy a liminal space, between theory, fiction and practice that works critically around coloniality with the intention to question the normative set of western attitudes, values and ways of knowing, that serve to rationalise and continue western dominance in the world. Eyal Weizman's reading and use of 'forum' helped me to recognize the different actors involved in this process. He explains how forensics, the art of forum – the practice and skill of presenting an argument before a professional, political or legal gathering – is part of rhetorical discourse, which includes not only human speech, but also that of things.[5] Because things cannot actually speak, there is a need for a 'translator' or 'interpreter': a person or a set of technologies to mediate between the thing and the forum. Forensics, Weizman argues, thus organizes the relation among three constituents: a thing, an 'interpreter' and a forum. Because the thing and its interpreter' make up an entangled rhetorical connection, in order to refute a forensic statement, it is necessary to dismantle the mechanisms of articulation, which means to show either that 1) the thing is inauthentic, 2) its interpreter is biased, or 3) the communication between them is short-circuited.

I am interested in this triangular relation. As an interpreter, I can publicly display materials and evoke different relations between them by 'straining against the limits of the archive' to write about the colonial house and, at the same time, 'enacting the impossibility' of representing all perspectives 'precisely through the process of narration'.[6] Saidiya Hartman proposes 'critical fabulation' as a guiding method for this writing practice. Critical fabulation, which I understand with Lisa Lowe's words as the creation of

5 Eyal Weizman, *Forensic Architecture: Notes from Fields and Forums,* Documenta 13 (Hatje Cantz Verlag: Ostfildern, 2012), 9. I would argue that 'things' in this context can be interpreted as objects, plants, animals, non-human entities etc.

6 Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 26, vol. 12, no. 2 (June 2008): 11.

a conditional temporality of 'what could have been,' generates a process of a thinking 'with twofold attention that seeks to encompass at once the positive objects and methods of history and social science and the matters absent, entangled and unavailable by its methods'.[7] However, as much as this process opens up perspectives in the context of coloniality and colonial history, it also unfolds an uneasiness with the role I take on as interpreter. A role, I'm aware, that is not without bias and presuppositions, as Weizman points out, because the forms of knowledge and control I'm trying to expose, could just as easily apply to myself. The necessity for a certain reading of and critique on colonial archives seems relevant, from my perspective, as a white Dutch person, but maybe not for others. My critique thus has a limit.

The questions of how to take this position as an interpreter seriously, and where in or around the archive to find my field of work, became leading incentives for my research. Researching the colonial past and the ways it resonates in the present, involves dealing with ethics of care and accountability. 'Since ethics and caretaking are the product of collective negotiation,' as Temi Odumosu suggests, 'the exercise' of thinking and working with colonial archival materials and other sources 'should too be open for questioning and debate'.[8] Is it OK to enter an archive, open a folder and spread its content? Is it naive or careless? Does it matter if it's in The Netherlands or Indonesia? I can only see with my eyes, and you have your own eyes. When we are looking at archival materials, are we seeing the same things? To understand 'what could have been' is not evident, it is a process of questioning and collective negotiation.

DISSECTING THE IDEA OF THE COLONIAL HOUSE

The framework I proposed for the workshop was to use the colonial strategies of dissecting and separating, taking apart the colonial house room by room and excavate the micro-narratives of spatial detail, organisation and use.[9] Ariëlla Aïsha Azoulay aptly observes that 'the right to dissect and study people's worlds and render their fragments into pieces to be meticulously copied is taken for granted'.[10] For us, the process of dissecting, by following the particular histories of different spaces and objects in the colonial house, became an act of 'rewinding' and replaying in a different conditionality, a counter strategy to the colonial modes of operation.

In five groups, focusing on the different spaces in and around the colonial house, i.e. the garden, the galleries, the bed and bathroom, the annex,

7 Lisa Lowe, "The Intimacies of Four Continents," in *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler (Duke University Press, 2006), 208.

8 Temi Odumosu, "The Crying Child. On Colonial Archives, Digitization, and Ethics of Care in the Cultural Commons," *Current Anthropology* 61, no. 22 (October 2020): 2 (pdf).

9 Together with prof. Johan Lagae and dr. David Hutama Setiadi I previously organized an advanced topic for MA students at Ghent University entitled Dissecting Colonial Domestic Space, in 2023, which already addressed the complexities and biases of the archive and focused on finding alternative research strategies to understand the spatial use of the colonial house.

10 Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History, Unlearning Imperialism* (New York: Verso, 2019), 5.

and the surroundings, the participants started the workshop by diving into literary sources and digitised colonial archives accessible online.[11] This provided context and brought the Dutch perspective on colonial history to the fore. In colonial Indonesia, the Dutch colonisers had persistent ideas of how to live in the tropics, as evidenced by numerous descriptions in handbooks and advice manuals from the first half of the twentieth century, which centred on the inhabitable house as a key feature of maintaining a modern and Dutch lifestyle in a foreign environment. For example, in 'Ons huis in Indië', a guide for young Dutch housewives newly arriving in the Indies, written in 1908, the well-known Dutch female writer J.M.J. Catenius-van der Meijden, provided detailed descriptions of the tasks that should be performed in specific rooms and spaces of the colonial house, by both the inhabitants and the domestic servants.

In her manual, Catenius-van der Meijden quoted a Dutch colonial who had lamented the lack of variation on housing typologies in the Dutch Indies: 'In the Indies […] one has to do, time and again, with the same set of a front verandah, an inner verandah, a hall in the center, an always equal number of the rooms on the left and on the right, and then the back verandah—all rectangular'.[12] In order to make the house a place of one's own and break with the deadly symmetry, so Catenius urged, it should be quickly filled with all kinds of objects. Rudof Mzárek points out, that the Dutch were 'overequipping themselves' in order 'not to appear like the 'people of the land''.[13] The interior of the colonial house was directed towards display and communicating the coloniser's status, which contributed to forms of identity building and fostering social relations.[14] Caroline Dreënhuizen argues, that by providing a sense of belonging and radiating a 'cosy' feeling, people in colonial Indonesia eased major geographical and social-cultural transitions by surrounding themselves with objects that reminded them of their past, and made a tangible link with the 'home' and family they had left behind.

COLONIAL ARCHITECTURE AS SPATIAL ARCHIVE

The participants confronted these materials with documentation gathered during field research in Candi Baru, (Nieuw Tjandi in colonial times), a hilly area south of Kota Lama, the old colonial city center of Semarang. We tried to broaden our understanding of colonial domestic space and culture, by expanding the notion of the archive, starting from the colonial architectural heritage itself and approaching it as a space of lived experiences and

11 The main digitized archives we used were those of the colonialarchitecture.eu, Delpher, KITLV Digitized Collections, NMVW.

12 J.M.J. Catenius Van der Meijden, *Ons huis in Indië. Handboek bij de keuze, de inrichting, de bewoning en de verzorging van het huis met bijgebouwen en erf, naar de eischen der hygiëne, benevens raadgevingen en wenken op huishoudelijk gebied* (n.v. Boekhandel en Drukkerij Masman & Stroink, 1908), 229. Translations from the Dutch original text.

13 Rudolf Mzárek, *Engineers of Happy Land. Technology and Nationalism in a Colony* (Princeton University Press, 2002), 45

14 Caroline Drieënhuizen, "Objects of belonging and displacement; Artefacts and European migrants from colonial Indonesia in colonial and post-colonial times," Wacana 23, no. 3 (2022):635–653.

(collective) memories. We established ways to critically analyse and work with this architectural heritage as a 'spatial archive'. Every group recorded and documented the architecture using their smartphones extended with DIY lenses that were demounted from old cameras. As an artistic gesture and a way to look, literally, through a different lens, working with the DIY lenses also established a tangible link between photographic materials in the colonial archive—the photographic mechanisms of framing, capturing, and extracting—and the colonial architectural heritage—the spatial implementations of hierarchy and separation.

The camera shutter is part of an imperial technology to dissect and separate, as Azoulay argues: 'In a split second, the camera's shutter draws three dividing lines: in time (between a before and an after), in space (between who/what is in front of the camera and who/what is behind it), and in the body politics (between those who possess and operate such devices and appropriate and accumulate their product and those whose countenance, resources, or labour are extracted).'[15] For colonial architecture we could argue the same, although in a slower pace: it divides between before and after, it does so through spatial interventions which define who has the power to own, live in or use certain spaces and who does not, and it creates body political hierarchies between those who have the means to build, accumulate and articulate their product and those whose spaces, resources or labour are extracted.

Researching the colonial architectural heritage as spatial archive made clear how today people have appropriated and decolonized the colonial house by using it in a very different way. For example, in past times the configuration and use of spaces in the colonial house was strictly organised and influenced by the discourse of medical science and hygiene, which was concerned with the comfort and acclimatisation of the white body in a tropical environment.[16] Today, other cultural and social conceptions changed the use of spaces. For the current inhabitants of the house we visited, the rooms are too big, and therefor changed in function and use: the bedroom is now a kitchen, the bathroom a storage space, and the spaces that were once conceived as different galleries of the house are now used freely as one open living room. The inhabitants use it as a place to eat, to pile up their laundry, to mingle, and to keep their motorcycle safe. Objects and artefacts are all around. The functions and services that in colonial times were designated to the annex and the native servants are now integrated into the main house. The participants perceived the dismantling of the annex, which in this case was not used anymore, as an act of decolonisation, because without the annex, they argued, the very essence of the colonial house is eliminated. Or, to speak in archival terms, the organising logics and spatial taxonomies that made up the colonial house are now disturbed and decategorised.

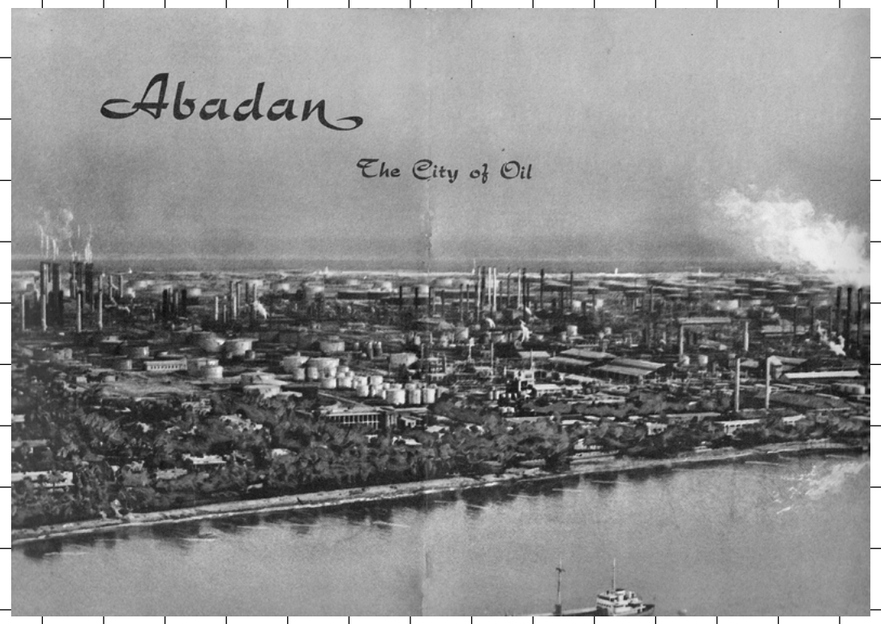
15 Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History, Unlearning Imperialism* (Verso, 2019), 26 (pdf).

16 Jiat-Hwee Chang & Anthony D. King, 'Towards a genealogy of tropical architecture: Historical fragments of power-knowledge, built environment and climate in the British colonial territories', *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, no. 32, 2011, pp. 283–300.

CONCLUSION

The workshop resulted in a collaboratively edited video work showcased during a public event at Hysteria Collective, weaving past (archival materials), present (architectural heritage) and intermediate (ghosts) worlds together through artistic, visual and spatial understandings, which opened up and collectivised the role of interpreter and made other ways of communicating and discussing colonial history possible. This approach brought overlooked aspects, such as the lives of servants and ghosts—'she', "Nonnie," or "white lady," a common seen ghost from the colonial past—in colonial houses, to the surface. It also highlighted participants' desire to engage with history in order to better understand contemporary socio-cultural and political issues. The use of visual strategies like photography, film, and collage, along with narrative techniques such as critical fabulation, proved effective in conveying historical and spatial insights. Through artistic expression, participants were able to distance themselves from their everyday environments, integrating personal stories into a broader collective discourse that merged formal and informal histories. The video acted as a "conversation piece," encouraging diverse interpretations and fostering a discussion on colonial history and its ongoing impact on the present.

> "There are people living in surrounding kampungs, once segregated through colonialism, who have appropriated and reclaimed their space. It is now vibrant and lively, the people gather, the kids are playing, the community found their identity.
>
> She is not there."



Aerial view of Abadan in 1960. Image source: Iranian Department of Publication and Broadcasting.

Ehssan Hanif (Cornell University)

Writing Domesticity: Historicising Two Silenced Stories of Modernisation by Iranian Women Writers

From the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, the architectural history of Iran became closely linked with oil, which introduced new technologies, actors, and spaces. A key event occurred in 1901 when English businessman William D'Arcy secured exclusive rights from the Iranian monarchy, to explore, extract, and export oil.[1] By 1914, D'Arcy sold a major share to the British government, ushering in a new era of British colonial influence in Iran.[2] To establish their presence and efficiently exploit Iranian oil, the British built 'modern' company towns, including Bawardeh in Abadan, designed by architect James M. Wilson and based on the Garden City concept. According to architectural historian Mark Crinson, this design aimed to address racial segregation issues but was rooted in colonial assumptions that European lifestyles were superior and only Iranians educated abroad were 'civilised' enough to live there.[3] These assumptions significantly impacted domestic life in these houses. Part of my paper aims to explore these impacts.

Concurrently, the new Iranian king, Reza Shah, influenced by European colonial ideas of 'modernity', began his modernisation efforts with a focus on state-building and centralisation, particularly through creating a modern army, as noted by historian Stephanie Cronin.[4] Reza Shah's modernisation blended colonial notions of 'progress' and 'civilisation' with a patriarchal nationalism centred around the 'new' figure of the crowned father.[5] Although Reza Shah did not complete any mass-housing projects, he significantly impacted domestic life by passing laws, like the unveiling law, and infrastructural projects, like widening streets, bringing pipelines to homes, and establishing the Rahni Bank for giving housing loans.[6] His

1 "D'Arcy 1901 Concession," Archive of Research Institute of Petroleum Industry, 0474440–47447.
2 Leonardo Davoudi, Persian Petroleum: Oil, Empire and Revolution in Late Qajar Iran (I. B. Tauris & Company, Limited, 2020), 145.
3 Mark Crinson, "Abadan: Planning and Architecture under the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company," *Planning Perspectives* 12, no. 3 (January 1997): 341–59, https://doi.org/10.1080/026654397364681.; Sirus Bavar, Naft: Tamadon-e Sanati va Memari Dar Khuzestan [Oil: Industrial Civilization and Architecture in Khuzestan, Iran] (Mirdashti Publishing, 2022), 389
4 Stephanie Cronin, ed., *The Making of Modern Iran: State and Society under Riza Shah 1921–1941* (Routledge Curzon, 2003), 1.
5 Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and Historiography* (Palgrave, 2001), 113.
6 Ashraf Zahedi, "Contested Meaning of the Veil and Political Ideologies of Iranian Regimes," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 3, no. 3 (2007): 75–98, https://doi.org/10.2979/mew.2007.3.3.75; and Ali Zangiabadi and Rahman Alihosseini, "Tarikh-e Bankdari az Aqaz ta Emruz [The History of Banking since the Begining till now]," *Bank va Eqtesad*, no. 110 (2010): 17–27.

top-down modernisation was responded to by women's resistance within their homes, which I will explore further in this paper.

The two discourses of modernity with their associated processes of 'modernisation' profoundly impacted residents' domestic experiences, particularly affecting women who, constrained by the patriarchal nature of the traditional family in Iran, had to spend the majority of their time at home.[7] The official archives of both Iran and Britain, shaped by colonial and patriarchal ideologies, largely overlook women's experiences of these 'modernisations'. As Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida have argued, archives can be institutions where power is exerted through the selection and conservation of information.[8] In this context, the influence of patriarchal and colonial systems is evident: British archives from this period were collected by colonial powers, while Iranian archives, with the brief exception of Farah Pahlavi, Fatemeh Soudavar Farmanfarmaian and Donna Stein, at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, were never from women.[9]

Nevertheless, as bell hooks has argued, 'the home has always been a site of resistance for women'.[10] Therefore, to study domesticity in this colonial and patriarchal context, we could seek archives beyond institutional ones. Women have employed various methods to preserve their experiences, notably through storytelling, which provides historians with a valuable archive for this silent aspect of history. In my paper, which aims to reread colonialism and modernisation in Iran through the lens of Iranian women from this period, I would focus on two novels written by Iranian women as my primary archive: 'Cherghaha ra Man Khamoosh Mikonam' [The Lights, I Will Turn Off] by Zoya Pirzad, and 'Tooba Va Manaye Shab' [Tooba and the Meaning of the Night] by Shahrnoosh Parsipur.[11] My aim is to highlight an alternative archive for understanding colonial contexts and to emphasise the intersection of gender and colonial issues.

Regarding the use of literature for history, I align with Allan Pasco's view that 'when handled judiciously, and in answer to appropriate questions, literature can provide a reliable window on the past'.[12] In other words, although literature may not directly mirror real life, it offers valuable insights into socio-cultural history, particularly in cases where power through controlling archives has suppressed certain perspectives. Thus, literature can enrich historical studies by revealing a deeper understanding of oppressed experiences.

7 Vida Nassehi-Behnam, "Change and the Iranian Family," *Current Anthropology* 26, no. 5 (1985): 557–62.
8 Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, [1st American ed.] (Pantheon Books, 1972); and Jacques Derrida and Eric Prenowitz, "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression," *Diacritics* 25, no. 2 (1995): 9–63, https://doi.org/10.2307/465144.
9 Mohammadtaghi Poorahmad-Jaktaji, Tarikh-e Ketabkhaneh Melli [The History of the National Library] (Iranian National Library, 1979); Reza Daneshvar and Kamran Diba, Baqi Mian-e Do Khiaban [A Garden Between Two Streets] (Bongah Press, 2010), 149. Reza Daneshvar and Kamran Diba, 149.
10 bell hooks, Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics (South End Press, 1990), 41–49.
11 Zoya Pirzad, *Cheraghha Ra Man Khamush Mikonam* [I Will Turn Off the Lights] (Markaz, 2002).; Shahrnoosh Parsipur, *Tooba Va Manay-e Shab* [Tooba and the Meaning of the Night] (Esparak, 1990).
12 Allan H. Pasco, "Literature as Historical Archive," *New Literary History* 35, no. 3 (2004): 373–94.

STORIES AND WRITERS

My two selected stories are in correspondence with the two aforementioned modernities: Shahrnoosh Parsipur's 'Tooba and The Meaning of the Night', which depicts domestic life in a central courtyard house and centres on a Muslim woman resisting Reza Shah's modernisation; and Zoya Pirzad's 'I Will Turn Off the Lights', which is set in an oil company town and portrays a Christian Armenian woman's anxieties in the colonial context of Abadan. Both authors draw on firsthand experiences of two modernities gained from their childhoods in the cities they write about. Parsipur is well known as a writer who 'portrays her resistance to gender problems in Iran by adopting fiction' and her 'feminist narratives question Iran's patriarchal discourse and power structure'.[13] Likewise, Pirzad has earned acclaim for 'her superb characterisation, ingenious representation of the conflicting emotions of a woman, and creating suspense through the deconstruction of everyday life'.[14]

REZA SHAH'S MODERNISATION IN 'TOOBA AND THE MEANING OF THE NIGHT'

In the early twentieth century, the middle class in Tehran typically lived in traditional houses with central courtyards, much like the house in Parsipur's story.[15] These homes featured two residential sections facing each other across the courtyard, with service areas in one corner and an underground floor on one side. The entrance was indirect, and the design was introverted, centred around a courtyard with a small pool and garden. Often, the house was divided into *Andarooni* [inner] and *Birooni* [outer] sections to ensure women's privacy. Domestic life within these homes was shrouded in secrecy, with women often bearing the burden of keeping secrets. As in the story, Tooba helps conceal all the secrets, including the murder committed by a father, which highlights the deep-rooted influence of patriarchy.

This act of keeping secrets, considered crucial for preserving the house, echoes Freud's theory on the *Heimlich*: 'What takes place within the four walls of a house remains a mystery to those shut out from it'.[16] Accordingly, the heroine, having spent her childhood in the same house, does not find the uncanny[17] unsettling, as past secrets are now her present reality. For her, protecting these secrets and the past equates to defending her life. For this reason, she fiercely resists the changes men, as symbols of patriarchal

13 Leila Sadegh Beigi, "Simin Daneshvar and Shahrnush Parsipur in Translation: The Risk of Erasure of Domestic Violence in Iranian Women's Fiction," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 16, no. 2 (July 2020): 124–43, https://doi.org/10.1215/15525864-8238146.
14 Amir Mohammad Reza Taheri and V. A. Rankhambe, "Marital Incompatibility in Things We Left Unsaid by Zoya Pirzad and Cry the Peacock by Anita Desai," *International Journal of Multifaceted and Multilingual Studies* II, no. VI (2015): 16–23.
15 Hossein Zomorshidi, "Amuzehay-e Memari-e Irani va Sakhtemansazi-e Maskuni az Doreye Qajary-e Ta Emruz," *Motaleat-e Shahr Irani va Eslami* 1, no. 3 (2011): 1–10.
16 Maria M. Tatar, "The Houses of Fiction: Toward a Definition of the Uncanny," *Comparative Literature* 33, no. 2 (1981): 167–82, https://doi.org/10.2307/1770438.
17 As something 'connected to the reappearance of something familiar from childhood of an individual.' See Tatar, 1981.

modernisation, try to impose on the house. This sense of protecting the house appears multiple times in the story, notably when the heroine's husband wants to bring a gardener to 'take care of the garden', and we read:

> 'Tooba believed that if a gardener, a construction worker (banna), a pitman (for digging or cleaning the water well), or anyone familiar with the house's hidden corners were to come to the house, they would discover the body. The house could not conceal its secrets from such people and would inevitably reveal them.'[18]

Likewise, years later, when her son-in-law attempts to 'modernise' the house by installing water pipelines and a private bathroom, Tooba resists. She views these 'modern' phenomena as a threat that could expose the secrets she is determined to keep hidden, so she refuses to allow any of these 'new' changes into the house.

This resistance underscores the failures of Reza Shah's modernisation, which, rooted in strong patriarchal and cultural norms, excluding women's agency, failed to improve women's status.[19] The exclusion of women from these processes leads the heroine to favour stability over abrupt change. In fact, she does not reject 'newness' itself but resists a social transformation that marginalises her—a resistance that can take the form of inertia, as we see in the part of the story when Tooba, seeking divorce, resorts to doing nothing or going a hunger strike.

When women can establish their control over domestic space, the inertia may transform into heightened activity. Pauline Hunt suggests that women in England maintain tidy homes to create a 'welcoming' space for their family members.[20] Similarly, in Tooba's story, the heroine obsessively cleans the house. However, this obsession is not to welcome her husband but to assert control over the last remaining female territory: the domestic space. Using Stephen Vider's framework, this can be described as 'domesticity as performance', where repetitive acts of cleaning embody the practice of claiming the home.[21] Judith Butler also echoes this, noting that identity is formed through the repetition of acts.[22]

The significance of this point is magnified when placed in the historical context of Reza Shah's unveiling law. As part of his modernisation efforts, Reza Shah aimed to 'secularise' the country by imposing a law that enforced a European-inspired dress code for women. As a result, many Iranian women

18 Shahrnoosh Parsipur, *Tooba Va Manay-e Shab*, 99.
19 Armaghan Ziaee, "On Contradictions: The Architecture of Women's Resistance and Emancipation in Early Twentieth-Century Iran," *ABE Journal. Architecture beyond Europe*, no. 16 (December 2019), https://doi.org/10.4000/abe.7059.
20 Pauline Hunt, "Gender and the Construction of Home Life," in Home and Family: Creating the Domestic Sphere, ed. Graham Allan and Graham Crow (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1989), 66–81, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-20386-4_5.1989
21 Stephen Vider, *The Queerness of Home: Gender, Sexuality, and the Politics of Domesticity after World War II* (The University of Chicago Press, 2021): 7.
22 Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 519–31, https://doi.org/10.2307/3207893.

who still valued the hijab avoided public spaces altogether, staying at home. Parsipur's story reflects this law and its resulting problems for women, too.

> 'When the rumours about the unveiling law turned out to be true […] a week passed without Tooba leaving the house. She heard that everything in the city had changed […] The women looked strange. Many wore their husbands' hats over their scarves and donned men's long coats.'[23]

COLONISERS' MODERNISATION IN 'I WILL TURN OFF THE LIGHTS'

Unlike Tooba's house, the colonisers' designs for Bawardeh lack the *Andarooni / Birooni* division, with kitchens open to everyone, sometimes even serving as the house entrance. The heroine, Claris, humorously remarks, 'Why is the whole city in my kitchen today?' This openness leads to a lack of privacy for women, a point Claris often criticises throughout the story.[24]

> 'I entered the house and locked it behind me. Nobody in Abadan locks their house door in the middle of the day. I only lock it when I want to be certain that I am alone in the house.'[25]

The failure of the colonisers' design lay in their excessive openness to the public, ignoring the social changes required before physical changes. Women's roles within the family remained unchanged, and they were still confined to the kitchen. What made things worse was that they now lost control over their last private spaces. This sparked a longing for 'traditional' homes like the one in Parsipur's story. When the heroine locks herself indoors to escape her present life, she nostalgically recalls her childhood home in Tehran with its small courtyards, and long corridors—a place she associates with her father who, unlike other men, never imposed his will on anyone.

However, a positive aspect of colonial domesticity is that by blurring the boundaries between inside and outside, women started to explore beyond the home's walls. Historically, public spaces in Iran were seen as masculine, confining women indoors.[26] However, in Bawardeh, the domestic space extends into the public realm; and Claris, representing women who challenge societal norms and domestic restrictions, begins doubting her life, signalling a transitional stage.

These doubts created anxiety for women. In Pirzad's story, Claris reflects, 'I think what a peaceful life I had before Emily and her grandmother moved in.'[27] Emily, the attractive young man who has just arrived in the neighbourhood, symbolises Claris's father and acts as an uncanny presence

23 Shahrnoosh Parsipur, *Tooba Va Manay-e Shab*, 121.
24 Zoya Pirzad, *Cheraghha Ra Man Khamush Mikonam*, 158.
25 Zoya Pirzad, *Cheraghha Ra Man Khamush Mikonam,* 64.
26 Ziaee, "On Contradictions."
27 Zoya Pirzad, *Cheraghha Ra Man Khamush Mikonam*, 192.

that raises Claris's doubts about her marriage. By the end of the story, as Claris resolves her inner conflict, changes her view of the old traditional house, and a dream reveals that this no longer holds any interest for her:

> 'I found myself in a large house with maze-like corridors and rooms, filled with unfamiliar people coming and going. Holding my twin children's hands, I tried to leave but could not find the exit. A tall priest approached and said, 'If you cannot answer my riddle, I would not let you go.' He then took the twins' hands and led them away. I chased after them into a vast courtyard surrounded by rooms, with a small blue pool at its centre. Crying and calling for the twins, I saw a woman enter the courtyard, holding a baby.'[28]

Later in the story, Claris visits Namgard, a small, marginal town inhabited by those labelled 'mad,' and encounters the same building from her childhood and dream. By situating Claris's childhood home—she, an Armenian woman—in a marginalised area, Pirzad underscores the intersectionality of gender, ethnicity, and religion within a colonial context. The story contains 'intersectionality's insistence on examining the dynamics of difference and sameness,' emphasising how this 'plays a major role in facilitating consideration of gender, race, and other axes of power in the wide range of political discussions and academic disciplines.'[29]

The colonial 'modern' house in this story represents a transitional phase for Iranian women. As changes in the built environment emerged, women started questioning their former lifestyles. Eventually, they accepted the new reality, resolving their internal conflicts. While these spaces provided more freedom and access to public life, the lack of privacy—stemming from women's limited involvement in these changes—led to contradictory outcomes.

CONCLUSION

Modernisation, whether driven by the colonial presence or Reza Shah's nationalist policies, imposed new architectural and social structures that ostensibly aimed to bring progress and welfare to Iranian society. However, both forms of modernisation were rooted in patriarchal and colonial assumptions that disregarded women's agency, privacy, and traditional roles in domestic spaces.

28 Ibid., 216.
29 Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall, "Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis," *Signs* 38, no. 4 (2013): 785–810, https://doi.org/10.1086/669608.

'Rest House. Top Station.' Photograph in an album by G.W. Cole, early twentieth century. Image source: James Finlay & Co. Archive, The Scottish Business Archive, Glasgow University Archives and Special Collections UGD 091/1/12/4/5/1.

Rachel Lee (Delft University of Technology) and Sarita Sundar (Hanno)

The Elephant in the Room: Sourcing the Planter's Chair

INTRODUCTION

In 'The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction' Ursula le Guin makes a case for replacing the extraordinary with the ordinary: heroes are replaced by everyday people, conflicts by conversations and spears by bags.[1] Bags, she argues, alongside other objects designed to hold stuff, including nets, pots and baskets, are likely the earliest cultural devices. As such, they are worthy of our attention and scrutiny. In this paper we turn to the so-called 'planter's chair' as a mundane cultural object with an unusual capacity for holding stuff: over the past two centuries of its existence, it has been a container for diverse bodies, objects, stories, actions, imaginaries and meanings.

Of uncertain origins, and possibly developed in nineteenth-century India within the context of British East India Company rule, the planter's chair became synonymous with colonial modernity, lifestyles and attitudes—a seat that supported leisure and repose, while simultaneously enabling power and surveillance. It undergirded the (often male-gendered) excesses of colonial life and assisted expressions of discrimination, othering and violence. From British-occupied India, it spread widely through other colonial contexts—Dutch, Portuguese, French and beyond.

Our research has investigated the form, materiality, facture and use of the planter's chair in different locations. We widen our gaze to investigate the settings in which it has operated: bedrooms, verandahs, foyers, libraries and clubs. Scaling up, we interrogate how it intersected with larger colonial landscapes such as tea plantations and cantonments.

Here we unfold a selection of the (hi)stories that the planter's chair holds, thereby foregrounding our methods and sources. How do you unravel the history of a chair? For something so ubiquitous, its traces are faded and scattered. As an object it often eludes the logics of archival catalogues and is rarely included in meta-data entries. Yet it can be found in the margins of a wide range of archives and has been documented in a rich variety of sources. Learning from the CCA's 'Fugitive Archives', we present stories through five sources: photo album, poem, museum, movie and oral history.[2] These vignettes serve to disentangle strands of meaning that the chair holds, colonial and otherwise, and illustrate how the chair becomes a vessel for new notions of modernity.

1 Ursula K. Le Guin, 'The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction.' In *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places* (Grove Press, 1989).
2 Claire Lubell and Rafico Ruiz, *Fugitive Archives: A Sourcebook for Centring Africa in Histories of Architecture* (Canadian Centre for Architecture, 2023).

PHOTO ALBUM: JAMES FINLAY & CO ARCHIVE

We have found planter's chairs in several repositories of historical material.[3] The search can be time-consuming and has involved studying visual material such as old photographs with magnifying glasses. This was certainly the case with the James Finlay & Co Archive.[4]

Founded as textile merchants in Scotland in 1750, James Finlay & Co shifted to cotton manufacturing in the early nineteenth century and opened a branch in Bombay. By the early twentieth century, they had diversified into tea production, becoming the UK's leading tea supplier with estates in India and Ceylon.[5]

The archive includes a photo album belonging to G.W. Cole, who was 'Chief Engineer High Range' and active in the service of tea production in South India from c. 1900–1931. Cole oversaw infrastructure projects enabling the efficient transport of tea from high-altitude estates to the valleys below, including the construction of a narrow-gauge light railway and a ropeway system.[6]

His album, dating from around 1910, presents thirty-five pages of black and white photographs, presumably taken by Cole himself, of infrastructure projects, landscapes, factories, and other buildings, including social clubs for the white population. The album evidences the destructive imposition of a utilitarian, agro-industrial Western modernity on the rural landscape, documenting how it impacted places and people. Cole's photos illustrate an isolated manager's bungalow, deforested mountainsides, and workers plucking, sorting, rolling, firing, sifting, and packing tea. The barefoot local labourers are in stark contrast with a helmeted, booted, and suited plantation manager, whose angular body language and cane violently reinforce his authority.

Within this unsettling colonial album, a pair of planter's chairs can be seen on the shaded verandah of the 'Rest House' at the top of the ropeway, offering respite to figures like the plantation manager or Cole himself during their regional travels. Also capturing the staff who would attend to the Rest House's guests, Cole's camera is implicit in enforcing colonial hierarchies of those who attend and those who are attended to.

POEM: MOONSHINE

The humorous poem 'Moonshine,' written around 1871 by Major Walter Yeldham (1837–1916) under the pen name Aliph Cheem, captures a serene yet discontented scene of colonial life. On a moonlit verandah, a man lounges in a planter's chair—referred to as a 'long-arm chair' in the poem—savouring a cigar and a drink, lost in thought as he embraces the stillness of the night. Yet beneath his reverie, the poem hints at his distaste for his surroundings. In the nocturnal silence, he unfondly recalls the rhythmic beat of the tom-tom drum as 'horrid' and the hum from the bazaar as 'irritating.' His insecurities also emerge as he anxiously hopes that the ice in his drink won't make him ill. In a context where he feels disquieted and uncomfortable, the verandah, planter's chair, cigar, and drink convene to provide a state of relative relaxation.

The 1901 edition of the poem features an illustration that further shapes the scene. A man, dressed in a suit and slippers, reclines in a planter's chair, a cigar in one hand and one leg propped on the chair's footrest. He gazes upward, watching the smoke from his cigar slowly dissipate into the night air while a servant pours a beverage—likely moonshine—into a glass on a nearby teapoy, or side table. The man's dismissive use of 'chokra,' a Hindi word meaning boy or young man, highlights his sense of authority. These power dynamics are reinforced by the planter's chair, which exudes dominance even though, or perhaps precisely because, it holds the sitter in a reclined position.

'Moonshine' appears in 'Lays of Ind', a collection of Yeldham's poems. The book, which offers a view of 'English life in India' from civil and military stations, was aimed at 'Anglo-Indian folk who enjoy a bit of humour.' Published by Thacker, Spink and Co. in 1871, 'Lays of Ind' was a hit, going through thirteen editions over fifty years. Founded in Calcutta in 1819, Thacker, Spink and Co. were prominent figures in the Indo-British publishing market, known for their Directories and for publishing Rudyard Kipling's early works.[7] Their imposing building in Calcutta, a landmark in the colonial city, reflects their role in shaping and reinforcing British perspectives on colonial life. In this context, 'Moonshine' is more than a lighthearted portrayal; its satire offers a weak colonial critique, with the planter's chair—emblematic of authority and privilege—highlighting the uneasy coexistence of colonial leisure and underlying discontent in late nineteenth-century India.

MUSEUM: ARNHEM NETHERLANDS OPEN AIR MUSEUM

Specialising in recreating 'vanishing scenes of human life,' open-air museums are closely linked to ethnographic studies of indigenous cultures, and work to preserve cultural heritage, often in alignment with national or regional agendas.[8] They allow visitors to experience recreated houses and interiors, learn about local cultures and crafts, and sometimes interact with 'inhabitants' portrayed by actors. As places that seek to authentically evoke living history, exhibited objects could be perceived as being in their natural, authentic setting.

3 These include the KITVL and Wereldmuseum in the Netherlands, The India Office Records, National Archives and Scottish Business Archive in the UK, and the Sarmaya Museum in India.
4 Housed in the Scottish Business Archive at the University of Glasgow's Archives and Special Collections.
5 Tata Tea purchased many of Finlay & Co's Indian tea estates in 1982.
6 The Kundale Valley Light Railway was damaged in floods in 1924 and never rebuilt.
7 Victoria Condie, "Thacker, Spink and Company: Bookselling and Publishing in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Calcutta," in *Books without Borders*, Volume 2, ed. R. Fraser and Mary Hammond (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).
8 Edward A. Chappell, "Open-Air Museums: Architectural History for the Masses," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 58, no. 3 (1999): 334–41, https://doi.org/10.2307/991526.

In India, the planter's chair features in at least two open-air museums, the Dakshinachitra Heritage Museum in Tamil Nadu and the Hasta Shilpa Heritage Village Museum in Karnataka, which showcase traditional homes of South India.

Perhaps more unexpectedly, a planter's chair is also displayed in the Dutch Open Air Museum in Arnhem an early and highly popular open-air museum dating from 1918.[9] The chair is located in a converted farmhouse from Hoogmade, built circa 1600. The building and its contents were acquired by the museum in 2002, following the threat of demolition due to the construction of a high-speed railway line.

Occupying a corner of the entrance hall alongside an oven, a love seat, and two rustic wooden chairs, the planter's chair is positioned by the window, overlooking the path through the garden to the front door. Its placement echoes that of many planter's chairs in warmer climates. Positioned outward on verandahs, these chairs allowed the sitter to monitor the house's entrance and survey the surroundings, exerting control over the environment.

What is the provenance of this planter's chair? Was it an heirloom? Does it have links to Dutch colonialism? Unfortunately, these questions remain unanswered in the museum. However, its presence as part of a curated set of objects suggests that the former owner of the farmhouse had 'domesticated' it to create 'an early modern material world that is global as well as domestic, exotic and yet, ultimately, Dutch.'[10] Made from foreign materials and crafted in previously occupied territories, perhaps the chair was viewed as a desirable object, proudly displayed in a traditional Dutch home.

MOVIE: ELIPPATHAYAM

In real life, the agency of the objects that surround us may not always be apparent, but in films and novels, they often evidence deeper intentionality and meaning. Deliberately placed within a carefully constructed space, these objects shape the setting and narrative, directing actions and movements.

The planter's chair has appeared in various films, for example orchestrating action in the Dutch plantation-centred film 'Rubber!' (1936), employed as a weapon in the Tamil movie 'Indian' (1996) or holding a silent watch in the Bollywood classic 'Sholay' (1975). These films document its transition from a colonial object to one used by affluent landowners and officials who aspired to the British lifestyle.

9 Thank you to Marie-Thérèse van Thoor for informing us about this chair.

10 Anne Gerritsen, "Domesticating Goods from Overseas: Global Material Culture in the Early Modern Netherlands," *Journal of Design History* 29, no. 3 (September 2016): 228–44, https://doi.org/10.1093/jdh/epw021.

In the 1982 award-winning movie 'Elippathayam' [Rat Trap], director Adoor Gopalakrishnan uses many metaphors to depict the trapped lives of his characters. Much of the film is shot on the pillared verandah of a dilapidated ancestral house in Kerala, a threshold where the tensions between the outer modern world and the inner traditional one are most evident, and where public and private life merge.

The film is minimal—in dialogue, characters, settings, and props. There is little furniture on the verandah or in the house, with raised platforms serving as seats. Unni, the dysfunctional protagonist and head of a once-affluent family, is seen on the only chair, a planter's chair on the verandah. The chair clearly belongs to him, as the man of the house. He spends most of the day in it, barking orders, reading the newspaper, or staring into oblivion. He doesn't rise to greet or offer a seat to a visitor, who is instead given a small mat, nor does he get up to shoo away a cow feeding on a banana tree in the yard. These scenes highlight the divide between those who may sit and those who may not, while commenting on shifting power dynamics in a crumbling household. Feudal life in Kerala is fading, and the chair is Unni's refuge from the modern world, allowing him to retreat into his narcissistic, patriarchal persona.

ORAL HISTORY: NAOMI HOSSAIN

While the oral histories we have collected have revealed the role the chair played in colonial history, it was rare for someone to vociferously express the kind of ambivalent discomfort that Naomi did in her interview.

Naomi, an academic who grew up in a multi-racial family in the United Kingdom, spoke fondly of winter holidays spent at tea garden bungalows with her extended family in Sylhet, Bangladesh. She remembered coming across the planter's chair there, 'We thought they were great. The kids would climb all over them. And we were like, look, this [armrest] comes out… Yeah, we thought it was fabulous. What the hell is this weird thing with the bits out, what is it for?'.

She recalls being told that it was for colonial officials: 'They would put their dirty boots up and their helpers would pull them off for them. That's what it was for…' While aware of the history of exploitation in colonial tea plantations and the association of the chair with plantations, she wonders: 'Why would you call it that?… People don't know what happened on plantations?' Yet, when she came across the chair in a shop in Brighton, she couldn't resist buying one. 'I was like, oh, we used to have these when I was a kid! So I had to have it.' She finds herself conflicted, struggling to part with it because, 'It's been around the world a bit with us.'

As well as the troubling historical associations, Naomi found the chair uneasy in other ways: 'To be honest, they're really uncomfortable to sit in. Like nobody ever sits in that chair. Nobody. The dog doesn't even sit in the chair.'

CONCLUSION

This exploration of the planter's chair reveals its ongoing entanglement with colonial modernity, as well as its continued significance today. From colonial-era photo albums to museums, literature, and cinema, the chair has consistently symbolised privilege, power, and control. In many contemporary examples—from the verandahs of 'Elippathayam' to Naomi's recollections of the chair—the planter's chair continues to evoke its colonial past, reinforcing its associations with authority and exclusion.

Rather than subverting its historical meanings, these examples demonstrate how the planter's chair still serves as a marker of status and control, even in different contexts. Yet, through this continued presence, the chair also invites reflection on how colonial legacies persist and how they might be reinterpreted in modern settings.

The planter's chair thus acts as a vessel for stories and memories that continue to shape our understanding of power and privilege. Its role in both historical and contemporary narratives reminds us of the importance of questioning how coloniality persists in the present—and how we might confront and transform these legacies moving forward.

Women on the street in Algiers.
Image source: photograph taken by Walid Talabi, posted on the Belaredj Band Facebook page, 2022.

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Haik-scape: An Urban ‘Fabric’ to Unveil Eastern and Western Colonisation of the Feminine Space and Intimacy of Algiers

INTRODUCING THE HAIK-SCAPE

The haik is a multifaceted traditional garment previously worn across North African cultures. In the context of Algiers, it was seen as a six by two meter twenty white piece of fabric made of wool, cotton, or silk worn by women customarily as a sign of purity and modesty. The haik is not stitched or patterned together. Hence, the body is not constrained or controlled by the garment; instead, the garment follows the body’s movements. Creating an undisciplined, pleated, and not-calculable form and a liminal space between the body it envelops and the urban sphere surrounding itself.

During the Algerian war for independence, the garment also represented liberation and national identity, and this liminal space between the body and the haik, catered to the resistance. Beyond its value as a fabric that wraps around the body, it also works as a layer of cultural, political and temporal apparatus, loosely blurring the boundaries of the space around the female bodies, the homes, and public urban spaces. The haik is a conceptual vessel we dwell on, to discuss these observed acts of governance, comparing the Western and Eastern colonial influences.

As a concept, the haik-scape draws parallels between Algiers’s architecture, specifically the Casbah’s Medina houses, and the haik itself, existing in a multi-scalar nature. Manifesting predominantly around feminine space, it connects intimately with the female body and extends into domesticity, where privacy is prioritised and homes are traditionally a woman’s domain. These spaces, designed to accommodate the ‘introverted lifestyle centred around the privacy of the home and the family’ when considered alongside the introverted nature of wearing the haik, highlight their protective and private fabrics.[1] Medina house designs mimic the haik’s liminal space, with features like the *sqifa*, a buffering entrance area. It is ‘a well-decorated transition space one passes through before entering the remainder of the house’.[2] Beyond the home, we seek to understand the haik-scape’s relationship with the urban public realm, as women use the haik to transgress between public and private spaces.

1 Zeynep Çelik, *Urban Forms and Colonial Confrontations: Algiers under French Rule* (University of California Press, 1997).
2 Karim Hadjri, “Vernacular Housing Forms in Northen Algeria,” *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* 5, no. 1 (1993): 69.

WESTERN COLONIAL INFLUENCE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE HAIK-SCAPE

The French colonial authority fixated obsessively on unveiling the haik-scape, under the guise of 'liberating' Algerian women and 'modernising' domestic spaces to reflect French ideals. Expressing their frustration of having yet dominated these aspects, Çelik explains, 'like the domestic space, women represented the unconquered part of the colony. As women were considered to hold the key to Algerian society at large, clarifying and demystifying their status with the ultimate goal of changing it became a major preoccupation, intertwining the two projects of investigation'.[3] Resulting in the French intervention in Algerian domesticity through colonial social housing schemes.

Such schemes aimed to reduce the risks posed in vernacular domestic spaces fostering independent Algerian consciousness' as 'the home was the "inviolable space" where Algerians recovered their identity'.[4] Mass housing projects were designed 'to provide minimalist, hygienic, and functional dwellings for all. Within this modernist functionalism, there was little space for plurality and populism, and society was expected to adapt to an idealised form of living'.[5] Their repetitive mass-produced modular block arrangements demonstrated their attempt at rationalising the natives' 'irrational' vernacular approach to domesticity.

This new 'idealised' lifestyle, modelled on colonial housing standards of nuclear families, methodically contrasts the vernacular living standards of the Algerian people accustomed to living with their extended family. Deliberately constructing smaller accommodations to undermine communal values clearly demonstrates the colonial power's tactic to 'divide and conquer'. Their emphasis on providing minimalist dwellings also highlights how they sought to omit vernacular liminal spatial typologies, such as the use of *sqifa*. Allowing colonial authorities clearer access to the inner confines of Algerian homes.

In conjunction with unveiling the haik-scape through domestic means, the French saw threats in its manifestation as the garment itself. It represented resistance and Algerian identity thanks to its contribution during the war for liberation. 'There were veiled women in urban centres who participated in the movement as weapon carriers and liaison agents'.[6] Alongside this the haik enabled high-profile F.L.N members to move covertly through the city, exploiting French caution and cultural sensitivity towards the garment.[7]

The haik's ambiguity, created blurred boundaries, and liminal space, preventing the body from being policed it was able to defy Western surveillance and its ungovernable nature frightened the colonial hegemony. Sparking a colonial movement for public ceremonies unveiling native women, framed as 'liberating' them from Algeria's 'oppressive' society. On May 16, 1958, rebellious French generals bussed in native men and women from nearby villages, and French women solemnly unveiled the native women. The 'choreographed event became a symbolic dimension that dramatized France's one constant feature of the Algerian occupation: its obsession with women'—exhibiting women's bodies becoming central to the hegemonic surveillance of the West.[8]

Despite these colonial attempts at disseminating the haik-scape, there is evidence that the native society has re-implemented it via updated forms. For example, colonial social housing often sees native residents incorporating veiling on their openings using curtains, voiles, blinds or shutters. Sticking to their beliefs that the 'inside should never be visible from the outside'.[9] Thus demonstrating natives reassuming spatial properties that embody their cultural values via 'modern' means, embodying the essence of the shifting nature of the haik-scape.

THE INFLUENCE OF EASTERN CULTURAL APPROPRIATION AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE HAIK-SCAPE

Postindependence, Algeria sought to heal the wounds of the French regime by instilling itself as an Islamic nation with the desire to oppose Western standards. To the F.L.N at the time, 'culture officially meant the "restoration" of an "Arab-Muslim" society'.[10] This identity overshadowing Algerian heritage, exemplified in part by substituting the haik with imported Eastern modest garments.

Amid a time of substantial economic uncertainty, the success of Islamic fundamentalism in the Iranian revolution against a Western super power inspired a similar religious movement in Algeria. Adopting—'a belief that the establishment of an Islamic state is the only possible solution to these problems'.[11] One of the most visible groups in the religious movement, the Front of Islamic Salvation (F.I.S), known for its militancy and persuasive leadership, won the ruling majority in the People's National Assembly in 1991. Following their success, certain urban areas became hotspots for Islamic fundamentalism, and in the context of the haik-scape, influencing how women dressed in public.

Often targeting poorer neighbourhoods, 'young girls are persuaded to wear the hijab by members of the F.I.S. who offer it to them free of charge'.[12]

3 Çelik, *Urban Forms and Colonial Confrontations*, 88.
4 Djamila Amrane, *Les femmes algériennes dans la guerre* (Plon, 1991), 45.
5 Amina Rezoug and Mine Özkar, "A Lived-in Shape Grammar: Parsing the Dwelling Activities in a Modernist Residential Building in Algiers," *Design and Culture* 16, no.2, (2023): 2, doi:10.1080/17547075.2023.2259672.
6 Marnia Lazreg, *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question* (Routledge, 1994), 122.
7 Front de Libération Nationale (National Liberation Front), are the ruling political party in Algeria since they won independence.
8 Lazreg, The Eloquence of Silence, 167.
9 Rezoug and Özkar, A Lived-in Shape Grammar, 14.
10 Front de Libération Nationale (National Liberation Front), are the ruling political party in Algeria since they won independence.; Lazreg, The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question, 135.
11 Lazreg, The Eloquence of Silence, 211.
12 Ibid., 218.

In instances where persuasion as such were not viable, compliance was achieved through more threatening means as armed groups 'posted signs on Algiers' street walls and dropped leaflets warning women to wear the hijab or risk death. This was no idle threat, as two students were gunned down at a bus stop on 30 March 1994, because they did not wear a hijab'.[13] Thus, violently shifting the haik-scape further away from the haik to a new socially acceptable modest dress - the hijab.

The appropriation of the hijab by this new cultural hegemony demonstrates its use of the garment as a tool to govern women's bodies. In contrast to the haik's unpredictable, smooth nature, the hijab is very structured. It follows specific techniques in the way that it is worn, easily understood by both wearers and enforcers, leaving little room for blurring boundaries. Thus, it became a tool for religious movements to survey women while promoting modesty.

During the 90s, the threat of violence in the public space of Algiers made women fear leaving their homes, particularly if they did not wear a hijab. In the scope of this ongoing research, an interview with an Algerian woman who lived in Algiers during the turmoil revealed she, as a woman that didn't wear the hijab, avoided going out and carefully planned her routes. Highlighting how women once again required domesticity for their protection. However, in some cases, domesticity also lost its protective role as Islamic fundamentalism led some men to impose a hegemonic presence within their households.

Women also alternatively sought refuge in select appropriate locations, such as the hammam, an environment in which women freely socialised unveiled outside the home.[14] With the emergence of this Eastern hyper-Islamic hegemonic influence over feminine space, 'there is a sense in which the mosque has displaced the hammam'.[15] The hammam provided a liminal space where women could move freely, beyond the cultural (male) hegemony's control. Their inability to control these spaces risked creating resistance, leading to women being pressured out of these deemed 'immodest' spaces. Therefore shifting women's social activities to mosques, under the supervision of religious leaders.

THE HAIK-SCAPE IN CONTEMPORARY ALGERIA

Scarcely seen in daily public life these days, the haik, following independence, saw its decline with the generations that used to wear it. Becoming a novel expression of historical culture reserved for special occasions and public parades.

13 Ibid., 222.
14 A traditional public bathhouse exclusively for women.
15 Lazreg, The Eloquence of Silence, 218.

An Algerian performance artist briefly revived the haik on the streets of Algiers, through the Belaredj Band, manifesting as a carefully orchestrated procession of women wearing the haik: The motivation of backing the relevance of the garment, is quoted as 'I want to give the haik its real value,' and 'the hijab and the niqab are not a part of our tradition'.[16] The procession, symbolizing Algeria's lost cultural heritage, quickly drew attention and nostalgia. Its success led to similar parades across the country. An Algerian woman was quoted, 'I want the haik to make a comeback,' and 'I wear the haik, but not the hijab. Many outfits like the hijab have been imported from abroad, particularly from the Middle East. Nowadays, we are tossed to and fro by dress codes that come from other civilisations.'[17]

The Belaredj band symbolised native women employing the haik to reclaim urban public space and their own liminal space, which has been lost culturally. The liminal space of the haik, as mentioned previously, has a loose, unbound nature in direct contrast to the rigidity and discipline of the hijab. Prompting Algerian women to question their affiliation with the hijab. The haik offers women more agency over their boundaries and negates the risk of surveillance over their bodies. This also perhaps suggests the employment of the hijab by present day hegemonic bodies again as a means of surveillance. The understanding of the haik's resistive and political use against the French colonial system remains steady in current mentalities. Which possibly alludes to said hegemonies' fear of the haik in turn being used against them in a similar manner, threatening the power they hold.

Contemporary domesticity in Algiers has adapted to modern life by integrating the traditional haik-scape with modern housing developments, prioritising the liminal space informally by repurposing certain components in urban block model houses. The *sqifa* as a privacy buffer has uniquely been adapted in contemporary dwellings through the popularised design choice of having garages occupy the ground floor. Elevating the privacy of the domestic space away from direct contact with the public street level. These garage spaces, have also developed a profitable duality to them. Most owners see the financial benefits of renting them out for commercial use, bringing forward a new and intriguing dimension to the traditional *sqifa*. Turning it, in some instances, into a hyperpublic commercial commodity. Whereas previously, the sqifa provided a blurred boundary between the outside and the inside, its commodification in this sense has restrained the ambiguity it once held.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

We employ this conceptualisation of haik-space to examine the complex relationship between hegemony and modernity in colonial and postcolonial

16 AFP, Algerian women march in white to defend tradition, AlArabiya News, March 22 2013, https://english.alarabiya.net/life-style/2013/03/22/Algerian-women-march-in-white-to-defend-tradition.
17 Dorothée Myriam Kellou, Algerian women take to streets to bring back the traditional veil, France 24, March 16 2015, https://observers.france24.com/en/20150316-algeria-women-haik-veil-march.

Algeria. Modernity, historically associated with Western colonisers like France, contrasted Western ideals with the perceived ‘traditional’ customs of the colonised. In Algeria, the haik, a traditional garment worn by women, became a potent symbol in the cultural conflict. As scholars like Frantz Fanon have argued, ‘clothing was one of the many ways colonial powers sought to assert their dominance, aiming to transform the colonised subjects physically and psychologically into reflections of Western modernity’.[18] Rooted in tradition and indigenous identity, the haik, resisted imposed modernity, serving as a space of cultural resistance.

However, modernity’s narrative is not static. As we move beyond the binary of coloniser and colonised, we observe that the concept of modernity, while initially centred in the West, begins to shift, reflecting broader geopolitical changes and the rise of new centres of power. Homi K. Bhabha’s concept of hybridity is helpful here, as it highlights how ‘cultures under colonial rule do not merely assimilate or resist but rather create new, hybrid forms of identity that challenge the simplistic dichotomy of traditional versus modern’.[19] In this light, the appraisal and disappearance of the haik can be seen as part of a broader dispositive, or apparatus, through which hegemonic power shifts and redefines itself.

This shifting centre of modernity, increasingly influenced by the East, reconfigures how we understand the disappearance of the haik. As noted by Leila Ahmed in Women and Gender in Islam, ‘adopting different modes of dress among women in postcolonial societies often reflects changing political and cultural hegemonies, where local interpretations of modernity diverge from those imposed during the colonial period’.[20] Therefore, the gradual fading of the haik does not merely signify the loss of tradition under Western influence but also illustrates how new forms of modernity—rooted in a reimagined cultural identity—emerge as hegemonic forces in their own right.

18 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks, trans*. Richard Philcox (Penguin Books, 2021).
19 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Routledge,1994).
20 Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam* (Yale University Press, 1992).

Education as Mission

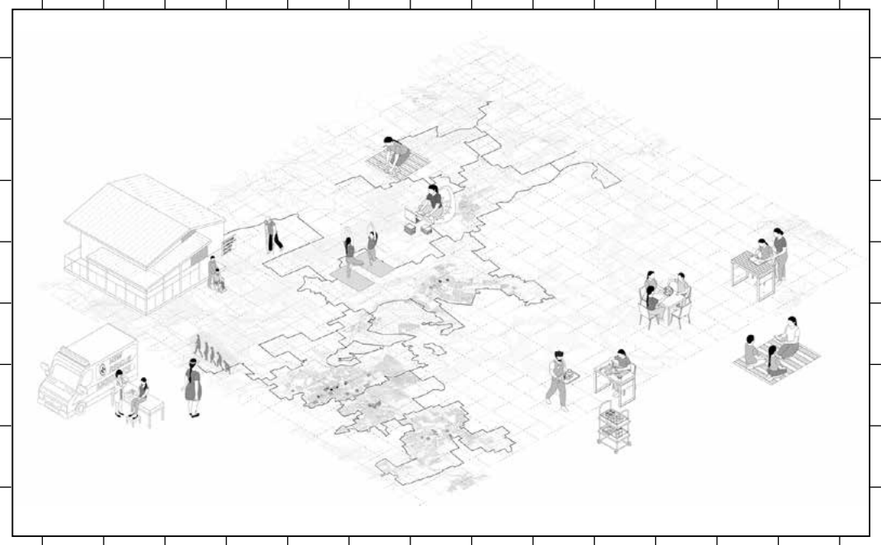

Image source: Kiara Gebrael, Blue Mountains Community Land Trust Countermap, 2022, Ink on Paper.

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Yarning and the Country Sphere: Modernity and Decolonising Architectural Education in Australia

INTRODUCTION

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia (collectively known as Indigenous, or First Nations), colonialism, modernity, and modernism coincided with the subjugation of Indigenous knowledges, languages, and cultures. Whilst Indigenous peoples do not necessarily oppose modernism, modernity's power dynamics falsely positioned European pedagogies as normal, natural, and universal. In this paper, we critique Habermas' concept of the public sphere and discuss how it perpetuates modernity's privileging of certain voices over others. In this case, and for Indigenous Australians: Western conceptions of place, time, and the built environment over Indigenous understandings of law, story, spiritual practices, and relationality, reflected through the term 'Country'. Drawing on the concept of 'yarning'—a transformative Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mode of informal and purposeful dialogue—we consider how architectural education can unsettle architecture's Eurocentric essentialism. We consider how yarning within architectural studios can foster inclusivity, empathy, and a connection to place that better reflects all voices—human and non-human—in ways that are overlooked by Habermas. In doing so, we argue for the adoption of a pedagogy of place that we call the *Country Sphere*.

COUNTRY AND PLACE

For Indigenous peoples in what is now known as Australia, Country holds the law, story, and the cultural and spiritual practices associated with place.[1] Connection to Country is expressed through living practices and relationality with human and non-human beings, flora, fauna, ancestors, spirits, and place, including its lands, waters and skies. All life and all time — the past, future and present — are interconnected and interdependent within a cyclical relational system.[2] Country is synonymous with memories that are brought into the present through stories of place and kin which continues

1 Karen Martin and Booran Mirraboopa, "Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing: A Theoretical Framework and Methods for Indigenous and Indigenist Re-Search," *Journal of Australian Studies* 27, no. 76 (2003): 203–14: 206.
2 Irene Watson, "Sovereign Spaces, Caring for Country, and the Homeless Position of Aboriginal Peoples," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 108, no. 1 (2009): 27–51: 35.

to inform understandings of the present and future. This ontological position offers an understanding of place that counters Western notions of time as linear, rights as universal and 'progress' as emancipatory.[3]

INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIAN CULTURES AND MODERNITY

Indigenous cultures and traditions in Australia are not homogenous, nor are they static. First Nations cultures are diverse, innovative, and adaptive. Having lived on the continent for upwards of sixty thousand years, Indigenous peoples have always been, are, modern, advanced—progressive—and intertwined with, and part of, Country.[4] Enlightenment ontologies, however, separate culture and nature, linking modernity to imperialism and the spread of Western epistemologies. This was a process that saw the slow rise of modernity and its architectural forms in concert with Eurocentric conceptions of culture and its narrow specification for the constitution of civilisation.[5]

In respect to intensified colonising practices, cultures that most aligned with European understandings of place were characterised as progressed whilst those that did not were labelled as uncivilised, part of nature so of lesser standing. Ignorant of Indigenous understandings of Country and place, Europeans view(ed) what they falsely saw as Indigenous peoples' lack of European markers of civilised culture as symptomatic of incivility and inferiority. Architecture, being a key signifier of European civilisation, has likewise been central to processes of subjugation and oppression where the construction of national identity and civilised nationhood held spatial and material privilege over Indigenous-designed environments and infrastructures.

Modernity is thus intertwined with the nation's colonial legacy, including its architecture. Its disentanglement or decolonisation is not a theoretical task alone as 'decolonisation is not a metaphor' as Tuck and McKenzie teach us.[6] Modernity nurtured colonising pedagogies and architectures, informed by European architectural traditions, which were imposed and reinforced in the absence of any dialogue with Indigenous peoples and knowledge systems. Habermas's sphere of public discourse excluded diversity of voices and related deliberative practices.

3 Katharina Hunfeld, "The coloniality of time in the global justice debate: de-centring Western linear temporality." *Journal of Global Ethics* 18, no. 1 (2022): 100–117. 101.; Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 13.; Immanuel Kant and Lewis White Beck, *On History*. 1st ed. (Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), 3. 'The Enlightenment is man's release from his self-incurred tutelage' is a translation of the Kantian notion that individual reasoning is emancipatory of religious dogma and aristocratic feudalism to entail progress and self-determination. This has instead facilitated power and domination in new forms of feudalism.

4 Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Harvard University Press, 1993), 10.

5 Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: global futures, decolonial options* (Duke University Press, 2011), 2.; Walter Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On decoloniality: Concepts, analytics, praxis* (Duke University Press, 2018), 111.

6 E. Tuck and K. W. Yang, "Decolonization is not a metaphor. Decolonization: Indigeneity, education & society, 1 (1), 1–40." (2012): 04: 1.

MODERNITY AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Habermas' idea of the public sphere posits that with the rise of modernity in eighteenth-century Europe came a socially constructed ideological space of critical public discourse such as the salons of Paris, in which dialogues, ideas, theories, and philosophies were debated amongst the bourgeoisie. Critically, Habermas's public sphere was a deliberative sphere between the state and 'the people'. Habermas did not explicitly acknowledge the centrality of material space in his conception of the public sphere. Within these spaces, democratic outcomes were based on the use of 'reason and rationality' negotiated and reached by those with access to the public sphere.[7] Many have critiqued Habermas on grounds that this reading of the public sphere fails to consider the intersectionality between state, public, and private domains and the role of material space.[8] In doing so, Habermas neglected to scrutinise power-relations and the socio-cultural structures that determine who is (and therefore who is not) considered a member of 'the public' and someone capable of contributing to use of reasoned debate and rational outcomes.

Although Habermas acknowledges that competing views existed within the public sphere, his failure to acknowledge race, class, and gender of the period as contributing factors to public dialogue—and therefore the decisions and outcomes that arise from them—presents the illusion that the public sphere is equitable, neutral, and universal. However, not all people of eighteenth-century Europe had equal access to 1) the media that debated the philosophies discussed in the public sphere; 2) the cultural capital, knowledge, or language needed to participate in the conversation; or 3) access to the places where such discussions take place. Furthermore, not all humans have historically been considered 'civilians', or even 'people'.[9]

Since colonisation, First Nations peoples in Australia have been—and in many cases still are—expected to assimilate to Western paradigms as a prerequisite for participating in the public sphere.[10] For many First Nations peoples, this makes the public sphere unsafe and alienating, since it does not represent First Nations' ways of knowing, doing, and being.[11] Even for Australian Indigenous communities participating and adopting hegemonic expectations and norms of the mainstream, equity is never guaranteed, nor is any assurance that views of those who do not fit the 'public image; will be heard. Habermas' neglect to consider a 'plurality of public spheres' means

7 Jürgen Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry Into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. 1st ed. (Oxford: Wiley), 1992, 96.

8 Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the public sphere: a contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy," In *Between borders*, pp. 74–98. Routledge, 2014, 78.; Jennifer Barrett, 2001, *Being Seen in Public: Vision, space and theories of the public sphere*, PhD Thesis, University of Technology Sydney; and Barrett, Jennifer, 2012, *Museums and the Public Sphere*, Wiley/Blackwell, Cambridge, UK.

9 Aileen Moreton-Robinson [Ed.], *Sovereign Subjects: Indigenous Sovereignty Matters* (Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 205.

10 Benjamin Nathans, "Habermas's 'Public Sphere' in the Era of the French Revolution," *French Historical Studies*, Baton Rouge, La., etc: Society for French Historical Studies (1990): 630.

11 Martin and Booran Mirraboopa. "Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing: A Theoretical Framework and Methods for Indigenous and Indigenist Re-Search. *Journal of Australian Studies*: 205.

that his public sphere is forever doomed to be a site of forced homogeneity and essentialism.[12] The ‘common good’ is reached at the expense of some groups’ views.

Despite its shortcomings, however, Habermas’ public sphere, provides a reframing analytical tool through which to assess power and explore how certain groups do resist, push back, and challenge dominant systems of thought by asserting cultural authority and sovereignties. These shortcomings, specifically in relation to gender, are acknowledged by Nancy Fraser and Seyla Benhabib. Rather than consider how the public sphere can better accommodate First Nations cultures, we explore whether it can be unsettled or decolonised to create a setting in which multiple knowledge systems, modes of communication, and relationships can *co-exist* without essentialising them or seeking to assimilate differences. Through an ontology based on place and relationality, we argue that the ‘Country Sphere’ offers a framework accommodating multiple ways of approaching architectural pedagogies that are inclusive of Indigenous life-worlds, ways of being and doing.

YARNING AS ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION

In Australian architectural education, Indigenous knowledge has historically been limited and considered lesser than the so-called ‘real’ or ‘legitimate’ thought of governing Western architecture. When Indigenous knowledge was taught with rigour and in relationship with Indigenous communities, it was done so in fringe studios reliant on a small cohort of Indigenous and aligned non-Indigenous academics.

From 2016, however, architectural education has evolved in response to extensive advocacy from First Nations academics (Michael Mossman), architects (Sarah Lynn Rees as chair of the Australian Institute of Architects First Nations Advisory Group) and allied discipline professionals represented by innovative reforms such as the Government Architect of New South Wales’ Connecting with Country framework (2023) led by Dillon Kombumerri, and the 2021 amendments to the National Standard of Competency for Architects. The Connecting with Country framework acknowledges Traditional Owners and recognised knowledge holders as disciplinary experts in the built environment and lays out a process through which they can play a key role in the design and planning of projects on their Country.[13]

12 John Keane, “Democracy and civil society: on the predicaments of European socialism, the prospects for democracy, and the problem of controlling social and political power.” *(No Title)* (1988), 14.

13 Architects Accreditation Council of Australia. 2021. *National Standard for Competency of Architects: Explanatory Notes and Definitions*, Sydney, Australia. https://aaca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021-NSCA-Explanatory-Notes.pdf. ‘Knowledge Holders are individuals and/or particular family groups that hold and maintain specific aspects of cultural knowledge, including knowledge about places, the environment and methodologies of caring for Country. Traditional Custodians are those who can speak for Country due to their deep ancestral connections to place.’

The new performance criteria for the accreditation of architects and architecture faculties include; the implications of projects on Country; compliance with Indigenous cultural and intellectual property (ICIP); First Nations people’s aspirations to care for their Country and how this informs the architectural design; respectful and meaningful inclusion of Indigenous knowledges and cultures into the design of architectural projects; culturally safe communication with Traditional Owners; the resolution of designs that take account of the health and wellbeing of Country; consideration of the impact of material selections on Country; ongoing consultation and engagement with First Nations people throughout the life of the project, amongst others. These substantial reforms have been a catalyst for broadscale institutional change across the allied built environment disciplines, but, despite their very prescriptive nature, have relied on a small cohort of Indigenous architects, community members and academics working within and outside of the system to shift the dominant architectural pedagogies. Key to the impact and changes taking place has been the inclusive and transformative Indigenous methodology of yarning.[14]

Yarning is an open group discussion format that gradually invites students and staff to consciously and unconsciously accept relationality, cultural dissonance, empathetic agility, reflexivity, vulnerability and generosity.[15] It is a process that encourages conversational speaking, listening and learning, and the activation of dialogue becomes part of a continuum rather than a means to an end. Yarning reconfigures power relations and enlivens studio learning environments. It facilitates an active role for non-human kin and involves a dialogue built on relationships with custodians of Country, including Indigenous community voices.

Taking students outside the confines of the institution to learn from and be inclusive of Traditional Owners, places and kin that are part of the design process and implicated in decisions being made by students, works to unsettle the knowledge/power dyad of the institution and the dominant architectural pedagogies.[16]

Yarning and the idea of the *Country Sphere* were central to a studio run in 2022 with the University of Sydney and Blue Mountains Community Land Trust. It introduced University of Sydney Master of Architecture students to Dharug and Gundungurra Elders and First Nations community members working toward land reclamation for housing and care of Country. The studio was dense in its ambition by introducing a non-linear, reflexive and iterative process led by Elders, with yarning and walks on Country being central. The focus of the studio was not on the object of architecture but on the

14 Dawn Bessarab and Bridget Ng’Andu, “Yarning about yarning as a legitimate method in Indigenous research,” *International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies* 3, no. 1 (2010): 37–50: 38.

15 Michael Mossman & Tom Gray, (2023) *From the Heart-Masters Studio*, eds, Anna Rubbo, Juan Du, Mette Ramsgaard Thomsen, and Martin Tamke. *Design for Resilient Communities: Proceedings of the UIA World Congress of Architects Copenhagen 2023*. 1st ed. Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2023: 783–792, 784.

16 Margaret Hughes and Stuart Barlo, “Yarning with country: An indigenist research methodology,”*Qualitative inquiry* 27, no. 3–4 (2021): 353–363, 354.

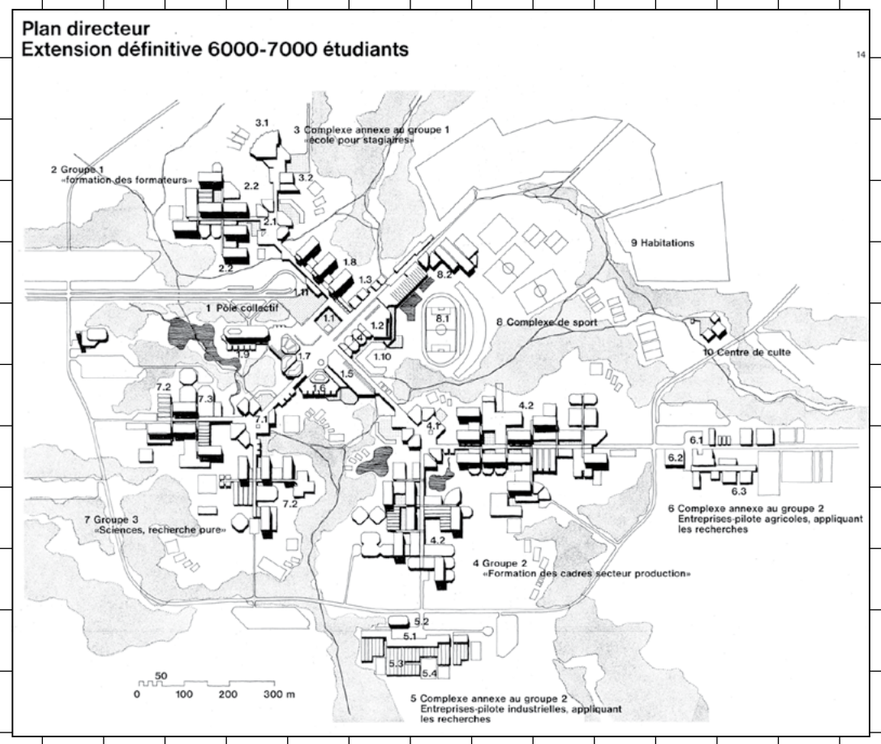
process the students undertook in developing their work and, in the spirit of Indigenous knowledge production and learning, the lessons were undertaken in relation and on Country inclusive of those with lived-experience and with students developing real-world outcomes. The shift in the relationship of students with the content of the studio was evident in their approach and commitment to the work and connection with the community. The students saw the value of the work and their relationship with this place as not bound by the institution and operating beyond the bounds of the discipline.

Yarning in the context of this studio, alongside and supported by the aforementioned policy and accreditation reforms, and how it worked to support the community land trust, is illustrative of the power of bringing non-Indigenous people into relation with Country and kinship systems to adopt an ethic of care and better support First Nations community in their work toward dwelling justiceand systemic change.[17] The impact of yarning saw a shift in the approach and response toward a more inclusive and less oppositional process and a shift from a process of knowledge extraction and appropriation to one of obligation and responsibility for Country, Elders and community. It became apparent to the students that an inclusive process, informed by those with lived-experience revealed the systemic privileging of particular voices over others, and helped them understand the importance of taking account of disparities in power relations in their work.

CONCLUSION

In this instance, yarning and the Country Sphere, when enacted in concert with structural shifts and inclusive processes, have seen the beginning of a dissolution of the knowledge/power binary held by the institutions and the privileging of voices often marginalised in discourse and pedagogies. While the studio ran for fifteen weeks the student experiences of yarning, inclusion, connection, of custodial rights and obligations, of the more-than-human and innovative design thinking worked to embed an alternative pedagogy and reframe what is considered disciplinary knowledge. The Country Sphere as an extension of this approach should be considered a core element of architectural education to reinforce the active nature of yarning in a holistic environment and its transformative impacts. First Nations cultures have always been modern and as a non-extractive, naturally regenerative and inclusive worldview, the invitation of unlearning Eurocentric ways of being and doing, complicit as they are with processes of oppression and dispossession, comes in this instance, with a generous process of collective truth-telling and reconfiguration of power relations. The Country Sphere bridges Habermas' struggle to articulate the interconnection between the material world; multiple epistemic and ontological understandings of that world; and the private domain—opening new possibilities for inclusive and innovative ways of being, knowing and doing in architecture.

17 Libby Porter and David Kelly, "Dwelling justice: Locating settler relations in research and activism on stolen land," *International Journal of Housing Policy* 23, no. 4 (2023): 817–835: 818.



Walter Custer's differentiated, expandable three-cluster campus master plan.
From Züblin's 1975 book brochure. Image source: gta Archive / ETH Zurich, bequest of Walter Custer.

Sebastiaan Loosen (ETH Zürich)

Euclid in Ivory Coast: Architecture and Modern Education as Swiss Export, 1975–1976

INTRODUCTION

In 1975 the Swiss construction firm Züblin approached the government of Ivory Coast on its own initiative with a proposal to build a fully-fledged university campus. In a bid that resulted in several Swiss companies teaming up under the name 'Project Euclid', and which was presented as being supported by the Swiss authorities and the polytechnical universities ETH Zürich and EPFL (Lausanne), Züblin and partners attempted to turn higher education into a product of exportable modernity, a conveniently bundled package of services that could be purchased and that contained the promise of access to modern education.

Züblin's actions took place after the wave of decolonisation in the 1950s and 1960s, when many newly independent countries in Africa went through processes of drastic modernisation. As this high-paced modernisation played out in a historically-grown global landscape of inequality—a landscape produced by centuries of colonialism, and as such often referred to as a continuing condition of coloniality—it was intimately entangled with the European project of modernity.[18] In this historical context, education was one of the major programmes that contained the promise of modernity and thus became a major site of exchange between newly independent governments and foreign partners.

In this paper, I aim to take the unexecuted but emblematic 'Project Euclid' and the protagonists involved—a closely-knit collaboration between Swiss industry, academia, politics, and architecture—to shed light on how, in the era of decolonisation, architecture was no stranger to the intimate connection between European modernity and its welfare politics, and the global condition of coloniality.

ZÜBLIN'S 'SWISS PROPOSAL'

Züblin's proposal for the creation of a new 'National Polytechnical and University Education Centre' took shape in mid-1975. Having been edited

18 Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," in "Globalization and the De-Colonial Option," ed. Walter D. Mignolo and Arturo Escobar, special issue, *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2–3 (May 2007): 168–78.

into a neatly designed book brochure, it was handed via diplomatic intermediaries to Félix Houphouët-Boigny, president of Ivory Coast since its independence in 1960.[19]

As Züblin was already active in Abidjan, they had become aware of the Ivorian government's plans for a substantial education reform, which, in the spirit of decentralising government services away from the expanding capital, aimed to favour the creation of new educational centres outside of Abidjan. Züblin acted swiftly: a fully-fledged proposal for a university centre structure and campus master plan was ready more than a month before the legislation was passed in parliament on 21 October 1975.

In line with government plans, the proposal suggested creating a second major institution in the interior of the country, near Houphouët-Boigny's home turf, and later capital, Yamoussoukro.[20] To complement the more humanities-oriented University of Abidjan, the new centre was to have a clear polytechnical orientation. In its 'Swiss proposition' (as the proposal was subtitled), Züblin made clear that this was not just a 'material' proposal to build the infrastructure and buildings, but also—and perhaps even more so—an 'immaterial' proposal, suggesting the involvement of Switzerland's two polytechnics, ETH Zürich and EPFL, in establishing this new and prestigious institute as a state-of-the-art polytechnical educational facility.

Despite the incongruity of a Swiss construction firm serving as the main instigator behind a new educational programme in a country they had only limited ties with, the proposed centre was remarkably well-designed and innovative. It was neither a conventional campus model such as one could find in many European or American cities, nor a copy-and-paste of existing polytechnics such as Zürich, Delft, or MIT.[21] Instead, it sought to address the particular challenges of Ivory Coast as a newly independent 'developing country' by gearing the centre's organisation towards the wider regional development of the country and to the dearth of higher-educated cadres and teaching staff. Interdisciplinarity and a strong connection to industry were to be the hallmarks of this modern, unique-in-its-kind education institute.

Thus, instead of planning separate blocks for separate discipline-specific departments (as in conventional campuses), the master plan outlined three clusters of educational buildings, joined together by a collective, central square, connected by pedestrian-oriented green spaces, and flanked by sports facilities and student housing. Each of the clusters had its pedagogic specificity, and a corresponding built form to meet its pedagogical needs, including its imagined interaction with society outside of campus. One cluster was dedicated to 'teaching the teachers' ('Formation des formateurs'), and included, among others, spaces for schooling neighbourhood children by teachers in training and spaces for 'permanent education' (refresher courses for teachers after graduating). A second cluster focused on industry leadership ('Formation des cadres insérés dans la production') and had a wide variety of buildings to meet the needs of agricultural, mining, architectural, and other specialised professional training, as well as an annexe to programme the exchanges with 'science-oriented industries' (an idea stemming from British and Israeli examples). And lastly, a smaller cluster was dedicated to fundamental research ('Sciences et recherche pure'), with postgraduate training, laboratories, and a central computer. As a whole, the project was conceived of in stages and allowed for the three clusters to grow incrementally, depending on needs.

CUSTER'S 'SPATIO-ARCHITECTURAL ORDER'

The level of design, both in the institute's pedagogic structure and in its master plan, can be called remarkable in being authored by a construction firm. Undoubtedly, the third signatory of the proposal—next to two Züblin signatories—played a major role in this: Professor Walter Custer, acting as the firm's consultant. Archival documents suggest that Custer was the main author of both the institute's structure and master plan.[22]

Custer was not only Professor of Spatial Planning at ETH Zürich, he was also well-connected with both the Swiss industry and the 'developing world', as it was then called and started to emerge in a changing geopolitical context. As early as 1948, he headed the Swiss–Nepal Forward Team to investigate the potential for Swiss aid in Nepal; in the mid-1950s he was involved in founding a Swiss foreign aid association (current-day Helvetas); in 1969 he co-initiated the Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Course on Problems of Developing Countries at ETH at the instigation of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation; and from the 1950s to the 1970s he had several missions abroad, frequently acting as broker to Swiss companies, including Durisol in India (lightweight construction materials) and Consolid in Algeria (chemically-improved soil bricks).[23]

19 Ed. Züblin & Cie S.A., *République de Côte d'Ivoire. Création d'un nouveau Centre d'Enseignement National Polytechnique et Universitaire. Une proposition suisse, soumise à S.E. Monsieur Félix Houphouët-Boigny, Président de la République de Côte d'Ivoire* (Zürich; Abidjan: Züblin, September 1975). ETH Zürich, gta Archive, bequest Walter Custer, folder 'Elfenbeinküste' (hereafter referred to as the Custer archives).

20 On Houphouët-Boigny's over-investments in Yamoussoukro, see Nnamdi Elleh, *Architecture and Power in Africa* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002); and Berthold Hub, "Rome Is No Longer in Rome, Rome Is at Yamoussoukro," *gta Papers*, no. 4: Grand Gestures (2020): 120–26.

21 Zürich, Delft, and MIT were explicit references in preparatory documents. 'CEN-PU / Konstituierende Sitzung' (17.06.1976), handwritten notes, Custer archives.

22 To date, as only part of Walter Custer's bequest at the gta Archive has been inventoried, the existence of design-phase documents remains unknown. Documents dating from shortly before, but mainly after, the September 1975 proposal, however, suggest Custer's authorship. These documents include detailed notes on the draft text of the proposal's section on 'immaterial structures' (handwritten notes, 31.08.1975); a memorandum by Züblin to former Federal Council member and political mediator Nello Celio, crediting Custer with developing a 'structure form' for the institute (memorandum, 17.12.1975); a letter from Züblin to Custer, acknowledging his 'close participation in the conception of the project, and developing its master plan' (letter, 10.06.1976); and the formal agreement between Züblin, Custer, and other Swiss companies on 'Project Euclid', designating Custer as responsible for 'the project's structure' (draft agreement, 17.06.1976).

23 For information on Custer's foreign activities, see Benedikt Huber et al., eds., *Urbanisationsprobleme in der Ersten und in der Dritten Welt: Festschrift für Walter Custer* (Verlag der Fachvereine an den Schweizerischen Hochschulen und Techniken, 1979); Walter Rüegg, "Not Just Chandigarh: In the Footsteps of Swiss Architects in India," in *A Tropical House: The Embassy of Switzerland in New Delhi*, ed. Bruno Maurer (gta Verlag, 2014), 166–79; and Priya Jain, "Prefabrication and Transnational Building Materials in Modern India," *Architectural Theory Review* 26, no. 3 (2022): 519–46.

Custer's role as a consultant in Züblin's proposal cannot be underestimated. His master plan of a three-cluster campus was presented as a so-called 'spatio-architectural order' (*ordonnance spatio-architecturale*). As such, it served the purpose of directly coupling the 'material structure' of the university campus (Züblin's core business as a construction firm) with the promise of 'immaterial support' (i.e., implementing modern education in collaboration with Switzerland's polytechnics). In other words, the master plan's 'spatio-architectural order' of an expandable set of clustered buildings neatly attuned to Ivory Coast's goals of forming future teachers, industry cadres, and researchers, turned modern education into an exportable product: the conceptual and institutional blueprint of the proposed state-of-the-art polytechnical educational facility was presented as inextricably entwined with the buildings and infrastructure that Züblin was keen to construct.

But perhaps of even more value to Züblin's proposal, was Custer's signature itself. At the time of the proposal, no formal agreements had been made with ETH Zürich, EPFL had most likely not yet been consulted (despite the central role granted to it in the project, due to their common French language), and Swiss officials had only informally nodded approvingly at Züblin's plans. Without Custer, Züblin was merely proposing bricks and mortar. With Custer on board, it offered a state-of-the-art modern education institute, a credible potential collaboration with renowned polytechnical schools, and a tacit suggestion that the Swiss state was indeed backing up the project.

SWITZERLAND'S 'IMMATERIAL ASSISTANCE'

Züblin spotted the opportunity, and together with Custer developed the project. While the initial proposal assured Houphouët-Boigny that the Swiss authorities had confirmed their willingness to collaborate along these lines, the arrival of tentative signs of interest from Abidjan kickstarted a series of diplomatic negotiations with the aim to concretise this willingness into action. In the year following the September 1975 proposal, a few dozen meetings took place between various stakeholders and visits back and forth between the Ivory Coast and Switzerland were organised. With Züblin's representatives pulling the strings, the plot revolved around Swiss and Ivorian officials, political mediators, lobby groups, university professors, and visiting rectors.[24] Now that Ivory Coast had expressed its interest, Züblin put pressure on the Swiss authorities to offer stronger commitments. The impact of this deal on the Swiss economy, so Züblin argued, was huge—at some point, the project was valued at three-hundred-fifty million to one billion Swiss francs (c. seven-hundred-seventy-five million to two-point-two billion today).

As the project was becoming too big to handle, or in order to increase the pressure on the Swiss state to reach a breakthrough (both are plausible explanations), Züblin decided in mid-1976 to transform the project from a private initiative to a joint venture. A select number of companies were invited to join the project: apart from Züblin and Custer, an existing consortium, GESCO (Groupement d'Entreprises Suisses de Construction), consisting of H.R. Schmalz AG (from Bern), Bless AG (Zürich), and AG Conrad Zschokke (Geneva), was invited around the table, together with Indevsa (Geneva) and the architecture and engineering firm Suter + Suter (Basel). In June 1976, they agreed to form an interest group on the planning, project development, and realisation of the said education centre—which, for the occasion (and to legally protect Züblin's plans), was now baptised 'Project Euclid'.[25]

Diplomatic negotiations intensified after this move, but Züblin received less than it was bargaining for. While Swiss officials were initially positive, it gradually became clear that Züblin was expecting too much involvement from the state. Financially (and after a positive evaluation), the state could support the initiative through a state-covered investment risk guarantee. But taking responsibility for the 'immaterial support' of the new institute—as was suggested in Züblin's proposal and which was envisioned, for instance, as covering the salaries of academic staff who would be temporarily released from their ETH and EPFL duties to help set up the new institute—was a step too far. The even bolder suggestion, which was raised at a later stage of the negotiations, that the state should take over the patronage of the project for the sake of the many Swiss interests it would serve, was certainly out of the question.

The project's unique selling point—coupling the material with the immaterial—turned out to be its weakness. If Custer already wondered about this in his preparatory notes for the initial proposal, 'how far can one go in this regard??'—i.e., flying solo and involving ETH Zürich and the Swiss state without formal agreements—his discussion with the Minister of Home Affairs a year later provided the answer: 'the offer of "immaterial assistance" had already gone a bit too far!'[26] Whether it was the limited commitment of the Swiss state ('the French are more invested in their companies' is how the internal notes express their dismay), or whether it was the bombshell letter that the Ivorian Ministry of National Education had written in the meantime (dryly listing all the higher education institutes that had recently

24 Throughout the various negotiations, the most important people involved were Carl Schaufelberger (Züblin), Robert Schweizer (Züblin), Walter Custer (ETH Zürich), Théodore De Mel (Ivorian ambassador), Jimmy Martin (Swiss ambassador), Nello Celio (former President and member of the Swiss Federal Council, acting as main political mediator), Hans Hürlimann (Federal Council, Home Affairs), Pierre Graber (Federal Council, Foreign Affairs), Ernst Brugger (Federal Council, Economic Affairs), Marcel Heimo (Swiss Office for Technical Cooperation), Jakob Burckhardt (Swiss School Council), Wladimir Romanowsky (Swiss Association of Engineers and Architects' Commission for Working Abroad, and a pivotal figure in Züblin's later partner, Suter + Suter), Valy Diarrassouba (rector of University of Abidjan), Franco Balduzzi (ETH Zürich, soil mechanics), and the Swiss Trade and Industry Association.

25 Draft agreement 'EUKLID' (17.06.1976), Custer archives. There are no indications why exactly 'Euclid' was chosen as its name, but the image of the father of modern geometry, epitomising western modernity and rationality, projected onto an Ivorian setting is a remarkably allegorical image of the historical logics that brought a Swiss construction firm to Ivory Coast in the first place.

26 Quoted from the Custer archives, noting on the initial proposal's draft text on 'immaterial support': 'Inhaltlich sehr wichtig wegen "Propositions". Wie weit darf man hier schon gehen??' (handwritten notes, 31.08.1975); and reporting from a later meeting with Hans Hürlimann, Home Affairs: 'In der Broschüre 15.9.75 ("une proposition Suisse") sei man mit Angebot von "Assistance immaterielle" bereits etwas zu weit gegangen!' (memo, 20.06.1976).

been established, suggesting between the lines that there is no place for such an ambitious programme as that proposed by the clearly uninformed Swiss), what is certain is that ‘Project Euclid’ died a quiet death.[27]

CONCLUSION

In the era of decolonisation, the programme of modern education is one of the key sites to discuss the entanglement of modernity and coloniality. Is it in this regard telling for European modernity that the ‘Swiss proposal’ to support Ivorian higher education was a private initiative of a construction firm, which turned education into a product of exportable modernity, a Trojan horse to land a three hundred thousand square metre deal? To say the least, academia and government were initially only implicated by proxy, through the private interests of a Swiss firm, and only through those interests were forced to take a position on Ivorian education.

While it is tempting to see cases such as Project Euclid as mere ‘economic deals,’ where it is up to equal parties on both sides to make an agreement or not, one can also identify such cases as structural features of late-twentieth-century welfare states in economic transformation. Not coincidentally, Züblin’s proposal came at a time when the European building sector was heavily impacted by the 1973 economic crisis and firms were trying to tap into foreign markets to secure European welfare. Engineering, as well as architecture firms, embarked on assertive, if not aggressive, internationalisation strategies to secure new commissions for their highly qualified staff. If coloniality is understood as the historically-grown global landscape of inequality, these internationalisation strategies were deeply entangled with it.[28]

Custer’s master plan is just one way in which architecture played a crucial role in materialising the interconnection between processes of drastic modernisation in one half of the globe and the securing and consolidating of modern welfare states in the other half.[29] In this regard, Swiss private firms weighing in on Ivorian decision-making concerning higher education cannot be seen in isolation from economic measures taken at home. Likewise, what the exotic image of Euclid in Ivory Coast brings to architectural history is to recognise that the expandable three-cluster campus master plan conceived for an Ivorian town is not something completely alien to late-twentieth-century European architecture culture, but rather intimately entwined with it.

27 Letter from the Ministry of National Education to Züblin (10.09.1976), Custer archives.

28 On these structural entanglements and the role of architecture in it, see Sebastiaan Loosen, Erik Sigge, and Helena Mattsson, eds., “Architecture in the Foreign Aid-Funded Knowledge Economy (Part 1: Expertise, Part 2: Pedagogies),” special issue, *ABE Journal. Architecture beyond Europe*, no. 21–22 (Summer–Winter 2023).

29 For brevity, I have omitted a section that discusses how the involvement of the firm Suter + Suter – the architecture partner invited around Züblin’s table for Project Euclid – was entirely in line with the post-1973 intensification of its own internationalisation strategy, how this internationalisation strategy affected the nature of the architectural services they offered, and how it relates back to changes in the office culture in Switzerland and the demands placed upon its employees for the sake of Swiss welfare.

Photograph of St. Joseph de Ngasobil, East side, undated.
Image source: Archives générales de la Congrégation du Saint-Esprit, ACCSp 3 I 18.12.2.

Alican Taylan (Cornell University)

Disentangling Modernity and Colonialism: The St. Joseph Mission School in Ngasobil, Senegal

MODERNNESS IN AFRICA

From the 2000s onward, postcolonial studies in architecture have allowed a re-evaluation of the foundations of the architectural discipline and the forces shaping its current-day canonisation.[1] During this time, scholarship in architectural history turned away from postmodern historicism, moving closer to other fields that rethink modernity from the perspective of the oppressed, be it in environmental, race, gender, or postcolonial studies. To succinctly capture the theoretical directions of postcolonialism here, we can turn to Immanuel Wallerstein, who theorised a world-systems approach to humanities, arguing that social sciences have historically been Eurocentric by idealising European dominance, treating European history as a universal model and justifying colonialism through claims of civilisation and progress.[2] The approach of postcolonial studies proposed undoing these assumptions and adopting a global perspective on history instead, one in which modernity was coproduced internationally. In this way, it held Europe accountable for the persistence of the nefarious effects of coloniality worldwide.

In the case of Africa, Walter Rodney's 1972 book 'How Europe Underdeveloped Africa' is an exemplary study in comparatively understanding the asymmetrical relationships between the two continents. For Rodney, it is no longer a matter of analysing the 'modernisation' Europe provided to Africa and the benefits of African labour and resources to the European markets separately but as entrenched in a dialectical process in which European development was achieved through the systematic extraction and expatriation of surplus from African resources and labour, leading to Africa's underdevelopment.[3]

Building on postcolonial scholarship, this study calls for reevaluating 'modernness' in a colonial context. It suggests that further differentiation must be made within coloniser and colonised categories. Focusing on West

1 For an overview of the state of postcolonial studies in architecture in the mid-2010s, see: Esra Akcan, "Postcolonial Theories in Architecture," in *A Critical History of Contemporary Architecture: 1960–2010* (Routledge, 2016).
2 Immanuel Wallerstein, "Eurocentrism and Its Avatars: The Dilemmas of Social Science," *Sociological Bulletin*, 46.1 (1997), pp. 21–39, cited in Akcan.
3 Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Verso, 1972).

Africa in the 1880s, just before Africa's 'scrambling', it invites differentiation between colonial administrators, Christian missionaries, and European traders—groups often perceived as acting in concert. Following Olúfẹ́mi Táíwò, I argue that while both colonial administrators and missionaries shared a 'mission civilisatrice', the former prioritised land and resource exploitation, whereas the latter included an autonomous African clergy skilled in arts and sciences—counting in their ranks modern West African philosophers.[4]

This does not suggest that the colonial system, as Jean-Paul Sartre defined it, is overlooked or trivialised. Sartre argued that there was no such thing as good or bad colonists; they were simply colonists. After the initial entrenchment of a colonial system of land, labour, and resource exploitation, the intentions of the colonial agents did not matter, he argued, even if they were devoid of malevolence.[5] Accepting Sartre's position, this paper looks closer into the built environment of Christian missionaries in late nineteenth-century West Africa through the work of African actors. How can we understand the role of African missionaries without boxing them into a coloniser-colonised binary?[6] For Táíwò, the answer lies in a close examination and framing of what it means to be modern.

How do we define 'modern'? Enlightenment literature saw 'the right to subjective freedom' as 'the pivot and centre of the difference between antiquity and modern times'.[7] Since then, this discussion has been the basis of extended arguments from scholars in many fields. For our purposes here, it is a relatively agreeable definition to say that, following Samir Amin, 'the autonomy of civil society is the first characteristic of the modern world'.[8] Other widely accepted characteristics of modernity include, as Táíwò noted, 'the centrality of reason, autonomy of action, liberal democracy, the rule of law, the conception of an open future, and an obsession with novelty'.[9]

If being modern means acting toward societal autonomy, then colonial administrators in nineteenth-century West Africa did the opposite for Africans, whereas Christian missionaries worked to establish autonomous communities. Based on these observations, Táíwò asserted in 'How Colonialism Preempted Modernity in Africa' that 'the principal agents for the introduction and implementation of modernity in Africa were [a certain cohort of] missionaries, and […] many of them were themselves Africans'.[10]

4 Olúfẹ́mi Táíwò, *How Colonialism Preempted Modernity in Africa* (Indiana University Press, 2010).
5 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, ed. Azzedine Haddour (Routledge, 1964), 27.
6 Sartre complicated the matter by speaking about internal colonialism, but this added layer fit inside the broader colonizer-colonized binary.
7 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, [1821] 2005).
8 Samir Amin, *Eurocentrism: Modernity, Religion, and Democracy: A Critique of Eurocentrism and Culturalism*, 2nd ed (Monthly Review Press, 1989), p. 81 cited in Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò, *How Colonialism Preempted Modernity in Africa*, 83.
9 Táíwò, *How Colonialism Preempted Modernity in Africa*, 78.
10 Táíwò, Introduction.

A MODERN AFRICAN PRIEST

Christian missionaries have been present in West Africa since the 1700s.[11] The Spiritans, an order founded in 1703 in Paris, merged in 1848 with the Society of the Holy Heart of Mary, which served former black slaves in French West Africa. This merger was led by Francis Libermann, who prioritised the formation of an indigenous clergy, writing in 1848 that the Spiritans must 'embrace all means' to achieve it.[12] In 1840, three African priests—Fridoil, David Boilat, and Pierre Moussa—joined the Spiritans after training in France. Boilat became a notable writer and draughtsman, publishing an expansive ethnographic volume, 'Senegalese Sketches' (1853), which analysed the country's landscapes and peoples, including a taxonomical series of watercolours. The book was a valuable resource for his contemporaries and remains a precious primary source today.

Boilat's drawings, influenced by European orientalist styles, seem to have been directly inspired by artist Jean-Baptiste Vanmour's earlier works on the Ottoman court, some of which are currently held in Amsterdam at the Rijksmuseum. Like Vanmour's engravings, Boilat's illustrations were widely distributed as postcards in Senegal, partaking in the visual and textual culture of the country. Boilat's illustrated 'Atlas', accompanying his text, resembled Vanmour's presentation style, offering short descriptions of each plate to inform a European audience about unfamiliar cultures.[13]

Despite similar structures, Boilat's and Vanmour's works differ significantly. Vanmour's texts display a typical Orientalist perspective, with superficial explanations reinforcing cultural stereotypes, sometimes mocking or insulting the subjects. In contrast, Boilat's descriptions directly address the images, providing detailed information on Senegalese dress, objects, locations, and personal anecdotes. His work, shaped by his education in Senegal and France, seeks to convey a comprehensive understanding of a dignified Senegal to a French audience. Boilat's tone reflects his colonial training—he refers to the French as 'us'—but his knowledge surpasses the typical orientalising gaze. He holds a middle ground between the coloniser and the colonised. Boilat and Vanmour produced fundamentally different works, although formally alike. The difference lies in the direction their drawings point toward. While Vanmour shows a society in stasis, unredeemable, for Boilat, describing Senegalese populations to a French audience is a path to progress for both. The difference is less in their respective objects of study (a culture's peoples and habits) but in the interpretative tools, they think with.

11 There is mention of opening a seminary in 1764 by Father Demanet, the parish priest of Gorée Island, according to J. Remy, "La Congrégation Du Saint-Esprit et Le Clergé Indigène," *Revue d'Histoire Des Missions* 13 (1936): 529–62.
12 Written declaration to the community in French Senegal on July 14th, 1848, cited in J. Remy.
13 The full title of Vanmour's book is *Collection of one hundred prints representing different nations of the Levant, engraved on the paintings painted from nature in 1707 & 1708, by the orders of M. de Ferriol, the king's ambassador at the gate, and brought to light in 1712 & 1713 by the care of Mr. Le Hay.*

Boilat's experience as an African clergy member opens an oblique entryway into the history of the mission in Senegal, in which the native actors became the carriers of modern ideas of self-realisation and subjectivation.[14] Until the middle of the nineteenth century, even though the French colonial administrators had concluded coercive agreements in the Walo region and beyond to erect forts where they deemed fit, the French settlements were limited to the islands of Gorée and Saint-Louis further up north. A commentator noted France did not possess 'an ounce of territory' on the mainland.[15] In 1843, missionaries forged relations with the Lebou people, residents of Cap-Vert, convincing the leader of the peninsula to let them build a settlement with a seminary school. The buildings were constructed under the supervision of Father Warlop, a Belgian engineer-architect commended by many sources for his knowledge of construction and described by Boilat as a 'skilled architect'.[16]

The customary construction code of West Africa required that buildings be light and fragile on purpose. The criterion for having the right to erect an enclosed structure was to be weak enough to allow a bullet to go through it.[17] The people of Joal, for example, strongly resisted the first chapel in their villages because the missionaries wanted to build it out of stone and not straw. For Joal residents, this was only a sign that the chapel was intended to become an armoury.[18]

The Spiritans who started the Dakar mission drafted and signed a long-term rent agreement between the three first missionaries on the peninsula (signatories included the architect-engineer Father Warlop) and the leader of Dakar. The document stipulated that the Congregation of the Holy Spirit would be allowed to build whatever they deemed fit inside the perimeter rented to them for the ludicrous sum of two hundred francs per year—quite literally a steal.[19]

In the following years, during the 1850s, threading between Joal and Dakar, Father Bessieux is reported to have spotted a piece of land along the Atlantic coast, notable for its 'favourable position and quality of land'.[20] Ngasobil was the place's name and meant fountain (*ngas*) of stones (*o bil*)—it was a site where wild animals came to drench their thirst. First, the missionaries and workers (it is unclear who these workers were) built straw huts there. Later, MBour carpenters from the north built a chapel and school out of wood, and a land agreement like that of Dakar was made.[21]

It was not until the 1860s that the Ngasobil site became an expansive settlement, notably through the efforts of Mgr. Aloÿs Kobès, the vicar apostolic to Guinea and Senegambia, co-founder of The Daughters of the Holy Heart of Mary, an order only recruiting West African women. In Kobès' vision, the Ngasobil site was to become an autonomous Christian village, a model later adopted across the continent by Christians.[22]

Kobès negotiated with the colonial administration for financial support. He obtained their agreement on the condition that the site cultivate cotton and millet for trading, exemplifying an instance where the colonial administration primarily sought profit while the missionaries were after developing an indigenous clergy. The foundations of the main stone building were laid on 22 January 1863, two hundred metres from the shore, 'in the most favourable location one can find in the region'. The mission's correspondence continuously underlines the dimensions of the main building, fifty-two metres long and nine metres wide.

Kobès was there to supervise the construction himself. He wrote, 'A providential circumstance provided us with help I had not expected. As a result of last year's wars, famine has forced Saloum's people to seek sustenance elsewhere. Hundreds have successfully come to work here […] New emigrants are arriving daily'.[23] The clergy provided food and shelter for the people who immigrated to Ngasobil, in exchange for which immigrants had to work the fields or participate in constructing the new buildings. An 1875 document by Spiritans reported that thousands of workers carried the stone (that the high tides brought) from the shore to the construction site. Seashells were collected to be crushed to become lime-like and be used as mortar. When the building was completed, it became a point of departure for further development. A novitiate for the Daughters of the Holy Heart of Mary followed suit. From 1866 onward, the Dakar mission's school and the printing press were transported to Ngasobil.

The planimetric organisation of Ngasobil would develop over the years to incorporate a grid of roads and more spacious residential quarters. According to the official history of Spiritans, by 1885, the Ngasobil village, composed of hundreds of Christian Africans, was self-governed, with a

14 However, the story remains an imperial one characterised by asymmetrical power relations. For reference volumes on the history of Catholic missionaries in Senegal, see Joseph Roger de Benoist, *Histoire de l'Église catholique au Sénégal* (Clamecy, France, 2023); Albert Sène, *Les relations Église-État au prisme de l'enseignement catholique au Sénégal*, de 1819 à nos jours (Paris, 2021). Even though these histories were written by authors close to the Church and its objectives, they recount the colonial relations between the Church and Senegalese populations.

15 Secrétariat Général Congrégation du St. Esprit, "Aperçu Historique Sur La Mission de St. Joseph de Ngasobil," 1875.

16 Abbé P. David Boilat, *Esquisses Sénégalaises: Physionomie Du Pays, Peuplades, Commerce, Religions*, 1853, 34.

17 This was about trust. A neighbour who built armoured construction could not have benevolent intentions—as the colonialists had proven over the centuries. This customary building code is explained in Congrégation du St. Esprit, "Aperçu Historique Sur La Mission de St. Joseph de Ngasobil," 20.

18 François G. Richard, *Reluctant Landscapes: Historical Anthropologies of Political Experience in Siin, Senegal* (University of Chicago press, 2018), 1–2.

19 The deal was to be extendable forever and terminated at the discretion of the Congregation. "Document for the purchase of the Dakar house and speech to the black people after the death of Mgr. Truffet," January 7 1846. Archives générales de la Congrégation du Saint-Esprit, ACCSp 3C6 29.

20 Congrégation du St. Esprit, "Aperçu Historique Sur La Mission de St. Joseph de Ngasobil," 18.

21 Decree of 2 May 1863 granting 100 hectares of land to Mgr. Kobes, on a provisional basis. Archives générales de la Congrégation du Saint-Esprit, ACCSp 3C6 29.

22 Henry J. Koren, *Les Spiritains : trois siècles d'histoire religieuse et missionnaire histoire de la Congrégation du Saint-Esprit*, trans. Joseph Bouchaud and Antoine Grach (Beauchesne, 1982), 515–17.

23 Congrégation du St. Esprit, 34–35.

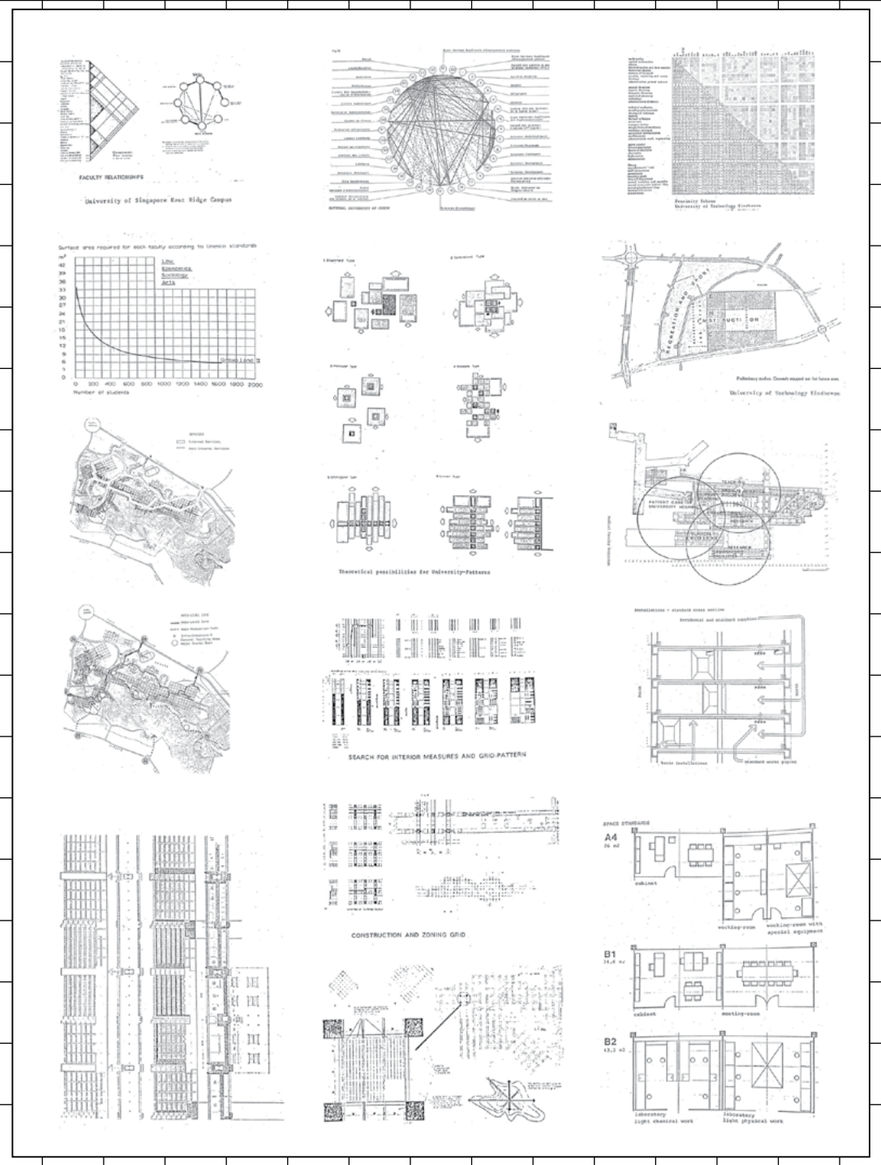
village council and internal policing procedures. According to Spiritan reports, this ‘closed society’ model would spread to Nigeria, Congo, Angola, and Cameroun in the following years.[24] When looking back at it, the Ngasobil school appears to be an overlooked case of modern architecture for its program (an autonomous complex for education) and sustainable architecture since it only uses on-site material, and the building still exists.

The Ngasobil mission had devotional artworks. Here, I present the story of one marble statue ornating the women’s chapel because it underlines the global cosmopolitan history of Ngasobil. The 1875 report describes a Madonna and Child statue offered to Kobès in Rome and attributes it to a ‘black […] woman sculptor born in America to a black African father and an Indian mother’. The unnamed artist reportedly wished to meet the ‘bishop of black Africans’ and gave the African mission a statue to contribute to her black heritage. This happened in the 1870s, without a precise date.[25]
The sculptor in question was almost certainly Edmonia Lewis, a celebrated artist who moved to Rome from the United States because, according to art historian Charmaine Nelson, ‘Rome could […] have represented an opportunity to transcend the social, material, and psychic limitations of her racial–colour identity in America’.[26] Lewis, a woman of African American and Indigenous descent working in Rome, one of Europe’s most competitive art markets at the time, can be seen as a paradigmatic figure of the modernness we have defined above as driven by principles of subjectivation, self-realisation, and autonomy. She sought to contact Kobès and donate a sculpture to the African mission, a sign that the mission’s actions aligned with her modern worldview. A recent article mentioned a lost Madonna and Child statue by Lewis, reportedly destroyed in an 1877 fire.[27] Could that be the one Lewis sent to Ngasobil?

Taking Táíwò’s argument seriously and diving into an intertwined, intercontinental history of Africans as purveyors of the modern opens a renewed possibility for understanding modernness in architectural history as well–one that, philosopher Marshall Berman would agree, is closer to its nineteenth-century roots of liberatory potentials.[28] This framework has three major conceptual strengths.

First, it allows us to stay with the problems of modernity by lucidly rethinking what constitutes a modern project: less the use of new technology (as many architecture historians of modernity thought in the twentieth century, championed by the likes of Giedion and Banham) and more the deployment of the built environment to materialise modern ideas of self-realisation, autonomy, and subjectivation for societies. Secondly, it opens the path for a granular reading of coloniality’s relationship to modernity. Re-evaluating the unavoidability of the modern as bearing a matrix of oppressive power, Táíwò’s is a call to re-establish modernness as an unfinished project of emancipation captured in the maelstrom of modernising forces. Thirdly, situating the discussion in West Africa, the project pluralises and expands modern historiography beyond Western epistemologies. In this way, modernity discourses are supplemented by the West African case study that becomes a constitutive, pivotal entryway into the core of the question.

24 Koren, *Les Spiritains*, 516.
25 Congrégation du St. Esprit, “Aperçu Historique Sur La Mission de St. Joseph de Ngasobil,” 78.
26 Charmaine Nelson, *The Color of Stone: Sculpting the Black Female Subject in Nineteenth Century America* (University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 7.
27 Joanna Moorhead, “Feted, Forgotten, Redeemed: How Edmonia Lewis Made Her Mark,” *The Observer*, October 10, 2021, sec. Art and design.
28 Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, 30. pr (Penguin Books, 2007).



Diagrams included in the 'General Master Planning and Design Approach for Universities in Developing Countries' formulated by OD205 in 1976. Image source: Nieuwe Instituut, ODEE_d2509.

Esther Gramsbergen and Yağız Söylev (Delft University of Technology)

'What Holland Can Offer': Samuel van Embden and the Knowledge Exchange on University Campus Designs, 1947–1976

INTRODUCTION

This paper is a report on the initial research on the global practice of university campus design by architect and planner Samuel van Embden (1904–2000). It outlines the first findings on the influence of Dutch expertise in planning and architecture as an export product and raises questions for further investigation.[1] Following WWII and the independence of the colonies of the Western countries, a foreign-aid-funded practice of university planning in the so-called developing countries was established.[2] Within this context, numerous projects and remarkable examples of modern architecture were realised in South America, Africa, the Middle East and Asia. These projects are important not only for their political and historical context but also for their outstanding architectural quality. Amongst others, the University City of Caracas in Venezuela and the Central University Campus of the National Autonomous University of Mexico are named UNESCO World Heritage. Additionally, the Middle East Technical University Campus in Turkey, the Ile-Ife Campus of Obafemi Awolowo University in Nigeria and the Chandigarh University Campus in India have been acknowledged for their quality by the Keeping It Modern initiative by Getty Research Institute.[3]

Recently, much has been written about the architects and planners who have served as experts in this context. Attention has been given to the works of Jacqueline Tyrwhitt, Otto Koenigsberger, Jane Drew and Maxwell Fry, amongst others as 'transcultural experts' that emerged in the – so-called –

1 Tom Avermaete, Viviana d'Auria, Klaske Havik, and Lara Lenders. "Crossing Boundaries: Transcultural Practices in Architecture and Urbanism," *OASE* 95 (2015).; and J. Gussenhoven, *Export of Intellect in Shaping the Future: 140 Years* (Royal HaskoningDHV Publication, 2021).

2 Jill Pellew, and Miles Taylor, eds. *Utopian Universities: A Global History of the New Campuses of the 1960s*. (Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350138667.

3 Since 2019, these projects have been analysed in the Campus Utopias Course run by the authors, in collaboration with Ayşen Savaş, at the Delft University of Technology, MSc program in Architecture. The results and students' works have been published in the journals of OverHolland and DOCOMOMO. See METU Analysis: Ayşen Savaş Sargın, "Campus Utopias I: Middle East Technical University Ankara, Creatief Herlezen." *OverHolland* 14, no. 22 (2023): 45–70. https://doi.org/10.7480/overholland.2023.22.242; Esther Gramsbergen and Yağız Söylev, "Campus Utopias II: UTwente, Twaalf Projecten, Dertien Ongelukken?," *OverHolland* 14, no. 22 (2023): 142–164, https://doi.org/10.7480/overholland.2023.22.246; Ayşen Savaş Sargın, Esther Gramsbergen, and Yağız Söylev, "Campus Utopias: A Visual Re-reading," *Docomomo Journal*, no. 69 (2023): 106–113, https://doi.org/10.52200/docomomo.69.12.

developing countries after decolonisation.[4] It is noteworthy that Van Embden's global practice and consultancy went unnoticed in this context. Van Embden was a Dutch architect and planner and the founder of the OD205 Architecture and Planning Bureau. In 1964, he was appointed a professor at Delft Technical College, now known as Delft University of Technology (TU Delft). Additionally, he established the International Society Of City and Regional Planners (ISOCARP) in 1965 and served as a UNESCO advisor on campus design in various countries, including Venezuela, Singapore and Nigeria. Although Joosje van Geest published a monograph on Van Embden, the global scope of the architect's practice could not be fully addressed due to time constraints.[5] The campus designs for TU Eindhoven and the University of Twente, along with Van Embden's contributions to TU Delft, were covered in a series of articles.[6] While these publications mention the architect's international work, they do not explore its full extent. Investigating Van Embden's foreign practice and the networks in which he operated will uncover new insights, particularly within the debate of knowledge exchange on architecture and planning in the postcolonial context.

ESTABLISHING THE EXPERTISE

The Technical College of Bandung (Bandung Institute of Technology, IBT) was opened in 1920 by Dutch entrepreneurs in Indonesia. It was the second Technical College in the Dutch Empire and closely related to the Technical College in Delft. From its foundation in 1842, one of the goals of the College in Delft was to educate the future civil servants to work in the Dutch East Indies. Streefland explains that the educational reform and changes in the tax system at the end of the nineteenth century resulted in the East Indies being 'perhaps even more than before, an investment area.'[7] The 'growing call for Indonesian independence' at the beginning of the twentieth century forced the Dutch government to 'encourage the spread of education' amongst other reforms. Putting education agenda together with the constant need for engineers in the East Indies led to the foundation of the TH Bandung.[8]

The college campus was designed by the Java-born Dutchman and TU Delft alumni Henri Maclaine Pont (1884–1971). The campus design strongly resembled Javanese palace complexes, called kratons, and consisted of ten faculty buildings with attention to the open fields in between. The preliminary plans included a more detailed design for the first buildings with a roof structure which was 'a free interpretation of the traditional Sumatran Minangkabau roof system'.[9] Interestingly, Johannes Widodo suggests that although this roof system looked vernacular, it was a very modern structure based on mathematical calculations, which Maclaine Pont documented in his notes later in Delft. Widodo adds that the German Architect Frei Otto based his revolutionary tensile structures on the calculations of Maclaine Pont as he found them in his time in Delft.[10]

In 1947, Van Embden was asked to move to Indonesia to become the chair of the Department of Architecture to be established. Due to the 1942 Japanese invasion, the country was still undergoing reconstruction, and it was expected that 'the new spirit' of independence could influence the architecture with the new education programme. After making inquiries about the political situation, Van Embden accepted the task of developing a new curriculum and expanding the faculty of Technical sciences and designing several faculty buildings. However, at the end of 1948, after the proclaimed Indonesian independence, the Netherlands started the euphemistically called 'police actions' (in Dutch: politionele acties), which was criticised by many Dutch people in Indonesia, including Van Embden. He returned to the Netherlands in January 1949 due to the growing political tensions and his objection to the government policy.[11] Even though his designs are not confirmed to be realised, this experience wasn't fruitless. During his stay in Bandung, he gained familiarity with a new context and made new contacts that helped further his career. In the following decades, with the experience gained from Bandung, he became a master planner and architect with his practice OD205 for the university campuses of Eindhoven (1951–1974) and Twente (1961–1973) in the Netherlands, as well as Singapore (1967–1970), Surabaya, Indonesia (1976–1985) and several universities in Nigeria (1981–1983).

CONSOLIDATING THE EXPERTISE

In 1951, the Netherlands Engineering Consultants (NEDECO) was established to unite the efforts of Dutch experts under an umbrella and establish Dutch expertise in planning, particularly hydraulic engineering, in the post-colonial global market.[12] Under NEDECO, many joint ventures were formed, including Concarplan, a collaboration between Haskoning and Van Embden's OD205, which offered a total package of design and engineering services, including water infrastructure, traffic engineering, urban planning, and architectural design for university campuses, among

4 Tom Avermaete, Viviana d'Auria, Klaske Havik, and Lara Lenders. "Crossing Boundaries: Transcultural Practices in Architecture and Urbanism." *OASE* 95 (2015).
5 Joosje van Geest, *S.J. van Embden.* (Nai010 uitgevers/publishers, 1996). As mentioned to Esther Gramsbergen in conversation.
6 In 2017, a whole issue of OverHolland was dedicated to the campus designs of TU Eindhoven and TU Delft. The work of van Embden was especially addressed in the following article: Esther Gramsbergen, 2018. "Integrating the city and the campus. Samuel van Embden and the Technical Collages in Delft and Eindhoven". *OverHolland* 18/19 (2017):07–28. https://doi.org/10.7480/overholland.2017.18/19.2436; Following on this issue, in 2023 another issue of OverHolland was composed around the campus design of U Twente. Otto Diesfeldt, Esther Gramsbergen, Yvonne van Mil, Iskandar Pané, en Yağız Söylev, "Campus-Atlas Twente". *OverHolland* 22 (2023): 71–96. https://doi.org/10.7480/overholland.2023.22.243 and Yvonne van Mil, Yvonne and Yağız Söylev, "Timeline Delft, Eindhoven, Twente. A comparison of Three Technical University Campuses". *OverHolland* 22 (2023):97–110. https://doi.org/10.7480/overholland.2023.22.244.
7 Abel Streefland. *The Shared History of TU Delft and Bandung Institute of Technology* (Delft University of Technology, 2020), 4–5.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid. 10–11.
10 J. Widodo, "SEAM Encounters Symposium | Johannes Widodo: Contextualizing Modernism: Asian Modernity," October 14, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=edlbs2OnyW0.
11 J. van Geest, *S.J. van Embden* (Nai010 uitgevers/publishers, 1996), 46–47.
12 J. Gussenhoven, *Export of Intellect in Shaping the Future: 140 Years* (Royal HaskoningDHV Publication, 2021).

other programs. Together, the firms advertised their expertise under the motto “What Holland can offer” in brochures aimed at foreign governments and commissioners.[13]

The case of the Kent Ridge Campus of the National University of Singapore (NUS) is significant as a total work of Concarplan and a project which helped establish their expertise in the South East Asian market. The lack of space for necessary expansions in the Bukit Timah Campus of NUS led to the development of the Kent Ridge Campus to provide room for all faculties and future expansions. Although the initial idea for the University was to remain in Bukit Timah, the university contacted UNESCO for advice in 1968. UNESCO committee, consisting of various experts, recommended the university to move to a new site, namely Kent Ridge. UNESCO pledged to support the university expansion plans with a three-year funding program of one hundred and fifty million dollars. The aid included ‘the move to a new and bigger campus; establishing a natural science museum; setting up a science and technology documentation centre; and expanding technical teacher training programmes’.[14]

Following the approval of the state to move to a new campus, Samuel van Embden was recommended to UNESCO for the role of consultant and master planner. He visited Singapore between 1969–70 and prepared the master plan for the new campus.[15] The ‘Kent Ridge site of four hundred and seventy-three acres’ was claimed to ‘provide space not only for an estimated student population of ten housand eight hundred by 1980 but further extension’.[16] The idea was to allocate all the faculties on ‘one basic structure, continuous and extendable’.[17] The campus facilities, with the Library and Great Hall in the centre, would form a horse-shoe layout and were envisioned to be connected by ‘a public learning street’ weaving the campus together on changing levels with a distinctive double height and viewpoints.

Van Embden had planned to leave Singapore once the master plan was complete. Yet, according to Tan, he was convinced by Vice-Chancellor Toh Chin Chye to continue his role to ensure the continuity and realisation of the campus. Van Embden’s practice OD205 was contracted to continue his involvement from the Netherlands and Meng Ta Cheang ‘a China-born architect and urban planner’ from OD205 was appointed ‘as chief designer and coordinator for the project’ until 1976.[18] It is understood from the notes of van Embden that the term ‘knowledge transfer’ was being discussed at the time and the critique of a one-way transfer ‘from the developed to the developing’ was already made. Therefore collaborating with local partners who would bring their expertise to the table was key for Concarplan to establish a mutual knowledge exchange.[19] Even though Van Embden was confident that the local architects could realise the ideas for the master plan[20], it was ‘Meng who, despite his young age, ensured that the project stayed on course true to the master plan’s vision and fleshed out the abstract planning guidelines’ in the end.[21]

The University of Singapore Development Unit (USDU) was established on 15 September 1970 for the project implementation. The unit was responsible for the realisation of the project and its ‘financial and administrative control’. The scope of this control included the liaison with the World Bank, which offered a loan of over seventy million dollars for the first two phases of the campus development.[22]

Despite the efforts to ensure the competent implementation of the master plan, the interviews with Meng Ta Cheang and Lee Tuan Seng reveal that vice-chancellor Toh Chin Chye was highly influential in steering design decisions, in directions that were detrimental to the success of the development, pressured by the political landscape, student protests at the time and the energy crisis in 1973.[23]

DISSEMINATING THE EXPERTISE

Besides UNESCO, the World Bank was another important organisation that funded development projects and commissioned architectural firms in the 1970s. One of these projects was the University complex in Surabaya, Indonesia, in 1976, where OD205 was one of the six shortlisted teams to propose a concept out of hundreds of designers who applied. Hans Wittermans, partner at OD205, who grew up in the Dutch East Indies, stated that the proposal which awarded them the contract for Surabaya was the work by him and Van Embden in condensing all the firm’s knowledge into one document in three weeks.[24] The authors believe this document was one of the first versions of the design guidelines entitled ‘General Master Planning and Design Approach for Universities in Developing Countries’.[25]

The thirty-seven-page document formulates straightforwardly and rationally all the aspects that need to be considered for the master planning and design of university campuses. It is a typical ‘total design’ approach with an emphasis on integrating land use zoning, infrastructure, and the allocation of

13 Concarplan, *Physical Planning in Developing Countries,* Collection Nieuwe Insituut / ODEE_d2453.
14 “Unesco Chief Pledges Aid for S’pore.” The Straits Times, February 7, 1969, p. 4.
15 Kevin Y.L. Tan, Peck Thian Guan and Lee Fook Nigan, “The Building of the National University of Singapore.” Essay. In *Kent Ridge: An Untold Story*, 243–85 (Ridge Books, 2019).
16 “All this - and room to grow too…” *The Singapore Herald Friday*, July 24, 1970, p. 3.
17 Ibid.
18 Kevin Y.L. Tan, Peck Thian Guan and Lee Fook Nigan, “The Building of the National University of Singapore,” Essay. In *Kent Ridge: An Untold Story*, 243–85 (Ridge Books, 2019).
19 Collection Nieuwe Insituut / ODEE_d2474.
20 Pie Jin Lim, “Positioning the Role of the State in the Kent Ridge Campus Master Plan: An Architectural History of Our University.” MArch thesis, National University of Singapore, 2009. p. 30.
21 Ibid. 30–1.
22 Kevin Y.L. Tan, Peck Thian Guan and Lee Fook Nigan. “The Building of the National University of Singapore.” Essay. In *Kent Ridge: An Untold Story*, 254–56 (Ridge Books, 2019).
23 Meng Ta Cheang was interviewed by P.J. Lim and Lai Chee Kien for Lim Pin Jie’s MArch thesis in 17 June 2009. Lee Tuan Seng was interviewed for the book Kent Ridge: Untold Story by Peck Thian Guan, Judith Holmberg and Edgar Liao on 15 Dec. 2010.
24 J. van Geest, *S.J. van Embden* (Nai010 uitgevers/publishers, 1996), 67–69.
25 OD205, *General Master Planning and Design Approach for Universities in Developing Countries,* Collection Nieuwe Insituut / ODEE_d2509 and d2477. Versions of the document can be found in different folders.

key buildings in the plan. It advocates the exploration of different theoretical compositions before shaping the design in relation to the landscape setting of the site. The concept of planning for change was crucial, and attention was given to flexibility and adaptability in all design scales. Furthermore, it emphasises the importance of dialogue with the client in the decision-making process and advises forming a steering group for the planning and implementing process and a locally-based design team.[26]

A rationalised design grid system was seen as a prerequisite for adapting the abstract guidelines to the conditions of a specific design task. However, as we know the meaning of design elements such as the grid is dependent on specific cultural, social, and political conditions. For instance, a similar design grid has guided the designs of the University of Twente (UT) and the National University of Singapore's (NUS) Kent Ridge campus. While the guidelines stressed the significance of gathering and community spaces, the results were influenced by different political realities in both contexts. The UT grid and student-empowered education aimed to promote a democratic academic community by encouraging socialising and student gatherings; however, the political landscape in Singapore forced the NUS directors to limit gathering spaces and decentralise students to prevent protests.[27] This illustrates the discrepancy between the diagrams and their landing in specific locales.

To conclude, a further investigation of the different aspects of the design guidelines seems to be quintessential to grasping the architectural knowledge exchange that was practised in the work of OD205. While the literature has extensively covered the 'what' and 'who' of knowledge exchange, the 'how' of knowledge exchange has only recently received attention.[28] We are particularly interested in the role of the design guidelines in sharing architectural knowledge among different countries and actors involved in university campus design and planning. The investigation leads to further questions. What was the influence of UNESCO and the World Bank on the guidelines? How can the design guidelines be contextualised to some of the other university guidelines around the same period, such as those of Giancarlo de Carlo and ARUP Associates?[29] How did these generic and abstract design guidelines land in different locales? Answering these questions will help to contextualise the work of Van Embden c.s. in the transition between the colonial past and the emergence of the post-colonial global market.

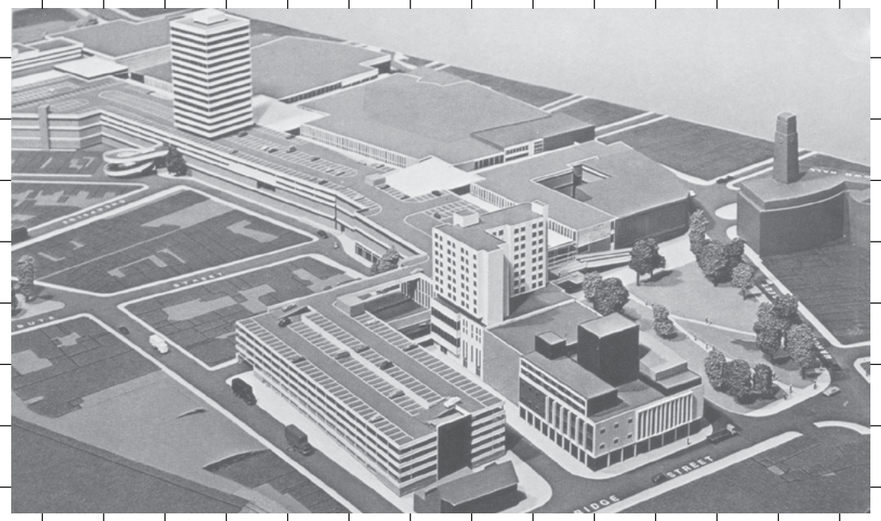
26 Ibid.

27 For Twente case: Benneworth, P. S. "Decoding University Ideals by Reading Campuses: Exploring Beyond the Democratic Mass University." In *The Physical University: Contours of Space and Place in Higher Education*, edited by P. Temple, 217–242. New York: Routledge, 2014. For Singapore case: Tan, Kevin Y.L., Guan, Peck Thian, and Ngian, Lee Fook. "The Building of the National University of Singapore." Essay. In *Kent Ridge: An Untold Story*, 243–85. Singapore: Ridge Books, 2019.

28 Rajesh Heynickx, Ricardo Costa Agarez, and Elke Couchez. "Introduction: The Mobile Landscape of Post-war Architectural Thought." In *Architecture Thinking across Boundaries: Knowledge Transfers since the 1960s,* edited by Rajesh Heynickx, Ricardo Costa Agarez, and Elke Couchez, 1–12 (Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2021). http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350153202.0005.

29 Giancarlo de Carlo, Giancarlo, ed. *Pianificazione e disegno delle universita.* Edizioni Universitarie Italiane, 1968; and Arup Associates. "Loughborough University of Technology, Grande-Bretagne." *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* 137 (1968): 53–56.

Neocolonial Practices



Architectural model of central area redevelopment for the English town of Luton.
Town & City Properties Limited, Report and Accounts, 1971.
Image source: P&O Business Archive, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.

Alistair Kefford (Leiden University)

Town & City Properties: From Colonial Rubber Plantation to the World's Largest Property Developer

INTRODUCTION

In the decades after 1945 the British real estate development sector exploded in size and began operating on a global scale. The largest real estate companies in the world were British in this era and they were responsible for planting new modernist forms—especially skyscraper office blocks and sprawling shopping malls—in cities all over the world.[1] This phenomenon was inextricable from the historical experience of empire, and the way this continued to benefit British business and to shape world economic systems in the post-1945 era. Britain's real estate firms exploited the country's worldwide commercial, cultural and geopolitical linkages to build in colonies, former colonies, and other imperially-linked spheres even as the empire was disintegrating in a formal political sense. In order to finance this transnational activity, British real estate firms partnered with the City of London's internationally-oriented financial sector. This was another imperial hangover. London's financial strength was rooted in transnational investment under the imperial world system, and its merchant banks and financial institutions were well-used to operating on a global scale. Alongside this striking global activity, the British real estate sector played a critical role domestically by partnering with local authorities to undertake large-scale urban renewal schemes in towns and cities all over the country. Through this work the real estate business was also centrally involved in the planned redevelopment of urban centres which revolved around new models of welfare statehood, automobility, and the affluent society.

This paper will approach this larger history through the story of one of the most prominent of these post-war real estate firms: Town & City Properties Limited. Town & City was at the heart of both of these dynamics—the global and the domestic—being simultaneously one of the largest property developers in the world in the 1970s and the most prolific urban renewal practitioner back in Britain. In the early 1970s Town & City was pursuing the largest development program of any property company in the world, worth £330m (this equates to roughly £3.5bn in present-day values). These developments were spread across the United Kingdom, North America, Australia, and Continental Europe, and they were predominantly modernist

1 Alistair Kefford, "The Global Rise of the British Property Development Sector, 1945–1975," *Past & Present* 264:1 (2024), 199–235.

office skyscrapers, which was the company's specialism.[2] This business therefore played a key role in the transplantation of new modernist forms to cities all over the world, and in the globalisation of urban development and real estate investment more generally. Domestically Town & City became the most prolific practitioner of large-scale public-private urban renewal schemes in Britain, with the company having completed around fifty such projects by the early 1970s and emerging as the undisputed leader in this field. Large-scale urban renewal, or comprehensive development, was at the heart of Britain's urban planning and redevelopment regime in this era, and it was carried out through partnership with real estate developers such as Town & City. Comprehensive development schemes saw urban centres overhauled and transformed with new shopping and commercial facilities, new roads and transport infrastructures, and also new social and municipal facilities. Such projects were therefore hugely consequential, reshaping cities according to the ideals of modernisation, motorisation, affluence, and welfare statehood, while introducing striking new modernist forms and environments to post-war Britain.[3]

TOWN & CITY'S IMPERIAL INHERITANCE

Having sketched out Town & City's scope and significance on both the global and domestic stage I want to return to the question of imperial inheritances and continuities, because the connection of Town & City Properties Limited with Britain's imperial past was direct and striking. The company which became known as Town & City was originally formed in 1910 as Gan Kee Rubber Estate Limited, a colonial rubber plantation in the British colony of Malaya. British imperialists and trading companies took firm control of the Malayan Peninsular in the mid-nineteenth century and began pursuing large-scale extractive and exploitative forms of wealth creation such as tin mining and rubber production. Rubber production especially was entirely an imperial creation (the rubber plant was native to South America) and it was one of the British empire's most profitable enterprises. Before the large-scale production of synthetic rubber (which began in the mid-twentieth century) natural rubber was one of the world's major commodities. For this reason rubber production in British Malaya boomed from the late-nineteenth century and made Malaya Britain's most financially lucrative colony. Rubber plantations required vast swathes of land, and commercial access to this land was guaranteed through the colonial authorities' claims to possession and insistence on the right to grant and enforce ownership rights. The Gan Kee Rubber Estate started out in 1910 by being granted 'an excellent block of land, 1,000 acres in extent, which has been selected and applied for from the government'.[4] Rubber production in the Malayan Peninsular, and the specific business activities of *Gan Kee Rubber Estate Limited*, were thus completely inseparable from empire and all its appropriations and exploitation of peoples, territory and resources.

The Gan Kee Rubber Estate operated for fourty-four years in British Malaya, until 1954 when the company was forced to extricate itself from this sphere during the violent anti-colonial struggles which the British euphemistically called 'the Malayan Emergency'. This was in reality an anti-colonial independence struggle, which involved a long guerilla war and brutal colonial reprisals and counter-insurgency measures. As premier sites of colonial economic exploitation, rubber plantations and rubber plantation owners were frequently targeted in this conflict. The Gan Kee company clearly decided its position in Malaya was untenable at this point, because the decision was taken to sell the estate and repatriate the proceeds back to metropolitan Britain. This process left the shell of a company casting around for a new business to enter. In mid-1950s London one could not fail to be confronted with one particular business that was positively booming: that was commercial real estate development, and specifically commercial office development in the capital. The amount of office floor space in central London increased by one third across the 1950s, as scores of new property companies began erecting modern (and modernist) office blocks in the City and the West End.[5] Gan Kee entered this field in 1956 by purchasing an existing property company called Midland City Properties. This purchase bought for Gan Kee a small property portfolio of around twenty 'shop and business premises', and it also brought the company into alliance with the London property professionals who were managing Midland City Properties. These figures were then brought into the management of Gan Kee. The company name was changed from Gan Kee Rubber Estate Limited to Town & City Properties Limited, and a new trajectory was set for this business.[6]

REDEVELOPING POST-1945 BRITAIN

Like many other real estate firms in this period, Town & City Properties expanded exponentially across the 1950s and 1960s as real estate boomed in Britain. The company's post-tax profits rose from £12,000 in 1958 to £3.75m in 1973. In real terms (i.e. adjusted for inflation) this profit figure of 1973 was 167 times larger than that of 1958, so this was an astonishing growth in business profitability. Town & City rapidly emerged as one of the dominant forces in multiple fields of real estate development in Britain. The company was a leader in metropolitan office development, where it owned and built numerous high-end office premises in central London, where commercial office rents were among the very highest in the world. Town & City was also active in industrial development, building and leasing factories and industrial estates in many parts of Britain. And, as indicated, the company became the undisputed leader in the field of large-scale

2 Town & City Properties Limited, *Report and Accounts* (1974), P&O Business Archive, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.
3 Alistair Kefford, *The Life and Death of the Shopping City: Public Planning and Private Redevelopment in Britain since 1945* (Cambridge University Press, 2022).
4 "Gan Kee Rubber Estate," *Financial Times*, 21 March 1910. See also Lynn Hollen Lees, *Planting Empire, Cultivating Subjects: British Malaya, 1786–1941* (Cambridge University Press, 2017).
5 Peter Hall, *The World Cities* (McGraw-Hill, 1966), 33.
6 "Town & City Properties Limited," *Financial Times*, 24 October 1956.

urban renewal, which was pursued in Britain via public-private partnership arrangements between real estate firms and local urban authorities. Town & City was responsible for dozens of such schemes all over Britain, both in major cities and in many smaller, second-order towns. To give just one example, there was the Luton central area redevelopment scheme, which comprised a new road scheme, a US-style shopping mall with one hundred and twenty-five shops, two multi-storey carparks, an eleven-storey hotel, an office block, a petrol station, a public house, and local authority flats. In a sign of the new enthusiasms of the auto age there were also plans for a sixty-room motel in central Luton, although this failed to materialise. Luton's central area scheme was one of the largest redevelopments in the country, and it was built across the late-1960s and early 1970s 'in partnership with Luton Corporation' (the city authority).[7]

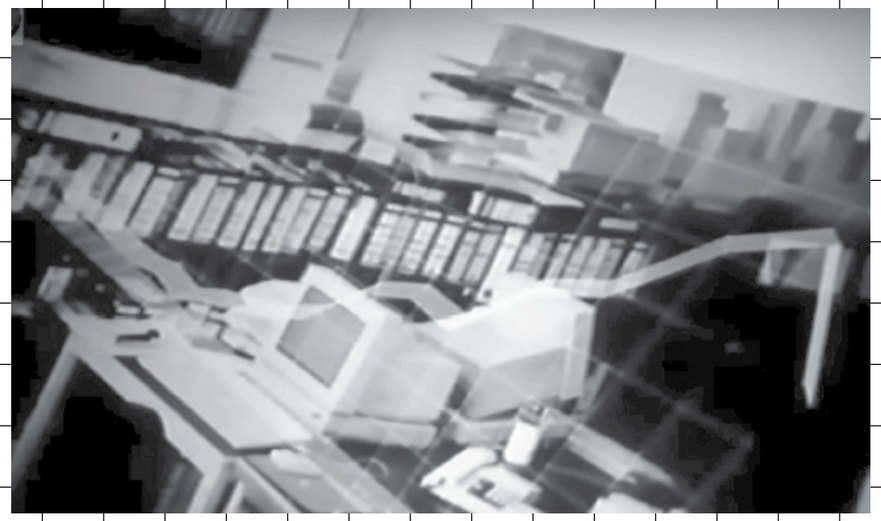
TOWN & CITY'S INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY

Through such urban renewal schemes, through office and retail development, and through its industrial projects, Town & City Properties clearly played an outsized role in reshaping the urban spaces and places of post-war Britain. All of this took place less than twenty years after the company's conversion from colonial rubber plantation. Town & City's international activities were just as striking as its domestic program, and these again followed remarkable rapidly from the company's conversion from a colonial enterprise in the mid-1950s. In the 1960s, Town & City began operating internationally, at first by entering friendly Commonwealth markets such as Australia, where the company built shopping malls and skyscraper office blocks. Around 1970 the company became very active in neighbouring European cities, such as Paris, Brussels, and Amsterdam. In the Netherlands in particular Town & City took on numerous development projects, mostly office skyscrapers but also some industrial schemes.[8] The most dramatic Dutch project was undoubtedly the Europoint office complex here in Rotterdam. These three hulking office towers were designed by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill and were the tallest skyscrapers in the country at the time of their completion in the early 1970s. When they were sold by Town & City (to Rotterdam city authority) in the mid-1970s, this was the largest ever property transaction carried out in the Netherlands.[9] Just like in Britain therefore, Town & City played a major, transformative role in the overseas urban contexts where it operated, reshaping urban landscapes and property markets. The reason British real estate firms like Town & City were able to operate internationally was because they were backed firmly by the London financial sector, which was responsible for extending the loans, the foreign currencies, and the guarantees needed for this work. At the same time as the Rotterdam Europoint scheme, Town & City was busy building oversized modernist office blocks in Amsterdam, Brussels, Paris, Copenhagen, Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Boston and New York. This remarkable global reach was made possible by London's long experience as an imperial financial centre, well accustomed to financing overseas commercial ventures.

CONCLUSION

Town & City's history is remarkable and revealing. Founded in 1910 as a colonial rubber plantation, the company operated as an extractive and exploitative colonial enterprise for almost half a century up to the mid-1950s. At this point, and seemingly with little trouble, the business was repurposed for metropolitan property development, and then began an astonishing ascent in both the domestic and the international spheres. Town & City's dual role as a key provider of urban renewal in post-war, welfare state Britain and an early proponent of globalized commercial real estate development is especially striking. Both of these roles were bound up with powerful dynamics of economic, social and cultural modernization in the post-war world, and they were carried out through modernist aesthetic and architectural registers which similarly spoke to ideas of progress, novelty, and societal advance. And yet the underlying capitalist structures within which Town & City thrived displayed marked continuities from an earlier age: the legal corporate entity of the business traced a direct lineage back to an exploitative imperial enterprise in colonial Malaya, while the world economic system through which Town & City operated transnationally in the 1960s and 1970s continued to be powerfully shaped by the afterlives and hangovers of empire.

7 "Luton Redevelopment," *Financial Times*, 15 December 1969.
8 Town & City Properties Limited, *Report and Accounts* (1971), P&O Business Archive.
9 Tim Verlaan & Alistair Kefford, "Building 'Holland's Tallest Office Block': The Transnational Origins and Troubled History of a Speculative Office Development in Post-War Rotterdam," *Architectural Histories* 9:1 (2021), 1–14.



Lecture at the AA School of Architecture, 5 May 2015. Rem Koolhaas – S,M,L,XL.
almage source: Youtube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YEGmhjouAeM. Subtitles by Romain David.

Romain David (Harvard University)

OMA 199X: Neo-Avant-Garde and the Afterlives of the Development Era (abstract)

This paper excavates the longue durée of Dutch globalisation and its entanglement with developmentalist networks and knowledge. The 'Dutch Miracle' of the 1990s is often referred to as the moment when the Netherlands became a global nation and economy once more, breaking through its European 'provincialism'. It coincides in architectural history with the exportation of a generation labelled 'SuperDutch' and the institutionalisation of the neo-avant-gardes. Through the case of OMA, the leading firm of this generation, I address one glaring hole in this narrative, namely the afterlives of the Dutch postcolonial networks and expertise in this 'new' moment of globalisation.

Indeed, in 1995, on the brink of bankruptcy, OMA was saved by the Dutch engineering firm De Weger, and two years later, after a merger, OMA became part of Royal Haskoning's conglomerate. Both firms were early members of NEDECO, a non-profit organisation created in 1951 by the most significant engineering firms, to promote their work and colonial expertise abroad in close cooperation with the Dutch Government following Indonesia's independence. Their participation in NEDECO and involvement with postcolonial states and global institutions, conditioned their international development in the second half of the twentieth century. By 1997, most of the firm's projects were still in Southeast Asia and Western Africa, overlapping with former colonial and postcolonial networks in Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Nigeria. The partnership and its position in the longue durée of Dutch globalisation created the possibilities of a global architectural neo-avant-garde such as OMA at the end of the twentieth century. My project is not one of biographical indictment, but aims to examine and dissect the structural entanglements and intimacies of architectural neo-avant-garde, transnational engineering consulting firms, developmentalism, and colonial epistemologies. I argue that following those entanglements means we cannot severe the global hegemony of the neo-avant-garde at the end of the twentieth century from the post-colonial networks of development from which it emerged.

Photo documenting the demolition caused by the construction of the Newry Through-pass in the early 1970s.
Image source: Newry and Mourne Museum Collection, NMD Museums.

Colm mac Aoidh (Hasselt University)

Planners Get Their Way—and Newry? The Persistence of Colonial Attitudes in the North of Ireland

A COLONIAL LEGACY

'Ireland may be regarded as the first English colony,' wrote Friedrich Engels in 1856, 'one which because of its proximity is still governed exactly in the old way'.[1] Modernity in Ireland has been influenced by its ongoing colonial relationship with Britain, a legacy that shapes not only the physical but also political, social, and cultural landscape of the entire island. Colonialism most palpably endures in the contested northern region of Ireland (NI) which has remained under British rule since partition in 1921.[2] This was demonstrated in the way Brexit was imposed against the democratic will of the NI electorate, but is also evidenced in many other decisions and actions taken by public representatives across the political spectrum. In an effort to understand the ambiguous and persistent relationship between coloniality, modernity and urban planning in NI, this paper examines three major infrastructural projects undertaken along the main route between Belfast and Dublin, at the border town of Newry: the Newry Through-pass, the Southern Relief Road, and the Narrow Water Bridge.

FROM PARTITION TO POWER SHARING

Partition was employed by the retreating British empire, as a tool to extend their influence and simultaneously contain aspirations towards independence through perpetuating the sectarian divisions of coloniality.[3] The partition of Ireland aimed to guarantee a loyal Unionist majority (mainly Protestant, identifying as British), who would maintain the union with Britain, but it also trapped within the artificially demarcated border of the newly-formed NI a sizeable minority of Nationalists (mainly Catholic, identifying as Irish), 'who questioned its legitimacy and resented its rule'.[4] This minority found themselves treated as second-class citizens, facing discrimination

1 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *On Colonies, Industrial Monopoly and Working Class Movement* (Futura, 1972), 21–23.
2 Even the name of the region is contested, referred to by British sources as 'Northern Ireland' and Irish as 'the North of Ireland'. For simplicity's sake, from here on in this paper it is referred to by the abbreviation 'NI'.
3 Arie M. Dubnov and Laura Robson, *Partitions: A Transnational History of Twentieth-century Territorial Separatism* (Stanford University Press, 2019), Introduction. Accessed at https://www.sup.org/books/extra/?id=24680&i=Introduction.html
4 Tony Canavan, *Frontier Town: An Illustrated History of Newry* (Blackstaff Press, 1989), 221.

in housing, employment, and education.[5] Government at all levels served the interests of the Unionists for whom NI had been created, its first prime minister famously declaring: 'we are a Protestant Parliament and a Protestant State'.[6]

Unionist domination began to be challenged after WWII with the imposition of post-war social reforms by Westminster. In August 1964, Geoffrey Copcutt, an English architect appointed to design the region's first 'New City' of Craigavon, resigned after alleging that he had been 'asked to engineer propaganda rather than a city,' criticising the project's 'religious and political considerations'.[7] The episode was one in a string of controversies revealing the underlying sectarian nature of the 'new technocratic strategy of economic modernisation and regional planning', that transformed the built environment of NI from the early 1960s onwards.[8] Government policy concentrated investment and economic development in Unionist strongholds at the expense of Nationalist areas, in an effort to maintain Unionist hegemony. While this represented a continuation of practices of dispossession and disenfranchisement that had been ongoing since the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century British plantations of Ireland, the same processes of modernisation also heralded the foundation of the Welfare State, leading to the emergence of an increasingly well-educated minority and an associated movement for equality and civil rights. By the late 1960s, the brutal suppression of this movement would erupt into a decades-long cycle of violence known as the Troubles.

With the advent of power sharing since the 1998 Good Friday Agreement and the fragile, incomplete peace process that it ushered in, such blatant discrimination has become a thing of the past, but the same colonial structures and decision-making processes remain a feature of NI planning at local, regional and (inter)national scales.

THE NEWRY THROUGH-PASS

Cutting a swathe through the heart of the town centre in the 1960s and 70s, the Newry Through-pass was promoted as a project of urban renewal intended to alleviate the town's traffic problems. However, closer examination of records from the time reveals another agenda.

The first two stages of the project, welcomed by some local councillors as an opportunity to 'rid Newry of cobwebs', involved the 'slum clearance' of mostly condemned or vacant and derelict properties.[9] The third stage necessitated the demolition of more than seventy homes and business

5 "Ulster's Second-Class Citizens," *The Times*, 24 April 1967.
6 *Parliamentary Debates (Commons)*, vol. XVI, 24 April 1935, col. 1095.
7 Memorandum from Geoffrey Copcutt to the NI Ministry of Development, August 14, 1964.
8 Martin Joseph McCleery, "The Creation of the 'New City' of Craigavon: A Case Study of Politics, Planning and Modernisation in Northern Ireland in the Early 1960s," *Irish Political Studies* Vol. 27, No. 1, 89–109, February 2012, 91.
9 "Rid Newry of cobwebs, council told," *Belfast Telegraph*, February 11, 1969, 3.

premises and met with resistance from local residents. In July 1968, the South Ward Citizens Association demanded the council review the plans, alleging that they were 'catering for traffic and not people',[10] and arguing that 'residents in the whole affected area must be consulted, and given the opportunity to air their approval or disapproval'.[11] The project's design engineer retorted that 'all feasible alternatives have been considered', with any other options being 'completely out of the question either financially or practically'.[12] He tellingly added, 'This scheme is both economical and necessary. The Dual Carriageway contract from Warrenpoint to Newry goes out to tender in the Spring of next year'. The tone of inevitability was echoed by the Council Chairman, who while sympathising with the residents, reiterated that since the new port was coming to the nearby town of Warrenpoint, the new roadway would also come.[13]

Both men already understood what the residents would eventually realise—that their eviction was a fait accompli. Earlier that year, the Minister for Commerce had refused to accept the recommendation of the Working Party on Port Facilities that the existing harbour at Newry could be adapted to handle increased traffic. Against their advice, he designated Warrenpoint as the official port for the new city of Craigavon, ruling out the prospect of any further development at Newry despite it having the highest rate of unemployment in NI.[14] Instead, £3.5 million was to be spent on developing the port facilities at Warrenpoint, and another £4 million on a new dual carriageway linking Warrenpoint and Newry 'to speed the increasing traffic flow'.[15]

At the council meeting of 26 August 1968, the scheme was passed by ten votes to four, with one abstention. Vesting orders were approved, the residents were displaced, and their homes demolished to make way for a roundabout connecting the new Through-pass with the enlarged port at Warrenpoint.

NEWRY SOUTHERN RELIEF ROAD

Perhaps unsurprisingly, running a dual carriageway through the middle of the town did little to alleviate Newry's traffic woes, and it continued to suffer from chronic congestion. Since the 2000s, local politicians have called for a new Southern Relief Road that would link the Warrenpoint dual carriageway with the main A1 Belfast to Dublin Road, allowing port traffic to bypass Newry altogether. The new road must bridge both the Clanrye River and the Newry Canal. While the canal fell into disuse once Warrenpoint Port was completed in 1974 and all Newry's shipping trade was transferred there, it narrowly avoided being filled in with the rubble from the Through-pass

10 "Planners get their way—and Newry?" *Frontier Sentinel*, July 13, 1968, 5.
11 "Council hears roundabout objections", *Frontier Sentinel*, July 13, 1968, 6.
12 "A Big Row Brewing", *Frontier Sentinel*, Saturday August 31, 1968, 1.
13 "Council hears roundabout objections," *Frontier Sentinel,* Saturday July 13, 1968. 6.
14 "Highest rates—highest workless: Newry's unenviable distinction," *Frontier Sentinel*, Saturday March 30, 1968, 1.
15 "Warrenpoint—a million pound port of the future", *Belfast Telegraph*, May 24. 1968, 13.

demolitions. Recently the lock gates to the sea and the quays at Albert Basin have been restored, and boats can once again sail up the canal into Newry town centre. Wishing the waterway to remain navigable, local people have campaigned to ensure that any new bridge can open to allow vessels of all sizes to pass.

A number of Community Consultations were organised by the Department for Infrastructure.[16] While these found a majority of respondents in favour of the new road, they also made clear that 'the navigation of the canal was the issue most highlighted as a barrier to support of the scheme'. The most recent report admitted that support 'has reduced from the previous Community Consultation… primarily as a consequence of a fixed bridge over the Newry Ship Canal being included within the design'.[17]

In spite of this, a March 2023 press release announced the DfI 'has confirmed that a non-opening fifty metre fixed bridge has been adopted as its preferred option', meaning ships taller than twelve metres would no longer be able to access Newry.[18] Controversially, this announcement came at a time when the NI Assembly was suspended due to disagreements over Brexit. In the absence of a Minister, the decision was taken by the Permanent Secretary for the Department, an unelected civil servant. Once the Assembly was restored, local councillors requested the Minister for Infrastructure to reconsider his secretary's decision, citing the canal's importance to the local economy and tourist industry. Upon reviewing the decision, however, the Minister insisted that a fixed bridge 'would provide access for the majority of vessels… thereby protecting and enhancing Newry's maritime history and heritage'. This claim was immediately refuted by the Inland Waterways Association of Ireland, with good reason: according to figures published by the Minister's own department, fourty percent of vessels currently berthed in Newry would be permanently excluded.[19]

NARROW WATER BRIDGE

The DfI's logic in approving a fixed bridge is difficult to comprehend given their support for another, opening bridge currently under construction on the same waterway. First proposed in the early twentieth century, following partition the idea of a bridge spanning the Newry Estuary at Narrow Water gained a new imperative as a way to reconnect neighbouring communities in the Republic and the North that had been severed by the border.

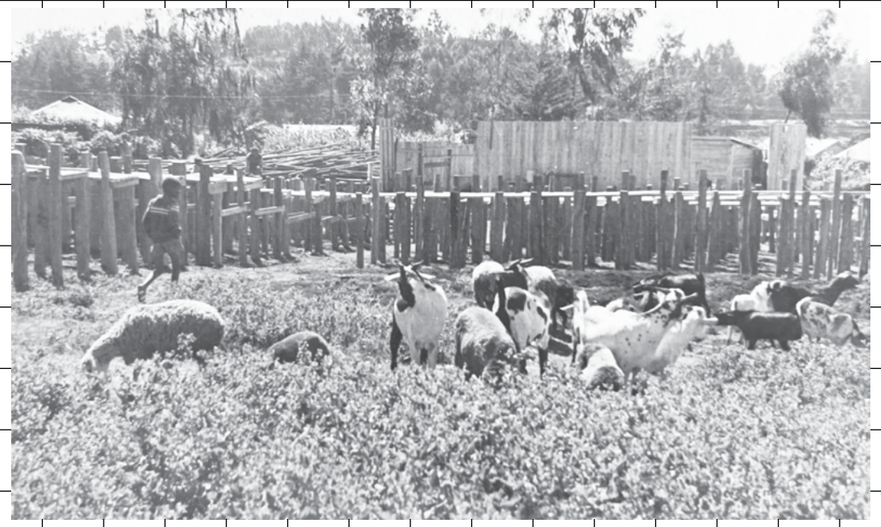
16 The Department for Infrastructure (DfI) is the successor to the NI Ministry of Development.
17 Department for Infrastructure/AECOM, *Newry Southern Relief Road Community Consultation Report* (Craigavon Department for Infrastructure, 2019), 44–45.
18 "Non-Opening Fixed Bridge proposed for Newry Ship Canal," *Department for Infrastructure*, March 2, 2023, https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/news/non-opening-fixed-bridge-proposed-newry-ship-canal.
19 Michael Scott, "Southern Relief Road bridge will 'provide access for majority of vessels': O'Dowd," *Newry Reporter*, May 31, 2024, https://www.newryreporter.com/news/environment/southern-relief-road-bridge-will-provide-access-for-majority-of-vessels-odowd-4648869.; Department for Infrastructure/AECOM, *Newry Southern Relief Road: Newry Ship Canal User Consultation, May 2020* (Craigavon Department for Infrastructure, 2020), 4–18.

For years the bridge remained unrealised since it would 'be too high to be economical or would have to have a central swing section to allow ships to pass'.[20] A solution in the form of a cable-stayed bridge with an opening bascule was finally unveiled in 2008. Originally planned to be jointly funded by the Irish and NI governments and the EU, after a decade of false starts, the Irish government announced it would fund the bridge as part of their Shared Island initiative.[21] The stated aims of boosting the local economy and improving connections will be seriously undermined if the Southern Relief Road goes ahead as planned: while all vessels will be able to enter Newry Canal via Narrow Water Bridge, almost half of those currently sailing to Newry will find their passage blocked by a fixed bridge just six point four kilometres further inland.

HISTORY REPEATING?

The parallels between these projects reveal the extent to which (neo) colonial approaches have become so ingrained that they continue to shape post-conflict urban development on both sides of the Irish border. The Through-pass and Relief Road are striking examples of infrastructure developed against the wishes of its attendant population. In both cases, the economic expansion of Warrenpoint Port is given priority in regional and local decision making, overruling the irreversible social, environmental and cultural losses suffered by the communities affected. In a region that remains financially dependent on Britain, the forcing through of projects and the threat of withholding much-needed investment betrays the unequal power dynamics of a persistent colonial relationship. While the language and mechanisms might have evolved, with increased emphasis on Community Consultations and Environmental Assessments, local concerns continue to be ignored and history repeats itself. The scepticism voiced by a resident facing eviction for the Through-pass in 1968 remains equally pertinent in 2024: 'We were told that Craigavon would be a great benefit to us, but what has become of that?'[22]

20 "Narrow Water Bridge—an old idea," *Frontier Sentinel*, Saturday January 27, 1968.
21 "European funding for Narrow Water bridge plan withdrawn," *BBC News*, November 15, 2013, https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-24956702.; "Unprecedented funding of over €800 million for Shared Island investment priorities including A5 road," *Department of the Taoiseach*, last updated June 4, 2024, https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/2c23e-unprecedented-funding-of-over-800m-for-shared-island-investment-priorities-including-a5-road/.
22 "We shall not be moved," *Frontier Sentinel*, Saturday July 27, 1968, 9.



Photograph of the Kamĩrĩĩthũ theatre. Image source: Sultan Somjee, courtesy of George Kabonyi.

Kenny Cupers (University of Basel)

Towards a Planetary History of Architecture: Notes from Golęczewo and Kamĩrĩĩthũ

INTRODUCTION

How might the history of architecture, with all of modernism's aspirations and legacies, be re-written in an age of enduring colonialism and compounding environmental crises? One answer to this question, I suggest, may lie in articulating the shift from a global to a planetary perspective in architectural history. Reflecting on two sites of colonial and environmental violence and design—Golęczewo (Poland) and Kamĩrĩĩthũ (Kenya)—I explore what such a shift might entail, analytically and methodologically. In articulating some such directions for a planetary history of architecture, I start from the entanglement of architectural and agricultural modernization with colonial relations of power over life and land.

In 'The Climate of History in a Planetary Age', Dipesh Chakrabarty distinguishes between the global and the planetary as the basis for an emerging direction of inquiry in the humanities.[1] The *global* pertains to questions of capitalism, technological change, and human-centric sustainability. In contrast, the *planetary* raises broader questions of habitability that address Earth's systemic processes and human as well as non-human actors. Such questions of habitability are about the past and future of life on Earth—the only habitable planet we currently know—and the modes and problems of inhabitation that support forms of life. A planetary history of architecture might thus take as its analytical objects designs and practices of inhabitation as much as their political and environmental stakes. Such inquiry would require substantive engagement with a range of other fields of study—including but not limited to material, environmental, and climate science. At the same time, to make such inquiry accountable to always-situated questions of planetary habitability, it must reckon with its own disciplinary hauntings—the entanglement of coloniality and modernity that continues to shape its ways of knowing and doing.

EMPIRE AND PLANETARY DESIGN

In 1906, the Prussian Settlement Commission renamed the village of Golęczewo to Golenhofen, marking the culmination of a monumental project of agricultural and architectural modernisation in the German imperial borderlands. Designed by Paul Fischer, the village was a model of settler colonial architecture, blending modern technology with symbolic vernacular

1 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (University of Chicago Press, 2021)

elements to project German national identity onto foreign land. Located near Poznań in western Poland, the comprehensively designed village featured medieval-looking half-timbered houses, but also modern wind turbines and even patented cement wall panels, all intended to root German farmers as settlers in their new homeland. However, this architecture was more than just a collection of aesthetic decisions—it embodied the ambition to reshape landscapes, populations, and local ecologies according to the needs of the empire. As I demonstrate in my book 'The Earth That Modernism Built', the design of this model village was part of a larger imperial effort to transform both the local environment and the identities of its inhabitants through architectural logistics.[2] Between its establishment in 1886 and 1918, the Prussian government settled close to a hundred and fifty thousand Germans in farming villages in its eastern provinces of Posen and West Prussia. Not all these settlers could move into neatly designed villages like Golenhofen, yet those who did not still needed homes, barns, schools, churches, roads, and machines—a whole infrastructure of agricultural settlement.

This massive project of rural modernisation illustrates a central argument of my book, namely that architecture's engagement with empire constituted a form of 'planetary design', or the reconfiguration of human-nature relations ranging from the intimate scale of the home to the Earth at large. Rather than viewing modernism primarily as a technical or aesthetic project, my study traces its planetary purview to an imperialist discourse, about the influence of the earthly environment on humanity. In this discourse, the mutually determining relationship between humans and the earth was not understood as static but as the result of a dynamic process of colonisation. For imperialist geographers such as Friedrich Ratzel as well as ecologists such as Raoul Francé (a key source of inspiration for Bauhaus modernists), this process was based on the technological transformation and cultivation of the surface of the Earth. This conceptualisation of planetary inhabitation was both inspired by and instrumental to German settler colonialism and imperial rule. It obscured not only indigenous stewardship of the land but also the fact that, despite heroising German male settlers as those who 'improved' the Earth, agricultural and infrastructural work across the imperial world was often done by female, migrant, and/or forced labour.

Germany's colonial project was ideologically shored up by a firm belief in environmental determinism—the conviction that climate and soil determined racial character and cultural development. At the same time, colonialism engendered far-reaching and destructive earthly transformation, which architecture, planning, and design helped facilitate. While colonialists and designers believed the environment shaped civilisational development, they also believed in their own ability to determine its transformation. This tension between environmental determinism and environmental determination was also a keystone of architectural modernism, which in imperial Germany extended to encompass the control, transformation, and management of the earth itself.

2 Kenny Cupers, *The Earth That Modernism Built: Empire and the Rise of Planetary* Design (University of Texas Press, 2024)

Incipient ecological thinking in architecture has often been celebrated as a precursor of contemporary sustainable design. Yet environmentalism in architecture was not merely about creating harmony between humans and the natural world or limiting negative human impact on existing ecologies. It emerged in an imperialist context indelibly marred by racial projects of governing land and life. Dominant nineteenth-century ways of thinking about planetary inhabitation also endured in Weimar's ostensibly postcolonial but hardly decolonised modernism. Modernist architects, though they generally distanced themselves from overt imperialist discourse, implicitly retained racial and environmental logics of settler colonialism in their framing human settlement and planetary design as biotechnological processes.

Black ecological contributions to the Anthropocene debate have foregrounded these racial politics of environmental modernisation by focusing on the plantation and its afterlives.[3] Such contributions can also serve to highlight the ways in which architecture facilitated efforts to dominate and exploit land and labour through the entrenchment of colonial relations of power—often far exceeding conditions of formal colonial rule. A planetary history of architecture would thus have to critically engage histories of agriculture and ecology—understood both as a discourse and as a genre of evidence for planetary change.

PLANETARY INHERITANCE AND INSURGENT ARCHITECTURE

While the Golenhofen village exemplifies imperial ambitions to reshape ecologies and manage populations across scales, the history of Kamĩrĩĩthũ, a colonial-era village in central Kenya, demonstrates how communities mobilized architecture and arts as tools of anticolonial resistance in the wake of the global plantation system.

In the course of the twentieth century, the British colonial regime dispossessed agricultural communities in central Kenya to create large tea and coffee plantations. Despite the promises of land redistribution and independence in 1963, camps, farms, and factories remained not only as architectural forms, but as economic infrastructures upheld by state power. The Kamĩrĩĩthũ open-air theater project, initiated in 1976 by residents, playwrights Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Ngũgĩ wa Mirii, was a collective response to these colonial legacies and continuities. By constructing an open-air theatre and staging the play 'Ngaahika Ndeenda' [I Will Marry When I Want], Kamĩrĩĩthũ's inhabitants sought to undo colonialism—as an economic and ecological system, a state of mind, and a physical reality etched into the landscape. Their collaborative design process for the open-air theatre, which involved the entire community, was a form of insurgent architecture that served to contest the ongoing exploitation of land and labour under post-colonial conditions. Soon after

3 Davis et al., "Anthropocene, Capitalocene,... Plantationocene? A Manifesto for Ecological Justice in an Age of Global Crises," *Geography Compass* 13, 5 (2019): 1–15.

the establishment of the open-air theatre, however, the authoritarian government banned the play, imprisoned Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, and later demolished the collectively built and managed structure.

Kamĩrĩĩthũ theatre takes a prominent place in African literature and performance studies, yet its architectural dimension has been neglected. This neglect is due not only to the demolition of the open-air theatre and dearth of publicly available photographs but also to dominant disciplinary frameworks. To highlight the role of architecture in transforming colonial legacies in African contexts, scholars have predominantly analysed monuments of nation-building and development programmes and their afterlives. With its focus on transnational circulation, expert knowledge, and governing institutions, the global history of architectural modernism offers few analytical inroads for grasping the significance of Kamĩrĩĩthũ.[4]

Nevertheless, the villagers of Kamĩrĩĩthũ did not stand alone, and their history is not just a local one. They were part of global movements for decolonisation and land redistribution that ran athwart international networks of development experts. Ngũgĩ wa Mirii drew inspiration via Augusto Boal from Paolo Freire's 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed', a revolutionary pedagogy rooted in the experience of northeast Brazil's plantation system. Kamĩrĩĩthũ's anticolonial liberation struggles and their South-South solidarities were thus also linked to larger movements, aimed at addressing the toxicity of agricultural and industrial landscapes.

By approaching the open-air theatre as insurgent architecture in the wake of agricultural modernisation imposed by colonial rule, a different direction for a planetary history of architecture emerges. Recent environmental histories of architecture have done much to foreground the planetary ramifications of professionally designed systems of extraction and production—attending to capitalist and colonial processes as much as environmental degradation.[5] Kamĩrĩĩthũ's theatre instead offers the possibility of a micro-history that can trace how the global confronts the planetary from below. Addressing inheritance and liberation as embodied, situated practices connected to land and planetary transformation, however, requires a further methodological shift in architectural history.

PLANETARY HISTORY AS A QUESTION OF METHOD

Recent scholarship has emphasised that to centre Africa in histories of architecture, its disciplinary archives need to be dismantled and expanded.[6] Building on these insights, Kamĩrĩĩthũ's theatre suggests that a planetary history of architecture requires the reworking of its disciplinary methods as much as its archive.

Together with a group of Kamĩrĩĩthũ's original performers (now largely in their 70s), Nairobi-based activists from the Social Justice Traveling Theatre, the public-interest organisations Twaweza Communications and African Digital Heritage, and Kenyan literature scholar Dr. Makau Kitata, we have collected oral histories, organised community workshops, theatre reenactments, and ethnographic walks, and created a digital three-dimensional reconstruction of the theatre—in addition to archival research in public and private collections in Kenya and Britain. The resulting collaboratively produced digital archive is a living public platform that radically opens up the existing narrative.[7] Its voices also multiply, diversify, and complement the authorial voice of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o himself.

Grounded in this polyphonic archive, our research demonstrates that the content of the play should be understood in direct relation to the architectural, infrastructural, and ecological inheritances of the place from which the performers and activists hailed as well as to the collaborative design process and construction of the open-air theatre. It reveals how performing arts turned life into a process of collective transformation, how building a theatre engendered new forms of architectural and environmental knowledge, and how collaborative design and construction aimed transformed the inheritance of a colonial past.[8] Centring the creative agency of workers and peasants in this way redefines what gets to count as architectural heritage in the Global South.

Architectural historians have recently done much to overcome the discipline's conventional reliance on material evidence and document-based archives, as the epistemic restrictions imposed by this reliance have long failed to do justice to the diversity of practices and ideas of underprivileged groups, who do not have the means to leave archives or tangible heritage. To understand architectural modernity as a planetary phenomenon, we may need to remake the architectural archive—not just expanding it to include oral histories or community practices, but fundamentally reworking how architecture is documented and understood, placing as much value on collaborative, ephemeral, and insurgent practices as on architectural monuments and institutional archives.

Such an approach to architectural history would allow foregrounding how the enclosure of communally cultivated land into cash crop plantations remade ecological and social relations, and how communities worked to undo these relations. Resituating architecture within such a framework would account for the politics of life and land underpinning imperial globalisation as well as the transformations engendered by anticolonial struggle and historical redress.

4 Prakash, Vikramaditya, Maristella Casciato and Daniel E. Coslett, *Rethinking Global Modernism: Architectural Historiography and the Postcolonial* (London: Routledge, 2021); Aggregate Architectural History Collaborative, *Architecture in Development: Systems and the Emergence of the Global South* (London: Routledge, 2022)
5 Kim Förster, ed. *Environmental Histories of Architecture* (Montréal: CCA, 2022)
6 Claire Lubell and Rafico Ruiz, eds. *Fugitive Archives: A Sourcebook for Centring Africa in Histories of Architecture* (Montreal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 2023)
7 www.kamiriithuafterlives.net
8 Makau Kitata and Kenny Cupers, "Situating Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's Theatre and its Afterlives" in *Routledge Handbook of Architecture, Urban Space and Politics*, edited by Nikolina Bobic and Farzaneh Haghighi (Routledge, September 2024)

Extraction Infrastructures

SF. Cepiring Sugar Factory **K.** Kendal

The *desa*s under the *kring* of the Cepiring Sugar Factory

1. Kebon Dalem
2. Trompo Koelon
3. Trompo Kampong
4. Trompo Wetan
5. Trompo Kidoel
6. Ketapang
7. Wareng
8. Gempol
9. Banjoetowo
10. Bettah Malang
11. Srendeng
12. Karang Geneng
13. Pengandapan
14. Bandengan
15. Ngassem
16. Balok
17. Kalieboentoe Koelon
18. Kalieboentoe Wetan
19. Kempel
20. Bugangin
21. Saban
22. Meteesih
23. Sidjerook
24. Grabak
25. Djettis
26. Soekoop Wetan
27. Soekoop Koelon
28. Dodogan
29. Klego
30. Tambakrotto
31. Pakintelan
32. Karangbalikan
33. Pagelon
34. Karangpitoe
35. Bodrie
36. Patebon
37. Djambi Kidoel
38. Djambi Lor
39. Wowo Wetan
40. Wowo Koelon
41. Wowo Gamblok
42. Marong Gladak
43. Marong Midjin
44. Marong Bulak
45. Marong Blandong
46. Prampogan
47. Soekalilan
48. Rangkang Midjen
49. Rangkang Gedée
50. Poewon
51. Wonosarie
52. Wonokerto
53. Ngemplak
54. Pedodo Koelon
55. Pedodo Koelon
56. Pedodo Wetan
57. Kretek
58. Kalirandoe Gedée
59. Kalirandoe Doekoe
60. Plandie
61. Damar Djattie
62. Taijoe
63. Djoewiring
64. Krandon
65. Meliling
66. Djettakan
67. Limbangan
68. Ngaglik
69. Kaliebalik
70. Wedarie
71. Gambiran
72. Woeloeh Lor
73. Woeloeh Kidoel
74. Soboking Kin
75. Wates
76. Kendarjakan
77. Blabakan
78. Tjepiring Lor
79. Tjepiring Kidoel
80. Semboong Lor
81. Semboong Kidoel
82. Doewet
83. Karang Tenga
84. Pendjor
85. Djamboe
86. Karang Soeno
87. Baloon
88. Lebogandool
89. Lebogandool Wetan
90. Lebogandool Kidoel
91. Pekerjongan
92. Petjarikan
93. Gembijang
94. Gondang
95. Kategoewan
96. Kathek
97. Kadilangoe
98. Doekooh
99. Karang Koedan
100. Gebang Anom
101. Kangkoong
102. Krassak
103. Laban
104. Karangmalang
105. Koemedjing
106. Sirandoe
107. Tjloemprit
108. Korowelang Wetan
109. Korowelang Koelon
110. Magersarie
111. Klanginan

Note:
The names of the *desa*s here are spelt as they appear in the monograph to prevent confusion.

Map showing the Cepiring Sugar Factory and the surrounding desas belonging to its kring. Visual reconstruction based on the Umbgrove Commissie report (1853–8). Drawing by Sandro Armanda, 2024

Sandro Armanda (KU Leuven)

Sweetened Territories: The Umbgrove Commissie and the Impact of the Dutch Colonial Sugar Industry on the Javanese Countryside, 1808–1930

THE DETRADITIONALISATION OF JAVA

In 'Agricultural Involution', Benjamin Higgins argues that the economic activities of the Dutch colonial administration in Java 'detraditionalised' the local society.[1] The term 'detraditionalised' implies a process of breaking away from traditional practices, norms, or structures. After the completion of the Great Post Road, the industrialisation of Java's countryside by the Dutch colonial administration disrupted and, to an extent, radically transformed traditional aspects of living and working within the Javanese peasant communities. However, the definition of 'traditional life' in Java, often stereotypically described as a peasant society and a community of cultivators living closely and harmoniously together in villages, requires clarification. Dutch sociologist Jan Breman suggests that the colonial state constructed the concept of the Javanese village system, known as *desa*—an autonomous territorial unit inhabited by several households.[2] Before the Dutch imposition, the family, rather than the *desa*, was the primary socioeconomic unit, with a patronage-like relationship existing between landowning and landless peasants. In accordance with the patronage-like character of this relationship, dissatisfied landless peasants had the right to transfer their loyalty from one patron to another, from one place to another, giving the impression that the Javanese countryside was in a permanent state of flux.

The colonial state sought to control peasant mobility by imposing restrictions and corporal punishments, aiming to stabilise agriculture and maintain economic order.[3] However, recognising their inability to control the peasant population directly, the colonial state appointed the head of a desa, known as *lurah,* as an intermediary.[4] Thus, the *desa* became the lowest administrative unit, leading to the standardisation of rural settlements:

1 Clifford Geertz, "Foreword" in *Agricultural Involution: The Process of Ecological Change in Indonesia* (University of California Press, 1974).
2 Jan Breman, "The village on Java and the early colonial state," *The Journal of Peasant Studies, 9:4* (1982), 189–240.
3 A prohibition on this movement was already issued in 1739 during the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC) era, and it was further enforced in the early nineteenth century, particularly during the British occupation of Java. See Breman, "Village," 225–6.
4 Breman, "Village," 196–208. See also Cornelis Fasseur and Robert Edward Elson, *The Politics of Colonial Exploitation: Java, the Dutch, and the Cultivation System,* trans. Ary Kraal (Cornell University, 1992), 139–41.

dispersed hamlets were concentrated, river courses altered, and access points restricted. This process started as early as 1809 (and possibly earlier) during the reign of H. W. Daendels, the Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies at the time.[5] In 1830, Johannes van den Bosch, the new Governor-General, implemented the *Cultuurstelsel*—a policy grounded on coercion, forcing the Javanese peasants to devote one-fifth of their field and time to cultivating for export crops (such as sugar) and numerous other duties. Under the *Stelsel*, the household system was reorganised to maximise control over the peasant population and communalise land for labour mobilisation. Marriages were enforced to merge individuals into households and convert Java into a labour colony.[6]

This paper examines the high point of the Cultuurstelsel period through the Umbgrove Commissie report—a state-commissioned research project on Java's colonial sugar industry from 1853 to 1858, revealing how colonial knowledge-building reinforced power and control over Java's peasantry for greater exploitation. The report showcases how the increasing colonial presence altered Javanese peasant labour organisation and uncovers the paradoxes in the colonial state's attempts to modernise the Javanese countryside for economic gain. Reassessing this colonial archive helps us develop new epistemological frameworks to understand the pivotal role of these efforts in shaping Java's rural territories throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

THE UMBGROVE COMMISSIE AND THE DREAM OF 'FREE LABOUR'

A series of events taking place in Java between 1850 and 1851, such as the famine in Central Java, the fall of sugar market prices, and the increase in beet sugar production in various European countries, raised some serious concerns for the Dutch colonial government. The Minister of Colonies in The Hague urged the Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies to make proposals on how the competitive position of Javanese cane sugar could be improved and how to retain the Stelsel. At the time, the Stelsel was heavily criticised by the government's opposition for being responsible for the said famine caused by heavy burdens on the peasant population from corvée and export cultivation duties on top of domestic agriculture and community work. These overwhelming duties left no chance for the peasant population to respond and adjust to the successive crop failures at the end of the 1840s.[7] Thus, an investigative research project was initiated.

This project aimed to reassess the Stelsel, addressing its flaws while retaining it temporarily as a step towards preparing the Javanese for 'free labour.'[8] The colonial government mandated two studies before making changes: one on Javanese sugarcane and another on the state of sugar cultivation in Java. In 1853, G. Umbgrove, Inspector of Cultivations at the time, was assigned to lead the investigation, giving the project the informal name of the 'Umbgrove Commissie'. The report provided detailed analyses of sugar factory organisations and revealed the social and economic conditions in the Javanese countryside. It is important to note that before this project, the colonial state had only rudimentary data on its subjects and land use.[9] Thus, this project marked the colonial state's first extensive attempt to catalogue Java's rural territories.

The *Commissie* report consists of one main volume (rapport) and twenty-seven annexes (bijlagen A-Z, Z1) containing information about land use, planting wages, means of production, sugar production, and the names of owners, representatives, and administrators of the sugar factories.[10] It also describes sugar factories in different sugar planting residencies in Java drawn up by their Residents.[11] The long duration of the project was mainly attributed to the fact that the Commissie did not collect the data directly but rather through an empty monograph template prepared by the Commissie and sent out to the Residents to be filled out with relevant data and sent back. After the Commissie dissolved, its archive remained in the Indies before being sent to the Netherlands in 1859 for consultation. However, on 7 December 1860, a collection of supplementary maps was returned to the Indies, and to this day, they have not been found.[12]

One of the report's annexes (bijlage N) contains the monographs of the ninety-six government sugar factories in Java. To maintain coherence and convenience, I will limit my focus to a single sugar factory, the Cepiring Sugar Factory, which, despite early challenges in the mid-nineteenth century, eventually thrived by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[13] The Monograph of the Cepiring Factory reveals its operational structure, relationship with surrounding desas and *sawah*s, and its broader connection to the rural territory. A significant shift was observed in the

5 S. van Deventer, *Bijdragen tot de kennis van het landelijk stelsel op Java, 3 delen*, vol. 1(Zaltbomel, 1865), 35. See also Breman, 'Village', 197.

6 A. W. Kinder de Camarecq, "Bijdrage tot de kennis der volksinstellingen in de oostelijke Soenda-landen," in *Tijdschrift voor Indische Tad-, Land-en Volkenkunde, deel 10* (Batavia, 1861), 264. See also Breman, "Village," 211.

7 R. E. Elson, 'Sugar Factory Workers and the Emergence of "Free Labour" in Nineteenth Century Java.' *Modern Asian Studies* 20, no. 1 (1986), 139–74.

8 In the early 1850s, the Dutch parliament agreed that the system of government exploitation would eventually have to be replaced by a more liberal system without government coercion. The Umbgrove *Commissie* was established to also assess the readiness of the Javanese peasantry for this change. See Fasseur and Elson, 'Politics', 136–9, 162–84. See also Nationaal Archief, *Inventaris van het archief van de Commissie voor de Opname van de Verschillende Suikerfabrieken op Java (Commisie Umbgrove) [1853–1858], 1854–1857*, ver. 24 March 2022 (The Hague, 1978), 7.

9 G. Roger Knight, "The Blind Eye and the Strong Arm: The Colonial Archive and the Imbrication of Knowledge and Power in Mid-Nineteenth Century Java," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 33, no. 3 (2005), 550.

10 Nationaal Archief, The Hague, *Commissie voor de Opname van de Verschillende Suikerfabrieken op Java (Commissie Umbgrove)*, access number 2.10.11.

11 A residency (*residentie*) was a Dutch East Indies administrative division. Under the Dutch colonial authority, provinces were divided into residencies. Each residency was headed by a Resident, normally a Dutch official, representing the colonial authority. The residencies included in the report were Banyumas, Besuki, Cirebon, Jepara, Kediri, Madiun, Pasuruan, Pekalongan, Probolinggo, Rembang, Semarang, Surabaya, and Tegal.

12 Nationaal Archief, *Inventaris*, 12. This material was held by the Arsip Nasional in Jakarta but became less accessible by 1892 (See Nationaal Archief, *Inventaris*, 14–15). In April 2024, I visited the Arsip Nasional to locate these maps and other fragments that were presumed to exist there still, but the institution could not find them. Consequently, we must rely on the surviving parts of the report to reconstruct the spatial and social organisation of the colonial sugar industry.

13 NL-HaNA, Cie. Umbgrove, 2.10.11, inv.nr. 76.

labour dynamics as more individuals sought employment at the sugar factory rather than engaging in traditional agriculture.

The operation of the Cepiring Sugar Factory consisted of one-hundred and eleven desas, spread within a radius of ten kilometres from the factory, belonging to the *kring* (*beschikkingskring*), namely the circle of exploitation of the factory. In the kring of Cepiring, the *desa*s were divided into two different types. The first *desa*s were to be imposed with Cultuur-obligations that involved not only working on the fields but also infrastructural and construction works whenever necessary, or the *herendiensten*. The second was to supply the factory with coolies (unskilled labourers) and therefore exempt from Cultuur-obligations. Of the one hundred and eleven desas, one hundred and seven belonged to the first group, while only four belonged to the second. The lurah of the first group was responsible for organising the villagers to cultivate, plant, and maintain the land as a joint effort. In the second case, the *lurah* was responsible for making sure that the supply of coolies at the factory was met daily.

The report states that land used for sugarcane cultivation was communal, organised collectively by surrounding desas, and rotated with domestic agriculture, mainly rice. The *desa*s were responsible for cutting and transporting the sugarcane to factories voluntarily, leading to the rise of small entrepreneurs offering these services. The report indicates that there were no more workers at the factory as peasants preferred cutting and transporting cane due to better wages, shorter working hours, and less supervision than factory work. Obligatory coolies from the four desas mentioned above often paid *buruh*s, voluntary wage workers from outside Kendal, to take their place, as their fishing businesses were more profitable than factory work. Although sugar manufacturers still relied on the government for cheap forced labour, they struggled to obtain it, relying instead on voluntary day-wage workers, who were irregularly available.[14] These challenges, coupled with manufacturers' resistance to ending forced labour, hindered the growth of 'free labour' in factories.

The evidence presented thus far indicates how the Javanese peasantry started to perceive economic opportunities. Peasants began offering their services to the sugar factory operation and gradually shifted from being coerced into work to willingly providing their labour in exchange for a wage, although, at this stage, this willingness was only in cutting and transporting services. Due to this situation, the Resident in the report remarked that it became impossible to expect the Javanese to work at the factory 'voluntarily' as the Stelsel intended. For this reason, in many cases, sugar manufacturers had to persuade the Javanese with advances, which were often still ineffective and financially damaging.[15] This struggle with getting a

14 "Residentie Pasoeroean. Kultuur Verslag over 1854," Local Archive, Pasuruan 23, Arsip Nasional, Jakarta. See also Elson, 'Sugar Factory Workers', 159.

15 Several authors also point out that during this period, apart from money, numerous sugar manufacturers enticed workers by providing them with strong alcoholic drinks and opium. This was deemed suitable for the labour-intensive nature of sugar factory work, which involved prolonged physical exertion and extended shifts lasting up to twelve hours, including overnight. It was also widely believed that labourers would flee any factory that did not provide opium. See James Rush, "Opium Farms in Nineteenth Century Java: Institutional Continuity and Change in a Colonial Society, 1860–1910," PhD diss., Yale University, 1977, 54. See also Elson, "Sugar Factory Workers," 150.

16 *Koloniaal Verslag*, 1872, Bijlage MM. See also Elson, "Sugar Factory Workers," 157–8.

17 "Nota omtrent de aangelegenheden der Suikerkultuur in de residentie Pasoeroean"; letter Resident of Semarang to Director of Internal Administration, 15 February 1869, Archive of the Minister of Colonies, Exhibitum 7 March 1870/82, Algemeen Rijksarchief, The Hague. See also Elson, "Sugar Factory Workers," 148.

18 In 1862, the Javanese were given the power to rent out their land to non-Javanese and in 1865, communal desa land was allowed to be divided if the communal landowners desired. See Cornelis Fasseur, "Purse or Principle: Dutch Colonial Policy in the 1860s and the Decline of the Cultivation System," *Modern Asian Studies,* vol. 25, no. 1 (1991), 37–8.

19 G. Roger Knight, "The Visible Hand in Tempo Doeloe: The Culture of Management and the Organisation of Business in Java's Colonial Sugar Industry," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 30, no. 1 (1999), 74–98. Also, Elson, "Sugar Factory Workers," 172.

20 Elson, "Sugar Factory Workers," 174.

labour force at the factory was one of the crucial signs of the Stelsel's failure, particularly shown in the report, which shows that the Javanese peasantry began increasing their awareness of their labour value and decreasing their dependence on landowning peasants, lurahs, and other indigenous elites. In conclusion, the *Commissie* report called for more permanent workers at the factory and a complete separation of cultivation and factory work.

The reassessment of the Stelsel, following the Commissie report, led to significant changes that transitioned the sugar industry to free enterprise and voluntary wage labour by the late nineteenth century, particularly after the 1870 *Suikerwet*. Sugar manufacturers were encouraged to hire labourers without government interference. By 1872, all government-owned sugar factories ceased using forced labour.[16] Manufacturers began allowing commuting labourers to establish settlements on factory grounds, facilitating their recruitment more efficiently, a practice that soon spread across Java's sugar regions.[17] This development, addressing the need for permanent workers, marked significant growth in Java's sugar industry, increased production, and allowed them to privatise more desa lands for sugarcane cultivation.[18] The manufacturers' upper hand over the peasantry was further solidified during the economic downturn starting in 1884, as Java's loss of rice self-sufficiency, a swelling population, and rising poverty made peasants more dependent on the sugar industry.[19] This situation led to a new, subtler form of economic coercion, giving rise to the *masyarakat industri* or 'industrial society'—a term used to refer to groups of labourers who settled within factory compounds.

The advent of the masyarakat industri and the sugar factory compound reflects a new managerial culture in the industry and the shift of often unreliable voluntary wage labourers into reliable and obedient corps of employees, which set the industry significantly apart from its *Stelsel* period. Peasants worked as wage labourers at the factories not because their indigenous superiors required it or because colonial officials coerced them but rather because, given the circumstances of a developing crisis, they had no other reliable options.[20] At the beginning of the twentieth century, several attempts to improve housing conditions for factory workers were made and strengthened the establishment of the sugar factory compounds in the

Javanese countryside.[21] These improvements brought along with them new and standardised housing typologies that introduced a modern water supply and sanitation system and more permanent construction materials to the Javanese countryside that, in a way, brought the constant movement and flux of the peasant population in the previous century to a halt.

THE ‘MODERNISATION’ OF THE JAVANESE COUNTRYSIDE

The emergence of the colonial sugar industry in Java gave way to the irreversible march of Western capitalism to the countryside, disrupting the previously constant and content rural territories.[22] The creation of the 1830 Cultuurstelsel aimed to keep this very stasis of the Javanese society, yet what it created was exactly the opposite of that.[23] The significance of the Umbgrove Commissie report lies in the fact that it recorded the state of the Stelsel right at its peak—two decades after its implementation and two decades before its termination. It documented the colonial state’s efforts to regularise and modernise Javanese labour for the benefit of the colonisers, leading to a gradual shift from forced labour to voluntary wage labour in the sugar industry. The Commissie report allows us to scrutinise the critical transformations in Java’s rural territories during ‘the most decisive stage’ of the Dutch era in the Indies.[24] It provides insight into the colonial decision-making process that shaped the lives and work of the Javanese peasantry.

The report highlights the link between colonial knowledge-building and the reinforcement of colonial power. It aimed to strengthen the colonial state’s control over Java’s peasantry by asserting that greater knowledge enabled better exploitation of the colonised. This underscores the close relationship between knowledge and power, with scientific knowledge serving as a tool for colonial domination. By understanding and manipulating the Javanese peasantry, the colonisers transformed a traditional agrarian society into a docile class of voluntary workers for the colonial economy. Indeed, the sugar industry did bring improvements to the living conditions of Javanese peasants.[25] Sure, its legacy is still evident today in the remnants of sugar factory compounds across the island, offering material for architectural studies within colonial/postcolonial frameworks. However, we must not forget that the industrialisation of the countryside that the colonial state started did not stop when colonialism in Java ended, which only means that the nineteenth-century colonial state’s dream of ‘free labour’ is now, for better or worse, a reality—but at what cost?

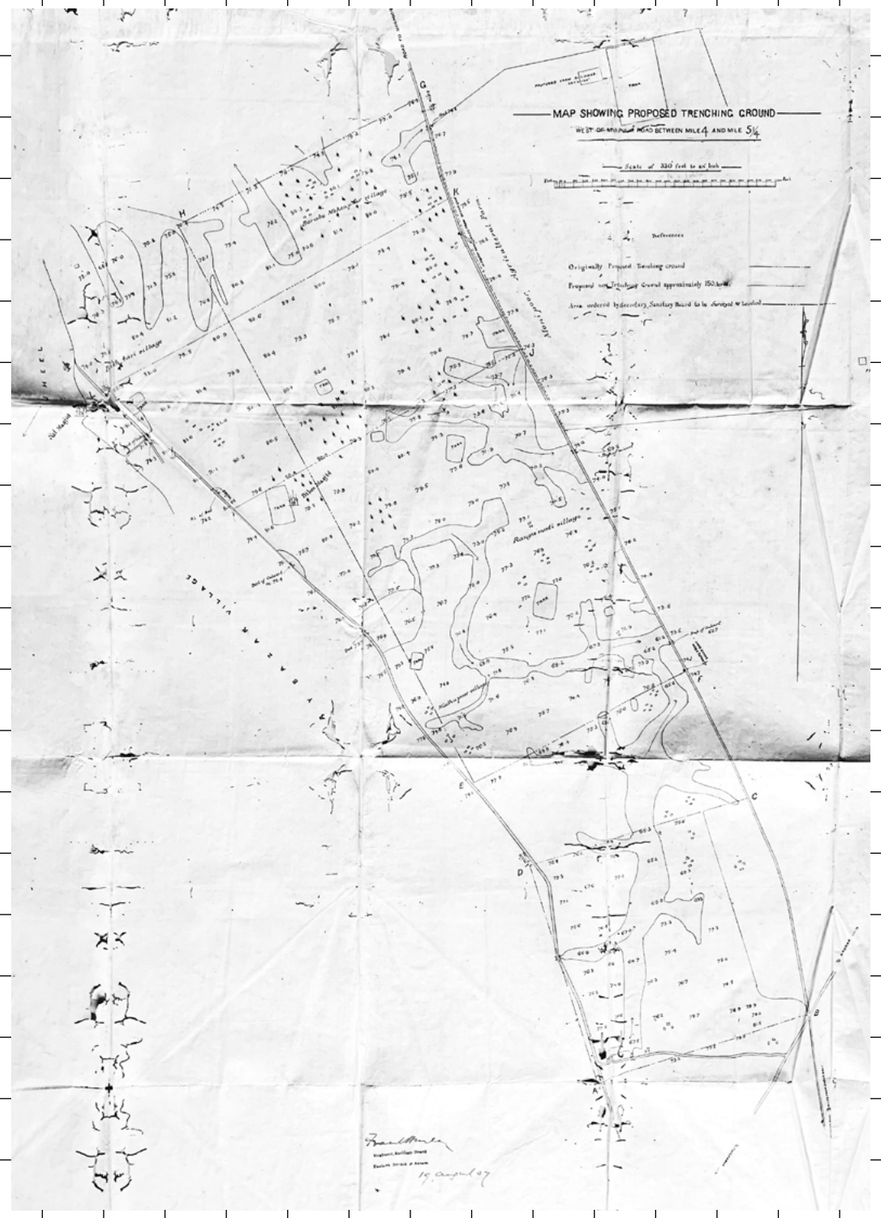
21 H. F. Tillema, *Kromoblanda: Over ‘t vraagstuk van ‘Het Wonen’ in Kromo’s groote land, deel V, 2e stuk,* (‘s-Gravenhage: 1922), 703–45.

22 Colonial sociologist Bertram Schrieke pointed out that the structure of Java in the eighth and eighteenth centuries was not very different. See Bertram Schrieke, *Indonesian Sociological Studies, Part Two: Ruler and Realm in Early Java*, (W. van Hoeve: 1957), 3.

23 Robert Van Niel, “Measurement of Change under the Cultivation System in Java, 1837–1851,” in *Indonesia,* No. 14 (Cornell University Press: 1972), 105–6.

24 Geertz, *Agricultural Involution*, 53.

25 Melissa Dell and Benjamin A. Olken, “The Development Effects of the Extractive Colonial Economy: The Dutch Cultivation System in Java,” *The Review of Economic Studies* 87, no. 1 (2020), 164–203.



The proposed trenching ground for Dacca, 1907. Image source: National Archives of Bangladesh.

Labib Hossain (Cornell University)

‘Filling’ and ‘Enactment’ Drainage and Conservancy Schemes: Discourse of Contained Waters in Dacca, Colonial East Bengal

INTRODUCTION

Three fourth of a million people died of malaria and cholera in the Bengal Province in 1878. The most accepted theory highlighted ‘waterlogging of the soil’ as the main reason for the endemic, which became popular among the officials. In the wake of a sanitary movement in British India, a special post of the ‘Sanitary Commissioner’ was initiated who would frequently inspect the towns, ‘watching and systematising’ the sanitary working of the municipalities. In general, the officials echoed for ‘filling up tanks and water holes, and raising levels of swampy grounds’ and all the recommendations directed toward ‘purifying’ air, subsoil and water. In Dacca, a town in the Eastern Bengal, the purification process involved an extensive ‘filling’ and draining operation by the Dacca Municipality, particularly during the period of 1880s, which continued in the subsequent decades.

The details of the discussion during the Water Supply and Drainage Conference, held in 1892, an important event in outlining future enactments of policy on drainage, disclose how the rhetoric of colonial benevolence for sanitary improvement overwhelmed the critical inquiries into the causes of the unsanitary conditions as well as the topic of ‘nation loss’. By closely looking at the period of 1880–1905, the paper argues that despite resistances, through a complex process of ‘filling’ and ‘enactment’, the modern systems—drainage and conservancy—displaced an indigenous water infrastructure and also facilitated future urban expansion after 1905, when Dacca would become the provincial capital.

‘FILLING’ AND REMOVAL OF WATER

In his inspection report of 1889, the then Sanitary Commissioner of Bengal, W. Gregg, highlighted connected bodies of water, which he saw as a by-product of an age-old settlement in the delta. These waterbodies were created employing a ‘dig and mound’ strategy, a method that had been practised by the local people for ages, in which artificial mounds were created as an initial phase of building dwellings above the flood level. In the lower Bengal region, most settlements in the flood plain were built on such raised artificial mounds, the ground for which generally came from the digging of lakes and ponds. As Dacca was going through a phase

of decline in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, most of these waterbodies got compartmentalised and often overgrown by wild vegetation.

Sanitary reports from the 1880s reveal an elaborate campaign by municipal officials to villainise and fill up the inland waterbodies, which were part of the indigenous water infrastructure and which officials commonly referred to as 'foulsome stagnant pools'.[1] While Gregg wanted to revive the inland water network, just a few years earlier, his predecessor as Sanitary Commissioner, Lidderdale, launched a campaign for filling them up. 'I am glad to see that considerable activity [has been] displayed for getting rid of these abominable cesspools,' he had written; 'some of them have since my last visit been filled up and somewhere I saw undergoing the filling up process'.[2] Moreover, viewing these waters as a threat to the health of the town was backed by a detailed experiment on well water led by the Civil Surgeon of Dacca in the early 1880s. His concluding suggestion was to close every cesspool and well, both public and private. In a municipal meeting early in 1883, the Commissioners decided to adopt the Civil Surgeon's suggestion to 'fill up' all cesspools.[3] The task proved laborious, and a number of different schemes were necessary to figure out how to drain and fill up the 'unhealthy' marshy lowlands.

THE WATER SUPPLY AND DRAINAGE CONFERENCE OF 1892: NATION LOSS VS. BENEVOLENCE

The colonial administration understood that they had to come up with a drainage solution urgently to deal with the rising cases of cholera and malaria. The Water Supply and Drainage Conference of 1892 was a major endeavour in this regard. The framing of the conference was made apparent by its convenor's concluding remark: 'You deserve the thanks of the poor people whose health will be benefited by the results of this conference'.[4] Although the efforts were a response to a real health threat, it is not difficult to see that the principal beneficiary of the various technical interventions was the colonial state. As one conference participant, Surendro Nath Banerjea, Chairman of the North Barrackpore Municipality, said: 'Malarial fever means so much national loss, and loss of wealth, apart from personal suffering'.[5] While the main objective of the conference was to suggest policies for guiding the drainage schemes of the municipalities, the underlying debate that influenced the framing of legislation to regulate the drainage and that would transform the material landscape of Bengal in coming decades, was about 'national loss' vs. 'colonial benevolence'.

1 NAB (National Archives of Bangladesh), Dacca City Corporation Records, "Dacca Municipality" Inspected on the 12th 13th and 14th November 1881. R. Lidderdale, Sanitary Commissioner for Bengal, dated 6th December 1881. Collection XXVI, File no 1, Record Department, 1881–82.
2 NAB, Dacca City Corporation Records, "'Dacca Municipality', Inspected on the 16th and 17th August 1887." R. Lidderdale, Sanitary Commissioner for Bengal, dated 20 October 1887.
3 NAB, Dacca City Corporation Records, "Proceedings of the Municipal Commissioners" held on the 12th January 1883, Collection XXVI, File no. 8, Record Department, 1883–84.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.

The conference was held at Belvedere on July 18, 1892, and explored the legislative actions to be enacted 'to promote the improvement of water supply and drainage' in Bengal. It was attended by various technical experts, and chairmen of municipalities. The conference agreed in enacting four resolutions. The first resolution was about empowering the local municipalities, which would authorise them to acquire land, collect subscriptions, and take decisions independently to effectively realise and run projects of drainage and water supply. The second and third resolutions were mainly about empowering the municipalities 'to combine with one another' for the drainage projects. And the one was about 'ascertaining the wishes of the majority of the inhabitants' in raising funds for meeting the cost of comprehensive drainage schemes.

Raja Peari Mohun Mukerji was the only dissenter to the first three resolutions. The debate initiated by Mukerji highlighted the tension between 'science' and 'practice' that sometimes marked debates about development projects in the Indian, colonial context. The practical was often framed and categorized in popular opinion as 'non-scientific', or merely 'religious'. Mukerji started by posing the question, 'what is the origin of this movement?', the movement of promoting 'the improvement of water supply and drainage' through the enactment of laws, which was the major premise of the conference. Referring to the Sanitary Commissioner's implementing what he called 'a new-born science', Mukerji declared:

> 'It is proposed to introduce the principles of that science in a country the religion of whose people is intimately bound up with the laws of health… We know that… a very serious harm was committed in the name of sanitation in rural villages from time to time. One medical gentleman advised the government to have all the jungles cleared, another to have all the aquatic plants removed from tanks, and people had to sell their very brass pots and pans to find the wherewithal to clear, jungles and clean tanks, and yet only three years ago, Dr. Gregg said in his annual report to the Government that several of these aquatic plants, instead of polluting, would preserve the purity of the water. We have it on the authority of Dr. D. B. Smith that swamps and marshes are not necessarily unhealthy surroundings.'[6]

Mukerji wisely supported his argument with established authorities such as Smith, Coates and Frayer who had nuanced the conviction that the swamps and marshes were an 'evil' that amounted to a 'zombie land'.[7] Moreover, Mukerji was against any compulsory legislation that would require coercive measures to collect extra taxes. Most of the other participants opposed Mukerji's position on drainage. Surendro Nath Banerjea, the Chairman of North Barrackpore Municipality, was among them, fully endorsing the resolution put forwarded by the conference. Replying to Mukerji, Banerjea said:

6 NAB, Dacca City Corporation Records, *Proceedings of the Water Supply and Drainage Conference*, 3.
7 Ibid., 4.

> ‘No doubt, we are an exceedingly cleanly people so far as personal cleanliness is concerned, but as regards our surroundings, we have yet to learn a great deal from the experts of the West. Calcutta, which was reeking with filth and the hotbed of malaria, has now been reclaimed, and has become one of the greatest sanitariums in India. That has been done by the teachings of science…’[8]

Banerjea’s remark appealing to, and glorifying, Western ‘science’ was typical of native officials. Banerjea claimed that the opinions that had been solicited indicated that the majority was in favour of the legislation, although the majority to which he was referring consisted mainly of higher officials, as Mukerji observed.[9]

While Mr. Mukerji opposed the use of taxation for drainage schemes, L. Hare, the Magistrate of Dacca, argued that residents of the local area included in any scheme should pay for its own ‘sanitary improvement’. Instead of tax assessment being ‘plot by plot’, all the land that ‘benefited’ from the scheme should be subject to a cess (tax). Hare proposed a Municipal Amendment Act, whereby the Municipality would retain possession of reclaimed lands and ‘repay themselves the cost for reclamation from the rents of such lands’.[10] In Hare’s account, the reclamation and filling of waterbodies was the only solution for Dacca. Hare favoured a self-sustaining framework that could carry out such operations without spending any government money.

The implications of this were drastic. Dacca had witnessed the material transformation of its urban ground in the preceding decade, when most of its waterbodies were filled up in favour of modern drainage schemes. Removal of water and raising the urban land became synonymous with ‘sanitary improvement’ in the popular discourse. Besides Mukerji, others, including Roy, Harrison, and Sircar, further problematized the ‘drying discourse’ with their nuanced observations about the matter of drainage. However, the majority of both native and colonial officials subscribed to the rhetoric of colonial benevolence, believing that the drainage schemes would save lives and improve their localities, while turning blind eye to the causes of the problems. The above discussion also shows how the benevolence rhetoric triumphed over that of ‘national loss’, for which taxation was necessary for the colonial state to carry out the costly drainage schemes that were presented at the conference in debates and negotiations.

DACCA CONSERVANCY AND TRENCHING GROUNDS

With the resolutions being enacted, the municipalities in Bengal, including Dacca, initiated several drainage projects. A. E. Silk, the Sanitary Commissioner of Bengal during the 1890s, developed several experiments to come up with the best material composition and the most efficient sections for these drains.[11] Silk experimented with shallow surface masonry drains, and numerous drains were being constructed in Bengal in the late nineteenth century and afterwards. Filling operation continued throughout these periods. The network of waterbodies, which had historically performed the drainage of water and waste, particularly during the monsoon time, was almost entirely obliterated, and the piled-up waste became a major threat to the newly constructed drains. As these towns started becoming dependent on these drains for drainage, this created the need for changes in the conservancy schemes, mainly to reduce the burdens from the man-made drains.[12]

Initially, in the early 1880s, waste was collected by pails and buckets manually by the *mehtars*, which was transferred to the carts driven by bullocks to the depot. In the late 1880s, W. H. Gregg, the Sanitary Commissioner of Bengal introduced a ‘shallow trenching system’, meaning disposing of night-soil in shallow trenches four feet wide, a foot and a half deep, and twenty-four feet long.[13] Some great advantages he identified, first, the excreta would be entirely removed from the localities; second, river pollution could be avoided; and third, the excreta would be utilised for agricultural purposes. Following Gregg’s suggestions, the municipality promoted the use of the shallow trenching method in the Ramna Trenching Ground.

After 1905 partition, when Dacca became the provincial capital, a new scheme was prepared by Hare, the Chairman of the Municipality, which would be implemented over the next few years. Under the new scheme, *mehtars* would transfer the collection from the latrines to steel tubs, which would be carried on cart frames run by bullocks to the night soil depot. At the depot the collection would be transferred to ‘tramway wagons’, which would be driven by steam engines up to the trenching ground. Hare introduced ‘conservancy tramways’, for the first time to Dacca’s landscape. However, the previous trenching ground Ramna became saturated by 1905. The town officials selected another site located at the north for future trenching, which comprised more than the area required (figure). Most importantly, the area was referred to as a ‘high level wasteland’, thus perfectly ‘suitable’ for trenching according to Hare.

A closer look at the area would reveal that it was not a ‘high level wasteland’ as it was called by Hare and other officials (figure). Many scholars have already identified problematic tropes with the term ‘wasteland’ that was often used by the colonial officials in flattening the diversity of landscapes.[14] The huge tract of land selected for the new trenching ground had numerous bodies of water, includes lowlands as well as forests and villages in-between.

8 Ibid., 5.
9 Ibid., 4.
10 NAB, Dacca City Corporation Records, L. Hare, Magistrate of Dacca to the Secretary of the GOB, Municipal Department, dated 24 December 1891, *Proceedings of the Water Supply and Drainage Conference*, vol. VIII,

11 The result was *A Manual of Surface Drainage,* published in 1900, which became an important reference for the municipalities in Bengal.
12 The term ‘conservancy’ was used for waste disposal.
13 Gregg had already implemented such a scheme in the Howrah Municipality earlier.
14 Evelin Hoop & Saurabh Arora, “Material Meanings: ‘Waste’ as a Performative Category of Land in Colonial India,” *Journal of Historical Geography*, (2017), 82–92.

The term ‘wasteland’ is used in the colonial accounts to refer to any type of unproductive land. Typically assimilated under this category were wetlands, marshes, dense forests, and chars and river islands.[15] In Dacca, the trenching system was ‘enacted’ in transforming the ‘wastelands’. It not only provided the ground for sewage disposal, but also enabled the Municipality to acquire vast tracts of land, flattening the pre-existing ecological and material realities, and implanting a self-sustaining system that reduced the burden on the municipal funds by generating profits. In the process, ‘variants of materialities and practices’ were erased, ignored, or suppressed by the state.

The dry conditions that colonial interests had engineered, troubleshooted, and designed proved particularly fitting for the late colonial and postcolonial context. Despite the expected advantages of state control, and with the new ground’s status as high and dry being supported by the lines of supply pipes and drains, various water leaks continued to destabilise local regimes and subject them to conditions of uncertainty. In the end, total dryness was no more plausible than the total colonial control that the empire’s rulers had imagined, no matter how ingenuously its designers and engineers dealt with the resistances.

15 J. Whitehead, “John Locke and the Governance of India’s Landscape,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 45 (2010), 83–93.

"Green for Come," cover from A Report on the Rehousing and Settling of British Asians from Uganda in York and District between October 1972 and June 1973. Published by the York Committee for the Welfare of British Asians from Uganda. Image source: London Metropolitan Archives, ACC 1888/204., London, England.

Priyanka Sen (Cornell University)

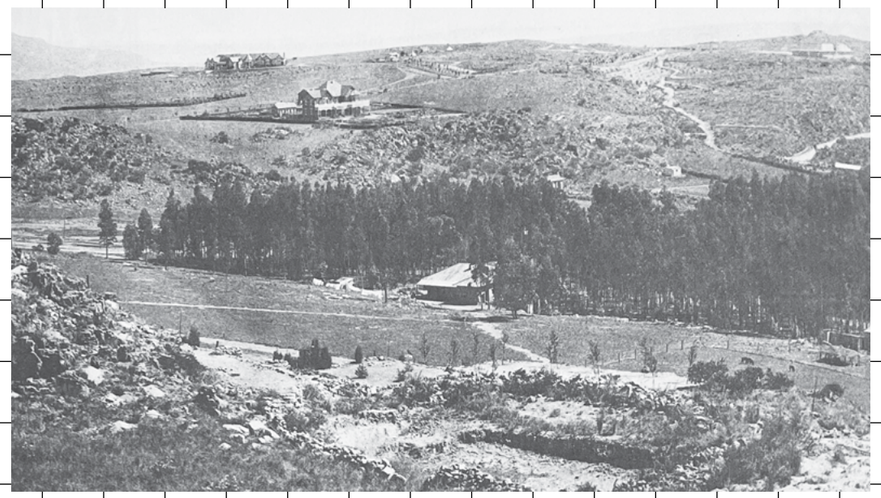
The Architect + The Farmer: Disentangling Expertise as a Mechanism of South Asian Migration (abstract)

The imbricated nature of modernity and migration in the global post-empire context, complicates notions of decolonisation, nation-state building and the making of a 'modern citizen'. The transnational case of the South Asian diaspora across the extents of the British empire in the twentieth century, demonstrates the complex relationality between modernity and cyclical neocolonial realities. By examining government reports, photographs, and personal testimonies, this paper employs the lens of diaspora and forced migration to interrogate the changing nature of agricultural and architectural expertise from colony to metropole.

Ernst May's work in British East Africa constructed the ideology of an 'Architect-Farmer' within a colonial setting, intertwining histories of agricultural labour with the production of the built environment through colonial settlements, plantations, and bungalow housing. However, these sites illustrate a racialised complexity that impact both architecture and agriculture, particularly in its codification of differences between 'Europeans', 'Asians', and 'Africans'.

Discriminatory land management practices categorised agricultural labour as a form of racial capitalism, generating tensions between the 'Africans' and 'Asians'. Additionally, the expansion of colonial knowledge production as a 'technical expertise' furthered racial hierarchies between the inhabitant population, situating South Asians as colonial mediators. This antagonism culminated with the passage of dictator Idi Amin's 1972 expulsion decree, highlighting the shifting nature of Cold War geopolitical decolonization. Many of these expelled individuals assumed a 'right' to British citizenship, employing infrastructures of empire with the hope to migrate to England, only to be placed in temporary refugee camps facing discriminatory housing policies through 'red and green' zoning practices.

Despite British governmental attempts to assist United Kingdom passport holders (UKPH), immigration criteria of 'desirability' contrasted 'high technical skilled professions, such as architecture, against the perceived 'low skilled' work of agriculturalists, exemplifying a shift of colonial thinking in a modernising world. While the paradox of desirability culled immigrant populations to the United Kingdom, colonial categorisation in the metropole simply translated into racist zoning policies, furthering new, neocolonial spatial planning practices in the aftermath of empire.



Sachsenwald Plantation from the slopes of Parktown, showing eucalyptus stands and the fist plots of Forest town and Westcliff. Unknown photographer, circa 1904.
Image source: Barlow World Rand Mines Archive, South Africa.

Serah Calitz (Delft University of Technology)

Growing for Gold: Colonial Tree Planting on the Witwatersrand Goldfields, 1892–1923

PROLOGUE

At the conclusion of the South African War (1899–1902), Chief Conservator of Forests, David Ernest Hutchins, travelled from Cape Town to the newly proclaimed Transvaal Colony. Among broader reconstruction efforts, Hutchins' mandate was to map environments amenable to colonial expansion: identifying climates fit for tree planting and the accompanying species to be introduced. His survey ended on 28 August 1903 with a visit to Sachsenwald plantation on the Witwatersrand goldfields.[1] Whilst a description of the plantation is absent from Hutchins' final report, a photograph dated a year later affords us an impression of what he may have observed: a dense, gridded expanse of trees, likely of the species Eucalyptus Globulus, grafted onto Highveld grassland.[2] Encircling this planned ecological encounter: the first plots and houses of Johannesburg's central suburbs.

Like much in the region, Sachsenwald plantation was rooted in mining. The exploitation of the Witwatersrand basin, the world's single largest gold formation, required a vast inventory of resources—human and more—to service expanding surface and subsurface operations. Access to non-native species through colonial circuits of botanical exchange enabled the mines to provision timber for props and supports in what was described as 'a comparatively treeless country'.[3] By 1920 approximately 24 million tonnes of ore was milled annually on the goldfields with each tonne milled requiring one metre of timber.[4] The majority of this timber was produced in extensive eucalyptus and wattle plantations which began to modify Highveld atmospheres, soils and hydrologies.

From its planting in 1892 by Braamfontein Co. Ltd., for the supply of mine timber to its materialisation as a suburban monoculture in 1923, Sachsenwald plantation seeded multiple conditions of colonial modernity.[5] In this paper I describe the material interactions of scientific forestry, planning practices

1 *Transvaal Forest Report*, David Ernest Hutchins. Pretoria: Government Printing and Stationery Office, 1903.
2 Sachsenwald plantation from the slopes of Parktown, 1904, 968 221:A(31), Photography Collection, Barlow World Rand Mines Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.
3 Herbert Read, "Mining Timber on the Witwatersrand," *Empire Forestry Journal* 8, no. 2 (December 1929): 248.
4 Read, "Mining Timber on the Witwatersrand," 258.
5 Braamfontein Co. Ltd. was a subsidiary of H. Eckstein & Co. which together with Wernher Beit & Co. and Central Mining & Investment Corporation Ltd. constituted the Corner House Group, one of South Africa's largest mining conglomerates. In 1904 Braamfontein Co. Ltd. merged into Transvaal Consolidated Land and Exploration Company (TCL), for consistency I refer to the former throughout the paper.

and land speculation that shaped these conditions by coupling commodity production – vegetal and mineral – to processes of (sub)urbanisation. I recompose these interactions by interpreting archival traces of tree-planting in mining records as instruments of 'ecological imperialism'.[6] Following eucalyptus seeds, trees, and timber, the paper unfolds in section, to reveal the arboreal grounds and undergrounds from which modernity emerged in the Witwatersrand at the turn of the twentieth century.

SEEDS: SETTLERS, SCIENCE, AND RELIGION

Mine timber is a product of horticultural borrowing.[7] Eucalypts followed Europeans inland, to the Witwatersrand, after their transfer to the Cape from Australia via Mauritius in the early nineteenth century.[8] As settler-colonists sought to domesticate the grassland ecosystems of South Africa's interior, they enhanced its productivity by exploiting the efficiency with which eucalypts convert sunlight, water and carbon dioxide to growth. Tree planting ensured self-sufficiency and the small-scale supply of marketable goods for the occupying Europeans. In his 1897 travelogue, 'Impressions of South Africa', historian James Bryce writes that 'one discovers in the distance a farm-steading or a store by the waving tops of the gum-trees [sic]'.[9] Bryce portrays how eucalypts began to index the landscape: materialising sites of colonial domesticity and production and the requisite alienation of African land.

In addition to provisioning colonial expansion, tree diffusion in South Africa was propelled by the pluvial anxieties of its European populace. Severe droughts in the first half of the nineteenth century evoked premonitions of 'The Great South African Desert'.[10] To allay these fears, colonial scientists advanced a desiccationist theory, correlating rainfall decline to deforestation. European farmers and, more frequently, African pastoralists emerged as the alleged offenders of ecological degradation and subsequent climate change. Appropriating the 'evangelical environmentalism' of Scottish missionary and forester John Croumbie Brown, colonial officials promoted afforestation and the restriction of African forest practices as a moral obligation.[11] Thus, forestry became entangled with colonial discourses that actively devalued African environmentalisms and land histories. Brown's prolific scholarship, which blended scientific thinking on trees and climate with religious doctrine, popularised eucalypts as skilful meteorological modifiers that would bring rainfall, and thus redemption, to South Africa.

6 Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900* (Cambridge University Press, 1986).
7 Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, "Naturing the Nation: Aliens, Apocalypse and the Postcolonial State," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27, no. 3 (2001): 639.
8 Geographers and historians debate the exact date of the genus' arrival. The majority tend to converge on 1828 when it is believed that the species *Eucalyptus Globulus* (Blue Gum) arrived at the Cape.
9 James Bryce, *Impressions of South Africa* (Macmillan and Co, 1897), 30.
10 "The Great Drought Problem of South Africa: An outline of the Interim Report of the Commission of Inquiry," *Journal of the Department of Agriculture* 5, no. 2 (August 1922), 118.
11 Richard Grove, "Scottish Missionaries, Evangelical Discourses and the Origins of Conservation Thinking in Southern Africa 1820–1900," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 15, no. 2 (January 1989), 164.

TREES: ARBOREAL OCCUPATION

By the turn of the nineteenth century Brown's enthusiasm for eucalypts had reached the Witwatersrand goldfields where mine-owned plantations had begun to sprout close to shafts and surface workings. Sachsenwald Plantation functioned as a predecessor and botanical blueprint for many of these plantations.[12] It was planned and planted by the forester Genth, who named the plantation after the forest belonging to his former employer, Otto von Bismarck.[13] At Sachsenwald, Genth and his successors pioneered silvicultural methods that integrated the cycles, logistics and statics of underground mining.[14] This demanded high volumes of low-grade timber. Genth cultivated these requirements by ensuring the proper density, or *espacement*, of eucalyptus stands. By planting trees in a competition for space, he ensured their rapid, upward growth toward the light needed to survive. Mine timber was the product of this race to the sun, harvested in short rotations of five to ten years, depending on the species, climate and soil. Records indicate that by 1893, Sachsenwald plantation enveloped Johannesburg in a five square kilometre blanket of eucalypts, planted at 1,500 stems to an acre.[15]

Differently from other mine-owned plantations, Sachsenwald was designed as both a site of commodity production and (sub)urbanisation. It was thus sited away from the mining belt, upwind from its noise and contamination. Under the guidance of foresters and town planners, eucalyptus afforestation prepared the ground (and air) for residential use. The species' ability to modify soil, water and air was aggregated into a vegetal infrastructure that worked to reclaim wetlands and settle fugitive dust. In addition to transforming local ecologies, the plantation promised rare, forested vistas, reminiscent of 'home', to future inhabitants.[16] A plan dated 1894 documents an early configuration of plantation and suburb.[17] In subsequent years, as eucalyptus stands matured and cycles in the housing and gold market dictated, increasing areas of plantation were cleared for township lots.

Tree-space also produced land for recreation. In 1903, holding company H. Eckstein & Co. purchased 200 acres of plantation for the establishment

12 As evidenced by Hutchins' visit to the plantation and the Annual Report of the State Mining Engineer of the South African Republic (1894) which both reference the guidance offered by foresters working there regarding: 'the kind of trees which can be most advantageously planted for mining purposes and the soils best suited to their growth.' See: *State Mining Engineer's Annual Report for 1894,* translated by Edgar Philip Rathbone. Pretoria: Government Printing and Stationery Office, 1895; *Transvaal Forest Report,* David Ernest Hutchins. Pretoria: Government Printing and Stationery Office, 1903.
13 A Prince and Prussian politician who under the position of chancellor achieved the Unification of Germany in 1871. In the same year, King Wilhem I gave Bismarck the Sachsenwald forest in honour of his achievements.
14 The transportation and handling of timber underground, together with its limited service-life, required poles typically less than 150 mm in diameter.
15 Study "Saxonwold" by Lynnsay Nuyten, n.d., PAM. 968.221 NU, Barlow World Rand Mines Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. (hereafter cited as Study, Barlow World Rand Mines Archive).
16 Jeremy Foster, "From Socio-nature to Spectral Presence: Re-imagining the Once and Future Landscape of Johannesburg," *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies* 10, no. 2 (April 2009), 197.
17 Plan of townships, drawing, 29 August 1894, HE 151, Hermann Eckstein Papers, Barlow World Rand Mines Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.

of a public park. Populated with picnic spots and riding trails, the park was designed to attract Johannesburg's colonial upper and middle class, as well as municipal infrastructure, to its embowered suburbs.[18] It was later apportioned and laid out as the Zoological Gardens (1904), Zoo Lake (1906) and Rand Regiments Memorial (1913). By 1919, the number of trees in the plantation had been reduced to 500,000 to accommodate new configurations of plantation, park and suburb.[19] In ensuant negotiations with the City, eucalypts were imbued with a strange agency: their preservation shaped the geometry of roads and tramways, whilst the quality of tree stands influenced the price of land under offer.[20]

Eucalypts also loom in Moses Tladi's painting titled, 'Cherry tree and old carriage house at Lokshoek'.[21] Tladi worked as a gardener for Herbert Read: manager of the Exchange Yard where timber was prepared and traded for underground use.[22] Read's home, Lokshoek, bordered Sachsenwald. Completed in the 1920s, the painting likely memorialises the last vestiges of the plantation. In 1923, as acquisition talks with the City collapsed, the remaining tree stands were laid out as the suburb of Saxonwold and hardworking eucalyptus trees were uprooted for the more ornamental kind.[23]

TIMBER: GROWING THE COLONIAL UNDERGROUND

The deforestation of mine-owned plantations such as Sachsenwald grew subterranean environments of timber, rock, water and air. A series of photographs, dated 1910, documenting underground operations at Rose Deep Ltd. reveals their making: under the supervision of European foremen, timber gum poles are packed or installed as props by African labourers to reinforce the shafts and stopes designed to bring miners to gold-bearing ore. Below ground, the verticality and spatiality of tree planting was replaced by a compositional logic. To economise on timber and produce sufficiently strong supports, engineers experimented with lattice-like structures and patented cribs reinforced with mining waste or concrete.[24] Initially, the wood used for these supports was untreated, providing subterranean (micro) organisms with a steady supply of carbohydrates. Feeding fungi and insects reduced the service-life of mine timber by at least a year.[25] Learning from the shipbuilding industry, scientists began to preserve harvested poles with zinc sulphate, a mining by-product.[26]

This subterranean techne surfaced in the silvicultural practices of mine-owned plantations, as well as in the building and energy sectors, where treated gum poles remain a staple. The transmission of these sensibilities mirrored the vertical transplantation of mine timber, establishing new reciprocities between Sachsenwald and its multiple undergrounds.[27]

EPILOGUE

Among ecologists and historians, 'witness trees' serve as arboreal archives: they record colonial property boundaries, historic events, and climate change. This paper examines eucalypts not as passive markers of settler-colonial landscapes, but as instruments of their design. At Sachsenwald plantation, tree planting functioned as a mode of both economic and environmental production. Through eucalyptus afforestation, Braamfontein Co. Ltd. repurposed Highveld grassland as a site of suburban modernity. The disciplining of local soils and hydrology disrupted downstream ecologies. Ordinary or out of sight, the leftovers of the plantation—trees, suburbs, parks, zoo, and underground—obscure its socioecological continuities in the present.

As the twentieth century progressed, plantations modelled on Sachsenwald migrated from the Witwatersrand to more moderate climates, reproducing its damage elsewhere. While most of these plantations were underwritten by African land and labour, a series of experimental resettlement schemes for South Africa's growing 'poor white problem' rehearsed new forms of arboreal occupation and redemption.[28]

18 Improved public access to the park was leveraged by Braamfontein Co. Ltd. in discussions with municipal officials regarding the extension of tramways to Sachsenwald. See: Memorandum to the Chairman of Central Mining & Investment Corp. Ltd. by C.S. Wald, Business Manager, Braamfontein Co. Ltd., 31 January 1912, box 509, folder 137, Transvaal Consolidated Land & Exploration Company, Barlow World Rand Mines Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.

19 Report on Afforestation and Ranching Programme, 1919, box 498, folder 61/1, Transvaal Consolidated Land & Exploration Company, Barlow World Rand Mines Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.

20 Emphasis is placed on the need to keep tram tracks 'as narrow as possible' to 'preserve the trees and open spaces'. See: Letter to Lionel Curtis, Town Clerk, Johannesburg Municipality from L.G. Heard, Secretary, Braamfontein Co. Ltd., 26 January 1903, box 509, folder 137, Transvaal Consolidated Land & Exploration Company, Barlow World Rand Mines Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa; On forest stands determining price see: See: Letter to Lionel Curtis, Town Clerk, Johannesburg Municipality from L.G. Heard, Secretary, Braamfontein Co. Ltd., 31 July 1902, box 509, folder 137, Transvaal Consolidated Land & Exploration Company, Barlow World Rand Mines Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.

21 In December 1931 Moses Tladi (1897–1959) became the first black artist, working in an international style, to exhibit in the South African National Gallery.

22 The Exchange Yard Pty. Ltd. was established by Rand Mines Ltd. By the mid 1920's it was supplying timber to the entire mining industry from its plantations in the eastern and northern Transvaal, present day Mpumalanga and Limpopo.

23 Study, Barlow World Rand Mines Archive.

24 Read, "Mining Timber on the Witwatersrand," 259.

25 M. Brown, "Mine Timber Preservation—Mine Fungi," *South African Journal of Science* 33, (October 1936): 386.

26 Brown, "Mine Timber Preservation—Mine Fungi," 383.

27 The interaction between sites of material production and consumption centres in the work of Jane Hutton, among others. See: Jane Hutton, *Reciprocal Landscapes: Stories of Material Movements* (Routledge, 2020).

28 This important history, evidenced by the coincidence of the Native Land Act and Forest Act (1913), falls beyond the scope of this paper. See: Thomas Cousins, *The Work of Repair: Capacity after Colonialism in the Timber Plantations of South Africa* (Fordham University Press, 2023).

Heritage Stories

Layers of public memory captured and expressed through the Uganda National Cultural Centre and Theatre. Collage by Anna Kintsurashvili, 2024. Image sources of collaged elements: Uganda Department of Information, Wikimedia Commons, Jackie Lloyd's private archives, HIPUganda, Nnyanzi Nuwa Wamala's private archives, photographs by Anna Kintsurashvili.

Anna Kintsurashvili (Independent Scholar)

Monument of Public Memory: Rereading the Uganda National Cultural Centre and Theatre (abstract)

In recent years, Tropical Modernism has garnered increasing attention, both as a legacy of colonial export and as a tool for nation-building in postcolonial societies. Even though the architects initially embraced Modernism to replace the historicist styles of earlier colonial architecture – unsuited to local cultures and tropical climates – interpreting Tropical Modernism only as an autonomous or progressive architectural movement is misleading. This paper shifts the focus from Modernist structures as isolated artefacts and proposes a more nuanced understanding, by regarding them through the lens of public memory, decolonial transitions, and the socio-political history of postcolonial nations.

The Uganda National Cultural Centre and Theatre designed by Peatfield and Bodgener Architects and built in 1959, three years before Ugandan independence, is a classic example of Tropical or African–Modernism. The European-style theatre, with a proscenium arch and brise-soleil, was a continuation of the Uganda Legislative Chamber (now Parliament). From the mid-1950s, the Uganda Protectorate was undergoing monumental changes preparing for Uhuru (independence). Designing the Theatre next to the Legislative Chamber, meant to encourage cultural and artistic activities across the country. However, until 1964, when the first native Ugandan director was appointed, these activities were ideologically controlled by colonial agendas. Critical African narratives were censored; even on the night of independence.

Over the sixty years of Ugandan independence, the National Theatre's stage has undergone monumental changes. As writer and actor Charles Mulekwa observes, 'The Ugandan National Theatre is–paradoxically–the embodiment of both the British colonial project in Uganda and the native struggles for independence, peace, and justice. This monumental cultural landmark has been both a theatre of oppression and a theatre of the oppressed'.[1] This paradoxical positioning of the Modernist building challenges a simplistic, solely architectural, interpretation of its significance. While the introduction of proscenium arch theatre by British architects may represent a projection of colonial modernity, limited to a Western vision of theatre, this perspective overlooks the subsequent history and memory of Ugandan theatrical experimentations and creative resistance that unfolded on the very same stage.

1 Charles Mulekwa, "Theatre, War, and Peace in Uganda," in , eds. C. Cohen, R. Varea and P. Walker, (New Village Press, 2011), 45-71.

In a city where theatre archives have been lost and public registries are lacking, the personal archives, oral histories, and the memories of how native Ugandan directors reinterpreted this stage and used it to foster indigenous drama offer an opportunity for an alternative reading of the building. Rather than being viewed solely as an artefact of imposed modernity, the National Theatre becomes a symbol of creative resistance and adaptation.

Ultimately, this paper argues that the heritage of Tropical Modernism should be analysed not only in terms of the introduction of specific architectural forms but also through the socio-political narratives of independence, coloniality, and resistance. By shifting the focus from the building as a static object to a dynamic vessel of public memory, this approach highlights the paradoxes of modernity, offering a deeper understanding of its role in postcolonial transition. Furthermore, by bringing public memory forward, the paper contends that, in the preservation of Tropical Modernism, this layer of memory should be given a tangible form, ensuring that the lived experiences and stories of local communities are recognised alongside the physical preservation of architecture. In doing so, the paper aligns with the need to both dismantle established histories and remain critically engaged with modernism's ongoing legacies.

Photograph of the Bank of Indonesia, formerly De Javasche Bank. M. Ghazi Kamal, More than Old Structure, 2016, Banda Aceh, Indonesia.

Azhiemi Iqbal (Umeå University)

Reassessing the Architectural Heritage of Banda Aceh: Colonial Legacies and Modernist Narratives

INTRODUCTION

The architectural heritage of Banda Aceh, Indonesia, presents a complex narrative shaped by the intertwined legacies of Dutch colonialism and modernist movements, particularly within the broader framework of welfare state construction and global production systems. This region, located at the northern tip of Sumatra, has been a focal point of various colonial powers, most notably the Dutch, whose architectural imprint remains prominent in Aceh's built environment. This study aims to critically examine how Dutch colonial architecture and subsequent modernist practices have influenced Aceh's physical structures and socio-cultural dynamics, drawing from extensive archival research and local narratives.

By investigating the dual role of architecture—as a tool of colonial domination and a medium for post-colonial identity reconstruction—this research foregrounds the significance of decolonising architectural history. Post tsunami reconstruction in Aceh since 2004, becomes one of the occurrences to further examine the ongoing negotiation between the past legacies and future aspirations affecting Banda Aceh's architectural heritage.

COLONIAL ARCHITECTURE IN BANDA ACEH: INSTRUMENTS OF POWER AND DOMINATION

As the capital of the Sultanate of Aceh, Kotaraja (former name of Banda Aceh) was assaulted by the Dutch from 1873.[1] As a religious community who relied on Islamic values, the Acehnese ran the war as a symbol of *Jihadi* 'self-defence'. Resultingly, the Dutch not only fought a physical war, but also battled the spiritual values and a particular set of Acehnese perspectives.[2] Due to their dominance, the Dutch managed to conquer the capital of the Sultanate of Aceh a year after and assigned it the seat of the government. The Netherlands invested heavily in infrastructure and constructed several military,

1 Jean Gelman Taylor, "Aceh Histories in the KITLV Images Archive," in *Mapping the Acehnese Past*, Eds. R. Michael Feener, Patrick Daly and Anthony Reed (Brill Academic Publishers, 2011), 203.

2 Amirul Hadi, "Exploring Acehnese Understandings of Jihad: A Study of the *Hikayat Prang Sabi*," in *Mapping the Acehnese Past*, Eds. R. Michael Feener, Patrick Daly and Anthony Reed (Brill Academic Publishers, 2011), 183.

governmental, and other public institutions.[3] These developments became a symbol of the Dutch Power's success in gaining control of Banda Aceh.

Kotaraja is separated geographically by the river *Krueng Aceh,* dividing the city in western and eastern sections. Following the urban strategy of the sultanate, the Dutch colony maintained this natural division. The construction under the Dutch was superior to previous developments though, and took the form of dwellings, entertainment venues and military buildings.[4] Concrete was often used as the construction material in this colonial period and helped transforming the city into an urban environment that appeared modern.

The Dutch also employed the river Krueng in other ways, transforming one of its banks from a slum into a fashionable neighbourhood. This development created vastly different residential areas on each side of the river. The western bank, called *Peunayong,* was populated by Chinese migrants, while the eastern bank was used as a business district and a residential neighbourhood for Dutch residents. Additionally, during this development era, the Dutch colony used the segregation of settlements based on class and informed by race, to prevent contact with the indigenous people, who were considered filthy. Hence Colonial architecture in Aceh also served as a tool for cultural domination, as the Dutch used architecture and spatial planning to impose their values and norms on the local population.[5]

POST COLONIAL ADAPTATIONS: IDEAS OF LEGACY IN ACEH'S BUILT ENVIRONMENT.

Once the Acehnese completely regained control of the city, the utilisation of colonial era construction was controversial. As Dutch symbols of power—it was commonly thought—the remnants of Dutch construction should be destroyed, rather than actively used. Conversely, a growing respect towards the earlier architectures of Acehnese origin, was part of this same move away from this period of oppression from 1873 onwards. Yet simultaneously, colonial era buildings were also used to serve a clearly national purpose during the era of revolution. *De Javasche Bank* for example, was used as the DPR: the People's Representative Council.[6]

As the animosity that existed during the Aceh War has diminished over time, the Acehnese people's adaptation of Dutch colonial heritage has also become more understandable. One reason for this, is the significant number of Acehnese who have since received Western education, leading to less resentment regarding that colonial past compared to the wartime period. When hostility does exist, it is primarily directed toward politically active individuals with advanced Western education, rather than the general population or those with Islamic education. Also, because of this Islamic education, many people have adopted a practical approach, opting to actually utilise existing colonial heritage. It is a rational consideration informed by Islamic values and an education that taught not to destroy these structures, which still had the potential to benefit society and a new government in other ways.

3 Muhjam Kamza, Farhan Fadhillah and M. Yusrizal, "Remnants of the Dutch Infrastructure in Banda Aceh During the Independence Revolution," *Indonesian Historical Studies*, no. 6 (2022): 150–165, https://DOI: 10.14710/ihis.v6i2.14412.

4 Kamza, Fadhillah and Yusrizal, "Remnants of the Dutch Infrastructure in Banda Aceh," 151.

5 Abidin Kusno, *Behind the Postcolonial: Architecture, Urban Space and Political Cultures in Indonesia* (Routledge, 2000), 42.

6 Kamza, Fadhillah and Yusrizal, "Remnants of the Dutch Infrastructure in Banda Aceh," 162.

DECOLONIZING ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIES: INTENTION OR IGNORANCE

In postindependence Indonesia, colonial construction legacies have been looked at critically, as they have often caused Indonesian heritage to be overlooked. From the moment President Soekarno came into power though, the government has tried to construct an Indonesian Identity through a new architectural expression, meant to be a symbol of a developed economy. In Aceh at the time however, instead of conserving the *Colonial Architectural Archives*, the Acehnese insisted—through rebellion—on getting a special, Islamic status. The first conflict was sponsored by Darul Islam in 1953, under the coordination of Teungku Daud Beureuh: the former military governor of Aceh. This rebellion demanded the creation of the Islamic state of Aceh.[7] The upheaval ended in 1965 with the agreement that Aceh would be a given a degree of autonomy, enabling the province to regulate education, religion, and law more.

A second rebellion—headed by Hasan Di Tiro—took place in Aceh, in 1976. It was a reaction against the broken promise to give Aceh special autonomy regarding education, religion, and customs.[8] It started a movement called *Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* (GAM), the 'Free Aceh Movement', to get Aceh full independence. This movement also isolated Aceh from other provinces in regards to conserving architectural heritage, as well as constructing new city plans. Securing Aceh by controlling GAM's power was simply considered more important. As a result of this conflict, The Colonial Architecture Archives were bombed and eventually burnt down: all in protest against the government of Indonesia. This tragedy caused the disappearance of many architectural histories.

THE ROLE OF ARCHITECTURE IN POST TSUNAMI RECONSTRUCTION: MODERNISM MEETS SUSTAINABILITY

The devastating tsunami of 2004, which caused widespread destruction across Aceh, prompted a massive reconstruction effort that brought together international aid agencies, the Indonesian government, and local

7 Cut Dewi, "Iconic Architectural Heritage in Banda Aceh: Remembering and Conservation in Post Disaster Contexts," (PhD diss., The Australian National University, 2015) 135, ProQuest (304508697).

8 R. Michael Feener, "Mapping the Acehnese," 18.

communities. Aceh Heritage Community (AHC) pursued some conservation activities to identify damaged sites to initiate a renovation of colonial heritage. Among these the MULO School (currently SMA 1 Banda Aceh), which was restored with help of the *Fondation Chaine du Bonheur* (the Swiss Solidarity Fund) through the support of the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC).[9]

In addition, during the reconstruction following the tsunami and the accompanying necessity to create a new face for Banda Aceh, the government attempted to implement an architectural modernism with high-tech materials and devices. One example of this campaign is the reconstruction of the grand mosque of Baiturrahman Banda Aceh, with an underground parking and a new garden with a giant, high-tech umbrella providing shade. This grand building has become a symbol of pride for the Acehnese, representing the Islamic province in Indonesia. The Tsunami Museum of Aceh designed by Ridwan Kamil on the other hand, doubles in function as a building mitigating the effects of a potential future tsunami by being built as a Tsunami Evacuation Building, while also being conceived as a symbol of trauma relief.[10] Simultaneously, this moment was also used by the government of Banda Aceh to construct a controversial, new mayor's office, with a hollow-domed metal roof and a cubical ship-shape façade. Instead of revitalizing the vernacular Acehnese style with this project, they opted to totally change the appearance of the governmental building, thus creating a new phase in defining Banda Aceh's architectural development.

The buildings made after the tsunami, create another architectural legacy in Aceh. Most of these *post-tsunami artefacts*, like *Kapal PLTD Apung*—consisting of a boat on top of a house in Lampulo—have become cultural symbols transformed by nature.[11] These projects highlight the potential for creating a built environment that is both resilient and culturally resonant, reflecting the diverse influences that have shaped Aceh's architectural history.

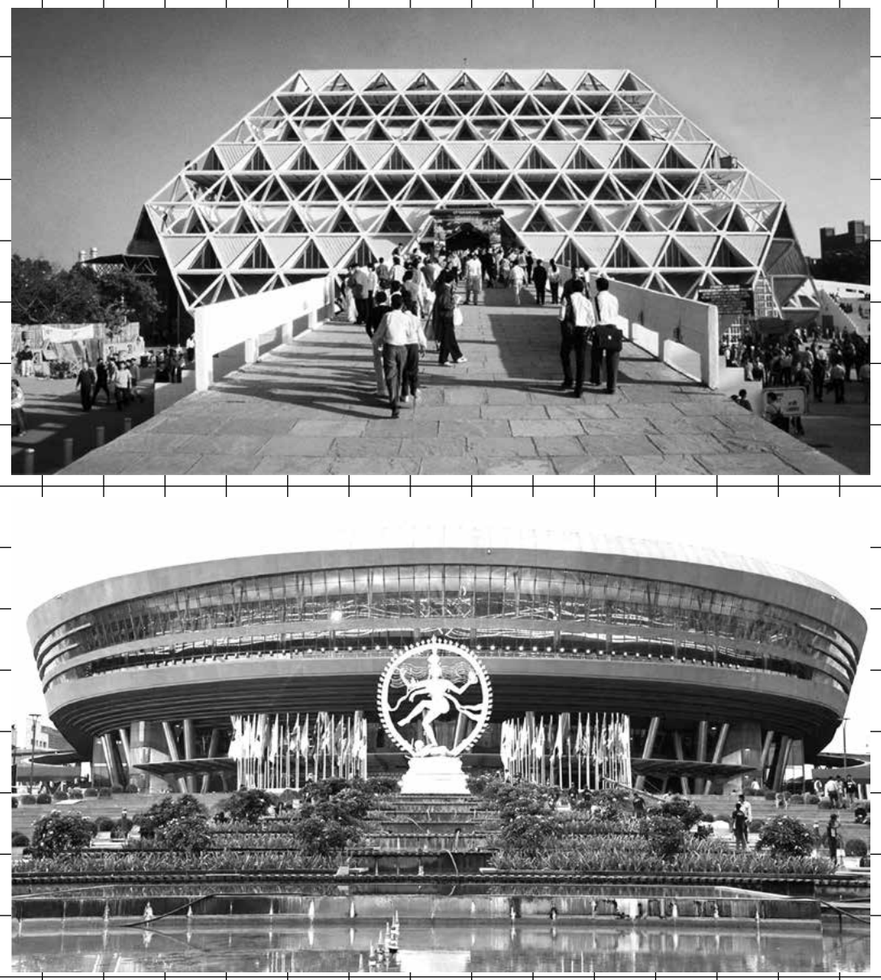
CONCLUSION

The architectural heritage of Aceh offers a compelling case study for examining the intersections of colonialism, local traditions and modernism. The enduring legacies of Dutch colonial architecture, coupled with the adaptation of modernist principles in postcolonial and post tsunami contexts, reveal the complex dynamics at play in shaping Aceh's built environment. This research underscores the importance of decolonising architectural history by challenging the dominant narratives that have marginalised indigenous voices and alternative epistemologies. By critically engaging with decolonization theories, the study provides a more nuanced understanding of how architecture in Aceh has been used both as a tool of colonial power and as a medium for postcolonial identity reconstruction.

The integration of modernist and sustainable design principles in Aceh's post tsunami reconstruction efforts, further illustrates the potential for architecture to serve as a catalyst for resilience and cultural continuity. Since the campaign of Banda Aceh as heritage was declared, a turning point in the awareness of its cultural value has occurred. Simultaneously, the post tsunami reconstruction effort provided the perfect opportunity to introduce modernist architecture and to construct a new vision for Banda Aceh as a modern city. As Aceh continues to navigate the legacies of its colonial past and the challenges of the present, the ongoing dialogue between heritage preservation and modernist aspirations play a crucial role in shaping the region's future. As a result of numerous essential tragedies a new iteration of Acehnese architecture has come into existence. The government should be more aware of presenting a clear vision for the city, as it has holds important values for the Acehnese and can potentially steer its development.

By reassessing Aceh's architectural heritage through a decolonial lens, this paper contributes to the broader discourse on decolonising architecture, in which architectural identities can change, develop, or perish either by nature or its environment. Through this lens, it offers insights into how local and global narratives intersect in the built environment, to add *a new architectural history*. It calls for a more inclusive and pluralistic approach to architectural history. One that recognises the diversity of experiences and knowledge systems, that have shaped the world's built environments.

9 Cut Dewi, "Iconic Architectural Heritage in Banda Aceh," 145.
10 "History of Museum Tsunami Aceh," Museum Tsunami, last accessed Sept 5, 2024, https://museumtsunami.acehprov.go.id/halaman/sejarah-museum-tsunami-aceh.
11 Rob van Leeuwen, "A Touch of Tragedy: Pre- and Post—Tsunami Symbolism in Banda Aceh, Indonesia," in *Cities Full of Symbol: A Theory of Urban Space and Culture*, ed. Peter J.M. Nas (Leiden University Press, 2011), 167.



Photograph of The Hall of Nations, Pragati Maidan, New Delhi. Image source: Mahendra Raj Archives (top); Bharat Mandapam that now occupies Pragati Maidan, Sunday Guardian Live (bottom).

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Redrawing Narratives of Modernist Architecture in India: A Tryst in the Courtroom

THE COURT CASE OF THE HALL OF NATIONS

The court case of the Hall of Nations is a landmark lawsuit, that entails a nexus of heritage conundrums, conflicting legacies, stakeholder disputes and legal implications. During the lawsuit, the building almost became artefactual, exhibiting dimensions of aesthetics, meaning, ownership, culture, and age. In its encounter with the courtroom, this 'site of spatial agency' became a place for dramatic arbitrations. Even after its destruction, it qualifies as an archetype of many cases that may arise in the future. Using the Hall of Nations court proceedings, we attempt to unpack emergent impressions of Indian modernity. This was the verdict that pitched the moral rights of an architect with the ownership right of the land owner (i.e. the government):

'The requirements of urban planning outweigh the moral rights of an architect. The architect cannot demand the intangibility of work because it would violate the right of ownership and the principles of freedom of commerce. Similarly, the functionality of the building has to necessarily outweigh the interest of the architect on the preservation of integrity. Thus, the owner of the building has full power to dispose it off and to destroy it.'[1]

This Delhi High court judgement from 2017 eventually led to the demolition of the Hall of Nations, Pragati Maidan, New Delhi, India. In its place now stands the Bharat Mandapam, inaugurated in 2023, which recently played host to the 2024 G20 Summit. The court verdict was a watershed moment—much like the demolition of the well-known Pruitt Igoe social housing complex in St. Louis, Missouri in 1972—leading to a disruption of the global modernist experience.

Designed by noted Indian architect Raj Rewal and structural engineer Mahendra Raj, the Hall of Nations was built in 1972 to mark the twenty-fifth year of India's independence since 1947. The structure became symbolic of a progressive, developing nation and was part of global exhibitions.[2] It was considered the world's first and largest space frame structure in reinforced

1 Raj Rewal v. Union of India & Ors. CS (Comm) No. 3 of 2018, before the Honourable High Court of Delhi, India, 2018, 26–27.
2 The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) has a collection item called: 'Raj Rewal. Pragati Maidan: Hall of Nations and Halls of Industries for the India International Trade Fair, New Delhi, India. 1970.'

concrete.[3] The halls have been a popular venue for nearly half a century, especially for the India International Trade Fair, the Auto Expo and the World Book Fair. Everything from books to airplanes was displayed in this building.

A proposal to redevelop the complex was unveiled in 2015 by the India Trade Promotion Organisation, a year after the new government came to power. This marked outrage across the world; with bodies like the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) taking legal action to preserve it. Rewal argued that the building was emblematic of India's indigenous modernity and therefore that it had intangible value beyond its function and as real estate.

In 2013, INTACH had submitted a list of sixty-two structures in New Delhi to the Heritage Conservation Committee (HCC) with the objective of formulating criteria for their heritage status.[4] The absence of any action until 2017—amidst the legal proceedings of the Hall of Nations case—led to a 'legal vacuum'.[5] In its 2017 ruling, the HCC maintained that only buildings older than sixty years (built before 1957)—or two generations (one generation is considered as thirty years)—can be considered for heritage status.[6] Modernist edifices below the sixty-year mark now remain unintentional monuments, facing the imminent threat of demolition.[7]
This particular condition of age, privileges the early modernist works of foreign architects like Le Corbusier and Louis Kahn, over later indigenous structures. Conflicting understandings of 'time or age-value' in the built landscape, reveal many meanings and raise questions about why buildings should be preserved, and which ones deserve to be maintained. This refers to the politics of attribution—the politics of the presence and absence of buildings. Time is no longer conceivable when a building comes to court in its linear progression. The case duration manipulated by actants (either accelerated or decelerated) warps the life cycle of the building. The sixty-year period might have been marked as it owes to the active lifecycle of a concrete building. The lifespan of traditional heritage buildings made of stone is far higher. Thus, the material's properties also mediate notions of antiquity and heritage.

In 2017, the court ruled that an architect of a building does not have the right to prevent the demolition of a building, as the right to property of the landowner outweighs the moral rights of the architect. The Hall of Nations architect's efforts to have the fourty-five-year-old structure declared as a modernist heritage site were not fruitful. This legally enabled India Trade Promotion Organisation (ITPO) to bulldoze this landmark into dust overnight.

3 Suneet Zishan Langar, "The Demolition of Delhi's Hall of Nations Reveals India's Broken Attitude to Architectural Heritage,"*ArchDaily*, 23 June, 2017, https://www.archdaily.com/874154/the-demolition-of-delhis-hall-of-nations-reveals-indias-broken-attitude-to-architectural-heritage.
4 HCC was formed in 2004 in terms of directions of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India for the protection of Heritage Buildings, Heritage Precincts and Natural feature areas in Delhi.
5 "No criteria on "modern heritage" status for post-Independence buildings," The Hindu, New Delhi. 2016.
6 The Minutes Submitted by The Heritage Conservation Committee at the Delhi High Court today on INTACH's petition to declare 62 buildings as heritage in Delhi (February 2017).
7 Alois Reigl. The Modern Cult of the Monument: Its Character and Its Origin (1903), 22.

Rewal referred to the demolition as 'an act of outrage', as the petition filed by INTACH was still being heard in the court at the time of its flattening. The court also dismissed the architect's instant lawsuit postdemolition, who sought the re-creation of his demolished architectural work.

This raises the following question: Do other relatively young, postindependence buildings then face the same fate as the Hall of Nations in the near future?

THE MODERN INDIAN ARCHITECT

'The Act does not give any guidance as to what is meant by honour or reputation of the author…'[8] While distorting or mutilation or modification of one of the embodiments of the work renders the work imperfect, prejudicing the honour or reputation of the author, destruction of the work in its entirety i.e. making it disappear, cannot be, prejudicial to the honour or reputation of the author.'[9]

The Hall of Nations case exposes the agency, moral rights, modernist legacy and authorship of architects. Rewal argued that his reputation here refers to his modernist works and that the demolition of the Hall of Nations is detrimental to his honour. He regards the Hall of Nations as a self-evident artefact, where the physical form encapsulates the total sum of its design intent. This echoes the modernist supremacy of the master-builder operating in a vacuum of timelessness. This brings up more questions. What is an author to architecture or practice? Does authorship function—as Foucault asserts—as more than the product of a person?[10] And if so, what purpose does the name of an individual serve?

Like the Indian nation, the contemporary Indian architect is a modern invention.[11] Both have struggled with shaping their postcolonial identity and purpose.There are two seemingly separate questions here. One regarding authorship and the agency of the architect. Another one regarding past and present monumentality and the creation of national heritage. The role of the modern, Indian architect was to embrace the change in materiality of buildings and find new embodied meanings of architecture. The vision for a postindependence India was harnessed through the departure of past traditions, by embracing the tenets of modernity. In contrast, the vision of the present government imbues newer ideas of progress, but also embraces the nation's cultural past. It is at the threshold of this 'value dichotomy' that the Hall of Nations case manifests.

8 The Copyright Act, 1957, Section 57(1) states that the author of a work shall have the right to claim authorship of the work; and to restrain or claim damages in respect of any distortion, mutilation, modification or other act in relation to the said work if such distortion, mutilation, modification or other act would be prejudicial to his honour or reputation.
9 Proceedings of the Hall of Nations court case, New Delhi. India, 22–23.
10 Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?' in *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology* (The New Press, New York, 1998).
11 A.G. Krishna Menon, "The Invention of the Modern Indian Architect," *Arch +*, Issue 255 (2010).

DEFINING THE ARCHITECTURAL ARTEFACT

‘The implementation into a building of the work of architecture is governed by other laws viz. the laws relating to town planning, building byelaws, environmental laws and laws protecting the rights of owners of adjoining buildings. It is thus not necessary that the constructed is always a true reflection of the designs authored by the architect’.[12]

It is often imagined that the purpose of architecture is the fulfilment of aspirations of a patron and the architect. However, there is the life of a building as it lives on. While art represents creative freedom, architecture always has specific, practical forces behind it. In reality, the lifecycles of modernist buildings are laden with chronicles of transformations, adaptations, affordances and destructiveness. The iconicity, agency, and learnings are not lost. They merely become sites of identity restructuring for which architects must relinquish their roles as creators.

‘It had to be an iconic landmark project which could match the aspirations of New India aspiring to be the global leader. The aim to redevelop Pragati Maidan as a modern world class Integrated Exhibition-cum-Convention Centre with large exhibition spaces and other associated facilities.’[13]

The paradox of modern heritage seeking permanence through radical renewal, or a possible rebirth, is a strive for antiquity and is opposed to the ideas of the natality of architecture.[14] The cycle of life, death and the afterlife of emblematic buildings, provide the opportunity to pluralise history and deviate from schisms of the colonial project.[15] It lays ground for provocations, new ways of thinking, knowledge production and ideas of the collective. The value of Bharat Mandapam will be determined by the ebbs and flows of time.

VALUES OF THE PRESENT: IDENTITIES AND CHANGE

‘Artistic work or architectural work are not scarce and more can be produced. All such other works in which copyrights subsists, are expressed in mediums which in themselves are of no value viz. a canvas or a record or tape or paper. On the contrary land is scarce as no more is being produced… Such land has a value of its own, even without the building with work of architecture thereon and often more than the value of the building thereon.’[16]

12 Raj Rewal v. Union of India, 25–26.
13 The competition project brief given for the design ‘Bharat Mandapam at Pragati Maidan, New Delhi an iconic masterpiece’. *Society Interiors & Design* (October, 2023).
14 Stephen Cairns and Jane M. Jacobs, architects and urban studies experts, called architects ‘natalists’, who always thought about making things anew. Stephen Cairs and Jane Jacobs, *Buildings Must Die* (MIT Press, 2017).
15 Historian Rosie Bsheer explores how destruction is a requisite for the making of history. Rhosie Bsheer, *Archive Wars: The Politics of History in Saudi Arabia* (Stanford University Press, 2020).
16 Raj Rewal v. Union of India, 24–25.

The functional use values and the iconic historical values of the Hall of Nations became less important than its land value as a piece of prime real estate. The non-indigenous association of Modernist architecture and hectic urbanisation are responsible for this sentiment.[17] The question of value here is rather a political one, as one may question for whom this is valuable? Why is this valuable? How is it valuable today? On the one hand the legacy of these modernist sites garners the gaze and adulation of the global audience and on the other there are urban bureaucratic issues of real estate.

‘With every passing year, buildings are being constructed with technological advances, these buildings are likely to last longer as compared to the buildings constructed in the past. Therefore, in order to ensure that only those buildings which truly deserve to be preserved or conserved are identified as heritage buildings.’[18]

There is a ‘newness value’ associated with art in the eyes of the masses (the voice of the elected government) which is reflected in the afterlife of the Hall of Nations: ‘The Bharat Mandapam’.[19] Buildings like the Hall of Nations are at the vanguard of a new wave of finding value in our recent past and serve as a tool for political expression and control. The forty-five-year-old building did not become heritage, but played as an agent in mediating the discourse of heritage in India. Its court case was enmeshed between the role of the state to maintain a structurally safe and technologically upgraded world-class icon and propagate a renewed sense of political architectural iconography. The relative, cultural value of the Hall of Nations remains mostly appreciated by the ‘aesthetically educated modern person’. Thereby, the onus of preserving modernist Indian heritage is presently not on any nationalist agenda and remains solely mantled on the shoulders of the architecture fraternity.

CONCLUSION: IMPRINTS AND TRAILS OF THE HALL OF NATIONS CASE

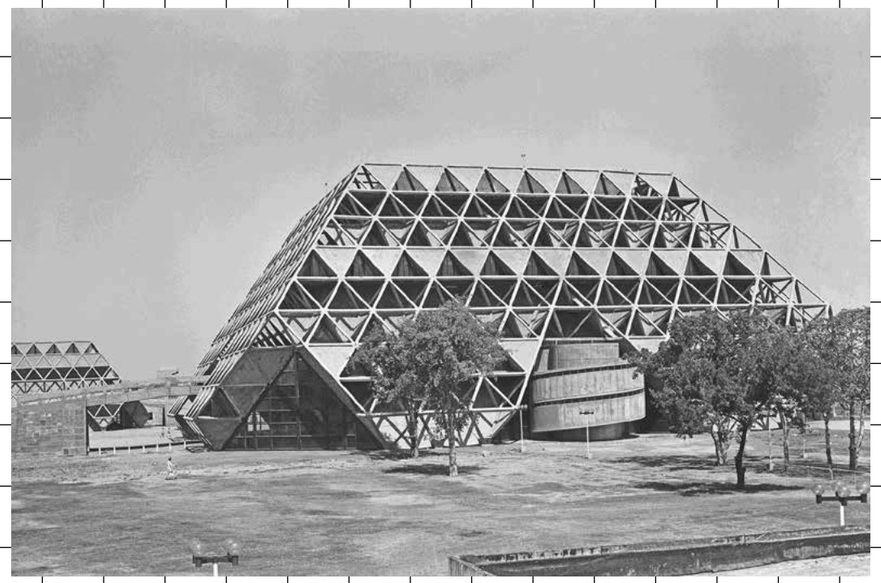
‘India is a good example of a society that is neither pre-modern nor distinctly modern; India is a place where “modernity has to reckon with the pre-modern.”’[20]

Decontextualised, iconic imagery of architecture continues to determine the ‘desired’ identity of Indian public buildings today, thereby precipitating the same kind of architecture as seen world over. This ‘sameness’ is a result of an accepted form of progress in the globalization process and access to common building materials and technologies. Thus, it is apt to say that the ‘project of modernity’ is still unfinished[21] in India, because the problems

17 A. Srivathsan, “Why Conserving Modern Architecture Has Become Nearly Impossible,” *The Wire*, September 16, 2023, https://thewire.in/the-arts/why-conserving-modern-architecture-has-become-nearly-impossible.
18 The Minutes Submitted by The Heritage Conservation Committee (HCC) at the Delhi High Court (February 2017).
19 Reigl. The Modern Cult of the Monument, 213–221.
20 A. Raghuramaraju, *Modernity in Indian Social Theory* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 158.
21 J. Habermas. Theory of Modernity: The Unfinished Project (Polity Press, 1980), 3–4.

it addresses have not yet been solved. The value of Bharat Mandapam will also be determined by the ebbs and flows of time.

Complex questions regarding the subsistence of modernist structures will gain traction over the next fifty years, as many iconic buildings will incur maintenance costs, inherit renewed use value, face land ownership disputes, be at the cusp of various urban development schemes and witness the limits of a democratic process. The modernist buildings in India are now situated at the margins: spatially, temporally, aesthetically, and politically. The discussion at the center here is this tension between two Indias. Old and new, traditional and modern.There is presently a renewed sense of Indian identity that warrants a global architectural language rooted in Indian culture. The vision for a postindependence India in 1947 was harnessed through the departure of traditions by embracing the tenets of modernity. In contrast, the present government's vision imbues newer ideas of progress and embraces the nation's cultural past. Modernist heritage becomes an inheritance of the loss of past Indian heritage. It is at the threshold of this 'value dichotomy' that the case of Hall of Nations manifests. The two strands of monumentalities entail different meanings and symbols of identity arising in a neo-heritage battle, as it challenges what is preserved and what is demolished. The creation of national heritage post-independence versus the heritage of New India is the cause of conflict here, rendering an affordance to modernist buildings to be destroyed.



Photograph of the Hall of Nations by Raj Rewal, New Delhi, 1970-72. It was demolished in 2017.
Source of photograph: Raj Rewal Associates.

Shruti Hussain (Independent Scholar)

Reframing the Indian-Modern Vision: Post the Colossal Loss of the Hall of Nations and Other Modern Icons that Wait Their End

COLONIAL AMBIVALENCES

‘Have you no architecture of your own? They are all European buildings,’ a Russian cultural delegation kept asking the state chief minister of the newly independent India on a visit to the Southern city of Bangalore.[1] In response, the minister with strong nationalist streaks went about commissioning a new State Legislature building for Mysore state, the Vidhan Soudha, that was an ode to South Indian regional symbolism. Completed in 1952, its ethos stood for a colony’s hard-won independence in August 1947 and a sure step into sovereignty.

While it was the revivalist Vidhan Soudha in the South, a prolific Public Works Department Architect, Habib Rahman was building the New Secretariat for another state government, West Bengal, around the same time. Rahman’s design of a curvilinear podium topped with the tallest steel frame structure yet in India in 1954, was the most iconic example in the new India of an unfettered modernist approach to the design of public architecture before Le Corbusier’s Chandigarh buildings.[2]

The two structures appear to project different ideas, but there are underlying congruencies. As much as the Vidhan Soudha was about regional pride, it is curious to note that its layout, massing and proportional system are British in character.[3] The Secretariat’s architect, Rahman, had been educated at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA and had worked with European modernists like Walter Gropius. In fact, Architects who started operating before 1947 were mostly educated in the USA or Britain on government scholarships and came back with an ethos that was contemporary. So, this colonial or Western effect, we see, cannot be dismembered from the practice of architecture in India.

1 Jon Lang, Madhavi Desai and Miki Desai, *Architecture and Independence: The Search for Indentity—India, 1880 to 1980* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 204.
2 Peter Scriver and Amit Srivastava, *India: Modern Architectures in History* (Reaktion Books Ltd, 2015), 136.
3 Lang, Desai and Desai, *Architecture and Independence*, 204.

THE INDIAN-MODERN

The postindependence Indian modernism project, after the first flush of excitement waned, has been critiqued for being too elitist and non-indigenous. But what is worth noting, is that India's postcolonial, modern architecture is about a synchronous harmony of Western-driven modernism peppered with regional sentiments in changing proportions, across a varying timeline. Let's see how that works.

French Modernist Le Corbusier, as the Chief Architectural Adviser to the Government of Punjab—a partitioned state that lost its capital to Pakistan—was in charge of the masterplan of the new capital city of Chandigarh and architect of the Capitol buildings in the 1950s. Architectural Historian William J. R. Curtis has summed up Corbusier's challenging commission by saying that he would have to acknowledge and then transform India's underlying sub-structures into modern symbolic forms.[4] The master architect's brutalist work in Chandigarh responds to Indian climate by employing the *parasol* to shade, *pilotis* to lift and cool and the *brise-soleil* as sun screens. Pritzker Prize winning Indian Architect Balkrishna V. Doshi had apprenticed with Corbusier in Paris and then at Chandigarh, a project that turned out to be nursery for Indian modernism. Doshi's design for the Institute of Indology (1962) 'is an early and strikingly overt essay in architectural hybridity', where exposed concrete expresses traditional elements of an Indian mansion or *haveli*.[5]

Such instances show that modernism in India was a uniquely Indian project, though it started out as what the first Prime Minister of the country, Jawaharlal Nehru had called 'one great experiment'. Architectural researcher Peter Scriver has reassessed the role of modernism in India in Nehru's era, that was seen as an extension of imperialism and is often pitted against the relevance of regionalism.[6] Scriver says that Nehru's intention was not that Indian architects should imitate Corbusier and the like, 'but take back a free-thinking approach and a new cast of mind, not shapes, in which Modern India would be at home.'[7]

But not everyone saw it this way and modernism began to be questioned in the later decades. Architectural historian Vikramaditya Prakash has reasoned sharply that modernism failed in India not because it was Western, but 'because the people were never involved, nor did they understand modernism, nor did they care.'[8] The idea of the elite leading the people, and ignoring traditional knowledge were other reasons, argues Prakash. Yet also,

4 William J. R. Curtis, "The Ancient in the Modern," in *Architecture in India*, eds. Raj Rewal, Jean-Louis Veret and Ram Sharma (Electa Moniteur, 1985), 81.
5 Scriver and Srivastava, *India: Modern Architectures in History*, 186.
6 Lang, Desai and Desai, *Architecture and Independence*, 5.
7 "Frame 2019: Lecture Peter Scriver," thinkMATTER, accessed August 25, 2024, https://thinkmatter.in/2020/06/20/india-modern-architectures-in-history/.
8 Vikramaditya Prakash, "Inheriting Modernism: Rethinking Chandigarh in the Post-colonial Frame," *Constructing New Worlds ACSA International Conference,* (1998): 187, https://www.acsa-arch.org/proceedings/International%20Proceedings/ACSA.Intl.1998/ACSA.Intl.1998.40.pdf.

he has spoken of the 'emancipatory desires of modernism that an emerging India related to, and we have now the double bind of "Indian-modern."'[9]

A MISUNDERSTOOD MODERNISM

All these arguments withstanding, India's mid-century architecture and all its actors operated in a very special time. It was when 'all was possible' as Le Corbusier wrote to Nehru and the country's leaders were trying to bring in an idiom of socialism, that could tie people together in a society fractured by the partition and ensuing bloodshed on religious lines.[10] Science and technology would bring about a social and economic revolution in the new country, they reasoned.

The spirit of modernism has not been understood in the right light and—Prakash is right—it did not involve the public. However, while one may not be an admirer, legacies cannot be disregarded. If India preserves its colonial buildings, those that are actually reminders of wounded pride, why does modern architecture that embodied democratic values and stood for a technologically sound and progressive bent of mind not deserve recognition and care? The architecture community did not realize the value of its modernist work well enough, to create a discourse beyond their silos. Nation-building made possible by new architecture remained an unsold idea. Hence, the sensibilities to save them and their archives, are practically non-existent. Soaring land prices, neglect, disuse and the modern-heritage oxymoron have further exacerbated the situation.

The Hall of Nations (1970–72) was the world's first and largest-span space-frame structure built in reinforced concrete to mark twenty-five years of independence.[11] Its homegrown high-tech frames showcased the building's structural engineer Mahendra Raj's skill, while also invoking traditional *jaali* or lattices, that let in the breeze while keeping the sun out, a true blue 'Indian-modern'. The building was demolished in 2017, ignoring the opposition of architects and historians in the country and abroad. Its architect, Raj Rewal called it an act of outrage. A new convention center was built on its grave, called the Bharat Mandapam, which was the venue for the G20 Summit in 2023. Columnist Fahad Zuberi has written in Indian Express, a major daily newspaper: 'Hall of Nations stood for inclusive nation building, Bharat Mandapam needs an official press release for meaning'.[12]

There are numerous other stories of neglect and erasure of modernist architecture in the country. The Indian Institute of Management (1974) in Ahmedabad, is American architect Louis Kahn's iconic expression in brick.

9 Prakash, "Inheriting Modernism," 187.
10 Curtis, "The Ancient in the Modern," 81.
11 Suneet Zishan Langar, "The Demolition of Delhi's Hall of Nations Reveals India's Broken Attitude to Architectural Heritage," *ArchDaily*, June 23, 2017, https://www.archdaily.com/tag/hall-of-nations.
12 Fahad Zuberi, "Fahad Zuberi writes on Bharat Mandapam: Decoding the building," *Indian Express*, August 1, 2023, https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/fahad-zuberi-writes-on-bharat-mandapam-decoding-the-building-8870021/.

A cluster of its dormitories are—once again—in danger of being demolished, after the institute had backtracked on its decision of tearing it down before, following an international uproar. Le Corbusier's Mill Owner's Association Building (1954), Shodhan House (1951–54) and City Museum (1951–57) likewise have an uncertain future, as they sit on prime land in the same city: once a cradle of modern architecture, with an educated elite as its patrons.

Why is modern heritage not acknowledged despite its supreme achievements, the most important being giving form to an Indian identity in a tumultuous time? Martino Stierli, Philip Johnson Chief Curator of Architecture and Design at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) has some explanations. Stierli and his team curated the exhibition 'The Project of Independence Architectures of Decolonization in South Asia, 1947–1985' in New York in 2021. He says that the neoliberal discourse since 1990 has been about delegitimising the idealistic visions of the previous generations. 'Today,' he adds, 'people have lost the belief in the progressive vision and historians need to remind audiences that modern architecture did play a significant role in the political processes of the global South.'[13]

India's Heritage Conservation Committee in 2017 decided that buildings should be at least 60 years old to be included in the heritage list. This only acted as catalyst for the demolition of the Hall of Nations despite pending court cases, underlining an anxiety to erase icons of an era considered close to the West, and thus not national enough. As a nation, India has to address the question of what should be considered heritage and whether it should always situated in the far past. The demolishing of the Hall of Nations makes a case for redefining what constitutes heritage beyond the age of a structure. Historic significance, integrity and context are the broad criteria for listing heritage buildings as per the Central PWD.[14] The issue here is the word 'historic' though, a very orthodox outlook that has not left room for modern heritage. While funds are always in short supply, it is a lack of imagination that is an even bigger impediment.

FINDING ANSWERS IN ARCHIVES

What is dust now, gets a second life in the archive, but India has had a poor history of archiving in general. Only private architecture archives exist and even these are very rare. Papers of South India's modern architecture doyen L. M. Chitale are not archived and have gone unnoticed and the archive of Aditya Prakash, who belonged to first generation of Indian modernists in North India, rest in Montreal. Probably because they did not find a safe place at home in India. Access to them has therefore become limited for Indians. Though architectural archives are scattered and not present as a central, credible repository, these ephemera still hold the key to turning attitudes and the meaning of architectural heritage. As it is only architects, historians and cultural scientists, who have knowledge about modern architecture, it falls upon pedagogy and practices to kickstart a movement. There seems to be preciously little that the government might do. Change must begin with fostering an awareness of what may be identified as heritage, among the youth.

Employing archives in design pedagogy can be seen in Educator Tanishka Kachru's approach in asking students to practice as curators at the National Institute of Design, a legacy, state-run institute in Ahmedabad. Navigating the politics of the archive and examining its value are important lessons for students to understand archives as spaces 'that save materials from the past or present and offer them to an imagined future—or not.'[15] William Curtis has said that India desperately needs a Centre of Architecture for critical discourse and has suggested architecture fundamentals to be taught in schools to cultivate deep sensibilities.[16] To safeguard stories that are vanishing, architectural educator Smita Dalvi suggests the government should acquire modern heritage, which is currently private, and enhance tourism, much like how Villa Savoye is conserved for posterity by the French government. For those buildings that are gone, like the Hall of Nations, its memory can be resurrected only by way of the archive. Not just to hail its unique form, but also its great engineering, the exhibitions it housed, and the public memory it shaped. Doing this by way of photo and film exhibits, memorabilia, lectures and conversations, could take it beyond the archive and touch the public, thus fulfilling the very intention of an archive.

HERITAGE IS NOW

A feeling of freedom—that one cannot quite understand as it is taken for granted today—expressed in built form, that was what modernism meant for the postcolonial world. It is something that even the great thinkers of modernism could not have imagined. In order to save the relics of this important epoch, we need to piece together the whole picture, that make the Western import of ideas an Indian project. One that belonged completely to the new country. 'Heritage is really about Now, the framing, the reframing of History is always about Now', states Peter Scriver. It indeed is.

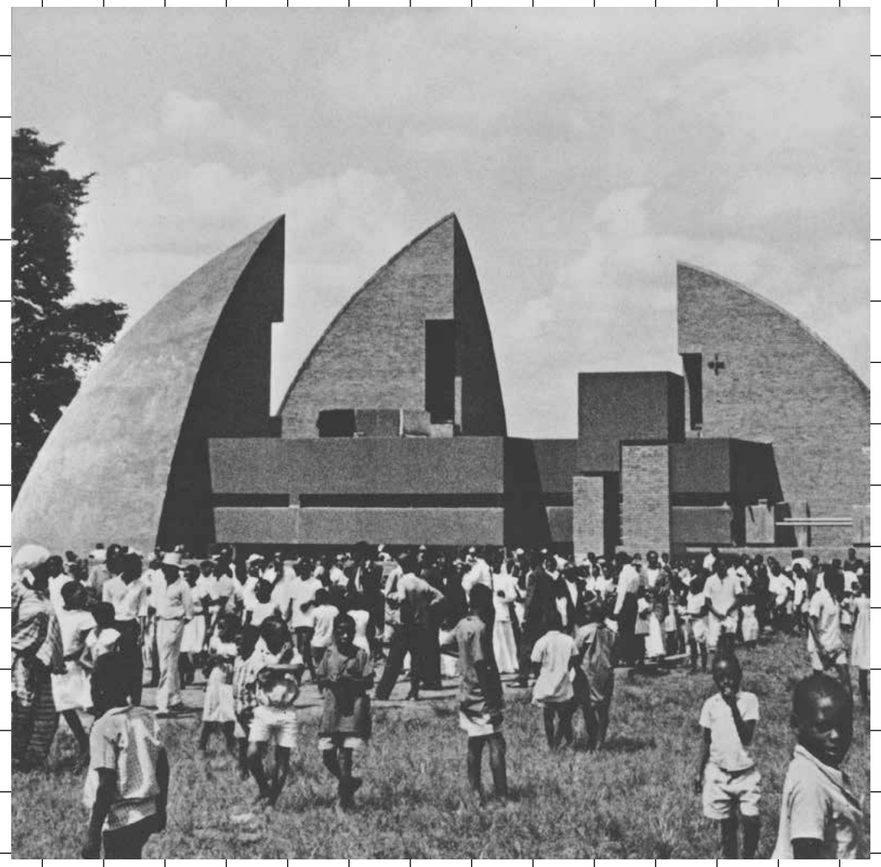
13 Martino Stierli, "126. Moving Beyond the Post-Colonial and the Mythological West with Martino Stierli," moderated by Vikramaditya Prakash, podcast, posted June 16, 2022, by ArchitectureTalk, Spotify, 10:03, https://open.spotify.com/episode/50EccCkj1hOJHxHCsvFWLb.

14 "Chapter 3 - Criteria for Listing Heritage Buildings", in *Handbook of Conservation of Heritage Buildings*, by Directorate General, Central Public Works Department, Minister of Urban Development, 5.

15 Tanishka Kachru, "Contemporary Reflections on NID History: Teaching through the Design," *Bauhaus Imaginista*, accessed on August 20, 2024, https://www.bauhaus-imaginista.org/articles/4363/contemporary-reflections-on-nid-history.

16 William J. R. Curtis, "Nothing is Sacred: Threats to Modern Masterpieces in India," *The Architectural Review*, March 28, 2014, https://www.architectural-review.com/essays/nothing-is-sacred-threats-to-modern-masterpieces-in-india.

Archiving Ethics



Postcard showing Justus Dahinden's Mityana Pilgrims Shrine, Uganda, 1972.
Image source: gta Archive, ETH Zurich.

Irina Davidovici and Sabine Sträuli (gta Archive, ETH Zürich)

'The Good, the Bad and the Ugly': Colonial Hybridities in the gta Archive Collections

INTRODUCTION

It is an inescapable condition of archives that bequests are removed from their specific socio-historical context, frozen from the flow of things. This is also a potential. Viewed from a (post-)colonial perspective, archives offer hidden possibilities to uncover a multitude of different actors and agendas—whether architects or consultants, local populations or governments—and bring to light positions and voices that were previously absent or marginalised. This leads to differentiated, nuanced, and often more critical angles that complement and sometimes contradict the official hegemonic narratives that the archives seem to support.

The gta Archive's focus on the built and planned architecture of Switzerland stands in contrast to the multiple, ambivalent connections with colonialism that emerge upon closer inspection. Their existence raises procedural questions concerning the identification, treatment, and visibility of archival artefacts related to colonial and post-colonial contexts. The gta Archive's colonial entanglements are most readily recognisable at the interfaces with non-western actors and cultures. Travelogues, travel photography, and correspondence collections, as well as the estates of Swiss architects and engineers who built abroad, offer productive entry points for decolonising archival practices.

This paper is in two parts. In the first half, through specific case studies we present the dilemmas and hybrid ties raised by archival holdings with colonial subtexts. Secondly, we orient these dilemmas towards archival practice, asking about the role of the archive, its curators, and its users, in the records and production of history.

EXPERTISE AS EXPORT

We propose the concept of hybridity as a critical lens to examine the export of Swiss architectural expertise and constructions systems to African and Middle Eastern countries in the postwar decades. A certain ambivalence arises from the application of a double perspective on items and products related to colonial and postcolonial contexts. On the one hand, 'export' practices have used economies under development as laboratories for testing prototypes and innovative construction methods, while imposing Western values through—or alongside with—religion and education.

On the other hand, the extractive logic of many such endeavours was balanced by the provision of welfare and infrastructural aid aimed at the betterment of society, culture, transport, or health. The cross-cultural exchanges arising from processes of design and construction have resulted in colonial hybridities at formal, programmatic, and technological levels.

The late 1970s saw a perspectival shift towards building practices in postcolonial contexts. At ETH Zurich, the 1978 exhibition 'Swiss Building Abroad' presented Switzerland's vast building output overseas in a positive and celebratory manner.[1] Yet only a year later, a thematic issue of the architecture periodical *werk-archithese*, entitled 'Export-Architecture', hit a more ambivalent note, questioning the impact of Swiss expertise in fast-developing Middle East.

Its timing was no coincidence. After the 1973 oil crisis, recession greatly affected the building sector, causing Swiss architects and contractors to seek building opportunities abroad. Werk-archithese critically reflected on expansion strategies and dilemmas proposing a plausible typology of Swiss operations, which were split into three categories.[2] The first category was that of 'large-scale interventions', including infrastructures and prefabricated modular systems. The second, ironically described as 'architectural parachute drops', referred to one-off representative buildings alien to the native contexts. The third, 'cooperation with adapted technologies', referred to collaborative projects involving locals and transplanting developed technologies into new fertile soil. In the editors' view, the evaluated types seemed to attract different ethical connotations.

We could reframe this typology of exported Swiss expertise as three moral categories, which we could call The Good, the Bad and the Ugly. To apply this 'triad' to the holdings of the gta Archive is however unfair. Today, it has long been clear that many interests were served under the guise of foreign aid. Most examples of colonial entanglements in the gta Archive fall into the second category of buildings 'parachuted' into their contexts. Are they Good, Bad, or how are they Ugly? The built work is as different as the people behind them, their production time, and geopolitical situation.

Case studies of three Swiss architects' estates at the gta Archive exemplify the multiple facets of Swiss constructions in post-colonial contexts, evidenced by photographs, drawings, and correspondence.

In 1953 André M. Studer (1926–2007) and Jean Hentsch (1921–1984) planned a modernist housing unit outside Casablanca, within a masterplan devised by the French authorities.[3] Their first project for a 'Habitat Marocain' was rejected, and from the second project only a few units were realised, as their funding ended after Morocco's independence. The well-known Moroccan Habitat was clearly a result of colonial interrelations, not only in the transfer of know-how and finance, but also the hybridisation with morphologies, typologies, and ideologies of European modernism.

In contrast, the work of Jesuit missionary and architect Bernard Jobin (1924–2020) is exemplary of a knowledge transfer through religious and ideological commitment. During missions to Burundi and Rwanda between 1958 and 1991, Jobin actively enabled the locals' access to learning and health.[4] His small studio produced not only churches, but also civil infrastructure (schools, hospitals, sports centres) and humanitarian facilities (refugee shelters and learning centres). Using low-tech, climate-friendly, local materials and techniques, the buildings were constructed with the resident population, and local draftsmen received architectural training that was then officially recognised.

A third example of Swiss expertise abroad is that of Zurich-based architect Justus Dahinden (1925–2020), whose building activities in Africa and Iran fell more firmly into the 'parachute' category.[5] Dahinden spoke of an 'acculturation of architecture', by which he meant a holistic building culture specific to its location and climate, based on local traditions, yet incorporating new techniques. The community centre of Mityana (1965–1972) and the cathedral of Namugongo (1973) were built in Uganda under these premises. The system of bubble-like shells that he developed together with Heinz Isler (1926–2009), described as earthquake-proof, was based on Iranian dome construction and adopted the traditional spatial arrangement around a courtyard. In parallel, Dahinden's hotel and leisure architecture planned for various tourist destinations and built with the top-down support of local governments seems in contrast more opportunistic.

None of these examples subscribes neatly to the triad of Good, Bad and Ugly. Their moral and aesthetic assessments fail to overlap. Projects that could be deemed architecturally 'good' represent the private interests of architects and developers, and projects that could be seen as socially progressive and idealistic also helped extend the interests of religious colonialism. Many architectural interventions abroad viewed postcolonial territories as experimental laboratories – what Dahinden called 'Lernfeld Afrika' [Africa as a learning field]. The resulting expertise later returned to Europe, where it could be monetised. This kind of moral hybridity challenges not only historical assessment but also archival practice, both in acquisition and cataloguing.

1 The exhibition 'Schweizer bauen im Ausland' was organized by the Organisationsstelle für Architekturausstellungen of ETH Zurich under the direction of Prof. Heinz Ronner. It took place from September 29 until November 26, 1978, and was initiated by a prior conference of the SIA section for Bridge and Structural Engineering (FBH) in 1977.

2 *werk-archithese*, no. 29–30 (May/June 1979), 7.

3 Studer/Hentschs building in a colonial context is the focus of the following publications: Daniel Weiss, "A Moroccan Habitat: Building within a Colonial Context", in *Colonial Modern*, ed. Tom Avermaete, Serhat Karakayali, Marion von Osten (Black Dog Publishing, 2010), 162–169; Sascha Roesler, *Habitat Marocain Documents* (Park Books, 2015).

4 The only documentation of his work to date is the self-biography: Bernard Jobin, *Parcours africain* (Editions à la Carte, Sierre 2011/12).

5 The following information is based on Muriel Pérez, *Bestandesbeschrieb Justus Dahinden*, on Website gta Archive / ETH Zurich, April 2020, archiv.gta.arch.ethz.ch/nachlaesse-vorlaesse/justus-dahinden

ARCHIVING WITHOUT PREJUDICE

The archive lies many traps for the postcolonial researcher. This starts from the acquisition stages, when the provenance of archival items, their content, significance, and associated ideologies will inevitably play a part in whether they will be added or not to the collection. Even in the presence of clear guidelines, criteria, or acquisition priorities, the subjective positioning of the archivist/curator will inevitably inform their decision to choose or discard materials. Some estates court controversy: should we accept them, despite, or perhaps precisely because, of their problematic ideological background? At another level, the archivist simply cannot anticipate the foci of research interest in twenty- or fifty-years' time. 'It is not by throwing away problematic material that we do history, but by engaging with it,' we were recently advised. And yet, at which point does this principle justify the allocation of valuable and scarce resources to the archival preservation of ideologically contested items?

Once in the archive, the descriptions of items in an archival inventory are vital for their visibility. According to how they are catalogued, archival materials can later be found and used as evidence in the production of alternative narratives. And yet, whether as part of first-time inventorying or during the critical re-cataloguing of older archival entry, archival descriptions are formulated according to contemporary values, concepts, and words. Whereas the archival item, frozen in time, is subject to its own, often long-superseded, value system. This misalignment needs to be transparently addressed at the level of inventory writing. Just as the historian is inevitably conditioned by their own time in their selection of historical evidence for writing histories, so is the archivist tasked with the writing of itemised descriptions. The use of words and their collateral meanings are subject to historical change, just as history writing depends on its own times and circumstances.

Contemporary historians are highly attuned to the limits of archives. The ways their contents have been curated or, on the contrary, thrown together through chance and (unequal) opportunity, are the subject of much scrutiny. Archives inevitably advance certain narratives over others, usually illustrating and reinforcing hegemonic understandings. According to corrective strategies, their contents must be read against or along the grain.[6] The archive has never been a site of freedom, the repository of raw evidence before being processed into knowledge, where the historian may write new innocent histories. The archive may not be taken at face value, and its contents must certainly be approached with a substantial *grano salis*. This awareness has led to critical analytical strategies informed by intersectionality, multi-disciplinarity, and a sense of social justice. As the Aggregate collective put it, 'it takes political urgency, as well as historical imagination, to redraw the boundaries of an archive.'[7]

The archivists, long presumed accomplices in the writing of biased histories, are acutely aware of this renewed scrutiny. They are researchers themselves, since research is needed to render visible the contents of an archive. Thus, an interesting friction arises: at what point in the selection and processing of archival evidence are new histories rendered possible? Are the new alternative histories the preserve of the critical historian reading the archive against its apocryphal grain? Or are they rendered possible by the informed, deliberate act of providing or correcting descriptions, so as to enable this reading in the first place?

The ubiquity of decolonising the archive comes hot on the heels of another related topic, the absence of subaltern (female, non-western, non-professional) voices in the archive. Not unlike the way Black Lives Matter movement followed from #MeToo, it adduces a new prism through which to address societal inequalities and injustices. However, the topic of decolonising the archive comes attached with two risks. The first obvious one is that of superseding the earlier issue (in this case, the invisibility of subaltern voices) or declaring it settled. Research topicality moves much faster than the production of research. It takes time and patience to write history and correct earlier disparities.

The second risk, more concealed and potentially pernicious, is that archival materials are approached with prejudice because being read against or from current value systems. This, in turn, can lead to ascribing current connotations to past works that were inescapably informed by the historical time of their own production.

A spirited debate arose at gta about the archiving of three slides taken during a US tour in 1957. The slides' frames were handwritten by their author with the inscription 'Savannah, Georgia, colored section'. Although the depicted neighbourhood scenes neutrally, a focusing on architectural and urban qualities, their label agitated the archivist, who brought it up for discussion. Should the inventory description highlight the use of this currently problematic term, thus—potentially—accusing the authors as racist, despite that, based on a wealth of corroborated evidence, they were progressive and socially-minded? Or, if the label is not openly addressed, invite users of the archive to claim a high moral ground by identifying this as a 'blind spot' against whose grain the archive must be read?

Current scholarship has proposed that 'colour' references reinforce racial dichotomies, although the term 'coloured' only became controversial after being denounced in the 1960s by activists of African origin.[8] This might

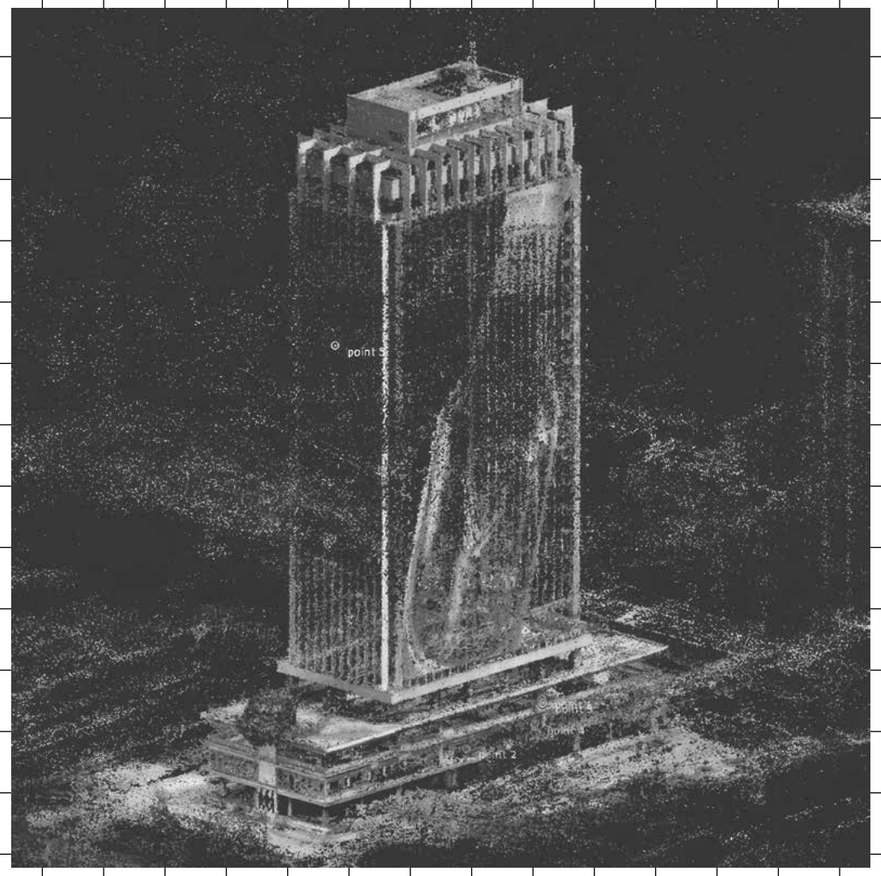
6 See Ranajit Guha, "The prose of counter-insurgency", in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies II* (Oxford University Press, 1983), 1–40; Stoler, Ann Laura. *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton University Press, 2009).; King, Michelle T., *Working With/In the Archives*, in: *Research Methods for History*, eds. Simon Gunn and Lucy Faire (Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 13–29.

7 Daniel M. Abramson, Zeynep Çelik Alexander and Michael Osman. "Introduction. Evidence, Narrative, and Writing Architectural History" in *Aggregate Architectural History Collaborative. Writing Architectural History. Evidence and Narrative in the Twenty-First Century* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2021), 3–14, here 11.

8 See Kalunta-Crumpton, Anita. "The Inclusion of the Term 'Color' in Any Racial Label Is Racist, Is It Not?" *Ethnicities* 20.1 (2020): 115–135, here 128.

clear our unwitting protagonists—who used it in the 1950s—of accusations of latent racism. In turn, this frees the archivist to label the inventory entry in a transparent and deliberate manner, without worrying that their description might be distorting the professional image of its subjects.

This presentation has sought to highlight some of the dilemmas of archival collections in postcolonial contexts. Even in the relatively 'neutral' context of Swiss archives, we are constantly faced with decisions on what to collect, how to describe the collected, how to reframe or disclaim some of its contents. Ultimately, in the assembly of collections and description of archives as in the writing of histories, context is everything. The multiple ambiguities of historical materials must be acknowledged, as much as the researchers' own situated subjectivity. The typologies that emerge in colonial contexts call for a constant contextualising of archival material, to detach it from moral categories, assessments, and prejudices. We should work within the awareness that historians are historically situated—and so are the archives we preserve and the histories we write.



Point cloud image of Independence House, Lagos. Image Source: Omi Collective, 2024.

Abdullah Ogunsetan (OMI Collective, University of Lagos)

In (Dis)Use: Nigerian Modernism in Retrospect

OMI COLLECTIVE

When the architectChuka Ihonor delivers an appraisal of Nigerian modernist buildings at ‘Open House Lagos’ gatherings, a typical student of architecture would easily be dumbfounded.[1] His mention of the presence of the ‘pilotis’ associated with Le Corbusier in the curator’s office of the National Museum in Onikan, Lagos, or the genius of JSK Macgregor’s tropical modernist residence in Apapa, would make them wonder how any of the tall, often public, dilapidating, or oddly renovated modernist buildings which dominate Lagos’ skyline have anything near genius. For the most part, these students are not to blame. The architecture curriculum in Nigerian Universities does not prioritise the study and documentation of these buildings, or the people who built them. Combing through the national archives for information on these buildings is equally cumbersome, as many of the documents in its repository are only physically accessible and are quickly deteriorating. The collapse and demolition of some of these buildings spell doom for Nigeria’s modernist heritage. Therefore, the complete erasure of memories across architecture and culture, presents an urgent need for a new approaches to archiving.

It is on these archival memory lapses, that the creation of Omi Collective is premised. Omi Collective is a group of individuals with an architectural background, who are concerned about the state of postindependence, tropical modernist heritage in Nigeria. The Collective corroborates existing literature works on some of these buildings, with digital procedures like photography, virtual reality and photogrammetry, to provide digital assets, that amplify knowledge of them. These digital assets are distributed through the Collective’s social platforms, to encourage people who have resources on any of these buildings–images, magazines, postcards, videos, et cetera–to share. Fortunately, this has helped mapping out many modernist buildings within the country, whose architects are not known, or generally less spoken about. One such case is that of Chief Augustine Egbor (1924–2011) and Sebestian Isola Kola-Bankole (1928–deceased), who have both passed away. The Collective has been privileged enough to connect with their descendants online, who have been able to provide clarity and additional resources to the group’s work. They–and others–have thereby contributed to the preservation of Nigerian modernist heritage, that many are unacquainted with, for posterity.

1 Chuka Ihonor is a Nigerian architect, who worked at Godwin & Hopwood, one of the foremost modernist architecture offices in West Africa.

THE EMERGENCE OF MODERNIST ARCHITECTURE

The introduction of tropical modernist architecture in Nigeria occurred after the Second World War. It was employed by the colonial government 'to allay the fears of her colonial peoples agitating for freedom from subjugation'.[2] Until independence, it was mainly practised by foreign, private practices. Chief among them were the architect couple, Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew. Other notable practitioners of this style in the colonies include the trio of James Cubitt, John Baker and Kenneth Scott, and the Architects Co-partnership of Leo De Syllas and Michael Grice in association with John Godwin and Alan Vaughan Richards.[3]

Fry and Drew are credited for the advancements of tropical (modernist) architecture in British colonies.[4] Their works across various states in West Africa, particularly Nigeria and Ghana, provided–among others–naturally ventilated spaces, using carved screens with cultural symbolism to the buildings' context. This, along with artworks like mosaics and murals embedded in the buildings' envelope, helped subdue the 'non-place specificity' modernist architecture pieces were generally criticised for.[5] Although the loci of the works of Fry and Drew draw upon response to climate, it is worth noting that they were not the first to make climate-conscious designs in the region. An earlier attempt is noticeable, in the Public Works Department's role in making buildings that aided the prevention of the incessant deaths of white people, who adapted poorly to the climate, for which Nigeria had become notorious. This in part earned Nigeria the reputation of the 'White Man's Grave'.[6]

By the 1960s, when much of the efforts to stem the tides of independence through this architecture would eventually prove to be futile, Nigeria gained full independence in 1960, tropical modernism had permeated the length and breadth of British West Africa.[7] It served as a precedent on which other architecture and planning alliances were built subsequently. And thus, it emerged as the lingua franca of the postindependence built environment of the region.

DECOLONISING IN THE POSTCOLONY

For most of British West Africa, decolonisation–which aimed to indigenise most colonial things–appeared to be the order of the day after independence. Like in Ghana, Nigerians also demanded the same. Omi Collective's research thus far highlights three cases in which decolonisation took place in the Nigerian building industry after independence.

2 Alan Vaughan-Richards and Kunle Akinsemoyin, Building Lagos (Pengrail, 1977), 45.
3 Ibiyemi Salami, "The Architecture of the Public Works Department (PWD) in Nigeria during the Early to Mid Twentieth Century" (PhD diss., University of Liverpool, 2014), 104.
4 Iain Jackson and Jessica Holland, The Architecture of Edwin Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew (Routledge, 2014), 6.
5 Ibid., 6.
6 Max Siollun, What Britain did to Nigeria: A Short History of Conquest and Rule (Hurst, 2021), 16.
7 Jackson and Holland, The Architecture of Fry and Drew, 6.

The Public Works Department

Decolonising tropical modernist architecture, which emerged as the lingua franca of the built environment in Nigeria before independence, initially proved difficult. There was little to no indigenous, professional workforce to support such an initiative. The construction of Nigeria's first University, the University of Ibadan in 1948–also Fry and Drew's earliest and largest institutional commission–provided no respite to this. Architecture was not taught at the institution. Hence, a few Nigerians had to take up architecture education in the United Kingdom.[8] Among them were Onafowokan Michael Olutusen, who returned from the University of Glasgow in 1953 as Nigeria's first architect and served as a town planning officer of the Public Works Department (PWD) in the Old Western region in Ibadan;[9] Egbor Akhuemokhan Augustine who studied architecture in Newcastle and returned to work for the Lagos PWD in 1953; Nwafor Christian Ogbo(n)naya Esq., Sobowale Frederick Babatunde and Jaiyesimi Samuel Oluyemi who all returned from Northern Polytechnic (now University of North London) and also joined the PWD of Lagos between 1959 and 1960; Uku Vivian Thomas, who was educated at Sheffield University and the Architectural Association, and returned to work at the PWD in Ibadan in 1959; and–finally–Odeinde Olufemi Abayomi who had studied at Hull University and returned to the PWD in Ibadan in 1960 as well. Other architects working with private enterprises at the time include Olumuyiwa Oluwole, and the duo of Alex Ifeanyichukwu Ekwueme (Nigeria's Vice President of the Second Republic) and Sebestian Isola Kola-Bankole.[10]

When the clamour for all things to be 'Nigerianised' intensified in the 1960s, the PWD became a victim of animosity by the press for its long-known status as a 'tool of conquest' of the British empire, being nicknamed 'plunder without detection'. It is ironic that despite this animosity, seven of the ten indigenous architects Nigeria had at the time of Independence, worked for PWDs.[11] The suspect 'tool of conquest' the organisation was thought to be, would surreptitiously become a viable tool for the indigenisation of modernism in Nigeria. Well into the 1970s, a significant number of architects registered in the 1970 Gazette of Nigeria worked for PWDs, by then christened the Federal Ministry of Works.[12]

Our Problem is 'How to Spend it'

By the 1970s, after the Nigerian civil war ended, Nigeria was fortunate enough to have her oil revenue more than quadrupled. So much so, that

8 Salami, "Architecture", 325.
9 "Onafowokan Michael Olutusen's vision of Tropical Modernism," accessed on 6th September, 2024 https://www.cca.qc.ca/en/articles/95183/onafowokan-michael-olutusens-vision-of-tropical-modernism
10 Kiley Feickert, from an extended format of her essay "Nigerian Campus Architecture: Augustine Akhuemokhan Egbor and select collaborators," sent to author, July 18, 2024.
11 Salami, "Architecture", 325.
12 Federal Government of Nigeria Official Gazette, No. 40, Vol, 57, July 9, 1970, https://archive.gazettes.africa/archive/ng/1970/ng-government-gazette-dated-1970-07-09-no-40.pdf, 935.

the country's Head of State at the time, General Yakubu Gowon, remarked that Nigeria's problem was not money, but rather 'how to spend it'.[13] This, in addition to General Gowon's indigenisation declaration in July 1972, made a huge impact on the country's construction industry and its indigenous professionals.[14] Grand buildings and large infrastructural developments sprang up across different regions of the country, while various Nigerian architects started private practices in collaboration with architects and planners from Eastern Europe and America, as highlighted by Lukasz Stanek as an extension of the Cold War politics, where influence on the African continent became competitive as well.

The National Arts Theatre and the International Trade Centre in Lagos are some major highlights of these alliances. The National Arts Theatre, an exact replica of the Bulgarian Palace of Culture and Sports, was built by the Bulgarian state-owned Technoexportstroy (TES) as the main venue for the Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) in 1977.[15] It featured a collaboration with Indigenous artists in a way that has arguably never been repeated in Nigeria since. The theatre parades works of artists including Erhabor Emokpae, Agboola Folarin, Isiaka Osunde, Amos Odion, Thomas Airen, Idada Omoragbe, Roland Ogiamien, Moses Osunde and Joseph Agha. Further West of Lagos, the International Trade Centre was built by Energoprojekt, a Yugoslavian construction company.[16]

Another notable collaboration of this period is the partnership of Chief Augustine Egbor and Solel Boneh, called Egboramy: Egbor, Adrichalim, Mehandesim, Yo'atzim (i.e. AMY; meaning architects, engineers, consultants). AMY is a subsidiary of the Israeli company Solel Boneh–the oldest and one of the largest construction and civil engineering companies in British-ruled Palestine in 1921.[17] Together, they planned and built a significant portion of the campus of Obafemi Awolowo University. Chief Egbor was also instrumental in the revision of the architecture curriculum at Ahmadu Bello University in 1966.

The Zaria Art Rebels

Another prominent tool for decolonisation, that is common even within ruins of modernist buildings in Nigeria, is art. While credits have to be given to Jane and Drew, who were proponents of extensively integrating art–to reflect a sense of place–in modernist buildings in the colonies, the existence of the Zaria Art rebels also helped sustain the tradition in the postindependence period.

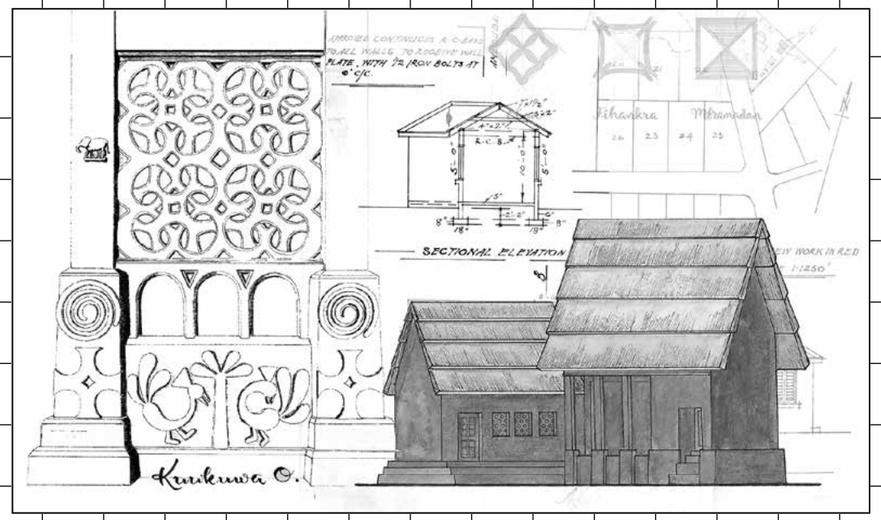
13 Tolu Ogunlesi, "How to spend it," The Cable, https://www.thecable.ng/how-to-spend-it/
14 "Nigeria's 'Indigenization' Policy Under Fire," https://www.nytimes.com/1976/10/30/archives/nigerias-indigenization-policy-under-fire.html?auth=login-google1tap&login=google1tap
15 Lukasz Stanek, Architecture in Global Socialism: Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East in the Cold War (Princeton University Press, 2020), 99.
16 Ibid., 99
17 Kiley Feickert, "Nigerian Campus Architecture: Augustine Akhuemokhan Egbor and Select Collaborators," Imprint 02, https://issuu.com/mitarchitecture/docs/imprint02_pdf, 70

The Zaria Art Society was founded in 1958 by students of the Nigerian Centre for Art, Science and Technology (NCAST; now Ahmadu Bello University).[18] Its founding members Uche Okeke, Yusuf Grillo, Bruce Onobrakpeya, Demas Nwoko, Simeon Okeke and Olu Oguibe, set out to synthesise traditional African art forms with contemporary techniques, a philosophy they termed 'Natural Synthesis'.[19] They contributed in no small numbers to postindependence, modernist architecture and as such were notable collaborators with architects (foreign or indigenous). Other notable artists to tow this line are Jimoh Buraimoh, Erhabor Emokpae and Felix Idubor, whose relief works can be found at the foot of the Independence House.

CONCLUSION

The modernist architecture in Nigeria also tells the story of collaborations between foreign and indigenous professionals and the process of decolonisation. Many are oblivious to these ideas, and the loss of some buildings or the rapid change they have undergone over the years have diminished our ability to know them with time. The decision on whether to stay with or depart from modernism, becomes apparent only when many realise that several modernist buildings that surround us today, were built by indigenous architects, who are not publicly known. Omi Collective is committed to making this known, so professionals and architects-in-training in Nigeria–or elsewhere–today, may learn from and continue to build on the rich legacy of Nigerian modern architecture.

18 "The Zaria Art Society and their Rebellion," accessed on 2nd October 2024 https://ucheokekelegacy.com/news/the-zaria-art-society-and-their-rebellion
19 Ezeluomba, Ndubuisi. "Zaria Art Society," in The Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism, Taylor and Francis, https://review.rem.dev.propagatorgroup.com/articles/zaria-art-society-the.



Diagrams of Southern Ghanaian Architectures between the seventeenth and twentieth century. Drawing by Kuukuwa Manful.

Kuukuwa Manful (Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning, University of Michigan)

Against Colonial Architectural Logic: Reading 'Unformalisation' from Archives of Formalisation

INTRODUCTION

Modernist architecture across the African continent and beyond was deployed both as part of and alongside the colonial apparatus. Architects, planners, and engineers from colonial metropoles aided colonial efforts to control the built environment through *formalisation*, which I define as the processes and systems aimed at regulating, disciplining, and ordering what were perceived as 'uncivilised' and 'unsuitable' African built environments.[1] For example, in mid-twentieth century Ghana, when it was under British colonial rule as the Gold Coast, city engineer Alfred Alcock, and architects such as Jane Drew and Maxwell Fry, undertook projects which purported to modernise and formalise 'native' housing and settlements. Drew and Fry depicted West Africa as an architectural tabula rasa in which they were inventing architecture 'without in any sense copying African detail'.[2] Their projects were undergirded by assumptions of the inferiority of existing indigenous architecture and the desire to create new, improved buildings according to ideas of their racial superiority.[3] Powered by the support of government officials and with funding and freedom to experiment, European architects in colonial Africa had prolific careers which firmly entrenched them in the histories of the countries and regions they operated in.

Much of the dominant historical scholarship on modernist architecture in Ghana—and West Africa more broadly—is critical and nuanced in approach. This rich literature has explored the motivations and political contexts of key modernists,[4] interrogated the underlying biases and assumptions that drove their design approaches,[5] and highlighted the underexplored

1 James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed.* (Yale University Press, 1999); Michel Foucault. *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977–1978*, edited by Michel Senellart, translated by Graham Burchell. (Picador, 2009).
2 Jane Drew's, *Autobiography*, undated, F&D/29/1, RIBA Collections.
3 Jane Drew et al., *Village Housing in the Tropics* (L. Humphries, 1947).
4 Iain Jackson and Jessica Holland, *The Architecture of Edwin Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew: Twentieth Century Architecture, Pioneer Modernism and the Tropics*, (Routledge, 2014); Ola Uduku, "Modernist Architecture and 'the Tropical' in West Africa: The Tropical Architecture Movement in West Africa, 1948–1970", *Habitat International* 30, no. 3 (September 2006): 396–411, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.habitatint.2004.11.001.
5 Hannah Le Roux, 'Tropical Architecture / Building Skin—Articles—Bauhaus Imaginista', *Bauhaus Imaginista*, 2018, https://www.bauhaus-imaginista.org/articles/4359/tropical-architecture-building-skin.

contributions of Africans and African diasporans.[6] Other studies have challenged the claims to newness that proponents of modernism made, evaluated their constructed outputs,[7] and contextualised the movement in international networks beyond the United Kingdom.[8] Through these studies, we understand much about how most of the 'formal' architecture, which is that associated with and approved by the (colonial) state, developed around the modernist movement from the late colonial to early post-colonial period.

Despite this, we still only have a partial picture. Not only of architectural modernism, but also of the much bigger and complex story of architectural modernity across the continent. This essay aims to contribute a pathway to expanding this story through an alternative method of approaching colonial architectural archives in Ghana and in other colonised contexts.

GOING AGAINST COLONIAL ARCHIVAL LOGICS

Since colonial, architectural archives were produced as records of formalisation, formal architectures and other state-ordered activity, studies of modernist architecture in Africa have focused predominantly on those aspects that were legible and acceptable to the colonial state and its attendant institutions. This is partly because records of colonial architectural activity, particularly by Europeans, were abound.[9] The UK National Archives, the RIBA archives, Unilever and the Architectural Association are a few of the organisations located in the United Kingdom alone, which contain massive stores of documents, photographs and architectural drawings, which were created as records of the activities of the (economically, socially and politically) powerful. Additionally, many of the papers and records of influential firms, agencies and architects involved in producing modernist architecture in Ghana, are those of foreign architects involved in official work and the formal sector. Simultaneously, there are many stories of intentional and unintentional losses and destruction of archives of African architects, universities, leaders and firms from these years. This has meant that most scholars of West African modernism rely on predominantly Eurocentric archives, even as they have attempted to write histories that go against and beyond those records of mostly powerful actors.

Thus, colonial archival logics and conditions have shaped the research landscape and outputs of architectural modernism and modernities in Africa. Apart from the focus on formal architectures, there is also disproportionate focus on the European-led or -influenced architectural modernity and modernisms to the detriment of other approaches and modernisms. Recent and upcoming exhibitions on the architecture and architects of 'tropical modernism' are testament to this.[10] Though some of these exhibitions have made efforts to highlight non-white and non-Western architects, the people featured are still part of the formal establishments and are chosen because of their place in the dominant movements. In contrast, very little is known of the other architectural thought, discourse, and production—both within and outside of the formal sector—that occurred in and beyond Ghana in this same period. As discussed previously, this is largely due to the nature of the better preserved and dominant records available to researchers. Another reason concerns the predominant approach of using repositories and sources only as archives of formalisation and the formal, which I will further explain in this essay.

I propose an alternative and additional approach to utilising material contained in dominant archives. One that runs counter to the colonial logic, inherent to their creation, preservation, and consolidation. I aim to read them as archives of both formalisation and what I refer to as *unformalisation*. I conceptualise and define unformalisation as the processes of diminishing, erasing, and excluding indigenous and local African architectural and urban forms.[11] The architectures that are diminished, erased, and excluded are what I term *unformal* architectures. These processes went hand-in-hand with the much more studied processes of formalisation. I position this as conceptually different from informality and informal architectures, which are defined as those that are created without architects,[12] outside of formal systems, and 'transgressing… definitions of architecture'.[13] While informalisation and the resultant informal architectures are conceptualised as somewhat unintentional and almost benign by-products of formalisation, I hold that the unformal products of unformalisation are deliberate targets of erasure by powerful actors. This approach to reading archives beyond the colonial logic is influenced by Christina Sharpe, Ann Stoler and many others, who have made compelling arguments about how to address historical epistemological imbalances and violences.[14]

I use this approach in my analyses of archival material from my Building Early Accra (BEA) project, which has digitised over 30,000 primary archival documents pertaining to architecture and urban governance in colonial

6 Kuukuwa Manful, *Building Identity: Ghanaian Architects and Tropical Modernism* (University of Oxford, 2015); Ola Uduku, 'West African Modernism and Change', in *Time Frames: Conservation Policies for Twentieth-Century Architectural Heritage*, edited by Ugo Carughi and Massimo Visone (Routledge, 2017); George W.K. Intsiful, "In Praise of Pioneer Architects", GhanaWeb, 7 August 2016, https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/features/In-praise-of-pioneer-architects-461011.

7 Viviana d'Auria, "In the Laboratory and in the Field: Hybrid Housing Design for the African City in Late-Colonial and Decolonising Ghana (1945–57)", The Journal of Architecture 19, no. 3 (4 May 2014): 329–56.

8 Łukasz Stanek, Architecture in Global Socialism: Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East in the Cold War (Princeton University Press, 2020).

9 The majority of these archives are held in institutions outside Africa while archives in former colonised African countries are often scattered, endangered, or both.

10 The term 'tropical modernism' while not used by its proponents to describe their work, is used to refer to the modernist architecture that was adapted under colonialism to so-called 'tropical' climates.

11 I use indigenous in the sense of pre-invasion, pre-colonial, traditional architectures that tend to be subject to marginalisation and discrimination.

12 Masood A. Khan, "'Informal' Architecture: An Examination of Some Adaptive Processes in Architectural Traditions" (M.S. Thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1983).

13 Kim Dovey, "Informalising Architecture: The Challenge of Informal Settlements", Architectural Design 83, no. 6 (2013): 83.

14 Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Duke University Press, 2016); Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton University Press, 2009); Grace A. Musila, "Navigating Epistemic Disarticulations", *African Affairs* 116, no. 465 (October 2017): 692–704.2016

Accra so far.[15] Dating from 1904 to 1947, these documents, mainly building permit applications and Accra Town Council records, are among the earliest documentary records of local construction and contact with colonial city planning authorities. They provide some of the richest sources about the formalisation of architecture in the then-Gold Coast. However, in using this archive, I have sought not to approach it in the spirit in which the documents were created—as records of control, modernisation, formalisation, and formal architectures—but also of unformalisation, refusals and disobedience. Through this, I seek out the aspects of the built environment that the colonial apparatus set to diminish and erase, thereby reconstructing stories and highlighting the previously obscured. Rather than taking for granted what institutions of power have presented as worthy of the designation of formal architecture, I challenge the underlying assumptions to seek out what is being excluded.

Using architectural archives against the colonial archival logic in this way, involves first acknowledging the fundamental epistemic limitation of the colonial archives. They can never be complete as sources of our historical knowledge and must be used in tandem with other sources. Including those considered informal. These include oral histories, which are now widely used in the study of African histories, and also stories, rumours, and vitally the so-called informal built environment. There are ample sources of evidence of architectural modernity in African countries, that tend to be overlooked because they do not fit the dominant 'light, minimalist aesthetic' as Ikem Okoye has argued.[16] These include a considerable number of extant architectures produced in the time periods under consideration, which were themselves articulations of modernity, or even responses to modernist styles. I have previously discussed, in the case of Ghana, the work of architects like Daniel Sydney Kpodo-Tay as a form of 'dissenting' modernism and that of Alero Olympio as a form of refusal of the (post-) tropical modernist aesthetic of her time and embrace of the organic architectural forms and natural construction materials, such as earth, which were discouraged under British colonial rule.[17] While Olympio and Kpodo-Tay, despite their dissenting approaches, were within the formal sector, there were other architecture practitioners—such as draughtsmen and builders—working outside the formal sector, who created buildings in distinct, modern styles. Some of which exist to this day.

In my analyses of historical building permits and ongoing work of tracing the names and histories of architects, draughtsmen, builders and designers operating in the then Gold Coast, from the late nineteenth Century to the mid twentieth Century, I have begun to identify individuals such as C.W. Quartey and Aldirisu Cofie.[18] As Drew and Fry were making false claims about the non-existence of architecture in the Gold Coast in the mid-1940s, African architects, draughtsmen, and builders had been designing buildings in the region for centuries and decades into the modern era. Interestingly, the design proposals by Alcock, Drew and Fry for their 'Building Experiment' in Asawasi, Kumasi in 1945, show many similarities in plans, elevations and sections to some of the designs of African architects and draughtsmen submitted as part of building permit applications (digitised through the BEA Project). Yet the former are taken as evidence of modern architecture in Ghana, while the latter—designs by Africans—have been overlooked. Their names have been largely forgotten, because they have been overlooked in architectural histories of the country. Yet their work, along with the work of other builders and draughtsman, helped shape the physical environment. Moreover, they trained others and passed on their knowledge, thus continuing to shape the Ghanaian built environment.

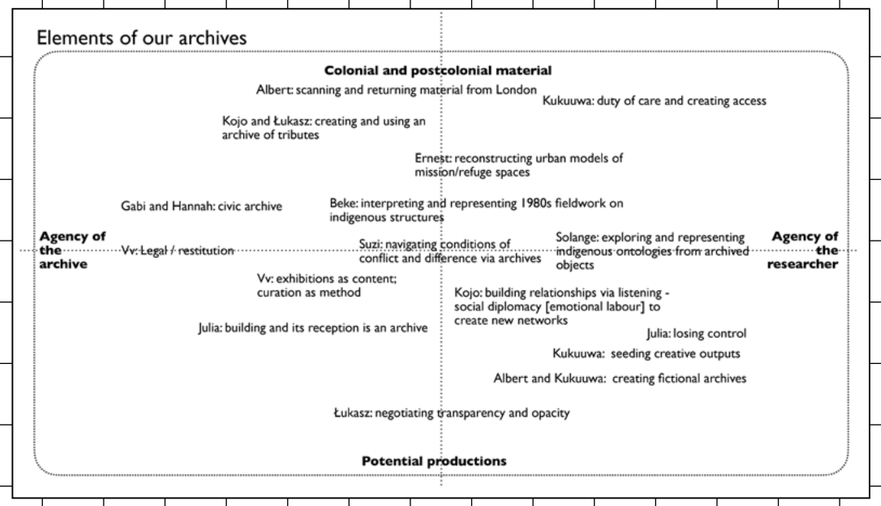
This essay has explored one mode of reading architectural archives against their colonial logics, thus moving towards expanded and expansive architectural histories, which will enrich and extend our knowledge about architectural modernisms and modernities. This approach could help us broaden the pools of sources, evidence, and themes for architectural histories. Not only on the African continent, but elsewhere and around the world. Most importantly, it offers us an opportunity to move beyond prevailing dichotomies of formality and informality, towards a fundamental shift in the way architecture on the African continent is studied, conceptualised, and categorised.

15 The Building Early Accra Project (EAP1161) was funded by the British Libraries Endangered Archives Programme. https://eap.bl.uk/project/EAP1161.

16 Ikem Stanley Okoye, "Where Was Not Modernism?", Canadian Centre for Architecture, accessed 26 August 2024, https://www.cca.qc.ca/en/articles/77238/where-was-not-modernism.

17 Manful, *Building Identity*; Kuukuwa Manful, "Venice Architecture Biennale: How Pioneering Ghanaian Architects Reckoned with Tropical Modernism", *The Conversation*, 17 May 2023, http://theconversation.com/venice-architecture-biennale-how-pioneering-ghanaian-architects-reckoned-with-tropical-modernism-202092.

18 This is a name extracted from a signature on a building permit. I may have incorrectly spelled it due to the stylised nature of the original handwriting.



Elements of Southern archives. Diagram by Hannah le Roux, made during London archival justice meeting, 26 June 2024.

Hannah le Roux (Sheffield University) and Nokubekezela Mchunu (Independent Scholar)

Digging and Processing: Addressing Archival Justice in Global South Research

CHALLENGING EXTRACTION, ADDRESSING EQUITY

Africa, 2021

We are working in what goes for an architectural archive in South Africa, though in reality it is just an open bay off the university library. Today's task is to look for drawings of buildings commissioned for the Witwatersrand gold mines in the early 1900s, scattered amongst very partial collections which have somehow survived despite the absence of any institutional policy of collection since the 1980s. What we do have is a grant from a prestigious Northern foundation: one that is paying for filing cabinets as well as gloves, archiving boxes and interleafs. One of us is paid for this work from the grant, but that contract cannot be more than 23 hours per month—local labour laws—unless it's a permanent post, which it can't be—international grant conditions. We could also pay for scanning, but the digitisation centre is moving buildings and short-staffed, so that needs to wait another year. We will get this all done. We simply do not know when that will be.

Most of the publishing scholars of global architectural history and theory are based in the USA, Europe and the UK. Their work, which is driven by book deadlines and grant windows, however, relies on labour from collaborators in the financially under-resourced contexts in the Majority World that are often the subject of their writing. These conditions are especially unequal in the process of African research. The division of tasks of digging through dusty material or assembling interview subjects, falling to local researchers, and that of western writers in processing material for publication and circulation to largely western audiences unsurprisingly mirrors the injustice in other forms of extractivism. Further, archives carry emotionally powerful content for the subjects on who it often falls to manage them. Modes of processing for publication that marginalise their reactions are common.

Despite the work of artists such as Sammy Baloji to reverse the messages communicated within colonial archives to give testimony of violence, architectural historians have struggled to deeply change practice.[1] As Tilley and Karina have put it, keeping, or opening doors to visiting researchers

1 Sammy Baloji, *Capture,* 2017.

'further exacerbates inherent inequalities within North–South relationships'.[2] As scholars working between these contexts, we use this paper to reflect on such conditions, potentials, and ethical frameworks, that could address archival justice between the Northern and Southern poles of our research.

Archival Justice

When we frame the issue of injustice from a theoretical standpoint, we risk perpetuating inequalities. This is particularly true for archival practitioners in the Global South, whose voices are often underrepresented in academic literature. This isn't just because there are fewer academic publishers in regions like Africa, but also because important archival work is increasingly being done through performance and oral traditions. These approaches highlight the absence of lived, local experiences in traditional archival methods.[3] In 'The Politics of Decolonial Investigations', Walter Mignolo argues for the importance of local and embodied processes in post-custodial archiving. He advocates for a return to fluid, flexible traditions, as opposed to rigid colonial structures, emphasising the need for local agency in post-colonial research.[4] While his approach underscores the value of local experts, decolonial methodologies are still intertwined with Western academic frameworks, which influence how knowledge is created and exchanged globally. It is under these conditions that local scholars and specialists in global humanities must navigate the infrastructural and emotional demands of scholarly work related to archives. Reforming these North-South relations, we feel, is essential for architectural and urban history's claims to contemporary significance, and this task involves both articulation and hard work. Towards this, we have some recent models.[5]

The Canadian Centre for Architecture and Mellon Foundation initiated the 2018–2020 research project, 'Centring Africa: Postcolonial Perspectives on Architecture' to investigate the complex role of architecture in post-independent Sub-Saharan Africa and the mutual influence of decolonisation, neocolonialism, and globalisation.[6] The intention was to bring eight multidisciplinary teams of researchers, mostly from the African diaspora, and their sources into dialogue in ways 'that foreground similar methods and challenges to locating, accessing, reading, and constructing otherwise fugitive archives.'[7]

2 Elizabeth Tilley and Marc Kalina, "'My Flight Arrives at 5 am, Can You Pick Me Up?': The Gatekeeping Burden of the African Academic," Journal of African cultural studies 33, no. 4 (2021), https://doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2021.1884972, https://go.exlibris.link/4F57XTVq. no. 4 (2021)

3 See, amongst others, District Six Museum and Fietas Museum in South Africa, the Low Down Arts Centre in Nairobi, Salima Naji's collaboration with artisans; and oral and aural memory projects by Keleketla! Library.

4 Walter D. Mignolo, *The Politics of Decolonial Investigations*, (Duke University Press eBooks, 2021), https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478002574.

5 See, for instance of others, Rachel Lee et al; Julia Gallagher and Kuukuwa Manful; Łukasz Stanek.

6 Canadian Centre For Architecture, "Centring Africa: Postcolonial Perspectives on Architecture," Canadian Centre for Architecture, accessed September 10, 2024, https://www.cca.qc.ca/en/61282/centring-africa-postcolonial-perspectives-on-architecture.

7 Lubell, Claire, and Rafico Ruiz, eds. *Fugitive Archives: A Sourcebook for Centring Africa in Histories of Architecture* (Canadian Centre for Architecture & Jap Sam Books, 2023).

The project resulted in a sourcebook titled 'Fugitive Archives: A Sourcebook for Centring Africa in Architectural Histories', which posed the question, 'What is an architectural artefact in the African context?'[8] The research followed the traditions of witnessing spatial practices, both canonical and those of its so-called 'other'. The themes of authorship, language and memory broadly summarise these practices. The sourcebook's strength lies in its emphasis on active witnessing in forms of manifestos, media and local folklore as primary artefacts, with all additional efforts aimed at complementing or being at service to it.

Through readers encounter the archives' complex, transnational entanglements and the frustrating gaps in knowledge they contain, revealing an unsettling reality: that even when archives are found and accessed, they often resist full justice. Their contents are shaped by the biases, omissions, and limitations of human record-keeping, reflecting both the failures and achievements of those who created and maintained them.

TWO MEETINGS

Europe, 2024

We sat amongst twenty architectural historians from various institutions over lunch in the basement level café of Athens' National Archaeological Museum to discuss restorative and ethical archive practice. Graduate students, early career academics, and seasoned scholars shared personal perspectives and anecdotes regarding encounters with 'Southern Archives'. We agreed they are under-resourced repositories in our Global South scholarship. Just one floor above everyone was the institutional antithesis of what was being discussed. The museum had expertly curated exhibitions in the extensively staffed halls, which were blasted with cool air to combat the searing mid-June heat. That archive too, however, was missing countless artefacts shipped from Greece to Rome, then London, Berlin, Paris and the United States.

As we joined forces towards creating more just cultures stressing inclusion and ethical engagement within architectural histories research, we convened a short meeting at the European Architectural History Network conference in Athens in June 2024 and a London workshop, co-convened shortly afterwards with Łukasz Stanek and aimed at producing a set of 'Field Notes' from locally based academics who work with Southern partners in writing architectural histories.

These discussions aimed to produce critical and productive conversations on ethics, transfers of praxis, and directions for archival work in the Majority World. In Athens, we simply reached out to speakers on the conference programme whose work had involved some form of archival work either

8 Claire Lubell et al., *Fugitive Archives: a Sourcebook for Centring Africa in Histories of Architecture* (Montréal, Québec, Canada, Prinsenbeek, The Netherlands: Canadian Centre for Architecture; Jap Sam Books, 2023).

done outside of European sites or on Southern sites from there. We were surprised by the number of acceptances, who surfaced a rich set of experiences, aspirations for their own practice, and examples from courses or existing models.

At the London meeting, a cluster of concerns (see: the paper's accompanying image) emerged from these stories that bear further elaboration, including notions of the civic archive, reparative evidence, soft skills, archival conviviality, fabulography, duty of care and slow local reading. Both workshops suggested how attention to research communities, decentering canonic knowledge, and consideration of justice are powerful drivers for practice. Following this preparatory work, we propose here an initial framing of a charter for better practice that will preface the 'Field Notes' and a proposed Interest Group on the project.[9]

WRITING A CHARTER

2026

We imagine future encounters with grant portals, ethics applications, researcher training and collaborators where ethical principles, and equitable resources, are required as a matter of course. Standard statements or charters are annoying; they feel as if they stand between us and the subject of our work. But, we realise once the project is funded and begins to happen in somewhat different ways to earlier ones that these elements help to mediate the transactions involved more ethically and equitably.

Amongst our crowdsourced principles for a charter, we propose:

1. Diversity with Inclusion

   Accessing private collections is a privilege, and the barriers of entry into these intimate spaces include financial and social capital. Towards this, we suggest:

   - Decolonising the boundaries of Northern research grants to allow full transnational partnerships, or Southern partner-led applications;
   - Transparency in reporting on geographical allocation not only of grants, but assets within them;
   - Where this equity is not possible, ways of 'leaving behind' content, equipment and skills should be included, as well as reimbursement to hosts for skills that visitors gained in travel.

2. Redistributing Access

   At the heart of global architectural research lies a troubling division of tasks, wherein local researchers in under-resourced contexts are relegated to labour-intensive work while scholars in the North are credited with intellectual output. This inequitable dynamic reflects broader historical patterns of extraction and exploitation, echoing colonial practices that continue to persist in modern academia. Towards remedying this we could:

   - Map the rise in global histories research grants and empower Southern partners to see access to primary sources as a commodity in an equitable exchange;
   - Use peer review to insert other perspectives into the process of publishing global histories;
   - Give due respect, time and resources to tasks that fall on local archivists and researchers;
   - Document and acknowledge historically colonial forms of (knowledge) extraction.

3. Acknowledging Limits
   (i.e. what minority world research should not take for granted)

   Western researchers often generally assume global accessibility. We recommend questioning this and proposing instead respect for boundaries, secrets and unknowable things in other places:

   - The assumed visibility of all places;
   - The reliability of family-owned archivesas objective, and the importance of them in assigning social and cultural capital in places without institutionalised markers of status;[10]
   - How translated material inevitably loses meaning.

4. Mitigating Harm

   The emotional weight involved in archive work, particularly those rooted in colonial histories, is often overlooked in architectural research. They are sites of complex emotions and trauma that local scholars and custodians often have to engage with or be mediators for, without standardised frameworks to address this dearth of sensitive practice. This neglect to acknowledge and provide for all concerned marginalises those directly affected by the emotional legacy, but also perpetuates an extractive approach to research that minimises or disregards the local scholars' emotional and ethical concerns.

9 Interest Groups are networks of people with common interests and a core mission within the European Architectural History Network that reflect developing interests in the discipline.

10 In the absence of trustworthy institutions, our experience is that individuals and their families or close friends tend to hold onto archival collections and might draw on them for publications.

CONCLUSION

Towards a draft charter suggested here, we propose a strategy of further tracing Southern networking and assets. This will follow on the diagrams evolved during and following the two workshops in Athens and London. In contrast to the formal ordering devices that well-funded archives reflect in their inventories and finding aids, this form of notation more closely reflects the labours of travel, introductions, friendships, favours, and care that take place in our work of access. We propose a third iteration of these diagrams in the course of this workshop through a mapping of archives and their access as mentioned here. This visualisation produces an evolving, and visually provisional document.

We hope that participation in such images will evolve towards chartered commitments to ethical research methods at several levels, such as personal codes of conduct, journal policies, and teaching tools in architectural research education. By emphasising the existence of a dynamic but informal set of supportive relations and loose associations, we challenge research institutions, grantmakers, and individual researchers to develop ethical frameworks that prioritise care, reciprocity, and the voices of local partners. This works towards establishing a more equitable and just global scholarly community in which knowledge production is not only inclusive but also ethical.

Appendix

Photograph of a spread in Rolando Vázquez' book 'Vistas of Modernity: Decolonial Aesthesis and the end of the Contemporary.' Image source: Mondriaanfonds.

Keynote: In Conversation with Rolando Vázquez Melken

> 'What happens in the museum is the constitution of a normative subject. A public that belongs to the cultural archive of whiteness attends the museum in order to acquire the power and entitlement of the normative subject.'
> —Rolando Vázquez interviewed by Rosa Wevers, 2019

Rolando Vázquez has engaged with numerous cultural and academic institutions—in the Netherlands and beyond—regarding decoloniality. Notably, he served as advisor to the Wereldmuseum Amsterdam, the Netherlands' foremost ethnographic museum formerly known as Tropenmuseum [Museum of the Tropics], when the institution was reinstalling its permanent collection exhibitions, and has co-organised the Maria Lugones Decolonial Summer School with Walter D. Mignolo for more than a decade. This year he was appointed Professor of Post/Decolonial Theories and Literatures, with a focus on the Global South. His work aims to bring into dialogue the European critique of modernity with Latin American and Caribbean decolonial thinking. Rethinking the canon, whether in a museum, a dance company, or a university, is an inherent part to what Vázquez does with these organisations and his students at the University of Amsterdam.

To conclude the eleventh Jaap Bakema Study Centre Conference *Staying with Modernity? (Dis)Entangling Coloniality and Architecture*, Rolando Vázquez joins us for a conversation. Following two days of speaking and thinking about (de)coloniality in our practice as architects, artists, designers and researchers, and a collective visit to the exhibition 'Built Homecoming': *The House of Aldo and Hannie van Eyck*, this is a moment to collectively reflect. Where are we standing now? How can we move forward? In an open dialogue with Vázquez, we can address some of our key findings and concerns.

Photograph of a house on Java, no date. From the archive of H.P. Berlage.
Image Source: Collection Nieuwe Instituut

Hetty Berens and Setareh Noorani (Nieuwe Instituut)

Working with the Dutch National Architecture Collection

The National Collection for Architecture and Urban Planning—held by Nieuwe Instituut—gives a unique insight into a hundred and thirty years of Dutch architecture and urbanism. Consisting of over seven hundred archives and collections of Dutch architects, urban planners, professional associations and educational institutions, the collection comprises some four million documents and counts as one of the largest architecture related collections in the world. In addition to museum quality drawings, this collection includes sketches, preliminary designs, working drawings, business and personal correspondence, photographs, models, posters, press clippings and published articles. In its width and depth, the collection gives a unique insight into the conception and realisation of much of the Dutch built environment, and way beyond.

Also included in this state collection, are holdings regarding the Netherlands' colonial history. With extensive colonies in—among others—regions now known as Indonesia, Suriname and South Africa, the country's outsized influence was (and continues to be) felt in places across the world. Naturally, numerous photographs, drawings, maps, letters, and other types of documents describing Dutch (ex)colonial architecture legacies—both within the Netherlands and abroad—have entered Nieuwe Instituut's collection. Hendrik Petrus Berlage's collection for example, notably include materials related to his travels in Indonesia. Likewise, such archives as those of Henri Maclaine Pont, Albert Frederik Aalbers, Bwan Tjie Liem, and Sonneveld House—the Museum House also under Nieuwe Instituut's supervision—are, in various ways, intimately connected to Dutch coloniality.

Nieuwe Instituut has been dedicated to critically assessing its holdings, and—through different projects and initiatives—aims to explore possibilities for alternative architectural, heritage and archival practice. The collection, and the way it is handled, should reflect a society that is constantly changing. Most recently, in the 'Arus Balik—Shifting Currents' programme, the past, present and future of the designer heritage shared by Indonesia, the Netherlands and the Indonesian diaspora has been explored. In that spirit, this special session, under the careful guidance of Hetty Berens and Setareh Noorani, explores some of the archival pieces in the Dutch National Collection central to that specific shared history, and others.

Photograph of Alison's Room, an extended reality archive. Installation by Paula Strunden.
Photographed by Johannes Schwartz.

Exhibitions on View: Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment

THE VIRTUAL ARCHITECTURE MUSEUM
Zuid Serre, Faculty of Architecture

The digital turn has created a new reality in the fields of design, research and knowledge dissemination. In the design studio 'The Virtual Architecture Museum' at Delft University of Technology, students have collectively envisioned the Architecture Museum of the future, exploring the intersections of the virtual and the real; the physical and the digital. The studio started from the architecture archives of Nieuwe Instituut as the discipline's collective memory. Reactivating historical design knowledge then helped set the stage for the design assignment for a Virtual Architecture Museum: a mixed-reality environment that combines plan analysis, narrative storytelling, and speculative design. The first phase consisted of case-study analysis. Students examined archival documents, drawings and texts, to create interactive Virtual Reality narratives. Then, they designed the pavilions–placed on the Lijnbaan shopping street–that compose a physical museum at the very centre of Rotterdam. These individual structures act as entry portals to envisioned virtual narratives and connect with the new museum. The end result was a collective design for a Virtual Architecture Museum, in which the city itself – connected in the realm of digital technologies–becomes the museum. In this exhibition the results of the studio, including pavilions models, films of the narratives and a curated selection of archival materials and storyboards are on display. The installation also includes a VR station, where visitors can wear a headset to immerse themselves in the Virtual Museum.

The studio was organised by the Architecture Archives of the Future group and the VR Lab at the Faculty of Architecture of Delft University, in collaboration with Nieuwe Instituut.

Instructors: Dirk van den Heuvel, Alejandro Campos, Stefan van der Spek and Hans Hoogenboom
Students: Nikoletta Kyprianou, Katarzyna Prokopiuk, Shanice Soeroredjo, Anan Tian, Ziyue Yu and Shuyu Zhang
Invited Guests: Aleksandra Belitskaya, Eytan Mann and Paula Strunden

Photograph of a housing system of mobile modular structures made from bamboo; Khudi Bari.
Photographed by Asif Salman.

MARINA TABASSUM: BUILDING WITH THE DELTA
Oost Serre, Faculty of Architecture

The exhibition Marina Tabassum: Building with the Delta explores the work of architect Marina Tabassum, whose practice is deeply rooted in the social and environmental realities of Bangladesh. Located at the delta of the Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers, Bangladesh is a country where architecture mirrors a constantly shifting landscape. This exhibition presents some of the key projects Tabassum has developed since 1995. These include symbolic national works, such as the Independence Monument in Dhaka, alongside socially impactful designs, such as the modular low-cost housing systems for communities threatened by shifting and rising water levels.

Building with the Delta not only showcases Marina Tabassum's significant contributions to architecture but also brings a message of resilience and hope from Bangladesh, illustrating how architecture can respond to both environmental and social challenges. The exhibition offers a window into intellectual and cultural vibrancy of Bangladesh, shaped by the country's waterscapes and the lives they sustain.

Exhibition curated by BK Public Programs, Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment, Delft University of Technology. BK Public programs is an initiative led by Dean Dick van Gameren.
Curator of Public Programs: Javier Arpa Fernández
Exhibition previously organised by Architekturmuseum der TUM, Munich (Germany) and MAC/CCB, Lisbon (Portugal)

Photos of the Built Homecoming display in the Research Centre. Photographed by Aad Hoogendoorn.

Exhibitions on View: Nieuwe Instituut

“BUILT HOMECOMING”: THE HOUSE OF ALDO AND HANNIE VAN EYCK Research Centre

Following the end of World War II, architectural discourses experienced a rapid anthropologisation in response to anti-colonial struggles and developments of the notion of culture. The new generation of architects aspired to go beyond functionalist paradigms, to conceive architecture as a socio-spatial construct shaped by cultural specificity. Their interactions with anthropology however went beyond literary references and design proposals. Influenced by their extensive travels, postwar European architects showed interest in non-Western material culture, paralleled by intense ethnographic encounters.

‘Built Homecoming’ presents the house of Dutch architects Aldo and Hannie van Eyck as a memory space where their engagement with art and world cultures was reified, illustrating the intellectual and cultural transformations that were occurring within modern architecture. Their House-Collection appears today not only as a source of inspiration and a tool for cross-cultural understanding, but a site of unresolved colonial entanglements.

The exhibition is structured through a series of eight vitrines that capture different corners of the house and the objects that populate these places, quite literally material gatherings of things. Through an arrangement of selected films, interior images, archival material, and artefacts from their home archive, the exhibition invites visitors to rediscover their work and ideas, while engaging with the complexities and implications of their approach to architecture and culture, particularly in relation to notions of Westernness and Eurocentricity. The choice of vitrines is crucial in this respect. Vitrines are a classic means of display, but they are also highly ambiguous: paradoxically, they are instruments of isolation and objectification, even as they provide protection and a temporary home for the selected materials. They regulate access and visibility, control the visitor’s gaze and frame the interpretation of the objects, ultimately shaping the narratives that surround them. The exhibition aims to critically rethink this framing in order to reverse the objectifying gaze and allow for the relativity and reciprocity advocated by the Van Eycks.

Curators: Alejandro Campos Uribe and Dirk van den Heuvel
Design: Olivier Goethals and Line Arngaard
Production: Christie Bakker
Excecution: Tjerk Fennema, Bouwko Landstra, Joost de Munk, Stefan Prins, Bart Smits, Koen de Vries
Collections manager: Emily Wijns
Special thanks to Tess van Eyck, and Julyan Wickham who passed away during the preparations of the exhibition.

‘Built-Homecoming’ is a co-production by Nieuwe Instituut with the Department of Architecture, Delft University of Technology. It has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 895384.

Photograph of the GUD Instituut Living Room on the Deck. Photographed by Aad Hoogendoorn.

NEW PLANTER'S CHAIR
Gallery 2

As part of the long-term exhibition 'Dutch, More or Less. Contemporary Architecture, Design, and Digital Culture' designers Yassine Ben Abdallah and Mileno Guillorel have been commissioned to create a special piece. For a limited time only, their contemporary take on the Planter's Chair will be on show in Gallery 2, along a wide range of Dutch Design examples. Iconic works by such architects and designers as OMA and Hella Jongerius, are countered with later and contemporary designs, including the new Planter's Chair by Ben Abdallah and Guillorel. 'Dutch, More or Less' aims to explore what Dutchness in design since the 1990s means.

The New Planter's Chair is designed by Ben Abdallah and Mileno Guillorel and is temporarily on display in the 'Dutch, More or Less exhibition'. A roster of contemporary designers is enlisted to design projects to feature in a specially allocated part of the show.

GUD INSTITUUT LIVING ROOM
Deck

The Deck has been transformed into the 'GUD Instituut Living Room'. Designed to resemble an Indonesian 'ruang tamu' or living room for the duration of the 'Arus Balik–Shifting Currents' programme. During this time, the deck serves as its central base: a meeting place and melting pot. The living room is an initiative from the Indonesian organisation Gudskul and Nieuwe Instituut. Showcasing artworks from earlier projects, including 'Resituating Colonial Archives' and collaborative living room-making workshops with Gudskul, the space is meant to elicit narratives of history and memory through real-life experience and social interaction.

GUD Instituut Living Room is a collaborative project between Gudskul and Nieuwe Instituut, within the larger Arus Balik–Shifting Currents programme.
From this September, Nieuwe Instituut, Museum Het Schip and Gudskul present the Arus Balik – Shifting Currents programme. Supported by DutchCulture, the Prince Claus Fund, the Marinus Plantema Foundation, Museum Arsitektur Indonesia, Berlage di Nusantara and others, this initiative aims to bring together architecture and design networks that link the regions and their diasporas, recognising architecture and design as material witnesses to colonial histories and pathways to possible shared presents. How can we rearticulate design legacies between Indonesia and the Netherlands and investigate future pathways?

Biographies

ABDULLAH OGUNSETAN is A3–Archnet's 2020 prize-winning applicant for writing about African architecture. Since receiving this award, he has dedicated himself to collecting metadata on Nigeria's built environment that has hitherto been under-documented, inaccessible or non-digitised. He continues these vital efforts as a researcher with Omi Collective (an awardee of Goethe Institut Support and Connect Grant, 2024) by documenting and preserving modernist, post-colonial buildings, through digital techniques, including photography, photogrammetry, and virtual reality, to create virtual replicas of these structures that facilitate detailed analysis and accessibility. This innovative approach not only aids in preservation but also promotes awareness and appreciation of Nigeria's architectural heritage, contributing to cultural tourism and education. Abdullah holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Architecture from the University of Lagos and is currently enrolled in the Master's of Environmental Design in Architecture programme at the same institution.

ABRAHAM BRADFIELD is a non-Indigenous researcher at the University of Sydney. He is author of 'Aboriginal Art and Australian Racial Hegemony: Decolonising Consciousness' (Routledge, 2023). His work is grounded in anthropology, social sciences, and critical indigenous studies. Abraham applies a cross and transdisciplinary approach to his research to explore themes relating to colonisation, identity, and the intercultural. He remains committed to developing and implementing morally responsible research that challenges colonial power structures and encourages new habits of thought and praxis.

ALEJANDRO CAMPOS URIBE is a Lecturer and Researcher at the Department of Architecture, TU Delft, specialising in postwar Modern Architecture and the colonial dynamics behind its universalising claims. Between 2021–2023, he worked as a Marie Sklodowska-Curie Individual Fellow at TU Delft and Research Associate at the Research Center for Material Culture (Netherlands), where he developed the EU-funded research project 'Multiculturalism in the work of Aldo and Hannie van Eyck'. In 2022, he organised the seminar 'From Multicultural to Pluriversal. Rethinking Universalist Notions in Modern Architecture' at Leiden Volkenkunde (Ethnographic Museum), and he was also awarded the SAH Opler Membership Grant for Emerging Scholars. He has participated in the summer school 'Learning to Unlearn Decolonially: Disobeying, Delinking and Relinking' by University College Utrecht.

ALICAN TAYLAN is an independent architect, engineer, and PhD student in the History of Architecture and Urban Development at Cornell University, where he studies nineteenth-century environmental and colonial history. Recently, he curated 'Strategic Landforms; (2024), an exhibition about military architectural production in French Senegal over the nineteenth century, questioning the role of colonial

infrastructure in modernization processes in West Africa. Between 2018–2022, Taylan was a visiting assistant professor at Pratt Institute's graduate architecture program. He contributed to various exhibitions, including co-curating 'Confronting Carbon Form' (2023), first shown at The Cooper Union, which explored innovative disciplinary approaches to addressing environmental concerns in architecture. He was a co-curator of the exhibition 'Aesthetics of Prosthetics' (2019) at Pratt Institute. He contributed to the 2018 Turkish pavilion at the Venice Biennale. His work was supported by grants from institutions including the Architectural League, Graham Foundation, and New York State Council on the Arts.

ALISTAIR KEFFORD is University Lecturer in History and Urban Studies at Leiden University, where he is also Programme Chair of the Urban Studies BA. His current research into the history of urban real estate development has featured in high-profile journals such as 'Past & Present and Urban Studies'. His first book, 'The Life and Death of the Shopping City: Public Planning and Private Redevelopment in Britain since 1945', was published by Cambridge University Press in 2022.

ANNA KINTSURASHVILI is a Tbilisi-born, Rotterdam-based architect and researcher working at the intersection of landscape and built environments. Her research explores how socio-political and post-colonial transitions, intertwined with public memory, influence the preservation of modernist heritage. Her earlier work focussed on Soviet modernist neighbourhoods in Lithuania and Georgia, analysing post-Soviet transitions and opportunities for transformation. She has lectured on this topic at the Tbilisi City Assembly and the first Tbilisi Architecture Biennial, and co-authored an essay for the Tbilisi Architectural Guide (2023). In 2024, Anna co-authored 'Weather is Nice, Let's Panic!', a three-part project for the Tbilisi Architecture Biennial examining the ecological impact of weather modification. Alongside her research, Anna practices landscape architecture, focusing on revitalization projects that integrate her research into design. She holds a multidisciplinary MSc in Architecture from Aalto University, where her thesis 'Traversing Modernist Memory' investigated heritage values and proposed a preservation plan for the Uganda National Cultural Centre and Theatre.

AZHIEMI IQBAL is an architecture and urban design student from Indonesia currently pursuing his master's degree at Umeå School of Architecture on a Swedish Institute Scholarship. His academic interests centre around the intersection of modernity, sociology and architecture, particularly within the context of sustainability. Iqbal has been deeply involved in research projects examining the architectural landscape of Dnipro-Ukraine, employing the Build Back Better strategy. In his capacity as one of Aceh's Tourism Ambassadors (since 2012), he has been involved in community development, specifically focussed on preserving tangible cultures. His experience in practice includes a role as Technical Assistant Architect at the Transportation Office of Aceh, where he contributed to planning and designing local ports, developing public infrastructures, and formulating construction policies. Azhiemi is committed to advancing sustainable urban development and innovative architectural solutions, with respect for and informed by historical architecture.

CANSU CURGEN-GURPINAR (FHEA, PhD, MSc, BSc), is a Lecturer in Architecture, Loughborough University. Her research interests include the economy-politics of design; daily life studies and design standards; and theory and criticism of modern architecture. Some of her recent works are 'The Ambiguous Standards Institute's' solo exhibition, held at the Art Institute of Chicago, and her editorial and associate-curatorial roles in the 'The Shift | Vardiya' project for the Pavilion of Turkey at the 16th Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia.

COLM MAC AOIDH is a Brussels-based transdisciplinary practitioner, researcher and writer working across design, communication, architecture and urbanism. He studied Visual Communication Design at TU Dublin, followed by Architecture at London Metropolitan University and Sint-Lucas KU Leuven. He has worked with architectural practices in London and Ghent and collaborated with the team of the Brussels Bouwmeester Maitre Architecte on the 'Horizon 2020 Urban Maestro' project, which explored and encouraged innovation in urban design governance. He is currently a PhD researcher at Hasselt University, investigating transdisciplinary practices of adaptive reuse through the platform Adapt, Reuse. Exploring ways to engage with and revalue what already exists, from literature to architecture, his research embraces a longue durée understanding of praxis as an ongoing and collaborative work in progress.

DORIAN BIANCO is a PhD candidate in History of Architecture at the Centre André Chastel, Sorbonne Université. His dissertation focuses on the 'dense-low homes' movement in Danish community planning and its contribution to neighbourhood design in postwar Denmark. Recently, he has expanded his research to examine North-South architectural and urban model transfers in Danish architecture. Dorian Bianco has been a guest researcher at the Danish Center for Urban History at Aarhus University (2020) and at the Landscape Architecture and Planning department of the University of Copenhagen (2021). He co-organised the colloquium 'Planning as a Welfare Project' with Jean-Baptiste Minnaert and he is currently editing the proceedings. Additionally, he will soon publish the chapter 'A Danish Kasbah? The Mediterranean-Islamic Homes and Town Centres as Models of Danish Dense-Low Housing (1950s-1980s)' in the anthology Modelling Social Housing edited by the Research Center for Social Urban Modelling (National Museum of Denmark).

DIRK VAN DEN HEUVEL is an Associate Professor with the Department of Architecture at TU Delft and the head and co-founder of the Jaap Bakema Study Centre, a collaboration between TU Delft and Nieuwe Instituut. His expertise is in modern architecture, welfare state policies, housing and planning, and their related fields of cultural studies and discourse analysis with a special interest in archives and exhibitions. Van den Heuvel is in charge of

the Architecture Archives of the Future group, which positions itself at the intersections of advanced architectural design and research, history and theory, archival studies and museology. The group aims to develop innovative methods of architectural knowledge production based on the new opportunities presented by digital technologies. Van den Heuvel was previously a visiting scholar at Monash University, received the Richard Rogers Fellowship from Harvard GSD and was the curator of the Dutch Pavilion for the 2014 Venice Biennale.

EHSSAN HANIF is a PhD student in the History of Architecture and Urban Development (HAUD) programme at Cornell University. His research critically examines the intersections of Petro-architecture and its relationship to modernity in Iran. Before coming to Cornell University, he worked as an independent researcher and translator. His most recent publication is a book review of Pier Vittorio Aureli's 'Architecture and Abstraction', published in Khōrein: Journal for Architecture and Philosophy.

ELENA MARTÍNEZ MILLANA is a Margarita Salas Postdoctoral Fellow funded by the European Union's Next Generation programme (2022–24), based at both the Delft University of Technology (TU Delft) and the Technical University of Madrid (UPM). Martínez-Millana holds a Master's and Doctorate in Advanced Architectural Projects (UPM), for which she obtained an Outstanding Cum Laude with the distinction of International Doctorate. Her doctoral thesis, 'Domesticity Behind Bars', was recognised with the Extraordinary Doctorate Award (UPM, 2022) and the Honourable Mention Award from the Official College of Architects (COAM, 2023). Her specialisation focuses on the history of collective living environments for solo dwellers, examining the spatial arrangements that shape their ways of living. She is a member of the research groups Collective Housing (UPM) and Architecture Archives of Future (TU Delft), and a research associate of the Jaap Bakema Study Centre at the Nieuwe Instituut, where she works drawing on its architecture archives.

ELIZABETH THOMAS is a second-year Design PhD candidate at the Indian Institute of Technology, Hyderabad, India. She is presently researching various cases of architecture that have appeared in the courtroom across India, in the quest for emergent narratives and discourses. Her areas of interest mainly lie in the domain of urban studies, architectural ethnography and socio-cultural dimensions of built spaces.

ESTHER GRAMSBERGEN graduated in architecture from the TU Delft's Faculty of Architecture in 1989. She has worked for various architectural firms, including Karelse van der Meer Architects and the ArchitectenCie. She is an assistant professor in architectural design at the TU Delft's Faculty of Architecture since 1999 and editor of OverHolland since 2009. Currently, she is the Coordinator of the Master Track of Architecture at the TU Delft. In 2014, she obtained her PhD in Delft, with a dissertation 'Kwartiermakers in Amsterdam. Ruimtelijke Transformatie onder Invloed van Stedelijke Instellingen, 1580–1880' [Quartermasters in Amsterdam. Spatial Transformation under the Influence of Urban Institutions, 1580–1880], a trade edition of which was published by Vantilt publishers. Continuing along this line, her current research focuses on the role of urban institutions, such as universities, in more recent transformations of Dutch cities. In 2020, she initiated with Ayşen Savaş and Yağız Söylev the Campus Utopias programme.

EYTAN MANN is an architect, computational designer, and Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment of TU Delft, part of the Architecture Archives of the Future research group. His work examines modes of transmedial historiography by mixing archival materials with digital modelling. In his research projects, he leverages computation to augment sites and archives, and designs new interfaces with architectural history. Through design research, Eytan seeks to rethink epistemic gaps between the physical and virtual, past and present, and between the object and subject. His research focuses on conflicted built heritage sites in Israel-Palestine and exposes multiple historical narratives. Eytan holds an S.MarchS degree from MIT School of Architecture and a PhD in Architecture from the Technion Faculty of Architecture and Town Planning.

FATMA TANIŞ is a postdoctoral researcher in the Architecture Department at TU Delft and research associate at the Nieuwe Instituut. Previously, Tanış pursued architectural studies in İstanbul, Stuttgart, Parma, Rome, and Hamburg while also studying Business Administration. In her doctoral project, she combined her personal interest in literary writing with her interdisciplinary background to explore İzmir from a cross-cultural perspective and earned a PhD degree from TU Delft with her dissertation 'Urban Scenes of a Port City (2022)'. Her other publications include a themed issue 'Narratives #1 Eastern Mediterranean and Atlantic European Cities (2021)'; 'Spatial Stories of İzmir (2020)'; 'Space, Representation, and Practice in the Formation of İzmir during the Long Nineteenth Century (2020)'. By weaving the threads of her experiences and scholarly interests, she is currently working on two parallel research projects 'The Histories of TU Delft's Architecture Department' and 'The Post Box: A Correspondence Network by Jaap Bakema'.

GENEVIEVE MURRAY is a Lecturer in Architecture at the University of Sydney whose research focuses on the intersection of settler and Indigenous world views in the built-environment. As co-founder of Future Method Studio with Joel Sherwood-Spring (Wiradjuri), Murray brings a unique perspective to the exploration of architectural discourse and practice. Her current Doctoral research investigates innovations in the planning system, namely the Connecting with Country Framework and Aboriginal Land SEPP from a reparative and distributive perspective.

HANNAH LE ROUX is an architect, educator and theorist. She holds a permanent appointment in the School of Architecture and Landscape at Sheffield University and a visiting Associate Professorship at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. She was Guest Professor in the gta, the

Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture at ETH Zürich from September 2022 to July 2023 and a Senior Fellow at the Collegium Helveticum in 2023. Her academic work revisits the modernist project in architecture, 1945–1990. Her grounded research has considered how its transformation through the agency of Africa presents a conceptual model for design and lived modernism. It takes the modes of design research, curricular innovation, and writing, based on site visits and archival sources. Her current and connected research projects are a transdisciplinary study of post-extractivist landscapes, the building material choices of nations of the Non-Aligned Movement, and relations between technical knowledge and colonialism in architectural practice.

HETTY BERENS is an architectural historian holding a PhD from the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. As Senior Conservator at Nieuwe Instituut, she is responsible for safeguarding the existing National Collection for Dutch Architecture and Urban Planning, overseeing new acquisitions, heading research of the institute's holdings, and preserving historic house museum Huis Sonneveld. Additionally, Berens curated such exhibitions as 'Architecture and Interior: The Desire for Style' and published on the way hygiene has made modern homes in the Netherlands healthier. Hetty Berens is currently a board member of the Iconic Houses Foundation and also served as a board member of the Research School for Art History (OSK).

IRINA DAVIDOVICI is an architect and historian and the director of the gta Archive at ETH Zurich. Since the Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture (gta) was founded at ETH Zurich in 1967, the gta Archive has been collecting and archiving original documents on architecture, urbanism, civil engineering, design and landscape design from the mid-19th century to the present. Davidovici's research focuses on housing studies and Swiss architecture. She is the author of 'Forms of Practice. German-Swiss Architecture 1980–2000' (gta Verlag 2012 and 2018) and 'The Autonomy of Theory: Ticino Architecture and Its Critical Reception' (gta Verlag 2024). Her book 'Common Grounds: Comparative Studies of Early Housing Estates' will be published in 2025.

JACOB MEYERS works at the intersection of architectural conservation, research, and advocacy, with a focus on modernism in Singapore. His interests lie in Singaporean architectural history, critical heritage, and the political economy of the built environment. As an Architectural Conservation Consultant at Studio Lapis, a conservation and research practice based in Singapore, Jacob has been involved in the conservation and adaptive reuse of significant examples of post-war Singaporean modernism, including Golden Mile Complex (Design Partnership, 1973) and the OCBC Centre (I.M. Pei, 1976). As an active member of Docomomo Singapore, he contributes to modernist conservation advocacy through published articles, workshops, and government consultation panels. Meyers graduated from the Bartlett School of Architecture, where he was awarded the Trevor Sprott Prize for Architectural History & Theory and DesignSingapore Scholarship. He is currently an MSc Architecture student at TU Delft and recipient of the Justus & Louise van Effen Excellence Scholarship.

JENNIFER BARRETT is a descendent of the Dunghutti people of the mid-North coast of New South Wales. She is a professor of Museum Studies and Pro Vice-Chancellor, Indigenous (Academic) since 2021 at the University of Sydney. She is the author of 'Museums and the Public Sphere' (Wiley Blackwell, 2012); Australian Artists and the Contemporary Museum (Routledge, 2016) and 'Museums, Human Rights, and Universalism Reconsidered' (Wiley and Sons, 2015). She co-edited 'The Holocaust and Human Rights Transnational Perspectives on Contemporary Memorial Museums' (University of Pennsylvania Press Philadelphia 2024).

KENNY CUPERS co-founded and leads the Critical Urbanisms program at the University of Basel. He is committed to the development of the architectural and urban humanities through collaborative pedagogy and engaged research. Grounded in primary research, his scholarship analyses spaces and landscapes in order to answer questions about power and historical change. His book publications include 'The Earth that Modernism Built: Empire and the Rise of Planetary Design', 'What is Critical Urbanism?', 'Coloniality of Infrastructure', 'The Social Project: Housing Postwar France, Architecture and Neoliberalism from the 1960s to the Present', 'Use Matters: An Alternative History of Architecture, Spaces of Uncertainty' and 'Spaces of Uncertainty: Berlin Revisited'.

KUUKUWA MANFUL (PhD) is a trained architect and researcher who creates, studies, teaches, and documents the history, theories, and politics of architecture in Africa. She is an Assistant Professor of Architecture at the Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning, University of Michigan. She curates Adansisɛm, a Ghanaian architecture documentation collective; runs Sociarchi, an architecture non-profit; and is president of Docomomo Accra. Her design and research have been exhibited at the Brunei Gallery in London and featured in BBC News, Citi Newsroom, and Off To Magazine. Her academic publications, creative writing, and public scholarship include a co-edited book titled 'Building African Futures' and have appeared in African Affairs, Al Jazeera, Curator: The Museum Journal, and Tampered Press. Her current projects include a book about 'The Architecture of Education in Ghana' and a study on the 'History of the Formalisation and Unformalisation of the Architecture Profession in Ghana'.

LABIB HOSSAIN is finalising his PhD in the History of Architecture and Urban Development programme at Cornell University and has his defense scheduled for November 2024. Hossain also joined the Department of Architecture and Interior design at Miami University as an assistant professor. His dissertation explores the discourse of 'contained waters' in the making of 'dry' and modern Dhaka and how it emerged through a series of colonial practices, interventions,

and interactions. Hossain's other research interests include land-water separation in colonial Bengal, archival practices in the dynamic landscape, and representation of water in South Asia. Before his time at Cornell, Hossain graduated from the University of Pennsylvania. Hossain has taught seminar courses at Cornell University and the Pratt Institute, and lectured at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology.

LEEN KATRIB is an Assistant Professor of Architecture at the University of Kentucky. Her work investigates architecture's materiality and historiography to design new frameworks for marginalised histories and material culture. Her research has been supported by Art Omi Architecture Residency, MacDowell / NEA Fellowship, Harry der Boghosian Fellowship, Paul and Daisy Soros Fellowship, Howard Crosby Butler Travel Grant, William and Neoma Timme Travel Grant, and George H. Mayr Travel Grant. Her work has been published in Deem, Future Anterior, Pidgin, Room One Thousand, Bracket, and various conference proceedings, and has been exhibited at Lexington Art League, Syracuse University, Seoul Biennale of Architecture and Urbanism in South Korea, Van Der Plas Gallery in New York City, and the A+D Museum in Los Angeles. Leen holds a M.Arch from Princeton University and a B.Arch from USC, and has practised in New York City at Marvel, LTL Architects, Peter Marino, and OMA.

MEGHAN HO-TONG is a Lecturer and Researcher at the School of Architecture, Planning and Geomatics at the University of Cape Town. Her work uses multidisciplinary modes of practice, including filmmaking, to investigate structures of dominion in the built environment, foregrounding femme perspectives with histories and spatialities of the Global South. Her films include 'Chorus' (2021), co-produced for MAXXI Museum's exhibition 'Buone Nuove' and selected for Arquiteturas Film Festival Porto (2022). In 2024, she was awarded the NWO 'Research into Collections with a Colonial Context' Grant for the project 'Moving Materials: Architecture, Extraction and Colonial Railway Infrastructures in South Africa' in collaboration with Delft University of Technology and Nieuwe Instituut, furthering her research interest in the development of subaltern archives.

MICHAEL MOSSMAN is a Kuku Yalanji man from Far North Queensland who currently lives and works on the Country of the Gadigal Peoples in Sydney and is a lecturer and researcher at the University of Sydney School of Architecture, Design and Planning. In 2024, Michael commenced his Australian Research Council Discovery Indigenous project 'Indigenising the Built Environment in Australia' that will continue until 2026. Michael champions Country and First Nations cultures as agents for change in the built environment.

NEELAKANTAN KESHAVAN is a Faculty Member of Design at the Department of Design, Indian Institute of Technology Hyderabad, India. He is particularly interested in design as a means of cultivation, preservation, and proliferation of differences and heterogeneity. His research areas are visual and spatial culture, the architect's agency, design as a discourse of visions, and architecture as an active search for being at home.

NOKUBEKEZELA MCHUNU is a South African architect and independent researcher specialising in architectural history. Her most recent role was as a PhD candidate as part of the ERC-funded project 'Expanding Agency: Women, Race, and the Global Dissemination of Modern Architecture', at University College Dublin. Her research interests encompass the design of democratic public spaces, the application of cultural hermeneutics in architecture, and equitable approaches to African architectural archival practices. In addition to her academic work, she has experience as a business analyst, focusing on process design. Nokubekezela has held roles as Junior Fellow at the Architectural Histories journal, as a research participant at the 2022 Bauhaus Lab and a Virtual Fellow at the Canadian Centre for Architecture, where she serves as a Steering Committee member of their Research Network

PAOLETTA HOLST is an artist and architectural historian based in Brussels. Her practice operates at the intersection of different disciplines to investigate the social, historical and political dimension of architecture and the urban environment. She is a PhD candidate at Ghent University, department of Architecture and Urban Planning (2022–2026). Her PhD research focuses on late colonial architecture and domestic cultures in Java, through an artistic mobilisation of the 'colonial archive'. She was an associated researcher at the a.pass Research Center in Brussels (2022–23), and artist-in-residence at the Jan van Eyck Academie in Maastricht in (2016–17). In 2019 she participated in the 900mdpl biennale in Kaliurang, Indonesia, resulting in the publication 'What Bungalows Can Tell' (Onomatopee, 2021) co-authored by Mira Asriningtyas and Brigita Murti. Together with Paolo Patelli she developed an archival research project around the Tillema Collections resulting in the workshop programme 'Editing the Archive' at Gudskul, Jakarta (2022) and an exhibition at Het Nieuwe Instituut (2022).

PAULA LACOMBA MONTES is an Architect (2014) and holds a PhD in Architecture (2020). She is currently a Margarita Salas Postdoctoral Fellow (Spanish Ministry of Universities, funded by the European Union) at the Department of Architecture of TU Delft and the School of Architecture of Madrid (2021–24). Specialising in educational architecture, her research explores how designs are shaped by cultural contexts, examining the humanization of learning environments in relation to public space, intimacy, and domesticity. Paula has been a visiting researcher at Cambridge University, an Affiliate Academic at The Bartlett School of Architecture, and is a Visiting Researcher at the Jaap Bakema Study Centre (Nieuwe Instituut). In 2021 she began pursuing a degree in English literature. In 2023, she was awarded a SAH Membership Grant for Emerging Professionals.

RACHEL LEE is an assistant professor at TU Delft's Faculty

of Architecture and the Built Environment, specialising in colonial and postcolonial architecture and urbanism. Her work focuses on migration, exile, heritage, and gender, primarily in South Asia and East Africa. Rachel co-edited the multi-sited ‘Feminist Architectural Histories of Migration Collections’ with Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi and was a Mellon Fellow at the Canadian Centre for Architecture, where she contributed to ‘Fugitive Archives: A Sourcebook for Centring Africa in Histories of Architecture’. She completed her PhD at TU Berlin in 2014, exploring Otto Koenigsberger’s architectural works and networks in exile.

ROLANDO VÁZQUEZ MELKEN is an educator and decolonial thinker. Vázquez is Professor of Post/Decolonial Theories and Literatures, with a focus on the Global South, at the department of Literary and Cultural Analysis & the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (ASCA). He is regularly invited to deliver keynotes on decoloniality at various academic and cultural institutions. Since 2010, he co-directs with Walter Mignolo the annual Maria Lugones Decolonial Summer School, now hosted by the Van Abbemuseum. In 2016, under the direction of Gloria Wekker, he co-authored the report “Let’s do Diversity” of the University of Amsterdam Diversity Commission. He is advisor at the Jan van Eyck Academie in Maastricht, the Rijks Academie in Amsterdam and the Textiel Museum in Tilburg. Vázquez wrote his essay ‘Vistas of Modernity’ as part of the Mondriaan Fund’s series of essays about current topics in the visual arts and heritage.

ROMAIN DAVID is a PhD candidate in architectural history at Harvard University. His research investigates the intersection in the 1990s between architectural neo-avant-garde firms and transnational networks of expertise from the Development era. The project is a ‘Global Microhistory’ and multi-sited archival research across East and Southeast Asia, Western Africa, and the North Atlantic that follows institutional and corporate networks. Romain holds a BA in cinema studies from Paris 3 Sorbonne Nouvelle and a BA and MA in architecture from l’Ecole Nationale Supérieure d’Architecture de Paris La Villette. His research has been supported by the Canadian Center for Architecture in Montréal, the Harvard University Asia Center, the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, and the Arthur Sachs Fellowship.

SABINE STRÄULI is an art and architecture historian working at the gta Archive since 2015, where she has contributed to several archive-based publications and exhibitions. Previous research includes studies on female architects (Trix Haussmann, Elsa Burckhardt-Blum), institutional histories (Swiss national bank, Institute gta) and architecture exhibitions (world and national exhibitions). Since 2024 she represents the gta Archive in the Decolonisation work group of the ETH Collections and Archives.

SANDRO ARMANDA is a PhD candidate at the Department of Architecture of KU Leuven, Belgium. He works under the supervision of Prof. Martino Tattara (KU Leuven) and Dr Sabrina Puddu (University of Cambridge). His doctoral project, ‘A 1000 km Long City’, looks at the enduring legacy of a thousand kilometer long colonial road in Java, Indonesia, known as ‘The Great Post Road’ and its impact on the relationships between architecture, territory, and society. His work has been presented at the Urban Design, Urbanism, Landscape & Planning (UULP) seminar at KU Leuven, Brussels (2023), the European Architectural History Network (EAHN) conference at the NTUA, Athens (2024), and the Arus Balik — Shifting Currents symposium at Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam (2024).

SARITA SUNDAR is a Bangalore-based designer and design historian, leading Hanno, a heritage interpretation and design consultancy. With thirty-five years in brand design and strategy, she blends her professional experience with academic expertise in museum studies. Her work critically examines culture’s visual engagement, from Indian vernacular typography to performance practices. Her recent publication, ‘From the Frugal to the Ornate: Stories of the Seat in India’, explores the cultural journey of seating in India. Sarita holds degrees from the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad, and the University of Leicester, and recently received a Fulbright fellowship to research the intersectional design histories between India and the United States.

SEBASTIAAN LOOSEN is senior lecturer and postdoctoral researcher at the Chair of History and Theory of Urban Design, ETH Zurich. After obtaining degrees in architecture and in philosophy, he completed his doctoral dissertation, ‘Shaping Social Commitment. Architecture and Intellectuality in the 1970s and ’80s’, on the formative years of architectural theory in Belgium, investigating the various vantage points from which ‘the social’ was addressed in architectural thought (KU Leuven, 2019). His current research is charting how architectural knowledge was transformed in the context of foreign aid, focusing, amongst others, on the role of architectural schools in developing training programs and research projects, and on the history of the so-called ‘sites-and-services’ approach as a paradigm of urban design. A recent outcome of this research is a co-edited double theme issue of ABE Journal. ‘Architecture Beyond Europe’ on ‘Architecture in the Foreign Aid-Funded Knowledge Economy’ (2023).

SERAH CALITZ is a PhD researcher for the ‘MineLives’ project, a bilateral research grant between the Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment at TU Delft and the School of Architecture and Planning at the University of the Witwatersrand. Her research examines mining’s design of water, energy and food systems in South Africa across the 20th century through sites of material production and exchange: minespaces. Serah completed her professional degree in Architecture at Delft University of Technology in 2018 with distinction. Her master thesis ‘Sino-African Counterpoints’ (EFL Stichting Research Grant, TU Delft Global Support) was awarded an honourable mention in the 2019 Dutch Archiprix. Serah has worked in professional practice for MVRDV and OMA and has exhibited work at the International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam (2022) and Dutch Design Week (2019).

SETAREH NOORANI is an architect, researcher and curator at Nieuwe Instituut, and an independent artist. Her current research at Nieuwe Instituut focuses on the paradigm-shifting notions of decoloniality, feminisms, queer ecologies, non-institutional and collective representations in contemporary architecture, its heritage and future scenarios. She leads the projects ‘Collecting Otherwise’ and ‘Modernisms along the Indian Ocean’. Most recently Noorani has initiated and co-curated ‘Arus Balik–Shifting Currents’, a project which aims to bring together architecture and design networks in the Netherlands and Indonesia, recognising architecture and design as material witnesses to colonial histories and pathways to possible shared futures. Setareh holds a MSc degree in architecture from the TU Delft.

SHRUTI HUSSAIN is an architect, independent researcher and journalist from Pune, India. She has a penchant for historical narratives that shape modern politics and geographies and resulting cultures of urbanism, built spaces, media and heritage. Shruti is a recipient of research fellowships from the Canadian Centre for Architecture and Wikipedia Open Knowledge. She is a Researcher with ‘Doing Digital Humanities: Archiving and Digitisation of Materiality of Indian Cinema’ project funded by the Indian Council of Social Science Research and previously with the EU project ‘Cultural Heritage and Identities of Europe’s Future’. Shruti is the Executive Editor of CQRA Podcast and Quality Edge magazine. As a Journalist she has been published in Failed Architecture, Netherlands and Architecture for Children, Hong Kong and worked for BBC South Asia - New Delhi, CNBC TV 18 - Mumbai and Sakal Times, Pune. Documentary films, moderating events and conducting interviews are her other professional interests.

STEF DINGEN is coordinator of the Jaap Bakema Study Centre at Nieuwe Instituut and a practising architect, interior designer and independent researcher. His writings exploring the representational quality of architecture on the boundary of the private and the public were published in Tijdschrift Article (2021, 2023). Most recently he co-edited the re-edition of a rare, limited run of Le Corbusier’s ‘Vers Une Architecture’ designed by Willem Sandberg and co-curated the accompanying exhibition ‘Revisiting Vers Une Architecture’ in the Faculty of Architecture at the TU Delft (2024). Stef holds MSc degrees from the TU Delft and The Berlage Center for Advanced Studies in Architecture and Urban Design. He was also a visiting student at ENSA-Belleville and a junior visiting fellow at Wolfson College, the University of Cambridge.

VICTOR PRÓSPERO is a Brazilian architectural historian, who currently works at Princeton University as a postdoctoral Mellon Fellow (2024–2025). His main research focus is on the relationship between architecture, politics and modernisation epistemologies in twentieth-century Latin America. He was a Fulbright Fellow at the Department of History of Art and Architecture at Harvard University (2021–2022), and obtained his PhD at the University of São Paulo on a FAPESP fellowship (2024). Victor was co-editor of the book ‘Arquitetura e Escrita: Relatos do Ofício’ and co-curator of several exhibitions reflecting on struggles for memory and the built environment in Brazil such as ‘Paisagem e Poder: Construções do Brasil na Ditadura’ (2024). He was Vice-President of the São Paulo branch of the Brazilian Institute of Architects (2023–2024).

YAĞIZ SÖYLEV is an architect and researcher. He holds an MSc degree with honours in architecture from TU Delft. His expanded practice involves architectural design, design research and mapmaking. He is currently a researcher and teacher at the Department of Architecture at TU Delft and participates in several teaching and research activities in the section of Building Knowledge, including the Campus Utopias programme. In addition, he frequently serves as guest teacher at the Academy of Architecture in Amsterdam. Since 2021, Söylev has been co-responsible for the cartographic studies in the OverHolland journal. His research interests include learning environments and global networks of knowledge exchange. He was the associate curator of the ‘Vardiya – The Shift’ Exhibition at the Pavilion of Turkey at the 16th Venice Architecture Biennale in 2018. Moreover, his work has been showcased at various international exhibitions, such as the 2014 Istanbul Design Biennial, 2019 Shenzhen Bi-city Biennale.

YASMINE DAHIM (BArch) is a Part II MArch Architecture student at Loughborough University, who has just completed her fourth year and is currently working as a Part I Architectural Assistant at Cottrell and Vermeulen Architecture. Her research interests lie in vernacular architecture, the criticism of colonial spatial practices, post-colonial theory, and the repercussions that these have on feminist space.

Programme

20.11.2024
TU Delft
Berlagezaal 1

9:00
Doors open

09:15
Welcome
Dick van Gameren, Dean of the Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment (Delft University of Technology) and Dirk van den Heuvel, Head of the Jaap Bakema Study Centre (Nieuwe Instituut, Delft University of Technology)

9:30
Welfare State Projections
Moderated by Alejandro Campos Uribe

Paulista Architecture and Ambivalent Modernity: Brazilian Dictatorship and National Representation in Osaka, 1970
Victor Próspero (University of São Paulo, Princeton University)

Western-based or Decolonised Welfare Planning? Ulrik Plesner's Town Design for the Mahaweli Development Programme in Sri Lanka, 1982–1987
Dorian Bianco (Centre André Chastel, Sorbonne University)

Architecture of the 'Property State': Public Ownership of Land and the Production of the Modern Built Environment in Postindependence Singapore
Jacob Meyers (Delft University of Technology)

Subverting the University Archive: A Decolonial Revision of Miesian Modernism
Leen Katrib (University of Kentucky)

Q&A

11:00
Break

11:30
Coloniality at Home
Moderated by Paula Lacomba Montes

Dissecting the Colonial House
Paoletta Holst (Ghent University)

Writing Domesticity: Historicising Two Silenced Stories of Modernisation by Iranian Women Writers
Ehssan Hanif (Cornell University)

The Elephant in the Room: Sourcing the Planter's Chair
Rachel Lee (Delft University of Technology) and Sarita Sundar (Hanno)

Haik-scape: An Urban 'Fabric' to Unveil Eastern and Western Colonisation of the Feminine Space and Intimacy in Algiers
Yasmine Dahim and Cansu Curgen-Gurpinar (Loughborough University School of Architecture)

Q&A

13:00
Lunch break

14:00
Education as Mission
Moderated by Fatma Tanış

Yarning and the Country Sphere: Modernity and Decolonising Architectural Education in Australia
Michael Mossman, Genevieve Murray, Abraham Bradfield and Jennifer Barrett (University of Sydney)

Euclid in Ivory Coast: Architecture and Modern Education as Swiss Export, 1975–1976
Sebastiaan Loosen (ETH Zürich)

Disentangling Modernity and Colonialism: The St. Joseph Mission School in Ngasobil, Senegal
Alican Taylan (Cornell University)

'What Holland Can Offer': Samuel van Embden and the Knowledge Exchange on University Campus Designs, 1947–1976
Esther Gramsbergen and Yağız Söylev (Delft University of Technology)

Q&A

15:30
Break

16:00
Neocolonial Practices
Moderated by Elena Martínez Millana

Town & City Properties: From Colonial Rubber Plantation to the World's Largest Property Developer
Alistair Kefford (Leiden University)

OMA 199X: Neo-Avant-Garde and the Afterlives of the Development Era
Romain David (Harvard University)

Planners Get Their Way—and Newry? The Persistence of Colonial Attitudes in the North of Ireland
Colm mac Aoidh (Hasselt University)

Towards a Planetary History of Architecture: Notes from Golęczewo and Kamĩrĩĩthũ
Kenny Cupers (University of Basel)

Q&A

17:30
Drinks & Exhibition visit

21.11.2024
Nieuwe Instituut
Auditorium

9:30
Doors open

9:45
Welcome
Aric Chen, General and Artistic Director
Nieuwe Instituut

10:00
Working with the Dutch National Architecture Collection
Hetty Berens and Setareh Noorani

11:00
Break

11:30
Extraction Infrastructures
Moderated by Meghan Ho-Tong

Sweetened Territories: The Umbgrove Commissie and the Impact of the Dutch Colonial Sugar Industry on the Javanese Countryside, 1808–1930
Sandro Armanda (KU Leuven)

'Filling' and 'Enactment' Drainage and Conservancy Schemes: Discourse of Contained Waters in Dacca, Colonial East Bengal
Labib Hossain (Cornell University)

The Architect + The Farmer: Disentangling Expertise as a Mechanism of South Asian Migration
Priyanka Sen (Cornell University)

Growing for Gold: Colonial Tree Planting on the Witwatersrand Goldfields, 1892–1923
Serah Calitz (Delft University of Technology)

Q&A

13:00
Lunch break

14:00
Heritage Stories
Moderated by Eytan Mann

Monument of Public Memory: Rereading the Uganda National Cultural Centre and Theatre
Anna Kintusrashvili (Independent Scholar)

Reassessing the Architectural Heritage of Banda Aceh: Colonial Legacies and Modernist Narratives
Azhiemi Iqbal (Umeå University)

Redrawing Narratives of Modernist Architecture in India: A Tryst in the Courtroom
Elizabeth Thomas and Neelakantan Keshavan (Indian Institute of Technology Hyderabad)

Reframing the Indian-Modern Vision: Post de Colossal Loss of the Hall of Nations and Other Modern Icons that Wait Their End
Shruti Hussain (Independent Scholar)

Q&A

15:30
Break

16:00
Archiving Ethics
Moderated by Dirk van den Heuvel

'The Good, the Bad and the Ugly': Colonial Hybridities in the gta Archive Collections
Irina Davidovici and Sabine Straüli (gta Archive, ETH Zürich)

In (Dis)Use: Nigerian Modernism in Retrospect
Abdulah Ogunsetan (Omi Collective, University of Lagos)

Against Colonial Architectural Logic: Reading 'Unformalisation' from Archives of Formalisation
Kuukuwa Manful (Taubmen College of Architecture and Urban Planning, University of Michigan)

Digging and Processing: Addressing Archival Justice in Global South Research
Hannah le Roux (Sheffield University) and Nokubekezela Mchunu (Independent Scholar)

Q&A

17:30
Drinks & Exhibition visit

18:00
Keynote
In Conversation with
Rolando Vázquez Melken

19:00
Drinks at Nieuwe Café

CONFERENCE

Conference Organising Committee
Dirk van den Heuvel
(Convenor of the conference,
Head of the Jaap Bakema Study Centre)
Alejandro Campos Uribe
(Co-initiator of the conference,
Delft University of Technology)
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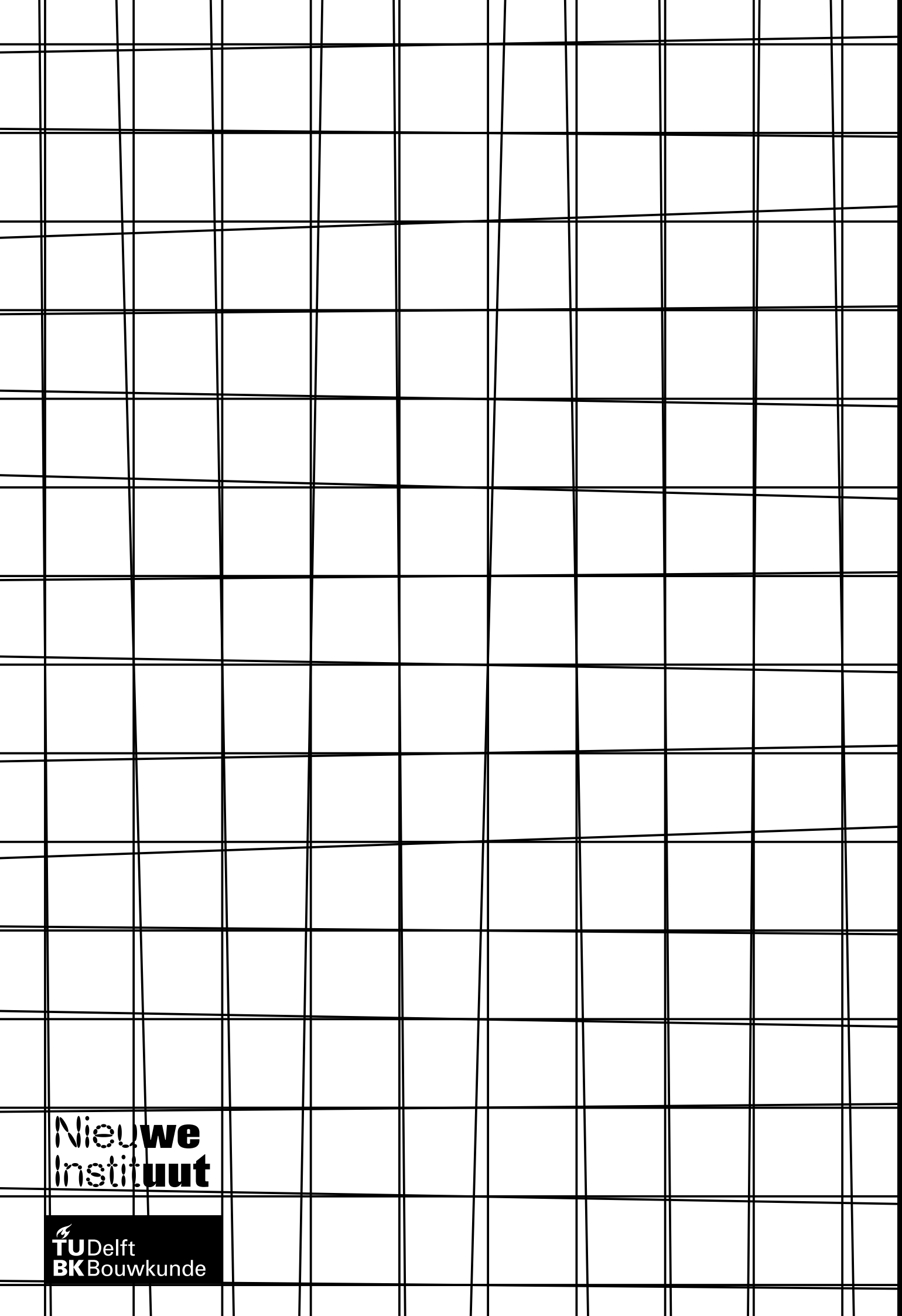

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