

ŁUKASZ STANEK

*Architecture in Global Socialism: Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East in the Cold War*

Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020. 368 pp.; 150 color ills., 127 b/w. \$60

The past decade has seen a wealth of scholarship on architecture and urbanism in both the Global South and the former socialist countries of Eastern Europe. Recent books by Itohan Osayimwese, Mrinalini Rajagopalan, Vladimir Kulić, Kimberly Zarecor, and many others, as well as numerous articles and exhibitions, have expanded our knowledge of the built environment in regions whose modernism has been understudied.<sup>1</sup> Yet a major lacuna in these histories has been the outsize role architects and planners from Eastern Europe played in shaping the cities of Africa and Asia during the second half of the twentieth century. Łukasz Stanek's remarkable book *Architecture in Global Socialism: Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East in the Cold War* examines the vast production of buildings and cities by architects from socialist countries who practiced in the Global South as part of extensive networks of technical cooperation formed during the Cold War.

Stanek traces in great detail the work of architects and planners from Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia who designed and constructed buildings (ranging from prestige projects like the National Arts Theatre of Nigeria to housing, schools, and factories), designed city plans, wrote building and zoning codes, developed university programs in the design disciplines, and otherwise shaped the built environments of Ghana, Nigeria, Iraq, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The author makes the case that the Cold War—and the international networks of technical assistance that it inspired—had as profound an impact on the development of architecture in those regions as the centuries of colonialism that preceded it. This approach stands in contrast to other recent histories of postindependence architecture and urbanism that emphasize the relationships between postcolonial developmental aid and colonial administration.<sup>2</sup>

Stanek describes the complexity of these exchanges with admirable nuance. His analyses are rooted in a meticulous study of materials held in public and private collections on four continents, interviews with numerous surviving protagonists from the period, and extensive visits to the five cities discussed in the book: Accra, Lagos, Baghdad, Kuwait City, and Abu Dhabi. The combination of archival research, field study, and oral history provides a wealth of data supporting the author's arguments about the importance of these architectural exchanges in the formation of national identities and professional roles in both sets of countries. Much of this documentation is new to the history of architecture and urban design, making the book an essential resource for scholars. But the book is just as important for introducing a method for analyzing the vast production of buildings and spaces by professionals from socialist countries. Stanek argues persuasively that, as part of the process of providing technical assistance to the newly independent states of the Global South, architecture and urban planning contributed to a project of socialist worldmaking on the part of Eastern European governments.

"Worldmaking" is the key conceptual framework in the book, and Stanek explains the term in his opening chapter, "Worldmaking of Architecture." Building on the concept of *mondialisation* introduced by Henri Lefebvre (about whom Stanek previously published an elegant monograph<sup>3</sup>), the author posits worldmaking as a notion that encompasses the creation of networks and modes of exchange that are clearly distinguished from the processes of globalization that followed the 1944 Bretton Woods agreements, such as neoliberal structures of extraction. Stanek argues that worldmaking describes "visions of global cooperation practiced by actors from socialist countries against the delineations of the world inherited from the colonial period and in competition with other projects of global cooperation after World War II" (305). Indeed, he asserts that worldmaking explains divergent practices and outcomes, depending on both the contexts in which it was practiced and the design professionals involved. "Socialist worldmaking," he writes,

included, but was not limited to, the claim to the worldwide applicability of the socialist path of development; the worlding of Eastern Europe, or the sharing with the developing countries of the Eastern European experience of overcoming underdevelopment, colonialism, and peripherality; and collaboration within the world socialist system. So understood, socialist worldmaking informed the changing geographies, volumes, speed, distribution, and programs of architectural resources that were moved between Eastern Europe and the Global South. (305)

The book's subsequent four chapters comprise case studies of architectural exchanges in which architects and planners from Eastern European countries worked in five cities in West Africa and the Middle East. Chapter 2, "A Global Development Path: Accra, 1957–66," examines the transformation of the Ghanaian capital during the years in which Kwame Nkrumah attempted to define national identity through architecture during his tenure as the country's first prime minister. The next chapter, "Worlding Eastern Europe: Lagos, 1966–79," explores major projects executed in Nigeria's principal city in the years between the First and the Second Republics, while chapter 4, "The World Socialist System: Baghdad, 1958–90," chronicles urban planning and monumental architecture in the Iraqi capital from the revolution that brought Abd al-Karim Qasim to power to the first Gulf War. Finally chapter 5, "Socialism within Globalization: Abu Dhabi and Kuwait City, 1979–90," compares the two Persian Gulf cities during the extensive development that occurred during the last decade of the Cold War.

Stanek devotes considerable time to explaining the importance of the numerous multilateral organizations that promoted technical exchanges among countries in Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East. The socialist countries were members of the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon), founded with the Soviet Union in 1949, which established frameworks for developmental assistance and normalized the international mobility of architectural services. (Cuba, Mongolia, and Vietnam joined the economic organization

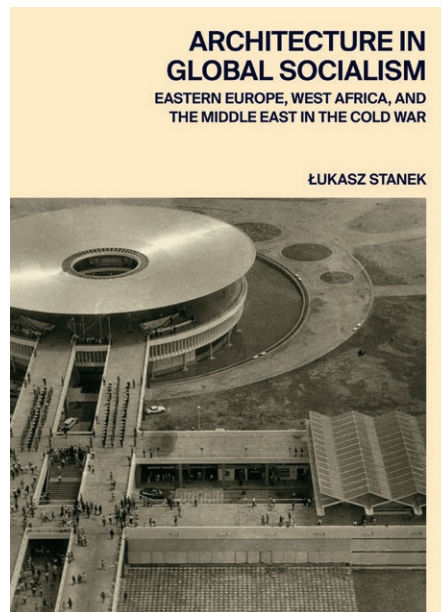
later.) Ghana, Nigeria, Iraq, Kuwait, and the UAE were all members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), whose sole European member, Yugoslavia, was among the founding nations in 1961. Comecon and NAM offered competing visions of global collaboration that were distinct from the relationships proposed by former colonial powers. In the newly independent states of the Global South they found an eager audience interested in replicating the socialist experience of emerging from underdevelopment through command economies and generous social welfare programs.

In his study of architecture and planning in West Africa and the Middle East, Stanek uses the perspectives of designers and officials in those countries as a lens through which to examine the heterogeneity of Eastern European countries. Rather than forming a monolithic “bloc” of Soviet client states, the author argues, the Comecon countries demonstrated a diversity of political and economic goals. This is evident in the pluralistic practices of figures like the Serbian architect Zoran Bojović, who designed monumental buildings in Nigeria and Iraq as head designer at Energoprojekt, and the Polish architects Grażyna Jonkajtys-Luba and Jerzy Luba, who produced urban design schemes with a notable sensitivity to cultural heritage in Ghana and Nigeria. Stanek thus balances a careful attention to the particularities of place, including cultural and political differences between various clients, policy makers, and building inhabitants in each context, with an understanding of the differences within Eastern European countries (and even the regions and republics within those countries).

The author also describes in a balanced way the political calculations of leaders in Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East, for whom these relationships offered legitimation for their respective regimes. Stanek notes that exchanges that were billed as the generous sharing of European technical skills with countries that had thrown off the yoke of imperialism and colonialism became the bartering of raw materials for services and industrially manufactured items. Though not the same as the extractive regimes imposed by colonial powers, Stanek makes clear that this hierarchy contrasted an industrialized

Europe against a preindustrialized Global South, which reinforced the notion that technical expertise flowed from the Global North—whether capitalist or socialist—to the Global South.

The book’s organization will make it very useful to scholars studying the built environment in any of the five cities discussed. Each chapter comprises an original contribution to the literature on its respective context, and the structure of *Architecture in Global Socialism* lends itself to being



excerpted for use in university courses. Stanek’s prose is clear and accessible, and he takes pains to explain his conceptual concerns and point to sources and topics for future study. The book is richly illustrated with drawings and photographs (both period and contemporary) and reproduces archival images that have never been published. Combined with a generous bibliography that lists numerous doctoral dissertations and ephemeral items conserved in private archives, Stanek’s text will prove to be an essential starting point for future research in the field.

One of the themes that carries through each of the case studies is the role architects from socialist countries played in developing architectural education in their host countries. Stanek discusses the careers and work of some of the architects educated in these programs—many of which began during periods of British colonial rule—and follows their efforts to establish professional societies

that would shape the ethical parameters of architectural practice in each country. Through education and professionalization, architects from socialist countries established the very language with which architects in the Global South would continue to practice, long after the collapse of state socialism and the end of technical assistance programs.

Throughout the text, Stanek also discusses the redefinition of architectural practice evident in these technical exchanges. Architects from socialist countries provided more than design services. In many cases they acted as construction managers and supervisors; in other cases they took on municipal administrative positions or wrote zoning and building code legislation; in still others they served as teachers and organized building-science research projects. Designers were often employed by large construction firms (such as the Polish company Miastoprojekt-Kraków and the Yugoslav concern Energoprojekt) hired to undertake major building and infrastructure projects on a design-build basis or in public entities such as the Hungarian Design Institute for Public Buildings, in which the role of “architect” as a singular author was replaced with an overtly collaborative process that modeled the cooperation between states embodied by these projects. As a history of both transnational construction industries and the work of individual designers—of both contexts and protagonists, in other words—Stanek’s text avoids the hagiographic biases that often limit monographic studies of architects and the skepticism toward architects that frequently limits studies of the built environment rooted in anthropological perspectives.

*Architecture in Global Socialism* constitutes a significant contribution to the historiography of modern architecture in Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East. It is the kind of book we need more of: expansive in scope, specific in analysis, and rigorous in argumentation. It recognizes the pluralism of actors and contexts in the Global South, which further dismantles the myth of a monolithic modernism and demands additional scholarship that both revises and builds. Stanek’s book promises to remain an essential reference for scholars and students well into the future.

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## NOTES

1. See, for example, Itohan Osayimwese, *Colonialism and Modern Architecture in Germany* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017); Mrinalini Rajagopalan, *Building Histories: The Archival and Affective Lives of Five Monuments in Modern Delhi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016); Vladimir Kulić, Maroje Mrduljaš, and Wolfgang Thaler, *Modernism In-Between: The Mediator Architecture of Socialist Yugoslavia* (Jovis, 2012); Kimberly Zarecor, *Manufacturing a Socialist Modernity: Housing in Czechoslovakia, 1945–1960* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011); Prita Meier, *Swahili Port Cities: The Architecture of Elsewhere* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016); Duanfang Lu, ed., *Third World Modernism: Architecture, Development and Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Maristella Casciato and Émilie d’Orgeix, eds., *Modern Architectures: The Rise of a Heritage* (Wavre, Belgium: Mardaga, 2012); Jiat-Hwee Chang, *A Genealogy of Tropical Architecture: Colonial Networks, Nature and Technoscience* (New York: Routledge, 2016); and Johan Lagae and Tom Avermaete, eds., “*L’Afrique c’est chic: Architecture and Urban Planning in Africa 1950–1970/Architectuur en stadsplanning in Afrika 1950–1970*,” special issue, *OASE* 82 (2010).
2. See, for example, Iain Jackson and Jessica Holland, *The Architecture of Edwin Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew: Twentieth Century Architecture, Pioneer Modernism and the Tropics* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2014); Viviana d’Auria and Bruno De Meulder, “Unsettling Landscapes: The Volta River Project; New Settlements between Tradition and Transition,” in Lagae and Avermaete, “*L’Afrique c’est chic*,” 115–27; and Luce Beeckmans, “French Planning in a Former Belgian Colony: A Critical Analysis of the French Urban Planning Missions in Post-Independence Kinshasa,” in *ibid.*, 55–66.
3. Łukasz Stanek, *Henri Lefebvre on Space: Architecture, Urban Research, and the Production of Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

## ADDENDUM

We recognize that the coeditors’ note for the issue published in September 2020 could have been misunderstood. Any equivalence between the movement of people and the movement of objects was never intended. We apologize if the note minimizes the horrors of human suffering. We remain steadfast in our commitment to diversity and inclusivity. And we continue to welcome and encourage the submissions that address race and art history.

—Coeditors-in-Chief