11

When Baghdad Was Like Warsaw

Comparison in the Cold War

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"Baghdad was like Warsaw"—this is how Polish architect Lech Robaczyński recalled his work in Iraq in the 1960s.[1] Robaczyński was part of a group of architects who traveled to Baghdad from socialist Poland after the pro-Western monarchy in Iraq was toppled in the coup led by Colonel Abd al-Karim Qasim in 1958, followed by a rapprochement with the Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellites.[2] This rapprochement initiated three decades of exchanges between Iraq and the socialist bloc motivated by various, and evolving, objectives. Iraqi governments from Qasim's to Saddam Hussein's mobilized Soviet and Eastern European expertise and resources in programs of state-building, economic modernization, and regional diplomacy. In turn, while the opening of the "second" world toward the "third" world since the mid-1950s was informed by visions of socialist internationalism and geopolitical aims, in the wake of the 1973 oil embargo it was economic objectives that became dominant for the debt-stricken Soviet satellite states, which badly needed convertible currency revenues and access to Iraqi crude oil.[3]

When Robaczyński compared Baghdad with Warsaw, he had something quite specific in mind. "Everything we produced was showcased and people flocked to see the plans," he said, likening the huge popular interest in the work of local and foreign architects and planners in Baghdad to the febrile atmosphere during the reconstruction of Warsaw after World War II.[4] In particular, he recalled two master plans of Baghdad, delivered by the Polish design institute Miastoprojekt-Kraków in 1967 and 1973, and presented to Baghdadi professionals and the public at large by means of exhibitions, seminars, and debates.[5]

Yet, at the same time, Robaczyński's statement points to a more general phenomenon: a new comparative environment that emerged in Iraq, and

throughout the postcolonial world, during the Cold War. When the untangling of Western European empires opened up Africa and Asia to architectural and planning expertise beyond the former colonial metropolises, the Soviet Union and its satellite countries, later joined by the Non-Aligned Movement and China, offered new sources of knowledge and new candidates for comparison. Within this environment it became possible to juxtapose sites that had never before been thought of together, among them Warsaw and Baghdad.

In the wake of the coup of 1958, professionals from socialist countries challenged the hegemony of Western European knowledge and technology in Iraq. Eastern Europeans argued that not only was their expertise useful for Iraq but also that their position toward the West was similar to that of the Iraqis, given both regions' history of political subordination, economic exploitation, and cultural devalorization by Western Europe. Architects and planners from socialist countries offered to Iraqis architectural tools and planning instruments that had been introduced in Eastern Europe since the late nineteenth century in programs of economic development and cultural emancipation. In this context, comparison became an opportunity and an obligation for Iraqi decision-makers, who compared the proposals of the newcomers with those already in place, including a master plan for Baghdad that British planners had delivered in 1956. When faced with the demand to substantiate their claims, Miastoprojekt planners, too, turned to comparison. They did so in order to demonstrate their professional competence, to provide evidence of the relevance of their earlier experiences for their work in Baghdad, to gain knowledge about the city, to build trust with Iraqi decision-makers, and to construct and maintain a professional community.

This chapter highlights how comparative practices in Baghdad were entangled with Cold War geopolitics in Iraq and its political economy. I argue that this "politics of comparison" needs to be understood beyond questions of ideological representation, which is primarily how comparison across Cold War antagonisms has been addressed by architectural historians, with the Hansaviertel and the Stalinallee in divided Berlin being one paradigmatic pairing. Instead, I show how the comparative urban knowledge produced in Baghdad was part of a broad political, economic, and cultural restructuring of Cold War Iraq and how the involvement of Eastern Europeans in these procedures came with emancipatory potential and dangers for Iraqi decision-makers.

The comparative practice performed by Miastoprojekt planners and their Iraqi counterparts required them to work across fragmented and heterogeneous cartographic documents. They practiced comparison by means of material operations performed on images and extended this approach to a study of Baghdad's urban development. In this chapter I test the ways in which comparison within digital environments, including geographic information system (GIS) software, opens a possibility for a more active, dexterous, and transformative way of

producing historiographic evidence—much in the way that the Polish planners conducted comparison. While coming with epistemic risks, such environments provide opportunities for a historian to reflect upon the politics of comparison in Cold War Iraq and beyond.

A Comparative Agency

Even before its occupation by Britain during World War I, Iraq was a destination for architectural and technological expertise from European imperial centers.[6] In the wake of the Ottoman Empire's collapse, Iraq in its mandate status and later the Britain-dependent Kingdom of Iraq became part of the globe-straddling British space of imperial knowledge production and circulation.[7] The eternal day of an "empire where the sun never sets" illuminated Britain's colonies, dominions, and protectorates, juxtaposing them with each other in a fictitious simultaneity and allowing for comparisons between them.

This approach differed from the tradition of collecting prestigious precedents in urban design, whether southern European public squares, revisited by Camillo Sitte in his *Art of Building Cities* (1889), or Athens, Rome, and Haussmann's Paris, referenced by Daniel Burnham in his *Plan of Chicago* (1909).[8] The latter publication included Burnham's own designs for Manila and Baguio in the US-occupied Philippines, thus showing that imperialism widened both commission opportunities for metropolitan planners and their comparative spectra.[9] This was confirmed by first comparative urban studies across multiple continents, including the Town Planning Conference in London (1910), which discussed cities in Europe, North America, and the British colonies, and the International Congress on Urbanism in the Colonies and Countries in the Intertropical Latitude in Paris (1931), which covered cities in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.[10] Colonial urbanism also appeared during the Fourth International Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM), in 1933, which featured, besides cities in Europe and North America, the cities of Dalat in French Indochina and Bandung in the Dutch East Indies.[11] The congress testified to the double effects of imperialism: the extension of candidates for comparison beyond Europe, as well as the inadequacy of categories developed in the European context for the urban realities in other parts of the world, notably the racially segregated cities in the colonies and the United States.[12]

Comparative practices were conceptualized, developed, and reproduced in the training of architects and planners for service in European empires. At Britain's first full-time course in architecture at the University of Liverpool, for example, architecture was regarded as an international culture of professionals trained both in rationalist, universally applicable methods of design, as well as in empirical methodologies of accounting for regional conditions and solutions.[13] This training emphasized the adaptation of British architectural and urban typol-

ogies to the climatic conditions, construction materials, building technologies, and craftsmanship traditions across the empire.

In the wake of World War II, this pedagogy informed the practice of several prominent Iraqi architects, among them Mohamed Makiya, a graduate of the Liverpool school and the future dean of the Department of Architecture at the University of Baghdad (established in 1959). But after the 1958 coup, the new government embarked on a fundamental restructuring of design and construction industries in Iraq to be facilitated by technical assistance and cheap credits offered by the Soviet Union and its satellites. This restructuring was inspired by Soviet modernization, featuring examples from Eastern Europe and Central Asia, including Tashkent, Samarkand, Dushanbe, Bishkek, and Ashkhabad. These became candidates for comparison for Iraqi cities, with which they shared some climatic conditions and Islamic heritage.[14] Such comparisons were further encouraged by Moscow's argument that the Soviet "liberation" of Central Asia from the "colonial oppression" of tsarist Russia was a precedent of a political, economic, social, and cultural emancipation to which the newly independent countries in Africa and Asia aspired.

Historians of imperial planning mapped its mobilities within the spectrum ranging from "authoritarian imposition" to "synthetic borrowing" of professional knowledge.[15] The colonial metropoles were centers of this expertise, even if it was also exchanged across colonial borders, notably in Ottoman Iraq. Qasim's coup complicated the dynamics of these mobilities, as it opened Iraq to alternative sources of knowledge beyond Western Europe and the United States. What from the imperial archives in Western Europe often appears as a closure of the former colonial markets, conveniently attributed to "nationalism" or "Soviet propaganda," many Iraqi architects and planners experienced as a multiplication of flows of knowledge and a widening of horizons of choice.[16] This was the case because the new candidates for comparison from Eastern Europe did not replace the previous ones, and British and Western urban regulations, know-how, technologies, and teaching curricula continued to have an impact in Iraq.

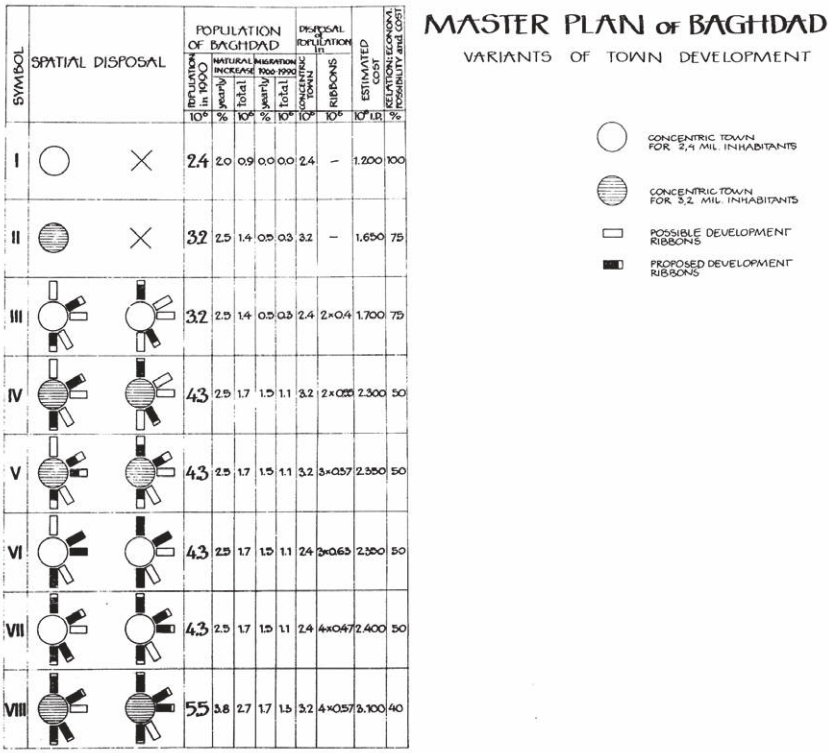
Iraqi decision-makers made an effort to diversify the candidates for collaboration. For example, they distributed the competition brief for the Baghdad Electricity Board Building (1961) in Western and Eastern Europe, as well as in the Arab world.[17] They also invited Eastern Europeans to Baghdad's International Trade Fair, where machinery, prefabrication systems, industrial facilities, and building typologies were displayed and compared across and within Cold War geopolitical divisions.[18] For Iraqi architects, planners, and administrators, however, comparison was often a frustrating experience, as it confronted them with incommensurable standards and diverging professional traditions. But it was also emancipatory, because it challenged the hierarchy of power and prestige inherited from the colonial period, and it put Iraqis into the position of apprais-

ers of metropolitan knowledge.[19] It also questioned the presumed coherence of Western expertise by dismantling its components and combining them with knowledge from other sources.

Both empowerment and frustration are readily visible in the reports about Miastoprojekt's master plans written by Iraqi and foreign professionals. After their arrival in Iraq, the Poles soon learned that the comparative environment in Baghdad was not just an opportunity for them to assert themselves in competition with more established actors. It also meant a high level of scrutiny of their own work by Iraqi decision-makers, who were often educated in the United Kingdom, and increasingly in the United States, and who were sometimes skeptical about Eastern Europeans. At every stage of the work on the master plans, Miastoprojekt planners needed to substantiate their decisions vis-à-vis the Consulting Board for the Affairs of the Master Plan, a body that included architects, administrators, and professors from the University of Baghdad's Department of Architecture. Beirut-based UN experts who visited Baghdad were also involved in the assessment of the plan. Consultants on the plan included professionals at the Department of Architecture, the Association of Iraqi Architects, and the Union of Iraqi Engineers.[20] In parallel to the work on the plans, Miastoprojekt planners participated in the municipality's planning committee, which decided where to place new buildings in the city.[21] As UN advisor Sayed Shafi recalled, this practice provided training for the municipality's planning staff and officials and accustomed them to the master plan before its official acceptance.[22] It resulted in an increasing professionalization of the planning culture in Baghdad and elsewhere in the country, which Iraqi historians counted among the biggest impacts of the master plan.[23]

The Poles' way of working differed from that of other foreign planners in Baghdad, including the British firm Minoprio, Spencely, Macfarlane, which produced the previous master plan of Baghdad (1956), and Doxiadis Associates, a Greek firm that produced an outline for the city plan (1958).[24] The most obvious difference was the bulk of the plans and their accompanying documentation: twenty-three pages for the British plan versus four volumes for the final plan prepared by Miastoprojekt. This documentation was produced by a large, interdisciplinary team of Polish professionals based both in Baghdad and at numerous universities in Poland. That team's size, composition, and the length of its stay in Iraq were facilitated by Polish trade agencies, which exploited the differences between the political economy of socialist foreign trade and that of Western actors. Notably, by manipulating the exchange rate of the Polish currency (inconvertible on international markets), decision-makers in Warsaw secured resources for an extensive urban survey of Baghdad.[25]

But this large amount of material also stemmed from the plan's mode of presentation. Rather than being a set of definitive decisions, Miastoprojekt's plan documented the planning process itself. The presentation of each functional



11.1. "Master Plan of Baghdad: Variants of Town Development." Town Planning Office, "Master Plan of Baghdad," 1967, vol. 1B, 4/III. Private archive, Kraków, Poland.

component of the master plan, such as housing, followed the same pattern: quantification of existing housing conditions in Baghdad, estimation of future housing needs as a function of increases in population and employment, and the spatial distribution of housing in the city. Since at every stage of the design process the planners were working with uncertain and incomplete data, conclusions were presented as alternative scenarios. This included, in particular, several models of physical development of the city and their variants (fig 11.1).[26]

Planning by means of alternative variants, complemented by the comparison of their methodological assumptions, data requirements, risks, and advantages, was a way for Miastoprojekt planners to support the conclusions of their work. When suggesting urban standards (e.g., number of hospital beds needed per thousand inhabitants) the planners estimated Iraq's capacities and goals in reference to standards applied in India, the Middle East, and Western and Eastern Europe.[27] They validated the proposed increases in certain amenities, such as theaters and concert halls, by the experience of Nowa Huta, the new industrial town in Poland designed by Miastoprojekt, since the late 1940s.[28] References to

socialist countries, newly independent countries in Central Asia and the Middle East, nations in Western and northern Europe, and the United States showed that old paradigms were not simply replaced by new ones.[29] Rather, foreign planners in Iraq were expected to substantiate and validate their proposals in view of competing bodies of expertise from across professional cultures and practices.

Models and Simulations

Substantiating Miastoprojekt's decisions was just one among many reasons for the Polish planners' use of comparison in Baghdad. They also compared historical maps, studies, and aerial photographs of the city in order to understand Baghdad's historical development since the Ottoman period and its water management, transportation network, and housing needs. These data often included widely diverging estimates of Baghdad's urbanization processes, for example its population growth, provided by various Iraqi ministries, UN experts, and the master plans prepared by Minoprio and Doxiadis.[30] Miastoprojekt planners used those prior plans not only as sources of data about Baghdad but also in order to assess the impact of earlier planning decisions on the city's urbanization and to distinguish their own plans from those of their predecessors.

Some of the British planners' decisions were upheld by Miastoprojekt, including the green belt, the general ovoid shape of the city, and the principle of the neighborhood units.[31] By contrast, Polish planners took issue with Minoprio's proposal of a threefold expansion of the urbanized area without proper phasing. They argued that it would lead to a "scattered city," resulting in excessive costs for infrastructure and public transport.[32] In particular, Miastoprojekt planners contrasted the large-scale demolitions of the Ottoman-era urban fabric recommended by the British plan with their own proposal for the extensive preservation of the historical districts of Baghdad, including the district of Kadhemiya, built around a revered Shia mosque.[33] Polish planners stressed that this proposal reflected the experience of the reconstruction of Warsaw's Old Town, which negotiated the re-creation of its historical image with the requirements of mass mobility. In line with the Iraqi regimes' instrumentalization of Baghdad's history as part of the nation-building process, the planners compared both cities in terms of the pedagogical roles played by their monuments and the urban fabric. They argued that as a "school for educating the Iraqi nation in the spirit of studying and appreciating their great national heritage," Baghdad was indeed like Warsaw.[34]

These comparative practices in Miastoprojekt's field office in Baghdad often centered on cartographic documents: maps, plans, and diagrams. Miastoprojekt planners often accessed these images, which had been part of earlier urban surveys or planning documentation, in isolation from the texts, drawings, and

11.2. Architect Władysław Leonowicz in Miastoprojekt's field office in Baghdad, no date. Private archive, Kraków, Poland.

references that originally had accompanied them. Their appearance of immediate accessibility was as much an illusion as it was an opportunity. The planners took that opportunity by producing maps that represented Baghdad with varying degrees of speculation, sometimes as hypothetical as the master plans that followed. This blurring of borders between a map and a plan was reinforced by their similar ways of production, based on the layering of images and their tracing.

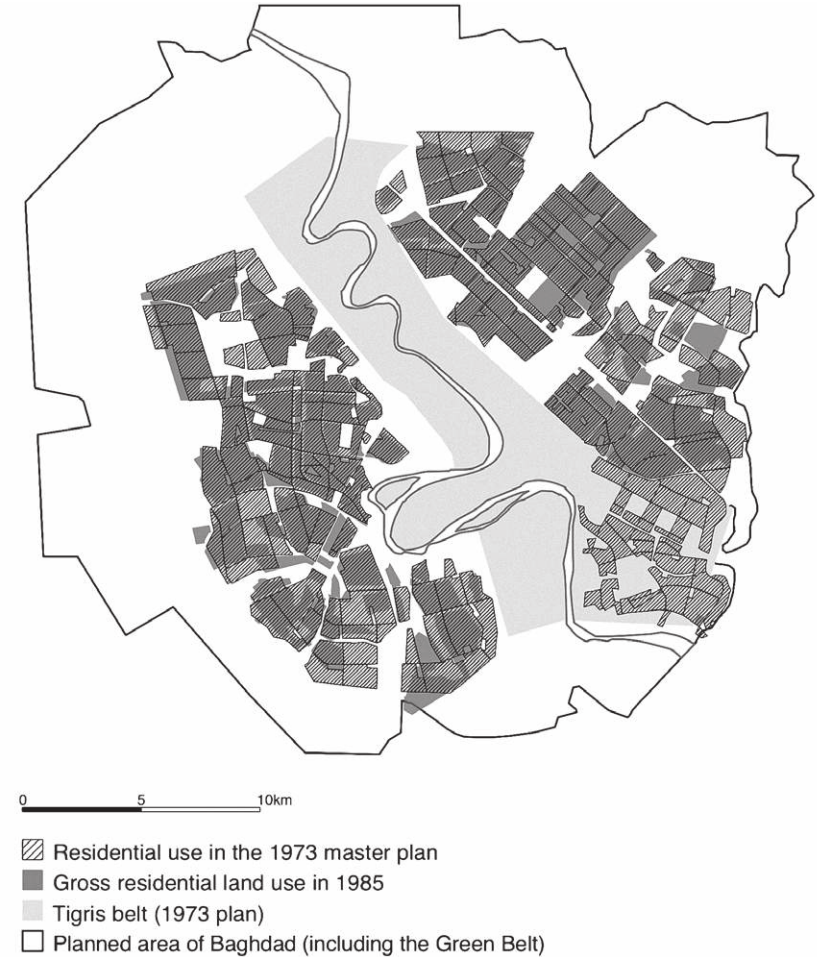
This procedure was captured in a photograph taken in Miastoprojekt's field office in Baghdad (fig 11.2). The photograph shows architect Władysław Leonowicz, a member of the Miastoprojekt team, in front of a large-format plan for Kadhemiya. Clipped to this plan is a smaller drawing, probably an alternative land-use scheme for the area around an existing wharf. By pinning this drawing to the larger plan, the architects were able to compare and assess both designs. To produce such a composite drawing one can assume that the architects first cut a piece of paper that fit the area in question in the same scale as the Kadhemiya plan. They pinned the paper onto the district plan and traced the outline of the riverbank and the boundaries of the area. They probably then moved the traced drawing to a drawing board and drew a new layout starting with a grid. Then they would have pinned the smaller drawing back onto the larger one and created a composite image. They could flip the smaller drawing up and down to

examine both versions of the layout in the context of the district plan. If any of this is true, one can begin to see comparison of images not as their juxtaposition, which was how comparison was practiced in Central European art history by the late nineteenth century.[35] Rather, comparison appears as a series of material operations: layering, framing, folding, trimming, rescaling, aligning, and tracing.

The tracing, trimming, and folding of documents seem far away from the conventional practices of historians. Yet their professional habitus is changing in view of the digitization of archival materials that produce new ontologies of historical data. The availability of digital photographs and scans of archival documents facilitates ways of historiographic work that are similar to Miastoprojekt's transformative, dexterous, and experimental operations. They may be particularly useful for researching Baghdad's urbanization during the Cold War and the impact of Miastoprojekt's planners on these processes, as such research requires coming back to the sources used by these planners themselves: dispersed and fragmented, heterogeneous and incongruous, detached from their accompanying commentary, and often accessible only as poor-quality monochromatic copies.

Such study may begin with layering cartographic images in order to compare them, whether in an editor of raster graphics (bitmaps) or by georeferencing them within a GIS environment. The latter procedure includes rescaling, rotating, and skewing maps and plans so that they fit the real-life geographical coordinates. Each of these steps, however, results in some loss of information. For example, enlarging a land-use map from a smaller scale to overlay it with one in a larger scale points at scale as an index of precision and not just of size. When these steps are actively logged rather than just glossed over, they document the diversity and sometimes incommensurability of the compared maps, including their scale, orientation, or projection system.

Opportunities for registering such differences grow exponentially when raster images are translated into vector graphics, or "shapefiles" in a GIS environment. Each shapefile is an object-oriented database consisting of discrete objects grouped into three parent classes of points, lines, and polygons. Objects in each class branch into more specific ones, characterized by attributes (graphic, textual, or numerical) and functionalities, including the ability for some classes to be clustered together.[36] Far from being a purely technical procedure, the translation from raster into objects populating shapefiles is an interpretive one. This includes not only interpreting partially preserved or discolored material but also negotiating the frequent inconsistencies in the symbology of a map. Variations among categories, such as "housing" or "social facilities," and their subdivisions become an opportunity for a historian to record and reflect upon the specificity of scientific, technological, and professional regimes within and across which the planners worked, as well as their assumptions and omissions. The latter include, for example, the fact that Miastoprojekt planned the distribution of mosques in



11.3. Comparison between residential areas in Baghdad surveyed in 1985 (by the Japanese Consortium of Consulting Firms) and the housing layouts foreseen by the 1973 master plan (Miastoprojekt-Kraków). Drawing by Ł. Stanek; postproduction by Kacper Kępiński.

Baghdad without differentiating between their denominations, thus avoiding a political controversy but also obscuring the social reality of the city.

Shapefiles lend themselves to manipulations that can be differentiated into "models" and "simulations," a distinction introduced by historians of cybernetic and nuclear weapons research, climatology, and biology in the Cold War.[37] Modeling is a recursive process of manipulating a digital representation, or their series. This may include comparing maps of Baghdad from the late 1950s with plans produced by Miastoprojekt in the course of the two following decades, and with surveys from the 1980s, when Japa-

nese planners plotted the city's land uses, among them housing (fig 11.3). Yet the comparison between the Japanese survey and Miastoprojekt's master plan requires a series of translations between their categories, in particular the merging of the seven categories of housing from the master plan into the single one presented by the survey ("gross residential land use").[38] Another form of modeling would be a study of the urban standards that underlay the designs of Baghdad's neighborhoods in the 1980s. The reconstruction of indicators of habitation density, catchment areas of public amenities, number of parking places, and square meters of green space per inhabitant as implemented in specific designs, when compared with urban standards introduced by Miastoprojekt, provides clues for assessing the regulatory impact of the master plan on Baghdad's urbanization.[39]

At the same time, a model can be expanded toward a "simulation," or an inquiry that tests hypotheses and rules out competing explanations.[40] While comparison of planning documents is often concerned with numbers—habitation densities, catchment areas, radii of social facilities, traffic indicators—simulations allow historians to read these data in view of their technopolitical conditions and consequences. This approach leaves behind the concept of a container-space, which, as scholars have pointed out, is the ontological assumption of a GIS database, and it promises to open that database toward an understanding of Baghdad as produced and reproduced by practices that are not only material but also representational, imaginary, and lived.[41] For example, doing a comparison of housing densities in both Miastoprojekt plans helps to unpack the controversies about the introduction of multifamily housing in Baghdad, which straddled concerns about welfare distribution, political loyalties, and cultural and national identities. The comparison of traffic flows planned in and around Kadhemiya challenges the discourse of heritage preservation and its vagaries, from the celebration of Baghdad's history under Qasim to the politics of preservation under Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq War. A study of urban standards regulating catchment areas of education, health, cultural, and religious facilities draws attention to visions and realities of everyday life in Baghdad and their relationship to the program of Arab socialism as advocated by the Baath Party. Each of these inquiries builds upon the GIS database and interrogates it in view of an expanded range of historical sources.

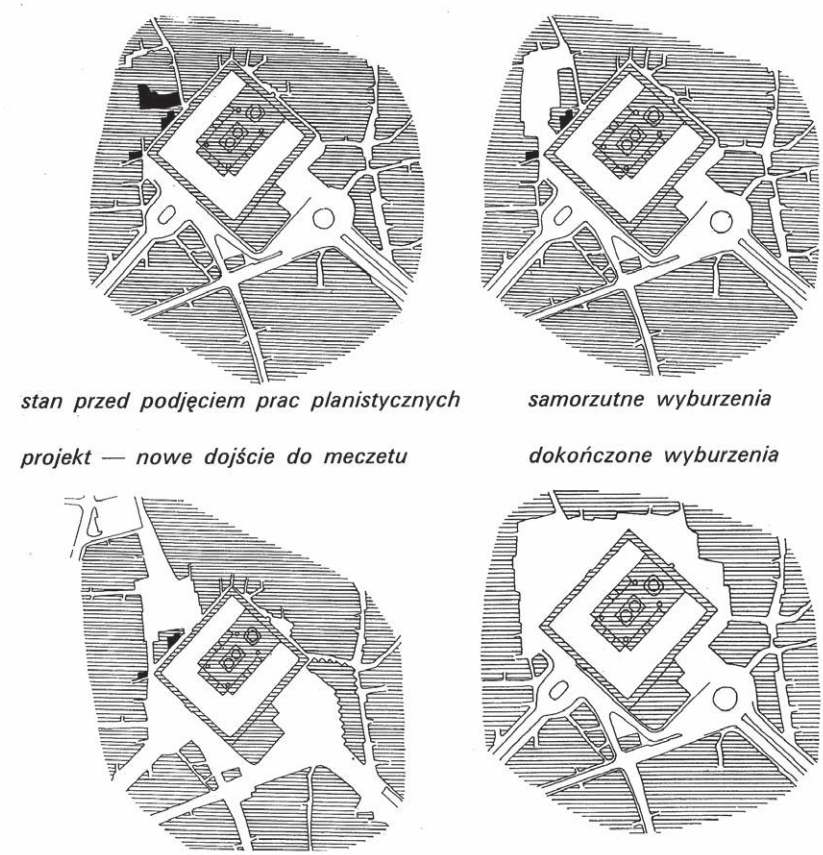
Models and simulations are means for approximating the knowledge of Baghdad produced by Miastoprojekt planners based on the cartographic materials available to them, for estimating their horizons of choices, and for evidencing the impact of the master plans on the development of the city. But these procedures come with considerable epistemic costs. Besides the reductive ontologies of space presupposed by most GIS-based studies, as critics of historical GIS have pointed out, there is also the incommensurability between the often ambiguous and enigmatic character of historical sources and the quantitative nature of databases.[42] Others objected more fundamentally to a historiography

that privileges cartographic sources and thus tends to favor the view of the producers of these documents, which are often entangled with state and military surveillance, normalization, policing, correction, and racialization.[43] In addition to these concerns, GIS-based studies of cartographic documents from Cold War Baghdad may result in yet another type of obfuscation. Such studies are unable to register antagonisms around the legitimacy, reliability, and prestige attributed to cartographic materials, as well as the negotiations that resulted from their confrontation by actors on the ground. In other words, when read in isolation from a broad range of historical sources, digital models and simulations risk obscuring what I have called the politics of comparison. This politics included, in particular, the high stakes and dangers for Iraqi decision-makers and professionals that resulted from extending the candidates, terms, and positionalities of comparison beyond those derived from Western centers.

Unforgetting the Cold War

Cold War politics of comparison made a surprising reappearance in August 1982 at a conference on the adaptive reuse of historical cities that was organized in Cambridge, Massachusetts, by the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at MIT. Among the speakers were John Warren and Roy Worskett, the British architects commissioned to deliver a new plan for Kadhemiya. In the published proceedings, they summarized Miastoprojekt's recommendation to "demoli[sh] the slums around the shrine of Kadhimiyeh [*sic*]."[44] After the proceedings of this conference reached Poland, they caused fury among those who had been in charge of the planning of Kadhemiya. Among them was Andrzej Basista, an architect, scholar, and educator who had published two substantial reports about Kadhemiya in 1976.[45] In a letter to the British designers and in his later book published in Polish (1995), he pointed out that Miastoprojekt's plans from 1972 and 1973 did not recommend the demolition of the urban fabric in Kadhemiya. Rather, they only accommodated the illegal demolitions of that fabric that were taking place in parallel with the planning process. Like his colleagues had done before in Baghdad, Basista presented this account using comparative means. He published a sequence of four line drawings that showed the changing reality around the mosque, juxtaposed with the shifting approach of Miastoprojekt's planners (fig 11.4).[46]

Basista's claims were consistent with the account of Iraqi architectural historian Ihsan Fethi, who showed that the transformations of Kadhemiya resulted from a confusing negotiation between various actors in Baghdad, among whom Miastoprojekt planners rarely had the last word.[47] But this controversy also testifies to something else. Basista was invited to Cambridge to participate in the 1982 conference, but he was prevented from traveling to the United States—and from making his voice heard—because of martial law that began in Poland



11.4. Kadhemiya, 1972–1973. *Top*: "Condition before the planning work began" and "Illegal demolitions." *Bottom*: "Design: new approach to the mosque" and "Finished demolitions." From Andrzej Basista, *Opowieści budynków: Architektura czterech kultur* (Warsaw and Kraków: PWN, 1995), 367.

in December 1981.[48] His letter to Warren and Worskett remained unanswered, and, unsurprisingly, his drawings from the Polish-language publication remained unacknowledged.[49]

Just as Cold War geopolitics and its political economy conditioned the possibility of the co-production of comparative knowledge between the second and the third worlds, so too did they facilitate the active forgetting of this knowledge in the "first" world. During the Cold War, Western access to this knowledge was often filtered, and by the 1990s the active forgetting of it had been reinforced by the "creative destruction" of research institutions in postsocialist Eastern Europe and by their destruction *sans phrase* in Iraq after the US-led invasion in 2003 (in which Poland participated). This forgetting was not just a result of the

isolation of Eastern Europe or its particular languages but also the consequence of a systematic devaluation of knowledge production in socialist countries that had taken place in the Cold War, when Western scholarship increasingly saw this knowledge as ideological and unreliable.[50]

This devaluation was rarely revised after the fall of the Berlin Wall. While this particular architectural event has been celebrated as indicative of the elimination of Cold War barriers, these barriers were disappearing in a highly selective and asymmetrical manner. A case in point would be the vibrant debates in "new comparative urbanism" that envisage "new geographies of imagination and epistemology in the production of urban and regional theory."[51] This was how, in the wake of the Cold War, Ananya Roy, Jennifer Robinson, and others challenged the universalistic assumptions of concepts derived from Western debates, experiences, and imaginations and called for cities of the Global South to become sites for theoretical production.[52] For Robinson, there are no privileged sites for theory-building, and any city could be thought "through" any other city in an instance of "experimental comparison."[53]

When envisioning a plan for Baghdad through the lens of Warsaw, as well as Kabul through Tashkent, Algiers through Bucharest, and Conakry through Zagreb, architects, planners, and scholars from socialist Eastern Europe and their counterparts in postindependence Asia and Africa had been performing such experimental comparison. Accordingly, one possible conclusion from this chapter would be to extend the pedigree of new comparative urbanism. The work of Miastoprojekt in Baghdad would be just one example among many, in addition to studies of architecture and urbanization in the Global South by Soviet planners and historians who tapped into the Soviet experiences of Central Asia.[54] Other examples include the comparison between the Eastern European and West African countryside by Hungarian architects, as well as comparative studies by Ghanaian and Eastern European regional planners, to mention just a few.[55] This work also included dissertation research by South American, African, and Asian scholars about urbanization in their countries—research that was carried out at Eastern European institutions or those newly established in the Global South—as well as a reverse movement of ideas, such as attempts at implementing the Chinese experience of laying out special economic zones in Eastern Europe in the 1980s.[56]

However, in spite of the continuities between these experiences and the current comparative debates, their differences are more striking. This chapter has suggested two of them. First, it pointed out the comparative agency of local professionals and decision-makers, who juxtaposed and assessed expertise coming from various centers and applied it to the tasks at hand. In other words, whether "Baghdad was like Warsaw" was not up to the Polish planners to decide; rather, this decision was part of a politics of comparison that was negotiated by Iraqi actors. Second, this agency was informed by knowledge produced

beyond former imperial centers in Western Europe. New sites of knowledge production were established in the socialist countries and in the Global South, including the Department of Architecture at the University of Baghdad. Their geography was facilitated by the geopolitics of the Cold War and its political economy, and it contrasts with the geography of the new comparative urbanism. The latter's proponents offer to dislocate the candidates of comparison beyond London, Paris, Toronto, New York, and Los Angeles while at the same time stabilizing these very cities as centers of comparative knowledge. Just as the protagonists of this chapter made strategic use of their distance from the world capitalist system in order to produce a new type of knowledge about Baghdad, so too is the gap between their experience and current comparative debates an opportunity for historicizing the political economy of comparative urbanism, old and new.