

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. incl. 150 colour and 127 b&w ills, ISBN 9780691168708, £48
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Reviewed by IULIA STATICA

In *Architecture in Global Socialism*, Łukasz Stanek provides an exceptional in-depth analysis of the landscape of collaborations between Eastern Europe, West Africa and the Middle East during the cold war. A subject of increasing scholarly interest, the rapport between socialist and postcolonial paradigms is approached from a novel perspective in this book. Rather than focusing on unilateral material and ideological transfers from the eastern bloc into countries in West Africa and the Middle East, the book presents a ‘view from the South’ that carefully maps the complex and often convoluted processes of exchange, entanglement and ‘global cooperation’. The notion of ‘worldmaking’, which Stanek derives from the Martiniquan philosopher Édouard Glissant’s *mondialité* and French philosopher Henri Lefebvre’s *mondialisation*, frames the argument of the book. Referring to Lefebvre’s idea that the ‘world is a contested and plural category’ that overcomes its abstractness and only becomes ‘true in practice’, Stanek points to both the subtleties of these processes and the specificity of each locality. Although each city he investigates — Accra, Lagos, Baghdad, Abu Dhabi and Kuwait City — comprises the topic of a chapter, Stanek does not limit his discussion to those urban territories. Rather, his extensive archival work and interviews point to wide networks of collaboration and intertwined political, cultural and economic dynamics. In this way, the book provides a careful insight into the architectural collaborations of the cold war beyond the political lens of socialism, its alliances and actors, instead using a changing framework of labour, adaptability and translation.

The first place the book investigates, in chapter two, is Kwame Nkrumah’s Ghana, where the collaborative ‘coproduction’ of architectural practice by the Ghana National Construction Corporation, the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Poland and Yugoslavia worked towards a ‘syntax’ of socialist modernity. Compared with the book’s other examples, Ghana was a unique case: its desired transition from a colonial to a socialist politics allowed perhaps the most clear-cut case of Soviet translation, also articulated in the ‘gift diplomacy’ initiated under Nikita Khrushchev. Nevertheless, the unrealised project for two housing districts in Ghana involved not only a transfer of socialist patterns of daily life, proposed through adapted typologies and materials, but also an experimental site of Soviet design for ‘hot climates’. The case of Nigeria, presented in chapter three, points to discourses that placed Eastern Europe and West Africa in mutual relationship and emphasised the two geographies’ common experience of ‘underdevelopment, colonisation and peripherality’. Unlike Ghana, however, Nigeria’s detachment from socialist politics meant that it saw these commonalities as favourable grounds for the constitution of a new architectural and urban language and typology. The work of the Polish architect and scholar Zbigniew Dmochowski (1906–82) in particular points to the ‘instrumentality of Eastern Europe’ in the process of the decolonisation of Nigerian architecture, insofar as

Dmochowski significantly contributed to the undoing of 'Eurocentric hierarchies' in the 1950s and 1960s through his role in reforming Nigerian architectural education.

The themes of the vernacular, tradition and urban heritage are major ones for many of the cities presented in the book, albeit in different ways. As in the Nigerian context, in the case of Baghdad the question of rescuing a certain 'tradition' became essential in the production of the new architecture. With a similar methodology to that used in the reconstruction of Warsaw after the second world war, the Polish proposal for the Baghdad masterplan included thorough documentation processes to be carried out in collaboration with 'nationals'. The plan emphasised the conjunction of a foreign methodology with local patterns and questions of architectural heritage. The latter were especially significant in debates around typologies of mass housing, which were intended to alleviate social injustice but were incompatible with local living patterns.

In the eastern bloc countries, the role of the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecom), and especially its Permanent Commission for Construction — which functioned, in effect, as a unifying body promoting socialist standardisation methods that could also be exported overseas — was complicated by singular national interests and economic goals of the different countries. Such international frameworks of labour coordination were often neglected in practice, as with the rather unsuccessful collaborations between East Germany and Romania in Iraq. Moreover, internal processes often led to peculiar forms of intervention. For example, the so-called 'technological adaptation' practised by Romania in both Iraq and Libya around large-scale barter transactions resulted in the 'exploitation of Romania's own population' through extreme shortages of food and amenities internally.

The diversity of interventions, collaborations and competition between Eastern European countries and the Middle East is further emphasised in the last two cities analysed in the book, in chapter five: Abu Dhabi and Kuwait City. Their case is peculiar because the United Arab Emirates had no affinity with socialism, while being firmly anchored in the Islamic world. The simultaneous and overlapping presence of socialist and capitalist practices in the UAE made possible forms of experimentation involving the use of new technologies with traditional Arab or Islamic building practices and urbanism, which Stanek points out as being significant for complex forms of knowledge exchange and material transfers. In this way, the UAE constituted a space of confluence that allowed architects from socialist countries such as Poland and Bulgaria to function within a system that extended beyond the socialist solidarities offered by other developing nations. Interestingly, chapter five is the only chapter that raises the question of ethnography's role in the new planning and housing construction. Although it is mentioned only briefly, this aspect resonates with Stanek's remark later in the chapter that the 1980 census showed that 'over three-fifths of the population in Kuwait and three-quarters of the labor force consisted of immigrants'. Nevertheless, in the reimagining of a new urbanism, the presence of 'the other within' — 'the migrant, the non-citizen, and the bidun' — was not acknowledged. These points, along with broader complexities regarding architecture's instrumental role in subject formation in other contexts, would merit further exploration.

Tracing the convoluted networks connecting these geographies of the south to the architects and planners of the Soviet Union, Poland, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, East Germany,

Romania and Hungary, the book reveals a complex overlapping of layers that reflects shifts in internal and foreign policies, as well as the complexity of discourses around labour and technologies. While the book offers a unique account of these networks of collaboration, it also engages with a compelling set of themes that emphasise not only architecture's instrumental role in the socialist endeavour, but also its ability to open up modes of worldmaking. In doing so, the book enriches and adds nuance to contemporary postcolonial discourses, which often overlook the presence and mediating role of these socialist countries in processes of decolonisation and state-making, and it demonstrates that the cold war context cannot be thoroughly addressed without a consideration of the intersections between the global north, south and east.

With its impressive investigation of multilingual archival material across multiple countries, Stanek's book is an extraordinary account of these heterogeneous rapports and changing sovereignties, and a ground-breaking contribution not only to the historiography of modern architecture, but also to the cultural history of the cold war.

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Lawrence Chua, *Bangkok Utopia: Modern Architecture and Buddhist Felicities, 1910–1973* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2021), 296 pp.
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The title of this book consists of words and concepts that are both familiar and unfamiliar to most architectural historians. Most architectural historians are acquainted with 'utopia' and 'modern architecture', while 'Bangkok' and 'Buddhist felicities' might be at the margins of scholarly preoccupation and the latter concept less familiar. It is this mix of the familiar with the unfamiliar and, more importantly, the defamiliarisation of the known or taken-for-granted that make this book a significant contribution to twentieth-century architectural histories of south-east Asia and the world.

Through case studies taken from twentieth-century Bangkok, the author Lawrence Chua, an architectural historian based at Syracuse University, New York, shows how the repertoire of concepts associated with modernity and modernism — from political concepts such as the nation and state to building types such as the cinema and hotel, from building materials in the form of concrete and steel to abstract architectural language — was reconfigured by Theravada Buddhism as modernity in Siam and (after 1939) Thailand, in a state that was never secular but always Buddhist. Drawing on Thai, Chinese and English sources, Chua demonstrates a deep interdisciplinary knowledge of Thai cultural and religious concepts. However, the in-depth discussions of the influences of the various cultural and religious specificities of Thailand on its