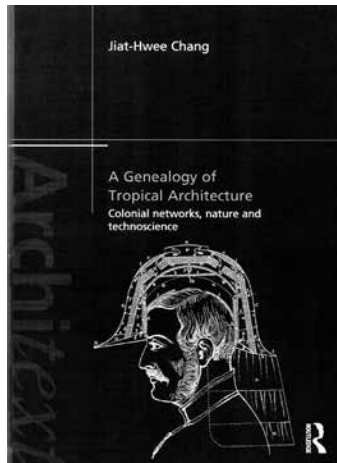


Book Reviews



A Genealogy of Tropical Architecture: Colonial Networks, Nature, and Technoscience.

Jiat-Hwee Chang. New York and London: Routledge, Architext Series, 2016. Xxviii + 290 pp., b&w illus.

The study of colonial architecture has changed dramatically over the past thirty years. The development of new analytical frameworks inspired by postcolonial and poststructuralist discourse has expanded understanding of the ways buildings actively participated in the construction and maintenance of the colonial project. The colonial built environment now appears as a much more fluid, variegated and contested milieu than previously considered — one shaped, in particular, by the agency of design knowledge in the service of administration.

Jiat-Hwee Chang's *A Genealogy of Tropical Architecture* is an important contribution to these efforts. Chang's interest in the topic stems from the notion of tropicity itself — in particular, its connotations of regional specificity and historical and political neutrality. These remain active in architectural discourse today, particularly in relation to so-called “sustainable” or “green” architecture. Through a carefully documented series of architectural and institutional case studies, Chang identifies the term's conceptual and etymological roots in colonial-era Singapore, and traces their circulation through Great Britain's imperial networks via people, practices and objects over the course of the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries.

The book is organized into two parts. The first consists of four chapters, each of which introduces a key building type that contributed to the political and discursive project of tropicity. In the first chapter, Chang reassesses the colonial villa as a heterogeneous artifact originating from the collective expertise of military engineers, clients, and immigrant Chinese and Indian builders. Chang then conceptualizes the military barracks as a kind of replicable hygienic enclave capable of mediating the British army's relationship to climate anywhere around the world. The third chapter describes how Singapore's first colonial hospitals did not necessarily ensure access to quality health care for the local population, but rather created the appearance of good governance through the collection of data via surveillance. Similarly, the fourth chapter describes the early history of the colony's public-housing program through the bureaucratic machinations of the Singapore Improvement Trust (SIT).

Collectively, these examples resituate tropicity as a crucial component of a larger political, economic and social project designed to establish and enforce difference vis-à-vis Great Britain. Importantly, each is considered not simply as the product of some singular, architectural genius, but as an embodiment of acquired knowledge and practice shaped by the uncertainties of colonial existence — physical evidence that effectively demonstrated the categorical construction of the tropics through architectural production.

The book's second half then broadens definitions of tropical architecture as part of the expansive technoscientific knowledge systems that gained prominence within the British colonial enterprise after World War II. Tropicity's value as a form of climate-based knowledge took on distinctive meaning during the early Cold War, when urgent questions of physical and ideological territory — its delineation, defense and representation — renewed interest in localized forms of design expertise. It is within this context

that chapter 5 discusses tropical architecture's institutionalization and internationalization through the Tropical Division of Great Britain's Building Research Stations (BRS) — which established nodes in a global network of designers, engineers and technocrats centered around the British metropole. The book's final chapter considers the lingering effects of tropicity in design pedagogy in both Great Britain and Singapore after colonization — in particular, the establishment of the Department of Tropical Studies (DTS) at the Architectural Association (AA) in London between 1954 and 1972.

As suggested by its title, the book owes much to post-colonial and poststructuralist theory, in particular Michel Foucault. Bruno Latour's work on network theory and the nonhuman actant figures prominently here as well. These frameworks are both essential and productive; Chang's emphasis on organizational structure, knowledge circulation, and the management of human behavior, for example, gives much-needed contour and definition to the procedural and regulatory dimensions of colonial authority. The author's reliance upon these ideas may occasionally test readers' tolerance for such specialized language, however.

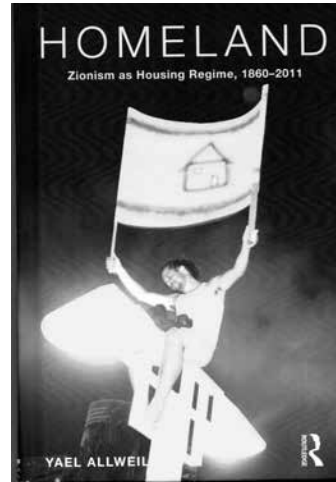
A Genealogy of Tropical Architecture represents an important rethinking of architecture's role in colonialism. One of the book's many merits is its rejection of the problematic formulations that often pit the local against the global in the study of colonial projects. Chang effectively demonstrates that all design knowledge is localized, and that only through its circulation through various institutions, agents and practices — “technologies of distance,” in the author's words, like prefabrication or data management — is it rendered as global (p.10).

By following tropical architecture as a consistent thread of knowledge from late-nineteenth-century British colonialism in Asia through its postwar “technocratic turn” (p.175), *A Genealogy of Tropical Architecture* presents an architectural history of imperialism that is both compelling and timely. By prompting readers to reconsider the broader range of technical-oriented aid programs and initiatives designed by the so-called “First World” for the “Third World” after World War II, it raises important questions about the bureaucratic mechanisms that continue to shape geopolitics and architectural production today.

Cole Roskam

University of Hong Kong

Homeland: Zionism as Housing Regime, 1860–2011. Yael Allweil. Abingdon, U.K., and New York: Routledge, 2017. 296 pp., 192 b&w illus.



The significance of housing in disciplining the modern subject has been widely discussed within architectural history with regard to a variety of contexts, periods and theories. The importance of housing in forming “adequate” subjects of the nation-state and shaping the state-citizen contract has ranged from investigation of late-nineteenth-century British social housing

projects and postwar architectural experiments to Foucauldian analysis of the disciplinary function of the working-class housing estate. Yael Allweil's book, which provides an account of the central role of housing in nationalism and nation-building, could have been comfortably assessed within this framework. Yet the complex and contested situation of Zionism and Israel-Palestine — a homeland for two competing nationalities (as its hyphenated name indicates) — and the author's ambitious timeframe and broad empirical perspective (encompassing more than 150 years of both Jewish and Arab housing) situate her work beyond this frame of reference.

As a national movement to establish a homeland for the Jewish people in the biblical “Land of Israel,” Zionism was different from other national enterprises in two main respects: its desired “Jewish nation” was scattered across the world, and its desired homeland had been inhabited mostly by Arabs for centuries. Therefore, not only did a nation-state have to be formed to govern a population in a specific territory, as in more “classical” cases, but a nation had to be gathered and a territory claimed while that governance structure was being established. Interestingly, demographic and territorial shifts were also being set in motion at the time by the decline of the Ottoman Empire. Yet, housing, as Allweil shows, was one of the main architectural instruments through which changes related to the Zionist project happened and could be traced. Housing programs were not only intended to design the subjects of the new nation(s) of Israel-Palestine; they were the means by which significant changes in the region could be enacted, both in terms of territories and populations.

Zionism is thus identified here as a housing regime characterizing the very *raison d'être* of each of its political projects. The housing types related to these projects are examined through their specific historical, geographical and political contexts in three themed sections.

The first section discusses the emergence of Zionist and Palestinian nationalism in relation to new settlement forms — namely, the defensive compound and the open campus. These forms first began to replace traditional structures following the Tanzimat reforms that led to the 1858 Ottoman land code, which subjected land, labor, money and sovereignty to the market and deeply changed both local Jewish and Arab societies.

The second section focuses on housing for “proto-nationalism.” Allweil here identifies two classes of Palestinian nationalism in “new native” housing types — the masonry houses of hilltowns and the straw-and-mud huts of plantation serf villages. And she examines the development of two Zionist urban and rural settlement patterns and housing types: the self-developed housing-based urbanism of Tel Aviv and the *kibbutz*'s communal children's house, designed to create a future “good Zionist subject.” She thus seeks to demonstrate reciprocal relationships in the development of new housing and settlement types and in the creation of new national subjects, both Palestinians and Zionists.

In the book's third section, Allweil then analyzes the relation between housing and nation-building after the establishment of the state of Israel. In particular, she examines the use of state housing for Jewish immigrants as a foundation for the state-citizen contract, and the self-development of Arab-Palestinian housing as a form of resistance against being “swept away.” Through its manifestation in terms of differentiated access to housing, she also analyzes the appearance of differentiated Jewish citizenship based on ethnicity, seniority, a market economy, and national politics.

Navigating through a discussion of different housing and settlement types in relation to different populations and changing political realities, Allweil identifies reoccurring spatial patterns and their social and political meanings. Among these were the influence that Palestinian and Zionist housing types had on one another, and on ideas and concepts within both societies as to what characterized “good” national housing. These included the Jewish-Israeli *Zamud* houses (Hebrew for “attached to the land,” with the ideal being a single-family villa) and the Palestinian-Israeli concept of *Summud* (Arabic for “resistance to being swept away,” with the intention of staying in one's original village at all costs and in defiance of state edicts). Both signified a claim to a homeland by expressing in similar Hebrew and Arabic words the ideal of housing attached to the land or to a specific place. As opposed to these aspirations as expressed through housing types and concepts, it is, however, striking to see the multiple forms of temporary housing documented in the book. These have appeared in Israel-Palestine throughout the years, from the tents of the first *kibbutz* settlers to the improvised shelters in Palestinian refugee camps — the ephemeral yet often enduring materialization of the radical geopolitical changes that have taken place in the area.

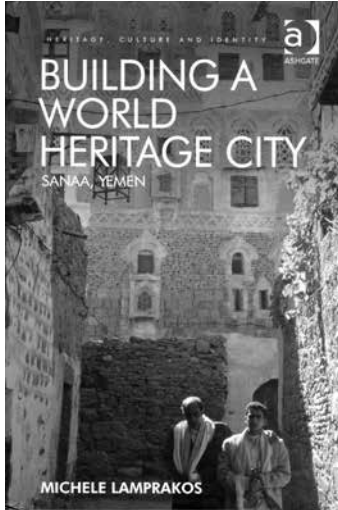
Housing, Allweil argues, is a quintessential object of agonistic conflict and political debate in Israel-Palestine, and it is around it that the state-citizen contract has evolved and developed. And by demonstrating the similarity to other cases in the U.S., Singapore and China, she contextualizes her study, while highlighting the state's role in formulating housing regimes that become inseparable from the larger nation-building processes. My principal critique of Allweil's effort is that her argument about the significance of housing in shaping nations could have been supplemented by discussing Zionism, and later Israel, within the larger context of other settler societies, in which housing was, and still is, being used as the building block of one nationality, while providing an important tool for the dispossession of another.

Building on the social housing protest of 2011, the book concludes with an optimistic utopian vision of the “nation yet to come” founded on a place-based equal demand for access to housing. As much as this dream is appealing, the tents of the inspiring 2011 social protest have long been stored away, while Israel's housing regime is still highly invested in less consensual projects on the other side of its recognized borders — whether we refrain from calling it Zionism or not.

Irit Katz

University of Pennsylvania / University of Cambridge

Building a World Heritage City: Sanaa, Yemen. Michele Lamprakos. Farnham, U.K., and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015. Xiii + 270 pp., illus., maps.



In light of the ongoing civil war in Yemen, which has taken a heavy toll on the capital city of Sanaa over the past few years, Michele Lamprakos's *Building a World Heritage City* offers a wistful, nuanced glimpse into an earlier chapter of its politics, one focused mainly on the production and conservation of heritage in the 2,500-year-old city. The book bridges heritage theory and practice,

where practice refers both to the practice of conservation and the unfolding of heritage on the ground — particularly through the vernacular building traditions that shaped Sanaa's distinctive urban assemblage of stone, brick and earth structures.

The book opens with an overview of the development of the Old City of Sanaa, a fabled trading crossroads known for its skyline of tower houses and dense urban fabric punctuated by communal gardens. Over the course of its long history, however, Lamprakos notes, the city only came to be touted as “historic” within the space of a generation, since the advent of modernization in the 1960s. Driven by complex regional geopolitics and the national politics of identity, the following decades saw an exodus from the historic city center, the partial destruction of the city walls (the defining landmark of the old city), and a subsequent backlash that gave steam to the nascent conservation movement.

Lamprakos delves into struggles in Sanaa to come to terms with the various notions of “past” and “heritage” that typify the views of the city's traditional master builders (*ustas*), a new class of Yemeni construction tradesmen and conservation professionals, and visiting international experts. This struggle is framed against the backdrop of the International Safeguarding Campaign for Sanaa, launched as an appeal to mobilize support for the history city, and the city's subsequent inscription as a World Heritage Site in 1986.

In unpacking these notions, Lamprakos circles repeatedly back to juxtapositions of the various terms used by Yemenis to articulate the city's condition. These are seen both as a source of pride and shame due to perceptions of “backwardness.” Among these terms are *turath* (heritage), *turath jadid* (new heritage), *athar* (antiquities, referring both to settlements and customs), and *tarikih* (history). Tensions

between these concepts may, for example, be seen in the different policy directives governing the conservation of *ma 'lam athari* (an archaeological monument) versus *ma 'lam tarikhi* (a historic monument) — where the former is subject to total conservation, whereas only the public exteriors of the latter must be kept, while the interiors can be changed.

With regard to the work of conservation professionals, the author's painstaking examination of various international and local conservation projects reveals that despite the rhetoric surrounding the supposedly universal and hegemonizing forces of international practice, on the ground the work of various players and their respective philosophies are characterized by deep schisms, and there is in fact no monolithic notion of conservation in the city. Two main strands emerge, however: strategies that favor a holistic revitalization of the city and its run-down urban services, versus donor-driven projects focused on the rehabilitation of individual high-profile buildings.

Meanwhile, unexpected alliances emerge as well. The typical narrative here pits the irrepressible expressions of creativity among modern-day traditional builders against mid-century international conventions of material and historic authenticity which frown upon interventions seen to compromise historic fabric. The author points out that modern-day *ustas* who validate their work in rebuilding in a historicist manner as “modernized heritage” have found a voice of support in the father of international experts in Sanaa, Ronald Lewcock, who counseled that “rebuilding is fine as long as traditional materials are used” in the context of the living city.

The author pays particular attention to the increasingly embattled role of the master builders, once the main agents of construction and repair of Sanaa's buildings and the keepers of Sanaa's building traditions. Today, these figures have largely been relegated to the role of subcontractors in a modern, industrialized construction system of tendering and paper-based documentation. Their knowledge and authority have been further undermined by the popularity of new construction techniques such as reinforced concrete, the codification of construction into modern professions and trades, and the emergence of the conservation profession and of codes hewing to international norms. Their marginalization is typified by the words of one master builder, who lamented, “If they do not first preserve the craftsmen, how can they preserve the old city?”

Reflecting this *cri de coeur*, the book's assertion that Sanaa's evolving building practice and practitioners — not only the resulting architectural edifices and urban landscape — are worthy of valorization is well taken. But in a sense, this is not a revolutionary notion: building practice is embedded in World Heritage criterion (iv) on typology and (v) on settlements as part of the ongoing management of such sites. And the continuity of such living practices, as well as notions of change and constant renewal, are at the heart of the newer Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural

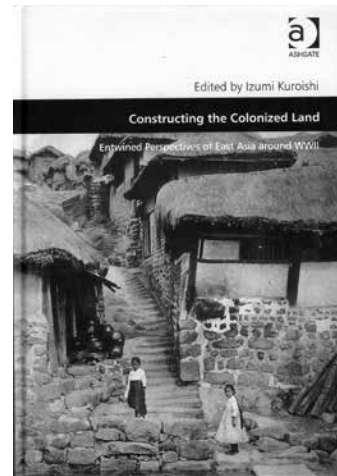
Heritage (which eschews the very notion of authenticity). The centrality of renewal as a modus for sustaining heritage places is also increasingly reflected in current conservation discourse, particularly in the context of living cities.

That said, as the book makes abundantly clear, the evolving corpus of building practice still struggles to find traction in the overall project of conserving the Old City of Sanaa. Thus the expressive flair of current-day builders — in particular, their introduction of new elements to the work of their predecessors — is seen as “contaminating” the historic built artifact, rather than a natural evolution of the architectural and social fabric.

Drawing upon extensive fieldwork, Lamprakos’s book offers a richly detailed documentation of the inner workings of the World Heritage city of Sanaa. Its attention to how conservation politics plays out at a local level is a refreshing change from heritage studies that focus mainly on the international machinations of the World Heritage Committee and its agents. In capturing the voices of many individuals involved in the conservation of Sanaa — including government functionaries, residents, international experts, and the all-important *ustas* — the book provides an evocative granularity in its narrative of the Sanaa story which will appeal to historians, architects, and conservation scholars and practitioners.

Montira Horyangura Unakul
UNESCO Bangkok

Constructing the Colonized Land: Entwined Perspectives of East Asia Around WWII. Edited by Izumi Kuroishi. Surrey, U.K., and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, Design and the Built Environment Series, 2014. Xiv + 266 pp., b&w illus.



Constructing the Colonized Land: Entwined Perspectives of East Asia around WWII is an important addition to expanding scholarship on colonial architecture and urbanism in the twentieth century. The book is particularly valuable given the dearth of English-language writing exploring this subject in the East Asian region, as compared to other colonial territories,

including South and Southeast Asia.

As Prasenjit Duara points out in the Foreword of the book, investigations into the role of architecture and political formation in East Asia before and around World War II are significant not only because this spatial legacy is still alive, but also because of the tensions arising from two contradictory developments over the past decade: growing aspirations toward “Asian integration” both economically and culturally, and intensifying disputes over sovereignty and territory between nations. This situation is further compounded by the growing threat of war and destabilization posed by North Korea’s nuclear ambitions and China’s ongoing building of new territory in the South China Sea. Although all of these developments have been facilitated by new technologies, diplomacy, and ongoing political negotiations, they are also predicated on particular interpretations of history, which are continually used to legitimize specific policies in the present.

With increasing concern over the protection of sovereignty and national interest, it is not surprising that these interpretations often focus on historical events that emphasize conflicts and nationalist struggle, rather than the complex negotiations and mutual collaborations that took place between different nations before and during the war. This book represents a major effort to delineate these complex, nuanced relationships by examining the production of architecture and urban space from the perspectives of different actors and institutions in the first half of the twentieth century. As the editor, Izumi Kuroishi, explains, the aim is “to investigate the hidden core of the social mechanism used to destroy, transform and construct East Asian cities in all of their contradictions.”

The book is divided into nine chapters roughly organized by areas in the region. It begins with Yashhiko Nishizawa’s chapter that discusses the context of colonial architecture de-

signed by Japanese architects in East Asia. This is followed by four chapters that examine the multiple trajectories of urban transformation in China and Taiwan: Cole Roskam's study on the competing civic building projects in semi-colonial Shanghai; Xu Subin's chapter on the research on Chinese architectural heritage carried out by Japanese scholars and the emergent influence of Asianism; Akihito Aoi's documentation of the transformation of religious landscapes in colonial Taiwan; and Chao-Ching Fu's study of the urban improvement projects carried out by Japanese in Taiwan. A chapter by Paula Morais next examines the shifting spatial strategies of the Portuguese administration in Macau in its attempt to maintain its colonial state identity. The remaining three chapters then examine planning and design initiatives in Korea aimed at modernizing the built environment: Junichiro Ishida and Jooya Kim's chapter on land readjustment projects in Keijofu; Woo Don-Son's chapter on the perspectives of a Korean architect who once worked under the Japanese authority in Chosen; and finally Kuroishi's chapter on the research carried out by Japanese scholars on the living conditions in Korea and how these works became linked to later projects in Japan.

While the methodological approaches differ between the chapters, all display a concerted effort to challenge assumptions of existing historical discourse by providing alternative interpretations of historical events via close examination of the perspectives of the social actors involved in the making of the colonial built environment. Crucially, the focus on the processes through which these individuals formulated their views of architecture and culture reveals a much more fluid conception of the East Asian region, one characterized by dynamic cross-national and cross-cultural exchange of knowledge production. These can be seen, for example, in Xu's study of the active collaborations between Japanese and Chinese researchers in the 1920s concerning China's architectural heritage, as well as in Kuroishi's examination of the research methodologies developed by Japanese scholars in their studies of housing conditions in colonial Korea. Both chapters illustrate not only how interpretations of architecture were influenced by particular cultural systems rooted in one place, but more significantly by the encounters with other cultures. At the same time, they demonstrate that within the imperialist production of space, there exist different perspectives that do not always align with ideologies and policy goals of the state.

Another important insight provided by the book involves its attention to persistent anxieties among colonial authorities over the need to assert a stronger state identity upon the colonized territories — identities which were less stable in reality than often assumed. This can be seen in Roskam's chapter on Shanghai, where he elucidates how different colonial powers sought to shore up their symbolic presence through ambitious building projects within the foreign concessions. But it can also be found in Morais's chapter on Macau, in which she shows how the indeterminate status of Portuguese rule propelled the administration to constantly search for new strate-

gies to strengthen its image of authority through urban planning. Likewise, this sense of uncertainty could be observed in the territories under Japanese colonial rule. As demonstrated in the chapters by Nishizawa, Aoi, Fu, and Ishida and Kim, Japanese architects were actively engaged in attempting to modernize the civic, religious and domestic landscapes of colonial cities to underscore the success of Japan's "civilizing mission" and the legitimacy of its rule.

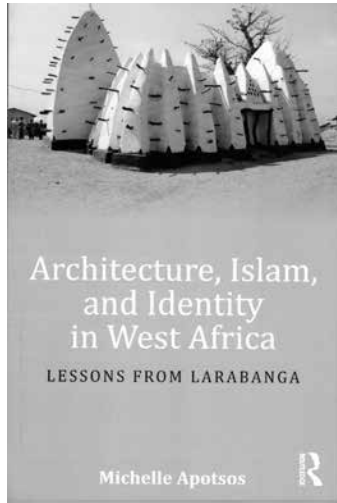
According to Kuroishi, the approach to history adopted by the book was inspired by the seminal works of several scholars, including Michel Foucault, Carlo Ginzburg, Eric Hobsbawm, and Michel de Certeau. Also acknowledged is the influence of Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey, whose conceptualizations of social space and collective identity enabled a more critical understanding of the relationship between the forms and spaces of cities beyond "traditional" architectural approaches focused only on physical elements.

Nevertheless, despite the rich theoretical perspective taken by the authors and the timeliness of the themes of the chapters, there are some limitations to this important volume. Although the introduction provides an excellent outline of the methodological approaches taken by the chapters, it could have included a discussion of how these works relate to and build on more recent writings on colonial architecture outside East Asia that engage with similar issues and themes. Indeed, given the emphasis on interdisciplinarity, agency, and relations of power in the colonial context, it is somewhat surprising to see no reference to some well-established concepts in the study of the colonial built environment. Among these are the association of colonial urban development with the world economy (Anthony King), colonial cities as urban laboratories (Gwendolyn Wright), the production of colonial knowledge and expertise (Timothy Mitchell), as well as the dualities of colonial cities and their representations (Janet Abu-Lughod). Given the richness of the materials in its chapters, the book could also have provided a more extended reflection on the advent of architectural modernism in East Asia and the extent to which it was incorporated into the uneven processes of modernization and emergent nationalism, and how the ongoing reappropriation of the modern in the region that relates to or departs from the ideological frameworks of the West and other colonial territories (Mark Crinson, Peter Scriver and Vikramaditya Prakash, Nezar AlSayyad).

Despite these areas where the book could have gone further, it is without a doubt a major contribution to the field of architectural history and colonial studies in East Asia and will serve as a catalyst for much-needed research in the years to come. It should be read by all of those interested in colonial architecture and urbanism, as well as scholars of area studies, cultural studies, urban history and heritage studies.

Cecilia L. Chu
The University of Hong Kong

Architecture, Islam, and Identity in West Africa, Lessons From Larabanga. By Michelle Apotsos. London and New York: Routledge, 2016. Xi + 215 pp., b&w illus.



Michelle Apotsos's book is a great contribution to the study of African architectural history. Her objective encompasses examining how in the early seventh century, Islam spread from Saudi Arabia to North Africa, and arrived in West Africa in the eighth and the ninth centuries, where it was assimilated into indigenous traditions in the region, and ultimately influenced the culture, architecture and identity

of the people of the town of Larabanga in northern Ghana. The book is grounded on the premise that "In the context of Larabanga and other regional communities, built form acts as a narrative vehicle capable of displaying history not as a singular monolithic account, but as a series of stories made manifest within the architectural folds of structure, creating a candid portrayal of history as it is continuously deconstructed, altered, reassembled, and developed in meaningful, deliberate ways" (p.36).

After a foreword by Barbaro Martinez-Ruiz, Apotsos's volume unfolds through an introduction, four chapters, and a conclusion. The most salient point in the introduction is that Islam is not just a "religion"; it is also a way of life that comprises "culture, lifestyle, identity, and a political strategy" (p.1). And, according to Apotsos, the town of Larabanga is ideal for collecting data on the important relationship between Islam and the people of West Africa, because it is the "only recorded 100 percent Muslim community" in Ghana (p.91).

In Chapter 1 Apotsos pays sustained attention to the concept of "Afro-Islamic" architecture, the contexts it developed, the origins of the building types it brought with it, and how its ways of life influenced indigenous built forms in the region. She surmises that studying "the variety of Afro-Islamic architectural types" in North and West Africa demonstrates "how the built environment in Larabanga has come to function as both a product and a producer of cultural reality" (p.9). In addition, Apotsos observes that the architecture of Larabanga and in the West African region at large push the boundaries of commonly held definitions about the characteristics of architecture as objects that are "three dimensional," have physical "presence," and are durable and permanent. Apotsos is brave here to challenge the boundaries of received "wisdom" from Vitruvius — particularly the deeply held view

in the "Western" tradition that durability and permanence are requisites for a built object to qualify as architecture.

Apotsos also pushes the boundaries of how we define architectural objects by examining the buildings in Larabanga from a phenomenological perspective attuned to the environmental factors that support how people use them. She writes that the people of Larabanga and in the wider West African region, "specifically . . . employ a building style whose form evokes distinctly haptic and optic senses through sensual combinations of protrusion and recessions, form and void, all of which collectively create movement, visual interest, and dynamism through their manipulation of light and dark" (p.9).

In chapter 2 Apotsos turns to an examination of the expansion of Islam from Saudi Arabia to North Africa in the early seventh century and then slowly into West Africa by the eighth and the ninth centuries via long-established trans-Saharan caravan routes. She identifies the new forms of buildings that grew with the spread of Islam in West Africa as "Afro-Islamic architecture," and provides explanations for how to understand its types. Afro-Islamic architecture, she points out, is not just a set of built objects and spaces. It reflects a body of knowledge spread across the region by Islam, migration, and Arab traders and settlers before and during the ascendancies of three major empires: Ghana (from the sixth to thirteenth centuries), Mali (from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries), and Songhai (from the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries) — all of which had disintegrated into smaller states by the eighteenth century. The body of knowledge adapted Islamic ways of worship to regional cultures, climate and technology, and defined social relations by instructing the people on gender roles in familial, spiritual and communal settings. In addition, the body of knowledge brought by Islam adopted and assimilated existing indigenous symbols, and cosmology, while introducing new ones, such as the mosque, minaret, *minbar* (the pulpit where the Imam preaches), and *qiblah* (the direction to Mecca, which all Muslims must face while in prayer).

To West Africans used to their ancestral spiritual needs and rituals, some of the beliefs and the symbols brought by Islam were not far from older religious ways, and they easily assimilated the new symbols and ways of worship into their cultural repertoires. For example, the tomb of Emperor Askia Muhammad (1443–1538) of the Songhai Empire is one of the many architectural objects developed with indigenous and Islamic influences. West Africans have always employed wall paintings that deployed complex symbols in sacred, and circular spaces. When Africans were thus introduced to the Islamic scripts and written passages from the Quran, they accepted the signs as representative of incantations and libations holding magical powers to protect them from evil forces and bring good fortune. Thus, the Songhai *musalla* — once an informal area for the "veneration" of ancestors — was incorporated into the "mosque/tomb" once Islam was established (p.56). As Apotsos points out, the Sankoré Mosque specifically "incorporates the ancestral pillar forms in the

wall crenellations as well as in the minaret structure,” and demonstrates other architectural conversations among indigenous and imported Islamic forms (p.56). Other examples, too, show that Afro-Islamic buildings and spaces in West Africa are not just imported objects; they are cultural narratives that include the history(ies) of the peoples of the region.

In chapter 3 Apotsos next discusses how settlement patterns in the town of Larabanga were defined by familial lineages among the Kamara people and the understanding of Islamic religious tenets. The Muslim teacher (*mallam*) Ibrahim Braimah, who was also known as Yidan Braimah, helped found Larabanga in the sixteenth century. Braimah was a descendant of Abu Ayyub Ansari, who came from Saudi Arabia to West Africa, and there were two major effects of his role. The first was to dictate settlement patterns and social hierarchies through familial relationships that helped establish a sense of center and periphery. As Apotsos points out, Larabanga is oriented toward a spiritual center defined by three elements: the “ancient mosque, the ‘Mystic Stone,’ and the grave of the founder, represented by a large stone placed in the middle of a major thoroughfare only twenty feet away from the clearing of the mosque” (p.97). In relation to this notion of center, settlement pattern and familial organization were based on the hereditary status of individuals. The eldest person, or chief, typically resided within the immediate compound, and the younger generations resided outward from the center, in an arrangement found in many traditional West African settlements.

The second impact of the teachings of Braimah was to establish a center for the town. This center, the point of original settlement, provided a cultural, philosophical and a spiritual binding force among all members of the community. The idea of a spatial center still defines how the people of Kamara interact with each other and outsiders, despite the fact that the forces of modernity and development are slowly spreading and recalibrating distances. Apotsos’s exploration of the center and the peripheries of settlement in Larabanga attempts to reveal the lines between private, semi-private, and public spaces, and how these establish social and physical boundaries of interaction. In addition, she explains how the finished surfaces of structures — something Apotsos recognizes as inherent in many West African communities — are used to convey knowledge and modes of relationships among the natives of Larabanga and outsiders. Thus, architecture serves not just as a physical object for shelter, but also provides a platform for communicating and defining boundaries of social hierarchy, relationships among people, and sources of everyday knowledge for the members of the Kamara people.

In her last chapter, Apotsos turns to the problem of modernity, particularly as this has involved changes in building technology, the expansion of Larabanga, tourism, and the awareness of heritage sites and objects and the need to conserve them. She describes here how recognition of Larabanga as a heritage center by the Ghana Museum and

Monuments Board (GMMB), and the implementation of conservation solutions, has caused problems among stakeholders. In particular, the youth of Larabanga feel that outsiders are coming in and dictating policies and introducing new ways of life that do not benefit them. They argue that the people of Larabanga rightfully know how to conserve the historical structures in their town better than anyone. After all, their ancestors maintained the structures for centuries and handed this knowledge down to the present generation; and the present generation sees it is unacceptable that the GMMB and other outside organizations would make policies without consulting them. To add to the problem, some of the implemented maintenance programs have used unsuitable materials, like cement, that have caused the structure of the Larabanga mosque to deteriorate. Such problems, caused by a new awareness of heritage sites, are indeed ubiquitous throughout Africa, but they have arisen at different paces in different countries depending on the resources in question.

In addition, with growing population, the old town of Larabanga is now expanding to new areas. As a consequence, familial settlement patterns and social boundaries have become increasingly stretched and permeated by the forces of modernity. For example, instead of settling at the peripheries of the ancestors’ compounds, people from the same family who can afford to build new homes are now moving further out, complaining about the lack of land in the center. Moreover, while new buildings by the younger generation retain certain aspects of the layout of their ancestors’ compounds and homes, outside influences are slipping into their design and spatial layout. Apotsos’s thorough examination of local settlement patterns here enables her to conclude her study by observing the effects and challenges of modernization and modernity on the spatial and cultural spaces in Larabanga (and the greater West African region), as new built forms are being introduced.

Apotsos’s observations in chapter 4, and in the conclusion that follows, are significant contributions to African architectural history. She shows how at Larabanga and in many parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, the pressures of tourism, economic development, heritage awareness, and market forces are pushing architectural practitioners to integrate traditional forms into modern building practice design. She uses photographs to demonstrate these points, including images of the Center for Community Development, Bole, Ghana (2012), and the building for API Mali (Agence Pour la Promotion des Investissements), in Bamako, Mali (pp.164 and 165). Apotsos here emphasizes important frontiers in the development of Africa’s traditions in terms of current scholarship, ongoing architectural practice, and general interest.

Expanding the examples of architects designing contemporary structures that are combining traditional and modern forms will help underscore the importance of the point Apotsos is making in the latter chapters of the book. Patricia Morton’s (2000) *Hybrid Modernities* showed how the French and

the Germans were already experimenting with African forms in the early decades of the twentieth century. This design trend fell out of favor with the arrival of the ubiquitous International Style after World War II. Nevertheless, under different guises, the effort to rediscover traditional African forms has remained an interest for both local and international architects practicing in West Africa. Among the buildings one might name as examples are UNESCO/Breda Dakar's Agricultural Training Center, Nianing, Senegal, 1977; Henry Chomette & Melot's design for SOS Children's Village, Dakar, Senegal, 1979; Laszlo Mester de Parajd's design for Agadez-Court House, Agadez, Niger, 1982; A. Sidibe & V. Galiou-tine's design for Independence Monument, Bamako, Mali, 1993; and Fabrizio Carola's design for the Medine Herb Market, Bamako, Mali, 1993. Also worthy of mention are Patrick Dujarric's design for Alliance Franco-Sénégalaise, Kaolack, Senegal, 1994; Pierre Goudiaby Atepa's design for the Headquarters of the Bank of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in Lome, Togo; Francis Diebedo Kéré's design for the Primary School at Gando, Burkina Faso, 2001; and José Javier Legarra Sádaba's design for the Tellaba Health Center, Ouadane, Mauritania, 2008.

I take away two main points from *Architecture, Islam, and Identity in West Africa*. The first and most important is that humanity is related culturally, biologically and physically (in architectural, spatial, and semiotic understandings) due to ancient, modern and continued interaction. In other words, what we all call globalization is a very old concept. Granted, the types of interactions that brought about the relationships we share with each "other" and different cultures, especially in the context of West Africa, were often unsavory because they were dominated by religious proselytization, war, conquest, and colonization. But we only need to pause and take a look at how what was once called the "New World" in Euro-American Art and Architecture History 101 was not new; it was settled by diverse peoples who had/have their own sophisticated civilizations.

By focusing on the Kamara people in Larabanga, Ghana, Apotsos makes the key point that if one sketches out a progression of cultural contacts, either diachronically or synchronically, architecture will appear as only one of the reservoirs of a shared history(ies). Seen in this light, the current socio-political environment in West Africa shows how the Islamic rebels of today have corrupted and exploited the Islamic philosophies of the past. And by combining their extremist visions with the strategies and diabolical implements of modern warfare, they serve little purpose but to wreak havoc and demolish the very communities and institutions they claim to represent. The rebellious groups specifically ignore evidence of these shared histories on the pretext there is a pure "ideology" they can use to govern the societies they conquer and colonize, regardless of the cost.

The second point I take away from *Architecture, Islam, and Identity in West Africa* is related to the first. Many people

today want to be part of (and have a say in) history(ies) that delineate the relationships among the physical (architectural), social (spiritual), and the quotidian experiences at Larabanga, and in West Africa in general. This, after all, was a place where Islam adapted to, adopted and assimilated indigenous heritage in design (as with the tomb of Askia Muhammad, mentioned above). Yet, in this narrative, Africa's contributions forever remain background text to architectural "production" and the "product."

This larger point is important because whenever we encounter a conjoined architectural style with a relation to Africa — for example, Afro-Brazilian Architecture, Afro-Portuguese Architecture, and African Colonial architecture (of Belgian, British, Dutch, French, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, and later American provenance in Liberia) — the native contributions to the hybrid style tend to dissolve. The result is to leave the sense of a continent that has forever a recipient of building knowledge from outside, rather than an originator of its own socio-cultural experiences and environments.

It is important today to understand how Africans are seeking new histories that show they were never simply recipients of knowledge from outside, but active agents in the creation of their own "lifeworlds." And indeed, with South Africa leading the way, African countries are today reconsidering external influences to environmental design. This desire to rewrite the script is so urgent that in 2015 and 2016 students in South Africa campaigned hard for curriculum reform in all spheres. They wanted to see themselves in the histories they were studying; and the strikes and class boycotts they organized showed that the "decolonization of higher education" is now one of that country's greatest priorities in higher education.

In *Architecture, Islam, and Identity in West Africa, Lessons from Larabanga* Apotsos has begun this investigation of what African architecture was and how it managed to retain its essence in combination with other influences. In her discussion on Afro-Islamic architecture, she has made a significant contribution to the architectural history of the Western Sudan (the historical name for West Africa) by adopting a method and approach that demonstrates the importance of shared histories and cultures.

Nnamdi Elleh
Cincinnati