

Editor's Note

Across the world, we are seeing heightened political polarization, cyber-attacks, and the spread of “fake news.” These occurrences have restricted freedom of expression and turned it into a global issue. When journalism is under fire, we, as scholars and members of a civil society, are faced with an added obligation to report the truth to the public. At IASTE, we have already seen our members take on this responsibility. Many papers submitted to the IASTE 2018 conference thus not only address its theme, “The Politics of Tradition,” but also attempt to deal with these attacks on development. For thirty years IASTE has been a platform for idea-sharing and international understanding. We look forward to witnessing how our members continue to reinterpret the past in light of the present.

We begin this issue with an article by Farah al-Nakib, based on her keynote address at the IASTE 2016 conference, which recounts Kuwait's striving for modernization through cycles of demolition and development since the advent of oil-based urbanism there following World War II. Currently, she explains, this has led to a revival of interest in the remnants of the previously disparaged pre-oil city. Meanwhile, the ongoing demolition of the mid-twentieth-century city — with its memory of aspiration for a more open, inclusive society — has been largely ignored, as its modern structures are thought to be unrepresentative of legitimate Kuwaiti heritage. Next, we feature an investigation by Barry O'Reilly of issues of legitimation surrounding traditional hamlets in Ireland. Such settlements were once stigmatized for their association with poverty, and even eradicated by landlords on account of their apparent disorder, when in fact they corresponded in many ways to mainstream patterns of European settlement. As O'Reilly further notes, present rural housing initiatives, though well-meaning, have largely misunderstood these settlements, and may thus also adversely affect the distinctiveness of Ireland's rural heritage.

Our third article, by Jennifer Gaugler, looks at the evolution of vernacular Rwandan dwellings as a result of forces acting from the top down and the bottom up. Both colonial and postcolonial governments tried to introduce “modern” materials to legitimize their rule. However, homeowners themselves have also chosen to abandon woven, organic structures for rectilinear nonorganic ones, especially in the wake of a campaign led by returnees from the 1994 genocide diaspora. As a consequence of multiple, conflicting modernization campaigns, however, “traditional” Rwandan architecture exists today only at tourist and exhibitionary sites. Our fourth article, by Shahrzad Shirvani, then compares the forms and symbolic programs of the now-demolished mausoleum of Reza Shah with those of the recently reconstructed mausoleum of Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran to reveal the importance of architecture to practices of nation-building in the Middle East. In particular, she interprets how the signs of authority and religiosity inscribed at each site reveal the use of sacred memory for political purposes before and after the 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution. Finally, in the Field Report section, Marta Catalan Eraso examines the appropriation of the tradition of Spanish cafés by Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs, and their subsequent introduction of the tradition to China, in modified form, as returning expatriates. Eraso's analysis thus emphasizes how everyday spaces may be deeply influenced by transnational flows of population and capital.

I would like to conclude this note by inviting all our readers to join us at the sixteenth IASTE conference in Coimbra, Portugal, in October 2018. The conference has already garnered great interest, and we expect it to be timely and thought provoking. We hope to see you there.

Nezar AlSayyad
