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Stanek, Lukasz (2020) *Architecture in Global Socialism: Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East in the Cold War*. Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford.

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Stanek, Lukasz (2020) *Architecture in Global Socialism: Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East in the Cold War*. Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford.

Architecture in Global Socialism is a much needed revisionist account of architectural practice and urbanism in the second half of the twentieth century revealing connections, flows of knowledge, expertise and cooperation that have hitherto been neglected in architectural and planning histories. The book explains in meticulous detail how architects, planners and the construction industry from socialist Eastern Europe worked on large-scale modernization and state-building projects in West Africa and the Middle East. In doing so, it shifts the focus away from dominant narratives and hierarchies surrounding knowledge and urban expertise that assume one-directional flows from the global north to the global south (what would have been termed the “first” and “third” worlds). This is particularly significant in the context of the geopolitical period that the book covers: the Cold War. Readers find out how socialist countries – Bulgaria, Poland, Yugoslavia, Romania, Hungary and East Germany – established important links with non-aligned countries that shaped the urban fabric of the emergent postcolonial world. The legacies of these entanglements are still visible today.

The book is structured around five main chapters. After the introduction, which outlines the key theoretical contribution of the book in the form of the concept of ‘worldmaking’, each chapter focuses on specific sites. These are Accra (chapter 2), Nigeria (chapter 3), Baghdad (chapter 4), Abu Dhabi and Kuwait City (chapter 5). All provide rich evidence of how architects, planners, engineers and construction companies from Eastern Europe played significant roles in the realisation of municipal buildings, schools, monuments, large-scale housing estates, hotels and industrial complexes, not overlooking how architectural education was part of this package.

The chapters are sequenced chronologically, from the mid-1950s to the early 1990s, and this captures the evolving nature of working relationships between Eastern Europe and newly independent/developing countries across this period. The book starts with 1950s Ghana and Nkrumah’s vision for a new socialist country where ‘encounters with Eastern Europeans were part of the extraordinary moment of independence’ (p. 1). It

segues to late-1960s/early 1970s Nigeria where examples of Hungarian interpretations of Nigerian vernacular building cultures and the establishment of an international trade fair site reveal ‘analogies and ambiguities of Eastern Europe’s own colonial history’ (p. 31). The chapter on Baghdad covers the late-1950s to 1980s and shows how the political economy of the socialist system dictated the types of collaborations that took place with Iraqi partners (e.g. public buildings by Yugoslav firms and architectural curriculum development by Czechoslovakia and Poland). It ends in the final decades of the Cold War in the UAE and Kuwait, when the emphasis had shifted from ‘intergovernmental agreements’ to ‘increasingly aggressive attempts by state-socialist companies to enter foreign markets’ (p. 33).

In addition to the historiography set out in the main chapters a broader intellectual framework that underpins the book is set out in the Introduction ‘Worldmaking of Architecture’ and the ‘Epilogue and Outlook’. The concept of worldmaking, which is informed by the writings of Henri Lefebvre, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Martinican theorist Edouard Glissant, reflects a postcolonial lens through which we might look beyond the image of ‘a curtain, either iron or nylon, that has informed most studies of Cold War architectural transfers’ (p. 33). With socialist worldmaking we see an emphasis on networks, entanglements and previously overlooked connections in order to reveal a ‘heterogenous and antagonistic genealogy’ (p. 33) of today’s global urban landscape.

There are different ways to read this book, and it certainly is not possible to take it all in during one sitting. In addition to the extensively researched main chapters and the wider intellectual apparatus that bookends the volume it can also act as a how-to guide for others who might be interested in grappling with transnational flows, practices of urban experts and how mobilities shape expertise. This element is revealed at the end of the book where there is an additional section which is perhaps mislabelled a ‘note’ on sources. This is where the approach and methods behind the research are explained in fascinating detail. The book was the result of many multilingual interviews across multiple countries as well as access to public and private archives, some abundant in their coverage, others mere fragments. One slight disappointment is that more use was not made of interview quotes in the main chapters. It’s clear that lives and careers were influenced in powerful ways through secondments and exchanges of varying lengths, and how the types of collaborations that took place was heavily influenced by what was

permissible under a given socialist political economy. Though the aspirations and disappointments associated with such endeavours as articulated by the people involved is something I would have liked to have seen more of.

The book has high production standards which results in it being a hybrid between a scholarly tome and a coffee table book. And coffee table book is not being used as a derisory term here. *Architecture in Global Socialism* is richly illustrated and it is a pleasurable task to digest and appreciate the breadth of the images it contains. These include maps, plans, drawings and photographs (some archival and others which have presumably been taken by the author). This visual language is an integral part of understanding the ideas and visions that underpin the spatial practices that feature in the book.

Architecture in Global Socialism will certainly be of interest to a wide readership, and it is definitely of relevance to readers of *Eurasian Geography and Economics*. It comes highly recommended because it taps in to wider research on transnational histories of architecture and urban planning and this is certainly a vital and vibrant area of research that looks to decentre and question Anglo centrism within geography, urban studies and allied disciplines. Indeed, for many geographers, as well as architectural/planning historians and practitioners this book will be a revelation because it sets out a counter history of the Cold War and does this through a focus on international collaborations, urban expertise and city-building.