HIs publications include: De la modernisation de la société à la modernisation des religieux (Le cas de Tlran); Interaction and Autonomy of Culture and Religion. Most recently he has published a chapter entitled ‘Hegemony, Ethics and Reconciliation’ in Pathways to Reconciliation: Between Theory and Practice (Rothfield, Fleming, Komesaroff, eds, 2008) and has edited the volume Multiple Modernities: Tangible Elements and Abstract Perspectives (I.B.Tauris, 2009). His research interests include cities and urbanities, the notion of modernities, knowledge construction and socio-cultural transformation in contemporary Muslim societies.

Arijit Sen, Assistant Professor of Architecture, teaches architectural design, urbanism and cultural landscapes at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee. He is the co-coordinator of the Buildings Cultures Landscapes doctoral program initiative between the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Milwaukee. His research interests include physical and cultural landscapes of immigration in the United States. He is currently completing his book Creative Dissonance: The Politics of Immigrant World Making and a co-edited monograph Devon Street, Chicago: Interpreting Landscapes of Transnationalism. Professor Sen received his PhD from the University of California, Berkeley and served as a Center for 21st Century Studies fellow at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee and a Quadrant Fellow at the Institute of Advanced Study at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

Edward Soja is a Distinguished Professor in Urban Planning at the University of California Los Angeles, and faculty at the London School of Economics. After starting his academic career as a specialist on Africa, Dr. Soja has focused his research and writing over the past 20 years on urban restructuring in Los Angeles and more broadly on the critical study of cities and regions, bringing together traditional political economy approaches and recent trends in critical cultural studies, and focusing on what he calls the spatiality of social life. His publications include Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory (1989), Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places (1996), and Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions (2000).

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Introduction

MODJTABA SADRIA

In the last thirty years, the Aga Khan Award for Architecture has created an important body of people, thought and networks involved in evaluating the challenges and achievements of architecture in Muslim societies. Meanwhile, in the field, many of the arguments concerning knowledge and practice in the built environment in Muslim societies continue to be made within the limited dichotomy of modernism versus tradition. The Award, with its long experience, wanted to show how aspects of these arguments could be made in a more sustainable way, both for the Award’s constituencies, as well as for a broader spectrum of people involved with the issues of the built environment. Bringing the notion of ‘multiple modernities’ into the conceptual frame for understanding the built environment provided an alternative way to understand the transformations in Muslim societies, beyond narrow dichotomies. Using this as a foundation, in 2007 the Award inaugurated the first Knowledge Construction workshop, which invited scholars to think about, understand and explain ‘Tangible Elements of Modernities’ in non-Western societies.

A key issue that emerged from this session was related to the processes leading to the homogenisation of representations. During the discussions it became clear that if homogenising processes do exist, and to the extent that they exist, they become a limitation – even a denial – of pluralism in general and the plurality of modernities in particular. Thus, the possibility of the homogenisation of representations was identified as a major issue in the evaluation of what is happening in the built environment and its impact on the way people live in different societies. This problematic became the theme of the second Knowledge Construction workshop, entitled ‘Homogenisation of Representations’, upon which this volume is based.1

It is possible to identify, even at a superficial level, several factors that contribute to the argument of homogenisation in relation to the built environment and architecture. Firstly, the increasing mobility of scholars teaching in faculties of architecture and urbanism leads

1 The successful organisation of the workshop, as well as the preparation of the manuscript for this volume would not have been possible without the intellectual rigor and generosity of the participants, the intelligent support of Farrokh Derakhshani, the Director of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, and the assistance of Rebecca Williamson.
to a cross-fertilisation of ideas which tend towards a universalised approach in institutions, regardless of the social, economic and cultural contexts within which these centres of learning are situated. While improving the quality of teaching, this trend may also contribute to homogenisation. Similarly, one could argue that scholarly networks and journals, through strong editorial policies, influence the production of certain types of knowledge in these fields. The growing presence of symbolic buildings conceived and built by largely the same networks in different locations across the planet, and the vertical integration, as well as horizontal articulation, of construction industries and offices of architecture in many parts of the world also highlights a homogenisation of representations. Moreover, trends towards homogenisation can be glimpsed in governments’ understanding of and desire to implement a certain mapping and organisation of urban space that is seen as necessary for major cities to be considered ‘global cities’.

Another contemporary factor potentially impacting upon this issue is the temptation to accept a generated reality of cities and buildings – and thus architecture and urbanism – as one dominated by form rather than human beings and social relationships. In other words, forms become characterised by subjectivity, while human beings and their relationships are rendered as objects that rotate, willingly or not, around these forms. Forms are given even more substance as subjects by the integration of technologies required for their creation. In this sense, we may begin to look for the presence or processes of homogeneity in the forms-as-subjects in the urban landscape, buildings and design, and conversely, in the objectification of people and social life in relation to these forms.

These issues are of great importance for the Award. By recognising certain architectural projects, is it also playing a role as a homogeniser? In addition to the above factors, however, there are certainly also present resistant, contradictory and opposing trends, which consciously look for originality, locality and insertion in specific social, cultural and physical fabric. Thus, it is also possible to consider where there have been movements towards differentiation, resistance and a heterogenisation of representations. The papers presented at the workshop, the dialogue amongst scholars, and the subsequent contributions in this volume all attempted to problematise the concept of a homogenisation and heterogenisation of representations in the built and lived environment.

I feel that the wider significance of these issues is perhaps even more salient in the present historical moment, which brings an opportunity to reflect on the trends of the past few decades, and also to pause for a moment and look to where we are heading once we are ‘out of the crisis’. It presents an opportunity to explore new territories in scholarship, new concepts, theories, methodologies and cross-disciplinary interactions, that can adequately grasp the ever-mutating dynamics between the built environment and social worlds. Although some very rich scholarly contributions have emerged recently that focus on issues around the social dimensions of architecture, very few have dealt in any substantial way with the possibility of homogenisation and heterogenisation from the perspective of the lived and built environment. The papers in this volume are divided into three sections: Foundations, Building Blocks and Building Bridges. The arguments in the first section provide, from different perspectives, broad theoretical discussions on the topic of the homogenisation of representations. The second section features essays that explore the homogenisation of representations through the framework of the built environment and urban form. The papers in the third section also build on these themes, but focus to a larger extent on exploring the homogenisation of representations from the perspective of both the lived environment and the built environment. These chapters explore the interrelationship between social issues, the public sphere and the urban environment.

In the first chapter, architectural historian Anthony D. King draws on recent literature to address a series of questions concerning the relationship between globalisation and the presumption of a homogenisation of architectural representation in urban contexts worldwide, and its putative effects on the economic, social and cultural order. King addresses the origins and nature of the debate on the question of homogenisation, the contexts and manner in which such processes are identified, and alternative meanings and connotations of the term ‘homogenisation’. The author also draws attention to the need to consider these issues comparatively, and within a long term, historical as well as broad geographical perspective, particularly one that takes note of the distinctive processes of imperialism, colonialism, neo-liberalism and the architecture of ‘corporate capitalism’.

Ian Angus approaches the topic of homogenisation from the perspective of philosophy and a critique of modernity. Angus explains why the anxiety concerning cultural homogenisation is an unavoidable problem in modern societies and thereby defends its relevance to issues of social inequality and power. He argues that modernity can be understood as the predominance of a conception of reason throughout all areas of human life. Angus explores how this concept of reason has come to a position of global dominance, looking in particular at the global culture industry and the anxiety generated around cultural difference and ‘authenticity’.

In my own contribution, I consider the implications of ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ processes of globalisation in urban life. To do so I look at three key dimensions of these trends: the relationship between modernisation, homogenisation and the public realm; the modernisation of urban space in contemporary cities; and the life politics that can bring about the possibility of heterogeneity in the built and lived environment. Building on the insights of Henri Lefebvre, I investigate the way in which desire and body politics act as dialogic forces shaping, constructing and transforming both the public realm and the built environments in cities. I also argue that the processes of homogenisation and heterogenisation are fundamentally dialogical processes that emerge in response to a
to a cross-fertilisation of ideas which tend towards a universalised approach in institutions, regardless of the social, economic and cultural contexts within which these centres of learning are situated. While improving the quality of teaching, this trend may also contribute to homogenisation. Similarly, one could argue that scholarly networks and journals, through strong editorial policies, influence the production of certain types of knowledge in these fields. The growing presence of symbolic buildings conceived and built by largely the same networks in different locations across the planet, and the vertical integration, as well as horizontal articulation, of construction industries and offices of architecture in many parts of the world also highlights a homogenisation of representations. Moreover, trends towards homogenisation can be glimpsed in governments’ understanding of and desire to implement a certain mapping and organisation of urban space that is seen as necessary for major cities to be considered ‘global cities’.

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specific context. The paper concludes with a challenge to academics to move beyond the existing parameters of the scholarship around urban life.

The second section of the book, Building Blocks, begins with an architectural approach to the issue of homogenisation. In his essay, George Baird demonstrates how aspects of homogenisation processes in architecture can be discerned through the use of analytical techniques of interpretation derived from semiotics. He goes on to argue that despite the social, political and economic power of homogenisation processes in the contemporary world, design possesses some capacity to resist such processes. In order to demonstrate these claims, Baird explores a number of architectural examples, both contemporary and historical, which sometimes illustrate homogenisation, and sometimes successful resistance to it.

Urban scholar and architect Nezar AlSayyad focuses in his chapter on urban form in relation to the Muslim world. He explores the rise and dissolution of specific urban forms in the 20th century, which accompanied the transformations brought about by modernity. He suggests that during the era of colonialism, specific hybrid forms developed that captured the complex relationship between the dominant West and the dominated Muslim world, and points to the way in which anti-colonial resistance used the same modernist, colonial ideologies to create forms for the new nation states. The author argues that pseudo-modern and post-modern forms in the current era of globalisation reflect neither homogeneity nor heterogeneity, and cast doubt on urbanism’s ability to represent the cultures in which it exists.

James Holston looks at a model of architectural modernism in Brazil to explore its effect on the country’s urban landscape. Focusing on the problem of ‘copying’ and transplantation in architecture, Holston contrasts two modes of producing CIAM modernist architecture in Brazil, that of master planning and total design with that of urban layering and contingency. Using several examples by Oscar Niemeyer to illustrate his points, the author explores how these modes produce different building forms and spatial characteristics that reflect both the homogenisation of the urban environment, and at other times, the creation of diverse publics.

In his contribution, Nasser Rabbat invites us to focus specifically on contemporary Islamic architecture as a way to view aspects of homogenisation. To do this, he explores the profound shifts that have occurred in architecture in the Islamic world in the last two centuries. In particular, he examines the way in which architectural expressions were framed through modernity and nationalism in the middle of the 20th century, and through the discourse on Islam as cultural identity in the last three decades. He argues that architectural responses to these processes risked regressing to a narrowly defined and homogenised ‘Islamic architecture.’ The author focuses on the theory of cultural autonomy as one significant factor contributing to this trend. Rabbat reviews the history of this theory, and demonstrates how its promotion, but also resistance to it, affected the orientation of architecture in the Islamic World.

In her chapter, architect and academic Mari Fujita proposes a new research agenda that challenges existing frameworks in architecture. In particular, Fujita problematises two parallel processes: the either-or logic that frames architecture as either ‘global’ or ‘local’ and the symmetrical construction of built form to ideas that asserts that architecture is the embodiment of ‘a’ world-view. Using the example of Thames Town, Songjiang City, China, she argues that these processes work in tandem to produce impoverished readings of urban developments of this kind. At the root of her paper is the belief that our socio-historic bias for categorisation, bounding and for assuming a static place-ness (urban form as noun) produces a limited reading and representation of space, experience, and urban subjectivity.

The final section, Building Bridges, begins with an essay by Jyoti Hosagrahar, who draws on the fields of architecture, planning, cultural heritage and history to reflect on the central questions of the homogeneity of representations through the paradoxical urbanism of India. The author notes the extreme contrasts of Indian cities, which are at the forefront of modernity and globalisation, and the ‘transitional’ spaces in between that are as yet ‘modernising’. She looks at three seemingly disparate aspects of urbanism in India to reflect on some of the ways that history, place, and locality have engaged with modernity and globalisation. It is argued that what appears homogeneous is not a simple rejection of locality and tradition, but instead represents various subaltern adaptations, appropriations, and contestations of urban forms, practices, and identities.

In the following chapter, Abidin Kusno reflects on intellectual and political questions that have been raised by the issue of homogeneity of representations. He suggests that one way to think about discourses of homogeneity and heterogeneity is to reflect on the historical conditions out of which they emerged: colonialism, Cold War arrangements, US-led globalisation, and the responses and counter-narratives that emerged as a result. In particular, the temporal dimension of homogenisation and its implications for the politics of space across colonial and postcolonial political regimes is explored. The last part of Kusno’s essay explores a specific example of the spatial politics of differentiation and the emergence of political consciousness in colonial and post-colonial discourses, and their articulation in relation to the forces of homogenisation and modernity.

Architectural historian Mohammad al-Asad takes the issue of cross-border homogenisation in the built environment as his starting point. The essay explores the wide variety of complementary and oppositional forces that give rise to this form of homogenisation, ranging from globalisation and Americanisation on the one hand, to
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diversity and fragmentation on the other. Drawing primarily on personal observations, the essay examines the flow of social, economic, political and cultural models between the Middle East and North America in order to better understand the forces connected to cross-border homogenisation and their role as creators of both similarity and difference in the built environment.

Arijit Sen approaches the issue of homogenisation from the perspective of architectural design, urbanism and the concept of cultural landscape. His chapter explores 21st century ethnic and immigrant landscapes, and argues that the homogeneity of representation of ethnic spaces across the world can be conceived of as resulting from forces of globalisation and the commoditisation of ethnic objects, signs and symbols. However, he argues that despite the banality of these spaces, they represent places where immigrants sustain their social and cultural life, and are important nodes within a large and globally dispersed transnational ethnic network. Using the example of the cultural landscape of South Asian communities on a street in Chicago, Sen’s paper suggests a methodological strategy and analytical frame which provides a way to identify and evaluate quotidian architecture and lived environments, and allow us to look beyond the narrow homogenising tendencies in the built environment and their impact on the lived environment.

The next chapter takes the form of a commentary presented at the Knowledge Construction workshop by distinguished urban geographer Edward Soja. His paper argues that accompanying the accelerated globalisation of capital and labour over the past forty years there has been the diffusion of a particular belief system or ‘global culture’, associated with a broadly definable neoliberal capitalism, which has had a certain homogenising effect. He notes that it is easy to identify a repetitive sameness in architectural features in nearly all the world’s major cities, which is more pronounced today than at any other time in at least the past 300 years. Soja posits that while many observers, scholars, and practitioners stop here and dwell entirely on this homogenisation process, this approach is misleadingly superficial. At the very least, he argues, homogenisation and its opposite, differentiation or heterogenisation, need to be seen as simultaneous processes. Focusing too narrowly on the homogeneity of representations can lead to a failure to see the dramatic changes that have been taking place in cities and urbanism as a way of life.

The final chapter in the volume presents a summary of the rich discussions that emerged over the two-day workshop. The key themes and exchanges, and their protagonists, are included in order to offer the reader a more nuanced understanding of the multiple approaches and complex arguments that arose in response to the question of homogenisation and heterogenisation of representations in the built environment.