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The Impact of Globalisation on Architecture and Architectural Ethics

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Abstract

The development of globalisation, both economically and financially, has promoted the flow of both information and people. Globalisation is also seen as an outcome of communication technology and the development of the Internet and this is subsequently encouraging international interdependence and the compression of time and space. This thesis is devoted to answering the question: in what way does the impact of globalisation affect the role of architecture, and how should it be interpreted ethically? It argues that the ethical evaluation of the role of architecture should be linked to architecture's natural ethical ability to form a relationship with a culture.

Nevertheless, in modernity, cultural identity is closely linked to national identity and because both are by nature unstable, the result is the formation of unstable relationships and the creation of dilemmas for the ethical role of architecture. There are four important trajectories that affect the ability of architecture to form a relationship with a national-cultural identity and its formation process; those trajectories are: the physical nature of the region, materials and methods of construction, belief system(s), and memory.

Under the impact of social and cultural diversity, technology, industry, and forgetfulness, all four trajectories are challenged and severely undermined. Because of the increase in information flow, advancements in communication technology and greater mobility of goods and people, the global culture is advancing its version of homogenisation. Challenges, on the other hand, are constantly being presented through the need for change and the dynamic nature of modern nations. These are exhibited in two processes: *innovation/stabilisation and innovation/transformation, and also in the two dynamics of: interpretation/reinterpretation and differentiation/integration.*

Today, iconic type of architecture and celebrity architects lead the innovation/transformation process, and the 'ordinary' practice of architecture leads the innovation/stabilisation process using the differentiation/integration dynamic. Architectural theory, on the other hand, advances the use of the interpretation/reinterpretation dynamic in architecture, which helps to destabilise meaning in architectural language that, when transformed to real world architecture, can result in alienating the physical horizons of cities and thus in the alienation of people.

To the spirits of my Mother and my Father

Preface

As an Iraqi, I lived through three wars, fourteen years of international sanctions and two years of US occupation. In the first war, though it continued for eight years (1980-1988) killing thousands of Iraqis, the social infrastructure came out only slightly harmed; however, all the important services were better. During the second war of 1991, most of the social and engineering infrastructures were crushed. The situation was worsened by the 14 years of international sanctions. It was not long before the Iraqi people had to face the US invasion of 2003.

Such extraordinary pressure had the deepest effect on the Iraqi value system. Architects were no exception. In universities private tutoring became a norm for young graduates and a few others from the older generation though such practices are illegal and considered immoral. If legal action was to be taken, the person committing such action would have at least lost his/her job.

As an architect and a member of the faculty in the University of Mosul and then the University of Baghdad, I tried to be impartial and evaluate the changes within my profession. At that time, I thought that the changes were local and linked to our local circumstances, which, in many ways, is true. Yet, after some research, I found that such problems in architecture are much more complex than any impact stemming from local change, and that some of the changes that Iraqis have witnessed are being felt worldwide. Hence, in the year 1999-2001, a master thesis under my supervision investigated the impact of globalisation on architecture, and came to the conclusion that consumerism is affecting architecture immensely. Still, this result was not sufficient. I needed to investigate the problem further and in connection to ethics and hence it became the subject of this thesis.

My interest was shared by Dr. Mike Linzey whom I shall always remember for his efforts to get me the necessary acceptance to study here at the University of Auckland. I most certainly would have had great difficulty in finishing this work without Professor John Hunt's understanding of my need for the kind of supervision that required special understanding and knowledge to support the process of this research that was unpredictable in many ways. This special supervision has been provided by my supervisor, Dr. Ross Jenner, through his patience, wide knowledge and much trust in my ability to manage things within the given time frame.

I am most thankful to the Graduate Studies Centre and in particular to Philip Beniston for his professional support without which finishing such a project at the University of Auckland would have been impossible. My deepest thanks to the University of Auckland for giving me this opportunity and the University of Baghdad for giving me an official leave to finish my studies, and I am most thankful and appreciative of my family for their support in all manner of ways, which cannot be expressed in words.

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Introduction