IN THE DESERT OF MODERNITY

Colonial Planning and After

Haus der Kulturen der Welt
29. August – 26. Oktober 2008

In the Desert of Modernity – Colonial Planning and After presents architectural and urban projects developed in North Africa and Western Europe during the 1950s and 1960s in the context of colonial governance, anti-colonial struggles, and transnational migration. It tells the stories of inhabitants, architects, colonial administrators, and scholars involved in the controversy surrounding modernity and modernisation. The exhibition examines the contradictions of colonial modernity and the forms of resistance that developed against it—all within a process of negotiation and appropriation that continues to this very day.

Examining a range of exemplary architectural and urban projects, the exhibition reveals how post-war modernism was put into practice under colonial rule. The large urban planning schemes developed for North Africa by architects working for offices like ATBAT Afrique played a key role in colonial modernisation—and beyond. Indeed, mass housing projects designed for North African cities soon migrated to the outskirts of European capitals, resulting in suburbs that became home to hundreds of thousands of people. Colonial housing and settlement policies radically changed cities, modes of living, and architectural discourse in North Africa and Europe alike. At the same time, the projects in North Africa led to a postmodern critique of architecture in Western Europe and the United States, with the experience of anti-colonialism permanently undermining the certainties of technocratic planning held by Europe's modernist architects.

COLONIAL PLANNING

At the end of the 18th century, social reform, based on new forms of production and lifestyle, was for the first time translated into plans. Urban planning played a central role in this process. It served as the strategic appropriation of the territory within the colonial context. In addition to residential and construction policies, new governing techniques for European cities were developed in the colonies. Planning and educational methods, military operations, scientific experiments and new forms of industrial production were tested or refined.
At the start of the 20th century, the North African port and industrial town of Casablanca was strategically developed by Europeans for Europeans. From the 1930s on demographics in the city began to shift. Moroccan migrants settled on the outskirts of the city in growing numbers. The Protectorate launched construction plans and organized these self-built settlements into clearly defined zones.The anti-colonial protest organized in these settlements during the 1950s ultimately led to the end of the Protectorate.

ATELIER AFRIQUE

For European modern architects colonial territories became laboratories in which they could realize their architectural and urban concepts. The “Sidi Othman” housing project (1951) by architects Studer and Hentsch and the “Cité Verticale” housing project (1952) by Candilis, Woods and Bodiansky are two examples of these modern high-rise projects in Casablanca. They were located in the “Cité Horizontale”, a low-rise scheme of courtyard dwellings that was used by urban planner Michel Écochard for the large-scale expansions of Casablanca. Located in the direct vicinity of large “bidonvilles”, these housing projects were designed for the new Moroccan workforce. In an attempt to engage with the dwelling practices of future inhabitants, the projects were based on the concept of “culturally-specific” dwelling typologies. Already existing European assumptions of cultural and racial difference were the point of departure. Under colonial rule, these categorisations were reinforced and turned into a means of exercising governmental power. The first housing estates were built far from the ‘European’ city, so that the residents of this city center would not come into contact with Casablanca’s new inhabitants.

TRANSFORMATION

Today, very few buildings of the great master-plan for Casablanca resemble their original condition. Architectural photographs usually represent buildings immediately after their completion, as results of the architects‘ design intentions. What inhabitants subsequently do with the building, how they live in it, is not revealed. Furthermore, architectural photographs portray the buildings without an indication of their colonial context or resistance. Inhabitants, however, have inventively appropriated, extended or changed the buildings through various uses and redefinitions. The appropriation and re-building of the modern housing estates underline their special status from the early to the mid1950s. After all, the post-war plans by Studer, Candilis and Écochard were based on spatial concepts that anticipated adaptations and re-adaptations. The concept of social housing without predefined use was developed in Morocco but it was only in the short anti-colonial period between the regime of the Protectorate and the restoration of the monarchy that it could be realized. Today, these buildings are often demolished to make way for property speculation. Since the country’s opening to the global market, urban plans for the wealthy clients have changed the social structure of this area drastically.

BIDONVILLES

The “bidonvilles”, settlements built by their inhabitants out of canisters (French: bidon), arose on the outskirts of North African cities from the 1930s onwards. Today, these self-built settlements, also found on the peripheries of major European cities, are a reaction to the difficulty of finding affordable housing. In Morocco, these “bidonvilles” were viewed by the colonial authorities as a reservoir of cheap labour. Moreover, they were feared as a source of social unrest – just as in France, where hundreds of thousands of people had been living in such settlements since the Second World War.
In the 1950s, anthropologists, sociologists, urban planners and modern architects became increasingly interested in the “bidonvilles” of Africa and Europe. However, they remained first and foremost important centres of anti-colonial movement. The hut settlements of Casablanca housed those who went on the streets to protest against the Protectorate as well as those who demonstrated against the government of independent Morocco. In 1961, it was in the “bidonvilles” of the Parisian suburbs that the major demonstrations against the Algerian War were initiated.

TRANSNATIONAL ANTI-COLONIALISM

Resistance was organized in the colonies either in the form of armed uprisings, civil disobedience or simple refusal. Anti-colonial movements did not just unfold in the colonies, they were part of a transnational web of relations. Just as colonialism was international, so too did resistance reach across the borders of nation-states. Whether Algeria, Morocco or Indochina: the protagonists of anti-colonialism acted and, indeed, lived in Paris, Lyon, London, Berne, Berlin, Lausanne and Marseille. Anti-colonial resistance did not organise itself solely as a relation between the colonial power and colony. It was a global movement that gathered the three continents of Africa, Asia and Latin America in a "Tricontinental Conference", co-founded by the Moroccan resistance fighter, Mehdi Ben Barka.

FROM 'MACHINE FOR LIVING' TO HABITAT

The experiences of architects in North Africa resulted not only in architectural projects, but also in discussions to revise major modernist concepts. These took place in the "Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne" (CIAM), the most important organisation of avant-garde architects between 1928 and 1959. In this context a presentation tool, the grid system, was developed by Le Corbusier. The goal of the "CIAM Grid" was to present and compare different modern town planning projects according to the CIAM categories: living, working, transport and leisure.
In 1953 at CIAM IX in Aix-en-Provence, two grids caused an upheaval: the "Habitat du Plus Grand Nombre Grid" and the "Bidonville Mahiedine Grid" – both designed by young architects who were active in North Africa. These studies no longer presented modern urban projects, but rather analysed the "bidonvilles" of Casablanca and Algiers as fabrics of social practices. A third grid that attracted the attention was the "Urban Re-identification Grid" by Alison and Peter Smithson which analysed, in a similar fashion, daily life in the working class neighbourhood of Bethnal Green in London. This understanding of the built environment through the notion of social practice caused a radical shift in the modern movement's conception of dwelling – replacing earlier notions such as "machine à habiter" with the more inclusive notion of "Habitat".

LEARNING FROM

The studies of the North African “bidonvilles” as a self-organised form of dwelling had a lasting effect on the global debate on architecture and urban planning. The 1953 CIAM congress in Aix-en-Provence and numerous articles in magazines and books helped to disseminate concepts, which focused on everyday dwelling practices and self-built housing. From the late 1950s until well into the 1960s building forms hitherto considered ‘pre-modern’ were accepted into the canon of post-war modernism. The exhibition ”Architecture without Architects” by Bernard Rudofsky in the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1964 propagated this idea internationally. The pre-industrial city, self-built constructions and self-organisation, as well as the participation of residents in the planning process, became exemplary models in the 1960s and are the expression of a global, colonial world in crisis. Nonetheless, the studies of the inhabitants’ everyday practices often led to grave misinterpretations. The architects usually approached pre-modern construction forms out of context and overlooked or ignored the colonial conditions under which they had been created. After all, the “bidonvilles” were the result of colonial urban planning, industrialization and migration, as well as an expression of spontaneous construction, influenced by the structure of the old Medina.

TRAVELLING ARCHITECTS

Fascinated by the white cubic forms and local building practices of the Mediterranean region, modern architects had been traveling to North Africa ever since the end of the 19th century. These experiences, but also the artistic and pedagogical “Grand Tours” from Europe to Africa and the accompanying orientalist, exotic and erotic fantasies influenced the general projections on this territory. Designs by modern architects were often considered in Europe visionary statements. They were only realized as exceptional projects, models or exhibition designs. Conversely, colonial Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco offered modern architects the space in which they could develop, and above all, realize new building approaches and housing settlements. Under the conditions of colonialism, the theoretical and practical tools and approaches for building “for the greatest number“ – post-war mass construction – were tested and implemented. During the period of decolonization these approaches travelled back to Europe, where they were applied in the planning for large-scale social housing developments and tourist resorts in the whole Mediterranean region.

OPÉRATION MILLION

In the 1960s, not only people moved from rural areas into European cities, or emigrated from the former colonies to France, Belgium, England and Germany. The new approach of building “for the greatest number”, which was developed in North Africa, also travelled to the peripheries of European cities. Here as well, mass housing projects, or the “Grands Ensembles” as they were called, were erected on or alongside migrants’ settlements.
Empowered by numerous government initiatives such as the “Opération Million” competition, architects like Georges Candilis and Shadrach Woods developed large housing schemes “for the greatest number”, especially in the “banlieues” of large cities such as Paris, Toulouse and Marseilles.
Since the 1980s some of these “Grands Ensembles” have come into focus, as flashpoints of social and political struggles over migration and citizenship. They have become centers of resistance – colonial history strikes back.

CITÉS D’URGENCES

Relocating people – an official strategy called “relogement” – became a generally accepted tool of modern urban planning in 1940s and 1950s colonial North Africa. The “bidonvilles” were the main focus of this relocation policy. People were moved to so-called “cités d’urgences” (emergency cities), that were often designed by modern architects for fast and low cost construction. All over the colonial territory these “cités d’urgences” emerged in the form of camps, mainly characterised by strict rules and control. Later, the inhabitants were displaced a second time to their permanent homes in the developments called “Habitations à Loyer Modéré” (HLM, low rent housing blocks).
In post-war France, bad housing conditions combined with rural migration, immigration from former colonies and changing demographics caused a housing crisis. The policy deployed by the government to tackle this crisis echoed the strategies developed in the colonies: the “îlots insalubres” – old housing blocks and hut settlements – were cleared and their inhabitants moved by force to emergency cities, workers hostels and a few to the new HLM housing neighbourhoods.

HOUSING STRUGGLES

Even before the end of colonialism, a transnational migration from North Africa to Europe began. The “Grands Ensembles” of the 1950s and 1960s were mainly built by migrant workers who lived in the “bidonvilles”. These new housing developments were usually populated by French citizens. Migrants lived in the “bidonvilles” of European suburbs, in temporary apartments, workers’ barracks or hostels. They may have been welcome in Europe for their cheap labour but not as citizens. This contradictory relationship was, for instance, expressed through the conflicts over the hostels for migrant workers (Foyers). Their inhabitants organized a nation-wide strike in France in the mid-1970s, to protest against the deportation of inhabitants, the bad condition of the buildings and the numerous regulative measures imposed on everyday life in the hostels.

IN THE DESERT OF MODERNITY – COLONIAL PLANNING AND AFTER

Artistic director: Marion von Osten

Curators: Tom Avermaete, Serhat Karakayali, Marion von Osten

Project director: Bernd M. Scherer, Susanne Stemmler, Haus der Kulturen der Welt

Project coordinators: Kirsten Einfeldt, Katharina Gelhaar, Haus der Kulturen der Welt

Project assistance: Elsa de Seynes, Haus der Kulturen der Welt

Exhibition designers: Jesko Fezer, Andreas Müller, Anna Voswinckel

Media productions: Labor k3000 Zürich/Berlin

Reproductions: max-color Berlin

Exhibition installations: Concern Art Karlsruhe

In the exhibition are represented: Lázaro Abreu, Franco Albini, Luis Álvarez, Arsac A., Ascoral des Jeunes, Association les Engraineurs, Atelier Archives Audiovisuelles BDIC, Kader Attia, Élie Azagury, Jacques Belin, Claude Beraud, Vladimir Bodiansky, Georges Candilis, Giancarlo de Carlo, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Chaïbia, Hassan Darsi, Robert Doisneau, Michel Écochard, Pierre-André Emery, Patrick Forest, Jesús Forjans, Gérard-Aimé, Georges Godefroy, Faïza Guéne, Marcel Gut, Nigel Henderson, Jean Hentsch, Monique Hervo, Bernhard Hoesli, François Issaverdens, Romain Jeannot, Alexis Josic, Élie Kagan, Bernard Kennedy, Labor k3000, J. Lambert, Yasmeen Lari, Le Corbusier, Guy Le Querrec, Jean de Maisonseul, Mario Marret, Pierre Mas, Louis Miquel, Janine Niepce, L. Ouhayoun, Eduardo Paolozzo, Henri Piot, Jean Pottier, Fernand Pouillon, Loïk Prat, Bernard Richard, Willy Ronis, Alfrédo Rostgaard, Bernard Rudofsky, Moshe Safdie, Guiseppe Samonà, Martin Schiedhelm, Roland Simounet, Wit Sklias, Alison und Peter Smithson, André Studer, L. Tamborini, Marcelle Vallet, Aldo Van Eyck, Jean Vidal, J. Wattez und Shadrach Woods.

Archives, lenders: Archives Françaises du Film/CNC; ARMOR Films; Association Les Engraineurs; Association Génériques; Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine; Bibliothèque municipale de Lyon; Centre d’Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes /MAE; Centre d’art L’Art en Marche; Cité de l’Architecture et du Patrimoine / Centre des Archives d’Architecture du XXème siècle; Cité Nationale de l’histoire de l’immigration/ Fonds Abdelmalek Sayad; Avery Library/Department of Drawings and Archives/Columbia University; Docs Populi – Documents for the Public; École Nationale Supérieure d’Architecture de Casablanca; ETH Zürich/GTA Institut für Geschichte und Theorie der Architektur; die Fotoagenturen der Gruppe Eyedea; Fondation Le Corbusier; Galerie Christian Nagel; Gaumont Pathé Archives; Magnum Photos/Agentur Focus; Musée des Beaux Arts La Chaux de Fonds; Nederlands Architectuurinstituut; Ministère de l’Écologie du Développement et de l’Aménagement durable; Parisienne de Photographie; Delft University of Technology.

Institutional partnerships: Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien, Architekturfakultät der Delft University of Technology, Casamémoire Casablanca, CPKC (Center for Post-Colonial Knowledge and Culture Berlin), École Nationale d’Architecture de Rabat, École Supérieure d’Architecture de Casablanca

Research team: Tom Avermaete, Serhat Karakayali and Marion von Osten in cooperation with Wafae Belarbi, Madeleine Bernstorff, Jesko Fezer, Brigitta Kuster, Andreas Müller, Daniel Weiss and students of the Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien, Delft University of Technology and École Supérieure d’Architecture de Casablanca

Acknowledgements: Mogniss Abdallah, Fahim Amir, An Architektur, Sven Arnold, Christiane Candilis, Jean Écochard, Touriya Azri Ennassiri, Laure Barbizet-Namer, Jochen Becker, Wafae Belarbi, Abdelmoumen Benabdeljalil, Madeleine Bernstorff, El Montacir Bensaïd, Camille Bitaud, Regina Bittner, Françoise Navez-Bouchanine, Sylvie Bourguignon, Sabeth Buchmann, Letitzia Capannini, Casamémoire, Zeynep Çelik, Samy Charchira, Sonia Chikh, Sarah Clément, Xander Cornelis, Daniel Coutelier, Anne-Sophie Cras, Lincoln Cushing, Chris Dertinger, Eva Egermann, Julien Enoka-Ayemba, Christiane Erharter, Gernot Ernst, Olaolu Olajide Fajembola, Silvia Fehrmann, Galerie Alif Ba, Elke Gaugele, Isabelle Godineau, Alexandra Gottely, Mohammed Graine, Henrike Grohs, Souad Guennoun, Sinan Gültekin, Inna Guzenfeld, Andrea Haas, Doris Hegner, Nanna Heidenreich, Tom Holert, Nicole Hovorka, Irene Hummel, Kanak Attak, Abderrahim Kassou, Kristine Kavelaars, Margot Klingsporn, Johannes Köck, Christian Kravagna, Brigitta Kuster, Perrine Latrive, Alice Laval, Frédéric Le Bourhis, Susanne Leeb, Sophie Le Tétour, Luis Marcel, Wolfgang Meissner, Anna Neumann, Rosa Olmos, Janet Parks, Cornelia Pilgram, Pascale Pere, David Peycere, Rémy Prat, Philippe Quinsac, Nolwenn Rannou, Lisa Reiser, Remember Resistance, Michel Richard, Veronika Richter, Valerie Smith, Chakib Sebatta, Horia Serhane, Gerhild Silber, Peter Spillmann, Eva Stein, Hocine Tallal, Claire Tirefort, Lada Umstätter, Claude Vidal-Breton, Simon Vith, Daniel Weiss, Daniela Wolf, Val Woods.

This project is dedicated to Françoise Navez-Bouchanine who died unexpectedly in June this year. We owe a great deal to Ms Navez-Bouchanine who worked as an urban sociologist at the Institut National d’Aménagement et d’Urbanisme Rabat and in Paris / École Nationale d’Architecture.

The House of World Cultures is a business division of the Kulturveranstaltungen des Bundes in Berlin GmbH
Director: Bernd M. Scherer

Supported by:

Der Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien

based on a decision of the Deutscher Bundestag

Auswärtiges Amt

IN THE DESERT OF MODERNITY is supported by:
Institut Français Berlin (Panel Europa / Migration / Stadt – Europe / Migrations / Villes), Fritz Thyssen Stiftung Köln (Conference The Colonial Modern)

presented by:
die tageszeitung, ARCH+, radiomultikulti