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Abstract

Calls for professional ethics and lawful conduct pervade the ways architects assess their contributions to urban development and ground their sense of responsibility towards the city and its dwellers. However, the centrality of professional ethics in architectural practice constitutes a way of delimiting the extent of this responsibility, rather than triggering a commitment to achieve greater social justice. By investigating the place of architecture in the development of Addis Ababa, a booming African metropolis, this article offers a critique of professional ethics, and an examination of how professional practice could be otherwise. I document how a limited number of architects seek to *break rank* to take responsibility for the ways social inequalities are reinforced in the process of urban change. I explore how individual attempts to change the terms and narratives of one's relatedness to the plight of unknown others can make achieving social justice a potential objective of urban politics. [Keywords: Architecture, professional ethics, responsibility, justice, development, Africa Rising, Ethiopia]

Growth, Responsibility, and Inequality

African cities are booming. Large infrastructural projects, new housing facilities, and steel-and-glass high-rises are reshaping African urban landscapes. Global consultancy firms are advertising the continent's urban growth as having great potential for investment (Hatch, Becker, and van Zyl 2011, Fine et al. 2012, Monitor Group 2009, Knight Frank 2017). Building African cities has become a highly profitable business.[1]

One of these booming cities is Addis Ababa, the capital of a country, Ethiopia, that has transformed itself from a symbol of humanitarian crisis to a paradigmatic story of Africa Rising. With economic growth, high-rise buildings, office blocks, and landmark corporate and government headquarters have reconfigured the city's skyline. Real estate developers offer a variety of accommodations in a growing market, with property costs from $50,000 USD to well over $500,000 USD. Since its inception in the early 2000s, the government housing scheme, which aims to provide home ownership to poorer urban dwellers, has delivered more than 230,000 housing units (UN-Habitat 2017). A city train line and expanded ring road have made Addis Ababa an African leader in transport infrastructure investment.

However, increasing private and state investments in the city have failed to trickle down to produce direct benefits for the urban poor. Wealth remains concentrated in the hands of a restricted domestic business community, the workings of which are largely opaque beyond evident intimate connections between politics, power, and capital accumulation (Weis 2016). In the city, high-rise buildings, office blocks, and real estate developments mainly service the upper middle classes, the super-rich, and Ethiopian returnees from Europe and America (Knight Frank 2017). Meanwhile, inequality has skyrocketed (UN–Habitat 2010, Solomon 2006).[2] Forced evictions have targeted poor communities in the inner city to make room for urban regeneration. The construction of government housing, especially in the suburbs, has either provided home ownership to a burgeoning middle class or simply trapped poor homeowners in circles of indebtedness (Planel and Bridonneau 2017). Finally, booming construction activities have provided employment, yet the majority of construction workers enjoy low salaries,[3] a lack of protections and safety, and the possibility of sudden dismissal (Di Nunzio n.d.).

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Ethnographers and critical urban studies scholars have documented how urban development has entailed waves of dispossession, eviction, and rising inequalities (Harms 2013, Baxstrom 2008, Herzfeld 2009, Caldeira 2001, Grant 2009, Mbembe and Nuttall 2004, LeVan and Olumbowale 2014, Jacobs 1961, Harvey 2001, Sassen 2014). These studies have also pointed out that the nexus between growing inequalities and urban development is not given, inevitable, or even necessary. It is a historical product contingent on courses of actions that could have been otherwise. This article seeks to provide an ethnographic and theoretical reflection on how we can discuss and account for responsibility for courses of action that contribute to the persistence of inequalities and injustice: who is responsible for inequality? And more importantly, who is responsible for addressing injustice?

To answer these questions, I examine the place of experts and expertise, in terms of both questioning inequalities, subjugation, and injustice, and deepening them. In this, I complement studies on the politics of knowledge, abstraction, and calculation within the application of expertise (Mitchell 2002, Li 2015, Abram and Weszkalnys 2011) by exploring how the positionality of experts in relation to inequality is defined through privilege and entitlement. In other words, I examine how the ways that experts justify privilege shape the terms of their involvement with the plight of marginalized others. Drawing on fieldwork conducted between 2013 and 2016 with actors in Addis Ababa's construction boom, I focus on the work of those experts who, more than anyone else, are accused of selling their technical expertise to enable accumulation by dispossession and speculation (Harvey 2001:406–407, Lefebvre 2003)—architects and consultants. The aim of this article is threefold: to discuss how these experts make sense of their role in the city's development and evaluate the extent of their responsibility; to provide a theoretical framework for evaluating the weight of individual action in triggering or, alternatively, obstructing wider collective projects for social justice in the city (Fainstein 2010, Young 2011); and to politicize the ways we account for the relation between expertise,

development, and the built environment (Lefebvre 2003, Beauregard 2015, Latour 2005, Barry 2013, Jones 2009, Ong and Collier 2005, Graham and Marvin 2011, Scott 1998) in the Global South generally (Anand 2012, Kanna 2011, Roy 2011, Searle 2016), and in sub-Saharan Africa specifically (Pieterse 2008, Parnell and Pieterse 2014, de Boeck 2011).

In this regard, the building of Addis Ababa tells a story common to those of other "ordinary cities" (Robinson 2006) in developing countries. Differently from world cities also located in the Global South—such as Dubai and Shanghai— for the most part, local architects, not international consultancy firms and star architects from the Global North, are reshaping the face of "ordinary cities" such as Addis Ababa (cf. Sklair 2005, Kanna 2011, Searle 2016). In doing so, they are elaborating an architectural language that is "local" but also cultivates the aspirations of the local political and business elites to wealth and abundance.

Wealth and abundance have an image, however. Becoming like Dubai or looking like New York figured prominently in the ways government officials and local investors described Addis Ababa's economic ambitions to me. As Stroll (2010) argues, Addis Ababa is high on "Dubai fever." However, this "Dubai fever" has little to do with the reality of Dubai. We have not witnessed the literal transposing of architectural forms from global cities like Dubai into less resource-rich cities such as Addis Ababa[4]. A "Dubai-style architecture," as some of the architects I interviewed called it, is locally designed but draws on simple yet globally popular architectural features, such as glass curtain walls, currently shaping visions of what growth and development look like (Roy 2011, Ong 2011). As a result, while buildings in an "ordinary city" such as Addis Ababa are significantly less magnificent than those in world cities, they retain the power to enchant (Gell 1992). This power lies not in the fact that they are recognized as *beautiful*, but because they bring imaginaries of global wealth and plenty home. In a poor country, such as Ethiopia, with a long history of famine and chronic poverty, high-rise

buildings question assumptions of the limits of what is possible amidst enduring poverty. Luxurious steel-and-glass high-rise buildings become the landmarks and signifiers of progress.

This look is not only a matter of pride and recognition for the building's owner, the designer, and for the political elites seeking to create an image of growth, but is also an important asset that attracts buyers and renters. Thus, as architects cultivate their clients' ambitions of wealth and abundance, they also enable the extraction of value. By providing technical foundations and aesthetic texture to capital speculation and accumulation, architects directly or indirectly contribute to deepening inequalities in the city between those who inhabit steel-and-glass high-rises, and those who make way for their construction. However, rising inequalities, forced evictions, and low wage labor at construction sites do not figure in the ways architects carry out their professional work of mediation and design.[5] The architects I interviewed told me that they were not the ones to blame for growing social injustice. Indeed, they argued that architects were doing their fair share to enable development and to make it sustainable through a commitment to professional ethics and quality design.

Henri Lefebvre (2003) has long warned of the ability of *urbanists*—architects included—to pursue projects of urban change framed as progressive or radical, while helping to obscure the regimes of authoritarian politics and exploitation that underpin transformations of the built environment (see also Kanna 2011). In this article, I complement Lefebvre's argument by looking at issues of responsibility in design. I show that the centrality of professional ethics and the value given to quality design in architectural practice enable practitioners to delimit the *extent* of their responsibility to within the safe boundaries of their technical expertise whilst denying responsibility for remedying injustice.

Drawing on the work of the philosopher Iris Young (2011), my contention is that moral and ethical conduct is not a guarantee of social justice per se. One might act morally, lawfully, and

ethically, while still contributing to the persistence of inequality and marginality (Berliner et al. 2016). I argue that we need to make an analytical and political distinction between the conceptualization of responsibility in terms of professional ethics (Fassin 2012, Lambek 2010) and one grounded in a political commitment to justice. The possibility of justice does not lie in moral and ethical action alone. Instead, it lies in *breaking rank*, by taking direct responsibility for challenging injustice (Young 2011).

The ultimate objective of this article, however, is not to find architects and consultants guilty of indifference, negligence, and complicity. Indeed, I document how some architects seek to break rank to take responsibility for the ways social inequalities are reinforced in the process of urban change. Through these examples, I contend, in the final part of the article, that the positionality of architects is not inevitable as mere "handmaidens to capitalism" (Beauregard 2015:2), or as vehicles of powerful interests through epistemologies of abstraction and calculability (cf. Mitchell 2002) and the depoliticizing effects of technocracy (cf. Ferguson 1994). I argue that when we look at experts, and not just expertise (cf. Mitchell 2002), we can appreciate that the relation between knowledge and power is not inevitably one of complicity (cf. Foucault 1980) but becomes so because of the ways professionals situate their practice. I suggest that it could also be otherwise: individual attempts to produce change can contribute to making social justice a potential objective of urban politics.

"Responsibility for Justice"

In an astute observation about the workings of infrastructure and structural violence, anthropologist James Ferguson (2012) argues that when we look at inequalities and their everyday effects it is difficult to pin down responsibilities. Inequalities are often "naturalized, made invisible, or made to seem inevitable" (Ferguson 2012: 559). In response, anthropologists and critical scholars have sought to de-naturalize inequalities and bring into view their

historicity. This approach has allowed a study of the workings of the institutions that enable the persistence of inequalities: the centrality of exploitation in capitalist economies of production (Marx 1867, Burawoy 1979), regimes of violence, coercion and oppression (Fanon 1952, Mbembe 2001) and the grounding of power in technologies of control, surveillance, and discipline (Foucault 2008, Ferguson 1994, Gupta 2012).

Institutional analyses, however, only partially help us to address the question of responsibility for persisting inequalities. An easy answer is to see the work of institutions as the by-product of ongoing struggles between proletarians and capitalists (Marx 1867), the powerful and the "weak" (Scott 1985), the hegemonic and the subaltern (Gramsci 1988). From this perspective, inequalities are produced either by default (Ferguson 1994, Gupta 2012), or by design and intent (Harvey 2007, Wacquant 2009). Thus, inequalities are either part of wider political projects of domination (Harvey 2007) or side effects of the moral and intellectual prejudices of the powerful towards the marginalized (Simmel 1908). Whether we emphasize intentionality or arbitrariness, these theories argue, inequalities are products of identifiable courses of action, responsibility for which lies with certain actors: the state, politicians, CEOs, government officials, experts, or the doomed development practitioners. Still, the difficulty of pinning down responsibilities persists because connections between the agency of powerful institutions and inequalities are not easy to identify. For one, inequalities appear as aggregate outcomes of multiple courses of action, which cannot be simply reduced to antagonism between the rich and the poor, the powerful and the weak, the ruler and the ruled, the one percent and the 99 percent. Alternatively, we could identify responsibilities as lying generally in society, capitalism, or the market economy, but this only reifies inequalities as inevitable—outcomes of a system that we cannot or do not wish to challenge.

In her book *Responsibility for Justice*, Iris Young (2004, 2011) offers a way out of this tangle.

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She argues that the most common ways of conceptualizing responsibilities for inequalities are grounded in a form of legal reasoning mainly concerned with "find[ing] guilt or fault for a harm" (2004:368). However, this model of "strict liability," she argues, limits considerations of social inequality. The state, powerful agencies, and CEOs might be guilty of reproducing inequality through forced evictions and low-paid labor but a range of others, often in positions of privilege, indirectly contribute to the persistence of inequalities. These individuals are not necessarily complicit, since they have not done anything directly harmful to the poor. Yet, they carry a responsibility—not because of what they have done, but, as Hannah Arendt (1963) argued, for what *they have not done* or *could have done*.

However, differently from Arendt, for Young, responsibility is not a synonym for guilt. In other words, while some remain blameworthy for causing harm, other individuals bear a responsibility to trigger a collective project to address inequalities, namely by being directly committed to act to improve the lives of near and distant strangers. Regrettably, Young continues, this collective project for social justice fails to materialize because of the excuses and justifications that those in positions of relative privilege might employ "to deny that they have a responsibility to try to remedy injustice" (Young 2011:153): *I pay my taxes, I do my fair share*; *I follow the law*; *it is the system, not me*.

For Young, the status quo is a cumulative product of the ways we accept and become complicit with a structure that enables both privilege and inequalities. However, complicity and acceptance do not necessarily employ the language of cynicism or opportunism. Instead, the status quo is often justified on moral grounds, using a language of necessity and inevitability that ultimately contributes to making inequalities persistent. Young thus argues that it is not enough to denaturalize inequalities through theory and discourse. We should also see injustice as a terrain for individual action and collective struggle to discharge our responsibility for

justice.

With their practice, architects find themselves at the heart of the making of ventures, capital speculation, and accumulation. As anthropologist Michael Jackson (2005) might put it, architects are *acted upon* by pressure from government institutions and investors to build and develop, but also *act upon*. By building their careers and designing urban spaces, they directly or indirectly shape the unfolding of urban development. In what follows, I explore these tensions in the work of architects, pointing out how inequalities are produced through action, and how actions can potentially challenge what is deemed to be inevitable or even necessary.

Urban Teleologies

Addis Ababa's construction boom began in the early 2000s, following a process of renewal (*tehadso*) within the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), the coalition that has ruled the country since the demise of the socialist Derg regime in 1991. Construction activities had already begun as the EPDRF's economic liberalization led to the abolition of some building restrictions and a greater availability of land (Himmelreich 2010). But investment and construction following the opening of markets in the 1990s did not by themselves trigger the construction frenzy we witness today. Instead, it was the EPRDF's emphasis, since the early 2000s, on delivering development, building state capacity, and boosting investment in the capital, that made the difference.

This new focus on urban development was a significant shift in the EPRDF's political agenda which, during the party's first decade in power, was primarily concerned with rural constituencies (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003). The shift signaled a change in the government's understanding of its role and the grounds of the legitimacy of the ruling party. In this understanding, delivering development is both the mode and the end of government.

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The centrality of development in EPRDF politics emerges from its attempts to synthesize two potentially opposing ideological perspectives: a commitment to Marxism-Leninism on one hand, and political centralism with a concomitant embrace of the market economy on the other. The war between the EPRDF and the Derg was fought within a shared commitment to socialism as a paradigm of government and state-building (Donham 1999). The downfall of the Derg's socialist regime, and the victory of the EPRDF in 1991, however, occurred in a changed international context following the collapse of the USSR and, above all, domestic dissent toward socialism. In these circumstances, the EPRDF had to reposition itself both strategically and ideologically. "Development," as a discourse and practice, provided the middle ground. The result was an enduring commitment to state-led development, political centralism, and collectivist ideology—"Revolutionary Democracy"—but with the market economy as the accepted paradigm for collective growth and development (Vaughan 2011).

Under the EPRDF regime, Addis Ababa, as the symbol of Ethiopia's economic success, has been radically transformed. Political centralism and the market economy have created a conducive environment for investment, mainly due to political stability and the central role of the state in managing the economy. However, it has not resulted in greater equity. Lack of redistribution has created widespread discontent. Labor struggles for better wages and working conditions are not rare at construction sites, though they often result in workers being fired, and receive little media attention. The eviction of entire communities from the inner city has triggered silent but visible forms of dissent. After Arat Kilo, part of the old city center, was bulldozed in 2012, graffiti appeared voicing opposition to the government's plans. In 2014, and more dramatically between 2015 and 2017, demonstrations occurred against the attempts of the city government to include the outskirts of the neighboring Oromia region into the city's planned expansion. Protests snowballed, triggering a country-wide wave of demonstrations demanding fairer redistribution of the benefits of economic growth.

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The government officials I interviewed at the time of these protests were aware of the challenges of urban development, growing dissent, and deepening inequalities. However, they saw inequalities as mere shortcomings or partial disruptions that could be addressed with proper planning, and which would dissipate as economic growth realized its full potential. The government's commitment to development was taken at face value as a guarantee of a better future, especially for the poor. For T.,[6] a former city official and then a government advisor on urban issues, development was inevitably incremental, and the present already showed significant achievements. For him, "today is better than yesterday" and, potentially, the future could be better than today.

To enable this potentiality, steps needed to be taken, he added. For instance, talking about the evictions of inner city residents to make room for elite construction projects, T. argued that demolition and regeneration are quasi-physiological stages, depending on which cities either die or thrive. As he and B., an official at the Land Development Authority, explained, you cannot choose when to develop your city, especially the capital of a country with a history of famine, poverty, and economic stagnation. When economic growth occurs, you simply have to seize the moment. "We cannot wait," B. stated, adding: "my office deals with the redevelopment of 306 hectares of land and the relocation of 10,000 people per year."

However, this sense of urgency was not applied to addressing marginality and exclusion in the present. Inequalities were not just seen as temporary disruptions, but as inevitable and even necessary for development. Similarly, the eviction of poor residents from inner city Addis Ababa was recognized as unpleasant for those affected yet necessary for the city's development.

These widely shared narratives of inevitability, urgency, and necessity constitute powerful ways of justifying inequalities well beyond the walls of government offices. CEOs and managers of construction companies, for instance, used the language of necessity to explain

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why worker salaries were low. Rising wages were simply perceived to be incompatible with the state of the economy and the health of construction companies. As Mario Ricolfi, the owner and manager of an Italian construction company founded by his grandfather and working in Ethiopia since the Italian occupation in the 1930s, told me, wage increases related to what was economically sound for a company: "you could ask me, 'why don't you raise the salary yourself,' but if I just do it the cost of my project will go up and then what do you do when you need to deal with your competitors?"

However, low wages are not just a matter of company competitiveness, as a McKinsey report (Fine et al. 2012) on job creation and employment in Africa pointed out, but a key condition for economic growth. For the writers of this report, low wages need not be tackled immediately, since they offer an opportunity for both investors and national governments to boost growth. Growth and development, it is then assumed, will eventually lead to better wages and better labor conditions.

A similar teleology of the future and justification of present conditions has pervaded academic and media narratives of Africa Rising and economic growth. For instance, in discussing Ethiopia and its sister success story, Rwanda, business reports, media accounts, and much literature on institutional development see development as comprising a succession of necessary steps for sustainable growth. Within this framework, political authoritarianism and social inequality are seen as transitional phases. Political stability, economic growth, social equity, and the fair distribution of political and civil rights are prioritized in a sequence leading to the realization of democratic, developed, and affluent societies. With this perspective, commentators, such as Alex De Waal (2013) and Tim Kelsall (2013), have invited critical scholars to give a fair hearing to the development vision of the EPRDF, and argued that time is needed for economic growth to fully realize its potential.

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The logic of these narratives is the logic of the trade-off. Forced evictions, rising inequalities, low wages, and, ultimately, political authoritarianism are justified as inevitable steps towards a better future. This reasoning not only neutralizes the legitimacy of the claims of construction workers and inner city residents as short-sighted and pessimistic assessments of the potentiality of development; as we will see in the next section, it also limits the ability of architects and urban planners, the indispensable technical manpower of Addis Ababa's construction boom, to effectively influence the city's development.

A Work of Mediation

"It is a kind of piecemeal [development], happening here and there and you cannot really see what [the city] is going to become…maybe it is going to be the city of the chaotic..." With these words, F., a government official in the Addis Ababa Planning Office, described her frustrations with the way the city was developing, namely the limited room that "development pressure," as she put it, allowed for comprehensive and extensive planning. What F. meant by "development pressure" was the effect of the sense of urgency and necessity that guided, for instance, the work of the Land Development Agency. "The speed is quite fast," F. commented. "You can go to one place, you see a plot, ok [you say to yourself] we can plan on it. Then you go [there] tomorrow and that plot is taken."

The limited room that planners such as F. have to intervene in the city contradicts the established impression of the absolute dominance of the state in Ethiopia's growth and development (cf. Kelsall 2013). The speed of development is also a result of the centrality of the market economy in Ethiopia's and Addis Ababa's trajectories of growth and, notably, in the government's own understandings of development. While the state remains central in poverty reduction (Di Nunzio 2017, Lefort 2012), the construction of hydroelectric dams and power plants (Mains 2012) and, in some key urban infrastructural projects, i.e., road building,

the city train line and condominium housing (Planel and Bridonneau 2017), the process of urban densification transforming Addis Ababa's skyline is primarily market-led (Fasil Demissie 2008, Goodfellow 2017). For instance, one of the most remarkable transformations of the past decade, a series of high-rise buildings near the airport, was not a result of urban planning. As F. put it, "the market created that place," and the energy of the market was highly praised by urban policymakers at the top of the state bureaucracy. When I recounted what F. had told me about the difficulties that urban planners encountered while trying to tackle the piecemeal development of Addis Ababa, an advisor to the Ministry of Development commented: "Can you stop Addis Ababa? Nobody can stop it!"

Development pressure, however, does not mean that Addis Ababa's construction boom lacks technical and professional grounding. While urban planners such as F. have limited room to think about comprehensive planning interventions, it is architects and private consultants who make sure that construction activities are sound. Like the urban planners, however, the architects I interviewed were also frustrated by the city's lack of urban texture and felt that they could not challenge the unfolding of its development. For Tomas, Chief Architect at a leading consulting firm, Addis Ababa was becoming a mere "collection of buildings." Regulations, architects pointed out, were too permissive or not detailed enough. Investors pressed for returns on their investments were allowed to build on the full area of their plot, leaving little space for parking or green areas.

In these circumstances, architects and consultants argued, their work does not simply consist of providing a language for the global ambitions of abundance of the city or a built brand for clients' investments. The work of an architect is fundamentally that of a building professional who seeks to shape, and in some cases contain, the effects of market-led development on the urban environment, mediating between the city's building and planning regulations, the

ambitions of the client, and the architect's technical knowledge, ethical stance, and aesthetic sensibilities. As Mulugeta, the CEO and Chief Architect of a consultancy firm, told me, an architect is not a Picasso who paints in his studio and sells his art to willing customers. From the initial design phase onwards, an architect works *for* someone else, with mediation and negotiation a fundamental part of the trade. Others agreed; the architect provides a service for elite clients, but ideally in a way that appreciates both technical constraints and the social and environmental effects. As Tilahun, the CEO and the Chief Architect of a consultancy firm, put it, a building occupies a space belonging to the public. The responsibility of the architect is to make sure that the building serves a public function, whether as an accessible venue or simply by adding coherence to the city's urban texture.

This is not easy to achieve. Architects pointed out that a critical juncture in their work is the time allowed for planning and design. Unlike urban planners, architects have sufficient land available on which to envision their designs. But, as with planners, development pressure, and especially investment value of the building, significantly affects what an architect can achieve. In these circumstances, time is money in very concrete terms: architect fees in Addis are not commensurate with the effort and time needed to develop detailed designs dealing with the social, ecological, and aesthetic dimensions of a given project.

"Come on, you want me to pay you this amount of money for this drawing?" Tomas quoted a client's response as he showed his work and stated the fee. Architects complained that clients undervalue their role. To make things worse, in Ethiopia there is no regulation establishing benchmarks for architectural fees, ideally fixed as a defined percentage of the overall budget. Hence, architects have limited bargaining power; they may be tempted to accept whatever is offered and produce a design commensurable with the payment. Gizachew, a Senior Architect in his early 30s working for a consultancy firm, was instructed by his CEO and Chief Architect

to complete his designs within a given time and budget. As Gizachew put, "it is all about the economy of a project." As a result, my interlocutors complained, architects lack time for detailed research to provide effective technical solutions that also address social and ecological implications.

A design, however, is not only born out of the contractual relations between architects and clients, but from the resources clients allocate to materialize the project. These resources are not used indiscriminately, especially if the concern is to minimize the time of delivery, maximize the use of space, and have a certain look to the building so as to be attractive to potential buyers. The "economy of a project," as Gizachew put it, ultimately defines the boundaries of the architect's work, making the design a compromise between the client's ambition, the financial resources available, and the architect's fee. For Tewodros, a Chief Architect at a leading consultancy firm, for instance, glass curtain walls evoking the architecture of Dubai and other world cities became popular in Addis because they provided a technological solution to issues of time, space, and aesthetics. Such buildings are considered attractive and aspirational. They are easy and quick to design as they rely on existing patterns and the use of glass curtain walls. Last, but not least, domestic construction companies know how to deliver the desired effect while saving time and costs.

As my interlocutors argued, financial circumstances are ultimately what constrain architects' ability to design. Like planners, architects struggle to be relevant in the way cities are built, despite their centrality to the way value is produced in the city (Harvey 2001). The constraints on architectural practice in Addis reveal that "the dull compulsion of economic relations," as Scott puts it (1985: 246), does not only affect the lives of the most marginalized in urban society, such as low wage construction workers and targets of forced evictions. It also has impacts on

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privileged professionals and their capacity to influence the making of development and to ultimately imagine alternative solutions.

The Politics of Quality

However, we should be careful in endorsing the ways privileged individuals justify their own positionality. Young (2011) warns us to be aware of the ways the "demands of immediacy," that is, the concerns of the especially privileged to maintain their economic status and living standards, "are likely to reinforce" (164) structural privilege and inequalities. In describing the economic constraints of architectural practice, architects and private consultants seemed to accept the terms of their interactions with powerful clients not as a form of subjugation, as is the case with construction workers and evictees, but as a means of sustaining their position of relative professional privilege. As a seasoned architect and a lecturer at Addis Ababa University told me, "an architect always needs a client."

The architects I interviewed were aware of their relative privilege but understood the extent of their responsibility in different ways. For some, an architect is a problem solver, but within the circumstances in which he or she finds himself. For instance, one interlocutor pointed out, star architects such as Frank Gehry are known to be able to provide cost-effective solutions that are commonly understood as fundamental components of quality design. However, in Ethiopia, this architect said, there is no space for such quality design. "Star architects are paid millions to find those cost-effective solutions" and to be creative and innovative depends on the time an architect is allowed to spend on a given project.

Some took the more optimistic position that, in the given circumstances with limited space for intervention, "any contribution is positive." Even the slightest contribution, by an educated person, one interlocutor argued, can be a significant change. From this perspective, the expert

eye of an architect can at least make a given project structurally sound or aesthetically compatible with its surroundings. Perfect designs that address all potential social and ecological implications, a Chief Architect said, are something you might do at graduate school when you are allowed to flirt with fantasy. Practice, he implied, is a different game.

Some architects considered this positioning as problematic because it reflected a tendency to comply not only with the demands of powerful clients, but also with the compensation customers were willing to give to architects. The fee issue was raised by virtually all the architects I interviewed, including those whom other architects dubbed rogues. Clients were often seen to prefer the lowest bidder. In these circumstances, low fees were not only considered to be damaging to the field, but also potentially reflecting unethical conduct. Cheap design is not only bad design, it may hide corrupt practices. A Chief Architect reported to me that he had participated in a bid where the proposed budgets for an architectural design ranged from 170,000 birr ($7,000 USD) to 1.8 million birr ($77,000 USD). "How can you justify 170,000 birr? That amount is not even enough to do the printing and pay for your staff! Those people do it because they plan to find money somewhere else."

Comments like this reveal a shared discomfort among architects about the modus operandi of the government, clients, and construction companies. Architects, my interlocutors argued, could do better to convince clients and challenge the ways development is occurring. For Solomon, a respected architect and professor at Addis Ababa University's Faculty of Architecture, architects have a clear responsibility: their practice is a way of harnessing the social, cultural, and historical fabric of Ethiopian cities. While the government is concerned with keeping the pressure of development high, and investors with squeezing out profits, architects have a crucial role in making sure that the concerns of the wider public are included in the design. "With our 3D models," Solomon told an audience of students and practitioners

at Addis Ababa University, "we [architects] give visions into the hands of powerful people." Architects, he argued, are part of the problem. They need to be conscious of their role, since they can directly contribute to worsening the living conditions of many in the city.

Solomon's claims for a more responsible architecture practice did not fall into a void. Calls for quality design pervaded practice and shaped imaginations of a form of professional commitment to do good for the city. Delivering quality design was believed to be the core of architects' professional responsibility, to which practitioners should commit with no excuses and regardless of fees, client demands, and permissive regulations. Quality design, for instance, was the measure that young graduates from the Faculty of Architecture used to define what they meant by professional ethics and identify a good consultancy firm to work for. Quality design and professional responsibility were the focus of debates at the university and the Ethiopian Association of Architects, a radio program on urban development hosted by a professional architect, as well as of articles and letters published in papers and magazines. "I am a professional and I need to be concerned about what is happening in this country, especially if it is about construction," an engineer working for a consultancy firm told me.

Emebet, the CEO and Chief Architect of a highly esteemed consultancy firm, embodied this commitment to quality design. She told me that architects should always stand their ground, fighting to convince their clients and resigning if a project does not fit their ethical and professional standards. It is a tough fight, she admitted, but it is worth it, not only for the city but for the sake of an architect's career and professional esteem. Good architectural design can transform a simple project into a landmark for which both client and architect could get credit. She told me about a project that was soon to be completed. "I remember when we started," she said, the client "came with that attitude." "And this guy [the client] did not just believe me like that. You need tenacity." Drawing after drawing, 3D model after 3D model, Emebet convinced

her client. "I told him 'you have a responsibility to Ethiopia.'" The result was a building that did not just have the usual bland glass curtain walls but a more elaborate design speaking to its architectural context and including elements, such as arcades in the outer perimeter, which enhance accessibility and give a special character to the building.

Emebet was not the only architect who could claim to have designed buildings with a special quality and that challenged the dull popularity of glass curtain walls. Solomon, Tomas, and Tewodros were also esteemed as architects committed to quality design. However, the kinds of clients that turned to such architects were an elite group. As Tewodros pointed out, clients willing to consider something like Emebet's arcades are those who are not pressed with extracting a profit out of each cubic meter. They are often extremely resourceful individuals, or government institutions, banks, and insurance companies which might be primarily interested in an iconic building that represents their success and the distinctiveness of their brand.

What Tewodros suggested is that while a commitment to quality design is the core of any architect's professional responsibility, few are able to actually practice it and often operate in economic spaces that are fundamentally exclusive. For most architects, practice is a compromise with a pool of investors who turn to them because they are obliged to do so by building regulations or because they are concerned with maximizing the use of space. As a result, the idea that "any contribution is positive" makes sense, yet also reveals that the language of quality design, whatever the extent of its actualization, is not necessarily an avenue for tackling inequalities. Emphasizing quality design enabled a few architects to claim greater room for maneuvering with powerful and resourceful clients. But, it indirectly contributed to reinforcing the structures of inequality that pervade professional architectural practice and encompass the city's development.

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Does this imply that architects are inevitably compliant with a conspiracy to build, and complicit in its effects on the urban poor? A closer look at ways some architects tune their practice towards social justice provides a more nuanced view of the positionality of experts.

"We Do Not Eat Buildings"

Addis Ababa's construction boom has not only reshaped its skyline, it has triggered imaginaries of better and wealthier futures among ordinary citizens and the urban poor: "it is like having a color TV for the first time," one resident of the inner city told me. However, the perception of living in a city with better roads and a more enticing architectural landscape does not necessarily result in widely shared experiences of being better off. As a man living in the inner city, selling small household items on the street, told me, "what is happening in the city is good, but you know, we don't eat buildings."

This quote speaks to the underlying tensions between thinking of development as serving the "public good"—something to be enjoyed by society as a whole—and pursuing development as a political project of justice and redistribution. A healthier economy or better roads are commonly believed to be good for society as a whole. However, this does not mean that poor people receive direct gains from wider infrastructural and economic development (McFarlane and Rutherford 2008, Larkin 2013, Harvey and Knox 2015). Urban theorist Susan Fainstein (2010:38–39) warns against relying too much on the "public good" narrative. This is a highly problematic notion because it hides how economic growth and infrastructural development can produce inequalities. Instead, it is important to make an analytical distinction between material gains and diffused benefits so as to assess the actual impact of development on the urban poor.

For instance, while poor residents of Addis might generically benefit from living in a better serviced city, it is only the actual delivery of direct material gains that can make the difference

in triggering trajectories of social improvement and emancipation. One could argue that a job at a construction site is a material gain delivered by urban development. However, when low wages, lack of job protections, and poor safety measures are taken into account, construction jobs do not seem much of a gain relative to the 40–50 percent profit that construction companies might earn from a multi-billion-birr contract.

Accounting for an unequal balance of benefits and gains is even more relevant if we consider the forced evictions of poor residents from the city center to make for room for elite construction projects. To be precise, these evictees were not simply forced out of their homes. The government had designed a system of compensation and relocation, which was not commensurate with the damages experienced by evictees. The few families who owned land in the inner city were allowed to remain if they could afford to redevelop their plot by building a high-rise. Otherwise, they were compensated for the cheap construction materials their houses were built of, but not for the considerable value of the inner-city land being expropriated. Meanwhile, those who rented houses that had been nationalized in the mid-1970s under the socialist regime were offered two options: resettlement in a condominium in the suburbs, for which they would need a down payment for a monthly mortgage that many struggled to pay; or, alternatively, relocation to government-owned houses wherever they were available, and where they would risk relocation again if these houses were targeted for urban development.

As Daniel, an architect and the coordinator of a professional association at the time of my fieldwork, pointed out, it is true that people in the inner city live in houses that are far below acceptable standards. However, differently from what government officials and some of his colleagues believed, development per se is not a guarantee of social improvement for the poor. Development, he argued, should be conceptualized and carried out so as to provide direct benefits to residents of the targeted areas or at least their direct descendants. This, he continued,

could be a matter of negotiation and bargaining, but, "you cannot just tell them, give me your parents' inheritance or property for someone who does not relate to you, [you cannot just tell them] the city [should] be physically improved, but the beneficiary can't be you."

Where does architectural practice stand in all this? To what extent are architects responsible for responding to the plight of those unknown others who are directly affected by their designs?

For some architects, addressing inequalities was simply "not my job." Their responsibility as they saw it was to make sure the design was sound. The city, one interlocutor argued, must develop, period. "I know that area, I was born there and I grew up there," he told me when I asked what he thought about the regeneration schemes and forced evictions. "I saw how my parents were living and I know the place is not a comfortable place to live in." People in poor neighborhoods, he argued, often get accustomed to their condition and pushing them to do something else is good for them and for society as a whole. "When I saw people living there, I saw people that were not using their potential."

If an architect wants to work for the poor, another of my interlocutors argued, he or she should work for institutions that work with the poor, such as the government. Echoing this, a CEO and Chief Architect argued that an architect does not work for or with the poor directly but can advise government policy. Seeing development as a sort of motivational force for under-achieving citizens, or an architect as an expert on the development policies of an authoritarian government, might be different ways of conceptualizing responsibility. Both are informed by a fundamental resistance to challenging inequalities and addressing the imbalance between diffuse benefits and direct material gains. For the first position, however, poverty is contingent on poor people lacking self-confidence and self-determination. For the second, economic growth is once more described as benefiting the poor.

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Other architects saw their responsibility as extending beyond the boundaries of a professional transaction. Emebet, for instance, did not just advise or work for a fee with institutions that work for the poor, but acted pro bono on projects such as schools and hospitals that might directly benefit the poor. As she put it, "you know I have a good life, I can do that." Solomon, who had warned young architects about 3D models, worked for the government, not as a technical expert, but as a professional pushing for alternative visions of development. Development must occur after all, yet it is the *how*, Solomon contended, that makes the difference. For Solomon and his colleagues, architects could actively help "slow down" development to allow room and time for negotiation and the questioning of government priorities.

This was not easy, and often did not produce the expected outcomes. Moreover, these approaches did not always entail a radical questioning of social inequalities. Yet, they shared an underlying attempt to see delivering direct gains to the poor as a concern of architectural practice. For Solomon, quality design should not just be functional, but also have a redistributive component. Emebet sought to see the political implications of quality design beyond its elite focus, as expressing the architect's responsibility as an engagement with a right to beauty: "Because it is a poor country, it does not mean that everything has to be clinics and hospitals." True, we don't eat buildings, she told me, but "then we do not need art, we do not need good food, we do not need all those nice places that have nice clothes in Haya Hulett," a flourishing neighborhood in south-eastern Addis.

Samuel, a lecturer at the Faculty of Architecture at Addis Ababa University, an urban thinker, and an architect, pushed Emebet's and Solomon's approach even further. For him, responsibility was not just about enlarging the number of people who directly benefit from architectural design but it was a wider political commitment to the plight of unknown others. I

met Samuel for the first time at a conference. Speaking to an audience of students, architects, government officials, and invited speakers from the USA and Europe, he began by saying "architecture has betrayed and ignored both nature and society." He concluded: "architecture has lost meaning to me."

I met him a couple of weeks after the lecture. Samuel asked both himself and me: "what is my stake?"; "as an architect, would that be my claim?" For him, architecture was about using design to serve the invisible majority that populates the city. Architects are too busy working for powerful clients, he told me, and the ethics of an architect should question whether you could work with someone who, as he said, "thinks of these little men as shit." "Sorry," he said, "I can't do that."

Pushing back is not just a move that architects should make to preserve their professional and ethical commitment to quality design; it reveals that architects can imagine alternative ways of doing their work. An architect, Samuel told me, should think of his commitment to be a problem solver in which the issue of redistribution remains a fundamental priority. This, he said, is not only a matter of aesthetics or pace of development, but about imagining what development is for, and for whom. For instance, if we accept that the priority of development is roads, we limit the range of beneficiaries of design to those who can afford a car. The same goes for buildings. If those directly enjoying the quality of a well-designed building are those who live in it or can afford to shop in it, exclusion is not addressed.

Samuel's practice was inspired by an imagination of his ultimate beneficiaries as a range of unknown others. By doing so, his words suggested, architects could be in a position to engage with and contribute to more humble, yet collective endeavors that could directly benefit poor city dwellers. One such endeavor was infrastructure, though not as a form of interconnectivity, but in its more classic connotation of provision. Infrastructures of provision, he suggested,

should not be conceptualized as an undifferentiated grid of pipelines running below a highly differentiated city (Anand 2012), but embedded into an imagination of the city in which rich and poor live in the same neighborhoods, share the same pipelines and develop a politics based on shared experiences of space.

From Ethics to Justice

The world could be otherwise; and that otherwise is contingent on practices that challenge established modi operandi that make the reproduction of oppression and exclusion likely. The ways architects, and professionals and experts more generally, carry out their work matter in either reinforcing or challenging inequalities. Statements such as "it is not my job," "I have to look after my business and my family," "I don't have time for it, I am too busy," "it is the system not me," "what I do is enough," are not innocuous accounts of the constraints of human action in the face of inequalities. They are a repertoire of justifications that help reinforcing inequalities, while being an active refusal of taking direct responsibility for challenging injustice (Young 2011).

In such circumstances, professional ethics, corporate social responsibility (Rajak 2011), and accountability and transparency (Strathern 2000) cannot be the paradigms of the collective struggle for social justice. The language of professional ethics provides professionals and corporate actors with a way of delimiting the extent of their responsibility while shielding themselves, legally, morally and politically, from the wider consequences of their actions. As Young writes: "it is very possible to act in accord with rules of morality and yet not have discharged one's responsibilities" (2004:379–380). A commitment to quality design enabled some Addis architects to cultivate an ethically aware and conscious architectural practice, even as their professional service served the vested interests of the most powerful.

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Seeking to rethink and reshape how we relate to the plight of unknown others, Young argues, is the first step in triggering a collective political process for achieving social justice. By seeing the invisible majority of urban dwellers as the ultimate beneficiaries of architectural practice, even when it serves the ambitions of powerful clients, Samuel seemed to suggest that change can come from the potential convergence of the claims of the urban poor and the work of privileged professionals.

As the paper goes to press, Ethiopia is going through a process of political reform and opening, led by the new Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. His appointment in March 2018 was, for some, the outcome of street protests that took place in the country, and in particular in the southern region of Oromia, between 2015 and 2016. The first Oromo in Ethiopia history to lead the Ethiopian state, dubbed as a reformer and appreciated for his eloquence and openness about the challenges ahead, Abiy Ahmed was viewed by many observers and protesters themselves as the man who could address demands for political opening and greater inclusion.

And indeed, Abiy Ahmed quickly reshaped Ethiopia's political space – opposition politicians, journalists and media activists have seen their room for maneuvering significantly increase. At the same time, whether Abiy Ahmed's reforms will result in greater political liberties and opportunities of social mobility for those at the bottom of urban and rural societies is unclear. The apparatus of political control and mobilization that the ruling party has built over the past twenty-five years to ground itself at the bottom of urban and rural society in the country remains largely in place. Inequalities are deepening. Low wages and threats of evictions persist. A sense of necessity and urgency continues to pervade discourses on growth in the country, *de facto* limiting the ability of ordinary citizens to question, or even have a say on central aspects of the new leadership's visions of the present and the future.

In the present conjuncture of reform, hope and optimism, the long-term history of political

authoritarianism in the country continues to weigh on the emergence of an alternative politics of justice, development and the city. In Addis Ababa, we cannot yet see the making of an urban alliance between evictees, construction workers and critical architects. However, identifying unseen convergences, narrating the potential grounds for shifting urban alliances, and witnessing the range of practices that can trigger collective projects of change, as Samuel himself pointed out, are important. They enable critical assessments of development, but also a way to think both theoretically and practically how experts, anthropologists included, can actively participate in a collective project for justice.

Acknowledgments

Endnotes

[1] The cost of addressing Africa's infrastructure needs has been estimated at $75–118 billion USD a year, with an annual funding gap of $35–46 billion USD. This "infrastructure shortfall" is an attractive business opportunity for foreign investment (Monitor Group 2009:14). Similarly, the expanding housing market is considered a promising business opportunity (Hatch, Becker, and van Zyl 2011:7). As the local capacity to spend increases, national business elites, diaspora returnees, and the emerging middle classes are portrayed as leading a demand for comfortable housing with modern amenities (African Development Fund 2011).

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[2] Real incomes in urban areas have increased, but only for the wealthiest households have they risen significantly. The incomes of poorer households have actually declined (Bigsten and Mekonnen 1999). As a result, while poor households have experienced increased availability of goods and services in an expanded market, their ability to access them has decreased (Solomon 2006).

[3] In 2016, the salary of a daily laborer remained between 50 and 65–70 birr ($2.30 and $3–3.20 USD) a day, while semi-skilled workers, such as steel fixers and carpenters, earned 90–150 birr ($4.20–7 USD) a day.

[4] In November 2018, Abu Dhabi-based real estate Eagle Hills and Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed launched *La Gare*, a new development in Addis Ababa's central district that will count over 4000 residences, shopping malls and luxury hotels. This project is the first of its kind in the country and whether the realization of this project will result in a more literal "Dubaization" of Addis Ababa's urban landscape and internationalization of the city's architecture practice is, at the time of writing, unclear.

[5] In 2013, the late award-winning architect Zaha Hadid was questioned by journalists about the working conditions of migrant workers in the multi-billion dollar construction projects she had designed in Qatar. She replied: "It's not my duty as an architect to look at it." (Goldberger 2014)

[6] Names have been changed to protect privacy.

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