

The '*New Flower*'

The modern city of Addis Ababa as a symbol of African union in the 1960s

*Modernity in the spirit of decolonization
and pan-Africanism*

ABSTRACT

The 1960s marked the start of a new era for Ethiopia. While Africa was in the phase of decolonisation, Ethiopia gained more importance due to its status as the only non-colonised country in Africa. In the context of these historical developments, the emperor Haile Selassie aimed to modernize Addis Ababa, which was supposed to be recognized on the global map, with architectural designs that would make his country proud. Haile Selassie aimed to show “that it is possible to construct grand buildings here too [in Ethiopia], by erecting a couple of high-profile structures. It is not their complexity or size that matter, but the maximum possible use of home-produced materials, in order to shake our wealthy middle class (which keeps its money under the mattress) from the inactivity that also binds it in the field of construction, and stimulate it to invest its assets also in building to make this ‘great village’ a city and a true great capital.”¹

However, how exactly did Addis Ababa undergo this process of modernization? And how was the representation achieved through architecture? In this period, there was a great number of international architects who contributed to the modern cityscape of Ethiopia.

But especially the architects Michael Teodros and Zalman Enav who worked together in a joint firm, have made a very great contribution. For the understanding of Ethiopian modernism it becomes inevitable to understand their approach and to address their works of modern architecture.

In order to understand how modernism expressed itself in Addis Ababa in the 1960s, this work will analyze architectural features of a political and residential building built by these architects. The documentation of the projects is provided by the Israeli Planning, Architecture and Development in Africa (ISPADA) archive, an online archive that studies Israel’s past involvement in architecture and documents architectural projects designed by Israeli architects. This work will explore in what way these projects contributed to the former plan of the emperor to create a modern capital of an unified Africa and if they actually led to the creation of a new African identity.

Key words: Addis Ababa, pan-Africanism, modernity, decolonization, identity, international

¹ Mezzedimi, Arturo. “Haile Selassie: A Testimony for Reappraisal (1992)” Arturo Mezzedimi Architetto, http://www.arturomezzedimi.it/en/pubblicazione_pdf.pdf

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In the 1960s the wind of change was blowing across Africa. The continent was in the phase of decolonization and Ethiopia, being the only African country never colonized, became of higher importance for building the new African identity. While all other African countries were undergoing the process of decolonization, the emperor Haile Selassie had the plan to position Addis Ababa, literally meaning “new flower” in Amharic, as a capital of unified Africa. In order to achieve that he invited multiple international architects and Addis Ababa experienced a boom of modern architecture which has not been widely talked about yet. Instead of modern architecture being a response to industrialization, Architecture became a political tool to express African defiance to western powers. However what value does modern architecture carry that developed out of the same system? Was it merely a facade or did it actually entail societal change? And what role did the ideological disparities between architect and emperor have in the process?

One of the main figures was Michael Teodros (1921 - 2012), who was the only experienced Ethiopian architect of that time. Teodros opened an office with Zalman Enav (born 1928), an Israeli architect and together they designed several buildings which contributed to the modern cityscape of Addis Ababa. This thesis will shed more light on the Mapping and Geography Institute (1964) and the Shelemay Building (1963). The Geography and Mapping Institute, now known as the Ethiopian Mapping Agency, is responsible for cartographic mapping and remote sensing activities in Ethiopia. Even if the agency itself is well known, the building that houses it is, despite its architectural worth, is unfortunately not known enough. The same applies for the Shelemay building, a residential building that enhances the streets of Addis Ababa, but whose architectural value seems still undiscovered. Both buildings are characterized by a strong enga-

gement with the site, which is evident in the external presentation of the buildings and the very advanced integration of climatic conditions. Thus both cases contain a great deal of architectural knowledge and have shaped Ethiopia’s cityscape. So the question arises how exactly did Addis Ababa undergo this process of modernization? And how was the representation achieved through architecture? How did the architect’s interpretation of modernity shape Ethiopia’s architecture?

The study of Ethiopia’s historical architecture is becoming increasingly important. Ethiopia is still in the process of industrialisation, which will ask for new building typologies in the future. In order to create contemporary architecture today without falling into the trap of copying the west, it is important to shift to valuing historic architectural developments first. This is crucial in order to make design changes today and further develop Ethiopia’s own path towards modernization and industrialization.

This paper shifts the narrative from idealized modern architecture from the west to projects which have not gained enough recognition. Through qualitative data, this paper analyzes the historical background of Ethiopia, its relation to modernity and the plans of the emperor to modernize Addis Ababa. The gathered primary sources are documents from the Israeli Planning, Architecture and Development in Africa (ISPADA) online archive. This archive provides online access to images and documents held in the Zalman and Ruth Architect Archive. The founder of the archive, Keren Kuenberg, an architectural researcher and curator, provided additional plans and documents. Furthermore, she provided interviews she conducted with a resident of the Safar-Benin building and an interview with a current employee at the Geography and Mapping Institute. The secondary sources include important books that explain the historical background and publications that deal more in depth with the developments of the 1960s. The Architec-

tural Guide: Sub-Saharan Africa: Volume 3: Eastern Africa. From the Sahel to the Horn of Africa edited by Philipp Meuser and Adil Dalbai is the first comprehensive overview of architecture south of the Sahara. Philipp Meuser is an architect and the owner of DOM Publishers, where the book was published. He got the idea to work on an architectural guide for sub-saharan Africa when he was working as an architect in West Africa and noticed how hard it is to get information about projects in that region. Adil Dalbai studied architecture as well as history and cultural studies. He focuses on the architectural history of Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and (post-)colonial contexts and works on architecture projects in Western Africa. Through the contribution of nearly 350 authors, a polyphonic work was created, displaying African architectural wealth and diversity. The chapter about Michael Teodros and Modernity in Ethiopia is especially important for this paper. Even though Michael Teodros contributed to Addis Ababa's cityscape there is nearly no information about his background, which makes this chapter in the Architectural Guide a valuable source. It talks about Michael Teodros' background, his collaboration with Zalman and Enav and explains as well a couple of their works like the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Also, the journal article "Haile Selassie's Imperial Modernity: Expatriate Architects and the Shaping of Addis Ababa", by Ayala Levin, has valuable information about the different historical phases that Addis Ababa underwent and Haile Selassie's plans behind it. Ayala Levin is an art historian and Associate Professor at the University of California specialized in architectural and urban planning in postcolonial African states. In her article, she goes into detail about the relationship between the architects and the emperor. This is particularly important for this paper as her work helps to answer the question of how ideas about modern architecture differed and what influence the architects had in defining an architectural identity.

In general, it can be said that the topic of modernity in Ethiopia in relation to architecture is still very unexplored and just recently gained attention. However, there are scholars who have examined Ethiopian modernism in the context of political and social sciences as well as art history. The pioneer in this field is Elizabeth W. Giorgis, who is an Associate Professor of Theory and Criticism at the College of Performing and Visual Art and the Center of African Studies at Addis Ababa University. In her article "Charting out Ethiopian Modernism" Giorgis gives a general but also very critical insight into the meaning of modernity for Ethiopia in the social sphere. Her critical analysis of the importance of the monarchy in this context, gives important background knowledge to understand the obstacles of the modernisation process.

All in all, this research focuses on the works of the architect Michael Teodros because his contribution to the development of Ethiopia's modernism is a story that has never fully been documented. But unfortunately he is no longer alive and information about him is limited. On the whole information about architectural modernism in Ethiopia is scarce and due to Covid-19 restrictions it has not been possible to travel to Ethiopia in order to investigate more on Teodros background and to further illuminate the selected case studies. Only asserting general information about the buildings and Michael Teodros required cooperation with people on the ground in Addis Ababa and scholars who have already dealt with the issue. This scarcity of information on Ethiopian architectural modernity shows that the topic is highly undiscovered. Thus, it was only possible for this research to give a small insight into the subject. However, this insight aims to encourage the acknowledgement of the importance of Ethiopia's modernity in order to stimulate further research in the future.

In relation to the structure of the theses, the first chapter highlights the historical situation in the 1960s, explaining the decolonization

around Ethiopia as well as the developments in Ethiopia. In this context, it explains the pan-African movement and Ethiopia's symbolic position within it. Furthermore, this chapter presents the plans of the emperor and his steps to modernize Ethiopia. The second chapter firstly focuses on the history of Michael Teodros and Zalman Enav. The second part of this chapter analyzes the two case studies, the Sifar-Benin building built in 1963 and the Geography and Mapping Institute (1964). Finally, the concluding remarks discuss the meaning of modernity to Ethiopia and how the architects tried to create a new modernity.

The research explains to what extent the aims of the emperor and the architectural projects of the 1960s have actually contributed to the establishment of a new African identity. The urge to modernize was about more than just being part of progress. It was about standing up to the western world and reflecting through modern architecture resistance, knowledge and power. However, it became clear that the architects and the emperor had different ideas about what modern architecture was. Even though the architects tried to develop modern architecture that evolved from within the Ethiopian tradition, it turned out to be very difficult to develop architecture that defied the Western way of building.

Ethiopia - A Symbol Of Resistance

At the End of the 19th century Africa was exposed to European Powers and was exploited for the purpose of colonization and imperialism. The 'scramble for Africa' made Great Britain, France, Germany, Spain, Portugal and Italy race for colonies.² Years of disagreement over the ownership of territories resulted in the Berlin Conference of 1884-85 where the European powers divided Africa between them. "Africa's people, mineral resources, harbors, rivers, forests - all were to be used to build up the economic and political strength of the colonial powers."³

These colonial encounters created a new hierarchy in our world as Western modernity was forced on to the non-Western world. This ensured that different modernities and different world views, which were not rooted in Western developments like Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, were completely colonized. Colonialism denied Africa to independently participate in shaping a "global cultural order"⁴ and instead caused the entire history of human existence to be based on a system driven by Western worldview. The formation of our continents as we know them today was not only a social invention but also a political one, in order to ensure the enforcement of Western ideals onto non-Western countries.⁵

*"Europe and America have appropriated human ideas of progress, civilization and developmentalism as exclusive virtues of Western modernity that had to be exported to other parts of the world."*⁶

Within the scope of colonialism Ethiopia became of higher importance to Africa. Because Ethiopia was the only country in Africa that resisted European cultural and political domination. Even though Haiti and Liberia were also regarded as independent at that time, they were only so politically because, economically they were appendages of the US. Which made Ethiopia the only black country that opposed the Western powers. This resulted in Ethiopia becoming a symbol of independence and hope to Africans in Africa and around the world.⁷

Another aspect which contributed to the importance of Ethiopia to Africa was the fact that Ethiopia defeated the Italian invasion at the Battle of Adwa in 1896 (Figure1). In light of the years of the destruction, the exploitation and the systematic degradation of Africa, this victory of Ethiopia uplifted the spirits of black people around the world.⁸ At the same time Ethiopia's victory immensely disturbed Italy's pride, since Ethiopia was the only African country to resist European colonization. This had the effect that Italy, which already felt inferior to the other European powers before, had to deal with increasing insecurities about its own modernity and racial status.⁹

Ethiopia's triumph made it a symbol of resistance and contributed to the black nationalism and resistance movements. The alliance with Ethiopia became a movement in itself, the so-called Ethiopian movement or Ethiopianism. Ethiopianism became a point of connection

² Kwame Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite* (London: Heinemann, 1965), 7.

³ Kwame, *Africa Must Unite*, 7.

⁴ Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Coloniality of Power in Postcolonial Africa: Myths of Decolonization* (CODESRIA, 2013), 40.

⁵ Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Coloniality of Power in Postcolonial Africa*, 40.

⁶ Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Coloniality of Power in Postcolonial Africa*, 40.

⁷ Metaferia, Getachew. "The Ethiopian Connection To The Pan-African Movement." *Journal of Third World Studies* 12, no. 2 (1995): 303. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45197577>.

⁸ Getachew, "The Ethiopian Connection To The Pan-African Movement," 303.

⁹ Ayala Levin, "Haile Selassie's Imperial Modernity: Expatriate Architects and the Shaping of Addis Ababa." *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 75, no. 4 (2016): 452. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26418940>.

between Africans in the diaspora and Africans in the continent. The movement was expressed in two ways, in the US it addressed the abolishment of slavery and in Africa it voiced the abolishment of racial domination and colonialism. It became a movement that refused the subjugation of black people in politics, culture and religion and challenged the current system.¹⁰ It encouraged black people all over the world to stand up for themselves and “challenge social injustice, racial discrimination, and colonial domination”.¹¹

Fascist Italy's Second Attempt to Colonize

Ethiopia's independence was challenged several times throughout history. Its geographic location and its leaders' urge to develop Ethiopia economically attracted the attention of European countries. Even though Ethiopia managed to defeat the Italians in the Battle of Adowa in 1896, it did not manage to prevent Italy's attack in 1935. Mussolini violated a covenant that Ethiopia and Italy signed and used

poison gas in order to subjugate Ethiopians and colonize the country. Black people around the world felt deep resentment against the fascist regime of Italy and interpreted the attack on Ethiopia as an attack on black people in general.¹² Jomo Kenyatta, who was to become the president of Kenya stated that Ethiopia was the ‘sole remaining pride of Africans and Negroes in all parts of the world’.¹³

Italians legitimized their occupation of Ethiopia by depicting it, especially its capital Addis Ababa as a rural city, a blank space without structures or buildings of value. However they failed to recognize that Addis Ababa was in fact a city of importance that was already present in the world economy. Addis Ababa was a junction for international trade and hosted a variety of international traders and diplomats from North America, Britain, India, Europe, Armenia and India. During the reign of Menelik II from 1889-1913 Addis Ababa doubled its size by expanding its territory.¹⁴



Figure 1: The Battle of Adwa on March 2, 1896. Source: The British Museum

¹⁰ Getachew, “The Ethiopian Connection To The Pan-African Movement,” 305.

¹¹ Getachew, “The Ethiopian Connection To The Pan-African Movement,” 313.

¹² Getachew, “The Ethiopian Connection To The Pan-African Movement,” 313.

¹³ Teshale Tibebu, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia: 1896-1974* (The Red Sea Press, 1995), 15.

¹⁴ Mia Fuller, *Moderns Abroad: Architecture, Cities and Italian Imperialism* (London: Routledge, 2010), 197.

Furthermore the emperor invited educated black people in the diaspora to return back to Ethiopia¹⁵ as well as “British, French, Italian, Russian, and German ambassadorial representatives to establish themselves in the wooded northeastern area just outside the city”.¹⁶ This influx of new residents from around the world contributed to the development of Ethiopia, especially by executing the construction of several new buildings in the fields of health, finance, education and structures like a water system and a hydro-electric installation. These changes led to Addis Ababa becoming a vibrant city characterized by the diversity of its international as well as national inhabitants. A city where Orthodox Christians, Muslims, Roman Catholics, non-monoists lived side by side and a wide variety of languages were spoken, such as Amharic, Arabic, French, Italian, English, Greek and many more.¹⁷ All of these developments “indicate[ed] that Addis Ababa, despite its poverty, was more cosmopolitan than [...] any Italian city.”¹⁸

Italians failed to recognize these progressive aspects of Addis Ababa, its own steps of modernization and instead looked at it through their own European lense of modernization. They concentrated on the poor hygienic conditions of the city and portrayed it as a medieval city in terms of its social and civil progress.¹⁹ The Italians used the way Ethiopians lived as an explanation to justify that all black people around the world were undisciplined and declared that Addis was ‘the true Negro city... the unhappy result o the incapacity that blacks on the whole and Ethiopians in particular have for [organization].’²⁰

Despite all these primitive circumstances for the Italians, Mussolini decided to position Addis Ababa as the capital of his East African empire. He did this not so much because of the geographical location, which was rather inauspicious, but rather because of Ethiopia’s symbolic value for Africa. The Italians believed that if they captured the Ethiopian sites which were an expression of their prestige and power, they would inherit it in some way. At first the Italians wanted to demolish the city completely, however due to a lack of resources they developed two other strategies. They decided to occupy the present centers of the city and remodel it as well as appropriate existing buildings instead of building new ones.²¹ The other strategy was to reconstruct excavated and cleared monuments according to Fascist construction methods that were used in Rome.²²

Even though the occupation was not long-lasting, the damage caused by the Italians was immense, especially socially. The Italians spread hatred and division among the Ethiopians. This led to the country dividing into ethnic groups and religious groups. Despite these attempts, Italians were not successful and Ethiopia was steadfast against Balkanization and colonization. After 5 years of occupation this period came to an end in May 1941 and Ethiopia was once again freed from the European invasion.²³

¹⁵ Getachew, “The Ethiopian Connection To The Pan-African Movement,” 309.

¹⁶ Fuller, *Moderns Abroad*, 197.

¹⁷ Fuller, *Moderns Abroad*, 198.

¹⁸ Fuller, *Moderns Abroad*, 198.

¹⁹ Fuller, *Moderns Abroad*, 199.

²⁰ Fuller, *Moderns Abroad*, 199.

²¹ Fuller, *Moderns Abroad*, 199.

²² Levin, “Haile Selassie’s Imperial Modernity,” 453.

²³ Getachew, “The Ethiopian Connection To The Pan-African Movement,” 314.

The Emperor Modernizes Addis Ababa

Haile Selassie, Ethiopia's emperor, dealt with the Italian invasion differently than expected. Instead of rejecting the Italian influences, he integrated them into his empire. The road network, the airfield and other monuments designed by the Italians were appropriated by Selassie's regime. One reason for this was that the Ethiopian regime did not have the financial means to overwrite these developments with new ones. In a way, this invasion played into Selassie's hands, because he had been planning to modernize Addis for a long time and he used the Italian plans for Addis Ababa as a starting point.²⁴ The actual start of the transformation of the city was underlined by a new development in the 1950s and 1960s. The winds of change were blowing across the African continent and the world was able to finally witness the independence of Africa, with Ghana being the first country to gain independence in 1957.²⁵ Selassie wanted Addis Ababa to become a modern African city, positioned "as a capital city in a united Africa in the new spirit of post-colonialism and pan-Africanism".²⁶

Three major events in the post-colonial area contributed to the urge to modernize. Firstly the 25th anniversary of Haile Selassie's coronation in 1955, Addis Ababa becoming the seat for the UNECA (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa) in 1958 and Addis Ababa becoming the seat of the OAU (Organization of African Unity) in 1963.²⁷ This event was of importance for Addis Abebas symbolic meaning for Africa. Only a year before, Ethiopia proposed an organization that would make this new agreement official and visible. Just one year later, this idea became reality and, in 1963 the Organization of African Unity was officially born.²⁸ Haile Selassie hosted this event in the conference hall of the Africa Hall. For this occasion a special painting was created and was depicted in the conference hall of the Africa Hall (Figure 2). The image shows the 32 heads of states and governments who signed the Organization of African Union Charter on May 25, 1963. This image depicts quite clearly the new hopes and aspirations of the newly independent states. Africa is displayed as the center of the world and in contrast to the colonial era, the African continent and its leaders are



Figure 2: The Thirty Two Heads of States and Governments who signed the OAU Charter on May 25, 1963. Source: <https://littleethiopia.wordpress.com/>

²⁴ Levin, "Haile Selassie's Imperial Modernity," 453.

²⁵ Getachew, "The Ethiopian Connection To The Pan-African Movement," 314.

²⁶ Philipp Meuser and Adil Dalbai. *Architectural Guide: Sub-Saharan Africa: Volume 3: Eastern Africa. From the Sahel to the Horn of Africa*. (Berlin: DOM Publishers, 2021), 304.

²⁷ Levin, "Haile Selassie's Imperial Modernity," 450.

²⁸ Getachew, "The Ethiopian Connection To The Pan-African Movement," 314.

depicted as honorable and prosperous. “The foundation of the OAU was seen, after a long process, as the culmination of the Pan-African movement [..].²⁹

The Emperor aimed for international recognition and in order to achieve that, he held international architectural competitions to attract architects that would create buildings that would reflect the new status of the capital. In this context not only new governmental buildings were built that would host these new organizations, but also residential and institutional buildings.³⁰ The architects he worked with most during this period were Arturo Mezzedimi, Michael Teodros and Zalman Enav. They had the emperor’s trust and therefore a special position as far as the approval of their projects was concerned.³¹ The construction of the railway line stimulated the city’s development, however the introduction of a new transportation had even bigger influences not only nationally but also internationally - the inauguration of the Ethiopian Airlines and the construction of a new airport, the Haile Selassie I International Airport. Whereas other airlines focused on connecting African countries to their former colonies, the Ethiopian Airlines was started with the pan-African vision to connect the newly independent African countries with each other, breaking down those artificial boundaries inherited from the colonial era.³²

²⁹ Getachew, “The Ethiopian Connection To The Pan-African Movement,” 316.

³⁰ Meuser and Dalbai, *Architectural Guide*, 304.

³¹ Levin, “Haile Selassie’s Imperial Modernity,” 456.

³² Meuser and Dalbai, *Architectural Guide*, 304.

Michael Teodros and Zalman Enav

Two of the main figures which were highly active in creating the new modern cityscape of Addis were Michael Teodros and Zalman Enav. Michael Teodros was born in 1921 in England to a British mother and an Ethiopian father. After serving the British Army he traveled through Greece and Italy, which inspired him to become an architect. After taking courses for ex-servicemen in quantity surveying in London he started taking courses in the field of architecture. Later he joined the civil service and worked in the building section of the London County Council. Hence that he had a secure income, he was able to concentrate on focussing on architecture in the evenings.³³

In 1952 he was called by the Ethiopian Ministry of Education which asked him to 'come home at once'. Being the only Ethiopian architect with experience at that time, Teodros was asked to replace the current architect at the ministry, who left. As an architect of the ministry he traveled across the country to build several school buildings. Through his experience he was able to gain a scholarship from the University of Pennsylvania in the US and arrived there in 1955. He enrolled in the undergraduate architecture programme that was headed by Louis Khan and later joined his graduate programme. He was deeply influenced by Khan's design teachings and design philosophy which had a huge impact on his future designs. In 1957 Teodros went back to Ethiopia, where he continued his work at the Ministry of Education. Later he met Zalman Enav who was also one of the many expatriate architects. Zalman Enav is an isrealian architect who graduated from the Israel's Institute of Technology in 1954. After continuing his studies at the Architectural Association School of

Architecture in London he moved to Ethiopia, Addis Ababa.³⁴ There he met Michael Teodros which "led to a new partnership and the first practice in Ethiopia with an Ethiopian at the helm".³⁵

Both architects tried to combine the principle of using local materials with using new technology. Even though they came from very different backgrounds, they shared the same views on the preservation of Ethiopian traditions and cultures, which they integrated into their architecture. This set them apart from the other modern architecture firms. They saw it as their task to develop a new expression of modern architecture to create a new "national architectural identity".³⁶



Figure 3: Zalman Enav and Michael Teodros in front of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1965. Source: ISPADA Archive.

³³ Meuser and Dalbai, *Architectural Guide*, 303.

³⁴ Meuser and Dalbai, *Architectural Guide*, 303.

³⁵ Meuser and Dalbai, *Architectural Guide*, 304.

³⁶ Meuser and Dalbai, *Architectural Guide*, 304.

Their best-known and most famous project is the Ministry of Affairs. The minister of finance initially wanted a building like the one for the United Nations in New York. A writer for the *Addis Reporter* wrote that a modern capital of a three thousand year old country needs a number of skyscrapers, which was an opinion which was widespread at the time. Enav and Teodros were careful to design a building that did not simply copy something from the West, but wanted to develop a truly 'Ethiopian building' that meets the emperor's demands and still reflects the Ethiopian culture.³⁷ They tried to implement this approach in each of their projects, even if it caused discourse with the emperor. Although Teodros and Enav were not the only ones to influence Addis Ababa's cityscape, they stood out in particular for their approach. Due to their different backgrounds, they were not bound to a certain architectural style, but were able to adopt different perspectives and reflect them in their designs.

The Shalom Shelemay Building (1963)

A building that has so far attracted little attention, but which is a great example for displaying the architectural approach of Zalman and Teodros, is the Shalom Shalome Apartment Building which was constructed in 1963 (Figure 2). The building is located between Piazza, the capital's lively old town and Merkato, the country's largest market. It is a private apartment building which was built for a client named Shalom Shalome. The location of the building created a particularly great challenge for the architects. On the one hand, the plot was of a triangular shape, and on the other, the building was to be built on a steeply sloping street.³⁸

However, "Enav and Teodros made a virtue out of necessity" and managed to design an effective and efficient building that makes use of most of the site. The floor plan (Figure 5)

shows how the architects solved the problem of accessibility. They decided to place the entrance of the building on the side facing away from the street. The entrance leads into a corridor through which it is possible to access all the apartments.

The volume of the building is divided into 4 parts, which are offset by half a floor along the slope of the street. The way the building adapts to the slope of the street is displayed in the section (Figure 6). There it is visible that the height offset of the individual volume parts was also integrated into the individual apartments. For the structure of the apartments was also designed in a rather unusual way, because the architects chose to apply the split level construction. This means that within one apartment there are two levels. The individual levels flow into each other, and are connected by open staircases, which are located within the living area. The apartments are positioned on top of each other in a way that each room faces the street. Furthermore each apartment has three balconies that serve as inner gardens. The ground floor is set back and thus allows enough space for the walkway, by additionally



Figure 4: Zalman Enav and Michael Teodros in front of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1965. Source: Zalman and Ruth Enav Architects Archive.

³⁷ Levin, "Haile Selassie's Imperial Modernity," 456.

³⁸ Nikolaus Knebel, *Addis Modern. Re-discovering the 1960s Architecture of Africa's Capital City*, (n.p. EiBAC, 2013), 80.

2. THE RESULT OF A UNIQUE COLLABORATION

making room for commercial purposes. The roof is designed in a way that makes space for servant quarters.³⁹ Enav and Teodros showed a strong skill by intensively dealing with the site and developing a building that is characterized by an efficient construction. In addition, the commercial area in the basement ensured that the building blends in with its surroundings and is part of the capitals public life.

More than 50 years after its construction, the Shelemay building is still functional and in use today (Figure). This shows that the architects' approach has proven successful and that they have created a building that can stand the test

of time. In order to obtain a better understanding of the buildings functionality today Keren Kuenberg and a fellow researcher were able to conduct an interview with current tenants of the building (Figure 7). Kuenberg conducted this interview within the framework of a research project at the Ben Gurion University of the Negev. The respondents were a married couple who have lived in the building for 28 years. When asked how they felt about the building, the husband, who is a doctor, replied that he liked the building very much. He mentioned that the flat is on two floors. The bedroom is on the upper floor and there is a wooden staircase leading up to it. The living

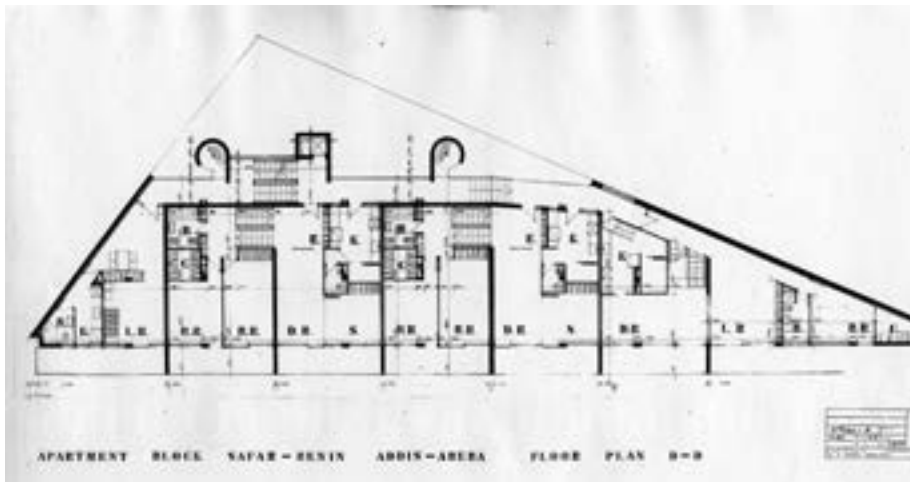


Figure 5: Floorplan of the Shalom Shelemay Building in Addis Ababa in 1963. Source: Zalman and Ruth Enav Architects Archive.

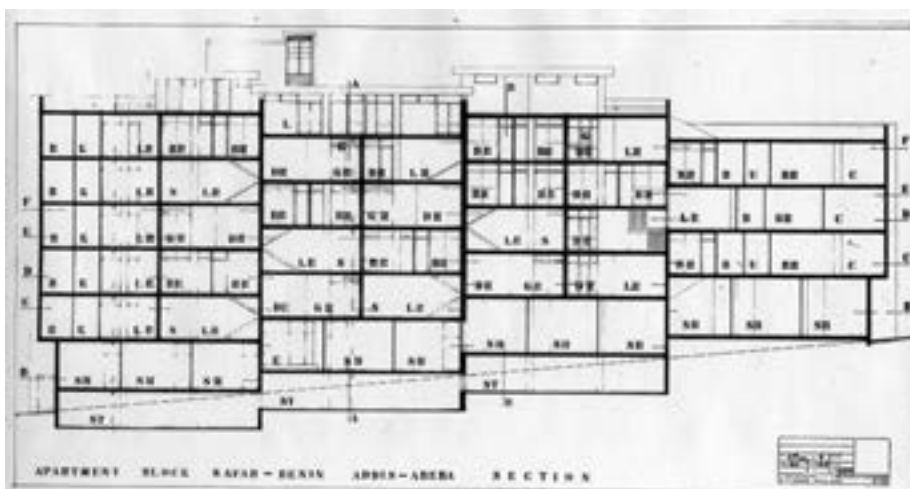


Figure 6: Section of Shalom Shelemay Building in Addis Ababa in 1963. Source: Zalman and Ruth Enav Architects Archive.

³⁹ "Israeli Planning, Architecture and Development in Africa - the Shelemay Apartment Building," ISPADA, accessed April 14, 2022, <http://www.ispada-archive.com/page.php?id=63>.



Figure 7: Shalom Shelemay Building in Addis Ababa. Source: Courtesy of Keren Kuenberg

room and the kitchen are on the lower floor. He finds the flat very comfortable because everything is accessible. He and his wife enjoy living there very much. He points out that the ventilation is very good, even though it is very warm outside, the temperature inside is constant. Regarding the other residents, the man mentions that there are some commercial offices and only a few families. The owner of the apartment building also owns a flat on the last floor.⁴⁰

The Mapping and Geography Institute (1964)

Another building which represents the expertise of Enav and Teodros is the Mapping and Geography Institute (Figure 8). The building was completed in 1964 and is located in the center of the city. It is situated in the vicinity of two important palaces and neighbours the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which was as well designed by Enav and Teodros.

The Institute was founded in 1954 and initially

began as a department within the Ministry of Education. The reason for the foundation was a shortage of geographical school material at that time. The Ministry wanted to change this and sought to provide geographical material for the production of geographical textbooks by opening the Institute. In 1960, the Institute was moved to the Ministry of Interior and there began to expand its activities. Instead of providing only educational material, the institute started to meet the national need for cartographic documentation.⁴¹

The Institute was supported financially and by additional personnel through the Point Four Program of the United States. This program was firstly introduced by the Harry S. Truman in 1949 and intended to make the “benefits of [the American] scientific advances and [their] industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas”.⁴²

A number of projects have been funded to

⁴⁰ Interview by Keren Kuenberg, Addis Ababa, 2018.

⁴¹ “Ethiopian Mapping Authority,” UNECA, accessed april 13, 2022,

<http://geoinfo.uneca.org/AfricaPPP/BrowseArchive.aspx>.

⁴² Amanda Kay McVety, *Enlightened Aid: U.S. Development as Foreign Policy in Ethiopia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

2. THE RESULT OF A UNIQUE COLLABORATION



Figure 8: The Mapping and Geography Institute in 1964. Source: Zalman and Ruth Enav Architects Archive.

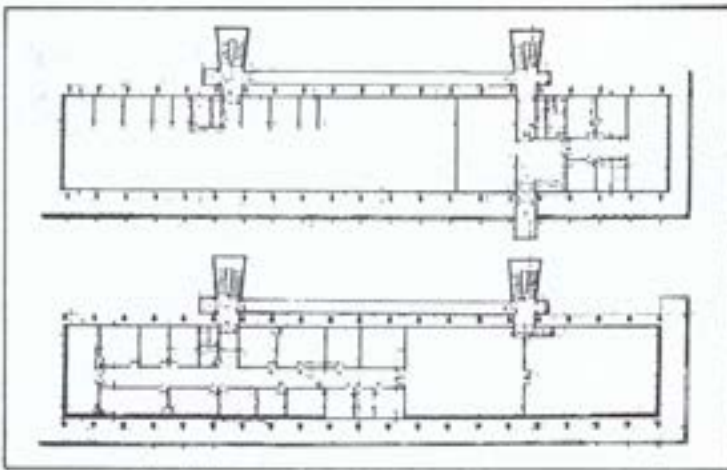


Figure 9: Floorplan of the Mapping and Geography Institute in 1964. Source: Zalman and Ruth Enav Architects Archive.

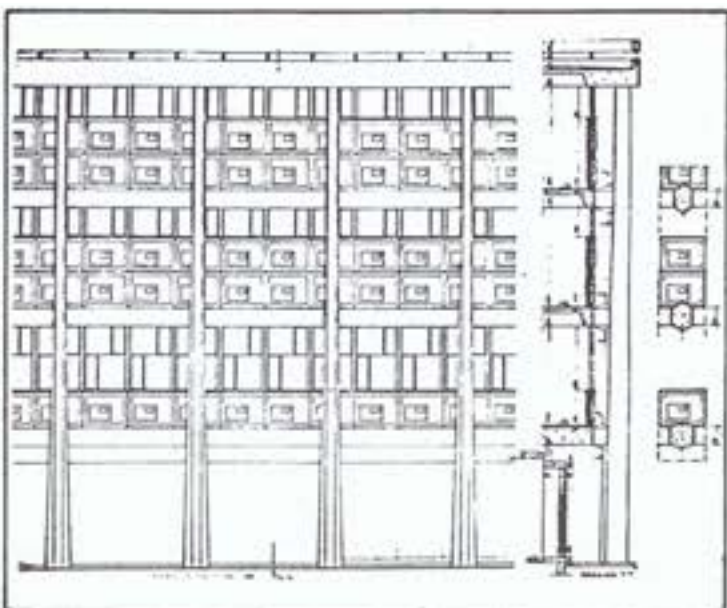


Figure 10: Detail drawing of the Mapping and Geography Institute in 1964. Source: Zalman and Ruth Enav Architects Archive.

drive scientific and educational progress in Ethiopia. Through the Institute in particular, the aim was to complete one-time projects, “the largest being the Blue Nile Basin survey”.⁴³ In 1962, the U.S. financial support was terminated and from then on the Institute had to operate independently.

It is not clear in what context Enav and Teodros were commissioned to design the building. However, it can be assumed that more space was needed due to the expansion of the institute's activities. Given the emperor's urge to spatially represent the modernization of the capital, it is conclusive that the architecture of the institute was as well supposed to reflect modernity. Enav and Teodros seemed to have pursued this, because, after all they applied very effective and efficient principles into the design. The Institute was designed in a way that all rooms are free of columns and walls. The floor plan (Figure 9) makes visible how a free room layout was achieved, which facilitates the flexible use of space.

The concept is based on that of the waffle floor slabs, which is a construction principle where concrete ribs run in two directions (Figure 10). This enhances the load carrying capacity of the waffle slab and makes it more resistant than other slab systems. These waffle slabs are then supported by exterior columns, thus the load transfer takes place in the exterior and no

supports are needed in the interior.

At this point it is very important to emphasize that the building still exists and is to this day still in use. Although the name has changed from Mapping to Agency, the architecture has remained almost the same. Enav and Teodros have again created a building that could last more than 50 years. They proved once again that they were able to develop a building that is not only durable but also capable to facilitate the original use until this day. In order to understand more precisely the effect of the building in today's world, it is again important to look at it from the perspective of a user.

Keren Kuenberg a communication director who works in this building today. When asked how he feels about working in this building, he explains that he is very delighted to be working in it. He finds it generally very interesting and highlights that the climate and the ventilation are excellent, as well as the general layout of the building. Furthermore he was asked how much he and his colleagues feel connected to the building and whether he would prefer to work in a more modern building. He goes on by saying that this building is historical and explains that he and his colleagues feel very connected to the historical value of the building.⁴⁴



2015), 1.
Figure 11: Ethiopian Mapping Agency. Source: Courtesy of Keren Kuenberg

⁴³ McVety, *Enlightened Aid*, 173.

⁴⁴ Interview by Keren Kuenberg, Addis Ababa, 2018.

Exterior Modernity Without Internal Modernization

Within the framework of the Four-Year Plan, the Ethiopian industry was expanded with the financial assistance of the United States. Through research into new technologies and the development of a progressive infrastructure, the emperor sought to modernize Ethiopia economically and socially. However, in any case, he wanted to prevent a political change that would challenge his monarchy.⁴⁵ When the initial plan was renewed in 1962, the emperor declared,

*"We believe in a progress that builds on a sound foundation and not on shifting sands. We believe in the adaptation of modern economic and social theories to local conditions and customs rather than in the imposition on Ethiopia's social and economic structure of systems which are largely alien to it and which [it] is not equipped to absorb or cope with."*⁴⁶

According to Haile Selassie the way to modernize Addis Ababa its cityscape as well as its society was by ensuring the existence of Ethiopian social and political traditions. He stressed the importance of the cultural development of Ethiopians instead of the pure emulation of the West. However, what exactly did this mean for the nation's development? What did the term modernity in its true sense actually mean to Haile Selassie?

Elizabeth W. Giorgis, an Ethiopian art historian, investigated this issue and argues that Ethiopian modernism can not be understood without studying its history. She considers the writings of the Ethiopian newspaper *Berhanna Selam* and the writings of the historian Gebre Hiwot Baykedagn highly important in this discourse, as they "root the source of the

discourse of Ethiopian modernity."⁴⁷

Bernahan Selam was founded in 1924 by the Emperor himself when he was still a prince called Taffari Mekonnen. According to historians, the newspaper contributed to the modernization of the society as the newspaper was dealing with societal and cultural topics of that time. It is interesting that although the newspaper stimulated social modernization, it kept on reinforcing the importance of the monarchy by portraying its existence as godly. The "[...] monarchy [was] presented as the most obvious and influential marker of Ethiopian identity and nationhood."

This intertwine of the monarchy with the christian religion made any criticism of the system morally impossible and therefore depicts the core problem of Ethiopian modernity. For on the one side there was a great pursuit of for a modern way of thinking and on the other side there was the national importance of the monarchy. The magazine praised the developments of the West while criticizing them nevertheless. This becomes especially interesting when analyzing the Emperor's beliefs. Because this dichotomous way of relating to modernity is also visible in the way the emperor tried to implement it. He wanted the nation to become economically active and stressed the importance of a change in the mindset of the people. However, this change of thinking should not be too profound, because that could lead to a rejection of his system. It was more about reflecting a progressive society that faithfully submits to his system.⁴⁸

Addis Ababa was the place that spatially embodied this change and he used the capital to showcase a nation that could be national

⁴⁵ McVety, *Enlightened Aid*, 175.

⁴⁶ McVety, *Enlightened Aid*, 176.

⁴⁷ Elizabeth Wolde Giorgis, "Charting out Ethiopian Modernity and Modernism," *Callaloo* 33, no. 1 (2010): pp. 82-99, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cal.0.0627>, 98.

⁴⁸ Giorgis, "Charting out Ethiopian Modernity and Modernism," 90.

as well as modern.⁴⁹ In order to facilitate this progress the emperor needed to balance both contrasts, the modern and the traditional. The emperor succeeded only moderately with this approach, as he aimed for the high-rise buildings which internationally reflected the epitome of modernity. However they did not contain any traditional value, which raised discomfort among the population.⁵⁰

Criticism of Ethiopia's Modernity

This conflict of trying to modernize the city by not actually modernizing the society was also depicted in the way the architects approach differed from the emperors and officials' expectations. Even though Zalman Enav was working in close contact with the emperor, he still voiced his criticism towards the architectural developments in Ethiopia. He expressed this criticism in the Journal of the Ethiopian Association of Architects and Engineers called Zede. In an article published in 1965, he highlights aspects that he noticed in the course of the architectural modernization processes in Ethiopia. Through these remarks, he does not simply want to express his criticism, but would like to propose other approaches for the future.⁵¹

Enav begins by explaining that the Ethiopian industry is developing rapidly, which is expressed by a number of new industrial buildings. In his opinion, the functionality of an industrial building, "[...] should follow systematic studies of production, timing, cost etc., and only after such designs are made should the construction be carried out."⁵² He notes that this is not always considered in Ethiopia, but this

is also the case in other places. In terms of the aesthetic of an industrial building he believes that 'form follows function', as the form of a building of this type is deeply intertwined with its function.⁵³

According to Enav, buildings that are modern in their true sense are buildings that reflect the culture of a society through their modern technology and materials. Especially buildings that serve the people, like commercial buildings should reflect this through their aesthetic, as they are accessed by the public on a daily basis. Enav states that he unfortunately does not see this reflection of society in most of the commercial buildings. In his opinion "[t]hey are what is supposed to be modern without being so in the true sense."⁵⁴

Enav continues by stating that the largest share of new architecture in Ethiopia is made of public buildings. He claims that this development is in itself a good sign, because in this way the society is expressed spatially. However, when public buildings are built that do not relate to society in terms of aesthetics, cost or location, they become buildings that exclude themselves from the real city. This can become a danger, that needs to be recognized. Because, "[p]ublic buildings symbolize more than any other building the nation's cultural heritage and aspirations."⁵⁵

They contain a great deal of symbolic value and therefore "become the strongest expression of the cultural life of the country". Enav points out that this is only the case when the public buildings are not isolated from the city,

⁴⁹ Shimelis Bonsa Gulema, "City as Nation: Imagining and Practicing Addis Ababa as a Modern and National Space," *Northeast African Studies* 13, no. 1 (January 2013): 5. <https://doi.org/10.14321/nortafirstud.13.1.0167>.

⁵⁰ Levin, "Haile Selassie's Imperial Modernity," 458.

⁵¹ Zalman Enav, "Architecture in Ethiopia Today," Zede 1, no. 1 (Nov. 1965), 18.

⁵² Enav, "Architecture in Ethiopia Today," 22.

⁵³ Enav, "Architecture in Ethiopia Today," 23.

⁵⁴ Enav, "Architecture in Ethiopia Today," 23.

⁵⁵ Enav, "Architecture in Ethiopia Today," 23.

which is unfortunately not the case in Addis Ababa.⁵⁶ It becomes visible that Enav refers to Ethiopia's developments rather as a false modernity. Architects such as Enav and Teodros, however, tried to combine the demands of modern architecture with the expression of Ethiopian culture. In this way, articulations of culture took their place in the projects in the form of ornaments. It is interesting to note that they thus rejected or transformed the "form follows function" movement, which was at the core of modernism. In this way, they tried to find a unique expression of modern architecture for Ethiopia.⁵⁷

Modernity a Construct of the West

Through this research, it becomes visible how elusive modernity actually is. Even though Zalman Enav, Michael Teodros and many others have tried to find their own approach towards modernity for Ethiopia, modernity was still related to the West. Whether because the emperor saw it as the only way to gain international recognition, or because the architects imposed their standards of modern architecture on Ethiopia. So the question arises: is it even possible to look at modernity in the true sense of the word without reference to the West? Edward Denison, a professor of Architecture and Global Modernities dealt with the challenges the modern heritage industry faces in his paper "Modernism, HUL and the Age of the Anthropocene". According to him:

"History is a record of power. The 20th century – modernism's century – was dominated by the 'the West'; its 'official' history bearing testimony to the west's dominance of 'others'. Modernist architectural history is a canon constructed by,

*for and of the West. This has major consequences for architectural encounters with modernity outside the west, which are routinely overlooked or possess an assumed inferiority; a postulation asserted through inauthenticity, belatedness, diluteness and remoteness, geographically, intellectually, and even racially."*⁵⁸

Thus, he explains that modernism began as a social construct and was architecturally formulated from it, developed by the West for the West. No room was left for ideological reformulation, as modernism was always closely related to the West, which was a constant reference.⁵⁹

Shmuel Eisenstadt a Israeli sociologist, dealt with this issue in his book *Multiple Modernities* which was published in 2000. He introduced the notion of "multiple modernities" which describes the modernities that transcend the boundaries of the classical perspective towards modernity.⁶⁰ According to Eisenstadt the term "multiple modernities" emphasizes a very important overseen aspect, the one that "modernity and Westernization are not identical; Western patterns of modernity are not the only 'authentic' modernities, through they [...] continue to be a basic reference point for others."⁶¹

It becomes clear that the concept of modernity is not a simple one, because it is always strongly connected to the one who created it - the West. It is therefore impossible to measure Ethiopia's modernity, or that of any other non-Western country, without measuring it against Western standards. However, it is a start to recognize that modernity is multifaceted and can express itself in various ways.

⁵⁶ Enav, "Architecture in Ethiopia Today," 24.

⁵⁷ Levin, "Haile Selassie's Imperial Modernity," 458.

⁵⁸ Denison, "Modernism, HUL and the Age of the Anthropocene," 5.

⁵⁹ Denison, "Modernism, HUL and the Age of the Anthropocene," 5.

⁶⁰ Shmuel Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities," *Daedalus* 129, no. 1 (2000): 5. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20027613>.

⁶¹ Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities," 5.

It is evident that it is difficult to develop a position on modernity in Ethiopia since many factors are involved. As mentioned earlier, Ethiopia was already in the international discourse before the Italian invasion and was shaped by knowledge exchange with different nations. The Italians, who initially spoke of Addis Ababa as a primitive city and thus had a tabula rasa planning in mind, quickly realized that Addis Ababa was already advanced. This led them to build on the existing urbanity. It is interesting to note that Haile Selassie was striving for the same strategy when the invasion was over. He took the Italians' plans as a starting point. He sought to formulate Addis Ababa as a modernized city and to create a new Ethiopian identity through architecture that would be representative of the whole of Africa.

However, some have criticized the emperor's attempt, claiming that it was more about external representation than actual modernisation of the country. For it is visible, as Enav has already pointed out, that public buildings in particular were more about representative effect than really serving the people. Moreover, one should not forget that the majority of the buildings only addressed a small part of the population - the elite. It is important to note that the buildings that eventually emerged in Ethiopia were influenced by the approach of architects such as Enav and Teodros, who were given a special status. Thus, they were allowed to work very closely with him, they were shielded from the real happenings in the government.

As Ayala Levin has stated: *"Perhaps unaware of their differential treatment, the architects acted in good faith while turning a blind eye to the discrepancies between the emperor's statements and his practice, particularly in his approach to the modernization of the economy while maintaining the traditional land tenure."*⁶²

It can be concluded that Haile Selassie's image of modernity was based on what the European powers had created, and even if he did not try to imitate the West, it was still aspired to. But how could it have been otherwise?

Modernity is a construct of the West and although Ethiopia was not colonized, developments in the West had an influence on Ethiopia. The emperor tried to defy the West by presenting this modern architecture to show them an image that is the opposite of a primitive country. Especially considering the special status Ethiopia had in all of Africa, it was important for the emperor to represent his country. This did not turn out as he might have planned, but there was no one before him who had such sovereignty over an African country that he could have learned from.

One way or another, the Italians showed that Europe has its own standards to characterize who is eligible enough to be called modern. This is still evident in our society today, where the West is seen as the pioneer of modernity and many modern developments from other countries fall off the radar. For this reason, it is very important for designers and architects of the future to question themselves and to become aware of their own biases in order to not recreate the standards of our fields predecessors.

⁶² Levin, "Haile Selassie's Imperial Modernity," 465.

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