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Motherhood and negotiations of patriarchy in Gyllenhaal's *The Lost Daughter* (2021)

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In Western patriarchal culture, the Good Mother is traditionally framed as rigidly self-sacrificing, submissive, and fulfilled in her role as “foundation parent,” but this is an idealised and damaging view of motherhood in the patriarchal imaginary. This romanticised maternal archetype has found expression and been promoted in popular screen media, setting an impossible example for women audiences. I argue that these destructive constructs require reassessment, in relation to the intersection of motherhood, personhood, and the patriarchal. One film to depart from such representations, and the subject of analysis in this paper, is Maggie Gyllenhaal's *The Lost Daughter* (2021). The film presents a searingly complex portrayal of motherhood and, according to the director, was used to explore maternal representation, feminism, and constructs of the Bad Mother. Through a close analysis of maternal figures, I argue that the film ultimately presents a radical and destabilising cinematic (m) other image which critiques and disrupts the deeply entrenched patriarchal control within the identity of the Mother.

Keywords: *The Lost Daughter*, Motherhood, maternal representation, Bad Mother, patriarchy

Maternità e negoziazioni del patriarcato in Gyllenhaal *La figlia perduta* (2021)

Nella cultura patriarcale occidentale, la Vergine Maria è tradizionalmente rappresentata come rigidamente sacrificante, sottomessa e realizzata nel suo ruolo di “genitore fondante”, ma questa è una visione idealizzata e dannosa della maternità nell'immaginario patriarcale. Questo archetipo materno romanticizzato ha trovato espressione ed è stato promosso nei media cinematografici popolari, imponendo un esempio impossibile al pubblico femminile. Sostengo che questi costrutti distruttivi necessitano di una rivalutazione, in relazione all'intersezione tra maternità, individualità e patriarcato. Un film che si discosta da tali rappresentazioni, e oggetto di analisi in questo saggio, è *The Lost Daughter* (2021) di Maggie Gyllenhaal. Il film presenta un ritratto complesso e penetrante della maternità e, secondo la regista, è stato utilizzato per esplorare la rappresentazione materna, il femminismo e i costrutti della Cattiva Madre. Attraverso un'analisi dettagliata delle figure materne, sostengo che il film presenti infine un'immagine cinematografica radicale e destabilizzante della madre che critica e interrompe il controllo patriarcale profondamente radicato nell'identità della Madre.

Parole chiave: *La figlia perduta*, Maternità, rappresentazione materna, Cattiva madre, patriarcato

The hegemonic patriarchal ideology of Western culture¹ dictates that “the only truly enlightened choice to make as a woman, the one that proves, first, that you are a ‘real’ woman, and second, that you are a decent, worthy one, is to become a ‘mom’” (Douglas and Michaels 2004: 5). These patriarchal maternal ideologies have become transposed into the media landscape, including film. For example, maternal figures in mainstream Hollywood cinema are largely subject to the patriarchal view of the ideal feminine, and so often serve misogynistic and conservative ends. Such unrealistic maternal representations prove damaging

¹ The study refers to discourses of patriarchy pertaining to the Global North and Western culture, a context in which the film case study has emerged and in which its narrative is situated. As such, when making reference to “patriarchy”, it is specifically from the perspective of patriarchy as derived from the ambit of Anglo-American/European normativity. The study's views on motherhood and the patriarchal maternal are thus located within the Global North and Western discourses on culture and patriarchy. The study acknowledges that these views, ideologies, and archetypes may translate differently to the Global South or expressions of black motherhood.

in how they shape and manipulate beliefs, expectations, and experiences of motherhood, as well as how the institution of motherhood is conceptualised. These attitudes toward motherhood are problematic, especially considering that the maternal figure has become “hypervisible” (Orgad 2019: 23) in contemporary culture.

Diverse, real-world women cannot always identify with culturally sanctioned configurations of the Mother and endure hardship if they attempt to conform to them, as they are expected to do. Among other things, romanticised, distorted notions of the maternal coerce women into motherhood, through generating false expectations and legitimising societal pressures. This can lead to the “othering” of mothers, causing them to experience feelings of inadequacy and deficiency. Relatedly, when women speak out about “real” experiences of child-rearing, any negative (i.e. undesirable) feelings are often invalidated and stifled by society at large. In contrast to the Western phallogocentric ideal mother figure, there exists hardly any popular media coverage of these “uncensored” maternal concerns or divergent (m)other figures that would be eminently more realistic.

Maggie Gyllenhaal’s *The Lost Daughter* (2021) is one of few mainstream films to depart from traditional patriarchal maternal ideologies. Rather, the film presents audiences with a transgressive cinematic (m)other who interrogates the values of the patriarchal feminine. In the director’s words, “it’s a movie about trying to embrace and normalise the huge spectrum of feelings that are inherently a part of being a parent” (Rao 2022). Asking how the film foregrounds experiences of mothers at the margins of representation, this study draws attention to the complexity of the film’s thematisation of contemporary motherhood. To access the discourse in which the film operates, I draw upon feminist concepts of the patriarchal feminine and the Good and Bad Mother. A text-based approach is then used to argue how the content and formal elements of *The Lost Daughter* coalesce to suggest Leda’s diminishing experience of motherhood and her inability to inhabit the role of Good Mother. Analyses of key moments elucidate how the Bad Mother is employed as a mechanism problematising the routine conflation of motherhood and personhood. Lastly, the study concludes with how atypical maternal representations in popular media are necessary to normalise how motherhood is not a uniform experience for individual women, nor is it experienced in the same way by all women. Ultimately, the study wishes to investigate how the film lays bare the patriarchal dominance undergirding the identity of the Mother, which is placed at the forefront of contemporary Western female existence.²

Motherhood and Patriarchy in the images of the Good and Bad Mother

Western patriarchally-informed constructions of social and familial structures have translated to maternal roles in popular media and on the screen. The mediascape’s plentiful depictions of the maternal may largely be categorised according to the binary of the “good” or “bad” mother. For this study, I draw upon pertinent concepts outlined by Sarah Arnold and E. Ann Kaplan to explore *The Lost Daughter*’s thematisation of atypical motherhood and Leda’s characterisation as a

² The scope of this study does not extend to or encompass theories of trauma. Rather, it is an investigation into how *The Lost Daughter* presents an opportunity to interrogate patriarchal ideals of motherhood, through its exploration and critique of the binary cinematic archetypes of the Good and Bad Mothers. While the study does mention the resulting harm these patriarchal maternal ideals have on contemporary women, it does so not as a general sociological critique, but in specific relation to the aforementioned maternal paradigms and Kaplan’s patriarchal feminine in film, which translate to and impact society.

transgressive (m)other. Arnold employs feminist psychoanalytic theory to further investigate the Lacanian duality of the Good and Bad Phallic Mother in *Maternal Horror Film: Melodrama and Motherhood* (2013). Arnold's maternal characterisations are scaffolded upon seminal feminist psychoanalytic theorist E. Ann Kaplan's Angel versus Witch trope (2013), which operates according to the patriarchal feminine. These concepts are discussed in Kaplan's 1992 survey of mid-1950s Hollywood melodramas (2013).

To understand the discourse of the Good Angel Mother, it is first necessary to contextualise Motherhood and Personhood from the traditional standpoint of the Global North, which considers these distinct roles as inextricably intertwined. Motherhood has long been deemed a "natural" and biological consequence of being a woman. In other words, due to the association of a woman's childbearing with her lactation capacities, women's corresponding desire for, complicity, and responsibility in childcare and maternal labour are readily presupposed and become taken for granted (Chodorow 1978: 3). Such devaluation of the role of women was instrumental in the establishing of sexual difference which undergirds women's consignment to "nature" - with reproductive labour an essential part of that nature. However, there has since been extensive feminist research to indicate that the linkage between motherhood and nature is merely a social, historical, legal, political, and philosophical construction (Neyer and Bernardi 2011: 165-7). The valuation of women solely for their biological capacity for procreation only relegates them to subordinate passivity in other spheres of life. In this light, second-wave feminists viewed motherhood as a basis of discrimination, and as a barrier to women's rights and equality which "concretely established [women] as the Other" (De Beauvoir 1953: 193) in Western phallogocentric society.

Kaplan highlights the sociopolitical positioning of the Good Mother within the patriarchal imaginary, underscoring how the archetype conforms to and buttresses the notion of the patriarchal feminine (Kaplan 2013: 1-6). The patriarchal feminine refers to the patriarchal ideal of womanhood constructed according to patriarchal male systems, desires, and ideologies. This highly constructed perception of women - which conflates women's biological capacity for childrearing with social motherhood, nature, and the idealisation of mother love - serves to "create, maintain, and legitimise women's subordination" (De Beauvoir 1953: 166). To clarify, the patriarchal feminine is geared toward justifying, enabling, and sustaining patriarchal male hegemony, even if the ideologies it promulgates are unattainable or harmful. The Good Mother, her values, characteristics, and desires, must thus be viewed through the lens of the patriarchal feminine, and scrutinised as a patriarchal product aimed at romanticising procreation, child-rearing, and motherhood devoid of agency.

The Good Angel Mother archetype finds its basis in eighteenth and nineteenth-century European Romantic ideals of True Womanhood (Kaplan 2013: 9) which demands that women aspire to the mythic role of self-sacrificial and all-providing Mother, as a path to fulfilment. This archaic ideology typifies an intrinsically nurturing and self-abnegating motherhood (Arnold 2013: 23), framed as an inevitable consequence of biology. Translated to the screen, the Good Mother is then cast in the image of "piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness" (Takševa 2017: 155). She is often defined in relation to or overshadowed by a paternal figure, occupied in her pursuit of living for and through her husband and children, and thus marginal to the film narrative. Spectatorial pleasure is derived from masochistic sacrifices and hardships endured by the mother as a means to maintain the mother-child bond. As such, the determination of "good" or "bad" corresponds with the cinematic mother's proclivity for self-sacrifice and prioritising her child above her own desires, which are derived from clearly-writ historical prescriptions of motherhood as a woman's true purpose (Kaplan 2013: 45-8).

To sum up, the hegemonic conflation of woman and nature establishes the Good Mother archetype as being entrenched in patriarchal ideals of womanhood. These ideologies uphold motherhood as the singular path to fulfilment and “true” womanhood, reinforcing childbearing not only as inherent to the female identity, but as presupposed and given. Kaplan (2013: 4) calls into question the reasoning behind women’s desire for the attainment of this “true” existence: “Since the patriarchy wants women to want children... how can a woman distinguish her desire for the child from that imposed on her?” Indeed, it may prove difficult to make such a distinction. The answer to Kaplan’s probing quantifies the Good Mother paradigm as existing intangibly outside of women’s agency and identity. Coercive enforcement of the reproductive ethic and ideals of the patriarchal feminine “not only deprives individuals of their freedom to make reproductive choices but also constructs a rigid social value system centred around procreation” (Venkatesan and Murali 2021: 109). The Good Mother paradigm “haunts and persecutes mothers... representing the full weight of personal guilt, failure, and grim accountability that accompany Western motherhood” (Quiney 2007: 24). Consequently, the image of the Good Mother is hinged on romanticised feminine ideals imposed by the patriarchy, ultimately serving its agenda.

Considering that Kaplan (2013: 86) identifies the patriarchy as being constructed according to the male conscious, the Bad Mother then serves as a corruption of the idealised, patriarchal feminine. If the imposed “patriarchal construct of idealised motherhood” (Kaplan 2013: 133-9), shaped by the patriarchal feminine, finds its basis in masochism and self-sacrifice, functioning as the “epitome of private, sacrificial femininity” (Quiney 2007: 22), the Bad Mother (Kaplan 2013: 45-6; Arnold 2013: 23-5) eschews this. Instead, she is typically characterised as selfish, evil, sadistic, hurtful, jealous, and transgressive, by extension aligning with notions of the Monstrous Feminine (Creed 1993) and the Abject (Kristeva 1980). Her actions are not merely repulsive, but are also enmeshed with a profound, ambiguous pleasure that threatens traditional hegemonic structures. This symbolic “phallic” Witch figure (Kaplan 2013: 107-10), who refuses the self-abnegation embraced by the Good Mother, demands individuality, agency, and differentiation from the child (Kaplan 1990). However, she herself is often symbolically “castrated” (Creed 1993: 122-3; Kristeva 1980: 158), punished, or disempowered for her desire for independence, as it comes into direct conflict with the idealised patriarchal feminine. Notably, although these archetypes tend to be punished upon reaching the film’s resolution, the characters embodying them are still presented with the opportunity to operate outside of their designated role, which may allow them a degree of agency that constitutes a powerful force within the text. The Bad Mother thus contributes toward enforcing patriarchal feminine ideologies or, conversely, challenging them through transgressive actions and decisions.

Overall, the Good and Bad Mother serve to concretise the constructs of maternal love and the patriarchal feminine, downplaying the lived experiences and realities of motherhood, and villainising maternal figures who resist this trope. In mainstream film, mother figures are frequently “demonised or deified, offering a narrow range of maternal representations that often serve misogynistic and conservative ends” (Smyth 2020). When representations of motherhood attempt to deviate from the sanitised, happy, subservience of the Good Mother to represent the harsh realities of motherhood, these renderings of abhorrent maternal experiences (as enacted by the Bad Mother) may be construed as obscene. In society, if struggles with the realities of child-rearing are openly depicted or admitted, mothers face cultural policing and censorship of their maternal speech. Breaking the Good Mother’s “saintly silence” and confessing maternal truths elicit moralising or unsympathetic reactions. Atypical maternal experience is seen as a subject decidedly not up for debate or theorisation, in Western culture or mainstream cinema.

Voicing and visibilising these narratives is seen as indecent, synonymous with low culture, and may garner accusations of “self-inflation... hysterical and imperfect femininity” (Quiney 2007: 26). This is because these radical women, who fail at being receptacles for birth, pose a threat to the patriarchal feminine and traditional family values. Indeed, when radical cinematic mothers resist the patriarchally-informed constructions of maternity in Western phallogentric and pronatalist society³, they are still presented as abnormal and Other. It is thus clear to see the sensibilities, agenda, and maternal ideals of the patriarchy represented and promulgated in the images of the Good and Bad Mother common to mainstream Hollywood cinema.

Implications for contemporary motherhood

The rhetoric, imagery, and fabrication of the idealised patriarchal maternal proves pervasive and harmful in its ability to shape and manipulate beliefs, expectations, and experiences of motherhood, as well as the ways in which individuals view the institution of motherhood (Heffernan and Wilgus 2018: 2). Understanding the implications of these maternal constructs is essential to contextualise the broader societal critique presented in *The Lost Daughter*. Sara Ruddick (2001: 189), in her assertion that the “idealised figure of the Good Mother casts a long shadow on many actual mothers’ lives”, underscores the importance of the film’s atypical maternal thematisation and its relevance to contemporary feminist discourse. It is especially applicable, considering that traditional affective dimensions have only intensified for mothers in the twenty-first century (Heffernan and Wilgus 2018: 7). For contemporary mothers, it is crucial that patriarchal maternal paradigms be challenged in favour of more healthy and realistic portrayals of motherhood.

Despite the potential for harm, contemporary culture superficially celebrates postfeminist mothers as “agents of their own destinies” (Douglas and Michaels 2004: 620), while parading impossible maternal ideals, emphasising motherhood as prerequisite to women realising their full potential. Such trends insist that mothers dedicate themselves wholly, joyously, and selflessly to their children, at the expense of their selfhood: “No woman is truly complete or fulfilled unless she has kids... to be a remotely decent mother, a woman has to devote her entire physical, psychological, emotional, and intellectual being, 24/7, to her children” (Negra in Douglas and Michaels 2004: 4).

In a landscape of maternal culpability, diverse, real-world women struggle to relate their lived experiences of motherhood to those inundating screen media, literature, and magazines. Regardless of context, resources, or income, mothers are expected to conform to these culturally sanctioned configurations of the ideal maternal, which serve as a form of neoliberal “responsibilising self-fashioning” (Littler 2013: 230). For mothers who do not conform to the

³ Pronatalist society refers to normative cultural practices, discourses, and institutions premised upon the belief that procreation and maternal labour are essential and non-negotiable parts of its ideology. Womanhood itself is situated within the boundaries of reproduction and the sociocultural and political structures that reinforce pronatalist ideology. Pronatalist society thus dictates that a woman’s role *must* involve childbearing and caregiving, where purpose and individual fulfilment are inextricably interwoven with that of maternity. Sathyaraj Venkatesan and Chinmay Murali (2021: 109) further assert that “enforcing motherhood as central to a woman’s identity through images, representations, and constructions of the maternal, usually perpetuated and enforced through mainstream cultural scripts, is the extant modus operandi of the pronatalist project.”

Good Mother paradigm, these media-fuelled representations inspire feelings of inadequacy, deficiency, and defectiveness (Collins 1992: 327-9). Mothers who do not fit this mould are not only denied “normalcy” by legal and welfare systems but are also exploited for the benefit of others by these very systems (Neyer and Bernardi 2011: 166; Collins 1997: 326), legitimising and promoting inequality and marginalisation (Kaplan 2013: 9; Littler 2013: 238; McRobbie 2013: 121). Due to these inherent social and personal inequalities, mothers – as the “foundation” parent - are tasked with the responsibility of childcare but deprived of agency in defining their own maternal subjectivities. Furthermore, placing the foetus at the centre of the mother’s universe effaces a denial of mothers’ “immediate and long-term needs, interests, and desires” (Takševa 2017: 155). Adrienne Rich, in her ground-breaking work *Of Woman Born* (1976), describes this as the yoking of mothers with “powerless responsibility”.

Additionally, unhealthy and unrealistic maternal ideologies (reflected and inculcated in popular media, culture, policies, and institutions) that cultivate circumstances in which mothers who cannot cope with their maternal labour must seek unhealthy or destructive outlets, have negative implications for the children involved. There is a notable relationship between maternal disengagement and misattunement and issues with children’s self-worth and ability to navigate adversity. Mothers - such as those without an innate desire to have children, who have consistently denied their own needs and desires, or who lack the necessary psycho-social or financial support - may struggle to meet their children’s bio-psycho-social needs.

Essentially, due to the homogenised, sanitised, and romanticised notions of the patriarchal feminine and Good Mother, women may be increasingly coerced into motherhood by false expectations or societal pressures, and those who are already mothers are “othered”. Furthermore, these constructs augment intersecting systems of oppression geared toward the subjugation and othering of “deviant” mothers. It is thus necessary to highlight and challenge the patriarchal discourse and gendered subjectivities that underwrite popular mainstream media of the maternal. *The Lost Daughter* offers a counterpoint to these patriarchal media representations in Leda’s atypical maternal experience, providing an opportunity for critical introspection and exploration into the underlying patriarchal dominance steeped in the identity of the Mother.

***The Lost Daughter*: transgressive (m)otherhood**

The Lost Daughter, a directorial debut from Maggie Gyllenhaal, is based on the 2006 Neapolitan novel *La Figlia Oscura* by Elena Ferrante and was released on Netflix in 2021. The psychological drama follows middle-aged professor Leda Caruso as she vacations in Greece. She soon begins fixating on the relationship between a young mother and daughter, Nina and Elena, which the film parallels in flashbacks to Leda’s strained relationship with her own daughters. It is thereafter revealed that Leda abandoned her young daughters for three years, leaving them in the care of her then-husband, in order to pursue a career in academia. During this period, Leda also embarks on an affair with a fellow professor. In the present, Leda’s theft of a beloved doll, belonging to the besotted Elena, precipitates a fallout between the two mothers. After confessing that she is a “selfish” and “unnatural” mother, Leda is stabbed by Nina at the film’s resolution. The film concludes surreally, with the image of a content Leda relaxing on the beach in conversation with her daughters via telephone.

Applying a text-based analysis to key moments within the film and using the feminist frameworks of the Good and Bad Mother, I will argue how the content and formal elements

of *The Lost Daughter* coalesce to suggest Leda's atypical experience of (m)otherhood, which exposes and interrogates the values of the patriarchal feminine. The analysis to come shall further reveal the film's thematisation of a capacious maternal experience, in a performance of womanhood that attempts to negotiate - and even critique - the patriarchal governmentality deeply entrenched in problematic maternal ideals.

First encounters

From the outset, the film establishes the binary paradigms of the Good and Bad Mother in Nina and Leda. These two archetypes, played up against one another, are later used to interrogate the meaning of motherhood as it is socio-culturally constructed.

Leda's first encounter with the young mother and daughter on the beach serves as the introduction to Nina as Good Mother. Nina emerges from the ocean, cradling Elena in her arms. Gyllenhaal's screenplay describes the two "TALKING TO EACH OTHER PEACEFULLY AS IF ONLY THEY EXISTED... They are a part of the big, noisy family but they seem like another species." In this quasi-ethereal scene, Nina is visually likened to the goddess of sacred love and beauty, icon of purity and saintliness, rising from the sea in Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* (1486). Nina thus becomes at once an idealised and desired figure, a notion one might parallel to that of True Womanhood and, considering that she emerges from the ocean *with child*, the very image of the Good Mother. Leda vicariously observes the young mother and daughter on the beach, in a display of idyllic mother-daughter connection characteristic of patriarchal feminine values. The camera, like Leda, is distanced and, through Leda's surreptitious gaze, the audience too witnesses Nina and Elena in their entirely private maternal sanctuary. The two are consumed by one another, in a peaceful exchange between mother and daughter. Here, the film primes the audience with the ideals of Motherhood that it will later subvert.

Now having established Nina as the Good Mother, the sequences that follow lay the foundations of Leda's consignment to the Bad Mother role. Leda's maternal unease (specifically evoked by the maternal ideal crusaded by Nina) is directly signified in the film's *mise-en-scene* and other formal elements. In almost the very next scene, Leda reaches for a plum nestled in a bowl of fruit in her holiday rental, but "exposes A MESS OF ROT AND MOULD under the pristine surface. All of the fruit is half rotten." Evocative of *natura morta* and *momenti mori* – iconography specific to seventeenth-century Dutch still life painting which signify death – this imagery appears misplaced amongst idyllic seascapes and holidaying families, thus proving rather unsettling for the viewer. Such injections of strange and disturbing imagery, not unlike the similarly toned and styled signposts found in early acts of the psychological thriller film, punctuate these scenes of motherhood with ominous foreboding. In doing so, they infer Leda's unease at Motherhood and inhabiting maternal ideals, as well as the air of liminality and instability. Furthermore, the proximity and chronology of this fruit bowl scene, occurring almost directly after Leda's observation of Nina and Elena, disrupts the sense of comfort and satisfaction evoked by their display of mother-child harmony. As discussed later, these and other arbitrary motifs mirror Leda's unwelcome intrusion into Nina and Elena's sacred relationship, with the intention of setting up Leda's othering and the "unconscionable" maternal acts to come.

To contrast our protagonist's suggested maternal impropriety, Leda's next encounter with the young mother and daughter concretely sediments Nina as the figure of the Good Mother. Elena, in a showcase of her intimate maternal bond, gently and dutifully bathes her sunbathing

mother and doll with ocean water gathered from her toy pail. Where Elena here assumes the role of caregiver, nodding to the interpellation of the girl-child, her mother is once again presented as an object of desire – inspiring not unease or disgust, but admiration and want. This is affirmed by Gyllenhaal and Dakota Johnson (who portrays Nina) in a *Vanity Fair* interview⁴ (2021), in which Nina is described as an initially objectified, “watched” character. These scenes are likewise shot with extreme close-ups and tight panning shots that hone into faces, limbs, and torsos. Nina, as “yummy mummy” (Littler 2013) is arguably objectified, and even dissected by the frame - recalling Mulvey’s male gaze. In accordance with the previously referenced image of Venus, the “yummy mummy” is at once desired and desirable. Here, she is simultaneously saintly, chaste, pure, and sacrificial, as necessitated by the unrealistic ideals of the Good Mother and patriarchal feminine. This scene not only asserts Nina as an object of desire (in her youthful beauty) but also as desired in her role as a mother. Nina appears oblivious to the ease with which she enthralls her daughter, almost flaunting the mother-child connection, suggested here as naturally given – and this too is attractive and satisfying from the pro-natalist patriarchal viewpoint. These intimate, even scopophilic, shots serve to showcase the enviable tenderness between Elena and Nina and introduce the mothering of the doll. At times, due to the extreme close-up shots that accentuate the corporeality of the characters, we are unable to distinguish mother from daughter, hinting at the mingling of the two identities and the slippage of the self. Here again, through Leda’s gaze, is the ideal of mythic motherhood (as well as female youth) and the intimated sanctity of the mother-child bond in the image of Nina as the Good Mother.

Leda then flashes back to a memory of herself as a young mother making a game of peeling an orange with her daughters, Bianca and Marta. While it is a “positive” memory and portrayed in a similar cinematographic style to the previously described scene, young Leda somehow does not seem as present or engaged as Nina. In the present, Leda is moved by Nina and Elena, and her memories of her daughters, implying a certain conflict in her maternal experience. Soon thereafter, Leda receives a call from her daughter, Marta. While Marta’s dialogue is inaudible, Leda’s responses are often superficial or interrupted. The scene touches on the physical and emotional distance between Leda and her daughters, which is so aptly juxtaposed against the preceding tightly framed shots of the mothers and daughters. In light of Leda’s voyeuristic observation of Nina and Elena and viewed from the film’s standpoint on motherhood, the aforementioned tightly shot sequences could conceivably connote an intense scrutiny of these maternal figures, evoking feelings of unease and claustrophobia rather than familial intimacy. Notably, the very next scene is another disturbing punctuator: Leda awakens to a loud male cicada on her pillow, looming large in the frame. Considering that only female cicadas are mute, the scene further infers supposed “lapses” in Leda’s maternal experience, while simultaneously hinting at the censorship of maternal subjectivities.

Already, the film suggests subtle incongruencies between Leda’s maternal experience and the Good Mother ideal embodied in Nina. The analyses to come shall further discuss the clash of the Good and Bad Mother archetypes, and how they are used to reveal and interrogate the patriarchal feminine.

⁴ Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gnQg2nDNnv0>.

Reckless abandonment?

Having previously alluded to incongruences in Leda's attitudes toward motherhood, additional flashback sequences reveal the protagonist's maternally ambivalent and fraught relationship with her children. These flashbacks depict Leda falling asleep on the floor as Bianca roughly brushes her mother's hair like a doll, trying to escape her daughters' incessant demands, and angering at Bianca's desecration of a childhood doll, amongst other things. Throughout, there is little intervention from Leda's then-husband, Joe. While certain flashbacks indicate scatterings of familial joy, such moments are fleeting. In this way, Leda's multi-faceted, but admittedly bleak, maternal experience unfolds.

Leda's incompatibility with motherhood is evident in her feelings of hardship, failure, regret, anger, and inadequacy. Leda concedes Bianca "would never let herself feel deprived, she sucks everything out of me". As a foundation parent, Leda is unequivocally expected to heed this call of self-sacrifice and nurture. In one scene, Joe implores young Leda to deal with the children. Deeply immersed in work, Leda removes her headphones, hears the girls wailing, and puts them back on. Another scene sees Bianca repeatedly hitting Leda to gain her attention, while she is again engaged in work. Leda admonishes Bianca, shouting that she needs "fifteen more minutes". After forcibly moving Bianca to another room ("I don't want to see you right now"), Leda slams the door, shattering the glass panes, leaving Bianca sobbing in the doorway and Marta frightened. In both scenes, Leda is shown to prioritise her needs above those of her children, effacing the traits of the Good Mother. She strives to carve space (figuratively and literally) away from her children and differentiate her role as a mother from her ambitions as a scholar. Indeed, balancing the roles of Mother and individual proves exceptionally challenging.

These and other scenes announce the "incompatibility of creativity and procreativity" (Milkova 2013: 104) innate to Leda's maternal subjectivity. The narrative's polarisation of Leda's academic success and domestic failure further underscores Leda's inability to assume the role of the Good Mother. Conversely, Leda's sexual fulfilment is paralleled with her academic success and self-fulfilment: Leda is invited to present her paper at a conference, and is praised by an acclaimed professor, signalling an assimilation into a world of highly-achieving scholars. With Joe unable to satisfy her sexually and his feigned incompetency to co-parent, Leda embarks on an affair with this professor who can meet both her sexual and intellectual needs. Additionally, in Leda's choice to continue the affair, she further eschews the notion of the Good Mother, echoed by Rich (1995: 183): "The divisions of labour and allocations of power in patriarchy demand not merely a suffering Mother, but one divested of sexuality... Women are permitted to be sexual only at a certain time of life." If Leda's sexuality is paralleled with her academic success, personal growth, and individual freedom, the affair operates as a means to recuperate the aspects of her life divested of her by her children. Again, Leda resists the role of the self-abnegating and submissive Good Mother, instead demanding autonomy and differentiation from her Mother role.

Leda's fraught relationship with her children, unsupportive husband, newfound academic success, and love affair – compounding factors all related to maternal expectations Leda evidently struggles with – culminate in Leda choosing to abandon her children for three years to recoup her femininity and selfhood. The events unspool as a flashback, Leda presumably reminiscing on the past as she scrubs Elena's doll in her apartment sink, the doll oozing brown sludge. Young Leda returns home after time away, yet her daughters shy away and require coercion to embrace her. Marta finally approaches and asks: "Are you home now, mummy?" and whether Leda can wash her hair after dinner. Leda gifts her daughters "fancy" white dresses, reminiscent of those

she wears in the early beach montages. In an intimate, tightly-shot sequence, Leda plays with her daughters and dresses Marta, while Bianca refuses her help. Joe then begs, and subsequently threatens, Leda not to leave. The girls ask Leda to play their orange-peeling game, to which she acquiesces. In this deeply unsettling, perhaps even harrowing sequence, Leda gathers her belongings and leaves, despite her children's pleas and cries ("Where are you going, mummy? Are you coming back?"). The film cuts directly back to present-day Leda as she attempts to extricate dirt from the mouth of Elena's doll, dropping it as a worm slithers out from the orifice.

Radical of cinematic mothers, Leda leaves her children in an effort to afford more attention to aspects of her personhood. In her rejection that childrearing and the role of a mother must come at the expense of selfhood, Leda denounces self-sacrifice (as self-degradation) and the forgoing of ambitions as a cornerstone of motherhood. In choosing to pursue her individual desires and relinquishing her children, Leda rejects the self-abnegating role of the Good Mother. *The Lost Daughter* thus presents audiences with a radical and destabilising cinematic (m)other who commits the "cultural crime of having refused to sacrifice her ambition to her child" (Spackman in Milkova 2013: 104). Leda's numerous decisions taken in favour of herself, her ambitions and desires expose the subversion of motherhood as natural in the eyes of our protagonist. Leda thereby defies the socio-cultural and historical constructs that dictate the role of women as natural caregivers where womanhood and motherhood are incorrectly conflated.

Further contrasting the cinematic Good Mother's unwavering devotion and mother love, maternal ambivalence and indifference form an integral part of Leda's performance of motherhood. Here, "ambivalence" broadly refers to a mother's coexisting feelings of love and hatred for her offspring (Smyth 2020; Takševa 2017), and "indifference" to a "lack" of regret (framed by the patriarchal lens as resulting from personal failure to adapt to motherhood). Leda's maternal ambivalence is presented as a real and pressing aspect of her maternal subjectivity, rather than "pathology" (Takševa 2017: 153). In acknowledging and normalising co-existing conflicting maternal feelings and atypical maternal subjectivities, personhood and the respective desires of the mother are not harmfully conflated with prioritising the child over the self. Though real and pressing, these alternative maternal subjectivities remain largely under-represented on the screen but are central to Leda's story and her desire for autonomy. Through the showcasing of Leda's maternal ambivalence, the film further resists prescriptive and unhealthy ideals of motherhood.

One of few mainstream films to do so, *The Lost Daughter* insists on visibilising and normalising maternal realities that depart from the Good Mother and patriarchal feminine paradigms, in its portrayal of Leda's transgressive and atypical maternal experience. In an article titled *I watched Netflix's The Lost Daughter and felt completely validated as a mother*, on the mothering blog *Mamamia*, Cate Gilpin (2022) shares how she identified with Leda's complex maternal subjectivity:

Every day, I experience those feelings of frustration and suffocation that Leda felt... I know the intense, overwhelming desire to escape [motherhood] that Leda has, and it was almost shocking to see this portrayed on screen in such an honest way but without judgement of Leda as a mother and a person. This never happens, mothers who leave their children are normally pariahs. Writing these words down scares me because I know there are a lot of people who don't like it when mothers talk this way. We're constantly told being a mother is a privilege and we should feel grateful, that children are a blessing... [but] like Leda, I also have big ambitious dreams and goals for my life that are entirely unrelated to my children... I love them and want them more than I can ever express, but I also long to escape them and be alone and pursue other things.

Correspondingly, Kate Dyson (2022) in another parenting blog writes:

The agonising moments in *The Lost Daughter* are compounded by the truth that there are times when motherhood is tough... the lack of mental stimulation, the loneliness and the lack of freedom... The mental load that falls to women... There are times when we lie awake at night, knowing that we snapped with irritation, or we denied some element of easy love, and scream into the pillow with sheer frustration and guilt. There are moments of desperately wanting to swap lives with our old selves, or find a snapshot of Who We Are within motherhood, when it feels too sacrificial. And if we are honest, there are times when we have fantasised about walking out of the front door to relish the idea of selfish freedom, without the hundred things that need to be thought of, juggled, balanced, found. There are times when we resent being needed all the time, until we aren't needed all of the time and then we punish ourselves for the moments we resented. All of it steeped in guilt, shame and self-loathing.

These responses evince the harm in the patriarchal image of the self-abnegating “good” mother so deeply ingrained in our cultural consciousness, as well as women’s struggles to maintain selfhood in the face of unrealistic maternal expectations where atypical emotions must be routinely suppressed. As seen in Gilpin’s reflection, feelings of maternal ambivalence and hardship that would otherwise be a normal part of mothering may likely garner suspicion and condemnation in mainstream society and culture, where self-preservation is sometimes mistaken for self-absorption. The film, used reflexively, may thus encourage women to acknowledge and confront their own “non-normative” maternal feelings – including ambivalence and indifference. Dissonance between the realities and ideals of mothering is thus less perceived as personal failure (often due to internalised patriarchal coercion). Rather, there is a realisation that these expectations and ideologies are birthed from intersecting systems of oppression implicated in women’s personal oppression. On whether the film illuminated anything in her own relationship with motherhood, Gyllenhaal responded: “I hope the movie is compassionate about how complicated being alive is. I was really trying to open the spectrum of acceptable feelings, and that has been really helpful to me, to allow myself to see in myself all sorts of complicated feelings and not indict myself for them” (Olsen and Elorbany 2022). In this way, *The Lost Daughter* may be used as a reflexive tool to problematise maternal censorship and romanticised maternal expectations as they come into conflict with the imperfect realities of motherhood.

While offering an opportunity for maternal introspection and interrogation, the film simultaneously problematises what happens when radical mothers defy the deeply ingrained prescriptions of the Good Mother. Despite choosing to care for herself, Leda is punished for reclaiming her selfhood and forgoing the maternal role – congruent with the Bad Mother archetype. This occurs in the eyes of audiences likely shaken by Leda’s filial abandonment, and other characters who cast her as being emotionally stunted, unfulfilled, indecent, and deficient. While Nina, Nina’s sister-in-law, and Joe respectively view Leda as atypical, suspicious, and scornful, the audience is bewildered and unsettled by her choices, perhaps even viewing her as a “monster”. Leda’s abandonment forms the film’s climactic peak, and the culmination of sequences geared toward eliciting revulsion toward the protagonist.

Despite the film’s contextualisation of Leda’s choices, many viewers still regard Leda’s maternal desertion as callous. In response to Leda’s inability to inhabit the traditional maternal role, certain amateur reviewers⁵ pathologise Leda as an unstable and objectively terrible mother,

⁵ Rotten Tomatoes. n.d. *The Lost Daughter Audience Reviews*. Retrieved from https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_lost_daughter/reviews?type=user; The Blue Futon. 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e35SjQXAvvE>.

further alluding to the cultural policing of maternal speech practiced in mainstream discourse. Leda is commonly demonised through the patriarchal belief that women too focused on fulfilling their desires – personal or sexual – cause their children to suffer neglect because of their “self-centred” ambition. In this way, the (m)other’s drive for differentiation and individual agency is rendered selfish, reflecting Western phallogocentric and pronatalist culture’s fear of the childless woman as a destabilising and radical figure, abominating their existence and projecting the idea that their lives are inevitably emotionally stunted and unfulfilling (Chodorow 1978: 77-91). Accordingly, Leda as a “malfunctioning” mother becomes an object of intense blame and is conceivably othered, ostracised, and punished in the eyes of the audience and other characters.

Gyllenhaal, however, resists leaning purely into the Bad “Witch” Mother archetype. She acknowledges that “parenting is designed to bring us to our knees... our survival literally depends on our parents wanting nothing more than to take care of us... [we] fantasise our mother as a good mother who’s bountiful and generous... And when our mother is anything other than that - which inevitably she will be because she’s a human being - that’s [a] ‘bad mother,’ almost like they are two different things” (Olsen and Elorbany 2022). Gyllenhaal’s observation problematises the totalising either/or nature of the “good” and “bad” mother, suggesting that mothering is far more fluid. This unjudgmental perspective is present even when Leda abandons her children for three years, an act which likely caused detriment both to herself and her children. The flashback of Leda leaving her children tactfully contrasts instances of motherly love (Leda’s peeling of the “snake” and gift-giving) with her forced consignment to the role of caretaker (Marta’s hair-washing request and Joe’s threat to send the girls away). While the urge to condemn Leda feels almost automatic, Gyllenhaal’s compassionate rendering of Leda creates opportunities to think beyond rigid binaries of the Good and Bad Mother, to consider new possibilities and approaches to maternal ideas and experiences.

Following the lines of how the abject operates in feminist film theory (Kristeva 1980), the adverse reactions of the audience and other characters, evoked by the protagonist in her display of “callousness”, evince a destabilisation of established norms and slippage of traditional boundaries. Leda’s inability to assume the traditional role of caretaker is initially inferred by abject iconography, such as the rotting fruit, male cicada, and worm emerging from the doll’s mouth. However, from a patriarchal standpoint, Leda’s filial abandonment establishes her within the archetype of the Bad Mother as she is now ostracised and forever changed from the perspectives of the audience. Disgust thereby acts as a civilising force when the civiliser-mother ruptures the boundaries of her presupposed role as the nurturing and self-sacrificing Good Mother. On some level, the unease and repulsion likely experienced by some viewers could function as a mirror for Leda’s emotional reaction to her stifling role as a mother, which torments her. In this way, the use of unease and disgust serves as a lens through which the audience may perceive the slippage of moral boundaries and the questioning of culturally-sanctioned maternal traditions.

In addition to destabilising related dominant ideological discourses, Leda’s act of desertion prompts a questioning of how and why certain maternal behaviours are deemed more appropriate than others. Ruth Quiney (2007: 27) explains:

Unease is generated by the highly articulate version of maternal embodiment and subjectivity... that threatens the cultural hegemonies governing writing [and speaking] about bodies and gender: the same dominant discourses that possess the rarely questioned power to marshal such terms as appropriateness, decency and... quality, and thus to sort the broadly normative and acceptable from the transgressive and dangerous.

Upon first encountering this montage, it is more than likely that viewers may find Leda's act of filial abandonment deeply distressing, despite the film's extensive contextualisation and justification of her actions. Forced to confront the inclination to respond so damningly, the film presents itself as a tool for introspection by inviting audiences to reflect on cultural hegemony's gendered expectations of parenthood. More specifically, when men abandon their children, or lump the responsibility of child-rearing on the maternal figure, it seems an unfair but unsurprising, even fairly routine, occurrence. This gendered domesticity is subtly evidenced in the film when Joe attempts to emotionally blackmail Leda by threatening to send Marta and Bianca to Leda's mother, her familial home fraught with turmoil. Contrastingly, a mother abandoning her children is construed as an unthinkable, unconscionable act. Thus, using unease, *The Lost Daughter* critiques double standards surrounding primary parenthood and responsibility, encouraging viewers to question culturally aggrandised maternal tradition, signalled by the abject.

Adoption/surrogate-mothering of the doll

The doll as an object signifies various thematic synchronicities within the narrative, reflecting and refracting the parallels of mothers who lose, abandon, and take a child's precious doll. This mirroring begins with the parallel of Nina and Elena and Leda and her daughters, extending to Elena's obsession with her doll and the mother-child dynamic in caring for it (inferring the interpellation from girl child to woman) which is mirrored by Leda and her daughters' interactions with Leda's childhood doll gifted, desecrated, and ultimately destroyed.

So, when Leda steals the doll, the surrogate embodies an "encroachment of Leda's past into her present" (Milkova 2013: 101). It is the object upon which Leda's feelings toward her imposed maternal role are enacted, alluding to Leda's punishment of her own daughters for destroying the agency she found as an individual and successful scholar, "usurping and exploiting the mother's body, time, and mind" (2013: 104). Meanwhile, the children's doll-like treatment of Leda reduces her to a mere object, a plaything, deprived of a voice, like the female cicada or mute surrogate doll. The futility of Leda cleaning the doll further repulses and disgusts, recalling the inevitable abject inherent to child rearing: the repetitive and ongoing changing of nappies and disposing of vomit and bodily fluids. With this view, the act of theft may be construed as Leda's attempt to sever the maternal bond, liberating Nina from the imprisonment of the sacrificial role of mother, where childcare is an all-consuming and never-ending task.

Contrastingly, some critics and viewers regard Leda's theft of the doll as a bitter sabotage. Noting particularly the film's close-on of Leda when Elena is lost (and presumably before Leda acquires the doll), the scene takes on the cadence of a psychological thriller with Leda observing the ongoings ominously from a distance. This is affirmed by Gyllenhaal who expresses that Leda is watching, aware of what she has done. Applying the Witch versus Angel archetype, Leda's transgression as the Bad Mother can be seen less as an act of jealousy, but rather one spurred by contempt and indignance toward the Good Mother. Leda stealing Elena's doll and rupturing the mother-child harmony belies a tipping of the ideal mythic motherhood performed by Nina. In doing so, Leda has simultaneously revealed the precarity of this façade, but also its ideal fallacy.

On the other hand, Leda's mothering – the cleaning, washing, and clothing - of the doll signifies the complexity of her maternal feelings. As surrogate mother of the doll, Leda attempts to assume the role of the Good Mother and absolve herself of her crime against culture and motherhood. In caring for the doll, Leda enacts the nurturing, self-sacrificing motherliness she

denied her daughters. However, as evidenced by flashbacks, while Leda is haunted by her choice to abandon her daughters, she does not regret her decision. Consequently, the cleaning of the doll, the undertaking of mothering, may then be construed as automatic culturally imposed self-responsibilisation, rather than a redemptive act.

Where the film suggests Leda's grappling with responsibility and expectation and the resulting guilt from rejecting these in favour of freedom and autonomy in Leda's act of desertion, Leda's surrogate-mothering of Elena's doll underscores *The Lost Daughter's* presentation of a maternally ambivalent mother figure, reckoning with coexisting conflicting maternal feelings.

Confrontations/negotiations

The film's resolution makes definitive statements about the film's discourse on motherhood. Leda's confessions of being an "unnatural" and "selfish" mother, as well as taking Elena's doll, spur Nina to revenge. Nina impales Leda's abdomen with a hatpin, gifted to her by Leda in a motherly gesture.

Leda's admission to being "selfish" speaks directly to the concept of True Womanhood, the patriarchal feminine, and the Good Mother. Such self-responsibilising exemplifies the maternal construct of selfishness as a lack of personal passivity. Leda's acts, such as her filial abandonment, refusal to sacrifice her ambitions of scholarship, and choice to recuperate herself and honour her femininity, are then branded selfishness - these aspects of normal, healthy personhood deemed scornful. Leda's fraught relationship with her imposed maternal labour, the expectation of pregnancy and motherliness conflict with and ultimately stifle her attempts toward individual freedom and personal ambitions. Already, she is set to fail when one must be chosen over the other. Self-responsibilisation, specifically regret, normally functions as a "powerful reproducer of the ideology of motherhood" (Donath 2015: 347) but remains largely unexplored as a part of maternal experience in mainstream discourse. Leda's confession is an affirmation that she is indeed haunted by her past. It is however significant to note that she does not regret the decisions made in honour of herself, which stand in opposition to the Good Mother and patriarchal feminine.

Furthermore, with Leda's confession of being an "unnatural mother", she distinguishes womanhood and motherhood as distinct aspects of identity. Leda is unnatural, other, due to her noncompliance with the maternal role. The struggle to extricate Nature and selfhood from Motherhood results in her being stabbed by Nina, who targets the corporeal site of procreation. This is, in accordance with feminism, the corporeal epicentre of compliance to patriarchal paradigms imposed upon women: their female labour in the form of "pregnancy, parturition, and motherhood" (Milkova 2013: 105). In stabbing Leda, who Nina perceives as her saboteur, the Good Mother figure at once eliminates the figure of resistance embodied by the Bad Mother and punishes Leda for her deviance.

The film culminates with Leda crashing her car on the way out of the holiday town one evening, later collapsing on the beach. In the next scene, she is bathed in morning light, jovially chatting to her daughters via telephone, and "peeling a snake" from the orange peel at the shore. The film's resolution and final metaphorical revenge thus leaves the audience in a liminal space, unsure whether Leda is dead or alive, dreaming, or in some afterlife. However, Gyllenhaal hints at a semblance of liberation in the figurative death of Leda. Perhaps in the death of the traditional

maternal role that Leda plainly admits she is unable to assume, Leda might begin again her life as woman and mother, these facets of identity and performance co-existing. Presented with such ambiguity, the audience is invited to tackle the emotions Leda's unsettling actions conjure up, make sense of the associated moral slipperiness, and contemplate the differentiated roles of mother and woman.

Conclusion: re-viewing motherhood

The Lost Daughter offers a refreshing counterpoint to patriarchally-informed Western cinematic maternal representation(s). As Gyllenhaal reflects during her interview with Mark Olsen and Heba Elorbany (2022):

I had never heard a lot of the things that [Ferrante] was talking about talked about before... about the experience of being a woman in the world that I think we've made an agreement culturally not to talk about and really not even to think about... desire, dissatisfaction, certainly the ambivalence and real complicated feelings about mothering, but also just being a thinking woman in the world, an artist as a woman in the world. And when I saw some of these things written down, it was really kind of shocking and intense for me. These were things in some ways I didn't even know I felt... I felt both disturbed and also kind of electrified by the truth of them and comforted, ultimately, by the fact that I wasn't the only person in the world having some of these feelings, which is how it feels if your experience isn't reflected back to you.

Leda's maternal experience is rendered as being (in her words) a "crushing responsibility", detracting from personhood, and (at times) depressing. Simultaneously, Leda's flashbacks and introspection suggest scatterings of the joy, love, and pride that popular culture and patriarchal pronatalist society tend to associate with motherhood, as evinced in the film's final image. In refuting the singular orthodox performance of Motherhood, the narrative honours a rightfully complex and nuanced maternal performance, arguably more resonant with contemporary mother figures. The film interrogates skewed parental responsibility and the influence of the Patriarchal embedded in the ideas of the Mother and Woman, which have informed Leda's complex feelings toward maternity. Rather than presenting moralising determinations of "good" or "bad", viewers are prompted to reflect on why and how these judgements are formed. Leda's maternal characterisation is thus not neatly encompassed in the rigid binaries of the Good and Bad Mother archetypes of cinema. Instead, Leda offers an iteration of motherhood that transcends and transgresses, where maternal experience is fluid and complex, involving potentially coexisting conflicting feelings.

The film prescribes no sole connotation or unified experience of motherhood, nor single emotion that children inspire in their mothers. This encourages a validation of Leda's experience as one of many versions of motherhood, even though this "atypical" rendition is culturally policed in dominant hegemonic structures and under or misrepresented in mainstream media. *The Lost Daughter* thus simultaneously functions as a tool for self-reflexivity and feminine introspection in that it forms a means to interrogate and resist normative maternal paradigms. It is crucial to amplify narratives that reflect and resonate with contemporary (m)others, so that media and society may begin to comprehend their realities. Ultimately, *The Lost Daughter* critiques the deeply entrenched patriarchal control within the identity of the Mother, tethered to women's biological capacity for childbearing. In truth, this maternal capacity is merely a capability - one eventuality among many - not a fated sentence, but a choice.

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Research on French colonial architecture from a decolonial lens: the vernacular adaptation of Créole architecture of Port Louis, Mauritius

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This study investigates how the influences of the enslaved and their Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) impacted the evolution of French colonial architecture to Créole architecture. Colonial legacies have severely affected the IKS that reflect the pre-colonial ways of being integrated with nature and spirituality. Yet, processes such as creolisation in Mauritius have seen the evolution of IKS and its influences on Créole architecture and culture. The paper explores the historical background of the Créole architecture of Mauritius from the colony to the post-colony. Additionally, the review of literature situates the island within the global scholarship of Créole architecture, which often ignored the contribution of Mauritius. The Créole architecture of Mauritius is a complex space of occupation and exchange, and still it remains significantly understudied. Part of its complexity is how it represents colonial continuity while integrating processes of creolisation. This paper argues for a reframing of Créole architecture as a contested study site which involved both coloniality and decoloniality. In Mauritius, creolisation represents the resistance to colonial hegemony. And in that decolonial lens, the paper reveals the contribution of the enslaved to the evolution of Créole architecture of Mauritius, through the application of their non-European knowledge of construction and material innovation.

Keywords: Créole architecture, Mauritius, decolonisation, Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Resers lor larsitektir colonial fransez depi en langle dekoloniale : lplikasion vernakilaire de larsitektir Kréol dans Por Lwi, Moris.

Sa letid la ekzamine kouma ban esklav ek zot sistem konaisans otoktone in fer en impak lor levolisyon arsitektir kolonial fransaz kin enswit menn nu a larsitektir Kreol. Ban leritaz kolonial inn graveman affekter ban konaisans otoktone de ban esklav, ek ban konaisans la reflet ban manyer prekolonial pu intègrer la natir ek la spiritualiter. Herezman, ena ban processus couma la kreolisasyon a lile Moris kin ressi inflinse levolisyon sa ban konaisans otoktone la. Sa levolisyon la ziska a zordi nou cav trasser dan larsitektir Kreol ek la kiltir Kreol. Sa lartik la pu eksplor kontext zistwar de larsitektire Kreol de lil Moris, dans lepok coloni ek apre.

Adityonelman, en revè de literatir pu aid nu sitier lil Moris en comparezon ek leselle mondial de larsitektir Kreol. Ek boku fwa sa ban literatir di passer la, in inyor lil moris so contribisyon. Larsitektir Kreol a lil Moris cest en lespas desanz ek dokupasyon bien kompleks, mai li ress enkor dan lombre. En parti de sa kompleksiter istorik la vin depi le fai ki larsitektir Kreol represent en kontiniasyon de ban sentimen ek valer kolonial, ek en mem tan fin intègrer ban processus kreolisasyon. Sa lartik la pe propoz en rekrademen de larsitektir Kreol en tan ki en site detid ki implik ban notion de kolonialiter ek dekolonialiter. Dan Moris, la kreolisasyon fin represente en resistans a lotoriter koloniale, ek la kiltir Kreol fin adopter par la nasyon Morisien. Dan sa meme langle la, sa lartik la p démontrer la kontribisyon de ban esklav lor levolisyon larsitektir Kreol, de par le fait zot fin aplik zot ban konnaisans otokton ki non-europeen en term de konstrikasyon, de ban adaptation materiel ek de manyere de vive lor nu lile tropikal.

Ban mo clé: Arsitektir Kreol, Moris, Dekolonizasyon, Sistem Konesans Otoktonn (SKO)

Can colonial architecture reveal a past of colonial resistance and vernacular adaptation? This question captures the discussion around colonial architecture, urban and the socio-cultural development of Mauritius. It looks at vernacular adaptation as both an architectural and an ontological response to fit within the tropical island conditions. Créole architecture is both an urban strategy and an architectural response in the French colony. It uses geometric and repetitive designs which facilitated rapid construction and urban development. One of the biggest yet overlooked contributions to this growth was the enslaved labor and the application of their Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS). The contribution of the enslaved has only recently been explored, and their craftsmanship and expertise can be studied in Port Louis, the capital of Mauritius.

Créole architecture refers to any “architectural tradition genetically descended from a synthesized tropical colonial form” (Edwards 1994). In the case of Mauritius island, in order to adapted to the climate and local materiality, the French colonial architecture has undergone a vernacular evolution. This architectural evolution is known as Créole architecture in Mauritius, and the decolonial lens of this paper explores this evolution as evidence of survival and resilience (Boswell 2013). The colonial buildings evolved by incorporating specialised non-European craftsmanship of the enslaved brought from similar climatic regions. The enslaved were experts of tropical climate and tropical materiality, as they were brought from similar context. This paper -based on a doctorate study in course at the School of Architecture, Nelson Mandela University- argues that the Mauritian Créole architecture contains proof of IKS of construction, materiality, and innovative climate response from Africa and Asia, blended into the rudimentary forms of European design. As non-European construction techniques began appearing within the island; the French colony created urban policies to instil a visually consolidated territory created through a French urban character.

The scholarship on the evolution of Créole architecture has defined it and limited it to a Western phenomenon (Carey 2018a; Edwards 1994; Pickens 1948). Architectural historian, Dwight Carey (2018a) states that Mauritius remains severely understudied regarding its potential contribution to the investigation of Créole architecture worldwide. A limitation of the study of Créole architecture of Mauritius is that the available public knowledge is often from a colonial lens and further whitewashes the history of this architecture. This paper considers the social, cultural and architectural factors which affected the vernacular adaptation of Créole architecture with the scope to offer a wider understanding of it. In doing so it explores the historical background of Mauritius and then discusses the Créole houses within St. George Street neighbourhood. Therefore, the study of Mauritian Créole architecture intends to indicate the connection to the colonial system on a global scale.

Historical background of Mauritius

Due to its strategic location as seen in figure 1, Mauritius has historical significance in the enslavement trade and the colonial expansion of the southwest region of the Indian Ocean. Mauritius as a research site, holds the potential to contribute to new perspectives on the enslaved and their influence within the island (Seetah 2015). Even though this antecedent has been explored from a historical lens, only recently archaeologists have used the concept of the “island as a site” to essentially connect Mauritius to global themes of slavery and the diasporic evolution. This paper considers a particular residential neighbour of the French port named Port Louis, as a study site of human settlement and architectural evolution. Earlier, historians have

relied on imperial records to create new work, and the colonial bias preexisting in these records cannot be denied. However, there exists tangible proof of the enslaved: the Créole houses of St. George Street which holds within the evidence of non-European pre-colonial knowledge.

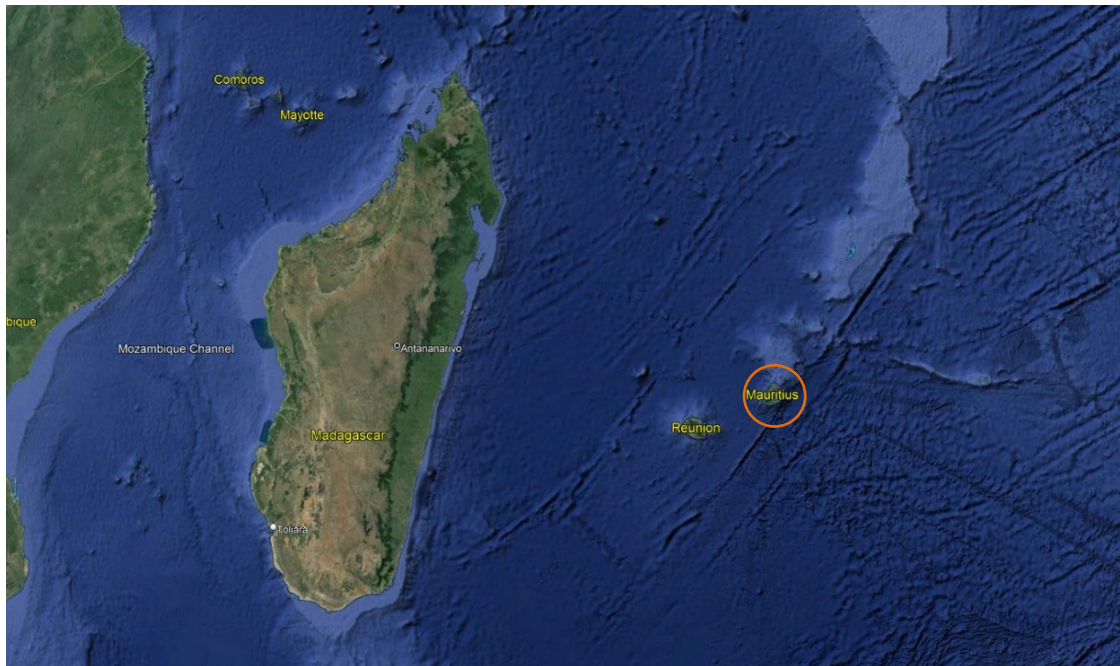


Figure 1
Mauritius island within West Indian Ocean
(Source: Google Earth, 2024).

Firstly, the historical background of Mauritius expands on the urban and population “development” of the island. In 1638, the Dutch East India Company settled on the island to consolidate their presence within the Indian Ocean. The location of Mauritius coincided with their already established routes from Europe around Africa to Asia. This position made the island a strategic “refreshment station”, around 20 years before The Cape of Good Hope was established in South Africa. In Mauritius, the colonists practiced extractive colonialism – the exploitation of natural resources, an explicit disregard for the custodianship of the ecology. Their way of life was not integrated within the natural landscape of the island which had no indigenous people. In fact, most of the island remained unexplored and unexploited. To begin their plans of agriculture and timber production, the Dutch brought enslaved people from Madagascar, however there were unexpected consequences to this. Many enslaved broke free and ran into the forests, where they formed maroon villages and survived by farming and hunting (Worden 1992: 3).

The “maroon communities” amidst their marginalization had an advantage over the Dutch settlers: the local context of Mauritius was familiar to them. Even though they had not been to Mauritius before, the island had similar climatic and material conditions as Madagascar. For the maroon and enslaved people, the application of their knowledge indigenous to their origin became the key to their survival in this new environment. They adapted their IKS to farm, hunt and even build shelters. The Dutch tasked the enslaved to build a fort and a fenced compound on the island, to be separated from nature. To construct this fort, the enslaved people from Madagascar, India, Southeast Asia, and Southern Africa, who were the primary builders, used

their knowledge of constructing with coastal materials such as oyster shells, lime, and sand.¹ The enslaved were chosen from these climatically similar regions, as they understood the material condition of the island. As Carey (2018a: 71) proposed, the Dutch fort was an early example of creolised architecture in Mauritius as it was created through creole architectural translation which was “the process whereby slaves applied disparate forms of non-European knowledge when erecting colonial structures”.

The enslaved, thanks to their IKS, adapted the European architecture style imposed by colonist, with locally available materials, to create buildings that otherwise would be unsuited to the island due to resource and climatic challenges. Their skills were used in construction, in sugar cane agriculture and timber logging.

Correspondingly, Carey’s (2018a) study of the Fort Frederik Hendrick in this Dutch settlement of Mauritius highlighted the presence of *armagasse*, a mortar used in the walls of the compounds. *Armagasse* was traced in neighbouring colonised territories such as Reunion and Madagascar islands. The traces of *armagasse* are evidence of regional application of construction techniques that are not inherently European. It is preferred because of its relatively low cost, which only involved labour (Gritzner 1978). Another name for *armagasse* is “argamassa” or “tabby concrete”, which means mortar, it is self-healing and moisture resistant. The colonies were a platform for cultural, social and skills exchange between the enslaved, which impacted the architectural expression of the colony. This is supported by scholars who affirm that consequent creolisation and cultural artefacts such as Créole architecture did not occur in a historical and political vacuum as colonial records falsely narrate (Boswell 2013; Carey 2018a; Eisenlohr 2007; Eriksen 2007).

After years in Mauritius, the Dutch decided that the island was not a profitable territory. The possibilities for colonial expansion were limited, and slave revolts were common. Additionally, the sugar crops did not survive the local climate. These conditions contributed to the Dutch leaving in 1710 and focusing most of their efforts on growing the settlement in the Cape.

Soon after, in 1715, the island was taken over by the French Company of the Indies and was renamed Isle-de-France. Its strategic location between Asia and Africa opened commercial opportunities to a quasi-global scale. Under the rule of the governor Mahé de Labourdonnais, the French built two settlements at opposite ends of the island: Mahébourg, and Port Louis. The latter, Port Louis, as seen in figure 2, became a free port and the capital of the island. Until now boasts the biggest French settlement in Mauritius. The project of Isle de France relied on the enslavement of people from climatically similar contexts as it is clear that the architectural evolution was influenced by them (Carey 2018b; Nicholls 2018).

¹ Truth and Justice Commission Vol 1., 2011: 57.



Figure 2
Port Louis, on the Northwest of Mauritius
(Source: Google Earth, 2024).

This period of history became known for the emergence of Créole architecture on the island. The capital was designed according to French urban characteristics with a grid plan, a city centre and public squares. The scale of the grid plan depended on the zone, as commercial and administrative zones required bigger buildings. In residential zones, the grid became smaller, creating a more intimate neighbourhood with many backroads for the servants and enslaved to circulate through without using master roads. Master roads were wide enough to accommodate the horse carriage transport of the time. The front facades of the Créole houses faced the master roads, while the dependencies, storage and backyards faced the servant access roads.

By then, most of the enslaved population spoke Kréol, a language that was created through forceful contact with French; it used French grammar and few Malagasy vocabulary with a prominent African lexicon. It allowed the enslaved to communicate and collaborate outside of the knowledge of the European authority. In modern times, Mauritian Kréol has become a proud cultural artefact of the decolonisation and emancipation of the enslaved, along with music and dance: séga (Betchoo 2019; Pyndiah 2018; Ramtohil 2022). The language has been absorbed as a process of becoming vernacular, as the Europeans claimed ancestry to Europe and part of Créole population who descended from the enslaved claim Mauritius as their origin (Boswell 2013).

When the British took over in 1810, almost a century of French colonisation period came to an end. During this time of British colonisation, the island was renamed Mauritius, but the French settlers remained the economic majority due to their sugar cane plantations. The plantation economy was still reliant on the slave trade. The enslaved, the French settlers and the first-generation Créole descendants became integrated as part of the Mauritian population. It was not until 1835, that enslavement was abolished following numerous revolts that marked all three periods of colonisations. Following the effect that this had on the colonial economy, the British needed to provide labour to the island. Therefore, indentured labourers were brought from India through a project called “the Great Experiment”. Mauritius once again became a

key territory in the movement and displacement of people due to colonial exploitation, as this was the first instance of Indentured labourer being brought from India globally. The British later, expanded this “experiment” to the east coast of South Africa and to the Caribbeans. The arrival of indentured labour fuelled more social unrest, as the social demography shifted. The architectural and cultural landscape of Mauritius reflects those non-European influences.

The British ruled until 1968 when Mauritius was declared an independent republic. Seemingly, the decolonisation process of Mauritius is a project from the time of the colony to the post-colony, and the people have embodied the diaspora of displacement and becoming vernacular. The Créole architecture went through a similar metamorphosis.

Créole Architecture: from global phenomenon to its local, vernacular application

During the colonial period, the term “Créole” referred to people of the Old World born into the New World, which seemingly only included the European settlers and their offspring (Allen 1998). This was an oversight, and the study of creolisation also mistakenly referred to this process as a Western phenomenon (Boswell 2013; Carey 2018; Stewart 2016). Currently, the term Créole architecture is popularly understood as the evolution of French colonial architecture, alike the early colonial definition of the term “Créole” (Chapman 1995; Fricker 1984; Edwards 1998; Pickens 1948). Even though this definition has since then been challenged within social sciences, architecture has yet to redefine it. It is now clear that Créole identities are diverse and that cultures are not cohesive wholes (Boswell 2013). This new understanding of the Créole identity is suited for the study of Mauritian Créole architecture, as the island is often described often as the Créole Island (Vaughan 2005). As seen in figure 3, Créole architecture was the only style used within the French colonial period.

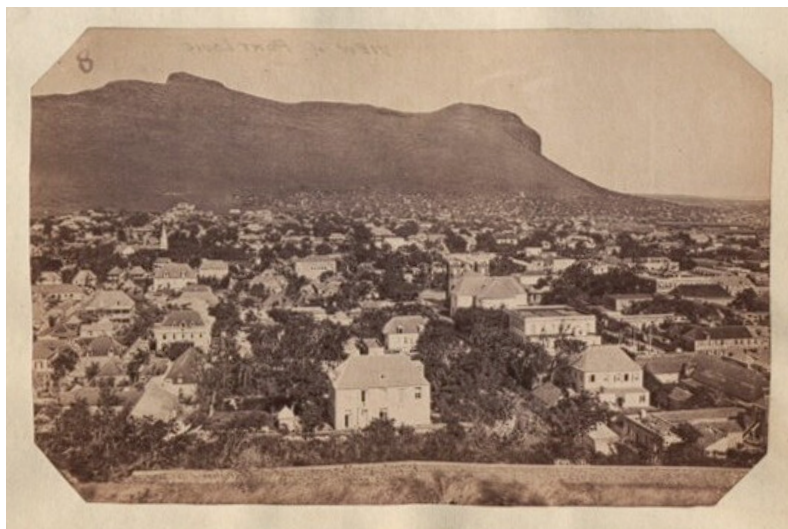


Figure 3
The architecture of Port Louis was a creolised adaptation of French colonial architecture
(Source: The UK national archives, public domain, date unknown).

The rapid French colonial urban expansion which brought about the frequent movements of the enslaved, resulted in an architectural and cultural exchange (Vaughan 2005). The builders

and crafters became exposed to Créole architecture within other colonies through “generalized architectural templates” (Carey 2016). The skills of the enslaved ranged from stone carving, carpentry, and building for architectural constructions, street building, and even boat building. It is evident that the project of settlement revolved around the activities and the goals of the slave trade (Nicholls 2018).

There are many reasons as to why the contributions of the enslaved was significant to Isle-de-France. For example, the large population of the enslaved surpassed the population of the settlers. This population imbalance meant that most, if not all the construction heavily relied on the enslaved, not only from the perspective of labour, but the intellectual work and agency to self-organize and create innovative architectural adaptations. These adaptations were yet unknown to the Europeans. Consequently, the enslaved became the main translators of the French architectural templates into realistic built formations. Non-European knowledge was essential to responding to the need of the tropical context.

In this paper, these knowledges are termed as IKS which are forms of understanding, expertise, customs, and beliefs that helped a group of people establish co-existence with nature.² The IKS were ancestral, as they developed precolonially over many generations of habitation with nature. The conditions of enslavement were oppressive, and many enslaved had to give up their religious belief and convert. Fortunately, in Mauritius, not all the IKS were lost to this process of cultural elimination. The identity of the enslaved -individually and collectively, was intricately linked to their IKS. Creolisation gave the enslaved an opportunity to protect themselves from the cultural loss that occurred when colonised. Creolisation happened through “internal restructuring, inventiveness and creativity” (Cohen and Toninato 2009). It appears that this creolisation also affected architecture because of the application of IKS. This internal restructuring seemingly manifested physically through the creolised architectural character of Isle-de-France.

This creolised architecture consolidated the territory of the French within the Indian Ocean. French coloniality and its visual expression was a prerogative of the French governor Mahé de Labourdonnais and he was in charge of overseeing the urban development of Port Louis as a free port (Toussaint 1971). A free port operates on a different scale from a refreshment station which caters only for a particular colonial power. A free port opens up global commercial avenues to other colonies. These exchanges between colonial settlements created a cosmopolitan world of trade and culture (Carey 2018a; Vaughan 2005). Additionally, the island was a transit station for the enslaved to be quarantined, trained and moved to other ports. These movements influenced the scale of the urban development of Port Louis. The settlement grew at an unsustainable rapidity (Carey 2016) and needed effective and geometric designs. This urban design facilitated repetitive application of several architectural template of Créole houses. The above-mentioned created various urban strategies, stemming from colonial underpinnings. In figure 4 the French settlement of Port Louis was drawn and archived in 1774. And figure 5, is an urban analysis by the author which depicts six key urban elements and the site under investigation: St. George Street. The surrounding mountains were used as military posts (point 1) to defend the bay from rival attacks. Another threat to the growing colony was diseases and unsanitary conditions (Cianciosi 2023; Parahoo 1986). Fresh water supply from the mountains was brought to the settlement through man-made canals (point 2) which were dug and paved.

² UNESCO 2022

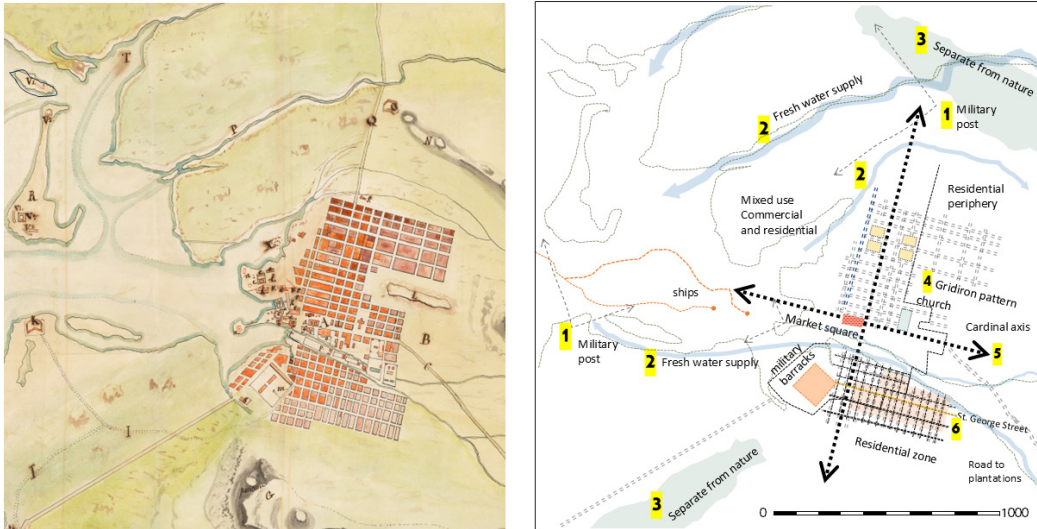


Figure 4 (left)
Map of Port Louis French port and the 1760s settlement
(drawn by M. Estaing, 1774)

Figure 5 (right)
An urban development analysis of the French colonial planning.
(1) Military post, (2) fresh water supply, (3) separation from nature, (4) grid iron pattern, (5) cardinal axes,
(6) St. George Street area of investigation
(drawn by the author, 2023).

The mountain was a divide between the rest of the island and the capital, a “distancing operation” as described by Donna Haraway (1992: 312). The settlement strategized the mountains as a natural barrier. The dense settlement was self-contained and separate from the natural surroundings (figure 5, point 3). The nature and culture divide are essential within colonial designs to frame coloniality as a modern and progressive project. The colonial project further created a strict urban precedent for future developments. A gridiron layout (figure 5, point 4) was employed as an effective and repetitive approach to building the urban and domestic scale. From this a cardinal axis (figure 5, point 5) was drawn as the central node which connect the harbour to the market square and church square. This central area was surrounded by commerce and administrative buildings. And the residential zones were placed at the margins where the scale of the gridiron was reduced to accommodate the domestic scale of the Créole houses. The houses differed in typologies but retained a visual character which evolved from the synthesis of climatically derived architectural features. In St. George Street neighbourhood (figure 5, point 6) the gridiron division created two road sizes namely the master road and the servant access. The pedestrian backroads were used by enslaved to circulate through the town “invisibly”. These roads defined racial borders which are now invisible in post-colonial Port Louis.

The main aspects employed for this rapid construction was vernacular material, self-organising labour and French architectural building templates. The traces of non-European knowledge employed in Créole architecture create a complex imagery of the ability of the enslaved to subvert the colonial hegemony through collaboration with the other enslaved on the construction site. These collaborations occurred outside of the European colonial optics, seen the enslaved were brought from climatically similar contexts such as Madagascar, India, Indonesia and the Swahili Coast, as it was clear that the architectural evolution was dependent

on their skills (Carey 2018b; Nicholls 2018). The French settlement witnessed the joint effort of the enslaved to create the architectural and cultural landscape of the colony. The enslaved population spoke Kréol, a language that was created through forceful contact with French; it used French grammar and few Malagasy vocabulary with a prominent Swahili lexicon. Kréol allowed the enslaved to communicate and collaborate outside of the knowledge of the European authority who viewed the language as barbaric, and subaltern compared to French. The same sentiment was conferred to Créole houses which strayed away from European ideals. Therefore, visual coherence among the building was important, and this reflected in material choices.

Their intensive labour and hours within the confine of servitude, created spaces of exchange through diverse non-European skill applications. New skills were formed from these exchanges which adapted the IKS of the enslaved to the conditions of The New World. The evolution of Créole architecture have been described as dialectical and dialogical approaches between the applied expertise of the enslaved and the application of various architectural templates (Bolland 1992; Carey 2018b; Edwards 1995; Vlach 1976). The dialectical approach was multi-dimensional between enslaved resistance and colonial oppression, IKS practice and limiting architectural expressions and the need to be rooted in the context and adapting to the new identity of the settlement. The IKS of the enslaved represented the cultural identity that binds the enslaved to their physical surroundings and created a sense of belonging to the island (Ghisleni 2020). The island was a new context with paradoxical familiarity as the enslaved held much expertise of living with this tropical context. The enslaved practiced material expertise from sourcing to processing and building techniques which were adapted to best fit the context and the material. Many Créole house typologies emerged during this time of experiment. Créole architecture became vernacular to Mauritius. Even though the forms and the context were colonial, the material and delicate embellishments defied coloniality.

The emergence of differing Créole houses typologies was an act of building within social, colonial, material and climatic dynamics that reflect the IKS of the enslaved. The practice of the IKS was a collective exercise of self-determination (Doxtator 2004).

The influx of people and economy propelled Mauritius to become an architectural laboratory of rapidly synthesizing methods of construction informed by enslaved builders from other French colonies. In summary, many factors surface when decolonising the definition of Mauritian Créole architecture, such as:

- Climatic response: the tropical climate distinct from the European seasons, the cyclones, floods, and rainstorms affected the modes of architectural construction.
- Material resource: the building resources on the island are different from the metropole, therefore, the Europeans do not have expertise in constructing with this materiality.
- Geographic location: the bigger slave trade at play within the region, which was different to the Trans-Atlantic enslavement, the limited expansion of the island, the morphology of the terrain, the geological make up of island, the lack of Indigenous people within the island not allowing for an urban strategic “reading” of how to create space efficiently, therefore, an earlier established model would be more efficient.
- Colonial policies: As non-European construction techniques began appearing within the island; the French colony created urban policies to instil a visually French colonial character which consolidated the free-port and the French territorial entrenchment.
- Economic growth of the island: from early settlement to cosmopolitan free port.

- creolisation: the different origins of the enslaved, the collaborative efforts, cultural growth, and linguistic creativity.
- Spiritual and symbolic needs to belong: expression and practice of identity through IKS and creolisation (Chapman 1995). IKS incorporated non-colonial ways of reading the natural context and making architecture which was responsive to the context and the emerging social needs.

The summary above was compiled by the author to reflect the complexity of creolising Créole architecture within a time of hegemony. While the summary deconstructs the factors, they were interlinked and impacted each other. For example, the economic growth impacted the materiality of the Créole house as materials such as wood and marble were imported from other French colonies. Exchanges of material resources became common along with architectural styles such as piazzas, Venetian blinds, porches, and jalousies.

As seen in figure 6, four typologies have emerged since the early settlement period in 1715 till now. The typologies informed the evolution of the living conditions as the settlement experienced economic boom.



Figure 6

The emergence of typologies. The rooms are labelled as follows:

- (1) living room, (2) masters bedroom, (3) office or secondary bedroom, (4) kitchen space connected to the courtyard, (5) bathrooms, (6) live-in maid quarters, (7) store room, and finally (8) the verandah. (drawings by the author, 2024).**

Typology A was mapped in the early French settlement, it reproduced Norman architecture of that time period (Edwards 2015). It has a high-pitched roof and is made of thatch which was readily available on the island. Unfortunately, it was not adapted to the constant rain, high humidity and strong winds. The typology B, is also mapped in Louisiana and Haiti, known there as the Shotgun house. In Mauritius, it has no name, so this paper will refer to it as the long Créole house. The layout ranges from three to four rooms, which developed as elongated rectangular shape starting with the short facades facing the public space. The main façade is directly on the pavement. The living room doors remain open to extend the social space into the public. The house was elevated on 200mm of basalt rock to create a void between the humid soil and the wooden floors. The walls are made of wood with strong pillars spanning across the rooms. The roof pitch was lowered to accommodate high winds and cyclones. The roof edges were extended so that the rainwater run off do not seep into the wooden walls.

Typology C will be referred to as the short Créole house. Like the typology B, the rectangular core of the house has three rooms. However, the long edge of the house rests onto the pavement/public space. The short Créole house was extended as the need of the residents grew. There is no corridor to maximise the internal layout. The doors and windows are placed across each other to facilitate cross-ventilation in the house. The house is placed on 700mm basalt rock foundations, which encourages a cross flow of air underneath the house. This keeps the house cool and dry. In the back of the short Créole house is a courtyard which separates the house from the dependencies. The courtyard and surrounding green space are utilised by the house.

The final typology D is similar to typology C and evolved to accommodate a front verandah (8) known as the *varangue*. The living room is much larger, and the back rooms open up to a shared back lobby. The Créole house had to retain the European classical rectangular forms and pitched roof to remain unchallenging to the colonial urban scape and policies. Some Créole houses were owned by non-European people and the survival of these building relied on their ability to appear seemingly alike to the colonial architecture while incorporating the indigenous technique that were practiced by Indian, Malagasy and African enslaved people.

Créole architecture: the global colonial landscape and beyond

Earlier studies around Créole architecture limited the emergence of this architecture to the regions of Louisiana in USA, and the Caribbeans. While the first ever instance of Créole architecture globally, is outside of the research scope, this paper views Créole architecture as a global phenomenon emerging in French colonies around seventeenth century. The term “Créole architecture” has been used interchangeably with “French colonial architecture” were used interchangeably (Fricker 1984) which seemingly defined a continuity with the colonial origin of this architectural style. And early scholarship assumed that Créole architectural style was a direct evolution of French colonial architecture in the West due to tropical and cultural responses only (Fricker 1984; Pickens 1948).

The scholarship of Créole architecture only began considering the influence of the Indigenous cultures and of the enslaved when the link between Créole architecture and the Trans-Atlantic enslavement trade was investigated. From this, architectural historians began critiquing the term “European-derived architecture” through the connection between continental Africa and the rest of the Créole world (Carey 2018a; Chapman 1995; Edwards 1994; Vlach

1976). The study was not limited to architecture only, as some methodologies of research involved comparative analysis and juxtaposition between language, culture, and architecture. The Créole world which includes Mauritius, create many overlapping methodologies of research as architecture becomes an expression of the Créole cultures. William Chapman (1995: 132) explains that similar to how a creole language began dissociating from its colonial origins, architecture can reflect “characteristics independent of its [colonial] origin”. The Créole house has been crucial to the study of Créole architecture, as it is a built artifact that primarily catered to middle to low social class within the colonial settlement. This paper defines a Créole house as a humble structure built according to the visual and typological principles of Créole architecture such as vernacular materiality, non-European building techniques and climatically responsive designs. As seen in figure 6, the different typologies evolved from the multiple factors mentioned earlier in this section: climate response, material resources, geographic location, colonial policies, economic growth, creolisation, spiritual and symbolic needs to belong. The Créole house plans in figure 6 are still present in St. George Street.

John Michael Vlach (1976) noted that the Créole house plans were popular among African Americans and intended “to trace the history of the shotgun house and indicate how it is associated with an African architectural heritage” (1976: 47). In the West, a popular typology of the Créole house is the so-called Shotgun house which was mapped in Louisiana, Haiti, and across the Atlantic Ocean in Senegambia (Edwards 1995; Vlach 1976). These similar architectural styles in the West and in Africa revealed the link between the process of creolisation and the translation of IKS into the New World through Creole architecture. The geometric room layout of those houses, often known as a core, presented an archaic privacy threshold. The house façade is set up directly on the pavement. This house type consists of “one room in width and from one to three or more rooms deep, with frontward facing gable” (Kniffen 1936: 165). However, to accommodate for the needs of a growing family, the backyard verandah is walled it to create other bedrooms and an indoor kitchen. The lack of corridors maximises the internal space and the doors promote a natural cross-ventilation within the house. While the dependencies and storage rooms faced the servant access often with a courtyard and water fountain. Traditionally, the kitchen and washroom were built outside of the Creole houses.

Recently, Dwight Carey (2016) created a comparative analysis of the Créole architecture of three previously French colonies: New Orleans in the USA, Senegal, and Mauritius. This analysis became the first scholarly work to record Mauritian Créole architecture from the perspective of non-European Knowledge Systems. In this work, the impact, and origins of the enslaved were carefully considered. Carey explained how Mauritius remains disconnected from the Créole architectural studies that depicted the creolisation process as inherently Caribbean and western. It seems that beyond viewing creolisation as only West African and European *métissage*, architectural creolisation should be considered through global systems of social control, commercial interchange, and even, identity. Creolisation should include factors such as spatial and urban policies, socio-economic identity and marginalisation, and the availability and access to resources.

It is undeniable that the slave trade influenced the Créole architecture of Mauritius as the island was part of a wider West Indian Ocean slave trade that included all East Africa and the African islands (Yank 2017). When acknowledging the role of Mauritius within the movement and activities of the enslaved, its impact on the architectural output can be seen.

Créole architecture embodied ideological necessities to fit “the symbolic needs of people in the region” (Chapman 1995). The enslaved practiced their non-European belief systems with precarity and had symbolic needs of self-expression. This architecture responded to social, cultural, and community needs to feel grounded within a new context. The spiritual factors are often overlooked, but they informed identity and were a social marker. Spirituality was important for the enslaved brought to the island. However, laws prohibited the enslaved from practicing their Indigenous belief systems, placing them at risk of severe punishment and even death (see translation of the *Code Noir of 1724*, Palmer 2019). The enslaved used various cultural instruments to preserve this crucial aspect of individual and collective identity. The embodied knowledge of the enslaved were displayed to the material world through the Créole house. It essentially became a physical manifestation of beliefs and identities, seemingly creating a metaphor of becoming vernacular ie. of the land, through inner knowing of the context. The enslaved and their descendants applied their knowledge which took on new forms through the creolisation process. In turn, this enriched the Créole architecture of today.

The popular knowledge on Mauritian Créole architecture created colonial continuity through its reliance on colonial records and its association with Franco-settlers. Colonial records only documented the Créole houses that belonged to the colonial settlers. The colonial cost logs purposefully omitted houses owned by the enslaved (Carey 2016), however they recorded that the enslaved were the primary builders of all Créole houses owned by the French colonials. Scholars focusing on Mauritian history have subverted colonial records to create counternarratives of the past. Pyndiah (2018) proposed a “decolonised historiography” through a critical lens that centers the impact of popular culture on the evolution of Kréol language in Mauritius. These studies challenge the singular colonial narrative help to redefine Créole houses as more than a colonial artifact.

To challenge architectural archival methods and to support the reading of spaces with culture and language, one must acknowledge that Créole houses was more than just a backdrop, and instead, acted as a vessel to an identity that was creolised. Créole houses were relevant to the social activities that were particular to the island therefore, it survives distance and time (Edwards 2005). Part of challenging archival methods is to at the documentation medium through a critical lens. The medium used to record Créole architecture has been orthographic drawings. They are two-dimensional drawings which are plans elevation of the Creole houses. They are reductive drawings which facilitate the reproduction of the houses. The labour who built the structures are recorded on a separate cost log as part of the expenses. The orthographic drawings do not document the human presence within the structure. An orthographic drawing is often dehumanising, it contains no evidence of human movement and presence within the building. The movement pattern of the enslaved inscribed through social and racial confinements became invisible in these archives. Consequently, Mauritian Créole architecture went through another form of colonisation by the transcription of the built form back onto paper and into history. It appears that the methods of architectural archival within this process are itself critiqued as it made invisible the enslaved: their knowledge, their roles, their presence, and their movement. The value of the humble Créole house adaptation within Mauritian Créole architecture is severely underplayed. Consequently, these houses are still undocumented and unpreserved. Thus, the Créole house is in a vulnerable state. From one side there is a lack of research dedicated to the Créole architecture of Mauritius within a lens that reframes the enslaved as contributors, and on the other side we witness the demolition of Créole houses in the St George Street area due to gentrification, seasonal floods, poor maintenance and restoration.

The Creole houses of St. George Street

This neighbourhood was affluent with European bourgeoisie and population of enslaved people. Correspondingly, the Créole houses which range from townhouse scale to humble house were built along St. George Street. The Creole houses were built with backroom dependencies where the enslaved were housed. During the 19th century many Indian merchants part of a “petit bourgeoisie” begin moving into this area. The demography of this neighbourhood stayed in flux and a few Créole houses were built and owned by non-European people, which made the neighbourhood fairly diverse. The Créole houses incorporated the indigenous techniques that were practiced by Indian, Malagasy and African enslaved people alongside having rigid colonial forms.

All the Créole houses followed similar setting out principles: the façade and verandahs were built facing the master road. The houses had a compact spatial layout. As they were built with a rectangular core, surrounded by a perimeter of roofed terrace or a front terrace (Edwards 1995).

St. George Street as a case study site, acknowledges that Créole architecture is not an object in space, but is a place-maker for the European settlers and non-European enslaved as well. The layout of the Créole House and its strong emphasis for social spaces such as the *varangue* and the numerous courtyards impacted the creations of Créole space. Créole spaces here refer to “left over” spaces with pockets of intimacy for the enslaved and other people of servitude to socialise during and after labour. These spaces offered limited freedom outside of the European optics. At night, it was also a space of meeting to organise rebellion, musical exchange, mourning chants and other non-European ancestral practices. These “left over” spaces were part of a wider social fabric of colonial resistance. From this lens, St. George streets reveals that the typical Créole house involved social and spatial values that have been understood as dichotomic and unconnected. Figure 7 shows the plan and elevation of the short Créole house, the last one remaining in the study area. This used to be among the most popular house plan due to the access to a backyard and possibilities to build the capacity of house. In this example, the house was extended with two rooms, the verandah kitchen (room 4), an inside outside space opened to the courtyard. In addition, a lived-in accommodation was built for a maid (room 5), which shows the affluence of the resident family.

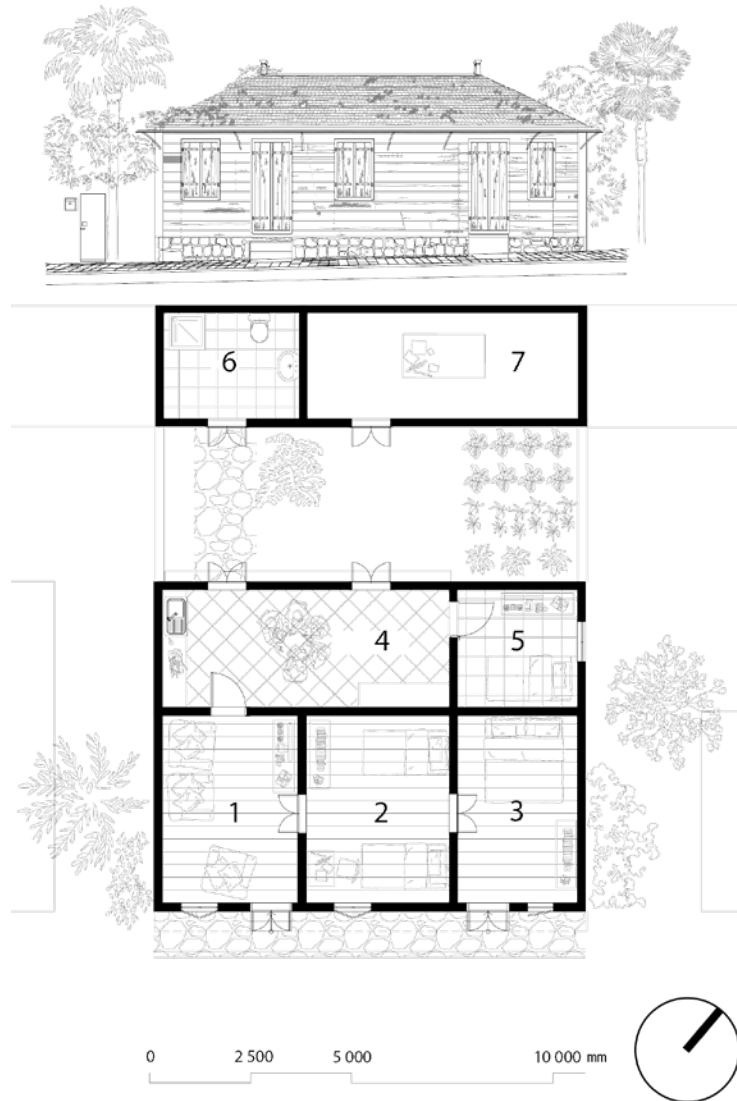


Figure 7
The plan and elevation of the short Créole house along St. George Street neighbourhood
(drawings by the author, 2024).

The elements of the Creole house

This section will speak of the main elements of the Créole house and at times use a Kréol label and its English translation. Including the popular noun of the element is a way to provide counter narrative. The elements of Créole architecture are a cultural synthesis of several traditions as well as a practical response to the local climate and resources. Here are some key elements of Créole architecture:

Lacour - The courtyard

The architecture of créole structures frequently aims to blend in with the surrounding environment. To provide a smooth transition between interior and outdoor spaces, gardens, courtyards, and shaded areas are frequently incorporated into architectural designs. Those backyards were

mostly used as servant spaces, because it linked the house to the external facilities such as kitchen, washroom and freshwater fountain. The movement pattern of the enslaved and women (people here bound by invisible servitude) inscribed social and racial usage of the space. These liminal zones were social activators which operated outside of the colonial optics. They became essential platforms of contact and exchange which are in the Mauritian diaspora, still remembered as places where acts of traditional Mauritian domesticity took place.

Varangue - verandah and balconies

In Mauritius, the verandah is typically called a *varangue*. It is an elevated zone which extends the house into the exterior. Because it rests above the ground level (as low as 300mm), it gives the residents of the house a pedestal position to view the activities on the road. These *varangues* are highly social spaces. The *varangue* is a liminal space that connects the most public rooms of the house: the living room and the study, to the courtyard and the street. This covered area cools the breeze that cross-ventilates the house. It protects the rectangular core from heat gain in summer. During rainy season, it is an extension of the living room and act as a climatic mitigator. High levels of humidity can affect the wooden building, therefore, the *varangue* protects the internal environment by keeping a levelled standard of coolness, humidity and constant ventilation. Some *varangue* use wooden floor, which most use either ceramic tiles or granite marble which were brought from Europe.

Raised stone foundation and wooden walls

Mauritius being a humid island, and the wooden structure of the house is vulnerable to mold and water damage. For this reason, the materials used to build the foundations -stone- and method of construction of it were crucial and it raises the Créole house from the ground to create an air pocket underneath the house. A few ventilation openings are built across each other into the stone foundation to create a natural cross ventilation which cools the house.

The basalt rock is cut into a typical block of the following dimensions: 300mm by 450mm by 550mm. They are mortared onto each other so that the foundation can be raised to a minimum of 550 above natural ground level. Some Créole have dug the ground level to obtain a crawl space underneath the house which is also used as a storeroom.

Above this crawl space wooden floor planks will be placed to further facilitate airflow across the house. The rectangular core is made through positioning 300mm by 300mm wooden pillars from the foundation level to the roof. These pillars are lined with wood with an insulating gap in the middle.

Ornate lace Fascia -dentelle

The fascia is like a lace (or dentelle in Kréol) it serves as a functional ornament. The example in figure 8, represents the three-leaf clover a symbolism often associated with colonial period. The fascia is cut from a flattened sheet of metal. It helps the rainwater drip off the roof away from the wooden walls.



Figure 8
Details of the rainwater drip around the perimeter of the room. An example of ornate lace fascia.
(photograph by the author, 2024).

Roof designs and shingles – bardot

Typically, roofs in Créole houses have a steep pitch and are covered with shingles or metal. This design ensures endurance and durability against the weather by assisting with rainfall flow and preventing the collection of debris. Figure 9 shows an example of fish scale shingles which are particularly rare nowadays. The shingles are typical of Créole houses and are made using takamaka or tamarin wood. One piece is around 70mm by 180mm, being thick at the top and thinner at the bottom. They are placed in a row, then the row above is placed to overlap the bottom row. Most of the shingles of the Créole houses in the St. George Street area have been recuperated from demolition sites. They are repurposed as the wood quality is far superior to the modern wooden alternative. Shingles require yearly maintenance and special protection before a cyclone. Yet, the owners of the Créole houses do not wish to adopt the modern alternative (slate which could heat up the house) or to replace shingles with tinted corrugated iron sheets. The specialised carpentry of making shingles is a precarious skill on the island, as few as 5 carpenters were mapped during the research.



Figure 9
Roofing details of a Créole house showing the shingles, ornate lace fascia, the wooden elements.
(photograph by the author, 2024).

Additionally, the roof designs extend to wide eaves and overhangs. They protect windows and walls from strong rains and minimize solar heat gain; these features are essential to Créole houses. These elements enhance the building's visual appeal while assisting in the maintenance of a comfortable interior environment. The visual expression of these elements began incorporating Indian motifs around the nineteenth century and as seen in figure 9 this model is called the hibiscus. It is inspired from the tropical flower commonly found on the island.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the important insights obtained by using a decolonial lens, while also underscoring the significant influence of French colonial architecture on the urban and cultural environment of Port Louis, Mauritius. From looking at the vernacular adaptations of Créole architecture, the architectural practices in Port Louis were dynamic, negotiated processes of resistance and adaptation rather than merely colonial design impositions. This synthesis of customs and styles demonstrates how colonial impositions were reinterpreted and rearranged to suit local sensibilities and requirements. This is an example of cultural agency. Through the creation of architectural forms that emphasise their own cultural identities and values, enslaved communities actively engaged with and modified colonial legacies, as seen by the vernacular adaptations found at Port Louis.

The Créole architecture of Mauritius originated from the tentative recreation of European urbanism in Port Louis, using “generalized architectural templates” (Carey 2018a). Yet the now vernacular Créole architecture became a palimpsest of evidence of the factors involved in the evolution, beyond climate determinism theory. Details such as embellishments appear in the houses during the economic boom of the island, furthermore, the materiality evolved to become more sophisticated. Other vernacular expressions appeared as the enslaved community became more socially active as a community and would express their spiritual belief through the detailing of the Créole architecture in an attempt to make it home. Their impact was immense on the architecture as they were the main builders and crafters on site. Their IKs, not only created the Créole culture of Mauritius, as explored by anthropologists and linguists, but also impacted the Créole architecture of Mauritius even though this connection has not been researched as yet. The architecture is an archive that reflects identity and ancestry, intricately. It represents the adaptation of colonial architecture to local elements, materials, and IK applied by the people who survived colonisation. Creole architecture is a metaphor to the people of the island who rooted themselves into this new space through collaboration and innovation.

As a site of study, St. George Street in Port Louis offers a wide range of Créole houses to explore through architectural survey and an ethnographic study. And it also reveals the critique that architecture often sees building as an object in a landscape, from an orthographic perspective. Yet, one of the research methodologies is to investigate Créole architecture from an urban town planning level to the Créole house unit. An ethnographic approach breaks down the colonial character of Port Louis and locates St. George Street as a complex neighbourhood of social network in which the Créole architecture of the Créole houses reveal their decolonial imprints.

Conclusively, in a town like Port Louis, colonial buildings have adapted and become vernacular. They do not exist as colonial buildings anymore, nor do they only belong to the colonial era. The buildings became the architectural archives of the enslaved who translated

their IKs into building materials that no longer exist on the island. They do not only speak of a time, but they speak of many cultures that existed before the time and who survived colonialism to create Mauritian modern Créole cultural heritage.

To further our knowledge of how Créole architecture was both a result and a process of cultural exchange, future studies -like the one in course at Mandela University School of Architecture- may investigate more colonial contexts using analogous decolonial framework. Recognising and appreciating these intricate relationships helps us understand architectural history better and promotes a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of the world's architectural legacy.

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Storytelling of Zulu and Sotho cultures on the selected figurative sculptures of Dinah Molefe from Rorke's Drift Pottery Workshop

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This paper examines two figurative sculptures by Dinah Molefe from the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Campbell Collection, which were purchased from the Rorke's Drift Pottery Workshop in 1982. These figurative sculptures are important pieces that tell the story through the portrayal of the cultural history of the region and document historical events. Using invented tradition as a basis, the study highlights the use of cultural symbols by Molefe in her figurative sculptures to tell stories which became part of representations of local cultures. Adopting purposive sampling, the study relies on non-probability sampling techniques based on sampling two figurative sculptures that have similar characteristics made by Dinah Molefe, that connects well with the study of the art of storytelling through examining each sculpture's details to unearth their meanings. The sampling method allows the author to interpret the sculptures respectively connecting with research purposes, supported by the relevant archives and literature. Thus, using existing data from archives and photographs, the study aims to interpret the way Molefe represents local culture through her sculptures. Findings generated through analyses of the sculptures aims to recognise the contributions and roles played by women artists through their artistic representation to preserve and revitalise local culture and history of depicting historical events through their creativity. This is reflected by Molefe's sculptures which narrate representations of cultural identity, using combinations of various cultures and changing artistic styles to suit the contemporary studio context. These key components are apparent in the selected Rorke's Drift ceramics from the Campbell Collection under investigation, which still play an important role in framing narrations of the famous Battle of Rorke's Drift and cultures of the region.

Keywords: Zulu, Sotho, Campbell Collections, invented traditions, Rorke's Drift, South Africa

Dipale tsa ditso tsa Mazulu le Basotho tse mabapi le ditshwantsho tsa tshwantshetso tse betlilweng tsa Dinah Molefe ho tswa Workshopong ya Rorke's Drift Pottery

Pampiri ena e hlahloba ditshwantsho tse pedi tsa tshwantshetso tse betlilweng ke Dinah Molefe ho tswa Pokellong ya Campbell ya Univesithi ya Kwazulu-Natala, tse rekilweng Workshopong ya Rorke's Drift Pottery ka selemo sa 1982. Ditshwantsho tsena tsa tshwantshetso tse betlilweng ke dikarolo tsa bohlokwa tse bolelang pale di bontsha nalane ya setso sa sebakeng se itseng le ho tlaleha diketsahalo tsa histori. Ka ho sebedisa setso se iqapetsweng e le motheo, thuto ena e hatisa tsebediso ya matshwao a setso a entsweng ke Molefe a sebedisa ditshwantsho tsa tshwantshetso tse betlilweng bakeng sa ho pheta dipale tseo e bileng karolo ya ditso tsa selehae. Ka sebedisa mekgwa e nang le morero ya ho bapatsa, thuto ena e itshetlehile ka mekgwa ya papatso e hlophisitsweng e ipapisitseng le mehlala e mmedi ya ditshwantsho tse betlilweng tse nang le ditshobotso tse tshwanang le tsa ditshwantsho tse entsweng ke Dinah Molefe, tse hokahanang hantle le thuto ya botaki ba ho bolela dipale ka ho hlahloba dintlha tsa setshwantsho ka seng bakeng sa ho manolla moelelo wa tsona. Mkgwa wa ho di bapatsa o dumella mongodi ho hlalosa ditshwantsho tseo ka makgethe a etsa hore di matahane le merero ya ho etsa dipatlisiso, e tshetshwang ke diakhaeve le dibuka tsa bohlokwa. Ka lebaka leo, ho sebediswa boitsebiso bo se ntse bo le teng diakhaeveng le difotong, sepheo sa thuto ena ke ho hlalosa tsela eo Molefe a bonahatsang ditso tsa selehae ka ditshwantsho tsa hae tse betlilweng. Diphuputso tse entsweng ka ho hlahloba ditshwantsho tse betlilweng di reretswe ho thusa ho lemoha tlatsitso le karolo e phethwang ke basadi ba takang ba sebedisa tsebo ya bona ya botaki bakeng sa ho boloka setso se ntse se phela le ho se tsosolosa le nalane e bontshang diketsahalo tsa mehleng ya kgale ka boqapi ba bona. Sena se bonahatswa ke ditshwantsho tsa Molefe tse betlilweng tse hlahlang boemedi ba mefuta ya ditso, a sebedisa mefuta e fapaneng ya ditso le mekgwa e ntseng e fetoha ya

botaki bakeng sa ho thusa hore di dumellane le mefuta ya mehleng ena. Dikarolo tse na tsa bohlokwa di bonahala haholo majweng a kgethilweng a Rorke's Drift a tswang Pokellong ya Campbell a ntseng a batlisiswa, a ntseng a phetha karolo ya bohlokwa bakeng sa ho hlophisa ditlhaloso tsa Ntwa e tsebahalang ya Rorke's Drift le merabe ya sebakeng seo.

Mantswe a sehlooho: Sezulu, Sesotho, Pokello ya Campbell, meetlo e iqapetsweng, Rorke's Drift, Afrika Borwa

The background history of sculptures at UKZN's Campbell collection has attracted the attention of scholars and much has already been written about it. There are plenty of sources about indigenous material culture from southern Africa (Winters 2016: 8). This study focuses on a selected collection of figurative pottery currently housed in Muckleneuk, which was the home of a sugarcane farmer in colonial Natal, called Sir Marshall Campbell (1848-1917). The Campbell Collections were the brainchild of William (1880-1962) and his daughter Killie Campbell (1881-1965). Killie Campbell, a keen collector of African art, lived in Muckleneuk until her death in 1965, after which her art collections¹ were bequeathed to the University of Natal, (today University of KwaZulu-Natal) and are a useful resource for research of this nature.

The Collections comprise a rich variety of rare books, manuscripts, and museum artefacts (Matlala 2019: 95), connected to the southern African region, of KwaZulu-Natal. Thus, the study examines ceramic sculptures that were bought originally from the Rorke's Drift Workshop, KwaZulu-Natal province by the Campbell Museum. Museum records show that the sculptures were directly purchased in 1982 from the pottery workshop when Molefe was still an active potter.

Context: Ceramic sculptor profile

Dinah Molefe was accomplished ceramic artist who was born in either 1918 or 1927 (dates vary in publications). Her current ceramics under discussions were produced when she was working as a ceramist at the Rorke's Drift Pottery Workshop between 1969 and 1983 (Sack 1988: 116). Molefe started to make traditional pottery at her home adjacent to Rorke's Drift before she joined the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC) Art and Craft Centre pottery workshop (Motsamayi and Dlamini 2023: 521). Steven Sack (1988: 116) further notes that her ceramic artworks were exhibited in KwaZulu-Natal at the Durban Art Gallery in 1970 and the ELC Art and Craft Centre in 1974, in Florence, Italy and in 1974 respectively, she won third prize in the Brickor Ceramic Art Competition.

¹ Campbell Collections, University of KwaZulu-Natal (<https://campbell.ukzn.ac.za/>).



Figure 1
Dinah Molefe
(source: SABC Documentary, Leihlo La Sechaba, 2010)



Figure 2
Dinah Molefe
(source: Clark and Wagner 1974).

Her ceramics are found in the Rorke's Drift permanent collection, Howard College Library, Durban Art Gallery, KwaZulu-Natal Museum, Tatham Art Gallery and Carnegie Museum Newcastle and the Campbell Collections of the UKZN (Motsamayi 2012: 54). Sack (1988: 116) recorded that her work has been exhibited in various galleries from the 1970s to this day. Dinah Molefe passed away, according to her former colleague, Gordon Mbatha.² She worked as a potter at the Rorke's Drift Pottery Workshop from its inception in 1968 to 1983. She formally trained as a studio potter in the ceramic workshop, with a background of African pottery. Traditionally, domestic pots were made by women (in Sotho and Zulu cultures) and mostly used for household settings (Levinsohn 1984: 76). Women learned these skills from other women in their home context, hence pottery practices have legacies gained from past generations (Vincentelli 2000: 35). Dinah Molefe was already a highly skilled potter producing domestic wares for her community when she joined the newly founded pottery workshop at Rorke's Drift in 1968 (Sack 1988: 116).

Dinah Molefe, who was considered as one of the most creative potters of her generation, retired from Rorke's Drift pottery in 1983. In the photograph in figure 1, she was about 83 years old. She took part in recounting the cultural history of the area through storytelling to her community. In her ceramic work, she articulated artistic knowledge and expertise of cultural history (Clark and Wagner 1974: 148). Molefe ceramic sculptures under discussion depict narratives of local culture and history with precision, using figurative sculptures combining indigenous artistic practices with contemporary studio practices; in the process challenging western dominant narratives that undermine the cultural history of Africans (Motsamayi 2012: 18). In her ceramic sculptures, Sotho and Zulu pot coiling practices incorporate indigenous motifs inspired by western studio ceramic practice (Watt 2020: 63). She is related to the Batlokoa/Batlokwa people who are found in Nqutu. They are Basotho who arrived in the area in the 1800s. Batlokoa Ba Molefe, the land that they occupy, is in Nquthu and adjacent areas (Motsamayi 2012: 28).

² Ian Calder, personal communication, Pietermaritzburg, July 2018.

For UKZN's Campbell Collection, it appears that workshop supervisors encouraged her to produce figurative sculptures due to her advanced technical skills. It is significant that a person who is not a Zulu could portray aspects of Zulu culture with precision. In this context it was cross cultural artistic creativity. Molefe's ceramics (figures 4 and 5) depict both the past and the present to educate present and future generations about the cultural history of the region, including the Rorke's Drift site, using sculptures as visual and historical tools to impart knowledge and educate people.

Research methodology and data analysis

Archival research was an important part of the study as it provides evidence of a historical nature that may reveal more about the subject being studied (Motsamayi 2021: 41). Researchers unearth stories connected to Rorke's Drift, which help to interpret issues related to this research. Using archives as primary sources (Heath 2018: 128), researchers can discover new information relevant to the Campbell Collection. Archival research proves to be more resourceful in obtaining and validating data gathered from various sources (Moore 2017: 133) in relation to description on hand-built ceramic sculptures.

Archival information pertaining to ceramics is based on the artworks and documents held by the Campbell Collection. The archival sources used in this project include manuscripts, documents, records covering electronic records, online sources, photographs, figurative ceramics, recorded sound and other related materials. In this regard, various approaches (Moore 2017: 133) were applied to analyse the data in hand connected to selected figurative sculptures supported by the existing literature. Secondary sources such as journal articles, books, online sources, documentaries, manuscripts, and other related research works were used. The data obtained used to position this study was extracted from files, artefacts, and stored data within UKZN's Campbell Collection and the university library, and primary data collected from relevant sources. The researcher consulted staff at the Campbell Collections to gain an understanding of how Molefe's work ended up in the museum. This archival research relied on liaising with museum staff members to help locate collections and to identify objects of Molefe's figurative sculptures in their collection and to interpret these figures with the relevant documents and materials available in libraries and museums revealing how invented traditions and representation of history and culture are interlinked.

Thematic analysis was applied as a method to conduct qualitative research which involves examining various forms of data from documented interviews, online sources, archival documents, texts, and transcripts, to discover the repetitive patterns of meaning from the given data concerning Molefe's figurative sculptures. Thus, thematic analysis due to its flexibility, proved effective for data interpretation (Braun and Clarke 2012: 58).

The theme is a subject that carries the meaning of the research content from a chosen text document associated with a research objective and figurative sculptures. It helps with systematic identification, connecting data, and the interpretation of ceramic motifs and constructions. One advantage of using the archival research method is that the data has already been collected (Moore 2017: 133). As a part of archival research, the study examined past records to identify connection patterns, especially regarding ceramic sculptural analysis. For this research, a ceramic is defined as a clay product made permanent by heat (Hamer 1975: 5). The figurative sculptures mentioned in this project are ceramic works.

Main objectives

The objective of this project is to enquire about the representation of culture, history and hybrid artistic styles in connection with the selected figurative sculptures. A further objective is to examine the sculptures using photographs, other relevant sources with details, form, surface, material, ceramic techniques to determine evidence of storytelling (Sclater 2003: 621). Both sculptures are analysed in relation to the existing literature.

Theoretical approaches: invented traditions and narrative sculptures

In research, Invented Traditions as a theory, helps to explain the subject being studied (Babbie 1992: 55). In this context, invented tradition is used to interpret figurative sculptures. Hobsbawm (1992: 1) indicates that an invented tradition aims to install certain ideals and customs by revisiting the past, and to connect with the present. Invented traditions respond to current conditions about social life within contemporary societies and represent them as unchanging.

Tradition as a concept has an ideological basis. In other words, the concept “invented tradition” covers those traditions that were invented, constructed, and officially established within the system (Hobsbawm 1992: 2). In this context, Molefe created sculptures that narrate stories in her community through her hand-built technique. Today her sculptures may be considered as a representation of indigenous cultures and history.

Invented traditions are contemporary cultural practices purposely created by establishments to help structure society and connect it to historical events. Thus, “Invented tradition” fosters continuity by drawing from the past. At Rorke’s Drift Pottery Workshop, teachers introduced innovative practices and encouraged Molefe’s sculptural production as a part of women empowerment.

Stuart Hall (2005: 18-20) noted that representation is the ability to describe a particular thing in culture, creating meaning. Tradition is to some degree similar to custom. Both direct what in many societies is considered as traditional. Molefe’s figurative sculptures are representative of traditions, including invented ones, as connected to Zulu and Sotho history, including recent influences of western norms. In this regard, the past is invented through sculptures and presented as unchanging to formalised contemporary cultural practices within the studio environment, by connecting traditional pottery, which is commonly hand-built by women, to earthenware clay figurative vases, through a kiln-firing process. The new methods including the kiln-firing process to which Molefe was introduced, differs from traditional pottery which take some hours to make, and historically was meant for domestic use. Molefe’s sculptural vases are meant for decorative purposes.

Rorke’s Drift site and the Evangelical Lutheran Church Art and Craft Centre

The history of Rorke’s Drift can be traced back to 1849 when James Rorke, a trader, bought a thousand acres of farmland on the banks of the river Mzinyathi (Buffalo River) in Natal. The place eventually adopted his name (Knight 1993: 11). Rorke’s Drift (in isiZulu: *Shiyane*) was also the historical site of the battle between British colonial forces and Zulu warriors following the Battle of Isandlwana in 1879, the historical turning point that finally brought the Zulu kingdom

under British colonial control (Knight 1993: 37). Rorke's Drift was also known as Shiyane or Oscarsberg. Likewise, Ian Knight (1993: 24) argues that the local African populations often call it *Kwajim* derived from James (Jim) Rorke. It is located north-east of the town of Dundee.

Knight (1993: 27) states that Reverend Otto Witt, a Swedish missionary, purchased the buildings at Rorke's Drift in 1878. The store of one building was converted into a church (Knight 1993: 37), which was the beginning of the Swedish connection with the area.



Figure 3
Rorke's Drift Art and Craft Centre (turquoise): view over Isandlwana (red) and Shiyane (yellow).
(photograph by the author, 2012).

After the Lutheran Theological Seminary was moved to Umpumulo, its buildings were left for the church to decide ownership between the Emseni Old Aged Home and the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC) Art and Crafts Centre (Sack 1988: 20). In 1962, a Swedish couple, Peder, an art teacher, and Ulla Gowenius, a textile artist, began their work at the Ceza Hospital near Umpumulo under the sponsorship of the ELCSA (Evangelical Lutheran Church of South Africa). Patients in the TB-ward and maternity ward were taught spinning, sewing and strip weaving. Between 1962 and 1963 the project moved from the Ceza Hospital to Umpumulo and an art and craft advisors course was started. In 1963, the ELC Art and Craft Centre was established in the earlier vacated buildings at Rorke's Drift.³

Due to its progressive programs, the pottery produced at Rorke's Drift became the leading centre for African art and crafts work in South Africa (Le Roux 1998: 85). It was initiated under the leadership of Peder and Ulla Gowenius from Sweden, and was aimed at imparting artistic skills to historically marginalised black artists in the rural areas in order to encourage self-sufficiency.

James Ambrose Brown (1978: 34) noted that African art pottery began in 1968 at Rorke's Drift Art and Craft Centre's Lutheran mission in KwaZulu-Natal, under the inspiration of a Danish potter, Peter Tyberg. Thus, Nordic people played a role in nurturing the artistic skills of black craft workers and offered them a platform to express themselves. When the pottery workshop

³ Ian Calder, personal communication, Pietermaritzburg, 14 April 2011.

opened in 1968, Dinah Molefe and other women in the Nquthu region joined the workshop as studio hand builders, using traditional Zulu and Sotho coiling methods. The gendered division of studio work with women potters coiling, and the men throwing, is maintained to the present. They were supervised by Tybjerg. Tybjerg, a mechanical engineer, built a kiln, but technical difficulties with coal firings delayed the full-scale production of the pottery at that time.⁴

In 1833 Americans were some of the earliest foreigners to organise a mission station among the Nguni people of South Africa, and the Zulu people, in particular (Etherington 1971: 75). The first group of missionaries to be deployed to South Africa was recruited during the period known as the Era of Reform (Etherington 1971: 78). Their main purpose was to convert people to Christianity. Their Christian activities were channelled through the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. The missionaries who were operating in Natal were either Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists, or Lutherans by denomination, and some were from European countries, for example, Sweden and Norway, among others (Etherington 1971: 7). It should be noted that the Nordic teachers at the Rorke's Drift Arts and Craft Centre were not themselves missionaries but artists who were employed to teach and direct its art and craft production at the centre. According to Sack (1988: 20), the ELC Art and Craft Centre at Rorke's Drift is commonly believed to have played a significant role in the development of South African black art and crafts in the early 1960s and late 1980s.

Swedish technical assistance in developing traditional crafts

According to Jennifer Opie (1989: 98), traditional crafts, techniques and motifs had been supported in the nineteenth century at the mission stations by the Swedish. This was realised through a school founded in 1844 in Stockholm by Nils Månsson Mandelgren and by the Swedish Society of Industrial Design to encourage and preserve traditional skills and motifs. Such initiatives benefited Southern African indigenous crafts.

The establishment of art centres, along with the one at Rorke's Drift, were thought to play a crucial role in empowering women artists in these Southern African regions. To continue with their nurturing of African artistic skills, Peder and Ulla Gowenius moved to Lesotho, where they established the *Thabana li Mele* community arts development project in 1968; and in 1973, a similar centre at *Lentswe la Oodi*, was established in Botswana (Lewis 2008: 42).

In 1973 American missionaries Reverend Carroll and Gabrielle Ellertson came to teach at the Fine Art School at Rorke's Drift. The Ellertsons eventually directed the Centre after the Lundbohms returned to Sweden in 1975. They subsequently left Rorke's Drift in 1979. Swedish missionaries contributed to creating space for local artists to express their individual and group-affiliations. The ceramic workshop was initiated in 1966. A kick wheel and an oil-fired kiln were adopted in the studio by 1973, and reduction-fired products began being produced.⁵

⁴ Ian Calder, personal communication, Pietermaritzburg, 8 June 2012.

⁵ Ian Calder, personal communication, Pietermaritzburg, 14 April 2011.

Molefe's sculptural influence and gender inspiration at Rorke's Drift Art and Craft Centre

The Campbell Collection of ceramics at UKZN is important, since these figurative vases were produced during the apartheid era when the artistic expression of rural black women was suppressed, and they were denied the opportunity to study art in school (Motsamayi 2012: 19). Molefe's cultural knowledge is the result of living among both Zulu and Sotho people, the two main ethnic groups found in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) (Motsamayi 2012: 81). With a small group of women, Dinah Molefe continued the tradition of women potters using the coil method and decorating their works with cultural motifs based on abstract and geometric patterns. Dean Arnold (1985: 9) notes that ceramics are more influenced by cultural history than other forms of cultural production. In decorations Molefe uses aspects of cultures and traditions of Zulu and Sotho, living in Nqutu. Her narrative art is inspired by classical Zulu art forms (Canocinici 1993: iv), and by *Imizekeliso* (legends) which are concerned with eminent Zulu characters, and the history of the Zulu nation. These legends are used in Zulu culture as a form of education and socialisation. Molefe's figurative sculpture represents *Imizekeliso's* narrative.

All ceramics produced in the crafts section were in a form of stoneware (a hard-strong and vitrified ware fired above 1,200 °C or 2192 °F, and in the process the glaze matures at the same time to form a combined body-glaze layer), also used by Dinah Molefe who would create a vessel shape as the basis for sculptural forms. Molefe's sculptures involved an acculturation, a process, common in the workshop where several cultural practices were applied.

E. J. De Jager (1973: 17) argues that when two cultures meet, we refer to the possible outcome as acculturation. This process is reciprocal, and both cultures are affected (Motsamayi 2012: 30). Acculturation is a characteristic of Molefe's work. She uses Zulu cultural motifs associated with their history. In Molefe's case, acculturation was based on the inter-cultural practices of Basotho and Zulu communities in her environment.

The adoption of the human form in ceramic sculptures is widespread in African culture, for instance in Mashishing (Lydenburg), one of the well-known Lydenburg hollow earthenware heads resembles an inverted terracotta pot with an animal that has a human form perched on top (Whitelaw 1996: 76). Another example is that of the famous Mangbetu women of the Central African Republic known for their clay pots in human form made by hand (Stone 2008: 21), thus indicating that use of the human figure in clay pottery is widespread.

Molefe uses human clay figures to narrate historical events. There is a connection in her work between the historical past and contemporary art practice, as she experienced it in the studio setting. All her figurative sculptures are made by the modelling and pinching of clay. Mixing differing cultural approaches in ceramic art is not uncommon. As Africa is a continent of wide diversity, the traditions of African communities are complex in nature. In addition, African communities have always been in contact with neighbouring cultures. Judith Perani and Fred Smith (1998: 3) state that "for centuries art tradition has been affected by migration patterns, intercultural patronage practice, and the innovative potential of individual artists with a proclivity towards change". Thus, when Basotho moved into Zulu territory, they felt challenged to maintain their original cultural artistic expression and avoid being influenced by their new surroundings and Molefe's sculptural narrative reflects this process.

Technical and stylistic observations

The throwing process was introduced as a Western pottery technique and taught to the staff of the Pottery Workshop, by pottery teacher Tybjerg. The Molefe women, including Dinah and Ivy were not taught to throw because of their pre-existing skills as traditional ceramist-practitioners.⁶ It is of stylistic interest that the sculptural vases have human forms and decorations, which are hybrid in their many references to both local pottery traditions and to the Western studio context of production and stoneware, linked with modernist pottery conventions of the mid-twentieth century (Hosking 2005: 2). African countries, too, have developed approaches to their visual art that are vernacular and not necessarily indigenous but rather invited for a particular cultural purpose (Stevens and Munro 2009: 10).

Molefe's geometric motifs which are associated with vernacular designs, are painted with a palette of brown, blue, and ochre colours. Stoneware was produced through reduction-firing, which is, "the actions of taking oxygen away from metal oxides. The potter uses reduction to coax different colours from the same metal oxide in his clay or glaze, such as black pots from a red clay" (Hamer 1975: 248). Brown slips (liquified clay) decorates both vases, which are unglazed both exteriorly and interiorly and are made of pale terracotta clay (fired earth at low temperatures) which has links to Basotho pottery. The motifs were formed by Molefe in this work by combining different processes, although mainly painted, there are also incised lines made with a sharp tool, and oxides were added in painted layers. It is not always possible to analyse the sequence of formation of her motifs as it seems evident in this work that she added clay designs in several layers.

It is noted that Zulu beer potters making domestic wares did not use slips or oxides of any kind but that slips and oxides are strongly featured in the wares of Sotho groups. Alida Zaverdinos (1997: 291) notes that Basotho decorate their vessels with ochre bands applied and incised on smaller vessels. However, the decorative patterns may be inspired by pots found in the Zulu tradition, which are often decorated with applied pellets, arranged in geometric patterns. Some clusters of pellets look like flowers, and some decorations of loops in longitudinal lines, resemble stitch-like incisions. The inference is that sewn, fabric designs were transferred into a domestic context of vernacular pottery designs, and hence into the Rorke's Drift studio. The designs of these ceramic pieces by Dinah Molefe may be referenced to this form of intercultural transfer. Local tradition could be associated with vernacular expression. Vernacular art is an art which is produced within a community or region associated with a particular group of people or place (Motsamayi and Dlamini 2023: 524).

Ceramic figures as indigenous narration

Molefe's ceramics reflect certain cultural concepts to which her community is alive. The form and decoration of traditional Zulu women (see View 1a) are hybrid in their many references to, on one hand local pottery traditions, and on the other hand, to the context of the pottery workshop to studio pottery conventions of the mid twentieth century. Reduction firing is to be linked also with modernist studio pottery conventions of the mid-twentieth century (Motsamayi 2012: 78). All ceramics discussed below are in the form of stoneware, done by Dinah Molefe, and based on an African vessel with cylindrical neck known as *Uphiso* (Grossert 1978: 37). An analysis of each sculpture is provided below.

⁶ Ian Calder, personal communication, Pietermaritzburg, 14 April 2011.

Analysis of a traditional Zulu woman

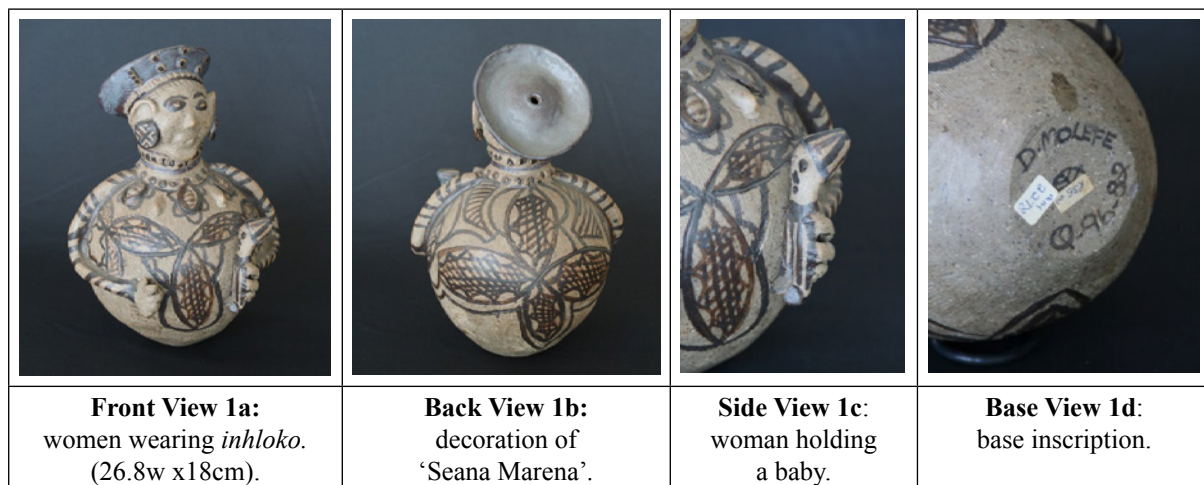


Figure 4
Traditional Zulu woman
(photographs by the author, 2012).

Front View (1a) portrays a Zulu woman with *Inhloko*, a round fibre and blue colour headdress, similar to that worn by female members of the Nazareth Baptist Church known for amalgamating traditional Zulu practices and Christian religion. The headdress has a cultural meaning which is very important. It is sometimes associated with *isicholo* (married woman's headdress), which is much broader compared to *inhloko*. The *isicholo* is a headdress based on a married woman's hair style, and is a symbol of womanhood in Zulu culture, when worn by married women (Bleek 1952: 33). This form of headdress has been changing in terms of design and styles throughout the years.

A Zulu woman is depicted with bigger earplugs, known as *iziqhaza* which is based on the custom of ear piercing practiced among Zulu people. The earplug is made of pierced wood and decorated with paint (Grossert 1978: 52). The woman is wearing the *isidwaba*, which is a traditional Zulu women's leather skirt worn by a recently betrothed or married woman. *Isidwaba* is made of cowhide or goatskin, and is associated with *Umemulo*, which is a ceremony about coming of age.

Back View (1b) of the figurative vase has motifs which have been borrowed from *Seana Marena* which is a popular blanket among Basotho traditionalists. The *Seana Marena* is a Jacquard woven blanket, inspired by a traditional Welsh blanket with a mealie/maize design known as *poone*, with four vertical shaped pin stripes depending on the designer. The colours light blue and yellow are prominent. The term *Seana Marena* in Sesotho means to swear by the Chiefs and is associated with a royal blanket replacing the indigenous leopard skin. Maize originated in South America and was adopted by many African nations as a staple food and is an example of invented tradition. These contemporary motifs linked to maize, symbolised fertility and agricultural prosperity (Rosenberg and Weisfelder 2013: 93). Donald Fraser was the first European to sell blankets in Lesotho in 1877. "Following a meeting between King Moshoeshoe and the Scottish textile manufacturer Donald Fraser in 1876" (Spring 2012: 228), the King introduced blankets with these motifs to his chiefs after it was presented to him. Thus, it is not an

indigenous design and has been adopted as local tradition by all Basotho in Lesotho and South Africa (Spring 2012: 101). The design has original connections with Victoria England Design manufactured by European textile.

It was later adopted as the national blanket of Basotho and has become a symbol of urban and rural identity for Basotho living in Lesotho and as migrants in South Africa. Many Basotho blankets are inspired by British symbols including the Crest (*lehlako*) which is associated with the Victoria England Design (Spring 2020: 159-60). These decorations inspired by British Victorian design have been adopted by Molefe into the studio context communicating cultural hybridity. The indigenous motifs are made (sometimes in combination) by adding clay (i.e., applied decoration) or by incising into the clay surface (i.e. *sgraffito*).

In Side View (1c), a woman is portrayed carrying a baby which is a symbol of motherhood in African culture. The Base View (1d) has the initial and name of Molefe, a symbol of a tree associated with Rorke’s Drift and an adopted numbering system, marked Q for the alphabetical order of firing; and 96, indicating numbers of ceramics fired in a particular kiln; followed by the year the ceramic was made: 82 (1982).

Analysis of a Zulu man as a warrior

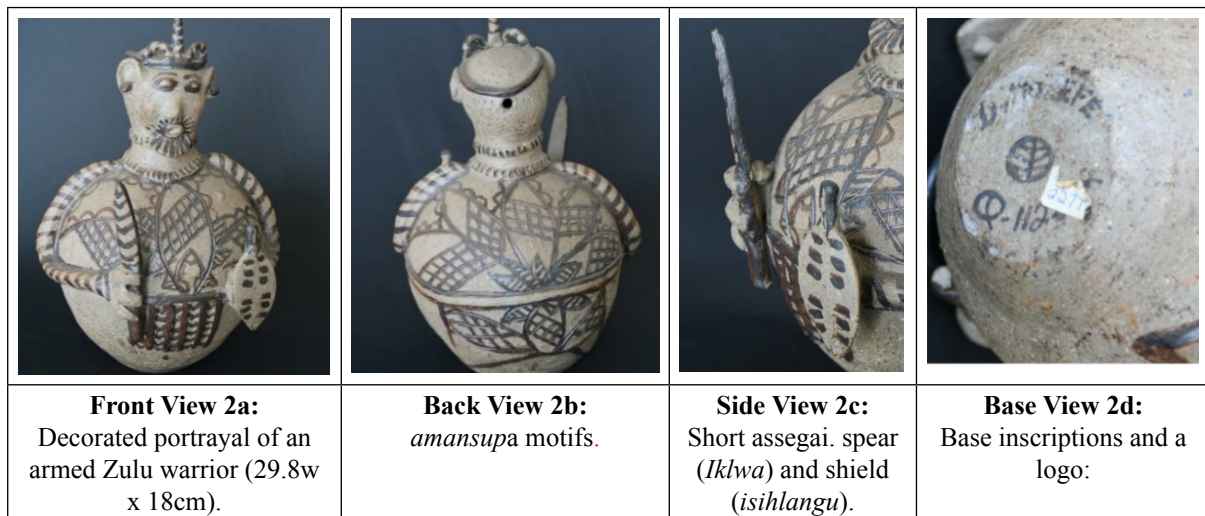


Figure 5
Traditional Zulu man
(photographs by the author, 2012).

Front View (2a) is of a Zulu warrior wearing a crown known as *Umqhele*, which is worn by warriors as a protective charm, signifying royalty and status (Grossert 1978: 52). *Umqhele* is related to the *isiCoco* a head ring, which is a crown of manhood and maturity worn by a man of higher social rank, or *ikhehla* – a warrior worthy of the honour (Savory 1965: 23). The warrior is depicted wearing *ibheshu*, which is a skirt made of animal skin to cover the back view (Grossert 1978: 52). The warrior’s loin-covering (*isinene*) is portrayed. In the past the head ring was a belt made of hair and grass woven onto the heads of married men. Here the man is portrayed with smaller earplugs (*iziqhaza*), popular among migrant Zulu in urban areas. On

his upper neck he is depicted wearing a necklace known as *Igcagcane* (1), which is a necklace made of several linked small squares (Grossert 1978: 52). It is similar to *Imikhohlombo*, another protective necklace worn by a warrior made of antelope or goat horns and could be linked with the crown worn by a warrior.

Back View (2b), of the warrior's neck is depicted with a necklace known as *isiqu*, for bravery. It used to be made of wooden beads resembling small squares, which is associated with the battles. On the vase the individual elements of Molefe's design here include a motif *Amasumpa* (also known as warts) and is commonly found on Zulu pottery utensils. The *Amasumpa* motifs were used by artists working in rural Zululand.⁷

Side View (2c) portrays the warrior with a Zulu cultural shield, which is used as a symbol of protection to ensure the warrior is not harmed. It is known as *isihlangu*, and is associated with Zulu warfare and was popularised in the nineteenth century by Shaka kaSenzangakhona, during his military exploits (Knight 1993: 37). Spears (assegais) and shields (*isihlangu*) were offered by the king to warriors of higher status. These were made by skilled blacksmiths. The figure is portrayed with a short assegai spear known as *Iklwa*, which was used in Zulu warfare in the early 1800s, at *Isandlwana* when the Zulus defeated the British; and at the battle of Rorke's Drift, known collectively as the Anglo-Zulu war. The short assegai spear is made of wood and has a blade with a sharp iron point which is believed to have been invented by Shaka Zulu during his military exploits. The Zulu warrior is depicted with *Isinene* (tassel front apron), worn with *ibheshu* (back apron), and *injobo* (tail hung from the side of the waist).⁸

Base View (1d) has a symbol of a tree associated with Rorke's Drift and a numbering schedule marked: Q for (alphabetical number of firing); and 122 indicating numbers of ceramics fired in that kiln; followed by the year the ceramic was made (82 refers to 1982). The inscription has a Rorke's Drift logo, and the initial and surname of the artist was written on the base.

Comparative analysis of Molefe's sculptures

These figurative sculptures are fashioned as Zulu beer pots and have long cylindrical necks and are known as *Uphiso* (Grossert 1978: 37). They are used to carry water, and the long neck is meant to prevent water from spilling when the pot is carried on the head. Comparing these two figurative sculptures with evidence from the literature, it becomes clear that these convey invented traditions that were nurtured within the studio context. Traditionally pots in Sotho and Zulu cultures are made by women, since they are mostly used for domestic settings which are associated with women.

Among Basotho *Khokhotsi*, orange-coloured substances sourced from basalt stone were used to colour rims of *Nkho* (a larger clay vessel with a narrow neck used for storing liquids and carrying water). Molefe's sculptures have a brown colour which is related to the Basotho material culture (Zaverdinos 1997: 285). It should be noted that Zulu beer potters making domestic wares did not use slips or oxides of any kind but that slips and oxides are strongly featured in the wares of the Basotho. Techniques used by Molefe at the Pottery Workshop are consistent with the hand building processes of coiling. Molefe's works display traditional geometric motifs found in contemporary Basotho blankets.

⁷ Ian Calder, personal communication, Pietermaritzburg, 8 June 2012.

⁸ Ian Calder, personal communication, Pietermaritzburg, 14 April 2011.

In relation to the Pottery Workshop, the Basotho and Zulu were never separated from each other; and that is why they were able to produce cross-cultural art. Artists at the Pottery Workshop were not guided by specific individual artistic expression, although the earliest Zulu artists like Gerard Bhengu, portrayed Zulu women with various hairstyles of the past (Savory 1965: 11). In Molefe's figurative sculptures and pottery, the ceramic vase was built first and the human head and other figures were added to the vase. Traditional geometric designs are common, and her hand-built figurative sculptures involved applying clay coils as decorations. She used a palette of brown, ochres and blue, and black for her pots. It appears that in her decorations, she applied clay coils, dots, or texture in the form of a basic repeat pattern.⁹

Sidney Littlefield Kasfir says that “[a] formal [modern] art-school education does two things in addition to the creation of this artistic consciousness: it offers a mastery of techniques which take time and practice, but it also offers specialised materials and equipment and confers some level of familiarity with world art history” (Kasfir 2000: 125). The interaction between the Swedish, American and South African teachers and the Zulu and Basotho students in an African context, made for a complexity of artistic exchanges and cross-cultural influences. Some figurative works seem to have been encouraged by missionaries due to their similarity of portraying the cultural life of Africans common with other artists who were influenced by Christian institutions, such as the artist Gerard Bhengu and sculptor Michael Zondi.

Conclusion: creation of meanings through artistic innovation and acculturation

Scholars have recorded artistic creativity among Sotho people who lived with Zulus in the past, but also noted the loss of Sotho culture as was passed on from generation to generation (Bryant 1949: 4; Zaverdinos 1997: 291). For purpose of this study, this process is recognised as acculturation. This is evident in pottery made by Ivy and Dinah Molefe; from the Batlokoa group from Nquthu, which bare similarities with Zulu pots because of the acculturation process. Acculturation occurred among these groups, as it is believed that intermarriages were taking place resulting in the mixing of cultures. Significantly, although there were some cultural differences, these groups lived together in harmony.

The ELC Art and Craft production combines Swedish technical assistance and traditional African design (Sack 1988: 20). Arnold (1985: 220) noted that “the process by which innovations enter a society is closely related to the socio-economic position of the innovation”. This new art combined Basotho and Zulu designs and narratives, like the figurative sculptures, because of the new artistic expression by black artists at the pottery workshop. Frank Jolles (2005: 115) argues that “once the regional style had been established, the balance between the retention of the original configurations and newly introduced variants brought about an ongoing evolution of styles. As rural mobility increased, the balance shifted in favour of innovation, leading to a plethora of new motifs, some of which, such as a reference to beadwork styles, can be used as markers in dating pots. They reflect the ever-evolving situation in which changing circumstances and allegiances are echoed in the material culture of people”.

As one of the founding Basotho women ceramists, at the Pottery Workshop, Basotho women generally have been making pots for centuries. Dinah Molefe amalgamated Zulu and Sotho culture in the studio, which had been already existing in the cultural sphere. This was

⁹ Ian Calder, personal communication, Pietermaritzburg, 8 June 2012.

made possible by what A.T. Bryant (1949: 4) believed to be “the mutual relationship”, both philosophical and ethnological, between the Nguni (Zulu) and Sutu (Sotho) groups. This may be associated with the link that exists in Europe between the English, Germans and Scandinavians of the Nordic race (Bryant 1949: 4). According to the authors, Mathodi Freddie Motsamayi and Phindile Dlamini (2023: 531), “The Molefe vases combine Basotho and Zulu indigenous traditions of construction in their forms, motifs and decorations. Their stoneware glazes do not follow African ceramic traditions but derive from Modernist studio genres of stoneware. The collection’s works (...) reflect strongly the cultural practices of local Sotho and Zulu ceramicists”. There is also the linguistic influence of Nguni languages on southern Sotho languages in coastal regions. It is important to note that since there were people from different backgrounds involved in the Rorke’s Drift Pottery Workshop, it is likely that some other groups’ traditions and cultural practices will be visualised in artworks depending on their artist tradition.

In relation to this, traditions have been associated with static and unchanging practices, but Molefe deconstructed this notion by adopting invented traditions which transformed her art to suit contemporality. Therefore, it is difficult for art objects to have a specific meaning and people tend to have their own perceptions about an object. This process led to the creation of art and crafts that have new meanings similar to Molefe’s figurative sculptures, which is what happened to the Rorke’s Drift artworks. Interpretation of an object depends on who is interpreting it and is therefore a continuous process that forms part of the multiple cultures already discussed.

Thus, regarding the ceramic figures discussed in this paper, their meanings are derived from invented traditions which were created by Molefe within the pottery workshop to reconnect with archives and visualise with the past events. Molefe’s sculptural work is therefore open to many interpretations. Within the Rorke’s Drift Art and Craft Centre, relationships exist between these sculptural works and their context; for example, where the ceramic was produced and how it is perceived and interpreted based on examples from the Campbell Collection to create a meaningful link to cultural history.

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Ethical consideration

All collections are owned by the university. The authors obtained permission through previous research, to use archives and collections for research purposes and to publish research results according to institutional guidelines for research.

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Arresting the ravages of time: Neoclassical architecture, with reference to some Neoclassical houses in Mytilene, Lesvos

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This paper examines Neoclassical architecture, with special attention to some Neoclassical houses in Mytilene, Lesvos, Greece, with a view to articulating the spatio-temporal implications of its characteristic spatial modulations. It is argued that, as the epithet, “Neoclassical”, suggests, its emphasis on geometric forms of a certain kind instantiates an assault on time, and concomitantly an attempt to escape from time’s ravages, in contrast with different kinds of architecture, for example that of the Black Forest farmhouse discussed by Heidegger, which embraces time and mortality. The latter is accommodated by Heidegger’s notion of “the fourfold” – earth, sky, mortals and divinities – and the purpose of this article is to show that, in the light of Karsten Harries’s related interpretation of Neoclassical architecture, it fails to provide human beings with the orienting compass embodied by “the fourfold”, except in instances where tell-tale deviations from Neoclassical principles occur. The work of Harries on Neoclassical architecture serves as a valuable guide and backdrop for the interpretation of selected Neoclassical houses in Mytilene. Harries traces the significance of Neoclassical buildings to the funerary and monumental architecture of antiquity, demonstrating that the secular Enlightenment found in these instances suitable models for an architecture that would no longer locate assurances of immortality in Gothic or Baroque church architecture, with its emphasis on verticality. Instead, it would look for a different kind of assurance in the face of the terror of time and death – that provided by the emphasis on a balance between verticality, horizontality and sublime monumentality of Neoclassical architecture, which promises the individual reassuring participation in a greater totality, such as the nation, or even a universal community beyond this. This analysis is brought to bear on some Neoclassical houses in Mytilene, but not without attention to some revealing deviations from the paradigmatic rules – deviations which show the reassertion of humanising temporal values.

Keywords: Neoclassical architecture, Heidegger, Harries, mortality, monumentality

Om die vloeï van tyd te keer: neoklassieke argitektuur, met verwysing na sommige neoklassieke huise in Mytilene, Lesvos

Hierdie artikel ondersoek neoklassieke argitektuur, met besondere aandag aan neoklassieke huise in Mytilene, Lesvos, Griekeland, met die oog daarop om die kenmerkende tydruimtelike implikasies daarvan te artikuleer. Daar word geargumenteer dat, soos die term “neoklassieke” aandui, die klem op sekere geometriese vorms ’n aanval op tyd verteenwoordig, ten einde aan die vernietigende uitwerking daarvan te ontsnap, in teenstelling met ’n ander soort argitektuur – byvoorbeeld Heidegger se Swartwoud-plaashuis – wat tyd en sterflikheid bevestig. Laasgenoemde word deur Heidegger se begrip van “die viervoud” – aarde, lug, sterflikes en goddelikes – geakkommodeer, en die doel van hierdie artikel is om aan te toon dat, in die lig van Karsten Harries se aanverwante interpretasie van neoklassieke argitektuur, laasgenoemde nie aan mense die nodige “etiese” oriëntasie gee wat in “die Viervoud” beliggaam word nie – behalwe in gevalle van veelseggende afwykings van neoklassieke beginsels. Die werk van Harries oor neoklassieke argitektuur dien as waardevolle raamwerk vir die interpretasie van geselekteerde neoklassieke huise in Mytilene. Harries verbind die betekenis van neoklassieke geboue met antieke graf- en monumentale argitektuur, en demonstreer dat die sekulêre Verligting hierin geskikte modelle gevind het vir ’n argitektuur wat nie langer gerusstelling ten opsigte van onsterflikheid in die vertikaliteitsklem van Gotiese of Barok-argitektuur soek nie. In plaas hiervan sou dit vir ’n ander soort gerusstelling in die aangesig van die verskrikking van tyd en die dood soek. Sodanige gerusstelling word in die klem op ’n balans tussen vertikaliteit, horisontaliteit en sublieme monumentaliteit van neoklassieke argitektuur gevind, wat volgens Harries aan die individu gerusstellende deelname aan ’n groter geheel beloof, byvoorbeeld die volk, of selfs ’n universele gemeenskap daarbuite. Hierdie interpretatiewe analise word vervolgens ten opsigte van uitgesoekte neoklassieke huise in Mytilene aangewend, en tegelykertyd word aan sekere veelseggende afwykings van paradigmatische beginsels by sommige van hierdie huise aandag geskenk. Sodanige afwykings

kan as 'n herbevestiging van humaniserende temporele waardes verstaan word.

Sleutelwoorde: Neoklassieke argitektuur, Heidegger, Harries, monumentaliteit, sterflikheid

This triad, monument – prison – museum, illustrates the character of the time like nothing else. Even houses and churches came to be conceived in the image of monuments (Harries 1997: 306.)

The nature of building is letting dwell. Building accomplishes its nature in the raising of locations by the joining of their spaces. *Only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build.* Let us think for a while of a farmhouse in the Black Forest, which was built some two hundred years ago by the dwelling of peasants. Here the self-sufficiency of the power to let earth and heaven, divinities and mortals enter *in simple oneness* into things, ordered the house. (Heidegger 2001: 157).

To be able to write sensibly from a philosophical perspective about Neoclassical architecture – which is the intention here – one has to have a clear idea of the distinctive character of the latter. One may approach this architectural phenomenon by noting, first, that Neoclassical architecture was part of a broad artistic movement which included painting and sculpture. Allison Lee Palmer (2011: 1) provides a succinct contextualisation of this cultural phenomenon where she writes:

Art created during the Neoclassical era was simultaneously historical and modern, conservative and progressive, traditional and new. Neoclassicism refers to the revival of classical art and architecture beginning in Europe in the 1750s and lasting until around 1830, with late neoclassicism lingering through the 1870s. Antiquarianism was increasingly viewed as a way to address modern social, economic, and political concerns in Europe, and inasmuch as these concerns often resulted in very progressive ideals, the style of neoclassicism was espoused by members of the traditional art academies across Europe. Thus, neoclassicism is a highly complex movement that brought together seemingly disparate issues into a new and culturally rich era, one that was, however, remarkably unified under the banner of classicism. This movement was born in Italy and France and spread across Europe to Russia and across the ocean to the United States.

In the excerpt, above, Palmer writes about “the style of neoclassicism” in a manner that seems to presuppose a common understanding of the term, “style”. And indeed, a reasonably informed person as far as art and architecture are concerned, usually has at least an intuitive grasp of its meaning, based on their experience in this context. However, Hazel Conway and Rowan Roenisch (2005: 168-9) alert one to the complexities of “style”:

Styles are not homogeneous or static but complex and changing amalgams of old and new forms. If we say a building is in a particular style, we are referring to its visual and physical characteristics. This implies that other buildings or artefacts share similar features. All the buildings in the style will not necessarily have identical characteristics, for the number of shared features may vary, but most will have a large number of them. Gothic cathedrals often have vaults, buttresses and openings with pointed arches. Some windows are simple lancets with no tracery, others have plate tracery, and yet others curvilinear tracery. Often, there is no single physical attribute that is both necessary and sufficient for membership of a style. In other words, we cannot say that a building is not gothic just because it does not have buttresses, nor that every building that has buttresses is gothic.

It seems that buildings which are subsumed under the name of a specific style could be said – employing Ludwig Wittgenstein’s (1968: 32e, section 67) well-known phrase – to display a “family resemblance”, which suggests that they are not visually and physically identical, but are recognisable as belonging to a group of artifacts that have certain overlapping features in common, but not necessarily others. Moreover, Conway and Roenisch (2005: 172) remind one that the notion of style is not always helpful to understand “revival architecture” such as neoclassicism:

Using style as the common factor linking buildings does not help us to understand anything very significant about the revivals of classicism in different countries, or under different political and economic conditions. In the eighteenth century classicism was revived in France as part of the enlightenment. Inspired by the rationalism and intellectual ferment of the period, architects such as E. L. Boullée and C. N. Ledoux questioned the Baroque and Rococo architecture of the early eighteenth century in a search to understand the essence of the classical tradition. In their new classical designs they did not copy antique originals, but took the spirit of ancient architecture with its simplicity, symmetry, order and proportion to create novel buildings.

Against this backdrop concerning the character of Neoclassical art and architecture, this paper aims to investigate the Neoclassical architecture in Mytilene, capital of the Greek Island of Lesbos, specifically domestic architecture in the guise of impressive Neoclassical houses, with a view to articulating an evaluation of their philosophical-architectural status, that is, their “meaning” in relation to human existence. For this purpose, the thought of (mainly) Martin Heidegger and Karsten Harries will be enlisted and applied to this architecture.

Lesvos is one of the biggest Greek islands, located North-East of Athens (figure 1). Its colourful history includes the myth of Orpheus, who used his mastery of the lyre and his irresistible voice to descend into the underworld in an effort to rescue his wife, Eurydice, from Hades. Because Orpheus’s music left no one untouched, the Furies – appropriately furious at Orpheus’s ability to move them with his playing and singing – killed him, cut up his body and threw the pieces into a river, carrying his head and lyre to Lesbos, where his head was placed in the Temple of Apollo.¹



Figure 1
Map of Greece
(source: <https://www.tripsavvy.com/maps-of-greece-1526137>).

¹Lesvos history. N.d. (retrieved from <https://www.greeka.com/eastern-aegean/lesvos/history/> on 27 August 2024).

Mythology aside, from archaeological evidence it appears that Lesvos has been inhabited since before the Bronze Age. Subsequently the island had a chequered history. In 1507 BCE the Pelasgians settled in Lesvos, later followed by the Achaeans (in 1393 BCE) and then by the Aeolians (approximately around 1100 BCE). In the sixth century BCE, Lesvos became a Persian conquest, in the following century it was the Athenians' turn, and in 334 BCE it was incorporated into the Macedonian Empire, before eventually, in 88 BCE, becoming part of the Roman Empire. In 1261 CE Lesvos fell under Byzantine rule, and from 1354 it was ruled by the Genoese, until 1460, when the Ottomans took over rule of the island.

It is noteworthy that, during this time, two important castles were built on Lesvos –the Castle of Molyvos and the Castle of Mytilene, followed later by one in Sigri. Evidence of Turkish rule is still visibly evident in Lesvos today, in the guise of many mosques. When, in 1824, the inhabitants of Lesvos rebelled against the Turks, the revolt was violently quelled, but on 8 November 1912 Lesvos was liberated by Greek Admiral Koundouriotis, and the island became unified with Greece. This did not prevent another conquest of Lesvos, however, this time by the Germans during World War II, to be finally freed on 10 September 1944.

Narrowing the circle of historical interest to that pertaining to architecture, apart from the impressive church of Agios Therapon (in the old city) – commenced in the nineteenth century and completed in 1935, and characterised by a distinctive (and somewhat incongruous) combination of Baroque, Gothic, Rococo, and Neoclassical elements² – what is particularly striking is the number of Neoclassical buildings, mostly in the guise of domestic architecture, that greet one in the streets of Mytilene.³ Under Lesvos architecture⁴ one is informed that: "... the 18th and 19th-century mansions of Mytilene are influenced by the Neoclassical and Baroque style. They belonged to noble families and distinguish [sic] for the marble decorations, flowered gardens, and wonderful wall frescoes". Unfortunately, it does not seem possible to gain access to detailed information regarding the dates, or years, during which these Neoclassical houses were constructed. The online site, Architecture in Lesvos,⁵ states in similarly vague terms as the site referred to above, that: "Big imposing windows, heavy wooden doors, and marble staircases are matched with pillars and pediments to clearly indicate the rich, urban past of the city. The buildings were built, for the most part, on the cups [sic] of the nineteenth to the twentieth century, combining Baroque and neo-gothic elements with classical Greek architecture". These are stately old houses, and then there are even Neoclassical imitation buildings that appear more as kitsch than anything authentic. But the point is that the Neoclassical style evidently made an impression on the sensibility of people in Mytilene in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

² Churches and monasteries in Lesvos. N. d. (retrieved from <http://visit.lesvos.gr/index.php/discover-islands-2/lesvos-island/culture-of-lesvos/church-monasteries/?lang=en> on 28 August 2023).

³ Neoclassical architecture in Mytilene in Lesbos, Greece. Lesvos architecture. N.d. (retrieved from <https://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-Neoclassical-architecture-in-mytilene-in-lesbos-greece-80017795.html> on 1 July 2023).

⁴ Lesvos architecture. N.d. (retrieved from <https://www.greeka.com/eastern-aegean/lesvos/architecture/> on 1 July 2023).

⁵ Architecture in Lesvos. N.d. *The Other Aegean* (retrieved from <https://www.theotheraegean.com/2021/02/architecture-in-lesvos/> on 28 August 2023).

Why Neoclassical?

That sets one wondering – in formal terms, why did this style appeal to Greek people in this city? Most of these houses are large mansions – certainly by today’s standards – and are indicative that, given their number, they date back to a time of prosperity on Lesbos, namely the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁶ Is there a connection between the style and economic prosperity, or were there other factors at play in the evident popularity of Neoclassical buildings at the time?

The obvious answer regarding the link between economic prosperity and Neoclassical architecture at a specific time in history is in the affirmative. When wealthy people have to decide on the design of a new house, their choice will, at least partly, be guided by considerations of currently fashionable style(s), or if not, then by their own idiosyncratic ideas of what style or design would be suitable as embodiment of their wealth – for example modernist (perhaps minimalist) elegance, or postmodernist aestheticism in the late twentieth century. But whatever the case may be, it is fairly clear that there is a link between wealth and architectural design in this obvious sense.

This is confirmed indirectly by architect and theorist Adolf Loos (see Harries 1997: 32-43), where he famously writes that “Ornament is crime”, that is, that the evolution of culture is synonymous with the incremental removal of ornament, and argues that money could be better spent on satisfying one’s needs than on superfluous ornament, which is a sign of backwardness, in his view. In other words, when it comes to architecture, Neoclassical design, which is eminently devoid of the kind of ostentatious ornamentation found in Baroque or Rococo buildings, is a sign of architectural progress, and economical, to boot, while still managing to project an image of wealth and hence, power.

In addition to this, however, there is a more fundamental connection, I believe, which has to do with the spatiotemporal dimensions of different styles and designs, and which is not arbitrary, but in a sense intrinsic. Furthermore, this spatiotemporal aspect cannot be divorced from the exigencies of a broader historical development, such as the transition from a theocentric medieval period – made manifest in the different architectural styles of the early and late Middle Ages, mainly in Europe – to early and late modernity. This is what interests me here, and the work of Karsten Harries is indispensable in this regard.

The features of Neoclassical architecture

But first, what are the typical features of Neoclassical architecture? Apart from a lack of ornamentation – a reaction against Baroque and especially the naturalistic ornamentation of Rococo – the features usually listed include: “massive scale, symmetrical floorplans, simplicity of form, built to achieve classical perfection..., uncluttered appearance (minimum decorations), roofs that are flat and often domed, supported with tall columns (Doric or Ionic)”.⁷ In introductory books on architecture one usually finds similar descriptions, like the following (Howarth 1990: 115-6):

⁶ Architecture in Lesbos. N.d. *The Other Aegean* (retrieved from <https://www.theotheraegean.com/2021/02/architecture-in-lesvos/> on 28 August 2023).

⁷ Neoclassical architecture style and defining characteristics. 2019. *World of level design*, 18 October (retrieved from https://www.worldofleveldesign.com/categories/architecture/Neoclassical/Neoclassical_architecture.php on 31 August 2023).

Neoclassical buildings are characterized by clean, elegant lines and uncluttered appearances, and also by free-standing columns and colonnades.

The prototype to which Neoclassical architects most commonly turned was the temple, which was considered to represent classical architecture in its purest form...

In Neoclassical architecture orders are also used structurally rather than as a form of decoration. Columns, free-standing and supporting entablatures, are more common than pilasters or attached columns.

Roof-lines are generally flat and horizontal, the roof itself often being invisible from the ground. There are no towers or domes.

Façades tend to be long and flat. In front of them might be what was in effect a screen consisting of a number of free-standing columns.

For present purposes the descriptions of the relevant features of Neoclassical architecture, above – no matter how accurate – is not sufficient, however, apart from which there are sometimes differences between them. For example, the list of features from the *Neoclassical style and defining characteristics* (2019) website includes the reference to “roofs that are flat and often domed”, while Eva Howarth (1990), quoted above, writes explicitly that “There are no towers or domes”. Some of the Neoclassical houses in Mytilene do, in fact, have towers (see figures 4 and 5), which apparently contradicts Howarth, but is in line with Conway and Roenisch’s (2005: 172) observation that “Some neo-classical buildings are an eclectic mix of different classical prototypes”. I shall return to something incongruous in this regard when commenting on Neoclassical houses in Mytilene.

Palmer (2011: 2), whose insightful remarks about Neoclassical art and architecture were quoted at the outset, enables one to get closer to the central interest of this article where she writes:

Neoclassicism has also traditionally been interpreted as a theoretical and stylistic reaction against the immediately preceding Rococo style, deemed too ornate and frivolous to inspire much dignity in art, despite the fact that the Rococo era can also be understood as a revolutionary movement that sought to dismantle some of the late Baroque academic hierarchy prevalent at the turn of the century. Unlike the Rococo, however, neoclassicism favored a linear approach to style rather than a painterly, and thus a renewed interest in central Italian Renaissance art rather than in Venetian Renaissance painting... To the Rococo love of nature was added a moralistic fervor, a sense of reason and law that was absent in Rococo art.

Neoclassicism was a highly theoretical movement, advanced in large part by an international group of scholars stationed in Rome during this era.

The reason why a purely formal, descriptive approach is inadequate for my purposes, and why the citation, above – which mentions moralism, reason and law – is already a step away from it, concerns the significance of Neoclassical features as understood in terms of their spatiotemporal and signifying implications. By this is meant what the stylistic features signify or mean beyond their formal characteristics, where such meaning may be shown to be rooted in historically changing sensibilities. This further implies that one has to set aside a merely formalistic understanding of Neoclassical buildings in terms of “style”, and focus on what may broadly be termed their “existential” meaning, that is, their significance for human existence in a broad sense, which will become clearer in what follows. (Note that by this is not meant their “existentialist” meaning, which pertains more narrowly to a well-known school of thought.)

To pursue an inquiry along these lines, an important source of insight is the work of well-known philosopher of architecture, Karsten Harries, on *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (1997), where “ethical” is used not so much in the sense of “moral”, but in so far as it is derived

from the term “ethos” (which is related to the ancient Greek word that describes the ideals and beliefs of a community or polis, as entailed in the term “character”). In this respect Harries’s work is considerably more helpful than that of Paul Guyer, whose *A Philosopher Looks at Architecture* (2021), in following the precepts of Vitruvius to evaluate architectural styles, does not enable one to answer questions about their spatiotemporal dimensions and connection with history. This is not to deny the value of Guyer’s work, but merely to point to its limitations for certain interpretive approaches (see Olivier 2022).

As an example of some useful insights in Guyer’s (2021: 44, ff) book, one might mention his brief consideration of Palladio, whose work may arguably be understood as exercising a strong influence on the emergence of Neoclassical architecture in the age of the Enlightenment. One of Palladio’s paradigmatic buildings features comparatively in the Introduction to Guyer’s book as illustration of the “timeless” validity of Vitruvius’s three architectural norms. It also serves to stress the reasons for the noticeable influence of this sixteenth century Italian architect in the eighteenth century (when there was a strong Palladian revival). Palladio maintained Alberti’s mathematically oriented rationalist aesthetic (through the creation of “geometric architectural beauty”) within the context of Vitruvian principles. Such architectural rationalism resonates with the fact that, on historical grounds, Neoclassical architecture valorised reason, as I shall demonstrate below.

Harries on Neoclassical architecture

In what may come as a surprise to some, Harries (1997: 293-9) situates the question of the *ethos* of Neoclassical architecture within the context of funerary architecture (graves or tombs) and monuments, dating back to ancient times. These, marking boundaries, demarcate the realms of the deceased and the living by honouring and therefore adjuring the (usually “powerful”) dead from cursing the living (and blessing them instead). He also shows how Christian church architecture and iconography, by contrast, provided visible expression of a *continuity* between the living and the dead through triumphal Gothic arches gesturing towards heaven, and ubiquitous sculptures of Christ on the Cross, both of which assured the living of eternal life beyond death (embodied in the saviour who conquered death). Having discussed the ethical role of such graves and monuments in antiquity, and of Christian churches at a later time, Harries (1997: 300-1) writes:

The very triumph over death celebrated by Christian architecture in the image of the cross had to seem illusory to the Enlightenment. Schopenhauer’s critique of Gothic architecture for pretending that the vertical could triumph over the horizontal, a pretense supported by and supporting in turn faith in what Schopenhauer considered the self-contradictory idea of eternal life, applies equally to a church like Diessen [A Baroque church built during the reason-oriented Enlightenment; Harries 1997: 264-5; BO]. Christian verticality is charged with refusing to take seriously enough human mortality. Here lies one key to the Enlightenment’s return to classical architecture, which promised an answer to the pretense of Christian architecture, to its false verticality. The Greek temple’s balancing of vertical and horizontal, of load and support, seemed to call on human beings to find meaning not in some impossible beyond but here on earth, obedient only to nature and to reason. Much more is thus at stake in the shift from late Baroque to neo-classicism than just a change of taste: at issue is the opposition between an ethos that seeks meaning beyond and another that seeks it within this world.

Put succinctly, far from merely instantiating the arbitrary return to a classical style for the sake of (quasi-)novelty – as books on Neoclassical architecture might suggest – Harries’s scrupulously philosophical interpretation of Neoclassical architecture demonstrates that it marks the return to secular values, instead of the spiritual values enshrined in Christian architecture, whether Gothic

or Baroque. It is in the light of this that the “disintegration of the church paradigm” and the enthusiasm of Enlightenment architects for the monument should be understood (Harries 1997: 301). In so doing, their monument-designs re-connect them with the *ethos* animating ancient approaches to funerary architecture.

What are the (spatio-) temporal implications of these, and how are they manifested? Succinctly put: Neoclassical architecture is an architecture of death, sublimity and glorification of some earthly trans-individual totality. This means that its monumentality – even visible in Neoclassical house architecture (Harries 1997: 306) like those in Mytilene, Lesbos – is simultaneously a negation, as Harries (1997: 306) demonstrates, of finite human dwelling. The latter presupposes an acceptance of time and mortality – as instantiated in the peasant house discussed by Heidegger (2001: 157-8; Harries 1997: 152-4).

In brief, Heidegger’s “fourfold” comprises four inseparably intertwined principles, or values, which function normatively as criterion for human cultural practices. This means that, if a practice, such as architecture, or education, for example, does not demonstrably resonate affirmatively with all four of these principles, it cannot be said to be a truly “human” practice. The members of the fourfold are “earth, sky, mortals and divinities”, and what they represent must be seen holistically in so far as they complement one another. Heidegger (2001: 147-8) writes about their “simple oneness”.

“Earth” denotes the ground of our being, to which we are connected through our bodies, and therefore acknowledges all the aspects of our physical existence, such as needs like thirst, hunger and shelter, as well as sexual desire. “Sky”, in turn, stands for the limits to our earthly existence, as well as for the unknown source of what befalls us in the guise of weather-related events such as storms or good weather. One might add that, as limit, it also functions to challenge humans to overcome or surpass these limits through human endeavours such as science and technology. “Mortals”, a self-explanatory concept, reminds one of one’s inescapable death, which is a different kind of limit, marking the boundary of one’s life, exhorting one to find meaning within that demarcated lifespan. “Divinities”, as the word suggests, does not allude to any specific gods or God, but to what is perhaps the most fundamental aspect of human life, to wit, the source from which one draws motivation, or inspiration, to live one’s life constructively and meaningfully. Together, these four values comprise a totality for assessing the question, whether a cultural practice – or, for that matter, a mode of living – satisfies the requirements for a meaningful existence. Heidegger frames his characterisation of the Black Forest farmhouse in these terms (Heidegger 2001: 157-8):

Here the self-sufficiency of the power to let earth and heaven, divinities and mortals enter *in simple oneness* into things, ordered the house. It placed the farm on the wind-sheltered mountain slope looking south, among the meadows close to the spring. It gave it the wide overhanging shingle roof whose proper slope bears up under the burden of snow, and which, reaching deep down, shields the chambers against the storms of the long winter nights. It did not forget the altar corner behind the community table; it made room in its chamber for the hallowed places of childbed and the “tree of the dead”—for that is what they call a coffin there: the *Totenbaum*—and in this way it designed for the different generations under one roof the character of their journey through time. A craft which, itself sprung from dwelling, still uses its tools and frames as things, built the farmhouse.

By contrast, Neoclassical architecture seeks refuge in an *ethos* that seeks to transcend the ineluctable death of the individual by affirming the axiological priority of a greater (secular) whole, such as the nation. Harries (1997: 301) leaves one in no doubt that, given the rediscovered ideals

of reason (in the age of early modern science), the architects and theorists of the Enlightenment rejected what they perceived as the “capriciousness...moral lassitude and a lack of honesty” of Rococo architecture. As Harries further points out, this did *not* mean that modernity (like former eras) did not continue valuing that which made life worth living, and simultaneously as also worth dying for, however, and the architecture produced during this revival of classical ideals is telling as far as the temporal values they embody are concerned. Unsurprisingly, this means that, instead of ideals rooted in the human body – which is subject to temporal degradation and expiry – it was to reason that architects of the Enlightenment turned.

...human beings transcend themselves, transcend their mortality, above all in their reason, which opens up the infinite realm of the spirit, and with it thoughts of a progress toward a humanity no longer burdened by superstition and by the chains that for so long have enslaved it. Such secular self-transcendence, too, is reconfirmed by martyrs, heroes whose self-sacrifice testifies to the selflessness of which human beings are capable even without the false promise of divine rewards. The soldier’s death especially gained a new ethical significance...As the boundary of life, death continues to offer the living ciphers of a personal self-transcendence that alone can justify our existence. Threatening to undercut all meanings, death yet hints at meanings strong enough to meet its annihilating challenge. The architecture of death helps keep such ciphers present among the living.

How is this achieved, particularly in Neoclassical architecture? It is to the monument (including monumental tombs) as paradigm of such architecture that Harries (1997: 301-2) points, and his discussion of such modern monuments – preceded by his brief reference to Laurenz Hirschfeld’s admiring description of the abundance of such buildings in ancient Greece – helps one understand the significance of the modern emulation of antiquity in this respect.

Harries’s discussion of modern monumental architecture commences with a consideration of four monuments on the Washington Mall which he compares to a national “cathedral” of sorts, and Harries (1997: 302) takes this as his point of departure for a lengthy reflection on the architecture of the sublime, which is what Neoclassical architecture essentially amounts to, in his view. Three of these monuments on the National Mall date back to the late nineteenth century (the Washington Monument or Obelisk), and the 1920s (the Lincoln Memorial and the Jefferson Memorial), respectively, while the fourth (Maya Lin’s Vietnam Veterans Memorial) was created in the 1980s. It may seem incongruous that the first of these, with a small pyramid at its apex, assertively projects the cultural image of ancient Egypt, given that – as Harries (1997: 302) observes – the first three monuments referred to “represent the democratic ethos of the country”. Regarding the Egyptian resonance of the colossal Obelisk, Harries suggests that it “establishes a new center” without any indication of how this should be understood, but as far as the Lincoln and Jefferson memorials are concerned, it is impossible not to understand them in this light, given that the former “*re-presents*” [as distinguishable from “represents”; BO] an ancient Greek temple and the latter the Pantheon in Rome, making of them Greek and Roman Neoclassical buildings. That is to say that both of these celebrate the values of democracy and reason in their designs, which are reinforced in the case of the Jefferson memorial by the fact that the statue of this third president (which forms part of it) of the United States, facing the White House, could be understood as instantiating what Jefferson symbolises, namely the ideals of the modern Enlightenment; after all, his accomplishments covered the spectrum from philosophy, science, linguistics, law, meteorology, architecture and politics, and he was a fervent believer in the liberty and equality of all human beings.

I mention this with the significance of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in mind, which introduces a different tone to what Harries (above) thinks of as a kind of cathedral (albeit a

modern one, which arguably makes of this metaphor an oxymoron) comprising these four monuments, with the fourth of these adding what he terms a “crypt” to this “church”. Keeping in mind the function of crypts in churches, in contrast to the other three – all of which represent (and *re-present*) certain classical values, from ancient Egyptian through Greek to Roman – Lin’s Memorial to those who died in the Vietnam war “questions all national monuments” (Harries 1997: 302). Referring to the fact that several commentators have associated Lin’s Memorial with “sorrow”, Harries (1997: 303) writes: “By preserving such sorrow, the Vietnam Memorial calls the living to a community beyond the national and ideological divisions that monuments too often honor”. This is highly significant as far as Harries’s understanding of the role of the monument as paradigm of Neoclassical architecture is concerned.

By comparing the monuments on the National Mall with a cathedral, Harries (1997: 303) is alluding to the fact that the Enlightenment replaced Christian churches with monuments which, not surprisingly therefore, still retain a “religious aura” in so far as they “celebrate the time-transcending greatness of the human spirit as a source of continuing meaning.” He reads this as a manifestation of a new ethos, where the monument functions as “a secularized Christian church, in which culture replaces God”. In so doing, monuments embody communal values by their memorialising of individuals who prioritised those values over their own interests, to the point where they were willing to sacrifice themselves for the continued existence of the community.

To substantiate his argument, Harries (1997: 303-11) lists a number of modern monuments, such as the Panthéon in Paris – which was transformed from a church to a Neoclassical mausoleum by removing all Christian symbols as well as its two towers, and ensuring that light only came from above, thus creating a darker atmosphere – in the crypt of which some of the great cultural figures of France are buried. The others include Leo von Klenze’s Neoclassical memorial temple, Walhalla (near Regensburg), and his *Befreiungshalle* (Kelheim), in Bavaria, as well as the (never built) design for a monument to Newton by Boullée. In his illuminating interpretation of these monuments (images of which are reproduced in the pages referred to above), Harries arrives at what might be thought of as the essential character of Neoclassical architecture.

First one should note the extraordinary fascination that Greece had for the Enlightenment, particularly in the light of sough-after models that encapsulate the value placed on nature and reason – valorised by Enlightenment thinkers – as antidote to the superstition and authoritarianism associated with the *Ancien regime*. The choice of a Neo-classical style must therefore be seen as normative, and as Harries (1997: 304) reminds us, it therefore has a critical function. Despite the fact that such a classical lexicon blended more easily with American Enlightenment-inspired preference for classical models than with what offered themselves as archaic medieval paradigms for German architects (Harries 1997: 305), King Ludwig of Bavaria, influenced by the classical taste of his architect, Von Klenze (who designed both the Neoclassical Walhalla and *Befreiungshalle*), cemented neoclassicism into the German landscape with these two monuments. But there is a significant difference between the two. While the former (the Walhalla) celebrates the philosophical, literary and artistic heroes of classical culture, the second (the *Befreiungshalle*) – intended as celebration of Napoleon’s military defeat – comes across as an undisguised monument to heroic, martial values.

Apart from being, in Harries’s (1997: 305-6) estimation, a considerably more original articulation of a classical architectural language than the other building by Von Klenze, there is something “problematic” about the *Befreiungshalle* in an “exemplary” manner: instead of

striking one as architecture, it presents itself as a sculptural creation. Why is this a problem? Commenting on the monument's cylindrical shape, buttresses and colonnade of marble columns, Harries (1997: 306) writes:

The history of neo-classicism is shadowed by a petrified, sublime classicism that seeks to banish the terror of death with naked monuments, which do not so much signify immortality than substitute for it. By its very essence, the sublime represents an assault on human dwelling. It is not at all surprising that, appropriating Klenze's appropriation of the Greek for their own ends, Hitler and his architects should have chosen a sublime and austere classical vocabulary...

However, as Harries (1997: 306) proceeds to remind his readers, this architectural interpretation of the Greek exemplar was no passive imitation; it shifted its Greek archetype towards an architecture of the necro-sublime, an "architecture of death", which resonates with Hitler's promise, to free individuals from their burdensome individuality in the name of a greater totality, concomitantly assuaging their dread of death.

Hence, what we have here – according to Harries's interpretation of the history of Neoclassical architecture – is an architecture of the sublime. This is confirmed when he turns his attention to Boullée's (never built) design for a monument honouring Isaac Newton, which must be understood against the backdrop of modern architects' commitment to a "sacred architecture" peculiar to the secular time, which would replace sacred church architecture. Harries (1997: 307) draws attention to the colossal, "inhuman scale" of many of the "utopian" monument-designs of this era, which evoke the sublime with their "timeless" quality. This, he avers, projects an image of some "abstract collective" (such as the nation, or humanity as a whole), in the glorified service of which the comparatively insignificant individual may assuage their fear of individual life as well as death. His discussion of Boullée's cenotaph design (Harries 1997: 307-8), in the shape of a gigantic globe, is carried out in terms of what Pevsner perceived as the tension between classicism and romanticism – the massive sphere representing the classical, while the interior, in the guise of the starry sky, instantiates the romantic motif. Harries (1997: 307) sums it up as follows: "...which is just to say that neo-classicism was a profoundly romantic classicism, a classicism marked by the tension between finite and infinite, between clear geometric figures and their ominous ground..."

This may seem incongruous, to say the least, given the general understanding of classicism and romanticism as diametrical opposites. Yet, as graphically illustrated in Jacques-Louis David's painting, "Napoleon crossing the Alps"⁸ – with the visible tension between the stormy wind, blowing the rider's cloak, his wild-eyed horse's tail and mane forward, and the calm, composed figure on its back, apparently unruffled by nature's forces – the two species of aesthetic can indeed be brought together in an artistic or architectural interpretation of reality. At this point one should perhaps remind oneself of what, precisely, the sublime amounts to as an attribute ascribed to artworks or architecture, which correlates with the experience of the sublime on the part of the perceiving subject. Immanuel Kant's (1790: 106) own familiar formulation of the "sentiment" of the sublime – which correlates with objects experienced as being "sublime" – bears repeating here (see also Harries 1968: 36-45; Olivier 2001):

⁸ Smarthistory. N.d. Jacques-Louis David, *Napoleon crossing the Alps* (<https://smarthistory.org/jacques-louis-david-napoleon-crossing-the-alps/>).

The feeling of the sublime is, therefore, at once a feeling of displeasure, arising from the inadequacy of imagination in the aesthetic estimation of magnitude to attain to its estimation by reason, and a simultaneously awakened pleasure, arising from this very judgement of the inadequacy of the greatest faculty of sense being in accord with ideas of reason, so far as the effort to attain to these is for us a law.

In other words, while one feels, unpleasantly, that what one perceives – signs of the stormy wind as metonymy of nature’s unfathomable cosmic might – cannot be encompassed by a set of images, one is simultaneously reminded, partly by the calm expression on the horse-rider’s face, that one is capable of grasping the very sensorily resistant infinity through the ideas of reason, which include the world in its unrepresentable, but comprehensible, totality.

As Harries (1997: 307) reminds one, the sublime has often been understood in terms of this tension, and it applies equally to Boullée’s cenotaph, which turns out to be exemplary as far as the (sublime) interplay between finite and infinite is concerned: the finite human being is confronted by the starry sky as symbol of the universe’s infinity. In Harries’s words (1997: 307-8):

...as Newton’s genius embraced the universe, so Boullée’s sphere, age-old symbol of perfection, encloses the starry sky within. A monument to Newton, the monument is not only that: it is also a monument to human reason, which, awakened by Newton’s genius, recognizes itself capable of comprehending and thus enfolding the vast universe. Here lies the key to the healing power of the sublime: what at first presents itself as a threatening abyss, the terror of endless time and infinite space threatening to reduce to insignificance the limited life span given to each human being, becomes a source of delight once the human being recognizes that as a being of reason he or she transcends him- or herself as a being of nature. If Boullée’s monument can help found a community, this cannot be national but must be a community of all beings who recognize that they belong to reason: a community so vast that it leaps over...all the little communities that normally provide human beings with sufficient shelter to not be crushed by their mortality.

Ironically, however, the fact that Boullée’s design really amounts only to a *finite* artistic *representation* of the infinite universe as suggested by the starry night sky, reminds one of one’s own finitude and mortality, so that, in the end – the recognition of being a member of the community of all rational beings notwithstanding – when faced with the sublime one is, paradoxically, left alone as a mortal being (Harries 1997: 309).

Neoclassical houses in Mytilene, Lesbos

But what, one may ask, do all of these considerations concerning the sublime and Neoclassical monuments have to do with Neoclassical *houses* – surely the latter are exempt from this? Such a question would ignore the fact that, with the rise of neoclassicism, “Even houses and churches came to be conceived in the image of monuments” (Harries 1997: 306). Hence, when scrutinising some of the houses – that is, domestic architecture – in Mytilene, capital of Lesbos, it is not at all surprising to find that Harries’s observation, above, regarding houses (and churches), is confirmed by the characteristics of these houses in Mytilene, although – as will be shown – with some interesting, but comprehensible qualifications.

When looking at some of these (figures 2 and 3), their broadly “monumental”, uncluttered style is immediately apparent, from the flat roofs to the free-standing columns supporting the entablature, the raised buildings accessible by a long, Neoclassical staircase. Intuitively

speaking, it is arguably not the style associated first and foremost with a house intended as a home, that is, a dwelling. Just like Boullée’s sphere for Newton, described by Harries as a “a monument to human reason”, so the monumental geometric properties of these houses, too, strike one first and foremost as something dedicated to reason (despite some decorative aspects, such as balconies, ostensibly detracting from their monumentality), and therefore evoking a universally conceived community, rather than a family. But do humans inhabit their dwellings first and foremost as creatures of reason, or is that a one-sided conception of such multifaceted creatures? I would argue that the latter is the case, and Heidegger’s notion of the “fourfold”, discussed earlier, constitutes a suitable touchstone in this regard (Heidegger 2001; Olivier 2011). From the preceding it should already be apparent that architecture, as cultural practice, may also be assessed in terms of the complex relations among these four principles. Earlier I wrote that the geometric properties of the two houses (figures 2 and 3) in Mytilene seem to indicate that, first and foremost, they are monuments to reason, evoking a universal community, rather than a particular family. Hence, one might ask: how do they stand with regard to the fourfold of earth, sky, mortals and divinities?



Figure 2
House in Mytilene
(photograph by the author).



Figure 3
House in Mytilene
(photograph by the author).

Being only partly creatures of reason, which always stands in a tension with our bodily-based needs and desires, the monumental geometric properties of these houses do not accommodate the first of the fourfold, namely “earth”, in any conspicuous manner, the way that the peasant house, with its overhanging eaves, discussed by Heidegger, does, for example (2001; see illustration in Harries 1997: 153). Instead, its all-too-rational appearance seems to resist any acknowledgement of the body, and hence, of earth. Regarding the principle of “sky”, it is clear that, as monument enshrining reason, it suggests a challenge to the limitations denoted by it, implying a latent, if not actual, attempt to overcome these limitations. Nor, given its flat roof (instead of a pitched or slanted one, like the farmhouse’s) – which meets the sky with blunt horizontality – does it visibly appear to accommodate the unpredictability of the weather in the guise of sheltering its inhabitants, by allowing rain or snow to run or slide down. The glorification of reason also seems to resist a recognition of human mortality (“mortals”), and reveals the “divinity” honoured by these edifices to be reason, devoid of holistically conceived human qualities. In sum: regardless of the prestige attached to such a house, as far as its architectural properties are concerned, it cannot readily be perceived as a true dwelling in terms of the fourfold.

Conclusion: telling deviations

This assessment is not always true of Neoclassical houses in Mytilene, however. Sometimes, it appears, the architects who designed these houses could not resist incorporating a feature that subverts the strict emulation of ancient Greek or Roman monuments, in the process betraying, perhaps, an awareness that this goes against the grain of the requirements of dwelling (as suggested by Heidegger’s “fourfold”). It will be recalled that, when discussing the characteristics of Neoclassical buildings, above, I cited Eva Howarth (1990), who states that Neoclassical architecture does not feature “towers or domes”, although (as pointed out) Conway and Roenisch

differ in this respect. I also said that I would return to an incongruity as far as this is concerned. The incongruity in question is perceptible in some of the Neoclassical houses in Mytilene, as may be seen in the case of two houses represented here (figures 4 and 5). In the first (figure 4) there is a cylindrical tower abutting the main part of the house, and in the second (figure 5), the first house on the right of the row of Neoclassical buildings pictured, features a tower that seems to be modelled on those that were characteristic of Romanesque architecture. In both cases the towers introduce an architectural element that stands in a tension with what the monumental Neoclassical design represents. The latter, as pointed out, amounts to a celebration of (secular) reason, implicating a universally conceived community, against the backdrop of an infinite universe (intuited in terms of the sentiment of the sublime), instead of the particularity of a family or a transcendent relation with the divine, as perceptible in the significance of the “vertical gesture” of Christian church architecture.

In both cases the towers attached to these houses, however, represent the temporality, particularity and finitude associated with the kind of architecture to which they traditionally belonged. Incongruously, the first (figure 4) evokes the towers that belonged to castles and military fortresses, with their function of defence against a particular historical (that is, temporal) adversary, whereas the second (figure 5) repeats the gesture of Romanesque towers, which signal heavenwards towards the divine realm as destiny of humans, who are subject to the contingency and vicissitudes of the spatiotemporal mundane realm. Ironically, in so doing these towers insert a humanising element into the architectural whole, bringing it closer to Heidegger’s “fourfold”.



Figure 4
House in Mytilene
(photograph by the author).



Figure 5
House in Mytilene
(photograph by Mariana van Rooyen).

Moreover, it will be recalled that Harries (1997: 307), commenting on Boullée’s cenotaph to Newton, observes that “...neo-classicism was a profoundly romantic classicism, a classicism marked by the tension between finite and infinite ...” The tension between the towers of some of the Neoclassical houses in Mytilene and their “monumental” geometric properties marks a similar relation between finite and infinite, thus introducing a romantic motif into the houses concerned. The moral of the story? When it comes to house architecture, the requirements of genuine dwelling – as encapsulated in the “fourfold” – have a way of (re-)asserting themselves, by almost surreptitiously inserting telling deviations from time-resistant monumentality (no doubt via the receptivity of the architect or client concerned).

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