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Architecture as Technical Governance at the African Union

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ABSTRACT

Few architectural sites seem as symbolic of the system of political rule whose official seat they accommodate as the African Union Conference Center and Office Complex (AUCC) in Addis Ababa. Funded, designed, and built by Chinese agencies, the complex sits at the center of a shifting set of international relations that also thread through the organisation's longer architectural history. In analysing the project, this article explains processes of material, spatial, and administrative organisation at its core: an array of design and construction practices, building-related technologies, and forms of post-delivery management and maintenance that we argue amount to a mode of technical governance. Understanding this architectural form of governance requires a closer study of the design, construction, and post-occupancy of the AUCC as well as the adjacent German-designed Peace and Security Council building. It also necessitates situating these within a longer history of architectural contributions to the shifting nature of Pan-African governance in Addis Ababa over time.

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Introduction

The African Union Conference Center and Office Complex (AUCC) in Addis Ababa has received significant international attention since its inauguration in 2012. Much of this has focused on the geopolitical implications of its Chinese finance, design, and construction (fig. 1). Local responses to this architectural landmark have revolved around Pan-Africanism and African unity, as Daniel Mulugeta has recently shown.¹ By contrast, recurring reports in western media have offered general criticism of the building as an “alien object” planted by the People's Republic of China (PRC) in Addis Ababa that embodies the PRC's “neocolonial” foreign-policy ambitions in Africa, rather than the spirit of mutual cooperation as it is presented by Chinese and African officials.²

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Figure 1. Tongji University Architectural Design Institute (Ren Lizhi), African Union Conference Center and Office Complex, Addis Ababa, 2012. Photograph by Kenny Cupers.

These diverging perceptions tend to overlook the cultural, diplomatic, political, and social exchange involved in the building's design and construction. Such exchange continues to take place at both transnational and local levels through the building's daily use and management. Current accounts also neglect the shifting international relations

that thread through the African Union (AU)'s longer architectural history, the forms of local and transnational technical expertise, performance, and management in which this architecture is enmeshed, and its potential long-term effects on development in Africa.³ The new conference center may offer overdetermined architectural symbolism, but its design, construction, and everyday use raise more mundane but important questions about technical performance, expertise, and repair. These elements compose what may be understood not simply as a form of transnational architectural expression, but as a mode of technical governance in and of itself: a physical and procedural instrument designed to enable and regulate decision-making within an organisation or society at large.

The AUCC is grafted on a longer history of large-scale building projects for the AU dating back to the organisation's original founding as the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963. That year remains a distinctive inflection point in Cold War-era discourse concerning decolonisation, Africanisation, and development—themes that have remained pertinent to subsequent projects, including the Chinese-built headquarters. The AUCC forms part of a 2007 master plan that also includes the still-unfinished African Union Grand Hotel, funded by an Ethiopian-Saudi billionaire, as well as the AU's Peace and Security Council. This latter project was funded by the German government, partly designed and built by Ethiopian contractors, and finished in 2016.⁴ With its rusticated stone cladding and slanted façades, the building offers a striking contrast with the Chinese-built conference center. The formal contrast between the buildings suggests a geopolitical tension in the current direction of African development; but when situated in the longer architectural history of the site, this contrast belies historical continuities in the transnational architecture of African governance.

Understanding the AUCC as a technological vehicle designed to support a transnational system of rule provides new insight into historical and contemporary practices of governance in Africa. These practices have recently and increasingly come to rely on strategies advocating large-scale infrastructural interventions designed to promote trade and economic development such as the PRC's Belt and Road Initiative. Such infrastructures and their attendant forms of architecture constitute a mode of governance that exceeds the power of formal government.⁵ Governance thus raises questions about the political role of physical environments and designed objects, particularly given architecture's ability to organise and integrate materials, space, and subjects into a specific order or relationship perpetuated over time. Technical governance in this context serves as an analytical concept for understanding architecture as a form of politics by other means, both currently and in relation to the broader, historical discourse of practices of rule and "development" after World War Two. Informed by a larger body of work on techno-politics,⁶ this analytical focus requires closer study of the building norms, standards, systems, and technologies, and the distinctive forms of expertise, knowledge, and language skills they require. Initiating and maintaining technical governance over time requires transfers that may operate relatively independently of the purview of the local or national state. Such governance works not merely through a building's design and completed construction, but also through the services and processes of management and repair they inevitably require

after delivery. Technical maintenance is therefore an important component of governance, key to shaping relations between architecture and society.

The growing scholarship on maintenance in anthropology, geography, media studies, and science technology studies has argued for repair as a “corrective framework” that acknowledges marginalised, historically overlooked contributors to the production and upkeep of built environments in post-industrial environments in North America and Western Europe.⁷ At the same time, theories of maintenance have been relatively and somewhat incongruously slow to emerge in the field of architectural history, despite their obvious relevance to design and construction.⁸ Exploring maintenance both to contexts outside the west and with regard to architectural history is therefore important.⁹

This paper traces technical governance through the physical and organisational history of the OAU and AU since the former’s founding in 1963. Such an African architectural history offers useful paradigms through which we may better understand how design, construction, and management help to establish, maintain, and transform broader sets of diplomatic, political, and economic ties in Africa—beyond the analytics of state-led decolonisation and Cold War geopolitics.

As “China’s gift to Africa,” the AUCC is situated in a longer history of architectural gifting as a form of diplomacy during the Cold War. These gifts mirrored but also differed from other socialist forms of aid as well as western-led development aid projects.¹⁰ Ayala Levin has shown how primarily Western European architects helped shape the modernisation of Addis Ababa under Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie.¹¹ Valeria Verri Guzmán’s study of China’s involvement in building a national stadium in Costa Rica reveals a form of architectural gifting whose “complex political, financial and diplomatic operations demonstrate how PRC foreign-aid projects operate at national and transnational scales.”¹² Wei Chang and Charlie Xue, among others, have recently demonstrated how Chinese influence in Africa is exerted through building projects, in particular through the use of Chinese building codes, control of investment costs, design guidelines, and the opacity of the bid evaluation.¹³ Such scholarship suggests a need to expand the analysis of China’s architectural gifting from an act of diplomatic symbolism to include its various financial, technical, and logistical dimensions and effects over time, particularly in relation to Africa and its shifting geopolitical orientation toward the PRC.

In pursuing these dimensions, our study of the AUCC, and the architectural history of the AU more broadly, shows how a range of diplomatic and political relationships are maintained architecturally, including through systems of maintenance and repair.¹⁴ These relationships are particularly important for a project that is as exemplary of “China in Africa” as is the headquarters of the AU. The success of this project depends both on a high symbolic degree of transnational visibility and on a more mundane level of technical performance, durability, and reliability. The PRC’s continued managerial oversight over the project complicates its own claims of equitability and collaboration relative to its diplomatic partners in Africa and elsewhere. It also challenges standard narratives of South–South collaboration, which presume a shared position of alterity in relation to the North.

Focusing on material and technical agency is not to reinforce an inflated sense of architecture's historical importance, but rather to see it as participating in shaping political constraints and possibilities over time. Such a research agenda requires a combination of architectural, historical, and social scientific methods. As an interdisciplinary collective including an architectural and urban historian focusing on Europe–Africa relations (Kenny Cupers), an Ethiopian social anthropologist with expertise in governance and land issues (Girma Hundessa), and an expert on Chinese architectural history (Cole Roskam), we combined archival research, architectural analysis, expert interviews, and ethnographic observation. Our interviewees included AU building facilities managers, AU officials, local contractors, and construction-sector experts; we also corresponded with the AUCC's Chinese architect. Our ethnographic observation focused on the headquarters and its surrounding neighbourhood over several months in 2022. And our historical work included archival research at the Ethiopian national archives, as well as international and digital collections.

The article proceeds as follows. First, it offers a historical analysis of the institutional settings of the OAU around the time of its founding in 1963, showing how modernist architecture embodied new ambitions of Pan-African independence while reflecting the western dependencies and political conflicts that sullied these ambitions. From there, we examine how the recently finished Chinese-built master plan and conference complex and the German-designed Peace and Security Council building both depart from and perpetuate historical patterns of design, construction, organisation, and maintenance at the core of technical governance, bringing divergent approaches to international development into organisational alignment.

Pan-African Aspirations, Western Aided Architecture

The Organization of African Unity—the predecessor of the African Union—was formally established on May 25, 1963 in Addis Ababa. Thirty-two signatory governments participated in the founding three-day meeting, which took place in Africa Hall, the headquarters of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) that had opened in 1961 (fig. 2). Upon the establishment of the UNECA in 1958, Emperor Haile Selassie had commissioned this complex to host the organisation's meetings and offices, and to serve as a venue for future African international conferences. The establishment of the UNECA and the OAU resulted from decades of struggle for African sovereignty. Political scientist Adom Getachew has recently shown how Pan-Africanism, born in Black Atlantic circuits of anticolonialism since the late nineteenth century, engendered a worldmaking project that cannot be reduced to the shift from an imperial world to a world of nations.¹⁵

Key political figures of African independence, such as Kwame Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere, understood their anticolonial nationalism only as a first step toward African unification. Despite disagreement on the form and speed by which such unification would be achieved, African independence leaders recognised the problematic nature of borders drawn by European empires and the need to rethink state sovereignty. Haile Selassie keenly recognised the importance of this historical moment for Ethiopia. Black internationalists had long celebrated Ethiopia as a bastion of African



Figure 2. Arturo Mezzedimi, Africa Hall, Addis Ababa, ca. 1961. Source: *Africa Hall, Addis Ababa* [inauguration booklet] (Asmara: Il Poligrafico, n.d.) 4.

resistance against European colonialism, having twice successfully pushed back European colonisation. Haile Selassie harnessed these exceptionalist portrayals of Ethiopia for his ambitious project of imperial modernisation, attracting a slew of international organisations and embassies in Addis Ababa.

By the time the Italian architect Arturo Mezzedimi was commissioned to design Africa Hall, he had already become one of Haile Selassie's most favored architects.¹⁶ Mezzedimi was the son of an Italian colonial settler in Asmara, which had become an important center of modern construction during the fascist occupation. As Ethiopia took control over Eritrea, as the UN had decided in 1950, Haile Selassie could draw from this settler colonial architectural and construction expertise to support his architectural projects in Addis.¹⁷ This included the Africa Hall, which was also imbued with an aspirational internationalism derived from western projects for intergovernmental organisations that had been built in the previous decades. To understand the functional requirements for this new type of facility, Mezzedimi personally visited the UN headquarters in New York, the UNESCO headquarters in Paris, the Palais des Nations in Geneva and Strasbourg, and the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in Rome.¹⁸

Building on these precedents, Mezzidimi's design reiterated the centrality of the assembly hall with a domed volume connected to a taller office slab that provides its background. While this "great international organizing machine" would be quite

simple and moderate in color, he envisioned the assembly hall volume to be “vibrating with gayer colors, freer and more open (the new creature, the assembly of the African people). All this was to be presented, obviously, with an outer sense of unity, and yet a hardly concealed desire to abandon oneself to a pulsating play of colours, vivid, vibrating: African!”¹⁹ Like other European architects in independence-era Africa, Mezzedimi emphasised the importance of supposedly “African” forms but also understood himself as an instrument of the “penetration” of architectural modernism into Africa. As such, architectural modernism was to stand in the service of a new mode of governing Africa, despite its role in entrenching global racial hierarchies and dependencies.

Mezzedimi also understood that the building itself would actively shape the everyday work and social routines of the organisations it housed. During his observational studies of other aforementioned international organisations, for example, he came to realise that “the needs, habits and preferences of the delegates and office staff” were important considerations in the design of governance. “Following them in their daily work, during their ordinary office routine, and in committees and meetings,” noted Mezzedimi, enabled “clearing the way for technical solutions” related to the building’s core mission. By shadowing UN and UNESCO employees in New York and Paris, Mezzedimi believed he could understand their work, which included “contacts in the lobbies, the bars, the restaurant and at delegation parties ... their labours, their rest periods, their tensions, their behavior, everything.”²⁰

This knowledge informed his design of the Africa Hall, which he characterised as a series of “continuous spaces” and “internal zones of differing shape and height.”²¹ The complex’s main assembly hall was ultimately left partially open, allowing delegates to leave their seats without leaving the assembly space itself, which also included a balcony level that would be open to the public (fig. 3). Exhibition halls further emphasised the aspiration to make the institution both public and a modern mechanism for continental-scale diplomatic negotiation. Mezzedimi’s design thus transmitted ideals of African sovereignty but also of transparency in this new Pan-African unity.

Africa Hall would become best known as the “birthplace” of the OAU, symbolically amplifying such aspirations of African governance (fig. 4).²² Importantly, however, the building was originally designed not for this organisation but for the UNECA. That the OAU would rely on the UNECA to facilitate its meetings reflects the limited funding at the organisation’s disposal, as newly independent African nations could spare little of their national budgets. To a certain extent, Mezzedimi’s work took this functional dependency into account. “Extraterritoriality areas” were included at the junction of the building’s two posterior wings and reserved for permanent Secretary of the UNECA staff. This zone also featured a doubling of service cores, including stairs, lifts, and toilets, to allow the organisation flexibility in accommodating both its permanent, localised staff and visiting delegations. A “self-governing [system] of zones” at the front of the building also helped to separate publicly accessible space from more restricted UNECA-specific areas.²³

The building’s technical construction and performance helped to enact a distinctive form of transnational governance in Addis. Construction was overseen by members

In fact, they enabled one not only to witness the latest application of artistic skill, applied with a generosity of means and outlook, in such architectural structures, and to take note of the suggestions of the senior officials and specialists, but above all to devote oneself to strict observances of the needs, habits and preferences of the delegates and office staff by following them in their daily work, during their ordinary office routine, and in committees and meetings; by contacts in the lobbies, the bars, the restaurant and at delegation parties; by observing their labours, their rest periods, their tensions, their behaviour, everything, in fact, that constitutes a way of life and hence a habit.

THE CONTINUOUS SPACES

All this was known, and besides contributing to clearing the way for technical solutions, it encouraged the search for particular solutions, above all that of adapting substantially different and particularly favourable climatic conditions to the character and customs of the country. Special efforts were made to overcome the feeling of claustrophobia which had been observed in some delegates after they had sat for hours in the closed-in atmosphere of a conference, and which caused them to leave their places frequently even if only for a short period.

The granting of partial relaxation during the conference — by allowing delegates to leave their seats in the hemicycle without leaving the hall, so that they are able to follow the discussions without interruption, and by arranging that there should be no problem of «In» or «Out» for them, seemed for a time to be the ideal solution for the general assembly hall of Africa Hall.

It was the search for this solution, in fact, which led to the inclusion of «continuous spaces» in the plan. The result, not to limit the hall to a specific well determined volume, but to allow it to continue and dissolve as it were in the abstract key towards the whole sector of the head of the horseshoe — of cylindrical-conical volume — and towards internal zones of differing shape and height, partly open and partly protected from the view of the hemicycle but always continuous and uninterrupted by the great glass windows opening on to the frontal panoramic balcony, constitutes, in fact, the newest and most novel element compared with conventional assembly halls. (And, as such, probably the most exposed to reserves of assimilation, the difficulties of overcoming certain traditional formula being well known).

A practical possibility — that of giving expression to the architectonic volume by the provision of visual continuation from environment to environment, from outside to inside and with the help of a permanently spring-like climate — which constituted a most interesting formula of volumetric placing, became the dominant formal internal language expressing the necessity of extending it over the whole structure by applying to it an intense and suggestive design adapted to the very special character of the building.

There is, in fact, continuity in the space applied in the delegates entrance hall, between the outside and the inside, through the covered-in area for the arrivals of the vehicles, the «fly-over» passages, staircases, walls and glass doors, etc., such a zone automatically acquires, precisely for these regions, coordinating functions of the internal-external viability of the whole structure, between the various bodies of the construction, the possible future extensions and the approaches used by pedestrians and vehicles.

And the ground floor of the fore-part, to be used by the public: the various rooms, such as the exhibition rooms for permanent displays, waiting rooms, cloakrooms, bars, etc., with the entrances, the internal passages, the staircases and the lifts, form a sequence of uninterrupted surroundings from differing destinations but gathered together in one big volume, half-screened off by some structural elements and by aluminium panels.

The same system has been adopted on the first floor, in the lobby, and wherever possible, within the limits, naturally, of essential measurements and the critical judgement of the architect.



Figure 3. Drawing and model photos of the assembly hall, Africa Hall, Addis Ababa, ca. 1961. Source: *Africa Hall, Addis Ababa* (Asmara: Il Poligrafico, n.d.), 18.

of Ethiopia's Ministry of Public Works and Communications and the building's main contractor, who was also Italian. A range of materials and equipment, including aluminium casements, steel, flooring, elevators, and furniture, were sourced from companies based in Nairobi, Eritrea, West Germany, Switzerland, Italy, and France.²⁴

Amid the Africa Hall's design, construction, and opening, Haile Selassie offered the OAU a prominent site in the center of the city, around the current Addis

Ababa University, for the construction of its own headquarters.²⁵ The heads of state, however, insisted that the organisation move into a completed building as soon as possible. The newly established organisation needed office accommodation

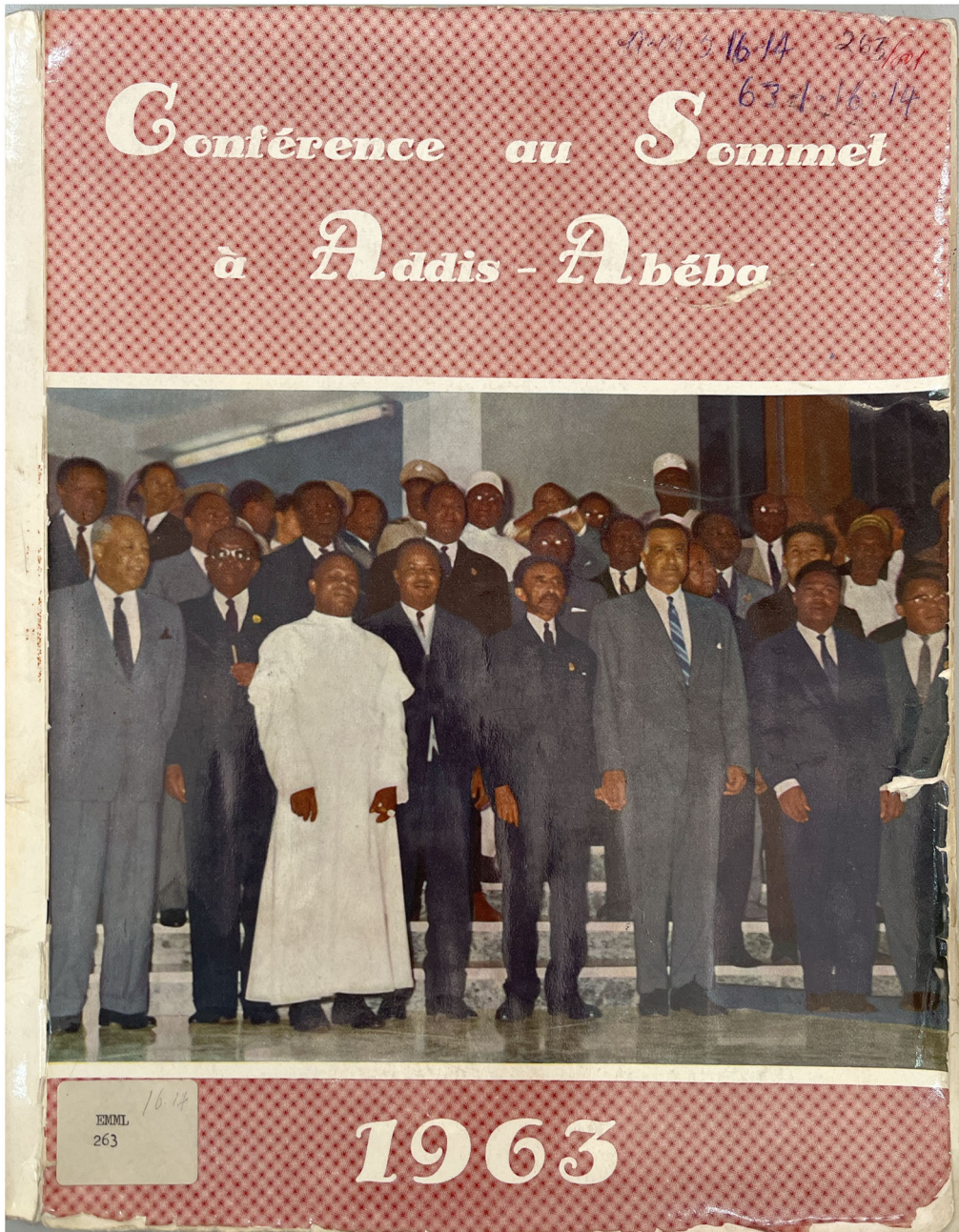


Figure 4. First meeting of the Organization of African Unity, held at the UNECA's Africa Hall in 1963, with the Gion Hotel and Ethiopia Hotel used as facilities for dignitaries. Courtesy Ethiopia National Archives.



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Son Excellence Habib Bourguiba prenant congé
de Sa Majesté Impériale.

L'Africa Hall, siège de la Conférence
au Sommet.



Les drapeaux des Etats Africains Indépendants flottent sur le
toit du Ghion Hotel, la résidence des Chefs d'Etat pendant la
Conférence.



L'Hôtel Ethiopien nouvellement construit dans lequel les
délégués ont été logés.



Figure 4. First meeting of the Organization of African Unity, held at the UNECA's Africa Hall in 1963, with the Ghion Hotel and Ethiopia Hotel used as facilities for dignitaries. Courtesy Ethiopia National Archives.

urgently, which led Haile Selassie to offer the site and buildings of the Abba Dina Imperial Police Staff College, a police academy located at the periphery of the city and near the notorious Alem Bekagn prison.

This Ethiopian “donation” illustrates, as we explore elsewhere, the fraught role of the African Union in human rights violations in post-colonial Africa as well as the darker side of Haile Selassie’s imperial modernisation of the city.²⁶ Yet the housing of the OAU in the police academy also further complicates the role of architecture in governing African unity, beyond the symbolic and technical functions of the Africa Hall. Following heated debates between different imperial government ministries and top officials during the 1960s, a decision was passed that the police academy building had to be funded by income generated from fines by people who had been punished for committing crimes. Additionally, the imperial government received about US\$160,000 from the American Public Safety Program for the purchase of construction materials for the academy.²⁷

For the design of the facility, Haile Selassie commissioned French architect Henri Chomette, one of the most prolific modern architects in sub-Saharan Africa in this period.²⁸ However, little is known about his design for the police academy turned OAU headquarters.²⁹ His design consisted of two simple rectangular buildings and a tower block, with a pavilion and dormitories somewhat at a distance from this composition (figs. 5–7). Three main oblongs created a plaza-like public space in the middle of the compound. The curvilinear recreational pavilion stood in its own verdant landscape (fig. 8). As in some of his other projects in the city, Chomette used a modular construction system with vertical elements of aggregate concrete with small, sharp stones, which give the façade a fine brutalist expression. The architect also

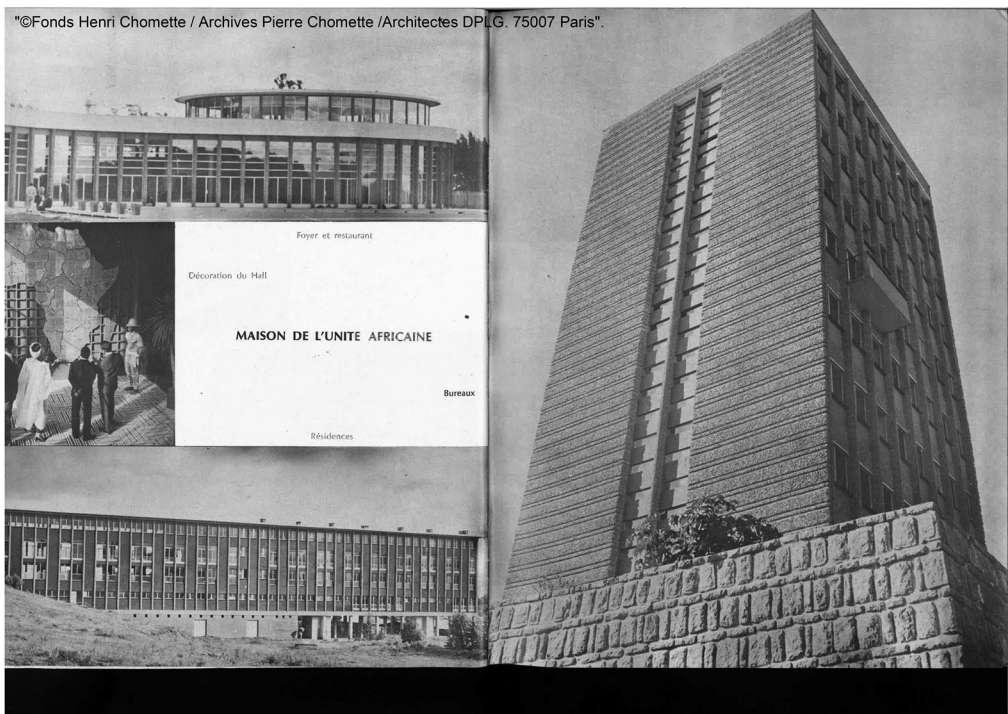


Figure 5. Henri Chomette, Abba Dina Imperial Police Staff College/African Union Headquarters, Addis Ababa, 1965. Courtesy Fonds Henri Chomette/Archives Pierre Chomette/Architectes DPLG, Paris.

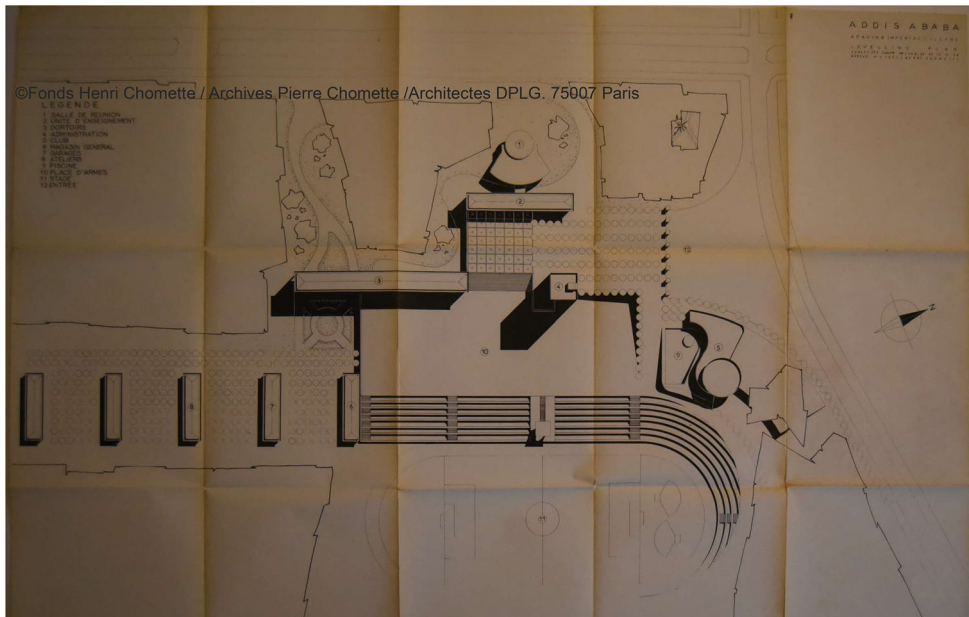


Figure 6. Site plan, Abba Dina Imperial Police Staff College/African Union headquarters, Addis Ababa, 1965. Courtesy Fonds Henri Chomette/Archives Pierre Chomette/Architectes DPLG, Paris.

insisted on the use of such local building materials as part of his intention to create a distinctly “African” modernism (fig. 9).³⁰

Construction of the Abba Dina Police College was completed in 1965, but the site served as a police campus for less than a year before the OAU officially inaugurated the building on October 6, 1965.³¹ By then, the OAU’s office needs had further grown due to the addition of new member states, and its governing demands were prioritised over those of local police officers and leaders, much to their frustration.³² Though designed for the police academy, the building proved well suited for entertaining staff and visiting diplomats. The police academy dormitories were also retrofitted for the AU staff offices. The tower block came to house the seat of the leadership, and Chomette added a balcony on the fifth floor, perhaps to announce the location of the president’s office to the surrounding area. It is otherwise unclear, however, whether Chomette designed any architectural elements specifically to be used by the OAU.

Several of our interlocutors understood Chomette’s design to be more “African” than the current Chinese-designed conference center; some Ethiopians even portray Chomette as a “father of African modern architecture.”³³ That a white European architect can carry such a title suggests the endurance of colonial relations of power—from the height of the African independence era until today. Perhaps ironically, it was (and still is) the narrative of Ethiopian exceptionalism, so central to Haile Selassie’s imperial modernisation, that separated Ethiopia’s reliance on foreign aid and technical imports from the history of European colonialism in Africa. While architectural historian Leo Noyer-Duplaix has framed Chomette’s design as exemplary of an African “critical regionalism,” the building’s western funding, construction, and



Figure 7. Dormitories, Abba Dina Imperial Police Staff College/African Union Headquarters, Addis Ababa, 1965. Photograph by Kenny Cupers, 2022.

design rather demonstrate Ethiopia's continued political and technical dependency on the west.³⁴ Mezzedimi's Africa Hall was similarly reliant upon UN support and European equipment and material suppliers. These European architects represented technical knowledge from abroad, and equipment, material, and certain forms of technical expertise used for both buildings were largely imported from Europe. This was also generally true of construction projects designed or financed by Eastern European experts during the subsequent Dergue regime (1974–91). At the same time, however, this importation stimulated the development of Ethiopia's own construction industry and design sector. Despite the surging presence in recent years of international (and specifically Chinese) companies in infrastructure development, private and public sector construction is still largely in Ethiopian hands.³⁵

“China's Gift to Africa” and Technical Governance

African governance took on new architectural dimensions over the course of the 1990s and 2000s. Globalisation and the rise of distinctly transnational concerns—the end of the Cold War, economic liberalisation, environmental pollution, terrorism, and the AIDS epidemic, among others—triggered changes in presumed “loci of authority” and related capacities of governance.³⁶ These global shifts may have been influential in OAU organisational reform initiated in 1999 in response to growing



Figure 8. Pavilion, Abba Dina Imperial Police Staff College/African Union headquarters, Addis Ababa, 1965. Photograph by Kenny Cupers, 2022.

disaffection with its role in African political affairs, particularly the organisation's failure to address the Rwandan genocide, and resulting in the establishment of the AU to replace the OAU. This relaunching of the project of African unification, in turn, required a new conference facility. With these symbolic politics of representation also came a new regime of technical governance.

The OAU had grown significantly since its founding in 1963, from thirty-two signatory members to fifty-five nations—an expansion that presented numerous administrative and spatial challenges in need of an architectural resolution. To this end, the AU launched an architecture competition, yet one that seems to have gone by without significant attention in architectural circles at the time.³⁷ The competition was won by Tom Ikimi Design Company, a Nigerian architecture office led by High Chief Tom Ikimi, a politician and architect with a long career in Nigerian government, as well as in the UN, ECOWAS, and the OAU.³⁸ The developer of the conference center was Mohammed Hussain Al Amoudi, the Ethiopian-Saudi billionaire businessman, who also undertook the development of the AU Grand Hotel, part of the Chinese-led masterplan.³⁹ The newly formed AU was officially inaugurated in Durban in July 2002, and the AU's new conference center a year later, with the attendance of Thabo Mbeki (then president of South Africa and chairperson of the AU) and Meles Zenawi (then prime minister of Ethiopia), and Amara Essy (then interim chairperson of the commission).



Figure 9. Abba Dina Imperial Police Staff College/African Union Headquarters, Addis Ababa, 1965. Photograph by Kenny Cupers, 2022.

Ikimi's design for the conference center was a monumental, symmetrical structure with a pyramidal roof (fig. 10). The roof was meant to symbolise the foundational importance of Egypt's ancient heritage for Africa. At the same time, the facility was designed to connect smoothly to the Chomette-designed facilities of the 1960s. A lowered courtyard resolves the topography of the site, a difference in height of several floors. At the back of the building is an entrance portico for dropping off visitors. The building features a main plenary room at its center, flanked by offices on either side. The building was meant to represent the AU's renewed ambitions of African economic integration and (after the Rwandan genocide) the abandonment of its long-standing policy of noninterference, though its limited capacity to sustain large-scale meetings and events arguably hampered these efforts.⁴⁰

The building's completion ushered in a new era of AU governance—one shaped not only by the organisation's rhetoric of promoting democracy, human rights, and social justice, but also by a new range of financial and construction actors. Beginning in the 2000s, Africa experienced a continent-wide building boom coupled with a strong "Africa Rising" narrative that reverberated through renewed ambitions to reimagine both the architecture and bureaucracy of the AU. These influences diverged from the established western development models shaped by the IMF and World Bank, and were increasingly informed by China's global rise. They also led to



Figure 10. Tom Ikimi Design Company, African Union Conference Center, Addis Ababa, 2003. Photograph by Kenny Cupers.

calls for a necessary upgrade of the Ikimi-designed facilities less than ten years following their completion.

The AU's growing administrative needs aligned with China's own desire to expand its global engagement through development aid work in Africa, some of which dated back to the early 1960s.⁴¹ Economic liberalisation had transformed China's economic and ideological profile in the intervening forty years, but many of its aid-related connections retained a certain logistical and rhetorical value to Chinese officials seeking to frame their architectural and infrastructural work in Africa as emblematic of uniquely nonhierarchical knowledge exchange and mutually beneficial technical cooperation. Highlighting China's own shared experience with African countries regarding colonial exploitation was another, important element of these efforts, particularly as it served to distinguish China's efforts from more dissociated forms of top-down developmental assistance offered by the United States or the Soviet Union.

In 1999, these objectives took on a distinctly more aggressive tone through the Chinese government's initiation of a "going-out strategy," or *zouchuqu zhanlue*, to more actively encourage Chinese direct investment around the world. In 2006, at the first Forum on China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) Summit and the third Ministerial Conference held in Beijing, then-President Hu Jintao announced eight aid projects designed to express the "consistent position" of the Chinese government in

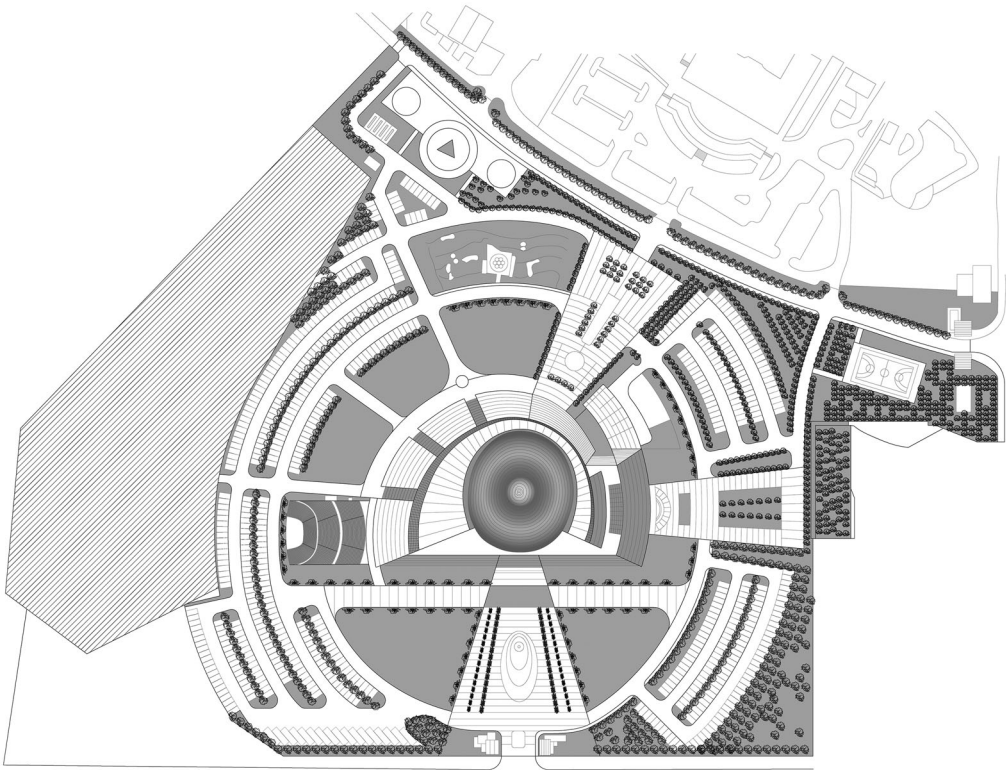


Figure 11. Site plan, African Union Conference Center and Office Complex, Addis Ababa, 2012. Drawn by Athena WT Yuen.

supporting African unity, self-improvement, and integration. One of these initiatives was China's design and construction of a new African Union headquarters.⁴²

The new conference center and master plan by the Chinese government, presented to African leaders at the 2007 AU summit in Accra, Ghana, featured a particularly heavy-handed symbolism about African Unity. In keeping with its international profile, the project's final design was the result of a competitive, national tendering process; many of the submissions, inadvertently or not, deployed the same formal arrangement on display in Mezzidimi's 1961 Africa Hall, including a large, domed assembly hall complemented by a taller office slab.

The Tongji University Architectural Design Institute's scheme, led by the architect Ren Lizhi, was selected from more than forty design submissions. Representatives from China's Ministry of Commerce, the African Union Commission, and the Ethiopian Institute of Architects were responsible for the scheme's final support. The fifty-thousand-square-metre complex includes a 99.9-metre-tall, twenty-storey vertical tower, one 2,550-seat conference hall, two 650-seat meeting halls, four smaller conference rooms, and other event-related spaces (fig. 11). The selected project's overarching theme, "China and Africa join hands to jointly promote the takeoff of the African continent," gestures toward an act of propulsive progress from which formal readings of the project as an interstellar vehicle may have derived, and much has been made

regarding the building's iconic and indexical significance of Sino-African integration and partnership.⁴³

The tower's height refers to the founding date of the AU on September 9, 1999, which made it the tallest building in the city at the time of its construction. The ellipsoidal form of the conference hall was designed to evoke a centripetal dynamic, which Ren and the project design team considered to be relevant to traditional African architectural culture and symbolic of the AU's organisational goals of cohesion, commonality, and unity. Project architects and scholars alike have attributed the AUCC's distinctive formal and aesthetic qualities to an aspirational "modernity," though the specific political and technical dimensions of these objectives, particularly in relation to the AU's organisational remit, remain unclear.⁴⁴

What has been made clear is the extent to which the complex was designed not merely to facilitate African intergovernmental meetings, but rather as a material and procedural showcase demonstrative of China's expertise and ability to organise, coordinate, and lead. Chief Architect Ren has stated that a consulting team consisting of architects, engineers, and officials from the African Union Commission and the Ethiopian Institute of Architecture, Building Construction and City Development (EiABC) provided technical advice throughout the process, from tendering to the design phase. In addition, Ren and members of his design team purportedly traveled to Ethiopia "dozens of times" during the project's design and construction. Ren has also acknowledged the project's aims of "solving the problems" of the AU's "outdated and insufficient supporting facilities."⁴⁵ More generally, foreign- and Chinese-language sources have noted China's capable coordination of a difficult project involving multiple stakeholders, and its ability to adapt and implement design adjustments quickly, and regardless of context.⁴⁶

Incorporating sophisticated, energy-saving building technology adapted to local climatic conditions was another major design objective, intended to entwine local construction technologies and China's own imported energy-saving technical systems, thus highlighting both site specificity and the overall quality of Chinese design, construction, project management, and technological standards on a distinctly global stage.⁴⁷ Built by approximately 1,200 Chinese and Ethiopian workers and completed in 2012, the complex's final cost totaled US\$133 million, with all funding provided by the Chinese government. Chinese technicians controlled the construction process. Chinese-sponsored news articles have also stated that "more than 260 professional and technical workers have been trained and more than 2,000 jobs created" through the project, though some Ethiopian observers have expressed skepticism concerning the endeavour's long-term effects on Sino-Ethiopian technical collaboration or knowledge transfer.⁴⁸

A closer look at the contributions made by the project's major builder, China State Construction Eighth Engineering Division Corporation, Ltd (CSCEC; Zhongguo jianzhu di ba gongchengju youxian gongsi), suggests the complex's value as a site from which Chinese companies could indeed promote their own expertise to both Chinese and international audiences. CSCEC deployed seven of its "major" new building technologies, fourteen "minor" new technologies, and eight other new technologies for the AUCC project, all of which were also being simultaneously promoted



Figure 12. African Union Conference Centre and Office Complex under construction, 2010. Getty Images.

by the Ministry of Construction over the course of the building's construction (fig. 12). These technologies included several different scaffolding systems, glass roofing and curtain wall technology, paneling, and systems monitoring and control hardware and software. High-precision automatic measurement and control monitoring, solar energy and building integration application technology, and general contracting management techniques were also highlighted.⁴⁹ Nearly all the project's materials, too, were manufactured in and imported from China, including its steel, granite, marble, wood, aluminum, and glass, though some building products were also apparently selected on the basis of whether local distribution offices were available.⁵⁰

Approximately ten years since the building's completion, public and scholarly attention continues to focus on its iconic significance as an embodiment of architectural aid from China, along with the claims of mutual benefit and cooperation at its symbolic core.⁵¹ However, such an emphasis obscures the extent to which the organisational framework and management of the facility's design and execution were unique. Fully funded and executed by Chinese representatives, the AUCC was very much what one Ethiopian engineer called "a very one-off project," in large part due to its importance as a showpiece of Chinese technical proficiency and logistical acumen.⁵²

Attention paid to the AUCC's striking aesthetics also overshadows the complex's core function as a mechanism designed to facilitate diplomacy between African nations and in relation to Africa's position in the world now and in the future, with continued assistance from China's Ministry of Commerce. The AUCC enables hundreds of meetings annually among members of the African Union Summit, its Executive Council, the Pan-African Conference, and various ministerial-level meetings. It also hosts local,

regional, and international events that arguably contribute to the development of local politics, economics, and culture and the city's overall reputation.

As a symbol of China's global influence and commitment to Africa, the project's imageability is an understandably important aspect of its overall legacy. That imageability, however, needs to be understood as dependent not merely upon the maintenance of the building's physical appearance for the sake of its own visibility, but also in relation to how the facility works and will continue to work over time. Technical proficiency and reliability remain essential to ensuring the building's practical use-value on a day-to-day basis, both to AU officials and to the Chinese government. Chinese representatives, for example, have argued that the technologies at work within the complex are both attuned to local climatic conditions and local forms of expertise in ways that render them sustainable over the long term. For example, it is estimated that more than seventy per cent of its rooms are adequately cooled without air-conditioning, and through the use of passive shading, natural ventilation, and controlled airflow design (fig. 13). Solar energy facilities help to fuel ambient lighting and hot water for the adjacent park, while "durable and adaptable materials" and reliable, "daily maintenance management" are all intended to guarantee that the AU Conference Center remains technically functional today, more than one decade after its completion.⁵³

The AU facilities management is aware that a building is an economic investment over time, as its costs include not just its planning and construction, but also its maintenance, upkeep, and repair over the years of its use. The Chinese state has committed to maintaining the complex over a period of ten years, free of charge, and this commitment is slated to be continued beyond 2022. Perhaps most importantly, there is a Chinese building facilities team on site, whose offices are directly abutting the conference center (fig. 14). A current member of the AUCC maintenance team reports that the building's daily maintenance demands, including HVAC and sanitation facilities, are carried out by coordinated teams of Chinese technicians and local, AU-affiliated technical staff, with spare parts fully provided by China.⁵⁴

The AU engineers and building managers with whom we spoke were impressed with China's professionalism and its efforts to satisfy the client. They generally appreciate the high standards of the design, and the continued commitment of the Chinese to maintain the building. They see Chinese-led development as a way for African societies to overcome political malaise, whether it is due to authoritarian and corrupt states or popular uprising. Those technicians with whom we spoke also understand very well that the Chinese "gift" to the AU is first and foremost China's "gateway to Africa": a showroom of Chinese possibilities that will convince African leaders of the benefits of Chinese partnership in construction and development, and thus facilitate the expansion of Chinese economic interests in Africa.⁵⁵

Yet the effects of the AUCC as a Chinese gift exceed the realm of diplomacy and require us to situate the building complex as part of a broader technical transformation prompted by Chinese-led construction in Africa. This raises questions about the future of Chinese-led construction, not only of the AU headquarters, but also more generally. With much of the facility's technological trappings nevertheless dependent upon Chinese knowledge, a certain technical dependency on China is inevitable, along with questions as to the risks posed by such dependency over time. For



Figure 13. Interior, African Union Conference Center and Office Complex, Addis Ababa, 2012. Photograph by Kenny Cupers, 2022.

example, perhaps the best-known equipment in the entire complex is its China-sourced data servers, which became the object of suspicion in January 2017 when the Chinese government was allegedly found to be stealing confidential data from them. The AUCC has since replaced them with servers of their own.⁵⁶



Figure 14. Office of the Chinese facilities management team on the site of the African Union Conference Center and Office Complex, 2022. Photograph by Kenny Cupers, 2022.

On the one hand, the project is most impactful because of the ways it displays a new degree of technical prowess in relation to the AU and as such serves to foster a new, more technical mode of governance across Africa. On the other hand, this model is very much reliant upon and largely enabled through China's beneficence, and ostensibly with China's participation. For all the technical capacity presented by Chinese-designed and financed architecture, it remains dependent upon power dynamics rooted in the delivery and management of foreign aid and architectural expertise that have arguably challenged the AU since its founding. In an interview, engineer Dr. Abraham Assefa emphasised that "it's very difficult to manage technology transfer with Chinese companies. The Chinese have managed to translate everything into their own language. So all of their drawings [and] communication is in Chinese, and the communication barrier is very high. Second, [these companies] are not oriented for technology transfer, they have a very strict command system."⁵⁷

The question of technical dependency of the AUCC is also more broadly reflected in the Ethiopian construction industry at large, which is increasingly dominated by Chinese companies and materials. International companies have long maintained significant influence within the country's infrastructure development, yet the bulk of residential construction continues to be in the hands of Ethiopian designers, contractors, and consultants. However, the building materials and technologies they employ now come largely from China—a shift in the industry from approximately fifteen

years ago, when a more significant amount of building material was sourced from the emirate of Dubai.⁵⁸ This change does not necessarily create a direct dependency on China, however, since the brands and standards are international, even when produced in China.⁵⁹ Moreover, access to cheaper Chinese-built equipment and advanced building technology has aided Ethiopian construction companies, such as Flintstone Engineering, in improving their overall building standards.⁶⁰ All this raises questions about whether the AUCC's construction facilitated greater Chinese access to the Ethiopian building industry, and how changes in Africa's relationship to China may affect the ways in which such technologies are supplied and serviced, which may in turn influence the politics that support them.

Activities between the AU and China did seem to increase following the construction of the complex, though it is difficult to ascertain to what extent the existence of the building itself was instrumental in this regard. What is certain is that every African government official visiting the building is immersed in an experiential showcase of Chinese building excellence and has an embodied experience of what a Chinese-built modernity would be like. In the 2019 AUCC Annual Report, for example, China's role in promoting the African Union and improving its outreach in China was noted, with plans to open a new African Union representational office in Beijing that same year.⁶¹

The AU and the Transnational Scope of Technical Governance

In Addis Ababa, the Chinese building contrasts markedly with the German-funded Peace and Security Council building, which was commissioned around the same time and finished in 2016. The building was named after Julius Nyerere, the first president of independent Tanzania. The process of naming the buildings in the AU compound has been carried out following the decision passed by the head of states of the AU, which meet once a year. The choice of naming after Nyerere symbolises the AU's history of post-independence ambition, but might recall Tanzania's history as a former German colony, or invoke the German government's own security agenda for development in Africa.

The Peace and Security Council Building project was part of the portfolio of the German government's GIZ (Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit), which spearheads German foreign development aid and technical cooperation programs (figs. 15 and 16). The key stated aim was to realise a building according to "German standards" in Ethiopia. "Because it is unfortunately not possible to find enough qualified engineers and workers in Ethiopia," GIZ project leader Manfred Off claimed, "we trained skilled workers with our instructors in order to realise the project."⁶² Moreover, such a transfer of skill would encourage the use of climate-friendly and energy-efficient materials and technologies in the Ethiopian construction industry.

The schematic design was done in Germany by the architecture office Hascher Jehle, following a competition by GIZ in 2009. The architecture office was founded in 1993 and works almost exclusively within Germany with a mix of government and private projects and a strong focus on sustainable construction. The Peace and Security Building is one of only a few international projects in its portfolio. "Stability and security, but also transparency and regional connectivity, as themes of the AU,



Figure 15. Hascher Jehle, Peace and Security Council building (interior), Addis Ababa, 2016. Photograph by Kenny Cupers, 2022.

guide the design,” according to the GIZ website.⁶³ This concept was translated into a monolithic building mass with a stone-clad exterior surface and horizontal slits of windows, and with an open courtyard that allows for interior transparencies and easy circulation across and between the building’s five floors.



Figure 16. Hascher Jehle, Peace and Security Council building, Addis Ababa, 2016. Photograph by Kenny Cupers, 2022.

Despite the German design, both the GIZ and the AU emphasise that this was a design-build project ultimately in the hands of an Ethiopian company. The GIZ awarded the project to a local construction company, Flintstone Engineering, back in 2008.⁶⁴ Much smaller than the Chinese-designed conference center, the PSC building is a modest four storeys tall, with an atrium in the middle. While the building lacks the grand symbolic statement of the AUCC, it certainly is not devoid of symbolic representation. The building's ashlar sandstone façade and irregular horizontal window strips suggest an affinity with natural geology and can be read as relying on a long history of colonial assumptions about "Africa" as being in closer proximity to the natural world. At the same time, the artisanal texture is off-set by a high-modernist eco-look that projects this idea of Africa into a sustainable high-tech future. The building's atrium is covered by a high-tech elastic membrane featuring solar panels in the form of the AU's logo, symbolically bringing together the project of Pan-African governance and sustainable development.

In addition to the building itself, the project includes a garden with indigenous plants and a water basin, which serves as the primary cooling device for the building. The GIZ website boasts: "The high tech roof consists of a highly transparent, heat-resistant material that allows UV rays to enter the building. Not only is the material self-cleaning, and not only does it have an unlimited service life, it is also elastic and tear-resistant."⁶⁵ This also makes the roof earthquake proof. Yet the engineers we spoke to criticised this

claim as fanciful and emphasised that the maintenance and repair of this high-tech roof would require it to be sent to Germany, there being no local company that can handle it—unlike much of the products used in the Chinese-built part of the complex, many of which are more standardised and globally available.

Six years after the building was inaugurated, it is possible to draw some initial insights about its lasting effects. According to Dr. Abraham Assefa:

there was a fair amount of, you know, we wouldn't call it technology transfer, but there was a close working relationship. But they will be mistaken themselves, and we ourselves will also be mistaken, if we assume that any of those proposals has matured enough [to influence] the industry. An average construction industry expert would not know whether this technology was brought from Germany or from [somewhere else], and there aren't any kinds of examples that you can say, "Oh, this is a German technology," or "This technology was adopted for this [particular] project."⁶⁶

Flintstone Founder and Chief Executive Officer Moges Tadese has described the construction process of the PSC building as "more organic" relative to the Chinese-designed complex. The building's sandstone façade, for example, was composed of individually extracted and cut blocks to approximate hand-crafted rather than automated industrial production. German concrete, woodworking, and textile professionals were flown to Addis Ababa on short-term consulting visits to conduct on-site inspections and provide training to Ethiopian workers. The involvement of skilled Ethiopian professionals was high, with numerous local contractors and subcontractors in electrical installation, plumbing, and mechanics hired during the construction process.⁶⁷ Collectively, these qualities evoke the working dynamics and aesthetic expressions of Mezzedimi and Chomette's earlier efforts.

At the same time, however, Moges has also challenged presumptions that the equipment and technology used in the Chinese- and German-designed projects can be clearly defined or distinguished based on country of origin. For example, the German project began just as the Chinese complex was completed, and some of the same Chinese-sourced concrete batching and mixing equipment was used for both buildings, though the respective labour systems undergirding each project were different. It is also unclear whether German efforts to use the project to build Ethiopia's construction capacity have been effective or sustainable. Flintstone is currently building residential projects across Addis Ababa, but whether such work is demonstrative of knowledge and technology transfer, or if it evinces the kind of deliberate engagement with local materials and sustainable construction methods on display in the PSC project, remain open-ended questions. Moreover, Ethiopia's construction sector still predominantly operates with materials and equipment from China; cheap, accessible technology in contrast to the PSC's state-of-the-art sustainable elements, which do not fit easily into a more conventional construction project's budget.⁶⁸

The Chinese and German involvement in the AUCC embody radically different approaches to both construction and development, while the continued reliance on Chinese-led maintenance and lack of technology transfer contrasts with the German ambition (but relatively low success) of capacity building toward sustainability in the Ethiopian construction sector. Their comparison reveals the perceived benefits and advantages of the PRC's distinctive model of technical governance: a centralized

system organised around expertise and management that distinguishes the PRC not only from western models, but from those offered by Brazil, Russia, Turkey, India, and other countries that have become increasingly important partners in African development, including also of the AU.⁶⁹

Conclusion

In 1964, soon after the opening of the Africa Hall and amid Chomette's work in Addis Ababa, the American historian and sociologist Lewis Mumford expounded upon theoretical differences between so-called "authoritarian and democratic technics." Mumford argued that since the beginning of human civilisation, there existed two basic technologies: one authoritarian, and characterised as "system-centered, immensely powerful, but inherently unstable," and one democratic in nature: "man-centred, relatively weak, but resourceful and durable."⁷⁰ Since then, scholars of architecture and technology have shown how Mumford's position on technology as possessive of discernible political ideologies was coloured by the deterministic, polarised ideologies of the Cold-War era, which influenced his analysis of cities and architecture.⁷¹

The architectural history of the OAU and AU tests Mumford's assertion and its underlying geopolitical dimensions, albeit in perhaps unexpected terms. Our research shows that in assessing the effects of architectural gifting as international diplomacy, political ideology offers limited insight. Architectural technology is informed, in many different ways, by the political and social relations in which it operates. At the same time, as the Africa Hall, the AUCC, and the PSC demonstrate, transnational architecture participates in its own, distinctly transnational form of governance.

Much of the western critique leveled against the AUCC project, and Chinese-led development and its architectural manifestations more broadly, slip into the well-worn ideological contours of Mumford's argument. This overlooks the extent to which foreign aid, regardless of its western or Chinese origins, its capitalistic or socialistic rhetoric, has done little to democratise African governance. In fact, much evidence suggests that the opposite is true. The radically different regimes of aid shaping Ethiopian history, from the United States-led aid during the rule of Haile Selassie to the Soviet aid during the *Dergue* regime and the increasingly Chinese-led regime of the past few decades, have in common that despite upheavals, they bolstered a highly centralized, authoritarian state.⁷²

Many African governments have publicly lauded China's architectural achievements in Africa on the terms of technical excellence set by China itself. China's rhetorical consistency has also incited and benefited from doubts among some African leaders about the nature and consequences of reliance upon distinctly western-sourced development aid, even as China's own perceived alternative paradigm comes with its own distinctive political dynamics and technical conditions. Indeed, China's projects have long been very much dependent upon Chinese designs, Chinese building materials, and Chinese technical expertise. This dependence has decentered the west and its patronising philosophy of development, though the shift toward China does little of course to dismantle the anti-democratic structures of previous transnational development regimes. In many respects, the AUCC suggests the emergence

of a new regime rooted in the dynamics of technical governance, with new forms of expertise and authority, repair, and control. The social and political hierarchies of this regime will depend in part on the design, construction, and management of these projects, which include the technologies they depend upon, the maintenance they require, and the decision-making processes that surround them.

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Notes

1. Daniel Mulugeta, “Pan-Africanism and the Affective Charges of the African Union Building in Addis Ababa,” *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 33, no. 4 (2021): 521–37.
2. In 2018, the French newspaper *Le Monde* reported that China had installed listening devices in the building, and its Chinese-built servers were sending data to Shanghai every night. In 2020, the Heritage Foundation claimed this was part of a larger pattern, as reports emerged that Chinese hackers redirected CCTV footage from the complex abroad. See Ghalia Kadiri and Joan Tilouine, “À Addis-Ababa, le siège de l’Union africaine espionné par Pékin,” *Le Monde*, January 26, 2018.
3. A notable exception to such reporting and an inspiration for our research is the work of Sophie Grove, “Special Relations,” *Monocle* 52 (April 2012), <https://monocle.com/magazine/issues/52/special-relations>.
4. Furthermore, the headquarters occupy the site of the notorious Alem Bekagn (literally “Farewell to the World”) prison, where previous Ethiopian regimes since the 1920s have tortured and killed political prisoners. The demolition of the prison in 2004 to make space for the new Chinese-built headquarters has raised questions about the African Union’s historical relationship to human rights violations in Africa and has led the organisation to memorialisation efforts that are leaving architectural marks on the site of its headquarters. See Alex de Waal and Rachel Ibreck, “Alem Bekagn: The African

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5. See James N. Rosenau, "Governance, Order, and Change in World Politics," in *Governance without Government: Order and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 4.
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 7. Shannon Mattern, "Maintenance Codes," in *A City is Not a Computer* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021), 221–39. See also Stephen Graham and Nigel Thrift, "Out of Order: Understanding Repair and Maintenance," *Theory, Culture & Society* 24, no. 3 (2007): 1–25; Steven J. Jackson, "Rethinking Repair," in *Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality, and Society*, ed. Tarleton Gillespie, Pablo J. Boczkowski and Kirsten A. Foot (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014), 221–39.
 8. Mattern, "Maintenance Codes," 110–11. One exception is Hilary Sample, *Maintenance Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018).
 9. Jessica Barnes's work on the politics of infrastructural maintenance in Egypt is notable in this regard, particularly as it attends to the politics of authority in an African nation that counterbalances overly laudatory narratives of maintenance's "inherent" grassroots-based goodness. See: Jessica Barnes, "States of Maintenance: Power, Politics, and Egypt's Irrigation Infrastructure," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 35, no. 1 (2017), 147.
 10. Tom Avermaete and Johan Lagae, eds., "L'Afrique, c'est chic: Architecture and planning in Africa 1950–1970," special issue, *Oase: Tijdschrift voor architectuur* 82 (2010); Luce Beeckmans, "The Architecture of Nation-Building in Africa as a Development Aid Project: Designing the Capital Cities of Kinshasa (Congo) and Dodoma (Tanzania) in the Post-independence Years," *Progress in Planning* 122 (2018): 1–28; Fassil Demissie, ed., *Colonial Architecture and Urbanism in Africa: Intertwined and Contested Histories* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012); Manuel Herz, ed., *African Modernism: The Architecture of Independence* (Zurich: Park Books, 2015); Ayala Levin, "Exporting Architectural National Expertise: Arie Sharon's Ife University Campus in West-Nigeria, 1962–1976," in *Nationalism and Architecture*, ed. Raymond Quek, Darren Deane, and Sara Butler (London: Routledge, 2012), 53–66; Cole Roskam, "Non-Aligned Architecture: China's Designs on and in Ghana and Guinea, 1955–92" *Architectural History* 58 (2015): 261–91; Grigor Doytchinov, "Pragmatism, Not Ideology: Bulgarian Architectural Exports to the 'Third World,'" *Journal of Architecture* 17, no. 3 (2012): 453–73; Łukasz Stanek, "Gift, Credit, Barter: Architectural Mobilities in Global Socialism," *e-flux Architecture*, July 2020, <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/housing/337850/gift-credit-barter-architectural-mobilities-in-global-socialism/>; Łukasz Stanek, *Architecture in Global Socialism: Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East in the Cold War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020); Ola Uduku, "Modernist Architecture and 'the Tropical' in West Africa: The Tropical Architecture Movement in West Africa, 1948–1970," *Habitat International* 30, no. 3 (2006): 396–411.
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14. As scholars Stephen Graham and Nigel Thrust have noted with regard to the repair or maintenance of an object: “Is it the thing itself, or the negotiated order that surrounds it, or some ‘larger’ entity?” Graham and Thrift, “Out of Order,” 4. See also Barnes, “States of Maintenance,” 148.
 15. Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019).
 16. Jacopo Galli, “Aspirations and Contradictions in Shaping a Cosmopolitan Africa: Arturo Mezzedimi in Imperial Ethiopia,” *ABE Journal: Architecture beyond Europe* 9–10 (2016), <https://journals.openedition.org/abe/10930?lang=en>.
 17. Bereket H. Selassie, *Eritrea and the United Nations and Other Essays* (Trenton, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1989). See also Levin, “Haile Selassie’s Imperial Modernity,” 447–68.
 18. Arturo Mezzedimi, “Africa Hall: How the Work was Conceived,” in *Africa Hall, Addis Ababa* [inauguration booklet] (Addis Ababa: Ministry of Information of the Imperial Ethiopian Government, n.d.), 16–18. Interestingly, the UN’s FAO was originally built in the 1930s by the fascist regime to house the Ministry of “Italian Africa” before being repurposed in 1952.
 19. Mezzedimi, “Africa Hall,” 16, 17.
 20. Mezzedimi, “Africa Hall,” 18.
 21. Mezzedimi, “Africa Hall,” 18.
 22. See “Africa Hall Advisory Board Holds First Meeting,” AllAfrica.com, August 10, 2017, <https://allafrica.com/stories/201708110631.html>. See also “ECA Signs \$28 Million Contract with Supplier to Commence Africa Hall Renovations,” AllAfrica.com, May 10, 2019, <https://allafrica.com/stories/201905130738.html>.
 23. Mezzedimi, “Africa Hall,” 23.
 24. Electrocommercial (S. Rizzo) and Philips (Ethiopia) provided the building’s electrical works and simultaneous interpretation equipment, respectively, with general supervision provided by Ethiopian Electric Light and Power Authority and the Imperial Board of Telecommunications of Ethiopia. See Mezzedimi, “Africa Hall,” 20–21.
 25. De Waal and Ibreck, “Alem Bekagn,” 200.
 26. Kenny Cupers, Girma Hundessa, and Cole Roskam, “Beyond ‘China’s Gift to Africa’: Showcase Urbanism in Addis Ababa” (manuscript under consideration).
 27. Tamrat Wasyhun, “A History of the Modern Ethiopian Police Force, 1942–1991” (PhD diss., Addis Ababa University, 2016), 181. The American funding for the police academy was not incidental, as United States foreign aid had come to play a major role in Ethiopian politics and development. Between 1954 and 1974, for example, the US was Ethiopia’s most important source of foreign finance. See Amanda Kay McVety, *Enlightened Aid: US Development as Foreign Policy in Ethiopia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). See also Getachew Metaferia, *Ethiopia and the United States: History, Diplomacy, and Analysis* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2009); Z. K. Brzezinski, ed., *Africa and the Communist World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1963), 49–83.
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 29. The AU does not seem to have kept original documentation of the project, and major parts of the architect’s own archive were lost in his move away from Addis. Many thanks

- to Fonds Pierre Chomette/Archives Pierre Chomette for providing two master plans, a short booklet, and some photos of the project.
30. See Henri Chomette, “La modernisation d’Addis-Abeba. Les conception de l’architecte H. Chomette,” *L’Éthiopie* 19 (1963): 23–24.
 31. “Inauguration de la maison de l’Unité Africaine,” booklet, n.d., Fonds Henri Chomette/Archives Pierre Chomette, Paris.
 32. Wasyihun, “A History of the Modern Ethiopian Police Force,” 181.
 33. Kassaye Begashew, pers. corr., April 1, 2022; Berhanu Hunegnaw, interview, Addis Ababa, March 31, 2022.
 34. Noyer-Duplaix, “Henri Chomette.”
 35. Abraham Assefa, pers. corr., April 1, 2022.
 36. Rosenau, “Governance, Order, and Change in World Politics,” 1.
 37. A search in the Avery Index to Architectural Journals for this project for the competition yielded zero results.
 38. For information on Tom Ikimi, see “About Me,” High Chief Tom Ikimi (website), <https://chieftomikimi.com/about-me/>; and “Tom Ikimi,” *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tom_Ikimi. As Berhanu Hunegnaw confirmed in our interview on March 31, 2022, the choice of this firm may have reflected Nigeria’s financial support for the building. Nigerian involvement might also be explained by the foreign policy ambitions of the Nigerian president Olesegun Obasanjo who wanted the newly democratic Nigeria, once a pariah nation under military dictatorship, to be recognised again as fully committed to African unity. See also Adesina Fatai Raji, “Nigeria’s Foreign Policy Implementation in a Globalised World, 1993–2013” (PhD diss., University of Lagos, 2015), 292–94.
 39. “7 Star Hotel Managed by Westin Hotels and Resorts being Constructed in the African Union (AU) Compound, Addis Ababa,” *AddisBiz*, March 15, 2015. The hotel was never completed; there has been speculation that Al Amoudi may have fallen out of favour with the new political regime.
 40. For example, the Ikimi-designed building’s largest plenary conference room was purportedly capable of accommodating no more than five hundred people, which required the AU to “borrow” the UN Economic Commission for Africa’s eight-hundred-seat conference hall for summits. See Michael H. Fantahun, “The AU Gets Its Conference Center,” Ministry of Commerce of the People’s Republic of China, April 26, 2023, <http://www.mofcom.gov.cn/article/beltandroad/africanunion/enindex.shtml>.
 41. Deborah Bräutigam, *The Dragon’s Gift: The Real Story of China in Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Jamie Monson, *Africa’s Freedom Railway: How a Chinese Development Project Changed Lives and Livelihoods in Tanzania* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009); Vera Leigh Fennel, “The Long March from Bandung: The Ghost of Bandung Spirit in Contemporary Relations between China and Africa,” *Indonesian Journal of International Studies* 2, no. 2 (December 2015): 115–33; Roskam, “Non-Aligned Architecture.”
 42. Charlie Q.L. Xue and Guanghui Ding, *A History of Design Institutes in China: From Mao to Market* (London: Routledge, 2018), 181.
 43. Ren Lizhi, pers. corr., October 11, 2022. See also Ren Lizhi, Zhang Liping, and Wu Jie, “Chuli Feizhou Fei Meng Huiyi Zhongxin sheji,” 142–43. *Shidai Jianzhu* 3 (2012): 94–101; Guanghui Ding and Charlie Q.L. Xue, “China’s Architectural Aid: Exporting a Transformational Modernism,” *Habitat International* 47 (2015): 136–47; Grove, “Special Relations”; Fennel, “The Long March from Bandung”; Thomas O. Falk, “Analysis: Does China’s ‘Palace Diplomacy’ Benefit Africa or Beijing?” *Al Jazeera*, October 14, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2022/10/14/analysis-does-chinas-palace-diplomacy-benefit-africa>.
 44. Ren, pers. corr., October 11, 2022; Ding and Xue, “China’s Architectural Aid,” 142–43.
 45. Ren, pers. corr., October 11, 2022. In fact, following the new AUCC’s completion, the plenary of the existing Ikimi-designed conference center was repurposed to support

meetings by the AU's First Ladies. When we visited the site, the building's left wing was being used by the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, while the right part housed other auxiliary functions. The building's front entrance had also been shifted to connect it with the new Chinese-built complex, which now constitutes the site's epicenter.

46. See, for example, Andrew Moody and Wang Chao, "Made at Home," *China Daily: Africa Weekly*, January 24, 2014, 1; Lujia Zhang, Yan Wan, Xinyu Liu, and Charlie Qiuli Xue, "Embedded Support: Chinese Aid Projects in the Horn of Africa—Case Studies of Djibouti City and Addis Ababa," in *Exporting Chinese Architecture: History, Issues, and "One Belt One Road"*, ed. Charlie Qiuli Xue and Guanghui Ding (Singapore: Springer, 2022), 187–205 (201); Frangton Chiyemura, "The Winds of Change in Africa-China Relations?: Contextualising African Agency in Ethiopia-China Engagement in Wind Energy Infrastructure Financing and Development" (PhD diss., Open University, 2019), 129–32.
47. Ren, pers. corr., October 11, 2022; Ren, Zhang, and Wu, "Chuli Feizhou Fei Meng Huiyi Zhongxin sheji," 98–99.
48. "Building Stories in the 'Assembly Hall' of African Union" (sponsored content), *The Reporter*, August 5, 2022, <https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/25544/>; Assefa, pers. corr., April 1, 2022.
49. Zhongguo jianzhu di ba gongcheng ju youxian gongsi, "Shou Fei Meng Huiyi Zhongxin gongcheng," August 23, 2013, <https://8bur.csecc.com/yjsl18/kycx88/sfgc/201308/2834800.html>.
50. See "Shou Fei Meng Huiyi Zhongxin gongcheng"; Yuan Fei Meng Huiyi Zhongxin Zhongguo jishu zu, "Yuan Fei Meng Huiyi Zhongxin ying zhen bang futanqi qingkuang fakui," May 2014, <http://www.zebon.com/CompVisualizeBig.asp?ID=143>; Jiancai faying daoxiang, "Fujian Quanzhou yijing chengwei woguo yuan zhu Feizhou jiancai de zhuyao chandi," *Jiancai Fazhan Daoxiang* 11, no. 2 (2013), 92–93.
51. See, for example, Ding and Xue, "China's Architectural Aid."
52. Assefa, pers. corr., April 1, 2022. Assefa contrasted the AUCC to another Chinese-financed and designed project, the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia Headquarters, which has employed a team of Ethiopian contractors and technicians in ways that facilitated a "huge amount of technology transfer."
53. Ren, pers. corr., October 11, 2022.
54. Ewunetu Fereda, pers. corr., November 8, 2022.
55. Assefa, pers. corr., April 1, 2022.
56. Kadiri, "À Addis-Abeba."
57. Assefa, pers. corr., April 1, 2022.
58. Moges Tadese, pers. corr., August 6, 2022.
59. Assefa, pers. corr., April 1, 2022.
60. Moges, pers. corr., August 6, 2022.
61. The PRC also agreed to expedite the construction and equipping of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and provide equipment worth US\$25 million to be used in the African Union logistics base in Douala, Cameroon. The PRC has also played a role in helping AU member states monitor and engage with their respective diaspora communities. See Executive Council, *Annual Report on the Activities of the African Union and Its Organs*, February 6–7, 2020, 94, <https://au.int/en/documents/20200207/annual-report-activities-union-and-its-organs-2020>.
62. "A Building for Peace and Security," Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH (website), <https://www.giz.de/en/workingwithgiz/40891.html>.
63. "Peace and Security Building, Addis Ababa, 2010–2015," Hascher Jehle Architektur (website), <https://www.hascherjehle.de/peace-and-security-building-addis-ababa/?ref=228>.
64. Flintstone is part of a local contractors' empowerment project known as the University Capacity Building Program. It was established more than twenty years ago and was

- implemented by GIZ International Services (GIZ IS) Ethiopia. See “Ethiopian Construction Firm makes Inroads in Tanzania,” ExpoGroup (website), May 23, 2015, https://www.expogr.com/tanzania/buildexpo/detail_news.php?newsid=1223&pageid=2.
65. “A Building for Peace and Security,” GIZ.
 66. Assefa, pers. corr., April 1, 2022.
 67. Moges, pers. corr., August 6, 2022.
 68. Moges, pers. corr., August 6, 2022.
 69. See, for example, Elling N. Tjønneland, “African Development: What Role Do the Rising Powers Play?” *Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre Report*, January 2015, <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/187491/fa8aeed1b5911794106c324bf90d0e09.pdf>.
 70. Lewis Mumford, “Authoritarian and Democratic Technics,” *Technology and Culture* 5, no. 1 (Winter 1964), 1.
 71. Langdon Winner, *The Whale and the Reactor: A Search for Limits in an Age of High Technology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 19.
 72. Tobias Broich, “U.S. and Soviet Foreign Aid During the Cold War: A Case Study of Ethiopia,” Maastricht Economic and Social Research Institute on Innovation and Technology (UNU-MERIT) Working Paper Series (2017), <https://ideas.repec.org/p/unm/unumer/2017010.html>.