

## Architecture of Colonial Modernity

Histories of Urbanism and Space within South Asia, Africa and the Middle East

Chris Cowell

[cac2207@columbia.edu](mailto:cac2207@columbia.edu)

Office hours by appointment

The imprint of European colonialism is still acutely felt upon much of our modern world, its cultures, cities and wider urban environments, despite its apparent consignment to the history books. This seminar course – using the tools of postcolonial theory and contemporary historical research – will focus upon the colonial histories of early nineteenth- to mid-twentieth-century South Asia, Africa and the Middle East. The course will examine the latent and overt ideologies and concepts that shaped European expansion within these territories, through architecture, urbanism and material space. A particular focus, due in part to a pioneering body of critical literature, will be upon British imperial expansion and consolidation within South Asia.

Colonialism and its relations with modernity is argued to be multiple and interlayered. The seminars will explore the role that architecture has played within this. A central paradox that will be examined is how colonialism segregated, divided and categorized, yet was compelled also to connect, transmit and relocate; the first, often through the ordering culture of information gathering and governance, the second, through the dynamics of modern capital. As a consequence, the shape of power relations within colonialism was evolving, complex and negotiated. Architecture's culpability and malleability might seem clear at first: we can speak of recording, planning, building, regulating through a built environment by a colonizing power upon a colonized people. Political and economic history provides ample examples that trace this development. But in order to expose the potency of these more visible acts to historical observation, a deeper understanding of the ideologies and compulsions, the apparatus underpinning such discourses, need first to be recognized and examined.

Each week, a theme will be introduced and discussed that situates architecture and urbanism at the junction of space, the material environment and colonial knowledge formation, and will examine how these interlink. These themes will follow a general chronology, building up methods to expose various modes of modernity at work within and against colonialism – in particular, to find out how both concepts interact. The themes will follow a general sequence: from wider theoretical inquiries to historical-specific case studies; from knowledge and information systems to space and material construction; and from histories of representation to histories of performance.

## Schedule of Seminars

### Part 1 - Knowledge, Power and the Subject

- Week 1 [Jan 17]      **Introduction: Orientalism / Representation**
- Week 2 [Jan 24]      **Modernities and Modalities of Colonialism**
- Week 3 [Jan 31]      **Problems with the Past** (India re-constructed)
- Week 4 [Feb 7]      Territory 1      **Trans-locality, Movement, Mapping Space**
- Week 5 [Feb 14]      Territory 2      **The Colonial City: Race, Dualism, Boundaries**
- Week 6 [Feb 21]      **Discipline, Medicine and the Enclave** (Camps and Prisons)
- Week 7 [Feb 28]      **Colonial Bio-politics: Security, State and the Body**

### Part 2 - Constructing and Governing

- Week 8 [Mar 7]      **Air and Adaptation: Climate, Ecology and the Envelope**  
[Mid-term Break]
- Week 9 [Mar 21]      **Colonial Typologies** (Bungalows, Barracks and Beyond)
- Week 10 [Mar 28]      **Institutions and Government** (Public Works and Public Defiance)
- Week 11 [Apr 4]      **Classifying, Exhibiting, Performing** (Egypt and India)
- Week 12 [Apr 11]      **Municipal-ism and Master Planning** (Algiers, Calcutta and Beyond)
- Week 13 [Apr 18]      **Nationalism and Postcolonial Space** (from Mumbai to South Africa)