

Surveying the Contribution of Women within Architectural History

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Today, we are bombarded not only by academic discussions on what *global* may mean for architectural education, but also by what social movements like #MeToo and #TimesUp may mean for current architectural culture. Still today, in spite of inclusive accreditation requirements, a majority of architects are awarded their degrees after studying programs characterized by a lack of acknowledgement of under-represented minorities. Recently, Mark Jarzombek argued that to achieve *global* we first need to accept that it is still a promise to be fulfilled, we first need to see its absence; and for the longest time half of the human race was absent from the surveys of architectural history. As is the case with many scholars, Kathleen James-Chakraborty experienced difficulties finding a suitably inclusive book for her survey courses on architectural/art history—even after the early 2000s shift towards *global*. She was prompted to write *Architecture Since 1400* (2014) “furious about the coverage (or lack thereof) of work by women in all these books and manuscripts” she was being asked by publishers to use or to review. *Architecture Since 1400* is intelligible and readable; it has even been considered a joy to read, and it synthesizes previous scholarship, as is the case with any survey. This paper aims to demonstrate that by taking a globally inclusive perspective, James-Chakraborty’s contribution goes beyond the mere revitalization of the survey, and redefines it as a genre. In his review, Fraser considers *Architecture Since 1400* “the First Year survey course we wish we had been given.” This prompts the question: with more inclusive literature now available, are existing approaches to survey courses being effectively updated?

This paper brings together two themes that framed the conclusion of my doctoral dissertation: the study of the writing of a global history of architecture (or at least the ‘mixed’ efforts to achieve it) and the study of the writing of architectural surveys—through the lens of the teaching of architectural history and the development of the NAAB Conditions for Accreditation. In the paper presented at the 72nd Annual International Conference of the Society of Architectural Historians (SAH), “Modern to Contemporary: A Historiography of Global Architecture,” I investigated the literature resulting from the translation of postcolonial theories into architectural discourse, exemplified by Sibel Bozdoğan’s 1999 call to challenge the Eurocentric canon in the teaching of architectural history.¹ She wrote:

The point in architectural history is not to incorporate Indian, Chinese, Islamic and other architecture into the Western canon in some form of benign tokenism, nor to discard the Western canon and replace it with works of the non-Western other. Rather, the point is to show what [Edward] Said calls “intertwined histories,” that is, to show that contrary to the basic assumption of traditional Eurocentric historiography, the Western canon and the cultural production of societies outside Europe and North America are not separate and independent. For one thing, the Western canon has been too deeply imprinted in the culture of the non-Western world for so long as to become as much their property as that of the West.²

Despite the fact that Bozdoğan and Esra Ackan argue that the term ‘non-West’ homogenizes what is ‘the Other’ of the West without allowing difference and diversity to come forth,³ the NAAB criteria kept the differentiation between Western and non-Western traditions in its documents of 1998 and 2004. Consequently, the differentiation between Western and non-Western traditions was still in place until the new document was adopted in 2009, already ten years after Bozdoğan’s seminal text, and three years after the publication of *A Global History of Architecture* by Francis Ching, Mark Jarzombek and Vikramaditya Prakash.⁴

In terms of my previous study of the writing of architectural surveys,⁵ it is worth mentioning how the NAAB criteria validated until 2009 a trend initiated in the mid-1980s of publishing histories of the Western tradition, namely David Watkin’s *A History of Western Architecture* and Isabelle Hyman and Marvin Trachtenberg’s *Architecture, from Prehistory to Postmodernism: The Western Tradition*.⁶ Both texts, published in 1986, have had subsequent revisions and editions and are still being used for teaching survey courses.

Before commencing the analysis, it is worth introducing a disclaimer: I have not yet taught a survey course. This year I had the chance to design a research seminar on my research topic, the Historiography of Modern Architecture. We studied the writing of architectural history in the 20th c through Giedion, Pevsner, Zevi, Banham, Tafuri, Curtis and Frampton (white male historians), with a couple of weeks reserved to the absence of the ‘Others’, namely countries outside central Europe and

the United States, and women and other minorities, who were practically absent from my own course. I did precisely what Bozdoğan argues is not enough: I introduced a couple of tokens in an otherwise, very privileged account.

In this paper, the development of NAAB Student Progress Criteria related to the study of architectural history from 1998 to 2019, is discussed in light of the debate about the *global* in architecture and the general invisibility in it of gender issues. Finally, this paper presents a survey that arguably addresses this gap and opens up further development of both NAAB criteria and survey literature.

FROM HISTORY TO TRADITION (AND BACK TO HISTORY)

The NAAB Student Progress Criteria was introduced in 1982, 'history' was one of the categories that organised them. In the 1986 document history was replaced by 'context', until categories disappeared in 1998, where this account begins. In his paper at SAH, Joseph Bedford mentioned how traditions, and not history, was the term chosen in the 1998 document, in which the non-West appears for the first time.⁷ Western architectural canons and traditions were required to be understood -that is assimilated and comprehended by students-, while an awareness -that is, familiarity with and recollections of- was required for non-Western parallel and divergent canons and traditions.

The fact that there are separate criteria for the Western and the non-Western tradition in the NAAB 1998 and 2004 documents is evidence of the use of the same categories, the same binary oppositions, that had already at that time been questioned by postcolonial theory. Bozdoğan argued that "in insisting on the difference [cultural difference, not diversity] shown by other cultures (of women, blacks, Orientals, and so forth) and resisting the naturalization of this difference by a benign inclusion, postcolonial critics seek to unsettle the canon itself and expose the relations of power that are integral to its initial constitution as the canon."⁸ That is actually one of the few mentions to women found in reviewing the literature on the *global*. Moreover, as Ackan wrote just three years later, "the word 'non-West,' not only refers to and simultaneously continues the ideology of an exaggerated difference between 'West' and its 'other,' but it also disavows the differences within these 'others' themselves."⁹

The immediate impact of postcolonial studies on architectural knowledge and education has been to express the necessity to challenge the Eurocentric canon and the collegiate survey course, as this quotation from Sibel Bozdoğan represents. Yet, this is not as facile as it might first appear to readers, since bringing a few examples from 'non-Western' contexts to the survey course as epilogues to a metanarrative is not what postcolonial critics have been arguing for. Challenging the

Eurocentric canon in architectural history necessitates challenging the very conditions that have formed the canon itself.¹⁰

Even if with the 2004 NAAB document both Western and non-Western canons and traditions require a level of understanding, the wording of both remains different. In the case of non-Western traditions, landscape is not mentioned, nor are the climatic, technological, socioeconomic, and other cultural factors that have shaped and sustain them. While the Western canon and traditions, though plural, seem to be somewhat homogenous, non-Western canon and traditions are referred to as parallel and divergent.

In addition, in both the 1998 and 2004 documents, there is a criteria entitled 'National and Regional Traditions,' requiring a level of understanding, where NAAB would include 'local regional heritage' and the 'vernacular tradition.' According to Bedford, this criteria, "for NAAB was seen to be neither Western nor, non-Western, but, one imagined, American," more accurately, from the United States.¹¹

It is not until the 2009 accreditation document, released three years after the publication of Ching, Jarzombek, and Prakash's *A Global History of Architecture*, that the divide between the West, the non-West, and the National disappears into the criteria 'Historical Traditions and Global Culture,' still framed around canons and traditions. According to Jarzombek and Alfred Hwangbo, the terms in the epigraph should be rearranged given that "History is always global, and traditions are always cultural products."¹² They stated:

The problem, however, is that many things that we call 'traditions' are not historical, but modern inventions often frozen in time for political expediency. By only teaching 'historical traditions' we are not bringing into the open the circumstance that traditions are also shifting signifiers. The linkage of "global" and culture, in the context of 'indigenous,' is also hardly neutral. It is a reiteration of a decades-old position that holds that global is to be taught and researched as a recuperation of an architecture-from-below, a premise which today is seen as patronizing. Taken together, the words Historical Traditions and Global Culture should have been arranged differently to read 'Global History and Cultural Traditions.'¹³

In the case of the criteria's wording, one of the problems is what the authors refer to as catenation of the following terms: indigenous, vernacular, local, regional, national, which used to be part of the epigraph of national traditions, and which result from the architectural discourse of the 1960s and 1970s and postmodern critique of modern architecture, rather than from postcolonial criticism, as was the case with the use of the notion of tradition. The way the terms are arranged, in succession, implies a certain development or progression beginning with

indigenous architecture and working the ‘way up the historical ladder’ to the architecture of modern nation-state, which evidences an alignment with the western canon, rather than its challenge. Even if with the 2009 document NAAB aimed at preparing graduates for global practice through cross-cultural and cross-curricular experiences in other disciplines, the way that this particular criterion is framed is still evidence of an Orientalist and colonialist attitude and does not overturn the bias and privilege of the canon.

In the 2014 accreditation document, the term ‘History’ replaces ‘Tradition’ which had been used since 1998. The references to the ‘Eastern, Western, Northern and Southern hemispheres,’ present in 2009, disappear, as does the term ‘national,’ from the catenation that now goes from indigenous and vernacular to local and regional.

Lastly, there is the development throughout time of the vaguely defined issue of ‘diversity’. Although both the 1998 and 2004 documents had the criterion ‘Human Diversity,’ the level of performance required increased from ‘awareness’ in 1998 to ‘understanding’ in 2004, as with non-western traditions. Also in the 2004 document ‘physical ability,’ was added to the ‘diverse needs, values, behavioural norms, and social and spatial patterns that characterise different cultures.’ In the 2009 document ‘Cultural Diversity’ replaced ‘Human Diversity,’ with ‘Culture’ going from being one of the factors affecting human diversity, to becoming the main emphasis, however, its wording was the same as in 2004. Reinforcing the direction that NAAB took when including ‘physical abilities’ in 2004, the 2014 document refers to the ‘responsibility of the architect to ensure equity of access to sites, buildings, and structures.’ Hence, the term equity, which could be used to introduce the reference to gender, minorities, class and race issues, is restricted to the accessibility of buildings, relevant and necessary, but not the only responsibility of architects (educators, and even students) in terms of diversity. Equity that was as well absent from the available literature.

Yet, our study of architectural history texts indicates that such critical thinking continues to remain marginal to the grand narrative of architecture. Even in the most recent texts published in the twenty-first century, figures that other authors widely acknowledged as prolific female voices remain, at best, marginally covered in the canonical premises of the text or at worst, totally dismissed.¹⁴

Postcolonial criticism permeated the NAAB criteria, even with limitations and deficiencies that I have pointed out, in a way that feminist studies still have not. Gender issues continue to be absent from the NAAB criteria. If they are present in syllabi and curricula around the United States is because of educators including those issues in their survey courses, but it is not required. Already in 2006, and based on the 2004 document, Meltem Gürel and Kathryn Anthony, pointed out

that “NAAB has not yet specifically acknowledged gender issues in architectural history as a criterion for accreditation,” making it “possible for students to graduate from an accredited architecture program without ever being exposed to women’s contribution to the built environment.”¹⁵ And this continued to be the case after NAAB released the 2009 and 2014 documents, and right until 2019.

It is up to authors of future NAAB student performance criteria as well as future architectural history texts to remedy these deficiencies. In order for change to occur, NAAB criteria regarding diversity, and gender and racial issues in particular, must be strengthened and more specific. A greater measure of accountability is needed to ensure that faculty teach and students learn about the importance of gender and racial diversity in architectural history. As we have already seen, changes in the NAAB criteria can translate into enhanced versions of architectural history, but one need not preclude the other.¹⁶

During 2019, the NAAB has presented for comment and consultation different drafts of what will become the 2020 Conditions for Accreditation. It proposes numerous and substantial changes to the accreditation process for architecture schools, including the replacement of the Student Performance Criteria with Program Accreditation Criteria and Student Accreditation Criteria. The program criteria include ‘History and Theory’ and ‘Social Equity and Inclusive Environments,’ the latter’s aim being for students to deepen their understanding of diverse cultural and social contexts.

INCLUDING WOMEN IN A SURVEY OF ARCHITECTURE

Even if NAAB criteria regarding equity and diversity are not strong, nor specific, there is at least an author that has attempted to remedy these deficiencies, and intertwine gender, race and class issues into a grand narrative of *Architecture Since 1400* (2014): Kathleen James-Chakraborty.¹⁷ Also published in 2014, in *A Critical History of Contemporary Architecture*, editors Elie Haddad and David Rifkind presented what they considered to be the major theoretical developments after modernism and over fifty years - namely, postmodernism, deconstructivism and postcolonial criticism in architecture, and high-tech and sustainable architecture, failing to include a chapter on feminist criticism in architecture. It is precisely these major revisions of history of the previous decades, colonialism and postcolonialism, non-western architecture, economic and urban history, but also social class, race and gender that James-Chakraborty intertwines in her text.

The book is the result of the tradition of teaching architectural history at the University of California Berkeley. The example of Norma Evenson teaching there since the 1960s “eventually supplemented by that of her colleague Spiro Kostof, established Berkeley as a place where the issue of modern

nonwestern urbanism occupied center stage.¹⁸ By the early 1990s, Nezar AlSayyad, Paul Groth, Thomas Metcalf, Dell Upton, and James-Chakraborty, all committed to the study of non-Western modernism, were working with students who would publish a string of important monographs on nineteenth and twentieth century urbanism in China, South Asia, and Turkey as well as elsewhere, including Swati Chattopadhyay and Zeynep Çelik.¹⁹ In her opinion, it is not only a matter of covering new geographical ground, but also intellectual, with an emphasis on the connections of the architecture of empire, on the periphery as the location of innovation, on understanding architecture as the locus of cultural memory, and on the changes introduced by migrations.²⁰ In a forthcoming essay that she has generously shared with me, also giving me permission to quote it, James-Chakraborty recalls:

By 1990, when I began to teach, it required very little effort to insert women into my lectures, since there was already an easily accessible secondary literature describing their contributions. And yet more than a decade later, when I felt almost besieged by textbook publishers hoping that I would adopt their new book or at least review the manuscript of it, what stood out most to me about these surveys was their blindness to the existence of half of the human race.²¹

Debates around ‘inclusiveness,’ and the challenge of what to insert or include in grand narratives, permeate not only the research on the *global* in architecture but also the writing and design of architectural surveys and survey courses. According to Jarzombek, to think global is to see first the absence, rather than a phantasy of inclusion, to think of what is not there—“a promise that it is yet to be fulfilled, if ever.”²² If to include, first we need to acknowledge an absence, one of the most striking, although not the only one, is the absence of half of the human race, regardless of their place of birth, class, race.

James-Chakraborty’s narrative emphasizes the role of all agents of the built environment, which facilitates the inclusion of ‘the Others’ including important women patrons of the arts and women architects—rather than ‘genius-architects,’ as well as construction workers or slaves. Her emphasis on including the work of women expands beyond the narrative into the short bibliographies for further reference that conclude each chapter. By effectively considering the other half of the human race—that is, the under-represented work of women as stakeholders of the built environment—as part of a wider cultural context, *Architecture Since 1400* broadens our understanding of the *global* in architecture.

Given the ambitious character of her study of global architectural history through six centuries, there are differences in the way women are included depending on the time and place in question. In the first half of the book—until the nineteenth century, references to women are by name in the case of the Western countries, with the Medici women as

examples of the “handful of wellborn European women [who] acquired a degree of political power that had been rare in the Middle Ages,” and Eleanor Coade in eighteenth century Britain, businesswoman and inventor, manufacturer, and seller of the cemented-like substance Coadstone.²³ On the other hand, women of the non-Western world are introduced, in a more general way, when explaining life in imperial palaces of the Ottoman Empire or the Mughal court in South Asia. Outside of ruling classes, James-Chakraborty elaborates on the role of women in building, dwelling and inhabiting of natives on the North American Land and Sumatra. These accounts seem to be drawn from sources of anthropology as opposed to the more architectural ones listed in the chapters on the Renaissance or Baroque, which she has admitted to be the case sometimes in our latest communication.²⁴

In the second half of the book, it seems that information on more women in Western countries was available, also beyond the ruling and upper classes, and the author reflects on their role as customers of shops and department stores, housewives and social reformers in houses, and workers, craftsmen and professionals beyond the factories, though, for example, in the case of the United States, still race needs to be taken into consideration with the segregation of African Americans. Segregation is also the key for James-Chakraborty to understand South Africa, where the African account from north to south finishes. The role of women in building and decorating the tents and houses throughout the continent is acknowledged, though again in an anthropological manner, without having specific examples or their names. Looking forward, James-Chakraborty shares:

Since writing the book I have taught a class on comparative sixteenth through eighteenth century court cultures in Europe and Asia, and found that there is much more available regarding women in these places and periods than I knew about at the time I wrote *Architecture* since 1400, so were I to produce a second edition, I would be able to weave some of this knowledge into it. Eleanora of Toledo owning the Pitti Palace is just the tip of the iceberg!²⁵

I argue that there are lessons to be learned from the process of building an inclusive survey text when designing and delivering a survey course. It seems that the teaching of the survey course is in itself a challenge that at times can lack equity. Several of the authors mentioned in this paper affirm that the survey course is thrown at early career researchers or “junior faculty,” who endure the “enormous challenge” that is “so often off-loaded disproportionately” onto them, as was the case of James-Chakraborty.²⁶ Jarzombek’s critique of this inequality is even harsher: in his opinion, and contrary to his own case, survey courses are “usually taught by the professors at bottom of the academic food chain” and are “often seen as far too trivial for advanced scholars.”²⁷

However, and as James-Chakraborty has pointed out, “there were also important rewards for being forced to broaden [her] frame of reference far beyond [the] original job description.”²⁸ To this we add the challenges of choosing a text book, and of preparing to an ever changing audience, in some cases very diverse, and in others, very homogenous.

There is a ritual among professors who teach the modern history survey in schools of architecture: we ask each other which survey text we use, and then promptly apologise for our own selection. There is no good answer: every option either marks you as subscribing to an historic movement now grown distasteful, as having too much or too little interest in form, or as trying too hard to be even-handed to the point of losing touch with what constitutes the field of architecture at all. We all feel the need to justify our compromise.²⁹

Finally, a certain parallelism can be established between the development of the NAAB criteria and the genre of the architectural survey. “The survey as historical genre became more or less suspect,” with scholars favouring analysis over synthesis, more or less at the same time that the term ‘History’ was suppressed from the NAAB documents.³⁰ Just as ‘History’ returned to the NAAB criteria in 2014, James-Chakraborty’s book, can be regarded as part of a return of the genre of the survey illustrated by several events and conferences held since 2017, making it “once more compatible with the major historiographical revisions of the past decades.”³¹ One could argue that the mixed nature of the globalising efforts in the writing of recent architectural history, have helped to rethink the disciplinary field.

In 2006, Gürel and Anthony, affirmed that “the NAAB has played a critical role in the gradual transformation of architectural courses,” and it could be added, as a result of survey texts.³² Similarly, in her 2008 review of *A Global History of Architecture*, Diane Ghirardo regarded the book as “timely” given the change introduced in the 2004 NAAB criteria to increase the standard of comprehension of non-Western architecture.³³ Considering that already the 1998 document NAAB included non-western architecture, that shift does not seem enough to cause a reconfiguration of the survey course. In my opinion, it is the development of the survey courses and the critical environment in architectural schools (as well as the work of many years) what lead to the publication of *A Global History of Architecture*. I argue that the book gave visibility

to the inconsistencies of the West/non-West and tradition/modernity binary oppositions of the 2004 document, favouring the changes appeared in the 2009 NAAB criteria. Then if *Architecture Since 1400* is the book that results from the absence of women in the latest surveys, regardless if global, it may lead to an explicit mention of Equity and Inclusion and to the inclusion of the contribution of women (and other minorities) in future NAAB documents, even if it is not the 2020 one.

Before concluding, I would like to go back to Bozdoğan’s 1999 seminal essay. She wrote:

As I have ruminated in this paper, the challenge is first, to make the modern survey more cross-cultural without either neutralizing or reifying the difference of other cultures, and second, to make it more political without reducing architecture to politics. There is no way of knowing if this new challenge will work itself out in the curricula of different schools of architecture. There is, however, no question that after postcolonial criticism, they survey course, like the Western canon on which it is predicated, can no longer remain what it once was.³⁴

This quotation, I believe applies to not only the survey courses, but also the survey literature. It is now that architectural history research and teaching uses migration, infrastructures, or trade as cross-cultural comprehension tools, in what could be seen as the realization of Bozdoğan’s 1999 claim. Not only available survey literature, but also NAAB criteria, even if with room for improvement, evidence this. Although research undertaken since 1970s in architectural history has looked at gender and race issues, in this case, it does not seem to have permeated the education of architecture, nor the literature with some exceptions, nor the NAAB criteria. I argue that James-Chakraborty’s *Architecture Since 1400* presents a cross-cultural transnational account of architecture, that is also gender and racially inclusive, making it more political, and exemplary of what is now the framework to reconsider diversity and inclusion in architectural education: intersectionality.

ENDNOTES

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