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COMMON GROUND
DUTCH-SOUTH AFRICAN ARCHITECTURAL EXCHANGES
1902-1961

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Following their well-received 2014 collection *Eclectic ZA Wilhelmiens: A Shared Dutch Built Heritage in South Africa*, Roger Fisher and Nicholas Clarke, along with co-editor Marieke Kuipers and a close-knit, binational collective of architectural historians and conservationists have produced a sequel covering the subsequent period from 1902 to 1961. This bracketing covers the period between the end of the second war between the Boer Republics and the British Empire (1899-1902) and the founding of a post-commonwealth Republic of South Africa in 1961. The bloodshed that marked these beginning and end dates goes unremarked in the introduction but certainly framed this period during which urban growth and cultural projects were initiated in an effort to reconstruct a country riven by wars. The book's timespan concludes shortly after 1960 when police massacred 69 unarmed people protesting pass laws in Sharpeville. In the wake of that event, many Black activists and liberal white South Africans left the country as apartheid policies, defended by an increasingly violent state, tightened.

In the introductory chapter, 'In Search of Shared Heritage', Marieke Kuipers terms the architecture produced by Dutch architects on South African soil in this period 'the result of a contestable past'. Already an understatement, this significant point sometimes gets lost. The narrative in the ensuing chapters is of architecture playing a very strong role in the construction of a settler state by developing shared White amenities, settling working-class Blacks in nuclear family housing, and building strategically for commerce, industry and logistics. Dutch welfarist modernism was one important referent to how some architects articulated their role in uplifting Afrikaner communi-

ties. At the heart of this growth lay pervasive racial exclusion. The book is therefore, above all, a history of White space. One exception is the text covering Atteridgeville, a Black 'location' near Pretoria, in which Dutch emigre public service architects played a role in planning and house designs between 1937 and 1950.

Arranged as a series of twelve chapters and four 'interludes', which are shorter thematic pieces, the book covers a lot of ground. Its array of case studies of individuals and structures serves to rebalance the record of White architects that had largely focused either on the lineage of University of the Witwatersrand-aligned modernists, such as in the books on Johannesburg by Clive Chipkin and Hilton Judin's history of Afrikaner projects of the 1960s and '70s, or the directory of British immigrant architects meticulously compiled by Joanna Walker. The latter, incidentally, was unpublished until placed online in the extensive Artefacts database by Roger Fisher, one of this anthology's editors. The prolific Dutch immigrant architects who are mentioned include Hendrik Niegeman, Gerrit Brink, Johan Burg, Mello Damstra, Jan Jacob de Jong, Jaap Jongens, Johannes (John) van de Werke and Hans Wegelin. The sheer number of their projects, a substantial number of which are illustrated with archival images, suggests South Africa was a destination of abundant opportunity and a blank canvas for the expression of a wide range of imported tendencies.

While there is no singular Dutch style to be gleaned from a scan of the images, there are some broad commonalities. Two are dealt with in texts by Esther de Haan, who identifies kitchens as an area of interest, and Mike Louw, who analyses the construction approach-

es of Dutch architects in South Africa. Initially they mirrored the tension between architects using crafted brick and those who followed the 'Nieuwe Bouwen', a movement that favoured concrete and skeleton structures. Later, hybridized approaches would use both innovative technologies, particularly reinforced concrete, glazing and even fibreglass, and more traditional organic elements crafted from stone, clay brick and wood. Perhaps the most Dutch of all the spatial design tendencies is captured in Fisher's interlude on the extension of the Cape Town waterfront into the Foreshore and Duncan Dock from 1935 onwards, a major reclamation project undertaken by the Dutch firm *Hollandsche Aannemings Maatschappij (HAM)*. Creating water landscapes had long been part of the Dutch project back home and in South Africa, and this extensive project relied on both imported concrete expertise and a flotilla of 35 vessels from the Netherlands. Used in 1952 as the launching spot for the replica *Drommedaris*, the vessel in which Jan van Riebeeck landed at the Cape three hundred years earlier but now largely underwater due to successive expansions, this fascinating liminal project deserves further consideration in transnational scholarship.

The remaining contributions cover two core themes of migration and building typologies. The separation of architects' biographical narratives from discussions on building types brings some unnecessary complexity to the volume. Architects and their buildings end up in different parts of the book, making cross referencing them a chore. It doesn't help that the comprehensive index, which is called the Register, is somewhat strangely arranged with place names inserted in the middle of the list of architects. It made this reader wish for simple tables, whether as a hyperlinked digital resource, or simply a list, to bring together the milestones in the lives of the architects and their key works.

Overall, however, the volume balances its task of chronicling with that of thematic discussion well. Annie Antonites' chapter on two waves of Dutch immigration establishes a bigger picture of mobilities. One phase began symbolically in 1934 with the launch of the *MS Bloemfontein* in Amsterdam, and the second after 1949 when the Dutch government lifted the post-war laws that had prevented its skilled citizens from leaving the country. Migration was discouraged after the early 1960s due to the international outcry against South Africa's racist policies, so these waves are largely covered within the timespan of the book. Antonites points out how Dutch clubs in South Africa fostered ongoing connections within the immigrant community, including with commercial entities such as the *Nederlandsche Bank voor Zuid-Afrika*, and the *Nederlandsche Zuid-Afrikaansche Landbouw*. Dutch archi-

tects often assimilated well into State research and administrative institutions.

These observations reinforce the impression that Dutch architects were very much complicit in the construction of an apartheid urban fabric. In her recent academic article covering memories of this period Barbara Henkes (2022) recalls the term *stamverwantschap*, which 'implied an ethnic-racial identification of the Dutch with White, Nationalist South Africans on the basis of an alleged shared history of Dutchness'. This background not only made for a comfortable sense of belonging in a new country, notwithstanding its racist policies, but also, as Henkes argues, reinforced Dutch amnesia about its complicity at home under Nazi rule during the Second World War.

This volume omits such painful discussions. Only occasionally do we get a glimpse of unease with the role of architecture in broader systems. Arne Sickel for instance, the South African educated son of immigrant Hendrik Sikkels, left for the Netherlands after designing a remarkable church building: *Die Ark* (dated in the book as both 1962 and 1967). In the political realm, Dutch activists would go on to play a role after 1960 in building the anti-apartheid movement, both as volunteers in the exile camps, as well as at home through the Netherlands Anti-Apartheid Movement (*Anti Apartheids Beweging Nederland, AABN*). Coming full circle, in 1998 the *NAi* (now *NI*) organised the groundbreaking exhibition *Blank: Architecture, apartheid and after*, for which the curator sourced the sepia prints of Willem van Beijma's drawings for Non European 51/houses that are reproduced in this volume.

The concluding two chapters on documentation are therefore pertinent to broader scholarship on Dutch designs in South Africa. Johan Swart describes the archives built up before and during this project – many through his own hard work in the *Architecture Archives of the University of Pretoria* – as a 'shared legacy'. This claim is undermined by the lost opportunity of augmenting them with oral histories other than those of Hans Wegelin and Gerrit Brink, whose families migrated in the 1940s. One wonders what one might have learnt from the stories of the domestic worker Hadjira 'Haya' Isaacs, photographed in the kitchen of the Vallie family to illustrate the 'Heart of the Home', as well as those of labourers whose unequal pay on building sites – as mentioned by Mike Louw – is a legacy of slavery in Dutch trading histories.

The expansion of Dutch patrimonial histories to settlements beyond Europe, while ignoring such histories in the same territory does not diminish the documentary value of this book. It simply means that *Common Ground* remains an inventory project linking Dutch and South African White histories, rather than offering a common understanding developed

through dialogue with the citizens (since the first elections in 1994) who have inherited the Dutch-designed buildings in public life. Actual common ground, over and above religious buildings and townships, would include Johanna Eleanor Ferguson's August House, now used as studios for emerging artists, and Niege-man's Rex Trueform Factory, which Ilze Wolff has documented as a site for identity formation for Black women in the course of their labour's extraction. In disseminating this elaborate publication, one hopes that such sites will be given ample access to its riches as well as opportunities to participate in a necessary debate about the use of the relevant architectural archives.

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