Laurie, E. and Philo, C. (2020) The post(-)colonial Arab city. *Space and Polity*, 24(2), pp. 262-282. (doi: [10.1080/13562576.2020.1787135](https://doi.org/10.1080/13562576.2020.1787135)).

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Deposited on: 23 June 2020

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The Post(-)colonial Arab City

Dr. Emma Laurie Emma.Laurie@glasgow.ac.uk
Prof. Christopher Philo Christopher.philo@glasgow.ac.uk

Abstract

A body of work from the 1980s by Ronan Paddison, Allan Findlay and colleagues on ‘the post-colonial city’ and ‘the Arab city’ is explored as a contribution to this Special Issue on ‘Paddison Geographies’. Distinguishing between ‘post-colonial’ (as periodisation) and ‘postcolonial’ (as critical way of thinking), an attempt is made to trace elements of the latter permeating this body of work, demonstrating that in certain respects the readiness of these scholars to engage with urban histories and geographies beyond the Global North anticipates more recent moves to engage open-handedly with the possibilities of multiple ‘other’ urban trajectories, lives and capacities for change. Additionally, by tracing the influence of writing by Janet Abu-Lughod on their ‘Arab city’ inquiries, it is suggested that Paddison and colleagues lean across to the ethos of a postcolonial ‘comparative urbanism’.

Keywords

Arab city; comparative urbanism; post-colonial city; postcolonialism; urban planning

Introduction

Throughout his life, Ronan Paddison regularly drew academic inspiration for both research and teaching from his own home city of Glasgow, but, as Cumbers and Philo (2019) note in their appreciation of his contributions to urban studies, his urban gaze expanded well beyond his own city’s boundaries. Particularly notable for the lead author here, as a researcher for whom postcolonial theory and scholarship is highly influential, has been Ronan’s work with Allan Findlay and others on ‘the Arab city’ [1] – which at one point they term ‘the post-colonial city’ (Findlay, Findlay and Paddison, 1984) – as reported in various publications during the 1980s. The paper that follows offers an outline commentary on this body of work, arguing that in certain respects it can be recovered as setting a precedent for inquiries now regarded as appropriately sensitive to the extraordinary diversity of global urban forms, cultures, histories and politics *beyond* those arising in the Global North (Robinson, 2006, 2011, 2015).

Although drafted over three decades ago, Paddison’s [2] writing with colleagues on ‘the Arab city’ can indeed be read alongside more current writings on postcolonial urbanism (Roy, 2011), contemporary debates around global and planetary urbanism (Sheppard et al., 2013; Reddy, 2018), and emerging work on Southern urbanism (Schinder, 2017). Such debates

challenge what Spivak (1991) identifies as a problematic universalisation or ‘worlding’ of ‘situated knowledge’, and explore how new lines of inquiry in urban research – and new scriptings of cities in the Global South – can transform how cities, when and wherever, are understood. While Ronan and co-authors in the 1980s may never have utilised the language of postcolonial urbanism as such, we reflect here on the ways in which his writing bears certain hallmarks of this new sensibility for understanding the cities of the Global South. More broadly, certain claims and references in their writings suggest their valuing of a ‘comparative’ approach when studying the diversity of urban forms and processes, past and present, which coincides with more recent – more theoretically charged – calls for a ‘comparative urbanism’ wherein any pre-supposed hegemony or superiority of Global-Northern urban-analytical tools is dismantled (Robinson, 2006, 2011, 2014, 2016). We will seek to elaborate these remarks in what follows, interleaving a few reflections generously provided as a personal communication by Allan Findlay (2020 [unpaginated]).

Ronan’s interventions on ‘the Arab city’ emerged from a UK Social Science Research Council grant (HR7739), for which he worked alongside departmental colleague Allan Findlay, then a staff member in Geography at the University of Glasgow, and Anne Findlay, a Postdoctoral Researcher also based in Glasgow, as well as with Habib Abichou, an Urban Planner for the District of Tunis. While Ronan brought his urban expertise – as detailed elsewhere in this special journal issue (also – to bear on this project, Findlay and Findlay “came ... with a primary focus on population and development,” including reading “work of many social anthropologists who had written most of the seminal papers on Arab society and in particular on North Africa” (Findlay, 2020). Given concerns sometimes expressed about the status of Southern collaborators in research originating from the Global North (an early statement is Sidaway, 1992), it is telling to hear the reflection that “Habib Abichou was a co-producer of the research and much, much more,” and that “[h]e was one of the drivers of the project, offering insights as an Arab planner and economist” (Findlay, 2020: **Figure 1**). Insofar that these inquiries did escape certain snares of imposing a Global-Northern perspective on ‘the Arab city’, the suggestion is Abichou’s input was highly significant.[3]

The overall project offered a comparative study of planning policies and spatial arrangements operative and present within the two North African cities of Tunis, in Tunisia, and Rabat-Sale, in Morocco. It led to papers published in *Third World Planning Review* (Paddison, Abichou, Findlay and Findlay, 1984), *Urban Studies* (Findlay, Findlay and Paddison, 1984),

Figure 1: Habib Abichou (right) and Anne Findlay (left) during fieldwork. (Source: Anne Findlay, personal collection)

(Paddison, Findlay and Findlay, 1984) and *Geoforum* (Paddison and Findlay, 1986), as well as the monograph *Planning the Arab City: The Cases of Tunis and Rabat* (Findlay and Paddison, 1986), itself a stand-alone issue of the journal *Progress in Planning* (Volume 26, Part 1; also Findlay, 1988). Four departmental ‘occasional’ papers appeared, as semi-published presentations of preliminary findings to do with both the ethnic and class geographies of the two cities (Abichou, Findlay, Findlay and Paddison, 1981; Findlay, Findlay and Paddison, 1983; also Findlay and Findlay, 1984) and the retailing environments of these cities set within a wider Middle Eastern context (Paddison, 1985; Findlay, Paddison and Findlay, 1985; also Findlay, Paddison and Dawson, 1990), while a related ‘occasional’ paper addressed both internal migration in Tunisia and emigration from Morocco (Findlay and Findlay, 1980). Two further conference publications from the project were Paddison (1988) and Findlay (1988).

The post(-)colonial hyphen conundrum and revisiting ‘the Arab city’ studies

The 1986 monograph on ‘the Arab city’ will be our main focus here,[4] but it will usefully ground our account to commence with reference to the 1984 *Urban Studies* piece that

deployed the term ‘post-colonial’ (its subtitle is ‘an analysis of social space in post-colonial Rabat’). The crucial hyphen here in ‘post-colonial’ reveals that the focus is a particular periodisation of the city’s history, underscoring its distinctiveness in being a city *after* colonialism (Findlay, Findlay and Paddison, 1984). A tripartite history is hence envisaged: a pre-colonial period dating back to the seventh century, centred on the *medina* as “a mosaic of streets and traditional courtyard houses”; a colonial period when, under French colonial rule, the old city was extended by “a European urban area laid out on a predominantly grid iron pattern with multi-story apartments and office blocks built in the style familiar to colonists who constructed them”; and a post-colonial period after 1956 when, with Moroccan independence, the departure of sizeable French and Spanish ‘colonial populations’ “created a time-specific void in the city’s housing market” that resulted in a substantial redistribution of Rabat’s Moroccan population as those with resources occupied the high-quality ‘*centre moderne*’ properties newly vacated (information and quotes here from Findlay, Findlay and Paddison, 1984, p.41: **Figure 2**). The root finding of the paper, based upon analysis of household returns to the 1971 census, a government national employment survey of 1977 and a door-to-door questionnaire of 177 households in 1982, is that “the spatial structures established during the colonial period continue to differentiate the city’s major social areas [, and m]igration flows have served to

Figure 2: Location map of central Rabat showing the *medina* (the old city) and the ‘centre moderne’ (the new city) and the researchers’ study areas. (Source: Findlay, Findlay and Paddison, 1984, Figure 1, p.43)

fossilise existing spatial structures” (Findlay, Findlay and Paddison, 1984, p.59).[5] Hence why Rabat here is expressly positioned as a post-colonial city: ones whose spatial forms have been substantially imprinted *during* its colonial period, and to an extent then ‘fossilised’ into the years that come *after* the formal withdrawal of colonial power.[6]

Unsurprisingly, Paddison and his co-authors did not deploy the unhyphenated term ‘postcolonial’ in the fashion now familiar within the realms of urban geography and, of course, human geography more broadly. In her introductory text, *Geographies of Postcolonialism*, Sharp (2009, p.3) helpfully explores “the importance of a hyphen” in this connection, and it is worth quoting her at length as a scene-setter for our argument to come:

When the hyphen is used in the term, it refers to the common-sensical definition of post-colonialism as the period following [a state’s] independence from colonising powers. ...

The term is written without a hyphen to recognise the problems with the first, or more conventional, use of the concept. ... This second definition seeks to play on the ambiguity of the concept, recognising continuities from the

colonial period as well as breaks from it – and also recognising that, while states might be physically decolonised, this does not mean that other effects of the colonial period have all disappeared. This is because postcolonialism represents a shift from a form of analysis based solely around politics and economics (again the conventional way of understanding the impacts of colonialism) to consider instead the cultural products of colonialism, particularly the ways of knowing the world that emerged. (Sharp, 2009, pp.4-5)

As she goes on to argue, “cultural decolonisation – what some call the decolonisation of the mind – has been a much more difficult process” (Sharp, 2009, p.5), not least due to European Enlightenment values and procedures of thought, engrained in much of the academic DNA of the Global North, being so readily exported elsewhere and so unthinkingly deployed to ‘make (common) sense’ of situations and circumstances outwith Europe and the Global North. Given these starting coordinates from Sharp, we hence propose in what follows to shift beyond what Paddison and co-authors say about the (hyphenated) post-colonial city, interesting as this work is, to ask whether anywhere in this body of work on Tunis and Rabat we can detect seeds of (unhyphenated) postcolonial “ways of knowing” (Sharp, 2009, p.5) these cities.

On initial reading, the 1986 monograph on ‘the Arab city’ is an example of quintessentially 1980s urban geography, its objective being to work with – to specify, apply, evaluate and (re)calibrate – ‘models’ that purport to capture the spatial essence of ‘the city’ or, with more nuance, particular categories of city identified with labels such as ‘the Arab city’. Such models tend to derive very much from the hallways of Western, or we might say Global-Northern, academia, deploying models whose situated origins lie in the likes of Chicago or Los Angeles and wherein urbanisation is reckoned to be shaped at bottom by free-market economic forces. In the 1986 monograph, one starting-point is explicitly identified as ‘regional science’ (Haig-Hurd-Alonso type) models of how ‘economic rent’, determined by the accessibility of urban markets at city centres, shapes urban spatial forms wherever they arise through creating an ‘equilibrium’ between centralising and decentralising tendencies. Swiftly, though, the authors reflect that:

Although market forces may operate in what appears to be a self-regulatory fashion ... , urban analysts have amply demonstrated with reference to specific historical and geographical examples that there are many other forces which prevent the freeplay of centrifugal and centripetal economic forces. Cumulative imbalance and congestion of the urban core seems to be the ‘normal’ outcome rather than an equilibrium solution. (Findlay and Paddison, 1984, p.11)

Such statements – muted as they may be, hardly amounting to trenchant critique of Global-Northern orthodoxies – are nonetheless instructive for what we wish to recover from these Paddison et al. inquiries, notably their recognition of the complications thrown into the mix by being open to ‘specific historical and geographical examples’. That readiness to reckon with specificity is crucial, in effect deprivileging the economistic locational models of the Global-Northern academy and quietly resonating with what has been termed a ‘postcolonial economic geography’ (Pollard, McEwan, Laurie and Stenning, 2009).

Conceptually, the root architecture and titling of the 1986 monograph suggests that the label of ‘the Arab city’ holds meaning, or ontological status, as an informative picturing of a reality beyond, notwithstanding the extent to which such a move cannot but be ‘essentialising’ or ‘reductive’. While never elaborated, the implication is a concern to debate what might be regarded as the core or defining elements of ‘the Arab city’, with all the risks attendant on operating with a simplistic typological category invented by Global-Northern researchers rather than necessarily holding much sway for scholars, let alone everyday city-dwellers, from the global region in question. Indeed, the notion of ‘the Arab city’ should be set within a larger family of potentially equally problematic categories referencing: cultural-religious baselines, such as ‘the Islamic city’ (eg. Abu-Lughod, 1987; Eickelman, 1974; Raymond, 1994; Zakaria, Ismail, Hassan and Al-Ashwal, 2018) or ‘the Muslim city’ (Maçais, 1940) [7]; named geographical regions, such as ‘the Middle Eastern city’ (eg. Blake and Lawless, 1980) or ‘the African city’ (O’Connor, 1983; Freund, 2007); or types of environmental setting, such as ‘the Desert city’ (Addoun and Hadeid, 2019).[8]

While ‘the Arab city’ is sometimes conflated with ‘the Islamic city’, especially by Global-Northern scholars, an objection raised by one writer asks about “the remaining five-sixths of the Islamic World” (Raymond, 1974, p.12). Indeed, ‘Arab’ (as in ‘Arabia’) is itself ultimately a geographical attribution, equating with what some term ‘the Middle East’, itself a tellingly ‘Western’ orientation, and in practice studies of cities such as Rabat are sometimes cast as explorations of the Mediterranean Arab world or, even more narrowly, as examples of the ‘French-African colonial city’ (Lowder, 1986, Figure 2.1, p.30). Academic work on ‘the Islamic city’, often rolled together with ‘the Arab city’, has been fiercely critiqued for its ‘Orientalist’ (Eurocentric) projections by Abu-Lughod (1987) and Raymond (1994) in a register different from the Edward Said-influenced postcolonial critique to be discussed below. To an extent, Paddison and his co-authors anticipate and deflect the Orientalist

critique, partly by subtly positioning their account as deviating from models forged in the crucible of European and ‘Western’ history and thought, and partly because they themselves derive inspiration – and indeed a form of non-Orientalist comparative scholarship – from the likes of Abu-Lughod. The first lines of argument here will thread through the next three sections of our paper, while the second will be expanded when finally concluding our paper.

Methodologically, the 1986 monograph builds upon primary research that proceeded with the utilisation of census data, national employment surveys, door to door questionnaires and urban mapping providing a predominantly quantitative and cartographic description of the two cities. The monograph offers, amongst many other attributes, tables detailing the respective cities’ population growth (Table 1, p.19) and retail concentration (Table 7, p.38), as well as maps (**Figure 3**) of the cities’ tertiary employment (bar chart maps: Figures 4 and 5, p.33), housing areas (Figure 7, p.44; Figure 8, p.45), population density (a choropleth map, only Tunis: Figure 9, p.48), land use (grid square maps: Figure 10, p.54; Figure 11, p.55) and planning (development) zones (Figure 12, p.60; Figure 13, p.74). These figures and maps ‘materialise’ the city’s economic, social and planning structures, but the authors also provide a lot of what might be termed more classical geographical description evoking places, their longer-term socio-economic histories and more recent transformations. Moreover, a closer reading reveals that, between the tables, cartography and descriptions, there are indeed insights and arguments that complement more contemporary debates around ‘planetary urbanisation’ (Brenner and Schmid, 2014; Reddy, 2018; Ruddick, Peake, Tanyiklic and Patrick, 2018). And so, we will suggest that moments can be detected, throughout ‘the Arab City’ monograph, where the

FIG. 4. Location of tertiary employment in Tunis.

FIG. 5. Distribution of tertiary employment in Rabat-Salé.

authors offer a postcolonial reading of the city as much as a reading of a post-colonial city. To do this, we will now focus on three main aspects: (i) a scripting of the postcolonial city; (ii) a provincialisation of European urban history; and (iii) a speaking back against global urbanism to contemplate alternative trajectories for cities and their inhabitants.

Scripting the postcolonial city

In their 2013 manifesto for ‘Provincialising global urbanism’, Sheppard et al. (2013, p.895) critique the manner in which mainstream urban scholarship “explicitly or implicitly relies on cities in North America and Western Europe as norm,” reflecting the domination of ideas from Global North urban planning as they are exported and transplanted to cities in the Global South. Against this backdrop, a comparative scripting of cities takes place, with the cities of the Global South always set in contrast to the cities of the Global North. In ‘Orientalist’ fashion, the constructed binary essentialism between North and South is never offered as *mere* difference, but rather in this discursive formation a ‘different’ Global South is “always symmetrical to, and yet diametrically inferior to, to a Europe equivalent” (Said, 1978, p.72). The North is set as model and standard for what the cities in the Global South can aspire to become, with cities to be remade “in the emergent principles of the European urban planning” (Sheppard et al., 2013, p.894).

Cities in the Global South, furthermore, are frequently scripted as *problem* or, as Roy puts it, always scripted under the banner of ‘underdeveloped’ and presented as “the mega city bursting at the seams, over taken by their fate of poverty, disease, violence and toxicity. They constitute the ‘planet of slums’ with the ‘surplus humanity’ and ‘twilight struggles’” (Roy, 2011, p.208). Most striking in what Paddison and colleagues write about ‘the Arab city’, therefore, is the complete absence of the descriptor ‘underdeveloped’, despite the dominance of this term in urban studies: neither city, Tunis nor Rabat, is ever cast as an ‘underdeveloped’ city. Instead, throughout their monograph Findlay and Paddison outline the challenges faced by residents. Population rise and high population density are both recognised, though never dramatised, and rather these phenomena are calmly captured through deployment of census information and detailed in table form. Never being hyperbolically discussed, they are simply positioned as challenges to be addressed.

Furthermore, in their analysis of economic trade in the city, Findlay and Paddison never depict a ‘scourge’ of illegal trade, and nor is informality positioned as an economic problem to be rectified. Rather, there is a call that such activities should be recognised and provided for, arguing that physical planning “needed to take account of the *so-called ‘informal sector’*” (Findlay and Paddison, 1986, p.8, emphasis added) and further noting that these “non-planned activities occupy a significant place within the urban labour market” (Findlay and Paddison, 1986, p.8). The addition in the first quote here of the phrase ‘so-called’

arguably distances them, if subtly, from a pervasive Eurocentric dichotomisation of ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ socio-economic activities. Indeed, each time they turn to the words ‘the informal sector’ to describe such activity, they always do so cautiously or problematise the term by encasing the words in scare quotes. Moreover, they write as follows, indicating too their borrowings from other scholars hesitant about a too-simplistic imposition of Global North terms and models [9]:

The International Labor Office has popularly referred to these as the ‘informal sector’ and although the term has been widely criticized (Bromley, 1977) the dualistic concepts of traditional/modern or formal/informal sectors has persisted, albeit in the guise of other terms such as upper and lower circuit (Santos, 1979) and structured and unstructured sectors (Charmes, 1982). Less important than the different nuances indicted by each of these terms is the general feature which they seek to identify – namely the presence of a substantial part of the workforce whose daily labours are not adequately described by the terms appropriate to the labour markets of the more industrialised nations. (Findlay and Paddison, 1986, pp.27-28)

Here, then, we hear hints of frustration at of cities’ stories half-told when the norms in the Global North are positioned as key referent-points. This taking seriously of the place-specific needs of the city, and the quiet attempts here to destabilise the referential position of the Global North, leads on to the second aspect of why this early work on ‘the Arab city’ could be characterised as a postcolonial urbanism.

Provincialising the European city’s history

Sheppard et al. (2013) draw upon the work of postcolonial scholar Chakrabarty and his call to ‘provincialise’ Europe, questioning the ways in which “thought was related to place” (Chakrabarty 2007, p. xiii) and noting how Europe always works as “a silent referent” (2007 p.28) located at ‘the end of history’, with European development histories are presented as both the global norm and the teleological destination-point for how all world regions and peoples will (and should) eventually develop. To provincialise Europe, as a provocative counter-move, involves ensuring that European ideas and trajectories are simply presented “one history among many local co-equals, each worthy of attention” (Sheppard et al., 2013, p. 895) and, thus, challenging universal knowledge claims. Those calling for a postcolonial urbanism note the ways in which European and American cities are so frequently presented as the epitome of modernity, taken as the gold standard for progress and development. Sheppard et al. (2013) register the struggle of mainstream urbanism, as both ‘real world’ project and intellectual-discursive agenda, to encounter ‘others’ openly, without prejudice or

hierarchy, and not simply to reduce otherness into its own image. Just like the ‘big-D’ Development project entrenched in modernisation ideology, so the modern city is frequently seen as a gift from the Global North to the Global South, with planning efforts needing to be enacted to bring Global South cities into orbit of – or to remake them in the image of – their Global North ‘betters’.

As such, urbanisation becomes as much a temporal as a spatial process, with all cities deemed to be “progressing at different speeds along the same linear development trajectory, following the advice of those ahead of them” (Sheppard et al., 2013, p. 896). In their writing on ‘the Arab city’, Paddison and colleagues actively rally against such universalising understandings of the city, and for them the urban development of Europe and North America is never positioned as either norm or goal. Discussing congestion in ‘the Arab city’, they recognise the heterogeneity of urban experience and explicitly argue that Western academics are “mistaken ... [in their] belief that congestion problems in Third World cities are merely a delayed response to the same forces which generated high land use intensities in western cities” (Findlay and Paddison, 1986, pp.11-12). Continuing, they note for cities in the Global South that “it must be recognised that the forces competing for access ... have been different and have combined in a different fashion from the European and American cities” (Findlay and Paddison, 1986, p.12).

As indicated, Paddison and co-authors use the hyphenated term ‘post-colonial’ when considering transformations in the urban spatial structures of Rabat, but it is striking that the lengthiest piece of writing from their 1980s project does not carry a title including ‘post-colonial’ but rather is called ‘Planning the *Arab* city’ (emphasis added). While we acknowledge the potential problematic descriptor – particularly if one was only to encounter the brevity of the title – we would argue, given the substantive content of the text, that the descriptor of the city as ‘Arab’ was precisely *not* an attempt pejoratively to ‘other’ these cities as inferior to a European counterpart or to “eradicate the plurality of difference” (Said, 1978, p.309) between the cities under review. Such an eradication of difference is precisely what angered and energised Edward Said in his game-changing book *Orientalism* (Said, 1978), itself borrowing from those older hesitations noted earlier about Orientalist projections from Europe, and one obvious parallel here lies in his critique of how notions of ‘the Arab mind’ have been deployed (eg. Said, 1978, p.105, p.287, p.311, p.320), notably in Patai’s widely-cited text of this name *The Arab Mind* (Patai, 1973; see Said, 1978, p.309). Indeed,

objections to constructs of ‘the Arab mind’ and ‘the Arab city’ are clearly cut from the same cloth.

On our reading, however, the use of the term ‘Arab’ in the Findlay and Paddison monograph appears as an open-handed, non-judgemental, substantive descriptor, fixing the cultural province and biography of the two cities under scrutiny. We would further suggest that it also does an element of work that *might* usually now be cast as unhyphenated ‘postcolonial’ by hinting, after Sharp (2009, p.5), at alternative “ways of knowing” these cities that might just escape the shadows cast from Europe. In so doing, Findlay and Paddison spell out how “the long history of urbanism in the middle east and the concept of the organic unity of urban society with Islamic civilizations have contributed to creating specific morphological, economic and social forms” (Findlay and Paddison, 1986 p. 14). Tunis and Rabat are thereby recognised as being emergent from a *different* temporal trajectory to that shaping urbanism in the Global North, but a trajectory, an Arab trajectory, history and culture – deemed equally valid – countering the myth of Eurocentric diffusionism at the root of much scholarship (Blaut, 1993).

The cities under analysis are not European-made, but cities with their own prior history outwith European intervention. In their retracing of the long history of urbanism, Findlay and Paddison recount the founding of Tunis back in the seventh century and its emergence as a vital administrative centre for Tunisia during the Ottoman Empire, recognising that French colonialism merely extended – and not created – its status as ‘capital’. The importance of Rabat, meanwhile, grew when the sultan began using it as a resting spot in travel between key cities, leading to palatial construction and the grand growth of the city. In Tunis, the authors note the Islamic influenced woven into the very fabric of the city, not only in founding Tunis as a functional urban space, but crafting the very form of it: from the *medina* to the networked narrow alleyways and *cul-de-sacs*, the character of the city was fashioned by “the social structures of the society that built it” (Findlay and Paddison, 1986, p. 21). The city walls, they add, were erected to respect the sacredness of the Islamic religious and legal institutions in Tunis, with the *medina* serving as a symbolic, as much as a physical, demarcation between city and country. Furthermore, the meandering street patterns and residential buildings constructed around central courtyards were architectural decisions that reflected a cultural tradition within Islamic societies for clear distinctions between public and private space (Findlay and Paddison, 1986, p.14), not least to reduce the visibility of women

by blocking sightlines. In both Tunis and Rabat, we read of the ways in which many of these Islamic and Arabic urban forms “*survive*” the French colonial urban expansion (Findlay and Paddison, 1986, p.14; added emphasis). Here, then, both cities are understood as organic entities coming to their present form through resistance to European manoeuvres within them, as much as through these European manoeuvres. Throughout all this writing of ‘the Arab city’, the cities of Tunis and Rabat are very much presented as possessing their own non-European history, where colonialism is a mere character in a city’s story, rather than the decisive author of it.

Our further sense, moreover, is that Paddison and his co-workers were *consciously* alert to the pitfalls of peddling in Orientalist projections that centralised, or took as a model, the European city’s history. We noted earlier the critique of Orientalism mounted by urban scholars such as Abu-Lughod and in a different vein by Said, and it is instructive to learn from Findlay (2020) that it was through the research team’s readings in social anthropology that “we arrived at Abu-Lughod,” and that “we attended a seminar given by Said quite early on, and before he became well-known in human geography”. There is more to be said about the influence of Abu-Lughod on this research team, as will be underlined when finally concluding the present paper. Tellingly, moreover, Findlay (2020) is emphatic about the importance in this connection of Abichou, the team’s Tunisian partner, to the project’s whole approach. Indeed, “[i]t was some of his critical thinking that shaped our ideas on how [O]rientalism had distorted accounts of the Arab city and how this played out in terms of the planning practices of the 1980s”. While needing to be hesitant about inferring too much with hindsight, it still seems plausible to conjecture that Abichou’s contribution, evidently as far *more* than just informant or gatekeeper, went some way to ensuring a meaningful Southern presence that militated against older variants of Orientalist urban scholarship. In the process, then, the project’s post-colonial focus arguably did fringe into what we might now describe as postcolonial critique.

Alternative future planning trajectories

The reflection above from Findlay (2020) about Abichou’s influence on how the research team thought about Orientalism inflecting ‘planning practices of the 1980s’ in the likes of Tunis and Rabat is a neat bridge through into considering the planning dimension. Indeed, not only do Findlay and Paddison provincialise Europe in how they write the histories of these cities, they also challenge the exporting of European ideas in the imagining of and

planning for their futures. They offer what Sheppard et al. (2013, p.898), in their manifesto, would understand as “alternative theorisations [that] open up ways of narrating urbanism worldwide that do not presume North American and European urban experience to be foundational, but also anticipate an agenda that seeks to respond with responsibility”. In recognising the diverse temporal, spatial and cultural influences that have come to create ‘Arab Cities’ (plural), Findlay and Paddison caution against the exporting of Eurocentric knowledges and call instead for the opening up of multiple futures. Talking specifically about planning to improve traffic congestion, they advise against depending “extremely heavily on foreign planning expertise” (Findlay and Paddison, 1986, p.17). Subsequently, they insist that “[t]he character of urban congestion in Tunis and Rabat differs in many respects from that of major cities in Europe and North America, making the direct transfer of planning solutions especially inappropriate” (Findlay and Paddison, 1986, p.77). Additionally, when concluding their study, Findlay and Paddison plainly advise against the cities of Tunis and Rabat simply emulating the trajectories (to the 1980s) of mainstream Western urban planning, suggesting that “unlike [in] Western cities the opportunity to maintain the city centre as a ‘living core’ still exists” (Findlay and Paddison, 1986, p.78; also Studer, 2015). No straightforward message here, therefore, about a ‘one size fits all’ trajectory - or ‘a Northern size fits all’ trajectory – as linked to recommendations about the singular (urban planning) path to follow.

In their 1984 *Third World Planning Review* piece, where they effectively take on ‘the urban planning machine’ (Paddison, Abichou, Findlay and Findlay, 1984, p.290), they more explicitly critique European planning regulations as parachuted down into Tunis and Rabat, noting “the proposals that followed from the consultants reports were in themselves neocolonial, particularly reflecting contemporary French planning ideology,” the failure to create productive change through these planning interventions demonstrating “the danger of assuming the export of planning concepts is achievable” (Paddison, Abichou, Findlay and Findlay, 1984, pp.296-297). They forcefully insist that the ‘responsible’ improvement of the urban condition in Tunis and Rabat cannot be found in ideologies deriving from the Global North.

Such cautious calls in 1986 remain all too relevant today and can be found echoed by those whose work on urban planning in the Global South is explicitly positioned from a postcolonial approach and situated within the perspective of ‘subaltern urbanism’. Campbell (2013), for example, critiques the export of Anglo-American homeownership ideologies to

Tanzania through the MKURABITA titling scheme and the vision of Hernando De Soto,[10] both for its linear notion of development and for a silencing of the consequential displacement of the so-called urban poor. She argues that the exportation of Anglo-American home ownership policies is “emblematic of the modernisation programme ... a shepherd in the progression towards structured governance, order and *civilization* [and] wholesale homeownership as the only end point of the development trajectory, regardless of the social and cultural contexts” (Campbell, 2013, p.458). In closing their lengthy disquisition on ‘the Arab city’, the authors reflect upon the need to shift scales of analysis when proposing that “an assessment of those who benefit and those who lose as a result of planning efforts would appear an obvious step forward” (Findlay and Paddison, 1986, p.79). Here, therefore, we might see a call for a subaltern urbanism ready to take seriously the subaltern experience - subaltern on a planetary scale - that negotiates and shapes ‘the Arab city’. And, indeed, the work of Campbell (2014) goes on to do just that through her doctoral thesis, as she “investigate[s] the implications of the overselling of home ownership, and the neglect of rental housing, for informal owners and tenants in practice ... [by placing] residents at the center of analysis, in an attempt to discern the complexity of experience of informal housing” (Campbell, 2014, p.4).

Conclusion

Here, to begin concluding, a rather personal but clear lineage between Ronan and postcolonial scholarship swims into vision for the Campbell mentioned above, Trish Campbell, was a one-time undergraduate who studied with Ronan. She was actually a member of one of the last cohorts of Geography students at the University of Glasgow to take Ronan’s undergraduate option course *Urban Geography* before he retired and, having excelled in that class, worked temporarily with Ronan as a Research Assistant on his project investigating the Hidden Garden in Glasgow in the summer before she commenced the above cited doctoral work, based in the Geography department at the University of Glasgow and supervised by John Briggs and Joanne Sharp, with her fieldwork sites in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Briggs and Sharp had undertaken pioneering research on ‘indigenous knowledges’ in Africa, specifically among the Bedouin of Egypt and alert to gender dimensions (Briggs, 2005, 2013; Briggs and Sharp, 2004; Sharp, Briggs, Yacoub and Hamed, 2003), interfacing that with the postcolonial vision advanced in Sharp’s textbook discussed above (Sharp, 2009). Briggs had worked alongside Ronan for many years (Briggs, 2020), while Sharp had researched and authored

with Ronan on the politics and practices of urban public artworks (as reviewed by Pollock, 2020). There are multiple professional and personal entanglements here, as well as a constellation of sensibilities that definitely included postcolonialism and hesitations before the authority of Global-Northern knowledge, science and social organisation. Ronan inputted fully to that mix and, by connection, influence and osmosis, his baton was, as it were, transferred through to someone like Campbell.

As Cumbers and Philo (2019, p.2615) note, “Ronan was an inspiration for younger scholars and new generations of urban and political geographers in both his support and generous encouragement for their work both within Glasgow and beyond. Many now established scholars first developed their critical urban gaze through Ronan’s lectures and tutorials.” That inspiration, moreover, is richly expounded in the gathering of postgraduate recollections brought together in this special issue (Beel, Crotty, Doherty, McCormick and Stewart, 2020). And, indeed, Campbell’s urban gaze was developed by Ronan, and the work that she went on to complete did absolutely bear the hallmarks of Ronan’s careful scripting of cities. She embodies a clear and direct route whereby the ways in which Ronan’s scripting of the city beyond Northern, Western domains, provincialising Europe as referent and guidance, really did leave a legacy of more explicitly positioned postcolonial urbanism within the field of urban geography here at Glasgow, and no doubt beyond.

Finally to close, let us revisit the point that constructs of ‘the Arab city’ and, more sharply still, ‘the Islamic city’ – particularly as initially developed by French scholars gazing on their colonial possessions – have long been criticised for their peddling of ‘Orientalist myths’: “the classic concept of the Muslim city is very much a French affair” (Raymond, 1994, p.3). This critique is expounded with particular force by Janet Abu-Lughod (1928-2013), the well-known sociologist and occasional geographer,[11] whose 1987 paper entitled ‘The Islamic City’ has been characterised as follows: “Orientalist analysis was strongly challenged and criticized; the reflection of J. Abu Lughod ... is a good example of this kind of devastating exposé” (Raymond, 1994, p.10). Her critique does not reference Said’s more famous encapsulation and withering assault on Orientalist habits of thought, as mentioned earlier, but Said dedicated the original 1978 edition of *Orientalism* to ‘Janet and Ibrahim’, the latter being Janet’s husband, and mentioned them in the Acknowledgements (Said, 1978, p.xi). Moreover, “the final bookcase, crowding her bed” (Abu-Lughod, L., 2013, p.35) held various texts that she evidently held dear, *Orientalism* included. It is perhaps of some moment,

therefore, that the publications co-authored by Ronan and colleagues do indeed draw nourishment from Abu-Lughod's scholarship. Her own in-depth sociological analysis of Rabat, narrated in her monograph *Rabat: Urban Apartheid in Morocco* (Abu-Lughod, 1980), was clearly indispensable, while several other of her writings are cited on numerous occasions (11 to be precise) in 'the Arab city' monograph (including a chapter in a collection edited by a geographer: Abu-Lughod, 1980). This prominent critic of Global-Northern Orientalist discourse – even if her ideas on this score were still gestating in the early- to mid-1980s, and even if she never centrally positioned herself as a postcolonial scholar [12] – was thus a, or maybe *the*, principal academic building-block for the Paddison et al. inquiries under scrutiny here.

The 1984 Rabat paper also referenced another paper by Abu-Lughod, one that offered provocative epistemological, even methodological, claims regarding “the burgeoning field of comparative urban studies” (Abu-Lughod, 1975, p.13).[13] Rehearsing the age-old difficulty, well-known to geographers, of balancing “biographical descriptions of individual cities” with place-transcending analytical generalisations, she suggests that a common solution leads scholars into the trap of “describing an ideal generic type which often turns out to have been abstracted largely from their own case” (Abu-Lughod, 1975, p.16). This trap is familiar to her, she continues, from her own familiarity with authors scaling up unthinkingly from detailed inquiries into the likes of Fez, Tunis or Rabat “to generalise findings to a mythological beast called ‘the Islamic city’” (Abu-Lughod, 1975, p.17). What she proposes instead runs like this:

I would therefore like to argue strongly for a strategy which moves in disciplined fashion from the very specific to the somewhat more general to the even more general via the semi-controlled ‘experiment’, and which attempts to illuminate the similarities and differences uncovered. ...

... [W]hat is meant by a semi-controlled experiment? What is being proposed is a procedure for tracing the operation of common variables within specific parameters set by a culture area and a level of technological competence before jumping ahead to taxonomies and theories of comparative urbanism which ‘throw into the hopper’ *all cities at all times from all over* to see which traits and isolated characteristics appear congruent or divergent. (Abu-Lughod, 1975, p.17; added emphasis)

The reason for quoting this passage at length is because it anticipates the species of ‘comparative urbanism’ now being so compellingly promoted by Robinson and others. When initially advancing her ideas in this respect, Robinson characterises Abu-Lughod as “arguably

urban studies’ pre-eminent comparativist,” and uses her ‘hopper’ quote (above) to support a ‘caution’ about needing “to reground ... an experimental comparativism in careful and rigorous procedures” (Robinson, 2011, p.19).[14] We might differ a little from Robinson in what we take from this quote: for her, ‘before jumping ahead’ is being read as ‘*instead* of jumping ahead’, whereas we read it as envisaging a *next* stage or possibility for the comparative endeavour provided that a *prior* phase of more ‘controlled’ or ‘constrained’ comparison has been completed. In this regard, it is intriguing to consider Robinson’s landmark statement five years later when speaking of ‘urban studies as experimentation’ (Robinson, 2016, p.3). Here she calls for constant openness “to critique and creative exploration from urban experiences elsewhere than has conventionally informed conceptualisation,” and insists that “[s]urprises and new possibilities for thinking the urban emerge from many different sources: different cities, regions, trajectories and practices press on taken-for-granted assumptions amongst scholars” (Robinson, 2016, p.4). Proceeding in a postcolonial mode (also Robinson, 2003), she now appears to be affirmatively channelling Abu-Lughod’s ‘throwing into the hopper’ of ‘all cities at all times from all over’. And, as we finish, our speculation is that something akin to such a wide-ranging postcolonial ‘comparative urbanism’ is, if by no means exactly how Ronan and co-workers labouring in and on ‘the Arab city’ (**Figure 4**) would have understood their efforts, then at least residing in loosely the same patch of scholarly space.

Figure 4: Ronan Paddison during fieldwork. (Source: Anne Findlay, personal collection)

Acknowledgements

We wish to offer sizeable thanks to Mark Boyle for his patience and encouragement, as well as to two referees whose suggestions have certainly helped to improve the final version of this paper. Thanks to Gordon MacLeod for assistance with thinking about the role of a comparative sensibility in *The Fragmented State* (Paddison, 1983), and thanks to Jenny Robinson for discussions about Abu-Lughod and comparative urbanism. Finally, particular thanks are due to Allan Findlay for his generous and helpful reflections on an earlier draft of this paper, a number of which have been incorporated into the final version, and to him and Anne Findlay for permission to use the photographs included here.

Notes

[1] We have deliberately not sought to disentangle the ideas and contributions of the different scholars involved in this body of research, but our strong sense is that the team involved was very much *a team* with no single dominant voice. It is interesting to note the variability in the authors named, and indeed in the orders of their naming, on the various publications arising from the research. Moreover, as is clear from other contributions to this SI, Ronan was an exemplary collaborator, rarely wishing to single himself out as the ‘special one’, and so it makes sense to follow that lead here and hence to report on a corpus of work where Ronan was undoubtedly a significant influence and contributor but where what ultimately matters is the collective outcome (not the individual input). Findlay (2020) confirms that the research was indeed very much a team effort, while also clarifying the different expertises brought to the table by the different contributors.

[2] For most of this paper, excepting when we conclude, we will not say ‘Ronan’ but rather use the normal convention of referencing authors by their surnames, hence ‘Paddison’.

[3] Abichou is formally named as a co-author, once as first-named author, on two of the project’s publications. Some publications from the team listed a document authored by Abichou entitled *La fonction commerciale de Tunis* (Abichou, 1981), which was likely a planning report (focussing on the city’s retail environments) produced by the District de Tunis (Paddison, Abichou, Findlay and Findlay, 1984, pp.293-296: Abichou’s report is referenced in Endnote 22, p.293). Sadly, no trace can be found of this document. In their 1986 monograph, the authors acknowledge how “[i]n Tunis our field work progressed quickly and efficiently thanks to the generous assistance of Mr Habib Abichou” (Paddison and Findlay, 1986, p.5), and Findlay (2020) recalls that Abichou also worked a field season in Rabat-Salé (often the full designation given to this city). Findlay (2020) further reports that “Abichou would later rise to high office within the urban management team in Tunis and go on to become an international consultant working in several other African countries, including Morocco, Gabon and Burundi”.

[4] We should acknowledge that neither of us are experts on ‘the Arab city’, and so this paper cannot be taken as an intervention within that specific field of inquiry: rather, it is essentially an attempt to craft a postcolonial reading of what Paddison and co-authors have to say about ‘the Arab city’ in its diverse post-colonial forms.

[5] For a parallel study of colonial and post-colonial Rabat, considering the “complicated spatialities” of this city arising from the overlay of certain colonial urban planning innovations by the French ‘cultural regent’ to Morocco, Louis H.-G. Lyautey, and then from attempts to rework or to heritagise the resulting spatial forms, see Wagner and Minca (2014). Paddison, Abichou and Findlay (1984, p.266) discuss Lyautey’s influence on Moroccan urban planning. Also, see Studer (2015), exploring ‘urban space in the Moroccan context’ and, without referencing the Paddison *et al* project but explicitly leaning across to an ‘ordinary towns or cities’ agenda (Robinson, 2006), offering insights into the “tension arising between urban planning and towns or cities as spaces of living” (Studer, 2015, p.1005). An important text discussing ‘French Modern’ social-urban forms, circulating France and its colonies, is Rabinow (1995).

[6] Intriguingly, in her book *Geography of Third World Cities*, Stella Lowder, a colleague in Geography at the University of Glasgow, illustrates broader claims about ‘Third World’ cities emerging from periods of colonial rule through drawing upon and citing the Paddison et al. Rabat study: “spatial patterns can be surprisingly enduring ... : in contemporary Rabat, for example, selective immigration has fossilised the contrasts between the various parts of the city centre by identifying each with an economic class” (Lowder, 1986, p.245).

[7] Marçais (1940) spoke of ‘*L’urbanisme musulman*’: see Abu-Lughod (1987, p.158).

[8] Another umbrella category under which the project sits is that of ‘the Third World City’ (eg. Lowder, 1986). Such a category is now commonly rejected as outdated, an artifice of how the world became divided up during the Cold War, and also – in more critical social science circles – because of how ‘Third World’ carries the implication of sitting at the bottom of a geoeconomic-geopolitical hierarchy within the global nation-state system. See chapter on ‘Thirdworldism and the image of global development’ in Power (2003; cf. Solarz, 2012).

[9] Particularly worthy of note is the borrowing here from Milton Santos, the Brazilian geographer, famous for conceptualising cities of the ‘underdeveloped world’ as a ‘shared space’ (Santos, 1979) hosting two distinct if related economic ‘circuits’ (some might say ‘modes of production’: Lowder, 1986, p.250), one capitalistic, large-scale, technologically-advanced and linked to national and international contexts, and the other informal, small-scale, craft-based and deeply ‘entrenched’ in a given city’s neighbourhoods. Santos was widely regarded as having early instituted a fierce critique of Western (or Northern) models of ‘development’ as deeply flawed in capturing the specificities of urban forms and processes outwith the West (or North). As Santos (1974, p.4) asked: “Why should we not ... rally expertise from the underdeveloped countries themselves: to develop theories which would make sense to them both as geographers and citizens? At the moment, ‘official’ geography operates as though the West had a monopoly on ideas.” Note that Santos was prepared, in the 1970s, to use the term ‘underdeveloped’ as a deliberate political strategy, questioning why some global places are indeed *underdeveloped* compared to what they might otherwise have been without outside interferences. Santos’s role in the history of radical geography is touched on by Crossa (2019).

[10] The MKURABITA programme (also referred to as the Property and Business Formalisation Scheme) is a World Bank-funded program in Tanzania, inspired by the work of Peruvian economist Hernando de Soto. De Soto proposes the formalisation of title deeds and property rights to those informally ‘possessing’ land in so-called slums. The central tenant of his argument is that property formalisation becomes a key path for development whereby newly titled homeowners can take out loans against their homes to invest in other areas of their lives. Through MKURABITA, the Government of Tanzania set out plans to “ensure that assets of the poor, which are currently held and exchanged outside the legal system, are adequately documented, standardised into universally accepted property records and connected to economic growth” (United Republic of Tanzania, 2007, p. 9 cited in Campbell, 2013, p. 463). For further discussion, see also Briggs (2011) and Mercer (2017).

[11] For many years she was Professor of Sociology, Geography and Urban Affairs and Policy Research at Northwestern University, Chicago.

[12] There is an early Northwestern ‘mimeo’ referenced in her 1975 paper which includes the phrase ‘post-colonial’ – given a 1974 date and subtitled ‘Rabat-Salé, Morocco, an example of a post-colonial caste system’ – and maybe there is a thread from here through to ‘the post-colonial city’ in the title of Findlay, Findlay and Paddison (1984). Discussing recent postcolonial critics of a Global-Northern dominance in urban theorising, Scott and Storper (2014, p.3) argue that, “[i]n some respects, these recent postcolonial approaches echo the work of earlier writers such as Abu-Lughod [and others] who define postcolonial urbanism in a quite literal way, that is, as an urban condition shaped by the experience of colonialism”.

[13] One of the papers arising from ‘the Arab city’ research was explicitly badged as ‘a comparison of two North African cities’ (Paddison, Abichou, Findlay and Findlay, 1984). Elsewhere it would not be hard to find Paddison being at least implicitly comparative in how he builds arguments based on observing, synthesising or counterposing urban or political ‘cases’ drawn from his expansive global and historical knowledge-base. Indeed, his major monograph *The Fragmented State* (Paddison, 1983) might be described as an exercise in ‘comparative statism’, roaming widely when exploring different examples of how unitary or fragmented – how centralised or decentralised – states can be in their intertwined institutional and territorial compositions (see also MacLeod, 2020). That said, he acknowledges “the

advanced industrial liberal economies with which we shall primarily be concerned” (Paddison, 1983, p.5), while only speaking lightly about either the colonial periods shaping some of these economies (mainly with reference to Australia: eg. Paddison, 1983, p.36) or the role of ‘Third World’ state formation in “the dissolution of empires” (Paddison, 1983, p.viii). A postcolonial critique of *The Fragmented State* could certainly be imagined.

[14] Here Robinson is using what is evidently a 1976 reprint of Abu-Lughod’s 1975 *Urban Affairs Quarterly* piece. Two approving references to Abu-Lughod (1999) occur in Robinson (2011, p.7, p.10). Introducing a virtual journal issue on comparative urbanism, moreover, Robinson (2014, p.5) recruits Abu-Lughod (1999) as a precursor of such an approach to fostering new urban knowledges. See also Brenner (2001).

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