Island Modernity: Jamaican Urbanism and Architecture, Kingston, 1960-1980

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Abstract: This paper explores peripheral modernity in the island of Jamaica. Jamaica's self-perception of being an island, as evidenced in texts and imagery, is *not* one that is peripheral, bounded, limited, small, or isolated. The trope of islandness, of interest to travellers and tourists, has been expressed both visually and textually, but it centers on being a *tropical location* as opposed to islandness per se. Although there has been a practical, literary and visual connection with the sea, the sea has not been portrayed as a separator but rather as a conduit and connector, no different from a continental coast. The process of modernization of Kingston, the island's capital and main port city, strongly reflects this 'un-islanded' or 'continental' self-perception, challenging the notion of peripheral modernity. Kingston was not imagined as a periphery at all by those who embraced and implemented the modernization project. This was so even while Kingston's hinterland, during the period under study (1960-1980), was largely rural, under-developed and poor. Kingston's geographical position, as a mainland port on a relatively large island, by Caribbean standards, facilitated the imagining and implementing of modernity following continental models. These arguments are built on an examination of the separate but interconnected ideas and practices of architect Wilson Chong, and the architectural firm Shankland Cox, using technical reports and periodical articles as primary sources.

Keywords: Jamaica, Kingston, waterfronts, modernism, architecture, tropics, island cities

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1. Modernity: Beyond lines of latitude

The disciplines of Island Studies and Urban Island Studies seek to uncover the "material [...] non-material [...] and epistemological" realities of island existence (Swaminathan, 2014). Historically, islands are occupied, represented, imagined and managed in ways that are unique to the particular geographic and cultural contexts of territories that are surrounded by water. Islands may be potentially isolated, may be a part of archipelagos, are at varying distances from continental land masses, exhibit varying levels of urbanization and may, through land reclamation activities become joined to other islands or mainlands. The habitation of islands involves the materiality of construction, engineering and reshaping of landscapes, as well as distinctive imaginaries, or poetics of 'islandness' (Grydehøj, 2014; Pigou-Dennis & Grydehøj, 2014; Kinder, 2015).

An intriguing aspect of the scholarship on architecture and cities in the Caribbean islands is that there is virtually no engagement with themes of 'islandness'. The tropical location of the islands, as well as their former and in some cases still current status as colonies of maritime Western European empires provide the most pervasive frames of reference for analytic purposes (Stagno, 2001; Caselas, 2009; Lauber, 2007; Segre, 2001). This has been the case across a range of related disciplines, including architectural history and theory, literature, and art history until very recently, when the concept of Small Island States and issues of sustainability and climate change have come to the fore (UTech, Jamaica International Conference, 2005). Recent analyses of the emergence of modern architecture in Caribbean islands have offered no context of 'islandness' (Rodriquez & Mores, 2005). This reality is overtly noted by only one scholarly work, in the field of Jamaican historical geography (Higman & Hudson, 2009, p. 245):

> Modern Jamaicans rarely refer to themselves as islanders. The fact of living 'on' an island, let alone a small island, is rarely vocalized or problematized. The sea is not regularly in sight, and there are only rare opportunities for intervisibility with other islands, notably glimpses of Cuba from the Blue Mountain Peak. Psychologically, Jamaica is continental. A peripatetic person may be referred to as temporarily 'on the island' or 'off the island', but for most Jamaica is simply home, homeland, yard, the Rock, JA or Jamdown.

Indeed, Higman and Hudson's commentary quoted above is the only direct reference to Jamaican 'islandness' as opposed to simply being an island, that has been discovered in academic literature in the fields of the humanities and human geography. This is highly relevant to the ensuing discussion about Kingston and modernity in this paper. In short, it will be argued that the relative lack of a public concept of islandness, especially as a peripheral, isolated, romanticized location, helped to pave the way for the pragmatic modernizing project for Kingston, especially the Kingston Waterfront. Ironically, the waterfront project may be seen as a part of a process of un-islanding, which was in keeping with the Jamaican psyche. Put another way, Jamaica's self-concept as an island was outward-looking, pragmatic, and not at all peripheral.

Higman has also discussed the Caribbean islands in terms which allow for an interpretation of the reasons for this peculiar quality of islandness. Referring to the Caribbean Sea, he asserted, "Without the islands there would be no sea." As an archipelago, "the islands of the Caribbean surround and demarcate the sea rather than sitting in it" (Higman, 2011, p. 1). The islands are wholly separate from mainlands, and, particularly in the Greater Antilles chain, of which Jamaica is a part, are hardly visible to each other. Tracing an arc that separates the Atlantic Ocean from the Caribbean Sea, the islands became a main seam in the blending

of the trans-Oceanic worlds, through the maritime, imperial projects of Western European nations between the fifteenth and twentieth centuries. This process made the islands "prime sites in the fateful modern colonization that brought Europeans and Africans across the Atlantic to the Americas" (Higman, 2011, p. 3).

This interpretation of the Caribbean islands launches them from a mere insular and peripheral setting to the centre stage of a process that was part of a broad sweep of modernization in its own right. The implication is that notwithstanding the decline of the agro-industrial plantation complex by the nineteenth century, the Caribbean Islands, and specifically Jamaica, had already become a part of globalizing and modernizing processes, which intensified in the decolonization period of the twentieth century.

Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that there are paradoxes and complex layers in the projections of Jamaica's sense of islandness, and not all of these can be addressed within the scope of this paper. One major paradox was that since the eighteenth century, Jamaica has been projected as the cultural imaginary of an exotic paradise for travellers and tourists, through landscape paintings, travelogues and descriptive writing. These tropes were particularly concerned with the nature of tropical landscapes, both tamed and untamed, and the cultural landscapes of exotic African and Asian populations (Thompson, 2006). It is important to bear in mind that this tourist landscape and seascape was vital to Jamaica's twentieth century economy, and yet this did not preclude modernist interventions in the form of hotels in Ocho Rios and Montego Bay, in the same time frame as the Kingston waterfront.

The complex configurations of global islandness have been discussed at length elsewhere. (Parry, 1993; Sivasundaram, 2013; Baldacchino, 2008; Grydehøj, 2014). The specific examples that will be discussed here are selected works of the Jamaican-Chinese architect, the late Wilson Chong, and the Kingston Waterfront Redevelopment Project, whose lead architect was the United Kingdom (U.K.) firm, Shankland, Cox and Associates. They are separate but related strands of the process of envisioning and implementing a modernist vision for the city.

2. Kingston's background: An accidental city

Jamaica's southeast coast has a harbour that is protected by the Palisadoes spit – a peninsula whose western end is home to Port Royal, the famous pirate town of the seventeenth century, which lost much of its fabric in the earthquake of 1692. In the aftermath of this disaster, the town of Kingston was founded across the harbour from the sunken city. From this accident, emerged a planned urban space, consisting of a tight grid. The new town was conceptualized by John Goffe, as a compact grid, which was drawn by Christian Lilly (see Figures 1 & 2).

The town was bounded on the south by Harbour Street, and by East, West and North Streets, encompassing 240 acres, three quarters of a mile north to south, and half a mile east to west. Over the next two and a half centuries, the city expanded in all directions – adding reclaimed land to the south, and spreading further west, east and north, eventually subsuming the southern portion of the bordering parish of St. Andrew, in 1923 (see Figure 4). This urban site inherited three significant features: the harbour, which is the seventh largest in the world; the site of the Liguanea flood plain, an extensive flat landscape which merges in to the foothills of the third feature – the Blue Mountains. The harbour made Kingston the centre of trade and commerce for the island, eventually wresting the role of administrative capital from landlocked Spanish Town.

The Liguanea Plain provided the means for the city to expand beyond the original grid, as townships, suburbs and commercial hubs spread east and especially north, urbanizing livestock pens and villages and reaching by the 1960s, into the foothills of the Blue Mountains. Finally, the city is almost entirely surrounded by hills and mountains, except for the waterfront to the south. The capacity to expand, and the drift of the city away from the coastal zone, towards the mountains engaged the city with land features rather more than seascapes. This contributed to the 'continental' psyche noted by Higman and Hudson.

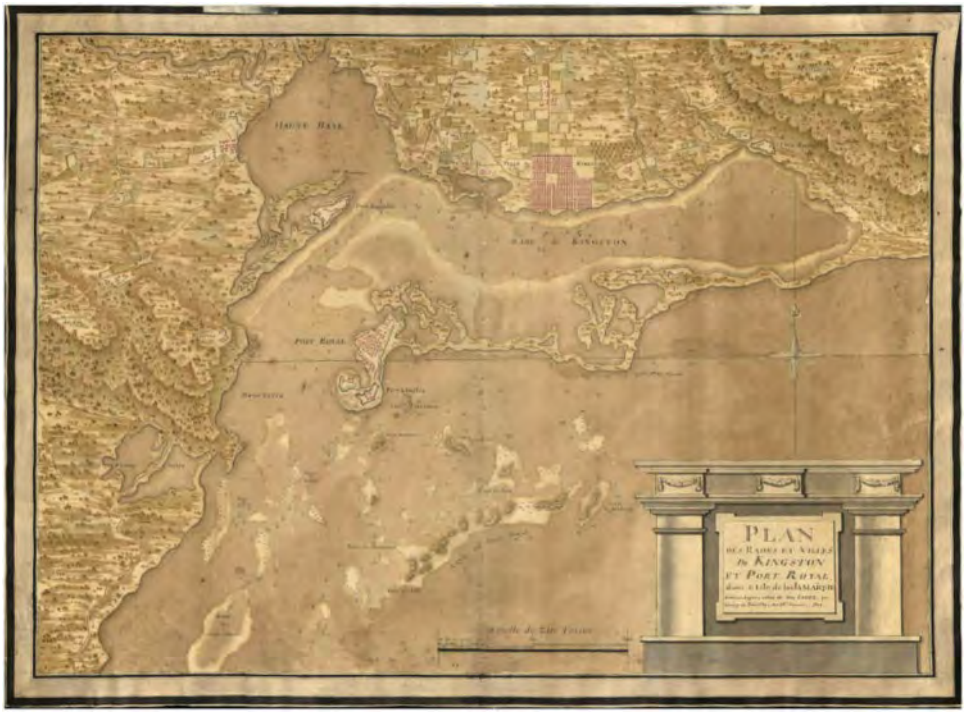

Figure 1: Plan des rades et villes de Kingston et Port Royal dans l'isle de le jamaique, 1803. Courtesy of the National Library of Jamaica.

Kingston was not an urban island. It was not a part of an archipelago, and with much of its built fabric developed away from the sea edge, the city did not develop an islanded sensibility. The prolific Jamaican author H.G. DeLisser, for instance, writing in the early twentieth century, compared Kingston to continental cities: "This handsome island has not a handsome city," he declared, almost apologetically contrasting the low-rise city to Chicago, Detroit and Manhattan. He considered Kingston to be a more slow paced town "as compared with the movement in the cities of England or the United States," due to the discomfort of the heat and humidity, yet, he also acknowledged its scenographic qualities. He classified the main commercial artery, King Street as "Jamaica's Broadway, Oxford Street, Boulevard des Italiens, too, if you like" (DeLisser, 1913: 76). Its harbour was "among the largest and finest in the world," and was a "magnificent sheet of water fringed with mangrove plant and cocoa-nut palm," and the mountainous background was a "mighty wall, green-clothed and cloud-capp'd" (DeLisser, 1913: 78, 79). Implicit in his description is the recognition of the island and tropical geography of Jamaica, yet explicit in his description is the transposing of the island city from its tropical, island context to comparative images of a more cosmopolitan, or continental setting. This mental navigation, from island to continent, was a prologue, so to speak, to the processes of modernization that would emerge later in the century.

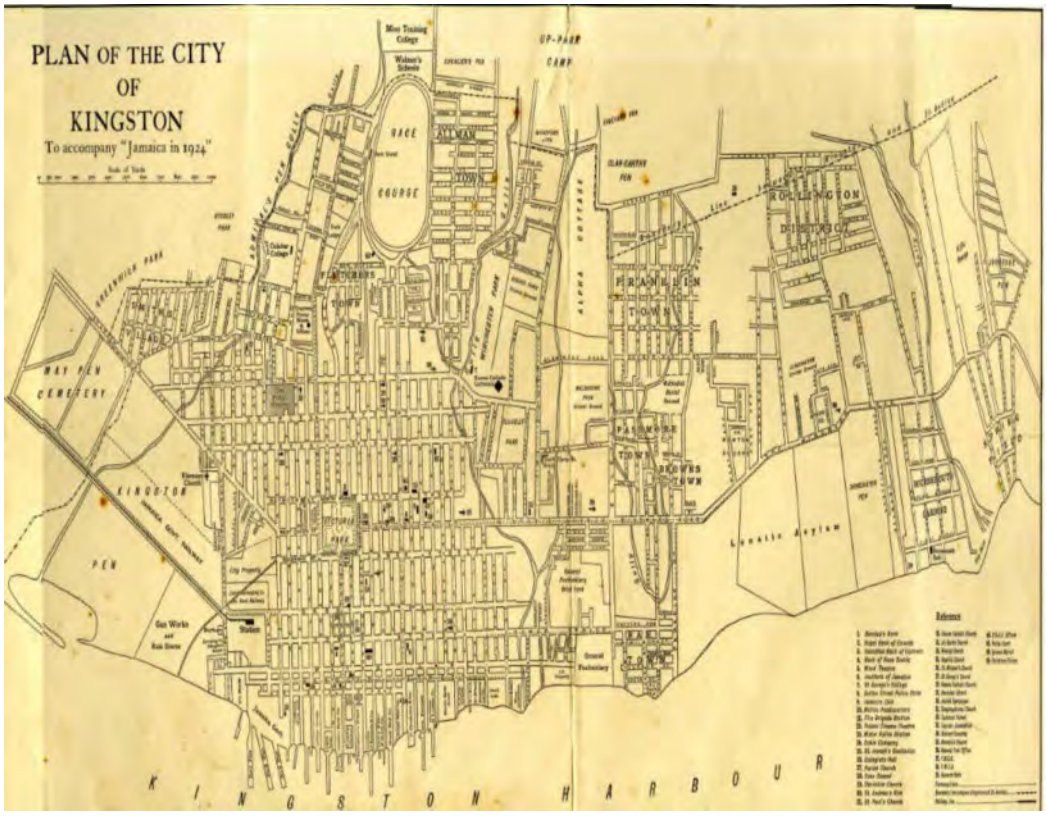

Figure 2: Plan of Kingston, 1924, Emery D. Walker. Courtesy of the National Library of Jamaica.

3 Modern architecture in Jamaica: context

Discourses and practice related to processes of modernization in Jamaica were almost entirely confined to the capital city of Kingston, and its earliest phase can be traced most especially to the period of rebuilding and adjustment after a severe earthquake in 1907 (Pigou-Dennis, 2009). Much of the core or downtown of the city crumbled under the force of that quake, forcing the rebuilding of the city according to a new building code. The 1908 code stipulated ferro concrete construction, later modified to steel reinforced concrete, and limited building height to two stories. Notwithstanding the advancements in terms of materials, the new buildings, which were both commercial and civic in function, tended to retain historicist architectural typologies. The commercial buildings along the main east-west artery, Harbour Street, and King Street, the main north-south axis were configured with faux Beaux Arts facades. The new public buildings, also built along King Street, embraced an abstracted version of colonnades and galleries that interpreted tropical, colonial typologies derived from Palladianism.

It was not until the 1950s that a modernism of taller buildings devoid of historic referents emerged in Kingston. This was due to two main factors. One was the emergence of a first generation of Jamaican architects, who had been educated overseas. The other was a conscious ethic of modernization and redevelopment that was pursued by the British and Jamaican governments, within a context of decolonization and newly minted independence. As Jamaica's dominant port, Kingston facilitated the import-export agendas of the British colonial government, and the city became a hub for commerce, banking and other services. The city supported several waves of suburban expansion, with each successive movement northwards and eastwards, leaving fabric that was taken over by poor rural migrants who became the poorest urban dwellers.

Figure 3: King Street looking South, Postcard early 20th century. Collection of Author.

This population was largely unemployed or employed in the lowest paying jobs, such as wharf laborers for males and domestic service for women. The informal, tenement yard settlements of the urban poor spread throughout western Kingston, a zone which was also characterized by the city's garbage dump and public cemetery. By the 1950s, the buildings that had been reconstructed after 1907 were showing signs of wear and tear, and the port facilities were increasingly unsuitable for larger ships (Clarke, 2006). Interestingly, Figure 4 below shows a statue of Queen Victoria, gracing the pier and market also bearing her name. These emblems of the British empire, located at the waterfront made a clear symbolic, outwardly oriented link towards the global imperial system. These emblems would be erased in the project of modernization.

Figure 4: Victoria Pier and Market, Duperly, late 19th century. Collection of Author.

The discussion below will highlight two related aspects of the visualizations and interventions which would generate modern architectural insertions in Kingston, and the re-imagination of the waterfront.

4. Architect Wilson Chong: Modernity beyond borders

Wilson Chong was a Jamaican in a truly globalized context. Born to a Jamaican-Chinese family in Santiago Cuba, his architectural education was achieved in the United States, at the University of Notre Dame and the University of Illinois, from which he graduated in 1952 with a degree in Architecture. He was one of the first Jamaicans to become a licensed Architect, and to engage in private practice on the island. It has been said that he faced difficulties in establishing his practice, given that both private and public sectors were accustomed to architects from overseas. Chong was versatile as a maker, inventor, designer and organizer of the architectural profession in Jamaica and received a number of awards. Chong's design of concrete shell structures was quite innovative and produced visually striking results in his gas stations, a medical centre, a church, and other structures (Robinson, 1985). For at least some of these structures he worked in collaboration with the engineer Fred Benghiat of the firm Firth, Cleveland Reinforcement, a British company. Benghiat had attended the World Conference on Shell Structures in San Francisco in 1962 ('Trade and Commerce', 1962). Thin shells were a modern structural system. Although derived from ancient vaulting techniques, the new material of reinforced concrete enabled a lighter more efficient means of distributing roofing loads. Illustrations in the *Architectural Forum* in the 1960s demonstrate that the thin shell system was an innovative structural development with pleasing aesthetic impact ('Concrete Shell Roof', 1963; 'Thin-Shell Roof', 1963).

Chong was an avid admirer of Le Corbusier, and he embraced specific elements of his architectonic principles – notably the *brise soleil,* which were shading devices or screens to modulate light, and *pilotis*, which were pillars that raised a building one floor off the ground, thus maximizing service spaces and green space. He employed the *brise soleil* to good effect on the Henriques Building, as it was known at that time, creating a facade that utilized an asymmetric, gridded pattern of concrete, that was unique within its context. The *pilotis* were integrated with the design of the Ministry of Education Building along the Race Course, which would become known as the National Heroes Circle. This was the first usage of this structural system in Jamaica.

Figure 5: Ministry of Education Building, Architect Wilson Chong. Courtesy of David Cuthbert.

However, his most notable project was the design of the island's National Stadium. The stadium was constructed in 1961, as part of public building projects that would prepare the island for independence in 1962. It was clearly understood in its role as a political and nationalist statement of identity for the island.

> There is no doubt in my mind whatsoever that the public generally are keen that Jamaica should have our own National Stadium. The necessity for this is seen as ever greater and more urgent as we prepare to embark on the era of Nationhood (Ramsay, 1961).

The Stadium was, from its inception, an icon embedded in the social history of the island, through the significance of spectator sports, and it was a structure that showcased the country globally, via international games, such as the Commonwealth Games in 1966. This social significance would not have been possible without the innovative structural system that Chong had contrived.

> The basic design unit of the grandstand of the Stadium is a tripod in reinforced concrete, from which a curved cantilevered beam springs, and the roof is a four inch thick concrete shell spanning between the beams in a circular cylindrical shape (Robinson, 1985).

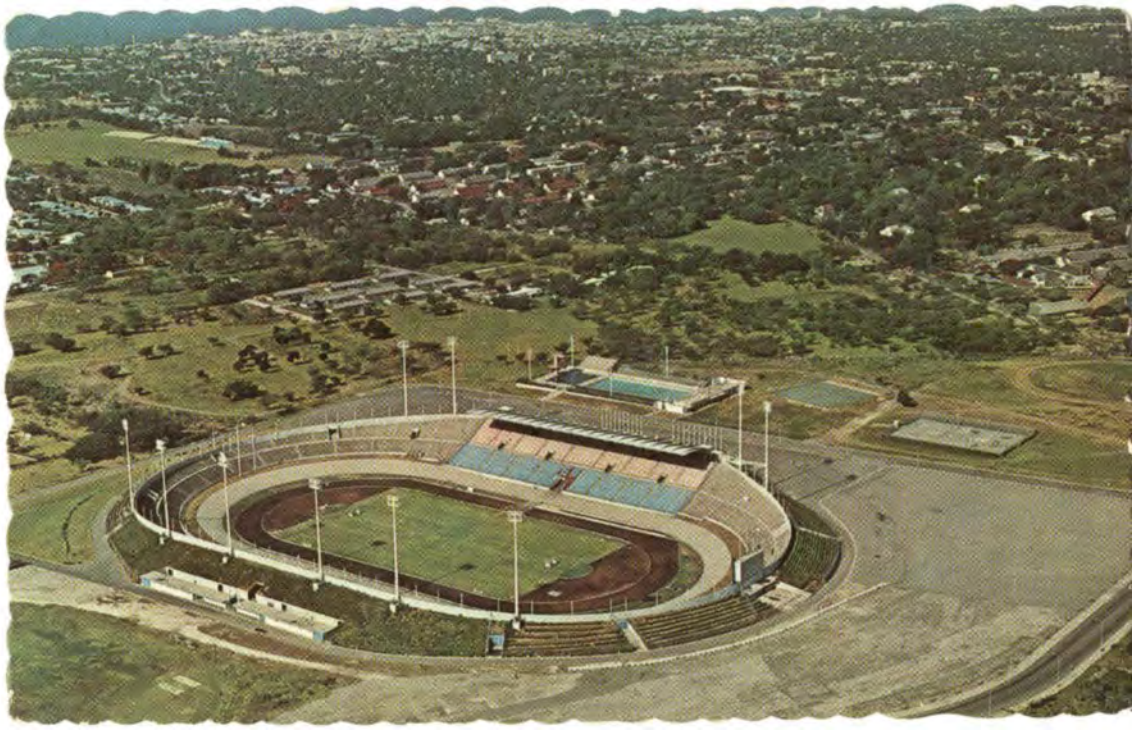

Figure 6: National Stadium of Jamaica, Architect Wilson Chong, Aerial Photograph, nd. Courtesy of the National Library of Jamaica.

This building was one of a number of global stadiums that were featured in the *Architectural Forum's* special feature of 1963. The featured examples, from countries such as the U.S., the Netherlands, Malaysia, Japan, as well as Jamaica all grappled with the structural issues involved in seating thousands of persons on several levels, providing roof coverage for at least part of the structure, and of course, providing the facilities for sporting and other mass public events. Chong's design seated 6000 in the grandstand, and 24,000 in bleachers.

> The structure of the grandstand consists of 22 arched concrete frames, each connected to its neighbors in combined footings and grade beams. The frames are joined in a tripod support visible in the back of the stadium. This tripod support [...] braces the structure against wind and earthquake. Each of the frames extends into a 68-ft cantilever, and the shallow concrete vaults shade nearly half the seats ('Stadiums' 1963).

Chong succeeded in pushing the limits of concrete and steel to meet the needs of the stadium brief. The completed execution merited mention not only in the prestigious *Architectural Forum*, but his work was featured in fifteen overseas publications, including the *Architectural Record.* He also won the inaugural cycle of Jamaica's most prestigious architectural prize, the Governor General's Award for Architecture, in 1964, and the Mexican architectural prize, the Aztec Pin of the Mexican College of Architects (Robinson, 1985).

There were a number of pioneering modernist Jamaican architects in Chong's generation, including Vayden McMorris, Jeremy Sibley, Bert Robinson and Harold Morrison. Chong stands out for the diversity of structural experiments he attempted, for his multifaceted contribution to his profession. He remained a leading exponent of modernism in Jamaican architecture, up until his untimely death in 1984. His trajectory as a designer exemplifies the cross-currents and paradoxes of the status of island colonies turned independent island nations. The key personnel in terms of engineering and architecture were almost always from the U.K. Since the earlier decades of the twentieth century, Jamaicans who desired to practice in these fields had to travel overseas for tertiary education. Wilson Chong fell into this latter category, receiving his architectural education in the U.S. as mentioned above. His generation of professionals was sandwiched between the era of solely expatriate professionals, and the island's capacity to provide tertiary education locally in the second half of the century. Architectural education was not initiated in Jamaica until 1988, with the founding of the Caribbean School of Architecture at the then College of Arts, Science and Technology.

The reality of receiving architectural training abroad was of utmost significance in the context of architecture. Architectural design education in the U.S. was overwhelmingly geared to the conditions of temperate climate, and the cultural milieu was entirely different. This was one potentially problematic issue – how to adapt modern architecture that was suited for the fast-paced urban living in temperate climates, to the tropical conditions of a much less developed island city. Jamaica was not by any means the only postcolonial nation to grapple with these issues. Countries in Africa, South America and Asia likewise had to deal with complex social, political issues as well as climatic adaptation in hot, humid or arid conditions (Beng, 2001; Rodriquez, 2005; Jackson, 2013; Bay & Ong, 2006). To be sure, the climatic issues of the tropics and sub-tropics were not new, given that the British, and other European colonizers, had long extended their imperial claims and practices in the torrid zones (Jackson & Holland, 2014; Danby, 1963). Indeed, in the case of the British, there was a long history of formal architectural education and policy making to facilitate climate-friendly adaptations of British architectural works in the colonies (le Roux, 2003).

The most comprehensive project that facilitated an engagement of modernism with the Jamaican context involved the discourses and execution of re-development of the capital city Kingston, most especially its waterfront zone, after 1966. Modernism intersected with a number of variables – foremost were climatic and tectonic conditions of earthquake risk. But there was also the adventure of creating a national identity, a makeover of the urban skyline and shoreline, and engaging directly with issues of underdevelopment and mass poverty. In all of these, Wilson Chong also played a significant role, as the City Architect.

The 1960s were heady days for Jamaica, as the island engaged on a path of economic diversification and industrialization, seeking to overcome the disadvantages of being a small, underdeveloped, former island colony. Indeed, the economic growth rate of Jamaica during the 1960s has remained unsurpassed. There is little evidence of serious antipathy in 1960s

Jamaica, towards the ideal of modernization, and the key symbols of this process – taller, modern buildings. Concrete was a natural choice of building material as the island was able to manufacture it locally. Chong quickly established himself as an advocate for and leader of, the modernization process. In his practice he demonstrated key aspects of the capacity to think beyond the periphery of a small island identity. Chong's thinking and the execution of his architectural interventions in the city, mark an intensification of a long-standing capacity on the part of key actors in Jamaican society, to un-island themselves, and in so doing, to perpetuate the tendency to think and act in 'continental' terms. While Kingston's modernist buildings have been surveyed by Lawton (2005) and Taylor (2010), these have emphasized the responses to tropical climate, materiality and technological innovation, but have not explicitly addressed a context of "islandness".

In the Ministry of Education Building, the National Stadium, the Henriques Building, Texaco Service Station and Oxford Medical Centre, he demonstrated his verve and grasp of the the technical and aesthetic potentials of concrete. (Robinson, 1985) His forms fit their functions, each one a unique iteration. He was an innovator in technical and design modes and he showed sensitivity to climate in the Henriques *brise soleil*, and Stadium cantilevers. He responded to earthquake risk in the Stadium tripod structure. He made modernism work in Jamaica. Making use of externally generated technological and aesthetic paradigms, which he was exposed to in his studies overseas, he demonstrated critical design thinking, and aligned his own professional goals with the nation building project of the island.

While Chong's thinking may be discerned from the actualization of the above-mentioned architectural projects, it is the public record of his involvement with the waterfront regeneration that his thinking as an architect is made clear. The revisualization of the waterfront engaged multiple actors – Chong, as City Architect, the leading political figures, investors, the media, the newly formed Urban Development Corporation (UDC), and the British firm of Shankland, Cox, and Associates.

5. Modernist urban regeneration: Stating the problem

The map in Figure 2 above shows the city grid, with the old finger piers. The city was bifurcated by the central axis of King Street, the main commercial centre, which was centered on a public open space, which was first a military parade ground, and then a park. The southern frontage to the sea was first occupied by Harbour Street, and then, on reclaimed land, by Port Royal Street. The northern and eastern boundaries of the expanded Kingston were framed by the Blue and John Crow Mountains and Long Mountain.

From its inception, Kingston responded to the pragmatic island context of Jamaica, and its trans-Atlantic relationships of trade, including the slave trade. Kingston remained the largest British West Indian port and city, and its activities were dominated by mercantile commerce and shipping. Plantation slavery had a profound effect on Kingston, among other things, creating an enclave of urban slaves in the western section of the city. When slavery ended in 1838, a steady and increasing stream of migrant rural peasants found their way into western Kingston, enlarging the slums and informal settlements of that part of the city. This legacy continued down to the independence period and beyond. Like many cities globally, Kingston embraced the process of suburbanization, with increasing sprawl towards the foothills of the surrounding mountains. The drift north was accompanied by the decay of entire neighborhoods

in the lower sections of the city, and the expansion of slum conditions. Yet the connection to the sea, through the port, remained a vital aspect of the economy of the city, and the entire island hinterland. It is against the problem of urban decay and neglect, and the extreme poverty of most of the lower city's residents, that urban regeneration was conceived, as a means to "slow the deterioration of Kingston into one vast slum" (Simmonds, 1966).

Chong played an integral role in the framing of the problems facing Kingston, pursuing his advocacy through the Jamaican Architectural Society, the Chamber of Commerce, by hosting public seminars and through the medium of interviews with the leading newspaper, the Jamaica *Daily Gleaner*. He submitted comprehensive proposals for reconfiguring of King Street (the central north-south axis) and the Parade, the public space which was bisected by King Street. His discourse was peppered with references to global precedents, both successes and failures, in cities such as Chicago and Detroit in North America. In fact he freely admitted that his architectural education in the United States had influenced his thinking about architecture and cities (Simmonds, 1966a; 1966b). He also contrasted Kingston's decay with initiatives to create new cities in Brazil, India, Belize and the United Kingdom.

This underscored the fluidity with which ideas and practices flowed between the island city and more developed 'centers' of knowledge and practice. Chong interpreted the problems of Kingston as part of an islandwide context, and advocated rural redevelopment and nucleation, so as to ease the population pressure on West Kingston. Yet at the same time, he advocated the application of continental solutions. He argued that the capital would remain an area of density, and advocated mass housing in high rise apartment buildings, the rationalization of mass transit, and the development of pedestrianized shopping areas and green spaces with public art to provide relaxation and respite. He visualized arch flyovers in the city centre, the curtailment of urban sprawl and lamented the waste of land that suburban dwelling entailed – citing Los Angeles as an example of poor urban design. He preferred 'progress' to 'nostalgia', and the journalist Ulric D. Simmonds lauded Chong for his "architectural imagination" (Simmonds, 1966a). Chong's thinking revealed a multi-layered vision of the city as an island place with continental aspirations.

Chong was not the only actor on the stage of re-visualizing Kingston as a modernized city, however, and ultimately, the modernization project devolved to other protagonists. Edward Seaga, then the Minister of Development and Welfare in the fledgling independent government led by Hugh Shearer, had also led initiatives that married private investment with government authority and had begun the redevelopment of the waterfront by relocating the harbour piers westward, to the expanded and upgraded facilities of Newport West, with plans for a Newport East. The modernized port facilities were also a part of a comprehensive development plan that created an industrial zone in the vicinity of Newport West, and cleared the most pernicious slum area in West Kingston, replacing this with the medium rise apartment blocks and community facilities of Tivoli Gardens.

Seaga's initiatives included the regeneration and complete reconfiguration of the old port frontage, through a project that entailed private sector investment, investment by the newly post-imperial British government, and the hiring of the British architectural firm of Shankland, Cox, and Associates to carry out the master plan, as consultants to the Town Planning Department. This move by the two governments underlines the complexities of centre and periphery formulations. On the one hand, it might seem to have been a regressive move - reasserting the primacy of British funding and technical expertise, and a foreign vision

of how the waterfront should look and function. On the other hand, it is clear that initiative came from the national government, which was itself genuinely framing a definition and intervention of 'modernity' for the tropical, island port.

There was a robust and genuine public input – though this was skewed in favour of the middle and upper classes. This took the form of discourse in public meetings and the print medium, as well as materially, in the form of the land swaps between private owners and government that facilitated the development.

6. "The most modern complex in the Caribbean"

The reconstruction of the Kingston waterfront was launched with high hopes, an infusion of capital and expertise, spearheaded by clear and direct governmental policy which bore the imprimatur of the enthusiastic and competent Seaga. Submissions to the Cabinet, under his signature set the stage for the collaboration between the Jamaican and British governments - creating a flow of technical assistance in spite of the formality of loosening the ties of imperial governance (Central Government, 1968). He reported that the British Ministry of Overseas Development had, in effect sponsored the consultancy of the firm Shankland, Cox and Associates, thus facilitating the visit of Graeme Shankland to Jamaica for nearly a month, in December 1965 and January 1966 (Central Government, 1966). Shankland's visit was followed by a final technical report in early 1968.

The flux of local and foreign ideas was well encapsulated in the words of Seaga at the outset of the project: "We hope that downtown Kingston will have a bright lights centre that all big cities have as a focal point of attraction. [...] A Piccadilly Circus of Kingston" or a "sort of Times Square." He envisaged a public square, surrounded by entertainment establishments, providing lively activities during the night as well as the day ('City Waterfront Redevelopment', 1967). Not unlike H.G. DeLisser, who was writing just over half a century earlier, Seaga's mental navigation encompassed the island city, yet instantly transposed continental or cosmopolitan cityscapes to the local context.

The final reports from Shankland, Cox provided attractive sketches of the proposed waterfront, and set out the technical drawings and details attendant on the project. A model was also presented to the government. In short, the project provided for the development of 150 acres which would be advanced in three phases. The old finger piers at the foot of King Street would be removed and replaced with a new cruise ship terminal. A new east-west thoroughfare, Ocean Boulevard, would be constructed, fronting the harbour, and lined to the north by a series of high rise building blocks housing a hotel, an apartment complex with shopping mall, and an office complex. There would be a square, pedestrian walkways, and a parking garage in close proximity. The later phases of the development would see additional mixed use projects comprising commercial buildings and apartment complexes to the east. Further, there was to be an entertainment complex to the west and another hotel with more housing in the adjoining parish of St. Catherine (Shankland, Cox, and Associates,1968).

> A dramatic new skyline will soon rise from the central waterfront section of Kingston. Hotels, shopping centers and entertainment facilities interconnected by promenades and walkways will create Jamaica's first metropolitan resort area, introduce 'downtown living' and restore night life to the city centre. All will have easy access to the tree shaded waterfront where only cruise ships will berth (*Jamaica Information Service*, 1968).

Figure 7: Kingston Waterfront, Aerial Photograph, 1978. Courtesy of the National Library of Jamaica.

The vision did become reality to a significant degree. By 1977, the Ocean Boulevard was completed, with its cohort of modern multi storied blocks of Ocean Towers Apartments, the Kingston Mall, the UDC office complex and the Oceana Hotel and parking garage.

The Bank of Jamaica was completed at the westernmost part of the waterfront site, and the Forum Hotel to the west were also completed. This alteration of the city's skyline and profile invited critical academic comment. Writing in 1977, Bruce Young addressed issues that are central to the dissemination of modernism from centre to periphery.

> That much of the new built environment is generally indistinguishable from that to be found in higher latitudes may be regrettable, but it is as inevitable perhaps, as the fact that Third World Cities, redesigned increasingly by persons trained in the First World, should utilize technologies and concepts associated with Western societies (Young, 1977: 77).

Young expressed the central dilemma of the center-periphery opposition which had been fostered by the imperial configuration of metropolitan centers with advanced economies derived in large measure from the exploitation of the raw materials of 'peripheral' islands and continents. While raising a question about the cultural and geographic provenance of Modern architecture, his analysis of the project contained some elements of resolution of this dilemma. He acknowledged that the developmental needs of the Kingston waterfront might have much in common with similar projects in North America and Europe, adding that the outcome was the result of a "mix of functions and the design features that the experts considered appropriate and modern" (Young, 1977: 77). He emphasized that the UDC was "wholly owned" by the Government of Jamaica, and that this entity had acquired the acreage for the development, and emphasized the initiative taken by the government. Although Young did not explicitly shape his argument around a theory of islandness, nevertheless, he had identified conflicts between local and foreign architectural typologies and contexts, especially

as these related to culture and climate. His commentary is valuable, in that it demonstrates that there despite the strong impetus towards modernization, there was scope for dissenting opinions.

Is there evidence that the Shankland, Cox, and Associates intervention gave consideration to the paradox of integrating a tropical, island environment with the worldview of a British architectural firm committed to Modernism? The firm's ethos was clearly stated in its Technical Report - "Today, styles and materials are international" (Shankland, Cox, and Associates, 1968: 39). The ultimate aim was for "unity and coherence" in a visual and functional whole, as opposed to an ad hoc assemblage of individual structures. This was considered to be the most appropriate response to Kingston's reality of "visual chaos" and "disorder" in which "a picture is presented which is depressing and uncared for; it is not the picture that is usually associated with the downtown of a capital city." The regeneration project was not intended as a one-off intervention, but as "the first stage in the gradual renewal of downtown Kingston" (Shankland, Cox, and Associates, 1967).

The Institute of Landscape Architects (ILA) in the UK reported favorably on the Kingston project, highlighting those aspects of the Technical Report which dealt with environmental and landscape issues. The reprint of text from that Report was juxtaposed against the nearly half page photograph of the model of the proposed development. Indeed, the model showed a waterfront sheared of its ragged finger piers, crumbling warehouses and assorted buildings with corrugated roofs. Instead, the proposed light hued edifices had strong orthogonal lines, mainly horizontal, but with some strong vertical notes. The coastal edge was a sharp linear strip which included a cruise ship terminal. There was an engaging rhythm of varying building heights, varied depths of setbacks, with long and short facades alternated as they fronted the main thoroughfare, and a pattern of courtyards between buildings.

The ILA emphasized what it may be argued was the most location-sensitive aspect of the entire urban design – the attention to tropical climatic context. The Jamaican microclimate along the waterfront was taken into account – the two main needs were to provide shade and to avoid blocking breezes from the sea. The alternation of the wet and dry seasons were taken into account, as the planting of new vegetation would require steady watering. This was designed so as to be supplied by new wells, as the groundwater was easily accessible. The model shows a tree lined main boulevard, along with other plantings. Indeed, the Technical Report devoted attention to "Urban Form and Landscape Principles", to social and economic context, the patterns of pedestrian and vehicular traffic, to existing land use and not least, to earthquake risk. There was another significant concession to local context in the vibrant and colorful mural on the lobby of the Kingston Mall, by Jamaican artist, Jerry Craig. This mural was supposed to represent Jamaica's symbolic "womb" giving birth to a new nation. (*Lane*, 1975).

7. In retrospect: Paradox of island urban modernity

"Jamaica would never have developed at all without Kingston's waterfront" ('The Task of Creating a New Kingston', 1966). The waterfront project straddled two main paradoxes – the relationship of the city to its hinterland, and the relationship of the island nation to the international context. It is argued here that there was a pragmatic recognition of the value of the waterfront for the economy of the island as a whole, which the port and industrial developments sought to address. Yet the aesthetic and architectural visualization of the waterfront, whether viewed from the sea, air or from the land, firmly anchored Kingston in the era of continental, International Style modernism, notwithstanding gestures towards climatic adaptation.

However, the Kingston Redevelopment Project was never manifested in its entirety. The mid-1970s change of the ruling political party shifted leadership to Michael Manley, whose democratic socialist vision for Jamaica entailed a massive social engineering intended to leverage the poor. These intentions alienated many in the middle and upper classes, and both foreign and local investments dried up. Intense rivalry between the political parties consolidated control of voting constituencies in downtown Kingston's residential communities, known as 'garrisons'. Garrisons became affiliated with organized crime, with gun violence, and fiercely defended boundaries.

The urban and architectural developments of the 1960s to the mid-1970s were the most active since the rebuilding after the 1907 earthquake. This phase occupies the heart of the paradox of centers and peripheries, and the destinies of small, tropical, island nations and their cities.

There was a cultural awakening amongst Jamaica's architects who had returned from overseas study, of whom, Wilson Chong was one of the most influential. His works certainly responded to a range of issues, tackling climate, concrete technology, mass housing and containing massive crowds of spectators. He theorized the urban space in terms of the modernity that he had observed abroad, and the ethos he had studied. So, dense high rise concrete buildings containing dwellings and commercial offices, mixed use, public parks, mass transit and fly overs were all a part of his vision. He saw decay, slums and the chaotic movement of vehicular traffic as the biggest blights on the city. His career, the interviews he gave and his public interactions constituted a microcosm of the flow between center and periphery, and the absorption of characteristics of the center by the periphery, so as to blur boundaries, to some extent.

While there were elements in common between his vision and that of other leading proponents of urban regeneration, it was not to him that the ultimate project devolved.

The Seaga-driven redevelopment of the port facilities and the urban waterfront re-engaged with the empire in a new guise. Thus funding and expertise flowed north south, as the Technical Report shows. As the discussion above shows, Shankland, Cox, and Associates gave due consideration to social and to climatic conditions. They imported current global (as defined by the West) standards of urban design. There was international recognition and publication of the work of both Chong and Shankland, Cox, and Associates evincing the extent to which they had drawn modernism in Jamaica into the global mainstream. In general, it does not appear that the commercial and intellectual classes in Jamaica objected to the overall thrust of regeneration, and to the creation of a modernist skyline along the Kingston waterfront. There was a flurry of compliments in the press: "Kingston has become a modern metropolis, towering buildings now distinguish the skyline, modern architectural structures of concrete, glass and steel have proliferated" ('Supplement 100 Years of Kingston as Capital City', 1972). The intervention was presented for public media consumption as a tableaux fit for a modernist utopia in a tropical setting. Thus, "ornamental trees, pools and fountains, the sparking ocean in the background", combined "cool ocean breezes" with "magnificent modern stores" and paths "closed to motor traffic" (Lane, 1975). Nevertheless, the new tall buildings required air conditioning.

The 1960s and much of the 1970s were an era of dynamism in the construction industry in Kingston. Concrete, which was manufactured in the island, became the material of first choice. Kingston, and by implication Jamaica, participated in an international phenomenon that in some ways blurred the distinction of place, thus enacting a process of 'un-islanding' by

implementing continental, modernist architectural solutions, notwithstanding a subtle re-islanding through according some consideration of the scenic and climatic context. This process highlights the central argument of this paper – that Jamaica was historically and geographically positioned to simultaneously articulate an awareness of island geography, even while the main thrust of the island's cultural imaginary, and that of the city of Kingston, was, paradoxically, continental. Thus, the ideas and works of Wilson Chong in Kingston, and the Shankland, Cox, and Associates Kingston Waterfront Redevelopment project were exemplary of the capacity of the island to think in continental terms. This paper has amplified the theme of Jamaica's continental consciousness that was raised by Higman and Hudson, and as such, is the first publication to explicitly address the theme of 'islandness' with respect to the modern architecture and urban design of Kingston.

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