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Cross the Atlantic and Rebuild Time: a Study on the Teaching of History for Architects in Two American Capitals [1854-1864]

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This research project starts from the interpretation proposed by the historian François Hartog that the French Revolution opened a gap in historical time. Hartog argues that this gap required a new articulation between the categories of past and future, inaugurating a new “regime of historicity.” For the historian, the crossing of the Atlantic Ocean and the American experience it enabled radicalized this condition. Several fine art academies in Europe and America underwent reforms between the 1840s and 1860s. These reform movements derived essentially from the new demands imposed on architects at the time because of the second wave of the industrial revolution. Contradictorily, when we investigate the biographies of the reformers, we realize the importance of history in their intellectual production. We question, therefore, what relationships could be established between the writing of history and the reforms in the teaching of architecture in academies of fine arts in the mid-nineteenth century. We propose to start the comparative exercises with the Brazilian and Mexican cases, since Manuel de Araújo Porto-Alegre (1806-1879) and Francesco Saverio Cavallari (1810-1896) were the ones who, among the identified reformers, undertook the transatlantic journey mentioned by Hartog. To achieve our objective, we resort to comparative history and, above all, to connected histories. From the notion of “intellectual biography,” conceived by François Dosse, we will take the reform actions as biographical fragments of those lives in displacement under study.



Exploring the Origins of Ad Hoc Advisory Committees: A Historical Assessment of Expert Commissions in Chile, 1890-1930

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This project studies the beginnings and foundations of ad hoc expert advice in Chile between 1890 and 1930. This research is part of my doctoral project at the Department of Latin American Studies at Leiden University, entitled: “Technocracy, Democracy and Socio-political Conflicts in Chile: The Role of Ad Hoc Advisory Commissions”. The main question of this research is: Why and how do extra-state experts intervene in situations of political and social conflict in Chile? To answer this question, I tracked the different instances in which experts from outside the state were summoned to analyse and recommend solutions to a public problem to the government. Then, I compare and analyse, with particular attention, those commissions that were convened due to the appearance of a conflict between the state and civil society.

The beginnings of the technocratic institutional legacy in the Chilean state have been identified during the 1930s. However, other works have shown the presence of ad hoc missions of foreign experts for state development in all Latin American countries in early stages. This research has considerably documented the impact of these foreign actors on public institution-building and state development in Latin America, however, there is little information on the crisis contexts and political reasons for their recruitment. In other words, ad hoc expert recruitment as a political tool for conflict resolution has not been explored in depth.

In this scenario, this project contributes to closing a theoretical and empirical gap in the study of experts analysing, in particular, ad hoc recruitment in Chile between 1890 and 1930. Studying this specific period is especially important for my doctoral project as it will allow me to review the origins of ad hoc recruitment, analysing with particular attention the political justifications argued by governments in order to understand, from a historical perspective, the evolution and role of ad hoc experts in Chile as a political tool in times of crisis.



Whose Savagery?

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The shrunken heads produced by the Shuar of Ecuadorian Amazonia have long stood as an icon of savagery in the Western imagination. This fascination has had a dire cost in Shuar lives. As was common across Latin America, the arrival of modern ethnographers of the Shuar—the first to document shrunken heads—coincided with intensifying colonisation of the indigenous territory, which in the Shuar case occurred in the early to mid-20th century. Missionary and traveller accounts from 1892 to the 1940s describe heads being widely taken and sold; one accounts suggests hundreds of heads were exported each year. This project investigates the evidence for a trade in shrunken heads from an under-studied part of historical Shuar territory, the lowland county of Gualaquiza, which crucially was settled from Cuenca in 1816. If Cuenca archives show such a trade existed soon after 1816, the commercial incentive for Shuar production of shrunken heads must have been established for generations before head-taking was ‘discovered’ by mid-20th century anthropologists. The project thus has the potential to reshape the narrative of Shuar history and add to our appreciation of the role of the civilised/savage dichotomy in the Western imagination for the constitution of the modern world.