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(Re) Constructing a World City: Urbicide in Global Korea

Abstract
This paper considers the relationship between Seoul’s growing status as a world city and the practices of urban destruction and development which are being used to construct Seoul as a world city in the age of neoliberal globalisation. The urbicide approach is often used to explain the reasons for urban destruction and the cultural and social implications of urban restructuring. The paper questions the novelty and substantive nature of the South Korean government’s soft power ‘global Korea’ rhetoric of Seoul as a world city of cultural diversity. The paper uses the South Korean case to show how urbicide as a Western concept can be developed within non-Western urban processes, and identifies conceptual limits and how these limits might be overcome.

Keywords
Urbicide, Modernization, Korea, Neoliberalism, Power
Introduction

In a discussion of urban degeneration in the Bronx district of New York, Marshall Berman (1987) called this “a great crime without a name” but “let us give it a name: urbicide, the murder of a city” (Berman, 1987: 9). Berman wrote “the physical and social destruction of the area began with the construction of the cross-Bronx expressway in the late 1950s and early 1960s” and then “in the 1970s disintegration occurred at a spectacular rate, devouring house after house, block after block.” Once public funds dried up, disintegration and social anomie were a further result of the disciplining of the neoliberal Washington Consensus. Berman (1987) described the buildings:

The facades were charred black, some of the upper walls had collapsed, the windows all were smashed (probably by firemen - this must have been one hell of a fire) and the sidewalks were still strewn with debris…There were a couple of blocks, once dense and noisy with sidewalks too narrow for their crowds, that now contained nothing at all.

Berman, therefore, begins his discussion on the origins and consequences of urbicide by focusing on the negative impact on local communities of the construction of the South Bronx Elevated Freeway and the dismantling of public spaces and communities that were flourishing during the ‘golden age’ of post-war capital accumulation. Buildings and infrastructure that once provided for numerous encounters between heterogeneous groups in public spaces were left to decay in a mire of ethnic and economic ghettoisation. Further community disintegration ensued as a result of neoliberal policies which have pressurised states and cities into competing for mobile financial and production capital. This meant the dismantling of publicly funded projects by states in favour of neoliberal discipline. For Graham (2004), drawing on Berman’s work, non-military urban destruction is ideologically justified by the state ‘in the name of progress’ and ‘cultural diversity.’ These narratives have become a part of competitive ‘world city branding’ strategies from municipal and state governments. As a result, community based and organic urban heterogeneity is being destroyed by state-led and official neoliberal narratives which also obscure economic and political power interests.

For Coward (2009), urbicide is a specific military strategy and a self-justifying objective to destroy buildings, the possibility of public space and therefore urban heterogeneity. There is no pretence or contrived ideology of cosmopolitan ‘progress’ as urbicide, in Coward’s view, is executed in the name of ethnic nationalism and homogeneity. This destroys public space and destroys heterogeneity by reducing the number of possible ‘encounters’. However, both approaches expect that urbicide destroys pluralistic and heterogeneous urban public spaces and, as a consequence, produces economic, political and social exclusions and homogeneity.

In this paper I consider the relationship between Seoul’s growing status as a world city in the age of neoliberal globalization and the practices of urban destruction. These practices are used by the South Korean government to construct and to market Seoul as a competitive world city. My argument is that urbicide in Seoul does not fit with the expectations of the urbicide approaches. This is due to the neglect, in the urbicide approaches, as to recognizing the contested narratives of heterogeneity and homogeneity and unpacking ‘what it is that is being destroyed.’ This means that the
relationships between the causes and consequences of urbicide in an urban space with widespread beliefs in a preceding racial and ethnic homogeneity are different. Thus, the contested narratives on heterogeneity and homogeneity from different institutions and constituents may also affect the expected or unexpected causes and consequences of urbicide.

Given that South Korea is technically at war with North Korea, the rapid development of Seoul has been intrinsically tied to national security issues. Thus, separating military from non-military urbicide is extremely problematic. The paper acknowledges that a direct or even intentional link between multicultural legislation and urban destruction does not exist as a ‘policy document’ per se. However, a world city perspective allows for an exploration of the links between the dynamics of urban development, world city status and neoliberal globalization. Moreover, the paper is not an attempt at outlining a paradigmatic ‘ideal type’ Asian approach to world city development and Asian urbicide. However, the paper is an attempt to outline a set of current conceptual and empirical limitations as to how urbicide is practiced and understood in a non-Western context.

In South Korea, the main economic and political institutions and agents of urban destruction and regeneration are the corporate conglomerates (chaebols). Chaebols emerged during the 1960s as a result of state patronage and economic favours (Moran, 1999). In the post-1997 Asian financial crisis period, neo-liberalisation as was tied to efforts for improving urban ‘good governance’ and democratizing Chaebol.¹ Chaebols are, however, instrumental in providing economic, technological and human resources for mass urban redevelopment projects.²

The Conservative government of the Grand National Party-GNP (now renamed Saenuri or New World) has continued promoting Seoul as a world city. Conceptual tensions are whether non-Western world cities such as Seoul can be analytically designated world cities in accordance with ‘ideal type’ world cities, whether the world city approach can be ‘concretised’ to specific cases, or, whether governments actually use the term ‘world city’ as a social constructivist marketing brand in itself but has no link to conceptual expectations. Moreover, there are specific issues as to whether Seoul is representative of a Korean-style world city, representative of the national ‘global Korea’ brand, or representative of a unique Korean city manifested through the philosophy of ‘fengshui’ through officially selected heritage buildings representing ‘Korea to the world’ as total globalisation (segehywa 세계화) (Kwon 2004).³

I explore the point that either the expectations of the Western urbicide approaches are not met in the South Korean case (and I give reason for this); or, alternatively, that if these expectations are met, then this is not necessarily through the cause-consequence logic of the current urbicide approaches. These issues will be discussed through the

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¹ This was the catchword of Seoul Mayor Gop (1998-2003) to cut government inefficiency and increase accountability by de-centralisation and citizen participation. The Mayor promoted ‘Saturday’ consultations (Jong, 2003). Resistances to urbicide have become violent such as the Yongsan protests of 2009 where ‘protestors illegally occupied building rooftops to prevent Seoul City’s urban redevelopment project’ where ‘families were evicted from rental houses which were later demolished’ The Korea Times, 11th November 2011.

² Chaebols were regarded as lacking in productivity and inefficient due to their asset ‘devouring’ of innovative medium firms or small sized ‘mom and pop’ businesses, whilst relying on the ‘state’ for continued debt servicing under the mantra that the Chaebols were ‘too big to fail’ in Korea Inc.

³ ‘Mayor’s to Discuss Urban Development through design in Seoul’ The Korea Times, 22nd February 2010; ‘Indulge in Design City Seoul’ The Korea Times, 11th November 2011
theme of homogeneity/heterogeneity, the interrelated theme of public space, and, the theme of ‘buildings’. Firstly I outline the world city perspective and explore the urbicide thesis through the world cities debate. Next, I discuss the historical development of Seoul and the government’s urban policies and ideational justifications for these policies. I argue that the thesis fails to attend to the significance of the contested narratives and underlying power interests defining what counts as (and relationships between) heterogeneity, homogeneity, urban public space, urban modernization and national identity in the age of neoliberal globalisation.

**World Cities and Urban Destruction.**
According to Bell and Shalit (2011):

> Globalised cities that allow for free movement of capital, humans and goods tend to have a more open-minded attitude toward foreigners and historically marginalized peoples. True, cities cannot provide the rich sense of community life characteristic of villages and small towns.

The assumption in such a statement is that as cities become larger then there are physically more possibilities of encounters between individuals and cultures. This means cosmopolitanism and heterogeneity. Yet cities cannot provide the security of a community life. However, at the same time, contradictory, yet linked processes occur. Firstly, as a reaction to neoliberal modernization, individuals and groups often resort to a defensive protection of their community ‘neighbourhoods’. Secondly, these neighbourhoods generate a politics of ethnic homogenization within a cosmopolitan city. In official multicultural states, cultural exclusion and ghettoisation can also be unintentionally encouraged as representing ‘cultural pluralism’. Thirdly, sites of local ethnic homogenization are simultaneously a part of a plural urban openness through a ‘rooted cosmopolitanism’. In this sense the local space does not necessarily mean private homogeneity and the global space does not necessarily mean public heterogeneity.

Cities are becoming more competitive in their search for overseas capital and labour and, as a result, strategies of ‘city branding’ now impact socially and culturally on local urban spaces and perceptions of ‘the global’. Tim Bunnell (2002) has argued that integrated networks of world cities are problematising the so-called ‘territorial trap’ of Westphalian politics (Curtis, 2011). Bunnell (2002) argued that world cities have a complex geography which allow for a concentration of capital and human resources.

The state often uses its territorially based world city for resources and yet the state competes with its world city for foreign capital and soft power prestige as the emergent world city sucks in skills, thus creating patterns of internal migration. 4Globalization in the world cities literature is not regarded as a hierarchically ‘scalar’ process ‘out there’ but understood as sub-national spatiality (Sassen, 2005). Cities are understood as networked sites where multiple global circuits interact with distinct interactions of actors. Cities are a ‘heuristic’ space capable of producing knowledge about some of the major transformations of a new epoch. Sassen (1998: XVIV) argued that a focus on world cities “allows us to recover the concrete, localized processes through which

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4 For instance, Seoul is often referred to as ‘The Republic of Seoul’
globalization exists” and the “denationalizing of urban space and the formation of new claims by transnational actors and involving contestation, raise the question-whose city is it?.” Sassen (1998: xxx) wrote that “The large western city of today concentrates diversity. Its spaces are inscribed with the dominant corporate culture but also with a multiplicity of other cultures and identities.” The state-led destruction and construction of ethnic zones representing world city diversity does not necessarily represent a substantive multicultural shift. Therefore, distinctions between official/unofficial and substantive/superficial heterogeneity need to be addressed in the urbicide literature as these distinctions impact on the type of modernization and the type of heterogeneity being constructed and destroyed.

Firstly, world cities are regarded as the territorial site of mobile global corporations and are integrated into the global financial system (Friedman, 1986). World cities are competing amongst themselves (and with the state) for mobile global capital and human resources. Established and aspirant world cities are cities “through which regional, national and international economies are being embedded within the global capital system of accumulation” (Smith, 2002: 1). In Asia there is also a distinction made between emergent world cities, and megacities (Rae, 1999).

Secondly, world cities tend to have a highly mobile professional class sector and a more ‘rooted’ lower wage migrant class sector. The inner-cities have become stratified into distinctive territorial zones. Affluent economic classes have often left the city centres in order to reside in the securely gated communities. This has led to economic and cultural exclusions and new forms of neoliberal panopticon surveillance of ghetto’s. Soft power cosmopolitanism can therefore obscure ‘hard power’ public and private practices of urban destruction and exclusion ideologically justified by parochial corporate interests ‘in the name of progress’ and diversity.

Thirdly, world cities encompass a diverse set of ideas, actors, institutions, inter-cultural tensions and social forces which are articulated through contested economic, political and cultural activities through the transnationalisation of the competition state. There is a complex network of institutions and actors engaging with an uneven decentralization and centralisation of capital and power interests. In placing the forces of neoliberal globalization as an explanation for urban destruction, Graham (2004: 33) argues that

the division between urban planning geared towards urban growth and development, and that which focuses on attempts at place annihilation or attack, is not always clear…much planned urban change itself involves war like levels of violence, destabilisation, rupture, forced expulsion and place annihilation…(P)articularly within the dizzying peaks and troughs of capitalist urbanism, state-led planning often boils down to the legitimised clearance of vast tracts within cities in the name of decay eradication, modernization, improvement, ordering, economic competition or facilitating technological change and capital accumulation and speculation.

For Graham, urbicide is an intentional strategy by finance-led neoliberal capitalist interests to engineer vast edifices of construction to sustain hyper profits for production and financial industries.

At the same time, it is necessary not to nostalgically ‘romanticise’ historic urban areas which might have been already a site of ethnic conflict and economic
ghettoisation. Nevertheless, neoliberal reforms have “added to a sense of crisis that has resulted in the erosion of social and economic security” and “in fact neoliberal globalization operated through a vast scale of violence, exploitation and criminality and which works in similar rhizomatic ways to transnational terrorism” (Graham, 2004a, 170). According to Graham (2004: 3) urban destruction in the neoliberal globalizing era can often take on a “warlike level of violence” as “countless informal settlements continue to be bulldozed around the planet in the name of modernization, free way construction, economic development, hygiene and the improvement of a city’s image”.5 The discussions on urbicide from Berman (1987) and Graham (2004) are predicated on the following expectations: urbicide destroys organic and heterogeneous communities and this leads to ethnic nationalism, xenophobia and ghettoisation.

For Coward (2004), urbicide is “a fundamentally political matter since it represents the violent foreclosure of the possibility of the political. Such foreclosure is the exemplary totalitarian moment, a violent foreclosure of the heterogeneous political arena that precedes the determination of society according to one single political program” (Coward, 2009: 42).

The problematic term here is ‘precedes’ given the dynamics of urbicide in non-Western communitarian states which have a history of ethnic nationalism and public spaces defined by ethnic homogeneity which is actually reinforced by encounters and exclusions of ‘the foreign’. For Coward (2009), the destruction of buildings has conventionally been viewed as being the ‘collateral damage’ of anthropological violence (killing people), or the destruction of symbolic buildings (libraries/mosques), or the destruction of noble concepts (ie destruction of the concept of democracy and civilization). Coward argues that these three interpretations do not attend to the ontology of ‘buildings’ which provide the conditions for heterogeneity insofar, as Coward puts it, that buildings allow for multiple physical encounters in and through their public spaces. When buildings are destroyed then it follows that the possibility 6 of heterogeneity is destroyed. There is, however, in this case, no analysis of what ‘heterogeneity’ means and represents for the different constituents and political actors, or an analysis into the implications of the urbicide thesis regarding the contested official and unofficial narratives as to what counts as heterogeneity. Instead, a strangely quantitative focus on how urban space allows for more numerical and physical ‘encounters’ between ‘difference’ is advanced. For Coward, urbicide is the “destruction of buildings as the condition of the possibility of all the possible identities that might at any time comprise a particular urban population” (Coward, 2009, 50). Coward (2009: 91-92) writes that heterogeneity comprises an existential condition in which a relationship with alterity perpetually unworks the presence of an identity. Buildings constitute the conditions of possibility for sharing by holding open the possibility of others existing in the same urban public space. However, what is understood as ‘sharing’ or ‘encountering’ come in many physical, symbolic and cultural forms in

5 “Korean Economy Undergoes Balkanisation’ The Korea Times, 17th February, 2011. The article argues that despite continued Chaebol growth, small businesses are still in financial trouble. Critics of the Chaebols would argue that small businesses do well inspite of Chaebol growth which stifles local small business development as ‘an octopus with tentacles’ (Kwon, 2004). Chaebols have different institutional cultures (Samsung emphasises Weberian rational cause-effect, whilst Hyundai, emphasises spontaneous and ‘manufactured crisis’ for improving creativity) and this impacted on economic performance (Rowly and Bae, 2004).

6 Again, what is the criteria of ‘possibility’ and what factors and which agents make these encounters more or less possible, and when and how?
different local, national and global communities. However, urbicide is said to be ‘political’ because it destroys the “negotiation between identity and difference and between the self and the other” (Coward, 2009: 42). Coward argues that the urbicide logic “cannot be extended to cover the demolition of buildings that occur as part of the everyday renewal of cities” (Coward, 2009: 131).

However, the refusal to focus on ‘intentions’ misses the point that it is not always the ‘destruction’ of urban spaces per se that leads to actual resistances to urbicide, but, rather, the real and perceived lack of democratic accountability, consultation and transparency from government and large private construction industries. Moreover, distinguishing between military and non-military violence is problematic insofar that it is the effects on cities and populations of urban destruction that is the key to understanding the causes and consequences of urbicide and resistance to urbicide, as well as concerning what these resistances represent and to different constituents (Cho, 2005). Coward, in my view, problematically marginalizes the issue of intentions and in doing so ‘reifies’ the causes and consequences of urbicide. Resistances to urbicide are a response not only to urban destruction and redevelopment but to the nature of the decision making involved which is often justified for ‘the benefit of the national communitarian family.’ Indeed, the ‘process’ is unintentionally naturalized by the urbicide approaches critiques as communities are often unintentionally framed as passive victims. So Berman (1987) writes:

No one has seriously tried to add up the victims of this latest wave of urban destruction. It wouldn't be easy. First, we would have to count all the people forced to flee instantly...These stricken people belong to one of the largest shadow communities in the world....The people caught in the fires, the urbicide victims, were so traumatized they simply couldn't grasp what was happening to them.

An alternative approach to urbicide might ask ‘who are these others’, how do they recognize themselves as ‘others’ (and do these groups actually want to) 7 and ‘what is their socio-economic status to be able to access public spaces’. Amin (2008) argues that different buildings and perceptions of buildings can create different types of behaviours (and expectations of behavior) 8 as public and urban spaces bring a constant possibility and dynamic in the mixing of strangers as a ‘situated multiplicity.’ Moreover, critics have pointed out that public spaces and buildings exist within authoritarian states and states promoting ethnic nationalism, not least for totalitarian military parades.

Coward (2006) replies that such critiques fail to separate the historical and empirical fact of homogeneity, from the existential principle of public-ness that characterises buildings. Coward argues that homogeneity ‘waxes and wanes’ whilst heterogeneity is an ever present possibility. But what are the determining economic and political factors of the naturalized term ‘wax and wane’? Moreover, surely homogeneity is not necessarily the space of the private because individuals of similar ethnic and racial beliefs encounter each other in public spaces in states such as South Korea. Coward makes clear by strategically placing the debate onto the ‘defining the urban question,’

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7 Foreigners living in communitarian states often want to ‘assimilate’ and lose their difference in order to survive basic culture shock and to feel included, even if this means ‘giving up’ difference as a basic survival strategy.

8 In Confucian states such as South Korea, the monitoring of code of dress, behaviour and even nuances of language is an everyday occurrence in public spaces defined through ethnic homogeneity.
urbicide does not necessarily mean ‘cities’ or ‘the revenge of the countryside’ on cities, although urban areas are more likely to be cities and their hinterlands. However, the need to draw definitional and historical boundaries between epochs of urbicide clearly becomes necessary otherwise the abstract approach to urbicide simply becomes an explanation of everything. Moreover, even in being able to avoid this concern, the question is as to where these boundaries are drawn, by who and for what purpose?

The approach of Berman and Graham seems to me to be a more startling and profound argument as it gets to the heart of the urban politics of ‘the everyday’ and the underlying practices of non-military urban violence that are ‘normalised’ by the neoliberal discourse ‘in the name of progress’ and in the name of urban ‘aesthetics.’ The South Korean government’s rhetoric of ‘design Seoul and ‘global Korea’ also obscures the economic power interests which, in Graham’s terms hides the ‘dark side of modernity.’

Rethinking Urbicide: On Homogeneity and heterogeneity in the case of Seoul

Stenberg (2010) argues that the destruction of cities can, and contrary to Coward’s argument, create the conditions for heterogeneity and democracy such as the allied bombings of Dresden during World War Two. Bousquet (2010) argues that public spaces in cities also contain homogenous ghettos which are undemocratically surveilled and monitored by what Stephen Gill once termed the state’s ‘neoliberal panopticon’. Fregonet (2010) asks whether or not the built environment is also liable to isolate individuals and communities rather than to create the possibility of heterogeneity. Indeed, buildings can also allow for the proactive or reactive ethnically homogenous ghettos as reactions to state-led multicultural policies failing rather than unintentionally or intentionally creating ethnic homogeneity per se. In Coward’s terms, the following view would be expected, in that Seoul:

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grows with its history. It adapts itself to the times and continually transforms itself completely…(I)t is said that civilization was born in cities. A city is a place where various contacts, opportunities and cooperation are born. Urban life is therefore based on dynamic changes, activities and interchanges (Lee, 1989: 20).
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Coward argues that public spaces and buildings ‘just are’ a gathering for heterogeneity and that urbicide is violent exactly because of its desire to destroy a preceding heterogeneity. However, this point misses the different contestations of the terms heterogeneity and homogeneity. As Grenville (2007: 456-457) points out, Seoul is “wrapped up in several layers of modernity and different variants of modernization and urbanization.”

For instance, in 1896 the first public park Tapkol Park or ‘Pagoda Park’ near the traditional craft ‘zone’ of Insa-dong was constructed by the ruling Joseon elites of Seoul. Thus, even before Japanese colonisation, the Korean ruling class had already begun a rethinking of the site and nature of ‘public space’ as a form of a specifically Korean modernisation. Thus a long standing tension began as to whether (South) Korean modernization was (and should be) ethnically homogenous and public (or heterogeneous and public), and whether contemporary modernization would be a break
from this tradition (in whatever form) or would be able to incorporate this tradition. This debate has been further complicated by the influence of the Japanese colonial period which brought to and imposed on Korea its own ‘foreign’ narrative on what counted as tradition and modernization. This, subsequently, led to a racially and ethnically homogenous Korean modernization as a form of ethnic national resistance to this colonial rule (Shin, 2006). Early resistances to the construction of ‘foreign’ modern buildings focused on whether to develop a specific future orientated Korean modernization as nationalism, or to develop a more defensive Korean nationalism based on traditional Confucian values, or to develop a progressive nationalism which would be based on foreign anti-colonial national liberation movements. Thus these debates included issues as to the form of nationalism to be taken and constructed (ethnic or civic). As noted, “The construction of nation-hood is as much a process of forgetting as it is of remembering; it is a process of filtering, condensing and organizing the complexities and uncertainties of history into the well bounded and highly specific terms that constitute national narratives, dates, periods, actors, and plots, among others” (Grinker, 1998: 126). With respect to the issue of heterogeneity, according to Grinker (1998)

Koreans do not have a concept of difference that evokes the sense of a melting pot, and the word used to explain cultural and political difference ‘ijil’ has a negative connotation (Grinker, 1998: xiii).

Thus, identifying the different historical narratives might produce different expectations as to urbicide practices and explain why these unexpected results occur.

As part of the modernization process the Japanese introduced a ‘foreign’ zoning of Seoul’s urban spaces into industrial, residential and public/civic zones (Kim, 1997). The aim was not only for Japanese imperial interests to legitimize their rule and to ‘convert’ Korea through a soft power strategy, but to create a modern cosmopolitan city with modern urban public spaces. However, these heterogeneous public spaces were a result of an asymmetric power relationship between the colonized and the colonizer. In this sense ‘difference’ represented colonial power interests rather than a democratic pluralism and heterogeneity. For Hong (2008) the Japanese halted a specifically state-led form of indigenous Korean modernization represented by public spaces such as Tapkol Park. In this sense modernization was becoming indigenous but it was not ‘organic’ because indigenous Korean modernization was based on a particular state-led version of public spaces which often encouraged and reinforced ethnic homogeneity. This means that the later urban destruction of building form and urban spaces by the Japanese as well as subsequent urbicide of Japanese colonial buildings generate different dynamics of cause and effect which run counter to the expectations of the urbicide approaches. This is because the urbicide approaches do not interrogate further into the question of ‘what it is that is being destroyed’. The point is that the different narratives of what counts as and what is represented by heterogeneity/homogeneity were constructed from different institutional sites. This is significant because representation of who and what the actor stands for, has implications for the different dynamics as to the cause and consequences of ‘resistances’ to urbicide. Indeed, resistances to urbicide do not always necessarily reject the objectives of Chaebol activity or government policy per se but they do often object to the lack of consultation.
and the ideational neoliberal propaganda of ‘progress’ that accompanies and legitimates urban destruction.

The neoliberal narrative of the Conservative South Korean government is one that links a strategy of state directed neoliberal economic development into a specific Korean globalization and thus it is reasoned, as a strengthening national security. This has implications for identifying what kind of modernization (and nationalism) is being produced and/or resisted, and from which agents/institutions. Many Koreans have often come to regard cosmopolitanism and modernization as an external foreign threat on Korean wholeness and the ‘Korean family’.

Urban areas such as Seouchon district represent a simultaneous mix of the different temporal and spatial Korea’s such as retro-1970s, traditional and postmodern. However as in any resistance movement, an ideological simplification was necessary to forge a counter ‘power’ rather than to acknowledge the complexities of Korean history. The urbicide thesis has simply reinforced these official ‘meta’ narratives on defining heterogeneity.

In Seoul during the 1970s, a variety of state-led shanty and slum clearances and relocation projects in metropolitan South Seoul were initiated. These neighbourhoods existed as a result of the Korean War (1950-1953) and the mass migration into Seoul during the 1970s as economic development began. These processes clearly complicate the reifications and abstractions of the urbicide approaches.

Residents were financially and often coercively encouraged by the government to move out to South East Seoul in the Gangnam and Jamsil areas near the Olympic Site and the current COEX Mall. The building of Seoul subway East Green Line 2 to link these new urban areas with the city centre was often backed up by oppressive state/police action and often the sanction of military action. The Hannam bridge was built to connect North and South Seoul. As South Korea prepared for the 1988 Olympic Games many housing units from the early 20th century were demolished (Ha, 1995: Hill and Kim, 2000: Sorman, 2010). The official government view was that ‘urban is better’ and this narrative fed into national security narratives during the authoritarian period. Yet, the housing units of the 20th century that were destroyed simultaneously represented ‘tradition Korea’ as a resistance to colonial domination and, were architecturally influenced by the Japanese colonial period. The issue is, as to whether specifically different cultures are represented by ‘buildings’ or if, as part of the epoch, inevitably reproduce the ideas and influences of the period. As Kim (2006:132) notes:

The close political alliance between political regimes and capitalist shaped the unique pattern of economic development...in this sense there is an informal division of labour—the state plans and the chaebols execute, an institutional arrangement that allows centralised planning and decentralised execution.
Various Chaebol company towns have been set up at Woolsan (Hyundai) and at Pohang (POSCO) (Pirie, 2008; Shin and Morales, 2011: Shin, 2008; Park, 2011). Since the 1960s Seoul has based its redevelopment along three ‘master plans.’ Firstly, there is demolish style redevelopment, restoration style development and finally conservation style urban development to attract and segregate foreigners in exclusive and gated ‘foreign zones’. Often local residents’ interests have come a firm second to redevelopment leading to urban resistances (La Grange and Jung, 2004; Altes and Im, 2011; Hyun Chin Lim and Jho Jang, 2006; Cho, 2005; Hassink, 1999). Kangnam, once a flat plain of rice fields is now proudly described as the ‘Manhattan of Korea.’

Nye (2004: 105) argues that “Promoting positive images of ones country is not new, but the conditions for projecting soft power have been dramatically transformed in recent years”. Nye (2010a) writes that “South Korea has a message for the world. To tell it though, it needs to see itself as more than a regional actor and think of ways in which it can contribute to global public goods”. This would “enhance its standing and in doing so, advance its foreign policy interests” (Nye, 2010a: 96). The Global Issues and Project Culture and Mutual Cultural Exchange Project recognizes that coordinated and centralized state-led ‘soft power assets, including culture, national values, and brand image,’ are key to a successful soft power (MOFAT White Paper, 2010: 229).

Incheon City, near Seoul, recently hosted a City Festival to help ‘establish an urban development model for the future’ which would be “a multicultural centre for business and education by 2020.” Corporate giants Hyundai Engineering and Construction, and POSCO Engineering and Construction presented their own corporate vision of future urban development projects. Seoul was listed as the worlds 10th most globalised city by Foreign Policy’s 2010 Global Cities Index (Kim, 2009). The current South Korean government also has a particular view on what a global city should look like (Mawoudi, 2010). According to a McKinsey Special Report ‘Urban World: Mapping the Economic Power of Cities’ (March 2011) the top 100 cities of the world generated over $21 trillion of World GDP in 2007. Former Mayor Oh of Seoul established several reconstruction projects and reinforce ‘fengshui’ as Korean tradition.

Looser Real Estate Policies Unveiled’ The JoongAng Daily reported that with a stagnant housing market there is a move to relax these rules and even encourage speculation as no one is buying homes due to fears of price depreciation. As a result there are more rent seekers and ‘jeonse’ deposits have gone up and due to the low interest The Ministry of Land, Transport and Maritime Affairs aims to revive housing market through policies to eliminate the laws on anti-speculation zoning in Seocho, Gangnam, and Songpa. Here, zoning was ‘designed to prevent sales of apartments or buildings scheduled for redevelopment and renewal’. However, the new bill also allows owners to sell their homes despite renewal planning to get the housing market moving.

City Centre Gets new Skyline’ The JoongAng Daily, 20th June 2011. In Seoul, office space was recorded at 9% unused. However construction continues as new towers representing modernization in the CBD near the newly Chonggye Stream (redeveloped by Hyundai) and near Tapkol Park are now counted as the Ferrum Tower, the 101 Pine Avenue, the Signature Tower (Eujiro) and the State Tower near Namsan. There has been widespread destruction of narrow streets in an aim to make North Seoul near the CBD similar to the high rise and wide boulevards of South Seoul such as Teheran Street.

Incheon Festival to attract 7 Million Visitors’ The Korea Times, 6th August 2009

One such project has been Gwanghwamun Plaza, described as a ‘third rate amusement park’. The project is regarded as an ill-conceived Baudrillard-esque simulacrum of Korean tradition as cultural diversity but separate from the ‘real world’ of Seoul. The plaza was intentionally constructed as a public space for the community and to encourage neighbourhood ‘encounters’ but critics have wondered what the real objective of this plaza is: a place to
projects so as to change the ‘exterior’ appearance of Seoul, whilst new Seoul Mayor, Park Won Soon is promoting Seoul city as a network of communities given that, perhaps paradoxically, larger world cities have more likelihood of recreating a local community ‘gohyang’ or that ‘hometown’ feeling.\(^{18}\) This tension between tradition and modernization as a contradiction, or, as a mutually reinforcing oscillation and swing, has been apparent in (South) Korea since the introduction of Western and modern practices in the late 19\(^{th}\) century.\(^{19}\) For instance, not addressed by Western urbicide approaches, is whether there a difference between state-designated public spaces and organic public spaces? Does this affect the nature of, and the kind of responses to urbicide and what these responses want and represent?

The Hi! Seoul marketing campaign (Soul of Asia) of 2009-2010 similarly juxtaposed images of Seoul’s newly renovated historic monuments and its futuristic architectural symbols (Seoul Tower) with a commentary that Seoul has ‘many flavours to sample’ and is now a ‘gateway to a new world.’ These campaigns as former Mayor Oh argued, will help ‘upgrade the value of the city’\(^{20}\) as a global design centre and compete with other global cities.\(^{21}\) Representatives from various international businesses have advised Seoul metropolitan government to boost diversity and make Seoul a business friendly environment. Saskia Sassen recently suggested to the South Korean government that Seoul needs to ‘start impressing foreigners.’\(^{22}\)

South Korea has an economic need for immigrants due to low birth rates, productivity issues and to fill gaps in the 3 ‘d’ jobs (dirty, dangerous, difficult).\(^{23}\) Many of these immigrants are now being encouraged to use the so-called and newly constructed Global Village Centres. These centres have been built in areas cleared and developed by the government.\(^{24}\) Traditional and modern buildings have been destroyed so as to make way for these new zones and ‘green belt land’ has also been marked out for planning permission.\(^{25}\) The underlying commitment of brand global Korea is summed up by the following passage “The government is targeting redevelopment under a plan to make the city a more cosmopolitan, aesthetically pleasing place for visitors and residents alike” and “you don’t throw money at an old building, you tear it down.”\(^{26}\)

It is possible to suggest that historically, even a limited version of heterogeneity in South Korea was not necessarily plural and ‘democratic but centrally and

\(^{18}\) ‘Community Building in Korea’ The Korea Times, 5\(^{th}\) December 2011.

\(^{19}\) As Huntington and Wallerstein note respectively, it is necessary not to assume that Westernisation necessarily means modernization or that capitalism necessarily means industrialization.

\(^{20}\) ‘Design is Everything’ The Korea Times, 27\(^{th}\) February 2010

\(^{21}\) ‘Dynamic Korea’ CNN, Wednesday August 10\(^{th}\), 2011: http://www.dynamic-korea.com/

\(^{22}\) ‘Design, Diversity, try to globalization Seoul’ The Korea Times, 11\(^{th}\) March 2009


\(^{24}\) ‘Design, Diversity, try to globalization Seoul’ The Korea Times, 11\(^{th}\) March 2009

\(^{25}\) ‘Korea to Needs to do more to empower foreigners’ The Chosun Ilbo 8\(^{th}\) October 2009

\(^{26}\) ‘The Debate over Hanok’s Heating Up’ The JoongAng Daily, 10\(^{th}\) November, 2009
paternalistically promoted according to traditional Confucian values, often with
the exclusions or limited inclusions of foreigners. However this point still assumes that
Confucianism was and is inherently predicated on a dominant ethnic homogeneity with
contrived opening to heterogeneity. Yet even this view can be contested given that
several writers have suggested that this view itself is simply a Western caricature of
Confucianism. Several writers have begun identifying the democratic and
heterogeneous potential located within Confucianism (Ackerly, 2005). Moreover, the
question of what and who are Koreans is still not settled in the turbulent narratives of
national identity and what this national identity is, not only on ‘which South Korea’ is
the ‘true’ South Korea (neoliberal/Confucian/postmodern/industrial/democratic ) but
which of the two Korea’s (North or South) is the ‘true’ inheritor of the Joseon dynasty
(1392-1910) which was disrupted by Japanese colonialism (Grinker, 1998).

President Lee, Myeung-bak, as previously mayor of Seoul, had embarked on a
project to destroy unattractive buildings and the elevated expressway in downtown
Seoul to recover the ancient Cheonggye stream. 27 The stream represents the unified
wholeness of the Korea of the Joseon period. For many therefore, this urban ‘green’
redevelopment by Hyundai Construction (of which President Lee was chairman) was
regarded as the ‘liberation’ of a traditionally heterogeneous Seoul from the artificial
uniformity of Korean or foreign homogeneity. This narrative regarded ‘concrete Seoul’
to be a result of the response to the impact of Japanese colonialism, peninsula division
and the ongoing threat of the North which led the South having to rapidly industrialize
during the authoritarian (1961-1979) period of General Park. Questions were raised as
to what the stream represented; a Korean tradition of ethnic homogeneity; an alternative
heterogeneous Korean tradition as a constant movement of people and ‘others’ into the
territory that had always been public and heterogeneous. In this sense urbicide has
destroyed an externally imposed heterogeneity ie a Korean version by creating a
specific Korean version of heterogeneity ‘in the name of progress.’ This would confirm
Graham’s thesis but contradict Coward’s. Thus, urban destruction is tied to national
development which is tied to issues of militarized national security in the technically
ongoing Korean War. However, Graham’s approach still does not take into account the
different contested narratives of heterogeneity and where these narratives come from ie
state or grassroots. In this sense whilst neoliberal modernization through urbicide
produces exclusions and ethnic nationalism, ethnic nationalism also preceded urbicide
which leads to different relationships between cause and consequence.

The problematic remains in identifying the contested nature of ‘what it is that has
been destroyed’. Two options emerge. Either, urbicide will release a specifically
historical Korean heterogeneity (which is therefore contrary to the urbicide position) or
that urbicide in Seoul may confirm the expectations of the urbicide thesis
(homogeneity) but through different and unexpected relationships between cause and
effect. For instance, whilst urban destruction might create ethnic homogeneity this is not
so much a result of government led urbicide but rather the result of the different
reactions and resistances to urbicide from ethnic national groups skeptical of
multiculturalism and of modernisation.

Rethinking Urbicide and Buildings: the case of the Hanoks

27 Executive Vice President of Hyundai Engineering and Construction, Young Nam Lee, hailed this project as a new
paradigm in ‘Cheonggyeong; Restoration and Urban Development’ (2003) http://management.kochi.tech.ac.jp
Stenberg (2010) argues that Coward problematically misses the significance of the ‘quality of the built form’ because this influences the implications, causes and consequences of urbicide on urban communities. I would add how long does it take for buildings to become recognized as locales for heterogeneous gathering. Indeed, what are the implications of the site and nature of this recognition for understanding responses and resistances to urbicide? Hong (2008) breaks the concept of buildings down into architectural form, building function, and production and consumer interests. There is also the conceptual and political significance (particularly in post-colonial states) of the nationality of the building constructor/architect. There is also the distinction between the ‘façade’ of a building and the inner structure of a building. These issues can represent different spatial and temporal cultural and historical forms of heterogeneity and homogeneity. This means that their destruction, can lead to unexpected results and contrary to the urbicide approaches. Lee (1989) writes that as a result of ‘foreign influenced’ modernization by the South Korean government, Seoul has been ‘sanitised with concrete tiles’ and although areas of North of the Han are “disordered” these were the organic urban neighbourhoods where Koreans “breathe.” For Lee, redevelopment by bulldozers has been like a ‘bad heart operation’ and the city has lost its ‘life of rhythm and culture.’

The city of Seoul’s architecture was historically mapped on the principles of Fengshui (Jin, 1999; Yoon, 2006). Fengshui is the affect on how humans are influenced by land and architectural form and is integral in selecting space to build graves, houses and buildings.28 This holistic belief system is at odds with positivist functionalism and the ‘foreign’ zoning of contemporary urban development. The issue of the Hanoks is also linked to broader questions such as how the South Korean government constructs specific official and exclusionary narratives on what counts as tradition, identity, history and modernization. Moreover these narratives change depending on whether the audience is Korean or ‘foreigners only.’29 These designations have often been predicated on what the government at the time deem potentially lucrative real estate. Monuments defined as heritage are classified through a ‘numbers’ system. Thus, a not so well known monument on a particularly piece of lucrative land might receive less interest in saving. On the other hand naming a monument as ‘heritage’ can increase land prices depending on landowner and political interests and connections (Aplin, 2007).

Henderson (2007) writes that heritage is both a socio-cultural and economic asset but always constitutes political capital. Hanoks have been renovated by young Korean artists often into colorful craft stores, private galleries, coffee houses and studios. Hanok’s are now becoming symbolic of a version of Seoul’s world city branding as representing Korean tradition to the world (Sam, 2007). Historic Bukchon zone where many Hanoks are being demolished is traditionally known as ‘the place that beauty gathers’ and was for decades a place of residence for the middle class state employees of the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910). State employees often met foreigners so in this sense Bukchon was traditionally (even from Confucian influenced government) known as a plural and heterogeneous urban space. However the area has also been designated an ‘official’ version of Korean tradition of ethnic homogeneity. Before urbicide even takes

28 For instance, buildings have their front entrances facing to the South.
29 The author recently read a placard outside a building in Seoul with these terms which obviously has strong connotations with discrimination and exclusion, and yet is heralded in Korea as ‘welcoming’ and as deference to foreigners.
place there are differences as to which particular historical narrative on heterogeneity is being used and by who. Jeong-dong urban zone caters for Seoul’s urban cosmopolitan elite, with foreign restaurants and cinema’s showing the latest foreign movies. This is promoted to foreigners as a ‘package of diverse and multicultural Seoul in miniature’. Tourist zoning is creating competing narratives between state-led accounts of Korean traditional and ‘grassroots’ or ‘organic’ neighbourhood traditions, both heterogenous and homogenous.\(^{30}\) As Eun (2010) notes:

> the government has sought a variety of programs in every social area, ranging from housing supply to tax incentives for childcare…The Korean government has been quick in coping with the onrush of foreign expatriates, increasing the number of multicultural family centers across the country to support their needs and human rights.

One issue raised is whether the destruction of those hanoks which were built during the Japanese colonial period is of a specific state-led Japanese version of Korean tradition, an official Japanese version of Korean modernization, a Japanese version of heterogeneity or an organic fusion of Japanese and Korean traditions ‘in the name of progress’.\(^{31}\) The destruction of the traditional Hanok’s is resisted by Koreans and foreigners.\(^{32}\)

Due to the state-led packaging of Korean tradition and state-led packaging of cultural diversity, critics have pointed out that hanok neighbourhoods are no longer ‘real’ but ‘officially designated museums.’ The government is making the case\(^ {33}\) that rebuilding roads to accommodate the latest cars will enhance the neighbourhood’s traditional atmosphere. This is making the Hanoks attractive to Chaebol Korean and foreign real estate developers (Shin and Morales, 2011). Real estate developers and the Chaebols have realized the immense profits that can be made in preserving and selling hanoks. The government has pushed through plans to provide better access to the Hanoks for cars, whilst the further destruction of Hanok supply from government and private companies will clearly push up the price of the Hanoks to the benefit of real estate developers and new owners who have bought out the original inhabitants.

The South Korean government distinguishes between rapid economic development and protecting the designated ‘national treasures’ (Chung, 2005). Seoul has developed as a world city through a set of violent swings between rapid destruction and ossified preservation of tradition (Pai, 1997). Thus, the conceptual separation of buildings from culture in the argument of Coward can not simply be about the ‘symbolism’ or ‘collateral damage’ issue. Indeed, Coward’s view is reasonable if it is placed within the terms of the urbicide approach. Many poststructuralist defend their position by suggesting that critics come from perspectives that the poststructuralists reject in their

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\(^{30}\) One recent example was advertised in the Conservative English daily the \textit{JoongAng Daily} which had an advert for Hillside Accommodation tailored as ‘an Exclusive Residence for Foreigners in Seoul’ and as ‘an exclusive new gated community,’ \textit{The JoongAng Daily}, 13\textsuperscript{th} February, p. 2. This indicates a neoliberal securitization of foreigners as a state-led separation is created between Korean Seoul and a ‘foreigners only’ Seoul.

\(^{31}\) ‘Foreigners fight to Preserve Hanoks’ \textit{The JoongAng Daily} 11th September 2010. Hanoks were originally specified for protection by the Mayor of Seoul and civil society groups in the late 1990s.

\(^{32}\) The 2001 government-backed Restoration Project poured money into the Bukchon region. Protests argued that this was a way of sprucing up the area for private real estate companies. http://www.kahal-dong.com and \textit{KBS World Radio} Seoul, 1st October 2010.

\(^{33}\) ‘Bukchon Area to be Made Car Free’ \textit{The JoongAng Daily}, 7\textsuperscript{th} September, 2010
argument. But this kind of defense can be turned around. My argument is that concentrating the debate on this separation issue (and the separation itself) it is problematic because the politics (and rethinking of ‘the political’) of this separation already directly impacts and is intrinsic to the real and perceived understanding of heterogeneity and homogeneity within buildings and thus impacts on the direction of agency and urban resistances and political responses to urbicide.

**Conclusion**

The current urbicide approaches rightly attend to understanding and explaining the crucial relationships between urban destruction, neoliberal globalization and issues of cultural identity. I have discussed these approaches in the context of urban destruction in a non-Western world city. I have identified two approaches to urbicide and within these approaches I outlined themes regarding the relationship between heterogeneity, homogeneity and urban space, and the question of ‘buildings’. I have outlined the underlying expectations of the urbicide approaches regarding these relationships. However I have argued that the current approaches fail to acknowledge and problematise the tensions concerning the contested narratives on site and nature of homogeneity and heterogeneity and the issue of buildings. The urbicide approaches fail to clearly identify the different approaches as to what it is that is being destroyed. This means that the expectations of urbicide in a non-Western context are either not met, or, if the expectations are met, then this is for alternative reasons of cause and consequence. These reasons are not addressed by the urbicide approaches. I have argued that the relationships between cause and consequence is a more complex one in states such as South Korea where there is a strong historical (and believed) preceding narrative of ethnic and racial homogeneity.

I have argued that the terms and concepts of homogeneity and heterogeneity are contested. These contestations are manifested as official and unofficial, and emerge from different political agents. The relationship between urban destruction and ‘that what is being destroyed’ often does not match the direct and indirect expectations of the urbicide approaches. I conclude that approaches to urbicide need to take into account the processes and dynamics of urban destruction in non-Western contexts. However, this should not be at the expense of losing the recognition of the interrelated global and local dynamics involved in non-Western world cities such as Seoul where juxtapositions of globalizations and ethnic nationalism are a constant feature of the politics of ‘the urban everyday’.

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