

Domestic Architecture of the Modern-day Elites: Manifestations of Periodic Change in Home Environments

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Abstract

Various aspects of elitism, elite life, culture, and their design traditions have all been undertaken and discerned largely by Western scholars over time. Hence, in addressing this seminal topic, such a body of knowledge becomes indispensable, although it is somewhat oblivious to an Eastern perspective. Since 15th century, these propagations have been ensued all over the modern world with the aid of wide-spread Iberian and Western European colonial practices as McGillivray (2006: 15-19) tells us. In the rapidly globalizing and predominantly capitalist modern world, elites are conveniently placed on top of the social hierarchy irrespective of their physical location. In this context, the paper attempts to explore the underlying reasons for this immutable condition. As its foremost contribution, the apparent sensitiveness of elites to periodic changes in society is to be investigated, while establishing what these are in actuality. In this exercise, how essential aspects of 'high culture' and 'grand design tradition' are bound to the elite dwelling – with its contiguity to the complex notions of 'home' – is dealt with, identifying their inter-relations.

Keywords: Elitism, domestic architecture, periodic change.

1.0 Eastern and Western Elitisms

The oblivious attitude of academia towards the study of eastern elitism becomes evident in the meticulous examination of available literature on the subject by Wijetunge (2012: 61-63). Although a successful attempt has been made by Wittfogel (1957) to determine the underlying factors of elitism in the Orient, the study's credibility is marred by an undertone of Orientalism – in the sense of Edward Said (2004). In such a backdrop, only a handful of attempts such as Wijetunge (2011, 2012) are to be found that can be accessed to have established a clear east-west dichotomy in elitism.

On the other hand, Western elitism has been a well-scrutinized area, where the study by Bottomore (1993) is arguably the most effective; as it takes into account a number of formidable points of view of other academics from past to present [*i.e.* G. Mosca (1939), V. Pareto (1963), M. Kolabinska (1912), and K. Marx and F. Engles (1998), C. W. Mills (1956), Horton (1964), Barber (1968) etc]. Hence, the study dwells on these sources to derive a definition for Western elitism.

2.0 Deriving a Definition for Western 'Elitism'

"A rich man may have difficulty in entering the kingdom of heaven, but he will find it relatively easy to get into the higher councils of a political party, or into some branch of government. He can also exert an influence on political life in other ways: by controlling media of communication, by making acquaintances in the higher circles of politics, by taking a prominent part in the activities of pressure groups and advisory bodies of one kind or another ... A poor man has none of these advantages..."

Bottomore, 1993: 96

The term 'elite' has been widely utilized and defined in numerous ways in the past by scholars all over the globe. Its connotation has largely evolved over the years, and in the process of further-evolution; especially in the lights of hitherto-unforeseen trends of *globalization* of the present day. Commenting on the basic alikeness of the human being, *Tom Bottomore* affirms that, *"... for all their individual idiosyncrasies, human beings are remarkably alike in some fundamental respects: they have similar physical, emotional and intellectual needs. This is why there can be a science of nutrition, and in a less exact way, sciences of mental health and healing, and of the education of children"* (Bottomore: 1993: 101).

On the other hand, Rousseau based on the world-renowned *Politics* of Aristotle reads, *"[from] the hours of their birth some are marked out for subjection and some for command"* (in Bottomore, 1993: 101). This illustrates the fundamental differences among human beings that he has classified and transcended to levels of inequalities.

"...there are two kinds of inequality among human species; one, which I call natural or physical, because it is established by nature, and consists in a difference of age, health, bodily strength, and the qualities of the mind or of the soul: and another, which may be called moral or political inequality, because it depends upon a kind of convention, and is established, or at least authorized, by the consent of men. This latter consists of the different privileges, which some men enjoy to the prejudice of others; such as that of being more rich, more honored, more powerful or even in a position to exact obedience"

Rousseau (inBottomore, 1993: 102)

Hence, one could assume that the condition of Elitism was derived out of such pioneering notions of human inequalities prevalent over the ages, and has been discussed in more general and wide-ranging terms in recent times. The rationalization with relation to various conspicuous periods of recent history derived by Bottomore (1993: 1), after having referred to various well-established scholarly propagations reads,

"[the] word 'elite' was used in the seventeenth century to describe commodities of particular excellence; and the usage was later extended to refer to superior social groups, such as prestigious military units or the higher ranks of the nobility".

Furthermore, the earliest known usage of the term 'elite' in the English language could be traced back to the Oxford English Dictionary of 1823, at which time it was already applied to various social groups, establishing the above elucidation. On the other hand, Horton's point of view establishes the role of elitism after the Industrial Revolution taking place in Western

Europe throughout 18th and 19th centuries. Prior to this juncture, European-elite largely consisted of the higher clergy as well as the land-owning nobility, and always had been an inheritable status. As he tells us, “[the] membership of an elite group is often inherited, but in some societies it may be acquired” (Horton, 1964: 294).ⁱ

This inclination proliferated throughout the world by the means of European-colonialism, which culminated by mid 19th century as Pakeman (1970: 62-66) affirms.ⁱⁱ Dwelling on this background, Barber (1968: 19,22), utilizing the simplicity of ranking dimensions, delineated three separate but interrelated dimensions for the elite; the economic dimensions, the power dimensions and the evaluation or prestige dimensions.

3.0 The Elite Make-up and Dominance in Society

The feeble explanations derived on elitism over the years were taken to a level of complexity by Pareto (1963: 1422-1423), who assumed that in every branch of human activity each individual is given an index. This index stands as a sign of capacity in a similar way that grades are given for various subjects at school examinations. The class of people who possess the highest indices in their branch of activity is referred to as the elite. However, Pareto does not attempt to employ the concept of the elite in a negative sense. Hence, it is not merely meant to emphasize the inequality of individual endowments in every sphere of social life. He furthermore defines the term ‘governing elite’ as his foremost affair, which explains that in our study of the social equilibrium, it is advantageous to divide the elite class into two; namely, governing elite and non-governing elite. As Pareto (1963: 1423-1424) further elaborates, the governing elite directly or indirectly play some considerable part in the government while the non-governing elites consist of the rest. He propounds the idea of a normal curve of the distribution of wealth in a given society and argues that if individuals were arranged according to other criteria, such as their level of intelligence, aptitude for mathematics, music talent, moral character etc., there would probably result distribution curves similar to that for wealth. Secondly, he affirms that, if individuals were arranged according to their political and social power (or influence), in most societies, the same individuals would occupy the same position in this hierarchy as in the hierarchy of wealth. Consequently, as Pareto (in Bottomore, 1993: 2) concludes, it could be conceived that the upper classes possessing such indices that define elitism, are usually the richest, and represent themselves as the elite in society. This conclusion affirms the pre-eminence of economics in the constitution of elitism.

Pareto’s conceptions may well have owed some acknowledgment to Mosca (1939: 50), who expressed the notion of two classes of people in all forms of societies, both primitive and the most advanced; namely, ‘a class that rules’ and ‘a class that is ruled’. According to him, the first class is always the less-numerous, performs all political functions, monopolizes power and enjoys the advantages associated with power, whereas the latter being more numerous, is directed and controlled by the first, in a manner that is now more or less legal as well as arbitrary and violent at times. This inevitable rule of the minority over the majority is facilitated by the fact that the minority is always organized. It is also said to possess ‘superior individuals’ who have certain attributes that are real or apparent, which is being highly-esteemed and exceptionally influential in the society in which they live. The power of this organized minority

group is irresistible as against each single individual in the unorganized majority. Such majority individuals stand alone before the totality of the organized-minority. As Mosca (1939: 53) further adds, the very reason for the organized character of the ruled is owing to its minority nature itself.

On the other hand, Pareto (1963: 1429-1430) further observed that the upper stratum of society or the elite nominally contains certain groups of people not always very sharply-defined, and called 'aristocracies'; military, religious and commercial in nature, as well as plutocracies – a doctrine that was later adduced by M. Kolabinska. Bottomore (1993: 4) states that Kolabinska sharpened the above point in her reading on the elites of France (largely prior to the industrial revolution) by discussing explicitly the movement of individuals between the different sub-groups of the governing elite. She examined in detail the history of four of such prominent sub-groups; namely, the rich, the nobles, the armed aristocracy and the clergy.

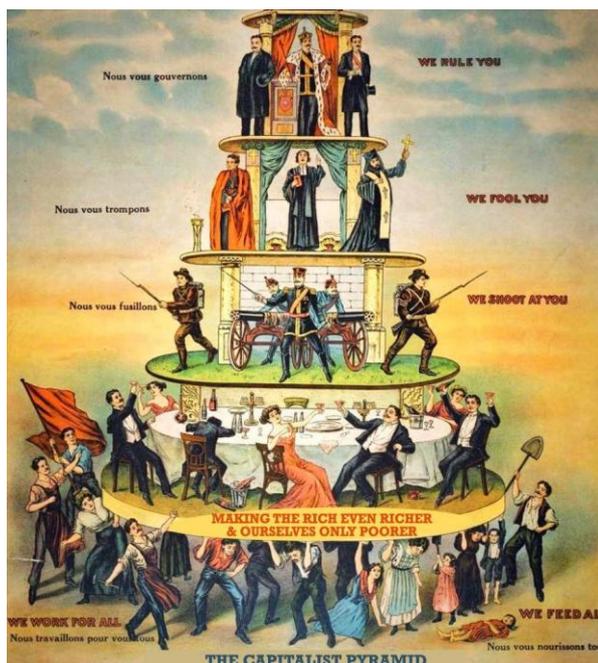
As Bottomore tells us, both Pareto and Mosca's ideas could be condensed into a few common concepts – applicable to the 20th century – that can be very easily conceived. In every society, the elites could either be found in the form of various 'functional groups' or as a 'political class'. In relation to the former, analysis of numerous scholarly notions on elitism can provide the most appropriate and convincing definition with regard to the 20th century and beyond. "[The] term 'elite (s)' is now generally applied, in fact, to fictional, mainly occupational, groups which have high status (for whatever reasons) in a society" (Bottomore, 1993: 7). As established by this statement, their influence is in fact, delimited to their respective occupational arenas.

On the other hand, the more conspicuous and loosely-defined latter consist of those who occupy the posts of political command as well as those who can in certain ways exert influence on political decisions. This class undergoes changes in its membership over a period of time, ordinarily by the recruitment of new individual members from the lower strata of society, sometimes by the incorporation of new social groups. Occasionally these rather-established elite are replaced completely by a 'counter elite', in situations such as revolutions, in a process referred to as the 'circulation of elites' (Bottomore, 1993: 10). Within the political class itself, there exists a smaller group, the 'political elite' or 'governing elite'; consisting of the individuals who actually exercise political powers in a society, at a given time. This includes members of the government, and of the high administration, military leaders, and in some cases, politically influential families of an aristocracy or royal house, and leaders of powerful economic enterprises. However, paradoxically, Bottomore does not address the intellectual role within this group and leaves it to be later attributed to 20th century elites who assume the role of earlier ruling classes. It is less convenient to set the boundaries for the political class as it might include the 'political elite' as well as the 'counter-elites'. The latter may comprise according to Bottomore, of leaders of political parties who are out of office and representatives of new social interests or classes such as trade union leaders, groups of businessmen, intellectuals who are active in politics. Politically influential aristocratic families and royal house are no exemptions either. It is pertinent to argue here that such groups are relegated to the margins of political class owing to their opposition to the governing elite, thus manifesting alternative political ideologies. They could either align themselves with the main opposition or otherwise, another feeble political party. However, it is inevitable that the aristocratic families and royal house will always exert some political influence at least, despite a feeble political participation.

Conversely, it could be argued that when the functional groups are politically apathetic or feeble, they remain within the elite faction their group name suggests, and remains distinctively outside the political class. The political class therefore, comprises a number of groups which may be engaged in varying degree of cooperation, competition or conflict with one another (Bottomore, 1993: 8). Moreover, Mosca (1939: 404) agreeably observes the notion of elitism with a hint of democracy. He disseminates that the elite does not merely rule by force and fraud, but 'represents' in some sense, at least, the common interests and purposes of important and influential groups in society.

In modern times however, the elite are not simply raised high above the rest of society. They are in fact, intimately connected with the masses through the 'sub-elite'. This much-larger group comprises of all intents and purposes, the 'new middle class' (Bottomore, 1993: 53). This particular group does not only supply recruits to the governing elite class, it is itself a vital element in the government of society. However, this feeble manifestation could be further clarified by arguing that these groups remain within the sub-elite class owing to their lack of economic, political, and especially socio-cultural influence. Hence, the examples Bottomore adduces above could be assumed as of being the lowest ranks of the respective groups. It is also logical to believe that once they come to inherit what they lack, then their upward social mobility is assured as recruitment to the political class enabled.

As Mosca (1939: 404) explains, the stability of a given political organism after all, depends on the levels of morality, intelligence and activity that this particular stratum has attained. Commenting on the political influence of elite on their respective societies, Bottomore affirms that, although the composition of governing elite may be progressively altered, the relative importance of the various groups within the elite stratum may not change. But a society can only survive and prosper if there is true collaboration between these groups in terms of unity of opinion and action. This has been largely achieved in the Western capitalist societies by the recruitment of elites from the upper classes, at least for the last two centuries.



The Capitalist Pyramid

Source:

<http://marchgroupeight.files.wordpress.com/2013/06/cpialist-pyramid-1911-industrial-worker-amer-socialist-pub.jpg>

4.0 Determining Factors and the New Faces of 20th Century Elitism

Having established the various ranks that constitute the elite stratum, it is pertinent to discuss the factors determining the elite status and its new faces. In this backdrop, Mills (1956: 277), provides a glimpse of how modern-day governing systems work by capitalizing on the important aspects of 'economic determinism', which should be elaborated in terms of 'political and military determinisms', implying their intrinsic relationships. The higher agents of each of these domains now often have a noticeable degree of autonomy, while most important decisions are often carried through by them with "*intricate ways of coalition*" as for Mills (1956: 277). The mere reason for their coalition as 'a single group' as he claims, is facilitated due to the fact that they all are representatives of 'an upper class' of solidarity. The power positions of these three principal elites are further elaborated separately; business executives could be understood in terms of the growth in size and complexity of their business corporations; military chiefs, by the growing scale and expense of the weapons of war (determined by technology and the state of international conflicts); national political leaders by the decline of legislature of local politics and voluntary organizations (Bottomore, 1993: 22-26).ⁱⁱⁱ

On the other hand, amongst the social groups which have risen to prominence in the tremendous social and political changes of the twentieth century, "*...three elite – the intellectuals, the managers of industry and the high government officials – have often been singled out as the inheritors of the functions of earlier ruling classes and as vital agents in the creation of new forms of society*" (Bottomore, 1993: 52). Hence, it could be conceived that, Bottomore's elucidation on the subject of the elite, which was precisely factual a several decades ago, still seems very formidable today with plenty of adducible examples. Firstly, the quintessential role played by the intellectual elite, behind post-independent or neo-colonial policies of their respective governments or world-wide organizations, to safeguard their respective capitalist interests (manipulated by underlying political and economic conditions), seems very much compelling in the contemporary world. Secondly, the hegemonic part played by multi-national corporations and mega industries of the so-called Global North (which strives to economically-relegate Global South) in world economy, in this age of globalization, is sufficient to vindicate the power exercised by their owners and managers (Karunadasa: 1999). Finally, political dictatorships and tyrant regimes are still commonly practiced, especially in the so-called 'Developing World' (Bottomore, 1993: 72-85).

5.0 Elite Sensitivity to Changes in Society

Up to this juncture, the paper attempted to disseminate that the elite in society are an organized-minority, and tend to dominate the unorganized masses in terms of an array of means. These may possibly range from their superior intellectual and physical qualities possessed from nature, to inherited or acquired powers, essentially of economic and political planes. Through these superior qualities, elites always tend to stay at the forefront of society manifesting their prestige, leading the way for the masses to follow, while striving to further-widen the existing gulf between the two stratums. This generic nature of elites as a whole is true, irrespective of their location in the world whether in a primitive society or the most advanced. In the olden ages, apex-status of the elites was manifested through their royal,

noble, cleric, aristocratic or bourgeois positions in society, and in the contemporary world, they prevail in their new faces – in the forms of intellectuals, managers of industry or bureaucrats – making these elite-positions in society the real determiners of most life aspects of the masses.

The elites rule, they manage, and are the ideological think tanks that manipulates society, while masses merely go along with what is imposed upon them with a minimal amount of resistance. It was established earlier that there are essential power and economic elements underlying elitism. Hence, the elites facilitate new political and economic changes in society, or alternatively, these changes take place because of them and their self-centered actions. It has to be noted here that political changes may also occur due to social revolutions. In that case it is referred to as 'circulation of elites', where a counter elite faction within the political class itself, replaces the ones at the top. On the other hand, Pareto's economic dimension (in Bottomore, 1993: 2) postulates that economics is the most vital aspect that constitutes elitism, as the elites epitomize their political power gained via economic formidability to achieve the edge over masses or alternatively, the reverse takes effect, as Mandel (1982: 18-25) points out as it happened through human history. Policies derived by the governing elites in turn, affect – in positive or negative terms – the economic statuses of themselves, the counter elites, the non-ruling functional elite strata as well as for the sub-elite and masses. Either way, the governing elite policies always strive to compliment and reinforce the best interests of its own stratum of "close coalition", as Bottomore (1993: 277) suggests., This is achieved through a concretization of an inequitable system that in turn makes and sustains them, with the intension of assuring its posterity.

It could be argued that changes in society could be attributed to its political and economic arenas, which are essentially intrinsic to one another. This can also be conceived through political and economic determinisms evident in contemporary state of global elitism vindicated before. Therefore, it could be concluded that, since political and economic factors are two of the greatest contributors in the making of elites in society, or the *raison d'être* behind elitism, they also make elites the most sensitive to their periodic changes. When changes are swept across these arenas in a given society, they eventually reflect in the day to day social lives of its elites, bringing the socio-cultural changes into the equation. It could further be deducted that these periodic and thus, socio-cultural changes are reflected in the masses in a more distant manner – arguably in trickle-down effect.

6.0 High Culture, Grand Design Tradition and the Elite Dwelling

With the matter of elite sensitivity to periodic changes in socio-cultural terms confirmed, it is now pertinent to give emphasis to the possible means of socio-cultural manifestations via levels of cultures and design traditions.

With regard to creative individuals of a society in particular, they essentially possess a vital interplay with the society of which, they live in. Over the history, this trend has been evident in the fields of science, painting, architecture, literature, religious movements as well as moral reforms; the quintessential elements that make up culture. These individuals associate together as elites, which can exist best in a society that is divided into stable and enduring classes as

Bottomore (1993: 115) tells us. With reference to the works of T. S. Eliot, in every society which is complex, there is a number of 'levels of culture' to be found, and it is utmost vital for the health of the society that these levels of culture inter-relate to one another, while remaining distinct at their own rights. Yet, the manner and the taste of society as a whole should be influenced by the society's 'highest culture'. Since culture is a factor that is transmitted primarily through family, if an upper class exists with families which are able to maintain a settled way of lives for a several generations only, the above can be facilitated. Although, existence of an upper class along with such conditions does not merely guarantee a high culture; yet, when they are absent, the higher civilization is unlikely to be found (although this is not so rigid). According to Bottomore, when it comes to the subjects of conservation and transmission of a high culture, we may dwell on the view that it has been, and must be, primarily the work of the family.

"In the past, many other social groups - religious associations, philosophical schools, academies - have been at least as important as the family in transmitting culture; the family, i.e. the families of the upper class in society, have usually passed on, if they have passed on at all, something that has been conserved and kept alive elsewhere, by associations which enjoyed no great stability of membership from generation to generation."

Bottomore, 1993: 115-116

On the other hand, it can be stated that the various associations he describes, may have had a strong influence on the elite of the society in the form of influential families, and their traditions were kept intact by them. In the contemporary world, where the influence of the governing elite is unchallenged, this seems to be just the case. This stability as mentioned earlier is very much sustained by the systems of close coalitions they practice:

Alternatively, in the field of architecture; Rapoport (1969: 2) identifies the dissimilarity between 'grand design tradition' and 'folk tradition', based on other similar scholarly classifications. He claims that, monument buildings belong to the grand design tradition, and are erected to impress either the populace in terms of the power of the patron, or to manifest to the peer-group of designers or cognoscenti, the cleverness of the designer and good taste of the patron. Therefore, based on the great influence practiced by the governing elites at the social apex, grand design tradition could be attributed to the 'highest culture' out of other prevailing levels of cultures in society that they themselves adhere to. Hence, a direct link could be established with grand design tradition and also the domestic building belonging to the elite, which makes up a noteworthy part of their high cultural production. The folk tradition in contrast, is said to be the direct and unselfconscious translation into physical form of a culture; its needs and values as well as the desires, dreams and passions of a people. *"The folk tradition is much more closely related to the culture of the majority and life as it is really lived than the grand design tradition, which represents the culture of the elites"* (Rapoport, 1969: 2).

As the authentic meaning behind folk tradition, Rapoport appropriately points out that, *"[it] is the world view writs small, the 'ideal' environment of a people expressed in buildings and settlements, with no designer, artist, or architect with an axe to grind (although to what extent the designer is really a form giver is a moot point)"* (Rapoport, 1969: 2). The above disseminations, along with the absence of any elements of power or non-insistence on ideological impartations on the society, affirm that folk tradition therefore, makes up 'other levels of culture', and is manifested as either 'primitive' or 'other forms' of 'vernacular'.^{iv}

7.0 Elitism and Home

The cultural element in architecture having being established, it is vital to examine how the notion of 'home' contributes to the complexity that is 'elite domestic architecture'.

There is a conspicuous difference between the connotations of 'dwelling' which is, "*a house or place to live in*" according to the Cambridge Dictionary (2010), and with that of 'home', which is more complex in nature. In contemporary society, home is literarily considered as a place of residence or refuge just as the definition of dwelling, and also has a certain weight of comfort intrinsic to it. It is usually a place in which an individual or a family can rest and be able to store personal property. Even animals have their own homes for that matter, living either in the wild or in a domesticated environment. While a house or a residential dwelling is often referred to as a 'home', the concept expresses itself upon a much broader sense of a physical dwelling. Many people think of home in terms of where they grew up or where they lived, a place that brings back old memories or feelings, and a home can even be a time rather than an actual place. The phrases, "*there's no place like home*" or "*home is where the heart is*" descend from these sentiments. Disseminations of Rybczynski (1988: 17-18) on the discourse affirms that, the feeling of 'homeliness' is all about being surrounded by "*essential*" or "*not so essential*" possessions that we use or take for granted in our day to day lives (that have become familiar to us no matter how small they could be). These familiarities have been mediated to us by history and tradition, where some homely possessions even have sentimental values attached to them.^v

Rybczynski (1988: 22) describes his notion of 'home' associating its general constituents of essential nature such as nostalgia, intimacy and privacy, domesticity, commodity and delight as well as ease. He postulates their gradual evolution from the Middle-Ages into present-day and further states how factors such as light and air, efficiency, style and substance, austerity and finally, comfort and well-being have become aspects we take for granted in the contemporary age. In the medieval period, only the feudal or bourgeoisie upper stratum of society enjoyed luxurious domestic living (by medieval standards), whereas the poor were "*extremely badly housed*" (Rybczynski, 1988: 22). They were without water or sanitation, with almost no furniture and limited to a few possessions; a trend that in Europe at least, lasted to the turn of the 19th century. Even the bourgeoisie houses were places of living as well as work, constantly cluttered with people. This resulted in a lack of privacy, intimacy and especially comfort. These houses assumed an objective notion, owing to the absence of technical skill and ingenuity in them. People in the middle ages thought differently about the subject of function, especially with regard to domestic surroundings unlike his contemporary counterpart who separates it from other attributes such as beauty, age or style. To the medieval man, every object had a meaning and place in life that was as much a part of its function as its immediate purpose while the two were inseparable. The notion of 'pure function' was unheard of and hence functional improvements would have meant tempering with reality. The objects of utility such as pieces of furniture were scarcely given any thought as they lacked in meaning, as against their more personified counterparts such as swords and cannons. These were of partly superstitious nature as well as being considered a part of "*divine order of the Universe*" at times (Rybczynski, 1988: 33, 49).

However, by the 17th century, things had gradually evolved from the middle-ages, incorporating a new element to the notion of home; *its 'privatization'*. Although 'personal

privacy' was still unimportant, home no longer was the working place and along with it, arose a growing sense of 'intimacy' that identified the house exclusively with 'family life'. In this hitherto-unforeseen age of refinement and literacy, people craved for new utilities such as writing tables-secretaries and bureaus, initiating the modern fascination with furniture. The emptiness that prevailed in the medieval interiors was cluttered with thoughtlessly arranged furniture. The transition from the public, feudal household to the private, family home was finally underway (Rybczynski, 1988: 39-48). These 17th century refinements could be further-justified in terms of the vital role of inspiration in 'domesticity', played by the Dutch, especially during their 'golden age'.^{vi} Despite being commercial-oriented by nature, the Dutch had a special bond with their children and homes. Their dedication to homes was well-manifested through their natural inclination to invest all their surplus income in fabric, adornment or furniture of their houses as well as the obsession of its cleanliness. According to Temple (1972: 94), the conspicuous amount of effort that went into furniture of taste with better function, the popularity of family portraits and homely genres of paintings and refined amenities directly related to the easement of household chores are the best of examples for Dutch cherishment of their homes. Consequently, the Dutch notion of domesticity described a set of felt-emotions to do with family, intimacy, devotion to home as well as a "*sense of the house as an embodying element*" and not a single attribute. Furthermore, home was not merely a harboring sentiment and assured a life that lacked autonomy and ensured homely domesticity largely depended on the development of a rich interior awareness, which was in fact the result of the woman's conspicuous role in the home. With such dominant Dutch-influence being prolifically felt in the 17th century Europe, home was publicized as follows.

" 'Home' brought together the meanings of house and of household, of dwelling and of refuge, of ownership and of affection. "Home" meant the house but also everything that was in it and around it, as well as the people, and the sense of satisfaction and contentment that all these conveyed. You could walk out of the house, but you always returned home"

Rybczynski, 1988: 75

Comfort in the physical sense on the other hand, had waited till the 18th century and was manifested in numerous ways. This sudden inclination towards commodity and physical comfort has been seen by some scholars as a pagan-escape, owing to the decline in religious faith during the modern-era, or at any rate abatement in religious fervor and consequently resulting in a materialistic society (Peel, 1964: 161-162). During this period, the emphasis on interior furniture underlining in complexity and richness of the idea of comfort, and also interior décor, gained in great popularity. This was especially, with the intervention of the French Royals who added significant value to 'well-designed' and 'customized' dwellings/edifices. The emphasis on Interior décor in fact, redefined and facilitated the exhilaration in the '*modern sense*', such as privacy, intimacy and comfort (Rybczynski, 1988: 87-88, 98). The famous Quotation from Jane Austen's *Emma* (in Rybczynski, 1988: 120-121), "*Ah! There is nothing like staying at home for real comfort*"^{vii} best explains this complex notion.

On the other hand as Rybczynski (1988: 107, 112, 118-119) further elaborates, 'ease' had always been a dynamic that the English nobility always cherished, finding it in their retreats in the countryside; playing games that they loved, visiting friends and family, placid walks in the countryside and especially, their gardens, which was eventually emulated by the bourgeoisie.

English enthusiasm in particular had given birth to the so-called first original contribution of the English to European culture; the 'Romantic Movement', that eventually promoted the interest in irregular and picturesque; prompting changes in less formal and rambling house layouts to gardens.

During the course of the 19th century however, changes in the domestic interior took place due to the newly gained insights into the area of thermal comfort. The Victorians had learned the great value of fresh air to human health, and better air-circulation and ventilation means were being incorporated into buildings, through both mechanical and non-mechanical means.^{viii} With the turn of the 19th century, the usage of these appliances and devices proliferated and was incorporated into the domestic building as an essential and vital part of it. These unprecedented innovations by the 1930s had become so rapid and essentially incorporated; home by that time was literally indistinguishable from the 1890s counterpart.

Style and substance also became a vital aspect by the 20th century and its growth could be attributed to the obsessive following of fashion as well as popular taste rather than technological improvements of the century. Various styles such as Queen Ann, Colonial revival, Georgian revival to Art décor came and went leaving their traces in the domestic interiors. Some 20th century architects such as Le Corbusier even attempted to develop an ideology based on the fact that human needs are universal and hence, could be universalized; arriving at solutions that were prototypical and not so personal. This was in fact, intended to be a new style for the 20th century '*Machine age*' and a style for more efficient living. Yet, like many others, what he had not realized was that, advent of domestic technology and home management had put the whole question of architectural style in a subordinate position (Rybczynski, 1988: 191). With such novel perceptions, came the notion of austerity, bringing '*Minimal Décor*' to the forefront of interior domestic design. The writings by Adolph Loos, propagating the notion of "*Ornament and crime*" as well as for many other such influential figures on the same discourse, facilitated and popularized this trend (Rykwert, 1982: 66-73). These notions negating periodic styles, opting out ornamentation and stressing new technology gradually replaced 'delight' with both visual and tactile trends of austerity.^{ix} Consequently, it could be stated that the re-discovery of the mystery of domestic comfort today in the 21st century has become a vital phenomena and without this notion, our future dwellings will indeed be machines instead of homes (Rybczynski, 1988: 232). Therefore, it becomes explicit that, home today, has become a constantly-transforming domain of essential nature to a person's life, which is intimately-bound with it.

The most vital point of view in particular, instigated by Rybczynski is that 'family life' began to acquire a private dimension in the 17th Century European 'bourgeoisie dwelling', and not in the ones of "*extremely badly housed*" commoners (Rybczynski, 1988: 50-51). The bourgeoisie had grown in numbers from the medieval period and made up a conspicuous portion of 17th Century populace for this notion to be widely-received. On the other hand, the plight of the majority's dwellings that prevailed into the 20th century never hindered elite auspices to enjoy a decent family life. The majority had to engage in the constant struggle to make a living of bare-essentials, and this inclination to continuous work (even applying to children) scattered their families.^x Lukacs (in Rybczynski, 1988: 51) provides concrete evidence to prove his above statement by stating that, "*[factors of] domesticity, privacy, comfort, the*

concept of the home and the family; these are, literally, principal achievements of the Bourgeois age”

In relation to the Dutch society of their ‘golden age’ that largely inspired, and was the envy of the rest of Europe; the society primarily consisted of merchants and landowners.^{xi} The limited land extent and natural obstacles coupled with other factors had made the society a one of largely city-dwellers as well as bourgeoisie in its construction (Rybczynski, 1988: 52-53). This point alone is sufficient to justify that the inclination of domesticity actually took place in a largely urban and especially bourgeoisie (arguably elite) dominated Netherlands. Moreover, the great innovations of domestic technology that came into usage by the 19th century (and more prolifically by the 1920s), were clearly limited to the people in society who could afford them; again the elites. These appliances found common usage with the majority of society a number of decades later, owing to the further-refinements in cheap technology as well as for the evident improvements in public well-fare following World War II. In the 21st century, this trend is still valid as the segment of a given society that embraces expensive domestic technology to begin with, is the elite class itself. Therefore, these justifications legitimize the studying of more privileged elites, as against the general masses in a given society, as embracers and trend-setters of *par excellence*, as well as being the group that can best manifest its close association with ‘home’, thus the domestic building.



Woman Playing the Virginals

by Emanuel de Witte (1660)

On the cover of *Home: A Short History of an Idea* by Witold Rybczynski, this painting appears. This is a clear depiction of the modern notion of ‘home’ associated with western elitism.

Source:

http://media.tumblr.com/tumblr_lyu6pjG9zp1qd2w3x.jpg

8.0 Why not cultural Projects?

Having established the fact that the elites are the most sensitive to periodic changes in society and their domestic architecture is the best ultimate manifestation of these changes, it is vital to debunk the common misconception that the building category so-called the ‘cultural projects’ have a similar capacity.

It could be argued that the house would have been the first building ever to be erected by man. Pallasmaa (2005: 26) in fact, draws an analogy between building construction in traditional cultures and the way birds shape their nests by movements of their bodies, where the body becomes the foremost referent. As he states,

“[it] is evident that the architecture of traditional cultures is also essentially connected with the tacit wisdom of the body, instead of being visually and conceptually dominated”.

Pallasmaa , 2005: 26

Hasan Udin Khan also agrees with this notion and explains that,

“ [for] most people in traditional societies, the house has been an extension of the human body, an outer layer of clothing, not unlike that of other people’s but capable of accommodating an extra amount of effort, of care, of ornament and of self-expression that lets its occupants inhabit it”.

Hasan Udin Khan (in Powell, 1995: 10)

The great variety of houses or dwellings found in a given society could be attributed to its cultural differences, particularly since the dwelling has traditionally been the most typical product of vernacular design and, therefore, *“most directly related to culture”* (Rapoport, 2008: 148). Dwelling (as a building type) essentially possesses a form, which manifests the complex interaction of many factors. Climatic-determinism as a commonly-acknowledged theory with regard to building, and thus dwelling form, can be questioned by extreme differences that exist in urban patterns and house types within the same areas in the world with similar climatic conditions. Hence, these changes could be attributed to culture than to climate, concretizing the relationship between the dwelling form and culture.

Moreover, *Rapoport* supported by compelling world-wide examples postulates that, in almost every culture (with a few exceptions), buildings of religious or social significance (often both at the same time) possess greater symbolic value and content than the ordinary dwellings.

“This is generally shown by their greater scale, more elaborate decoration, and method of building...; in any case, they are different. These are the monumental buildings of a culture which tend to stand for more than the house... also stands for more than is generally assumed...”

“[Any] emotional or religious surplus, and therefore material surplus, which is extremely limited in societies of scarcity, is reserved for these special types of buildings.....”

Rapoport, 1969: 10

By referring to worldwide examples it could be stated that this symbolic propensity arguably becomes more prolific in more primitive cultures and becomes feeble in more economically-privileged counterparts. These disseminations hence, affirm that cultural projects of social significance possess more symbolic value than intimacy, as well being superfluously Pretentious. They do not manifest the true economic situation of the patron culture or their life

style; but either accepted religious or political beliefs of a certain consensus. Such projects therefore, are meant mainly for the utilization of masses of a given society, and are implemented by its governing elites. It is inevitable that them, who commission these cultural projects, expect to convey a certain message of either political or cultural (religious) nature – via symbolism – to their governed-populaces for their own best interest. Since these projects are predominantly meant for the governed-masses of society, in order to be successful, they should be functionally and psychologically comfortable and familiar to potential users. Therefore, the designers of these projects essentially have to resort to the other ‘different levels’ of more familiar culture of the society’s masses, rather than following up of unfamiliar ‘high culture’ of their patrons. Earlier it was proven that the elite of a given society are the most sensitive to changes in its political and socio-economic arenas in comparison to its general masses due to the undue influence they practice in all possible arenas. Therefore, artificial implementations of ‘folk traditions’ of the masses in a cultural project at a given time, either in its ‘pre-industrial vernacular’ or ‘modern vernacular’ divisions would not effectively portray the specific political or socio-economic changes of that particular era. The possible limited manifestation is in reality the influence the governing elite exercise. Yet, in certain occasions, with strong insistence of patrons, the designers incorporate the ‘high culture’ of society in the form of ‘grand design tradition’ in such projects. At times, due to the overwhelming influence of the political patrons of such projects, the over-utilization of ‘grand design tradition’ takes place, and models these projects to be both ostentatious, superfluous, and hence artificial as a possible medium of manifestation.

More importantly, bulk of the built environment including the house has been historically neglected for the study of so-called “*important*” buildings in the form of monuments. Hence, it is clear that if merely the smallest part of work is addressed, that part tends to assume undue importance and perceiving it in isolation will lead to the observer not grasping its complex and subtle relations (Rapoport, 1969: 2).

Conclusion

Firstly, the paper affirmed how elites persist immutably at the social-apex, and how they become more sensitive to the inter-related political and economic changes occurring in society (than the general masses). As an intrinsic part of this argument, how economic and political conditions construct the factor of elitism, and hence, how it is affected by their periodic changes was established. It was also posited that these periodic changes in turn manifest in the socio-cultural arenas and the making of house form is indeed a cultural gesture, but one of any other seminal factor.

Furthermore, how elites become patrons of a given society’s high cultural discourse that in turn, determines various other levels of cultures of non-elite masses was avowed. The contiguity of elite high culture with grand design tradition was affirmed by establishing the above point, while attributing vernacular tradition to other levels of culture belonging to non-elite masses. On the other hand, the historical account of how the seminal notion of ‘home’ came in to being largely in Western elite societies was narrated, along with its essential

constituent elements. This narration helped to confirm that historically, the elites have always been more intimately bound to their homes than any other lower social stratum. This is owing to their privileged economic and political conditions in society, which is explicitly manifested in their domestic built forms. It was already disseminated that the dwelling form is more immediately determined by culture than any other type of building. Hence, considering its contiguity to the complex notions of home, it could be logically concluded that, the elite dwelling with the great influence of elite high culture, becomes the most ideal form manifestation of periodic changes in society.

Secondly, it was affirmed that, although cultural projects could symbolically manifest political and religious ideological consensus that prevail or imparted on a given society, at a given time, they never accurately convey the true life-style of its masses as it is lived. Religious high cultural projects that essentially follow grand design tradition are always plagued by exaggerated symbolism backed by the sacrificing of an artificial level of social surplus, which results in products of undue pretension and ostentation. On the other hand, whenever designers are compelled to pursue high cultural grand design tradition by the governing patron-elites for cultural projects of political agendas, the products inevitably become distant to general masses again, for being unduly pretentious and ostentatious. Hence, it could be affirmed that, this symbolic propensity is epitomized by the elites to maintain the gulf between them and their masses for posterity. However, a middle ground consisting of both high cultural grand design tradition (of the elite) and its low cultural vernacular counterpart (belonging to the general masses) could be epitomized to achieve certain dialectic. Still the resulting product cannot possibly rival the supremacy of the elite domestic building for the intended function. Therefore, cultural projects could perhaps, be utilized to compensate for the shortcomings of domestic buildings of the elites as the most ideal for the purpose, if such could be validly exposed as a scientific inquiry elsewhere.

After all, it is largely conceived in architectural academia that,

“[the] houses of the rich have always been the major indicator of architectural change. Through them the aspirations and the reflections of self-image are made most apparent. They act as models for others in a filtering down effect”.

Hasan Udin Khan (in Powell, 1995: 10)

Hence, having being derived from such feeble assumptions, the wider question of whether domestic architecture of the elite is the most ideal manifestation of periodic changes in a given society – as against other possible forms of edifices such as civic projects – has been tacked here.

It could also be stated that these western-derived conclusions on the elites are equally valid to their counterparts of the contemporary eastern world as they are now also immersed (partially or fully) in western political, economic and socio-cultural value systems; at least since the Western colonial project started five centuries ago.

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End Notes

ⁱ Moreover, Horton provides his valuable opinion regarding the power dimension associated with elitism, as well as their volume in society.

ⁱⁱ Formerly, too many Western European powers were in the world-wide colonial-race and it was only subsequent to the defeat of *Napoleon* in 1815, that the world-order became more static; finally resulting in a British hegemony.

ⁱⁱⁱ Bottomore is not convinced by this 'uneasy coincidence of economic, political and military power'. According to him, that Mills attempted to explain by the pressure of the international conflicts that in which the USA have taken part in.

^{iv} Vernacular could be epitomized in grand design tradition as well. It again has a division: pre-industrial vernacular and modern vernacular (Rapoport, 1969: 2).

^v "Hominess is not neatness. Otherwise everyone would live in replicas of the kinds of sterile and impersonal homes that appear in interior-design and architectural magazines. What these spotless rooms lack, or what crafty photographers have carefully removed, is any evidence of human occupation. In spite of the artfully placed vases and casually arranged art books, the imprint of their inhabitation is missing."

^{vi} Dutch Golden Age is considered as the period between 1609 and 1660.

^{vii} *Jane Austen*, who wrote in the 19th century, merely limited her topics to the prosaic daily comedy of family life rather than murders or mysteries, instigating a domestic-genre of novel writing essentially filled with the sentiment of 'ease'. Yet, the word 'comfort' has been greatly epitomized in her literary work in its various forms; "nest of comforts" being one. Not only she used the notion to convey 'support' or 'assistance' in the old sense, more frequently intended them to convey a new kind of experience- a sense of contentment brought about by the enjoyment of one's physical surroundings.

^{viii} Great improvements also in *interior lighting* conditions were being achieved, owing to the introduction of gas power and electricity along with light bulbs. Other innovations such as electrical appliances and various mechanizations were being intended to improve the efficiency of the household's functioning as *labor-saving devices*, as well as to ease the great amount of burden and effort that goes in to it. Mechanical means were in fact, coupled with *ergonomic requirements* that had begun to establish with the induction of the *domestic engineer* as an essential part of these refinements (Rybczynski, 1988: 145-171).

^{ix} Some scholars even see this as a wrong-headed crusade that was originally meant as an attempt to rationalize and simplify. This whole scenario has attacked the very idea of comfort itself that the human being yearns for, and that is why they now are compelled to look for it in the past. The modern minimalist interior of the present has lost its conveyance of comfort and well-being, which is deeply rooted in the human being (Rybczynski, 1988: 215).

^x Furthermore, the medieval unsentimental attitude towards childhood still in tact centuries later in the lower strata exacerbated this disbandment. The 16th century introduced formal schooling, replacing apprenticeship of young children firstly of the bourgeoisie at least, also contributed to the whole scenario. At least, they could finally experience their children growing up, without being sent away for apprenticeships, first time in centuries (Rybczynski, 1988: 39, 48).

^{xi} The *Netherlands* lacked a landless peasantry, had no powerful aristocracy or a king for that matter, as it was a loose confederation ruled by a *State General*, unlike elsewhere in 17th century Europe.

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