

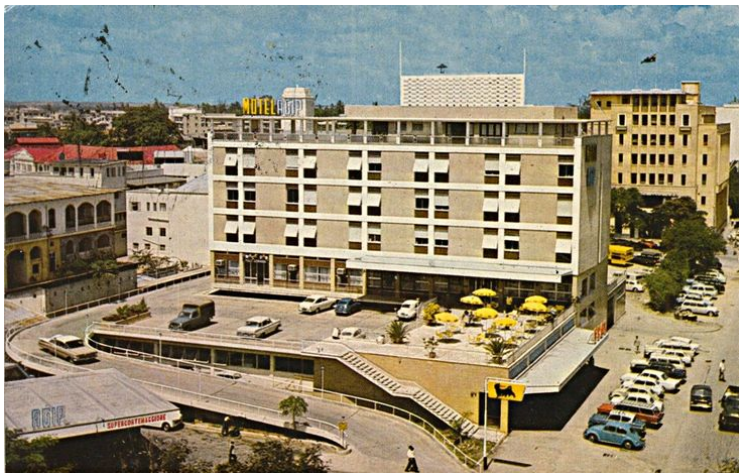
## Postcolonial Logistics: ENI's Disegno Africano. The Agip M/Hotel of Dar es Salaam

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### ABSTRACT

African postcolonial modernism has been mainly celebrated as the expression of independent nation-building, modernity, development, and pan-Africanism. Similar accounts reaffirm modernist claims of neutrality and deny the use of modernism as an arm of neo-colonial imperialism.[1] This paper fills this gap by focusing on the role of the Italian national hydrocarbon agency ENI (Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi) and its commercial branch AGIP (Agenzia Italiani Petroli) as agents in the production of space. In particular, the paper will focus on early independent Tanzania where Agip built and managed a Motel and over 50 gas stations.[2] Depicted by ENI as the “missing infrastructures” able to spur development and real economic independence, these artifacts were in fact fundamental tools for ENI’s neo-colonial project. While spreading Agip’s corporate identity, they operated as outposts for the conquest of new territories, repeatedly and insistently suggesting an oil-based modernity and a consumerist way of life. Nonetheless, a closer and more engaged observation reveals more nuanced and ambivalent dynamics.

After providing an overview of ENI’s architectural and infrastructural expansionistic strategies, the paper will focus on the Motel Agip of Dar es Salaam. Built by Agip in the heart of Tanzania’s capital city in 1964, the motel was a specimen of the “Motel 59” prototype originally designed by ENI engineering department to populate the newly built Italian highways. Inspired by recent development in marketing strategies, ENI built over 60 revisited versions of this north American typology throughout Italy. In Tanzania, only one motel was built.



The Motel Agip and the Agip gas station, Dar es Salaam, 1960s.

Contrary to Agip propaganda, the motel was not a standard building offering a standardized service to businessman and motorists. For over 30 years, up to its closure in 1999, the motel was managed by a Greek - Tanzanian family who contributed greatly in defining the motel operation style, appearance and clientele. Its design, slightly but significantly adapted to the postcolonial urban context, reveals a “segregationist” attitude that transformed the Motel Agip into a meeting space for the Tanzanian elite and the white settlers community. At the same time, the car-oriented design of the building offered a stage to perform a newly achieved aspiration of motorized modernity (harshly criticized by Tanzania’s first President).

Inspired by scholarship in architectural geography,<sup>[3]</sup> this paper addresses the “contexts, relationships and performances”<sup>[4]</sup> of the Motel Agip of Dar es Salaam in the attempt to understand the role it played in the definition of postcolonial geopolitics of de- and neo-colonization. Following Sandro Mezzadra’s suggestion to engage with postcolonial categories, concepts, and images to deepen and complicate our understanding of global capitalism,<sup>[5]</sup> a critical greading of this artifact will be enriched by an engaged study of how the building has been experienced, appropriated and transformed by different actors.

Adopting a multiscalar, and multisource methodology that includes the direct observation of the motel, the study of archival sources and oral histories, the paper will question the political and strategic meaning of Agip supply-chain architecture for both post-war Italy and independent African states. By doing so, it will reveal a series of incoherence in the narratives of ENI and of the Tanzanian socialist postcolonial state.

[1] Crinson, Mark. *Modern Architecture and the End of Empire*. British Art and Visual Culture since 1750. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003.

[2] Accorinti, Giuseppe. *Quando Mattei era l'impresa energetica io c'ero*. 3. ed. Matelica: Hacca, 2008.

[3] Lees, Loretta. “Towards a Critical Geography of Architecture: The Case of an Ersatz Colosseum,” 2001, 37.

[4] Sarmiento, João, and Denis Linehan. “The Colonial Hotel: Spacing Violence at the Grande Hotel, Beira, Mozambique.” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 37, no. 2 (April 2019): 276–93. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775818800719>.

[5] Mezzadra Sandro, *The Postcolonial Condition*, Postcolonial Text, Vol 2, No 1 (2006)