

THE PROFESSION'S FOUNDATIONS: ARCHITECTS AND ARCHITECTURE IN THE MODERN MIDDLE EAST



A WORKSHOP PRESENTED BY THE AGA KHAN PROGRAM FOR ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE AT MIT
SATURDAY, APRIL 30, 2022 - 10:30 AM TO 4:30 PM - ROOM 56-154

The global history of twentieth century architecture, as it stands, is mainly narrated as the story of Western architects and their influence on the rest of the world. This workshop contests this narrative by inviting participants explore the life and works of the early milieu of Middle Eastern architects, planners, and engineers who developed the modern architectural profession in their countries in the late colonial and postcolonial periods. It pays special attention to these professionals' role in the transnational exchange of technical expertise and the flow of architectural knowledge, experiences, and imageries both regionally within the Middle East and globally during the twentieth century.

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PROGRAM

10.30 WELCOME NOTE
Nasser Rabbat, MIT

OPENING REMARKS
Nadi Abusaada, MIT

SESSION I

Discussant: Nasser Rabbat, MIT

11.00 *Techniques of Architectural Estimation and the Keşif Defter-i*
Yara Saqfalhait, Columbia

11.20 *The First Milieu: Palestinian Architects and Arab Regionalism*
Nadi Abusaada, MIT

11.40 DISCUSSION AND Q&A

12.00 LUNCH BREAK

SESSION II

Discussant: Kishwar Rizvi, Yale

13.00 *Transnational Exchanges: Egypt and the Arabian Gulf*
Reem Khorshid, Yale

13.20 *US Agencies and the Architecture of Development, 1949-1961*
Dalal Musaed Alsayer, Kuwait University

13.40 *Qasim's Architects? Rifat Chadirji and Kahtan Madfai as Post-Revolutionary Professionals in Iraq*
Huma Gupta, MIT

14.00 DISCUSSION AND Q&A

14.30 COFFEE BREAK

SESSION III

Discussant: Mark Jarzombek, MIT

15.00 *The 'Foreign' and 'Own': Approaches to Architecture and Urbanism between the Arab Region and Latin America*
Wesam Al Asali, Princeton

15.20 *From Mystic Visions to Futuristic Designs*
Pamela Karimi, UMass Dartmouth

15.40 DISCUSSION AND Q&A

16.00 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Nadi Abusaada

The Profession's Vanguard: Arab Architects in Mandate Jerusalem

Abstract: Writings on architecture in Palestine and the Arab region in the first half of the twentieth century have often focused on the legacies of colonial architects and planners in shaping Arab cities and built environments. In this talk, Nadi Abusaada will highlight findings from his postdoctoral research on the overlooked history of the first milieu of trained Arab architects in Palestine, particularly in the city of Jerusalem. He will trace their professional trajectories and their development from the late Ottoman era and their continuities into the British Mandate period. Although these architects were working within the British colonial system, they nonetheless were able to forge their own understandings of the architectural profession and modern architecture. Importantly, they were not working in isolation. They considered themselves part of a broader quest for developing the architectural profession regionally within the Arab world. This talk will shed light on the transnational connections that linked the first milieu of Palestinian architects with their counterparts in the Arab region in the 1930s-40s.

Biography: Nadi Abusaada is an architect and a historian. He is currently an Aga Khan Postdoctoral Fellow at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Nadi completed his Ph.D. and M.Phil. degrees at the University of Cambridge and his B.A. at the University of Toronto. Nadi is also the co-founder of Arab Urbanism, a global network dedicated to historical and contemporary urban issues in the Arab region. His writings have been featured in a number of international publications including *The Architectural Review*, *The International Journal of Islamic Architecture*, and *the Jerusalem Quarterly* among others.

Wesam Al Asali

The 'Foreign' and 'Own': Approaches to Architecture and Urbanism between the Arab Region and Latin America

Abstract: This paper examines and contrasts perspectives on the architectural practice between the Middle East and Latin America during the second half of the twentieth century. It compares the approaches to the production of the built environment between the two regions, specifically how each region understands architecture within its technical and socio-political limitations. The comparison is based on the delegates' participation and presented narratives from countries in the two

regions in the World Congress of the International Union of Architects-UIA. Since its establishment in 1948, the Union congresses have been a contested place of thoughts about architecture as a global profession, offering snapshots into how these were manifested, understood, interpreted, or rejected. In particular, the study will focus on four UIA congresses: Havana 1963, Mexico City 1987, and Cairo 1985. These events took place either in the Middle East or South America with titles underlining architecture's societal and political roles, such as "architecture in underdeveloped countries" in 1963 Havana or "the present and future missions of architects" in 1985 Cairo. By examining these congresses' participation from Latin America and the Middle East, I will be tracing two main concepts. The first is the definitions of the architects in their socio-technological contexts, specifically concerning the notion of resources and technology and how this relationship is manifested in concepts like 'underdeveloped,' 'regional,' or 'local' architecture. The second is the manifestation of identity in architecture through ideas on heritage and traditions in the profession on the one hand, and how this identity is related to colonialism on the other hand.

Biography: Wesam Al Asali is a 2021-2022 Fung Fellow at Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies. He is a practicing architect and cofounder of IWLab (his practice in Syria and Europe) and CERCAA (his school of building crafts and technologies in Valencia, Spain). Wesam received his Ph.D. in Architecture from the University of Cambridge, where he worked on policy, training, and design strategies of thin-tile vaulting for low-carbon construction. Through research and built projects, Wesam's work examines how scarcity-driven architecture in the Middle East and Latin America can enrich our understanding of design and environmental emergencies.

Dalal Musaed Alsayer

US Agencies and the Architecture of Development, 1949-1961

Abstract: During his second inaugural address on January 20, 1949, President Harry S. Truman announced his "bold new program" to promote peace, freedom, and democracy to underdeveloped nations by "helping others to help themselves through cooperative effort."¹ While this "bold" program appeared "new," Point IV was, in reality, enmeshed within a much larger network of development agencies which includes the Ford Foundation, the Near East Foundation (NEF), Rockefeller Foundation, and others. Acting as a funding agency, Point IV supported projects in Iran, Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Syria. This paper examines the role that these US development agencies played in the region between 1949 and 1961. Presented as a series of case studies, this paper moves away from the minute details of each of the projects, and instead

focuses on the broad gestures of these agencies: how was the environment imagined? How were people trained? How was architecture designed? The paper looks at the Arab Development Society (ADS) in Jordan, funded by Point IV and the Ford Foundation; NEF rural development projects in Jordan, funded by private donations and Point IV funds; and the International Basic Economics Corporation (IBEC) Housing Corporation (IHC), one of the Rockefeller Foundation's subsidiaries, housing venture in Iraq. These projects aimed to "develop" the region in lines with US-practices and norms. Never were the local conditions, realities, and desires taken into consideration. Rather, climate, environment, and social customs were ignored in favor of blanketing the region with US agricultural, climatic, and architectural norms. By examining the overarching themes such as rural development and village improvement, this paper sheds light on how development agencies shaped the modernization processes in the region.

Biography: Dalal Musaed Alsayer is an Assistant Professor of Architecture at Kuwait University. Her research lies at the intersection of architecture, environment, and development in the context of Arabia during the twentieth century. She holds a professional Bachelor of Architecture from Kuwait University; postgraduate degrees in architecture, urban design, and landscape from Columbia University and Harvard University; and a PhD in Architecture from the University of Pennsylvania. She is the coauthor of *Pan-Arab Modernism: History of Architectural Practice in The Middle East* (Actar, 2021) and is the co-founding editor of *Current: Collective for Architecture History and Environment* (www.current-collective.org).

Huma Gupta

Qasim's Architects? Rifat Chadirji and Kahtan Madfai as Post-Revolutionary Professionals in Iraq

Abstract: This paper investigates how the 1958 anti-monarchic revolution led to the emergence of post-revolutionary architectural professional in Iraq. Specifically, it looks at how the first Prime Minister of the post-revolutionary state, General Abd al-Karim Qasim or al-Za'im (the leader), appropriated the architectural labor and expertise of both Iraqi and non-Iraqi architects and architectural firms to realize the revolutionary aims and promises of the new republic. The paper focuses on two prolific architects who are considered foundational to the development of architecture as a discipline and profession within Iraq and beyond. Rifat Chadirji (1926-2020) and Kahtan al-Madfai (1927-2021) were both educated in the United Kingdom, worked for ministries in both the monarchic and post-revolutionary Iraqi state, worked with and for the Greek firm Doxiadis

Associates, taught at the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Baghdad, published books on Architectural History and Theory, and received the Tamayouz Excellence and Lifetime Achievement Awards. However, based on the author's interviews with Chadirji and Madfai before their passing in 2020 and 2021, respectively, it became clear that their participation with the post-1958 Qasim government was something that neither of them were eager to highlight as part of their legacy. Yet both Chadirji and Madfai appear prominently in the archival records of Doxiadis Associates after the revolution because they were appointed by Qasim as national architects and bureaucrats that would shepherd the transition between the reliance on foreign consultants to Iraqi experts. While the revolution called for ideological rupture, practicing state architects were tasked with negotiating continuity through ongoing architectural and planning projects that were originally envisioned to support the economic and political agendas of the monarchic regime. Through a close examination of archival documents, oral interviews, and construction projects, this paper will re-narrate the fraught emergence of the post-revolutionary architectural professional in Qasim's Iraq.

Biography: Huma Gupta is a full-time Lecturer in the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at MIT. Gupta holds a PhD in the History and Theory of Architecture and a Master's in City Planning from MIT. Currently, she is writing her first book *The Architecture of Dispossession*, which is based on her doctoral thesis on state-building and the architectural transformation of migrant reed-mat and mudbrick settlements in mid-century Iraq. Previously, Gupta was the Neubauer Junior Research Fellow at Brandeis University, Humanities Research Fellow at New York University-Abu Dhabi, and International Dissertation Research Fellow at the Social Science Research Council. Her work has been published in the *International Journal of Islamic Architecture*, *Journal of Contemporary Iraq and the Arab World*, and *Thresholds*.

Mark Jarzombek

Biography: Mark Jarzombek is a Professor of the History and Theory of Architecture at MIT. Jarzombek works on a wide range of topics – both historical and theoretical. He is one of the country's leading advocates for global history and has published several books and articles on that topic, including the ground-breaking textbook entitled *A Global History of Architecture* (Wiley Press, 2006) with co-author Vikramāditya Prakash and with the noted illustrator Francis D.K. Ching. He is the sole author of *Architecture of First Societies: A Global Perspective* (Wiley Press, 2013), which is a sensitive synthesis of first society architecture through time and includes

custom-made drawings, maps and photographs. The book builds on the latest research in archeological and anthropological knowledge while at the same time challenging some of their received perspectives. He is currently finishing a book for Routledge Press entitled *The Long First Millennium: Affluence Architecture and the Making of Modern Society*

Pamela Karimi

From Mystic Visions to Futuristic Designs

Abstract: Since the aesthetic experiences of the avant-garde, including those of the Bauhaus theorist and artist, Johannes Itten (Middle) Eastern mystical practices have embellished the imagination of Western experimental designers, and utopian thinkers. This presentation argues for a new understanding of futuristic design projects that have animated the architectural discourses of progressive circles since the 1969 landing of humans on the Moon. In particular, the presentation foregrounds the significance of spiritual dimensions of Middle Eastern architecture within the broader context of alternative and experimental design movements of the 1960s-1990s. It does so by highlighting the contributions of the Iranian American architect Nader Khalili (1936- 2008). A self-described "mystic" architect, in mid-career Khalili went on to explore the frontiers of space settlements through his decade-long survey of Iran's self-sustained desert architecture, culminating in a number of studies, including the book, *Sidewalks on the Moon*, as well as a proposed project for NASA. Khalili's work will be explored against the backdrop of experimental designs by important contemporaneous architects and experts such as John P. Allen, whose "spiritual" practices and expeditions in the deserts of Iran for the Development and Resources Corporation gave the impetus for Arizona's Biosphere 2, an analog for human settlements on the Moon or Mars.

Biography: Pamela Karimi is an architect and an architectural historian. She earned her PhD from the History, Theory & Criticism of Art and Architecture Program at MIT in 2009. Her primary field of specialization is art, architecture, and visual culture of the modern Middle East. Her second area of research is design and sustainability in North America. Karimi is the author of *Domesticity and Consumer Culture in Iran: Interior Revolutions of the Modern Era* (Routledge, 2013) and co-editor of *Images of the Child and Childhood in Modern Muslim Contexts* (Duke, 2012), *Reinventing the American Post-Industrial City* (Sage, 2015) & *The Destruction of Cultural Heritage in the Middle East: From Napoleon to ISIS* (Aggregate Architectural Collaborative, 2016). Karimi's forthcoming book, *Alternative Iran: Contemporary Art & Critical Spatial Practice* will be published by Stanford University Press in 2022. This book project was recently awarded the 2021 Millard Meiss Publica-

tion Fund from the College Art Association.

Reem Khorshid

Transnational Exchanges

Abstract: Around the time Egypt was taking part in educational and institutional building missions in cities like Kuwait, Riyadh and Sharjah in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Egyptian architects, planners and engineers had also been already contributing to the built urban and architectural environments of the Arabian Gulf.

Classifying Egypt and the Gulf as sites of transnational exchange of architectural knowledge, I attempt to study the trends, dogmas and ideologies that were predominant in the work of Egyptian practitioners in Egypt and abroad. The paper also traces the regional political, economic and cultural influence of Egypt within the Arab region, placing their urban and architectural production within a historical context. Finally, I also engage with the question of today's reversed urban and architectural exchange, particularly through examining the neoliberal urban transformations and developments of both sites.

Biography: Reem Khorshid is an architect and researcher whose work examines architecture and urbanism. She is currently pursuing a master's degree in Architecture from Yale University. Reem's work has been exhibited at Jameel Arts Centre, Tbilisi Architecture Biennial and The Spatial Sound Institute. Her writings have appeared in *Platform*, *Mada Masr*, and the *Daily News Egypt*.

Nasser Rabbat

Biography: Nasser Rabbat is the Aga Khan Professor and Director of the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at MIT. His interests include Islamic architecture, urban history, heritage studies, Arab history, contemporary Islamic art, and post-colonial criticism. He has published numerous articles and several books on topics ranging from Mamluk architecture to Antique Syria, 19th century Cairo, Orientalism, and urbicide. His most recent books are *'Imarat al-Mudun al-Mayyita* (*The Architecture of the Dead Cities*) (2018), and an online book, *The Destruction of Cultural Heritage: From Napoléon to ISIS*, co-edited with Pamela Karimi (2016). His book on the

great 15th-century Egyptian historian al-Maqrizi will come out from EUP in 2022. He is currently editing a book on the cultural history of Syria (EUP, 2023), and co-editing another on heritage conservation, destruction, and reconstruction (AUC Press, 2022). His next book project is a history of Mamluk Cairo, which is under contract with AUC Press.

Kishwar Rizvi

Biography: Kishwar Rizvi is Professor of Islamic Art and Architecture at Yale University. Her recent publications include *The Transnational Mosque: Architecture and Historical Memory in the Contemporary Middle East* (University of North Carolina Press, 2015), for which she was selected as a Carnegie Foundation Scholar, and *Emotion, and Subjectivity in Early Modern Muslim Empires: New studies in Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal art and culture*, editor, (Brill, 2017). Her earlier publications include *The Safavid Dynastic Shrine: History, religion and architecture in early modern Iran* (British Institute for Persian Studies, I. B. Tauris, 2011) and the anthology, *Modernism and the Middle East: Architecture and politics in the twentieth century* (University of Washington Press, 2008), which was awarded a Graham Foundation publication grant.

She is currently a fellow at the Aga Khan Program in Islamic Art and Architecture at Harvard University.

Yara Saqfalhait

Techniques of Architectural Estimation and the Keşif Defter-i

Abstract: Regulating the quality of new building projects along with the expenditure of treasury funds were among the declared concerns of the Ottoman bureaucracy in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, as it introduced new administrative and technical mechanisms for organizing architectural practice across the empire. The enforcement of these mechanisms was to be overseen by the Building Council (Ebniye Meclisi), established in Istanbul in 1848 to preside over agreements with contractors and tendering processes. This preoccupation with building quality further permeated the codification of the areas of knowledge within the purview of architects, which according to Seyyid Abdülhalim Efendi, the head of the Building Council, included the ability to keep building accounts, control the quality of building materials, and make sound quantity

estimates.

This paper will examine the conditions under which techniques of architectural cost estimation were codified and systematized in the Ottoman empire in the second half of the nineteenth century, and their influence on organizing architectural practice. Taking the textbook *Usûli keşfi mimaî* (The Principles of Architectural Surveying) which was translated from French in 1884 by Ahmet Şükrü as its point of departure, the paper will read the particular processes and formats the book devises for estimating quantities and costs, organizing labor, and assessing the quality of building materials in relation to broader changes in the political economy of the Ottoman empire, and the role of architects as mediators between capital and labor.

Biography: Yara Saqfalhait is a Doctoral Student in Architecture at Columbia University (GSAPP), and a Graduate Fellow at the Institute for Comparative Literature and Society. Her work focuses on the historical relations between architecture, technical knowledge and capital in the Ottoman Empire across the long nineteenth century. She was trained in Architectural Engineering at Birzeit University in Palestine, and earned a Masters degree in History and Philosophy of Design from Harvard University.

Cover Foto: Baghdad, Firdaus Square, Tomb of the Unknown Soldier (built in 1959 according to a design by Rifat Chadirji, demolished for a statue of Saddam Hussein at the beginning of the 1980s)

