

Contemporary Arabic Architecture: A Quest For a Sense of Regionalism

Hassan Radoine

Université Mohammed VI Polytechnique de Benguerir

Introduction

The lack of a sound conceptual framework as well as the current eclectic built environment makes it difficult to have a lucid image of a contemporary architecture relevant to the Arab region. A growing number of contradictions, dichotomies, and ideological controversies appear to be replete in the study of ‘Arabic architecture.’ The adjective ‘Arabic’ is used herein to signify the architecture practiced in the twentieth-century Arab countries where Arabic is the official language.

Whilst there is a relation between the adjectives ‘Arabic’ and ‘Islamic’ as the Arab region contains a Muslim-majority population, the Islamic world that extends from North Africa to Southeast Asia is wider geographically and culturally. Therefore, the focus is made on contemporary ‘Arabic architecture’ located in the Arab region, stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the West to the Arabian Sea in the East. The term ‘Arabic’ may intersect with ‘Islamic’ for as far as architecture is concerned both shared the same geographical and cultural features for centuries. In this sense, this paper reviews the works of selected local architects from this region since 1900.

However, local and foreign contemporary architects practicing in this region have often pursued two lines of thought. The first group of local architects, mainly educated in the West, lacked a close understanding of their milieu, and the second group of foreign ones had no willingness to genuinely learn about the local context. In addition, dearth of in-depth critical research regarding contemporary Arabic architecture has made young local architects vulnerable to imported architectural models. The major issue facing the coming generations of architects is that they may lose forever the link with their local built environment. As most forces are leaning towards the ‘ethos’ of abstract internationalism, this loss is not only physical, but also mental.

The first generation of local architects who practiced between 1930s and 1950s was deeply influenced by what can be termed as ‘progressive architectural ideas.’ Technology was seen as an end in itself and not a means while architecture was considered as no more than its vehicle. Defended by

an amalgam of ideologies, modernists converted raw concrete, steel and glass to utilitarian designed forms that spread all over. This movement first invaded all schools of architecture in Europe and US, and faced little or no resistance in the Arab region during both the colonial and postcolonial periods.

Accordingly, the graduates of these schools imported modernist architectural models to their homelands, regardless of being in harmony or otherwise with local climate and culture. Following the steps of European architects, these young architects pursued the same position towards their own cultural antecedents with rise of modernism. Traditional or vernacular architecture therefore appears to be perceived as a conglomeration of dead archaeological vestiges or obsolete buildings incongruous with the modern time.

In the case of Egyptian architects, for example, Abdelbaki Ibrahim, a former Chairman of the Centre of Planning and Architecture Studies (CPAS) in Cairo, published an article entitled "The Architecture Circus,"¹ he described what had been designed by foreign architects in some Arab countries as an attempt to manipulate imported forms and building materials without any relevance to local culture or environment. He stated that most of the Egyptian architects were attracted to this circus and tried to play the same games. However, he exempted some few who either resented this attitude or tried to find ways to apply the values learned from the rich architectural heritage of Egypt.

Very few architects in the whole region resented imported forms as well, and saw the potential of exploring local architectural heritage or attempted to rejuvenate its regional historic elements. Being of major influence in the Arab region, the prominent among them (who are the focus of this paper), such as: Hassan Fathy, Abdel Wahid Wakil, Mohamed Saleh Makiya, Rifat Chadirji, Maath Alousi, and Rasem Badran, formed the first wave of contemporary architecture in the region that shifted the paradigm of modernism, and offered a fresh appraisal of a dynamic regionalism.

This paper intends to show, based on their theories, writings, projects, and interviews, how they constituted a regional critical response to modernism, and how they challenged its subsequent internationalism. After a close study of their works and direct contact or learning from some of them (Chadirji, Badran, and Wakil), the key objective of this paper is to examine their response that formed an unexplored architectural discourse that may provide a unique perspective of regionalism.

1. Abdelbaki Ibrahim, "Contemporary architecture in Egypt," *Alam al-Bina* 5 (1998): 6-8.

This paper is thus structured chronologically from as early as 1900 onwards, and presents accordingly the different trends derived from theories and works of selected architects. However, some architects may not be from the same period of the trend but followed the same line of thought. In order to frame its content therefore, a discussion on regionalism and internationalism is presented in the first part after this introduction.

Regionalism and internationalism: background

Internationalism is the attempt towards the globalization of modern architecture to transcend forms beyond the individual and contextual levels through a modern aestheticism devoid of a sense of place. Despite the fact that this internationalism seems to bear the seeds of liberty of man from some of the negative aspects of power-heritage, it has had an adverse impact on the “creative nucleus” of cultures and traditions that persists.²

It is often assumed that culture ought to be modernized and therefore globalized. However, both terms are antagonistic. Is modernization only a question of change of tools or is it a change of the “creative nucleus”? If modernization is concerned with standardizing the means of building and living, which surely provided a standard comfort for the global masses, it can hardly be possible for a particular culture to meet the requirements of standardization in order to produce comfort at its own level. Modernization of a culture cannot escape from the philosophy and dogma of modernism.

The main issue of modernism is to enforce so-called rational rules on regional and vernacular architecture to attune to the modern reason, which labels it as primitive or disorderly without consulting its users in order to decipher its complexity. In order to remedy the defects of modernism in coping with this complexity, regionalism as a discourse attempts to plant abstract aestheticism in the soil in order to establish the global. Instead of questioning the reliability of modernism, the place is criticized for not being subservient to it.

Regionalism and modernism are two sides of the same coin because the first was invented to cure the emptiness of the second. Whenever the genius of a place is revealed in an architectural project, the concept of regionalism is applied to situate it vis-à-vis modernism in conformity with its international minimalist abstraction. When tradition is explored in order to regenerate and revive a certain genuine continuity with the past, a number of associations are made such as fabrication of tradition, invention of tradition, and historicism.

2. Paul Ricoeur, “Universal civilization and national cultures,” in *History and truth*, trans. Kelbley Chas A. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965), 278.

However, these associations should be applied in places where tradition is lost forever and what remains are but its dead archeological artifacts or symbols, but in places with living traditions these associations would be idiosyncratic. The abandonment of a cultural past to espouse fully future moves will only generate chaos in the evolutionary patterns of architecture that are intertwined with embedded social fabrics.

Modernism is seldom applied in the Arab region as an ideology. Rather, it is more of a fascination with technology and its subsequent tools and new forms. Thus, Alan Colquhoun's question of the relation between cultural patterns and technologies is pertinent. This relation "to some extent, obscured in the West, because industrialization evolved out of local cultural traditions, and adaptation to a post-industrialized culture is already quite far advanced."³ He added that "the problem is glaring, however, in the East and in Africa because of the friction between two worlds and two times: the agrarian and the industrial. Are cultural patterns absolutely dependent on an industrial base, or can they maintain certain independence? Is an industrialized culture irrevocably Eurocentric?"

The link between industrialization and modernization is essential for grasping the complexity of architecture in the Arab region where tradition is viewed and differently embraced in comparison with the industrialized world. The gap between imported modernism and local sustainable cultures is therefore wide. People of these cultures have never fully understood what it means to be modern and are in continuous conflict with modernization.⁴ To resolve this paradox, a retrospective measure must be sought. What is lost due to modernism? And what is to be gained from sustainable cultures? Unquestionably, the solution is beyond "critical regionalism." Architecture in the Arab region is thus trapped between corrective measures of its own tradition and imported dictated rules.

Kenneth Frampton's description of the 'universal civilization' as a victory over "inflected culture" in order to advocate a "critical regionalism" is subjective.⁵ To use Ernesto Nathan Rogers' *formalistic aestheticism*, the 'freestanding high-rise and the serpentine freeway' are yet to surrender to the preexistences of their milieu. "The context is the place of these preexistences and anything that did not feel their influence would be vague

3. Alan Colquhoun, "The concept of regionalism," in *GB Nalbantoglu and CT Wong*, ed. Postcolonial space (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997), 22.

4. Ricoeur, "Universal civilization and national cultures," 278.

5. Kenneth Frampton, "Towards a critical regionalism," in *The anti-aesthetic*, ed. H Foster and P Townsend (Washington: Bay Press, 1983), 17.

and indeterminate.”⁶ When Frampton proposes “critical regionalism” as a way to counter-balance the “sentimental regionalism,” it seems that he creates a vicious cycle rather than solve the dilemma. If regionalism stems from a rectification of modernism, then on what new basis does Frampton suggest the pursuit of this new approach? When referring to Alex Tzonis and Liliane Lefaivre in the “Grid and the Pathway,” (1981) it is essential to state that regionalism has not dominated “architecture in almost all countries at some time during the past two centuries and a half,”⁷ it is rather a specific architecture that has dominated all regions. This specific architecture is a compound of modernist pre-made philosophies, idioms, and aesthetics.

The challenge of contemporary architecture in the Arab region is therefore the establishment of a provision that permits an escape from the canon of pre-framed concepts such as regionalism, critical regionalism and modernism, particularly its uniform internationalism. This provision cannot be attained without first understanding technological advancement in order to be gradually integrated in the social and cultural fabric of the region. Claude Lévi-Strauss, in *Tristes Tropiques*, explains eloquently that the adaptability of a culture to civilized tools is just a matter of time perception, and not a lack of ability.⁸ To use the tools of other cultures presupposes the understanding of one’s own tools.⁹

Architects in the Arab region ought to assimilate the cultural and geographical peculiarities of modernism, and be reminded that technological tools that prompted it should serve as a facilitator and not as an end in a regional design process. When time gap widens between people and their architecture, confusion prevails, making a sense of belonging irrecoverable. This sense of belonging is the identification with a place and a community. It is a crucial human need in order to cultivate a sense of identity that derives from sustainable physical and mental references. Architecture is among the key vehicles of memory and belonging that translates communal, spiritual and environmental elements to living contexts.

If the sense of belonging is lost, architecture will need time to recover the link between people and their places. The Arab region in particular has suffered from the architecture of order and rule that has a dramatic impact on the physical and human level. A sense of belonging is more genuine than a

6. Ernesto Nathan Rogers, “Preexisting conditions and issues of contemporary building.” In *Architecture culture*, ed. J.Ockman (New York: Rizzolo, 1993), 202.

7. Frampton, “Towards a critical regionalism,” 20.

8. Claude-Lévi Strauss, *Tristes tropiques* (Paris: Plon, 1955).

9. Ricoeur, “Universal civilization and national cultures,” 282-3.

sense of a region (regionalism) that signifies applying regional materials and forms to a modern design in order to make it local. This regionalism resulted in a 'postmodernism' that promoted a kitsch-architecture and discarded the living history, memory, and tradition of the region.

The sense of belonging is currently enhanced with the movement of sustainability which cannot be realized without durable regional parameters. However, sustainability in the Arab region ought to be more inclusive of cultural identity to further embrace the human and social factors that are often overlooked by solely technical ones: carbon emissions, energy consumption, waste management, or economic development. Cultural continuity is a valuable potential in rendering regional architecture more humane and memorable. This bridges the chasm created by detached modernism or technological sustainability. Hassan Fathy's model is accordingly a valuable contribution to cultural and technological sustainability that indisputably grounds architecture in its regional rural and urban milieu.

It is thus imperative to construct a theoretical and conceptual basis for contemporary Arabic architecture, and challenge the conventional notions of regionalism as a sub-theme of internationalism. Regionalism, in the context of this paper, may also mean the inner forces within the Arab region in order to cope with the development of its own vernacular architecture. A review of theories and practices of influential contemporary architects in the region permitted the deduction of the following architectural trends.

Archaeology and conservation

Widespread European interest in the Arab world at the end of the eighteenth century to explore its lands for both scientific and colonial purposes exposed Arabic architecture, and prompted a series of Orientalist writings and images that remained influential for almost two centuries. A movement of restoration and reconstruction for colonial ends followed an exploration of existing archaeological sites and discovery of the extinct ones. Restoration means herein not a restoration for a genuine end, but rather a colonial archeological systematic reconstruction of Hellenistic vestiges in order to prove the legitimacy of European presence.

This shifted the perception of Arabic architecture from a dynamic one to an archaeological one that distanced the hitherto living human dimension. It envisaged freezing the past –or in some cases reinventing it– without concern for the development of local needs. Selected Arabic and Islamic monuments were restored to attract European tourists for colonized lands, and to promote an image of exotic architecture of the East. This archaeological conservation

emphasized the importance of fragments and led to the *historicization* of local architectural heritage. *Historicization* means here the conversion of a dynamic cultural continuity into deadlock archeological artifacts.

Consequently, the production of Arabic architecture ceased to be the prerogative of living qualified master-builders, but rather of colonial artists and architects. For example, the French artist-architect, Maurice Tranchant de Lunel, reinvented new monuments in Morocco (1912-24) under the auspices of General Lyautey during the colonial period. These monuments designed with an archaeological lens in order to construct an exotic built environment as imagined by Orientalists (fig. 1). Wright asserted, “Tranchant de Lunel was decidedly more romantic than his colleagues. He wanted to return Morocco to the integral, exotic world he believed had once existed there.”¹⁰



Fig. 1: Court designed by architect Albert Laprade for the French invented *medina* of *Habous*, Casablanca, 1917. This neo-traditional building explores local details while its composition resembles a European castle. Its architecture is unprecedented and has Orientalist interplay of Western and Eastern forms. (Photo: Author, 2009).

Nevertheless, this archaeologist and conservationist approach created a momentum for revisiting Arabic architecture. The colonial purpose was to adapt ‘indigenous’ architectural vocabulary to European architecture in order to give it a local touch. French colonial architectural designs based on this adaptation generated an unprecedented historicist architecture – at least at the aesthetic level (fig. 2).

10. Gwendolyn Wright, “Tradition in the service of modernity: architecture and urbanism in French colonial policy, 1900-1930?” *Journal of Modern History* 59 (1987): 131.



Fig. 2: *Palais de Justice* designed by Joseph Marrast for Casablanca's grand colonial plaza, 1925. The building consists of an open Moorish façade-arcade to an inner courtyard with an exquisite play of local archaeological details following a classical subdivision centred around a monumental Roman-arched gate (Photo: Author, 2009).

This first attempt to explore regional architecture in modern buildings was later pursued by local architects but with a different objective. Among these architects was Farid Mahmud Eshafi'i who was born in Cairo in 1907, and graduated as an architect from the faculty of architecture at Cairo University in 1929. He received a Masters degree (1943) and a PhD (1950) in architecture from the same university. With the motive to revive local architecture, he criticised the fast spreading modernism imported by Arabs from their Western masters. Eshafi'i stated in his book: "*The Arabo-Islamic Architecture, Past, Present, and Future*":

After the collapse of the Ottoman dynasty and colonization of the European countries of those Islamic regions, a number of European architectural trends, from the remains of the Enlightenment period and after from the modern movement, had been imported. This import had increased with the architects who were followers of these schools or with the young architects [from Arab countries] who were sent to study at the centres of these trends. They studied from the masters of those movements, and came back pursuing the same track.¹¹

Eshafi'i was thus among early Arab architects who refuted the imported European modern architecture and advocated for the continuity of a regional Arabic one. He perceived the latter as sustainable and that it could become current if explored thoroughly.

Notwithstanding his defence of traditional forms that were adequate for the local environment, his approach fell into the archaeological trap for its pursuit of static historical typologies of Arabic architecture, such as the

11. Farid Eshafi'i, *al-'Imāra al-'Arabia al-Islāmiya: Māḍihā, Ḥāḍiruhā, wa-Mustakbaluhā* (Riyadh: University of King Sa'ud Press, 1982), 215.

courtyard, the fountain, and latticework (*Musharabiat*). The well-known project of Eshafi'i was the mosque of Engineering Faculty in Riyadh, in which he epitomized the use of a central courtyard.

With different nostalgic views, this archaeological perception of architecture is still prevalent. Among other known architects who pursued this line of Eshafi'i was Maath al-Alousi. Al-Alousi was born in Baghdad in 1938, and educated as an architect in the Middle East Technical University of Ankara in 1961. Among his early projects that reflected this trend were: Confederation Labour Unions (1974, Iraq), Central Bank (1975, Oman), and Arabic-African Bank (1977, Kuwait), and The UAE Embassy (Jordan, 1979).

Al-Alousi, through his acquaintance with the progressivist architect Chadirji by working in his firm, Iraq-Consult in 1961, shows an extreme adornment to Arabic archaeological fragments. He chiefly advocated for the return and use of the arch in most of his projects. His master, Chadirji, explored the arch in his projects too but not as an overstated individual element taking over an architectural ensemble. Al-Alousi did not escape from mimicking the traditional vocabulary accentuated with his very formalistic classicist symmetry (fig. 3).



Fig. 3: Maath Al-Alousi's Cube House, Baghdad, 1985, reflects his excessive classicism. The façade emulates Sumerian archaeological antecedents and follows the tradition of brick construction in Iraq. It creates also an impression of a monumentalism though it is a house (Source: Aga Khan Trust for Culture, AKTC).

The weak element of this conservative regionalism was its neglect of evolutionary contemporary architecture and application of historic fragments *ad verbatim*. It had and still has a low consideration for the genesis of form vis-à-vis its contemporary function and socio-cultural content. This fails to engender a process of producing a sustainable regional Arabic architecture, and it has been always nostalgic since its inception. It may aesthetically and partially work in duplicating monuments or public building for Nationalistic

ends, but had no sense of continuity when challenged with the contemporary changes of building, technology, and society.

Nature and building materials

Hassan Fathy is, par excellence, the leader of this trend. He was born in Alexandria in 1900 and died in 1989 in Cairo. He graduated as an architect in 1926 from Cairo University where he also taught (1930-46). He designed around 160 projects. The key one that displayed his painstaking action for an affordable and regional architecture was the New Gourna (a village for relocating tomb dwellers built fully with mud in Upper Egypt in 1946).

As a result of observing the architectural crisis in the Arab region, and Egypt in particular, he searched for a regional response. During a critical period of colonization and World War II, Fathy searched for an identity of Egyptian built environment that got mixed up with imported architecture. This extraneous architecture that dictated its own materials, costs, and politics went far beyond the poor capacity of the Egyptian laymen. Fathy spent his whole career proving that the regional architecture is the solution in a time of the fast spread of modernism. His efforts were not recognized by Egyptian government, but were fully recognized internationally, and his theories well disseminated in media and professional journals.

His regionalism started with a fascination with the countryside and rural areas since his childhood. He saw in this inspiration a source for conceiving an architecture suitable to the peasant's way of life. In his book, *The Architecture for the Poor*, he wrote, "(...) This second wish had deep roots, going back to my childhood. I had always had a deep love for the country, but it was a love for an idea, not for something I really knew. The country, the place where the fellaheen [peasants] lived (...)"¹² (fig. 4).



Fig. 4: Peasants' environment in the Old Gourna village in 1994 showing the ancient Egyptian archaeological remains of Royal Necropolis in Luxor. This is the environment that inspired Hassan Fathy to design the New Gourna village, under the auspices of Egyptian Department of Antiquities, in order to dwell permanently these peasants who lived on the site pillaging its ancient tombs (Source: AKTC).

12. Hassan Fathy, *The Architecture for the poor: an experiment in rural Egypt* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1973), 1.

The main ideal of Fathy is based on ‘sustainability’ of nature and place in building. In order to preserve the communal tradition of living, he vehemently defended the use of local materials and building techniques. The ancestral crafts are affordable to the peasant and adequate to his natural milieu (fig. 5). Fathy wrote regarding his project of earthen village, New Gourn, the following:

Besides the man-made environment of Gourn, with which the village would have to harmonize, there is the natural environment of landscape, flora, and fauna. A traditional architecture would have accommodated itself to this natural environment, both visually and practically, over many centuries. The new village would have to tone with this environment from the very beginning, and its buildings must look as if they were the product of centuries of tradition...¹³



Fig. 5: The village of New Gourn designed and built by Hassan Fathy between 1945 and 1948. This project had made Fathy known internationally thanks to his book-memoir, *Architecture for the Poor*. This view is showing the façade of theatre in the village. The architecture clearly stems out of the site relying on techniques of construction that engender forms and their embedded aesthetics. The opaque volumes with latticed openings answer the environmental concerns of the site (Source: AKTC).

Following this line of regionalism, Christian Norberg-Schulz later advocated (1980) this prominence of nature and place to create a sustainable sense of belonging, particularly his search for a *Genius Loci*, by referring to local and traditional forms.¹⁴ However, the position of Fathy vis-à-vis modernism was similar to Eshafi'i in terms of the noticeable decline of traditional building methods due to colonial industrialization. Fathy stated: “The tradition is lost, and we have been cut off from our past... This gap of continuity in Egyptian tradition has been felt by many people and all sorts of remedies have been proposed.”¹⁵

13. Fathy, *The Architecture for the Poor: an Experiment in Rural Egypt*, 1.

14. Christian Norberg - Schulz, *Genius Loci* (New York: Rizzoli International Publication, Inc, 1980).

15. Fathy, *The Architecture for the poor*, 19.

In comparison with Eshafi'i, Fathy seems to incline more towards technical and practical innovation. While Eshafi'i relied on mimicking the archaeological form, Fathy explored the techniques of making it in order to make current both its shape and function. Subsequently, this generated an intrinsic current physical environment through the fertilization of the peasant's memory of skills.

Fathy's environmental approach versus that of archaeological relics in reviving Arabic architecture was nuanced when he reproached Eshafi'i's understanding of contemporaneity: "We condemn contemporaneity in architecture as decorative architectural details such as *mukarnassat*, arches, or *musharabiat*. This is an archaeological view that is very far from the concept of architecture, which is based on the principles of design."¹⁶ Fathy pushed the dynamic regional design process to explore sustainable elements, including climate, landscape, local materials, culture, and nature (fig. 6).

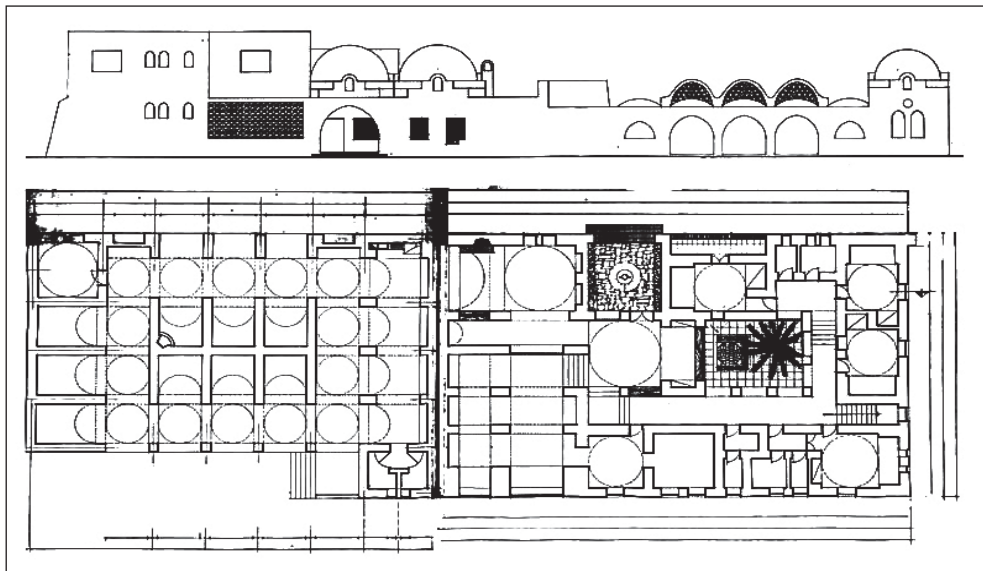


Fig. 6: Hassan Fathy's New Gourná's crafts exhibition center: plan and elevation. The design process of Fathy is generative and follows a grid system in the plan that simplifies the method of construction to be pursued by local craftsmen. The elevation is a translation of the simplicity of the plan that creates a rhythm of aesthetic forms such as domes and vaults. The roof structure of the whole project reflects the continuity of the earthen structural system (Source: AKTC).

He therefore challenged the inability of modern architecture as a sophisticated building process to produce a genuine communal context. In

16. Hassan Fathy, Interview. *Majallat al-'Alam* 103 (1986).

the Ruskinian way, his book is a manual of ethical stances that expose modern imported practices of architecture as isolated from the spirit of people and their place.

The school of Fathy was very influential and had many followers in the Arab world. Abdel Wahid Wakil, one prominent student of Fathy, emulated the formal side of his master's architecture by duplicating its invented rural vocabularies for a different clientele and purpose. Wakil departed from his master's path.¹⁷ Nonetheless, Fathy's theory and practice of regional architecture created a new academic discourse of architecture in the Arab world. He was among the few Arab architects who stirred international interest.

His projects and writings remain influential in schools of architecture worldwide. J. M. Richards affirmed that, "News of Hassan Fathy's enterprises and beliefs in Egypt first reached the Western World, perhaps not coincidentally, just as concern was becoming widespread about the growing gap between what technology claimed to do for human welfare and what it was actually achieving in buildings that answered the needs of ordinary people..."¹⁸ The prophecy of Fathy became true when modernism came to an end for its break with people and their tradition. Richards added that, "Their philosophy [modernists] required a total break with the past, whereas Fathy has looked always for continuity. Modernists' break with the past proved disastrous to the relationship between architecture and the public."

Accordingly, Fathy's purpose was not to waste time attacking modernists, but to work with his own people, heritage, and environment in order to realize sustainable design solutions. Indeed, his was a spiritual mission:

If the architect does not respect the God-made environment, he commits a sin against God. The God-made environment is the landscape, the atmosphere, the flora, the fauna, and the human beings who live in this environment. In this God-made environment there is nothing that is inharmonious. If we become one with nature, beauty is defined as it is Beauty, then is obtained when form considers the forces that are working on it.¹⁹

Fathy's painstaking endeavour to find an ideal architecture that is original and rooted in the local community made him, *par excellence*, one of the precursors of sustainability movement. Despite the criticism that his

17. Abdel Wahid Wakil, Interview. *Al-Binae* 34 (1987).

18. J. M. Richards, "In the international context," in *Hassan Fathy* (Singapore: Concept Media, 1985), 11.

19. James Steele, "A tribute to Hassan Fathy," in *Architecture for a Changing World*, James Steele (ed.) (London: Academy Editions, 1992), 51.

New Gournia project did not work well in terms of convincing tomb dwellers to move to it, which was mainly due to their subsistence on stealing buried treasures, it remains a unique experiment at a time when regionalism was seen as *arriere-garde* and modernism as *avant-garde*. His work inspired several action groups namely: ADAUA, Craterre, and Development Workshop.

Tradition and contemporaneity

Contemporaneity has always challenged the capacity of a tradition to adapt and integrate change. It is to explore contemporary tools and means in order to shape anew an existing architecture. It comes out of the challenge of history to deliver its link with a new reality. Accordingly, a tradition that cannot regenerate itself to deliver a contemporary link can be thought as sterile. When a link is possible between different periods of time, historical continuity becomes dynamic and produces new forms and functions that push architectural evolution forward.

Arabic architecture generated continuous links throughout centuries, and came to a halt when its legitimacy was questioned by the encounter with the new ‘universal’ modern school since XIXth century. This encounter raised several nagging questions on how to continue to perform and keep its values while facing the pressure to change radically. Ricoeur put it as follows:

“(…) Only a living culture, at once faithful to its origins and ready for creativity of the levels of art, literature, philosophy and spirituality, is capable of sustaining the encounter of other cultures—not merely capable of sustaining but also of giving meaning to that encounter.”²⁰

The quest for a historical continuity while being open to learn from other cultures has sustained contemporaneity of architecture in the Arab world. Arabic architectural heritage has had a capacity to project itself into the future when challenged. Thus, this heritage, if not limited to dead objects or dogmas, can be an active element in shaping new contemporary physical environments.

Among the key figures that pursued this architectural discourse is Mohamed Saleh Makiya. His years of architectural practice in Baghdad and London had enabled him to establish several conceptual guidelines for new contemporary architecture in the Arab region. He was born in Baghdad in 1914, and received a degree in architecture from Liverpool School of Architecture in 1941. He holds a PhD from King’s College, Cambridge, 1946. He established Makiya and Associates in Baghdad in 1946. Among

20. Ricoeur, “Universal civilization and national cultures,” 282-3.

his known projects are: Khulafa Mosque (Baghdad 1960), Rafidain Bank in Iraq (Kufa 1968), and Kuwait State Mosque designed in (Kuwait 1976-1984). Makiya's most eminent writings are: *The Architecture of Baghdad* (Gulbenkian Foundation 1969) and *The Arab Village* (UNESCO 1951).

Makiya defines architecture as a cultural continuity between past, present, and future. He delineated contemporaneity as that when "in its apogee and quality of parameters has never passed over its heritage values. When it did so by following formal seductions, the price was high and the quality was low."²¹ Accordingly, when contemporaneity limits innovation to be solely that of technological means, architecture becomes but a slave of its own tools.

If one studies the archaeological remains of a lost architecture, the main vector for understanding its lost civilization is how this architecture was able to transmit its social, cultural, and political meaning for a specific period. This reflects the status quo of contemporaneity relevant to each epoch in order to assess the historic evolution or devolution of architecture.

Makiya's approach can be considered therefore as an attempt to assess the input of architectural heritage of different periods in contemporary modern architectural context in order to create a time-relevant architecture for the Arab region. In his Kuwait State Mosque (fig. 7), he explored contemporary modern engineering and raw concrete while integrating Arabic and Islamic architectural vocabulary.

Makiya's projects are proof of his skilful manipulation of contemporary architectural and engineering structural systems to cope with the symbolism of the building envelope. Contemporaneity according to Makiya is to project a building as an evolving entity according to technological advancement, while tradition fosters its sense of regionalism.

He avoided the formalities dictated by modern aesthetics and focused on the essential elements of making architecture a common ground for all architectures. Modernism for Makiya is almost synonymous with Westernism, and, as he argued, to be Western is to be modern. He openly criticized the contemporary architectural scene created by prestigious firms from all over the world that created a break with the continuing history of Arabic culture. He considered the new environment created by this architecture as unworthy by stating the following:

21. Kanan M. Makiya, "Modernity and heritage: the impact of progress in architecture and urban Planning," *Proceedings of the Agha Khan Seminar*, (Sana'a, July 3, 1983).

Buildings, may be good in themselves, have been imported without consideration of the local environment. Their architects have proved not up to the task because of the limitations imposed by their own background and education. Opportunities unique in history have been missed for three decades. These handicaps can only be overcome by additional research towards a clearer understanding of the context. We are now in transitional phase where a new intellectual approach is evident, and the traditional quality of space and architectural form is being reassessed. This approach is very different from Western modernism.²²



Fig. 7: Kuwait State mosque designed by Mohamed Saleh Makiya, Kuwait City, 1976. Its prayer hall covers 5000 square meters and its largest dome has a diameter of 26 meters and a height of 47 meters. Being one of his biggest projects, this mosque shows his search for a local ‘monumentalism’ and local ‘symbolism’ using modern structural system and raw concrete. The key force of this project is Makiya’s preservation of the proportions of traditional forms in monumental concrete frames (Source: AKTC).

Makiya was therefore at the centre of the 1980s search for a meaning of contemporary Arabic architecture. He became engaged both intellectually and practically with the antagonism of tradition and contemporaneity with the aim of finding lost opportunities in history for a contemporary context.

His regionalism is neither a “critical-regionalism” nor a “post-modernism.” It is rather a genuine exploration of modern structure and heritage tectonics that generates a contemporary Arabic architecture which answers future moves while being embedded in regional symbolism. He stated accordingly that, “The architectural forms, whether past or present, should be sympathetically and deeply

22. Kanan M. Makiya, *Post-Islamic Classicism: a Visual Architecture of Mohamed Makiya* (London: Saqi Books, 1990), 125.

rooted in meaningful and significant responses. Symbolism extends the concept of functionalism to the higher level of the intellectual aptitude demanded by the designer and asserted by its social meaning... They are so much part of the natural setting that they stand beyond the label of “traditional” or “contemporary.”²³

His early buildings such as Rafidain Bank in Kufa, Iraq (1968), reflected what could be termed as “contemporary regionalism.” It sought to present regional architecture as competing with European modernism, and prove that it had its own sense of local ‘monumentalism’ without forcibly bowing before shallow “post-modernism.”

Urban and environmental planning

On the eve of independence of Arab countries from European powers, and in response to the growing need for a local territorial and regional planning in the 1960s and 1990s, local architects were challenged with greater urban projects. The new independent Arab States solicited architects to become planners in order to improve social urban issues in their cities. These post-colonial cities reached a state of crisis in terms of high population density and urban poverty. The understanding of architecture changed accordingly to consider the greater urban context by expending architects’ knowledge and skills to solve urban problems. They were pushed to discern the new urban forms of the fast developing Arab cities and their rural territories. However, the housing crisis was the main avenue of competition with regard to finding adequate solutions for millions of unsheltered people in the Arab region.

In addition to fortifying the scope of architectural practice, the attitude of Arab States towards identity is fuelled with Nationalism and Arabization movement, *al-qawmiyya al-‘Arabiyya* in the post-colonial period. This required most new housing projects to be built to have a sense of regionalism at a larger scale. However, a communal and environmental concern of housing was coincidentally a worldwide phenomenon. Habitat became a focus of attention at the UN with the establishment of UN-Habitat in 1978.

The Aga Khan Award for Architecture (AKAA) founded in 1977 has been trying to champion this cause. It clearly showed a very early shift from individual buildings to regional community, landscape, and environmental projects. For example, The 1980 Cycle of Awards granted the prize the Agricultural Training Centre in West Africa, Senegal (1977) and Kampung Improvement Programme in Indonesia, Jakarta (1969). The 2001 Cycle Awards granted the prize to two further regional environmental and

23. Kanan M. Makiya, “The Arab house: a historical review,” *Proceedings of the Colloquium on the Arab House* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1986), 12.

community projects: Bagh Ferdowsi in Tehran (1997), and Ait Ikel village in Morocco (1995). They were then examples of environmental Arabic and Islamic architecture that dealt with development of regional communities through architectural and rural planning.

The first project in Tehran was chosen by AKAAs "...for its innovative approach to environmental design, which limits urban development and promotes an awareness of conservation and nature among urban population of Tehran."²⁴ (Aga Khan Award 2001, 138). The second in Morocco was chosen "...because it exemplifies a new approach to development, environmental conservation and the improvement of living conditions for rural populations."²⁵ This approach impacted on the projects selected by the AKAAs at very early stage when sustainability started to be a major trigger of development at the international level. This is a new regionalism that went beyond the adaptation of internationalism but sought local durable architectural and environmental solutions for living communities.

For the introduction of the VIIIth Cycle of the Aga Khan Award (2001), Kenneth Frampton, as a member of the steering committee, stated that "Ever since John Turner's pioneering work with squatter settlements in Latin America...and since Hassan Fathy's *Architecture for the Poor*...we have been only too aware of the overwhelming scale of global poverty, and the limits of architecture as a bourgeois practice when confronted with the degree zero of human habitation. Whether we like it or not, we are returned to these grassroots circumstance..."²⁶ For the selection of the project in Morocco, Frampton affirmed that, "Among the numerous settlements nominated for this cycle, non perhaps is more directly representative of the interaction between modernization and local culture than the rehabilitation of the village Ait Ikel in Morocco."²⁷

However, parallel to the work of an organization, the Aga Khan Award for regional projects in the Islamic and Arabic world, two key architects were involved at this early stage in environmental design and planning at a large scale: Rasem Badran and Rifat Chadirji. Both architects developed a new architectural approach different from Fathy's and Shafi'i's trends. They

24. Aga Khan Award of Architecture, *Modernity and community: architecture in the Islamic World*, ed. Thames & Hudson (London, 2001), 138.

25. Aga Khan Award, *Modernity and community*, 66.

26. Kenneth Frampton, *Modernization and local culture* (Geneva: Aga Khan Award of Architecture, 2001), 10.

27. Ibid.

stressed the importance of place-making through contemporary architectural, urban and environmental design elements.

Badran was born in Jerusalem in 1945 and graduated as an architect from Darmstadt University in West Germany in 1964. He won several architectural competitions and awards. Badran received the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 1995 for the Great Mosque of Riyadh and the Redevelopment of the Old City Centre. Among his known projects are: Khoury Residence (Amman 1973), Al-Awqaf Housing Project (1978), Hatahet Residence (Amman 1979), Housing for Public Security Complex (Amman, 1981), Cement Company Personnel Housing (Fuhais 1982), Queen Alia Airport Housing Project (Amman 1983), and the Great Mosque State Mosque of Baghdad (1982).

In his housing projects in particular, Badran proved the possibility of designing neighbourhoods' integrative environments. Integration and separation were both considered in his projects in order to generate a continuous interchange between public and private places. This often created a harmonious social environment within the anarchic contemporary Arab urban fabric.

Badran explained that the experience of Queen Alia Airport Housing project was centred upon the successive reactions of occupants towards the built environment, and it takes into account traditions, social habits and a way of life, which have caused environmental changes. He added that, "These changes have in turn produced spontaneous features in the overall urban fabric. The project contains twelve thousand dwellings with all necessary services and communal facilities (...)"²⁸

Despite critics, Badran's skill to build a bridge between architecture and planning in order to create new regional environments has been exceptional. On one hand, this is due to his close understanding and analysis of the Arabic traditional urban fabric through his early work chiefly on Jerusalem and Kuwait. On the other hand, his years of study and practice in Germany enabled him to gain international technical tools such as his involvement in a major low-cost-housing project with the German Ministry of Housing in 1972.

His designs reflect thus a constructive blending of internationalism with regionalism towards the creation of a contemporary regional environment.

28. Akram Hamdan, and Rasem Badran of Jordan, "Architecture in Development," *MIMAR* 25 (1987): 54-55, Singapore: Concept Media Ltd.

This permitted Badran to design highly functional and technical contemporary local typologies without losing the sense of place.

In the case of Rifat Chadirji, the planning was considered his chief tool through his architectural success in the region. With great governmental and private expertise in Iraq, he can be considered one of the visionaries of planning in post-colonial Arab cities. He was first the Head of the Building Department of Waqaf in Iraq (1954-57), after which he became the Director General of Housing at the Iraqi Ministry of Planning (1958-63).

Chadirji was born in Baghdad in 1926, and graduated as an architect from the Hammersmith School of Arts and Crafts in London, 1952. His talent in design surfaced and became apparent when he established Iraq Consult (IQC) in 1952. His leading architectural projects in Baghdad include: Federation of Industries Building (1966), Tobacco Monopoly Offices (1966), Rafidain Bank (1969), and Central Post Office (1970).

However, the work of Chadirji that is relevant to our argument in this trend of urban and environmental Design and planning is his vital role in the redevelopment of modern Baghdad in 1980. With his firm position of non duplication of the past and his deeper understanding of modernism, he shifted the perception of architecture and urbanism to be more inclusive of new cultures. This can be realized through a sound synthesis of forms and functions supported with new possibilities of technology. He stated accordingly:

No culture of excellence can be achieved –or was ever achieved in the past–in the absence of a supporting technology. For this reason, the globalization of technology militates against the continuity, revival, or establishment of a national culture. From this, one can conclude that to achieve an urban development of excellence, worthy of a nation with a great historical past and an eminent culture, the planner should prepare a strategy that integrates the various cultural constituents.²⁹

Design, according to Chadirji means, therefore, challenging local architectural heritage to provide fertile solutions for modern architectural and urban issues without fully bowing before modernism or blindly mimicking the past. He searched for new architectural and urban aesthetics relevant to the modern regional image of Iraqi cities.

29. Margaret Bentley Sevcenko, *Continuity and change: design strategies for large-scale urban development* (Massachusetts: The Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, 1984), 59.



Fig. 8: Main Façade of Central Post Office in Baghdad designed by Rifat Chadirji in 1970. The building proves the move of Chadirji from pure international aesthetics at the beginning of his career to be more inclusive of cultural elements without losing the aesthetic and environmental purpose (Source: AKTC).

Chadirji attempted to achieve a synthesis between traditional forms and inevitable advent of modern technology. He said partly: “My aim was to create an architecture which at once acknowledges the place in which it is built, yet which sacrifices nothing to modern technical capability. At the same time I was concerned to understand analytically the reasoning behind traditional devices of environmental control such as courtyards, screen walls, natural ventilation, and reflected light.”³⁰ The environmental purpose was the overarching element for his designs that bridged the gap between regional and modern aesthetics (fig. 8).

Chadirji is a theorist par excellence with a strong ideological drive inspiring his aesthetics. During the last interview of the author with Chadirji,³¹ he confirmed his long research and practice of both western and eastern aesthetics relevant to contemporary design by drawings lessons from the evolutive and progressive nature of architecture through a methodical judgment of the past and present. Badran on the other hand is more a practitioner who speaks the language of graphical representation of which he is a master. This affiliation to graphical communication is proven through the large amount of drawings

30. Konstantin Bazarov, “Rifat Chadirji,” in *Contemporary Architects* (Chicago: St. James Press, 1987), 163.

31. Rifat Chadirji, Interview. Ajman Urban Planning Symposium, (UAE, 2010).

he produced as an expressive process for his designs (fig. 9). This enabled Badran to interpret Arabic architectural vocabularies through the lens of modern design.³² Through the author's involvement in Badran's work mainly in the UAE, and based on his direct interview,³³ he confirmed that through his painstaking design exercise of creatively moving between architectural and urban scales he creates a strong sense of place and environment.

Though critics may semantically distance Badran and Chadirji, their work undoubtedly shifted architectural and urban paradigms in the Arab region. The architectural theory and practice of these two leading architects reached maturity in designing regional environments without relaxing into ubiquitous modern models or surrendering to the fate of archaeological ones. Their quest for a genuine sense of place might be viewed as 'critical regionalism,' but it certainly goes beyond the regional cliché to merely adapting modernism to a region for the sake of postmodernism. It is rather a self-definition of international architectural progress in order to design a regional contemporary architecture.

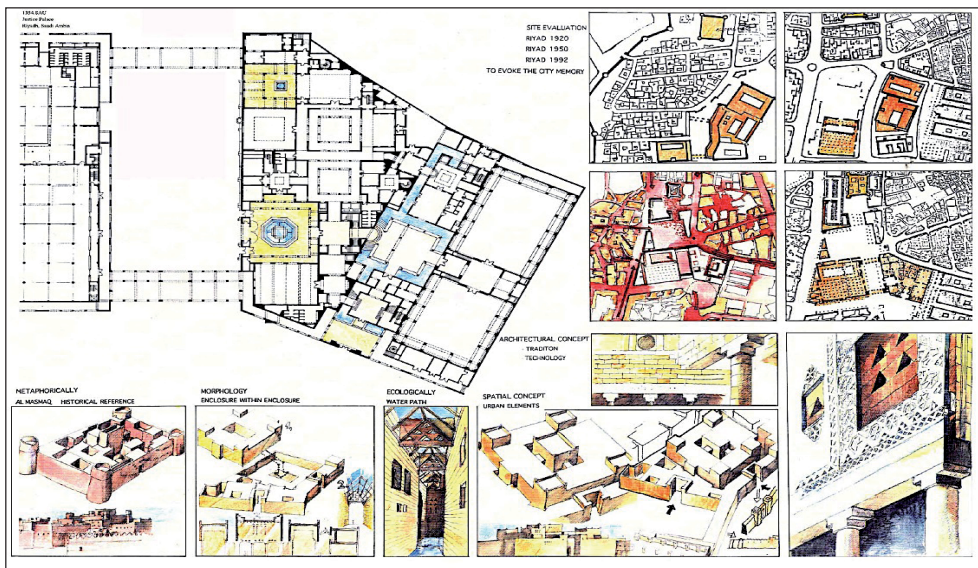


Fig. 9: Site Analytical sketches of Rasem Badran for the Justice Palace Project in Riyadh. The drawing techniques and capacity of representing graphically his generative designs put Badran as the master of visual communication of the technical, cultural and environmental elements. Most of his projects are well documented in terms of the process pursued to reach a final architectural or urban project (Source: ATKC).

32. Rasem Badran, "Historical references and contemporary design," in *Theories and principles of design in the architecture of Islamic societies*, ed. M. B. Sevckenko (Massachusetts: Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, 1988), 159.

33. Rasem Badran, Interview. Moroccan National Order of Architects (Tetouan, Morocco, 2010).

Post-orientalism and fantasy

Following nationalist movements to establish an iconic architecture reflecting the greatness of a nation, traditional Arabic architecture has been fantasized to portray political powers in several modern Arab States. Thus, many administrative and ministerial buildings in these States have been shaped with unprecedented monumentality in order to create effects of awe.

These overstated pseudo-Arabic designs become commonplace whilst their urban settings reject their peculiar aesthetics. The key question is why is this return to Arabic or Islamic architecture only made when it comes to iconic nationalistic buildings? Since no clear answer can be provided, the main argument that remains is that architecture throughout Arab history has always been explored to symbolize ruling powers. From Mansur's grandiose circular city of Baghdad to current rulers' prodigal palaces, Arabic architecture has had a great role in shaping an iconography of power.

This new 'Arabicized' architecture often emulates colonialist or orientalist styles, which uses romanticized historic symbols and forms. I categorize it as a post-Orientalist trend because of its similarities, voluntarily or involuntarily, with the Orientalists' exaggerated drawings and images. While the drawings of Orientalists have been severely criticised by Post-colonialists –as false images of the East with a European bias,– some architects, both locals and international, still apply their fictional aestheticism. This is due mainly to their ignorance about the intrinsic principles of traditional architectural language or simply toeing the precepts of colonial designs that used local antecedents as pastiche elements.

Another key reason for the current spread of this post-Orientalist trend is that it pleases mainly some rich Arab patrons and tourists. To attract more tourists, many cities have been invaded with fantasized Oriental theme parks. The best example herein is the city of Marrakech. Despite its glorious history and exquisite monuments, new-fashioned heritage styles have been invented outside its walls. It is an utter eclecticism of oriental architectural metaphors. The point is to create an exotic sensation that makes the visitor feel as if in a story from *Thousand and One Nights* (fig. 10).

Marrakech is only an example as various cities in the Arab region are following the same trend in order to enhance their sense of exotic adventurism. Dubai contains currently the largest number of invented exotic theme parks such as Ibn Battuta Mall and Old Town Island adjacent to Burj Khalifa.



Fig. 10: Overstated Oriental style in a guesthouse named “Aladin’s House” in the madina of Chefchaouen, Morocco. It was originally a historic house but converted by a Moroccan owner with the help of local craftsmen to a tourist restaurant and hotel. This style is spreading all over the Middle East to attract more European tourists who enjoy the exotic Orientalist images and forms (Photo: Author, 2011).

The two examples present how the exotic Oriental culture becomes commercial and tourist commodity. The Mall architecture imitates the styles of the places visited by the famous traveller Ibn Battuta. Its different pavilions embody his travel journeys that depict different cultures of the East as an allegory to a lost Orient in order to induce visitors into intense shopping (fig. 11). The Old Town Island is a business and residential district that mimics an Arabic traditional Madina (fig. 12).



Fig. 11: An interior view of Ibn Batouta Mall in Dubai depicting the traveller’s journey in the Egyptian court leading to the Indian one with a model of Muslim invention, an elephant clock. The Mall was designed and implemented by Nakheel Propoertise in 2005 (Photo: Author, 2007).



Fig. 12: The main entrance of Old Town Island and its Palace Hotel in Dubai. The town was designed and implemented by Emaar (2007). The Town presents an amalgam of eclectic Arabic and Islamic idioms to fabric an image of a madina. The design is extravagant and without consideration of the authentic different traditional styles (Photo: Author, 2010).

This post-orientalist architecture is neither embracing the known regionalism or critical regionalism, but it is an amalgam of fantasies that extrapolates the Oriental image for the sake of consumerism. It is mainly created to please tourists and boost their envy to enliven their dream about the East. However, due to lack of understanding of the compositional and artistic logic of local forms, both local and foreign architects alike produce a twisted image of historic Arabic architecture.

Conclusion

This is an attempt to delineate some trends in thinking and practicing architecture in the Arab region at a critical period. While some of these trends may be seen as producing a mere regional modernism, it would be unjustifiable to blindly pursue the fast spreading internationalism at the expense of a certain genuine sense of place.

This paper examines thus the contributions of local architects in order to establish a regional architectural discourse. It goes beyond the conventional 'regionalism' and 'critical regionalism' to seek new theories of a constructive regionalism that situates the inner forces of a region in order to appreciate its uniqueness, history, culture, heritage, and geography. A regionalism germinated out of a place and not dictated upon it, generative of its own idioms and not corrective of failed modern ones.

Nonetheless, with the lack of constructive criticism and theoretical research, contemporary Arabic architecture has lost its momentum. Accepting utter ugliness of current international designs parachuted into the middle of deserts from North Africa to the Middle East is a proof of this crisis. It also

reflects the image of modern Arab States that lack technological production, democracy and intellectual independence.

Hence, several questions are still open for further research regarding the critical status quo of Arabic architecture. Is it an issue of Arabic culture that is becoming stagnant and therefore failing to resume its past architectural genius? Is it the inability to understand the forces of contemporary technology and ideology? Is it the ignorance of architects and patrons who have lost the link with their own social and cultural anchorage? These are some of the questions to consider before rushing in with the label, 'Arabic' architecture.

This paper attempted therefore to decode further this label. Its close redefinition is indeed imperative for deciphering the current large number of competitions and projects launched under the umbrella of this unfathomed concept. In Gulf countries that are endowed with endless resources, the label 'Arabic' or 'Islamic' is used to satisfy hitherto rich patrons who are often seeking a mere extravagant architecture.

The result is numerous architectural spectacles and theme-parks with metaphorically invented Arabic aestheticism that frequently parodies the whole architectural legacy of the region. Whilst it is a universal problem, the theme-park architecture also jeopardizes the integrity of city fabrics with their prodigal postmodern Arabic paraphernalia.

Whether they failed or succeeded, the architects presented in this paper reflected upon the challenges facing Arabic architecture and questioned the suitability of modernism in their region. The objective of this paper is hence to trace regional architectural theories and practices in the Arab region in order to construct a fresh discourse for a constructive regionalism. This would be highly beneficial for a new generation of architects in the region that are detached from their context and environment in the name of progress. It would also guide the regional architectural practice that lacks a sense of aesthetic, technical, and environmental criticism.

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ملخص: العمارة العربية المعاصرة: في البحث عن الهوية المحلية والإقليمية

إن البحث عن هندسةٍ معمارية ملائمة للسياق الثقافي والاجتماعي لا يزال محط الاهتمام في المنطقة العربية. وعلى الرغم من التحديث والتحضر، فإن الإصرار على الحفاظ على الإحساس بالطابع المعماري المحلي مستمر وما زال قائماً. وهكذا، حاول مهندسون معماريون محليون حل ازدواجية العمارة الحديثة المستوردة مقابل أخرى تقليدية صامدة تعتبر أصيلة وذات مرجعية. ويعرض هذا المقال لعمل المهندسين المعماريين سواء الذين حاولوا دعم إحياء ما هو تراثي أو من سعوا إلى تطير ما هو حديثي داخل السياق المحلي. وعلى الرغم من بعض الانتقادات تمكن هؤلاء المهندسون المعماريون من إنتاج نظريات ومفاهيم فريدة في العالم العربي.

ويجتم المقال بنقاش حول جدوى العمارة الجهوية المبنية على أساس بعد نقدي لتوجيه الممارسة الفوضوية للعمارة المحلية الناشز في المنطقة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: العمارة السياقية، العمارة الإقليمية، العمارة المحلية، التحديث، الحفاظ، العمارة العربية.

Abstract: Contemporary Arabic Architecture: A Quest for a Sense of Regionalism

The quest for a regional architecture is a prevalent concern in the critical context of the Arab region. Despite the fast modernisation and urbanization, to sustain a sense of an architectural local character is persistent. Accordingly, local architects attempted to resolve the dichotomy of imported modern architecture vis-à-vis a traditional one deemed as authentic. This article focuses on the work of key architects who either endorsed the revival of the traditional as referential or strived to contextualize the modern. Despite some shortcomings, these architects generated unique theories and concepts throughout the Arab world. The conclusion discusses the relevance of a critical and constructive regionalism in the architectural practice in the region.

Keywords: Local architecture, Modernization, Conservation, Arabic architecture, Critical Regionalism.

Résumé: Architecture arabe contemporaine: En quête d'un sens de régionalisme

La recherche d'une architecture régionale est une constante bien connue dans le monde arabe. Malgré la modernisation et l'urbanisation rapides, la conservation d'un sens d'un caractère locale architectural est persistante. Ainsi, les architectes locaux ont tenté de résoudre la dichotomie de l'architecture moderne importée vis-à-vis d'une architecture traditionnelle jugée authentique et tant qu'un référentiel. Cet article présente le travail d'architectes qui ont soit soutenu le renouveau du traditionnel ou tenté de contextualiser le moderne. Malgré quelques limitations, ces architectes ont pu sans doute générer des théories et concepts uniques dans le monde arabe. La conclusion évalue la pertinence d'un régionalisme critique et constructif dans la pratique architecturale de la région.

Mots-clés: Architecture locale, modernisation, conservation, architecture arabe, régionalisme critique.

Resumen: Arquitectura árabe contemporánea: una búsqueda de un sentido de regionalismo

La búsqueda de una arquitectura regional es una preocupación frecuente en el contexto crítico de la región árabe. A pesar de la rápida modernización y urbanización, el carácter arquitectónico es persistente. En consecuencia, los arquitectos locales intentaron resolver la dicotomía de la arquitectura moderna importada frente a una tradicional considerada como auténtica. Este artículo se centra en el trabajo de arquitectos clave que respaldan el mundo tradicional. A pesar de algunas deficiencias, estos arquitectos generaron teorías y conceptos únicos en todo el mundo árabe. La conclusión discute la relevancia de un regionalismo crítico y constructivo en la práctica arquitectónica en la región.

Palabras clave: Arquitectura local, modernización, conservación, arquitectura árabe, regionalismo crítico.