

The Arab City
Columbia University GSAPP
Spring 2025
ARCHA6454

Monday 10:30am-1:00pm
409 Avery Hall

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Introduction

The Arab City seminar was launched in 2012. Already then, the introduction started with, “At a time of devastating conflict and uncertainty in the Middle East and the Arab World in general, it can seem futile to focus on the evolution of its cities, past and present.” Fifteen years later, it is devastating to re-read this statement in light of the recent tragedies unfolding across the region. And yet, it is precisely because of such violence that it seems important to turn to the region’s history, mining its cities’ rich past and complex present to enable the projection of possible, peaceful, and progressive futures.

The Arab City does not exist. Yet, as an idea, it has occupied the site of endless projections—from exotic to political—which, re-examined, can enable us to better understand the region’s architectural and urban complexities, amongst other things. As a reality, the Arab City has manifested itself in varied ways across time and place. As such, it is a wonderful lens through which to understand a shared culture and people, its interconnected geography, and complex histories.

In the past decades, The Arab City has fostered a wide array of radical experiments in architecture and urbanism. From leading the wave of 'instant urbanism' to building the first zero carbon city, the MENA region has hosted the FIFA World Cup, witnessed a resurgence of social housing and investment in outstanding institutional buildings, public spaces, and education campuses, led major reconstruction and preservation efforts as well as re-affirmed for the world the importance of public space through ongoing civil resistance and revolutions, however brutally repressed.

Beyond the contemporary production of wildly broadcast 'iconic' projects, this seminar will contrast the region’s emerging and struggling cities while situating the work within a long history of complex exchanges regionally, between East and West, and between North and South. The seminar will move across time from the Ottoman Empire to the present while also moving across space, contrasting historical centers to emerging ones. Throughout, we will ask what constitutes the project of Arab Modernity, as embodied through architecture and cities, then and now.

While focused specifically on architectural ideas and urban production in the Arab World, the seminar will attempt to both learn from local specificities and move beyond them, as it engages questions that span from issues of representation, social inequity, or the environmental crisis to the challenges posed by globalized architectural practices - all of which can present a wealth of critical opportunities to learn from and point to alternate possibilities, not only for the region’s cities but also for our increasingly urbanized world.

Structure and Assignments

The seminar is structured around nine 'frames'—whether a historical juncture, a political movement, or a critical lens—with each class focused on a specific frame through which to read a particular aspect of the region's development. The topics are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive, and comparative analysis between buildings and cities within and beyond the region, as well as at different times, will be critical to the discussions.

Student Presentations

All students are expected to be quite familiar with all of the readings each week, and one or more students will be assigned to present the readings every week, depending on the class size. Weekly presentations should situate the readings within a larger historical and geographical context, present an in-depth and critical understanding of the texts, and offer a perspective on how they have informed their understanding of architecture and urban production historically and today. For this, students are asked to illustrate the readings through visual presentations, including examples of architecture, buildings, cities, and environments.

For the Final Research Assignment, students are asked to choose three variables: a building and/or a city, a time and place, as well as a 'frame' through which to understand a particular built project and present a new reading of it in light of a contemporary question or concern. The assignment should propose an in-depth critical and imaginative analysis through a combination of architectural drawings, diagrams, and text. A draft of the Final Research Assignment will be presented to take advantage of feedback from the class. Dates for these presentations will be scheduled on the first day of class to reflect the class size.

Assessment

Attendance and Participation 20%
Weekly Readings Presentation 20%
Final Research Assignment Presentation 20%
Final Research Assignment 40%

Readings and Schedule*

Week 1: Introduction and The Ottoman Empire and its End

- Albert Hourani, "Part III The Ottoman Age" in *A History of the Arab Peoples*, (New York: Grand Central Publishing Edition, 1991), pp. 207-248
- Michael Provence, "Introduction" and "Chapter 1: Ottoman Modernity in the Long Nineteenth Century: Training State Servants and Making Citizens" in *The Last Ottoman Generation and the Making of the Modern Middle East*, (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 1-55
- Janet L. Abu Lughod, "Chapter 6: Cleansing the Augean Stables 1800-1848" and "Chapter 7: The Origins of Modern Cairo" in *Cairo: 1001 Years of the City Victorious*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 83-117
- Kamal Salibi, "Introduction," "Chapter 1: How it All Began" and "Chapter 2: The Confidence Game" in *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered*, (London: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 1-56

Week 2: The Nahda

- Samir Khalaf, "Chapter III: The Arab Malaise is a Period in History and it is Now More Acute than it Was Before", "Chapter IV: Modernity was not the cause of the Arab malaise" and "Chapter V: The Arab malaise is not the result of modernity but of modernity's collapse," in *Being Arab*, (London: Verso, 2006), pp. 31-66
- "Introduction", "Butrus al-Bustani: The Culture of Arabs Today" and "Nazira Zeineddine: Unveiling and Veiling" in *The Arab Renaissance: A Bilingual Anthology of the Nahda*, Ed. Tarek El-Ariss, (New York: the Modern Language Association of America, 2018), X-XXVII, pp. 3-19 and pp. 372-392
- Georges Corm, "Chapter 7", in *Arab Political Thought Past and Present*, (London: Hurst & Company Published in Association with the Aga Khan University Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilizations, 2020), pp. 113-134
- Rifa`a Rafi` al Tahtawi, "Fourth Section. On the housing of the people of Paris and related matters", "Fifth Section. On the food of the people of Paris and their eating and drinking habits", "Six Section. On the clothing of the French", "Seventh Section. On the entertainments of Paris" and "Eights Section. On hygiene in the city of Paris" in *An Imam in Paris: Account of a Stay in France by an Egyptian Cleric (1826-1831)*, Translated and Introduced by Daniel I. Newman, (London: Saqi Books, 2011), pp. 216-237

Week 3: Orientalism

- Timothy Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt*, (Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 1-34
- Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Random House Inc., 1979), pp. 1-28
- Janet Abu-Lughod, "The Islamic City – Historic Myth, Islamic Essence, and Contemporary Relevance," in *International Journal of Middle East Studies* Vol. 19, No. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, May 1987), pp. 155-176
- Sandy Isenstadt and Kishwar Rizvi, "Modern Architecture and the Middle East: The Burden of Representation," in *Modernism and the Middle East, Architecture and Politics in the Twentieth Century*, Eds. Sandy Isenstadt and Kishwar Rizvi, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), pp. 3-36
- Ahmed Kanna, *The City as Corporation* (MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 1-42; pp. 77-194

Week 4: Colonialism

- Rachid Khalidi, "Chapter 1: The First Declaration of War, 1917-1939" in *The Hundred Years War On Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917-2017*, (New York: Picador, 2021), pp. 1-17
- Gwendolyn Wright, "Global Ambition and Local Knowledge", in *Modernism and the Middle East, Architecture and Politics in the Twentieth Century*, Eds. Sandy Isenstadt and Kishwar Rizvi, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), pp. 221-254
- Michael Provence, "Chapter 2: Theory and Practice of Colonialism in Post-Ottoman Middle East" in *The Last Ottoman Generation and the Making of the Modern Middle East*, (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 56-95

- Brian McLaren, "Modern Architecture, Preservation, and the Discourse on Local Culture in Italian Colonial Libya", in *Modernism and the Middle East, Architecture and Politics in the Twentieth Century*, Eds. Sandy Isenstadt and Kishwar Rizvi, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), pp. 61-78
- Karim Hadjri and Mohamed Osmani, "The Spatial Development and Urban Transformation of Colonial and Postcolonial Algiers", in *Planning Middle Eastern Cities: An Urban Kaleidoscope in a Globalizing World*, Ed. Yasser Elsheshtawy (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 29-58

Week 5: Pan-Arabism

- Lukasz Stanek, "Chapter4: The World Socialist System, 1958-90" in *Architecture in Global Socialism: Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East in the Cold War* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press), pp. 169-238
- Lukasz Stanek, "Chapter5: Socialism within Globalization Abu Dhabi and Kuwait City, 1979-90" in *Architecture in Global Socialism: Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East in the Cold War* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press), pp. 239-302
- Mercedes Volait, "Town Planning Schemes for Cairo Conceived by Egyptian Planners in the "Liberal Experimentation" Period", in *Middle Eastern Cities 1900-1950 Public Spaces and Public Spheres in Transformation*, Eds. Hans Chr. Korsholm Nielsen and Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, (Copenhagen: Aarhus University Press, 2001), pp. 88-104
- Mohamed El Shahed, "Representing Cairo in the Egyptian Press between WWII and Revolution" In *The Arab City: Architecture and Representation*, Eds. Amale Andraos and Nora Akawi with Caitlin Blanchfield, (New York: Columbia Books on Architecture and the City, 2016), pp. 78-93
- "Introduction," "Infrastructure: Oil and Water" "Individual Dreams: The Making of a Modern Villa" "Housing for All: Desert and Urbanism as a Social Project" "State Building: Museum, School, Nation" and "Kuwait Abroad: KFAED and its Projects" in *Pan-Arab Modernism 1968-2018*, Eds. Ricardo Camacho, Dalal Musaed Alsayer and Sara Saragoca Soares, (Barcelona: Actar, 2021), pp. 135-172

Week 6: Regional Modernism

- Timothy Mitchell, "The Stage of Modernity", in *Questions of Modernity*, Ed. Timothy Mitchell (University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 1-34
- Samuel Isenstadt, "Faith in a Better Future: Josep Lluís Sert's American Embassy in Baghdad" *Journal of Architectural Education* Vol. 50, No. 3 (Blackwell Publishing, Feb. 1997), pp. 172-188
- Jad Tabet, "From Colonial Style to Regional Revivalism: Modern Architecture in Lebanon & the Problem of Cultural Identity," in *Projecting Beirut*, Eds. Hashim Sarkis and Peter Rowe (Prestel, 1998), pp. 83-105
- Rem Koolhaas Hans Ulrich Obrist, "Takako Tange Noritaka Tange," in *Project Japan*, (Spain: Taschen 2009), pp. 551-636

- Ziad Jamaledine, "From the Nation State to the Failed State" in *The Arab City: Architecture and Representation*, Eds. Amale Andraos and Nora Akawi with Caitlin Blanchfield, (New York: Columbia Books on Architecture and the City, 2016), 9 pp. 4-101
- Manar Moursi, "Regional Exchange and Knowledge Transfer through Building Practices: the work of PACE in Yemen, 1968-2016" in *Pan-Arab Modernism 1968-2018*, Eds. Ricardo Camacho, Dalal Musaed Alsayer and Sara Saragoca Soares, (Barcelona: Actar, 2021), pp. 273-288
- Kenza Boussora, "Regionalism: Lessons from Algeria and the Middle East," in *Architectural Regionalism: Collected Writings on Place, Identity, Modernity, and Tradition*, Ed. Vincent B. Canizaro, (NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 2007), pp. 124-127

Week 7: Destruction/Reconstructions

- Bora Erden, Graham Bowley and Tala Safie, "The Great Omari Mosque, built on an ancient holy site, is one of the many treasured landmarks damaged in Israel's military offensive." In New York Times, May 28, 2024
<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/05/28/arts/gaza-omari-mosque.html?smid=nytcare-ios-share&referringSource=articleShare&sgrp=c-cb>
- Eli Osheroff and Dotan Halevy, "Destruction as Layered Event: Twentieth Century Ruins in the Great Mosque of Gaza" in *Imagining Antiquity in Islamic Society*, Ed. Stephenie Mulder, (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2022)
- Francesco Bandarin, "The Destruction of Aleppo: The Impact of the Syrian War on a World Heritage City" in *Cultural Heritage and Mass Atrocities*, Eds. James Cuno and Thomas G. Weiss, (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2022)
- Saree Makdisi, "Laying Claim to Beirut: Urban Narrative and Spatial Identity in the Age of Solidere" in *Critical Inquiry*, Spring 1997, Vol 23, No. 3, Front Lines/Border Posts, (Spring 1997) pp. 660-705
- Hiba Bou Akar, "Epilogue", "The Doubleness of Ruins" and "the Lacework of Zoning" in *For the War Yet to Come*, (San Francisco: Stanford University Press, 2018), pp. 1-10 and pp. 35-104

Week 8: Gulf Cities

- Amale Andraos, "Problematizing a Regional Context: Representation in Arab and Gulf Cities", in *The New Arab Urban: Gulf Cities of Wealth, Ambition and Distress*, (New York: New York University Press, 2017), pp. 58-78
- Yasser Elsheshtawy, "Real Estate Speculation and Transnational Development in Dubai" in *The New Arab Urban: Gulf Cities of Wealth, Ambition and Distress*, (New York: New York University Press, 2017), pp. 235-255
- Harvey Molotch, "Consuming Abu Dhabi," in *The New Arab Urban: Gulf Cities of Wealth, Ambition and Distress*, (New York: New York University Press, 2017), pp. 256-275
- Sulayman Khalaf, "Camel Racing in the Gulf: Notes on the Evolution of a Traditional Cultural Sport," *Anthropos*, Bd. 94, H. 1. /3. (Anthropos Institute, 1999), pp. 85-106

- Yasser Elsheshtawy, "Redrawing Boundaries: Dubai, an Emerging Global City", in *Planning Middle Eastern Cities: An Urban Kaleidoscope in a Globalizing World*, Ed. Yasser Elsheshtawy (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 169-199

Week 9: Influence vs. Power: the case of Doha, Jeddah and Riyadh

- Jumanah Abbas, "The Corniche: the representation of Doha's waterfront and its institutional buildings" in *Urban Modernity in the Contemporary Gulf*, Eds. Roberto Fabri and Sultan Saoud Al-Qassemi, (New York: Routledge, 2022), pp. 138-155
- Trinidad Rico, "Modernism in Qatar: survival through reuse," in *Urban Modernity in the Contemporary Gulf*, Eds. Roberto Fabri and Sultan Saoud Al-Qassemi, (New York: Routledge, 2022), pp. 226-245
- Faisal bin Ayyaf Al-Mogren, "Operational Planning: An Alternative view of Doxiadis Project in Riyadh" in *Urban Modernity in the Contemporary Gulf*, Eds. Roberto Fabri and Sultan Saoud Al-Qassemi, (New York: Routledge, 2022), pp. 156-171
- Yasser Elsheshtawy, "Chapter 1 Introduction: Discovering Riyadh", "Chapter 5: Riyadh's Urban Growth and Development a Historical Overview" and "Chapter 10: Conclusion: The Future of Riyadh" in *Riyadh: Transforming a Desert City*, (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2022), pp. 1-26, pp. 118-146, pp. 274-290
- Stefan Maneval, "Navigating Urban Space: Jeddah, early twenty first century" in *New Islamic Urbanism: the architecture of Public and Private Space in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia*, (London: UCL Press, 2019)