

**"Falling Upon Deaf Ears":  
THE CASE OF COLLOQUIAL ARCHITECTURE.**

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June, 1986

Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Science in Architecture Studies

at the  
**MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY**  
June 1990

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### **abstract**

World War II had instigated a strong national movement in The Middle East. In the Fifties and Sixties this region witnessed the end of colonialism in wide spread revolutions. The predominantly agrarian societies of The Middle East were mobilized to modernize. The institutions, with a specific understanding of modernity, mobilized a society with deeply ingrained tradition to change. This intersection of modernity and tradition had produced rich and unique cultural manifestation.

A local formulation that captured the essence of this intersection was manifested. This thesis proposes this manifestation as "colloquial" in nature and will aim at recovering it.

A reconstruction of the society's cultural history - institutional intervention: physical as in architecture and urban planning; social as in mass media and social programs- of the Fifties and Sixties is necessary to this recovery. Colloquial architecture had a *space of aesthetic* that was in tune with its cultural history. This has rendered the architectural expression constantly shifting, thus the difficulty of its recovery .

This thesis will trace the particularities of colloquial architecture, as they break away from modern and traditional discourses, by alternatively assuming the position of a modernist and traditionalist. Particular methods will be employed to the various discursive fields that will be analyzed. The mode of analysis will be semiological in nature.

Thesis Supervisor: David Hodes Friedman  
Title: Associate Professor of the History of  
Architecture

## ***acknowledgements***

This thesis owe its realization to all things I came in contact with in the past few months. The following individuals were the most instrumental to its realization.

David Friedman for his interest and guidance, Benjamin Buchloh for his rigor and enthusiasm, and Mona Serageldin for her eagerness and attentiveness.

I am also in debt to Hashim Serkis for his time and critical feedback, Nasser Rabat for reviewing portions of this thesis, Suhair Al-Mosully and Raad Al Mumaize for shooting the slides. I am also thankful to Rifat Chadirji for his thoughts and guidance.

I am indebted to Mr. Khaled Ousseimi of GEFINOR COMP. Geneva, Switzerland for his contribution to my studies at MIT. I am equally indebted to the Aga Khan program and the Aga Khan scholarship association for their financial support.

I shall thank my friends by recognizing their initials A.C.E.J.M.N.S.T.V.

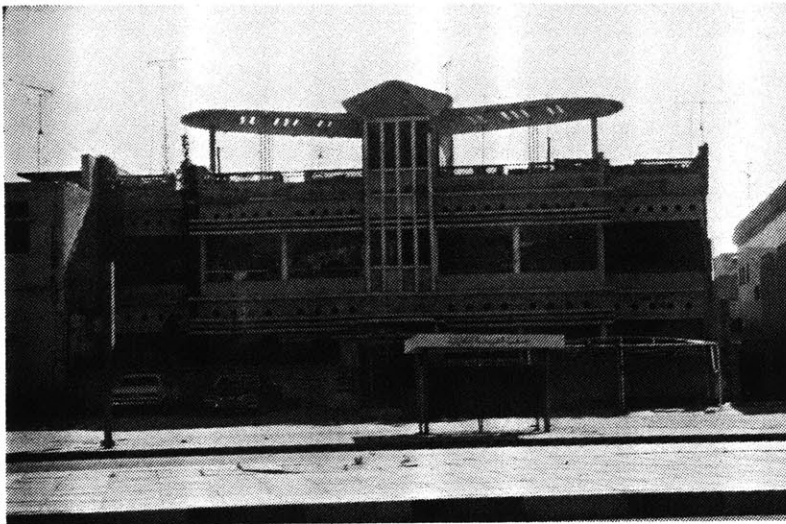
I dedicate this work to the memory of my mother and to my family for their continuous support.

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## " Falling Upon Deaf Ears"<sup>1</sup>: The Case of Colloquial Architecture



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<sup>1</sup>Adolf Loos, "collected Essays 1897-1900", *Spoken Into the Void*, translated by Jane O. Newman and John H. Smith (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: MIT Press, 1982) p. 6.

I am borrowing the German colloquial title of Adolf Loos's collected essays of 1897-1900 which appeared under the title "**Spoken Into the Void**". Jane O. Newman who translated the work into English has noted: "*The title, which we have rendered as Spoken Into the Void, is somewhat more colloquial in the original. An alternative translation might be "Falling upon deaf ears."*"





**Chapter One**

-----**1.0 Introduction**



The relationship between institutions<sup>2</sup> and Mass society<sup>3</sup> is a complex one. This thesis will deal with the issue of representation vis-a-vis "reality" in the relationship between cultural institutions and mass society. This complex subject will be limited to the examination of the cover illustrations of a popular cultural magazine (Al- Arabi) and the institutional discourse in architectural production. These will be analyzed for analogies within the institutional architectural production and mass media, on one hand, and the state of mass society and its architectural expression on the other. This examination will address such important issues as identity crisis, the nature of the institution's representation of mass society, and the implications of these issues.

In the relationship between cultural institutions and mass society two issues are central. First, in

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<sup>2</sup> Alan Bullock, Oliver Stallybrass and Stephen Trombley (editors), *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought* (second edition), (New York: Fontana press, 1988). institutions is defined as: *In Sociology, activities which are repeated or continuous within a regularized pattern that is Normatively sanctioned. Sociologists usually speak of four major complexes of institutions. Political institutions regulate the competition for power. Economic institutions are concerned with the production and distribution of goods and services. Cultural institutions deal with the religious, artistic, and expressive activities and traditions in the society. Kinship institutions focus on the questions of marriage and the family and the rearing of the young.*

<sup>3</sup>Mass society; A society in which similar tastes, habits, opinions, and activities are shared by the large majority of the population who accordingly become less differentiated either as individuals or in terms of social class, etc. *ibid.*

representation what do the institutions project upon mass society. Second, how does mass society internalize these projections and what are the resultant outward effects.

In order to explore the first concern we must recognize the following: institutions have been created by mass society and in that process they have been granted a mythical dimension of power<sup>4</sup>. It is this power that is utilized by the institutions to "guide" that which has created it. The discourse of films, television, magazines, arts, etc, have become more effective and deeply entrenched in mass society's consciousness. The project of such a discourse is to neutralize the masses in order to naturalize the control of the institution over the ideological and economic status of society<sup>5</sup>. These roles are of such grave importance that they must be scrutinized critically. Roland Barthes identified the importance of developing a science of Semiology to deal with this phenomenon. He wrote:

***"The development of publicity, of a national press, of radio, of illustrated news, not to speak of the survival of a myriad rites of communication which rule social appearances makes the development of a semiological science more urgent than ever."***<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> power; control; access; right; duty; authority; force; ..etc.

<sup>5</sup>Marshall Berman, *All that is solid melts into air*, (New York: Penguin Books,1982) p. 111.

<sup>6</sup>Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, (New York: The Noonday Press, 1957)P.112, see footnote.

Though this tradition is well developed in the West, it remains in its infancy in the Middle East. The most interesting work of any critical value to the cultural well being of society is to be found in the work of such feminist writers as Nawal El Saadawi and Fatima Mernissi. In the context of culture - history , Edward Said (the only clear case of semiological analysis; Orientalism), Janet Abu-Lughod, and Ibrahim Abu-Lughod have contributed critically. In the context of faith and religion, the most active research is to be found in Al-Azhar university, the most influential religious institution in the Muslim world. Al- Azhar's research is likely to be limited to its concern with reinterpreting Islamic law in order to resolve the conflicts of modern life in Muslim society. The media has provided critical work -theater, movies, and television shows- that has addressed society's modern problems. The media however, lacks the critical environment which is so important to foster a work that would expose the complexities and tackle the ambiguities of contemporary life. In art and architecture a similar situation persists. Most of the Middle Eastern artists remain in the Impressionistic or post- Impressionistic period<sup>7</sup>. No critical effort is made to address contemporary art in the Middle East; it is as if Art stopped some time in the fourteenth century! Photography, graphic arts, advertising, and

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<sup>7</sup>In Baghdad in the Fifties and Sixties, for example, twenty art groups have appeared with manifestoes in which such search for an Arab school of painting were entertained. Theaa Al- Azawi have lead a group of artists who were interested in capturing the spirit of their time through impressionistic paintings of landscapes. Akeel N. Mulla Hiwaish, "Comparative analysis in Architecture and Planning", *Modern Architecture in Iraq*, (Baghdad, Iraq: The press house of general cultural concern, 1988), P. 226.

industrial design, if at all existent, are limited and underdeveloped. Architecture in the Middle East is well promoted by the institutions in order to bolster their image. However, the rhetoric and dogmatic approaches of these institutions have produced mediocre architecture. In the name of local identity, either Arab or Islamic, the institutions were blind folded and sent into history to reconstruct ruins, hold seminars and invest in research in order to revive a culture that long been dead. At best such a discourse could only mimic an image of the past devoid of its meaning and spirit; a form that had long since been abandoned. Stanford Anderson has suggested:

*"A society that adopts historical reconstructions, ironically, distances itself from the past, just as it comes to know that past"*<sup>8</sup>

Indeed there were a few projects of special interest, but these were designed by foreign architects and were few and far between. In the Middle East architects only Rifat Chadirji<sup>9</sup> has provided us with critical writing on the subject of architecture. Other theoreticians (Arabs or Western Orientalist) have grappled with the issue of identity, and their search seems to have consistently led into the distant past and sometimes right back to the Word of God! This mental block has immobilized the architectural production in the Middle East in the form of

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<sup>8</sup>Stanford Anderson, "Types and Conventions in Time: toward a history for the Duration and Change of Artifacts", *Prespecta* # 18, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT press, 1982 ), p. 109.

<sup>9</sup> Rifat Chadirji, *Concepts and Influences; towards a regionalized international architecture 1952-78*, (London, England: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986).

revivalism; a hypnotic state, simultaneously asleep and trying to be awake, being in the past and in the present, both in illusion and in reality. This kind of revivalism has become the institution's primary source of salvation.

Roland Barthes has captured these architectural polemics in his account of the Basque house in Paris on Rue Gambetta or Rue Jean- Jaures. He wrote;

*" But if I am in the Paris region and I catch a glimpse, ..., of a natty white chalet with red tiles, dark brown half-timbering, an asymmetrical roof and a wattle-and-daub front, I feel as if I were personally receiving an imperious injunction to name this object a Basque chalet: or even better, to see it as the very essence of **basquity**. This is because the concept appears to me in all its appropriative nature: it comes and seek me out in order to oblige me to acknowledge the body of intentions which have motivated it and arranged it there as the signal of an individual history, as a confidence and a complicity: it is a real call, which the owners of the chalet send out to me. And this call, in order to be more imperious, has agreed to all manner of impoverishments: all that justified the Basque house on the plane of technology - the barn, the outside stairs, the dove-cote, etc. - has been dropped; there remains only a brief order, not to be disputed. And the adomination is so frank that I feel this chalet has just been created on the spot, **for me**, like a magical object springing up in my present life without any trace of the history which has caused it."*<sup>10</sup>[His emphasis]

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<sup>10</sup>R. Barthes, *Mythologies....* , P. 124-5.

This passage represents an underlying theme in this thesis. I will expose and question some of the myths at work in traditional architectural elements and modern architectural dogmas. The Basque house was naturalized for Paris by means of technology; a dislocation of *sign* to *signification*; of reality to myth. The transformation of *meaning* (signifier) to *form* is of prime importance to the understanding of the project of *Ideographic* representation<sup>11</sup>. The responsibility of cultural institutions (*bourgeois culture: the body of intentions that motivated it [the Basque chalet in Paris] and arranged it there as a signal of an individual history*<sup>12</sup>) to mass society (that is the *me*, the observer, in the passage) is always naturalized by a dislocation of power (the utilization of *metalanguage, myth*).

Just as power is endowed to institutions, so "*submission*" (or better yet, the appropriation of a mythical reality that of the bourgeoisie) is granted to the masses. It is then interesting to pose the second question; how does mass society internalize these projections and what are their outward effects? This question is extremely complex; nevertheless, within the developed world it has been addressed rigorously.

The Middle East, is in a culturally interesting situation in that it is similar to eighteenth century Europe, yet is open to the full flux of western modernity. This

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<sup>11</sup>I am utilizing the terms; sign, signification; meaning, form; real language, metalanguage ( myth) in the manner proposed by Roland Barthes. *ibid.*, p. 115-7.

<sup>12</sup>*ibid.*



provides for the possibility of a unique and rich experiment. To observe the development of a "bourgeois" society and to identify its dynamics vis-a-vis mass society is an opportunity that cannot be wasted. Berman when discussing the experience of modernity, had the following to say about the third world experience today;

***"These regimes have all tried, in many different ways to achieve what nineteenth century Russians called the leap from feudalism to socialism: in other words, by heroic exertions, to attain the heights of modern community without ever going through the depths of modern fragmentation and disunity ..... When governments spokesmen and propagandists proclaim their various countries to be free of this alien influence(western decadence) what they really mean is merely that they have managed to keep a political and spiritual lid on their people so far. When the lid comes off, or is blown off, the modernist spirit is one as the first to come out: It is the return of the oppressed. It is this spirit, at once lyrical and ironical, corrosive and committed, fantastic and realistic,.."***<sup>13</sup>.

The bourgeoisie in the Middle East, I suspect, is quite different from its European counterpart. I will touch on this in the thesis, but what is clear is that a rapidly growing quasi-European bourgeois culture is

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<sup>13</sup> M. Berman, *All that is solid melts into air.....*, p. 125.

underway. This thesis will draw attention to this social transformation when discussing colloquial architecture. In other words, I will suggest that in colloquial architecture reside the social characteristics of the new bourgeoisie, and that mass society adopts these characteristics thus emulating the bourgeois life style. It is in the nature of the bourgeoisie to constantly change in order to avoid collapsing into the popular culture, consequently its tendency to modernize. The most vibrant state of modernity and the most promising search for identity in this complex Middle Eastern state is taking place here. This thesis will expose some of the dynamics molding this manifestation and the particularities of its characteristics.

## 1.1 Modernity: an Operative Definition

***"Although Modernism can be clearly identified as a distinctive movement, in its deliberate distance from and challenge to more traditional forms of art and thought, it is also strongly characterized by its internal diversity of methods and emphases: a restless and often directly competitive sequence of innovations and experiments, always more immediately recognized by what they are breaking from than by what, in any simple way, they are breaking towards."***<sup>14</sup>

Raymond Williams's definition of modernity will be the operative definition for this thesis. The thesis will argue that *colloquial architecture* is a genuine modernist discourse which breaks away from traditional and modern architecture. It exhibits a restless sequence of innovations and experiments, and can only be recognized by what it breaks away from; i.e. it is identified by the differences in motivations from those of traditional expressions and conventions, on the one hand, and the dogmas of modern architecture, on the other.

In the Middle East two phenomena have provided a conducive environment to the modernization of the built form: one was the process of assimilating and

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<sup>14</sup> Raymond Williams, "against the new conformists", *The Politics of Modernism*, (London. New York: Verso, 1989), P. 43.

appropriating aesthetics, techniques, and technology and the effort to modify what was appropriated to the society's needs; the other was to redefine those needs and conventions so as to optimize the utilization of the new potentialities.

Two architectural manifestations are of prime importance to this thesis. The first analysis will engage "*institutional architecture*". I will utilize the term institutional architecture to denote public buildings that were designed by local or foreign architects and government agencies. In the context of public buildings I will describe the general architectural trends. I will discuss these in two contexts: first, the buildings will be regarded as **autonomous** objects; the building's form and program will be analyzed in the context of its cultural history. Second, the description will be on the **signification** level, as Roland Barthe's understands it. These considerations would facilitate a specific understanding of this architecture vis-a-vis its historical moment. They would permit the discussion to deal with the mythological aspect of representation which would transcend the specific localities of the architectural objects. I will limit this reading to buildings that are located in Kuwait and Baghdad for the following reasons: a) In the fifties and sixties Iraq witnessed the development of two major architectural movements which were active both in Iraq and Kuwait. These movements had advanced manifestoes which recommended what expression architecture should take. b) both countries experienced an oil boom in the fifties and sixties. c) The proximity of the two countries had facilitated

reciprocal influences. d) My familiarity with Iraq, and available materials to sustain the discussion.

The second architectural manifestation is a local phenomenon. Suffice it to suggest, that colloquial architecture is the *avant-garde* state of popular architecture. It could be described as that ambiguous domain between popular expression and high aesthetics. It is the ground upon which certain elements are tested and then transferred to mass society to become a popular expression. It is highly experimental in nature and highly impressionable by *cultural history*<sup>15</sup>. In contrast to high culture aesthetics colloquial architecture seeks no aesthetic language. This architecture differs from Venturi's vernacular architecture in a fundamental way; the latter requires a *post-industrial society*<sup>16</sup> where *signs* and *consumption* are fundamental constituents of the cultural discourse<sup>17</sup>. The former occurs in *developing* cultures where life has not been totally

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<sup>15</sup>Defined by one of its greatest exponents, Johan Huizinga, as the study of 'Themes, SYMBOLS, CONCEPTS, IDEALS, styles, and sentiments,' it overlaps with INTELLECTUAL HISTORY but is also concerned with the HISTORY OF MATERIAL CULTURE and with RITUAL. It is sometimes referred to as *Geistesgeschichte* by those who believe that the art and literature, science and religion of an age are all expressions of the same spirit, that an age is a whole. *Harper dictionary of Modern Thought*.

<sup>16</sup> Post-industrial society is used here as defined by Daniel Bell: characteristics are; the centrality of theoretical knowledge as a source of innovation and of policy formation for the society; economically, it will be marked by the change from good-producing to service economy; occupationally, by the pre-eminence of the professional and technical CLASS; and in decision-making by the creation of new 'intellectual technology'. *ibid*.

<sup>17</sup>Specifically the notion of "the transformation of reality into images, the fragmentation of time into a series of perpetual presents". Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society", *The Anti-Aesthetic; essays on postmodern culture*, (Seattle, Washington: Bay press, 1983), p. 125.

institutionalized; in these cultures society has maintained a degree of *spontaneity*.

In this research I will be concerned with identifying a modern discourse in colloquial architecture. I will then argue that its expression was fueled by the convergence of modernity as it was propagated by institutions and of the society it mobilized to change. I will not discuss the development of architecture in the Middle East. Neither will I discuss the experience induced by modern urban planning as it differed from traditional layouts. I will not discuss the introduction of new functions and modern buildings such as Factories, hospitals, and Museums. I will expose a set of the relationships between the political, economical, and cultural dimensions as they consolidate to form a modern state of architecture. I will trace some of these considerations in colloquial architecture and expose their manifestations. My interests here is to isolate an architectural expression that appears in the Middle Eastern<sup>18</sup> context which exhibits a vibrant state of modernity.

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<sup>18</sup>It is possible to find a similar architectural expression most likely in the developing world.

## 1.2 Premises of Thesis

In general the research will be based on Stanford Anderson's suggested approach:

*"The interpretation of artifacts is an intricate activity, inseparable both from the place of artifacts in cultural systems and from our theories of culture, of time, and of interpretation itself"*<sup>19</sup>

The central discourse will be to reconstruct the cultural system of the period relevant to architectural production. In this case it would be Middle East in the fifties and sixties. I will do this by looking at the cultural conditions through the exposure of social dynamics based on the relationships between the family and its internal composition, and institutions (governments and intellectuals). This cultural condition, due to lack of information, limited time, and my own removed situation will be an *impressionistic*<sup>20</sup> reconstruction. The mediums through which this reconstruction will be arrived at are: a) mass media, b) institutional discourse; national development plans and public building production.

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<sup>19</sup>S. Anderson, Types and conventions in time .... , P. 109.

<sup>20</sup>I am utilizing this term to express the following concept: The conversion of a photographic image into dots which would facilitate an efficient reproduction and transference. The reproduction of certain image through different shades of a limited number of dots would reproduce what I am calling an impressionistic image.

**a.** The most active form of mass media in the Middle East were the magazines. Television replaced magazines as the prime source of mass media in the late sixties-early seventies. In the fifties-sixties period image oriented magazines were very appealing due to the high illiteracy rates. In 1959, for example, illiteracy in the Middle East was lowest in Egypt at 80%<sup>21</sup>. The most popular and culturally instrumental magazine in this period, I would argue, was Al-Arabi which was established in December 1958 rendering it the most relevant publication for this thesis. This is due not only to its subject matter (culture), but also to the discourse of the institution behind the magazine. The thesis will only utilize the cover images of Al-Arabi magazine in order to decipher two *semiological* readings of the images: first will be a reading of the institutional agenda, both explicit and implicit, and second with the aid of statistical information and major cultural dislocations such as revolutions, education, new urban fabric, new economical discourse, etc, I will expose a suppressed reading of the social conditions and the thematic axis that motivate that cultural transformation.

**b.** I will reconstruct, in a general sense, the nature of institutional intervention in urban planning and architectural development. This section will attempt to clarify the theoretical discourse of the institutions and major architectural movements vis-a-vis cultural

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<sup>21</sup> Egypt, United Nations Statistical abstracts, 1959. Due to the different bases upon which these statistics were developed caution must be exercised when dealing with them. For example: children under ten years of age were considered illiterate and the numbers likely had considered urban dwellers only. As such the female illiteracy likely to have been 90%.



transformation and the issue of identity in particular. This section is more particular to the locality that I have chosen (Iraq and Kuwait). Nevertheless, the level at which the reading will be performed will allow me to retrieve the general characteristics that were shared by most Middle Eastern countries at this period. These two constituents (a and b) will allow me to animate *impressionistically* the Middle Eastern *cultural history* of that period. I will utilize this as a background for the thesis central objective which is to recover "*colloquial architecture*"<sup>22</sup> .

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<sup>22</sup> Refer to my definition of *colloquial architecture* in the next section.

### 1.3 Operative Methodology

My operative logic will be based on Raymond Williams description of the nature of movements of modernity which could only be- "***recognized by what they are breaking from than by what, in any simple way, they are breaking towards***"<sup>23</sup>. I will, therefore, examine this expression as seen in its *cultural history* and determine how it differs from traditional and modern architectural aesthetics. I will do this by assuming the position/logic of the modernist/traditionalist of certain architectural elements (fence, garden, main entrance, roof, etc.) then I shall expose their contradiction in my description of colloquial expression. An important consideration I need to advance is that colloquial architecture has not been discussed or written about apart from modern or traditional architecture. Mona Serageldin has discussed the economical logic that resides in the informal developments with which colloquial architecture shares an affinity. Consequently, a portion of the discussion on colloquial expression when its logic stems from the actual state of culture, will involve my personal experience. I have attempted to minimize any such injection and this intrusion is only marginal to the thesis.

The deciphering of colloquial architecture will stem from an external viewpoint that reduces the analysis

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<sup>23</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism* ....., P. 43.

to a two-dimensional reading; i.e its optical reception. This is necessary at this stage. A three dimensional analysis would require a vast body of information that is not available today. Lack of information has rendered it impossible to discuss this architecture as it relates to specific regions. Building technology, available materials, rate of economical growth, the nature of mass media, the rigidity of conventions, ...etc are all important considerations that would play a significant role in the nature of the architectural expression. This study is not intended to provide this kind of historical account of the development of a specific architectural expression as it moves from tradition toward modernity. It should be considered rather, as a *movie clip* in that the reading will attempt to analyze architectural expression within the historical context of its creation rather than in its evolution. As an example, consider a sequence of two movie scenes. Though each scene has its own physical and logical construct both are linked by a thematic axis. These constructs could be deciphered and analyzed as being autonomous in which case their internal composition (physical and logical interiority) must be examined; or they must be analyzed as a thematic axis, where the binding relationships (physical and logical) between the scenes become the focus of analysis. Any radical dislocation in the relationships between the physical and logical constructs within either the autonomy of the scenes or their thematic axis would demand a readjustment of the audience's logic of perception.

Colloquial architecture, I will argue, was a unique manifestation in which tradition and modernity

collapsed in order to promote a hybrid expression that was free of the dogmas of either. This new expression finds its logic in its *cultural history* and lies quite clearly outside the aesthetics of traditional and modern architecture. For this reason there exists an epistemological difficulty which stems from the resistance of this expression to be categorized. In other words this architecture manifests itself in the manner the *cultural history* would require; it is like water taking on the form of that which contains it. This characteristic would render this manifestation the epitome for modernity; to comprehend it would require not only a recovery of its *cultural history*, it would demand a particular logic of perception.

## 1.4 Structure of Thesis

The precedence for this thesis shares topological discourse with such works as Reyner Banham: *"Los Angeles; The Architecture of Four Ecologies"*, and Robert Venturi: *"Learning From Las Vegas"*. Both of these works have dealt with defining a manifestation that is *ambiguous* and undecipherable with conventional research methodologies and approaches. Such manifestations require a new logic of perception that is capable of recovering the particularities of the manifestations, and thus their unique methods and structure of dealing and presenting those manifestations. At the center of this thesis lies Adolf Loos's discourse, his attempts to understand his context devoid of any myths and dogmas. In the foreword to his collected essays *"Spoken In The Void"*, Adolf Loos wrote:

*"As a German, I wish to lodge a complaint against everything that has been abandoned by other peoples only to be proclaimed thereafter as German."*<sup>24</sup>

The aim of this thesis is to question some conventions and dogmas and to recover a unique and promising architectural expression. This expression has been obscured by its own nature and the nature of architectural research in the Middle

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<sup>24</sup>Adolf Loos, "Collected Essays 1897-1900", *Spoken Into the Void*, ( Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T press, 1982), p. 3.

East. The exceptional article "*New Popular housing in the Middle East*"<sup>25</sup> by Mona Serageldin was a confirmation of the existence of such a manifestation and provides hope that this thesis will not end up "*Falling Upon Deaf Ears*".<sup>26</sup>

The structure of this presentation will be unconventional due to the nature of the manifestation. The thesis will utilize two *discursive*<sup>27</sup> fields; mass media images and architecture. Their *discursive* nature is dominated by their intersection at the levels of institutions and of mass society. I will expose within each discourse the extent of their *discursiveness* and this will reveal their potential reciprocity. Appropriate methodologies will be employed for each discourse recognizing its particularities.

In order to facilitate a more effective reading of this thesis the following order will be observed: in the context of *institution* we have institutional architecture and mass media images; in the context of *colloquial architecture* we have *form* and *program*. The discursive nature of *form* is closely associated with that of *institutional architecture*<sup>28</sup>. The introduction of new building technology, materials and architectural expressions usually occurs in such institutional

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<sup>25</sup>Mona Serageldin, "New Popular Housing in the Middle East", *Architecture and Identity*, (Singapore: Concept Media, 1982).

<sup>26</sup>Adolf Loos: *Spoken Into the Void*. ..., p. vi.

<sup>27</sup>Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (translated by A.M. Sheridan Smith), (New York: Pantheon books, 1972).

<sup>28</sup>The introduction of such materials as cement or steel could only occur through institution which would effect the methods and the forms of building. Building public buildings with specific architectural expression also plays an important role in private building.

buildings as hospitals, schools and government offices. These would permeate and influence the architectural production of the private sector, thus the close relationship of *form* to institutional architecture. *program* is associated with *cultural discourse*, thus *mass media images*. The program of the house is directly related to the social structure of the family. This structure would be altered and modified by the government as it introduces laws that require all children to attend schools, women's right to work in the public sector and an improved health conditions. Mass media plays an equally important role in inducing change in the social sphere, thus the role of Al-Arabi's cover illustrations. I would suggest that such a structure is valid because *program* is culture specific while *form* often finds its genesis in institutional building. Since by definition we must reconcile *form* and *program* into colloquial architecture a weaving of the associative overlapping between *institutional architecture* and *mass media images* will naturally occur. There is no fixed order to these four chapters. Each can be read as an entity into itself. The suggested order, however, should produce a better understanding of the forces that have shaped this architecture.

## **1.5 Manifestation**

I wish now to discuss briefly the architectural expression as a manifestation. The fundamental difference that delineate between manifestation and aesthetics is that in the former, an instantaneous expression out of the process of creation (physical as in buildings or art works, or textual as in stories or poems) would be manifested with no concern for mimicking that instant again. The manifestation is an authentic outcome of the needs, skills and materials that determined the object's process of creation. Traditional buildings, for example, at their inceptions were attempts to fulfill specific needs within the context of available skills and materials. The manifestation would emerge from the resolution of function and structure as they are reconciled through a process. It has been argued, correctly I think, that the specificity of traditional or regional expressions are determined by the cultural and physical specificity of a given context. The production of specific skills and cultural conventions would eventually develop an aesthetic expression for a particular community. To foster specific skills and conventions would establish a process that, on one hand, allows aesthetics to develop and be refined, and on the other, the process of refinement not only suppresses the development of alternative discourses but it resists any external influence. There exists a threshold beyond which aestheticization becomes a mere decadence which would suffocate the creative powers of the community, thus



stagnation. External influences or internal movements then are fundamental to induce a fracture or a dislocation that would disturb the hibernating community by evoking their spirit of modernity. In the context of colloquial architecture what is critical for this thesis is the nature of the manifestation vis-a-vis the external influence and the internal tradition.



## ***Chapter Two***

### **——2.0 *Cultural History: Fifties and Sixties***



## 2.0 Urban Planning and Building Production

This period of architectural development was without a doubt the most instrumental in determining the evolution of building production. I will not do justice to the complexity and the vast contribution of the many architects who contributed a great deal to the introduction of new sensibilities and expressions in the built environment. My task here will be limited to recovering a *thematic image* of institutional contribution in the context of architecture. I hope to clarify the institutional stand vis-a-vis the new cultural discourse of modernization and the architectural manifestations that were promoted in order to express their vision of the new society.

The examination of Iraq, as a case study, will be utilized as to expose the various issues and institutions that play a central role in directing and influencing architectural production. I am not interested in the particularities of the Iraqi condition, rather in the general mechanism and the factors at work when a nation is faced with such development. I would suggest that the Iraqi model could be extended to other Middle Eastern countries which were facing similar challenges at precisely the same period.

I will identify the institutions which have a direct relation to architectural production and their themes. Two entities could be identified in the general body

of institution: these are either social formulations such as art and architectural groups or government agencies such as The Public Office for Building Administration. I will briefly review each entity and expose their contribution to architectural expression.

## 2.1 Planning: Autonomy of Expression

In order to understand the extent of modern planning in the Middle East we need to consider only the contribution of *Doxiadis Associates International* since 1958 to such countries as Iraq, Sudan, Libya, and Syria. In Iraq by 1976, for example, Doxiadis Associates had been involved in designing 210 urban planning schemes for neighborhoods in Baghdad alone. Similar planning went into the central district of the eighteen governances that compose the country, and the urban planning of another 50 towns and 101 districts was achieved during the same period<sup>29</sup>. To put this in perspective, Mulla Hiwaish has traced the basic urban planning philosophy that was employed by Doxiadis to his schooling at the University of Pennsylvania in the early thirties: Thus the modernist discourse<sup>30</sup>. It was in this newly expanded urban context that colloquial expression emerged. The Doxiadis Plan consisted of modern grid systems with consideration for modern amenities, with specified land subdivision that were to be sold, subsidized, awarded or built. Mulla Hiwaish has described the new urban context of Iraq in the fifties and early sixties noting:

*" a grid-iron infrastructure was planned with transportation loops and streets hierarchy. The rectangular land subdivision, 600 s.q. meters a lot, were delineated by a fence with one side fronting the*

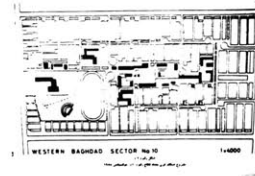


Fig.1 Sector-10  
Western Baghdad.  
Doxiadis, 1958

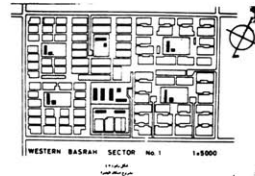


Fig.2 Sector-1 Western  
Basrah. Doxiadis, 1959

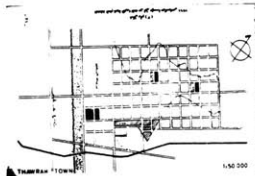


Fig.3 Thawra Town,  
Baghdad. Doxiadis,  
1961

<sup>29</sup> A. Mulla Hiwaish, *Modern Iraqi Architecture.....*, p. 65

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p. 47.

*street . In such context two Western house typologies, with enclosed interior, were employed. **Constructed out of local materials, and with large windows that have distinguished their expression.***<sup>31</sup>(my emphasis and translation)

This new urban form represented a radical shift from the traditional one thus inducing a modern experiment. Wide and linear streets with prescribed sizes and functions invoked order to facilitate the creation of modern living conditions. The authority's role in regulating the rights of individuals to build has rendered the neighbors' permission and negotiation obsolete<sup>32</sup> . Only the fences that now demarcate the adjacent lots would undergo such a process. This freedom has redefined the whole concept of building and started a totally new experience in architectural production. The modern fabric was conducive to freedom of expression<sup>33</sup> which came at a moment of considerable social transformation. Consider the following statistics, in the context of Iraq, as an illustration to better clarify this social upheaval.

*In the context of education the United Nations statistical abstract for the years 1949, 1965, 1983 reads as follows: the number of primary schools have grown from 976, to 4345, to 10138 consecutively. The number of secondary schools have also grown from 28, to 535, to 2027 consecutively. The figures*

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<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, P. 94 .

<sup>32</sup> Such a negotiation was fundamental in every aspect of building in the traditional manner.

<sup>33</sup> Manfredo Tafuri, "Design and Capitalist Development", *Architecture and Utopia*, ( Cambridge,Mass.: MIT Press, 1976), p. 38.



*for the ratio of schools per inhabitant for the years 1949 and 1983 were for primary schools; one school per 5500 inhabitant, to one school per 1450 inhabitant consecutively. For secondary schools; one school per 213600 inhabitant, to one school per 7250 inhabitant. Infant mortality rate has dropped from 111.1 per thousand in 1949, to 23.3 per thousand in 1983. In the context of mobility the number of families per car have dropped from 70 families per car in 1949, to 2.5 families per car in 1983. ( United Nations yearbook statistical abstracts for the corresponding years)*

The new neighborhoods were made up of a diversity of ethnic, religious and educational backgrounds that were grouped and mobilized by new social systems such as: new professions, new working class, new industries, institutions for education, etc.. The order of the urban fabric facilitated a harmonious coexistence of heterogeneous neighbors which would have been impossible in the traditional context. Modern amenities such as running water, electricity, and the introduction of automobiles have produced another radical shift that further facilitate a higher degree of experimentation in the building process.

One of the most instrumental agencies that had a significant influence on the expression of architecture was the *National Agency of Consultation For Architecture and Engineering* .

The architectural staff of this government agency were graduates from the school of architecture at Baghdad University. These architects, trained in the modern tradition, were faced with limited building technology and expertise, low budgets, and rapid



Fig.4 Typical School, Baghdad. Early fifties

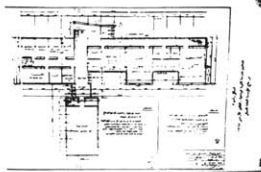


Fig.5 Floor plan of a High School Model. The Public Office for Building Administration, Baghdad, 1965

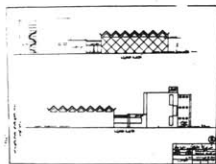


Fig.6 Elevation of A High School Model. The Public Office for Building Administration, Baghdad, 1965

growth which resulted in the production of inferior buildings. *The Public Office of Building Administration* often designed large institutional buildings and government centers all over the country. Such projects had one typical design that was executed by each district, thus reproducing the same structure in different localities without any modifications. It is rather amusing to note the building methodology and the architectural expression of schools and how it had influenced private building production. Consider for example the Public Office For Building Administration model design for secondary schools in 1965. The consequences of such practice were critical in the following ways: a) The model would be implemented in several districts thus presenting the communities with particular images and modern aesthetics, that would come to denote specific institutions - place of learning in this case; b) The implementation of the buildings were based on local techniques and method of construction. For this reason these buildings were designed in such a manner as to minimize any differences in the finishes. For example, since the same model was implemented in different localities, which meant that different materials were utilized (stone or brick). The structure was designed to utilize either material then was covered with a cement finish<sup>34</sup>. Finally, the structure was painted in the subscribed color producing a unified image. An identical construction method was utilized in the private domain as we will see later; c) Local

<sup>34</sup>A. Mulla Hiwaish, *Modern architecture in Iraq* ..., P. 363. My translation from Arabic . Note the structural notes on diagram #5.

contractors and masons would likely be commissioned to execute such structures, thus getting exposed to new architectural expressions. This also furthered their technical abilities and skills which they experimented with in the public domain.

This relationship between the institution and the public is quite important in influencing local architectural production both as a structure and an expression. Other government agencies or ministries were implementing housing schemes for either their workers or subsidized public authorities to develop their own. Though the housing done by these agencies represented only a small percentage of building production, nevertheless, its influence was extremely important. All institutional housing was based on the international style, setting an example for others to follow<sup>35</sup>.

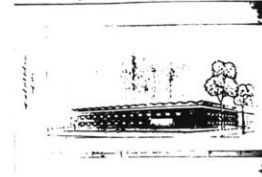


Fig.7 Typical Barracks.  
SV. Hogsbro, for  
General Agency for  
Building. Baghdad,  
1964

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<sup>35</sup>ibid., p.132.

## 2.2 Art and Architectural Movements

There were groups of artists who gathered in the cafes of the forties and fifties to discuss the new spirit of nationality as it gained momentum during and after World War II. Rifat Chadirji noted in his autobiography:

*" we went to a cafe in southern Baghdad next to cafe Brazil ..... it was a large room with a high ceiling and large columns. It was designed by such architects as Midhat Ali Madloom ..... and such artists as Jawad Salim who painted a mural on the wall behind the bar"*<sup>36</sup> (my translation)

These gatherings were the nucleus of intellectual movements that were to become extremely active in the search for cultural identity in the arts and architecture. These artists and architects were actively involved in the resistance against colonial powers. The architect Midhat Ali Madloom, seen by Chadirji in the cafe, had participated in the 1941 Gailani Coup, for which he was exiled for three years to Rhodesia.<sup>37</sup> The work of Jawad Salim was always motivated by the search for expression of the new Iraqi individual. He finally developed a distinctive style which became the epitome, within the artistic circle, of the new society. For this he was

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<sup>36</sup>Rifat Chadirji, *Taha street and Hamersmith*, ( Beirut, Lebanon: the institute for Arab research,1985), p.14. (Arabic text).

<sup>37</sup>Ihsan Fethi, "Contemporary architecture in Baghdad: its roots and transition", *Medinat Al Salaam: Baghdad 1979-83*, (Tokyo, Japan: Process Architecture, 1985), p. 125.

commissioned after the 1958 revolution to build a statue of liberation at one of Baghdad's central and most important squares . Out of those meeting two art movements with manifestoes developed late in the fifties which included architects in their memberships<sup>38</sup>. These movements were "*The Baghdadi Group For Modern Art*"<sup>39</sup> led by Jawad Salim, and "*Al-Azawi and Comrades [friends]*"<sup>40</sup> led by Al-Azawi. These two groups have followed different approaches in the search for identity. The Baghdadi Group For Modern Art was seeking to find an expression outside both modern and traditional discourses. One of its sub-groups The New Vision<sup>41</sup> published its manifesto declaring:

*"We must disassemble tradition as to invent it again, we must transcend it as to step outside it..... We are the generation of change, of overcoming, of ingenuity, we refuse the mummified past, we refuse the artist of fragmentation and of boundaries, we advance, we fall, but we will not be setback as we present our new vision to the world ."*<sup>42</sup> (my translation)

Indeed this group was ideologically motivated and they had clear political agendas which I will not explore here. Surely such architects as Rifat Chadirji and Qahtan Awni were influenced by this group and by Jawad Salim in particular<sup>43</sup>. As for The Al-Azawi



Fig.8 Statue of Liberation. Jawad Salim, Baghdad 1958-61



Fig.9 Statue of Liberation, Jawad Salim.

<sup>38</sup>A. Mulla Hiwaish. *Modern architecture in Iraq*...., P. 226.

<sup>39</sup>ibid.

<sup>40</sup>ibid.

<sup>41</sup>ibid.

<sup>42</sup>ibid.

<sup>43</sup>R. Chadirji, *Taha street and Hamersmith* ....., p.19.

group they had a more conventional discourse where artists were involved in impressionistic paintings of natural scenes. They were more interested in capturing the spirit of the society rather than defining a totally new one. Both of these movements were in close association with the architectural discourse, however, architecture in the fifties within these circles did not attain a full consciousness of its own cultural discourse. The rapid development that was induced after The 1952 agreement<sup>44</sup> which increased oil revenues from 3 million ID (*Iraqi Dinar*) in 1950 to 50 million ID in 1953<sup>45</sup> has employed the, by then, thirty Iraqi architects who were all graduated from either England or the United State except two who were from Egypt<sup>46</sup>. Ihsan Fathi, in describing the architectural production of Iraqi architects in the Fifties has noted:

*"It may be considered as a hasty experimental phase during which Iraqi architects abandoned their cultural roots in favour of catching up with the western bandwagon."<sup>47</sup>*

The Fifties building production was one of modern architecture due to rapid development and Western academia trained architects. The admiration for western architecture was so considerable the development board, in 1957, invited world renowned

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<sup>44</sup>I. Fethi, *Process Architecture: Medinat Al Salaam...*, p.125.

<sup>45</sup>ibid.

<sup>46</sup> . Numan Jalili, and Hamid Rashid graduated from Cairo in 1946 and 1951 consecutively. ibid., p. 132.

<sup>47</sup>ibid.

architects to lecture and design schemes for Baghdad. They attracted such architects as Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier, Alvar Alto, Walter Gropius, and Doxiadis. The Sports complex, designed by Le Corbusier, was constructed; Baghdad University, designed by Walter Gropius, still under construction; and Doxiadis executed hundreds of large urban planning schemes and an equal number of housing projects. These schemes played an instrumental role in influencing architecture, specifically, urban planning and Baghdad University. Critical events, instrumental to influencing architecture, were the opening of the first cement factory and the revolution of 1958. Ihsan Fethi noted:

*"In 1952 the first Cement Factory was opened and thus offered a greater momentum for reinforced concrete to be used more widely. The 1958 July Revolution created probably the most significant impact on Iraqi architecture because not only the strong ties with the west were suddenly shattered, but also it created a tremendous pride and nationalism. This was immediately reflected in the plastic art as well as architecture."<sup>48</sup>*

In 1959 the Iraqi union for Engineers was founded and included architects in its membership. In the same year a department of architecture was established due to the effort of Husham Munir, Mohamed Makiya, Abdulla Kamel, Rifat Chadirji, and Qahtan Awni<sup>49</sup>. As the role of the architect become

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<sup>48</sup>ibid., p. 129.

<sup>49</sup>ibid.

recognized, and accelerated development was taking place, new architectural experiments were developing. In the early sixties Baghdad was receiving 40,000 immigrants annually from the rural area<sup>50</sup>. Urban sprawl was taking the form of modern suburbs that were subdivided and given at nominal prices to members of numerous professional communities. The conditions were ideal for a wide range of architectural experimentation in search of local expression. This search was led by the thirty architects who were joined, in 1964, by the first locally educated architects<sup>51</sup>.

By the mid Sixties, few distinctive architectural tendencies were taking place. Three general themes were distinctive and influential. I will utilize operative titles to identify these tendencies as *Modernist Theme*; *Modern Regionalist Theme*; and *Modern Traditionalist Theme*<sup>52</sup>. I will briefly provide some general description of these themes illustrated by corresponding images.

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<sup>50</sup>A. Mulla Hiwaish, *Modern architecture in Iraq...*, P. 122.

<sup>51</sup>I. Fethi, *Process Architecture: Medinat Al Salaam...*, p.129.

<sup>52</sup>These titles should not be considered as absolute, rather I am merely using them to facilitate an easier method of communication and in no way do I assume that these trends should be limited in their internal logic to these operative titles.



### 2.2.1 Modernist Theme

The architects of this theme were, I would suggest, Midhat Madhloom as seen in his building Thikeer Building, 1951-52; Hisham Munir as seen in Baghdad Chamber of Commerce, 1963; Jaafar Allawi as seen in Mirjan building, 1954; Abdulla Ihsan Kamel as seen in Khan al- Pasha Building, 1957; etc. The architectural expression of these buildings were modern with elaborate shading devices or deep recesses as to protect the openings. There were no attempts to explore any regional redefinitions of the modern aesthetics in these buildings beyond the problem of shading. Ihsan Fathi has noted in regard to Husham Munir's work, who obtained more commissions and build more buildings in Iraq than perhaps any other architect, suggesting:

*"His work with Madhloom on Baghdad University with Walter Gropius had influenced his style very clearly. Munir's work, however, has a distinctive style, though not necessarily of 'Islamic' character. His style maybe described as 'correct' and elegant, well composed in terms of form and mass but lack strong visual excitement."*<sup>53</sup>

The theme of this group was inclined clearly towards a modern expression. The large number of commissions this group has executed, specifically in the public domain, was an indication of the institutional inclination towards adopting modern

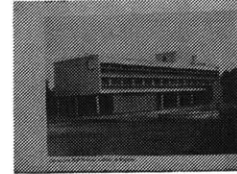


Fig.10 Red Crescent, Alen Ali-Jawdat. Baghdad, early fifties

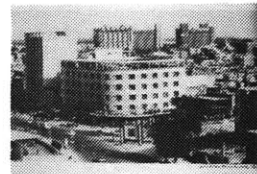


Fig.11 Mirjan building, Jaafar Alawi. Baghdad, 1954

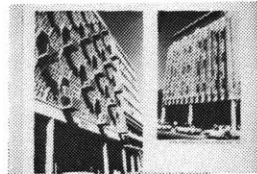


Fig.12 Thikeer building, Midhat Madhloom. Baghdad, 1951-52  
Khan al-pasha building, Abdulla Ihsan. Baghdad, 1957

<sup>53</sup>I. Fethi, *Process Architecture...*, p.132.



**Fig.13 Chamber of  
Commerce, Husham  
Munir. Baghdad, 1963**

architectural aesthetics. This theme was synchronous to modernization as was promoted by institution and was reinforced by the modern city layouts that were designed by Doxiadis.

## 2.2.2 Modern-Regionalist Theme

At the center of this group were Rifat Chadirji and Qahtan Awni. The discourse here was to develop an architectural expression though fundamentally modern but also regionally specific. The polemics of reconciling tradition with modernity in a rapidly transforming context had presented a tremendous challenge to the work of this group. Their experimentations has produced the most interesting expressions. Fethi described Chadirji's contribution noting:

*"Chadirji now (after 1961-62) began to use local brick and concrete in fair-face technique, and turquoise wooden shutters.... Chadirji's contribution for the evolution of a local school of design is very impressive indeed. His new style provided an obvious link with the past, with the essence of Abbasid architecture- in its treatment of materials, climate and light. He created several works which still represent the most serious and creative attempts in Iraq."*<sup>54</sup>

Both Chadirji and Qahtan Awni were close friends whose works exhibited similar tendencies. Chadirji in his autobiography recalls this close association:

*"Qahtan Awni was not only a friend of thirty years, rather, we were contemporaries in developing our discourses, we became architects at the same time*

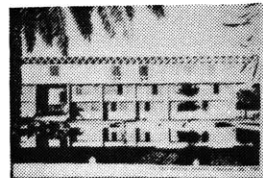


Fig.14 The American Embassy, J. L. Sert. Baghdad, 1957-63

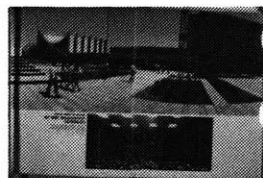


Fig.15 Al-Mustansria University, Qahtan Awni. Baghdad, 1963

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<sup>54</sup>ibid., P. 131.



Fig.16 Office building,  
Rifat Chadirji. Baghdad,  
1966

*hence our reciprocal influences, discussion, and arguments. Thus influencing each other.*"<sup>55</sup>(my translation)

The fundamental theme of this discourse was to develop regionally specific modern architecture. One of its most conspicuous characteristics was the utilization of brick and concrete frame. Both architects maintained a modernist clarity in expressing the materials and the structure. The integration of regional character was attempted through the utilizations of traditional brick and abstracted traditional forms such as arches. The work of these architects require a close examination which lies beyond the objective of this thesis. We only need to retain two themes: a) the motivation in this group was to develop an architectural expression modern but also regional. b) the utilization of brick and concrete frame as a structural system was a popular construction method. Chadirji designed and executed a large number of buildings both in Iraq and the Gulf countries. The majority of them were institutional projects. As for Awni his most famous contribution was University of Mustansiriya<sup>56</sup>.

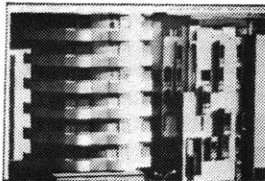


Fig.17 Office buildings,  
Hazim Namiq and Rifat  
Chadirji. Baghdad, mid-  
sixties

<sup>55</sup>R. Chadirji, *Taha street and Hamersmith ...*, p. 5.

<sup>56</sup>a number of foreign architects who taught at the school of architecture have worked for Qahtan Awni when he was designing the Mustansiriya. I. Fathi, *Process Architecture...*, P. 131.

### 2.2.3 Modern-Traditional Theme

This group was centered around Dr. Mohamed Makyia who was the dean of the architectural school in Baghdad for ten years<sup>57</sup>. In 1964 Makyia began addressing the need to develop an architectural expression that would recognize tradition<sup>58</sup>. Makyia's work was fundamentally modern with the provision to include some traditional elements that were basically applied to the facade. These elements were not transformed or abstracted as done by Chadirji and Awni rather they made immediate references to specific historical monuments. Akeel N. Hiwaish described Makiya's work suggesting:

*" The project would be designed based on modern methods and considerations first. A grafting of some elements that were copied from tradition would then take place. This could be seen in Makiya's proposal for the foreign ministry in 1967 which was inspired by Boston city hall and traditional elements (the arch and mashrabiya)"*<sup>59</sup> (my translation)

In the sixties this discourse was limited only to pick up momentum towards the end of the decade. This search for identity was fueled by the Arab defeat in the 1967 war<sup>60</sup>. Makiya's search was analogous to Al-Azawi's art movement; an attempt to capture the

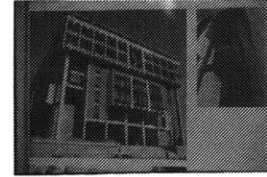


Fig.18 Water Board, Mohamood Al-Ali and Mohamed Makyia. Baghdad, mid - sixties



Fig.19 College of Theology, Mohamed Makyia associate. Baghdad, 1966

<sup>57</sup>A. Mulla Hiwaish. *Modern architecture in Iraq....*, P. 251.

<sup>58</sup>ibid., p. 248.

<sup>59</sup>ibid., p. 253.

<sup>60</sup>The Arab Israeli war were the Arab nations lost the conflict which raised a great deal of dissatisfaction with the West and disappointment with the Arab state in general.

identity of society not to define a new one. His design's, consequently, appear strained by the superimposition of traditional elements on a basically modern building.

The search for local expression and a wide range of experimentation in architecture was taking place in the Fifties and Sixties. Only Chadirji and Awni, based on modern discourses, were able to develop a unique style that was sensitive to the locality - their integration of brick and reinforced concrete. The majority of the buildings, done by these groups, were institutional buildings. This facilitated high visibility, consequently, they were influential. Most of these architects had also worked in the Gulf countries and Kuwait in particular. The majority of buildings, executed in this period established modern aesthetics and only towards the middle and the end of the Sixties did tradition and regionalism become an important issue. Even then the number of buildings that attempted to deal with the subject were very limited.

### **2.3 Status of Housing: Public and Private Domain**

The institution's definition of modernity was propagated through mass media. This was illustrated in the mass media, as suggested through the analysis of Al-Arabi's cover. The development plans included social programs, education, health, modern city layout, and architectural expression. These factors consolidated to form the foreground of a scene the background of which was determined by tradition.

The United Nations statistical abstracts (70's-80's) have shown, though no figures were available for the fifties and sixties, that only ten percent of the building activity was performed by the government. If we consider, with caution, that such a trend could be taken as indicative of the sixties, then it is evident that construction had taken place predominantly within the private domain. The growth of private building industry and practice could be seen in the United Nations statistical abstracts as reflected in the number of private building or repair permits that were granted:

*In the year 1949 the number of new building permits granted were 3347, and the repair permits were numbered at 13053. in 1965 the new building permits granted were 16238, and a smaller number of repairs( no statistics were available for repairs for that year, however preceding and following years suggest a sharp decline in numbers of repairs was*

*the trend in the sixties). in 1983 the number of new building permits granted were 66621, and repairs were 15971. In 1981 the number of new building permits granted reached unprecedented height of 240334, and repair permits were 26364. The decline in 1983 was due to economical difficulties caused by Iraq-Iran war. ( United Nations yearbook statistical abstracts for corresponding years)*

The demand for new buildings grew rather rapidly. This was also fueled by the rural migration into the cities. This migration reached 33000 people a year into Baghdad alone during the Fifties, and increased to 41000 during the Sixties<sup>61</sup>. The statistics indicate that people were building new far more than attending to repairs. This could be understood as an indication of:

- A.** New buildings were needed to provide for the new cultural condition.
- B.** Social aspiration for modern environment and new architecture was strong. i.e. people were moving outside the old cities.
- C.** Improved purchasing power provided for the realization of peoples most fundamental aspiration; that of building a new home.
- D.** Change and new developments were the direction of the cultural thrust.

This dynamic situation motivated society to an active and *concrete* participation in its realization. Construction was the society's most immediate and conspicuous activity, hence the pressure to engage

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<sup>61</sup>A. Mulla Hiwaish, *Modern architecture in Iraq....*, P. 122.



the act of building. The society was mobilized to build in a manner that fulfills its aspiration. After the 1958 revolution, the government embarked on building numerous housing schemes for its workers. These schemes were designed on western models - thus satisfying a whole set of aspirations - and were executed with local materials - rendering them affordable and easy to appropriate. The general public appropriated these housing schemes as a precedence for their housing. The choice of the Western house typology was an extremely complex issue for the following reasons:

**First**, there was a psychological affinity with the west (England, France, and Italy) for they were the colonizers. The Middle Eastern societies came to admire the West for its technological advances and high living standard. In order to achieve modernity a dislocation of the colonial powers was necessary to liberate the forces of change and to accelerate the process of transformation. What I am suggesting here is that the political upheaval that eliminated the colonial powers was instigated by the colonial powers resistance to fulfill the society's desire to modernize-Westernize<sup>62</sup>. This is critical in order to understand that anti-colonialism did not contradict the liberated society's desire to become Westernized. Consequently upon liberation the new programs for developments were basically Western



Fig.20 Yarmook Master Plan, Doxiadis. Baghdad, 1963

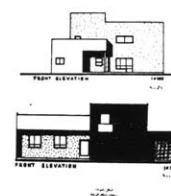


Fig. 21 Elevation: Yarmook Government Housing. Baghdad, 1963

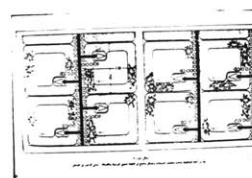


Fig.22 Plans for typical housing. Mousil, Iraq. Mid - sixties

<sup>62</sup> The project of colonialism was to sustain the colonized in a state where they were demobilized socially and economically. To Westernize means the achievement of some basic requirement, such as education and health, which would surpass the critical threshold for unleashing the masses desire for modernity which ultimately means the end of colonial control.

and the social affinity was, ironically, with the colonial nations.

**Second**, on a more pragmatic level, the constituents of modernity<sup>63</sup> as came to be known and desired in the twentieth century were Western creations, therefore to seek precedents from the West was only a logical conclusion.

**Third**, Society was mobilized to seek modernity, thus it was necessary to break away from the conventional discourse to actualize the birth of the new one. The modern house presented itself as the optimum integral typology to the new urban fabric; conversely the urban fabric was conceived with this typology in mind. The freedom of isolated individual expressions, implicit in the grid-iron urban layout<sup>64</sup> encouraged the implementation of such a typology. The possibility of building without being constrained by the neighbors was an immediate realization of the new social condition.

**Fourth**, The modern house typology did not conflict with culture or the new social situation, rather its transparency has rendered it accessible to varying states of cultural transformation. Its simple structure has acquired popularity with the introduction of new material such as I-Beam and concrete. These

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<sup>63</sup> Industrialization and its supporting constituents: education, health, media, amenities, etc

<sup>64</sup> Tafuri has noted: "The use of a regular network of arteries as a simple, flexible support for an urban structure to be safeguarded in its continual transformation, realizes an objective never arrived at in Europe. In the American city, absolute liberty is granted to the single architectural fragment, but this fragment is situated in a context that does not condition formally: the secondary elements of the city are given maximum articulation, while laws governing the whole are rigidly maintained." M. Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia...*, p. 38.

structures utilized traditional building skills<sup>65</sup> extensively.

This dynamic context produced a spectrum of architectural manifestation that, I would suggest, were an epitome as a modernist experience. This experience could be traced through the development of building manifestations which I am calling colloquial architecture. In the following sections I will discuss form in colloquial architecture. The form will be discussed with the cultural history that was described above, the discussion of mass media and the program of colloquial architecture as a backdrop. I will reveal the nature of its manifestation and how it differs from traditional and modern architecture.

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<sup>65</sup> According to the *United Nation Statistical abstract* resource for the years 1970-83, in Iraq for example, that ninety percentage of the buildings were erected utilizing brick as the principal material. This of course was in conjunction with utilizing either concrete or concrete frame. This is a clear indication of the continuity of brick construction, however it was a continuity that did not mimic traditional conventions of building.



***Chapter three***

**—————3.0 Colloquial architecture: Form**



In the Middle East the basic building materials are brick and stone, however, in the past few decades concrete and concrete blocks became an important constituent of building structure. This, I would suggest, was due to the growing demands for a more flexible structure which was induced by rapid and unpredictable growth. The structure of colloquial architecture was characterized by heavy construction. Permanent and durable materials, brick, stone, and concrete were used, thus continuing the tradition of building for permanence. My contention here is to point out some of the different ways in which this hybrid structure stepped outside the institutions of modern and traditional construction in order to provide a compatibility of structural requirements to an unpredictable social transformation.

### **3.1 Building Methods**

I will review building methods in the context of the following architectural element's; wall, ceiling, window and door openings, and exterior finishes. The reason for dealing with structure in this manner is because diverse building methods, not necessarily compatible, are usually utilized in the construction of one building. It would be more accurate to consider these buildings as a collage of materials and building methods. The reason for this could be attributed to economic conditions, availability of materials, availability of skilled labor, the absence of an ideological discourse towards architecture, and the ever transforming social context.



### **3.1.1 Wall Structure**

Colloquial architecture utilized a combined building system for the construction of its walls. Poured in place reinforced concrete frame provided the skeleton of the wall structure which was filled by conventional brick or stone construction. The concrete frame was the most expensive element of construction . Conventional and cheaper brick construction was utilized to balance the construction expenses. The concrete frame attained a superior position to all other materials because of: **1.** the capacity of this structure to stand heavy loads specifically when the frame was over engineered which was a typical practice. **2.** allowing further addition to the building without the need to upgrade the structure. The tradition of adding to the building is an old one. The concrete frame provided the ideal structure to maintain such a practice, adding vertically, in the modern context. **3.** The plasticity of the material provoked a spectrum of experiments in which specific expressions were realized. **4.** Traditional concepts of permanence and solidity were enhanced further by this structure. In fact the amount of concrete utilized in building these structures was relatively proportionate to the importance and the value of the building. People took pride in how many cubic meters of concrete and what size of bars were used in building their houses. The amount of concrete was the indication of strength and permanence of construction. The employment of reinforced concrete construction in institutional buildings, on one hand, and the constant

collapse of brick buildings in the traditional quarters, on the other, provided a clear evidence of the superiority of concrete frame structure. The nature of reinforced concrete appealed quite strongly to the traditional desire of permanent building. This structure seems to have the potential to fulfill that dream. Needless to say that concrete had a spectrum of other characteristics that were explored by modern architecture which made it even more appealing to society. There was a whole psychological effect on the social interactions and conception of concrete construction, for example: In Iraq there exist a colloquial dictum which goes "*aha! you could see through concrete*". The utilization of this dictum would normally be invoked when an individual wishes to express his admiration for someone's wit. Here the metaphor of concrete was employed as a signification for its opaqueness and ambiguity. The strength it possessed stems from obscured elements that are not visible without the wit to discern them. There are other dictums from other Arab countries where specific characteristics of the concrete are employed metaphorically in a verity of contexts. It is of worthy to note that pouring concrete has become the most ritualized event of building in Middle East.

The concrete frame, usually, was filled by brick, stone, or concrete blocks. The material for this infill would be determined by the locality of the project. Concrete block construction was not utilized much until very recently. One of the reason was their hallow interiors which were taken to be fragile, thus standing at odds with the desired solidity of building

construction. This changed later due to the economical affordability of concrete blocks and the demystification of their fragility. What was critically unique in the frame-wall structural system was the proper integration and the optimization of two different building tradition to create a hybrid system that catered for a specific social needs. It has become a common scene to see the concrete columns rise beyond the roof level with their bars exposed awaiting the fulfillment of their destiny that of being completed. In the nakedness of these column lies the signification of strife and the capacity of society to develop. The unfinished state of the structure was a graphic evidence to the absence of any consideration for structural aesthetics. In colloquial architecture the structure has taken on a whole new manifestation that stands outside the conventions of tradition and modern aesthetics. As in modern architecture, colloquial expression has employed a "universal" structure that of column and slab to facilitate the possibility of expansion, thus the continuum of traditional convention. In contrast to modernist discourse, this structure was utilized to produce heavy, firm, and permanent buildings. Colloquial architecture resisted to integrate the structure aesthetically, and attempted no concealment of the unfinished program of the building. In stead the exposed structure with steel bars reaching out of the concrete columns was both a confirmation of the incompleteness of the project and the aspiration to fulfill the demand of the steel bars call for wholeness.

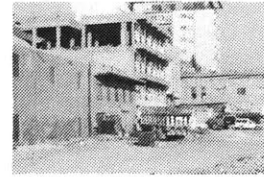


Fig.23 Concrete frame in Baghdad. Note the brick in-fill walls.



Fig.24 Concrete frame and concrete block construction, contemporary, Baghdad, 1980s

### 3.1.2 Roof Structure

There exist two structural methods for constructing the roof, in colloquial architecture, these were the *Jack-arch* and the concrete slab. The introduction of the *Jack-arch* to Iraq, occurred in the early twentieth century by German engineers. These engineers worked in collaboration with the Turkish authorities in connecting Baghdad to Europe by train. Ihsan Fethi noted the following in regard to the introduction of the Jack arch:

*"Another major influence took place when, in collaboration with the Turkish authorities, the German engineers introduced the use of I-steel joists for shallow brick-arching, known as Jack-arch construction. This method was quickly taken up by local masons because it offered a quicker, cheaper, and a more durable building technique."*<sup>66</sup>

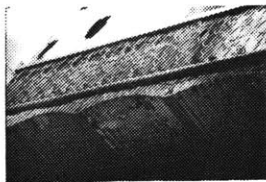


Fig.25 Jack-Arch construction in traditional house. Baghdad, 1930s - 40s

The *Jack-arch* was a remarkable bridge between traditional brick and steel. The I-beam was utilized to hold shallow vaults of 90cm apart, thus continuing tradition of building with vaults. The I- beams did not change the basic building conventions which were the reason for not altering the architectural expression of traditional houses. Ihsan Fethi noted:

*"In some houses, where the roof had collapsed it was replaced by the jack-arch, consequently, the new*

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<sup>66</sup>I. Fethi, *Process Architecture ...*, p. 119.

*system did not alter the basic appearance of the traditional house."*<sup>67</sup>

What the *jack-arch* really done was to render the construction system efficient with regard to materials and time when compared with traditional roof construction. Most importantly such construction method produced flat roofs rather cheaply, thus fulfilling a need that traditionally required an extensive effort to attain. Ihsan Fethi described the traditional method of obtaining a flat roof in the traditional houses of Mosul<sup>68</sup> noting:

*" In order to build a flat roof, the spaces left between the construction of the arches and the roof had to be filled in, the ideal way of doing this was to use ceramic jugs, placed sideways, one on top of the other."*<sup>69</sup>

Indeed the new construction displaced traditional vaulting because it was more efficient specifically in dense neighborhoods. There the houses had to rise two to three stories high. In order to attain flat roofs in three story residence - in the manner described earlier - was structurally quite formidable. This was more so in the context of building with bearing wall construction. The thrust of the vaults and the extra weight added to obtain flat roofs rising three stories high renders the construction very heavy. It might be

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<sup>67</sup>Ihsan Fethi, "Urban conservation in Iraq", *A thesis Submitted for Phd.*, (Sheffield, England: University of Sheffield, 1977).

<sup>68</sup>Iraq's largest northern city. It has existed for thousands of years

<sup>69</sup>I. Fethi, *Phd thesis...*, p. ?

argued that attached housing was necessary to retain the thrust of adjacent houses in the traditional fabric which necessitated a close coordination between neighbors. The *jack-arch* construction resolved a number of structural problems. In this construction the forces were downward oriented. As a result the width of the wall structure was reduced considerably - from 80cm to 40 or 30cm - making the building cheaper and more autonomous. The autonomy gained by the *jack-arch* was to play an important role in the modern urban layouts of the Fifties and Sixties. The *jack-arch* by the Fifties was widely accepted as the common building practice in Iraq. Therefore, modern urban fabric of the Fifties and Sixties did not deal with a tradition that lacked the capacity to build in an autonomous context. Rather the process of modernization was further animated by the new capacity of this structure to facilitate efficient and affordable detached houses. The introduction of the *Jack-arch* was indeed a metamorphic act that freed, not completely, building practice from traditional one.



Fig.26 Concrete slab and concrete block construction. Kuwait, 1980s

The economic and social realities were developing the need for a more flexible system with the capacity to expand vertically in an efficient and economic manner. The *jack-arch* construction and the traditional methods were both bearing wall construction that required an extensive upgrading when expanded vertically. For this reason they were displaced by reinforced concrete. The column-slab construction system attracted a strong popularity due to the advantages it offered over other construction methods. Flexibility, strength, durability, and safety

rendered it an extremely desirable system of building. This was more true in the cases of those house holds who were planning an incremental growth vertically or rich clients who were concerned with permanence. Concrete slabs had also facilitated the utilization of overhangs and projections more extensively. Round balconies or projections became possible, consequently their appearance could be traced back to the introduction of this building methodology. The concrete slab had been utilized, to great extent, precisely in the manner the *jack-arch* construction was used. This construction did not develop any unique architectural manifestation within the interior spaces. What was required off of the slab was to provide flexibility to expand, permanence, and capacity to stand heavy loads. It is clear that the potential of reinforced concrete construction remains latent in the context of the Middle East, however, the continuous experimentation and the mastery of the concrete technology had in certain instances created original expressions as seen in colloquial architecture.

What is interesting to note about these structures is their ability to extend some conventions from one system to the other without any radical shift. The vaulting in the *jack-arch* construction was certainly an extension of the traditional practice. In fact this was so much so that no radical shift in the expression of houses built in traditional context occurred. The complete appropriation of *jack-arch* system was an indication of a completely pragmatic discourse and an absence of an aesthetic one. The inhabitants had no dogmas about abandoning the traditional systems

in favor of other alternative as long as these alternatives did not contradict their logic.

The psychic implication of concrete characteristics on culture, as seen in the usage of colloquial dictums, is preparing the grounds - as was the case with the *Jack-Arch* and its role in urban setting of the Fifties and Sixties - for another metamorphic change in construction and a new phase of urban development.



### **3.1.3 Window and Door Openings**

Is it absurd to suggest that all, or almost all, the openings found in colloquial architecture were rectangular. Ironically this might very well be the case. The headers utilized to build these openings were steel lintels, precast or poured in place concrete beams. In the context of brick wall construction the most common practice had been to provide a continuously reinforced concrete beam that run around the whole structure and was placed at the top of the openings. This did bind the structure continuously and rendered all openings lined up. Though there was greater freedom to placing the openings when utilizing steel or precast concrete lintels, nevertheless, these openings were often placed at the same level. Such a practice was due to either conventions or a need for a balance of interior space. What is crucial here is that no single construction method would necessarily be used exclusively. In the fifties and sixties the openings were usually all rectangular. This, I suggest, was not due to modernist aesthetics nor a rejection of traditional conventions, rather it was mostly a pragmatic manifestation. Rectangular openings were the most efficient with regard to materials, time, and affordability, thus its logical manifestation. This does not mean that rectangular openings were not influenced to a certain degree by modern architecture, rather if they were to resist the traditional logic of building - building expediently - the outcome would likely to be different. In other

words, the pragmatic character of rectangular openings were the intersection of colloquial and modern architecture. But for the colloquial architecture it was devoid of any *aesthetics*.

In relation to the type of window materials that were used, steel and aluminum were the most popular. Large aluminum windows were symbol of wealth in many Middle Eastern countries. This was not due to their aesthetic qualities, but rather to their rarity and cost.

### 3.1.4 Exterior Finish

In general, colloquial architecture draped itself with the fine finish of a concrete skin. This was most conspicuous for its affiliation with modern architecture. The clarity of the geometric composition and the reductivist nature of its finish collapsed colloquial architecture into the international style reducing it to mere mimicry. I would like to suggest that the concrete finish in colloquial architecture was primarily functional and not one of aesthetic. This, however, does not negate the influence of international style on this expression, rather what is more critical is what latent potentials did the society recover from this finish, and how culturally bound was this recovery. This is important in order to reveal the reasons behind the popularity of concrete finish, and consequently it will allow us to perceive of this architecture on its own merits.

The smooth concrete finish provided an excellent solution to the problem of dust in Middle East. It collects very little dust when compared to brick or stone buildings, and with the introduction of running water it proved efficient when hosed down. Later buildings that used stone for their facades, for example, utilized smoothly finished stone that, quite likely, was influenced by the smooth concrete finish. The concrete did lend itself to painting, thus the freedom to change the color of the building. Paint was also utilized to prevent moisture from infiltrating into the structure by applying specific coatings, and



Fig.27 Cement finish.  
Baghdad, 1960s

the colors were used as a mean to identify buildings. Surely the application of colors on buildings was a radical shift from the traditional practice. In contrast to the brown colors of traditional quarters, the new buildings experimented with a spectrum of colors which rendered these buildings more heterogeneous than what they really are. It was this diversity in color schemes that frequently rendered the expression of colloquial architecture as perceptually irritating when seen *en masse*. This heterogeneity, I would suggest, was an authentic expression of the society's makeup - in modern neighborhoods - and desire to differentiate its constituencies. The affordability, durability, and the low skilled nature of concrete finish stands behind its popularity. One of its most important uses was to produce a good quality finish for buildings that were made out of cheap and diverse materials. It was also used to cover up a far less articulate construction when compared to traditional building. This was extremely important for the time and cost of construction in the traditional manner made it obsolete due to the large demand for building.

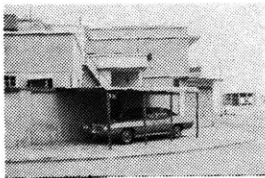


Fig.28 Paint and concrete finish. Kuwait, 1960s

This was not to dislocate the employment of traditional construction materials (brick or stone) or abandon existing skills. Rather it integrated them with the new materials and skills which created a building methodology that optimized its resources and executed construction expediently. The concrete finish became an integrating element for a diversity of materials (brick, stone, or concrete blocks) and spectrum of skills that were usually used in construction. It is clear that concrete finish was not

devised by modern architects to hide a collage of materials and skills of construction, this would run in direct contradiction to the modernist dogma of structural expression. The modernist, in stead, used it to produce pure geometries with an efficient and cheap methodology. Between the two considerations lies the difference between the expression of colloquial and modern architecture: the former was more concerned with overcoming the inconsistencies of building in a steadily shifting context while the latter was concerned with developing efficient building methodologies to achieve an aesthetic expression. The role of institutional buildings in transfearing these methodologies to the public was channeled by employing local masons in building schools or other public buildings.

The skills for applying concrete finish in the Middle East required very little adjustment. This was due to the traditional convention of finishing the adobe houses<sup>70</sup> with mud plaster. The scaffolding system that was used was reemployed for the concrete finish. Consider for example the traditional practice of constructing scaffolding: several bricks or stones on the same level and at equal intervals would be left void. These would occur at vertical intervals of a man's height. Tree trunks would then be placed in these holes providing a cantilevered beams which were then spanned by flat piece of wood one to two feet wide. The builders would patch these holes as

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<sup>70</sup> the majority of the population were farmers thus living in adobe structures until the the launching of nation wide developments plans to modernize and improve the living conditions which started aggressively after liberation.

they moved down completing the facade. The coat of paint would seal and take care of any color inconsistencies which were common due to a variation in concrete mixing. This relationship between paint and concrete was developed due to the limited technology and expertise that was required to produce the exact shade of the concrete mix. For this reason it was unusual to leave buildings unpainted. Unpainted buildings were a sign of either repairs or an economical difficulty. Other finish materials such as stone, brick, or tiles were used in a limited manner and often were either devoid or utilized simple ornamentation. It was not unusual to find facades that employed some or all of these materials simultaneously. Painted concrete finish was the primary finishing method for colloquial architecture.

I don't wish to negate the influence of modern architecture on colloquial expression. What we need to question is the transparency of modern architecture to other context and how it was utilize in different cultures. In the Middle East it was a spring board to develop a diversity of expressions which did not adhere to the modernist dogmas and at times were contradictory to it. Is the undetermined characteristics of the international style, for example, is the domain in which different cultures inhabit and manifest their particular tradition. In the case of colloquial architecture its logic and cultural history permeated the undetermined domain of international style. This permeation was so profound that it redefined the determined characteristics of intentional-style.

### **3.3 Review**

The preceding review of forms was meant to provide a glimpse into a sphere of considerations that was suppressed by conventional approach to understanding this architectural expression. An exclusively aesthetic or ideological readings would impoverish this rich and promising manifestation from its unique expression. The spectrum of issues that must be considered in order to understand this or any other architectural manifestation could be exemplified in the following consideration: The speed, thirty years, in which the Jack-arch replaced traditional vaulting raise a critical issue: what are the logical underpinnings that operate in the building tradition. I will address the issue within the context of this chapter's discussion.

It seems reasonable to suggest that the master builder's main concern is to produce structurally sound building that fulfills its programmatic requirements satisfactorily. Principally the mason would utilize, or work towards, the most expedient method of building in order to achieve that goal. It is through this process the master builder had developed, given the proper time, various forms by experimenting with ways of expedient building. This is why building methodologies, bearing wall construction for example, developed numerous alternatives in executing one typological problem such as a door opening. This rigorous experimentation over the centuries with one building

methodology facilitated a high degree of its resolution. What remains at the center of such a discourse, I believe, is that the master builder always apt to experiment and always ready to adopt new construction methods that would yield a more efficient resolution. The logical premises of efficiency and the fulfillment of the program do explain clearly the complete appropriation, in such a short time, of Jack-arch construction as a substitute for traditional vaulting. We need to recognize, specifically in typical housing construction, that the high degree of resolution masons achieved with vault construction was a natural discourse of *convention* which is *neither determined nor determining*<sup>71</sup>. On the contrary, *forms are embedded into the cultural systems and the material conditions*<sup>72</sup>, thus their natural reciprocity. The total appropriation of the Jack-arch is also indicative of another extremely important consideration. I would propose that the master builder had no resistance to new methods of constructions if they did not contradict his *logic*<sup>73</sup>. The new building methodology opens new possibilities and render older conventions obsolete. Such developments are not a resistance to tradition rather it is a naturally selective process that facilitate cultural adaptation to new social and economic conditions. When conventions are altered or dropped out, whether architectural forms or building tradition, is because they have become archaic and inadequate to the fulfillment of the cultural needs.

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<sup>71</sup> S. Anderson, *Types and Conventions in Time*...., p. 109.

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> Expedient construction method and the primary interest of fulfilling the programmatic requirements.



The logic that underlays the mason's practice is what free him from nostalgic considerations to form and it allows him to be free in his appropriation of influences and being spontaneous in expressing them.



## **Chapter Four**

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### **4.0 Cultural history: Mass media**



#### 4.0 Al-Arabi Cover Illustrations

A general review of Al-Arabi's cover would facilitate an exposure of the social context that is necessary to understanding colloquial architecture. This introduction will explain the premises and the approach that I will utilize in discussing this material.

Al-Arabi is a monthly magazine published in Kuwait and subsidized by its ministry of information<sup>74</sup>. The ministry holds no responsibility for its content<sup>75</sup> - *political neutrality*. The magazine was first issued in Dec-1958, and is still in circulation<sup>76</sup>. Al-Arabi was developed to educate the Arabs about history, science, literature, arts, the well being of family,....., included a monthly exploration of an Arab city<sup>77</sup>. The magazine, due to its political neutrality and the perceived neutrality of Kuwait, is to be found all over the Arab world. Since the magazine is subsidized, its price renders it accessible to the majority of society.

The circulation of Al-Arabi reached 712.000 copies in the early 60's, and reached in 1970 an estimated 1.65 million<sup>78</sup>copies. From the range and complexity of the covered topics it could be assumed that the

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<sup>74</sup> Ezzat Ali Ezzat, *Media in gulf countries* (first edition), (Baghdad, Iraq: Gulf states information documentation center, 1983), P. 181.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*, p.183

<sup>76</sup>*ibid.*, p 181

<sup>77</sup>*ibid.*, p 182

<sup>78</sup>*ibid.*, p 183

readership had a secondary school to higher educational level.

The importance of *Al-Arabi* transcends its popularity due to its subject matter. "*Al-Arabi*" is taken to mean in this context "*The Arab*". As such the magazine conceives of its own project as a representation and an embodiment of what the Arab is. It is through *Al-Arabi*, and mass media in general, that Arabs had an access to their extended culture, the Arab "*being*", and the Arab world<sup>79</sup>.

This research will limit itself to the cover of *Al-Arabi* due to the accessibility of the materials and the prime interest in the ideographic representation which facilitate more direct comparisons to the sphere of architecture. A discussion of the relationship between the cover and the magazine's content will not be attempted for I assume the cover to be the embodiment of the magazine's content.

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<sup>79</sup>ibid.

## 4.1 Premises of Reading

In the cover I will be analyzing the ideographic representations of *Al-Arabi*. I will expose two readings of the cover illustration. The **first** would be an affirmative or positive reading: which would utilize the “*iconic*” aspects of images to reveal the ideas or ideologies behind the representation. The **second** reading would be a negative one that is based on the notion of falsehood; here the image will be analyzed through contradictions, negations, and absences. Such a reading exposes the falsehood of the image yet at the same time emphasizes and clarifies the ideas or ideologies behind the image. I will provide an account of the methodology that will be utilized for these readings later.

The word “*Al-Arabi*”, the name of the magazine, although utilized here to denote Arabs, is of a masculine gender. *Al-Arabieh* is its feminine equivalent. Since the magazine had chosen not to utilize “*Al-Arab*”, which means Arabs without denoting any gender<sup>80</sup>, then having chosen “*Al-Arabi*” instead must be taken as an ideological stand. To address the whole society in the form of a

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<sup>80</sup>It is customary to denote both genders by evoking the masculine one. This is true of language because it is culturally conditioned. English has much less gender specific terms than Arabic for example. However, Arabic has the capacity to address both genders and could also be gender free as in the title of the magazine. *Al-Arab*, *Al-Arabi*, and *Al-Arabieh*, are an example of that. Consider the term tree in Arabic “*Shajarah*” it is of feminine gender, this is because traditionally Arabs plant trees for fruits and never for purely aesthetic reasons. This by definition renders all trees around being females, thus the term.

masculine introduces a complex set of issues pertaining to women, specifically their emancipation. The fact that 90% of the cover images are those of women seems to be the more paradoxical ! The nature and implications of this complex issue will be addressed obliquely within the context of this thesis.

The nature of utilizing this material will be based on three premises. **First**; Al-Arabi is only one magazine in a wealth of literature that is only one constituent of mass media. Although Al-Arabi is a unique and popular magazine of relevance to culture and architecture, it could only be considered a beginning to the exploration of theater, movies, music, poetry, fashion,...etc. Only a comprehensive analysis of all these cultural components would reveal how did they come to represent and define the Arab identity. **Second**; I will consider the cover as an autonomous object. I will neither discuss its relation to the content of the magazine nor discuss whether or not the editor - institution - was totally aware of the whole spectrum of readings these images provided for. **Third**; the magazine is a cultural institution whose work is to inform and educate Arab society about its culture.



## 4.2 Operative Methodology

I will be utilizing a methodology that was introduced by *Mark Roskill and David Carrier*<sup>81</sup> in their book *Truth and Falsehood in the visual Images*. The structure of this methodology concerns itself with :

*"basic ways of conveying truth (what is meant in calling something true, what counts as true; what is held to be true). For a visual Image to do this entails its communicating that suggestion, connotation, or implication, without any necessary truth of reference to a particular subject or object...."*<sup>82</sup>

The three corresponding versions of visual truths are the basic premises that I will be operating on. These visual truths consist of:

*"....First, an Image may convey a certain truth about the world, in the same general way as a map or globe designates or denotes the fact that the world is round; convention-governed forms of representation do this as a matter of principal, within a prevailing schema of usage (as with stick figures). Second, it may communicate an accepted or ready to be accepted truths, so that it constitutes evidence to that fact. Third, it may sum up and show forth what is held or found to be true about people and things; either in a general sort of way.....or specifically for a time or place....."*<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Mark Roskill and David Carrier, *Truth and Falsehood in Visual*

Hence Mark Roskill and David Carrier have indicated their appropriation of the ".....*skeptic and the relativist viewpoints, and the approaches of the structuralist and Marxist writers....*"<sup>84</sup> this in turn will be manifested in my readings of the Images. The ascription of falsehood to visual Images is equally important to its reading as it has been suggested by Mark Roskill and David carrier:

*"it rests on three possible claims or charges being made concerning the character of the Image, each of which is given a distinctly negative connotations: 1) that of fabrication, as opposed to the showing of what does or could reasonably exist; 2) that of making things appear as they are not, as opposed to the way they are or would seem to be; or 3) that of pretense, as opposed to sincerity, honesty, or some equivalent term...."*<sup>85</sup>

These methodological clarifications, I hope, will induce the reader to participate in a critical reading of the materials on their own. This is particularly important given the magnitude of the Images that are to be analyzed. Complimentary or contradictory readings will be very important not only to scrutinize my interpretation but to enliven and advance the discussion further.

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*Images*, (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts press, 1983), p.8.

<sup>82</sup> *ibd.*

<sup>83</sup> *ibd.*, p. 9

<sup>84</sup> *ibd.*, p.10

<sup>85</sup> *ibd.*, p. 118

### **4.3 General Review of Al- Arabi's Cover Illustration**

The task of dealing with every cover of this magazine is truly formidable and unnecessary for the purpose of this thesis. This should not undermine the importance of every cover. The richness of this material is so vast that I could only hope to point it out and discuss it obliquely. Let me start by addressing the methodology of organizing the images of Al-Arabi; I have reproduced three hundred and forty seven cover images, all displayed in chronological order on a proof sheet format. This is to facilitate a simultaneous viewing of the whole thirty years of the cover's images. These images begin to formulate an extremely complex story that could have never been told otherwise. This story was not only about the magazine but about the whole history of the Middle East in the past three decades. I will only point in general to the events that played an important role in directing the cultural transformation of Middle Eastern societies, specifically in the late Fifties and Sixties period. It must be noted here that an attempt to analyze these images for literal correlations between ideological changes in the spheres of politics, economy, and culture would be rather naive. This is because these images are ideographic representations which require a reading based on semiology. The analysis will tackle the following issues: **First** the nature of the subject matter and its semantics. **Second** the implications behind the use of women on the cover's images.

It is extremely important to recognize that what I will be dealing with in these images (the relationship between the signifier and the signified) are not their signs, rather their significations as in Roland Barthes's sense<sup>86</sup>. The intention of this reading is to recover the historical project of these images through a deciphering of general trends in the image's ideographic representation. Thus the need to establish certain guidelines to the *forms* - the second order of signifier as introduced by Barthes - of such themes as modernity, tradition, western, context, and Islamic. These themes will correspond to ideographic representations that are supposed to facilitate an agreed upon system of reading. The definitions of these themes need not be a fixed one, rather it can be redefined as seen appropriate by the reader. The following ideographics will denote their perspective themes as follows:

**1. Theme of modernity<sup>87</sup> :**

The following depictions are to denote the state of modernity when seen against the Middle Eastern tradition:

- 1.1 The women being outside the private domain. This is particularly true in the fifties and sixties.
- 1.2 Having birthday parties; modern social behavior.
- 1.3 Women going to school and attaining education<sup>88</sup>.

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<sup>86</sup>Roland Barthes, *Mythologies...*, p. 114.

<sup>87</sup> I am utilizing the term to denote any change, shift, or dislocation in the customs and conventions of the new generation from the traditional one.

<sup>88</sup>this will have important implications that I will discuss later.

1.4 Women's right to work beyond the traditional environment and in the public sector.

1.5 Women Playing music, sports, or engaged in art production.

## **2. Theme of Westernization<sup>89</sup>.**

Western fashion.

## **3. Theme of Emancipation<sup>90</sup>.**

Modernity can be denoted through the emancipation of women as revealed through the absence of men from the image - context.

## **4. Theme of Tradition<sup>91</sup>.**

This can be denoted through the depictions of women in either a traditional dress and/or traditional activity

## **5. Theme of Context<sup>92</sup>.**

Context can be communicated through a clearly identifiable setting of a city or a country. Lack of such identification is to induce ambiguity.

## **6. Theme of Islam<sup>93</sup>.**

Islamic subjects were represented through the images of mosques or any of its constituents, Muslim

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<sup>89</sup>It must be read as an ideographic image.

<sup>90</sup>The absence of a male is to denote female emancipation. I will return to this later.

<sup>91</sup> Traditional dress could be considered an indication of modernity specifically when it is reinterpreted; i.e. if an individual wears a Hashimi dress and goes outdoors or merely attends a tea party (casual occasion), the dress is then not utilized for its formal function( it is the most valued dress traditionally ). We must also note that traditional activities to mean such things as house keeping, cooking, bringing up the kids, ...etc.

<sup>92</sup> The context is important in order to identify the subject. Context could be utilized to obscure the subject, and it is this ambiguity that is so central to ideographic representations.

<sup>93</sup> Surely faith is this dormant or active power that could always be called upon to when either a mobilization or a demobilization of the masses is required, to trace its manifestations in mass media is then important to expose any specific ideological tendencies that were taking place in a given society.

historical characters, and any Islamic ideographic images .

Al-Arabi cover illustration



-----1959-1960

Al-Arabi cover illustrations



-----1961-1962



### 4.3.1 Findings

These themes I will utilize in a general sense to identify the trends that the illustrations have portrayed and then examine their implications. For now the task is to decipher the general trends within the previous seven themes. The findings were based on a systematic applications of the above themes as seen from the view point of the methodological construct which I have already proposed. The images were found to have the following significations:

|              | dec 58-dec 67 | jan 68- dec 76 |
|--------------|---------------|----------------|
| Modern       | 72%           | 55%            |
| Western      | 70%           | 31%            |
| Emancipation | 100%          | 80%            |
| Tradition    | 28%           | 44.3%          |
| Context      | 5%            | 38.6%          |
| Islam        | 0%            | 5.6%           |

During the period dec-1958 to dec-1967 the percentages are out of 105 Covers; the period jan-68 to dec-76 the percentages are out of 106 covers.

These statistics could be redefined by each individual when dealing with these images, and I think the outcome will basically be the same. I would also like to suggest that the time delineations presented in the graph were conceived with two considerations in mind when I chose 1967 as the break point of the first period: a) the Arab defeat in

1967 war had induced a significant change on the issue of identity as could be seen in the graph. **b)** that magazines were declining as the prime sources of information displaced by television in the late sixties. Indeed the transition points were not so radical. However, when seen from a historical viewpoint the illustrations did change considerably. As such the graph has fulfilled its abstracted essence.

Al-Arabi cover illustrations



-----1963-1964

Al-Arabi cover illustrations



-----1965-1966

#### **4.3.2 Al-Arabi Cover Illustrations: Dec. 1958 - Dec. 1967**

Before performing the analysis of these illustrations a review of the historical context of the Middle East within this period is necessary.

The fifties and sixties were a time of political, economical, and social upheaval in the region. Revolutionary movements all over the Arab world were gathering momentum to overthrow the colonial powers and to emerge into republics with promises of education, health, and a better living standards. In order to understand the magnitude of this upheaval I will list the dates of establishment of revolutions in the Arab world<sup>94</sup>:

*SYRIA 1949, EGYPT. July 1952, TUNISIA. July 1957, IRAQ. July 1958, SUDAN. Nov 1958, ALGERIA July 1962, YEMEN ARAB REPUBLIC Sept. 1962, REPUBLIC OF YEMEN Nov. 1967, LIBYA Sept. 1969.*

A new vision and ideologies were captivating the revolutionary governments. Modernization was the prime objective in order to sustain an independent nation. Plans were devised to provide education, health, and industrialize the economy. The limited economic power and the lack of human resources combined with political instability slowed the

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<sup>94</sup>The 1948 Arab Israeli war, which the Arabs have lost, rendered the army officers unsatisfied with the ruling governments which instigated these revolutions.

modernization of these societies. This was natural since these revolutionaries had very limited experience in running the affairs of a nation - they often were army officers. Surly this part of Middle Eastern history is quite rich and complex . What we need to retain from it, however, is the following:

1. The uprooting of the colonial power system brought promises for education, health, living standard, land reforms, ..etc. This of course led to a massive social and physical mobility.

2. Under the colonial control education was very limited often to no more than 5% of the population<sup>95</sup>, and all the vital services were conducted and controlled by the colonial power. The colonial power fostered two social levels; an elitist society which represented 2% of society, and a 98% peasantry. It was only through the army recruits that some of the peasants could attain access to economic and social mobility. It was out of the consolidated consciousness of the army officers, teachers, university students, artists, and other members of the middle class - a very small percentage of society not exceeding at best five percent of the population - that a bourgeois culture began to develop. It was out of this bourgeois society - the army officers<sup>96</sup> in particular - where the sparks of revolutions began.

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<sup>95</sup>*The United Nations statistical abstract yearbook, 1959.*

<sup>96</sup>The revolutions in Egypt, Iraq, Algeria, Libya, Sudan, Tunisia, Syria, Yemen Arab Republic, Democratic Republic of Yemen, Oman. all were lead by army officers.

3. It had always been the legacy of the colonized, when liberated, to appropriate the colonizer's culture. This was not only a psychological<sup>97</sup> desire, but an intentional one in that the aspiration for modernity were confused with westernization.

Now its is time to decipher the images of Al-Arabi's cover as situated in this historical context of the Middle East. The cover illustrations of Al-Arabi in this period depicted *seventy two percent* of the images as women in a state of modernity. This intense depiction is to be understood as follows: Women in state of modernity were not only utilized to inspire society to modernize but it also represented the achievements of the new governments promises for education, health, and better living standard.

Let us consider for a moment the images that were depicting women as being eagerly studious. No doubt the subject of those images was education - the importance of literacy. If we consider the fact that eighty five percent<sup>98</sup> of the population were illiterate it become clear that access to educations was of vital importance to society. Surly the society understood that in order to modernize and improve their economic status, the only guarantee was through education. As such education had and still acts as the springboard to achieving a higher social and

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<sup>97</sup>The desire of the slave to conquer his master, or neutralizing one's inhibition by consuming what inhibited him.

<sup>98</sup> This figure is based on the consideration that all individuals able to read and write, even children under ten years old, were considered. United Nations statistics includes individuals over ten years of age. Women illiteracy rate is much heigher, ninety five percent would be an accurate estimate.

economic status. In a major way, during that period, the family took pride in having one of its members in school. It was through that individual not only their future was guaranteed to improve but the aspirations of these poor families were channeled through their educated members. I feel justified in assuming that the governments then were quite aware of this reality; after all the revolutionaries at that moment were either those newly educated individuals or they were at close touch with such conditions. There seems to be no doubt about the critical role of education and its accessibility as an instrument that could be utilized by the governments to fulfill the aspiration - at least psychologically - of a large portion of society. The economical limitations and the lack of human resources must have forced these governments to start new programmes to dampen the flux of the massive demands for modernization. Surely mass media in all its forms must have been an efficient instrument for such a task.

It is in this light I would suggest that the images of Al-Arabi should be read. A reading of these images from within the context that I just described will reveal the following: by depicting a subject with an open book is to suggest that the subject was actively engaged in reading which denote not only the subject was able to read but being educated . The subject was eager - displayed in the smile - for reading what appeared to be one volume of the several that were on the bookshelves behind awaiting their implicit fate of being read. The depiction of a female as the subject in this context



has implications that would transcend the obvious message for the education of women.

The United Nation statistical yearbook for the year 1960 suggests that the percentage of illiteracy in the Middle East for the year 1959 was the highest at ninety seven percent in SUDAN and the lowest in EGYPT at eighty nine percent<sup>99</sup> . The student body was constituted of ten percent females in the late fifties growing to twenty five percent in the seventies (see U.N statistical yearbooks, 1960,1970). In other words, female students were an extreme minority. Surely access to education, which had been denied to the society for so long, was now at the disposal of the least privileged<sup>100</sup> group; women . As such the implication here was that the emancipation of the privileged men from illiteracy had been fulfilled. Women were a signification to men in that the women's success in education was symbolic of men's success hence their traditional privilege. This might be clarified further if we consider that if a family could only support one of its members the privilege was given to the male. In fact it was conceivable, if not common, that only after all the male members in the house hold who were eligible to study were provided for first.

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<sup>99</sup> No statistics for LEBANON were available for the year 1959.

<sup>100</sup> The hierarchical structure of the Arab family is stratified on the basis of sex and age. The youngs are subordinate to the old, and females to males. Elizabeth Warnock Fernea, "new voices of change", *Women and the the family in the Middle East*, (Austin, Texas: University of Texas press, 1985), p. 27; Halim Barakat, *The Arab family and the challenge of social transformation*, *ibid.*, p. 27-48.

Indeed *conventions* had it that man was responsible for providing for the family, hence not only a traditional priority was granted to him but he was endowed with a mythical superiority. It was only too often one heard the comment that "*if she could do that, then I could too*", that was one of the basic myths that was at work in these images. To be sure, this was not different from the U.S. Army T.V recruitment advertising in which the gentleman - or the male viewers - was assured that his dream of flying a jet in the Marines was all the more possible after he discovered that his colleague, a woman, was a Marine wings herself.

In order to eliminate repetition I would like to point out that an analogous reading of the subjects who were depicted in the working force could be performed. One need to consult the U.N statistical abstracts yearbook to realize that in 1959 only two percent of the female population were *active economically*<sup>101</sup>.

Truly the most striking aspects of Al-Arabi's cover in the sixties, along with fact that the images were of females, were the depictions of the subjects being engaged in leisure pursuits. In order to provide a reading for such depictions one must remember that in Middle Eastern society the outdoor was a profane domain for women. Indeed the traditional quarters were designed to facilitate a better control over the outdoor space such that an eye - al abadaih - could, on one hand, oversee the kids and the women's

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<sup>101</sup>Active economically excludes farmers, specifically in the Middle East women were not paid to work the farm, it was for the household or the husband.

conduct - behavior - in the public space, and on the other, intercept all outsiders coming into the quarter. In the fifties and sixties - and still is - the Arab world was very conservative<sup>102</sup>. Major modern city planning designs were developed by the Greek planner Doxiadis for Iraq<sup>103</sup>, Sudan, Syria, Libya, and other countries. Even then the conditions changed very slowly for obvious reasons such as economic difficulties and lack of human resources. Just to illustrate the conditions of education in the Middle East in the late fifties the following are the percentage of illiteracy - true of females, males were about five to ten percent higher - in some Arab countries<sup>104</sup>:

*Algeria, 1959 it was 92%, Egypt, 1959 it was 89%, Iraq, 1959 it was 89.7%, Yemen Arab Republic, 1959 it was 98%, Libya, 1959 it was 89%, Morocco, 1959 it was 95%, Tunisia, 1959 it was 89%.*

If one considers education, and I think we should in this case, as primary vehicle that will facilitate social change, then it is clear that the Arab world was a long way from modernization. We must also consider the fact that these illiteracy figures constituted 90% of females (see U.N. abstracts). Though the fact that women could achieve their emancipation only through an economic independence is by now universally accepted fact, it is then true that without education all hopes for emancipation are lost. And

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<sup>102</sup> 95% illiterate, the majority of the population was agrarian, ..etc.

<sup>103</sup> A. Mulla Hwaish, *Modern Architecture in Iraq....*, p. 35.

<sup>104</sup> *United Nation statistical abstract yearbook, 1960.*

this harsh reality was particularly true in the Middle East due to the unyielding convention which had privileged men.

Why was it then all these images of emancipated women on Al-Arabi's cover? And what was the myth behind depicting females in the outdoors beyond the traditional compounds? This is of a two fold reading.

**First** as I mentioned earlier the social and political upheaval was so profound in this period that the aspirations of the newly emancipated society would stop at nothing short of fulfilling their desire to be Modern/ western. This could account for the political instability that swept the Middle East in the sixties. Army officers were corrupted by absolute power which diverted their attentions from fulfilling the society's aspirations for a state of modernity. As these revolutionaries were being replaced by each other in the name of development and better living conditions, so were the expectations of the societies by now running so anxious that even a simple image that depicts an Arab in a state of freedom and modernity would be the hope for prosperous and promising future.

The establishment of Al-Arabi magazine (1958) must then be seen as the rise of the newly emancipated Arab recovered from the abyss of ignorance and now worthy of the appraisal of the enlightened. Thus the outdoors, the anonymous context, must be understood as the freedom of no containment, the negation of all context, the vision was so grand and the potential was so infinite such that only a

background of nothingness (blared undifferentiated landscape) allowed the viewer to be suspended in its ambiguity, being everywhere and nowhere concurrently. The image of the female in fact has elevated this state to the degree of intoxication, such that the images no longer belong to the sphere of reality but have become a fantasy. These images were a demobilizing instrument that were utilized, on the one hand, to materialize some of the public aspirations -though illusion, and on the other, to induce a critical cultural dislocation : these depictions were made to appear natural and true as if they were a common occurrence in the daily life of society. However, in the viewer's immediate social context ( Middle Eastern) this was not likely to be the case, society was uneducated and poor.

A tension between the idealized image and one's immediate context was then induced, this was to be aggravated further by the impossibility of attaining, in reality, the status of the image due to economical limitations and the rate at which conventions are able to change. It is this impossibility of attaining that which is so immediate (the images were of Arab women, though of the bourgeoisie) but yet so far. The viewer was under the impression that the status depicted by these images was achievable. It might only mean that they (the viewers, or society) have to work harder or wait for tradition to yield to a new set of conventions. Such ambiguous images have always been the key to demobilizing the masses. We must remember that if and when the attainment of the idealized state (modernity) becomes clearly

impossible for the masses, a revolution would take place.

**Second** ; The outdoors, birthday parties, sports, art, music and dance, were events that surly reflected a rather prosperous society. Forty seven percent of the images of this period were allotted to entertainment.

According to the U.N. statistical yearbook in the years 1959 to 1967 the consumer price index<sup>105</sup> in the Middle East indicated that food consistently accounted for slightly over fifty percent of the budget. This to be juxtaposed to the twenty percent<sup>106</sup> of the population which was active economically. It is then reasonable to suggest that the majority of this active population was unskilled labor due to the fact that only 0.1% of the population (or 5% of the student body) made it to the University levels and 1% made it to Technical schools<sup>107</sup>. It is clear that all these images were not portraying the common conditions of society, rather they were portraying either the bourgeois or the elite classes. Indeed to travel or even the simple notion of exploring the outdoors requires not only being well off economically but *sophisticated* taste to enjoying such simple pleasure as wandering in nature. Such adventures occurred in

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<sup>105</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> The percentage of the population that was attending all levels of education, from primary school to university was the lowest in SUDAN at 3% and the highest in EGYPT at 11.1% for the year 1959. See *U.N. statistical abstract 1960*. There are no figures in which the unemployment levels were shown, therefore it is reasonable to utilize the figures of education to draw an estimation of the economically active population. Two to three folds of the educated population would be a resonable estimate.

<sup>107</sup> *ibid.*

a social class that has adopted new conventions; the ability of women to go out in public alone, or the possibility of her playing music or sports, or celebrating events such as birthday parties. To permit such conduct could have only occurred in the bourgeois or the elite society. Needless to say that reality here was of little concern, what was important to fulfill were the aspirations of the public for modernization - westernization<sup>108</sup>. The population might have not understood how much had to change in order for such an illusion - the bourgeoisie - to be the common life style. Not only the economic situation must improve but the social norms; society, home, and male- female relationship would have to be radically redefined. To clarify the complexity of such a redefinition I would invoke Marshall Berman's assessment of Karl Marx's understanding of modernity. Berman noted:

*" What kinds of people does this permanent revolution (Modernity) produce? In order for people, whatever their class, to survive in modern society, their personalities must take on the fluid and open form of this society. Modern men and women must learn to yearn for change: not merely to be open to changes in their personal and social lives, but*

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<sup>108</sup> I will not be able to stress enough the point that the project of modernity was totally confused with westernization. This does not mean that the institutions were totally unable to differentiate between the two (NASSER's ideology, and the Baath's ideology were clearly aware of the differences- see manifestos), rather, it was the masses who were only exposed to modernity through the western colonial powers. As such the myth of modernization (to westernize) not only came naturally through the relationship of the colonial to the colonized, but it was also utilized by the governments to negotiate the difficult task of achieving modernity.

*positively to demand them, actively to seek them out and carry them through."*<sup>109</sup>

It was such a complexity that was suppressed by the immediacy of Al-Arabi's images. These depictions of modern women were naturalized by the conventional gestures of the subjects through the innocent smile, and the family album-like photographs. These depictions - playing sports and music - at times had deformed reality to such an extent that in some cases the subject had escaped the orbit of the Middle Eastern culture for the Western one.

In fact few images had managed to reach the state of spectacle as in the cover of December 1961 in which a close up of a woman swimming was utilized as the cover subject. What made that image a spectacle was the violation of the subject's private space which traditionally was only accessible to the family members. This was more true of the Middle Eastern society of the fifties and sixties. Thus the violation of society's most sacred space, that of women, by the hundreds of thousands of viewers was nothing short of the signification of the crumbling barriers of conventions and tradition. I am confident that the argument could be extended to the reading of such images as playing music, sports, dancing, or partying which would expose their bourgeois and elitist significations.

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<sup>109</sup> M. Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air...*, p. 94-95.



Al-Arabi cover illustrations



-----1967

### 4.3.3 Women as an Object of Illustration

To address the issue of why did Al-Arabi utilize women as its subject, a general review of the female status and role in the Middle Eastern culture is required. I, as a Middle Eastern male, would have a subjective assessment of the situation due to my growing up in traditional society. Neither will I be able to truly understand the condition of women in the Middle East from inside. To render the discussion more objective I will be relying on the Arab feminist discourse. To provide a reasonably accurate picture of the complexity of this subject and yet reveal in general the social status of women in the Middle East I will quote at length a passage from an essay by Nadia H. Youssef in which she addressed the status of Muslim women:

*"An evaluation of the Muslim women's marital, reproductive, educational, and occupational behavior must thus be understood as basic choices made in the context of the combined effects of the tradition of seclusion and exclusion patterns. The former refers to the volitional response of women to "resist" the forces of social modernity, the personally motivated avoidance of higher education, economic independence, and participation in public life, as distinct from exclusion, by which is meant the sanctioned prohibitions and limitations imposed by males. .... The interaction between the acknowledgment of economic and moral responsibility toward all kinswomen as prescribed by*

*kinship institutions, on the one hand, and principles of familial honor which depend upon attributes of female sexual purity, on the other, has consolidated the structure of control over women into the exclusive hands of male members of the kin group. That in performing such a function, male family members receive the full institutional support of the religious and judicial systems has meant that the sanctions invoked against women can be very strong, particularly when the principle of legitimacy is couched in terms of family honor. Honor alone, however, is not sufficient as a cultural ideal to implement control. For kinship sanctions to become fully effective, it becomes incumbent upon the kinship group to provide economic support for its women at all times. This is exactly what has happened up until now in most Muslim societies: the perpetuation of the status of women as economic dependents. Few women have felt the need to be self-sufficient through education or employment because of the availability of economic support. It is only when family responsibilities for the economic support of female relatives begin to be questioned that the present structure of control and the prerogative of male family members to impose restrictions on their women will become nebulous."*<sup>110</sup>

Middle Eastern society developed an intricate social system that deprives women by either "choice" "seclusion pattern" or by force "exclusion pattern",

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<sup>110</sup> Lois Beck and Nikki Keddie, *Women in the Muslim World*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 69; Nadia H. Youssef, "the status and fertility patterns of Muslim women", *ibid.*, p.69-99.

from their economical independence and political activity. Attaining education for women does not necessarily guarantee independence. In Middle Eastern societies women, as it has been suggested by Nadia Youssef, were reduced to concern themselves with marriage and family life.

Of interest to my argument are the following considerations: women were utilized in the context of culture to provide two vital functions. The **first** being that the woman was the center around which the structure of society was built. Not only man was responsible to provide for her but her own "*purity*" determines the male and by extension the family's honor. The **second** being that the role woman would play as a mother in bringing up the new generation is an extremely vital one. Indeed the mother has always been the provider for the child's psychological and physical wellbeing. As such she maintains a very special relation with her children, boys and girls alike. The mother was the mediator between their needs and the fathers' support, reducing the male role to being mythically important. Hence the venerability of the males status in this whole cultural scheme. After all if woman can be economically independent, then this would undermine the status of men. Maintaining the role of provider for the family was his only way to maintain control. The risk for man in the traditional society was that the emancipation of woman would mean the deprivation of his ego.

The other consideration of importance here is that since the religious and the kinship institutions have consolidated to maintain male domination, women

were rendered powerless, they were reduced to objects. Thus in the images of Al-Arabi; the female was the perfect subject to portray the cultural development of society, and the female's political *neutrality* rendered her totally accessible.

All women achievements within the Middle Eastern context - since they had no power - were attributed to men. Surely a higher percentage of educated women or their attainment of a higher living standard, or even the very possibility of women working must stem from the development and the generosity of men. For without men's approval or help, if not their will, women would not have been able to modernize. A crude analogy could be drawn between such an objectification of females and the assessment of a prized commodity . Like automobiles, these images represented what a man could possess; healthy, educated, westernized and most importantly content women. Like automobiles the subjects were about pleasure: beautiful and ambiguous, surely not about struggles and hardships. like automobiles these subjects would perform the tasks society would assign or demand of them being a mother and a wife. Indeed the subjects frozen gaze were submissive to the lens and consequently to what was behind the lens. It is this ambiguity of who was behind the lens that is so elusive, for the proximity of the subject to the camera indicates an intimate relationship<sup>111</sup>. Thus the images were naturalized through their personalized nature (their family like snapshot).

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<sup>111</sup>It is in the nature of camera to be able to produce such expressions.

Paradoxically their intimacy and tabooed publicity when exposed to the public would function as their sexual signification.

As for the female's political neutrality, Nadia Youssef's essay suggested that women were placed in a social system that deprived them of any power outside the relationship to their children. I have suggested earlier that the majority of women remain uneducated and economically dependent till now. Deprived of power women's achievements would be the will of her father, husband, brother, or the institutions. Thus women were depoliticized subjects that sustained no political ideologies and only exceptionally did they exhibit resistance to the cultural norms. They were transparent subjects employed to exhibit the will and the desire of men. This rendered their utilization on the cover to be safeguarded by the complex social system which maintained a critical position in regard to women's emancipation. In other words, though these images might suggest at a superficial level the desire to emancipate women, nevertheless, the social and political systems would guarantee the annihilation of any such move. The conservative nature of the society in the fifties and the sixties were the guarantees that were needed to securely utilize females as the cover subjects without running the risk of inducing any radical changes which would threaten the male's traditional status in society. It was this judgement that would prove wrong in the seventies and the eighties, thus the role of Islamic

revivalism in protecting social conventions as argued by Fatima Mernissi<sup>112</sup> .

Toward the end of reading the images of the fifties and sixties I like to suggest that I could have not been able to read these images from a women's viewpoint, or even how did the women in the Middle Eastern society in that period have interpreted those images. Also it is important to remember that I have employed a western methodology in reading these images which might have deformed the readings. A note on the mythical signification as presented by Roland Barthes;

*" The nature of the mythical signification can in fact be well conveyed by one particular simile: it is neither more nor less arbitrary than an ideograph. Myth is a pure ideographic system, where the forms are still motivated by the concept which they represent while not yet, by a long way, covering the sum of its possibilities for representation."*<sup>113</sup>

Thus I have neither exhausted the possibilities of reading the images of Al-Arabi nor would I wish to claim so.

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<sup>112</sup> Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil; Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana university press, 1987), p. vii-xxx.

<sup>113</sup> R. Barthes, *Mythologies....*, p. 127.

#### 4.4 Review

I would like to reconsider some of the relationships that are of pertinence to the discussion of colloquial architecture which were presented in the analysis above. In general the role of mass media in influencing the society was indeed a central issue . The images have also served to address two major issues of direct relevance to architecture. First, the relationship between the magazine as an institution and its discourse vis-a-vis society. The choice of the subjects and their signification have revealed, I believe, a rather clear thematic discourse; one of modernization. At the same time the images, considering the context of The Middle East, have functioned as a demobilizing element due to the discrepancy between what was depicted and reality. Similar discrepancies have been taking place in many Middle Eastern countries where government institutions have established equal rights, access to education and work. Such laws were maintained under tight traditional conventions, which were not changed. This allowed men to be in control of society and relieved the institutions from the burden of providing double the number of jobs that would be required<sup>114</sup>. It is this tension between conventions and a modern way of living, the family structure and internal relationships, that will become of great concern to understanding the architectural

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<sup>114</sup> Nahid Toubia, *Women of the Arab World*, (London and New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd, 1988); Nawal El Saadawi, "The political challenges facing Arab women at the end of the 20th century", p.8-25.



expression of colloquial architecture and by extension popular architecture. Second, to recover the suppressed reality of social status in order to produce an *impressionistic* image of the dynamics of control and the extent of manipulation that was taking place. This is critical in order to understand the importance and the relationship between these new architectural elements and the social transformation. Since the program of the house is culturally determined, then the relevance of this chapter to program is quite clear.



## ***Chapter Five***

### ***————5.0 Colloquial architecture: Program***



This section will expose the functional manifestation of specific elements within colloquial architecture as seen from, on one hand, traditional and modern discourses, and on the other, how it differs from such discourses. I will argue that the functional manifestation of these elements which colloquial architecture shares with either modern and/or traditional architecture are operative on a logic that is outside the *aesthetic program* of both traditional and modern architecture. The issue of privacy is central to trace the dynamics of change which lead to such manifestations as in colloquial architecture. The issue of privacy will expose the social dynamics of men-women relations vis-a-vis some architectural elements. The discussion will be extended to address some larger social issues in general when seen pertinent. An underlying premise at work here is that function is a cultural activity that could only be determined through the specificity of its cultural context.

## 5.1 Privacy and traditional layout

Traditional architecture has provided privacy through maintaining a rather blank facade to the outside. Small openings were located high in spaces for ventilation have always been the only openings to the public domain at the ground level. When a large opening was required it would take on the form of "*Mashrabiya*", and it was usually the women who used this form of openings to look out with out being seen. The family's outdoor space has traditionally been the courtyard. Usually most of the rooms and circulation spaces were feeding off of it. In the traditional settings these houses by either projecting a "*mashrabiya*" or by sheer height have protected the narrow streets which connected them from the blistering heat of the summer sun or the frigid wind of the winter months:

The courtyard was the basic configuration that the traditional house had employed in order to provide a private outdoor space. It was clear that society in the fifties and the sixties were mobilized to modernize, in other words, to move from the centuries of stagnations and darkness that loomed over the society under the Ottoman and the colonial powers. It was natural that society sought the creation of a new environment which not only embody the new aspirations but it would also resist the old environment which by that time had come to represent darkness and regression. A new society with redefined conventions were to be manifested physically, as to make real the emancipation of

society from the darkness of the past. Through Colloquial architecture we could analyze the function of the new architectural elements and their role in the new society.

## 5.2 Modern building layout

These residential homes have shifted radically from the traditional notion of courtyard to adopt an outward oriented plan. Needless to say that this typology was a modern architectural expression that was developed in the west. As to how this plan was modified to fulfill the newly redefined privacy considerations we need to consider the basic relationship between the house and the open space. The house has come to be surrounded by open space which then was utilized as a garden, children play ground, and most importantly it has become a semi-public space that was transformed to induce an impression over those who visited the house. A beautiful garden, a well kept grape vine that would shade the walkway, or the finish materials of walkways would all be utilized to enrich the experience. It is clear in this appropriated house typology that the new outdoor space (the notion of being outward oriented) had offered a greater flexibility from the introversion of the courtyard<sup>115</sup>.

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<sup>115</sup> If one consults the work of Hassan Fathy, *Oriental houses in Iraq*; by Subhi H. Al-Azzawi, Ihsan Fethi's doctorate thesis to the university of Sheffield in 1977, or the Aga Khan publication; *Designing in Islamic Cultures: Urban Housing*. 1981, what becomes clear is that every single one of these publications have not addressed the following issue: *I am not aware of any body who has discussed the courtyard typology within the context of the gaze. Since all the spaces that surrounds the courtyard are both accessed and open to it. On the other hand, the courtyard in this typology is rendered as the busiest space in the compound; the reason for it being constantly occupied. Consequently the following relationship would develop: all the rooms surrounding the court are constantly gazing at it (the*



In order to take advantage of the garden views this typology was open to the outdoor space developing such elements as large picture windows, porches, and balconies. As a result the house was rendered open to the world beyond. This openness to the public domain was not total, in colloquial architecture, as could be seen in the development of high fences and high parapet walls. However, the openness was significant as seen in the introduction of large windows, balconies and the fact that outer fences provide privacy from pedestrian but not necessarily from neighbors for they could look into each other gardens from the balconies or the roof terraces. It must be recognized that this openness has developed a whole new set of social relationships between the neighbors of these modern dwellings. This was due to the diversity of neighbors backgrounds and their ethnic affiliations which was far more homogeneous in the traditional settings . This issue is quite complex and must be

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*rooms are open to the court for access and light). The court being the center of the compound with its busy nature; a constantly present gaze that watches all the surrounding rooms. This relationship, though considerably different from Foucault's panopticon, nonetheless they do share some characteristics that are worthy of critical research. It could be argued that this typology, specifically when the courtyard is small, produces a rather rigid and sharp conventions in the social relationships. Whence all moves are observed, and privacy is no longer possible the psychological conditioning of the occupants would be quite different from dwellers of other typologies. It is interesting to note that the strictest dress codes, specifically for women, have developed in cities that the urban form of which was composed mostly of courtyard housing. This issue, I believe, is of a grave importance which might reveal the consequences of the courtyard plan as being the controlling devise, which would shed the light on its implication on the social structure of the family. This reading is only speculative, and a detailed research is needed to assist its validity.*

dealt with by social scientist and not here. In the following pages I will discuss specific architectural elements in relation to the social discourse. These elements were chosen for the following reasons: a) they are the most conspicuous elements of this architecture. b) their social role has been quite instrumental in the cultural life of modern society. c) they are the most difficult elements to recover from their collapse into modern aesthetics. In other words, because they share many characteristics with the aesthetics of modern architecture, thus the misinterpretation. d) they are general enough as to be applicable to the whole Middle Eastern context. e) these elements are equally accessible for comparison by all: modernist and traditionalist; Arabs and Europeans. Now I would like to move and address the roles of the fence, the main entrance, porches, balconies, roof terrace, and shading devices in the context of colloquial architecture and society.

### 5.2.1 The garden fence

The fence was a manifold of functions both traditional and modern. The traditionally critical issue of territory which conventionally was demarcated by placing the bulk of the building on the exterior edges of the property, thus enclosing a courtyard, was resolved by building a fence that was as permanent as the building itself. The height of the fence has become a reflection of the degree to which liberation or conservatism of the residences were exercised. High solid fences were the signification for being a conservative and traditional while short and transparent fences denoted openness and liberation. One is able to sense in cities like Baghdad that the fences were considerably shorter and more transparent than fences in more conservative cities like Ramadi<sup>116</sup>. And even in conservative cities one would observe variety of fences. It was often the Bourgeois society who had a short fence as opposed to conservatives or elites<sup>117</sup>. The outcome of building a short fence permitted the household to show their garden to the public, hence attaining a special place in the neighborhood specifically when the garden was unique. It was implicit in the context of exhibiting the garden that the household was not only liberal but they have attained a skill that they were proud to share with the neighborhood. I

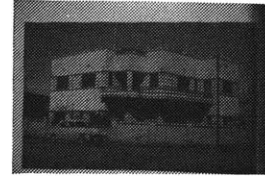


Fig.29 Low fences.  
Baghdad, 1950s



Fig.30 High fences.  
Kuwait, 1960s



Fig.31 Street in a new  
neighborhood.  
Baghdad, 1950s

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<sup>116</sup> Ramadi is the capital city of the district of Al-anbar which is located at 70 miles north- west of Baghdad. It is also my home town.

<sup>117</sup> The elites all over the world tend to build high fences for they truly live in another social class that is usually the center of attention and the need to protect their privacy.

suggest that one would be able to observe this phenomenon in other Middle Eastern cities which were building a similar housing typology.

Another programmatic importance attributed to the garden fence of this typology was due to it being the outer boundary. When approaching these dwellings the fence was encountered first. For this reason the fence has become a significant object that reflected, usually, the qualities of the house in terms of structure, texture, and expression. It was a perception and tactile introduction to the house beyond. This experience stands in contrast to the visitor's encounter with the houses of traditional quarters. Traditionally the visitor would encounter the house itself first<sup>118</sup> which was commonly undifferentiated from its neighboring houses, therefore, the role of the front door became critical for it was the identification of the house and a symbol of the status of its owner. The role of the fence-main entrance in the new typology has sustained its traditional role, though it has become more complex as I will discuss later.

A conjecture could be made in regard to power signification in the context of the fences. The traditional courtyard typology can be read as a gesture of fortification. The thrust of the forms conquers every inches on land (as could be seen in the steps leading to the main entrances as located in the public domain) or in the air (as seen in the projections of mashrabiya) that the individual was

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<sup>118</sup> In either modern or traditional settings the social boundaries of neighborhoods does exist, though in the former it is much less pronounced.

able to negotiate<sup>119</sup>. The typology of the courtyard form lends its self to all ideographic representations of a fort. Indeed historically the courtyard typology was only discussed in the context of climate control and privacy, thus suppressing a whole set of consideration that lies beyond these conventional readings, some of which were territory and defensive mechanism physical and psychological. From this context then the reduction of the enclosing forms to a mere fence could be understood as a development of a new relationships between neighbors whose control over their property no longer demanded an elaborate defensive forms. These relationships were mediated by a modern invisible power system that came to be called the municipality<sup>120</sup>. We should note two typical features, common to the outer fence, these were:

**First**, the height of the solid portion of the fence usually does not exceed eye level. At this level, commonly five feet, the solid portion gives way to a perforated concrete blocks or a brick design that would facilitate a partial viewing to either the outside or the inside. To look through this portion of the fence from the outside into the garden and home was considered a big offense. This portion of the fence

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<sup>119</sup> This acquisition was not by force, rather it was based on good will and the avoidance of harming one's neighbors and maintaining public access. This however neither contradict nor limit the manner in which the individual would express or assume control of the land he was granted. It is also true that we should not reduce the reading of courtyard topology to a defensive one, but rather we should consider it as an important one.

<sup>120</sup> Traditional institutions have maintained public access and resolved any conflicts that aroused from new building and existing structures; i.e to solve problems rather than plan the urban form. Municipalities did not exist in the Middle East until 1920's (Mona Serageldin)

was often utilized by the family, specifically females, to inspect from a guarded spot either the visitors or the outdoors. Conservative people frequently carry on a conversation across the fence with strangers who were not accepted to enter the premises of the house when, for example, the husband was not present<sup>121</sup>.

**Second** , the upper portion of the fence, the perforated concrete blocks, was normally repeated to provide a similar function for the roof terrace, this in turn provided architectural continuity. The fence demarcated the boundaries of the new house typology, it was also a signification of the emergence of a new cultural discourse. The role it was awarded in the modern context has transcended its conventional function of demarcation to contribute to the social experience of the new environment.

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<sup>121</sup> Lois Beck and Nikki Keddie, *Women in the Muslim world...*, See the following essays: 1- The status and fertility patterns of Muslim Women. by Nadia H. Youssef. 2-Women and Social Change in Morocco. by Vanessa Maher. 3-The Status of Women in Four Middle Eastern Communities. by Emrys L. Peters.

### 5.2.2 Main entrance

The character of the main entrance in colloquial architecture was extremely unique. Its importance stems from the convergence of two dramatically different sources; tradition and modernity which was resolved in a manifestation that stands outside the aesthetics of either source. For this reason I would suggest that the main entrance to be considered as the clearest expression of a cultural catharsis; conspicuously colloquial.

From the perspective of tradition, the important role that was assigned to the main entrance of the house stemmed from such considerations: as I have mentioned earlier that in the traditional context the houses were built within a specific building conventions and materials. Consequently the traditional quarters emerged as a homogeneous expression the constituents of which, the houses, have traditionally been distinguished by their particular entrances. This necessity for distinguishing the entrance was coupled by the pedestrian nature of the quarters lead to the development of intricate designs. The pedestrian pace demanded a detailed work on the entrances as to enrich the pedestrian experience, provide an aesthetically pleasing door that could be contemplated by the guests when waiting at the entrance, and most importantly the door was utilized to demonstrate the status of the family. The entrance opening has enjoyed a primacy in the elevation, for it was the threshold through which the house could be entered. Psychologically



Fig.32 Entrance canopies and door details. Kuwait, 1960s

this fragility of the entrance was very present in that the society has developed such conventions as to render the entrance impermeable. For example; upon moving to a new house a sacrifice (slaughter a lamb or a chicken) at the front step of the entrance was important. This was to prevent the evil spirit's from crossing that threshold into the house, and to bless those who would cross the door in or out of it<sup>122</sup>. The event of entering a space have developed a particular set of conventions either religious or secular. A religious primacy was awarded to the person that stands to the right hand side of a crowd that was about to enter a space<sup>123</sup>. In the secular sphere, a complex set of behavioral patterns were adhered to, when visiting, in relations to the nature of the visit, the relationship of the visitor to the household, the employment of specific manner of speech, the observance of a particular distance from the entrance, and a distinct stand should be maintained all in relation to who would open the door; a man, a women, or a child. I will leave this complex issue at this level of general consideration in order to attend to the issue at hand.

Modernization, on the other hand, has brought a new set of conditions that were to play a critical role in influencing the character and nature of the main entrance. The new urban morphology of linear grid system with wide streets for vehicular transportation, on one hand, and the object plan with the solid fence

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<sup>122</sup> Usually the meat that is obtained from the sacrifice is given to the poor.

<sup>123</sup> This practice often performed by conservative Muslims in their following of the prophets habits.



at the perimeter, on the other, have produced the following manifestations:

**First**, the main entrance maintained its traditional importance due to the character of the garden fence which remained as the demarcating boundary of the house. The solid construction of the fence have restored the fragile character of the entrance, hence the attention to counteract its vulnerability. Social conventions remain applicable and were maintained in this new context, though in certain cases the new condition would require a significant transformation in the convention. In the event of moving into an apartment building, for example, the new residents would usually have their sacrifice at the apartment entrance rather than at the street. Such a behavior was often tolerated, but such a context would eventually force the convention to be modified or be abandoned totally.

**Second**, the main entrance was commonly located at the garden fence away from the house. This location have rendered the entrance exposed to the elements, therefore new provisions were needed to provide for a proper space of entry. In order to provide shade from the sun and cover from the rain, while the guests were waiting, a system of shading canopies were employed. I will discuss the aesthetic aspect of these canopies in the next chapter, for now I will be only concerned with the functions. These canopies have also provided protection for lighting fixtures which were utilized to light the main entrance at night.

**Third**, the width of the streets and the introduction of automobiles have necessitated the development of an expression that was perceptible from a distance



Fig.33 Entrance canopies. Kuwait, 1960s

and easily identified when approached by an automobile. As such the intersection between these modern considerations and the traditional role of the main entrance, in the context of this house typology, would be extremely crucial to reveal the local ability of resolving unconventional set of considerations architecturally.

It must be noted that a greater freedom was awarded to designing the main entrance for two reasons; **a**, the physical separation of the main entrance from the house entrance. The interior entrance off of the garden has provided for the possibility of accommodating two different expressions. The interior entrance was often more traditional, being out of wood and sometimes with intricate details, thus satisfying a range of traditional demands<sup>124</sup>. **b**, the main entrance was treated as an experiment for, on one hand, the new set of considerations found no traditional manner of expression, therefore local interpretation of institutional building resolution were adopted<sup>125</sup>, on the other, that the expression of the main entrance could easily be modified at a later stage<sup>126</sup>. For these reasons the main entrance has developed bold geometric forms with conspicuous

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<sup>124</sup> The relationship between the expression of the interior entrance and the exterior one could be understood as a reflection of the duality of the state of society as it was transforming in relation to tradition (interior entrance) and modernity (exterior entrance).

<sup>125</sup> Typical institutional buildings, done in the modern style, have utilized projections over main entrances which might have served as a precedent to local interpretation.

<sup>126</sup> Being located away from the house renders any construction to interfere minimally with the functioning of the house. Also the expenses to renovate the entrance would be minimum when compared to altering the character of the interior entrance.

angles, exaggerated canopies with expressive forms, "pop-art" door details, and the utilization of distinct colors for the doors and to highlight the structure of the entrance. Steel or aluminum doors were used for the main entrance due to their durability but, more importantly, for security. These doors required painting once or twice a year allowing for constant change of colors, thus more experimentation. The employment of metal doors have fostered the development of new skills that were needed to execute metal doors<sup>127</sup> that were custom designed .

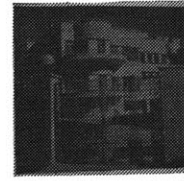


Fig.34 Iron details.  
Baghdad, 1950s

The main entrance in colloquial architecture has represented the clearest body of social signification in this context. This gate like entrance asserts its uniqueness by interrupting so violently the simple and often passive character of the fence. The exaggerated expressions of the structure, the canopy, and the details insured the entrances distinctive signification. The expression of the entrance seemed to have reached out and grasped that aspiration, out of the individuals imaginations, then solidified it into an expression of concrete and steel which was then realized. The estranged element seemed to be content in disassimilation, vibrant with disconformity, jubilant by uniqueness, and full of originality. These entrances did seek to fulfill their assigned programs; physical and symbolic. Beyond the physical functionality lies the sphere of representation where every entrance

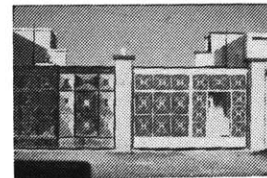


Fig.35 Colors and  
decoration to  
differentiate the  
dwellings. Kuwait,  
1960s

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<sup>127</sup>It would be extremely important to investigate the development and the mechanism of this fundamental constituent of the building industry in the Middle East.

attempts to define and signify its patron. Thus the arbitrariness of the representation which seemed in the eyes of the critics nothing more than a "*hodge podge of architectural form*"<sup>128</sup>, was in reality only a semiological exploration that did seek to define the ambiguous concept of patronage. Ernest Cassirer in commenting on representation noted:

*"For all mental processes fail to grasp reality itself, and in order to represent it, to hold it at all, they are driven to the use of symbols. But all symbolism harbors the curse of mediacy; it is bound to obscure what it seeks to reveal"*<sup>129</sup> .

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<sup>128</sup>Huda H. Al-bahar, "Contemporary Kuwaiti Houses" *\_(Mimar 13, July 1984)*, page 63.

<sup>129</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *Language and Myth* (translated by Susanne K. Langer), (New York: Dover publications inc. ,1946), P. 7.

### 5.2.3 Porches

Although the object plan typology was the decisive promoter to the introduction of the porch in this context, nevertheless, generically the porch did share a number of characteristics with the traditional courtyard. These characteristics have facilitated the transformation of conventional utilization of the courtyard to the porch, hence their continuum. The porch has also induced the development of new conventions or accelerated the modification of the old ones. Lets consider the following characteristics of the porch in colloquial architecture and note briefly their roles in the new context.

The porch as a transition space; The entrance to the houses were usually entered through a porch. In the modern Iraqi house, for example, the entrance was always located off of a "*tarmah*", which was a porch that opened to the garden and was connected to the main entrance by a clearly defined pathway<sup>130</sup>. This space served to shelter the the entrance and adjacent window openings and it also provided cover for the visitors when greeted upon arrival or departure. Along with the entry porch there exist other covered spaces that function as an extension of interior rooms, thus providing garden views. The view of the garden was a considerably different experience from the view of the courtyard in such ways as for example; in the context of the courtyard the rooms must maintain a high degree of privacy



Fig.36 Porches. Kuwait, 1960s



Fig.37 Porches. Kuwait, 1960s

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<sup>130</sup> A. Mulla Hiwaish, *Modern architecture in Iraq...*p. 175.

due to the public nature of the courtyard; a variety of screens were necessary to permit cool air to enter these spaces and yet maintain privacy. In the object house typology, the garden often surrounds the house permitting the potential to develop a number of isolated porches with uninterrupted views. This character was effective in providing different sitting spaces for males and females if needed. Traditionally there existed a comparable space to the porch that could be found in the traditional Arab houses. This space was called "*takhtabush*", of which Hassan Fathy have noted the following in its description;

*"The vernacular architecture of the Arab house includes an element called the takhtabush, a type of loggia. This is a covered outdoor sitting area at ground level, located between the courtyard and the back garden, opening completely onto the courtyard and through a mashrabiya onto the back garden."*<sup>131</sup>

It is clear that this traditional form required two open spaces, the courtyard and outdoor garden, in order for it to function. This in turn would render the highly desirable *takhtabush* as a luxury item given the fact that the high density nature of traditional fabric usually did not allow for the presence of a courtyard and a garden simultaneously. The covered walk ways that surrounded the courtyard often functioned, like the *takhtabush*, as sheltered sitting spaces

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<sup>131</sup> Hassan Fathy, *Natural Energy and Vernacular Architecture*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago press, 1986), P. 63-4.

where some of the interior function, such as cooking or washing, would be extended . Large covered walkways would also serve for dining or after siesta "tea time" gathering<sup>132</sup> . In the modern porches such conventions were maintained but naturally were modified in order to extend the interior spaces physically and programmatically. Indeed the introduction of air conditioning, running water, electricity, and new building typology have, sometimes, refined and formalized some of these conventions while, at others, rendered them obsolete. I am thinking of conventions that were maintained such as keeping an eye on the kids playing while socializing with friends, food preparation, the late afternoon "tea time", and some times dinning. These porches, like the *takhtabush*, were furnished but, unlike the *takhtabush*, with flexible modern furniture, it was also utilized to watch T.V. in comfortable summer evenings. The porch when understood in the context of the programmatic specificity of the interior spaces in the object house typology, and in conjunction with modern amenities of running water and electricity, will reveal an adequate comprehension of its potentials and the reasons behind its popularity. The porch did not suppress the traditional conventions, rather it facilitated their modifications and induced the creation of new ones<sup>133</sup> . It was an element of

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<sup>132</sup> Tea time was an English influence which have become a tradition, at least in Iraq.

<sup>133</sup> For those who consider the dropping out of some conventions as unhealthy phenomenon would only be professing stagnation. The complex dynamics of social behavior would render obsolete any single dimensional argument to explain the culture's social evolution. Architecture is only one

freedom from the confinement of introversion. The porch allowed the interior spaces to relate to different orientations and views while maintaining a high level of privacy. Male and females could have different porches if desired, but also different interior spaces could have their own extended space to the outdoors. The potential of the porch to accommodate traditional and modern conventions is its most valuable character.

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constituent of a complex web of agents that fuel such social metamorphosis.



#### 5.2.4 Balconies

This element was not totally foreign to the tradition as might seem at first. In the courtyard houses there existed the tradition of having covered corridors, or a roof-terrace loggia that opened to the courtyard. The mashrabiya was another form that have always functioned as a balcony, and was argued by Hassan Fathy to have been:

*"The mashrabiya has five functions. Different patterns have been developed to satisfy a variety of conditions involved: (1) controlling the passage of light, (2) controlling the air flow, (3) reducing the temperature of the air current, (4) increasing the humidity of the air current, and (5) ensuring privacy."*<sup>134</sup>.

I would suggest that Fathy's first and last conditions were theoretically acceptable, while I found it hard to accept the remaining conditions in light of the physical make-up of the mashrabiya. A wooden lattice no deeper than an inch could only contribute in a limited manner to modify the humidity and reduce the temperature of the air current. I would suggest that there is no difference between the Italian wooden shutters and the wooden lattice of the mashrabiya. As for the lattice to increase the humidity of the air is a misconception, it is the *gulah* ( ceramic vase filled with water for drinking) placed at the

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<sup>134</sup> H. Fathy, *Natural Energy and Vernacular Architecture...*, p. 47.

mashrabiya as to take advantage of the air which facilitate water evaporation off of the wet surface of the *gulah*. Such action would cool the water in the *gulah* and as a byproduct will contribute to humidify the air. We must remember that the *gulah* was there in the first place for drinking purposes, because the mashrabiya was the only place where one could sit and relate to the outside world; a balcony. Deep below the house, in the cellar, the inhabitant of the traditional houses would retreat for cool and humid spaces with air current brought in by an elaborate wind catchers. Commonly, these catchers would integrate a fountain or continuously running water which would humidify the high column of air as it was drafted by the wind catcher<sup>135</sup>. Surely a simple combination of *gulah* and wooden lattice if proved to be of any substantial effect on climatic conditions would have rendered the cellar and the wind catcher obsolete. A critical scrutiny of conditions two, three, and four would be required in order to validate their concreteness and to demystify their effectiveness, however this is not the place to do that.

The mashrabiya traditionally was open to the public space in order for the women to see the outside world without being seen. The uncompromising mashrabiya jets itself out as to project in the public space, thus producing the most conspicuous element of the house. What was remarkable about this element was the intricate resolution of the wood work which was required to control light and public gaze while at the same time permitting women to observe

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<sup>135</sup>ibid., P. 52

the outdoors. The mashrabiya is an element of elusiveness. What render this form elusive is the fact that it was a confinement from which the female could observe the world without ever being inhibited by the fact of being watched. Ironically, she could only achieve that by rendering herself invisible. Thus to attain freedom from the inhibition of the gaze, the women must be veiled by a wood screen. The shadow of the screen falling on the viewer behind it decomposes her into an unrecoverable spots of light that obscure her presence. Looking from the inside, her physical and social relation to the world, is conceived in an obscured or actually deformed manner<sup>136</sup>. The intricate wood lacing provide a screen that would render obsolete any unmediated engagement of the outside. Though the mashrabiya has a small operable opening which was utilized for brief conversation, its usage was limited to active social exchange and not a contemplative one. Paradoxically, the more creative and intricate (the mesh of the screen varied in accordance to height) the wood work of the *mashrabiya* is, the more effective it is in limiting the exchange between the interior of that space and the world beyond. For this reason, society's most elusive controlling devise has become the epitome of society's most celebrated architectural element <sup>137</sup>.

The introduction of balconies, therefore, was extremely important for it represented a manifold of

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<sup>137</sup> This reading is conjectural, therefore it requires an elaborate and critical research into the psychological implications of such architectural elements as mashrabiya on the females, and by extension the family, social and psychological state.

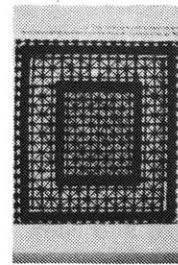


Fig.38 View focusing on lattice of Mashrabiya



Fig.39 From the same spot, view focusing on the building across



Fig.40 A dialogue between Old and New. Old neighborhood, Baghdad, contemporary

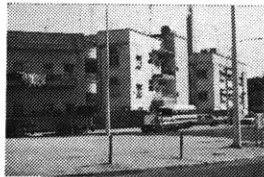


Fig.41 A variety of balconies. Kuwait, 1960s

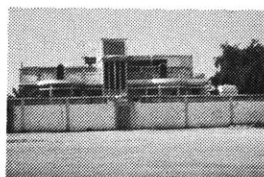


Fig.42 A hybrid balcony. Kuwait, 1960s

significations, not only ideological, but programmatic as well.

Balconies were designed either as voids when carved out of the solid mass of the architectural form, or as a projection. This expression was influenced by the aesthetics of modern architecture which was the language of a very high percentage of institutional buildings. The majority of schools, hospitals, and government agencies, built in the modern architectural style, were to be found in every community, whence their influence on the building tradition. The balcony was utilized to provide protection for large openings from direct sun light and rain. In this manner a full advantage of the large opening will be benefited from. This space was also utilized as a storage space, and often as place to dry clothes. Such a practice, on one hand, occurred in the absence of roof terrace or a garden, on the other, it was the continual of a specific traditional practices. As it was universally utilized, the balcony was also a place to sit out and look-out to what lied beyond one's immediate context.

Privacy in the context of the balcony, within this architectural expression, has developed a hybrid form that was a graft of a roof terrace with its protective parapet wall to the prototypical balcony form. The two balconies were commonly joined by an opening with the open balcony being to the outside. A conjecture could be made in regard to who would utilize the open balcony as opposed to the more private one. Surely man remains the master in this social system, but clearly with a very different attitude from his predecessors (those of the traditional fabric).

Indeed the open balcony would be utilized mostly by men in a conservative context and equally by both sexes in a liberal society. This, however, did not mean that women could not use the balcony in a conservative society, rather specific behavior patterns were required from both genders though women's behavior would be more strict. Though the ability to access the open balconies by females seem to be a banal fact, nevertheless, it was a significant shift from the *mashrabiya*. At least physically the women had the choice to access the open balcony, and there was no doubt that even if she did not utilize the balcony only rarely, to have been able to access it was psychologically important. The physical existence of the hybrid balcony (*colloquial balcony*) was a signification of two folds in the male-female relationship: **First**, females were now given the chance to determine for themselves whether it was appropriate or not to step into the open balcony and right into the eyes of the world. In this lied the potential for women to either challenge or abide by the rules of their social context, specifically now that she could see the world while the world could see her. Surely the moment of emergence from behind the walls of tradition into the naked rails of the open balcony was nothing short of the miracle of birth. To transgress illiteracy and dependance was to transform a being that would emerge into a world that only believed in itself: that was the world of modernity. **Second**, The balcony did also denote man's overcoming the boundaries of tradition. His breaking away was equally dramatic to that of the women, because in his empowerment - as opposed to the males traditional role of authority - the

transformation of the individual was as remarkable. The freedom and the trust to utilize the balcony, a space that reveals, which was awarded to the family was a signification of not only the new vision of the male vis-a-vis female and the family, but it was a step toward his emancipation from the traditional inhibition<sup>138</sup>.

On the level of signification, the balcony stands as an epitome for the emergence of new society. Being elevated from the ground, the balcony reveals what lies beyond one's immediate context. As the immediate surroundings drops underneath the jetting datum of the balcony, as to become a viewing platform, revealing the sweeping view that is both contained and freed by the thin line of horizon. Removed from one's immediate reality by the undulation of the building masses as they vanish into oneness of the perspective, one feels arrested and liberated by the authority of such a sight<sup>139</sup>. The program of the balcony in architecture, it seems to me, has an acute metaphorical equivalence in the new social discourse. Education, health, and strong

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<sup>138</sup> I am not suggesting that a total emancipation have taken place, rather I am suggesting that such architectural elements as the balcony plays an important role in inducing change and evoking new set of social considerations which could be the first steps for a social emancipation. Needless to say that such transformations are slow but surly architecture plays an important role directly and indirectly in creating the proper environment to foster such change.

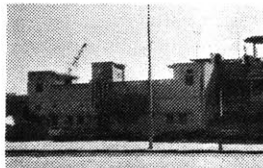
<sup>139</sup> I am certain those who stood at balconies and delivered speeches to large crowds must always feel physically the power of authority as the crowds are reduced to a single entity, an abstract banality, that provides authority to the speaker and evokes inspirations in the crowd. I suggest that the balcony is certainly the ideal manifestation to facilitate, in different context and for different reasons, the interchange of authority.

economy are only few examples of *cultural balconies* that would enable society to attain a better view of its future.

### 5.2.5 Roof terrace



Fig.43 Terraced roofing.  
Kuwait, 1960s



Fig, 44 Simple flat roof.  
Kuwait, 1960s



Fig.45 Exposed steel  
bars and concrete  
columns. Baghdad,  
1960-70s

This space was an evolution of the traditional roof-terrace loggia that was typical in Iraq, Egypt and North Africa<sup>140</sup>. This space has provided for various functions:

**First**, until the introduction of air conditioning the roof terrace was used for sleeping by the family during the summer months when the temperature at night was cool. Indeed this was an old tradition that continued until recently. To sleep under the stars was truly a wonderful experience that has become obsolete as cities developed air pollution.

**Second**, the roof terrace has functioned as a large and safe playground for the children. The parapet fence provided a secure containment for the children, while its isolation from the rest of the house provided for a rather quite spaces bellow. Because of the roof terrace finish, often being concrete tiles, it provided a completely different playground from the garden, whence a completely different activities. For example: while in the garden children would play ball, run around, play in the sand box, etc. The roof did lend itself to such things as flying kites, setting up traps for birds, or playing with toys that required a large smooth open space<sup>141</sup>.

**Third**, the roof terrace has always functioned as a storage and habitation space where such thing as

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<sup>140</sup> I am certain that this space is common in many other countries of similar environment. H. Fathy, *Natural Energy and Vernacular Architecture....*, p. 50.

<sup>141</sup> It has been argued that Le Corbusier's notion of a roof terrace play ground was developed from his observations of the Algerian's utilizations of the roof terrace.



chicken or bird cages were kept. Flying pigeons, for example, was a spectacle in Baghdad. Several pigeons, sometimes reaching a hundred, would be let loose to circulate a circumscribed regions were the folk of pigeon in flight would attract any lost or uncommitted pigeons in the neighborhood, hence increasing their number<sup>142</sup>. Such a practice does utilize the roof terrace quite extensively. The roof was also utilized to dry clothes because even with drying machines the practice of sun drying remains favoured by the majority of society. Roof terrace was often covered partially by a verity of trellises or shading devices which often take on a rather expressive forms.

**Forth**, the flat roof provides for an efficient and economical platform for the house to expand and built onto. This would prove important as the size of the family would grow and the economic situation would change.

**Fifth**, the water tank storage was always located either on the roof terrace or on top of the stair well . This of course was to produce high water pressure.

The potential of the roof terrace is undetermined. The roof was this perfectly flat datum that was so modernly abstract that, I would suggest, has captured the very spirit of the culture as it was propelled by the ambiguity of modernization. The roof terrace was able to transform into all possibilities in order to allow a physical flexibility for desired or demanded alterations by the unpredictable social *change*. The

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<sup>142</sup>This phenomenon is considered to be a sport, and its done for pleasure only.

flat roofs of modern architecture were motivated aesthetically to complete the object . Le Corbusier was, without a doubt, modern architecture's illustrious figure who took an advantage of the flat roof. The roof garden of *Villa Savoye* and the roof play ground at *Unites d'habitation* were aesthetically critical as to complete the object both physically and programmatically. The project would be radically disfigured if the roof terraces were either eliminated or altered; the object is aesthetically complete. In contrast, the roof terrace of colloquial houses would not resist such utilization as those of the modern architecture, rather its indeterminate resolution (in the context of form or program) has freed the roof to develop beyond both the modernist or the traditionalist discourses. The open ended purpose of the roof terrace was a testimony to a social transformation that was motivated by an ambiguous future.

### 5.2.6 Shading devices

The functional concerns of these devices were to protect windows, main entrances, porches and balconies, and roof terraces from weather and direct sun light. I will note briefly some of the interesting ways colloquial architecture have dealt with this requirement.

#### Windows

Three methods were employed in shading the window openings, they were; projecting an overhang, recessing the window into a balcony or a porch, or a shading screen. All these methods could be found in traditional or modern architecture, however, in this context their aesthetics were clearly inspired by modern architecture. The least elaborate method of protecting the opening was to project a an overhang. This was usually an extension of the poured in place concrete header. It was also common to have a three or even four sided projection around the window opening, however, this was most likely for a decorative purposes. Balcony projections, an extension of ceiling slab, were also utilized to provide protection for the windows. What is important to consider here is that overhangs required the development of new expertise in concrete construction so they would be economically feasible. When balconies and-or porches were utilized, a full



Fig.46 Window shades.  
Kuwait, 1960s

advantage of their protective nature was used. Large windows were usually placed off of these spaces which normally would face the front of the house or toward a street, thus opening to the views. In the case of employing shading screens there existed a peculiar phenomenon. In Kuwait, for example, an extensive appropriation of shading screens that were employed to form the exterior wall of the stair wells recalled very strongly a similar treatment that was common in institutional buildings. This is interesting in that such an appropriation would reveal to us the type of projects the society was looking at and to what extent did they appropriate or adopt certain expression. There is no doubt that a number of builders who were engaged in building some of the institutional buildings went - schools or government buildings - on to build other private residences where they might have employed their new skills. The canopy was the common shading devise that was used to cover the main entrances. Poured in place concrete was the typical construction method that was utilized to build this form. As I have suggested earlier that the main entrance was a unique manifestation, consequently the canopy was particularly important in this expression. A considerable skills and experimentation could be observed in these canopies the concern of which was to create a unique expression.

### **Porches and Balconies**

I have grouped these elements together because they were often shaded in precisely the same

manner. Further shading of these spaces were sometimes required due to their shallow depths. The shading devices in such cases were placed on the upper portion of the space. These devices were varying in designs and materials spanning a range from metal panels to poured in place concrete. The designs of these elements were often highly decorative, thus placing them outside the discussion of this thesis. The canopies at the roof terraces were the most provocative expression of colloquial architecture. programmatically these shading devices were used to provide protection for water storage, or a verity of activities such as those discussed in earlier sections. The zigzag, the curved or the flat but rounded forms were basically, aesthetically motivated, expressions of a modern affiliation which were present in institutional buildings<sup>143</sup>.

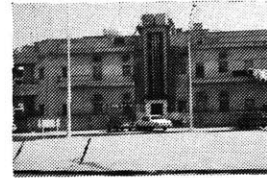


Fig.47 On stair wells an appropriation of institutional shading devices, specifically as seen in schools, were employed. Kuwait, 1960s

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<sup>143</sup>Typical schools in Iraq had such architectural roof tops specifically on top of the gymnasium. See institutional architecture, chapter one.

### 5.3 Review

I would like to identify some of the dynamics deduced from the preceding discussion on program. A new set of modern conventions - access to education, work, and basic rights - placed by the governments to propel society into modernization were superimposed on the traditional *conventions*<sup>144</sup> of privacy, segregation, family structure, male superiority and work . This was coupled by economic mobility and aggressive modern urban planning. To a great extent both institutions - traditional and modern - were employed concurrently providing for a dynamic state of their reinterpretation and assimilation in unanticipated manners. Conventions have a degree of arbitrariness or relativity, as suggested by Stanford Anderson<sup>145</sup>. This undetermined cultural redefinitions have the potential to step outside the institution and into genuine modernity.

The program of the architectural elements, discussed above, provided for conventions: the fence and roof terrace maintained privacy; the porches and the garden continued some of the courtyard traditional functions; segregation is possible if required; etc. While modern conventions were integrated as in: the garden, roof terrace, porches

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<sup>144</sup>"With 'convention' comes a self-consciousness both of these norms and of a degree of arbitrariness or relativity in their beginnings and maintenance". S. Anderson, *Types and Conventions in Time...*, p.109.

<sup>145</sup>ibid.

and large unobscured windows facilitated an opening to the outside world. The porches and garden provided for late afternoons social gatherings, television viewing, and dining. Electricity and running water, without a doubt, did alter daily life considerably. Colloquial architecture developed conventions that were particular to its situation: the roof terrace and the garden were play grounds but also birds or chicken storage places, vegetable garden, and even places for living. The fence, the canopied entrance, the hybrid balcony, the roof terrace with its conspicuous shades were all manifestation of a new reality, an expression of a society that enjoyed its spontaneousness.





**Chapter Six**

—————**6.0 Do You See What I See!**



## 6.0 Ways of Seeing

Based on Panofsky's structure of understanding the visual arts, it becomes clear that our perception and deciphering to large degree is conditioned by culture and knowledge<sup>146</sup>. Seeing then must also be conditioned in the same manner in order to understand the objects perceived. Our mental ability to decipher and qualify visual arts, based to large extent on the ocular sense, is then vulnerable to be undermined by the dynamics of perception and interpretation. This becomes acute when one attempts to decipher the objects of art from those which are not. Conventionally this was done by qualifying the objects through certain agreed upon systems of aesthetics, and an object which did not conform was regarded as none artistic until an agreed upon aesthetic system (taste) is developed that would qualify that object. The problem of subjectivity in such a discourse has been recognized for long and Panofsky has warned against such determinism:

*"Where the sphere of practical objects ends, and that of 'art' begins, depends, then, on the 'intention' of the creators. This 'intention' cannot be absolutely determined."*<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the visual arts*, (Chicago: the University of Chicago press, 1955).

<sup>147</sup> *ibid.*, p. 12.

It is this indeterminate view of architectural production that was natural to the perception of such canons as Le Corbusier to see in the American industrial buildings and grain elevators the constituency of a modern architecture. Le Corbusier noted:

*"Thus we have the American elevators and factories, the magnificent FIRST-FRUITS of the new age. THE AMERICAN ENGINEERS OVERWHELM WITH THEIR CALCULATIONS OUR EXPIRING ARCHITECTURE."*<sup>148</sup> (his emphasis)

Le Corbusier's vision was not limited to architecture but he saw in AirPlanes, Steamships, and Automobiles the aesthetics of the new age. The chapters discussing these mechanical creations were titled "EYES WHICH DO NOT SEE"<sup>149</sup> which was designed to expose a domain of inspiration that for long been suppressed by the limited horizon of the conventional architectural paradigm.

Robert Venturi also has challenged the conventional wisdom of looking backward (past) in order to advance forward. In "Learning From Las Vegas" he looked downward for inspiration, Venturi noted:

*"There is a perversity in the learning process: We look backward at history and tradition to go forward; we can also look downward to go upward. And*

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<sup>148</sup>Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, (translated from the thirteenth French edition and with introduction by Frederick Etchells), (New York: Dover publication, 1986), P. 31.

<sup>149</sup>ibid.

*withholding judgement may be used as a tool to make later judgment more sensitive. This is a way of learning from everything."*<sup>150</sup>

Reyner Banham, when dealing with Los Angeles, looked into the '*rear-view mirror for historical illumination*'<sup>151</sup> and found it uninformative. The question was: what methodological discourse one must employ when faced with a unique case where no precedents exist. How to deal with:

*'this giant city, which has grown almost simultaneously all over, is that all its parts are equal and equally accessible from all other parts at once.'*<sup>152</sup>

A new methodology is required to the understanding of a city that '*more and more to move by an almost random or Brownian motion over the whole area.*'<sup>153</sup> The methodology adopted by Banham was a '*Los Angeles specific*' ; four ecologies of highly discursive nature would account for this complex manifestation called Los Angeles.

In order to better understand colloquial architecture and its seemingly contradictory nature we need to overcome the epistemological difficulty of categorization which would liberate our perception as to see the object in its proper context. Then an

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<sup>150</sup>Robert Venturi, *Learning From Las Vegas*, (Cambridge, Mass., and London England: M.I.T press, 1972), p. 3.

<sup>151</sup>Reyner Banham, *Los Angeles; The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1971), P. 36.

<sup>152</sup>ibid. ,P. 36.

<sup>153</sup>ibid.

examination of its hybrid structure as a paradigm for reconsidering every element of this manifestation would facilitate a recovery of a general definition for colloquial architecture.

## 6.1 Colloquial Architecture and Bats: An Epistemological Difficulty

Consider for instance "*Bat*"! Bats have been defined by the Oxford dictionary as;

*a flying mammal with a mouselike body!*

This definition of bats exhibits the fundamental problems at work in deciphering such expressions as that of colloquial architecture. The Bat in this case was diminished into a bird due to its ability to fly, and it was collapsed into a mouse for in one way or another there is a resemblance. The nature of such impoverishment is extremely reductivist to the point where the image of a Bat, as defined by Oxford dictionary, sounds rather *cartoonish*. The critical issue here is it appropriate to understand Bats only through those attributes which they share with birds and mice. Wouldn't such a discourse suppress all other qualities found in Bats but absent from birds and mice. The epistemological difficulty here is that if an object can not be categorized as to be represented and communicated then it would be collapsed into other immediate categories that facilitate the most approximate representation of the object. What is critical here is that the reductivist process of categorizing suppresses totally all the object's characteristics that inhabit the domain outside categorization.

The other important issue we must consider deal with cultural appropriation. A transformation of forms is not necessary as long as the form has the capacity to accommodate the program of the appropriating tradition. This process is selective in that society would appropriate best, either inside or external influences, those forms which resists its nature the least. At the same time society cannot resist forms that do not contradict its traditional logic. Analogous mechanism could be observed, at an infinitely abstract level, would be a tissue that is finely knitted to filter water, for example, would not resist a whole spectrum of liquids that differ from water in characteristics that are totally transparent to the tissue, and for the same reason it would not block a fine grained solid materials. The magnetic tapes of music cassettes, for example, have been commonly utilized to store large computer data base informations. The nature of the tape does not resist its utilization as a data bank as opposed to Rock music, rather it proved to be extremely convenient method of storing information. Are we then to assume that such an appropriation of tapes is contradictory to its conventional use? I think not. In the context of culture this process is infinitely more resilient and illimitably complex.

In the case of colloquial architecture I will argue, based on the above premises, that this architecture has inhabited the undetermined domain of the traditional logic and modern form. Thus producing a unique architectural expression that claims its particular logic and unique manifestation.



## 6.2 The Hybrid Structure: a Colloquial Sensibility

The utilizations of two structural systems, bearing wall construction<sup>154</sup> and concrete frame, is important in two folds: **First**, Masons maintained a minimum distinction between bearing and non bearing walls. The concept of infill walls, assumed by the modernists as being transparent, temporary, and flexible, was not entertained. The traditional concept of wall as being permanent, solid, and durable remains as the pervading concept. Architects or engineers upon specifying a wall that does not conform to the traditional concept is likely to encounter a resistance. The traditional distinction between bearing and non bearing walls has not resisted their collapse into one expression that of bearing wall construction.

**Second**, This hybrid structure stands as a contradiction to the modernist development of the concrete frame. The system was designed to free the walls from the burden of weight, and consequently the development of new aesthetics. The rationality of the system promised an efficient utilization of materials, and its precise determinism was to celebrate the aesthetics of the machine age.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Although the infill brick wall is only used to place openings and hold its weight. However, the manner in which the wall is built exhibit no differences from a wall bearing structure.

<sup>155</sup> Ulrich Conrads, "Le Corbusier, 'Five Points towards a new architecture 1926'", *Programs and Manifestoes on 20th-century architecture*, ( Cambridge, Mass.: MIT press, 1971), p. 99.

what characteristics are unique to this hybrid construction method? And how does those characteristics manifest themselves architecturally?

Let us consider the hybrid structural system as a paradigm to investigate the characteristics of colloquial architecture. The implication of the structural duality and how it manifested itself in the cultural discourse were manifested in the following considerations:

**First**, the structural duality enabled this building methodology to incorporate two building traditions to be reconciled so as not to alienate either one.

**Second**, an inherited ambiguity in the structural system functioned as a deterrent to a dogmatic discourse. This structure allowed the architecture to always be incomplete, contradictory, or neutral, hence its capacity to fulfill a wide range of demands. Such state of ambiguity was the proper environment for a high degree of experimentation and was conducive to the development of imaginative expressions. This was even the more important since the social transformation was rapid and radical at times and its perpetual movements between tradition and modernity has rendered it as chaotically dynamic. This structural ambiguity had the optimum plasticity as to express these dynamics. In other word, varying degrees of appropriation from traditional and modern architecture could be resolved within this structure without negating either one.

**Third**, the nature of the structure resists the structural aesthetics of traditional and modern architecture. The traditional brick or stone buildings developed

intricate solutions which have become conventions of buildings that often resisted change. Consider how far did wall structures, openings, and roof constructions develop within brick or stone buildings. Vaults, domes, and arches with magnificent variation on one basic theme, the arch, were the limitations of that material's structural logic. The concrete frame was awarded by the modernist a set of aesthetic principles that were developed to exhibit the structure's rational and empiricist potentials. There is an arbitrariness in limiting the aesthetics of such a structural system to specific deterministic dogmas. On the contrary, as has been argued by Stanford Anderson:

*"Forms, while neither fully determined nor determining, are both embedded in cultural systems and related to material conditions"*<sup>156</sup>.

That the hybrid structure developed a form, different from the modernist aesthetics of the concrete frame, is only natural. This is because the modernist aesthetics of this form was determined by the *"cultural systems and related to material condition"*<sup>157</sup> of a particular context and period. For this reason the hybrid structure in colloquial architecture, determined by its particular *cultural systems and material condition* should only be perceived from that perspective.

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<sup>156</sup>S. Anderson, *Types and conventions in time...*, p. 109.

<sup>157</sup>ibid.

The nature of this hybrid form not being "*either- or*" but "*both-and*"<sup>158</sup> is its most liberating character. The form's ambiguity stems from its ability to reconcile the limited logic of stone and brick with the unlimited nature of concrete, thus on one hand, collapsing their aesthetics into each other, and on the other, stepping outside their aesthetics as to liberate its manifestations. Its nature is impressionable as to take the shape of *its cultural history* without any internal resistance to its nature or form. Like the water taking the shape of what contains it, this form borrows its manifestation from the logic of its corresponding moment of creation. Therefore its expression cannot be deciphered visually, rather it is only revealed through a recovery of the condition under which it was created.

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<sup>158</sup> Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction In Architecture*, ( New York: The museum of modern art papers on architecture, the museum of modern art, 1966-67), P. 16.

### 6.3 Colloquial Architecture Recovered

A specific concept of aesthetics is required in order to recover colloquial architecture. In his essay "The Dialectics of the Aesthetic"<sup>159</sup> W.F. Haug speaking of *The space of aesthetic*<sup>160</sup> noted:

*"I understand the dominating power in the imaginary as ideological, the acting as an end in itself as the cultural. The point is on the field of aesthetic to separate in this sense the ideological and the cultural and to conquer as much cultural space as possible"*<sup>161</sup>

Space of aesthetic, as argued by Haug, is both ideologically conditioned and culturally specific. The dynamic nature of space of aesthetic stems from the perpetual influence between ideology and culture. Colloquial architecture' space of aesthetic is dialectically motivated by dogmas of tradition and modern ideologies, on the one hand, conventions and material condition, on the other.

The issue of privacy, for example, is transferred from ideological sphere into cultural space in the following manner: a law, divine or otherwise, would define the nature of privacy, thus its injection into cultural space. The definition of privacy will be manifested in various

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<sup>159</sup>Wolfgang Fritz Haug, *Commodity Aesthetic, Ideology and Culture*, (New York and Bagnolet: International General,1987).

<sup>160</sup>ibid., p. 137.

<sup>161</sup>ibid., p. 143.

societies differently<sup>162</sup>. Manifestations, when acquire a cultural significance, are expressed formally. The Mashrabiya is an instance of such expression. Education, when introduced by institutions in the cultural space, will undergo a similar process . Because they occupy the same cultural space, education and privacy, will redefine each other reciprocally. Manifestations of this reciprocal redefinition are the relatively unobscured gardens, the balconies, the roof terraces, and the gender mixed or segregated schools. In the same manner Al-Arabi's cover illustrations would induce a redefinition of privacy, education, style, aspirations etc. The cultural constituency's discursive nature renders its space of aesthetic as infinitely dynamic. This dynamism is excited further by any radical injection or dislocation of constituencies. These include urban form, technical developments, intellectual movements and the like. Within the dynamic cultural system a varying degrees of transformations and redefinitions of the constituencies are induced in relation to their nature . Women's privacy, for example, get modified slower than the acceptance of her getting educated; women's right to work is becoming more acceptable than her involvement in politics. Colloquial architecture inhabits this state of constant redefinition.

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<sup>162</sup>Manifestations are conditioned by conventions and material conditions. The same concept of privacy would be manifested differently in the rural area than the city, and from one social level to the other. In other words, manifestation is conditioned by its Cultural History .

Some of the cultural constituencies, when they are constantly shifting or transparent<sup>163</sup>, will not be manifested architecturally for two reasons: **First**, the constant shifting of the constituency does not allow for a rigorous definition. Consider, for example, the integration of fans, aircoolers, and airconditioners. Colloquial or popular architecture did not project a different adaptation to these systems. This was due to the flexible nature of these systems and their constant modification. **Second**, when the constituency is transparent. Consider conventions of visiting or religious practices which are commonly manifested in behavior.

Architectural manifestations are the result of two constituent types: **First**, a constituency that is slow changing and traditionally ingrained. The manifestation of such constituencies take place, either by modifying an appropriated architectural forms, or the development of new expression. These type of cultural constituencies developed the most conspicuous manifestations in colloquial architecture. Consider privacy, for example, where the development of solid fences, high parapet walls, and hybrid balconies were a combination of appropriation and new development. The important role of the main entrance demanded new manifestation in the context of modern planning. Conspicuous canopies, angular lines, large door details, and colors were all explored to develop a unique expression. The unpredictable form or rate of social transformation demanded building with

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<sup>163</sup> Requires no formal expression, prayer, for example.

concrete frame structures. This structure did satisfy traditional demands for solid and permanent building and yet it was capable of expansion vertically with no structural upgrading. The house garden, porches, balconies, and roof terraces had provided for the continuation and the modification of traditional conventions. Some of these conventions were sleeping out on the terrace, children play ground, food preparation, social gatherings, etc only to mention few. **Second**, a constituency of aspiration; a constituency of conscious change. The desire to be educated, to achieve higher living standard, to obtain modern amenities, to have a car, etc. It is important to realize when these constituencies appear in the cultural space - i.e. the desire to have something - it is an indication of an already redefined cultural space which accommodate these desires. For example, consider a poor individual, living in traditional quarter, who aspires to have a home with modern amenities. If within the cultural space this aspiration is defined as being a form of an international style in a Grid-Iron planned community, then this will be the desired manifestation. What is interesting here is that aspiration, international style, and Grid-Iron planning are redefined within the context of the cultural space. An image of an international style house, for example, is internalized differently by poor or rich, illiterate or literate, teacher or engineer, etc. This internalized image when expressed through owner-mason/architect corporation is likely to be specific not only to their particular understanding - which is culturally conditioned - but also to the material condition. The expression of this appropriated form therefore is not



one of *mimicry*, rather it is a genuine expression of aspiration and *cultural history*.

Consider the redefinition of international style in colloquial architecture. The solid fence obscures the modern expression of the house it demarcates. This is not a misinterpretation of modern expression - designed to be perceived as a whole - rather, it is a redefinition of modern architecture that is culturally specific. As such, the expression exhibits a local specificity that is seen in the relationship of the solid fence to the house, the parapet wall to the roof terrace, etc. The flat roof was turned into a multi-function terrace and its flatness was never appreciated for its *Platonic abstraction*. The concrete frame did not liberate *infill* walls from the traditional conception of wall. The cement finish was not an abstraction of form, rather it was an efficient and cheap finish material that corrects building inconsistencies and integrates its form.

It is the undetermined nature of these *Forms*, appropriated or developed, that facilitated a wide spectrum of redefinitions, thus their capacity to fulfill an equally varied programmatic requirements. The hybrid structure discussed earlier as a paradigm for colloquial architecture had exposed, to a limited degree, the plasticity of these architectural elements. It is for this reason any attempts to decipher architecture by examining the forms exclusively is rendered polemical.

The nature of colloquial architecture is embedded in the cultural systems and the material conditions of the Fifties and Sixties. Only through a reconstruction

of that period's *cultural history* can we appreciate its architectural manifestation. Within such considerations the concept of aesthetics - as utilized conventionally - must be abandoned in favor of a *space of aesthetic*.<sup>164</sup> This space permeate the totality of cultural space, hence grasping all its particularities which are then manifested in the architectural production.

The ideological discourses of Modern Architecture were preserved in manifestoes. If we are to understand Modern Architecture exclusively through manifestoes then we are bound to understand it ideologically. But to understand it as manifested in the cultural space, it would require a reconstruction of its cultural history. It is clear that manifestoes facilitate a reading of a particular kind that is non-existent in colloquial architecture. Popular architecture could be described aesthetically as *decadence* or economically as affordable, either reading is too limited to fully grasp such manifestation. Colloquial architecture, more than any other expression, cannot be understood outside its cultural history.

A conjecture could be advanced here: that colloquial manifestations are found, not only in architecture, rather in all aspects of culture. Consider car mechanics in The Middle East who repair German cars, for example, with parts obtained from Japanese or American . The mechanic's project is to keep the car functioning, as such the dogmas associated with the institution of models are often transgressed. Cars

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<sup>164</sup>W. F. Haug, *Commodity Aesthetic, Ideology and Culture* .

in the Middle East are likely to be a collage than being model specific.

The Middle Eastern experiment is worthy of critical and close examination in order to understand better the regions cultural discourse. This experiment is so unique it requires a fresh and a particular approach to unravel its complex and fascinating manifestations. The efforts, in this thesis to free my approach in order to recover colloquial architecture, were limited by the nature of research and my cultural conditioning. I wish this thesis to be a stepping stone and a beginning to further explore the intricacies of the cultural space and the space of aesthetic in colloquial expression. The Middle Eastern experience should no longer remain *Falling Upon Deaf Ears*.



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