

# Sharing and Building Modernities: Egyptian Architects in Kuwait 1960-2000

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*The primary goal of this magazine — the first of its kind in Egypt — is to serve the art of architecture [...] by opening a door and setting up a forum for the exchange of honest opinions and ideas [...] With this work alone, we will soon be able to proudly assert that Egyptian architecture is on the right track, with a distinctive voice, built on strong foundations.*

Sayed Karim, 1939, Opening to the inaugural issue of the first Arabic language architectural journal, *Al-Emara*.

*Egypt, which was previously considered a regional role model in terms of its architecture, and which contributed so much to the development of neighboring Arab cities through its architects, lost its canonical position and stature. Instead, the very cities that had looked up to Egypt and its architects have now become the embodiment of what Egyptian architecture should have and could have been during that period of time.*

Sayed Karim, 1989, *Egyptian Architecture in the Twentieth Century: Its Past, Its Present, Its Future*. Preface to the book: Twentieth Century Architecture in Egypt.

A discourse on the state of Egyptian architecture was never more present than between 1939 and 1959 in the pages of the first Arabic language architectural journal *Al-Emara*, established by Egyptian modernist architect Sayed Karim. If the magazine was, as Karim described it, “the forum for the exchange of honest opinion and ideas,” then the newly formed independent states of the Arab world were the terrain in which these ideas were tested, circulated and shared. Fifty years after the launch of *Al-Emara*, in the 1989 preface to the book Twentieth Century Architecture in Egypt, Karim laments the loss of Egypt’s position at the center of architectural and urban development in the region. Reflecting on those fifty years however, one cannot deny the formative role Egypt played in developing the urban fabric of the cities of the Arab World.

Urban history is often told through the lens of what remains of its built landscape, but the drawing board and the building sites were not the only spaces in which Egyptian architects effectively disseminated their ideas. Magazines, conferences, education and institution building were other avenues through which they etched their presence onto the built environment of the region.

Taking Kuwait as a case in point, this article seeks to shed a light on the often overlooked contribution of Egyptian architects in the city from the 1950s to the 1990s. Though it might be but a minor chapter in the history of Kuwait’s modernism, it serves nevertheless, as a counterpoint to the predominant narrative of a singular first-world influence on Kuwait’s 20th Century architectural and urban development. This chapter links Egypt and Kuwait in the last fifty years of the 20th Century via two key Egyptian figures of modernist architecture and urbanism, Sayed Karim and Mahmoud Riad, and the more widely recognized Hassan Fathy, as well as lesser-known practitioners such as Said Abdel Moneim, credited with the design of public

and private buildings dotted throughout the city.

Disaggregating Kuwait and Egypt’s urban and architectural relationship involves unpacking first the layers of Egyptian cultural and political regional influence and assessing its reach in Kuwait. In the political realm, Egypt’s fight for independence no doubt had strong reverberations in the region. The Suez Canal crisis nurtured the Kuwaiti desire for independence. During the crisis, support for Nasser was synonymous with strikes and a boycott of French and British products. Looking up to Egypt, Kuwaitis aspired to take full control of their resources. This can be gleaned from a series of entanglements in the immediate aftermath of the Canal crisis, where the then British controlled Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) was repeatedly and publicly attacked in the Kuwaiti press for “stealing” Kuwait’s oil and resources. The *Al-Itihad* newspaper, published by the *Kuwait Students in Egypt Association*, demanded the KOC openly reveal the quantities of oil they produced to the public, as well as their costs and sale prices, so that “the Imperialist Company cannot play with the people’s destiny and openly steal their resources.”<sup>1</sup> A strong wind of empowerment, rebellion and incitement was therefore blowing from Egypt. It is no coincidence that just five years after the Suez crisis, Kuwait was already requesting its official independence from Britain.

Though officially the Kuwaiti position steered away from the Arab nationalist stance, on the street Egypt’s president Gamal Abdel Nasser had a strong popular base. An event which illustrates Nasser’s popularity was a gala dinner permitted by the Kuwaiti authorities in celebration of the union of Egypt and Syria in 1958. In the lead up to the dinner, crowds gathered on the streets chanting slogans like, “awake from your sleep.”<sup>2</sup> Speeches held in a public square included Kuwaiti Jassim al-Qatami, who claimed it was time to dissolve the current regime’s tribal rule in the growing tides of Arab nationalism. Though his passport was torn to pieces by the authorities afterwards, this event somehow demonstrates the reach and appeal of Arab Nationalist discourse in Kuwait at the time.<sup>3</sup>

On 25 June 1961, immediately following Britain’s relinquishing authority in Kuwait, Iraqi president of the time, Abdul Karim Qasim, announced that Kuwait would be incorporated into Iraq. The military threat was seen by Britain and Kuwait as imminent. The subsequent British and Egyptian military interventions on behalf of Kuwait to stave off any attack strengthened the political bond between Egypt and Kuwait.<sup>4</sup>

On the media front, Kuwait’s press, newly established by Kuwaitis educated in Egypt, was reported to be “copying articles directly” from Egyptian counterparts.<sup>5</sup> Egypt’s public radio station, “Voice of the Arabs,” was the most popular station of the time.<sup>6</sup> Cinema, literature, music and theater were other manifestations of the reach of Egypt’s soft power in the region. The first cinematic projection and opera had taken place in Egypt almost a century before any other Arab country, with the celebrations for the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. In the Cairo of the 1950s, theater professionals returning from educational missions abroad were already experimenting with new forms such as realism, melodrama and the absurd. They would later help in establishing theater companies in other Arab countries. In Kuwait, Egyptian dramatist Zaki Tulaymat formed “The Arab Theater Troupe” in 1961, the mission of which would be, in Tulaymat’s words, “a revival of Arab glories.”<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, young Egyptian-educated Kuwaiti thespians returned to Kuwait, writing and directing the first plays and activating the theater space.

1. Alissa, Reem. "Building for Oil: Corporate Colonialism, Nationalism and Urban Modernity in Ahmadi, 1946-1992." UC Berkeley Dissertations & Theses (2012). 81.

2. Joyce, Miriam. *Kuwait, 1945-1996: An Anglo-American Perspective*. London: Routledge, (1998), 41.

3. Ibid.

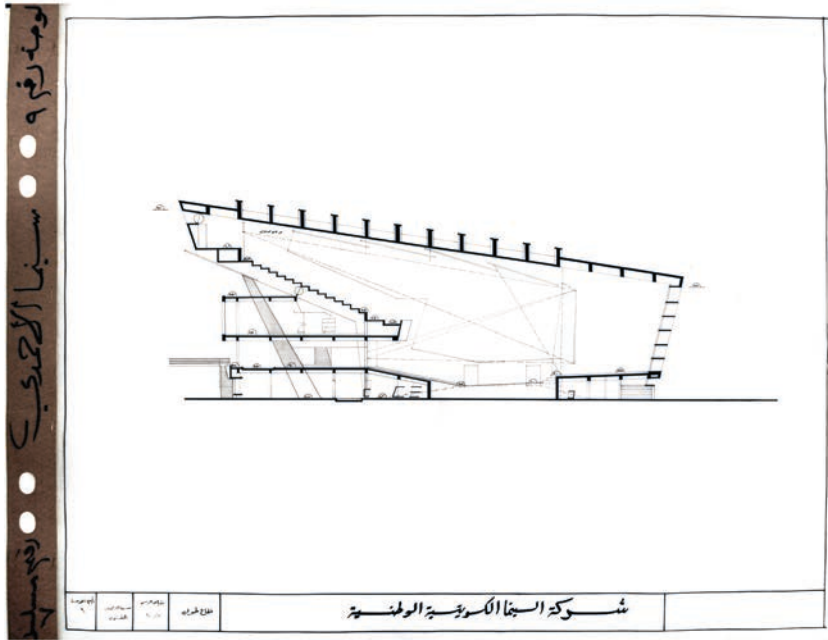
4. Jones, 137.

5. Jankowski, James. *Nasser's Egypt, Arab Nationalism, and the United Arab Republic*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, (2002), 56.

6. Ibid.

7. Sadek, Said. "Cairo as Global/Regional Cultural Capital?" *Cairo Cosmopolitan*. Ed. Diane Singerman. Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, (2006), 180.

1. Sayyed Karim, Ahmadi cinema, Ahmadi, 1962-1965, section drawing.  
© National Cinema Company



Education and institution building, not just in the realm of theater, were the primary conduits for the transmission of Egyptian values and ideologies in Kuwait. By the mid-1950s, sensing this threat, the KOC's British managing director advised that, "It was most desirable that more students be educated away from the Egyptian influence."<sup>8</sup> Egyptians however maintained their dominance of the educational bastion with special missions, sending teachers and specialists to form, along with Palestinians, Kuwait's nascent educational system, including the establishment of Kuwait University in 1965, while Kuwaitis were being sent to Egypt to study at Egyptian universities.

In the architectural field, Egypt's university system, though fairly young, was one of the most established in the region. Founded in 1887, the *Muhandiskhana*, or engineering school was built following the models of European-style higher technical schools. Architecture was a branch of this engineering school and was seen as an essential cog in the machine of modernization.

Already by 1887, Egypt's urban landscapes had undergone a radical transformation. The inauguration of the Suez Canal, and a visit by Khedive Ismail to Paris' Universal Exposition were catalysts for this desire to modernize the cities of Egypt. For the inauguration of the Canal, entertainment was to be provided to the international honorary guests in the form of theaters, gardens and hotels, which needed to be designed and built. For this task, the Khedive invited European engineers and professionals to "Haussmanize" the city.<sup>9</sup> A vast market for engineering and design professionals thus materialized, attracting flocks of foreign architects.

The urban transformations, which Cairo, Alexandria and the canal cities underwent at the time, spurred a recognition for the need to secure and train local skills. The engineering school was therefore set up in 1887, followed very shortly by the school of fine arts in 1909, which also included an architecture department. Young graduates of these universities were sent abroad at the government's expense for further training in prominent

European schools in Paris, Liverpool and Zurich. Others went at their own private expense including, most notably, the father of Egyptian architect Mostafa Fahmy. The University of Liverpool was chosen as a destination due to the British occupation's influence, and because it offered the only academic course on Urban Civic Design at the time. The French Beaux Arts School was in some ways a natural extension to the prevalent classical architectural and urban styles already existing in Cairo. The Swiss Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule (ETH) on the other hand, with its focus on engineering, science and technology, was considered a zone of openness to innovation and freedom from the classics, as described by Architect Yehia el Zeiny in a 1947 issue of *Al-Emara*.

The first graduates of the missions returned to Cairo in the early 1920s, shortly after the 1919 revolution and independence from the British in 1922. Independence did not necessarily entail full immediate autonomy from British interference. Nevertheless, an impact was felt, whereby, rather than occupying the usual subordinate ranks in the Egyptian civil service, Egyptians where now occupying governmental elite positions, "particularly in technical offices, such as those attached to the Ministry of Public Works, where local officials were soon to replace foreign experts in all upper ranks".<sup>10</sup> This was the case with Mahmoud Sabri Mahboub, who a few years after joining the service, was already heading the *Tanzim* Department at the Ministry of Public Works. This department had been the central authority in charge of most of Cairo's municipal affairs and civic activities. As director of the Tanzim office, English-trained Mahboub undertook the task of a "comprehensive survey" of the city and proposed a general town plan for Cairo's improvement and extension.<sup>11</sup>

Other graduates followed in Mahboub's footsteps, amongst them, Liverpool-trained Mahmoud Riad, who joined the Ministry of Endowments (Wakf) in 1932. After seven years of service, Riad was appointed as Head of the Architecture and Engineering Department within the Ministry. He held this position until future appointments as Director General of the Popular Housing Division at the Ministry of Social Affairs in 1949 and Director General of The Cairo Municipality from 1954-1965.<sup>12</sup>

Riad's approach to town planning can be gleaned from his final thesis project for the diploma course of Town Planning at Liverpool University.<sup>13</sup> Titled, *The City of Cairo: Proposed Development Scheme for the Central Area*, it recommended the rebuilding of the downtown area. "Examining his scheme one might suspect that what Cairo was lacking, in his opinion, was monumentality, as the plan concentrated mainly on this aspect." Riad proposed the opening up of three new large avenues, to be lined with monuments, plazas and gardens. This grand design approach to town planning, with "axial compositions, perspectives and large parkways," is also evident in Riad's later proposal for Mohandiseen, a new residential neighborhood for emerging middle class professionals on the West bank of the Nile.<sup>14</sup> In addition to his work in town planning, Riad ran his own private architectural practice with a diverse portfolio, including iconic civic and Modernist buildings in Cairo, like the *Arab League* headquarters and the recently demolished *National Democratic Party* building, which was originally intended to house Cairo's municipality.

As the representative of Cairo's municipality, Riad was invited in 1961 to the United Nations' Expert meeting on metropolitan planning held in Stockholm. It was this participation in an international forum that perhaps

10. Volait, Mercedes, *Architectes et architectures de l'Egypte moderne (1830-1950): genèse et essor d'une expertise locale*. Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, (2005), 448-450.

11. Volait, Mercedes, "Town Planning Schemes for Cairo Conceived by Egyptian Planners in the 'Liberal Experiment' Period." *Mass Mediations: New Approaches to Popular Culture in the Middle East and Beyond*, ed. Walter Armbrust. Berkeley: University of California Press, (2000), 87.

12. Ibid., 96.

13. Riad, Mahmoud. "The City of Cairo, Proposed Development Scheme for the Central Area." Unpublished Thesis. Liverpool: Liverpool University, (1932).

14. Volait, Mercedes, "Town Planning Schemes for Cairo Conceived by Egyptian Planners in the 'Liberal Experiment' Period." *Mass Mediations: New Approaches to Popular Culture in the Middle East and Beyond*, ed. Walter Armbrust. Berkeley: University of California Press, (2000), 96.

8. Alissa, Reem. "Building for Oil: Corporate Colonialism, Nationalism and Urban Modernity in Ahmadi, 1946-1992." UC Berkeley Dissertations & Theses (2012), 80.

9. Volait, Mercedes. "Making Cairo Modern (1870-1950): multiple models for a "European-style" urbanism" *Urbanism - Imported or Exported? Native Aspirations and Foreign Plans*, ed. Joe Nasr and Mercedes Volait. Chichester: Wiley-Academy, (2003), 21.



catapulted the second part of his career as technical advisor to the Ministry of Public Works in Kuwait. Already, Riad was facing political opposition to his proposals and plans in Cairo, the pressure of which eventually culminated in his resignation from his position as director of the municipality in 1965. In that same year, Riad was invited, along with fellow Egyptian architect Omar Azzam and Dutch architect Jacques P. Thijssse, professor of comprehensive planning at the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague, to go to Kuwait to consult on the new development plan for the city. He was also invited to propose a design for the Kuwait Sports Center in Kifan.



1. Sayyed Karim, Ahmadi cinema, Ahmadi, 1962-1965, section drawing.  
© National Cinema Company

At the time, the municipality of Kuwait was already acknowledging problems of urban sprawl, low density, lack of infrastructure and an unrealistic land and property market. These problems were to be addressed in a new development plan. However, what was proposed neither dealt with demographics, detailed traffic studies, or with the challenges of the city center expansion. If anything, “it intensified the problems of low density, urban sprawl, and the extension of roads and services outside the center,” despite the original objectives.<sup>15</sup> Realizing this, the government felt a more comprehensive planning effort was required and requested further advice from the United Nations. A committee of three advisors, including Mahmoud Riad, was formed to make recommendations on the management and control of the rapid development. The municipality’s invitation letter to Riad conveys this mood of uncertainty towards a new plan: “Before adoption of the Master-plan in question, we would like to invite your considered opinions on the subject[...].”

The global landscape post World-War II was a fertile terrain for the growth of new institutions under the umbrella of the United Nations. Within a more utopic and idealistic world view that was thirsty for the maintenance of international peace, these UN bodies were seen as instrumental institutions that would protect, unify, and encourage cooperation, as well as social and economic development. More critically however, a post-developmental perspective argues that the concept of development was constructed as a mechanism to control “third world” countries and was merely an extension of

the colonial and cultural imperialism project. The most prolific of post-development theorists, Arturo Escobar, a Colombian-American anthropologist, argued in his 1995 book *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, that the “development era” was a product of Harry Truman’s foreign policy ideas, rather than true philanthropy. By referring to South America, Africa, and Asia as “underdeveloped” and in need of structural changes to achieve progress, Truman “set in motion a reorganization of bureaucracy around thinking and acting to systematically change the “third world.” Escobar contends that the establishment of the development apparatus functioned to support the consolidation of American hegemony. The UN, with its various bodies, was the vehicle with which western economic structures and ideas on society could spread as universal models for others to emulate.

From this perspective, the United Nations consultants on modern town planning were sent to underdeveloped countries to help shape their cities, thereby became agents of this apparatus, whether knowingly or unknowingly. Lucia Allais’ work on preservation in the modern period and its relationship to international institutions and global practices asserts that the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization “acted as an agent of a type of urban planning that Lewis Mumford would call “the highway and the city,” by replacing the Beaux-Arts of the immediate postwar with more strictly “functionalist” ideas, drawing from a modernist palette, including zoning, tunneling, and parks.”<sup>16</sup>

On the ground, consultants like Riad, who themselves came from underdeveloped and anti-colonial contexts, were certainly unaware of this undertone to their UN missions. In fact, Riad’s relationship to the Kuwaitis, which was further developed through his more permanent assignment as a technical advisor to the Ministry of Public Works, was as more of a confidant, big brother and role model from a neighboring Arab nation, someone who could be trusted to liaise and mediate between the Kuwaitis and the Western influx of architects and professionals operating in their city. By the time Riad entered the scene, Kuwait did not yet have a class of engineers and architects who could negotiate the terms of construction with the foreign consultants brought in to work for them. This is the niche into which Riad inserted himself.

In an interview with Abdul Rahman Makhoulf, an Egyptian town planner who worked in Abu Dhabi in the late 1960s, Makhoulf explains why he came to Abu Dhabi to replace Japanese Katsuhiko Takahashi, “Sheikh Zayed had decided he wanted someone to help him who didn’t always need a translator. So when a representative from the United Nations program for technical assistance came through the Gulf, Sheikh Zayed asked him if he could find him an Arab planner.”<sup>17</sup> Not only was Riad’s extensive portfolio and experience reason enough to recruit him for the position of technical director of the planning board, the idea of a translator and mediator who understood the language, culture, religion and politics of Kuwait must have certainly added to his appeal during the recruitment process.

One of Riad’s first assignments in office was the supervision of the design of Kuwait’s International Airport Terminal and Kuwait Sports Center, projects on a scale he knew all too well from his previous experiences in Cairo, where he had just overseen the development of Cairo’s International Airport and International Stadium Projects. Riad’s role in the technical department can be understood best as somewhere between a client

15. Aal-Mossuly, Soheir. “Revitalizing Kuwait’s Empty City Center.” Unpublished Thesis. Boston: MIT, 1991.

16. Lucia, Allais. “Will to War, Will to Art: Cultural Internationalism and the Modernist Aesthetics of Monuments. 1932-1964.” Unpublished Thesis. Boston: MIT, (2008) 306.

17. Makhoulf, Abdulrahman. “Plans the Earth Swallows: An Interview with Abdulrahman Makhoulf.” By Todd Reisz. *Portal* 9, Issue 2, The Square, Spring 2013.

representative, commissioner and curator of the city. Bar the Kuwait Sports Center, which he designed in 1965, Riad wrote the briefs, managed and oversaw the architects' work, and negotiated the terms with which the projects were to be executed. His role can be deciphered between the lines of the letters and exchanges he had with figures like Kenzo Tange, Reima & Raili Pietila and VBB & Sune Lindstrom, who discussed with him specific amendments and suggestions to their projects, and in some cases seemed to be pitching services.<sup>18</sup> Coming from the repressive context of 1960s Cairo, where he was essentially pushed out of office due to interference in his projects by governmental bureaucrats, probably made Riad all the more aware of the significance of the role a mediator could play in shaping the form of the city and its discourse – a role perhaps even more significant than the influential yet stunted one of architects and planners.

Kuwait and Cairo's intimately bound relationship in planning and architecture had already begun almost a decade before Riad's arrival through the architect and urban planner Dr. Sayed Karim. Karim was the son of Egypt's Minister of Public Works under King Fouad, Ibrahim Karim Pasha, who was friendly with the Kuwaiti Emir, Sheikh Abdallah al-Salem al-Subah. According to Karim, in an interview conducted with him for Kuwaiti magazine, *Al Yaqaza*, the Emir called Karim's father to personally invite his son, who he heard was an engineering expert, to consult on some of the buildings built by the British that were experiencing structural damage. Karim elaborates on how upon arriving in Kuwait, he examined the cracks in the concrete and conducted some experiments on the affected buildings. Upon further research, the source of the problem was identified to be a flaw in the elements of the cement mix used by the British. Impressed by Karim's discovery, the Emir decided to commission a series of building projects to him.

It is not clear whether it was through his work with the UN as a planning consultant on the neighboring cities of Baghdad (1946), Jeddah (1949), Riyadh (1950), Mecca and Medina (1952), or whether it was through the circulation of his magazine and discourse in the conferences for Arab Engineers, which he organized, that Karim originally became known to the Emir. As a prolific visionary, Karim had studied Cairo and published proposed plans for its expansion that were never implemented. It was these plans and studies that gave him recognition with the UN. Consultants invited from the UN to Cairo's municipality researched the city and encountered Karim's body of work. Impressed with his comprehensive survey of the city and proposals for its development, they invited him to join the UN as a city-planning consultant, a position he held from 1949 onwards, opening up new opportunities and allowing him to transition from local projects in Egypt to planning cities and building extensively throughout the region.<sup>19</sup>

Karim's ideas were also circulated through the magazine he established and the conferences he organized. With the increasing number of engineering graduates, a society for Egyptian architects was established in 1919. This was followed by a larger syndicate for engineers in 1946. Both sought to enhance the exposure of the fields of engineering and architecture and to set rules and legislation to govern how the profession was practiced. Meanwhile, conferences for Arab engineering and the magazine, *Al-Emara*, which was conceived by Karim, further propelled the professionalization of architecture in the region.

The first Arab engineering conference was held in Alexandria from

March 15-19, 1945, exactly three days before the Arab League was officially formed in Cairo on March 22. Though the alignment of these dates was probably coincidental, it is still telling of a momentum that was building in the Arab world towards nationalism and unity, and illustrates a desire for regional integration and development to more easily confront imperialistic initiatives in the region. In the opening speech for the session, engineer Sayed Mortada beckons in "a new era in the history of engineering in Egypt and the East, for it is the first time engineers from this region gather to exchange opinions on issues of concern to the general public [...] The reality is that we now, more than ever, are in dire need of a dialogue on different aspects of our practice. We need, together, to work on developing our civic resources, as well as increasing the standard of life for all citizens."<sup>20</sup>

The conference was a platform for Arab engineers to share experiences, forge collaborations and enhance their networks. Housing, water and transportation were running themes discussed and presented at these conferences, with a focus on planning projects at the national level. After the opening remarks at the Alexandria conference, Karim took to the stage to present to the audience what he coined as a project for "Fouad's Cairo" – a plan to follow Khedive Ismail's plan for Cairo in ambition.<sup>21</sup> He also outlined other proposals he had been working on, which were then presented throughout the conference by his colleagues and collaborators. These included plans to ameliorate the standards of education through civic architecture, housing in poor neighborhoods, healthcare, tourism and historic preservation. Other than presenting visionary plans and policy proposals, Karim and his collaborator Tawfik Abdel Gawad, also advanced the main tenants of their manifesto on Modern Architecture, a discourse they had recurrently introduced to their readers via the pages of *Al Emara* magazine. The Kuwaitis' first attendance at these conferences was in 1960.

Like the conferences, *Al-Emara* was an even earlier attempt to establish a space for discussion on current architectural projects and trends, as well as urban policies and planning. According to Sayed Karim, who tells the story of his magazine in its 10th year anniversary issue, the publication was established after much prodding from architectural colleagues, who he met at international Modernist Architecture conferences, as well as his mentor and professor Salvizberg, who promised to attend the magazine launch from Zurich. Indeed, fulfilling his promise, professor Salvizberg bought a ticket to Cairo in 1939 to celebrate the first issue of the magazine. In Karim's account of the founding of the magazine, he likens not having an architectural magazine while having an active space of architectural production, to a country that knows how to read and write but has no printing press.<sup>22</sup>

Karim's magazine developed and contextualized the modernist ideology he had absorbed throughout his time in Switzerland. It also served to circulate and disseminate his projects to a wider public, in an attempt to educate potential clients and collaborators on his practice. The opening salvo to his magazine's sixth issue in 1940 posed the question: could national identity be expressed in built form? The history of pre-revolutionary Egypt, which pre-dated the magazine, established the debates between several factions of society on what exactly constituted Egyptian national identity. As Egyptians struggled to free themselves from British occupation, Pharaonism, derived from Egypt's ancient past, homogenous ethnicity and territory, gained currency as notions of identity. Other opposing visions emerged post-independence, including secular liberalism, Arab nationalism, as well as

18. I was able to access the family archive of letters and correspondences thanks to Mahmoud Riad Junior who has also published these letters online on the family website: <http://www.riadarchitecture.com/>

19. Karim, Sayed, "The Genius No One Knows." An interview by Hisham Zaki Mahmoud. *Shams al-Hayat*, Issue 126, December 4th, 2009.

20. Mortada, Sayed. "The First Engineering Conference." *Al-Emara*: 2-3, (1945), 7.

21. Karim, Sayed, "The Engineering Conference and the post-War Projects." *Al-Emara*: 2-3, (1945), 10.

22. Karim, Sayed, "1939-1949." *Al-Emara*: 1-2, (1949), 6.



reform and traditional Islamism. In architecture, these contending visions often manifested themselves in one building, which could include a Pharaonic scale with Islamic detailing, for example. The Beaux Arts educated classicists embraced the ideas of Pharaonism or Islamic expression in their work, most notably Hassan Fathy and Mostafa Fahmy. Meanwhile, Swiss educated Karim, aware of these contrasting visions, articulated a clear orientation towards an international modernist voice in architecture in his first issue of *Al-Emara*, which juxtaposed itself with a secular modernist perspective of Egyptian identity:

Architecture is no longer an ornamented beautiful object [...] nor an external outfit [...] nor a borrowed dress which distinguishes its owner from the rest based on class and privilege[...] The modern car has replaced the jewel studded carriage, supported on arms and shoulders[...]Architecture is no longer a canvas with strict symmetries and proportions[...]Architecture has begun to be liberated from the past and is headed with all its prowess towards science and innovation, supported in its development by research, industrial production, and intellectual effort[...]Architecture has started to move towards the spirit of the time, with an articulation of the social and economic requirements and needs of its occupants[...] it is just like any modern machine in its adaptability to function and the service of humanity[...]Architecture is starting to develop a common language across borders and is moving towards an international style as nations become inextricably linked on a global scale [...] It is our role as architects to move towards this modern future built on science. We need to join the world stage in developing and applying research adapted to our climate and social conditions. The concept of holding on to old traditions is wrong, and so is advocating for the maintenance of old styles because they are part of our national identity [...] Maintaining tradition is regressive; had our forefathers maintained tradition, we would still be living in caves[...]Architecture is an art, its beauty measured by its honesty and functionality [...]it is built on industry and science with modern materials to accommodate modern comfort and lifestyles.<sup>23</sup>

With these words, Karim articulated his radically modernist dictum, which he elaborated on further in future issues of the magazine by his partner and collaborator Tawfik Abdel Gawad. Abdel Gawad's presentation in the 1950 fourth edition of the Arab Conference of Engineers, published in *Al-Emara*, outlined the contours of three conflicting positions that were then already prevalent in architecture. These positions can be summarized as being oriented towards holding on to past traditions in architecture, be they Pharaonic, Islamic or Arab, a second position which attempts to amalgamate traditional forms with modernism, and a third archetype — the school that embodied Abdel Gawad and Karim's forward-thinking visions of modernist architecture, materiality and language. Abdel Gawad conveys his message clearly regarding what was then already emerging as a major alternative discourse:

They speak today of a revival of old traditions and we are in the age of the machine. They support their claims by saying that the religion of our nation is Islam so our Arab buildings must be a symbol of Islam. They do not realize that Islam is not restricted to Egypt only or to the Arab East, but is an international, not national religion. As Islam is the *Sharia* of each age and time, a *Sharia* free of stagnation, free of restriction and complication, free of imitation, so must our buildings be honest and correct in their articulation of their meaning and significance, representing the modern times in which they were built. This makes me want to pose a further question: Does Islam have a particular dress-code to which it is restricted? The answer is no. Because we took off those old outfits. So have modern buildings, they have rid themselves of the old materiality in favor of new materials and construction methods as well as new industrial programs [...] There is a revolution in all of

the arts today including architecture. Surely we feel some sadness and pain leaving behind all that is old, but we have embraced the future with some courage, confidence and faith.<sup>24</sup>

Karim's gravitas and conviction towards international modernist discourse is evident in his built works. No hints of Islamic architecture can be seen in his aesthetics, bar the distant relative of the mashrabiya — the brise-soleil — though Karim did not even acknowledge the genotype of this sun-screen and its distant Islamic relative. In Kuwait, in addition to being commissioned to design two palaces for Sheikh Abdallah al-Salem and Abdallah al-Mubarak, Karim was also given the task of designing three schools — Al-Mubarakiya, as well as a middle school for boys and a mixed primary school. It is no surprise that Karim, an Egyptian, was assigned the task of designing some of the earliest schools to be built in Kuwait after those designed by Tripe and Wakeham. As key contributors to the development of the educational system, it follows that the Emir would entrust this task to an Egyptian architect. The Al-Mubarkiya School was the first to be built in Kuwait in 1911. It was housed in a traditional building on a much smaller scale until Karim was asked to design its expansion in 1957.

By this time, Egypt had already been using reinforced concrete in construction. The first use of concrete in Cairo can be traced back to as early as 1863, when it was introduced by French contractor Nicola Marciani. Francois Coignet, who is considered among the first pioneers to pour reinforced concrete in the world, was responsible for the construction of the buildings for the Suez Canal Company in 1892-95, in Port-Tawfik and Port-Said (Habashi, 10). In 1951, foam concrete — an experimental porous cement material, invented in 1944 by French engineer Rene Fays — was also used in construction in Cairo.<sup>25</sup>

Local cement industries and contractors were already producing cement in Cairo and perhaps Karim brought these contractors with him to Kuwait. The advertisements in his magazine were mainly those providing complementary amenities for a modern living experience — such as air conditioners and electronic appliances — as well as contractors seeking collaboration with architects, and those providing construction materials and services. One of the advertisers that appeared repeatedly from the earliest issues onwards, stands out as the potential partner in the Kuwait projects — the Misr Concrete Development Company. In addition to setting up his own office in Kuwait and attracting the first set of Egyptian architects to the scene, Karim can also be credited for bringing in Egyptian contractors. Tawfik Abdel Gawad, in his seminal book on Egypt's twentieth century architecture, reinforces this position: "*Al-Emara* magazine opened its doors to architects, engineering firms and construction companies to extend their practices to the Arab World and to replace foreign companies. It paved the way for large contractors to set up offices outside of Egypt".<sup>26</sup> Other potential contractor partners in Kuwait could be Osman Ahmed Osman, founder of the colossal Arab Contractors, who, according to Karim's son, worked in Karim's office and was introduced to both the Saudis and Kuwaitis through Karim and was thus able to start his contracting practice through projects in Kuwait and the Gulf.

Karim's buildings relied on concrete almost exclusively. His architecture was functional, materialist and industrialist. In the pages of his magazine, he advocated the use of concrete and experimentation with it. In

24. Eel-Habashi, Alaa Elwi. "The Building of Auguste Perret in Alexandria: A Case for Preservation of Modern Egyptian Architecture: Historic Preservation." Unpublished Thesis. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, (1994), 10.

25. Mercedes Volait, "Egypt (1914-1954): Global Architecture before Globalization, 6.

26. Abd al-Gawad, Tawfiq. *Misr al-'Imâra fil-qarn al-'ishrin [Egyptian Architecture in the 20th century]*. Cairo: the Anglo-Egyptian Bookshop, (1989), 23.

23. Karim, Sayed, "What Is Architecture?" *Al-Emara*: 1, (1939), 11-10.



C. George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1939).

Kuwait, Karim introduced the brise-soleil through both the Al-Mubarkiyya school and the Al-Andalus cinema projects, built roughly at the same time — around 1957. From the 1930s to the 50s, before the widespread use of mechanical HVAC systems, the brise-soleil functioned as a mediator between the building and the external climate, shading openings, and avoiding heat loads and reflection caused by glazed surfaces. The brise-soleil were designed to be attractive from the street, while from the inside, their effect was to create a sense of enclosure and peace by establishing a distance between the exterior and the interior. There was no longer just a thin layer of glass between outside and inside; instead, a thickness was provided by the brise-soleil’s fixed concrete slats and sun protection grids.

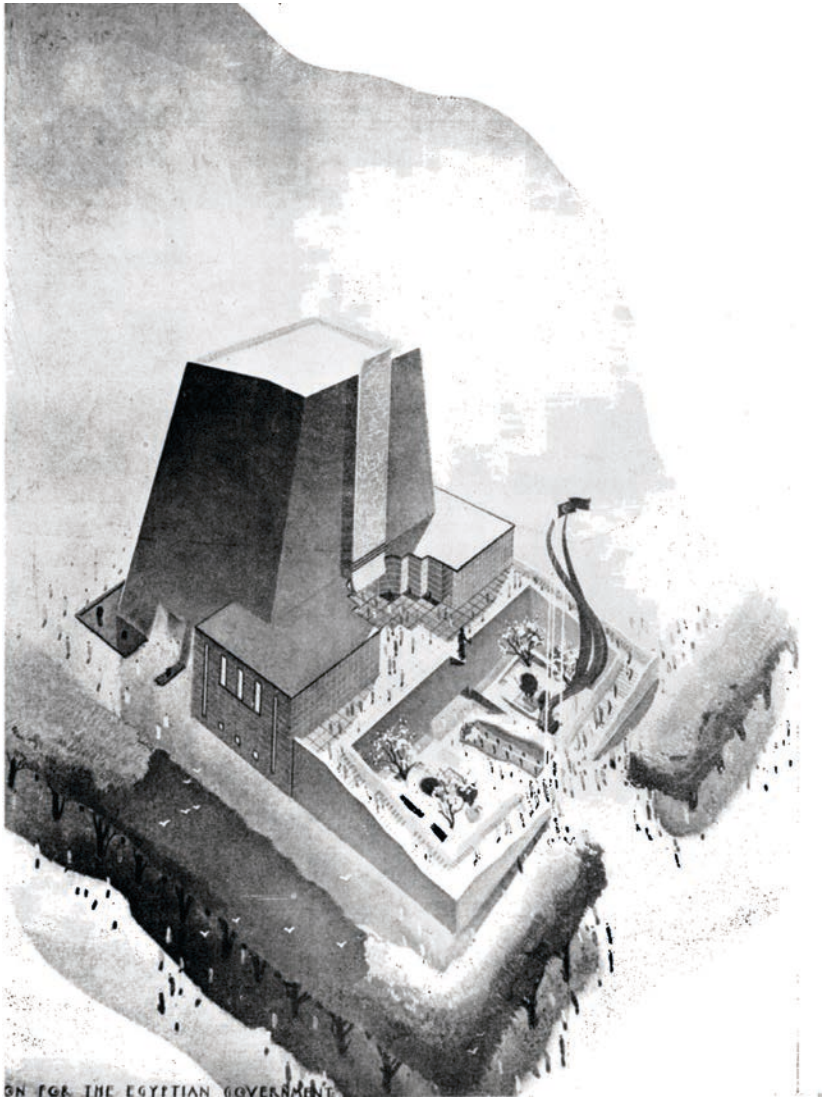
To maximize natural lighting and increase cross-ventilation in the classrooms, a long and narrow plan was implemented by Karim for Al-Mubarakia. The building was slightly curved, in recognition that the main mode of transport to the school was by automobile. The entire building plan followed this slightly curved form, to allow an easier and safer drop-off zone.

Karim’s design for Al-Mubarakia appears to be in conversation with the work of Brazilian modernists Lúcio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer, and gives a nod to Le Corbusier’s later work, namely the Ministry of Education in Rio De Janeiro (1936–43), *the Unité d’Habitation* at Marseilles (1947–1952), as well as the Secretariat in Chandigarh (1953–1959). Five years before Al-Mubarakia’s commission, Karim’s 1952 issue of *Al-Emara* was devoted entirely to highlighting Brazilian modernist projects. A 1953 issue of the magazine also featured Le Corbusier’s Unité d’Habitation housing project in Marseille, the first project Le Corbusier built after the Second World War. Aesthetically, the Unité marked a radical break in Le Corbusier’s architectural style: the abstract plane, the smooth surfaces and the slender columns of his purist style were abandoned in favor of brutalist, muscular and sculptural forms.

Le Corbusier, in collaboration with Costa, Niemeyer and a team of Brazilian architects, had already experimented and built the first brise-soleil wall in the Ministry of Education in Rio. Le Corbusier continued these experiments with the facades of the *Unité*, and in Chandigarh. Searching for universal solutions to warmer climes, a structural system that he called “respiration exacte,” was intended to produce “one single building for all nations and climates.” Le Corbusier’s inspiration for the brise-soleil system came from his study of North African and Arab vernacular architecture. Though the first built manifestation of it was in Brazil, in 1933, he had already developed the concept for the unbuilt design of the Durand in Algiers.<sup>27</sup> He had seen that screens could be arranged “to provide a ‘valve’ capable of allowing sunlight to enter in the winter, while providing shade in the summer.”<sup>28</sup> The brise-soleil system was based on the wooden screen *mashrabiya* of Arab buildings, and the brick louvered claustra, seen in Morocco and Iran. Le Corbusier was attracted to the effectiveness of these vernacular devices to provide shading, reduce glare and facilitate natural ventilation. Thus, he sought to interpret these shading systems using modern materials with equivalent functions.

Meanwhile, in Alexandria, Auguste Perret was also developing a pre-cast brise-soleil system, which he introduced to the upper parts of the windows of a villa he designed in 1922 and another building he designed in 1938 — but he would have probably dismissed the practice of making entire walls of plate glass and then masking the whole façade with a screen of permanent concrete ribs as irrational and contradictory, which Le Corbusier

is more frequently credited for.<sup>29</sup> Surely Karim, in addition to following the work of Le Corbusier and the Brazilians, was also exposed to the home-grown example and precedent of Perret’s work in Alexandria.



D. George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1939).

For Al-Andalus cinema, Karim used an entirely different system of brise-soleil than the one he designed for Al-Mubarkiyya school. This time, there was no egg-crate system with depth and thickness, but instead an amorphous outer covering to the main facade which created harmony for the street viewer through its patterned effect. This can possibly be explained by the fact that, unlike the school, the cinema required less sunlight and less shading. On getting the cinema commissions, Karim revealed in an interview with *Al-Yaqatha* that each night after dining with the Emir, they would watch a movie projection in the palace’s cinema hall. One night, Karim told the Emir, “The people of Kuwait have complained to me that in order for them to go to the cinema, they have to travel to Egypt or Lebanon. They are asking why they can’t have their own theaters where they can watch movie and theater productions in the capital, which is destined to be a global capital.”

29. Collins, Peter. *Concrete: The Visions of a New Architecture*. Montreal: McGill University Press, (2004), 218

27. Mostafavi, Mohsen and David Leatherbarrow. *On Weathering: The Life of Buildings in Time*. Boston: MIT Press, (1993), 93.

28. Kamal, Mohammad Arif. “Le Corbusier’s Solar Shading Strategy for Tropical Environment: A Sustainable Approach.” *Journal of Architectural/Planning Research and Studies*, Vol 10, No 1, (2013), 20.



According to Karim, it was from this point on that the Emir commissioned him with the construction of four cinemas, which he worked on between 1957 and 1965. Al-Sharqiya cinema had already been open since 1954, but it was just an open space with a projector, nothing like the fully programmed cinemas of Karim, which often included outdoor and indoor halls, and other semi-public spaces, such as cafeterias and shops on their ground floors.

Coming from Egypt, Karim was aware of the powerful role a cinema could have in spreading lifestyles and ideas, but also in broadcasting his portfolio to the public. As Ifdal Elsaket points out in her thesis, *Projecting Modernism*, by the late 1930s, the cinema had become one of the most significant and ubiquitous cultural institutions in Egypt.<sup>30</sup> It was the urban space par excellence located in bustling settings, particularly downtown Cairo, surrounded by department stores, casinos and cafes. The Cinema signified a space of sociability and modernity, but was also a space where social and political tensions were played out. Other than its influence through the cinematic production that was projected on its screens, the cinema was also an active space of protest and politics. “Scattered through the British Foreign Office records are references to the use of cinemas as venues for worker and student union meetings during the interwar period”.<sup>31</sup>

In a way, Karim must have wanted to reinvent this space of vitality in the more tabula rasa setting of Kuwait. He intended to achieve this through the mixing of programs – shopping, casinos, cafés, theaters and cinemas in one complex. Further, Karim’s Swiss education probably exposed him to the work of Swiss architectural theorist Sigfried Gideon. In 1943, Gideon coauthored a manifesto titled, “Nine Points on Monumentality,” and an essay on “The Need for a New Monumentality,” which called for the construction of civic centers “symbolizing the idea of ‘community’, in which all the visual arts would collaborate”.<sup>32</sup> Elizabeth Mock, a curator at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, wrote about these ideas of new monumentality in 1944: “There must be occasional buildings which raise the everyday casualness of living to a higher and more ceremonial plane, buildings which give dignified and coherent form to that interdependence of the individual and the social group...”<sup>33</sup> Karim’s subscription to this school of thought is evident not only in his cinemas, which acted as monumental institutions for communities of people in Kuwait, but also in Egypt, where he initiated projects for civic centers in peripheral cities such as Mansoura, Assiut and Aswan.

The monumental scale Karim introduced through the cinemas he designed in Kuwait, can also be traced back to the Neo-Pharaonic architectural expression in Cairo decades before Karim’s arrival in Kuwait. The apotheosis of this scale was evident in the design of the Egyptian Pavilion at the 1939 New York World Fair, published in the third issue of *Al-Emara*, with a description of the pavilion by the architect himself, Mostafa Fahmy, who was one of the first graduates from the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. The classicism the school reinforced in him is evident in his oeuvre. Fahmy was concerned with Pharoanic revival, and he combined the monumentality of Pharaonic architecture with elements from Art Deco and Islamic Architecture, using modern materials. This is also evident in his design of the mausoleum for Saad Zaghloul in Mounira.<sup>34</sup> Since Fahmy taught Karim at Cairo University, he must have been familiar with his professor’s theories and work.

Finally, the monumentality in Karim’s design could also be attributed

to the monolithic capacities that concrete afforded him, where architecture was no longer a sum of “parts.” For Cinema al-Hamra, Karim was able to use a pre-stressed concrete beam for the first time, designed by Greek structural engineer George Stamatatos, enabling large spans.<sup>35</sup>

Aside from the monumental language of Karim’s cinemas, his architectural vocabulary repeatedly revealed a layered treatment of intersecting volumes, which composed the entirety of his built programs. He also highlighted the modern machine-age through monumental car drop-off spaces and entrance vestibules. The buildings were often lifted off the ground on pilotis, and interior courtyards were carved to split the spaces between “winter” outdoor theaters and “summer” indoor theaters, as with Al-Ferdaws Cinema.

Karim’s Modernist ethos of transparency and honesty were evident in the form of the cinema hall of Al-Ahmadi Cinema, which followed the sectional diagonal of the theater’s seating. His design for Al-Andalus cinema mimicked the form of a giant TV screen, whether intentionally or not, with the brise-soleil’s façade simulating the pixilation of a screen. Though Karim expressed his concern for environmental issues in his work, through his measured use of openings in the facades, his designs were often not context specific. The design of Al-Ahmadi Cinema’s was an exact replica of a civic center designed by Karim in Mansoura, Egypt.

Unlike other foreign architects, who later flooded the scene in Kuwait, Karim’s work displayed an enthusiasm and zest. Uninhibited by requirements to justify “Islamic” or “Arab” architecture or to orientalize himself, Karim’s work was emblematic of a generation of daring and experimental Egyptian architects. The cinemas and Al-Mubarkiya School were the most iconic of Karim’s buildings in Kuwait. He also designed the Emir’s private residences, the printing press, military hospital and two other schools.

It is not known why Karim stopped practicing in Kuwait after 1965. In an interview with his son, Ibrahim Karim, I was informed that, due to conflicts with the Nasserist regime over the planning of Nasr City, Karim was placed under house arrest, with all of his assets frozen. It is perhaps this political handicap that hindered his movements. Other reasons could be that Karim’s modernist, industrialist aesthetics did not fit with the zeitgeist of Kuwait in the late 1960s, early 70s, where winds from the past had strongly established an atmosphere of nostalgia. This mood is evident in an article published in *Sawt al-Khaleej* in 1965, titled, “The Kuwaiti Family: Living between Two Worlds”.<sup>36</sup> The article lamented Kuwait’s then-current state of indiscriminate modern adaptation, without taking into account traditional family values. Karim’s architecture, with its programmatic implications and brutally modernist style embodied this heavily criticized new modern-era of cinema-going, educated Kuwaitis.

The search for an architectural language which could express this longing for the past was a propitious setting for the work of Hassan Fathy to appear in Kuwait. In his discourse, Fathy too had agonized intensely about the region’s “rapid cultural transformations, a product of decolonization,” and “the accompanying agendas of modernity and nation-building.” In the 1945 issue of *Al-Emara*, Fathy’s scathing critique of adapting Western models of architecture called for “connecting to what we have disconnected from — our rich heritage and past [...] we’ve reached a point where we’ve been eating the leftovers from others’ tables.” The leftovers and the “other” are clearly a

35. This was mentioned in an interview with Charles T. Haddad the transcript of which is included in this volume.

36. Aal-Ragam, Aseel. “Critical nostalgia: Kuwait urban modernity and Alison and Peter Smithson’s Kuwait Urban Study and Mat-Building.” *The Journal of Architecture*: Volume 20, Issue 1, (2015), 4.

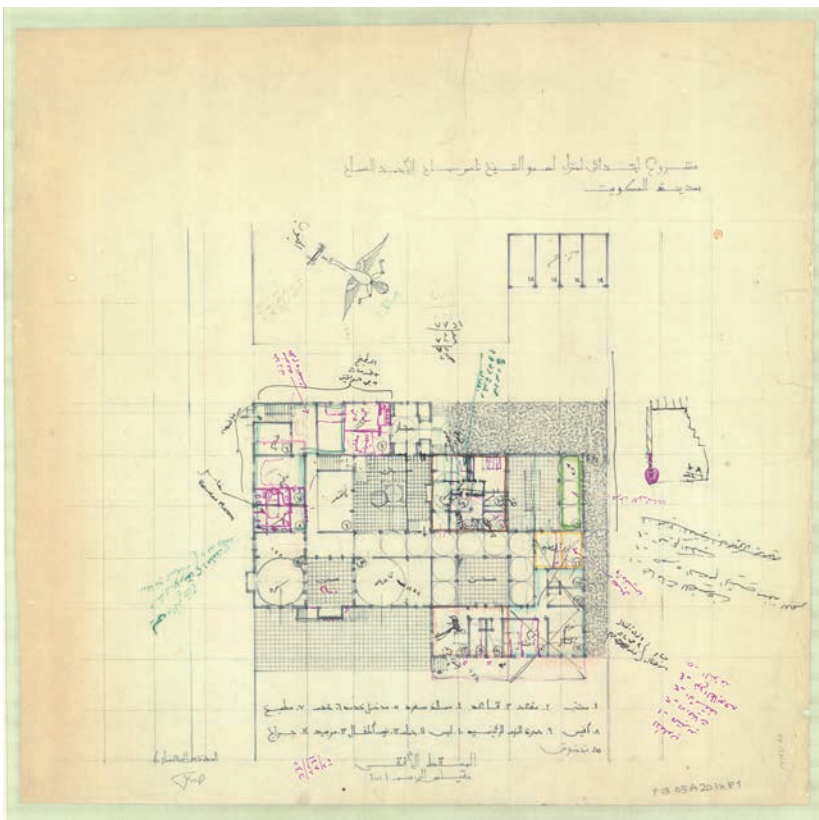
30. Elsaket, Ifdal. “Projecting Egypt: The Cinema and the Making of Colonial Modernity.” Unpublished Thesis. Sydney: University of Sydney, (2014), 91.

31. Ibid., 87.

32. Colquhoun, Alan. *Modern Architecture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, (2002), 213.

33. Ibid.

34. Abd al-Gawad, Tawfiq. *Misr al-‘Imâra fil-qarn al-‘ishrin [Egyptian Architecture in the 20th century]*. Cairo: the Anglo-Egyptian Bookshop, (1989), 418.



reference to the colonizers. Fathy's presentation on "Planning and Building the Arab Tradition" in the 1960 conference of "The Metropolis in the Arab World" went further in elaborating his discourse. The presentation focused on his experiment in building a village in New Gournia in Upper Egypt. The first section was aptly titled, "The Failure of the 'Modern'." He discussed the benefits of using traditional materials, mourned the decline of craftsmanship, and called for the re-establishment of what he described as the "trinity: architect, craftsman and client." In Fathy's opinion, the Arab tradition is particular and significant, with consistent elements like the courtyard and the dome. Though existing in other Mediterranean settings, these elements, for Fathy, took on additional ethereal meanings: "To the Arab, the courtyard is more than a space that controls temperature [...] it is more than an architectural device for privacy and protection. It is, like the dome, part of a microcosm that parallels the order of the Universe itself."<sup>37</sup>

Educated in the Beaux Arts, Fathy graduated at around the same time as Karim, but unlike Karim, subscribed to a school of traditional revivalism. Commissioned by the Egyptian Department of Antiquities in 1945, his most momentous project in Egypt, New Gournia was built with the goal of relocating a community of Nubians that were to be displaced after the building of the Aswan High Dam. The village was built using traditional materials and designs, including domes and courtyards. Political and financial complications, as well as residents' opposition to relocation, prevented the project from ever being completed. The domes that Fathy employed in the housing for the villagers, were perceived as a symbol of death, used traditionally only in mausoleums. As for the courtyard, it was

37. Fathy, Hassan. "Some of the Problems Confronting the Egyptian Architect." *Al-Emara*: 5-4, (1945), 57.

considered a form exported from Cairene houses, rather than adapted from an existing local language which the villagers related to. Fathy was accused of developing an architecture that was based primarily on an imagined history and an invented tradition. In the end, New Gournia was also as Ijlal Muzaffar put it, "a project where community and tradition were invoked to displace rural populations from tourism sites and carry out the modernizing agenda of an oppressive state apparatus and its international sponsors."<sup>38</sup>

Despite the failure of Fathy's work in Gournia, he succeeded in propagating his discourse through the publication of a seminal text in English on his experience there, published in 1973 and titled, *Architecture for the Poor*. This book allowed Fathy's work to be appreciated by international audiences, and he began to serve in 1976 on the steering committee for the nascent Aga Khan Award for Architecture and was awarded local and international prizes for his work. It was through this moment of international acclaim that he was eventually invited to Kuwait in 1978 to work on a private residence for Sheikh Nasser Subah al-Ahmed al-Subah.

Fathy's loyalty to Beaux Arts symmetry can be seen in his first floor plan for the house, while his insistence on local materials, domes and courtyards were ingrained in the house as his signature aesthetic stamp. Beyond this project, the paucity of Fathy's built work in Kuwait is not at all a proportional reflection of his influence both in Kuwait and in the region. In a way, Fathy's work, both built and published, was where new parameters were negotiated for a forthcoming generation of post-modernist architects that included his students, who continued to practice in Kuwait, such as Soheir Farid and Rami al-Dahan.

The Kuwait of the 1980s was a veritable crucible of architectural styles. The city had experienced a radical shift, with architects of international renown claiming it as their playground for experimentation. These included: Kenzo Tange, The Architects Collaborative (TAC), Arne Jacobson, Arthur Erickson, Mohamed Makiya, Reima and Raili Pietilla and Skidmore Owings and Merrill (SOM), among many others. The political landscape of the Arab world changed dramatically from the mid-1960s to the early 80s. The defeat of Arab armies during the Six-Day War in 1967 by Israeli troops constituted a pivotal moment in the Arab world. This loss, along with economic stagnation in the defeated countries, was blamed on the secular Arab nationalism of the ruling regimes. A steady decline in the popularity and credibility of secular, socialist and nationalist politics ensued. Islamist movements gained ground and flourished as an alternative to fill the identity vacuum. The Islamist ideology can also be read within a broader religiously-oriented nationalism that emerged in the Third World in the 1970s. Gulf countries were also gaining more agency in the region, through their economic power and rising oil prices. The remittances from Egyptians working in the Gulf signaled the start of a new era, in which, rather than exporting their modernism in a uni-directional trajectory, Egyptians were now on the recipient end of Gulf ideology and influence, which included a focus on Islamic and traditional themes. This socio-economic and ideological shift in the region had architectural ramifications, with growing popularity for an 'Islamic' language, albeit in modernist form and construction materials.

This identity turn in architecture can also be attributed to the work of some of the foreign architects practicing in the region. To justify their work, even the most radically modernist, infused their discourse with references to the context, if even invented and imagined. Their architecture included

38. Muzaffar, Ijlal. "'The World on Sale': Architectural Exports and Construction of Access." *Office US: Agenda*. Ed. Eva Franch i Gilbert, Amanda Reeser Lawrence, Ana Miljacki and Ashley Schafer. Zurich: Lars Muller Publishers, (2014), 231.



references to an Islamic heritage and was often decorated and dressed with ‘Islamic’ and ‘Arab’ attire. This trend is most evident in the design of the Kuwait National Assembly Building in the early 1970s by Danish architect Jorn Utzon. His plan featured a colonnade of thin piers that support a draped concrete roof over an open plaza. Utzon claimed that “the cloth-like sensation of the roof references the iconic tent construction of the Arabian Bedouin people”.<sup>39</sup> Appropriating a local vernacular typology, Utzon drew inspiration from Arabian bazaars in his layout of the government working spaces, which were clustered around central courtyards. “Selectively abstracting and modernizing certain historical motifs, such as arcades of pointed arches, he superimposed a ‘local’ language onto a modern set of forms”.<sup>40</sup> Arab ornamentation is abstracted and applied throughout the building in an attempt to appeal to a “somewhat fantasized Kuwaiti culture”<sup>41</sup>.

Debates on what constituted ‘Islamic’ or ‘Arab’ architecture in the region began to emerge in new architectural journals published in the Gulf and in Egypt, as well as in conferences focused on the built environment. Some went as far as to illustrate how Sharia could be translated in an urban setting.<sup>42</sup> These debates resonated with the international discourse on architectural postmodernism, which called for contextualization and appropriation of historical themes and ornamentation. Postmodernism was somehow the future’s idea about the past.

It is in this context that Said Abdel Moneim began his architectural journey in Kuwait. Abdel Moneim arrived from Cairo in 1968 in search of opportunities, just as the international offices started to compete for terrain. He established Arab Consultants in 1969, and, over the course of thirty-eight years in Kuwait, built a portfolio of over 50 projects. Initially Abdel Moneim’s practice relied on residential projects, mainly single family homes. His design of the KFTCIC Residential Building in Salmiya in 1972 was a transition from the private realm to larger scale projects.

The influence of TAC and PACE’s iconic Kuwait Fund building can be seen in many of Abdel Moneim’s projects, including the KFTCIC Residential Building, the Carlton Hotel in the early 1970s, the Kuwait Finance House in the 1980s and Al-Hajri Building in the 1990s. The extrusion of the TAC parti<sup>43</sup> — of an overhanging roof held by piers or columns to a tower form, allowing for shading, is a scheme that Abdel Moneim regularly experimented with. Other consistent features of his work are a tripartite composition for the facades, which can be traced back to a Fatimid tradition in Cairo, as well as an emphasis on symmetry, axes and grids. His Carlton Hotel project demonstrates sensitivity to climactic conditions, with only small openings for ventilation in the bathrooms on the hottest façade facing south-west. Shading for the south-east and north-west façades came from the overhanging top two floors. The architectural language of the Carlton, with its deep piers is the most resonant with the Kuwait Fund’s piers.

The next project of significance in Abdel-Moneim’s portfolio was Al-Awady Towers in Sharq, built exactly one year after the Carlton Hotel in 1976-77. Again, the tripartite composition of the façade and the environmental concerns were the key elements in the overall architectural expression. This project also marked the introduction of mixed-use programs to Abdel Moneim’s work, as well as the use of pre-cast concrete elements and abstract Islamic references. The al-Awady Towers were designed with the intention to include showrooms, offices and banks. The ground floor,

which acted as a common base for the three towers, had a shaded arcade for shopping and other commercial activities. The Islamic ornamented *muqarna* vault form was employed on different scales on the façade to provide shading. On the ground level they extended to double height arches for the arcade, while in the middle section of the building they spanned the entire length of the five stories, thus allowing more sunlight in. The exposure to the sun, permitted in this section, was most likely justified by the shading provided from the overhang of the top two levels. Meanwhile, the top two levels were characterized by smaller openings and a density of deep *muqarnas*, intended to keep the windows shaded, since they had no upper overhanging levels to protect them from the sun. The plan and section were simple, with cores attached as appendages to each building, a remnant of a brutalist approach of transparency in terms of function, expressed in the exterior. The distribution of offices and shops in both plan and section was symmetrical and axial. Like the Fisheries, Al-Awady towers included a tripartite façade, but here, it is much less noticeable, due to the uniformity of the panels covering its skin. The building’s skin, clad in the prefabricated concrete *muqarnas*, along with bronze aluminum windows, can therefore be considered its most original feature.

Continuing in the vein of pre-fabricated concrete, Abdel Moneim’s design of the Fisheries Headquarters in 1976 was one of the first buildings in Kuwait constructed entirely of pre-cast concrete exterior panels. The use of concrete on the façade was a choice that reflected a desire for durability, and an awareness of thermal issues — namely an intention to reduce glare and solar gain. In the late 1960s, a factory was established to manufacture prefabricated concrete in Kuwait, making the panels a more cost-effective solution by cutting shipping and import costs.

Other projects from Arab Consultants that are worth noting is their design of the Kuwait Finance House. A stepped sectional “V” was inverted to a downward Pyramid in the building’s entry vestibule. The design was a collaboration between the Arab Consultants and Spanish Eulalia Marques and George Braun, through a competition they jointly won in 1981. In this building, we can see the convergence of several of Abdel Moneim’s design motifs. The *muqarnas* were re-explored, the tripartite façade was re-articulated and so was the use of an overhanging top four stories, supported by overdramatized columns to create shading for the glazed façade of the building. Unlike his other buildings, where the overhang occurred on all four facades or on symmetrical facades, the overhang of Kuwait Finance House was on just two facades touching each other, creating below them a deep shaded niche. This niche faded down, with the pyramidal *muqarna* that melts onto the street to create an urban plaza, announcing the main entrance to the building. The building was not oriented parallel to the street but rather on an exact diagonal, to allow the leftover four triangulated quadrants to be used as urban outdoor plazas, each articulating different access and entrance ways for women, men and private employees. The other facades of the building had no openings, again emphasizing a consistent respect for thermal issues.

The Kuwait Finance House is the most post-modern in Abdel Moneim’s portfolio, in which diverse architectural styles meet and collide on the exterior. Meanwhile, the interiors are dressed in Islamic “Gulf clip-on” decorations. Perhaps this was the result of his collaboration with foreign architects for a competition of this scale or just the natural evolution of his

39. Langdon, David. "AD Classics: Kuwait National Assembly Building / Jørn Utzon." 20 Nov 2014. *ArchDaily*.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

42. Moustapha, Ahmed Farid. *Islamic Values in Contemporary Urbanism*. Jeddah: (1986), 4.

43. A parti is the basic concept of an architectural design.

work and a sign of the time. Abdel Moneim continued to work prolifically in Kuwait up until the early 2000s, producing drawings for more than 50 buildings. His designs dot the urban landscape of Kuwait's downtown, Salmiya and can even be found as far as Abu Halifa. His drawings are currently archived in stacks that fill rooms in his home in Cairo.



Architecture is a machine that contains many opposing elements: light and dark, memory and forgetfulness, permanence and evanescence. Throughout this research which relied in part on primary sources and interviews with the descendants of the architects studied, the question of preservation of both their drawings and their built work was ever-present. If lucky, the archives of their work are preserved and located in libraries around the world. Otherwise, like a missing appendix or tonsils, Kuwait's architectural archives are as imperceptibly lost as the architects that faded quickly in and out of its urban stage. The richness of the city's building process is somehow separated from the current state of oblivion regarding its built heritage, with a deep hairline crack. The demolishing of Al-Andalus, Al-Ferdows, and Al-Hamra cinemas, all to make way for new malls in the early 2000s, is one of the many examples of this lack of awareness and devaluation of the importance of these Egyptian architects' foundational contributions to the city. This sentiment is echoed in Cairo, where if anything, their work at home is barely recognized, while their influence abroad is virtually unknown.

Through the snapshots presented in this research from different moments in Kuwait's architectural history, I attempted to construct an observational scaffolding in which their story was set. The role of Egyptian architects in the shaping of Kuwait's early built environment was part of a deeply embedded and tightly woven relationship between the two countries. As I attempted to demonstrate, the contribution of Egyptians in the early development of Kuwait took the form of two roles: that of the commissioner and that of the architect and builder. In addition to these two roles, Egyptians gave direction to the regional discourse of architecture through their

of magazines, printed material, hosting of architectural congresses as well as influence of the architectural educational trajectory of forthcoming generations in Kuwait.

Post-Nasser and Sadat, Egypt's political and cultural sphere of influence in the region gradually began to shrink. Meanwhile, the Gulf countries, including Kuwait, became richer, and started to spread their own investments and culture beyond their borders. It is important to read the past and present urban developments of Cairo and Kuwait in juxtaposition with the evolution of their political and economic contexts, bringing the two views together like two images in a stereoscope. As a result of regional shifts, the dynamics eventually reversed between Egypt and Kuwait in the field of urbanism and architecture. Today, the Gulf is shaping Cairo via its economic influence, its developers and ideas of suburban modernity.<sup>44</sup> This research thus represents a small chapter of a complex story that continues to the present.

F. George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1939).

44. Developers like Emariti Emaar and Qatari Diar are building residential compounds and towers both in Cairo and on Egypt's North Coast. Meanwhile, Kuwaiti investors, for example, own more than 30 percent% of the land in the contested central triangle of Bulaq in downtown Cairo.