

Architecture Climate Change & Society

Buell Center
2020 Course Development Prize



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ARCHITECTURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL ORIENTALISM IN THE ARAB WORLD

The course investigates the relationship between architectural and environmental imaginaries in the development of post-colonial architecture in the Arab World. The course integrates readings and discussions around Orientalism, Environmental Orientalism, environmental history, and colonial/post-colonial architecture in the region. Integrating environmental history methodologies into architectural discourse reveals the relationship between architecture, environmentalism and colonialism. This framework raises the following questions: What do colonial legacies have to do with environmentalism, and how does this shape Arab architecture? How do contemporary ideologies and practices of environmentalism impact Arab architecture? And finally, what are non-Western designers to do in the face of ongoing Orientalism and the climate crisis?

Image: Kamar ed Din Series: Hand-sawing of Logs into Planks, 1938.

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Architecture and Environmental Orientalism in the Arab World

Course Description + Syllabus

COURSE DESCRIPTION

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The course is structured in three parts. First, the readings build up conceptual complexity by introducing the ideas around Orientalism and modernity. Second, the course investigates the role Environmental Orientalism, and environmental history in the built environment. Third, the seminar moves towards a case study approach, with each week looking at a specific territory within the wider region to unpack the relationship between colonial architectural practices, the construction of an environmental imaginary, and the territory's actual environmental history. Throughout the course, we investigate explicitly architectural responses in the Arab World. However, they are now recast through the lens developed throughout the course.

COURSE OUTCOMES

1. Understand the conceptual framework of Orientalism and its relationship to architecture, the environment, and nation building in the Arab World with a specific focus on viewing it through the lens of Environmental Orientalism.
2. Deploy research methodologies used in environmental history into architectural research. This is due to the close proximity between the material, political and cultural components of both disciplines.
3. Identify the differences amongst colonial practices as it relates to the environment and architecture across the region.
4. Contextualize the emergence of post-colonial architecture practice in the Arab World and how these practices, and critical analysis of these practices, might influence contemporary architecture culture in the region.
5. Develop critical positions about contemporary architecture education and practice in the region

ASSESSMENT METHODS

1. *Critical Reading Responses:* Weekly written reading responses.
2. *Research Project:* This project integrates a writing exercise, archival research and field photographic documentation. Students investigate a built condition in the UAE that can be tackled through the tools of environmental history. The criteria for site/object selection include its historical relevance, the inherent relationships it presents with some form of shaping or manipulation of the natural environment, accessibility to an archival record, physical access for photographic documentation.
3. *In-class presentations:* Each student leads the class discussion once a semester through a presentation, extrapolated from the week's readings.
4. *In-class discussion.*

COURSE STRUCTURE

Week 1-3: Introduction of Theoretical Framework: Orientalism and Modernity

Here, we embark on readings from primary and secondary texts on Orientalism, Modernity, Colonialism and Post-Colonialism, while always making inferences to the built environment. Students will be encouraged to develop opinions through an architectural lens, culminating in a discussion about how radically different colonial practices in the region generated radically different architecture and urban design practices. In general, the course deploys a Socratic method of open inquiry, where my role includes directing conversation in a way that enables students to think critically on the topic at hand and to question their own assumptions.

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Week 4-6: Introduction of Environmental History and Environmental Orientalism

Here, the readings and discussions begin to become more focused on issues of Environmental History and Environmental Orientalism as they relate to the built environment. The point of this part of the course is to integrate ideas around Orientalism and the environment, to show how they both work to create a particular architectural narrative in the region. This portion, before we start to look at more precise case-studies of architecture and urban design from the region that remained largely invisible to the student throughout their careers up to this point, allows the students to gain new knowledge and a new set of tools that are not typically introduced in architecture schools.

Week 7-14 – Region by Region Case-Study

This part of the course focused on a specific region per week, where readings highlighted both the architectural, environmental and cultural context of the region during and in the period after direct colonial rule ended. For example, each week sees readings around architecture, environmental history, environmental imaginaries and cultural history of the specific region, encouraging the students to understand these components as part of a larger whole.

READING LIST

Week 1: Orientalism

- Said, Edward. "Introduction to Orientalism." In *Orientalism*, 1-28. London: Penguin, 2003.
- Updike, John. *Satan's Work and Silted Cisterns*. The New Yorker, October 17, 1988

Week 2: Tradition and Modernity

- Hobsbawm, Eric. "Introduction: Inventing Traditions." In *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, 1-14. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- Mitchell, Timothy. "The Stage of Modernity." In *Questions of Modernity*, ed. Timothy Mitchell, 1-34. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
- Abu-Lughod, Janet. "The Islamic City: Historic Myth, Islamic Essence and Contemporary Relevance." *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 1987, 155-176.

Week 3: Colonial Spatial Practices

- Wright, Gwendolyn. "Introduction." In *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism*, 1-13. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991.
- Tabet, Jad. "From Colonial Style to Regional Revivalism: Modern Architecture in Lebanon and the Problem of Cultural Identity." In *Projecting Beirut: Episodes in the Construction and Reconstruction of a Modern City*, ed. Peter G. Rowe and Hashim Sarkis, 83-105. Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1998.
- Huggan, Graham, and Helen Tiffin. "Green Postcolonialism." *Interventions* 9, no. 1 (2007): 1-11.

Week 4: Environmental Histories

- Mikhail, Alan. "Introduction: Middle East Environmental History." In *Water on Sand: Environmental Histories of the Middle East and North Africa*, edited by Alan Mikhail, 1-25. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- McNeill J R. "The Eccentricity of the Middle East and North Africa's Environmental History." In *Water on Sand: Environmental Histories of the Middle East and North Africa*, edited by Alan Mikhail, 27-50. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Week 5: The Climate and Postcolonialism

- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. "The Climate of History: Four Theses." *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 2 (2009): 197-222.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. "Postcolonial Studies and the Challenge of Climate Change." *New Literary History* 43, no. 1 (2012): 1-18.

Week 6: Environmental Imaginaries

- Davis, Diane K. "Imperialism, Orientalism and the Environment in the Middle East," In *Environmental imaginaries of the Middle East and North Africa*, edited by Diana K Davis and Edmund Burke III, 1-22. Athens: Ohio Press, 2011.
- Cidell, Julie. "Sustainable Imaginaries and the Green Roof on Chicago's City Hall." *Geoforum* 86 (2017): 169-76.
- Lahoud, Adrian. "The Mediterranean: A New Imaginary." In *New Geographies* 5, edited by Antonio Petrov, 81-100. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Graduate School of Design, 2013.

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Week 7: Environmental Imaginaries: Case Study 1

- Didion, Joan. "At the Dam." In *The White Album*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979.
- Mitchell, Timothy. "The Stage of Modernity." In *Questions of Modernity*, ed. Timothy Mitchell, 1-34. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
- Reynolds, Nancy Y. "Building the Past: Rockscapes and the Aswan High Dam in Egypt." In *Water on Sand: Environmental Histories of the Middle East and North Africa*, edited by Alan Mikhail, 181-205. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Week 8: Environmental Imaginaries: Case Study 2

- Makdisi, Karim. "The Rise and Decline of Environmentalism in Lebanon." In *Water on Sand: Environmental Histories of the Middle East and North Africa*, edited by Alan Mikhail, 208-229. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Sarkis, Hashim. "A Stone of Contention: The New Town Hall of Byblos, Lebanon." In *The Arab City: Architecture and Representation*, ed. Amale Andraos, Nora Akawi, and Caitlin Blanchfield, 183-189. New York City: Columbia Books, 2014.

Week 9: Environmental Imaginaries: Case Study 3

- Ochsenschlager, Edward L. "In the Garden of Eden." In *Iraq's Marsh Arabs in the Garden of Eden*, 145-169. University of Pennsylvania Press, University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2004.
- Bernhardsson, Magnus T. "Visions of Iraq: Modernizing the Past in 1950s Baghdad." In *Modernism and the Middle East: Architecture and Politics in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Sandy Isenstadt and Kishwar Rizvi, 81-96. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008.

Week 10: Environmental Imaginaries: Case Study 4

- Innab, Saba. "Reading the Modern Narrative of Amman: Between the Nation and the National." In *The Arab City: Architecture and Representation*, ed. Amale Andraos, Nora Akawi, and Caitlin Blanchfield, 119-135. New York City: Columbia Books, 2014.

Week 11: Environmental Imaginaries: Case Study 5

- Wright, Gwendolyn. "Tradition in the Service of Modernity: Architecture and Urbanism in French Colonial Policy, 1900-1930." *The Journal of Modern History* 59, no. 2 (1987): 291-316.
- Trumbull, George R. "Body of Work: Water and Reimagining the Sahara in the Era of Decolonization." In *Environmental imaginaries of the Middle East and North Africa*, edited by Diana K Davis and Edmund Burke III, 1-22. Athens: Ohio Press, 2011.
- Crane, Sheila. "Housing as Battleground: Targeting the City in the Battles of Algiers." *City & Society* 29, no. 1 (2017): 187-212.
- Celik, Zeynep. "Le Corbusier: Orientalism, Colonialism." *Assemblage*, April 1992, 58-77.

Week 12: Environmental Imaginaries: Case Study 6

- Ghorayeb, Marlene. "The Work and Influence of Michel Ecochard in Lebanon." In *Projecting Beirut: Episodes in the Construction and Reconstruction of a Modern City*, ed. Peter G. Rowe and Hashim Sarkis, 106-121. Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1998.
- Roesler, Sascha. "Interview." In *Habitat Marocain Documents: Dynamics between Formal and Informal Housing*, 14-31. Zurich: Park, 2015.
- Chatel, Francesca De. "Chafa and Chirb, the Laws of Water." In *Water Sheikhs and Dam Builders: Stories of People and Water in the Middle East*, 56-63. Routledge, 2017.
- Chatel, Francesca De. "Making the Desert Bloom." In *Water Sheikhs and Dam Builders: Stories of People and Water in the Middle East*, 101-105. Routledge, 2017.

Week 13: Environmental Imaginaries: Case Study 7

- Rab, Samia. "Sharjah: Seascape Urbanis, in a Khaliji Port City". In Annie Cormier, Annie Pedret & Alberto Perez-Gomez (ed.) *The 99th ACSA Annual Meeting Proceedings, Where Do You Stand* (2011).

Week 14: Environmentally Recast: Post-Colonial Practices

- Kultermann, Udo. "The Architects of Iraq." *Mimar* 5, 1984, 54-61.
- Kultermann, Udo. "The Architects of Egypt." *Mimar* 4, 1982, 56-61.
- Kultermann, Udo. "The Architects of Morocco." *Mimar* 7, 1983, 60-66.
- Kultermann, Udo. "The Architects of Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya." *Mimar* 9, 1983, 59-65.
- Kultermann, Udo. "The Architects of the Gulf States." *Mimar* 14, 1984, 50-57.
- Kultermann, Udo. "The Architects of Saudi Arabia." *Mimar* 16, 1985, 42-53.
- Abu Hamdan, Akram. "Jafar Tukan of Jordan." *Mimar* 12, 1984, 54-65.
- Andraos, Amale and Caitlin Blanchfield. "An Interview with Bernard Khoury." In *The Arab City: Architecture and Representation*, ed. Amale Andraos, Nora Akawi, and Caitlin Blanchfield, 225-229. New York City: Columbia Books, 2014.