

Architectural Academic Tourism: Saudi Chronicles

or

Social Mobility for Women through Architectural Design and Education in Saudi Arabia



<http://www.arabnews.com/node/362096>

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Poetic Licence, Architects Without Borders



Taqiyya and Hudna

This paper is a sequel to a monograph about teaching architecture and design in four ‘divided nations’ (Cyprus, Korea, Uganda, Sri Lanka) and elaborates on a subsequent teaching stint in Saudi Arabia. While KSA is not typically thought of as a ‘divided nation’, the country and culture, relative to other countries, are in fact (with a few rare exceptions like King Abdullah University of Science and Technology) strictly divided along gender lines. I taught architecture as an associate professor in the Architecture Program of a women’s university in the west of the country for the academic year 2013-14 (names are occasionally withheld in this article for reasons of discretion and upon request). While I had taught at a women’s college in South Korea (Duksung U), there were ample men on the Korean faculty and access to the campus for men was easy, whereas at the Saudi university, with the exception of one wing which

had a few isolated classrooms set aside for ‘male’ instruction, the attractive interconnected one-building campus was completely exclusionary with tight security.

As a practicing architect I had had Saudi clients (and friends) and been to Saudi Arabia before; I saw the stint as a service and research opportunity for and with women in tandem with a Visiting Fellowship at Cambridge’s Lucy Cavendish College, a ‘mature’ women’s college which graciously provided significant moral backing and in-kind support. Apart from what might seem to the reader to be obvious challenges, the venture was complicated by the fact that the Architecture Program in which I taught went through three program directors that year, was young and had not yet graduated any students, was pursuing draconian Saudi NCAAA accreditation, and though seemingly in denial, was obliged to navigate a growing MERS epidemic (with most cases going unreported).¹ None of these complications could have been gleaned from the university website or email correspondence with the university before arrival. The ten-year old college (which was accorded ‘university’ status in January 2014) was entirely run by women, albeit the Board was composed primarily of men. Many of the women had been hired locally (often Egyptian or Syrian wives of men working in KSA) or **by** ‘local hires’ whose understanding of international architectural credentialing was coloured or dictated by that of the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE), and substantially different from credentialing and licensing in the UK or US. Architectural licensing procedures modelled on the US system have recently been introduced by the Saudi Umran Society of Architect Registration Council but remain largely ignored.

Complicating academic routine, from this author’s perspective, is the Islamic modus operandi of *taqiyya* and *hudna*, which accounts for much of what is seen by the

¹ MERS: ‘A Slowly Growing Epidemic’; Most Cases Unreported <http://mers-virus.blogspot.co.uk/2013/11/mers-slow-growing-epidemic-most-cases.html> last accessed 11 June 2014

expat or ‘west’ as Saudi or Middle Eastern unreliability or changeability—largely strategic. My delightful Saudi teaching colleagues and assistants would argue that they were subject to the same whims, inconsistencies, teaching overloads and ‘academic politics’ as we ‘infidels’ were however (of course I was never directly called an ‘infidel’). This micro-example means that with Saudization² the common perception of employers treating foreign workers like servants is not ‘outsider’-specific and has to do with indigenous ‘social pecking orders’ as well, hinting at yet another potential ‘Arab spring’. With the current crisis in Iraq, potential home-grown terrorism, and threatening ISIL caliphate on its doorstep, KSA is currently in a state of high alert (on several fronts). As might be suspected, the model of empowering women in Saudi Arabia through architecture (traditionally a male-dominated field) and design education has not been without trials and frustrations—but the paradigm has proven to have undeniable and profound benefits to all parties beyond the transference of technical skills—lasting friendships, expanded philosophical and psychological horizons, language development, social mobility, increased transparency and accountability, and greater insight into the lot of women in KSA.

Taqiyya (‘holy deception’) and *hudna* (‘tactical truce’) are Koranic principles which basically justify lying or breach of contract (false *politesse*) to gain the upper hand in dealing with non-Muslims.³ However, as mentioned, the *modus operandi* does not seem limited to foreigners and appears to account for substantial in-fighting and confusion among locals as well, with several well-respected **Saudi** professors/administrators ‘let go’ by the university in prior years taking the university to court for breach of contract. It is fairly safe to assume that ‘legal’ agreements are likely

² ‘Saudization is the national policy of Saudi Arabia to encourage employment of Saudi nationals in the private sector...’ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saudization last accessed 12 June 2014

³ <http://www.inquiryintoislam.com/2010/06/what-is-taqiyya.html>, and <http://www.thereligionofpeace.com/quran/011-taqiyya.htm> last accessed 4 July 2014

to morph (or be broken) while working in or with Saudi Arabia; in order to survive one has to ‘go with the flow’, be flexible, exercise patience and diplomacy, expect the unexpected, humour ‘upper echelons’ and **have** a good sense of humour. Deception and/or ambiguity might be confused with ‘growing pains’, yet as one blogger writes, ‘the only thing certain in Saudi Arabia is uncertainty.’⁴ The university in KSA is not necessarily a safe place to explore/espouse/debate different or opposing ideas or be a ‘truth-seeker’/researcher, although my students proved adept at inquiry and felt honesty to be essential. Much has been written about the perils of working in Saudi Arabia as an expat and it is not the purpose of this paper to elaborate on the risks—suffice it to say they exist.

On a positive note in regard to women’s rights, King Abdullah is the key player behind the innovative King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, where women can drive, the *abaya* (typical long black cloak) and head scarf are optional, and classes are co-educational. The university ‘has the second largest endowment of any university in the world, second only to Harvard—at \$20 billion.’⁵ This remarkable, ‘sustainably-designed’ campus by HOK Architects has an extraordinary setting and enviable views of the pristine, turquoise blue Red Sea. Security at KAUST is understandably tight, with the KAUST phenomenon suggesting that KSA leadership is more prepared for a western style of development than is the larger population—a position further challenging ‘stability’.⁶ This upmarket KAUST ‘brandscape’ is doing much to promote equality for women despite fundamentalist reticence (sometimes, ironically, originating from conservative or ‘conditioned’ women). Given the background of *taqiyya* and *hudna*, and though the ‘brand’ of Islam practiced where I

⁴ <http://life-in-saudi-arabia.blogspot.co.uk/2014/04/procedure-of-final-exit-from-saudi.html#.U7aJ0fldV8E> last accessed 4 July 2014

⁵ <http://www.arabnews.com/news/461379> last accessed 4 July 2014

⁶ http://al-shorfa.com/en_GB/articles/meii/features/2009/10/10/feature-02 last accessed 17 July 2014

taught, for instance, purported to be one of ‘love and peace’, ‘getting things done’ in academe and industry can be problematic.



Women's University, ZFP Architects



KAUST (King Abdullah University of Science and Technology), HOK Architects

<http://www.hoklife.com/tag/kaust/>

The Studio or Using Design for Social Change⁷

My architectural studio or lab was constructed as a ‘safe place’ where ‘thinking outside the box’ and creativity were encouraged. As one student told me, ‘No one thinks like YOU!’ Despite occasional cultural differences we were able to make some extraordinary design progress, including live project work for a large garden photo exhibit by and for women, a university fashion show (with the first-ever Fashion Department in KSA), a day care centre for the university, and the UK and US Consulates (in a studio focused on ‘culture’). A sampling of these projects is presented below. Animations were explored and created for the first time in the program.

⁷ <http://sds.parsons.edu/blog/learn-about-design-thinking-for-social-change/#single> last accessed 12 July 2014

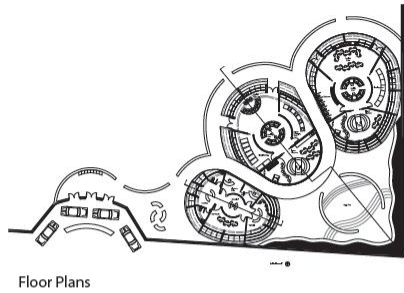
Architecture proved to be not just an end in itself but a medium of expression and haven for what western society considers a highly underprivileged people group (a discussion of how these young Saudi women view themselves is covered in the next section).

As an example of ‘cultural misunderstanding,’ I was giving a lecture on acoustics when a call to prayer simultaneously sounded. Mentioning ‘noise transmission’ as potentially disturbing and outlining methods of sound insulation towards more sustainable and user-friendly environments, my commentary was interpreted as insulting by a co-teacher and her attending students, who made an official complaint to the provost (for the sake of context I should add that my student and peer evaluations were stellar). Studios were spacious and well furnished though the women lacked designated desk space and storage and could not stay to work beyond 6:00 at night, which during an architectural *charrette* can be counter-productive.

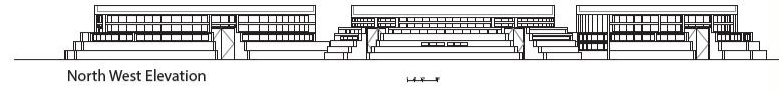


Live Project Café Pavilion for Photo Exhibit (Razaz Abbas, Marwa Abdulah, Farah Aqrabawi Jinia Sarker)

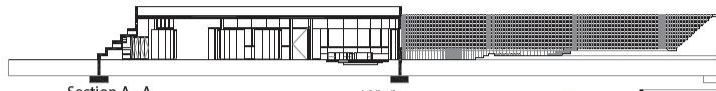
Planning



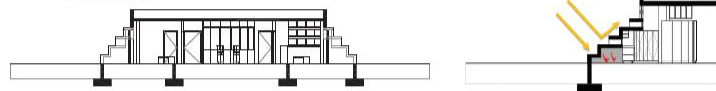
Floor Plans



North West Elevation

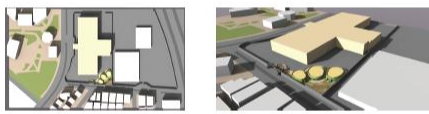


Section A - A



Section B - B

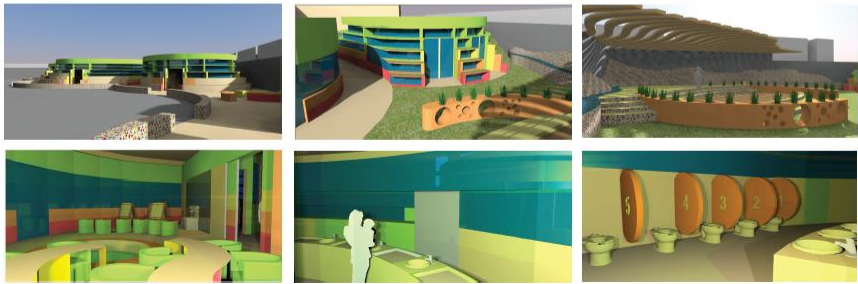
Site Plan



Colors & Materials



3D Shots



FARAH AQRABAWI 1120034 STUDIO II SMALE-SCALE & SUSTAINABLE BUILDINGS ARCH 2502 FINAL PROJECT JAN. 2, 2014

Project Introduction
A sustainable kindergarten prototype design subordinate to dar al-hikma college site, Jeddah, KSA.

Project Concept
Breaking the box of the archetype kindergartens with a playful stroke that is both interactive and sustainably integrated with the given site.

Desired Goals
Changing children's first impression of an emblematic kindergarten and providing them with both education and contentment.

Sustainable Considerations

- Site integration
Units-like form division
Linear form organization
- Sustainable cooling systems
Elevated vegetation on walls
Courtyard-like corridor
Gray Water Filtering System
- Light sources
Natural light via facade openings and corridor
- Sustainable building materials
Rapid Wall Construction and rubble mats

Zoning

Circulation

Scenario

Access

THE KINDERGARTEN

Meaad Hanafi
Rahaf Almuzaini
Buthaina Enani

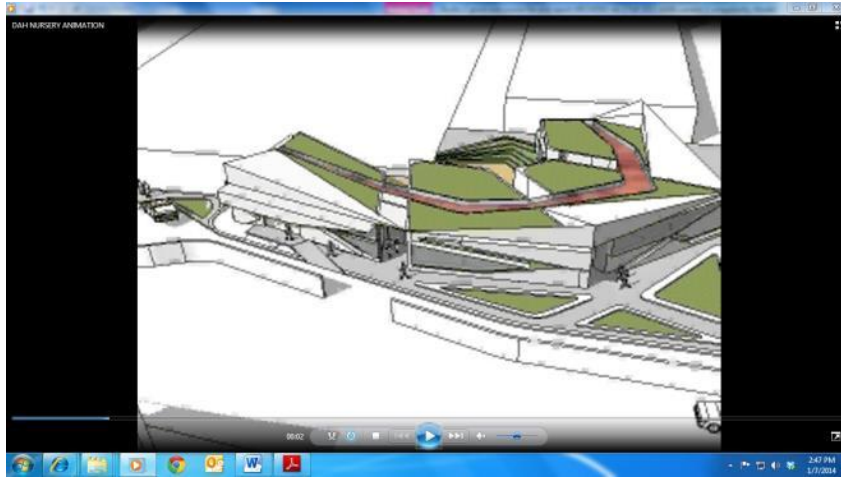
Design Concept

- Rectangular Plot
- Breaking The Box
- Separating The Units
- Linking The Units

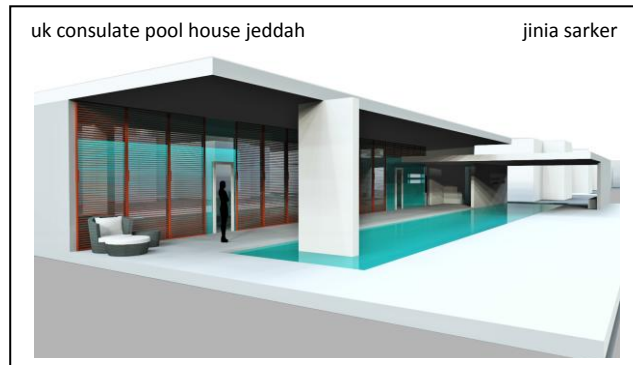
Architectural Drawings

Process

Day Care Centre for Children of Working Mothers (Buthaina Enani, Meaad Hanafi, Rahaf Almuzaini)



Day Care Centre Video/Animation



US & UK Consulate Projects - First Prize Winners

Local Colour



While KSA appears very ‘black and white’ to the outsider and clothing can and typically does reflect culture, it can also be extremely superficial (and is even becoming

colourful). The *abaya* and *hijab* (head scarf) were not required once inside my university except in the presence of the rare male visitor (as in ‘juries’), requiring partitions to be set up in corridors as visual barriers. In the studio, students were ‘typical students’ although perhaps more ‘chatty’ and social; many kept their *abayas* on for the sake of convenience (for the simple reason that lockers were small, cloak rooms unavailable, and air conditioning was kept on high). These young university women did not appear to see themselves as ‘handicapped’ or underserved in any way although most felt they should have the right to drive, while concurrently appreciating chauffeured vehicular transportation in navigating chaotic city traffic. Students told me they could usually go anywhere they wanted with their drivers, although fieldtrip supervision was stringent. When I gave my students a twenty-minute ‘free time’ break during a fieldtrip early in the year I was called into the director’s office and severely reprimanded (although the students were delighted with the ‘liberal approach’). Little information was shared in advance despite numerous ‘orientation sessions’ geared more towards highlighting unforetold and atypical obligations such as daily electronic ‘clocking-in’ and tedious end-of-term ‘course files’ (ostensibly required for accreditation). ‘Busywork’ was abundant. Most colleagues were in KSA strictly to make money, and most were given substantial teaching overloads since attracting faculty to KSA was difficult despite relatively high (‘tax-free’) salaries. Entry visas could also be problematic. Since interviews were prohibitive due to the complicated visa process, Skype video calls were employed for interviewing, with a colleague remarking that ‘mercenaries, misfits and missionaries’ were regular recruits.⁸

As in Uganda, my students made my time in Saudi truly meaningful and worthwhile, despite any exploitation and competitive faculty undercutting or rudeness

⁸ <http://coa.sagepub.com/content/28/4/406.short> last accessed 4 July 2014

(stemming mostly from insecurity, abuse, jealousy and/or a history of ‘women being their own worst enemies’).⁹ While the school’s president held two degrees from Cambridge including a PhD pertaining to the ‘Evaluation of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia’, the educational system did not, ostensibly, reflect much of the Cambridge paradigm or ethos, which might be expected in a ‘developing world’ situation and different culture despite forward-thinking intentions. ‘Can the Saudi system tolerate hearing the critical voice of a Saudi female researcher and professional?’ the scholar asks in her 2005 thesis, reminding the reader of the Islamic *shura* (‘consultation’) concept for discourse (as does this author).¹⁰ Saudi men and women alike appear to revert to strict indigenous cultural norms upon returning to what one expat blogger sarcastically calls ‘Paradise,’¹¹ with the master-servant mentality and pigeon-holing of workers by nationality emerging as a dominant *modus operandi* (as opposed to collaboration based on competence or merit). One co-worker claimed ‘you have to be mediocre to survive’ and another, ‘be careful not to upstage your colleagues or you’ll be ousted.’

Change and development appear slow, with current norms dictated by government authorities and private university boards/owners, and innovation is typically discouraged (again, KAUST is a welcome exception). Most faculty members have primarily been trained in the Middle East and Africa: Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Turkey, Sudan and so forth, though a good number have spent a few years obtaining a degree in Europe or North America—Muslim colleagues appear adept at learning technical skills abroad without compromising their cultural mores. A remarkable

⁹ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/nov/18/women-own-worst-enemies-study> last accessed 4 July 2014

¹⁰ [Author’s name withheld], *Evaluation of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia...* (U Cambridge PhD Thesis, 2005) page 274

¹¹ <http://www.energypost.eu/trouble-oil-paradise-domestic-challenges-saudi-energy-market-global-implications/> last accessed 4 July 2014

Sudanese lawyer working at my school taught three different legal systems in the Legal Studies Program including Sharia law, managing to compartmentalize the three like languages, with Sharia taking precedence as ‘mother tongue’.

Mass email announcements to faculty, staff and students identified university members as ‘Dears’ or ‘Roses’, with the president frequently addressing members as ‘Darling’. By western standards students were often overtly/overly affectionate with one another in class, and it is not unusual in KSA for members of the same sex to hold hands (though taboo in public for members of the opposite sex).

At the time of writing, the school is essentially a commuter college open from around 8am-4pm Monday through Friday with a visionary president who has the ostensible where-with-all (and backing) to realise expansionary dreams. My students were eager to learn, though for many (some brides and mothers from a very early age) the experience was more an opportunity to socialize outside the home. During the (ongoing) MERS epidemic, students who had been seriously ill with fever and cough refused to get tested, believing they were more likely to get sicker at the hospital (the only place where testing was available), stigmatised, or quarantined, when little could be done by way of treatment in any case. Only individuals in need of serious help (e.g. mechanical respiration) would actually go to the hospital, and with antibiotics readily available over-the-counter, people self-treated for cough, fever and/or pneumonia. Typically no one stayed home to protect others from infection unless they were truly immobile. Since the school required medical certificates from students, staff, and faculty alike in order to officially excuse absences (sick days were otherwise ‘docked’ from staff and faculty salaries), most everyone showed up despite severe illness, and germs spread easily. In the main students and staff saw western standards of hygiene and quarantine as being ‘over the top’ and despite mass campaigns to encourage

cleanliness, in practice health concerns were largely ignored. As I often had to spend a half hour or so in close contact with contagious architecture students for ‘crits’ (individual design critique/teaching sessions) either in studio or my office, I eventually became quite ill myself. When I asked if I could take a semester off or revert to a more ‘western’ (flexible) professorial schedule to accommodate research, I was informed that a termination notice would shortly be forthcoming (despite the excellent evaluations from students and peers and a two-year contract). The situation quickly evolved into a settlement by mutual agreement with token extra pay (it should be noted that salaries had diligently been paid on time), with settlement terms broken by the school two weeks later. In the course of a year my contract had morphed or been reneged on five times without my permission or consultation (*taqiyya* and *hudna*).

Though infrequently discussed, students and colleagues alike viewed polygamy and the fact that changing one’s religion (apostasy) could result in death (if publicly acknowledged) as highly problematic--along with the prohibition of women driving. Students were awarded prizes for learning the entire Koran by heart, and the initiative was taken very seriously. Some non-Muslim colleagues likened the exercise to ‘brainwashing’.¹² At the time of writing, many young women have transformed the *abaya* into a colourful, loosely worn robe not dissimilar to the kimono or other decorative garb, viewed by some conservatives however as a minor gesture of rebellion (‘acceptable in Jeddah but not Riyadh’¹³).

¹² <http://filmmakermagazine.com/27229-koran-by-heart-director-greg-barker/#.U7aQhPldV8E> last accessed 4 July 2014

¹³ <https://uk.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20080707085822AABq0Te> last accessed 4 July 2014



https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=colorful-abayas&source=lnms&tbn=sch&sa=X&ei=VL62U-24KOWU0AWjn4HoAQ&ved=0CAYQ_AUoAQ&biw=1920&bih=970

Due to Saudization and various ‘developing world’ parameters (although KSA was taken off the EU list of developing nations in 2013),¹⁴ many academic employees are what might be considered to be ‘in training’. Hiring is done with little understanding of how various fields and their peculiar dynamics work and differ, particularly at the international level and in the professions—and again, largely due to MOHE directives and the lack of meaningful applicant pools.

At the university I taught at (fairly representative of higher education in KSA in that all universities are governed by MOHE) any degree from Europe or North America was typically seen as an asset while any western licensing processes were generally seen as irrelevant. The program director’s role was apparently to keep faculty ‘in line’ and grow already oversized and understaffed (and highly unselective) programs (the ubiquitous ‘university as commercial enterprise’), rather than focus on appropriate staffing, program improvement and development, sensible scheduling, design excellence and a cultivation of team spirit. Bullying and rudeness were not uncommon—perhaps due to ‘victims becoming victimizers’.¹⁵ As mentioned, given visa restrictions and the general reputation of KSA regarding women’s rights, health issues, freedom of thought and movement, Saudization, etc., recruitment of qualified administrators and faculty was difficult. On the upside, higher education is now

¹⁴ <http://www.arabnews.com/news/467535> last accessed 4 July 2014

¹⁵ <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/10493322> last accessed 4 July 2014

available to Saudi women in Saudi Arabia (and the Saudi government provides full scholarships for those wishing to study abroad). While this higher education may be in the ‘start-up’ phase and a ‘work in progress’, the machinery is in motion and to be highly commended.

Acculturation

As with ‘under-qualification’, ‘over-qualification’ can also have serious drawbacks in any ‘developing world’ teaching situation and beyond. I was asked to be the acting dean of the School of Design & Architecture shortly after arrival in KSA (a similar opportunity had presented in Uganda) which ‘ruffled feathers’ even though I was not interested and by MOHE’s standards was not a suitable candidate (I am a practicing licensed architect rather than the generally preferred PhD in Architectural History or Theory). While students invariably profit from qualified ‘expat’ instruction and are typically enormously grateful for the contact and input, the teaching mission is severely complicated by academic politics beyond the norm (‘ferocious because the stakes are so small’)¹⁶, paperwork, and teaching/advising/committee overloading. Additionally, university women who were victims of polygamy and/or threatened with death for thinking outside the system/changing their religion made for disturbed ‘bedfellows’.

Navigating culture shock, rivalry and/or frequent exploitation as part of the acculturation process was often handled by expatriate colleagues through complacency, complicity, silence, ‘playing dumb’, diplomacy, ‘hidden agendas’, and/or deception. The impartation of ‘western’ values of academic honesty and freedom, creativity, time management, reliability, productivity, tolerance, compassion, responsiveness, work

¹⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sayre's_law last accessed 4 July 2014

ethics and so forth was by-and-large encouraged and sanctioned in the classroom but not beyond the teaching platform. Many foreign instructors went ‘native’ fairly quickly, often from fear and/or in order to survive KSA emotionally. There are few ‘support bases’ other than the mosque (although ‘house churches’ abound and there is an underground Christian movement even among Saudis);¹⁷ one response is to change Islam from the inside.¹⁸

‘Workers’ (including women university professors) are normally transported to their employment venues from compounds (or foreign worker housing)¹⁹ daily in school buses at given hours. In my case the commute was dusty, long and tiring (almost an hour each way), and conversations on the bus were apparently monitored and reported to and by those ‘in the system’. Overt and honest discourse could lead to reprimand, ostracism, or dismissal though the bus ride could often accommodate a useful exchange of information between friendly colleagues as well. It did seem that all walls had eyes and ears. Many colleagues ‘escaped’ into Red Sea diving, food addiction, Consulate parties, gallery openings, recreational shopping and boyfriends (another KSA ‘taboo’). In sum, and as was to be expected, there were substantial complexities and frustrations beyond the norm in connecting with young women in a fundamentalist Muslim venue through the art and science of architecture in order to improve lives and inspire/create more positive, sustainable environments and futures. This was not business/teaching or research ‘as usual’ and acculturation was a tug of war.

¹⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ysfr7rxIT94> and <http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.con&contentid=20140414201838> last accessed 4 July 2014

¹⁸ http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/05/28/changing-islam-from-the-inside/?_php=true&_type=blogs&_r=0 last accessed 4 July 2014

¹⁹ My ‘compound’ housing consisted of attractive, air-conditioned, two-storey brick townhouses with seventies’ furniture in a tree-lined, architecturally interesting and well landscaped, gated complex with swimming pools, tennis court etc.

An Architecture for and by Women

Several extensive studies have been made about design and accessibility for women--mothers with prams and/or small children and pregnant women, including detailed observations about design issues such as suitable paving for high heels, public bathrooms (usually designed for women by men) lacking counter space, baby changing facilities, hooks for handbags and coats, etc.²⁰ Not surprisingly little has been written about accommodating women in culturally-specific arenas like Saudi Arabia, where dressing rooms in clothing stores do not exist and public bathrooms do not accommodate ritual washing before prayer (hence women often wash their feet in sinks splashing water all over), hooks for *abayas* and/or cloakroom facilities, mechanical ventilation and a choice of western or eastern hygiene, proper floor drainage and so forth. Driving is one of the few instances where women are given ‘special attention’, but in the peculiar sense that it has been identified as ‘detrimental to women’s ovaries’.²¹

Some of the reasoning behind the design or ‘architecture’ of the black *abaya* and *hijab* (other than custom)²² is that the dress provides protection from sand storms and sun (white, the traditional colour of the men’s *thobe*, would certainly be less heat-absorbent though perhaps more difficult to identify against a desert palette). Some colleagues suggested that given the extensive practice of polygamy (described as ‘heart-breaking for any woman anywhere’), the custom of having women cover up provided a welcome impediment to ‘wandering eyes’, though children lost in supermarkets found it hard to locate their mothers and outsiders found the dress ‘frightening’ (with ‘masking’

²⁰ <http://www.architecture.com/Files/RIBAProfessionalServices/Practice/GuidetoAssistedLiving/AGuideforAssistedLiving.pdf> last accessed 4 July 2014

²¹ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2436607/Women-shouldnt-drive-damages-ovaries-pelvis-warns-Saudi-sheikh.html> last accessed 4 July 2014

²² <http://www.mwlnusa.org/topics/dress/hijab.html> last accessed 4 July 2014

reminiscent of ISIL). France has gone so far as to ban the face veil, a decision which was recently upheld by the EU.²³ Interesting to note, the Koran mentions only the requirement of a loose, modest garment for women (no headscarf or specific colour are called out), whereas the Bible distinctly suggests women ‘cover their heads’.²⁴ Muslim, Christian and Jewish women alike would invariably posit culture and the concept of ‘by the spirit not the letter of the law’²⁵ for their respective interpretations of relevant scripture.

Two live architectural design projects undertaken with my students and colleagues and briefly mentioned earlier, a large outdoor photo exhibit for women by women and a fashion show set for the first ever Fashion Department in KSA, merit some discussion. Further live projects for the US and UK Consulates were undertaken to give students a glimpse of different cultures and to increase self-esteem through working on ‘high profile’ projects where both men and women government officials sought design input from and listened very carefully to women students. Both the US and UK Consulates hosted exhibits of the student design work (which the young women, however, were forbidden by the school to attend). An introductory small-scale live project included the design and fabrication of a kite (see poster and photos of imaginative student work below).

²³ <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/02/world/europe/european-rights-court-upholds-frances-ban-on-full-face-veils.html> last accessed 4 July 2014

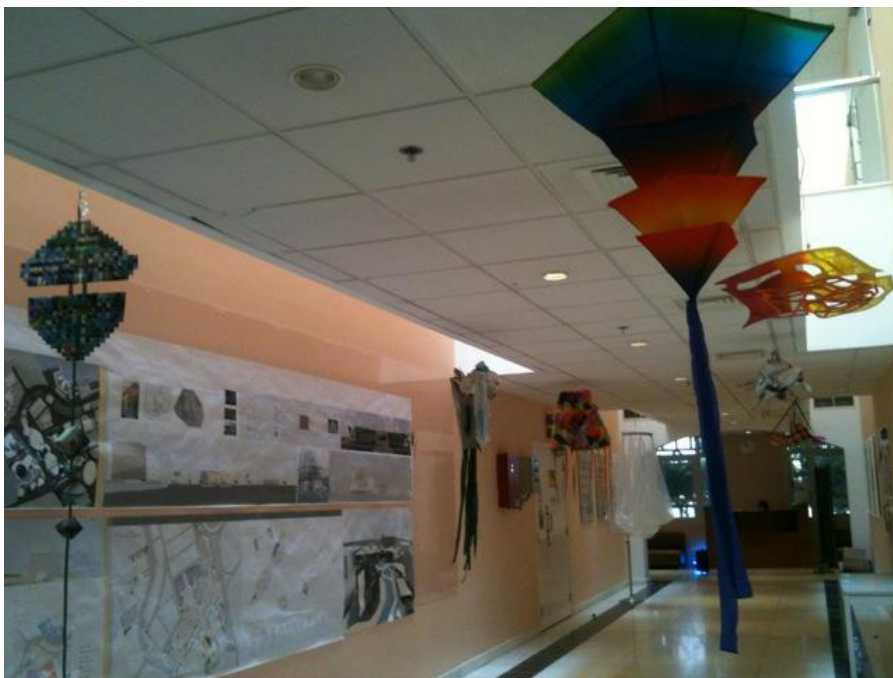
²⁴ http://biblehub.com/1_corinthians/11-6.htm and <http://www.mwusa.org/topics/dress/hijab.html> last accessed 4 July 2014

²⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Letter_and_spirit_of_the_law last accessed 4 July 2014

k i T e s H o W

architecture dept 1st (fdsa 1301) & 2nd (arch 2502/3) yr students

[northwest and southwest wing corridors **now**]





The photo exhibit was the Master's thesis project/brainchild of a school photography lecturer, Zaynab Odunsi, and her mentor, Dr. Effat Abdullah Fadag from King Abdul Aziz University. Zaynab identified and gave training and cameras to ten local women and asked them to shoot an endangered urban neighbourhood, Jeddah's Al Ruwais, in an effort to raise awareness about the importance of its preservation and restoration. The initiative was also geared towards the empowerment of the many women involved in the show's production and beyond. Some design work had been done the semester before I arrived, but the site and budget changed dramatically with time and so I was asked to undertake the initiative afresh with my students and younger colleagues. The project was enormously successful and many students helped with the

building of the display pavilions. The below self-explanatory press release offers further insight; numerous articles appeared online and in local newspapers.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

A Hit for Saudi Women Architecture Students!

In a remarkable pioneering-fashion, women Architecture students from [a Saudi university] have come up with some eco-friendly pavilion designs (which they also helped build) for a photo exhibition by women for women, Hekayat Ashara 10 (<http://www.hekayat10.com>), this December 2013 in the Jeddah Park Hyatt Hotel gardens. The exhibit was in support of the urban rehabilitation/preservation of a historic district of Jeddah, Al Ruwais, and the students' program was to capture the feel of this neighbourhood and use recycled, recyclable and sustainable materials in showcasing the women photographers' work.

University ARCHITECTURE PROGRAM Studio Critics: Marga Jann, AIA, RIBA, Visiting Fellow U Cambridge, Lucy Cavendish College/CDS (ARCH 2501, 2502), Noor Ragaban (ARCH 2501), Sherin Sameh (ARCH 2502) / Lubna Yasin, Site Manager

Teaching Assistants: Shatha Abualfaraj (ARCH 2501), Yasmin Arslan (ARCH 2501)
For further information and names of student designers for each project contact:
mj292@cam.ac.uk, marga.jann@gmail.com



A time lapse film was made of the construction process and numerous web sites emerged from the project. Insofar as the undertaking was not an official university initiative, students felt free to abandon their *abayas* and enjoy some outdoor seaside ‘recreation’.

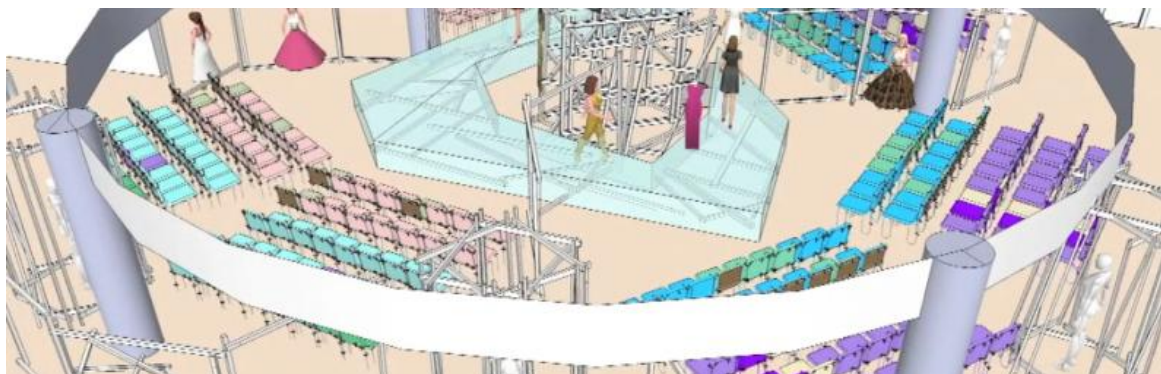


Building Process (from Time Lapse film by Anggi Makki)

The fashion show set design work might not be exceptional except that it was a first for a fledgling Fashion Design Department in Saudi Arabia. While the MERS ‘epidemic’ cut the semester short and the project did not come to fruition in the same way that the photo exhibit did, the fashion show **did** come off—albeit in a large tent in the school parking lot rather than the school atrium for which the sets were designed. One of the student designers (whose project won ‘first prize’ and is shown below) also modelled in the show. Though photography during the event was not allowed, the accompanying exhibit was open to the larger community, as was the highly professional, collaborative and well-publicised architecture retrospective held earlier in the spring.



First Prize Fashion Show Set Design - Rawand Al Madani



Glass Runway - Remaz Basrawi

Architecture students exhibit innovative house designs



JEDDAH: HABIB SHAIKH & FADIA JIFFRY [HTTP://WWW.ARABNEWS.COM/NEWS/557911](http://www.arabnews.com/news/557911) Published — Saturday 19 April 2014 ARAB NEWS

‘Breaking Free’

Education is an undeniable key to freedom for women in restrictive Muslim societies—hence so much fundamentalist resistance to it. With all the construction in the Middle East, it would indubitably be advantageous for locals to share in some of the enviable design work. Architectural education for women has begun and will undoubtedly continue to grow but not without significant ongoing challenges. Within the ‘system’, creativity appears to be at odds with the apparent lid on thinking for oneself and ‘outside the box,’ although remarkable examples of both contemporary and historic Islamic art and architecture abound.



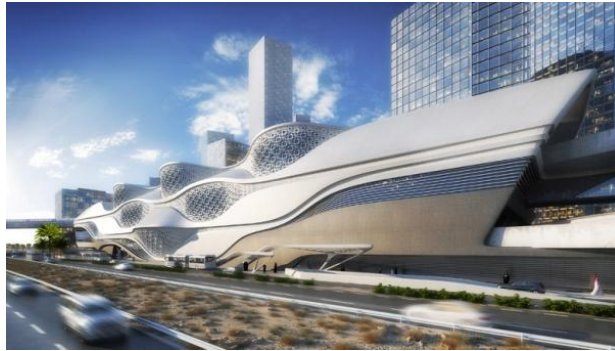
Detail from Alhambra, 889/12th C



Angawi Residence 1980's



Balad, Old Jeddah, 20th Century



King Abdullah Financial District, Riyadh (Metro Station by Hadid)



Louvre Department of Islamic Arts, Paris (by Bellini & Ricciotti Architects)

Architecture, while relatively neutral compared to fields such as theology, public policy, gender studies and so forth, provides, in many respects, an exceptional ‘point of contact’ for interfaith dialogue, ‘bridging the unbridgeable’ and reducing east-west tensions and conflict. In the face of ISIL, design can provide some ‘crisis intervention’ and common spiritual ground transcending the constraints of man-made religion. It is not an easy connection or one without cost, but once made has limitless possibilities providing oases of freedom in both public and secret ‘gardens’.

Finally, while KSA still appears very much a divided and developing nation from the ground and ‘in the field’, from the air (or leer jet) it is hard to grasp the huge discrepancy between rich and poor despite the extraordinary oil wealth. Fear has curbed a substantial manifestation of the discontent in the street, but as students are well aware, freedom is only a click or two (or text) away.

Addendum

(Email from an Anonymous Colleague, 4 July 2014)

Hi Marga,

You have been busy! I admire your perseverance particularly after such a gruelling 10 months.

I just quickly read through your paper, I'll read it much more thoroughly later. I don't think it's too daring, your main points are of course true and I might get the relevance of many of the points made [better] if I had read your previous reports.

Because I experienced many of your observations I wonder would the reader ask how you managed to achieve completing exciting projects with the students particularly as you had so little support from higher management. I think it's worth highlighting the main reason which I believe is due to your practical experience; they simply didn't know what you were doing and then when the projects were finished they either took the credit for the success or just side-lined you....I think it's important to shed some light on the behaviour of the senior management and your observation as to why they do not support the expertise they employ. My observation in that regard is that members of senior management are in most cases alumni and have not experienced working anywhere else--even those who did work in another university have no varied work experience, even within Saudi Arabia....

Culturally in Saudi, people in senior positions are revered and not questioned and the expectation of that level of subservience combined with an overwhelming lack of experience of different working environments has cultivated a dictatorship which is easily threatened by experienced professionals. Most western professionals will have a bounty of teaching and working experience and they walk unwittingly into a situation where the majority of employees work in fear of losing their jobs. To reinforce this, the top management respond to unwelcome challenges by removing the experienced voice to silence the debate and send an overwhelming message to the weaker subservient workers that such challenges will not be tolerated.

I have asked most of the women in [my] department why they stay?? They have been there years and made no progress professionally; their answer was all the same: where will I go? They do not see themselves as having options, so they put up with [the situation]. Saudi women are controlled--they only understand control as a method of management, it will take longer than our lifetime to change that. We women in the west have had the right to vote for 80 years and yet we are still fighting to have our experienced voices heard. The Saudi women cannot even get in a car and go to the corner shop, and yet they pretend they have enough understanding and experience to run a university.

It's all laughable really...it's just a matter of debating and qualifying the observations in the Saudi cultural context because the west has no idea.

[Yours truly,...]

(Email from an Anonymous Student, 11 July 2014)

Hi Marga!

When I first opened your article I did what any other lazy person would do, read a few lines, see [if my project might be] featured and be done with it.

But when I read the first page I knew I had to finish all of it. It is perfect. The part about the university sending mass emails addressed to "dears" and "roses" always got to me. It annoys the hell out of me and I am so glad you mentioned it.

Your observation and understanding of this place is spot on. When these people say things about empowering women it is nothing but a big fat lie.

Great article!

[Anonymous Student]

(Email from an Anonymous Colleague, 18 July 2014)

Dear Marga

Thank you so much for sending me your article which I really enjoyed. You captured the atmosphere at the University in a well balanced way, as you say, giving credit where credit is due.

I just wanted to mention some points from my own experience if it helps in any way to shed more light on yours.

1. The University promotes itself as a premier institution for women in KSA. This impressive marketing campaign is what attracts high calibre international recruits (to be carefully distinguished from many locally hired faculty, detailed below) and indeed attracts students. However, after only one week, I saw faculty were working in an atmosphere of fear: fear of student complaints, fear of being fired. After a month, I saw more issues. Students thought they had a realistic prospect of passing courses but they were not adequately prepared or qualified to take these courses. This inevitably led to disappointment on the students' part and sometimes conflict, where the faculty would be routinely blamed for student failure. Suggestions on change and improvement were listened to but nothing was done.

2. In contrast to the impressive international recruitment campaign, some management are picked from an existing pool of staff and thus without management training skills or experience. Incompetence, whether from PDS or faculty, when it arose, was deftly hidden, whereas new faculty such as myself, who were given no support or guidance and made innocent mistakes as a result, were well-publicised by mainly local-hire (non-Saudi) faculty with, sorry to say, poor English language skills and/or possessing poor grade qualifications. Other mismanagement examples I witnessed were:

- Nepotism
- Faculty treated with disrespect and discourtesy by management and a large proportion of students
- Discrepancies between written communication and oral, with emails and minutes of staff meetings not reflecting discussions
- Difference in behaviour in front of Saudis and non-Saudis
- Large classes with over 35 students
- Assigning courses to instructors who expressed that they were very uncomfortable teaching courses of which they have no knowledge or experience then accusing them a few weeks into the course of being 'incompetent' and marking down their evaluation
- Not matching courses with faculty specializations
- No official record keeping or sharing of student complaints in a constructive manner with faculty in order to improve
- Lack of modern teaching resources, faculty collaboration, obsession with Power Point as the only tool

3. Gossip and lack of confidentiality seemed to be "normal". A minority of faculty who are insecure about their jobs proved very effective in initiating smear campaigns against new faculty whom they perceived as a threat. Even students were used as tools to implement their plans of "framing" new faculty--such as gossiping with them, and inciting and encouraging them to spy on and complain about new faculty (this links with point 5 below).

4. The University is organised in terms of looking good on paper, such as policies on professional conduct, guidelines for disciplinary offences and implementation of Saudi labour

law. However, in reality this was ignored and I was saddened at the way in which internationally recruited faculty with impressive credentials were treated.

5. There are a number of non-Saudi faculty who are not internationally recruited as they are wives of expats working in Jeddah. In November 2013 labour laws were enforced so that 'housewives' were no longer permitted to work unless they changed their sponsor from the husband's company to the University. Thus these ladies have transferred their iqamas [resident permits] to the university without having their qualifications verified by the Saudi Cultural Attaché [or appropriate vetting authority] in their respective countries, as international recruits do.

6. The University is not at all conservative by Saudi standards. The recorded call to prayer, congregational prayers in the atrium and other 'religious' activities sit uneasily with the culture of the University such as the lack of ethics and morals, loud Western music and dancing events (some where participation by faculty is compulsory) to the extent that it is hypocritical.

To summarise, I was very disappointed with my academic experience and what kept me going were some pleasant and professional staff (particularly in the library, finance and HR) and the fact that I knew it would only last for another eight months.

[Yours truly,...]

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Birdhouse by Shahd Khalil