The Politics of Contextual Specificity and Global Architectural Trends[1]

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Abstract

> *This paper explores issues of regionalism and contextual specificity in relation to architecture in two moments in twentieth-century Iranian history: firstly, the International Congress of Architects, inaugurated on 14 September 1970, by Queen Farah, in the historic city of Isfahan, and secondly, the first significant national architecture competition held after the Islamic Revolution in 1991, with entirely Iranian participants, for the Iranian Academies Complex. That competition and subsequent debates activated professional and academic circles. At the centre of this activation was the government-sponsored journal, Abadi.*

> *The paper will refer to the proceedings of the 1970 Congress and to journal archives on the top five competition submissions, in order to articulate persistent discourses related to contextual specificity. The paper demonstrates the persistence of global architectural trends and debates despite the ideologically charged Iranian environment. In conclusion, it suggests the futility of the regionalist position, which is too easily appropriated by totalitarian political systems, and identifies an anxiety over identity as a leitmotif of the Iranian culture in the late twentieth century. It will also remark upon the inherent disconnection between cultural production and crises of political ideology in Iran.*

Introduction

In this paper, we review the theory of regionalism in relation to one case study, the Iranian re-evaluation of its architectural heritage. Our study will examine two moments in history: firstly the first International Congress of Architects in Iran, which was inaugurated in September 1970 in Isfahan and was attended by leading international figures who generally espoused a regionally-specific architecture, and secondly, the first nationally significant

architectural competition, the competition for the Islamic Republic Academies, held in 1991 after the architectural hiatus caused by the eight year war between Iran and Iraq.

The first moment followed rapid socio-economic and cultural changes enforced by the state under the aegis of its 'White Revolution.' The second moment occurred after the Islamic Revolution and the subsequent educational reforms of the Maoist-inspired 'Cultural Revolution'.[2] Islamist ideologues often assert that the Islamic Revolution was cultural in essence, with political consequences – indeed, the Islamic state followed a strong, albeit ideologically-driven, cultural agenda from the outset. In order to test this notion of a cultural basis to the revolution, we will examine the specific test-case of architectural discourse – here the official discourse of architecture. We will analyze the early issues of the first government-supported architecture journal, *Abadi*, specifically focusing on the competition for the National Academies Complex, and will compare this discourse to the politico-historical milieu of the country in the decades leading to the 1979 revolution. We will conclude that, despite revolutionary rhetoric favouring variants of nativism, the architectural discourse of Cultural Revolution in practice followed the local contextualist and traditionalist discourses of the 1970's and, perhaps with some delay, reproduced aspects of Western regionalist theory.[3]

Moment 1: The Isfahan Congress 1970

In the aftermath of WWII, Iran was the recipient of American aid through a local version of the Marshal Plan, known as 'Point Four', which linked aid to required social and economic reforms.[4] There were also domestic demands for change, driven in part by a burgeoning middle class that demanded economic and social change (Ansari: 2001: 3-4).[5] In response, and to legitimise and strengthen the monarchy's rule, a raft of reforms was packaged under a comprehensive program known as the White Revolution (Ansari: 2001:1).[6] The program, formulated between 1958 and 1963, and launched in 1961, pursued 'liberal' policies including land reforms, privatisation and women's suffrage.[7] From the standpoint of the religious and conservative sectors of the society, as well as those opposing the regime, the White Revolution represented yet another deviation from Islamic tradition, and appeared to conservatives to be driven by foreign interests.[8] By the 1970's, transformations were apparent in the state cultural policies and in its support and promotion of the fine arts and architecture. This was a personal passion of the person of the Queen, Farah (Diba) Pahlavi, who before her official position, was an architecture student at the Ecole de Beaux-Arts in Paris.

Figure 1. Left: Queen Farah giving her Inaugural Address to delegates. Right: Forughi, the honorary Chair of Iranian Institute of Architects giving his address (Farhad, Liela, and Laleh Bakhtiar, (eds.) 1970. *Investigating the Possibility of Linking Traditional Architecture with Modern Building Methods: report of the proceedings of the First International Congress of Architects.* Isfahan, 13, 19).

It was in this atmosphere of contested change that, in 14 September 1970, the Queen inaugurated the First International Congress of Architects in the city of Isfahan entitled 'Investigating the Possibility of Linking Traditional Architecture with Modern Building Methods.' In her inaugural speech (Figure 1), she declared the importance of reconciling traditions with progress.[9] The location of the Congress was important, given Isfahan's many exquisite examples of Islamic art and architectural heritage. Delegates were also taken to Persepolis, the exemplary pre-Islamic monument. Participants included eminent international intellectuals and practitioners including Louis Kahn, Oswald Matthias Ungers, George Candilis, Ludovico Quaroni and Paul Rudolf, and their Iranian counterparts, including Nader Ardalan a prominent Traditionalist, and Kamran Diba, perhaps the first advocate of contextual or environmental architecture in Iran.

The Congress was a response to contemporary conditions in Iran, a rapidly modernising country where tradition was increasingly problematised. It was, as the Minister for Development and Housing remarked,[10] an attempt to address problems born of liberal (and modernising) economic and educational policies, and their repercussions for the field of architecture, problems we can characterise today as pertaining to an identity crisis. The central theme of the conference was to investigate "the mutual impact of tradition and technology."[11] Echoing the Queen's introduction, the conference concerned itself with the relevance and validity of tradition in the present. Forughi, a prominent architect and honorary

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Chair of the Architects' Institute, former Dean of Faculty of Fine Arts and politician, formulated the theme thus: "...since the continuity (consistency) between traditional and contemporary architecture is now gone, we do not know to what extent we can be inspired by the form and spirit of past art."[12] This problem would persist until a few decades later.

Under the theme of tradition and progress, delegates also concentrated on the problem of the relationship of architecture to its physical and cultural context, under the following themes: the meaning and value of heritage, the expression of identity through architecture, the distinction between tradition and the traditional, authenticity in architecture and the social and ultimately political context of architecture. The latter, mainly brought up by Candilis, was never elaborated in the Congress proceedings, an omission that perhaps reflected the specific conditions of absolute monarchy in Iran. The exchanges in that Congress were important in two respects. Firstly, the issues were globally pertinent and not limited by the context of Iran – the Congress was addressing a global concern through the example of Iran, a country that sat on the periphery of Western modernism. Quaroni argued that this conference was "...the first time that anyone has found the courage to discuss this important problem [of tradition and modernity], which is so hard to resolve." [13] Questions of the relationship between creativity and technology and architecture and national development would only be discussed in the International Union of Architects (UIA) congresses in 1975 and 1978.[14] Secondly, these issues determined the tone and direction of architectural discourses and tendencies in Iran in the forthcoming decades to the present. The Congress formed a pivotal moment that architects of that generation would never forget. Furthermore, this was not a theoretical conference foreshadowing an architectural direction to come. Under the existing system of architectural education and practice at the time, local architects experimented with some of the ideas that took place during the Congress. In this respect, the Congress was a means for articulating existing practical tendencies and strategies within the country, and perhaps, for the local organisers, to influence or even codify it. While some international participants, such as Quaroni, the joint designer of the Neo-Realist Tiburtino housing project in Rome (1949-54), saw tradition as a thing of the past, others, including the Iranian Ardalan ascribed a timeless and immutable quality to it and yet others, including the German Rationalist Ungers thought of it as being in a dialectical relationship with the present and therefore in a constant state of change.[15]

The debate over the relation of tradition and modernity set the tone for architectural discourses of the next three decades in Iran. Another participant, Abtullah Kuran, a Turkish

theorist and architectural historian, argued that the region existed in a condition of peripheral modernity, noting:[16]

> Modernity is not about relinquishing cultural specificities in order to arrive at a common global thought, it means rather, that the architect combines his creative spirit and thought and feelings, which are coloured by his cultural and social milieu with new materials and modern technology and present a good combination of them in the form of a building.

He went on to suggest that there may be a global culture emerging from the mixture and acknowledgement of different cultural sensibilities: "...alongside technological development, cultural specificities and thoughts and sensibilities specific to societies become less prominent and humanity becomes more uniform."
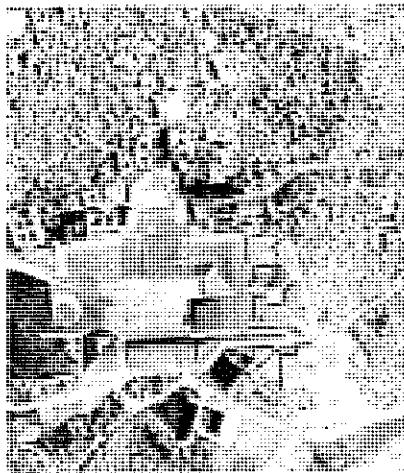

Figure 2. Ludovicio Quaroni, Adolfo de Carlo, Massimo Amodei, Roberto Berardi, Behamin Hagler: Government Centre, Tunis, 1966, Model (Source : Vittorio Gregotti, *New Directions in Italian Architecture* (New York: Braziller, 1968), 116)

Quaroni, too, thought it was "...possible that we will end up having a global style that is differentiated by its local manifestations in accordance with local traditions and a country's "inherent spirit," speculating that perhaps tradition, in its internal sense, no longer existed. Rejecting attempts to imitate traditional motifs, he asserted that there remained perhaps only "...a false tradition made of shallow forms or discrete parts that is forced upon people. This is a global crisis." The way out of such falsehood and superficiality would be to situate architecture within its urban context "...by revitalisation of the spirit of the city in relation to the spirit of architecture. One can show the dominance of geometry (as means of expression) anew." He advocated internalizing the [essence/principles of] masterpieces of

Iranian architectural heritage in ...new projects so that an internal relationship with the past could be preserved (Figure 2).[17]

Sardar Afkhami, a prominent Iranian practitioner, located the problems of contemporary architecture in the crisis of tradition and the social discontent arising from modernity, one that was, he argued, social and spiritual[18] While traditional means and methods were no longer sufficient for today's problems, architecture could not be seen as a field upon itself.[19] His comments were pointed at a group of Traditionalists, among them Congress organisers, who advocated return to Islamic traditions of the past.
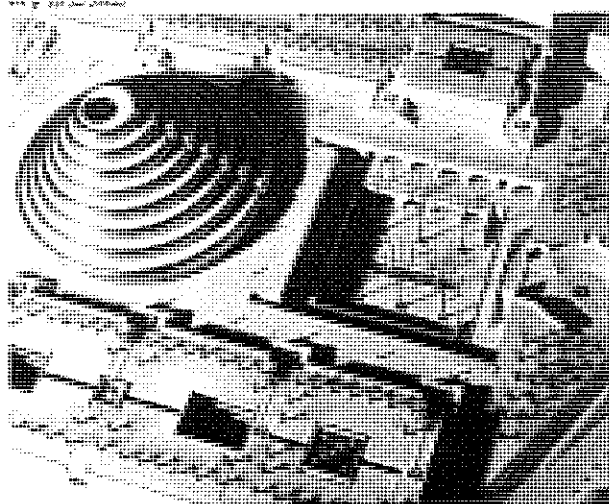
Figure 3. Nader Ardalan, Design for the Iranian Centre for Music (partial photograph of model). (Source: Amir Bani Masoud, *Iranian Contemporary Architecture*, (Tehran Honar-e Memari Publications, 2010), 319)

Another group of traditionalists sought a more authentic, and perhaps Islamic-nationalist, approach in architecture and rejected the universalising aspects of modernity – they advocated a return to origins and localities. Prominent among them, on the Iranian side were Nader Ardalan and Naser Badi`, the Congress secretary. Ardalan, a Harvard Graduate and Iranian only by birth, had decided to return to Iran after what may be described as his own identity crisis, which had led to a quest for a more authentic and meaningful approach to architecture.[20] He developed an admiration for the traditional desert architecture of Iran and for the esoteric schools of thought, articulated by prominent Traditionalist Seyyed Hossein Nasr. At the time of this conference, Ardalan was, together with his wife, the Congress proceedings editor Laleh Bakhtiar, in the process of writing a book, *The Sense of Unity: The Sufi Tradition in Persian Architecture* (1974), in which they adopted the methods of urban formal analysis of Colin Rowe and others, in seeking to define the quintessential typologies

and geometries of traditional Iranian cities and buildings (Figure 3). At the congress, Ardalan asserted: "...the Islamic tradition is [the] most direct manifestation of Iranian culture," particularly since architectural and material evidence of that tradition was, he argued, more readily available.[21] His position was reinforced by Congress Secretariat Badi' who called for a contextually-specific architecture and rejected the International Style, which he described as unsuitable for the local, climatic and racial [ethnic] characteristics of the nation's architecture.[22]

The Traditionalist position was perhaps aided by Louis Kahn's long and elliptical discussion – in a Platonist vein – on the nature of inspiration, and in defence of an intuitive (as opposed to a rationalistic) approach to understanding relationships in nature, humanity and architecture – an approach that located the source of inspiration not in the promise of the future, but in a distant past. Despite the inherently universalizing nature of his design approach, his words authenticated the position of those Iranians who were alarmed by the rapid changes of modernity and sought a return to the security of familiar traditions. In the following decades, this quest for authenticity would inform both a social upheaval – the Islamic Revolution – and the official discourse of architecture it espoused.

End of an Era? The Islamic Revolution and the Rhetoric of Cultural Transformation

Nine years after the Congress, the Islamic revolution took place in Iran. The revolutionary state intended to transform all facets of life and this became evident in public sphere, in mass media, in sanctioned dress, modes of speech, education, and forms of artistic and architectural expression.[23]

Attempting to put into practice the anti-colonialist and traditionalist ideologies they had adopted from European models, Islamist ideologues intended to reverse the Pahlavi westernising tendencies, and to restore national and religious identity on the basis of Islamic dogma. They argued there was a need for a cultural revolution in the people's mentality such that it was aligned with an ideological interpretation of Islam. This cultural revolution necessitated the Islamicisation and depoliticization of higher education.[24]

While the intellectuals and academics operating under the old regime were targeted as proxies of the colonialist west,[25] universities were censured as part of the apparatus of western domination through which a 'cultural assault' on domestic culture was effected.[26] Islamist revolutionaries further argued that such universities (established with a westernising and modernising agenda) were displaced from their social and historical context and failed to

project or respond to an authentic identity.[27] This process came to its logical conclusion when Khomeini, the leader of the Revolution, decreed the Cultural Revolution on 12 June 1980.[28] Amongst the ten objectives of the Cultural Revolution were:

1. the expansion of the influence of Islamic culture in different facets of the society and the reinforcement of cultural revolution and the elevation of popular culture;

2. the cleansing of the scientific and cultural environments of materialist thought and rejection of expressions and effects of 'westoxification'[29] from the cultural sphere of society.

Moment 2: (post-)Revolutionary Architecture, the Persistence of a Discourse

Following the purges of the Cultural Revolution, universities remained closed for almost two years. By the time they had re-opened, the country found itself at war with Iraq and the economic conditions impeded architectural ambitions in both the public and private sectors for over a decade. Professional journals were scarce, and limited to the struggling local *Architecture and Urbanism* journal, the pre-revolutionary journal archives in private and university libraries, and the scarce copies of current international journals that made it through the Islamic vetting system of imports.

The first prominent local journal after the Cultural Revolution was *Abadi* (its title meaning 'Development' in Persian). It was published quarterly under the auspices of the Ministry for Housing and Urbanism with the Deputy Minister, Seyyed Reza Hashemi, as its Editor-in-Chief (Figure 4). The journal reflected the official position of the ministry, which was in charge of all major public works. In its very first issue (Summer 1991) Hashemi set forth, in an editorial, the general direction of the journal, one that articulated current issues in practice and the education of architecture.[30] He criticized the weight given to socio-political debates surrounding problems of urbanism instead of practical know-how. His emphasis on concrete problems rather than social debates, while pertinent, represents more broadly a familiar official attempt on the part of state officials to divorce all fields from their possible political implications.[31] Ironically, this position recalled the avoidance of political debates in the Isfahan congress under the Pahlavi monarchy. Hashemi's position was clear: "...since we played no part in the international transformations of industrialisation in architecture, we failed to preserve and transfer the traditions of that rich and magnificent and humane patrimony (of past architecture) to a contemporary civilisation."[32]
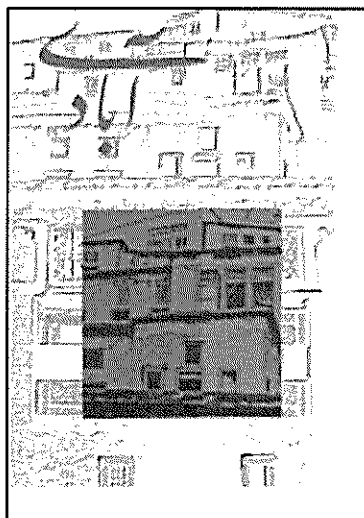
**Figure4.** Cover of the first issue of Abadi. The graphics seem to emphasise the vernacular.

While pursuing its sanctioned apolitical agenda, *Abadi* followed an established (western) style in its content, publishing discussions on education and curriculum, practical problems, introducing (and then promoting) architects through their projects, including interviews with practitioners and academics in the field, and running annual architectural awards. Much of this was new for the post-revolutionary environment. Representing the establishment discourse on architecture, *Abadi* sought to engage academics and practitioners, organising events and debates around pertinent topics such as national projects.

The Quest for a Contextual Architecture: the Competition for the Iranian Academies

The first significant post-Revolution architectural competition was the competition for the Iranian Academies. The competition was announced at the beginning of the so-called 'Constructivity Period', an era of economic liberalism ushered in by the government in the aftermath of the eight-year Iran-Iraq war. This would be one of a repertoire of projects representing the state's architectural and development ambitions. The Ministry for Housing and Urban Development was at the centre of the event, as was *Abadi* through its introduction and critique of the projects (issues 12 and 13, 1994). The submissions, and more importantly the selected projects, reflected the dominant perceptions of official Iranian architecture at the time. The brief consisted of a design for three Academies – Science, Medicine, and Persian Literature – and their support spaces, totalling 58,400m^2 in an 82,350m2 lot of land in what would become the new official cultural centre of Tehran.[33] When the competition was announced in 1993, 64 expressions of interest were received, of these 44 proceeded to registration, and ultimately 15 schemes were submitted.[34] Despite the

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low entry numbers, this was to be considered a significant participation on the part of the profession, given the social context.

At the time of the competition's announcement, the country was still relatively closed to an influx of information or architecture graduates from western universities. However, professionals and academics were gradually becoming exposed to European and American developments through university libraries, whose collections were being replenished, and the occasional private copies of books, which were then photocopied and circulated. Thus, for example, architects took an interest in the works of James Stirling, and ideas developed by Rob Krier in his books, Stadtsraum (Urban Space) and Elements of Architecture.[35] There were developments taking place within the country as well. The Agha Khan Trust and its award for Islamic architecture were taken more seriously by practitioners and academics alike. In conjunction with this, there was a new appreciation of Ardalan and Bakhtiar's book, A Sense of Unity (1974), a traditionalist study, which approached the question of esoterism in architecture through typology and formal language. Anecdotal evidence suggests that such interest would inform approaches to design and the formation of architectural styles and taste.
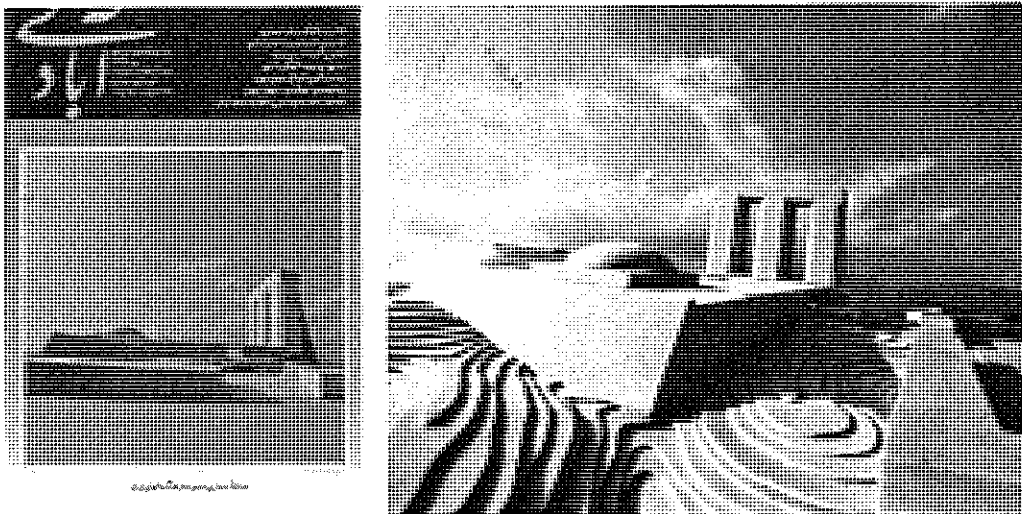
Figure 5. Left: cover of Abadi no. 12 depicting the winning scheme
for the Islamic Republic Academies. Right: another view of the
winning competition entry by Mirmiran (Abadi 12, 49).

In his Editorial in issue 12 of Abadi, Hashemi pointed out that despite the passing of a few years since the Islamic Revolution, and the reopening of universities after the Cultural Revolution, there had been little serious conversation about architecture, just as there had been little enthusiasm expressed in architecture classes and studios or through graduation

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projects. If there was anything written by commentators, he wrote, it mostly consisted of translations and quotations of non-Iranian architects and critics in an unfamiliar (meaning jargonistic and foreign) language. The competition for the Iranian Academies, he argued, changed this situation. This was the first time that such a complicated and significant project would be entrusted to Iranian designers, implying that it was a step forward in self-reliance (self-sufficiency?) and independence in this field, and thus in line with revolutionary rhetoric.[36]
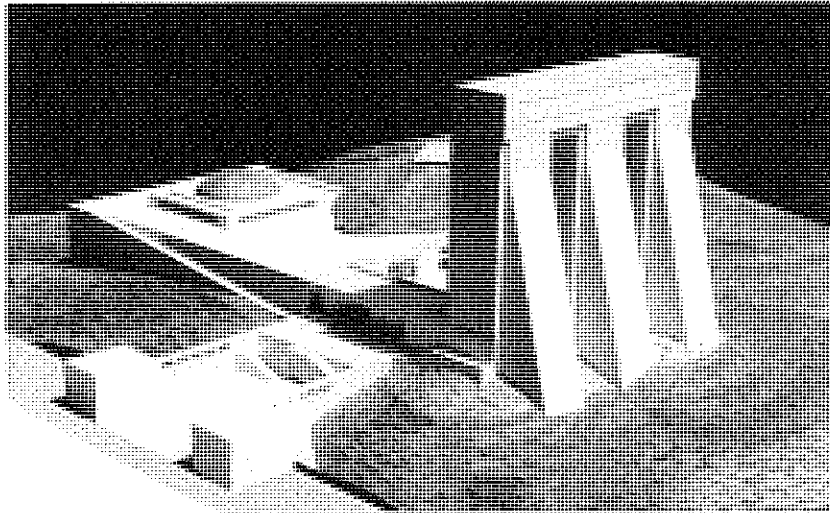

Figure 6. View of the model of Mirmiran's competition entry (Source:
Bani Masoud, *Iranian Contemporary Architecture* 392)

Publication of the submissions in *Abadi* instigated the first serious post-Revolution conversation about architecture, tradition, and identity in the professional and academic circles (Figure 5). The exchanges reflected deep-seated anxieties over architectural authenticity and 'Iranianness.' Ironically, the calls for a regionally and culturally specific architecture recalled similar positions advocated in the 1970 Isfahan Congress of Architecture. Architecture was in a time-warp that had lasted 23 years and was going to last even longer. The confusion felt between tradition and modernity in the 1970's was still persistent in the mid-90's and this was apparent in the jury's position which emphasised 'cultural aspects' (meaning specificities) and normative modernist universalisations such as the inherent value of simplicity in design. The first prize went to Naqsh-e Jahan Pars group (Seyyed Hadi Mirmiran) for "simplicity in expression, clarity in design and spatial organisation" and for its urban monumental qualities (Figure 6). The second prize went to Tajir (Ali Akbar Saremi) for its "...new expression and the creation of consistent and flowing spaces", Third was Ivan Hasht-Behesht (Darab Diba) for "rational distribution of spaces and simplicity of relationships", Fourth place went to Bavand (Iraj Kalantari) for "the balanced

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combination of vernacular and modern architectural elements", and the fifth place went to Memar-Naqsh group for "their attention to cultural and functional [design] aspects".[37]

From the explanations and discussions of designers in *Abadi*, it is possible to discern a number of regionalist tendencies in four of the five participating designs, some of which enjoyed strong official backing.

Regionalist Rhetoric

The first tendency, articulated by Mirmiran, suggested a typological essentialism that ascribed a trans-historical, timeless and essential quality to Iranian architectural patterns and spatial configurations such as the dome.[38] The premise was that such elements might be recreated, perpetually, in new contexts without losing their meanings. However, in the process, such motifs and elements were decontextualized, thus blurring the boundaries between traditional and modern iconography, much as in Western Post-Modernism. The monumental design combined typological elements of courtyard, dome, gateway, and platform in a manner reminiscent of certain Rationalist projects of the 1970's. The towers – Gateways – resembled Achaemenid (pre-Islamic) palace structures evident in archaeological remains (Figure 7). While the dome could be read as an Islamic symbol, it also recalls the forms of Oscar Niemeyer's National Congress of Brazil (Figure 8). The ultimate driver is a formal and geometrical order that, rather than internalising past masterpieces as Quaroni had advocated in 1970, reproduced and juxtaposed their motifs in an historicist pastiche.
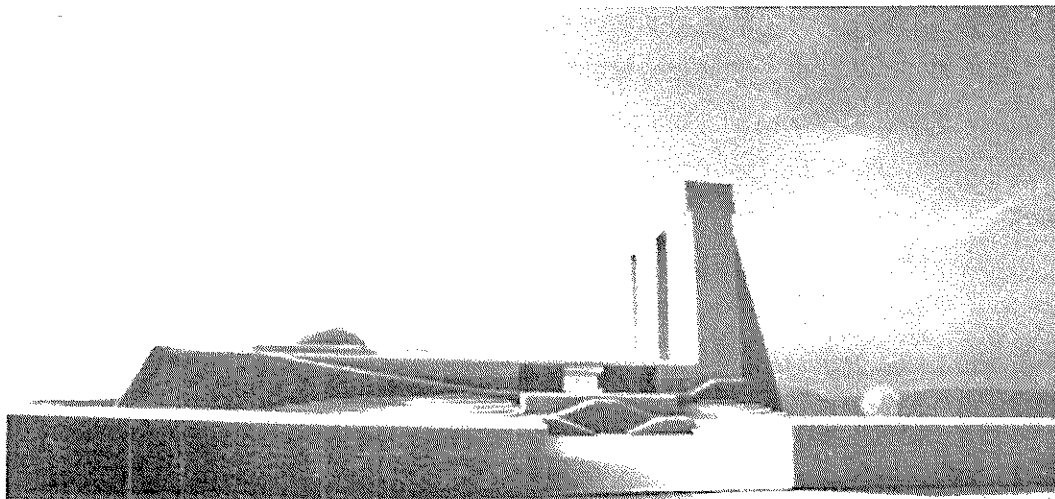

Figure 7. View of the model for Mirmiran's competition entry. The ceremonial stairs leading up to the platform replicate similar stairs in Persepolis, the Achaemenid capital (520-330BCE). (Source: Abadi, 13, 6)
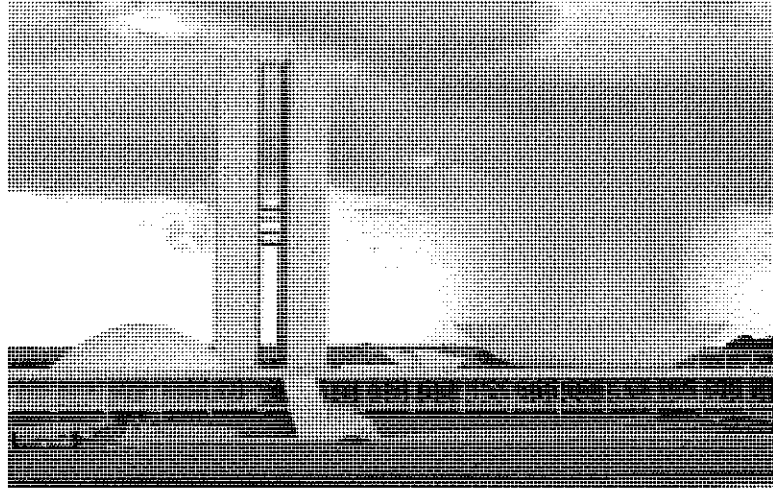
Figure 8. View of Niemeyer's National Congress of Brazil (1985).
(Source: wikicommons)

Diba's work (Figures 9 and 10) represented a second tendency; one concerned with establishing an architectural identity by pursuing geometrical and formal consistency between architecture and its cultural, historical and environmental context. Contextual continuity was apparently expressed through the geometrical organisation of the architectural plan. In its totality, however, the design resembled certain Euro-American architecture of the 1960's to 80's and, in particular, Kahn's monumental projects such as Dhaka.

The design was explained as a process of appropriating of multiple sources. The team claimed to have studied traditional Iranian architecture to find its "...timeless artistic richness," and, in particular traditional Iranian geometric 'science'. The architects referred to precedents from other Islamic countries in order to define typological elements pertaining to Islamic identity, while acknowledging developments by modern architects, ranging from Mies Van der Rohe to Doshi.[39] The outcome of this historical and theoretical soup, however, appeared to be a homage to Kahn's work. This model suggested that an authentic identity could be achieved through the application of eclectic bricolage of elements from other Islamic and Western contexts in addressing the issue of identity crisis; it was reminiscent of the discourse at the 1970 International Congress in Isfahan.
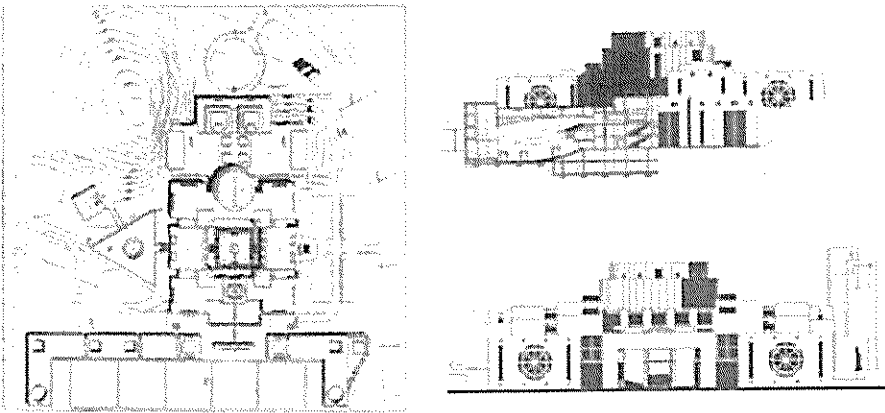
Figure 9. Diba's entry for the Academies Competition, site plan and elevations. . (Source: Abadi, 13, 11-13)
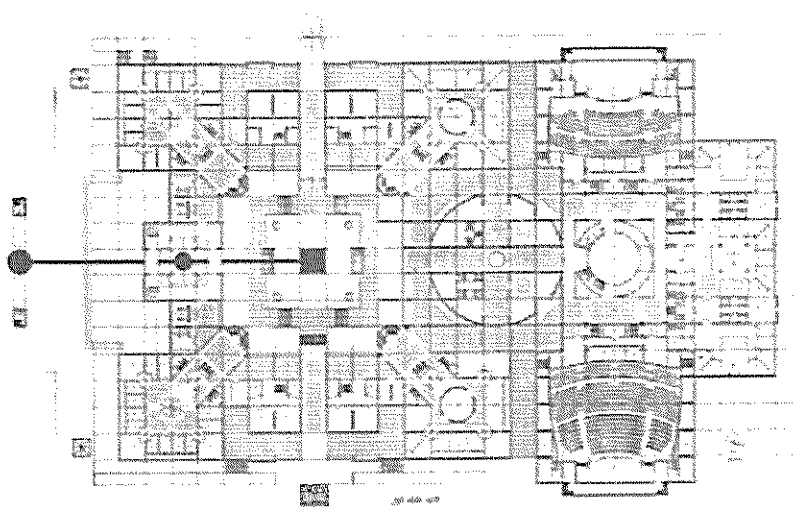
Figure 10. Diba's entry for the Academies Competition, Plan.
(Source: Abadi, 13, 10)

Kalantari represented a fourth tendency that sought symbolic expression and vernacular identity within an eclectic historicism (Figure 11).[40] The design followed an organisational hierarchy reminiscent of traditional cities. The centre, defined by a tower (housing the libraries) was demarcated by a citadel – the walls reminiscent of traditional citadels such as the one in Birjand (Figure 12) – outside of which a series of functions were housed at a domestic scale. Kalantari's typological reference to the medieval Islamic city and his playful use of its architectural motifs, while essentially postmodernist, accords with one of the possibilities discussed in the 1970 Congress by Kuran.
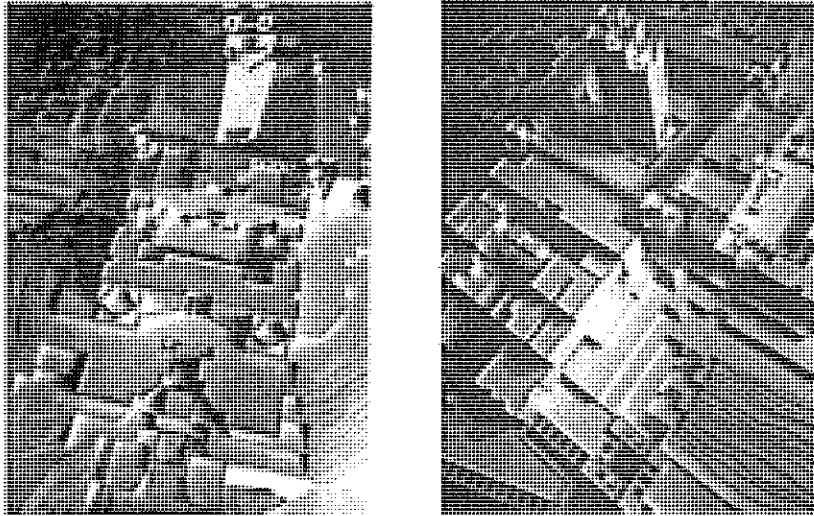
Figure 11. Kalantari's entry featured an Islamic city typology with a
citadel . (Source: Abadi, 13, 14-15)

Figure 12. Aerial image of the city of Birjand, east of Iran, with its
citadel and surrounding historical district. (Source: Wikicommons)

The fourth tendency was apparent in the project by the Memar-Naqsh group, the project that would subsequently be chosen for construction (Figure 13). The design in this instance is authenticated with reference to the reproduction of geometrical relations and patterns such as axiality and central courtyards found in the traditional desert architecture of Iran, which it interprets with an impoverished and fetishized iconographic expression. On paper, the design was a faithful reproduction of traditional rules, patterns, and formal relations, perhaps a perfect response to the official projections of architectural identity. In reality, however, as evidenced in the constructed Academies complex, the outcome is familiar to our eyes-resembling a post-modern mock-monumentality, with traditional motifs uneasily integrated with utilitarian modern concrete frame construction.

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In theorising their work, the designers claimed that they sought to attain order, clarity and simplicity in their designs, normative principles that recall early modernist creeds rather than traditional Iranian architecture.
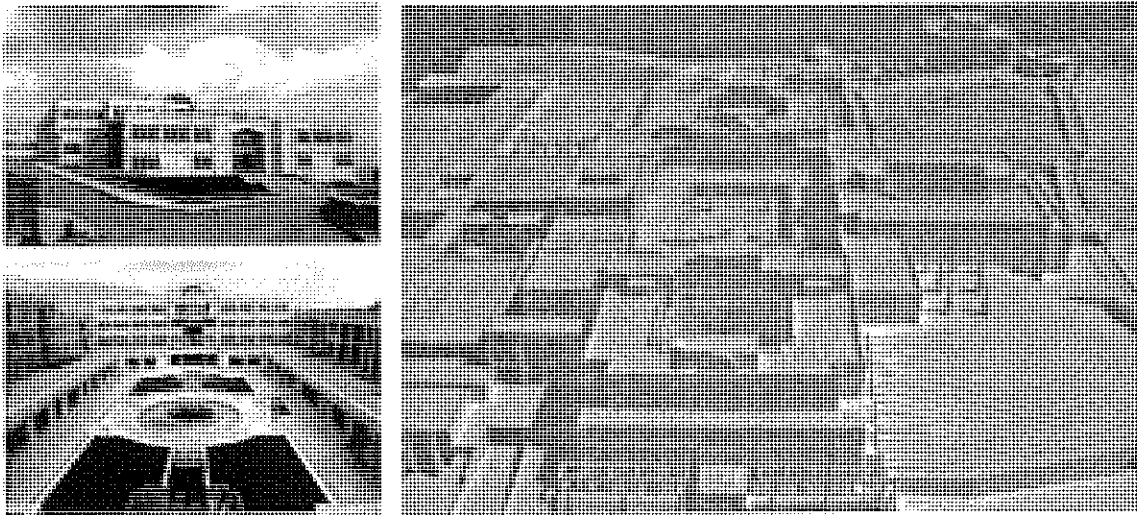
Figure 13. Right: Memar-Naqssh competition entry. (Source: Abadi, 13, 16), Left: Memar Naqsh design as constructed. (Source: Bani Masoud, *Iranian Contemporary Architecture* 470)

Conclusion

From the cited projects, one can adduce a characteristic regionalist discourse that was shaping up as the preferred establishment style of the Islamic republic.[41] This could be characterised in retrospect by what Quaroni had called a 'false tradition' – the appearance of motifs and patterns of geometrical relations that aided the use of tradition as an ideological veil concealing actual discursive inconsistencies.[42] Abstracted from their context, idealised traditional forms became fetishized, and turned into ideological devices reproducing the political relations that dominated the society. As had occurred in Iranian political discourse, this was a highly aestheticised architecture where patterns and theories (such as resistance and regionalism) replaced genuine, lived experience. In justifying their works, architects felt compelled to reproduce a sanctioned rhetoric, while in practice they may have been doing something else. In their quest for an authentic identity many Iranian architects, and their politically compliant intellectuals reproduced Western anti-enlightenment discourses.[43] This situation was not new. Since the 1970s, Iranian intellectuals and ideologues had been bewildered by an ineluctable modernity, and remained trapped in a peculiar position where they identified themselves as the colonised, thus appropriating, often unknowingly, anti-enlightenment western discourses, while as their means to attain an authentic position. In doing so, they failed to recognise the global context of their condition, that of a peripheral

modernity. This would, decades later, result in a hangover that left them confused about their place in the world and thus about their sense of ownership in cultural products such as architecture.

As the competition entries suggest, even by the 1990's many architects and theorists clung to a form of regionalism that concealed the global nature of their problems. This was consistent with the creeds of Cultural Revolution, which advocated a return to the indigenous. However, this discourse was neither new nor revolutionary, in the sense of being a disruption of the old relations in the field. It was, rather, a continuation of a discourse first articulated in the Isfahan Congress of Architects in September 1970, indicating that cultural transformations have a life of their own, one which does not necessarily accord with political ruptures.

Meanwhile, the anxiety over identity is slowly dissipating in the younger generation of architects, giving place to a sense of nihilism characterised by a decline in interest in place and identity; superficial and formal appropriation of foreign trends that increasingly suggest alienation from local cultural context. This nihilism is yet another quintessentially modern experience.[44]

Endnotes

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We also thank Mr. Bijan Shafei, a fellow researcher and colleague in Iran for his generosity in supplying us with historical documents of the Isfahan Congress, Mr. Afshin Taslimi in obtaining archival materials and our indeed our anonymous reviewers who made encouraging and constructive comments to help us improve this work.
[2] There is anecdotal evidence to suggest a connection between the Iranian and communist versions of Cultural Revolution. An early example of this comparison is found in Khosrow Sobhe, 'Education in Revolution: is Iran duplicating the Chinese Cultural Revolution?', Comparative Education, 18:3(1982), 271-280.
[3] In architecture, this was first enunciated by Frampton in: Kenneth Frampton, 'Prospects for a Critical Regionalism', Perspecta, 20. (1983), 147-162.
[4] During the War, Iran was occupied in 1942 by the allied forces under the pretext of the King, Reza Shah Pahlavi being sympathetic to Germans. The occupation caused the abdication of the King.
[5] The shah and his ministers frequently described the country's conditions as medieval or from the dark ages, which shows that an ideal of Western progress and historical transformation was what they had in mind See: Ali M. Ansari, 'The Myth of the White Revolution: Mohammad Reza Shah, 'Modernization' and the Consolidation of Power', Middle Eastern Studies, 37, 3, (2001), 1-24.

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[6] Ansari, 'The Myth of the White Revolution', 1-2. Ansari refers to the White Revolution as "a legitimating myth for the Pahlavi Monarchy" that ultimately "undermined the structural foundations of the Pahlavi monarchy" and "contributed to its ideological destabilization."

[7] Industrialisation was at the forefront of the agenda.

[8] In 1963, in reaction to land reform and women's suffrage, two of the principles of the White Revolution, Khomeini, the would-be leader of the Islamic Revolution (1979), called for an uprising that led to bloody suppression by the state and thus marked what his Islamist followers would identify as the beginning of the Islamic Revolution.

[9] Farhad, Liela, and Laleh Bakhtiar (eds.), *Investigating the Possibility of Linking Traditional Architecture with Modern Building Methods: report of the proceedings of the First International Congress of Architects*, (Isfahan, Ministry for Development and Housing, 1970), 13.

[10] Farhad and Bakhtiar, *Investigating the Possibility*, 16.

[11] Farhad and Bakhtiar, *Investigating the Possibility*, 5

[12] Farhad and Bakhtiar, *Investigating the Possibility*, 20.

[13] Farhad and Bakhtiar, *Investigating the Possibility*, 60. In the following decades and under the influence of anti and post-colonial discourses of Europe (motivated by Fanon, and their Iranian followers such as Shari`ati and Al-Ahmad) and the European revolutions of the 1960's, ideologues would interpret the Iranian problems as the result of colonial ambitions of the West and thus assume a limited perspective on the global aspects of their local problems. Later, the proponents of Cultural revolution would follow this line and argue that Iran was culturally dominated by the West and thus cut off from its roots, its identity and traditions and was therefore, in a state of inauthenticity. See: Nahid Roshan Nahad, *Cultural Revolution in Islamic Republic of Iran*. (Tehran: The Centre for Islamic Revolution Documents, 2004), 32-33.

[14] These conferences were: 1975, Mexico City- 'Architecture and National Development; 1978: Warsaw- Architecture, Man, Environment.

[15] There is, however, a strand in the so-called rationalist movement of the 1970's that indeed sought the timeless and immutable – the analogous city of Aldo Rossi 1973, as seen in the first Milan architectural Triennale of that year. Rossi emphasised architectural autonomy and others, such as Giorgio Grassi defined rationalism in a Platonist vein, as a trace or impression of what is absent.

[16] Farhad and Bakhtiar, *Investigating the Possibility*, 2.

[17] Farhad and Bakhtiar, *Investigating the Possibility*, 75. Quaroni's statement coincides with his late urban projects which follow metabolism (eg. Tange, Tokyo Bay 1961) in imposing a macro form on a new city that was otherwise still articulated through modernist principles. Also see Vittorio Gregotti, *New Directions in Italian Architecture* (New York: Braziller, 1968), and Manfredo Tafuri, *History of Italian Architecture 1944-85* (Cambridge, MIT Press,1989).

[18] Perhaps not surprisingly, Saradar Afkhami's words resonate with what Ali Mirsepassi relates as the Heideggerian spiritual crisis of the west, an idea that many Iranian intellectuals of the 1960's found appealing. See: Ali Mirsepassi, *Political Islam, Iran, and the Enlightenment: Philosophies of Hope and Despair*, (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 89.

This group of intellectuals "postulated resistance to deculturation and Westernization; they advanced a critique of Europe and the United States from a radical, populist, Islamic and Third Worldist perspective." (Val Moghadam, 'Socialism or Anti-Imperialism? The Left and Revolution in Iran', *New Left Review* 166 (1987), 5-28.)

Central to the Islamist self-perception was a false dichotomy between East and West. In its radical form, this would become a futile attempt at distinguishing between the local and the global. This was a line of thought articulated by nativist intellectuals. See: Jalal Al-Ahmad, *On the Service and Treachery of Intellectuals [in Persian]* (Tehran, Kharazmi Publishers, 1979).

[19] Farhad and Bakhtiar, *Investigating the Possibility*, 66.

[20] For further on this refer to Haeri, Shahla. *Ardalan, Nader* [Interview]. Foundaiton for Iranian Studies, 21 July 1991. Available from http://fis-iran.org/en/oralhistory/Ardalan-Nader.

[21] Farhad and Bakhtiar, *Investigating the Possibility*, 31.

[22] Farhad and Bakhtiar, *Investigating the Possibility*, 24.

[23] Revolutionaries in general and Islamists in particular, argue that the monarchy forced people to abandon their authentic culture, traditions and customs, which were their source of innovation, turning them to pure consumers (Roshannahad, Cultural Revolution in Islamic Republic, 36-37).

[24] Roshannahad, Cultural Revolution in Islamic Republic, 30.

[25] For an example of this kind of rhetoric about intellectuals see: Masoud Khorram, *Identity [Persian: Hoviyyat]*, (Tehran, Hayyan Cultural Publishing Institute, 1997). Fanon foreshadowed this position remarking that

> "The colonialist bourgeoisie, in its narcissistic dialogue, expounded by the members of its universities, had in fact deeply implanted in the minds of the colonized intellectual that the essential qualities remain eternal in spite of all the blunders men may make: the essential qualities of the West, of course. The native intellectual accepted the cogency of these ideas, and deep down in his brain you could always find a vigilant sentinel ready to defend the Greco-Latin pedestal."

See: Farnz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, (New York, Grove Press, 1963), 46.

[26] Roshannahad, Cultural Revolution in Islamic Republic, 88, 106-107.

[27] Roshannahad, Cultural Revolution in Islamic Republic, 114-118.

[28] In March 1980, in his first New Year message after the Islamic Revolution, Khomeini called for a revolution in the higher education system of the country. This revolution would aim at "turning universities to a healthy environment for flourishing of sublime Islamic sciences." Subsequently, all universities were close down in 5 June 1980 and on June 12th, Khomeini decreed Cultural Revolution. The event would be post rationalised as a remedy for the lacking contextual specificity and applicability (usefulness) of knowledge in higher education under the previous regime. See: Roshannahad, Cultural Revolution in Islamic Republic, 102-106.

[29] 'Westoxification' or 'Occidentosis' was an idea initially discussed by the Heideggerian philosopher Ahmad Fardid but later popularized by Al-Ahmad in his famous book of the same name. It designates a kind of 'disease' that destroys the culture from within but is inflicted upon Iran (and other countries) by the West and its culture of domination. For a succinct treatment of the concept in the intellectual discourse of 1960s-70s Iran see: Brad Hanson, 'The "Westoxication" of Iran: Depictions and Reactions of Behrangi, al-e Ahmad, and Shariati',
International Journal of Middle East Studies, 15, 1 (Feb., 1983), 1-23.

[30] Hashemi, Seyed Reza. 1991. 'Foreword'. *Abadi* 1, 1 (1991), 2-3.

[31] Part of the agenda of the Cultural Revolution was to enforce a singular, state-sanctioned political position upon all educational institutions. Hashemi's position was also a reaffirmation of the place of instrumental rationality, the type of rationality that was, since the late nineteenth century, advocated by Islamic modernists who argued for the compatibility between Islam and modern scientific endeavours.

[32] This remains a well-known rhetoric about contemporary Iranian history, one that blames nineteenth century Qajar dynasty and its softness toward European colonialism in particular, for the country's ills. In such a narrative, Iran would have had its own indigenous modernity.

[33] (Unknown author), 'Competition for the Design of the Iranian Academies Complex', *Abadi* 3,12 (1994), 49-50, 49.

[34] (Unknown author), 'Competition for the Design of the Iranian Academies Complex', *Abadi* 3,12 (1994), 2-3. This was despite the official announcement that, based on their professional standing and experience, up to 18 would receive a small fee to cover basic costs. See: Competition for the Design of the Iranian Academies Complex', *Abadi*, 50.

[35] Much of this was propelled by the demands of post Iran-Iraq war reconstruction of cities which had brought numerous master plans and urban design projects to practices. The historicist and postmodernist underpinnings of the 'new' scholarship was seen to be suitable to the cultural and political demands of the country at the time.

[36] Hashemi, Seyed Reza, 'Editorial', *Abadi* 3, 12 (1994), 2-3.

[37] (Unknown author), 'Competition for the Design of the Iranian Academies Complex', *Abadi* 3,12 (1994), 49-50, 49.

[38] (Unknown author), 'Architectural Competition for the Design of the Iranian Academies Complex: Introducing Winning Schemes', *Abadi*, 4, 13 (1994), 4-17.

[39] 'Architectural Competition for the Design of the Iranian Academies Complex: Introducing Winning Schemes', *Abadi*, 13, 12-13.

[40] (Competition for the Design of the Iranian Academies Complex 1994, 14)

[41] While other Iranian scholars have observed the flourishing of different strands of regionalism in Iran, under labels such as traditionalism, *culturalisme*, or nativism, none have explored the political

imperative in shaping and supporting this movement. For examples refer to: Amir Bani Masoud, *Iranian Contemporary Architecture,* (Tehran Honar-e Memari Publications, 2010) or Sayyed Mohsen Habibi, *Intellectual Trends in the Contemporary Iranian Architecture and Urbamnism (1979-2003),* (Tehran, Cultural Research Bureau), 2007.

[42] This includes myths such as the claim that Iranian architecture embodies attributes such as honesty, directness, and simplicity, tenets that seem more like modern projections onto the past than an intended effect on the part of past masters.

[43] For an interesting reading on this topic, from a committed post-colonialist perspective, see: Mirsepassi, *Political Islam, Iran, and the Enlightenment,* 67-84.

[44] This assertion is based on a small sample of field survey and interviews carried out in Iran by Ali Mozaffari with the generation of architects who were educated after the Cultural Revolution.