

Archaeology, heritage, and Architecture; ; cultural agents for the East-West dialogue

The Cold war and the Italian cultural diplomacy in Iran, Egypt and Turkey (1947-1991)

A) Introduction

During the Cold War, cultural diplomacy became an increasingly significant vehicle for promoting the values and ideological precepts of the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. Cultural diplomacy was a comprehensive cultural program for the soft power of the dominant countries in Third World countries, especially in the Middle East, North Africa and Latin America. This diplomacy began with the signing of cultural agreements and the opening of cultural associations in both countries and expanded by the holding of exhibitions, exchange programs for students and professors, learning language and literature, changing the system of education, publication of magazines and books, holding cultural weeks with literature, poem, film and theatre screenings, and other cultural programs which widely targeted the culture of the host country.

Architecture and planning was a significant part of soft power and cultural diplomacy. In architecture and urban planning, the decade of the 1970s was the peak period of cultural diplomacy in the Middle East and North Africa. Especially since the late 1950s, New York (1958) and Moscow (1959), exhibitions had been an arena for promoting the contrasting lifestyles under two different ideologies, as well as promises of human well-being through architecture and urban planning. In addition to the world's two superpowers, other countries such as Italy, Britain, West and East Germany strove to establish cultural agreements and cooperations, especially by exporting architecture as a cultural vehicle in order to achieve two primary goals: firstly, to expand economic and technological relations and, secondly and more importantly, to solve its energy problems by signing an oil agreement. Italy was more successful than others in its pursuit of cultural diplomacy, as evidenced in the breadth of cultural agreements it established in third world countries. A reason for Italy's success was that it shared some common concerns with these countries, such as its civilization-historical commonalities and common cultural-technical issues with Islamic countries in the region, such as the development of cities and the preservation and future of historical centres, development, modernity and the issue of their impact upon tradition and identity in architecture and urban design, and the crisis of architectural universities in response to these issues.

During Mussolini's dictatorship, cultural diplomacy had previously contributed to spreading the Italian language and culture as well as the Fascist ideology it espoused. However, in the late 1960s and the early 1970s, the Italian cultural diplomacy expanded by Aldo Moro in North Africa and the Middle East, to promote the image of a new, democratic and anti-Fascist Italy was aimed at fostering political and commercial relations. The Italian cultural diplomacy pursued long-term goals and promoted cultural exchanges, dialogue and cooperation, according to the principles of UNESCO such as heritage

conservation, restoration of historic centers, and educating architects who could respond to this agenda. Additionally, the archaeological missions played an important role as the archaeological excavations focused mainly on topics that had the approval of the Middle Eastern and North African countries' elites, and often related to distant times, such as the Renaissance and the high points of Islamic culture, such as the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates, and the Safavid empire in Iran. Eventually, the signing of new cultural agreements between Italy and Islamic countries in the region such as Tunisia (August 1969) Morocco (January 1970), Iran (September 1970), Algeria (June 1971), Lebanon (July 1971), Syria (December 1971), Saudi Arabia (February 1973), Libya (February 1974), Iraq (July 1974), and Egypt (April 1975) enabled the commencement of a comprehensive Italian cultural program in the Middle East and the North of Africa. In architecture and cognate fields, Italian institutions such as Associazione Internazionale di Studi sul Mediterraneo e l'Oriente (IsMEO), presented a coherent cultural program included archaeological excavations, conservation and restoration projects for historical centers, architecture and urban design projects, and cultural agreement between Italian and Middle Eastern architecture schools to hold exhibitions, exchange students, and changes to the curriculum content and approach to architectural pedagogies.

B) The Middle East in the period of change: From modernism to nativism

After the first wave of modernity in Middle Eastern countries such as Turkey, Egypt and Iran, which was accompanied by the modernization of countries' cultural, political and social institutions to move from a traditional to modern society, from the 1950s, the Second waves of intellectual modernization emerged in the form of nativism. The main feature of this phase was an emphasis on domestic sources of thought, the development under leftist influences, and the will to localize the concept of development and modernization. Accordingly, no longer attracted by the novelty of Western technology and development, nativists reacted against capitalism along three lines: nationalism, Marxism, and Islam. The union of these movements of thought was manifested differently in the three countries of Egypt, Iran and Turkey. Nationalists-Islamists movement in the Arab countries such as Egypt sought cultural independence by distancing themselves from the Ottomans by emphasizing their Arab roots and the close relationship between Islam and Arabic culture and history. In Iran, the unity of Islamist-Marxist intellectuals, such as Ahmad Fardid, Ali Shariati, Seyed Hossein Nasr led to present updated interpretations of Islam in accordance with the modern world, and in Turkey, the intellectual Leftist-Nationalist movements tried to promote the self-images of Turkish culture in modern literature, artworks and architecture.

Despite these differences, the unity of these opposed intellectual movements had one thing in common in all three countries: cultural heritage. They all tried to reach a deeper level in theorizing the country's history and culture by maintaining an outlook on the cultural heritage. As a result, the

preservation and revival of historical centers, especially the historical centers of the Islamic period, as part of the cultural heritage was considered by the intellectuals of the movements. In fact, historical centers were the focus of the discourse of nativism and cultural independence in the field of architecture and urbanism in these countries.

In the meantime, Italian cultural diplomacy, contrary to the concepts of modernization and development of East and West, followed the intellectual movements of nationalists, Islamists and Marxists in the revival and restoration of historical centers as the cultural survival of Islamic countries. As a result, the three important Islamic cities of Cairo, Isfahan and Istanbul, and their historic cores, were a center of attention for implementation of a comprehensive cultural diplomacy program by Italian archaeologists, restorers, architects, urban planners and educators. IsMEO's archaeological activities in these centers included running heritage conservation and restoration projects, holding conferences in Isfahan (1971, and 1973), Cairo (1984), and Istanbul (1978), and itinerant exhibitions of contemporary Italian architecture such as "Italian architecture in the 1960s" (1972) and "Italian architecture 1965-1970" (1973). Italian collaborative projects for the conservation and restoration of urban heritage were awarded prizes in the First Agha Khan Award (1980) and the second Venice Biennale "Architecture in the Islamic Worlds" (1982). Furthermore, a jumelage agreement was established between Italian architecture faculties such as Rome, Florence and Venice and those in Egypt, Turkey and Iran, changing the architectural curricula, and opening programs for the conservation and restoration of monuments and historical contexts. These collaborations were parts of the Italian cultural policy which not only provided contents related to the three important Islamic cities, but also promoted the discourse of heritage conservation and restoration of historic centers.

C) Research statement

Focusing on discourses of conservation of the built environment in Muslim contexts, the project analyses and explains the relationship between cultural diplomacy, domestic politics and the built environment, where the latter is understood as a powerful cultural vehicle for shaping society and achieving socio-political aims. From this perspective, architectural projects in general, and conservation projects in particular, serve as media for communication, representation, persuasion and control, functioning on both a domestic scale and internationally in pursuit of geopolitical goals. As an example, Soviet and Western political discourses had led to differences in architectural practice and pedagogy shaping Islamic communities and habitats. In a period of the hegemony of modern culture and industry, and while Muslim countries were rapidly changing in imitation of modern Western cities, the idea of heritage conservation was promoted by Italian intellectuals and architects to not only preserve the heritage, history and cultural identity and the Islamic image of cities but also the creation of culturally-authentic human settlements that might form a basis for the future.

Taking the three important Islamic cities, Cairo, Isfahan, and Istanbul, the research will show how heritage conservation has been a cornerstone of the Italian cultural diplomacy. For this purpose, The project thus seeks to answer the following questions:

- 1) How was the Italian cultural diplomacy shaped in the three Muslim contexts during the Cold War? What was the socio-political agenda behind these cultural diplomacies in these Muslim and developing countries in the Middle East?
- 2) What were the main agenda, and components in the section of cultural heritage and conservation in the three countries?
- 3) What were the main conservation projects that run and completed through the Italian cultural diplomacy in the three countries? And who were the main actors (institutions, politicians, architects, conservators, educators) who participated in these projects from Italy and from the countries mentioned above?
- 3) How did the conservations projects were read as resistance cultural-political projects against modern and development projects in these three countries?
- 5) How did Italian cultural diplomacy influence education of the built environment in these countries?

D) Research method

The research method includes three main steps:

(1) Archival studies: It needs to look at some archives such as archives at National library, Ministry of culture and tourism, and Italian-Iran, Italian-Turkey, and Italian-Egypt associations, architecture schools such as Fine Art and National university at Iran, METU at Turkey, and Fine Art at university of Cairo at Egypt, Agha Khan, IsMEO and University of Rome, Florence and Venice at Italy, etc to find two main category of documents:

A) Documents in terms of cultural-political agreement, and other related documents for establishing the cultural diplomacy and its components.

B) Documents in terms of the projects such as archaeological excavations, restoration and conservation projects, related exhibitions, conferences and publications, and architecture education at three countries.

(2) In-depth interviews with Italian and local architects, archaeologist and restores, who involved these projects. These interviews help the project to identify main actors that played role in these projects, finding the related documents from their private archives, stating the influences of these projects in their cultural-political context of the countries, and also in the education of the built environment in their universities.

(3) Analysis of these archival material and interview data to find and explain a network of actors, patterns, relationships that were shaped in each conservations projects in the three cities, Isfahan,

Istanbul and Cairo. Also, this analysis help the research to state the socio-political role of the conservation projects in the modern nativism's movement in three countries, Iran, Turkey and Egypt. As a result, the analysis shows that how various disciplines such as politics, archaeology, heritage, conservation, architecture and education could work together under the title of Italian cultural diplomacy to achieve political and economic aims in the Middle East during the Cold War.