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The Transnational Transformation of Architecture Practice:  
Iranian architects in the new geography of professional authority, 1945-2012

By  
Shawhin Roudbari

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
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Doctor of Philosophy  
in

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of the  
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Fall 2013

The Transnational Transformation of Architecture Practice:  
Iranian architects in the new geography of professional authority, 1945-2012

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By  
Shawhin Roudbari

## Abstract

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Iranian architects in the new geography of professional authority, 1945-2012

by

Shawhin Roudbari

Doctor of Philosophy in Architecture

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Nezar AlSayyad, Chair

In the past decade, Iranian architects have mobilized professional institutions—such as magazines, awards, professional bodies, and workshops—to transform their profession and to extend their exposure beyond Iran’s tightly controlled borders. To do so, they established connections with foreign architects through travel, migration, networking with expatriate communities of architecture students and professionals, and exchanging information through the Internet. By investigating these actions, I use this study to reveal subtle yet significant aspects of transnationalism in the architecture profession. The case of architecture practice in Iran—a national context isolated through political and economic sanctions by the global community as well as practices of censorship by organs of the Iranian state—emphasizes a range of formal, informal, and underground practices engaged by professionals and their institutions in the process of transnationalism. In this way, the case of Iran serves as a barometer for the transnationalization of the architecture field globally.

Methodologically, this investigation demonstrates that the study of globalization of a profession must account for ways that profession is defined in various national contexts. In the case of architecture, this means that an understanding of the globalization of the field of architecture cannot operate under any single (nation-based) definition of the architecture profession—a multiplicity of national definitions of the architecture field must be considered in order to grasp the myriad of ways a globalizing profession is shaped by the professionals participating in the process from other countries—even those countries as politically and economically isolated as Iran.

The transnational space is one in which architects produce and consume professional knowledge and acknowledgement. I distinguish between individual and institutional transnational practices. The former involves the movement of individuals across borders and offers them embodied experiences. The latter are a set of connections between Iranian institutions and foreign actors that offer a more symbolic transnationalism—what I call transnational credibility—to Iranian architects who participate in those institutions. I

identify the ambiguity between the individual and the institutional forms of transnationalism as a driving factor in what I claim to be the destabilization of established structures of professional authority in Iran.

Building on these tenets, I suggest the following arguments: first, architects' transnational practices are leveraged for professional power under the guise of credibility through claims of transnational exposure. I conclude that this credibility takes the form of transnational capital and that in the context of Iran's complex relationships with things foreign, Iranian architects' self-constructed transnational capital carries significant purchase power in markets of symbolic capital exchange. Second, transnationalism, as an institutional mode of operation in the profession today, carries with it the risk of stunting the growth of critical engagement within design professions in developing countries by promoting superficial engagement with "global" architecture. Third, transnational practices are decentering the geographic locations of recognition and authority in the profession in Iran and globally.

In making these claims, I show ways architects in Iran, and Iranian architects around the world, mobilize institutions to garner professional and political power. Theories of the globalization of architecture tend to depict a force that is as a set of practices and ideas driven in large part by a dominant core and dealt with by peripheral communities of professions in developing countries. In contrast, the transnational perspectives advanced in this dissertation show ways that bottom-up practices engaged by actors scattered around the world complicate the dominance of that core.

To highlight this transnational perspective, methodologically, I gather evidence from documents in more marginal spaces of global knowledge exchange: weblogs, design competition websites, informal communications between architects in Iran and communities of expatriates in North America and Europe, and magazines. I pair this archival research with in-depth and open-ended interviews with architects in Iran and in cities they migrate to in a multi-sited ethnography.

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## **Prologue: A Profession in Crisis?**

I begin the description of the problem as I encountered it—in the field, talking to architects. I had a set of things that generally interested me: I knew that I was fascinated by institutional structures that drive architects' and planners' practices. In my preliminary research on scholarship about Iran's built environment, I found that scholars in North America and in Europe studied problems one way and that students and scholars in Iran studied them another way. I thought that much of the difference between Western scholarship and Iran's scholarship on issues of the built environment had to do with cultures of research and cultures of knowledge. This was perhaps what got me thinking about the role of institutions like universities and their history in shaping such cultures.

At the same time, I was very interested in what architects were doing on the ground. There was a palpable air of a profession in crisis in Iran during my initial fieldwork in 2010. True, this sentiment has been present historically and in many places around the world. But in Iran, it was the strongest I'd seen anywhere. I moved to Iran when I was eleven and lived there until I was almost seventeen. During that time—the mid 1990s—Tehran was experiencing a post-Iraq war real estate development boom. Buildings, architecture, and planning were very much on everyone's mind. At the same time, my generation of boomers born around the 1979 Revolution was approaching young adulthood, finishing high school, entering universities or the workplace, and, importantly, driving cars. Tehran's congestion problem exploded. As a result, urban planning in our city of over twelve million was also very much on everyone's mind.

By the time I returned to Tehran for exploratory fieldwork in 2010, many of the problems I started noticing as a teenager had burgeoned to a magnitude that people could almost no longer wrap their minds around. The streets were effectively parking lots and residential high rises were going up in an antiquated urban fabric. When I returned, over the course of a dozen interviews with practicing architects and educators, I was bombarded with stories of a profession in turmoil.

Architects, planners, and even engineers (these three fields aren't as separate in Iran as they are in the US), shared stories of warring professional associations, complex state-profession relations, and hope offered by a rising architectural avant-garde. I was told about the proliferation of architecture schools (from four to four-hundred in thirty years,

with most of the new architecture departments inaugurated in the past five years) and the frightening prospects this held for a future profession inundated with undertrained degree holders.

Migration was another big change. So was the Internet. All these forces were radically transforming the work of environmental design professionals, educators, and students. Another thing that drew me toward their stories was that an astonishingly few of the dynamics they shared with me were things I had studied in my forty-eight plus units of graduate courses on globalization in architecture, histories of development and underdevelopment, sociology of organizations and work, or area studies and environmental design in developing countries around the world.

In the midst of stories of what I then called professional activism, I was overwhelmed with information that all seemed clearly connected yet completely scattered. Architect, planners and engineers were telling me about how their underground meetings could (and have) resulted in them going in jail; how the head of a national association of architects refused to hold elections and step down; or how as a result, lectures, workshops, and other events were boycotted. They told me that architecture magazines were acknowledging fresh architecture through a new awards project and how that was launching the careers of an architectural avant-garde. Others told me that those magazines and awards sold article space by the page and that young architects would design photogenic buildings that they could then write up and pay to publish in a magazine in order to effectively buy credibility. A similar thing was happening on international design blogs.

I was told about underlying problems like a weak or absent culture of reliance on expertise in Iran's professional sphere. The internationally familiar prognosis of developers unwilling to let architects make aesthetic or formal decisions has reached pandemic proportions there. Developers, builders, and clients demand that buildings max out legal (or physically feasible) floor area. As a result, new residential architecture throughout the country is relegated to an issue of designing facades on boxes that are extrusions of the plots of land upon which they sit. The luxury of volumetric design was reserved for the relatively negligible number of well-funded civic and cultural projects led by a lamentably small group of inspired clients. Cultures of work, taste, and reliance on expertise were increasingly set through developer-dominated contracts of residential development.

In the midst of these many issues, in this dissertation I focus on the roles that combined individual and institutional transnational practices play in the metamorphosis of Iran's architecture profession. Movements and exchanges of people and ideas via migration, travel, the Internet, media, or even recognition by international awards, represent a spectrum of transnational engagement that strongly influences change in Iran's profession. As a politically and socially isolated country, and as one where the location of agency between individuals and institutions is unresolved, Iran brings into relief significant lessons about transnational practices in ways architects mobilize institutions for professional and political power.

Several factors make Iran a barometer for transformations of the architecture profession globally. First, the “massification” of education mentioned above is a phenomenon that is affecting Iran as well as other countries around the Persian Gulf. A cadre of university-credentialed hopefuls is moving into the design profession en masse. Second, rapid exposure to the Internet and architects’ uncritical borrowings of design trends imbued with transnational allure is pronounced in post-revolutionary Iran—a context for which scholars I cite in the following chapter have offered fascinating interpretations of the nature of the symbolic capital that foreign things enjoy there. Third, Iran’s tumultuous social and political history with the West, particularly with the US and the UK, is reflected in an unsettled engagement of Iranian professionals with institutional models they borrowed from these countries. There is a clash of institutional culture that is palpable in Iran. Ad hoc institutions have much sway in a context of weak professional structures. The Iranian context of profession, state, and society gives insight into the nuanced ways foreign and domestic institutions interact and how, in the process, professionals leverage ambiguous foreign credibilities that ultimately complicate, or decenter, established structures of authority in the architecture profession.

## **Chapter 1. Introduction: Framing the Transnationalization of Iran's Architecture Profession**

Unique among other professionals, architects navigate domains separately frequented by artists and technocrats. Each of these fields engages their respective transnational communities through different channels and with different restrictions. The Iranian government sends engineers abroad to participate in foreign conferences while it persecutes Iranian filmmakers that participate in foreign film festivals. Iran's architects and their profession embody significant insight into the agency of individuals and institutions in the context of authoritarian, restrictive, and isolated regimes. As such, Iran is a unique context for investigating the power of architects who navigate transnational networks.

Three aspects of the Iranian context bear significance for investigating the transnational transformation of the architecture profession. The first aspect can be found in state-society relations as the space in which freedoms, restrictions, subjectivities, and national culture are articulated and managed. The second aspect is encapsulated in state-profession interactions as the institutional space of Iranian architecture where the political agency of architects is navigated. The third aspect concerns the intersection of profession and society, where cultures of expert authority are staked.

I draw upon archival and ethnographic evidence in each of these spaces to show how Iranian architects leverage an indistinct combination of substantial and unsubstantial foreign recognition domestically and I claim that this transnational consumption and reproduction of credibility is decentering structures of authority in the profession with adverse and beneficial consequences for the future of architecture practice. By corollary, first, I show how architects leverage transnational connections for professional power and how they increasingly do so through less formalized networks in order to evade political persecution. Second, a history of transnationalism in the profession reveals a complicated institutional colonialism that is in part defined by (a) a recognition-producing core and a consuming periphery, but also increasingly by (b) a transnational institutional space defined and maintained through globally circulating new media such as international design award websites organized in the periphery. Third, this investigation uncovers ways transnational practices are shifting the locus of recognition and authority in the profession in two ways: geographically, to places off the beaten path of globalization, like Iran; and institutionally, away from hardened professional bodies and towards more fluid

transnational networks. In ways I will detail, transnational networks enable more ambitious design but also discourage substantive and critical engagement in architecture practice.

How the transformation of the Iranian architecture field is framed is a significant part of the problem I encountered in my investigation. Some architects described the changes in the field of architecture as globalization, others as colonization and dependency on foreign institutional models; one interviewee framed the changes as “photogenicization” (or the trend of designing to publication in magazines and on websites—more on this in Chapter 5); a group of architects framed the problem as a “massification” of underqualified professionals and superficial institutions that they trace to the unbridled proliferation of architecture schools in Iran in the past decade; one architect considered that the changes may be Iranian architecture’s first renaissance since the Safavid era (of the sixteenth century); but a majority described the changes as a deepening crisis.

How architects frame these transformations affects what they do to enact change in their profession. These framings are also a source of conflict and growth among architects and between them and their patrons, clients, developers, and the state. My greatest challenge in understanding the formation and transformation of the architecture profession in Iran has been in sorting through the ways the architects I interviewed and documents I studied connect ideas, people, institutions, historical, political, and social context. This introductory chapter presents my analytical organization of these framings.

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A sketch of the problem according to the synthesis offered in this dissertation is as follows: (A) institutions of Iran’s architecture profession establish contact with foreign institutions. As such, these Iranian institutions gain legitimacy domestically and bestow the promise of transnationalism to their audience of Iranian architects. (B) Iranian architects gain access to the world outside Iran’s borders (the much desired “global”) through emigration, the Internet, and international institutional sites such as foreign magazines and international awards. Together, these institutional (A) and individual (B) transnational practices result in the formation of transnational institutions and transnational credibility, respectively. The isolated context of Iran is an atmosphere in which substantive and superficial forms of transnational credibility are hard to distinguish. Within Iran, the professional capital of an architect with a degree from Harvard and experience working at the Office for Metropolitan Architecture (a design firm of global fame) on her resume is not easily distinguished from that of an architect who has a trivial international award on his. Other architects without transnational experience, clients, and even state-based institutional actors are often unaware of foreign and global hierarchies as a result of Iran’s deep political and social isolation since 1979. The result of this ambiguity between what I call substantive and weak transnational credibility is a destabilization of established structures of hierarchy in the country’s architecture profession. I argue that this case of architects in the Iranian context is a barometer for changes in hierarchies in the field of architecture globally.

## The Iranian Context

The state-profession-society nexus of Iran highlights a number of significant factors in understanding the architecture profession. Of specific import is the location of the profession's institutions within Iranian power structures and within Iranian cultures of expert authority. I dissect the Iranian context by providing an interrogative framework at the intersections of scholarship on state and society, professions and state, and professions and society.

### *State and society*

Literature on Iran's 1979 Islamic revolution (henceforth revolution) offer framings of state-society and state-society-institution relationships that link the pre-revolutionary era of modernization with the collapse of the Pahlavi monarchy in 1979 and the following rise of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This classical body of Iranian modernization and Iranian revolution literature spans Weberian perspectives that focus on bureaucratic modernization, Durkheimian accounts of modernization induced anomie, and studies that highlight the role of "the man on the street" attributed to the work of James Scott. In his analysis of the revolution, *The Turban for the Crown*, Said Amir Arjomand, combines Weber and Durkheim to locate his concern with social anomie in the wake of Shah's modernization programs of the 1960s and 1970s in the context of the modern bureaucratic state (Arjomand 1988). As such, Arjomand argues that the modern revolution must be seen in relation to the state and therefore should be traced to rise of modern bureaucracy. In contrast to this perspective, Asef Bayat mobilizes James Scott's man on the street to foreground of his analysis of the revolution and argue for the significance of the "quiet encroachment of the ordinary" (Bayat 1997). These studies connect state and society in Iran in gainful ways by signifying the agency of individuals and institutions vis-à-vis the state. But the approaches are limited in their almost exclusive domestic focus. They do not recognize the significance of transnational networks in the construction of domestic agency.

A critical dimension is added to scholarship on modern Iran by Mino Moallem in her study of the transnational formation of discourses of modernization and modern subjectivities in Iran (Moallem 2005). Her transnational approach connects Iranian society to global currents of knowledge production and consumption in ways (discussed below) that complicate the classical literature noted above. Moallem's alternative approach provides a significant foundation for my study of the history and current transformations in Iran's architecture profession. Because I am concerned with the role of professions and professional institutions, I also draw from the classical perspectives above, notably Weberian connections of modernization with the bureaucratic transformation of the state.

Fariba Adelhah examines the bureaucratization of traditional cultural values toward the formation of modern institutions (Adelhah 2000). In doing so she draws attention away from the state-society gap by integrating the two spheres and showing how socially conditioned values permeate the state through their institutionalization. This perspective is

an inward one that does not address how seemingly traditional, homegrown values have been formed and informed by transnational forces of meaning formation and subject formation. Taken together, Moallem's transnational channels and Adelkhah's bureaucratization of social values suggest a possible pathway of transnational modernizations of Iranian institutions. This pathway underlies my approach to connecting the transnational inspirations of the transformation of Iran's architecture profession in the context of the Iranian state.

While state-society framings offer important understandings of the Iranian context, they do not offer a complete picture of how and where the profession fits in. Toward this end, I examine ways scholars have studied the interactions of profession and state and the location of professions in society.

### *Profession and state*

The institutions of the architecture profession in Iran have had varied political relationships with the state. In the post revolutionary era, where organized bodies competing for power were deemed by the state to be a threat to their nascent sovereignty, offering them political power was not an option. In the absence of research on professions and the state in Iran, I look to ways scholars of similar profession-state contexts have written on the political power of design professionals and professions.

Lindsay Bremner writes about ways that South African architects became politicized at different eras from the 1930s through the 1990s (Bremner 2010). In the 1980s and 1990s, architects formed associations and made political statements through them. They made institutional declarations about the education and hiring of architects against the grain of apartheid politics. This form of politicization is distinct from earlier forms of politicization through studied means of architecture design and discourse. Modernist era housing plans that followed ideologies of equality are examples. The institutional context as an incubator of political power is what interests me as one that is probable in the context of Iran.

In the case of the Soviet Union, Hugh Hudson Jr. shows the ways architects promulgated visions for a softer socialist society through flexible architecture and eventually suffered the consequences of their less-than-Stalinist implementation of tenets of communism (Hudson 1994). Their architecture encouraged people to be agents of the state's ideology rather than its objects.<sup>1</sup> In that context their architecture was revolutionary and a very direct political statement. For that it is a fascinating history. What I'm interested in is how architects established state-sanctioned professional institutions such as the Higher State Technical and Artistic Studios (VKhUTEMAS). Significantly, I take from Hudson's history important lessons for the intersection of politics among professionals and between them and the state. He examines the feud between architects and their

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<sup>1</sup> For an insightful analysis of Hudson's *Blueprints in Blood* see Ellen Weiss, *the Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, vol. 54, No. 2 (June 1995) 255-6.

organizations and institutions—namely the Union of Contemporary Architects in Moscow, the Association of New Architects, and the First Congress of Soviet Architects.

I connect Hudson and Bremner’s framings of the political agency of professions to the small body of work on civil society in Iran. Masoud Kamali argues for a context-specific definition of civil society, which in the case of Iran he links to the clergy (Kamali 2001). In this, he challenges Ernst Gellner’s much-cited framings of civil society that do not comprise religious organizations. Take the following definitions of civil society as: (a) “the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values... Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power,” and (b) “a civil sphere where people can organize their daily lives without the intervention of the state?”<sup>2</sup> What Kamali’s position offers my analysis stems from the hermeneutic approach in which he challenges foreign definitions of civil society by applying them to the Iranian context. The local context provides a more nuanced understanding of civil society while adding a significant dimension to sociological understandings of the agency of organizations with respect to the Iranian state. My attention to a context-specific definition of the Iranian architecture profession is motivated by this same hermeneutic approach: first, Iran’s design profession, when considered a form of modern civil society, can be analytically connected to claims of institutional power; and second, connecting the profession to the state offers an evolutionary step forward for parochial definitions of the scope and agency of professions (which I return to in the following section).

### *Professions and society*

The intersection of profession and society in the case of Iran is rich with complexity, historical transformation, and complexity. Of particular interest is, first, expert authority in the context of Iran, from which I draw on literature on the authority of experts in general and of architects in particular. I treat this literature cautiously because of the Western cultural assumptions inherent in my sources, which are discussed in the following paragraphs. I also draw from theories of professional legitimacy and cultural capital (Haskell 1984, Fourcade 2009, and Stevens 1998). Second, the pre- and post-revolutionary context of, respectively, globally connected and globally isolated Iranian socio-political spheres is significant in terms of the consumption of global knowledge. Here I draw from literature on transnational knowledge consumption (Moallem 2005).

*Authority, legitimacy, experts.* The nature of the architecture profession in Iran must be seen as distinct from the architecture profession in other national contexts. Indeed, an “architect” in the US means something different from an “architect” in the EU and from “architects” in the very different professional geographies across the globe. In specific national contexts there is a discernable set of traits that shape the image of the architect and these sets of traits are distinguishable between national contexts. In Iran, for example, the

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<sup>2</sup> Masoud Kamali, “Civil Society and Islam: a Sociological Perspective,” *European Journal of Sociology* 42.03 (2001): 457.

professional title of an architect has shifted its prevalent form from “builder” (*memar*) to “architect” (*architecte*) to “consultant” (*moshaver*) to “engineer” (*mohandes*). I situate the historical specificity of these professional titles in Chapter 2. More than semantics, these labels indicated shifting foci of the profession and its own portrait of the architect. From technical builder to artist to manager to technocrat, though all these traits were always present, there have been historical shifts in the shape of the profession with respect to these constructs.

Garry Stevens uses Pierre Bourdieu’s ideas about symbolic capital and fields to provide a flexible view of the architecture field that comprises individuals and a mélange of sites that grant forms of capital that individuals exchange (Stevens 1998). Stevens offers a flexibility in his framing of the field of architecture that traditional sociologies of professions do not. His framing helps understand ways architects engage each other in schools and in work, through various sites like awards, magazines, professional associations, in a scramble for recognition. The traditional sociological studies that Bourdieu criticizes as archaic, however, offer other tools I find useful.<sup>3</sup> Magali Sarfatti Larson, Andrew Abbott, and Marion Fourcade give well-defined pictures of power and professional institutions. They show how professional associations as institutional bodies capture power for their members. Abbott shows how a profession struggles to expand its jurisdiction in the face of other professions (Abbott 1998). Larson frames this as manifestation of a groups’ will to power (Larson 1995). More recently, Fourcade makes a specific move that I capitalize on: in her comparative study of professions in different national contexts, she identifies professions shaped and controlled by the state—in her example of economists in France (Fourcade 2009). Leveraging that point, I extend Larson and Abbott to suggest ways professionals engage extra-professional domains of jurisdiction. Specifically, I use this modified conception of the profession to see how Iranian architects leverage their profession’s institutions for political power in resisting the state’s restrictions in the form of censorship and institutional control. I pair this with the work of other scholars have applied Bourdieu to better understand the architecture field (Noordegraaf and Schinkel 2011). They note the architecture field’s unique situation between fields of arts and sciences. Architects capitalize on competencies and capital in both domains. I argue that in the case of Iran, and by extension other countries with states that repress the arts, architects use the bi-field domain of architecture to dodge censorship.

To historically situate scholarship on authority and expertise in the professional sphere, I draw upon the work Thomas Haskell that identifies a historical periodization of society’s reliance on and belief in the authority of experts (Haskell 1984). Writing with the assumptions inherent in the context of the industrialized West, Haskell highlights the 1960s and 1970s as a period of crisis of professions that was “stimulated in part by deep rifts within the professions that pitted member against member and whole professions against one another.”<sup>4</sup> He and other scholars of professions identify the Jacksonian era—as

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<sup>3</sup> Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (University of Chicago Press, 1992), 242.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Haskell, *The Authority of Experts* (Indiana University Press, 1984), xiii.

one in which social hierarchies of power and expertise were challenged—as another significant crisis point for the authority of experts (Starr 1982). Both these periods are identified by a crisis of credibility and expertise in the context of power and authority. It is thus that much of the “professions literature” of the late 1970s and 1980s (primarily research conducted during the late 1970s) adopted a Marxist perspective that drew attention to the jurisdictional contestations of professions. The 1990s and 2000s saw a drop in core research on professions in favor of attention to the field of organizational theory. Dana Cuff and Judith Blau’s research on architecture firms fall in this category (Cuff 1992, Blau 1987). Marion Fourcade’s recent study of transnationalism in the economics professions, *Economists and Societies*, marks a significant revisiting of the field of professions (Fourcade 2009). The past decade has seen a resurgence of interest in professions, primarily toward understanding the transnationalization of professional institutions, firms, and the global division of expert labor. Economic geographers have taken the lead on amassing case studies. Faulconbridge, Tombesi, Kloosterman, Knox and Taylor, McNeil and Sklair exemplify the work that is relevant to the architecture field (Faulconbridge 2010, Tombesi 2001, Kloosterman 2005, Knox and Taylor 2005, McNeill 2009, Sklair 2006). I offer a review of this literature in the following section in which I frame transnationalism in professions.

I discuss this historiography of professions in their historical and political context because it helps critically examine what is happening with professional authority in Iran today. The authority of professional expertise is very much unsettled in Iran where the modern design professions are just over half a century old. In Chapter 2, I chronicle the challenges architects experienced in defining themselves to society as a modern profession distinct from millennia-old traditions of architectural practice. The 1979 revolution brought a Marxist ax to the authority architects had amassed during the developmental era of the 1960s and 1970s. The blow was powered by the anti-imperialist contempt of elite technocrats that enjoyed the blessings and resources of the monarchy’s favoritism toward them.

It is in the post-Iraq war context of the 1990s that Iran’s design, construction, and environmental development fields, among many others professional fields, began their current incarnations. As such, in the political historical context of post-war Iran and in the cultural context of Iran as a nation still grappling with cultures of expertise, the architecture profession and its attending hierarchies and structures of authority are very much unresolved and doubly complex when we consider some key actors in the profession were active before the revolution, and that some fled Iran and then came back. It is in this historical context that this dissertation’s investigation of Iran’s architecture profession has that urgency that Haskell’s examination of the authority of experts had in 1984. What’s more, the Iranian crisis in authority is of concern not just to players in Iran, but to architects around the world, because the problem is very much a global one, as evidenced through the transnational channels I explore in the following section on framing transnationalism.

*Transnational knowledge.* The post-revolutionary and post-war context of political, economic, and social isolation in Iran has forced a decontextualization of facets of architecture knowledge ranging from design discourse to institutional practices and frameworks. Indeed many of my interview participants spoke about the painfully tangible distance between their practice and global currents of architecture knowledge. In the absence of access, and in the context of Iran's highly active profession (post-war reconstruction boom and large and prominent schools of design), Iranian architects have grasped at snippets of knowledge at even the slightest, most ephemeral opportunity. Examples include the enthusiastic, almost desperate, reception of architecture magazines brought into the country by travelers or stories from colleagues that travel or migrate abroad. The scant foreign knowledge gained is "filled out" by necessity and used in Iran's discourse and institutional practices. That knowledge is dangerously decontextualized. This is a root of the profession's problem. Chapter 5 shows how design websites bestow recognition and thus exacerbate the promise of globally recognized knowledge where that knowledge is decontextualized and incomplete—a façade on an aged and incomplete structure of ideas.

Moallem writes about decontextualized knowledge in her research on the politics of transnational consumption (Moallem 2011). She examines how knowledge about commodities are disconnected from the circuits of labor and cultural meaning they are produced in when consumed by foreign consumers. The reverse of this flow of disconnected knowledge is the case in this dissertation. Indeed, similar to her transnational commodification of knowledge, where "the transnational circulation of the commodity relies on the discourse of difference,"<sup>5</sup> many architects who participate in the transnational circulation of knowledge benefit from a discourse that privileges foreign knowledge over domestic knowledge. This connects to the confusion between substantive and weak credibility that I outline below.

In order to recognize the significance of the ways professional credibility operates in Iranian society and how connections with the world beyond Iran's borders affect facets of the profession-state-society nexus, I next turn to ways scholars have framed and investigated transnationalism.

### **Framing Transnationalism**

Transnationalism is treated by scholars variously as an interrogative concept in tension with theories of globalization; as a condition that emphasizes global networks of knowledge and ideas; as a venue of subject formation; and as a methodological stance that draws attention to migrants and other everyday actors that are connected to the world beyond their nation-state. These approaches lay the groundwork for an investigation of transnational knowledge and consumptions of those forms of knowledge that are the focus of the approach I build in this dissertation.

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<sup>5</sup> Minoo Moallem, "Objects of Knowledge, Subjects of Consumption," 159.

*Transnationalism: globalization, the nation-state, and subjects*

Transnationalism as an interrogative response to globalization scholarship acknowledges the significance of the nation-state, whether explicitly, as in the work of Michael Peter Smith (Smith 2001) or implicitly, as in the work of transnational ethnographers such as Aihwa Ong (Ong 1999) or Anna Tsing (Tsing 2011). Michael Peter Smith's *Transnational Urbanism*, criticizes the body of "global cities" scholarship that prioritizes the economic ordering of global urban hierarchies (such as Sassen 2001). Smith advocates a primacy of local agency and the continued role of the nation-state as "mediator of transnational migration and global networks through public policies, and a maker of political alliances and regulatory frameworks seeking to govern global trade, investment and production."<sup>6</sup>

The case of Iran—with its challenging restrictions on Iranian migrants, particularly into the US, the EU, and to a lesser extent, Canada—fits in the interrogative position of transnationalism that stands in opposition to studies of globalization. The hurdles of migration that were prominent in the stories of the architects I interviewed, and which I detail in Chapter 4, support a very uneven and fractured idea of globalization in which foreign policies of immigration and economic sanctions are far from the neoliberal limit-state image of a well-connected global web.

The transnationalism I frame in this dissertation locates the nation-state in the context of transnational networks of knowledge and institutional practices. Because Iran is linked through complex political, economic, and cultural connections to forces beyond its borders, its development or underdevelopment cannot be examined in isolation. Moallem argues, for example, that by taking a national frame of analysis, other scholars are comfortable in stating that Iran was never colonized—and this is problematic (Moallem 2005). By taking a transnational frame, she shows that colonial discourses developed outside Iran were appropriated within Iran and effectively constituted a form of colonization—one that would not be visible without a transnational frame.

Much of these transnational processes can be framed by understanding transnational subjects and recognizing their agency in social transformation. The role of processes of transnationalism in subject formation is an area in which fascinating work has been done (Moallem 2000, Ong 1999). One category of research in this area includes Moallem's demonstration of how diasporic subjects are formed through transnational entrepreneurial practices. Where her focus is on migrants in their new host country, I examine transnational subjects in the sending country and their connection with emigrant peers. As an example, the sharing of a graduate syllabus between an Iranian graduate student in the US and his peer in Iran who is an instructor at an architecture department has the potential to make profound change in Iran's architecture field and in that peer's career.<sup>7</sup> In *The New*

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Peter Smith, "Transnational Urbanism Revisited" in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (2005): 237.

<sup>7</sup> While my focus in this dissertation is not on the formation of transnational subjects, this is an area that deserves much attention. First, it provides a subtext to the transnationalization of institutions by individual actors that I'm investigating. And second, it informs an understanding of the outward flow of cultures of

*Transnational Activism*, Sidney Tarrow explains that “even prosaic activities, like immigrants bringing remittances home to their families, take on broader meanings when ordinary people cross transnational space.”<sup>8</sup> The same holds true for many of the activities I investigate in this dissertation. A second category of subject formation that focuses on the transnationally mobile subject is exemplified by Aihwa Ong’s work on Pacific-Rim migration of Chinese families. Ong shows how elite migrants engage (or fail to engage) a transnational accumulation and exchange of symbolic capital.

Where and for what means transnational subjectivity is produced is different in Moallem and Ong’s respective studies. Each examines a specific national or transnational context in which subject formation takes place. I make a distinction between active and passive transnational subjects: on one hand, there are those with active, first-hand transnational experiences enabled by travel and migration, and (I will posit) Internet activity; and on the other hand, there are those who receive transnational knowledge more passively, through indirect connections abroad or nominal participation in foreign institutions. These two groups may be conceived of as holders of embodied vs. disembodied transnationalism, respectively. It is this distinction that lies at the heart of my separation of substantive and weak transnational credibility, an idea which I expand upon below.

#### *Transnationalization of the architecture profession and its institutions*

What the case of the transnational practices of the architects in this dissertation demonstrates is an emerging, more complex transnational exchange of expertise where the Western dominance of ideas of professions and cultures of expertise are challenged. Moallem writes about the unique space of immigrant entrepreneurs in established spaces of economic activities: “the entrepreneurial presence of immigrants problematizes narrow conceptions of participation in a centralized, state-regulated polity, subverting the parochialism of modern nationalism as well as the global city-state.”<sup>9</sup> The presence of these actors, which I argue the architects of this dissertation are examples of, not only problematizes the conceptions noted by Moallem, but they also complicate parochial notions of expertise, professionalism, professionalization, and the production and consumption of expert knowledge.

With the democratization or flattening of hierarchies of recognition tied to transnational accolade granting sites in the field of architecture, for example, comes a forfeiting of aspects of the control of that mode of production and consumption of knowledge that Western professional institutions previously enjoyed a monopoly over. The example of institutions of knowledge in the design fields is exhibited in one extreme in the histories of colonial planning and urbanization practice exemplified by Paul Rabinow’s study of French institutional colonialism in Morocco and Timothy Mitchell’s study of

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institutional practice exported by migrants to host communities and their respective political, professional, and cultural contexts.

<sup>8</sup> Sidney Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 2.

<sup>9</sup> Minoo Moallem, “Foreign-ness and Belonging” 2000, 200.

technopolitics in Egypt (Rabinow 1995, Mitchell 2002). In contrast, recent studies of transnationalization of professions within the sphere of the EU examine a more distributed model of agency in creating and consuming institutions of knowledge (Faulconbridge and Muzio 2011). I locate the contribution of this dissertation at the opposite end of a spectrum of globally dispersed agencies from the work of Rabinow and Mitchell. This dissertation foregrounds the role of immigrant actors in shaping the way foreign professional institutions affect their national professions.

In order to better understand the landscape of research that lies at the intersection of the above-defined perspectives of transnationalism and the design professions, I offer a review of the related literature in what follows.

In *The Global Architect: Firms, Fame and Urban Form*, Donald McNeill combines in-depth interviews with firm leaders with content analysis of professional and news media (e.g. promotional material, manifestos, reports) to map new geographies of architecture as a business practice (McNeill 2009). McNeill structures his approach around issues of power, fame, and ethics. He takes the firm as his fundamental unit of analysis, but his study is not of architecture practice per se. Rather, he examines how architecture firms operate in global circuits of business practice and real estate development. He does this by examining architects' travel, delegation of design tasks to other offices, the role of communication technologies in client meetings and in supporting global design workflow whereby design can progress around the clock by time zone. Most of his evidence is anecdotal. He draws quotations from architects and their statements in various professional and public media.

Other scholarship on the globalization of architectural production brings focus to transnational circuits of business, design, media, and development around large building or urban design projects in ways that account for forms of symbolic capital that are absent in strict economic geographic accounts of architecture practice. Examples of this scholarship include Xuefei Ren's work on China and Kris Olds' work on the Pacific Rim (Ren 2010, Olds 2001). Ren tracks ways large developers such as SOHO in China use the symbolic capital of globally recognized architecture firms such as the Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA) to attract investment and media exposure. She does this by observing developer meetings, private events such as opening galas, and by analyzing the visual and textual content of project advertisements.

Kris Olds promotes the use of a relational geography of urban development in his study on Pacific Rim development. By implicating urban change in networks shaped by the actions of individual actors, he builds on methodologies that place agency in actors and their association through networks. He builds on Manuel Castells's call for connecting personal micro-networks (of say, architecture design processes in a firm) to macro-networks of development (of say, large building projects in Vancouver and Shanghai): "The space of flows is made up of personal micro-networks that project their interests in

functional macro-networks throughout the global set of interactions in the space of flows.”<sup>10</sup>

Others trace the globalization of architectural production through methods in economic geography and scholarship on the globalization of professional services. Paul Knox and Peter Taylor conduct a statistical analysis of evidence of the globalization of architectural production by examining variables such as travel itineraries and file transfer logs (Knox and Taylor 2005, Tombesi 2001). They construct a map of the globalization of architectural production. It comes as no surprise that their cartographic exercise produces a map very similar to Saskia Sassen’s map of global cities that make up the command and control nodes of the global economy (Sassen 2001). Knox and Taylor’s approach is valuable in reconstructing a familiar geographic narrative of multinational organizations. It falls short of the nuances brought to such analyses by more critical geographic approaches that account for much-expanded geographies of globalization (consider for example Castells 2010, Ong 1999).

Taking Knox and Taylor’s geography of global practice as his starting point, James Faulconbridge, traces architects and design technologies as human and nonhuman actors in an application of Actor Network Theory (Faulconbridge 2010). Faulconbridge shows how local buzz, in the form of discussions amongst architects in local gatherings, inform global discourse in the profession, and he uses this to connect local communities of architects to global professional communities of practice.

Where Faulconbridge focuses on the global diffusion of design discourse, Paolo Tombesi focuses on the increasingly divided global geography of architecture labor (Tombesi 2001). He examines wage rates for various architecture tasks across world regions where outsourcing of design services are common with costs of running architecture offices in those locations. As an economic analysis, his successfully tracks a transformation in the operation of architecture firms. He hypothesizes an impact of the globalization of architectural production for the professional jurisdictions of architecture in places like the US: “access to non-local reservoirs of technical labour could interrupt the traditional, self-regulating mechanisms of the profession and, in particular, the natural distribution of work that characterizes closed economic systems.”<sup>11</sup>

Aside from its merit in understanding the economic logic of globalization of design practice, Tombesi’s methodology is not one sensitive to non-financial forms of capital that are strong at play in circuits in which the architecture profession operates. For such analysis of symbolic capital we have the methods used by McNeill and Ren noted above.

Xuefei Ren uses quantitative data on architectural firms’ geographic distributions and commissions to distinguish between transnational architecture’s consumption and production cities. She exposes ways that power rather than just market forces—or the

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<sup>10</sup> Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: John Wiley and Sons, 1996. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2010), 446.

<sup>11</sup> Paolo Tombesi, “A True South for Design? The New International Division of Labour in Architecture,” *Architecture Research Quarterly*, 5.2 (2001): 176.

operating logic of symbolic capital rather than financial capital—is necessary to understand globalizing cities discourses and practices in urban China. This is evidenced, for example, through the spectacle associated with projects like Herzog and de Meuron’s Birds Nest (the Beijing National Stadium) and the extensive media coverage of its elaborate opening ceremony. In the example of China, Ren explores the present moment in which cities like Beijing are transforming from purely consumption cities to house the production of transnational architecture with young, up and coming Chinese firms just barely finding a presence on the global stage (Ren 2011).

Leslie Sklair theorizes historical periods in the transnationalization of architectural consumption (Sklair 2005). Looking to colonial and postcolonial modes of development, Sklair distinguishes between historical state-led iconic architecture and today’s icon construction, which is driven less as a project of empire and more by what he defines as a transnational capitalist class (TCC). Unlike Ren, however, Sklair categorically links professional architects that are part of the TCC to a globalizing agenda that is driven by the forces of capitalist globalization.

Another strand of research that helps frame transnationalism in architecture practice comes from studies of innovative clusters of architecture firms. Clusters are defined as a strong collection of related companies located in a small geographical area, sometimes centered on a strong part of a country’s science base.<sup>12</sup> The study of innovative clusters of architecture firms is part of broader literature in economic geography and economic development studies that debate the importance of clusters in shaping innovation and producing knowledge, and the role of firms in this process (Baptista and Swann 1998). In 1990, Michael Porter launched a debate on the “competitive advantage of firms in global industries,” in *The Competitive Advantage of Nations* (Porter 1998) that Robert Kloosterman and Eva Stegmeijer extend to study innovation in architecture firms in Rotterdam (Kloosterman and Stegmeijer 2005). First, Kloosterman and Stegmeijer analyzed the numbers of pages and numbers of references dedicated to firms in international architectural magazines to determine that Rotterdam is a global capital in terms of innovative design. Next, they conducted interviews with architects employed in architecture firms in Rotterdam. They note the role of high rates of employee turnover and a large pool of highly qualified labor in the dissemination of knowledge between firms. From these interviews they point to the role of regional architecture institutions in promoting knowledge, innovation and fundraising and defining sites for face-to-face interaction and knowledge exchange.

In using only prominent international architecture magazines such as *Architectural Review*, *A+U*, and *Domus* to locate Rotterdam as a global capital of architectural innovation the authors reproduce a discourse on global architecture that is guided by specific actors and institutions and fully implicated in economies of symbolic capital (see discussions on journals in Colomina 2010, Crysler 2003, and Larson 1995). By being

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<sup>12</sup> See “Background” section in Rui Baptista and Peter Swann, “Do Firms in Clusters Innovate More?” *Research Policy*, 27.5 (1998).

critical, however, I am not ignoring the central role of these publications in producing a discourse on architecture of globalization (Crysler 2003). For these very publications are those that build up architects' images to the extent that developers such as SOHO in China will hire them for the very symbolic capital they gain through these publication (Ren 2010).

Kloosterman and Stegmeijer focus on tracking ways knowledge moves between a network of Rotterdam firms through the interactions of individual actors. By focusing on interviews and extrapolating to conclude that "the emergence of a spatial concentration of internationally renowned architectural firms" has its genesis in career trajectories that started at OMA, their methods fail to adequately account for the possibilities of the successful marketing strategies of Dutch firms, the successful business networks that Dutch firms have established with overseas developers, and other historical and institutional factors such as the success of Dutch architecture education in or near Rotterdam (Rotterdam Academy of Architecture and Urban Design, the Berlage Institute, and nearby Delft University of Technology) and the role of local professional institutions (the Netherlands Architecture Institute and the (potentially central role of the) Architecture Promotion Fund).<sup>13</sup>

Faulconbridge connects local communities of practice, similar to those defined by the clusters of firms discussed above, to global constellations of practice, which he defines as global spaces of learning and innovation (Faulconbridge 2009 and 2010). He defines constellations of practice as "configurations that connect spatially dispersed communities of practice together."<sup>14</sup> Methodologically, he traces the role of human and non-human actors using concepts in Actor Network Theory. Faulconbridge starts his account of agency with the software and other tools architects use: "practice-relevant knowledge becomes "available" only in and through interacting with the machines, through hands-on, trial-and-error supported by the wisdom collected over time by the workgroup."<sup>15</sup> He then traces this knowledge globally through employee travel, inter-firm publications, and projects.

Faulconbridge highlights the centrality of a mixed ethnographic approach that combines interviews with observation for studies of communities of practice. I categorize his ideal data set into three areas: first, perceptions of interactions, buzz, and office work; second, people's interaction with non-human actors such as machines, software, drawings, models and so; and third, the professional institutions in/through which much of the local community and global cluster interactions take place.

Despite it's claimed transcendence of different spatial scales, the combined methods that Faulconbridge employs don't offer a path to transcending an inward look at

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<sup>13</sup> Robert Kloosterman and Eva Stegmeijer, "Delirious Rotterdam: The Formation of an Innovative Cluster of Architectural Firms," in *Learning from Clusters: A Critical Assessment*, R. A. Boschma and Robert Kloosterman (eds). (Netherlands: Springer, 2005): 203.

<sup>14</sup> James R Faulconbridge, "Global Architects: Learning and Innovation Through Communities and Constellations of Practice," *Environment and Planning*, 42 (2010): see quotation from Wenger on page 2854.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

professions and firms. These methods don't give adequate attention to national cultures of practice, histories of institutions and clusters (both locally and globally), and larger social, political, and economic structures, or, milieus. The account is solely concerned with the agency end of a structure-agency spectrum. Faulconbridge's methodological approach to studying local communities and global constellations of practice fails to resolve the distinctions (discussed in the introduction) that make studying architecture practice unique.

The research cited above stands on both sides of the transnationalism-globalization interrogative divide emphasized by Michael Peter Smith. Agency is placed with large professional institutions and individual architects, and furthermore, the context of the nation-state is present in several examples. Collectively, however, scholarship on the global dimensions of architecture practice fails to call attention to the following significant positions: (a) the role of everyday architects, including migrant professions, (b) the definition, scope, and power of domestic and international institutions of the architecture profession, (c) ways architectural knowledge is globally circulated, produced, and consumed, and, importantly, (d) the ways nationally specific cultures of expert authority in the architecture profession collide in transnational movements of people, practices, and ideas. In what follows, I introduce an analytical framework that attends to these positions.

### **An Analytical Framework for Studying Transnationalism in Iran's Architecture Profession**

Iranian architects, isolated from global circuits of professional knowledge as they are, have an encounter with foreign knowledge that is rife with paradox. The rapid encounter with foreign professional media and the widespread, access-equalizing nature of weblogs, point us to the paradoxes inherent in the consumption of such transnational knowledge and how, in turn, such knowledge can be leveraged for power in the professional field at home. Moallem writes, "connoisseurs' mediation between consumptive production and productive consumption [generates] symbolic capital, which lends both credibility and visibility to the imperial project. The connoisseur knowledge links image, experience, and information through the simultaneous release and confinement of the Other in the pathways of transnational circulation."<sup>16</sup> By positioning the architects of this study as consumers of foreign knowledge and global recognition (e.g. through mention in design blogs or awards), their "mediation" of the production and consumption of that knowledge offers a strategy for generating symbolic capital in the context of their home profession. By doing so, there opens the channel of influence of foreign professional institutions in Iran's architecture field. Importantly, such institutional practices are mediated by architects as consumers and therefore the transnational institutionalization of Iran's architecture profession is an affair that is subject to the filter of ways individual architects embody their experiences of consumption of transnational knowledge.

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<sup>16</sup> Mino Moallem, "Objects of Knowledge, Subjects of Consumption," 164.

These twin issues of credibility and institutions that are affected through transnational channels frame the analytical backbone of my argument. First, Iranian architects amass transnational credibility through participation in foreign and/or transnational sites of the architecture profession. In this dissertation, I examine architects' participation on architecture websites and weblogs, transnational exchanges through email, work in foreign firms and education at foreign schools. Importantly, I look at mention of Iranian architects and their work in foreign publications and websites. These sites are a significant venue for the distribution of recognition in the design profession and they lead to the second component of my analytical framework: transnational institutions of the architecture profession, which I describe below as the sites of knowledge production, consumption, and recognition and power-making, such as professional associations and design awards, that are not identified as belonging to a specific nation-state's profession. In what follows, I offer definitions for transnational institutions and transnational credibility and explore their theoretical implications.

### *Transnational institutions*

Institutions of the architecture profession include professional associations, regulatory bodies, licensure, publications, awards and competitions, education and continuing education in the form of lectures, colloquia, and workshops. These are the sites that define the profession, educate its membership, build and disseminate knowledge, credibility, and authority. In the case of Iran, the majority of these institutions were defined by looking at models from Europe and North America. I cover the history of these institutions in Chapter 2 and analyze the present institutional ecology of Iran's architecture profession in Chapter 3. Even though these institutions have their inspiration in institutions abroad, I label them as domestic because they are formed in Iran and govern and shape Iran's architecture profession.

There is another category of institution, which I call transnational, that I define as professional institutions that are not identified as belonging to a given national profession. These transnational institutions of the architecture profession include such organizations that identify themselves as "international" such as the International Union of Architects (UIA), and, historically, the International Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM). Transnational institutions also include those organizations and projects that circulate, recognize, and bestow accolades upon architects and their projects around the world. Examples include globally circulating and internationally oriented design magazines, such as *DOMUS*; international design awards, such as the Aga Khan Award for Architecture; international design expositions and fairs, such as the Venice Biennale; and, recently, design websites, weblogs, and among them, the growing cadre of international design competition websites, such as the World Architecture Community Awards and the World Architecture Festival. In addition to being transnational institutions of the architecture profession in the global sphere, these institutions operate in some domestic spheres with more influence than other domestic institutions. In Chapter 5, I will argue that international design award granting sites operate, with significant consequences, as institutions within Iran's architecture profession.

This classification of transnational institutions raises theoretical questions about institutions and their relationships to domestic professions. Faulconbridge and Muzio explain ways professions are changing under transformations associated with globalization:

[In the professions,] globalization has created a situation in which the national actors assumed in existing neo-Weberian framings [that emphasize the nation-state context] to be powerful and the regulators of professional projects have to learn to coexist with equally powerful and effective supra-national actors, something which transforms professionals' sociologies.<sup>17</sup>

This position highlights the way a nation's professions are no longer solely defined by that nation's institutions. Unfortunately, it ignores colonization histories that show us that outside European and North American traditions it was rarely the case that a profession's institutions were defined domestically. The examples from Rabinow's Morocco and Mitchell's Egypt cited above are cases in point. Of particular relevance to my framework is Mitchell's hinting at the domestic absorption of foreign cultures of expertise in *The Rule of Experts*. Both identify direct channels through which foreign expertise is imposed or absorbed domestically through projects on the ground or by the hands of policymakers. In contrast, Faulconbridge and Muzio's view might be categorized as a more domestic location of agency where professionals in the home country transform their profession through foreign institutions.

There is an important distinction to be made between the framings offered by Rabinow and Mitchell on the one hand versus those offered by Faulconbridge and Muzio and other scholars of economic geography such as Kloosterman and Sklair on the other: the former are looking at professions outside the knowledge producing core where professional institutions are typically designed and from where they are often exported. The latter scholars are looking at the transnationalization of professions within that core and exchanges of institutional practices among the countries of (typically) the European Union.

What is absent from scholarship is an understanding of how professionals in countries outside the Euro-American core behave as agents in transforming their professions. Western scholarship of professional fields of work in the case of such significant geographies of study including China, India, and countries in South America collectively trend toward the Rabinow-Mitchell view of imposed professional change. It is likely that studies of locally driven change and domestic placements of agency are more common in theses and dissertations produced in those countries. Such is the case in Iran, where such studies do not make it outside Iran's own domestic sphere of scholarship. An understanding of transnational institutions as framed here offers a way to address this gap in scholarship on professions.

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<sup>17</sup> Faulconbridge and Muzio, "Professions in a Globalizing World: Towards a Transnational Sociology of the Professions," *International Sociology* 27:136 (2011): 137.

### *Transnational credibility*

Scholars of immigration and transnationalization uncover an expanded geography of the mobility of financial, symbolic, and cultural capital (e.g. Ong 1999, Portes 1999). For example, in her study on transnationalism, Aihwa Ong's definition of "flexible citizenship" focuses on cultural logics that induce people to take advantage of changing political and economic conditions by means of travel and displacement. Citing Bourdieusian conceptions of capital, Ong argues that in the case of transnational professionals, financial capital is exchanged for other forms of capital, such as symbolic and social (Ong 1999).

The conception of transnational credibility I develop here introduces a new tool in understanding the motives and agency of migrant professionals, the individuals they are connected to in the sending country, and others who capture transnational credibility without migration or direct foreign connections. This concept provides an analytical framework that brings attention to a missing dimension in studies of transnational profession and the globalization of architecture, namely the nuanced ways credibility is circulated around the world through migration or other non-migratory means.

There is a global mediation of credibility that is ineffective or absent in the case of global design recognition. The challenge of mediating transnational knowledge is captured by Moallem, who explores: "the significance of knowledge production for the transnational circulation of commodities and also the importance of the politics of mediation in the global marketplace."<sup>18</sup> Indeed there is a connection between transnational knowledge, acknowledgement and power that architects capitalize on. I connect acknowledgement and power to the discourse of knowledge and power. The word "acknowledge" itself is rooted in the obsolete verb form of "knowledge." And it is in this sense that acknowledgement in global design recognition sites bestow power via credibility to architects in Iran. Some, in turn, capitalize on the decontextual nature of this acknowledgement in their domestic professional context to mobilize weak credibility as if it were substantive. And thus the peril that structures of authority and power find themselves in Iran's architecture profession.

I posit that there is another important aspect of the dynamic of transnational value and that is the confusion between substantive transnational experience and non-substantive, or weak transnational experiences. The professional ecology of peers, patrons, and clients of Iran's architecture field does not sufficiently distinguish between architects who go to the best schools abroad and those who win a loosely-sanctioned international award—both accomplishments are often read as line items on a resume that glow with the promise of a vague notion of transnationalism.

A root of the crises experienced by Iran's architecture profession can be found in the ideas of a "scopic economy" articulated by Moallem as, "the relation of non-value to use value and exchange value in a "scopic economy" that subsidizes the flow of

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<sup>18</sup> Mino Moallem, "Objects of Knowledge, Subjects of Consumption," 159.

representations for the history of material objects by producing audiences/spectators with a scattered and disconnected sense of attention.”<sup>19</sup> There is an aspect of this economy that pertains to the object of architecture and its representation as images circulated on the Web and in magazines. But there is another aspect of this economy that connects to the consumption of representations of acknowledgement. As I will discuss in Chapter 5, the capturing of such foreign credibility by architects and the bestowing of it by transnational organizations reveals problems in ways new media grants authority and recognition to architects globally.<sup>20</sup> The transnational context of decontextualized knowledge combined with the idea of a scopic economy produce a potent admixture that is acutely applicable to the architecture profession with its connection to design, circulating images, and recognition. The tracking of these connection is the subject of my research methodology, which I turn to next

## **Methodology**

Iranian architects are implicated in circuits of knowledge consumption and credibility generation through mechanisms such as travel, migration, and participation in globally circulating print media and web content. To track networks of influence and agency in Iran’s profession requires connecting several types of actors and actants (or human and non-human agents).<sup>21</sup> Jane Bennett articulates the useful concept of the grades of agency of assemblages of human actors and non-human actants (Bennett 2010). This Actor Network Theory (ANT) framing of agency is fundamental to how I track networks, or assemblages, of (a) Iranian architects in Iran, their peers abroad, and, particularly, those that travel back and forth in and out of Iran; (b) information such as emails between globally connected actors, resumes, and personal and firm websites with their listings of credentials; (c) professional print publications, weblogs, and websites; among these (d) international design award sites; and (e) archives of institutions such as bulletins of professional associations, trade magazines, and memoranda of understanding among professional groups and between profession and state. In this section, I attend to methodological debates that inform my investigative approach and subsequently connect them to the development of my fieldwork plan.

### *Methodological framework*

Locating agency is largely a product of the investigator’s method. My exploration of institutional archives emphasizes the role of professional organizations with respect to the role of the state in shaping the architecture profession, its members’ rights, and the qualities by which they are measured. My analysis of the nature, dates, frequency, and content of the appearance of contemporary Iranian architects and their projects in

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<sup>19</sup> See Mino Moallem’s “Nation on the Move” project:

<http://vectors.usc.edu/projects/index.php?project=83&thread=AuthorsStatement> accessed November 3, 2013.

<sup>20</sup> New media here connotes ubiquitous, interactive, and unregulated web content.

<sup>21</sup> The assemblage of actors and actants is espoused by proponents of Actor Network Theory. I cite Bruno Latour and Jane Bennett among others in what follows.

international media and websites sheds light on the emergence of Iranian architecture beyond its borders, particularly when compared to contemporaneous international political and economic policy. Interviews with Iranian architects in sending and receiving countries highlights the nuances of transnational opportunities and barriers they encounter. While each of these dimensions provide lucid accounts of a profession undergoing radical transformation, alone neither addresses the cultural tendencies, transnational channels, and structural dilemmas that afflict professions and the authority of experts in the case of Iranian architecture or of professionals in general.

Actor Network Theory provides inroads to connecting these disparate arenas of investigation. Fundamentally, Bruno Latour argues against the false division between social and physical “actants” in social studies (Latour 2005). He argues against letting the boundary between matter and society divide the natural and social sciences.<sup>22</sup> This position has been popular in architecture research for the fodder it provides and justifies to scholars intent on emphasizing the agency of architecture and space. In this dissertation, by contrast, I purposefully refrain from an analysis of the object of architecture in order to focus attention on the institutional and social dynamics of transnationalism. Where I do incorporate the ethos of ANT into my methodology is through the recognition of the role of things like email and weblogs—not for their content but as technologies with significant agency. I do study their content, and I will discuss that shortly. Importantly though, inherent in my method is a belief in the power things like the electronic format of the PDF (Portable Document Format): this format, together with the security of Gmail, is part of what enables an Iranian graduate student in California to send a course syllabus that they are a Teaching Assistant for, to a colleague teaching at a school in an Iranian province. Of similar interest to this analysis is that in contrast to websites, weblogs grant the ability to disseminate micro-content rapidly and by anyone with very basic web skills. In sum, the physical-technological nature of these actants bear a significant role in the transnational transformation that is the subject of this dissertation.

Transnational ethnographic methods of tracking transnational actors and their actions as well as content analysis of transnational media are at the heart of my approach. Scholars engaged in transnationalism from the interrogative position explained above (in the section titled Framing Transnationalism), have increasingly brought attention to ethnographic accounts of transnational migration. Smith and Favell bring attention to high-skilled migrants (Smith and Favell 2006). They analyze skilled migrants in terms of the still plentiful challenges and barriers this population experiences in their migrant and professional life stories:

[macro-level analyses] should always be carried through meso-level institutional mediation to micro-level insights into an appreciation of the very real consequences of these structures on the lives of actual individuals and groups.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Bruno Latour, “When Things Strike Back: a possible contribution of science studies to the social sciences” *British Journal of Sociology*, 51:1, 2000, 108.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Peter Smith and Adrean Favell, *The Human Face of Global Mobility: International Highly Skilled Migration in Europe, North America and the Asia-Pacific*, (Transaction Publishers, 2006), 6.

They go on to support the role of qualitative research to,

show how these trends express themselves in the real life experiences of agents, both individual and collective, as mediated by context, contingency and the unpredictability of life stories and circumstances.<sup>24</sup>

My approach begins on the grounds that Smith and Favell lay out. But I combine an analysis of institutional transnationalism to show ways transnational actors are influential in structural transformations. In this way, I extend their methodological focus by combining it with an analysis of professional institutions within Iran and those that operate transnationally.

In my analysis of magazine, bulletin and Web content, I look for ways interaction with foreign ideas, people, and projects are framed by contributors. I build on the method of professional discourse analysis used by Greig Crysler in his investigation of design journals (Crysler 2003). I also examine the direct ways contributors frame the foreign through their text, and I consider how transnational content is located in the context of the medium it is presented in, including its visual presentation. I attend to the choice of content and the logistics of accessing that content. Such logistics are significant considering the various levels of censorship and difficulty of access to foreign material from within Iran. My concern is with access to and the media through which the transnational is presented.

My ethnographic approach is geared toward understanding migrations of people and ideas, the global flow of authority and credibility, and architects' institutional agency. I adopt methods of multi-sited and global ethnography to account for the flexible itinerary of a contemporary anthropology that traces cultural flows and varied forms of agency transnationally (Fourcade 2009, Ong and Collier 2005, Marcus 1995, Burawoy 2000). My focus on ethnographic evidence here substantiates the role of individual actors in understanding what I will argue is a complex, subtly operating, yet significantly influential aspect of the globalization of Iran's architecture professions and, I argue, the profession globally. I pair this with research on clusters of innovation of architecture firms that rely on tracking the agency of organizational newsletters, drawings, and design technologies in creating the professional chatter (buzz) that form and strengthen communities of practice (Faulconbridge 2010).

In my exposition and presentation of evidence, I triangulate data through interviews, media content, and analysis of institutional archives. I buttress significant evidence claims throughout the text or in the footnotes with data from additional types of sources. I do, however, foreground the voice of informants where I intend to highlight their perceptions. As an aspiring ethnographer, I align myself with expositional methods of writers that emphasize their participants' voices for the richness that those words offer. Paul Willis's ethnography of working class kids is an important inspiration (Willis 1977). A goal of my methodological project is bringing this level of ethnographic attention to design professionals and institutional actors, who are typically overshadowed by their work.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

Within the literature on the architecture profession, I am steering away from the above cited approaches used by Cuff, Blau, and Larson, which despite studying architecture firms or the architecture profession, do not build on architects' stories (Cuff 1992, Blau 1987, Larson 1995). This method of exposition is the basis of the account of the transnational movements of architects and ideas in Chapter 4.

### *Fieldwork*

Conceptions of the globalization of architecture depict it as a set of practices and ideas driven in large part by a core and “dealt with” by peripheral communities of professions in developing countries. The transnational perspective advanced in this dissertation shows ways bottom-up practices engaged by actors scattered around the world complicate the dominance of that core. Toward this end, in my fieldwork, I gathered evidence from documents in less-accessed spaces of global knowledge exchange: weblogs, design competition websites, communications between architects in Iran and communities of expatriates in North America and Europe, and magazines. I pair this archival research with in-depth and open-ended interviews with architects in Iran and in cities they migrate to in a multi-cited ethnography in order to uncover nuanced transnational practices. As such, my fieldwork included: (a) in-depth, open-ended interviews with architects in Iran and in cities they migrate to; (b) archival research on the history of Iran's profession in its publications, bulletins and bylaws of professional associations; and (c) research on current media, publications, websites, and weblogs as sites of the profession's transformation.

*Interviews and Observations.* I conducted in-depth, open-ended interviews with about seventy individuals. I also conducted about five focus group interviews. Approximately thirty of my interviews took place in Iran—mostly in Tehran. About twenty interviews happened in Toronto, ten in New York and Boston, two in Paris, and others happened in person or by Skype with participants in Los Angeles, Texas, and London. The interviews generally were between one and two hours long; some lasted over three hours. In each case I prepared an interview guide that covered broad discussion themes. In the majority of my interviews I strived not to lead the informant in a specific direction. Following the ethos of qualitative ethnographic research, I wanted participants to describe what they deemed significant about the recent changes to Iran's architecture profession. I gathered information until I started hearing the same story repeat itself. That was my cue to stop gathering interview data on a given theme.

I started interviewing practicing architects in their thirties. These were the generation of architects I was told about in my exploratory fieldwork as movers and shakers of the profession. They were an important generation of architects trained after the revolution and the Iran-Iraq war. Most were in architecture school in the mid 1990s. These are also the generation that began a wave of emigration from Iran in the early 2000s during the era of international dialogue of then Iranian President Mohammad Khatami. Snowball sampling from this core group of participants connected me to a diverse set of architects in Iran as well as architects across North American and Europe. There was a burgeoning cadre of younger architects in their twenties graduating from proliferating architecture schools in

Iran. They were connected to the Internet and their predecessors had broken the immigration barrier for them. There was also an important caste of older architects, trained before the revolution that were active in the profession's institutions and that engaged in power plays with the architects in their thirties. I extended my interviews to include, on one hand, architecture students and those just entering the profession, and on the other hand, the generation of pre-revolutionary architects. This increased my field from a core of architects to include those in their twenties and those over sixty. Because of the dormancy of architecture practice and education in Iran in the 1980s, I didn't have many architects in their late-forties or fifties in my sample.

A portion of my ethnography encompassed participant observation at formal and underground meetings, workshops, and offices of architects. In sum, I conducted about ten such observations. All of these observations were in Iran.

*Archives.* It was the older generation of architects that led me to the pre-revolutionary history of the profession. Many of the transnational practices I was looking at in the field today had some precedent under the Shah's Westernization schemes from the 1940s through the 1970s. Importantly, many of the current transnational practices, of course did not have precedent—an insight I gained only after my archival research.

I looked to professional associations, professional magazines, and the universities as the three primary institutions of Iranian architecture practice before 1995. Histories of these institutions are recorded in bylaws and bulletins of the two associations (The Society of Iranian Diplomat Architects, SIDA, and the Association of Iranian Architects, the AIA) that led the profession from 1945. The magazines provided a very significant meta-narrative of development and transformation of the profession. In reviewing these sources, I was attentive to things like the news of the profession; news of foreign travel and visitors to Iran; details of conferences in Iran and abroad; textual and visual content that spoke to state and private patronage of the profession; translations of foreign articles or other coverage of architecture globally; and membership rosters and educational histories of members in those rosters (many were trained in Europe from the 1920s and later in North America as well, from the late 1960s).

I was fascinated to discover a revolution-era magazine, *Jame-eh va Memari* (Architecture and Society), which denounced the architecture profession and its members as agents of an imperialist regime. This magazine, as one of five that I review in depth (and analyze in Chapters 2 and 3) highlighted the political role of professional architecture magazines in Iran. Post-revolutionary publications were not as overt in their political statements, but their stories are equally telling.

*Current media.* As a counterpart to my archival research, I studied (a) current architecture magazines in Iran as well as coverage of Iran's profession in foreign publications; (b) the content of architecture websites, as well as (c) the websites of design festivals and awards. Magazines in Iran have had tremendous purchase on shaping the profession in the past decade. I reviewed the content, articles, as well as coverage of awards, projects, profiles of architects, and news of about thirty issues of magazines that have been published from the

mid-1990s but primarily from 2002 to today. I also tracked the editorial process, cost of publishing, circulation, and politics of their editorial boards. Foreign magazines and websites are significant as institutions that affect the careers of Iranian architects in Iran and abroad as well as institutional structures of Iran's architecture profession. In between the lines, by looking at contributors and post comments, these sites help me map the transnational network of actors that I'm studying. Together, the interviews, archives, and current sites constitute an assemblage of actors scattered transnationally, the tracking of which I consider a primary project of this dissertation.

It is important to note that I am not focusing on the *work* of the professionals I am examining—that is, their designs, buildings or urban plans. The architecture itself narrates an important story about the transformation of Iran's profession. It also highlights systems of patronage, work, and building cultures that all coalesce to develop the product of architecture. A focus on architecture also considers an important aspect of architects' agency that I put aside to focus instead on individuals' stories and the institutions they interact with. My approach offers a critical take on architecture practice that is largely absent from discourse that is encumbered by focusing on architects' work.

## **Dissertation Argument and Outline**

The evidence I gathered through the above outlined fieldwork plan, supports the following empirically driven claims: (A) international design award websites and other globally circulating sites that bestow recognition and acknowledgement behave as *transnational institutions* in the context of Iran's architecture profession; (B) these sites bestow *transnational credibility* to Iranian architects; (C) substantive and weak forms of this credibility are rarely distinguished as such by the groups that architects interact with: clients, developers, the architecture community at large, and other sibling professional fields (engineers, planners, even artists); and therefore (D) the result is a destabilization of structures of authority in the architecture profession in Iran over the past decade as Iranian architects found ways to permeate their national isolation through travel and migration as well as the Internet, and other increasingly globally produced, circulated and consumed media.

In theoretical terms, these claims translate to the following hypotheses: foreign and globally circulated knowledge and authority are more easily circulated in a decontextualized state through such channels as global media and loosely administered sites of design recognition. This decontextualized knowledge and authority are consumed by populations in different national-professional-cultural contexts where much is lost between the transnational consumption and domestic dissemination of credibility that is built on decontextualized knowledge and authority. A result is the destabilization of domestic structures of professional authority by transnational authority.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> The evidence provided in this dissertation offers a provocation about the nature of professional authority beyond the context of Iran (an investigation of which is beyond the scope of this work). This destabilization

This argument addresses a problem with the current trend of discussions and literature on transnationalism in professional institutions that is preeminent in economic geography scholarship that offer quantitative studies of the movement of professionals and their ideas transnationally, particularly within the EU (Faulconbridge and Muzio 2011, Knox and Taylor 2005, Tombesi 2001). The wealth of research on transnationalism in professions and of professional institutions based on quantitative methods and in this geographic context obscures the significance of very different national cultures of expert authority that are substantial when examining professional fields of work globally. This dissertation recalls the ethos of investigations of colonial development, such as those offered by Mitchell and Rabinow, whose lessons appear lost in contemporary economic geography (Mitchell 2002, Rabinow 1995).

The argument of the dissertation is organized in three parts. First, I analyze how professional institutions function in the context of Iran and under the influence of transnational channels in Chapters 2 and 3. Second, I investigate ways the movements of transnational actors and actants shape credibility in Chapters 3 and 4. Third, I connect evidence of transnational institutions and transnational credibility to substantiate the transformation of Iran's architecture profession and its crisis of authority (see Figure 1).

In Chapter 2, "Instituting Architecture: a history of transnationalism in Iran's architecture profession, 1945-1995," I provide a history of the Iranian architecture profession from the founding of its first professional society in 1945 through its persecution during the 1979 Revolution and up to its resurgence in the early 1990s. I build on contextual literature on transnational practices in the environmental design fields in the twentieth century as well as literature on the history of modern Iranian architecture. In this chapter, I set a historical foundation for studying the interaction of architects and their professional institutions. I also establish ways architects mobilize these institutions to exercise power vis-à-vis the state and society.

Archives of professional associations and their publications are examined to show ways the profession was founded on transnational networks of knowledge exchange and through individual and institutional practices. Through this history, I argue that Iranian architects mobilized institutions for professional and political power. In attending to the agency of institutional actors, this history develops analytical and methodological approaches to examining modern architecture practice; it lays bare the tenuous distinction

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of national professional authority is taking place violently in the context of Iran. I posit that the problem is more subtly operating as a global one. Rather than a claim in this dissertation, this statement is a provocation that the research in this dissertation enables us to consider seriously. The dissertation shows the effects on structures of authority of nation-states that are separated from the cultures of expert authority of those countries that are driving the global dissemination of design recognition. Iran and countries in many regions of Asia are examples. The dissertation also shows, however, ways transnational credibility can be decontextualized and recontextualized in problematic ways and how transnational institutions permeate and disrupt domestic institutional structures. That a large Canadian architecture firm competes with a small Iranian architect for a World Architecture Festival design award, and gets ranked behind that person, then offers that Iranian architect a high position at their firm is an indication that even the Canadian profession is susceptible to the paradoxes of transnational credibility.

between bottom-up practices and top-down policies that have shaped Iran’s architecture profession. The transnationalism chronicled in this chapter is predominantly institutional. Evidence for individuals’ transnational experiences are limited here to documentation in society bulletins and magazines.

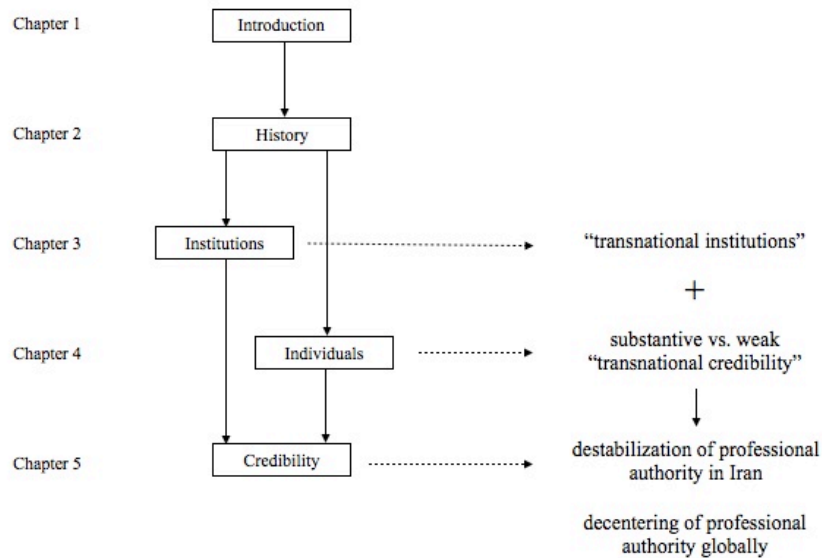


Figure 1. Diagram of dissertation chapters and core arguments.

In Chapter 3, “Institutional Transnationalization and the Iranian Architecture Profession’s Transformation, 1995-2010,” I examine transnationalism in specific institutions of Iran’s architecture profession. I build on sociology of professions and economic geography to analyze the growing field of domestic and transnational institutions in Iran’s architecture profession: proliferating magazines, increasing design award sites, professional associations, and formal and informal meetings, workshops, and lecture series. Here I introduce the idea of transnational institutions.

First, I examine the profession’s post-Iraq war contact with foreign architects in its magazines and through its award project. In 2002, one magazine started an annual design award that cast recognition more democratically across the profession. By introducing foreign jurors in 2005, they placed Iranian architecture under the scrutiny of global standards of practice for the first time since the revolution. Second, I examine how that contact was expanded with state-sponsored architecture competitions requiring entrants to partner with foreign collaborators. Joint ventures have since been largely unsuccessful because of the difficulty of operating in Iran’s building industry, its unwelcoming political climate, and economic sanctions. But, despite their failures, attempts at joint ventures have affected the Iranian profession. Next, I show how in 2002 a quasi-governmental group that acts as an incubator for young architecture firms, the Physical Development Research

Center (PDRC), began sponsoring three-day workshops with foreign architects in Iran that effectively provided a generation of architects with exposure to global architecture ideas and projects.

In Chapter 4, “Looking and Moving Abroad: The rise and fall of transnational credibility in Iran’s architecture profession, 2000-2012,” I track about thirty Iranian architects who migrated permanently or temporarily to North America (and Europe in a few cases). This chapter works to document what Ong calls the “vibrant center of globalization” that is penetrated by various practices by agents beyond the West.<sup>26</sup> I study evidence of the movement of architects and their ideas between Iran and the West. I focus on transnational movements involving individuals instead of those conducted or sanctioned by institutions (which are the subject of Chapter 3). I use ethnographic data to show the significance of informal, individual transnational practices in transforming the Iranian architecture profession. These practices make up a part of the story of the global transformation of the architecture profession that is not told in studies of the globalization of architecture. I build again on economic geography as well as migration studies literature. I categorize a sequence of five “transnational movements”: (1) the outward gaze of architects in Iran to North America and Europe; (2) the travel or migration of those architects abroad; (3) the return of emigrant Iranian architects to Iran; (4) the gaze of foreign architects into Iran; and (5) the travel of foreign architects to Iran. In this analysis I introduce the idea of transnational credibility.

The first movement is the Iranian architects’ gaze abroad. In the context of post-revolutionary Iran, this gaze was not trivial. Broadcast media was tightly controlled by the state and those foreign books and periodicals that made their way to Iran’s borders were censored. The second movement is the travel or emigration of architects from Iran, primarily to cities in North America and Europe. This movement became easier as Iran’s isolationist foreign policies started to thaw in the late 1990s and the international community of visa grantors increasingly allowed Iranian professionals in. The third movement is a return migration to Iran. The motivations for return were described to me as variously as a sense of duty or the opportunity for professional advancement in Iran with foreign experience on a resume. The fourth movement is the gaze of foreign architects to Iran. I use foreign magazine issues on Iran and look at the networks of Iranian and non-Iranian individuals that collectively bring that gaze to Iran. The fifth movement is the travel of foreign architects to Iran. In this part, I include both foreign architects of Iranian descent and non-Iranians. (The transformative effects the latter two movements have had on the Iranian profession at the institutional level are discussed at length in Chapter 3.)

Chapter 5, “Iranian Architects in the Shifting Geography of Architecture Acknowledgement, 2002-2012,” is a synthesis of ideas about transnational institutions and transnational movements of individuals covered in Chapters 3 and 4 in an analysis of ways new international sites of acknowledgement in the profession (e.g. design award websites

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<sup>26</sup> See Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: the cultural logics of transnationality* (Duke University Press, 1999), 244

or design weblogs) affect Iran's profession. I use this chapter to argue that these sites destabilize professional hierarchy in Iran by indiscriminately distributing weak transnational credibility widely among a growing generation of young professionals. This chapter is a study of international sites of acknowledgement and accolades bestowal and their effects on Iran's profession.

In the concluding chapter, "The Transnationalization of Architecture and its Discontents," I connect the histories, analyses, and interviews of Chapters 2 through 5 to extrapolate lessons from the case of the Iranian architecture profession to the architecture profession globally. First, I argue that the case of architecture in Iran shows how architects use their institutions to establish authority beyond the profession to engage politics of the state. Second, I lay bare ways substantive engagement in architecture is filtered out in the transnational dissemination and reception of ideas. Third, I situate the contributions of this research among scholarship on professions and the globalization of architecture practice. This chapter shows that in order to better understand the globalization of architecture, we need to bring attention to ways the profession and its institutions are transforming through transnational practices. Individuals have significant agency in institutional change and they have tremendous agency in mobilizing transnational credibility in their home professions and globally.

## Chapter 2. Instituting Architecture: A History of Transnationalism in Iran's Architecture Profession, 1945-1995

*Architecte* is purely a technological and aesthetic publication, which cannot and does not wish to have the slightest involvement with the world of politics – *Architecte*, September 1946

Our goal, in service to our homeland, is to recognize the art and architecture of its soil and to strive, with enthusiasm, to become globalized – *Honar va Memari*, spring 1969

In the years of the dictatorship, without doubt there was no way to publish a “professional” magazine that worked against the loyalties of that regime and for the benefit of the masses. It was the sad period of disgraceful magazines like *Honar va Memari*, which were actively supported by corrupt thieves and traitors – *Jame'eh va Memari*, March 1981

The profession [of architecture] that comprises the most practitioners and uses the largest portion of the country's wealth... still has no overarching professional institution – *Abadi*, spring 1992

These statements were issued in four magazines that defined Iran's architecture profession for half a century, from the founding of its first professional society in 1945, through the post-Islamic revolution and post-Iraq War recovery of the profession in 1995. The stories of these statements, the publications they appeared in, and their editors and contributors comprise a history of the Iranian architecture profession that brings attention to the complexities of state-profession and profession-society dynamics and highlights the nuanced ways transnational practices shape those dynamics.

Building on the previous chapter's framings of the nexus of Iran's profession-state-society context and the transnationalization of the profession and its institutions, this chapter offers a probing look into the history of the profession's institutions. From the founding of Iranian architecture's first professional society in 1945, the story of these institutions is a fascinating one. One among these institutions—magazines—stands out as preeminently influential in shaping the profession. In magazines, the founding of societies, news of Iranian and foreign architects' travels into and outside of Iran, announcements for

competitions, deliberations of juries, and cries to the state for institutional independence are all vocalized—often dramatically.



Figure 2. Professional publications as sites of institutional change. Headlines on the cover of the special issue of *Jame'eh va Memari* denounce the institutions of the architecture profession from before the Islamic Revolution of 1979 as instruments of Western imperialism and vehicles of the monarchy's anti-populist practices.<sup>27</sup> (Source: National Library and Archives of the Islamic Republic of Iran)

<sup>27</sup> The figures in the dissertation serves one of two purposes: some are visual illustrations of archival material; others are paired with content analysis in the text. Where appropriate, analysis is provided in the text where the image is cross-referenced.

The epigraph statements from *Architecte*, *Honar va Memari*, *Jame'eh va Memari*, and *Abadi* mark milestones in the rich and tumultuous relationship between the profession and the socio-political history of Iran from the post-WWII era through the post-Iran-Iraq War era. The inauguration of Iran's modern architecture profession is marked by the founding of the Society of Iranian Diplomat Architects (SIDA) on January 30 1945. The membership of SIDA comprised Iranians trained in architecture schools in Europe, primary among them, the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. By the 1960s and 1970s the profession evolved through exposure to foreign architecture firms working in Iran. Iran's economic prosperity of the 1970s fueled the rise of larger architecture firms and the rise of the Association of Iranian Architects (AIA). The 1979 Islamic Revolution saw the denouncement of these architecture consultancies as instruments of Western imperialism. The era after the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war of reconstruction discovered wealth in real estate development and saw an invigoration of professional activity.

The milestones marking these transformations in the profession are not only chronicled in Iran's architecture magazines, they are instigated by the magazines themselves. Architecture magazines helped institute the modern profession in Iran. Their content and editorial context is used here to narrate a history of the profession that inherently challenges modernization narratives of Iranian architecture. And by building on the framings of transnationalism presented in Chapter 1, this history of institutions uses the nuances of individual agency in institutional change to complicate accounts of Iranian modernization and the revolution, that are built on Weber, Durkheim, and Scott, which dominate the literature on Iran.

### ***Architecte* and the Institution of Iranian Expertise**

The big problem is that in our country everybody sees themselves as architects and they're ignorant of the fact that for every regular daily task an *expert* needs to be consulted. For example, for clothes we consult a tailor, for shoes a shoemaker, and for ailment from disease, a doctor... but for their residential buildings, people never seek the professional advice of an architect... and thus fate themselves and their progeny to a crippling home... and that's why this country's buildings are soulless and its streets are ugly.<sup>28</sup>

From the 1940s, Iranian architects strove to establish themselves as modern experts and their trade as a modern profession. An occupation of architecture distinct from the traditional *me'mar* or master builder was not new to Iran. Evidence of modern architecture practice exists as early as Karim Taherzadeh Behzad's architecture firm founded in 1928 or even the hiring of European building companies in late Qajar Iran.<sup>29</sup> Some historians of modern Iranian architecture place its origins in the public and private buildings constructed

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<sup>28</sup> Vartan Avanesian, "Architecture's Problems in Iran," *Architecte*, no. 3 (1947): 90. Emphasis added.

<sup>29</sup> See Amir Bani Mas'ud, *Iranian Contemporary Architecture*, 2nd ed. (Tehran, 2011), 229-233; and Mina Merefat, *Building to Power: Architecture of Tehran 1921-1941*, (PhD diss., Cambridge: MA, MIT, 1988).

in the 1920s and 1930s in the first Pahlavi period, the work of European building firms in Iran, or with institutional patrons such as the Municipality of Tehran and the Society for National Heritage.<sup>30</sup>

Architecture is distinct from other fields that have become professionalized: on the one hand, architecture commands under its scope the rhetoric of semiotics and the techniques of the fine arts (Kostof 1977); on the other hand, architects have operated as engineers and builders for much of history (Saint 2007). This dual-nature of architecture was present in Iran historically (see for example, Bani Mas'ud 2011, as a comprehensive representative of the Iranian school of architecture historiography). The popular discourse around the aesthetics of sustainability in vernacular architecture in the region speaks to the historically ingrained associations of architecture as art and science. As such, this history of the early formation of the architecture profession in Iran uniquely responds to cultural sensibilities as well as narratives of technological modernity.

Architecture involves many trades. And the process of architecture is preceded by generations of master and apprentice builders. So for SIDA, refining the term “architect” and popularizing the profession of “architecture” was a complicated imperative. Through *Architecte*, Iranian architects introduced a modern definition for a profession apart from its traditional predecessors:

The meaning of the word architect is broader than what can be obtained from words like me'mar and so on, this word has an international quality and in this sense, its use is fitting.<sup>31</sup>

The modernist ethos of *Architecte*'s technological and aesthetic modernizing mission was reflected in its format and content. Its clean and minimalist visual style set it apart from other journals in circulation (see Figure 3). *Architecte*'s content typically included letters from the editor and SIDA affiliates, international news, spotlights on Iranian architects, their projects, and news of the society. Contributors to *Architecte* used its pages to place professional architects in modern Iranian society. They did this first by removing non-architects from the building scene:

In general, we aim to enforce the removal of non-experts from all the country's sensitive civil and development work and put in their place the educated and enthusiastic youth trained as experts in these fields;<sup>32</sup>

and then by taking their place and demanding recognition:

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<sup>30</sup> See respectively, Marefat, *Building to Power*; Bani Mas'ud, *Iranian Contemporary Architecture*; and Talinn Grigor, “Recultivating ‘Good Taste’: the Early Pahlavi Modernists and their Society for National Heritage,” *Iranian Studies*, vol. 37, no. 1 (2004). See also Talinn Grigor, *Building Iran: Modernism, Architecture, and National Heritage Under the Pahlavi Monarchs* (New York, 2009).

<sup>31</sup> Iraj Moshiri, “Our Objective,” *Architecte*, no. 1 (1946): 2.

<sup>32</sup> Moshiri, “Our Objective,” 2.

The person of the architect must be fully protected and have the support of the public. An architect and architecture must be given attention by the masses and recognized as the body of educated experts that they are.<sup>33</sup>

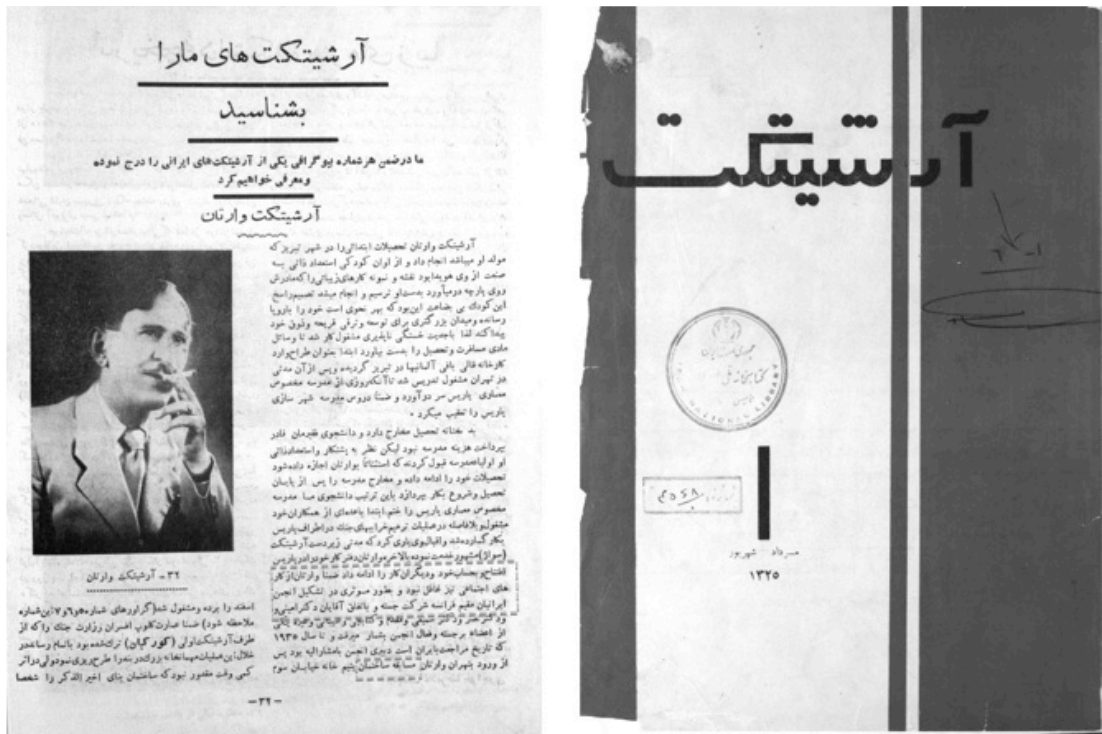


Figure 3. Constructing the image of the architect. *Left*, this article, titled “Get to know your architects” in the first issue of *Architecte* is the first in a series in which the image, work, and culture of the architect is constructed in Iran. *Right*, cover of the first issue of *Architecte*. Even through its title, *Architecte* strove to define architecture as a modern profession apart from the traditional occupations of builders. (Source: National Library and Archives of the Islamic Republic of Iran)

*Architecte* arrived in the wake of twenty years of residential and monumental civic buildings designed by non-Iranian architects, archaeologists, and builders as well as Iranian architects trained abroad. Foreigners such as Andre Godard, Maxime Siroux, and Nikolai Marcoff are credited with such notable buildings as, respectively, the Archeological Museum of Iran (ca. 1936), the medical school complex of the University of Tehran (ca. 1937), and Alborz College (ca. 1946) among others commonly cited in histories of modern Iranian architecture.<sup>34</sup> These same designers founded the independent academy for architecture that began operating in the fall of 1938, which became the

<sup>33</sup> Avanesian, “Architecture’s Problems in Iran,” 90.

<sup>34</sup> See for example Marefat, *Building to Power*; Bani Mas’ud, *Iranian Contemporary Architecture*; and Grigor, *Building Iran*.

Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Tehran (UT) in the 1940-41 academic year.<sup>35</sup> They laid the groundwork for a new mode of architecture teaching and practice in Iran. But none of them were Iranian.

Later, Vartan Avanesian, Mohsen Foroughi, and Keyghobad Zafar, as examples, followed in their footsteps. These architects partnered with their foreign counterparts on buildings such as Nikolai Marcoff, Mohsen Foroughi, and Keyghobad Zafar's Bank-e Melli-e Iran (ca. 1928) and Roland Dubrulle and Mohsen Foroughi's Treasury Building (ca. 1939). Ultimately, these Iranian architects were the ones who founded SIDA. And in 1946, when the first issue of *Architecte* was published, mention of Godard, Siroux, and Marcoff was limited to their role in founding UT or in historical reference to their buildings. They were not members of SIDA. They represented a slightly older generation that was in its occupational prime during Reza Shah's tenure. The Iranian architects founded a homegrown institution—but built it on transnational grounds.<sup>36</sup>

In the first issue of *Architecte*, thirty-seven “Architect” members were listed with fourteen honorary members. The latter were politicians or members of the court. The founding members include Keyghobad Zafar, Mohsen Foroughi, Ali Sadegh, Manoochehr Khorsand, Vartan Avanesian, Abass Azhdari, Naser Badi', and Iraj Moshiri.<sup>37</sup> The membership roster of SIDA reveals the transnational foundations of the profession as well as its connection to the royal court. The founding fathers of the modern profession had active transnational life histories (through travel and education abroad); and in the first Pahlavi period, the court and state organizations enjoyed near-exclusive patronage of buildings designed by foreign and foreign-trained Iranian architects.

*Instituting the profession.* Theories on professions and the process of professionalization abound. Some focus on the process by which occupational groups institute esoteric bodies of knowledge, professional societies, licensure, and codes of ethics. Other theories focus on groups' struggles to maintain exclusive jurisdiction over a type of work. A third set focuses on the historical context of professions in shaping their work and institutions.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Gholamreza Khajouyee, “History of the Faculty of Fine Arts,” *Architecte*, no. 1 (1946): 31; University Council, “Founding the Faculty of Fine Arts,” *Amuzesh va Parvareh*, no. 6-7 (1940): 95.

<sup>36</sup> Recall that transnationalism is a contemporary analytical frame that I am projecting on this historical analysis. In Chapter 1, I note that this projection helps illuminate the way individuals shaped the profession through institutional practices.

<sup>37</sup> “News of the Society,” *Architecte*, no. 1 (1946): 39.

<sup>38</sup> The first set of theories emerged in the early and mid-twentieth century in the UK and the US. See for example, A. P. Carr-Saunders and P. A. Wilson, *The Professions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933); or G. Millerson, *The Qualifying Associations* (London: Routledge, 1964). The second set was established by Andrew Abbott in *System of Professions: An Essay on the Division of Expert Labor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). The third set came about in the 1970s and 1980s. See for example Magali Sarfatti Larson, *Behind the Postmodern Façade: Architectural Change in Late Twentieth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

Finally, current sociology brings attention to country-specific meanings of professions—in other terms, hermeneutically in a comparative geographic frame.<sup>39</sup>

Classical attributes of a profession stem from studies based in Europe and North America—where Iranian architects found their models. These attributes include: establishing a professional body, training in esoteric knowledge, developing abstract or theoretical knowledge, licensure, and establishing codes of professional ethics. The founding of SIDA, its concern with defining the title “architect,” and its efforts at establishing occupational jurisdiction all speak to the first attribute.

By naming itself a society of *diplomate* architects, the degree from UT became a prerequisite for membership in the profession. UT’s four-year program granted the equivalent of a Master’s degree.<sup>40</sup> Admission to the university was restricted through a stringent entrance exam that tested applicants in math, history, design, and literature. As a gate-keeping mechanism, the exam and degree filtered the population of professional hopefuls.<sup>41</sup>

Third, a sustainable profession produces abstract or theoretical knowledge that supports innovation.<sup>42</sup> In architecture, this is design theory and criticism—an area of weakness in Iran identified at the beginning of the first issue of *Architecte*:

The advancement of technical work in Iran faces many problems... even in expressing theory and discussion of theoretical topics we lack any meaningful amount of discourse with which to do anything.<sup>43</sup>

Last, evidence of licensure or the adoption of a formal code of professional ethics was altogether absent. Membership in professional societies was granted by having the required education, experience, and sponsors but without an oath to abide by an adopted professional moral code. Formalizing ethics typically comes in more evolved professions, after a well-defined community is established.<sup>44</sup> In the early development of Iran’s architecture profession, ethics had yet to impress the profession’s founders as an institutional necessity. This is not to say a discourse of ethics did not exist among architects. In fact, debates about the role of architecture in social betterment were not uncommon. Welfare discourses about hygienic design and the imposing ethics of

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<sup>39</sup> Marion Fourcade, *Economists and Societies: Discipline and Profession in the United States, Britain, and France, 1890s to 1990s* (Princeton, 2009) is relevant because it shows how nationally specific contexts shape fundamentally different professional paradigms. In the US, the economics profession is corporate and market based, in the UK it is founded on elitist ties, and in France, it is a state-defined and controlled institution. Iran’s architecture profession has elements of each, as well as less-defined traits today such as what might be called quasi-statism and complex networks of patronage.

<sup>40</sup> Khajouyee, “History of the Faculty of Fine Arts,” 31.

<sup>41</sup> “Founding the Faculty of Fine Arts,” *Amuzesh va Parvaresh*, no. 6-7 (1940): 96-98.

<sup>42</sup> See Abbott, *The System of Professions*, 8. Ultimately, for Abbott, “abstraction enables survival in the competitive system of professions.”

<sup>43</sup> Moshiri, “Our Objective,” 1.

<sup>44</sup> Abbott, *The System of Professions*, 5.

modernist housing practices were widespread in Iran from the early twentieth century.<sup>45</sup> As the profession's prestige and size grew in the 1970s, a professional ethics might have been instated had the revolution and subsequent war with Iraq not halted the activities of the architecture profession. Today, the urgency of the question of professional ethics has surfaced in Iran. Many of the architects I interviewed consider the profiteering of development-oriented architects (so called *besaz befroosh*, which roughly translates to "build to sell") as a bane of the profession. They believe that architects concerned with the betterment of the built environment and of livelihoods should make up the profession, not those who exploit the market.

Another attribute central to Iran's architecture profession that is not accounted for in theories of the period's professions is transnationalism. The present scholarship in sociology and economic geography examining transnationalism in professions is split between studies that concern the emergence of global professions and those that study the transnational flow of ideas among professionals (Fourcade 2006, Faulconbridge 2010). Both assume mature professions. Neither considers transnationalism as process and ingredient in the historical formation of a profession. The evolution of Iran's architecture profession and even the Iranian definition of "architecture" are built on migration and global networks of knowledge exchange. Iran's architects demonstrate how a national profession's definition and its success can be instituted on transnationalism. The following examples illustrate this.

In the article that introduced SIDA in the first issue of *Architecte*, Manuchehr Khorsand described the founding of SIDA as a means to coordinate efforts by foreign-trained Iranian architects struggling against the "backwardness of governmental officials."<sup>46</sup> In a 1946 article on the history of the Faculty of Fine Arts, Gholamreza Khajouyee credited the foreign travels of young Iranians for bringing home educational practices that captured Iranians' latent talents.<sup>47</sup> In a 1969 article in *Honar va Memari*, Vartan Avanesian recalled the formative years of the profession around the 1930s:

At that time our young architects, upon completing their studies in Europe and America and returning to their country, would put themselves upon the complicated task of lending to their country the results of the knowledge they learned over several years abroad.<sup>48</sup>

Even the importance of foreign magazines was noted early:

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<sup>45</sup> The reader is pointed to forthcoming scholarship by Mohammad Tavakoli-Targhi.

<sup>46</sup> Manuchehr Khorsand, "The Society of Iranian Diplomat Architects," *Architecte*, no. 1 (1946): 3.

<sup>47</sup> Khajouyee, "History of the Faculty of Fine Arts," 31.

<sup>48</sup> Vartan Avanesian, "Iranian Architecture at the Crossroads of National and New Styles," *Honar va Memari*, no. 1 (1969): 35.

One of [Seyhoun's] first innovations was ordering a number of French magazines and books for our library. From then on, the face of our college transformed. We had access to global trends in architecture.<sup>49</sup>

The news of key Iranian architects' travels abroad were published in the "News of the Profession" section of *Architecte*. And in the fourth issue of the magazine, a new section was devoted to foreign news. SIDA sought connections with similar societies internationally. They started a library with contributions from the Cultural House of the Soviet Union, a French publication representative, and the Cultural Attaché of Britain. Members of SIDA organized an industry fair in 1945 on English architecture in which emphasis was placed on expanding exposure to foreign architecture practice.<sup>50</sup>

A new definition of architecture was being cast. That definition was predicated on a transnational exchange of industry and professional structures, knowledge, and architecture culture. The training of Iranian architects abroad and the participation of foreign architects in Iran's profession and schools became central to Iran's profession's identity.

Between the tenure of *Architecte* and its successor, *Honar va Memari*, the project of the profession shifted from one of instituting a foreign definition of the architect, with its attending professional institutions, to one of building a globalized profession. Both projects relied on similar channels of migration, travel, and knowledge consumption. The difference lay in the changing availability, nature, and geographic end points of those channels in the development era of the 1960s and 1970s.

### ***Honar va Memari* and the Rise of the Profession**

*Architecte* published its last issue in 1948. Editors of Iranian architecture magazines I interviewed say the politics of the profession in the decades after *Architecte's* last issue imposed too volatile an atmosphere in which to present a single voice.<sup>51</sup> In response to this twenty-year period of institutional disenfranchisement, in 1966, a group of six architects distributed the following announcement among Iran's professionals:

For the purpose of establishing connections and cooperation between architects... and toward increasing the value of the profession and the status of the trade and architects in Iranian society, we propose the formation of a society called the "Association of Iranian Architects."<sup>52</sup>

The Association of Iranian Architects (AIA) became the profession's new institutional body. The founders of the AIA included Vartan Avanesian, Abass Azhdari, Naser Badi',

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<sup>49</sup> "The Story of Architecture Education in Iran: Told by Architecture's First Graduates," *Abadi*, no. 3 (1992), 63.

<sup>50</sup> "News of the Institute," *Architecte*, no. 1 (1946): 39.

<sup>51</sup> Without access to primary text sources documenting this period, I relied on first-hand accounts. This is a period that I hope future research will shed light on.

<sup>52</sup> *Bulletin of the Association of Iranian Architects* (1973): 3-4.

Abdelhamid Eshraq, Manuchehr Khorsandi, Iraj Moshiri, Ali Sadeq, and Keyghobad Zafar. Shortly after it was established, the founders of the AIA collected and exhibited all the foreign architecture magazines they could gather.<sup>53</sup> Following the success of this exhibition, they created Iran's own internationally oriented magazine. *Honar va Memari* became the professional and public face of the AIA. Its stated goal was "the globalization of Iran's art and architecture."<sup>54</sup> The opening statement of the first issue of *Honar va Memari* starts:

Our goal, in service to our homeland, is to recognize the art and architecture of its soil, and to strive, with enthusiasm, to become globalized.<sup>55</sup>

In content and format, *Honar va Memari* was faithful to its mission. It was a substantial magazine by any country's standards, printed on heavy coated, glossy color pages. Much attention was paid to graphic content and style. Of the four magazines studied in this chapter, *Honar va Memari* was the most flamboyant (Figure 4). Its content included translations of foreign articles, original content, and spotlights of foreign architects and their projects. Each issue had French or English translations of article abstracts and front matter. Although traces of *Honar va Memari's* discursive ethos can be connected to Iran's 1960s milieu of publications by left leaning intellectual groups, loyalty to the patronage of the monarchy would cast a long shadow on visual and textual content of the magazine and eventually play a part in the profession's fate in the years of the revolution.<sup>56</sup>

*Honar va Memar* covered international gatherings of the profession that were located in Iran. In the 1970s, the first and second international congresses on Iranian architecture and the first congress on women architects were organized by the founding members of the AIA, principally among them, Abdelhamid Eshraq, the editor in chief of *Honar va Memari*. The magazine's third issue announced the king and queen's patronage of the First International Congress of Architects in Iran in 1970. A table of attendees at the Second International Congress in 1974 included such globally celebrated architects as Alvar Aalto, Buckminster Fuller, Richard Neutra, Kenzo Tange, and Jorn Utzon as well as "distinguished representatives" from national professional associations of architects in Romania, Pakistan, Czechoslovakia, India, the Soviet Union, and Turkey.<sup>57</sup> The events around the meetings were covered in *Honar va Memari* with images of court patrons, foreign participants, and their Iranian architect hosts. The visual and textual content of this coverage depicted a nexus of state, transnationalism, and institutions.

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<sup>53</sup> Interview with a founding member of Iran's AIA. All interviews were conducted in accordance with requirements of confidentiality set forth in research protocol 2011-12-3853 filed with the Committee for Protection of Human Subjects (CPHS) of the University of California, Berkeley. Interview dates and names and titles of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement.

<sup>54</sup> *Honar va Memari*, no. 2 (1969): front matter.

<sup>55</sup> *Honar va Memari*, no. 1 (1969): front matter.

<sup>56</sup> For more on the publications of intellectual groups in Iran, see Negin Nabavi, "The Changing Concept of the 'Intellectual' in Iran of the 1960s," *Iranian Studies*, vol. 32, no. 3 (1999): 337.

<sup>57</sup> *Honar va Memari*, no. 3-4 (1970): 119.



Figure 4. *Honar va Memari*. Left, images showing Queen Farah with Iranian and foreign architects at the Second International Congress on Iranian Architecture. Right, a magazine cover. (Source: National Library and Archives of the Islamic Republic of Iran)

These events in the profession took place as Iran’s economy entered a new era of development. Iran’s economic growth outpaced the average of twelve leading Western economies through the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>58</sup> The 1973 oil price increases redoubled state investment in construction. The amount and types of buildings contracted in that decade gave Iran’s architects many opportunities. But larger projects demanded new abilities from them. State patrons required that Iran’s cultural infrastructure such as museums, stadia, and parks be designed and built to international standards. The result was an influx of foreign architects and the evolution of a new kind of Iranian architecture firm, larger and more equipped than any Iran had in its past.

The scope and pace of development in Iran, in return, attracted foreign architects. American architect Victor Gruen, for example, was hired for the first Tehran Metropolitan plan in 1963. As Gruen’s biographer, Jeffrey Hardwick, notes, “the Shah was the client that [Gruen] had long wanted—in this case, a dictator capable of giving [him] the land, power, and means to control every facet of the environment: houses, stores, highways,

<sup>58</sup> See Figure 1 in Hadi Salehi Esfahani and M. Hashem Pesaran, “The Iranian Economy in the Twentieth Century: A Global Perspective,” *Iranian Studies*, vol. 42, no. 2 (2009): 181.

lakes, and parks.”<sup>59</sup> In the early 1970s, Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, participated in the design of the Aryamehr (now Azadi) Sports Complex. In both of these large-scale projects, Iranian architect Abdol’aziz Farmanfarmaian partnered with American counterparts. When foreign architects came to Iran for lucrative design work, they left behind their customary method of practice. Abdol’aziz Farmanfarmaian and Associates (AFFA) would become a model for Iranian corporate architecture firms. This era saw the rise of “consulting engineers”—the typological label Iran’s architecture firms adopted.

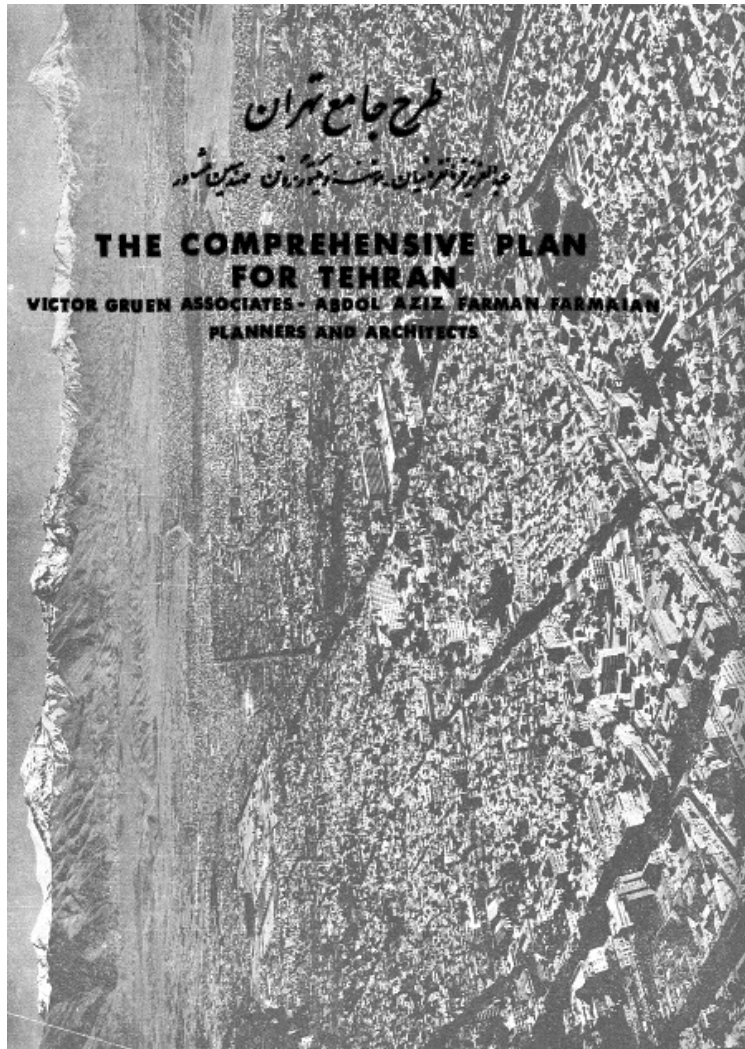


Figure 5. The Tehran Comprehensive Plan. *Honar va Memari* article on the collaboration of Victor Gruen’s firm with Abdolaziz Farmanfarmaian. (Source: National Library and Archives of the Islamic Republic of Iran)

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<sup>59</sup> M. Jeffrey Hardwick, *Mall Maker: Victor Gruen, Architect of an American Dream* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 221.

As project types and state involvement in architecture practice changed in Iran and globally, the AIA modeled their bylaws after those of similar institutions in other countries.<sup>60</sup> One of the AIA's six committees was dedicated to the "research and gathering of documents and information as well as establishing contact with similar foreign organizations."<sup>61</sup> In 1966, Iran was one of five countries inducted into the International Union of Architects.<sup>62</sup> With these actions, Iranian architects increased their exposure to the global architectural community. As their exposure increased, so too did their cultural and professional credibility at home.

At the same time, patronage of architecture and architects grew. This new patronage, in turn, strengthened the architecture profession. Indirect state support came in the form of such large projects as described above. *Honar va Memari* itself was patronized: Princess Ashraf Pahlavi is acknowledged as benefactor in numerous issues (see Figure 6). Other support came as backing for international gatherings. Prime Minister Hoveyda was acknowledged for supporting the profession's first international conference in 1970:

We are grateful to our beloved Prime Minister Mr. Amir Abbas Hoveyda, an honorary and notable member of the Association of Iranian Architects....<sup>63</sup>

Architecture professionals joined the ranks of key actors in the production of a cosmopolitan culture in Iran.<sup>64</sup> Court patronage exacerbated this role. It is not surprising, then, that as the regime collapsed and the profession's patrons were persecuted, so too were architects, their institutions, and the spectacle of the production of culture they had cast broadly through *Honar va Memari*.

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<sup>60</sup> *Bulletin of the Association of Iranian Architects* (1973): 12.

<sup>61</sup> *Bulletin of the Association of Iranian Architects* (1967): 8.

<sup>62</sup> *Bulletin of the Association of Iranian Architects* (1967): 21.

<sup>63</sup> *Honar va Memari*, no. 2 (1969): 1.

<sup>64</sup> Strong examples of actors in cosmopolitanism can be found in other fields such as literary criticism, art history, and film. While an analysis of these other fields is not in the scope of this chapter, the reader is pointed to scholars such as Negin Nabavi, "The Changing Concept of the "Intellectual" in Iran of the 1960s," *Iranian Studies*, vol. 32, no. 3 (1999); Kamran Talattof, "'I Will Rebuild You, Oh My Homeland': Simin Behbahani's Work and Sociopolitical Discourse," *Iranian Studies*, vol. 41, no. 1 (2008); Hamid Naficy, "Nonfiction Fiction: Documentaries on Iran," *Iranian Studies*, vol. 12, no. 3-4 (1979); Ali Behdad, "The Power-ful Art of Qajar Photography: Orientalism and Self-orientalizing in Nineteenth Century Iran," *Iranian Studies*, vol. 34, no. 1-4 (2001).

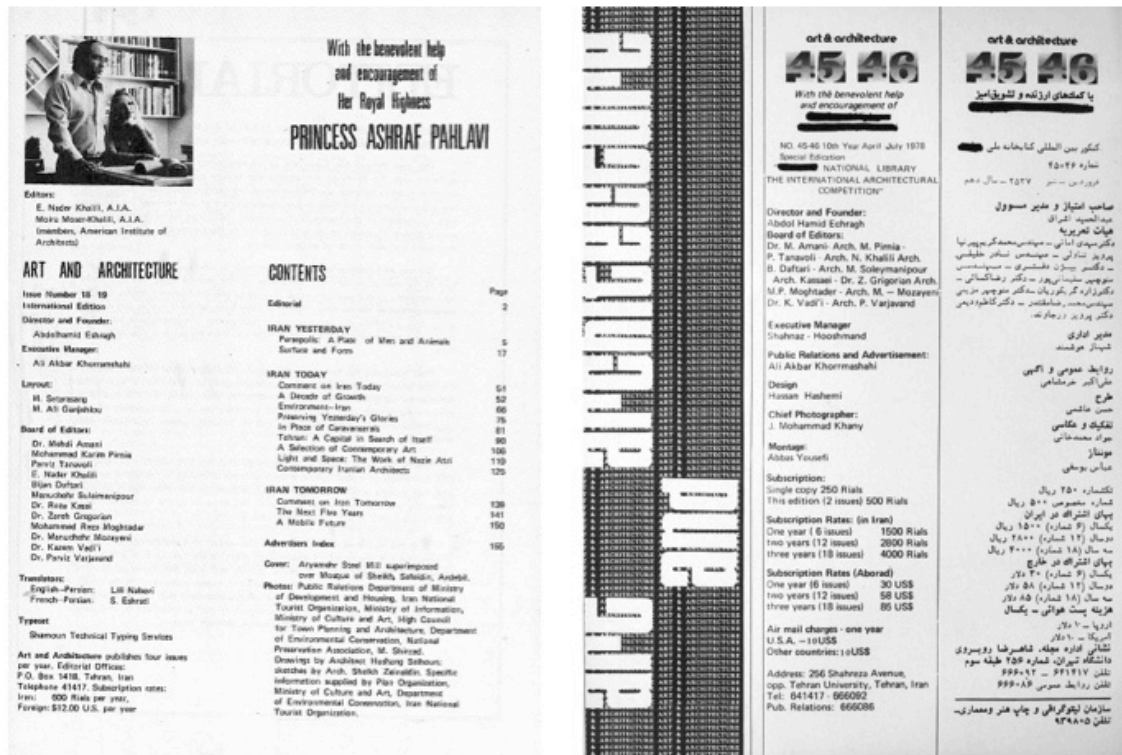


Figure 6. Patronage, transnationalism and censorship can be read in the tables of contents of two issues of *Honar va Memari*. Shown on the left, Princess Ashraf Pahlavi is acknowledged on the contents page of most issues. Here, Iranian-American architects Nader Khalili and Moira Moser-Khalili “members, American Institute of Architects” are editors. On the right, names associated with the Pahlavi Regime are censored after the 1979 Revolution. (Source: National Library and Archives of the Islamic Republic of Iran)

### *Jame'eh va Memari* and the Institutional Revolution

In an announcement aired by public media in December 1980, The Plan and Budget Organization (Sazman-e Barnameh va Budjeh, henceforth PBO) requested documents exposing individuals in the building industry who had connections to the previous regime.<sup>65</sup> A fledgling professional magazine, *Jame'eh va Memari*, put out a special issue exposing architects (who were then called consulting engineers) and their firms (see Figure 2). The special issue proclaims in bold, oversized typeface:

**Special Issue: Exposition of the [politically] Affiliated Institution of “Consulting Engineers”**

The profession of architecture consultancy was founded in our homeland at a time when the goal was destruction, exploitation, and annihilation.

<sup>65</sup> “Purging Individuals or Foundational Change?,” *Jame'eh va Memari*, no. 19-20-21 (1979): 35.

The primary functionaries of the [politically] affiliated institution of “consulting engineers” were hand-selected elements of the past imperialist regime

The institution of “consulting engineers” was formed in a network of politically affiliated relations and enactors [of political aims] to fulfill their anti-populist goals.<sup>66</sup>

The subsequent pages of the special issue identified specific architects and listed their affiliations in an exposé of what *Jame'eh va Memari*'s editors called a network of corruption in which architects had been active participants.

In its austere reprographic quality, *Jame'eh va Memari* more closely resembled a political pamphlet than an architecture magazine, particularly when compared to the lavishly illustrated pages of *Honar va Memari* (Figure 7). Its contents surrounded themes of revolution, socialism, and war and where among these the profession fit in. A significant amount of language was devoted to chastising prerevolutionary architects and their institutions.

In the issue that came out in December 1979, architects were labeled as corrupt in their political affiliations, through their patronage, and the architecture they designed for the aristocracy and bourgeoisie. Examples from a list of sixty-two architects included Kamran Diba—listed as “an affiliate of the royal court”; Hossein Amanat, designer of Shahyad (now Azadi) Square—“an affiliate of the corrupt Pahlavi regime”; George Avanesian—“a Freemason”; and Michelle Julie—simply “a foreigner.”<sup>67</sup> With imperialism as their target, the editors of *Jame'eh va Memari* also implicated transnational actors. The judgments levied shook the profession and saw leading architects flee the country for fear of retribution and of consequences that could include imprisonment or worse.

At this historical moment, the state confronted the architecture profession in such a direct way as was without precedent in the modern era. The intense patronage of architecture in the second Pahlavi era, the significance of global image-making for the Iranian state, and the recognized strengths of Iran's architecture field (historically), contributed to a spectacle of state-profession destruction that casts light on our understanding of ways states and the institutions of architecture professions can perceive the power of each other's projects. Furthermore, because Iran's revolution was in many ways a social and cultural revolution, the result of the explosion of state-profession relationships affected profession-society relations as well. The edifice of the authority and prestige of the architect that was built by the editors of *Architecte* and developed by those involved with *Honar va Memari*, also changed with the revolution. While to the lay public, the attack on the institutions of the profession were not so visible, the dormancy of architecture practice during the revolution and eight-year war did much to withdraw architects and architecture from the public eye.

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<sup>66</sup> *Jame'eh va Memari*, no. 12 (1980): cover title block.

<sup>67</sup> *Jame'eh va Memari*, no. 12 (1980): 3.



Figure 7. Architecture and revolution. A cover from *Jame'eh va Memari* on the one-year anniversary of the Revolution. (Source: National Library and Archives of the Islamic Republic of Iran)

In *Jame'eh va Memari*, consulting engineers were accused of delegitimizing the profession and expertise. By contrast, thirty-five years earlier, the editors of *Architecte* saw architects as key players in the struggle to instill a culture of respect for expertise and reliance on professionals. But to read *Jame'eh va Memari*'s push for architecture's future as a force in the opposite direction of *Architecte*'s would be wrong. *Jame'eh va Memari*'s desire was a more egalitarian distribution of expertise. In an article titled "Investigating the Structure of the Reactionary Institution of Consulting Engineering," published in January 1980, institutional archives were used to demonstrate ways firms with political ties hoarded work. The authors argued that architects and independent firms could not compete in the corrupt professional ecology that had come to be through the patronage of the court and the selective practices of transnationalism.

There is no clear distinction between *Jame'eh va Memari*'s authors' distaste for the political exploitation of patronage—clientelism—and their expressed abhorrence of imperialism. Professional success and transnationalism went hand in hand; and success through transnational connections indicated hierarchy and imperialism. *Jame'eh va Memari*'s authors criticized Iranian firms connected with foreign firms and "multi-

nationals connected with imperialist interests.”<sup>68</sup> First in their list was Gruen and Farmanfarmaian’s collaboration.

The breaking of transnational ties by the revolution exacerbated the shrinking of Iran’s architectural world. Architects no longer traveled to or from Iran. One of the only channels of exposure with the world of architecture outside Iran was through architecture magazines that would make their way around censorship and luggage searches at airports into Iran. A director of UT’s architecture program and a prominent practitioner explains:

The only design influence for teachers and students after the war were foreign magazines that we would get. The Internet and all that came later—that’s only ten to fifteen years ago. They started copying postmodernism and deconstruction. They were only rip-offs. These magazines would come and they became their bible... their Quran.<sup>69</sup>

During the war with Iraq, transnational mechanisms of transfer of people and ideas were even more limited. Other institutions of the profession, such as the universities, were shut down (as part of the Islamic Republic’s cultural revolution) from 1980 through 1983. In the wake of these changes, many architects fled the country, some were drafted to war, others changed occupation. The fate of those who remained in Iran’s profession became less clear as the revolutionary state struggled to redefine the country’s institutions.

In this milieu, the editors of *Jame’eh va Memari* proposed a cooperative for offering consulting services as an alternative to the rule of consulting engineers:

Within the scope of our professional activities we will once again expose the activities of the reactionary institution of “consulting engineers” and will, to the best of our abilities, find a replacement institution through proposing “cooperatives that provide consulting services,” so that by this means we can contribute our part to bring the revolution to the tortured people of Iran.<sup>70</sup>

In the new cooperative structure, membership was extended to all Iran’s qualified architects. The leadership would be elected democratically and candidates had to have clean records:

Architects or planners (having a Bachelor’s degree and higher) with at least three years of work experience, without having been members of any anti-populist organizations (e.g. SAVAK, Freemasons, CIA, etc.), and without affiliations with the previous regime are eligible for candidacy.<sup>71</sup>

This last condition for candidacy would truncate a significant amount of prerevolutionary experience from the profession. At the same time, however, it would

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<sup>68</sup> *Jame’eh va Memari*, no. 12 (1980): 3.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with IE.

<sup>70</sup> *Jame’eh va Memari*, no. 12 (1980): 1.

<sup>71</sup> “About the Architecture System,” *Jame’eh va Memari*, no. 13-14-15 (1980): 2.

bring opportunity to the architects that made up the base of the profession. The new leaders of the profession aimed to thrust architecture into a political project aligned with the socialist ethos of the revolution.

The question of the avant-garde versus the profession's equivalent of a proletariat is one of continued irresolution in Iran today. A current row over which group should lead a central association of architects has led to the circulation of criticisms by emails, boycotts of meetings, lectures, and elections (I discuss this controversy in Chapter 3). The root of this conflict can be traced to *Jame'eh va Memari* and its contributors' attempts to reposition power in the professions' institutions.

The fervor with which the articles in *Jame'eh va Memari* called for the dismantling of the profession's institutions would hurt the profession when the dust of the revolution and the subsequent war settled by 1990. Later, commentators on the postwar crisis in the profession placed the genesis of the problem with the discontinuity in consulting practice that took place with the revolution:

The crisis started in the first years after the revolution when managers and big names in the consulting profession either left the country, had their companies seized by the government, changed profession, or were forced to retire early—as such they were expelled from the arena of the profession.<sup>72</sup>

As early as 1981, the importance of transnational knowledge exchange was recognized in *Jame'eh va Memari*. But, that version of transnationalism was couched in the rhetoric of revolution. It had a distinct socialist flavor. According to contributors to *Jame'eh va Memari*, there were two revolutions happening around the world: one was social and the other technical. They said the magazine would be used to connect Iranian architects to knowledge produced in places that had experienced both types of revolution. As such, the transnationalism that *Jame'eh va Memari* imagined was a socialist and egalitarian one with a focus on topics such as social housing in Portugal and Cuba rather than high-style architecture achievements of the era's postmodern and deconstructive architecture. Importantly, the magazine's contributors acknowledged that Iran did not have the resources to produce its own knowledge and that they had to rely on foreign ideas. And thus the transnational channels of knowledge dissemination remained open even if constricted, despite the revolution—or even in service of the revolution.

### ***Abadi* and the Profession's Renaissance**

The first state-acknowledged meeting of a national body of architects after the revolution took place from June 10 to 12 1991. In the opening ceremony, President Hashemi Rafsanjani tasked engineers and designers with reconstructing the devastation of the war. He told them to make use of the latest technical knowledge from around the world toward

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<sup>72</sup> Mohsen MirHeidar and Pedram Rahbari, "Architecture Consulting Engineers and the Current Crisis in the Profession," *Abadi*, no. 5 (1992): 32.

efficient construction and to train the next generation of architects in the process.<sup>73</sup> His statement and coverage of the event came in the inaugural issue of *Abadi* in 1991—the architecture professions’ first magazine after *Jame’eh va Memari*. Physically more substantial, *Abadi*, was closer in reprographic quality to *Honar va Memari*, though conservative in graphic style (Figure 9). The layout of articles, text, and images across issues spoke to a methodical focus on textual content. The social responsibilities and socio-political agency of the profession that had been assumed in *Jame’eh va Memari* were not present in *Abadi*. Neither was the emphasis on architecture as art that had been axiomatic in *Honar va Memari*. *Abadi* was not solely dedicated to architecture. It encompassed other design and planning trades such as City and Regional Planning.

As a publication of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, *Abadi*’s focus was on technical matters and the establishment of professional institutions. After the war, the need to reestablish not only the work of architects, but also their institutions became clear:

The position of consulting engineers is so central... that the success of the development and growth in Iran depends on their abilities or inabilities.<sup>74</sup>

In the ten years after the revolution, no substantive professional institutions in any of the environmental design fields had formed. To the contrary, the activity of professional bodies was restricted by the state through the first decade after the revolution. One architect describes the state’s suspicion of the architecture profession:

The government was paranoid about any group that was active at an institutional level. [The government] had obtained power and was afraid to loosen their controls. They still weren’t confident enough to trust anyone on the outside, because they were concerned about losing power. That’s why they wouldn’t let [architects] organize.<sup>75</sup>

In 1992 a group of professionals presented their case to the head of the PBO. The architects argued that the state needed to give power back to the professions in order to put their resources and capabilities to use for the success of the country. In response, a sympathetic leader of the PBO agreed that the postwar government no longer needed to be concerned about counter-revolutionary forces. He gave the group of architects a green light to organize. Subsequently, under the leadership of architects, the National Coordinating Council of Engineering, Trade, and Professional Associations (Shoray-e Hamahangi-e Tashakolhay-e Mohandesi, Senfi, va Herfei-e Keshvar, henceforth National Council) formed and met monthly with the PBO to plan the future of Iran’s architecture, engineering, and planning professions.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> “The President’s Message,” *Abadi*, no. 1 (1991): 2-3.

<sup>74</sup> MirHeidar and Rahbari, “The Current Crisis in the Profession,” 30.

<sup>75</sup> Interview with IK.

<sup>76</sup> “Memorandum of Understanding Between the National Coordinating Council of Engineering, Trade, and Professional Associations and the National Plan and Budget Organization,” (2003): 1.

To set up their new institutions, Iranian architects once again looked abroad. The fall 1991 issue of *Abadi* outlined the history of the International Council of Building Officials (ICBO) in the United States. Particular attention was given to its institutional setup as a private organization, detailing the number of people working there, the size and layout of the central office and its library. Details were provided on ICBO's financial structure and managing logistics as well as the structures of membership in the association, meetings, gatherings, management, committees, and publications.<sup>77</sup>

In the institutions that were founded in Iran (the National Council and the Iranian Technical Committee for Implementing Building Regulations, are two of what would eventually become dozens of examples) architecture is placed beside several other building trades such as civil, mechanical, and electrical engineering. Whereas a collective of building trades initially served as a crutch for rehabilitating the architecture profession, the same affiliations would weigh architects down when they tried to regain exclusive institutional power, particularly in relation to other building trades and developers.

On the tail end of postwar reconstruction, by the mid-1990s, developers had found the residential sector to be a lucrative one. With land and housing prices inflated and with the Municipality of Tehran selling floor-area-ratio in residential buildings as a means of municipal income, residential mid- and high-rise construction skyrocketed.<sup>78</sup> Architects suddenly had the opportunity to claim a substantive volume work. But not all developers considered architects' services necessary in constructing buildings. With the power to decide how facades should look, Tehran's developers had a strong hand in dictating taste—postmodern and neoclassical sold well. As a result, much of what was built was starkly out of touch with the design tastes of Europe and North America that Iran's architects had closely followed before the revolution.

The dominance of developers (and on their heels, a subservient cast of licensed architects willing to take orders for the sake of profit), affected the symbolic capital and authority of the architect. Architecture increasingly became a commodity exchanged in the currency of facades on mid-rise apartment buildings. The volumetric, spatial, and symbolic negotiations that the prerevolutionary architects invested their expertise in died away. Part of this was the lack of civic and cultural projects, the lack of time and money to engage those architectures, and the lack of imagination and patronage. But underlying all was the constriction of channels of access to foreign knowledge was at the heart of the problem as a handicap that architects had, which developers could get by without.

During the postwar real estate boom, Iran's eager architects could only manage meager glimpses of global trends in architecture. They struggled to find foreign architecture magazines. What little they got their hands on neither fulfilled their need for critical content nor brought them up to speed with the expertise in building technology that had

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<sup>77</sup> Fazlollah Hashemi, "ICBO, One of the Most Important Centers for Developing and Setting Building Regulations," *Abadi*, no. 2 (1991): 81.

<sup>78</sup> Interview with DM.

evolved globally in the 1980s. Foreign published and broadcast media was actively restricted in Iran through the 1990s and the Internet was not widely accessible until the early 2000s. Any transnational connection was eagerly attended by Iran's architects. In its first four years, *Abadi* published numerous articles on foreign architects and their projects. But of these, a majority were translations of articles originally published decades earlier.



Figure 8. Criticism and post-revolutionary residential construction are reflected in an excerpt from an article in *Abadi*. (Source: National Library and Archives of the Islamic Republic of Iran)

What Iranian architects saw as progress beyond Iran's borders stood out in comparison to widespread disillusionment in their own profession:

The problem of our profession is a lack of continuity. In Portland, for example, a competition will be held for one year, the winner will design the project the next year, and the following year, the project will be built... in Iran, I've designed over 70 projects [since the revolution], three went to bid, three went to bid, and two have been built. As a professional architect I cannot do my job.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>79</sup> "The Story of Architecture Education in Iran," *Abadi*, no. 4 (1992): 17.

The professional credibility of the prerevolutionary architect had been lost.

In 1992, *Abadi* published an article titled “Promoting Traditions of Selectivity” that was concerned with encouraging a regime of acknowledgement and accolades in the profession. The ideas spelled out in this article would transform the profession and start a movement toward reviving the place of architects in Iranian society. In the article, Seyyed Reza Hashemi put forth a vision for new institutions in the profession. The profession needed awards, research centers, and incubators.<sup>80</sup> Foremost among these, Hashemi argued that awards would cultivate a critical edge in Iran’s architecture scene through the discourse and proceedings of award juries; and a regime of awards would cultivate a professional hierarchy that would in turn inform clients of value in architecture.

In addition to the *Abadi* awards that followed, a series of nation-wide design competitions helped jumpstart the profession. The first was the competition for a National Academy at Abbas Abad announced in 1993. This project was advertised in *Abadi*, where the results were later covered in detail. The imposing monumentality of the proposal from the firm Naqsh-e Jahan-Pars won (see Figure 9). The competition was touted as the biggest since the revolution. It ushered in an era of competitions for state projects that continues today (despite that winning project never being built).

The coverage of foreign architecture news and the gradual increase in foreign travel among Iranians shaped the transformation that was beginning in the profession. First, *Abadi* brought news of the 1992 Aga Khan award to Iranian readers. The five winning projects in Tunisia, Turkey, Egypt, Jordan, and Indonesia demonstrated a regional state of practice at an international standard of judgment.<sup>81</sup> Second, the editor of *Abadi* presented a paper at the first Conference of Publishers of Trade Magazines in the Middle East on *Abadi* in Kuwait. This paper was presented in the session on “Local Magazines in Global Networks.” In the accords set forth at that conference, the editor of *Abadi* was elected as one of two deputy directors and the only representative from Iran in that organization. Third, foreign architects were invited to give lectures in Iran. In his lecture at the University of Tehran, Tridib Banerjee (Chair of Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Southern California when this article was written), exposed Iranian students and faculty to contemporary thinking in their field taking place beyond the isolation of Iran’s borders.<sup>82</sup>

What followed the 1992 *Abadi* article encouraging excellence in the profession was the growth of the award project, an increase of workshops with foreign architects, and patronage of young and avant-garde architects through the support of (quasi-) state-based incubators. This was a turning point in the direction of the profession and society’s construction of the image of the architect. Iran’s architects timidly approached a reinstitution of transnational connections. But the success of their efforts remained limited

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<sup>80</sup> Seyyed Reza Hashemi, “Promoting Traditions of Selectivity,” *Abadi*, no. 6 (1992): 2.

<sup>81</sup> “The Awarding of Prizes for Winners of the Award for Islamic Architecture,” *Abadi*, no. 6 (1992): 89.

<sup>82</sup> “Seminars of the Society of Consultants,” *Abadi*, no. 7 (1993): 83.

by policies of censorship, sanctions, Iran's premature development of professional institutions, and a weak culture of reliance on expertise.

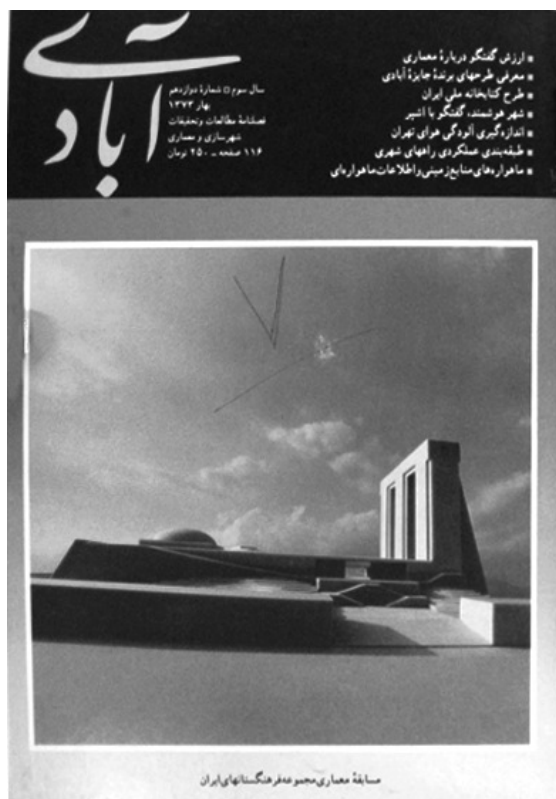


Figure 9. A cover of *Abadi* shows the winning entry of the architecture competition for the National Academy complex in Abbas Abad. (Source: National Library and Archives of the Islamic Republic of Iran)

### Discussion: Instituting a Transnational Profession in Iran

This fifty-year history shows ways in which Iranian architects engaged transnational flows of ideas, mobilized professional institutions, and courted patrons associated with the government. Their efforts were affected by power plays within the profession as well as with the politics of the state. Architects' struggles were visible in the way their profession was defined by foreign descriptions in the pages of *Architecte*, how it globalized through the content and events organized by *Honar va Memari*, the persecution of architects and dismantling of their firms through the revolutionary activism of *Jame'eh va Memari* and then, after the war, the rebirth of the profession instigated by *Abadi*. Inherent in histories of institutions is a framing of individual agency. By indicating the interplay of individuals and institutions, I use the history chronicled in this chapter to complicate notions of agency by connecting individual to institutional agency.

I summarize three lessons from this history in what follows: the first concerns the success of the Iranian architecture profession, the second is about the relationship between profession and state, and the third is a discussion on the contribution this transnationally framed, institutional history presents for the historiography of modern Iranian architecture.

First, there is little evidence of Iran's early architecture profession substantively engaging theoretical or abstract knowledge in the shape of formal design theory. This is partly a symptom of the uneven global geography of architects' attention to design theory in the 1940s and 1950s. At that time, a limited geographic core was recognized as the producer of design theories and trends in architecture criticism that were consumed by a broad periphery. The 1960s and 1970s brought theoretical debates to the fore of architecture education around the world. Even then though, Iranian architects' engagement in theory and criticism was minimal. This is not to say Iranian architects did not think critically about theoretical issues in architecture. They did—but only to an extent. Their debates did not shape an active discursive field in the profession. Architecture criticism of Iranian buildings, for example, was nearly absent from the profession's publications.

Some Iranian architects see the absence of theory and criticism as a root of many of the profession's problems today. In 1992, one commentator would argue that modern architecture never really happened in Iran because its foundations were never critically discussed and that was because the universities—as incomplete institutional copies of schools in Europe—never taught it as such.<sup>83</sup> More critically, in the immediate aftermath of the revolution, another architect claims that the capitalist ethos of development embodied in Pahlavi-era architecture education and practice resulted in a complete void of theory.<sup>84</sup> The inability of the profession to sustain power after the revolution and into the present follows from its failure to engage what sociologists of professions term “abstraction.”<sup>85</sup> Abstraction is a fundamental element in the sustenance of a profession through social and technological transformations that would otherwise render the skills of an occupation irrelevant. Abstraction gives professions complex theories that help secure the function of the profession in the long term.

Second, the relationship between profession and state in this history is rich but hardly consistent. Iran's architects mobilized institutions and leveraged transnational connections and their credibility for professional and political power. SIDA comprised honorary members from the court, yet tried to free itself from traditions of clientelism. Even before the profession formalized, its founding fathers in the 1920s and 1930s, in the Society for National Heritage declared, “a member will be dismissed from the organization in case of involvement in political activities in the name of the Society.”<sup>86</sup> The AIA openly courted the state by capitalizing on the royal family's patronage of the arts and the Shah's development agenda. The revolution saw the confluence of internal struggles of architects striving for a more egalitarian landscape of commissions and the revolutionary

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<sup>83</sup> “A Look at Iranian and Global Architecture Today,” *Abadi*, no. 4 (1992): 17.

<sup>84</sup> “Architecture and Society – Chapters and Headings,” *Jame'eh va Memari*, no. 34-38 (1981): 6.

<sup>85</sup> For example, see Abbott, *The System of Professions*.

<sup>86</sup> As quoted in Grigor, “Recultivating ‘Good Taste,’” 23.

government's anti-imperialist and isolationist rhetoric. As the new government established its authority, it launched an institutional power grab. Most recently, the expansion of state-based organizations as property owners and patrons of architecture marks yet another form of institutional control through quasi-state hegemony over patronage of civic and institutional architecture.<sup>87</sup>

Historically, the state increasingly managed the profession through control of its institutions, from channels of patronage before the revolution to institutional regulations in the 1990s. It was not until after the war that architects found the courage to ask for institutional independence. Despite these efforts, today the state maintains institutional hegemony. The scope of professional associations is reviewed by the state before granting them permission to form. For example, the PBO has developed its own template for institutional structures of professional associations that applicants must adopt in order to be recognized and registered. But architects have ways of navigating these controls. They capitalize on the twin location of their profession in fields of art and culture as well as technology and development in order to manipulate state patronage or skirt censorship. Iranian architects have effectively operated in a third space of political engagement between state and civil society—a space of professional activism. This space challenges the existing conceptions of profession-state and state-society relations summarized in Chapter 1. It represents ways professionals operate between bureaucratic institutions and informal transnational practices.

Finally, by corollary, I use this chapter to argue that historians can gain important insight into modern architecture professions by bringing attention to its institutions and to specific mechanisms of transnationalization—at both the levels of individual and institutional transnational practices. This attentiveness to transnationalism is supported by the frameworks for exploring transnationalism developed in the Introduction.

Histories of modern Iranian architecture thinking and design are typically framed as responses to discursive and aesthetic calls from Europe and North America. Modernization histories of Iranian architecture assume a separation between the architectural happenings of Iran and other parts of the world—an assumption that has become increasingly acute in framings of Iranian architecture in the political context of the period following the revolution. Less common, colonization histories of Iranian culture identify the imposition and reception of foreign policies and practices in Iran. Examples include Grigor's history of the Society for National Heritage with her attention to the role of foreigners like Andre Goddard in shaping Iran's architecture field and the histories of domestic architecture published in Iran by scholars such as Grigor and Bani Mas'ud (Grigor 2009, Bani Mas'ud 2011). Both modernization and colonization histories focus agency abroad. They reproduce a narrative of a one-way geographic flow of architecture practice and thought into Iran. The transnational perspective espoused in Moallem's work on connoisseurship

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<sup>87</sup> For more on quasi- or para-state organizations, see Ali A. Saeidi, "The Accountability of Para-Governmental Organizations (Bonyads): the Case of Iranian Foundations," *Iranian Studies*, vol. 37, no. 3 (2004).

develop a more nuanced agency that is distributed among actors on both sides of transnational exchanges (Moallem 2011). In this vein, looking at professional institutions, such as magazines, not only brings into relief the role of transnationalism in shaping Iranian architecture since the twentieth century, it also brings needed attention to the structures, practices, and individuals behind the buildings that typically comprises the focus of Iranian architecture histories written in the past fifty years.

“Transnational” is a contemporary analytical frame that I am projecting on this historical analysis. It is important to recall here that transnationalism is an analytical framework I am employing to uncover connections, channels, and flows between Iran and abroad. Transnationalism as an analytical frame stands in contrast to each periods’ own framing of international engagement. In the 1940s, architects were concerned with foreign definitions of the role and scope of the modern architecture professional. They looked largely to French models of the architecture profession that they were exposed to through the presence of French bureaucrats in Iran’s apparatus of nation building and through the return of Iranian’s who had studied at the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris. The heads of archaeology and industrial development organizations are examples I cite above. In the 1960s and 1970s, Iranian architects contended with a broader sense of globalization. They were aware of the postwar international reach of architectural institutions in the United States and the professional power of large firms designing projects in different countries. American architecture firms such as Victor Gruen Associates or Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill (SOM) were active in Iran. They were also aware of the regional opportunities they could capture. Israeli architects had led significant housing developments in Iran in the 1970s.<sup>88</sup> The Shah’s overt project of Westernization in the 1950s and 1960s gave way to a less Westoxified<sup>89</sup> and more independent project of modernization in the late 1960s and 1970s. This shift is reflected in the oil price increase of 1973 that would be unpopular with the West and can be traced as early as Iran’s Third Development Plan (from 1963 to 1977), the implementation of the Shah’s White Revolution of land and social reform and, importantly, the enactment of Import-Substitution-Industrialization (ISI) policies.<sup>90</sup> Players in the 1979 revolution framed transnational ties as a web of imperialism that had driven Iran’s transnational dependency and corrupted it through Westernization. Throughout these stages and to today, Iran has maintained complex and changing relationships with the world beyond its borders—like many countries. But unlike many countries, aspects of cultural production in Iran have been defined by their relationship with the foreign. I argue that this history demonstrates that this is the case for the modern practice of architecture in

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<sup>88</sup> Neta Feniger and Rachel Kallus, “Building a ‘new Middle East’: Israeli architects in Iran in the 1970s,” *Journal of Architecture*, 18:3 (2013).

<sup>89</sup> The term Westoxification was used by Jalal Al Ahmad in his landmark book titled *Gharbzadegi* (see citation that follows), which has been translated as Westoxification or Occidentosis. Al-Ahmad, Galal, Hamid Algar, and Robert Campbell. *Occidentosis: a Plague from the West*. Berkeley, California: Mizan Press, 1984.

<sup>90</sup> See Julien Bharier, *Economic Development in Iran 1900-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); and Morteza Assadi, “Import Substitution and the Structure of the Iranian Economy 1962-1977”, *Social Scientist*, Vol. 18, No. 5 (1990): 30-41.

Iran. Where I use a transnational frame, I do it through an analytical lens informed by current scholarship.

The proposed historiographical and methodological directions for studying Iranian architecture acknowledge a nuanced and complicated geography of institutional dominance. Transnational connections—by way of magazine content, awards, juries, workshops, incubators, and other formal or informal networks—can be seen in some ways to strengthen the profession and in other ways to reinforce its dependence on foreign architects and institutions. A contributor to *Abadi* speaks to this point:

In Iran, the transformations associated with reconstruction and political and social turmoil paid no heed to the social wisdom of history or the people who embodied that wisdom in their experience; rather, we were on the margins of the influence of the economic and political development of the West; there was no cultural and historical solidarity between our leaders of the architecture profession and the institutions that brought us modern architecture from the rest of the world.<sup>91</sup>

Similar in sensibility, the transnational history offered in this chapter neither resolves the placement of agency with Iranian architects nor with foreign institutional models. Rather, it acknowledges the complexity of the formation of the profession and the significance of the interplay between architects' individual and institutional transnational practices.

By understanding the transnational knowledge that shaped the definition, growth, destruction, and rebirth of Iran's architecture profession, this analysis is positioned to investigate the mechanisms through which transnationalism in the architecture profession operate today. Further, with a history of profession-state-society articulated, the historical and institutional context developed in this chapter, provides a foundation upon which the concepts of transnational institutions and transnational credibility in today's profession can be understood.

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<sup>91</sup> "A Look at Iranian and Global Architecture Today," 17.

## Chapter 3. Institutional Transnationalization and the Iranian Architecture Profession's Transformation, 1995-2010

Only a democratic and independent institution of architects, chosen by architects and for architects and beyond the destructive forces of the government or other outside influences can gradually leave a positive impact on the society of architects.<sup>92</sup>

The institutions of Iran's architecture profession operated as domestic ones throughout the history covered in the previous chapter. These institutions were defined by foreign ideas and shaped by the myriad connections beyond Iran's border that were detailed in the previous chapter—but they were all domestic organizations registered by the Iranian state, operating in Iran, and dedicated to Iranian architects. Beginning in the 2000s, another type of institution entered the scene upon which Iran's professional institutions previously had sole domain. These were transnational institutions: the international associations and globally circulating media that found their way into Iran with the slight opening of Iran's borders under the presidency of Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005) and the growing presence of the Internet.

In this chapter, I examine the ecology of Iran's domestic professional institutions from the post-Iraq war period to today in order to lay the groundwork for understanding power and agency in professional institutions and to pave the way for understanding how transnational institutions behave in this ecology. I focus my attention on the role of magazines, design awards, professional associations and other organizations, workshops and lectures, and design competitions in shaping Iran's architecture profession. I study ways transnational practices have affected these institutions, the people connected to them, and ultimately, the Iranian profession as a whole.

Few accounts of the architecture profession cover the ways it is shaped by its institutions. There are histories of professional associations such as the AIA in the US and RIBA in the UK.<sup>93</sup> Colonial institutions are also examined in light of policies of association and assimilation in, for example, North Africa (Rabinow 1995, Wright 1991). But neither of these accounts offers a framework with which to connect complex,

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<sup>92</sup> Ali Kermanian, *Architecture Beyond Architecture* (Tehran: Nazar Press, 2009), 91.

<sup>93</sup> See for example Mary N. Woods, *From Craft to Profession: The Practice of Architecture in 19<sup>th</sup> Century America* (University of California Press, 1999).

integrated networks of institutions. As a result, these histories are blind to the way such networks of professional institutions engage professionals and the state.

Methodologically, by focusing on specific transnational practices in these institutions, this analysis contributes to our understanding of the institutional channels through which the processes of globalization in architecture operate. Most of these institutional channels are missed in the literature on transnationalism of professions that I reviewed in Chapter 1; yet, as I will show in this chapter, institutions play a tremendous role in transnationalizing Iran's architecture profession.

In presenting my evidence, I categorize my empirical findings by institution type. I begin with magazines and awards, then professional associations and informal groups, followed by workshops, and finally competitions. I use organization bylaws and bulletins; award and competition advertisement; jury proceedings; coverage in magazines; an extensive review of archives of two magazines; and participant observation in professional meetings, award ceremonies, and underground discussions and meetings. I also draw from Internet content for announcements that show how Iran's architects' activities are cast globally. To a lesser extent, I use content from in-depth interviews with practicing architects, educators, and heads of professional organizations to establish a network of institutional actors. Some of my evidence draws from interviews in which the politics of institutions were discussed at length. I spoke with heads of all but two of the institutions investigated in this chapter. I also spoke with leading critics of these institutions. I assemble interview evidence beside content analysis toward triangulating as complete a picture of the interconnections of institutions as I can.

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From my first interviews with architects in Iran in 2010, I gradually became aware of a complex network of issues that were plaguing them. As examples: one person told me about a head of Iran's AIA delaying elections for his position; another person shared communications in which architects were boycotting lectures by the AIA amidst calls for the president to step down; that association head told me about the democratic vision he holds for the organization in reaching out to all architects and not just those in the lime-light of magazines, awards, and foreign attention; then, in the archival research presented in Chapter 2, I uncovered that the president of the AIA was the editor of the same *Jame-eh va Memari* that had so sharply criticized the "corrupt institution of consulting engineers" of the prerevolutionary regime; I learned that one architect was leading a resistance by hosting his own underground meetings and effectively shaping his own informal professional association with events, lectures, film screenings, debates, and underground gatherings advertised to select colleagues via SMS (text message). Other dramatic accounts around other institutions abound.

The bodies of literature in architecture history and sociology that cover the politics of architecture practice in different national contexts (e.g. Bremner 2010, Hudson 2004) and ways professions and professionals vie for institutional control and political power (e.g. Abbott 1988, Fourcade 2009) shed much light on what I observed in Iran, but they do not

quite contain the dynamics I was observing. Actually, they didn't even come close. Interview participants connected things such as the way architecture projects were publicized in magazines printed on high-quality paper and distributed widely among architects, developers, and the interested public to the struggle for representation in professional organizations. They described how such seemingly disparate things coalesced toward what one informant described as "an impending crisis of the profession that was increasingly colonized by its own fascination with the West and the East and a denial of its own history,"<sup>94</sup> which many had written off as lost to the recent Iran-Iraq war, revolution, and some of the earlier social and political transformations discussed in the Chapter 2.

In the exposition that follows, I discuss the dynamics around each institution in turn. I connect specific stories (among them, anecdotes, which have methodological significance as described in Chapter 1) to the analytical framings of transnational capital, transnational institutions, decontextualized knowledge, and the consumption of spectacle of transnationalism that I introduced in Chapter 1. To start, I offer the following quote as an example of the statements I encountered, which effectively demanded that I connect institutions (awards, in this case) to individuals and to a transnational frame of analysis:

The attention paid by designers, specialists in the field, insiders of the building industry and keen observers, has turned these awards into an occasion awaited by many. A similar interest is conspicuous in architectural journals, seminars and exhibitions in the last years, throughout the country. Now Iranian publications are successfully competing with foreign titles in the domestic market, through insiders of the profession [who] are following the developments elsewhere in the world with more carefulness, putting the issues of the contemporary Iranian architecture in perspective. So the improvement of the forum for better ideas, coupled with the growth of cultural means, has prompted our architects to pay more attention to the country's tangible issues than they did in the past.<sup>95</sup>

## Magazines

Starting in the mid 2000s, two independent professional architecture magazines (*Memar* and *Sharestan*) profiled successful expatriate Iranian architects, introduced and administered annual design awards, or with these awards, they invited expatriate Iranian architects and foreign architects as jurors. These specific practices jump-started the profession's transformation. While they built on processes and ideas present in the magazines that preceded them (e.g. *Architecte* and *Honar va Memari*'s profiles of architects and *Abadi*'s awards), the social and political moment in Iran provided a very different historical context in which Iranian architects had almost no access to foreign architect or their ideas.

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<sup>94</sup> Interview with K1.

<sup>95</sup> Kamran Afshar Naderi. "The Grand Me'mar Award 2005 and Independent Tendency in Architecture," Head article in *Memar* (Dec-Jan 2005-6), Translation by magazine; words in [brackets] are mine.

In Chapter 2 the historical significance of professional magazines in Iran's architecture profession is established. With *Abadi*, and articles such as the one in the 1992 issue titled "Promoting a Tradition of Selectivity," the post-Iraq war profession became increasingly defined through content in these magazines. *Abadi* underwent a change in management in the late 1990s. Its founding editor and active deputy editor are rumored to have had a falling out with leadership of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, MHUD. Recall that *Abadi* was not an independent or privately held publication. It was published under the auspices of MHUD and as such it belonged to a state ministry. There were forms of direct influence on the content and focus of the magazine, though, according to individuals involved on the editorial board, not to such a significant extent as to be considered outright control. I was told that MHUD might set the agenda for special topics to be covered in *Abadi*. But technical content was not redlined to any degree considered by its early editors to be stifling. As a mechanism of state influence over a profession's prominent institution, this channel of control is noteworthy.

The events around the shifting of *Abadi*'s leadership led the editors to found a new magazine called *Memar* (meaning "Architect"). *Memar* was independent and relied on advertising and private funding structures. Through the vision of its first lead editor and her connection to circles of literary criticism through her own degrees in literature, *Memar* had a seemingly more grounded and substantial connection to critical content to its name. The editor's comfort in navigating transnational circles, with a more sophisticated exposure drawing from her own reading and writings in literary criticism supported a more confident and gracious encounter with contacts outside Iran than exhibited by other post-Iraq war institutional actors.

#### *Memar Magazine and the Grand Memar Award*

Like *Abadi*, *Memar* elected to invest in its reprographic and graphic quality. Heavy coated color pages made *Memar* stand out on magazine stands throughout Tehran's streets (Figure 10). As architects remained desperate for access to global ideas in architecture, *Memar* increasingly became a window outside Iran.

*Memar* magazine introduced the *Grand Memar Award* in 2001. I see the award as a coming to fruition of the vision spelled out in the *Abadi* article on promoting selectivity (written by the cofounder of *Memar*). Significantly, in the second year of the award, *Memar* began inviting expatriate Iranian architects, and eventually, foreign architects to sit on the jury. The *Memar* Award's first expat juror, Mohsen Mostafavi (then head of Architecture at Cornell University), sat in 2003. The first foreign juror, Vicente Guallart, sat on 2008. And in 2010, all the jurors were Iranian expatriates. Each of these parts of the award's history presents a milestone in the transnational expansion of Iran's architecture profession. Through these milestones, Iranian architects saw their work judged by international—or at least supra-national—standards for the first time after the revolution.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> The term supra-national is used often in economic geography literature to refer to processes that occur in a domain of practice that extends outside the nation state.

The process added foreign context or a transnational legitimacy to the international architectural knowledge's they had been struggling to gain access to since the revolution.

I asked the editor of *Memar* about how expatriate jurors were invited. She said it was a combination of opportunity and nationalism.<sup>97</sup> The expatriate jurists all responded with enthusiasm to her invitation. Some of them wanted to stay engaged in Iran, but Iran's "miserable (*felakatvar*) bureaucracy" turned them off. In terms of their judging, she said with few exceptions, none of the jurists were aware of the profession's goings on in Iran. As a consequence, their knowledge of the context of state-profession-society relations were limited or absent.

Before talking about the awards, some detail on the process of inviting and hosting foreign jurists merits attention. In our interview, the editor said that these architects were contacted cold in many cases without connections. In 2010, the jury consisted of the Hariri Sisters, Nasrine Seraji, Hadi Tehrani, and Nader Tehrani from the US and Europe (all globally recognized practitioners and educators). One among them said that the invitation intrigued him and he accepted. He had not been active in Iran in any way for decades. He had emigrated long before the revolution and had since had a strong career in Europe and the US. The debates around the award ushered the first critical discussion about architecture since the revolution and, I will argue, to an extent even in the Iranian profession's history, as this was also a moment when Iranian architects became critical of how their work was judged by the jury of expatriate architects and thus critical of the judges themselves.

To understand the impact of the awards on the profession, one must first understand the award process from advertising to submissions to judgment and finally, to the award giving ceremony and the spectacle of recognition and acknowledgement produced around the magazine, the architect, and the award itself. The judgment process for the *Memar* Award is as follows: applicants submit five poster boards on a built project in either of two categories—residential or non-residential—a fifteen-second movie of the project, and a one-page description of the project. *Memar* receives these entries and codes them for anonymity. The jury meets over two days. First they put up all the boards and descriptions for the over one hundred entries. In the first round, each juror applies stickers with colors unique to them and marks the projects they want eliminated. There isn't much discussion in this first round. In the second round they do the same thing while discussing projects that have *not* been unanimously voted out. In the third round they argue for about twenty projects that they want to keep as finalists. They watch the videos for these finalists. In the fourth round, they rank the projects on a one to ten scale. The top three winners' projects are published elaborately in *Memar* and are recognized in ceremonies. Pictures from these ceremonies are published in *Memar*. The magazine published significant content around the award judgment process: in addition to the short bios of the judges, *Memar* published large parts of the proceedings of the meetings.

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<sup>97</sup> This idea was verified through interviews with those jurors.

**داوران جایزه معماری ۸۹**  
(به ترتیب حروف الفبا)  
**THE JURORS OF MEMAR AWARD 2010**  
(In Alphabetical Order in Persian)

**هادی تهرانی**  
**Hadi Teherani**

هادی تهرانی متولد ۱۳۳۴ تهران و فارغ‌التحصیل دانشگاه فنی برانشویگ (Braunschweig) در سال ۱۹۸۴ است. او پیش از تأسیس دفتر کار شخصی خود در ۱۹۹۰، در دفتر پروفیسور یواخیم شورمان (Joachim Schurmann) در کلن کار کرده است. در سال ۱۹۹۱ دفتر معماران برت (BRT) را در هامبورگ تأسیس کرد و در پروژه‌های بین‌المللی متعددی فعالیت داشته است. او پیش از این عضو هیئت داوران جایزه معماری ۸۴ بوده است.



**نادر تهرانی**  
**Nader Tehrani**

نادر تهرانی دو مدرک کارشناسی در رشته‌های هنرهای تجسمی (۱۹۸۵) و معماری (۱۹۸۶) از مدرسه طراحی رد آیلند (Rhode Island School of Design) دریافت کرد. او پس از دریافت مدرک کارشناسی ارشد از دانشگاه هاروارد (Harvard GSD)، دوره‌ای را برای مطالعه تاریخ و تئوری معماری در انجمن معماری لندن (AA) گذراند. نادر تهرانی علاوه بر تدریس در دانشگاه‌های هاروارد، رد آیلند و انستیتو تکنولوژی جورجیا، در حال حاضر رئیس بخش معماری انستیتو تکنولوژی ماساچوست (MIT) است. تهرانی دفتر حرفه‌ای خود Office dA را در ۱۹۹۱ تأسیس کرد. او پیش از این عضو هیئت داوران جایزه معماری ۸۳ بوده است.



**گیسو حریری**  
**Gisue Hariri**

گیسو حریری در ۱۹۸۰ از دانشگاه کرنل فارغ‌التحصیل شد. پس از همکاری با چند دفتر معتبر در سانفرانسیسکو و نیویورک، دفتر معماری حریری و حریری را در سال ۱۹۸۶ تأسیس کرد. او علاوه بر کار حرفه‌ای، از ۱۹۸۷ در دانشگاه‌های کلمبیا، کرنل، مک‌گیل (Mc Gill) و مدرسه طراحی پاریسونز تدریس کرده است.



**مژگان حریری**  
**Mojgan Hariri**

مژگان حریری مدرک کارشناسی معماری را در ۱۹۸۱ و پس از تدریس زیر نظر کالین رو (Colin Rowe)، و مدرک کارشناسی ارشد در رشته طراحی شهری را در ۱۹۸۳ از دانشگاه کرنل دریافت کرد. او پس از کارآموزی در دفتر جیمز استوارت پولشک و همکاران (James Stewart Polshek & Partners)، همراه با خواهرش گیسو، دفتر معماری حریری و حریری را در سال ۱۹۸۶ تأسیس کرد. پروژه‌های دفتر حریری و حریری به دلیل کیفیت و نوآوری جوایز متعددی - از جمله جایزه معتبر آکادمی امریکا - دریافت کرده و در نمایشگاه خانه غیر خصوصی (Un-Private House) موزه هنرهای معاصر نیویورک نیز ارائه شده‌اند.

**نسربین سراجی**  
**Nasrine Seraji**

نسربین سراجی متولد تهران و فارغ‌التحصیل انجمن معماری لندن (AA) است. او پس از کسب رتبه اول در مسابقه طراحی مرکز موقت آمریکایی، آتلانتا سراجی را در ۱۹۹۰ در پاریس تأسیس کرد. سراجی در سال ۱۹۹۳ در دانشگاه کلمبیا و دانشگاه پرینستون تدریس کرده و هم‌اکنون رئیس بخش معماری دانشگاه کرنل است. سراجی علاوه بر کار حرفه‌ای، در سال ۲۰۰۶، با حکم ریاست جمهوری، به مقام ریاست مدرسه عالی معماری پاریس دست یافت و همان سال مجدداً رئیس بخش معماری و هنر آکادمی هنرهای زیبای وین شد. او همچنین در سال ۲۰۰۶ به پاس خدماتش در عرصه معماری، مدال "Chevalier des Arts et des lettres" را از وزیر فرهنگ فرانسه و در سال ۲۰۰۸ مدال نقره را از انجمن معماری فرانسه و مدال "Chevalier dans l'ordre national du Mérite" را با حکم ریاست جمهوری فرانسه دریافت کرد. سراجی پیش از این عضو هیئت داوران جایزه معماری ۸۴ بوده است.



Figure 10. *Memar* magazine spread with bios of jurors.  
(Image from *Memar* Magazine)

The involvement of foreign jurors and the dissemination of their deliberations affect the state and significance of transnational knowledge consumption. Their decontextualized judgments and decisions also affect basic ideas of hierarchy and authority in the profession. In one instance, the Iranian jurors voted for an established and well-respected, middle-aged architect over a younger architect who had been trained after the revolution. The older architect was a senior member of the profession (and in failing health). But the one foreign juror gave all his ten vote points to the younger architect and none to the older one, because he earnestly felt that design was better. This resulted in the young architect's shocking win over his elder. This marked the first time the younger, post revolutionary generation of architects gained the attention of the profession. It allowed architects to

reconsider where design authority was placed. Where it had been somewhat held up in seniority and prestige, authority could now come from a young architect trained after the revolution. The significance of this moment for the profession was stressed in several interviews.

The longer-term results of disturbances such as this example are mixed. The benefits as perceived by Iran's architects are several: the process opened recognition to projects instead of people; it caught the attention of aspiring young architect and inspired them to actively pursue design for its own sake instead of following the status quo of practice; and it brought the interested public's attention to a new direction in the profession.

One architect argued that the *Memar Award* project ushered in an era in which architecture was appreciated as art for the first time after the revolution.<sup>98</sup> In the 1990s period of reconstruction, architecture was overwhelmingly, and almost exclusively, a means to profit for developers in the real estate boom that ensued. But with the awards, architects found reward for doing architecture for its own sake. This was a significant break with the post-revolutionary past.

Two architects, Hamid and Salma, told me how winning the *Memar Award* for their self-funded project was a turning point in their firm's previously stagnant career.<sup>99</sup> After the award, they became known in the profession. Developers and clients that saw their project showcased in *Memar*—which has by far the largest readership in the building industry—would contact the magazine office, which in turn provided their firm's contact information.<sup>100</sup> The professional capital gained by the award in the context of the building industry also affected the role of architects with respect to contractors. Hamid and Salma gave me an example:

Before the award, we only had about 10% say in debates on a building project and the contractor had a 90% say. Now, after winning awards, we have over 30% say and the contractors are listening more. It's still not at 100%. By contrast, in similar projects in the US, on average, I think architects are at about 85%.<sup>101</sup>

Even the perception of increased professional capital is significant when considering profession-state relations. Other interviewees cited a complicated drawback of the shift wrought by the awards. This was the de-emphasis of expertise and experience in design. When an award is conferred for architecture, often it emphasizes how the building looks and feels and *not* how well it operates—the quality of its heating, ventilation, structure, and so on. The small group of critics of the award saw the dangers of the spectacle of recognition being promoted by the magazine. This spectacle gained much momentum in Iran's profession. It set the stage for the currency of credibility in the profession. The same

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<sup>98</sup> Interview with AM

<sup>99</sup> The names and the specific nature of work of individuals, firms, and groups that are currently active in the profession are all anonymized.

<sup>100</sup> Interview with PA1.

<sup>101</sup> Interview with PA1.

circuits of credibility comprise the foundations of the transnational credibility that I devote the next chapter to.

In the tenth award cycle, which comprised five Iranian architects of noted accomplishment abroad as jurors, it was considered a triumph for Iranian architects to have these distinguished expatriates on their jury. But the results of the award got mixed reviews. Some felt the expatriate jurors projected a nostalgic longing on their criteria for the winner. The awards went to more traditional projects instead of the projects that architects in Iran considered avant-garde.<sup>102</sup>

With the profession-shaping influence that *Memar Magazine* ushered in, others caught on to the power that professional magazines could have. Furthermore, *Memar* sold very well and demonstrated that private magazines could be profitable. *Memar* was also a very exciting opportunity for professionals to establish connections with the field outside Iran. This connection offered the promise of transnational credibility to Iranian architects. One magazine that was founded on these premises and succeeded to become another uniquely rich channel of transnational connection, was *Sharestan*.

### *Sharestan Magazine*

Beginning in 2003, *Sharestan* published special issues with in-depth interviews with successful expatriate Iranian architects. Bahram Shirdel was interviewed in 2005 and Farshid Moussavi was interviewed in 2006 (both are globally recognized for their contributions through design theory and practice, respectively). Mehrdad Hadighe (chair at U Penn), Nader Tehrani (chair at MIT), Mehrdad Yazdani (Yazdani Studio), Hadi Tehrani, and Nasrine Seraji (then chair at Cornell) all had special issues devoted to their work and their occupational histories. In our interview, an editor of *Sharestan* shared with me his approach in exposing his audience to foreign people and ideas. He said (paraphrasing):

I want to take the lamentable characteristic of Iranian people to worship foreigners and make it something positive by turning it on its head.<sup>103</sup>

This editor lamented the audience and population he published for. He's cognizant of a strategy of critically engaging transnationalism for the emerging generation of architects (paraphrasing):

It becomes very critical to choose the correct foreign people to interview and engage. Whatever I present will be quickly absorbed here. So for example, I want to connect with Nasrine Seraji because she engages big ideas critically... Here there's a saying 'the hen's neighbor is a goose' and you can't fix this just by saying it. My partners don't get it. It's a very easy concept but very hard at the same time.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Interview with M1.

<sup>103</sup> Interview with RS1.

<sup>104</sup> Interview with RS1.

He took it upon himself to make *Sharestan* a critical lens with which to train Iranian's gaze.

We're looking to solve the problem at the level of concept instead of the larger level of metaphor... we're too zoomed in.<sup>105</sup>

The story of the special issues came about thus: by 2006, *Sharestan* had about five issues published under another editor's leadership. The new editor joined the team and brought in articles by rising Iranian architects and this signaled a shift from the previous issues. In his legwork, he benefited from the advice of Bahram Shirdel, a dormant giant as far as expatriate Iranian architects go, and wanted to return the favor. A colleague suggested doing a special issue on him. The idea of special issues with in-depth profiles was born. (The editor noted that only later did he see that the well-known, globally circulated, Spanish architecture magazine *El Croquis* did the same thing.)

*Sharestan's* next special issue was with Farshid Moussavi, a partner at Foreign Office Architects (FOA). The editor was introduced to Moussavi through her office and conducted the interview remotely. For others *Sharestan* interviewed, he arranged to meet them in person, typically on visits to Iran. He oversaw eight special issues before resigning in 2011 (for reasons relevant to this investigation that are discussed below).

The detail of another of these special issues presents a significant level of micro-detail that better illuminates this transnational channel and the specific ways the foreign is translated for domestic Iranian consumption. Mehdi had left Iran in his youth, before the revolution. He returned to Iran in the mid-2000s for personal reasons. Word of his trip got to the editor who asked if he would consider an interview while in town. Mehdi, otherwise completely detached from Iran's profession obliged with an air of curiosity. A long interview was conducted and before he returned to the US. Because most of the interview was in English (English was the language Mehdi was trained in to communicate his architectural ideas), there was an exchange of translated interview transcripts via email that he was asked to review prior to publication in Tehran.

In our meeting, Mehdi mused that so many of his ideas were totally lost in translation. Many of the theoretical concepts he discussed were effectively transliterated rather than translated. He said that that was telling about the state of the profession in Iran. He sent revisions and the article was published. He still didn't think that the thrust of his discussion got across. This experience highlights the significance of even basic ways transnational knowledge is decontextualized.

On the other side of the transaction, the editor or the Iranian readers may not, or would not, have noticed the hand of the translator. It may very well have been the case that they were more eager to read about the biography and career history of a successful Iranian architect abroad. Mehdi's theoretical stance would have been of secondary, if any, importance to a good number of readers of the article—the consumers of this transnational

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<sup>105</sup> Interview with RS1b.

exchange. Indeed, since the special issue on Mehdi was published just as the Internet was becoming widely available in Iran; he would have been seen as a rare opportunity for enterprising architects in Iran to connect to. Indeed they did. Mehdi said the communications poured in. Job applicants and aspiring migrants tried their luck. One group was successful. A studio instructor asked if Mehdi could serve as a remote critic or aide for a project his class was working on. He reviewed their work by email and provided criticism in an exchange that he saw as very engaging for him and he imagined significant for the students in Iran that he worked with. This speaks to the object of consumption of transnational knowledge's.

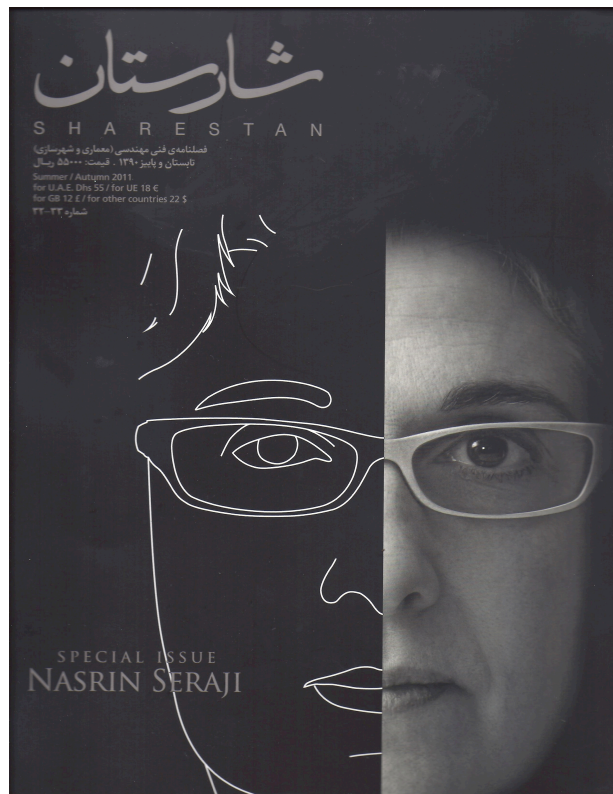


Figure 11. Sharestan architect profile: cover of issue featuring Nasrine Seraji. (Image from Sharestan magazine)

The case of Shirdel is another very interesting one. At the time of contact with the editor of *Sharestan*, Shirdel was working in the US. He has taught at the AA, GSD, and SCI-arc. He was contacted cold by the editor with an interview request, and he agreed. In our interview in his Tehran office, Shirdel said that contact was instrumental in reminding him of Iran's architecture profession and bringing his attention to Iran. The publication also brought Iran's community's attention to this dormant behemoth of an architect. They invited him for project competitions in Iran. Eventually, the idea of work and a vague sense of instrumentality in recovering Iran's lost architecture heritage and development of

Persian philosophies of architecture may have been what took him back there. In this case, a somewhat opposite transnational transaction brought the expatriate to Iran instead of using the expatriate to get Iranian architects out.

The *Sharestan* articles comprise an intro to Shirdel by the editor; an interview with Shirdel by an Iranian architect based in Italy, Abbas Gharib of Studio Gharib International and an architect in Iran; an article about an exhibit of Shirdel's work at the Iran Contemporary Architecture Gallery by Mohammad Reza Haeri; an article about Shirdel's work titled "To Go Beyond Form Towards Space" by Iranian architect Mohammad Mohammadzadeh (a member of the young, domestically trained, rising cadre of designers (then in his thirties); a dialogue between an interviewer and a collaborator of Shirdel's for an installation at the 1984 Venice Biennale; and last, an article by Jeffrey Kipnis titled "Toward a New Architecture" that I'm unclear was or was not an original contribution for this magazine since it didn't have a direct focus on Shirdel, but discussed their shared approach of "folds" in their architecture.<sup>106</sup>

According to one of the contributors, Shirdel had come to Iran on a contract for the new airport serving Tehran (Imam Khomeini International Airport, IKA). He is categorized as an adventurer that follows architectural opportunity. This is what Shirdel shared with me in our interview too. In the article, Haeri adds:

Shirdel stayed in Iran for about a decade, he participated in domestic design competitions, he gave lectures, he had relationships with Iran's architects, urbanists, and artists, he introduced his own work, and he spoke about his beliefs and thoughts, and like an architect, **he closely followed the architecture profession**, and clearly although beyond ways we can appraise, he affected generations of contemporary Iranian architects and the country's fields of professional and academic architecture and urbanism.<sup>107</sup> [original emphasis]

Models and renderings of his projects occupy a majority of the ninety-eight pages devoted to the topic. A couple pictures of Shirdel chatting with Peter Eisenman as they walk in Istanbul are included in the magazine: one as the first image of the editorial at the front of the magazine and another with the English translation of the interview by Gharib. These images serve as an example of marketing transnational capital akin to the imagery prevalent in *Honar va Memari*. These images form a significant dimension of the scopic economy that Moallem writes about (Moallem 2011). Such are the ways transnationalism gets published in Iran's institutions.

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There are a host of other trade magazines such as *Memari va Sakhteman*, *2A*, *Memari Irani* (*MA*) among others. The content some of these magazines publish, how much they charge

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<sup>106</sup> Sharestan no. 15-16; spring and summer 1386 [2007].

<sup>107</sup> Mohammad Reza Haeri, "Life Architecture—Shirdel in 'the workshop of contemporary Iranian architecture'," *Sharestan*, 15-16 Winter-Spring (2007): 26-31.

for printing articles, or publishing profiles of projects have grown to become areas of contention (*MA* was noted as an exception) that were mentioned in several interviews. As an example, a past editor of *Sharestan* said that he resigned from his position when the magazine's board offered him the income from sixteen pages of pay-to-publish content in lieu of the salary he was promised. I was told that:

all but a few articles get published without paying to be published. If you want your project or your article published in a magazine, you typically pay a fee for it. The editor of a particularly crooked magazine held a design competition recently. He called the winner of the competition and told him he had to pay a certain amount if he wanted his project on the cover. The competition winner rejected the proposal. I don't know what the outcome was, but this exchange was fascinating.<sup>108</sup>

That editor claims he resigned from *Sharestan* because of this. He is setting up another magazine in which he wants to continue the in-depth interview special edition format. But he lamented that the process would be difficult because, in his words, *Sharestan* "will shoot my shadow."

I cared about legitimacy. But the magazine board doesn't care about that at all. They're about meeting the bottom line.<sup>109</sup>

### **Professional Bodies: the AIA, PDRC, and ROSHD**

The power of professional bodies is regarded with ambivalence among Iranian architects. Some architects see these bodies as the only channel for securing political power, while others see them as futile institutions struggling in the corrupt milieu of state-registered and bureaucratic bodies. One architect summarized the pessimistic view thus:

These institutions, typically have no record of progress or action in terms of substance and quality. No evidence of any significant idea or movement is recorded in the history of their activity. It's as though the issue of "multiplicity," which even catches our attention in the case of the country's architecture magazines, places them in a societal condition of "quantity over quality," which subsequently contributes to the reproduction of a null cycle.<sup>110</sup>

It took time for professional bodies to take shape after the revolution despite immediate post-revolutionary attempts to organize. *Jame'e-yeh Memaran-e Iran* (the Society of Iranian Architects) is an example of an organization of architects formed right after the revolution that was destroyed rapidly as members were persecuted or emigrated after the revolution.

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<sup>108</sup> Interview with S1.

<sup>109</sup> Interview with S1.

<sup>110</sup> Ali Kermanian, *Architecture Beyond Architecture*, 90.

One architect I interviewed connected the failures of institution to launch to cultural characteristics:

Just as architecture is a reflection of societal and cultural problems, so do professional organizations reflect upon the people and society in which they operate. The growth of such organizations is hampered by rivalry and poor interpersonal relationships on the one hand. On another hand, these organizations aren't a respected and settled part of Iranian society.<sup>111</sup>

His argument, shared by the majority of the architects I interviewed, speaks to the vividness of the perception of profession-society cultural relationships that I described in Chapter 1.

Today, the dominant professional association, *Anjoman-e Mohandesan-e Memar* (Association of Iranian Architects, AIA, my acronym) is inclusive of all licensed Iranian architects. It is formally recorded in Iran. It is also Iran's representative organization to the International Union of Architects (UIA). Notably, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (MHUD) applied to become Iran's representative body to the UIA but they were rejected on grounds of being a governmental organization.

This transnational networking of the AIA is telling when we consider that it is the leadership of the AIA that is fiercely contested in Iran, particularly among some of the rising transnationally charged avant-garde. One architect published the following description of the AIA in his monograph. I quote it at length for its polemic content as well as the politics that can be read in between the lines:

Perhaps the most important achievements of this society can be cited as their membership in the Iran Artist House (Khaneh-ye Honarmandan) and their establishment of a connection and membership with the International Union of Architects. This institution has not benefited from a reputation as a strong society or one as a source of reference for expertise in architecture because of the opacity of its management and political infighting, despite their organization of lectures and other cultural events... Thus, the results of holding all these cultural events are in the end unclear and naturally without any specific effect on the country's architecture [profession]. From the fall of 2007, following internal differences among the board of directors, weakness of its management, the incompetence and dictatorship of its top leader as well as the weakness of its founding board in making decisive actions to relieve this crisis, this institution has since become passive and static.<sup>112</sup>

He goes on to write that:

Only a democratic and independent institution of architects, chosen by architects, and for architects and beyond the destructive forces of the government or other

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<sup>111</sup> Interview with M2.

<sup>112</sup> Kermanian, *Architecture Beyond Architecture*, 89.

outside influences can gradually leave a positive impact on the society of architects.<sup>113</sup>

The AIA leader repeatedly postponed the general society elections. Those I interviewed saw this as his way of keeping power and not stepping down. Another architect active in Iran's professional institutions, Nader, made it his goal to reinstate the elections. Nader has maintained an independent role of facilitator and activist in the profession. He has maintained weekly gatherings at his home for years. About twenty to forty people are invited by SMS. It is in this milieu of dissatisfaction that such informal and even underground groups have formed.

Beyond this controversy, I did not hear much about the AIA in any of my interviews. Instead, respondents typically located the reigns of the profession in the grips of smaller organizations and incubators such as the Physical Development Research Center (PDRC) and ROSHD (which translates to "growth").

The PDRC was formed as a part-governmental, part-private incubator for leaders of Iran's young generation of architects. It started with the state-supported initiative to develop a large technology park campus, Pardisan. The proposed campus would house offices and plants of numerous organizations on a large site located on the outskirts of Tehran. Hekmat, the director of the PDRC proposed that architects for the projects in the campus be selected from a pool of award winning young architecture firms as a way to patronize them while benefiting from fresh architectural ideas. The pool of firms would be syndicated as ROSHD. The Pardisan campus became their proving grounds. Many of the rising Iranian architects cite ROSHD and their project(s) in the campus as the turning point in their career. Given the opportunity to build and showcase their designs, they captured the attention of corporate and state patrons.

Depending on who I interviewed—members of ROSHD or those unable to compete with them—I got different perspectives of the role of the PDRC in the profession. The first criticism, as expected, came from those outside ROSHD that did not benefit from what they suggested as closed circle of patronage offered to its due-paying members. Another architect offered a more biting criticism. He told me:

The campus was an architectural zoo where caged animals were put on display outside their natural habitat for consumption.

He went on to suggest that:

Contrary to what Iranians think, certain incubators and institutions [(in reference to ROSHD and the PDRC)] are preventing such conditions [of substantive growth of critical architecture] rather than facilitating them. The Pardisan technology park is more of a zoo than a habitat for creativity in architecture. Consuming architecture

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 91.

in these parks is like harboring an animal for its fur coat and incubating it in a cage. These parks are sites where quality is traded for quantity.<sup>114</sup>

This criticism becomes only more salient when we realize it is the design firms associated with ROSHD that host Iran's foreign architect workshop series. They are the audience of Iranian architecture's most overt channel of transnational flow, which I turn to next.

### **Continuing Education: Foreign Architect Workshops**

Ashkan traveled to Iran in 2004 to sit on the jury of the *Memar Award* and in that trip befriended two Iranian architects, Hamid and Ehsan. Together, they cultivated a relationship and produced the Foreign Architect Workshop Series (FAWS, my acronym) with the informal support of the PDRC. The FAWS would expose Iranian architects to leading foreign architects through two to three day workshops during their weeklong visits to Iran.

The workshops occurred roughly every two months. Hosting the foreign architects is delegated to one of the thirty or so member firms of ROSHD. Each time a foreign architect visits Iran, one of the firms in this group is assigned to host that architect and to take them on a trip within Iran. These hostings have led to partnerships between visitor and host firms. At times these partnerships—desires for collaboration really—have been successful. The last FAWS event was the 16<sup>th</sup> in the series and it occurred in December 2011. This was about the same time as the jump in the Iranian Rial to US Dollar currency exchange rate. One architect speculated the following hiatus of the FAWS had to do with the increased cost of hosting foreign architects in Iran: their airfare, lodging, and other expenses—a dynamic that reveals the indirect effects of economic sanctions on informal enterprises.

On one hand, an architect told me that foreign architects' presence in Iran was motivated by self-interest, as a means to enter a potentially untapped market that is unaffected by the economic downturn in Europe. He said:

Participants in international workshop series are not helping Iranian firms, but rather themselves.<sup>115</sup>

On the other hand, one architect noted that exposure to foreign architects—particularly those with big names—found Iranian architects a more confident and more critical voice. Over the past decade, Iranian architects have become increasingly critical of architects they had previously deified through reading about them in foreign magazines in the 1980s and 1990s. In one event, two internationally leading figures in digital design techniques (one of whom was Patrik Schumacher) visited Iran for a weeklong workshop. An Iranian emigrant

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<sup>114</sup> Interview with M3.

<sup>115</sup> Interview with RD.

employee working at an Australian firm initiated the workshop. One architect told me she was impressed by the criticality of Iranian student attendees. She was happy that they weren't star struck by their foreign guests.<sup>116</sup>

As an illustrative aside, at the same event a head of a local professional group and government liaison for the Iran War Museum who gave a talk in which he said things (including anti-imperialist slogans) that was embarrassing for the host architects. The organizers managed to mitigate translating his speech by claiming technical difficulties. Members of the Iranian audience, including students walked out in protest.<sup>117</sup>

## Competitions

Competitions are a significant institutional mechanism in exposing Iran's profession to foreign architects and their work. The following text, quoted at length, and subsequently analyzed, comes from a post on *Archdaily*—a prominent architecture news website with wide global readership—about the winning design for Iran's largest recent competition. It is written by David Basultoby, one of the two cofounders of *Archdaily*:

During the last few years the world has witnessed dramatic changes. Our world is no longer rural, economic models are struggling, and the centres of innovation and political power have shifted.

It is this context that explains why the recently held competition for the new Tehran Stock Exchange is relevant beyond the building. The Physical Development Research Center [PDRC] organized a competition between 29 top architecture firms, later narrowed down to eight after a RFQ [Request for Qualifications] process, who each worked with a local Iranian firm. In a country experiencing a very unique economic moment, the brief of the competition aimed to challenge the typology of the stock exchange in general, as well as factors that could alter this type to address cultural factors specific to its location. Thus, the firms were asked to look at how this program has developed throughout history while also undertaking a thorough analysis of the specificity of this project.

The jury was composed by local architects Mehdi Alizadeh, Farhad Ahmadi, Bahram Shirdel, Hossein Sheikh-Zeineddin and Nader Tehrani (MIT Head of Architecture, principal at NADAAA) as spokesperson.

Alejandro Aravena (founder of Alejandro Aravena Architects, Executive Director of ELEMENTAL) together with local office VAV Studio were selected as the winners for their artful, considered, and minimal, project; of the various proposals, it was the only project which took into consideration functions and forces, geometry and geography, and an organization that distributed its program in a field condition, evenly spreading its function to best capture, light, views, cross ventilation, as well as shade. In turn, it produces a timeless (yet fast-paced)

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<sup>116</sup> Interview with S2.

<sup>117</sup> Interview with K4.

character of the stock exchange as an institution, a building that extends broader traditions while mirroring the current state of its country.

Aravena's entry stood out from the rest as it was conceptually distinct, aligned with the brief of the competition. Other highlights of this entry are its geometry, structural base, sensitivity to climate, and relation to its mountainous landscape, which are explained further in the architect's description below:

A monolithic figure at a first glance, the building achieves a particular transparency thanks to the hollow blocks used on its skin, turning into a lamp that is transparent to the public.

The decision of the jury, while unanimous, is only a recommendation to the client, so we will keep you informed as the project moves forward.<sup>118</sup>

The context of Iran is framed for the broad, global readership of *Archdaily* as an unexpected node of innovation and opportunity for internationally operating architecture firms. Notably, the institutional context of the organizing bodies of the competition organization receives mention as do specific individuals. The architecture itself (Figure 12) reads strongly as context-specific innovation in the same rhetorical spirit of Basulto's argument. That Iranian architects see their context described thus and circulated by the editor of *Archdaily* is profoundly significant in the construction of the professions self-image as a transnational player.

To some architects in Iran, the competition requirement for joint ventures with foreign architects is not so much driven by necessity of absorbing foreign expertise as it is by a desire to brand Tehran's new institutional buildings with foreign architects' names.

One architect writes:

The results of architecture competitions over the past 20 years are a good example of the effects of politics on the nation's architecture. The initial idea behind these competitions was to create movement in the society of architects and accessing the best solutions for specific problems and increasing the overall level of architecture in the country. Unfortunately though, in our country, these competitions always become subject to client and statesmen's whims and agendas... we have seen many instances where one firm wins and another's design is the one used.<sup>119</sup>

In another instance, a competition hosted by the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) required Iranian firms to partner with foreign collaborators. In the partnership that won, the director of the Iranian firm had met the head of the Canadian firm in travels to North America during the revolution when she effectively could not stay in Iran. The success of that collaboration was rare. By the account of the same Iranian firm director, attempts at collaboration in the 1990s were complicated. She had projects outside Iran such as Iranian

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<sup>118</sup> David Basulto, "Tehran Stock Exchange Competition, 1st Prize: Alejandro Aravena Architects & VAV Studio," *Archdaily*, (13 Aug 2012): Accessed 13 May 2013. <<http://www.archdaily.com/261206>>

<sup>119</sup> Kermanian, *Architecture Beyond Architecture*, page 29.

embassies. Through those and through her participation in conferences, she had gained the attention and interest of potential collaborators. But because of external and internal sanctions, partnerships didn't materialize. She says she could get around external sanctions that limit financial engagements between Iran and other countries. It was the internal restrictions that architects cannot navigate.<sup>120</sup> The internal sanctions she was talking about relate to clientelism and state-connected bodies monopolizing development work.



### Tehran Stock Exchange Competition, 1st Prize: Alejandro Aravena Architects & VAV Studio



Exterior South © Alejandro Aravena Architects

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It is in this context that explains why the recently held competition for the new Tehran Stock Exchange is relevant beyond the building. The Physical Development Research Center organized a competition between 29 top architecture firms, later narrowed down to eight after a RFQ process, who each worked with a local Iranian firm. In a country experiencing a [very unique economic moment](#), the brief of the competition aimed to challenge the typology of the stock exchange in general, as well as factors that could alter this type to address cultural factors specific to its location. Thus, the firms were asked to look at how this program has developed throughout history while also undertaking a thorough analysis of the specificities of this project.

The jury was composed by local architects Mehdi Alizadeh, Farhad Ahmadi, Bahram Shirdel, Hossein Sheikh-Zeineddin and Nader Tehrani (MIT [Head of Architecture](#), principal at [NADAAA](#)) as spokesperson.

Figure 12. Snapshot of *Archdaily* article showing Aravena and Vav Studio's winning entry for the Tehran Stock Exchange Competition.  
(Image from Archdaily.com)

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<sup>120</sup> Interview with HK.

Architects I spoke with told me about several instances in which political and economic sanctions on Iran directly prevented collaboration. In one case, Iranian architects could not join an international organization of architects because that organization's base was in the US where non-profit organization laws prevent certain levels of engagement with Iran.<sup>121</sup> In another example, a leading international architect had to withdraw from heading the design jury for a major Iranian development project because his home country forbade his involvement for fear of US retribution on breaking sanctions.

### **Discussion: Institutionalized Consumptions of Foreign Architectural Knowledge**

The Iranian architecture profession's competitions, workshops, awards, professional bodies, and magazines collectively define a field of individual and institutional actors engaged in transactions of recognition and the establishment of connections with foreign architects and their judgments. This field has become an increasingly active one over the past decade of entrepreneurial explorations of institutional agency in the context of the post Iraq war renaissance of the profession. As expected, competition is rife, but collectively, there is evolution and movement toward a new institutionalization of Iran's architecture profession.

Consumptions of foreign architects' judgments and ideas should not merely be seen as one among many aspects of this institutionalization; transnational practices are foundational and they are shaping ways architecture is consumed and produced in Iran. One interviewee very neatly spoke to this point:

Iranians are more influenced by Western thought than Eastern thought. We had a consumptive relationship with our own past at first, but we didn't get anywhere with that, so we thought instead to consume the West. Never did we think to make our own cake – it was either the past or the West. A superficial solution to this conundrum exists today as an Islamic Iran that is a combination of Iran and the West as culture and technical know how—but this equation is merely a commercial one. In architecture, this means Hadi Tehrani's cheap and unsuccessful projects in the west being sold in Iran. Iran doesn't have the means of drawing such architects' creativities to itself. Zaha Hadid proposes her discarded projects for Tehran; she's not drawn to Iran to create an architecture. Iran needs to create conditions for this to change.<sup>122</sup>

There is an institutionalization of decontextualized transnational knowledge that is problematic, which comes with the stirrings of transnationalism in the context of the institutionalization of the profession. The images of foreign architecture that magazines circulate, the short stays of foreign architects participating in workshops, and the temporary, often only nominal, collaboration of foreign firms with domestic partners in competitions are in a way part of a scopic economy of production and consumption of the

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<sup>121</sup> Interview with PK.

<sup>122</sup> Interview with AM.

transnational that underlies the proliferation of institutional power in Iran's architecture profession.

How decontextualized transnational cultures of practice are institutionally consumed in Iran's building and development sector is thus deeply problematic. An alternate framing suggests an institutional colonialism is operating via transnational channels. In my interview with the head of the AIA, he told me (paraphrasing):

Architecture education in Iran is really deteriorating. The proliferation of Azad University branches is a proliferation of moneymaking shops. Magazines are also part of the deterioration of architecture education and practice. Students that flip through the fancy pages of *Memar* magazine only see renderings and get a superficial coverage of architecture. That drives a Photoshop based understanding and excitement for architecture. Not the bricks and mortar of making real architecture.

Clients also see *Memar* and demand fancy renderings in presentations.

The magazines have been helpful in opening exposure to global trends. Magazines as well as the Internet and over 2000 channels of satellite TV.<sup>123</sup>

Architecture's simultaneous positioning in artistic and technical fields renders some aspects of decontextualized knowledge consumption visual in the ways made salient in this statement and others I cite above (see particularly the reference to the PDRC's production of "architectural zoos").

Transnational connections cultivated through these institutions offer hope to the many movers and shakers of the profession, but they also instill fear among the most observant critics. The future of the profession's quest for stability and power remained fully unresolved to almost everyone I interviewed. The only thing there was consensus on was that the profession was undergoing a radical shift and that transnational connections were at the center of those changes. Institutions such as magazines, awards, professional bodies, and such things as the FAWS were one side of the movement. The migrations of individuals out of and back to Iran make up the other side of the movement. These migrations are the subject of the following chapter.

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<sup>123</sup> Interview with NS.

## Chapter 4.

### **Looking and Moving Abroad: The rise and fall of transnational credibility in Iran's architecture profession, 2000-2012**

In this chapter I track the transnational subjects that are formed in the Iranian architecture profession's present encounter with the world beyond its borders. I bring attention to the movement of architects and their ideas between Iran and North America and Europe. This investigation of individuals' movements and transnational accumulations of professional capital stands in contrast to the institutional transnationalisms investigated in the previous chapter. Methodologically, as I argued in the Introduction, at one level, I use interview data to show the significance of informal, individual transnational practices in transforming the Iranian architecture profession; and at the level of the broader dissertation argument, I use the evidence from this chapter to connect transnational subjects to constructions of authority and credibility in the profession.

To organize the presentation of my empirical findings I distinguish five transnational movements. These movements are diagramed in Figure 13 as: (1) the outward gaze of architects in Iran to North America and Europe, (2) the travel or migration of those architects abroad, (3) the return of emigrant Iranian architects to Iran, (4) the gaze of foreign architects into Iran, and (5) the travel of foreign architects to Iran. These movements are inspired by the transnational analyses present in histories of Americanization in architecture and planning, such as Daniel Rodger's *Atlantic Crossings* and Caroline Maniaque's essay on the travels of European architecture students to the US (Rodgers 1998, Maniaque 2009). Moallem's analysis of the global movements of ideas in the pages of travelogues provides further inspiration in reading subject formation in transnational exchanges (Moallem 2005). Ong's evidence from transnational symbolic capital accumulation of migrant elite Chinese populations further buttresses my signification of these Iranian architects' transnational movements (Ong 1999). I will note here that it is in this vein of signifying the nuances of the creation of individual transnational subjects that I foreground my interviewee's words in this chapter. My aim is to connect their motivations for travel and migration to the ways they frame political, professional, and social contexts.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> The reader is referred to the discussion on the methodological merits and limits of this approach discussed in the Methodology section of Chapter 1.

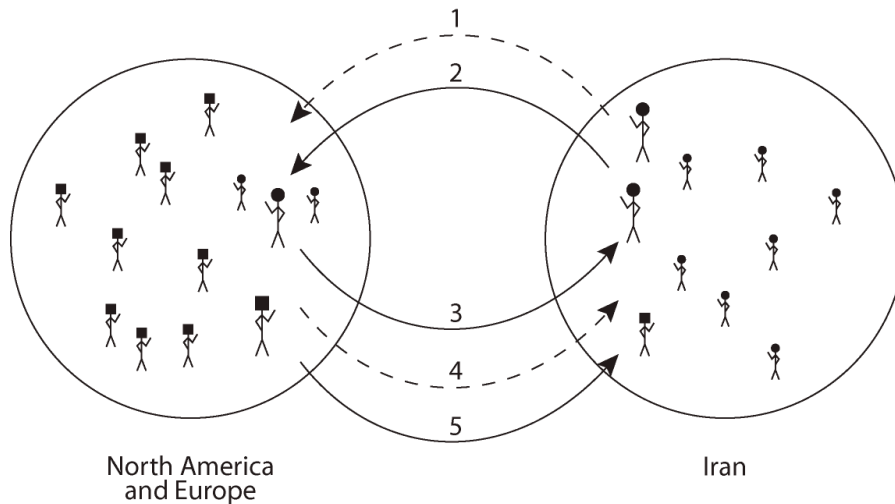


Figure 13. Five Transnational Movements: (1) the outward gaze of architects in Iran to North America and Europe; (2) the travel or migration of those architects abroad; (3) the return of emigrant Iranian architects to Iran; (4) the gaze of foreign architects into Iran; and (5) the travel of foreign architects to Iran. Solid lines indicate physical travel and the dotted lines indicate the gaze abroad.

### Movement 1: looking abroad

The only design influence for teachers and students after the war were foreign magazines that we would get. The Internet and all that came later—that’s only ten to fifteen years ago. [Architects] started copying postmodernism and deconstruction [from the magazines]. They were only rip-offs. These magazines would come and they became their bible... their Quran.<sup>125</sup>

This statement comes from a prominent practitioner and past director of the architecture program at the University of Tehran’s architecture. It describes a symptom of Iranians’ lack of access to architecture design and discourse from after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, through the eight year Iran-Iraq war and up to the late 1990s and early 2000s when a loosening state rhetoric of isolation coincided with the introduction of the Internet to Iran. As such, the statement highlights the perceived location of Iranian architects with respect to a scopic economy that was as subject to sanctions as the country’s financial and trade economies.

Before the wave of migration that helped bring global trends in architecture discourse to Iran, one architect, Peymon describes:

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<sup>125</sup> Interview with II.

In Tabriz [a city in the academic periphery of Iran's Tehran-based core] we dreamed of access to architecture courses in Tehran... but when I finally got to Tehran for grad school, I saw they were in the dark too. No one in Iran knew what was happening in the rest of the world.<sup>126</sup>

Peymon started architecture school in 2002, just as the World Wide Web was becoming available to the Iranian public at Internet cafes. He would tirelessly scour the Web for articles on architecture theory, translate them, and post them in the halls of his department.

At around the same time, many young professionals stated their intent to study, intern, or work with architects in Europe and North America by finding contact information online and sending emails. This was a significant method in getting an early wave of young architects out of Iran in the early 2000s. More recently, architects in Iran email emigrants of that first wave for advice in following their footsteps.<sup>127</sup>

With this advice sometimes comes the sharing of resources. One architect in Toronto told me she shared her course syllabi from Canadian architecture graduate school with a colleague in Tehran that is an adjunct teacher at a university there. This communication of information that has expanded in the past five years has transformed architecture practice and education in Iran. Where ten years ago, students in Iranian universities felt a real concern for not having access to advances in architecture discourse in schools outside Iran, practices like syllabus and reading list sharing becomes significant.

The means for looking abroad might be glossed over as trivial. They are more than a starting point of the impetus for moving abroad. In themselves, such practices inform ideas about the foreign, they shape ways Iranian architects imagine the transnational, and eventually, these practices form the basis of valuations of the transnational. This latter point becomes particularly salient when considering the value with which transnational credibility is judged by the fields of architects, patrons, and clients. I return to this point in the discussion at the end of this chapter and in Chapter 5.

## **Movement 2: getting out of Iran / getting into Europe and North America**

I will never forget, the day that I had sat behind my used-to-be desk, in my used-to-be office, making an exclusive list of all my used-to-be assets. The reason was I had finally made the decision to leave Tehran for Toronto. And the challenge was, how is it possible to convert my whole life into two suitcases, each with a maximum weight of 30 kilograms, respecting the IATA regulation for overseas flights.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Interview with SM.

<sup>127</sup> See for example, interview with PK.

<sup>128</sup> "My personal experiences about compactness," *rzlbd POST: monthly notes of atelier rzlbd*, 1.1 (2009).

In the mid 2000s, about a dozen Iranian architects, approximately in their thirties, moved to cities in North America and Europe including Toronto, Boston, New York, London, and Paris (in the order most traveled to). Some stayed, others returned to Iran, and some moved from city to city. A few shut off contact with Iran after their migration. But most remain engaged with Iranian architects and the Iranian profession in some way. How these architects managed to get out of Iran and get into foreign cities and the challenges they faced in doing so is telling.

One architect, Milad, told me about how he ended up abroad, working for a prominent architect in Paris. He was in military training in Iran, and out of what he described as “sheer boredom” he thought to write letters to architects he admired around the world to state his intent to work for them as an intern. This is around 2002—when someone in his shoes did not have Internet access. He found the architects’ addresses in *Architecture Now*, a Taschen Press, coffee table book someone likely brought to Iran in their personal luggage, had scrutinized at the airport luggage check, and donated to the university library. To Milad’s astonishment, a short while later, he heard back from one of the offices he wrote to. By the time he started working there, several things happened: first, he finished his military service; then he was rejected for his visa for a year; he set up a firm in interim; and one of his professors told him that a university in the Milan Polytechnic University in Italy had just opened its doors to foreign students without a language requirement. With a trip to Italy set up and a valid student visa, Milad again sent a letter to the office in Paris he had been offered an internship with a year earlier. They told him to come. He was an intern there for some months and was hired for the rest of his year there.<sup>129</sup>

Another architect, Mahsa, told me how she got a job at a large, well-respected architecture firm in Toronto fresh out of Tehran. A year earlier, a residential building her small firm built in Tehran was placed on the shortlist of a new international design competition based in the UK. She says the organizers of that award caught wind of her project through images that had been circulating on the *Archdaily* design blog. One of the large firms she applied to in Toronto had also been shortlisted for the same award. They saw the accomplishment in her resume and hired her. To paraphrase, Mahsa explained:

The founder was surprised at how at my age [under thirty] I was shortlisted for the award in which their large firm had also competed without winning. So, they took me seriously. Later, I was given tasks that only project managers with decades of experience would be trusted with.<sup>130</sup>

In Iran, it isn’t difficult for a young architect out of school to start a firm and have a portfolio of completed buildings in their first five years of work. Tehran’s explosive real estate development scene, a weak culture of reliance on technical expertise, and a loose bureaucratic framework for project approval and inspection are all factors leading to this. In North America, even the most successful young architects are typically employees in larger firms and won’t be licensed for years into their professional career.

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<sup>129</sup> Interview with KP.

<sup>130</sup> Interview with AI.



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## Project in Detail

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### No Name Shop

Category: Shopping  
 Location: Isfahan-Najafabad, Iran  
 Architect: Ayeneh Office, Tehran, Iran  
 WAF Entry: 2013  
 Award: **World Architecture Festival 2013 - Shortlisted**

Category:

Sub Category:

Country of Project:

WAF Year:

WAF Award:

Keyword(s):   
 e.g. Architect, Town

[Begin search](#)



Caption  
 Photograph by Farshid Nasrabadi



#### No Name Shop

The experience of designing a shop without a specific use was a special one. The elongated proportions of the land owned by the Client, demanded a particular approach not helped by the fact that he was not sure what to sell in this shop. To make matters worse, we were facing other issues such as a chaotic urban fabric as well as height and economic constraints.

We cut the land into two halves on the north-south axis and divided the space into four separate mezzanines. To respond to height limits, we decided to build mostly below the ground level. Physical and visual fluency of space was used to attract customers.

As the tight budget limited means of vertical circulation to stairs, shallow stairways were designed in response. To attract visitors to the deepest parts of the store we both deepened and widened the interior views from the street level using colorful strips over plain monochrome surfaces and extending the vibrant color of the entrance frame to the north down to the similarly vibrant southern light well.

The client was not sure whether to use the whole building as a single store, so we provided him with the possibility of subdividing the space into four independent shops each with their own means of access control.

Of utmost importance in our facade design was the location of the property in a mostly characterless, developer-built district but an historic house facing our project, and belonging to our client.

Our discussions with the Client persuaded him to maintain the historic house, renovate it, and let a dialogue happen between the old and the new building. This will include reflections of the old building on the glazed facade of the new, and an image of the old framed by the new.

The Client is now in a position to offer a vivid antidote to an otherwise boring, chaotic passageway, on top of the flexibility he can enjoy in the ways he uses the shop.

Figure 14. *World Building Directory* profile of awarded project.  
 (Image from [worldbuildingdirectory.com](http://worldbuildingdirectory.com) website)

Some Iranian architects with graduate degrees from Iran go for second graduate degrees from schools in Europe and North America. Others try to work in their host country the way they worked in Iran: with the same expectations of the market and the same norms of professional progress. Some of these architects have such little success that they have changed their field of work while others have been so successful as to become leading figures in their host professional communities.

Mahsa believes that emigrants like her benefit from changing the way they work:

I say, go into their firms and go to battle on their terms. Address yourself to them. In their system, you go to work to become PM (project manager), associate, senior associate, then partner... and in Canada at least, this is possible... as immigrants, its possible with hard work. And its different there than [in Iran]. You'll realize it's rewarding. First, I thought being a PM was boring. I wanted to have my little design and do it all. But now I think leading a team is fulfilling. I want to coordinate and learn how to manage a project... it's different there [in Canada] and there are other things in it for us. We don't have the sense of ambition and pride that comes with our name being known in Iran... I still don't know which one is best. I still don't know what it is like being a partner there. How much control of design you get.<sup>131</sup>

I asked Mahsa if things like the *AD* or *Plan* special issues on Iranian architecture was a channel through which Iranian architects could get a footing outside Iran. She said in a way it was. She mentioned an *El Croquis* article on some governmental building in Iran. Or mention in Aga Khan's publication.

With these things you got connected to a network that gives you access to outside Iran that you otherwise didn't have access to. Access to that network is very important. For example, the large company I worked at gave me an important responsibility [setting up Art Design Review] that it would only give its experienced managers. And I think they gave that to me because [my firm in Iran] was shortlisted for [an international] prize. And their firm, with their large size, also only got shortlisted one year. So they thought, OK, we have this person who competed in the same competition as us and got the same recognition as us. So she must have something going.

These things certainly have an impact. No matter what you do in Iran—even if you win the *Memar* Award—they don't know what that is. Who cares. They don't even know what *Memar* Magazine is. But if a foreign publication publishes your work, that's another story. For example, even when our project was shown in A+U's website, or *Architizer*, *Archello*, I sent the links to the firms I was applying to. Those had influence. Later, when there were projects I wanted to compete in—when I was an employee at this firm—they paid my salary for two days that I

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<sup>131</sup> Interview with M3.

worked on the competition with the caveat that I did so under their name. Why would they let me do this if they didn't know I had a track record?<sup>132</sup>

This passage says much about the transactions of professional credibility that these architects navigate in their movement abroad.

A number of the architects I spoke with that started their move with a new graduate degree remarked on the difference in the culture of work they encountered in their host country. Neda was astonished by the amount and ethic of work typical at her North American school. She compared the workload at Tehran's leading architecture school as minimal in comparison.

As a last example, Nima told me:

I tried to cooperate with foreign architects that had come to Iran for the lecture series, but they all pulled out because of the sanctions. One of them said that it was an ethical issue... that was heavy.

Because of the sanctions, I had to get out. Because of the situation there you can't work global from within Iran.<sup>133</sup>

Nima's motivation exemplifies that of many Iranian architects at that moment in the early 2000s when the policies eclipsing the rest of the world from their gaze started shifting. The Internet aided them technologically. The magnitude of the restrictions felt in Iran became clearer when they saw the changes in architecture practice globally. The architects cited in this movement represent a specific and significant generation in the transnationalization of Iran's architecture field. The spectrum of happenstance to persistence that saw their move out of Iran reveals the subtle yet significant ways forces of globalization operate in the context of transnational subjects.

### **Movement 3: going back**

A friend said an important thing to me: it would be wrong to take successful young architects like my husband and his peers out of Iran because younger architects and architecture students are looking to them as role models and watching to see what they do. We are liable to [the new generation of architects].<sup>134</sup>

Iranian architects that move back to Iran do so for different reasons. Some only spend a year abroad, some return after a graduate degree and some peel themselves away from successful jobs because of a sense of duty to the profession in Iran.

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<sup>132</sup> Interview with M3.

<sup>133</sup> Interview with NA.

<sup>134</sup> Interview with PA.

Babak told me about his return to Iran as a sense of mission. He left Europe after about a year of working with a renowned architect and doing his own grand tour of contemporary and early modern continental architecture. He had found inspiration in the works of Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe over their contemporary descendants. He spent three days walking around the Pantheon in Rome. Equipped with this spiritual-architectural awakening, he terminated his employment and returned to Iran. But what he encountered in Iran was not what he anticipated:

I entered a period of depression. Maybe in part it was leaving the excitement of Europe, maybe it was the challenge of working in Iran and dealing with all its stuff [bureaucratic and professional politics]. I had imagined an ideal Iran.<sup>135</sup>

Nevertheless, one of the projects he was passionate about was bringing his travel experiences to Iranian architecture students. He got the opportunity to do so at one of Iran's new, up and coming architecture schools where he was offered a job following a design award he had won in Iran prior to his year abroad.

For me I wanted to give *everything* I experienced over this year to these kids. I wanted to show them what contemporary architecture was and meant. The mission became life and death for me.... I brought all the ideas that were racing in my mind to these kids in theory discussions [each class] before we started studio.<sup>136</sup>

There are other reasons for migration and return—other push and pull factors—that cannot be ignored. Having children grow up abroad was cited several times. To my surprise, not wanting to be in Iran because of social pressures associated with the government was mentioned only a couple times. (This could well have been because of our research-centered relationship, but I felt that most participants would have freely expressed dissatisfaction with Iranian politics to me.) For Nooshin, the decision to return to Iran was complicated—when she decided to leave, her boss in Canada asked why:

I told him I was going to Iran to go help my husband out. I can't do it like this. I told my boss that if I could see a strong future here [in Canada], then I would stay. Two days later, two of the firm's partners came to see me and told me that me and my husband had a strong future at the firm and that we would move up... the people there are good.

But on the other hand—a friend said an important thing—it would be wrong to take successful young architects like my husband and his peers out of Iran because younger architects and architecture students are looking to them as role models and watching to see what they do. They are liable to [the new generation of architects]. After I heard this, it helped settle me. I'm thinking about it now. In our work, we're important here [in Iran]. Everything else in Iran aside, the architecture profession is moving in the right direction. There's something happening here.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Interview with BK.

<sup>136</sup> Interview with P2.

<sup>137</sup> Interview with PN.

After winning a design award in Iran, Shahaub emigrated and completed his graduate degree at a prestigious university in the US. Upon completion, he worked in the firms of several leading architects in the US and Europe. About three years after leaving Iran, he returned to Tehran to collaborate with old friends on a competition. From working with the big names of global architecture, he had become accustomed to all-nighters and acute level of attention to detail in producing the competition set of drawings and other deliverables. The competition team in Iran saw this and emulated it. In this way, Shahaub served as an important cross-pollinator of a foreign culture of design work.<sup>138</sup>

Parham told me that in his year abroad, he made close connections with colleagues from all parts of the world.

There were people from Japan, Brazil, Italy, and this international group made it such that when I got back to Iran, I felt very comfortable establishing connections with people around the world... and I mention this because it broke open that dam that kept me from the rest of the world.

But I knew I had to leave, because I wanted to do for our architecture what, say, Shigeru Ban did for Japan's architecture. If I stayed, I would have been an employee... and yes, part of it was ambition for recognition: I wanted my own firm, I wanted to be a Shigeru Ban.<sup>139</sup>

There are other examples of more direct transfer of design practices as exemplified by the story of Kea, an architect who moved to the US in 2006. He cites the culture of efficiency and re-use in architecture design as impressing him when he moved to Boston (paraphrasing):

Working in the US opened my eyes to the culture of expertise and consultants. Every detail was given tremendous attention. In Iran, young architects throw together schemes for everything from facades to HVAC to lighting. At best, they consult engineers for the building's structure.

In the US, I was affected by the culture of recycling. Reusing waste became an obsession that I channeled in the projects I did when I returned to Iran.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Interview with D1.

<sup>139</sup> Interview with K1.

<sup>140</sup> Interview with R1.



Kea's US experience influenced his design for the Mahallat Apt. No. 1. Working at Skidmore, Owings and Merrill opened his eyes to a vastly different culture of expertise that relied heavily on technical consultants. Every detail was given tremendous attention. In Iran, young architects assemble schemes for everything from facades to HVAC to lighting, with the exception of consulting engineers for the building's structure.

Kea brought back to Iran ideas for design and design processes. Parham brought back connections with foreign colleagues and an idea of working collaboratively with transnational partners. Others brought back cultures of work in corporate or boutique firms or carried with them inspirations for contributing to the architecture field in Iran. The movement back home carries with it a host of ideas, connections, and inspirations. The cross-pollination that occurs when architects travel, study, or work abroad seeds Iran with promises of many forms of transnational activism and significant change in the profession. With a single project, such as Mahallat Apt. No. 1, dozens of architecture students and young professionals change their view of what is possible in their architecture. Spectators and consumers of foreign knowledge are present in growing numbers. In the context of schools and professional institutions still defined by the isolation imposed after the revolution, cross-pollinated ideas find fertile grounds for growth.

#### **Movement 4: drawing foreign architects' attention to Iran**

It's nothing official. Most of our connections with [foreign architects] happen by chance. Someone travels abroad, meets someone at a lecture, gets an email address. The summer [University of Tehran / Architecture Association (AA)] workshops happened because of one such fleeting connection.<sup>142</sup>

This passage signifies the informal personal connections that enable institutional transnationalism in Iran. Where the state is reluctant to establish international connections, individuals are eager. Iranian architects that move abroad draw the gaze of foreign architects and their institutions toward Iran through a range of active and passive connections such as those cited in what follows.

Ali and Minoo met an English architecture educator at a conference in Tehran. They offered to show this professor around Tehran during his stay. They established a relationship that eventually helped Ali and Minoo to emigrate to London, where they both completed graduate degrees at the AA.<sup>143</sup> They worked with the same professor to edit a book on sustainable architecture technologies. Pleased with the Iranian students' work, the professor proposed to them and to a connection with *Architectural Design* magazine to do a special issue on Iran's changing architecture scene. In this issue, recent Iranian emigrants

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<sup>142</sup> Interview with PM.

<sup>143</sup> Interview with S4.

and their colleagues in Iran share their work from the past five years.<sup>144</sup> The magazine touts an emergence of Iranian architecture on the global stage.<sup>145</sup>

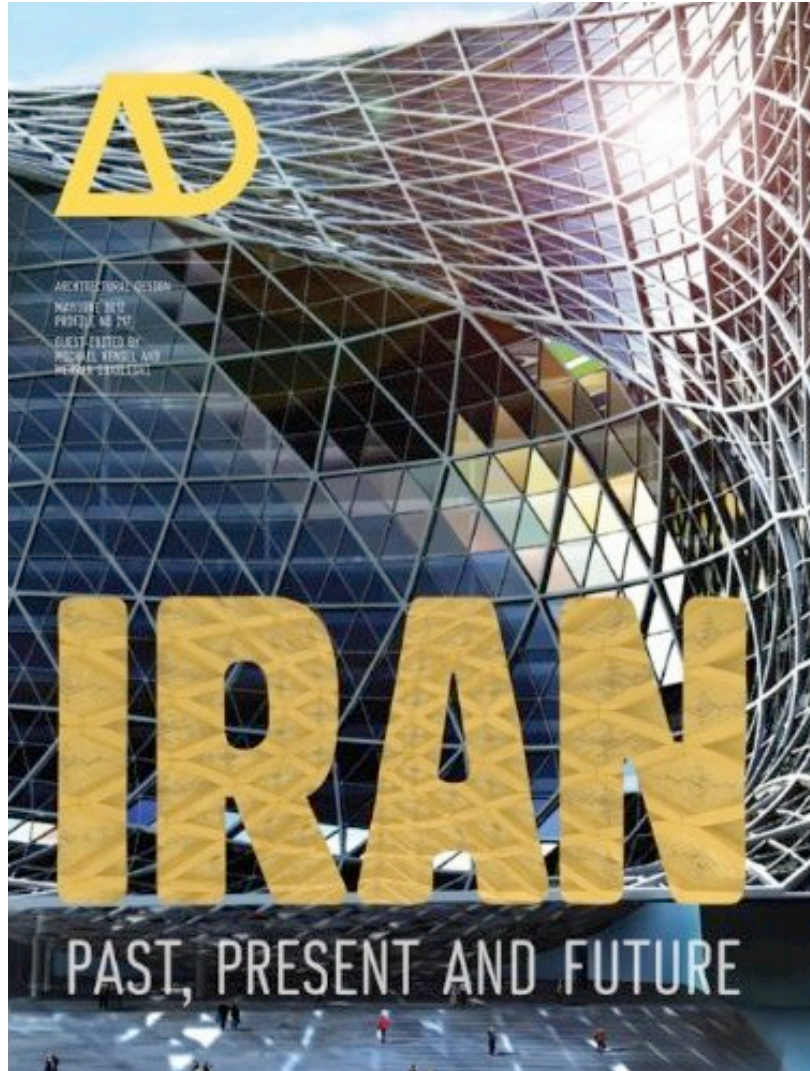


Figure 16. Cover of the *Architectural Design* special issue on Iranian architecture.  
(Image from AD Magazine)

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<sup>144</sup> There was a small buzz about these two magazine issues in Iran, but most architects—at the time of writing this chapter—had only heard murmurs about these issues existing and did not have access to the actual copies because the magazines had not made their way to Iran yet. I suspect there will be mixed feelings about what “the West” chose to showcase from Iran’s emerging architectural scene. Those published are a small circle of connected designers. While they are part of Iran’s youngest avant-garde (educated in the early 2000s), they exclude the elder vanguard of the post-revolutionary profession (trained in the 1980s and 1990s).

<sup>145</sup> Architectural Design (AD), 2012 and The Plan, 2011.

In a less direct case of drawing the attention of foreign architects to Iran, in one interview, I was told about Anousheh, a young Iranian architect who had done very well in postgraduate study and practice first in Canada and then in the US and the Netherlands all with leading architects.

Anousheh is an interesting example in Toronto. She's worked at a lot of good places in the US and Europe and then she went back to Toronto to see what she can do. She's working all sorts of ways there to demonstrate to [the architecture community in the US and Canada] what we're capable of doing.

She told [a leading figure in Toronto's architecture community] that in Toronto, young architects don't get opportunities to shine... During a meeting at her office, she told him that Canada doesn't give opportunities to young architects. Europe does. So he told Anousheh to put together representatives from groups of such young architects that could speak on their behalf in a gathering that he proposed so that he could see what it was they had to say. So Anousheh was charged with putting together this committee. Several in the group were the Iranians, others came from other places—mainly young adjuncts at the university.

Anousheh used their own professional structures to find a path in their system. And through it, they're paying more attention to [the emerging avant-garde in Iran].<sup>146</sup>

Last, the example of an Iranian project published in *Design Like You Give a Damn 2* lies at the passive end of a spectrum of ways Iranian architects draw the gaze of foreign architects and their institutions. The humanitarian design organization, Architecture for Humanity (AfH) selected a bamboo hut designed by Tehran based architect Amir. Their web portal, Open Architecture Network (OAN), shows images from a team of Iranian architects in Kermanshah province of Iran constructing one of Amir's designs as part of a pilot scheme. I revisit the implication of the global distribution of Iranian architects' work in Chapter 5.

The article accompanying the profile for the project on the OAN website states:

[Amir] and his ambitious team of designers and university students are eager to spread the practice of humanitarian design, and have a particular interest in sustainable and inexpensive construction techniques for the undeveloped region on the border between western Iran and eastern Iraq.

As a result of the project in Kermanshah, the team has been invited to participate in the festival Grains D'Isère 2012 in France. Teams will build an entire village for children using different earth architecture techniques. The workshop, entitled "The houses of the Three Little Pigs," is based on a scientific and artistic approach exposing children to natural materials in a way that creates awareness on the richness and diversity of their environment.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Interview with PE.

<sup>147</sup> [http://openarchitecturenetwork.org/projects/mud\\_structure](http://openarchitecturenetwork.org/projects/mud_structure) accessed on April 6, 2012.



Figure 17. Bamboo Hut project featured in DLYGD2.  
(Image from *Design Like You Give a Damn II*)

The AfH book team came across a description of the project while exploring weblogs such as *Archdaily*. They found the architect's office contact email and got in touch with him that way. Following the publication of his project in *Design Like You Give a Damn*, communication between humanitarian design organizations and young architects in Iran expanded from virtually nothing to a fledgling movement of humanitarian design in Iran sponsored by foreign partners.

Another mechanism of drawing foreigners' gaze to Iran is present in the case of design competitions such as those introduced in Chapter 3. In another example, Benetton led a competition for retail outlets in Tehran. I quote at length an article on a widely read web resource, *bdonline.co.uk*:

The winner will be picked by a jury headed by French architect Odile Decq, who has worked in Morocco, Turkey and Algeria.

Decq said the project was a chance to create a fresh, intense and relevant design in Iran.

But there are fears for the future of the project after activists recently set fire to a branch of Benetton in Tehran following claims in the local press that company founder Luciano Benetton had Zionist links.

Decq, who chaired the competition jury, said she was inspired to take part because of the lack of female architects working in Iran, and insisted that it was a safe, if not an easy, place to work.

[The contest] is interesting because of Tehran, because of the place and its architecture,” she said. “Not every country is easy to work in, but we have to go there and prove we can do something in relation to these countries.

London-based architect Cezary Bednarski, founder of Studio Bednarski, expressed interest in entering despite a previous disappointing experience in the country, but he warned practices to protect their work in Iran.

With a client like Benetton, it’s probably reasonably safe, although the worry is how do you get paid and how do you protect your copyright,” he said. “If it happens in the western world, you can use your lawyers, but if it happens in Iran, you can forget it.<sup>148</sup>

Though controversially worded, this statement for a competition in Iran reveals another way in which attention is drawn there. In the spectrum of direct and indirect ways of bringing attention to Iran, this almost colonial conception of development demonstrates ways foreign architects imagine the national space in which they plan to intervene. It is not always Iranian architects calling for attention. Certainly opportunity drives foreign architects to consider Iran; despite its political and social restrictions, Iran’s building sector remained growing while much of the rest of the world was in decline. It is perhaps telling, though, that foreign activity in Iran remains comparatively low and almost restricted to the examples cited in this and the previous chapter.

### **Movement 5: foreign architects visiting Iran**

The movement of foreign architects to Iran occurs primarily as part of the processes of transnational institutional engagement described in Chapter 3. Examples include the Foreign Architect Workshop Series (FAWS) sponsored by the Physical Development Research Center (PDRC); the participation of foreign architects in the *Memar Award* juries; foreign architects standing in as foreign firm collaborators on public building competitions; and the AA summer studios at the University of Tehran. While each of these engagements present an unprecedented post-revolutionary shift to transnational engagement (in many cases with the US) by Iranian professional institutions, in many cases, the presence of foreign architects at any level comes under the scrutiny of more thoughtful observers and critics within the profession.

The involvement of even a single foreign juror on a *Memar Award* cycle had a transformative effect on the rise of an Iranian architectural avant-garde. As a reminder, in that award cycle, the Iranian jurors voted for a well-established, older Iranian architect over a young visionary architect, because the former was a senior member of the profession (and in failing health). But a foreign architect invited to sit as a juror in that cycle gave all his voting points to the younger architect and none to the older architect. The vote resulted in the young architect’s winning the award in what was a shocking result for

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<sup>148</sup> Anna Winston, “Benetton holds competition for Tehran buildings,” *bdonline*, (Jan 9, 2009): article accessed 5.16.13 <http://www.bdonline.co.uk/news/benetton-holds-competition-for-tehran-buildings/3131004>.

the profession. This marked the first of many times a young architect trained after the revolution would win the coveted *Memar Award*. This stands in contrast to another *Memar Award* cycle where all but one juror were foreign architects. Critics felt the foreign jurors projected an interest in traditional Iranian architecture on their criteria for choosing the winner. Instead of what many Iranian architects considered to be the avant-garde project winning, the more traditional ones did.

According to one architect and critic of the profession that I spoke with, exposure to foreign architects—particularly those with big names—has gradually found Iranian architects a more confident and more critical voice. She said she was happy to find that Iranian architects have recently become critical of architects they previously deified through reading about them in foreign magazines. As another result, those magazines lost the larger-than-life allure they had for Iranian architects in the past.<sup>149</sup>

Another channel is exemplified in the case of the *Sharestan* special issue on Shirdel, where one contributor offers the following prompt:

Attention to Shirdel's invaluable presence from the [late 1990s and 2000s] in Iran's architecture profession field has educational lessons or at least valuable experiences for followers and enthusiasts of Iranian architecture and urbanism.<sup>150</sup>

He then asks:

What was Shirdel's view on returning to Iran? At what point in the transformations of the country did Shirdel choose to come to Iran? Presently, at what point is it that he has chosen to work abroad over staying in Iran? Did Shirdel know Iran as a many-dimensional society in tremendous flux, and if he did would he still have come to Iran? And up to now, has he gained familiar with all the complexities of Iranian society?<sup>151</sup>

The contributor goes on to write that Shirdel is an adventurer that follows opportunities for architecture and mentions the project for the Imam Khomeini International Airport that brought Shirdel to Iran in the first place.

Collectively, the presence of foreign architects in Iran has significant consequences through the myriad of ways that local professionals react to foreign architects' presence, their work, and their ideas. Beyond the significance of Iranian architects' criticisms, celebrations, or admonitions of foreign architects in Iran lies the significance of Iranian architects' exposure to these transnationals, their perceptions of difference, and, importantly awareness of a transnational difference. All this plays into the construction of the authority of transnational credibility, or in other words, the production and consumption of transnational capital.

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<sup>149</sup> Interview with AM.

<sup>150</sup> Mohammad Reza Haeri, "Life Architecture—Shirdel in 'the workshop of contemporary Iranian architecture,'" *Sharestan*, 15-16 (Spring-Sumer 2007): 26. (See earlier reference to this article in Chapter 3.)

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

## **Discussion: Movements Toward a Transnational Credibility**

Iranian architects produce, collect, and consume transnational knowledge and cultures of practice through the five movements covered above. Collectively, these five movements represent distinct types of transnational engagement that include, first, migration and travel, through temporary or indefinite emigration, study outside Iran, or contact with Iranian architects abroad; and second, participation in foreign sites of institutional activity, for example, participation in foreign competitions, getting published in foreign magazines or websites, participating in projects or workshops outside Iran, working in foreign firms, or participation with foreign architecture groups.

Many of the associations that connect interviewees to transnational networks can be categorized as informal and ad hoc. They are characteristic of an “everyday” transnationalism that is distinct from formal or top-down practices that typify globalization discourse. In this way, this chapter is about the agency of everyday actors and everyday actions and is situated in conversation with Smith’s transnationalism as an interrogation of globalization discourse (Smith 2001). This framing of transnationalism extends Leslie Sklair’s transnational capitalist class beyond the scope of employees and heads of firms that he limits his investigation to (Sklair 2005). This framing similarly shows that the globalization of the architecture profession is more widespread than McNeill argues for in his study of globetrotting architects (McNeill 2009). The transnationalism presented in this chapter shows that in Tabriz, in the academic periphery of Iran’s architecture education system, which is in turn in the global periphery of the production and consumption of architecture knowledge, there are young architecture student-professionals that are changing the profession in Iran and even in the places where they eventually emigrate to in sometimes small, but cumulatively significant ways.

The ethnographic evidence presented shows that there is more to the globalization of architecture practice than the international division of labor or the global mobility of architects and the geography of transnational firms’ operations. Through architecture blogs, design competitions, architecture magazines with large distributions or small, workshops, lectures, competition juries, and article translations, Iranian architects and their profession have transformed significantly in the past ten years. Transnational actors have carried cultures of practice from other countries into Iran and from Iran to the cities they work in as active professionals.

The five movements I found in my research represent my attempt to unpack the transnational processes engaged by the individuals I interviewed. This classification serves to highlight what might otherwise be glossed over as the trivial details of things like the transnational gaze. What this chapter shows is that ideas about the foreign are formed when Iranian architects look abroad and when foreign architects look to Iran. These ideas inform actions and characterize agency. They are the basis for informal institutional practices (such as those described in Chapter 3) that crystallize to shape the profession’s formal institutions and ultimately the transnationalization of the country’s architectural field.

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In the context of Iran, transnational practices exercise a professional credibility for the architects that engage them. An architect who has worked abroad can be more marketable in Iran. A firm that participates in workshops with foreign architects may perceive themselves as in touch with global currents and less hesitant to participate in the profession internationally. Getting published in a foreign magazine might lend a global dimension of legitimacy to one's work. Examples of Iranian architects whose professional credibility in Iran is affected by their transnational resumes include the student who translated design theory articles from foreign blogs and posted them in the halls of his department; the architect who completed a two-year post-professional degree at Columbia University and returned to Iran to continue her practice there; and the architect who lives in Toronto but travels to Iran each summer and works at her friend's firm on a competition deadline. They represent the three first movements of the schematic I'm using in this chapter. Iranian architects that participate in the other two movements are also affected. The architect whose work is published in the *Architectural Design* special issue and the architect who attends workshops led by foreign architects visiting Iran both get transnationalism stamped on their resumes.

The effect of transnational practices on these peoples' work is evidence of the transnational credibility that I framed in Chapter 1. This credibility operates to different degrees in different ways, and its valuation peaked somewhere in the past five years. When I asked one architect (who had worked at leading global firms for a few years before returning to Iran for a summer trip in 2010) if all his old friends and colleagues flocked around him to ask about his experiences abroad, he responded:

You know, I thought I would be bombarded. But to my surprise, no one seemed to care. It was strange.<sup>152</sup>

Strange indeed—I will argue that had his summer trip happened five years earlier, things would have been much closer to his expectations. Up until the late 2000s, transnational exposure was very strongly sought after commodity. Many young architecture students have figured out ways of getting transnationalism on their resumes. There are countless examples of students who participate in foreign design competitions. These competitions are proliferating and there are an increasing number that are administered with looser standards. It is much easier to win a foreign design award now than it was ten years ago. Now, young architecture students, without built work, can submit concepts to any number of dozens of small or large foreign competitions and win. The clients and patrons in Iran who see these foreign awards on architects' resumes are not necessarily aware of their trivialness.

Transnational credibility is not static. As Iran relaxed its borders in the early 2000s and as the Internet became widely available, early transnational connections carried a fascination that has changed over the past decade. The change might be described as a

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<sup>152</sup> Interview with EZ.

waning or as a saturation: a waning of fascination as distances contract or a saturation of the market for coveted transnational capital on architects' resumes. Both dynamics are present. It is a confusion between such aspects of transnational credibility that I turn to next. The following chapter builds on the movements of the architects discussed in this chapter and the ways these movements are leveraged in the institutional ecology of Iran's architecture profession.

## **Chapter 5. Iranian Architects in the Shifting Geography of Architecture Acknowledgement, 2002-2012**

The stirrings of crisis in Iran's architecture profession were frequently expressed by interview participants but variably, and often confusingly, articulated. This chapter is my attempt to articulate and understand the nature and roots of the present transformation in Iran's architecture profession that one would not be amiss to identify as a crisis. This crisis affects the profession internally as well as its state and society connections. As such, I draw from the framings of the Iranian political and social contexts as well as framings of transnationalism presented in Chapter 1. As evidence, I connect institutional investigations from Chapter 3 to ethnographic evidence from Chapter 4 to claim that a host of transnational institutions are bestowing a brand of transnational credibility upon Iranian architects but that those consuming that credibility do not sufficiently distinguish between substantive and weak transnational credibility, and that as a result the architectural field's socio-politico-professional structures of authority are compromised. In particular, I focus on international sites of design recognition and acknowledgement such as design awards, blogs, and magazines and how they affect authority and acknowledgement in Iran's architecture profession. I argue that new transnational institutions such as these disrupt the structures of the countries' architecture professions with constructive and destructive consequences. Inherently, the evidence and claims of this chapter offer an alternate view from what much of the economic geography scholarship reviewed in Chapter 1 suggests would be the pathways to and effects of globalization in professions like architecture in developing countries—particularly the idea that a greater circulation of knowledge leads to improved conditions of practice in places like Iran that are off globalization's beaten path.

### **Transnational Institutions as Global Sites of Recognition**

Even domestic institutions of Iran's architecture profession are founded on transnational knowledge. These institutions comprise a growing vibrant ecology of organizations, magazines, awards, competitions, and workshops that was the subject of Chapter 3. There, I distinguished between such transnationally shaped domestic institutions and transnational institutions that affect Iran's architecture profession, but which are not registered, sanctioned, or operationally based in Iran. These transnational institutions are the subject of this section.

In 2012, the humanitarian architecture organization, Architecture For Humanity (AfH), published the sequel to their popular book *Design Like You Give a Damn (DLYGD)*. The book recognizes architecture from around the world that offers “practical and ingenious design solutions that address the need for basic shelter, housing, education, health care, clean water and renewable energy.”<sup>153</sup>

I briefly introduced Amir’s case in Chapter 4. In 2011, Amir’s bamboo hut was among the projects selected for publication. With acknowledgement in DLYGD2, Amir’s influence in Iran’s architecture profession grew. He passed his now internationally legitimated humanitarian interest on to his students at the university where he taught. His office hosts informal workshops with guests to debate topics from earth architecture to professional ethics. By teaching about humanitarian design, liaising with AfH, and hosting workshops, Amir and his network have been instrumental in instituting a new wave of humanitarian architecture in Iran’s profession.

Interestingly, Amir’s same bamboo hut project won Iran’s *Memar Award* in 2009. That award was influential in launching his career and getting him a studio instructorship at an up and coming architecture department at Islamic Azad University (IAU). Recall that the *Memar Award*, which launched in 2001, has been instrumental in positioning design awards at the forefront of professional authority in Iran. Indeed, Amir’s *Memar Award* and his recognition in DLYGD2 offer a telling comparison. In Chapter 2 and primarily in Chapter 3, I argued for the significance of the award project in Iran’s profession. The dissemination of images and accolades around the award project are an industry, part of that scopic economy that Moallem references, that is largely contained in the institution of magazines, but also apparent in award ceremonies and on resumes. The stories of award winners examined in Chapters 3 and 4 set the stage for understanding the ways *Memar Award* winners’ careers are transformed after winning. Professional authority comes with accolades, particularly in Iran as a context in which there is much pomp and spectacle around recognition.

Second, the comparison reveals the contrast between the transnational social capital of AfH and the domestic social capital of the *Memar Award*. In our interviews, Amir talked a lot about transnational institutional connections and how they set him up to become a leader of the humanitarian architecture trend in Iran today. The *Memar Award* didn’t figure in his story so much. It might have set him up for recognition in Iran and it brought peoples’ attention to him. It got him a job as a studio instructor at the IAU and it got him the attention of *Memar’s* audience (students, peers, clients). But that was all within the domestic professional sphere. The AfH award may not have been understood by that same crowd, though it may have impressed his students. For the same project, the *Memar Award* and the AfH recognition had different effects, opened different doors, and affected Amir in different ways.

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<sup>153</sup> *Design Like You Give a Damn II* (2012): p.2

The presence of the Bamboo Hut in *DLYGD2* nevertheless stood as testament to the foreign architecture community's vetting of the project and its presentation in their marketplace of recognition. As such, it carries with it a transnationally charged claim of authority for Amir globally. In Iran, that authority is valued based on its being foreign, but also not quite understood because it is foreign. The Iranian audience isn't aware of the popularity of AfH in the US and in the humanitarian design field. As such, Amir is assigned a transnational credibility that is somewhat vague. That ambiguity or vagueness is significant and will be attended to in the following section on Transnational Credibility.

The case of the popular weblog *Archdaily* bears some similar effects on Iranian architects as *DLYGD2* had on Amir's career and the effect on the profession he instigated with the aid of his recognition through AfH. But the influence of *Archdaily* is of another order of magnitude. I attribute this in part to the wider distribution and recognition of *Archdaily* among Iran's architects.

*Archdaily*'s mission is stated as follows:

Our editorial staff works on a daily basis with the most prestigious and influential architectural practices around the world in order deliver specific and valuable content to a premium readership of architects, designers, consumers and influencers. In one year *Archdaily* has quickly established itself as one of the leading architectural websites in the world due to our editorial staff's meticulous understanding of what the audience is really looking for: **the best architecture around the world, as soon as possible.** [sic]<sup>154</sup>

The story of *Archdaily* is covered in an article published on that site following an event at AIA NY titled "Going Viral" in a panel with Bjarke Ingels of BIG, Toru Hasegawa and Mark Collins of Morpholio and Cloud Lab at Columbia University's GSAPP, and David Basulto and David Assaei, the cofounders of *Archdaily*.<sup>155</sup> These participants lend professional and academic credibility to the project, particularly to spectators among Iran's architects. Text across the *Archdaily* site signifies their global reach and implies a desirability for that reach:

In its four years, the Building of the Year Award has received over 195,000 votes, making it the largest prize for architecture in the online world.<sup>156</sup>

It's not hard to imagine how statements like this attract young architects in places like Iran. The comments in *Archdaily* posted by architects in Iran show popular engagement with the site. That *Archdaily* was often referred to in interviews with younger architects confirms the site's presence in Iran.

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<sup>154</sup> <http://www.archdaily.com/about/>, accessed March 29, 2013

<sup>155</sup> Karen Cilento, "Going Viral + The ArchDaily Story" 22 May 2012. ArchDaily. Accessed 13 May 2013. <<http://www.archdaily.com/236935>>

<sup>156</sup> Vanessa Quirk, "Infographic: ArchDaily, The Past 5 Years" 14 Mar 2013. ArchDaily. Accessed 13 May 2013. <<http://www.archdaily.com/344066>>

# ARCHDAILY BUILDING OF THE YEAR AWARDS 2012



Over the last year ArchDaily has kept growing, reaching more than 280,000 daily readers and 70 million pageviews per month. But more important than these figures is our mission: to provide inspiration, knowledge and tools for the architects that will face the challenge of improving the quality of life of the next 3 billion people that will live in cities in the next 40 years.

After 70,000 votes we are happy to present the winners of the ArchDaily Building of the Year Awards, a peer based, crowdsourced, architecture award where a collective intelligence of thousands of architects filter and recognise the best architecture featured on AD during the past year.

This group of buildings is unique in several aspects, from their spatial qualities to their structures, but also in terms of what they represent for society and their impact on local communities. Thanks for being a part of this amazing process, where the voices of architects from around the world unite into one, strong, intelligent, forward-thinking, single message.



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**London 2012 Velodrome**  
Hopkins Architects



EDUCATIONAL  
**Cassia Coop Training Centre**  
TYIN Tegnestue Architects

Figure 18. Archdaily Building of the Year award site.  
(Image from Archdaily.com)

One example of an Iran-based controversy, on *Architect* (a site with similar transnational institutional characteristics to *Archdaily*) depicts an institutional interaction between *Architect* (as a transnational institution) and *Sharestan* (as a domestic institution) (See Figure 19):

An initial comment reads:

Farshid Moussavi had been developing her own office for two or three years. She published a monograph on her own name in 2007, by Sharestan magazine, featuring the work of FOA, without a mention to her partner, and with a picture of herself on the cover which is larger than life. (see attached links) The rumor is that Alejandro Zaera-Polo sued her for copyright infringement, but I do not have any information of the outcome from my Iranian informants.

Cover of the Farshid Moussavi special issue and contents are provided by an earlier blog:

[http://www.sharestan.info/issue\\_17.html](http://www.sharestan.info/issue_17.html)

Credits demonstrating an implication of the press department of FOA in Moussavi's monograph (despite Sharestan disclaimer) are located here:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/45751215@N06/4197448138/>

Hopefully Sharestan can clarify the implications as this seems to go beyond "partibazi". (Iranian for favoritism)

Another comment reads:

If Alejandro thought of suing his wife because she appeared on the cover of a magazine than he needs a serious sanity check.

Sharestan is an Iranian magazine that publishes Iranian architects. Most of their issues are monograph style, that's what they do. And they normally put the person on the cover...

So, what's the point?

Sharestan is one of the few magazines in Iran that publish interesting architecture, why would you not allow them to run an issue on the work of FOA?

Especially when Alejandro is rather good at claiming things for himself, see Spanish article from two days ago with the work credited to 'Studio Alejandro Zaera' as usual.....

<http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2009/12/11/paisvasco/1260558600.html>

The editors of *Sharestan* responded:

We the editors of Sharestan are sorry to hear this news about FOA.

We have read the various comments on this site that have made reference to issue we published dedicated to the work of FOA.

To clarify any doubts, we are writing to declare that the editorial decisions of this issue were ours entirely.

Given that Sharestan is an Iranian magazine, that is not distributed outside of Iran, and dedicated to the work of Iranian architects, we made the decision to foreground Ms. Moussavi. We have credited all the work published in the magazine to FOA and credited Mr. Zaera-Polo. These decisions were ours alone.

In reference to the issue we are preparing of the work of Office dA, Mr. Tehrani visits Iran frequently and we have had the benefit of working with him directly on his issue. However, when we were assembling the FOA issue, Ms. Moussavi had not been to Iran for 25 years, and she was not involved in the process of editing the FOA issue.

We stand by all of our editorial decisions, and we felt that it was important to post this note to clarify the confusion over this issue.<sup>157</sup>

**Archinect**  
News

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**Foreign Office Architects to close as partners split**

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End of the marriage = end of the firm. [BD Online](#)

Previously ShowCased: [John Lewis Department Store and Cineplex by FOA](#)

End of the marriage = end of the firm. [BD Online](#)

Previously ShowCased: [John Lewis Department Store and Cineplex by FOA](#)

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14 Comments [Back to Top ↑](#)

**TCV15**  
Dec 10, 09 12:41 pm

what a pity, these guys set the bar for a long time.

---

**Umbanda**  
Dec 11, 09 10:06 am

I doubt that a husband or business partner would sue his other half (being Iranian) for appearing on an Iranian magazine cover. If Alejandro really is so paranoid then divorce might be a rather good idea.

Its a shame to see them split, but they seem to have operated independently for quite a while. At least Alejandro has been promoting himself for years as independent, he ensured that the projects in Spain were always promoted just under his name as alejandro zaera, never mentioning Farshid or Foa.

Don't think it matters now anyway, they should both move on and open their own offices, its not a bad time to start a new business, good luck to them both. Hope they don't drag it out for themselves and the staff...

---

**Umbanda**  
Dec 12, 09 7:10 pm

If Alejandro thought of suing his wife because she appeared on the cover of a magazine than he needs a serious sanity check.

Sharestan is an Iranian magazine that publishes Iranian architects. Most of their issues are monograph style, that's what they do. And they normally put the person on the cover.

Issue 15-16, Braham Shirdeh:  
[http://www.sharestan.info/issue\\_15.html](http://www.sharestan.info/issue_15.html)

Issue 17-18, Farshid Moussavi/FOA:  
[http://www.sharestan.info/issue\\_17.html](http://www.sharestan.info/issue_17.html)

Issue 20-21, Mehrdad Hadighi:  
[http://www.sharestan.info/issue\\_21.html](http://www.sharestan.info/issue_21.html)

So, what's the point?  
Sharestan is one of the few magazines in Iran that publish interesting architecture, why would you not allow them to run an issue on the work of FOA?

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<http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2009/12/11/paisvasco/1260558600.html>

---

**capoeira**  
Dec 13, 09 2:53 pm

Dear editor,  
This thread does not make any sense any more, as you are systematically removing all the comments that criticise FM's sharestan monograph. So the ones that defend her are unintelligible too. Where is your impartiality?

---

**SHARESTAN**  
Dec 13, 09 3:09 pm

We the editors of Sharestan are sorry to hear this news about FOA.

We have read the various comments on this site that have made reference to issue we published dedicated to the work of FOA.

To clarify any doubts, we are writing to declare that the editorial decisions of this issue were our entirely.

Given that Sharestan is an Iranian magazine, that is not distributed outside of Iran, and dedicated to the work of Iranian architects, we made the decision to foreground Ms. Moussavi. We have credited all the work published in the magazine to FOA and credited Mr. Zaera-Polo. These decisions were ours alone.

In reference to the issue we are preparing of the work of Office dA, Mr. Tehrani visits Iran frequently and we have had the benefit of working with him directly on his issue. However, when we were assembling the FOA issue, Ms. Moussavi had not been to Iran for 25 years, and she was not involved in the process of editing the FOA issue.

We stand by all of our editorial decisions, and we felt that it was important to post this note to clarify the confusion over this issue.

Figure 19. *Archinect* controversy over *Sharestan*.  
(Image from Archinect.com)

I quote the comments at length and provide a snapshot of the webpage because I attribute significance to the context of the exchange as much as I attribute to its content (following the ANT-inspired methodological framework discussed in Chapter 1). There are

<sup>157</sup> See comments at archinect.com: <http://archinect.com/news/article/94467/foreign-office-architects-to-close-as-partners-split>, accessed May 16, 2013.

three points about this exchange that merit attention. First, the citation of domestic content, including links to the cover of a *Sharestan* special issue demonstrates the navigability of content beyond the domestic institutional sphere. This would be a significant experience for the editor of *Sharestan* who would otherwise not assume global audiences have access to their efforts.<sup>158</sup> Second, the citation of logistics of travel and involvement in the editorial process are clearly significant from the Iranian perspective and used to validate the magazine's position. Third, the anonymous, globally unlocated comment format of the *Architect* post places *Architect*, *Sharestan*, and its commenters in a dialogue that is not only global (as in reflecting perspectives from different geographic locations) but also transnational (because of its implication and connection of institutions from at least three different national contexts and requiring an accountability for the transnational institutional space of the webpage).

#### *Foreign sites as transnational institutions in Iran's profession*

Foreign recognition granting sites, like AfH's DLYGD2, *Archdaily* and *Architect*, operate in Iran's profession with as much influence as Iran's own recognition granting sites such as the awards and magazines that were the subject of Chapter 3. If the award winners are not announced in magazines displayed in newsstands in the streets, they are circulated online, in resumes, and in conversation. Where these foreign sites may lack in domestic spectacle, they make up with the power of being foreign. As such, I call foreign recognition-granting sites *transnational institutions* in the context of Iran's profession.

In the case of Iranian architecture, up until the mid 2000s, professional associations, universities, professional magazines, and domestic design awards were the most influential institutions. As a reminder, I called these sites of the profession its domestic institutions—since they shape the profession, drive it forward in jurisdictional battles with other trades, and bestow or become sites of exchange of its members' credibility.

When economic geographers James Faulconbridge and Daniel Muzio write about transnationalism in the context of professions, they identify the following distinction:

...a *transnational* professional project [versus a global project,] [draws] attention to the way dialogue, conflict and compromise between supra-national and national actors increasingly generate regimes that shape the regulation of professionals and their activities<sup>159</sup>

What the cases outlined here show is that the supra-national dimension operates through more subtle and less formal channels than currently acknowledged in literature on transnationalism of professions and institutions that focus on more formal and bureaucratically advanced engagements. They thus discount the agency of informal,

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<sup>158</sup> This claim is based on findings from interviews with the editors of Iran's major architecture magazines. See Chapter 3 for further discussion on the transnational connections of Iran's domestic professional institutions.

<sup>159</sup> Faulconbridge and Muzio 2011, 141.

everyday institutional actors that I locate as the primary drivers of the transnationalization of institutions.

Faulconbridge and Muzio cite international associations, such as the International Union of Architects (UIA), as evidence that:

the professional association now needs to be considered as potentially having an international dimension and capability as part of a broader shift towards ‘transnational markets and international divisions of labour.’<sup>160</sup>

In contrast to this statement, in Iran the informal foreign institutions are more influential than the formally recognized transnational institutions such as the UIA that Faulconbridge and Muzio attend to. Iran is a member of the UIA through its affiliate home institution, the AIA. But, as demonstrated by the institutional ecology elaborated in Chapter 3, the UIA doesn’t affect Iran’s profession or its members’ resumes the way international awards do. As such, I argue that it qualifies less as a transnational institution than blogs like *Archdaily* do.

In the following section, I draw on evidence that shows how beyond a shift in the market and labor landscapes, these institutions operate through architects’ resumes (figuratively and literally) as transnational professional credibility. Magali Sarfatti Larson reminds us that “built or unbuilt, the projects ranked in an important competition are published, diffused, examined, discussed, and entered as credits in their authors’ resumes.”<sup>161</sup> This is pronounced in developing countries and particularly heightened in the case of sites of recognition that operate as institutions that reflect the global community’s judgment of an architect’s work.

### **Transnational Credibility**

In Chapter 4, I suggested ways transnational credibility is achieved by architects in Iran through their transnational movements. Here, I investigate ways architects gain credibility not through physical movements, but through the Internet. The capturing of this credibility by architects and the bestowing of it by transnational organizations reveals problems in ways new media grants authority and recognition to architects globally and how those architects mobilize credibility in their domestic professional ecologies. To support this claim, I offer illustrations from the World Architecture Community and the World Architecture Festival.

The World Architecture Community’s (WAC) award submission and selection processes are open, widely cast, and loosely administered:

Participate for **FREE!** The aim of the WA Community Awards is to highlight and publish remarkable projects that might otherwise remain unnoticed by the

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<sup>160</sup> Faulconbridge and Muzio 2011, 142.

<sup>161</sup> Larson 1994, 472

international public yet have the potential to inspire exciting questions about contemporary architectural discourse. **ALL PROJECTS** uploaded to the portal are considered as candidates for WA Awards, so we invite architects, architecture students from **ALL COUNTRIES** to submit their buildings (realized or not) of **ANY TYPE** for the appreciation of the WA Community.

Awarding follows a most **democratic** procedure where all members' ratings and the votes of all Honorary Members are effective in the final decisions.

Registrations are **completely FREE** so that all architects can participate both as candidates and judges.<sup>162</sup>

The WAC award process is perhaps too loosely sanctioned to demand the respect of prestigious architects and critics, but be that as it may, the award has an effect on the profession in countries like Iran as well as in countries where architects from less globally connected countries migrate to. A case in point is Reza's rise to domestic recognition by placing among twenty other project in the awards first round in 2008.<sup>163</sup>

After winning WAC, a few foreign architecture magazines got in touch with me. Iran was exotic for them and the project photos were good...<sup>164</sup>

Coverage of his WAC award on popular architecture websites (like *Bustler*<sup>165</sup> and *Archdaily*) became accolades to tout among peers and "global" enough to impress indiscriminating clients with. In Iran, where his clients typically had very little transnational exposure, having international acknowledgement on his resume went a long way. Reza used the award in his resume, it secured him a teaching job, and it gave him the foreign connections he used to help set up a series of workshops with foreign architects in Iran. This is to say, he leveraged the recognition of a foreign institutions as he would the recognition of a domestic institution, such as Memar.

The back-story of Reza's arrival at the WAC award is telling. He told me:

Farrokh Derakhshani [director of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture] was a friend of a friend and I asked him about scholarships and so on and in the process, I showed him my projects. Farrokh got excited and said I should submit to AKAA... I did, but it didn't win... so I applied to following the recommendation from the Aga Khan people.

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<sup>162</sup> <http://www.worldarchitecture.org/main/?manifest=awards>, accessed March 20, 2013, emphasis in the original.

<sup>163</sup> [http://www.bustler.net/index.php/article/winners\\_of\\_world\\_architecture\\_community\\_awards/](http://www.bustler.net/index.php/article/winners_of_world_architecture_community_awards/), accessed March 20, 2013.

<sup>164</sup> Interview with RN.

<sup>165</sup> Bustler is a site dedicated to design competition news: See <http://www.bustler.net/index.php/about/>

After winning WAC, a few foreign architecture magazines got in touch with me. Iran was exotic for them and the project photos were good... with these things Iranian architecture students get really excited<sup>166</sup>

The organizers of WAC seem well aware of this kind of opportunity their services provide. Banners on their website proclaim such statements as: “Being on WA is being on worldwide media.”<sup>167</sup> Other excerpts from the WAC website speak to the organization’s attempt to position itself as a transnational institution:

Country editors decide which names shall be highlighted as representing the architectural scene in their country. All members are invited to create Architect Pages for recognized masters in their country and contribute to already created ones by simply providing relevant links or posting images of the buildings they admire. All contributing members are mentioned at the header of respective pages.<sup>168</sup>

“Simply posting images of buildings they admire” is problematic. It speaks to a visual valuation of architecture. And with Iran as the second most active country on this web-portal, the effects are not negligible. (After India, the US, and Turkey, Iran has the most members. Among these, normalized by the country’s population, it is second to Turkey, where the founder Soha Ozkan is from, but an order of magnitude greater than India and the US.)<sup>169</sup>

The WAC site provides downloadable PDFs of “winners posters” (see Figure 20). The winner’s posters are formatted as a letter of recognition/certificate/diploma, showing another way in which the award (and arguably the whole institution of the WAC) is geared to distributing accolades. The readily downloadable, preformatted PDF posters represent a matured not to the distributing agency of the medium. I attribute significance to the format of the medium in the success of the WAC to act as a transnational institution in other national professional contexts.

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<sup>166</sup> Interview with RN.

<sup>167</sup> <http://www.worldarchitecture.org/banner>, accessed March 20, 2013.

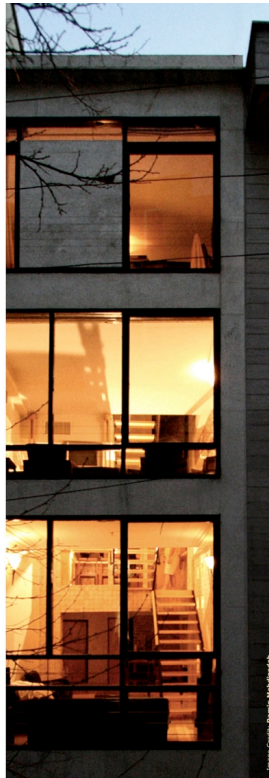
<sup>168</sup> <http://www.worldarchitecture.org/main/?manifest=declaration>, accessed March 20, 2013.

<sup>169</sup> Based on calculation of participant statistics for WAC from <http://www.worldarchitecture.org/all-countries/>, accessed March 20, 2013.

AWARDS  
COMMUNITY

World Architecture Community congratulates  
Ramin Mehdizadeh's "Stair House"  
selected for WA Awards, 1st Cycle, September 2008

*WAC Award*



World Architecture COMMUNITY

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Figure 20. “Winners Posters” provided on the WAC website (*top*) and a snapshot of the WAC webpage where posters can be downloaded (*bottom*).  
(Images from <http://www.worldarchitecture.org/press/WA.winner.projects/>)

Similar to WAC's transnational castings, the World Architecture Festival (WAF) reaches a wide audience and notable brings them together physically for their awards event. In the 2008 WAF, there were seventeen award winners for each of twelve categories: Civic; Culture; Energy, Waste & Recycling; Health; Holiday; Housing; Learning; Nature; New & Old; Office; Pleasure; Private House; Production; Religion & Contemplation; Shopping; Sport; Transport.

For the 2008 awards, international juries shortlisted the best recently completed buildings in 17 categories from a total of 722 entries from 63 countries. All the 224 shortlisted projects were presented by their architects to the juries and audiences at the festival. On the final day the 17 category winners again had to present the work, competing against one other to win the first architectural Prix de Barcelona. The international judging panel, composed of architects, allied professionals, clients and architecture critics, was headed by Norman Foster.<sup>170</sup>

I quote the statement on the he criteria for what could be entered at length:

Buildings, projects and landscapes, completed between 1 January 2012 and 1 June 2013 for Completed Buildings and Landscapes\*, there is no time restrictions for Future Projects entries. If you have drawings of your future plans why not enter them into WAF

There is no limit on the number of buildings/projects that can be submitted

Buildings/projects can be submitted in more than one category where relevant, including INSIDE the sister event of WAF which celebrates the best interiors of the last year.

All designs must be by professionals whose qualifications are recognised by their local accreditation organisation

Please note: If your building is shortlisted, two representatives from your practice will need to purchase tickets and be available to present at the Festival in Singapore. If your project wins a WAF category award, the architect must be available at the Festival to collect the trophy at the closing ceremony on the final evening of Friday 4<sup>th</sup> October 2013.<sup>171</sup>

Three segments of text underlined in this excerpt gain salience in this analysis. The first illustrates the wide cast of WAF's net for entrants. The second speaks to a professional requirement: entrants must be "recognized by their local accreditation organization." The nominal presence of this requirement illustrates WAF's imagined integration with multiple countries' institutions of professional licensure. The third underlined segment speaks to the persistent challenge for some entrants—particularly those limited by travel and visa restrictions—to participate in and win awards, reminding the participant of the ever present barrier of foreign travel policy in even this most transnational of institutions.

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<sup>170</sup> Wikipedia: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World\\_Architecture\\_Festival](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Architecture_Festival), accessed March 2, 2013.

<sup>171</sup> WAF website. Entry Conditions. [http://www.worldarchitecturefestival.com/entry\\_conditions.cfm](http://www.worldarchitecturefestival.com/entry_conditions.cfm), accessed March 2, 2013. My underlines.

Further analysis of content on the WAF website reveals a very didactic placement of content that spells out how the site can be leveraged by participants from around the world. Excerpts from a panel titled “what do past entrants and delegates think?” read as follows:

It has been amazing to be part of the WAF awarding winning team. When you look across the range and quality of projects put forward for the WAF Awards, to be short-listed and then become associated with the overall winner is a momentous achievement for Grant Associates.

Winning the WAF Award has given credibility and respect to the work of the practise, an unquestionable Kudos which speaks for itself - we are taken seriously and shown respect. (Peter Rich, SA)

WAF is the best in terms of breadth and depth of architects. Mostly you don't get a meeting of world architects, but here you do. It's the number one. (Charles Jenks)

I think WAF is very important for all architects all over the world, because we can learn so much from each other and make many contacts. (Catarina Castanheira Antunes, Portugal)

It was indeed a pleasure and honour to have met you at WAF in Barcelona. The ceremony and the entire presentation was a delight for anybody who is in the profession of architecture. The standards that have been set, the platform created for the younger designers and the showcasing of the works was indeed a feat in itself and I on behalf of the ADA Team and architects from Pakistan congratulate you in such a meaningful venture. (Marya Aslam-Haydar, Pakistan)<sup>172</sup>

The content of these testimonials indicate the global reach of the WAF participants and judges, and the significance to participants in terms of global exposure and connection making. Their messages' dissemination through the website reifies the transnational nature of the institution by making a rhetoric of transnational credibility readily available to winners and shortlisters of the prize.

Among those shortlisted in the first round of the WAF in 2008 is Iran's first mention as a shortlist, where a firm was listed for their entry in the Production category. As expected this firm marketed this recognition in their rise to domestic recognition.

### *Substantive Credibility and Weak Credibility*

The credibility given by transnational institutions, transnational credibility, stands out in Iran's isolated professional, political, and social context as discussed in Chapter 1. Iran's profession has had limited access to global architecture discourse and practice. Many of the profession's members have not navigated transnational circuits or institutions of architecture. As a result, actors within the Iranian profession do not easily discriminate between more or less substantive credibilities—between what I am calling substantive and weak credibilities. Importantly, both forms of this credibility lend themselves to authority

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<sup>172</sup> See “testimonials” quoted on <http://www.worldarchitecturefestival.com/testimonials.cfm>

and this is a root of the destabilization of local structures of authority that I claim in this dissertation.

When one participant thoughtfully concluded that:

...in retrospect these accolades don't solve Iran's architecture problems, they maybe even make them worse,<sup>173</sup>

he was speaking to the problematic distinction between substantive and weak forms of transnational credibility. What he meant by accolades making Iranian architecture's problems worse was how flashy but mediocre award architecture was becoming popular among young architects. I posit that this is a symptom of the destabilization of professional hierarchies.

An origin of this problem can be traced to the practice of young architects getting accolades through mention in Iranian architecture magazines as a lead-in to commissions. This started with the *Memar Award*. With a proliferation of magazines within Iran, young architects started designing to photos that could get them recognition in magazines and hence commissions. A sort of advertising scheme. Indeed, a lot of magazines charge for placing non-advertisement content. It was in this context that an interview participant I cited in Chapter 3 talked about the explosion of publishing, and architecture made for magazines.<sup>174</sup>

They strive to make the image of the work look like the images of architecture in the West.<sup>175</sup>

Through weblogs and Web-accessible sites of recognition, it's easy to see how such practices carry over to the transnational arena. Weblogs and awards are to transnational professional capital what Iran's magazines and awards are to a more domestic capital.

According to one architect who migrated from Iran a couple years ago:

Despite all these awards and stuff there are *very few* good architecture works in Iran. Maybe one, two, or three good projects a year. And then only about a handful of architects who do good work.<sup>176</sup>

In Chapter 4, I shared the story of an architect who returned to Iran for a summer project. Contrary to her expectation, she was not stampeded by young architects. This speaks to the expansion of the population of people with transnational exposure. She no longer stood out as a rare bringer of transnational exposure. By the late 2010s, a lot of people had transnational exposure, but theirs wasn't as substantive as hers. She had worked with leading, globally recognized architects in Europe and North America. She had won awards in more stringent international competitions. In contrast, dozens of others who had

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<sup>173</sup> Interview with R1.

<sup>174</sup> Interview with M4.

<sup>175</sup> Interview with RM.

<sup>176</sup> Interview with M4.

increased the transnational color of Iran's professional landscape did not have the direct, rich exposure she had. Many had perhaps traveled abroad and participated in a workshop led by a second or third-tier institution, had a project published or shortlisted in a loosely sanctioned award or on a blog. Some even had foreign experience listed on their resume for work that didn't go through. Perhaps they started a collaboration that didn't go through and what engagement they did have didn't give them access to foreign practice. They would not have accumulated much by way of substantive transnational experience. Some completed a degree or two at foreign academic institutions. While some walked away with rich experiences, some effectively only walked away with a title that they could market themselves with. In this landscape of different shades of transnational experience, the ones with substantive experience aren't as easy to make out. With a proliferation of award granting sites, more and more architects have jumped on the transnational credibility bandwagon in the past five to ten years. The duration of the novelty of transnational credibility is short.

### **Discussion: Destabilizing Authority in the Profession**

The idea that awards disrupt the established order of hierarchy that other institutions establish is not a new one. In 1994, Magali Sarfatti Larson wrote that competitions appear to contradict the established hierarchies of prestige on which professionals found their expertise.<sup>177</sup> In the case of transnational awards, this problem affects multiple countries' professions. And where transnational connections are as lucrative a commodity as they are in Iran, the power of the credibility that awards bestow is magnified. An important question to ask then is if new egalitarian transnational recognition and award giving sites, like those introduced in this chapter, diffuse the geography of authority in architecture by giving voice to award winners that would otherwise not be heard.

One interview participant described what she called the “photogenicization” of design:

The proliferation of architecture magazines in Iran encourages this trend. There is gratification in having photos of your projects published. Foreign awards based on uploaded photos—without the jury actually visiting the buildings—encourage this too. Young architects design to what they see in magazines and on the Internet as Western architecture. These projects are shallow and unsophisticated. They don't function as buildings. Architecture is more than a pretty façade.”

She went on to say, for example, that:

“the majority of Iran's new and fancy buildings are hardly inhabitable. South facing, fully glazed facades in Tehran's arid climate have tremendous energy demands that cost a lot to keep habitable.”<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> My paraphrasing of Larson (1994): 471.

<sup>178</sup> Interview with SN1.

The so-called photogenicization that she described helps problematize the loose, global castings of design recognition through sites like WAC. Sites that give recognition shape the design practices of communities in unanticipated ways. What is not accounted for in framings of the potential of such sites is that participants' national contexts have very different systems of valuation of credibility and authority than what the global community takes for granted as a unified system of recognition and professional hierarchies.

In these countries, professional authority itself is subject to being undermined—weak transnational credibility destabilizes substantive transnational credibility. By the late 2010s, a lot of people in Iran's architecture profession had transnational exposure, but theirs wasn't necessarily substantive. There are those transnational players that have worked with Pritzker winning architects in Europe and North America. And by contrast, there are those recent dozens of others without the same direct, rich exposure that have obscured the more substantive professional experiences of others. Interviews and analysis of resumes and built works show that many had a project published or shortlisted in a loosely sanctioned award or on a blog. Some even had foreign experience listed on their resume for work that had fallen through and never happened.

The result—particularly for young architects—is that the authority in Iran's architecture profession is decentered. No longer are substantive leaders of the profession easily recognizable. And through international award giving organizations like WAF, architects from around the world rub shoulders virtually on websites as well as in person at festivals and award ceremonies; these international circuits that they participate in affect their view of global authority. Thus the issue is not limited to Iran. The implications of the global extent of the issue is one I expand on in Chapter 6. This aspect of globalization calls into question the stability of the foundations of professional authority.

Resumes posted on personal or firm websites or sites like LinkedIn offer a telling view into this problem. For example, the following architect notes having been nominated for a prize:

Nominated by EMU to participate in Archiprix international (presents the world's best graduation projects in Architecture, Urban design and Landscape Architecture) 2011

Nominated for World Architecture Festival in production category 2008

First prize of Memar award competition 2007<sup>179</sup>

A perturbation to the system that involves recognition-claiming is occurring at a pace driven by the rapidly growing cadre of young architects graduating from proliferating architecture departments. As noted in the Prologue, where there were four schools of architecture before the revolution, there are about four hundred in Iran today (most inaugurated in the past decade). The “massification” in architecture education in Iran, is occurring in architecture education in other countries as well.

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<sup>179</sup> LinkedIn profile for K1.

There is more at stake here than the direct impact on the profession that transnational institutions grant. The awards decenter the location of accolades and authority within the profession in Iran. In Iran, it is no longer the established, experienced architects with buildings that have stood the test of use and careers that have faced scrutiny and criticism that are the winners of accolades and thus holders of authority in the profession. Now, a young architect with “photogenic” design ideas and mention on a foreign blog and maybe even a design idea award to his credit carries accolades—with the stamp of transnational approval—and authority enough for younger architects to be drawn to him. This is not as much the question of the old guard being replaced by an avant-garde—it is both of those groups being obscured by a faux-garde.

Not only is the changing placement of accolades affecting the location of authority in the Iranian profession, but it also changes where Iranian architects—and certainly architects in other countries (but mainly those with limited transnational exposure)—look to for authority abroad. This dynamic can be illustrated as follows: fresh out-of-college architecture students in Iran learn that their role models (holders of authority) don’t need to be the old, established, architects “with names” that generations before them looked to. They take that lesson and apply it to foreign architects they look too. No longer are figures like Rem Koolhaas the only authorities in avant-garde practice. Why, there are dozens of award winning architects all around them. For purposes of emulation, this approach sufficiently gets these architects where they think they need to go.

Larson’s research on design competitions offers insights into the issue of authority in the context of this chapter. Recall the article in *Abadi* that I argue in Chapters 2 and 3 represented the laying of a foundation for the transformation of the post-revolutionary profession in Iran. In that article, the editor wrote about the importance of cultivating a culture of recognition in Iran’s architecture profession. He spoke of awards and later with a handful of others, helped institute the awards project that revolutionized architecture practice in Iran. That article ideologically coincides with Larson’s position that competitions challenge established hierarchies of prestige that are central to the authority of experts. I extend this “contradiction” beyond hierarchies in a profession to hierarchies across national professional contexts.

If open and anonymous contest can rank talent differently (and possibly better) than the established profession, competition may well entice original departures from the accepted canon of architecture, on which rankings ultimately depend.<sup>180</sup>

Indeed, in the cases presented here, competitions or awards “may well entice original departures” from the accepted role models and geographies of authority in architecture practice. Again, quoting Larson:

In competitions that matter as discursive events, architects gamble to accumulate what Pierre Bourdieu aptly calls symbolic capital: the right to speak with authority in a delimited field, wherein that symbolic capital is created and reinvested

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<sup>180</sup> Larson 1994, 471

according to field-specific rifles. In the symbolic domain of discourse, the odds of winning are much better than those of landing a real commission. Overall, the potentially subversive effects of any particular contest, as well as its effects on the winners' careers, are always mediated by the authorized and authoritative discourse of the architectural profession.<sup>181</sup>

The arguments of this chapter complicate the idea of “the authorized and authoritative discourse of the architectural profession” by recognizing the transnational twist that the global architecture field is experiencing today with the global circulation of new media. This chapter shows how fragile authority in the architectural profession is in countries like Iran. I suggest the “authorized and authoritative discourse of the architecture profession” globally is far less authoritative than assumed. As such, following Larson’s logic, there is less mediation of the directions architecture practice take. With the widening distribution of recognition comes a transnational thinning and spreading-out of the field’s loci of influence and control.

This transformation has implications for individual architects making their way in the profession as well for the institutions that give the profession structure. Furthermore, the example of “photogenicization” cited above brings to our attention the implications this transformation has for the product of architecture: the examples in this chapter and others like them show that buildings, facades, interiors, and larger landscapes respond not only to the architects’ visions and client’s desires, but also to the promise of transnational capital.

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<sup>181</sup> Larson, 1994, 473

## Chapter 6. The Transnationalization of Architecture and its Discontents

In an interview, an observer of globalization in architecture related the following:

when I was in school [in the 1970s], there was zero doubt about where architecture authority came from... there were centers like Switzerland, Great Britain, or America... and they had schools of thought and they were connected to institutions and the hierarchies were very well defined. But now, the minds and will powers of architects in places like Iran, Korea, Chile, Brazil are pegs in the constellation of discourses emerging simultaneously... architecture authority is shifting.<sup>182</sup>

In Chapter 5, I began to argue that transnational credibility is no longer reserved for the few whose work is acknowledged by a geographic core and laboriously circulated around the world through print media. Today a less substantive transnational credibility is produced, circulated and mobilized, with less effort, through weblogs and loosely administered international design awards. I showed that professionals in countries located off the beaten path of globalization do not sufficiently distinguish between substantive and weak forms of credibility. I argued that the confluence of transnational institutions and varying transnational credibilities destabilizes authority in Iran's profession and that they are a force in destabilizing authority globally.

Corollary to the arguments of Chapter 5, which served as a culmination of the dissertation's main argument, are a number of arguments that contribute to the literature on the sociology of professions, economic geography, and architectures of globalization that I reviewed in the Introduction. This chapter expands on those arguments. First, I offer examples of the frictions that occur when transnational cultures of professional practice overlap. The case of Iranian professional culture juxtaposed with global professional culture offers a salient comparison. Next, I consider the implications of this transnational study for the framings of professions vis-à-vis the broader and more flexible conceptions of fields. Here I compare the ideas of various sociologists of professions with the Bourdieusian notion of the field. Third, I argue for a more complete understanding of professions in relation to their nation-specific definitions. In doing so, I offer the lessons shared in this dissertation toward bridging gaps in the literature on transnationalism and globalization of work and occupations. Finally, I address the relationship between

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<sup>182</sup> Interview with N2.

profession and state by considering the agency that professionals have in the sphere of state politics.

### **Through a Transnational Filter: the Limitations of Exposure to the Global**

What happens when cultures of work collide? As Chapters 3, 4, and 5 show, transnationalism brings professionals, their institutions, and their practices in contact. This happens formally through sanctioned collaborations, informally through friendships, and accidentally through ideas being exposed to broad audiences with different national cultures of ethics, practice, etc. In these chapters, I shared several examples of the frictions that arise when Iran's professionals and their institutions interact with those outside its borders. When Farshid Moussavi was profiled in *Sharestan*, a heated debate ensued on *Architect* about copyright infringement and the possibility of her partner, Alejandro Zaera Pollo's discontent with her almost sole association with their (now dissolved) firm, Foreign Office Architects. Remarkably, one contributor to the discussion connected the *Sharestan* debacle with their split. Regardless of the accuracy of that position, the fact that it discussed on global, accessible media and reacted to by the editors of *Sharestan* and visible to the global community of architects says much about transnational discourse and ways previously peripheral national actors participate.

When *Archdaily* recognized Sadar and Vuga's project in Serbia and Iranian architects noted the similarity with Fluid Motion Architect's (FMA) theater that the architecture Sadar and Vuga had visited during their trip to Iran to lead one of the foreign architect workshops, this was another expression of friction (see Figure 21). The debate on copyright in architecture design is a very complex and vague one. FMA did not, and could not, claim that the Sadar and Vuga project was an unethical copy of theirs. But they did make the effort to share their project with the *Archdaily* team even if only for the editors' information. Again, like the FOA example, while this controversy was not one that rocked the profession or necessarily bothered either of the architects in any significant way, it became a forum of extended debate and awareness, in this case, by Iranian participants in the debate on *Archdaily*, that their architecture is being looked at by the global community. That some asserted the unethical-ness of the copying reflects an important shift from the days that majority of the Iranian profession copied projects from the occasional architecture magazine that made its way into Iran in a book fair or with a traveler.



Figure 21. Sadar and Vuga's Center of Promotion of Science in Belgrade, Serbia, 2011 (*top*) and Fluid Motion Architects' Mellat Cineplex, Tehran, Iran, 2008, (*bottom*).  
(Images from Archdaily.com)

A third example, or group of examples, is the entries of foreign architects for Iran's Stock Exchange competition—Iranian architects criticized Zaha Hadid's towers and Hadi

Tehrani's projects as these architects' offices' discarded projects from other places being offered for Tehran.



Figure 22. The Tehran Stock Exchange Building competition submission by Zaha Hadid.  
(Image from Web)

These examples represent the most obvious problems associated with transnational practices discussed in this dissertation. More nuanced controversies fall under the radar, but have tremendous purchase on the problems encountered by Iranian architects. Many of these can be attributed to the space between the aspects of global architecture that make it through transnational channels and what gets left out. This question comes up in Chapter 5: media such as websites only communicate certain messages. Even architects that visit Iran, in the flesh, as it were, are there for about a week making that exchange also limiting. And those that come are by and large designers. What about critics and theorists? Places like Iran getting a transnational architecture with criticism and theory filtered out. Transnational exchanges, institutional and individual, seem to carry only what a majority of the community of Iranian architects deem important or ready for productive consumption.

Examples of magazine content discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 show the limits of access to current critical discourse in architecture. Even in my own experience, I have been approached numerous times by peers in Iran struggling to gain access to theoretical articles and critical discourse. Because of sanctions on Iran, most cannot purchase access to sites like JSTOR or obtain subscription to journals or magazines. Despite flowering access to online content, that content remains dangerously lopsided. The promise of the Internet hides the withholding of academic or vetted theoretical content. The transnationalism Iranian architects are exposed to is dangerously uneven.

### **The Field and the Profession: Framing the Institutional World of Architects**

During my fieldwork, I could not neatly separate architecture students from educators from professionals. In Iran, as in many countries, architects begin professional practice alongside school after their second or third year as undergraduates. People that were full-time students before graduating and then entered the profession were the exception (as opposed to the rule in places like the US). With the proliferation of architecture departments, a significant cadre of graduate student/professionals are hired as teachers in the many branches of Islamic Azad University around the country. This population of student/professional/educators is so extensive that they are commonly labeled “flying faculty” because they often study and work in Tehran and fly to cities across Iran to teach a class or two and return home as part of a routine commute.

This is not to say that there is no divide between the institutions of the profession and academia. This distinction exists more at the upper echelons of these respective arenas than at its extensive base. For this reason, and because of the fluid movement of a majority of architects between universities and the profession, the common framing of professional institutions distinct from universities is limiting. At the same time, scholars such as Magali Sarfatti Larson and Marion Fourcade do link these arenas in their writings on professions (Larson 1979, Fourcade 2009). Larson writes about the transfer of discursive formations between studios and the profession and Fourcade writes about the culture of economics professions as stemming from their national academic cultures. Writing after Bourdieu, Fourcade acknowledges his framing of the field as one that shapes her extended view of the economics profession. Writing before Bourdieu, Larson and others such as Cuff and Blau don't offer an explicit distinction between analytical framings of a field versus a profession of architecture.

Again, architecture is unique as a discipline because its pedagogical models essentially place a cohort of apprentices under the tutelage of a master or studio patron. In the US, we know studio instructors are often not tenure-track faculty and are often active members of their profession. In Iran this is also the case. The discipline of architecture intrinsically requires a more flexible understanding of the relationship between academic and professional institutions. The idea of a field that encompasses interactions between individual and institutional actors is very useful for examining architects and their practices.

Once that flexibility offered by the framework of a field is obtained, I find it limiting to focus back on exchanges of symbolic capital within that field to the extent that Garry Stevens does (Stevens 1998). The focus on capital directs one's view on individuals' accumulation of power at the expense of their bureaucratic and institutional ambitions. In the context of Iran, these latter aspects are significant in ways they might not have been prevalent in Bourdieu's France. From my interviews and observations in Iran, I do see symbolic capital as an important and even central theme or a key analytic to understand the motivation of actors in their practices. But if I were to limit my investigation to symbolic capital, I would lose sight of other motivations that interview participants revealed. Most notably, perhaps was a desire to advance the practice of architecture in Iran. Despite avant-garde architects' seeming detachment from the familiar tradition versus modernity debates that rage in academia and among the base of the profession, in a number of cases, deeper into our interviews (usually in hour two or three) some of the country's most notable architects expressed a belief in an inherent, historical architecture potential that has been lost in Iran.

That these concerns came up, contrary to my initial perception of the interviewees and deep into our conversation, precisely speaks to my point about its removal from circuits of capital exchange. These are ideas these architects may not espouse vocally and wear on their sleeves in a way that they would with forms of symbolic capital. Nevertheless, these are ideas that drive some to found magazines, start lecture series with foreign architects, establish non-profit incubators for promoting avant-garde architecture, and to put up with never seeing their projects come to fruition. Thus, I argue that what we see in Iran's architecture profession shows that in the field of architecture, there is more than symbolic capital at work. As such, through this dissertation, I espouse a methodology that brings attention to individuals *and* their institutional practices.

### **Professions Beyond Nation-States**

The way professions are embedded in their national context is fundamental to the study of what professionals do. The literature exhibits a range of grappling with this thesis. Much of the early classics of the sociology of professions established their arguments within a national context without bringing particular attention to how that national context differed from others. And they didn't need to because their studies were not comparative. Examples continue up through Andrew Abbott's *The System of Professions* in 1988. In 1977, Magali Sarfatti Larson made the important step of placing professions in political and economic context in her Marxist analysis of professions in *The Rise of Professionalism*. In 1995, Larson did the same for the architecture profession in *Behind the Postmodern Façade*. In these studies, she was among those scholars that expanded our understanding of professions to their broader social context. She elaborated on the heteronomy, or what Jeremy Till would later simplify as the dependencies of the work of a profession like architecture (Till 2013).

These contextual placements of professionals, their work, and the structures that comprise their profession were picked up and elaborated by scholars writing in the

emerging vein of economic geography. Marion Fourcade closely studied the difference of the economics field in the national contexts of the US, the UK, France, as well as Germany (Fourcade 2009). She examines economics education, practice, policy, and the nature of the science in each context in relation to the cultures of academic, professional, and policy institutions. In “The Transnationalization of the Economics Profession,” Fourcade shifts her focus from the nature of the economics profession in different national contexts to the shaping of ideas about an economics profession at the conceptual level of the global (Fourcade 2006). James Faulconbridge and Daniel Muzio—representing, by my reading, the more conceptual end of European scholarship on the topic—occupy a third space between the two ends of Fourcade’s work (Faulconbridge and Muzio 2012). They examine the affect of regional professional structures, in the context of the EU, on nationally specific professions, such as that of architecture in the UK:

In particular, the rise of supra-national professional bodies and regulatory agencies suggests that the nation-state is no longer the only scale at which access to the profession or professional standards are controlled. Most significantly for the argument here, the transnational mobility facilitated by emerging supra-national regimes might be said to undermine the long-standing assumption that practitioners operating in a national profession sphere share a common, nationally specific foundational knowledge base and qualification trajectory, while also apparently lessening the ability of a national association to define and police its own boundaries. And this rescaling of governance regimes is not the only way that transnational forces now affect the professions.<sup>183</sup>

While they call theirs a study of transnationalism and globalism in professions—and to a great extent it is successful in establishing the dynamics of supra-national institutional and individual actors—Faulconbridge and Muzio’s analyses do not account for the uniquely and significantly different aspects of professions in developing countries or countries, like Iran and China for instance, that have overtly and extensively controlled borders when it comes to markets of capital, culture, and expertise.

This dissertation shows that the specific context of countries like Iran changes the way a transnationalization of professions can be theorized. Indeed the nature, extent, and complexity of a transnationalism of professions expands significantly when we understand how professional institutions in Europe or the US are affected by Iranian architects (e.g. the wave of young students and professionals joining schools and firms in Canada, as discussed in Chapter 4), their institutions (e.g. the participation of Iranian architects in competitions hosted by English organizations, as discussed in Chapter 5), or even their work (e.g. the FMA theater project, as discussed earlier in this chapter), and how individuals and institutions in the US and the UK shape the profession in Iran (in the myriad ways discussed throughout the dissertation). The transnationalism of the architecture profession I advocate is one that embraces the formal as well as informal channels through which very different cultures of practice permeate different nations’

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<sup>183</sup> Faulconbridge and Muzio (2011): 142.

professions. This transnationalism acknowledges the many fascinating cross-border exchanges that touch perhaps only a handful of architects and their projects; in doing so, it also discovers those exchanges that touch many architects, many projects, and indeed a whole country's architecture profession. The transnational dynamics shown in Chapter 5 speak to the greater significance of the changes that the profession is experiencing in Iran as well as globally.

## **Profession and State**

There is much “red-lining” and censorship around what gets written in Iranian magazines, what gets posted on a blog, and even what people text each other via SMS. Forming and running professional institutions—be they magazines, awards, professional associations—are not only mired in elaborate bureaucratic processes, but they are also tangled in an impossibly complex web of politics. In my interviews, there were clues about the complexity of this aspect of the politics of Iran's profession. Chapter 2 documents the historical cases. For the contemporary situation, some interviewees were explicit in stating their relationship with state actors—be it beneficial or restrictive. I am not quoting specific statements in order to keep my analysis relatively apolitical (in the sense of the politics of the profession vis-à-vis the state). In what follows, however, I do lay out an analytical framework for understanding the political agency that architecture professionals carry as an addition to the discussion on profession and state in the context of Iran covered in Chapter 1.

Iranian architects gently nudge the state by asserting their institutional power through professional associations, magazines, and to an extent the other institutions discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. According to those I interviewed, these assertions are almost entirely a means to professional independence and power—not a covert or overt battle of ideology. That skirmish (and I relegate it to a skirmish rather than a war because of its seeming lack of contestation for Iranian architects) is conducted in discursive circles: articles about Islamic-Iranian architecture in more academic journals, students' theses, and debates in informal settings. The country's most successful avant-garde architects design Islamic religious architecture. Bahram Shirdel's Mashhad mosque and FMA's mosque in Tehran are prominent examples.

The only significant political movement among the professions institutions that I found evidence of was at the height of the 1979 revolution and in the pages of *Jameh'e va Memari* were the institutions of the prerevolutionary profession were singled out as harboring a corrupt regime of imperialism, inequality, and clientelism. More subtle politicking occurs when, for example, a magazine publishes an image of the Hariri sisters without their headscarves on. Things like that do indeed affect architects' lives: one return migrant was barred from joining the faculty of a university when a group of conservative watchdogs on campus leveraged against him images from his Facebook page where he was shaking hands with a woman even though he was living in the US then. (They may have had ideological concerns with his research or his education, but they used the pictures to prevent him from joining the campus.)

Across the spectrum of minor to major engagements between architects and the state, the case of Iran's architects shows us how, in a field spanning arts and sciences, and in the political context of a state substantially isolated from the rest of the world, Iranian architects are able to manipulate the dual dimensions of their field and their ability to engage transnational connections strategically to their benefit. If the state does not want Iranian culture to be diluted with Western culture, Iranian architects get around that by establishing foreign connections on the grounds of technical expertise rather than artistic discourse. They host global architecture's avant-garde as technical experts, then, while in Iran, they can subtly draw from those architects' cultural and artistic capital. These maneuverings are significant.

In countries like Iran, architects and their professional institutions are a subtle channel of power that straddles the divide between arts and science, cultural and real development, and national and transnational networks. Architects can navigate both sides of this divide to skirt censorship and establish political power.

Furthermore, institutional engagements with transnationalism have a blurred boundary with individual actions. What is unique about the intersection of individual and institutional practices speaks to the ability of individual actors to exert agency at an organizational level. In the case of Iran, this has important ramifications. Where the state casts a watchful eye on the activities of organizations, it is less stringent with the movements of individuals. Without strict censorship, individual architects navigate the isolation that being in Iran imposes upon them. Through the rather thick individual-institutional boundary that weak bureaucratic regulation in developing countries sometimes provide, individuals mobilize a good deal of institutional power. Outside the intersection of the conceptual spaces that comprise individual and institutional practices, where they are mutually exclusive is also telling. It speaks to the limits of individuals' professional activism, but, it also emphasizes the range of formal and informal practices that affect a profession.

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Indeed, the case of Iran brings into relief much about transnationalism, the architecture profession, and the globalization of professions in general. An authoritarian state, the government's ambivalent relationship with the rest of the world, and a very eager population of young professionals are important characteristics of the Iranian context. Iran's proliferation of architecture schools and its potential of housing the world's largest population of architecture graduates demand consideration. The simultaneous spread of transnational institutions such as loosely sanctioned international design awards hints at a volatile admixture with profound consequences for Iran and for the world.

These changes to architecture practice globally may pass like a calm swell of a changing tide or crash with the impact of a tsunami. In either case, the findings offered in this dissertation compel architects and scholars to ask: what will the emerging geography of authority in the profession look like? And in this new geography, what will the impacts

be on design by architects around the world when models of substantive architecture are obscured by a saturation of awards?

The lessons gleaned from the transnational practices of Iranian architects extend beyond the field of architecture. It is incumbent on transnationally active professionals to consider the power of their everyday transnational practices. Such actors and transnational activists will find it worth their while to question their assumptions about the role informal institutions play in affecting change globally. Remarkably, the stories of the architects shared in this dissertation—of members of a weak profession in an oppressive state—reveal tremendous agency and power in the everyday connections they establish and the informal practices they manage.

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