Cosmopolitan Radicalism

Exploring the intersections of visual culture, design and politics in Beirut from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s, this compelling interdisciplinary study critically examines a global conjuncture in Lebanon’s history, marked by anticolonial struggle and complicated by a Cold War order. Against a celebratory reminiscence of the ‘golden years’, Beirut’s long 1960s is conceived of as a liminal juncture, an anxious time and space when the city held out promises at once politically radical and radically cosmopolitan. Zeina Maasri examines the transnational circuits that animated Arab modernist pursuits, shedding light on key cultural transformations that saw Beirut develop as a Mediterranean site of tourism and leisure, a nexus between modern art and pan-Arab publishing and, through the rise of the Palestinian Resistance, a node in revolutionary anti-imperialism. Drawing on uncharted archives of printed media this book expands the scope of historical analysis of the postcolonial Arab East.

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The Global Middle East

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Cosmopolitan Radicalism
The Visual Politics of Beirut’s Global Sixties

ZEINA MAASRI
University of Brighton
In memory of my father
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Preface and Acknowledgements

This project has long been in the making, travelling with me as I relocated my academic life from Beirut to Brighton; and I would like to thank a number of individuals and institutions whose collaboration, guidance and support have made it possible.

My biggest debt of gratitude is to Abboudi Bou Jawde. Much of the archival material used here is culled from his magnificent collection of printed matter from the modern Arab world. The sheer amount of stuff he has collected, assiduously cared for and saved from otherwise being thrown out, together with his generosity in sharing this material and his excitement over seeing it used, should make any institutional archive and librarian blush. I met Abboudi in 2005 while conducting research for my previous project on the political posters of Lebanon’s civil war. As I folded the latter into an online archival resource (signsofconflict.org), Abboudi and I embarked on a new project: to identify new material and to develop, digitize and catalogue new collections of Arabic posters and illustrated books, in the strong conviction that these should also be made available for future academic and public use. This is especially so – as any historian of the conflicted Arab East and modern Lebanon in particular would know – because public institutional archives are ‘logistical labyrinths’ (Scalenghe and Sbaiti 2003: 68) if and when they do exist. Without Abboudi’s collections, our long discussions, treasure hunts, precious findings and his immense support, this book would not be what it is today.

I began my research on this project when I was a faculty member in the Architecture and Design Department at the American University of Beirut. While teaching courses on the history and theory of graphic design and visual culture, I came to realize the dearth of such scholarship as related to the Middle East. This gap had to be compensated for in my teaching; and so the archival collections I was building with Abboudi found their first audience in my classes. Students’ enthusiasm further encouraged my project. I owe a lot to them and to my colleagues at AUB for having motivated me to embark on this research. I want to thank especially Howayda al-Harithy, Marwan Ghandour, Mona Harb and Mona Fawaz, for being the genuine and generous scholars I have been lucky to begin my...
academic journey with, to learn a great deal from and to develop friendships with. AUB awarded me several research grants to begin the archival groundwork and fieldwork for this project. These helped fund the digitization and cataloguing of my primary sources and to enjoy the assistance of students to work with me on this arduous task. My special thanks go to Aya al-Bawwab, Yumna Ghandour, Omar Mismar and Douaa Sheet. I am also very grateful for late Victor Margolin’s mentorship and encouragement to pursue doctoral studies in Design History and for pointing me in the direction of the University of Brighton.

This book is a developed outcome of my dissertation. I want to thank the University of Brighton for offering me a PhD studentship, which allowed me fully to concentrate on this project for three years. I am grateful to my supervisors, Paul Jobling, Guy Julier and Mark Devenney, for probing my intellectual enquiries and supporting my endeavour. My viva examiners, Walter Armbrust and Jeremy Aynsley, having engaged with my work with the necessary academic rigour, enthusiastically encouraged me to publish it in book form. Throughout my doctoral studies, I greatly benefited from discussions with Bob Brecher, Tom Hickey, Darren Newbury and Louise Purbrick, who read and commented on earlier draft chapters. Darren has since read an earlier version of the entire manuscript and given me insightful comments and encouraging feedback. Louise has been particularly persistent in encouraging my work on different occasions and I’m deeply grateful for her ongoing support. Bob Brecher has generously read, and reread, my entire manuscript at different stages; his close – octopus-like – readings have helped me sharpen my arguments and give my prose the required scholarly rigour and vigour. I can’t thank him enough for his sincere mentorship. My intellectual journey would not have been the same had it not been for our long conversations and sometimes heated debates. Hala Auji has generously read and commented on earlier draft chapters; her leads on the early history of the Arabic press were invaluable.

While at Brighton, formerly as a doctoral researcher and currently as an academic member of staff, I have had the chance to engage in different research groups and centres based in the School of Humanities, where I took part in reading groups and workshops, shared my work, learnt from others’ and participated in discussions. I am forever grateful to the stimulating intellectual environment of the Research Cluster on Understanding Conflict: Forms and Legacies of Violence; the Centre for Applied Philosophy Politics and Ethics (CAPPE); Image Object Text Analysis (IOTA); the Centre for Design History (CDH); the Centre for Memory, Narrative and Histories (CMNH); and the Philosophy, Politics, Aesthetics seminar.
My past years at Brighton have been an intellectual haven, thanks to you all. Finally I want especially to acknowledge CMNH, CDH, CAPPE and the School of Humanities for awarding me research support funds that helped complete the book.

Throughout this project, I have had several opportunities to present my work in progress at different conferences, seminar series and workshops and have benefited from valuable comments and discussions with colleagues and friends. I wish particularly to thank here Ziad Abu el-Rish, Andrew Arsan, Harriet Atkinson, Hannah Baader, Cathy Bergin, Hiba Bou Akar, Francesca Burke, Kjetil Fallan, Rania Ghosn, Christine Guth, Christian Hogsbjerg, Mary Ikoniadou, Mezna Kato, Khaled Malas, Nada Mouttaz, Tania Messell, Megha Rajguru, Kirsten Scheid, Hanan Toukan, Fawwaz Traboulsi and Jana Traboulsi as well as enthusiastic audiences at the Design History Society annual conferences, the Middle East Studies Association of North America annual meetings, the RCA/ V&A Design History Research seminars and the Art Histories Seminars at the Forum Transregionale Studien in Berlin.

A section of Chapter 1 was published under the title, ‘Troubled Geography: Imagining Lebanon in 1960s Tourist Promotion’ in Kjetil Fallan and Grace Lees-Maffei (eds.), Designing Worlds: National Design Histories in an Age of Globalization (Oxford: Berghahn 2016). I thank both editors for their constructive comments. A version of Chapter 3 was published in Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East, and I want to thank the two anonymous reviewers and journal editors for their diligent comments, which fed back into my book.

I am deeply grateful to the individuals I have interviewed for this project and to those who gave me kind permission to reproduce artworks in this book: Christine Abboud, Nawal Abboud Traboulsi, Youssef Abdelke, Dia al-Azzawi, Hisham Bahgat, Mouna Bassili Sehnaoui, Abboudi Bou Jawdeh, Kamal Boullata, Mustapha and Ahmad Ellabbad, Omar Fadel, Waddah Faris, Halim Fayyad, Faleh Jabbar, Nadim Karkutli, Hasna Mikdashi, Safaa Nabaa, Helmi el-Touni, Mona Saudi, Bashar Shammut and Leila Shaheen da Cruz. Mouna Sehnaoui generously dug out her own portfolio of graphic design work from her years as art director of the National Council for Tourism in Lebanon. This material has been immensely precious for this study, especially because the current Ministry of Tourism in Lebanon holds no such archival collections. I wish also to thank Ziad Abu el-Rish and Kirsten Scheid, who shared with me some valuable archival material. Rima Jabbour kindly donated twenty precious Palestinian political posters dating back to the late 1960s. Adnan Hammud at the Arab Cultural Club was
kind enough to show me through the photographic archives of the Club and trust me to handle and digitize its uncatalogued collection. Yolanda has kindly done the same with regard to Artshop’s graphic design portfolio from the early 1970s. Thanks, too, to Samar Mikati-Kaissi and Iman Abdallah at the Archives and Special Collections Department of AUB for helping me locate sources on the activities of the Arab Cultural Club and student life at AUB in the 1950s and 1960s. The photographic reproduction of large format books was meticulously carried out by Agop Kanledjian.

This book was made possible thanks to the enthusiastic support of Maria Marsh, commissioning editor at Cambridge University Press. I am also grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their extremely helpful and encouraging comments on an earlier draft. The coloured reproduction of plates has benefited from a Research Publication Grant awarded by the Design History Society.

Last but not least, the warm support and relentless encouragement of friends and family have considerably softened an otherwise trying journey. The loving memory of my father has accompanied me all along; I dedicate this book to him.
Note on Transliteration and Translation

Arabic words and names have been transliterated according to a simplified system. All diacritical marks have been omitted except for the ‘ayn and hamza. Names of individuals are spelled according to their preferred English or French transliteration when commonly adopted as such. The prefix ‘al-’ is used rather than ‘el-’ for names generally except when individuals concerned have adopted a preferred transliteration (e.g. el-Touni or Ellabbad).

All translations from Arabic and French sources in this book are mine, except when otherwise specified.