

**Architecture and the question of identity:
issues of self-representation in Islamic community centers
in America**

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July 1984

SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF SCIENCE IN ARCHITECTURE STUDIES
AT THE
MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
JUNE 1993

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of
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ABSTRACT

This study examines the opposed notions of architecture as an autonomous discipline and of architecture as a product of cultural politics. It also suggests that recent development in cultural critique, particularly regarding issues of identity and the representation of culture, can support architectural criticism and inform architectural production.

The particular circumstances of Muslims living in America as a minority have contributed to the development of a sense of Muslim-American identity. This, while possessing a stable ideological core, can be seen as in reality a kind of hybrid identity, based on constant negotiation and shifting perspectives. Yet the reaction to certain aspects of these circumstances, as well as to the continuing East/West confrontation, have contributed to a growing assertiveness of an exclusive sense of identity, which has generally surfaced in the character of the Islamic community centers in America. In many cases this has perpetuated, through the use of architectural icons, long established Western stereotypes about Islam. There is a need, therefore, for the character of these buildings to be re-conceived on the basis of interaction and participation, rather than reaction or withdrawal; on inclusion instead of exclusion, and the articulation of a character that gives physical expression to shared values, as well as to those enriching differences that can contribute to the vitality of America.

In an atmosphere of increasing multiculturalism, architecture can be viewed as a significant mediator, and as potentially capable of acting as an important vehicle of cross-cultural communication. By pointing to the implications of current architectural practices on the perception of Muslims in America, the study highlights the need to establish such a dialogue through architecture, and suggests ways of approaching a more positive architectural outlook.

Thesis Supervisor: Masood A. Khan
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"O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another (not that you may despise each other). Verily the most honored on you in the sight of God is (he who is) the most righteous. God has knowledge and is well acquainted"

The Quran, 49: 13

Acknowledgments

To begin with, I wish to thank the Aga Khan Program for giving me the invaluable opportunity to further my studies at MIT.

I express my deep gratitude to Masood Khan, who has been an inspiring advisor and a true friend. To him I will always turn for guidance.

My sincere gratitude to Ron Lewcock whose encouragement has been for me a driving force throughout this work.

I am indebted to Sibel Bozdogan for introducing me into the field of cultural critique, and for her support and enthusiasm.

I am also indebted to Bill Porter for inspiring me to initiate this work.

My special thanks to Omar Khalidi for his valuable assistance in obtaining the necessary material.

I would like to thank Nasser Rabat for his support. From him I learned the advantage of skepticism.

My two years in Cambridge could not have been the same without Tarek Beshir. To him and to Nadia I would like to express my deep regards for being true friends.

To Raya Ani, Vivek Agrawal, Sonit Bafna, Robert Gonzalez, Zisong Feng, and Joseph Wong, my appreciation for their help and concern.

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, my sisters Zaida and Sahar, and to the memory of my father.

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This thesis is concerned with the relationship between architecture and the issue of representation with particular reference to Islamic community centers in America. Central to this study is the need for mutual understanding between the cultures involved, and the need to find a balance in the field of architectural expression. The search is for an equilibrium between, on the one hand, an identity of difference which risks alienation, and, on the other, the attempt at reconciliation (forced or voluntary), which sacrifices the creative potentials of diversity. In studying Islamic community centers, we hope to gain an insight into the way Muslims are approaching the challenge of their life in America. The architectural character of these centers has been shaped by both the images of Islamic architecture in the West as constructed through the Orientalist discourse, and the development of "Contemporary Islamic Architecture" which reflects the post-colonial search for identity, as well as by the particularities of postmodern architectural practice in America. By looking at their architectural products, we may evaluate how much of the historical confrontation between Islam and the West is shaping Muslim identity in America, and how much this Muslim presence is contributing to what Michael Fischer calls "Orientalizing America."¹

Architecture concerns a product, 'a building', as well as 'the process of building'. Both aspects of architecture are clearly interrelated and reflect, besides issues of functionality, structure, construction technology, aesthetics and physical context, a broader interplay of social, economic, and political forces. The effects of such a varied set of forces on a building provide it with a range of complex interpretive potentials. Much of the uniqueness of an architectural product is an outcome of its program as intended and formulated by the client, as interpreted by the architect, and as modified throughout the design, construction and operational stages. These processes relate to the value systems of each affected party to the architectural process, and reflect, through the outcome of that process, the interactive complexities of the culture or cultures to which these parties belong. The understanding of architecture as a process as well as a product, can therefore be revealing of the contradictions of its cultural setting, and a critique of architecture can expose those values that are often taken for granted and, in so doing, contribute to a further understanding of the question of identity.

¹ Fischer, Michael, "Orientalizing America: Beginnings and Middle Passages", in: *Middle East Report*, Sept./Oct., 1992, pp.32-37.

In order to understand the nature of this architecture it is important to outline the philosophical positions that inform the architectural discourses involved in its creation. Chapter I of this study, therefore provides a review of recent developments in the field of cultural critique, focusing on the representation of Islam in the West and the question of identity. My interest in discussing the development of Western views of Islam, particularly over the past few decades, stems from two important premises; the fact that architectural practice is basically Western, and that the so-called "contemporary Islamic architecture" is in itself an outcome of Western social and intellectual development. The intention is to understand the post-structuralist background for the recent debates concerning "the making of the discourse on Islamic architecture", and to be able to articulate possible attitudes towards architectural criticism on the basis of such understanding.

The American-Muslims' struggle at making sense of the conflicts of living in the West, and expressing their hybrid identity has given them a unique and enriching experience of participation, resistance and confrontation, and has led to the emergence of the idea of the Islamic community center as a concrete manifestation of this experience. Chapter II focuses on the cultural context of this phenomenon and examines the nature of American-Muslim identity. It outlines the history of Muslims in America, their ethnic composition, and the development of their nationwide institutions. This part of the study investigates the characteristics of the experiences of immigrants and exiles in general and the effect of such experiences on their identities, and highlights the recent realization in America of the virtues of multiculturalism over assimilation while elaborating on those aspects of experience that are unique to Muslims in America. It illustrates how the American-Muslim identity is constituted not only of ritual practices and religious beliefs which are shared with Muslims all over the world, but also those aspects of adaptation specific to Muslims living in America.

As a tool of representation, architecture can reveal deep cross-cultural issues. Images and icons have dominated the character of most Islamic community centers in America and can be seen to reflect old myths and fantasies about Islamic architecture developed in the West over the last two centuries. These myths and fantasies have become ingrained, not only into the American view of such architecture, but also in the way Muslims themselves see their own architectural tradition. Another important and interrelated issue in this discussion is the increasing perception of such architecture by Muslim communities as an important vehicle for the expression of their distinctiveness: "Muslims in non-Muslim lands demand monuments restricted in their use to the Faithful but frequently also expressing power,

wealth, piety, and self-conscious and at times militant cultural identity."² Chapter III investigates the influence of the forces of multiculturalism and, what Zeynep Celik calls, the "complex and multilayered dialectic - within each culture and between cultures"³ that can be associated with the architecture of Islamic community centers in America. It provides a thorough and critical examination of the various Muslim and non-Muslim attitudes towards the character of this architecture, in order to grasp the implications that stereotyped iconic references might have for the relationship between Islamic communities and the majority culture.

In the context of America, Islamic community centers can best perform their roles as cross-cultural mediators when located within an urban setting which can provide the opportunities for dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims. Chapter IV illustrates the case of the Islamic Cultural Center of Manhattan, New York, which was designed by Skidmore Owings and Merrill, and was completed in 1991. This building is a product of a unique interaction among non-American Muslim patrons, immigrant community members, a modern architectural practice, and a number of prominent Western scholars specializing in Islamic art and architecture, and therefore highlights the relationship between patron, identity and architecture. Because of its significant physical context, the Manhattan project raises important issues concerning the contemporary interpretation of traditional Islamic architecture within a non-Islamic urban setting, and illustrates the implications of the architectural articulation of the building program on cross-cultural dialogue between the Muslim community and the dominant culture.

The nature of the relationship between architecture as an autonomous discipline and architecture as a product of cultural forces is crucial to the understanding of representation through physical form. The study of the influence of such forces on the evolution of an architect's design philosophy can highlight important aspects of this relationship. Chapter V investigates the work of Gulzar Haider who has been involved in the design of a number of Islamic community centers in North America. He has been particularly critical in his numerous writings, on Islamic architecture in non-Islamic lands, of the perpetuation of Orientalist myths and fantasies in the architecture that Muslims build for themselves in America. He has been advocating an expression of Islam in architecture, and has carried

² Grabar, Oleg, "From the past into the future: on Two Designs for State Mosques," in: *Architectural Record*, June 1984, p. 150.

³ Celik, Zeynep, *Displaying the Orient, The Architecture of Islam at the Nineteenth-Century World's Fairs*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford, 1992, p. 198.

out his own architectural experiments toward this end. The aim of this chapter is to understand some important issues concerning the mechanisms and constraints of architectural practice particularly the relationship between architect and client, and to investigate the extent to which issues of collective memory and of the cultural politics of identity influence architectural opinions, and perpetuate the cycle of the Orientalist representation of Islamic architecture.

The architecture of Islamic community centers in America is a product of its complex set of circumstances. It has, in general, been of indiffererent architectural value, mainly because of the particularities of the architectural practice in a consumerist context, the economic constraints, as well as the unstable nature of client / architect relationship in the majority of these projects. On the other hand, this architecture has not been able to articulate a sense of self-representation that expresses the positive aspects of the American-Muslim identity. Some examples of Islamic community centers in America can be seen as registers of the Muslim community's efforts at creating a dialogue with the dominant American culture, while others highlight certain architectural and programmatic solutions that can be seen to impede such a dialogue. Through the exploration of the relationship between architectural representation and the issues related to the interaction between cultures, an adequate understanding of the problems involved may eventually be obtained. In this context, the present study is not only about Islamic architecture in America, it is more about the possibility of architecture becoming a significant agent of cross-cultural communication, capable of bridging the gap between identities, and sending messages back and forth between cultures, rather than being a tool for the assertion of a narrowly perceived identity, or a form of art that is detached from actual experience. I hope that this work will not only identify the problems that are restricting the emergence of a 'good' Islamic architecture in America, but that it will also point to certain directions to follow towards such an endeavor.

CHAPTER I
Representation and Identity

Chapter I: Representation and identity

Recent developments in cultural critique are beginning to affect the way in which the West is viewing Islam. This chapter provides the theoretical framework for this thesis by outlining the broad ideological background of the relationship between Islam and the West. It addresses the question of Muslim identity from within these cultural theories, and investigates their potentials and shortcomings for achieving cross-cultural understanding. The intention behind this investigation is not only to understand how Islam is viewed by Western scholarship today, but also to be able to arrive at a framework for the discussion of the American context of the Islamic community center, and a cultural basis for the evaluation of its architecture.

I. 1. The Western views of Islam:

The recent views of Islam in the West have been shaped by a complex set of historical events that stretch all the way back to the rise of Islam itself in the seventh century. Any understanding of these views needs to be located within this historical context, which may be categorized into three main periods: The Middle Ages, Modernism and Postmodernism. Throughout these periods, the relationship between Islam and the West has been characterized by general hostilities, but has also been interspersed with periods of coexistence and mutual borrowing of thoughts and cultural products.

From the early days of Islam, it was able to secure for itself enormous gains by conquering vast territories, including substantial lands ruled and inhabited by Christians, many of whom converted to Islam, and in so doing, to pose one of the most far reaching problems for Christendom in the Middle Ages.¹ The European fear of Islam throughout this period was related in the first place to the unpredictability and immesurability of the danger it posed to the West, which indicate the deep incomprehension of the mechanics and the potentials of the internal forces which led to the Islamic conquests, due to Europe's ignorance of, and lack of accessibility to the Islamic religion itself. This ignorance was

¹ In his book: *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages*, R. W. Southern outlines the evolution of Europe's image of Islam during this period, which he divides into three successive stages of: "The Age of Ignorance", which lasted until the advent of the Crusades, "The Century of Reason and Hope", which coincided with the Crusades during the thirteenth century, and "The Moment of Vision", which stretched until the end of the sixteenth century.

translated during the period preceding the Crusades by the distortion of the image of Islam, of the "Saracen", and of the Prophet in the eyes of medieval Christendom.²

Through the triumphs of the Crusades, the Europeans were able to get closer to the heart of Muslim lands, but the image of Islam that was developed in the early decades of the crusades formed literary fantasies whose authors "...luxuriated in the ignorance of triumphant imagination."³ In spite of the general hostility between Islam and the West during this period, there were moments of appreciation and mutual respect; "even European crusaders sometimes settled down as Muslims, or returned speaking Arabic and teaching things learned abroad."⁴ According to R. W. Southern, it is during the latter part of the thirteenth century, that the habit of independent inquiry in Europe was first established. He points out that this philosophical approach was slowly strengthened, over the following three centuries, by Europe's increasing exposure to the works of Muslim philosophers, through whom Europeans were also able to access the intellectual treasures of antiquity.

The continuation of the debate in the academic circles of Europe on the nature of Islam and its relationship to Christianity was thus sharpened through the use of the intellectual habits and scientific tools that reached Europe through the Muslims, and contributed to the birth of the Age of Enlightenment, and the development of a secular outlook on the world. These were also the same tools that enabled Western Europe to reach the Indies, partly in order to avoid the friction with the Islamic world, and in so doing, to discover the New World, and to acquire an unprecedented wealth. These factors, which coincided with the slow decline of the Ottoman Empire, contributed to the resolution of what used to be for medieval Christendom, the "Islamic problem".

From the mid-seventeenth century onwards, Islam gradually became for Western Europe, the inferior "Other", and the Islamic World became an easy prey for Western colonization during the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. Besides the reasons that Southern gives in his analysis of the change in the Western perception of Islam, the image of the "Other" was shaped by the philosophical developments in Europe from the second half of the

² On the other hand, as Southern explains, coexistence between Muslims and Christians in places like Spain, caused some Christians, who feared assimilation, to develop a complex reactionary view of Islam, which nevertheless remained one of ignorance, in spite of the fact that they were living in the midst of Muslims, and that they had direct accessibility to Islamic thought.

³ Southern, R. W., *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1961, p. 28.

⁴ Fischer, Michael, and Abedi, Mehdi, *Debating Muslims, Cultural Dialogue in Postmodernity and Tradition*, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989, p. xxii.

seventeenth century up until World War II. This image can be seen to be linked to Modern Western philosophy, and to be tied in with the idea of "progress", which first appeared during the Age of Enlightenment and was refined during the nineteenth century.⁵ According to this theory, human societies emerge from the most primitive level to ever more complex and developed states of cultures. Since every change results in a definite improvement, the latest state of affairs is always regarded as the best and fittest in the evolutionary chain, and this was believed to be represented by modern Western civilization.

This pattern of development towards advanced civilization was not only considered to be desirable, but also believed to be inevitable. Evolutionary progress was therefore tied in with, and justified, the universal supremacy of Western civilization and the exploitation of the "inferior" non-Western cultures. Moreover, Western culture had constantly been concerned with the idea of a 'return' to a lost 'origin', which became an anthropological obsession for Western scholars of the 'Orient' during the colonial period. "Oriental" cultures represented to the West what they might have been, or where they might have come from, therefore giving a strong reason for recording and representing those people and trying to salvage what was left of their exotic cultures before their inevitable transformation by the civilizing agents of the modern West.

Edward Said's criticism in *Orientalism*, of the Western tradition of scholarship which was directed beginning from the eighteenth century towards the Islamic world is centered on the premise that Western representation of Islam came out of a position of superiority and was accompanied by colonialism. Said's attacks are directed against a group of Western scholars who specialized in Orientalism in the colonial period as well as those who still practice it today. According to Said ".. Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient - dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient."⁶

Said continues to criticize those Orientalists who depict Muslims as lacking confidence in themselves, and need the West to provide them with the knowledge about themselves. He

⁵ In his book: *The Origins of the Species*, although at first glance Charles Darwin appears, to be merely concerned with animals and plants, he makes it clear that the conclusions of his treatise are applicable to human society. Darwin's contemporary, the English philosopher, Herbert Spencer, transferred this theory of evolution from biology to sociology, which led to the modern concept of progress.

⁶ Said, Edward, *Orientalism*, New York, Vintage Books, 1987, p. 3.

points out to what he describes as the most familiar Orientalist themes about Muslims: "...they cannot represent themselves, they must therefore be represented by others who know more about Islam than Islam knows about itself."⁷ Yet, to an extent, this Western image of Muslims forms an element of the identity of some of them, (what is commonly known in the Arab world, for example, as the "westerner's complex"). Such a "complex", by definition, is a negative one, and it is disturbing to see Muslims becoming, to put it in Michael Fischer's words, "... appendages of the West, driven by envy, feelings of belatedness, and fear of being locked into subordination"⁸. Yet the reaction to this condition is not merely making anti-Western Islamic rhetoric, as Fischer suggests; rather, it is a genuine concern for the implication of the distorted perspectives of such Muslims, which reflect on their attitudes to their fellow Muslims and other non-Westerners.

Following World War II, the polarization of the world into Capitalism and Communism, and the de-colonization of what became the Third World, coincided with a gradual shift in Western philosophy from objectivism to subjectivism. Objectivism employs tools and expressions of colonial domination; subjectivism signifies inter-cultural equality and respect. In the development of the "subjectivist" trend, the Frankfurt School, and its "Critical Theory", set itself apart from the negative outlook of Marxism as manipulated by the political agenda of Communism and, to some extent, paved the way for post-structuralism.⁹ The latter tends to link colonialism and forms of authority with positivism.¹⁰ Post-structuralism insists that all cultures should be treated as equal, and none of them should be in a position to sit in judgment of another, or to interpret others according to its own standards, and must not claim that the world is correctly described in its own terms, or else it finds itself associated with the forces of imperialism. In summing up this development, Gellner points out that:

"..... the great epistemological tradition in Western philosophy (now claimed to be overcome), stretching from Descartes to Hume and Kant and beyond, formulated the

⁷ Said, Edward, "Orientalism Reconsidered", *Race & Class*, XXVII, 2, 1985, p. 7.

⁸ Fischer, Michael, and Abedi, Mehdi, *Op. Cit.*, p. xxv.

⁹ The fundamental difference was that while the old Marxism claimed its possession of objectivity, and merely charged its opponents with failing to practice it properly, and had to explain their deviation in sociological class-based terms. the Frankfurt School was characterized by its tendency to repudiate the practice of objectivity altogether, and not only its alleged distortion. The postmodernists have gone one step further by not seeking to affirm any path through which objectivity may be approached, and insisting instead that such a path is neither possible nor necessary nor desirable.

¹⁰ 'Positivism', which relates to the pursuit of generalization in science, is repudiated by postmodernists, who suspect or even deny the concept of objective reality. Accordingly, positivism is challenged on the ground that facts are inseparable from the observer who claims to discern them, and from the culture which supplied the categories in terms of which they are described.

problem of knowledge, not in terms of a kind of egalitarian hermeneuticism, or of hermeneutic egalitarianism, but, rather, in terms of a discriminating cognitive elitism. It did indeed hold all men and minds, but *not* all cultures and systems of meaning, to be equal. All minds were endowed with the potential of attaining a unique objective truth, but only on condition of employing the correct method and forswearing the seduction of cultural indoctrination".¹¹

Recent Western scholarship has generally treated Islam as a cultural phenomenon, respecting the societies who follow it and admiring the past achievements of their cultures, while disapproving of Islam as an ideology being manipulated by what are commonly termed as "fundamentalists", whose beliefs and actions are repudiated because they are generally thought of by left wing liberal intellectuals as agents of domination. To many Western or Westernized scholars who subscribe to this view, Islam is classified into an acceptable Islam, which is manifested in folk traditions, customs, rituals, festivals, and social habits in general, and a 'fundamentalist' Islam, based on a disapproved ideological commitment.

The reasons for the rise of this fundamentalism has generally been explained in materialist terms and has been considered by many scholars in the West as a reaction against the failure of nationalism (which was initially embraced by many Muslims who blamed Islam for keeping them behind) in bringing about its promised economic welfare and political freedom.¹² Edward Said is one of those scholars who claims that the return to Islam is a negative reaction. He considers both the revival of religion, in Iran for example, and the quest for Western assistance which has re-opened a country like Egypt to new forms of cultural and economic imperialism, as both equal consequences of recent economic and political failures: "So out of this unsuitable mix of technology and national security, you have a nostalgia developing for colonialism or religion - atavistic in my opinion."¹³ Said also suggests that recent "returns" to culture and tradition, which in the formerly colonized world have produced varieties of religious and nationalist fundamentalism, are not only

¹¹ Gellner, Ernest, *Postmodernism, Reason, and Religion*, London and New York: Routledge, 1992, p. 37.

¹² Philip Khoury offers a materialistic interpretation for Islamic revivalism. Dealing primarily with Egypt and Syria, Khoury claims that Islam is used in this case as the "most convenient, readily available ideological instrument" of domination and manipulation by certain urban classes, over traditional masses to whom they are attached, and capitalizing on the corruption of the classes and elites supporting and running the state, in a manner unlike those of the bourgeois and radical nationalists. He explains that: "For the classes sponsoring revivalism, Islam must be seen as a vehicle for political and economic demands, rather than as being itself the "impulse" behind these demands." Khoury, Philip S., "Islamic Revivalism and the Crisis of the Secular State in the Arab World, An Historical Appraisal", *Arab Resources*, (Ibrahim I., ed.), London, 1983, p. 215.

¹³ Said, Edward, "In the shadow of the West", in *Wedge*, winter / spring, 1985, # 7/8, p.10.

reactions to imperialism, but that they also "... accompany rigorous codes of intellectual and moral behavior that are opposed to the permissiveness associated with such relatively liberal philosophies as multiculturalism and hybridity".¹⁴

Therefore Said sees Islamic revivalism, on the one hand, as a reaction against the failure of secularization and nationalism, and on the other hand against liberal relativism *as well as* imperialism. From any opposing direction it is viewed, therefore, Islamic revivalism remains, to Said, a negative reaction. The proponents of this view, while maintaining their sympathy with Islamic cultures, continue to deny Islam its potential for the transformation of its people and their participation in world civilization. Such explanations of a phenomenon that belongs to another culture through tools of analysis which are alien to that culture, expose the alleged neutrality of the post-structuralist critic, and the political nature of his position. It also raises doubts about the alleged effectiveness of such theories in challenging the way in which Islam is viewed by the West.

The post-structuralist position regarding Islam stems basically from the growing body of recent work in anthropology, which has been intended to challenge assumptions about dichotomies and in the process to offer new perspectives for understanding other people. This position is largely based on the work of French post-structuralists and particularly that of Michael Foucault. In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault illustrates the way those with social power define the 'official' discourse of psychiatry. He sees binary oppositions, such as 'sanity/madness', 'true/false', 'permitted/forbidden', 'rational/irrational', as expressions of hierarchy in social practice. There is error in any verbal representation arising from our perceptions of 'difference' and 'sameness'. 'Difference' allows hierarchies to be set up between social groups, while 'sameness' enables a social group to identify itself as a unity.¹⁵

The importance of the anthropological attention to historical process has been, for James Clifford, "to reconceive 'cultures' as arenas not merely of structural order and symbolic pattern but also of conflict, disorder and emergence."¹⁶ The intention of this work has been to 'displace global dichotomies', that characterize Western views not only of non-Western people, but also of marginalized people within Western cultures. Clifford is critical

¹⁴ Said, Edward, *Culture and Imperialism*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf 1993, p. xiii.

¹⁵ Foucault, Michael, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1965.

¹⁶ Clifford, James, "Of Other Cultures, Beyond the Salvage Paradigm", *Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, (Foster, H., ed.), Seattle: Bay Press, 1987, p. 125.

of dichotomies, particularly those such as "historical consciousness/ mythic consciousness", which is reinforced by other oppositions: literate/non-literate, developed/underdeveloped, hot/cold. He points out, for example, that the pair hot/cold, which was coined by Levi-Strauss, "assumes that, for good or ill, Western societies are dynamic and oriented toward change, whereas non-Western societies seek equilibrium and the reproduction of inherited forms."¹⁷ He is against these oppositions even if they have some truth about them, because they tend to become rigid and oppressive when the differences they imply become frozen and essentialized.

For our discussion an important example of this is the oppositionary pair West/Islam, to which a post-structuralist like Clifford would be opposed, not only on the grounds of the implied Western hegemony in this relationship, but also on account of Islam's claims for truth, and its believers' assertion of their identity. To oppose such a dichotomy, is therefore to attack Muslim identity when it is accompanied by the so-called fundamentalism, which is a term that in itself implies opposition and hierarchy.

In an article entitled "What is a Muslim? Fundamental Commitment and Cultural Identity", Akeel Bilgrami, talks about the need for what he calls *moderate* Muslims to undertake a reformation of Islam in order for them to be able to take their position in the world. Bilgrami's reformation may be described as reducing Islam to a passive spirituality, which does not threaten the secular state, nor does it pose any threat to the Western sponsors of such a state. He specifically talks about leaving intact only those verses of the Quran with the more purely universalist and spiritual claims and commitments, while reforming those which speak to questions of the polity and the personal and public law, that is, "to oppose the inviolability of the *Sharia'a*."¹⁸ In other words, a 'deconstruction' of Islam, in the name of reformation. According to Bilgrami, the reformation of Islam, means that Islam has to become Western, following secular patterns by which the religion is domesticated, otherwise it will always be treated as the defiant "Other", and in order to eliminate conflict with the West, the Islamic identity has to be sacrificed; after all binary oppositions are agents of hierarchy and domination.

On the other hand, stemming from the view of Islam as a rich cultural phenomenon, but also diverging from it, Michael Fischer offers an interesting understanding of Islamic

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 124 - 5.

¹⁸ Akeel Bilgrami, "What is a Muslim? Fundamental Commitment and Cultural Identity", *Critical Inquiry*, # 18, Summer, 1992, p. 838-9.

culture, while maintaining a critical stance against "fundamentalist" Islam. Affirming the richness of Islamic tradition, its cultural, emotional and intellectual resources, Fischer points out to an affinity rather than an opposition between Islam and the work of people like Derrida. He argues that the Quran can be viewed not just as another scripture, "...but as a primer "text" of poetic enigma, a text that can speak to all the mysteries of contemporary (postmodern) literary criticism, thereby arguing both that such literary criticism is not a passing fad but (understood properly) has deep cultural roots, and that Islamic culture can be an intellectual interlocutor in the modern world scene, as it was in the days when it gave form to the nascent modern 'Western civilization'."19

Fischer may be seen by conservative Muslims to lack in his understanding of the nature of Islam as an umbrella of faith in the Islamic essentials, when claiming its affinity with postmodernism which opposes such essential belief. This is clearly a controversial approach which offends those Muslims who, as Ernest Gellner puts it, ".. would vehemently, and rightly, repudiate any attempt to reinterpret their own convictions in a relativist spirit. They mean what they believe."20 Yet, while Gellner's point about Islamic convictions cannot be disputed, it must be noted that Islamic culture is based on a set of differentiated levels of adherence to Islam as "a way of life". This includes all aspects of human transactions, as well as ritual and devotional practices, under the overarching condition of belief in the essentials, on the part of the peoples of Islam. Fischer's focus, in his anthropological work, is on this "way of life", which is just as important for the understanding of Muslim identity as the Islamic convictions. His attempt to displace the oppositionary pair West/Islam is therefore interesting in so far as he tries to bring in the similarities and the common grounds between Islam and postmodernism, rather than focusing on differences. In the context of Muslims in America, this approach may prove valuable in providing a basis for a closer cross-cultural interaction and understanding.

In an article entitled "Is Islam the Odd-Civilization Out?", written by Fischer two years after the publication of the above book, he continues to stress the historical context of postmodern theories in the Muslim world of North Africa, but seems to project a modified opinion of Islamic fundamentalism, and attacks what he considers as a false dichotomy between Islam and postmodernism. However, his change of attitude towards fundamentalism has not come out of a sudden appreciation of their convictions, but a realization that some of these fundamentalists are gradually becoming Westernized,

19 Fischer, Michael, et al., eds., *Debating Muslims, Op. Cit.*, p. xxi.

20 Gellner, Ernest, *Postmodernism, Reason, and Religion, Op. Cit.*, p. 71.

therefore more acceptable to the West. He cites, for example, the influential part played by the cassette in the Iranian revolution, but he also talks about internal debates seeking to reform certain interpretations of the *Shari'a*, with regard to women's, rights among other issues. His change of attitude is also related, in addition to what he sees as the affinity between Islam and postmodernity, to the fact that the Muslim world is now more than ever part of the West through its demographic presence in Europe and America:

"In sum, while there is no doubt that fundamentalist movements in the Islamic world are strong and growing, for good sociological reasons, there is at the same time dramatic cultural change pervading these societies - changes that have also managed to affect the sensibilities of fundamentalists themselves. There is no point in demonizing the struggles of the Middle East as some land of Absolutes, or in dichotomizing it as the polar opposite of 'postmodernity in the West'."²¹

Another contrasting view to the revival of Islam, has been offered by Ernest Gellner who, in his book *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*, asserts that the rise of Islam in the modern world is indeed related to the spread of modernization. But whereas the explanation by many Western scholars generally stresses the negative aspects of the nature of this resurgence as a reaction against imperialism, secular nationalism, and against liberal diversity, Gellner regards this phenomenon as a result of the influence of modernization, in a positive sense, in enabling the transformation from Folk Islam to High Islam to take place.²² He presents this hypothesis as a form of final irreversible "reformation", which he relates to an age long internal struggle in Islamic societies. He points out that "urbanization, political centralization, incorporation in a wider market, labor migration, have all impelled populations in the direction of the formally (theologically) more 'correct' Islam."²³ He expresses his view of the relevance of this reformation for Muslims, indicating that the fact that millions find it satisfying to live under its rules is of significance to the modern world. As Gellner puts it:

"....the world of Islam demonstrates that it is possible to run a modern, or at any rate modernizing, economy, reasonably permeated by the appropriate technological,

²¹ Fischer, Michael, "Is Islam the Odd-Civilization Out?", *New Perspectives Quarterly*, Spring 1992, 9/2, p. 59.

²² According to Gellner, Islam has always consisted of two forms that dominated Islamic societies in a cyclic fashion, and he calls these two forms "High Islam", which belonged to the urbanized scholars, and "Low Islam" or "Folk Islam" which was followed by the illiterate Muslims in the rural, tribal or semi-tribal countryside, and was heavily centered on magic and the cult of saints and various superstitions. Frequently, an alliance between the urban scholars and the militarily formidable peripheral tribes, enabled the urban orthodoxy to overthrow the corrupt establishment, and forge a great renewal; a pattern of state or dynasty formation that occurred from time to time, well into modern times as for example in the case of the Wahabi movement in central Arabia, among others.

²³ Gellner, Ernest, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 15.

educational, organization principles, and combine it with a strong, pervasive, powerfully internalized Muslim conviction and identification. A puritan and scripturalist world religion does not seem necessarily doomed to erosion by modern conditions. It may on the contrary be favored by them."²⁴

While Gellner's point of view may be applicable only to certain Islamic societies, such as Morocco, it nevertheless opens a new perspective into the way Islam may be viewed by the West. Perhaps it is true that Islamic revivalism rises in reaction to failures of modernization programs in Islamic societies, or of liberal relativism, and it may well be prone to be manipulated by certain urban classes. But its resurgence needs also to be seen as coming out of an internal set of forces, a complex phenomenon with its own dynamics, which can also be seen as a form of resistance to the forces of imperial hegemony. What is of concern to us, is not to reduce it to a negative, nor to a positive phenomenon, but to work with it, in order to reduce its negative implications, and to benefit from its humanistic promises. Yvonne Haddad, in her book, *Contemporary Islam and the Challenge of History*, talks about the questioning by Muslims of the appropriateness of a non-Muslim attempting to interpret and 'represent' Islam, and the fear of many Muslim from the inadequate judgment of outsiders:

"In fairness, it must be said that such a fear is understandable in the light of many centuries of insidious commentary made by Western observers about Muslims and their ways and traditions. It is also true, however, that enormous strides have been made in the past several decades away from the Orientalist perspective in which value judgments totally unacceptable to Muslims were frequently implicit and sometimes explicit. Even the next stage of the Western approach to the study of religion, however, the phenomenological suspension of judgment in favor of dispassionate and objective judgment, often falls short of the sensitive understanding necessary to see that each phenomenon of religious life must be dealt with in the context of the whole."²⁵

I. 2. Issues of self-representation:

Post-structuralist theories stress the notions that everything is a "text", that meaning is the basic material of texts, societies and almost everything, that meanings are there to be 'deconstructed', in a way which also brings in their opposites.²⁶ The idea of a stable

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²⁵ Haddad, Yvonne, *Contemporary Islam and the Challenge of History*, Albany State: University of New York Press, 1982, pp. xiv-xv.

²⁶ Derrida emphasizes the value of taking influential texts, and deconstructing them in order to expose their inconsistencies, and showing that the author himself, would have to modify his views, if he were

identity is not only questionable by the proponents of post-structuralism, but is completely rejected in favor of an ever shifting and multiple form of identity - a fragmented self, constantly torn by the multiplicity of meanings, and the relativity of interpretation. This denial of identity, is also a denial of otherness, and the post-structuralist attention instead is on the blurring of boundaries, and against the assertions of unity. There are two important points here regarding the issue of representation: the point that the characterization of human conduct is meaning-pervaded, and that in the study of members of one culture by those of another, two sets of meanings, and the problem of their mutual intelligibility and translatability, are involved.²⁷ The second point relates to the problem encountered in the case of the observer being of the same culture, because of his or her own interests and prejudices. These two considerations tend to reinforce the shift from object to subject, and from thing to meaning and away from the representation of the "Other".

The main message of Said's *Orientalism* is its critique of representation as a tool for domination. Part of the disturbing aspects of this book, for all those who have been representing the "Other", is that it automatically puts them under suspicion, as agents of domination, by questioning what had seemed for a long time an essential aspect of human nature, that of representation. Said is not concerned, in this book, with the issue of whether it is possible not to have representation at all, or with providing an alternative to the representation of the "Other". He talks about the importance of understanding the implications of the act of representation, which are often concealed behind the apparent calmness of the image itself. He points out that:

"Whether you call it a spectacular image, or an exotic image, or a scholarly representation, there is always this paradoxical contrast between the surface, which seems to be in control, and the process which produces it, which inevitably involves some degree of violence, decontextualization, miniaturization, etc. The action or process of representing implies control, it implies accumulation, it implies confinement, it implies a certain kind of estrangement or disorientation on the part of the one representing."²⁸

However, Said stresses that the elimination of representation is not what he means in his critique of the representation of other people, acknowledging that representation is a form of "human economy", and that it is necessary to life in society and between societies. Said

to be true to the concepts he is advocating. He calls for challenging our received opinions, and uses terms such as 'denouncing unexamined assumptions', 'putting into question', and 'problematizing'.

²⁷ This problem is referred to as 'ethnocentrism', defined by Webster Dictionary as "a habitual disposition to judge foreign people or groups by the standards and practices of one's own culture, or ethnic group..".

²⁸ Said, Edward, "In the Shadow of the West", *Wedge, Op. Cit.*, p. 4.

is against those forms of representation in which the represented are prevented from participating or intervening in the way they are being represented. However, in order for people to participate equally in the act of representation, they need to develop their own system of self-knowledge. Unfortunately, for a long time what has been presented to them by Western authority as real and rational knowledge, has been interwoven with their knowledge of themselves. Said doubts the very possibility of self-representation in the complex world that we inhabit, and would not advocate it, even if he accepts its possible existence: self-representation would reinforce a dichotomy and creates hierarchy. As Virginia Domingues puts it:

"A deliberate shift to self-representation sounds welcome but simplistic. Who is to be delineated as the self? How much change would this bring about? After all, we have implicitly, unconsciously represented our *imperial* self in all of the applications and manifestations of the salvage paradigm. Moreover, the empowered group's ideology so penetrates into the underprivileged sections of a population that there is no guarantee that the presentation of the self produced by members of the minority population would necessarily differ from the empowered group's representation of their otherness."²⁹

Said acknowledges the difficulty of escaping from this "cycle of representation", and therefore advocates a participatory and collaborative process, rather than an authoritative one. He suggests that "...we must identify those social-cultural-political formations which would allow for a reduction of authority and increased participation in the production of representations, and proceed from there."³⁰ Similarly the alternative to the representation of the "Other", for James Clifford, is not self-representation; rather it is a 'dialogic' form of representation, what he calls "paradigms of discourse or dialogic and polyphony"³¹ which avoids presenting unique facts, and replaces them with multiple visions. Michael Fischer too believes in the importance of dialogue between cultures, and is opposed to the treatment of those cultures as ethnographic objects to be described, or reduced to the ethnographer's own categories and forms. Nevertheless, Fischer is critical of the recent critique of Orientalism, and argues that "the introduction of alternative perspectives is the strong, poetic way of combating monolingual, monocultural intolerance, a much stronger way than the industry of Orientalist-bashing that serves only to solidify the very Orientalist categories that the critics claim to want to destroy."³²

²⁹ Dominguez, Virginia, R, "Of Other Peoples: Beyond the Salvage Paradigm", *Op. Cit.*, (Foster, H., ed.), p. 137.

³⁰ Said, Edward, "In the shadow of the West", *Op. Cit.*, p. 5.

³¹ Clifford, J., and Marcus, G. E., (eds.), *Writing Cultures: The Poetics of Politics of Ethnography*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986.

³² Fischer, Michael, "Orientalizing America, Beginnings and Middle Passages", *Middle East Report*, Sept.-Oct., 1992, p. 37.

In his book, *Debating Muslims, Cultural Dialogues in Postmodernity and Tradition*, Fischer's argues that the world today is multilinguistic and multicultural, which makes questionable the notion of bounded cultures. "Perspectival truth" is a key term that he uses here. He points out that: "The global political economy deeply structures local events, so that cultural understandings are saturated with borrowings, comparisons, and references to others, drawing partly upon traditionally organized social stratifications. Perspectival truth becomes ever more necessary to recognize, and thoroughly antiquates the debates over 'relativism' versus 'universal reason'."³³ Fischer insists on a three-fold understanding of dialogue as an "internal" understanding of each party to communication, as argumentation or "rational reconstruction" between parties, and as "political" such as fundamental versus liberal interpretations or third-world ideologies against first-world claims for "rational" or "universal" truth. In all this the stress needs to be ".. on discourses, on the way interpretive positions structure understanding, rather than on individual interactions, texts isolated from the other texts to which they refer, or arguments separated from their context of use."³⁴

Fischer is seen here critical of Derrida, insisting on the importance of practical experience, and the contextual constraints that form and inform actual and real situations.³⁵ Derrida's "undecidables", may work in theory, but once they are carried into actual practice, they become concrete realities, setting 'themselves' against 'other' realities and competing with them for prominence.³⁶ Fischer's three-fold understanding of dialogue, is an alternative framework for overcoming the hierarchical implications of the dichotomy of representation, while trying to maintain the suspension of judgment. His stress on discourses, rather than "intertextuality", promises to facilitate a deeper understanding of binaries, and in the process to soften their oppositions, or even show that such oppositions are not as threatening as they seem to be. Yet his 'Perspectival truth' remains a wishful proposition, in the world of concrete confrontational identities that we live in. Reconciliation, on the other hand, while it achieves a degree of peaceful coexistence, only serves to dilute the rich potentials of diversity.

³³ Fischer, Michael, et al., eds., *Debating Muslims, Op. Cit.*, 1990, p. xxiii.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xxii-xxiii.

³⁵ In Derrida's deconstruction there is a shift of focus from identities to differences, unities to fragmentations, epistemology to rhetoric, and from presence to absence. Like Foucault, he too attacks binary oppositions, and talks instead of the 'undecidables' - words that have multiple meanings.

³⁶ We can see the adoption of Derrida's deconstruction into recent works of architecture, for example, intended as challenges to accepted architectural norms, as becoming realities in themselves, and becoming objects that may not in themselves be deconstructed, suggesting instead that the next thing to do is to reconstruct them again.

Said points out that "No one today is purely *one* thing. Labels like Indian, or woman, or Muslim, or American are not more than starting-points, which if followed into actual experience for only a moment are quickly left behind."³⁷ While I agree with Said that identity is a complex issue, and cannot be reduced to one thing, his claim that this identity is to be quickly left behind once followed into actual experience, at least when it comes to Muslims, is a gross misunderstanding of Islamic history, and a sign of detachment from this actual experience. It is reinforcing the need to be vigilant to all attempts of representation, whether by those who treat Muslims as "Others", or those scholars who do so on their behalf. It is also making necessary to try to understand the issue of identity through personal involvement in the actual experiences of those people who seek to assert it, in order to reveal the layers of their commitment. As has been recently pointed out:

"We submit that it is vital that cultural studies not ignore - but strive to explain - the relations of force that account for the reassertion of unity, the unity of the subject and the possibility of judgment, and that this can be done without giving up what structuralism taught us to appreciate - difference - and what postmodernism has taught us to recognize - the effectivity of surfaces. We must find a way to theorize and judge in that elusive "unity in difference".³⁸

The point about identity, is not that we should accept it as a fact, or that we should see it as a construct to be attacked. What is being argued are not universal truths, nor the denial of such truths, rather it is about the need to go beyond the rhetoric of conflicting truth claims. It is important to focus, instead, on aspects of agreement that are often concealed behind the confrontational aspects of identity claims, and to try to extend lines of universal communication, without rejecting the possibility of an eventual universal truth, in a world that is becoming increasingly smaller. It is more fruitful, in my view, to look positively at dichotomies, and oppositions, which our past and present tell us are here to stay, rather than waste our energy in trying to eliminate them, or to challenge their existence, or to pretend that they are merely subjects of interpretation. What is important is to remain vigilant of the possible manipulation of dichotomies for purposes of domination, to allow the constant tension between them to enrich our human experience, and to highlight the positive as well as the negative aspects of this process of interaction/confrontation. We need to investigate ways in which people and cultures, in their emphasis on identity, and

³⁷ Said, Edward, *Culture and Imperialism, Op. Cit.*, 1993, p. 336.

³⁸ Slack, Jennifer Daryl, and Whitt, Laurie Anne, "Ethics and Cultural Studies" *Cultural Studies*, (Grossberg, Lawrence, Nelson, Cary, and Treichler, Paula, ed.), New York, London: Routledge, 1992, p. 583.

their efforts at self-representation, can demonstrate their acknowledgment of one another, and to show their active participation in the constant re-making of the one world we all inhabit.

CHAPTER II

The Cultural Context: negotiating Muslim identity

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Muslims in America face a complex range of issues related to the conditions of immigration and exile, multiculturalism, the relationship between the state and religion, liberal and permissive cultural attitudes, old and new stereotypes about Islam and Muslims, as well as issues of US foreign policy regarding the Islamic world. The ideological and technological context of this new phenomenon makes it markedly distinct from the past patterns of cultural interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims in pre-modern times, or in non-Western contexts. This phenomenon is coinciding with an increasing realization in this country of the virtues of diversity and multiculturalism which are replacing the concepts of assimilation and the "Melting Pot", and may be seen as part of the gradual transformation which has characterized Western social and intellectual thinking since World War II. Expressing these new sentiments, Michael Fischer points out that "we need the resources of the immigrant imagination. Above all, we need attention to the discourses immigrants use in making sense of their own lives, in comparing their own value systems with their new settings, or in forging philosophically resonant frames that draw on the genres, tropes, metaphors and imagery of both old and new cultural settings."¹

This chapter outlines the complex issues of multiculturalism, and their implications on the identity of immigrants in America, and investigates those aspects that differentiate the experiences of Muslims from non-Muslim immigrants. It also provides a brief account of the history of the Muslim presence in America, and the development of nationwide institutions which are clear expressions of the cultural needs of Muslims in this country. This part of the study deals primarily with certain forms of negotiations which Muslims make with the dominant American culture, and their constant adaptations of the Islamic way of life to this context. While displaying wide varieties in the conduct of their lives, American-Muslims maintain common agreement on essential matters of faith with Muslim communities throughout the world. The daily interaction of Muslims with these forces can be seen to contribute to a hybrid sense of identity which is in nowhere as strongly felt as in their community centers. These centers have become over the past few years concrete manifestations of the Muslim presence in America.

¹ Fischer, Michael, "Orientalizing America: Beginnings and Middle Passages", *Middle East Report*, 1992, p. 36.

II. 1. Understanding Muslim identity:

In his book, *Covering Islam*, Edward Said raises a number of important questions, that continue to occupy the minds of many Western and Westernized scholars, and are vital to our understanding of the nature of Islamic architecture:

"Is there such a thing as Islamic behavior? What connects Islam at the level of everyday life to Islam at the level of doctrine in the various Islamic societies? How really useful is "Islam" as a concept for understanding Morocco *and* Saudi Arabia *and* Syria *and* Indonesia? If we come to realize that, as many scholars have recently noted, Islamic doctrine can be seen as justifying capitalism as well as socialism, militancy as well as fatalism, ecumenist as well as exclusivism, we begin to sense the tremendous lag between academic descriptions of Islam (that are inevitably caricatured in the media) and the particular realities to be found within the Islamic world."²

The contradictions Said perceives between the everyday lives of Islamic societies on the one hand, and doctrinal Islam on the other, are as he points out, "real". Furthermore, the recent realization by Western scholars, of the potential for the multiple interpretations of Islam, is in principle fairly true, and a much more accurate depiction of Islam than the simplistic, totalizing and hence easily stereotyped images of traditional Western scholarship. But these two facts do not necessarily mean that, what Said refers to as "Islam", is not "useful" when explaining the diversity of Islamic societies, as he seems to be implying here.

Acknowledging the strong presence of Islam as a doctrine in the social collective, is vital for understanding the diversity of Islamic societies and the richness of individual expressions of behavior, outlook and architecture, among other cultural forms. Diversity is considered in Islam an enriching experience among the various groups, and the *Umma* - the *spiritual* community of Islam - is the expression of this diversity.³ This phenomenon is characterized by its mission of achieving social justice, and by its commitment to collective as opposed to individual benefit. Islam as a complete way of life is not only a personal matter of faith and convictions, but also covers aspects of social conduct, education, economic transactions, and jurisprudence. The Islamic 'way of life' is, therefore, an important aspect of understanding the Muslim identity. As Yvonne Haddad puts it:

² Said, Edward, *Covering Islam*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1981, p. xv.

³ It is important to stress the spiritual aspect here, because the term *community* has increasingly become associated with a particular geographical location, which does not fit into the non-physically bound concept of the *Umma*.

"Islam is not simply an affirmation of creeds or an articulation of commitment to an accumulated and ossified tradition; rather, it is an appropriation of ultimate reality and participation in its daily fulfillment in everyday life, a total awareness of this reality in every act of eating, sleeping, working, praying, dreaming, in recreation and in interpersonal relations. To apprehend this religious reality, the Muslim must participate in the religious act and fulfill the prescriptions of the *Shari'a*. *Jihad* on the part of the individual is the essential element in re-creating the Muslim person and hence the Muslim society, for every decision and every action undertaken in the present by or for the *Umma* has an impact on its future."⁴

The sense of the unity and diversity of the *Umma* is no where as evident as it is during the *Haj* to Mecca when Muslims from all over the world unite in action that overrides their differences, while still exhibiting the diversity of their numerous cultures. Hence the confession of an American pilgrim who, for the first time in his life, experienced during the *Haj* the exhilaration of the universality of Islam: "America needs to understand Islam, because this is the one religion that erases from its society the race problem. Throughout my travels in the Muslim world, I have met, talked to, and even eaten with people who in America would have been considered 'white'- but the 'white' attitude was removed from their minds by the religion of Islam. I have never before seen sincere and true brotherhood practiced by all colors together, irrespective of their color..... I could see from this that if white Americans could accept the Oneness of God, then perhaps they too could accept in reality and wholehearted practice, the Oneness of man."⁵

II. 2. A brief history of Muslims in America:

A Muslim presence was maintained in America long before the arrival of Muslim immigrants from the Islamic World during the latter years of the nineteenth century. It has been pointed out that the history of Islam in America goes back several centuries, with the possibility of an Arab-Islamic arrival in pre-Columbian days.⁶ The spread of Islam in America in recent decades, in addition to twentieth century immigrations from the Islamic World, has also been due to a process of conversion. This is particularly the case among Afro-Americans, many of whom were Muslims when they were brought to America as slaves from various parts of Africa, the first slaves being Berber, Moors and Spanish

⁴ Haddad, Yvonne, *Contemporary Islam and the Challenge of History*, Albany State: University of New York Press, 1983, p. 137.

⁵ *The Autobiography of Malcolm-X*, New York: Ballantine Books, 1992, p. 340-1.

⁶ Nyang, Sulayman, "History of Muslims in North America", *The Muslims of America*, (Haddad, Yvonne, ed.), New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 39.

Muslims, brought from Morocco, Mauritania and the port of Zafi. The centers of the trade shifted throughout the period stretching back to the early sixteenth century and slaves were still arriving in America as late as the 1850's.⁷ Black Muslim organizations have gained momentum since the mid-twentieth century, but until 1975 Afro-American Muslims, most of whom were members of the Nation of Islam, called for maintaining the identity of the black race, and refused to integrate with the whites. Today most black-American Muslims have embraced the Islamic principle of racial equality and are eager to identify themselves with other non-black Muslims, and with the larger American culture.

The Muslim community in America includes, in addition to black Muslims and immigrants, Muslims of transient, but nevertheless influential status such as the diplomatic missions of Islamic countries in Washington DC and New York, and a substantial student body which has been active in the formation of nationwide Islamic institutions in America. In addition to these Muslim groups, there is a limited, but increasing number of conversion among Americans of European origin, most of whom are women who get married to immigrant Muslims. The immigrants, diplomats and student organizations have been most effective in the development of the architectural character of the Islamic community centers in America, and their cultural background is therefore the focus of this study.

II. 3. Social aspects of immigrant life:

Change and stability:

The United States has been, and remains, a powerful magnet for immigrants from all over the World, a phenomenon that continues until today to give America its vitality. They come to America in pursuit of better economic opportunities within a democratic and politically stable environment. Non-Western immigrants, including Muslims, are generally frustrated by political anarchy in their home countries, and disillusioned by other conditions in those countries such as the failure of nationalism in bringing about the promised political freedoms, economic welfare and social justice.

Whether from the West or from the East, from the North or from the South, immigrants invariably find their new life in America an unsettling experience. They react to it

⁷ Winters, Clyde Ahmad, "Origins of Muslim Slaves in the U. S.", *Al-Itihad, the Annual journal of Islamic studies*, vol. 21, September, 1986, pp. 49-51.

differently, according to the contrast between patterns of living in both their homeland and the country they have moved to. Immigrants, particularly from the non-Western world, are often overwhelmed by the fast rate of change which characterizes American urban society, the perception of which is undoubtedly magnified due to their initial unfamiliarity with this environment. They have to constantly be alert to political and social indicators around them that are rapidly changing.

The general feelings of rootlessness are common to both immigrants as well as black-Americans. To many of them the past is defined as a period ending with their arrival in America, and one that is geographically bound to their country of origin. This is natural to both new immigrants as well as for those who are many generations removed from their homeland. This is because one of the most important physical elements in basic group identity is the place of habitation, the land and the soil to which the group is not just literally but also historically attached. It is the mythical place of origin, where ancestors are buried, and where one was born and forever wishes to return. This is a vital reason for the nostalgic longing of immigrants for their home country, which is often idealized in ways that have little to do with reality; it is why black Americans, for instance, long after they were forced out of their original home, continue to identify themselves with Africa.

In his home country, the immigrant, for better or worse, was known to a large group of people around him who constantly confirmed his identity which therefore was stable. This is generally the case with traditional societies, but even the contemporary societies of most of the so-called Third World still retain this social quality to variable degrees. In America, particularly for the immigrants who come from the non-Western world, their images of themselves become ambiguous, and shifting. They can no longer be sure about their identity. Even their names, proudly chosen by their parents for their symbolic meaning, no longer mean anything in their new cultural context, in fact these names often become sources of embarrassment to them; too long, hard for Americans to remember or pronounce, or linked to negative stereotypes. Names, for sure, are the simplest and most direct forms of identity; in a foreign cultural context, they often become clear signifiers of nationality, race, or religion.

The identity of these immigrants also is partly formed by their general resistance to change, their constant desire to re-establish the lost sense of stability, and to reconstitute their disrupted lives. Even though many of them come to this country by choice, and are anxious to adapt to what they had perceived from outside as the attractive realities of the American

way of life, they find it difficult to totally exclude their previous cultural experience, which often becomes considerably romanticized for many of them. Their feelings of being cut off from their roots, their homeland and their past, the fact of not fully belonging to their new setting, with which they try to develop new attachments, the composite degrees of their "nearness" and "distance" which contribute to their sense of being "strangers", all amounts to living in an unsettling state of exile. To many of them this is an uncomfortable and painful experience, but nonetheless it gives them a sense of freedom from physical constraints and geographical boundaries, which gradually becomes an important quality of their identity. As Edward Said puts it:

"For an exile, habits of life, expression or activity in the new environment inevitably occur against the memory of these things in another environment. Thus both the new and the old environments are vivid, actual, occurring together contrapuntally. There is a unique pleasure in this sort of apprehension, especially if the exile is conscious of other contrapuntal juxtapositions that diminish orthodox judgment and elevate appreciative sympathy. There is also a particular sense of achievement in acting as if one were at home wherever one happens to be."⁸

The urban centers where immigrants are generally concentrated are characterized by the fast life patterns in which they have to deal with more people in shorter periods of time, making the average duration of social relationships shrink to a minimum. At the beginning, they have to frequently change their places of residence as they change their jobs, which prevent the formation of strong social and physical ties with any one group or place. The pace of life in these cities inevitably leads only to brief, face-to-face encounters, rather than any kind of lasting human relationships. All this amounts to a sense of strangeness, even when these immigrants attempt to belong to already established groups with some general common, occupational, political, or ethnic traits. Such a life pattern, which is based on temporary, and unreliable human and physical ties, is often perceived by many immigrants, especially from the non-Western World, as in sharp contrast to the stable relationship to society and the built environment they had in their home countries.

Architecture in the past was the most part of the physical environment that contributed to people's sense of permanence. The immigrants immediately discover that their ties to architecture have been substantially severed once they had left their home countries. In America, relationships between people in general, not just immigrants, and their dwelling places are normally short lived. This weak relationship is clearly an outcome of the fast

⁸ Said, Edward, "Reflections on Exile", *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, (Ferguson, R., et. al. eds.) Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990, p. 366.

mobility of life in America. But for most of the immigrants from the so called Third World, it is related to their mental construct of the permanence of architecture, the actual use of stone, and concrete, rather than the apparent ephemerality of timber and shingles that characterizes American domestic architecture. The houses of the wealthy immigrants are seldom built or modified to follow a particular traditional style of their home country. Perhaps this is because such immigrants have to keep in mind the possibility of having to sell their properties in the future, in which case such a "foreign" character would not appeal to the potential American buyer. Nevertheless, the houses of such immigrants are often full of "authentic" objects that cover the floors, walls and shelves in their living rooms, displaying artifactual aspects from their homelands inside American suburban houses.

From the "Melting Pot" to Multiculturalism:

"When the numbers of those not of British origin began to rise, the word 'American' became a far more complicated thing. Legally, it meant a citizen. Socially, it lost its identifying power, and when you asked a man what he was (in the United States), 'American' was not the answer you were looking for. In the United States it became a slogan, a political gesture, sometimes an evasion, but not a matter-of-course, concrete social description of a person. Just as in certain languages a word cannot stand alone but needs some particle to indicate its function, so in the United States the word 'American' does not stand by itself. It is does, it bears the additional meaning of patriot, 'authentic' American, critic and opponent of 'foreign' ideologies."⁹

There is no apparent opposition between the ethnicity of incoming immigrants and the ideology of America. However, once they accept the goals and values of the American people, the immigrants are already on their way to accepting their life styles, their habits, and their language. The speed with which immigrants in general adapt to American life is largely due to entering a different world to which one brought only the clothes in which one stood and which were easy to discard. There is no old house to remind one of the traditional social relationships that can no longer be maintained. Instead, a different kind of house lived by those who practice different kinds of relationships is ready to support the change. This has led in the past to a general assimilation into the American national mainstream, and remained the normal expected behavior for immigrants for a long time:

"For three centuries, men of vastly different ways of life have come to America, left behind their old language, their old attachments to land and river, their betters and subordinates, their kin, their old joint families and their icons, and have learned to speak, walk, to eat and

⁹ Glazer, Nathan, and Moynihan, Daniel P., *Beyond the Melting Pot, The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City*, The M.I.T. Press and Harvard University Press, p. 15.

dress in a new fashion. As we have learned to change ourselves, so we believe that others can change also and we believe that they will want to change, that men only have to see a better way of life to reach out for it spontaneously. We conceive of them as seeing a light and following it freely."¹⁰

Yet, because of the complex ethnic composition of American culture, it may be argued that American nationalism is primarily non-ethnic in comparison, for example, with that of most of the European nations. Consisting primarily of commitment to the ideals of American democracy, political and social equality, unlimited individual and collective progress, it does not, in principle, conflict with or demand the abandoning of immigrant ethnic values. Because of the universal aspects of the American ideals, a condition has emerged in which ethnic groups are situating themselves within other ethnicities, and in which boundaries are constantly shifting between different groups. As Talcott Parsons explains:

"...in spite of its origin as what is often called a WASP community, the American societal community is no longer in the older sense of its own history and of the classical pattern of the national state an ethnic community. This is not to say that ethnic groups have ceased to have significance. In certain respect quite the contrary is true. The most salient point, however, is that it is an ethnically pluralistic community where even the previous vague and informal stratification of ethnic subgroups has ceased to have its previous importance."¹¹

The role of the English language in American nationalism is perhaps related to this overall non-ethnic American identity. Just as there is no longer any ethnic foundation to American nationalism, so there is no special language awareness in the use of English (unlike, for example, its ethnic implications in Britain, or its colonial connotations in India). In the present multi-ethnic context of America, the English language seems to be more of a tool for communication rather than a constituent element of identity.

In the United States, where language shift takes place extremely quickly, one finds many English-speaking Americans of second-or third-generation immigrants who share two overlapping cultures. When the difference between two cultures is very large (as between Middle Eastern culture and the mainstream American culture), the adjustment is much harder than when two cultures are relatively similar or overlap (such as the British and the Anglo-American culture). But some degree of "culture shock" is inevitable in all cases, created by the combination of differences, large and small: language accents, religious

¹⁰ Mead, Margaret, *New Lives for Old*, New York: a Mentor Book, New American Library, 1956, pp. 19-20.

¹¹ Parsons, Talcott, "Some Theoretical Considerations on the Nature and Trends of Change of Ethnicity," *Ethnicity, Theory and Experience*, (Glazer, N., and Moynihan, D. eds.), Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1975, p. 63.

beliefs, family organization, eating habits, child rearing, the level and nature of education, the urban and rural nature of the community, and the contrast in physical space - its scale, expanse, and configurations. Such an overlap of cultures invariably creates a hybrid form of culture that combines "authenticity" with the appropriation of new cultural norms.

It is curious, for example, how certain dialects persist among the children of Arab peasant immigrants, when the same dialects are slowly abandoned, in favor of the more urban and "fashionable" dialects, by their countrymen who immigrate to Arab cities. To their fellow Arabs back home, the immigrants' combination of the "perfect" American accent and their forefathers' "outmoded" accent, seems to be a novelty. Thus, to their fellow Arabs in their home countries, American Arabs often represent, paradoxically, both the "modernity" of the West and the "authenticity" of the East.

Immigrants adjust in different ways to the new culture. Some never adjust, either because they choose not to or because the surrounding society does not allow them to do so. Elderly immigrants living in minority communities often attempt to continue, as best as they can, the lives they led in the home country. They make little attempt to learn the majority language, interact only with members of their own group, and follow the customs and traditions of their people. They generally regard their living in America as a sacrifice for the sake of a better future for their children.

At the other extreme we find individuals who "over-adjust" to the host culture and do everything they can to assimilate themselves into that culture. Such over-adjustment, which can be due to a total rejection of the culture of their homeland, or to a strong wish to be accepted as members of the new culture, often goes hand in hand with rapid abandonment of many traits of the original culture.

Between these two extremes, however, we find people adjusting to a certain level of "biculturalism"; a state of coexistence and /or combination of two distinct cultures.¹² The level attained by each person depends on a number of factors such as the size of the minority group, its immigration pattern, geographic concentration, intermarriage, language

¹² According to Francois Grosjean, many bilinguals are aware that in some sense or another they are also bicultural and that biculturalism or its lack has affected their lives. Grosjean also states that in certain societies, a monolingual person may be bicultural, a bilingual may be monocultural, and that bilingualism and biculturalism are not necessarily coextensive. In the context of immigrants in America, however, one is more likely to find bilinguals who are also bicultural. Grosjean Francois, *Life with two Languages: An introduction to Bilingualism*, Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, p. 157.

use, among other factors. This group of people combine traits of the two different cultures, which may lead some people to feel that they do not belong to either culture. Many people in this category may first seek to belong solely to one or the other culture, but with time they realize that they are most at ease with people who share their bicultural experience. As an Arab American writes:

"At home in the Middle East, I am seen as the Americanized Arab...and in America, I am seen as an Americanized Arab by people that have come to realize that they are Americanized Arabs also. Therefore, almost anywhere I go I make sure my world is full of Americanized Arabs."¹³

In some cases bicultural immigrants may not feel at home in any cultural group. The anguish of such individuals increases when social pressures are exerted on them to give up one aspect of their dual identity for the sake of blending into the dominant culture. This, fortunately, is not too frequent: many feel quite at home in both cultures, and many others feel at ease with people who, like them, combine the traits of two cultures and make up a new cultural group.¹⁴ If the two cultures are valued equally in the home, in the school, and in the society at large, and if biculturalism is judged to be as valuable as monoculturalism, then people who are in contact with two cultures will accept both instead of rejecting or being rejected by any one of them or by both.

The established educational system in the United States is generally designed to lead to linguistic and cultural assimilation: the idea of the "Melting Pot". Generally speaking, the educational system is intended to "normalize" the minority child, to make him or her a member of the majority group. The most widespread approach to assimilation is quite simply not to differentiate between majority and minority children.¹⁵ Admittedly, many children do make it through the system, but often at the cost of losing their native language and culture in the process. Complete identification with the dominant culture is not possible in such cases, but recreating the group sense is equally impossible.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

¹⁴ Lambert, W., "Culture and language as factors in learning and education", *Current themes in linguistics: bilingualism, experimental linguistics and language typologies*, (F. Eckmaned), Washington D. C.: Hemisphere, 1977, p. 31.

¹⁵ According to Francois Grosjean, in this approach, called the "submersion" or "sink or swim" method, many of the minority children fall behind in their school work and drop out of school before graduation. This is due in part to the language and culture gap, but also to the "self-fulfilling prophecy syndrome": teachers and administrators have low expectations for the minority children, who adopt these low expectations for themselves. These children are left by the wayside: they have fallen behind in school, have failed to master the majority language, feel insecure, and often have negative attitudes towards both the majority group that rejects them and the minority group they have been taught to look down upon. Grosjean Francois, *Op. Cit.*, p. 208.

Since the early sixties the persistence of ethnic groups, despite all attempts at assimilation, has been increasingly acknowledged. "The notion that the intense and unprecedented mixture of ethnic and religious groups in American life was soon to blend into a homogeneous end product has outlived its usefulness, and also its credibility."¹⁶ The recent realization has been that, where religious and cultural values are involved, differences between immigrant groups are matters of choice as well as of heritage; of new habits in a new context, as well as the maintenance of values and forms of living brought in from the original country. This realization prompted a new search into alternatives to the earlier assimilative programs.

In view of the recent positive attitude towards ethnic diversity, forms of bilingual education have been developed.¹⁷ New educational methods are being directed towards linguistic and cultural diversification. Such programs, which are called "maintenance programs", employ two languages and are based on two cultures, and are intended to preserve ethnic identities, give equal status to all languages and cultures in the country, and make its citizens bilingual and bicultural.¹⁸ This educational system, unlike the assimilative programs, undoubtedly results in the maintenance of group self-esteem and valuation of ethnic culture.¹⁹ It also promotes a better cross-cultural appreciation between members of the minority group and the dominant culture, and provides better chances of developing "a fairer, more equitable society."²⁰

II. 4. Muslims in America: conflicts and opportunities:

Religion and politics in America:

The importance of religion in America has steadily increased in the recent past, especially during the Reagan/Bush administrations. In the early seventies, religion, had receded from

¹⁶ Glazer, Nathan, and Moynihan, Daniel P., *Op. Cit.*, p. v.

¹⁷ Grosjean Francois, *Op. Cit.*, p. 220.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

¹⁹ Recently, in the United States a few maintenance programs have been established, with two major premises in mind. First, the minority children are educated to maintain their identity, and to reinforce their cultural values, beliefs, and traditions, while learning to master the English language and the American culture so as to take their place in America, if they desire. Second, the school is administered by the community itself which is involved in the education of its children. The program is thus bilingual and bicultural, and the children are brought up to respect their ethnicity, while recognizing that this can be done without endangering the entity of the larger nation, *Ibid.*, p. 217.

²⁰ Lambert, W., "The two faces of bilingual education", *Focus*, 3:1-4, 1980, p. 3.

sectors of the society in which it previously flourished. Brigitte Berger wrote in 1971 that: "Not only have the institutions of the Church withdrawn from education but Christian symbols, values, and beliefs have tended to disappear totally or to become irrelevant and meaningless."²¹ In 1981, John Pastier wrote: "We live in a time of resurgent Christianity..."²² Although the withdrawal of religious teaching generally still holds true in the public school system, alternatives are being maintained through private schools, where children are given traditional religious education.

There is an increasing popularity today of what John Pastier describes as the "electronic" religious experience which is characterizing Christianity in postmodern America: "Syndicated television programs that straddle the ground between variety hour, old-time singing and preaching, talk show and on-the-spot healing have become a familiar if not standard video format. Accordingly, the quintessential meeting place of God and mortals is no longer a cathedral, church or chapel, but a broadcast studio housing evangelistic and performing stars, an audience of the faithful and sophisticated equipment and technicians."²³ In spite of implications of this phenomenon of religious architecture in America, considerable efforts and energies have been placed, during recent years, in the design and construction of architecturally much celebrated religious buildings (Fay Jones' Thorncrown Chapel, Eureka Springs, Ark, Johnson/Burgee's Crystal Cathedral, Garden Grove, Calif., Moore Ruble Yudell's St. Mathew's Church, Pacific Palisades, Calif., to name but a few examples.)

An important issue concerning religion in America relates to the modern scientific developments in the West, which resulted in a clear separation between the religious beliefs and matters of daily life, and between state and church. People in the West, in general, have learned to accommodate two conflicting ways of life. Ernest Gellner describes this situation as "the viable compromise" and explains that this compromise is "the equivalent of constitutional monarchy in the sphere of conviction":

"...a kind of double authority, with the separation of their respective zones left deliberately obscure and ambiguous. In the sphere of legitimation of social arrangements, the old pieties are retained in the social liturgy; in the sphere of serious cognition, they are ignored. The cultural Board which embraces them both allows individuals to locate themselves at will

²¹ Berger, Brigitte, *Societies in Change*, New York: Basic Books Inc., 1971, p. 223.

²² Pastier, John, "Soaring Space Wrapped In Metal and Glass", *American Architecture of the 1980's*, Washington DC: The American Institute of Architecture Press, 1990, p. 31.

²³ *Ibid.* p.31.

along this spectrum, and in no way obliges or expects them to be consistent in their self-location: they can move sideways according to context, occasion or mood."²⁴

Gellner makes an interesting analogy between the curious compromise of religious beliefs and political conduct in the West, and the case of "...a man who takes the plumbing, lighting and structure of his home from modern technology, but all of whose furnishing and decoration is strictly *period*. That way, he can be warm and comfortable, and at the same time satisfy his taste for aesthetic coherence, at least on the surface."²⁵ This is not to say that in the vast world of America, religion has always and uniformly been domesticated to such an extent, or taken as superficially as Gellner might want us to believe; one only needs to be reminded of the events of the 1992 Republican convention and the campaign that preceded it, the outcome of which was substantially influenced by the forcefulness of the right wing policies of the Pat Buchanan constituency. Yet Gellner's argument becomes forceful when we consider that Christian fundamentalists remain a minority within a largely secularized society, and becomes even more forceful when compared with some recent fundamentalist movements in the Islamic World who have been able to secure major political gains.

For many Muslims who come from a world where religion and politics are intricately intertwined, the separation between state and religion in America represents a marked contrast to what they have been used to. This condition, ironically, is what allows Muslims and people of all other religions in America, theoretically, to freely practice their faith as long as they do not, in so doing, violate the constitutional rights of others. Islam has been increasingly recognized as part of the religious landscape of America but has not been treated by the political establishment as fully equal to Christianity or Judaism. As Yvonne Haddad has noted, when it comes to Muslims:

"America's spirit of religious tolerance, which they welcome, does not equate for them to freedom of opportunity to practice their faith. In a country in which religion is so obviously valued, they experience frustration in attempting to practice their own. The American experience has molded them into citizens responsive to American ideals of freedom and equality. Increasingly, they can be expected to hold their country accountable to those same ideals, as applied to them."²⁶

²⁴ Gellner, Ernest, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*, New York: Routledge, 1992, p. 92.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

²⁶ Haddad, Yvonne, "A Century of Islam in America", *The Muslim World Today*, occasional paper No. 4, Islamic Affairs Programs, Washington, DC.: The Middle East Institute, 1987, p. 1.

US. foreign policy and the image of Islam:

Following World War II, the steady increase in the US involvement in the political and economic affairs of the Islamic World, particularly its support of corrupt and despotic regimes and its unconditional alliance with Israel, developed a gradual resentment developed among Muslims in America, particularly immigrants, who identified the successive US administrations as hostile to their home countries. Many American-Muslim, and some non-Muslim, are increasingly blaming the West, lead by the United States, for the continuing political and economic chaos in the Islamic world. As Edward Said puts it:

"For two generations the United States has sided in the Middle East mostly with tyranny and injustice. No struggle for democracy, or women's rights, or secularism and the rights of minorities has the United States officially supported. Instead one administration after another has propped up compliant and unpopular clients, and turned away from the efforts of small peoples to liberate themselves from military occupation, while subsidizing their enemies."²⁷

The crisis of the American hostages in Iran and the terrorist attacks on American targets, both by nationalist groups and by those labeled as "Muslim fundamentalists", were heavily exploited by the American media which drew heavily caricatured and distorted images of Muslims and Arabs. In his book, *Covering Islam* Edward Said illustrates how the American media determines public opinion on Islam, and how its efforts at the stereotyping of Muslims reflect a general political collectivity. He points out that "...there is a consensus on 'Islam' as a kind of scapegoat for everything we do not happen to like about the World's new political, social, and economic patterns. For the right, Islam represents barbarism; for the left, medieval theocracy; for the center, a kind of distasteful exoticism. In all camps, however, there is agreement that even though little enough is known about the Islamic world there is not much to be approved of there."²⁸ Twelve years later, he still perceives, with the same vigor, the climate of general hostility to Muslims and Arabs in the United states, and echoes the same views about the American media in his book, *Culture and Imperialism* :

"For decades in America there has been a cultural war against the Arabs and Islam: appalling racist caricatures of Arabs and Muslims suggest that they are all either terrorists or sheikhs, and that the region is a large arid slum, fit only for profit or war. The very notion that there might be a history, a culture, a society - indeed many societies - has not held the

²⁷ Said, Edward, *Culture and Imperialism*, New York: Alfred A. Knope 1993, p. 300.

²⁸ Said, Edward, *Covering Islam, Op. Cit.*, p. xv.

stage for more than a moment or two, not even during the chorus of voices proclaiming the virtues of 'multiculturalism'."29

The American media characterization of Muslims has often resulted in hardships and hostilities incurred by Muslim Americans in general and Middle East nationals in particular. The reaction of Muslims to these media distortions and the occasional hostilities that often accompany them, has in the last few decades been a major factor in shaping the identity of Muslim Americans. The Islamic Center of Los Angeles, for example, has been mounting a state-wide campaign to force California schools to revise their social-studies school books to clear away what these Muslims regard as offensive stereotypes to their faith. In one of these texts, Muslims are depicted as "sword carrying Bedouins". A concerned Muslim father at the Center criticizes another text for junior - high students, focused on the Middle Ages around the world, which illustrates each section with an image.: "For Europe, there's a French market woman; for Africa, a king; for Japan, a samurai. Islam is illustrated by an unattended camel..... It's the only one without a person".30 There is also a general ignorance of Islam as one of the three Abrahamic faiths besides Judaism and Christianity, and that the people of these three religions share a Semitic heritage in which the worship of a single God is paramount.31

Issues of adaptation and negotiation:

Like many other immigrant groups in America, Muslims feel the need, as a result of their alienation, to belong to a group of people who share the same values, traits and customs, of related sentimental attitudes, moral nature and guiding values. Very often, in the urban industrial centers such as Chicago or Detroit which include large Muslim concentrations, groups are formed following ethnic lines of common origin or language. These groups usually have their own annual festivals, and folklore events throughout the year, normally held in rented spaces in the city; they often produce a wide range of cultural products including newspapers, weekly programs broadcast on the local television and radio stations, and operate a number of ethnic shops. In many large American cities, there are

29 Said, Edward, *Culture and Imperialism, Op. Cit.*, p. 301.

30 Niebuhr, Gustav R., "American Moslems: Islam Is Growing Fast in the U. S.," *The Wall Street Journal*, October 5, 1990. Cited from a collection of articles by AKP librarian Omar Khalidi on "The Mosque in America."

31 Richardson, E. Allen, *East Comes West: Asian religions and cultures in North America*, New York: A Pilgrim Press, 1985, p. 163.

entire streets lined with grocery stores, often operated by extended Arab families specializing in Middle Eastern foods:

"A particularly cohesive city is Dearborn, Michigan, where there is the greatest concentration of Arab-Americans in the United States, 95 per-cent of which are Muslim. There a Lebanese village has been reconstituted in the midst of an urbanized, industrial area. As many as 600 members from the same village live within five blocks of one another. In this tightly knit community, many persons are related, and live together much as their parents and grandparents did in Lebanon."³²

Muslim immigrants share most of the basic aspects that characterize the condition of immigration in general, but also differ from non-Muslim immigrants in several other ways. These differences are attributed to the need to observe religious practices, such as the daily prayers or attending the Friday prayer in the local mosque, which necessitate the interruption of their activities. Fulfillment of religious obligations becomes especially difficult during the fasting month of Ramadan, particularly for new Muslim immigrants or students who are unable to find a local Muslim community with whom to share the special collective experience of this month. There is a wide ranging variety of issues that specifically concern Muslims in an alien environments, such as the issue of banking interests, the question of the Islamic burial, and issues of restriction and constraints on diet..

An important aspect of cultural adjustment for Muslims in America is related to Muslim women who adhere to the Islamic dress, and often become walking targets for curiosity and even harassment. Women converts, in particular, often face considerable pressures from their families and friends. In a survey of a number of American women who have converted or who are in the process of converting into Islam, a number of them pointed out to the difficulties facing them at home and in the society at large. One woman points out to the resistance of her family to the possibility of her conversion: "my brother says I am going to hell, my family is upset, and people stare at me and act rude."

A converted woman stated that: "I believe that Muslims, especially women, have a very difficult time in America. When Muslim women wear *hijab* in the street, people stare. ...It is difficult for a woman wearing *hijab* to get jobs here." Another woman states that: "Because of *hijab*, there are many more "looks" than before. It seems people find it harder to approach me. Parents and family do not understand. Old friends wonder "what

³² Ibid., p. 167.

happened" to me."³³ In many cases, this treatment, especially for the new immigrant women, who are not as well equipped as the American converts in facing the challenges of the dominant culture, forces them to retreat from public life in order to avoid such situations. The difficulties faced by Muslim women because of these restrictions on their mobility, are real problems that reflect on their social development within the American culture; a subject that deserves more attention than it has received so far:³⁴

"...the role of Muslim women in North America can also be filled with frustration and confusion. While many second-and third-generation Muslim families have assimilated into life in the United States and Canada, newer arrivals often have not. Wives may be expected to conform to customary standards of dress and behavior that are difficult to maintain in a non-Muslim society. They may know few other Muslim women and feel alone and alienated from the North American culture of which they are now a part. Similarly, they may be discouraged from holding a job or planning a career and instead be expected to remain in the home."³⁵

However, it is worth noting that, in general, Muslim women in America are becoming increasingly aware of the difference between the teachings of Islam, and the distorted cultural practices in many Muslim societies. Muslim women in America, in general, have a great deal more freedom than their counterparts in, say Saudi Arabia and Iran. In the words of a Muslim housewife and accountant in Gulfport, Miss: "A lot of women today over in the Muslim countries are indeed oppressed. But that's not the religion, that's the culture."³⁶

One of the main difficulties facing Muslims who come from the more conservative environments of the Islamic world, is the level of permissiveness of American culture. Even though the latter is considerably less permissive than many societies in Western Europe, it remains a relatively very liberal by the standards of most Islamic societies. Issues of gender mixing or segregation inside and outside schools, as well as sex-education, and television programs such as soap operas and talk shows, become important

³³ From a survey of converted Muslims in Evansville, Indiana, conducted by the author as part of this work.

³⁴ The position of Muslim women within their community itself presents its own dilemmas. Forms of gender segregation persist today in many Islamic communities in America. A Muslim woman complains about the effects of such discrimination practiced in her community mosque. She talks about: "Not being able to hear other people lecture on things, because we had to sit in a small room with fifty million children. So I noticed within the Muslim community that women are conditioned not to aspire for intellectual growth. They don't even listen to the lectures now. See, because they've been trained not to know, so they don't even go for it anymore. They submit themselves and they're pretty unhappy." Fischer, Michael, and Abedi, Mehdi, *Debating Muslims, Cultural Dialogue in Postmodernity and Tradition*, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, p. 320.

³⁵ Richardson, E. Allen, *East comes West, Op. Cit.*, p. 169.

³⁶ Niebuhr, Gustav R., "American Moslems: Islam is growing Fast in the U.S.," *Op. Cit.*

daily debates and sources of anxiety for Muslim families who are concerned for the moral development of their children.

Muslim communities are realizing the importance of basic education concerning the Islamic "way of life" in preserving their values and maintaining their identities. The Islamic community centers are therefore increasingly becoming educational institutions. The programs of many of these centers incorporate classrooms as important components of their buildings, while the existing facilities are often being extended to accommodate additional classrooms. Although instruction is generally limited to the teaching of the Arabic language, learning the Quran, and the principles of Islam, and normally offered on weekends, more and more schools are being established in the urban centers with Muslim concentrations, where all aspects of learning are being offered on full-time basis in both Arabic and English.³⁷

In schools of this kind, students generally express their preference of this educational setting in which they mix with other students who share with them their cultural values, where they are taught about their history and heritage, and where they are not treated as different, nor forced to conform with the majority. There is more interaction and involvement, within this setting, of the parents, especially the mothers, both in the educational process and in social activities. The community school is seen as a place where the child is made welcome and feels secure, where learning can be a constructive experience, and where teachers are supportive and are interested in the child's success. The school is clearly intended as a social institution; a form of community life in which all efforts are concentrated in order to effectively bring the child to share in the inherited ethnic resources, and to develop diverse skills for the benefit of the community.

With the constant interaction between Muslim and non-Muslim in America, in schools, universities, businesses and places of work, and through conversion, the image of Islam is slowly but steadily changing. In my survey of converted Americans in the Evansville community, a number of them pointed out the negative stereotypes of Muslims that are generally held by the American society, and how their views of Islam have changed in the

³⁷ The importance of Arabic, the language of the Quran, in maintaining Islamic thought and identity is acknowledged in most Islamic schools in America, although other ethnic languages, such as Urdu, and Farsi, are also taught in some schools. Very often the non-Arabic language continues to be used at home, but children do not learn reading and writing in their native languages. As a result, Muslims in America generally become trilingual, communicating primarily in English but also using their ethnic language, mainly at home, and the Arabic language in special circumstances.

process of becoming Muslims. One girl who has been studying Islam for four month, but has not yet converted, points out: "I thought Muslims were violent and held women inferior, but people (Muslim friends) have showed me differently." The views of another American woman, who became a Muslim when she married an Arab Muslim, indicate one aspect of the pattern through which this change is taking place:

"The image I had of Muslims before embracing Islam was, I think, typical of most unenlightened Americans affected by the media such as Arab, terrorist, hostile and backward. Of course my image has changed totally now. I know Muslims are good people striving for Allah. They are human just like everyone else. They are not just Arab, but from almost every country in the world. Muslims are very peaceful people unlike the media portrayal."

II. 5. The development of nationwide Islamic institutions in America:

Many Muslim immigrants who came to the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, gradually lost their Islamic identity and were quickly assimilated.³⁸ However, by 1914 this early period of assimilation and fragmentation had ended. By then, more Muslims had entered the United State, and Islamic organizations in New York and in the Midwest had attracted growing numbers. Muslims in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, for example, many of whom were peddlers who later became small shopkeepers supplying farmers in the area with needed goods, had formed the beginnings of an Islamic community. The first mosque was established by 1920, for which a hall was rented and converted. In 1929, plans were made for the construction of a mosque, and an Imam was hired to oversee the effort.³⁹

A similar process took place in Michigan City, Indiana, where an Islamic Center was incorporated in 1914 as a non-profit organization. Most of the community members were Syrian and Lebanese immigrants, who continued the Arab mercantile tradition. Soon the community erected a mosque, which attracted Muslims from three other states since no other Islamic centers were nearby. The Michigan City mosque became an important institution that helped revitalize ethnic and religious traditions, reviving the values and ways of life that the community members had learned as children. "Reflecting its expanding role, the mosque reorganized in 1924 under the name "Asser El Jadeed Arabian Islamic

³⁸ Richardson, E. A., *East comes West, Op. Cit.*, p. 150.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

Society." "Asser El Jadeed" meant "The Modern Age". The name affirmed both the Arabic and Islamic heritage of its supporters." 40

A number of important developments took place following World War II: the foundation, in 1952, of the Federation of Islamic Associations (FIA) in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and the completion of the Islamic Center of Washington DC. in 1957, both marking a major institutional transition for Muslims in the United States.⁴¹ Moreover, several Muslim student associations were organized on the university campuses of the United States as overseas students from the Muslim world arrived for higher studies. By 1963 those associations were active and close enough to see the need for a national student organization to coordinate their activities and further their services and outreach. In their first national conference in Urbana, Illinois, the associations formed the Muslim Student Association (MSA) which represented the diversity and internationalism of Islam. Commitment to Islam overrode every other affiliation. "Islam was seen as an ideology, a way of life, and a mission, and the organization was not considered simply as a way to serve the community but as a means to create an ideal community and serve Islam."⁴²

Gradually the MSA began to dominate community activities and overshadow other non-student and off-campus Muslim organizations, such as the Federation of Islamic Associations FIA, which caused increasing tensions among the various groups. In 1981, the Islamic Society of North America-ISNA was created as a more encompassing organization under which MSA and other non-student organizations operated. However, the power of the MSA, and its meddling in community affairs continued to grow, the reactions to which led eventually to a restructuring of the MSA which resulted in the creation of an off-campus national community organization known as the Muslim Community Association MCA. Since then ISNA has included under its leadership umbrella many Muslim organizations in addition to the MSA and the MCA. The Islamic Society of North America ISNA is considered to be *the* national Muslim organization in the United States and Canada, and generally represents the Islamic mainstream. It serves as one of the few Muslim organizations connected to thousands of Muslims around North America. However, although many American-born Muslims have joined its ranks, it continues to be

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁴² Ahmed, Gutbi Mahdi, "Muslim Organizations in the United States", *The Muslims of America*, (Haddad, Yvonne, ed.), New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 14.

seen by many others as a basically immigrant organization. Non-immigrant Muslims in general continue to have their own community organizations.⁴³

ISNA's activities include annual conventions, as well as symposia on specific topics, which provide Muslims in this country the opportunity to hear and interact with imminent Muslim scholars and leaders from North America and from the Muslim world, and gives business people a forum in which to present their goods and services and discuss business matters, as well as providing for social gatherings. But the real difference ISNA has made in the nature of Islamic work in America is its Islamic commitment, its serious efforts to set up grassroots, and to provide needed service institutions covering all aspects of Islamic life, as well as its publishing of a number of Islamic periodicals such as *Islamic Horizons*, *Al-Itihad*, *American Journal of Islamic studies*, *The Muslim Scientist*, and others.

In addition to this important institution, there are various communities scattered around the country. These communities function through buildings that house multi-functional institutions which act as places of prayer and learning, especially for children, as well as places of gathering for members of the community, and in some cases, for interaction with other non-Muslim communities. They are intended to accommodate a complexity of shared the spiritual as well as the secular aspects of the life of their members.

A number of these communities have called for the services of learned Imams from such Islamic institutions such as the al-Azhar University or from the religious schools of Saudi Arabia. These instances have been highly significant in the development of Islam in America, as these Imams help to extend the rich body of knowledge of such institutions, and to reinforce the mainstream Islamic orthodoxy in the United States. The services of these imams are often paid by the sponsoring institution as is the case with the mosque in Washington DC. and the Manhattan mosque where the imams are subsidized by the University of al-Azhar.

Some mosques, however, have maintained their roles without the services of an appointed Imam, in which cases members share regular duties such as the Friday *khutba*, and other administrative matters. Some of these communities have not been able to get an appointed imam, but others generally see the rotating "imamship" as a more democratic process, and

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 18.

prefer not to having to deal with one authoritative figure imposed on them from overseas, who often lacks familiarity with the specific realities of living in America.

In the past, there have been some tensions among the various Islamic communities in America; tensions that are based on ethnic differences, manifested in the many ethnically based mosques, or sectarian interpretations, especially between the Sunni Afro-American Muslims and their rivals in the old Nation of Islam, during the 1960's and 1970's. Black-Muslims have not entirely integrated with the immigrant Muslims for reasons related to the historical and national development of each group. American blacks, in general, have gone through a whole political, cultural, and social transition of reclaiming their African identity. Afro-Americans in general were not targeted by the assimilative programs in the past, for reasons of racial discrimination. The maintenance of ethnic identity is, therefore, generally sought for among most blacks. The fact that in most American cities blacks tend, or more precisely they have been forced, to have their own ghettos, has resulted in black Muslims establishing their own Islamic centers in which the immigrants, who settle in other parts of these cities, do not participate. The persistence of a number of separate congregational places which belong to black Muslims, as well as the ethnic exclusiveness of some immigrant communities continue to impede the full integration of the various Muslim American groups.

However, as noted by Sulayman Nyang, significant changes have taken place in the Islamic movement in the United States, as a result of the establishment of influential Islamic organizations at the national level, and the reformations of the old Nation of Islam, which were effected by Imam W. Deen Mohammed, who brought black Muslims to the fold of Sunni Islam.⁴⁴ As Sulayman Nyang put it:

"The identity question is central to the Muslim presence in the United States. The American Muslim can maintain his identity only by holding steadfastly on the rope of *tawhid* (unity of Allah). This is definitely not an easy task, because numerous forces are at work which are likely to make life difficult. Though Muslims differ on some of the burning issues of American society, however their sense of unity is evident in their common faith in *tawhid*, in their collective practice of Muslim rituals and in the expression of solidarity on matters affecting Muslims living in America. To put this another way, one could say that, though divergence exists in the realm of perceptions of and attitudes to American society, convergence exists in the realm of rituals and fellow feelings toward one's coreligionists."⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Nyang, Sulayman, *The Muslims of America*, (Haddad, Yvonne, ed.), New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, p.40.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

II. 6. The Community Center:

The community center has become a vital institution for preserving the community's ties with the Islamic tradition, and providing continuity with the past which is important for maintaining the Muslim sense of identity. As Yvonne Haddad points out: "For the committed Muslim, history provides authentication of God's constancy. History is that which has given the community its identity and each individual his own point of departure."⁴⁶ Moreover, the emphasis of maintaining historical links can also be seen as a form of protection against external influences that are liable to alter a community's perception of its identity. As James Clifford points out: "A strong historical sense is crucial to the group's identity and its continuing resistance to outside powers."⁴⁷

The formation of an Islamic community center is an indication of the Muslims' search for identity that goes beyond the limitations of ethnic bonds; a community institution that helps them consolidate their scattered efforts, gain recognition by the dominant culture, and secure their rights to practice their beliefs. This attitude has become increasingly evident among the intellectuals and the professionals of recent immigrant groups coming from Islamic countries: "The mosque is thus the heart of the Islamic community in North America. It is a symbol of Muslim identity in an environment that often has not understood Islam and has been hostile to it. Whether it is constructed in the best architectural traditions of the Middle East or in the homes of a resident Imam, a mosque is an extension of the spirit and devotion of each unique Muslim community."⁴⁸

The very concept of an Islamic community center in the West represents a set of contradictions. In the first place, it concerns the establishment of a religion, which covers all aspects of life, in a majority society of non-Muslims who have by and large secularized themselves over the last two centuries. The Islamic community in America is seeking to build for itself a sense of group identity in a social context that glorifies individualism as opposed to communal interaction. It strives to create permanence and stability in a culture that is increasingly being based on fast mobility and change. It struggles to maintain its ties with its ancient past and far away homelands in a seemingly isolated land that is largely indifferent to the world around it, except when its overseas interests are at stake.

⁴⁶ Haddad, Yvonne, *Contemporary Islam and the Challenge of History*, Albany State: University of New York Press, 1982, p. 139.

⁴⁷ Clifford, James, "Of Other Cultures: Beyond the Salvage Paradigm", *Discussions in Contemporary Cultures*, Seattle: Bay Press, 1987, p. 125.

⁴⁸ Richardson, E. A., *East comes West, Op. Cit.*, pp. 163-64.

American Muslims are striving to develop an Islamic society that is autonomous as well as participatory; one that works with the contradictions of living in America, rather than hopelessly trying to eliminate them; one that is vigilant to the hegemony of the dominant culture, and aware of its role in challenging the injustices of the world it inhabits. Such roles are already emerging. They can be detected at many levels, personal, collective, economic, and political. There is an increasing Muslim presence manifested in growing involvement among Muslims in local and national politics, inclusion in the defence forces, an increased emphasis on education, and a growing economic base supported by Islamic banking institutions. Each of these disciplines can give important clues as to the roles American Muslims are carving for themselves.

Like so many people in America, Muslims have come with their cultural baggages, which they have questioned over time, dropping some, and retaining and modifying others. They have been through similar experiences of immigration and cultural adjustment. Just as they have reacted to stereotypes and occasional hostilities from the dominant cultures, so they have also been involved in changing those stereotypes about themselves and about their religion. In the process, they have become active participants in the continuously evolving American culture. They have their own stories to tell, stories about their past, and stories about their struggle to put together a meaningful framework for their present and future, stories that are enriching other people's lives, and adding to the vitality of Islamic culture itself. As Gulzar Haider puts it:

"Muslims in the West, especially the ones, who by passage of time, can break away from the the inertial ties of national and ethnic prisons, will be the ones who will forge an Islamicity hitherto unexperienced. Muslims beyond the Muslim world will discover the essence of Islamic tradition by having the freedom to question the canons of traditional expression..... One can safely infer that exile as a state of being, a perceived separation from the center, will make the expressions of Islam more profound, be they in literature, music, art, or architecture."⁴⁹

While Muslim Americans have clearly rejected assimilation in its colonial sense, they seem to be increasingly developing their own way of coming to terms with the contradictions, and their community institutions are vital in making possible this adaptation. The accommodation of these realities is undoubtedly a clear indication of the genuine interest of

⁴⁹ Haider, Gulzar, "Space and the practicing architect", *Expressions of Islam in buildings*, Proceedings of an International seminar sponsored by the AgaKhan Award for Architecture and the Indonesian Institute of Architects, held in Jakarta, Indonesia, October 1990, p. 164.

these communities to belong to America. This unique context is producing a whole generation of American Muslims with a hybrid sense of identity who, while remaining sincere to their religious principles, are able to enjoy the political and economic benefits of the freedom allowed them under the American system.

Yvonne Haddad has studied many Muslim congregations around the country, and has found in many of them, particularly the Islamic community of Toledo, Ohio, an increasing integration of the Islamic tradition and the American culture. She states that: "Many of the second-and third-generations of Muslims living here [in Toledo, Ohio] celebrate Christmas and Thanksgiving. There's a great deal of breaking away from tradition. Building a structure like the Toledo mosque is a way for Muslims to celebrate themselves and not to hide anymore. It's a matter of pride."⁵⁰

The Islamic community center in America is an important manifestation of this hybrid identity, in the way it embodies at the same time the unity and the diversity of American Muslims. The fact that a particular center belongs to a certain ethnic or sectarian group, does not prevent any member of other groups from attending and participating in its functions. Moreover, the wide dispersal of these buildings, and the great variety in their architectural character, as we shall see in the following chapter, cannot hide the unity of purpose behind their establishment, and the similarities in their programs. This diversity within unity reminds us once more of the *Haj*, and the community center's orientation towards Mecca further stresses this symbolism; it also affirms the affinity between Muslim Americans and the larger spiritual community of Islam.

⁵⁰ "Moslems Making Their Mark in Ohio," *The New York Times*, November 25 1984, cited from a collection of articles by Omar Khalidi on "The Mosque in America."

CHAPTER III

The Community Center: the "mutilayered dialectic" of Islamic architecture in America

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The image of Islamic architecture in America has been historically influenced by a number of factors that go back centuries, perhaps to the time of the early settlers from Spain, who may have brought with them the architectural traditions of Andalusia. However, it is during the late nineteenth century, initially as an outcome of the great international expositions, that an interest in the arts and architecture of the Islamic world became widely manifest in the American architectural scene. This interest continued well into the first half of the twentieth century, and is most evident in the Mission-style architecture of California and the Southwest, which clearly draws on the Mudejar style of Spain, as well as in the architecture of various public and commercial buildings throughout the country.

This phenomenon relates to a similar trend in Europe, particularly in Britain during the Victorian era, and has roots that go back to the latter decades of the eighteenth century. Europeans carried out a systematic process of exploration, partly inspired by curiosity and romanticism, which largely aimed at the exploitation of the vast resources of the Islamic world and led eventually to its colonization by Europe. As Edward Said puts it: "The Orient has been created by the West, by artists, thinkers, dreamers, and adventurers. It gives fantastic expression to some reality that Europeans either wanted to possess or feared."¹ The issues discussed in Said's book *Orientalism*, are also applicable to those nineteenth century European artists who depicted the Orient in their paintings and travelogues, often as unchanging and frozen. As Linda Nochlin argues, the Orient was often represented by artists, like the French Jean-Leon Gerome, as "... a world of timeless, atemporal customs and rituals, untouched by the historical processes that were "afflicting" or "improving" but, at any rate, drastically altering Western societies at the time. Yet there were in fact years of violent and conspicuous change in the Near East as well, change affected primarily by Western power - technological, military, economic, cultural - and specifically by the very French presence Gerome so scrupulously avoids."²

Since the end of World War II, the de-colonization of Islamic countries, and the rise of the international power of the United States and its increasing involvement in the Islamic

¹ Said, Edward, "In the shadow of the West", *Wedge*, Winter - Spring, 1985, # 7/8, p. 5.

² Nochlin, Linda, "The Imaginary Orient", *The Politics of Vision*, Harper & Row, New York, 1989, p. 37.

world, together with its unique immigration policy which allowed many Muslims to immigrate to America, all altered the American image of Islam, and have been contributing to the formation of the identity of American-Muslims. The development of Islamic institutions and the emergence of community organizations in America after World War II, sparked a new revival of Islamic architecture in America, this time in response to the emerging identity and the increasing assertiveness of Muslims not just in America, but also in the modern world in general, rather than as a fashionable stylistic movement.

The architecture of Islamic community centers in America has been shaped by a complex and interrelated set of forces that can be seen to be linked, not only to the particular circumstances of life in America, but also to the age-long relationship between Islam and the West. Although the main forces which are influencing the character of these buildings may be closely related to the established Western myths and fantasies about Islamic architecture, and to the Muslim community's own perception of the identity of its architecture, it can be argued that such an architectural character has also been motivated by socio-economic forces as well as by influences unique to architectural production in America.

Most of the Islamic community centers in America have been designed by American architects who base their knowledge of Islamic architecture on their own American image of this architecture and on the Western scholarship regarding this subject. In this respect, such architecture may be seen as a descendent from the "Moorish Revival Style". Just as this style formed part of a general Western trend, so has the architecture of the Islamic community center become part of a wider architectural movement in the West where the presence of Muslim communities is increasingly felt, especially in the metropolitan centers of Western Europe and North America. This chapter investigates the nature of what Zeynep Celik calls a "complex and multilayered dialectic - within each culture and between cultures"³, in the present context of Islamic community centers in America, while stressing the depth of the Western influence on the architectural forms of self-representation in these buildings. It argues that, although this multi-layered interpretation can be viewed positively as a reflection of the rich diversity of American culture, it is nevertheless contributing to the perpetuation of cultural stereotypes and is impeding the full development of cross-cultural understanding.

³ Celik, Zeynep, *Displaying the Orient, The Architecture of Islam at the Nineteenth-Century World's Fairs*, Los Angeles and Oxford: University of California Press, Berkeley, 1992, p. 198.

III. 1. The modern background of the Western image of Islamic architecture:

European representation of Oriental architecture:

The systematic representation of Islamic architecture goes back to the eighteenth century which was marked with Europe's increased interest in the East, when European travelers and artists who visited the Middle East came back with vivid impressions of the 'Orient', which they recorded both in writing and through paintings. During the early decades of this encounter, the European artists faced strict restrictions imposed by the Muslim authorities on their freedom to draw the mosques from outside, and were constantly denied entry into the mosques. In Turkey and Egypt these restrictions continued, with few exceptions, well into the nineteenth century. As noted by Patrick Conner: "For such travelers the mosque was an object of perpetual curiosity, a symbol not only of Islam itself but of their own isolation from Islamic culture; an object of which the conspicuous forms and decorations powerfully attracted European visitors only to deny them entry on grounds of their religion."⁴

To the European travelers, some of the most fascinating aspects of these mosques were the domes and minarets. The seventeenth century English traveler George Sandys wrote of the mosques of Istanbul as: "...all of white marble, round in form, and coupled above,...", and having minarets as "..turrets exceeding high, and exceeding slender: turrets aloft on the out-side like the maine top of a ship"⁵ Another English traveler of the same period, Thomas Gainsford, described Ottoman mosques as "indeed heaps of ostentation and fabrics of great delight".⁶

As a result of the early restrictions on the European artists, the images which they conveyed and the engravings in which they depicted these mosque were largely distorted in their details and proportions: minarets and columns became ill-proportioned, curvatures of domes were exaggerated, pointed arches, shallow arches and horse shoe arches were used interchangeably, and so on. "Thus the engraver made his own small contribution to the

⁴ Conner, Patrick, "The Mosque Through European Eyes", *Apollo*, July, 1984, p. 44.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

picturesque myth of the Orient."⁷ Such depictions were translated into architecture, particularly in the exotic garden buildings of the eighteenth century, as exemplified in the Kew "mosque" built in about 1758. by Sir William Chambers for the Prince and Princess of Wales⁸ (fig. 1).

In Egypt, during the nineteenth century, the French artists, often under considerable difficulties, (with the exception of Pascal Coste who was privileged by Mohammed Ali for assisting the Pacha in the radical rehabilitation of the Egyptian economy) and later the British artists, who enjoyed a more relaxed relationship with the authorities in Egypt, were able to produce many superbly accurate depiction of interiors and exteriors of Cairene mosques. Among these was David Roberts, who executed some of the most familiar images of nineteenth century Cairo, and influenced the work of Frank Dillon, who depicted Cairene scenes in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. The British architects Owen Jones and James William Wild, who made drawings of some mosques of Cairo in the 1830's and the 1840's respectively, went on to adopt Islamic themes in their own architectural practice, while Richard Phene Spiers who visited Cairo and depicted its mosques in the 1860's delivered lectures, and produced writings and illustrations on Islamic architecture.⁹

The architectural outcome of this interaction, however, goes back even earlier, to the times of the British involvement in India, and is perhaps best exemplified by the Royal Pavilion at Brighton, England, designed by John Nash (built 1815-22), which became a much imitated model during the Victorian times.¹⁰ This building was built as a frivolous fantasy for holiday weekends, in a like-manner to Disneyland. This fantasy, which is a distortion of the formal qualities of Indian architecture, may nevertheless be viewed as a playful game of imagination, and an escape from the seriousness of the prevailing architectural styles in Europe at the time (fig. 2).

Notwithstanding the light-hearted intentions of the architect of the Brighton Pavilion, its unique architecture may be seen as an important step in the representation of the Western triumph over the Orient through architecture. Not only that Islamic architecture was

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁸ Darby, Michael, *The Islamic Perspective, An Aspect of British Architecture and Design in the 19th century*, A world of Islam Festival Trust Publication, London, Scorpion Pica Ltd., 1983, p. 13.

⁹ Conner, Patrick, *Op. Cit.*, p. 48-9.

¹⁰ David, Terence N., *John Nash: The Prince Regent's architect*, Newton Abbot & Charles, 1973.

captured and shipped to Europe, its composition and the proportions of its formal elements were distorted when it was re-assembled in the alien land, as if to deny it its authentic identity by imposing onto it the aesthetic rules of its new masters. The transportation of this architecture to Europe and its distortion in buildings such as the Kew mosque and the Royal Pavilion at Brighton, may be seen to reflect more than a mere fascination with that architecture; it is perhaps also a statement about its appropriation by the West.

Oriental architecture in America:

During the latter eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and as part of a general romantic movement in the West, the depiction of the exotic world of Islam was popularized through the many literary works published in America. The first English edition of the *Arabian Nights* was published in 1794, and immediately became a best seller. Washington Irving brought to America the exotic taste of Islamic architecture through his romantic depiction of Islamic Spain in the *Conquest of Granada*, 1829, and *Tales of The Alhambra*, 1832. These works were followed by books like *The City of Sultan* (1837), *A Romance of the Harem* (1839), *The Berber* (1850), Fitzgerlad's *Rubayyat of Omar Khayyam* (1870) and *The Garden of Allah* (1905). Edith Hull's book *The Sheikh* (1921) created the character of Valentino, Fairbanks popularized *The Thief of Baghdad*, while Barnum and Baily produced the shows of "Persia and 1001 Nights".¹¹

However, it was during the international expositions of the nineteenth century in New York, 1853-54, Philadelphia, 1876, and Chicago, 1893, that Islamic architecture was brought to America in the various pavilions of the participating Islamic countries. As the international expositions moved to America, the symbolic relationship between power and architecture that characterized the European representation of Islamic architecture, naturally changed in the context of the land that nearly a century earlier fought its war against the British Empire. Moreover, the United States did not have the extent of colonial adventures in the Islamic world as did the European powers, although it may be argued that it had already had its own colonial expansion in the New World, as well having its distinct history of the slave trade with Muslim Africa.

¹¹ Adams, J., "Into Your Tent I'll Creep, A survey of Near Eastern Motifs in American Popular Culture." An undergraduate paper, N.J.: Princeton, 1979.

What the expositions brought to America was an exotic Orient, already tamed, but not necessarily viewed in the terms of power and domination, which characterized its relationship with Europe. The romantic image of this Orient, previously held by Americans in the exotic literature that came through Europe, was then reinforced through the physical presence of Islamic architecture of the pavilions, and the Muslims who represented their countries in these exhibitions (fig. 3). This experience inspired many American architects and the American public at that time. The character of Oriental cultures, intimately experienced and made accessible, and 'real', through the medium of architecture, reinforced the prior romantic and exotic constructs of the Orient in the eyes of the Americans. As Zeynep Celik points out, that in spite of the Western claim to scientific authority and accuracy in the construction of these buildings, the architecture of the pavilions "...was received as a dreamlike environment - the setting of fairy tales - because of the preconceptions about other cultures that were well established by the nineteenth century."¹²

Many well known American architects of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century were influenced by the Oriental themes of the Expositions as well as by the nineteenth century works of the British architects. The 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, for example, relates Islamic influences particularly to the work of the American architect Frank Furness¹³ (fig. 4). The American architect, Samuel Sloan (1815-1884) was noted for his use of Islamic design motives borrowed from Islamic architecture; his best known work in the Moorish style is the mansion called Longwood in Natchez, Miss.¹⁴ Leopold Eidlitz (1823-1908), who was a master of revivalist architecture in the nineteenth century, designed, early in his career, the P. T. Barnum's mansion "Iranistan" in Bridgeport Ct., modeled after the Brighton Pavilion, and later designed a number of churches and synagogues with Islamic design features.¹⁵

A number of prominent American architects were influenced in some of their projects by the themes of Oriental art and architecture. The brilliant ornamental vocabulary of Louis H. Sullivan (1856-1924) was often inspired by Oriental motives¹⁶ (fig. 5). Much later, in his

¹² Celik, Zeynep, *Displaying the Orient, Op. Cit.*, p. 2.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁴ Coledge, Harold N., "A Sloan checklist", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 19, March 1960, pp. 34-38.

¹⁵ Schuyler, Montgomery, "A great American architect: Leopold Eidlitz", *Architectural Record* XXIV, September 1908, pp. 164-79.

¹⁶ Hope, Henry R., "Sullivan's architectural ornament", *Magazine of Art* XL, # 3, 1947, pp. 110-17.

project - Plan for Greater Baghdad - 1957, Frank Lloyd Wright, was clearly inspired by the themes of the *Arabian Nights*, and celebrated many of its characters, to which he related, in his design: "Since childhood he had loved the Arabian Nights, and incorporated much of the tradition he had absorbed into features and decorative elements of the building."¹⁷

The fascination with the Oriental architecture of the international expositions was manifest, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in the "Moorish Revival style" which first appeared in villas and mansions of wealthy American patrons, and later found its way into the houses of the middle classes. A number of books and magazines, such as *Artistic houses*¹⁸ which, together with the pattern books of the nineteenth century, such as Lockwood De Forest's *Illustrations of design*¹⁹ and Samuel Sloan's *The Model Architect*,²⁰ all helped to popularize this style in America.

The popularity of the "Moorish Revival style" extended to commercial and entertainment buildings throughout the United States. This style is best exemplified in the grand theaters and motion picture palaces of the 20's and 30's of this century. Among these is the Fox Theater in Atlanta (1929), which was built to look like a mosque. Moreover, a number of religious congregational buildings commissioned by American religious groups were constructed in the Moorish Revival style during this period. Among these are synagogues such as the Temple Beth-El in New York designed by Arnold W. Burner (1857-1925) one of many notable buildings in New York clearly inspired by the Islamic architectural models of Spain.²¹

By the early years of the twentieth century, the American public had already formed a vivid favorable image of Islamic architecture, which remain until today, together with a continuing fascination with the exotic literary depiction of the Arabs, and the use of such themes as those of the *Arabian Nights*, particularly in the entertainment, fashion, restaurant and hotel industry. Gulzar Haider notes that: "A factory in Ohio manufactures fiberglass

¹⁷ Frank Lloyd Wright Monograph, v. 8, p. 618.

¹⁸ *Artistic houses*: being a series of interior views of a number of the most beautiful and celebrated houses in the United States. New York, D. Appleto, 1883-84; reproduced in 1979.

¹⁹ Lockwood De Forest, *Illustrations of Design: based on note of line as used by the craftsmen of India*, Boston, Ginn and Co., 1912.

²⁰ Sloan Samuel, *The Model Architect: a series of original designs for cottages, villas, suburban residences ... prepared expressly for the use of projectors and artists throughout the United States*, Philadelphia, E. H. Butler, 1852.

²¹ Wolfe, Gerard R., and Jo Renee Fine, *The synagogues of New York's Lower East Side*, New York, Washington News Books, 1978.

domes, arches, and grilles of any color and caters to restaurants that promise exotic food with belly dances."²²

It is in places like Opa-locka, Florida, that the survival, and the revival, of these themes are best exemplified. Opa-locka, is a suburban area of Miami that boasts America's largest concentration of Oriental - 'Islamic style' - architecture. It was established in the 1920's by the American aviator Glenn Curtiss, who based the design of the town on his favorite theme of *The Thousand and One Nights*.²³ He set up everything in the manner of what he imagined a Muslim city to be, and to heighten the city's Arabian character, Curtiss named all the streets after places and characters in *The Thousand and One Nights*: Baghdad Avenue, Ahmed Street, Sesame Street, Ali-Baba Avenue and the Sharazad Boulevard.

"...The multimillionaire's fascination with Arabesque design was sparked by the 1924 silent film *The Thief of Baghdad*, After the movie, a lot of people caught on to Moorish revival architecture. The style was immensely popular, even though its gross exaggeration of domes and minarets runs contrary to Islamic architecture, which only has domes for certain ceremonial places. In Opa-locka, everything had a dome and a minaret. It provided a fantastic setting to an otherwise sandy area that Americans thought looked like the Arabian desert."²⁴

The recently restored Town Hall features four domes and three minarets as well as a large octagonal tower overlooking Opa-locka Boulevard (fig. 6) The building has numerous porches, mashrabiyyas, arches, painted ablaq walls as well as a courtyard with a fountain. The planned demolition a few years ago of the "Arabian' style building, caused a public outcry, which gave the citizens a rallying point and fostered civic involvement. The restoration of the Town Hall has been seen as a way of building pride for the poor people of Opa-locka, by involving many of the residents in the restoration of the building. The administration sees the restoration of the remaining 75 buildings out of the original 100 structures of Curtiss's dream city, as a means of not just reviving the pride of the community, but also improve its run-down economy. In the words of the City's Mayor: "We're trying to rebuild the city. We've seen how successful places like Disney World have become, and so we've held fast to the Arabian theme."²⁵

²² Haider, Gulzar, and Mukhtar, Muhammad, "Islamic Architecture in Non-Islamic Environments", (an unpublished paper), p. 19.

²³ FitzGerald-Bush, Frank, *A Dream od Araby, Glenn H. Curtiss and The Founding of Opa-locka*, South Florida Archaeological Museum, Opa-locka, Florida, 1976.

²⁴ Luxner, Larry, "Opa-locka Rising", *Aramco World*, vol. 40, # 5, September-October 1989, p. 74.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.74.

These romantic perceptions still persist today, in the architecture of places like Opa-locka and Disneyland, where they have always been considered sources of frivolous entertainment, and seen as such, like for example, the 'Scandinavian villages' that can be found in many states throughout America. Yet, whereas Americans in the past experienced the architecture of Muslims without actually coming into contact with the Muslims themselves, they now have Muslims living among them; Muslims who are no longer those exotic characters of the *Arabian Nights*, and the perception of fantasy and romance associated with Muslims and Arabs is juxtaposed with the realities of everyday living with them as fellow Americans. These two perceptions have become important factors influencing the perception by the American public of the architectural character of the emerging Islamic community centers in America.

Western architects designing for Muslims in America:

A recent survey of Islamic community centers in America estimates close to one hundred purpose-built buildings, out of the 600 facilities listed in the directory of the Islamic Society of North America-ISNA, which are currently in operation in the United States and Canada.²⁶ The on-going survey, which is intended to establish a directory of such buildings, has revealed that the majority of Islamic community centers in America have been designed by non-Muslim American architects.

For many non-Muslim American architects, established myths and stereotypes of Islam and Islamic architecture invariably continue to influence their designs for Islamic community centers. Even with the recent increase in the public awareness of Islam's presence in the world as well as in America, most Americans seldom have any significant knowledge of Islam, except perhaps what they learn from the American media, and the images of Islamic architecture is related in their eyes to the myths and fantasies of Hollywood and Disney Land, or perhaps to places like Opa-locka. An American Professor of history at the University of California, Davis, recently wrote that Islamic architecture in America has traditionally appeared "...in gambling casinos, Shriners' Halls, and movie theaters, a use that reflects some aspects of Western stereotypes about Islam. Typically, to the American

²⁶ The survey entitled "The Mosque in America", was conducted by Librarian Omar Khalidi for MIT Libraries in 1993, and concerns purpose-built projects only.

eye, domes and arches recall harems and the *Arabian Nights*."²⁷ However, through their experience in designing Islamic community centers, non-Muslim architects often get a chance to reconsider some of their myths about Islam, and to change their previous negative images about Muslims. Such an experience does not just provide them some familiarity with an exotic architectural tradition, and the simple functional requirements for such a building, but also exposes them to the nature of the faith itself, and generally allows them to appreciate its simple tenets, most of all the absence in Islam of the concept of mediation, which is an essential aspect of the majority of Christian denominations.²⁸

The main sources of knowledge for these architects, is the increasing number of community buildings throughout the country, as well as the substantial literature that has been developed in the West on Islamic architecture, which is often referred to by these architects for inspiration. In general, most Islamic community buildings in America seem to follow similar patterns of design development. In all cases included in the above survey, architects had no prior experience of Islamic architecture, some of them stated that they were shown images of mosques in India and the Middle East, others looked through the available books on the subject in their public libraries, and others made the effort to visit other community centers in order to acquire a first hand experience of the functioning of these buildings, and to gain further inspiration for their designs.

Many of the new Islamic community centers in America are scaled down and impoverished imitations of old monuments. Concerned mainly with images, these buildings are therefore inevitably superficial, symbolic perhaps of the very fakiness of this mimicking of the past. The designer of the West Virginia building, William Preston points out proudly that: "The South Charleston center is modeled after a famous Islamic house of worship, the Badshahi Mosque, in Lahore, Pakistan. The Badshahi Mosque is bigger than the Taj Mahal, and is considered to be the largest house of worship in the world."²⁹ In the final product, it is none of these monuments that is perceived, the building in no way resembles any of the them, but this does not seem to disappoint either the architect or the client (fig. 7). To them imitation is not the intention, rather it is the capturing of the "flavor" of the old, or the

²⁷ Metcalf, Barbara D., "Chapel Hill mosque should utilize local culture to express distinctiveness of Islam", in: *Chapel Hill Newspaper*, cited from a collection of articles by AKP librarian Omar Khalidi on "The Mosque in America."

²⁸ Orosz, Monica, "Local Moslems Build Place of Prayer", *Charleston Daily Mail*, Chaleston, West Virginia, February 13, 1987, City Page, section C, cited from a collection of articles by AKP librarian Omar Khalidi on "The Mosque in America."

²⁹ *Ibid.*

"blending" of old and new. This way the contemporaneity of the building is expressed in a form of parody, that is not only desirable by a nostalgic community, but also by a generation of architects and Americans in general—a generation that, in the words of Preston "... has lost faith in the future, and seeks for the present the stability and humanness embodied in vernacular and pre-modern architecture."³⁰ In this context, therefore, the architect's role is to bring back the past, and to reinterpret its vocabulary in the every day language which can be easily understood. In postmodern America, this is the language of the commercial strip, with the result that what the clients and their architects consider with pride as "capturing the essence of Islamic architecture", is perceived by the general public as perhaps an exotic oriental restaurant. The architectural features of the mosque, especially the minaret become more like sign posts to gas stations or fast food restaurants. Moreover, the distorted expressions of many of these buildings, their vivid colors and their use of modern industrial materials, deny them both the authenticity of the old monuments they are attempting to imitate, and the romanticism with which the image of Islamic architecture has been generally held in America.

On the other hand, the architecture of Islamic community centers in America generally lacks the qualities of refined aesthetics and use of materials of the traditional architecture. It also lacks the creative, though overly exotic works of architects like Frank Furness. Although he had never been abroad and therefore did not experience Islamic architecture, Furness was nevertheless able to develop a "highly interpreted use of Islamic forms", particularly in his neo-Islamic design of the Brazilian section of the 1876 Philadelphia Exposition.³¹ The generally crude aesthetics of many of the Islamic community centers in America, may be seen as related to an important consideration which underlies the general perception among Muslims in America, in which the role of the architect is reduced to a mere technician. Since the recreation of the old monument is beyond the means of the community, and perhaps is not necessarily desirable, the clients settle for a replica, in which only the image of the monument is sought which, according to many of these clients, any architect regardless of his background can provide by referring to the available visual resources. As Gulzar Haider explains: "When Muslim groups set out to build an Islamic center or a mosque, they consider professional architectural services quite redundant. An architect is 'not needed' because 'who doesn't know what a mosque looks like', and 'we need only a

³⁰ From an interview with the architect by the author.

³¹ Celick, Zeynep, *Displaying the Orient, Op. Cit.*, p. 167.

few drawings for fund raising' and 'later' any draughtsman under an engineer's advise can draw them up for a building permit' ..."³²

The role of non-Muslim architects in designing for the religious needs of Muslims, raises a number of other interrelated issues. To begin with, it may be argued that an important reason for this acceptance is the fact that the traditional relationship between faith and architecture is often not perceived as a necessary condition for the selection of architects for the design of mosques in the contemporary world . As Lance Wright points out, the "design of religious buildings has become predominantly an intellectual and aesthetic function on the part of the architect; it is not, as it was in the past, an extension of faith."³³ Architectural education is such that both Muslim and non-Muslim architects have similar approaches when designing a mosque, based on form making, and drawing from the extensive historic background of Islamic architecture, with minor 'innovations' here and there resulting from new programmatic requirements or from economic, legislative or site restrictions. The difference between Muslim and non-Muslim architects may only be in the degree of personal competence in responding to these restrictions, in understanding the aesthetic rules of form making, the experience of the resources of Islamic architecture and in the understanding of the nature of rituals and religious requirements for such a building type, all of which are matters of training, and are not necessarily related to faith.

The choice of non-Muslim architects may be seen to reveal some of the important implications of representing other cultures, and to expose issues of identity as reflected by the degrees of collective participation and choice exercised by these cultures in representing themselves. It must be noted that, in the context of America, the selection of non-Muslim architects for the design of such projects may not always be a matter of choice for the Muslim clients; it is related in many cases to issues of availability and economics. However, the common selection of such architects is not simply related to such mundane constraints, in fact there can be detected a number of fundamental cultural attitudes that go much deeper than mere economics. One explanation is provided by Gulzar Haider, who was involved with many such committees, of which he has become increasingly critical. According to Haider, immigrant Muslims prefer to deal with non-Muslim architects, which he explains in terms of the concept of *thawab* (divine reward). He points out that when the architect is Muslim, he is expected to perform his professional services as a form of charity

³² Haider, Gulzar, and Mukhtar, Muhammad, "Islamic Architecture in Non-Islamic Environments", *Op. Cit.* p. 16.

³³ Wright, Lance, "Man Plan Five: Religion", *Architectural Review*, March, 1970, p. 5.

in support of the cause of Islam. If the architect insists on being compensated for his services, then his faith is put into question by the committee. But if he chooses to volunteer, then his services are as good as any other volunteer, and his work is not appreciated as a result.

On the other hand, the selection of western architects may be related to the general faith that many people of the so-called Third World have in the superiority of western science and rationality, which naturally extend to all products of the modern world including architecture. This attitude extends to Muslims who live in the West, such as the immigrant committee members that Gulzar Haider has mentioned. Haider points out that, if professional charges are unavoidable, then most of these committees would prefer to pay them in return for the services of a Western, non-Muslim architect. An example of the preference for western architects among immigrant Muslim clients, is the case of the Islamic Cultural Center of Manhattan, New York. This project was initially given to an Iranian architect who developed a scheme based on traditional architectural themes. Later, however, the committee of clients, headed by Kuwait, replaced this architect with the American firm Skidmore, Owings and Merrill. While acknowledging the competence of this internationally reputable architectural firm, the selection of SOM for this project, as well the extensive participation of this firm and many other western firms in the Gulf region, may be seen in the context of the general attitude of many clients from the Gulf States, which reflects a general assumption by those clients that because the West represents the technologically advanced world, its views on architecture, be it a mosque or not, should carry greater authority than those of the non-Westerners.

The architectural character of Islamic community centers in America is not only influenced by the divorce between faith and architecture in the modern world, or the architect's limited knowledge of the aesthetic values of Islamic architecture, or the incompetence of the architect, technician and the engineer who are called upon to give form to the nostalgic wishes of the clients, or the age long fantasizing and romanticizing of Islamic architecture, but some of all this as well as a uniquely American postmodern way of seeing the commercial strip as a legitimate source of inspiration for architecture. The diversity of these influences on this architecture makes this practice well placed within the dominant architectural culture of America.

III. 2. The "multilayered dialectic" of the architecture of Islamic community centers in America:

The character of the architecture of Islamic community centers in America can be seen as an outcome of local technical constraints related to the unique context of architectural practice in America, and the relationship between architects and clients. However, there is another aspect that is equally important, if not more fundamental, to our understanding of the architectural expressions of these buildings; it is the relationship between architectural imagery and the Muslim identity. This aspect is related to a complex range of cross-cultural issues, and highlights significant aspects of the act of self-representation. The following discussion centers on the impact of the multi-cultural context of America on the image of this architecture. It explores through the works of Muslim and non-Muslim architects, the relationship between the legacy of nineteenth and twentieth century Western representation of Oriental architecture, and the architecture of the Islamic community center.

The search for "visual authenticity" and the perpetuation of myths:

In her book, *Contemporary Islam and the Challenge of History*, Yvonne Haddad, when speaking of contemporary Muslim scholars, points out their insistence on the necessity of appropriating the faith as a commitment to a complete way of life, rather than adopting Western answers to solve Muslim problems of existence in the contemporary world. Their need for authenticity to combat Western domination makes them seek corresponding answers in their own heritage, answers and ideas which they abstract from the experience of a previous life in an Islamic culture and universalize the same without due consideration to the particular physical and temporal contexts of such experience. She adds that:

"The past serves the utilitarian function of providing an authentic alternative to the vacuum in the identity of the new generation. Not only is it perceived as authentic, but as endowing the community with legitimacy and honor. For many, their heritage becomes an emotional attachment to the past, a focus of pride, and the hope of confidence for the future. This, however, leads to the abandonment of the central framework of the glory of Islamic heritage, the commitment to Islam as a way of life."³⁴

A parallel to this attitude towards the past can be seen, whether in the Islamic world or in the West, in relation to the Muslim community's appropriation of what it perceives as a

³⁴ Haddad, Yvonne, *Contemporary Islam and the Challenge of History*, Albany State: University of New York Press, p. 137.

universalized image of Islamic architecture into the character of its religious architecture, which often becomes symbolic of its self-image. Whereas this might have also been true in traditional societies, it is now more of an end in itself, rather than being a subconscious form of expression, and is provided for the community by the architect in the western sense of the architect as a form-giver. The individual aspect, therefore, becomes dominant and results in the use of an essentialized architectural character for the purpose of asserting the Islamic identity of the community. This phenomenon which characterizes the architecture of Islamic community centers in America can be seen as part of a much wider phenomenon that relates architectural production throughout the Islamic world. As Gulzar Haider puts it:

"The demand for visual authenticity in the mosque, however, has intensified over the last decade. In the Western world it is not so much a new commitment to tradition but the result of an emerging assertiveness of the Muslim community. Of course, the post-functional search for "meaning" and return of the "philosophical inquiry" through architecture have been timely for the emergent discourse on Islamic architecture."³⁵

In the Muslims' quest for authenticity through architecture, the use of iconic references has become widespread in many Islamic countries, even where those forms did not belong in the past. Hasan-Uddin Khan points out that: "In Indonesia, prefabricated tin domes which can be bought at road stands have enjoyed enormous popularity. Such domes replace the traditional roof as a signal of a mosque's presence and are perceived as relating to the Middle Eastern Arab architecture of Islam's origin."³⁶ While this universalized use of iconic references may seem to be a product of the Muslims' attempt at representing themselves through architecture, it can be argued that this modern phenomenon is related to the Western representation of Islamic architecture that goes back to the eighteenth century, and that this Western representation is being perpetuated today by both Muslim and non-Muslim architects and scholars.

In Saudi Arabia, for example, until a few decades ago domes were opposed on fundamental grounds because of views based on Wahabi religious interpretations, and the old mosques of Najd did not have domes. Today we find numerous El-Wakil type mosques of multiple domes, as well as many domed mosques by Western and local architects. A few architects, such as Rasem Badran (Riyadh Central Mosque), and Trevor

³⁵ Haider, Gulzar, "Space and the Practicing Architect", *Expressions of Islam in buildings: Proceedings of an international seminar sponsored by the Aga Khan Award for Architecture and the Indonesian Institute of Architects*, held in Jakarta and Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 15-19 October, 1990, p. 158.

³⁶ Khan, Hasan-Uddin, "The Architecture of the Mosque, an Overview and Design Directions". *Expressions of Islam in Buildings*, Proceedings of an international seminar sponsored by the Aga Khan Award for Architecture and the Indonesian Institute of Architects, p.120.

Danatt (the mosque of the Riyadh conference center), have avoided the use of domes in their projects, but the overall trend has been the popularization of these icons. This is also the case in Egypt, where domes in the past were generally restricted to tombs throughout the Mameluke period, and even though they were introduced into mosques during the Ottoman and colonial periods, their association in the minds of the general public remained with the dead. Recently, in a presentation at MIT of his project for a children's park in Cairo, Abdel-Halim Ibrahim, pointed out to some initial comments from members of the public who thought the project was a cemetery because of the many stone domes in its buildings. What Ibrahim has done in this instance is to popularize and domesticate the dome, continuing on the footsteps of Hasan Fathy, and therefore to deconstruct its traditional associations in Egyptian urban society - associations which are not unlike those related to the use of domes in a place like Opa-locka.

Western architects and scholars have also contributed to the spread of this phenomenon. In their entry to the State Mosque competition in Baghdad, Venturi, Rauch and Scott Brown chose to include an enormous dome over the courtyard instead of the usual location within the sanctuary. Their reason for this departure was "to preserve the egalitarian quality of the hypostyle plan."³⁷ The architects' insistence on the use of the dome, even with a hypostyle mosque and even if it is covering the courtyard, makes this a unique example of the postmodern obsession with this icon. As the architects explain it: "The State Mosque should be perceived and recognized from a great distance. For this reason, a large dome is an important element in our design of the exterior. Domes have long been associated with mosques and particularly with contemporary mosques."³⁸ According to the architects, therefore, the dome becomes at once a historical reference as well as a sign of contemporaneity. It is worth noting that Oleg Grabar hailed this design as "a powerful exterior sign, a potential cultural landmark, and a stunning solution to the necessity imposed by the program of avoiding a space open to the sky."³⁹

The search for visual authenticity is particularly significant for people like the immigrant Muslims in America, who are culturally and physically displaced from their traditional environment. They often seek to retain in the character of their community building, a vivid visual link with their country of origin, and a physical reinforcement of their collective

³⁷ Chadirji, Rifat, "Regenerative Approaches to Mosque Design: Competition for State Mosque, Baghdad," in: *Mimar* 11, Jan/Mar 1984, p. 50.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

³⁹ Grabar, Oleg, "From the past into the future: on Two Designs for State Mosques," *Architectural Record*, June 1984, p. 150.

memory. To the members of the community, their Center is a permanent anchor that provides them with a sense of stability in a sea of rootlessness and rapid change. This stability is often perceived in terms of architectural forms that are anchored in the distance past or the remote homeland and often relate to one or more of Islam's most famous monuments or to the local mosques these immigrants had frequented in their home countries.

Gulzar Haider, who has designed a number of Islamic community centers in America and Canada over the past three decades, has often questioned the use of iconic references in such projects. Haider who has had a particularly overwhelming experience with client committees, points out that "nothing is more telling of the communal fragmentation of ideas and images than the kinds of mosques people carry in their minds. It is not easy to untangle the complex network of individual and collective memories of first - generation immigrants."⁴⁰ The images of the dome and the minaret, are further perpetuated through visual media other than architecture, in advertising, in many aspects of graphics, for example in the design of logos or emblems, in calligraphy, where the image of the mosque is creatively used again and again to symbolize an Islamic identity. These images are then used in school education, in which children are taught from the beginning what a mosque should look like. So for many children of immigrants and non-immigrants alike, the mosque can not be a mosque without a dome and a minaret even if they might have never experienced one that has these features⁴¹ (figs. 8-11).

The Islamic Cultural Center of Washington DC.:

One of the earliest, architecturally significant building that immigrants constructed, and that clearly reflects the need for historical belonging, is the Islamic Cultural Center of Washington DC. This stone finished building was designed by Egyptian architects of the Egyptian Ministry of *Awkaf*, and built by a local American firm and reflects a dominant Cairene character, but also includes Turkish and Andalusian decorative motifs (fig. 12). The Islamic Center in Washington was completed in 1957, but its planning goes back as an idea to 1944, when it became the dream of an immigrant Muslim from Palestine and the

⁴⁰ Haider, Gulzar, "Space and the Practicing Architect", *Op. Cit.*, p. 158.

⁴¹ This is much like the case of children throughout the Middle East whose drawings of houses often show an English type house with a pitched roof and a front garden, even though these young artists might have never seen a real house of this type, or even if they themselves live in a flat roofed courtyard house, or in a modern apartment tower.

Egyptian ambassador. It was financed by the diplomatic missions of the Islamic countries and became since its completion an important Islamic institution in America: "The Islamic Center was an unprecedented venture that marked an increased level of religious cooperation among Muslim countries in support of a US. mission. The Center became a symbol of Muslim unity and identity in the United States. It continues to support an Islamic consciousness among the various Muslim communities across the nation."⁴²

In spite of its general eclectic expression, the Islamic Cultural Center of Washington DC. retains, in its neo-Mameluke character, the elegance of proportions and details of the Islamic architectural traditions of Cairo. This is one of the first cases of Islamic community centers in America in which Muslims were representing themselves proudly in what they considered as the best image they can present to both the American public, and to their fellow Muslims. Yet in its historic references, and in the international and diplomatic context in which it is located, this building reminds one of the "exotic" pavilions of Islamic countries which were erected in the great international expositions of the nineteenth century or perhaps it complies with the canons of dominant ethnographic representation which James Clifford accuses of being mainly concerned with "pasts rescued as timeless essences" and confirms the conception in the West of non-Western societies tendencies to seek "equilibrium and the reproduction of inherited forms."⁴³

Such architectural representations, when they appeared in the Islamic pavilions of the great expositions, were much desired and fantasized decades ago, and are still enjoyed by the American public in places like Opa-locka, even though they are understood as belonging to a foreign culture. The same forms, however, have come to bear a complexity of opposite meanings in the architecture of the Islamic community centers of the eighties and nineties. As Gulzar Haider points out, "...the Muslims in the U.S.A. and Canada should recognize the basic fact that the images of Islamic architecture and culture they carry with them from their original countries or from their history are well recognized in North America but in very different contexts and usually with grossly different meanings."⁴⁴

⁴² Richardson, E. Allen, *East Comes West*, New York: A Pilgrim Press, 1985, p. 154.

⁴³ Clifford, James, "Of Other Peoples: Beyond the "Salvage Paradigm", *The Politics of Representation*, pp. 124-5.

⁴⁴ Haider, Gulzar, and Mukhtar, Muhammad, "Islamic Architecture in Non-Islamic Environments", *Op. Cit.*, p. 19.

Dar al-Islam, Abiquiu, New Mexico:

Hasan Fathy's design in New Mexico exemplifies the search for the universalization of Islamic architecture, and illustrates the implications of such essentialization of architectural representation on the image of Muslims in America. The founders of this pioneering social and architectural experiments in Muslim community buildings in America, opted for an isolated site near the town of Abiquiu, New Mexico, for establishing the settlement of Dar al-Islam.⁴⁵ This is an extensive settlement intended for an exclusively Muslim community where Muslims could live together and establish their own religious, economic and educational institutions independent from the dominant American culture. The community center, consisting of a mosque and madrassa, was designed by Hassan Fathy in 1980, who also proposed the master plan for a whole community (fig. 13).

The village is inhabited by Muslim families, mostly of American origin, and the intention was that they would build their own houses following the adobe tradition of Nubia, Egypt.⁴⁶ The founders of the project believed that the future inhabitants of Dar al-Islam would embrace Fathy's ideas of self-built housing constructed with indigenous materials, as well as the minimalist lifestyle of the New Gourna peasant. Abdullah Schleifer, who introduced the founder of Dar al-Islam to Hassan Fathy, notes that construction at the settlement has not proceeded according to Fathy's building system because: "This system requires pre-existing communal ties and traditional social structure, a neighboring parent village for satellite settlement, tribal or clan relationships and the subsistence economy that provides...the time and the available willing labor for cooperative work. The Abiquiu project unfolds in a social void."⁴⁷

⁴⁵ The idea of this community goes back to the mid-seventies, when two American born reverts to Islam, Nuruddin Durkee and his wife Nura Durkee, established the Darul-Islam Foundation which purchased about 8,000 acres of land in the wilderness of the small town of Abiquiu in New Mexico. Abiquiu is 50 miles from the nearest major city, Santa Fe, and more than 100 miles from Albuquerque, where the nearest major airport is located.

⁴⁶ David Dillon notes that this adobe tradition was brought in by Hassan Fathy who visited the site in 1980, together with two Nubian masons, to show local architects and craftsmen how to build arches, vaults, and domes from adobe, without using wooden formwork. He further points out that these skills disappeared centuries ago in the west, although vestiges of them can be found in churches in Northern Mexico or at Xavier del Bac in Tucson. It can be argued that Fathy's New Gourna tradition is, in a curious way, an unintended attempt at reviving age old practice in New Mexico. Dillon, David, "A Mosque for Abiquiu", in *Progressive Architecture*, June, 1983, p. 90.

⁴⁷ Schleifer, S. A., "Hassan Fathy's Abiquiu, An Experimental Islamic education center in rural New Mexico", *Ekistics*, 304, Jan./Feb., 1984, p. 59.

Apart from the unsuitability of Fathy's co-operative building system in the consumerist American society, his design approach in the settlement of Dar al-Islam is highly questionable from his own perspective, when it comes to the issue of the character of Islamic architecture in America. Fathy stresses the important relationship between form and culture, and the need to understand architecture as a form of cultural self-representation. He states that "Every people that has produced architecture has evolved its own favorite forms, as peculiar to that people as its language, its dress, or its folklore."⁴⁸ Moreover, Fathy calls for the need to respect architecture's unique relationship to its cultural and environmental circumstances, and that building forms that have developed over time in a particular place, cannot be made to belong comfortably in a different context:

"Until the collapse of cultural frontiers in the last century, there were all over the world, distinctive local shapes and details in architecture, and the buildings of any locality were the beautiful children of a happy marriage between the imagination of the people and the demands of their countryside. ... I like to suppose simply that certain shapes take peoples fancy, and that they make use of them in a great variety of context, perhaps rejecting the unsuitable applications, but evolving a colorful and emphatic visual language of their own that suits perfectly their character and their homeland. No one could mistake the curve of a Persian dome and arch for the curve of a Syrian one. It follows that no one can appreciate an architecture that is transplanted to an alien environment".⁴⁹

In Dar al-Islam, Fathy has done the opposite of what he had advocated earlier. The architecture of New Gurna was transferred to New Mexico, and was built by people who did not relate to it historically. Even climatically, the adobe architecture which Fathy developed for the hot arid Egyptian desert, did not fit well into the New Mexico weather with its severe winter of fairly heavy rain and snow. On the question of the uniqueness of the relationship between place, culture and architectural expression, Fathy can be seen to contradict his own beliefs in his design for Dar al-Islam. Fathy's own "happy children of a happy marriage between the imagination of the people and the demands of their countryside", have themselves become alienated, occupied by people who continue to regard themselves as alien in the context of America, and prefer the isolation of their physical setting, where they live in the illusions of an ideal environment which, to them, is expressed by Fathy's architecture.

It may be argued, that Fathy's architecture is appropriate in the context of Dar al-Islam in view of the cultural and architectural links of New Mexico to Spain, and the existence in

⁴⁸ Fathy, Hassan, *Architecture for the Poor*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1973, p. 19.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 19

the past of local building traditions similar to those of New Gourna, making the buildings of this community center historically contextual. It may also be argued that given enough time, Fathy's self-help construction ideas may eventually work. Yet, in a curious way perhaps, Fathy was chosen, not only because of the affinity of his architectural style with those of the region, or for his socially inspired building system, but also because of his symbolic status in the contemporary world of Islamic architecture, and for his great efforts in encouraging the search for architectural identity in the Islamic world.

The architecture of Dar al-Islam may be seen as a reflection of the founders' aspirations as represented in the symbolism of the name of the Foundation itself: Dar al-Islam. The idea of creating an environment in which Islam can be practiced in totality is related here to the Muslim *Umma's* definition of itself as *Dar al-Islam*, the land of peace, a term that implies its opposite of *Dar al-Harb*, the land of war, which may be seen here as the dominant culture of America regarded perhaps by the founders of the community as hostile to Islam, and is therefore to be excluded. The community of Dar al-Islam shies away from addressing the conflicts and diversities of modern life, while the transplanted architecture of New Gourna has expressed the alienation of this community from its American context. By refusing to engage in a dialogue with the dominant culture, Dar al-Islam, in its physical isolation, can be seen to reinforce the Western views about the "otherness" of Islam. It reflects the duality of attitudes by which the community has defined its identity, not only on the essential aspects of its 'Islamicness', but also in reaction to these Western views. Moreover, the view of the essentialist nature of Islamic architecture by both the architect and the founders of the community may be seen to reflect a subconscious and uncritical adoption of long established Western views of Islam and Islamic architecture as timeless and unchanging. As Terry Allen points out ". the idea of the 'Islamicness' of Islamic art has been picked up by Muslims unaware of how deeply rooted it is in a highly culture-bound Western view of the 'East'"⁵⁰

The confrontational aspects of identity:

Over the past few years, American-Muslims have become more aware of their presence and the increasing strength of their nationwide organizations. As part of this emerging confidence, for example, the Islamic Center of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, which was converted

⁵⁰ Allen, Terry, "The Arabesque, the Bevelled Style, and the Mirage of an Early Islamic Art", *Five Essays on Islamic Art*, USA, Solipsist Press, 1988, p. 2.

in 1990 from what used to be the Pentecostal Church of God, has been renamed The Mother Mosque of America. This was the first mosque to be built in America in 1934, and was sold to the Church after a second and larger mosque was constructed in the city in 1971. The re-conversion of this building into a mosque as well as its new name reflect a growing sense among this community of its own American history and Muslim identity.

The assertiveness of Muslim American identity is evident in the numerous cases when the Muslim community members have clearly expressed their pride in the architectural character of their community center and emphasized the significance of its architectural character. The mosque of Toledo Ohio, for example, is one of the largest in the United States. Its dome is 60 feet in diameter, and its two flanking minarets are 135 feet high. As the chairman of the mosque's board of directors, Falah Jabarín puts it: "We could have built a simple mosque for less, but we wanted more. We wanted the American public to understand and appreciate Islam, its culture and its architecture"⁵¹ In another case, an immigrant Muslim who uses the Islamic Cultural Center of New York, in speaking for his community, states that: "It's what we'd hoped for all these years - a central symbol of pride in our traditions and culture, an official acknowledgment that we, Moslems, are part of New York City, too."⁵²

For the majority of these communities, architectural symbols become important as they are used to achieve something more than the satisfaction of nostalgic sensations, and certainly more than the immediate need for these forms, which has been made redundant by modern technology, (a dome as a roofing device, or a minaret as a structure from which to call for prayer). The intentions of the Muslim community behind the architectural character of its building is to express its Muslim identity which often conflicts with the perceptions of the dominant culture of the same architectural forms, mainly because they are associated with what is perceived as an alien culture. The architecture become personal and exclusive, and the expression of this self-image, because it is not widely shared, loses the aspects of dialogue with the general context, that is characteristic to the traditional environments of the Muslim immigrants.

⁵¹ "Moslems Making Their Mark in Ohio", *The New York Times*, November 25, 1984. Cited from a collection of articles by AKP librarian Omar Khalidi on "The Mosque in America."

⁵² Safi, Shazia, "Mosque a symbol of unity, five pillars of faith support one dome", *Daily News*, 28 September, 1979. Cited from a collection of articles by AKP librarian Omar Khalidi on "The Mosque in America."

Moreover, despite the use of local modern materials, and sometimes the use of familiar images that people associate with the local 'Oriental' restaurant, many of these buildings are treated with suspicion by the American public. The varied perceptions of Islamic architecture among the Americans and the immigrant Muslims often lead to conflicting interpretations of these buildings. Moreover, because of the relationship between Islam and the West, such expressions are perceived by the dominant culture as challenging to its values. As Zeynep Celik puts it: "Even as Western popular culture imbues Islam with dreamlike images, the very symbols that represent the culture are seen as threats."⁵³

The Muslim's sense of pride of the architectural expression of their community center is therefore not necessarily shared by their non-Muslim neighbors. One example of this is the Islamic Center of Perrysburg, Toledo, Ohio. Since its completion, the size of this mosque and the visitors it draws have troubled some residents of Perrysburg. One mother worried about her kids going to the same schools as Muslims; another woman, who sees this \$3 million structure rising from the flat Ohio fields, alongside cornstalks and barns whenever she looks out of her bedroom window, stated that: "it was a strange site for a long time. Now I've got used to it"⁵⁴ (fig. 14).

The appearance of Islamic community centers often becomes a source of conflict between the Muslim community and the neighborhood of non-Muslims. This is the case, for example, with the Islamic Society of Quincy, which was seeking to get approval on its proposed mosque in Milton, Massachusetts. The restrictions of the local building codes necessitate a substantial reduction in the size of the dome, and caused frustration for the community members who took their case to court. A reporter in a local newspaper explained that the community members "... say they are not asking for much: just a new mosque with a reasonably sized dome ... And the Center's leaders contend that the new restrictions - particularly those substantially limiting the size of the mosque's dome - essentially discriminate against Islam." However, the chairman of Milton's planning board maintains that officials are not biased against the Islamic faith, but are concerned about maintaining the town's character. To the community members, the size of the dome is in itself an important reflection of the status and self-esteem of the community. In the words of a community leader: "We won't be able to have a good-looking minaret or dome. All

⁵³ Celik, Zeynep, *Displaying the Orient, Op. Cit.*, p. 198.

⁵⁴ "Moslems Making Their Mark in Ohio", *Op. Cit.*.

you could put in was a puny little dome, which would look so out of character it would be terrible."⁵⁵

One unique example of an action taken against an Islamic community center is a recently built mosque by the Islamic community in Christiansburg, Virginia. This community was forced to sell out its building to a Christian group in the city, which subsequently converted the mosque into a church, after replacing its dome with an octagonal lantern (which looks like a Cairene *shukhshaikha*) and a cross replaced the crescent on top of the minaret. It is interesting to see how the dome could not be tolerated by the new Christian owners. To the new Christian owners of the building, the dome, in its pointed profile, must have been seen as a clear icon of Islam, while the minaret was sufficiently abstract for it to survive as the bell tower of the new church (fig. 15)

Conflicts between the Muslim community and the dominant culture have recently taken many different forms: the neighbors' attempts to prevent the Muslim community from buying the site for its building on the grounds of the neighbors' fear of the noise and parking problems that may be generated by this building or the resistance to the building of the center or limiting its visual impact or the imposing of certain restrictions on the operations of the building. Some community centers have even been subjected to arson attacks, often in times of rising tensions between the United States and one or more of the Islamic countries, as in the burning of the Quincy mosque during the Gulf War in 1990, and the stoning of its stained glass dome during the crises of the Iranian-held American hostages in 1980. This may not be a unique phenomenon as such; minorities in America have often been targeted during times of American involvement with their home countries, an obvious example being the Japanese communities during World War II. However, arsons against Muslims do not only coincide with such troubled times, for example, the Islamic Center of Charleston, West Virginia was sabotaged during an apparently calm period, by what the architect termed as "Christian fundamentalists" in the town. Thus for Muslims, such hostilities may be motivated by religious as well as by political and racial prejudices.

It is clear from all this that Islamic community centers in America are often considered by the American public as alien and forbidding; an exclusive settings belonging to a foreign culture. This exclusiveness of most of these centers is in sharp contrast to the attractive

⁵⁵ Cited from a collection of articles by AKP librarian Omar Khalidi on "The Mosque in America."

nature of buildings like those of Opa-locka, in which the American public can fully participate. The domes, minarets and arches of many of these buildings often reinforce a negative image in the eyes of the American public, whereas the same features might have produced a positive response at the beginning of the century before the American involvement in the Islamic world, or even today in buildings that are not associated with Muslims living in America.

III. 2. 3. Between "dialogic" representation and the expression of the "Melting Pot": The Islamic Center of Evansville:

One of the unique examples of a newly-built community center is the Islamic Center of Evansville, Indiana.⁵⁶ This is a bungalow-like building, with no references to Islamic architecture, no dome, or minaret, and no pointed arches. One of the most interesting aspects of this building is the spatial type of the prayer hall. This is a large rectangular room with a barn-like roof the structure of which is expressed inside. Minimum effort is made to relate the interior of the prayer hall to the conventional image of a mosque, and no architectural elements are added to the barn type as direct visual iconic references of a mosque. The only exception in this otherwise domestic, suburban character, is the projection in the *qibla* wall marking the *mihrab*, and three plates of Arabic calligraphy with verses from the Quran set into high level octagonal windows in the *mihrab* (fig. 16).

This domestic character may be seen to represent the founders' view of the building as the home of the community, which indeed is reflected on the way the building has been used. However, in order to satisfy the local authorities, the building *had* to look residential and to follow the character of the surrounding buildings. It was not a question of blending with the surroundings; the municipality obviously did not want it to announce its "Islamic nature", since only next door there is an enormous church which stands out from its setting. Yet the Muslim clients thought it would be to their advantage to project a harmonious image in order to avoid future tensions with the larger community. They wanted their prayer hall to have large windows onto the main street, so that the neighbors

⁵⁶ This building (completed in 1986) was designed by the executive members of the community, who were mostly immigrants from Pakistan, with technical input from Fischer Stein Architects and Engineers, Carbondale, Illinois. The Islamic Center of Evansville is composed of two prayer halls, ablution areas, a multi-purpose room, a library, and a class room. It now caters for over a hundred and fifty members composed of immigrant families and university students from many Muslim countries, as well as a number of American converts.

would see them praying, rather than leaving the outsiders to wander as to what secretive practices were conducted in that building. Moreover, in order to improve relations with its neighbors, the Islamic Society of Evansville has been striving to communicate with the public at large through inter-faith seminars at the Center or in churches and synagogues all over the city.

Notwithstanding the conflicts behind the formation of the Islamic Center of Evansville,⁵⁷ in its American suburban outlook rather than being a reflection of a preconceived notion of Islamic architecture, in its emphasis on domestication rather than monumentality, and in its concerns for transparency instead of exclusiveness, the character of this building may be viewed as a sincere attempt by the community at establishing a cross-cultural dialogue with the dominant culture. On the other hand, in the community's efforts at projecting a harmonious image with that of the mainstream culture, expressed through the character of an American vernacular architecture, they seem to have lost the opportunity of expressing their individuality. Many of the new members of the community, especially converts, have stated their preference for a "more pronounced Islamic character because people in the surrounding neighborhood still do not know that this center is here", and that such character would be "educational for the community particularly for the children who have no experience of Islamic architecture."⁵⁸ The Islamic Center of Evansville highlights the need to achieve a balance in architectural representation between, on the one hand, expressing an identity that risks alienation or misunderstanding and, on the other, striving for reconciliation which sacrifices the rich potentials of diversity.

⁵⁷ Initially the Muslims of Evansville used a room at the University of Evansville for Friday prayer, which was given to Muslim students at the University. The wealthy members of this small community combined their resources and bought a house which they used for prayer and community activities. As the reaction of the members of the neighborhood became generally hostile to the Muslim users of this house, the executive members of the community decided to build the present building.

⁵⁸ From a survey by the author of American converts in the Islamic community of Evansville.

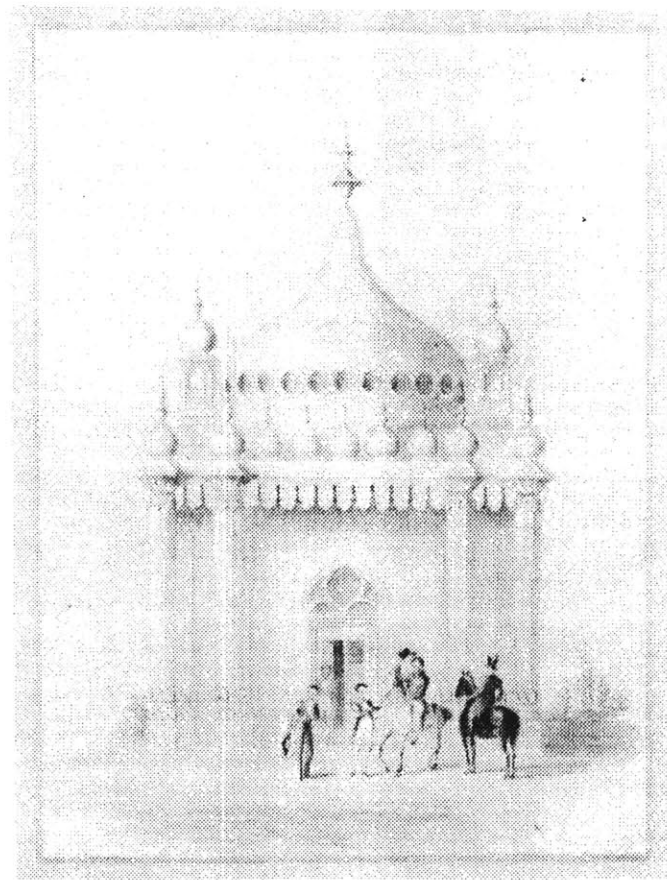
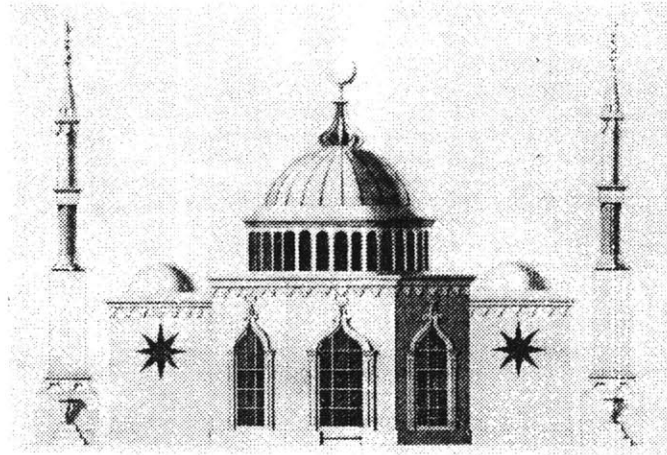


Fig. 1 Design based on the mosque at Kew Gardens by Sir William Chambers (1759-63), main elevation (top).

Fig. 2 The Royal Pavillion at Brighton by John Nash (1817-1824), principal entrance (bottom).

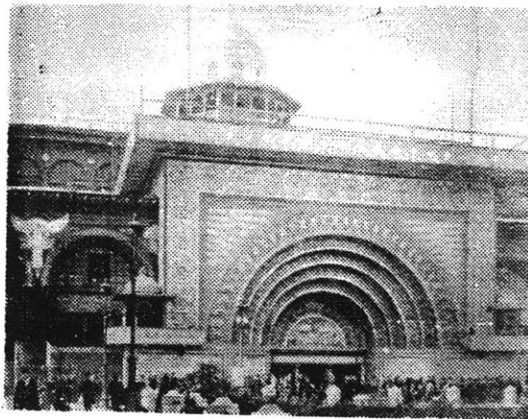
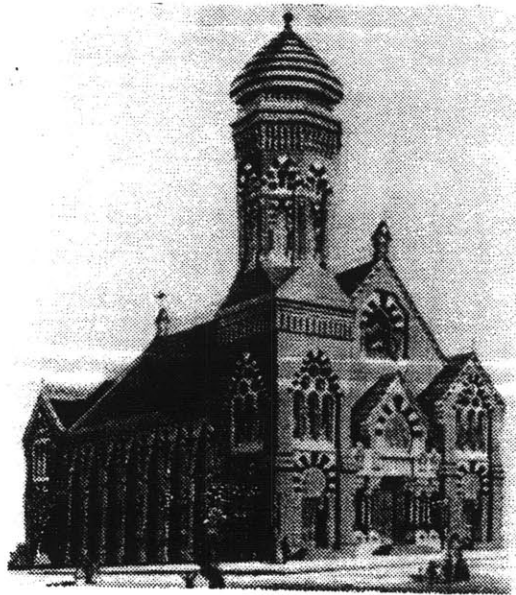
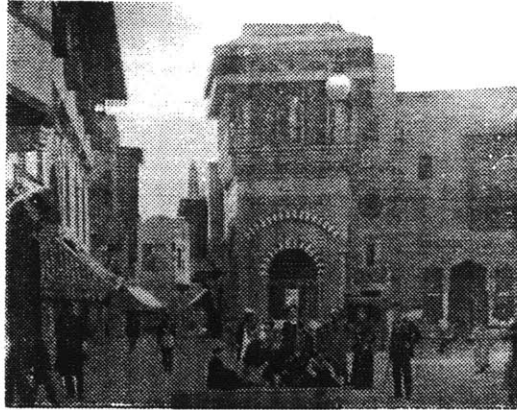


Fig. 3 Cairo Street, Chicago 1893 World's Columbian exposition (top).

Fig. 4 Frank Furness, Roedef Shalom Synagogue, Philadelphia, 1869 (middle).

Fig. 5 Adler and Sullivan, Transportation Building, the Golden Gateway Chicago 1893 (bottom).

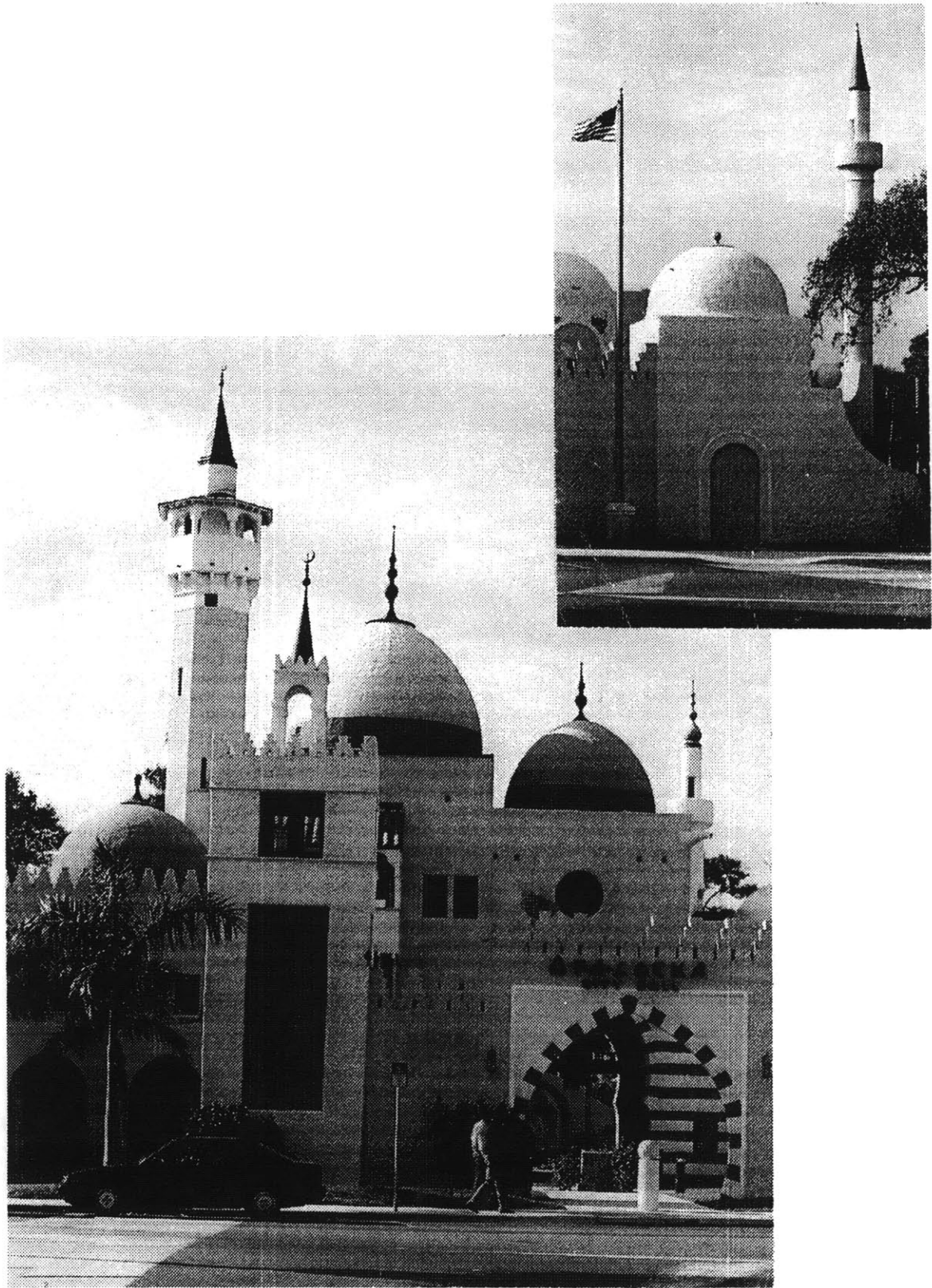


Fig. 6 . City Hall, Opa-Locka, Florida.

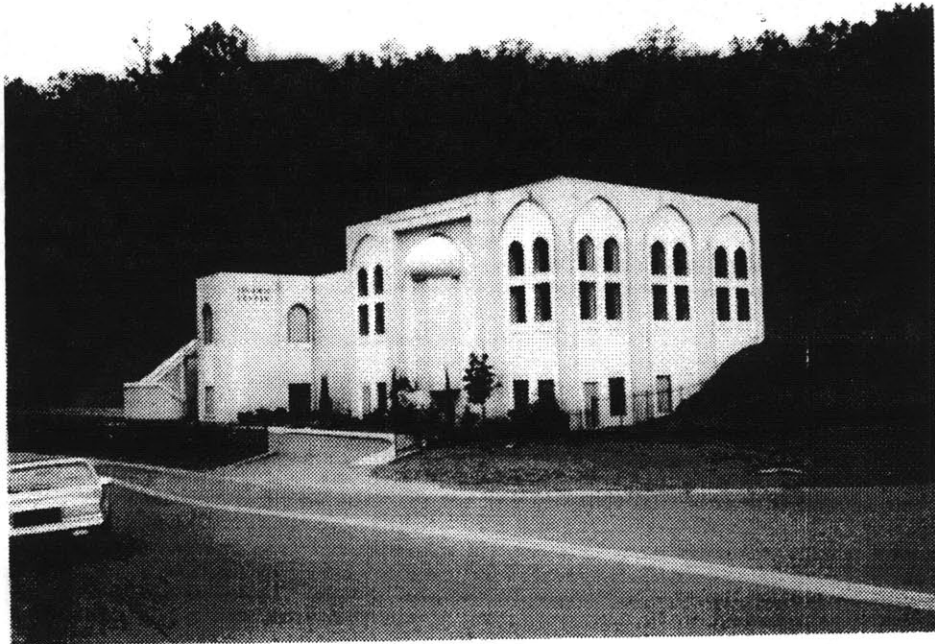
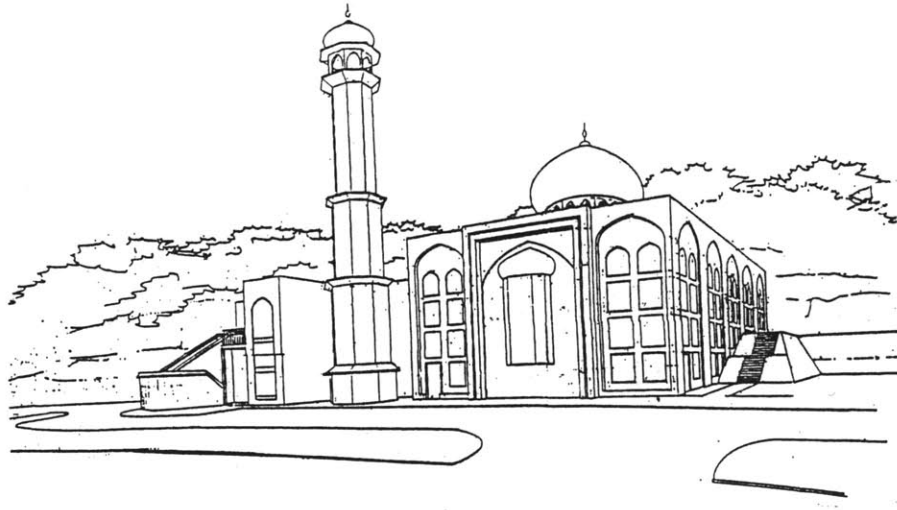


Fig. 7 The Islamic Center of Charleston, West Virginia.

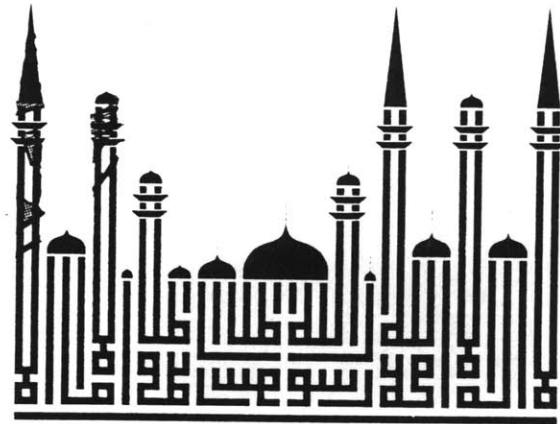
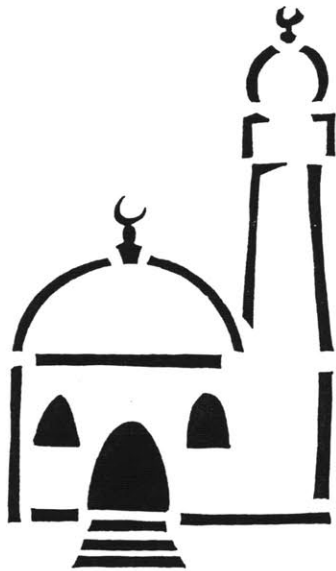
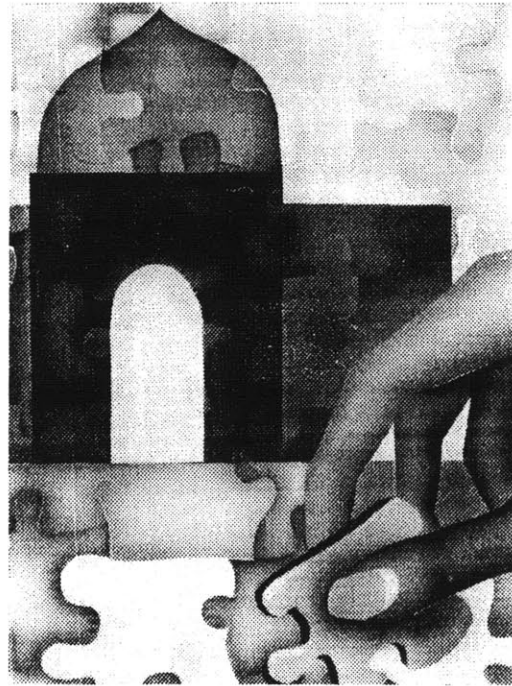


Fig. 8 The Logo of the Islamic Society of North America (top left).

Fig. 9 "Only by putting together all the different pieces of the community - the various ideas, talents, financial resources, etc. - can Muslims end up with the picture we're looking for." (Islamic Horizons, Spring 1992) (top right).

Fig. 10 An illustration used for educational purposes at Al-Abideen Community Center, Queens, New York (bottom left).

Fig. 11 Arabic calligraphy in the image of a mosque (bottom right).

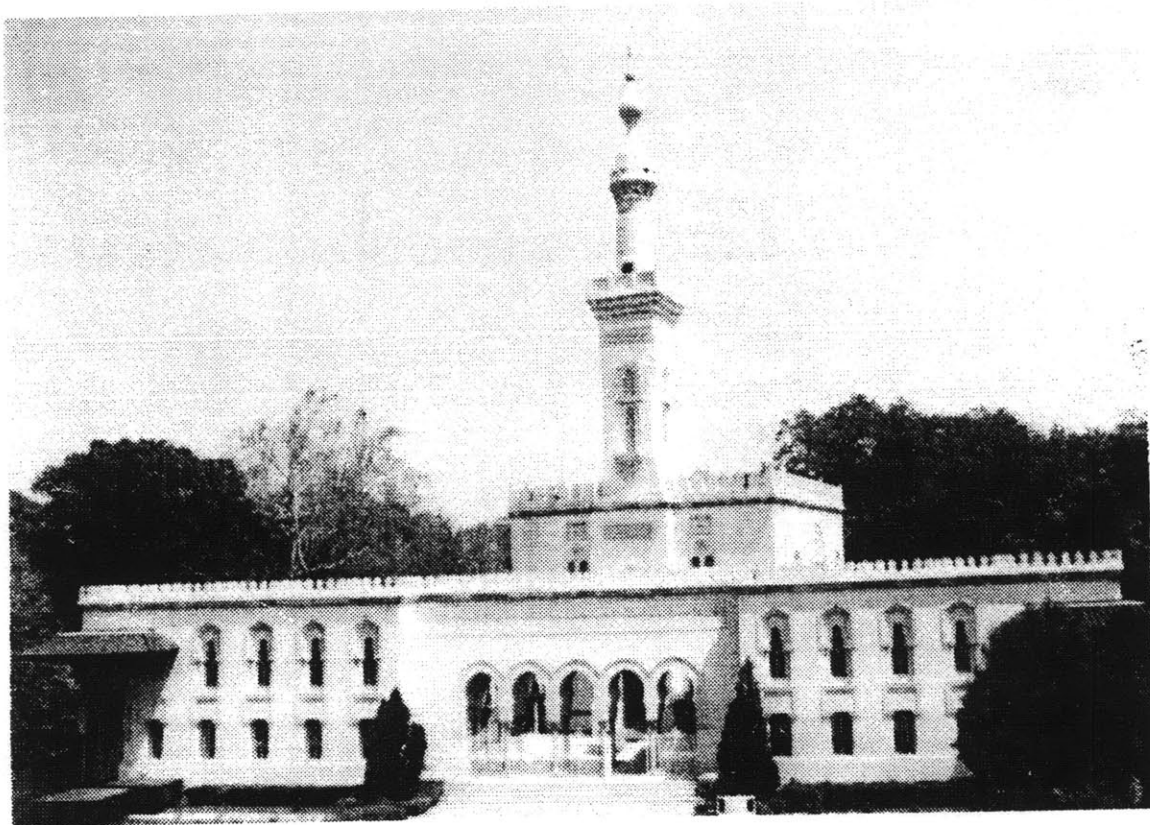


Fig. 12 The Islamic Cultural Center of Washington D.C.

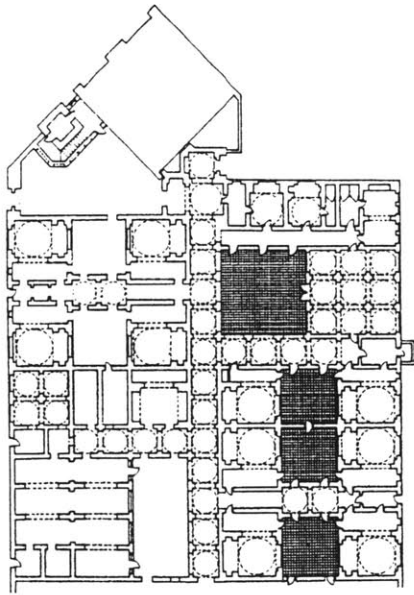
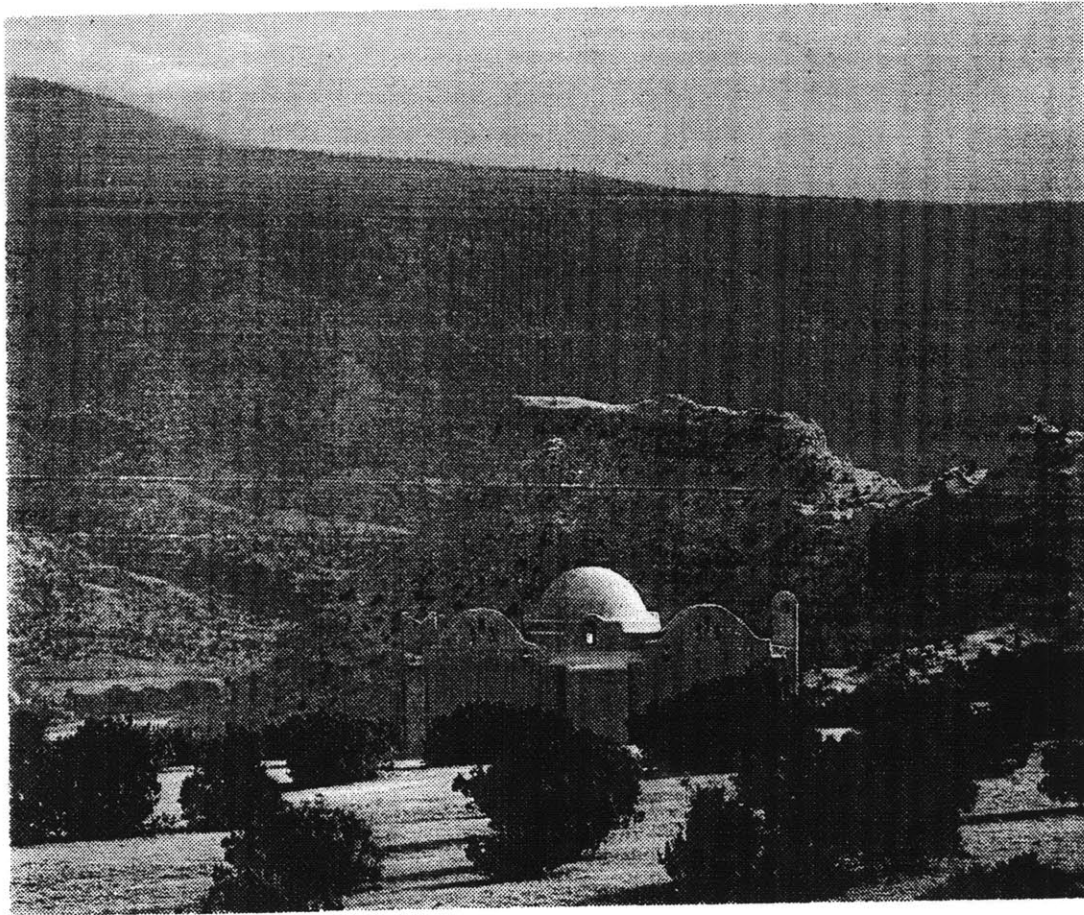


Fig. 13 Dar al-Islam, Abiquiu, New Mexico: exterior view of mosque.(top), plan of the mosque and madrasa. (bottom left), aerial view (bottom right).

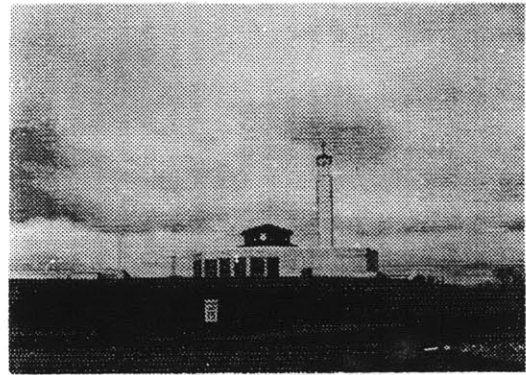
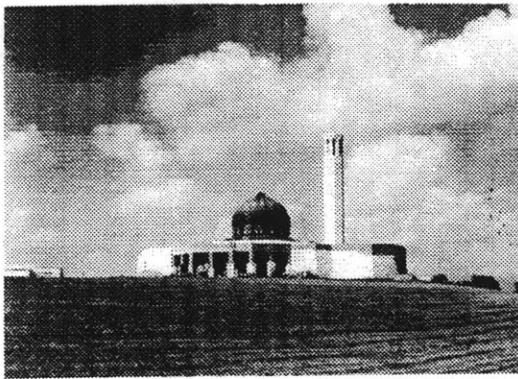
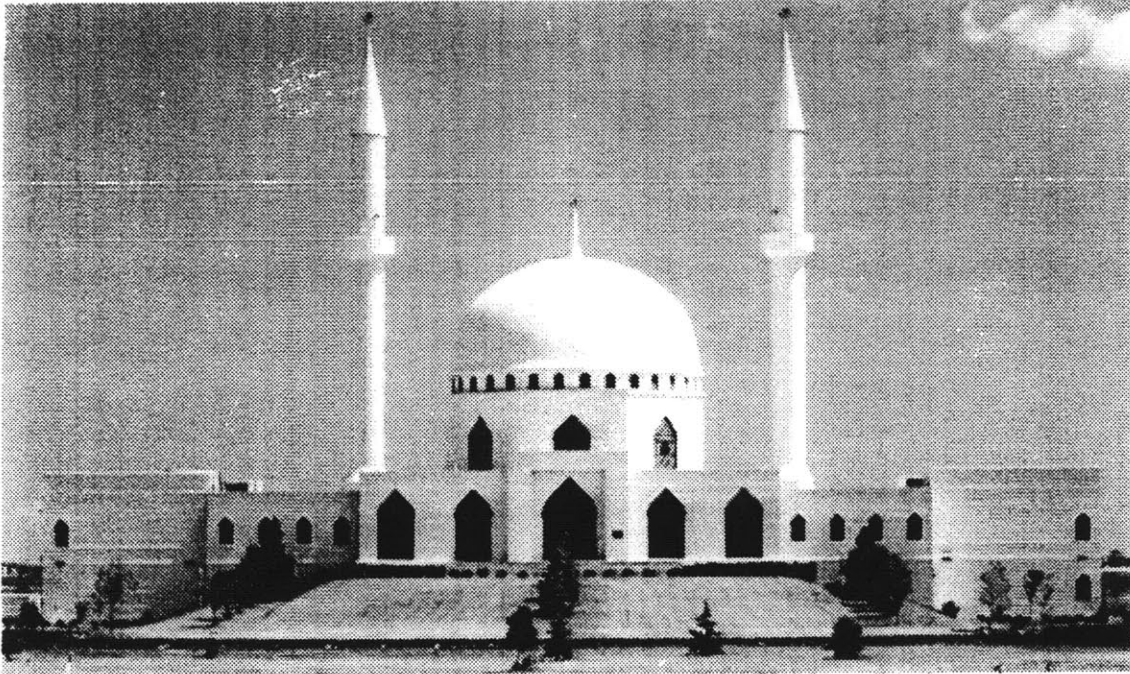


Fig. 14 The Islamic Center of Toledo, Ohio (top).

Fig. 15 The Islamic Center of Christianburg (bottom left). The former Islamic Center of Christianburg, now converted into a church (bottom right). Note the replacement of the dome by a lantern, and the addition of a cross on top of the minaret.

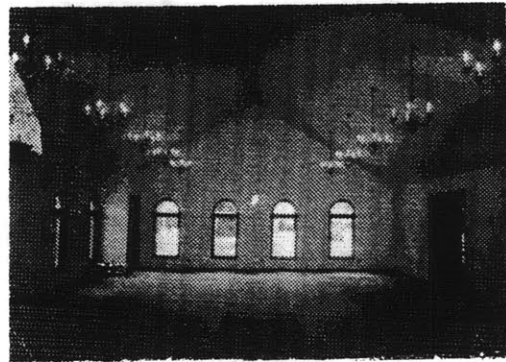
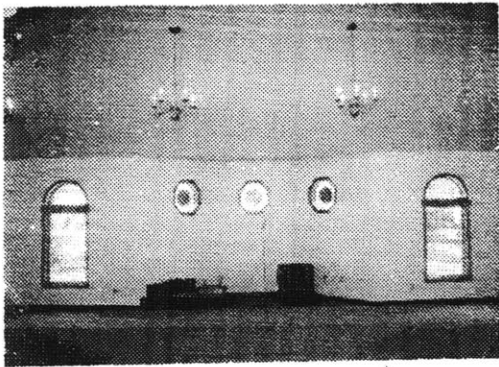


Fig. 16 The Islamic Center of Evansville, Indiana: exterior view with church in the background (top), *mihrab* (bottom left), the main prayer hall (bottom right).

CHAPTER IV

**The contemporary interpretation of tradition;
the Islamic Cultural Center of Manhattan,
New York**

Chapter IV:

The contemporary interpretation of tradition; The Islamic Cultural Center of Manhattan, New York

The mosque: Michael McCarthy, Partner of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill.

The minaret: Alton Gursel, Swanke Hayden Connell.

The Islamic Cultural Center of Manhattan, New York, which was completed in 1991, is located at the intersection of Third Avenue and 96th Street in Manhattan. It the first new mosque to be built for the use of the almost one million Muslims living in New York. Other mosques exist in the city, but ordinarily they are buildings converted from other uses.¹ This project illustrates the search for an image that is appreciable by both the Muslim community and the majority culture. It also highlights the relationship between architectural production and the cultural politics of identity. In the course of this study, I visited the mosque and met with Ziad Munayair, the project coordinator at the Kuwait permanent mission to the United Nations, Mustafa Abadan, the senior designer at Skidmore Owings and Merrill, and Alton Gursel, the Swanke Hayden Connell designer of the minaret.

IV. 1. Project background:

This project was designed to accommodate the Islamic community of Greater New York which has for an important component the diplomats at the United Nations. The project dates back to 1966 when the governments of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Libya bought the site of the present building. The board of trustees of the Islamic Cultural Center of New York has since then been headed by Kuwait, who contributed more than half the project cost, and whose ambassador to the UN, Muhammad Abulhassan, became in 1981 the prime mover behind this project. Initially the project was given to the Iranian architect Ali Dadras, who designed a traditional mosque with a courtyard and gardens. By the mid-eighties, however, the board of trustees became in favor of a more contemporary style, and so the Iranian architect was replaced in 1987 by Skidmore Owings and Merrill. The minaret's design was given to Swanke Hayden Connell of New York.

¹ According to Joseph Griffith, there are approximately 116 mosques throughout New York State, 25 of them in the New York City area. Griffith, Joseph P., "Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem . . . and New York", *Scene + Heard, the metropolis observed*, December, 1989, p. 17. Cited from a collection of articles by AKP librarian Omar Khalidi on "The Mosque in America."

SOM's long architectural involvement in the Gulf region has, by the time of its selection for the Manhattan project, been capped by its winning of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture for the Haj Terminal (King Abdul Aziz International Airport) in Jeddah. The firm has also contributed a considerable number of buildings in the Gulf States, notable of which are King Abdul Aziz University in Mecca, the National Commercial Bank in Jeddah, the Banking Complex and al-Ahli Bank in Kuwait, and the Gulf Bank in Manama, Bahrain, among others. Its design for the Chancery of Kuwait in Washington DC., which was by that time completed, continues the firm's main themes of advanced structural systems, modern cladding materials and details, combined with elements of decoration, mainly on the interiors, which, as in the case of the Chancery, "abstractly recall the Islamic heritage of Kuwait".² The the appointment of SOM for the design of the Manhattan Cultural Center can therefore be attributed to the reputation of SOM, the relationship developed over the years between the firm and the clients of the Gulf States, as well as to the particular familiarity of the firm on the part of the Kuwaiti diplomats as a result of the design of the Chancery of Kuwait.

Initial suggestions entailed the construction of a small office building while another proposal called for the construction of a mixed use residential/office building. The board of trustees has considered the construction of a 40-story building on a non-utilized part of the property, with the intention of using the proceeds of its office rentals to defray the operational and maintenance costs of the Center in the future. A joint-venture between the Islamic Cultural Center and a real estate developer in New York had been projected and the construction of what amounts to a "modern *waqf*" building was anticipated. The Mosque is the only part of the project that has been built so far. It includes a main prayer area for men and a prayer gallery above for women. Located below the Mosque is a large multi-purpose hall, ablution areas for men and others for women, as well as various office spaces, storage and service areas. The project was intended to include a separate rectangular building housing a school, a library, a museum, a home for the imam, and even shops and stores. Michael McCarthy, SOM's design partner, reported in an interview in 1989 that "What you have now represents a very modest beginning. They could have put up the Taj Mahal if they wanted"³ (Fig. 17).

² Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill, "Chancery of Kuwait", *A Celebration of Diversity: Planning the International Center*, A.I.A. Foundation, p. 15.

³ Gill, Mark Stuart, "The Making of a Mosque", *7 Days New York*, Jan. 25, 1989. Cited from a collection of articles by AKP librarian Omar Khalidi on "The Mosque in America."

IV. 2. The Manhattan Mosque and its Ottoman precedent:

The mosque consists of a 90-foot clear span structure roofed by a system of four trusses supporting a steel and concrete dome above, from which is suspended the women's gallery beneath. The plan is composed of a domed cubical area in the center, with four square corners roofed by skylights in the form of quarter pyramids. Light pours in from these skylights and through the decorative square openings of the trusses beneath the dome. Islamic decorative features include a modern adaptation of Kufic used here as ornament over the main entry portal, the mihrab and the apex of the dome; and a modern circle of steel wire-supported lamps, reminiscent of the circles of oil lamps at the Mohammed Ali Mosque in Cairo, and elsewhere. Interior decoration continues the square module in the screens located within the large square openings of the trusses, in the entrance screen, in the carpet pattern, and in the ceiling tiles. The walls, which are a pale pastel green, have almost no decoration. The green color reflects the clients' preference; it has traditionally symbolized hope and fertility, and has been extensively used in Islamic architecture, though not in the pastel tone which is applied here. The square module has been consistently used throughout the building, at various scales, and in a variety of materials and expressions. The external walls are divided into large square modules of light granite panels each outlined by a strip of glass and supported by a concealed grid of tubular steel. The abstract nature of this geometric form has lent the design of the mosque a simple rational appeal, giving the project an appropriately contemporary character, while allowing continuity of association with traditional Islamic architecture through the use of abstract geometry.

Its link with mosque architecture, however, goes deeper than subtle references through geometry, or the obvious use of architectural icons and calligraphy. As Grabar has pointed out, the drawings for the final design of the mosque, prepared by the Michael McCarthy team, were "quite reasonable" in the conventional Ottoman tradition.⁴ Although the architect was clearly referring in the design of the New York Mosque to the typology of the Ottoman mosque, he was nevertheless uninspired by the interior ambiance of such mosques: "Working with senior designer Mustafa Abadan and two other architects,

⁴ Traub, James, "The road to Mecca", June 24, 1991, p. 40. Cited from a collection of articles by AKP librarian Omar Khalidi on "The Mosque in America."

McCarthy rejected the dimness of the old mosques and placed skylights in roof corners and patterned glass in walls, bathing the prayer area with light."⁵

The interior of the mosque is broadly divided into three vertical zones; the part between the floor of the main prayer hall and the soffits of the peripheral areas, the large screen trusses define the middle part of the interior, while the dome marks the upper part. The stepping, pendentive-like beams at the corners of the middle part, in addition to their structural role in supporting the dome, help to visually connect the trusses to the dome, thus allowing a smooth transition between the square and the dome. This inspiration from traditional structural and aesthetic systems seems to unify the middle and upper parts of the interior of the mosque. Moreover, the steel ribbed structure of the dome expresses its modernity, and the tectonic expression of the supports of these ribs, with their minimum proportions, reinforced by the light penetration, creates a distinctively modern floating effect. Therefore, although the dome is used as a traditional form, it is effectively expressed in a contemporary language (fig. 18).

The structural system of the screen trusses that support the dome appears to be cantilevered from the external walls, creating a truly modern expression. This cantilevering of the middle part of the interior is illusionary and is created by the ambiguity of the expression of the relationship between the trusses and their vertical supports in the outer walls, and by the fact that the soffits of the trusses are merged with the ceiling of the peripheral areas. All this seems to create discontinuity between the lower and middle parts of the interior of the mosque, and to give a visual heaviness of the trusses. The intersection of the main trusses is emphasized by the creation of the corner skylights which allow this intersection to be seen as a point on which all the upper part of the building is supported. This 'dematerialization' of the corner seems in contradiction with the tectonic emphasis on the support system of the dome above. In contrast, in an Ottoman mosque such as the Suleymaniye, the effect of the enormous columns leading up to a transitional zone of half domes that in turn leads visually up to the large central dome, creates a graceful uninterrupted upwards thrust, while increasing in the lightness of the ceiling and the slenderness of the support system. The reversal of this arrangement in the Manhattan mosque, is a clear statement of the modern technology employed, but what it does is that it

⁵ Ball, Edward, "Kuwait Comes to Harlem: A Mosque Grows on 96th Street", *The Village Voice*, March 12, 1991. Cited from a collection of articles by AKP librarian Omar Khalidi on "The Mosque in America."

sacrifices the organic lightness and 'spirituality' of the Ottoman type, for the sake of creating a column-free space, and displays the clients' desires for a progressive image.

The solidity of the external shell reflects an exclusiveness of the building, a complete separation between the outside and the inside which is unlike the traditional quality of internalization in Islamic architecture where the inside does not exclude nature, but instead maintains a specially defined relationship to it. This building, perhaps because of climatic considerations, can be seen to have been modeled on the Ottoman type rather than the courtyard or the iwan types. However, an Ottoman mosque presents itself to the outside through an elaborate system of fenestration and through an entrance courtyard that provides a spatial transition. The solidity of the Manhattan mosque is therefore unlike the relative transparency of its Ottoman predecessor which maintains its dialogue with the outside, while creating a unique internal experience.

What makes this building markedly different from its Ottoman predecessors is precisely the sharp and abrupt distinction between outside and inside. While sharing its free standing monumental posture with the Ottoman precedent, in its blank walls, its exterior is clearly indicative of the nature and scale of its monumental interior. The element of breathtaking surprise so characteristic of the mosques of Sinan, for example, is therefore somewhat denied; the outside appearance makes the inside predictable to a great extent. In contrast to this predictability in the Manhattan Cultural Center, the Suleymaniye Mosque is brought down in scale as one gets closer to its entrance. It is molded to human scale, employing a variety of devices: latticed windows, covered colonnades, intricate stone carvings that can be touched and enjoyed, all create an intermediary intimate experience that allows one to transcend the experience of the exterior monumentality. This state of mind is then unsettled by the drama of the interior space that appears "heavenly" in its enormous proportions, the experience of which is further exaggerated by the sharp contrast between the restriction of the entry sequence and the openness of the interior, between the uniform heights of the external spaces and the multi-leveled domed interior, between the brightness of the exterior, and the subdued interior and between the mono-colored exterior facades and the brilliantly decorated inside. Such spatial layering has traditionally allowed a 'spiritual' transition, rather than a mere physical crossing of boundaries from the busy world of commerce outside, into the quite internal atmosphere of worship and learning.

The architects of the Manhattan Mosque may have started with the Ottoman mosque type, but they were clearly not obsessed with it. Mustafa Abadan had earlier visited 50 mosques

in Turkey and Egypt, under the auspices of Cornell University, his alma mater. His tendencies for more traditional designs were constantly put into rigorous questioning by design partner Michael McCarthy, who sought the more challenging interpretation of traditional architecture in contemporary language. McCarthy's approach was fully supported by the committee of scholars, as well as the by the Kuwaitis, who were in favor of an image appropriate for New York. In the process, Abadan's research into mosque design, together with McCarthy's emphasis on modernity, produced a synthesis that has incorporated references to some of the qualities of traditional architecture, although it ignored many more, and in the process created a building of its own time.

Generally speaking, the finished building suggests the look and feel of an international hotel atrium - open, airy and clean-lined. It expresses an austerity that has more to do with the modernist aesthetic than traditional mosque design. As expressed by the architectural correspondents for *Newsweek* magazine: "In fact the mosque is a building strongly evocative of its own time, with its sober, bankerly facade of tawny pink granite. If big office buildings like the IBM building had chapels attached to them, this is what they would probably look like - save for the accompanying minaret designed by Swanke Hayden Connell and the radically eccentric siting."⁶

IV. 3. Cultural interpretations:

Internal relationships: the women's prayer gallery:

One of the important aspects of this building is the position of the women's prayer area. The mosque is designed on two levels: the main prayer hall on the ground level, and the women's gallery suspended by rods from trusses above. This is undoubtedly an inventive way of integrating women and men under one roof. Access to the upper gallery is made from two stairs that act as free standing sculptural elements directly accessible from the main floor. The complete visual transparency of the women's area, its direct link to the men's area, and the fact that it is located above the men's prayer area, all represent a bold statement that must be seen in its historical context.

⁶ Adler, Jerry, and Malone, Maggie, "A Minaret Over Manhattan The Big Apple's Muslims get a world-class mosque", *Newsweek*, March 9, 1992, p. 69.

In describing the Harlem Mosque, a local New York magazine reporter wrote about the prayer area: "The prayer area accommodates 800 standing worshipers, while a small mezzanine with room for 100 more juts out of one wall, announcing the gender divide that fissures the faithful (men on the floor, women overhead)."⁷ The cultural significance of this statement, and the design approach for the women's gallery, can better be understood, when comparing the handling of this issue in both the Manhattan mosque and the London Central Mosque, both of which share many similar circumstances. The London Central Mosque, which was completed in 1977, was designed by the British firm of Frederick Gibberd & Partners. As in the Manhattan case, the committee of this building was mainly composed of ambassadors of Islamic countries who, likewise, funded the building's construction. The London mosque, which was an outcome of a competition, initially had a similar arrangement to that of the Manhattan Mosque; a women's gallery located above the men's prayer's area. Certain aspects of the competition design were rejected by the clients' committee, who strongly objected to this arrangement. Ronald Lewcock has conveyed the committee's rationale, while referring to the view of Edward Lane on this matter. He states that :

"In particular, they felt that women must not pray over men, understandable in the light of the relative inferiority of women in Islamic theological eyes, and that women should not be visible to men within the prayer hall, explicable again by the view that "the presence of women inspires a different kind of devotion from that which is requisite in a place dedicated to the worship of God" (Lane). Note that the segregation of men from women within the mosque is not practiced in all Islamic countries, while in others women enter only on special occasions"⁸

The argument about the "relative inferiority of women in Islamic theological eyes" could be a challengeable reading of Islam's position, not only by Westerners, but also by many Muslims like those of the London Mosque committee.⁹ The idea that women should not pray over man, and the argument that the presence of women distracts the believers inside the mosque, can perhaps also be questioned. The issue of the "inferiority of women" was used by the committee of the London Mosque to justify their rejection of the physical position of the women's gallery above the men's prayer area. The architect in this case had to follow the demands of the committee and to modify his initial design. As Lewcock puts it: "He solved the difficult problem of providing prayer space for women, and yet keeping

⁷ Traub, James, "The road to Mecca", *Op. Cit.*, p. 40.

⁸ Lewcock, Ronald, "London Central Mosque", *Architect's Journal*, vol. 166, No. 32, 10 August, 1977, p. 266.

⁹ Boisard, Marcel, A., *Humanism in Islam*, Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1988, p. 77.

them out of sight of the men, by moving his balcony back until it was above the foyer, so that 'no women pray over men' and then screening it with pierced wooden screens."¹⁰

Such a questionable understanding of the position of women in Islam, and the literal interpretation of the Islamic requirement for the separation between men and women in prayer, have therefore served, in the London Central Mosque, to perpetuate the established practices. The design of the Manhattan mosque seems to challenge such an interpretation, and to provide fresh cultural and architectural perspectives which reflect more enlightened interpretations of the Islamic tradition. As Gulzar Haider points out: "the idea of the women's mezzanine is not common in the historical mosques. However, for present day needs when more and more women are participating in the mosque activities, and the mosques have to be compact for economic reasons, a mezzanine works successfully because it satisfies all the requirements of Islamic law and tradition and also provides a sense of participation not available if they were in a horizontally separated, screened-off area."¹¹

On the other hand, in the Manhattan Mosque, the women's prayer gallery has a strong presence within the main prayer area. From a purely architectural point of view, it may be seen to reinforce the axis of the *mihrab*, being positioned directly opposite to it; it creates a transitional spatial layer from the outside to the main prayer hall, thus reducing the unfortunate lack of depth in the entrance experience as one moves into or out of the box-like building. Moreover, the women's gallery provides an internal canopy which brings down to a more human scale, the enormous height of the Mosque's interior. A screen located just inside the main entrance, underneath the gallery, prevents a direct view of the Mosque's activities from the outside. This arrangement, however, meant that the space utilization of the main hall was substantially reduced as the area under the gallery became mainly a circulation space.

The positioning of the women's prayer gallery in the Manhattan mosque has resulted in a number of drawbacks, which reflect the architects' unfamiliarity with the functional aspects of this building. The relationship between the women's prayer area and their ablution area, located in the first basement and approached from the eastern entrance, was ill-conceived; those women who use the ablution area would have to cross the main prayer hall diagonally in order to get to the gallery, otherwise they would be forced to leave the building

¹⁰ Lewcock, Ronald, "London Central Mosque", *Op. Cit.*, p. 266.

¹¹ Haider, Gulzar, and Mukhtar, Muhammad, "Islamic Architecture in non-Islamic Environments", unpublished paper, 1980, p. 30.

altogether and re-enter from the southern entrance. It is worth noting here that the desire to have a symmetrical layout, even for the ablution and toilet areas, resulted in equal areas for men and women, when the women's prayer area itself was substantially less than the men's. Initially, the lobby in front of the ablution area was divided equally for men and women. In practice, however, this division would have made each space extremely restricting, and the partition was not included. The resulting arrangement is unconventional. In actual fact this apparent liberalism was not intentional, it merely resulted from the architects' lack of understanding of the traditional solutions. When raising these questions to the architects and the mosque administrators, they acknowledged the impracticality of these design decisions, but explained that women usually perform ablution before coming to the mosque, and so conflicts seldom arise. This only confirms the lack of understanding of this sensitive issue which, given proper consideration, could have resulted in a convenient arrangement for women.

External relationships: the master plan:

The relationship between the mosque and its urban setting has considerably changed in modern times. Mosques in the past generally had a strong relationship to the physical environment, and were surrounded by community services, such as madrassas, hospitals, and commercial activities, which reflected the functional integration of the ritual and liturgical aspects of the religion with all that is civic and non-liturgical, particularly those commercial functions which supported the religious institutions. In the cases when mosques were conceived as objects in the field, they often were more of complex architectural statements as for example in the case of the mosque, madrassa and mausoleum of Sultan Hassan in Cairo, or they were planned as integral parts of the a larger urban ensemble as can be seen in the Fatih Kulliyesi in Istanbul. This relationship between the mosque and its appenditures is in sharp contrast to the present day emphasis on the mosque as an object in the field intended to provide important cultural references. As Grabar points out: ".. mosques provide an indisputable statement of cultural identity. Those mosques that are also contemporary architectural statements would serve as truly genuine symbols of cultural revival for the Muslim world"¹² (figs. 19-21).

¹² Grabar, Oleg, "From the past into the future: on Two Designs for State Mosques," *Architectural Record*, June 1984, p. 150.

SOM's reason for expressing the mosque as an object in the field, as explained by Mustafa Abadan, stems out of the architects' intention for projecting a friendly image to the neighborhood: "a welcoming image which includes, rather than excludes the public, is of symbolic importance to this project". To the designers, a courtyard would have given an exclusive message, being inward and enclosed, unlike the open landscaped plaza all around the building. While it is true that the openness and greenery of this corner site of East Side Manhattan, comes as a welcoming contrast to the heavily built up blocks of the city, it is nevertheless made exclusive through the introduction of the high security fence that surrounds the property of the Islamic Cultural Center. Despite the fact that issues of vandalism and crime are not unfamiliar in Harlem, yet the design had proceeded with creating a large open plaza which, in the context of the harsh realities of Harlem, could not have been dedicated to the public.

Because of the mosque's location on a busy intersection, the problem of noise and visual distraction became the next concern for the architects. Arguing that the mosque's activities need to take place in a quite secluded environment, the architects excluded the external distractions by enclosing the building with a windowless, largely plain wall which is nearly 40 feet high. The solidity and massiveness of this wall, together with the fence that surrounds the site, seem to work against the architects' intention of a welcoming image. The Manhattan Cultural Center presents itself to the outside as an impenetrable, rather unfriendly institution, which does not seek to establish a dialogue with the surrounding residential towers, with their endless square windows constantly overlooking their alien neighbor. Resorting to an enclosed environment may arguably be justified in this context, but this did not necessarily have to lead to a box-like image, which is also reinforced by the decision to monumentalize the building by elevating it, therefore increasing the surface area of the external walls, and adding to its visual solidity. The architectural character has resulted from the programmatic intentions of creating a mosque rather than a social institution.

Had the architects opted for a courtyard solution, in which the courtyard were to be enclosed by the ancillary functions, which could have had the advantage of lining the surrounding streets with public related cultural functions, the project might have offered a good deal of service to the neighborhood, and allowed a degree of interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims through these functions, instead of the strict separatism of the present scheme. Such a solution, however, would have put more emphasis on the domestic part of the program, which is delegated to a secondary position in SOM's scheme, and

would have possibly reduced the visual impact of the mosque on the surrounding environment. The image of the mosque as a simple, clearly understood icon of Islam, would have been sacrificed in this alternative solution. Yet the building, in its present image does not go beyond pointing out that Muslims are now part of New York, that they are an exclusive community, and perhaps, judging from the expensive cladding materials of the building, that these Muslims are fairly wealthy. In the context in which this building is located, this last quality further alienates the Muslim community from its immediate neighborhood.

Admittedly, the impact of the siting of the mosque and the expression of its juxtaposed orientation would have been lost had the building been surrounded by ancillary structures lining the main streets, and it would have been weakened had it been attached to SOM's proposed ancillary block. The mosque's violation of the Manhattan grid gives significant clues of the building's identity, or at least it raises questions about its identity. As pointed by *Newsweek's* architecture correspondents: "The Islamic Center sits behind a high wrought-iron fence, on a paved plaza set well back from the sidewalk, its axis rotated at an awkward, not-quite-45-degree angle to the street grid. That is how you can tell it's a mosque: it's the angle Third Avenue makes with Mecca."¹³ Yet there is not many precedents for this attitude in Islam. Mosques have almost always related to public spaces or streets; they seldom consciously express the qibla direction. Moreover, the ancillary facilities of the Center could have been utilized to create additional layers around the mosque, providing a more human scale on the exterior, and enabling a deeper transitional experience from outside to inside. In this way the cultural center would have expressed a unity between the cultural aspects of the program, rather than the intended bipolarity of religion and the other cultural activities of the Center. Perhaps in the way it is designed, the Manhattan Cultural Center well expresses the values of modernity, not just in its modern aesthetic, but also in the separation between religion and daily life as manifested in its master plan.

Imagery and identity:

During the design stage of this project, the board of the Islamic Cultural Center, including all the representatives of Islamic nations in New York, headed by the Kuwaiti ambassador

¹³ Adler, Jerry, and Malone, Maggie, "A Minaret Over Manhattan The Big Apple's Muslims get a world-class mosque", *Op. Cit.* p. 69.

to the UN, appointed two advisory committees - one composed of prominent members of the Islamic community of New York, mostly immigrants, the other included Islamic scholars, most of whom non-Muslims, to look over the shoulder of the architectural team led by Michael McCarthy of SOM. The committee of scholars included Oleg Graber, Renata Holod, Mildred Schmertz, and Marilyn Jenkins.

The debate between the two committees was centered on the image of the building, and according to Marilyn Jenkins, who is a curator of Islamic Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the aim was to build something that "belongs to the 21st century". The nostalgic immigrants on the citizens' committee, wanted the architects, to the furthest extent possible, to reproduce the style of a traditional mosque, and sought literal versions of historic motifs. On the other hand the scholars wanted a contemporary mosque for Manhattan. The scholars urged on the architects virtually total freedom in the use of forms and motives, while remaining respectful for Islamic beliefs and architectural traditions. McCarthy chose to follow the second path. He justified his decision by pointing out that "Islam, in its vast conquests, absorbed the best of local building techniques and materials under an overall umbrella of a careful geometric ordering of mass, enclosure, and finishes. Why not meld this tradition with the best that the twentieth century technology has to offer?"¹⁴

While the citizens wanted a dome, a minaret, and arches; most scholars did not. McCarthy recalls Oleg Grabar, then of Harvard, threatening to leave the committee if the mosque was to have a dome and a minaret. The main concern of the scholars' committee was that the building not turn into a piece of kitsch. The scholars committee pushed, throughout the design reviews, for an abstract image, and constantly challenged the architects to produce a mosque that maintained an Islamic identity without having to resort to the easy way out of having a dome and a minaret. The citizens, on the other hand, wanted a building they could relate to, one that communicates through recognizable images and icons. Although the unanimous decision was in favor of a "modernist" character, which was favored by the Kuwaiti Ambassador, the clients succeeded in forcing the use of both minaret and dome. This conflict of interest highlights the importance for immigrants of the issue of the emotional aspects of architecture, which Western, and Westernized, scholars on Islamic architecture generally tend to undermine.

¹⁴ Kliment, Stephen, "Manhattan Mosque", *Architectural Record*, August, 1992, p. 93.

The development of the minaret itself highlights other issues of the relationship between architecture and identity. Initially, SOM perceived the position of the minaret as a hinge between the two juxtaposed elements of the project, the mosque and the ancillary building. SOM's proposed minaret was cylindrical all the way up, and its only articulation was a balcony at the top. According to the Kuwaiti councilor, the modern cylindrical form of SOM's minaret was not accepted by many members of the committee of clients who preferred a more historicized form. For reasons related to the availability of funds, the minaret's detailed design and construction had to be suspended, and only the mosque were to be built. For most members of the board, however, the mosque would not be complete without the minaret. It is interesting to note that, according to Ziad Monayir, the project coordinator at the Kuwaiti mission in New York, the symbolic importance of the minaret was not only perceived by members of the clients' committee and the Muslim community, but also by some New Yorkers who were intrigued by this project. He particularly mentions David Rockefeller, who upon passing by the construction site, and when he learned of the funding problem behind the absence of the minaret, came forth with a substantial contribution towards its construction. The Emir of Kuwait eventually paid \$1.5 million for the minaret himself following his visit to the site in 1988.

SOM's high fees for the design of the minaret led to the commissioning of Swanke, Hayden Connell Architects-SHCA. This New York firm has been involved in a wide range of projects in the United States, one of which is the Kuwait Mission in New York.¹⁵ Once the decision for having the minaret was made based on the availability of funds, it became a question of how it should look. The final design did not follow any particular style in order not to be identified with any specific region in the Islamic World. Alton Gursel, SHCA's architect in charge of the minaret project, explained that he was faced with the problem of having to satisfy representatives of 46 Islamic countries in the committee of clients, each with his own ideas of how a minaret should look. The architect had to create nine models of minarets ranging in their appearance from sharp pencils to ball-point pens, before eventually choosing one sufficiently abstract and dehistoricized, more of the ball pen type, as the other type maintained a strong Turkish look, and was therefore unanimously approved by the committee.

¹⁵ Recent SHCA work includes various restoration projects including those of the Statue of Liberty, St. Patrick's Cathedral on Fifth Avenue, the original U.S. Senate Chamber and Supreme Court, as well as the expansion of the Capitol building itself. The architect of the minaret, Alton Gursel, is of Turkish origin, and has also been largely responsible for the firm's design of the Permanent Mission of the State of Kuwait to the United Nations, completed in 1987. Gursel is also responsible for the design of the new Sabanci Center in Istanbul, which is a seven storey glass atrium, bridging between two existing towers.

In contrast to the massiveness of the mosque proper, the minaret's slenderness, sheer height (one and a half the height of the top of the dome) and simple articulation makes it an elegant part of the project. In view of its astounding 1.5 million dollar price tag and its redundancy in functional terms,¹⁶ it demonstrates how far people go in their efforts to express their identity. The fact that significant cultural parts of the program, such as the school and the library, had to be delayed while the minaret's construction went ahead, is another indication of the client's priorities; it makes this as a case in which image making is more important than providing the community with the much needed services.

The official image of Islam:

According to Ziad Monayair, counselor of the Kuwaiti mission in New York, "This is a project that was badly needed for the city, to represent the beautiful Islamic culture and architecture. It is a building Muslims can be proud of."¹⁷ While expressing pride in the new structure as a sign of Islam's growth in the United States, Muslim leaders in New York's neighborhoods stress that Muslim life will continue to be centered in local mosques throughout the city. Yet, for New York Muslims in general, the mosque stands as a recognition of a sizable Islamic community in New York City. As the Imam of the mosque points out: "the mosque will not be defined for a certain nationality. It will not be a Saudi place, an Egyptian place or a Pakistani place. It will be an American place for all Muslims"¹⁸ The imam has also expressed the significance of this mosque and its size for Muslims in America: "For a long time there was a lack of a mosque here. It was important to Muslims and many New Yorkers to have a mosque of this size. It will be a central mosque open to all Muslims in America."¹⁹

The expensive structural system resulted from the desire, shared by both client and architect, to eliminate any intermediate columns in the prayer hall, in the name of creating a contemporary image through the display of advanced technology. Moreover, the obsession

¹⁶ In functional terms, the minaret seems especially pointless, since there are not that many Muslims in the immediate neighborhood to call for prayer.

¹⁷ Gaither, Rowan, "Under construction, East is East", *New York Magazine*, 3/12/90. Cited from a collection of articles by AKP librarian Omar Khalidi on "The Mosque in America."

¹⁸ Joseph, Tara, "Is the Mosque ready? Are we?", *Resident*, vol. 3, No. 15, Feb. 25, 1991. Cited from a collection of articles by AKP librarian Omar Khalidi on "The Mosque in America."

¹⁹ Griffith, Joseph P., "Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem . . . and New York", *Op. Cit.*, p. 17.

with the identity of the building, seen here to reflect the growing Muslim community of New York, and undoubtedly the generosity and piety of the patron, all led to the creation of a monumental building that generates pride through sheer proportions and extravagance in the use of materials. What the Islamic Cultural Center of New York communicates most of all is luxury-granite walls, large doors, and marble countertops in the ablutions areas. After all this is a building that was built by the Gulf oil money, as a show piece of Arab, and specifically Kuwaiti, diplomacy.

Inscribed on the granite base of the minaret is the following: "With God's help and guidance, the cornerstone was laid by His Highness Shiekh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, the Amir of the State of Kuwait,". Because of the identity of its patron as well as its monumental scale and lavish details, the Manhattan mosque is seen by many local Muslims as representing what Grabar has termed "the official image of Islam".²⁰ Historically speaking, the architecture of grand mosques, to which the Manhattan example undoubtedly belongs, has always been sponsored by elites, who had the power and wealth to build monumental architecture. As the architectural correspondents of *Newsweek* magazine put it:

"Architecture of course began as the material expression of man's relation to the divine, but sought other sources of inspiration as soon as princes became richer than churches. This was in the West, where sacred architecture has been pretty much going down hill since the 14th century. But in Islamic countries, the prince and the faith are inseparable. The resurgence of Islamic power in the 20th century has accordingly given rise to a world-class mosque 10 minutes by limousine from the United Nations."²¹

For such a relationship between patron and architecture to be despised by some New York Muslims, may be seen as a sign of their lack of knowledge of the history of Islamic architecture, but it can also reflect a disapproval of this relationship. The Manhattan mosque raises a number of questions which are seen generally to hardly matter in Kuwait or any other Islamic country, but in the context of America they make some difference. One may imagine the following question in the minds of the Muslims of New York: why do Muslims in America need these elites to build their places of worship, rather than relying on their own sources? The answer may be that this mosque was build for those representatives of Islamic countries and their families in New York, which reinforces the elitism of this building. Moreover, the Muslims in New York City, have congregated, until this building, in converted storefronts and old buildings around the City. Had the owners been concerned

²⁰ Traub, James, "The Road to Mecca", *Op. Cit.*, p. 40.

²¹ Adler, Jerry, and Malone, Maggie, "A Minaret Over Manhattan, The Big Apple's Muslims get a world-class mosque", *Op. Cit.*, p. 69.

about the congregational and social needs of these Muslims rather than with grand image making, it might have been possible to build, for the cost of this single monument, a number of smaller centers that would have related better to the various Muslim concentrations in the City.

Another question is raised as to who these princes are really glorifying in building mosques of this kind, God or themselves. It may be both, after all, in Islam, man and all his wealth are the property of God, who rewards those who use their wealth for the propagation of Islam, including the building of mosques. But why should a mosque cost almost 20 million dollars, and its minaret alone, 1.5 million dollars, when the actual use of the prayer hall is limited to an hour or so every Friday, and the rest of the time it is locked up, and the believers are confined to a room in the basement? The Center's officials point out to the need to reduce the high running costs for the main hall, and to protect its expensive custom-designed carpet (from the feet of the believers).²² If a mosque's expensive materials and running costs prevent its full utilization and puts restrictions on its use and availability to the ordinary citizens, then it may well be seen as an elitist building, and it is then understandable why some New York Muslims see it this way.

In the context of the separateness that lingers in the Muslim communities of America between black-American Muslims and the immigrant Muslims, the Islamic Cultural Center, with its expensive price tag, its Kuwaiti financing, and its corporate solidity in keeping with the institutionalism of SOM, represents precisely the ruling-class values, the official image of Islam, that most black-American Muslims reject. With this perception of the ICC, and with its officially appointed Arab clergy, it is yet to be seen how this center will bridge the gap between the two communities. However, the Center will undoubtedly draw together the scattered immigrant Muslims of New York, and cater for their spiritual needs and those of the diplomatic missions at the United Nations. It is hoped that the ICC will provide a forum where these groups can interact together and establish stronger ties with the black Muslim community of New York.

²² It must be pointed out that, according to the project co-ordinator at Kuwait Mission, the annual running cost of the Islamic Cultural Center is almost 300,000 dollars, provided in total by Kuwait.

The cross-cultural role of the mosque:

A quick review of the New York media coverage of the Islamic Cultural Center, as well as the architectural media, gives a fairly revealing idea of the way the mosque and Muslims are seen in New York. Titles of articles written by non-Muslim American correspondents, are in themselves often telling: "A Minaret over Manhattan, The Big Apple's Muslims get a world-class mosque" *Newsweek*. "Cultural Collaboration, SOM wins an award for New York's first mosque", *Interiors*. "East is East": *New York Magazine*, "Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem, ... And New York", *Metropolis*. "For New York Muslims, a Soaring Dome Is Ready", *The New York Times*, "Is the Mosque Ready? Are We?", *Resident*.

Since its completion two years ago, the mosque has become a landmark in the area. A passerby made a revealing remark when expressing his appreciation of having a mosque like this in New York: "it is nice to have something of every denominations represented in the City". It has become perhaps more like a collector's item, and fits well into the picture of multi-culturalism which America is eager to project to the world. In the words of one of its staff members, the Cultural Center is becoming a tourist attraction, and that the administration is hoping that the Mosque will be included in the City's tourist map. For the surrounding community, the Islamic Cultural Center provides a visual relief in an area of high rise development along Third Avenue. The building is an unusual feature in the New York landscape, but it is generally seen as an improvement rather than a detraction.²³

One of the Islamic Cultural Center's prime functions, is to improve dialogue and interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims. For this purpose the large room below the prayer hall is intended for lectures and seminars bringing together the different communities, to convey to non-Muslims the message of Islam as "a religion of tolerance, patience, moderation, wisdom, and compassion", in the words of the Kuwaiti Ambassador to the United Nations.²⁴ According to the imam of the ICC, the mosque, in addition to being a house of worship, will serve as a symbol of understanding between the Muslim and non-Muslim communities

²³ Favorable comments were made during interviews with local residents by reporters of several New York newspapers such as: Joseph, Tara, "Is the Mosque Ready? Are We?", *Resident*, vol. 3, no. 15, Feb. 25, 1991, also Bagli, Charles V., "Delays on Mosque on East 96th St.", *The New York Observer*, September 24, 1990, and Moore, Keith, "Rite at the mosque, and "E. 96th St. will get one," *Daily News*, September 28, 1988. Cited from a collection of articles by AKP librarian Omar Khalidi on "The Mosque in America."

²⁴ Traub, James, "The Road to Mecca", *Op. Cit.*, p. 40.

The Islamic Cultural Center of New York has won the "1992 Interfaith Forum on Religion, Art and Architecture's International Architectural Design Awards program for Built Religious Structures." As one of the jury members, Thomas Fisher, who is the Executive Editor of *Progressive Architecture*, puts it: "I think it is also good to see a religion such as Islam producing work of good quality in the United States. It is that kind of cross-feeding of religions and cultures that is something I am glad we are recognizing here."²⁵

The Manhattan project, in its urban setting, has undoubtedly brought Muslims into closer contact with the dominant American culture. Despite its programmatic and functional shortcomings, and its financial implications, it nevertheless demonstrates the positive role that architecture can play in the lives of its users, as well as in their relationship to non-users. Its announcement of Muslim identity may be seen as an important first step in view of the circumstances in which this building has come into being; now that it is there to stay, it may perhaps open the door for a more flexible, practical and a humbler interpretation. It has opened debates among non-Muslims, mostly characterized by appreciation and therefore the suggestions that the results could have been even better had the building been more welcoming, should not undermine the Center's achievement thus far.

²⁵ Cited from a collection of the AKP librarian Omar Khalidi on "The Mosque in America".

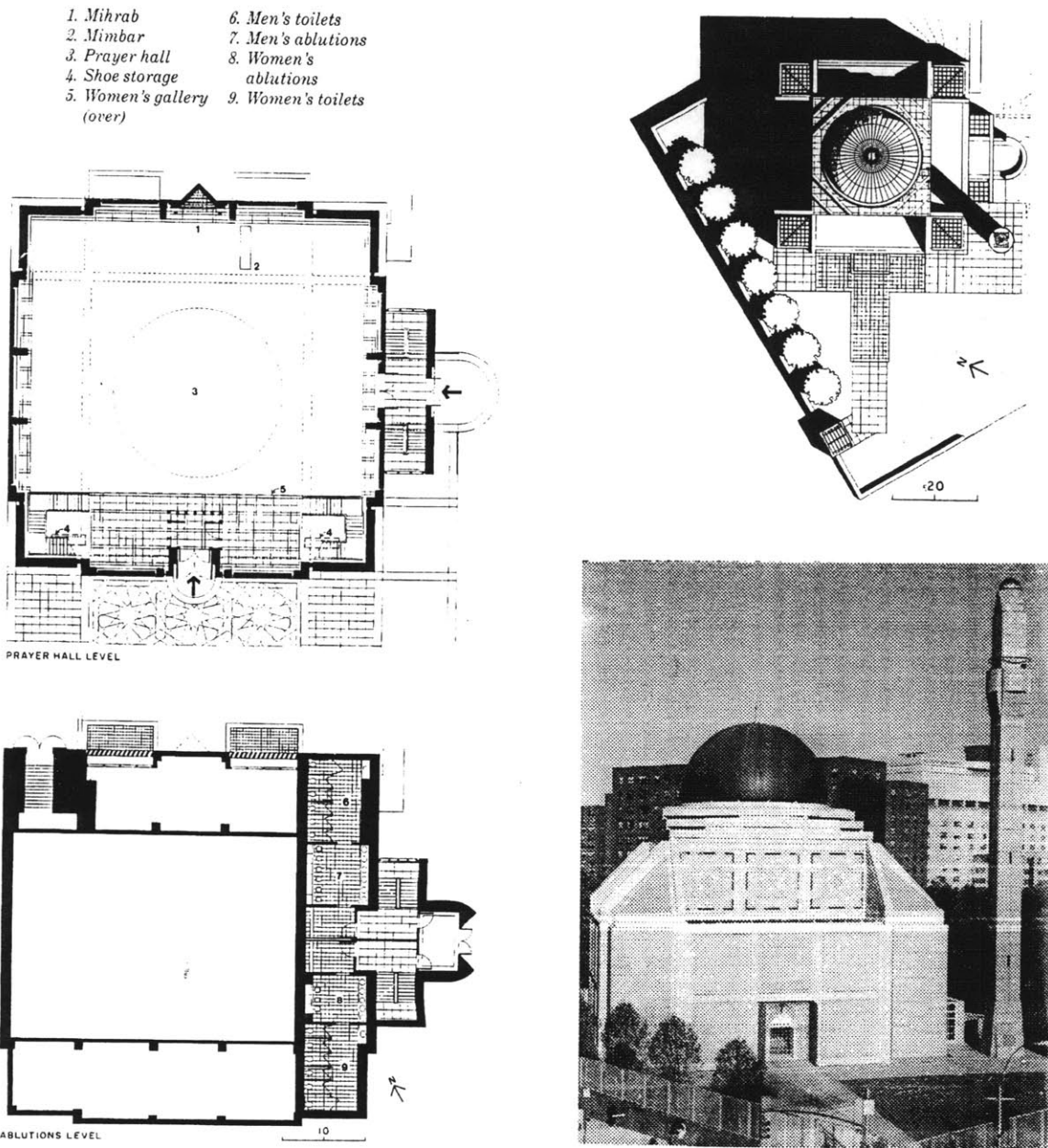


Fig. 17. The Islamic Cultural Center of Manhattan, New York: site plan, basement and ground floor plans, and exterior view.

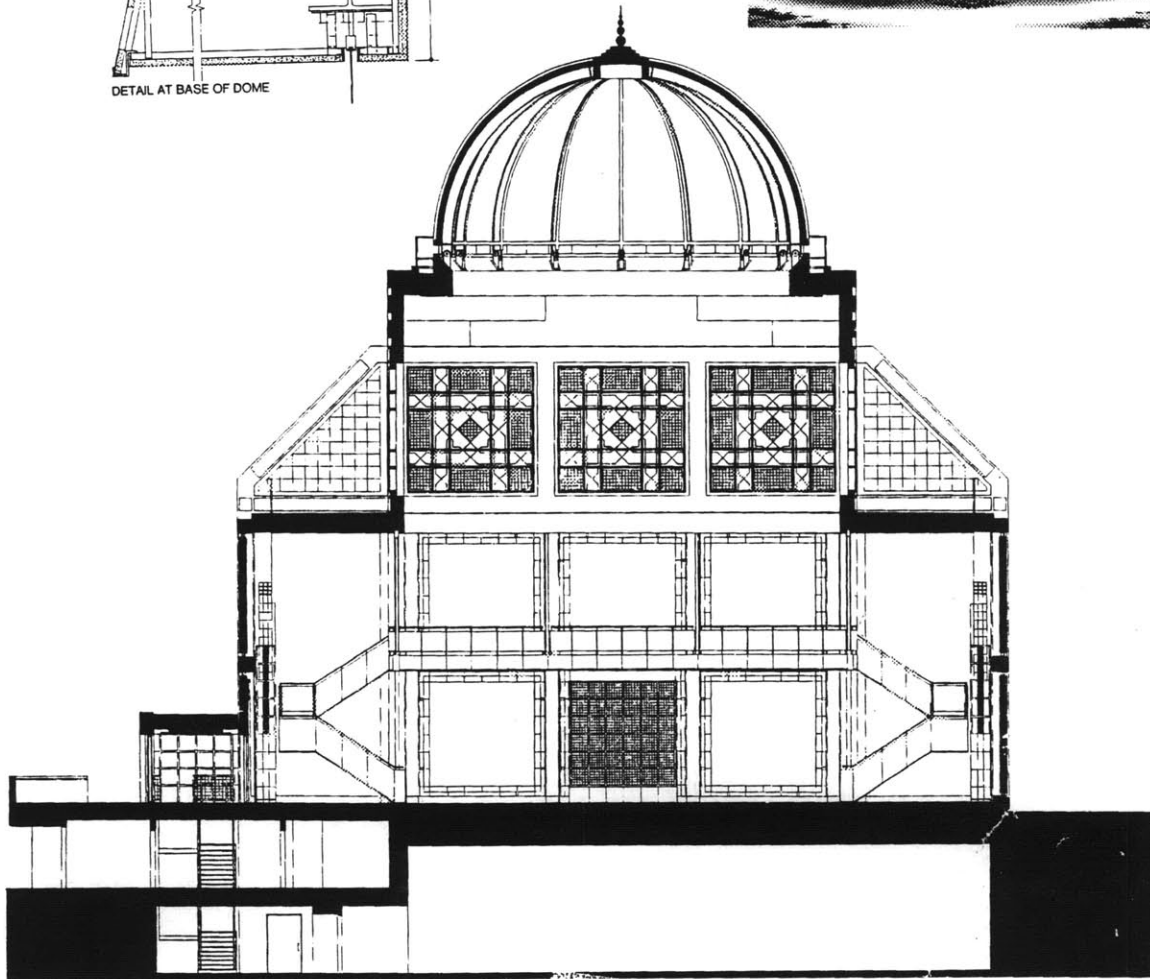
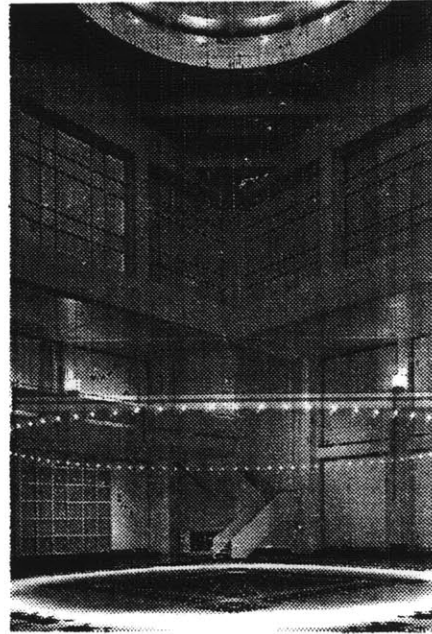
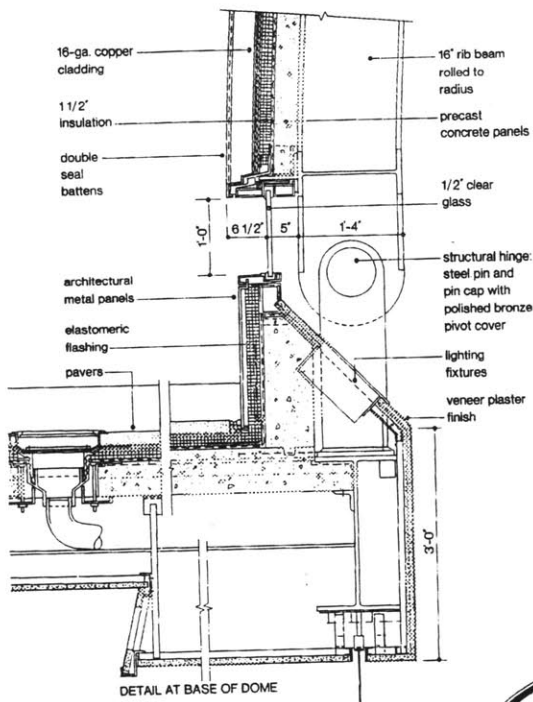


Fig. 18. The Islamic Cultural Center of Manhattan, New York: section, interior view and detail of the base of the dome.

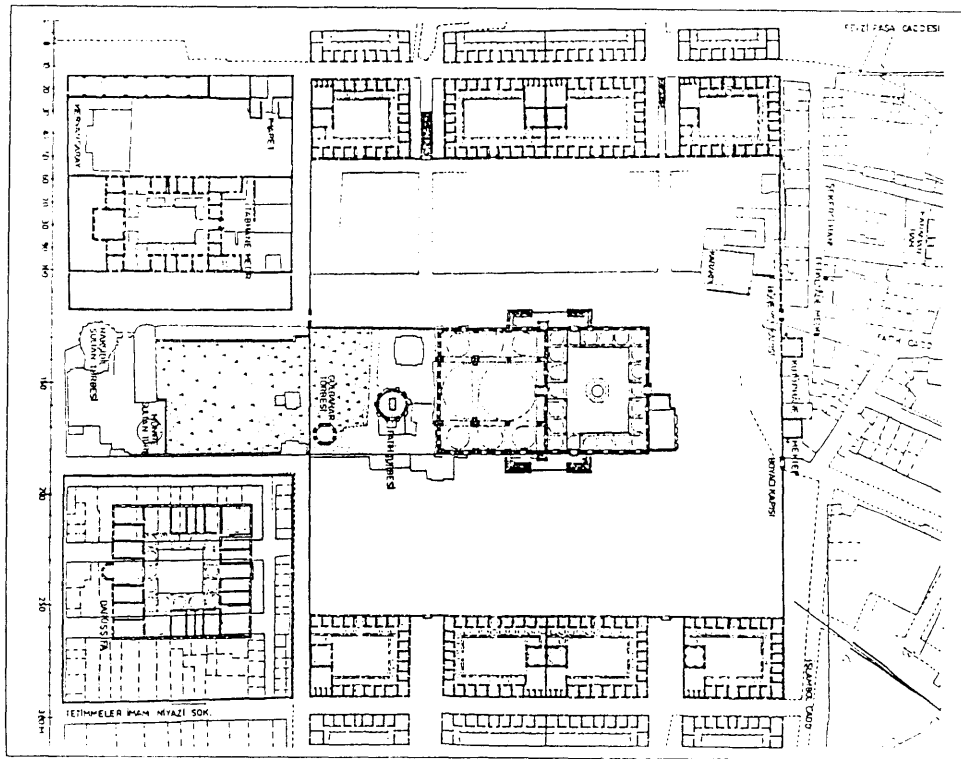
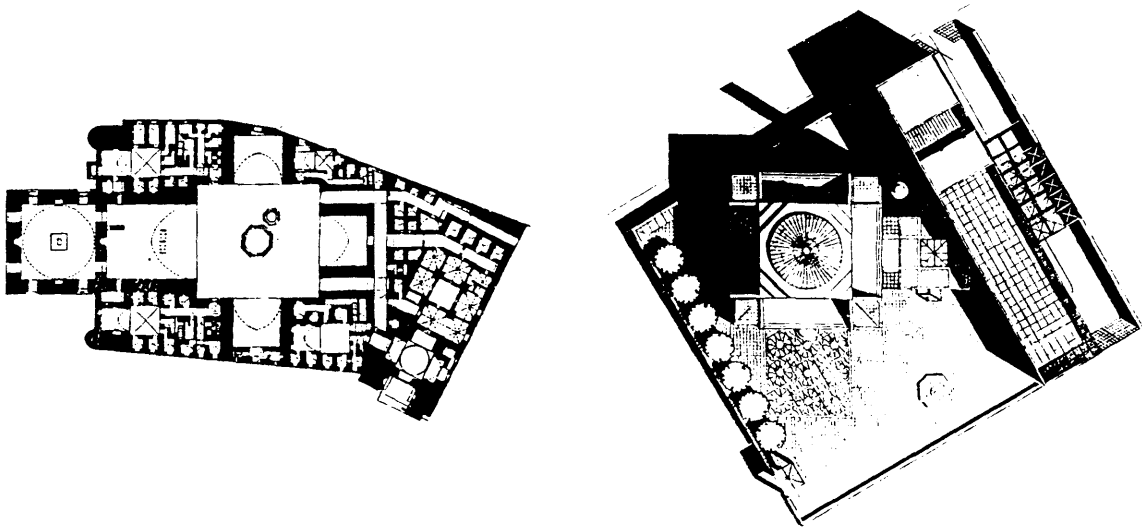


Fig. 19. Mosque-madrassa and mausoleum of Sultan Hassan , Cairo (top left).

Fig. 20. The Islamic Cultural Center of Manhattan, New York (top right).

Fig. 21. Fatih Kulliyesi, Istanbul (bottom).

CHAPTER V

Islamic architecture in America between ideals and practice: the work of Gulzar Haider

Chapter V:

Islamic architecture in America between ideals and practice: the work of Gulzar Haider

Gulzar Haider has been involved in the design of a number of Islamic community centers in North America, and has written a considerable amount on the subject of Islamic architecture. His own personal experience as an immigrant architect, as well as his architectural contributions in North America are relevant to this discussion. He received his higher education at the University of Illinois, Urbana where he gained an M. S. in Structures in 1962, a B. Architecture in 1968, and a Ph. D. in 1969. During his school years at the University of Illinois, he became active within the Muslim students community and participated in 1963 in establishing the Muslim Students Association of the U.S.A. and Canada, MSA.¹ Since 1977, Gulzar Haider has been a professor at the School of Architecture at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada.

I have met twice with Gulzar Haider and visited the building he designed for the Islamic Society of North America in Plainfield, Indiana-ICNA, which is the focus of our discussion of Haider's work. The sources for this study are the architect's own accounts of this building as well as a number of writings on issues related to the Islamic city², cosmology in Islamic architecture,³ and the subject of Islamic architecture in non-Islamic environments. In addition to ICNA, two other built projects, the Johesboro Mosque, Arkansas, and the Ahmadiyya Center in Canada, as well as the design studio taken as a student by Haider, are referred to in this study in order to identify the persistent themes and the changing directions of his work. The intention behind this study is to gain further understanding of the influence of the changing intellectual and architectural ethos in America on the development of the philosophical thinking of an architect who, being an immigrant Muslim, is very much involved in the question of Muslim identity and its relationship to representation in architecture.

¹ Haider, Gulzar, "Space and the Practicing Architect", *Expressions of Islam in Buildings: Proceedings of an International seminar sponsored by the Aga Khan Award for Architecture and the Indonesian Institute of Architects*, held in Jakarta and Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 15-19 October, 1990, p. 155.

² Haider, Gulzar, "Habitat and values in Islam: a conceptual formulation of an Islamic city", *The Touch of Midas: Science, Values, and Environment in Islam and the West*, (Ziauddin Sardar, ed.), Manchester, UK.: Manchester University Press, 1984, pp. 170-208.

³ Haider, Gulzar, "Islam, Cosmology and Architecture", *Theories and Principles of Design in the Architecture of Islamic Societies*, The Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1988, pp. 73-85.

V. I. The background of the architect's views on Islamic architecture in North America:

There are four main influences on the development of Haider's architectural thinking particularly in the period preceding his involvement in the design of the Islamic Center of North America-ICNA: his modern educational background, his objection to what he saw as the negative implications of modern architecture on the physical environments of the Islamic world, his reaction to the Oriental representation of Islamic architecture in America, and his often frustrating personal experience with the clients committees of Islamic community centers.

Following an initial embracing of modernism in the sixties and for the most part of the seventies, his attitudes towards architecture in general, and in particular to the question of design for Muslims, started to change during his sabbatical leave in Saudi Arabia in 1977-78, and the accompanied travels through Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey: "I saw the destructive and alienating forces of architecture in the name of development, progress, and civilizational fast-tracking. I also experienced the ecology of architecture, literature, belief, philosophy, commerce, culture, and craft. It dawned on me for the first time that architecture was a formative energy of culture rather than a mute expression of it." ⁴

In his travels around America, Gulzar Haider has been greatly disturbed by what he terms as the "Thousand and One Nights" image of Islam predominant in America.⁵ This is typified in the immaculate Moorish style building, the Shrines Headquarters in Pittsburgh popularly know as the 'Syrian mosque' complete with calligraphic inscriptions faithfully copied from the Alhambra. He also mentions the town hall of Opa-Locka, Florida, or the Fox Theater, Atlanta, also built like mosques. Haider explains that for Americans, the image of Islam and its architecture are encapsulated in such exotic buildings, as well as in the domes and arches that embellish local Arab restaurants. This was something from which he was determined to escape, only to find that among many of his Muslim clients in America, there were some equally rigid ideas of how a mosque should look.⁶ "Little wonder that whenever a Muslim bank publishes a calendar of mosques, their torn pages start to appear in the mosque committee meetings. I have also the unique honor of having

⁴ Haider, Gulzar, "Space and the Practicing Architect", *Op. Cit.*, p. 159.

⁵ Haidar, Gulzar, "Islamic architecture in non-Islamic environments", in *Places of public gathering in Islam*, AKP 5th seminar, Geneva, 1980, p. 123.

⁶ From an interview with Gulzar Haider titled: "For America; A Modern Mosque", in: *Arabia: The Islamic World Review*, # 13, P. 70.

received a childlike paste-up calendar made of cutouts collected by a member of the community who owns an auto-body repair shop."⁷

Haider's experience with client committees, which started after his graduation in 1969, has often been troublesome, and has been one of the most influential experiences in his architectural practice. He describes his first such experience when he was called by the Ottawa Muslim Association to "... perform a minor miracle of designing a mosque with infinite space and zero cost. That was the beginning of a relationship marked by extreme loyalty and utter frustration. It surprises me, and ever worries me, that I survived that committee for sixteen months. The mosque was finally built six years later, but thank God I was not the designer....There is, or has been, a committee like this in every Muslim urban population in North America."⁸ He identifies four domains of confrontation between the architect and the Muslim committee for the mosque project. These are (i) the size of the program, (ii) the sources of funds (from total self reliance on community resources to resorting to the art of "organized begging"), (iii) the opposing forces of volunteers and professionals, which he considers as one of the most crucial issue in this relationship, and (iv) the recurrent issue of architectural expression. On the first issue, he points out that the program often starts "From the grandiose schemes of a complete Islamic campus, to a humble warehouse cleaned and fixed by weekend volunteers,..... most clients go through the battle between their grand imaginations and harsh realities."⁹

V. 2. Universality and tradition: the Islamic Center of North America-ICNA:

In 1979, the Muslim Students Association of the USA and Canada (MSA) decided to centralize its numerous activities by establishing a headquarters in Plainfield, Indiana. The project was designed by Gulzar Haider, while the detailed construction documents were produced by the associated architect, Mukhtar Khalil, AIA, of Dana Architects and Planners of Chicago and the building was completed in 1983. The 84-acre site has been reserved for a number of facilities including a headquarters building comprising a mosque for five hundred people, a research library, and an office complex, in addition to a school, dormitories for five hundred short-term residents, staff housing for seven families, and

⁷ Haider, Gulzar, "Space and the Practicing Architect", *Op. Cit.*, p. 158.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 157

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

recreational and outdoor sports facilities. Only the mosque and library were built, in addition to part of the landscaping. The office complex is expected to be built in the near future but, as the architect points out, it will most likely be constructed according to a different design prepared by another architect who has been commissioned by the ICNA's new committee of clients.

The headquarters building is set amidst an elaborate landscaping with a formal front plaza and a free-standing minaret which is not as yet built.. The three elements of this building, the mosque, the library and the office block, form a unified scheme in which the mosque and the office block are placed on one axis and the library is located on an axis perpendicular to the first axis. The architect describes the symbolism of his design thus: "A mosque is a space celebrating man's servitude to God. The office building is an arena of work for Islam and its society in North America. The library is a research facility upholding the Quranic ideal that only through knowledge, intellect and contemplative thought does Man ascend to higher levels of belief and action."¹⁰

The bipolar relationship between the mosque and the office building is emphasized by the opposed orientations of both elements of the scheme, which in plan look like two arrow-heads pointing away from each other. This perception is created by the introduction of the rectangular space linking the two squares of the mosque and the office block which forces the deformation of the two squares by eliminating one of their corners and in the process becoming outwardly in their opposing direction. This tension between the two poles of the scheme is then subdued through various landscaping devices, using the front pool plaza and the stepping terraces around the building, in an effort to tie the two main elements back together. Although the library is immediately visible from the main entrance of the complex, it does not seem to fit comfortably in the overall scheme, and this is clearly evident in plan. The library block seems to be only accidentally related to the entrance lobby and to be simply stuck on the body of the bipolar arrangement of the mosque and the office block, sharing a similar informal relationship to this scheme as that of the front plaza and the isolated minaret.

The architect's intention behind this bipolar relationship is to express "the mutually essential and interdependent nature of the prayer and work",¹¹ so that "the sacred and mundane are to be integrated through continuity and juxtaposition, yet differentiated by the

¹⁰ "For America; A modern mosque," *Op. Cit.*, p. 71.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

character of space and form."¹² The scheme, in its geometric configurations, seems to express the opposing tendencies of these two elements as well as their interdependent nature. Such a duality may be interpreted as a statement about the realities of Muslim life in America which is often characterized by the tension between adhering, on the one hand, to Islamic convictions, and on the other, to the practical aspects of daily life. This duality seems to be reinforced by a sense of fragmentation in the unresolved relationship of the library to the bipolar arrangement of the mosque and the office block. Moreover, the minaret stands isolated and the pool plaza, which would have traditionally related to the world of pleasure or contemplation, has become in this project a mere front plaza which is not well integrated into the whole scheme. The isolation of the headquarters building from the rest of the project, which includes the school and the extensive residential quarters, further reinforces this fragmentation. It can again be interpreted as an expression of the particularities of modern living and the adaptation of the Muslim community to such realities. Such fragmentation, however, seems to clearly deny the architect's intention of integrating the sacred and the mundane, which is characteristic in a traditional Islamic environment, and emphasizes instead their juxtaposition and alienation in a non-Islamic environment.

The symbolic principles of ICNA; Gulzar Haider and the *Sense of Unity*:

In his design of the Islamic Center of North America, Gulzar Haider raises important issues about the relationship between symbolism and identity in Islamic architecture in America. There are two main themes that he refers to in his design for ICNA; the Islamic concept of the "Hidden" and the "Manifest", and the classical principles of geometry related to the dome and the cube. Haider uses these two themes as guiding principles for the architectural image of the mosque and for the articulation of its formal structure. This design approach is strongly influenced by the "mystical" school of thought represented in cultural interpretation by Seyed Hossein Nasr and, in architecture by Nadar Ardalan and Laleh Bakhtiar. Haider clearly states that he is indebted to *The Sense of Unity*, "for an initiation into the relationship between the esoteric philosophy of Islam and its architectural expression."¹³

According to the mystical approach, there exists a duality between the inner and the outer beauty. This concept is derived from the works of Muslim scholars such as al-Ghazali,

¹² Haider, Gulzar, "Islamic Architecture in Non-Islamic Environments," *Op. Cit.*, p.123.

¹³ Haider, Gulzar, "Space and the Practicing Architect", *Op. Cit.*, p. 166.

who states that: "...he who appreciates the inner values more than the outer senses, loves the inner values more than the outer ones."¹⁴ Nadar Ardalan approaches the subject of artistic expression with a unique interest in the spiritual manifestations in the works of Islamic art and architecture. "The traditional artist creates the external art form in the light of the inspiration which he has received from the spirit; in this way the art form is able to lead man to the higher states of being and ultimately to Unity."¹⁵ He emphasizes the notion that the artistic creations of Muslims are related to Islam itself, and that they are bearers of meaning of the cosmic and natural orders. Accordingly, the sources of Islamic art are to be found in the Qur'an: "Islamic art is no more than a reflection in the world of matter of the spirit and even the form of the Quranic revelation."¹⁶

Unity and the presence of the Almighty, in the mystical school of thought, are represented through geometry and numerology, and according to this point of view, creativity lies in the combination of squares, circles, triangles, polygons and so forth. Each number and figure, when seen in its symbolic sense, is an echo of Unity and a reflection of a quality contained in principle within that unity, which transcends all differentiation and all qualities and yet contains them in a principle manner."¹⁷ Accordingly, architecture is seen as an expressive medium reflecting the cosmological orders, and the architect is "he who geometricizes."¹⁸ This school of thought attempts to explain Islamic architectural forms in terms of this symbolism of the cube and the sphere which it relates to the Divine: "the square of the Ka'bah repeated in the classical courtyards and buildings is not just a square. It is also the symbol of stability and completion and a reflection of the quadrangular temple of paradise of which the Ka'bah itself is the earthly image."¹⁹ Also, according to Nasr "the octagonal form of so many mosques is not just an architectural device to enable the architect to place the dome upon a square base, but a reflection of the Divine Throne ('arsh), which according to Islamic traditions is supported by eight angels. The dome is not just a way to cover the walls. It is the image of the vault of heaven and beyond it of the infinite and illimitable world of the Spirit of which the sphere or circle is the most direct geometric symbol."²⁰

¹⁴ Quoted by Ettinghausen, R., "Al-Ghazali on Beauty", in *Islamic Art and Archeology Collected Papers*, Myriam Rosen-Ayalon ed., 1984, p. 19.

¹⁵ Ardalan, Nader, and Bakhtiar, Laleh, *The Sense of Unity*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973, p. 7.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. xi.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

The geometric principles of ICNA:

The design of the Islamic Center of North America is based on the geometric principles of the square, octagon and the dome which are used throughout the project as a consistent formal scheme, and are mostly expressed in the interlocking cubic forms of the mosque. Haider uses two octagons to express the importance of the two poles of his scheme, the mosque and the office building. Although the two octagons are equal in their dimensions, and are both enclosed by two equal squares, they are sharply distinguished from each other in their three dimensional configurations. The octagon of the mosque is covered with a dome, while that of the office block is roofed by a an octagonal skylight. Thus while the place of worship is self focused, sealed from nature and prevented from reaching upwards, that of work maintains its ties to the sky.

Haider bases his use of geometry in the design of the headquarters building of ICNA on al-Kindi's position on the symbolism of a sphere (the cosmos) and a cube (the earth),²¹ which is an important source for the mystical school of Nasr and Ardalan. He nevertheless acknowledges the Western sources of such forms, and the universal aspect of their application. He refers to the works of Plato on the correlation between the regular solids and the elements, and refers to the works of Western scholars such as K. Crichtelow (*Islamic Patterns*), and W. R. Lethaby (*Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*). He further points out that "in many cultures and traditions, domed spaces described as "majestic parasol" and "heavenly bowl" have sacred and celebrated connotations"²²

In the design of ICNA, Haider's use of the geometry of the sphere and the cube is based on a deep understanding of its historical and universal aspect, as "perhaps so fundamental to the psyche of man that he has used them to structure his observations, has given them concrete physical form, has attached symbolic meaning and optimal, even magical qualities to them and has derived pure aesthetic joy."²³ Haider's understanding of a primordial nature of this geometry together with his acknowledgment of the non-Islamic sources of such approach seems to depart from the essentialist position of Nasr and Ardalan which stresses the relationship of these forms to the Quranic Revelation.

²¹ Rescher, Nicholas: "Al-Kindi's Treatise on the Platonic Solids" , in *Studies in Arabic Philosophy*, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1966.

²² Haider, Gulzar, and Mukhtar Muhammad, "Islamic Architecture in non-Islamic Environments", unpublished paper on the Islamic Center of North America-ICNA, 1980, p. 34.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

The "veiling" of the mosque:

Haider sees the need to search for ways of expressing aspects of belief through architecture, rather than simply using conventional iconic references. Such an approach, he argues, can give physical expression to Muslim identity. He points out that "symbols whose purpose is to convey concrete substantive information are comparatively easier to grasp than those which are rooted in belief and tradition and whose purpose is to be catalytic towards a feeling and a state of mind. Such symbols can create an emotional community through common focus and congruent meaning."²⁴ His own interpretation of such aspects of tradition is best exemplified in his treatment of the architectural character of the ICNA mosque.

The ICNA mosque is characterized by its austere contemporary character and the absence of iconic references to traditional Islamic architecture. The solid walls of the exterior give little clues as to what is inside the building and narrow vertical slit windows widely spaced add to the building's sense of impenetrability. This is in contrast to the use of a large dome in the mosque hidden behind the tall walls and parapets, which comes as a pleasant surprise as one ventures from outside to the inside of the building. Haider justifies this contrast between the outside and the inside in terms of the idea of the Hidden, *al-Batin*, and the Manifest, *al-Zahir*,²⁵ which he sees as "...of special interest to architects in pursuit of the silent eloquence of space and the quintessential presence of form."²⁶ He states that through his experience of Islamic architecture he became very intrigued by these Divine attributes: "And in all the beautiful names of God, I searched for a special wisdom to guide the designer who must create but not confront, offer but not attack, and express profoundness in a language understandable and pleasing to the listener. .. I chose to distinguish the exterior from the interior. I chose to veil this mosque."²⁷

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

²⁵ *Al-Batin* (Hidden), and *al-Zahir* (Manifest) are two of the "Ninety-nine" *al-Asma' al Husna* (Beautiful Names of God). Nader Ardalan defines the world view constituting part of the Islamic perspective as one in which "...the universe is composed of a macrocosm and microcosm, each containing three great divisions: the body (*jism*), the soul (*nafs*), and the spirit (*ruh*).Two interpretations of this concept arise which, although apparently different, are essentially the same. In the first, God as Manifest (*Zahir*), is the reality of universal externalization. From within the concentric circles of the macrocosm, there is an outward movement from the earth as corporeal manifestation through an all-pervading soul to the enveloping Heavens, viewed as the seat of the Divine Spirit. In the second, complementary view of God as Hidden (*Batin*), there is an inward movement within the microcosm of man, beginning with his physical presence and moving towards his spiritual center, the "Hidden Treasure". The two schemes correspond to each other, at the same time that one is the reverse of the other." Ardalan, N., and Bakhtiar, L., *The Sense of Unity, Op. Cit.*, p. 11.

²⁶ Haider, Gulzar, "Space and the Practicing Architect", *Op. Cit.*, p. 166.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

Notwithstanding the mystical explanations for Haider's decision to veil the ICNA mosque, the contrast between the outside and inside of this building is also related to a number of cultural issues which he considers crucial to the design of Islamic architecture in America. Haider stresses the need to understand the importance of the complex aspects of architectural symbolism in a cross-cultural context and points out that: "symbols, words and language are essential to human discourse and realization of collective meaning. The physical context in which a symbol exists and the cultural, intellectual and emotional context representing those who observe a symbol are crucial to the meaning it conveys."²⁸ When talking about the ICNA project, he calls for an architectural expression that acknowledges the complexity of this cultural setting:

"This architecture should be expressive and understandable to all. It should employ a form language which for immigrant Muslims evokes a sense of belonging in their present and hope in their future. To indigenous Muslims it should represent a linkage with Muslims from other parts of the world, and should underscore the universality and unity of Islam. To new Muslims this architecture should invoke confidence in their new belief. To non-Muslims it should take the form of clearly identifiable buildings which are inviting and open, or at least not secretive, closed and forbidding"²⁹

According to Haider, the building addresses itself to Muslims through the concept of the *Zahir* and *Batin*, through the mystical geometry, and particularly through the cubic form of the mosque as a subliminal reminder of the Kaaba, the symbol of Unity. Moreover, he relates his decision of contrasting the inside from the outside to the context of Muslims being a minority living in America. He sees this contrast as symbolic of the fact that Islam in this country is a private matter of faith rather than a state religion as is the case in much of the Islamic world. "If the dome is symbolic of the esoteric and the divine, and the cube that of the esoteric and of the Earth then we consider it a befitting gesture to make the dome internally manifest and externally veiled."³⁰ Haider's quest for symbolism is understandable in the light of his exposure to the mystical school. But he constantly seems to be justifying his design decisions in terms of weak symbolic gestures. The argument of the building physically translating the Muslim symbolism of the "Hidden" and the "Manifest" is a case in point. It could just as easily be applied to Christianity, a matter of private faith in the United States, with its separation of religion and the state, where

²⁸ Haider, Gulzar, and Mukhtar, Muhammad, "Islamic Architecture in non-Islamic Environments", *Op. Cit.*, p. 32.

²⁹ Gulzar Haidar, "Islamic architecture in non-Islamic environments", *Op. Cit.*, p. 123.

³⁰ Haider, Gulzar, and Mukhtar, Muhammad, "Islamic Architecture in non-Islamic Environments", *Op. Cit.*, p. 35.

churches often have as contrasting exterior / interior relationship as the ICNA mosque. Furthermore, such gestures are difficult to grasp by the uninitiated mind and do not easily communicate to the collective emotions of the community. The rupture that has taken place over the last century in the intellectual and symbolic understanding of architecture in the Muslim milieu makes such mystical interpretations (which could well have been legitimate to Sufi builders in the past) less and less accessible to the members of the community particularly in an alien context.

The symbolism of the internalization of faith is overlaid with another important issue in Haider's mind when designing ICNA. This is the image of Islamic architecture in America. To Haider at the time of his design of ICNA, "an exterior dome, as such, is not a singular identity mark of a mosque. In North America a dome has more likelihood of creating inaccurate associations.....A dome is first and foremost a space to be experienced from within and much less to be observed from without."³¹ Moreover, the exterior of the building, in the choice of materials, details and fenestration is intended by Haider to be "sympathetic to North American indigenous architecture rather than any historic or modernized Islamic style."³² Yet contrary to the architect's prescriptions for Islamic architecture in America to be inviting and sympathetic to the dominant American culture, this building, in its dark-colored brick cladding and high solid walls with minimum opening, seems to be rather forbidding and secretive. Furthermore, its setting in the middle of a large open field surrounded by flat grounds of grass and parking areas contributes to an unfortunate sense of isolation and reinforces a sense of alienation of the Muslim community from its cultural context.

The rhetorical question of the "modern minaret":

Haider has pointed out to the rhetorical question of the "modern minaret" which, he recalls, was first raised by William Porter at the Aga Khan seminar in Fez, Morocco. Haider's position when he designed ICNA was against a contemporary interpretation of the minaret, on the ground that "there are no defensible generating forces for a newer form of a minaret. This is all the more true in the North American context. We run too much of a (risk of a) mistaken identity with look-out or transmission towers."³³ Oleg Grabar expressed a similar

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 35-6.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 35.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

position, when criticizing Venturi's inclusion of a minaret in the competition for the Baghdad mosque, on the grounds of what he argues as the redundancy of minarets in the contemporary world. He points out that "with loudspeakers and magnetic tapes, their specific pious or liturgical purposes are gone. With television towers and 20-story office buildings, their actual meaning within the urban order has disappeared. They remain as forlorn leftovers from an older time and, however well designed, seem nothing more than copies, magnified to the scale of the rest of the building, of older minarets."³⁴ Haider also states that: "The pursuit of a modern minaret is in itself indicative of the compulsion to seek change lest lack of change be taken as a sign of stagnation and cultural death."³⁵

In the design for the Islamic Center of North America, Haider points out that "the client's wish for the minaret led to much discussion. The only possibility that made sense within our theoretical position at that time was to re-construct a minaret from Al-Maghrib."³⁶ Haider justified his choice for the Al-Maghrib on the ground that it is the traditional Muslim West, hence the symbolic link with the American West. He also expressed his preference of the Maghribi minaret because of its simple square profile which he saw as compatible with the square geometric vocabulary of ICNA. This important free-standing feature of the project is set on a square podium that forms a sun dial, of which the center is the minaret itself. Its character, as indicated in the drawing resembles the Maghribi style, but it seems to be unmistakably 'oriental' in its decoration, which conflicts with the austerity of the rest of the project, and appears more reflective of those images of the *One Thousand and One Nights* which Gulzar is so critical of in the context of Islamic architecture in America.

The traditional character of the minaret, and its non-traditional siting as a free-standing object, raise a number of issues that seem to contradict the architect's early positions on the subject of expressing Islamic architecture in non-Islamic lands. Notwithstanding the symbolic link between Al-Maghrib and the West, the reconstructed minaret would have expressed a deep sense of alienation. Moreover, its foreign architectural language could not have supported what Haider envisioned for ICNA "as a generous gesture analogous to respecting the host's language and etiquette."³⁷ On the other hand, the transported historic minaret would have probably reinforced those stereotyped interpretations of mosque

³⁴ Grabar, Oleg, "From the past into the future: on Two Designs for State Mosques," in: *Architectural Record*, June 1984, p. 151.

³⁵ Haider, Gulzar, "Space and the Practicing Architect", *Op. Cit.*, p. 158.

³⁶ Haider, Gulzar, "The Architect's Record of ICNA", submitted to The Aga Khan Award for Architecture, 1991.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

silhouettes as perpetrated by Hollywood, which Haider is so opposed to, simply because of the continuing perception of this style as exotic in the eyes of the American public.

ICNA and Haider's appropriation of modern architecture:

Many years after his arrival in America, Haider recalls: "my total knowledge of the Muslim architectural tradition was based on my memories of Lahore, and my visual encounters with Pope's Survey of Persian Art and Architecture. But who cared about tradition then. I had not traveled across the oceans only to recall my past. I was totally innocent even of the potential choice between the old and the new. Old was the "problem", and solutions lay in the newness, the differentness in modernity."³⁸ In 1964, as a student at the University of Illinois, Haider was allowed to substitute one of his studio projects with the design of a mosque in America. His design approach for that mosque reflected the modern architectural thoughts of that time and his own misunderstanding of tradition, as he explained many years later that: "The shift of orientation of the Masjid-i-Shah against the great Maydan of Isfahan was posed as one of the problems that needed a new solution."³⁹ Of this first project Haider recalls:

"I confronted the problem by eliminating it. My prayer hall was circular in plan: a symbol of "unity" and free from the demands of orientation. I solved the problem of columns by invoking the long span virtues of a single inverted thin shell dish. I took the pool from the courtyard, made it much larger, and let my mosque float in it like a lotus. Finally, I proposed a bridge that was symbolically the path from the worldly parking lot to the other - worldly prayer hall.....Perhaps the most daring gesture was to propose large-scale calligraphy on top of the dome. The idea was to let the modern man in flight look down and recognize that it was a contemporary mosque in the West. My professors rated this project excellent. Three decades later it is a touch embarrassing to confess, but perhaps forgivable, that I was fully convinced of my high grade."⁴⁰

Yet in spite of this embarrassment, and the exposure to the mystical philosophy which is in many ways opposite to those modern concepts Gulzar employed in his studio design, many parallels can still be drawn between his first mosque in America and his design of ICNA. To begin with, there is the problem of directional neutrality of the circular plan of the studio project. In ICNA, his prayer hall is octagonal, a form that contains the possibility of a considerable equivalence of orientation although not the complete negation of direction

³⁸ Haider, Gulzar, "Space and the Practicing Architect", *Op. Cit.*, p. 155.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

implied by the circular mosque of his design studio. But then Gulzar Haider in ICNA, orients the entire complex towards Mecca, therefore again confronting the problem of Mecca orientation by eliminating it as an outstanding feature of the mosque alone.

On the other hand, as we have seen in the case of Dar al-Islam, Hasan Fathy confronted a similar problem differently in New Mexico. In both cases the site offered a total freedom for orientation, but Hassan Fathy chose to juxtapose the orientation of the mosque in relation to the rest of the project. Yet this too is unlike the Mosque of Isfahan, whose juxtaposition with the fabric of the city is not a symbolic gesture as it is in Dar al-Islam, but an outcome of satisfying the orientation to Mecca within a fabric that follows, in its general orientation, environmental and geographic necessities. Moreover, the orientation of the Mosque in Isfahan is not expressed at street level, where the building is surrounded by shops and the arcades of the Maydan which conform to the general orientation of the city. Yet in one respect, Haider's mosque, in its strong morphological relationship to the rest of the headquarters building and its clearly distinguished articulation, makes it sympathetic to the traditional prototype. It can be argued that Haider's decision in ICNA, not to follow the example of the Masjid-i- Shah, is not because it was still a problem to him as it was when he designed his studio mosque, but that it is a reflection of what can be considered as his quasi-modernist and rationalist approach at that early period of his career.

There are other similarities between the ICNA mosque and Haider's studio project. The columns that he saw as a problem, which he eliminated by using a single inverted shell dish, are evidently still seen as a problem in his ICNA mosque, this time he decides to use a complex system of 'overhanging concrete arches' which gives an uncomfortable sense of heaviness. Whereas in the school project he took the pool from the courtyard, made it larger, and let the mosque float in it, here he creates a whole plaza of pools in front of the building, which he intends as a symbolic "Prayer Rug".⁴¹ Moreover, the bridge that was the symbolic link between the parking and the mosque in the school scheme, has been replaced by a strong vehicular approach into the site, terminated by the ICNA mosque itself. In contrast to his school project, however, in the ICNA mosque there is no calligraphy on top of a dome to let the modern man in flight identify the "Islamicity" of the building, in fact there is no dome visible to the outsider at all.

The architectural character of ICNA may well reflect the architect's fascination with the

⁴¹ Haider, Gulzar, "The Architect's Record of ICNA", *Op. Cit.*

mystical interpretation of Islamic architecture. The adoption of abstract geometry in ICNA can be seen as a reflection of Haider's search for universal architectural solutions, but with which he can identify as a Muslim, because of the rootedness of these solutions in the Islamic architectural tradition. This architectural character can also be seen as an attempt at addressing complex cross-cultural issues, and the difficult question of expressing identity through form without having to resort to traditional imagery which did not appeal to his modern design sensibilities at the time. In ICNA, Haider can be seen to be working within the prevalent architectural thinking to which he was exposed in America, particularly that of Louis Kahn. His attempts at justifying his design decisions in mystical terms, may be considered a form of appropriating modern Western design philosophy as a physical expression of Muslim identity. ICNA is one of the significant examples of Islamic community centers in America because of such appropriation, justified by a narrative that essentializes architectural concepts, as well as by a considerable understanding of the past from the perspective of the concrete circumstances of the present.

V. 3. The assertion of identity; Haider's change of position from the "Hidden" to the "Manifest":

Since ICNA, Haider has been involved in the design of a number of projects, the most notable of which are the Islamic Center of Jonesboro, Arkansas, which was completed in 1984, and the Canadian national headquarters for the Ahmadiyya Movement which was completed in 1991. These two projects illustrate the shift in the architect's design philosophy, from the quasi-modernism of ICNA towards a kind of free-eclecticism with a conscious attempt at communicating through recognizable imagery drawn from traditional Islamic architecture. The Jonesboro mosque, is the more significant of the two because it comes only three years after ICNA, and yet already shows a considerable shift in the architect's design sensibilities.

The Jonesboro mosque was commissioned by a Saudi Arabian patron for a small number of Muslim students on the campus of the University of Arkansas. In this building, Haider uses recognizable traditional imagery such as the striped red and white masonry, the entrance portal, the "modern" Turkish minaret, and the bold decorative brick frieze of Kufic calligraphy containing Quranic verses that warps around the building. Nadar Ardalan gives an explanation for the architectural character of this mosque by pointing out that "The mosque design was very influenced by the cultural origins of the congregation, for it is of a

Saudi Arabian style,"⁴² The notion of seeing the architecture of an immigrant Muslim group as an expression of the architectural heritage of this group's home country, seems to suggest a curious form of "transplanted regionalism" which, as we have seen earlier, is a common phenomenon among the Islamic community centers in America, and which Haider himself questioned in his design of ICNA.

The use of the striped masonry in particular is evocative of romantic images of Islamic architecture, and can probably be seen as rooted in the American perception of this architecture in a place like Opa-locka, something that Haider was opposed to earlier in his career. This association between the mosque and the images of fantasies in the American eyes seems to undermine the integrity of the mosque as a religious institution, and to include Quranic calligraphy in such a controversial representation is to belittle the messages of these verses. Despite these implications for the potential misunderstanding of the message of the mosque in America, Ardalan still sees the Jonesboro mosque as "a modest, yet significant statement regarding the concept of a mosque in a non-Muslim environment."⁴³

In a number of ways, the Jonesboro mosque must be seen as the antithesis to the austere functionality of the Plainfield mosque. To begin with, it is a triumph of exterior imagery through the use of icons and therefore raises profound questions about the architect's earlier commitments to his own interpretation of the concept of the "Hidden" and the "Manifest", which he employed in the design of ICNA. It reflects a perception of architecture as a mere tool for the assertion of rigid ethnic identities of Muslim groups, rather than its potential for questioning such assertions, particularly in an alien environment. It can also be seen as a contradiction to his earlier opposition to the exotic depiction of Islamic architecture in places like Hollywood and Opa-locka. What the Jonesboro mosque illustrates, in its playful imagery, and in its use of history as a kit of portable accessories, is an attempt to create a place where identity might be reclaimed in the midst of alienation, but in the process it also produces a popularized and indulgent architecture that seems to convey "... a sense of some search for a fantasy world, the illusory 'high' that takes us beyond current realities into pure imagination",⁴⁴ as some kind of theatrical performance. On the other hand it may be argued that the architectural character

⁴² Ardalan, Nadar, "Architects in America, Design for Islamic Cultures", *Arts and the Islamic World* no. 3, Autumn 1985, p. 48.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 49.

⁴⁴ Harvey, David, *The Condition of Postmodernity, An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, p. 97.

of this building complies with Haider's earlier point about respecting the host culture and etiquette in the design for Muslims in the West, especially his call for a dialogue with the dominant culture. This may be seen so because the Jonesboro mosque communicates in the same postmodern language that America understands today.

Almost ten years after ICNA, Haider was commissioned to design the Canadian national headquarters mosque for the Ahmadiyya Movement. He points out that: "This community, declared out of Islamic bounds, suffering consequences that come with such 'doctrinal eviction', and now immigrant in Canada and U.S.A., wanted all the architectural help to express their Islamic presence in Canada. Quite understandably, from their position, they chose to call this the Bait-ul-Islam, i.e., the 'House of Islam'. The formative directive this time was the pronouncement, the assertion through architecture, rather than the anonymity through dissimulation."⁴⁵ Haider opted in this project for a fully fledged use of domes, minarets, and arches, with an eclectic reference to Mamluk domes, Yemeni minarets, among other Islamic architectural traditions, assembled in a monumental look befitting a classical North American State Capitol building. In this project, Haider seems to be moving closer to a neo-traditionalist position, in which emphasis is on recreating "visual authenticity" and linking such approach to the idea of fulfilling the client's wish for the re-assertion of a denied identity through architecture, thus opting for quick emotional remedies for serious cultural issues. In all this, it may be argued that Haider is being consistent on the issue of communicating to the host culture, in view of the increasing emphasis in North America on the virtues of diversity and multiculturalism.

V. 4. The persistence of the "cycle of representation":

One of the most important themes in the work of Gulzar Haider is his constant attempt at addressing the relationship between architectural expression and the question of identity in Islamic architecture. This is understandable in the light of his background and that of his clients as immigrant Muslims in the West, as well as the symbolic nature of his projects. His work and his writings can be seen to demonstrate a deep and consistent understanding of the Muslim sense of identity in an alien environment. What has changed over time, however, is his interpretation of such identity into architectural form which reflects his accommodation of the changing socio-political atmosphere in the American context, and its

⁴⁵ Haider, Gulzar, "Space and the Practicing Architect", *Op. Cit.*, pp. 160-1.

influence on architectural thinking. He wrote of ICNA ten years after its completion:

"The ICNA Mosque is primarily a rhetoric, simultaneously questioning and answering. It questions literal transplant of alien tradition. It offers the possibility of purposeful dissimulation. It negotiates between the 'expressed' reality eager to be understood by the host culture and the 'reserved' reality: a sensorium of memories, ablution, *Qiyam*, resonant recitation, layered light, *Rokuh*, Heavenly Dome, *Sojood*, directed niche and infinite plane of *Salat*. It is not a sign board mosque and yet as experienced, it is nothing but a *Masjid*."⁴⁶

Haider can be seen here to refer again to the "Hidden" and the Manifest", but replaces these abstract Divine attribute with terms such as "reserved" and the "expressed", used in relation to cross-cultural relationships, the realities of negotiating Muslim existence in an alien land. He points out that because ICNA does not follow the conventional image of a mosque does not take away from its purpose; it is a mosque because of what goes in it in terms of rituals, and stresses the importance of these rituals as a "sonorium of memories" which allow the maintenance of this identity. However, he discovers, over the years, that such memories are not enough to sustain the immigrants' hunger for their roots, and that recognizable imagery is as important as rituals for the Muslim immigrant's psyche. Haider himself points out that: "It is fascinating that the clients who were very proud of this building a decade ago have now started to express what a Freudian might diagnose as a 'dome and minaret envy'."⁴⁷

Haider still views with reservation the tendency to inflict nostalgia on buildings. He cites his first encounter with a Muslim community which prayed in a small English house in Wimbledon over thirty years ago, when an old man expressed the community's pride in their mosque even though it did not have the looks of a mosque. He recalls when visiting the same building twenty-five years later: "the house mosque is now wrapped in white glazed tiles, there is an apology of an entrance arch, there are some green bands, and the roof has acquired a small dome and a minaret." He wonders as to what has happened over the years. "Why did they feel compelled to "Islamicize" that English house by the stick-on-signs?"⁴⁸ Yet, as an immigrant Muslim himself, he can be seen to have gone through a similar transformation as that of the Wimbledon community. His many years in exile may have re-awakened in him a sense of nostalgia for the past, and the constant confrontations with modernity may probably have pushed him towards the free use of imagery in his later projects, "the dome and minaret complex", in which he feels the need to assert his identity.

⁴⁶ Haider, Gulzar, "The Architect's Record of ICNA", *Op. Cit.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

While Haider continues to question the use of pastiche, he has always been concerned with the relationship between symbolism and geometry with architectural ordering principles to be found in deep-rooted traditions, and with ways of achieving refined aesthetics. His change of position from a quasi-modernist in ICNA, to an eclectic postmodernist in Jonesboro, to a neo-traditionalist in Ahmadiyya, can be seen to reflect the larger ethos of "the condition of postmodernity" in the context of America. It may also indicate a rather uncritical acceptance of the fashions of the architectural profession, as well as the wishes of a Muslim immigrant clientele seeking to reassert its identity through architectural form. This raises the important issue of the relationship between architecture as an autonomous discipline and architecture as a product of the cultural politics of identity and illustrates that architects can not ignore the powerful socio-economic and political forces that affect cultural production. Haider's use of imagery, despite his constant criticism of the stereotyped images of Muslims in Oriental architecture in America, is a clear indication of the overwhelming influence of Western representation of the "Other", and the difficulty, even for an enlightened Muslim intellectual, of escaping from its cycle.



Fig. 22 The Islamic Center of North America, ICNA, Plainfield, Indiana: master plan.

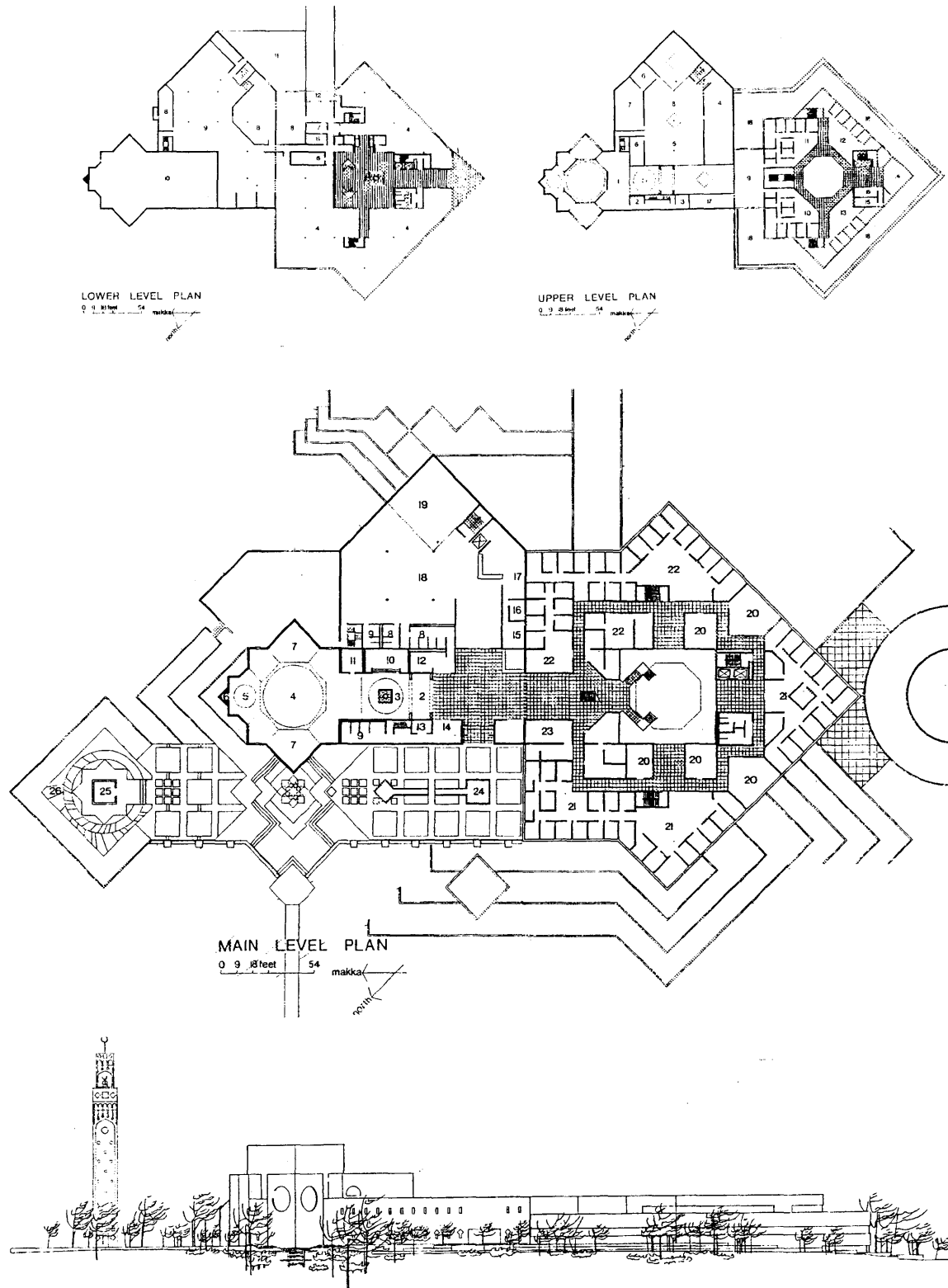


Fig. 23 The Islamic Center of North America, ICNA, Plainsfield, Indiana: plans and main elevation.

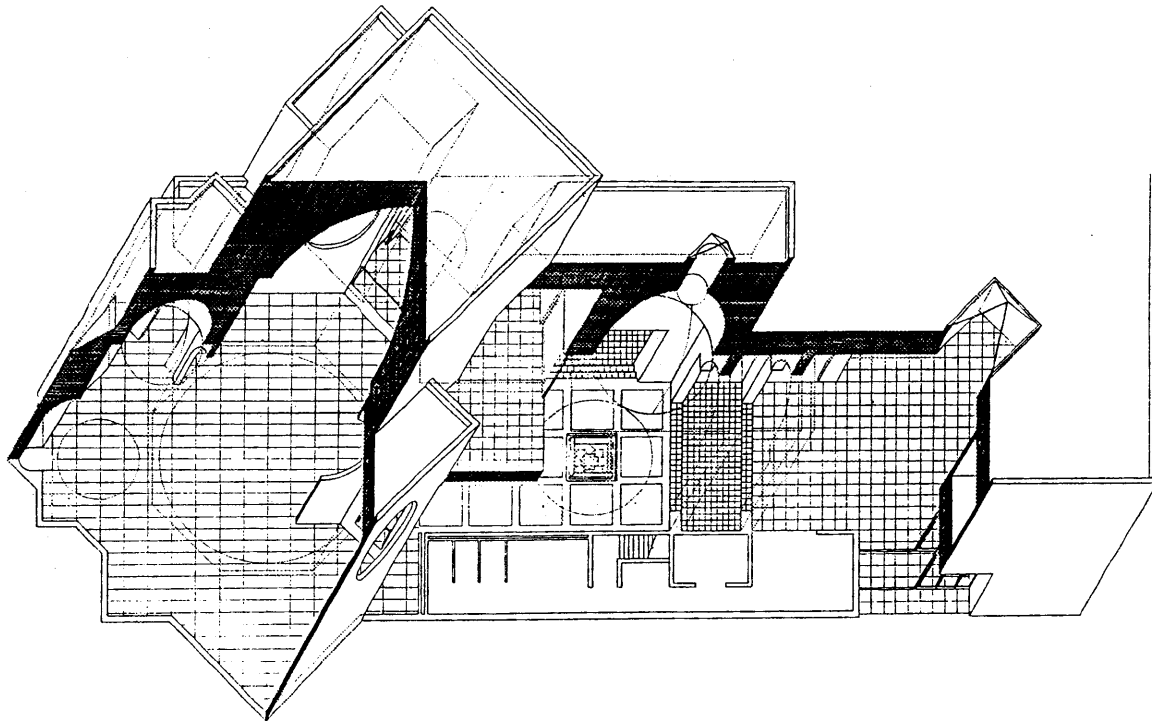
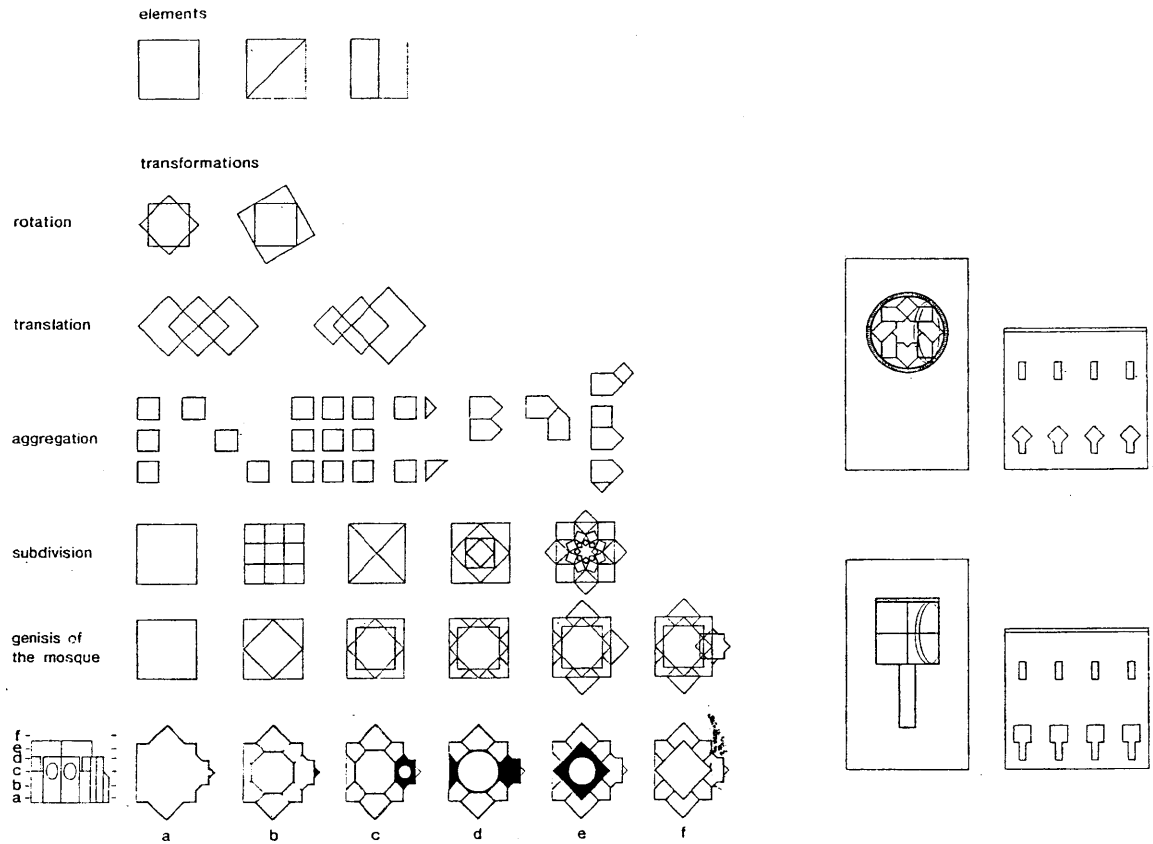


Fig. 24 The geometric principles of the Islamic Center of North America, ICNA (top).

Fig. 25 Axonometric of the Islamic Center of North America, ICNA (bottom).

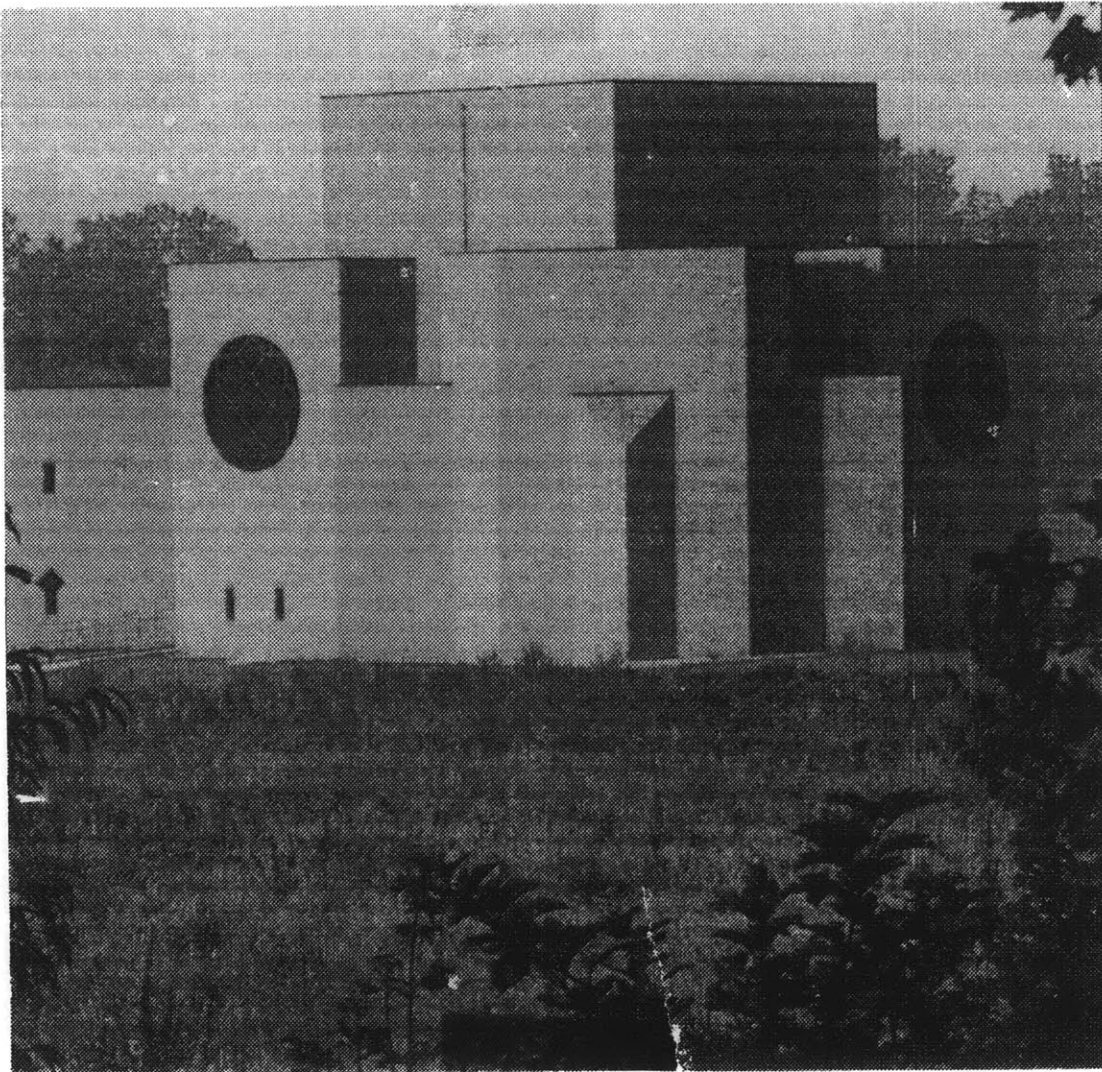
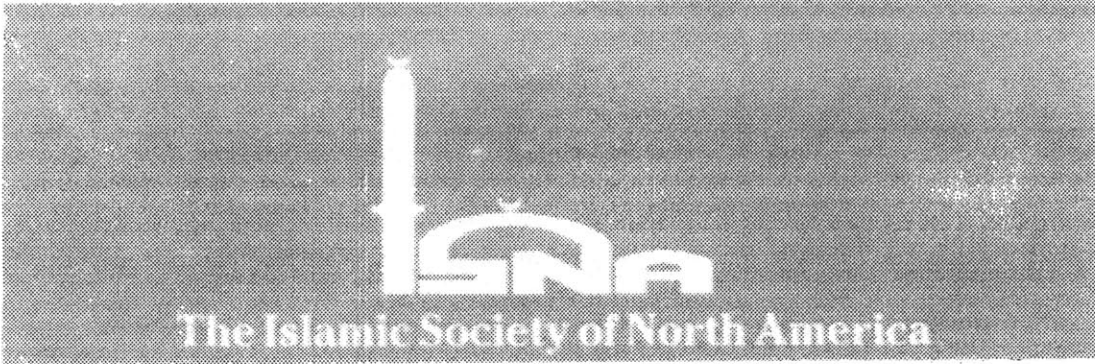


Fig. 26 The Islamic Center of North America, ICNA, Plainsfield, Indiana: Note the iconic reference of the logo of the society.

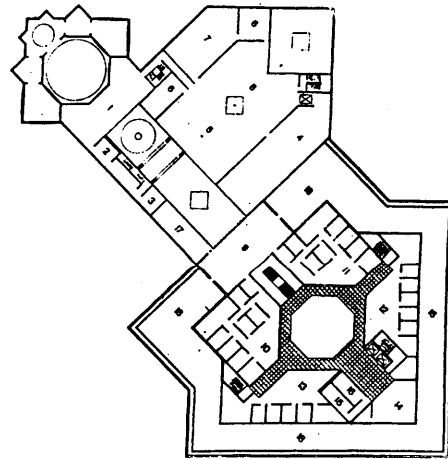
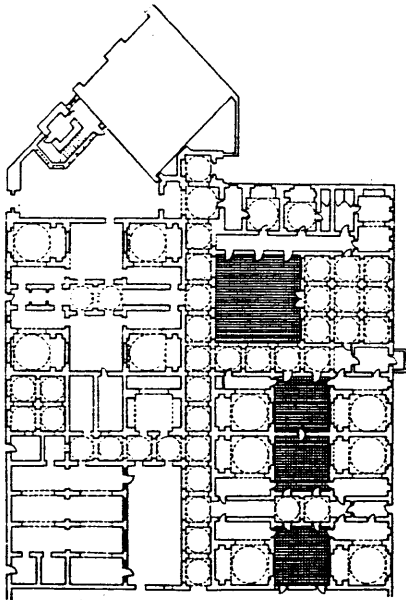
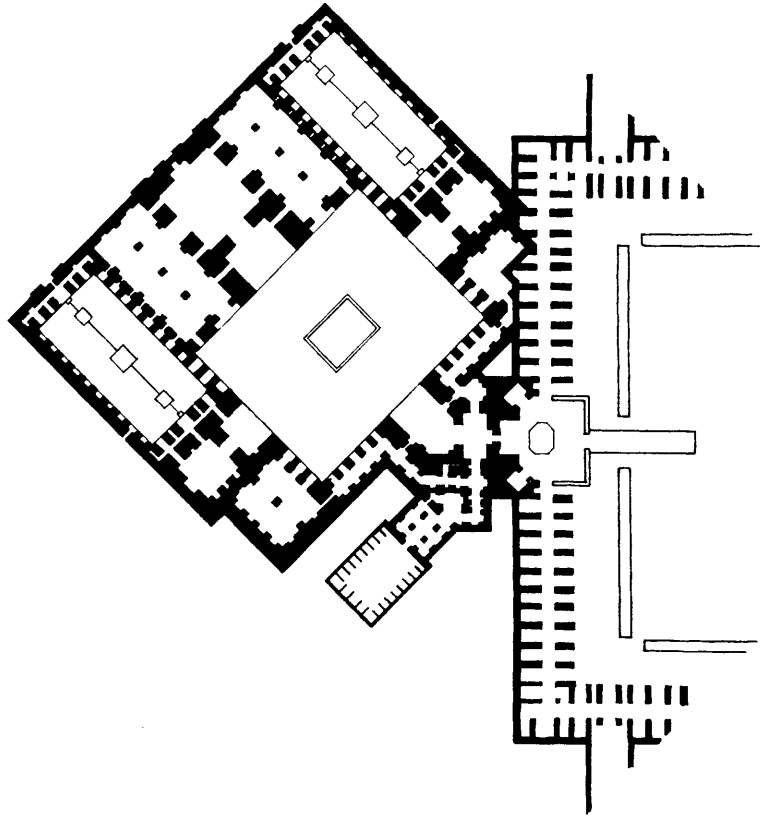


Fig. 27 The Masjid-i-Shah, Isfahan (top).

Fig. 28 Dar al-Islam, Abiquiu, New Mexico (bottom left).

Fig. 29 The Islamic Center of North America, ICNA, Plainfield, Indiana (bottom right).

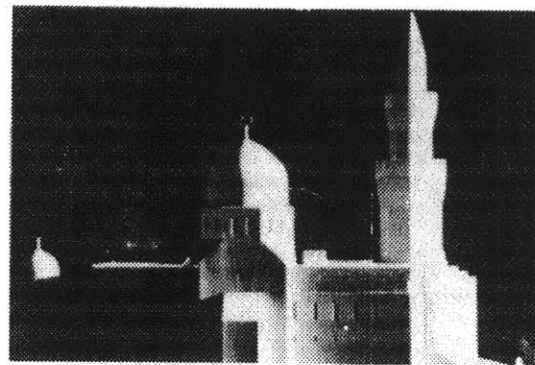
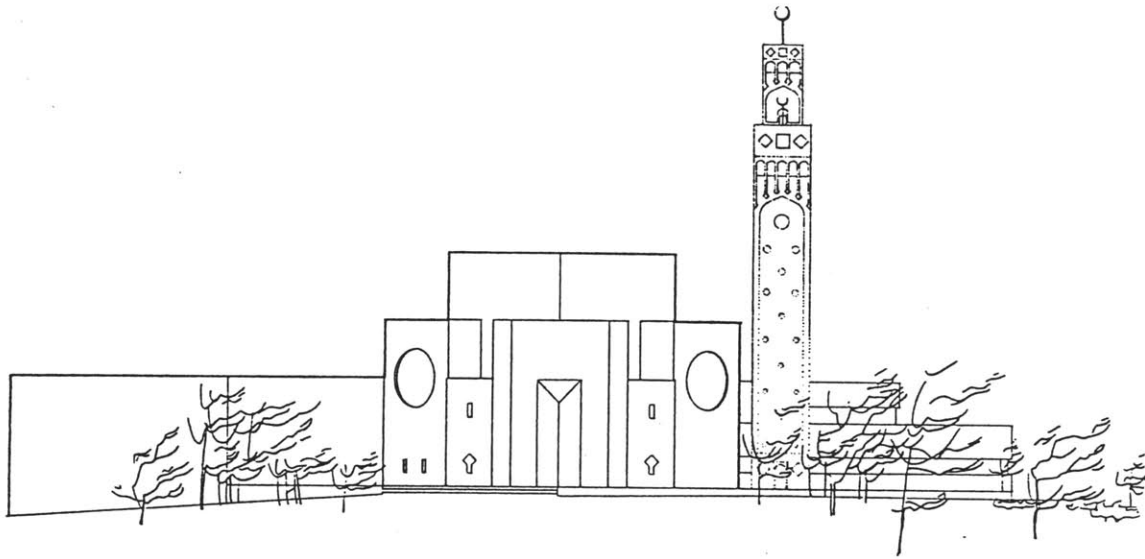


Fig. 30 The Islamic Center of North America, ICNA, Plainfield, Indiana (top).

Fig. 31 Jonesboro Mosque, Arkansas (bottom left).

Fig. 32 Bait-ul-Islam Mosque, Toronto, Canada. Model (bottom right).

REFLECTIONS

REFLECTIONS

The presence of Muslims as a minority in America raises a complex range of cross-cultural issues that have an important bearing on the architecture that houses their activities as a community. The philosophical context for the present review of the nature of the evolution of an American-Muslim identity supports the virtues of ethnic diversity over assimilation, but denies the need for the assertion of a stable kind of identity. Muslims in America are performing a precarious balancing act between, on the one hand, maintaining issues of Islamic convictions and the Muslim way of life and, on the other, adapting to the complex circumstances of being in the West. Their adaptation to these circumstances could be seen as potentially enriching to both Muslims and non-Muslims in America. Their physical detachment from the Islamic world, and their sense of cultural isolation in America, may at times give them a sense of rootlessness, but it is this very condition which can allow them to judge themselves as well as the dominant American culture with "the spiritual detachment and generosity necessary for true vision,"¹ and may eventually enable them to forge a vibrant renewal of their way of life. As Gulzar Haider puts it: "Muslims in the non-Islamic West are undoubtedly grounded but not yet rooted. Theirs is a promising exile: a freedom of thought, action, and inquiry that is unknown in the contemporary Muslim world. They are challenged by a milieu that takes pride in oppositional provocations."²

These constant negotiations, adaptations and confrontations are manifested in the evolution of the idea of Islamic community centers in America, and have surfaced on the architectural character of most of these buildings. This architecture illustrates issues related to a culture in exile attempting, through architectural form, to re-establish continuity and stability, to express identity, to maintain forms of collective memory and to constantly search for visual authenticity. It also strives, though less frequently, at reinterpreting its past in contemporary language, and tries to consciously avoid stagnation through innovation and departure from traditional norms. Nevertheless, this architecture has also been substantially influenced by the already established myths about Islamic architecture in the eyes of the American public, and is naturally conditioned by the practices of the architectural profession in America. In addition, the architecture of the Islamic community center can be seen as a manifestation of the general discourse on Islamic architecture, and of the role of

¹ Said, Edward, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1978, p. 259.

² Haider, "Gulzar, Space and the practicing architect", *Expressions of Islam in buildings*, Proceedings of an international seminar sponsored by the Aga Khan Award for Architecture and the Indonesian Institute of Architects, held in Jakarta and Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 15-19 October 1990, p. 164.

Western scholarship in its evolution. The relationship between identity and iconic references in the context of this study should therefore be seen within its global setting because of the increasing universalization of ideas about "contemporary Islamic architecture", which constantly move back and forth between the West and the Islamic world, through architectural scholarship, competitions and commissions.

In her book *Displaying the Orient*, Zeynep Celik talks about the patterns of cultural representations encountered in nineteenth century international expositions, arguing that these representations are still influencing the images of Islamic cultures in the eyes of the West. Moreover, she adds that Islamic cultures "... continue to display themselves according to images drawn through the eyes of others, with references that rely heavily on nineteenth century legacies and that broadcast simultaneously old and new value systems. This complex and multilayered dialectic - within each culture and between cultures - may play the most important role in the rapidly changing cultural definitions of the late twentieth century."³

The architecture of Islamic community centers in America can be seen as an exemplary product of this "complex and multilayered dialectic"; it reflects multiculturalism in America, and it is certainly participating in an evolutionary process by which the Muslim minority and the dominant American culture view each other. As a result of this phenomenon, the character of Islamic community centers, like the identity of Muslim-Americans, can be seen as hybrid and dynamic. However, this architecture, in general, has not been conducive of positive cross-cultural understanding, mainly because it is linked in the American public perception to cultural stereotypes about Muslims in America which are perpetuated through stereotyped iconic references. It is also so because of the continuing, and hitherto *undeconstructed*, historic confrontation between Islam and the West.

The use of various forms of images among cultural groups may be seen as an important act by which each group defines its own identity in relation to those of the other groups. "Representation is a form of human economy, in a way, and necessary to life in society and, in a sense, between societies."⁴ Alan Colquhoun argues that the primitive arts had a representational quality, and the need for this quality persists today through the "iconic values" of technological products. He points out that "there seems to be a close parallel

³ Celik, Zeynep, *Displaying the Orient, The Architecture of Islam at the Nineteenth-Century World's Fairs*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, Berkeley, 1992, p. 198.

⁴ Said, Edward, "In the Shadow of the West", *Wedge*, Winter/Spring, 1985, # 7/8, p. 5.

between such systems and the way modern man still approaches the world. And what was true of primitive man in all the ramifications of his practical and emotional life - namely, the need to *represent* the phenomenological world in such a way that it becomes a coherent whole and logical system - persists in our organizations and more particularly in our attitudes towards the man-made objects of our environment."⁵

While acknowledging the fact that representation is a form of "human economy", there is a need for Muslims to be critical of the Western forms of representation, and there is an equal need to question what is perceived by them as the "authenticity" of the image. On the other hand, it can be argued that by insisting on the use of such iconic references in the new context of Muslims in America, it may be possible to force a critical reconsideration and a change of view of the other party with respect to them, and help reduce the politically charged aspects of their association with Muslims. By juxtaposing conflicting values against each other, a totally new perception might emerge in which the totalizing forces of fantasies and the politics of identity, which may be seen as oppositional, are blurred and deconstructed. The nature of the "multilayered dialectic" of Islamic architecture in America is already, to some extent, contributing to the challenging and problematizing of such totalizing views; a building such as Haider's Jonesboro mosque can not be simply seen as either fantasy or as the polemical statement of identity politics.

But the important point here is while such creative juxtapositions can help blur the boundaries between conflicting stereotyped images, the result may still be a representation of a new, complex stereotyped iconography. While such a form of hybrid representation, which can be compared to Derrida's 'undecidables', may work well in certain circumstances of pluralist cultural coexistence, it has a limited capability of contributing to cross-cultural understanding in the particular case of Muslims in America. What is crucial here is to go beyond merely trying to deconstruct the Western interpretation of these iconic references. There is a need to critically evaluate the very usefulness of such images, as inter-cultural mediators and as communicators of human values. It is understandable why such emotionally charged images of the mosque in the culturally complex setting of America, are increasingly perceived by Muslims as significant forms of self-representation, and by non-Muslims as forms of authority which are expressive of Islam. The circulation of conflicting messages between the Muslim minority and the majority American culture can lead to undesirable confrontations. This is exemplified, as we have seen, by the

⁵ Colquhoun, Alan, "Typology and Design Method", *Essays in Architectural Criticism*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1982, p. 44.

removal of the dome of the former Islamic Center of Christiansburg in the course of its transformations into a church. The promises of cultural diversity and its manifestation in the multilayered character of the architecture of Islamic community centers in America must therefore be looked at critically in order to avoid the inherent dangers of idealizations in a world which is still largely based on ingrained myths as well as the concrete realities of conflict and confrontation.

From another angle, we have seen that Muslims in America, in their efforts at self-representation through the architecture of their community centers, have often unconsciously expressed themselves in the very language of myths and fantasies of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Edward Said acknowledges the difficulty of escaping from this cycle of representation, and therefore advocates a participatory and collaborative process, rather than an authoritative one. He suggests that "... first we must identify those social-cultural-political formations which would allow for a reduction of authority and increased participation in the production of representations, and proceed from there."⁶ Such reduction of authority in architecture requires a thorough questioning of the established conceptions about Islamic architecture in the minds of Muslims in America, and in particular a critical analysis of issues of continuity with the past and ways of maintaining collective memory through form. It also require research into the relationship between form and the perception of power and identity in a multi-cultural setting.

The understanding of the issue of the relevance of the past and the importance of collective memory is crucial to the development of Islamic architecture in general. It has been argued that Islamic culture was, to begin with, not based on values that can be interpreted in recognizable architectural form. "Except for the Arabic alphabet, there was no coherent, consistent, and reasonably pan-Islamic acceptance of visually perceived symbols; there was no clearly identifiable sense, even of forms considered to be one's own, culturally discrete ... that it is not the forms which identify Islamic culture and by extension the Muslim's perception of his architecture, but sounds, history, and a mode of life."⁷ It has also been argued that "spiritual continuity with the past is not a formal continuity."⁸ Yet the fact is that over time certain architectural forms have become strongly embedded into the collective memory of Muslim societies and became inseparable from their perception of their own

⁶ Said, Edward, "In the shadow of the West", *Op. Cit.*, p. 5.

⁷ Grabar, Oleg, "Symbols and Signs in Islamic Architecture", *Architecture and Community: Building in the Islamic World Today*, (Renata Holod & Darl Rastorfer Eds.), The Aga Khan Award for Architecture, Geneva, Aperture / Islamic publications, 1983, p. 29.

⁸ Kuban, Dogan, "Modern Versus Traditional: A false Conflict?", *Mimar* 9, 1993, p. 58.

culture. In the context of Muslims in America, it is important therefore not to deny the important aspects of this collective memory, while at the same time to search into the potentials of those aspects of the Muslim "mode of life" and the qualities of this "spiritual continuity" on the architecture of the Muslim community. The experience of Gulzar Haider in the design of the Islamic Center of North America-ICNA presents such a search for the expression of Islam in buildings, but it also illustrates the shortcomings of trying to interpret abstract Islamic values into the formal language of architecture. Moreover, the dramatic shift of Haider's design approach from the "veiling" of the mosque in ICNA to the abundant use of imagery and iconic references in the Jonesboro mosque and the Ahmadiyya building, further illustrates the important influence of the issue of the collective memory on the perpetuation of the cycle of representation in contemporary architectural practice.

For Muslims in America, solutions for their architectural products must be sought within a comprehensive understanding of the need to interpret the formal aspects of Islamic architecture, as well as of the intrinsic circumstances of their lives in America in order for these products to be meaningful to both Muslims and the majority culture. The character of many Islamic community centers generally illustrates an act of announcing the Muslim presence in America through forms borrowed from the past. This act may be necessary, especially initially in the light of the special post-colonial condition prevailing in the immigrants' home countries and the circumstances of Muslim presence in the West. However, it must be pointed out that while Muslims believe that they are resisting the homogenization of Western culture, what they are doing in fact is to express themselves in the very language of postmodern America. As a result, the present architectural character of Islamic community centers in America generally does not say much about the values held by the users of these institutions, beyond what is known in the form of cultural stereotypes to the dominant social groups and other non-Muslim segments of society. It is important therefore to search for ways of creating an Islamic architecture that retains the important aspects of the collective memory of traditional architecture, while being the expressive envelope for the American-Muslim way of life.

In the design for Islamic community centers in America, the focus needs to shift to what kind of identity is being expressed, and whether the architectural aspects of collective memory of Muslims can be complemented, overlaid, or even replaced by other systems, so as not to miss the potentials of a creative representation in architecture. This critical understanding may raise issues of shared human values that can help create a dialogue with

non-Muslims through architecture as a communicative tool between cultures. Such human values may be expressed through a fragmentation that reduces the authoritative aspects of formality and humanizes the architectural product, or even through a domesticity in which the Islamic center can be perceived as the 'home' for the community rather than as a headquarters building for a foreign mission. In all this, emphasis needs to be directed to the expression of transparency in architecture, rather than to the obsession with privacy and exclusiveness. A point must be made here that, although the Islamic Center of Evansville offers an architectural interpretation of these issues of informality, domesticity and transparency, it nevertheless risks being an 'assimilative' solution and sacrifices the rich potentials of diversity which calls for more formal distinction.

The need to understand the role of the architectural composition in facilitating cross-cultural dialogue brings us to the issue of the building program which is, in my view, one of the most important agents of this communicative process. The programs of almost all Islamic community centers in America involve a multiplicity of religious, educational, and social functions, though they seldom include commercial activities. However, in many of these centers, there is a conscious, logical and mythical elevation of the mosque to the status of an object in the field and the suppression of all other functions. The important social gathering spaces, and even classrooms are often located in a basement, resulting in an architectural expression dominated by the mosque. In other cases, as in the Manhattan project for example, the program is divided into a mosque with a multi-purpose hall in the basement and a building that houses a multiplicity of cultural and ancillary functions located in the background of the mosque. In expressing the program of the community center, it is vital that efforts be made to understand the difference between the role of the mosque in a dominant Muslim culture, and its perception in an alien environment.

Emphasis in the architectural interpretation of the program of the Islamic community center can be directed to such important elements as the social gathering hall, the school, and the library, which when elevated to their deserved status, can complement the mosque, reduce its iconic charge, and therefore reduce the danger of expressing a stereotyped image. Moreover, the nature and the interpretation of the building program can provide an important opportunity for raising the level of interaction between the Muslim community and the dominant culture. It is through the careful design of the program, that the potential of the identity of the community may be fully expressed by making the building more inclusive, a refuge for all those who seek stable and reliable human relations, and opening it for those eager to know about other systems of thought. New cultural elements, which

can even be related to the mundane aspects of daily life including commercial activities, may be added to the program of an Islamic community center with the aim of creating direct interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Muslims in America need to crystallize new views, and inspire new expressions in their buildings, that reflect the positive aspects of their being part of the larger American culture. In a context of multiculturalism, the Islamic community center can become a significant architectural statement if its members decide to become truly active in the making of their wider cultural environment. The intention behind this architectural statement, is not only to give expression to the identity of the Muslim community, but also to provide the physical context for an enriching dialogue with the dominant culture. Yet it must be pointed out that even with a Muslim community determined at reversing the stereotypes that are held about it by the dominant culture, together with a carefully designed program and a humanized architectural composition, a distinguished architecture is not a guaranteed outcome. The Islamic community centers in America can only be elevated into distinguished products of architecture if there is a genuine understanding, among architects and community members alike, of the complex forces that make what we may call a 'graceful' architecture, which can only be achieved through a process of cultivation of taste and aesthetic values, and of constant refinement of visual and aesthetic standards. It may well be that a true understanding of the issues involved in the making of this architecture can only be obtained after more serious initiatives have been tried and evaluated.

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