Politics and Identity in Design: An Analysis of
Two Contemporary Cairene Mosques

Volume I

A Thesis submitted to
The Department of Arab and Islamic Civilizations
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Islamic Art and Architecture

by

Leena Sadek

under the supervision of

Dr. Bernard O’Kane

2018
For my father.
### Table of Contents

Introduction 3

Review of Literature 5

Sources and Methodology 8

1.0 Theoretical framework 10

1.1 Modernism and the International Style 10
1.2 Traditionalism 16
1.3 Regionalism 31

2.0 The Mosques 45

2.1 The Hassan Abbas Sharbatly Mosque 45
   - Location 46
   - Plan 46
   - Division of Space 47
   - Decorative Program & Materials 48

2.2 The Police Mosque of New Cairo 60
   - Location 61
   - Plan 63
   - Division of Space 65
   - Decorative Program & materials 66

3.0 Conclusion 78

Bibliography 98
Introduction

Forging a national identity has been an issue many Islamic nations have undergone and struggled with in the wake of a colonial era long established in the third world. The attempts at achieving such a goal have been varied, with many seeking to revive their pre-colonial past under new and modern implications. The success of such attempts has not yet yielded a satisfactory template that can be applied without question in one nation, let alone across the Islamic world. Nonetheless, such a quintessential conundrum has not hindered the building program of many nations, who are still striving to achieve their own building style that is a reflection of their history and national identity. Questions of architectural heritage, what aspects of the history held true to the nations’ identity, and which aspects were deliberately to be rejected all held an important role in shaping the end product devised by each nation, and all needed to be digested to fathom the national style they sought so ardently. The mosque in particular emerges as the explicit monument type due to its innately Islamic character. For this reason, this study is concerned with the nature of mosque building in the post-modern globalized commercial city fabric we actively partake in today.

To remedy this disconnect and notable gap in their architecture, some nations, such as Turkey, undertook a secular national building program to highlight their modernity.\(^1\) Others took on the task of creating a bridge amongst Islamic nations and establishing communication between them by adopting an architecture that incorporated variant elements from different Islamic cultures, as seen in the Gulf\(^1\)

\(^1\) Moustafa, *Contemporary Mosque Architecture in Turkey*, vi.
states\textsuperscript{2} with their “transnational” mosques, as coined by Kishwar Rizvi. In Egypt, a movement returning to previous eras of glory was attempted with Neo-Mamluk architecture,\textsuperscript{3} along with attempts at channeling the long lost Pharaonic heritage, a movement that quickly faded.\textsuperscript{4} What, then, does contemporary mosque architecture reflect? What weight does patronage carry in the outcome of the building, and how much does it shape its conception? What of the users and how they participate in this dialogue, if at all? Ultimately, how successful was the mosque in reflecting an Islamic character, as well as being coherent with the nature and aspirations of the society? This thesis will conduct an analysis of two contemporary mosques in Cairo, assessing the impact of Islam on the nature and form of the built environment.

The scope of the study of this thesis will be a) the description of two mosques in the area of New Cairo, as it is one of the most rapidly evolving sites of urban landscape in the capital, and b) the analysis of these monuments from the perspectives of the Modernist, Traditionalist, and Regionalist approaches, as well as measuring the buildings’ success with regard to serving the community. This will inevitably lead to the formulation of conclusions pertaining to the questions mentioned above. The selected mosques are chosen based on their representation of each of the two dominant divisions who chiefly sponsor building in Cairo today, namely the state (whether the government division of the Ministry of Interior, or the separate entity of the Military), and the private sector.

---

\textsuperscript{2} Abd-Allah, \textit{The State Mosques of the Arabian Gulf}, 120.
\textsuperscript{3} Marei, \textit{Revival of Mamluk Architecture}, 3, 73.
\textsuperscript{4} Rabbat, “What is Islamic Architecture Anyway?”’, 6.
Review of Literature

Despite the proliferation of literature tackling the mode of architecture and the built environment in the contemporary Islamic world, one cannot assert the existence of a de facto paradigm with clear and tangible guidelines on the creation of a mosque, authentic to the character of its environment. It seems that the question of identity is one that has inhibited the field to a large degree, and authors are more inclined to critique prevalent approaches and pit them against each other, essentially criticizing them, but are deficient in proposing a precise and substantive solution. The late architect Hassan Fathy may form an exception insofar as he established a workable methodology of building in accordance to Egyptian heritage, however much it was limited to his own perspective,\(^5\) which falls under the category of regionalism, to which William J.R. Curtis, Süha Ozkan, Kenza Bousorra, Dogan Kuban, Hasan-Uddin Khan, and Ismail Serageldin have contributed. Rifaat Chadirji emerges as another valuable architect in this area.

James Steele, having widely discussed Hassan Fathy’s ideology, goes on the inform us of his successors in terms of preserving his concept of building: Abdul Wahed El-Wakil, Rasem Badran, and Omar El-Farouk, with examples illustrating their work and the approaches they employ.\(^6\) This is of great value because it allows the reader to not just accept their conceptual approach, but study their application of it and decide if this coincided with their understanding of regionalism or not, or consider the different manners in which one can apply regionalism to architecture.

In an effort to establish a new strategy for contemporary mosque architecture, Aly Gabr espouses the traditionalist approach as he delves into the traditional

\(^6\) Ibid.
Mamluk process of building, declaring that Sufism was thoroughly integrated in the building practice. Additionally, his view of modernism is one of being the ‘evil’ introduced during the French occupation that severed our ties with the traditional Islamic way of life and hence, the Islamic building process that carried within it value in conception of form as well as symbolism. His attribution of the disconnect and the overall imbalance rampant in society today is to modernism, building on the theories of other traditionalists, namely Gulzar Haidar, René Guénon, and Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Guénon, while theoretical, attributes the “monstrosity” of our materially fixated culture today to the adoption of merely profane sciences and the disavowing of all things outside of them. In fact, he equates the traditional with the religious, maintaining that “the modern outlook is anti-religious; and it is anti-religious because, in a still wider sense, it is anti-traditional.” Similarly, Nasr advocates the idea that architecture is a reflection of the direct displacement the modern Muslim experiences within himself, with the “confrontation” of Islamic buildings with those of foreign “blandness” being evidential of the premise. He, also, translates tradition to mean al-dīn, which actually denotes ‘religion’ in Arabic. It is then worth observing that religion and tradition are one and the same to the aforementioned scholars. While not so avidly explicit about religion being the source of his apprehensions toward modernism, Mohamed Arkoun places modernism at the forefront of the “rupture” between society and revelation. Contrary to this scholarship, Gül Asatekin and Aydan Balamir discuss traditionalist architecture in Turkey as divorced from the spiritual or religious approach.

---

7 Guénon, Crisis, 95.
8 Nasr, Traditional Islam, 228.
9 Ibid.
10 Arkoun, “Muslim Character,” 210, 212.
While Renata Holod holds that there exists “an almost unbridgeable gap between past and present,”¹¹ and Steele concludes that the efforts of Fathy’s disciples demonstrate that a link between past and present may be established, Nasr envisages a hope for continuity of life and the Islamic tradition in building if there are schools of building and architecture established to properly educate and train the modern Muslim architect in the ways and principals, both technical and moral, of the traditional Islamic arts.¹² Against this is Kishvar Rizvi’s hope that evoking historicism in contemporary architecture ceases, and be replaced with an element unique to the mosques of today, allowing them to prompt their own epoch historically, because the past to him is “unattainable.”¹³ On the other hand, Kenneth Frampton’s starkly different definition of what could constitute an Islamic building suggests that what could make a building Islamic need not be overt, external, or even recognizable to the public: “what would appear intrinsically Islamic about all these works is the assumption of responsibility for the basic well-being of the society on the part of a relatively small number of enlightened individuals.”¹⁴ Either that, or he was criticizing the lack of elements that attribute the buildings to Islamic culture.

¹² Nasr, Traditional Islam, 236-7.
¹³ Rizvi, The Transnational Mosque, 31.
¹⁴ Frampton, “Modernization and Local Culture,” 15.
Sources and Methodology

In this research, we will be examining three different mosques in New Cairo. First, the nature of the problem of building the mosque in contemporary Egypt will be addressed. An evaluation of the role of modernization as a shift in the building program will be tackled, and the different paradigms that exist as a responsive disposition to colonialism\textsuperscript{15} will be evaluated in the hopes of reaching an appropriate methodology for mosque building that is reflective of the character of the surrounding area, and the nation on a broader spectrum. This will constitute the first part of the thesis.

Following that, a standard description of each of the mosques selected will be conducted, based on building form, location, decoration, and unit division in each monument. A critical analysis will be made of each monument with regard to plan (plans will be provided where made available), the allotment of spaces in each edifice and the purpose they serve, as well as the decorative elements employed and their provenance. All these aspects of each building will be evaluated as to what they convey to the user, and the role of the client in dictating the above. Hypotheses on the purpose of the mosque and what it was trying to achieve will then be drawn.

The primary sources for this research will be the monuments themselves, and whatever information that may be provided by the institutions sponsoring the erection of the monument, or involved in its conception and design (if any). Sources that will be reviewed for the dictation and analysis of building will be those of scholars advocating a particular archetype for contemporary building in the Islamic world and the literature discussing the said approaches, such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr, William Holod, “Introduction,” 16.
1.0 Theoretical framework

A note on preservation: preservation should not be misconstrued as the act of preserving a building or set of buildings from the past, such as with conservation. Preservation here reflects the idea of preserving one’s heritage, tradition, culture, and way of life so as not to be completely annihilated in a fast-paced world entirely focused on progress, innovation, and overwhelmed by that which is considered “efficient.” For the purposes of this study, preservation should be taken to mean “the continuity of our cultural identity.”16

1.1 Modernism and the International Style

Modernism is a trend that has been around for almost a century, and is still prevalent today. This movement has been celebrated for some time by the early work of Le Corbusier as a mass-producing machine that promised the creation of buildings that were universal and could be adopted anywhere; the creation of a living unit based on function and stripped of all else, which came to be called the International Style of building. It was and still is favored as a Western import of the image of progress, yet the havoc it wreaked on the world and on other cultural civilizations was not considered seriously until recently. The problem with this is not limited to architecture, where “the societies of both the East and West have witnessed the massive destruction of their cultural and architectural heritage in order for the ‘new’

16 Kuban, “Conservation,” 34.
to replace it,“¹⁷ but has struck the core of Egyptian society, visible in the dichotomies it produced. Some individuals consider it an injustice to send children to national schools instead of an international language school,¹⁸ if the family has the ability to afford the latter, indicating a preference for the foreign over the local. On this matter, Mohammed Arkoun remarks,

What we call modernity… brings a historical way of looking at our problems which is a rupture with the ontological framework in which civilizations have developed according to the teaching of the revelation as they received it from the Bible, the Gospels, and of course the Quran. This change is fundamental. The problem for us is to face this rupture which is imposed on us from outside Islamic history.¹⁹

This phenomenon is not implicated in architecture alone, but in the way of life now practiced by our societies. This rupture that is evident in the stagnation and discontinuity of our hereditary and traditional forms is mimicked in our daily practices, and can be viewed as a direct reflection of our social values. Modernism has infiltrated day-to-day life, apparent in the excessive consumerism the region has fallen victim to, particularly in Cairo. This is not to say that moderate consumption is bad nor that wanting to live in a comfortable environment with access to devices that facilitate easier living is wrong. The preoccupation with the “new and shiny” external appearance resonates in our built environment, but it does not originate there. In addition, international politics and the interference of other nations in the way countries manage themselves and their people have blurred some of the lines that distinguish many peoples from others around the world, capitalizing on the notion of “the global citizen.” This, in turn, threatened the autonomy, distinctiveness, and even the continuity of many cultures, leading to the emergence of an engrossment in the concept of identity in the field of architecture. Of course, identity and authenticity are both very elusive and abstract notions, leading to a superficial rendition of the Arab or

¹⁸ Mumtaz, “A Case,” 56.
oriental style in architectural design. This is exactly what we see in our architecture and reflects a palpable division in our society as well as in our perception.

This self-destructive mentality is apparent in the consumer habits of the people of Cairo, opting for foreign manufactured imported products over local ones, with the underlying belief that they are of better quality. This stems from an inferiority complex shared by many Egyptians (and others of third-world nations) that was planted in their forefathers from the times of the colonialist occupation.\textsuperscript{20} What this indicates is that the concept of colonialism was not just manifested in the physical form, but has shaped an ideological conception that has become inherent in the heritage of formerly conquered peoples. This argument is predicated on Edward Said’s position that Europe defined itself as not being the other; that its distinction came from it being more modern, more civilized, and therefore superior to the former.\textsuperscript{21} The concept of orientalism is still in fact intertwined in man’s modern psyche. As Heynen puts it: “Orientalism really pervades our way of thinking. It is an organizing factor, a structuring factor which influences our frame of mind, our worldview, the way we think about the world.”\textsuperscript{22} It is therefore not separate from the way the modern Middle Eastern person perceives himself and his world today. This, to me, is emblematic of a modern colonialism dominating the majority of the non-Western world today, where control is not necessarily overt with armies and tanks, yet is all the more powerful in that it penetrates people’s minds. This prevalent Western imperialism is one that encroaches upon nations through commerce, financial control, ubiquitous media,\textsuperscript{23} and through securing control over the resources of other nations, working hand-in-hand with the political status quo, since all global organizations of

\textsuperscript{20} Khosla, “Crashing through Western Modernism,” 58.
\textsuperscript{21} Said, Orientalism, 46-48.
\textsuperscript{22} Heynen, “Intertwinement,” 92.
\textsuperscript{23} Arkoun, “Architectural Alternatives,” 42.
authority, whether they be financial or political, are essentially Western,\textsuperscript{24} such as the United Nations, the World Health Organization, the World Bank, or the Multinational Force and Observers. It is thus a modernized version of a long established imperialist colonialism that we live in today.

When it comes to the building style, the creation of a building that fits anywhere is by default a building that does not belong anywhere. All countries have a myriad of differences among them, such as topography, politics, ethnicity, culture and history, among other things. Hence, the adoption of a singular building style throughout the world is bound to alienate, not relate to the inhabitants of the area or the users of the architecture. It does not speak to them on a personal level, and does not allow them to connect with it via shared experience, history, or any relationship with the country, principles, values, and traditions they are familiar with. Adopting a one-size-fits-all mentality in architecture is definitely a destructive rather than constructive measure. As Doğan Kuban observed, “the physiognomies of the cities of Muslim countries are rapidly becoming grotesque imitations of those of modern Western cities,”\textsuperscript{25} indicating that a large-scale loss of identity in architecture is plaguing the Muslim world. Further, he posits that, “modern urbanization and architectural practice mutilate the past because they are the outcome of a process that is lacking in any real understanding of the time dimension in urban culture.”\textsuperscript{26} Not only is there a lack of understanding of the concept of time, it is compounded with ignorance and degradation of the traditional practices and mode of life of the supposed “primitive”\textsuperscript{27} peoples of Islamic nations. As Holod affirmed, “Acceptance of the products of technologies generated elsewhere has meant that modernization

\textsuperscript{24} Grabar, “The Mission,” 8.
\textsuperscript{25} Kuban, “Conservation,” 32.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid, 32.
\textsuperscript{27} Heynen, “Intertwinement,” 95.
came in as a finished piece, rarely filtered through collective experience within a
nation and thus ill-adapted to its particular needs.” Moreover, the adoption of
Western architectural models created in industrial nations is not a move towards a
‘better’ solution. In fact, it is quite the contrary, as Heynen pointed out when claiming
that the study of developing countries’ architecture from a Western perspective
centralizes industrial nations’ architecture as a point of reference:

…it is very clear that the point of reference here is the architecture in industrial
countries. The whole idea is that modern architects can learn something from this so-
called primitive architecture, or the architecture in the so-called under developed
countries. They can learn something from it because of the qualities that are inherent
to it; it is communal architecture instead of individual; it fits buildings into their
natural surroundings; there is a desire for secure, well defined places instead of the
sprawl of unchecked growth in the West; a rare good sense in the handling of
practical problems; there is humaneness in this architecture and in general the people
behind these buildings look at the good of everyone rather than at profit making.

It appears that the balance has shifted, and instead of Western architecture learning
from that of the East, Muslim cities are now liberally borrowing or completely
appropriating Western building practice in their cities. It should be noted, however,
that Suha Özkan repeatedly points out that it is Internationalism, not Modernism, that
is the culprit to all the issues discussed, stating that “Modernism demands a respect
for inherent qualities of building materials, expressiveness for structure, functional
justifications for forms that constitute buildings. These abstract demands do not
contradict much with anything done by an architect who wishes to adopt a
Regionalist approach.” While the International Style is the major player in the
degradation of the cultural identity of nations, Modernism is also a contributor to the
problem so long as it is not properly assimilated to the national heritage of the
country it is used in.

29 Heynen, “Intertwinement,” 95.
This placelessness of modernist architecture gave rise to the school of Post-Modernism, which created buildings that were very ornamental and decorated, but equally placeless due to their indifference to context. Yet again, but in a different way, the buildings reflected an insensitivity to authenticity, identity, and a lack of relevance to their location or function. William Curtis remarks on the matter, stating “‘Post-Modernism’ is part of the disease, not the cure, since it reduces the problem of tradition to a trivial manipulation of signs and references and since its trendy aestheticism masks a cynical and reactionary cultural stance.”31

1.2 Traditionalism

All nations have had to create a political unity and a cultural identity in response to the traumatic and debilitating effects of colonialism. Energies were turned toward the establishment of the contemporary machinery of state, at times perpetuating administrative and economic structures which had been developed for the explicit purposes of the colonizing power, at others evolving new ones. The more distant, precolonial past was rarely used as a source of inspiration because there had been no natural evolution from its attitudes and forms to new ones. Rather, the intrusion of the alien body of Western and European colonial products, techniques, and attitudes was instrumental in devaluing this past. Moreover, the expulsion or withdrawal of the colonizing powers left an almost unbridgeable gap between past and present. Isolated and marginalized, the precolonial past could not easily be incorporated into the making of a present.\(^{32}\)

Architecture as understood by the common man in Egypt does not particularly pose a critical element, but more of an aesthetic indulgence used for the beautification of a place or the environment – more of a luxury than a necessity, and does not comprise a significant portion of his daily life or concerns. He does not recognize the vital role it plays in the socio-cultural integration of the city fabric. In this regard, breaking away from heritage and adopting Modernist, placeless designs has created or acutely contributed to a form of chaos discernible in the nation today. According to Aly Gabr, a passionately Traditionalist architect, “Architecture is reflective and interwoven in the essence of the society it serves, to the effect that it has an impact on the ‘socioulture and symbolic values.’”\(^{33}\)

The Traditionalist theorists predicate their argument on the existence of a crisis in the modern world; that the majority of the people in the world are misguided and disillusioned, and unless this tragic situation is corrected immediately, and the minds of the general public are reoriented towards what they call the Truth, humanity will come to a rapid demise. The obsession with progress and innovation, with the individualistic, with speed and the perpetual acceleration of the pace of life, are all marks of this cataclysmic time. While this may sound fantastic and somewhat

---

\(^{32}\) Holod, “Introduction,” in *Architecture and Community*, 16.

\(^{33}\) Gabr, *Influence*, 16.
comically conspiratorial, when one considers the rates at which populations are growing and the resources of the natural environment are being depleted or destroyed in the endeavor to industrialize, their prophecy might not appear so bizarre. As noted by Kuban, “the destruction of what is not new is clearly a side effect of the rate of consumption in an industrial society. It is the result of profit making through the plundering of human resources by an ever-growing demand for industrialisation.”

This ideology does not blame millennials for the situation we find ourselves in, or Modernism in and of itself. Instead, it suggests that the shift from the traditional sciences, which assigned value to esoteric and exoteric truths, to the “profane” and rationalistic orders of thinking and learning, ones that gave rise to materialism, is the antecedent. Guénon, while theoretical, attributes the “monstrosity” of our materially fixated culture today to the adoption of the profane sciences alone and the disavowing of all things outside of them. Materialism in this context is not merely the preoccupation with material possessions, but the concern with only fulfilling needs that are integral to the physical perimeter of what is natural, such as the need for food or water to maintain the body, in turn relegating all that which is spiritual and sacred to an inconsequential and unacknowledged domain. The “moderns,” however, are culpable for the distortion of history, signified in dubbing it ‘The Dark Age,’ in order to justify this shift. Guénon reflects that as early as the seventeenth century, all intellectual and aesthetic meaning associated with medieval monuments had been lost on them, although I expect this was applicable only to the Western world. Such claims are, of course, not verifiable, but a large part of the Traditionalist theory is the same as it forms its basis on religious faith. The notion of empirical verification by

---

34 Kuban, “Conservation,” 33.
35 See Guénon, Crisis, 61-67, and Gabr, Influence, 112.
36 Guénon, Crisis, 6-12.
37 Ibid, 9-11.
modern standards to the Traditionalist is part of the problem created by the reduction of what the Traditionalists call “Truth” to only those things that can be verified by the profane sciences and numerical values. It ignores the concept of the spiritual sciences exactly because they are not measurable – something that is symptomatic of the humanism and materialism. With the Renaissance came the birth of “humanism,” which consisted of “reducing everything to purely human proportions, of eliminating every principle belonging to a higher order and figuratively turning away from heaven on the pretext of gaining possession of the earth,”38 earth here conveying the tangible and the material. To this effect, the modern and the traditional are directly opposed, the “anti-traditional” modern West standing as the antithesis of the “normal” East, since the “abnormal and aberrant” refers to “a civilization which recognizes no superior principle and is really based on nothing but negation of principles.”39 In fact, he equates the traditional with the religious, maintaining that “the modern outlook is anti-Christian because it is essentially anti-religious; and it is anti-religious because, in a still wider sense, it is anti-traditional.”40 Similarly, Seyyed Hossein Nasr advocates the idea that current architecture is a reflection of the direct displacement the modern Muslim experiences within himself, with the “confrontation” of Islamic buildings with those of foreign “ugliness,” or at best “blandness.”41 He, like Guénon,42 translates tradition to mean al-dīn,43 which actually denotes ‘religion’ in Arabic. It is then worth observing that religion and tradition are one and the same to the aforementioned scholars. This can be explained in Nasr’s elaboration that religion, now, has been marginalized so as to affect only the aspects related to human actions.

38 Ibid, 10-11.
39 Guénon, Crisis, 15.
40 Ibid, 95.
41 Nasr, Traditional Islam, 228.
42 Guénon, Crisis, 95.
43 Ibid.
as they appear in the law of Islamic jurisprudence, since all other realms have been encompassed by secularism. Both he and Gabr condemn the divorcing of Islamic wisdom and true knowledge (hikma and ‘ilm, respectively) from the practice of religion, when they are actually the driving forces behind the doctrine itself.

Traditionalism, then, is not a particular style that was employed in an age that has passed. To the Traditionalist, it is very much an ongoing and all-encompassing collection of principles and knowledge; a value system, which is deeply rooted in Islam. At the heart of Traditionalism is this: the traditional approach enables us to attain a thorough understanding of the monuments of the past, deciphering their multiple levels and inherent symbolism, and as such, arriving at a solution of the difficulties encountered. It is in the return to the principles of traditional Islamic building and planning that the crisis of today can be averted. The traditional to our thinkers is intrinsically imbued with a symbolic level that is vital to traditional architecture. Almost everything in traditional Islamic architecture carries a symbolic meaning, even naturally occurring and external elements such as light and space, which reflect Divine Presence and Divine Intellect. In the eyes of Traditionalists, monuments of the Islamic faith are not just edifices, devoid of the spiritual essence which they could not have accidently or circumstantially represented, and in that regard, the term ‘symbolic’ does not stand for a lifeless, material aspect of design simply alluding to an otherworldly concept of the faith as a distant, theoretical, unreal aspect rather than a living, manifest, intrinsic yet intangible soul, so to speak, of the entity. The Traditionalists distinguish between the physical form of the symbol, and the “essence of the form,” emphasizing the requirement of the Muslim’s intellectual capacity obtained from religious science or ‘ilm to combine them, derived from the

44 Nasr, Traditional Islam, 229.
45 Gabr, Influence, 289.
Quran. The separation of the symbol from the meaning renders it just a sign, instead of a functioning, composite constituent with a very real and dynamic presence. This remains, however, a very theoretical and abstract notion of the Traditionalist concept, and the lack of true symbols in contemporary mosques is described by Gabr accordingly:

Looking at contemporary mosques... traditionally inherited values, symbols, universal canons of aesthetics and spatial order – we find that such a language can hardly be said to exist. It might have evolved naturally... but this possibility was excluded by Modernism’s rejection of historical stereotypes which left a void which has hardly begun to fill. One of the dangers of this time is that under the pressure of the need for more building, the void will be filled not by a language in the full sense constantly developing and adapting to fine shades of outer and inner modes of expression, but by a code, a limited, and external sign system.⁴⁶

Hence, according to the Traditionalists, when the symbol fails to channel this intrinsic quality referred to above it becomes a mere sign. Gabr attributes the prohibition of the use of human and animal figures in Islamic art to the very same concept: since the creation of the symbol carries a dimension of life and meaning to it, then the creation of these forms would mean that man has the capability to give life to the figures,⁴⁷ a capacity exclusive to God. Hence, the abstraction of natural forms emerges as the ideal way to merge the science of nature and the blueprint of God’s creation in decoration.

There is a tendency to identify that which is traditional as changeless and ageless, as argued by Gabr and Guénon. This further shows the opposition of the traditional to the constantly morphing, updating, improving, progressing, and thus fleeting, new. This should not be misconstrued for a static, un-developing state of being, otherwise Islam would have ceased to exist and would not have spread and been assimilated in various regions all over the world, but this necessary change for

⁴⁶ Ibid, xix.
⁴⁷ Ibid, 292.
the sake of sustaining life must be anchored by tradition. At the very core of this notion is that God is the Everlasting and the Permanent, and if Traditionalism honors these principles, then it honors the existence of God and His supremacy altogether. Hence, building from the Traditionalist point of view is in itself a tribute to the Almighty.

Nader Ardalan also emerges as something of a Traditionalist, although not referring to himself as such. As a practicing architect, he emphasizes an establishment of a bridge between historical, traditional architectures, which he states, “have fallen into a state of obscurity,” and the architecture of today. Through surveying major mosques across the Islamic world since the arrival of the faith, he has been able to recognize a distinct Islamic “vocabulary” of specific forms, and a “grammar” of the scheme by which such forms are organized together to produce a final assemblage. What aligns him with the major upholders of Traditionalism is his belief in the symbolic nature of the achievement and implementation of beauty in Islamic design, purporting that “in Islam, the fundamental mandate of architecture, apart from fulfilling necessary functional requirements, should be to manifest a purposeful sense of beauty,” which advocates Nasr’s view, which states, “beauty is an intrinsic dimension of the Truth and its manifestations, and it is therefore a necessary component of every legitimate artistic creation.” On the same note, Gabr contends that “bare utility is not, and cannot be a form of religious art.” This contradicts Muhsin Mahdi’s reminder in later scholarship, speaking from the perspective of Islamic philosophy, that “any public building that solved an immediate practical

---

48 Gabr, Influence, 8-9.
50 Ibid, 55.
51 Ibid.
52 Nasr, Traditional Islam, 231.
53 Gabr, Influence, 494.
problem was considered satisfactory by men and women who were the very models of Islamic piety – in fact, by the Prophet himself, and by his companions.”

Ardalan, Nasr, and Gabr all subscribe to the belief that the Quran is the supreme source from which to draw inspiration and a basis for Islamic architecture. There is to a great extent an emphasis placed on the metaphysical aspect of cosmology, in which intuition plays a great role, and its significance in the occupation of an intermediate space between the material and spiritual worlds, from which the imagination of the Muslim derives illumination, after the scripture, which shaped the “canon of sacred art.” To further clarify this point, Gabr writes:

We have seen that medieval Muslims tended towards a mode of comprehension which provided a metaphysical interpretation of life, an interpretation that preceded and went beyond all external perception. This mode of comprehension, involving Sufi interpretation (ta’wil), affected all of man’s perceptions because it began by situating him/her in the Universe. The Universe, as we saw, is composed of a vertically bound and parallel series of Heavens and earths culminating with God above the throne and seat (Footstool) […] part of the responsibility that a truthful craftsman (sani’) had, was to reflect the Divine Form-Giver by: first contemplating His Creation (i.e. Nature), then to abstract from it and finally, to emulate that Creation in his art and architecture. That is to say that his buildings – especially the sacred ones – were ultimately seen to “lie between Heaven and earth.”

In Islam, they claim, beauty and utility are not separate notions, therefore differentiating the beautiful from the decadent. The beautiful must also be useful, and not just pleasing to view as is the case with the decadent. At the same time, Traditionalism preaches that all things must remain simple and minimalist, since all things are insignificant before the Majesty of Allah. In that effort, monuments must preclude grand and lofty displays, in an understated transience, associable with all but Allah. Another aspect of Traditionalist building is that it sought to present the built environment as harmonious with nature and its surroundings, indicating that architecture that appeared to be in discord with its environment could not be

---

55 Gabr, Influence, 253.
56 Ibid, 308.
57 Nasr, Traditional Islam, 230-231.
considered Traditionalist, such as the Supreme Constitutional Court on the Ma’adi corniche in Cairo. This feature of Traditionalism also reveals that sustainability and advocacy of environmental preservation were very relevant concerns for the traditional builder.

Gabr espouses a Sufi conception in Traditionalist architecture, in that building, making, or creating is a reflection of the Divine process of Creation. It is, as closely possible, the mimicking of the blueprint of Creation, initially ever undertaken by God – the Perfect – himself, in an effort to obtain the highest degree of perfection attainable to man, and is therefore in itself a process that is sacred and divine.\textsuperscript{58} The maker of things, as explained by Gabr, must possess a knowledge of God as the ultimate Maker, as well as knowledge through science of the bodies which He has created, such as planets for instance.\textsuperscript{59} He states, “Islamic metaphysics and theology [see] the origin of all things in God, for He is the Knower of all things, and therefore the essences of forms have their reality in the Divine.”\textsuperscript{60} His claim is that Sufism was thoroughly integrated in the daily life of traditional man, and in particular the building practice, with knowledge disseminating to construction workers and craftsmen through rituals of the hierarchy present in guilds.\textsuperscript{61} This notion can be supported by Abouseif’s claim that “Through their close association with their patron’s pious foundations, the ulema tended to bridge the cultural divide between the aristocracy and their subjects.”\textsuperscript{62} This is evidence that teachers, notably shaykhs and ulema, had an almost exclusive relationship with the populace, and hence largely contributed to

\textsuperscript{58} Gabr, \textit{Influence}, 325.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid, 290.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid, 249.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid, 254.
\textsuperscript{62} Behrens-Abouseif, \textit{Cairo}, 5.
the ‘collective’ knowledge dispensed among society. This allowed for their teachings to shape, or at least influence, day-to-day activities in the life of the common man.

In Traditionalism, a large emphasis is placed on that which is whole, and on unity, derived from the centrality of the term al-tawhīd,63 or Oneness. It is effortless to determine this, since God is symbolic of wholeness and union; the One. From this stems the impulse that the mosque was the heart of traditional towns and cities, and all other structures grew out from it. It was therefore essential that the cityscape reflected the same formal vision and was homogeneous in taste and in style. This notion is derived from the idea that the Ka'ba is the navel of the earth, and that the world came into existence from this center.64

A unity pervaded the architecture of the city which related the architecture of the home and even of the palace and other municipal buildings to that of the mosque. This unity made the space within the Muslim home an extension of the space within the mosque, which in fact it is from a ritual as well as an artistic point of view.65

This unity was a mark of integration, of the religion in the Muslim’s everyday life, and of the Muslim within society. Architecture, being reflective of social norms pervading the lives of men, needed to represent this integration, and non-religious buildings in the city were interconnected with the religious, educational, and social institutions of it, in the most recognizable and inescapable means of architecture. This factor largely contributed to the ‘spirit’ one senses when walking about a traditional town. Grabar, on the other hand, is not so quick to adopt this interpretation of the symbolic meaning claimed by Traditionalists, stating, “I am hesitant in attributing a symbolic rather than a socially functional meaning to traditional physical constructs of the Muslim city like the mosque-market-maidan unit.”66

63 Nasr, Traditional Islam, 232.
64 Gabr, Influence, 295.
65 Nasr, Traditional Islam, 232.
Traditional art is described Gabr and Nasr as subtle and nameless, in the sense that monuments do not usually carry the name of their maker or designer, because it was part of the process of life and daily experience of the whole society. Furthermore, the artists of traditional times did not seek recognition or acknowledgement for their work, because it was their duty and they were merely contributing to the continuity of their heritage and religion. Art was a participatory exercise that included all the people and the users, and taste was uniform, because “differences of perception were accommodated because taste was not individualistic but shared by the whole society as it was based on the value system of tradition itself.” The entirely opposing architectural practice of today on the other hand, comes from the idea of individualism. There has been a global tendency of focusing on the individualistic, customized, tailored experience marketed by corporations, idolizing the singular person and capitalizing on separation, rather than the communal whole. This whole, however, has been identified by the Traditionalists as the source of social development, prosperity, continuity, authenticity, integration, and stability. This is contrasted with the agitated state modern man finds himself in, its art characterized by novelty, impact, progressiveness, and even neuroses.

In traditional mosques, one cannot help but notice the repetition of forms and decorative elements over long periods of time and in a vast majority of buildings that greatly resembled one another. While this can be traced to the ‘good’ sense of Traditionalist art with its intrinsic, qualitative function in discovering what works and continuing with it, since art was not individualistic but collective, it is nevertheless informed by the application of the idea of permanence and continuity over change, in

---

68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
an effort to achieve ‘ideal beauty.’ This is attributed to the ‘oneness of faith and 
culture, [which] naturally gave rise to the choice of similar symbolic forms denoting 
the same meaning [over different regions].’

It was a matter of reproduction of a meaningful and successful prototype, ascribing to the notion that Islam assigns no value to concepts such as innovation or aspiring towards the achievement of the new. As Kishwar Rizvi remarks, “Repetitions of form and echoes of the past conjure a history that is at once mutable and ever-present.”

On this subject, Grabar leaves the matter to the user of a monument to decide its symbolic significance, stating:

The greatest difficulty I had was identifying those aspects of architectural creation for which it is justified to seek a symbolic significance. My answer is that the referent alone (viewer, user) decides on the symbolic meaning of an artistic creation. […] Theoretically it is possible to derive symbolic meanings from formal consistencies, i.e. the repetition over the centuries of certain forms, but I am not sure whether consistency of form means consistency of symbols or convenience of functions.

However, if by repetition of form one refers to the mode of decoration adopted in most mosques in the general absence of figural representation, Hillenbrand accounts for this as “[coming] to be valued in its own right as an aid to contemplation, […] its purpose is the same: to dissolve matter, to deny substantial masses and substitute for them a less palpable reality whose forms change even as they are examined.” He refers here to the continuous geometric or vegetal designs that appear to repeat infinitely, claiming that the capacity for indefinite variations of those motifs is suggestive of the limitless copiousness of God’s creation, and in them carry a symbolic reference to paradise, or even God himself.

A huge section of the issue is not simply posed by modernization in buildings as it is, but significantly arising from the education received by designers, whether at

---

70 Gabr, Influence, 252.
71 Rizvi, Transnational Mosque, 1.
74 Ibid.
home or abroad. Whether the architects have traveled overseas to seek a better quality of education or have stayed in their home country and obtained training in building design, the curricula provided by the universities still tailor projects for the elite or Western-influenced clientele. Designers are then forced to acquire a Westernized design perception, at least in order to be able to compete with international firms and architects that are usually commissioned for largescale developments. Herein, education unfolds as the critical issue at hand;

Although successful in training professionals to compete with Westerners on their own terms, this pedagogical philosophy has effectively cut off Muslim professionals from their own culture and stylistic background. It is therefore not surprising that an interest in their own culture is almost invariably manifested in superficial use of traditional forms, rather than in search for solutions responsive to life styles and concepts of private social space that are still influenced by Islamic traditions.  

Rizvi also mentions this matter, citing Azmi Fakhouri’s notion that:

Emphasis on historicism is born out of what the architect sees as a crisis in architectural education in the Middle East, one in which students and educators turn more toward Euro-American trends than regional architectural history. Architects such as Fakhouri view themselves as marginalized from the academy, master architects of an art of building soon to be forgotten.  

In order to resolve this situation, the curricula used for training professionals must be reformed, a solution supported by Nasr. The syllabi, I believe, ought to incorporate a number of different factors that are of key relevance to the modern world, such as ecosystems and conscious building for the environment, along with sustainability. Socio-cultural factors must also be integrated into the system of education and be viewed as central to the conception of the built form. Measures to counter the senseless replication of stereotypical design elements must be established, and a proper understanding of traditional building processes and rationale behind the selection of community responsive prototypes must be acquired. Architects should be given real-world scenarios on which to build their projects. This means that in

75 Serageldin and Vigier, “Changing Roles,” 51.  
76 Rizvi, Transnational Mosque, 199.
practice, they are given projects where they must design for a broader range of clientele, one that is drawn from the nation, projects for the needy and underprivileged, the government; ones that do not strictly cater to the affluent strata and pose limitations of resources and funds. While this may be counterintuitive since those are the clients capable of paying for projects, governments also commission welfare housing and sizable community projects that serve a different and much larger segment of the population. This is the only way in which professionals, in their own capacity, will be able to adequately respond to the varied needs of their users, as “responsible architects cannot afford to ignore the socio-economic environment in their legitimate pursuit of excellence of design, nor is it necessary to sacrifice excellence in finding socially responsive solutions to the difficult problems in our societies.” Nasr, however, claims that such a drastic and necessary revision of the educational system cannot occur unless the persons living within the society embody the virtues of Islam, capitalizing on the concept of “as within, so without,” coupled with the revival of Islamic sciences and fields of knowledge, and the “rediscovery of spiritual and metaphysical principles.” On this note, Gabr seems to arrive at a similar conclusion: that traditional architecture, an architecture reflective of “Truth,” drawn from the religion and its principles, and one that serves “a therapeutic and psycho-spiritual potential” cannot exist except by being produced by a living traditional society. To the Traditionalists, this method of building need be adopted in order to avoid the reduction of Islamic architecture to a mere outer shell with no integral content.

78 Nasr, Traditional Islam, 235.
79 Gabr, Influence, xvii-xix.
80 Ibid, xxii.
Contrary to the polarity reviewed in the previous sections between the modern and the traditional, Dogan Kuban reflects on the matter differently, suggesting that both concepts be abandoned altogether:

We should be satisfied with the idea that spiritual continuity with the past is not a formal continuity […] The spiritual continuity with the past for the sake of cultural identity can only mean that we are able to select architectural forms for ourselves. Whether they fit in to a vision of spiritual continuity with the past is not a problem of identity, but a problem of interpretation.”

Kuban considers the continuity of the past but in an almost abstract form. He finds that the pitting of the modern and the traditional, or the Western and the Eastern, against one another is the “wrong issue,” so long as we do not blindly copy the image of the modern from the West. 81 To him, the past will find ways of manifesting itself “in organization of form and space” if it is truly of value to the people, although he does state that this makes it more difficult to distinguish and evaluate the continuity of heritage. 82 He makes no reference to the process of building that others find vital in the concept of continuity, or materials and methodology. Adopting either approach, to him, is a hindrance of the possibly creative output of present-day architecture, and that this is not the right point of departure for the architectural discourse, but a result of a colonialist past that Muslim nations have struggled with, a natural development to the histories of Muslim nations. Instead, he finds it to be an issue political in nature that is not relevant to current building practice. This idea does not seem to me to be particularly sensible, as the architecture of nations has always been reflective of their histories and even indicative of political allegiances and agendas over time, as reflected in the Cairene architecture of the early 20th century under the British occupation, and the French campaign before it. To suddenly shed all these influences and deem architecture as separate hardly seems applicable.

81 Kuban, “Modern versus Traditional,” 58.
82 Ibid.
What, then, should architecture represent and what should it communicate? Additionally, the matter of integrating the past into modern architecture is not so simple as it spontaneously combusting on its own, but will only come to exist out of a willful endeavor to make it happen; the people are not the decision makers or the builders. It is the architects and the patrons that control this affair, and they come from distinct and narrow strata, applying their own agendas and ideas of progress. The entire debacle we find ourselves in now is in fact largely due to this circumstance. Also, the “problem of interpretation” that he refers to is not a simple matter; after all, “it is user response that spells the difference between success and failure. As a landmark, the building must generate a sense of pride, the message it conveys must be comprehensible to be understood.”83 If the said manifestation is not an obvious and readable one, one can expect that only the highly educated in architectural history and the literati can be able to identify the continuity of heritage in a building. Since the user is the ultimate decider in the success of the building, Kuban’s proposed mechanism surely does not hold water.

---

1.3 Regionalism

“Regionalism is never a singular theory or practice, but it is most often a means by which tensions – such as those between globalization and localism, modernity and tradition – are resolved.”

In order to not overwhelm nor confuse the reader with multifaceted Regionalist theories, I will try to provide a simple definition of the general concept of Regionalism as I have come to understand it. First, the term Regionalist is directly connected to that which is local, whether it be material, building practice, use, or day-to-day experience as lived by the local user. It not only respects this, but builds according to it; these aspects dictate the way a Regionalist monument is erected and can be used. It centers on forming a connection between the people and their environment. As Canizaro puts it, “It must foster connectedness to that place and be a response to the needs of local life, not in spite of global concerns and possibilities, but in order to better take advantage of them.” This is his take on Regionalism, spurred by his admitted dissatisfaction with the concept of Critical Regionalism, championed by Kenneth Frampton, a concept sometimes perceived as rigid and uncompromising. What is most encouraging about Canizaro’s particular brand of Regionalism is that he challenges the notion that being local and being backward are mutually exclusive concepts, a perspective that is refreshing in our afflicted modern world. Canizaro reflects on the inherent resistance of Regionalism to “standardizing structures that would diminish local differentiation.” Therefore, just like Traditionalism, Regionalism emerges as a counter-measure to the conformist attitude of Modernism with its colonialist overtones. The issue with modernity is that it quells authenticity.

---

84 Canizaro, “Introduction,” in *Architectural Regionalism*, 16.
86 Ibid.
Regionalist architecture, however, attempts to rectify this, and some variations of it allow for the incorporation of a form of technology that fits within the means of the locale and is accessible to it. What makes Regionalism the paramount theory of interest in this study is that it seeks the “establishment of connections between new works and pre-existing local and regional characteristics. […] These values range from the desire to preserve a region’s cultural heritage to the desire to manifest social and political order drawn along regional distinctions.” This statement is telling of the power of architecture to reshape the established mode of socio-political life, making it a very potent tool, and a dangerous one in the hands of the wrong entity. Considering the institutions with the capacity to erect buildings, one must be wary of the agendas and ideals communicated through an adoption of certain building programs.

Although possibly less radical, Regionalism can sometimes be equally as vehement as Traditionalism, as in the case of the great Hassan Fathy, who Grabar calls “the architectural prophet from twentieth-century Egypt.” Drawing on the premise that the people are the greatest resource of any developing nation, in that they build their knowledge not on scientific bases but on a collective and gathered experience of trial and error with regard to their environment, creating an expertise acquired through testing and handed down over many years, Fathy suggested that architects must study the needs, lifestyles, and practices of the people they are building for in the New Nubia project. While this seems fair and perfectly reasonable, the way in which he suggested this be achieved is what may have posed a

---

88 Steele, “Continuity,” 23.
92 Cantacuzino, “Continuity and Change,” 27.
difficulty; the architect was to be “attached” to a segment of the project, in this case “a cluster of houses in Old Nubia.” This message is echoed by Charles Correa when discussing the success of certain architects in appropriating the Indian vernacular like Le Corbusier, versus the designers of major projects in the Gulf who have spent no time in acquainting themselves with the locals and ways of life practiced in the area.\cite{Correa}

Fathy’s message was simple: to respect the natural environment and be in harmony with it, unlike the modernist practice of ignoring the natural surroundings, and to create an architecture that is responsive to the needs of the people,\cite{Steele} in which he was unfortunately unsuccessful. To that effect, contrary to a widely held perception of him, Fathy was not against contemporaneity in and of itself, but instead the way in which it had come to be applied in the architecture of his time in the onset of modernization. It was his view that contemporaneity meant being “of the time, relevant to its situation in space, time and human society,” and in that sense, “all great architecture is contemporary,“\cite{Fathy} which separates the modern from the contemporary.

Once again, environmental factors were also significant underpinnings in the school of thought, as Doshi remarks:

> To achieve this unity and to integrate physical and spiritual needs, due importance was given to nature and its basic laws. Nature was accepted as it is. Life-style and activity followed in consonance with nature and architecture with nature. Concern for resources and conservation of energy was reflected in all rituals, social actions, and very clearly in physical planning.\cite{Doshi}

One of the important problems that Regionalism strives to remedy is the exploitation of labor and the use of expensive modern materials, either imported or now locally produced by foreign technology, as well as giving local craftsmen back their livelihood. The latter is indicated in Özkan’s statement, “Modernism, through its

\begin{itemize}
\item[93] Correa, “Vistas,” 17.
\item[94] Steele, “A Tribute,” 51.
\item[95] Fathy, “Contemporaneity,” 56.
\item[96] Doshi, “Cultural Continuum,” 87.
\end{itemize}
sub-theme of internationalism proclaimed universality and world-wide applicability of certain values of architecture and over the past sixty years, almost totally discarded all the ‘regional’ building activity,” signifying that the local craftsmen found themselves in a difficult position when their skills and crafts were no longer in demand due to the emergence of modern, albeit impractical, material and methods. The use of concrete, for instance, was not advocated by Hassan Fathy because it was not suitable for the climate of the region due to its quality of being heat-retentive, so opting for an alternative found in the locale was more appropriate. “A major aspect of Regionalistic building is the ability to derive from the traditional building crafts and the need for continuity that in the past was sustained by the craftsmen as a way of finding meaningful expression of the spirit of Islam within the context of modern life and technology.”97 Additionally, in using indigenous materials, the architect reduces the use of energy and cost for production and transportation, as well as instigates the presently grossly lacking self-reliance and self-sufficiency,98 which inevitably increases efficiency. This further capitalizes on the inclusion of the community in the inception of their built environment, as it is directly from the community that workers, craftsmen, and builders, who have the knowledge and the capacity to manipulate their immediately available resources into building materials,99 come. This measure also counters waste, in that the resources available at the disposal of a region are utilized to the highest possible degree,100 a necessary effort in light of the economic constraints now faced by the nations of the third-world.

The use of local building materials and methods constitutes the Vernacular mode of building, which is supposedly more cost-efficient than the use of universal

100 Mumtaz, “The Architect,” 152.
materials such as reinforced concrete,\(^{101}\) yet the proliferation of modern materials might be an indication that at present, they are cheaper. Vernacular, Canzario finds, is different from Regionalism in that it comes as a “response to local conditions,” making it unconscious or “accidental,” and not self-aware, unlike Regionalism which he finds to be an act of purposeful volition and deliberate intent.\(^{102}\)

In this case, the classification of Hassan Fathy’s New Gourna Mosque as “Traditional/Vernacular” by Ihsan Fethi\(^{103}\) is inaccurate, considering that it was a very intentional project undertaken by the use of local building methods and techniques, and by no means accidental. Furthermore, Hassan Fathy writes, “In attacking what passes for contemporaneity in architecture today, I am most emphatically not asking architecture to regress. I respect the work of the masters of the past, but I do not want to arrest architecture in some past century,”\(^{104}\) indicating indeed that he was not a Traditionalist. Özkan divides Vernacularism into conservative and interpretive, or Neo-Vernacularism. The conservative is the one that uncompromisingly makes use of local materials and technologies, and the latter, he describes:

> utilized levels of technology which usually had nothing to do with those which existed regionally. […] In these efforts more of a lip service was given to the regional components, and therefore, architecture became more of an expression of local shapes and forms where culture is also reduced to souvenirs and folklore.\(^{105}\)

The Aga Khan also critiqued Vernacular architecture in its failure to “cater to contemporary aspirations, either in rural areas or the towns.”\(^{106}\) Vernacularism finds itself incorporated in the larger body of Regionalism because it is by definition of the

\(^{101}\) Cantacuzino, “Continuity and Change,” 28.
\(^{103}\) Fethi, “The Mosque Today,” 55.
\(^{104}\) Fathy, “Contemporaneity,” 56.
\(^{105}\) Özkan, “Regionalism,” 11.
region, derived from its resources and restricted by its limitations, and hence, Özkan calls for a change of terminology to accommodate this.\textsuperscript{107}

What makes a building Islamic, as argued by the English architect John Warren who practices in the Middle East, is its sensitivity to the way of life of Muslim populations, and a building cannot be made Islamic simply by “sticking things on it.”\textsuperscript{108} According to the advocates of Regionalism, the architect then must be aware of the natural development of forms and styles in response to the demands and conditions of living in any Islamic city, and conceive a building in accordance to those needs, insofar as they have meaning to the users and community. “This continuing tradition, however, is not to be confused with the revival and reproduction architecture now common in the West.”\textsuperscript{109} Regionalism is not a revivalist or post-modernist style movement, in the sense that the focus is made on the ornamentation, where buildings ‘don the garb’ of previous eras to associate with them, creating what Kuban calls “cultural fetishism.”\textsuperscript{110} Instead, it is realized by combining a holistic understanding of the client’s needs, the nature and problems of the site, and the capacity of the materials used to deliver what it is the architect aspires to, based on the above. It therefore is not a reproduction, since “the mere application of traditional Islamic forms will [not] make a building Islamic,”\textsuperscript{111} but a reintroduction of the valid fundamentals that should shape architectural conception: the user, the environment, and the means of achieving the vision. Correctly applied Regionalism yields

\textsuperscript{107} Özkan, “Regionalism,” 12.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid, quoting Warren.
\textsuperscript{110} Steele, “A Search,” 31.
\textsuperscript{111} Cantacuzino, “Continuity and Change,” 18.
unobtrusive and well-placed monuments. In this sense, Regionalism becomes
“architecture [that] is for the people and by the people.”  

Unfortunately, Regionalism has come under attack by some critics and scholars because of the efforts of some architects to Regionalize a building by applying the superficial means of pastiche to make it appear Islamic to the observer. Correa illustrates this by dividing the architectural movement into two schools.  

The first consists of those designers who [mainly differ from] the so-called ‘International’ stylists in that their ‘grab-bag’ of images is somewhat more localized. But essentially, it is the same superficial process. On the other hand, [the second] also generates a regional architecture, expressing strong cultural roots. […] It is a far more difficult but far more rewarding path. Such architecture does not merely transfer images (whether of local or foreign origin) but transforms them, by re-inventing them.  

In order to create architecture of the latter, Correa devises a formula signifying four forces that must be considered when conceptualizing a building: culture, a “reservoir” that is continuous and changes only very gradually; aspirations, which are “dynamic and volatile;” climate, a “fundamental and unchanging force;” and technology, a force that changes very rapidly.  

When the four elements come to a resolution, he explains, architecture is produced, and the fourth pillar is used to express the former three. In this sense, Regionalism is not anti-technology; on the contrary, Correa states that “we should be open to new technologies,” so long as we do not use it to copy traditional forms in new materials, but use it appropriately to allow traditional concepts to evolve, hence achieving transformation over transference.  

One such architect who finds himself under fire is one of Hassan Fathy’s disciples, Abdel Wahed El-Wakil. Often falling in the category of Traditionalist architects, his work which reinterprets traditional forms in modern capacities makes him a Regionalist architect. Rizvi describes his work as follows:

112 Jain, “Regionalism,” 49.  
114 Ibid.
El-Wakil’s work appears at first glance both essentialist and Orientalist, in that context and history are removed, reducing the Middle East to a timeless and placeless entity. However, in whitewashing away all ornamentation and decorative detailing, El-Wakil’s mosques appear profoundly modern; reductive and formal, they owe as much to Le Corbusier as to Sinan.\textsuperscript{115}

Furthermore, she classifies his work with the “revivalist” mosque architectural movement, which she states is “labeled kitsch, reactionary, and conservative, [as well as being] marginalized in architectural discourse and viewed as unworthy of intellectual engagement,” El-Wakil being the exception to the obscurity of its practitioners.\textsuperscript{116} Derivative and derogatory, Rizvi groups together the Traditionalist with the Regionalist, under the false title of revivalist. The Neo-Mamluk architectural style was revivalist; El-Wakil’s Regionalist architecture, according to him, is not Neo-Fatimid, although it might appear to be to many critics. James Steele refers to his work as “‘neo-classical’ due to its repeated references to the ‘classical’ Islamic architecture of the ninth and sixth centuries AD (sic).”\textsuperscript{117} Attempting to reincorporate elements of historic forms in modern building methods is not what can be described as a sheath cladding a monument for historical authenticity: “they don the mantle of the past as a cloak that is meant to grant them historical authenticity.”\textsuperscript{118} This is a superficial interpretation of a work whose designer has made clear his approach to creating a monument and the references he makes to the past via well-thought-out and integrated elements representing an authentic Islamic character. James Steele elaborates on this, stating: “While criticized in some quarters for such recycling, El-Wakil has noted that reinterpretation of archetypes has always been a central part of traditional architecture: there is also a socially important element of recognition and

\textsuperscript{115} Rizvi, *The Transnational Mosque*, 198.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid, 24-25.
\textsuperscript{117} Steele, “Introduction,” 46.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid, 13.
continuity in the regeneration of something familiar into something new.”

Key in this description is the theme of ‘reinterpretation,’ indicating that it is not a matter of copying past forms in their static state as a cut and paste action, and in that effort producing something new. There might not be much new about his mosques outwardly, but there is in the way he implements traditional forms, such as his use of modern technology to generate elaborate *muqarnas* “to a degree of accuracy that has not been achieved elsewhere today.”

In keeping in line with the Regionalist thought, El-Wakil builds mosques with the use of load-bearing brick and stucco exclusively. This does not necessitate a restriction to small buildings, which is a general misconception, as evidenced by the King Saud Mosque in Jeddah and the al-Miqat Mosque in Madina. All of El-Wakil’s buildings are in fact characterized by “his provision of workshops to instruct the building team in the techniques and methods of traditional Islamic crafts.” This promptly reminds us that Regionalism is not just a matter of form, but also very much a reconciliation of traditional building methods and materials, incorporating the local craftsman, and cost-effective building.

Clearly influenced by Traditionalists such as Nasr and Guénon, El-Wakil’s belief is that the loss of identity can be attributed to the pursuit of “novelty and individuality,” and not in the repetition of principles. He stresses that allegiance with tradition on part of the architect does not necessitate the repetition of the past, since “it is not a mere act of imitation; for mimicry destroys the whole significance and meaning of repetition of archetypes. Authentic traditional design is a complex process of careful adaptation and assimilation in an act of gestation.” Hence, one can draw from this

---

120 Ibid.
122 Steele, “Introduction,” 46.
that there is a difference between the act of repetition and imitation – one is vital for continuity, and the other is fatal in the preservation of the character of a culture in building. Although opposed to the vilification of Modernism, Özkan describes El-Wakil’s mosques as “extremely distinct architectural elements and powerful symbols.”

However, the gentrification of traditional building styles has caused the backlash of some, including Rizvi, stating that “Nostalgia and theological revivalism are the fundamental motivations for the historical turn in transnational mosques since the 1980s.” Such remarks carry offensive and arrogant connotations, ignoring many factors that most definitely have shaped the appearance of an “historicist” movement in architecture, such as cultural elements, the measures that need to be taken in the effort toward modernization and the importation of building technologies, and even unsustainable maintenance requirements. Tossing it under the label of nostalgia and religious revivalism is flawed.

What is compelling about Regionalism is its versatility, contrary to the ‘conservative’ reputation it has acquired through the work of architects such as Hassan Fathy. Within it is the capacity to adapt itself to the more rigid elements of Traditionalism, as with Historicist Regionalism seen in the Harity Mosque, Corniche Mosque, and King Saud Mosque in Jeddah, or to employ Modernism to suit the requirements of contemporaneity, such as with Regional Modernism. Remarking on Ken Yeang’s definition of Regionalism, Ismail Serageldin states that “this view clearly defines regionalism as bridging both technology and culture, and may also reflect the ideas proposed by some who advocate the view that the proliferation of a uniform, media-generated, international culture has caused an equal and opposite

---

This underlying flexibility while honoring the culture and local heritage of a place and the people makes it the ideal architectural theory to turn to in this time where constructions not only fail to bridge the gaps in taste and style, but exaggerate them. On this note, Ismail Serageldin identifies the National Commercial Bank of Jeddah, a huge triangular tower sporting a cutting-edge Modernist design as successful, insofar as it reinterprets and “internalizes” the concepts of the courtyard and wind catcher of the surrounding architectural vernacular. He describes it as a “landmark,” “a clever solution to a nagging problem [of the tall building in the harsh climate of Jeddah],” and “the epitome of what great architecture is all about.” It is important to note that Serageldin himself stated in the same review that, “the building does not attempt to relate in any significant way to its surrounding urban fabric. The old city of Jeddah, a stone’s throw away from the site, is not integrated into the design, either by resonance or extension,” and has noted that the materials used in the construction of the building were primarily structural steel and insulated concrete finished in travertine veneer, none of which are indigenous materials. It is obvious, then, that while the building might incorporate certain (and very few) elements that are from the school of Regionalism, it does not qualify as a Regionalist structure, if not for anything other than an almost exclusive reliance on imported materials and design. Even in the more flexible application of Regionalism as proposed by Boussora that adapts itself to the existent built form for a harmonious presence, it poses difficulties in an area such as New Cairo. In this area, a penchant for modern, “progressive” buildings can be found, as suggested here: “the progressive locates cultural identity in an emancipatory

128 Ibid, 28.
future, i.e. in an architecture that reflects progressive and instrumental rationality, “130 a notion reflective of the upper class ultra-modern taste present in the surrounding residential and corporate buildings. However, those are not the only types available; many opt for a Greco-Roman style, so the result is a disrupted, un-cohesive urbanism that is regulated only by the district-imposed building height legislation for residences and private buildings. How, then, can this Regionalist aspiration be applied in this instance?

There are examples of a successful Regionalist enterprise. The Cultural Park for Children in Sayyida Zeinab, conceived by the Egyptian architect AbdelHalim Ibrahim AbdelHalim, is such in the sense that it enhances its surrounding environment and was formulated based on concepts derived from its immediate surroundings, including the Ibn Tulun mosque. Furthermore, the architect went even further and incorporated the users of the facility in the planning phase in order to attain the most livable and actual model possible for the space, their interaction with the space producing significant decisions for the facility. This was achieved by building a life-size mockup of most of the major elements of the park, in place of the usual drawings and small maquettes, and allowing the children of the community to enter it as if they were entering the park after having been completed. In this way, the end user was directly involved in the design process, rather than allowing it to impose itself upon them, and the means by which the users interacted with the space determined certain aspects of the design for the architect. In doing this, the architect supposedly managed to “restore the age-old function of the building ceremony that had been traditional in Egypt, from the Luxor Temple and mosque of Ibn Tulun,”131 although he does not elaborate on the building ceremonies in the buildings he has referenced. Additionally,

the building process was centered around local craftsmen and building materials traditionally used in Mamluk and Ottoman architecture, such as limestone. The inclusion of local labor in modern day architectural practice cannot be emphasized enough, in that it directly affects the community and the economy of the country, and that it enhances the skills of workers whose talents have been relegated thanks to Modernism and largescale building contractors. Khaled Asfour discusses the perception of historic building elements as static and “frozen,” and cites Abdel Halim’s Culture Park as one that has “defrosted” it by interpreting the past as “a living process.” He discusses two approaches to incorporating history in contemporary architecture: the method of copying (in which he places El-Wakil), whether of façade treatment or plan, which yields a “visual abstraction,” and the method of building on the basis of principles and formulas (where he places the National Commercial Bank of Jeddah), what he calls “conceptual abstraction.” He then cites Rasem Badran in a third approach, one that is a combination of the two. Architects who follow any one of the three approaches, to him, perceive history in a frozen state. Abdel Halim, on the other hand, managed to give life to history by not incorporating it as a means to an end where elements, whether they be visual or conceptual, are borrowed, but rather, as a “design attitude” and a process. Evidently, the architect accomplished the incorporation of traditional and historic elements in the vicinity over a myriad of different levels, exemplifying the Regionalist building approach. As Curtis states, “Just as Traditionalism is a reaction

---

133 Asfour, “Abdel Halim’s,” 72.
134 Ibid, 74-75.
against loss of continuity, so Regionalism is a restorative philosophy in favour of supposed raw harmony between people, their artifacts and nature.”\textsuperscript{135}

\textsuperscript{135} Curtis, “Regionalism in Architecture,” 74.
2.0 The Mosques

2.1 Hassan Abbas Sharbatly Mosque

The Hassan Sharbatly Mosque, as it is commonly known, is one of the most prominent mosques in New Cairo, if not the most, as it is one of the earliest established large mosques in the area, dating to the year 2009 (fig. 1). The built area of the mosque is 5,700 meters squared with a capacity for 5,000 worshippers, on an 18,000 meters squared plot of land, with “surrounding arenas” that can fit more than 3,000 people. It is a privately constructed mosque built to commemorate the life of Hassan Abbas Sharbatly (fig. 2), a Saudi businessman of substantial influence who partook in various activities across numerous business sectors, such as the Riyadh Bank, and became the first person to be given the title of Minister of State Emeritus in the history of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia during the reign of King Abdul-Aziz. The mosque was built by the Hassan Abbas Sharbatly Charity Foundation for Community Service, a Saudi Arabian non-profit organization that participates in diverse cultural and social works for the betterment of society and the community, not least of which are religious. The project was delegated to the DMA Engineering and Contracting firm, and the mosque was designed by the Egyptian architectural engineer Dr. Muhammed Amer (fig. 3). The mosque is currently managed by the Sharbatly Islamic Center Association for Community Development, an Egyptian organization with no immediate affiliation with the Foundation, but one that has Saudi members on the board. The Association maintains the mosque from funds.

---

accumulated from events held in the mosque's four ceremonial halls, although the Foundation’s website states that the mosques are maintained, restored, and the salaries of all their workers, utility bills, and operational expenses are paid by the Foundation itself. The religious program of the mosque, including the sermons performed at the Friday prayers, is managed by a group of shaykhs and scholars from the al-Azhar institution and not by the Ministry of Endowments, which is generally meant to oversee all religious monuments that hold a khutba throughout the nation.

**Location**

The construction of the mosque began in the year 2005, at a time when the surrounding area was not as inhabited nor filled with residences or commercial areas as it is today. It is built in the Fifth Settlement of one of the major urban extensions of the capital, New Cairo. The gated mosque is on the corner of a block on a main road, but is diagonal to the street as the whole edifice is oriented towards the qibla. The mosque is surrounded by residences on two sides, a sports academy on the third, and an open, unconstructed area on the remaining side (fig. 4).

**Plan**

The mosque is constructed according to a simple, square nine-bay plan with a large dome at the center, and four buttressed minarets, one projecting from each corner (figs. 5-8). A deep arcade on all four sides (fig. 11), three of which contain three glass doors leading into the men’s prayer hall (fig. 13), surrounds the entire mosque. The women’s prayer area is accessible via an indoor elevator that leads to a

---

138 Personal information obtained from Major General Reda, executive director of the mosque.
balcony within the men's prayer hall (fig. 14). The basement floor houses the administrative offices, as well as the four ceremonial halls, reachable by a ramp (fig. 12) where a few cars of authorized personnel can park, or by flights of stairs. Overall, the layout of the mosque is straightforward.

**Division of Space**

The designation of space in the monument is immediately prognostic of the message and purpose of the mosque: to facilitate the acts of worship and prayer. The largest area of the mosque, and the one of easiest access and several points of entry is the main prayer hall, which constitutes almost the entirety of the building (figs. 15-17). It also gives the sensation of spaciousness and openness due to its very high ceiling. It is on the ground level, with nine entryways (three on each of the three sides) for the convenience of the worshipper. The women's prayer balcony is incorporated into the same space of the men's prayer hall with the same width, but on a higher level. This point is noteworthy because there is not a palpable separation in structure between the two genders, as is most common in modern Egyptian mosques, although this feature is found elsewhere in the Muslim world, such as in contemporary mosques in Saudi Arabia or the Dar al-Hijrah Mosque in Virginia, USA. Both genders participate in the same space and are present in it simultaneously, without having different quarters defined in an external construction for the women, which is not the common practice in contemporary Cairene mosque architecture, as seen in the Police Mosques and the Moshir Tantawi Military Mosque. Secondary to that is the space allotted for the purpose of holding events and official ceremonies. The basement floor holds four ceremonial halls, two used for holding wedding ceremonies, and two others allocated for holding memorial services and funerals,
exclusively. This particular point is very interesting because the mosque administration has separate designations for the halls, in the sense that marriages and funerals do not take place in the same areas. According the Executive Director of the Association and the manager of the mosque, this decision was entirely based on marketing strategies, in order to appeal to the client's personal sensibilities, since some individuals are reluctant to hold marriage ceremonies, an act of continuity, life, and a prospering future, in the same vicinity that is equally designated for events surrounding death. On the part of the mosque administration, this measure is one taken to maximize the profitability of these halls, although having limited spaces designated for events could allow for fewer bookings at a time, since only a single marriage or funerary ceremony could take place in the same instance. The marriage halls are al-Nur and Badr, fitting up to 250 and one hundred people respectively, while the funerary halls are one per gender, the men's (Uhud) taking up to one hundred and ten visitors, and the women’s (Qiba’) holding around ninety.

**Decorative Program & Materials**

The decorative program of the mosque is one that is wholly unpretentious and unified. Whether on the external facade or indoors, the walls are completely covered in sand-colored Hashemite stone blocks, named after the Kingdom where the source of the stone was found in Jordan, and with minor sections of GRC cladding on the mosque façade (fig. 8). Bands of differently sized and textured stone blocks adorn the facade of the mosque, but they remain homogenous with the whole wall. The architect selected this material as a means of enhancing the sustainability of the mosque and reducing its expenses, since stone relieves the entities responsible for the mosque’s
maintenance of the burden of routinely painting the walls.\textsuperscript{140} The women’s prayer area wall is broken up by sets of elongated rectangular windows to allow for natural light to illuminate the space, as well as to break up the appearance of daunting solidity of the façade (figs. 5, 18). The four octagonal buttressed minarets at the corners of the mosque are pierced with four sets of four windows arranged in a vertical line, and each is topped with a glass lantern-like structure that lights up at night (figs. 9-10).

With the exception of the qibla wall, all three sides of the mosque incorporate a large glass section in the design, which greatly contributes to the sense of openness and space prevalent in the vicinity (figs. 15-17, 34). The mihrab panel is surrounded by glass squares that break the monotony and imposition of the great stone wall (figs. 19, 26). Outside the mosque building but within the facility's gates are suitable green areas plentiful with foliage and trees, giving the worshipper a peaceful and serene sensation, since they are visible from within the mosque through the glass sections in the wall. The integration of nature in the architecture in this fashion makes for an overall harmonious and calming experience for the worshipper, one that allows them to disconnect from the bustling city life outside of the mosque gates, and permits spiritual contemplation. Additionally, this suggests that light as a visual constituent plays a significant role as a decorative element in the mosque, because the building would have had a much more somber impression on the viewer had the walls been closed up with stone in place of the large glass segments that break them up.

Another enhancing element of the mosque one must recognize is the absolute symmetry of the mosque along the axis perpendicular to the qibla wall. This creates a sense of harmony to the entire mosque, as well as emphasizes the centrality of the prayer hall and the axiality of the whole structure. This places the emphasis instantly

\textsuperscript{140} Personal information obtained from the mosque architect, Dr. Muhammed Amer.
on the large mihrab, affirming the purpose of the mosque via the direction of the visual axis towards Mecca. Additionally, symmetry is symbolic of the perfection and divinity of God, a prominent feature of traditional prayer hall assemblage in classical Mamluk architecture, apparent in the employment of regular geometric shapes in the prayer halls' structures despite the seemingly haphazard or restricted aspects of the rest of the building due to street alignment and other factors. This also asserts that the functionality of the mosque was the most significant aspect in the conception of the building.

Aside from the alternating beige and sandy hues of the stone blocks used throughout the walls of the mosque, carved stone calligraphy is the only decorative feature found within the mosque walls. The calligraphy however is not used in the way that it is in most mosques; as an inscription band running under the ceiling or in the drum area of the dome. Instead, it forms whole segments of the qibla and side walls of the main prayer hall, in a large script not typically encountered in mosque decoration (figs. 20-23) and is also present on the walls underneath the women's raised prayer area. Starting on the right section of the qibla wall and continuing in sequence to the left on all the walls of the prayer hall, the inscriptions are of the first twenty-five Quranic verses of Sura al-Rahman (55:1-25). According to the architect Muhammed Amer, this particular size and method of writing was selected in order to allow for the verses to be read by people of different educational levels from all areas of the mosque via the appearance of different shades in the stone, achieved by alternating carving and relief in the formation of contrasting variations in the text, unlike those of traditional calligraphic decoration.141 In terms of the choice of Sura, the name of the chapter is one of the most known names of God, al-Rahman, which

---

141 Personal information obtained from the mosque architect, Dr. Muhammed Amer.
roughly translates to the Ever-Merciful, a name reserved for God alone. Unlike some of the other ninety-nine names of God, which refer to qualities that may be found in man as well, al-Rahman capitalizes on the completeness and perfection of the quality of mercy in God, as opposed to al-Rahim, another name of God also reflecting the quality of mercy. However, the use of this particular chapter could be viewed as an appeal to the all-encompassing mercy of God on the soul of the person this monument was built to commemorate after his passing. The women’s prayer hall (figs. 14, 24-25) is a balcony opposite the qibla wall, with a view of the mihrab (fig. 26). The walls in this area are also decorated with carved inscriptions of Quranic verses in the stone blocks, but it does not follow a particular sequence or singular chapter as in the men's prayer hall.

The mihrab panel in the qibla wall is also of stone (fig. 27), with a small protruding balcony on the right reserved for the imam giving the sermon of the Friday prayer, as a modern interpretation of the traditional pulpit found in classical mosques. To the left of the mihrab there is a smaller calligraphic panel containing a Quranic verse from Sura Nuh (71:10-12), referring to the act of asking forgiveness of God, for He is the Forgiver, and the One who has bestowed upon man countless blessings (fig. 28) in alternating recessed and raised lines. On top of the simple, semi-circular mihrab recess is another short inscription referring to the change of the qibla from Jerusalem to the Ka'ba in Mecca (2:144). The mihrab recess itself is of the same stone used throughout the mosque, but cut in smaller, rectangular blocks, and arranged in a particular pattern not found elsewhere in the building, with alternating bands of dark and light stone (fig. 29), emphasizing the orientation towards Mecca. An aspect of this pattern is somewhat recreated in the carpeting of the mosque (figs. 21-22). At the center of the mosque ceiling is a large, circular dome of alternating stone and glass
segments (fig. 30), mounted over a tall, square lantern interrupted by pairs of long, rectangular glass windows (figs. 31-32). The dome itself is noteworthy because the exceptional use of glass segments in it is novel in terms of contemporary mosque architecture. It is reminiscent of perforated domes such as the Almoravid one in the Great Mosque of Tlemcen, but the use of modern materials allows for the discarding of the protective layers used in the ancient delicate ones. These elements permit more light into the space, and alleviate the sensation of heaviness produced by a completely stone dome, giving it a quality of etherealness. The lantern is carried on four beige octagonal columns with white capitals that help to bear the weight of the dome (figs. 32, 34). From the undecorated apex hangs a monumental metal chandelier, the “largest in the world,” making it in fact even larger than the fifteen meter high and ten meter diameter Swarovski crystal chandelier of the Grand Sheikh Zayed Mosque in the Abu Dhabi. The Sharbatly chandelier was constructed by a specialist Egyptian lighting company over a period of nine months, weighing three tons, and measuring up to a height of 17.7 meters and a diameter of 17.6 meters. It merges different geometric forms in its metal segments, such as the octagon and the square, in seven successive tiers symbolizing the seven heavens, from which hang octahedron-shaped transparent light bulbs (figs. 30-33). The Quranic verse 69:17 is inscribed on its “forefront,” according to the Sharbatly Foundation. Although not actually visible to the viewer, the verse refers to God’s throne being above the seven heavens in the eighth level. This chandelier is quite similar to the modular lighting

---

143 Abd-Allah, *State Mosques*, 93.
145 Ibid.
146 Ibid.
fixtures used in Rasem Badran's Justice Palace in Riyadh, which are equally
geometric and generate a gradual dissipation of light over several layers (fig. 35). The
focus on the geometric characteristic in all the components of the mosque creates a
sense of cohesion and uniformity throughout the building, one that contributes to the
sense of wholeness experienced there, and eliminates the distraction of multifarious
elements. The ceiling of the mosque is of square coffers, also known as paneled
beams. From a structural perspective, this modern roofing technique allows the
architect to create wider spans between columns, in order to reduce the number of
columns used in a space to carry the weight of the ceiling (fig. 36). This is achieved
by incorporating the beams that form the square shapes in the ceiling, which can
drastically widen the span between columns to 150 m$^2$.\textsuperscript{147} This feature is surely of
structural significance and convenience, as having several columns distributed
throughout the prayer hall would have obstructed the sense of openness in the space.
Furthermore, the cost of creating the same spans between columns using flat concrete
slabs is so expensive that it is not at all used for such purposes in architecture. The
coffers are of particular interest here however because of their connection to the
ancient cubical mosques of the Arabian Peninsula. The coffered ceiling was an
element found in several of the sacred buildings either dated to pre-Islamic times of
the Gulf region, or early Islamic mosques.\textsuperscript{148} An example of this is Masjid al-‘Abbas
in Asnaf, Khaulan, dating to the year 1126.\textsuperscript{149} While the al-‘Abbas differs from the
Sharbatly Mosque in that the ceiling is decorated along with the column capitals, both
feature coffers as a roofing technique. Additionally, the ceiling is carried on two rows
of columns, as are several other examples from the same region, including the mosque

\textsuperscript{147} Personal information from architect Yasser el-Leathy.
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid, 125.
of Tamur.\textsuperscript{150} While the Sharbatly differs from these two mosques in that it is a nine-bay mosque, the common feature of interest here is the roofing technique applied. This similarity may not be coincidental, since another characteristic feature of these mosques is the closed, cubical form, also found in the Sharbatly Mosque. Another major difference between them is the use of glass and windows throughout the mosque, as well as the large dome and lantern, which is a very significant deviation from the indigenous example, since neither of the two aspects are found in the ancient mosques of the Gulf region. In fact, the dominance of darkness in the ancient mosques created a cave-like quality. The Ka‘ba is perhaps the most maintained and recognized example of this architectural form, and was the inspiration for the architect when he visited the Haram in Mecca.\textsuperscript{151} This leads us to the possibility that this mosque was built as a modern conception of the traditional cubical mosque of the Gulf region and Arabian Peninsula, since the Abbasid and Umayyad periods witnessed a proliferation of this mosque type.\textsuperscript{152} While the nine-bay mosque plan is of the most common plans throughout the Muslim world, both geographically and temporally, possibly due to its emphasis on symmetry as suggested by O’Kane,\textsuperscript{153} the fact that the patrons of this mosque, as well as the personality it is built in the name of, are both Saudi Arabian further suggests that the Sharbatly Mosque was designed in the style of the Arabian mosque heritage. In terms of contemporary mosques, the Masjid al-Kabir of Kuwait employs a similar coffered roofing technique in the ceiling of the main prayer hall with a similar nine-bay plan.

As Hillenbrand remarks on congregational mosques, “It was in some sense a showpiece for the faith and often for the person, dynasty, or area most closely

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid, 124.
\textsuperscript{151} Personal information obtained from mosque architect, Dr. Muhammed Amer.
\textsuperscript{152} O’Kane, “The Origin,” 203.
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid, 190.
associated with it,” in this case the obvious association of person being Hassan Sharbatly, the Saudi businessman. In this case, one can safely state that the Hassan Sharbatly Mosque is a successful example of Regional architecture, respective of the region of its founders and purpose, in that it is based on the construction methodology of their local and historic mosque architectural vernacular, and pays tribute to it, all while maintaining modern-day comforts provided by technology as well insightful innovations that have improved the structure and brought it into the twenty-first century. While it is an example of Regional architecture, it is not representative of the Egyptian region, but of the Arabian region.

The concept behind the mosque seems to be an attempt at moving towards modernizing Arabian mosque design, not as a mere repetition of traditional forms, while preserving the primary elements that are necessary in the composition of any mosque, such as the mihrab, minbar, etc. This concept is manifested in the unique dome, glass walls, the use of a balcony as a minbar, and the style applied to the alternating embossed and engraved calligraphy of the Quranic verses on the walls. What is more impressive is that the mosque has managed to provide the user with a holistic experience that aids its function, with its focus being on the prayer hall and the incorporation of the natural elements of light and greenery, without degrading itself with gaudy decorations such as with the Grand Mosque of Sheikh Zayed. The Sharbatly maintains its overall integrity with clear connections to Regionalist architecture of its homeland, making it a flagship to an ancient practice representative of a region's architectural identity in a foreign territory.

While the mosque might communicate this experience to the user via its plan and internal components, the exterior of the mosque contributes little to the sense of peace and serenity discussed previously. In fact, when viewed from the outside, the
mosque generates an imposing, weighty, block-like impression. This could be due to the fact that there is no gradual ascension in the elements of the external mosque design, starting with the dome. While the dome is carried on a square lantern quite apparent from the inside of the mosque (fig. 31) in an effort to raise it, it is hardly visible from the outside (fig. 18). To avoid such an issue, the vertically elongated Mamluk domes were often situated at the edge of the qibla wall and incorporated both a high drum and a large transitional zone whose heights were almost the same as those of the dome itself (as in the Sultan Qaytbay funerary complex, Faraj ibn Barquq, and al-Ashraf Barsbay complexes, or the Madrasa of Umm al-Sultan Sha’ban), which allowed it to be clearly visible from the narrow streets to any passerby, an imperative element considering the proximity of the many mosques to one another. However, the Sharbatly dome appears rather squat, despite not being shallow like Ottoman domes, but its placement at the center of the large prayer hall and lack of a drum causes it to be invisible at a close angle from within the enclosure. This could be due to the fact that the urban surroundings of the mosque are rather spacious, so the architect did not need to pay much attention to this aspect, or its presence could be a way to assimilate the mosque with the Egyptian habitation of seeing domes in mosques. Furthermore, the minarets do little to remedy this despite their function as vertical fixtures that facilitate movement towards the Divine, at least symbolically. They differ significantly from Mamluk minarets, with their notable stateliness and their visible evolution of terrestrial density into a refined and elegant airiness, which draw the viewer gracefully upwards and point their vision, and hence their soul, toward the skies, via the application of balconies that progressively increase the ratio of void to solid. The minarets of Sharbatly are quite solid; even in the median section where they break free of the buttressing, they remain of
unchanging volume until they culminate in a finial-topped lantern. This makes the facade of the mosque with its minarets the weakest aspect of the design. In this regard, one can draw a connection between the Sharbatly minarets and the untapering block minarets of contemporary Saudi Arabian architecture, built in the Najdi style, of the Justice Palace mosque as well. The Justice Palace Mosque on the other hand, being of the Najdi style, does not support any domical structure, stemming from the Wahabi belief that domes are symbolic of mausoleums, and were destroyed when used over mosques. In that regard, the Sharbatly Mosque differs from the indigenous Saudi Arabian or Najdi mosque architecture in that it carries a dome.

The Hassan Sharbatly Mosque strongly resembles contemporary mosques in the Gulf, such as the al-Salam (figs. 37-38), al-Aziz (figs. 39-41), and al-Sharbatly (figs. 42-43) mosques in Jeddah, as well as others Taif and Dubai. All of them follow the same conception in terms of number of stories, division of space, internal configuration, and façade elements. For instance, all of the mosques incorporate large glass paneling in the walls of the prayer halls. Additionally, their minarets are stout and hefty, with no evolution in design or size as they ascend, and are also attached to the corners of the constructions. The lack of attention paid to the development of the minarets of these mosques could be attributed to Hillenbrand’s claim that the minaret “never fully established itself” in Saudi Arabia, where the ancient practice of making the call to prayer from the roofs of mosques is still applicable. Their domes have no zone of transition, and are hardly visible from the street level. Their interiors have very few or no columnar supports, and their pulpits are all constructed in the same modernistic method of a glass balcony jutting out from beside the mihrab. These

---

154 Badran, Justice Palace Presentation Panels, 9.
155 The exception is that of the Masjid al-Nabawi in Madina, in order to preserve the sanctity of this particular mosque and the Prophet’s tomb.
mosques having been built by the same institution as the Hassan Sharbatly Mosque is indicative of the degree of control on part of the patron in dictating the design of the mosque. It appears that the Hassan Sharbatly Foundation has birthed its own style and is applying it to all of the monuments it funds. While there are other versions of the domed cube structure used for some Gulf state mosques, such as the Masjid al-Kabir of Kuwait, the Ahmed al-Fatih Mosque in Bahrain, or possibly even the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque of Oman, they all have variations in their plans such as large courtyards or hypostyle areas that contrast with the Hassan Sharbatly Mosque of Cairo. The use of large calligraphy to decorate the interior of the prayer hall is an element not found in any of the other Sharbatly Foundation mosques, indicating the Egyptian influence of writing on the walls of temples since the Pharaonic ages, as was communicated by the architect.\(^{157}\) While the Sharbatly Mosque of Cairo is the most sophisticated and refined of the Saudi mosques referenced earlier built under the same sponsorship, it stills carries strong references to Saudi Arabian contemporary mosque architecture, even if it is the single mosque that boasts four more slender minarets of the twenty-mosque collection of the same sponsorship,\(^{158}\) in addition to being the only one whose dome is carried over a lantern and not on a simple drum like the others.

The heavily buttressed minarets of the Jeddah mosques might fall under the category described by Hillenbrand as giving “an embattled air.” However, the Cairene Sharbatly siting of its four minarets at the corners of the monument could be an effort to demarcate the building as a mosque, considering the large spaces between buildings in New Cairo. The dome was unable to do so, being so insignificant from the exterior. The minarets are used here as they were used in Ottoman Turkey, to

\(^{157}\) Personal information obtained from mosque architect, Dr. Muhammed Amer.

“articulate the mosque [or] mark out the perimeter of the building as a whole.”\textsuperscript{159}

Furthermore, even in its modern functional obsolescence, the minaret symbolically has become the primary indicator of mosques, more so than the dome, since domes may be used in other types of buildings and not just mosques.\textsuperscript{160} Even so, the Sharbatly Mosque’s Regionalist character remains undeniable. Hence, it is safe to assume that the Hassan Abbas Sharbatly Mosque draws clear inspiration and is greatly influenced by the indigenous and contemporary architecture prevalent in the region of the patrons of the monument.

\textsuperscript{159} Hillenbrand, “The Mosque,” 42.
\textsuperscript{160} Fethi, “The Mosque Today,” 61.
2.2 The Police Mosque of New Cairo

The Police Mosque (fig. 1), known as "Masjid wa Dar Monasabat al-Shorta bil Qahira al-jadida" is a recent mosque, completed in July 2017, commissioned by the Egyptian Ministry of the Interior (fig. 2). It is one of the largest mosques in the Fifth Settlement of New Cairo, and is estimated to have cost around 150 million Egyptian pounds, according to the accountant of the mosque.\(^\text{161}\) It has ever since been under the direct management of Major General Mohsen Rady, an Assistant Minister of the Interior. According to him, the mosque is built to reflect a combination of Islamic and Andalusian styles.\(^\text{162}\) The facility was inaugurated by the Minister of Interior, Magdy AbdulGhaffar, on the seventh of July 2017.

The mosque was delegated to el-Afifi House of Expertise, a large independent architecture and construction consultancy in Cairo, founded by the Egyptian engineer Dr. Hakim el-Afifi in the year 1976. Dr. Hakim el-Afifi started his career working as a military engineer for the armed forces.\(^\text{163}\) Upon acquiring a Ph.D. in Architecture from the Paris University les Ecoles des Beaux Arts, he went on to teach at the Military Technical College, becoming the Head of the Architectural Department and Construction Division, and eventually the Assistant Director of Graduate Studies and Affairs.\(^\text{164}\) Later, he was appointed the Head of the consulting office of the Engineering Authority for Armed Forces until the year 1999.\(^\text{165}\) The el-Afifi firm does everything from design and building, to construction supervision and project

\(^{161}\) Personal information.
\(^{162}\) Ibid.
\(^{163}\) “El Afifi founder bios,” http://elafificonsultant.com/founder-bios/ (accessed [March 6, 2018]).
\(^{164}\) Ibid.
\(^{165}\) Ibid.
management. Their ventures are focused in the Middle East, with company branches in Qatar and in Abu Dhabi, but they also pursue projects globally.\(^{166}\)

The mission of the mosque, as stated in the official publication of the mosque, is the "building of man," which reads on the first page of the booklet: "This [is] the heavenly message that the Beneficent Allah bestowed [upon] the earth and inspired with it the hearts and spirits of His prophets and messengers for the sake of man, every man for mankind, and all mankind for the building of the earth, for the sake of life."\(^{167}\)

**Location**

Situated near the Orouba Square, the mosque is constructed "in one of the most important locations in the city of New Cairo."\(^{168}\) The mosque is built in the area of the Fifth Settlement in New Cairo, under 700 meters away from the presiding large mosque of the area, the Hassan Abbas Sharbatly Mosque, to the extent that each can be seen clearly from the other (fig. 3). In fact, they are within walking distance from one another. This particular point is interesting for several reasons. First, the surrounding area where the mosque is located is not one of a distinctly high residential count, so the need for two large mosques at such close proximity is questionable. It invokes images of the Mamluk era, when mosques were built as an illustration of the patrons' power and in a way where they challenged the surrounding mosques. Each patron built his mosque in an effort to exhibit his ability to sponsor a better, more expensive building, causing ever more grandiose edifices to be erected.

The fact that al-Zahir Baybars overturned the Ayyubid sultan Salah al-Din’s

---

\(^{166}\) "History," [http://elafficiconsultant.com/](http://elafficiconsultant.com/) (accessed [March 5, 2018]).

\(^{167}\) *Masjid al-Shorta.*

\(^{168}\) Ibid.
institution of the *Shafi`i* principle of one Friday mosque per urban entity\(^{169}\) to allow for more than one mosque in the same area is indicative enough of the matter.

Furthermore, the mosque is situated in a position adjacent to Cairo Festival City, the largest commercial complex in this area of Cairo, and Downtown Cairo, another commercial complex, both of which serve an upper-middle class to elite strata of society almost exclusively.

We can draw from the choice of location two things. Firstly, the mosque does not serve a necessity in terms of providing a space for worship, due to the existence of another large mosque in the same area. This suggests another possible motive for building, which is to compete with the presiding mosque over certain ceremonies that can be held in mosques (this point will be discussed further below). Additionally, the mosques are built so that they are facing away from one another, each facing a main road, but the areas of land they are built on mimic each other (both are constructed on an area of land that is almost the same, shaped like a quarter circle (fig. 3)). The idea that the Police Mosque adopted the same style in the plot of land they built on makes it inevitable that there is some form of discourse between the two mosques. Secondly, locating the mosque between two large, thriving retail facilities indicates that it consciously attempts to take advantage of the overall commerciality of the area; if the affluent people who visit these places to make purchases and spend money encounter a mosque that appears new, extravagant, and visually appealing, they are more likely to use it. This means that the mosque being built in such an area, as opposed to being built in a less commercial part of New Cairo, serves as a way for it to advertise itself, particularly to members of a privileged social class, allowing it to attract more income.

---

\(^{169}\) Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo*, 54.
Plan

The mosque is built on a gated plot of land surrounded by a white iron fence on the curved side, and on the rest with concrete walls with diamond wire mesh. It has a spacious rectangular parking area that is separated from the mosque itself by security gates and their personnel. Upon passing through the parking entrance (the main gates to the mosque are reserved for specific individuals or certain processions), the viewer finds himself facing a large white arcade, which later appears to be one of the sides of the building, and an unpretentious garden on the right.

The mosque sports a very peculiar plan, one that bears no connection to any previously studied monument. It is built outwards from a right angle, forming a quarter of a circle, with two linear extensions running along the sides of the right angle (figs. 4-5).

The mosque is comprised of three floors (ground level, mezzanine, and basement), with specific designations to each. For instance, the ground floor is composed of a large central indoor vestibule flanked by five halls of different sizes. There is an additional supplementary ceremonial hall to the main hall, and two salons on this floor. On the mezzanine is the main prayer hall for men with the capacity to accommodate up to 800 worshippers.\(^{170}\) It is triangular with a curved edge and covered by the main dome superimposed behind eleven smaller domes covering the arcade, and a large open courtyard (essentially the roof of the halls below) that can accommodate around 3,200 people.\(^{171}\) In the basement, there is the women’s circular prayer hall, which is substantially smaller than the former, and has no dome or arcade, but a separate ablutions area. Apparently, the selection of this area for the allocation

\(^{170}\) *Masjid al-Shorta.*
\(^{171}\) Ibid.
of the women’s prayer hall was a measure taken as a solution for a problem presented to the architects well into the construction phase. Initially, the women’s prayer hall was meant to occupy the space of the supplementary, and smallest, ceremonial hall located on the ground floor of the edifice, as per the architects’ design. Upon construction of the building, however, the patrons decided that this space would be better suited as an additional ceremonial hall for women, in the case that the adjacent large hall was being used for the purpose of a memorial service for men. The architects then found themselves in a challenging situation, because at that point the overall construction had been finalized, and they were in the finishing steps of landscaping the external area surrounding the building within the mosque gates. Therefore, they had no option but to build the women’s prayer area separately, underground, and not attached to the core of the original building. Further, there are three sets of escalators to transport people to and from the upper level of the mosque (fig. 7), or the basement level. Those are complimentary by static staircases and elevators. The two main staircases lead up from the driveway to the open courtyard in front of the prayer hall through two Persian-looking pishtaq portals (fig. 8), except that each is topped with a dome and exhibits rather compressed proportions next to the monumental ones of Persian architecture. From the side axes of the mosque rise four minarets, two on each axis. The two main gates (fig. 9) of the mosque open onto a red, paved, almost lustrous ramp that extends around a large, round fountain adjacent to a modest garden (figs. 4-5).

Division of Space

172 Personal information obtained from Rana, one of the site engineers
The eccentricity of the mosque plan inevitably leads to a discussion of the division of space within the building. While from the outside the building is very clearly a mosque thanks to the minarets and circumscribing dome, the allotment of spaces and their designation inside seems to suggest otherwise. The majority and the largest of spaces, additionally the ones with the easiest accessibility due to being on the ground floor, are allotted for halls used for events, namely funerary and official marriage ceremonies, or "cultural seminars and scientific conventions" as stated in the mosque's official publication.\(^1\) The ceremonial halls are of varying sizes. The largest one, al-Rawda, occupies the central space below the prayer hall on the ground floor, accessible via the spacious inner vestibule, and carries up to 400 individuals. It is supplemented by a smaller hall, al-Kawthar, that fits up to 100 people. On either side of the largest hall are two smaller halls, al-Safa and al-Marwa along one axis, each with the capacity of 200 people, and al-Huda and al-Duha on the other axis, holding the same number of people. Both sets of halls can be opened up onto one another respectively to allow for a capacity of 400 visitors at a time. Additionally, this mosque supports a practice not commonly found in similar buildings, which is to hold events outdoors in the open area surrounding the trapezoidal garden. These events are usually for the entertainment of guests attending marriage ceremonies in the vicinity, at an extra price paid by the bride and groom. They provide a seated reception with decorations and catering that lasts for several hours, and trained staff to wait on the guests, but no music, because they find that to be inappropriate for a mosque.\(^2\)

The placement of the prayer halls either above or below the main (and largest) floor indicates a secondary role to them. Furthermore, it suggests a very distinct focus

---

\(^1\) Ibid.
\(^2\) Personal information provided by Taha, an employee in charge of events at the mosque.
on the commercial element and the generation of funds rather than the worshipping aspect of the mosque. This notion, however, goes directly against the claim made by the mosque authorities in their publication, which will be discussed in the coming section.

Decorative Program & Materials

One of the most beautiful and prestigious mosques that the eye can see, and its architectural design, beauty and splendor [are] a unique sign in Islamic architecture throughout the ages, leaving an aesthetic value reflecting the spirit and civilization of the Islamic religion with all of its heritage and tolerance. The mosque was built to serve as a bridge between the police institution and the various social spectrums, and an Islamic edifice that strengthens and deepens the Islamic religion and its tolerant concepts, and is a platform for spreading the teachings of the true religion in its tolerant moderation.175

In its surroundings of sandy desert and beige residences, the Police Mosque stands as an imposing whitewashed icon that forcibly grabs any spectator's attention. Interrupted by two large gates, the front section of the mosque grounds is surrounded by a white, wrought iron fence formed of overlapping pointed arches holding a continuous geometric star pattern within them, against Plexiglas. The gates open onto a slightly inclined, red driveway that bends around a semi-paved garden with a large fountain at its center (fig. 10), which is decorated by a band of tile mosaic eight-pointed blue stars (fig. 11).

The purpose of the red driveway, as the mosque authorities have pointed out, is to convey the luxury and eminence of the 'red carpet' experience to the select persons whom are allowed to drive into it. Usually, those are either men of stature and political importance, or a bride and groom who have reserved one of the mosque halls to conduct their official marriage ceremony. This concept is extremely disturbing, as it combines two contradictory ideals in one place. While this is a religious monument and a house of God, it simultaneously imports a concept foreign and opposed to the

175 Masjid al-Shorta.
ideals of Islam and worship. I say worship because even in the case of users coming to
the mosque to perform a ceremony, this can be considered a religious endeavor
because it is any Muslim couple's duty to follow these certain steps in order to be wed,
as is evident in the Shari’a. Getting married does not make a person a celebrity, so
mimicking a Hollywood practice in a place that is intended to be a holy sanctuary
directly associated with God is quite out of place. According one of the site engineers,
the design of the mosque proposed by the firm did not include this red, paved
driveway, but instead was supposed to be comprised of interlocking stone.\footnote{176}
However, this concept was abandoned when authorities pointed out that cobblestone
streets are not particularly practical for women’s high-heeled shoes, and present a
difficulty for them when walking that necessarily need be avoided.

The eclecticism of the mosque is apparent in the elements selected in the
decoration, which might blend well together, but cause the monument to stand out
abruptly from its surroundings. The driveway directs vehicles up to a pavement
leading into an indoor vestibule accessible through three large glass doors within keel
arches (figs. 12-13), which are the thematic arches used throughout the mosque with
the exception of the mihrabs. On either side of the external Kashmir granite pavement
(fig. 13) are white marble stairways that lead up to two identical pishtaq dome-topped
portals (figs. 12, 14) that form an entry to the open courtyard of the mosque. The side
walls of each of these portals are decorated with a simple, white, embossed geometric
star pattern found throughout the mosque, with a single hanging lantern in an
undecorated inner dome (figs. 15-16), and a simple star design in the marble floor (fig.
17).

\footnote{176 Personal information provided by Rana.}
The courtyard is made of treated white marble that is not affected by heat from the sun's rays.\textsuperscript{177} The floor of the court is decorated with a large, colorful geometric star design within a larger circle (fig. 18), and the arrangement of marble floor tiles within the frames is at an angle to indicate the qibla direction (fig. 19). Additionally, there are decorative mosaic recesses with broken-headed arches to indicate the qibla along the external walls of the prayer hall with a Quranic verse about the qibla (2:144) and the name of God in golden tesserae for the same purpose (fig. 20). The use of this particular type of arch throughout the mosque is reserved only for the function of indicating the qibla.

The main prayer hall entrance is indicated by a projecting, domed pishtaq portal with a decorative abstract golden band running around its facade, framing the mosaic star design surrounding the large keel arch (figs. 21-22). On either side of the entrance portal is an arcade with white, embossed geometric star patterns in the blind arches that alternate with ones decorated with glass mosaic inlay (figs. 23-24), and the soffits perpendicular to the qibla wall also have white geometric star designs that run from the ground up (figs. 25-26). The arcade is topped with miniature domes inlaid with bronze colored tesserae (fig. 27), and the facade of it carries a recessed band of a continuous geometric star pattern (fig. 28). The hall is accessible via large wooden doors adorned with a geometric star pattern with golden sunbursts (figs. 29-30), the main door being the only one with an embossed medallion carrying God’s name painted in gold within a keel arch. The main door is additionally defined by two mosaic panels with geometric designs in gold and blue, which are not repeated elsewhere in the mosque (fig. 31).

\textsuperscript{177} Masjid al-Shorta.
Inside, there is a central area underneath the dome and two side areas in the curving prayer hall, indicated by the three hanging chandeliers, the middle one being the largest. The inside of the dome is of painted stucco with a pattern comprised of curved lozenges that decrease in size towards the apex, but stop altogether before reaching it (fig. 32). Furthermore, this effect is enhanced by applying a gradient in the painting of the design that gets lighter toward the top, blending hues of teal and cream very appealingly. Inside the first four tiers of lozenges are abstract symmetric foliated scrolls with yellow, red, white, and salmon elements in addition to the original colors. Underneath the dome is a narrow drum that is decorated with a fine, abstract mosaic pattern of white and blue, followed by a gilded tesserae inscription band of Quranic calligraphy against a blue background (figs. 32, 34-35). Underneath the dome hangs an abstract, interrupted concentric circle-shaped, gilded copper chandelier, with white, turquoise, and blue glass and crystal elements "dripping" down from it in the shape of water droplets (fig. 36), symbolic of rain coming down from the heavens; a kind of blessing from God that allows for the flourishing of life on earth. Framing the central dome area with its decoration are two simpler geometric star designs on the ceiling (fig. 37), one on either side, with a single, continuous ring of the same chandelier type hanging from each (fig. 38). Next to these secondary designs on the ceiling are two roundels with an interlacing double band border surrounding golden-painted calligraphy, one on each side. One roundel reads Allah, jall jalaluhu (fig. 39), and the other Muhammad rasul Allah (fig. 40). The dome has no transition zone, causing it to appear squat, unlike its traditional counterparts. The wall cladding inside the main prayer hall is a combination of natural white marble and mahogany with copper and stained-glass inlay (figs. 34-35, 38). In four of these panels are calligraphic roundels (figs. 34-35), each with a different name of God: al-Wadud; al-Qayyum, al-Sami’, al-
Muhaymin. It is interesting that these names are not taken in their known sequence from the ninety-nine names of God, nor do they create a certain rhyme. Their meanings however, being the Friendly, the Almighty, the All-Hearing, and the Supreme Overseer, respectively, are qualities of God that are relevant to attributes a worshipper ought to be reminded of, or perform their prayers based upon. While all of the Asma’ al-Husna can be used to call on God, these particular names demonstrate qualities that any Muslim can easily appeal to; viewing God as Friendly and All-Hearing for instance allows the worshipper to be open and close to God in their prayers, unreservedly speaking to Him knowing that He is listening and not judging. Being Almighty and the Absolute Overseer of the different aspects of the worshipper’s life also remind the Muslim that they can ask anything of God, no matter how immense and unsurmountable the request may appear to them, for God’s power surpasses all that our human capacity can comprehend, and He is the One who watches over and balances the different areas of the lives of mankind. The walls on the right and left sides of the prayer hall are broken by wooden recesses with a pair of frosted glass windows in each (figs. 41-42), which diffuse the sunlight while allowing for natural light to filter into the hall, as well as ventilation when the weather is pleasant, and so that there would be minimum use of the central air-conditioning system installed throughout the mosque. The prayer hall floor is covered in hand-woven, natural wool carpeting with designs exclusive to the mosque,\textsuperscript{178} mirroring the designs on the ceiling (figs. 33-35, 38).

The sumptuous mihrāb opposite the prayer hall entrance is very elaborately decorated, recessed in a large panel of mahogany (fig. 43). Atop the panel is a golden inscription band of a Quranic verse regarding the direction of the qibla (2:144).

\textsuperscript{178} Masjid al-Shorta.
Underneath it is a golden keel arch enclosing the broken-headed arch recess flanked by flat, undecorated wooden columns. However, from the capitals of the columns towards the apex of the painted arch is an intricate golden design of an abstract foliated leaf scroll, culminating in a golden, fluted shell boss. Within the recess is a mosaic geometric star pattern, composed of red, white, blue, turquoise, and gold tesserae (fig. 44). This pattern is also employed in the two flanking blind recesses with rounded horseshoe arches of the mihrab panel. Beneath them are two abstract, golden, foliated interlace design medallions within golden square frames (fig. 43).

The women's prayer hall is considerably smaller than that of the men's, fitting from one hundred to a hundred and fifty female worshippers. It is circular with a wooden, fitted, interlocking, six-point star-design dado running across the entire wall, underneath a cream-colored wallpaper with a subtle embossed, abstract, curving vegetal leaf design (fig. 45). In the center of the ceiling is an embossed, abstract, foliated, white stucco design against a cream background, from which hangs a sophisticated, gilded copper with stained-glass and crystal, flower-shaped chandelier (fig. 47). The point of the chandelier also forms a six-pointed star when viewed from underneath (fig. 46), indicating that this is the shape of choice in this prayer hall, as it is not found elsewhere in the mosque. Also unique to this prayer hall is the mahogany mihrab panel, which displays a horseshoe arch recess within a larger horseshoe arch. This entire design is flanked by two protruding wooden columns with golden, polylobed arch designs framing the hanging golden appliqués, over abstract, vertically symmetrical, golden designs in the dadoes (fig. 48). Inside the mihrab recess is a golden, painted star design, a modest one compared to that of the men's prayer hall. Opposite the mihrab is the same arched outline, with a shallow, flat recess echoing the
design of the mihrab (fig. 49). Here, again, the wool carpet reflects the design of the chandelier.

The ground floor is the largest space in the building, and therefore exhibits numerous decorative features. To begin with, the marble stairways are flanked on either side by tall, white, decorative mosaic panels forming a calligraphic text that reads *al-hamd li’llah* (fig. 50). This panel is then topped with a mosaic arch with the same design found in similar locations over prominent arches (fig. 51). Around the majority of this level is an arcade of keel arches (fig. 52) similar to that surrounding the men's prayer hall, but on a larger scale, with white, embossed geometric star patterns in blind keel arches (fig. 53) alternating with ones incorporating bronze and blue tesserae inlay (figs. 23-24). The facade of the arcade has abstract decorative foliated scrolls in the spandrels (fig. 56) and is topped with a repetitive golden pattern in the molding under the cornice (fig. 55). There are no crenellations nor *muqarnas* found anywhere throughout the mosque, two staple elements of traditional Egyptian mosque architecture. The escalators are found on the extreme ends of the building on either side, their shiny metallic exterior standing out crudely from the remainder of the white mosque. This is due the escalators being added at the request of the patrons also after construction, causing them to be unclad with marble, unlike the rest of the façade.¹⁷⁹

The indoor vestibule leading to the ceremonial halls follows the same method employed throughout the mosque in ceiling decoration, in that there is a central star design in the middle of the ceiling (fig. 57), surrounded by a wholly different geometric star pattern on either side (fig. 58). The central design is recessed in a white circle, with an eight-pointed star with muted gold, blue, and copper paint applied to

¹⁷⁹ Personal information provided by Rana.
the protruding elements, each holding a circular geometric design. While the circle is individually lit from the inside, small lanterns are suspended from two black, wrought iron rings that hang from the center of the star. The auxiliary ceiling design is of geometric circular stars in hues of beige, blue, yellow, and red. The floor of the vestibule mirrors the ceiling designs almost exactly, but in marble (figs. 59-61). The ceiling is supported by both columns and piers; the columns are decorated with shades of white glass tesserae from top to bottom (fig. 62), and the piers are of carved, white marble with an abstract symmetric foliated design in the top section (fig. 63), and a blue mosaic design with a white and gold abstract medallion on the bottom (fig. 64). The walls of the wide corridor leading into the main hall have twin blue marble panels within a dark mahogany frame, with a golden decorative band running around it. Carved in the marble is the Quran verse 3:104 in golden calligraphy about those who do good and avoid evil deeds (fig. 65). The walls of the vestibule contain several decorative panels, all in pairs. Flanking the glass doors are blue star pattern mosaic fountains in keel arches, with water pouring down onto a stone bed (fig. 67). This element seems to have Moroccan bearings to it, being very similar to the tile mosaic recess and water basin found in the Hassan II Mosque in Casablanca (fig. 68). Another design is that of a white rounded horseshoe arch, with blue diamond-shaped marble inlay within smaller carved white marble diamonds (fig. 66). Once again, the horseshoe arch is suggestive of a Maghrebi influence in the decoration of the mosque. A third blue marble panel within a white marble recess is wider than its counterparts and is oddly shaped (fig. 69), with an embellished handcrafted golden ornamental medallion mounted at the center, almost like a mandala. It is bejeweled with white and green rhinestones, with a large lotus flower forming the heart of the concentric design (fig. 70). This and the embellished, golden oblong mirror with rhinestone-crested
chinoiserie flowers and vegetal motifs in the remaining panel are reminiscent of Indian or Southeast Asian artwork and decorative features (fig. 71).

The main dome was one of the challenges the architects faced in construction, due to its size and the lack of columns to support it in the main prayer hall (fig. 72). It is a steel construction overlaid with a type of steel gauze, sprayed with a non-porous cement using a gun to finalize the insulation and fire-proofing process. The dome was then covered with glass fiber reinforced concrete, or GRC, which is a material that is pliable and allows easy manipulation to form decorative features. Additionally, this material is elastic and therefore has an enhanced ability to absorb stress. It is pre-formed and installed in panels, and the site architect reported that the "entire mosque is [made of] GRC."180 Upon the installation of the four quarters of the dome, the azmaldo tesserae were inlaid in the curving lozenge shapes mirrored in the dome interior, to form the dark teal background and bronze sculpted beams. The azmaldo is a type of shimmering glass tesserae produced and imported from Italy, used throughout the mosque in different colors in all the mosaics. The mosque clearly imported large amounts of this material to be able to use it so liberally throughout the decorative program.

The four tapering octagonal minarets stand in pairs on each perpendicular axis (fig. 4-5). They are interrupted by a balcony with broken-headed arches, and topped by another balcony with rounded horseshoe arches and a bulbous dome and lighting finial (fig. 53-54). This is possibly one of the oddities in the book of minarets, because it does not follow any particular style attributed to Egyptian architecture with the sole exception of its upper open columns which resemble Egyptian examples. Neither are

180 Personal information provided by site engineer Shady.
there parallels to them in Moroccan, Persian, or Indian architecture, since those appear to be the three styles the mosque draws from elsewhere.

As with the minarets, colored lights in all the arches and domes garishly illuminate the mosque at night (fig. 74), with the ones used over the courtyard and in the fountain changing their colors gradually, an aspect found in the dancing fountain of the neighboring Cairo Festival City mall. Additionally, the Kashmir and Aswan granite floors on the outside of the mosque on the ground floor are embedded with recessed, white floor lighting strips (fig. 75).

Save for the wood, GRC, and Aswan granite, all the materials used in the finalizing steps of this edifice's construction are imports: the Italian azmaldo and white marble, the Kashmir granite, and even the Chinese-manufactured escalators and elevators. The large-scale import of materials for such an immense and extensive building project must have been costly. In the interest of preserving the nation and expanding its economic growth, particularly at a point of such dire financial circumstances in the country's history and the struggle of its people, this enterprise seems far from sensible. Moreover, this type of undertaking is emblematic of sultans and monarchial rulers who resorted to these measures as a testimony to their far-reaching influence and wealth: two conditions that cannot be held synonymous with Egypt today. The current state of affairs makes this no longer applicable, because it is not the ruler of the country who is seeking to highlight their vast supremacy through the grandeur of the edifices they built, but a particular institution whose main function is to serve the people. Building such a monument succeeds in alienating a large faction of the population, even if it caters to a slim group of individuals, since the mosque also serves the purpose of holding police personalities' functions at a discounted price, as well as memorial services for its officers, as was the case in the
2017 Wahat Road terrorist operation that killed several young police officers of different divisions. It is precisely for this reason that one must question the relevance and unnecessary lavishness of such practices, and even the existence of monuments endorsing this objective.

Likewise, this importation is not only on the scale of materials, but also design, demonstrated in the arbitrary amalgamation of several styles, none of which seem to be particularly Egyptian, from the Persian pishtaq and Maghrebi arches, to the Andalusian mosaics, the gold and blue tesserae reminiscent of the Great Mosque of Cordoba, and the Indian decorative features. Moreover, this makes the mosque neither Traditionalist nor Regionalist, particularly in the case of the latter because it goes against what Hassan Fathy put forward as relying on local architectural methods and materials in building, in addition to exercising low cost methods of construction. Hence, this mosque falls under none of these categories.

Nonetheless, it is very successful in standing as a sign of the times, and an attestation to the sordidness of the stratified society from which it springs. It mirrors what our true values now are, rather than what our values ought to be in religious architecture, as propagated in the mosque statement referenced earlier. The values that govern society today, irrespective of class, are those of consumption. The more we have, the better, and this is viewed as a huge mark of prestige. The mosque definitely succeeds in that regard. It does not, however, fare well in correcting people's behavior or serving as a somber reminder of the more virtuous and prudent facets of man and being, of benevolence and modesty as was claimed in its message quoted earlier in this section. Hence, it certainly does not reflect the virtues of Islamic simplicity, humility, resourcefulness, and sustainability. Instead, it promotes lavishness, power,
and glory, as well as the piercing disconnection between the different classes of society, and between the people and the state.
3.0 Conclusion

The commonly used plan types in mosques the world over are the hypostyle plan, the four-iwan plan, the qa’a plan, the nine-bay plan, and the centralized dome plan. In one survey of 113 mosques, 83% corresponded with one of the common mosque typologies.\textsuperscript{181} Despite that, the Police Mosque demonstrates a deliberate departure from this, evident from its odd plan. This indicates that it does not seek to foster any continuity with previous or commonly used forms of mosques in the Islamic world, but instead aspires to establish itself as unique, progressive, innovative, and unprecedented. In this effort, it has succeeded in separating itself from the Regionalist, the Traditionalist, and even the Modernist categories discussed in this thesis. The Sharbatly Mosque, on the other hand, follows a modified nine-bay plan, situating itself among a group of long established mosques in the Gulf region.

From the perspective of the Traditionalists, the aspiration toward the Divine, produced by the vertically oriented minarets and finial-topped domes, a common feature in a majority of the mosques, is symbolic of the ascension of prayers to the skies, and in turn, to God. This verticality is meant to contrast the horizontality of the mosque façade, in the case of the Sharbatly Mosque at least, since the Police Mosque has such an irregular plan that it does not evoke a vertical element to the viewer. In the case of the Sharbatly Mosque, however, the minarets, along with the disproportionately low dome, do not successfully manage to neutralize the blocky, heavy effect posed by the sheer size and solidity of the cubical design. However, the cubical formation of the Sharbatly Mosque with its four abutting minarets can symbolize “the four Angels, and [thus] the four pillars, representing the celestial

\textsuperscript{181} Ardalan, “Mosque Architecture,” 56.
While farfetched, this is the mode of decoding the form of the Sultan Hasan square mausoleum as proposed by Aly Gabr, originating from his interpretation of the cubic geometrical form. He cites Ibn ‘Arabi on this matter, in his description of the Throne of God with its four corners carried by the four Angels or Throne-Bearers. He supports this conclusion with the Sufi interpretations of authentic hadiths on the Prophet Muhammad’s ascension into the heavens during the event of the mi’raj. In this journey, it is said that the Prophet came across “four Angels bridging the earth with the seven heavens.” However, since an interpretation such as this cannot be tested or proven, it is difficult for it to garner any particular or formal advocacy in the field. While the Police Mosque also has four minarets, their scattered arrangement makes this interpretation inapplicable, since they do not represent four corners or arkan of the ‘Arsh. “Beyond the particular, the Regionalist tries to see the type, the general law, the originating principle.” The Police Mosque poses a great difficulty for analysis because of the obscurity it presents us with when attempting to trace any remote principle used in its construction. It seems far more reasonable to ascribe no principles in its conception beyond the attempt to shock the viewer with how much of an anomaly it is. The only principle one could possibly assign to it can be that, like Mamluk mosques, it is built to express the power of its patron and to prove their legitimacy. The Sharbatly Mosque, on the other hand, exhibits strong affiliations with Regional principles of Arabian ancient and contemporary mosques, gradually evolved but still distinguishable in the plan, order, and overall theme, even in its Modernistic application of them.

182 Gabr, Influence, 487.
183 Apud. Ibid, 324.
184 Ibid.
On the matter of decoration, both mosques despite their extensive differences seem to be in line with Hillenbrand’s conclusion based on physical evidence that not all parts of the mosque are of equal sacredness, and that there exists a hierarchy of importance indicated in the architecture itself. He observes that the prayer hall or inner sanctuary is the paramount sacred space, and the one with the most ornamental decoration, stating that “This is not to say that the mosque as a whole is not sacred. Nevertheless, it implies that one part – the musalla – was accorded greater visual emphasis and status than the rest of the building.” While the Police Mosque is extravagantly more decorative overall than the Sharbatly Mosque, the covered prayer hall in particular vaunts a very lavish decorative program, indicated most in the mihrab panel with its multi-colored mosaic patterns and golden designs. The Sharbatly Mosque, being minimalist in decoration, also complies with this analysis in that the chandelier and the large calligraphic verses of the Quran adorn the prayer hall of the mosque, and not the external areas that can also be used for prayer.

One could draw a parallel between mosques studied in Dhaka and the Sharbatly Mosque, in that “In the posh residential areas it has been observed that the community mosque in its final phase undergoes a complete transformation into a professionally designed modern mosque where prime importance is laid on the overall form of the mosque structure with complete rejection of redundant ornamentation.”

From a Regionalist perspective, Curtis’s writing on the different buildings that are found under this category is beneficial:

At its worst, it may degenerate into a skin-deep instant history in which ersatz images of the vernacular are combined with pastiches of national cultural stereotypes. At its best, Regionalism penetrates to the generating principles and symbolic substructures of the past then transforms these into forms that are right for the changing social order of the present.

---

186 Hillenbrand, “The Mosque,” 34.
Curtis purports an authentic Regionalism, which he explains “tries to penetrate to what is of lasting worth in the present culture and in tradition; arbitrariness and superficiality are its enemies.”

In the case of the Police Mosque, it is exactly arbitrariness and superficiality that we are encountering. The agglomeration of randomly selected elements derived from other parts of the Islamic world is nothing but superficial, as the building itself, as we have discussed, does not adopt any conceptual framework that rationalizes the presence of the decorative elements used, nor does the plan and designation of space coincide with any similar building in the region. “At issue once again is the distinction between signs that have no expressive base and the genuine re-invigoration of symbols,” describes the monument completely because even the “signs” alluding to Islamic architectural elements are not implemented tastefully, apparent is the unfortunate proportions observable in the pishtaq gates and portals of the Police Mosque. Oleg Grabar discusses the concepts of signs and symbols, observing that “We can come to the conclusion that [the] discrete significance was minimal or merely cosmetic, that the contemporary world has made cultural discreteness obsolete, and that universal modes of judgement are the only valid ones.”

He speaks of the significance of symbolic value that might have been ascribed to an image or object and communicated with the user implicitly and automatically through “discrete” knowledge or day-to-day practice that could have been intrinsic at the time of traditional buildings, now lost their meanings over time and through the relegation of traditional life. This is one of the issues contemporary building practice faces at present when attempting to create an authentic Islamic character in its mosques. Conversely, this description by Rizvi seems appropriate for

---

190 Ibid, 27.
the Sharbatly Mosque: “Contemporary mosques employ tradition as a starting point for their design, but their styles move beyond the simple repetition of form. Not only are older motifs reinterpreted, but the very functions of a mosque are altered in order to respond to social change.”\textsuperscript{192} The mosque follows a straightforward and simple design in its plan and decoration. That is not to say that it remained static and produced a repetition of previously established norms; it reinterpreted the mosque’s most basic functional elements in a modern way that situated it comfortably in the criterion of the Regional Modernist. In that sense, the mosque does not ignore modern technology in the creation of a comfortable atmosphere to accommodate the user, such as air-conditioning and elevators, but also largely capitalizes on the naturally occurring elements in its surroundings, thus articulating a traditional practice. While this may be the case, how much tolerance can there be in the response of buildings to this elusive notion of social change in order to not entirely reshape the character of the mosque so that it is marred and no longer maintains its sacred and religious integrity?

Equilibrium and interrelation of the monument with the surroundings is central to the concept of Unity and oneness purported by Traditionalism. “[This] state of oneness [is] reflected through the tranquility and harmony of the Islamic architecture and the act of making one or integration which interconnects the element of a single edifice, and in fact a whole village or urban setting.”\textsuperscript{193} What, then, of virgin sites as posed by Kenza Bousorra?\textsuperscript{194} In that case, the matter can be deemed simple, because the only elements the edifice need respect would be the immediate natural environment of the monument – the desert in the case of our mosques in New Cairo. According to Nasr, “Islamic architecture and city planning have always emphasized

\textsuperscript{192} Rizvi, \textit{Transnational Mosque}, 7.  
\textsuperscript{193} Nasr, \textit{Traditional Islam}, 241.  
\textsuperscript{194} Boussora, “Regionalism,” 70.
the integration of architecture in its natural setting,” and that the mosque itself “is not a holy space separated from natural space but an extension into man-made environment of the space of virgin nature which, because it is created by God, is sacred in itself and still echoes its original paradisal perfection.” ¹⁹⁵ Not only does Traditionalism uphold respect for the elements of the natural world, it actively incorporates them into the building, such as the use of wind and light. However, the two mosques studied did not come to be constructed on wholly barren lands, but near to several residential and corporate buildings at the time of their inception. In this instance, the matter becomes of substantial difficulty, especially considering that each building, whether it be corporate or residential, seems to have been built according to an arbitrarily assigned design principle – perhaps even none at all. To erect a building that can be cohesive with such an environment, perturbed with the random manifestations of personal inclinations of home owners and corporations, presents a truly formidable, if not impossible, task. This can be traced to city planning and building regulations, or lack thereof, because in the world of Traditionalists, the mosque is the point of initiation, and all other buildings then follow suit in an organic metamorphosis, as the city “grows out of the mosque.” ¹⁹⁶

The idea of segregation emerges here because it is applicable to both mosques. Ul-Haq raises a compelling point, regarding the spirit of equality in Islam and how it should be implemented in any such monument that claims a connection to, let alone a representation of, the faith. ¹⁹⁷ He discusses the idea of equality in the sense of accessing the mosque from different gates for regular citizens, versus ones designated for individuals of recognition, being of political significance or otherwise. This, he

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 245.
¹⁹⁷ Ul-Haq, 41.
posit, goes against the message of Islam and therefore is unsound. He expands this further to encompass the whole city: “any city that is built along hierarchical lines and that consciously segregates different income groups in different locations can hardly qualify as a noble example of an Islamic city.” Here, there are several matters to discuss. Firstly, pertaining to the issue of access granted to plebeians, the Police Mosque is under official requirement to conduct a security check on all individuals who enter the facility. Moreover, in order for one to be admitted into the mosque, one must provide a reason for their entry. The idea of simply walking in to merely pray is not sufficient grounds on which to grant people access, with the exception of Friday prayers or religious holidays, such as Eid. This is in addition to the fact that private citizens do not access the mosque site from the official main-entrance gate, reserved only for select individuals. To exacerbate the situation further, one must keep in mind that one of the monuments discussed here represents the state; an institution whose principal task is to serve its citizens, whom it protects. Furthermore, the notion that the mosque is constructed using government funds means that it is fundamentally for the people. For it to not serve them, and for them to not be granted unrestricted access to the vicinity remains counterintuitive, unjust, and possibly even exploitative. Insofar as a mosque “strives for social cohesion,” the Sharbatly Mosque rather than the Police Mosque comes much closer to the ideals ascribed by Islam. All people who wish to pray or worship (by reading the Quran for instance) may enter the mosque to do so with no restrictions.

With regard to Ul-Haq’s take on the ‘noble’ city, or apparent lack of it thereof, Cairo is far from this idealistic depiction. One of the many problems Cairo faces is the

198 Ibid.
199 Ibid.
200 Imamuddin et al, “Community Mosque,” 60.
never-ending expansion and multiplication of gated communities, initially in the suburbs, and now even within the city itself. This is a glaring form of the segregation that increases day by day, marginalizing the underprivileged, with 27.8% of the population being below the national poverty line in 2015.\textsuperscript{201} Jamel Akbar makes a similar depressing claim: “Only when they begin to prosper will Muslim societies be able to enjoy the luxury of seeking an architectural identity or style,”\textsuperscript{202} indicating that our nations have much more pressing matters to attend to before even considering the question of establishing an identity. The location of both mosques analyzed in this study is indicative of the fact that they only cater to a certain sliver of the population, that of the upper middle-class and the elites, who can afford to hold ceremonies at, or in the case of the Police Mosque, be admitted into the building. Essentially, that would mean that by Ul-Haq’s standards, these two mosques are veritably not Islamic at all. What is more, if this is going to be the criterion that produces an Islamic building, it qualifies any other building that contributes to the community and the city inhabitants’ general well-being as Islamic architecture, such as a church hospital that provides medical assistance for those in need. Because this obviously does not accord with our sensibilities, we are required to incorporate other essential elements into what makes an Islamic building; the property of performing services for the needy and contributing to community welfare need not be discounted or removed, however, on its own, this quality cannot stand as the singular aspect that makes an Islamic building.

In terms of financial conception and fund allocation, Mahbub Ul-Haq’s criteria for Islamic architecture prove extremely relevant. He is of the belief that

\textsuperscript{202} Akbar, “Accretion,” 108.
interest in “Islamic architecture [is not] merely for the sake of Islamic architecture,” but should cater to the relief of impoverishment within the community. In that regard, the expenditure of 150 million pounds on this mosque, which does not in any way cater to the poor, subjects the Police Mosque to harsh criticism. Considering that there is no drastic need for the existence of this edifice, particularly in this location due to the existence of another large mosque that serves the area, would this money not have been better allocated to serve this huge sector of the community? Considering the areas in need of subsidies throughout the country, and even more directly, Cairo, this sum would have alleviated the suffering of many of the people living in the capital. While the authors of the publication “Role of Government in Architecture” write with regards to Bangladesh, this statement proves particularly relevant here: “In view of the financial constraints under which they operate, the authorities should concentrate on innovative ideas which will lower project cost and encompass participation of people likely to benefit from the project.” What makes this especially compelling is that this mosque was built by the government, using state funds, which makes the matter all the more pressing that they ought to be better allocated to serve the community in a more vital form. The fact that the surrounding area of the mosque does not include low-cost housing for the poor makes the matter all the more controversial in that it does not cater to them, some of whom commute to work in the commercial centers, mega-malls, and companies surrounding the mosque. While there exist other state institutions that sponsor building programs and support for the livelihood of such communities, it remains far too insufficient to allow for the decent living and survival of whole communities, and the individuals who find themselves in this stratum, beyond their choice or ability for change in our lethally capitalistic

society. Something is amiss in our global allocation of funds, and our global populace is so far displaced that no real solution is being effectively exercised to remedy the situation. While this may appear to be an idealistic, even utopian concept, it really is not as it is attempting to address the particular needs of a country that are starkly different than of the examples of those it follows and whose way of life it has imported. The applicability of such a way of life is moot, as the availability of and access to resources runs in a wholly un-parallel direction here. The lack of information on the Sharbatly Mosque’s cost forces us to be unable to apply the same analysis to it, however, it remains a private mosque and one built with the funds of a charity foundation, so its responsibility toward the Egyptian community is not as weighty as that of a state mosque.

It cannot be said that the extensive attention paid to the commercial aspect of the Police Mosque is solely for the purpose of making up for the expenditure that occurred when materializing the building, because should that be the case the building would not have been conceived in the first place, based on Kuban’s practical observation that buildings are preserved, or erected, based on their economic viability and capacity for profit return. Spending an estimate of 150 million Egyptian pounds on a building by public or government funds cannot simply be for no reason, and the form of the building indicates that the focal point was not the creation of a space for prayer. Additionally, if that really is the case, then once the building achieves cost-recovery for expenditure from revenue, the building should then immediately cease to provide such services that have facilitated the said profit. Because the generation of revenue is the obvious end here, the Police Mosque becomes a symbol for the deterioration of our cultural continuity, as Kuban remarks, “We have the obligation to

---

counter profit making as the only motive in the development in our cities if we want to salvage our heritage.”\(^{207}\) This is not meant to be an attack on the notion of business to facilitate the continuity of an institution, as that is merely a modern extension of the \textit{waqf} system. However, it is the degree of importance given to only this particular element, as portrayed in the Police Mosque, that is disturbing.

It is no longer just a matter of preserving culture and preserving heritage, but a matter of preserving the earth’s resources and the mindful use of them and respect for the environment. Not only does the country not readily have access to such materials, the frivolous expenditure of national resources and capital to secure and transport them is far more impractical than it is useful, and does not reflect an environmentally conscious building model. All these facets of regurgitating numbers, whether of profit or efficiency, are all matters of quantitative measure and are symptomatic of industrial nations – one which Egypt is not. While they are essential tools for managing the economy of all nations, rich or poor, it cannot be just numbers, as argued by Kuban, that determine what is viable for preservation. He writes, “Industrial society has created a human being conditioned to evaluate everything according to industrial standards – but efficiency as defined by numbers alone can be a grossly inadequate yardstick.”\(^{208}\) Therefore, this appears to be a mindless and automatic adaptation of a Western model that is ill-fitted for our needs and capacities. Even if we abandon any notion of strictly applying approaches to our building processes as Kuban suggested, he still renounced the idea of copying Western models, stating that “The only correct issue, and also a logical one, is to go against the blatant transfer of “the modern” from the West.”\(^{209}\) James Steele synopsizes this situation aptly:

\(^{207}\) Kuban, “Conservation,” 33.  
\(^{208}\) Ibid, 33.  
\(^{209}\) Kuban, “Modern versus Traditional,” 58.
...the vast majority of Muslims live in poor countries with inadequate resource bases, low per-capita incomes, and high rates of population growth. Their governments characteristically do not have the financial, technical, and managerial resources required to tackle the immense problems related to poverty and the environment. Additionally, government planning is usually based on conventional models adopted from the first world which, apart from being capital intensive, do not make use of the considerable skills, vitality, and ingenuity that poor communities possess. The cost of formal private sector development and services, on the other hand, is beyond the financial capacity of low income groups. Thus, an increasing majority of Muslim communities are being denied access to decent shelter, physical infrastructure, and social services, or are being serviced by an exploitative and technically defective informal sector. 210

Most informal settlements in Egypt use rebar (modern technology) and brick construction – presumably because it is the cheapest – but it is also inefficient. We are not about to make up cost in building something of poor quality that will not last, and the maintenance requirements of such building practices are bound to accumulate high costs. The use of indigenous materials however does not necessarily mean the use of the most expensive stone for instance. Other locally produced materials need to be incorporated, depending on the construction at hand. We must keep in mind that cost, here, does not simply stand for the price of the products used to construct the building. Necessary elements such as the place of building dictate certain impositions that also affect the financial conception of the building overall – from topography, accessibility of the site for the transportation of materials, the working hours allowed for construction pertaining to the location, and the availability of materials in the area. The use of rebar and brick in the Manshiyyit Nassir area in Cairo for instance does not necessarily mean that those were the cheapest products, but they may have been chosen simply for the reason that they are the easiest and fastest means to erecting the underprivileged housing units, a significant factor considering that the settlement is an illegal one, not following governmental processes for building; therefore, time was of the essence.

Another viewpoint to consider is the discourse around the transnational mosque, as discussed by Rizvi:

Transnational mosques, as conceptualized in this study, are buildings built through government sponsorship, both in the home country and abroad, whose architectural design traverses geographic and temporal distances. They are thus state mosques as well as ambassadorial gifts, monumentalizing the political ambitions of their patrons. Their audience is the local user as well as the international community, for whom they represent a particular vision of global Islam. 211

Accordingly, contemporary mosques that fit this category are ones that merge both global and local doctrines, underlining a fundamental flexibility of religion with regard to mosque building, as well as politics of the modern world in that the mosques fit anywhere, along with their ideological reflections. As stated by Rizvi, in that they traverse time, they assign a significant part to the historical memory of Islam and the Middle East in their construction. 212 Firstly, the Police Mosque is a state mosque funded by the government, and therefore meets the first criteria posited by Rizvi. That it is built in the homeland negates the possibility of it being an “ambassadorial gift,” leaving us with the option that it is a banner for perpetuating the ideologies of the state. On this, Rizvi writes:

The mosque’s status as an imperial symbol has often given way (as monarchies have been replaced by republican governments in the Middle East) to its role as a national emblem, where the ceremonies of state are performed. Weekly Friday prayers as well as important religious holidays are celebrated at the main congregational, or jamiʿ, mosques. 213

Why, then, is there a collection of international elements represented in the mosque aesthetic, since it is not located in an area that particularly serves the international community or is a touristic hub? It is unlikely that this mosque is trying to foster international or ambassadorial relations. It is thus better defined as a pastiche, representing Fethi’s fifth category of contemporary mosques, the “Eclectic/Arabian Nights,” described as having “whimsical and often bizarre combinations of Islamic

211 Rizvi, Transnational Mosque, 5.
212 Ibid, 26.
213 Ibid, 17.
forms and symbols. The eclectic use of symbolic elements from various regional architectural styles, such as curious arches and the excessive use of decoration, evoke Hollywood images of the Arabian Nights.”214 The mosque itself seems to promote this Hollywood image with its incorporation of the red-carpet driveway. This kitschy and vulgar style seems to be well-suited for the state. The Sharbatly on the other hand very much qualifies as the transnational mosque tout court, it being a Saudi Arabian mosque built by a Saudi Arabian patron for a Saudi Arabian persona in the Egyptian capital's urban extension. In that regard, it is almost as if the Saudis are extending an arm out into one of the Middle East’s largest and most influential nations, either for the sake of allying themselves with it, or increasing their own influence or significance within it. It may be useful to remind ourselves that much of the investment undertaken in Egypt today is by Saudi Arabian institutions, such as the Sharbatly Commercial Group’s City Stars projects, multiplying over the past decade and now present in several areas in the country. Rizvi remarks on such mosques, stating, “the mosques are extensions of the donor country, sites for propagating ideology, and home to covert political machinations. In many cases the historical style serves as shorthand for ideology; it is a conscious decision undertaken by the builders and patrons of transnational mosques.”215 The similarity between the design of the Saudi Sharbatly Mosques and the Egyptian one cannot be ignored, and is indicative of how much the patrons dictated a distinct style to the Egyptian architect who conceived the building. This is relevant also when discussing the Police Mosque in that it serves a political ideology; a state mosque built in light of the June 30th revolution when the Muslim Brotherhood ruling party was overthrown by the military. Faced with accusations from the international community of performing a

215 Rizvi, Transnational Mosque, 23.
coup on the Brotherhood’s seemingly elected government, the new government might have turned to building and sponsoring mega-projects as a recourse strategy, for the improvement of infrastructure and roads across the capital and in other areas of the country to assert the validity of their rule and legitimacy.

The Aga Khan Award cycle for the year 1992 set certain criteria as the most important for the assessment of social projects: “the relevance of the project to the context of the country, its compatibility with the social and economic reality of the beneficiaries, its sustainability, its social and physical impact, and replicability,” echoing Ismail Serageldin’s words: “Architecture is the physical mirror of the socio-economic, cultural, and technological reality of a society.” The mosques are buildings of social and religious capacity, and can therefore be evaluated accordingly. Sustainability and replicability are intertwined, since to replicate a building one must follow the same process of building and material used. In the case of the Police Mosque, this makes it neither sustainable nor replicable, for reasons of economic and environmental natures. In fact, Maurice F. Strong’s concept of ecodevelopment rebuffs following Western development models based on expansion, consumption, industrialization, and “unchecked” urbanization. The act of building must make adequate use of local resources, including skills and craftsmanship, in order to be environmentally conscious. How relevant the Police Mosque is to the country and how compatible it is with its socio-economic extant circumstances are also interdependent factors, and ultimately give rise to the same conclusion: it is not. While the mosque may serve a political message of the current government in the wake of a revolution that ousted a fanatical party disguised under the cloak of

---

216 Steele, “Continuity,” 22.
religion, passing the criterion of context, financially and socially it is not representative of the majority of the population. In terms of social impact, the mosque performs a very marginal service to a limited social class, hardly consolidating an impact, particularly because it performs no other services to the community as in the days of the Mamluks.

The same criteria – “the relevance of the project to the context of the country, its compatibility with the social and economic reality of the beneficiaries, its sustainability, its social and physical impact, and replicability” – to the Sharbatly Mosque, one finds that the result is somewhat different, although not entirely so. First, the fact that this is a charitable construction built to serve the surrounding community is very relevant; firstly, because at the time of its conception, no large mosque was built in the area to serve as a congregational prayer space, so it served an immediate need with regard to urban planning. Additionally, its primary function as a prayer space open to all means that the rich and poor alike can be admitted into the building for the purpose of worship, and therefore serves everyone, from the common man cleaning the surrounding streets, to the wealthy businessman who owns a villa nearby. In terms of corresponding to the socio-economic reality of the beneficiaries, the commercial service of holding events the mosque provides is not affordable by the common man, but then again, those are not the intended beneficiaries of this aspect of the mosque, judging by its location. However, most people from this social segment do not pay money for such events, as they are usually held in smaller communal mosques in their own neighborhoods, informally but largely at almost no cost, a practice prevalent in rural towns where most workers have migrated to the capital from.219 In that regard, though, one could say that the mosque could have been better

219 Personal information obtained from Taha, a Police Mosque events employee.
conceived somewhere that did correspond to a more socially disadvantaged area, but then the entire construction and workings of it would have been entirely rethought (finding ways to produce revenue for instance). With regard to sustainability, the architect tried as much as possible to reduce the cost of maintenance of the mosque by employing stone in the inner and outer walls, a material that does not require much upkeep and the topography and nature of the land area was maintained in the conception of the mosque, which was built in accordance to the existing topography.\textsuperscript{220} The physical impact of the mosque (the social will be discussed later in this section) from the outside is one that blends with the immediate area, in that its color reflects the surrounding desert and the majority of the surrounding buildings. The surrounding fence with privacy shrubs also obscures visibility of the mosque from the streets. In turn, even the use of the word “impact” seems too strong, for visually the effect of the mosque façade and gates can be rather negligible on the viewer. It is only in its four minarets that he recognizes the presence of a mosque. The replicability aspect of the mosque seems uncomplicated, because it already is a slightly modified replication of modern mosques in Saudi Arabia. In terms of the appeal of the style of such a mosque to the Egyptian population as an advent of its replicability, it is difficult to say, but an indicator could be the popularity of the mosque among Egyptians from the neighboring areas of Heliopolis, Nasr City, and New Cairo itself as a prestigious venue for their ceremonies.

The Police Mosque is reminiscent of building in the Mamluk era, at least in terms of its raison d’être: "A common reason for establishing religious foundations among military officers and rulers was to assert the legitimacy of their rule and

\textsuperscript{220} Personal information obtained from the Sharbatly Mosque architect, Dr. Muhammed Amer.
political domination over the local population.\textsuperscript{221} This description of the context of buildings in the thirteenth century remains very relevant today as is demonstrated by the Police Mosque. The elements of its design, the magnitude of the project, and the scale of the building all attest to this combination of legitimization and assertion of power. The issue with this is that in the time of the Mamluks, the monuments performed many socially beneficial functions that served the different classes of the populace, and particularly the common folk. This allowed for their endeavor to be successful in obtaining the people's favor\textsuperscript{222} and fostering a sense of loyalty to their leaders. Abouseif also attests to the social beneficence of Mamluk religious buildings, stating:

\begin{quote}
Waqf documents and physical evidence indicate that all religious foundations included a maktab or charitable primary school for orphan boys, which spread literacy at an early age among the needy. The maktab gradually became a prominent architectural feature of Mamluk religious monuments. Access to the metropolitan teaching institutions, being philanthropic and in principle open to all, offered an opportunity for the local urban and rural population to ascend in the social scale as ‘men of the pen’.\textsuperscript{223}
\end{quote}

In the case of our state mosque, charitable acts are not an aspect of its interaction with society. In fact, most people are not even granted access to the mosque on an unregulated basis, if at all. Abouseif attributes the expansion of the middle-class in the Mamluk period to the provision of education in the different ranks of society,\textsuperscript{224} something that our present-day society is in dire need of, and is neglecting. The fact that the religious institution could have such a profound impact on its immediate surroundings in previous eras provides a strong contrast to the present. The Sharbatly Mosque holds classes for Quranic and religious teachings within the prayer halls, although ones that are not of the same scale as those practiced in Mamluk times. This

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{221} Asfour, “Mamluk Architectural Esthetics,” 236.
\item\textsuperscript{222} Ibid, 237.
\item\textsuperscript{223} Behrens-Abouseif, Cairo, 5.
\item\textsuperscript{224} Ibid, 6.
\end{footnotes}
does not necessarily make the Sharbatly Mosque comparable to Mamluk religious institutions’ educational endeavors, yet it indicates an attempt at an integration with the surrounding community that is lacking in the Police Mosque. This further highlights the Regionalistic aspect of the Sharbatly in its inclusion of and interaction with the community it serves despite not being a state sponsored institution.

A thought-provoking postulation raised by Grabar and supported by Asfour is one that is somewhat unconventional for our field but valid nonetheless, since the nature of the art we study is physical. Grabar suggests that, “It may be possible to propose that traditional Islamic culture identified itself through means other than visual […] this conclusion would suggest for the contemporary scene that it is not forms which identify Islamic culture and by extension the Muslim perception of his architecture, but sounds, history, and mode of life,”225 and “Islamic culture finds its means of self-identification in hearing and acting rather than in seeing.”226

Architecture in itself being a primarily visual communication does not represent the Islamic ethos prominent in the three areas he has identified, meaning that there is no visual representation of Islam so long as it is not coupled with one of those three elements. History, however, is or can be alluded to visually, as is the case with the minaret, but only because it evokes memory based on its function and not its visual form, as with the cross which automatically represents the Christian faith, for instance. Islam is itself not just a faith, but an entire system and way of life, which explains why older, more traditional, and conservative members of society are attached to bygone elements of a way of life no longer practiced in the modern suburbs now erupting across the greater capital. For this reason, what people hear and what they do and see evoke the greatest memory, which in turn becomes the most

226 Ibid, 32.
representative aspect of Islam, and the shortest way to reestablishing an identity. Asfour supports Grabar’s conclusion by indicating that Muslims were able to recognize the presence of a madrasa through the sound of pupils’ recitation of the Quran and the smell of incense wafting through the air, though he places those aspects as ones that supplement the architecture.

Finally, there is but one method comprehensive yet simple enough to judge a building’s success: “the need it fulfills must be one that the population actually feels,” which is an effort that must be undertaken to foster a sense of inclusion and cohesion among the people of a society, in order for us to overcome the prevalent mode of disconnect and fragmentation. As Curtis writes, “We use words like ‘identity’ and ‘Regionalism’ as a sort of short-hand to talk about extremely interesting psychological and sociological phenomenon, which deal really with the question of human order in relation to the earth’s crust.” The precursor to all of our architecture is humans; the people, and as long as this is not forgotten, the monuments we produce are bound to be successful.

---

228 Serageldin and Vigier, “Changing Roles,” 46.
229 Curtis, “Regionalism in Architecture,” 73.
Bibliography

Anon., *Masjid wa Dar Monasabat al-Shorta bil Qahira al-jadida* (NP [Cairo?], ND [circa 2017?]).


Asatekin, Gül and Aydan Balamir, “Varieties of Tradition and Traditionalism,”

*Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review*, vol. 1:2 (Berkley, 1990), 61-70,


Badran, Rasem, Justice Palace Presentation Panels, courtesy of Architect (Geneva, 1995), Aga Khan Award for Architecture, 2-17,


O’Kane, Bernard, The Mosques of Egypt (Cairo, 2016).


<https://www.academia.edu/22544503/What_Is_Islamic_Archite>.


