

# Identity between Experimentation and Alienation Predicament of Authenticity and Contemporary

## Abstract

The intellectual interaction in the Arab world, with respect to architecture, has lost its strength long time ago. The Islamic conquest represented a globalizing force which introduced the Islamic model to the world. The newly conquered cities were overflowing with architecture that bore a strong Islamic tint. The blend testified to the fact that unity in diversity coexisted in real life. Al-Fustat, Kairouan, Fes and Al-Andalus, all had their distinct features and *idiosyncratic* architecture. However, only one principle served as a guidepost for all of them, monotheism. This is an attempt to introduce an enlightened view of revivalism that many people call to to abort the process of globalization. By analyzing several historical periods, refining our authentic rich product and creating fresh invention appropriate to present and future. Such refinement will assist freeing us from a certain status quo characterized by schizophrenic identity and alienation.

It is an invitation to contemplate our identity and strength which lie in unity compared to the dangers of unilateralism. In addition to this, it is to deepen our faith in more comprehensive, feasible and viable solutions. Bearing all this in mind and acting upon it will be setting us in the direction of success.

**Keywords:** Islamic Architecture, Identity, Al Fustat, Alienation, Globalization.

## 1- The Problematic of Authenticity and Modernity

In mainstream Arabic thought, the problematic of authenticity and modernity often comes to surface as the problem of choice between the western model and heritage; the latter being viewed by many as a viable alternative that can fit in all aspects of modern life. However, earlier reviews have proven that heritage could not to address all modern needs, such as issues pertaining to the stock market for example, and whether it is possible to replace it with the traditional establishment of "Bait Al-Māl." Equally, we will have to wonder if there is a virtual environment for a traditional alternative to modern day architecture, and whether there is a spiritual authority that steers that alternative.

Side by side with the architectural norms and patterns borrowed from western countries, which have become commonplace in countries of Arab or Islamic background, the values of the past that have been inculcated in Arabs and Muslims were able to persist strongly. In consequence, the cities of the Muslim and Arab world suffered from architectural, economic, social, administrative and cultural duality. The symptoms of schizophrenia which appeared in the cultural and economic life produced two distinct ways of living. One is the self-identified "modern" approach, a crossbreed of western and eastern influences. The other approach is the, also, self-identified "traditional" one. It is sad to admit that the latter was a frivolous attempt to bring the traditional model into effect. Both approaches exist in our life in different forms: separate, parallel, intertwined and conflicting.

Admittedly, the achievements of the western culture are too brilliant to be overlooked, and for that reason interaction and borrowing are indispensable on ideological, scientific and aesthetic levels. The generality of Arabic thought is now incapable of forgoing the ideological principles of pragmatism, cannot pretend that the scientific achievements and technological advancements of modern age do not exist and cannot keep at a distance from the arts that flood the Arab countries through the media. If Arabs are short of addressing these variables, how seriously is it expected to produce the amount of creativity needed to work out the problematic under discussion?

In general, the Arab state of affairs is troubled by a conscious that is torn between a powerful deep-rooted civilization, and a fast-paced, fast-growing contemporary one. At the same time in which the members of Arab culture are predominated by old values that deeply move them and bring them joy, they also seek to solve the dilemmas of modern time. While acting under the effect of the past, they are unconscious of the exact reasons behind their frustrations: is it modern time and its achievements or the shackles of tradition?

A multi-part question poses itself: do modern Arabs have the capacity to achieve balance amid these factors? Which of the two approaches are better, the first or the second? Should they stand up to these factors? Can they? Inevitably, there is an equal reaction from the inside of something to every action from the outside. The outside could be the environment whereas the inside is one's inherited principles and convictions, or that the outside is the conscience and the inside is the subconscious. Arab nations now live in an environment that is completely different from their traditions. Ironically, many expect the dormant culture to combat the active; the subconscious to squash the conscience. The growing civilizations move more rapidly toward human knowledge, driven by the impetus to become better, whereas the Arab nations receive the flow of knowledge as ardent defenders. They either resign themselves to the current state of dormancy in submissiveness, or meet it with suicidal resistance. (Figure 1 & 2)



**Fig(1) The Equestrian Club in KSA**



**Fig(2) Al-Faisaliyah Center in Riyadh, KSA**

Part of the problem lies in the nature of the Arab traditions that are so deep and forcible, and the Arab nature that is highly nostalgic. An Arab can be easily moved emotionally at hearing verses from old Arabic poetry by the effect of the magical inescapable figures of speech that distinguish the language. There are two choices, either to continue valuing the letter above the spirit, gradually letting go of the analytical and reasoning faculties, lurking in the shadows of history to smell its fragrance, and immaturely surrendering to the winds of change; or, set out to analyze this stagnant status in search of solutions.

Preserving the genuine identity should not be briefed in attempting to retrieve a lost identity. Actually, preservation of identity must be a continuous process for the huge benefits it brings, such as keeping the society at pace with the changes of time, and giving every achievement a distinguished flavor. If achieved, it can be described as the successful symmetry between space and time. Losing this symmetry makes the members of a nation similar to the actors on a stage who wear masks with eastern features sometimes, and western at other times. On the stage spontaneity disappears, identities melt and time becomes unrecognizable. There, no one will be able to tell the difference between reality and fiction, disease and symptoms.

In today's world, loss of identity went to extremes that no one can braveheartedly claim to be the sole owner of his innovations and creations. The contemporary human being can access the creativities of others so easily that they overlap with his own, either consciously or unconsciously. In fact, collective creativity is one of the characteristics of modern time. (Figure 3 &4)

From the moment they realize this, the Arabs must choose between discarding their inherent individualism or going on in magnifying the Arab ego, to its own detriment. They cannot proceed in that obliviousness; scatter their energies in assessing themselves while others are preoccupied by innovating more and talking less. Much time has been already wasted on enumerating the achievements of the past; many generations have been exhausted in the process. In current times, the speech about authenticity draws more attention to modernity as a viable alternative. These speeches prove themselves to be self-deception mechanisms. The speech-givers set off to reclaim the glories of the past through verbosity. The breaking ground to innovation is to recognize a new fact, which leads to discovering a new idea, and that idea leads to another fact, and so on and so forth. But twining ideas and weaving thoughts theoretically is a most unrealistic alienating disservice that a nation may be doing to itself. It will end in the recurring escape from tradition to imitation, in complete surrender. Amid the astonishment of many, the same ones who have engaged in sheer lip service

will pride in the outstanding achievements they have promised to make, and have, they claim, kept their promise.



**Fig(3) Taba Heights, Sinai, Egypt.**



**Fig(4) A Village in Aswan, Egypt.**

It would not be an exaggeration to describe the Arab attitude in facing problems as a form of bankruptcy. Denying it makes things worse. They have to admit that theoretical hypotheses were given privilege over the most essential human value, which preserving one's humanity. A sign on it is the confusion which strikes these people at seeing the achievements of modern civilization. For a long time they have been occupying the role of receivers and borrowers. The way they think and speak exposes their intellectual senility, and the way they act reveals their spontaneous attraction to modernity. They are torn between authenticity and innovation. They engage in dialogue, but a huge gap exists between the continuous lecturing they call dialogue and real one. Due to this, the rift between the proponents of modernity and those of authenticity are so enormous. Some chose to dispense with modernity altogether and the others chose to snap their identity from the roots. Contrary to this, a conciliation has to be made between modernity and tradition, free thinking and inherited principles.

Many observers have noted that modern civilization is duly the product of the agonizing efforts made by a spectrum of nations expanding from the eastern borders of China to the western coastlines of Andalus. The nations in between have offered their experiences and benefited from the experiences of others. Today, the communication revolution and the spread of media allow unlimited access to, and circulation of, information. An idea that lights up in someone's mind located in the far North, together with an uprising that takes place in the farthest South, can make huge change in the several parts of the world. Hence, conciliation is the best choice Arabs have, conciliation between their conscience and "the other." The Arab civilization has participated in laying the bricks of modern civilization, and so, it cannot sit at odds with it. Again, the same problematic imposes itself at every turn: is hinging to the authentic the only choice? The future needs an answer. However, before finding any, people must realize that man is the enemy of what he does not know. Animosity at its worst level is animosity toward thought, knowledge and arts of one's time. Thus, the most important task that should be fulfilled on the way to conciliation is clearing the conscience from animosity.

The outcome of the cultural dialogue that started at early stages up to now is indicative of the oneness of the future of humankind. Much effort must be done to achieve this, a try after another, a solution after the other. By and by, people can leave out the pressure of the past and the present together, clearing the way for the conscience, the strength and the sense to express unrestrictedly and produce a genuine identity hereafter.

## **2- Globalization and Localism:<sup>(i)</sup>**

We must ask: is the general stream of modern Arab architectural thought capable of meeting the intellectual challenges posed by western thought, especially since global thought seems to transpire into new forms? What are the needed requirements for tackling cultural and intellectual shocks at the same time?<sup>(ii)</sup> The capability of Arab architectural thought to take up the challenges of the time is demonstrated in its success to preserve its identity, and to formulate the main principles that will be a point of departure for a new construction project befitting a new millennia.

Setting our sights on the western countries, we can see the profound effect of technology on architecture. Nevertheless, historical impressions are remarkably present. The western architects tend to use the rich

heritage of the Classical era, Baroque era and the Renaissance in their work. The architectural urban produce widely contains symbols and patterns from past eras intertwined with modern ones, thus creating a new vision for the future. The most developed technologies were implemented in these creations, bringing about major quantum leaps in the field. Essentially, we will have to compare this western attitude of respect to heritage to the Arab one. On a verbal spectrum, the Arabs may pride in their respect of their heritage, but on real grounds tangible representations are absent. (Figure 5)



**Fig(5) The Cultural Park for Children, Al-Houad al-Marsod, Egypt.**

The power of nations and communities lie in their ability to adapt to change. The fall or death of numerous civilizations can be traced back to a failure to keep step with the new developments which occurred to them. Applying this to the development of Islamic architecture and the intellectual turns it has undergone, we can see the landmarks of a unique, fully distinguishable identity in eighteenth century architecture. The buildings which were constructed during that time were in harmony with the time, the place and the economy of their era. The people did not suffer from an identity crisis nor did they express their wishes to distinguish their culture from that of others.

Toward the end of the eighteenth century AD, and by the time the western nations had begun to interfere in the Arab internal affairs, the features of the Islamic architecture which had prevailed in the Arab countries started to collapse. The aftermath of this unwelcome intervention was grotesque architecture that renounced the traditional architectural environment, by the instruction of decision makers. That was the first blow dealt to the genuine Arab-Islamic architecture as a direct outcome of the contact with the west. For all practical purposes, the pains of the Arab individual started to surface. He felt the need for re-identifying himself and reclaiming his genuineness which was lost to the slogans of modernity. When the west imposed its ideas and principles on the Arab countries, either coercively or by consent, the entire cultural framework of the traditional architectural environment began to fade away. As a reaction, much spotlight was focused on the problematic of authenticity and modernity. That reaction led to a neo-classical movement in the Islamic architecture, in the period between AD 1900 to 1970, which aimed at localizing the architecture and reclaiming part of the longed-for losses by making a marriage between technology and traditional architecture.<sup>(iii)</sup> (Figure 6)





**Fig(6): Dubai and Manhatan**

After much advancement was achieved, a new phase chimed in. It can be identified as the zenith of the neo-classical style. This type of architecture was influenced by the western postmodernist architecture. Interestingly, that influence extended beyond being intellectual in nature. It was a normal reaction to the previous period that brought along the realization that: retrogressing to a former state does not help to constitute a distinguished identity. Awareness started to grow that establishing an identity does not depend on tradition alone, but the identity must be a reflection of the status quo of the society, in the period between (1900: 1970).

A newer stage that dates from 1970 until present day featured a new contemporaneous phenomenon: a new global economy that evolved from the economic system which has been formulated by the western capitalist policies. These policies sought control over world economy, and have achieved a great deal of it lately, since other economic systems could not help but retreat in favor of capitalism. This synchronized with an overall tide of scientific advancement and a particular information revolution. The digital revolution contributed to connecting the entire world to all kinds of services, so much, that anyone can communicate, even those who are a huge distance apart, and have access to all services and information. It set people free from the obstacles of time and place.<sup>(iv)</sup>

The giant leap in information technology had bearings on the movement of stock markets and capitals. An economic revolution erupted in consequence. Shortly after, it conduced to connecting the global economy in a single network comprised of twenty three counties by 1948; the GATT organization was launched. It is short for “The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.”

In addition to this, the technological revolution, represented in the swift growth of technologies and industries, took a leading role in engineering the phenomenon of globalization. Globalization profoundly affected individuals and societies alike, and so, their architecture. The massive wave of changes hit many of the world’s nations after a long period of reclusion. The invisible strings of a virtual web, the internet, can now tie them together turning the world to a global village characterized by similar architecture and indefinite personality.

The identity of the age of globalization can be called “identity of no identity.” As matters stand, the western powers are imposing their models, culture, behaviors, values, consumption patterns, etc on the Arab states, who, in turn, have programmed themselves to receive, not to show any sign of objection nor attempt to filter the incoming cultural intakes. The cultural aspect of globalization is being achieved by the agency of the media, which has gained full control over world cultures. The media exhibits an ability for propagating false information and imposing a specific pattern of behavior on the audience. Sadly, it has robbed the audiences of their senses, and they have yielded in to it. The process was forceful enough to dilute the identity of entire nations or cause them to fall one after the other. More importantly, the media pioneered a project for commodifying the audience, which means inculcating the values of the market in them. Commodification

was applied to cultural events so much so, that culture was turned into a commodity. Cultural identity stood like a candle in the face of the wind due to this. In Islamic thought, culture is the on-going process of cultivating and refining the human soul with regard to thoughts, beliefs, values, etiquettes and arts. Contrariwise, by the effect of globalization, the human soul is frustrated. Globalization proposes one definition to culture, a universal culture that imposes barriers on the freedom of man. That type of culture is a hoax through which the strong imposes what he defines as culture on the weak. It tricks man into entering a complicated world of peace and coexistence, although he has no idea whatsoever of the laws and realities of this world.<sup>(v)</sup> It is of true importance to stress that these points do not mean that people should subscribe to the idea that globalization is the unavertable phenomenon of a universal cultural and economic oneness that will sweep regional culture aside. Contrariwise, the local cultures have to be revived and adopted to suit the spirit of the time, with respect to architecture. An authentic identity cannot be reclaimed except after realizing the fact that the theories proposed by the west are largely unfit for application in the Arab world. The speciality, circumstances and values of every society fix the reason behind this. To apply the western theories to the Arab world would be to fall into dual error. One is the failure to discriminate between theory and application; the other is a lack in self-confidence. Naturally, the latter is symptomatic of a parallel defect in the potential to be creative and operative. World cultures must be alert of the sharp line between borrowing and blind imitation of one another. Dependence on the western culture to build the Arabic identity is simply wrong. (Figure 7). Regrettably, the contemporary Arab architecture has witnessed a clear emulation of western architecture, for the defeated usually tries to take after the winner. In this context it is appropriate to define culture as the manner in which urbanization and civilization are made, whereas civilization is the embodiment of the philosophy of the members who have created this civilization. Since the purpose of any civilization is populating the earth, architecture serves the progress of civilization by providing faster methods for the transport of information and exchange of commodities and services. The easy access to knowledge and services that architecture is capable of achieving enhances the odds of creating a united civilization of heterogeneous cultures. At this point, we need to put much thought on the extent to which local and regional architectures are desired in a globalized world.<sup>(vi)</sup>



**Fig(7) What is the destiny of identity? KSA**

Attention must be drawn to the fact that globalization is not something new to the world and that it was caused by the revolution in communication and information. It began when Europe introduced modernity toward the end of the eighteenth century, which later turned into a reality by the advent of the third technological revolution in the twentieth century. Globalization has been occurring long time ago, though the speed of implementation still varies, and the effects it leaves on local, cultural, economic and political entities are divergent. My point of focus is the destiny of Arab architecture and that of the Arab identity, and also culture and history in this unpreventable fastly globalizing world. On the short run, we will bear witness to a world in which the role of technology mounts to a supreme degree. It will retain the final decision regarding utilization of land and city planning. Access to information and communication apparently will not hinge on to the hindrances of time and place any more.



**Fig(8) Kasr Al-Hokm Palace, Riyadh, KSA**

The conflict that takes place between globalization and localism is never ending. (Figure 8). While the first attaches no importance to borders and playfully resets them, the latter emphasizes borders and their gravity. In the educational and social spheres, globalization underscores the necessity to share some thoughts and principles among all nations, and occasionally, the necessity to suppress and abolish others. Localism is a natural live expression of the conscience of the individual and the society. It is their fulfillment of a desire to belong and be creative. Localism is peculiar to communities.

It is a representation of their individual personality and their cultural reserve.<sup>(vii)</sup> Among the drawbacks of globalization ranks first the loss of the cultural identity of countries and individuals alike. The extent of this loss is determined by the range of the expansion and weight of the markets, and by the cultures they bring along. Some cultures which spread with the influence of markets have left a devastating effect on local cultures. The expansion and weight of the markets equally affect consumption levels and patterns and the general standard of living. These changes create severe contradictions inside the societies, such as dividing the society to rich and poor, increasing the gap between social classes, raising violence and crime rates, and frays the social fabric of the family.<sup>(viii)</sup>

### **3-Communication between Arab and Islamic Societies on the Level of Time and Place:**

The world is experiencing a grand cultural transformation toward a global culture. Meanwhile, several world countries highlight the necessity of preserving their legacies from the danger of loss amid the cultural openness which overwhelmingly tinges this age. There is a variety of intellectual trends in the Muslim world that take different attitudes with regard to heritage. They all revolve around the type of interaction between the Islamic heritage and globalization that should take course. Actually, the cultural solutions that are to be proposed must clearly express the traditional heritage on the one side, and the advancements of the present time on the other. However, that looked-for interaction might lack the real aspects of communication, or possess them partially. If so, it will lack in any future continuity. Architects believe, in accordance with the opinion of some thinkers, that the primary goal of interaction should not be to cut the ties that connect the past to the present, nor hold people back from their ancestors as if they had never existed, or as if time starts from the present and the past had never been there.<sup>(ix)</sup> Many architects have touched upon the importance of creating a connection between the authentic and the modern, and creating interaction between them.<sup>(x)</sup> (Figure 9)





**Fig(9): Shibam in Yamen an authentic representation of Community**

The interaction we have at hand does not solve the problem of communication, which is thought to have a vital role in outlining a clear and sequential vision of Arab architecture. That thought of theirs seems to be of considerable significance. However, this does not mean it is the best solution for continuing communication, nor does it mean that the vision of this communication is eligible to persist back from the past, up to the present, onward to the future. Forming an alliance between heritage and modernity, the stagnant and the developing is a central issue.<sup>(xi)</sup> Yet, this alliance does not seem to be the most viable solution, since it will definitely involve an attitude toward overlooking the past and marginalizing the future in some way.<sup>(xii)</sup> It should also be present in the aspects of civilization.

Architecture is that civilizational aspect that mirrors the thinking and education of a community. The reflection of culture on the architectural formations exhibits the degree of intellectual and cultural changes in the Muslim world. Thus, the effect cultural values have on the patterns of architecture in the Muslim countries can be viewed as a vital criterion needed to ascertain whether the continuity of place and time truly exists in the architecture of Muslim countries in totality. The problems that face Islamic architecture can be summed up in two main groups:

**First Group:** The problems which were the effect of globalization:

1. The danger of a negative impact on the identity and architectural expression.
2. The dangers of intellectual dependency and the negative impact it could leave on civilization.

**Second Group:**

1. The widespread discourse concerning the concepts of the past and the need to put them into practice, under the banner of authenticity.
2. The widespread discourse concerning the concepts of the future and the need to put them into practice, under the banner of modernity and progress.
3. The widespread discourse concerning connecting the past to the present and the calls to revive the traditional plastic architecture without the intellectual depth which should govern the vision toward creating communicative interaction.
4. The limited space devoted to the future in communicative thought.



The few foregoing years witnessed the emergence of a number of intellectual trends that generally had bearings on the cultural thought, and specifically on the practical architectural applications. These trends affected the architecture by influencing some of the plastic visions or intellectual architectural trend. In Egypt, many architects followed some of these architectural trends that have certain intellectual trends behind them, namely:

- First: The trend calling to adopting history and heritage as the applied basis of architecture.
- Second: The trend calling to adopting modernity as the applied basis of architecture.
- Third: The trend calling to adopting modernity and authenticity together as the applied basis of architecture.

The first trend views man as being the axis of attention, along with his identity, history, culture and spiritual entity, and the ways in which they inspired the architecture. Accordingly, the traditional pattern, or rather the collection of formational traditional architectural patterns, prevailed. Parallel trends appeared calling to the utilization of the traditional formations and skills for their being an inseparable part of human conscience and imagination on many levels. Their standpoint was finding an exit from being another copycat representative of the official contemporary architecture imposed by globalization.<sup>(xiii)</sup>

In addition to this, that kind of architecture would be an ideal method for expressing a distinctive national and historical identity, and for preserving the spiritual and utilitarian values of traditional architecture. Among the most distinguished pioneers of that trend is late Eng. Hasan Fat-ḥī. He was criticized from the premise that the human being lives in the present not in the past, and that no one can live in the same way his ancestors did. Those critics believed that reviving the past forms is an obstacle to development, as if no new innovations could be made and that time has stopped.

The other trend focused on modernity as the axis around which architectural expression should revolve. At the beginning of the twentieth century, new trends, writings and architectural applications emerged calling to separation between architectural creativity and tradition. They maintained that that creativity should be focused on the material contemporary values.<sup>(xiv)</sup> The adoption of the modern formational architectural pattern aimed to indicate that the thought of a nation and that of other nations will not stop to progress, that human ability to instrumentalize all materials is unending, and to demonstrate the superior influence knowledge and technology have. Similarly, that trend received its share of criticism and blame. Criticism was ignited over the declaration of detachment by the proponents of that trend from the traditional and historic values. Thus, the distinct personality of the Egyptian civilization will be muted. The intellectual heritage will be of no use, and the connection between the past and the present will exist no more. By the influence of that trend, man will be dissociated from all connections and time will appear to have started from the present moment; no such thing as a “past” would seem to have ever existed.<sup>(xv)</sup>

Either this trend or the former have been illustrated in various formations that range from being superficial in the extreme to being of true depth. That means that some architects were influenced by the fashion of formation only, subsequently producing architecture that “looks” like past or present models,<sup>(xvi)</sup> and others were influenced by the methodology and intellectual concepts of others which showed in their work. There are various levels inside the trend of the formational influence, diverging from casual observation to complete awareness of all generalities and details. Likewise, the trend of the intellectual influence had various levels of depth, starting from transmitting the values in their raw traditional form, to developing and conveying them in a manner that harmonizes with the present life and thought, in ways that carry the impression of authenticity and the logic of modernity.

Recently, a newer growing trend emerged with calls to borrow the traditional concept and mechanics of architecture and use them to represent both contemporary and traditional elements and concepts. These mean to revive the concept of architectural formation that expresses the history and culture of a place, and at the same time, be careful to select the aesthetic values that suit the present time. The traditional aesthetic values move the viewers emotionally. On the other hand, contemporary aesthetics moves them in a different way. They reflect development, modernity and other aspects which make an integral part of the culture of any contemporary society. Many architects interpreted this intellectual methodology through their works in Egypt. Their interpretations differed according to every architect’s vision of tradition and modernity and the intellectual methodology suitable for connecting them. Interestingly,

some architects managed to revive the tradition in their works using multiple methods. Others tried to establish an intellectual concept for communication with tradition. Does that suggest that those calling to a communication between the present and the past went different ways? That is true. The evidence is the disparity in the intensity of their desires to maintain a distance between the contemporary and the traditional. The criticism that has been directed at this trend mainly concentrated on the details of the intellectual concepts not the general theory. It was more to being a criticism of application rather than of the intellectual methodology itself. With that being said, it remains important to know for how long the traditional and the contemporary can appear together and communicate with each other in architectural forms, and how greatly does the critic pay attention to the integrity of the architect in transmitting the heritage.

The communication between the traditional and the contemporary gives architectural works an expressive value. Potentially, the expressive value lies in the connection of architecture to modernity with all its developmental civilizational values on the one side, and its connection to tradition as an effective channel to express the values of the Islamic identity on the other. The intellectual connection between tradition and modernity can be seen in the groups of methods and methodologies that seek to specify the intellectual and cultural products of both of them. Architecture is considered one of the strongest cultural manifestations of the development of the human and cultural thought. The results of implementing the trends that call to a synthesis between tradition and modernity appeared most profoundly in architecture. Among these clear results there are some which represent the concepts of revival and communication expressed in the work of many architects in Egypt and abroad.

The idea of connecting between tradition and contemporariness appeared in a relatively recent time as a reaction to the ever-recurring dialectic relationship between the proponents of tradition and those of modernity. It is worth mentioning that this dialectical relationship between the two groups contributed to the appearance of a third group composed of various trends to create a connection between tradition and contemporariness. Such groups are aware of the importance of preserving the identity in the face of globalization.

The desired expressive values for creating an intellectual connection between the past and the present are represented in a wide sweep of concepts that lie between the concepts of heritage revival and communicating with it. These central values are the cause for the similarity which exists between the formational visions which embody the concepts in the form of architecture. The architect wishes to express his tradition and alloy it with the present time through innovative formational art. Apparently this can take place in several ways. These ways range from direct transmission of tradition in a work, to abstract transmission. Generally they include four basic methodologies: straight revivalism, eclectic architecture, revivalism and abstractionism in form and detail, Minimalist.<sup>(xvii)</sup>

Straight revivalism runs on the formational level and does not mirror the cultural dimension behind the form. This method is the simplest architectural vision for expressing the thought of connecting the traditional and the contemporary. It is an architectural mimeses of a particular traditional architectural creation, usually with minor variations from the original based on the dimensions available for the architect, and with no change in proportions. The functional aspect of the recreation is different from the original, but that issue may not affect the architectural formation. Primarily, this formational methodology is rarely used because some of the details are hardly achievable at the present time.

In essence, the three previous concepts can be re-introduced as attempts to either revive or connect with the heritage, depending on the intellectual methodology of the architect. Minimalist is a concept that is based on verifying the cultural significance of traditional form, then the innovating of a new form which gives expression to the tradition in a contemporary framework. Thus, such a concept does not demand any perceivable abstraction of the genuine elements, but rather immaterial abstraction, paying much caution to not lose the cultural significance in the process. That being the case, the formational product will seem to resonate with the phenomenon of modernity with all its material aspects. Yet, in essence it will reflect the traditional culture, if the initial purpose for creating it was the revival of tradition, or the communicative culture, if it was born to the cultural communicative trend.

The proponents of the revival theory make efforts to promote it from the level of cloning the traditional to that of forming a communicative dialectical relationship between the traditional and the contemporary, by means of varied and graduated concepts and methods. Nevertheless, revival as a

theory remains different from the communicative theory. The difference lies in the premise of the communicative theory that tradition is alive and continuing, for so it does need to be revived. According to that theory, tradition is a contemporary reality that takes root in the past, and will remain subject to development.

The mission of the communicative theory is not combining two antitheses, the past and the present, but seeks a synthesis between the two of them. The past and the present, in the ideology of that theory, are one continuous entity. On the grounds of time, the past has been a present, and the present will become a past. The same applies to the future. This temporal continuity can be maintained by realizing and enhancing the cultural and intellectual development across time, steering away from the method which depends on gathering pieces of scattered facts together and trying to connect them, as found in the revival theory.

## **Concluding remarks**

### **Continuity context between past, present and future**

In order to understand how the physical environment of the Muslim city came about, one can look at it as a 'whole' and attempt to provide an interpretation of urban forms through their historical and cultural contexts. We will not deal with elements of urban forms, but look at the forms themselves as part of a broader Islamic tradition.

### **The Past**

The preservation of tradition works at different levels reflects if anything, differing contemporary functions and ideological needs (e-g. the need for legitimacy) by ascendant elites or their rivals. On one level, there is the effort to preserve the best examples of traditional buildings as exemplars, sources of contemporary inspiration and/or custodians of part of what its bearer regard as their contemporary cultural identity.

On a different level, the preservation and reuse of individual buildings in contemporary society raises serious functional and ideological problems. Yet, such adaptive reuse appears to be the only possibility of maintaining vitality for the buildings and avoiding the museum approach to important elements of an organic living city.

The preservation of a single building, whether reused or not, is different from the preservation of the character of an area and, here, different criteria come into play. Of these, the sense of urban context is a fundamental one, as is the question of scale, proportions, street alignments, fenestration, articulation of volumes, relations between solids and voids, and, most of all, activities permitted in the public space and inter-relationship between the public and private domains.

Decoding Symbols of the Past. Architects must acquire the sophistication to read the symbolic content of this heritage in a manner that enriches their ability to produce relevant buildings for today and tomorrow, and to guide the "authentification" efforts between the twin shoals of Kitsch and alien inappropriateness.

This sophistication can only come through a strengthened educational process which engenders in future architects the critical sense required to decode the symbolic content of the past in a realistic, as opposed to an ideologically mystifying, fashion. This, of course, necessitates a broad knowledge of the methodology as well as the content of historical studies, a sense of the growth of societies as a process of successive attempts at tantalization and above all an ability to see the built environment of the past as it was perceived by contemporaries.

### **Understanding the Present**

The societies of the Muslim world are inescapably societies in transition, however much some members of those societies may try to avoid this basic process by denying it, or by absolutising a past which exists only in their own minds as a counterweight to the present reality they deny and the future which they fear. The demographic, technical, economic, cultural, political and ideological components of this transition process are well known. Drowning in a flood of Western technology and cultural imports that are frequently ill-matched to local conditions and insensitive to cultural traditions, Muslim societies are today struggling to



create a cultural environment that provides them with a viable sense of self-identity and which is suited to regional and national conditions. Authenticity for an Indonesian will not be the same as authenticity for a Moroccan. Yet there is this fine thread of commonality of the nature of the search with variability of the conditions under which it is undertaken. This is part of the creative genius of the Muslim culture, whose hallmarks have always been unity with diversity. Contemporary "regionalism" must express itself in new and contemporary ways. This truism must be restated frequently in the face of a strong current that seeks refuge in perpetuating the myth that traditional vernacular architecture is enough. This "escape into the past" must be forced to recognize the scale and technology that increasingly link and undergird the urban built environment. Slavish copying of the past is not the answer. For those who would try, the dimensions of modern technology and its related infrastructural requirements will quickly remind them that the path of excellence requires creativity.

### **Anticipating and Preparing for the Future**

A timeless continuity: reading the signs. Architects must be masters of a wide range of skills and their deployment - a range far greater than architectural education currently prepares them for. First, architects must be able to decode the past so they can understand how their predecessors viewed their past, present, and future. Armed with this comparative knowledge, they must secondly attempt to read the signs and trends of the present. This is particularly tricky as, while buildings last a long time, current trends may prove ephemeral, and become so within the space of a few years. Third, architects must not only think of their single building, but of its relationship to the wider community. Fourth, and most significantly, they must pull all of this analysis together and design and implement a product which, over its lifetime, can justly win a place in the timeless continuity of world architecture, as have the great buildings of the past which, speak of excellence, not of an age, but for all time. (Serageldin, Ismail, 1991)

Significantly, the historical and civilizational depth of a nation play a vital role in providing impetus toward narrowing the technological gap which resulted in creating two different worlds. One is the place of the human beings who belong to the industrial world, and the other is for those who survive on minor industries. That gap generated more uncalled-for racism into this world.<sup>(xviii)</sup> Amid these circumstances, the non-industrial nations turned to centers for modern alienation. All the activities relating to economy have been ideologized, the specialized scientific discoveries were monopolized away from them, and generally, measures were secured to keep the human being of the less developed countries in a state of scientific deterioration to the interest of the industrial countries.<sup>(xix)</sup> Some researchers predict that in the next three decades, the scope of the scientific and technological branches of knowledge that are exigent for the progress of nations will be identified. This is because, in the coming period, the contemporary generation will witness the hugest scientific and technological advancements.<sup>(xx)</sup> The scientific technological gap places the modern Arab thought in a permanent challenge, that is primarily financial, because the Arab nations, like in the western countries, need to allocate handsome funds for science and technology in order to bring about a scientific uprising in their countries.

The West calculatedly attempts to marginalize the role of the Arab individual in the global production rates. Consequently, he will become a consumer of others' productions, namely western products, intellectually as well as economically. The more the scientific technological gap grows, the more consumptive that individual will become. Breaking free from that technological dependence can be attained through continuous scientific work and commitment, and through delving deeper in the field, and sparing no time in establishing strong financial and moral infrastructures. Time is running out more than ever.<sup>(xxi)</sup> A group of exterior factors are created to mold the Arab thought in a certain way, as a means of obstructing the efforts done to retrieve an authentic identity, and to keep it from taking right steps in the direction of scientific and technological progress. As matters stand, it seems that the wars fought by the occupied nations for independence had aspired for intellectual independence mainly. The Arab nations must engage in a scientific and technological competitive war in order to meet the challenges posed by west. It is of paramount importance to find the road to this.<sup>(xxii)</sup>

Potentially, the basic steps in drawing a plan for development that accords with our deep-rooted Arab-Islamic cognitive principles can be achieved, mainly through devising contemporary scientific-based intellectual frameworks. The function of these frameworks will be to scrutinize and refine the heritage in an honest objective manner. As a result, a scientific Arab power of a distinct identity will emerge to the world with steadfast steps.

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