TRADITION VERSUS MODERNITY
FROM CULTURAL DISCOURSE TO ARCHITECTURAL CRISIS

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Abstract
This paper is concerned with an issue that gained so much attention and momentum during the last four decades and was the centre of debate and discussions; that is the question of tradition and modernity. This paper will detect how it became an important issue in Arabic/Islamic culture in general and in architecture in particular. The inquiry will start at the cultural broad level, before turning to the architectural level, when the issue of tradition and modernity became a ‘crisis’. One important line of inquiry will be to understand the components of the so called ‘Islamic’ architecture, which is believed to be part of the problem that engulfed Arab Moslem thought within architectural context. By unfolding this broad cultural subject within its architectural dimension, this paper is only a start to shed light on some terms used in the architectural as well as the cultural discourse, which need to be re-visited. The methodology will be to evaluate, review and discuss available data on the record to account on this crisis.

1. Introduction
Tradition and modernity has emerged since the mid-seventies as a major problematic issue within Arab cultural discourse in general and in architecture in particular. Thinkers and architects have sought to view tradition each on their own rights. They have been divided into three schools of thought: The first adheres to tradition with a nearly total rejection of modernity. The second, contrary to the former, seeks to superimpose modernity over tradition which is seen as an aspect of retrogression. The third, however, adopts a methodology of reconciliation between tradition and modernity where tradition has been understood in a contemporary context. This paper will look briefly at the factors why tradition versus modernity has become pivotal to Arabic culture in general and to the Arabic architectural thought in particular. In the following two sections, the first will address how this issue features in Arabic thought, as we will investigate prevailing methodologies in tackling this problematic issue, while the second will trace attempts by leading Arab architects to recognise this issue in Arab architectural arena. Both sections are meant to familiarise the reader with reasons why such an issue is considered to be vital in Arab architectural discourse.
2. Tradition-modernity in the Arab culture

Tradition and modernity came about as an emergent recent phenomenon in contemporary Arab culture only recently, as it only emerged upon the seventies when most Arab countries gained independence from direct colonization that preceded that era. Critics and thinkers, Arkoun and Al-Jabiri's, to name but a few, argue, as we will review in due course, that this issue came upon the unbalanced cultural interaction with the 'West' with the emergence of many factors that provided the right circumstances for a problematic issue sustained by retrogression and cultural decay and a unique state of weakness of Arab States and culture in general. Within the normal objective course of events, time and place, tradition versus modernity can be only a natural phenomenon of continuity with the past, where the present eventually follows historical precedents. For this, the question that comes to mind is: What are the reasons that made this issue become problematic in Arab/Moslem culture in recent times?

Let us begin by stating that the issue is dividing not uniting thinkers and scholars for many reasons, some to do with the standing points of views, ideologies, and the misuse of terminology, while others to do with differences in cultural attachments/adherence from one thinker to another. Thinkers, at a first glance in their writings, seem to distinguish between two basic terms; tradition versus contemporaneity and tradition versus modernity. The former, some argue, embeds a more positive theme than the latter. Habbabi and others argue that contemporaneity Hadathah denotes continuity and belonging rather than a mere notion of time, as not all what is 'modern' to a nation could relate (implicitly or explicitly) to it (Habbabi, 1985: 99, Zurayq, 1985: 366 ). Some thinkers distinguish Modernity Mu'asaarah from contemporaneity Hadathah, as the latter is the conscious choice rather than living at a certain time with no intellectual choice. Al-Khadoor argues that the use of the word modern Mua'sir instead of contemporary Hadeeth is misleading in the sense that it embeds mere relation to time that distinguishes the past from the present, and embeds a superficial prejudice that favours the present assuming it should be better than the past (Al Khadoor, 1995: 61, Taysini, 1985: 99, Sharabi, 1990: 367-370). Sharabi and others describe contemporaneity as timeless, when it does not refer to a certain period of time. He also negates the assumption that the present should be better than the past, and hence the future should be better than the present. Instead, he argues, contemporaneity is reflected in themes, concepts, ideas and meanings, hence, according to him, our ancestors, in this sense, could be more contemporary than us (Sharabi, 1990: 371-375, Arkoun, 1990: 329, Al-Khadoor, 1995: 85-89). Available writings on this issues notably show that Arab thinkers use the two words for one or more of these purposes: Some use the terms in the duality (tradition-modernity or tradition-contemporaneity) to distinguish between the past and the present. Others use the term to refer to socio-cultural issues (Sharabi, 1990: 377, Arkoun, 1990: 349, Al-Khadoor, 1995: 89). In contrast, others view the pair (tradition-modernity) as two entities: one as a dominant model that dictates and the other is a replica (Taysini, 1985: 87, Habbabi, 1985: 106-107, Al-Jabiri, 1991 b: 30-31). Others refer to the phrase to indicate the process in which the past is integrated with the

As a result, it is notable that there exist three main approaches to tackling the issue of ‘tradition versus modernity’ in the Arab world: the first endorses tradition, the second superimposes modernity over tradition, and the third compromises between the two. Those who adopt tradition have been described as ‘traditionalists’ and their approach as ‘conventional’ or *Salafiyyah*. Hassan Hanafi has accounted on this approach and pointed out that it appreciates ‘tradition’ as a sacred heritage that contains the ideal solution to the past and present. However, within this methodology, Hanafi argues, tradition has been dealt with in different way: while some adhere totally to the tradition that they reject modernity completely, others are more tolerant as long as it does not contradict with what he calls ‘pure tradition’. The third group, Hanafi continues, adheres to a more intellectual approach seeking to interpret aspects of the present in difference to traditional themes (Hanafi, 1980: 27).

This methodology, mainly prevalent in religious studies, is criticized for being incapable of coping with emerging changes, thus escaping back to the past, as well as being ‘non-historic’ in the sense that it lacks the objective reading of the past (Hanafi, 1980: 28, Arawi, 1978, Taysini, 1979, Arkoun, 1992, Al-Jabiri, 1992a). Others who adhere to modernity, critics argue, view ‘tradition’ as part of a retrogressive past or one of its aspects. They claim it adds no good to the present that it should be neglected altogether (Hanafi, 1980: 30). This approach, according to Hanafi, favours ‘modernity’ and all aspects that relates with advanced examples of the industrial West. However, this approach is criticized for being a replica of ‘international’ models, ignoring the importance of the ‘self-identity’ of culture within the context of place and time (Hanafi, 1980: 31). The third group conciliates tradition and modernity. Abdul Basit Seeda has elaborated on this approach in his thesis and argues that it can take one of two forms. The first is ‘external reconciliation’ by adopting a modern theory and applying it on ‘tradition’. This approach is also, Seeda notes, utilized by Arab graduates from Western universities. He also claims that this occurs accidentally rather than intentionally as the purpose in most cases is to attract attention to the person rather than to the ideas themselves. Some call this ‘the return of the prodigal son’ (Seeda, 1990, Hanafi, 1980). The second, ‘internal
conciliation'; matches positive aspects of tradition with the needs of the modern times with regard to social transformations. However, he criticizes this approach of being 'eclectic' (Seeda, 1990: 32). After this brief introduction, we turn to the question: how did tradition versus modernity become an important issue in Arabic discourse and how did it evolve? Following, we will preview the emergence of this issue in Arabic discourse, and then in architecture in particular.

2.1 The emergence of tradition and modernity in Arabic discourse

As we noted earlier, the issue of tradition and modernity gained significance in the mid seventies in the Arab world. Thinkers and critics became more aware of an identity problem that manifests itself in cultural aspects following the end of a colonization era that swept across the Arab world. One of the elite Arab writers to highlight this confrontation and subjection of Arab culture to Western influence, resulting in an identity problem, was Edward Said. In his book 'Orientalism', first published in 1979, Said argued that the cross cultural confrontation between the West and the Orient was more than scientific expeditions exploring aspects of culture. He writes: 'Orientalism is a system of representation, framed by a whole set of forces that brought the Orient into western learning, western consciousness and, later the western empire' (Said, 1979: 203). Said critically reviewed colonising powers' views about the 'Orient' from the 18th century, which many writers consider the beginning of 'Orientalism'. He founded his argument upon Michael Foucault's theories of domination and power, where Orientalism was a tool of Western domination upon the Arab world. He argued that 'Orientalism' in its basic methodological system only views conquered nations as anthropological creatures to study and control. In this sense, 'Orientalism's ideas are mere functional ideas that integrate with an overall colonisation system (Said, 1979, 1991: 124-133). Since the publication of 'Orientalism' Arab critics and thinkers have contributed to this issue in different ways. Many writers had in mind an identity problem and an issue of confrontation between a foreign culture and a dominated or deteriorating Arab one. While some sought to analyse the current entangled situation, others alluded to the past to understand its parameters, giving much importance to 'tradition'. Writers across the Arab world tackled Arabic Islamic thought, its evolution, formation and the current state.

One of the remarkable contributions is the work of the late Moroccan philosopher Mohammed Abed Al-Jabiri. In his works, Al-Jabiri highlights the issue of tradition and modernity from different points of view, which we will preview next as well as others'.

Al-Jabiri set out a project in the early 1980s in four publications that tackle tradition and contemporary Arab discourse and thought (Al-Jabiri, 1982, 1986, 1991-a,1991-b). In addition, he started a project he published in three consecutive volumes. His aim was to analyse, understand, and evaluate the Arab thought, mind, and the mentality behind the vast heritage considered the 'golden age of Arabic civilization'. He aimed at understanding the factors behind the evolution of 'tradition' and the process of tradition evolution.
Al-Jabiri's first volume in a series called *Critics on the Arab Mind* was 'The Evolution of the Arab Mind' (Al-Jabiri, 1991c). Al-Jabiri starts this study by adopting a methodology of 'conjecture-refutation' of all inherited tradition. He introduces first the idea of using the word 'mind' to indicate not the human organ, but rather the process of analysis-synthesis by which the human mind produces knowledge and science. He refers to what relates to the Arabs as the 'Arab mind' meaning the process of thinking that produced literature, science, etc. as *means* and *context* (Al-Jabiri, 1991c: 11-17). He argues that understanding the process by which 'the Arab mind' functions as means and contextual axiom will eventually make clear the distinction between 'Arab mind' and 'French, English, or European mind', etc. in the way it produces knowledge and heritage as a *process* rather than as a *product*. (Al-Jabiri, 1991c: 11-13). Al-Jabiri argues that in order to be able to think within a certain socio-cultural milieu, it is not enough to think *about* its issues, but rather the thinker has to think *with* and *of* its issues by *means of the epistemological system that formulated these issues within its socio-cultural parameters*. Al-Jabiri, from this standing point, criticizes 'Orientalists' for being 'outsiders' to the culture they were studying (Al-Jabiri, 1991c: 13). Al-Jabiri then borrows Lalande's distinction between *La raison Constituente* and *La raison Constituee*, to define the 'Arab mind' under investigation as: 'the set of rules that the Arab culture imposes upon Arabs or those who belong to that culture as a means of acquiring knowledge, in other words the epistemological system' (Al-Jabiri, 1991c: 15). However, he does affirm the interrelation between the two distinctive 'minds' considering Levi Strauss's argument that 'the La raison Constituente implies the existence of the La raison Constituee, meaning that the evolution of the La raison Constituente is a result itself of a prevailing set of rules or another La raison Constituee. This lead him to make comparisons between the 'Arab mind' as a product of preceding cultures, particularly Greek, and to detect influences of Plato's and Aristotle's thought upon the formation and evolution of Arab culture (Al-Jabiri, 1991c: 17-35).

He then embarked on the investigation of Arab culture since its evolution in the era that preceded the spread of Islam in the 7th century, which led him to conclude that 'time in the Arab culture had come to a standstill in terms of the production of cultural knowledge' (Ibid.: 42) and that 'contemporary Arab countries live, culturally, in the same era that preceded Islam; which witnessed the prosperity of knowledge and cultural production' (Ibid.: 50). Then he marked a later period within the Abbasid dynasty called 'The writing-down era', in which Arabs were involved in the reproduction of their cultural heritage up to that date not as has been introduced or inherited but as has been perceived according to contemporary circumstances (Ibid.: 56-71). From this perspective, Al-Jabiri studied aspects of Arab culture. He started with language as the basic tool to produce knowledge as a means and context. He put forward an interesting argument that Arabic, up to our current time, is only a reflection of the 'world of the Bedouin', in the sense that it reflects, and is confined to the 'Bedouin world', who depicted the 'desert' around him (Al-Jabiri: 1991c: 75-95).
Al-Jabiri then investigated Islamic history from the death of the Prophet in the 7th century to the mid 9th century. He argued that 'Islamic culture during that period is as much a reflection and a production of religion, as we can ascribe Greek culture to philosophy' (Ibid.: 96). Al-Jabiri argues that that era witnessed the evolution of a crisis; where upon, the elite of that era were involved in superficial marginal debates, while offsetting the real meaningful matters to do with the basis upon which evolving sciences at the time, mainly religious, had been founded (Ibid.: 101). He then reviews what he believes different Islamic doctrines contributed to the evolution of the crisis by establishing what is known to historians as the 'linguistic debates'. Al-Jabiri adds that the spread of mythical interpretations and witchcraft beliefs contributed to the decline of culture and complicated the crisis, as the prevailing analysis-synthesis process then lacked logic and led to what he calls the 'retired mind in the Arab culture' (Ibid.: 149).

In his 'The structure of the Arab Mind', Al-Jabiri defines three epistemological systems that prevailed within Arab culture since its evolution in the ‘writing-down era’. The first is the ‘literal’ or ‘dictating’ epistemological system (Bayan) which Al-Jabiri claims was embodied in the Arabic language. Such a system establishes a gap between cause and effect. The second system he calls the ‘Sufi’ epistemological system (Irfan); introduced to Arab culture through the pre-Islamic inherited legacy, when a struggle at the beginning of the Abbasid period emerged between Sunni and Shia’a political thought, especially the Isma’ili, Sufi philosophy, witchcraft, myths, astrology, and magic. Such a system establishes a certain view of the world based on the connection between the infinite and the definite, and upon spiritual thinking, myths and magic. The third system Al-Jabiri defines is the rational logical epistemological system (Burhan); introduced to Arab thought through the translation of Greek knowledge in the ‘writing-down era’. This system is based upon the science and philosophy of Greek thinking as developed by Aristotle. Such a system is based upon a framework that views the world as one logical entity, based upon the relation between cause and effect. It also establishes the ground for knowledge that is the result of rational thinking, from certain logic to logical conclusions (Al-Jabiri, 1992a). Al-Jabiri argues that these three epistemological systems prevailed in a context of conflict and contradiction within the Arab culture. This conflict was sustained by the political struggle between Shia’a and Sunni, leading the former to adopt the second system (Sufi), and the latter the first system (Bayan). Both sects invoked certain aspects of the third system (Burhan) occasionally.

This resulted in a lax mentality and thinking, open to indiscriminate and acceptance of all thought and beliefs, including myths and miracles, and denying the rationale behind things. Moreover, Al-Jabiri argues that this struggle between the three contradictory systems ended up with the supremacy of (Sufism) above the Sunni as well as Shia’as minds. It thus demolished not only the other two systems, in that it introduced non-logical discourse to the realm of (Bayan) and (Burhan), but also entered the realm of the majority of people who were relatively illiterate. Therefore, Sufi buildings were erected to praise the realm of the new power that defeated the ‘mind’ and became the system by which all aspects of social, political,

Another fairly similar line of thinking and critical skeptical approach can be found in the writings of Mohammed Arkoun, which focus on the analysis and criticism of Arabic Islamic thought (Arkoun, 1985, 1985a, 1987, 1992, 1993, 1997). In his writings Arkoun seeks to understand the evolution of tradition within the Arab culture, and most importantly key turning points of its evolution. Arkoun integrates three elements he regards responsible for the evolution/regression of Arab cultural knowledge, namely: thought, language, and the socio-historic milieu (Arkoun, 1997: 206). He establishes three systems to understand the past or 'tradition'. The first is to understand tradition as 'all what has been thought of', which will eventually lead to the other two: 'the nonthought of' tradition, or the decisions that have been discarded, ignored or omitted during the evolution of a certain tradition at a certain time, and the third, 'the impossible-to- think of at the time' tradition (Arkoun, 1997: 59-63). Arkoun argues that understanding the circumstances and factors that led to the adoption of a certain tradition over another is central to a better comprehension of the process, not the product, responsible for its evolution. Like Al-Jabiri, who considers the 'mind' central to his investigation of (thought, language, socio-historic milieu), Arkoun questions the essence of what he calls 'the Islamic mind' and its role in the production of 'religious sciences', which he claims as influential in the evolution of knowledge and science during the 'golden era' of Arab civilization (Arkoun, 1997: 65-74). Arkoun also investigates the effect of the Islamic religion upon thought on the one hand, and the effect of religion upon society on the other and argues that throughout Islamic history thought was subject to many variables rather than one, and that the detection of these turning points is key to understanding the emergence of the 'crisis' in Arabic Islamic thought (Arkoun, 1997: 206-240).

Arkoun draws attention to two major turning points: One is the intervention of 'Orientalism' and the new vision it provided to understand past heritage (Arkoun, 1997: 245-269, 1994: 30-79). The second is the tendency to divide religion affairs from the political life of the State or (Ilmaniyyah) by Ataturk (Arkoun, 1997: 275-290).

In addition to some factors raised by Al-Jabiri, Arkoun adds more, for example, and calls for the evaluation of the traditions we inherited to verify which can be accepted that suits our times. In other words, the traditions produced in a certain past time can still be accepted provided that we can understand the process and minds that influenced its evolution in the first place. This leads to explore the essence of tradition not as superficial forms, but rather as inherent embedded meanings and themes. This means that we are invited to reconsider some decisions that were not possible to think of during the production of tradition, which were either impossible to think of at the time, or not thought of at all, but might be possible to be thought of or considered in modern times for the change of circumstances. Arkoun also considers the study of language, and argues that it has been a major factor in the decline of Arab thought.
Other important arguments can be noted in Abdullah Al-Arawi’s writings (1970, 1974, 1978, 1980, 1983, 1992), where the Arab thought is the realm of his investigation. His writings are based upon the political parameter in difference to the Arab thought; and the socio-economic dimension and conflict with thought. His claims that conflict exists as political ideology that resulted in the evolution of class-related thought during certain periods in the Arab history. His book ‘The Arabs and historical thought’ marks his inclination to adopt Marxist theory and a class-history-political model to analyse Arab thought within its historical context (Arawi, 1980: 11-25). Hence, Imperialism, directly or indirectly produced social classes and affected interrelations among them, as well as the link between the past and the present. He argues that ‘the ideological Arab situation is a result of the pressures of Imperialism in all its aspects, and is the result of a class conflict’ (Arawi, 1980: 13).

From this point of view, Arawi argues that any thought which is a result of certain social factors does eventually reflect that situation, and in order to bring any ideological change this will result in conflict. Moreover, he argues that such contradictory forces tend to adopt prevailing thought which is subject to change, yet they are also subject to an inherited situation or one which resulted from outside change or political decisions (Ibid.: 13). Arawi then distinguishes two factors that govern ideas and which become part of the social system, one is the role of these thoughts which determines the relations between classes in society, the other is the essence and the structure of these ideas which are determined by their evolutionary factors (Ibid.: 14). He then describes, analyses, and evaluates the Arab society in the light of thought that determined its class structure within its political, economic, and historical milieu, and argues that ‘Arab society is fragmented due to Imperialism, each class within it struggles to defend its interests by all means; one of which is ideological’ (Ibid.). He studies the ‘traditionalist' movements in the Arab world, and criticizes them for being dedicated to tradition with no consideration to modern ideas. He later calls for a revolutionary study of the ‘other' in order to progress towards modernity and change (Arawi, 1980, 59&207, 1978: 20, 1974:167).

Hassan Hanafi’s contributions in the subjects of tradition and modernity are also of interest because of ideas and argument he put forward (Hanafi, 1980, 1981a, 1981b, 1991). Hanafi investigates ‘tradition' and the challenge of modernity from three main perspectives: The first, in which he studies heritage in order to formulate a certain point of view in his book ‘Tradition and Modernity’ (Hanafi, 1980). In the second he studies ‘western tradition', in ‘An Introduction to Occidentalism’. The third where he examines the ’present' in search of a theory in his ‘Contemporary Issues in Modern Arab Thought: Parts I &II).

In his first study, Hanafi highlights certain issues that he considers vital when looking at ‘tradition'. His approach tends to include socio-cultural, historical, and political aspects. He therefore tackles the issue on different levels; the first from a socio-historical perspective, where he argues that we should understand ‘tradition' in the light of our ‘present', and that we should grasp the past as per our modern time not as we inherited it (Hanafi, 1980: 10-26). This leads us to note that some may have bias with the past that leads to stagnation and
a limited view of tradition (Hanafi, 1980: 37). To many 'tradition' is associated either with the 'sacred' or 'untouchable', and 'any attempt of change is a sacrilege' (Ibid.: 39). On a third level, Hanafi tackles the educational systems and Islamic studies in particular, where, according to him, there is a split between the thinker/scholar and his cultural background in the sense that 'his study of his tradition is on the level of theory which does not influence him or his real world, whereas tradition should be the essence of his existence, his past, present, and future' (Hanafi, 1980: 75). Hanafi suggests solutions for the desired change. The first proposal is at the level of language. He argues that 'the basic traditional sciences in our heritage are still limited to the borders of the rigid language that can no longer cope with the modern scientific world or can describe it' (Ibid.: 124). Hence, he suggests that 'since language is the axiom to translate and interpret thought, then modernizing the language will influence and modernize thought itself' (Ibid.: 125).

The second proposal is at the level of exploring new innovative methods of analysis-synthesis by utilizing what he calls 'psychological consciousness' in reading and understanding the tradition. He identifies various layers within the relation between the mind of the transmitter, in this case the creator of the 'tradition', and the receiver (us),' (Ibid.: 153). According to him, the analysis of the hidden socio-psychological 'mind' of the inventor of the tradition, either in its physical or non-physical aspects, will lead to a better understanding of tradition, its evolution, as well as ways of preventing any misreading of tradition (Ibid.: 151-156).

The third proposal is at the level of changing the cultural milieu if necessary; that is, Hanafi argues that 'tradition' is the outcome of the 'superiority' of certain aspects of cultural environments over others, either to do with family, lifestyle, political system, etc. However, these dominant aspects might not be the case at present, which means that in order to revive a certain tradition, the contemporary cultural environment has to match its precedent when tradition evolved (Ibid.: 157-168). Hanafi's finally argues the need for an overall 'rebuilding' of the traditional sciences in the light of contemporary variables (Ibid.: 170-216); in other words, he calls for another 'writing-down era', which Al-Jabiri introduced in his studies.

Hanafi establishes what he calls 'Occidentalism', or the study of the Western Renaissance, in order to understand its evolution (Hanafi, 1991: 31). Hanafi argues that intellectuals in the Third world suffer from various problems that prevent progress and affect changes in the cultural milieu. These problems vary from external ones such as political repression, co-option, corruption, and greed, or personal factors related to livelihood, which might lead to segregation of the individual from his socio-cultural environment, or immigration to another culture. In the light of these problems that surround contemporary Arab culture, Hanafi tackles the dialectic relation between tradition and modernity in the Arab world and argues that this marks a standstill state in thought and change (Hanafi, 1981a: 19-53).

Such writings reviewed indicate the significance of this issue in the Arab discourse and the impact it has upon aspects of culture. Now let us review the problem in the realm of Arab architectural thought.
3 Tradition versus modernity: From cultural debate to architectural crisis

Since the second half of the 20th century, upon the independence of most of the Arab world from direct colonisation, the tension between the past and present became a hot issue. Many contemporary Arab architects then became aware of the legacy of a preceding era and were alarmed by a viable extended 'external interference', characterized by 'imported' styles and forms. This led to the adherence to the past and tradition. Such an adherence came about as a reaction against the ‘international architectural style’. The imported forms, styles, and planning theories found their way via various tracks. Firstly, they were adopted by colonizing agents as ‘alternatives’ to existing traditional planning and architectural systems, examples can be seen in some North African cities like Fez or Meknas. In Cairo, a new system of planning after the Boulevards of Paris created by Haussman (Figure 1) was adopted by the Egyptian Khedive Ismail in the mid 19th century (Figure 2), who adopted the Gothic style, leaving Cairo with two extreme architectural faces as well as contradictory planning systems: one Gothic, to be seen in the new planning system, which contains wide, straight streets that end in a square. The other is the traditional Fatimid, characterized by narrow winding alleyways and cul-de-sacs. It was not only limited to Cairo, but the same conflicting planning systems were notable in most other Arab cities. Such an extreme contrast led many Arab thinkers and leading architects to sound the alarm of a growing problem, which has become known in architectural discourse as the 'crisis in the built environment'.

Fig. 1: Haussman's Paris (after Curtis, 1996:34).
Fig. 2: Cairo after Haussman's Paris: a planning system adopted by Khedive Ismail (After UIA).

This ‘crisis’ in the built environment accompanied by the overall ‘crisis’ in Arab culture led to a call
for a review of major standing points of contemporary Arab architecture. One of the first to raise this issue was the Egyptian architect Hassan Fathy (1900-1989). Fathy noted a 'crisis' in contemporary Arab architecture, he wrote: 'Arab architecture nowadays is undergoing a bitter crisis in the history of its development throughout all Arab countries without exception. In fact we can say that there is no contemporary Arab architecture, but rather a European architecture in the Arab countries' (Fathy, 1971: 21). Curtis notes that Fathy was among those critics who saw the 'international style' as just one more intrusion in the already fragmented and colonised culture of his own country (Curtis, 1982: 381).

The era within which Fathy’s architectural theoretical thought evolved, in the 1930s, witnessed the emergence of architectural schools of thought, which included many western stylistic architectural theories that spread across the Arab world. In addition, there emerged some influential doctrines, and political events. Yet, on the cultural level, it seems that this influence goes back to an earlier period. In this regard, Edward Said mentions the Napoleonic expedition in the 19th century as a major turning point, where by the beginning of the 20th century Egypt had already had a long history of foreign consecutive interference by European powers. This left imprints upon the social as well as cultural life, and also affected the architectural heritage (Said, 1991: 25). Said notes that Egypt was exposed to foreign cross-cultural influence as early as the era of Khedive Ismail in 1863, followed by the declaration of Egypt’s bankruptcy and the declaration of the public debt owed to England and France in 1878 (Said, 1991: 30-35). This led four years later, as writers note, to the military occupation of Egypt by the British for the next 70 years. Eventually, this occupation led to the emergence of a national movement against colonization; most notably by Mohammed Abduh and by the mid 20th century this long history of direct interference ended with the takeover of the government by the Free Officers in 1952 (Mansfield, 1980: 67). Hassan Fathy grew up in this socio-political context, Steele notes, and developed his thoughts and ideas with close friends such as the artist Hamid Said, who recalls a mutual feeling of awareness of an emerging cultural crisis among Fathy's friends (Steele, 1997: 150).

Therefore, Fathy -followed later by Rasem Badran, M. Makiya, A. Ibrahim and others - led a school of thought that adopted a practical approach to implement ‘traditional architecture’. Hence, many issues became under scrutiny in the discourse of contemporary Arab architecture so it became pivotal to understand the past to adequately interpret it in a modern way. Moreover, to understand 'tradition' and the causing circumstances for its evolution to determine whether it fits in place, form, space and time within the present's varied needs. Curtis writes:'Far from perceiving 'modernism' as an instrument for universal liberation, critics like Fathy saw it as a destructive force that was reducing the whole world to a hollow sameness'. (Curtis, 1982: 381).

For this, the subject of ‘tradition’ came to the front stage where many questions were raised; most important of which is: how many traditions exist within the Arab geo-climatic, regional, trans-regional, as well as socio-cultural environments? Do we have a single tradition that embeds all
cultural and social aspects or do we have many diverse ones that reflect variations of history, time and place?

In this regard, we find considerable dispute as thinkers are divided in two camps: The first claims a single tradition embedded in Islam and Sharia'a (Al-Hathloul, 1981, Kultermann, 1982, Llewellyn, 1983, Hakim, 1986). They argue that Islam as a prevailing religion has united and dominated aspects of social, political, and economic life in such a way that the built environment - though betray minor superficial differences across regions and trans-regions - reflects only one main dominant factor of influence. More specifically, this group argues that architecture across the Arab and Muslim world embeds one main prime theme derived from Islamic concepts. The second group, contrary to the former, considers this a huge misunderstanding, and views the term 'Islamic architecture' as most controversial and leads to misinterpretations of heritage and tradition in theory and in practice. Hence, they reject such a notion of the existence of one single Arab tradition (Kuban, 1983-a, Grabar, 1980, 1983, 1983-a, 2001, Hill, 1976, Grube, 1978).

The debate starts in the first place on a technical level; namely the use of terminology, and then on a cultural more important one. Yet, the two levels are intertwined as they cause negative impact of theory upon practice. On the terminological level, the misunderstanding of the broad term 'Islamic architecture' has negatively influenced architectural thinking for years.

The story begins with the arrival of archaeological expeditions from the West in the second half of the 19th century to study the East, particularly, the architecture of the Arab and Muslim world. Those historians and travelers, used terms as ‘Mohammedan architecture', (For example 'Muhammadan Architecture in Egypt and Palestine' by Martin S. Briggs, Oxford, 1924.), ascribing it to the Prophet ‘Mohammad', or more often was referred to as 'Islamic architecture'. Ascribing something to someone, implies that the former has the least characteristics of the latter. In other words, ascribing architecture to Mohammad means it reflects his teachings and beliefs. The same can be said about 'Islamic architecture', where this term leads to think that it is associated with Islam and Sharia'a. For example, Basim Hakim in his 'Islamic city', in 1984, analysed the city of Tunis, and argued that Arabic Islamic cities were mainly planned according to Sharia'a and the verbal sayings (Hadith) of Prophet Mohammad. The study of Hathloul at MIT earlier in 1981 falls within this category as he argued that the dominant factor that shaped the urban fabric of the city was Sharia'a (Al Hathloul, 1981). Others such as Llewellyn's 'Sharia'ah-values pertaining to landscape planning and design' argue that Islam and Sharia'a have an influential role in landscape and urban planning (Llewellyn, 1983).

Fig. 3: Mohammad's house, Medina, as may have appeared before his death in 632 Reconstruction drawing (After Bloom et al, 1997)
The fact that Mohammad neither encouraged nor invented an architectural style or a single architectural artefact - apart from his very simple mosque with the attached chambers for his wives - (Fig. 3) is the simple answer to such arguments. The term 'Mohammedan architecture' can simply be refuted and be very much controversial on the grounds that it neither denotes an architectural system nor a style hence wrongly marking an 'architecture' rather than a 'building'. It is almost impossible to ignore the studies that made clear the distinction between 'architecture' and 'building' (Hillier, 1996: 15-21, Rapoport, 1969, 126-128), as the former - superior, elitist, high-style, as opposed to the latter - inferior, popularist, vernacular. Mohammed's act was 'building' rather than 'architecture'. Evidence from the Sirah of Mohammed indicates that he discouraged a man from adding a dome to his roof on the grounds that such an act can be deemed as inclinations to godless life.

As for the widely-used term 'Islamic architecture', it similarly involves much controversy and has recently opened the door wide for an exclusive review of major standing points in contemporary Arab architecture. The investigation starts on the level of its meaning and most importantly about its use of the term in Arabic architectural discourse.

The term, seems to be widely used to describe an architectural style, certain shapes and forms (vaults, arches, etc.), and a system of building that evolved throughout a long period of Islamic rule - mainly since the Umayyads until the Ottomans. It is also widely known that, writers refer to Islamic architecture with notable variations. For example Hoag's 'Islamic Architecture' in 1975, or Hillenbrand's 'Islamic Architecture: Form, Function and Meaning' in 1994 are examples of this use of the term. There seem to be differences between writers in the way they use the term, as despite the seemingly similar title for the two books, each author decides a different approach to refer to that architecture. The former classifies it throughout the book according to region, whereas the latter provides a classification based on building types across regions. Contrary to both, Cresswell uses another method in his 'The Muslim Architecture of Egypt' in 1959, and subdivides his two-volume study according to ruling dynasties within the Islamic period (Ayyubids, Fatimids, Bahrite Mamluks, etc.).

This shows clearly the problem that encountered travelers and historians. It seems that they tried to find a term, as simple as possible, to describe that architecture that spreads across time and region. In other words, they tried to find a common influential factor that can form an umbrella to such architecture without the recourse to long expressions that describe various styles, forms, or spatial patterns. Such a search for a framework opened the door wide for doubt and debate on a fundamental level of inquiry. For example Ernst Grube writes: 'the first question we must ask ourselves is whether there is such a thing as 'Islamic architecture' (Grube, 1978: 10). He also questions the meanings by which we refer to Islamic architecture; and writes: 'Do we mean the architecture produced for and by Muslims to serve Islam as a religion, referring, consequently, only to that architecture which did serve a religious function, the mosque, the tomb, the madrasa? Or do we mean all the architecture produced in Muslim lands? And if this should be so, what does
'Islamic' mean in this context? If 'Islamic' is not an adjective defining a religious quality, should it be understood as a word that identifies a special kind of architecture, that of a civilization reflecting, or determined by, special qualities inherent in Islam as a cultural phenomenon? Does such an architecture exist? (Grube, 1978: 10).

Similarly, Dogan Kuban led another skeptical investigation. In his article 'the geographical and historical bases of the diversity of Muslim architectural styles' in 1983 he argues that there has been an extensive search to find an appropriate definition for the concept Islamic architecture, but he concludes that: 'Seeking a unified architectural expression of time and space in those diverse forms and not finding it, I arrived at the conclusion that the fundamental assumption of a homogeneity and unity in Islamic architecture was faulty' (Kuban, 1983-a: 1). No sooner had this unprecedented argument been raised by Kuban than the alarm was sounded, with even a touch of panic. This was followed by a call for the need to revise major standing points of contemporary Arab architecture. In fact, before that time the search for a united homogeneous architecture to be put under one umbrella has been taking the shape of historic studies, yet this has even proved to be problematic. According to Kuban, such historic studies derived mainly from Western textbooks can be criticized of being centralized around Western perception (Ibid.).

Yet the fundamental question remains unanswered: If we reject the idea that the connection between Islam and architecture is NOT the criterion to find such a definition, how can we then define the framework for the term 'Islamic Architecture'? Is it the form, the function, region, dynasty, builders or users? What adds to the problem is the fact that if we accept Derek Hill's argument which implies that due to historical, cultural, and geographical factors, it is not possible to find a single style of 'Islamic Architecture' (Hill, 1976: 61).

In search of an answer, two problems arise: The first is the fact that 'Islamic architecture' is claimed to be the architecture of the minority rather than the majority. Secondly, we find little offered to provide evidence to sustain, explain or justify definitions provided. For example, the following definition put forward by Hassan Fathy does not provide a solution but rather implies the need for more inquiry. He writes: 'Islamic architecture was a traditional and regional art: every Islamic country had its own architecture, certainly all Islamic countries have something in common, in accord with faith, but their environments and consequently their physical needs differ widely' (Faraoui, 1980: 77). There emerge concepts that add complication to the problem: one provided by Kuban, and the other is the concept of the monumentality of Islamic architecture provided by Oleg Grabar. Kuban for example, argues that the invention of a universal term, led to the invention of what he calls 'orientalist tradition', which 'rests on the premise that Islamic culture necessarily had to produce artifacts with a consanguine formalism, which inherently expressed a universally accepted Islamic world view disciplined by the religion' (Kuban, 1983-a: 1). It followed from that that Arabs or Muslims have taken this tradition as pronounced by Westerns, not because it is their history, and tried very hard to confirm its veracity, forgetting that it expresses not a universalism, but a parochialism' (Ibid.). The other emerging
problematic idea to do with 'Islamic architecture' stems from the claim that it is replete with either monumental architecture that has no certain use or where forms have been borrowed from outside the culture of Islam. On the issue of the use of such monumental architecture, Fadan offers a rather bizarre explanation that lies outside Muslim faith, he writes: 'Because these buildings [monuments] are characterized by uniqueness, permanence and luxury of construction -having been built to impress God as well as the people [my emphasis]' (Fadan, 1983: 295). An example for such a monumentality can be noticed clearly in the Mosque and Madrassa of Sultan Hassan in Cairo (Figure 4), built in 1356-62.

This building was regarded influential for contemporary architects. It however provokes questions as how it can reflect Islam that prohibits unnecessary spending, let alone to justify its building in the first place. The Arab historian Al-Maqrizi narrates that its construction cost the treasury of the Islamic Empire at the time a daily expenditure of 40,000 Dirhams for seven years (Al-Maqrizi, 1916: 30). Al-Maqrizi also reveals that the reason for the erection of this mosque in its grand size, which seems out of proportion, was to oppose the Citadel of Saladdin during the fight between the Mamluks (Al-Maqrizi, 1916: 33, Michell, 1978: 227, Ukashah, 1981: 192, Yeomans, 1999).
and the 'shape of the building, its technique of construction, decoration, and nearly all such physical attributes were not created by Islam, but were part of the traditional, Christian, vocabulary of the eastern Mediterranean' (Grabar, 1983: 7). He, therefore suggests that this monument is a shrine built for political and symbolic reasons to announce an identity rather than for functional purposes. Others note that this monument was erected by Abdel-Malik in 691 AD after the church of the resurrection in Jerusalem (Ukashah, 1981: 154-155, Yeomans, 1999: 29, Hoag, 1963: 12, 1975: 16).

The other controversial 'Islamic' monument is the 'Taj Mahal' in Agra in India (Figure 6), which represents a mosque for a dead spouse (Golombek, 1981: 43, Hoag, 1975: 380, Wheeler, 1965: 154). Such buildings, Ukashah argues, prevailed in Islamic history for circumstantial reasons and served short-term purpose rather than to serve the public (Ukashah, 1981: 136). Begley suggests a rather bizarre reason for its building that contradicts Muslim faith. He suggests that the Taj Mahal was an extraordinary attempt to show on earth God's throne as it will appear at the time of the resurrection (Begley, 1979: 33). Such arguments and bizarre ideas raise again our fundamental question: How can such monuments that contradict the basics of Islam be regarded as Islamic?

In seeking answers to the questions, we find little that has been offered in this regard, apart from some contributions by Grabar and others. Such contributions are based on the fact that Islamic architecture is replete with non-functional iconographic signs, symbols and forms.

**Conclusion: Further research needed**

These arguments sustain the idea that Islamic architecture is 'monumental' and that much focus has been on this domain offsetting its 'vernacular' domain. This brings issues of form-function, the vernacular, and space organisation in Islamic architecture to the front stage and raises a series of questions, for example: Has this issue been tackled properly in the research about the meaning of Islamic architecture and to what extent? Have the morphology and the structure of Islamic architecture been scrutinized as far as form and function as integral coherent patterns are concerned? What contributions have been made towards the vernacular within the Arab architecture to understand its basic organisation pattern as far as space organization is concerned? The answers to such questions have to be investigated rigorously in forthcoming independent research.
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