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# Award-Winning Mosque Projects by the Aga Khan Award for Architecture

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**Abstract:** The mosque is one of the building types focused on by successive juries of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture. This paper proposes to investigate the main agenda of the AKAA through an analysis of the award-winning mosques. The main topic of this inquiry is a discussion of different architectural discourses prevalent in the architectural circles of the Islamic countries. The general inclination of different master juries of the Award has been towards defining architecture either as a social practice or as an autonomous field. In addition, some of the affiliated circles of the Award try to foster an Islamic identity that might be expressed by architecture. The issue of identity interacts in the two definitions of architecture. On one hand, Islam provides a society with a set of shared social values, and on the other hand, the history and tradition of Islamic architecture determines some formal features.
The author claims that the two sets of values -architectural and social- can be alienated and demarcated from each other, although they may have a common historical origin. The process of westernization and modernization raises the same kind of demarcation between architectural symbolism and social values and also between the social expectations and the social role of architecture that is clearly observable in the contemporary mosque architecture. In the case of demarcation, architecture might play the role of reinforcing the traditional values through its symbolism. Another possibility is a critical understanding of the possible reasons of the demarcation. The award-winning mosque projects by the AKAA provides an appropriate case to discuss the above mentioned issues.

## Introduction

The mosque is one of the building types focused on by successive juries of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture. This Award[1] is given every three years since 1980. One of its main aims is the creation of public awareness about environmental issues among Islamic societies. Through these awards and connected seminars, educational programs, and the publications that follow, the Award tries to foster an interest in the built environment of these societies. At the end of the first six cycles the award-winning projects constitute a wide range of examples that have been selected from amongst a number of different building types, and they serve to illustrate varied architectural approaches. It is worth attempting to trace the implications of these approaches through a comparative analysis of the award-winning projects of one specific type.

Six award cycles succeeded each other until the year 1995. By the end of these cycles seven mosques had been given prizes and one mosque was cited as deserving honorable mention. Mosques were awarded prizes in each cycle with the exceptions of the Award cycles of 1980 and 1992. It can be claimed, therefore, that recognition of the mosque as an important building type has been a constant theme throughout the history of the Award.

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[1] Every three years a steering committee selects a master jury composed of nine persons with different backgrounds. The master jury chooses a number of projects from among the ones submitted by nominators from different countries, to be further documented by technical reviewers. In successive sessions, the master jury selects the award-winning projects according to the technical reports. The number, categories, and the nature of the selections are claimed to be the decision of the master jury.

In this paper, it is proposed to investigate and discuss the main agenda and intentions of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture through an analysis of the criteria used for selecting mosques as worthy of the award. The main topic of the inquiry is a discussion of different architectural discourses prevalent in the architectural circles of the so-called Islamic countries. The typology of the mosque is a relevant topic because of the differing architectural discourses that underpin different approaches to mosque architecture and most significantly because of the symbolic and cultural meanings attributed to mosques.

To date, none of the Steering Committees of the Award has established an explicit, detailed agenda involving criteria for making the Award. They have, rather, a loose agenda that is only traceable through the analysis of the introductory texts of the award-winning projects of each cycle. This loose agenda can be summarized as the fostering of architectural excellence and the improvement of the quality of the built environment. It is possible to differentiate certain common themes through the analysis of the selections of the different master juries. It is possible that the general inclination of different master juries has been towards defining architecture either as a social practice or as an autonomous field in which aesthetic preferences become more dominant than social preferences. In addition to these common themes of the master juries, some of the affiliated circles of the Award try to foster an Islamic identity that might be expressed by architecture. In brief, the discourse of the Award, is shaped by its loose agenda, by underlying themes of the selections of the master juries, and by ideas originated within the affiliated circles of the Award.

The issues of identity, of what makes a building a representation of an identity, and of an 'Islamic' architecture interact in the two definitions of architecture seen in the master juries' selections. On one hand, Islam is a social construct that provides a society with a set of shared social values to which architecture is thought to respond. On the other hand, the history and tradition of so-called Islamic architecture determines formal features. Thus, an inquiry into Islamic architecture necessitates an understanding of the social and autonomous dimensions of that architecture. Both social values and architectural values are to some extent historically related. This does not mean, however, that they must be synchronous. It is claimed, therefore, that the two sets of values -architectural and social- can still be demarcated and alienated from each other although they may have a common historical origin.

It is also possible that the process of westernization and modernization that traditional Islamic societies have faced creates a similar alienation, not only between architectural symbolism and social values, but also between social expectations and the role designated for architecture. Mohammad Arkoun describes this alienation as a "bricolage". He writes: *"If, like other artistic expressions, architecture translates the main trends of cognitive system and cultural representations in a given tradition, we must recognise that the built environment in contemporary so-called Muslim societies is under the influence of a generalized ideological bricolage, which can also be described as a semantic disorder."* [1, p. 19]

Architecture might play the role of reinforcing traditional values through its symbolism, the collective meaning associated with buildings. It is believed that there exists another possibility for architecture that is more substantial. This requires a critical understanding of the possible reasons of the state of disorder. This alternative approach does not accept architecture merely as representation, whose role would simply be the expression of meaning through symbolism, but views architecture as a practice which is embedded in the complex web of social, cultural, and economic factors.

The analysis of the mosque projects has significance in terms of the consideration of the mosque as the Islamic building par excellence[2]. First and foremost, the mosque is the building that is directly

[2] The idea that the mosque is the Islamic building par excellence comes from Robert Hillenbrand.[2, p. 33]

associated with Islam. Traditional values, mainly derived from religion, are therefore expected to be embedded in the typology of the mosque. Indeed, the mosque is thought to be the representation of the Islamic tradition. This is why one is most likely to find in the mosque the interstices between tradition and modernity. Secondly, The award-winning mosque projects comprise different architectural approaches, and this makes a comparative analysis possible.

The analysis of the issue of identity is not limited to the inquiry into the prize-winning mosques. It will also focus on an examination of the architectural discourses that underpin these projects. This is because of the close relationship between discourse and the formation of an identity, and thus between architectural discourse and current architectural practice.

The aim of this paper is to investigate different understandings of architecture and its relationship with society, and to deal with this issue through an inquiry into the mosques singled out for awards by the Aga Khan Award for Architecture and into the discourses that underpin these selections. It is then followed by a discussion of social identity and its relevance for the discipline of architecture. In the case of the Islamic world, the issue of identity opens up a discussion of modernity and tradition.

In addition to the discussion of identity, the aim is to understand the relationship between architectural discourse and architectural practice. These two areas of inquiry can parallel each other since, discourse is one of the main determining factors of the formation of an identity. The Award with its different prize-winning projects and the discourses that substantiate them lends itself to such a multi-layered discussion. By saying this, it is not argued that the Aga Khan Award for Architecture attempts to foster a specific kind of architectural discourse. This would be, in fact, the reverse of their goal, which is to value a variety of approaches in the field of architecture. It is rather proposed that each selection portrays a different discourse. Even though, among the selections of the master juries, there might be a tendency to permeate certain kind of projects, this is not explicitly stated by the members of the steering committee or the master jury. Still, it will be worth looking for general tendencies and promoted discourses among different circles affiliated with the Aga Khan Award for Architecture.

## The Aga Khan Award for Architecture

The aim and agenda of AKAA, though it is extremely loose and open to various interpretations, gains meaning within this general context of the debates of transformation and the issue of identity.

It is actually very difficult to find a systematic and comprehensive statement of intentions and aspirations of the Award. The available sources are either essays published in periodicals or books published for the Aga Khan Award for Architecture. This is why it is hard to differentiate personal ideas from the Award's official point of view. In brief, the available sources are the writings of some scholars who are, or were, actively involved in different organizations of the Award; however, their writing cannot provide a comprehensive account of the philosophy of the Award. Another kind of source is the statements of the master juries. Since these statements are not very detailed it is almost impossible to compare the intentions of the Award and the selections made by the master jury.

The Award declares and admits a general physical deprivation all around the Islamic world. This deprivation of the physical environment illustrates itself at the level of the deprivation of traditional symbolism and at the level of material conditions of daily life, insufficient to provide the minimum conditions of life for the people. These two levels determine the main concerns of the Award: to improve the physical conditions of settlements for a better life and to enhance an appropriate expression of the contemporary Islamic culture. The Award aims to promote those attempts that take into account these two factors.

The Award also tries to inaugurate a theoretical discussion about the problems of the contemporary Islamic world. A search for a theoretical discussion in addition to the selection of award-winning

projects determines the two major components of the Award. Mohammed Arkoun describes the first component as an attempt to create "a space of freedom".

In spite of the confusion among intellectuals and the lack of a well-defined agenda it is possible to trace a rather loose agenda from the statements of the Aga Khan on several occasions, from the writings of scholars affiliated to the Award, and from publications in the press. All these sources may give a general idea about at least the main themes of the Award. The Aga Khan describes the difficulty of defining his aim as follows: *"I am looking for something hard to define. It is an evocation partly of our faith, partly of our culture, partly of our history and partly of our aspirations."* [3, p. 70]

First of all, the Award, as described in the words of the Aga Khan, aims "...to heighten the sensitivity of all decision-makers concerning the problems of built environment" through successful examples [4, p. 81]. What are successful examples? The Aga Khan describes what it is needed as follows: *"...we must demand from our respective national decision-makers, our architects, our planners and our landscape architects an environment in which we can live, work and practice the precepts of our faith harmoniously and to the fullest."* [5, p. 50]

In another context, the Aga Khan adds, *"the Aga Khan Award will encourage our architects to consider Islam when they design"* [3, p. 6].

According to the Aga Khan, the basic underlying factor that gives shape to the environment is "our faith", Islam and its tradition. This is why the preservation of tradition becomes one of the major consequences of this rather general aim. In architectural debates, tradition takes an important role. What is advocated among the circles of the Award is first the understanding of tradition and then to find out new ways of expressing Islamic identity that will be appropriate to modern times.[3]

## Mosque Architecture

The debates of identity and self-expression in the Islamic world reach their peak in the case of the mosque. In a period when it is claimed that an identity crisis is experienced throughout the Islamic world, the continuation of traditional values might be thought of as a way to cope with the crisis. How can architecture be responsive to an identity crisis? Can it alone provide salvation? Some scholars state that to cope with this crisis needs finding an expression that will be in continuation with tradition. Other views advocate the necessity of innovation in the symbolism that will be more appropriate to contemporary times. Relative to these views, there are very few viewpoints that point out the necessity of rethinking the role of the mosque in our age. It is generally thought that architecture, through its language and vocabulary, is capable of finding a solution to the crisis, either by the continuation of tradition or by innovation. In both cases, architecture is understood to be an expression of a certain state of being. The views that are more 'conservative' advocate the use of a traditional architectural vocabulary by which it will be possible to weaken the thread on traditional values. On the other hand, more 'progressive' views look for a 'modern' expression in mosque architecture that will be an approval of the process of change. What is common to both views is the idea that architecture is about the expression of a certain kind of message and identity. Architecture can be socially relevant as long as its message is clear, understandable, and appropriate to the prevalent ideology. If the message is obscure, ambiguous, or inappropriate to the prevalent ideology then it is concluded that there is a gap

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[3] Grabar and Serageldin present two of the concerns of the Award in the following comments. Grabar writes: *"...to incorporate and understand the astounding wealth of fourteen hundred years of an Islamic architecture built, mostly by Muslims, for their Muslim brothers and sisters and for all of those who lived inland ruled by Muslims"* [6, p. 6].

Serageldin states: *"...to understand the past...to decode its language through contemporary eyes...in order to transcend the past"* [7, p. 134].

between social cultural values and architectural values. Different ideologies promote different architectural languages to fill the gap with negligible attention given to understanding the nature of the problem itself.

At the level of theoretical work, several significant works have been published both on mosque architecture and on contemporary mosques. Some of these works are mainly historical studies and some of them are simply surveys of the contemporary state of mosque architecture. [2, 8, 9, and 10]

First, the mosque is accepted to be the crucial building type in Islam. It is stated that "*the mosque is the principle religious building of Islam,*" with multiple functions, among which communal prayer is the most important one [2, p. 33]. It is "*the central building*" within city life [6, p. 8]. It has usually been part of daily life, although it demarcates a place for prayer, a sacred place.

The architecture of mosques has been determined by the general requirements of Islamic prayer, the conventionally accepted formal and compositional features, and regional constructional techniques and traditions.[4] The formal and compositional scheme has very and simple features. It consists of a closed prayer hall, *haram*, an open courtyard, *sahn*, and a semi-closed shaded area around a courtyard, *rewak*. This basic scheme originated from the first mosque in the Islamic world. This basic formal composition later on was elaborated over time in different places.

The first basic formal feature of a mosque is a wall, which designates the direction of the *qibla* to which prayers are oriented. It is claimed that the nature of the prayer reinforces a longitudinal elongated interior space, which will maximize the length of the rows of the prayers parallel to the *qibla* wall. From this feature Ihsan Fethi concludes that the prayer hall in the mosque has to be a rectangular horizontal space rather than a vertically emphasized central space [8, p. 61].

The second feature consists of the differentiation of interior and exterior space delineates sacred and mundane spaces. According to Robert Hillenbrand, the mosque is a sacred, introverted space whose threshold is marked by the gateway. The overall exterior image of the mosque, he states, with the exception of the decorations on the gateway, shows an ultimate indifference to the external expression; whereas the interior, in comparison to the exterior, is highly ornate.[2, p. 48]

In context of its surrounding, the mosque is generally surrounded by narrow streets that provide only fragmented views of the mosque, rather than an imposing unified view.[12, p. 59] The mosque is hardly a dominant figure within its surrounding [2, p. 48] and merges into the urban fabric.[12, p. 59]

There are very few specific formal and symbolic features of the mosque, because of the simplicity and scarcity of ritual requirements in Islam. This is why the design of a mosque provides an utmost flexibility for the designer.[2, p. 49] Notwithstanding the lack of ritual requirements, there are some elements that are thought to be the basics of mosque architecture.[5] These elements include: *mihrab*, a niche on the qibla wall designating the qibla direction, *maqsura*, a demarcated space for the governor or imam, *minbar*, a pulpit used for Friday preaches, a courtyard, and a minaret. To this list Frishman adds *dikka*, "a raised platform on top of which respondents repent the ritual postures of the imam," *kursi*, used to locate the Qu'ran, and pool, either decorative or for ablution [13, pp. 37-38]. Holod and Khan group these elements into two categories: obligatory ones and optional ones. They state that it is only the *mihrab*, the *qibla* wall, the *minbar*, for Friday mosques, and the ablution facilities that are necessary for a mosque and that the rest is optional.[14, p. 13]

The use and interpretation of these elements in the Islamic world differs from region to region. The basic distinction among regional types of the mosque, however, is not based on differences in their use

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[4] For instance Richard Ettinghausen claims that the regional characteristics to which pre-existing local traditions were part of, had always been the sources of inspiration for the mosque architecture.[11, p. 63]

[5] The list of the basic features of the mosque is derived from the writings of Richard Ettinghausen, Martin Frishman and Hassan Uddin Khan, and Renata Holod and Hassan Uddin Khan.

of the above-mentioned basic elements. The difference is rather a matter of overall compositional characteristics that express the impact of different regional and pre-existing cultures. According to Hillenbrand, for instance, the evolution of mosque architecture is a product of the millenium tradition of the Near East and the Mediterranean world.[2, p. 36]

Ihsan Fethi gives four regional interpretations of the mosque: Arab Hypostyle, with a longitudinal prayer hall; Persian cruciform, a scheme with four *eiwans* around a courtyard; Seljuk pillar and dome; and Ottoman centralized mosque, with a unified space dominated by a central dome. [8, p. 54] Frishman adds to this categorization two other groups: the triple-domed mosque with a large courtyard and the walled complex mosque with separate pavilions, which is often seen in China.[13, p. 12] One should add to this list the Indonesian mosque without a minaret and with a pointed roof instead of a central dome.

It must be stated beforehand that mosque iconography is extremely limited compared with other types of religious buildings. The compositional scheme and combination of the basic elements of the mosque constitute the symbolism of the mosque. In addition, it is the interior ornamentation, especially the calligraphy, which conveys the symbolic message of the building. Calligraphy deserves an important attention, first of all because figurative ornament is hardly promoted by Islam and secondly because of the significance given to the written word. The word is one of the most potent reminder of the existence of the God, since it is believed that Qu'ran is the unmodifiable word of God.[14, p. 13] Calligraphic writing does not even have to be legible in order to be recognizable. Indeed, usually the inscriptions are either so complicated or so abstracted that it is almost impossible to understand the literal meaning of the script.

The use of pure geometry is another feature of Islamic symbolism. Khan and Frishman argue that numerology, mathematics, and geometry has a metaphysical significance in the case of mosque architecture.[14, p. 13] Ronald Lewcock points out the importance of geometry as follows: "*In Islam at a very early period, the importance of symbolic geometry became firmly established...* "[15, p. 372]

Geometry symbolizes the order of the world created by God. It is through the use of geometry that "*the artwork illustrates and shows the order and the harmony of the world*".[16, p. 21]

Besides geometry and calligraphy, some writers single out some of the basic features of the mosque to have symbolic significance by themselves. Some of these views are extreme to the extent that they equate the symbolism of the mosque with only one formal feature, such as minaret. For instance, Fethi argues that "*the minaret is the most important single architectural element in mosque design*" [8, p. 21]. In a similar way, but more strongly, Jonathan Bloom writes that "*..'minaret' a word ultimately derived from an Arabic word meaning 'sign' or 'marker,' is still the most appropriate term for the universal architectural symbol of Islam*".[17, p. 191]

The above mentioned theoretical works about the symbolism of the mosque problematize a couple of issues. First, the mosque is thought to be the true expression of Islamic identity. Secondly, some critics argue that there has been a shift in the significance of mosque architecture that is expressed in the changing role of the mosque in urban pattern and in civic life. Some other writers, whereas, advocate that there is a crisis in the language of the mosque architecture.

What is the state of mosque architecture in contemporary times? Frishman states two main factors that affect the contemporary mosque. The first factor, he writes, is resistance to any kind of innovation that might be interpreted as a direct opposition to the orthodox tradition of Islam. The second factor is related to the search for regional diversification without being completely opposed to technological developments [14, p. 40]. In a similar way Serageldin notes the importance of regionalism that favors "*the identity of the Islamic self and society*" as opposed to the "*homogenizing influence of consumer oriented societies relying on technology-based industries.*" [17, p. 79] Among some circles the quest for the identity of the Islamic society is so strong that Khan relates it to "*the emergence of a pan-Islamic viewpoint based on a political view of world as 'us' and 'them'.*"[14, p. 248]

In addition to the regionalist and pan-Islamist approaches, Khan points out two other trends in mosque architecture. These approaches are desire for internationalism through modernism and individual interpretation which are very rare.[14, p. 248]

All of these approaches intend to find an appropriate symbolism for the mosque because what is claimed to be crucial in contemporary mosque architecture is the deterioration of traditional symbolism. In addition to symbolism, the functional shift in the role of the mosque; and the changing role of the mosque in the city pattern are other crucial issues in the contemporary mosque architecture. These three issues mark a departure from tradition.

Grabar and Arkoun express the shift in the role of the mosque. According to Grabar, the traditional functions of a mosque have been taken over by the state in the modern times. Historically, the mosque is supposed to be part of a larger complex in which several functions other than prayer were being held.[14, p. 23] Once it is taken from its conventional setting, the mosque has lost its organic links with the city life. Arkoun describes the situation with the case of the Selimiye Mosque in Edirne, Turkey as follows: "*A mosque in the time it has been built and in the time the entire city was integrated around this mosque, which was a pole, an attractive pole for all activities, not only daily activities but also the activities of mind, of culture, all this is completely disappeared.*" [18, p. 376]

The disappearance of the urban role of the mosque coincides with worries about the contemporary symbolism and with the ideological use of this symbolism, either in favor of the dominant ideologies, such as state ideologies, or in favor of the ideologies of radical groups. Holod and Khan argue that the mosque has become "*a symbolic marker in the context of the expanding metropolis, and, in many cases, as an ideological space for the propagation of traditionalist and Islamist thinking*". [9, p. 11]

Arkoun voices the crucial question whose answer may orient the possible alternatives. He writes: "*Are the main components of the mosque --mihrab, minbar, minaret, courtyard, ablutions-intrinsically Islamic and therefore unchangeable through time and culture, or are they arbitrary forms and signs made orthodox by theological definitions, made sacred by collective ritual functions established over centuries?*" [1, p. 18]

## The Award-Winning Mosque Projects

In contemporary mosque architecture, there are several trends differentiate from each other according to their answers to the above question. Some of the trends aim for a complete continuation of a tradition. Some others illustrate slight modifications in traditional elements. There are also trends that are relatively radical representing a break with traditional symbolism and compositional scheme of traditional mosque.

Writers have categorized current trends under different headings. For example, Serageldin states five trends: vernacular, historic, populist, eclectic, and modern.[17, p. 254] In another context, he categorizes the award-winning mosque projects by the Aga Khan Award under four headings, with slight modifications as follows: "*traditionalist such as the Yaama and Niono Mosque, populist such as the Bhong Mosque, adaptive modernist such as the Said Naum Mosque, and finally modernist such as the Sherefudin's White Mosque*" (Figs. 1-4). [10, pp. 55-56]

Looking at this wide and somehow opposing approaches, it is almost impossible to differentiate whether the Award promotes any one of these trends or not. The Award seems to be appreciating each example for its own merit rather than promoting one of them.

Among the intellectuals of Islam, it is difficult to find any criticisms about any of the above trends. It is as if almost everyone is satisfied with the multiplicity of the trends. One clear objection to the confusion comes from Arkoun. He claims that any mosque project that does not bring any novelty should not be permitted. He thinks that in religious architecture there is need for 'modern' approaches

that will open up the horizon of the Muslim world. [19, p. 114] In another context Arkoun clarifies his way of thinking based on the concept of innovation. He first refers to the differentiation of the Islamic concepts *taqlid*, imitation, and *ijtihad*, free interpretation, in order to points out that historically there have been times when some Islamic issues Islam were more open to innovation. [19, p.18] Indeed, he seems to be in favor of a path that will foster *ijtihad*. *Ijtihad*, however, never completely denies tradition and never aims for a complete breakthrough, or a total renewal. This is why he voices the necessity of a mid-way between complete break and complete obedience to tradition, by which society might accommodate novelties without experiencing any discontinuities with its past. He introduces the necessity of an integrated society, that is to say stable, and integrating society, that is to say open to changes. [20, p. 20]

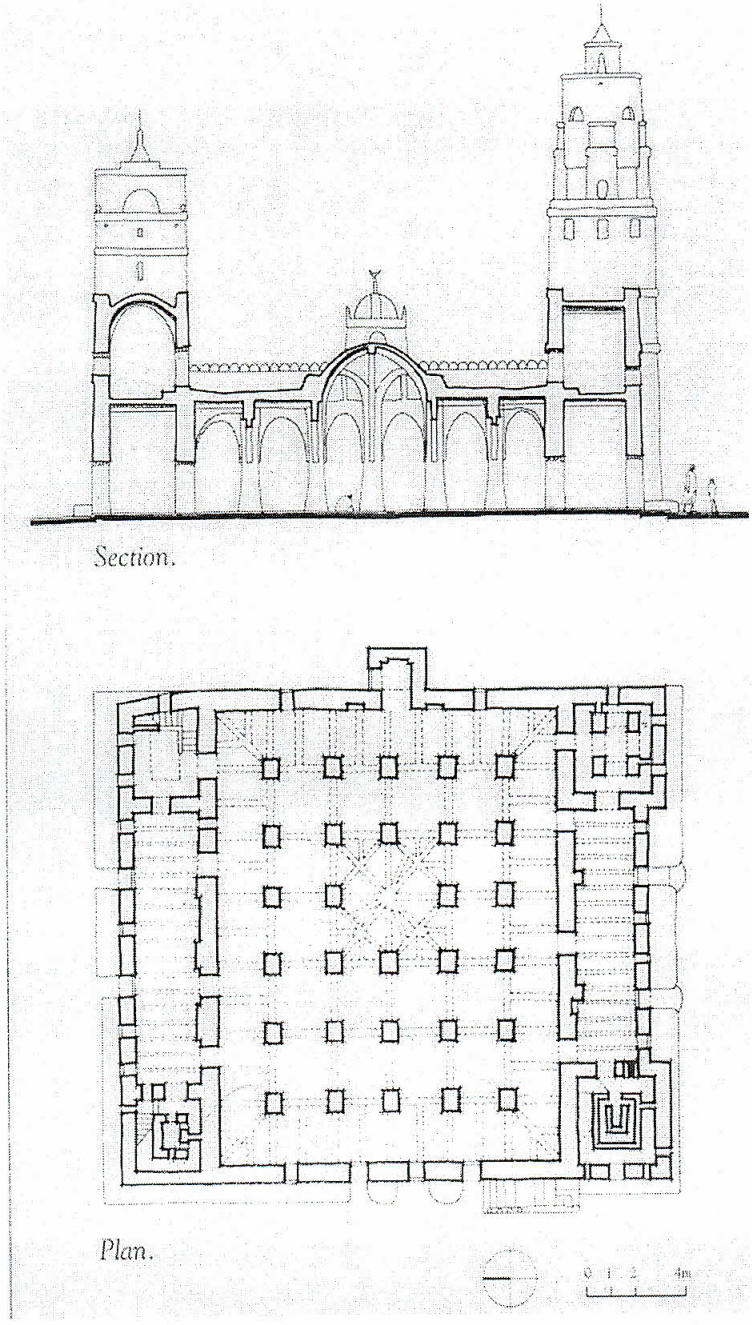



**Fig. 1: Yaama Mosque, section and plan.** [7, p139]

In our times, the change in the material conditions of production is not only peculiar to the Islamic world. In the industrialized world, there has been a shift from collective building practice to a more professionalized one. The emergence of professionalism and the disappearance of the collective production are one of the characteristics of the modern times. It may not be, therefore, quite appropriate to revive the collective unity of the building production and a search for the continuity of traditional professional relationships between craftsman, mason, architect and the society. This is what Arkoun is in favor of and some of the award-winning mosques are rewarded for. He urges for: *"There is an urgent need today for this relationship [the close tie between architects and society] to be re-established so that the close tie between sacred and the socio-political in Muslim societies can be made evident."* [19, p. 272]

In brief, the award-winning mosques portray different discussion themes in the Islamic world such as identity and symbolism, innovation and modernity, tradition and continuity, regionalism and universalism, and popular and elite architecture.

## Premiated Mosques

During the six cycles of the Award, there have been six premiated mosques and one mosque praised with an honorable mention. In addition to them, there have been four other premiated larger complexes that include a mosque.[6]

The premiated mosques can be categorized into three categories. The first category is the traditional approach that continues and reinforces traditional language of architecture, traditional construction techniques, and traditional social relationships related to the construction process. The award-winning mosques from Africa can be categorized under this heading such as the Yaama Mosque, Niger, and the Niono Mosque, Mali. The second group of projects might have also been described as traditional, however the reference to the tradition in these projects is constrainted only to the use of the traditional architectural language such as the Said Naum Mosque, Indonesia, the Corniche Mosque, Saudi Arabia, the Great Mosque of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and finally the Bhong Mosque, Pakistan (Figs. 5-6). The third group includes those projects that portray either a personal experimentation or a modernist interpretation. These mosques bring innovation and a break with tradition such as the National Assembly Mosque, Turkey, and the Sherefudin's White Mosque, Visiko (Figs. 7-8).

## The First Group

The first group of mosques is built for relatively traditional societies in which community has a direct influence on the building industry and architect. The mosques in this group, the Yaama and the Niono, are located in rural areas that are least exposed to the impact of modern technologies. In a society that still keeps alive its traditional character it is easier to practice in the traditional mode of production.[7]

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[6] These are: the National Assembly Building, Dhaka, by Louis Kahn, the Dar Lamane Housing project, Casablanca, the Intercontinental Hotel and Conference Center, Mecca, by Frei Otto and Rolf Gutbrod, and finally the Al-Kindi Plaza, Riyadh.

[7] An article published in Kenya describes the construction process of the Niono Mosque as follows: *"When in May 1969 the committee of the elders of the existing Friday Mosque decide to enlarge it [the Mosque] they turned to Lassine Matta, the master mason who had devoted much of his career to the construction and earlier extension of this building. He agreed to execute the work for a very modest sum (about US $365) with the material and additional labour to be contributed by the community. Shortly after he began his work...transforming it [the Mosque] within four years from a small local mosque to a great monument in the vernacular tradition"* [21, p. 5].

The crucial problem experienced in these areas is the ever-growing urbanization process. The process accelerates the migration of rural population at the end of which rural areas get deprived of their productive young generation. The message of the Award in selecting these projects is to make the appropriateness of local traditional architectural qualities more explicit and desirable for contemporary architecture.

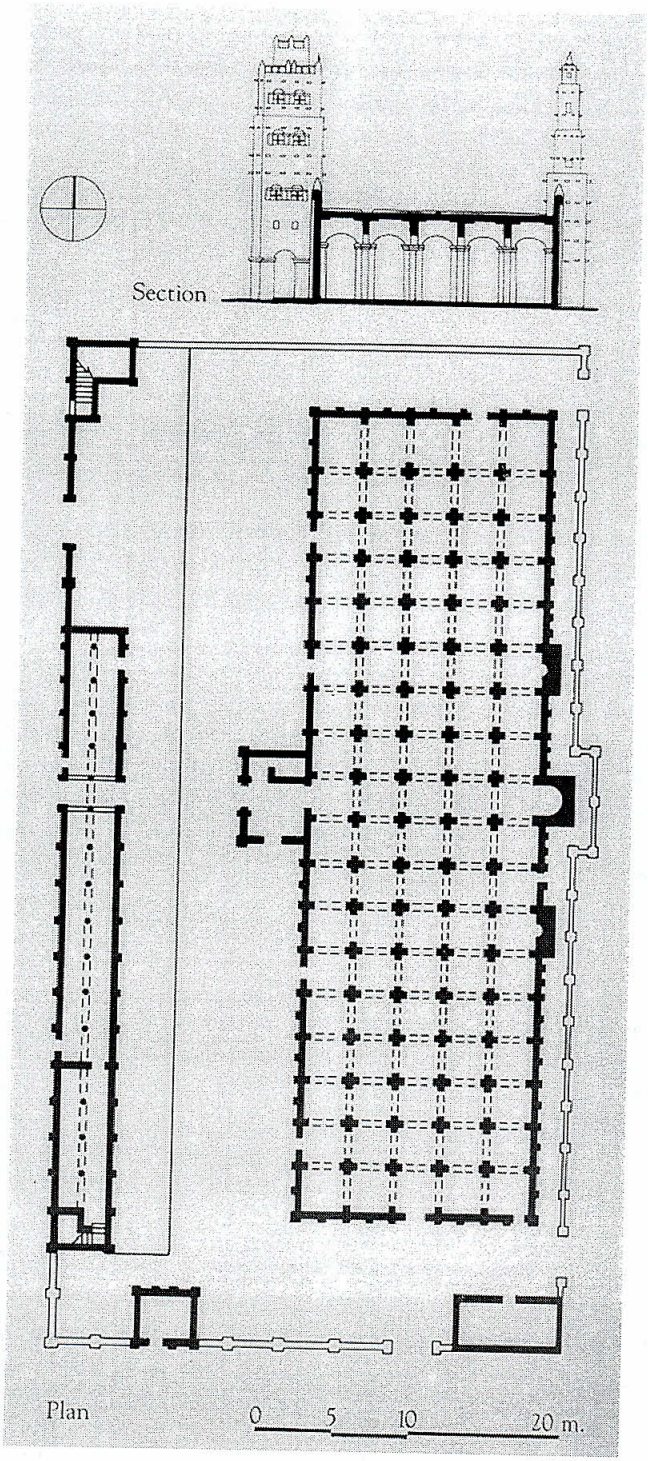



**Fig 2: Great Mosque of Niono, section and plan.** [22, p.150]

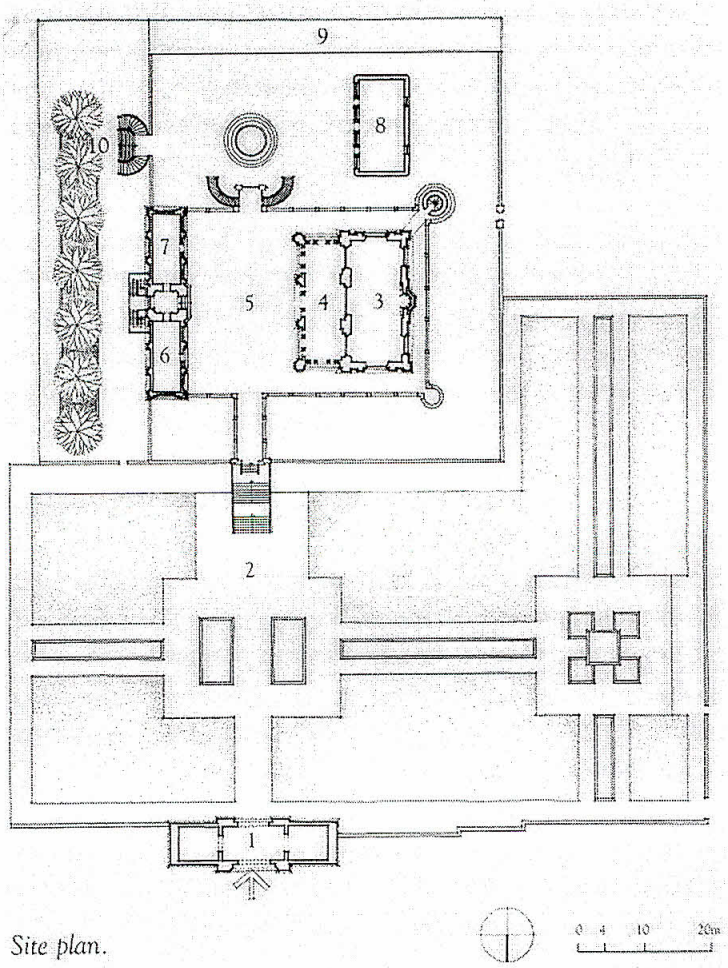



**Fig. 3: Bhong Mosque, site plan.** [7, p152]

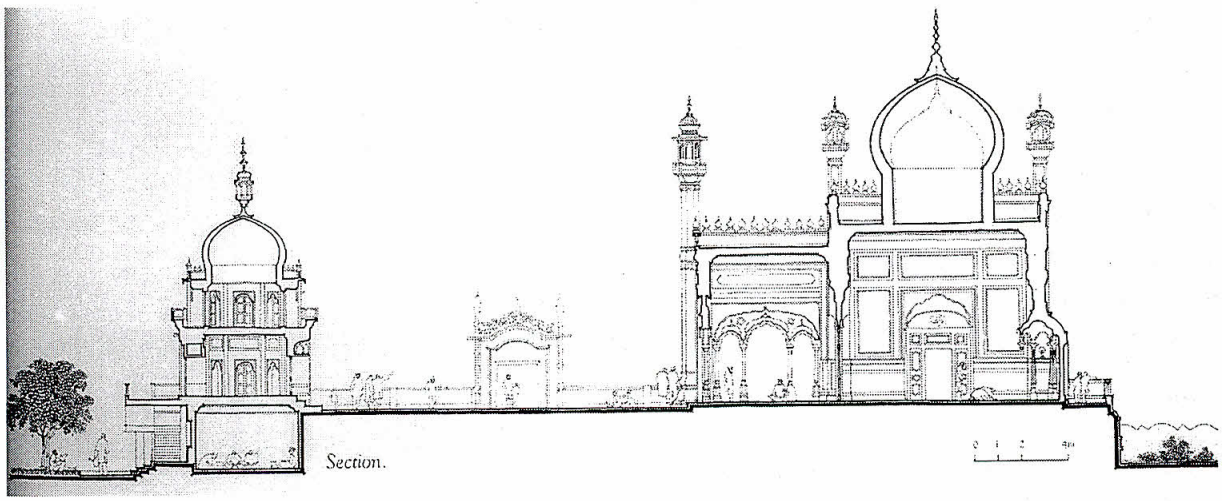



**Fig. 4: Bhong Mosque, section.** [7, p149]

The Great Mosque of Niono, completed in 1973, and the Yaama Mosque, completed in 1982, were built by master masons who were talented in local crafts and construction techniques. Both buildings are made of mud-brick and they have almost no ornaments neither on the outside nor in the inside. Its occupants welcomed their overall composition because the mosques are rooted in their own tradition. Furthermore in both projects, the local community was as influential as the master mason in the building process; hence the end product belonged to the overall society.

These mosques might be assessed as successful within their settings; however, they do not exemplify an alternative way of out for the problem of symbolism that modern Islamic countries are searching for. In both cases the challenge that modern Islamic societies are faced with, both on the side of the builder and on the side of the community, is almost ineffective. There is nothing usual within a traditional society but to produce within the framework of its tradition.

It must, however, be pointed out that the juries permeating the projects stated different criteria for their selections. The Yaama Mosque was appreciated by the 1986 Awards' jury for its collective significance.[7, p. 136] Whereas the 1983 Awards' jury appreciated the formal characteristics of the Niono mosque. The jury's statement affirms as follows: "*... the continuing existence of traditional forms--both sophisticated and primitive--is one of our strongest allies in retaining architectural character and cultural identity as large-scale modern industry and world-wide building models assert their presence.*" [22, p. 133]

In brief both projects are examples of vernacular architecture and the encouragement of the vernacular architecture has generally been an important issue for the Award. This is expressed by The Aga Khan himself as follows: "*Vernacular architecture has to be rethought, because it fails to cater for contemporary aspirations, either in rural areas or the towns.*" [22, p. 28]

The appreciation of vernacular architecture within the traditional societies might to some extent be plausible, however, It may fail to provide a model for "contemporary aspirations."

## Second Group

The second group of mosques, for the exception of the Bhong Mosque, is designed by architects. The Bhong Mosque portrays a case between the vernacular approach of the Yaama and the Niono and the second group of mosques. It is similar to the Yaama and the Niono because of its emphasis on local crafts; however, it also illustrates the desire of a single individual, its patron Rais Ghazi Mohammad. This is how it differs form the Yaama and the Niono, which are completely products of their local communities.

The case of the Bhong Mosque is striking because it might denote the passage from vernacular to more individualistic interpretation of vernacular architecture for the sake of continuity in tradition. Furthermore, the Bhong Mosque is one of the most provocative award-winning buildings by the Award. Indeed, it raised a lot of questions about popular and elitist architecture and has been accused as an example of kitsch.

The Bhong mosque is premiated by the 1986 Awards' jury. Ismail Serageldin, while explaining the jury's selection in the introductory book for 1986's awards, describes the jury's understanding of social change as a process of gradual evolution without denying the necessity of change. He writes: *"The inevitable evolution towards modern construction techniques could become more gradual, allowing more scope for transition with continuity, and safe guarding local and regional architectural vocabulary."* [7, p. 143] This statement, indeed, reinforces the idea that the Bhong represents a transitory stage. He openly declares the building's transitional position as follows: *"The issues it raises about the relevance of the intellectual pursuits of architects and critics as well as the inadequacy of unbridled populism help define an important agenda for practicing architects in the Muslim world today"* [7, p 154]

What signifies the transitional character of today's Islamic architecture? At the level of architectural practice, this might simply be the dichotomy between the construction methods and techniques, with the exception of rural traditional areas, and the symbolism and the richness of traditional crafts. The Bhong mosque is a combination of modern technology, though not very advanced, and local craftsmanship. Indeed, the outer skin of the building is embellished by craftsmen using mass produced elements.

The jury appreciated the richness and the creativity of the embellishment of the building arguing that it will be an inspiration source for further developments. Moreover, it praised its contribution to the revival of local crafts. [7, p. 145-150]

The questions that this mosque raises are in multitude. Indeed, the reaction of the architectural public to the 1986 Awards were different from the reactions to the other cycles' awards. There were views in favor and against the 1986 awards.[8]

One of the most prominent critics of the 1986 awards was W. J. Curtis, who criticized the Bhong mosque as an example of populist and "*orientalist kitsch.*" [23, p. 88] He even thinks that the mosque is "*a flabby contract between religious traditionalism and Post-modernist quotation of little lasting substance" and adds "the road between kitsch is usually littered with populist intentions.*" [23, p. 88] [9]

Curtis may be right to criticize the mosque as 'kitsch', however, it is also true that the mosque is commonly appreciated by the local community and reflects the communal taste.[10] What might the master jury be thinking of while giving an award to this mosque? Is it because it is a good expression of popular taste that it is premiated? If yes, then the mosque does not contribute anything new to architectural scene. If it supports the continuity of tradition, it realizes this just at the level of the ornamentation and symbolism, compositional scheme and not in the continuation of the traditional construction methods. The intention, then, might be to enhance continuity, just on the surface, or just on the level of architectural 'language'. If the concern of the jury was related to search for an appropriate architectural language, then the mosque might have still deserved some attention. If the Islamic world is after a substantial mid-way between change and continuity, then the mosque does not provide a successful example. Indeed, it only pretends to be in continuity with tradition. In brief, the mosque does not bring any innovation, if this is what the Islamic world is looking for.

The other mosques in this group are also examples of individual variations on tradition. The questions that they raise might not be as sharp as the Bhong; however, they still portray the dichotomy of change and continuity in the Islamic world and the responses of the individual architect to this dichotomy.

The Corniche Mosque, Jeddah, by Abdel Wahed El-Wakil is the most striking one of this group more because of its location than because of its formal characteristics. Formally and symbolically, the

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[8] Serageldin describes the views in favor of the selections as praising "*the exuberant character of the decoration*" and "*the central importance of the building for the community*," and the views against the decisions as criticizing *"its lack of a true association with the frame of references of the used ornaments."* [7, p. 45]

[9] Curtis, in his criticism, compares the Bhong Mosque with Kahn's mosque in the Dhaka National Assembly Building. He thinks that the Bhong is an example of the use of history as an applied cliche and the Dhaka as an example of a deep understanding of history. It is rather questionable whether Kahn had ever tried to understand the historical features of a mosque because his building is ultimately an expression of an individual interpretation.

[10] The master jury supports its selection as follows: *"On the whole, the Bhong Mosque deserves attention, not so much for the architectural merits of composition or aesthetics, but because it reflects a statement of local, contemporary taste that runs counter to much is clear to international and regional architectural theory and criticism."* [7, p. 154]

mosque is described as revivalist and eclectic. The 1989 master jury described the mosque as a proclamation "to the outside world the presence of the Muslim religion" with reference to "Islamic vocabulary."[6] [11] Once again, the appreciation of the jury relies on the representational quality of the mosque. The mosque, now, is a showcase by which continuity with tradition is shown to the outside world.

The mosque's being a showcase is not at all in contradiction to its location and to the intentions of its client and architect. The clients, the Municipality of Jeddah and the Ministry of Pilgrimage and Endowments of Saudi Arabia, first planned to place several sculptures all around the city of Jeddah. El-Wakil, receiving the commission, succeeded to convince the clients to build mosques instead of sculptures that will be more appropriate for an Islamic country.[24, p. 49] El-Wakil's mosque is located on the corniche of the city of Jeddah next to a recreational site. The site is out-of town. It is a relatively new setting for a mosque. Khan and Holod describe the context, in which the mosque is built, referring to all his other mosques built in Saudi Arabia, as follows: "*It was thus in the context of an exuberant display of consumerism that El-Wakil introduced his mosque designs.*" [14, p. 135]

In this new consumerist context, the traditional role of mosque in a society has been changed and reduced to its representational qualities. Although, there is a clear breakthrough in the tradition of mosque in terms of its social role, its place in the urban pattern, and its functional role, the architect decided to continue the tradition in terms of representational features. Some writers even appreciated the intention of the architect to continue the traditional formal features. Peter Monroe praises the mosque as follows: "*Their aim (El-Wakil and the Mayor of the city of Jeddah) to take the mosque out of its urban claustrophobia to stand exposed as jewel in its own right, exhibited as proof and a yardstick of the enduring validity of traditional architecture. They wished to place it in the foreground, to remind people that the mosque is the highest expression of Islamic architecture.*"[7, p. 11]

Another mosque that is premiated from Saudi Arabia is Raseem Badran's Great Mosque of Riyadh.[12] The mosque received an award by the master jury of the 1995. It is, in terms of its context, the reversal of the Corniche Mosque. The mosque is located within the old city center of Riyadh. It is part of a larger complex that includes several functions. The overall scheme is a proposal for the redevelopment of the traditional city center of Riyadh. The scheme aims to create a public space developing around the mosque. The whole idea is to provide an urban public space in which the mosque has a significant place. In this case the mosque keeps its traditional social role that reinforces its continuity with the tradition and the physical surrounding.

In terms of its compositional characteristics, it continues the tradition of the hypostyle mosque scheme. There is not much novelty in the formal scheme. The exterior expression of the building is an interpretation of the traditional regional architecture.[6, p. 77] Arkoun criticizes the mosque for its failure to express a new symbolic language, which he thinks must be one of the indispensable characteristics of any contemporary mosque.[6, p. 114] The last mosque in this group, the Said Naum Mosque, Jakarta, is mentioned as honorable by the master jury of the 1986. The mosque is located in an urban fabric. It is, however, distanced from city life with a green buffer zone. The scheme follows the traditional Indonesian Hindu-Japanese building tradition. It has no minarets and dome, which is a peculiarity of the mosques of this part of the Islamic world. The mosque, neither formally nor conceptually, makes any contribution to the contemporary mosque architecture.

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[11] In a larger mosque, the King Saud Mosque, El-Wakil's approach becomes even clearer. There, he uses the Sultan Hasan Mosque, Cairo, as a model and he directly copied the portal of the mosque.[10]

[12] The Al-Kindi Plaza, another award-winning project that includes a mosque in it, is similar to the Great Mosque of Riyadh both in its formal and urban character.

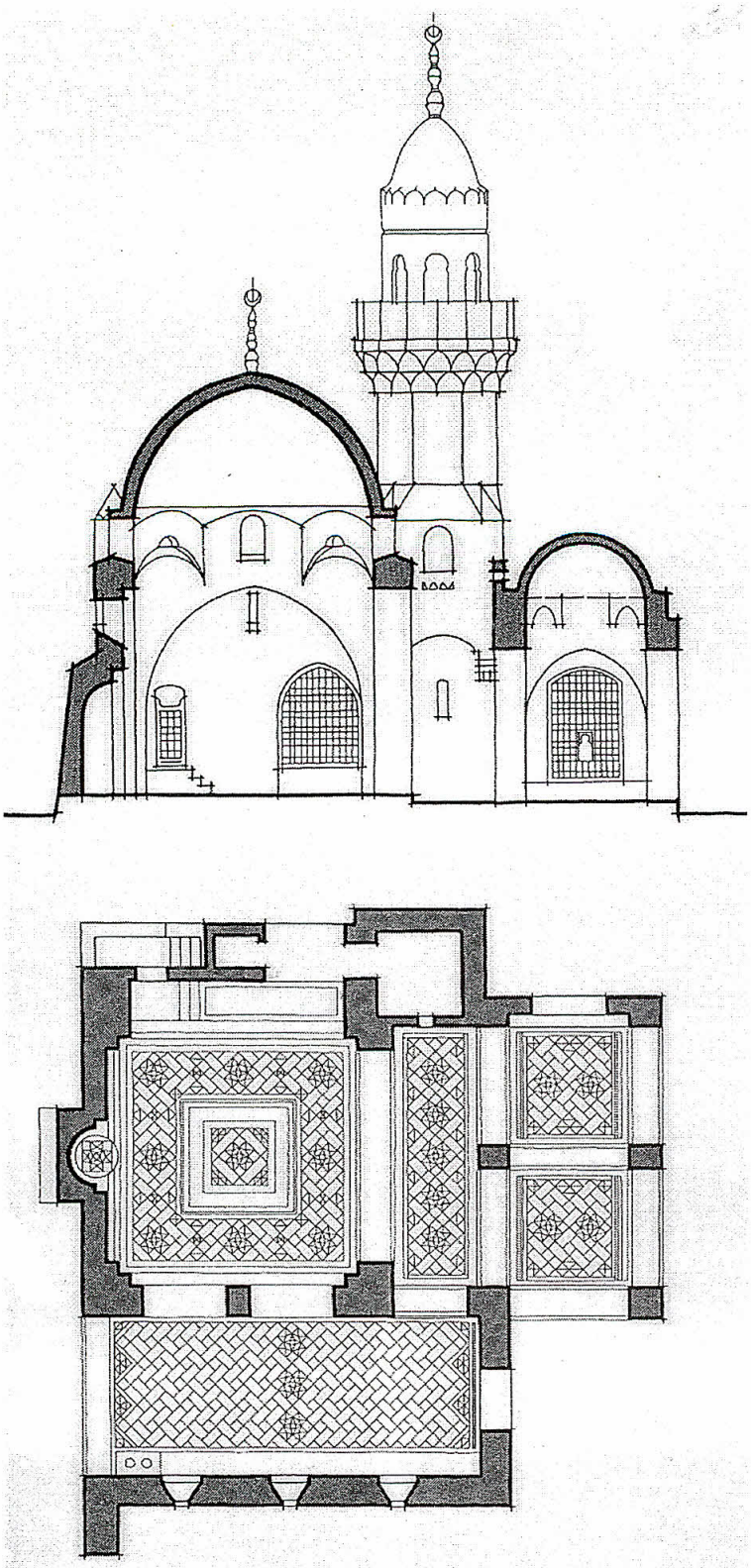


**Fig. 5: Corniche Mosque, section and plan.** [6, p.115]

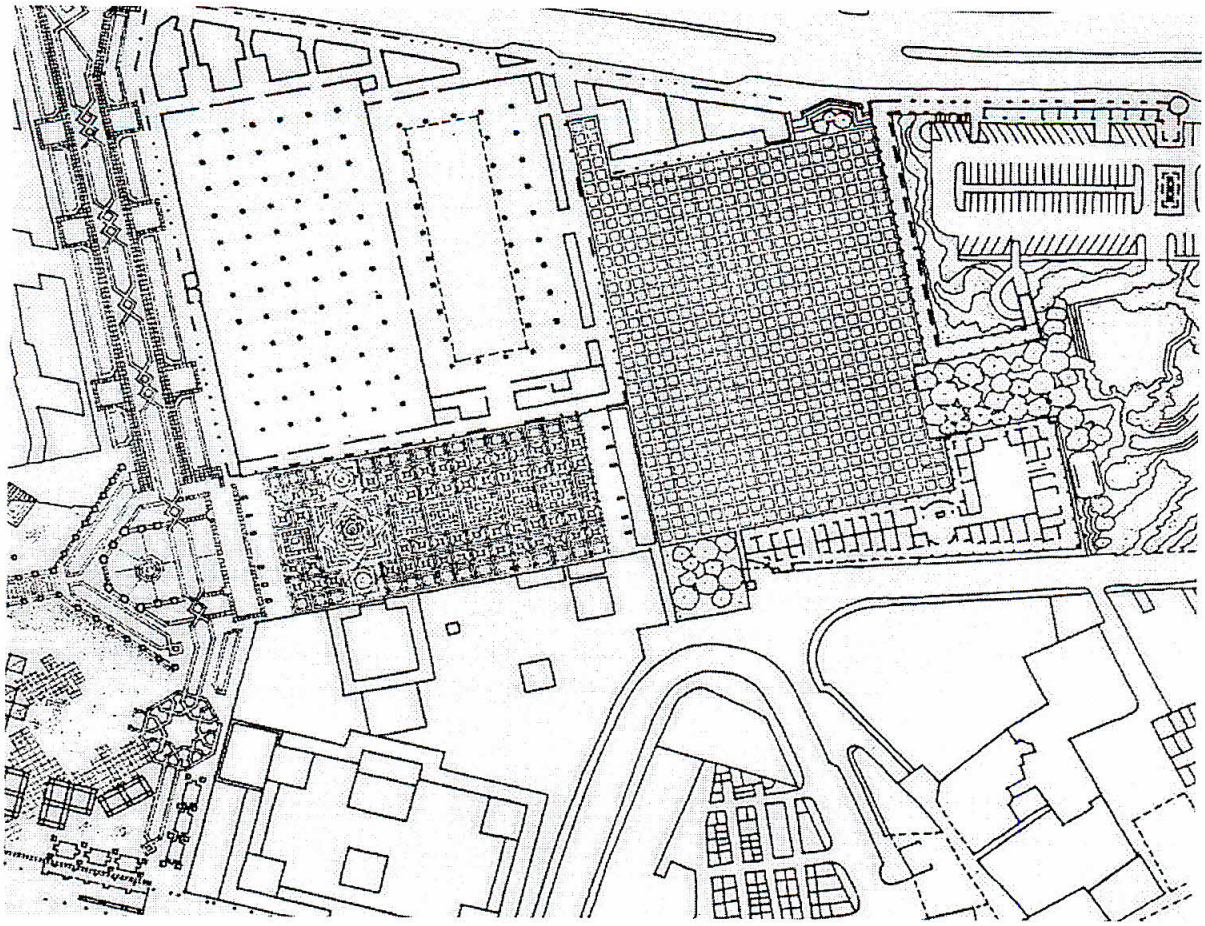


**Fig. 6: Great Mosque of Riyadh, site plan.** [25, p.93]

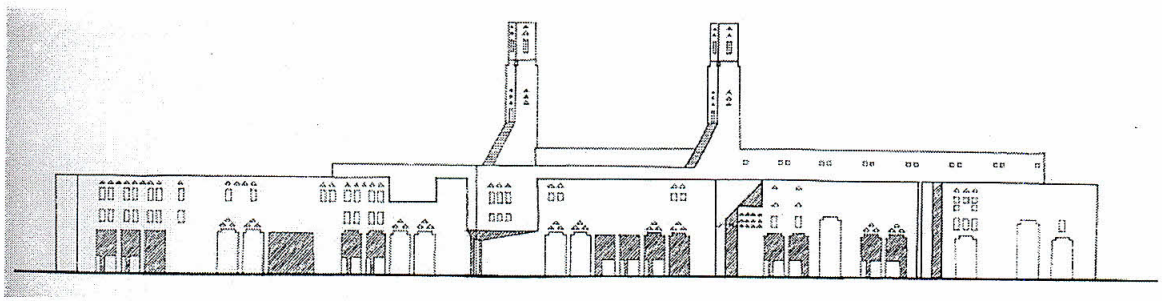


**Fig. 7: Great Mosque of Riyadh, section.** [25, p.93]

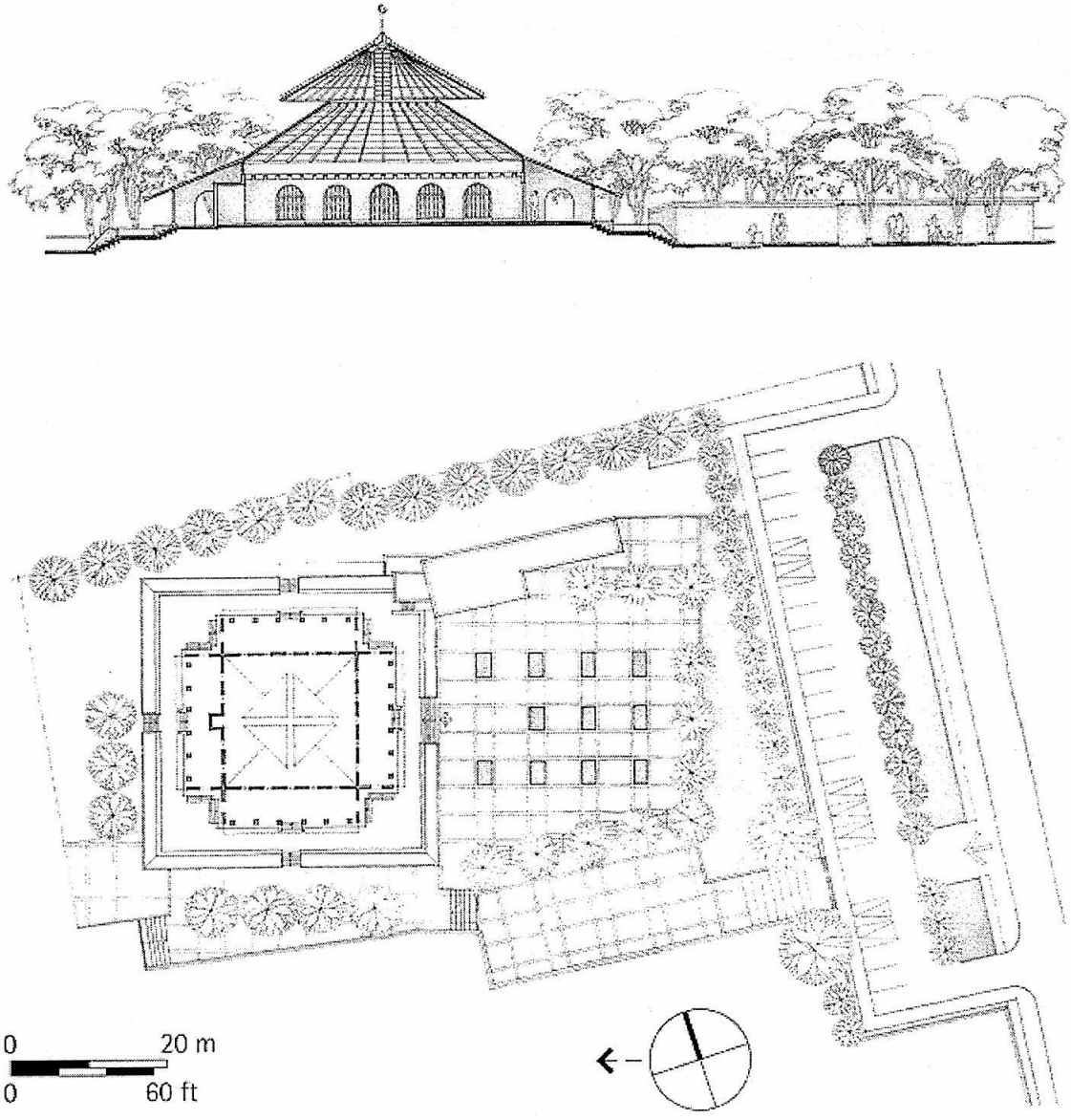



**Fig. 8: Said Naum Mosque, section and plan.** [9, p.145]

## The Third Group

In the third group, there are two mosques: the National Assembly Mosque, Ankara, and the Sherefudin's White Mosque, Visiko. Two projects reflect two kinds of breakthrough with the traditional mosque scheme and offer two alternative positions about the concern of tradition and continuity. In its formal aspects, the Sherefudin's Mosque seem to be more radical; nevertheless, they both represent relatively radical alternatives.

The National Assembly Mosque is given an award by the master jury of the 1995 for its innovative character. The jury praised the mosque for its challenge on the traditional mosque vocabulary. [6]

The Assembly Mosque is located on the backside of the National Assembly Building of the Republic of Turkey. It is situated at the end of the central axis of the complex and opens up to the landscape. The mosque is isolated from the rest of the complex and from city. It is isolated form city life because of its being a parliamentary mosque and not a congretional mosque. It is, therefore, at first sight a purely pragmatic building.

A close insight to the project reveals that the symbolic issues of the mosque were more important during the design process than other concerns. The Turkish Republic is constitutionally secular. The parliament house, which is the representation of the secular authority of citizens, preferred to not have a mosque with a traditional vocabulary, thought to be ideologically equated with conservatism and anti-secularism. The architects responded to the challenge by intentionally breaking and reversing the conventional elements of a mosque.

Once again, it is the symbolism of a mosque that is considered to be the most significant factor of design process. First of all, the mosque has a half courtyard surrounded by a prayer hall and a library. The courtyard is surrounded by a portico, but without columns. The columns are implied by their bases, whereas their shafts and capitals are missing. The traditional longitudinal prayer hall is opened up to the exterior from by a large glazed *qibla* wall. The mihrab is transformed from a darkened niche to a glass wall. The dome and the minaret are missing; instead of a dome the roof is covered with a stepped pyramid and instead of a minaret there is just a tiny balcony.

Arkoun describes the mosque *as "a deliberate attempt to hide and erase all recognizable feature of a traditional scheme."*[25, p. 18] [13] In this sense, the National Assembly Mosque is almost the reversal of the intentions of the Corniche Mosque for it tries to eliminate the traditional symbolism of the mosque. They are, however, similar in their understanding of architecture as a language. The former is looking for a rupture through the denial of the symbolism; the latter enforces the continuity by the use of symbolism. In both cases, the most important concern of the jury is symbolism and the choice to be made is between the secular, '*progressive*' symbolism and the '*traditional, conservative*' symbolism.

The last award-winning mosque to be mentioned is the Sherefudin's White Mosque premiated by the 1983 master jury. The mosque represents an almost complete break with tradition.[14] The local community of Visiko, commissions it in a similar way to the Yaama and the Niono, however, not to a mason but to an architect.

The architect, rather than looking to tradition, preferred to be radically innovative. The jury praised the mosque as *"a bold attempt at reinterpreting the traditional forms of the mosque in a contemporary language."*[22, p.105] The selection is described in the jury statement as follows: *"This building is a unique achievement in a period when the great problem confronting all architecture is integrating and absorbing the "modern movement" into the developing architectural scene."* [5, p. 105]

The author thinks that the Sherefudin's Mosque illustrates one of the most appropriate examples for a society that is in a process of transition. It, on one hand, keeps a continuum with tradition because of its close link to the local community and on the other hand it does not apply any traditional symbolism in order to pretend to be in continuum or it does not intentionally negate tradition in order to give a '*progressive*' image.

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[13] In the introductory book of the 1995 awards, it is stated that the mosque is a "direct challenge to the iconography and siting of mosques in Turkey."[25, p.116]

[14] To some extent, it keeps the formal characteristics of a single domed Ottoman mosque with a single minaret.

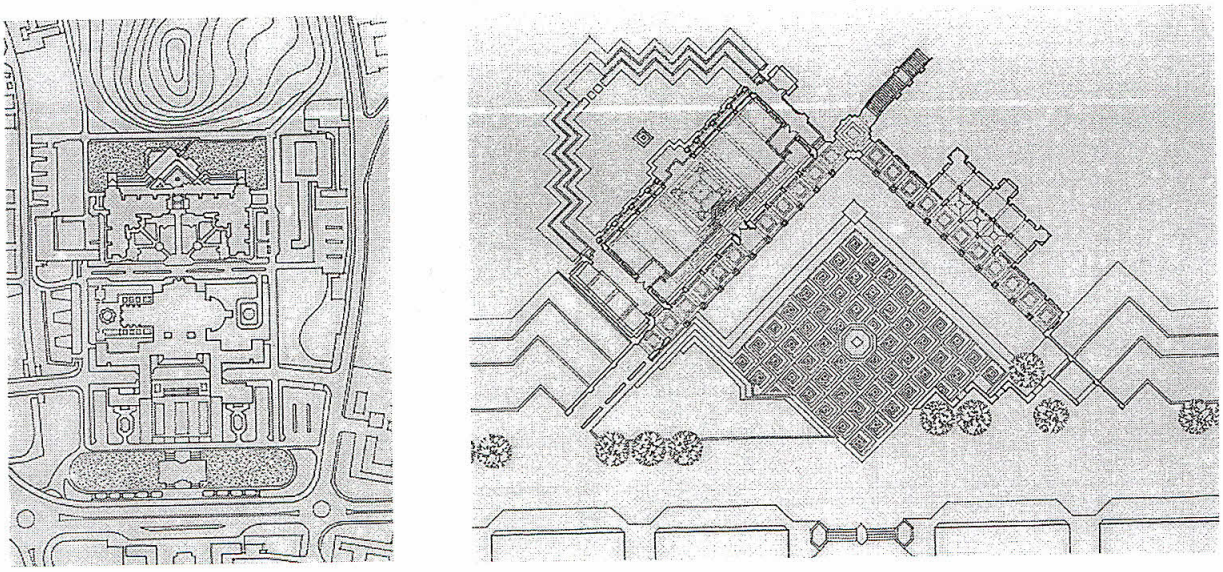


**Fig. 9: Mosque of the Grand National Assembly, site plan and plan.** [25, pp. 127-128]

## Conclusion

The issue of identity in the discussions among circles affiliated with the Award is reduced to representation. In our times, when the media has an undeniable power to manipulate communication and transmission of meaning, it is difficult to deny the power of image and representation. When architecture reinforces the already existing symbolism it is thought to be faithful to tradition and representative of the traditional world. If, however, architecture challenges the traditional symbolism, then it is thought to be progressive. The latter criticizes the former approach as regressive and conservative, and the former to be alien to the unique identity of a society criticizes the latter.

Overall, both of these ideologies have their own representational constructions. The aims are to see this construction be materialized through the symbolism and the representational quality of architecture. Image alone, however, can be neither progressive nor regressive. Moreover, it cannot be a solution for an identity crisis, if such a crisis exists.

In the contemporary Islamic world Western cultural expansion is seen as threatening local identities. The Islamic countries complain about the loss of their own traditions in the face of the ever-growing impact of Western technology and cultural expansion. In the case of architecture, this crisis is claimed to be expressed in the degradation of traditional symbolism.

Do Islamic countries really face a crisis of identity? It would be hard to find a quantifiable measure in order to answer this question. What is more obvious is not the crisis of identity itself but the increasing interaction among different cultures. Each culture is to some extent exposed to other cultures and to the potential influences from other cultures. This is one of the major transformation patterns of traditional societies. Cultural clashes are inevitable. The effect of cultural interaction may be manipulated and controlled when clash is thought to be threatening.

What may be the reasons to be negative about cultural clashes? The relative strengths of the two sides in a cultural interaction are the major determinant of its nature. If the two sides are not nearly in equal strength, then eventually one side may become a passive receiver. The interaction, then, may turn into domination of one culture over the other. The culture remaining in the receiver position may even become more reactive to this one-sided relationship by holding onto its unique traditional values as

much as possible. This may be a way of preventing the domination, however, it cannot provide a permanent, effective solution because the unbalance between the two cultures will continue.

When the threat becomes stronger, the weaker society may, with all its forces, concentrate on its differentiation from other cultures. This means that the process of the continuing formation of the society's identity will be reduced to a process of differentiation.

The process of formation of an identity has three dimensions: differentiation, creative production, and the freedom of selection. Differentiation is a natural result of freedom of selection. Freedom of selection involves self-realization and decision-making, without being under the domination of others.

Creativity is not restricted to the process of production of new objects. Equally crucial is the ability to produce new ways of interpretation of 'imported' or 'alien' objects.

Architectural objects or forms, by themselves, are neither alien nor familiar. Their being familiar or alien is based on cultural conventions and associations. The value of the object is not derived from whether it is imported or produced within the same culture but rather emerges from interaction between the object and the user. If a society is creative at the level of production and consumption and if it provides freedom of selection it is more likely that it will keep its own identity and 'tradition'.

An identity that is based only on differentiation closes its doors to cultural interactions and transformations. In this case, continuity will be accepted as a virtue by itself, and the most promoted attitude will be the preservation of tradition for its own sake. The preservation of tradition may be pursued either at the level of representation or at the level of continuity in determining social factors. In architecture, the preservation of tradition may be synonymous with accepting tradition as continuity of symbolic and representational features.

Within the framework of this understanding, the relevance of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture lies more in the premiated projects than in the discourses behind the selections. This is because the Award has no determined and specific conception either about continuity or about change and because the premiated projects may transcend the intentions of their architects and open the way for new alternatives.

This is how transforming, traditional societies may transcend the discussions of an appropriate symbolism for an Islamic identity in both mosque architecture and Islamic architecture and contribute more to the international scene.

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# مشاريع المساجد الفائزة بجائزة الأغاخان للعمارة

**فهمي دوغان**

*معهد جورجيا للتقنية*

*أطلانطا، جورجيا, الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية*

**ملخص البحث** : تعد المساجد أحد أنواع المباني التي تجد الاهتمام عند لجان التحكيم المتعاقبة لنيل جائزة الأغاخان للعمارة. تناقش هذه الورقة جدول الأعمال الرئيسي لجائزة الأغا خان للعمارة من خلال تحليل المساجد الفائزة بالجائزة، وسوف يكون موضوع البحث الرئيسي هو مناقشة المواضيع المعمارية المختلفة الواقعة في محيط العمارة في الأقطار الإسلامية. ويسود الاعتقاد العام للجان التحكيم المختلفة نحو تعريف العمارة إما أنها مهنة اجتماعية أو مجال مستقل لذاته, كما يحاول بعض المنتسبين للجان التحكيم تبني هوية إسلامية يمكن أن تعكسها العمارة. ويتداخل موضوع الهوية هذا بتعريفيين للعمارة. من الناحية الأولى أن الإسلام يزود المجتمع بقيم اجتماعية رفيعة ومن الناحية الأخرى أن التاريخ والتراث المعماري الإسلامي حدد بعض السمات الأساسية للعمارة الإسلامية.

يعتقد الباحث أن مجموعة القيم الاجتماعية والمعمارية يمكن أن تنفصل عن بعضها البعض وتحدد ذلك بالرغم من اشتراكهما في الأصل من الناحية التاريخية. كما أن عملية التغريب والحداثة فصلت بين الرمزية المعمارية والقيم الاجتماعية وكذلك بين التطلعات الاجتماعية والدور الاجتماعي الذي تلعبه العمارة. وتعكسه بوضوح عمارة المساجد المعاصرة. وقد تمكن حالة الفصل هذه العمارة من لعب الدور في تقوية القيم والتقاليد من خلال الرمزية. وهناك احتمال آخر يتمثل في الفهم الناقد للأسباب المحتملة لعملية الفصل هذه. وتتيح المشاريع الفائزة بالجائزة الحالة المناسبة لمناقشة المواضيع المذكورة.