

Identity-as-Form: The Mosque in the West¹

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Abstract

*This article is a reconsideration of the ethical conceptual framework developed by Edward Said in his book *Orientalism* within an art historical context. It focuses primarily on the relationship between form and cultural identity in the architecture of contemporary mosques in Europe and North America to discuss key theoretical issues and current methodological tendencies in cross-cultural art history. The aim is to explore the highly charged topic of contemporary mosque architecture and minority cultural identity through the prism of what I call the Saidian turn. The article concludes by suggesting that one of the virtues of the Saidian turn is to contextualize 'otherness' not as a cultural dead-end burdened by an over-determining sense of identity but as an opportunity to participate in a material and open-ended becoming.*

Something in me mistrusts
"identity."
Orhan Pamuk, 1998, 489

"So, are you designing minarets?" In the early nineties while practicing architecture in London I often heard people ask me this question after telling them that I was Turkish. At first I did not know how to take this joke, though I assumed it was a joke since it was followed by a smile. The frequency of the question was enough to reveal an underlying discursive structure whose principle has been described by Edward Said as an ideological construction of culture as a source of identity geared to "differentiate 'us' from 'them,' almost always with some degree of xenophobia." (Said 1994, xiii). This ideological construct rests on a syllogistic intellectual and moral deduction based on an essentialist chain of signifiers, whereby minarets are seen as a common denominator of Turkish culture as well as of Islam; and, in turn, a Turkish architect is seen as the correlative bearer of that form wherever she or he may be in the world. Apart from the baffling degree of arrogance and blindness to other histories that this narrative reveals, what is explicitly suggested (and reproduced) under a smile in this ahistorical, discriminating, and deterministic portrayal of an individual (architect), a culture (Turkish), as well as a civilization (Islam), is a post-modern Orientalism under the guise of cosmopolitanism. As Said has shown, Orientalism led the West to see Islam, or the East, as static both in time and place, as "eternal, uniform, and incapable of defining itself" (Said 1995, 15). In addition, by this artificial *telos*, working against today's liberalism, all agency and creativity are also disturbed according to pre-set categories. The contradiction be-

tween current tendencies towards architectural open-endedness, abstraction, or internationalism, and the cultural authenticity or ethnic religious identity, subconsciously or consciously implied by the above question deserves a closer scrutiny.

Challenges to alterity, assimilation, or multiculturalism through the "uses" of culture and tradition are not only a symptom of latent Orientalism, they have also become a general phenomenon of identity politics in the face of fragmentation and alienation, nurturing varieties of religious and nationalist fundamentalism worldwide. Critical post-colonial theory has in this respect pointed out many similarities between colonial and post-colonial discourses of identity claims; both are based on a system of ambiguities, contradictions, and separations, aiming at a homogeneous order by marginalizing or alienating one another. Identity, or a sense of existential belonging or subjective determination, is not a coherent path through unproblematic instances, but a contingent and precarious sense of constructions produced by sets of mediations and discourses, "opposed essences," and a "whole adversarial knowledge built out of those things" (Said 1995, 352; Said 1994, 60). In this article my aim is to both historicize and contextualize Said's claim that Orientalism is the blind spot of identity politics through a reading and interpretation of metropolitan architectural culture, and in particular, of the purpose-built mosques in Europe and North America since the late nineteenth century.

Since the emergence of post-colonial states, mosques funded mostly by petrodollars present us with a visual discourse of an unprecedented kind that strives towards a formulaic objectivity or sameness, particularly, but not exclusively, in the West. This discourse, as I will show, invents along the way traditions and even an architectural ontology of sorts in which *minarets* have a particularly enduring appeal. My study focuses on this uneasy gesture of negotiating Muslim identity within a poor repertoire of forms. It contends that identity politics is a predicament that leads to not less, but more strict methods of self-definitions based on even lesser signs and categories of distinctions. As I shall argue, more than a mere signifier, the minaret, together with the dome, has become a structural metonym of Muslim identity that can no longer be read in any other context than the one it predetermines, even though there exist in the Muslim countries both old and new mosques *without* minarets and domes. Hence the relevance of the question posed by my British acquaintances on this topic, since it is a product of a tendency to deny distinctions and foreclose alterity, or even hybridity, by reducing cultures (Turkish or /and Islamic) to the homogeneous stance of a visible sign such as a minaret. Such a regime of referential singularity not only sustains the category of identity as a logical boundary between 'us' and 'them' but also reconfigures the colonial trope, *image-as-identity*, into one of post-colonial, *identity-as-image*.

Highlighting Islam (symbolized by the minaret instead of the mosque itself)

both as a cultural and national marker points towards the enduring force of religion, rather religious distinction, in the awkward articulation of national identities both in the East and the West. As the relationship between religion and nationalist politics is being evoked following political reconfigurations and the resurgence of Islamism in the Muslim world, we indeed find ourselves in the midst of intense debates that continue to draw ontological and essentialist distinctions between the West and the East, notably around the questions of secularism² as exemplified by recent polemics surrounding the Muslim veil both in France and in Turkey or the worldwide violence caused by the offensive Danish caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed. We may ask if Western European identity is being redefined against Islam and not just without it (Huntington 1997). The realm of the purpose-built mosques in Europe and North America since the 1950s, following decolonization, is one among other realms where the religious polemic is taken to its extreme by both sides in forging political identities based on poorly defined notions of Islamic civilization.

The idea that globalism produced vibrant identities in the form of the hybrid is an attractive one (Bhabha 1994). Yet, there is surprisingly little evidence in the architecture of mosques that resists the reproduction of idealized forms and their distribution. Nowhere has this predicament manifested itself more clearly than as in the mosques founded by the Muslim minorities in Europe and North America. In describing a new multinational world order, Gayatri Spivak iden-

tifies this tendency as "neo-colonialism," that is to say,, "a displaced repetition of many of the old lines laid down by colonialism" (Spivak 1989, 269). She continues, "It is in this newer context that the post-colonial diasporic can have the role of an ideologue" unable to negotiate their identity outside the context of a colonial discourse (Spivak 1989, 269-292). An investigation into the genesis of purpose-built mosques in the West provides us with a case study of such displaced notions and uncanny repetitions of colonial styles.

Outside of the imperial context, Western Europe is very new to the experience of multi-religious and multi-cultural existence. The Middle East, on the other hand, as the cradle of all three monotheistic religions, would be unthinkable without the co-existence of synagogues, churches, and mosques however contentious that co-existence might still be. This difference, as we shall see, also effects the appropriation of foreign architectural forms into an indigenous context. Until very recently, according to sociologists, Muslims in Europe were usually perceived as transient immigrants, refugees, or negligible ethnic minorities, rather than as part of communities deserving their own places of worship or cultural institutions. In this sense the Orientalist colonial discourse was a function or by-product of the distance between the dominant center and the dominated periphery. Thus the early appropriations of cultural forms from the East were based on synoptic views of the history of Islamic architecture From the second half

of the eighteenth century onwards, the mosque, with its dome and minaret, was singled out as the stylistic/formal metonym of the Muslim 'other.' It became a leitmotif in what is known as 'exoticism' or *turquerie* in architecture. Mosque-like buildings,, mostly based on the Turkish model-- since the "Turk" itself was a synonym for the Muslim 'other'-- transfigured into garden ornaments all over Europe (Figs. 1 and 2) Examples of this transfiguration include the Turkish Mosque at Kew Gardens in London built in 1762, the Mosque at the Schloss Garten in Schwetzingen constructed in 1776, and the Mosque at the Armainvilliers, near Paris, designed in 1785. Needless to say none of these buildings were functional. Although Frederick the Great of Prussia went so far as to think about establishing a working mosque as part of his enlightenment project of religious tolerance, the foundation of such a mosque in Western Europe has its much more humble origins in the late nineteenth century.

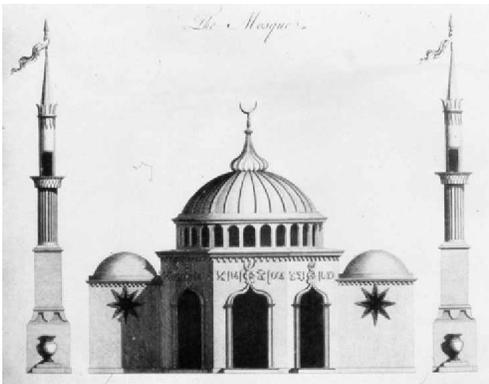


Fig. 1 The Turkish Mosque, Kew Gardens, London, UK, Sir William Chambers, 1762. Plans, Elevations, Sections and Perspective Views of the Gardens and Buildings at Kew in Surry London: 1763.



Fig. 2 The Mosque, Schloss Garten, Schwetzingen, Germany, Nicolas de Pigage, 1775. Photograph by Peter Richter.

With the dawn of industrialism in the early nineteenth century, however, these ornamental buildings were replaced with functional ones clad in freely mixed architectural idioms of the East for playful aesthetic reasons. Although continuing to resemble mosques with their domes and minarets, they functioned as bathhouses (such as those at Leeds or at Tsarskoye Selo in St. Petersburg c.1852), or as steam-driven pump stations (like the one built at Potsdam near Berlin c.1842), and even as a cigarette factory (Figs. 3, 4 and 5). This last example, constructed in Dresden, Germany in 1909 by the architect Martin Hammitzsch is several stories high and features a mixture of Middle-Eastern styles (Wefing 1997, 18-20). Since 1998 there has been an attempt by the Muslims living in this community to reclaim the building as a mosque because it is said to carry key religious motifs such as the dome and minaret, even though no call to prayer could be allowed from the so-called minaret, which actually functions as a chimney.

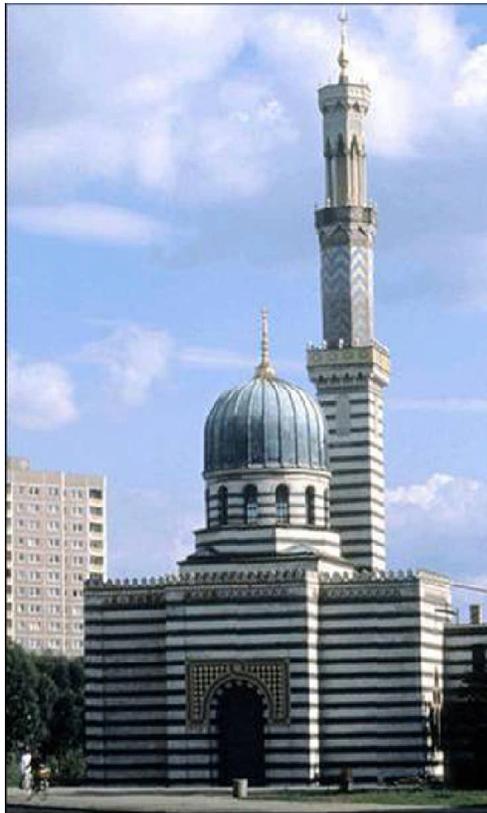


Fig. 3 Steam Driven Pump Station, Potsdam, Germany, Ludwig Persius, ca. 1842



Fig. 4 Turkish Bath, Tsarskoye Selo, St. Petersburg, Russia, Monighetti Rossi, 1852



Fig. 5 The Tobacco Factory in Dresden, Germany, Martin Hammitzsch, 1907

What this brief genealogy shows is that this formal representation of the Muslim East has had the effect of severing forms from any live context—which would be dynamic, changing, and innovative—for more than two centuries. The multifunctional possibilities of that form also resulted in it being the locus of an unambiguous collapse of culture and religion into each other: the temporal and the spiritual, the here and the there, the now and the always, thus performing the Orientalist trope identified by Said, according to which "Islam was the essential Orient" (Said 1995, 116). This overloaded process promoted Islam or Muslimhood in the West as if it were a nationality, with one culture, one language, one identity, one form, and so on. In this abstract and uncritical semiotic operation both the signifier—form—and

the signified—identity—are essentially either reduced to empty shells, or on the contrary hardened into ideological 'mythemes', as the example of the Dresden factory demonstrates.

If eighteenth-century exoticism was integral to the gradual opening up of Europe to other cultures, Orientalism—that is to say carefully studied objectification, description, and representation of the other became a principle feature of nineteenth-century imperial control against the possibilities of hybridization or heterogeneity at home (although hybridization did sometimes occur, as in the case of the establishment of the Turkish bath more often than not they were subjected to hostile and racist attacks).³ Thus, increasingly, standardized and idealized purpose-built metropolitan mosques of late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, while perhaps putting an end to the form/function discrepancy of the earlier period, crystallized the image into an identity once and for all. It is beyond the scope of this article to provide a detailed history of each and every mosque built in Europe. Instead, I will briefly point out the underlying mechanisms that sustained colonial subjection during the construction process of some of these mosques, such as the Shah Jehan Mosque in Woking near London (Fig. 6), the Great Mosque of Paris (Fig. 7) and the Hamburg Mosque (Fig. 8). We will see that in each case the chosen style of architecture was usually determined by the colonial presence in that region; that there was always a drawn out process of decision-making and construction during which endless financial, political, and structural limitations were

imposed; and most tellingly, that almost in all cases, while the funding was foreign, the architect was always local.



Fig. 6 Shah Jehan Mosque in Woking, Woking, UK, William Chambers, 1889



Fig. 7 The Great Mosque of Paris, Paris, France, 1926



Fig. 8 Imam Ali Mosque, Hamburg, Germany, 1973. Photograph by Greg Gulik.

The first mosque dedicated to Muslim worship in Europe was built in Woking, 25 miles southwest of London in 1889, without any governmental contributions. It was a modest project promoted by the Orientalist Gottlieb Wilhelm Leitner, who had been the principal of the Punjab College in Lahore (originally a Hungarian Jew, brought up in Istanbul), and financed by Shah Jehan, Begum of Bhopal, whom the British restored to power in India and after whom the mosque is named. A minor architect, William Isaac Chambers, ostensibly designed this tiny structure, measuring only 16 by 16 feet, with 'recognizable' Indian features. Its façade supposedly alluded to the famous Badshaahi Mosque in Lahore and the Taj Mahal in Agra, but it was more than anything else an imperialist showcase, as Mark Crinson asserts, for "a studied synopsis or distillate of knowledge about some object imagined as utterly other" (Crinson 2002, 82). Crinson argues in favor of *visibility* granted to a functioning mosque, based on Homi Bhabha's notion of the third space, or the interstices, to show that meaning becomes more ambiguous in a metropolitan context: "its appearance of respect or sympathy for this cultural otherness is part of the management of consent essential to the dynamics of hegemonic power" (Crinson 2002, 82). Without undermining the complex but slow transformation taking place within power dynamics, it is equally important to interrogate the aesthetic validation of the mosque's appearance and the context from which it emerged. Declarative, 'self-evident' architecture of the other was the metropolitan conditionality; therefore what is seemingly the granting

of religious rights with functioning mosques turns into the peremptory enforcement of *display* not *visibility*.

The specific entanglement of such architecture with British imperialism, defying productive or creative hybridity, is clearly discernible if we compare the Woking Mosque with the Crimean Memorial Church in Istanbul constructed twenty years earlier. The church was built not only for the Christians living in Istanbul but specifically for the use of British minorities. What is more, unlike Woking, the Memorial Church was designed in the most fashionable style of architecture of the time by a native British architect, but financed by the Ottoman government. Interestingly, although the English toyed with the idea of granting a similar kind of aesthetic autonomy to Muslim minorities (Egyptians in this case) living in London during the conception phase of the London Central Mosque in early twentieth century, the same imperialist logic, as we shall see, prevented its implementation (Tibawis 1983,1-4).

A formal structural comparison between the Woking Mosque and the Taj Mahal or Badshaahi Mosque has often been neglected (Crinson 2002, 82). Considering the monumental differences in their sizes, how and in what way they are similar is a legitimate question. Additionally, the Taj Mahal is not even a mosque. In fact, formally speaking, there is an astonishing visual proximity between the Woking Mosque and, not with the above mentioned Indian buildings, but the ornamental Turkish Mosque at Kew Garden built more than one hundred years earlier in 1762. by Sir William

Chambers (see Fig. 1). Perhaps it was not a sheer coincidence that even the architects shared the same name. We find in both cases not only a use of simple architectural rhetoric based on recognizable signposts in the shape of domes and minaret-like structures, but also the exact same central buildings covered with a dome and flanked by lower pavilions and decorated with ogee arches, urns, and crescents. This shows that, in fact, when it comes to adapting alien forms into a dominant culture, it is not the knowledge of the 'original' that holds the authority but the *precedent* that sets the standard for what is and is not aesthetically acceptable. Naturally, such an admission would unsettle the Orientalists' claims that they are the "agents of authority" (Said 1994, 19) about the East; as, for example, Leitner saw himself to be, as evidenced by his numerous scholarly publications (Leitner 1889, 1868). Not acknowledging this fact is one of the pitfalls of Orientalism. This comparison clearly demonstrates that a century of presumably increasing knowledge had no impact on the way in which the Eastern models were observed and implemented.

Like the Woking Mosque, the Great Mosque of Paris also stands out as recognizably different from its surroundings. They are also very different from each other, carrying the signs of their respective colonies in the East. The Paris complex, designed by a group of French architects who took their aesthetic inspirations from architectural idioms across Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, and the famous Alhambra in Spain, was completed in 1926 with the help of North African craftsmen. Although the site, in this case,

was given by the French government following intense negotiations which began as early as 1895, most of the funding that enabled the mosque's realization came from overseas. The Magazine *L'Architecture* identified the Paris mosque not only as the hallmark of the whole of the 'Orient' but also as the triumphal representation of the French in North Africa,, lest the man on the streets of Paris have any doubt: "What is all this ... may ask the twentieth-century Parisian man of the street, who by chance passes through these environs. This ensemble [the mosque], on the other hand, brings back to those who have visited our North Africa, or those who have traversed the far and prestigious *Orient*, familiar impressions" (Bayoumi 2000, 272). Thus the tautological representation of the 'other' by its 'otherness' is the essence of an alienation process that achieves a certain kind of imperialist subjection. The Hamburg Mosque in Germany, finished in 1973, designed by the Schramm & Elingius Architects, with financial contributions from the local Iranian community and religious institutions in Iran, was similarly replete with Orientalist assumptions with its dome and two minarets (Holod and Khan, 213-232). Although the mosque is tiled with turquoise revetments and has a modern flare its overall appearance has an uncanny resemblance to that of the Kew mosque. In addition, its process of construction, fraught with conflict and controversy, took more than 13 years to come to fruition.

Such genealogy has important implications for our understanding of post-colonial purpose-built mosques because what emerges is not a rejection, but a *con-*

tinuation of such formally authorised, yet equally disfranchising, modes of diasporic self-representation. Architecture is often seen as fundamental in assuming the role of a moral and physical signifier in and for cultures. Thus mosques in the West have become the 'official' repository of identity claims from all sides (Muslims, immigrants, and host nations), articulated as they are around a pseudo-transparency of form to meaning. George Bataille's critique of architecture as having "the authority to command and prohibit" is justified in a discussion of colonial and post-colonial conditionality of identity-as-image (Bataille 1997, 21). Bataille reminds us that "when architecture is discussed it is never simply a question of architecture.... [the discourse] finds itself caught from the beginning in a process of semantic expansion that forces what is called architecture to be only the general locus or framework of representation, its ground ... Architecture, before any other qualifications is identical to the space of representation" (Hollier 1989, 31). Indeed as Said has argued, the construction of colonial discourses about the 'other' has often been a way to claim a tight control of that space of representation; and as Homi Bhabha has shown this colonial sense made the representation of the other spin "around the pivot of the 'stereotype'" (Bhabha 1994, 76). This also holds true of the architecture of the modern mosques. Despite the buildings' reliance on technology, materials, and skills, certain essentialism about these mosques continues to hold the space of Islam (or for that matter Muslim cultures) as fixed and presents it as either unchangingly distinct from the 'West' or

identical everywhere in the 'East.' Even the most recently built mosques have failed to produce an alternative representation.

Like a spinning top, since the eighteenth century the 'Oriental' stereotype thus became defined by its outline, as the essence of a radical difference that could be realized less ambiguously. This is indeed pushed to the extreme in twentieth century modernist mosque architecture and has, in effect, produced what Spivak has called a "collective hallucination" (Spivak 1989, 280). This should not come as a surprise, as recent literature has pointed out that modernist architects assimilated the colonial ideology of difference wholeheartedly into their movement by endowing *pure* abstract forms with the notions of authority and authenticity (Celik 1992, 58-77). Thus, instead of discouraging any attempt at reducing an aesthetic artifact (such as a mosque) to one of its features (such as a minaret) which pushes the association chain all the way to the collective identity (Muslim) that such an artifact is supposed to hypostatize, they have instead endorsed it.

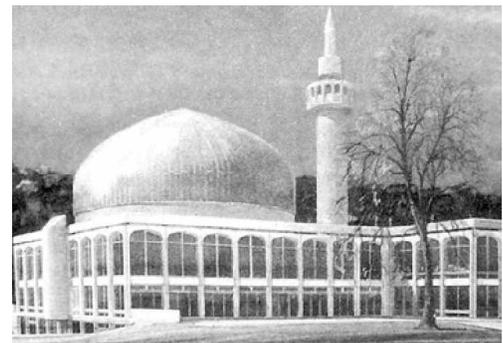


Fig. 9 The Central London Mosque, London, UK, Sir Frederick Gibberd, 1977. *Architects' Journal*, 22 October 1969.

The Central London Mosque at Regent's Park, which took nearly half a century to realize, is a case in point. The project was political and the Muslims living in London became directly participating members. Encouraged by the Parisian example, it was promoted as early as the 1920s by the Egyptian ambassador, Hassan Nashat Pasha, and Lord Lloyd, Secretary of State for the Colonies, but the diplomatic antagonism over the Suez Canal and budget deficits halted the work until the 1940s. Also around this time the Egyptian government granted land and total liberty for the construction of the Anglican Cathedral in Cairo, a project to be designed by Adrian Gilbert Scott. Hoping for reciprocal attitudes, the Mosque Committee made a demand for a plot from the British government while at the same time commissioning the Egyptian architect General Ramzy Omar. Although the land was granted, Omar's traditional plan was finally thrown out, yielding to a metropolitan cultural anxiety. The British opted for a competition hosted in 1969 to find an 'appropriate' design. Out of fifty entries mostly from Muslim countries, Sir Frederick Gibberd's modernist design won and the work began in 1974 (Fig. 9). Gibberd's design placed a greater emphasis on the purity of forms and undifferentiated specificity of dome and minaret, although the project brief included a statement that no prayer call would be allowed from the tower. Opting for a highly modernist design instead of the truly heterogeneous Muslim projects, clearly suggests that the use and circulation of cultural codes was a Western prerogative. The complex was finally

consecrated four years later in 1978. Entirely funded by petro-dollars, additional Muslim contributions were assigned to the interiors; minbars were sent from Egypt, tiles from Turkey, and carpets from Iran (Tibawis 1983, 1-4). The Functionalists protested against the design as being an empty shell, though not on the basis that it still looked traditional, but that it lacked the movement's integrity: "Of course, you cannot put the decor to one side. It is not the fact that it is decorated that upsets us, or even that it is recognizably traditional in appearance, but the fact that there is no internal logic, which ties the decor to the structure behind it. This makes it (at least for architects) a frivolous building" (Crimson 2002, 88). Even though the comment is disguised as a modernist lamentation, it is not really concerned with the problem that function doesn't follow the form, since the existence of the minaret is left unchallenged. The modernist believes that Islamic cultures and traditions can be represented in simple *recognizable* shapes, in effect facilitated by a decisive link between archetypes and identity politics. Gibberd's design was later embraced as the prototype for the Grand Mosque of Kuwait City in 1984 (Fig. 10). The favorable approach would be to read this mosque as an instance of hybridity or as a metaphor for border crossing, but Mohammed Arkoun identifies it instead as a 'symbolic statement of power' of a rising new dynasty in Kuwait rather than as a spiritual place of worship (Frishman and Khan 1994, 271). Such a sharing of visual language with the former colonial power is indicative of a global sharing of the language of power through the

desire for immediate access to an originary identity or tradition through representation.



Fig. 10 Kuwait State Mosque, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Muhammad Saleh Makiya, 1984. Photograph by the architect.

The predicament here is not that modernism has caused forms to collapse into signifiers of whole cultures, and in particular Eastern cultures (for example, an all-subsuming Islamic 'shape' in the form of a minaret or a dome), but that these ideas have somehow converged with some of the Muslim views particularly endorsed by those living outside Muslim countries, as an effect of socio-economic violence, displacement, exile, and in general, imperialism. In Spivak's words, "s/he is more at home in producing and simulating the effect of an older world constituted by the legitimizing narratives of cultural and ethnic specificities and continuities, all feeding an almost seamless national identity—a species of 'retrospective hallucination'" (Spivak 1989, 282). Indeed more and more purpose-built mosques in Europe and North America, mostly funded by the Wahabi sect (Sunni fundamentalists from Saudi Arabia), do seem to strive towards a "seamless national [Muslim]

identity" inspired and guided by the colonial sense that the dome and minaret were the undisputed signs, not only of Islamic cultures, but Islam itself.

Indeed when Ziaulhaq Zia, the chairman of the Islamic Centre of Ocean County in the United States, was asked to describe the project for a new mosque the first thing he declared was: "We will have a *minaret*" and "We will have a *dome*" (Everline 2004). Seen from this perspective, the question "are you designing minarets?" can be decoded on the one hand as a colonial fantasy and on the other as a post-colonial diasporic desire. The missing element in all of these is that, in actual fact, neither the Koran nor Traditions—the sayings of the Prophet—dictates a shape for a mosque or its accompanying structures. Few Muslims would even disagree with the idea that there is no need for a mosque to pray. Scholars have also argued that the minaret was essentially an invention of formal archaism (simply a tower imitating a lighthouse) and that its use in a religious context was almost accidental (*adhan*, the Muslim prayer, by chance took place up in the tower). The Islamic art historian Jonathan Bloom's in-depth study of the minaret is unequivocal: "the minaret was invented, not early in the first century of Islam, but at the end of its second century, ... and that in the beginning it had little if anything to do with the call to prayer" (Bloom 1989, 7). As Bloom has shown, only in the thirteenth century did the minaret become a common element of a mosque and even then it was entangled in aesthetic and political signs of representation; its style, which was extremely varied, advertised

distinction not unity (Fig. 11). Indeed the dogmatic shape of mosques, with not one but several minarets, belongs to the legacy of the Sunni Hanafi School championed by the Ottomans, the longest lived Muslim imperial power.

Such formal reductionism, transcending all questions of style, design, technology, culture, history, or modernity, has now become the orthodox principle of a singular Muslim identity. In the same way that Charles Jencks has identified



Fig. 11 Minarets from Turkey, Yemen, Morocco, Xinxiang, China

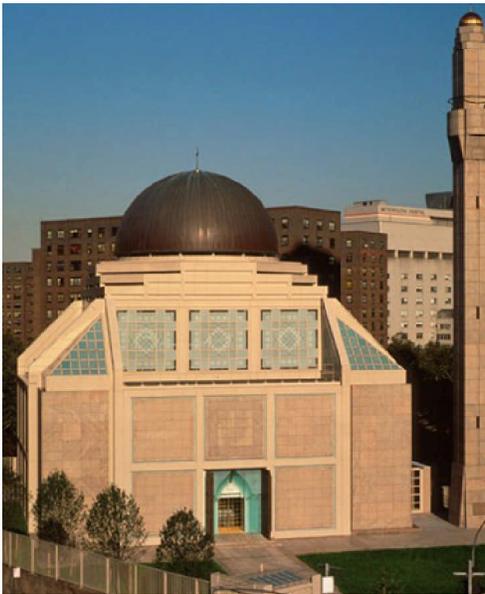


Fig. 12 The Manhattan Mosque in New York, U.S.A., Minaret by Altan Gursel, 1991. Photograph by Aliye Pelin Celik.

the self-conscious classical architecture, with its principal columns and entablature, with European fascism (Jencks 1987, 46), so do the dome and minaret become the universal properties of Islamic fundamentalism. Even the intensely debated design of the Manhattan Mosque built in 1991 gave in to this convention of the dome and minaret (Fig. 12). Omar Khalidi, a historian of North American contemporary mosques, writes that "[a]fter a long and thoughtful debate the two groups [Muslim financiers and non-Muslim academic advisors] agreed on a 'modernist' building, but with the Muslim Committee forcing the inclusion of both a minaret and a dome, neither of them favoured by the architects and scholars" (Khalidi 1998, 324).⁴ Since the minaret and the dome were claimed as divine properties of a mosque, any rejection of them was seen in opposition to Islam. Indeed for most practicing Muslims, and

particularly those living in the West, even the sheer idea of a mosque lacking a minaret and/or a dome has now come to present a challenge of an existential kind. Jencks's view is pertinent: "the politics of the self-conscious tradition [of architecture], as one could guess, are conservative, elitist, centralist and pragmatic with an occasional element of mystical fundamentalism thrown in to catalyse, or brutalise the masses" (Jencks 1987, 46). After it was decided that there would be a minaret at the Manhattan mosque, it was separately designed by the Turkish-American architect Altan Gürsel. The rationale for this decision could be that the pencil-shaped Ottoman/Turkish minaret easily translates into a modern shape, but in political terms, as more and more contemporary mosques around the world draw on this model, it provides the most congenial sign of the Muslim *Umma* (the universal community of Muslims) as well an identification with power (the Ottoman Empire being the last vestige of that memory).

This insistence on minarets has now produced surprising new results—a minaret without a mosque. In Turkey, in a small village called Ayvalik, near Izmir (Symirna) I encountered a ruined, thus unused, mosque with a brand new minaret attached to it, the foundation plaque reading 2005 (Fig. 13). When I inquired about the mosque itself and whether it was scheduled for a repair I was told that it is in the process of reparation but that they chose to build the minaret first. Even when the mosque is finally restored, what is lost in this upside down process is an enduring sentiment of spirituality. When the spectator looks at this minaret

without a mosque, he or she invests it not with less but greater politics, perhaps the politics of the current Turkish Islamicist regime.⁵



Fig. 13 Hayrettin Pasha Mosque, Ayvalik, Turkey, (converted church). Minaret dated 2005. Photograph by the author.

There is no one methodology for understanding the long catalogue of minarets from Manhattan to Ayvalik but it is clear that most contemporary mosques no longer involve the makings of "a place of worship and collective social activities," but rather, as Oleg Grabar asserts, they are in the service of "a monument" symbolizing power as culture (Frishman and Khan 1994, 245). The existence of a minaret in this case is a neutral, easily manageable, generic trope, neatly tidying so many different cultures, habits, climates, and traditions. Within such a context it becomes apparent that legiti-

mizing narratives for building minarets are not simply based on religion or historicity, but on sheer appearances, taken at face value, constructing a social and political reality based purely on themselves.

The problem with political Islam is that it attaches so much value to that form that even the outright Orientalist buildings are recoded into consecrated ones and reclaimed by Muslim minorities as their own. As Jencks states, "[t]he self-conscious tradition of architecture often shows an attention to its own actions which is so self-reflective as to be paralyzing" (Jencks 1987, 46). The Dresden Turkish Tobacco Factory is a case in point (see Fig. 5). The attempt to claim it as part of a Muslim cultural identity, because of its dome and minaret-like chimneys, is indicative of this paradox. This is not to deny that such a recoding could not be read as an appropriation of power on the part of the marginalized, but to suggest that it only serves an ideological end that traps these communities in a perpetual state of minority and forecloses their creative abilities. Within the metaphorical and symbolic field this frozen identity-as-image produces not culture, but melancholy or fundamentalism. It cannot articulate difference; it only creates a fictitious totality against the equally fictitious homogeneity of a host nation.

Formal militancy, in a way, encourages a regime of resistance for the sake of resistance. Indeed, in Europe and North America more and more mosques are under greater scrutiny and new mosque projects are received with suspicion. Marco Pastors, a city councillor

in Rotterdam, declared his protest against a new mosque which was recently completed in a quasi-fascist manner: "We want a *European version of Islam*, and that Islam must adapt to Europe, not Europe adapt to Islam. ... [Y]ou have to earn the right to make very distinctive buildings when you are new in a country" (Knox 2004). What is in fact utterly perverse about this statement is that if there is a version of Islam it is already *the European version*. Based on these kinds of statements identity becomes a fallacy, a jail whose keys are in the pockets of the inmates, or as Adorno describes it, "the whole dispute resembles shadow-boxing" (Adorno 1978, 303).

There is an intrinsic difficulty to cope with open-endedness about cultures (in the Foucauldian sense of the term, culture's lack of a 'pure' origin or meaning or enclosed authority). As Said states: "... no one finds it easy to live uncomplainingly and fearlessly, with the thesis that human reality is constantly being made and unmade, and that anything like a stable essence is constantly under threat" (Said 1994, 333). And he adds that "we all need some foundation on which to stand; the question is how extreme and unchangeable is our formulation of what this foundation is" (Said 1994, 333). This question is important in order to prevent a vicious circle of complicity in the handling of predetermined, uncritical claims to identity. Equally to objectify discursive elements is to disentangle analytically the ideological pre-requisites (ontological, political, and aesthetic) implicit in cultural products, and to consider them as guiding themes in

shaping one's critical stance towards them.

Edward Said's *Orientalism* has indeed forcefully thrown open Pandora's box for all of us. Scholars following the Saidian concept contested the dominant norms (narrative) of history writing, interpretation, and cross-cultural interactions within the socio-political context of colonialism and post-colonialism (Celik 2002, 21). But so far, contesting dominant forms (modalities) of representation remains unexplored. Challenges to dominant narratives have indeed expanded the academic canon and even altered its historical interpretation. However, reading the proliferation of standardized mosque architecture in the West as a post-colonial success story runs the risk of being partial to the 'other.' Considering these mosques as autonomous statements of a single Muslim identity in the West would also undermine the theoretical issues that have identified representation *with* power. In order to avoid ideological pitfalls we must then pose the pertinent question of *form*, which has been side-tracked by most scholars. In Adorno's words, "a work of art that is committed strips the magic from the work of art that is content to be a fetish, an idle pastime for those who would like to sleep through the deluge that threatens them, in an apoliticism that is in fact deeply political" (Adorno 1978, 301). From this perspective it becomes clear that a mosque without a dome or a minaret is not a threat to the processes of becoming or identification. Only a discussion of creativity instead of identity can make these mosques politically visible, and only then potentially existentially fulfilling.

This is not just a theoretical wishfulness; alternative solutions, aesthetically creative and non-conformist mosques employing modernizing elements, with or indeed without domes or minarets, do exist. Amongst them are the Sherefudin Mosque in Visoko, Bosnia, by Zlatko Ugljen (1980); the Plainfield Islamic Centre in Indiana, USA, by Gulzar Haider (1981); the National Assembly Mosque of Behruz and Can Cinçi, in Ankara, Turkey (1989) (Fig. 14); Poulad Shahr in Isfahan, Iran, by Mohammad Ali Badrizadeh (1991); Ilyas Cavusoglu Camii in Rize, Turkey, by Erhan Isözen (1993); the Nour Mosque in Gouda, Netherlands, by Gerard Rijnsdorp (1993); the Kazan Mosque in Russia, by Rafik Bilyalov (1998); or the Tuzla Mosque in Bosnia, by Amir Vuk (2000) (Fig. 15) to list just a few. Their forms are contemporary and modern; here I am using this adjective not as a European prerogative but as a shorthand for a set of tendencies betraying an autonomy that, both thematically and formally, presents an outward-looking cultural productivity. These mosques have none of the identity politics trappings; they are not conceived as religious signposts. The mosque of the National Assembly in Ankara with its 'international' style, for instance, takes its function as a mosque for granted and aligns itself with a cultural discourse of secularism in a country with a Muslim population. These mosques foster a sense of cultural context and artistic concentration, and can be seen as not only contesting the *modes* but also the dominant *forms* of representation. This is akin to what Said says about the works of writers he admires,



Fig. 14 Ilyas Cavusoglu Mosque, Rize, Turkey, Erhan Isözen, 1993. Photograph by the architect.



Fig. 15 Mosque of the Behrambeg Madrasa, Tuzla, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Zlatko Ugljen and Husejn Dropic, 1999. Photograph by Azra Akšamija

such as Césaire and Walcott: "whose daring new *formal* achievements are in effect a re-appropriation of the historical experience of colonialism, revitalised and transformed into a new aesthetic of sharing and often transcendent re-formulation" (Said 1994, 353). One of the virtues of the Saidian turn is to contextualize 'otherness' not as a cultural dead-end, burdened by an over-determining sense of identity, but as an opportunity to participate in an open-ended becoming.

More recently, artists are focusing on expressions of the Muslim way of life in the West precisely in those terms. Bosnian-born artist Azra Akšamija, now living in the United States and Austria, resists the post-colonial identity-pastiche by promoting what she calls "nomadic mosques" (Akšamija 2005, 17-21) by which the Muslim practice of prayer can be performed anywhere (Figs. 16 and 17).



Fig. 16 Dirndlmoschee [Dirndl Dress Mosque], Azra Akšamija, 2005. Courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 17 Nomadic Mosque, Azra Akšamija, 2005. Courtesy of the artist.

According to Akšamija "...the design of wearable mosques—clothing that can be transformed into prayer-environment ...examines the notion of mosque space and investigates its formal limits" (Akšamija 2005, 17-21). This radical work also explores the themes of cultural dynamism and adaptability inherent to Islam as seen by the young Muslim artist: "[t]he religion of Islam" Akšamija writes "is not understood as a static concept, which it often claims to be, but rather as a dynamic process that adapts to specific geographical and cultural conditions" (Akšamija 2005, 17-21). Here, the experience of the civilian massacres in Bosnia and of post-9/11 politics in the United States places an awareness of Islam as a crucial space of today's global politics (i.e. the need to flee or hide to save one's life, the status of the displaced, misplaced, or refugee). But rather than remaining frozen on a passive, victimized spot, Akšamija's work emphasizes the creative dynamics of cultural de-territorialization under the figure of the nomad with her portable/wearable mosque. A mosque *on the road* as it were for an undetermined becoming is able to decode and re-code and de-code itself with the changing landscape, politics, and life in general. The signified of the line of flight leads not to de-politicize Muslim populations but to invigorate self-determination. In the words of Akšamija, the "success [of the project] is contingent upon the actual wearing of the mosque, which can only take place if the Muslims themselves recognize and accept the basic ideological elasticity of Islam" (Akšamija 2005, 17-21).

Notes

¹This is a revised and extended version of a paper delivered at the Conference *Hommage à Edward W. Said* held at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris in September, 2004. Research for this paper was carried out during my Fellowship at the Columbia University Institute for Scholars at Reid Hall in Paris in 2005. More recent version of the paper was delivered at the symposium on *The Mosque in the West* organized by the Aga Khan Programme at MIT in April 2006.

²The notion of secularism has now itself become an essentializing and chastising decoy, hiding the much more concrete issues of the universalist, global neo-imperialism, presented either as democratic or as natural human condition.

³The reception of Turkish Baths in London in the 1860s is a case in point. One critic identified the Turkish habit of washing as a barbaric and enervating act. This is how he describes it: "Turkish Bath vies with Mons. le Gorilla (referring to Charles Darwin's book *On the Origin of Species by means of Natural Selection*, 1859) in attracting public attention at the present time. This is not at all to be wondered at, seeing that the latter desires to claim us as first cousins, while the former is going to assist in bringing us down to the level of the latter" (Avcioglu 1998, 66).

⁴The scholars have included none other than the doyens of Islamic art and architecture Oleg Grabar and Renata Holod (Khalidi 1998, 324).

⁵One is immediately reminded of the poem read by the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan in 1997: "The minarets are bayonets/ the domes helmets/ the mosques our barracks/ the believers our soldiers." As the first line suggests the minarets have now become the proverbial political instruments rather than elements in an architectural scheme.

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Response

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This article aspires to move the discourse on contemporary mosques in the West, both as architectural objects and as framers of communal identities, from its usual frames of reference—taxonomic, typological, and stylistic on one hand, and political, ideological, and polemical on the other—into the expanses of critical theory. To achieve that end, in a review of important mosque projects in Europe and North America, the author discusses and tests current themes in cultural criticism, such as the signs and boundaries of cultural territories and cultural claims; the polarity of center and periphery, both original and derivative; and majority and minority. These themes were originally formulated for the investigation of cultural and social politics and issues of identity in modern and post-colonial contexts, but have successfully migrated in recent years to permeate the study of creative processes, such as architecture.

The author's examination of the design and building of mosques in the West offers a prime opportunity to question the validity of geographic, historical, religious, and national boundaries as disciplinary dividing lines. Styles of building design in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries constructed as frivolous exercises in stylistic exoticism resulted in various buildings in Europe masquerading as pseudo-mosques. In the various Western cities where new Islamic communities grew beginning in the 1950s, these pseudo-mosques became formal

"precedents" for the design of modern mosques seeking roots. Burdened by Eurocentric administrative limitations and ideological passions forced upon them for a variety of reasons, these communities sought conformity, historicity, and authenticity in the architectural vocabulary of their places of worship away from their Islamic home.

These developments in the West, however, are not independent from what happened in the Islamic World in the last 30-40 years, where architecture underwent a series of complex transformations. Indeed, the romantic conception of an exotic, colorful, and religiously driven Islamic architecture, which was originally propounded by Western Orientalists in the nineteenth century, was challenged by new visions with the gradual collapse of the colonial rule by the middle of the twentieth century. The independence movements which became ruling political parties in the colonized Islamic countries, brought with them the more vocal and aggressive concepts of modernity and nationalism to represent the architecture of their newly constituted states. This period, however, was short lived, succeeded and somewhat supplanted by the no less passionate discourse on religion as identity marker that sprang forth in the 1980s, primarily as a backlash to the failure of the nationalist rhetoric to encompass the cultural aspirations of the vast majority of the common people in many countries of the Islamic world.

This process (badly understood by most), evolved intermittently during the 1980s and 1990s in the vast majority of the Islamic countries and gave rise to an

ideology that saw Islam as identity. The shift has been promoted by at least two economically and politically dissimilar, though ultimately mutually reinforcing, social groups.

First was the reemergence of a fundamentalist political movement in many Islamic countries after an apparent dormancy of some thirty years. Spurred by the triumph of Khomeini's Iranian Revolution of 1979, and vaguely conceived as a response to the perceived failures of the national states to face up to foreign interference, economic corruption, and moral decadence, the fundamentalist movement sought a return to more authentic political and social foundations to govern the Muslim Nation. Despite its relentless and violent attacks on what it sees as the depravity of all Western cultural constructs, especially those aimed at the Islamic world, the fundamentalist movement showed surprisingly little interest in the conceptual contours of various aspects of Islamic cultures, including Islamic architecture.

The second group to emerge in the 1980s was made up of the elite of many recently formed nation-states of the Gulf region, which experienced an unprecedented prosperity and a concomitant socioeconomic empowerment in the aftermath of the oil boom of the 1970s. Their new wealth, deeply religious and conservative outlook, and fervent quest for cultural identity combined to create a demand for a contemporary yet identifiable Islamic architecture. Sincerely at times and opportunistically at others, many architects responded by engaging in the design of various historicist styles, all modern and all dubbed "Islamic,"

sponsored by these elite groups across the Islamic world or wherever new Islamic communities happened to congregate, mostly in the West.

These three phases of architecture in the modern Islamic world—the Orientalist/colonial, nationalist, and neo-Islamist—share the same historicist discourse on "Islamic Architecture." They differ only in the historical segment they select as their main reference. The Orientalists see the dawn of Islam as the beginning of Islamic architecture and the beginning of the colonial age as its end, and consider all preceding or contemporary traditions external to it. They construct a continuous narrative that runs parallel to the Western architectural tradition but almost never intersects with it until it dissolves with the onset of modernity.

Both nationalists and neo-Islamists accept the paradigm of cultural autonomy but emphasize different historical trajectories. The nationalists stress the point in time when their putative nations—*i.e.* Turkish, Iranian, Arab—rose to prominence under Islam or broke away from its hegemonic grip, and construct their history selectively from that moment to the present, which they invariably see as resurgent. They sometimes search for anchoring roots in the distant, pre-Islamic past and postulate some latent continuity between that past and the awakening of their nation to its true identity in the modern age.

The neo-Islamists, too, construct a preferred historical trajectory, which is a medley of Golden Ages stretching from the high Caliphate in the 8th century to the Gunpowder Empire in the 16th cen-

ture. They hold that age as the fountainhead from which their architecture derives, yet still, in the present moment, attempt to rebuild that romantically remembered architectural utopia using purely postmodern compositional and formal techniques and leaving out all that they consider aberrant, or, to use their favorite term, *jahili*, (ignorant, a term that usually refers to the pre-Islamic period in Arabia). As a result, both nationalists and neo-Islamists conceive "their" architecture from exclusionary perspectives, which they unwittingly inherited from their Orientalist predecessors and which resulted in the traditional, rigid, and almost caricature-like architecture of their places of worship both in the Islamic World and the West.

The publication in 1978 of Edward Saïd's seminal book *Orientalism* marked a turning point in the conception of Islamic studies in the West, but its influence on design in the contemporary world was mostly indirect and hard to gauge. Progressive architects working in the Islamic world did begin, around that time, to breach the artificial boundaries of their heritage and explore new design ideas, but their experiments were limited and lacked popular appeal. They chafed under bureaucratic restrictions and the influence of populist movements. Perhaps their most formidable opponent was the dominant paradigm of the entire discipline of architecture, which legitimizes a theoretically reflective and historically evolving Western architecture while casting the architecture of other cultures as outdated and unable to beget modern living expressions. Changing these conditions, in my opin-

ion, depends to a large extent on the satisfaction of two interrelated requirements. First, these progressive architects building new mosques must resolve the tensions inherent in the discourse of contemporary architecture and diffused over such binary oppositions as "regional vs. international", "transcendental vs. historical," "traditional vs. modern," "vernacular vs. designed", or "static vs. dynamic." The second requires Western architects and town planners and administrators, in their capacity as prime arbiters of the discipline, to reflect the thoughts and work of their newly assertive interlocutors from the Islamic world.