

Women and Space in Muslim Societies

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1. Clarifying the Issues

The Aga Khan Award for Architecture has included and integrated skilful women in the field of art and architecture since its inception in 1977. Yet, this is the first time that a formal session has been reserved to reflect on women's place, role, and contributions to the built environment in Muslim societies. This seminar, on *Contemporary Expressions of Islam in Buildings*, seems to be the right place to start this kind of reflection and to follow the tradition of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture of learning from the past, reassessing the present, and suggesting alternatives for a better tomorrow, for a better world.

The Aga Khan Award for Architecture seminars have addressed at length the importance of the role of architects in development. Mohammed Arkoun suggested in the fourth Aga Khan Award for Architecture seminar that the architect acts as a mediator between philosophical ideas and their physical projection in construction. Therefore it is appropriate to consider briefly ways in which contemporary expressions of Islam in buildings may reflect the role and status of Muslim women. Their role and status, like everything else, has evolved over time. This evolution, with its ups and downs, has not always been for the better, and has had much more to do with changing social, economic, and political conditions than with intrinsically religious or theological issues.¹

Remembering these realities might help us at the outset of this deliberation. To do that, it is constructive to consider two sets of separate issues: gender inequality present in all cultures to varying degrees and in various manifestations; and the specific condition of women in Muslim societies today.

Whether in Germany or Egypt, Poland or Iran, the United States or India, illustrations of gender inequality are found in legal and socio-economic rights, in perception and language, as well as in visibility or power. They are also manifested through social and economic indicators evident in practically every society.²

In less-developed countries and in less-developed areas in general, gender inequality is closely allied with poverty,³ a vulnerability to economic hardship,⁴ and/or a lack of education. To the extent that women are also the custodians of the young, this gender inequality translates into very high levels of child malnutrition, morbidity, and mortality.⁵ It is therefore important to underline that many of the statements on gender inequality that follow are broadly applicable to most countries of the Third World without regard to their being predominantly Muslim or otherwise.

General Observations

In most less-developed countries today, women, who account for 50 percent of the population and, in many sectors, 60 percent of the labour force, are frequently the prime producers of food (in



Grameen Bank Housing, Bangladesh (top and above). This institution, reaching the poorest of the poor with small loans averaging \$50-70 per person, focuses primarily on women, who account for over 86 percent of borrowers. Women are proving to be the true vector of social change in these very poor communities. Grameen not only empowers them with credit, but it gives them a sense of dignity. Architect: Hassan Ashraful Photographs: H. Anwar/AKAA

many countries rural males produce cash crops while rural females produce food crops). Yet they earn as little as 10 percent of the salary income and own as little as 1 percent of the assets.⁶ There are significantly lower levels of access to educational facilities and a tremendous disparity in risk factors. For example, women in some developing countries are 150 times more likely to die in childbirth than women in the United States. Furthermore, in perilous conditions such as drought and famine, women figure predominantly in the vulnerable groups, along with their attendant infants.

In addition to the women's role and potential role in production, women are still the major, if not the only, caretakers of children, both boys and girls. Young women then become the most important group for both policy-makers and grassroots activists. Starting from birth if not before (in the womb) — according to recent research — children of both sexes know from their mothers directly and indirectly their place in society. Just as a relationship between heredity and physical health of human beings has been shown, more and more research provides evidence of the outcome of the relationship between the "internal" reality of the mother and her "external" reality and its influence on both daughters and sons. That is to say that for those who believe that development is "people centred", gender inequality can explain a great deal of the existing dynamics in most Third World countries whether they are predominantly Muslim or not. The prevalence of disease, the increase in poverty, pollution, and environmental degradation in the present world have helped bring attention to the direct link between development and the role and place of women as co-architects of development.

Efforts to improve the conditions of women that are in extreme poverty are therefore at the forefront of the concerns of those who must deal with the problem of poverty and socio-economic development. One of the most successful efforts for so doing has come from Bangladesh, the 1989 Aga Khan Award winner, Grameen Bank.⁷ "What started as a housing credit scheme has turned into an overall integrated development process... The previously marginal, dispossessed poor in Bangladesh, especially women, are now socially empowered... The lesson of this success story lies in the thoughtful concept and the participatory process behind it — which could be emulated, not imitated all over the Muslim and Third Worlds" (Master Jury).⁸ The inspiration provided by the success of the Grameen experience is no doubt encouraging many other efforts elsewhere in the Muslim world — and more broadly the whole Third World — to deal more effectively with both poverty and gender issues. Linkages between housing, credit, and the participatory process, as the Master Jury pointed out, has led ultimately to an overall development process that allowed the poor, and especially women, to become socially empowered and free to carry out their role inside and outside the house and be equal partners in the development of their community.

On Women in Muslim Societies

When we come to issues related to Muslim countries, there are important distinctions to be made between religious doctrine and social practice. Thus religious doctrine provides the general ethical framework within which Muslim societies are expected to function.⁹ The status of women in such cases can be argued on a variety of textual and other references in an *Usuli* framework (Muslim scholasticism) or it can be looked at in terms of present societal reality. The major concern of this paper is with the latter. Nevertheless, a brief discussion of the former is appropriate given its profound importance in the perceptions of large segments of the Muslim population and therefore its likely impact on real societal factors. In discussing religious doctrine, it is important to underline that in the historical context of early Islam, the status of women generally — and poor women specifically — significantly improved in the early period, compared to the pre-Islamic times.¹⁰

Studying the tradition for various injunctions and applications of such injunctions should therefore not be divorced from the historical context, namely, the specificities of the societies in which the injunctions were being applied. Thus Islam imposed a considerable limit on polygamy compared with what had prevailed in pre-Islamic times.¹¹ Rights of property were assured and legal rights were significantly expanded.¹²

What the present interpretation of doctrine in a rapidly changing world should be depends on the reading of learned scholars and jurists. Al-Shafi'i, one of the greatest jurists of all time, applied the same legislation differently in Cairo than in Baghdad. When asked why, he said that what is applicable in Cairo is not applicable in Baghdad, and what is applicable today is not applicable tomorrow.¹³ Arguably his ruling would also differ now a thousand years after that statement and would differ if he were making rulings for a Muslim community in France or one in Indonesia. Within Egypt itself, from the rulings of al-Shafi'i in the tenth century A.D. to those of Muhammad Abduh, the Mufti in Egypt at the end of the nineteenth century, one can also see important differences. Thus Muhammad Abduh in a published opinion wrote that it was within the power of the state to limit polygamy under an Islamic rule.¹⁴

What makes that particular statement by such an eminent authority of great importance is that it was not a decision rendered under pressure from a state that wanted to move in that direction. It was a volunteered position moving against prevailing official opinion, and therefore did not constitute an *ex post facto* rationalization of a societal condition. It was the thoughtful reading of both text and precedent and the realistic understanding of a changing society by a scholar of rare insight and distinction.

Even in civic and political leadership, areas in which women are considered to be most marginalized in Muslim societies, there is evidence that there is little that is inherently Islamic in the barriers

women confront. Thus, even in the medieval period, a few women of exceptional character were able to rule Muslim states, like Sultana Radia in Delhi (1236 A.D.) and Shajarat al-Durr in Cairo (1250 A.D.). In the second half of the seventeenth century one could note four Indonesian women rulers.¹⁵ And recently in Pakistan, Mrs. Benazir Bhutto became the first elected woman prime minister in a Muslim country.

More broadly, Muslim women have carried their share in national struggles, occasionally bearing arms (from documented cases in Iran at the beginning of the century to Libyan women serving in the Libyan army today), but more frequently participating in organized political activity against colonialism and occupation forces.

Thus, the historical record does not support the view that the rigid limitations imposed on the role of women in some Muslim societies are in any way norms applicable throughout Muslim civilization over time. There is indeed a body of opinion that would define the special role of women from the premise of fundamental human rights and equality inherent in the Islamic belief in the liberation of all mankind. Using a derivative approach, it would seek amendments to that body of rights and not start from an *a priori* position on the status and the role of women.¹⁶

Divergences and Trends

Looking at the Muslim societies today, there is tremendous variability in social practice between the societies of Tunisia and Niger, between Turkey and Saudi Arabia, and between Pakistan and Indonesia. This variability in social practices translates into different societal roles for women and for the contextual framework within which women's views of self and societies are defined.¹⁷ It is important therefore to clarify which society is being discussed.

This is not to deny that there is a common thread that defines the Muslim societies of the world, but to recognize that there are significant differences among the individual members of this collective family. Indeed, one of the unique features of the organizing principles of Islam is "unity in diversity", which is no less than the national motto of Indonesia. Even within a given Muslim country, there are significant differences among subsocieties. Nomadic, rural, and urban populations tend to be quite different in terms of social organization, role differentiation, and patterns of interaction.

This vast mosaic, complex as it is, is made even more complex by constant and rapid change. An explosion of technology, global communications, population movements, and new economic structures are transforming societies everywhere. Women's access to education and jobs is rapidly expanding. The extended family is rapidly shrinking. The very fabric of society is changing as the links and the boundaries between the spiritual and the materialistic, the sacred and the profane, the modern and the traditional, are

being redefined in myriad ways. In fact, even in Saudi Arabia, arguably the most conservative Muslim society, a distinguished Saudi female scholar, Dr. Soraya al-Turki, after detailed investigation and documentation, has concluded: "If we look at... developments as stages, we can see that patterns once viewed as religiously sinful have become not sinful nor even shameful from a social point of view but, in fact, acceptable."¹⁸

Changing Conditions and Roles

These changes are accompanied by changes in the contributions women are making in Muslim societies everywhere. Indeed, and even though the role of Muslim women in reproduction or as mothers is common knowledge, *their role in production has been frequently overlooked*. Muslim women, more than Muslim men, followed the teaching of al-Shafi'i. Illustrations of their changing roles according to their changing conditions can be found everywhere. In Mauritania women are active in the fisheries industry. In mixed-gender institutions of such countries as Egypt, Tunisia, and Iraq, Muslim women are law professors, engineers, and nuclear physicists. Women brokers and entrepreneurs have their own activities serving other women in Saudi Arabia, and Saudi women in the West can be found at the most prestigious universities and in professional institutions, all in mixed-gender environments. Women are found at all levels in the Muslim world: in the media, in some cases in politics, and in some areas of the judiciary.

The special case of the Muslim communities living in the West needs to be studied separately because of the complexity of the place of women in what is perceived as a nonprotective environment or an unsafe place. But what can be said here in this limited space is that Muslim women living in the West are as active as their non-Muslim counterparts, whether inside or outside their homes, depending on their socio-economic class or their level of education. Nevertheless, Muslim women in the West have to deal with the challenges and problems related to their Muslim identity in the society of adoption.

2. The Architectural and Urbanistic Dimensions

The role and contributions of women as articulators of space and creators of an architectural vocabulary specific to their societies are occasionally formal, but mostly informal. Although the number of women architects is rising rapidly in countries such as Turkey and Egypt,¹⁹ the profession is still mainly dominated by males.²⁰ This is a worldwide phenomenon as documented in Clare Lorenz's recent book, *Women in Architecture*.²¹ It is therefore more appropriate to look separately at women's contributions to the articulation of space when it comes from practising architects. It is the experience

accumulated through practising in the field that will give women the opportunity to assume their role as “potential mediators” and design buildings reflecting contemporary expressions of the new needs of her fellow men and women in a changing world. Muslim women architects can then, as much as men, be part of the process of development; they can be equal partners in promoting equality and human rights, in promoting the kind of creativity which will accelerate development and ultimately will help establish a real partnership between men and women as the co-architects of Muslim society.

The Articulation of Urban Space

Two unique features of the articulation of urban space in Muslim societies set it apart from many other cultures. First, the concept of property in Islam is different from and more sophisticated than that in many other societies. It strikes a unique balance between the needs of society and the needs of individuals, and makes distinctions between ownership, control, and use.²² Second, the regulations that govern urban building in Muslim societies leave much to the discretion of people living there, especially neighbours.²³ This is a reflection of the special emphasis on the relations between neighbours, which is also a profound part of much of Muslim religious thought and societal practice.

These two characteristics are particularly relevant to the role of women, for women are the “anchor” of the family unit, which is the building block of all societal interaction. In that context they have had much to say about the actual use of their property and in working out “arrangements” with neighbours that have affected the overall pattern of urban space.

Returning to religious and societal aspects for a moment, one finds that the unique position of Muslim women in Muslim culture, with its emphasis on modesty and limitations on the intermixing of the sexes, results in particular patterns of “private”, “semi-private”, and “public” spaces that are quite distinct. This was illustrated in Janet Abu-Lughod’s contrasts between the urban spaces created by some Hindu and Muslim societies, even though both societies placed a heavy emphasis on modesty and on the regulation of male-female conduct in society. She states:

Why, then, would their organizations of urban space be so different? One key lies in the different definitions of modesty. In Hindu society, a maximum segregation between the sexes and hence female modesty is directed toward insulating the wife from her husband’s male relatives and most especially from her husband’s father. Therefore it is within private space (the dwelling itself) that segregation is most needed. In Islam, maximum segregation between the sexes is required outside the kin group, i.e. vis-à-vis strangers. Private space is safe and secure.

Public space is completely unsafe and must be eschewed by females. And the “social invention” of what I have called semi-private space is an attempt to create a protected area outside the dwelling unit itself within which kin-like responsibilities (and freedom) govern.²⁴

The Societal Impact on Architecture

From the societal segregation of women comes specific challenges to the designers’ talents. One remarkable case worth mentioning is the original design by the late Fazlur Rahman Khan of S.O.M. for the Mecca Campus of King Abdul Aziz University.

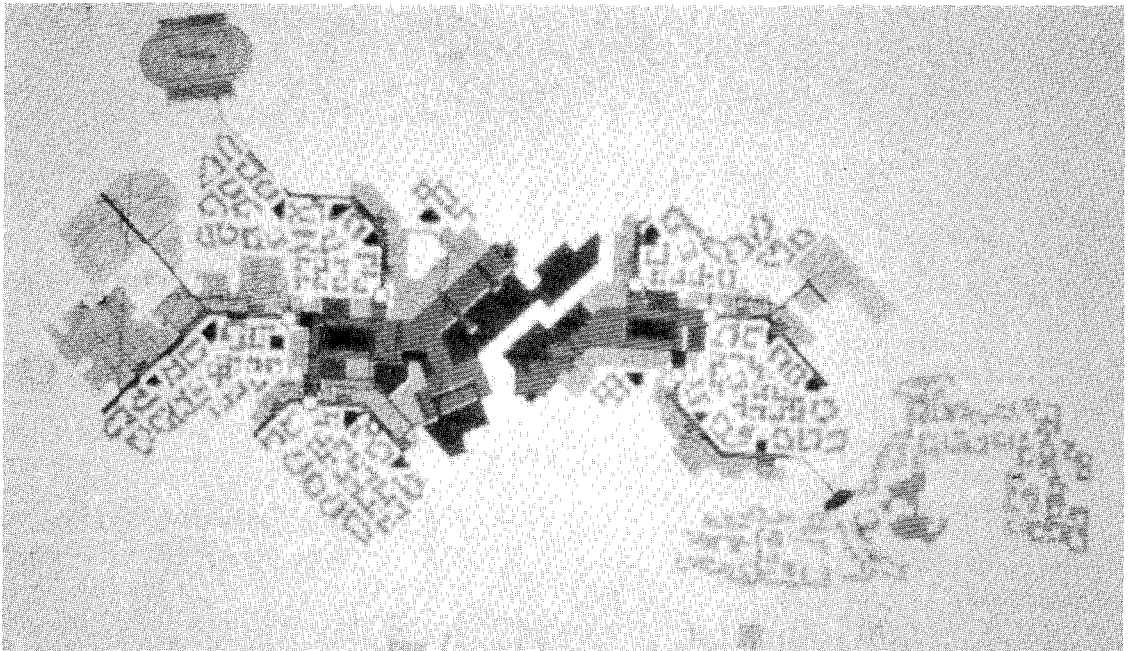
Though never built, this design has been published and very widely discussed among concerned professionals. It is hailed as one of the most sensitive designs ever done for that sort of problem. From working with the site, to attention to climate, to social features, nothing was left unstudied. One feature concerns us here. Respecting current societal preferences, the programme called for two separate campuses, one for men and the other for women. The design provides this complete segregation, with completely separate entrances. But conditions and attitudes change. What if the entire complex (both campuses) were to be turned over to one of the two sexes, or what if one day it were to become a co-educational facility? The design, by abutting the administrative complexes and the libraries of both campuses, facilitates the eventual linking of the two campuses.

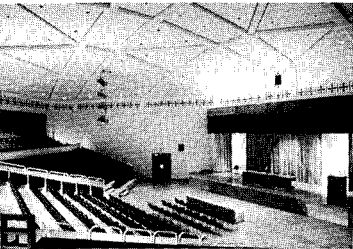
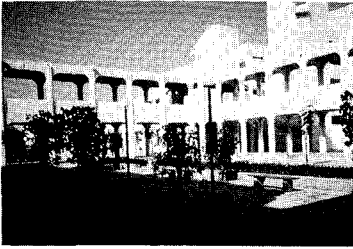
A different approach was used in Sultan Qaboos University in the Sultanate of Oman. There, separate residential facilities for men

The original design of King Abdul Aziz University’s Mecca Campus in Mecca, Saudi Arabia (the subsequent Um al-Qura University), designed by the late Fazlur Rahman Khan of S.O.M. showed great sensitivity to site and locale and to the need to segregate the women’s campus from the men’s. But the architect’s design allowed for integrating the two campuses into a single one at some future date around a core administrative and library building complex.

Architect: the late Fazlur Rahman Khan of S.O.M.

Photograph: Courtesy of S O.M.





*The Sultan Qaboos University in Oman segregates residential facilities (top) but allows common teaching areas (above).
Architect: YRM International
Photograph: Courtesy of the architect*

and women were connected by independent corridors and staircases to common classrooms, where students attend in patterns of seating that allow separation of sexes.

Yet the societal segregation of women in Muslim societies is not absolute. Women, as potential objects of desire, are to be shielded from the gaze of strange men. Women are permitted to see the men in question, provided they are not seen themselves. This particular definition of privacy has produced the quintessentially Middle Eastern device of the *musharabiyya*. Popularly regarded as a symbol of segregation and exclusion of women from public life, the *musharabiyya* permits women at the same time to see but not to be seen.

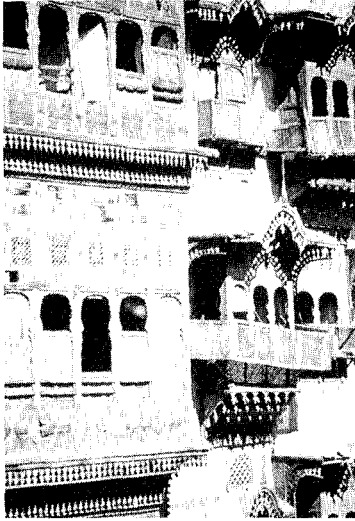
In different ways this same logic is found in the articulation of religious and secular space. In religious space, women's prayer places in congregational mosques are not just separated from the men, but are put behind, or in a mezzanine, or to the side, where they are not visible, but where they can still see the male worshippers and the imam.

Traditional dress also hides women's features, but not men's. Even though many Muslim societies do not adopt the veil for women, most still demand that their body be well clad. Not only are men's facial features always visible, but in many societies nudity of the male torso is fully acceptable. One can make a case based on the history and evolution of traditional dress of Muslim women to underline the fact that the veil symbolized different economic, social, and political statements since the early days of Islam.

Residential architecture is the area in which women are assumed to have the most influence. Certainly interior decoration is conceded to be a domain where women's contributions have had a marked and decisive effect. In many Muslim countries, the decorative and the architectonic are interwoven into an inseparable whole. Village residential architecture in North Africa, for example, complements simple exteriors with elaborate interior decoration (e.g., Ghadames, Libya, documented by Intisar Azouz).

Traditional values also have an impact upon the articulation of residential space. Despite the immense architectural differences between the Malay house and the North African house, they still share in common the notion of a large central room or space (e.g., courtyard) that articulates the distribution of other rooms or spaces, with a private area to which the women can repair. The differences arise mostly in the relative strength of the segregating partitioning, and the presence or absence of the semi-private space within the house.

Yet these societal practices are changing. Reduction of the extended family concept to the adoption of the nuclear family, women's increasing participation in formal employment, and the decline of fertility, along with rising congestion and land values in cities, are all increasingly changing the pattern of residences towards more



The musharabiyya, that quintessentially Middle Eastern device, symbolizes the unique place of women in Arab Muslim society. It provides protection whereby women may see but cannot be seen.
Photograph: AKAAs Archives

apartments. These, in turn, are increasingly laid out in more conventional Western fashion.

The direct link between the changing roles of women and families on the one hand, and of residential architecture on the other, is also demonstrated by the case of the Minangkabau who traditionally were a matriarchal society. Enormous houses sheltering an entire clan are disappearing as many younger women are attracted to a different lifestyle and leaving the village.²⁵

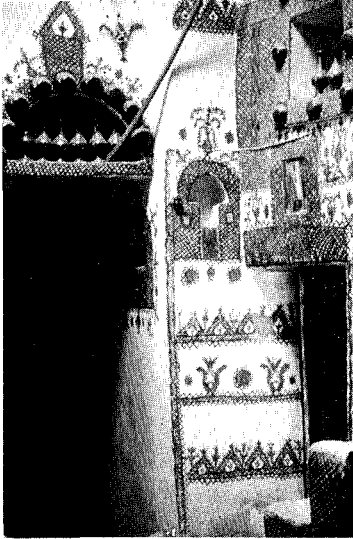
But, in the rapidly changing societies of the Muslim world, women's roles, although changing, still revolve around a core of feminine functions as daughter, wife, and mother. Their participation in religious as opposed to spiritual life is still governed by societal rituals of birth, marriage, death, and mourning. Indeed, some social scientists have argued that rituals such as weddings and funerals provide unique insights into a society. Some fascinating studies have been undertaken along these lines.²⁶ Such rituals "in all societies are rich in symbolism and the signs through which one can understand the broader aspects of that society".²⁷

Women as Practitioners

The societal role of Muslim women varies tremendously from country to country. Some countries have questioned the appropriateness of women taking on professional careers outside the home. This view, however, has ceased to carry weight in most Muslim societies, and women are found making their contributions to practically all the professions.²⁸ Women professionals have tended to be confronted by a wide range of covert and overt barriers, in Muslim as well as in non-Muslim societies.²⁹

Women architects have fared no differently from women in other professions. Their outstanding output,³⁰ from the early pioneers to the many thousands of practising architects today, provides testimony to their abilities. Most would choose to be judged as architects, not as women architects.³¹ Their work, however, deserves special recognition because they have had to overcome many societal hurdles to participate fully in the profession.³² Without question, they have demonstrated ability to perform as effectively as their male peers and to bring to bear their sensibility and talent on a wide range of problems, achieving outstanding results. Among the achievements worthy of mention here is Malene Bjorn's Kuwait Water Towers, winner of the 1980 Aga Khan Award for Architecture.³³ No less interesting is the work of many notable Muslim women practitioners.

Yasmeen Lari of Pakistan has not only been president of the Pakistani Architects Association, but has also built sensitive housing schemes for the poor, such as the Anguri Bagh Housing Project. Rawia Fadel, who launched the first architecture programme for women in Saudi Arabia,³⁴ is now the key architect in Egypt's government school-building programme. Zaha Hadid, of Iraq, is



Elaborate internal decoration combines with the architectonic features to produce the unique environment of this home in Ghadames, Libya. Women have a major role as the “anchors” of the family unit in the internal residential space.
Photograph: I. Azouz

at the forefront of current world thinking in architecture with her award-winning deconstructivist work for The Peak in Hong Kong.³⁵

Fawizah Kamal is struggling with the definition of an authentic regionalism in Malaysia, and her project for an Islamic centre deserves special mention given the theme of this conference. The Balai Islam, linked to the campus in Penang, Malaysia, is to be a centre of teaching, learning, and spiritual development. It was designed³⁶ inter alia to:

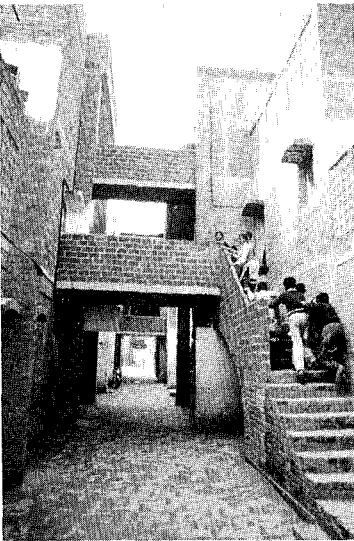
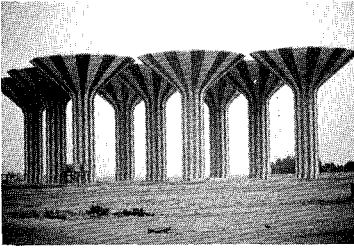
- Provide a training centre and spiritual guidance centre for students who will become future leaders of the country;
- Encourage the campus society, including non-Muslims, to be aware of the principles and activities of Islam;
- Provide a meeting-place for congregational prayers, religious teaching, and seminars;
- Be a motivating factor and a symbol of Islamic activities in the region;
- Act as a centre for books, pamphlets, and documents relating to Islamic studies.

The main block of the complex consists of a prayer hall which can accommodate 1,200 men and 800 women (males on the ground floor and females on the mezzanine floor), an ablution area, and shoe storage facilities. Total area of the ground floor is 18,000 square feet (1672.2 square metres). There are also six other blocks of 1,200 square feet (111.48 square metres) each. One has a small prayer hall and ablution area for the deceased (*tempat sembahyang mayat*). Another consists of a food preparation area, rest room/lounge, and imam's room. The other blocks include seminar rooms and the library.

3. For a Gender-Sensitive Architectural Criticism

Lack of attention to the needs of any particular group is usually made easier by the invisibility of the presumed requirements of that group. Thus, until the architectural profession took to heart the needs of the handicapped, which they have done in recent years, there was nothing wrong in the eyes of most designers or critics in designing public buildings without ramps for wheelchairs or with doorways too small to let them pass through, or to have elevators without braille buttons or sound signals for indicating the movement between floors. That this was an architecture that created and organized spaces that would inherently limit the accessibility of a public building for some members of the public was not sufficiently appreciated. In fact, against that criterion some of the great buildings of this century (such as the Barcelona Pavilion of 1927) would be found lacking.

Similarly, the special needs of women and the unique contributions they bring to any society, a fortiori a Muslim society, are not sufficiently appreciated to provoke a more gender-sensitive



Water Towers (top), Kuwait, 1980 Aga Khan Award for Architecture winner, were designed by Malene Bjørn of Denmark. The design showed that a necessary facility could be a major architectural element in the cityscape. Indeed, so successful was the design that the towers have become the symbol of Kuwait. Yasmeen Lari's Anguri Bagh Housing Project (above) for the poor of Pakistan shows sensitivity to scale and materials. Photographs: M. al-Hariri/AKAA; J. Bétant/AKAA

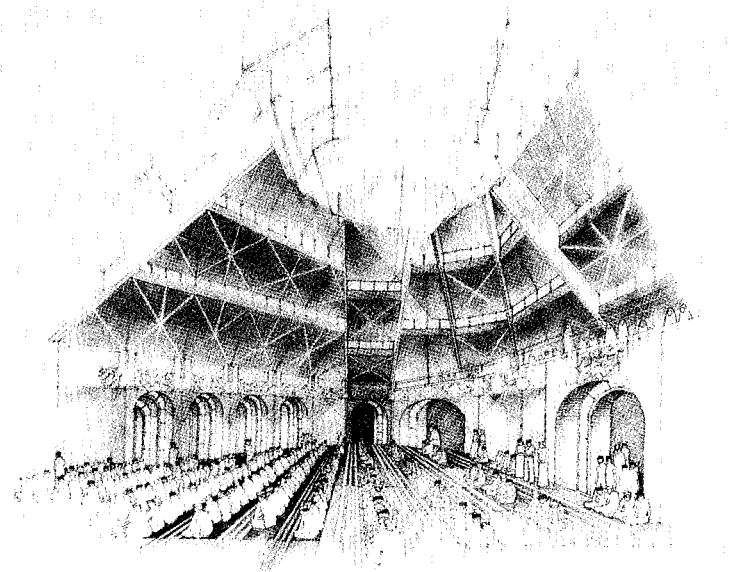
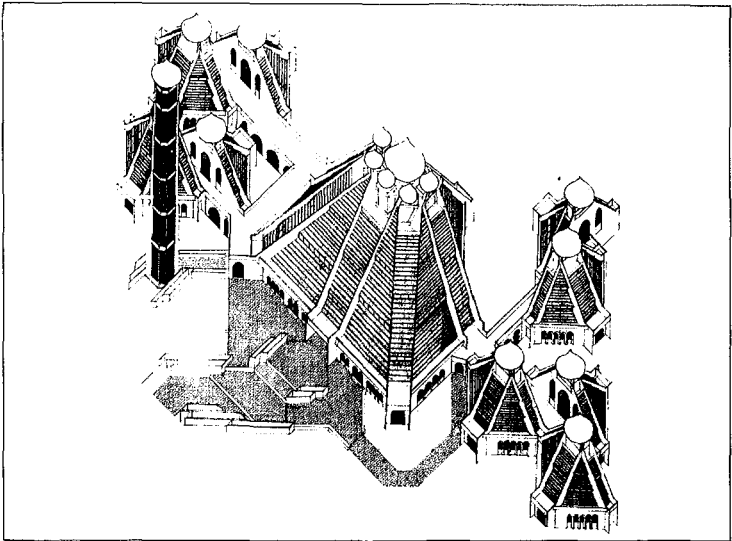
architectural criticism. The preceding discussion has shown how women's special contributions are reflected in endless ways in today's rich canvas of Muslim societies in transition. The unique dilemma of the search for cultural identity in Muslim societies, one that *risks* being stifled and trampled by an overpowering and insensitive Western mass-consumption culture, finds an echo in microcosm in the dilemma of the contemporary Muslim woman trying to define her role and contribution in a Muslim society that frequently tries to suppress her contribution as a means of asserting its own individuality, its otherness from the dominant West. This oppressive stasis is neither inherently Islamic nor is it necessarily the sole or correct reading of the tradition of the past. Much less will it be the correct path for the future of truly Muslim societies.

This is not an appeal for Muslim scholars to adopt the ideological constructs or the positions of Western feminism generally or of Western feminist art criticism specifically.³⁷ Rather, it is an appeal to broaden our own architectural criticism, which has already made its own contribution in recognizing the profound problems of cultural continuity and authenticity as important elements to assert in the face of a "historical rupture" that has torn the cultural fabric of Muslim societies. It is now pertinent to expand our concerns further and recognize the needs of women as well as their unique contributions to building society and buildings in a Muslim world in the throes of rapid change.

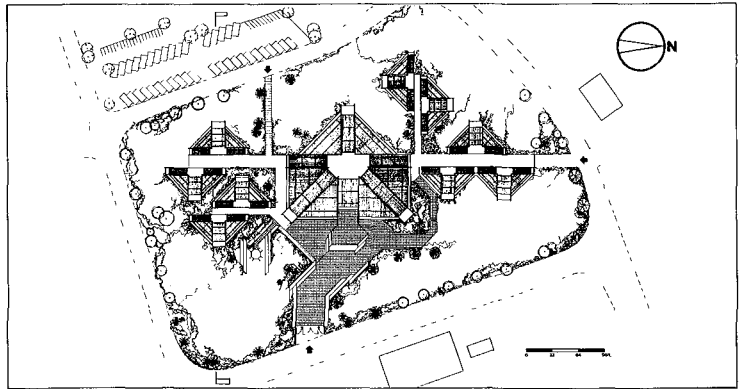
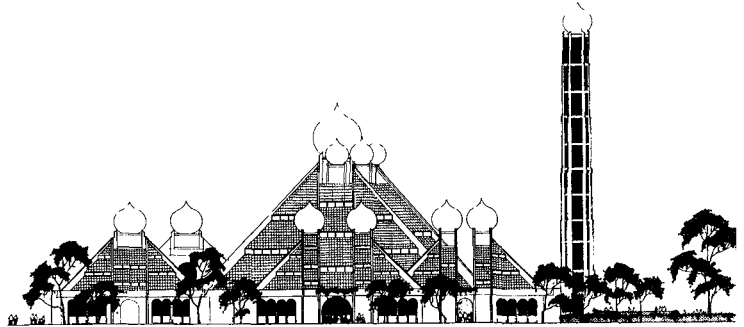
Such a gender-sensitive architectural criticism would have certain characteristics. The key to significant gender-sensitive architectural criticism is to transcend the mere recognition that women architects and women artists exist and to give them due recognition, which hitherto has been lacking. In other words, it should not just be the same old criticism with women added. What is required is to go to the heart of the present critical thinking in art and architecture and to "question the universal validity of those very myths and values and cultural assumptions that, in the past, have automatically excluded from the domain of Art the experiences of half of our population".³⁸ Or as Carol Duncan pointed out, "The value of established art thinking and how it functions as ideology must be critically analysed, not promoted anew."³⁹

This brings us fully to the heart of this seminar's subject. Architectural criticism in Muslim societies has seldom been as ideologically charged as it is when discussing the spiritual-temporal link and religious architecture specifically. Some would restrict the allowable architectural vocabulary to a few traditional elements. Others would insist that only Muslims can build mosques (a historically inaccurate statement) and discussion of the subject tends to become so ideologically charged that dialogue, so essential to expand knowledge, is severely constrained.

In bringing to the fore the need to develop gender-sensitive architectural criticism, we underline the need to bring to bear the



Fawizah Kamal's project for the Balai Islam, an Islamic centre at Penang, Malaysia, uses the traditional architectural vocabulary in simplified modern garb (both right). Noteworthy is the proportion of prayer space (800 worshippers) allowed for women, which at 67 percent of the total allowed for men (1,200 worshippers) is higher than in most mosques (left). Photographs: Mimar, 1981



modern tools of critical analysis, to deconstruct the discipline of architectural criticism itself,⁴⁰ so as to rebuild it anew, informed and enlightened by the process of critical deconstruction itself. To rebuild it with new insight that will not just be beneficial to establishing a place for women in Muslim art and architecture, not just to liberate their expressive and talented contributions as women, but to transcend feminism and through this rethinking of architectural criticism itself, to make a contribution to liberating the evolving cultures of Muslim societies. To liberate these cultures from insisting on defining themselves in the negative terms of how they must be different from the rejected Western Other, to a new position where they can define themselves in the positive terms of their own achievements and fulfilment.

Notes

1. It might be instructive here to consider a parallel that can be made between the evolution of the role of the mosque in Muslim society and that of women in Muslim society, from the simple early times to the complex and variegated present. In the beginning the mosque was not only a space for prayer; it was also the place where all important matters for the community were discussed and decided. It was a space that integrated the spiritual and the temporal. Likewise, early Islam redefined the role of women as the centre of the family, one who integrates and nurtures. The role and place of the mosque have varied from time to time and from one place to another. The form, structure, and overall appearance of the mosque have reflected a similar evolution and variation.

In a similar manner, the role and place of Muslim women have varied from place to place and over time. In the case of mosque function and appearance and in the case of women's role and place, positive and negative changes have occurred over time, the result of prevailing and changing political, social, and economic conditions, not of changes in religious doctrine or something intrinsically Islamic.

Keeping in mind that societal changes have affected even the mosque, that most important of buildings in Muslim society, the role of women as the integrating and nurturing forces of the family and as co-architects of Muslim society has been equally affected — sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse. These ideas are currently being developed in research being carried out by Afaf Mahfouz and to be published in 1992.

2. See *inter alia* Paul Collier, *Women in Development: Defining the Issues*, WPS 129 (Washington D.C.: The World Bank, 1988).

3. See The World Bank, *World Development Report, 1990*, WDR 90 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

4. See Paul Collier, *Women and Structural Adjustment* (Oxford: Oxford University, February 1989), mimeo.

5. UNICEF's work provides ample evidence of that. See UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children: 1989* (New York United Nations Children's Fund, 1989).

6. See the analyses prepared by Women's World Banking.

7. For a detailed review of the Grameen Bank experience, see Mahabub Hossain, *Credit for Alleviation of Rural Poverty: The Grameen Bank in Bangladesh*, Research Report no. 65, International Food Policy Research Institute/Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (Washington, D.C./Dhaka: February 1988). For a review of its *architectural* side, see Ismail Serageldin, *al-Tajdid wal Ta'asil fi 'Imarat al Mujtamaat al-Islamiyya* (Innovation and Authenticity in the

Architecture of Muslim Societies) (Geneva: AKAA, 1989), pp. 90-97. *Mimar* 33 (December 1989); also *Mimar* 34 (March 1990).

8. *Mimar* 33 (December 1989): 19.

9. See I. Serageldin, "Individual Identity Group Dynamics and Islamic Resurgence", in Ali E.H. Dessouki (ed.), *Islamic Resurgence in the Arab World* (New York: Praeger, 1982), pp. 54-66.

10. See *inter alia* Ma'ruf al-Dawaliby, *Wad' al-Mar'a fil Islam* (The Status of Women in Islam) (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Lubnani, 1981), and Muhammad Abu Zahra, *Tanzim al-Islam lil Mujtama'* (Islam's Organization of Society) (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-Arabi, 1975), pp. 5-14.

11. There is a vast literature on the question of polygamy in Islam, but pre-Islamic Arabia included many other forms of marriage which Islam prohibited. See *inter alia*, El-Sayid Sabeq, *Fiqh al-Sunna* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Arabi, 1971) 3rd ed., 1977, vol. 2, pp. 8-9.

12. See *inter alia* El-Sayid Sabeq, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, pp. 602-603.

13. Muhammad Abu Zahra, *al-Shafei* (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-Arabi, 1978), pp. 158-161.

14. See the full text of this *fatwa* (legal opinion) in Muhammad Imara, ed., *al-A'mal al-Kamila lil Imam Muhammad Abduh* (The Complete Works of the Imam Muhammad Abduh) (Beirut: al-Mu'assassah al-Arabiyya lil Dirasat wal Nashr, 1972), vol. 2, pp. 90-95.

15. See Fatima Mernissi, *Sultanes oubliées (Femmes chefs d'Etat en Islam)* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1990).

16. See Ismail Serageldin, "Comments", in Center for Arab Unity Studies, *Islam and Arab Nationalism* (in Arabic) (Beirut, 1981), pp. 605-610.

For a writer who takes the same derivative approach from universal human rights to the specificities of women's issues, but arrives at diametrically opposed conclusions, see Ali A.W. Wafi, *Huquq al-Insan fil Islam* (Human Rights in Islam) (Cairo: Dar Nahdat Masr, 1979).

17. For the case of Egypt, for example, see Earl L. Sullivan, *Women in Egyptian Public Life* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1987).

18. Cf. Soraya al-Turki, *Women in Saudi Arabia: Ideology and Behaviour among the Elite* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 152.

19. These women are usually expected to, and usually manage to, maintain their traditional societal roles of wife and mother, as well as their professional careers. See E.L. Sullivan, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

20. The issues facing women architects in these countries are not dissimilar to those facing their sisters in the West. See *Progressive Architecture* (March 1977), a special issue devoted to women in architecture.

21. Clare Lorenz, *Women in Architecture, a Contemporary Perspective* (New York: Rizzoli, 1990). See especially the Introduction (pp. 8-9) and the appended Statistics (pp. 143-144).

22. See Jamel Akbar, *Crisis in the Built Environment: The Case of the Muslim City* (Singapore/Leiden: Mimar Books/Concept Media/E.J. Brill, 1988), esp. pp. 17-22 and p. 202 (note 1 in chap. 1). See also his discussion of changes in the traditional forms of submission on pp. 45-46.

23. Janet Abu-Lughod observed that: "Islamic law... recognised that the misuse of urban property or the creation of a nuisance discommoded adjacent neighbours more than it adversely affected those living far from the scene. It therefore left to informal agreements between adjacent co-residents the right to mutually restrict each other's property usage in such a way that urban development would not infringe on the privacy or property rights of each other. When such agreements were lacking or unenforced, litigation was required to redress the grievance. The prevalence of cases revolving around building height and their threatened invasion of the visual privacy of a neighbour's interior court, or the number of cases of litigation over the obstruction of access to an individual dwelling by occupation of a common easement testify to the manner in which neighbours exercised control over the development of their immediate vicinity." Janet Abu-Lughod, "Contemporary Relevance of Islamic Urban Principles", in Aydin Gemen (ed.), *Islamic Architecture and Urbanism* (Dammam: King Faisal University, 1983), p. 67.

24. Janet Abu-Lughod, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-67.

25. See Jacques Dumarçay, *The House in South East Asia*, Images of Asia Series, trans. and ed. by Michael Smithies (Singapore/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). See specifically pp. 39-40, where the Minangkabau house is described, and p. 69, where the argument of the impact of social change is presented.

26. See Walter Edwards, *Modern Japan through Its Weddings: Gender, Person and Society in Ritual Portrayal* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989).

27. See F.G. Notehelfer's review of Edwards' *Modern Japan through Its Weddings: Gender, Person and Society in Ritual Portrayal*, *op. cit.*, in *The Annals* 513 (January 1991): 169.

28. Even Saudi Arabia, arguably the most conservative country in this respect, has long supported the professional role of women in the health and education sectors. In architecture, however, the International Symposium on Islamic Architecture and Urbanism recommended that women should be allowed to be fully trained professionals. The recommendation states:

By virtue of their position in the society, women have a particular and indispensable perspective of the needs of the family and its demands for the built environment. Some mechanism must be found to solicit and to integrate their knowledge and needs into planning.

Women's opinion relating to the built environment must be considered, translated into realistic specifications and incorporated in the design process. Without women social researchers and trained professionals in architecture and planning, this process will not or cannot be fully achieved.

Therefore, a comprehensive training programme at the university level should be established to prepare a cadre of women professionals who can:

Conduct studies of space utilization and family needs;

Understand the process of architectural design and city planning to translate these needs into terms useful to architects and planners; and

Participate in the decision-making process pertaining to environmental issues.

International Symposium on Islamic Architecture and Urbanism: Recommendations (Dammam: King Faisal University, Saudi Arabia, 1980), pp. 28-29. Pursuant to that resolution, a special architecture programme for girls was established at King Faisal University in Dammam. There was talk of opening a similar programme in Riyadh, but the experiment has not been continued.

29. See *inter alia* Mino Vianello and Renata Siemienska, *Gender Inequality: A Comparative Study of Discrimination and Participation* (Sage Publications, 1990), esp. pp. 122-157.

30. Among their outstanding output we must also list their contributions to architectural thinking. See *inter alia* Laleh Bakhtiar and Nader Ardalan, *A Sense of Unity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

31. See B.B. Taylor, "Women in Design", *Mimar*, no. 2 (1981): 27, the "Theme Introduction" to a special issue devoted to the work of women architects.

32. For example, see interviews with women designers in *Mimar*, no. 2, *op. cit.* Also *Progressive Architecture*, *op. cit.* (March 1977): 28-29, special issue on "Women in Architecture".
33. See Udo Kultermann, "Kuwait Tower", *Mimar*, no. 2 (1981): 40-41.
34. It is notable that her star Saudi pupils are now published in their own right. See "Mona Khalid al-Dossary and Ghada Abdul Aziz al-Mogren", in Clare Lorenz, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-29.
35. See Phillip Johnson and Mark Wigley, *Deconstructivist Architecture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1988), pp. 68-79.
36. *Mimar*, no. 2 (1981): 38-39, from whose text the description is also taken.
37. For an excellent survey article of the subject, the reader is referred to Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Mathews, "The Feminist Critique of Art History", *The Art Bulletin* 69, no. 3 (September 1987): 326-357. See especially their sections IV and V (pp. 346-357).
Showing that there are no monolithic views on the subject that excellent survey article was poorly reviewed by Casandra Langer, "Feminist Art History: Critique Critiqued", *Women Artist News* 12, nos. 5-6 (Fall/Winter 1987): 38.
For a scholarly compendium of essays, see the anthology of American work given in Norma Broude and Mary Garrard (eds.), *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany* (New York, 1982).
For a review of significant recent works, see Ellen Handy, "Women, Art, Feminism", *Arts Magazine* (May 1989): 25-31.
38. Norma Broude, in her "Review of Germaine Greer's *Obstacle Race*, Munro's *Originals* and Loeb's *Feminist Collage*", *Art Journal* 41 (1981): 182.
39. Carol Duncan, "When Greatness is a Box of Wheaties", *Art Forum* (October 1975): 64.
40. For such a consistently radical position on methodology, albeit from a narrow Western feminist perspective, refer to Griselda Pollock, "Women, Art, and Ideology: Questions for Feminist Art Historians", *Women's Art Journal* (Spring/Summer, 1983): 42-44.