## Imitation vs. Adaptation in Canadian Mosques

The Conflicts and Challenges of Purpose-Built and Repurposed Architecture

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## **Author's Declaration**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions as accepted by my examiners. I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

#### **Abstract**

In Canada, the construction of Islamic mosques has been influenced by various cultural biases, historical interpretation, and a multitude of subtle contradictions which shape the identities of the different generations of Muslims and their communities. Mosques in Canada also face various social and political challenges including discrimination and hostility towards traditional Islamic forms and the practice of gender segregation through spatial barriers. Although historically, Islamic architecture has played a significant role in impacting architectural practices and theories, and mosques have been symbolizing the diverse Muslim cultures across the world, such challenges are detrimental to the social and architectural identities of contemporary Muslims who already suffer from a controversial past in North America.

The primary objective of this thesis is to document and investigate the use, interpretation, and changing nature of mosques in Canada by analyzing them in two main categories: purposebuilt (traditional) and repurposed. I argue that the variability and polarizing nature of these two types of buildings show us that mosques and Muslims in Canada are in a state of an architectural identity crisis. For traditional purpose-built mosques, my arguments are directed specifically to their expressive exterior forms which attract social and political hostility, and their aesthetics (not always consistent with the congregation's identity) become incompatible within the landscape of Canada. The tendency of Muslims to neo-historicize exterior architectural expressions of purpose-built mosques by referencing traditional iconography, attract opposing views and prejudices in municipality meetings and in their urban settings. The practice of imitating from history also produces mosques that do not fit architecturally within their urban context and as well as discourage innovation in the field of Islamic Architecture. For mosques renovated in former storefronts, warehouses, and offices – despite the fact that their grassroots ways of adapting in such

spaces arises from a necessity – their appropriated interior spaces become unsuitable for the practice and experience of the sacred and secular rituals, and their exterior identities remain camouflaged behind the façades of their former buildings. I argue that not only do these issues shape western perceptions associated with Islamic architecture, but they also reveal the socioeconomic reality of diasporic Muslims in Canada.

Within the scope of this thesis, I also briefly raise and examine a few fundamental questions about the commonality between these two contrasting types of mosques: they both practice gender and other social segregation methods reflected in their architectural and symbolic expressions. Debates on the nature of inclusion and agency of women, as well as youth and converts, raises several perspectives on how diasporic Muslims refuse to relinquish their customary ways of practicing their faith, even in the land of diversity and multiculturalism, in the 21st century. Several projects such as the birth of the first Women's Mosque of Canada in Toronto or the documentary film "Me and the Mosque" by Zarqa Nawaz, have challenged the common practice of the separation of men and women in prayer spaces. Moreover, these projects show that reform is needed both socially and in the spatial configurations of mosques in order to create a more diverse culture within the congregations.

Furthermore, I will also explore some of the ways in which the Muslim communities and architects can reimagine the formal and cultural expressions of Canadian mosque architecture with John Renard's notion of the communitarian, didactic and experiential in sacred spaces.

Additionally, in order to further ground my arguments, I will be analyzing five case studies of contemporary mosques located in various cities in Canada. Lastly, in this research, I present three case studies of repurposed mosques at various scales located in the neighborhoods of Scarborough and East York in the Greater Toronto Area. The former structures of the mosques include, a

suburban house, a storefront and a warehouse. I investigate how their vernacular forms respond, either effectively or ineffectively, to the needs of their congregation, their religious practices and traditions, cultural expressions and other secular programs in the buildings. Finally, I respond to some of the examined challenges and issues presented in this thesis by proposing an architectural intervention in each of the three repurposed mosques. The interventions reflect and edify the mosques' liturgical activities of worship, the multifunctional secular programs, social inclusivity, and offer a method to uphold the cultural identities of Muslims in the contemporary societies of Canada.

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## **Introduction**

#### A Problem of Form and Function

A new mosque would not only lead to traffic and noise issues but it would also lead to "rape, villainy, and destruction of Canadian values" – these were the type of claims which Mayor Bonnie Crombie of Mississauga had to fight against at a 2015 City Council meeting for a new mosque proposal. Several mosques in recent times have also encountered bruising opposition from the public, where cultural and political resistance are often disguised as potential increase in traffic volume and parking requirements. Since the early twentieth century, the mosque has been one of the most visible markers of Islam in the West. As a distinct and historic structure, the mosque is central to Muslim religious and cultural life in Canada and occupies a critical place in the practice and propagation of Islam. Serving more than 3.2 percent of Canada's population, the mosque is an important cultural institution, a place for worship, solace, and religious instruction. Canadian mosques have also become places where Muslims can gather and engage in non-religious services and activities such as daycare, job networking, gym and Friday school for youth. However, considering that many of these mosques exist within hostile environments, along with the economic and sociocultural struggles of diasporic Muslims, the mosque is becoming a difficult platform for them to represent their culture and religion both architecturally and socially.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Royson James, "Crombie and Council Spurn Prejudice in Fight over Mississauga Mosque," *Toronto Star*, October 14, 2015, https://www.thestar.com/news/city\_hall/2015/10/14/crombie-and-council-spurn-prejudice-in-fight-over-mississauga-mosque-james.html.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Mohammad Qadeer and Maghfoor Chaudhry, "The Planning System and the Development of Mosques in the Greater Toronto Area," *Vancouver Island University 40*, no. 2 (February 2000): 18, https://viurrspace.ca/handle/10613/6518.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Statistics Canada, "Canada Day... by the Numbers," *Statistics Canada*, June 19, 2017, https://www.statcan.gc.ca/eng/dai/smr08/2017/smr08\_219\_2017.

Purpose-built mosques with their overtly traditional Islamic architecture induce angry sentiments from those who are unaccustomed to their aesthetics, historical and religious significance. Furthermore, their architectural forms attempt to directly replicate from historical models, such as implementing domes, minarets and arabesque, for the sake of memory and identity. Not only does this receive opposing views from non-Muslims, it also generates conflicting opinions amongst Muslims themselves. However, the foregoing instances of conflicts at the city council meetings are not the only struggles that Muslims experience; repurposed mosques adapted in various existing structures also reflect the deprived socio-economic realities of the diasporic Muslim communities in the country. Representing the bulk of Islamic spaces in North America,<sup>5</sup> repurposed mosques are constructed in properties such as, former offices, grocery stores and warehouses, that are cheaply acquired at auctions as the result of bank foreclosures or estate sales. Such mosques show the ways in which diasporic Muslims must adapt and integrate their ritual and communal spaces given their underprivileged financial situation and accessible needs. While the growth of repurposed mosques arises from the desperate needs of Muslims for functional and cost-effective spaces, the negative outcome of such mosques is their disguised exterior identity behind the facades of their former structures, and their disordered interiors which lead to unsuitable environments for prayers and other sacred rituals.

Furthermore, another important underlying issue in both types of mosques is the need for reformation in the degrading socio-political structure of the Muslim communities themselves.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Fatima Syed, "No Minaret, No Dome. A Closer Look at the Modern Mosque," The Globe and Mail, June 5, 2017, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/toronto/no-minaret-no-dome-a- closer-look-at-the-modern-mosque/article25271318/.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Omar Khalidi, "Approaches to Mosque Design in North America," in *Muslims on the Americanization Path?*, ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Hadadd and John L. Esposito (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 317.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Qadeer and Chaudhry, "The Planning System," 17.

Movements such as the first Women's Mosque of Canada and documentary films such as "Unmosqued", illustrate the segregation methods used by mosque authorities to isolate Muslim women from the men with physical architectural barriers. Muslim youth converts and multicultural worshippers also eschew traditional Islamic institutions, due to majority of the mosques being dominated by one specific ethnic group who focuses their teachings and programs towards only a certain traditional culture or a particular age group — usually the elder generation.<sup>7</sup>

The primary objective of my thesis is to document and investigate the use, interpretation, and changing nature, and as well as the external and internal socio-political challenges of mosques in Canada by analyzing them in two categories: purpose-built and repurposed. First, I will examine how purpose-built mosques straddle notions of traditional and modern architectural forms within the realities of urban, non-Islamic and often antagonistic environments. I will also be discussing the tendency of Muslims to neo-historicize their exterior architectural expressions by referencing traditional iconography in order to induce memory and the dangers that come along with it. Second, I will explore the struggles of repurposed mosques to find an appropriate architectural identity and sacrality – the quality or ability of the interior sacred spaces to evoke feelings of awe and curiosity of the spiritual world. In conjunction with these two categories, I will also briefly examine how the explicit and implicit methods of gender and ethnic segregation practiced by Muslims shape the architecture of the mosque and the perceptions of women, youth and future generations of Muslims towards Islam as a religion.

In order to respond to some of these problems, I will be analyzing specific contemporary precedents of Islamic sacred spaces; their formal expressions evoking a phenomenological experience of the sacred to its worshippers and their strategies in upholding a sense of identity and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Ahmed Eid, "Unmosqued," Film (Unmosquedfilm, 2014).

belonging in their sites. I will also be discussing the notion of the numinous and the meaning of sacred spaces studied by Rudolf Otto, and as well as other theorists and architects such as Douglas Hoffman, Paul Goldberger and John Renard. Lastly, within the scope of this thesis, I will present a set of design interventions in three repurposed mosques at various scales located in Scarborough and East York in the Greater Toronto Area – a site chosen due to its increasing growth of immigrant Muslim population and its popularity for Islamic mosques.<sup>8</sup> Although both types of mosques are important in understanding the western Islamic world, analyzing and designing the repurposed spaces is fitting for this thesis as they possess a broader depth in their scale, functions, temporality, and community.

My overall intention with this thesis is to identify and examine some of the definite and subtle challenges surrounding Muslim communities and their sacred spaces and offer certain design strategies to respond to some of these problems. Apart from examining mosques, this thesis will also raise questions that are significant to the general discourse of Islamic architecture in the West: How can a religious institution, such as the Islamic Mosque, communicate its mission and values to an increasingly secular and antagonistic society? What is the value of architectural beauty and historical memory in purpose-built and repurposed mosques and how can it be represented in today's culture? How can architectural design encourage inclusivity instead of segregation? How can a mosque be designed to represent a sense of identity and belonging?

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Sandeep Kumar Agrawal, "Faith-Based Ethnic Residential Communities and Neighbourliness in Canada," *Planning Practice and Research 23*, no. 1 (February 2008): 41–56, https://doi.org/10.1080/02697450802076431.

### Chapter One: Building Islam in the West

#### The Dynamic Historical Framework of the "Islamic Style"

In his 2004 essay, "Islamic Architecture as a Field of Historical Enquiry", Nasser Rabbat points out that until recently, Islamic architecture has been "among the least theoretically developed areas of enquiry in the field of architecture." Many of the pioneering historians, architects, artists and draftsmen in the field were of European descent whose historical research and studies were woven into the fabric of European knowledge of Islam. Most of the early developments in the studies came when students of Islamic architecture were involved in collecting, processing and interpreting data on all aspects of culture and society in the Islamic Orient. In search of adventure and possibilities for financial gain, they measured and recorded ruins and sacred spaces in cities sites such as Spain, Western Turkey, the Holy Land, and Egypt, and illustrated their studies using all sorts of techniques from free hand sketches to exact camera lucida projections. Impressive catalogs of these buildings, singular monuments, architectural and ornamental details were produced, and eventually were introduced to Europe and the dominant classes in the Orient itself - the rich Islamic architectural heritage that was previously almost totally unknown. However, despite their erudite and prodigious output, most early students were neither equipped to, nor interested in, exploring and communicating the substantial intracultural variety within Islamic architecture, nor its conscious interaction with the architecture of other cultures, past and present. 10 Instead, they framed Islamic architecture as an exclusive and intolerant tradition that began with the first Mosque in Islam by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in

<sup>9</sup> Nasser Rabbat, "Islamic Architecture as a Field of Historical Enquiry," Architectural Design 74, no. 6 (2004): 18.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Nasser Rabbat, "Toward a Critical Historiography of Islamic Architecture," *Repenser Les Limites: L'architecture à Travers l'espace, Le Temps et Les Disciplines*, 2005, https://doi.org/10.4000/books.inha.642.

Medina around AD 620, and inexplicably died out with the dawn of the colonial age in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>11</sup>

Accordingly, Islamic architecture with its rich cultural heritage and fruitful interaction with medieval Middle East, Europe and the Crusades, has been merely reduced to a set of common characterizations – "static, sensual and ornamental." Similarly, categorizing Islamic architecture after the Western stylistic sequence – Classical, Medieval or Baroque – has subjected the development of Islamic architecture to the same rhythm of those architectural traditions, even though they only overlapped intermittently throughout history. Although dynastic changes have influenced the growth of Islamic Architecture in specific geographical areas, such as Umayyad or Seljuk architecture, other decisive forces such as, massive population movements, theological and spiritual breakthroughs, artistic, structural and technological innovations, had a more deeper effect on Islamic Architecture than mere dynastic change. <sup>13</sup>

Rabbat points out that in order to enrich both the discipline and practice of architecture in the Islamic world and beyond, the multicultural quality of Islamic architecture must be explored. As with all architectural traditions, there is no single model or unique cultural reference as the sole inspiration behind any of the famous examples of Islamic Architecture. Instead, he explains,

"Different tensions were at work. The people and groups concerned seem to have adopted, borrowed, resurrected and invented at every stage, and then reapplied the new creative process to the next work. The buildings they constructed reflected these choices in their forms, spaces and techniques, but also exhibited a relative stability of their intentions and goals. They referred to multifarious cultures, traditions, ideals and

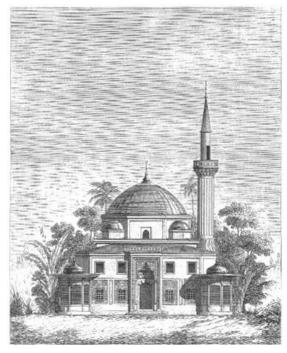
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Rabbat, "Islamic Architecture as a Field of Historical Enquiry," 18-19.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Ibid, 19.

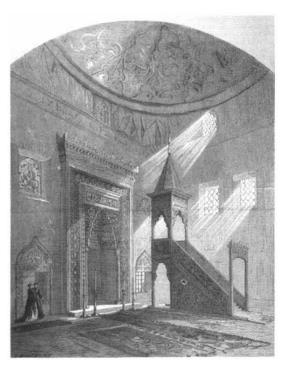
<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 20.

images which their patrons, designers and builders considered suitable, representative or desirable, for themselves and for their cultures."<sup>14</sup>

To begin to critically understand contemporary Islamic architecture in relation to its historical significance, the study of its material, conceptual, social or religious context must be combined with the emergence and evolution of the variegated architectural and cultural traditions that we call Islamic. Studying the idiosyncratic ways in which the mosque serves and represents its communities' functions and identities, and their socioeconomic realities in the west, offers a solid framework to consider how an open-ended search for novel architectural expressions with a vibrant historical self-consciousness has endowed Islamic Architecture.



**Fig 1.1:** Parvillée's Depiction of a Mosque's Exterior in Bursa (Léon Parvillée, Facade of the Mosque, 1867, Drawing, 1867, Paris, Gazette des Architectes et du Bâtiment.)



**Fig 1.2:** Parvillée's Depiction of a Mosque's Interior in Bursa (Léon Parvillée, Interior View of the Mosque, 1867, Drawing, 1867, Paris, L'Exposition universelle)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Rabbat, "Islamic Architecture as a Field of Historical Enquiry," 21.

#### Islam in Canadian History

We know that Islamic architectural history has been vast in terms of styles, time spans, and uses. Yet in the contemporary world, it is mostly restricted to its monumental and dynastic built environments that dominate Muslim societies, partly due to its Orientalist origins. Although such traditional architectural styles and culture are important for understanding the dynamic history of the Islamic world, an emphasis on the production of mosque architecture and its influence on a number of buildings in the context of North America, provides a multivariant understanding of how Islamic architecture is produced outside of countries with Muslim-majority populations. Some of the examples studied in this chapter and the next, will explore the continued marginalization and exclusion of Muslim populations from the public sphere in the West, and how this can further influence the false conception and perception that Islamic architecture is unconnected to Canadian architectural history.

Just as the limited knowledge brought in by the other early European researchers in the field, very little has been documented or discussed about the history of nearly a century of Muslim contribution to the construction of mosques affecting the growth of Canadian urban and suburban cities and neighborhoods. Few contemporary social and architectural historians have studied the subject of Islamic Architecture in the West such as, Tammy Gaber's "Beyond the Divide: Women's Spaces in Canadian Mosques" (2014), Christian Welzbacher's "Euro Islam Architecture: New Mosques in the West" (2008), Nadia Kurd's dissertation "Competing Visions, Common Forms" (2013), Omar Khalidi's essay "Approaches to Mosque Design in North America" (1998), Akel Ismail Kahera's "Deconstructing the American Mosque" (2002), and Barbara Daly Metcalf's "Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe" (1996). Each of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Rabbat, "Islamic Architecture as a Field of Historical Enquiry," 23.

these studies illustrate the short but complex Islamic culture in the West, along with several case studies which synthesize the Islamic and Western architectural histories. However, comprehensive links between the two most dominant types of mosques in the country – purpose-built and repurposed – and their interconnected relationships with Canadian Muslim communities, including their gender roles, have largely remained understudied. This research will attempt to fill some of the gap in the studies of contemporary mosques by documenting and providing a range of architectural examples and responding to some of the issues through design proposals.

Given the heterogeneity of Muslims in Canada, the intra- and extra-cultural influence on mosques are at one of its strongest when it comes to understanding the dynamic cultural expressions of diasporic Muslims in the country. Haideh Moghissi, Saeed Rahnema, and Mark J.Goodman points out in "Diaspora by Design" (2009), that much like the traditional definition of diaspora, the idea of Muslim diaspora is not only marked by a sense of not belonging, but also with "sociocultural marginality, racialization, and denial of access to political and economic power." The arrival and settlement of immigrant Muslims in Canada is one that continues to be characterized by an imbalance of power and an alienation with the models of democracy of the country. In order to alter a group's feeling of home, diasporic Muslims must incorporate the relations of identity, either socially or architecturally, in a foreign land such as Canada.

One of the ways in which this social and political disparity in power is evident is in the ways which Muslims throughout Canadian history have been constructing their houses of worship. In many ways only few of the historical mosques in Canada such as, the Al Rashid

<sup>16</sup> Nadia Kurd, "Competing Visions, Common Forms: The Construction of Mosque Architecture in Canada and the US" (PhD, 2013): 11.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Haideh Moghissi, Saeed Rahnema, and Mark J. Goodman, *Diaspora by Design: Muslims in Canada and Beyond* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 3-4.

Mosque and Mosque One, succeeded in reflecting Canadian values of social inclusivity and gender roles. However, their historical mark in their land was only temporary. While part of it was due to the significant population growth in the Muslim community which both positively and negatively affected the mosques, problems such as, political and social controversies (both externally and internally), were significant in shaping their development. The following case studies explores the historical significance of some of the first mosques in Canada and how they shaped their subsequent mosque construction in the country.

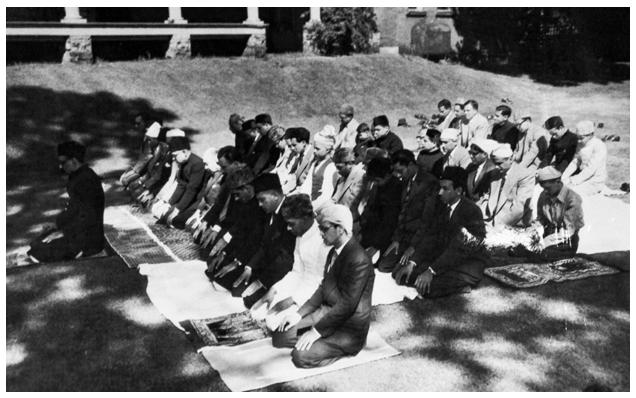


Fig 1.3: Eid Al-Fitr Celebration in Ottawa, 1953 (Photographer: Unknown, Muslim Link, "First Eid al Fitr Celebration at Pakistan High Commission," 1953, Muslim Link)

## Historical account of Purpose-Built Mosques

Case Study: Al Rashid Mosque, Edmonton

The story of the very first mosque in Canada, the Al Rashid Mosque, sums up quite well the struggles, opportunities, and political tensions affecting Muslim communities and mosque construction in the country. Established in 1938, the mosque building was the very first Islamic marker in Canada serving about 700 Muslims in its neighborhood. Along with the first Muslims arriving in the country in 1871, the need for a religious and cultural gathering space was necessary to establish the identity of the early communities. A group of Muslim women approached Mayor John Fry of Alberta for a plot of land, and eventually managed to raise the funds for the construction of the building. Other groups who supported the mosque included the Jewish and the Lebanese Christian community, composed of traders, merchants, and farmers who made up a small but important part of Alberta's social and economic fabric. 19

The architecture of the mosque was an amalgamation of the skill and knowledge of an immigrant contractor and the community's functional needs – a hybrid method which would come to represent many subsequent purpose-built mosques in North America. The building exterior featured two tall minarets and a small dome placed on top of its roof. The interior featured a simple and efficient rectangular floor layout consisting of a unified prayer space, Imam's office, a pulpit (Minbar) and a podium – all built within a matter of ten weeks. People from every community, regardless of their race, ethnic background or gender were welcomed to participate in prayers, events or lectures, and the mosque was run by local donations and charity. The

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Andrea Lorenz, "Canada's Pioneer Mosque," Saudi Aramco World 49, no. 4 (July/August 1998): 28-31,

https://web.archive.org/web/20090511014641/http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/199804/canada.s.pioneer.mosque.htm.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Kurd, "Competing Visions, Common Forms" (PhD, 2013): 27.

mosque reflected the deeper history of Muslim settlement and arrival, and for the first time marked the identity of a Muslim community in the country.<sup>20</sup>

The Al-Rashid mosque, however, was forced to move twice from its original location due to political tensions - first, due to the expansion of Victoria Composite High school on its original land, and later, due to the expansion of Royal Alexandra Hospital from its subsequent site. At this point, the Muslim community also grew very large and needed a new space to accommodate everyone, and thus they eventually built a new mosque with years' worth of help from local donations. As the city decided to demolish the original abandoned Al-Rashid mosque due to the hospital expansion, a group of women (many of them granddaughters of the founding members), decided to instead preserve the structure by moving it to Fort Edmonton park. However, further controversies arose when they discussed with the mayor about their intentions - the park officials contended that the mosque could not be considered "heritage" as it was built in 1938 which did not "fit in with Fort Edmonton's new master plan that puts its time frame between 1795 and 1928."21 What occurred in the following months was a heated public opposition against the relocation project, and among the many arguments made from people outside the Muslim community was the claim that the park should not have to accept a "historical intruder."22 After several attempts and challenges, although the group of Muslim women were successful in preserving the building at the park, many cases of their struggles and hardships are reflected in today's diasporic Muslim communities who build and maintain mosques in Canadian

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Storyhive, "Secret Edmonton: Canada's First Mosque," YouTube, September 20, 2018,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IzHSRxwOpIs.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Lorenz, "Canada's Pioneer Mosque," 28-31.

cities. The establishment of Al-Rashid mosque set the stage for future mosques for the growing number of Muslims finding their new homes in Canada.



**Fig 1.4:** Al Rashid Mosque, Edmonton (Photograph: Unknown, "The History of Al Rashid Mosque," 2019, Al Rashid Mosque)

#### Historical account of Repurposed Mosques

Case Study: Mosque One, Toronto

As the Muslim population started growing and spreading across the country, several other major cities saw the growth of both purpose-built and repurposed mosques in their urban areas, such as the Islamic Cultural Centre in Quebec built in 1954, the Hazelwood Mosque in Manitoba in 1976, the Muslim Association of New Brunswick built in 1985, the Islamic Association of Saskatchewan built in 1989 and the Muslim Association of Newfoundland built in 1990. The diaspora of Muslims in different provinces also saw the growth of mosques in distant places such as the Midnight mosque in Northwest Territories and Masjid Iqaluit in Nunavut – the first mosques in the Canadian arctic built in 2010 and 2016 respectively.<sup>23</sup> Ontario's first mosque which was built in 1961 in Toronto in a renovated storefront, served a small, multi-ethnic community in the neighborhood. The storefront mosque was used by members from various cultures ranging from Pakistan, India, Bosnia, Albania, Turkey and Egypt. Named as Mosque One by some of the early pioneers who established the institution, they depicted a congregation where cultural diversity was tolerated, moderation was promoted, and women played a key role in fundraising and managing operations alongside the men. Besides a unified prayer area, the mosque also included a small library and a Sunday school, designed to help children to retain their cultural and religious identity.24

The interior space was humble but efficient. It obeyed the rules of a traditional mosque, where the sitting arrangement of the worshippers were oriented towards the Qibla wall; the wall

<sup>23</sup> Tammy Gaber, "A Century of Mosques Spaces in Canada," in *Canadian Identities: 150 Years of Nation Building(s) II* (SSAC/SEAC 2017: Layered Histories / Palimpsestes, Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada, 2017).

https://torontoist.com/2015/11/historicist-torontos-first-mosques/.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Jamie Bradburn, "Historicist: Toronto's First Mosques," *Torontoist*, November 21, 2015,



Fig 1.5: Mosque One, Toronto (Google Street View 2018)

facing towards the direction of Mecca. The worshippers simply used two sheets of fabric laid on the floor as their "prayer mats" and the back wall of the prayer space featured a row of chairs facing the Qibla wall for those who needed accessible seating. Images of Kaaba (the holiest site in Islam) in Mecca and palm trees were printed on rugs and hung on the walls, and dimmed lights hung from the ceiling. The Muslim community in Toronto for the first time felt proud to have a place where they could not only go to pray, but to meet and share their experience with other people from different culture and ethnicities. Alia Hogben, who is the executive director of the Canadian Council of Muslim Women and was one of the members of Mosque One during its time said, "All I remember was the excitement of having our own place. It was very cheap, a very crummy little place and dirty . . . but it was ours."

Mosque One shared a lot of similarities with Al-Rashid Mosque in the way it was founded and run by its communities. However, its demise was caused due to internal social controversies which included disagreements between its leaders and worshippers in the mosque's elections. This also marked one of the first time in Toronto's history when a Muslim congregation divided to form their own ethnic mosques.<sup>27</sup> Since then, many other subsequent mosques and their congregation to this day practice methods of preaching which enable segregation and discourage diverse communities. Such controversies were not unique to Mosque One, as Muslim communities are still suffering from the varied internal socio-political and cultural clashes.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Tendisai Cromwell and Fatima Altaf, "Mosque One: Home of Toronto's First Muslims," Video, *YouTube*, April 4, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vm6OaXwGM8k.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Bradburn, "Historicist" 2015.

Case Study: Jami Mosque and Bosnian Islamic Centre (purpose-built), Toronto

A number of Balkan Muslims from the Mosque One community separated and renovated a church into the Jami Mosque in the High Park neighborhood. That same year, the Bosnian members from the same group divided and went on to form the Bosnian Islamic Centre which was a distinctly ethno-religious Mosque compared to the Jami Mosque. Later, other groups such as the Albanians, the Turks, and Gujarati Muslims disassociated and formed their own respective mosques, each catering to their own people either with their distinct architectural style, social events, or explicit labels.<sup>28</sup> However, the congregation at Jami Mosque always maintained their practice of inclusivity in their social sphere. Amjed Syed, the administrator of Jami Mosque, said, "We've never had a label on our mosque ... Our policy from day one has been to keep our doors open to the public. That is the beauty of this place." Yet, the divisions within the Muslim communities and other mosques catering towards particular ethnic groups soon affected the attendance of Jami Mosque as it saw its number fall considerably in recent years.<sup>29</sup>

As with the majority of repurposed mosques, minimal modifications were carried out in the renovation of Jami Mosque. Most of the exterior church structure was retained except for the addition of a calligraphic symbol on the gable spelling the name of God. In the interior, one of the long walls in the rectangular structure that faced Mecca was assigned as the Qibla wall and the former longitudinal axis of the church was shifted laterally to direct the prayer direction of the worshippers. Being the most important wall in any mosque, the Qibla wall featured two significant symbolic elements in Islamic culture: the Mihrab – a niche on the qibla wall marking

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Muhammad Khalid Masud, Travellers in Faith: Studies of the Tablīghī Jama at as a Transnational Islamic Movement for Faith Renewal (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 227.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Tom G. Kernaghan, "Jami Mosque Served Changing Community," *Oak Writer*, May 18, 2016, http://oakwriter.com/project/jami-mosque-served-changing-community/.

the axis to Mecca, and the Minbar – a pulpit where the prayer leader stands and deliver sermons (see chapter two for more). The gothic style windows of the Qibla wall also brought in natural light in the interior prayer space and illuminated the wall to make it distinct from the other structures.

Like the other Balkan Muslims, the Bosnians also purchased an unused church but unlike the Jami Mosque, they demolished it to build a new mosque which featured a minaret. The brick cladded mosque featured windows that were partially decorated with Islamic arabesque, while the interior featured a decorated wooden Mihrab and Minbar, bookshelves, and a simple carpeted floor. From the decorations of the Islamic elements, the style of the windows and the grand chandeliers, to the ornamental shape of the massive pencil minaret, the mosque upheld an image that was reminiscent of an Osmanic appearance.<sup>30</sup> Other than facilitating regular prayers, the Bosnian mosque also offered various other services geared towards Bosnian Muslims such as marriage counselling, educational programs, and cultural events.

In all three preceding cases of mosques, it is evident that individual groups needed to have their own distinct ways of expressing their culture in their religious spaces, even though they had the same religion, worshipped the same God, and even belonged in the same community at one-point. In purpose-built mosques, as in the case of the Al-Rashid Mosque and the Bosnian Islamic Centre, it is primarily through the exteriors of these mosques that visual distinctions from other religious institutions were evoked such as the implementation of domes and minarets. In repurposed buildings, as in the case of Mosque One, Muslims found more liberty in constructing the interior prayer spaces to their liking with the nuanced approaches. However, expressing one's

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> The minaret was built right outside of the main structure. Its tall and slender shape with a pointed cone at the top could be seen as a reference to the early Ottoman Mosques of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, or other early Bosnian mosques such as Ferhadija Mosque (1579) and Gazi Husrev-beg Mosque (1530).



Fig 1.6: Jami Mosque, Toronto (Google Street View 2019)



Fig 1.7: Bosnian Islamic Centre, Etobicoke (Google Street View 2019)

culture by creating distinct and explicit ethno-religious spaces through social and symbolic means comes at the cost of segregating other diverse worshippers including the young and future generations. While the expressive architecture of the purpose-built mosques and the grassroots adaptation of the repurposed mosques made sense as an early step for the first generation of Muslims in Canada's history, one must recognize that the current society's needs are much more diverse. What many contemporary Muslim communities in Canada fail to understand is the true meaning of a mosque, its purpose and its symbolism. The value and cultural significance of a mosque within the context of Canada must come from its ability to welcome and attract a multiethnic community, and this idea must also be reflected in its architecture.

What needs to be further discussed and investigated in the study of Canadian Mosques is the relationship and influence of Islamic spaces on current and future generations of Muslims, and the need for an architectural identity and how it affects the contemporary landscape of Canada. The next chapter will discuss several contemporary issues surrounding Mosques and Muslims. Given the heterogeneous culture of Muslims and the hostility towards Islam in the West, the next section will also bring new questions into consideration: What is the meaning of a Canadian Islamic identity and how can it be established in the construction of mosques in Canada? How do both form and function come to be determined in a given location? Where did the builders, craftsmen, architects, etc., acquire the knowledge to build such structures? How is the interpretation of traditional forms to be rationalized in a modern society? Is there a specific type of contemporary religious building suited to the needs of the Canadian Muslim community?

### Chapter Two: Between Tradition and Modernity

#### The Philosophies and Symbolism of a Mosque

The idea of the Masjid (mosque) places emphasis solely on the act, time, and place of prostration. 31 Taking the fundamental religious meaning into consideration, it is important to understand that the form and embellishment of an Islamic religious space is optional. Although ornament, inscription, and architectural form have been constructed throughout history as integral aspects of the aesthetic language of a mosque, these features are essentially independent of any ritualistic demands. In fact, it is written in the Quran that, "The [whole] earth is a masjid", which can be understood as the notion of spatial form prescribed specifically for prayers only accomplishes a subordinate purpose, and therefore it is deceptive to speak of the architect as the creator of any original form or ideal enclosure.<sup>32</sup> However, the architecture of the mosque does more than just serving as a place for worshippers to pray. The mosque exists like the Arabic word ummah - which means community and the linguistic expression of Masjid in Arabic links to root words like jamaat – a congregational togetherness, and sujud which means prostration. One of the fundamental purposes of a mosque is to act as a gathering space for Muslims and their communities to represent their cultures. Apart from hosting various programs such as Friday schools, events, and gyms, the Masjid also becomes a cultural symbol in its site and the broader context. While its form may differ (as its communities around the world), the essential purpose of

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Akel Ismail Kahera, "Deconstructing the American Mosque: Space, Gender, and Aesthetics" (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 37.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Muḥammad Ibn Isma d Bukharī and Muhammad Muhsin Khan, Şaḥiḥ Al-Bukharī: *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih al-Bukhari: Arabic-English*, (Al Nabawi'ya Saudi Arabia: Dar Ahya Us-Sunnah; [Chicago, Ill, 1976) vol. 1, book 7, Hadith 331.

the mosque is to represent its communities' values and ideals, and such standards are reflected in the social, architectural, and symbolic expressions of their structures.<sup>33</sup>

A deeper dissection of the various aesthetics of a mosque reveals that several architectural forms, inscriptions and ornaments were a subsequent phenomenon which occurred due to the proliferation of architectural features that predate the history of the seminal mosque. The only mosque that can be considered "original" is the Prophet's first mosque in Medina as it laid the foundation for the elements of an Islamic space. Although fundamentally no mosque is needed for the purpose of devoting oneself to God, the Prophet constructed the first mosque of Islam as essentially a functional space without the use of ornament or inscription. The mosque hardly exhibited any attention to adornment or beautification and had the single architectural purpose of meeting domestic and devotional requirements. One of those requirements was the Qibla (orientation) of the building towards the Kaaba (Mecca). The Prophet Muhammed believed that any place of prostration, no matter how rudimentary, must retain an association with this ontological axis. A rule followed by Masjid everywhere in the world, this axis to Kaaba is the esoteric affirmation and a universal expression of belief. The Prophet dedicated an entire wall towards the direction of Mecca, and hence the Qibla wall was formed. The horizontal dispersion and structuring of worshippers across the prayer space, all facing in the same direction, also

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Barbara Daly Metcalf, "Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe," ed. Barbara Daly Metcalf (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Kahera, "Deconstructing the American Mosque" 42.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> Although the Qibla axis is often defined as the axis of prayer or the ontological axis, it is the Quranic command, "turn your face toward the Sacred Mosque" (fawalli wajhaka shatr al-Masjid il-Haram), that governs the orientation of a Muslim congregation and therefore, requires all worshippers to face the direction of the sacred site of Kaaba in Mecca. The injunction is based on; Muhammad Muhsin Khan and Muhammad Al-Hilali, trans., The Qur'an. Interpretation of the Meanings in the English Language (Riyadh: Darussalam Publishers and Distributors, 1999). Chapter 2: Verse 144, 149 and 150.

symbolized equality and modesty before God,<sup>36</sup> while its vertical dimension signified the cosmic connection to Islamic history and future seeking aspiration, such as the spiritual realm or heaven.<sup>37</sup>

Other forms of significant symbolism in a mosque also followed its own story of transformation throughout history. The Qibla wall, for instance, usually contained two important symbolic elements – the Mihrab and the Minbar – which reinforced the direction of a worshipper towards Mecca. The Mihrab, originally derived from a secular room in a house or a throne room in a palace, was formed during the reign of the Caliph Uthman ibn Affan (r. 644-656). Although in the beginning, the Mihrab was merely an Arabic sign on the Qibla wall so that pilgrims could pray in the right direction, it eventually evolved to be a niche – which came to be universally understood as an architectural focal point that marks the direction to Mecca. The Mihrab usually symbolizes an aesthetic expression in an Islamic sacred space, and this symbolism structures the worshippers to a prescribed mode of devotion.<sup>38</sup> This niche also includes a Minbar (either placed on the right or inside of the Mihrab), which is a pulpit where the Imam (prayer leader) stands to deliver sermons. The Minbar first appeared as a palm tree trunk pillar which the Prophet leaned

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> The notion of equality echoes the Quranic verse that describes community (ummah) as being "created...from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not that you may despise each other)." Functioning as a community and the act of bowing down together before God is symbolically reflected in the horizontal spatial configuration of a mosque's prayer space. See the Quranic verse at: Khan and Al-Hilali, trans., "The Qur'an. Interpretation," Chapter 49: Verse 13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> Ozayr Saloojee, "Community, Space, and Time in Islamic Architecture," *Faith and Form 51*, no. 3 (2018), https://faithandform.com/feature/community-space-and-time-in-islamic-architecture/.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Mihrab | Islamic Architecture," in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2019, https://www.britannica.com/topic/mihrab.

against to deliver his speech, and subsequent mosques eventually modified it to be a heavily decorated stepped platform.<sup>39</sup>

Islamic art such as, geometric and mathematical patterns, are also one of the significant forms of aesthetic expressions which began dominating Islamic architecture since the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The rejection of figurative images in religious spaces caused artists to explore non-figural art which, as Keith Critchlow argues, leads the viewer to an understanding of the underlying reality of spiritual life and are believed to be the bridge between the physical realm and the sacred realm when used in an Islamic sacred space. The art of mathematical shapes is derived from the patterns found in nature in which basic geometric shapes are repeated to create an array of meaningful translations. The very idea of Islamic patterns, whether they are applied to architecture, ceramics, textiles or books, is to emphasize the art of transformation. The very idea of Islamic patterns are transformation.

Similarly, other important signifiers such as the dome and minaret (which also served functional requirements) began to dominate Islamic mosques from 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> century. Domes became a major structural feature of historical mosques after first appearing in Islamic architecture in 691 with the construction of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. Although a universal understanding of the structure could be argued as symbolic association with the sky or heaven, domes were mainly used to showcase royalty in the early centuries of Islam. Minarets were

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Minbar | Islam," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, July 20, 1998, https://www.britannica.com/topic/minbar.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Keith Critchlow and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Patterns: An Analytical and Cosmological Approach* (London: Thames And Hudson, 2017).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> David Wade, "The Evolution of Style," in *Islamic Design: A Mathematical Approach* (Springer, 2017), 31–39, https://doi.org/10.1007/9783319699776\_4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Dome of the Rock | History, Architecture, & Facts," in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2019, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Dome-of-the-Rock.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Oleg Grabar, "The Islamic Dome, Some Considerations," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 22*, no. 4 (December 1, 1963): 191–98, https://doi.org/10.2307/988190.

originally used as torch-lit watchtowers and were a copy of church steeples found in Syria.

Originally the adhan (call to prayer) was broadcasted from the roof of the house of the Prophet which doubled as a place for prayer. Eventually during the times of the Umayyad Caliphate, more than being used as functional towers, the Minaret, along with the sound of the adhan itself, became a symbolic structure which signified the establishment of the community. 44

Yet, despite their deep cultural history, Oleg Grabar and Yasser Tabbaa characterizes

Islamic architectural forms as having relatively low levels of symbolism in historical eras, and that certain forms were initially highly symbolic but lost their associations over time. <sup>45</sup> In "Symbols and Signs in Islamic Architecture," Grabar argues that with the exception of the Arabic alphabet,

"there was no coherent, consistent and reasonably pan-Islamic acceptance of visually perceived symbols; there was no clearly identifiable sense, even, of forms considered to be one's own, culturally discrete. It may, therefore, be possible to propose that traditional Islamic culture identified itself through means other than visual: the sounds of the city, the call to prayer, the Word of the Revelation but not its forms, the memories of men and events ... this conclusion would suggest for the contemporary scene that it is not forms which identify Islamic culture and by extension the Muslim's perception of his architecture, but sounds, history and a mode of life."

Although one can debate whether Islamic symbolisms were historically unique to their respective culture or not, the notion of extracting meaning from experiential means, such as the sound of the adhan, the aroma of halal foods or gathering of the communities, that Grabar pointed out is precisely the identity of Islamic cultures. But in terms of architecture, the notion of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> K.A.C. Creswell, "The Evolution of the Minaret, with Special Reference to Egypt-I," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs 48*, no. 279 (1926): 290–98.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> Yasser Tabbaa, "The Muqarnas Dome: Its Origin and Meaning," Muqarnas 3 (1985): 61–74, https://doi.org/10.2307/1523084.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> Oleg Grabar, "Symbols and Signs in Islamic Architecture," in *Architecture as Symbol and Self-Identity* (Philadelphia: Aga Khan Award for Architecture, 1980), 7.

identity becomes more complicated. As new physical elements were later added to the initial structure of the Prophet's mosque, such as domes, minarets and arabesque, it becomes challenging to decide whether it is legitimate or not to record such expressions as being original. Moreover, the individual elements and architectural form themselves have been influenced by cultural or regional adaptation. Nonetheless, in order to frame the "non-visual" in Islamic cultures, I argue that the visual architectural form is needed in order to uphold the notion of Islamic identity but only if it serves to edify and complement the mode of life of Muslims, rather than merely existing as a showpiece for power and wealth by projecting a "low symbolic charge." In other words, the visible form and aesthetics of a mosque must not overshadow its non-visible communal lifestyle.

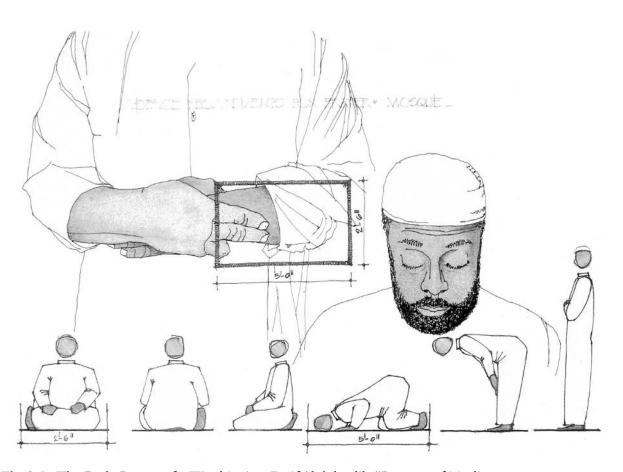
It is also for this reason why the Prophet never discouraged the use of embellishment or adornment (except religious figures) but rather constructed his mosque as a "blank canvas" or a nascent structure for succeeding mosques to experiment with their aesthetics, while explicitly maintaining the notion of community and togetherness. <sup>48</sup> Therefore, when discussing the treatment of an Islamic space, things are never straightforward nor easy to understand. The constant change of aesthetical and formal interventions throughout Islamic history blurs the line between functional requirements and cultural expressions. In the contemporary era, this vagueness of information makes it challenging for architects to simulate physical details of an extant regional example. Yet, at the same time, it could also provide a sense of freedom to reinterpret traditional

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Oleg Grabar, "Symbols and Signs in Islamic Architecture," 4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> The Prophet, however, harshly criticized the use of inappropriate decoration. In one of the hadith he is reported to have said that people only start decorating whenever their faith and performance start to weaken. Here the meaning of the term "decoration" is only referring to inappropriate aesthetics in a mosque such as, figures, idols, and false monumentality. See both; Spahic Omer, "Mosque Decoration between Acceptance and Rejection," Islamic Studies 54, no. 1 (2015): 5–38; and Kahera, "Deconstructing the American Mosque" 35–42.

forms into contemporary modes of expression to serve the needs of the modern Muslim congregations. Generally, when a mosque is constructed in the Middle East and South-East Asian countries with an established Muslim majority, it embodies the complex historical and cultural milieu of the region produced over the course of more than a thousand years. However, one must ask the question; what is at stake when a building type, such as the expressive purpose-built mosque, that is so centered around a specific regional or cultural group, comes to exist in a foreign society with heterogeneous cultures and very little Islamic history?



**Fig 2.1:** The Body Postures for Worshipping (Latif Abdulmalik, "Postures of Muslim Worship (Salat)," 1998, Pencil on paper (Artwork © 1998 Latif Abdulmalik)).

### Purpose-Built Mosques: Conflicting views on Foreign Forms

A 2017 Angus Reid study shows that 54% of Canadians hold an unfavorable view of Islam and only 56% of Canadians would accept the construction of mosques. 49 Muslim identity in the last three decades has been shaped by geopolitical events and has been immensely scrutinized for its adaptability in modern, democratic societies. Before 9/11, Muslims have been understood firstly as either "slaves or colonial subjects, and then later as hostile intruders." Tensions from global events such as the Gulf Wars (1990s – 2000s) and Iran hostage crisis (1980) to the more recent prohibitions on minarets in Switzerland (2009) and the ban on hijabs or other face coverings in Quebec (2017) revealed and powered the anti-Muslim sentiments globally. Debates on such issues built upon historical orientalist and racist hierarchical divisions have detrimental effects on Muslims and their communities. With such prejudice, it is becoming increasingly difficult and challenging for Canadian Muslims to represent their culture. What becomes even more apparent in considering early Muslim history and in the previously discussed case studies of the historical mosques of Canada, is the importance of disrupting the myth of a unique and "pure" identity that is perpetuated in these nations. Yet, with purpose-built mosques, Muslims tend to borrow and derive certain architectural forms directly from history and repeatedly implement them in their sacred buildings. Forms and arabesque that are locally recognized in Islamic countries not only become foreign to non-Muslims in Canada but also to Muslims who come from different cultures and backgrounds and who do not necessarily associate with such modes of expressions.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Kurl, Shachi, 2017, "Canadians View Non-Christian Religions with Uncertainty," Angus Reid Global, p. 1-8.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> Kurd, "Competing Visions, Common Forms" (PhD, 2013): 60.

Because meaning is connected to an aesthetic language, which is found in extant modes of expression, the Canadian mosque reverts to the past, even though it exists in a new environment that is different from the past.<sup>51</sup> Such practice has the potential to negatively influence outsiders who are not accustomed to Islam and makes the relationship between the global and the local a recurrent tension for Muslim communities. Their overtly expressive forms often attract prejudice from local non-Muslim citizens; one such case was in 1995 in an Ontario Municipal Board meeting when a Toronto resident representing his supporters spoke out angrily against a mosque proposal arguing, "There is no comparison to that kind of building in Canada. It is going to be a foreign, exotic building . . . If they put up this minaret and dome, it will act like a calling card for the whole community."52 Other anecdotal evidences include; the anti-Arabic graffiti on a York region mosque,<sup>53</sup> urination on a Markham mosque,<sup>54</sup> food thrown at an Owen Sound mosque,<sup>55</sup> and the countless other cases across North America. Although it is difficult to find any hard evidence that suggests a direct causation between expressive mosque architecture fueling violence against Muslims, few of the instances mentioned above nonetheless provide a decent look at some of the contemporary challenges Muslims face. The archetypal image of a mosque carries huge emotional and political meanings in today's day and age, and therefore it becomes challenging to construct its architectural meanings in an alien society.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> Kahera, "Deconstructing the American Mosque" 28.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> Isin Engin and Myer Siemiatycki, "Making Space for Mosques: Claiming Urban Citizenship," in *Race, Space, and the Law: Unmapping a White Settler Society*, ed. Sherene H. Razack (Toronto, Canada: Between the Lines, 2002), 205.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> Sheri Shefa, "Vandals Spray Anti-Arab Graffiti Outside Toronto-Area Mosque," *The Canadian Jewish News*, November 30, 2014, https://www.cjnews.com/news/canada/vandals-spray-anti-arab-graffiti-outside-toronto-area-mosque.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> Gilbert Ngabo, "Vandals Recently Urinated on a Markham Mosque. Muslim Leaders Responded by Opening Their Doors to Everyone," *The Star*, February 25, 2020, https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2020/02/25/vandals-recently-urinated-on-this-markham-mosque-muslim-leaders-responded-by-opening-their-doors-to-everyone.html/.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> Scott Dunn, "Judge Sentencing in Mosque Vandalism Case," *Owen Sound Sun Times*, November 28, 2019, https://www.owensoundsuntimes.com/news/local-news/judge-sentencing-in-mosque-vandalism-case-dec-18.

## NATIONAL®POST

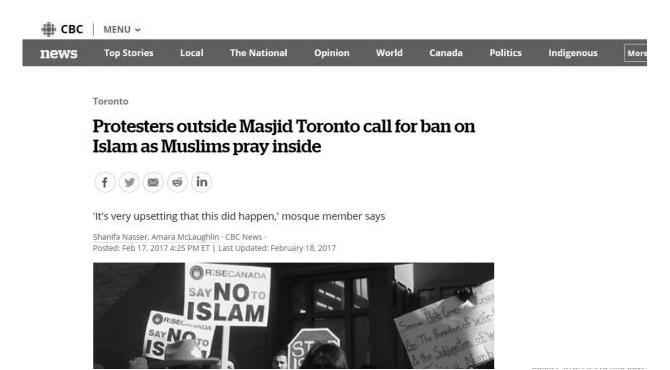
NEWS - FULL COMMENT - SPORTS - CULTURE - LIFE - MORE - JOBS - CLASSIFIEDS - DRIVING - SUBSCRIBE - FINANCIAL POST - VIDEO

# In Quebec, fear of religious discrimination as zoning rules used to clamp down on mosques

A court victory this month by another Islamic centre in Montreal contains a warning to municipalities that the tactic can infringe on religious freedoms



**Fig 2.2:** Screenshot by Author. In Graeme Hamilton, "In Quebec, Fear of Religious Discrimination as Zoning Rules Used to Clamp down on Mosques," National Post, 2017.



**Fig 2.3:** Screenshot by Author. In Shanifa Nasser, "Protesters Outside Masjid Toronto Call for Ban on Islam as Muslims Pray Inside," CBC News, 2017.

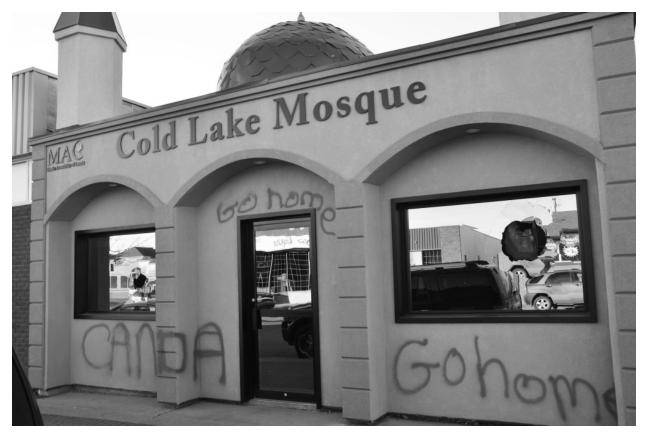
Concurrently, the perception of "a foreign, exotic building" is also realized amongst some progressive Muslim groups who are concerned about the traditional aesthetics of mosques. Many Muslims desire to build and establish a mosque that not only fulfills the need for the current times but also portray an architectural image that reflects innovation and the current ethos of our culture. Mohammed Qadeer, professor emeritus of urban and regional planning at Queen's University, argues that a detail such as a minaret should not be considered a touchstone of Islamic culture, but instead he believes that "In North America, there will be a new type of mosque ... There will be other architectural solutions that harmonize the structure into the landscape."<sup>56</sup> Others such as Nazir Khan (owner of an Islamic Centre in Toronto) agree that an Islamic prayer space only needs "a basic structure" and "a pure simple cube can perform that function." What Nazir Khan meant by a basic structure for prayers is the notion of going back to the roots of the meaning of a mosque – the act, time, and place of prostration – and the need for architectural reinvention for our contemporary times. However, what makes comprehending a novel architectural meaning of an Islamic sacred space difficult, is the fact that expressive imitation of historical models of mosques already established a strong emotional value for its worshippers. Physical symbolic elements such as, the dome and the minaret, is widely understood as identifiable markers of a mosque, and therefore, not only is it difficult to introduce new modes of architectural identities but such expressions may also complicate the cultural perception of a mosque. In order to further explore this contradictory subject of tradition versus innovation, it is important to ask, why do Muslims recreate historical modes of expressions in their mosque and

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> Syed, "No Minaret, No Dome," 2015.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

what are the dangers that come along with it? How does the practice of neo-historicism affect Muslims' and non-Muslims' perceptions towards the image of a mosque?



**Fig 2.4:** Mosque Vandalized in Cold Lake, Alberta (Photograph (modified): Cold Lake Sun, "A Mosque in Cold Lake is Shown after Vandals Smashed its Windows and Spray-Painted its Exterior on Friday," 2014, CTV News)

### Purpose-Built Mosques: Incompatibility of Neo-Historic Aesthetics

Before I explore the architecture of the traditional purpose-built mosques, I would like mention that the arguments made against them in this thesis is specifically directed towards their exterior display of traditional iconic features and ornamentation rather than their interior programs. I acknowledge that many traditional mosques incorporate programmatic spaces which serves their particular congregation's need effectively and they function as community centers successfully in their particular contexts. The interior functions and spaces will also be explored in the case study of Baitul Aman Masjid following this section.

The debate that I am raising in this thesis is the idea that the exterior features of a purpose-built Islamic sacred space built today in Canada is in many ways a regional variation of the stereotypical image of a mosque, and may create deeper social problems for the Muslim communities in the long run. <sup>58</sup> It can be argued in many ways that the features of a purpose-built mosque is directly related to the phenomenon of the Muslim diaspora. Diasporic Muslims find themselves in the middle of cultural displacement and marginality in a new country, and thus there is "a lack of immediate contact with the past and a loss of cultural hegemony." <sup>59</sup> When constructing a mosque, the community ascribes emotional value to the utilization of well-known conventions or an influencing customs from the Muslim world and produces a recognizable religious image which gives outward expression and meaning to the presence of an Islamic practice in North America. Despite geographical, historical, and chronological nuances, the features of a historical image, when reanimated, become a common aesthetic ethos which is happily embraced by the community. Consequently, one no longer remains in a foreign

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> Kahera, "Deconstructing the American Mosque" 35.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> Ibid, 7.

environment but becomes part of a larger community where belief and emotions are nourished by memories and aesthetics that are familiar.

However, violence against traditional mosque aesthetics are not the only problems of replicating from the past. In his book "Deconstructing the American Mosque", Akel Ismail Kahera explains that "In attempting to replicate extant features from the past, the architect invariably produces a de facto facsimile whose aesthetics are severely compromised."60 Given the numerous cases of indiscriminate use of a well-known convention or an influencing custom, certain extant modes of expression in purpose-built mosques become incompatible within their Canadian contexts, such as; the onion dome built on top of the prayer spaces, minarets towering over roofs, and Arabic texts and ornaments wrapped around the façades and entrances. Many of these elements have often been itemized and objectified by the nineteenth-century European colonial approaches to Islamic architectural and cultural historiography in the Near East and South Asia. Although first generation Muslims feel connected to these symbolic elements, many of them have often been distilled, categorized, and repeated either as direct replicas or are associated with an identifiable "Middle-Eastern" style. 61 Though domes and minarets perform an emotional role in a mosque's character, neither of these architectural forms are found universally across regions with Muslim majorities. Muslims simply appropriate these visual tropes in order to assume their "Islamicness." When these elements are repeatedly applied to purpose-built mosques, not only does the final product has the potential to become a kitsch expression of a historical language, but

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 64.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> Jan Nederveen Pieterse, "Travelling Islam: Mosques without Minarets," in *Space, Culture and Power: New Identities in Globalizing Cities* (London and New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd, 1997), 177.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> Amaney Jamal, "The Political Participation and Engagement of Muslim Americans," *American Politics Research 33*, no. 4 (July 2005): 526, https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673x04271385.

the image could also deter future generations of Muslims from viewing the mosque as a community centre regardless of their internal programing.

Kahera explains that the features of a traditional purpose-built mosque can be boiled down to the rubrics of "image," "form," and "text," as these "three features suggest an anachronistic language corresponding to the use of ornament, inscription, and architectural form." Expanding on his three debates of image, text and form, we can get a detailed understanding on how each characteristic of a traditional purpose-built mosque affects Muslims. In the first debate he addresses the idea of images being used as a display of ornament without regard to time or context. The "image" of the mosque could be defined as the overall vision and narrative of the mosque or the general appearance of the building to the public. Diasporic Muslims essentially create an appearance which satisfies an emotional condition that has historical efficacy. Although it gratifies the first-generation of Muslims who can associate with the image of the mosque through memory, some key questions must be asked as part of the discourse: How is the image of the mosque affecting the second, third, and future generations of Muslims? What is the architectural image communicating to non-Muslims? How is it perceived by other Muslims who do not necessarily associate with the particular memory being created? How does a mosque affect its immediate context and broader urban environment when it imitates history or an extant model?

In the second debate, he examines the appropriation of form. Unlike image, form is concerned with structuring programmatic spaces for a mosque and the production of a coherent site condition.<sup>64</sup> This also includes elements such as domes, minarets, hypostyle arrangements of columns, etc. It is evident that there is a direct relationship between certain formal elements and

<sup>63</sup> Kahera, "Deconstructing the American Mosque" 65.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 65.

memory, however, the argument could be made that the repeated usage of such elements only feeds the stereotype of Islam being a homogeneous culture, and the mosque as a "static, sensual and ornamental" structure. Meanings linked to such architectural forms evoke memories but also have the potential to discourage innovation. From the great central dome and pencil minarets of the Ottoman Selimiye Mosque (1575) to the Quranic phrases carved into the wood and marble in the secular Alhambra palace (1238), the historical transformation of Islamic Architecture in Europe, Middle East and Asia have seen many architectural innovations which set precedents for subsequent mosques in many countries. However, the neo-historical repetition of elements such as, the dome and the minaret, leads to a culture where mosques are unable to be identified without their presence and potentially making it difficult for contemporary modes of expressions to take place. Furthermore, there are practical reasons why these structures are not intrinsic or necessary today for the practice or propagation of Islam: Minarets were traditionally used for elevated platforms on towers to broadcast the adhan, a rarity in many cities where people can use alarm clocks or smartphone apps. 65 Classical domes have served some temperature controlling functions in the interior; however, they are not very cost effective for underprivileged Muslim communities who are already struggling financially. 66 Also, the production of a building that

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<sup>65</sup> Although many regions in the world such as, South Asia and the Middle East, still practice the traditional adhan from a Minaret, the broadcast is projected through digital speakers instead of the voice of a person. The sound of the adhan in contemporary times carries symbolic meaning for many Muslims across the globe. However, it must be noted that this would only work in a country with Muslim majority and not within the context of Canada. An example of this includes the controversies which arose when some provinces in Canada made a one-time exception to allow the adhan to be broadcasted during Ramadan in 2020 – this was when COVID-19 was at its peak and Muslim families were unable to break their fast together or gather for worship. Although there were no noise complaints, among the numerous backlashes made from non-Muslims was the concern that they should not be allowed to pray at all. See; David Said, "Allowing the Call to Prayer in Canada Spurred Complaints — but Not about Noise," *The Conversation*, May 24, 2020, https://theconversation.com/allowing-the-call-to-prayer-in-canada-spurred-complaints-but-not-about-noise-138882.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>66</sup> Oleg Grabar, "Reflections of Islamic Art," in *Muqarnas I: An Annual on Islamic Art and Architecture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 2–4.

mimics a historical style demands traditional workmanship, materials, and skills, all of which are not readily available in Canada.<sup>67</sup>

In the third debate, Kahera examines the use of epigraphy or the textual inscriptions in a mosque. The topic of inscriptions in a mosque is complicated: although nowhere it is written in the Quran that the utilization of Arabic epigraphy is needed in mosques, certain inscriptions have been widely deemed as necessary to remind people of certain recitations before entering the sacred spaces. For example, the Shahada (Muslims declaration of faith), "I bear witness that there is no deity but God, and I bear witness that Muhammad is the messenger of God", can be seen written in Arabic on the entrances of mosques as a means of reminding worshippers the first pillar of Islam. However, the linguistic makeup of the Canadian congregation is very different from other Islamic countries: most Canadian Muslims do not speak Arabic. Moreover, skilled calligraphers are not easily found within the Muslim communities, and hence many mosques in Canada have de-emphasized the use of inscriptions.

Kahera raises several important questions when it comes to the use of epigraphy: "Is the purpose of a pious inscription to evoke a symbolic charge ... or is it intended to be decorative, a means to enhance the image of a structure or merely to adorn a wall? Who reads the text of the inscription? Would a mosque with a pious inscription be more reverent than a masjid lacking an inscription?" Although these questions might be viewed as controversial within the Muslim

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> Kahera, "Deconstructing the American Mosque," 73.

<sup>68</sup> Khan and Al-Hilali, trans., "The Qur'an. Interpretation," Chapter 3: Verse 18.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>69</sup> Many mosques apply inscriptions to their forms through posters or carvings on walls. Some mosques in Canada translate the Arabic quotes into English for worshippers to help them understand what needs to be recited. However, because of the way they are being used; writings printed on small letter sized papers, on colorful banners, miniature carvings on the Mihrab and Minbar, and so on, their existence more often becomes distractions rather than instructions.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>70</sup> Kahera, "Deconstructing the American Mosque," 65.

societies, such inquiries are critical in the discourse of Islamic identity to understand the psychological relationship between a mosque and its worshippers within the context of Canada. Whether or not a worshipper would be more concerned with the decorative quality of the inscription or with its symbolic charge, the architect, nonetheless, must re-evaluate the value and the functional intent of an inscription within the overall design concept of the mosque.



Fig 2.5: The Prayer Space of Baitul Islam Mosque in Vaughan, Ontario



**Fig 2.6:** This installation by Aajlan Gharem in Vancouver questions the role of religion in a contemporary Western society. It evokes the feelings of anxiousness and imprisonment by the religion where Muslims are "caged" by the image and culture of a traditional mosque. (Aajlan Gharem, Paradise Has Many Gates, 2018–2020, Steel mesh wireframe, chandeliers, megaphone, carpet fabric, Vancouver, Canada, Vancouver Biennale. Image (modified) courtesy of the Artist)



**Fig 2.7:** Madinah Masjid, East York (Pahwa 2019)



**Fig 2.9:** Baitul Islam Mosque, Vaughan (By Author 2020)



**Fig 2.11:** Nugget Mosque, Scarborough (Google Street View 2017)



**Fig 2.8:** Scarborough Muslim Association, Scarborough (By Author 2020)



**Fig 2.10:** Baitun Nur Mosque, Calgary (Google Street View 2019)



**Fig 2.12:** Masjid Usman, Pickering (Google Street View 2019)



**Fig 2.13:** Ahmadiyya Muslim Mosque, Regina (Google Street View 2017)



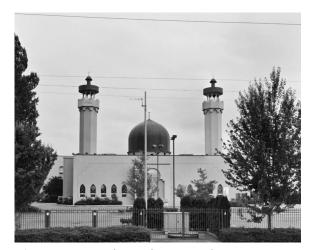
**Fig 2.15:** Al Rashid Mosque (current), Edmonton (Google Street View 2017)



**Fig 2.17:** Bosnian Islamic Association, Etobicoke (Google Street View 2015)



**Fig 2.14:** Akram Jomaa Islamic Centre, Calgary (Google Street View 2017)



**Fig 2.16:** Az-Zahraa Islamic Academy, Richmond (Google Street View 2016)



**Fig 2.18:** Bosnian Islamic Center, Hamilton (Google StreetView 2019)



**Fig 2.19:** Halton Islamic Association, Burlington (Google Street View 2019)



**Fig 2.21:** Jaffari Community Centre, Thornhill (Google Street View 2016)



**Fig 2.23:** Islamic Society of St. Catharines, St. Catherines (Google Street View 2019)



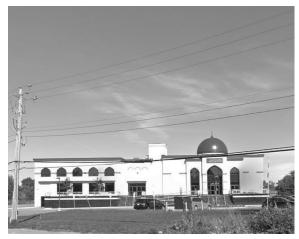
**Fig 2.20:** Islamic Center of Quebec, Quebec (Google Street View 2017)



**Fig 2.22:** Islamic Society of Niagara Peninsula, Niagara (Google Street View 2020)



**Fig 2.24:** ISNA Canada, Mississauga (Google Street View 2019)



**Fig 2.25:** Jami Omar Mosque, Ottawa (Google Street View 2018)



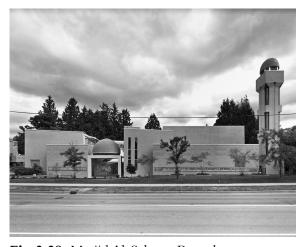
**Fig 2.27:** Masjid Al-Farooq, Edmonton (Google Street View 2019)



**Fig 2.29:** Masjid Ar-Rahman, Vancouver (Google Street View 2017)



**Fig 2.26:** Masjid Al Fatima, Edmonton (Google Street View 2018)



**Fig 2.28:** Masjid Al-Salaam, Burnaby (Google Street View 2019)



**Fig 2.30:** Masjid Bilal, Ottawa (Google Street View 2019)



**Fig 2.31:** Masjid Makkah-Al-Mukkaramah, Pierrefonds (Google Street View 2019)



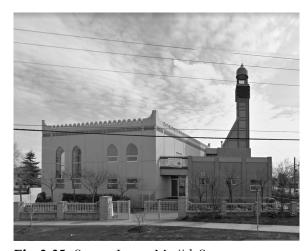
**Fig 2.32:** Outaouais Islamic Centre, Gatineau (Google Street View 2019)



**Fig 2.33:** Richmond Jamea Mosque, Richmond (Google Street View 2019)



**Fig 2.34:** SNMC Mosque, Nepean (Google Street View 2019)



**Fig 2.35:** Surrey Jamea Masjid, Surrey (Google Street View 2019)



**Fig 2.36:** Islamic Shia Ithna-Asheri Centre, Edmonton (Google Street View 2019)

### Case Study: Madinah Masjid, East York, ON

Although the very beginning of Madinah Masjid was a conversion of a former church, the mosque had undergone several major expansions over the span of three decades and incorporated many of the features of a traditional purpose-built mosque. With the last major expansion taking place in 2007, the mosque has become one of the leading Islamic Centers in North America. <sup>1</sup> The building consists of more than thirty thousand square feet of space for over 3500 worshipers and include spaces such as; a multi-purpose hall, classrooms, funeral preparation room and a kitchen, in addition to the prayer halls. The mosque also regularly holds youth activities and schools, marriage ceremonies, fundraising and iftar programs. <sup>2</sup> Although the community and the architect of Madinah Masjid separated the sexes in the prayer halls, the sacred experience of the women is not compromised by the architectural design as they get direct views to the Qibla wall and the Imam from the women's prayer space which is designated on the mezzanine on top of the men's space. Hence, it creates a more balanced approach towards worshipping for both genders. <sup>3</sup>

However, I argue that the problem exists in the meaning in the exterior iconography of the mosque. Certain elements such as the dual columns supporting the checkered arches along with the arched windows of Madinah Masjid is a direct imitation to that of the Al Masjid an Nabawi in Madinah, Saudi Arabia. A closer look at the checkered arches in the latter mosque reveals the carved arabesque of floral patterns and gold-plated door frames and capitals showcasing the intricacies of the design developed throughout centuries since when it was first constructed

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Hilal Committee of Metropolitan Toronto and vicinity, "About," Madinah Masjid, 2017, https://madinahmasjid.ca/services/.

Ibid.
 This is my observation from the architectural drawings posted in the architect's website which can be found here: Zak Ghanim,

<sup>&</sup>quot;Drawings," www.zakghanim.com, accessed January 12, 2021, http://www.zakghanim.com/cm/cm\_banner.aspx?id=3306.

under the Prophet Muhammed in 622 CE.<sup>4</sup> In Madinah Masjid, however, such details are absent and with the appropriation of a historical style it produced an image which lacks the authenticity, and therefore distorting the meaning associated with the ornamentations. The green dome of Madinah Masjid also resembles the famous green dome of the Al Masjid an Nabawi, and the minaret, the top of which traditionally serves the call to prayer, is inaccessible, and is not integrated within the overall design concept.

To reiterate my position on traditional mosques, I certainly recognise that many of them including Madinah Masjid are successful in operating as community centers in their particular neighborhoods given the variety of programs which connect the Muslim communities in their spaces. However, by analyzing the external image of a traditional mosque, I am simply raising a number of questions such as: What message is the traditional mosque communicating to youth and future generations with its external appearance? What is the role and value of architectural innovation when it comes to Islamic sacred spaces in Canada? How can Muslim communities go beyond the image of traditional elements such as domes and minarets to identify their mosques? And, how can architects learn from the few existing contemporary purpose-built mosques in Canada to come to a novel understanding of mosque architecture that responds to its site and considering context to include current social and cultural realities?

The argument of aesthetics in mosques, other than creating various problems and disagreements amongst Muslims and non-Muslims, produced a type of mosque architecture that could be considered unconventional compared to a monumental built form: the repurposed

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Duaa Mohammed Alashari, Abd.Rahman Hamzah, and Nurazmallail Marni, "The Aesthetic of Islamic Calligraphy and Ornamentation in Prophet Mosque Interior of the Calligrapher Abdullah Zuhdi (Al-Masjid An-Nabawi)," *UMRAN - International Journal of Islamic and Civilizational Studies 7*, no. 2 (June 28, 2020): 69–80, https://doi.org/10.11113/umran2020.7n2.374.

mosque. While this style of architecture is not foreign to the urban societies of North America, the utilization of repurposed forms for sacred purposes, its interpretation within its context and as well as its evolving nature is a direct result of the socio-economic and political tensions revolving in the Muslim communities. The phenomenon of repurposed mosques will be investigated further in the next section along with a few case studies for a deeper understanding in how such architecture affects Muslims and their communities.



**Fig 2.37:** Exterior Facade of Madinah Masjid in East York, ON (Photograph (modified): Vik Pahwa, "Madinah Masjid," 2019, Architectural Conservancy Ontario)



**Fig 2.38:** Exterior Facade of Al Masjid an Nawabi in Medinah, Saudi Arabia (Photograph (modified): Unknown, "List of Gates of Masjid al-Nabawi," 2020, Yugo Journey)



Fig 2.39: Urban Context - Madinah Masjid, East York



Fig 2.40: Urban Context - Scarborough Muslim Association, Scarborough







Fig 2.41: Urban Context - Jame Masjid, Markham



Fig 2.42: Urban Context - Nugget Mosque, Scarborough





### Repurposed Mosques: Disguised Character

Because of their experiences that purpose-built mosques can fuel antagonistic environments, coupled with the focus on forms over function, Muslim communities have resorted to using repurposed structures to construct their worshipping spaces. The argument could be made that purpose-built and repurposed mosques exist on two opposite ends of the typological spectrum. While traditional forms in mosques are blatantly expressive for the sake of distinctiveness in their architectural language, repurposed mosques remain disguised within the urban fabric, bearing little or no Islamic identity. Despite the majority of the mosques in Canada consisting of repurposed structures, studying such buildings become challenging as there is a lack of scholarly examination on these types of Islamic spaces. Information and images on such mosques along with the different sects of Islam are also not easily accessible or available, and moreover they have not been examined in comparison to more traditionally designed mosques in North America.<sup>71</sup> This is partly due to the temporal and grassroots nature of such spaces, and as well as their forms existing as vernacular expressions in their specific urban locations. Nonetheless, the representation of culture and architecture through repurposed mosques is particularly important when studying the various cultural nuances of Muslims and their communities. On this topic of repurposed mosques, the arguments made in this thesis is a combination of personal and the limited research studies that is available including Jerrilyn Dodds' book Mosques of New York (2002), Barbara Daly Metcalf's Making Muslim Space (1996), and Nadia Kurd's dissertation Competing Vision, Common Forms (2013).

Along with the creation of Mosque One and Jami Mosque, the Muslim diaspora in Canada set off a wave of subsequent construction of mosques adapted in disused buildings. Instead

71 Kurd, "Competing Visions, Common Forms," (PhD, 2013): 9-13.

of implementing aesthetics and functions based on history and memory, the formation of such mosques arises from the immediate need to fulfill the function of prayers. Former office spaces, houses, churches and storefronts have often been affordably purchased and converted into a mosque with minimal amounts of changes to both their interiors and exteriors. Most of the renovations have been done by the members of the communities without the assistance of architects because of the affordability, scale and cost of the renovations.

As Mohammad Qadeer explains in his research paper, "The Planning System", the process of repurposed mosque development in Canada takes place in three phases. In the first phase, a small congregation gathers for prayers in private apartments in condominiums or residential houses. Private living rooms, basements or even entire houses are often transformed into makeshift prayer spaces where neighboring Muslims gather to worship. Occasionally, these spaces are also used for other programs such as children's Quran readings and various other meetings. At this phase, the events in the spaces are run mostly by local donations from worshippers who attend the prayers. It is not until the congregation reaches its next phase when the prayer space is recognized locally as a "mosque". In the second phase, as the congregation grows larger, and bigger spaces are needed to incorporate the various secular programs found in mosques, a disused store, church, or an office space is purchased by the community and renovated into a mosque. In the third phase and with a further increase in the population of Muslims, the congregation can take two courses of actions: they either purchase a piece of land to construct a purpose-built mosque, or renovate a massive warehouse or an industrial building to house their worshipping spaces. Similar to purpose-built mosques, renovated warehouses are meant to serve as a permanent worshipping space serving several ethnic groups from surrounding and distant neighborhoods. In all three phases, the key driving factors for the construction of repurposed mosques is affordability

and accessibility.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, once a mosque gains popularity amongst Muslims, it can promote the economic growth of ethnic neighborhoods by encouraging businesses such as halal restaurants and cultural clothing shops. Such businesses return the favor through donations and by providing job opportunities to support the mosque, which create a sense of community and belonging. These places of worship neither claim their territory nor formally consecrate their architectural spaces but rather blend in amongst their surroundings. As Daly points out that these informal spaces reveal the "discursive practice of Islam," along with their cultural processes and characteristics.<sup>73</sup> The discourse of repurposed spaces allows for an analysis that shows the "web of loyalties and networks" of Muslim life – which contrasts the idea of Islamic architecture in its quintessential forms.<sup>74</sup>

However, there are several challenges in the renovated built forms of mosques. In terms of analyzing their architectural and sacred purposes, and as well as comparing them to the image of traditional style of mosques, few important questions need to be discussed: How are the aesthetics and architectural ideals of repurposed mosques differ from purpose-built mosques? Do the programmatic spaces in these mosques function in a similar manner? How are these mosques influenced by the Islamic architectural history? And most importantly, what sort of challenges do repurposed mosques inflict on Islamic architecture and Muslim identity in Canada?

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> Qadeer and Chaudhry, "The Planning System," 17.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> Barbara Daly Metcalf, "Introduction," in *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe*, ed. Barbara Daly Metcalf (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> Ibid, 2.

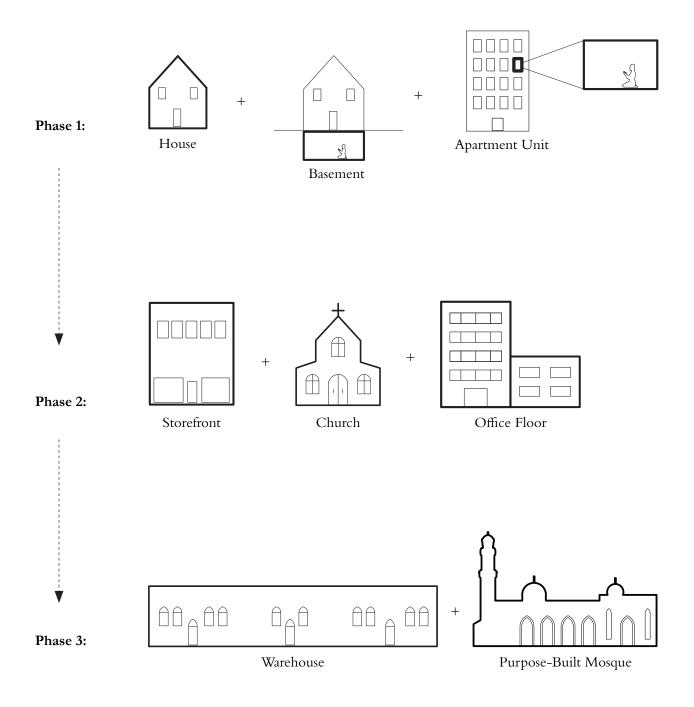


Fig 2.43: The Three Phases of Mosque Development and Their Typologies



**Fig 2.44:** Mosque One (former), Toronto (Google Street View 2018)



**Fig 2.46:** Toronto Islamic Centre, Toronto (Google Street View 2015)



**Fig 2.48:** Gawsul Azam Masjid, Scarborough (Google Street View 2019)



**Fig 2.45:** Danforth Islamic Centre, East York (By Author 2019)



**Fig 2.47:** Masjidur Rahman, Toronto (Google Street View 2016)



**Fig 2.49:** Baitul Jannah, Scarborough (Google Street View 2018)



**Fig 2.50:** Fatih Mosque, Toronto (Google Street View 2018)



**Fig 2.52:** Masjid Omar Bin Khatab, Toronto (Google Street View 2017)



**Fig 2.54:** Hamza Mosque, Scarborough (Google Street View 2017)



**Fig 2.51:** Masjidul-ut-Taqwa, Toronto (Google Street View 2019)



**Fig 2.53:** Masjid Toronto, Toronto (Google Street View 2019)



**Fig 2.55:** Albanian Muslim Society, Toronto (Google Street View 2016)



**Fig 2.56:** Al Tawakkal Mosque, Toronto (Google Street View 2018)



**Fig 2.58:** Turkish Islamic Association, Toronto (Google Street View 2019)



**Fig 2.60:** Jerrahi Sufi Order of Canada, Etobicoke (Google Street View 2020)



**Fig 2.57:** Sunnatul Jamaat, Scarborough (Google Street View 2018)



**Fig 2.59:** Baitul Mukarram Masjid, Scarborough (By Author 2019)



**Fig 2.61:** Subhan Masjid, Scarborough (Google Street View 2019)



**Fig 2.62:** Association of Islamic Charitable Projects, New Westminister (Google StreetView 2017)



**Fig 2.64:** Baitul Ma'Moor Foundation, Montreal (Google Street View 2017)



**Fig 2.66:** Mosque Noor-E-Madina, Montreal (Google Street View 2019)



**Fig 2.63:** Assuna Annabawiyah, Montreal (Google Street View 2018)



**Fig 2.65:** Faizan-E-Madina, Montreal (Google Street View 2019)



**Fig 2.67:** Islamic Downtown Assn, Edmonton (Google Street View 2019)



**Fig 2.68:** Jamia Masjid Aulia Allah, Surrey (Google Street View 2019)



**Fig 2.70:** Khadijah Mosque, Montreal (Google Street View 2018)



**Fig 2.72:** Marpolle Musalla, Vancouver (Google Street View 2019)



**Fig 2.69:** Bullay Shah Academy, Surrey (Google Street View 2017)



**Fig 2.71:** Madinah Masjid, Edmonton (Google Street View 2018)



**Fig 2.73:** Masjid-At-Taqwa, Edmonton (Google Street View 2017)

### Repurposed Mosques: Grassroots Adaptation

Repurposed mosques provide a glimpse into the heterogeneous uses and applications of mosque architecture in Canada. Such mosques incorporate broader community focused activities in addition to their function as a religious institution. They have a vast range in terms of style and they also show the ways in which Islamic sacred spaces have been interpreted to accommodate the Muslims community in its geographic situation. However, in terms of their architecture, my general critique against repurposed mosques is their unsuitability to perform as sacred spaces. The reasons for this include three debates: inadequate spatial layout, de-emphasized or kitsch expressions of aesthetics, and the struggle to find architectural identities. Furthermore, the practice of gender divisions through architectural barriers and ethnic segregations in these mosques (including purpose-built ones) are also severely detrimental to the image and psychology of their communities (this is discussed further in the last section of this chapter).

In the first debate, I argue that the spatial configurations of different programs in repurposed mosques are usually poorly laid out. Although efficiency is one of the main goals when it comes to placing sacred and secular programs, significant portions of the interior spaces become inefficient due to the already existing arrangement of the walls and rooms. On the other hand, if the community decides to demolish and recreate the interior spaces (usually without the assistance of an architect), they are left with an inadequate floor layout that is not adjusted properly for prayers. For instance, in the Baitul Aman Masjid (a former restaurant), because the placement of the thick existing columns was not optimized for an Islamic prayer space, the structures become a visual and physical barrier for worshippers who are seated around it. It becomes even more difficult to occupy the space when a large number of worshippers come to pray Jummah on Fridays due to the columns blocking their spaces. Other examples include the

mosque Sunnatul Jamaat (a former warehouse), in which the imbalance of assigned floor real estate between secular and sacred programs including the arrangements of walls and partitions, create chaos when either spaces start to get fully occupied on occasions such as community dinners, Eid prayers, Quran lectures, and so on (see chapter 3 for the full case study of this mosque).<sup>75</sup>

Moreover, when renovating a space, it becomes difficult for Muslims to orient the interior of an existing structure towards Mecca because of the building's already existing layout conforming to its urban block. Many worshippers attempt to solve this conflict of directionality by simply dedicating the wall closest to the direction of Mecca even if it is slightly misaligned – a practice which is religiously and culturally inappropriate. Alternatively, if the direction of Qibla is specifically pointed towards the corner, for instance, the worshippers would arrange themselves in a "fan" pattern in order to fill in the gaps in the prayer space. However, this arrangement of seating or standing is not ideal in a rectangular space due to its confusing visual and physical nature during the act of praying.

In the second debate, I argue that the kitsch expression of aesthetics is one of the fundamental reasons why repurposed mosques are unsuitable for a sacred space. In describing the works of Louis Kahn and Tadao Ando, Paul Goldberger explains that the harmonious relationship between aesthetical elements and architectural spaces has the potential to "take us away from the physical world." The right balance of ornamentation and architectural ambiguity in religious buildings is what achieves the quality of being sacred and therefore, must be taken into account

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> I write this from my own personal experience of visiting these mosques and participating in the sacred and secular programs in the interior spaces. This also applies to all the description of the upcoming examples of purpose-built and repurposed mosques I write about in this thesis.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>76</sup> Paul Goldberger, "Architecture, Sacred Space and the Challenge of the Modern" (August 12, 2010), http://www.paulgoldberger.com/lectures/architecture-sacred-space-and-the-challenge-of-the-modern/.

when designing sacred spaces. The phenomenological experience of the sacred which Goldberger describes is precisely what the repurposed mosques are lacking. This is partly due to the "fast paced" nature of such mosques, as the primary goal of these space is to solely serve the immediate functional needs of the Muslims, and therefore, lacking the notion of contemplation in their architecture. Kitsch decorations and other redundant elements are applied to their exteriors and interiors, for instance: the Mihrab in Mecca Islamic Centre is merely a cut out of a cardboard symbolizing the direction to Qibla, while the prayer space of Islamic Iranian Centre boasts an array of green neon and LED lights filling the entire room. Other repurposed mosques reference traditional symbolism, such as, the spray-painted entrance door of Sheikh Deedat Centre which is marked with a cartoonish image of a traditional mosque (one with dome and minarets) and painted waves of a tropical beach as its background symbolizing paradise. Some mosques such as the Fatih Mosque, even retrofitted a literal miniature version of a dome and two minarets in front of its main entrance while keeping the repurposed façade in the background. Moreover, the interior of these former offices, warehouses and storefronts are often dark and grungy, creating an unpleasant environment for worshipping.

While interpretation of beauty and the use of aesthetics in architecture is always subjective, according to Gregg Lloren, "the right, or wrong, blend of taste and culture in any given medium produces an artform that may or may not comply with a generally accepted idea of what is beautiful and can thus be deemed ugly." Nevertheless, even though the primary purpose of these mosques is to serve the immediate functional needs of the worshippers, it is obvious that through the implementation of these subtle symbolisms, embellishments, and architectural tropes,

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>77</sup> Gregg S. Lloren, "Tacky, Kitschy, Campy: Variance in Architectural Aesthetic Confusion In and Around Intramuros," in *Critique* (Manila, Philippines: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2014), 181.



Fig 2.75: Entrance to Sheikh Deedat Centre (Photograph (modified): Himy Syed, "Sheikh Deedat Centre," 2015, 30 Masjids)



Fig 2.74: Fatih Mosque, Toronto (Screenshot by Author. In Google Street View, 2018, Google)

the Muslim communities yearn to represent and characterize their culture, whether the aesthetics are attractive or tacky. Few questions can be asked concerning the debate of aesthetics: Are the features and elements used by the community in the interior spaces sensible or valid? What is the motivation behind the use of various aesthetic nuances? What do these nuances mean? And how does the subjective or objective interpretation of beauty affect the outcome of a vernacular mosque design?

Lastly, I argue that in search for a better life in a foreign land – one that encompasses better job opportunities, education and economical status – diasporic Muslims are least concerned in sustaining an appropriate visual cultural identity through the architecture of the repurposed mosques. The formation of such mosques is not only distinct from the image of a traditional purpose-built sacred building but also challenges the concept of memory and identity associated with Islamic architecture. The fact that many of them are concealed behind the façade of their former buildings blending with the rest of their neighboring post-war structures, show that diasporic Muslims are more concerned about adjusting to their conditions rather than upholding an image with their mosques. Whether with the tacky decorations on the interior or the paintings of "paradise" on the main entrance door, these expressions are the result of the idiosyncratic ways in which diasporic Muslims interpret the meaning of aesthetics in their sacred spaces.

Furthermore, due to the grassroots appearance of both the interior and the exterior of the mosques, the image of the mosques is neither seen as a traditional approach nor a modern interpretation of Islamic architecture.

Yet, in terms of examining the physical characteristics of repurposed mosques and its context, we can understand that the notion of identity might not always take its shape or form in the intense symbolism of domes and minarets, but the expression can be subtle. For instance,

repurposed mosques blend in amongst halal restaurants and various cultural shops, apartment buildings and rows of fruit markets. Arabic calligraphy and other multicultural languages can also be seen or heard spoken everywhere. Subtle indication of cultural expressions is also implemented in the various sacred elements such as; the form and embellishment applied to the Minbar of Turkish Islamic Association in Toronto is reminiscent to that of the Hagia Sophia or the Blue Mosque in Istanbul, or the Mihrab of Albanian Muslim Society of Toronto which appeared to be inspired by the one in Et'hem Bey Mosque in Tirana, Albania. Other than prayers and just as any other mosques in the West, repurposed mosques also include various secular programs such as Friday schools, religious lectures, community centers, and often become cultural hubs for various events.

Although these grassroots structures do not always express their culture through design, they nonetheless use parts of the idioms and ideas of traditional Islamic architecture, whether programmatically or contextually.<sup>79</sup> As Kahera explains,

"the subjective use of imagery takes on importance in response to culture and environment, which means that culture and environment unfold as we study the vernacular expressions of imagery. The mosque lends itself to an ethos that connects indigenous imagery with culture and environment. This distinct ethos may assume the notion of a syncretic image—an image born of diverse cultural associations."

Nevertheless, these contradictions of repurposed mosques raises several questions: Are these buildings simply conveying "an essentialized version of mosque architecture or do they

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> This comparison is purely based on personal observation.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>79</sup> Khalidi, "Approaches to Mosque Design in North America," 317–34.

<sup>80</sup> Kahera, "Deconstructing the American Mosque" 27.

successfully claim a sense of architectural authenticity?"<sup>81</sup> Are the subtle representations of culture behind the façades of storefronts and warehouses sufficient to uphold an Islamic identity within the diverse urban society of Canada? What is the role of design when it comes to adapting in repurposed buildings? And how can architects and the Muslim communities use architectural design as a tool to represent their culture?

In conjunction with the architectural debates of purpose-built and repurposed mosques, it is fruitful to also consider one of the underlying debates of the practice of gender and ethnic segregations. Not only do these practices occur at a social level, but the Muslim communities also use physical architectural barriers and symbols to contribute to an exclusive culture. Such problems reveal that diasporic Muslims are struggling to relinquish their customary ways of practicing their faith in a land where diversity and inclusivity is promoted and encouraged. Although a much broader and in-depth research is needed to address these issues, within the scope of this thesis study I merely raise a few relevant questions and outline a number of problems related to space and gender in mosques. The following section will be discussing these problems.

<sup>81</sup> Kurd, "Competing Visions, Common Forms" (PhD, 2013): 19.

# Baitul Mukarram Islamic Society (Church)

3340 Danforth Ave, Scarborough, ON



Fig 2.76: Front Elevation



Fig 2.77: Interior Prayer Space



Fig 2.78: Urban Context





### Mecca Islamic Center (Storefront)

3234 Eglinton Ave E, Scarborough, ON



Fig 2.79: Front Elevation



Fig 2.80: Interior Prayer Space



Fig 2.81: Urban Context





# Subhan Masjid (Garage)

2956 Eglinton Ave E, Scarborough, ON



Fig 2.82: Front Elevation



Fig 2.84: Urban Context



Fig 2.83: Interior Prayer Space



# Masjid Bilal (Restaurant)

214 Markham Rd, Scarborough, ON



Fig 2.85: Front Elevation



Fig 2.87: Urban Context

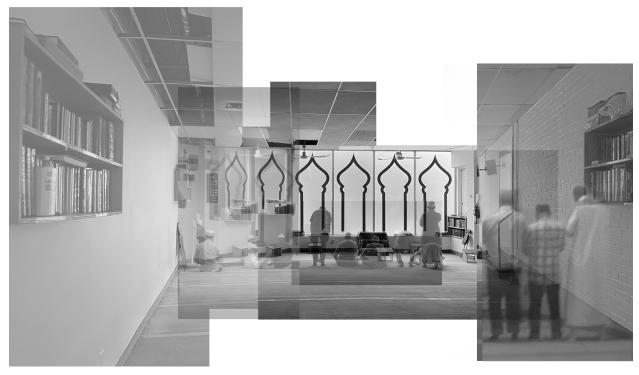


Fig 2.86: Interior Prayer Space





Fig 2.88: Urban Context - Masjid Al Jannah, Scarborough (Office)



Fig 2.89: Urban Context - Baitul Jannah, Scarborough (Motel)







Fig 2.90: Urban Context - Jaame Masjid, Scarborough (Warehouse)



Fig 2.91: Urban Context - Masjid Al-Hidaya Markaz, Scarborough (Industrial Flex Space)





#### Degrading Social Structure of the Muslim communities

"Muslims always seem to be talking about the injustices done to them by the outside world, but I rarely hear Muslims talking about the unfairness that exists within our own communities," said Zarqa Nawaz in the 2005 documentary, "Me and the Mosque." Although many continue to push for better representation of all levels of mosque governance and participation, growing alienation within the sociopolitical system of various mosque congregations in Canada urges the need to reform. The system of segregation in both purpose-built and repurposed mosques is twofold: First, sex and gender are used to define the architecture of the mosque with Muslim women playing extremely limited roles in the congregations. Second, from the leadership of the congregation to the symbolic elements of its architecture, many mosques in Canada portray an image of cultural exclusivism — one that discourages diversity in age groups and ethnicities.

Physical separation of women's prayer spaces from the men's through architectural barriers such as walls, separate rooms, and even basements are a common sight in the majority of the mosques in Canada. Nawaz added, "I have prayed in a room where there was a one-way mirror so men cannot see me. I am told we are a distraction. I look out and I see them, but they just see a mirror. Presence of women in my mosque has been erased." Historically, the gender division practice emerged only in certain regions of the Islamic world. Possibly the most influential on this development was the Ottoman proliferation of a new mosque typology heavily related to the Byzantine Hagia Sophia. In addition to absorbing the use of domes and minarets, subsequent Ottoman design of mosques also included the Byzantine gynaeceum, which was a place

<sup>82</sup> Zarqa Nawaz, "Me and the Mosque (2005)," YouTube, October 15, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sder6fD\_Kp8.

<sup>83</sup> Amina Wadud, Inside the Gender Jihad Women's Reform in Islam (Oxford Oneworld, 2018).

<sup>84</sup> Nawaz, "Me and the Mosque," 2015.



**Fig 2.92:** The Physical Separation of Women in a Prayer Space (Photograph: Giuseppe Milo, "Praying," 2014, Flickr)

designated for use by women. However, this reserved space for women eventually became the norm for designating gendered usage of sacred spaces and was an element that architects "freely modified to suit the compositional needs regardless of the impact that it would have on the act of prayer such as reduced areas, visibility, and access." Subsequently, the norm of gendered mosque spaces spread throughout the Islamic World and other methods of segregation such as walls and mezzanines were implemented by governing bodies – even in mosques that originally did not have separate spaces for men and women. This practice of segregation has not only been detrimental to the social lives of Muslim women, but it also directly contradicts the teachings of the Quran. The Quran and the Prophet's sunnah never mentioned any explicit gender or race division. As a matter of fact, it is clearly stated in the holy book that no one is more disgraceful than those who forbid or limit someone's freedom to enter a mosque or practice their faith in God. Even the Prophet's first mosque in Islam welcomed diversity and gender as men and women would pray in the same prayer space and participated in the same programs together. The prophet's first mosque are prayer space and participated in the same programs together.

Islamic identity is more than its physical symbolism, aesthetics or the architectural expressions of a mosque. Beyond one's perception and belief of a singular God, Muslim identity also encompasses the treatment and caring for human beings with huge diversity in gender, color, language, ethnicity and culture. In addition to their social relationships with people from diverse backgrounds, Muslims must also build their sacred spaces which reflect the core values of Islam, especially within the context of Canada. However, much of these standards and principles are lost today as the communities are not only duplicating the physical aesthetics from historical mosques

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<sup>85</sup> Tammy Gaber, "Gendered Mosque Spaces," Faith and Form 48, no. 1 (2015).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>86</sup> Khan and Al-Hilali, trans., "The Qur'an. Interpretation," Chapter 2: Verse 114, Chapter 8: Verse 34, Chapter 22: Verse 25, Chapter 48: Verse 25.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>87</sup> Maryam Eskandari, "[Re]Construction of Women's Spaces in the American Mosques," in *The Graduate Consortium in Women's Studies* (Gender, Sexuality, and Urban Spaces, Working Papers Collection, 2012).

but also imitating their social segregation methods. The desperate need for women to find inclusive places of worship produced controversial gatherings such as Canada's first Women's Mosque launching inside Trinity-St. Paul's United Church in Toronto. 88 The mosque received major backlash from other communities with people claiming: "There is nothing in Islamic tradition to support the notion of a women only mosque" and the "effort would only divide people and reinforce harmful stereotypes about the oppression of women."89 The co-founder of the mosque, Farheen Khan, was hoping to avoid any backlash as she simply aimed to provide an opportunity for women and girls to regularly gather for Friday prayers and together reclaim their religious inheritance. It is evident from such events that many of these actions have directly arisen as the result of the longstanding patriarchal nature of gender segregation and leadership in mosques. The production of such "radical" religious spaces show the ways in which women are simply adapting to the situation. Although in some mosques, congregants have lifted the separation barrier and afforded authoritative roles to a few Muslim women due to divergent cultural, educative, and economic shifts in the Muslim diaspora, however, these cases are rare. The reality is that Muslim Women in the West, like many Muslim women across the globe, continue to "directly experience the consequences of oppressive misreadings of religious texts."90

On the contrary, the most common pro-gender-separation argument claims that in a unified gender atmosphere, men would be distracted by the backs of women while in prostration. Even many Muslim women agree on this notion of distraction and accept that they pray with an increased level of comfort knowing that men would be unable to see their bodies while

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<sup>88</sup> Farheen Khan, "First Women's Mosque of Canada Opens in Toronto," Now Toronto, April 24, 2019.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>89</sup> Amira Elghawaby, "Backlash over the Women's Mosque of Canada Is Predictable and Misplaced," *The Globe and Mail*, 2019, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article backlash-over-the-womens-mosque-of-canada-is-predictable-and/.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>90</sup> Asma Barlas, *Believing Women In Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an.* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 3.



**Fig 2.93:** Photograph (modified): Ruth G., "Farheen Khan Leads Women's-Only Friday Prayers at Trinity St. Paul's United Church in Toronto," 2019, Broadview.

worshipping. Even if the architecture is designed to include both men and women in the same prayer space, physical barriers are eventually implemented by the communities to have separate spaces for the sexes. In many instances of contemporary mosques, the architects would resolve this problem by designating specific spaces in the prayer hall for men and women but without compromising the architectural experiences for either one of them. For instance, many contemporary mosques in Canada such as Masjid Al Salaam and Masjid Al Hidayah implemented a mezzanine in their prayer spaces where women would be praying separately but have clear and direct views to the Imam and the Qibla wall. Other mosques would have women praying behind the men separated with glazed walls in order to equally distribute the floor space between both genders.

Women are not the only ones who suffer the consequences of segregation in mosques. Many purpose-built and repurposed mosques in Canada are dominated by one particular ethnic group, which includes either South Asian, Arab, or African Americans. As Muslims in our contemporary society become integrated within the multi-racial Canadian environments, it feels increasingly uncomfortable and unwelcoming to enter a mosque that is conspicuously dominated by a certain culture. Especially for the youth of today who, growing up in a multicultural society, do not have a strong connection with their parents' country of origins – which aggravates their discomfort when entering an ethnically based space in which they feel like an outsider. Such forms of exclusionary means do not come in the form of physical barriers but with other elusive expressions. For instance, certain explicit naming conventions are used in mosques; the Bosnian Islamic Centre of Toronto, the Afghan Canadian Islamic Community, the Albanian Muslim

<sup>91</sup> Tom G. Kernaghan, "Jami Mosque Served Changing Community," Oak Writer, May 18, 2016,

http://oakwriter.com/project/jami-mosque-served-changing-community/.

<sup>92</sup> Eid, "Unmosqued," Film.

Society of Toronto, and so on. Some mosques such as the Turkish Islamic Heritage Association, even includes the half-moon symbol of their flag engraved on the façade to mark the main entrance of the mosque. The programs and languages used in these mosques are also structured in a way so that they are geared towards Muslims only from one certain ethnicity.

Yet, despite such exclusionary means practiced by the communities, these mosques have been formed in order to provide community and comfort to the influx of Muslims that have come from diverse parts of the world to Canada. New immigrants, whether Muslim or not, are constantly looking for spaces where they could be involved and be part of a community who speak and understand the same languages and relate to their native culture. Hence, an ethnic mosque geared towards a certain culture becomes a very satisfying place for a newcomer Muslim. However, we must ask, is the comfort going to remain with future generations and multicultural Muslims in Canada?

The notion of mosque architecture segregating certain groups in order to include others, especially in the context of Canada, is a complex multi layered subject that must be discussed by architects and the Muslim communities. As mentioned earlier, a much more comprehensive study is needed in order to fully understand the deeper levels of social and architectural exclusionary means practiced by the Muslim communities. It is nonetheless important to raise several key questions that is relevant within the scope of this thesis research: How can the Muslim community alter the physical and aesthetic makeup of mosques to include women, youth and converts? How can programs be designed for inclusivity while respecting different cultural traditions, social practices and gender? What are the challenges and implications of a mosque representing a contemporary Canadian culture? And how can architects and Muslim communities work together within these parameters to design a mosque for all?

# Chapter Three: Rethinking Islamic Spaces

Hermeneutics can teach us the importance that is attached to two types of modalities in mosque architecture that can make a structure appear anomalous to the naked eye: hidden meaning and transformed meaning.<sup>93</sup> For instance, the hidden meaning associated with the use of double minarets in purpose-built mosques can be traced back to the architectural expression of the fifteenth and sixteenth century Ottoman architecture. However, such an expression is an aesthetic anomaly in North America. Conversely, the renovation of an existing storefront or a restaurant to transform its meaning to an Islamic sacred space without the use of traditional architectural expression, could potentially be an unconventional practice in the countries of origins of Muslim immigrants. Therefore, mosques in Canada experience this unusual tension of two different types of architectural interpretation resulting from the Muslim diaspora. Interpretation of the image of a mosque coupled with Muslims' economic struggles, takes varying degrees of subjective and objective meaning within their communities. In other words, if the idea of "the whole earth" being a masjid is understood for its metaphorical meaning, then any style and form of architecture or lack thereof could potentially act as a "mosque" regardless of their architectural style.<sup>94</sup> Therefore, from the perspective of the diasporic Muslims it can be argued that function and efficiency is more relevant than exploring novel aesthetics, spatial order, and innovation in mosques. And yet, whether with domes, minarets, halal restaurants or Arabic calligraphy, there are obvious explicit or subtle evidence of Islamic expressions and cultural

<sup>93</sup> Kahera, "Deconstructing the American Mosque" 26.

<sup>94</sup> Due to the use of unnecessary embellishments and meaningless signs and symbols in many mosques throughout history, many scholars took the meaning of earth being a masjid literally and were against praying on anything except on bare earth, and even regarded praying mats as a repulsive innovation, which however is far from being the case. See; Al Zakarshi, I'lām al-Sājid Bi-Ahkām al-Masājid (Bayrūt, Lebanon: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīyah, 1995), 357; Omer, "Mosque Decoration between Acceptance and Rejection," 30; and Kahera, "Deconstructing the American Mosque" 35-36.

memories, that are being implemented in mosques and Muslim neighborhoods. Such instances prove that Muslims desire for a sense of identity and belonging through their social environments and sacred spaces and are continually putting forward their best attempt in expressing their culture through such means of expressions. Apart from their socioeconomic struggles, many of them simply lack the guidance of architects to design and structure their spaces that avoid literally imitating the conventions and elements "that are connected to the universalized and colonial imaginings of Islamic architecture."

The dual characters of both purpose-built and repurposed mosques along with the multivariant socio-political problems encompassing Muslims and their sacred spaces, demand for a method of reimagining the architectural expressions of Mosques and reforming the practice of social hierarchies among the Muslim communities. It is necessary for architects today to build any sacred space, whether Islamic or not, to not only convey a meaningful architectural experience but one that reflects and edifies the liturgical and communal values of the worshippers. Rudolf Otto argues that "the most effective means of conveying an experience of the sacred is to communicate a sense of the sublime" with the rider that "architecture is the most apt medium for that purpose." To understand how meaning is conveyed in a religious space, it is important to consider the relationship between the psychological perception of religious symbols and the phenomenological experience expressed by the architecture, and as well as the treatment of space to serve a socially inclusive environment. According to John Renard, religious architecture functions in three levels: the communitarian, which relates to the ritual, functional and social needs of the community; the didactic, which is the role of explicit symbolism in projecting the

<sup>95</sup> Kurd, "Competing Visions, Common Forms" (PhD, 2013): 7.

<sup>96</sup> Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy (London, 1923), 65–67.

content of a religion through elements and ornamentation; and the experiential, which relates to the architectural form capturing the worshippers' emotions.<sup>97</sup> The roles of the communitarian, the didactic and the experiential are all interconnected by the architectural space of the mosque, and must be discussed in the contemporary age of designing sacred spaces by architects and the Muslim communities in order to improve the current problems of Canadian mosques.

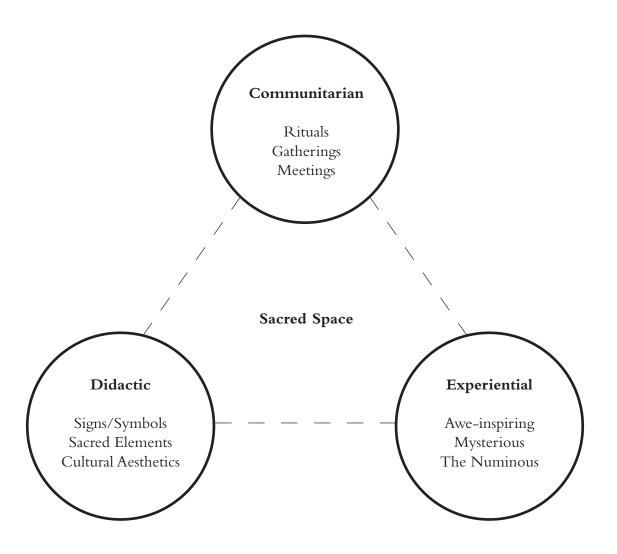


Fig 3.1: The Three Fundamental Levels of Sacred Spaces

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>97</sup> John Renard, "A Method for Comparative Studies in Religious Visual Arts: Approaching Architecture," *Religion and the Arts* 1, no. 1 (1996): 100–123, https://doi.org/10.1163/156852996x00423.

#### The Communitarian: Raising Awareness and Learning from Precedents

While radical change in the social sphere must come from within the individual and their communities alike, several measures can be taken to raise awareness of the sociopolitical issues in the diasporic Muslim communities. Documentary films such as, "Unmosqued," illustrate the various segregating notions implemented within purpose-built and repurposed mosques and how such practices create a large amount of confusion in the minds of millennials, generation Xers and women between what is cultural practice and what is essential in Islam. The film raises awareness by diving deep into the social and architectural nuances of Mosques, and shows how the practices of segregation can have a profound and negative impact on worshippers and Islamic identity.<sup>98</sup> Growing alienation has also sparked movements in which women, young people and converts avoid traditional institutions, including multimillion-dollar mosques, in search for alternatives or "third spaces." Third spaces are different from a traditional mosque where the focus of the communities are inclusivity practices including formal and informal gatherings without barriers and an authentic embrace of diversity. 99 Besides the Women's Mosque of Toronto, other examples also include the Unity Mosque, which serves the LGBTQ Muslim community. 100 However, not only do these mosques incur their own unique controversies, but most of them struggle financially to expand as community centers and thus remain as only brief measures to fight the discrimination. The phenomena of young Muslims "unmosquing" – avoiding

<sup>98</sup> Eid, "Unmosqued," Film.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>99</sup> Faiqa Mahmood, "Understanding Inclusivity Practices at 'Third Spaces'" (Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, September 2016, 2016).

<sup>100</sup> Imam El-Farouk Khaki co-founded Toronto's first LGBTQ-friendly mosque in 2009, to welcome lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer Muslims to attend prayers without having to hide their sexual orientation or gender identity. Although historically the notion of a queer mosque is extremely controversial in almost every single Muslim communities, Khaki noted that things are starting to change in Canada as more communities and mosques are starting to celebrate and embrace inclusion and diversity. See more in; Finbarr Toesland, "Affirming Mosques Help Gay Muslims Reconcile Faith, Sexuality," *NBC News*, April 1, 2019, https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/affirming-mosques-help-gay-muslims-reconcile-faith-sexuality-n988151.

participation in mosques because they began to feel marginalized or alienated by their Muslim community, <sup>101</sup> and the continued struggle for women in mosques raise significant questions about the roles these "minority groups within a minority group" play in religious and civic life in the West.

Another significant approach to address and question the problems of segregation may involve learning from historical models such as the first mosques of Islam (The house of Prophet in Medina, the Fustat, Basra and Kufa mosques) and the historic mosques of Canada (Al Rashid Mosque and Mosque One). These examples of mosques set good precedents in understanding the importance of cultural identity and gender inclusivity without explicit divisions or markers demarcated by architectural elements. The spaces in these mosques incorporated a type of fluidity which allowed for a singular and unified mosque space for the community. Learning from the few contemporary precedents existing in Canada may also be fruitful, such as the Ismaili Centre of Toronto, where worshippers of any age and gender is welcomed to pray in one unified space of worship, or the prayer space of Noor Cultural Centre, where the subtle gendered delineation in the prayer space is marked only by two separate rugs in an equal horizontal division of space. Such mosques can be considered as important examples to understand that Islamic architecture can go beyond the existing norm set by Muslims.

<sup>101</sup> Eid, "Unmosqued," Film.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>102</sup> Tammy Gaber, "Beyond the Divide: Women's Spaces in Canadian Mosques," in *Architecture, Culture, and Spirituality Symposium* (Symposium: Forum for Architecture, Culture and Spirituality, architectural research centers consortium, 2014), http://www.acsforum.org/symposium2014/papers/GABER.pdf.



**Fig 3.2:** Photograph (modified): Sean Gallup, "Muslims Attend Friday Prayers during the Opening of the Ibn-Rushd-Goethe Mosque," June 2017, NBC News.

#### The Didactic: Abstraction in Aesthetics

As discussed earlier in chapter two, aesthetics and symbolism in both purpose-built and repurposed mosques can have a strong impact on the image of the mosque and thus it can shape the perception of both Muslims and non-Muslims. I argued that overtly expressive symbolism in a mosque reverting to the past fails to uphold its architectural meaning within the contemporary and foreign landscape of Canada. Conversely, the 'lack of symbolism' or the notion of kitsch expressions of aesthetics, discourages one to find sacred meaning within the disguised facades of renovated structures. When rethinking the connection between symbolism and tradition, Dora Crouch explains that,

"Tradition, like history, is something that is continually being created, recreated, and remodeled in the present, even [though] it is represented as fixed and unchanging. There is no architecture without inviolable rules of construction and interpretation that are formed in the course of history for every people by means of a more or less complex convergence and superimposition of elements . . . and associations." <sup>103</sup>

Reimagining a novel understanding of mosque architecture in Canada requires architects to examine, not one distinct building tradition or design concept, but rather an aggregate of concepts and traditions, related to one another yet aesthetically unconstrained. Examples of such architectural expressions can be seen in the Prince George Islamic Centre in British Columbia, where instead of implementing floral patterns on the Mihrab like the ones in traditional Middle Eastern mosques, the Qibla wall in the prayer space unveils the actual natural vegetation on its site by framing it with its transparent glazed wall, and thus creating a space where one could contemplate nature as a creation of God. Here the notion of paradise represented through nature

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>103</sup> Dora P Crouch and June Gwendolyn Johnson, *Traditions in Architecture: Africa, America, Asia, and Oceania* (New York: Oxford University, 2001), 3.

is both abstracted and grounded on the very site the mosque is built upon. Noor Cultural Centre in Toronto implements a shading screen composed of abstracted arabesque which lets in soft natural light to the interior prayer space. The natural light illuminates the Kufic writings along with the upper section of the glazed wall, and thus naturally directing the focus of the worshippers towards the Qibla Wall. Ismaili Centre includes a large multifaceted angular glass dome – which is a contemporary reconstruction of the symbolic eight-pointed Islamic star – rising above the roof to mark the presence of the community on the exterior. The massive size of the abstracted glass dome is a reinterpretation of the vertical symbolism created by the historical domes and minarets. A sliver of glass in the interior cuts one of the faces of the dome marking the direction to Mecca and is used as the Mihrab. With the diffused natural light coming through the frosted glass, the prayer space underneath the dome not only remains as the most striking feature of the mosque but it is also designed to be contemplative, cultural, educational, and most importantly inclusive of all race, age, and gender. These mosques will be further explored at the end of this section in order to understand their deeper architectural layers.

All three aforementioned mosques incorporate the contemporary use of image, geometry, and epigraphy in a manner which ground the building appropriately in its geographic location, framing Muslim identity in a Canadian context. These models show that finding the right harmony between tradition and modernity is significant when it comes to designing and constructing sacred spaces that speak to different generations of worshippers and their communities. These mosques also capture the true meaning of Islamic aesthetics which go beyond the mere visual embellishments described by David Wade:

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<sup>104</sup> Jessica Mairs, "Charles Correa Completes Crystalline Islamic Centre," Dezeen, June 4, 2015,

https://www.dezeen.com/2015/06/04/charles-correa-completes-crystalline-islamic-centre-ismaili-toronto-aga-khan-museum-canada/.

"Much of the art of Islam, whether in architecture, ceramics, textiles or books, is the art of decoration – which is to say, of transformation. The aim, however, is never merely to ornament, but rather to transfigure. ... The vast edifices of mosques are transformed into lightness and pattern; the decorated pages of a Qur'an can become windows onto the infinite. Perhaps most importantly, the Word, expressed in endless calligraphic variations, always conveys the impression that it is more enduring than the objects on which it is inscribed." <sup>105</sup>

When designing a contemporary mosque in Canada, one must ask, how can we derive meaning from the spatial paradigms of the past or work with the existing vernacular method of adaptation to create a sense of memory and belonging? And, how can architects learn to question each symbolic gesture of a mosque in order to create a novel identity for their communities?

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>105</sup> David Wade, "The Evolution of Style," *Pattern in Islamic Art* (blog), March 2006, https://patterninislamicart.com/background-notes/the-evolution-of-style.

#### The Experiential: The Numinous and the Rational

Many theorists, such as, Mircea Eliade, Eugene Walter, and Jonathan Z Smith have debated the idea of the true meaning of the concept of sacred spaces. One of the fundamental notions of sacred spaces that is common to most of their theories is perfectly described by Douglas Hoffman as the transitioning of the mind and body from the current physical realm to the unseen and unknown spiritual realm. 106 The power of the spiritual realm or the concept of the Numinous studied by Otto explains that a sense of mysterious power - which is beyond and incomprehensible by humankind – is an overwhelming feeling that is both inviting and haunting when experienced. This mysterious power is both fascinating and enchanting as it holds our interests and attention at the deepest levels, and in many ways makes us search for the spiritual and the religious in the world around us. 107 This complex feeling of spiritual and sacred presence is key to become conscientiously religious. While the feeling of the Numinous must come from within ourselves, the relationship between this mysterious power and our human senses is captured and framed by sacred architecture. The experience of the Numinous has three components: the "mysterium" which embodies the mystery, wonder and stupor; the "tremendum" which is the feeling of terror, energy, dread, creature-feeling or nothingness; and the "fascinans" which embodies attractiveness, joy and charm. <sup>108</sup> All three components of the Numinous are experienced simultaneously "in the fixed and ordered solemnities of rites and liturgies, and again in the atmosphere that clings to old religious monuments and buildings, to temples and to churches." This power can also be felt, for instance, in the massive columns,

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>106</sup> Douglas R Hoffman, Seeking the Sacred in Contemporary Religious Architecture (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2010), 5–12.

<sup>107</sup> Otto, The Idea of the Holy, 5-23.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 12-23.

<sup>109</sup> Goldberger, "Architecture, Sacred Space and the Challenge of the Modern" (August 12, 2010)

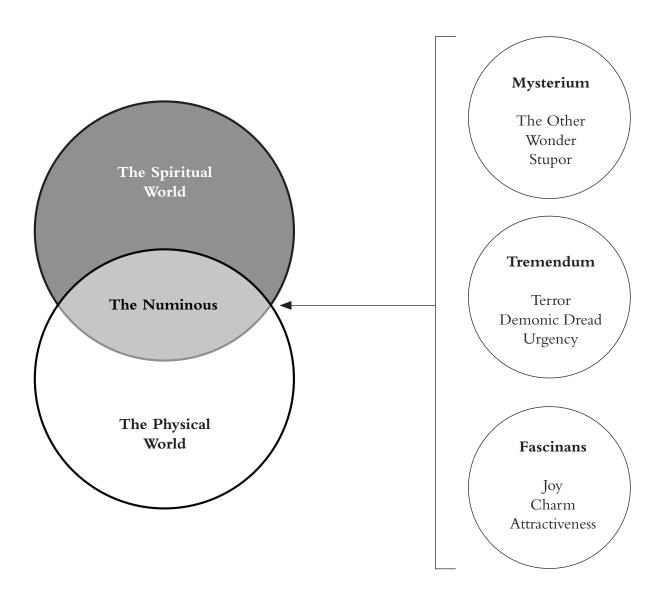


Fig 3.3: The Notion of the Numinous by Rudolf Otto

arches and structural ribs in the interior of the Notre Dame in Paris or in the very strangeness of the shape of Le Corbusier chapel at Ronchamp pulling worshippers away from the rational and suggesting an unseen, spiritual power.

Goldberger, however, explains an intriguing paradox when experiencing sacred spaces in any form of architecture,

"...in the realm of the sacred, architecture, the discipline most dependent on materiality, indeed the ultimate expression of materiality, must try to express what is not material, what cannot ever be material. In the quest to create sacred space, architecture is in a way working against itself, struggling to use the material to express what transcends the material, using the physical to express the transcendent." <sup>110</sup>

The reality is that architecture by nature and expectation is rational – building structure is logical unlike the sacred which is irrational. The sacred not only does not demand logic, it defies it. Therefore, this contradiction points to the fact that one can contemplate the idea of God, but it is impossible to engineer the physical reality of God. However, we need the tangible reality to greatly strengthen our feelings of the numinous, or in other words, we need the physical world to transport us to the divine world. Sacred space in its purest sense – a near perfect interplay of all the spatial elements creating total architectural harmony – can evoke the feeling of awe and reach the status of, as Le Corbusier once described it, "Ineffable." Therefore, the materiality and the rationality of architecture becomes a transitioning medium in which we transcend from one realm to another. This leads to a few key questions; how can today's architects design an Islamic sacred space which expresses and heightens the feelings of sacredness and awe? Or more specifically, how

<sup>110</sup> Goldberger, "Architecture, Sacred Space and the Challenge of the Modern" (August 12, 2010)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>111</sup> Roberto Gargiani and Anna Rosellini, *Le Corbusier: Béton Brut and Ineffable Space, 1940-1965; Surface Materials and Psychophysiology of Vision* (Lausanne Epfl Press, 2011).

can the formal characteristics of purpose-built and repurposed spaces be utilized in order reinforce the connection between the worshippers and the numinous? And is it even possible to achieve the ineffable in the informal characteristics of Canadian mosques?

The mystery and awe of the sacred can be awakened through the architectural setting of a mosque, but to facilitate this sense of the sacred, the space must provide meaning in both the physical and metaphysical realms. A wide range of "experiential intangibles" can be invoked through "the manipulation of formal characteristics such as line, space, mass, surface, colour, proportion, movement, rhythm and light." Hoffman also identified three characteristics that point to the numinous: darkness, silence, and emptiness, but in order for a space to evoke these feelings, there must be ambiguity in the space. The true meaning lies not in the final state but in the transitioning zone between light and darkness, noise dimming to silence, emptiness and profusion, and humility and monumentality. 113 Hoffman in his study also includes physical expressions that are architectural and archetypal such as; the gate, path, place and portal, axis mundi, the four elements, and geometry. 114 He suggests that the experience of awe and curiosity of the divine is evoked through these transitioning elements, and thus reinforces one's belief of the numinous. Yet, it is important to ask, how can today's architects design such a phenomenological space in a society where many Canadian mosques, especially the repurposed ones, eschew the concept of architectural experience? Is it possible to achieve the spiritual experience of awe in their buildings that makes it feasible both economically and in their longevity?

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>112</sup> John Renard, "Approaching Architecture," Religion and the Arts.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>113</sup> Hoffman, Seeking the Sacred in Contemporary Religious Architecture, 13-17.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 1-17.

# Contemporary Expressions of Canadian Mosques

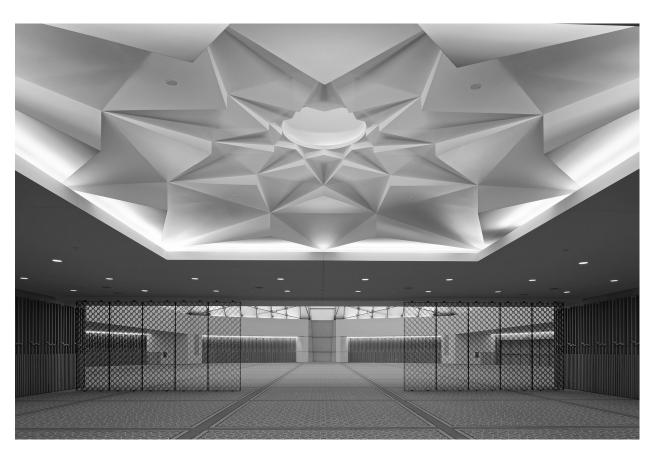
Case Study: Ismaili Centre, North York, ON

Ismaili Centre is located in North York and sits adjacent to the Aga Khan Museum. The building serves as an important hub for the Ismaili community in Toronto where Muslims gather to not only worship but to also engage with the diverse Islamic programs and events that are held in the building. The building hosts various programs which celebrate the diversity and values of the Islamic communities in Toronto such as, lectures dedicated to faith and ethics, celebrating Muslim women's work in the community, discussion about identity and belonging in the Muslim community in Canada, and philosophical conversations about the religion. The programmatic spaces, such as the prayer hall, social hall, meeting rooms and lecture rooms, are connected and separated by the large common hallway which starts from the main entrance and leads the occupants to the various parts of the building. This wide hallway also incorporates seating and meeting spots where the occupants can gather before or after the social events. Women play a key role in the management and programs of the Ismaili centre, as they hold many events dedicated to their roles in the Muslim communities and participate in various discussions which challenges the notion of gender segregation in Islamic cultures.

The architecture of the Ismaili Centre also responds to and compliments the identity of the community with its contemporary formal expression creating a phenomenological experience in the interior. The architect Charles Correa used the form of the building to capture the natural light in specific areas to create the feeling of awe and curiosity in not only the sacred spaces but also in the secular rooms. The courtyard in the centre of the building is a social gathering space which visually connects the upper floors to the ground floor and enables natural sunlight to penetrate the interior common hallway. Similar cuts and voids in the building are also

implemented in the lecture space and the meeting room, where a large skylight cuts the wall and roof to bring in maximum natural light and views to the sky. Calligraphic patterns are also hand carved on the walls and glasses in the interior spelling out the name of God in various geometrical shapes.

The architect reimagined the eight-pointed Islamic star and implemented this symbol in the form a large multifaceted angular glass dome which rises out of the prayer space to mark the presence of the Ismaili community. Another version of this star is applied on the ceiling of the anteroom before entering the main prayer space. The anteroom does not receive any sunlight and is comparatively darker than the prayer space, however, this move was applied in order to create the feeling of transition from darkness to light when one enters the main prayer space. The natural light washing down from the sky from the glass dome of the prayer space is a symbolism towards light coming down from heaven and the multi faceted eight-pointed star marks the perfection of God's creation of the world. A sliver of clear glass cuts one of the faces of the dome marking the direction to Mecca and is used as the Mihrab, and the translucent glass brings in soft natural light from the sky. This angular dome of the building is also reminiscent of the corbelling in many of the traditional domes in the Islamic world. Men and women both pray in the same circular prayer space, but they are equally divided by the visual axis created by the glazed Mihrab. This creates opportunities for women to be comfortable while praying while also maintaining a direct view to the Imam and the Qibla wall.



**Fig 3.4:** The Anteroom of Ismaili Centre (Photograph (modified): Gary Otte, "The 'Muqarnas' Is a Finely Crafted Corbelled Ceiling Whose Skylight Provides a Subtle Transition from the Outside to the Serene Jamatkhana Inside," 2014, The Ismaili)



**Fig 3.5:** The Prayer Space of Ismaili Centre (Photograph (modified): Shai Gil, Inside the Jamatkhana, the Central Skylight Panel Descends to a White Translucent Onyx Block, 2014, The Ismaili)

#### Case Study: Noor Cultural Centre, North York, ON

Noor Cultural Centre was originally built in 1963 by the architect Raymond Moriyama for a Japanese Cultural Centre. The redesign and renovation of the building in 2003 was also done by Moriyama himself which became today's Noor Cultural Centre. An important cultural hub for people both inside and outside the Islamic communities, the concept of the programming in Noor Cultural Centre is derived from the Quranic hadith; "We have created you male and female, and made you into nations and tribes so you may know one another." All the programs and events in the building are geared towards fostering an inclusive relationship between multicultural communities which celebrate gender and promotes discussion about moving towards the future in terms of social values. The communities here also promote discussion about interfaith values, climate change, history and activism in the country. Female Imams also regularly lead prayers and play a key role in leadership.

The architecture of the building enables the rich diversity of the programs by creating spaces for lectures, iftars, large gathering spaces and a gym that is used by both Muslims and non-Muslims. Majority of the spaces are dedicated to secular programs and the prayer space is located adjacent to the kitchen. In this space, the perpendicular division for men and women is subtly marked with the linear space created by the rugs behind the Minbar. A large portion of the Qibla wall incorporates a series of kufic geometric patterns spelling out "Noor" which means light in Arabic. Natural light is captured by these wooden screens and brought into the prayer space which edifies the quality of worshipping to God. These wooden screens are also repeated in other parts of the façades where light is captured in the secular spaces as well.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Khan and Al-Hilali, trans., "The Qur'an. Interpretation," Chapter 49: Verse 13

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Noor Cultural Centre, "The Building," Noor Cultural Centre, accessed January 12, 2021.



**Fig 3.6:** The use of Concrete and Wood on the Exterior Facade (Photograph (modified): Thomas Guignard, "Noor Cultural Centre," 2017, Flickr)



**Fig 3.7:** Natural Light Penetrating through Kufic Calligraphy Pattern on the Qibla Wall (Photograph (modified): Thomas Guignard, "Noor Cultural Centre," 2017, Flickr)

## Case Study: Prince George Islamic Centre, Prince George, BC

Prince George Islamic Centre is located in Prince George, BC which was built by the funds raised by the communities of British Columbia Muslim Association (BCMA). When designing the mosque, the architect Sharif Senbel carefully considered the context of the building in terms of its orientation, use of materials and environmental sustainability. The building includes a large multipurpose gym, which is bigger than the prayer space, and used for various programs such as youth and sport activities, but it can also be converted to be used as an event space and other social and educational gatherings. The scale of this multipurpose space shows that the secular programmed spaces in a mosque are equally as important as their sacred counterparts.

The architecture of the Prince George Islamic Centre reflects an iconography that is familiar to both the Muslim and larger community of Prince George by incorporating both traditional and local embellishments. For instance; the materiality of the mosque features Spruce Pine glulam beams served as structural and aesthetic elements, exterior cladding includes bright corrugated metal which is commonly used in the city, and local craft, knowledge and methods were embedded in the design and construction of the mosque. The women pray on a mezzanine on top of the men's prayer space, but they have direct view to the Qibla wall and the Imam because of the row of glass railing towards the prayer axis. Instead of implementing floral patterns on the Mihrab like the ones in traditional mosques, Senbel used a series of large windows to frame the natural vegetation on its site. Here the architect emphasized the building's relation to its site and enables worshippers to contemplate nature itself as truly a perfect creation of God in all seasons. This glazed Qibla wall also brings in adequate natural light in the interior and the mezzanine, and thus creating the experience of transcendence in the sacred space.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Tammy Gaber, Safira Lakhani, and Jessica Lam, "An Argument of Craft for Prayer – A Contemporary Mosque Design in Northern Canada," *Architecture, Culture and Spirituality Symposium (ACS9)*, 2017, 1–8.



**Fig 3.8:** The Exterior Facade of Prince George Islamic Centre (Photograph (modified): Datoff, "PG Islamic Centre," 2014, Datoff Bros. Construction)



**Fig 3.9:** The Prayer Space of Prince George Islamic Centre Framing the Natural Vegetation on the Site (Photograph (modified): Himy Syed, "Brother Mazhar makes Adhan Al-Asr Call to Afternoon Prayer," 2016, 30 Masjids in 30 Days of Ramadan)

#### Case Study: Masjid Al Hidayah, Vancouver, BC

Masjid Al Hidayah is located in Vancouver and is also designed by Sharif Senbel who defined an indigenous Islamic architecture in the West coast of Canada. As many Canadian mosques, this building also incorporates diverse programs which are geared towards creating an inclusive culture where there is no segregation or social barriers. The mosque features an Islamic resource library, kitchen and cafeteria, a funeral room, a courtyard and a children's play area. A gym is also incorporated which, apart from hosting sports, can also be used to host various other social and recreational events such as weddings, dinners, and workshops. The intriguing factor of this space is that it is strategically oriented towards the Qibla direction in order to expand itself to the prayer hall if more space is needed for the worshippers.

Through the use of local construction methods and materials such as concrete masonry, clay bricks and timber, the architecture of the building is tied to its woodland environmental site. The strip of glazing on the walls of the prayer hall are etched with geometric floral patterns where natural light penetrates the shapes creating an interesting play of floral shadows on the floor. The movement of the light through these glazed windows symbolizes God's guiding light and creates a sense of time moving forward.

Separate, but identical entrances for men and women represents the duality of God's creation and symbolizes equality of access and rights for both genders. In the prayer space, although the women pray separately on a mezzanine, their sacred experience is not compromised as they get clear and direct views to the Qibla wall, the Imam and the floral shadows created by the natural light.<sup>8</sup>

 $^8\ Sharif\ Senbel,\ ``Masjid\ Al\ Hidayah,"\ www.studiosenbel.com,\ 2013,\ https://www.studiosenbel.com/projects/masjid-al-hidayah.$ 



**Fig 3.10:** Exterior Facade of Masjid Al Hidayah (Photograph (modified): Studio Senbel, "Masjid Al Hidayah," 2013, Studio Senbel Architecture + Design)



**Fig 3.11:** View from the Women's Prayer Space (Photograph (modified): Studio Senbel, "Masjid Al Hidayah," 2013, Studio Senbel Architecture + Design)

#### Case Study: Masjid Al Salaam, Burnaby, BC

Masjid Al Salaam is located in Burnaby in British Columbia and is also one of the purpose-built mosques designed by Sharif Senbel. As with any successful Canadian mosques, Masjid Al Salaam incorporates multi secular functions with its sacred spaces such as, Friday schools, interfaith programs, community dinners, and as well as a food bank. There is also a multi-purpose gym which can be transformed to become a lecture hall and a kitchen which brings the community together in events such as weddings and Ramadan iftars. With the inclusion of such programs in a mosque, women and youth do not feel alienated in their communities.

Inspired by the masonry building in Vancouver's gas town, Senbel combined traditional forms with contemporary expressions in the mosque's architectural language. The overall exterior including the dome and the minaret are built with masonry with Kufic calligraphy spelling out the name of God engraved on the façade. The interior features a courtyard attracting natural light deep into all the areas of the building in addition to providing a social gathering space for the community. This courtyard also provides a layered transition between the outside chaos to the inside tranquil.

In the interior, the women pray on a mezzanine in the double height prayer space but the sacred experience for them is not compromised by the architecture. The women get clear and direct views to the Qibla wall and Imam, and experience the changes of the interior atmosphere by the series of diamond shaped skylights puncturing the ceiling which brings in natural light throughout the day. Senbel was also careful in choosing local materials such as, glulam beams and planks, for the ceiling and a glazed Qibla wall, in order to further ground the mosque in its site. The purpose of the Qibla wall is to frame the natural vegetation in its site indicating that the notion of paradise is metaphorically located at the very site the mosque building is situated in.<sup>9</sup>

9 Sharif Senbel, "Masjid Al Salaam," www.studiosenbel.com, 2013, https://www.studiosenbel.com/projects/masjid-al-hidayah.



**Fig 3.12:** Exterior Facade of Masjid Al Salaam (Screenshot by Author (modified): Google Street View 2019, Google)



**Fig 3.13:** View from the Women's Prayer Space(Photograph (modified): Studio Senbel, Masjid Al Salaam, 2013, Studio Senbel Architecture + Design)

#### Reimagining the Repurposed: Intervening in existing Repurposed Mosques

In addition to the preceding architectural precedents and strategies to respond to some of the contemporary issues in Canadian mosques, the following section will provide three design proposals which incorporate and explore the notion of the communitarian, didactic and experiential in existing mosques. The proposals include a set of design interventions in three repurposed mosques in which, two of them are located in Scarborough, Ontario and one of them is in East York, Ontario – two sites chosen due to their high volume of Muslim immigrants and their popularity for the construction of repurposed Islamic spaces. The mosques were chosen according to their scale, usability and response to urban context, and as well as their common typologies representing most of the other repurposed mosques in the country.

My primary reasons for selecting the repurposed type instead of its purpose-built counterpart is because renovated mosques directly conform to the three phases of mosque development along with the growth of a diasporic Muslim community in Canada. The practice of adaptive reuse of postwar structures is very reflective of Canadian vernacular architecture in urban and suburban cities and shows how diasporic Muslims have been historically adjusting to their situation in a foreign country. The popularity of repurposed mosques also show that accessibility and affordability are fundamental in the design considerations of mosques and show how functions have been incorporated and re-incorporated in the layered histories of the existing vernaculars. Although there is a notion of solidarity in both traditional purpose-built and repurposed architecture, renovated mosques with its humble and simplistic forms evoke a more intimate feeling of community among the members of diaspora, and show how the idea of the masjid can be implemented in any given time and space.

The three chosen repurposed mosques for the design interventions include; Gawsul Azam Masjid (a former residential house), Danforth Islamic Centre (a storefront structure) and Sunnatul Jamaat (a former industrial warehouse). The main goal of the following interventions is to transform the meanings of the existing structures in order to draw upon the experience of the numinous and create individualized architectural identities, and more importantly, visualizing spaces where diversity and inclusivity is promoted and practiced within the boundaries of the sacred and secular programs. Because the topic of gender in Islam was addressed lightly within the scope of this thesis, all three proposed design imagine the mosques as having unified prayer spaces without any designation. Theoretically this is the ideal situation, however, given the deeper levels of social and gender needs of such mosques along with the comfort of women, I acknowledge that the practice of unifying a prayer space without designation is flawed within the context of Canada. In order to explore the deeper questions of gender and translate that into practicality, the social structure for each mosque must be explored and studied further.<sup>115</sup>

The chosen materials, form and programs also respect each of the mosques' financial capabilities and their temporal characteristics. Each cases of mosques will include an in-depth study of its existing architectural forms, elements, aesthetics and programs, followed by a detailed description of the proposed design interventions.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>115</sup> The bulk of this thesis was written during the COVID-19 pandemic when all three mosques along with many others were in lockdown. Therefore, I did not have the opportunity to conduct an in-depth study of the social structure of the communities nor I had the chance to talk to the women about their needs in these mosques.

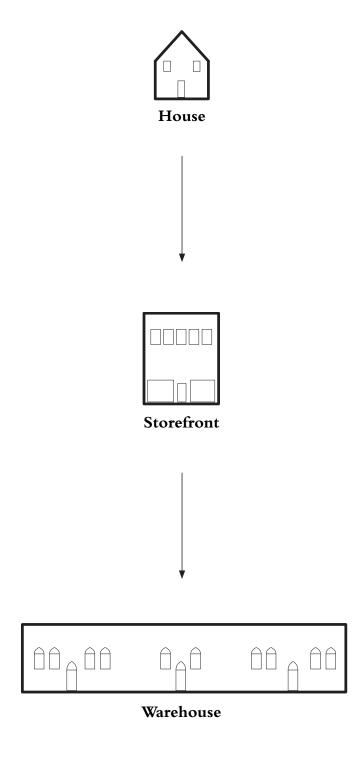
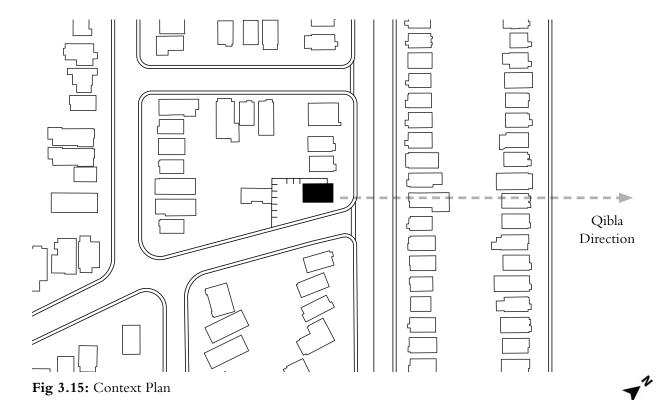


Fig 3.14: Three Repurposed Mosques at Different Scales

#### Documentation: Gawsul Azam Masjid (House)

The single-family house typology of Gawsul Azam Masjid is tucked in a quiet neighborhood along Warden Avenue. Renovated in 2013, the small footprint of the mosque sits discreetly on a corner site alongside other residential houses. Anyone passing by the building would assume that it is a typical single-story unit with its own front and backyard. The only indication of the mosque is the sign on the front lawn and another one at the top of the main entrance. The backyard was converted into a tiny parking lot, mainly used by the staff.

When one enters the mosque, there are two more doors inside; one of them leads the men to the main prayer space and the other one leads the women into the poorly lit basement. The main prayer space does not get much natural light either as the retrofitted mezzanine blocks the two windows in front of the building. In the interior, everything else was stripped off in order to maintain a singular barrier free space for worship. The wall of the mezzanine was dedicated as the Qibla wall, and various elements were later added to it; Arabic writings on posters and other difficult to read notices, bookshelves, a Minbar, a cut-out picture of the Kaaba acting as the Mihrab, speakers, a partition curtain on the handrails of the stairs, and a storage on top of the mezzanine itself. Although there are no other interior structures, the existing room feels disorganised with all the applied elements occupying the walls. Space is very limited here as the building was meant to serve only a small community in the neighborhood, who might eventually grow to occupy a bigger space such as a storefront or warehouse. Nonetheless, even within the limited space, the community practices their weekly lectures and religious discussions, in addition to their usual five-time prayers. The mosque also receives its donations from its local worshippers and somewhat becomes a mini cultural center in its local neighborhood.



# Gawsul Azam Masjid (House)

250 Warden Ave, Scarborough, ON



Fig 3.16: Exterior - Front Elevation



Fig 3.18: Exterior - Urban Context



Fig 3.17: Interior - Prayer Space



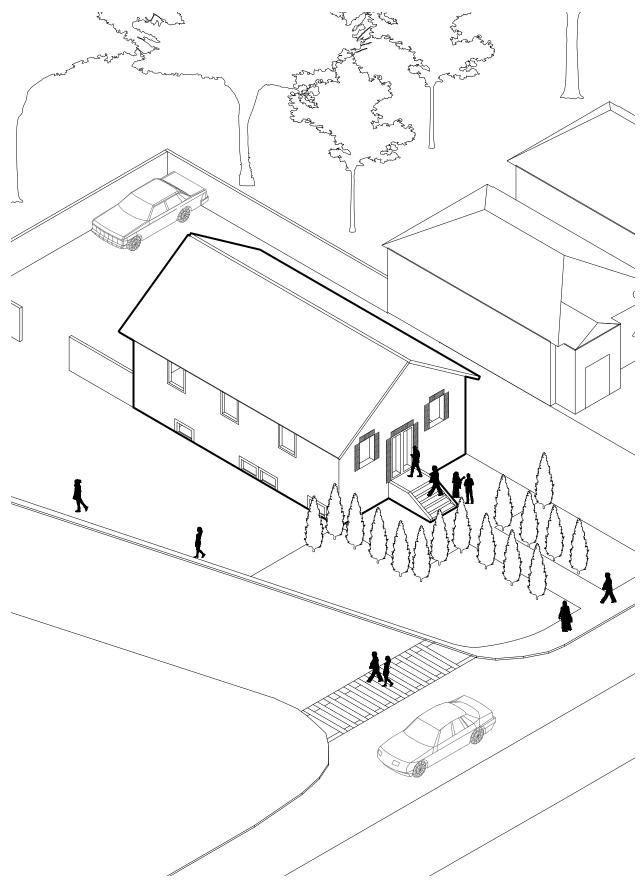


Fig 3.19: Axonometric View - Existing Structure

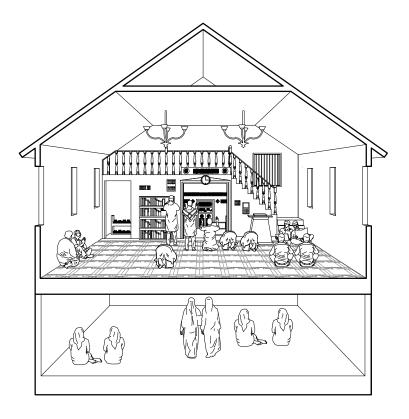


Fig 3.20 Perspectival Section - Existing Prayer Spaces (Maghrib Prayers)

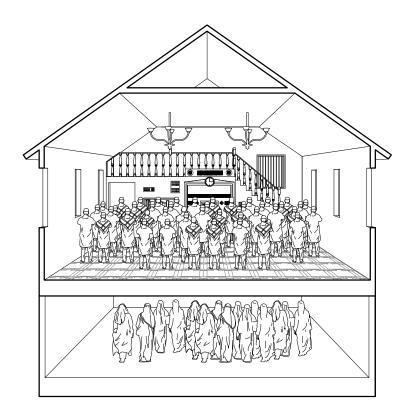


Fig 3.21: Perspectival Section - Existing Prayer Spaces (Jummah Prayers)

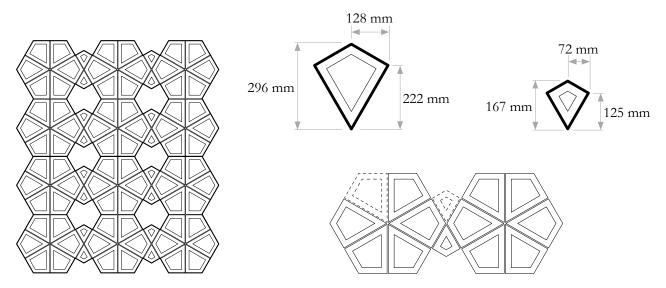
## Proposal: Gawsul Azam Masjid (House)

The design proposal of this mosque prioritizes its simplified architectural space geared towards sacred programs and cultural gatherings. The main goal of this intervention is to respond to the disordered interior, lack of natural lighting, and to provide a sense of architectural identity. One of the fundamental moves of this design intervention includes the tearing down of the existing Qibla wall and replacing it with an Islamic patterned screen which is sized to take advantage of the full height and width of the front façade. The rules of the geometry are simple: six kite shapes are joined to form a hexagon; the hexagon is arrayed to create a larger honeycomb pattern; the joints between each hexagon are also connected by two smaller kites. The overall pattern makes the Qibla wall distinct from the rest of the interior, and also partially reveals the gatherings and programs to the outside and thus creating an interesting relationship between the interior and the exterior. In this case, the programs themselves become the identity of the mosque. The currently existing elements in the space are a distraction that does not enhance the space and interferes with the room's coherence. In this design proposal, the patterned Qibla wall strips of all the existing elements, including the mezzanine, and directs the focus of the worshippers towards Mecca while creating a pure interior space.

The geometric shapes of the screen are a metaphorical expression of the interconnected culture amongst the Muslim communities in Canadian mosques. Each hexagon represents the individual Muslim communities who are "connected" with each other by the smaller kite shapes, and the infinite repetition of the pattern shows the eternal growth of the diasporic communities in Canada. This underlying meaning of the geometry is reflected through the shadows of the patterns created by the natural light when it shines through the Qibla wall and onto the worshippers in the interior. Experiencing the natural light through the glazed and geometric

Qibla wall creates the window to the infinite realm and thus bringing forth the meaning of the sacred space. The movement of the interior shadows created by the light also evokes the feeling of transitioning through time and changes the atmosphere of the interior prayer space throughout the five different prayers in a day.

In addition to this, the former windows on the north wall have all been removed and the former south wall windows have been extended vertically in order to gain additional light in the interior. A blank wall was implemented on the other side where furniture and other elements can still be placed if needed. Because of the direct southern exposure, several window sliding shades in the form of Islamic patterns have also been placed along the vertically extended windows which would allow the worshippers to adjust the amount of sunlight coming in depending on the time of day. In terms of programs, the proposal reimagines a space where the male and female worshippers would be praying in the same room, while the previous women's prayer space in the basement would be used as a storage room. The previous parking lot in the back of the building was also removed and replaced with a small basketball court where children in the neighborhood can play.



**Fig 3.22:** Two different sizes of Kite Shapes joined and arrayed to create an Islamic Pattern

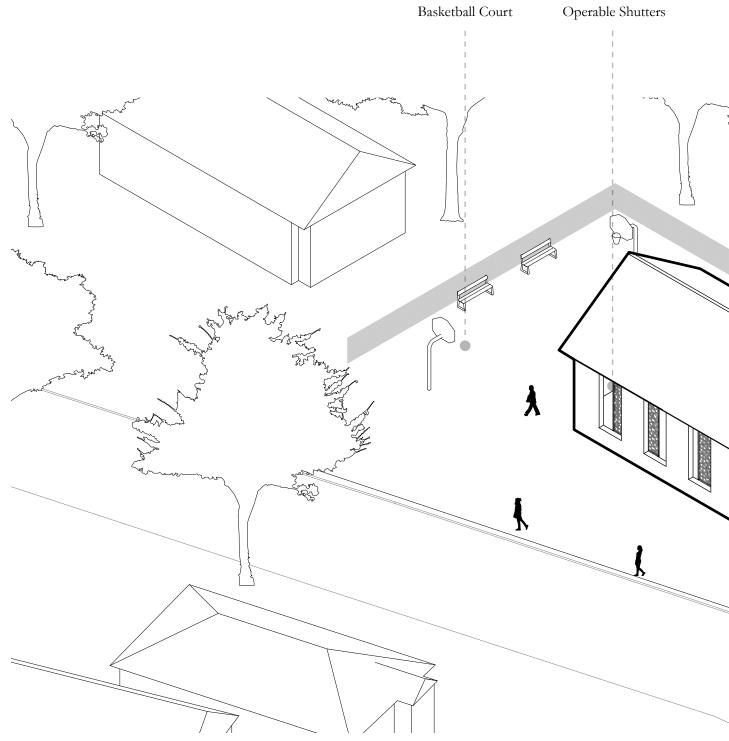
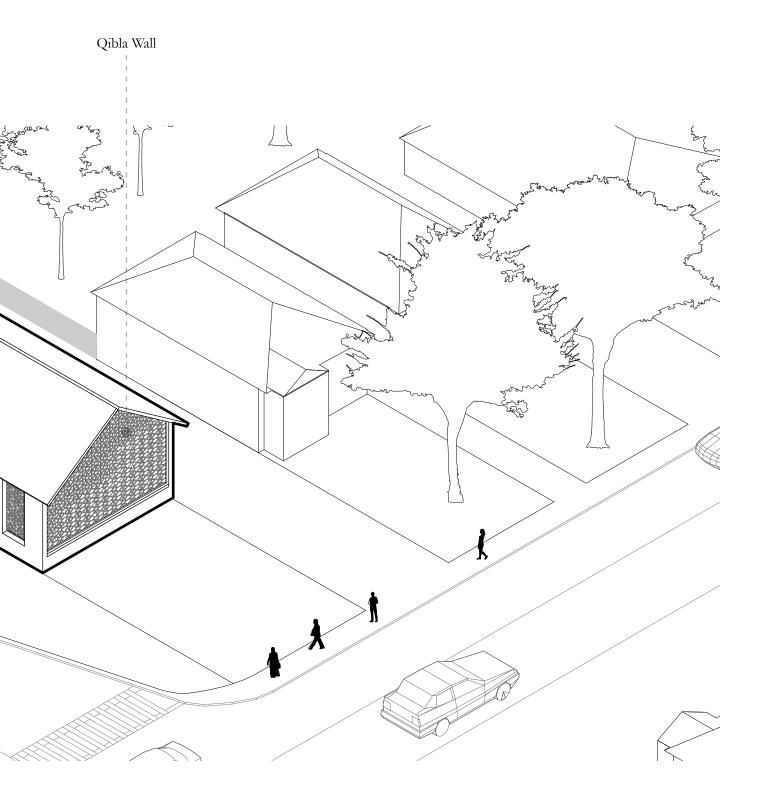


Fig 3.23: Axonometric View - Proposed Structure



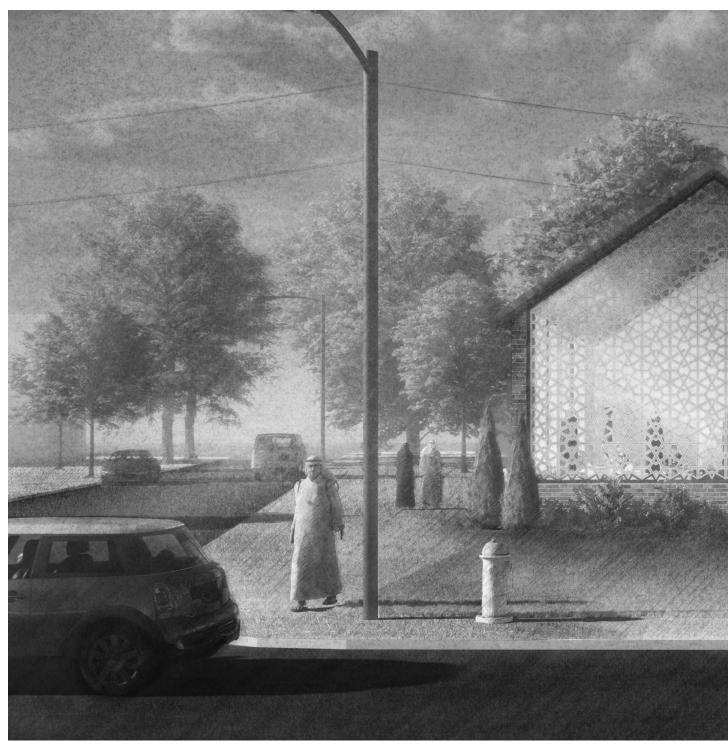
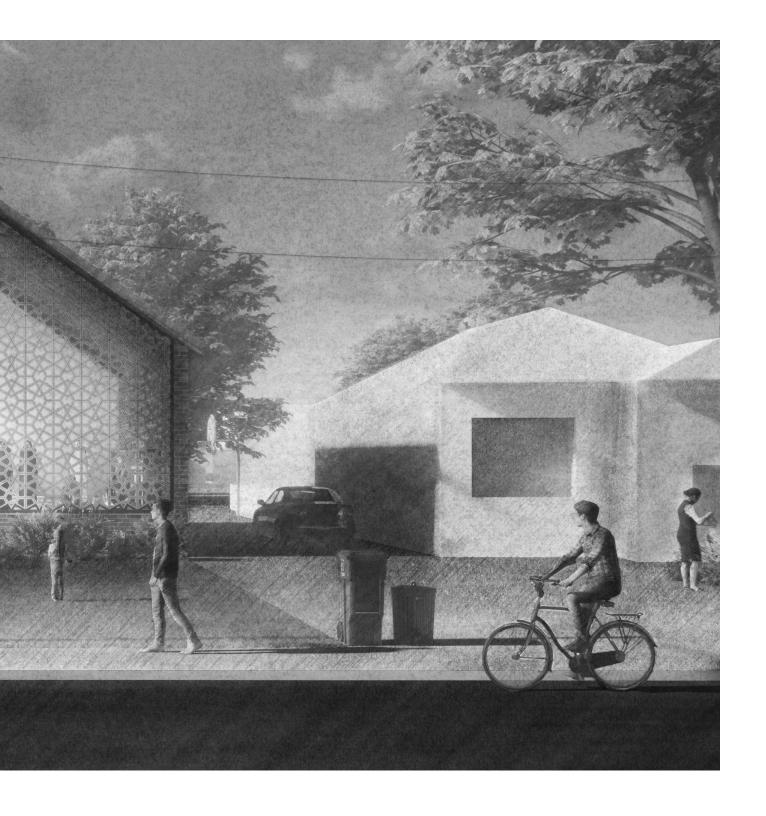


Fig 3.24: Exterior - Front Elevation



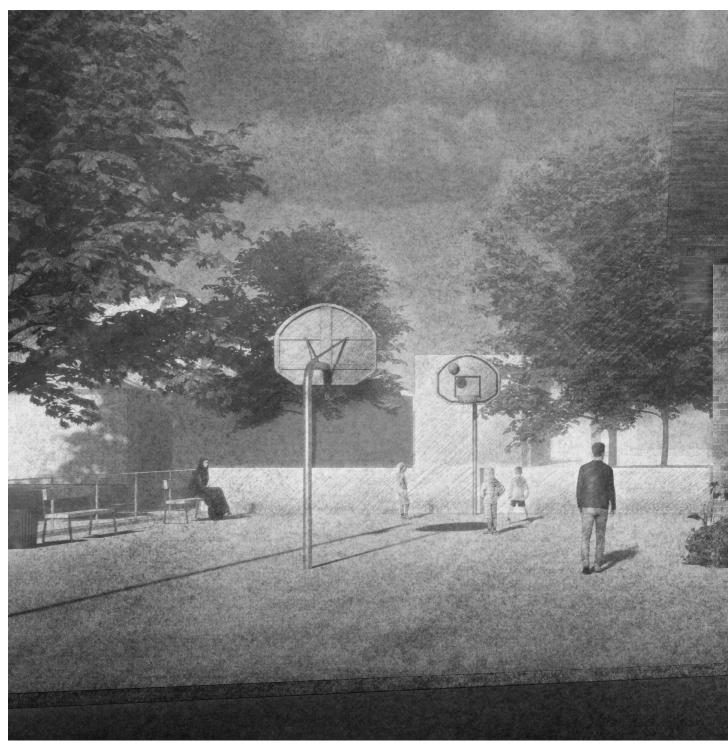


Fig 3.25: Exterior - Side Elevation

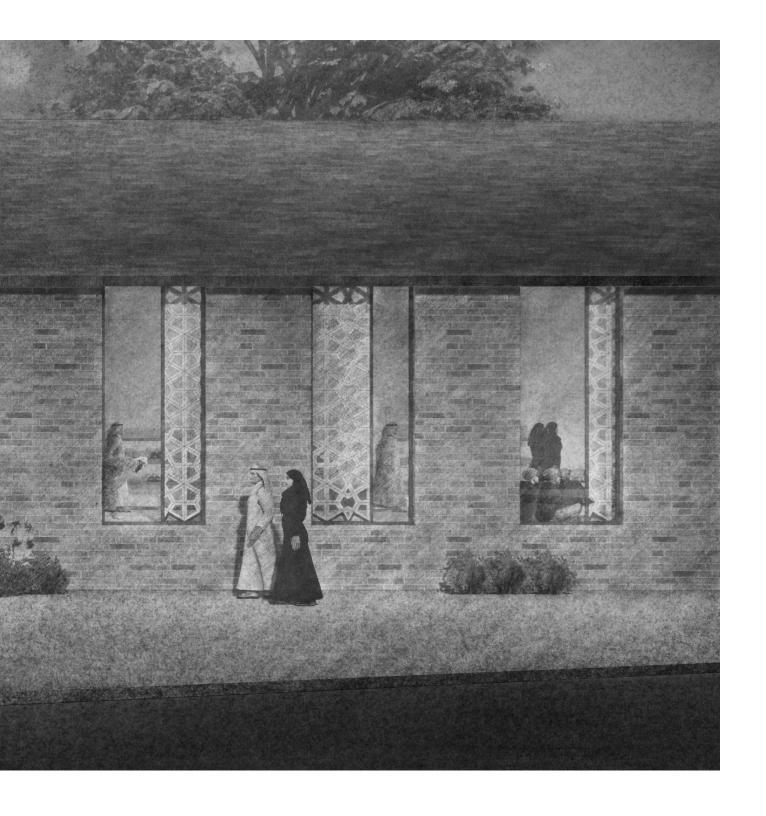
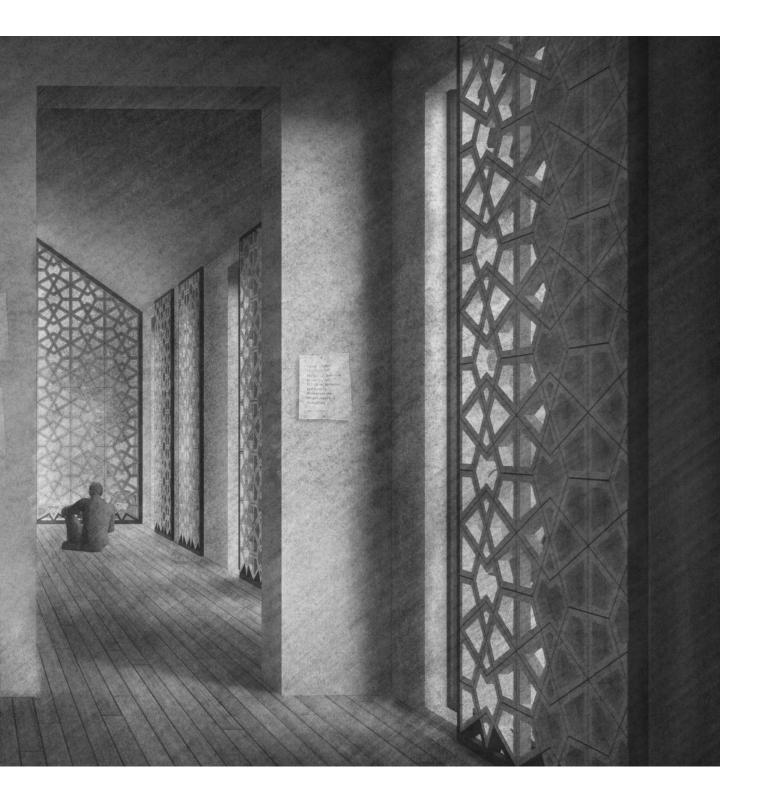




Fig 3.26: Interior - Anteroom



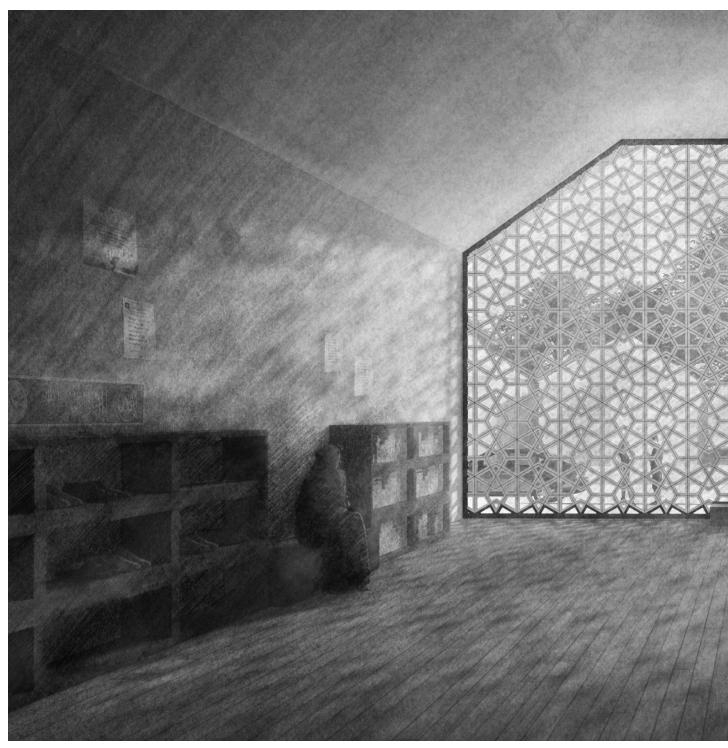
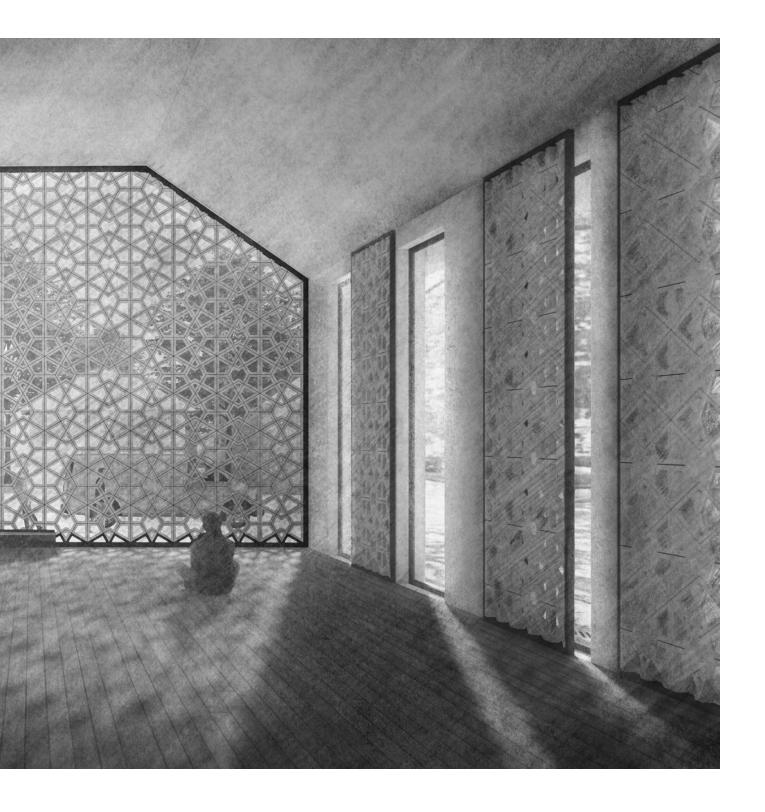


Fig 3.27: Interior - Prayer Space/Qibla Wall



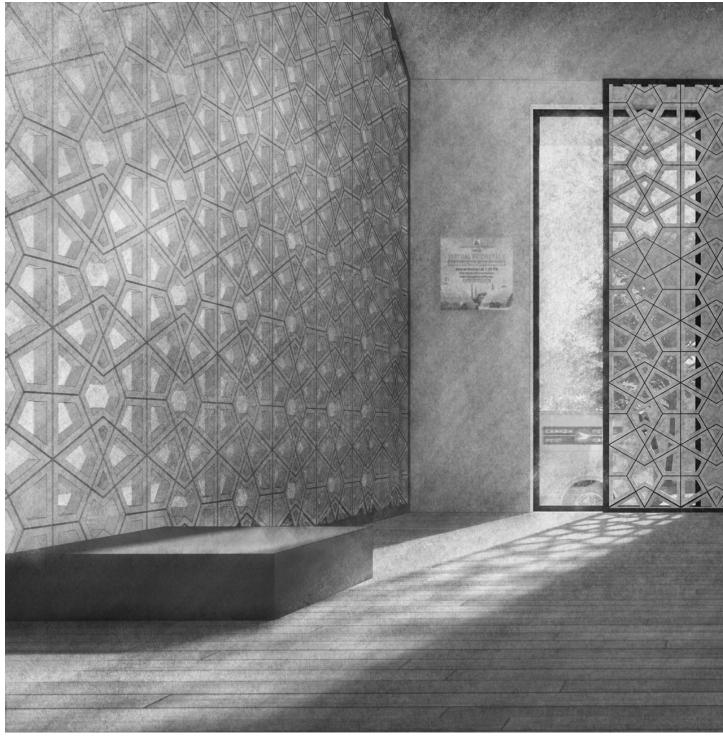
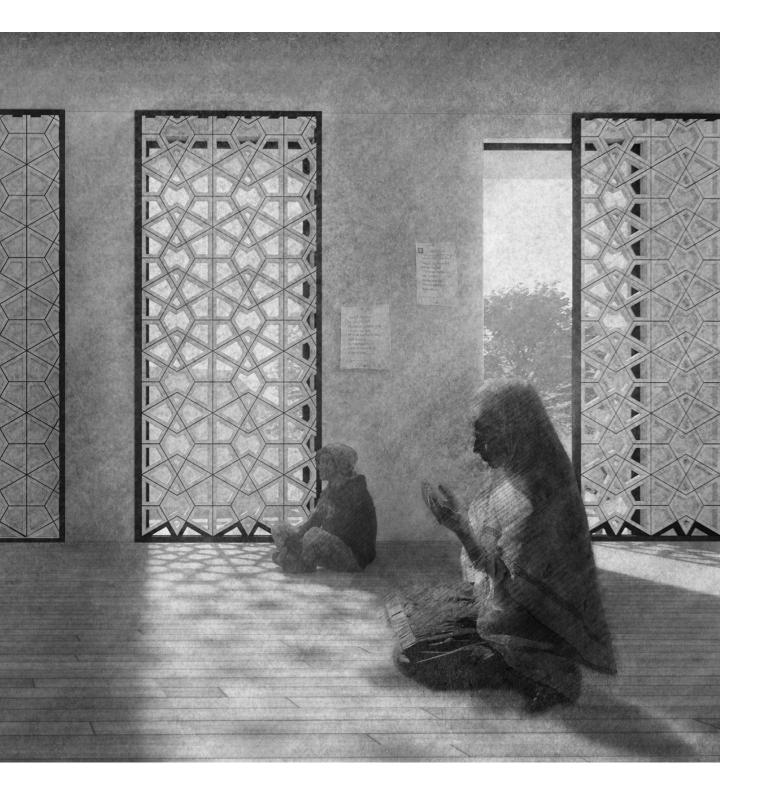


Fig 3.28: Interior - Prayer Space/Operable Window Shades

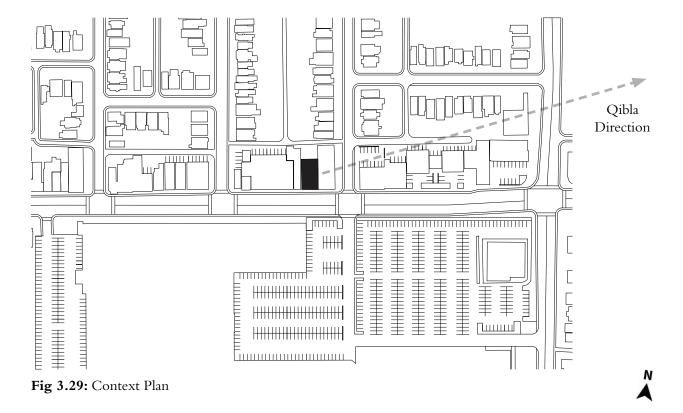


## Documentation: Danforth Islamic Centre (Storefront)

Danforth Islamic Centre is adapted behind the façade of a storefront building located in the heart of a predominantly Bengali neighborhood in East York, Ontario. The big red and vellow sign indicates the name of the grocery store located in the ground floor, while a tiny washed out sign placed on top of the main entrance to the building indicates the name of the mosque. Following a narrow flight of stairs leading the worshippers to the second-floor hallway, which is poorly lit with fluorescent lights and often filled with shoes that are taken off before entering the sacred space. Two prayer spaces (for men and women) are separated into two different rooms at the end of this hallway. Having almost twice the size of the floor area as the women's prayer space, the men's space can fit more worshippers, accessible chairs, bookshelves, and larger furniture including the Minbar. Yet, the Qibla wall in the men's prayer space is filled with distractions: out-of-place notice boards, wall mounted fans with unpleasant noise, bookshelves which are often filled with unnecessary non-religious objects, and a difficult to read clock. Moreover, one of the fundamental problems with this Qibla wall is that it does not align with the axis to Mecca as it is already bounded by its existing shell. It is also difficult to orient large amounts of worshippers diagonally in the long rectangular space, and therefore the wall closest to the correct axis is assigned as the prayer direction.

The space also constantly changes to accommodate various sacred and secular programs; worshippers come to pray five times a day including Jummah prayers on Fridays, and children's Quran classes and lectures all take place in the prayer space, while meetings are held at a separate room adjacent to the prayer space divided with only a curtain. This meeting room can also be expanded to include more worshippers if needed. All the other businesses in the building including the tax and the travel offices in the second floor and as well as the grocery store in the

ground floor, are all owned and operated by the mosque's community. These commercial businesses attract Muslim customers and contribute to the economic structure of the mosque congregation, and the mosque itself holds cultural events and lectures to help attract customers and retain their businesses.



## Danforth Islamic Centre (Storefront)

3018 Danforth Av, East York, ON



Fig 3.30: Exterior - Front Elevation



Fig 3.31: Interior - Prayer Space



Fig 3.32: Exterior - Urban Context





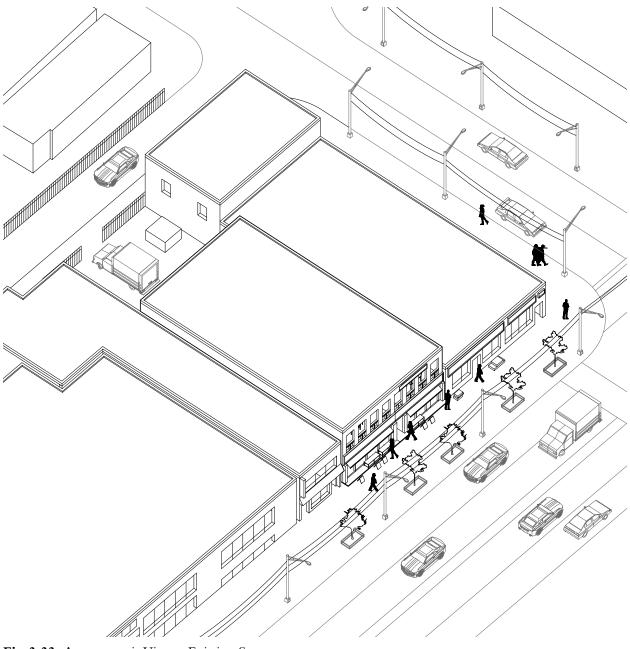


Fig 3.33: Axonometric View - Existing Structure

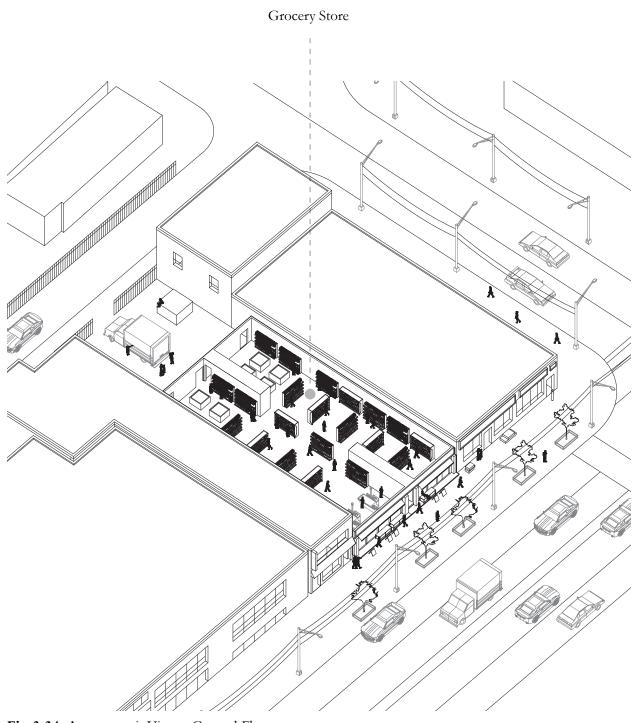


Fig 3.34: Axonometric View - Ground Floor

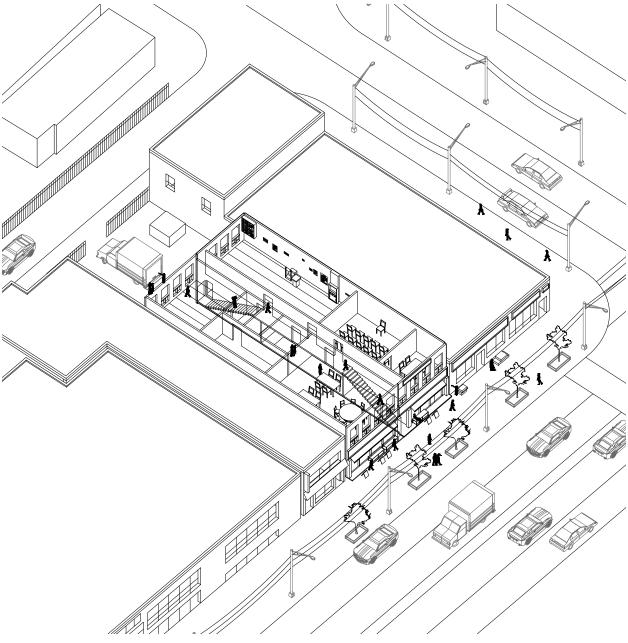


Fig 3.35: Axonometric View - Main Circulation

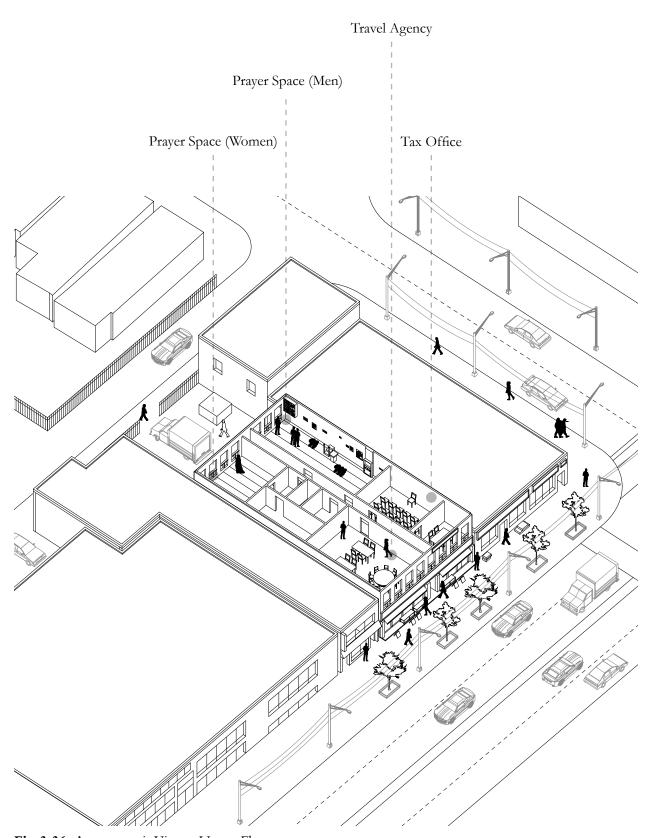


Fig 3.36: Axonometric View - Upper Floor

## Proposal: Danforth Islamic Centre (Storefront)

The proposal responds to many of the challenges that this mosque is facing while emphasizing some of its advantages through design. The existing floor layout of the building places the grocery store in the ground floor, the tax and travel offices in the front half of the second floor, and the prayer spaces in the other back half in which the women's prayer space is split from the men's. A number of approaches have been considered in order to reimagine this problematic interior. One of the iterations rearranges the spaces without sacrificing the existing programs; the tax and travel offices are conjoined into one space and while their sizes are reduced, this compromise had to be made in order to assign a bigger floor space for the prayer room on the other side of the hallway. More than just accommodating a large number of worshippers, this prayer space is made bigger in order to include both men and women in daily prayers. An extra meeting room is also assigned replacing the former women's prayer room on the other side of the hallway. The proposal also assumes that if a larger space is needed to accommodate the huge number of worshippers coming to pray on occasions like Jummah or Eid prayers, the offices and meeting room can sacrifice their rooms momentarily to enable the entire second floor to act as one big prayer area. A second iteration reimagines the ground floor by dividing and compressing the grocery store into one half of its floor area while introducing a new religious bookstore in the other half. This iteration also imagines the furniture and seating to be to be light and movable, so the space can also be used for praying when a further increase in worshippers arises on special religious occasions.

One of the architectural responses in creating an external identity for the mosque is with the implementation of a 'glazed cut' at the center of the façade indicating the axis to the main circulation hallway of the building. This cut is also filled with the same kite and hexagon patterned Islamic screen as Gawsul Azam Masjid which also create the notion of the interconnection between the various diasporic communities. It also creates an intriguing visual relationship between the interior of the hallway and the exterior sidewalk. This move also brings in a lot of natural light and creates a distribution of patterned shadows in the previous dark and gloomy hallway. A series of foldable windows replacing the previous static window walls provide several opportunities for the programs to address their needs in different ways: the sidewalk can now be used by the grocery store and the bookstore to sell or advertise their products; views to the outside are now much wider; adequate sunlight can be received in all the floors; and the operable windows can allow for natural ventilation and noise control during prayers in the building. With the addition of these two elements, the image of the façade will change depending on the movement of programs, folding windows and people, and thus emphasizing its informality while also maintaining an Islamic identity.

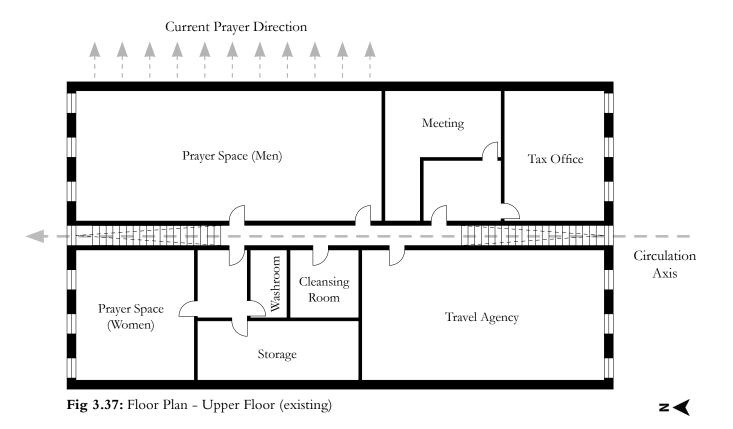
In the prayer space, a series of movable partition fins hinged to the existing Qibla wall is introduced at regular intervals. These fins can lie flush to the existing wall or rotate out into the room a few degrees to correct the angle the worshippers face – or even to 90 degrees to separate more intimate scale spaces. This creates visual partitions between multiple programs taking place in the sacred space. To signify the Mihrab, a cut-out of the Arabic word "Allah" (God) is applied in which the shape is illuminated by artificial lighting. The angles created by these fins, not only establish the relationship between the physical architecture of the space with the ontological axis to Kaaba, but also signify the entire Qibla wall as a distinct element in the prayer space. Here the light is symbolizing the spiritual world or "the other" beyond the finned walls, and is designed to be most visible and brightest when they are angled towards the ontological axis.

The floor of the space is marked by thick dark lines running parallel to the Qibla axis and perpendicular to the partition walls, each spaced out conforming to the width of a person, and hence further reinforcing the notion of this angled axis. The wall opposite to the Qibla wall includes three sets of cut-outs in square Kufic calligraphy – characterized by its angular, rectilinear letterforms and horizontal orientation. This tiled rendition of the calligraphy reads the verse Ayatul–Kursee, which speaks about how nothing and nobody is regarded to be comparable to God and is often recited to ward of evil spirits. The verse is read clockwise, starting from the bottom right corner (although square Kufic calligraphies are primarily used for decorations rather than recitations). The purpose of placing the Kufic calligraphy on the hallway wall is to "purify" a worshipper from the evil spirits before one enters the sacred space. The constricted boundaries of the hallway also become visually open when one looks into the prayer space through the patterns.

The interventions in this mosque is imagined to either co-exist with each other, or they can be present individually in time and space depending on the communities' financial situation and needs. To emphasize both of these situations, the following drawings and sketches show the elements as either working together or working individually in relation to its existing structure and its urban context.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>116</sup> Khan and Al-Hilali, trans., "The Qur'an. Interpretation," Chapter 3: Verse 18.



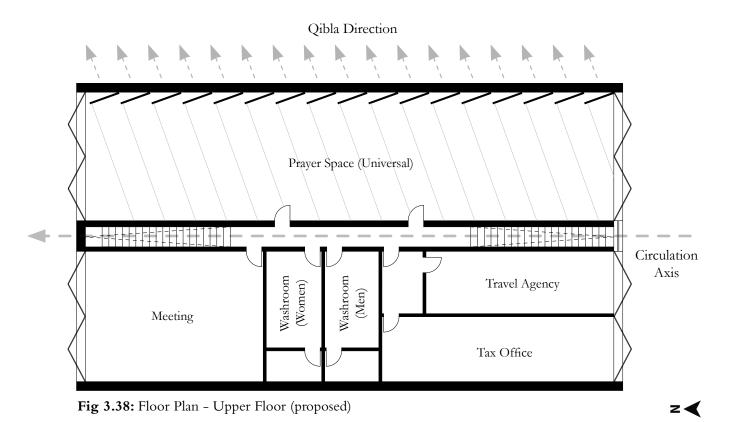




Fig 3.39: Exterior - Front Elevation

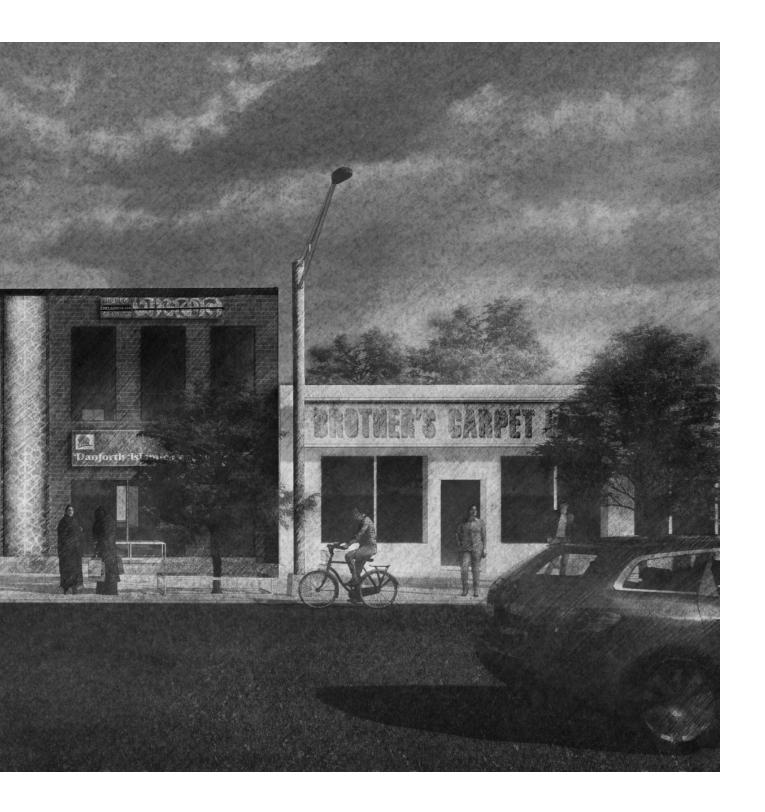




Fig 3.40: Exterior - Front Elevation/Fruit Sale

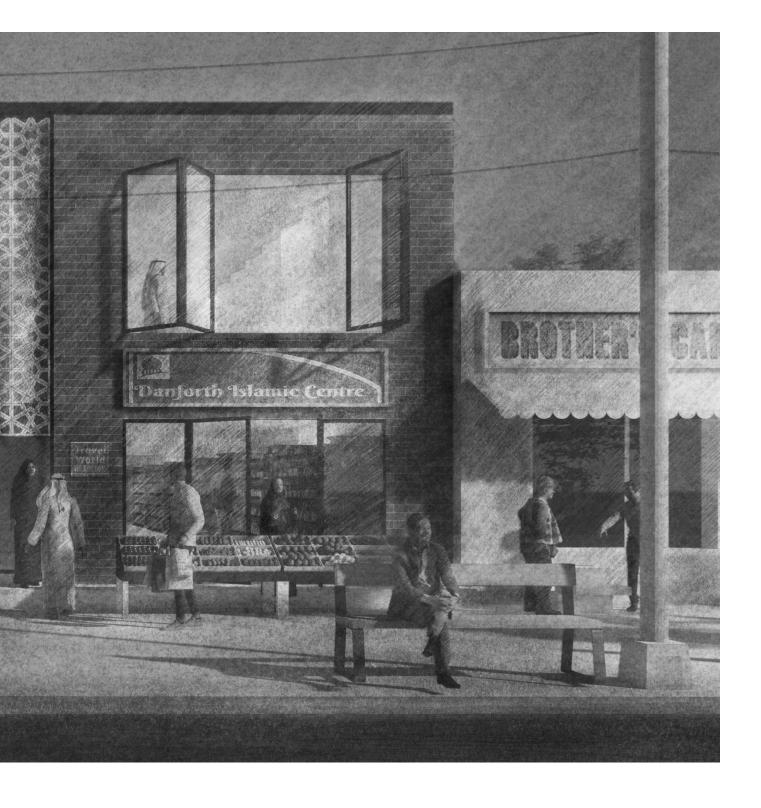




Fig 3.41: Exterior - Front Elevation/Book Sale





Fig 3.42: Exterior - Front Elevation/Asr Prayers

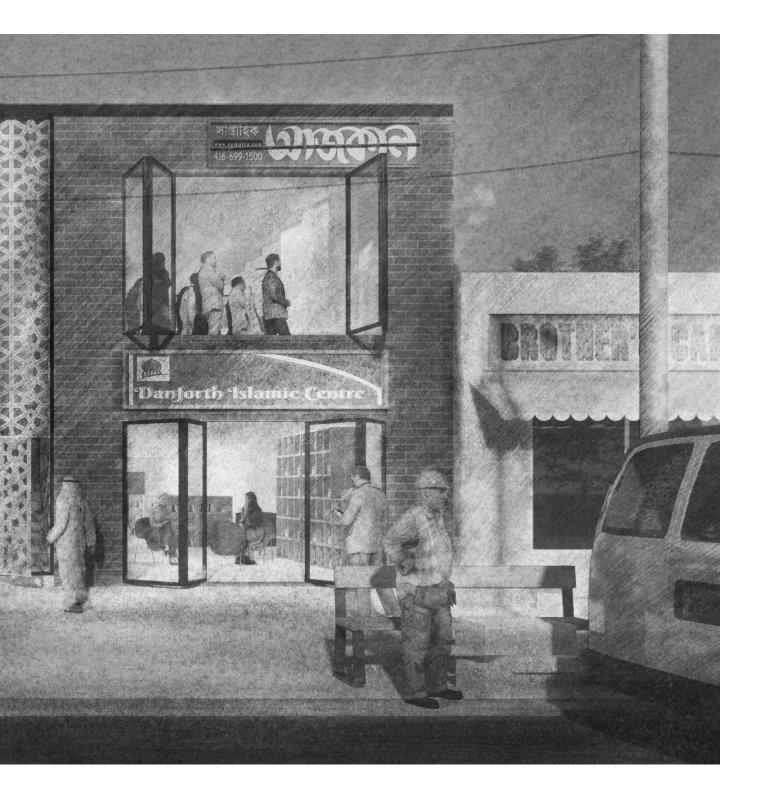




Fig 3.43: Exterior - Front Elevation/Jummah Prayers



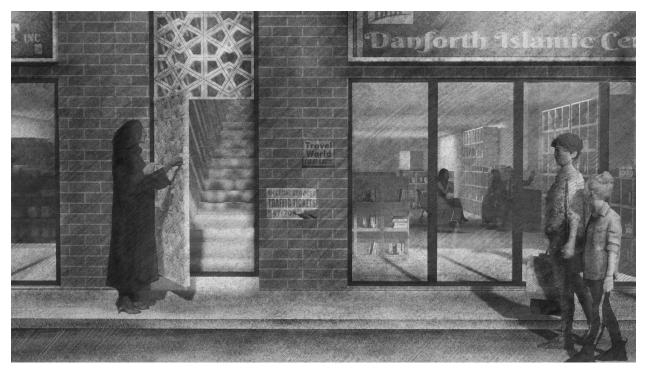


Fig 3.44: Exterior - Main Entrance



Fig 3.45: Interior - Main Circulation Stairs

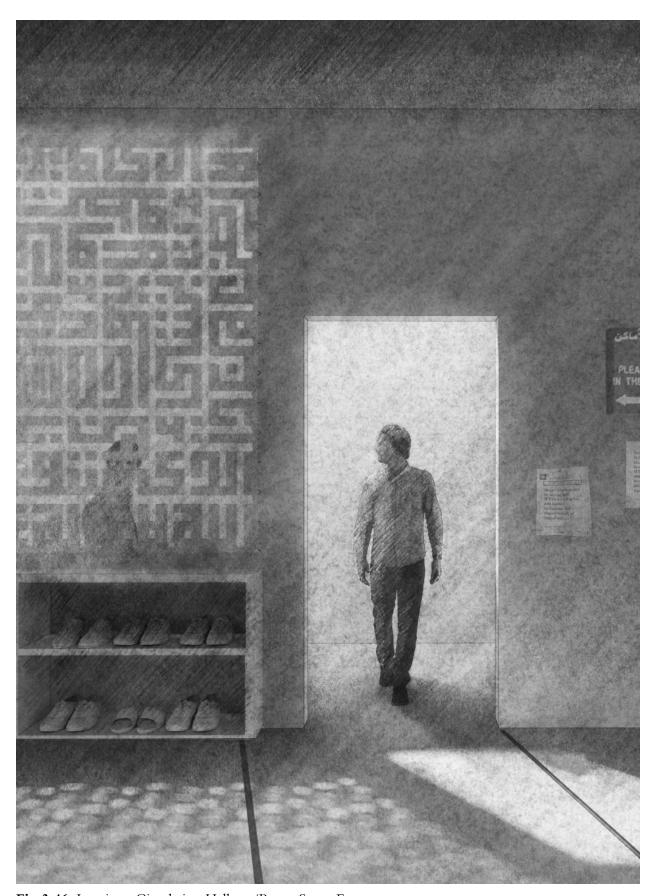


Fig 3.46: Interior - Circulation Hallway/Prayer Space Entrance

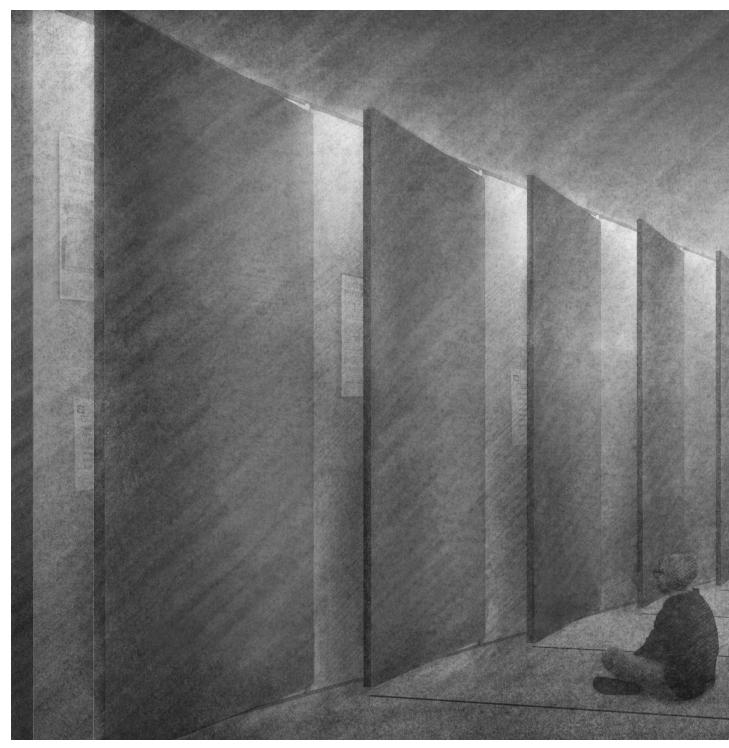
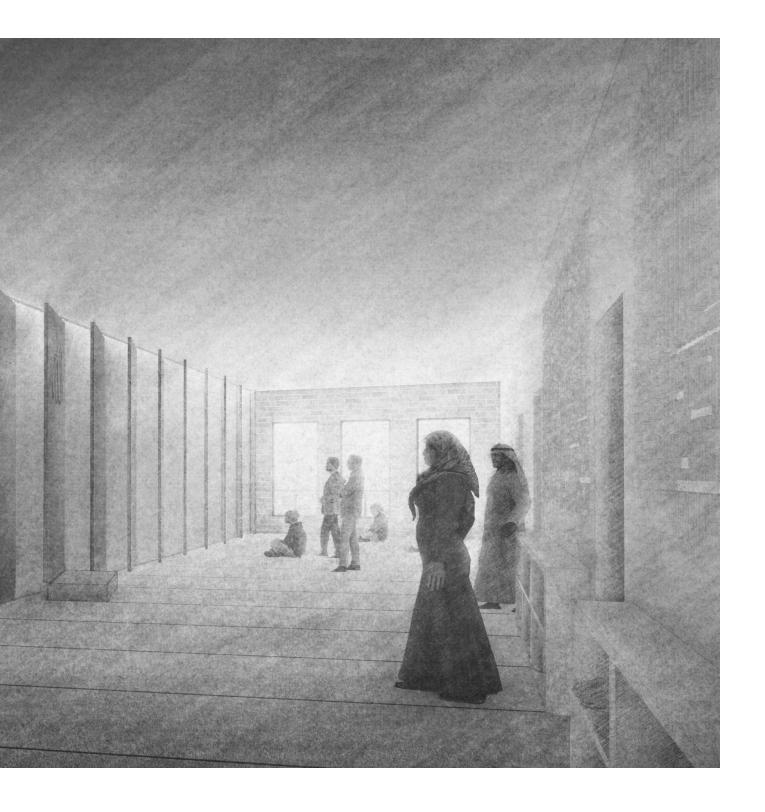


Fig 3.47: Interior - Dhuhr Prayers/Qibla Wall



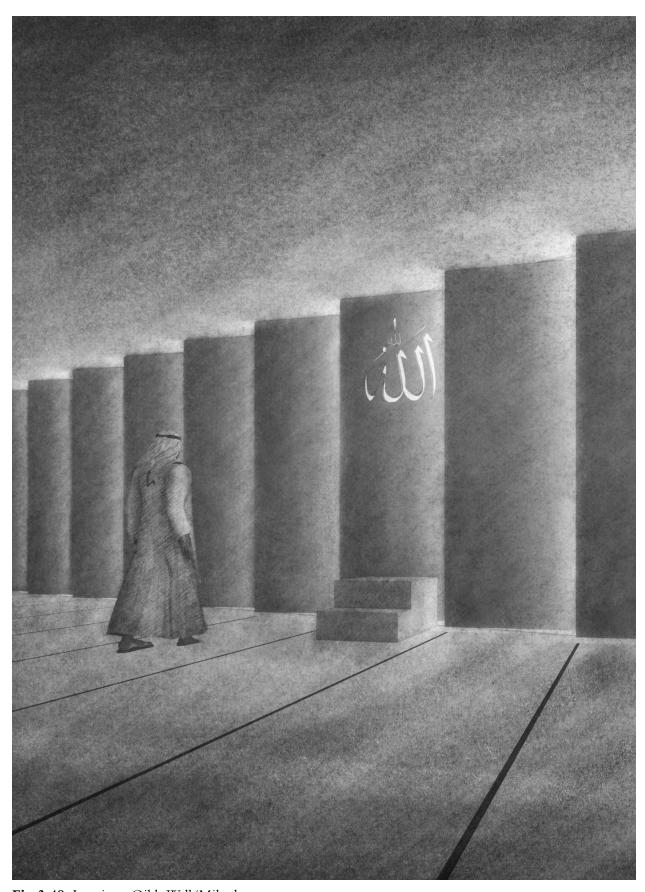


Fig 3.48: Interior - Qibla Wall/Mihrab

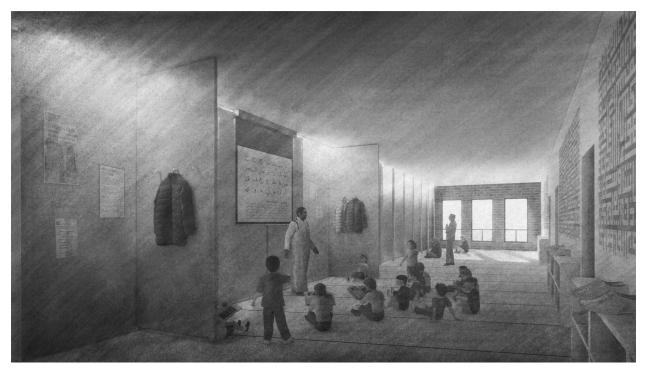


Fig 3.49: Interior - Friday School



Fig 3.50: Interior - Lecture

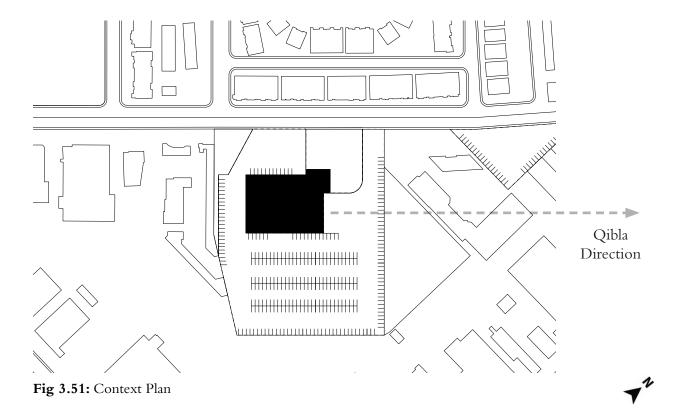
## Documentation: Sunnatul Jamaat (Warehouse)

Located along Danforth Road in Scarborough, Sunnatul Jamaat was formerly an automotive warehouse situated amongst other industrial buildings in its site. While most of the site still consists of other warehouses and mechanical shops plus the row of residential housing on the opposite side, the building of the mosque itself was renovated with only minimal and necessary changes to accommodate the large number of Muslim immigrants settling in its local neighborhood. The site of the building features accessible parking in the front and another massive lot in the back, which fills up almost entirely during Jummah prayers. A portion of the front and back parking lot near the entrances are also often used by Muslims from the community to set up their makeshift fruit and vegetable stands to sell them to worshippers coming in and out of the mosque.

Although the renovation was done informally, certain symbols point towards the use of traditional expressions such as the pointed arched windows and doors or the Islamic crescent moon and star embedded on the façade of the main entrance. Yet, the programmatic layout of the interior spaces is inefficient; only one third of the interior space is dedicated towards sacred programs and the other spaces are assigned for secular functions such as weddings, community dinners, lectures, and a large kitchen used for iftars during Ramadan, Eid, and other ceremonies. When the prayer hall receives a large number of worshippers, especially during Fridays, it becomes very chaotic with its limited availability of individual space regardless of the massive size of the overall warehouse structure. Meanwhile, other than the occurrence of large Islamic ceremonies and community gatherings, the secular spaces remain empty most of the time during the week. In the prayer hall itself, the majority of the floor is dedicated to the male worshippers while women pray separately in a divided space with partition walls at the outer edges of the hall.

These blank walls also prevent the women from getting any views to the Imam or the main Qibla wall, and the only way they would follow the prayer leader would be through the sound coming from the speakers.

In terms of the mosque's structure, the renovation of the mosque kept its former trusses running its full length and as well as the existing punctured skylights on the ceiling. The Mihrab on the Qibla wall features Arabic writings and a pointed arch framing the niche to distinguish itself from the rest of the elements and structure. Other elements on the Qibla wall includes bookshelves, wall mounted fans and as well as notice boards and clocks – although they are difficult to read if one sits further back in the space. The separation of the sacred and secular space is marked with a long yellow tape on the floor, and shoe racks embedded in the wall where the worshippers would take their shoes off before entering the prayer room. This shoe area also creates an informal and unbounded gathering space where the community would come to socialize with each other while they put on their shoes after exiting the sacred space



## Sunnatul Jamaat (Warehouse)

347 Danforth Rd, Scarborough, ON



Fig 3.52: Exterior - Front Elevation



Fig 3.53: Exterior - Urban Context





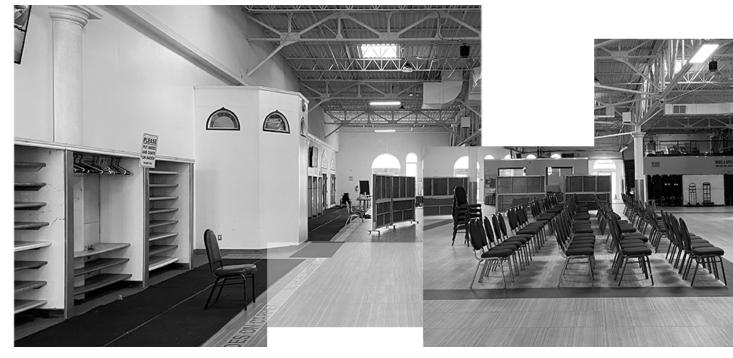


Fig 3.54: Interior - Event Space/Shoe Racks



Fig 3.55: Interior - Male/Female Prayer Spaces





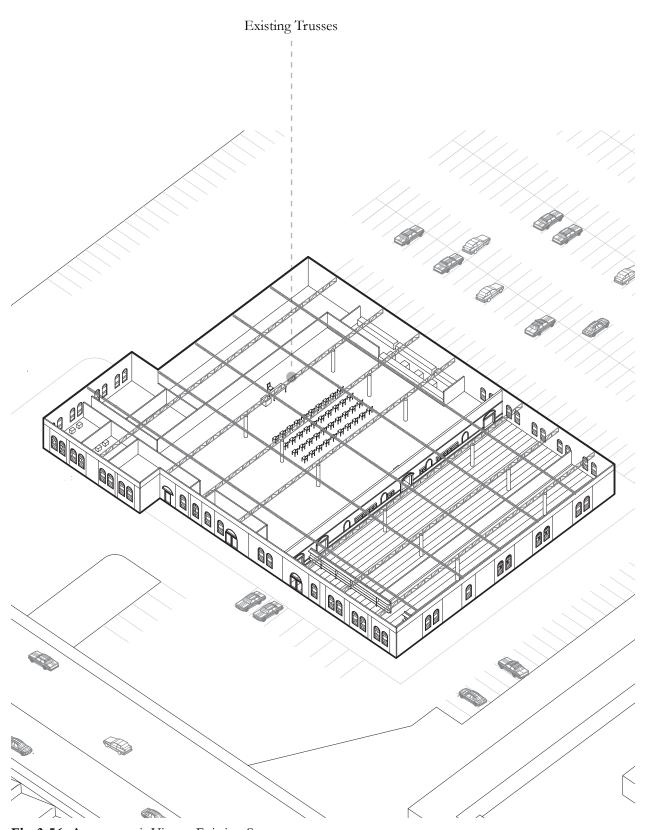


Fig 3.56: Axonometric View - Existing Structure

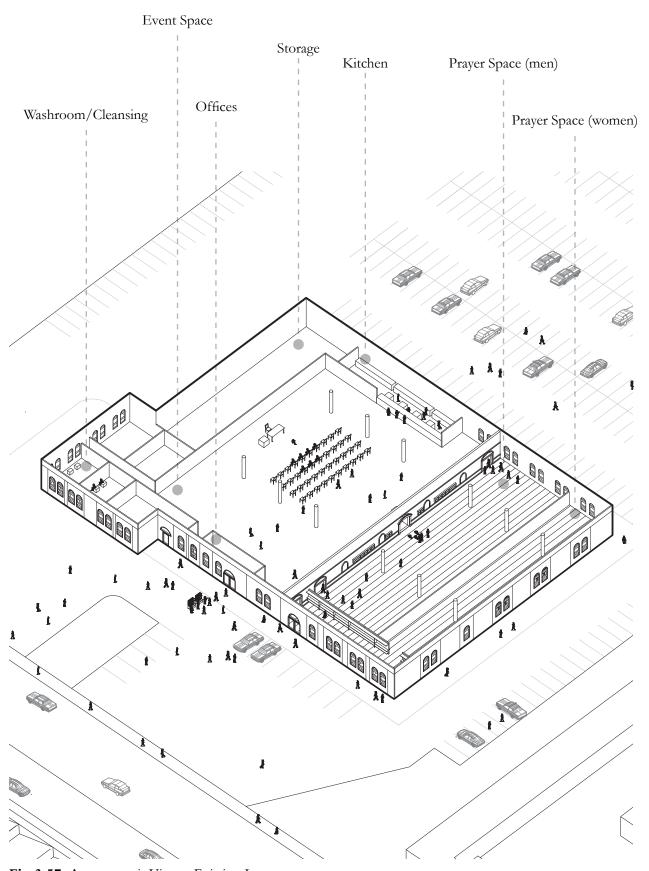


Fig 3.57: Axonometric View - Existing Layout

## Proposal: Sunnatul Jamaat (Warehouse)

One of the fundamental changes in Sunnatul Jamaat is proposed through the implementation of a courtyard, at the very center of the building. This courtyard responds to the problems of the mosque on three levels; bring natural light in the interior, expand the sacred or secular spaces to include more people if needed, and provide a dedicated social space for the community. The courtyard is placed strategically in order to serve both the secular and the sacred spaces with its movable walls which provide the freedom to people to manipulate and customize the space depending on their needs. The trees in the courtyard also provide shading and create an interesting play of light and shadows in the interior. On the secular section of the mosque, the former event space replaced by a new gym as part of one of the secular programs, and the event space/lecture hall bounded by walls for privacy is implemented in the Northern section of the building. The gym can also potentially be merged with the courtyard with its movable walls and transformed into a larger community gathering space if needed.

The Qibla wall of the prayer space is equipped with two large movable walls with Kufic pattern tiles, which opens into the courtyard enabling the sacred space to expand depending on the number of worshippers. Here the Kufic calligraphy reads the 36<sup>th</sup> surah of the Quran, Yaseen (containing 83 verses). One of the messages of the surah describes the absolute power of God and His ultimate creation of the balance and harmony of in nature. The following is an excerpt from the surah: "Glory be to Him, Who has created all the pairs of that which the earth produces, as well as of their own (human) kind (male and female), and of that which they know not. And a sign for them is the night, We withdraw therefrom the day, and behold, they are in darkness. And the moon, We have measured for it mansions (to traverse) till it returns like the old dried curved date stalk. It is not for the sun to overtake the moon, nor does the night outstrip the day. They all

float, each in an orbit." The power of God and nature is captured by the Kufic calligraphy which frames the trees and the different seasonal changes in the courtyard, and thus truly creating the appreciation of the natural world in the sacred space. The surah also explains that worshippers will be rewarded with the ultimate version of nature in paradise where they will receive anything they ask for. The notion of paradise here is metaphorically represented with the natural light which literally reflects the shadows of the messages of the surah onto the worshippers in the prayer space, transcending them away from the physical world to the spiritual realm. The design reimagines an ideal mosque for future congregations as a unified prayer space for all genders by removing the barrier of the existing women's space and replacing it with an anteroom which runs along the perimeter of the prayer space. Partitioned by walls, this anteroom includes rows of shoe racks and benches, enabling and emphasizing the social interactions taking place before or after prayers.

The other main intervention in Sunnatul Jamaat is the proposed redesign of the front parking lot of the building. Three axes connect the Danforth Road to the mosque; two pedestrian lanes lead to the main and the lecture space entrance, and one car lane connects the large parking lot in the back. Rows of trees are planted along these lanes and two reflecting pools are implemented in the in-between spaces created by the axes. The pedestrian lanes can also become a designated exterior space for people from the community to sell their products to worshippers from the mosque. The goal of this exterior intervention is to reimagine the front of the building to be a more welcoming and sociable public space and as well as create a sense of exterior identity for the mosque in its neighborhood.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>117</sup> Khan and Al-Hilali, trans., "The Qur'an. Interpretation," Chapter 36: Verse 36-40

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, Chapter 36: Verse 55-57

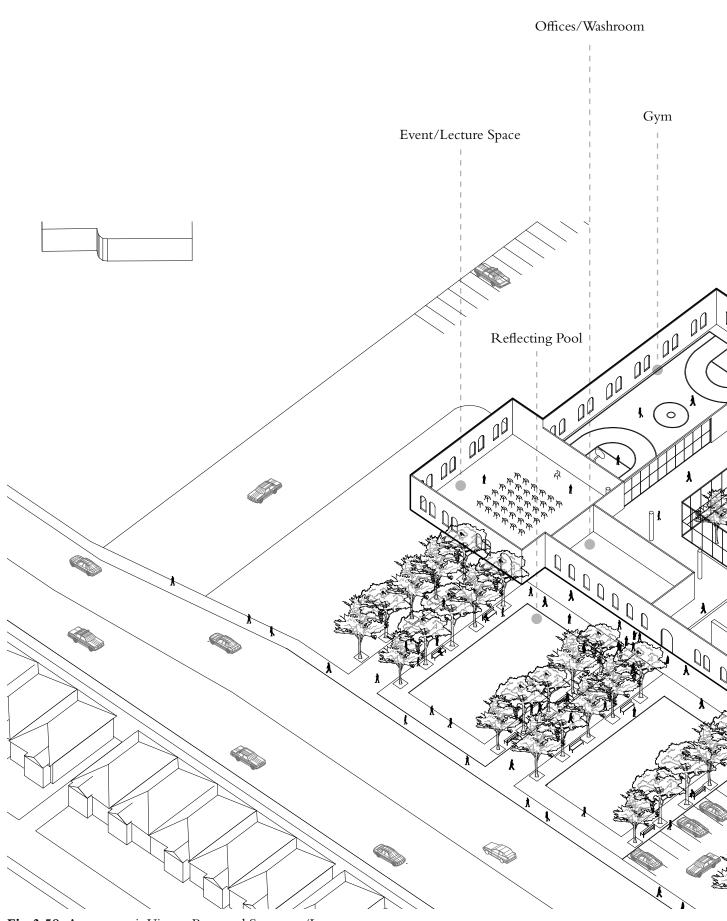
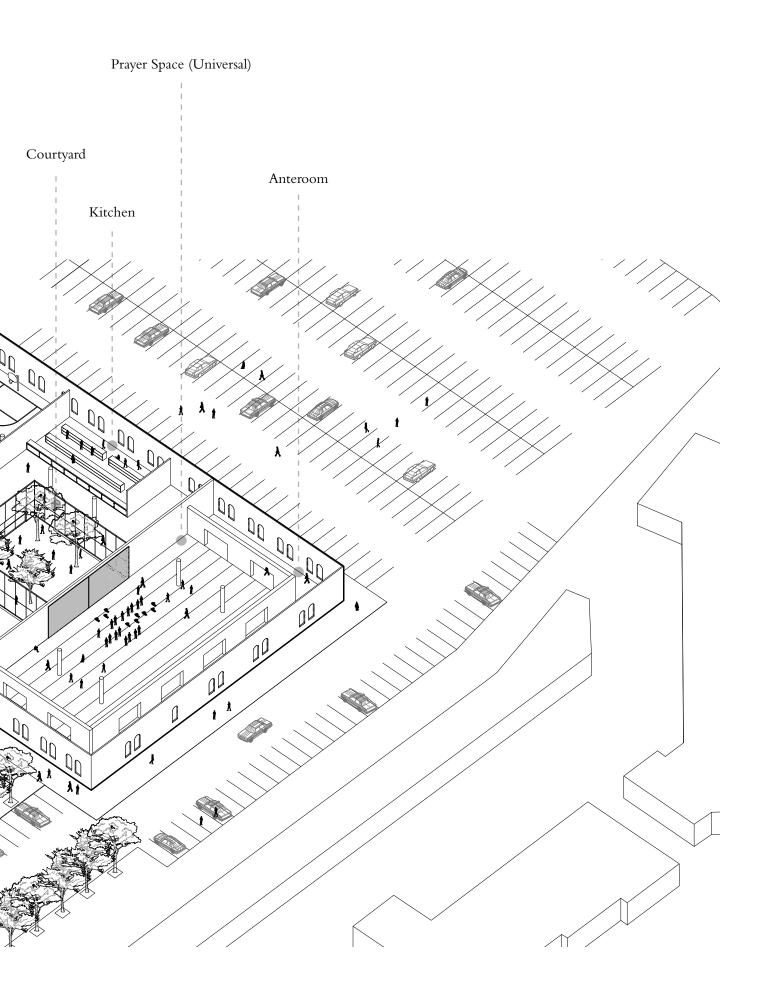


Fig 3.58: Axonometric View - Proposed Structure/Layout



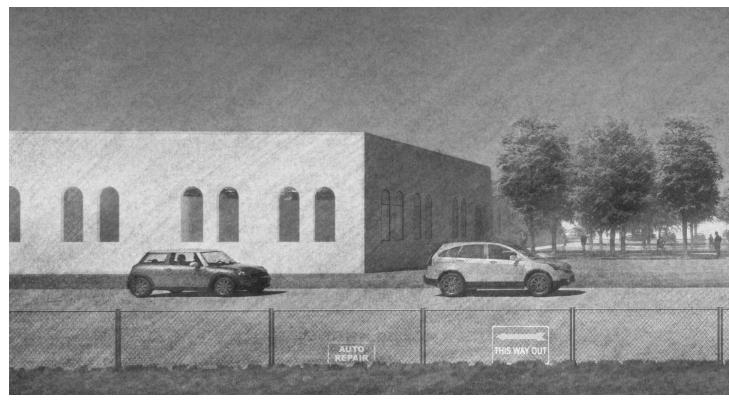
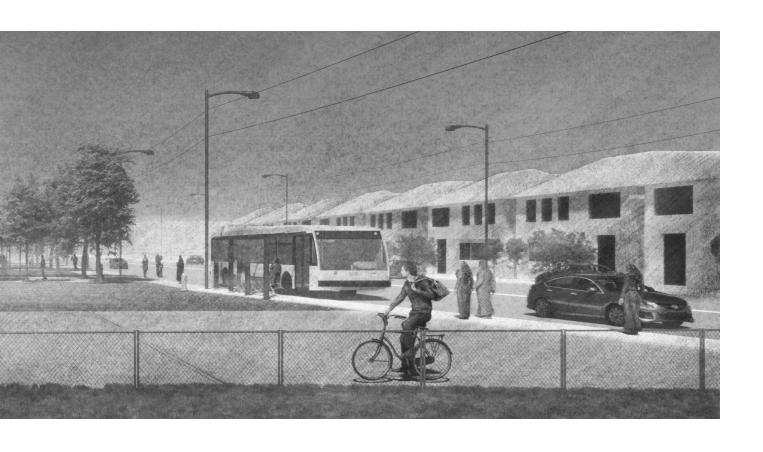
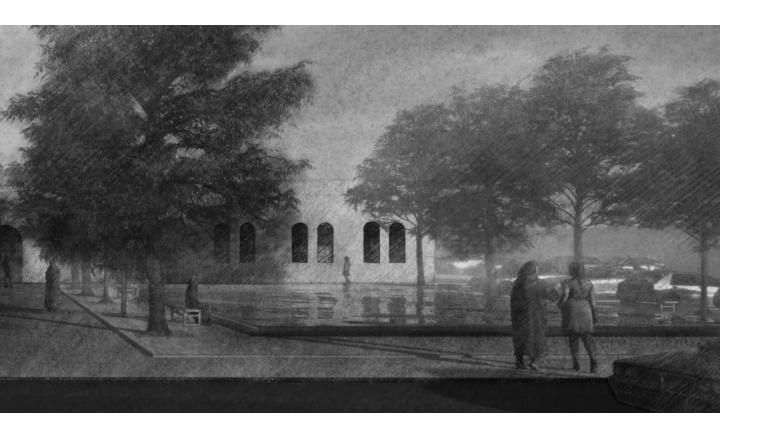


Fig 3.59: Exterior - Side Elevation/Relationship to Main Road



Fig 3.60: Exterior - Front Elevation





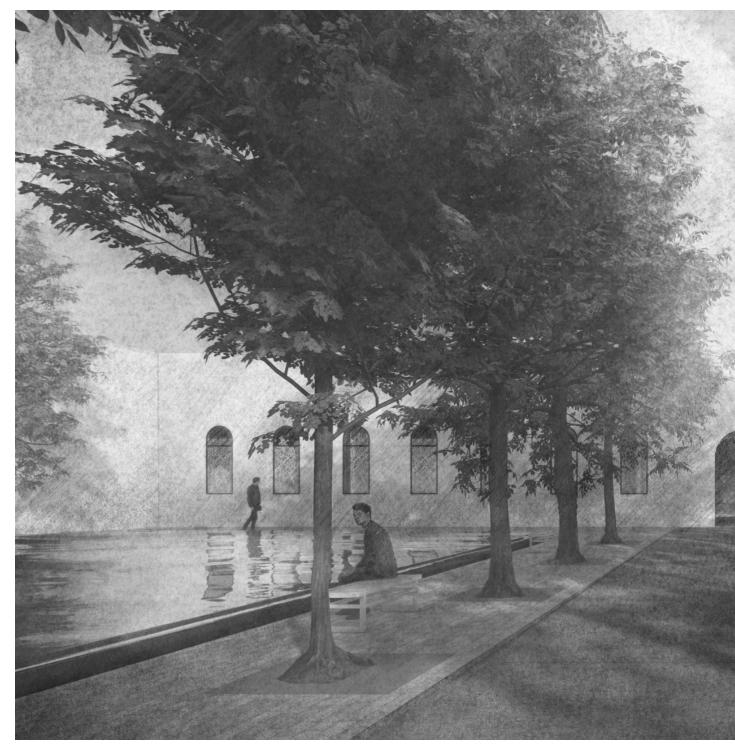
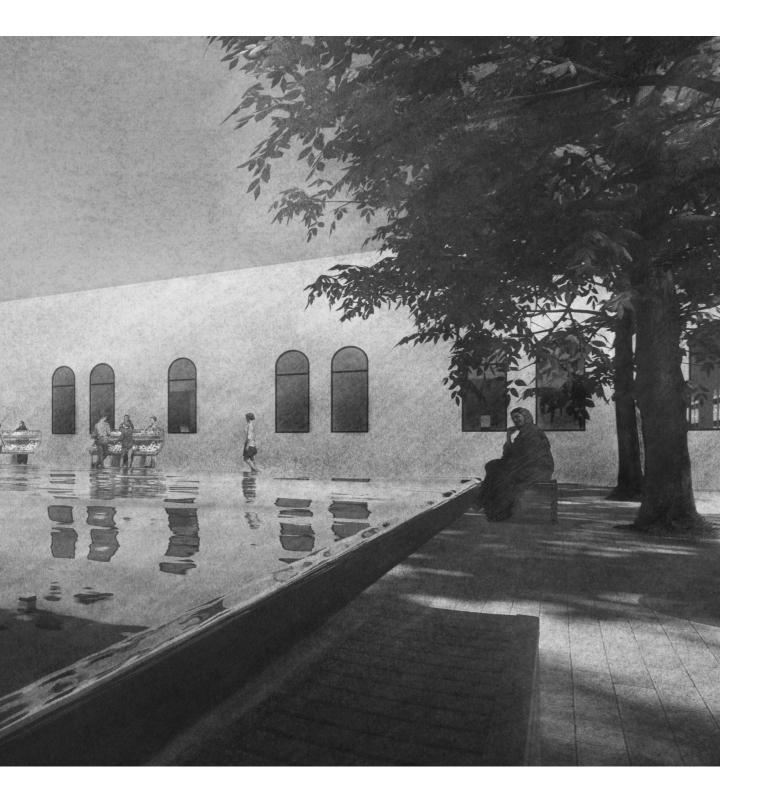


Fig 3.61: Exterior - Main Entrance Axis





Fig 3.62: Exterior - Reflecting Pools



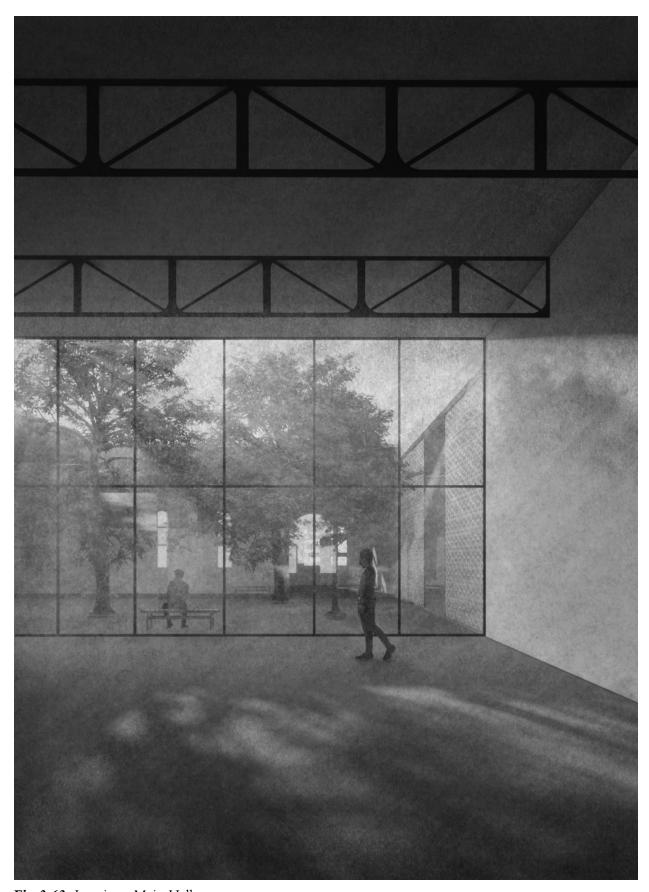


Fig 3.63: Interior - Main Hallway



Fig 3.64: Interior - Anteroom



Fig 3.65: Interior - Prayer Space/Qibla Wall



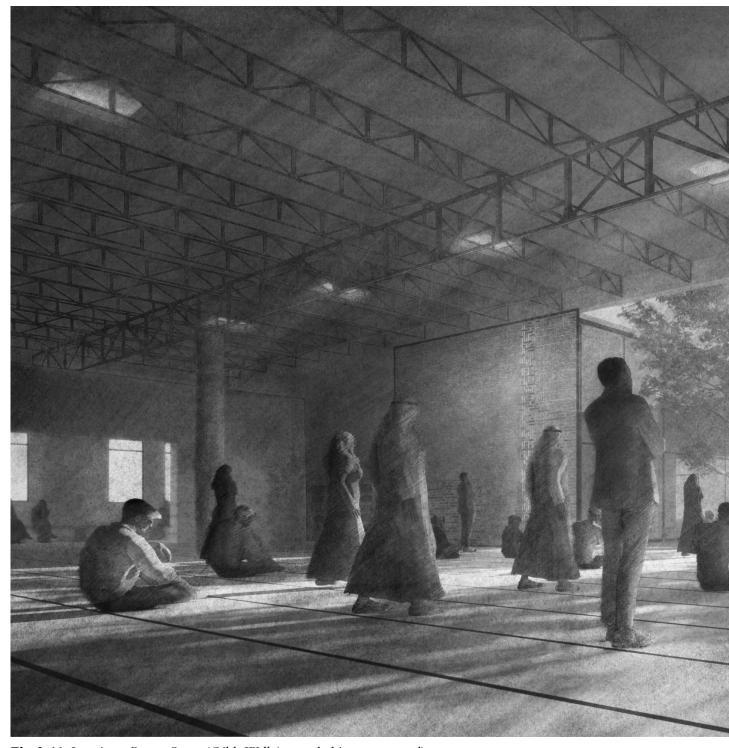


Fig 3.66: Interior - Prayer Space/Qibla Wall (expanded into courtyard)



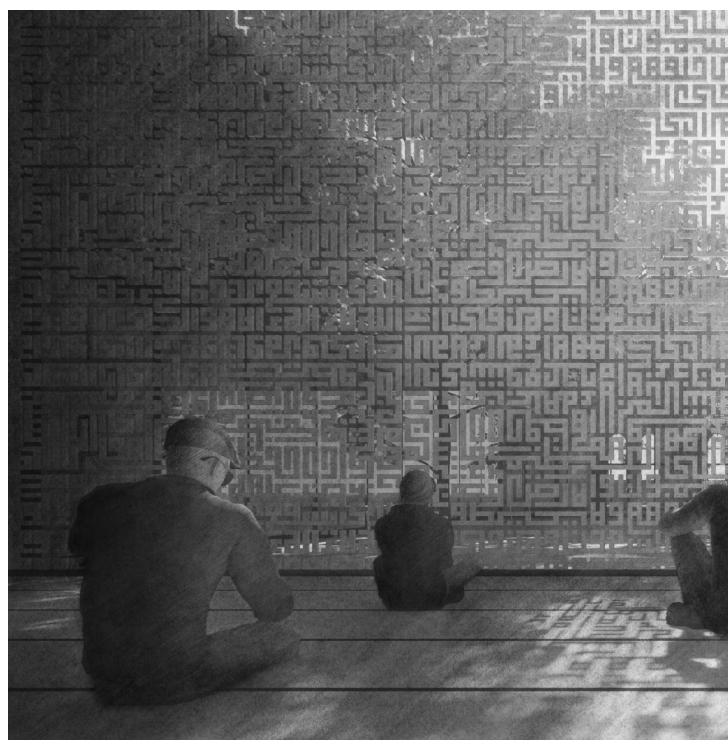
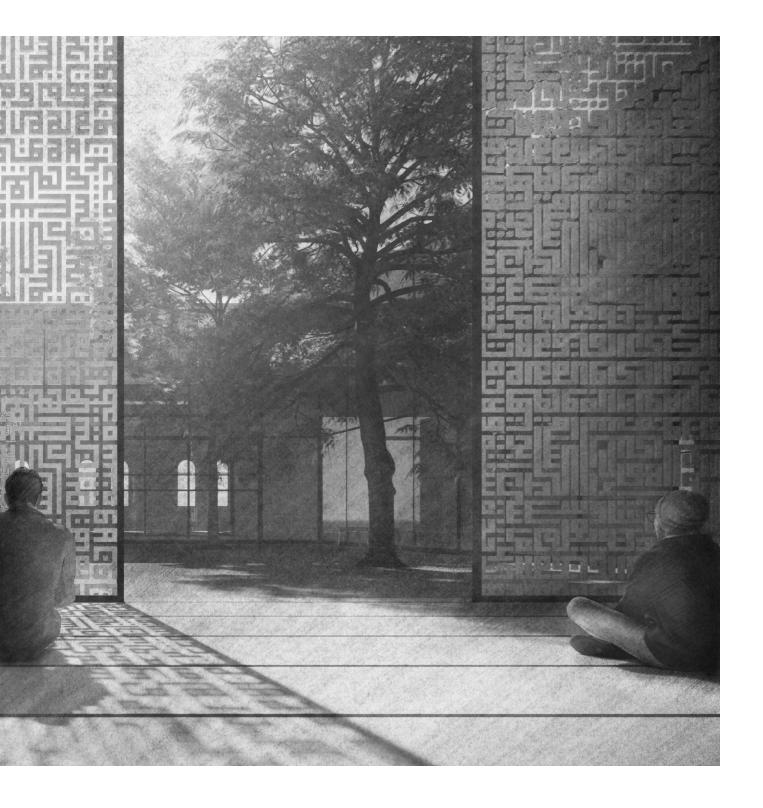


Fig 3.67: Interior - Prayer Space/Qibla Wall Pattern



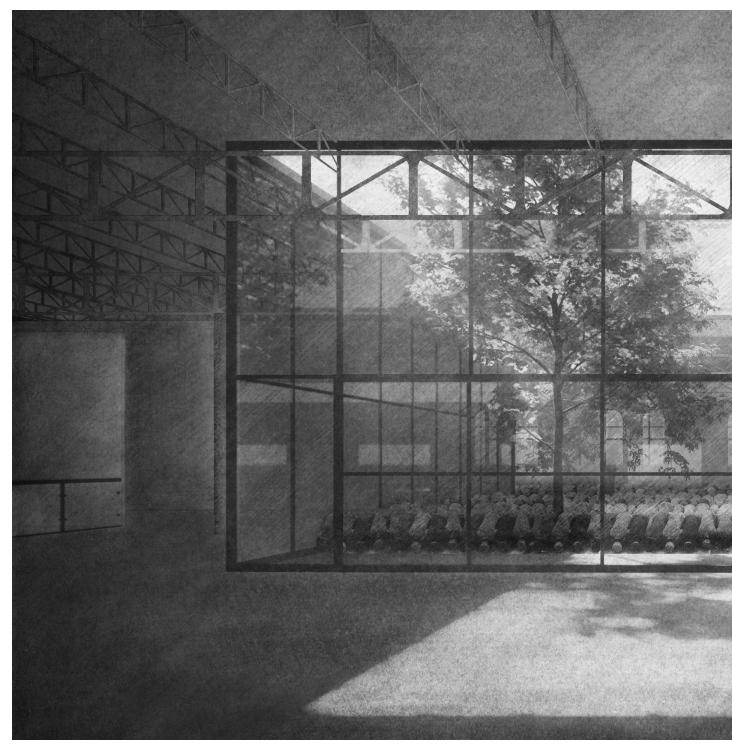


Fig 3.68: Interior - Courtyard

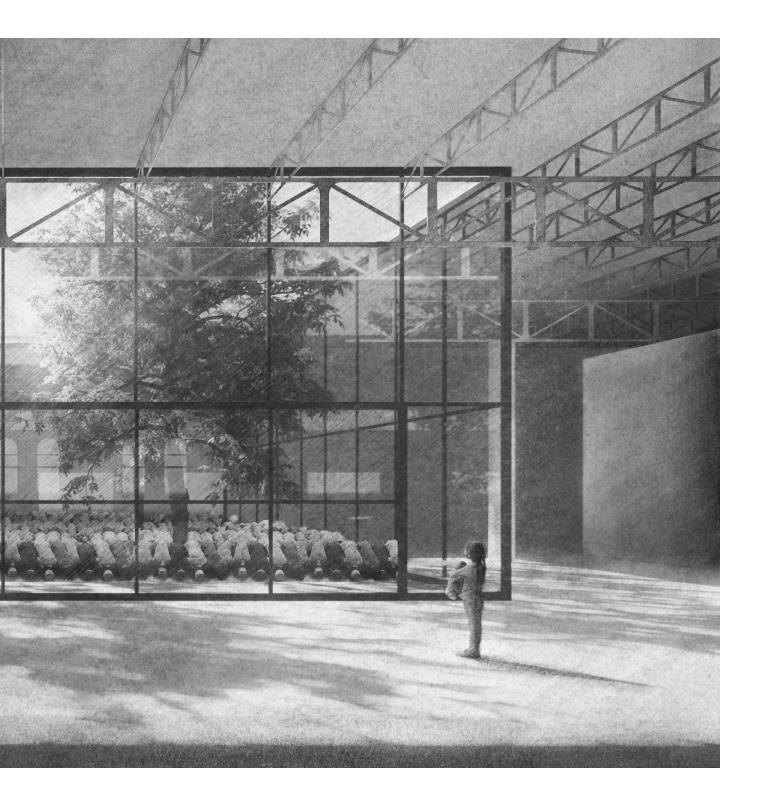




Fig 3.69: Interior - Gym



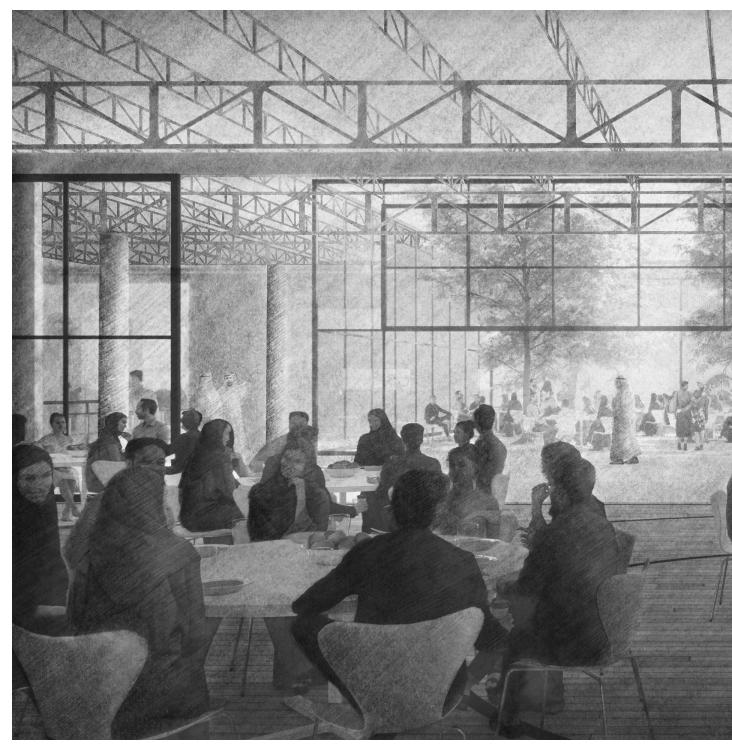


Fig 3.70: Interior - Community Gatherings





Fig 3.71: Interior - Kitchen



## Conclusion

Although they are vastly different in terms of their architectural language, arguably both purpose-built and repurposed mosques offer a complicated version of Islam – one that shows how styles and built forms influenced by and originating from a variety of Muslim cultures have taken root and flourished in Canada. Purpose-built mosques, in addition to reaffirming formal stylistic descriptions and grand narratives reveal the interrelated colonial origins of their architectural histories, and as a site for showing how Islam has been "condensed into a symbolic construction with enormous psychological power." Conversely, repurposed mosques being unidentifiable pieces of cultural pockets within the urban fabric of Canada, reveal the socioeconomic realities of Muslims in a North American country. Such institutions emphasize the "separation of architecture's cultural content from its spiritual and community function" and arguably that "such cultural visual forms are unrelated to the spiritual or religious practice." In addition, the overarching problem in both of these types of mosques is the degraded social structure of the congregations themselves – one that has had trouble addressing the concerns and interests of young Muslims, women and other diverse ethnic groups.

In the beginning of this thesis I introduced the early history of Muslim arrival and settlement in Canada and examined how these early communities sought to express their Islamic identity with mosques such as Edmonton's Al-Rashid mosque and Toronto's Mosque One. I also elucidated the colonial roots of Islamic architectural history and its development and transformation as extension of Orientalist learnings. The framing of Islamic architecture as an exclusive and intolerant tradition by the early students had profound effects and complicated the

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>119</sup> Moghissi, Rahnema, and Goodman, "Diaspora by Design", 13.

<sup>120</sup> Jerrilynn Denise Dodds and Ed Grazda, New York Masjid: The Mosques of New York (New York: Powerhouse, 2002), 65.

present understandings and perceptions of mosques. The interests of these early historians and architects in exploring only the sensual and ornamental characters of Islamic architecture and their disregard towards studying the extensive intracultural and architectural variety within the field, prevented Islamic architecture to be studied and developed further compared to classical, baroque and medieval style. Similarly, due to the limited study and documentation of Islam in North America, Muslims are continued to be characterized by an imbalance of power and an alienation with the societies in which they arrive and settle to find a new life. Mosques such as the Al-Rashid, Mosque One, and the multitude of first mosques in other provinces, not only show a history of contribution from Muslims in Canadian societies but reveal the variegated social nuances of such architecture.

In the subsequent chapters, this thesis has stressed the contextual and connected histories of Muslim life and mosque architecture in the present day and the diverse application of Islamic architectural forms and aesthetics in the various aspects of their sacred spaces in Canada. The canonical understanding of Islamic Architecture rooted in the nineteenth century Western colonialism and orientalism, has deeply influenced the study, perception and design of mosques in Canada. Evidence of such direct influence can be found in the traditional forms and aesthetics in purpose-built mosques to manifest their religious identity. Archetypal mosques like the Madinah Masjid or Baitul Islam Mosque further carries the stereotypical image of a mosque in terms of appropriating historical Islamic symbolism. The use of such elements and form also has the potential to fuel hostile situations, such as the racist remarks directed towards Muslims during the 1995 and 2015 city council meetings for a new mosque proposal, or the countless other violent cases or political bans in North America and other global nations against Muslims. The sociopolitical challenges of Al Rashid mosque relocating to Fort Edmonton Park in 1992 also

highlighted some of the ongoing challenges mosques and Muslims face in their acceptance and belonging to the larger national narratives.

Yet, without the use of such expressions, it would be difficult to identify a mosque much like their renovated types, as the imagery of elements such as the dome, minaret and inscription, is deeply embedded in the memories of the first generations of Muslims. Therefore, it becomes a very difficult and complicated task for an architect to design a mosque, especially in the context of North America, as its architecture and symbolism has deep rooted meanings and as well as contradictions in both Islamic history and Western politics. However, in order to innovate in the field of Islamic architecture, architects and worshippers must question whether the repeated use of such elements and formal language would fulfill the needs of the current and future generations of Muslims, and how they can re-influence a positive perception of a mosque through design.

Similarly, on the other end of the spectrum of mosque typologies, renovated structures must also be evaluated in terms of their cultural identity in today's day and age. What is the architectural language of grassroots adapted spaces communicating to Muslims and non-Muslims? How is the notion of a disguised exterior identity and unsuitable interiors contributing to the discourse of innovation and creativity in Islamic architecture? While the informality of repurposed mosques stems from the need for cheap and accessible spaces for worship, Muslims must realize that identity, inclusivity, and the sacred experience of their spaces is equally or, if not, more important and meaningful to enrich their belief in God and their lives in the communities. The growth of such mosques occurs partly due to the political difficulties to get approvals for a purpose-built mosque, and partly because of Muslims' deprived economic status. While such mosques promote the growth of neighborhoods by encouraging businesses such as halal restaurants and cultural shops, many of these renovated spaces are built informally with very little

or no architectural guidance. Therefore, many of them become unsuitable to act as sacred spaces due to their mismanaged spatial layouts, kitsch aesthetical expressions, and a lack of interior architectural experience and exterior identifications. These explicit and subtle contradictions of repurposed mosques make us question the role of design and the value of beauty in vernacular structures.

Although brief, this thesis also examined the practice of sex and ethnic segregation through architectural barriers in both purpose-built and repurposed mosques and provided examples of various design strategies used in some progressive mosques that respond to sexism and racism. Unlike the historical models of mosques in Canada, many contemporary mosques have lost the meaning of community and inclusivity and employ various strategies to separate the sexes. Additionally, these mosques and their worshippers are also implicitly biased towards their own ethnic congregation, and therefore makes their spaces uninviting to other diverse groups including youth and converts, who are searching for meaning and acceptance in their communities and faith. Radical movements such as the first Women's mosque of Canada, and the sacred spaces of the Noor Cultural Centre and Ismaili Centre, have not only opened the discussion of women's agency within the Muslim community but challenged the spatial power of mosques. The issue of gender segregation has been far from exclusionary in these mosques as the women pray alongside the males and are also given the opportunity to present and participate in the daily communal activities. Though the acceptability of women-led prayers remains a controversial issue within the Muslim community at large, these examples of movements prove that slow change is on the way. 121

<sup>121</sup> Kurd, "Competing Visions, Common Forms" (PhD, 2013): 244.

A number of strategies including Renard's notion of the didactic and experiential in architecture, were also presented in this thesis research to respond to many of the foregoing challenges that Canadian mosques face. The abstraction of aesthetics and symbolism (the didactic) in Islamic sacred spaces can reshape the architectural perception of both Muslims and non-Muslims alike, and as well as ground the building appropriately in its location. A mosque responding to its site through its architectural and symbolic gestures is crucial in understanding the image that it is creating in its urban fabric. Thus, learning from precedents such as, the Ismaili Centre and Prince George Centre, can teach us the importance of finding the right harmonious balance between tradition and modernity. Moreover, architecture's ability to frame and capture the power of the numinous (the experiential) must be considered when designing an Islamic sacred space. The atmospheric ambiguities such as, darkness and light or sound and silence, along with structuring sacred elements like gate, path and axis mundi, in a manner where one transitions from one state to another is precisely where one experiences the feelings of awe and curiosity. That is to say, the architecture of sacred spaces is fundamentally "the use of material forms to evoke feelings that go beyond the material, and which cannot be measured." 122

In the last section of chapter three, I introduced a set of design interventions in three repurposed mosques located in Scarborough and East York in the GTA. The mosques included a former residential house, a storefront building, and a former industrial warehouse – each one chosen due to their scale, developmental phases, compatibility, and urban context. These existing structures of mosques show us the possibilities which vernacular modes of expressions can offer, and the power of architectural design to transform such structures into meaningful spaces.

Whether with the transformation of the Qibla wall of Gawsul Azam Masjid (house mosque),

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>122</sup> Goldberger, "Architecture, Sacred Space and the Challenge of the Modern" (August 12, 2010).

complementing the temporality of Danforth Islamic Centre (storefront mosque), or the implementation of a courtyard in Sunnatul Jamaat (warehouse mosque), each intervention explored the various potentials of the architectural spaces to create a sense of identity and belonging, and as well as evoke the sense of awe and curiosity.

This thesis study of purpose-built and repurposed mosques provided a glimpse into the heterogeneity of Muslim life – the ways in which mosques have been built and used are contextual and have engaged with varying degrees of aesthetic and symbolic choices to manifest their religious identity. It also raised several questions regarding the parameters of Islamic architectural history within the context of Canada. For example, what constitutes a mosque outside of countries with long and historic traditions of Islam? Do either of these type of mosque buildings fit with the chronology of Islam? What are the motivations behind the uses of traditional Islamic architectural expressions in a foreign country? How do mosques spatially construct gender? Do these types of mosques racialize Muslim identity, and what is at stake in such identity constructs? While there is no singular expression of Islamic Architecture in Canada, the links between colonial and Orientalist perceptions of the field continue to infiltrate the discourse of Islamic architectural history. However, engagement with the spiritual concepts of Islam, the interpretations of the meaning and values of mosques, the power of diversity and inclusivity, and their application in mosque architecture are few of the ways in which a localized Islamic architecture can grow and mature. As Kurd argued in her doctoral dissertation,

"without an analysis of how spaces formulate and convey notions of Islam in builtform in Canada and the US, the practices and identities that are utilized by Muslim
communities become further stigmatized, while their built-forms are seen as being
either pastiche expressions or as being incompatible with the North American
architectural landscape. Or at worst, mosques in particular are seen as sites of hostility

and the unknown (and for example, a potential place for the recruitment and training of extremists)."<sup>123</sup>

The way of life in Islam is based partly on the direct imitation of the Prophet's sunnah or "spatial sunnah" – a term I borrow from professor Akel Ismail Kahera – and partly on the independent judgement of its followers concerning matters of personal, social and cultural lifestyles of Muslims in various social, political, and economical contexts. <sup>124</sup> Therefore, I would argue that both in purpose-built mosques and in adaptive reuse of existing fabric, architects need to approach their design as reflective of contemporary culture – one that fits the context of Canada, while also respecting Islamic traditions. While there is no simple formula, the precedents, strategies and the intervention proposals discussed in this research suggest how an inclusive and appropriate mosque design must be "based on understanding the relationship between the eternal idea of the mosque and the needs of the present Muslim society." A mosque that is rooted in its time and place and one that represents diverse Canadian Muslims is what we should try to achieve.

<sup>123</sup> Kurd, "Competing Visions, Common Forms" (PhD, 2013): 37.

<sup>124</sup> Kahera, "Deconstructing the American Mosque," 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>125</sup> Mohamad Tajuddin Haji Mohamad Rasdi, "Rethinking the Mosque in the Modern Muslim Society" (Kuala Lumpur: Institut Terjemahan & Buku Malaysia, 2014), 274.

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