Religious Architecture

Anthropological Perspectives

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ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

Edited by Oskar Verkaaik

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Oskar Verkaaik

Given that many people of religion tend to downplay the importance of religious buildings as merely representing the outside or the superficial part of their religion, it is remarkable how much time, energy and – above all – money are put into the construction of new religious buildings all over the world. Proselytising Christian groups in the US, Europe or Africa have built an astonishing number of new churches, some of which are quite costly and spectacular, and they will continue to do so (LeCavalier 2009). Since the end of Communism in the former Soviet Union, many new Russian orthodox churches have been built and others have been restored or rebuilt (Köllner 2011). New Hindu temples have been erected in India in some of the places that have benefited the most from the economic liberation since the 1980s (Valenta 2010). We find many new, purpose-built mosques in Western Europe and the US as well as in countries where Muslims make up a majority. A remarkable but little noticed example of contemporary religious architecture is the recent boom in synagogue building in Germany thanks to the influx of Jews from the former Soviet Union since the 1990s. In addition, in predominantly secular and multicultural societies and spaces, we see the emergence of new secular or multi-faith retreats which offer some of the facilities that mosques, churches, synagogues and temples also offer (Hewson 2011; Holsappel-Brons 2010). All over the world, religious buildings are being restored as heritage sites.

Still, anyone involved in the study of religious architecture will recognise the moment when practitioners of faith question this scholarly interest as slightly beside the point. 'Professor, please stop asking about architecture,' a New York-based imam asked Jerillynn Dodds (2002: 67) after a long interview about contemporary mosque design in the US. Although some may argue that mosques, like synagogues, are essentially just religious community centres – unlike, for instance, Catholic churches which Catholics supposedly consider sacred spaces – there is a tendency across all contemporary religions to argue that the heart of religion lies in indi-

vidual faith, the community, charitable deeds, ritual or doctrine, but not primarily in the religious building. Put otherwise, the soul of the building lies in its people, not in the material of which it is made. Anthropologists do not usually disregard the statements of informants as irrelevant. Why then devote a whole book to the topic of modern religious architecture?

One answer lies in anthropological methodology, developed ever since the publication of Bronislaw Malinowski's seminal *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922), which is based on the idea that people do not always do what they say they are doing and that there is often a discrepancy between ideology and practice. Why, for instance, spend such an astonishing amount of money to erect a church or a mosque if it hardly matters? Despite many Muslims' insistence that one can perform one's religious duties everywhere, it often happens that a poor migrant community of two hundred active members in a small European town will raise two million euro to build a new community mosque. Former labour migrants skip the annual summer trip to their country of origin to be able to contribute to a new mosque in Germany, France or the UK. True, people pray in makeshift places and often do so without complaints. After the Second World War, several Dutch Jewish communities, for instance, tried to regain some Jewish community life by hiring small rooms in hotels or school buildings to congregate for Sabbath. But many of these Jewish communities are now putting a lot of energy into restoring old synagogues, rescuing them from destruction, and using them again as centres for religious community activities. Apparently, buildings do somehow matter, despite religious dogma.

One of the most perceptive answers to the puzzle of why people put a lot of time into something they proclaim to be obsolete is the argument that religious buildings may not be crucial for religious reasons but are important in a social or political sense. In the case of contemporary mosques in North America and Europe, we find interpretations of this kind in the work of Dodds (2002) and Metcalf (1996), among others. The argument postulates that for religious minorities, their religious buildings represent religious identity and power and are therefore linked to processes of emancipation or integration. In nineteenth-century Europe, the Moorish style of synagogues or the neo-Gothic style of Catholic churches certainly served such purposes of visibility and communal pride. Similarly, some of the impressive contemporary mosques in the Islamic world, such as the ones in Casablanca or Islamabad, are obviously linked to post-colonial state power and may primarily be considered nationalist monuments rather than religious buildings in a strict sense. In sum, this inter-

pretation has the merit that it takes seriously what religious people say as well as what they do. They say that for religious purposes the building is meaningless, but they build and pay for them anyway because of their social or political significance.

Despite this analytical elegance, however, the interpretation is not entirely satisfactory because it draws a conceptual line between religious and political aspects of contemporary religion that may not exist as such in the eyes of people of faith. Drawing on the same distinction between inner faith and outer form that has relegated ritual to the margins of religious experience (Asad 1993a), this analysis seems to separate the ritual, aesthetic and habitual dimensions of religion from the question of religious social identity and political power. It implicitly assumes that one can distinguish between on the one hand the material expression of religion that belongs to the superficial domain of political identity and on the other hand the immaterial true heart of religion. Although this is precisely the division that many modern religious people make when they argue that religious architecture is obsolete, some of the most relevant recent anthropological contributions to the study of contemporary religion rest upon the critique of this very disconnection of the immaterial from the material. In his work on materiality, Daniel Miller for instance argues that although religion by definition strives for the immaterial beyond the material, it necessarily needs the material to evoke the immaterial (Miller 2005: 1). Like earlier studies on the importance of ritual for religious collective behaviour, Birgit Meyer has developed the notion of 'sensational form' to argue that contemporary religion is not merely a mental and ethical engagement with religious doctrine but a profound somatic, performative and aesthetic commitment to 'the affective power of images, sounds, and texts on their beholders' (Meyer 2009: 6). Others like Webb Keane (2008) and David Morgan (2010) have argued that material religious objects do not simply express already existing religious identities but may be constitutive of certain religious sensations and experiences that impact upon a religious sense of self. In the work of these authors, the material and immaterial are reconnected again even in the most iconoclastic forms of religion. Hence, we not only see the profound Muslim purist renouncing all reverence of material form as idol worship (*shirk*) but also the person who treats the material form of the Quran with the utmost respect or adores the voice who performs a beautiful Quranic recitation.

It is from these insights on how the material can be constitutive of the immaterial that the chapters in this book deal with religious architecture as an aspect of contemporary religion that goes beyond the repre-

sentation of religious power or identity. Although churches, synagogues, mosques and temples obviously do represent religious communities and hierarchies to the outside world – and most authors in this volume do pay attention to this aspect – their relevance to modern religious life is much broader. In this book we bring together chapters that discuss religious architecture as not merely expressing identities but performing religious identities; as representing not just identities to the outside world but ways to broaden and internalise one's knowledge of religious doctrine or deepen one's faith. There are chapters about the importance of religious architecture for the creation or reproduction of religious communities and about religious space as an intrinsic part of ritual rather than a mere container of ritual. There are contributions about religious architectural forms evoking sensations that, in an almost Durkheimian way, evoke a sense of effervescence that intensifies religious feelings or, in contrast, arouse intense feelings of dislike in conflicts over space-making (whose city is this?) and religious doctrine (what is and is not allowed according to the traditions?). In short, all these essays regard religious buildings as playing a more active part in processes of religious experience, identity and community than the conceptual split of the building in a private religious interior and a social, political exterior would allow for.

An anthropology of religious architecture

It is often said that anthropologists pay scant attention to architecture – a statement informed as much by reality as by ignorance (Buchli 2002: 208; Vellinga 2007 & 2011; Verkaaik 2012). As a result of the unproductive nineteenth-century divide between the Great Tradition of high art and the Little Tradition of folklore, anthropologists have indeed to some extent left the study of architecture to art historians and architectural critics. Nonetheless, anthropologists have written much more about buildings, including religious buildings, than is often assumed. Although there is a considerable body of literature about vernacular architecture (e.g. Amerlinck 2001; Blier 2006; Rapoport 1969; Vellinga 2004), predominantly about houses (Carsten & Hugh-Jones 1995; Gullestad 1984) but also including some work on religious architecture (Marchand 2001, 2009; Nelson 2007), there is less about modern architecture in anthropological writing. In different ways, Clifford Geertz (1980), Edmund Leach (1983), Maurice Bloch (1968), Pierre Bourdieu (1973) and even Marc Augé (1995) have all looked at how buildings represent and reproduce cosmolo-

gies and social hierarchies, but they have hardly explored how people use, read or 'consume' buildings. Tim Ingold (2000) and others influenced by Heidegger's notion of 'dwelling' (1997) explore how people position themselves within the natural environment, but they pay less attention to how people do so in built environments. The recently developing study of space and place (Lawrence-Zuniga & Low 1990; Low & Lawrence-Zuniga 2003) does focus on the politics as well as the consumption of built spaces, but it tends to take the materiality of architecture for granted. Materiality and its affect, however, play a larger role in recent studies of modern iconoclasm and utopian architecture (Buchli 1999; Rabinow 1995; Hoorn 2009), but this has had little influence on the anthropological study of religious architecture thus far.

Anthropologists have a lot to learn from art historians and architectural critics, but they also have a great deal to contribute. Consider, for instance, Eric Roose's recent study of contemporary mosque design in the Netherlands. His iconological approach is a welcome correction to the architectural critical perspective that dominates the public debate about the issue. Rather than interpreting contemporary mosques in terms of temporal and regional styles as many architectural critics do when they dismiss new mosques as nostalgic replicas of the Ottoman, Moghul or Mamluk tradition, Roose focuses on the designing process as a symbolic-political practice. Mosque commissioners do not simply and unreflectively copy styles from their country of origin, they actively choose between various forms and styles to make a political statement. Explicitly borrowing from an interactionalist perspective on culture, Roose treats the parties involved as political actors rather than mere children of their times (Roose 2009).

Anthropology also offers an alternative to a dominant perspective in architectural criticism that treats buildings as texts, as speaking architecture or *architecture parlante*. Like literary critics, architectural critics tend to focus on what the architect, as author, tries to convey about the function, symbolism or even character of the building. The semiotic approach in anthropology is more complex as it treats texts, like symbols, as inherently polysemic and contextual (Buchli 2002). This shifts the attention from the design and construction of buildings to the question of how people use them, from production to consumption (Vellinga 2011). Moreover, the centrality of context in meaning-making processes makes it possible to argue that buildings may have different meanings or even 'lives' (Appadurai 1986) to different groups of people in different periods of time. Rather than trying to decipher the authoritative meaning of a

building – that is, the opinion of the architect, the commissioner or architectural critics – an anthropological perspective focuses on shifts and conflicts in meaning-making practices.

Taken together, the interactionalist and contextual-interpretative approaches allow for a perspective on buildings as more than just passive objects or texts conveying a static message. Recently, anthropologists like Daniel Miller (1987) and Alfred Gell (1998) have questioned the 'objective' nature of 'objects'. Building upon philosophical and theoretical backgrounds as wide apart as Hegel's notion of objectification and Mauss's concept of reciprocity, these theorists argue that the relation between an object and its maker or user is an interactive, dynamic one. We find similar arguments in Actor Network Theory (Latour 2005) and, much earlier, in Gregory Bateson's work on cybernetics (Bateson 1971). More directly related to the issue of religious architecture is the work of Yael Navaro-Yashin (2009) on 'affective spaces' and 'spatial melancholia'. To analyse the affective power of spaces and building, Navaro-Yashin refers to Spinoza's notion of the affect – a crucial building block for Spinoza's theory of the unity of body and mind – and Deleuze's interpretation of the affect as a sensation that 'moves through human bodies, but that do not necessarily emerge from them' (ibid: 12). The power of affect, in other words, may originate from outside the human being in objects like buildings. Deleuze's notion of the affect allows us to conceive human experience not merely in terms of subjectivity and the symbolic interpretation of the world but also in terms of environmental impulses and 'lines of flight' (Deleuze & Guattari 1987) that have the capacity to move human beings beyond their learned symbolic registers. It is from this perspective that it can be argued that religious spaces have a kind of agency. They are man-made products that have an impact on human experience. Concretely, buildings limit or direct movement, impress visitors, affect the senses, evoke connotations. Neither an empty cipher with no intrinsic meaning whatsoever nor an authoritative text, a building provides opportunities for processes of identification within a particular social context. We are being trained to interpret and experience buildings in a certain way, but that does not exclude the possibility that they may, positively or negatively, overwhelm us and make us look at ourselves and our communities in a new or renewed way.

Recent studies in material religion focus explicitly on this dynamic and interactional relation between material objects and religious subjects. The works of Saba Mahmood (2005) or Annelies Moors (2009) on Islamic veiling, for instance, interpret this practice as a technique of becoming a

pious Muslim. More than just a symbol of religious identity, the veil can be seen as an affective object – an object, that is, that imposes its power onto the human subject and affects the subjectivity of the person who wears it. By wearing the veil, Muslim women actively allow the affective power of the material to transform their sense of self. This volume looks at religious architecture in a similar way. More than just a 'message cast in stone', as the iconological approach would have it, several of the authors in this book consider mosques and churches and synagogues as affective places. Working in the spirit of philosophers like Gaston Bachelard (1969) and Brian Massumi (2002) as well as architects like Juhani Pallasmaa (2005) and Peter Zumthor (1999), to name but a few, several chapters in this book look at those qualities of architecture that do not simply represent something that already exists but that help make and unmake identities, enable and disrupt experiences, create, reproduce or break up communities – in short, that make a change.

In sum, interactionalism and identification are conceptual key terms in this volume. As used here, interactionalism refers to two processes: 1) the negotiations between various parties in the design, construction and use of religious buildings, and 2) the dynamic relations between the architectural object and the religious subject. Identification refers to the idea that a religious self engages in a socio-material field that includes both others (fellow community members, secular majorities, religious minorities and so on) and objects (including religious buildings and places). Although these two terms – interactionalism and identification – do not return in each and every chapter, all of the contributions are concerned with interactive, dynamic relations of identification between religious groups and architectural spaces.

What is religious architecture?

Ever since Talal Asad's critique of substantive definitions of religion, especially those by Clifford Geertz (1973), and his insistence that definitions of religion are always situational (Asad 1993b), it is no longer self-evident what religious means within a particular historical moment. This has obvious consequences for the definition of religious architecture. For how exactly does religious architecture differ, for instance, from the architecture of the modern state? The greatness of God expressed in architectural form has an obvious family likeness to the greatness of the state as represented in modern architectural monuments. When it comes to the

evocation of ritual effervescence, a sense of community or the sensation of the sublime – all aspects we might associate with religion – we might find these qualities in secular buildings like sport stadiums, modern museums or courts of law rather than in modern churches or mosques. To define religion in terms of the holy, the sacred or the transcendent does not solve the problem either: to talk of mosques or synagogues in such terms has often been criticised as importing Christian notions about religious space into Islam or Judaism (Eade 1996: 226). And even though this viewpoint may draw too sharp a boundary between Catholicism and other monotheisms on the basis of religious texts and received ideas alone, whereas in actual practice many Muslims and Jews also seem to recognise the special character of religious spaces, anthropologists have consistently maintained that the rigid distinction between the sacred and the profane that informed classical sociological definitions of religion is untenable cross-culturally (Evans-Pritchard 1965; Goody 1961). Churches and synagogues lose their religious function and are converted into houses, museums or cultural centres. Does that mean they are no longer religious buildings? Or vice versa, is a former garage or school building turned into a mosque a piece of religious architecture? Several authors have pointed out that space is defined by ritual rather than the other way around and that the status of a building as religious or even sacred is situational (Smith 1987; Metcalf 1996), which suggests that definitions can never be static.

One solution to the problem of definition is to give up a substantive definition of religious architecture altogether and follow Asad's point that the religious is always constituted by the secular and vice versa. In this line of reasoning, religious spaces are almost by definition 'heterotopias' – a term coined by Foucault to denote 'other spaces' or '*espace autres*'. In the 'infinite, and infinitely open space' of the secular, some spaces defy the 'desanctification of space' by being 'other', 'counter-sites', 'fantasmatic', 'a mirror' (Foucault 1967). In a similar vein, Bataille could compare religious sites to slaughterhouses: both are expelled from the secular main street and, on top of that, are – in Bataille's essentialist take – places of sacrifice (1997: 22). The important point of these insights seems to me that religious architecture is not defined by some inherent qualities but by its opposition to secular space and its potential to create spaces of affirmative transgression where the secular is confirmed by the very existence of its opposite. However, although the notion of heterotopia may be helpful to understand the place of religious spaces in societies where secularism is the dominant belief system (see, for instance, Irvine in this volume), the

downside of it is that it makes it very difficult to see how the religious and the secular come together in a mutually affirmative rather than a dialectic way, for instance in churches or mosques that are built to the greater glory of the head of state or a rich local entrepreneur (see Köllner in this volume).

Another solution, then, might be a return to a functional definition of religion and religious architecture. According to Roy Rappaport, the function of religion lies partly in its capacity to 'offset the deficiencies of language and symbolic culture' (Lambek 2001). Although thoroughly part of the social and political world, partly indeed as the necessary contrast to the secular, religion also evokes a domain beyond the social world of learned speak and symbolic behaviour, offering a ritually defined entrance to this domain. Obviously, religion is not alone in its evocation of the sublime. Art, psychology, travel, violence and other bodily practices may generate similar desires and techniques to fulfill them. We might indeed get ourselves into trouble if we try to argue that modern religion stands out as somehow special and unique amidst other techniques of evoking the Real. A more fruitful way to emphasise the significance of modern religion might be to say that in highly disciplined modern societies that constantly instill modern subjects with the romantic aspiration for authentic individuality, religion is one of various ways that modern society offers to consume this desire. If this is so, the question becomes how religious architecture evokes and fulfills this desire.

A third and perhaps academically unsatisfactory solution to the problem of definition is to take common sense demarcations for granted. For although it may be difficult to conceptually distinguish modern religion from, say, the sovereign power of the bureaucratic state, the autoreferential qualities of art or the communal aspects of sport, modern subjects, including anthropologists, do make these distinctions in everyday speech. This is a social fact that has an effect of its own. That is not to deny that it may be useful and welcome to destabilise common sense notions of religion by comparing religious architecture with skyscrapers in the business centres of global cities – New York's Saint Patrick Cathedral is indeed one of the smallest buildings in its surroundings, and the term 'ecstatic architecture' has recently been used for postmodern office towers rather than for religious buildings (Jencks 1999). In many other ways, the conceptual distinction between religious and non-religious architecture remains blurred and problematic. And yet most of our informants seem to have a fairly clear idea about religious buildings as purpose-built places where people come to perform rituals they themselves call religious or

where communities gather under the flag of some faith. Or rather: the problem of definition is relevant for them on some level but not on another. Muslims may, for instance, have fierce discussions about the doctrinal requirements of a mosque, about questions such as whether a *mihrab* (where the person stands who leads the collective prayer) is required or not? In other words, they may struggle with the definition of a mosque in terms of the Quran and the Hadith, but they know perfectly well where a person is going when he says he is going to the mosque. Grounding ourselves in this practical knowledge, then, we ask questions about the relation between the building with its architectural form and the interactions and experiences people have when they individually or collectively engage with the building as a self-defined religious place.

This volume borrows from all of these three definitional tactics, all of which direct us to relevant questions about how religious buildings, as heterotopias, take their place in opposition to the secular surroundings; how they, as evocations of the sublime, help believers to move beyond the boundaries of modern subjectivity; and how they, in their common sense definition, function as community centres in urban daily life.

Introduction to the chapters

Building upon the definitions and theoretical framework outlined above, this collection addresses a number of themes: affect, identity, community, heritage and the relations and conflicts between these various aspects of religious buildings. I will briefly specify how these themes are addressed in the various chapters.

Richard Irvine's chapter about an English Benedictine monastery explicitly deals with religious architecture as 'counterfactual' and self-consciously opposed to key values of dominant secular society. Although its nineteenth-century neo-Gothic architecture was originally meant as an expression of a Catholic minority religious identity, the meaning of the building has changed considerably, as it now stands out as a place of stability and tradition in a world of 'global movement and fleeting interaction', as Irvine puts it with reference to the work of Marc Augé. Irvine describes how the architecture of the place is intimately linked with the everyday routine of Catholic ritual, and it is this combination of ritual taking place in a particular architectural setting that creates the 'value of staying put', as one monk puts it. Heritage, community, identity and affect are all intertwined because the sense of tradition and stability that gives

the community of monks its modern 'counterfactual' identity is aroused not in the least by the very materiality of the monastery as a site of English Catholic heritage.

Analysing the mythical language of size in relation to newly built mosques in Europe, Pooyan Tamimi Arab addresses the issues of affect and identity within the highly politicised context of European Islam. Focusing on the Essalam Mosque of Rotterdam and how it is framed as a 'megamosque' or 'the biggest mosque in Europe' by Dutch Muslims and anti-Islam politicians alike, Tamimi Arab examines the affective dimension of this depiction. Although the Essalam Mosque is, in reality, not the biggest mosque of Europe, the author is less interested in analysing the 'megamosqueing' myth as a discursive construction than in seeking to find out how the myth works for various parties involved. Using Bruno Latour's notion of 'symmetrical anthropology' in which fact and fetish are no longer seen as oppositional, Tamimi Arab analyses the role of the building in current identity politics, emphasising how its mythical reputation impacts how the physicality of the mosque is experienced.

The issue of affect is taken up further by Mattijs van de Port who in his contribution explicitly focuses on the question of how the sublime can be evoked by architectural means. Taking the baroque church architecture of Brazil as his example, Van de Port explores what Jens Baumgarten has called the 'visual rhetorics' of the Brazilian baroque architecture (Baumgarten 2010). Whereas Baumgarten examines the religious, aesthetic and social dimensions of the Brazilian baroque, Van de Port explicitly rejects a historical or representational interpretation that would explain baroque colonial architecture in the context of the Counter-Reformation, colonial expansion and Brazilian nationalism. Instead, he delves into the question of how baroque architecture affects the senses, developing an argument that is reminiscent of Edmund Leach's point in an article on Hindu temples: that the overwhelming and spectacular presence of a magnitude of gods and goddesses functions to derail the senses of the visitor and in that way to take him beyond himself. Borrowing from the equally self-consciously ahistorical work of Bataille and Barthes, Van de Port emphasises the 'sovereign power of form itself' to develop an argument about the interaction between architectural form and human perception. Put differently, this contribution focuses on how the sensational form of the baroque church creates a dimension beyond the realm of discursive identity formation. If Irvine and Tamimi Arab emphasise in their contributions the relations between affect and identity, Van de Port forms a counterpoint to these opening chapters by indicating how architecture

can create a sensation of the sublime which overturns and deranges religious-political identity.

Tobias Köllner's chapter on new Russian Orthodox churches in contemporary Russia shifts our attention to issues of heritage and community. After the fall of communism, the Russian Orthodox Church has re-entered the public space, and many new churches and monasteries have been built since the 1990s. Describing two such cases in the monumental city of Vladimir, Köllner highlights the moral dimension of gift-giving in the context of religious revival. The financial gifts of entrepreneurs who have made the most of Russian capitalism, as well as the manual labour contributed by poor religious community members, are interpreted as public works of penance. Interestingly, it is through these gifts that public tensions in the new Russia can temporarily be solved. Not only do new churches link local communities to the nation by reviving national religious heritage, the gifts given to new church projects also reinforce economic ties and political positions whereas they also function as a public form of moral purification. For example, through financial gifts, rich businessmen strengthen their relationships with local politicians and the Russian Orthodox establishment but also publicly and privately show themselves as moral persons, capable of sin and penance. It is this religious money that hints at the links between the simultaneous rise of the Russian Orthodox Church and Russian capitalism.

Even more than Köllner, Markha Valenta zooms in on religious architecture as an expression of contemporary global capitalism. Her account of the Siddhivinayak Temple, the richest and most spectacular of Mumbai, is an explicit attempt to analyse what is contemporary about contemporary religious architecture. Refusing any kind of reductionism, Valenta describes how the rise of the temple, which attracts some 100,000 visitors daily, reflects the political, economic and cultural changes since the 1980s and how these changes have impacted Mumbai as a global city. Indicative of these often-conflicting changes, the temple itself is full of contradictions. Symbolising a new demotic Hinduism, for instance, it also functions like a gated community with airport-like security and modern technologies that make the structure largely self-provisional and yet globally connected through media and finance. It speaks of the conflictual but simultaneous rise of chauvinistic and cosmopolitan Hindu religious politics, of Bollywood as well as Shiv Sena. In these and other ways, the Siddhivinayak Temple is, as Valenta puts it, reflective of 'the structural interplay between equality, (dis)possession, consumption and desire in our brave new world'.

In his analysis of the Great Mosque in Djenné, Mali, reputedly the world's largest mud structure, Trevor Marchand takes the issue of heritage and community further, explicitly emphasising the potential tension that exists between the interests of heritage preservation and community activity. Starting out by documenting various historical ideological disputes about its design that arose over the years between locals and invading religious purists, Marchand then moves on to describe the re-plastering ceremonies that take place annually to maintain the structure. These ceremonies become festive rituals that reproduce a sense of community. However, the mosque is also world heritage, the object of conservation projects financed by donors like the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, and a focus point of the annual *Festival du Djennéry* that is largely staged for tourists, all of which neglect the important social function of the maintenance activities by the Muslim community. The conflict becomes one between the outsiders' admiration for the building as an authentic end-product and the seasonal engagement of the community with the materiality and building techniques.

A similar tension occurs in Verkaaik's discussion of the new mosque in Granada, Spain, built and used by Western converts to Islam who have settled in the shadow of the Alhambra. Like Marchand's contribution, this chapter describes the encounter between tourists seeking authentic Moorish culture and Muslim converts doing largely the same but with a religious rather than a leisurely purpose. A profound difference with the Great Mosque in Djenné, however, is that the Muslim community in Granada is a new community of converts who need to establish a religious habitus from scratch. The sensational practices of making things in a refashioned and revitalised Moorish tradition are an important part of this effort to create a new aesthetic community. Verkaaik also describes how this attempt clashes with reformist-minded notions of Islam as a truly inward-looking faith and how this enigma of religion and aesthetics leads to local discussions about time and beauty.

Ivan Kalmar's contribution discusses another example of how the Moorish legacy of Al-Andaluz is revived in a modern context. Focusing on nineteenth-century synagogue building in Europe – in this case the synagogue in Florence, Italy – Kalmar refutes the often-repeated notion that the Moorish style as applied to synagogues expressed an admiration for religious tolerance in Muslim Spain. Based on historical documents, he shows how in the nineteenth century the Moorish style was associated with the Orient. Since the Jews were seen as an 'Oriental' people, non-Jewish architects in particular considered the Moorish style appropriate

for synagogues. The rediscovery of the Moorish style was thus related to the growing visibility and integration of Jews as a separate ethnic-religious community.

Shahed Saleem also focuses on contemporary mosque design, namely the various trends and development in mosque building in postwar Britain. Some of the discussions about style and identity in the case of the contemporary British mosque are comparable to the discussions analysed by Kalmar, but Saleem also takes the analysis a step further by analysing the designing process as a process of negotiation, learning and 'objectification'. Disagreeing with the often-heard criticism that European Muslims simply produce cheap replicas of traditional Islamic building styles, Saleem points out the many variations, adaptations and innovations in British mosque design. Although the gaze of the secular world affects in an important way how Muslims design their mosques, Saleem's look at the mosque interior shows that Muslims are also driven by other concerns such as religious disputes on mosque design, the wish to create a familiar and relaxing place for prayer, and the ambition to literally build an English Muslim identity. These complex interactions make the designing and building process 'a performance that the community engages in to establish its own dynamics and relationships to each other and the outside world'.

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Stability, Continuity, Place

An English Benedictine Monastery as a Case Study in Counterfactual Architecture

Richard D.G. Irvine

This is about a home: Downside Abbey in Somerset, England, which is home to a community of Catholic monks who derive their pattern of life ultimately from the sixth-century *Rule* of Saint Benedict. What I want to explore here is the *active* role of buildings in Benedictine life, and the crucial part that architecture plays in building up an English Benedictine identity. The monastery is a practical architecture for living – praying, eating, working, studying, sleeping – as well as a visible site of witness to the world. Drawing on ethnographic and historical research, I will first attempt to describe the role that architecture plays in the monks' lives and will then introduce the idea that monastic architecture might productively be treated as 'counterfactual architecture' – that is, architecture that raises 'what if?' questions about history and social life.

Benedictine monks are men whose life cycles become *wrapped around* a particular place, a set of buildings that shape their daily routine. To offer some context, I will begin by describing an event that is simultaneously ordinary and extraordinary: the monastic community gathers around the altar, as they do every day, for the *conventual* (communal) celebration of Mass. To return to the same places day after day, week after week, year after year – this is the monk's pattern of life. To repeat the same gestures, the same words, in the same locations. This is a life shaped by the call to prayer, the continual, steady striking of 'Great Bede'[1] from the Abbey's square tower calling you again and again toward the place of worship. The monks take up their places towards the east of the church in the part of the church known as the Choir; the monastic community's presence in the space is marked by the elaborately carved choir stalls even when the monks themselves are absent. The lay congregation that come from outside the monastery to join in the monks' worship are seated in the Nave, the body of the church to the west.

It is in the context of this regular pattern of worship that a major life-event occurs. The ritual in which a monk makes his solemn profession[2] is embedded in the community Mass (albeit a community Mass with a

dramatically increased attendance, including the attendance of the natal family of the monk who is committing himself to life in the community). Following the Liturgy of the Word, which consists of readings from scripture, and a homily preached by the Abbot, the candidate for solemn profession advances towards the altar upon which the conventual communion is celebrated daily. Upon this altar, he signs a form pledging himself in perpetuity to monastic life and to the monastic community. He then kisses the Abbot's hand, demonstrating his familial obedience to the father of the community. Next, he lies on a black funeral pall and has his face, hands and feet covered. Cantors kneel at his feet as a litany is chanted, and candles are lit at each corner of the pall. The monk to be professed is surrounded by the symbolism of death; and the locus of this symbolic death is at the heart of the Abbey Church, in the midst of the daily worship. Following the chanting of the litany, the Abbot sprinkles the candidate with holy water. The candidate is then dressed in a new set of robes, which are also blessed with holy water. He is welcomed into the community with the kiss of peace from his fellow monks. The hood of his cowl is raised over his head and pinned in place, and following the Mass, the monk begins three days of silent retreat in his private room (sometimes referred to as a 'cell'). Monks who offered accounts of this process generally focussed on its symbolic resonance. As the novice master (the monk in charge of the spiritual formation of those entering the monastery) summarised for me: "I am dying, I am being reborn ... three days in the tomb like Christ in the tomb for three days"; another senior monk explained, "I thought of it rather like Jonah in the belly of the whale before being thrown up ... a lot of time to think, maybe to feel pretty sorry for myself before finally putting myself into the hands of God". Following the retreat, the monk's hood is lowered, and he returns to full life in the community.

The solemn profession is the culmination of a gradual process; by the time of his solemn profession, he has already spent time as a guest, as a *postulant* (from the Latin *postulare*, to demand or request) seeking admission to the community and as a novice, all before making a temporary profession for a period of at least three years.[3] The monk has therefore moved through different stages of incorporation within the community before being admitted to solemn profession, after which he is bound to the community perpetually.[4] The monk has renounced his own property and money, only using or spending that which the abbot gives him permission to use or spend from the monastery's resources. The monk has taken on a new name as well as new family ties and responsibilities.[5]

In order to understand the particular importance of architecture to the Benedictine vocation, it is important to outline the nature of the commitment that monks make during their profession. The monk commits himself to *stability* – understood in the personal sense of persevering in the monastic state, but also understood as a commitment to remain in a particular community, to bind oneself to it, and not to wander from it. As one monk explained, reflecting on his three-day silent retreat following solemn profession: "I remember this very strange dissonance, I kept thinking 'I want to go home', and every time I was reminded, this realisation like a bell, 'you are home', and this continued ... and I was thinking about lying on the funeral pall and reflecting that this is where I will die ... I'll be buried in the cemetery out there. That's what stability means." In making his profession, the monk also commits himself to *obedience* – he promises to live by the Rule (in particular as it is understood through the constitutions of the congregation) and under the governance of the abbot. This can be understood as filial obedience; the abbot is described as the father of the community or of the family, the head of the household (sometimes referred to by the Latin *familia*) who directs its activity and takes responsibility for its welfare. As Nuzzo (1996: 874) notes, "this concept of father of the monks is directly parallel to the Roman concept of *paterfamilias*, where the senior male of the family was its 'singular authority figure'". Finally, the monk commits himself to *conversatio morum* – this resists easy translation,[6] but the commitment was generally explained to me as being a promise to live a monastic way of life. Christopher Jamison, the Abbot of Worth, another monastery of the Congregation, provides a useful working definition: "If you look up the word conversation in some dictionaries, you find a clue to the meaning of *conversatio*. There you discover that the first now obsolete meaning of conversation is living with somebody ... So this Benedictine vow is a resolution to live with others, specifically with other monks, and hence to live the monastic way of life" (Jamison 2006: 116).

Taken together, what we see is a powerful commitment to *becoming part of a household*. This lies at the heart of the monks' understanding of Benedictine identity, as was made clear in the opening talk given during a retreat for young men considering their vocation: "The first and, I would say, most important thing is that St Benedict is writing for *cenobites*, that is, monks who wish to live in community, according to a rule, under an Abbot ... so the *Rule* is not for the eremitic lifestyle of the desert monks of the early Christian centuries, living in some kind of spiritual solitary combat, but a cenobitic lifestyle, praying together, eating together, serv-

ing one another". A useful device, borrowed from the first chapter of St Benedict's *Rule*, was to contrast this ideal 'cenobitic' form with disordered alternatives; for example, St Benedict criticises 'gyrovagues', or wandering monks who tramp from place to place. As was explained during the vocations retreat, "the trouble with these gyrovagues was that they were entirely self-interested and without the discipline which comes from the support of a community"; by contrast, "the [Benedictine] community is about monks living together, and coming closer to God through social interaction in the monastery, not by shunning social interaction entirely".

Space in which to gather

The architecture of the monastery should be understood first and foremost as architecture that facilitates this social interaction. The primary locations in which the monks express their identity *as a household* are ritually and physically connected in the daily *horarium*. The monks' rooms in the west wing of the monastery are connected to the Abbey Church (plate 1), so that the movement through the cloister is a transition from their individual space to the space for collective prayer in response to the tolling of the bell. The monks rise in the morning for *Vigils* at 6:00 a.m., making their way to the Abbey Church; they return to that space repeatedly throughout the day. "We are a human clock," joked one of the monks while being drawn away from the library where he had been engaged in private study by the sound of the bell, and the workings of this clock are acted out by the movements of the monks through the cloister. They are called again to gather in the Abbey Church for *Lauds* at 7:10 a.m., community Mass at 8:35 a.m., midday prayer at 12:30 p.m., *Vespers* at 5:45 p.m., and *Compline* at 8:00 p.m., at the conclusion of which the Abbot blesses the community, sprinkling them with holy water. The monks raise their hoods and make their way back along the cloister to their rooms in the west wing, where the *summum silentium* begins, and the monastery becomes a space marked by silence until the next morning.

In addition to gathering in the Abbey Church, the monks also gather together three times a day in the refectory to share food. Eating is connected to the work of prayer, and this connection between the daily liturgy and the meal is made visible as the monks make their way along the cloister, moving from the Abbey Church to the refectory. Each meal follows a period of prayer and can be seen as a continuation of that prayer. Breakfast follows *Lauds*, and lunch follows the Midday Office, while supper follows

the half-hour period of private prayer after *Vespers*. The monastic refectory is a ritual space, which demonstrates the importance of commensality in the monks' lives (Irvine 2011). As in the choir stalls, monks are seated in a specific order reflecting their place in the community; novices and juniors (monks in the early years of their membership of the community who have not yet made their solemn profession) are seated at one table, and the rest of the community sits along the tables in the order in which they received the habit, with the exception of the Abbot, the Prior and the Sub-Prior, who are seated together at the end of the room. Prayers are chanted before lunch and supper (at breakfast, the monks individually say grace in silence before eating). These prayers are intoned by the *hebdomadary,* who is the monk appointed to intone prayers for that week in the Abbey Church. The meal is served following a scripture reading for the day, drawn from the Liturgy of the Word at the community Mass, and then food is eaten in silence while the community listens to a reading from a book chosen by the Abbot. We can see, then, that the refectory is a space of silence and prayer used in ways that reflect the ritual arrangement of the Abbey Church.

So within the architecture of the monastery, the different facets of communal life feed into one another. At the heart of this connection is the cloister, the passageway linking the different spaces used in the monks' daily lives. The cloister is a core feature of Benedictine architecture, reaching back to the design of medieval monasteries (although in the case of Downside, in spite of the clear inspiration taken from medieval design, their cloister falls short of the medieval prototype by only enclosing the central garden on three sides; this is not the ideal four-sided yard entirely enclosed by monastic buildings). As Horn (1973: 13) explains, the medieval cloister is a form that expresses a particular idealised pattern of social life: aside from "those rare occasions" when he might be called away from the monastery, "the monk spent his entire life in this enclosed yard and its surrounding structures, which served as his living, eating, working, and sleeping quarters". Horn points to the *Plan of St Gall* – a ninth-century manuscript prepared in the context of monastic reform synods held in Aachen in 816 and 817 sketching out an ideal arrangement of monastic buildings – as providing a prototypical answer to the crucial question of how a monastery should be designed. What we see in that plan is the much-replicated model of a cloister that connects the sleeping quarters and the refectory, surrounded by the various buildings and gardens which provide the resources the monastery needs to function. The ideal for which it stands is the containment of the monastic life cycle

within a set of communal buildings – from the accommodation for novices newly entering the monastery through to the accommodation of the sick, the monastery was a space in which people lived, worked, studied and prayed, providing for their needs from the day they are admitted to their monastery through to the day of their death.

Contemporary English Benedictine monasteries do not aspire to this level of complete containment. According to the constitution of the congregation, with permission, monks may spend up to 30 nights in the year away from the monastery, and many monks use this allowance to spend time with their natal families. Monks also spend time away giving lectures and talks, acting as spiritual directors or conducting community work as priests in parishes beyond the boundaries of the monastery. Nevertheless, the monastic architecture does exude a particular aspiration to stability. As in the *Plan of St Gall*, the monastery buildings incorporate the religious life cycles of the monks; those in the early stages of their monastic development – postulants, novices and juniors – have individual rooms in the novitiate section of the monastic accommodation before moving on to the west wing to live in rooms in the main living quarters with the rest of the solemnly professed monks. The west wing of the monastery also contains an infirmary, where sick and elderly monks live under the care of the infirmarian, an official appointed from within the community specifically to care for those who are ill. The infirmary has its own direct link to the Abbey Church, opening out into a gallery, enabling continued participation in the community's ritual life. So the monk incorporates his own life cycle into a monastic complex that is designed to be an enduring unit over and beyond the lifetime of the individual. This endurance is made visible in the monastic cemetery: the monks are buried in the grounds of the monastery, where row after row of black, cast-iron crosses form a massed community of the deceased. Even in death, the monks' bodies remain within the boundaries of the monastic household.

Stability and continuity

What we see, then, is a form of architecture that asserts stability. This assertion, I would suggest, is a work of contrast: as we saw above, it involves the active rejection of the lifestyle of the 'gyrovague', who lacks commitment to place. The political significance of this contrast becomes clear when we turn to the history of the English Benedictine congregation, in which the right to stability is hard won.

It is important to place the architecture of the monastery within the context of the internal politics of the congregation as well as the wider political landscape. The community inhabits buildings that are the product of a pivotal time in English Benedictine history. The west wing of the monastery, containing the living quarters and *calefactory*[7] (a kind of common room with chairs and newspapers where the monks spend periods of recreation and gather together after supper), was built in phases between 1872 and 1899, while work began on the Abbey Church itself in 1880. Around this time, the monks of the community were immersed in a heated debate about the nature of English Benedictine identity (see Irvine 2010 for a detailed account of this debate).

The history of the English Benedictine congregation is intimately linked with the mission for the re-conversion of England to Catholicism.[8] Monastic life in England had come to an abrupt halt following the dissolution of the monasteries between 1536 and 1540 under the reign of Henry VIII. Yet English vocations to the Benedictine life continued, and Englishmen entered monasteries on the European continent; it was under these circumstances that English monks petitioned to be allowed to return to England, where the church had ceded from the authority of Rome, so that they might minister as priests to their own people. Growing numbers entered monasteries on the continent in order to join this missionary work, and the monastic community of St Gregory the Great, now resident at Downside, was founded in Douai in 1606, then a notable centre for Catholic exiles (Bossy 1975: 12-17), as a house from which to send monks for the mission in England. The Papal Bull[9] *Plantata*, issued in 1633 by Pope Urban VIII, ratified the English Benedictines' missionary mandate, confirming that the monks should, when making their profession, take a 'Missionary Oath' through which they solemnly accepted the President of the Congregation as having the sole authority to transfer them to or from the mission.

The community remained on the continent until policies suppressing monastic orders in France, as well as the French Revolution and the French revolutionary government's declaration of war against Britain, made it unsustainable to continue Benedictine life there. Forced to leave Douai in 1794, the community based themselves temporarily in Acton Burnell, Shropshire, before settling at their current site in 1814. But even though the community had relocated to England, the missionary commitment remained, with the majority of monks called to leave the monastery shortly after they had been ordained as priests, spending the rest of their lives away from the monastery running parishes. The late nineteenth century

saw the emergence of a vociferous movement to reform English Benedictine monasticism, calling for a shift in emphasis from the mission to the cloister. These reformers emphasised stability as an essential condition for Benedictine life. Aidan Gasquet, the head of the community between 1878 and 1885, stated that stability "is the key to the spirit of monasticism as interpreted in [St Benedict's] Rule, for by it the monastery is erected into a family, to which the monk binds himself forever" (Gasquet 1896: xiv).[10] To enter a Benedictine monastery is to become part of a corporate body and to share in all aspects of life with that body, "acting only through it, sharing in all the joys and sorrows of its members, giving and receiving that help, comfort and strength which come from mutual counsel" (1896: xii). Similarly, Edmund Ford, the head of the community from 1894 to 1906, wrote in a sketch of the Benedictine vocation that "the normal life of Benedictines is the life of many living together, not for the sake of doing any particular work, but that they may carry out as far as possible the full teaching of Christ on the perfection of social life". For these reformers, the ideal was that "the monks ... are bound together by ties which are particularly close. They are truly said to form a family". It was under the leadership of these monastic reformers that work began on the monastic architecture that the community inhabits today.

So if the monastery buildings assert stability against the life of the gyrovague, they do so as an active statement about the kind of monastic life the community was seeking at this juncture in its history. The buildings express the aspirations of a group that wanted to build a home: living, working, growing through social interaction and ultimately dying as members of a family.

One of the most important ways in which such aspirations were justified was by way of an appeal to the past – the life of the Benedictine monk in England should demonstrate a continuity with the lives of medieval English monks. The significance of this historical connection is made clear in the words of Laurence Shepherd, a monk who gave a series of retreat talks for the Downside community in 1882. We know from contemporary records that his words had a substantial impact on the views of the younger monks especially.[11] Shepherd's words are saturated in the rich history of English monasticism, "the ten hundred years history of glory in England" prior to the Reformation.[12] He evokes the tremendous learning, the hospitality and above all the solemn celebration of the liturgy of the medieval monks. He looks around him, and finding the community at Downside "engaged in the grand work of Building a House to God",[13] he envisions the building work as a restoration of the spirit and place of mo-

nasticism in England. "If I have talked too much as tho' I were dreaming, dreaming that St. Gregory's of Downside was getting turned gradually into Glastonbury, it is pardonable."[14]

The idea of 'rebuilding Glastonbury' is a potent one. Aidan Gasquet, under whose leadership the construction of the new church at Downside began, had also written about Glastonbury Abbey as a symbol of England's monastic heritage (Gasquet 1895). Glastonbury connected the history of monasticism to the thread of British history. It was the resting place not only of King Edmund I and King Edmund II but also, according to legend, the burial site of King Arthur. Famously, Glastonbury was said to have been visited by Joseph of Arimathea, the man who had taken Jesus down from the cross and entombed him. For Gasquet, these legends did not need to be verifiable in order to be significant – they simply stood as a clear indication of the link in the popular imagination between monastic life and England's history as a Christian country. "Here, and here alone on English soil," he wrote, "we are linked not only to the beginnings of English Christianity, but to the beginnings of Christianity itself" (Gasquet 1895: 4). With the dissolution of the Abbey in 1539 and the subsequent execution of Richard Whiting, its last abbot, for treason, this link was all but severed.

Against the backdrop of this historical rupture, it is little surprise that monks come to appear as something alien. This is a context, after all, in which Catholicism itself was treated with a great deal of suspicion and even hostility (Ralls 1974; Paz 1992). Catholics, it was claimed, owed their allegiance to a foreign power. In the mid-nineteenth century, the sermons of Cardinal Wiseman,[15] in which he expressed admiration for those condemned as treasonous in this world and crowned as martyrs in the next, were used as evidence by the Conservative Member of Parliament Charles Newdegate, who argued that the Catholic hierarchy was a threat to the security of the state (Arnstein 1982: 168-170). Newdegate was hardly unique in holding this view. An established church (as existed, and still exists, in the form of the Church of England) renders religious authority subject to the authority of the state. Loyalty to Rome could therefore all too easily be construed as disloyalty to Queen and Country. How can one simultaneously claim to be 'Catholic' and 'British'?

As for monasteries, we can see the particularly acute suspicion in which religious and monastic orders were held at this time. The view of celibacy and enclosure as unnatural forms of asceticism fuelled a growing literature detailing imagined acts of depravity within the cloister. Ingram (1991: 783) details the "professional leisure industry" which satisfied the public

appetite "for stories about the misbehaviour of the Catholic priest and his lascivious practices in confessional and convent ... a great torrent of public performers in the character of 'escaped nuns' and 'reformed priests' toured the British Isles lecturing to delightedly shocked audiences with accounts of their own 'personal experiences'". The portrayal of monasteries as sinister presences in the English landscape is exemplified by false allegations against the Cistercian Abbey of Mount St Bernard, Leicestershire, after a man named William Thomas Jeffreys claimed to have been held at the monastery against his will; his claims of captivity, detailing the cruelty of the monks, were published in 1849 in a pamphlet titled *A Narrative of Six Years' Captivity and Suffering among the Monks of Saint Bernard, in the Monastery at Charnwood Forest, Leicestershire.* The angry reaction of locals, who threatened to blow up the monastery, shows the clear potential of such tales to inflame tensions and prejudices (Paz 1992: 122). At the heart of such suspicions are claims that monasteries were 'Popish prisons', essentially foreign and forever incompatible with English values.

'Rebuilding Glastonbury' in this context is to make a claim on continuity in place of rupture. When envisioned as a restoration of past glories rather than some kind of foreign imposition, the architecture becomes a way of asserting the *Englishness* of Benedictine monasticism. This helps us to understand why the monastery buildings designed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the Abbey Church in particular, are so clearly evocative of the past. In the words of one of the monks who published an architectural history of the Abbey: "It is not a medieval church ... And yet to the perceptive stranger visiting it to-day, there is no doubt that it possesses the atmosphere of a medieval church" (James 1961: 6). The architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner, who chronicled the buildings of England in his massive multi-volume project *The Buildings of England*, concurred: "If ever there was excuse for building in period forms in the C20, it is here ... The whole of the abbey church has become the most splendid demonstration of the renaissance of Roman Catholicism in England" (Pevsner 1958: 71).

The first plan, drawn by Archibald Dunn and Edward Hansom in the 1870s, in fact drew heavily on the gothic architecture of French cathedrals, especially Amiens, which Dunn had studied (James 1961: 10). The drawings prepared by Dunn and Hansom, complete with processions of tonsured monks, demonstrate the medievalist imagination at work (plate 2). Yet of this plan, only the mid-part of the church was completed, in addition to the ambulatory (that is, the walkway around the envisaged east

end of the church) and the side chapels radiating from the ambulatory. After Dunn's death, the decision was made to entrust the building work to Thomas Garner, who drew his own new plans for the church. Garner envisaged a square east end, which he felt was far more in keeping with the architecture of English medieval churches (ibid: 47); his design was largely based on the Perpendicular Gothic style of English churches in the fifteenth century (ibid: 42). The building work was continued by Giles Gilbert Scott in 1925, who blended his own work with Garner's scheme, following its proportions. However, the west end of the church was not completed, as the community could not decide whether they wished to extend the nave of the church further and so opted to build a 'temporary' plain west wall so as to delay the decision (ibid: 75-76). This wall still stands.

The intention throughout these phases was to build "a Downside which should vie with great pre-Reformation abbeys in dignity and magnificence" (ibid: 72). The building material used for the Abbey Church – Bath stone, an oolitic limestone – evokes the architecture of nearby Bath Abbey, built with materials from the same quarry, and the interior is full of reminders of England's monastic heritage. The vaulting of one of the largest side chapels, dedicated to St Benedict, is bossed with the arms of major English Benedictine monasteries prior to their dissolution. The choir stalls to which the monks return throughout the day for the cycle of liturgical prayer are reproductions of the choir stalls at Chester Cathedral, itself a former Benedictine Abbey, while the altar around which the community celebrates Mass is built out of stone taken from Glastonbury Abbey. The monks therefore surround themselves with points of connection to the monasticism of a past age.

What we see is a tremendous effort to bring the past into the present; the architecture not only connects the monastery with pre-Reformation forms but also serves as a demonstration of their continuing vitality. One of the most imposing demonstrations of the Abbey's claim to continuity is its tower, completed in 1938 based on a design by Giles Gilbert Scott. The design of the tower is deliberately imitative of the pre-Reformation church towers of the county. The 'Somerset Tower' is a recognisable style that consists in its simplest form of a buttressed square tower, topped with a parapet and pinnacles at each corner (Wright 1981). Church architecture throughout the county between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries shows the development and elaboration of this theme. Scott, in completing the tower of the Abbey, crowned it with pinnacles and placed it firmly within this tradition. Indeed, one member of the community has

published a pamphlet taking the reader on "a journey around the ornate parish church towers of the Somerset Mendip hills" (Lambert 1997), in which the tower at Downside is presented as a continuation of the county's indigenous style of architecture. So the tower is integrated within a Somerset skyline, a sign of the continuity of Catholicism within the English landscape.

Counterfactual architecture

What is being proclaimed here is *survival.* In fact, we might even consider the architecture of the monastery as an exercise in counterfactual history. It poses a set of provocative "What if?" questions: What if Henry VIII had not dissolved the English monasteries? What if the Reformation had never happened?

The use of architecture to present contrasting sets of values was an important motivation in the Gothic Revival movement of nineteenth-century England. Augustus Welby Pugin (1812-1852), whose extensive advocacy of the Gothic style was particularly influential in ensuring its revival[16] (Lang 1966), presented architecture as a visible manifestation of truth and error. In the context of his own conversion to Catholicism in 1835, this becomes a way of demonstrating the wrong turning that English society had taken following the Reformation. His famous work *Contrasts; or, A Parallel Between the Noble Edifices of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries, and Similar Buildings of the Present Day; Showing the Present Decay of Taste* is an illustrated polemic that attempts to demonstrate the moral superiority of Gothic forms. The message of his work is clear: "on the eve of the great change of religion, we find Architecture in a high state of perfection, both as regards design and execution" (Pugin 1841a: 5), but from then on, the story is one of catastrophic decline. We read of suppression, spoilation and desecration, avarice and greed, and the loss of religious unity and pious feelings; for Pugin, these were the primary social effects of the Reformation. This moral decline, suggests Pugin, is clearly evident in the degeneration of architecture, and he sets out to prove this through a series of illustrations contrasting pre-Reformation and nineteenth-century architecture. Parochial churches, chapels, altar screens and memorials are all catalogued in ways that seek to elevate the beauty of the old forms and the ugliness, banality and incongruity of the new forms. Pugin does not restrict his contrasts to aesthetic comparisons; that he is presenting social commentary is made clear by his con-

trasts of pre-and post-Reformation cities (the latter filled with factories, workhouses, a lunatic asylum and a 'socialist hall of science'). Monasteries are presented as crucial to the pre-Reformation order: "It would be an endless theme to dilate on all the advantages accruing from these splendid establishments; suffice it to observe, that it was through their boundless charity and hospitality that the poor were entirely maintained. They formed alike the places for the instruction of youth, and the quiet retreat of a mature age; and the vast results that the monastic bodies have produced, in all classes of art and science, show the excellent use they made of that time which was not consecrated to devotion and the immediate duties of their orders" (ibid: 7). The failings of the current age are illustrated by drawings contrasting the care for the poor provided in a monastery with the nineteenth-century workhouse, complete with chained inmates, a watchtower in the style of Bentham's panopticon and the ominous notice: "a variety of subjects always ready for medical students".

The counterfactual potential of English Benedictine architecture is that it invites us to imagine an England in which the rupture of dissolution and Reformation had not taken place. Hobsbawm (1983), in developing the concept of the "invention of tradition", has recognised the role of architecture in appealing to traditional authority by way of "establishing continuity with a suitable historical past. A striking example is the deliberate choice of a Gothic style for the nineteenth-century rebuilding of the British parliament [partly designed by A.W. Pugin] and the equally deliberate decision after World War II to rebuild the parliamentary chamber on exactly the same basic plan as before" (1983: 1-2). The use of antiquarian forms in architecture can root an institution in history, offering legitimation of authority by directing attention away from the present moment and into the past. In a different context, Bloch (1968, 1986) has shown how ritual structures are able to give the impression of transcending the present. The tombs of the Merina in Madagascar have walls of stone and cement, with the top "usually capped by a huge stone slab covered in concrete" (Bloch 1968: 100) and are often brightly painted and decorated. Bloch argues that they "demonstrate in material form the victory over time and also over movement. Tombs are emphatically placed in a particular highly significant place and they are there for ever" (1986: 169). In doing so, they give material form to an ideology of descent which "remains still amidst the vicissitudes of time", legitimating the authority of the ancestors over the present life and its activities by creating the impression of "a group which is unaffected by day to day events and

which continues to exist as generations come and go" (1968: 100). In the context I have been describing here, to infer continuity is certainly to suggest that Benedictine monasticism endures while generations come and go; but by suggesting that buildings might be treated as 'counterfactual', what I am saying is that the architecture *invites* contrast between an enduring traditional order and the present world. Pugin (1841) ends his *Contrasts* with an illustration of the architecture of the nineteenth century placed in a balance and weighed against the architecture that preceded the Reformation. Surrounding the illustration is an inscription of words from scripture (Daniel 5: 27): "They are weighed in the balance and found wanting". Taking my cue from this, what I am arguing here is that counterfactual architecture such as that of the monastery is a way of presenting a different set of historical values, to be weighed against the values of the surrounding world.

The power of monasteries to evoke an order that contrasts itself with the 'vicissitudes of time' has been remarked upon by scholars such as Mumford (1934), who saw medieval monasticism as a driving force in medieval technological and economic development. He argued "that presence of order" (1934: 12) in the monastery stood "opposed to the erratic fluctuations and pulsations of the worldly life" (ibid: 13). For Mumford, this presence of order emerges from the coordination of activity that comes from the daily rhythm of the horarium: "one is not straining the facts when one suggests that the monasteries ... helped to give human enterprise the regular collective beat and rhythm of the machine" (ibid: 13-14). This association between monasteries and time discipline has proved influential; see, for example, Zerubavel's description of the strong sense of mechanical solidarity that emerges through the coordination of times for prayer, meals, work and so on (1980).[17]

The significance of coordination in the monastery is not lost on the monks. To repeat the joking I quoted earlier, "We are a human clock"; but what might this mean? Throughout my fieldwork, the sense conveyed to me about the monastic liturgy was that it was about moving beyond subjective experience. This comes through most clearly in a conversation with the monastic choirmaster, where we had been discussing the development of the liturgy in the past 50 years. He was particularly keen to stress the importance of collectivity in shaping liturgical reforms. We had been talking about attempts to ensure that the Divine Office was a vehicle for collective experience, such as choosing hymns that address prayer to God in the first person plural, when he explained: "You might have your own concerns which you have been struggling with in private

prayer, but when you are called to prayer in the Office, these concerns are subsumed, in a way they are objectified, you have your subjective concerns in life but the business of the Divine Office is not your concerns, not your business but the business, the prayer of everyone, of the whole church as a unity". Such an approach is reinforced by the way in which the psalms are understood. Although the psalms as texts are reflective of the mind of a particular individual praying to God (some psalms might deal with despair, some with joy, and so on), the practice of chanting psalms is said to be objective in that you are not chanting psalms that are reflective of your own personal state of mind. Rather, the psalms follow a set order over a two-week cycle in which the whole psalter is recited. One monk who entered the monastery in the 1990s and often serves as a cantor explained that when chanting the psalms, he imagines himself to be joining those people who are experiencing the emotional states set out in the psalm, even (or, he suggests, especially) if he finds himself in a very different state of mind. "The psalms are the prayers of an individual, so of course they are ideal as the prayers of individuals. But we're not chanting them individually … and we don't necessarily share the mindset of the psalmist." The monk chants these words with the understanding that they are the common prayer of the church, and in doing so "we stand alongside and represent those in that state of mind, we stand alongside them in Christ".

This movement of the individual beyond himself is well illustrated by the practice of *statio* before Vespers: the monks assemble in the cloister as the bell rings, they stand in line along the walls like statues in niches with their hoods up and heads bowed in a moment of collection before being called to process into the Church for the act of prayer. The guestmaster, describing *statio* to me, referred to it as a "gathering", both in the sense that it was a collective gathering of the monks together before the procession, and in the sense that it gave individuals an opportunity to gather their thoughts. The gathering and focus on the task ahead is part of the process through which the monk is removed from his personal circumstance. He is removed from his immediate concerns and activities and called to the Abbey Church, responding not to his individual desires but to the call to prayer ringing out from the Abbey tower. As another of the senior monks in the community explained to me, "When the bell rings, I could be peeing or trying to write a poem or anything and I have to think, I've got to finish and get to the church … The bell marks the limits of individual creativity". The monastic *horarium* takes the daily flow of time and places it in relation not to personal desires but to the worship of God

by all the church. The individual joins himself with the rest of the community in common prayer. In this sense, the bell ringing out the 'hours' can be seen as constitutive of a consciousness that the individual is part of a community in prayer.

As was explained in a talk during an April 2006 retreat for young men considering their vocations:

> The most powerful thing … is the idea that you are praying the same prayer as so many other people. And you will come in at the same time next day, and the next day, and next week you will say the same prayers. Sounds tedious, no? Well, you know what they say, the first 50 years are the hardest … But no, really, it's not tedious when you think about it as something shared by everyone, if you imagine that at that moment in time you are joined in prayer with people the whole world over, and that you are doing what monks and other faithful have done for generations.

What is being described here is a powerful sense of simultaneity (Anderson 1983) – a sense of coordination that links the monks with a much wider 'imagined community' that is sharing in their prayers. Interestingly, Anderson contrasts the simultaneity of the modern world with the simultaneity of the 'medieval Christian mind', which he sees as linking "past and future in an instantaneous present" (1983: 24). And indeed, what is being described above is a simultaneity that links past and future through an image of the enduring stability of the *horarium.* Is this really a contemporary manifestation of a medieval mind? Once again, we return to the powerful claim of survival, demonstrated in the counterfactual architecture of the monastery. But more than that, what I feel is being contrasted here are two ways of viewing time. Anderson points to a modern sense of simultaneity in which people can imagine a community living in a shared present – but the architecture of the monastery poses a "What if?" question through which people can imagine themselves as part of an enduring unit that stretches through time and links the past, the present and the future. This is the enduring unit that is emphasised through the monks' emphasis on *stability* and through the architecture that makes this stability possible.

Augé (1995) has recently turned his anthropologist's eye to the forms of architecture that frame our contemporary world of global movement and fleeting interaction.

A world where people are born in the clinic and die in the hospital, where transit points and temporary abodes are proliferating under luxurious or inhuman conditions (hotel chains and squats, holiday clubs and refugee camps, shanty towns threatened with demolition or doomed to festering longevity); where a dense network of means of transport which are also inhabited spaces is developing ... a world thus surrendered to solitary individuality, to the fleeting, the temporary and ephemeral, offers the anthropologist (and others) a new object. (1995: 78).

It is in this context that the counterfactual architecture of the monastery comes into its own; a "What if?" question that challenges the proliferation of non-places with its insistence on household, stability and *place.* As one of the monks, a teacher in the school run by the monastery, explained to me, "I think what we demonstrate is the value of staying put. Modern society is so full of people rushing from one place to the next, one job to the next, even one family to the next. But we're able to stay put, and I think there's something that's attractive about that because so many people are rootless." Here, he reflects the message offered by a 1970s commission of monks and nuns from throughout the English Benedictine congregation, who emphasised what they saw as the 'witness value' of stability:

Through the vow of stability Benedictines bear witness, in a torn and individualistic world, to Christian unity which knows how to overcome barriers. To live in community is to make the approach to Christ more clearly visible ... In an unstable world where life is characterized by mobility and fragmentation, a Benedictine community can be a centre where life is deeply experienced and where others come not only to share in silence and prayer, but also to discuss the social realities of the present time ... Stable monastic life confronts the fleeting character of human experience, so evident today, and seeks an understanding of the meaning of life itself. (Rees et al. 1978: 142-143)

As we saw above, stability is placed in contrast to the life of the *gyrovague.* An architecture that demonstrates the importance of place invites a contrast with the world around it. In this context, the deliberately constructed medievalism of the monastery is not simply an architectural anachronism, it is a fixed point in the English landscape that invites comparison. It shows a possibility of what could be.

Notes

1   The bell is named as a memorial to Bede Vaughan (1834-1883), a monk of the community who was appointed Archbishop of Sydney.

2   See also Yeo (1982: 283-288) for an account of solemn profession in the English Benedictine Congregation from a historical and legal perspective.

3   The period of temporary profession may be extended by the Abbot beyond three years, but according to the constitution of the English Benedictine Congregation it should not last for longer than nine years.

4   Solemnly professed monks may, however, petition the Holy See to seek a release from their vows.

5   See Qirko (2004), who argues that institutions such as monasteries encourage the manipulation of kin cues – although it is important to note that English Benedictine monks do not cut off ties with natal kin when becoming part of the monastic household.

6   This has sometimes been rendered simply as 'conversion' (see Rees et al 1978: 148-149 for an English Benedictine perspective based on this understanding), meaning that the monk commits himself to the work of reforming himself, renouncing sin and accepting new values of monastic life; however, this straightforward translation has traditionally been challenged in the English Benedictine context by Butler (1919: 136) and his explanation that if we look at Chapter 48 in the earliest manuscripts of the Rule, the term used is conversatio and not conversio, and that conversatio here means "either the personal manner of life of the monk, or the manner of life of the community".

7   From the Latin calefacere, to warm; the name is retained from the name traditionally given in Benedictine monasteries to the room with the fire where the monks would have gone to warm themselves.

8   See Green (1980) for a concise account of the history of the Congregation, and see Lunn (1980) for an account of its origins and early centuries.

9   A Papal Bull is an official decree issued by the Pope.

10   It has been noted, for example, by Knowles (1963: 252), that other monks of the community were involved in the composition of Gasquet's words here; so it probably makes sense to treat them as the expression of a philosophy of a group of like-minded reformers rather than as the ideas of a particular individual.

11   See Cuthbert Butler, The Downside Movement, 17-19. Manuscript held in Downside Abbey archives.

12   Laurence Shepherd, Notes of the Retreat given at Downside 1882, 115. Manuscript held in Stanbrook Abbey archives.

13   Shepherd, Notes of the Retreat given at Downside 1882, 121.

14   Ibid., 147.

15   Appointed first Catholic Archbishop of Westminster in 1850 following the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy in England and Wales.

16   A.W. Pugin had, in fact, been commissioned to draw plans for monastic buildings at Downside, and he made several drawings for this work between 1839 and 1842 (O'Donnell 1981). However, a lack of funds meant that it was only later in the century that building work could begin on a new church and monastery complex, by which time new plans had been drawn up by Dunn and Hansom.

17   Mumford and Zerubavel are perhaps guilty of overstating the role of abstract time reckoning as a source of coordination in the Rule of St Benedict. Dohrn-van Rossum (1996: 33), for example, argues that Mumford's mechanistic image is 'erroneous', pointing out that 'the required punctuality was not related to abstract points in time, but to points in the sequence of the rhythm of collective conduct' – in other words, that monastic time-keeping in the Rule and the centuries afterward was not rigid and depersonalised. While this point is important for an understanding of Benedictine history, I believe that Mumford and Zerubavel's approach to punctuality remains helpful for our understanding of contemporary monastic experience; whatever the time-keeping basis of monks at the time of the Rule, Downside's reading of the Rule is shaped by a more recent imagination. If the monastic horarium of the sixth century is understood and restored through the lens of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, then it should be no surprise that monastic timetabling is infused with a mechanised time-discipline.

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The Biggest Mosque in Europe!

A Symmetrical Anthropology of Islamic Architecture in Rotterdam

Pooyan Tamimi Arab

The new Essalam Mosque of Rotterdam, often said to be "the biggest mosque of Europe", opened in December 2010 after more than a decade of conflict and controversy. The building was realised thanks to the financial backing of the Al Maktoum Foundation based in the United Arab Emirates. Together with the mayor, the sponsor representatives and local media, former "guest workers" – now Dutch citizens – marched from the original mosque to the new building in the same neighbourhood. The difference was striking: the former structure was small, poorly lit, with a very limited space for ablution and prayer, and only a small sign made it recognisable, whereas the new building was a purpose-built mosque, had two minarets and a dome, several floors, and windows on all sides so that the new carpets were bathed in light.

The Essalam Mosque's community consists mainly of Dutch-Moroccan elderly men, their sons and grandsons. The mosque is used to a lesser extent by women but also for example by local Somalian Muslims and international visitors from countries such as Egypt and Malaysia. Islam in the Netherlands has grown primarily as a result of migrations after the Second World War. The guest workers who first settled in cities such as Rotterdam "became" Muslims – that is to say, their Muslim identities were brought to the fore with greater emphasis when it dawned on them and their Dutch hosts that they and their children would stay. In the past decades, the desire for cultural and religious recognition has become more important and remains pertinent today. "*Wij blijven hier*" ("We are staying here") is the title of a popular blog of young Dutch Muslims, created half a century after the first guest workers arrived. The blog's statement of purpose shows that decades of debates on recognition have not resolved the issue: "We [Dutch Muslims] are staying here! Because we are born here or raised here. Because this is our country and we enjoy living here and would like to keep it that way."[1]

In contemporary Rotterdam, Islam impacts citizens' feelings about their "right to the city" (Harvey 2008) and their right to change them-

selves by changing the city landscape and constructing houses of worship. Especially since the 1990s, Western Muslims have moved interior Islamic aesthetics to the exterior. As Joycelyne Cesari has concluded for European cities in general, Islam has gone from "being invisible" to "being unwanted" (Cesari 2005: 1018). The experience of not being wanted in its turn reinvigorates Muslim demands for cultural and religious recognition. In the Dutch context, the competing demands for recognition and integration have not and cannot be easily transcended because they are based on the everyday feelings of being wanted or not wanted. Mosque architecture, a spatial and material medium par excellence, plays an important role in these dialectics. In other words, the Dutch "politics of home" (Duyvendak 2011) are very much a matter of "aesthetic formations" (Meyer 2009). The where, what and who of home-making are not answered merely by speaking words but by tactile, aural and – in the case of architecture – visual speech.

In this chapter, I discuss the genre of the so-called "megamosque" in Europe. The script follows recurring themes in Western European countries. I first focus on the hype around the size of Rotterdam's Essalam Mosque. I have been following the construction of the Essalam Mosque passively for years and actively since it opened during my fieldwork in Dutch mosques from 2010 to 2012. Particularly helpful for discussing the ways in which the size of the mosque is interpreted by various groups was a documentary that I used as ethnographic data about the construction of the mosque. *Hoger dan de Kuip* (Higher than the Kuip) was screened several times on national television. The title captures the complaint of residents and at least one politician who said that the minarets are too provocative because they are higher than the nearby football stadium of Feyenoord Football Club nicknamed the Kuip.

After describing the megamosque genre, I link my observations theoretically to Bruno Latour's analysis of fetishised objects (Latour 2010). Latour blurs the boundaries between the socially constructed fetish and mind-independent, often physical, facts. I suggest that the megamosque genre should be understood as a play between "factishes", a mixture of fetishes and facts. The idea of the "factish" arises from Latour's method of a "symmetrical anthropology", which collapses the distinction between the realms of the social and the physical.

The megamosque genre

Plans to build a central mosque for Rotterdam were already made in the 1980s. On a 1987 drawing that announced "a mosque in the neighbourhood" (*een moskee in de wijk*), a huge Ottoman mosque in the style of Sinan's Selimiye Mosque is depicted as dominating the Dutch streets (Maussen 2009: 198). Twenty-five years later, the image of an alien "megamosque" that will dominate and take over a cityscape continues to haunt the European imagination. A conversation of two Dutch-Antillean residents in Rotterdam-South gives an impression of how the megamosque genre has – thanks to years of "megamosqueing" – played out in Rotterdam:

> *I love this neighbourhood. Really! Now it's just dead, dead, dead. It looks like you step into another culture. I step out my door, I'm in another country.*
> What do you mean? Aren't their two churches close to that square as well? What's the difference?
> *That mosque is big, very big. Do you get what I mean? The biggest in Europe!*
> But what's so threatening then?
> *It's the vision that I see. It's not a threat. I step outside my door, I step into another world ... that mosque there, bling bling. (*From *Hoger dan de Kuip)*

These imaginations exist in countries such as the UK, Germany, Italy, France and most notoriously Switzerland, where minaret construction has been banned as of 2009. Dutch anxiety about the "biggest mosque in Europe" in one's own local environment should be understood in the broader Western European context of mosque construction such as the new Cologne Central Mosque and the Marseille Grand Mosque. In all of these cases, size has been emphasised as a major obstacle and a provocation, and the buildings are often described as the "largest" of Europe, of the country or simply as "bigger than x". The genre of the megamosque is a transnational one. If one googles "biggest mosque Europe", one finds several results from different countries.

For instance, the Abbey Mills Islamic Centre in London was never built and was only a conceptual proposition but attracted strong responses especially after 7/7, the 2005 terrorist attacks in London. Even before the bombings, however, the Prime Minister's Office received an e-petition,

its largest ever, with over 280,000 signatures against the idea of a mosque "bigger than St. Paul's" (Jaeckle & Türetken 2011). In Venice and surrounding areas, especially Mestre, the number of Muslims has increased since the 1990s. In a city where almost every building is a monument, this has brought forth the very sensitive question of whether it would be possible to have a mosque in Venice. Wael Farhat, a local Muslim architect, told me that "Venice must have a mosque, because the Muslims are here as well". For now, he has only pleaded for a symbolic floating mosque, an art project that he likes to call the "Jesus Mosque" because "it, too, walks on water".[2] A poster advertising an event organised by architects to debate mosque architecture in Venice resulted in a furious reaction: "No, no, no, no, again, no!" was marked on the image, on which an enormous mosque overshadows the Doge palace. Just like the case of the Abbey Mills Islamic Centre, no actual plans or funds for a constructed mosque in Venice exist, but the image or very idea is experienced as jarring.

The Mosque of Rome often features in debates on European mosques because of its modern design by star architect Portoghesi. On a visit, the local Muslim janitor told me, without my asking, that it was the "biggest mosque in Europe". The mosque's Wikipedia page claims that over 12,000 people can be accommodated for prayer. According to the janitor, however, no more than 2,000 people visit the mosque on the busiest days, and the prayer space, though impressive, cannot contain many more people than that. The gated mosque is located far outside the city in a quiet green environment that can only be accessed by subway or car. Expecting the "biggest mosque of Europe", visitors often encounter only a handful of people. Only on Fridays do believers show up in some numbers. Because the mosque is far from the city, buses are used on Fridays to transport the believers. However, the Muslim community that resides and prays in the city has its own mosques which were not constructed as such and, although invisible from the exterior, are more lively inside. In fact, the Mosque of Rome did not develop in a grassroots way at all but is known instead as an "embassy Islam" (Laurence 2012), barely frequented by local Muslims. When pressed, the janitor, who had first talked about the "biggest mosque of Europe", said that, in practice, it was too far from the city to be really used as such. He also did not know in which sense the mosque was actually the biggest, either in terms of minaret height, dome size or height, or prayer space surface.

Branding a mosque as a megamosque is not something that is done exclusively by its opponents but also by Muslims and others who are impressed by the vocabulary of size. The language that was used by a young

Muslim tourist who visited the mosque and made a video is also striking for its insistence on the mosque's size:

> Right now I'm actually at *the* largest mosque in Europe! This one actu-
> ally beats the one in Madrid, which is number two and this is number
> one. I'll just try to capture it all in the video but it's just really really big
> … You can't even see the other end from here. It looks like it's infinite.
> It's just really really big. I think the designer designed to represent the
> infinite nature of Allah [referring to the geometric patterns and the
> columns] … It's really big, amazing, mashallah.[3]

The short video ends with the statement that, actually, the main prayer space is only opened on Fridays (presumably because of a lack of visitors), and that those who come here to pray ordinarily use "a basement". The basement is moreover often empty, and the space for ritual ablution, the *wudhu*, is also very quiet and not at all designed for handling thousands of people.

The megamosque genre is about both size and location, as in the Mosque of Rome or the Mosque of Venice, creating images of mosques that are right at the centre of these places of Christian-European heritage, even though in fact the Mosque of Rome is outside the city and the Muslim population that works in Venice and surrounding areas lives in Mestre, a nearby town not visited by tourists. Similarly, the so-called "Ground Zero Mosque" in Lower Manhattan, often described as a "megamosque" as well, is a name that emphasises location rather than size. Although the nickname was invented by its opponents, it is now frequently used by Muslims and other sympathisers in its defense, and also because they are often unfamiliar with the more neutral name Park51 Mosque. At a meeting about the image and future of Park51 in New York, one of the speakers warned board members of the Islamic center that "if you don't define your brand, someone else will".[4] We may add that the megamosque "brand" can be appropriated and interpreted in more than one way.

Megamosqueing, or making a mosque an object of both anxiety and pride, is exemplified by the way in which the city of Rotterdam has dealt with the Essalam Mosque. In this case, buildings much higher than the mosque have altered the landscape only a few blocks away without much ado. When the Russian Orthodox Church of the Holy Alexander Nevsky was built close to Rotterdam's Erasmus Bridge, in a neo-style that could be perceived as similar to that of the neo-traditionalist Essalam Mosque, there were no protests. Meanwhile, opponents of the Essalam

Mosque called it a "megamosque" but also "a huge religious fortress". Geert Wilders, leader of the anti-Islam Freedom Party (PVV, *Partij Voor de Vrijheid*), frequently referred to it in the media as a "a palace of hatred" (*haatpaleis*). In the Freedom Party's 2010 election campaign video, Wilders is standing before the mosque as he warns of subsequent waves of Muslim foreigners threatening the Netherlands by increasing crime and welfare dependency. The PVV has also stated that one of its political goals is to ban mosques from being constructed within the ring of Dutch cities, even though mosque construction is currently legally guaranteed by the freedom of religion (*godsdienstvrijheid*) and acknowledged by almost all political parties.

Wilders chose the Essalam Mosque as a symbol of what his party is against because of its megamosque image that makes it out to be the largest in the Netherlands or even Western Europe. Even usually well-informed newspapers uncritically adopt this trope. Leading Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad*, for instance, began a 2010 article by emphasising the size of the mosque: "With a dome of 25 meters and 50 meter high minarets the Essalam Mosque was opened in Rotterdam-South. It is immediately the biggest Islamic house of worship in Western Europe. The towers reach higher than the lights of the nearby located football stadium, the Kuip of Feyenoord." For non-Muslims living in Rotterdam, the idea of a mosque close to the football stadium and with minarets that reached higher than the football stadium lights was often disturbing. The documentary made about the people in the neighbourhood of the mosque, *Hoger dan de Kuip* (i.e. higher than the Kuip football stadium) includes interviews with Dutch seniors living next to the mosque. Some of them did not mind the mosque; others were unhappy with the building but could reconcile themselves to its presence by employing humor. But there were also those who could not help feeling alienated from their neighbourhood. A senior lady remarked: "If I had known [that the mosque would be built], I would have never decided to live here." Her neighbour added: "The problem here is that there already so many foreign shops and people, and if that mosque is added, then our neighbourhood just isn't the neighborhood anymore." The residents felt that the minarets of the mosque should not be higher than the "native" lights of the football stadium.

On a map of Rotterdam-South published in a local newspaper in 2011, the mosque is called "the biggest in Europe".[5] The map was designed for addressing the problem areas in Rotterdam-South and placed the supposedly largest mosque in Europe in a central location surrounded by urban

issues such as high rates of crime. In many debates about the mosque, the issue of size is often equated with the social issues of inner-city areas. In such imaginings, the mosque symbolises socio-economic marginality rather than emancipation through public expression. For instance, an article in a major national newspaper about crime among young Dutch-Moroccans was accompanied by a picture of the Essalam Mosque's visitors and the word "scum" (*tuig*) in the title.[6] The picture showed mosque visitors putting on or taking off shoes before or after performing a prayer, including a young child in the middle and one of the mosque's board members. The building and its everyday life thus become visually associated with crime and marginality.

The Dutch history of intolerance towards Catholics suggests that it would be an oversimplification to portray the conflict over mosques as one between a "white" Dutch population against a "black" – in this case Moroccan – population. Only from the nineteenth century onwards were Catholics allowed to build churches, and the law that banned Catholic processions was not reformed until the 1980s. That said, megamosque conflicts, as well as interreligious conflicts with Islam in the Netherlands, are powerfully tied to the racial tensions that exist among and within all groups in the highly multicultural district of Rotterdam-South. In *Hoger dan de Kuip*, three young unveiled Turkish girls ask a Surinamese Rotterdammer, a huge football fan and someone who was raised in the neighbourhood, what he thinks about the mosque:

> "*It doesn't belong here. Rotterdam is the harbor, cranes, the Euromast tower.*"
> "But why not? There has to be a mosque, right?"
> "*Everybody has a right to his own house of worship, but it didn't have to be this big.*"
> "But it isn't that big!"

Later in the documentary, the man sits in a Dutch brown café, a place where local Dutch Muslims usually don't go. "For me, there is only one temple in this neighbourhood and that is the Kuip. That's enough." He was worried that the non-Muslim inhabitants would leave the neighbourhood because of the mosque. At first, he boldly states that he would stay no matter what but then says that should he have a family in the future, it would probably be better to leave.

Muslim sympathisers frequently do not mind the Rotterdam mosque being branded as the largest mosque of Europe. Some Rotterdam-based

Muslims question the status of the Essalam Mosque as the biggest in Europe, but nevertheless the mediatised vision of the Essalam Mosque as a "huge" building has survived to this day. Before the opening of the mosque, the Muslim community would regularly pray outside in the open because their smaller, almost invisible, mosque was packed. "When the big mosque is finished, we will not have to pray outside anymore. It will be the biggest mosque of Europe!", said one of the children as he and his family joined the others for prayer in the chilly weather.

Symmetrical anthropology

It should not surprise the reader by now that the Essalam Mosque is de facto neither the biggest in Europe nor even in the Netherlands. When I first visited the mosque myself, I remember being surprised by its relatively small size (plates 3 & 4). It was much smaller than I had imagined, far smaller than most churches. I was quite puzzled. The terrain around the building did not look very attractive to me at the time – still under construction and surrounded by mud and dirt, the building was located alongside an uninspiring road towards the highway (plate 5).

The maximum capacity of the new building of around 1,000 individuals is dwarfed by the East London Mosque or the Mosque of Rome. When finished, the Marseille Grand Mosque claims to be able to support over 7,000 people. Though in terms of surface and capacity, the Essalam Mosque is nowhere near being the biggest, the 50-metre-high minarets are among the tallest in Europe. For example, the Cologne Central Mosque has only slightly higher minarets, and those of the St. Petersburg Mosque, which opened in 1913, are also around 50 metres high. Nevertheless, even a year after the opening of the Essalam Mosque, it has repeatedly been referred to as the "biggest in Europe". To my surprise, this occurred again on television in 2012 in one of the episodes of Mijn Moskee is Top ("My mosque is great"), a Dutch television show about local mosques. The presenter, a veiled Dutch-Moroccan woman, welcomed her viewers in the Essalam Mosque, smiling and gesturing with her hands: "Welcome to the biggest mosque of the Netherlands and of Europe!"

The obsession with mosque size in the language of both Muslims and mosque critics indicates that the mediation and perception of size lives a life of its own. Because the language about megamosques is clearly unrelated to actual reality, a strict constructivist would be tempted to call the

trope of the megamosque a fetish. The fetish is an idol that we have created ourselves, feared by some and revered by others. Motivated by a political goal – for example the advancement of religious freedom – the strict constructivist aims to smash the discourse that he believes is responsible for the fetish, which is deemed in conflict with this right. However, as Bruno Latour has argued, the use of the term fetish exaggerates the power of social construction. In our case, the strict constructivist fails to explain the effects that the mosque produces by being perceived by different parties such as mosque sceptics and local Muslims. The constructionist language does not allow the object, the mosque, to *be* threatening or to *make* someone happy. The use of the word fetish is in a way pejorative because social constructionism is, as Bruno Latour has argued, the parlance of the anti-fetishist, someone who is in the business of breaking idols such as the megamosque. The anti-fetishist holds that it is not allowed to understand a human fabrication as an autonomous entity. An ethical desire may guide the anti-fetishist to defend a minority's rights to their own space by stepping outside the illusory construction and convincing the impartial reader that the mosque is, in fact, not necessarily threatening in itself but hyped as such. An odd consequence of this approach is that the mosque can also not be accounted for the happiness it generates among its users *as* a big mosque.

A fetish is ordinarily interpreted as wholly mind-dependent, the product of the "inside" of our minds. When describing the megamosque genre, words such as "imagination" can mislead us into downplaying the role of physical things in the process of mediation and ultimately into an exaggeratedly anthropocentric epistemology, which sharply separates the "inside" world of the mind with the "out there" world of physical facts. Radical epistemological anthropocentrism fails in critical thought because it promotes forgetfulness of "what Michel Foucault called the 'awesome materiality' of our human-technical worlds" (Read 2012). Constructivism is valuable when it explores the conditions for the possibility of human knowledge, by setting limits and explaining how knowledge is constructed. The introduction of such a Kantian theory of knowledge, deepened by Foucault's genealogical approach, means that social constructions are never up for grabs but made possible by the material limits of our worlds. What Latour calls a "symmetrical anthropology" (2010: 29) also limits a radical constructivism in which anything could be potentially constructed by reminding us not only of "constructed" fetishes but also "factual" realities. But where social practices are concerned, these can never be accessed as wholly distinct from each other.

Rather than studying either side, Latour thinks we should see them as "factishes", an entanglement of what is constructed and what is objective. Rather than seeing the task of the anthropologist as freeing himself from the alienation of a constructed and thus illusory reality, he thinks that we should study how the partial and impartial, the fetish and the fact, exist only "from entanglement to even greater entanglement" (ibid: 61). In short, Latour subverts the very idea that anthropologists must "choose between constructivism and realism" (ibid: 16). Not only are facts constructed and value-laden but what is constructed is real and fact-laden. A building, therefore, is not a neutral object waiting to be imbued with meaning by people but it facilitates values, for or against it, disclosed in and through an organically intertwined "world" (Heidegger 1927; Arendt 1958), existing as a spiraling of the subjective-objective poles, which Latour has also called a "circulating reference" (Latour 1999: 24-79). Mosque construction has been one of the most influential ways for the spatial establishment of such a "world" of Dutch Islam. However, a mosque "in itself" cannot determine the quality and future of spatial establishments but relies on how the building is used and perceived – that is, on social practices.

If not merely a fetish but a factish, how then does the megamosque that we have constructed ourselves, physically as well as in collective imaginations, speak? Latour's notion of a "symmetrical anthropology" collapses the dichotomy between interiority and exteriority, between mind-dependent constructions and a mind-independent reality, and thus also between a speaking subject and a spoken-about object. A Muslim does not only pray in a mosque, he is not only a subject or a mosque user, he is also called to prayer by the mosque and in that sense the object of a mosque's attention. The claim that buildings speak can be exaggerated when the "spirit" of a time and place is ascribed to a building in an overly deterministic and homogenising manner. Nevertheless, buildings can be said to have "psychologies" that affect the humans who use them. In a meditation on the language of architecture, Alain de Botton suggests three possible ways in which buildings speak (2007: 77-100).

First, buildings speak about who we are, they are *anthropomorphic*. The mosque is personified, an actor in the megamosque allegory. We have seen that it has ignited feelings of competition. Other physical objects such as a crane in the harbour or a light in a stadium become personified as well. It is easy and instinctive for neighbourhood residents to identify with these objects and to give them their own identities. Competitive personification means that, for example, size can become a mat-

ter of a Muslim's defense of what he considers his right to the city, despite any pious or sober claims that one can pray anywhere and that the whole earth is a mosque. The story of relationality, by definition, is not something that happens merely in private but rather in shared spaces in the city.

Second, buildings speak about who we wish to be, they are *metaphoric*. The mosque speaks by expressing visions of polity, of a city and a nation, of who we want to be together. Physical mediation is essential for such grand mosque speech acts. We can see the mosque clearly when approaching it from the river and on the side of the train tracks. Its white marble glitters in the sun and because the area has not yet been fully developed, the mosque can look impressive in size in comparison with the flat space that surrounds it. Thanks to the car roads connecting the mosque to the highway, the number of people who actually see it run in the thousands. Because the mosque is located next to a railway track connecting Rotterdam to the south of the Netherlands and Belgium, it is known far beyond Rotterdam-South. At night, the mosque is lit up and clearly visible. This visibility sparked criticism because the mosque speaks about a city that people may not want to belong to, and about citizens who may not want to respond to the mosque's demand for acknowledgment. The responses to the mosque shape citizens' identities.

Third, the Essalam Mosque speaks in a highly connotative manner, it is *evocative*. It addresses the city or the nation by being dressed up in a certain garment, quoting from the innumerable images that shape our conscious and unconscious thoughts. Especially this aspect of the mosque's speaking was experienced as troubling for critics of the mosque, which reminded them too much of a conservative, old-fashioned Islam. For Christian Welzbacher, for instance, the Essalam Mosque is in Europe but not European (2008). The mosque upholds the binary of Islam and the West rather than progressively dissolving it. On the Internet and in newspapers, it was described as a mosque from Disneyland, a kitschy collage. From the right of Muslims to put their mark on the city, such lines of arguing quickly lead into debates about style. These style issues are closely connected to the evocative quality of the mosque and lead to questions as to what it is exactly that different groups of people want the mosque to evoke.[7] From a debate about citizens' right to the city or the right of mosques to speak at all, we can move towards what they should tell us. Whereas some local Muslims may want to religiously distinguish themselves from other groups of Muslims, others may be more concerned with their relation to a national identity.

It is not without reason that architects believe that their work can influence our behaviour, feelings and thoughts. Not only style but also spatial composition, for example, has an impact on how mosques speak. At night, when standing in front of the mosque, the lights of the football stadium make it look as if mosque and stadium are close to each other. When standing in between them during the day, however, the distance is perceived to be much greater. It takes about ten minutes by foot to approach the football stadium, whereas at night it looks as if the stadium is right behind the mosque.

The aesthetic transformation of the environment speaks to the residents of the neighbourhood and in time subtly changes who they are, who they want to be and how they associate imagery in the process. Since the Essalam Mosque has been in use, further alterations to the mosque continue to transform the neighbourhood. Although the inside of the Essalam Mosque has still not been finished due to financial stagnation, a square has been realised in front of the mosque, which makes the building look more monumental. In spring, the tulips in front of the mosque have improved the appearance of the environment. The square has been named "Vredesplein" or "Peace Square" after the mosque's Arabic name, and it has its own street sign. Beneath the Peace Square and in front of the Essalam Mosque, a large parking space has been created. On one occasion, after observing and participating in the Friday prayers, I left the building with a friend and took the stairs to the parking lot to get to his car. The signs in the parking facility had been adjusted to accomodate the mosque: on one of the walls, the word "Mosque" with an arrow had been painted in big block letters. Such subtle material changes enable the Muslim community to materially spatialise in a "concrete lived environment" (Meyer 2009: 5).

Conclusion

In the last two decades, the Dutch city of Rotterdam has become one of the main urban centres in the Netherlands for debates on the social significance and aesthetics of mosques. Religious architecture engenders explicit discourses of identity, a literally material way to demand recognition for the right to the city. In this paper, I showed that the megamosque genre ordinarily conveys information about the depicters and users of the image, whether for or against the building, and barely about what it is supposed to depict, namely the mosque as it is used in everyday

practices. It would therefore be wrong to say that the megamosque genre is not a social construction, coloured mainly by anxieties and fears, but also by pride and the wish to belong. However, I have argued that that does not mean that the importance of physical alterations to Rotterdam's cityscape should be underscored or seen as inconsequential. Following Latour, I have suggested that we adjust our conception of social construction by making it less anthropocentric. The constructed megamosque genre is inextricably bound to the very real Essalam Mosque, a building that has the power to impact people's feelings about their city. We have seen that conflicting emotions such as anxiety and pride can manifest themselves through and thanks to the mosque. Not only demands for integration and recognition but also the practice of religious toleration, something in between anxiety and full acceptance, must then have aesthetic dimensions. How can a building evoke feelings of toleration and sentiments of sociability? Such questions need to be informed by stylistic criticism, which in turn needs anthropological accounts of how people use and view such buildings, but also of how in their everyday lives they can call them forth.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1   www.wijblijvenhier.nl
2   Pooyan Tamimi Arab. "De drijvende moskee van Venetië", December 9, 2011. www.nieuwemoskee.nl
3   "Largest Mosque in Rome (Italy)", Accessed Oct. 3, 2012. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OjaAae4t4Ec
4   Pooyan Tamimi Arab. "De toekomst van islamitische kunst en architectuur in New York", March 16, 2012. www.nieuwemoskee.nl
5   "Rotterdam-Zuid het afvoerputje van ons land", AD Nieuws, Feb 17, 2011.
6   "Het tuig gaat met de ramadan aan de haal", www.volkskrant.nl, July 21, 2012.
7   For the sake of brevity, I have not discussed the specifics of the stylistic debate. For the vision of the Essalam Mosque's Dutch architect, Wilfred van

Winden, see his essay in Erkoçu and Bugdaci (2009). Christian Welzbacher has criticised the mosque design (2008). Marcel Maussen has discussed the mosque's construction process and the stylistic debate from the perspective of Dutch governance of Islam (2009). Eric Roose has written an essay about the designing process in which he discusses the role of the patron (2012).

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Golden Storm

The Ecstasy of the *Igreja de São Francisco* in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil

Mattijs van de Port

> Without the *sacred*, the totality of the plenitude of being escapes man,
> he would be no longer anything but incomplete.
> *Georges Bataille*

Although I am slightly embarrassed to admit it, there is no denying the fact that when I entered the Igreja de São Francisco in Salvador, Bahia – one of the most famous baroque churches in Brazil – I had an immediate bodily reaction: my nipples hardened. No goose bumps, no gasping for air, no shivers down my spine (bodily responses which somehow feel more admissible to open an academic discussion) but hard nipples. And mind you, it wasn't even the first time I entered this church.

'The erection of nipples', writes the Wikipedia entry on the subject (where I hastily sought to objectify the curious response of this unruly body of mine), 'is due to the contraction of smooth muscle under the control of the autonomic nervous system'. The site also reassures me that hard nipples are

> ... more akin to a hair follicle standing on end than to a sexual erection. Nipple erections are a product of the pilomotor reflex which causes goose bumps. The erection of the nipple is partially due to the cylindrically arranged muscle cells found within it.

For whatever this information is worth, the important fact to note here is that an architectural space worked my 'autonomic nervous system'. A religious building made my 'cylindrically arranged muscle cells' respond, quite independent of what I deem appropriate for visiting a church or consider becoming for opening an academic inquiry. What this oddly detached encyclopedic language effectively brings to the fore, then, is that in situations where people enter religious buildings, the body is as much a medium as the church. Both are sensation-producing instruments. Rather than sticking to the sender (church)-

receiver (visitor) model, we are dealing with the intersection of two mediating systems.

In this contribution, I want to draw attention to what seems to be the sovereign power of an aesthetic formation such as a church building over (the body of) its visitors[1] – more in particular the sense of loss and disorientation that comes with it. Anthropologists have long restricted their study of architecture to the way buildings are linked to the broader patterns of world-making in a given time and place.[2] Churches, mosques, temples and shrines have thus been analysed as the materialisation and expression of peoples' ideas, discourses, mental maps or worldviews. Thus, Clifford Geertz, in his analysis of the 'theatre state' in Bali, wrote about the *puri*, the kingly palace:

> Like so many traditional palaces the world around, and most notably like Indic ones, the puri was itself, in its sheer material form, a replica of the order it was constructed to celebrate … its layout reproduced in yet another medium the deep geometry of the cosmos … What the padmasana expressed sculpturally, the lingga metaphorically, and the cremation theatrically, the puri expressed architecturally: the seat of the king was the axis of the world. (Geertz 1980: 109)

Edmund Leach, in his discussion of South Indian temple architecture, similarly argued:

> The members of all societies, complex as well as primitive, externalize the ideas they hold about the physical and metaphysical universes, and about the social relations within their own society, by making and manipulating artifacts. The clothes we wear, the houses we live in, the decorated structures with which we surround ourselves, the paths we construct through such human worlds, are all expressive of *human ideas,* some of which are perfectly well known at a conscious level of experience, while other are only dimly perceived and exist only as sets of relations within the artificially constructed world of culture. (Leach 1983: 243-244, italics in the original)

Regarding Brazilian baroque architecture, of which the Igreja de São Francisco is an example, art historian João Adolfo Hansen took a similar position. The only academically valid discussion of this church, Hansen argues, is a reading of it through the prism of the worldview of its eighteenth-century designers and commissioners. Hansen goes as far as to re-

ject the notion of 'the baroque' as a useful heuristic tool for analysis. The baroque, he argues, was only coined as a 'style' in the nineteenth century, and the characteristics attributed to this particular style – 'informality, irrationalism, the pictorial, fusionism, contrast, disproportion, deformation, accumulation, excess, exuberance, dynamism, incongruency, doubt, a taste for stark oppositions, *Angst*, word plays, thematic nihilism, fear for emptiness' (Hansen 2006: 18-19) – speak to the theoretical dispositions and ideological concerns of the nineteenth-century academy. Hansen argued that one cannot make the a priori assumption that these characteristics – and more important, the moral and psychological connotations attributed to them by nineteenth-century scholars – are revelatory of the mindset and affects of eighteenth-century Brazilians, and the term has therefore no role in the interpretation of an architectural form such as the Igreja de São Francisco.

While the interpretation of a building within its historical and cultural context is certainly a useful approach, I also deem it problematic. First of all, the reduction of architectural meaning to the interpretations that pertain to a particular locality and period eliminates all incentives to investigate the sovereign power of form itself. Keeping the example of the baroque in mind, I would like to draw attention to the fact that the expressive potential of a curl is not the same as the expressive potential of a straight line, and that this is so independent of time and place. And although the experiences provoked by either a curl or a straight line will be evaluated and interpreted in culturally and historically different ways, this does not do away with the fact that there is something intrinsic to curls and straight lines: they 'speak differently'.

Second, giving primacy to the local fixes the understanding of a building's meaning in a particular culture and a particular historical period and fails to register that buildings tend to survive their makers (and their culture) and thus come to mean something else in dialogue with new times and generations (and their cultures) (cf. Appadurai 1986). Thus, if we return to the example of the Igreja de São Francisco, the meaning of that church cannot be locked into the worldview of the eighteenth-century commissioners, architects, artists and craftsmen who conceived of the building and built it. As the church continues to attract new generations of Bahians – not to mention the throngs of non-Bahian visitors who visit the church today – its meaning is constantly changing. In semiotic terms, the Igreja de São Francisco cannot be taken as a single, unified object – it is, as Victor Turner (1969) would put it, 'polysemic'.

A third problem that arises from this perspective is that primacy is given to the sense-making that the symbolic order[3] allows for: in the approach advocated by Geertz, Leach and others, the culturally informed subject always already knows (even if only 'dimly perceived', as Leach suggested above) what the church, mosque or temple is, signifies and does. They pertain, after all, to the same structures of meaning. In this line of thought, all that a religious building can ever be is an illustration, a confirmation, an expression of that cultural order, i.e. *that which is already known.* As indicated in the opening of the article, this perspective leaves no space whatsoever for the fact that *experientially* a religious building may be playing a visitor as much as the visitor is playing it, and that the way visitors are being played may well go against their very own understandings. 'When we adopt what we take to be the [artwork's] organizing principle,' says Bruce Baugh, 'and allow it to order our experience, we give the work a power over us sufficient to alter our experience of the world from its very foundations' (Baugh 1986: 481). Indeed, buildings may baffle us, derail us, shake us out of the expected, disrupt our received ways of knowing and understanding, transport us beyond the horizons of our knowing. This 'numinous', 'sublime', 'miraculous' or 'ecstatic' dimension of architecture, I will argue, confronts us with what I have elsewhere called 'the-rest-of-what-is' (Van de Port 2012). Following William James' adage that 'in the distinctly religious sphere of experience', many persons possess the objects of their belief, 'not in the form of mere conceptions which their intellect accepts as true, but rather in the form of quasi-sensible realities directly apprehended' (1902), this experiential dimension cannot be neglected. Most definitely not in a study of *religious* architecture, as my reading of the interior of the Igreja de São Francsico will show.

The Igreja de São Francisco: 'Catch me, catch me, I'm falling!'

The Igreja de São Francisco is part of a Franciscan convent and was built between 1708 and 1723 to replace an earlier church destroyed by the Dutch during their invasions of Salvador. Art historians tell us that the decoration of the interior took much longer and was only finished in 1782.[4] Seen from the outside, the church looks plain enough. Somewhat tucked away at the far end of the Terreiro de Jesus, the central square of the historical Pelourinho district, it comes across as 'yet another baroque church' (Terreiro de Jesus alone counts four huge baroque churches, the city many more). Entering the building, one first has to access the *portaria,* a spa-

cious dark entrance hall with a late-eighteenth-century – and not entirely convincing – *trompe l'oeuil* ceiling, painted by José Joaquim da Rocha. It now contains the ticket office for the many tourists who want to visit the church. The portaria gives way to an open, two-storey cloister with white-washed plastered walls reflecting the bright sunlight. The lower parts of the walls are entirely decorated with eighteenth-century white and blue *azulejos* tile panels, which were manufactured in Lisbon and depict allegorical scenes of virtuous living based on sayings by the Roman poet Horace.

To enter the church itself, one has to pass a narrow and rather uninviting corridor, which does nothing to prepare the visitor for what is coming (or indeed, adds to the shock effect): stepping into the church, one finds oneself in the midst of what João Adolfo Hansen (in his attempts to undo eighteenth-century architecture of nineteenth-century qualifications and remain 'objective') would probably describe as 'an ornately decorated space'. I would rather describe it as a 'golden storm' – an overwhelming, whirling jumble of gilded ornaments and a 'blast' to one's sensory apparatus, all the way down to one's 'cylindrically arranged muscle cells'.

Sitting down on one of the hard wooden pews, taking in the jumble bit by bit, one may observe some striking facts about the interior design of the church.[5]

The most noticeable aspect of the interior is what some have called the 'horror vacuii' of the baroque, its 'fear for empty spaces'. The walls around the main entrance contain some white plastered parts, but as one progresses towards the altar there are no more empty surfaces. Wherever you look, there are vines, tied bows, roses, atlantes, caryatides, seashells, acanthus leaves, hearts, ropes, grapes, birds, garlands, blazons, dragons, stylised torches aflame, bells and angels. Angels – hundreds of them, cherubs and seraphims, with and without wings, punctuating the golden shimmer with their baby-coloured skin and marzipan-pink nipples. Where there are no woodcarvings smothered in gold leaf, there are panels of azulejos, depicting the miraculous events from the life of Saint Francis, paintings of biblical scenes or statues of saintly figures. The rectangular, hexagonal, rhombic and star-shaped surfaces in between the complicated geometrical patterns of the vaults on the ceiling all contain paintings with more biblical scenes. The multi-coloured marble floor is decorated with wild, curly vegetal motives. Every single object – chandeliers, candle stands, balustrades, balconies, altars, columns, doors, holy-water fonts – seems to have spurred on the decorative zeal of the builders and become a pretext for more ornamentation.

Focusing on the ornamentations themselves, the eye soon gets lost in a labyrinth: a genuine proliferation of floral and vegetal motives that get lost in what seem to be an unstoppable movement of curling, curving and spiraling. The sensation of the 'labyrinthical' is most spectacularly evoked in the ceiling above the altar, where a white and golden geometrical pattern is running loose (plate 6).

Next to the evident preference for curls, curves and labyrinthical patterns, the interior also reveals a remarkable hostility to closure. Wherever boundaries were found, the impulse has been to break them down, negate them. The *trompe l'oeuil* ceiling of the portaria (and many other baroque churches in Salvador) is the clearest example of the preference for 'permeable frames'. With their breaking skies and flying angels, inviting the eye higher and higher up to the Light, they are a pure negation of a closed structure, promising a freedom of movement and flow between sacred and mundane domains. In the Igreja de São Francisco proper, however, the undoing of rigid boundaries is more the effect of the indulgence in ornamentation, which leads to an 'encrustation' of all clear lines, blurring all sharp divisions and leaving all forms amorphous, like a shipwreck on the bottom of the ocean. The negation of closure is also evoked by the angels. Often positioned at the margins of architectural spaces, these flying creatures lend their ephemeral nature to the boundary – negating the absoluteness of the division, connecting separate domains, inviting the spectator to cross the line.

In ocular terms, this interior exemplifies what Christine Buci-Glucksman (1992) calls, in her study of baroque aesthetics, 'la folie du voir'. The bewildering jumble of images and ornaments provokes a restless eye, lost in curves and curls and folds, destabilised by the perpetual movement and shifting boundaries. Yet the attempt to grasp how one is being 'played' by the church in optical terms misses out on M.T.J. Mitchell's reminder that: 'Architecture, the impurest medium of all, incorporates all the other arts in a *Gesamtkunstwerk* and typically is not even "looked at" with any concentrated attention, but is perceived, as Walter Benjamin noted, in a state of distraction. Architecture is not primarily about seeing, but about dwelling and inhabiting'. The interior of the Igreja de São Francisco is better grasped in terms such as 'aisthesis' (Verrips 2006) or 'corpothetics' (Pinney 2004), which underscore that *all* the senses are being addressed and played – all the way to the autonomous nervous system and pilomotor reflexes of the body. Indeed, the Igreja de São Francisco does not want you to maintain your distance so as 'to get the picture'. Its aesthetic tactic is to overwhelm you, to engulf you, to break

down the control that 'observation' allows. The sensation it seeks is to push you off track, to provoke a sensation of dizziness, of falling, of losing one's grip. There is no better illustration of what this church proposes as a 'sensational form' (Meyer 2010) than to see what it has made out of the classic columns of earlier epochs: no longer straight and erect, they have become spirals, icons of movement, negations of the very stone they are made of.

The sensation of losing one's grip, and the bodily dizziness that comes with it, continues at a semantic level as the dissolution of clear-cut architectural boundaries coincides with the dissolution of clear-cut categories that make up the symbolic order. There are transformations and metamorphoses everywhere. Decorative curls become plants, which in turn become human figures. When giving them a second, more attentive look, the acanthus leaves reveal the features of a lion's head. Human limbs, not pertaining to anybody, hold out chandeliers. Indeed, the category 'human' is not treated as a privileged category here; the limbs are mere decorative elements. Everything could well be something else. Are these angels really angels? Many offer their nakedness to the congregation as ever so many flashers. Some seem pregnant. Some have remarkably erect nipples. Some look at us as would a prostitute soliciting at a street corner. Most of them boast silly smiles and other rather idiotic facial expressions, so stupid that you can't help thinking that the slaves who did the woodcarving must have had a good laugh mocking the facial expressions of their Portuguese masters (a point that is also stressed by the black tour guides who take tourists into the church and help them 'read' the interior).

And yet, for all the dizziness that the golden storm that is the interior of the Igreja de São Francisco provokes, a description of my impressions would not be complete without mentioning its experiential antidote. For as much as this place seeks to induce in its visitors a sensation of falling, no one actually falls when entering the church. No one loses control or goes mad. And intriguingly, it might well be again the design of the interior that brings about this sensation. For in the storm of whirling ornamentations, the statues of the saints remain calm and serene, resting points for the eye in spite of their flowing robes. More importantly, the overall structure of the interior has a theatrical set up: the corridor of the nave, flanked by dark wooden pews, and the arched aisles all draw attention to the altar, thus bringing into focus the huge statue of Saint Francis embracing Jesus on the cross.

It is in this simultaneity of 'losing one's grip' and 'being led towards the savior' that this church interior is at its most effectual: the sensation of

disorientation and instability comes hand in hand with an awe-inducing sensation that a transcendent power, capable of keeping it all together, is present in this space. One might put it this way: dizziness is produced to derail the subject, to force him out of the regular structures of the everyday, only to then grab this falling subject and lead him up to the light. Martin Jay reminds us that this, again, is as much a sensuous effect as a psychological one. 'If the eye is so deceptive and the visual scene so replete with dazzling flashes of brilliance', says Jay, 'casting light only on opaque, impenetrable surfaces, recourse to another sense for security may appear an obvious antidote to its dizzying effects' (Jay 1988: 318).

Multiple responses: What to make out of this golden storm?

Although my intent has been to keep the previous section somewhat 'descriptive', it is, of course, a very particular evocation of the interior of the Igreja de São Francisco. Every phrase, every word, every metaphor is loaded with particular qualifications, judgments and assessments as to what to make of this 'ornately decorated interior', and I am fully aware that these qualifications are relevant and appropriate to a Dutchman with a sensitive autonomous nervous system and a cultivated aversion to academic forms of world-making, visiting Bahia at the beginning of the twenty-first century – and not necessarily to other visitors of the church. An inventory of reactions to the church interior reveals that indeed the Igreja de São Francisco (and similar baroque churches in Bahia) has elicited a multiplicity of different comments as well as provoked a variety of actions.

To start with the latter, whereas this church interior struck me as a convincing example of Georges Bataille's guilt-laden confessions on the experiential proximity of the temple and the whorehouse – 'my true church is a whorehouse, the only one that gives me true satisfaction' (Bataille 1998: 100) – Talento and Hollanda (2008: 79) tell us that many of the angels and cherubs originally had genitals, but these were at some point in time cut off by Franciscan friars, presumably trying to police the boundary between ecstatic worship and erotic stimulation. They were donned with little *culottes*, which – in a continuation of the striptease act – were taken off again in later stages, for reasons I do not know (plate 7).

Luis Freire, in his interesting history of the interior reforms to which the great majority of Salvador's baroque churches were subjected in the nineteenth century (but not the Igreja de São Francisco, as the Franciscan

order could not afford such reform), minutely reports how one religious brotherhood after the other sought to reduce the 'excessive ornamentation' in the churches of their patron saint, which, under the conventions of Enlightenment thinking and the neo-classical style that was *en vogue,* now came to be understood as 'a lack of control' (Freire 2006). Curly, dizzying decorations as found in the Igreja de São Francisco were removed and replaced by a much more 'restrained' kind of interior design. Yet Freire adds, not without glee, that nineteenth-century members of religious brotherhoods could not easily shake off their baroque 'fear for empty spaces': they did introduce austere Greek columns in the altar works of their churches but kept commissioning '*many* columns'.

In scholarly debates, the Igreja de São Francisco became an example for qualifying and defining 'Bahian baroque', which in turn became a key-element of the 'culture of Brazil' and 'the psychology of the Brazilian people' (cf. Peixoto 1999; De Grammont 2008) Although this is not the place for a full-length discussion of the baroque in the imagination of 'Brazil', some examples can show us just how different culturally informed readings of Brazilian baroque may be.

Maria Lucia Montes, in her essay on the religious ethos in Brazil, states that Jesuit Catholicism in the New World sought to immerse believers in the splendour of the Divine by playing on their bodies. The pagan people were not to be persuaded by rational argumentation but by a bombardment of the senses. Baroque, in her opinion, is the immersive aesthetic par excellence.

From the earliest times of the Jesuits onwards, theatre, music, song, dance and poetry had been part and parcel of the catechistic arsenal. Simple souls had to be conquered by stunning them; they had to be elevated to the ineffable greatness of the Sacred through the work of the imagination and the senses. Later, the form in which the churches were constructed, the decorative profusion of their ceilings, the perfection of the woodcarvings that incarnated the Saints, the splendour of the gold – sparkling in the ornaments and connecting itself with the silver so as to give liturgical objects a light of their own – the singing and the oratory of the sermon: all of this contributed to the production of that magical atmosphere in which the truths of the Faith – floating on perfumed clouds of incense – impregnated the soul through the five senses (Montes 1998: 104).

For Roger Bastide, the church became a prime example of the ecstatic and mystical tendencies in Bahian religiosities. In one of his earliest works on Salvador da Bahia, the French anthropologist has left us an in-

triguing description of the way the Igreja de São Francisco played him. Sitting in the church, Bastide contemplates the striking correspondences between the ecstatic religion of Salvador's Afro-Brazilian community, the Candomblé, and the no less ecstatic environment of this baroque church interior:

> When one visits churches and candomblés, an analogy imposes itself, even against one's will, between two modes of ecstasy. Down there, in that intensely green valley, between the palm trees, the banana trees, and the thick undergrowth of plants, most of which carry the names of saints and orixás – Bush-of-Ogum, Saints-wood, Carpet-of-Oxalá, Wounds-of-Saint-Sebastian – the tam-tam of the negroes penetrates one's being though the ears, through the nose, through the mouth, punching one in the stomach, imposing its rhythms on one's body and mind. Here [in the baroque churches of the upper city] it is the tam-tam of the gold and the ornaments that penetrates us, not through our ears but through our eyes. As with the other tam-tam, that of the sanctuary of the spirits, it is inescapable. Attempts to get away from the golden profusion by closing one's eyes are in vain. It is as when one has been looking into the sun for too long: luminous stains, a whirling of reds and yellows going through one's brain. Opening one's eyes again, there is no way to put one's spirit to rest. The light plays over the low columns, it nestles in a black vine, in a green leaf, a sacred bird, an angel's smile, and then leads us to yet another glittering spot, with the effect that everything seems to be dancing and whirling, a spinning sensation that soon captures our own heads. Here, all that is profane in us has left us. Here, it is impossible to link two ideas, or to coordinate a thought: we find ourselves turned over to the most terrible of adventures. (1945: 27-28)

Art historian Affonso Ávila, hinting at the 'semiotic exuberance' of the interior and 'the insertion of African elements and sensibilities', took the church to be an example of the 'Black Baroque in Bahia ... in contrast to a White Baroque in Minas Gerais, which was also tempered by a strong mulatto presence' (2001: 124). Others contrasted the 'sensuality and audacity' of the Brazilian baroque with the baroque of the Spanish colonies, with its 'abiding devotion to the ascetic' (Underwood 2001: 527), thus highlighting Brazilian sensuality. 'Brazilian Baroque', says Underwood, 'delighted in the tumescence of carnal forms, in the provocative swelling of the flesh' (ibid: 524).

A most curious reading of the interior of the Igreja de São Francisco, expressive of a nationalistic perspective that seeks to define a 'Brazilian essence' in opposition to 'the European', is the one offered by Riccardo Averini. Writing about the 'tropical baroque' of Brazil (1997: 24 ff.), this art historian resists the whole notion of the baroque as exuberance, excess, instability, chaos and complexity, which he deems a thoroughly Eurocentric understanding of this aesthetic.

> The exuberance of baroque decorations in no way exceeds the impetuousness and disorderliness of tropical vegetation, but to the contrary, adapts itself perfectly, and, in its compositional schemes, offers a criterium of selection and ordering principle. In terms of intensity and variety, this baroque is a 'less', not a 'more'. The gaze that is habituated to the inextricable convulsions of the tropical forest or the picturesque cultural mixtures of the early tropical farms, where one would find next to each other gigantic tall trees and the low level vegetation of productive plants. Here corn, cacao and vegetables would grow in liberty among each other, and man would not interfere to separate and direct them (his only function being to harvest the product). The eye so connected to the disorder of nature, a disorder that is animated even further by the incredible colors of wild flowers, immediately distinguishes the distributive qualities and pacifying order of the structure, in the [retabulos] of the woodcarvings, and it also senses how this art, building forth on this nature, and imitating it, soon surpasses it, subjecting it to the discipline of calculation. (1997: 28)

Other commentators focus on the observation that this is the baroque at its most sumptuous and opulent, or, as Bahian novelist Jorge Amado put it in his famous 1942 city guide *Bahia de Todos os Santos. Guia de Ruas e Mistérios*, 'the vanity of the religious city' (2000: 112). In this framing, the church induces anger and indignation about the waste, the breach with the Franciscan pledge of poverty. 'Scholars will probably never figure out what motives lead these Franciscans, whose philosophy was one of forsaking wealth and embracing poverty, to construct such a rich church.' (Talento & Hollanda 2008: 78). Of the mere two paragraphs Jorge Amado dedicates to the Igreja de Sao Francisco in his guide to Salvador (he was still a communist in those days), one is curiously about a beggar who used to approach visitors inside the church:

A little idiot, mutilated, with staring eyes, a syrupy voice, and a stammering kind of talk, sells religious pamphlets to the visitors. He seems to have escaped from an old novel, a new Quasimodo, crippled, deformed, with a yellowish complexion, greedily taking in the nickels given to him. In the midst of the marvel of this church he is even more absurd and more impressive. (2000: 112)

Tourist blogs, to mention a last source of comments on the interior of the Igreja de São Francisco, again reveal a wide variety of comments, prohibiting single readings of 'what this church is like'.

Today's remaining tourist trap was an ornate church called Igreja Sao Francisco. Our guide book states the non christian slaves who were forced to build it gained their revenge by endowing the angels with prominent sexual organs. There's something peculiar about walking around a church in a hunt for prominent sexual organs.[6]

Exuberant decoration. I'm without words.[7]

We went to see the Igreja Sao Francisco church, which is this massive baroque church. The inside was so tacky and completely covered in gold from floor to ceiling. I guess that was once considered beautiful!!![8]

Almost every surface inside the church – the walls, pillars, vaults and ceilings – are covered by golden sculptures, gilt woodwork and paintings. The interior is one of the most beautiful pieces of religious art we've seen to date.[9]

A spectacular work of art ... On the altar a portrayal of the dream of Saint Francis in which he embraces Jesus, still on the cross ... I was very moved ... even more so because I was there with my husband and children ... I felt blessed ...[10]

And so we can go on and on and on, endless readings, convincing and appropriate within the particular frames, projects and worldviews of the people doing the reading. Yet the question of course is: are there more general lessons to be drawn from this building for an anthropology of religious architecture?

Multiplicity and coherence, derailment and redress, jouissance and plaisir

The multiplicity of responses to the interior of the Igreja de São Francisco and other similar churches blocks every attempt to produce straightforward, singular statements about 'the meaning' of this religious structure. In a way, the church imposes its 'baroque' being on its analyst. Empirically, there is no other conclusion than to say that this church is many things to many people. It is 'multiple'. As an author, however, who owes his readers an argument, I keep searching for ways to bring coherence to these responses, for a story that might keep my readers from losing it, just as the underlying structure of the church interior keeps the visitor from falling.

The easy way out is to introduce the thinking of Alain Badiou (2003) on the Event: ecstatic derailment catapults the beholder beyond the horizons of the known, blows apart the theater of one's own imagination, enables one to face the limitations of one's reality definitions, and thus helps to expand possibilities of belief into the infinite rest-of-what-is. To be converted, in other words, requires this radical shake-up of one's reality perceptions.

Yet it is here that I need to restrain my all too radical arguments and force myself to look at the less spectacular occurrences in – and reactions to – the church interior. The different and multiple responses to the church interior that were just discussed do express a recognition of this potential to shake up the canons of belief, but they are, in themselves, *moments of redress*: attempts to draw into the realm of meaning and thus colonise and exploit experiences that defy 'meaning'.

Allow me to explore this thought a bit further. It seems to me that in most of the responses, an earlier experience of derailment – hard nipples, tears, head spinnings, feelings of bliss, or indignation – is still present in the articulation. Take this quote from a travel blog, written by an American tourist:

> ... they took more than 100 kilograms of gold and slathered it over every available knob and curlicue in the richly carved interior of this high-baroque church. The result could hardly be called beautiful – works of the nouveaux riches seldom are – but by God, it's impressive. The inside fairly gleams; on nights when the doors are open it casts a yellow sheen all the way up to Terreiro de Jesus.[11]

I find this a most curious mixture of a person seeking distance from experiences imposed on him by the church (the ironic use of the verb 'to slather', which I associate more with food than with gold; the refusal to call the interior 'beautiful'; the sneer at the tastelessness of the 'nouveaux riches') and a person who is still under the influence of the way he was being 'played' (the exclamation 'by God!', the qualification of the interior being 'impressive', the reference to the gleaming of the gold all the way up to the Terreiro de Jesus). Is this comment not an attempt at *redress*, an attempt to draw into the realm of meaning and thus colonise experiences that defy meaning? And, if we look at other examples presented above, are not the very references to 'sensuality and audacity', to 'provocative swellings of the flesh', to the 'peculiarity' of walking around a church 'in a hunt for prominent sexual organs' phrasings that seek to incorporate ill-classifiable bodily reactions provoked by the church into the realm of the known? To animate and vitalise the world of things we know with the thrill of the unknown? Or take Averini's suggestion that the gaze of true Brazilians is 'jungle-informed', and therefore comes to rest in the ordered interior of the Igreja de São Francisco (rather than become dizzy). Is this not yet another attempt at redress: the replacement of an experience of derailment, a shocking confrontation with the collapse of meaning, with the fantasy of actually being the master of this *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*: they, the Europeans, get lost in a place like this, we Brazilians are in control of this?

These attempts to *overcome* an initial moment of derailment, *and yet allow this derailment to linger* so as to exploit its disrupting energies – as in writing an article to undo the embarrassment of the hardening of one's nipples, and thus keeping those nipples centre stage – reminds me of the discussion initiated by Roland Barthes on the interplay between two forms of enjoyment, *plaisir* and *jouissance.*

The enjoyment that is plaisir, as Jane Gallop puts it, is 'comfortable, ego-assuring, recognized and legitimated as culture' (1984: 111). It is the pleasure of finding oneself (one's body, one's senses, one's being) compatible with the scripts of culture, one's social role or identity. It is the pleasure of experiencing that the social is a possibility, a match, rather than a straightjacket or obstacle. Moreover, says John Fiske,

> Plaisir involves the recognition, confirmation, and negotiation of social identity, but this does not mean that it is necessarily a conformist, reactionary pleasure (though it may be). There are pleasures in conforming to the dominant ideology and the subjectivity it proposes when it is in our interest to do so; equally there are pleasures of opposing or

modifying that ideology and its subjectivities when they fail to meet our interests. Insofar as people are positioned complexly in society, in simultaneous relationships of conformity and opposition to the dominant ideology, so the form of plaisir that will be experienced will vary from the reactionary to the subversive. (1989: 54)

The pleasure that is jouissance – which might be translated as bliss, ecstasy, orgasm – is of another order. This enjoyment is *perverse*, in the sense of 'shocking, ego-disruptive, and in conflict with the canons of culture' (Gallop 1984: 111). Unsettling ideological assumptions and classifications, jouissance is the pleasure of evading the social order, to escape from 'meaning', a liberation from the social and the socially produced self (Fiske 1989: 50). It is beyond good and bad. Getting hard nipples when entering a church building, I feel confident to say, pertains to this enjoyment called jouissance.

Roland Barthes is quite clear that he did not introduce the binary of plaisir versus jouissance to slot the world of experiences into two distinctive halves. On the contrary, he introduced this opposition to enable himself to think about its fundamental instability. 'The distinction will not be a source of decisive, steady classifications', he sternly instructs his readers (quoted in Gallop 1984: 112). Thus, jouissance not only pertains to special, carnivalesque moments (as has often been noted) but may occur in the midst of the pleasurable activities that pertain to the notion of plaisir, empowering the identities in the making with its energies. Taking up Barthes' famous example of the multiple pleasures that go into the act of reading, Fiske argues that jouissance 'occurs in the body of the reader at the moment of reading when text and reader *erotically lose their separate identities and become a new, momentarily produced body that is theirs and theirs alone, that defies meaning or discipline*' (1989: 51, italics mine). Gallop adds that these moments never last. Jouissance 'does not endure but burns itself out in a "precocious" instant'. According to Barthes, 'as soon as it is understood … [it] becomes ineffective, we must go on to something else' (1984: 112).

Coming from film studies, Vivian Sobchack's discussion of the cinematographic experience articulates similar insights in another vocabulary: watching a movie, she writes, is too often discussed as 'a specular and psychical process abstracted from the body and mediated through language' (Sobchack 2011). Yet what is actually happening is a much fuzzier thing. 'As the image becomes translated into a bodily response, body and image no longer function as discrete units, but as surfaces in contact, engaged in a constant activity of reciprocal re-alignment and inflection'

(ibid.). Watching the movies is the 'commingling of flesh and consciousness, the human and technological sensorium, so that meaning and where it is made does not have a concrete origin in either bodies or representation but emerges from both' (ibid.). Yet Sobchack too is aware of the follow-up of this 'commingling' when the lights go on, and one asks one's friend: 'Well, what did you think of the movie?'. There is, again, this moment of redress. Even the initial incapacity to find the right word – or rather, the realisation that whatever word one will utter will break apart the 'commingling of flesh and consciousness' of the cinematic experience – will inevitably give way to renewed control.

What these moments do, I would say, is to infuse reality, that is, the definitions of reality with actuality. What such discussions help us to see is what the vacillation between derailment and redress, between plaisir and jouissance, between flesh and consciousness produces: a renewed sense of mastery, of regaining control, of having been lost in the vortex yet having refound oneself anew as some-one: believer, anthropologist, man-of-words, Brazilian, communist, world-weary-tourist, mother-of-one's-children-and-wife-to-one's-husband.

Conclusion

So what lesson might be drawn from this for an anthropological study of religious architecture? My discussion of the experiential dimension of the Igreja de São Francisco – its capacity to derail us, shake us out of the expected, disrupt our received ways of knowing and understanding – sought to open a perspective in which religious buildings cease to be mere human representations of the divine, maps of the world, or replicas of the cosmos. Religious buildings have a power of their own that is not illustrative of religious knowledge already in place, but that one might call 'ecstatic', in the basic meaning of *ek-stasis* – outside-of-itself.

The vacillation between plaisir and jouissance, consciousness and flesh, a body of religious knowledge and the-rest-of-what-is is characteristic of many mystical traditions and techniques. What my discussion has made clear is that experiential incursions into the realm of the numinous – which produces experiences that are subsequently to be 'made sense of' – are not restricted to the practices of a neatly compartmentalised 'mystical' sub-division of a religious community. It is in aesthetics – the 'process of en- and disabling sense impressions and a tuning and streamlining of the senses' (Meyer 2010: 754-755) – that mystics, believers and

mere-visitors-of-a-religious-building alike are made aware of the rest-of-what-is.

As William James made clear in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), religions cannot do without such experiences. 'Our impulse belief is always what sets up the original body of truth, and our articulately verbalized philosophy is but a showy translation into formulas' (James 1902). And: 'The unreasoned and immediate assurance is the deep thing in us, the reasoned argument is but the surface exhibition … Instinct leads, intelligence does but follow' (ibid.). Geertz phrases it somewhat differently, but his point about how the ethos strengthens the persuasiveness of the worldview (and the other way around) is similar:

> The ethos is made intellectually reasonable by being shown to represent a way of life implied by the actual state of affairs which the world-view describes, and the world-view is made emotionally acceptable by being presented as an image of an actual state of affairs of which such a way of life is an authentic expression. (Geertz 1993: 89-90)

This, I would say, is what architectural spaces accomplish. They 'play' the visual, olfactory, auditory and tactile capacities of the visitor, and the encounter of the senses with the sensational form produces an experience that comes to inform an embodied understanding of the divine.

Notes

1   I opt for the term 'visitor' here to underscore that in the present day and age, a religious building such as the Igreja de São Francisco is frequented by religious and non-religious people, users and tourists, worshippers and sceptics, and that I see no reason to privilege religious responses to the building.
2   I take world-making to be the way people go about the task of carving meaningful worlds to inhabit out of the plenum of existence.
3   In my thinking, which builds forth on the insights of 'Lacanian' scholars such as Slavoj Žižek, Terry Eagleton and Yannis Stavrakakis, the symbolic order is but one of the three registers through which world-making comes about: it works with the register of the imaginary and is set off against the forces of the Real (cf. Van de Port 2011).
4   Biaggio Talento and Helenita Hollanda, 2008, *Basílicas & Capelinhas: Um estudo sobre a história, arquitetura e arte de 42 igrejas de Salvador*. Salvador: Bureau.

5   A fantastic 'virtual tour' of the interior, using sophisticated 360° photography that allows you to scan every single detail of the church, is available on the internet: http://www.onzeonze.com.br/blog360/toursaofrancisco/index.html

6   Read more at: http://blog.travelpod.com/travel-blog-entries/davidbowmaker/worldwide2005/1127169780/tpod.html#ixzz1lbK76omy

7   http://moleskineletronico.blogspot.com/2011/06/igreja-de-sao-francisco-salvador-ba.html

8   Read more at: http://blog.travelpod.com/travel-blog-entries/vmcelani/s._america_-_08/1203894000/tpod.html#ixzz1lbKnEcOt

9   Read more at: http://blog.travelpod.com/travel-blog-entries/dhruve_anjli/1/1301288768/tpod.html#ixzz1lbLtC5jX

10 http://www.flickr.com/photos/tudocomfuxicos/5992078680/

11 Read more at: http://www.frommers.com/destinations/salvador/A31021.html#ixzz1lbJZSHku

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Works of Penance

New Churches in Post-Soviet Russia

Tobias Köllner

Within a few decades, Russia – in Soviet times a self-declared atheist country – experienced an astonishing religious revival, often described as a 'religious rebirth' (*religioznoe vozrozhdenie*). Religion, formerly 'domesticated' (Dragadze 1993) and limited to the private sphere, reappeared in the public. Under General Secretary Gorbachev, *glasnost* and *perestroika* were initiated and set off two processes: economic reforms were carried out and religious freedom was granted. For the latter, the celebration of the millennium of the introduction of Christianity into Russia (Kievan Rus at that time)[1] is considered to be a turning point, as it marked the end of attempts to ban the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) from the public sphere. The social significance of religion increased, the religious infrastructure was developed, expressions of religiosity such as prayers and processions reappeared in public, references were made to Orthodoxy on many occasions, and there was widespread coverage of religious events in the media. In addition, new institutions like advisory boards or committees fostered cooperation between religious, political and economic groups. In many cases, explicit connections to pre-socialist practices and traditions, real or imagined, have been drawn (cf. Hann et al. 2006: 6). This finding is confirmed by Irena Borowik, who noted that the religious revival is "above all a return to tradition" (2002: 505). The widespread romantic picture of a religion that survived in remote places, however, is misleading because the recent revival largely depends on religious and political centres like Sergiev Posad, Vladimir or Moscow (Benovska-Sabkova et al. 2010).

It is for this reason that I chose the city of Vladimir and its surroundings as a field site for this research. The city, the capital of the district (*oblast*) of the same name, is situated about 180 kilometres east of Moscow. During the time of my fieldwork (2006-2007), the city had about 330,000 inhabitants. The number of inhabitants of the city as well as of the district is steadily decreasing due to low birth rates and population movements to bigger cities, mainly Moscow. Especially the villages un-

derwent a sharp decline in population numbers after the end of socialism. Due to worsening working conditions and low paid work, young people often left the countryside and changed to more prestigious employment in urban centres. Equally affected by the end of state socialism was the rural infrastructure. Institutions from socialist times such as kindergartens and schools were closed down and churches were in a dilapidated state.

The city Vladimir itself is famous for its historical importance, and it is often referred to as the 'Heart or Soul of Russia' (*serdtse* or *dusha Rossii*). It was founded in 990 by Prince Vladimir Sviatoslavovich of Kiev ('The Red Sun'), and in the thirteenth century the city had been the political and religious capital of Russia. From these early days, two churches and the Golden Gate remain, which are on the UNESCO world heritage list. The buildings are famous for the white limestone used, and therefore the period is called the 'white-stone architecture period'. In 1238, Vladimir was conquered by the Mongols and burned down. It was rebuilt, but the capital soon moved to Moscow (1330) and the city lost most of its former importance. Nevertheless, in post-socialist Russia, the historical importance of Vladimir and the surrounding region was stressed again and played an important role in the Orthodox religious revival in Russia.

The religious revival in post-socialist countries such as Russia involved not only a return to local religious traditions but also the sudden influx of new religious groups. The newly acquired religious freedom not only supported traditional religions but also attracted non-traditional religious groups from other countries that challenged the position of hitherto dominant churches (e.g. the Russian Orthodox Church). Despite religious competition in contemporary European Russia, up to 82% of ethnic Russians claim identification with the Orthodox Christian Church (Filatov & Lunkin 2006: 35). The actual meaning of this identification, however, is diverse: it ranges from committed religious believers who follow the ROC's prescriptions strictly to people who understand Orthodoxy as one possible ethnic marker of their Russianness (Borowik 2002; Filatov & Lunkin 2006; see also Hann & Goltz 2010 for notions of syncretism in Orthodoxy).

Moreover, the changes not only affected people but left heavy imprints on the landscape as well. During the socialist period, many churches were destroyed, fell into decline, or were used for other purposes, such as radio stations or museums. During the time of my fieldwork, the Russian Orthodox Church was the most trusted institution in Russia (Dubin 2006: 84), and there exists a general tendency to restore former church buildings and to erect new ones in places where churches had been before

the 1917 Russian Revolution. A clear and tangible sign of the expansion and strength of the ROC is the impressive reconstruction of already existing churches and the building of new churches, new monasteries and religious monuments. Compared to less than 7,000 functioning parishes and 21 monasteries belonging to the Moscow Patriarchate in 1988, in 2011 there were nearly 30,675 parishes and 805 monasteries.[2] Although these figures cover the whole former Soviet Union, the overwhelming majority of the Russian Orthodox parishes is situated in the Russian Federation.

In this article, I do not focus on particularities in religious architecture in Russia but emphasise the building process, its religious interpretations and its implications on social relations. Already from this statement it becomes obvious that I understand the church building not as a mere symbol but as part of a cultural process. So, if we look closer at the material domain we are able to recognise how form itself becomes "the fabric of cultural worlds" (Miller 1998: 3). In many ways, people are able to transform resources into "expressive environments, daily routines and often cosmological ideals: that is, ideas about order, morality and family, and their relationships with wider society" (Miller 2010: 8). Therefore, the relationship between people and the things they construct is bound to the cultural context and hardly separable from religious notions, social relations and moral evaluations. Here I refer to Latour (1985), who urges us to trace the associations between the social and the material world. Thus he defines the social as "*a type of connection* between things that are not themselves social" (1985: 5, emphasis in original).

The analysis of the interaction between the social and the material worlds has a strong tradition in anthropology, where the 'social life of things' has been at the focus of research. According to Appadurai (1999), the perception and understanding of things is not fixed but is shifting from one notion to another in different contexts. The context, according to Kopytoff (1999: 64), depends on the moral economy that is at stake and is also expressed through the material used. Through this constant shift between different notions, things can develop biographies and have to be examined through their whole lifetime. Thus, we have to research how materiality is incorporated and used to express different notions and concepts.

This article draws special attention to notions of penance in the context of church constructions. In order to corroborate my arguments, I have chosen two ethnographic examples where churches were constructed. In the first case, money was collected from Orthodox believers and a building company received the donated money for the construction of

the church. In another example, believers received a church building in a dilapidated state but no money for reconstruction. In the following years, they renovated the church on their own by contributing their time and labour. Both examples – the labour contributions and the monetary donations to the Russian Orthodox Church – were described as forms of penance by my interlocutors. Thus both ethnographic examples show that the material construction of a church carries important religious and social meanings. The link between contributing labour or donating money, and penance as a quest for the peace of one's own soul or of the souls of one's relatives, was stressed by many of my interlocutors as reasons for their engagement.

Russian Orthodox Church Architecture

As in many other cultures, an Orthodox church symbolises the structure of the cosmos in general and the relationship between heaven and earth, men and God in particular (Gould 2006). From the outside, a typical Russian Orthodox church is rectangular or oval, symbolising a ship and reminiscent of Noah's Ark. The nave itself is square and often has the form of a cross. On top of the nave or church there is one big circular dome representing heaven. Around the world, Russian church architecture is well-known for its onion-shaped domes, which are often covered with gold. Inside the main dome of the church building there is the image of God, called Pantocrator or "ruler of all". Beside the big dome, there are often four smaller domes. Looked at from above, the four smaller domes are shaped like a cross and reflect the cross-shaped form of the nave (plate 8). In addition, most Orthodox churches, if money is sufficient, have a bell tower that is located on the west side of the church.

The main axis in Orthodox churches is from east to west. In this way, believers enter the church from the west and move to the sanctuary in the east. The inside of the church is embellished with many images symbolising life on earth and in heaven. On the west side there are images of martyrs and the last judgment, and on the east side there is the altar hidden behind a screen called "iconostasis". On the iconostasis there are icons on display which have a particular order. Each row of icons is dedicated to one particular group of saints, apostles or prophets. Other icons show scenes from Biblical life. In the middle of the iconostasis there are the Holy Doors (*Sviataia vrata*), also called the Beautiful Gate, which are opened during service and used for religious purposes only. The icon on

the left side of the gate is reserved for the icon to whom the church is dedicated, and the icon on the right side shows Jesus. The room behind the iconostasis is used by the clergy alone or with their blessing. Great emphasis is laid on the icons in the church. They can be found on the iconostasis and are spread all over the church. Some of the icons are considered to be wonderworking, which is important for the prestige of the local church and attracts visitors from far away.

Inside Orthodox churches, there are no chairs or benches. During services, orthodox believers stand or pray on their knees. This form of prayer is also practised in front of the icons where it is common to light candles. This ritual is said to carry the prayers to the saint who is on display on the icon. But often the most important religious items in the church are the relics of a saint. The relics are kept in a shrine and are venerated by believers with a kiss on the pane that hides them.

Two cases of church reconstruction

One important aspect in the context of church constructions is the religious interpretation of sinful life and the necessity of doing penance (*pokaianie*) in order to secure salvation (Surozhskii et al. 2005). According to widespread Orthodox teachings, human behaviour after the Fall is always connected to sin, and only through penance does salvation become possible (*Osnovy* 2000 I.2). Therefore, in most cases it is not one particular action that requires penance but the abstract notion of sinful life after the Fall which is relevant for all Orthodox believers. As a result, participation in church life and membership in the Orthodox community are described as necessary preconditions for salvation, and the concept of 'inchurchment' (*votserkovlenie*) plays a pivotal role. In the narrower sense, *votserkovlenie* is part of the baptism ritual and refers to the admission into the religious community. But today it is mostly understood in the broader sense as a lifelong process of engagement with the Church and a strict observance of clergymen's prescriptions.

Part of the inchurchment process for Orthodox believers is the recognition of one's own sinfulness and the recognition of the necessity to do penance. But like believers' identification with Orthodoxy, the understanding of penance varies widely and depends largely on priestly advice and interpretation. Whereas some priests and believers favour almsgiving or donations to the Church as genuine forms of penance, others stress the importance of loss, hardship and work. In the latter case, penance reflects

ascetic ideals as they are practised in monastic life such as fasting, poverty and manual labour. Therefore, help for the Church and for people in need are, among other forms of penance, perceived and described as forms of penance for one's sins by Orthodox believers.

But what is noticeable is a discrepancy between an idealistic image and everyday parish life. Although the level of religious participation and church attendance remains low (Borowik 2002; Filatov & Lunkin 2006; Kääriäinen & Furman 2000; Sokolova 2005), respect for religious practices such as the Eucharist (*prichastie*), penance and the confession (*ispoved*) is high. Therefore, the construction of existing church buildings and the erection of new ones are important as works of penance and for the establishment of new parishes. Without the intense construction activities, the Church would have even less attendees. In this way, the construction activities help the ROC to gain public attention, to attract believers and to sustain existing parish communities.

Case 1: Our Lady of Kazan

When I left my field site in August 2007, the first stone was laid for a new church to take the place of one that had been destroyed in 1970, when a new district was built. In socialist times, the church and its cemetery had been replaced by the eternal flame commemorating the victims of the 'Great Patriotic War' (World War II) as well as a park that formed the newly designed centre of the district. In 2007, a new church was built situated behind the eternal flame in the park and dominating the square. The church is dedicated to Our Lady of Kazan – one of the most important icons in Russia. For the construction of the church, charitable contributions (*blagotvoritelnost*) and donations (*pozhertvovanie*, *darenie*) were collected from the rich, most of whom were businessmen. Indeed, two businessmen had donated 10 million rubles (about 300,000 Euros), but this was probably still not sufficient because the expected construction costs were 25 to 28 million rubles (700,000 to 800,000 Euros).

Gennadii was one of the entrepreneurs who supported the construction of the new church. He is in his mid-40s, a member of the local parliament faction of the United Russia Party, and runs one of the biggest construction companies in the region. In addition, he is a well-known donor who had financed the construction of yet another church in Vladimir. The first church was built on the site of the current cemetery of the city and had been completed before my arrival. Nevertheless, the construction was still mentioned among local people during the time of my research.

The construction work had started in 2004 and the church was finished in 2005. As in the case of the second church construction, Gennadii had also donated a considerable amount of money for the construction of the first church, but shared the cost with several other businessmen. As reason for the construction of the church on the cemetery, Gennadii mentioned the following dream he had before:

> I saw myself standing on a hill in white clothes. Other people stood with me in white capes, and next to me was a white church. An endless chain of people passed by and bowed to us showing signs of respect. A mysterious apparition.
>
> Later it happened, completely accidentally, that they proposed to me to build [this church in the cemetery]. And why not? There used to be a church there and we decided to rebuild it. Before we got involved they had already tried to build it, about ten years earlier, but they hadn't succeeded. They collected some money, laid the first stone, but it led nowhere. There was nothing, nothing worked. For this reason, when the foundation of the church was laid, a box with holy relics [*sviatye moshchi*] was included.
>
> Later there was a meal, it was such a celebration, and the archbishop, he said: 'Gennadii, you can't imagine how those people who are buried here in this cemetery will thank you! They will pray for you [*za tebia molit'sia*].' And I remembered this dream, the endless chain of people. And here in the cemetery, 100,000 people are buried. [...] This is what is important to me ...

Dreams play an important role in Orthodoxy and are thought to be supernatural signs, possibly from God. Many instances can be found where the construction of a church goes back to a dream. The explanations, then, seem to build on traditional interpretations of church constructions. A historical example of a dream from the Vladimir region that led to the erection of a church is the famous Virgin Mary intercession church (*pokrov na nerli*).[3] In 1155, Prince Andrei Bogoliubskii[3] was on his way from Kiev to Rostov Velikii when his horses suddenly stopped. He had to take a rest and during the night the Mother of God appeared to him in a dream and advised him to build a church there, which he did soon after.

In contrast to the historical example of Prince Andrei Bogoliubskii, in the ethnographic case described here, Gennadii could make no sense of his dream in the beginning. It was no more than a mysterious apparition for him. Only after following the remark from the archbishop, who is his

confessor and spiritual father,[4] did he interpret the people in his dream to be the ones who are buried in the cemetery. It was the archbishop who put forward the argument that the people buried in the cemetery will thank him and might pray for him, securing his salvation. Even some years later, when I met Gennadii and we talked about the 100,000 people buried there, it became obvious that he was moved and impressed by the fact that they might pray for him and for the salvation of his soul.

But the interpretation of the dream was not the only thing given by the archbishop. The suggestion to build the first church on the cemetery goes back to the archbishop and the other confessors of Gennadii ("they proposed to me"). Following their understanding, the donation for the construction was described as a form of penance. The positive outcome for salvation was stressed, as the people buried there would pray for him. This shows quite clearly the importance of the relation between believer and spiritual father. Through interpretations and suggestions, spiritual teachers guide people's actions advising particular codes of conduct or particular forms of penance. But Gennadii's example also had a material effect: it resulted in the construction of two churches, one on the cemetery and one on the square next to the eternal flame.

When the first stone for the new church next to the eternal flame was laid, a big ceremony was organised. In addition to Gennadii, the mayor of the city of Vladimir, the archbishop, several high-ranking priests and some believers took part. In the beginning, a cross was placed on the site where later the sanctuary of the new church would be erected. During the opening ceremony, the place of the church was demarcated in order to show the impressive size of the building. It was announced that part of the relics of Prince Andrei Bogoliubskii were inserted in the first stone in order to protect the building and the construction. Afterwards, the archbishop led a ritual with a common prayer in order to bless the activities. At the end of the ceremony, the archbishop sprinkled water on the construction site, and every believer was invited to kiss his cross and to receive a blessing with holy water by him. Then a procession formed and went around the square where the church would be erected. Over the next months, the construction was largely carried out by Gennadii's construction company.

When I attended the official blessing and dedication of the church in November 2008, the construction of the building was completed, but inside the church was still empty – iconostasis, paintings and icons were still missing. But because the archbishop was pressing and the day of the icon of Our Lady of Kazan was 4 November, the dedication took place

on that day, before the official opening. Many people attended the ceremony and most of them arrived at least one hour before the appointed time. Most of the attendees were elderly women from the surrounding area who, until recently, had to go to the city centre in order to attend church. So they were expressing their approval for the construction of a new church in their neighbourhood.

The archbishop, the mayor, the head of the local faction of the United Russia Party and Gennadii took part in the official opening ceremony and gave speeches. The archbishop and the mayor thanked Gennadii and all the other donors for their help and praised the new church. This clearly illustrates the close connection between state and Church and their common attempt to foster an Orthodox revival. When the mayor mentioned Gennadii's name, he asked him to step forward in order to introduce himself to the crowd. Gennadii than talked briefly about the work of building the church and the problems they faced, but seemed to be glad when he stepped back down again. Afterwards, the archbishop led a prayer and carried out the blessing of the church with holy water, followed by a procession around the church. Towards the end of the official ceremony, the archbishop again expressed his gratitude and gave an icon (Our Lady of Kazan) to Gennadii as a gift. Gennadii thanked him and stressed the importance of this church for the people in this district of the city. Although Gennadii appeared to dislike the publicity, he gave interviews to TV and radio stations as well as to newspaper reporters attending the event.

Here, the political dimension of church constructions becomes obvious. Although the first steps to support Orthodoxy were already taken under Boris Yeltsin's presidency,[5] the policy of favouring the Russian Orthodox Church came to a climax under Vladimir Putin's presidency. During his first and second presidency (2000-2008), Putin not only used every possibility to show himself as a devout believer but also managed to arrange for substantial financial support to the ROC, despite state and church being separate according to the constitution. How secular nation-states and modern religious movements impinge on one another in a more general context is shown by Talal Asad (2003), who noted that the secular and the religious are mutually constitutive. In Russia, one way of supporting the Church is to declare its church buildings architectural heritage, which enables the ROC to receive state funding for their reconstruction. Nevertheless, the Church is still highly dependent on donations from private businessmen, a development which is very much enhanced by the state. And due to the fact that the economy and politics in Russia are still

very much entangled, many businessmen participate in order to enhance their position in society (Burawoy & Verdery 1999: 14; Humphrey 2002: 7; Humphrey & Mandel 2002: 12f).

Case 2: A poor man's church

But not all parishes receive money from rich businessmen, and the parishioners sometimes start reconstruction work on their own. Again, notions of penance are important and work for the Church is described as activity in order to secure one's salvation. This happened in one of the small settlements near my main field site Vladimir, where a church was restored in this way. Over the course of several months, a group of about 30 parishioners spent very little money but exerted a lot of effort in order to carry out the work. The group – two-thirds of whom were women and one-third men – met on weekends to work and to hold services; sometimes they met more frequently.

Until the construction work started, the settlement had no active parish community and no church that was working. As my informants told me, collective religious life in the settlement was restricted to irregular events because a priest was missing too. Most of the inhabitants were elderly people, as most of the younger ones had moved or wanted to leave to the nearby city of Vladimir. This is a common trend in Russia because the formerly active life in rural settlements is steadily declining. Often former houses of culture and shopping as well as childcare facilities are closed down or used for other purposes. This is a consequence of decreasing work opportunities and declining levels of income. As a result, most of the young people and especially families have left or want to leave the settlement.

Those who stayed had very different backgrounds and had limited mutual contact, because most villagers were oriented towards the nearby city. The situation changed considerably when a new priest moved to the town. In the beginning, people met in his private house and held services there. In this way he established contact with most people in the settlement and they, in return, held him in high respect. Later, he made use of his influence and suggested the existing church building be reconstructed. This church was not used in socialist days and had fallen into decline. Because no big enterprises were situated in the settlement and there were no rich people, the priest proposed to make use of the joint labour force for the construction. In his description of the construction, he explicitly drew on Orthodox notions of penance and described the construction work as one

possible step to salvation that is blessed by him and the Orthodox clergy. Here it is important to note that a blessing in this context is a clear advice to believers who try to follow clergymen's prescriptions.

But not only the religious dimension was important because most people in the community welcomed the idea, as it opened a new perspective for community life in the settlement. In particular, those whom I talked to stressed the work of penance for the Church and praised the close community feeling that arose during the collective activities. This community feeling also provided a reason for people who did not live in the small town to join in with the work. Besides the work, there were church services and common meals (*trapeza*). During my research, the reconstruction work came to an end and from then on only occasional repairs were necessary. These repairs were mainly done by a few men and not by the whole group. As a result, the group cohesion changed because people now met mainly during the church services, and the priest sometimes complained that people were too loud: "The church is not for conversations but for prayers!" But those who took part in the reconstruction still form a strong group within the parish, as one can see from their frequent interactions.

Within the group of labourers, I had the closest contact with Igor, who is about 40 years old. I got to know him through an acquaintance of mine who worked as a teacher in a religious school of Vladimir but lived in a nearby village next to Igor's. Igor had studied theology at St Tikhon academy in Moscow for three years, but since he had to provide money for his wife and their four children he could not finish his degree. He worked as a driver but still wanted to finish his studies. Igor underlined the importance that working for the Church has for him. He perceived this work as the fulfillment (*ispolnenie*) of the Ten Commandments and stressed the penitential aspect of manual labour for the Church. Working for the ROC, according to Igor, brings special grace (*blagopoluchnyi*) to one's afterlife. For him, hard work was part of an ascetic lifestyle, like fasting which he also observes.

One day Igor and I were standing not far from the church and he said: "See, this is our church – not the most beautiful but built with tears." His statement clearly reflects his pride in the fact that the group managed to reconstruct the church without any external help. In his view, other churches may be nicer, but this is 'our church' (*nasha tserkov*) and it has a special meaning for him – as a material building for service and prayer, and for the effort they needed to build it. He points to the penitential aspect of the project when he says that the church is built 'with tears', reflecting the hardship of their work.

Conclusion

To conclude, let me stress again that this article is less concerned with the architecture of religious buildings than with the religious, moral and social underpinnings of the construction activities and its implications for local relations. First, it is important to note that both donations to the construction of churches and the manual labour for the building of churches are understood to be acts of penance for one's sins. Thus the idea of church construction is intimately linked to religious notions of penance. Following clergymen's prescriptions, every Orthodox believer is eager to attract God's grace and to secure salvation through different acts of penance. Donations as well as labour for the Church are considered to be very successful means of penance by Orthodox believers. But not only believers were eager for church constructions, they were also welcomed by clergymen who give such advice to their confessors.

Small wonder, then, that the construction of churches is among the most widespread acts of penance in contemporary Russia. However, in both ethnographic examples given in the text above, the role of the spiritual father for the interpretation of sin and for the decision to construct a church as act of penance was important. The religious penance of believers, then, depended less on axiological teachings of the Russian Orthodox Church and more on the exegesis, interpretation and advice of the respective spiritual teacher. As a result, the meaning attached to religious practices of penance varied considerably, as the form of the relation between believer and spiritual teacher varies as well.

In addition, I draw attention to the educational consequences of the construction activity. Often the religious revival is described as if Orthodoxy survived in rural areas. However, this is misleading because even in rural landscapes many Russians have little knowledge about Orthodoxy. Therefore, the ROC tries to attract as many believers as possible and to teach them about Orthodox history, morality and religious understandings. Through church construction, many Russians take part in parish life and start to engage with Orthodoxy for the first time in their lives. In this way they learn a lot about Orthodoxy through their participation in the construction of the church. The knowledge acquired, however, is less about proper construction than about Orthodoxy as such: What is sin and why is penance important? Why are religious practices like the Lent or pilgrimage important and what meaning is attached to them? What is the meaning of the Orthodox calendar, when are the days of the important saints and which icons are said to protect me and my family? Often

this knowledge is transmitted through the spiritual father or within the parish community when contact has been established through the initial purpose of constructing a church. Here I argue that the materiality has been important for people to join the community, but that it transformed its meaning and resulted in new social relations that were not intended in the beginning.

Finally, I emphasise the difference between both forms of church construction and their implications for social relations. In the first ethnographic case, the community of donors did not know each other and they were more or less invisible. The donation of money for the construction of the church was not necessarily linked to any active participation in parish life and vice versa. In contrast, the second case set off a process of group formation. During the building process, a new parish was formed and changed the social relations inside the settlement considerably. This clearly indicates that the material building and the building process had consequences for social relations inside the community and for the emergence of new, religiously oriented, moral notions and concepts.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1   In 988, Prince Vladimir of Kiev, head of the Kievan Rus, converted to Byzantine Christianity which today is described as the 'baptism of Russia' (*kreshchenie Rossii*). In 1988, the anniversary of the first millennium was held and gained some government support. At the same time, churches were reopened and the implicit ban on religious propaganda in the public sphere was lifted.

2   See the official website of the Russian Orthodox Church, http://www.mospat.ru, accessed on 4 January 2012. However, figures cited for the socialist period have to be handled with care because no official records were kept at that time.

3   Andrei Bogoliubskii (1111-1174, Andrei the God-loving) became ruler of Vladimir, Suzdal and Rostov in 1157. He raised the importance of Vladimir, fortified the city and built many of the famous historic buildings like the Assumption Cathedral.

4   A spiritual father or teacher (*dukhovnyi nastavnik*) can be a priest from one of the local churches or a monk from one of the nearby monasteries. He takes confession and guides behaviour through advice and interpretation. The relationship to spiritual fathers is based on respect, but reflects the personal preferences of the confessor. Often these are long-lasting relations that are renewed again and again and require a certain degree of intimacy (see also Köllner forthcoming).

5   See, for example, the law "On Freedom of Consciousness and on Religious Associations" (*O svobode sovestii i o religioznykh ob'edineniiakh*) of 1997, which favours Russia's "traditional religions".

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Divining Siddhivinayak

The Temple and the City

Markha Valenta

One of the most profound effects of India's shift since the 1980s from a developmentalist state to a neoliberalising one has been to fundamentally transform the role and the form of its cities. If, following in the footsteps of Gandhi, India's villages were long thought to hold the key to the country's identity, values and future, today India's cities are not only growing phenomenally – fed by migrants and commuters from rural hinterlands across India – but have become sites for cutting-edge global innovation in urban capital extraction, deregulated planning, informal living, insurgent and gated citizenship and fierce contests between an emergent middle class with world-class aspirations and the poor whom many would like to expel in the name of the city beautiful (Roy 2009; Roy 2011b; Benjamin 2008; Weinstein 2008; Holston 2007). Highly dynamic, creative, productive and conflicted, these are cities, as Ananya Roy (2011a) remarks so incisively, in which neither neoliberalism nor justice are guaranteed to be the outcome.

Ostensibly, these processes would appear to have little to do with religion. And yet, quite strikingly, in the same period that India has been neoliberalising[1], there has also been a distinct intensification of communal identity politics.[2] This has not only nurtured the well-known rise of a highly chauvinistic Hindu nationalism, but has also led more generally to an increased visibility of religious difference in Indian cities through divergences in forms of dress and bodily aesthetics, spectacular public manifestations, increasing residential segregation and architectural differentiation. Despite the fact that the dramatic transformations of India's cities have been receiving extensive attention, this particular element of India's changing urban fabric has been much less studied. This is in large part because those most interested in neoliberalisation and global cities – geographers, urbanists and sociologists – have historically had little interest in religion, even as those who have been most interested in religion as it is lived in cities – notably, though not exclusively, anthropologists – have until recently had little interest in theorising the (global) city

and (neoliberal) urbanity as such.[3] And yet religion is deeply entangled with the forces of urban change: not only has urban religion in India been highly responsive to the social, economic and political spaces opened up by neoliberal deregulation but at moments it has played a formative role in giving shape to innovations in urban politics, forms of sociability, economic relations and the built environment. Correspondingly, existing religious formations have not only been transformed by India's globalising cities but have themselves contributed significantly to shaping the forms and fabric of this new urbanity.

This chapter will look at one very specific example of such a formative transformation: the Siddhivinayak Temple in Mumbai.[4] In unpacking the relation between this temple and its urban environment, the larger interplay between religion, politics and urbanity under neoliberalisation will begin to be sketched. Given the short amount of space, this will not be done exhaustively, but rather suggestively: by way of proposing the extent to which religious buildings are shaped by and shape the city within which they reside, the globalisation of which they partake and the neoliberal contradictions they imbibe.

Locating Siddhivinayak

Siddhivinayak is Mumbai's richest temple and one of its most spectacular (plate 9), a place where Bombay, Mumbai and India both come together and apart.[5] Each day it hosts more than 100,000 visitors who come to see and be seen by Ganesh. On Tuesdays, the most auspicious day to visit, the number may reach 200,000.[6] The anonymity of this mass of visitors, snaking in curving lines outside the building, is regularly pierced by spectacular self-displays from famous film stars, politicians and sports icons, some arriving barefoot and accompanied by a barrage of cameras, along with visits from infamous rape and terrorist suspects whose movements and prayers the media report faithfully. Visited by people from virtually all castes, religions, classes, linguistic and regional groups, Siddhivinayak is widely seen and presented as an iconic embodiment of Mumbai and its cosmopolitan pluralism.

This, however, is a recent development. Siddhivinayak began as a tiny temple in 1801, housing a small Ganesh statue and little more, continuing in that way for a long time. Built by a childless widow, Mrs. Deubai Patil of nearby Matunga, so that other childless women might go to Ganesh for help, its dome was so low it was largely overshadowed from a distance by

a grove of banana, breadfruit, drumstick and jamun trees. Inside it was so small that there was no space for the traditional circumambulation of the idol. For many of these early years, it had perhaps eight or nine regular devotees, and even by 1900 it did not draw more than 125 visitors on festival days. The building itself was part of a complex covering 2,550 square metres that included a rest house and a building in which the owner lived, a lake built to supply water, and two tall *deepmalas* (light pillars). After Independence, the number of visitors began to grow, and in 1954 the temple was rebuilt. But still it made nothing like the impression of Mahalaxmi temple, which was far grander at the time. Yet by 1965, even as the city itself was rapidly expanding, so many visitors were visiting the temple that there began to be long queues. Ten years later, the crowds were so great that it was difficult to even enter the temple and see the idol, while each year the number of visitors continued to expand exponentially. By 1988, plans were drawn up for a completely new structure, which was then built in the early 1990s.

In considering how to go about drawing up a new structure, it was decided that the most exemplary predecessor was the 1,000-year old Shiva Temple in Ambarnath. What becomes clear in comparing the two temples with each other is that Siddhivinayak offers a tremendously modernised, abstracted version of this classic. Most striking immediately when looking at Siddhivinayak are the smooth angularities of its rounded ridges, which contrast strongly with the textured, highly carved, "narrative" surface of the Shiva temple. Just as striking is the fact that the Shiva temple's local black stone has been replaced with a lighter coloured one. In this sense, where the historical Shiva temple at Ambernath offers a blend of North and South Indian temple styles commensurate which its Deccan (mid-West Indian) location, Siddhivinayak offers one of Western (post) modernist and Eastern Deccan aesthetics: a very contemporary urban rewriting of rural religious inheritance, deeply embedded in a particular aesthetics of neoliberal (post)modernity. This entails not only a move from the country to the city and from the past to the present, but also – as will be discussed below – from the (post)colonial regional to the neoliberal global, from the private to the public, from idealist politics to realist, and from the material to the "ethereal".

A good starting point is to consider the temple's specific locations: in Mumbai and in the virtual urban that is the web. In Mumbai-on-the-ground, Siddhivinayak is located in Prabhadevi, an area that has become one of the prime neighbourhoods for expensive real estate. Situated in the geographical centre of the city, Prabhadevi's population has shifted since

the last great mill strike of 1982 from working-class migrant mill work-ers to upper middle-class multinational businesses and their employees. While many of the mill buildings still stand, they long ago stopped being profitable and were closed down or converted to malls, restaurants and discos, even as many of the workers have been forced to move elsewhere. This shift in the social, material and economic logic of the neighbourhood is crucial to understanding the place of Siddhivinayak in the city, in west-ern India and in India at large.

The traumatic end to the strike of 1982 left 150,000 workers unem-ployed, pushing them into much more precarious and informal labour and housing conditions. There has been extensive thoughtful research on the ways in which this shaped the lives of workers and its deep sig-nificance not only to the political economy of Bombay but to its social, economic and political development since then (to begin with, see Ra-maswamy 1988; Van Wersch 1992; D'Monte 2002; Chandavarkar 2003). Most often, however, these developments are read within a local, munici-pal framework, relative to the power politics of political parties, labour unions, Communist and Hindu nationalist movements, and business in-terests. Just as crucial, however, as Arvind Rajagopal (2011) has argued, is the way in which the 1982 strike – which would so change Siddhivinayak's neighbourhood – marked a vital shift in the political logic and method of the Indian state after the Emergency:

> In the aftermath of the Emergency there occurred a profound politi-cal reorientation of the existing model of developmental politics … The change meant a shift away from the Nehruvian focus on the economy as the crucial arena of nation-building, involving labour as the key modal-ity of citizenship. Instead, culture and community became categories that gained political salience in the period of economic liberalization. In the process, there was a redistribution of the places where political conflict occurred, besides election campaigns. In the period leading to the Emergency, industrial conflict was perhaps the key arena regulated by the state where citizens could express dissent and organize collec-tively … After the Emergency, politically significant forms of conflict that occurred around organized labour drastically diminished and thereafter new channels grew for the expression of conflict. (Ibid: 1005)

In extensive detail, Rajagopal documents the ways in which in the course of the Emergency, the state decreasingly asserted and justified its political authority through its commitment to development via economic inter-

vention – in a nation of citizen-workers – and increasingly through its commitment to the market and to citizens conceived as consumers making choices that would reflect their (emerging) middle class and cultural identities. In this way, the key subject of the state began to shift from the worker to the consuming middle class. In practical terms, this meant that after the Emergency, the state increasingly sided with business over labour. The effect of this on labour relations in the Bombay textile mills and, subsequently, on the urban environment in which they were embedded and which they sustained, is all too clear. Today the mill towers, long the distinctive mark of Prabhadevi, are increasingly over-towered by the luxurious, exorbitantly priced skyscrapers rising all about them.

The conspicuous wealth of Siddhivinayak shows clearly the extent to which it has managed to negotiate this shift much more successfully than the erstwhile textile workers who for so many decades were its neighbours. Rising up even higher subsequent to their demise, Siddhivinayak is a very impressive structure – six stories tall, with stacked ridges on the rising outer walls that are topped by 48 gold-plated crowns on the roof whose visual effect is that of a self-confident fortress. Inside, there is an elevator between the large kitchen on the second floor and the sanctum sanctorum; closed-circuit internal TV for security reasons; an IT and media centre; a conference area and library; and offices for the chairman, executive officer and others. In addition, solar panels on the roof make the temple electrically self-sufficient. By the entry to the temple there is a sophisticated security system, while the temple itself has its own security personnel. In other words, in the context of Mumbai's rather unpredictable electrical, security, welfare and communications relays, the temple has ensured both its self-provision and self-preservation.

At the same time, the transformation of Siddhivinayak partakes of a much more comprehensive pattern of transformation in religious buildings to be found all along the Konkan (Central West Indian) coastline. Up until several decades ago, while there were significant monumental religious buildings to be found throughout this area, the majority of religious buildings were small and unassuming, blending easily into their environment. Just as the people living in the Konkan in their public life widely shared surnames, clothes, food habits, rituals and the Marathi language irrespective of their communal identity (whether Brahmins, Kolis, Bohras, Parsees, Jains or Jews), so their religious buildings were similarly interchangeable (Dalvi & Dalvi 2006).[7] They served first and foremost "as functional objects for active reverence, not as iconic image builders for a particular community". On the exterior, they include no overt symbols of

faith "and one could easily be mistaken for another". Only their interior spaces differ: it is only once one enters that one sees whether one is in a mosque, temple, derasar, agiary or synagogue. They are preeminently domestic in style, contemplative, urbane, syncretic and self-similar, not only to each other, but to the residential housing around them.

In the last thirty years, however, the style of religious architecture has begun to change drastically through the combined effects of new wealth, new building materials and new identity politics. In a highly unregulated and ad-hoc fashion, the domestic (public) religious buildings are being razed and displaced by distinctive monumental ones that not only tower over the surrounding streets but clearly advertise their religious affiliation. Burgeoning real estate prices throughout the area, driven by developments in Bombay/Mumbai, have led to a ferocious property rush and building boom. Many residents read this as a sign of upward mobility, an "upgrade in one's living condition and environment". From the perspective of heritage and urban cohesiveness, however, these new buildings constitute a drastic rupture marked by "monumental shikharas, minarets or domes all built in the technology of reinforced concrete, all expressing a larger than life semantic, quite without aesthetic precedent, where big is big for its own sake". This is a transformation that is rarely self-reflexive – relative to the heritage that is being abandoned – even as it is intensely aspirational. Notably, this is the same process that much residential housing is undergoing, even as this process of architectonic erasure and displacement by contemporary monumentality is to be seen far beyond the Konkan, throughout India and Asia more generally.[8] In other words, the very monumentality of Siddhivinayak makes it quite un-exceptional and highly representative of the urban transformations in which it is embedded.

This is the case not only with regard to its monumentality but also its self-sufficiency. Indeed, Siddhivinayak functions very much like the host of gated communities that have been springing up throughout the city – that is, the modernity, wealth and imposing size of Siddhivinayak and those of the new high-rise apartment buildings pushing up around it both literally and metaphorically reflect back on each other. This effect is heightened by the fact that apartments in those high-rises are literally advertised as having a "temple view". Darshan from your kitchen window! In exchange we could say, for the cosmopolitan, elite "darshan" the new developments themselves lend the temple in their midst. Likewise the apartment in the building next door that has a direct view of Ganesh in the sanctum sanctorum sells for a higher price than the neighbouring apartments, despite their equal physical proximity to the temple. More

generally, all the advertising boards in the vicinity of the entrance to Siddhivinayak focus on financial services related to taxes and investment and the production of capital wealth.[9] Within this urban space, then, Enlightenment, status, wealth and security reflect on each other, both literally and metaphorically – called into life by a flurry of gazes from worshippers, passers-by, drivers on the road, upper-class neighbours, Bollywood stars and politicians – gazes all being cast simultaneously at Ganesh while seeking to receive his eyes and watching each other.

Transmitting Siddhivinayak

Indeed, Siddhivinayak has been incredibly resourceful and creative in finding as many ways as possible to multiply the transmission of darshan[10] to as many people as possible, including through the gold on its roof that is said to transmit darshan to those passing by far away in cars. This innovation is particularly noteworthy since the Shiva temple at Ambarnath on which Siddhivinayak is modeled is distinctive for *not* having a roof. In the process, Siddhivinayak itself benefits from the waiting people's effect and affect – the effect of masses of people *as an iconic image of the demotic* in its everyday guise (as a crowd) waiting in line at Siddhivinayak's doorway. That is, Siddhivinayak's representative status for the city does not come from its close relation to the mills and its workers that were the industrial heart of Bombay but rather derives from the temple's ability today to mobilise people of all classes and backgrounds from across the city, the nation and the world to come to its courtyard and to pass their money and gold through the temple's coffers. The internet and India's non-resident diasporic business and migrant communities (especially in the US and Canada) play a crucial role here. While Siddhivinayak stays in place – in fact, asserts its presence, authority and importance through its quite impressive ability to embody, enclose and remain unmoved in space – its survival depends on the massive movement of people, money, images, sounds, exchanges and worship. At the same time, the (individualised) movie stars and politicians who visit the temple, and in the process bypass the waiting masses on their way to the fast-track VIP entrance for the rich and famous, only further reinforce the demotic nature of the crowd. There is a mirroring and an echoing back and forth between the "religious" darshan transmitted via Ganesh by the Siddhivinayak temple and the economic, political, celebrity and demotic "darshan" transmitted in turn to Siddhivinayak temple when it

takes in and becomes the object of what we might call the "charismatic aura" of its everyday and privileged visitors.

In line with this, Siddhivinayak temple has hired one of the foremost IT companies in India to create and run its internet site. On the website they have a live darshan (viewing of the *aarti* ritual when the light of lit wicks is offered to Ganesh) that is webcast which gets 4 million hits a month. In addition, there is online booking of *pujas* (prayer rituals) and delivery of *prasad* (sweets consumed by devotees after first being offered to the deity) both within India and abroad (via FedEx or other courier services). There are several ways that patrons can make donations to the temple: Union Bank of India, IndusInd Bank, BillDesk, ICICI Bank NRI Services, Remit2India, Itz Cash or Wallet 365. The temple has tie-ups with most of the major cellphone companies in the country for text alerts of prayers and *aartis*, downloads of Lord Ganesh wallpapers, ringtones, logos, e-cards and so on. In addition to the website and phone collaboration, the first popular film featuring Siddhivinayak temple has just been brought out and was promoted by the cricket star Sachin Tendulkar. Last but not least, the early morning rituals at the temple are at times broadcast live on television, also at Mumbai airport, making darshan available to all the travelers streaming by and through, allowing them in theory to carry its effect far into the rest of the world. In other words, the temple's ability to mobilise the bodies and the contributions of worshippers who come to receive darshan from Ganesh is complemented by its ability to mobilise disembodied elements of itself through the ether and through the vast electronic networks that circulate a rather spectral form of financial wealth (whose movements we at moments understand as little as we understand, with any surety, the divine).

At the same time, the temple's success also depends on its trustees understanding the changing logic by which such mobilisation takes place. As in other successful urban temples in contemporary India, Siddhivinayak's guardians and trustees have been highly astute religious entrepreneurs making full use of India's dynamic socio-economic, political, cultural and religious fields to transform the temple into a blessing on – and a generator of – tremendous wealth through the most modern technological, financial and celebrity relations. This includes as well their ability to negotiate with a state increasingly seeking to incorporate, rationalise and milk religious institutions by asserting the preeminence of state authority over religious authority. This they continue to do successfully. In the process, Siddhivinayak's trustees have gone so far as to displace the original shrine, twice, along with the hereditary temple guardian who, it is said,

languishes around the corner. In other words, the better Siddhivinayak mobilises, the better it can stay in place and the better it can displace the "Siddhivinayaks" and guardians that preceded it: architectonically, socially, economically and politically.

Contesting Siddhivinayak

Now I want to focus on one specific moment in January 2007 when a small but strident Hindu nationalist group called the Hindu Janajagruti Samiti (HJS) held a demonstration outside Siddhivinayak Temple.[11] They were protesting a law newly proposed by the Maharashtra Law Commission that would give the state government control of Hindu temples and religious institutions. The ostensible motivation for the law had been a stampede at another temple during which more than 200 people were killed. While the state asserted that control of temple arrangements would allow it to better ensure the safe organisation of mass events, the possibility of gaining access to generous flows of religious donations could not help but play an important role as well. Rather than appreciating the support of the HJS, however, the chairman of the Siddhivinayak Temple Trust – Subhash Mayekar – left his office on the third floor to come outside and forcefully chase the demonstrators away. He asked them why they were provoking people and why they were waving black flags "*when the Trust did so many good deeds for society and for children*". It was in fact "*the HJS that was oppressing Hindus*", Mayekar told them, by hindering the good work the temple does and, implicitly and more generally, through their nationalist orthodoxy. "Our temple is open to followers of all religions." One of the demonstrators then responded that everyone had been reading about the Trust's mismanagement of funds, it had been in all the papers and the HJS had spread this information far and wide. Mayekar, meanwhile, upped the ante by threatening to "issue final notice to" the demonstrators.

What initially might have been a protest by the Hindu nationalist HJS on behalf of the temple trust turned out to be as much a protest *against* the trust as it was against the proposed law. And what had appeared to be a political-religious issue turned out to be as much an economic one. Some years earlier, in fact, the (much larger) Hindu nationalist VHP had helped to instigate a formal investigation of the Siddhivinayak trusts' dispensation of temple funds. Crucially, this was four years *after* the (Hindu nationalist) Shiv Sena chairman of the trust had been replaced by an ap-

pointment from the Congress Party. This investigation revealed explicitly what everyone knew: that there was no oversight or procedural discipline for allotting temple money. Correspondingly, significant funds had been directed to the funds of organisations belonging to powerful political figures at the local and state level and were used to cover the expensive medical treatments of others.

Notably, controversies about the misappropriation of temple funds are widespread across India today, just as economic controversy has been endemic to the politics of temples since colonialism. As Jackie Assayag (1990) has argued, it was precisely in seeking to achieve a rupture between the "religious", on the one hand, and the "economic" and "political" on the other hand, that colonial authorities exhibited their blindness to – and became entangled in – "networks formed by solidarities, as well as by conflicts". This was a process that reified temples as institutions, what we might call a form of institutional fetishism. That is, the colonial authorities treated temples as independent establishments (which they were not by any means) in need of being "made uniform according to a common (ecclesial) model" while simultaneously assuming their administration. In the process, they certainly transformed temples, their place in society and their functioning. Yet at the same time, in becoming the manager of the Hindu temple,

> ... the secular and democratic State assumed administration of a patrimonial institution ... [that] continued to be largely based on a hierarchical social order in which power is determined by status, the exact opposite of the socio-political principles governing modern politics. (79)

In other words, in the very process of "reforming" temple administration and claiming authority over it, the colonial State incorporated into its system of governance an entity organised according to principles and processes deeply at odds with a secular, democratic order. Once the postcolonial State took over where the colonial State had left off, India took over this fundamental contradiction. And this is what we see at play here, with the HJS deploying democratic means to critique the temple's failure of democratic and bureaucratic justice. Needless to say, the HJS makes use of democratic logic and repertoires *instrumentally*, the better to further its own un-democratic, Hindu-nationalist ends.

The activities of the HJS are part of a much broader – national, international and transnational – rise in nationalist populism that we are seeing on every continent across the globe. Crucially, such mobilisation

is meant to displace established elites while securing the privileges of national(ist) culture. This process is realised through the global mobilisation of political, economic and ideological networks in the interests of establishing a new local elite, advertised as loyal to indigenous demotic-vernacular culture, history and people. This process entails by and large – in places as distant from one another as Holland, South Africa, the United States and India – the incorporation and "solidification" of formerly politically irrelevant and diffusely marginal, under-educated, "native" populations as coherent audible and visible collective players or identities in the democratic process. Such mobilisation generates significant socio-political instability, even as it is carried out in the name of restraining or reversing the illicit and dangerous mobilities of elites and aliens (with regards to everything from money, to sex, to loyalty). In other words, populist mobilisation is a mobilisation that masks its own process of bringing-into-motion and the irreversible socio-political and cultural transformations this creates by claiming to speak in the interests of a past and a culture that through populist mobilisation are constituted as immobile.

Critically, with regard to the issue of populist nationalism, Siddhivinayak Temple has invested a tremendous amount in promoting pluralism as one of its defining and authorising qualities. Perhaps the most sensitive, critical example is the fact that when the temple was comprehensively expanded and renovated in the early 1990s, it hired Muslim artists to carve the frame (Makhar) of the sanctum sanctorum. On its internet site, the temple presents this as an "interesting ... inter-religious aspect" and proudly notes that these artisans have also worked in Mecca and Medina. Subsequently, in the next sentence it then mentions that the crown of the temple was made by a Marathi artisan. The building, then, is presented as literally carrying within its body – through not only the religious identity but also the religion-specific styles – the skills and traditions of the craftsmen who made it, the very pluralism that it celebrates in its visitors, and by implication in Mumbai as a whole.

Significantly, however, at the same time as the temple goes out into the world – even presenting itself as encompassing the world – it protects itself from that world. A few years ago, after an attack on another temple, it secured itself by building a tall "wall" around its premises, thoroughly disrupting and preventing the movement of pedestrians, in order to prevent possible terrorist attacks. In addition, the temple has airport-like security and scanning devices at its entrance and an internal CCTV system to monitor all visitors continuously. Regular devotees furthermore have

the option of using a biometric identity card in order to gain quicker entry – much like the privileged fast-track border passages at airports. A further security measure involves the temple working together with Israeli security to train its very own security personnel. This is in line with the general interest in Mumbai for Israeli security measures: a trip was recently made to study the Israeli airport in order to apply those principles in Mumbai. This is an extension of the extremely close intelligence and military collaboration between India and Israel (and America). So there is a critical slippage here between the logic of the international airport, the logic of (in)security and violence when traveling, and the logic of the temple. On the one hand, there is the transmission of darshan to the airport, and more generally the international dispersion of darshan much like the airport's international dispersion of travellers. At the same time, the temple takes on the safeguarding – visually, structurally and procedurally from the airport – as that safeguarding is being heavily shaped by the safeguarding in Israel, in its conflict with the Palestinians, and more generally by the American war on terror.[12] So we see here that Siddhivinayak temple, in the process of elaborating on the long history of Ganesh worship in India, inserts itself into global economic, telecommunications, media and security circuits as these are being shaped by international geopolitics.

Energising Siddhivinayak

One of the most important points here – if we consider Siddhivinayak in relation to the growth of national and transnational circuits of populist nationalism since the 1980s – is that the popularity (and wealth) of Siddhivinayak as a temple was growing in parallel with that of Shiv Sena. At the very moment that the Shiv Sena was ascending on a platform of fierce anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric and violence – in fact, at the very moment this exploded in the Mumbai riots of 1992/93 – Siddhivinayak was built in an explicitly syncretic, modern "Bombay" style. The tremendous appeal of this temple to both the elite – politicians from all sides of the spectrum (including Bal Thakeray himself, the charismatic head of the Shiv Sena) to actors and businessmen – and the masses from within and beyond Bombay suggests that when considering the transformation of Bombay into Mumbai, what is involved is the *simultaneous* rise of a chauvinistic and cosmopolitan Hindu religious politics. At moments in tension with each other, as in the conflict between the temple and the

HJS, there is also a crucial relation of overlap, intrication, shared audiences and occasions of visiting.

We have become very much used to (and invested in) opposing "Bombay" and "Mumbai" in our narration of the city's development through time – and this opposition is with good reason when we consider the amount of violence, blood, death, dispossession and increasing segregation that is pulling apart the city. But it is as important to also invest in an understanding of their ongoing simultaneity. Rather than "Bombay" stopping when "Mumbai" began, "Bombay" is alive and well to this day. The critical point, then, is that the site of Bombay has shifted from the "secular" *tout court*. The advent of "Mumbai" marks not the defeat of cosmopolitanism as such but the partial exhaustion of secularism as the *means* to urban, globalised cosmopolitanism. Instead, we see that the energy – the site of innovation and mobility – has shifted to the religious in all its variations: the chauvinistic, the elite, the inclusive and the grassroots, the material and the 'ether-real'.

At the same time, notwithstanding the temple's demotic success, its global dispersal of spiritual enrichment and its explicit (international) ideology of multicultural tolerance, it also reenacts and sustains highly undemocratic, local structures of inequality, dispossession and impoverishment that it inherited from Bombay, as well as the ones to which liberalised, corporatised, multi-financed Mumbai gives birth. Much of the violence here is neither physical nor consciously directed and in fact contradicts much of the explicit intent of the temple but emerges through the temple's success at positioning itself in contemporary, transnationally mobile spiritual, celebrity and real estate circuits according to a logic of visual and political consumption.

Speaking more generally, this suggests that we reread the history of the city not as the ascendancy of modern secular urbanity – nor as the secularisation, conversion and rationalisation of the backward (rural) migrant as it is so often read – but as the messy assemblage of the secular and the religious, as these contest and elaborate the present and the past, the self and the other, the here and there continually in relation to each other. In this way, Siddhivinayak allows us to attempt to read democratic liberty and its violence in relation to our world's mobile religious, economic and demotic technologies. Traveling with great energy, setting foot on the ground at sites far and near, such technologies time and again feed upon the structural interplay between equality, (dis)possession, consumption and desire in our brave new world.

Notes

1   The concept of neoliberalisation is notoriously slippery and contradictory. For the discussion in this chapter, the recent work of Neil Brenner, Nik Theodore and Jamie Peck has been particularly useful. See especially Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore (2002); Jamie Peck (2010); Jamie Peck, Nik Theodore and Neil Brenner (2009); and Neil Brenner (2013).

2   On the relation between neoliberalisation and religious politics, see Arvind Rajagopal (2001) and Stuart Corbridge and John Harriss (2000). The literature on Hindu nationalism is extensive. For an overview, see Christophe Jaffrelot (2005). See also, Thomas Blom Hansen (1999) and (2001).

3   So while there exists a wide and growing range of anthropological studies of urban religious communities, sites and practices, these largely refrain from considering how this transforms our understanding of contemporary urbanity. The city essentially forms the setting and background to the study of religious community, sociability and politics. In this way, theories of urban change and studies of urban religion have largely led separate lives. Yet there are quite interesting possibilities from within anthropology for relating these fields, particularly in terms of those anthropologists addressing neoliberalism and cities. The work of Comaroff and Comaroff (2001) on millennial capitalism as a form of culture rife with enchantment, magical thinking and casino relations offers fruitful opportunities for thinking through what we might call millennial urbanism; Loïc Wacquant's more structural conception of neoliberalisation as the re-deployment of the state in the interest of impressing the market on the citizen (2008, 2009) – a process that engenders a glorification of the penal and practices of urban seclusion – offers us the means to consider how urban space and relations are being transformed through governments of insecurity that criminalise (Muslim) religious identities, sacralise consumption and desecrate the collective and the public; while Aihwa Ong's work on neoliberalism (2006) as a highly versatile tool of governance, subjectivity and subjectification has explicitly engaged both religion and cities, though not the relation between these two. These discussions cannot be incorporated here, but they are a very useful reminder of the variety of "religious" processes at work in neoliberalisation relative to the sociability, geography and governance of cities.

4   This paper is part of a long-term project on the politics of religion in postcolonial port cities – strategically juxtaposing Mumbai, New York and Amsterdam – in relation to globalisation and neoliberalisation. The substantive focus of this project is on religious buildings that range from the iconic to the (semi-)invisible, while the theoretical engages the politics of religion

under neoliberal urbanity. The argument being presented in this chapter, then, draws on research, thinking and writing that I am also doing on New York and Amsterdam, but which for reasons of space cannot be elaborated here. During this time, I have done significant research on Siddhivinayak and Mumbai as presented in national and local media and (more recently) social media and, over the past four years, have visited Mumbai six times, each time for ten to fourteen days, during which I frequented Siddhivinayak and other religious buildings regularly, as well as talking extensively to a wide range of scholars, journalists, activists, students, writers and many others I encountered during my work and travels in Mumbai. Since my concern centres on the dynamic relation between religion, politics and global neoliberalisation as this takes place through the built environment rather than on the experiences of pilgrims and worshippers as such, I have not conducted ethnographic fieldwork in the temple itself. My concern instead is with the ways in which the actual building "performs" religion relative to the politics, economics, bodies and desires shaping and being shaped by Mumbai more broadly. See Markha Valenta (2011).

5   "Mumbai" displaced "Bombay" as the name of the city in 1995, in a shift that remains incomplete and contested. Carried out under the government of the Hindu nationalist and Marathi populist Shiv Sena, the transformation was meant to indicate a break with the colonial past and a strengthening of Marathi identity (Mumbai is the capital of Maharashtra, and roughly 30% of the city's population speaks Marathi as its first language). In many formal and informal accounts of the city, however, "Bombay" is deeply felt to encompass a heritage of pluralism, tolerance and urban comfort that is now experienced as making way for a city riven by communalist tensions, dramatically inadequate infrastructure, shrinking public space, nouveau riche vulgarity, rapacious extraction, political failure, out-of-control migration, environmental degradation and increasing criminality. In my reading of the history of Bom/Mum/bay/bai, these are not so much sequential urban modes but have been simultaneous from its earliest years. What shifts over time are the ways in which they have been given form and their dynamic relation to each other. This argument will be suggested here, while I am developing it more fully elsewhere.

6   There are no exact figures for the number of visitors to Siddhivinayak, but these figures are widely cited in media reports, newspaper articles and informal conversations with journalists and others.

7   My discussion here is strongly indebted to the research and findings of Dalvi & Dalvi. The document in my possession contains no pagination, so no page numbers are noted after citations.

8   Much has been written on this development. For an overview, see William S. Logan (2002). For an incisive and influential specific study, see Ackbar Abbas (1997).

9   This was the case on the multiple occasions that I visited.

10   Darshan, or 'blessing', literally means 'sight' or 'vision', and can be defined as the moment of interaction between the devotee and the devoted.

11   This account is based on the account given on the website of the HJS (31 January 2007). The account is credited to the local Mumbai (Marathi/Hindi web) newspaper *Dainak Sanatan Prabhat.* Unfortunately, no other media group seems to have reported on this event. Nonetheless, it is worth using because while some details in the account might vary from how other participants remember or experienced it, the general story line is a familiar one not only within India but also relative to the ways in which the politics of multiculturalism and populism have confronted each other across class lines in the Netherlands. It is precisely this dynamic in multicultural politics in world cities that my larger project is tracing, though more extensive research will be necessary to determine the precise ways in which this dynamic overlaps and diverges at these very different sites, Amsterdam and Mumbai. For now, the account here – read as something between fact and allegory – is sufficient to make the argument I present.

12   The 2008 attack on Mumbai has been critical in this regard but cannot be discussed here except to mention the vital point that attacks were on homologous sites which, like Siddhivinayak, combined transnational streams of mobility, iconicity, performativity: the Taj Mahal hotel, Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus Railroad Station (Victoria or "VC") and the Jewish Chabad centre.

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Plate 1   *The interior of the Downside Abbey Church*
Richard Irvine
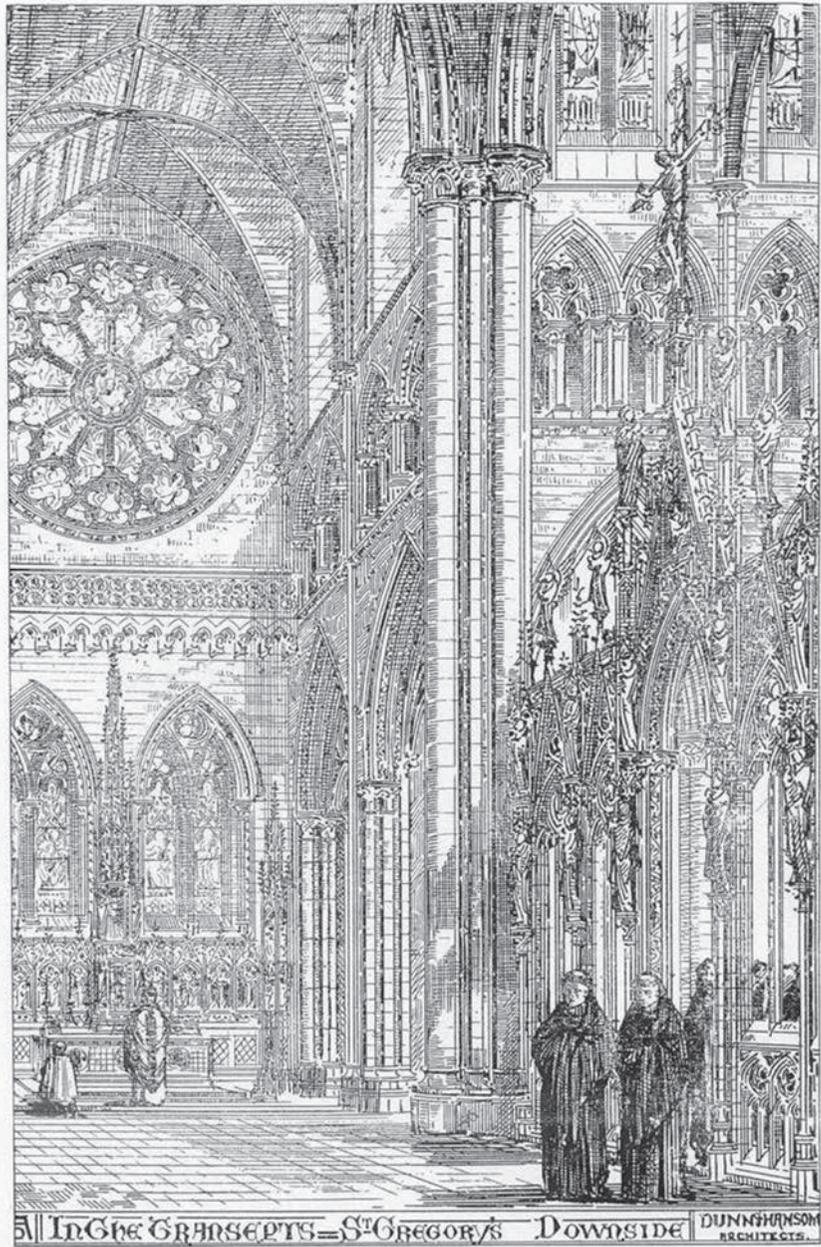
Plate 2   *The drawing prepared by Archibald Dunn and Edward Hansom
(1870s), complete with processions of tonsured monks, demonstrate
the medievalist imagination at work*

Plate 3   T*he Essalam mosque in Rotterdam-South*
Pooyan Tamimi Arab

Plate 4   T*he Essalam mosque in Rotterdam-South*
Oskar Verkaaik

Plate 5   *The Essalam mosque is located near major highways and railways connecting Rotterdam to the South of the Netherlands*
Oskar Verkaaik

Plate 6   *The altar of the* Igreja de São Francisco
Mattijs van de Port

Plate 7   *Detail of the ornamentation in the* Igreja de São Francisco
Mattijs van de Port

Plate 8   *The Assumption Cathedral in the center of Vladimir, Russia*
Tobias Köllner

Plate 9   *The Siddhivinayak Temple in Mumbai*
Markha Valenta

413. Afrique Occidentale - SOUDAN - DJENNÉ — Ruines de l'ancienne Mosquée

Collection générale Fortier, Dakar

Plate 10   *Postcard of the ruins of the former Djenné Mosque*
Photographer Edmond Fortier, circa 1906, just before the reconstruction of the existing mosque;
photographic reproduction courtesy of the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde, Leiden

Plate 11   *Postcard of the reconstructed Djenné Mosque published after World War Two*
Photographic reproduction courtesy of the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde, Leiden

façade est
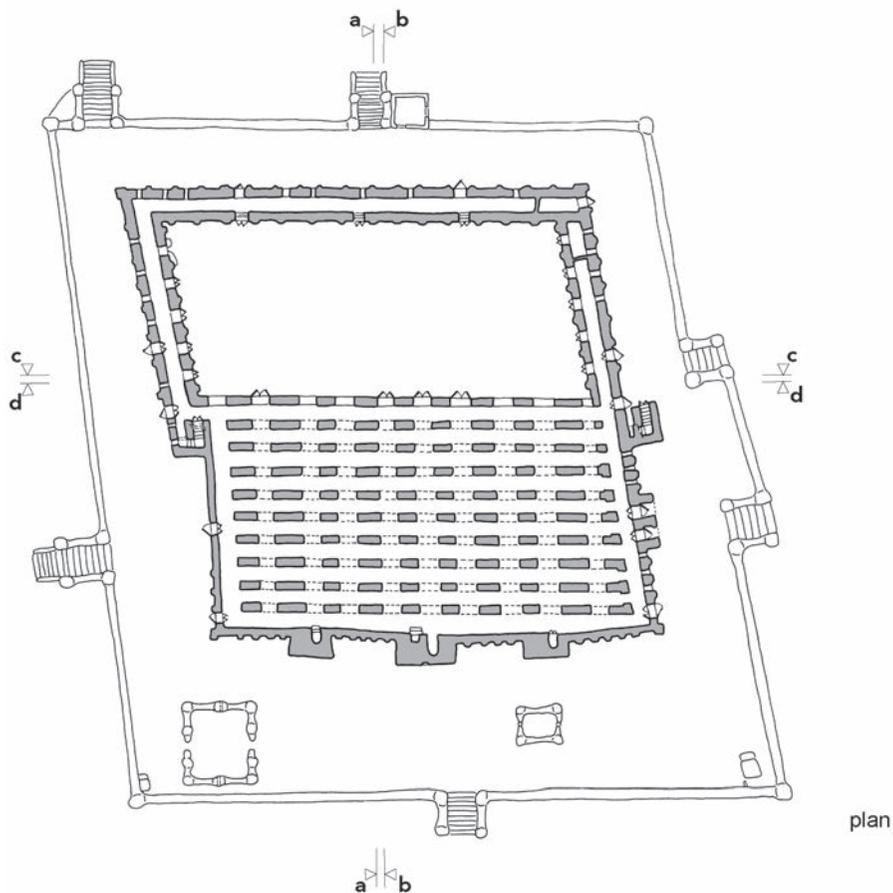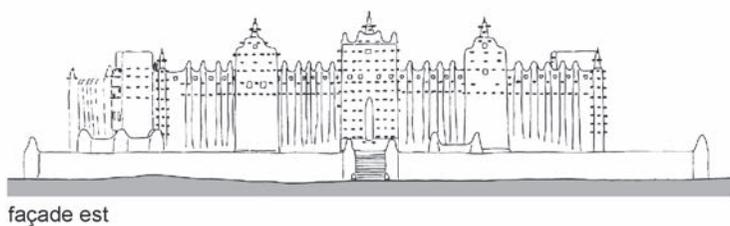
plan

Plate 12 *East elevation and floor plan of the Djenné Mosque*

Plate 13   *Squadrons of boys delivering basket-loads of mud for re-claying the
Mosque*
Trevor Marchand

Plate 14   *Re-claying the Djenné Mosque*

TREVOR MARCHAND

Plate 15   *An early stage in the AKTC restoration works*
Joseph Brunet-Jailly

Plate 16   *View of the restored Djenné Mosque*
Joseph Brunet-Jailly

Plate 17   *View on Albaicin from the Alhambra; the new mosque of Granada is in the center in between the church of San Nicolas (left) and the convent (right)*
Oskar Verkaaik

Plate 18   *The mihrab of the new mosque of Granada*
Oskar Verkaaik

Plate 19   *The façade of the Florence synagogue*
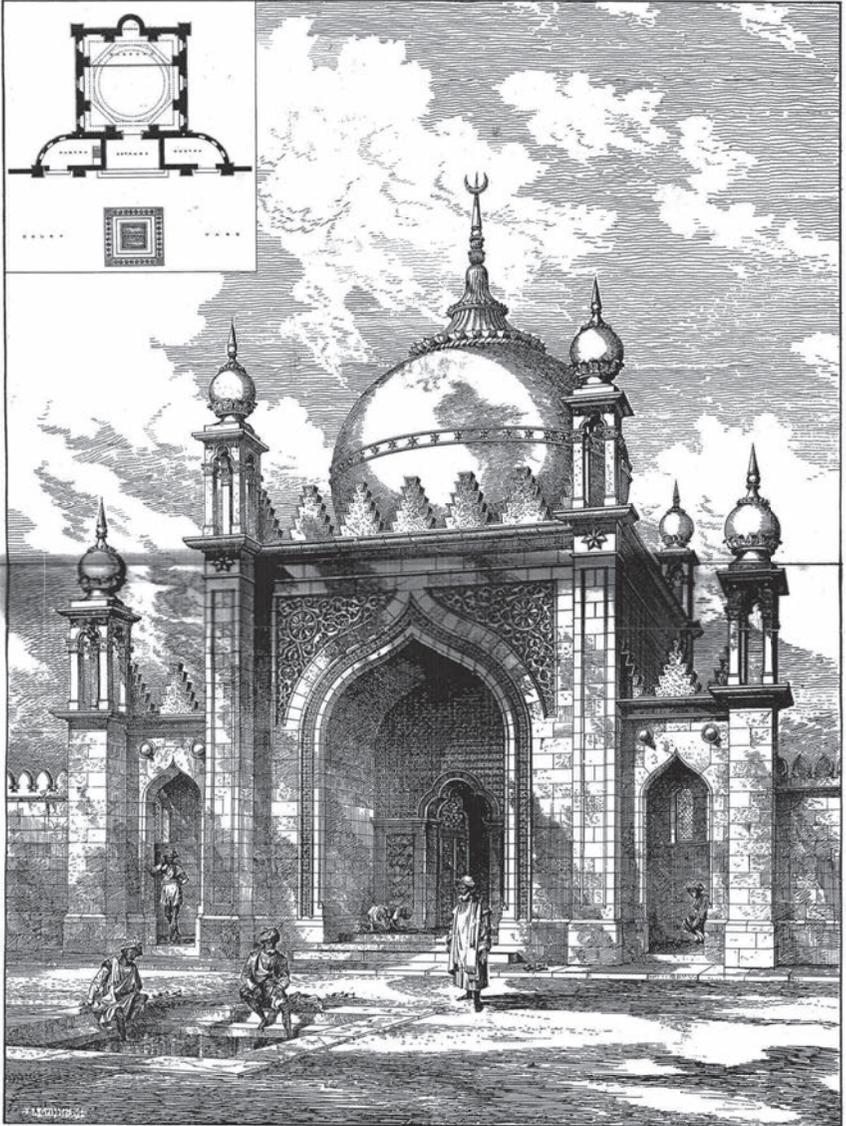
THE MOSQUE · WOKING · W·I·CHAMBERS·ARCHT

Plate 20   *Woking Mosque original drawing*

Plate 21   *Wimbledon Mosque*
Shahed Saleem

Plate 22   *Ghamkol Shariff Mosque, Birmingham*
Shahed Saleem

Plate 23   *Fazl Mosque, Southfields London*
    Shahed Saleem

Plate 24   *Regent's Park Mosque*
    Shahed Saleem

The Djenné Mosque

World Heritage and Social Renewal in a West African Town

Trevor H.J. Marchand

Following a historical and architectural overview of the Djenné Mosque, this chapter raises questions of ownership and control of cultural heritage. The Djenné Mosque is reputed to be the largest single mud structure in the world, and each year during the dry winter season the town's population festively re-plasters its surfaces in an exhilarating one-day ceremony. Traditionally, an auspicious date for the ceremony was agreed upon by a group of wise and trusted elders, and the association of masons lent their blessing. In 2005, however, control over scheduling the event was assumed by a festival planning committee with vested interests in attracting foreign tourists and international development aid to Djenné. The Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) is one such donor, and in 2009 they oversaw a massive conservation project for the mosque, stripping its walls, roof and buttresses of accumulated layers of plaster in order to restore the building to its "original" form and to address points of structural weakness. Debates and discussions ensued among conservationists, material scientists and town residents over the long-term preservation of the building, and it was rumoured that one group of foreign experts even proposed the application of a more permanent protective layer that would render the annual re-plastering ceremony obsolete.

Based on ethnographic research, this chapter will argue that such scientific solutions and Western-framed conservation agendas neglect the important social function played by the communal re-plastering effort. The annual ceremony renews bonds among the town's citizens and between the various town quarters. It also provides an important forum for youth to learn about their architectural heritage and religious identity, and it introduces young men to basic building techniques that they can apply in the upkeep of their own homes. In sum, the Djenné Mosque is more than a place for Muslim prayer or an object of architectural interest: rather, it is the focal point around which Djenné society, identity and knowledge has been continually renewed and reinforced. According to Djenné master mason Konbaba Tennepo: 'Each year the people of Djenné

congregate to re-plaster the mosque, and the event rekindles love and understanding between them. I don't want that to stop. If you replace the mud plaster with tiles or cement, it will all stop! But with mud, people have in mind that they must come back, from wherever they are, to participate.'[1]

The contents of this chapter are based on published material, my long fieldwork with the masons of Djenné conducted between 2000 and 2002, and on data gathered during many subsequent visits to the town, including documentary film shoots in 2005 and 2012.[2] I first visited Djenné as a traveller in 1989. At that time, Mali was only just beginning to emerge from two decades of devastating drought. President Moussa Traoré continued to control the country with an iron grip, and travel was difficult at best. It was possible, however, for non-Muslims to visit the mosque and, for a small fee paid to its guardian, to access the roof and delight in the panoramic view over the (then meagre) offerings of the Monday market. When I returned 11 years later I found hand-painted signs posted at the bottom of each staircase to the mosque reading '*Entrée Interdit aux non-Musulmans*'. The popular explanation for this change in policy was that a European photographer had been granted permission by local authorities to conduct a fashion shoot, but the models were caught scandalously changing costumes inside the mosque. Allegedly this violation of Djenné's most sacred space nearly resulted in a riot, and the strict exclusion of non-Muslims continues to this day with only a few exceptions.

Since starting fieldwork, I have been most fortunate to visit the mosque on two separate occasions. During my second season of laying bricks and mixing plasters alongside the masons, I was invited to join an expert team of Dutch conservators who were taken on a full tour of the building by the director of Djenné's Cultural Mission.[3] The team of Dutch architects, archaeologists and engineers had ambitiously undertaken the conservation of nearly one hundred historical and architecturally significant mud houses in the old town (see Bedaux et al. 2000), and their privileged access to the mosque, and especially its prayer hall, was granted in recognition of the long, dedicated work they were conducting. My second opportunity arose while shooting a documentary film in 2005 that included scenes of the annual re-claying of the mosque. During this event, foreign observers and dazzled tourists were welcomed into the grand courtyard and its surrounding galleries and were allowed to climb the slippery staircases in the north and south towers to the roof but, understandably, access to the prayer hall remained restricted.

Following a brief history of the mosque, the chapter presents an architectural description of the building and an account of the annual re-

claying ritual. I then describe a rather tragic and violent event in 2006 that brought the struggle over Djenné's cultural heritage, and particularly its mosque, into graphic relief. The chapter then concludes with a final discussion of heritage politics and the present challenges facing the preservation of the Great Mosque.

A brief history

The Djenné Mosque is arguably the most famous architectural monument in sub-Saharan Africa. Reputed to be the largest extant mud building on the planet, the complex of prayer hall, courtyard and perimeter galleries rests on a high plinth, towering over dense urban quarters and dominating the skyline of the vast, flat expanse of scrubland and riverine floodplain that encircles the island town. The mosque's foreboding walls are buttressed by rhythmically spaced *sarafar* pilasters and pierced by hundreds of protruding palm-wood *toron* spikes, all geometrically arranged like a cubist cactus. Three sturdy towers punctuate its eastern flank, providing a dramatic backdrop to the busy Monday market and orienting Djenné's prayers toward Mecca. Each of the towers terminates in a missile-like pinnacle capped gracefully by a gleaming white ostrich egg, and the terrace rooftop of the complex is ringed by a high and curvaceously crenulated parapet wall.[4]

Residents are fiercely proud and protective of their mosque, and the building has long been pivotal to their collective identity as *Djennenké*, even when it stood in ruins during much of the nineteenth century (plate 10). After its rebuilding, the French glorified it as an exemplar of the "Sudanese style",[5] and its image circulated on the photographic postcards published by Edmond Fortier in 1906 and on colonial postage stamps of the French Sudan (Maas, Mommersteeg & Gardi 1995)[6] (plate 11). The new mosque also served as a prototype for other mosques, including those built in the towns of Mopti, San and Niono as well as in smaller villages throughout the Inland Niger Delta region. Curiously, the design for a mosque built after World War One in the southern French city of Fréjus, to serve garrisoned French West African soldiers, was also based on the Djenné Mosque (see Mommersteeg forthcoming).[7]

The appropriation of Djenné's architecture as a marker of regional culture and local tradition was perpetuated by Mali's postcolonial governments, and most concertedly by President Alpha Konaré (1992-2002) who made cultural heritage a fundamental part of his development strategy

(Arnoldi 2007; De Jorio 2003). Konaré subscribed to the idea that architecture is perhaps the most 'enduring feature of the cultural heritage and national identity of Mali', and that showcasing and celebrating distinctive buildings, such as Djenné's Mosque, is an effective means for 'promoting a "democratic form of citizenship"' (Rowlands 2007: 127-128). Indeed, the mosque has become a seminal icon of Mali's distinct world-class heritage on a global stage. As expressions of tangible and intangible heritage respectively, the mosque and its spectacular annual re-claying ceremony feed social and political imaginings of pre-colonial roots, authenticity and sustained tradition, while their integration into economies of tourism and development allow them to be productively 'brought into line with national ideologies of cultural uniqueness and modernity' (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004: 61).

Legend claims that the mosque stands on the site of the ancient palace of Koi Konboro, a local king ruling in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries who, according to al-Sadi's *Tarikh al-Sudan*, converted to Islam in CE 1180 (Hunwick 2003: 17-19). As his subjects followed suit and embraced Islam, the original town at nearby Djenné-Djeno, tainted by a long history of animist practices, was gradually abandoned and the population of traders, craftspeople, fisher folk and cultivators migrated three kilometres to the northwest and took up residence at Djenné's present site.[8] Today's masons claim that Koi Konboro's palace was built by the legendary figure, Mallam Idriss, teacher of masons and founder of the town's enduring architectural style. In his detailed and fascinating observations of life in Djenné, colonial administrator Charles Monteil recorded oral claims that Mallam Idriss was a Moroccan (1932: 195-196). Architect Labelle Prussin's fuller account explains that he arrived from Timbuktu with his brother Mallam Yakouba at the time of the Moroccan invasion in CE 1591 and built Djenné's first mosque (1986: 47; also Domian 1989: 56). Despite the incongruity between the alleged period of Koi Konboro's rule and the year of the Moroccan invasion, it is nevertheless maintained by residents that the king's converted palace served as the principal *masjid al-jum'a*, or Friday mosque, until the early nineteenth century.[9]

In 1818, Fulani Muslim Cheikou Amadou, presumably inspired by Uthman Dan Fodio's recent success in bringing "true" Islam to the Hausa states, instigated a momentous jihad that spread throughout the Inland Niger Delta. He soon founded the Macina Empire with its capital at Hamdallaye. A strategic target of Cheikou Amadou's military campaigns was the historical market and trading centre of Djenné where, in his youth, he had studied at one of the numerous Qur'anic schools. He admonished

its religious scholars for their laxity and syncretism, and for conducting trade in the mosque (Azarya 1980: 435, 443-444, 447). His Fulani troops invaded from the northeast and occupied Djenné, expropriating land in and around the town, dominating its political administration, and wielding a conservative brand of Islam that had a lasting impact on the urban fabric.[10] Cheikou Amadou, keenly aware of the pervasive anti-Fulani resistance and potential for uprising amongst Djenné's citizens (Azarya 1980: 446), ordered the closure of all neighbourhood mosques to prevent their use as rallying points (Monteil 1932: 151).[11] He later shut the doors to the Great Mosque, justifying his actions with claims that its sanctity had been stained in the sixteenth century by the corrupted practices of the occupying Moroccans (Ba & Daget in Bourgeois 1987: 56). They allegedly shed blood, sold fermented drink and engaged in licentious dancing therein (Bourgeois 1987: 56).

Chiekou Amadou's fundamentalist agenda banned 'games, music, and other signs of merriment', restricted 'consumption and any signs of luxury' and made participation in Friday prayer a mandatory duty (Azarya 1980: 447). Quite plausibly, his accusations of syncretism were directed at the kinds of religious, spiritual and magical customs that flourish today: local *marabouts* (religious scholars), for example, produce amulets (e.g. *gris-gris*) and recite benedictions (*gaara*) for paying clients (Mommersteeg 2011); craftspeople invoke powerful trade "secrets" (*sirri*) that blend so-called "white" Qur'anic knowledge (*bey-koray*) with "black" African knowledge (*bey-bibi*), and many people don protective devices (e.g. *kamba baakawal*) beneath clothing and wear blessed *korbo* rings on their fingers to defend against malevolent *djinn* or evil *aru-kuru* spirits (Marchand 2009). At the time of my fieldwork, individual citizens conceived of these activities as being entirely compatible with their identity as devout Muslims and with Djenné's widely acknowledged reputation as a holy town. And it is likely that their predecessors equally believed so in the face of their Fulani persecutors.

Cheikou Amadou's denunciation of music and his claims that dancing took place in the mosque may have been provoked by the drumming that today accompanies the annual re-claying of the structure. Vibrant rhythms serve to quicken the pace of work, tighten coordination between the hundreds of participating bodies, and transform this arduous task into a joyous celebration of community and accomplishment. In all likelihood, this tradition extends back well before the present era, and possibly before the arrival of the Fulani jihad. English painter and explorer Arnold Henry Savage Landor witnessed the building of the present mosque during his

travels across Africa, and wrote that 'drummers and flute-players stood gracefully under the shade of a tree, making the greatest possible noise in order to keep the workmen in good temper' (1907 vol. 2: 461).[12]

The Fulani leader could not lawfully order the direct demolition of Djenné's neighbourhood mosques since they were Islamic edifices. Instead, he artfully arranged for their rainspouts to be blocked, thereby allowing the mud structures to slowly erode and dissolve during the successive rainy seasons and to eventually collapse under the assault of natural forces. The same tactic was later exercised on the Great Mosque (Bourgeois 1987: 55-56). In its place, Cheikou Amadou erected a brand new congregational mosque on a spacious site located a short distance to the east of the old one. The building's plain rectilinear geometry accommodated greater numbers of worshippers, but its low ceiling and stark expression were carefully calculated to convey the Massina Fulani's conservative religious attitudes and to focus the believers' full attention on prayer.

The Fulani Empire was toppled in 1862 by another jihadist wave, this time arriving with Tukolor horsemen riding out from the Fouta Djallon Hills far to the west.[13] Three decades later, French troops, under the competent command of Colonel Louis Archinard, made inroads into the Western Sudan, gradually extending their grip over the Inland Niger Delta. On 12 April 1893, they took Djenné. Colonial forces established administrative control in the heart of the town where their *campement* buildings stand to the present day. Under their aegis, the bulk of trade – Djenné's lifeblood for nearly two millennia[14] – was transferred to the burgeoning town of Mopti, advantageously sited at the confluence of the Bani and Niger rivers. From then onwards, Djenné's prominence slowly waned, transforming this once-thriving centre into the remote and economically marginal backwater it is today.

The neighbourhood mosques were never rebuilt, and some former sites were transformed into small cemeteries. Reconstruction of the Great Mosque, however, was initiated in 1906 on the (by then) weatherworn ruins of Koi Konboro's original structure. The French razed Cheikou Amadou's ascetic mosque that same year and in its place they erected a *medersa* to school their new colonial subjects in both French and Arabic languages. The *medersa* site is now occupied by the Sory Ibrahim Thiocary elementary school with its formidable Djenné-style entrance gate elaborately clad in local clay tiles.[15] Though prominent members of the non-Fulani community colluded with the French in eliminating the Fulani mosque from the townscape, Bourgeois suggests that this conten-

tious deed, as well as the initiative to rebuild the original mosque, were successfully ascribed to the infidel Europeans. The satisfactory result for all parties concerned was that '[t]he French appeared generous, the anti-Peul[16] forces blame-less, and the Peul [i.e. Fulani] the helpless victims of an overwhelming foreign power' (1987: 60).

But, more than simply being accredited with initiating its rebuilding, the French also came to be popularly associated with designing, engineering and overseeing the reconstruction of the Great Mosque. According to Bourgeois (1987: 58), this attribution was first made by Landor (1907 vol. 2: 461), and shortly after was entrenched and embellished by French journalists and scholars.[17] The story of French authorship was subsequently adopted by the local Djennenké population and by Malian historians,[18] and further substantiated by Labelle Prussin who linked the design to the aesthetic rationale of the Ecole Polytechnique and to the influence of the great nineteenth-century French architect, theorist and restorer Eugène Viollet-le-Duc (1974, 1977, 1986).[19]

Jean-Louis Bourgeois' article on *The History of the Great Mosques of Djenné* (1987) furnishes an erudite account of the mix of local politics, social relations and cultural thinking that gave birth to a long-enduring conviction that the Great Mosque is a French creation. Therein he cogently contends that the present structure was designed, engineered and built not by the French but by local masons with logistical and economic support from a resident population who were animated by a jubilant spirit of independence from their former Fulani oppressors. Bourgeois' thorough archival research turned up no evidence to support claims that the French were involved with the building beyond granting authorisation, assisting in the conscription of labour (which also serviced the construction of their *medersa*), and making a lean but indeterminate financial contribution to the project (ibid: 58). He expands his argument in support of African authorship with references to oral histories of the construction process and legends of masons' novel solutions to arising structural challenges. Bourgeois also carefully analyses the building's plan, massing and architectural forms which he perceptively correlates with Djenné's extant pre-colonial houses. According to Bourgeois, the shared anti-Fulani sentiment was powerfully and materially manifested in the prominent towers of the new mosque, the lofty interior of its prayer hall and the inclusion of a women's gallery (1987: 62), all features that stood in contradiction to Cheikou Amadou's austere philosophy on mosque architecture.

An architectural description

The Great Mosque was completed by the masons in 1907 under the direction of their chief, Ismaila Traoré, and with the manual assistance of conscripted labourers from throughout the region (Bourgeois 1987: 62). As depicted earlier, the mosque is regally elevated on a broad plinth that rises nearly three metres above street level, and its principal façade looks commandingly eastward over a flat, wide-open space at the town centre. The open space was once a marshy pond until filled in by the French at an early date during their rule. Now, the dusty expanse is transformed each Monday into a lively, colourful marketplace, and on other days it serves as a football pitch or informal gathering place. The earlier pond suggests that the site was formerly used as a borrow-pit from which laterite soil was excavated for the manufacture of mud bricks and finishing plasters. This activity is presently carried out on the floodplain immediately surrounding the town's perimeter. Typically, brickmaking takes place during the dry season when water levels on the floodplain subside, leaving puddles of water where soil can be churned into mud. Straw, rice husks, animal dung or other organic binding ingredients are added to the mixture. The rectangular bricks are then quickly produced with a wooden mould and laid out on the ground in neat, evenly spaced rows to bake in the hot sun.

The ground plan of the plinth is an enormous parallelogram with two pairs of parallel sides, and it is accessed via six grand staircases that ascend to a commodious terrace surrounding all four elevations of the mosque building. The staircases – a single one on the east side and on the south side, and two on the west side and on the north side – are flanked by squat, robust walls that jut perpendicularly from the plinth's sturdy retaining wall. On the east terrace, in front of the Mecca-facing *qibla* elevation, rest two saint tombs delineated by low rectilinear enclosures. At a glance, the organisation of the east façade appears to be symmetrical – a geometric quality that is foundational to Islamic art but that also contributed significantly to the popular belief that the French designed the building. Closer inspection, however, reveals a balanced but irregular arrangement of architectural elements: namely an alternating sequence of four and five pilaster-buttresses along the length of the elevation, and differing arrangements of small, square fenestrations and protruding *toron* between the left and right towers. Because the entire building was reconstructed in a short space of time and by the coordinated efforts of the masons' professional association (*barey ton*), these variations of elements cannot be accounted for by cumulative building phases, alterations

and additions across generations. Rather, these minor irregularities may have been consciously calculated to produce a symmetrical effect while responding to the given geometry of the site.

Doorways giving direct access from the exterior to the prayer hall are located in the north and south walls of the building. North and south doors are commonly used by residents from the quarters lying in corresponding directions. On the north elevation, a pair of double doors is grandly framed by three substantial pilasters that support a deep and protruding bulkhead. The face of the bulkhead is decoratively pierced by a horizontal line of small roundish apertures with two tidy rows of projecting *toron* below and a capping of *sarafar idye* crenulations above. In addition to their decorative appeal, the *toron* that project from all the walls and towers serve a number of vital functions: penetrating horizontally, deep into the thickness of the walls, they supply lateral support by distributing the weight of the mud bricks above; and they serve as a permanent exterior scaffolding for making repairs and re-claying the surfaces year after year. A series of bold *sarafar* pilaster-buttresses lend support to the wall structure on either side of the monumental north doorway, and the north wall contains a number of clerestory and ground-level fenestrations that allow daylight to enter the prayer hall. By comparison, the south elevation, with its two unceremonious double doorways and fewer but larger windows, is somewhat plain and sombre. Maas and Mommersteeg suggest that the apparent contrast between the north and the south facades reflects a general disparity in wealth between these two halves of the town (1992: 115).

Upon entering the prayer hall, eyes and ears adjust to the hushed darkness, and bare feet sink softly into the sandy floor. The interior, measuring approximately 50 metres long by 26 metres wide, and nearly 12 metres in height, is insulated from the hum and the heat of the outside world by the building's thick mud-brick structure. The three towers along the *qibla* wall each contain a deep *miḥrāb* niche that orients the congregation and their prostrations toward Mecca. The central tower hosts the largest of the *maḥārīb* (pl. of *miḥrāb*), as well as a second smaller indentation that is elevated a short distance above floor level. This serves as the *minbar* from which the imam delivers his sermon. The arched hollow of the central *miḥrāb* is decoratively echoed on the exterior face of the tower by a slender and shallow depression.

The building's interior is essentially a hypostyle hall containing ninety massive pillars that constitute a very considerable proportion of the total floor plan (plate 12). Like a platoon of gigantic dominoes, the pillars

are neatly set out in ten rows of nine each that align with the *qibla* wall and configure the entire space into a series of long, narrow corridors that traverse the building north-south and east-west. The dimensions of the rectangular pillars vary by row, and the row furthest to the north includes an array of trapezoidal-planned pillars built to accommodate the angled line of the adjacent exterior wall. The tops of the pillars along the north-south axes are connected to one another by pointed mud arches – an architectural element disputably imported from North Africa or beyond, (Aradeon 1989: 126), introduced by the French, or perhaps locally derived (Bourgeois 1987: 62; Brunet-Jailly 2010: 8-9). Heavy, termite-resistant palm-wood timbers (*Borassus aethiopum*) span the short distances between pillars and support the weighty, flat mud roof above.

In combination, the massive pillars and the complete absence of any central or open space within the mosque limits the size of the Friday congregation that can be accommodated inside the hall. On the other hand, this spatial arrangement has the benefit of allowing devotees who visit on other days of the week to find a secluded spot for focussed meditation, discreet socialising or quiet rest in the cool of the dimly lit interior. Daylight filters into the hall and between the rows of pillars through the fenestrations in the north and south walls; through the series of arched doorways along the western wall that give access to the courtyard, and through small oculi that pierce the flat terraced roof of the building. A single oculus is centrally positioned between each quadruplet of pillars. At roof level, the oculi are protected by round terracotta vessels with removable covers for letting daylight in and hot air out. The grid of evenly spaced vessels creates a fantastical roofscape of gentle protrusions amidst the fissured grey expanse of sun-baked mud (front cover). The roof terrace is accessed by two stout stair towers abutting squarely against the northwest and southwest corners of the prayer hall. All three *qibla*-wall towers along the western edge harbour small *ṣauma'a* chambers accessible from the roof.[20] The *ṣauma'a* in the middle tower is connected to the central *miḥrāb* in the prayer hall below by a slim vertical passage which at one time allowed the *mu'aḍḍin* to simultaneously listen to the imam's sermon and stridently transmit it to the neighbouring quarters.

The spacious courtyard occupying the western half of the mosque complex is bordered on three sides by narrow corridor-like galleries that serve mainly as segregated prayer spaces for women (see Cantone 2012: 339-341). This area of the mosque is known simply as the "Western Gallery". Windows and doorways along the length of the galleries open to the outside, and a greater number of arched doorways lead directly into the

courtyard. On Fridays, when all male citizens of Djenné are expected to attend the congregational *ṣalāt al-jum'a* prayer, the overflow of devotees unable to find space within the prayer hall form long lines in the courtyard and on the raised plinth surrounding the building. In unison, they attune prayers and prostrations to the imam's cues broadcast over crackling loudspeakers.[21]

The weekly procession of men to and from the mosque is an essential ingredient of Djenné's social glue. As the young and old wend their way through the maze of streets, scrubbed clean and donning their finest attire, they warmly exchange greetings, donate alms (*zakat*) to the poor, sick and disabled, and pay social visits to the households of friends and extended family. Joining together for the *ṣalāt al-jum'a* not only reminds Djennenkés that they are members of the global *ummah* (Islamic community of believers), but more concretely that they are citizens of an urban place populated by myriad ethnic and language groups and steeped in a long history of multiculturalism. Sharing the mosque on a regular basis helps to bridge the steep socioeconomic divides and cultural differences that strain daily cohabitation, and it lubricates negotiations of shared civic identity. Equally, the mosque can become a stage for civic competition and even violent contestation over the control and ownership of Djenné's cultural heritage (Joy 2012; Rowlands 2007) and, in effect, of Djennenké identity, which I illustrate in the following sections.

Annual maintenance

Like its mud houses, Djenné's mosque requires basic annual maintenance and re-claying to safeguard the structure against erosion from the steady *harmattan* winter winds, pounding rains during summer months, and the intense Sahel sunshine that decomposes the organic matter that binds the bricks and plasters. Historically, the mosque's annual re-claying took place late in the dry season,[22] usually in March or April when the masons' building activities were winding down[23] and while stagnant ponds on the floodplain still contained sufficient water for mixing the thick grey plaster.[24] An auspicious day was negotiated between town elders and the *barey ton* chief, and was publicly declared with little forewarning. Preparations had to begin immediately – and energetically. Visiting tourists and researchers merely relied on chance to be in Djenné on the day of re-claying. Circumstances surrounding the event that I witnessed in 2005, however, were entirely different from the past.

In the autumn of 2004, a group of town residents organised a committee to plan for the first-ever *Festival du Djennéry* in 2005. The festival was to be scheduled for the month of February to capitalise on the country's brief tourist season, and the committee reckoned that the centrepiece and major draw for foreigners would be the re-claying of the mosque. According to anthropologist Charlotte Joy who joined the committee as part of her study of heritage politics (2012), the motivation for the festival was driven by the economic and cultural achievement of other commercialised festivals that had materialised throughout Mali in recent years. The practice of displaying Mali's rich cultural heritage extends back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century colonial exhibitions in Paris and Marseilles, and more recently to the series of national *Biennales Artistique et Culturelle* inaugurated by Mali's first post-Independence president, Modibo Keita. For decades, Malians have also been loyal spectators of television serials that display their cultural traditions, ritual dances and music from around the country, produced with the aim of fostering national integration through the celebration of locality and diversity (Schultz 2007). In particular, the Djennéry committee was inspired by the international success of the *Essakane* music festival held each year since 2001 in a sandy location north of Timbuktu,[25] and the newer *Festival sur le Niger* staged annually in the historic Bamana town of Segou. Joy reports that the 2005 Djennéry event was envisaged as a trial run for an even bigger festival in 2006 marking the centenary of the (re-)building of the Great Mosque (2012: 182).

The 2005 *Festival du Djennéry* was an eclectic and mildly chaotic affair. The week-long agenda, from 19 to 25 February, included a daytime crafts fair, a poster exhibition on local architectural heritage and archaeology hosted in the town's grain hall, and a programme of "cultural evenings" at the *Maison des Jeunes* that featured ethnic music and dance performances by troupes from Djenné and the surrounding Bozo, Fulani and Bamana villages. The re-claying of the mosque was billed as the closing extravaganza. Disappointingly, however, only a small number of tourists showed up for the festival, and the whole business was tarnished by accusations of financial corruption and mismanagement (see Joy 2012: 179-197). Most controversial, perhaps, was the fixing of the date for the re-claying ceremony to accommodate the festival calendar. This manoeuvre sparked enduring tension between the planning committee and the circle of senior men who formerly made their selection in secret, allegedly in consultation with almanacs and lunar calendars and in sympathetic coordination with the region's variable climactic conditions. Their dispute embroiled

the Imam and his entourage, the government employees of the Cultural Mission, Djenné's traditional *Chef de village* and the elected mayor. The elders were finally pacified and brought on side after the "*prix de thé*" (a cash gift that forms and sustains bonds of patronage) was paid to them (Joy 2012: 187).

As normal, the *barey ton* masons were responsible for overseeing the planning and logistics of the 2005 re-claying event, while young male and female representatives appointed by each town quarter were tasked with organising the preparation and delivery of materials, food and entertainment on the day, and with supplying willing labour. In previous years, re-claying occurred in two separate stages spaced a week or so apart, and the populations of the northern and southern quarters of the town were responsible for plastering the surfaces on their respective halves of the building. I continue my description of the 2005 event with passages borrowed from the final chapter of my book, *The Masons of Djenné*. These convey the level of community coordination and festive spirit invested in this extraordinary annual undertaking, and ultimately the social antagonism that arose due to the committee's interference with the fixing of the date:

> Massive, coordinated preparations began Wednesday afternoon. On the outskirts of town, armies of little boys frolicked in shallow ponds of soupy brown water, trampling, scooping, and gathering piles of dark oozing mud. In a cacophony of shouts, chants, and banging metal pots, squadrons of older boys and young men arrived with horse carts and woven baskets to collect the mud, and then rampaged back to town behind fluttering flags and banners (plate 13). Groups of adolescent girls and unmarried women sang praises and made music with cowry-laden calabashes along the sides of the road, tossing and spinning the instruments and cheering the mud-spattered hordes of men as they sprinted to the Mosque and up the wide stairs onto the raised platform that envelops the enormous building. Idle onlookers were aggressively pelted with fistfuls of pasty mud, and globs of the stinking stuff clung tenaciously, like tar, to hair and clothing. Cartloads and baskets were dumped in ever-growing piles at the base of the Mosque walls and in the market square. This activity continued through the afternoon with raw energy and mounting intensity. The rambunctious squadrons became fully engrossed in their task; as they charged through the streets, some of the individuals gazed unwaveringly ahead with feverish, wild stares. People said these boys drank infusions of *almukaykay*[26] to boost vigour and sharpen their focus. [...]

That evening, pre-plastering revelries were organised throughout Djenné. In a neighbourhood of Yobukayna, a blue plastic tarpaulin was stretched between rooftops to shade the open space below, and stereo speakers were mounted in windows and doorways. Metal-framed lawn chairs with corded rubber seats and backs were lined up in neat rows facing one another, and a colourful display of plastic flowers was arranged on a low wooden table positioned at the centre of the public square. Music soon crackled over the speakers, luring a slow but steady trickle of residents to the street party. As the day's heat subsided, the blare of music grew louder. The mix of popular Malian hits and heavy-metal rock drowned out all possibility for conversation, and guests sat sedately in the long rows of chairs sipping bottles of sugary soda water. The gathering lasted until half-past-two in the morning, the stragglers strolling home under the bright light of a full moon.

A shrieking whistle pierced the dawn at 6:20 AM, signalling the start of the event. Drums beat madly to a chorus of cries, and what seemed like a thousand bodies rushed forward carrying baskets and pots of every description. Legions of sinewy, muscular arms hoisted colossal wooden ladders against the walls, creating the scene of a fortress under siege. Scores of men scrambled up the front face of the building, climbing the ladders and acrobatically scaling the armature of projecting *toron* (plate 14). A continual relay was set in motion, delivering basket after basket of mud from the ground to the highest pinnacles that adorned the towers and parapet wall. [...] Companies of women hastily transported colourful plastic pails brimming with water from the marshes, pouring them from the top of their heads in steady streams upon the gigantic piles of mud. Masses of young boys trampled the mucky mess, churning it into plaster and playfully painting each other from toe to head. Other young ones colonised their own small patches of the building, spreading plaster over the podium walls and nearby saints' tombs with tiny sweeps of their palms. Even foreign tourists who dared venture from the relative safety of the sidelines lent a hand in the plastering work. Musicians ferociously pounded drums, and young women spun their calabash instruments, heightening the frenetic tempo of the festivities.

The masons and apprentices were centrally involved, shouting instructions to the squadrons of young men and commandeering the plaster work from the highest rungs of the ladders, straddling *toron* in mid-air and organising the waves of deliveries that wound their way up the

mosque staircases to the roof. [...] All clothing was muted in shades of browns and greys, perfectly harmonised with the tones of the newly dressed mosque. (Marchand 2009: 290-293)

Television crews were on site to witness and broadcast the event to the nation. Representatives from the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Arts and Tourism were on hand, symbolically endorsing the Malian government's vested interests in Djenné's cultural property and its World Heritage status. The Minister of Culture and the Prefect of Djenné briefly lent a hand in the muddy business to the applause of onlookers and for the keen attention of rolling television cameras. Attracting media coverage to transmit Djenné's greatest cultural event to the nation, and hopefully to the world beyond, was a core aim of the festival organisers. In effect, the TV-screen image would validate their local tradition as worthy and relevant to modern nation-building in the eyes of a Malian viewing audience, and it would attract more tourism and possibly much-needed development assistance for the town.[27]

> Every able-bodied man and boy, and hundreds of women, participated in this extraordinary feat of coordination, energy and speed. By 7:30 AM, the eastern façade and towers of the Mosque were complete, and the remainder of exterior surfaces, including the courtyard walls and the roof, were finished a few hours later. By late morning the task was over. Unlike in the past – when half the building was plastered and the other half tackled a week or so later – the entire building was covered at once. Because of the enormity of [the 2005] mission, accurately estimating the total quantities of mud required was difficult. As a result, supplies ran dry before all the surfaces could be adequately covered. It was rumoured that a second coating would be needed once the first layer dried. This miscalculation ignited [further] debates about the procedures and preparation, and many elders and *marabouts* alleged that the plaster shortage occurred because the tradition of selecting an auspicious date for the ritual had been discarded in favour of the new festival calendar. The Mosque's centenary would be celebrated in a year, and popular sentiment was that Djenné must revert to hosting this important event on a specially chosen day.
> By noon weary crowds trailed off home, and hundreds journeyed by foot, bicycle, and in the back of trucks to bathe along the banks of the Bani River at Sanuna. Children jumped from the docked ferryboat and splashed about in the gently flowing waters, while mothers laundered

soiled clothing. Back in Djenné individual neighbourhoods hosted celebrations, and handfuls of candies were distributed among the throngs of anxious children. A group of women cooked a special meal of rice and lamb that later would be shared by the *barey ton* in the courtyard of the mosque. Seventy-odd members of the masons' association gathered on the west side of the mosque to hear the closing words from their chief, Sekou Traoré. They sat closely together on the ground, shaded by the high walls, and, as they listened, casually peeled dried splotches of mud from their clothing, limbs, and faces. Before rising to their feet, the masons graciously raised upturned palms toward the sky and made a communal benediction for the safety of the town and prosperity in the year ahead. (Marchand 2009: 294)

A gathering storm

The 2006 *Festival du Djennéry* was 'a scaled-down' and 'insignificant event', largely soured by the corruption scandals that had surfaced the previous year (Joy 2012: 197). 2006 also marked the start of declining tourism, not just in Djenné but throughout the country, as international news reported the emergence of a group calling itself "Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb" (AQIM) and its suspected infiltration into West Africa, including Mali. The tourist trade, a significant sector of the national economy, was dealt further blows by the renewal of Tuareg rebellions in the North (in 2007-09 and again in 2011-12), while a general situation of impoverishment throughout the Sahel region was exacerbated by persistent threats of catastrophic drought (recurring in 2005, 2010 and again in 2012). One cannot but ponder, even fleetingly and fancifully, whether a conceivable connection could be made between the extreme difficulties experienced by Djenné since 2005 and the admonitions issued by its elders about reclaying the Great Mosque on an inauspicious day.

One particular, calamitous event in 2006 will long be remembered by Djennenkés, and equally by foreign researchers and conservationists who have worked in the town and especially on its mosque. The account I offer is based on extensive coverage of the incident published by the local historical conservation group, *Djenné Patrimoine*, in their electronic bulletin (2006 no. 26); the official response by the Cultural Mission to allegations of elitism and lack of communication with the general public (ibid), and the ethnographic description and fine analysis furnished by Joy (2012: 120-124).

On 16 September 2006, a team of technical experts from the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) arrived in Djenné. Three years previously, the Aga Khan had signed an agreement of cooperation for development with Mali's President Amadou Toumani Touré which included plans for the architectural restoration of the historical Sudanese-style mud-brick mosques in Mopti, Timbuktu and Djenné. Restoration of the Komoguel Mosque in Mopti was successfully completed in 2006, and preparations were underway to commence work on Djenné's Great Mosque. On earlier visits to the town in 2005, the AKTC team made initial inspections of the building, noting especially the problems posed by a colony of bats resident in the prayer hall. Together with representatives from the Cultural Mission, they also paid courtesy visits to the Imam, the hereditary *Chef de village* and other elite office holders. The five short days they would spend on their return to Djenné in September 2006 would prove surprisingly eventful.

During the first four days, the AKTC team conducted further elementary surveys of the mosque structure, its electrical wiring and its sound system, initially proposing that necessary works would take eight months. The state of the roof was investigated, and it was decided that a small excavation should be made to accurately measure the depth of mud plaster accumulated over the last century and to assess the state of the wooden supporting beams below. Following further courtesy calls to the Prefect, the Mayor and the *Chef de village*, and a meeting with the Chief and Secretary of the masons' *barey ton* association, the team of AKTC specialists assembled on the mosque roof in the early hours of 20 September and began digging a hole.

According to some sources, the excavation was made at a "sensitive" location close to the *miḥrāb* tower (Joy 2012: 121). Rumours about illicit foreigners spoiling the mosque, digging for sacred treasures, or secretly planting a computer device in the building spread through Djenné like a brush fire. A group of youth vocally confronted the AKTC workers on the roof, drowning out the experts' explanations with cries condemning the Imam and the *Chef de village*, who authorised the restoration work, as "corrupt!" A riot quickly erupted on a scale and with a level of intensity unprecedented in the recent history of the town. Though the AKTC team escaped unharmed, their tools were vandalised and the angry crowd descended into the prayer hall, ripping down the electrical cabling and ventilation fans donated in 2002 by the American Embassy.[28] They marched onward, protesting angrily at the town hall, the home of the *Chef de village* and the Office of the Prefect in turn. The crowd next vented its unre-

lenting rage at the Cultural Mission, where they sacked the premises and destroyed displays of archaeological objects in the courtyard. Returning to town, they damaged the Imam's three cars and denounced him for such material extravagance. Reinforcements of police and soldiers from Mopti finally arrived to quell the violence. Sadly, one young man drowned in the marshes while trying to escape. Many were arrested that afternoon, and, in the days and months following, their faces were systematically identified on a video shot by a local photographer as the chaos unfolded.

The majority of those arrested were residents of Djenné's southern quarters, reputed to be the poorest neighbourhoods. As Joy notes, these young people are members of the most marginalised communities, reaping little or no economic benefit from tourism, development or the few employment opportunities that the politics of cultural heritage bring to the town. The heritage projects are popularly perceived as 'cash cows', exclusively benefiting a select, privileged and "corrupt" circle of civil and religious office holders (2012: 120). The top-down promotion and management of cultural heritage, according to Joy, further entrenches 'divisions between those people in society who can legitimately mobilise money for its promotion and those for whom the money is intended (directly or indirectly) and who remain disenfranchised from the whole process' (2012: 197). I share Joy's conclusion that the 2006 riot was not merely the delinquent activity of a few unruly youth, as portrayed by the authorities. Rather, it was the manifestation of a widespread sense of impotence and exclusion from the centres of power and decision-making that directly affects the homes people live in and the buildings where they pray and socialise and which they maintain as a community.

Indeed, protesters and members of Djenné Patrimoine placed blame for the riots on the Cultural Mission and on elite civil and religious authorities, accusing them of making critical decisions regarding the town's mosque in a thoroughly undemocratic fashion and without public consultation. In their bulletin published after the incident, Djenné Patrimoine also speculated that the roots of the unrest were deeply embedded in a power struggle between conflicting philosophies for preserving Djenné's earthen architectural heritage. They noted that many of those charged with inciting the riots were close allies of town resident Jean Louis Bourgeois, an author of scholarly works on "vernacular" architecture and, notably, on Djenné's Mosque (cited above).[29] Allegedly, Bourgeois believes that no outsider should be permitted to tamper with the town's mosque (2006 no. 21: 3), a view that straightforwardly challenged the AKTC's proposed intervention. In concert with Bourgeois, Djenné Patrimoine stated that,

as a local heritage association, they have 'repeatedly asserted that protection of Djenné's heritage must be put in the hands of the town's population or else such protection will never be assured... And naturally this applies even more strongly for the Mosque – Djenné's only place of prayer for all believers – than for its civilian buildings' (2006 no. 21: 4, my translation).

In the same bulletin issue, following Djenné Patrimoine's reportage and socio-political analysis of the incident, the association justly published the response of the Cultural Mission (2006 no. 21: 4-6). Mission representatives responded in detail, vociferously defending their position and insisting that plans for the AKTC works had been communicated to the population well in advance via a newspaper article, radio broadcasts on the local "Jamana" station and face-to-face meetings with a variety of town authorities and representatives. Amongst town residents, however, the Cultural Mission has popularly been cast as the "outsider"; in combination, the government-level appointment of a civil servant from another region to oversee the Mission's operations and the physical location of its office and museum a kilometre outside the old town have reified this status in the minds of many Djennenkés.

But plainly, the power struggle over control of Djenné's cultural heritage, and namely its mosque, entangles a far more complex mix of interest groups than just the hard-core adherents of Bourgeois' philosophy, a party of foreign AKTC "experts" and a handful of self-interested civil and religious elites. The bulletin containing Djenné Patrimoine's stinging report and the Cultural Mission's response illuminates a web of tension that incorporates local, national and international strands. While fostering its own international network of scholars, experts and benefactors, Djenné Patrimoine proclaims to represent the true concerns of local town folk about their historical urban environment. But reaching agreement among an ethnically and linguistically diverse citizenry about how architectural heritage can add tangible value to their lives, or how their homes and their mosque might be preserved while simultaneously taking advantage of present-day amenities and new technologies on offer, is an arduous process with no guarantee of clear outcomes. The Cultural Mission, too, represents the cultural and social aspirations of some town residents but, as a government office, its more overt agenda is to safeguard heritage for the nation and to keep Djenné on UNESCO's World Heritage list. It also acts as official mediator for, and collaborator with, the teams of foreign experts who propose and finance conservation initiatives in the old town and the surrounding region. To state the obvious, bringing all of these various scales of concern and interests into dialogue with one another

and establishing a workable consensus is a formidable task but a necessary one to keep the peace and give the Djennenké population a clear stake in shaping their futures.

Deflated centenary celebrations

The 2007 re-claying of the Great Mosque was carried out in a single day. Authorities and elders worried that the traditional competition between northern and southern quarters in renewing their respective halves of the building might rekindle smouldering hostilities from the 2006 riot. The event went off without the pomp and pageantry that many had envisaged to mark the centenary of the building's completion. One hundred years before, on 13 April 1907, the Imam Et-Taouati made a short speech to mark the opening of the mosque (*Djenné Patrimoine* 2007 no. 23: 1). The 2007 re-claying was therefore scheduled on 12 April, followed the next day by a *maouloud* celebrating the birth of the Prophet Muhammad. The aim of combining the events was to heal social ruptures and foster peace and unity in the still-shaken community. The centenary festivities that had been planned for the month of December were cancelled altogether. Papa Moussa Cissé, the President of Djenné Patrimoine at the time, emailed association members and benefactors to explain that the community of *resortissants* in Bamako were unable to raise sufficient funds for the event. Djenné Patrimoine nevertheless hosted an exhibition titled "*Djenné depuis cent ans*" that was displayed from late December until early January 2008. This consisted mainly of photographs taken from the late nineteenth century onward, and included images of the Great Mosque, the town's administrative buildings, streetscapes, grand houses and residents. A text accompanying a sample of the photos published in the association's bulletin read:

> The images before your eyes made a tour of the globe a century ago, making Djenné world-renowned: the photographs are testimony to the heritage passed on to us by our forefathers. They display the grandeur that we have to transmit to our children. (*Djenné Patrimoine* 2007 no. 23: 1, my translation)

Meanwhile, the AKTC redirected its energies to restoring the ancient and glorious Djingueré Ber Mosque in Timbuktu, also a UNESCO World Heritage monument.[30]

The Mosque re-made

The Aga Khan Trust for Culture did finally return to Djenné and began restoration work on the Great Mosque in January 2009 under the stewardship of an international team of architects and in close collaboration with the town's *barey ton* masons and local labourers. The work site was positively promoted as a forum for 'fruitful exchange' between the foreign experts and the masons, and as a place for training and for improving earthen technologies that would be transferrable to other historic buildings (AKTC 2010:4).

The team's first task was to remove the nearly 60 centimetre-deep accumulation of heavy mud on the roof terrace and assess the condition of the wooden supports below. Two layers of wood were discovered, one laid perpendicularly to the other. The lower level was constructed of termite-resistant palm timbers spaced tightly together, and most were judged to be structurally sound; by contrast, the upper layer was made of ordinary timbers, many of which had rotted. All of the latter were replaced with lengths of quartered palm wood imported from the western region of Kayes. The masons re-clayed the parapet walls and pinnacles surrounding the roof terrace with a smooth rendering made from a light-coloured earth (quarried from a spot near the archaeological site of Djenné-Djeno) carefully mixed and fermented with rice husks (plate 15). It was agreed that the annual re-claying ceremony would proceed in order to coat the remaining wall surfaces, but an exceptionally late date of June 4th was set for the event (Djenné Patrimoine, 2009 no. 26: 13). This would be the last re-claying ceremony for three years.

On Thursday, 5 November 2009, after a spate of heavy rainfall that damaged numerous houses, the upper half of the mosque's southern *miḥrāb* tower suddenly collapsed, releasing several tons of mud bricks, plaster and wooden *toron* that came crashing down onto the terrace below. Four masons working on the scaffolding at the time were thrown to the ground but, miraculously, they suffered only minor injuries (Bouleau, email text sent to the Djenné Patrimoine mailing list, 8.11.2009). According to masons, no person has ever been seriously injured while working on the mosque, not even during the frenzied re-claying ceremony, owing to the prayers and the secret benedictions that they recite beforehand (Marchand 2009: 26). Masons also claim that they share with their totem, the yellow-headed *m'baaka* lizard, the 'agility, balance and capacity to cling to, and scale, vertical wall surfaces' (Marchand 2009: 67-68). If a mason falls, then 'quick as a wink he will change into a lizard and scamper

down the wall' (Bourgeois 1987: 62). The collapse of the tower prompted Djenné Patrimoine to acknowledge 'the extent to which Djenné's architectural heritage is in danger, and the extent to which its protection demands urgent action of a well-defined and large-scale nature' (email announcement to the association's mailing list, 08.11.2009). This is precisely what ensued with the mosque.

A subsequent series of borings made through the thick layers of plaster and into the underlying structure led the conservation team to conclude that the mosque was showing signs of weakness and that a more thorough intervention was justified. In a report published by the AKTC in late January 2010, it was noted that the annual re-claying ceremony was failing to supply the technical maintenance necessary for the building's long-term preservation. Analysis of the plaster layers also revealed that the general quality and water-repellent properties of the mud had declined in recent years. According to the report, this was due to poor preparation that allowed insufficient time for fermentation of the added organic materials, and to the feverish competition staged between the town quarters which motivated hasty and incompetent applications of the rendering. The AKTC's recommendation for future practice was that 'the masons should play a central role in preparing the materials and overseeing the annual re-claying; and, on the days following the festivity, the masons should conduct technical surveys and carry out the more delicate repairs and maintenance' (2010). The AKTC offered to furnish an illustrated technical manual to guide future maintenance, and this, they suggested, would complement the embodied know-how of Djenné's local masons.

It was agreed by the various parties involved that a century's worth of accumulated plaster be removed from the building envelope in order to execute the necessary structural repairs. As a supposedly beneficial consequence, this exercise would also restore the mosque to its "original" 1907 form.[31] Over the next two years, all interior and exterior surfaces were peeled back and renewed; the electrical wiring for interior lighting, ventilation and the sound system was replaced and encased within the mud walls; wooden doors, windows and grills were restored or remade, and structurally unsound sections of the building, such as the two towers flanking the central *miḥrāb* tower and the north stair tower, were demolished and reconstructed (Cultural Mission 2010). Reconstruction was executed with *djenné-ferey*, a compact cylindrical brick pre-stressed by hand and used almost exclusively in Djenné until the introduction in the 1930s of the rectangular wooden mould for rapidly manufacturing so-called *tubaabu-ferey* ('white-man's brick') (Marchand 2009: 41). Reviving

the method for producing and building with *djenné-ferey* (a skill apparently lost to all but one surviving elder mason) has long been a priority for the Djenné Patrimoine Association (2008 no. 24: 3-4), and thus the AKTC programme of works won trust and support. Permanently evicting the resident colony of bats from the prayer hall, however, proved to be a more challenging campaign.

The cancellation of the annual re-claying ceremony in 2010 and again in 2011 while restoration works continued, combined with the prescriptive recommendations for future maintenance, resuscitated suspicions that care and ownership of the mosque had been wrested from the hands of Djenné's ordinary citizens. Worries were dispelled when, finally, a date for re-claying was announced in 2012. On 11 March, the task was carried out in a single morning, seemingly with the same energy and zeal as in the past. Mali's Minister of Culture attended the early-morning prayers and benedictions, and he stayed to witness the electrifying start of the event.[32] Mounting troubles in the country, however, including the kidnapping of foreigners, an armed Tuareg insurrection and a growing Islamist insurgency in the north, and violent demonstrations in the capital, kept most tourists away from the 2012 re-claying spectacle. Just a few weeks later (and one month before scheduled national elections), a military *coup d'etat* ousted President Amadou Toumani Touré from power, with the effect of further reducing and practically eliminating any remaining tourism in the country and deterring visiting researchers. At the time of writing, troubles persist throughout much of the country without any foreseeable resolution in the short to medium term.

It therefore seems reasonable to predict that Djenné will be putting on its re-claying spectacle for itself in coming years. The political and security crises, and the resultant desertion of tourists and disappearance of foreign aid, will surely have devastating effects on an economy already crippled by corruption, drought and regional instability.[33] Conservation and research projects in Gao, Timbuktu, the Dogon region and Djenné have been suspended for an indeterminate period or terminated. If there is anything positive to emerge from all this chaos, it may be that Djennenkés will, by necessity, re-appropriate ownership and responsibility for sustaining their cultural and architectural heritage. This is not to suggest that Djennenkés harmoniously share a common ideal about what to preserve and how to preserve it, as studies by Joy (2007, 2012) and Rowlands (2007) illustrate so well.[34] Rather, struggles and competitions over meaning, value, building materials and methods will be anchored once again in the local. In my opinion, this is where they belong (Marchand 2003).

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to convey that the Djenné Mosque is not just a place of prayer or an aesthetic object for historical preservation. Perhaps more importantly, it is a building constructed, maintained and, one might add, perpetually transformed by its community. Whether as physical site of ritual performances or as photographic representation, postage stamp graphic or scale model,[35] the mosque instils a deep sense of both religious and civic belonging and a fierce pride of place, origins and historical continuity. Weekly prayers and the annual re-claying ceremony are practices that create and renew social cohesion, but equally they are sites for contestation and negotiation. Personal and group displays at Friday prayers and divisions of labour during the re-claying impute and reinforce hierarchies of wealth, rank, piety, gender and access to knowledge. But when the disparity between those at opposite ends of the spectrum grows too wide (e.g. in the 2006 riot), or when there is failure to reconcile ideological gaps through peaceful means (e.g. during the Fulani jihads), the mosque becomes a prime site of resistance for contesting, and sometimes reconfiguring, the social order.

As attested in this chapter, the mosque has also long been a battlefield between opposing aesthetic views and between competing conservation philosophies and strategies. For the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, and presumably for those Djennenkés and Malians working in close collaboration with them, stripping away the layers of plaster revealed the "original" edifice as it stood newly built in 1907. This restored and frozen version of crisp straight lines and sharply defined geometries – rendered in a brighter, silky smooth plaster – was celebrated by some as "authentic". But as Barbara Bender astutely notes, 'the very act of freezing is itself a way of re-appropriating' (1998: 26). Furthermore, it needs to be recognised that 'heritage interventions – like the globalising pressures they are trying to counteract – change the relationship of people to what they do' (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004: 58).

Outside interventions that aim to control the materials and methods employed in the annual re-claying ceremony impose a detrimental kind of change upon people's relationship to what they do. As master mason Konbaba Tennepo declares at the end of a documentary film on Djenné and its masons, the re-claying event is 'our greatest celebration' (Vogel, Marchand & Sidibe 2007). In a later interview, the elderly mason lamented the results of the AKTC restoration: 'There is a big difference now between the mosque today and what it was. In the past, when you looked at it, you had

the impression that it was a very big mosque. But now it looks thin and narrow. It doesn't look good. What I want is that we now add *banco* (mud plaster) so that the mosque regains its form.'[36] The palimpsest of plaster layers, now removed, represented a century of finely calibrated work co-ordinated between the hundreds of men and women who participated each year (plate 16). It is the physical and social "processes" – processes of building, renewing and transforming the mosque with accretions of mud and, of course, praying, socialising and finding tranquillity within it – that undeniably constitute the core of its "heritage value" (Marchand 2003). In spite of foreign concerns for the long-term preservation of the physical building as a unique cultural artefact, it needs to be respectfully acknowl-edged that as long as there is a resident community with the skilled know-how to (re-)make, modify and maintain, and the available materials and conditions to do so, Djenné's Great Mosque will surely endure as a living place with meaning and purpose for resident Djennenké, and hopefully, too, for the wider world.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1   Interview with Konbaba Tennepo in Leiden, 25 September 2012.
2   My anthropological fieldwork, supported by the British Academy and the School of Oriental & African Studies, resulted in a number of publications including *The Masons of Djenné* (2009), the documentary film *The Future of Mud: Tales of houses and lives in Djenné* (2007, co-produced with Director Susan Vogel and Samuel Sidibé), and an exhibition at London's Royal Insti-tute of British Architects (2010). A further exhibition featuring new short

documentary films is planned for the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History (2013, in collaboration with Mary Jo Arnoldi).

3   A Cultural Mission was set up at each of Mali's UNESCO World Heritage Sites, including Djenné and the archaeological site of Djenné Djeno, the town of Timbuktu, the tomb of Askia Muhammad in Gao and the Dogon region. Their remit is to sensitise local populations to the value of cultural heritage and educate them about conservation management, and to enforce the rules and regulations that accompany UNESCO World Heritage status.

4   See Marchand (2009: 325 n2) for a discussion of the debated significance of the mitre-like *sarafar* projections.

5   Sometimes referred to as Sahelian or Sudanic style, the Sudanese style is a French creation that combines the "minaret of the Djingueré Ber mosque at Tombouctou with the traditional Muslim façade of a house at Djenné" (Prussin 1986: 18). These elements appeared in the model reconstruction of a colonial citadel of French West Africa at the 1922 Marseille Colonial Exposition and, more ambitiously, they were employed to establish "an architectural prototype for France's entire West African empire" (ibid). Attempts to define the core features of the style and its geographical spread have been taken up by numerous Western scholars including Engeström (1955: 122), Denyer (1978: 160-1), Prussin (1986: 103, 161), Domian (1989: 24), Maas and Mommersteeg (1992: 77), LaViolette (1994: 89) and Trimingham (1970: 69).

6   The French made similar use of the Teleuk traditionally built by the Mousgoum people of Northern Cameroon. An example of this elegant, beehive-like mud structure served as the French Equatorial Africa pavilion at the 1931 International Colonial Exposition in Paris, and was featured on postage stamps, currency and posters. Steven Nelson argues that, over the course of the twentieth century, the Teleuk has been transformed into an architectural repository of both Mousgoum and European cultural history, memory and experience (2007).

7   Mommersteeg (forthcoming) notes that this building, which belongs to the French Ministry of Defence, was classified as a historical monument in 1987.

8   Archaeological evidence demonstrates that Djenné-Djeno was settled by the third century BCE, became a thriving urban settlement by the eighth century CE and was populated until the fourteenth century (see R.J. McIntosh & S.K. McIntosh 1981). Both the archaeological site and the contemporary mud town of Djenné were declared UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 1988.

9   See Bourgeois for a detailed account of the siting of the first mosque (1987: 56-57).

10 See Azarya (1980) for a detailed account of the Fulani Massina Empire.

11 The total number of neighbourhood mosques that existed in Djenné at that time remains uncertain. See Bourgeois (1987: 91, footnote 16) for a brief discussion of the conflicting figures in the published sources.

12 See also the photographic plate in Landor 1907 (2): 462.

13 The Tukolor *jihad* was led by Chiekh Umar Tall and his Tijaniyyah followers against the Massina Fulani, who were members of the Qadirriyyah brotherhood. The *jihad* reached Djenné in 1862, and the short-lived Tukolor Empire was effectively ended in 1890 with the arrival of French forces in the region.

14 See R.J. McIntosh and S.K. McIntosh (1981) and R.J. McIntosh (1998) for an archaeological and historical account of the ancient city of Djenné.

15 Djenné's classification as a UNESCO World Heritage Site demands that all buildings in the town be constructed from mud brick. However, the school, like Djenné's hospital, the *Jamana* radio station and several government administrative buildings, were built in concrete. According to Joy (2012:208), parents and teachers distrusted the authorities to carry out the necessary annual maintenance required for mud structures, and successfully campaigned to have the school built in concrete.

16 Bourgeois uses the term *Peul* for the Fulani. *Peul* is a term used by other ethnic groups in the region to describe the Fulani. In the town's dominant Djenné-Chiini language, the word *filan* means Fulani.

17 Bourgeois (1987: 58) cites the works of journalist Felix Dubois, French scholars Paul Marty and Alphonse Gouilly, and the Surrealist writer Michel Leiris.

18 See, for instance, Ba & Daget (1984: 156), cited in Bourgeois (1987: 58).

19 Viollet-le-Duc, a contemporary of John Ruskin, is perhaps best known for the restoration works he carried out on France's medieval national monuments such as the Cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris, the Benedictine monastery of Mont St. Michel and the fortified town of Carcassonne.

20 A *ṣaumaʿa* translates from Arabic as a 'monk's cell' and refers to the small chamber on a mosque's roof that shelters the *muʾaḏḏin* (prayer caller). *ṣaumaʿa* is also one of three Arabic terms used for 'minaret', the other two being *manārah* (lighthouse) and *miʿḏḏana* (place of the calling).

21 Note that congregational prayers during ʿĪd al-Aḍḥa (known in French West Africa and the Maghreb as *Tabaski*, and popularly referred to as ʿĪd al-Kabir) take place not in the mosque but in a dedicated large open space in the western quarter of Kanafa. This is an exclusively male event, and thus women pray at home.

22 Anthropologist Geert Mommersteeg reports that, during the drought years of the 1980s, the event was sometimes scheduled as early as February depending on the availability of water for making the plaster (personal communication). This was also the case in 2012.

23 The building season typically lasts from December to March, after which masons engage in other forms of work and employment including fishing and agriculture, and some become migrant labourers working on building sites, using concrete and steel, in Bamako or West African cities further afield. See Marchand (2009) for a more detailed discussion about work and life strategies among the community of masons.

24 Interview with chief mason Sekou Traoré, February 2005.

25 Despite serious security concerns throughout northern Mali sparked by the latest Tuareg insurrection, the Essakane *Festival au Désert* was held successfully in January 2012 but was "exiled" to a site in Burkina Faso for 2013. Islamic rebel groups announced a ban on any music across the northern half of Mali which, at the time of writing, is under their control.

26 This is a species of the *Datura* plant belonging to the family *Solanaceae*. Most parts contain toxic hallucinogens.

27 Mommersteeg (forthcoming) notes that, as of 2010, tourism had become Djenné's main industry.

28 During a visit by the American Ambassador to the Imam of Djenné in 2002 (apparently to explain that the War against Saddam Hussein was not a war on Islam), the Imam seized the opportunity to ask for "a small gift". The electrical fans were later donated by the American Embassy for the Mosque. (*Djenné Patrimoine bulletin* Autumn 2006, nr. 21: 3)

29 Bourgeois was also a leading voice of the Cultural Survival campaign against the damming of the Bani River whose flood waters surround Djenné and replenish the land with rich silts for making mud bricks and plasters (see Marchand 2009: 310n19, 326nn3,5, 327nn6,8).

30 The alliance between Tuareg and Islamists was short-lived, and the al-Qaeda-linked Ansar Dine group seized Timbuktu in April 2012 and imposed a strict interpretation of sharia law. The Islamist insurgents proceeded to destroy saints' tombs and attack Sufi mosques throughout the city, as well as the ancient Djinguereé Ber Mosque. UNESCO expressed fears that valuable artefacts and manuscripts were looted and trafficked to international markets (BBC 10 July 2012).

31 During restoration works, a number of tombs were discovered at the base of the south wall of the prayer hall, confirming that the mosque had been used as a cemetery following its destruction by Cheikou Amadou in the nineteenth century (Cultural Mission 2010: 5).

32 See http://www.djennedjenno.blogspot.co.nz/2012_03_01_archive.html

33 At the time of editing the final draft of this chapter on 10 January, the Ansar Dine Islamist insurgents, who control the north of Mali, took Konna (BBC 10 January 2013), an important central town less than one hundred kilometres

north of Mopti and about two hundred kilometres from Djenné. If Djenné is taken and a strict interpretation of sharia is imposed, the shrines and saint tombs around the Mosque may be attacked, *marabout* practices could be threatened, and the re-claying ceremony would likely become a sadly different and more sombre event.

34 See also Fontein, who notes that despite the fact that historical and archaeological sites and museums were used for purposes of 'anti-colonial and post-independence nation-building in Africa, this does not eliminate potential for conflict and tension around the use of the past – especially its use as heritage' (2000).

35 Miniature models of the Mosque are on display in the National Museum in Bamako and in the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde in Leiden; a scale replica of the building was constructed by Djenné masons for a temporary exhibition under the high-tech steel-and-glass dome of the Clayarch Gimhae Museum in South Korea (see *Djenné Patrimoine* bulletin nr. 22: 6), and a group of masons have been contracted to build a replica in downtown Brussels for a 2013 exhibition curated by the BOZAR.

36 Interview with Konbaba Tennepo in Leiden, 28 September 2012.

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The New Morabitun Mosque of Granada and the Sensational Practices of Al Andaluz

Oskar Verkaaik

The conundrum of beauty and religion is a particularly salient one for the community of Western Islamic converts who have settled in Granada, Spain.[1] Known as the Morabitun – the Arab word for the Almoravids who ruled most of Spain in the eleventh and twelfth centuries – this group of converts came to Granada in the 1980s where most of them have lived in the neighbourhood of Albaicin, located opposite the Alhambra with a view of the Sierra Nevada. Aiming to revive the Islamic culture of Al-Andaluz, they chose as their home a place of objective beauty, even despite the fact that Albaicin was a run-down, neglected and romantically dangerous part of the city in the 1980s that has been gentrified, tamed and renovated since the influx of the converts from all over Spain, from other European countries, the US and Latin America. Many of these new *Granadinos* mention the architectural splendour of the Alhambra and the natural beauty of the Sierra Nevada as an essential part of their lives as Muslims in Andalusia. Living in the shadow of the Alhambra, the former centre of what they perceive as European Islam, is part of their religious identity as converts. Yet, they are also concerned with the notion of Islam as primarily an ethical tradition and an inward form of spirituality that is cultivated by the believer's personal worship of God and his or her submission to the religious tradition. From this perspective, one is apprehensive of too much emphasis on aesthetic delight. If piety needs to be evoked by the outward beauty of architectural ornamentation, well-designed gardens or even snow-capped mountains, there is apparently something lacking inside. As the founder of the Morabitun community Sheikh Abdalqadir as-Sufi – born Ian Dallas – writes in one of his books, the doctrine of the oneness of God leads to a radical transcendence in which God cannot even be compared to all the beauty in the world (As-Sufi 2009: 33-47). How, then, should one reconcile this interpretation of Islamic doctrine with the aesthetic pleasure of living in the heart of Andalusian heritage?

This is not the only enigma Granada Muslim converts have to deal with. They are not the only ones who are attracted to the Islamic cul-

ture of Spain. They share the Albaicin neighbourhood with hippies and backpackers who gather around the Mirador de San Nicolas to listen to flamenco music, drink cheap beer and play with their dogs, while taking pictures of the famous hilltop on the other side of the Darro river. Classy tourists in search of the authentic Andalusian experience, which the large hotels downtown cannot offer, come to stay here in expensive, exclusive guesthouses while yuppies and artists renovate old houses and gardens, decorating them with Moorish tiles (*azulejos*) and woodwork. For Muslim converts, their own fascination for Al-Andalus comes dangerously close to that of others from whom they nonetheless need to distance themselves. They share with the hippies a dislike of capitalist consumer society, and both groups have in common a preference for a simpler lifestyle, but the Muslims reject the hippies' antisocial behaviour, their dogs and their drinking habits. Like the tourists and the artists, they are aesthetically attracted to the Alhambra, but at the same time Al-Andaluz is more to them than cultural heritage alone – it is a cultural tradition they seek to revive and live. But how this desire differs from the tourist search for authenticity is not altogether clear, especially because a significant number of Muslim converts make a living in the tourist industry, selling self-made or imported pottery, woodwork, leatherwork or recorded Sufi music.

Muslim converts in Granada, then, cannot simply admire the aesthetic quality of Andalusian heritage and landscapes. Religious dogma and mass tourism force them into a level of reflectivity that stands in the way of unpretentious delight. And yet, they deliberately seek to live close to the Islamic heritage of Al Andaluz in order to recreate a new Muslim lifestyle that they feel is intrinsically connected to Spain's Islamic past. Al Andaluz heritage is central to what I will call 'sensational practices', that is, an aesthetically informed lifestyle through which the convert community creates a complex of bodily habits or 'habitus'. It is through these sensational practices that Muslim converts develop their Islam into an entire way of life, beyond mere religious doctrine, connected to former aesthetic traditions.

In this article I will look at the centre of the Morabitun community – a new mosque opened in 2003 – by asking how Granadino Muslim converts deal with these dilemmas. The new *Mezquita Mayor de Granada* is built on a prominent spot, just next to the Mirador de San Nicolas with its splendid views of the Alhambra and its around-the-clock tourist industry (plate 17). The gardens of the mosque offer equally panoramic views of the Alhambra set against the Sierra Nevada, and those tourists who want to get away from the hustle and bustle of San Nicolas come to take their pictures here and enjoy the tranquillity of the gardens. Built in the Mudéjar

style of the surrounding churches and convents, the *Mezquita* is hardly recognisable as a mosque from the outside (which is, of course, ironic, given that the Mudéjar style was a continuation of Islamic architecture under Christian rule), but the sight of clean-shaven men dressed in suits and ties who come to say their daily prayers here and stop to have a chat with fellow Muslims amidst the flowers and the fountains while checking their iPhones for their next business appointment gives the place a sense of everyday routine that is quite distinct from the heritage/holiday atmosphere to be found outside its walls. The mosque apparently creates a space in which the converts' dilemmas are at least partially and temporarily solved. Below I will analyse the new mosque as a creative and to some extent successful response to these dilemmas.

The mosque as a sensational form

Approaching the question of architecture from a perspective of problem-solving implies a departure from a representational approach that focuses on the meaning of architectural forms in terms of power and identity. From a representational perspective, a religious building is an 'argument cast in stone' (Mekking 2009: 12), a political statement by means of architectural form. It expresses power or represents a certain identity. Most studies on contemporary mosque design in the West adopt such an approach, either implicitly when they speak of spatial politics (e.g. Metcalf 1996; Sunier 2005) or explicitly as an alternative to approaches that portray architectural history in terms of temporal and regional styles (Roose 2009). What I would like to call a local concern approach does not at all deny the relevance of power and identity, but it does not assume these questions to be most crucial to all cases either. It rather starts by empirically exploring the nature of the local context in which a religious structure is built, what issues it raises and what concerns it seeks to remedy. The term 'local' here is meant in a relative and situational sense: the locality of a representative religious building that attracts a lot of national or even international media coverage will be much wider in scope than the locality of a village church or mosque. Power and identity are likely to play a role in all cases of religious architecture, but other concerns such as a consideration of religious doctrine or habitus may be just as relevant (Verkaaik 2012).

   A purely representational analysis of the new Granada mosque would be rather straightforward. By choosing the Mudéjar style, the community

not only adapts to the local environment (as was in fact the city government's demand), it also places itself firmly within the Islamic tradition in Spain, presenting itself as a continuation to some extent of Al-Andaluz, as indeed its name – the Morabitun – also suggests. Besides, it is an affirmation of the essentially European identity of the Morabitun community as well as a statement that Islam is historically part of the European religious landscape. On one of my first visits to the mosque, the caretaker, clearly used to showing visitors around, pointed out to me the horseshoe ornamentation of the entrance to the praying room, narrating that this element, although now widely taken to be an essentially Islamic architectural feature, is in fact Visigoth and therefore pre-Islamic in origin. I later discovered this to be a statement about the quintessentially native nature of Muslim Andalusia. According to the caretaker, the Islamic culture of Al-Andaluz had developed out of an indigenous pre-Islamic past and had not imported its art and architecture from the Middle East. Although the Muslim kings originated from Damascus, he said, they had adapted to the local culture and developed it. At the same time, however, the interior of the mosque also makes pan-Islamic references, such as the *qibla* wall (that points towards Mecca) that is modelled upon the Dome of the Rock Mosque in Al-Quds (Jerusalem), calligraphy that is based upon the Topkapi palace in Istanbul, or wooden decoration derived from the Madrasa Ibn Yusuf in Marrakech (Robinson 2007: 268-9), all of which suggests the Morabitun's ambition to be part of mainstream Islamic tradition. In short, this somewhat eclectic mix of architectural references can rather straightforwardly be taken to identify the Morabitun as traditionalist Muslims with a strong sense of Spanish and therefore European identity.

All of this may be true and important, but it overlooks the enigma of aesthetic pleasure and religious doctrine that forced the converts into a deeper engagement with the mosque project than would have been the case if mosque design were a matter of representing a religious identity alone. This is an issue that some of the more perceptive studies of contemporary mosque design in Europe and the US are attentive to. As Jerrilynn Dodds has shown in a study on mosques in New York, American Muslims tend to reject the question of architectural design as religiously irrelevant. Time and again they told Dodds that Muslims can pray anywhere as long as the chosen spot is clean. As the mosque is essentially about spirituality and community life, its architecture is obsolete. Prayer, they argue, is 'an act out of time', 'in prayer all external concerns must vanish' (Dodds 2002: 65); hence, it is irrelevant to place, too. Especially the notion of the mosque as a sacred place is sometimes condemned as transplanting

Christian ideas about religious architecture into Islam (Eade 1996: 226). And yet, despite this contemporary Islamic iconoclasm, we find a strong preference for conventional architectural forms and decorative elements like domes, minarets, arches, calligraphic bands, mosaics and the like in the vast majority of new Western mosques. Some criticise this trend as a form of migrant nostalgia (e.g. Avcioglu 2007; Welzbacher 2008), whereas others see it as a religiously obsolete but socially relevant symbol of Islam in a predominantly non-Muslim society (Dodds 2002: 81-89). It seems to me, however, that such explanations simply accept contemporary interpretations of religious doctrine as reality, assuming that Muslims literally practise what they preach, thereby circumventing the real issue that modern Muslims in the West need to deal with the discrepancy they might experience between contemporary religious doctrine and certain aesthetic traditions. The only study that I know of that seriously engages with this dilemma is Akel Ismail Kahera's book on American mosque design, in which the author tries to develop a theory of mosque aesthetics from the theology of Ibn Arabi. For the latter, beauty is both one of the attributes of the divine (*Al-Jamal*) and the result of human creativity (*al-jamal*), both dimensions forming a continuum. From this it follows that subjective human creativity is not an absolute innovation, which, if translated as *bida*, does not have a positive connotation in Islamic theology but 'a synthesis of preexisting visual expressions' and therefore allowed or even desirable (Kahera 2002: 13). As I read it, this is an attempt to ground architectural practice and spatial experience in Islamic theology, creating a space for aesthetic practice within religious doctrine, but it is not an ethnographic exploration of how contemporary Muslims do or do not solve the problem of aesthetic pleasure and religious doctrine.

Put in terms recently developed in material religion studies, the question is to what extent it is justified to consider the contemporary Western mosque as a 'sensational form'. Birgit Meyer has recently defined religion as a 'practice of mediation' between 'human beings and a transcendental or spiritual force that cannot be known as such' (Meyer 2009: 11). Religion offers certain forms and techniques that make it possible to contemplate the divine that is not of this world, and it is only through these forms and techniques that we are able to get near the divine. In fact, Meyer seeks to dissolve the whole distinction between form and substance, as it is only in religious form that religious beliefs can be manifested. She coins these forms and techniques 'sensational forms' that constitute a 'religious aesthetics', because of their affective impact on the practitioners (ibid: 13). Like an older anthropology of religion that emphasised the centrality of

ritual practice, Meyer shifts the attention from the cerebral to the sensory aspects of religious experience, asking how religious mediations invoke an ongoing engagement with the divine and the religious community. In the case of contemporary Islam, one can think of praying, dietary practices or dressing styles as sensational forms that create a sensory experience of piety (Mahmood 2005). From a perspective of reformist theology, it is a lot more controversial to consider the mosque as a sensational form. But if we consider prayer not merely as an act of the mind that places itself out of time and out of place but as a contemplative technique of the body in its entirety that allows for this transcendental experience, it becomes imperative to think about the sensory, and hence spatial, dimension of the ritual.

It is important to note that Meyer defines 'aesthetics' in Aristotelian terms as the sensory experience of the world rather than simply beauty. Much of the religious aesthetics that the authors in Meyer's edited volume talk about invokes sensations of the sublime or the habitual rather than the beautiful. When in this article I use the term 'beauty', I do not mean to refute Meyer's definition of the aesthetic. I rather do so for empirical reasons. For the Morabitun, as probably for a lot of tourists, the Islamic heritage in Spain is primarily described in terms of beauty, pleasure, harmony, order, geometry, peacefulness, etc. But in contrast to most tourists, Al-Andaluz for the Morabitun also stands for a past and a way of life that one seeks to revive by physical proximity and imitation. Al-Andaluz is therefore more than mere beauty or heritage. It is, as we shall see, an Islamic ethics concealed in beauty and sensory pleasure. At the same time, the public use of cultural heritage is diverse and contested, as Granada attracts many visitors who come to see the Alhambra. It is by taking Al-Andaluz as a tradition that is as ethical as it is aesthetic that the Morabitun distinguish themselves from the tourist search for Islamic heritage.

Muslim converts in Spain

The new mosque of Granada is the most prominent physical proof of the presence of contemporary Islam in Andalusia. It is also one of the first representative mosques in Europe established by Western converts. Spokespersons of the Morabitun, however, do not pride themselves for this fact. They rather insist that they are part of a much wider trend of conversion to Islam among native Europeans. The reason why this trend of conversion is given so little attention, they say, is because dominant

voices in the public debate always depict Islam as foreign to Europe. They see themselves as living proof that this commonsensical notion is false. Al-Andaluz, with its tradition of *convivencia* (coexistence, tolerance), is evidence that historically, Europe has been multi-religious. They see the expulsion of the Muslims and Jews from Spain after 1492 as a form of genocide or ethnic cleansing and the beginning of a long Christian effort to drive Islam beyond Europe's borders. They resist this attempt to obscure the past. For them, the new mosque is therefore not the result of recent globalising trends that bring Muslims to Europe but rather a milestone in the ongoing restoration of an original pre-1492 Europe.

The Morabitun of Granada number around a thousand families – a flexible figure because new converts constantly join in whereas others move out. They are but one among various groups of Spanish converts, but many of these groups originate from them. The Morabitun are an initially British Sufi group led by Ian Dallas, a Scottish writer and actor, who had been initiated into the Darqawiyyah brotherhood in Morocco in the late 1960s and who later called himself Sheikh Abdalqadir as-Sufi (Geaves 2000: 142-145). Spanish travellers to the UK brought the Morabitun to Spain, where they founded a first community in Cordoba in 1976, moving to Granada in the early 1980s. Around the same time, in 1981, the movement initiated the mosque project when the city government offered them a plot in Albaicin opposite the Alhambra. At a time when popular resistance against Islam was still negligible due to the fact that there were hardly any Muslims in Granada, the municipality anticipated that a new mosque built in the traditional Mudéjar style would help promote the city's reputation as an exotic tourist destination. But the project was delayed by financial problems and growing resistance from local anti-mosque activists, among them several Catholic organisations (Roson Lorente 2001). Meanwhile, the Morabitun moved from being initially a movement engaged in Sufi mystical practices, such as the reciting ritual of *dhikr*, to a more sharia-based interpretation of Islam and a rejection of Western capitalist society. Many converts travelled to Syria and Saudi Arabia to study Arabic and theology at Islamic universities (*madrasah*). The Morabitun became more and more a closed, endogamous group which resulted in the emergence of a strict social hierarchy with a number of major schisms. Run-away groups settled in places like Orgiva (in nearby Alpujarras), Murcia, Sevilla and Almodovar del Rio (near Cordoba), whereas new convert groups sprang up in Barcelona and Valencia. At the same time, Muslim labour migrants from Morocco, Mauritania, Senegal, Pakistan and other Muslim countries came to Spain, whereas the beach resorts at the Costa

del Sol attracted wealthy Muslim families from the Gulf region. There is, however, relatively little interaction between converts and migrants (Rogozen-Soltar 2012). Whereas migrants form their own local communities, converts are well-integrated into transnational networks of fellow converts, such as the global Nasqhbandi brotherhood, travelling and visiting each others' centres in the UK, Germany, the US, Morocco and the Middle East (Dietz 2004: 1093). This also explains why the Morabitun include many natives from European and American countries.

There are several factors that help explain the revival of Islam in Spain. At the beginning, there was the fascination for 'Oriental' mysticism in the counterculture trend of the 1960s and 1970s, which included Sufism. One American convert who has lived in Spain since 1979 recalled that he got in touch with Sufism in California through a Palestinian sheikh, not yet realising that Sufism was Islam. He travelled to Morocco and after his initiation settled in Spain. Like him, the majority of the first Spanish converts were young left-wing students, critical of consumerism and interested in spirituality.[2] The transition from counterculture Sufism to a more scriptural or Sunna-based form of Islam was accelerated by interactions with Syrian students and refugees who had come to Spain in the 1960s as a result of Spain's cultural policy toward the Arab world which offered students from the Middle East the opportunity to study at Spanish universities. These students founded the first Islamic centre in Granada in 1966. Syrian students belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood stayed in Spain as refugees, as Syria had outlawed the Brotherhood. These well-organised groups maintaining transnational links across the Muslim world successfully mediated for the Morabitun to get funds and arrange scholarships in the Middle East. They also criticised the Sufi-minded converts for being 'out of Sunna', warning them against heterodox communities like the Ahmediyyas (who built a mosque in Pedro Abad near Cordoba in 1982), inviting them to accept Islam as a discursive moral tradition (Arigita & Ortega 2012).

After the death of Franco in 1975, Islam began to play a role in the construction of a separate regional identity of Andalusia in the context of federalisation and secularisation. Under Franco, Spain had been a mono-confessional Catholic state, actively trying to 'castilianise' the various regions. Democratisation put an end to this by granting equal rights to religious minorities, a long process finalised in 1992 (Arigita 2006: 565), and allowing greater regional autonomy. However, the new constitution distinguished between two kinds of regions: those based on 'historical nationalisms' with distinctive cultural and linguistic features, and those

without such cultural idiosyncracies. Catalonia, Galicia and the Basque Country belonged to the former category, but Andalusia initially did not, partly as a result of the fact that as of the 1960s the Spanish tourist industry had promoted Andalusian popular culture (Semana Santa, bullfighting, flamenco and gypsies) as Spanish culture. In its search for greater regional autonomy, the provincial government did not only try to reclaim this heritage as essentially Andalusian, but also stressed the *Moro* legacy as a distinctive feature of Andalusia. Although Muslim converts reject this instrumental use of Al-Andaluz by non-Muslim politicians, their very presence in Andalusia has in fact endorsed these claims (Dietz 2004: 1094-5).

On a national level, too, Islam and the Al-Andaluz legacy have played a significant role in recent national identity debates. Since the 1970s, the left-of-centre PSOE has consistently stressed Spain's mediating role between Europe and the Islamic world. This also included a policy of dialogue with domestic Islamic communities and the affirmation in 1992 that Islam was historically 'well established' (*notorio arraigo*) in Spain. In this symbolically loaded year, half a millennium after the fall of the last Muslim kingdom of Andalusia, the government stated that the 'Islamic religion is one of the spiritual beliefs that has configured the historical personality of Spain. Our culture and tradition cannot be separated from the religious foundations that have forged the most profound essences of the Spanish people and character' (quoted in Arigita 2009: 225-6). As part of the same ceremonies commemorating the events of 1492, the Saudi-sponsored King Abdel Aziz al Saud mosque in Madrid – better known as the M30 mosque for its proximity to highway M30 – was inaugurated in the presence of the royal families of Spain and Saudi Arabia. We find the same sympathetic attitude towards Islam after the terrorist attacks in Madrid (2004) when Prime Minister Zapatero called for an 'allegiance of civilizations', a clear response to Huntington's infamous 'clash of civilizations'.

Such statements, however, are deliberately meant to counter a widespread notion of the Spaniards as an essentially Catholic nation rooted in a centuries-long war with Islam. Hence, at the same time as Zapatero was proposing an allegiance of civilisations, his political rival José Maria Aznar placed the terrorist attacks of 2004 in the context of the *reconquista*, suggesting that 'many radical Muslims' strive to invade Spain again (ibid: 232). Given its symbolic history, it is not surprising that Granada is not just a meeting place for Muslim converts but also the site where this anti-*Moro* sentiment finds a ritual expression in the annual *Dia de*

la Toma, or Day of the Fall, the city's main festival when the conquest of Al-Andaluz by the Kings of Castile and Aragon is celebrated. It is an increasingly controversial festival, contested by Muslims and non-Muslims alike who seek to replace it for a *Fiesta de la Tolerancia*. These conflicts symbolise Spain's and Andalusia's ambiguous identity as a place where Europe and Islam come together and at the same time a frontier state against invading Moors.

Living like an urban bedou

Unlike the hippies of Albaicin, most Muslim converts are now economically well-integrated and self-sufficient, holding jobs in civil services or running private businesses. A significant number of them are active in the creative industry and the tourist sector as designers and constructors, musicians, ceramists, tilers or woodworkers. This is more than just a way of making a living. Consider Ahmad[3], a carpenter who received a formal education in modern woodworking, but then began to study and practice the Mudéjar techniques that he found in and around Albaicin. Not knowing much about these traditional techniques at first, he gradually discovered their logic by imitation. Next he moved on to study the subtle woodworks of the Nasrid monuments that he had always admired for their dazzling ingenuity and their effect of making you feel lost in endless repetitions of criss-crossing patterns. To his surprise, he discovered that all these wonderfully decorated ceilings and doors were based on a simple logic. 'Pure mathematics,' he says: 'Once you are on to it, it is as rational as modern carpentry, only much more beautiful and inventive.' Now he makes a living decorating new private houses, or renovating old ones, in Nasrid or Mudéjar style. In times when business is slow, he makes small wooden boxes with inlaid patterns of various kinds of wood that he sells to tourist shops. Although he realises that his products are remakes, he does not feel that he is cheating on tourists looking for authentic souvenirs. Nor does he think that his work as a carpenter and designing woodworker creates mere illusions of a long-gone Islamic past. His aim and pleasure, he says, do not lie in the recreation of old forms as such but in learning to use the traditional craft. Employing and developing these old techniques as a carpenter has become a form of self-transformation. 'When I am at work, I feel close to that wonderful Muslim culture.' Besides, he considers his work to be of higher quality than the cheap, mass-produced, quasi-Nasrid columns with readymade arabesques, mozarabs

and Koranic texts that are used to decorate the often Moroccan-owned teashops in and around Albaicin.

What struck me in my conversations with Muslim converts in Andalusia was the centrality of the notion of 'Muslim culture' in the way they talked about their lives. For Abdul, a musician born in the UK, Sufi music has been the gate that led to his conversion. In the early 1990s he met a group of Spanish Muslims on his first hajj. Although he lived in Syria for ten years to study Arabic and the Sunna, he spent almost every summer in Granada before finally settling here five years ago. With his Granada-based music group, he travels a lot to Europe, the US, Morocco, Turkey and the Middle East to give concerts, but he now considers Granada his home. Playing Sufi music in Britain, he always felt out of place. In Syria he was so absorbed in learning that he hardly touched his violin. Syria deepened his religious knowledge, which he considers immensely valuable, but Granada and his return to music have reminded him of his first love for Islam. 'The first cut is the deepest,' he says, and what he calls 'the spirit of Granada' comes very close to that primary experience. 'Granada is Europe and not Europe. It has got this wonderful Islamic architecture that was built to last a thousand years. My hope is to have an international Sufi music festival here. Granada is the perfect place for it.'

What Ahmad and Abdul convey to me is that 'Muslim culture' means more to them than just Sufi music or Nasrid woodwork. Music and woodwork are rather suggestive of a whole way of life that they associate with Islam. This lifestyle includes a certain rhythm of the day structured by the times of prayer, drinking tea in a coffee-minded and alcohol-addicted environment, eating dates, nuts and halal meat, sharing the Friday afternoon lunch in the mosque, or wearing clean and modest clothes. But given their personal interests and talents, composing Sufi music or designing Nasrid-styled ceilings happens to be their preferred way of engaging with this 'Muslim culture'. The aspiration is twofold. On the one hand, making music or woodwork is a pedagogical or disciplining practice – an *Anthropotechnik* in Peter Sloterdijk's terms (2012) – through which Muslim converts seek to create a religious habitus that has not been part of their upbringing. On the other hand, they also seek to revive this 'Muslim culture'. Perhaps Miguel Ruiz Jimenez expresses this ambition most accurately. A sculptor and a potter who has built his workshop in a village just north of Granada, he makes replicas of the huge Alhambra jugs that he sells to the Gulf region. He has spent years trying to reconstruct the traditional pottery skills in order to make the 1.5-metre-high jugs. He has rebuilt Arab-type kilns big enough for the jugs. He has experimented with

various kinds of wood to reach the right temperature inside the kilns. But the point of all these efforts, he writes, is not to bring to life an art that was destroyed 500 years ago. Apart from the obvious commercial purposes, his aim is rather to continue, rather than duplicate, a tradition that was interrupted by war and expulsion. It is his objective to treat Nasrid art as a living culture rather than mere heritage. And although he himself is not a Muslim, his ambition is illustrative of the ways many converts in Andalusia engage with what they call 'Muslim culture'. It also shows that in Spain one need not be a Muslim to seek the revival of 'Muslim culture'.

A publication of the Morabitun entitled 'Welcome to the Islamic Capital of Europe' puts it this way: 'We, the Muslims of Al-Andaluz today, are not seeking the revival of a bygone culture and historical splendour, but rather the re-encounter with the essence of what it is to be human, the natural form of man: nobility of character and a society where justice prevails.' Still, despite the fact that the convert experience is inextricably linked to Al-Andaluz, there are various shades of meaning to the notion of 'Muslim culture', leading to debates and arguments that sometimes escalate into a schism. In Orgiva, a mountain town south of Granada, I talk to two converts, an American from Ohio and a Catalonian from Barcelona, for whom Al-Andaluz has strong ideological and political implications. We meet in a teashop (*teteria*) called Baraka, which serves Middle Eastern food and advertises courses in yoga, chakra healing and astrology for children. Despite this New Age feel, which is quite different from the Morabitun centre in Granada, Umar McBrien and Sheikh Nazim have more than just their personal spiritual wellbeing on their minds (even though they see the weekly trance-evoking chanting ritual of *dhikr* as their main religious practice, next to prayer). Their turn to Islam – both converted in the 1970s – is also an act of social criticism. Both bearded men, wearing robes, baggy trousers and a fez, describe modern society as a world of disorder, leading to social injustice and strife, ultimately heading for the apocalypse. They blame both the capitalist economy and the democratic political system for modern social anarchy. As Sheikh Nazim states, 'Our world is one of sexual freedom in return for financial slavery.' For them, Al-Andaluz stands for a just economic system without usury, based on the real material value of gold and silver rather than the virtual nature of modern money flows.[4] It is also a sultanate that links sovereign power to social responsibility and honour, which they much prefer to a democratic system that puts power into the hands of the people without holding them responsible for their democratic acts. They interpret the apocalypse as the moment when modern society will be destroyed, after which the

sultanate will be restored. 'But we have no idea what that means,' says Umar McBrien: 'We have never lived in a system like that. We can only have trust.' The combination of their mystical practices and rejection of modern society has pushed them to the margins of society, as symbolised by their retreat into the Alpujarras mountain region, where they feel as though they are living as 'Moriscos', Muslim communities that continued to live in Al-Andaluz after 1492, taking refuge in the mountains, until they, too, were finally expelled in 1609.

Although the Muslims in Orgiva have left the Morabitun some twenty years ago after major disagreements with its leadership, what Umar McBrien and Sheikh Nazim tell me is remarkable similar to the ideology put forward by Ian Dallas alias Sheikh Abdalqadir as-Sufi, the Scottish founder of the Morabitun, who himself now lives in South Africa. In several books alternately published under both his names, he has circulated his sermons and lectures on Islam, which for him is as much a political and economic system as it is a set of pious practices. For him, this system that he calls Sufism is ultimately rooted in a certain way of life and mentality which he terms Bedouin or *Bedou*. A Bedou is not a slave of the modern economy, the international banking system or consumerism. Drawing on a mixture of German Romanticism, Sufi traditions and the sociology of Ibn Khaldun, as-Sufi defines the Bedou as someone who accepts the authority of the king as long as he is a just ruler, who is a responsible member of a spiritual community that transcends the tribal and familial, but ultimately listens only to his natural and eternal self that is part of divine creation rather than society. 'The Bedou,' he writes, 'is outside the urban system. The Bedou is cut off from the urban entity even if he is in it' (Dallas 2006: 275). He is 'an in-time creature somehow with a beyond-time contract' (ibid: 292). Like the Sufi, he will not submit to the kind of conformism that modern society demands from him but lives a life of permanent pious resistance.

Although his books are for sale in the *Mezquita Mayor de Granada*, they are hardly read as messages from a charismatic leader. His rejection of the modern financial system and his call to use only silver and gold for money, for instance, is completely ignored. Avoiding any association with the hippies on neighbouring Mirador de San Nicolas, most Morabitun members live middle-class lives, maintaining friendly relations with their neighbours. Some Muslim converts who do not consider themselves part of the Morabitun anymore but do go to their mosque to pray even dismiss the sheikh's admiration for Ernst Jünger, Carl Schmitt and Richard Wagner as 'fascist'. But his notion that being a Muslim entails more than the

performance of religious rituals and also assumes the self-cultivation of a certain mentality and lifestyle rings true to most of the people I talked with. In a community of converts, this is a highly reflexive search for an Islamic way of life. For most people it includes a sense of moral independence from non-Muslim society, a distrust of consumerism, certain moral obligations like hospitality and honourable behaviour, certain aesthetics, habits and everyday practices, as well as certain religious obligations like praying, attending the *juma* prayer on Fridays or partaking in Thursday night *dhikr* sessions. There are profound differences of opinion as to what extent being a Muslim is an implicit form of social critique or a political project, just as there is considerable disagreement as to how eclectic one can be in the formation of a religious habitus. Some, for instance, will condemn doing *dhikr* without accepting the Sunna as a mere New Age practice that makes you a part-time Muslim at best. What is clear, however, is that being a Muslim in Granada is in a way a total phenomenon and a mixture of moral concerns, aesthetic desires, everyday economic activities and social critique that some summarise as 'Muslim culture' whereas others, following the founder, call it a search for the urban *bedou*.

Designing the infinite

How, then, does the *Mezquita Mayor de Granada* feature in this quest for a Muslim way of life in Spain? To arrive at an answer to this question, let's first have a brief look at its more than twenty-year long process of completion. As indicated above, the municipality of Granada was initially more than willing to accommodate the Morabitun's wish for a new mosque and offered them a prominent spot in what was then a neglected and uninviting part of the city for sale. The *Sociedad Para el Retorno al Islam en España* was formed to buy the plot in 1981. But when local protest rose, arguing that there were already too many 'religious buildings' in Albaicin (Robinson 2007: 264), the demands of the city government increased. The building was to be built in a local Mudéjar style so that it would not stand out amidst the churches and convents of Albaicin. There were also limitations to the size of the building and its minaret, with the result that the mosque is considerably smaller than the neighbouring San Nicolas church. When the plot was prepared for construction, pre-Roman remains were discovered and construction work had to be postponed for excavations to take place. But more than official restrictions, local protest and archaeological surveys, it was financial problems that delayed

the building process. For a long time the plot laid empty. Rather than the location of a new mosque, it became a dumping place for garbage, and the Granadino Muslims continued to pray in private houses and, on Fridays, on public squares. Meanwhile, a prominent member of the community left the Morabitun and, after spending years in the Middle East, returned to his ancestral lands in the Sierra de Segura – a desolate, inland region east of Granada – where he built his own mosque and madrasah with the financial help of the Shah of Sharjah. Set against the dry mountains covered by pine forests and olive groves, the white-washed complex with its low square minaret, marble mihrab, colourful tile work and horseshoe arches makes a clear reference to Moorish architecture, even though it is not an exact replica. Invited to inaugurate the complex, the Shah of Sharjah learned about the financial problems of the Granada community and offered to donate the necessary sum. This allowed the Morabitun to finally complete the mosque, which was opened in July 2003.

Designed by the Granadino architect Renato Ramirez Sanchez, the complex looks like a smaller version of the neighbouring San Nicolas church, painted white, with a square minaret adorned with a band of Koranic texts in Kufic calligraphy. The praying room is on the upper level, accessible by way of the gardens adjacent to the Mirador de San Nicolas. On the ground floor, which has its entrance on a narrow passage, the Carril de las Tomases, there is a cultural centre with a library, an exhibition room, classrooms and offices. Simple from the outside, the interior is more eclectically decorated. Apart from marble work resembling the Dome of the Rock and calligraphy inspired by the Topkapi Palace in Istanbul, the most remarkable element is the mihrab that is a replica of the mihrab of the Mezquita of Cordoba (plate 18), only smaller and – according to the interior designer Sidi Karim – more mathematically perfect, since it was designed with the help of a computer. The marble patio with its washing place features wooden mozarabs, lattice work and mosaic tile work, some of which were made in Morocco, that are clearly reminiscent of the Alhambra, visible through the windows of the praying room.

I meet Sidi Karim, the interior designer who is now in his eighties, in the cultural centre of the complex. He tells me that he was born in Murcia – his family name is Viudes – and has lived in Granada for 30 years. He describes himself as a Muslim who has studied Islam in the Maliki tradition, one of the four law schools (*madhahib*) within Sunni Islam. This introduction surprises me, since no Granadino Muslim I have met before has mentioned his *madhhab*, but Sidi Karim explains that he deems the study of the tradition essential at a time when Muslims in Europe are

struggling with modernity. He mentions the Salafists as an example of modernised Muslims who have lost touch with what he calls 'classical' Islam. Asked what he means by classical Islam, he says: 'Sufism. In other words: praying five times a day.' He laughs. 'It is as simple as that. Praying is the essence of Sufism. It modulates time. It anchors time.' He explains that the Muslim converts in Granada try to bring some order into chaotic modern society by anchoring themselves in prayer.

Inviting me to the praying room upstairs, he says that the real mosque is not the physical place but the people and their pious and charitable deeds. I take that as an apology for his work as an interior designer. The moment we enter his masterpiece, he downgrades its relevance. This may be a response to the disapproval of some purist converts who think that too much money has been spent on design and decoration. He must be aware of their criticism that a mosque is, or should be, nothing more than a clean place for prostration. For a while they stayed away from the new mosque, preferring to pray in the small mosque located in an old house downtown in the area where the Moroccans and Senegalese run their tourist shops and tea stalls. But over time, such disagreements have gradually diminished. Although Granadino Muslims still form various communities, they do tend to come together in the new mosque for Friday prayer now.

Sidi Karim shows me around, pointing out the similarities with the Mezquita of Cordoba, making me feel the softness of the marble, indicating the craftsmanship of various decorative elements. Sheer beauty, he says, had been his only criterion. He did not try to copy anything or make a statement. 'We are not looking back nostalgically,' he says. 'I have built a 2003 mosque.' When I comment that many of the elements look traditional to me, he corrects me: 'They are classical. That means timeless.' He explains that Andalusian art is traditional in the sense that it was invented and developed in a certain era, but it is also timeless in the sense that it speaks of the eternal. He compares it to studying Islam in the tradition of one of the law schools. These traditions are man-made and the product of a certain time, but they lead you to what is infinite and timeless in Islam.

The explanation makes me see the difference between my own secular perspective on Andalusian art and architecture and Sidi Karim's religious perception of it. In a secular worldview, nothing can be out of time, everything is historical, man-made and political, including – and perhaps especially – claims to infiniteness and timelessness. From such a viewpoint, Andalusian art is heritage and its contemporary revival can be interpreted as a range of comments on the present. As I have argued

above, for many Muslim converts in Granada, however, Andalusian art is more than heritage; it is a way of life that was interrupted 500 years ago but is now being revived. Sidi Karim adds another dimension to this. For him, there are moments and glimpses of the eternal in the course of time. The whole point of praying, Sidi Karim argues, is to create such moments. Andalusian art has developed out of a similar attempt to evoke a sense of infiniteness through visual means. Although the result of human creativity, it also speaks of a dimension that is out of time and therefore, perhaps, of all times. Hence, there is no discrepancy in calling a praying room that clearly and deliberately bears the traces of various historical Islamic monuments 'a 2003 mosque'. Imitation serves to create an atmosphere that is supportive of the timeless act of praying. The result is a 2003 interpretation of the infinite – a prayer cast in stone.

It now also becomes possible to see how Muslim converts distance themselves from the tourists in their admiration of Andalusian architecture. For although it is quite conceivable that tourists also sense a universal and timeless beauty in the Islamic heritage of Granada, there is a distinction between tourists and converts that becomes clear when we consider the possibility that most tourists may describe the Alhambra in terms of authentic beauty, whereas they will most likely use more ordinary terms like 'nice' or 'agreeable' for the new Granada mosque, provided they indeed like the place. This indicates that their aesthetic experience of Andalusian architecture is related to the auratic affect of heritage that loses much of its impact after imitation (Benjamin 1969). For Sidi Karim, however, the infinite dimension of Andalusian art is not in its aura of authenticity but in its capacity to recall and revive 'classical Islam', which for him does not belong to a bygone era but is of all times.

Sensational practices

Of course, some designers and architects may tend to rationalise their work in order to make the designing process – most often a contingent practice of improvisation and negotiation with various parties – look like the product of their artistic genius. Besides, over the years Sidi Karim has shown a considerable number of visitors around and in doing so he will have constructed a certain narrative about the mosque design that is nothing more than an authoritative interpretation of the creative process. Taking his account with a grain of salt, then, I do think that his account of the new Morabitun mosque as a space designed to ritually step out of time

resonates with the way habitual visitors of the mosque experience and talk about it. Several of the Granadino Muslims I talk with after Friday prayers relate how the 'classical' design of the mosque tends to have a deepening effect on the experience of prayer. Careful not to ascribe too much power to the aesthetic quality of the place, they do experience the act of praying in the Morabitun mosque as special compared to other spaces because of the sense of connection with the Islamic heritage of Al Andaluz that it evokes. This suggests that Sidi Karim's story of the mosque design may be illustrative of a common way of experiencing the mosque shared by others in the Muslim community of Granada.

As such, his words may also show the limitations of a representational approach to mosque design. From a representational point of view, Sidi Karim's preference for the 'classical' art of Al-Andaluz may be interpreted as a statement against Salafists or other Muslims who he considers overmodernised. And I do, in fact, think that there is some truth in that interpretation. Their origin in Sufi mysticism and fascination for Muslim culture tend to prevent most Muslim converts in Andalusia from deeply engaging with reformist Islamic trends, even though they have come to accept the authority of the Sunna. Although there are differences of opinion on this issue, aesthetic Islamic traditions are too dear to many of them to become purists. Hence, the Mezquita Mayor of Granada can indeed be read as an architectural statement against radical reformist tendencies in Islam. But Sidi Karim also lives in a community of converts in which the engagement with Islamic art is encouraged as a human technique to develop a religious habitus. In other words, the impact of these imitative practices and desires is not merely political in the sense that they serve as an identity marker vis-à-vis other Muslim groups. It is also profoundly religious and aimed at the spiritual transformation of the self.

In more general terms, I do think that a representational perspective has its merits. It is a welcome alternative to the art history paradigm with its roots in nineteenth-century historicism that explains architectural design in terms of epochs, *Zeitgeist* and regional variations, without taking the politics of the designing process seriously. A representational approach takes architects and commissioners to be rational, creative and political agents rather than mere children of their time and place. But applied to religious architecture, a representational perspective also tends to reduce religious architectural expression to a question of power and identity politics alone. In a period when Islam in Europe is already overpoliticised, this may obscure motivations of a pious or aesthetic nature.

A final word about the question of beauty and religion. Obviously, this is not an issue that can easily be settled. It is rather a productive dilemma that shapes religious and artistic practices. What my conversations with the new Muslims of Al-Andaluz do suggest, however, is that it may be useful to make a distinction between sensational forms and sensational skills or practices. The new Granada mosque as a sensational form – or more broadly Andalusian heritage as sensational form – remains a controversial issue because of the doctrine of the divine's radical transcendence, as explained above. Even Sidi Karim would deny that God becomes perceptible in human creations. God is, in fact, far too great for human beings to contemplate or to materialise. Despite the doctrine of the oneness of God, however, Islam does ascribe various attributes to the divine, and although it is accepted that human creations will never be able to portray the divine, they may evoke some of the divine attributes such as beauty or timelessness. Yet this remains a fiercely debated issue. It may, however, be less contentious to call the recreation of Islamic art and architecture a sensational practice. As I have argued, the development and mastering of these aesthetic skills is an inextricable and important aspect of the Muslim way of life in Granada and a method to immerse deeper in what it means to be a Muslim. In that sense, being a Muslim convert in Andalusia is a profound aesthetic experience.

Notes

1   I thank Marieke Brand, Elena Arigita, Annelies Moors and Jojada Verrips for their comments and assistance.
2   Personal communication with Elena Arigita.
3   All names are pseudonyms.
4   See Nils Bubandt (2009) for a description of the Morabitun's critique of modern capitalism and its call to a return to material money in the form of gold and silver.

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The Israelite Temple of Florence

Ivan Kalmar

As the site of regularly performed religious rituals, religious buildings are permanent, institutionalised sites for producing the Holy.[1] But the religious building also produces and reproduces – mainly through its architectural style and its location – the relationship between the religious organisation and the wider community where the building stands. Here, the religious is produced along with its relationship to the secular.[2] The religious buildings of minority faiths, in particular, create and reflect their version of the Holy along with the struggle to define the status of the minority religion vis-à-vis not only the majority religion but also the secular polity where majority and minority live together. This essay examines the case of the nineteenth-century so-called "Moorish-style" synagogue, through the particular example of the Israelite Temple (*tempio israelitico*) of Florence.

The history of the Florence temple is a specific example of the difficult negotiations that must take place when a not-quite-welcome, not-quite-trusted minority wishes to advertise its rights and achievements – its integration without losing its identity – through an architectural landmark. The actors making decisions on what and how to build were the community as well as the architects, and also the arbiter of local bourgeois taste, the *Reale Accademia delle Arti del Disegno.*

Other than the painful dictates of cost, the community had a number of priorities. These concerned the dimensions of both space (size and location) and style. The history of most Moorish-style synagogues reflects a local community's struggle to build large synagogues in conspicuous places and to negotiate a style that asserts the greatness of Judaism *as a modern religion* with respectable ancient roots. Taking place in the context of the struggle for legal and social emancipation, this struggle to present a grandiloquent image of the Jews would be taken to the very limits, just a little shy of offending even sympathetic gentiles. It required decades of difficult negotiations between the Jewish community and the Florentine elite.

'Moorish Style': The Jew as Oriental

Moorish-style synagogues are instructive in part because they suggest parallels to mosque building in the Western world today. Parallels exist not only in the social and political function of the two kinds of religious building but also in their aesthetic execution.

The situation of Muslim communities in the West today is in many ways vastly different from that of Jewish communities a hundred and fifty years ago. Nevertheless, there are important similarities. Nineteenth-century Jews, like twenty-first-century Muslims, aimed to construct religious buildings that would be noticed, in order to legitimate their presence in both the physical and the social landscape. And nineteenth-century Jews, too, often faced vigorous opposition from segments of the public. These similarities in the political function of the mosque today and the synagogue then mean that a look at nineteenth-century synagogue construction is of interest not only for its own sake but also as something of a historical precedent for the building of mosques in the West today.

There is more to the similarity between the synagogue then and the mosque today, however. In addition to similarities of political function (that is, of how the building represents the community's relationship to the wider polity), there are also specific, concrete similarities in those cases where synagogues were built in the West in an Orientalising style, traditionally called "Moorish" but in fact drawing on decorative elements from throughout Islam. This same "Moorish" tradition of Western architectural decoration is an important historical source for those contemporary mosques whose builders have decided to give them an "Oriental" appearance. For while the mosque may include a conspicuous copy of some architectural landmark in North Africa or the Middle East, the building as a whole projects a Western reader whose idea of what is Oriental is educated not by knowledge of any specific example from the East but rather by familiarity with a long history of *Western* Orientalist decorative idiom. The "Moorish style", also known once as "Arabian", is a Western style of presenting Islamic architectural references. It started around the time of the Royal Pavilion at Brighton (1787-1823) and then produced, in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, a host of villas and palaces, concert halls, water towers, bars and cinemas, Masonic Halls and synagogues. All sported the stereotypical horseshoe windows and doors, domes, minarets and battlements referring to the "magic East" (Danby 1995).

The long history of conflict between Jews and Muslims in historic Palestine has now succeeded in almost completely obscuring the fact that well into the twentieth century, Judaism and Islam were often thought of as kindred religions by Christians, and that Jews and Arabs were *always* thought of as racial relatives – by everyone in the West, including Western Jews themselves. Both were thought of as "Oriental" at a time when "Orient" meant principally the region from North Africa to West and Central Asia. Since it was universally believed that the Jews, as Semites, were an Oriental people racially akin to Arabs, many gentiles and Jews saw borrowing Arabic, and therefore Muslim, styles as the appropriate manner for the surface finish of Jewish buildings.

Why did many Jews accede, including in making architectural decisions, to this view of themselves as Oriental outsiders to Europe? The heyday of the Moorish-style synagogue coincided more or less with the Romantic and neo-Romantic period in Western high and popular culture. Both the exotic and the archaic were admired by Romantics. Edward Said recognised that Islamophobia and anti-Semitism were branches of the same noxious tradition (Said 2003: 368). But conversely, Islamophilia, for there was such a thing, was also akin to philo-Semitism, and both were expressions of a more general Romantic philo-Orientalism or what Raymond Schwab, admired by Said, called "the oriental Renaissance" (Schwab 1984). Those who chose the Moorish style for their synagogue were exploiting the philo-Semitic cachet of the Jews as an ancient people from outside Europe.

The *tempio israelitico* of Florence, completed in 1882, is a fine example of the mature stage of this style of synagogue building and decoration (plate 19). The temple occupies a large dedicated lot. When viewed from above, as from the famous lookout at Piazzale Michelangelo, the cupola of the synagogue appears as a more modest reprise of the famous Brunelleschi dome of the city's main *duomo* of the Basilica di Santa Maria del Fiore. This visual link to the majority Christian community's iconic shrine is exactly what the Jewish community had in mind, and the goal was at least partly achieved – though, as we shall see, not without considerable struggle. The basically Christian church silhouette of the synagogue having been accomplished, the decorative detail was made to evoke the Orient. The combination made the message clear: this is a dignified place of worship of a people of Oriental origin who are fully at home in the Christian West.

It was quite typical for the "Moorish" style in general for the Islamic allusion to be assimilated to more familiar Western elements, but also often

to other exotic references. In the case of the Florentine synagogue, as in many others, there are Byzantine as well as Islamic allusions. To read the Byzantine element correctly, however, it needs to be remembered that in the nineteenth century even more than today, the culture of Byzantium was understood to be, like Islamic culture, one of the Orient. (Indeed, in the Roman Empire and later within Christendom, the "East" or "Orient" often meant the regions of Eastern Christianity.)

For Western Jews – as it would be for Western Muslims later – Oriental decoration stressed affiliations with eastern origins, while the essentials of the building design and, even more, modern Western construction techniques, emphasised how compatible the non-Western religious tradition is with Western modernity. In both the Jewish and the Muslim cases, the combination of Oriental *ornament* and Western *fundament* allows the community to proudly assert its romantically exotic flourish without posing a serious threat to the conception of Western values as a universal basis of a modern society, multicultural or otherwise.

Location and size

At first, the location and size of the synagogue seemed more important than style. The Jews of Florence were, in spite of occasional setbacks, acquiring a greater degree of civic and legal equality with their gentile neighbours. In Tuscany, the Jews were given full civil rights only in 1861. In the mid-nineteenth century, most still lived in the area of the just-abolished ghetto but as in other European cities were moving outside of it and wished to build a major synagogue in a non-traditional location. Building new, representative synagogues at the outskirts of, or well beyond, the ghetto was part of the emancipation process. In 1847 already, the Florentine Jews were thinking of a new place of worship,[3] but the idea needed several decades to be realised. Marco Treves, the Jewish architect who would be mainly responsible for the *tempio,* was chosen for the job as early as 1860,[4] though the building was not completed until 1882.

The delay was largely due to long and difficult discussions about space. The Jews of Florence, as in other West and Central European cities, wanted to declare that they would no longer hide. Until emancipation, most European cities had permitted synagogues only if they were inconspicuous. Most Italian synagogues had been practically unmarked and looked to passers-by as ordinary houses. Now Jews wished to symbolise their

coming out onto the surface of public life by building a synagogue that would be as visible as possible. In Florence, the idea was to be in, or as close as possible, to the historic and religious – that is to say – Catholic centre of the city, dominated by the cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, better known as the Duomo.

Unfortunately, the community did not have the means to follow up on such grandiose intentions. There is no evidence of any anti-Semitism in the failure to build the synagogue near the Duomo. It appears, rather, that the community did not have, or was not willing, to pay the price demanded by the gentile owners (Boralevi 1985: 56-60). Therefore, there was general relief and excitement when, in 1868, the president of the community, the *Cavaliere* David Levi, willed all his means for the completion of a *tempio.* This did, however, mean that one had to wait for Levi to die, which happened on 16 February 1870. And even then, the considerable sum received by the community was not enough to purchase any of the coveted downtown locations. Finally, in 1872, the present location was chosen, fairly distant from the old centre (ibid: 60-63). The new lot lacked the prestige of a historic location, but it was in a spot that was part of a middle-class expansion to the green outskirts of the city, of which many Jews were a part. Importantly, it was suitable for a sizeable garden that was to surround the building, which itself – and this was of the greatest importance – could be *large*.

For various reasons, some having to do with traditional Jewish prayer practices and some with restrictions imposed by the non-Jewish authorities, synagogues before Jewish emancipation in Italy as elsewhere tended to be, with some exceptions, no more than prayer rooms, with only a few capable of comfortably seating more than a hundred worshippers. The small size also accorded with the traditional prohibition against travel on the Sabbath. Many small synagogues were more practical for worshippers who had to arrive on foot, than a few large ones. However, from the late eighteenth century on, many Jewish communities wished to stress their desired or actual emancipation by no longer trying to stay out of sight. Though many of the Orthodox objected, for modernising Jews in the nineteenth century – be it in Florence or in Manchester, Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Budapest, St. Petersburg, New York or Cincinnati – size did matter when it came to synagogue building. In Turin, the exotic skyscraper now known as Mole Antonielliana was originally projected by the over-ambitious Jewish community, who had to sell the unfinished building when they ran out of money. The *tempio israelitico* of Florence was built following this ideal of large size. The community never hav-

ing numbered more than a few thousand at most, it is unlikely that the building has ever been overly filled with worshippers. What was more important was that it demonstrated through its size, to Jew and Gentile alike, the importance and confidence of the Jews in Florence, in Italy and in Europe.

Style

With the lot finally won, the Jewish community turned to the question of style. Tour guides today maintain that the "Moorish" style of the synagogue is an expression of nostalgia for medieval Islamic Spain, where some of the ancestors of the local Jewish community are said to have come from.[5] This is false on several counts.

The large conspicuous dome has no precedent in Islamic Spain, where domes were simply not part of the architecture of mosques *or* synagogues. Moreover, the Moorish style, which was more or less set in the first half of the nineteenth century, developed at a time when the famous synagogues of Cordoba, Seville and Toledo were not widely known outside of Spain. Clearly, although there are important references to Muslim Spain at the Florentine *tempio,* especially in its interior decoration, these came to the construction team not directly from Spain but from the well-established tradition of Moorish-style building in Europe. These relied heavily on the sketches of ornamental detail from the Alhambra of Granada, published in various forms by or under the leadership of Owen Jones (who had made careful drawings of the Moorish monument himself) between 1836 and 1845.[6]

There is proof nearby, at the palace of Sanmezzano, 34 kilometres from Florence, that the influence of the Alhambra did not necessarily have anything to do with a sort of nostalgia for the Jewish past in Muslim Spain. Sanmezzano was the residence of the eccentric Ferdinando Panciatichi Ximenes d'Aragona. Since Panciatichi was of Spanish origin, he may be thought to have chosen the Moorish style in order to pay homage to his Iberian heritage. Yet at Sanmezzano, allusions to Persia outweighed those to Muslim Spain.

True, there was a belief among Western Jews that still survives today and which holds that in Muslim Spain, Jews lived an ideal existence, appreciated by the Muslim rulers and playing an important part in the state and society. This belief was made popular by nineteenth-century German Jewish scholars, who held out the supposed bliss of Muslim Spain as an

example for increasingly anti-Semitic Europe. So it is possible that this notion would have impressed the Jews of Florence, especially since it is true that some, though not all of them, reckoned themselves of Spanish descent.

It is possible that it would have impressed them, but it didn't. The documentary evidence completely belies this tour-guide narrative. Unfortunately in Florence as elsewhere, the symbolic core of the Moorish-style synagogue has been reinterpreted in order to tell an exclusively *Jewish* story, erasing all allusions to kinship with Arabs and Islam. Furthermore, the current local narrative also erases the agency of the non-Jewish Italian community.

In truth, the Jewish community did not initially want to build in an Orientalist style at all. They intended to take the second choice I mentioned above: to emphasise sameness, not difference. In the heart of Florence at the time, the default unmarked style was neo-Renaissance. The boldest, most provocative element of the original design was the roof: it was to be topped by an unmistakable copy of the famous Brunelleschi dome of the Duomo, the pride of the Florentine Renaissance and one of its dearest symbols.

This rejected design survives in the archives of the *Reale Accademia delle Arti del Disegno*.[7] The Jewish community felt obliged to get its project approved by this august body founded by Michelangelo. This was not a legal requirement but was a strategic move for reasons of prestige that could not have hurt the community once it requested the necessary building permits from the city. What the officials of the *Università* did not expect was the shock that the academicians expressed at the idea of the Jews building one of the city's most conspicuous religious buildings, and building it in a style that recalled a church. In their meeting of 23 November 1872, they showed considerable unease about how to put such misgivings to the Jews. Finally they agreed on striking a committee that was to report back to them. Prof. Giuseppe Cappellini went on record saying that:

> ... the [suggestions of the] Commission should be accepted and carried out, and regardless of what its views may be, and one must have the courage of one's own convictions to tell all the truth.[8]

It was, it seems, Prof. de Fabris who was charged with an investigation that would be specifically designed to uncover what was being done in synagogue building in the German-speaking countries. De Fabris came back with a written opinion, which he read to the assembled. However,

the Secretary, Prof. Francolini, was not particularly satisfied with what seemed to him an unexpectedly mild criticism of the temple project. One has to point out, he said,

> ... the wretchedness, once again, of the same vis-à-vis the sublime idea of a Temple offered to the Divinity (be it of the Israelite cult), and one must decide for a total rejection.[9]

Francolini and Cappellini insisted, and the whole group ended up asking De Fabris to redraft his opinion before it was sent to the Jewish community.

The revised letter was approved on 5 December 1872 and signed by all those present. "In sum", the letter argued,

> ... it seems to the College that as each Nation has impressed its history on Monuments of a religious nature, so also a building with the afore-mentioned purpose must stand out at first sight in a manner that recalls the dates and places that are the most interesting for that Religion, and must possess such a character that it may not be confused with the religious or civil monuments of other Nations and Religions.

The need to build in a distinctive style was, then, essentially conveyed to the Jews by the gentile College of Architects. It was a repetition of the history of the Moorish-style synagogue itself, which appears to have begun with the decision of the Bavarian government in the 1830s to build officially sanctioned places of worship for the Jews. (The first known Moorish-style synagogue was the small prayer house at Ingenheim, which had a Moorish-style door.)[10] Repeating a question previously asked in other parts of Europe, the architects of the *Accademia* next considered just what a distinctively Jewish style would be. They suggested that the solution lies:

> ... in reminiscences of the Arab style, and in general of Monuments scattered in Asia Minor, or if you wish of the Byzantine [style]. (...) The Israelite Council is surely in a position to appreciate how far from this one is taken by the organic elements of the Romanesque style, and the forms of the Renaissance, of which one sees patent references in the Project submitted.[11]

This argument was identical to the one expressed by the Viennese architect Ludwig von Förster, who had constructed the ground-breaking

Moorish-style synagogues of Vienna-Tempelgasse (1858) and Budapest-Dohány utca (1859). In a published explanation of his thinking about the Budapest temple, Förster had suggested that:

> It is known to be a difficult task indeed to build an Israelite Temple in a form required by the religion and suitable for its practice, and at the same time corresponding, at least in its essential features, to the hallowed ideal of all temples, the Temple of Solomon. It is doubly difficult in so far as [the building's] external architecture is concerned, for the existing records cannot nearly provide us with a reliable picture; and those Houses of God that belong to a later time either lack any distinct style or carry features that are in their inner being entirely alien to the Israelite religion.
>
> In my humble opinion the right way, given the circumstances, is to choose, when building an Israelite Temple, those architectural forms that have been used by oriental ethnic groups that are related to the Israelite people, and in particular the Arabs ... (Förster 1859: 14).

Förster, who was a very prominent architect in Vienna, may or may not have had a direct influence on the Italians in Florence, but in any case they agreed on the same rationale for choosing the style of a synagogue. This had nothing to do with nostalgia for Spain but rather expressed the belief that Jews as the cousins of Arabs should build in an Oriental, not a European, style.

Disarmed, yet deeply desirous of the approval of the gentile elite, the Jews of Florence obliged. Summing up the project after it was completed, the project supervisor Eduardo Vitta reported that:

> [the] Temple is of the oriental style derived from the Arabic and the Moorish styles, observed in the monuments of Egypt and of Spain, modified, however, and adapted to its times, its function, and its location (Vitta 1883: 5).

Elements of the dome, Vitta added, recalled "those of monumental mosques and of the tombs of the caliphs that are found in Cairo" (ibid: 6). Vitta did point out that the interior was expressly modeled on the Alhambra, though it is clear that the decorators were working under the influence of contemporary Orientalist decoration in general.

Vitta says nothing about the Alhambra recalling any Golden Age of the Jews. In the context, it is clearly just one architectural and ornamental

model – though an important one – from the Islamic world, along with those from specifically Egypt, and in the spirit of the *Accademia* architects' suggestion for Jews to imitate the Arab world.

The Florence temple was designed by Marco Treves, Mariano Falcini and Vincenzo Micheli. It seems that Treves, a Jew, was the main spirit behind it; the others were perhaps only *Paradegoyim*, "goys for show" to use a contemporary Viennese expression. Treves' attitude was characteristic of the community. Soon enough, they accepted the programme suggested by the *Accademia* with great enthusiasm. Other Italian Jewish communities embraced the architectural expression of their eastern identity. In 1878, the northern community of Vercelli completed a synagogue following an even more boldly Orientalist design by Treves.

Conclusion

These temples proudly joined the ranks of other Moorish-style synagogues built for – and increasingly by – the Jews, the Oriental nation in the West. Some of the buildings still stand today or have been renovated, while most of the less significant examples are gone. At one time, however, the fundamentally European but Islamic-decorated Moorish-style synagogue could be seen, proudly clashing with its architectural environment, not only in Italy but almost everywhere that Western Jews lived or had influence: Liverpool, Antwerp, Berlin, Prague, Budapest, St. Petersburg, Cincinnati, New York, Pretoria and even, under Western influence and partly for Western Jews, in Istanbul and Cairo (Kalmar 2001).

The exchange between the *Accademia* and the Florentine Jewish community illustrates the difficult symbiosis between gentiles and Jews in the context of the increasing but contested acceptance of the Jews as equal subjects of the wider polity of the city, the state and the continent. The struggle over the style of the local synagogue was one of symbolic capital. The Jews of Florence originally wished to use a style that would eradicate the difference between themselves and the Catholic majority. Yet this was a community bent on acculturation, not total assimilation. The suggestion that they should build in a different yet equally monumental style appealed to the goal of both remaining distinct and being included in the larger community.

Europe-wide, it is instructive that the first Moorish-style elements were incorporated into synagogue building by gentile architects and, it seems, under pressure by the secular political authorities. It is possible

that the horseshoe windows on Prague's Grossenhof Synagogue date to the rebuilding after the fire of 1754 (Hammer-Schenk 1988). But a more unequivocal beginning was made only much later, in the 1830s, in the erstwhile Kingdom of Bavaria. Here, the important architect Friedrich von Gärtner appears to have been involved in a plan to build several synagogues in Moorish style. The first may have been the one at Ingenheim, built between 1830 and 1832 (Hammer-Schenk 1981). But as the style matured in the last part of the nineteenth century, many liberal, Western Jewish communities as well as Jewish architects embraced it enthusiastically (Kalmar 2001: 84-88).

True enough, there continued to be also Jewish voices against the Moorish-style synagogue, wishing to emphasise Jewish sameness, not Jewish difference. Among the many reasons why these eventually won out was the demise of Romantic Orientalism, as "Semite" changed from a moniker of intriguing exoticism to an epithet for the noxious outsider. To be mourned, however, is the sense, now so difficult to reconstruct, that Jew and Muslim were akin, two of the same Oriental kind.

One place where similarities between the two groups do resurface is in the issues faced by mosque builders today and synagogue builders in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. No doubt today Muslim communities face the same challenge in choosing the style of a mosque: whether to exoticise decorative elements over modern construction, stressing the ability of the old tradition to adapt as an equal to modern society, or to adopt a style that erases all but the ritually prescribed differences from secular buildings and those of other religions, underlining the complete integration of the minority community.

Notes

1   Here I follow Roy Rappaport's view of the Holy as produced by ritual (Rappaport 1999: 278-9).
2   That the religious and the secular are in principle produced together is the thesis of Talal Asad (2003: 269).
3   Archives of the Jewish Community of Florence (then *Università Israelitica,* now *Comunità Israelitica di Firenze*), box 59/98/13, "Rilievi per servire di delucidazione all'unito Progetto sviluppato dal sottoscritto Architetto ..." signed and dated by the architect Marano Falcini, 21 April 1847. I am indebted for this and most of my other information from the archives of the Jewish Community to Alberto Boralevi, "La costruzione della sinagoga di Firenze," in *Il*

centenario del tempio israelitico di Firenze: Atti del Convegno 24. ott. '82, Firenze: Giuntina, 1985. Unfortunately, this excellent article by a leading Florentine curator is not widely available.

4   Letter from the governing council (*Consiglio Governativo*) of the Jewish Community to Treves, 15 January 1860 (Archives of the *Università Israelitica.* Boralevi, *La costruzione,* 54).

5   The first-listed website about the synagogue on google.com (http://www.jewishitaly.org/detail.asp?ID=27, accessed 23 March 2012) states: "Because the Florentine Jews were Sephardic, the design of their synagogue recalls the Muslim art of Moorish Spain."

6   See, for example, Owen Jones, Pascual de Gayangos and Remnant & Edmonds, eds. *Plans, Elevations, Sections, and Details of the Alhambra.*

7   *Atti della Reale Accademia delle Arti del Disegno in Firenze,* 1872.

8   *si deve accettare la Commissione ed adempirla, e qualunque sia il parere, e si deve avere il coraggio della propria opinione, e di dire tutto il vero.*

9   *... si dovesse dimostrare,* he said, *la meschinità ancora del medesimo di fronte all'idea sublime di un Tempio destinato alla Divinitá, sia pure del culto Israelitico; e si debbe concludere per il totale rigetto.*

10 On Moorish-style synagogues in general, see Ivan D. Kalmar (2001: 68-100).

11 *Reale Accademia delle Arti del Disegno in Firenze* to the President of the Council of the Israelite Community of Firenze, 5 December 1872. Archives of the Jewish Community of Florence.

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The Mosque in Britain Finding its Place

Shahed Saleem

Before the census of 2001, there was no way of accurately determining the size of the Muslim population in Britain, as previous censuses did not categorise religious affiliation. The best estimates, in 1991, concluded that the Muslim population at the time stood at one million, with 80% being of South Asian origin. The remainder were drawn mostly from the Arab world, Malaysia, Iran, Turkey, Cyprus, and East and West Africa (Lewis 2004: 14). With natural growth, continuing globalisation and post-colonial migration fuelled by economic hardship and conflict, more migrants arrived in Britain from other parts of the Muslim world. By the 2001 census, the Muslim population had risen to 1.5 million, now with some 65% of South Asian origin, indicating the increasing multi-ethnic make-up of Britain's Muslim population.

Although references to Muslims in Britain date back to the fifteenth century, the first settled communities emerged in the late nineteenth century. The country's first mosque was created not by Muslim migrants but by an English convert to Islam, Abdullah William Quilliam, who adapted a house in Liverpool into the first recorded mosque in 1887. In 1889, a Hungarian Jew had built the first purpose-built mosque in Woking, south of London (plate 20). There were then only two more built examples to follow before the Second World War, one in south London by the Ahmadiyya community in 1925 and the other in Cardiff in 1946.

Imperial Britain had over centuries established multiple political, cultural and social links with its colonies, where most of its subjects were Muslim. It was through these imperial projects that Muslim communities first settled in Britain, coming to the country, for example, as seamen, students and scholars. These early settled communities formed in the port areas of Cardiff, Liverpool, South Shields and East London. A series of mosques were established in converted houses, and one was built by the late 1940s by Yemeni sailors in Cardiff's Tiger Bay. The Muslim community until the Second World War was mostly limited to port towns or was otherwise intellectuals, students, dignitaries or converts in and around

London. It was from this milieu that the London Mosque Fund emerged in 1910, a movement that would eventually have a hand in the creation of two of London's major Muslim institutions, the East London Mosque and the Regent's Park Mosque.

After the Second World War, with the advent of decolonisation, large numbers of Muslims settled in Britain from certain parts of South Asia,[1] and the Muslim population proliferated. Much of this migration was from specific areas of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and chain migration networks were established which transported whole sections of communities and their respective cultures to British towns (Ansari 2004: 145). It was the social characteristics of these migrants and the Muslim culture they brought that established the framework for the evolution of post-war British Muslim culture and architecture in the subsequent decades. It was a Muslim demography and culture that was profoundly different in scale, dynamics and culture from the Muslim environment of the early twentieth century.

In 1951, the estimate for Britons of Pakistani and Bangladeshi descent stood at 5,000, and by 1991 the figure had reached 640,000 (Lewis 2004: 15). Muslim migrants came from a few specific locales, namely the north Indian state of Gujarat, the Pakistani states of Punjab and Azad Kashmir, and from Sylhet in Bangladesh. There were a number of social and economic processes at play that resulted in these migratory networks being established. These are identified as being primarily socio-economic, combined with cultures of emigration in search of work. Migrants settled in urban areas across the UK, following employment opportunities and consolidating social and communal networks. Consequently, Muslim communities emerged in Britain's main industrial conurbations: London, the West Midlands, Yorkshire and Lancashire, Clydeside in Scotland. A number of factors combined to produce these settlement patterns: 'social support, and shared linguistic, cultural and religious traditions' (Ansari 2004: 176), along with cheap housing and the experience of social and institutional racism all played a part. The result is that Muslim communities resulted largely 'in spatially defined areas within the major industrial cities corresponding to the late-Victorian and Edwardian inner and middle-ring neighbourhoods ... The highly regular and well-differentiated layout of the industrial urban landscape, characterised by regular streets, long street blocks, standardised plot sizes and repetitive two storey terraces, formed a morphological frame governing [the] urban change' (Nasser 2003: 8) that was to follow.

The Muslim communities that emerged from the 1960s were, on the whole, 'very successful in reproducing their traditional social and cultural world[s]' (Lewis 2004: 18). This description was not restricted to South Asian settlers. A study of Yemenis in Britain described them as forming an "urban village ... living within its own socially, linguistically and ethnically defined borders' (ibid: 19).

Communal structures from places of origin were replicated in their new environments. For example, the Muslims of Bharuch, Gujarat, already lived in India in considerably self-contained enclaves, a pattern that was repeated and indeed intensified in Blackburn, with chain migration reproducing village and kin networks (ibid). It was the arrival of families in the 1960s that changed the nature of these early settler communities. Prior to this demographic event, 'Indians, Yemenis and Turkish Cypriots [had] lived together in boarding houses ... sharing more or less the same religious facilities' (Ansari 2004: 343). It was the reuniting of families that led to the gradual separation of Muslim migrants to form 'ethnic settlements', and it was from within these distinct cultural and ethnic groupings that institutions started to form. It was the size and concentration of these emergent Muslim communities that enabled them to 'generate and sustain institutional and economic infrastructure that embodied and perpetuated specific religious and cultural norms. What emerged at the end of the 1970s was a patchwork of communities, each impressing its particular national, ethnic, linguistic and doctrinal character on the organisations it created' (ibid).

This was the cultural context from which the mosque, as the primary social institution, emerged in Britain post-1960, its role being as much a place of practical support and cultural comfort as of religious provision. These mosques 'were primarily concerned with the promotion of worship and religious life, the encouragement of 'fraternal' links in Muslim communities, the provision of assistance and moral support for individuals ... and the improvement of social, cultural and educational conditions' (ibid). The result was that the handful of mosques that existed in Britain up to 1960 snowballed over the decades to follow.

The mosques that were established in these early post-war years were rudimentary operations, formed mostly from converted houses or other buildings that were adapted to serve a new religious function. The 'portability' of Islamic rituals meant that a mosque could be created with the most elemental of alterations, in essence the opening up of rooms to form prayer halls, where congregants could perform the prayer in rows, facing Mecca.

As mosques proliferated across the country, certain architectural patterns emerged. Either houses or other non-domestic buildings were converted into places for Muslim worship, or mosques were built as new structures. These new mosque typologies can be broadly outlined as follows.

Mosque Typologies

House mosques are simply dwellings that have been converted to function as mosques and have undergone various degrees of internal and sometimes external adaptations. The conversion of the house is usually rudimentary, with the emphasis being on the creation of as much open floor space as possible to accommodate the maximum number of worshippers in as unified a space as possible. Islamic symbolism will usually be limited to signage and the *mihrab* and *minbar*,[2] which could be a simple timber structure of a few steps, with a specific prayer mat for the Imam.

Converted mosques are non-residential buildings that have been converted to form mosques. Examples of these are quite varied, including former warehouses, banks, public houses and churches. The extent of building work in converting buildings varies widely. Some may have minimal alterations to enable the building to function as a mosque, while others may involve extending, cladding and adding religious symbolism to the extent that the original building can be difficult to discern.

The *purpose-built mosque* is one that has been built from the ground as a new mosque. They could be built on a completely new site or in some cases as a replacement of a pre-existing mosque that had been formed through a conversion. The purpose-built mosque is often the culmination of a Muslim community's mosque development trajectory, a journey that generally starts with a house mosque or converted building that is eventually found to be insufficient to cater to the needs of a growing Muslim population and is then replaced with a larger purpose-built facility.

Wider responses to the mosque

This new urban form did not go unnoticed and indeed was quickly to become a highly contested object in the urban field. The mosque became a symbol around which notions of identity could be played out, eliciting both crude and complex reactions in which notions of civic rights

and cultural identity were enmeshed. Architecture became the carrier of embodied notions of home and 'Other'. One objector to the design of a mosque in south London in 1977 encapsulated this complexity:

> When I moved to Ryfold Road some 15 months ago, one of my reasons for selecting the area was that it was a pleasant, quiet, typically turn-of-the-century residential area. Architecturally, the locality, including the church in Ryfold Road, forms a consistent whole, with buildings of characteristic and pleasing proportions. I feel that the introduction of a minaret into Wimbledon (plate 21) would be completely out of character as to be a serious detriment to the area. I can believe, and accept freely, that there is a need for a place of worship such as the mosque in this area, but feel that a minaret is not an essential adjunct to such worship.[3]

What is interesting is the nuance of this comment in that it suggests acceptance of migration and associated minority cultural practices but argues that these should not alter the physical landscape of what is understood to be an unchanging and consistent English suburbia. This type of objection, against the architecture of the mosque and what it signifies for English identity, has been a common theme throughout mosque establishment across the country. For example, the following objection was submitted to the Noor-ul-Islam mosque in Bolton in 1994:

> I would like to express my very strong objection to this eyesore for the following reason. Although we now live in a multicultural society, it is England after all, and we do not wish our hometown to resemble New Delhi. It is so annoying and depressing to have our town taken over like this.[4]

Despite such objections, which have been a consistent characteristic of mosque proposals, the dome and minaret have persisted, which shows the depth of meaning these symbols have to the Muslim communities. In a number of cases, for example with the Brick Lane Jamia Mosque, the minaret was added some thirty years after the building was well established, again illustrating the enduring relevance of this object for the mosque. These symbols have come to characterise Muslim architecture in Britain for both Muslims and non-Muslims, and debates around mosques have often fixated on these elements.

As a result, the symbol of the dome, arch and minaret has become the default signage for Muslim buildings: they 'are being deployed as a

shorthand for a Muslim presence, reinforcing a vocabulary understood in the West as representing Islam, and thus representing a specific identity' (Nasser 2003: 15). The aesthetic character of the purpose-built mosques that emerged in the two decades from the 1980s, the first 'wave' of mass mosque-building, is captured in this description of the Ghamkol Sheriff mosque in Birmingham (plate 22):

> the mosque's stylistic expression is one of ambivalence. The building has all the usual 'Islamic' architectural imagery; however, it is difficult to trace its referent. As such, these reductionist, albeit imagined signifiers, are combined with local forms and materials to create a stylistic hybridity. In particular, the fusion of brickwork and slate roofing with an eclectic array of fenestrations, domes and a minaret, represent what Gale and Naylor call 'stylistic domestication' – an aesthetic form that is not reducible to any particular tradition. (Nasser 2003: 16)

The role of the mosque in the spatialisation of Islam

Mosques emerged in areas of high Muslim populations, which in turn attracted Muslims to the area, with consequent visual, domestic and social impacts on the streets, leading to what some academics have called the 'Islamisation of space' (Eade 1996). Racism and exclusion also left migrants in a cultural no man's land, suspended between a home culture they were disconnected from and in danger of losing, and a host society that excluded them completely. As families were reunited in Britain and children were born indigenously, the prospect of such alienation for the next generation was a cause for deep concern. This was allied with the cultural distance that migrants felt towards majority White social practices, whereby the 'West' was imagined as 'materialist, exploitative, licentious, and at once, godless and Christian' (Metcalf 1996: 7). It was this lack of a religious infrastructure to maintain and transfer traditions and values that served as a significant motivation for the establishment of mosques where religious ritual and education could be enacted and religious practice could be transferred and maintained.

A study of mosques in Bradford describes the mosques established by the first generation of migrants from South Asia as 'vehicles for the dynamic reconstruction of tradition and culture so as to advance subaltern group interests in contexts of rapid social change ... [providing] an important space – for first-generation immigrants especially – to resist

assimilation, navigate social exclusion and organise self-help … [by] creating continuity of experience in terms of institutional form, religious rituals and specialists, and social relationships' (McLoughlin 2006: 1060). The paper also notes that this process and role of community institution-building is historically not exclusive to Muslim migrants: 'Many first-generation peasant and working-class immigrants from East European Jews to Irish Catholics, have adopted this same strategy of survival in Britain' (ibid).

However, it is important to note that the mosque is not the only, or indeed the primary, way in which Muslim space is constructed. 'Ritual and sanctioned practice that is prior to and that creates "Muslim space", does not require any juridicially claimed territory or formally consecrated or architecturally specific space' (Metcalf 1996: 3). This means that the mosque is one part of a matrix of Muslim practices that together constitute Muslim culture and identity in Britain. That is to say that the mosque, therefore, is not essential – prayer is, which can be carried out almost anywhere. The mosque, therefore, fulfils a symbolic role with a range of messages from presence to permanence and also serves to replicate a religious and social institution familiar to the migrants' origins.

The mosque in Britain does not, however, simply represent the relocation of a religious institution from a 'home' culture into a new 'Western' one, it also offers a transforming social and religious order within Muslim discourse. Firstly, although many mosques in Britain are denominationally dominant, they nevertheless serve to combine plural Muslim religious practices from different parts of the world. They therefore serve as hubs for a globalising Muslim community and effect a shift towards a generic form of religious practice and understanding that starts to leave regional and denominational differences behind. This can be seen as a characteristic of diaspora mosques in the 'West' where, for example, 'in the United States, the Islamic Society of North America … has particularly urged Muslims to overcome ethnic customs in favour of a shared normative practice … [here] Muslims strip away centuries of innovation and succeed in getting to the essence' (Metcalf 1996 10).

These findings emerged from an academic research committee in the US in the late 1980s. One of the key points of this research was that diaspora Muslim communities settled in the 'West' – referred to as 'border populations' – constituted a wholly new potential for the evolution and development of Muslim cultural practice. This new practice emerged from the new realities that migrated Muslim populations found themselves in, where they were minorities within majority non-Muslim societies and

were ruptured from the cultural trajectory of their homeland, forced to address new relationships with globally diverse Muslim communities.

The potential is that this 'border' situation sets up a new social and cultural context from which the mosque could possibly be reinvented, functionally and visually. For Britain's urban history, it is a new typology, brought into being by formations of Muslim society that are without precedent. What this mosque is, what it does and what it looks like is now open to reinterpretation.

Explorations: The first mosques

An architectural interrogation of what the mosque could be in its new British context can be seen in early mosque architecture from the first mosque at Woking through to the Regent's Park Mosque of the late 1970s.

The mosque in Woking, the first built example, is quite an elaborate and expressive affair and reflects the late eighteenth-century Mughal style in India. Architectural elements of the onion dome, the central portico entrance, the arched doorways and niches were prevalent throughout the Mughal period and in later buildings become noticeably more sculptural. Such buildings were familiar in late nineteenth-century England through popular engravings and exhibitions. The mosque is therefore a perfect example of high Victorian eclecticism, a fantastic folly in a woodland evoking the lure and mystery of the Orient.

The next mosque to be built, Fazl Mosque in south London, consists of a single prayer hall, just seven metres by ten metres (plate 23). On the side elevations, tall narrow windows with rounded arches are located within each bay between vertical piers. At each corner of the building are simple cupolas, which are a characteristic element of Indian Mughal architecture. These elements, however, are treated in a way that starts to depart from the Oriental imagery that characterised its predecessor at Woking. From here the idea of the mosque as a British Islamic building influenced by contemporary trends in modernism and art deco can be explored.

Fazl Mosque is architecturally significant in that it marks a departure from the high Victorian Orientalism of buildings such as Woking, the Brighton Pavillion and Sezincote House, and presents instead a restrained Islamic language infused with a sense of contemporary 1920s art deco. Fazl was therefore a radical and progressive departure and could be said to mark the end of exotic architectural representations of the 'East', and so the end of the Orientalist genre in British architecture.

Two mosques were built in Cardiff, the first in 1946 and the next in 1967. It was the latter, Alice Street mosque, that was demolished some ten years after it was completed to make way for the current mosque building. It nevertheless represented a significant experiment in mosque design.

As a building it was determinedly contemporary, reflecting the stylistic influences of post-war British Modernism that had been emerging since the early 1950s. The plan is a simple arrangement of a circular prayer hall, with an offset rectangular two-storey residence linked back to the prayer hall with a single-storey entrance lobby. The prayer hall is topped with a concrete shell roof with glazed side panels and glazed flat roof infill sections. This is a contemporary reinterpretation of the traditional dome that draws from the heroic Modernist architecture of the 1950s and 1960s. The prayer hall and lobby are rendered, and the residential block is brick faced. The only concessions to traditional Islamic styles are found in the detailing of the entrance doors and lobby windows, which have ogee-arched frameworks. A series of smaller windows to the lobby are triangular shaped, being neither strictly traditionally Islamic nor modernist, but cleverly acceptable to both.

This mosque has discarded any allusions to traditionalism and opted for a decidedly modern approach, showing confidence and experimentation. While it seems the experiment did not pay off, the building being demolished ten years later, it nevertheless stands as the first modernist exploration of the mosque in Britain and remains to this day one of the most contemporary examples of a British mosque.

Although a small mosque was built in Preston in 1969, the next major mosque to be built, and to continue the investigation in the language of mosque architecture in Britain, was Regent's Park mosque in central London, which was also the largest to date (plate 24).

This was the country's first monumental landmark mosque and was built to represent Islam in Britain on a world stage. An international competition was held in 1969 to find a suitable design, which was won by Sir Frederick Gibberd, one of the first generation of British modernist architects and very much a member of the architectural establishment at the time.

The competition was won just two years after Gibberd had completed Liverpool Cathedral, a radical and avant-garde expression of the Catholic Church in the city centre. Regent's Park mosque, therefore, was Gibberd's second monumental religious building, completed just over a decade after Liverpool. It received architectural criticism at the time for its reversion to traditional Islamic elements of the dome, minaret and pointed arch.

However, Gibberd's argument was that these were the symbols that gave the building near universal meaning for Muslims and were important to incorporate especially, as this was the first major mosque in the UK.

The mosque incorporates and interprets these traditional Islamic motifs in a way that is neither literally traditional nor overtly abstract. The forms are actually quite recognisable but are contemporised mainly through their materiality, which was thoroughly of its time. The façade units were pre-cast concrete panels, mixed with Derbyshire Spar aggregate and white cement, giving a smooth deep-ground finish. The minaret also rises as a thick concrete column alongside a copper dome, and the internal floors were polished terrazzo.

Gibberd's design was required to sit comfortably with John Nash's Cumberland Terrace on the southwestern edge of the Park as well as represent Islam in Britain and respect the majestic setting of Regent's Park. It was a complex context requiring the mosque to dance to a set of differing tunes. The result is a stately building rising from mature trees on the park's edge, being both an Islamic icon and an encapsulation of the tail end of Britain's modernist era.

Post-war: Self-building mosques

These early mosques materialised from among the first Muslims that were forming settled communities in Britain. These communities were small and localised, and they used local non-Muslim architects to make their ideas manifest and then give them architectural form. The result was a handful of buildings that each, in their own way, explores the idea of the mosque in Britain.

After the decolonisation of India and its subsequent partition, Muslims from the region migrated in large numbers. These communities rapidly built mosques, and their numbers proliferated. The process of designing and building mosques was now very different to those built by the first communities. Now designers were sought from within the community or non-Muslim architects were more closely directed as to the visual syntax of what the mosque should be.

The aesthetic culture of the places from which Muslim communities originate played a determining factor in the expression of these post-war mosques in Britain. With the majority of the Muslim population originating in South Asia, it was Indian Mughal styles that were largely replicated. For example, the converted church of Brent mosque had limited scope for

Muslim signification with the only possibility being a series of smallish domes on key locations. These domes were designed as replicas of the Jamma Masjid in Delhi, in the distinct Mughal style of the onion dome with spire.

There are two main schools of religious thought brought to Britain by south Asian migrants – the Deobandi and the Barelwi – both originating from religious traditions founded in India. As most mosques were established by south Asian migrants, these traditions can be seen to have had their own influences on design. It is the Deoband mosques that are more likely to move away from Indian references, even where communities originate in South Asia. For example, with the Leicester Jameah mosque, a North African Fatimid language was chosen, and for the earlier Masjid-e-Noor in Preston, a rounder, plainer dome is used. This can be contrasted to the onion-shaped and pointed dome of the nearby Reza masjid, a Barelwi mosque which is also adorned with fluttering green flags and coloured lights. For the Barelwi, their emphasis on demonstrating emotional attachment to God and the Prophet Muhammed carries through to architecture and aesthetics, which are therefore duly demonstrative. The Deoband prefer a plainer, more austere expression, perhaps showing their devotion through rigorous religious practice, which takes priority over the architecture.

Mosques by non-South-Asian communities again differ in their design approach and can be seen to reflect the traditions of their places of origin. This is particularly evident in Turkish community mosques, which can be seen to embrace Ottoman architectural and aesthetic heritage. North London's Azizye mosque has transformed an art deco-style cinema by fully tiling the front façade with traditional Ottoman tilework. The nearby Sulemanye mosque, while being largely non-descript, is marked out by the distinctly Ottoman needle minaret. The South Wales Islamic Centre of the Yemeni community mixes modernist and Islamic influences to create a distinct architectural composite.

Visual references are not strictly defined according to the mosque makers' place of origin, and Islamic styles do cross over as Muslim communities in Britain become more diverse and, with generational change, potentially less tied to places of origin and their attendant visual cultures. Harrow mosque, although established by a South Asian Barelwi community, has been designed in the style of an Ottoman mosque, with a flat dome and needle minaret. The designer is of Indian Gujarati descent, and the mosque committee members are from India and Pakistan, so there were no Turkish links as such. The language was therefore, perhaps, a

simple matter of choosing an Islamic architectural idiom preferable to all. Although Sheffield Islamic Centre is a Barelwi mosque, the commissioners, who were British-born, were clear that their design language should originate in the Middle East and north Africa, as such stylistic approaches were closer to their own aesthetic tastes. Perhaps there is also an element of British-born Muslims wanting to demarcate their cultural expression from that of their parents' generation, as a demonstration of the forging of new cultural identities that are not geographically fixed according to origin but rather according to ideas and affinities.

A key determinant in the design language and expression of the mosque is its political organisation. Mosques in Britain are, apart from a few exceptions, community-led initiatives. While a mosque committee, for the most part, may be formed from within a particular ethnic group from the same place of origin, it is invariably a democratic institution. Therefore, the members of the mosque committee need to appeal to their electorate – the congregation – to retain their support and resist any leadership challenges. Rivalry over the control of mosques has been a characteristic of many mosques established in the 50 years since 1960, and the design of the mosque becomes a factor in this dynamic.

In one case of a mosque in East London, whose leadership was being challenged by a rival faction within the congregation, the credibility of the incumbent committee rested on it being able to deliver a new purpose-built mosque to replace the temporary structures that the mosque currently operated from. Throughout the design process, the opposing group criticised the designs of the new mosque as being too 'modern' and not properly Islamic. Religiosity was a measure against which both groups competed, the group that was the more religiously correct claimed the right to control the mosque. The design of the new mosque, therefore, had to reflect this religious diligence, and the more modern the design, the more liberal the committee and therefore the more unfitting it was to run the mosque. At one design meeting, one of the members contesting the mosque leadership stated that 'we do not want a multicultural minaret, we want an *Islamic* minaret'. The proposed mosque design, therefore, went through a series of iterations from initial contemporary offerings by the architects, which the incumbent committee was broadly satisfied with, to more and more traditional versions, until it was traditional enough so that it could no longer be used as a point of criticism by the challenging group, which otherwise used the contemporary designs to highlight the 'modernity' of the incumbents and therefore their distance from Islamic culture.[5]

Delivering a mosque that most people respond to and approve of becomes the committee's priority over whether it should contribute to a discourse on mosque architecture in Britain. Visually, therefore, the mosque needs to symbolise its identity quickly and easily to as many of its users as possible, which means, in essence, replicating known and popular images of mosques from around the world.

Architectural style, therefore, has been one of the essential mechanisms through which Muslim communities have made their presence known. Through their architecture, such communities have presented themselves *to themselves*, as well as to the wider society. For example, with Suffat-ul-Islam in Bradford, when the committee wanted a building that spoke unequivocally of being 'a mosque', they were demarcating what a mosque should look like for themselves and other Muslims as well as how the wider society should perceive a mosque to be. One can therefore argue that the new historicist period of mosque building, with the examples shown here, is an attempt to aesthetically conclude, for the benefit of Muslims and non-Muslims, what a mosque is.

These are mosques that were built from the late 1970s through to the turn of the century. In this twenty-year period, most of Britain's purpose-built mosques were erected, and with scant resources. Often they were not designed by architects but by local surveyors, engineers or draughtsmen, sometimes from within the community. These mosques can be described as self-built projects, bypassing the professional and procedural norms and bureaucracies that a large-scale public building would normally be procured by. The mosques were also built incrementally as funds were raised and building stages could be funded. In many cases, identifying elements such as minarets were added a number of years after the mosque was built and operating. This resulted in an architectural landscape of the mosque that was piecemeal and composite, combining Islamic and English vernacular idioms, and so presenting a building type that seemed to be in a tortuous struggle to find its own expression and voice.

This architectural landscape has become the focus of considerable architectural and sociological debate, sometimes termed the architecture of homesickness, of 'imitation culture' or 'self-Orientalism' (Verkaaik 2012). It is a debate that draws some strong reactions, described as 'a kind of barbarian Orientalism' and 'garish syncretism', designed by 'underpaid jobbing architects' who are dimly recalling Muslim culture in the Sub-Continent (Murad 2009).

This state of British mosque architecture even gained the attention of the mainstream architectural critics, with articles in national papers de-

crying the state of mosque design. In 2002, a critic asked, 'Why are there no great British mosques?' (Glancey 2002). He considered the mosque in Woking as the only real expression of a credible Muslim architecture in the country, with the mosques that followed failing to reach any criteria of architectural merit, often being 'no more than brick boxes with minarets and domes applied like afterthoughts? Why are the new mosques … so determinedly glum?' It was a question that came back in the same paper a few years later when a commentator lamented that 'despite the huge number of new mosques being built, few reach beyond the level of flimsy imitation' (Shariatmadari 2007).

However, these critics missed that a turn was taking place. But it was not a turn towards the contemporary, as the cultural critics would have liked; rather, it was towards a more traditionally intact and complete architectural object.

The historic turn

The shift from the mosque as an amalgam of vernacular and Islamic styles to the mosque as a more completely 'Islamic' object can be pinpointed to a mosque in Leeds designed in the early 1990s. The Bilal mosque is a newly built, free-standing mosque in the inner-city district of Harehills, built by the same organisation that would later build the Suffat-ul-Islam in Bradford. The mosque was first designed by a local non-Muslim firm that was unfamiliar with Islamic buildings, and by accounts, the scheme was the usual amalgamation of local and Islamic architectural elements in an ambivalent and unconvincing arrangement. It was the Iraqi structural engineer Al Sammaraie, who had been introduced to the mosque through some of his other mosque projects in neighbouring towns, who critiqued the design and pointed out its flaws from the perspective of Islamic architecture. Based on his perceptions, the mosque committee asked him to revisit the design and to provide them with a more aesthetically 'correct' Islamic building. With this brief, Al Sammaraie set to work revising the scheme, working through the plans and elevations to bring symmetry, decoration and a formality to the layouts. Internally, a hexagonal marble fountain was introduced into the entrance lobby, an interiorised interpretation of the traditional mosque courtyard with ablution fountain. Early sketches of the exterior show the tiled pitched roof being embellished with a decorated minaret, until it is replaced completely with a parapet wall punctuated with double storey glazing which serves

to situate the dome, rather than it being somewhat awkwardly enmeshed into the pitch of the roof.

By the time the scheme gained planning permission in 1993, two hexagonal minarets stood at the front corners, and a pair of smaller minarets flanked a double height entrance portico, projecting forward from the front façade. The parapets were decorated, and a pair of squat onion domes sat on castle-like turrets on the rear corners of the building. The walls were faced in buff-coloured forticrete blockwork, resembling stone, with pairs of arched windows arranged along the facades. A large green dome, slightly bulbous around its middle, is off centre on the plan, so that it can be central in the first-floor prayer hall.

All reference to the local architectural context is gone, there is no red brick to reference the terraced housing, or tile or pitched roofs. The windows are also 'Islamised' in shape and are extended to read as double storey openings in the walls. Although Al Sammaraie had been working on additions or interventions to mosques prior to Bilal, this was his first complete mosque where he could express his ideas for a completely new building. The result is the first in a series of mosques that Al Sammaraie would go on to design, benefitting from the positive exposure that the Bilal mosque came to receive from within and outside the Muslim community. With Bilal as the precursor to this trend, the mosques would move away from the assemblage aesthetic of earlier buildings and instead seek to represent a more singular coherent aesthetic, one that was based on a discourse of 'Islamic authenticity' in the field of architecture.

Al-Sammaraie himself was able to propagate this architectural vision through a string of commissions that followed the Bilal mosque, which was held up as an exemplar of mosque design in Britain. His influence in the Midlands and the north of England was extensive, with the number of mosques that he has designed since running well into double figures. This completes the 'Islamisation' of the mosque, where any attempt at referencing local styles and architectural approaches has been abandoned in favour of an aesthetic that is wholly founded on Islamic traditions. Al-Sammarie's later projects in Bradford and Peterborough show this newly inspired determination, where the mosques are full expressions of Muslim visual traditions. It is not a trend limited to one designer, as the Jameah mosque in Leicester shows, it being an articulate representation of Fatimid Cairene architecture.

A number of factors made this shift possible, the primary one being the changing status of Muslim communities. British-born and British-educated second-generation Muslims were entering adulthood and

joining in the communities' institution-building. Funding was better organised and resourced, with mosques developing sophisticated and successful funding strategies to raise capital. Muslim design and construction professionals were now operating in the market, resulting in potentially better communication and understanding between client and design team.

The mosque was no longer a self-built project, assembled over time with a combination of Islamic and local styles. Instead, it had become an idea that was preconceived by designers, and then implemented, perhaps still over a longer period than normal, but as one complete and coherent piece of architecture.

New narratives

In 2011, a planning application was submitted for a new purpose-built mosque on Mill Road in Cambridge, a thoroughfare that forms the geographic focus for the city's Muslim communities. The new mosque was to replace the Abu Bakr mosque within a mile of the new site, a former chapel converted in 1984 that was now too small for the expanded congregation. The site was purchased by the Muslim Academic Trust, a charity led by Yusuf Islam, perhaps the most famous contemporary English convert to Islam. The secretary of the trust and the ideational force behind the new project is Tim Winters, also an English convert to Islam and Cambridge academic, who is a prolific writer on aspects of British Muslim culture.

In the new mosque's design statement, Winters articulates a critique of mosque design in Britain and positions Cambridge as something of an antidote to what is presented as an uninspiring architectural heritage. Winters describes these 'first-generation' buildings as 'cheap but vast barns to keep the rain from the heads of worshippers, with scant attention paid to architectural nuance.' He makes the point that while generational shift within the Muslim communities brings with it new aspirations, 'a newer generation, both more educated and more reflective about religion, is growing restless.' (Winters 2011)

The question of style that has dogged mosques in Britain from the earliest examples reverberates here in Cambridge, as Winters writes:

> Mosque design has historically reflected the local cultures of the Muslim world. A mosque in Java bears no resemblance to a mosque in Bos-

nia, or a mosque in Senegal. And with Cambridge Muslims claiming such a diversity of origins, it was far from clear what the chosen idiom should be.

A hybrid seemed inevitable, and one with local references. But if mosque design has historically reflected local culture, how could British architecture figure in the shaping of the Cambridge building? One could quarry the past, and build a Gothic or a Palladian mosque. The dangers of pastiche would be immense. So, too, would be the potential alienation of the mosque's users, unused to the religion's heritage and its particular notion of the sacred.[6]

An international design competition was held to select the design proposal for Cambridge, with submissions varying from 'brutalist concrete … [to] Star Trek futurism, replicas of medieval Syrian buildings, and revivals of Victorian architecture' (ibid). The winning design was by Marks Barfield Architects, prominent British architects who had designed such avant-garde structures as the London Eye, and who had cut their teeth on Islamic projects for Yusuf Islam in north London.

From the outset, the architects have situated the design scheme within the narratives of Islamic architecture, opening their explanation of the concept by referring to descriptions of Islamic architecture as the 'architecture of the veil', where beauty lies in the inner spaces that are not visible to the outside.[7] This idea of an inner facing building, enclosed around a courtyard, is further legitimised with reference to the first mosque, that of the Prophet Muhammed in Medina, which established this typology. This concept is adapted in the Cambridge design into the idea of the mosque as a 'calm oasis', again evoking imagery from medieval Arab imaginations. The architects are aware, however, of local context and raise the question of 'what should an English mosque look like and how should it be adapted to English culture'. What sets Cambridge apart from the wider genre of British mosques is this very question, which does not seem to have been raised in any of the other mosques across the country. While a handful of other mosques may be seen to be dealing with this issue of local context, it is has never been verbalised as explicitly as it is here.

The architects set out to address this by attempting to 'synthesise the essential application of geometry with Islamic and English heritage'.[8] The building is therefore organised with a grid of structural 'trees', 'evoking the 14th century English innovation of the fan vault', and 'the concept of the oasis is reinforced across the whole site with over 60 new trees creating a permeable green edge around the new building'.

The building geometry is arranged as a sequence of spaces from the front of the site to the rear, culminating in a large square prayer hall. At the front, a landscaped garden mediates between the street and the building. A modestly proportioned gilt dome, internally decorated with geometric tracery, is placed off centre in the prayer hall towards the mihrab, an arrangement reminiscent of Andalusian Islamic architecture, for example the Mezquita in Cordoba from the tenth century. Also similar to traditional mosques is that the Cambridge mosque is laid out over a single floor, with only a limited second-floor element, with the atrium and portico being two storeys high and the prayer hall three storeys. The whole building is enclosed with a brick skin, patterned with diamond-shaped profiled brickwork in a light buff Cambridgeshire brick, thereby materially tying the building in to its context.

The mosque has been designed in conjunction with Professor Keith Critchlow, an expert in sacred and Islamic art and founder of the organisation Kairos, which promotes the traditional values of art and science. He founded the Visual Islamic and Traditional Arts School in 1984, which eventually became the Prince's School for Traditional Arts. His colleague at the School, Emma Clark, an expert in traditional Islamic gardens, was engaged to design the garden for the mosque.

The proposed mosque for Cambridge marks a step change in the narrative of British mosque design. It is perhaps the first mosque to ask the question of what an English mosque should be. The response to this question is not a building that moves away from traditional Islamic architecture and visual culture to develop a new 'English' form but, on the contrary, one that moves towards traditional Islamic roots in a more profoundly academic way that is perhaps perceived by its commissioners as more authentic. Although Winters states that the building is 'strongly modern in inspiration and temper', its final bearing is perhaps determined through the make up of its design consultants, who are versed in traditionalism and pre-modern aesthetics, Marks Barfield perhaps being the anomaly.

Through asking a series of questions about design and cultural identity, Cambridge attempts to position itself as both an Islamicly authentic building and an English one. It therefore overlaps with the new historicist mosque genre through its reliance on an interpretation of traditional Muslim architecture and suggests a new one where forms are re-invented for an English context.

As one of the newest major mosques being conceived in Britain, Cambridge points to a future in which Islamic tradition is carefully studied

and then translated into British mosque design. It requires resources and professionalism to work, both of which are slowly becoming available to some Muslim communities. It represents the modernisation of the design process, where the building is conceived as an idea in totality before being implemented – again, a step-change from the mosques that are designed and built incrementally as part of a process of community formation and development. The notion that Cambridge represents the mosque returning more accurately and completely to its Islamic roots is also in line with the earlier mosques in the new historicist era, such as Suffat-ul-Islam and Jameah Leicester. So while it stands apart, it is also part of a wider trend towards a more completely historical turn.

Notes

1   For the purposes of this article, South Asia is taken to refer to India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.
2   The *mihrab* is the prayer niche in which the Imam leading the prayer stands, and the *minbar* is a series of steps, similar in function to the pulpit in a church, from which the Imam delivers part of the sermon for the Friday congregational prayer.
3   LB Merton planning file ref. MER 654/77 Objection letter dated 7 November 1977.
4   Bolton City Council Planning File 44971, Haliwell Rd Mosque.
5   Interview with Makespace Architects, mosque location not disclosed 7 March 2012.
6   Timothy Winters in Cambridge Mosque Design and Access Statement, Marks Barfield Architects, 4 November 2011.
7   Proposed Mosque, Mill Road, Cambridge, Design and Access Statement, Marks Barfield Architects, 4 November 2011.
8   Ibid.

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