



1 | Al-Rashid Mosque, Fort Edmonton Park, Alberta, 1938. (Photo: Nadia Kurd, 2009)

Sacred Manifestations: The Making and Meaning of Mosques in Canada

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*When they arrive in the new country,
Voyagers carry it on their shoulders,
The dusting of the sky they left behind.¹*

And whenever the time comes for prayer, pray there, for that is a mosque.²

Introduction

A 1940s tourism booklet on Edmonton, Alberta, describes the city as the ideal gateway to the north and praises it for its central location in Canada.³ Throughout the booklet the tourist (and possibly the potential investor) is presented with Edmonton's many virtues as a picturesque yet growing natural resource-based and global economy. Somewhat surprisingly, it also refers to two communities that contribute to the city's cosmopolitan image, noting the existence of a Chinatown and the presence of Canada's first "Moslem temple" the Al-Rashid Mosque (Fig. 1). While it may seem odd that either of these communities is credited with giving Edmonton a sense of global presence, their mention provides a glimpse of Canada's increasingly diverse cultural and religious landscape, although it gives an inaccurate portrait of the prevalent attitudes towards belonging, citizenship, and immigration in Canada during the 1940s.⁴ Unlike the Chinese community of this period, Edmonton's predominately Arab Muslims had been neither fully defined as or considered as being part of a racial Other distinct from their Euro-Canadian counterparts. Upon their arrival in Canada, many community members had become somewhat assimilated by adopting English names and marrying non-Muslims and could, as a result, often legally or socially pass for being white.⁵ The Al-Rashid mosque, with its two hexagonal minarets and makeshift metal dome, was for many the only visible marker of their religious identity in Edmonton.

The story of the Al-Rashid Mosque, while an important part of Edmonton's early settler history, is an unfamiliar one. Members of the community that formed the Al-Rashid Mosque had been coming to Alberta



2 | Assuna-Annabawiyah Mosque, Montreal, Quebec, 1993. (Photo: Nadia Kurd, 2010)

since the late 1880s, seeking economic prosperity and political refuge.⁶ This community, which consisted of Ottoman Arabs from countries now known as Lebanon and Syria, was composed of traders, merchants, and farmers who made up a small yet significant part of Alberta's social and economic fabric. By 1938, the community had the means to employ Ukrainian master-builder Mike Drewoth to build the Al-Rashid Mosque.⁷ The mosque's unique, church-like design, which showcases an amalgamation of the community's needs and the builder's skill and knowledge, would come to represent the hybrid nature of subsequent mosques in Canada. The history of the Al-Rashid Mosque, like those of mosques in cities such as Montreal and Vaughan, Ontario, is evidence of a deep history of Muslim arrival and settlement, one that is far less politically or socially polarized from Canada's past than is often imagined.

The intent of this paper is to examine the development and impact of two distinct types of mosques in Canada: the repurposed (Fig. 2) and the purpose-built (Fig. 3). Buildings such as Montreal's repurposed Assuna-Annabawiyah



3 | Baitul Islam Mosque, Vaughan, Ontario, 1992. (Photo: Tahir Mahmood, 2012)

Mosque (1993) and Vaughan's purpose-built Baitul Islam Mosque (1992) not only display divergent methods of mosque construction but also convey the varying social and religious circumstances of contemporary Muslim life in Canada. As a distinct historic structure, the mosque has a significant place in the practice of Islam and in shaping Muslim identities, serving as a place where one can learn about Islam, seek supplication, and receive community support. I argue that these two types of Canadian mosques, though different in their representation of Islam, can provide an understanding of the Islamic faith that is "lived by its people today, people who are no longer isolated from the pluralistic chaos and consequences of modernity and the after-effects of colonialism."⁸ Moreover, these mosques show the ways in which Muslims spatially and visually articulate Islam. In doing so they raise significant questions, such as, what constitutes a mosque in Canada? How are these mosques used? Where do these buildings fit in the chronology of Islamic architectural history?

Whether purpose-built or repurposed from existing structures, these mosques, with their various visual forms taken from several cultures, trouble the traditional parameters of Islamic architectural history in both their use and understanding of Islamic built forms. They also reveal the presumption that it is possible to have a secular and raceless urban landscape in countries like Canada, which have growing Muslim populations.

Purpose-built mosques such as the Baitul Islam use a combination of crafts and visual forms of traditional Islamic architecture from Egypt, Iran, Turkey and Spain.⁹ Designed by architects at the behest of Muslim communities, such buildings are easily recognizable as archetypal mosques. In replicating and synthesizing the visual forms commonly associated with traditional Islamic architecture, they affirm an idealized image of the mosque. Conversely, repurposed mosques such as the Assuna-Annabawiyah are purchased storefronts, houses, and even warehouses that are made into mosques through a series of renovations to both the exterior and interior of their original structures. Depending on the scale of the renovations, these mosques are often not easily identifiable as places of worship and, as a result, are most often experienced as “interiors.”¹⁰

Though the roots of Muslim immigration to Canada can be traced back to the late 1880s, the easing of Canadian immigration laws for non-European immigrants from the 1960s onward has meant that the size and diversity of Muslim communities in cities such as Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal have grown significantly.¹¹ According to Statistics Canada, from 1991 to 2001 the number of people identifying themselves as Muslim grew by 128.9 percent, making the Muslim community one of the most significant religious groups in the country.¹² However, the growing presence of Muslims in major Canadian metropolises has been met with heightened levels of hostility toward Muslims, Islamic religious practices, and the establishment of mosques. Hostility toward the Muslim community has grown in tandem with global concerns about terrorism that are often linked to polarizing events, from the Gulf Wars to 9/11 and the subsequent war in Afghanistan.¹³ Rather than being seen as an integral part of Canada’s multicultural society, Muslims have increasingly been seen as being at odds with Canadian society in terms of integration and assimilation.¹⁴ The construction of mosques has been at the heart of these debates and such sentiments are most clearly expressed in some of the thinly veiled Islamophobic arguments made against their establishment. Among the most common concerns are complaints over the appropriateness of the building’s location, decreased property values, traffic congestion, and the possibility of inadequate access to parking for local residents.¹⁵

For many Muslims across the globe, the template for all mosques is the Prophet’s Mosque in Medina. As the second holiest site for Muslims,

this early mosque was initially a simple courtyard with a palm leaf roof for shade,¹⁶ which was primarily used as a meeting place for followers and for communal prayer. Contemporary mosques have largely stayed true to the function and purpose of this first mosque. As spaces that are used for more than just the performance of Islamic ritual, contemporary Canadian mosques, either purpose-built or repurposed from an existing structure, have become community centres in the diaspora and continue to serve Muslims as places for educational, cultural, and social activities. In recent years, there has been increased availability of faith-based services such as marriage and youth counselling, food bank and housing initiatives, funeral services, and even secular primary and secondary education, which are organized and handled by mosque administrators.¹⁷

A cursory review of Islamic architectural history reveals that historical approaches have focused almost exclusively on the religious character of an array of buildings originating in Spain, North Africa, the Middle East, and the South Asian Subcontinent.¹⁸ A product of nineteenth-century colonialism, the study of Islamic architecture was initially taken up by men employed in the military service of colonial powers such as England and France.¹⁹ This often meant that the survey of buildings was conducted by men such as K.A.C. Creswell who, during the 1920s, worked on the assumption that Islamic buildings constructed in Muslim lands were intrinsically spiritual, timeless, and limited to the period between 650 to 1918 A.D. Put another way, this time frame begins at Revelation and stretches to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.²⁰ Despite Creswell's lack of education and knowledge of Middle Eastern languages, his extensive survey of buildings in Egypt not only provides the basis of the field of Islamic architecture but also contributed to the formation of the notable library of Islamic art and architecture at the American University in Cairo, which, during his tenure there, he often fondly referred to as his "harem."²¹

Although the field of Islamic art and architecture has developed considerably since its colonial inception, several conceptual limitations linger. Islamic art and architecture, in the broadest sense, is still understood as comprised of objects and buildings produced in the "core" Muslim lands (conventionally known as the Middle East) by Muslims and for Muslim patrons for the purpose of Muslim populations.²² This framework has ensured that both secular and religious objects are found in the historiography of Islamic art and architecture. Medieval glassware and dynastic mosques as well as late nineteenth-century paintings originating across a vast geographic area have been considered to be within the scope of the field. In their examination of the precariousness of the subject of Islamic art and architecture, historians Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom write,

There is no evidence that any artist or patron in the fourteen centuries since the revelation of Islam ever thought of his or her art as “Islamic,” and the notion of a distinctly “Islamic” tradition of art and architecture, eventually encompassing the lands between the Atlantic and the Indian oceans, is a product of late nineteenth- and twentieth-century Western scholarship, as is the terminology used to identify it.²³

Fellow Islamic art historian Oleg Grabar echoes Bloom and Blair’s analysis of the tenuous parameters of the field:

Thirty years ago, the study of Islamic art was easy enough to define. Most people came to it along one of three simple paths: One was archaeology: the study of Umayyad palaces in the Levant and cities like Nishapur in Iran ... Another was collecting rugs: ceramics and miniatures acquired a market value ... Finally, there was the old and much-maligned Orientalism, which instilled, through dry and inhospitable grammars and furtively read travel accounts, romantic notions of faraway lands and exotic cultures.²⁴

In terms of architecture, the term “Islamic” has come to define a more limited terrain. Because there are a limited number of examples of dynastic and monumental built forms, Islamic architecture is often considered to be distinct from other forms of Islamic art in that it is more commonly created and used by Muslim populations. However building types such as mosques, medressas, caravanserais, palaces, and mausoleums have all been viewed within the context of Islamic architecture. Among these examples of building types, only the mosque has a direct relationship with the practice and propagation of Islamic religious ritual and, more significantly, is used by wider segments of the Muslim population. As Islamic architectural historian Robert Hillenbrand argues, the mosque “lies at the very heart of Islamic architecture. It is an apt symbol of the faith which it serves. That symbolic role was understood by Muslims at a very early stage.”²⁵

Repurposed Mosques: Montreal’s Assuna-Annabawiyah

Nestled in the heart of Montreal’s multiethnic Parc-Extension neighbourhood sits the Assuna-Annabawiyah Mosque (Fig. 2). Originally an office building, the four-story Mosque is almost indiscernible among the rows of discount fruit shops, hair salons, and Lebanese restaurants. Apart from the sign above the doors, the mosque is subtle in its proclamation of a Muslim identity. Since 1993, the Muslims of this working-class Montreal neighbourhood have found



4 | Assuna-Annabawiyah Mosque (interior view, men's section), Montreal, Quebec, 1993. (Photo: Nadia Kurd, 2010)

solace, education, and support in this place of worship. Once a predominantly Greek enclave, Parc-Extension has recently become known more for its South Asian stores and residents. Unsurprisingly, many of these businesses have congregated around the mosque and, as a result, the neighbourhood itself has also become visibly “Muslim.” With the establishment of the Assuna-Annabawiyah, Muslims from across North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia have established roots and made Parc-Extension home.

Though understated, the repurposed Assuna-Annabawiyah Mosque reflects not only the socioeconomic realities of its congregants but also the ways in which they have had to adapt and integrate their ritual and communal spaces in an urban environment. While the exterior of the mosque remains unchanged, save for the calligraphic Arabic signage above the main entrance, a number of small-scale modifications were carried out in order to transform the former office building into the Assuna-Annabawiyah Mosque. These renovations included the installation of a *minbar* (pulpit), elimination of walls to create wide unobstructed rooms (Fig. 4), insertion of the *mihrab* (niche) to orientate the congregants towards Mecca, curtaining of spaces to segregate women and men (Fig. 5), as well as appliques of patterned arches adorning the windows (Fig. 6). Inside the mosque, there are also classrooms,



5 | Assuna-Annabawiyah Mosque (interior view, women's section), Montreal, Quebec, 1993. (Photo: Nadia Kurd, 2010)

administrative offices, and a community library. The renovations made to the Assuna-Annabawiyah do not necessarily reflect any strict aesthetic concerns for Islamic visual traditions but rather the need for practical spaces for the community within the mosque.

Furthermore, what becomes immediately evident upon looking at the Assuna-Annabawiyah Mosque is the communal nature of its construction. As a repurposed mosque, modifications have been carried out and maintained exclusively by members of the community and changes to the sparsely decorated mosque were made without the assistance of an architect to oversee or develop the space. Absent are outwardly architectural forms closely associated with Islam, such as minarets, domes, or a stylized tilework facade. As well as presenting an alternative image of a mosque, the Assuna-Annabawiyah Mosque emphasizes a re-examination of the primacy of architecture over ritual practice. Such mosques reveal the fluidity of ritual practice by showing that it is not contingent on the replication of specific visual forms or structures of space. Considered from a religious perspective, the act of prayer and remembrance of God require the believer's undivided attention, independent of the presence or assistance of formal structures and visual aids. This means that reliquaries, religious images, or idols are strictly



6 | Assuna-Annabawiyah Mosque (window), Montreal, Quebec, 1993. (Photo: Nadia Kurd, 2010)

prohibited inside the mosque and more importantly, in the presence of an individual performing prayer. The physical performance of communal prayer becomes the primary means through which the identity of the mosque is formulated, an identity that is independent of the form of the structure or the appearance of the mosque. Repurposed mosques emphasize the “separation of architecture’s cultural content from its spiritual and community functions” and, arguably, suggest that such cultural visual forms are unrelated to spiritual or religious practice.²⁶

To understand the non-visual religious informality of the Assuna-Annabawiyah Mosque, an apt description of how the building is ascribed with a sense of sacredness is what social anthropologist Michel S. Laguerre explains a “hegemonic temporality.” Laguerre’s conception of time refers to the way in which non-Christian religious communities in North America articulate their identity both via time and against the hegemonic temporality

of an urban centre. Diasporic Muslim communities, Laguerre notes, observe social practices regulated by civil society on one hand while, on the other, they are part of a temporal enclave “that links them to a worldwide Islam via an Islamic calendar.”²⁷ The mosque and its surrounding neighbourhood experience a different time, one that has been modified and adapted to also make room for religious practice. Around the Assuna-Annabawiyah Mosque, this temporality can be directly observed five times a day when the faithful, composed primarily of taxi drivers, neighbourhood shopkeepers, and residents, arrive at the mosque for their daily prayers. Through the temporality of place, the structure of Assuna-Annabawiyah becomes visibly activated as a sacred site through the daily and repeated performance of ritual.

This is not to wholly disregard the visual importance of the mosque in Canada, for a few symbolic and structural elements are regularly taken up by Muslim communities during the transformation of existing structures. Whether it is the Arabic calligraphic text on the mosque’s exterior or the gendered divisions within the mosque, these “storefront” mosques incorporate Islamic architectural forms that communicate the sense of a communal tradition and the sacredness of the site that serve to distinguish it from other urban structures. While these elements are not consistently or uniformly replicated across similarly renovated mosques, they are idioms that can be traced back to historical mosque architecture. Due to the affordability of buildings such as that used for the Assuna-Annabawiyah Mosque, in terms of the scale of the renovations and the initial cost, these types of buildings have come to represent the bulk of mosques in North America.²⁸

Despite the wide presence of repurposed mosques across North America, such buildings have not received the scholarly examination commonly given mosques that conform to a defined affinity with traditional architectural styles. Ranging from old churches to storefronts, repurposed mosques like the Assuna-Annabawiyah are often disregarded because they do not make their religious identity explicitly known. In their architectural subtleness, these mosques contest the traditional, colonial image of mosque as well as a singular visual or built-form representation of Muslim life in the West. Instead, these repurposed mosques respond to the immediate needs of the local community, demonstrating the degree to which experience is privileged over expression.²⁹

Purpose-built Mosques: Baitul Islam Mosque (Vaughan, Ontario)

Purpose-built mosques such as the Baitul Islam stand in sharp contrast to mosques like the Assuna-Annabawiyah. Built in 1992 and located half an hour north of Toronto, the Baitul Islam Mosque was, until 2005, one of the largest

mosques constructed in Canada.³⁰ At first glance, the striking architectural designs of the Baitul Islam Mosque suggest that this monumental building represents typical mosque architecture characteristic of mainstream Islam – and such an observation would not be altogether incorrect: the mosque’s use of archetypical Islamic architectural elements such as lattice work, minaret, dome, and vaulting all visibly confirm its Muslim identity. However, a closer examination of the building and its congregants would reveal that the mosque is used by adherents of an Islamic sect who, due to their religious viewpoints and practices, have been marginalized in countries where orthodox Sunni Islam dominates.

Through the establishment of mosques in countries such as Canada, the US, and UK, these communities have been able to claim a Muslim identity that is otherwise denied them. The Muslims who worship at Baitul Islam Mosque are part of a revivalist sect known in Islam as the Ahmadiyya Movement. With roots in British India, the sect has been deemed heretical and is considered to be non-Muslim in countries such as Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, where it has been subject to persecution and displacement since the early twentieth century. Legally declared to be non-Muslims in Pakistan in 1974, members of the Ahmadiyya Movement are, among many other things, denied access to public places of worship, banned entry to Mecca, and forbidden to label their buildings as mosques.³¹ Only in the diaspora are the members of the Ahmadiyya permitted to identify themselves as Muslims and construct mosques that have the formal characteristics of Islamic architecture.

Such attitudes towards the Ahmadiyya exist outside the geographical boundaries of either Saudi Arabia or Pakistan. Reflecting on the construction of Baitul Islam Mosque, architect Gulzar Haider writes “I was advised to reject this commission, lest I risk my future and never get another job, or even risk my hereafter by ‘partnership in crime of Ahmadiyyat.’”³² Indeed, Haider’s comment on the construction of the Baitul Islam Mosque reveals how various diasporic Muslim communities struggle to legitimize their claim to a Muslim identity, while other parts of the community continue to reject the claims of such sects to visual and religious authenticity. While entrenched Sunni antagonism against the Ahmadiyya continues in the diaspora, being outside countries with Sunni Muslim majorities allows these sub-sects to legitimize their buildings as mosques. Because of their knowledge and expertise, architects like Haider navigate a precarious position, being the arbiters of both Islamic architecture and Muslim identity.

In her study of Alevi and Sunni Turkish communities in Berlin, Ruth Mandel notes that in the diaspora, “migrant Alevis have in many ways successfully reversed their hierarchical subordination to Sunni Turks ... [They] also have opportunities to participate in organizational, preaching



7 | Baitul Islam Mosque (interior view), Vaughan, Ontario, 1992. (Photo: Tahir Mahmood, 2012)

and educational modes that would be illegal in Turkey.”³³ In terms of understanding the dynamic involved in the ownership of Muslim identity, this scenario closely parallels that of the religious activities and observances of Ahmadiyya communities, a religious minority within Islam, in that the legally unlegislated religious space of the diaspora offers freedom from persecution that would otherwise be unavailable. In claiming the mosque as a visual and structural edifice for their practice, these Muslim sects are not only offered access to legitimacy but also to the practice of Islam and ownership of a Muslim identity. Moreover, for the Ahmadiyya, the Baitul Islam Mosque functions as a potent image of Islam that anchors their practice of Islam and also contributes to the stable growth of the community.

Stylistically, the Baitul Islam incorporates several identifiable Islamic architectural tropes. The Ottoman minarets buttress the stainless steel Mughal-style dome, while the Mosque’s geometric-shaped windows throw patterned shadows across its light-filled interior (Fig. 7). Like the Assuna-Annabawiyah, the interior of the Baitul Islam Mosque is spatially sparse. The presence of the *mihrab*, *minbar*, and clean unobstructed rooms corroborates Assuna-Annabawiyah’s layout for ritual space. The Baitul Islam differs in the

format of the interior space primarily in the look of the design but also in the building's technological capacities. Throughout its various administrative offices and educational and ritual spaces, the Baitul Islam Mosque is electronically linked via projectors and wide-screen televisions that ultimately serve not only to connect congregants to the individual leading the prayers and delivering sermons but also to the Ahmadiyya community abroad.³⁴

Like most other purpose-built structures, the Baitul Islam Mosque was designed by an architect under the close guidance of community members. Furthermore, commissioned mosques are often supported financially by both local and international communities. Due to a centrally organized religious clergy, the Baitul Islam Mosque, from its groundbreaking, has been an important part of the larger Ahmadiyya community in Canada. In contrast to the local storefront mosque, the purpose-built Baitul Islam plays a far more critical role for the Ahmadiyya community across Eastern Canada in terms of its location and religious organization. In addition to being the primary congregation site for Ahmadiyya members from Ontario and Quebec, the mosque also hosts an annual religious event known as the *Jalsa Salana*. This formal religious convention provides members the opportunity to listen to and potentially to meet Mirza Masroor Ahmad, the fifth spiritual leader of the Ahmadiyya Movement. Besides being the religious leader, Mirza Masroor Ahmad is also the great-grandson of the founder of the sect, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, considered by the Ahmadiyya as the "Promised Messiah." The mosque's role as the site of the spiritual event of the *Jalsa Salana* in Eastern Canada heightens its symbolic role in the wider community.

More recently, the desire of the Ahmadiyya community to claim a larger authentic religious space has been demonstrated: soon after constructing the Baitul Islam, members of the Ahmadiyya community advocated renaming streets around the mosque with Muslim names associated with both the Ahmadiyya Movement and Islam generally. Streets such as Ahmadiyya Avenue, Mosque Gate, and Tahir Street, now surround the Baitul Islam Mosque. Changing street names around the mosque was part of a larger architectural and spatial program: in the late 1990s, the community began the creation of a purpose-built Ahmadiyya subdivision called the "Peace Village" adjacent to the Baitul Islam. Single unit family homes and a high school were constructed on the twenty-five acres around the mosque. For the Ahmadiyya residents of the predominately Urdu-speaking South Asian enclave, the benefit of living in Peace Village is the ability to hear the call to prayer five times a day from the comfort of their homes.³⁵ In addition to providing a spatial and visual claim to Islam, the Baitul Islam Mosque also offers an aural reminder of Islamic ritual practice that extends far beyond the walls of the mosque.

Though the Ahmadiyya enclave is one of many suburban enclaves in and around Toronto, the establishment of a neighbourhood around religious values has, on one hand, provided a sense of security and stability, while, on the other, increased the isolation and ghettoization of the Ahmadiyya community. Even with the sect's active global missionary and charitable programs, the degree to which these purpose-built enclaves affect Ahmadiyya acceptance among other Muslim denominations has yet to be seen. The establishment of the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam and the construction of the Baitul Islam Mosque in Vaughan exemplify what is at stake for Muslim communities in the use of Islamic architectural tropes and the complexity involved in ownership of such visual forms.

By way of conclusion: Revisiting the Al-Rashid Mosque

A look at the contemporary situation of the Al-Rashid Mosque provides an illustration of the radical changes in attitudes towards mosques in North America in the last few decades. After being the centre of Edmonton's Muslim community for close to forty years, the purpose-built mosque, known for its fusion of distinct architectural styles, the early settlement histories of its congregants, and its Ukrainian builder, entered a new phase.³⁶ By the mid-1980s, Edmonton's multi-ethnic and multi-generational Muslim community had grown exponentially to 16,000 and two new mosques had been constructed to accommodate the Muslim congregation. Unused and abandoned for several years, the old Al-Rashid Mosque had fallen into disrepair and had been set for demolition by the city. A group of women led by Karen and Evelyn Hamdon, the granddaughter and grand-niece of Hilwie Hamdon, one of the first community leaders of the Edmonton Muslim community, rallied to save the mosque because of its historic legacy.³⁷ Through active community fundraising, the women were able to secure enough funds to preserve the mosque. However, to the dismay of the Muslim community, the most challenging task was persuading the city to allow the mosque to be relocated to Fort Edmonton Park as there was heated public opposition. Among the numerous arguments from outside the Muslim community was the claim that the mosque did not fit the park's mandate and that the park should not have to accept a "historical intruder."³⁸ During a public meeting held by the city of Edmonton, an outspoken resident shouted at the elderly Saleem Ganam, an early member of the mosque, that he should "go back" to the country he came from, to which he replied, "Sir, are you aware that I was born in Canada?"³⁹

Toward the fall of 1992, after much debate and fundraising, the mosque was successfully moved to its current location at Fort Edmonton Park. As a

living museum, Fort Edmonton Park narrates Alberta's history up to 1930 with period actors circulating inside and outside historical built-forms throughout the park. Because the mosque was constructed in 1938, the period actors do not narrate its history but instead step out of character, breaking the historical framing and narration of the tour to talk about the building in the first person. No longer part of Edmonton's rich collective and celebratory past, the Al-Rashid mosque is now largely seen as an unanimated recent addition at the end of the 1930s street, removed from the other buildings and histories at Fort Edmonton Park.⁴⁰

This recent history of the Al-Rashid Mosque reflects the current condition of Muslim life in the West. In the last three decades, Muslim identity has undeniably been shaped by and contingent on geopolitical events and has been vigorously scrutinized with regard to its adaptability in modern, democratic societies. These polarizing debates about the location and inclusion of mosques build upon colonial hierarchical divisions and have had immediate and detrimental effects on all sectarian segments of the Muslim community.

The history of mosques such as the Assuna-Annabawiyah, Baitul Islam, and the Al-Rashid show the challenges and conditions communities face in attempting to access and adapt the urban landscape in order to maintain their religious needs. While contemporary scholarship on traditional Islamic architecture continues to expand upon the valuable surveys of buildings in the Muslim world, without a contextual analysis of how Islam is represented in built-form, Muslim practices and identities risk being further stigmatized and ultimately viewed as incompatible with Canadian civic ideals and democratic values. As a result of their varied forms, Canadian mosques resist colonial and formulaic understandings of Islamic architecture but reveal how these mosques are continually utilized, reinterpreted, and re-examined by Muslim communities. In other words, by being both geographically and stylistically outside official Islamic architectural histories, Canadian mosques show the limits of the field but are also dependent on a number of symbolic conventions of mosque architecture.

No doubt, the mosques represent a powerful and challenging image of Islam. In settler societies such as Canada, the idea of a normative urban landscape and built-forms is heavily informed by distilled notions of not only cultural but also religious belonging. These notions are deeply rooted in early histories of European settlement and continue to be dependent on the dispossession of those who do not culturally fit within this conception.⁴¹ The marginalization of mosques can be linked to a longer colonial project that alleges an incompatibility between Islam and democracy and has been active in shaping attitudes towards Muslim groups in Canada.⁴² Such binary

frameworks have created barriers for Muslims throughout Canada, not only in the terms of claiming urban space but also of accessing full citizenship rights.⁴³

As Muslim communities grow and establish mosques across Canada, their heterogeneous composition needs to be continually affirmed, recognizing that it emphasizes the variable ways in which the term “Islamic” has been conceived and visualized through mosques. In the Baitul Islam, we see how the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam uses the image of the mosque to affirm its religious identity whereas the Assuna-Annabawiyah shows that Islamic religious practice is not contingent upon replication of strict structural or visual forms. Whether renovated or purpose-built, Ahmadiyya or Sunni, Canadian mosques employ symbolic visual forms to varying degrees and incorporate the community’s needs in their construction. “Even the most casual engagement with these buildings and the communities they serve,” writes art historian Jerrilynn Dodds, “defies any single reductive image.”⁴⁴

NOTES

- 1 Mohja KAHF, “Voyager Dust,” *Emails from Scheherazad* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 1.
- 2 Muslim ibn AL-HAJJAJ AL-QUSHAYRI (ca. 821–75 CE) *Sahih Muslim; being traditions of the sayings and doings of the prophet Muhammad as narrated by his companions and compiled under the title al-Jami’-Sahih, by Imam Muslim. Rendered into English by ‘Abdul Hamid Siddiqi, with explanatory notes and brief biographical sketches of major narrators* (Lahore, Pakistan: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1971–75), 264.
- 3 *Edmonton, Gateway to the North: Tourists’ Souvenir Guide Book* (Edmonton, AB: T.H. Dale, 1947).
- 4 Canada and the United States have long had discriminatory immigration policies that favour European settlement through the displacement and dispossession of Aboriginal peoples. In the 1960s, the liberalization of immigration policies opened the door for non-European settlers. See Sherene H. RAZACK, ed., *Race, Space, and the Law: Unmapping a White Settler Society* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2002) and Sunera THOBANI, *Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and Nation in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).
- 5 Sarah M.A. GUALTIERI’s *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009) provides insight into how early Syrian settlers used legal and economic means to define their racial identity as being “White” in the US during the late 1800s–early 1900s. Unlike early South Asian or East Asian immigrants, these Ottoman Arab settlers, the majority of whom were Christian, were able to use both historical and contemporary notions of race to support their claims of whiteness and, ultimately, their citizenship.

- 6 Leading up to the First World War, given the changing religious and ethnic legislation aimed at non-Muslims and non-Turks during the late-Ottoman period, the bulk of Ottoman Arabs who migrated to North America were of Christian and Jewish faiths. However a significant number of Muslim Arabs were also affected by the changing laws and social attitudes towards Arabs in the predominately Turkish-ruled Ottoman Empire.
- 7 Andrea W. LORENZ, "Canada's Pioneer Mosque," *Saudi Aramco World* 49:4(July/August 1998): 28–31.
- 8 Amina WADUD, *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* (Oxford: OneWorld Publications, 2006), 2.
- 9 Akel Ismail KAHERA, *Deconstructing the American Mosque: Space, Gender and Aesthetics* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 69.
- 10 Jerrilynn D. DODDS and Edward GRAZDA, *New York Masjid: The Mosques of New York* (Brooklyn, NY: PowerHouse Books, 2002), 21.
- 11 Omar KHALIDI, "Approaches to Mosque Design in North America," eds. Yvonne Yazbeck HADDAD and John L. ESPOSITO, *Muslims on the Americanization Path?* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 317.
- 12 Haideh MOGHISSI, Saeed RAHNEMA and Mark J. GOODMAN, *Diaspora by Design: Muslim Immigrants in Canada and Beyond* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 7. According to the 2001 Census, the number of Muslims in Canada was 579,640, which represents 2 percent of the total population. Accessed 24 Sept. 2012, <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/home/index.cfm>
- 13 Much has been written on contemporary Muslim life in North America. For more recent information, see Sherene H. RAZACK, *Casting Out: The Eviction of Muslims from Western Law and Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008); Natasha BAKHT, *Belonging and Banishment: Being Muslim in Canada* (Toronto: TSAR Publications, 2008); Geneive ABDO, *Mecca and Main Street: Muslim Life in America after 9/11* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Peter MANDAVILLE, *Transnational Muslim Politics: Reimagining the Umma* (London: Routledge, 2003) and Yvonne Yazbeck HADDAD, ed., *Muslims in the West: From Sojourners to Citizens* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
- 14 MOGHISSI, RAHNEMA, and GOODMAN, eds., *Diaspora by Design*, 16.
- 15 Engin F. ISIN and Myer SIEMIATYCKI, "Making Space for Mosques: Struggles for Urban Citizenship in Diasporic Toronto," *Race, Space, and the Law: Unmapping a White Settler Society*, ed. Sherene Razack (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2002), 188, 201.
- 16 Robert IRWIN, *Islamic Art in Context* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997), 11.
- 17 MOGHISSI, RAHNEMA, and GOODMAN, eds., *Diaspora by Design*, 14–15.
- 18 Robert HILLENBRAND, "Studying Islamic Architecture: Challenges and Perspectives," *Architectural History* 46 (2003): 5.
- 19 Ibid., 5–6.
- 20 Sheila S. BLAIR AND Jonathan M. BLOOM, "The Mirage of Islamic Art: Reflections on the Study of an Unwieldy Field," *Art Bulletin* 85, no. 1 (March 2003): 152.
- 21 J.M. ROGERS, "Architectural History as Literature: Creswell's Reading and Methods," *Muqarnas* Vol. 8, K.A.C. Creswell and His Legacy (1991): 45.
- 22 BLAIR and BLOOM, "The Mirage of Islamic Art," 152.

- 23 Ibid., 153. Many other historians of Islamic art and architecture have examined the origins and limitations of the field. They have included, most notably, Oleg Grabar, Robert Hillenbrand, Dogan Kuban, Hassan Khan, Sheila Blair, and Jonathan Bloom. The approaches used to understand traditional Islamic art and architectural history have become increasingly fragmented with the emphasis on contemporary national identities rather than any particular religious ones. In terms of understanding the colonial production of knowledge on the Middle East and Muslims more broadly, work by the late Edward W. SAID has been the most influential and informative, namely, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978) and *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (New York: Random House, 1997).
- 24 Oleg GRABAR, "Reflections on the Study of Islamic Art," *Muqarnas 1: An Annual on Islamic Art and Architecture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 2.
- 25 Robert HILLENBRAND, *Islamic Architecture: Form, Function and Meaning* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), 5.
- 26 DODDS and GRAZDA, *New York Masjid*, 65.
- 27 Michel S. LAGUERRE, *Urban Multiculturalism and Globalization in New York City: An Analysis of Diasporic Temporalities* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan Press, 2003), 80.
- 28 KHALIDI, "Approaches to Mosque Design in North America," 317–34.
- 29 DODDS and GRAZDA, *New York Masjid*, 32.
- 30 In 2008, the Ahmadiyya community built another mosque in Calgary, which now claims the title of largest mosque in Canada. In addition to prayer spaces, the 48,000-square-foot Baitul Nur Mosque also contains a library, offices, gymnasium, and classrooms.
- 31 Barbara Daly METCALF, "Introduction: Sacred Words, Sanctioned Practice, New Communities," in Metcalf, ed., *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), 10.
- 32 Gulzar HAIDER, "Muslim Space and the Practice of Architecture: A Personal Odyssey," *ibid.*, 42.
- 33 Ruth MANDEL, "A Place of Their Own: Contesting Spaces and Defining Places in Berlin's Migrant Community," *ibid.*, 155.
- 34 Unlike Sunni Islam, the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam has a centrally organized clerical leadership. Based in London, UK, members of the Ahmadiyya missionary leadership regularly communicate religious teachings via satellite television programming.
- 35 Dorn TOWNSEND, "Building an Enclave Around a Mosque in Suburban Toronto," *The New York Times*, 18 Nov. 2007. Accessed 24 Sept. 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/18/realestate/18nati.html>
- 36 As a mosque built with the specific intention of being used as a place for ritual practice and community gathering, the Al-Rashid is a purpose-built mosque. However, because of the building's use of modified elements of local built forms (those of Eastern Orthodox Christian churches found in the Prairies for example), the Al-Rashid also encapsulates characteristics of a repurposed mosque. Some well-known mosques that similarly synthesized religious architectural forms across the globe include the Great Mosque of Cordoba (Spain) and the Jamia Mosque of Srinagar (India).

- 37 LORENZ, "Canada's Pioneer Mosque," 28–31.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Richard Asmet AWID, *Through the Eyes of the Son: A Factual History About Canadian Arabs* (Edmonton, AB: Accent Printing, 2000), 71.
- 40 In the fall of 2009, I visited Fort Edmonton Park and was provided a tour of the site where I learned that the park does not regularly animate or host activities at the mosque. This task is often delegated to volunteers from the local Muslim community. Though Edmonton's Muslim community had arrived and settled in Canada before the 1930s, their identity only became materially and spatially identifiable with the construction of the mosque after the Park's 1930 historical cut-off, and as a result, the history of the Al-Rashid Mosque is largely absent from the Park's scripted historical narrative.
- 41 Nicholas BLOMLEY, *Unsettling the City: Urban Land and the Politics of Property* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 110.
- 42 ISIN and SIEMIATYCKI, "Making Space for Mosques," 192.
- 43 A number of recent public examples of Muslim Canadians who have been denied citizenship rights can be cited here, namely, Mahar Arar, Suaad Hagi Mohammed, Mohammed Harkat, Abousfian Abdelrazik, and Omar Khadr. Some building projects in Switzerland and the United States have generated hostile public debate over the "appropriateness" and admissibility of mosques and spaces created by Muslims.
- 44 DODDS and GRAZDA, *New York Masjid*, 25.

Manifestations du sacré : construction et signification des mosquées au Canada

NADIA KURD

En tant que structure historique distincte, la mosquée est une institution importante dans la vie religieuse et séculière du musulman, car c'est un lieu où on peut apprendre à connaître l'islam, s'adonner à la supplication et recevoir l'appui de la communauté. Le présent article examine la construction et la signification de deux types distincts de mosquée, celles qui ont été bâties spécifiquement comme mosquées et celles qui sont des structures existantes réaménagées, et pose la question : qu'est-ce qui constitue une mosquée au Canada ? Et, le plus important, quelle est la valeur symbolique de ces édifices ? Citant en exemple les mosquées Al-Rashid (Edmonton, AB), Baitul Islam (Vaughan, ON) et Assunna Annabawiyah (Montréal, QC), cette étude montre les stratégies visuelles divergentes employées dans ces constructions pour exprimer leur identité islamique. Pour les mosquées construites avec une intention spécifique, comme Al-Rashid et Baitul Islam, des marques visibles comme le dôme ou le minaret, non seulement confirment l'importance de l'architecture islamique monumentalisée, mais expriment aussi la force de ces signes comme formes symboliques dans la diaspora musulmane. En particulier pour les membres de la mosquée Baitul Islam, qui font partie du mouvement islamique Ahmadiyya, les formes authentiques d'architecture islamique confirment leurs lieux de culte comme mosquées et, ultimement, leur propre statut de musulmans.

Bien que toutes les formes utilisées par ces mosquées ne soient pas fondées sur les conventions de l'architecture islamique traditionnelle, ces édifices montrent que ces décisions dépendent des diverses réalités économiques et politiques vécues par leurs congrégations respectives. Ainsi, les mosquées réaménagées sont discrètes dans la proclamation de leur identité islamique et sont presque exclusivement perçues comme des intérieurs. Bien que de tels édifices montrent la simplicité non visuelle de l'espace rituel musulman, ils peuvent communiquer leur identité à travers ce que Michael Laguerre explique en terme de « la temporalité de l'espace ». Cela signifie que ceux qui fréquentent des mosquées comme Assuna-Annabawiyah, par exemple, communiquent leur identité à travers le temps aussi bien que contre la temporalité hégémonique d'un centre urbain. Les communautés

de la diaspora musulmane, note Laguerre, d'une part observent les pratiques sociales réglées par la société civile, et, d'autre part, adhèrent à une enclave temporelle « qui les relie à un islam mondial par un calendrier islamique ». Cela signifie que la mosquée et son voisinage expérimentent une routine temporelle différente qui a été modifiée et adaptée pour accommoder la pratique religieuse. Autour de la mosquée Assuna-Annabawiyah, cette pratique du temps peut être directement observée cinq fois par jour, quand les fidèles, principalement des chauffeurs de taxi, des commerçants du voisinage et des résidents, arrivent à la mosquée à temps pour les prières quotidiennes. À travers la temporalité du lieu, la structure de la mosquée Assuna-Annabawiyah devient visiblement un espace sacré à cause de la répétition du rituel quotidien.

Je soutiens, de plus, que ces mosquées hybrides et réaménagées rompent, à leur façon, avec la compréhension traditionnelle de ce qu'est l'architecture islamique, pour montrer une tension particulière de la diaspora musulmane au regard de la question de l'authenticité. En tant que produit du colonialisme de la fin du XIX^e siècle, l'étude traditionnelle de l'architecture islamique a été presque exclusivement axée sur un ensemble d'édifices historiques, séculiers et religieux, à travers le Moyen Orient, l'Espagne et le sous-continent sud-asiatique. Les mosquées contemporaines dont il est question dans le présent essai montrent les déficiences des connaissances coloniales dans la description de l'histoire sociale de ces immeubles contemporains, mais interpellent aussi la présomption d'un paysage urbain séculier et racialement neutre dans des pays à population musulmane croissante comme le Canada. Qu'elles soient construites avec une intention précise ou réaménagées, ces mosquées montrent la fluidité de la pratique spatiale islamique et soulignent ce qu'Edward Saïd appelle « la dimension humaine de l'islam ». Elles sont aussi devenues une pierre de touche importante pour comprendre la transformation du paysage religieux canadien qui continue d'interpeller notre compréhension des formes bâties islamiques en Occident aujourd'hui.

Traduction : Élise Bonnette