

Chapter Three

Muslims and Housing Today

Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss some issues relating to the relationship between the theme of housing and the intellectual, cultural and civilizational state of Muslims nowadays. An attempt will be made toward a diagnosis of some of the most obvious and painful ailments and their causes, what sustains them and how the situation can be improved.

The chapter is divided into the following three sections:

1. Islamic housing between yesterday and today;
2. Education and Islamic housing;
3. Toward a contemporary Islamic housing.

Islamic housing between yesterday and today

As said earlier, the Islamic house is a microcosm of Islamic culture and civilization. Achievements and successes in both Islamic housing and Islamic culture and civilization are interrelated, one leading to, or originating from, the other, irrespective of which one exactly is the cause and which one is the effect. Islam is a total life-style. The house phenomenon, and all the sectors related, directly or indirectly, to it, is the ground for living and practicing the most essential segments of human existence on earth, and, as such, the ground for living the most essential segments of the Islamic worldview, *shari'ah* (law) and ethics.

The house dominion is where people rise and fall, that is to say, where people either succeed or fail in managing and conducting the most crucial aspects of their lives. Housing is where the epicenter of the rise and fall of cultures and civilizations lies. Thus, some of the chief causes of the decline of Islamic culture and civilization, if properly examined, could be related, one way or another, to the complex subject of housing and its own decline and its causes. Likewise, some of the main cures and catalysts for the revival of Islamic culture and civilization could be found right in the ambit of the subject of reviving a genuine Islamic housing. Indeed, Islamizing

housing today could be a turning point, as well as an engine of growth, insofar as a total recovery and revival of Muslim cultural and civilizational consciousness and involvement at a world stage is concerned.

While calling for a revival in contemporary Islamic housing, Muslims often cast a glance towards history and how the Muslims of some past generations had handled the same issue. It is therefore of a paramount importance that today's Muslims view and assess correctly the achievements of their predecessors in the field of architecture, in general, and housing, in particular. Understanding the present predicaments of Muslims with regard to housing depends very much on this first step. This is a normal and desired course of action. However, some cautionary steps ought to be taken.

It must be immediately stated that this scenario will not be feasible at all if Muslims remain either ignorant about their own history and civilization, or are relatively acquainted with the same but with a knowledge which is often served in so many forms, often distorted ones, by their former colonial masters. Ignorance, it follows, is one thing, but a distorted knowledge is totally something else. Both are appalling, but the latter, surely, is worse than the former. They both mislead and ruin a person, however, while ignorance sometimes needs no more than a spark to make a person come to terms with his dismal condition, and to swiftly embark on filling up that glaring cavity inside his self, a distorted or a corrupted knowledge, on the other hand, having left no glaring intellectual cavity inside a person, blinds, deafens and deceives him, so he becomes blindly contented and proud, hence receptive neither to criticism and reassessment of his precarious position, nor to new vistas of knowledge and new ideas.

Regarding the second state of affairs where some Muslims possess some knowledge about the history of their cultures and civilization, most of such knowledge, however, had been misconstrued and, in some instances, even corrupted by the interferences of the colonial masters and their allies, and in such a state had been served to the Muslim minds, both young and old, in schools, colleges and universities. Those colonial masters, it stands to reason, must have often had a number of covert goals and agendas behind the dissemination of such a knowledge. Even if they had none, and were somewhat sincere in their undertakings, they, in the final analysis, rarely could remain completely neutral and unprejudiced, something which is quite natural and expected if we

consider the nature of humans, as well as the nature of the colonizer-colonized relationship. In the best scenario, the colonial masters, despite their intermittent somewhat sincere efforts, still remained short of grasping the essence and spirit of Islam, as well as the nature and profundity of its imprints on history and life in general. Still however, this is sufficiently a bad situation that inevitably leads to equally bad results.

However, Muslims must not blame anyone but themselves for their present unenviable situation. At the same time, they must not play blame or finger-pointing games. There is no time or reason for that, because such a thing is uncalled for and is a serious spiritual failing. It brings more harm than benefit, recklessly consuming the restricted time, energy, resources, willpower and zeal of people. Muslims must pick themselves up, dust themselves off, and as a unit and in a confident mode start moving forward. They must accept that their fate lies in their own hands, not in the hands of others, whoever they may be. Allah says that He will never change the condition of a people unless they change what is inside their selves, or hearts, first. (al-Ra'd, 11) That means that people are the architects of their own (mis)fortune, as well as that they are to worry, and busy themselves, only about those things that are within their own spheres of influence; what lies beyond, Allah will take care of it. The true independence, freedom, cultural and civilizational creativity, productivity and contentment of Muslims, it follows, can come about only as a result of a fusion of faith, right education, hard work and perseverance, which will be woven with the threads of a comprehensive excellence culture.

In doing so, Muslims must remember an underlying rule which both the Holy Qur'an and history clearly bring to light. That rule is: in order for one to know and diagnose one's present state, one must know his past; and for one to be able to chart his future course, one must know both his past and present conditions. This applies to the fates of societies more than anything else. Indeed, any other approach is a flawed and misleading one. It denotes one of the plainest paradoxes that one can adopt. It is a self-deception and self-hypocrisy. The disposition of a present condition, in a person or a society, owes much to the past conditions that preceded it. Also, the disposition of future conditions will always owe much to both the present and past ones and how people handled them. People who are ignorant about, and indifferent towards, their history are people with a fake identity. They possess no real life orientation and mission,

and they regularly waver in some of the most important things in life. Their civilizational undertakings, at best, are shortsighted, myopic and superficial, often serving not their own interests, but the interests of those parties and groups to the rhythm of whose political or economic currents they swing.

This situation is similar to a seriously sick person who went to see a doctor. Indeed, the only way for the person's illness to be properly and quickly cured is that he informs the doctor about what had transpired earlier: what he had eaten, or what unusual he had done or had happened to him, for example. The doctor will ask if the person had similar, or some other serious, illnesses in the past and how he handled them. He will ask, furthermore, whether the person is allergic to certain medications. Knowing the medical history of the person's immediate family members will also be crucial to the doctor. Only when the doctor is well acquainted with all these matters, he will be able to correctly diagnose the illness and proceed with an effective and beneficial therapy for the ill person. Any failure in properly diagnosing the person, either due to the doctor's ignorance of the person's present and past conditions, or due to some misleading information given to the doctor, will inevitably lead to a failure in curing the person from his disease. As a result of this failure, sometimes a wrong therapy may lead not only to the prolonged suffering of a patient, but also to a deterioration in his condition. It may even lead to his death.

As far as the subject matter of housing in Islam is concerned, studying its history will bring multiple benefits. They will all revolve around discovering how and why the early Muslims were able to evolve such astonishing and sophisticated housing systems and designs that effortlessly integrated into their fold the worldview, values and teachings of Islam together with the many requirements of the climate, environment, culture, technology and engineering of the day – such is exactly what Islam as a comprehensive worldview and an all-encompassing code and way of life preaches, and what a genuine Islamic culture and civilization are all about. Islamic housing was a source of pride to Muslims. It was a testimony that they lived up to the requirements of the vicegerency mission placed on their shoulders. It will not be an exaggeration to even say that Islamic housing was a testimony of the success of Muslims in this world, which is a prelude to a success in the world to come. Islamic housing was always the best source of the legitimate worldly pleasures to

Muslims too. It was arguably the greatest gift and blessing provided for them in this world, which was capable of endlessly giving most. Thus, a genuine Islamic house is described by many, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, as a paradise on earth.

Titus Burckhardt, for example, wrote that the inner courtyard of an Islamic house “is an image of paradise; when it contains a fountain and watercourses which gush forth to water trees and flowers, it does in effect recall the descriptions in the Qur’an of the abode of the blessed.”¹ It should be noted that inner courtyards in Islamic residential architecture and planning always featured prominently, perhaps more than any other component of the house. This was so because of the multiple functions and benefits that domestic courtyards offered, such as, manipulating weather conditions and getting the best out of them, privacy protection, constant interaction with environment and space, entertainment and recreation.

Hassan Fathy, as cited by Gianni Scudo, went so far as to say that the Islamic (Arab) courtyard house was “a microcosm linking, in space and time, land and sky through the symbolic meaning of its components”.² He said: “The four walls of the courtyard represented the four columns carrying the dome of the sky. The sky is then drawn down into intimate contact with the living rooms by reflecting it in a basin which has the form of a dome on squinches. Thus, nature and space are brought into the town-house by their transportation into architectural forms and by symbolism.”³

When Isma’il al-Faruqi spoke of the arresting preference of Many Muslims in the past for an extended family, as well as about the life in Muslim houses where such a phenomenon was enclosed and facilitated, he inferred that the reasons for that were purely educational, psychological, recreational and spiritual, clearly spelling out the nature and dynamism of the roles and functions of the house institution in Islam. Al-Faruqi concluded that those Muslim houses which facilitated and promoted the notion of an extended family ensured, among other things, the proper and uninterrupted upbringing, education, socialization and acculturation of the young. And it is not a secret that the lack of a proper upbringing, education

¹ Titus Burckhardt, *Art of Islam*, (London: World of Islam Festival Publishing Company Ltd., 1976), p. 191.

² Gianni Scudo, “*Climatic Design in the Arab Courtyard House*”, in *Environmental Design: Journal of the Islamic Environmental Research Centre 1-2*, (1988), 82-91.

³ *Ibid.*

and acculturation of many young Muslims is one of the main problems faced by the Muslim community today, and one of the main obstacles on the way of a Muslim cultural and civilizational awakening.

Al-Faruqi wrote: "The Muslim family suffers from no generation gap as three generations live together. Thus, the socialization and acculturation of the young is always complete, guaranteeing the transmission of tradition and culture with as little adulteration as possible. Here, the past is genuinely in touch with the present and the future. Another crucial advantage of the extended family is that it provides its members with instant company whenever he desires it. And there are usually enough to choose from, according to the prevailing mood. There is always somebody ready to play with, to joke with, to discuss with, to contemplate with, to cry with, and to hope with. This is a crucial prerequisite for mental health. The extended family never lacks a child element, an adult element, a feminine element, a masculine element, an elderly element wiser and more experienced than all others."⁴

While the Islamic housing of the past filled Muslims with pride and happiness, it was filling many non-Muslims with awe and admiration. For example, following the return of the crusaders from Palestine and Syria, who interacted more closely than ever before with the cultures and civilization of Muslims, many spread tales of the refreshing gardens, private and public, of the holy land. It was then and through the returning crusaders that the concept of the domestic courtyard, or the outdoor room in the house, came to the European culture. The Islamic domestic courtyard, together with the concept of the Islamic garden, was thought to be "a literal evocation of the joys that await the pious in the afterlife".⁵

It goes without saying that the only way forward for Muslims is to, while holding fast to the guidance of the holy Qur'an and the Prophet's *sunnah*, critically and thoroughly examine both their past and present-day conditions, the findings of which will have to constitute the core of their educational systems, socio-economic and political philosophies, as well as any reformatory and revivalist tendencies and movements. Such an ethos will shape their unique

⁴ Isma'il Raji Al-Faruqi, *Al-Tawhid: its Implications for Thought and Life*, p.137.

⁵ Susan Zevon, *Outside Architecture*, (Gloucester: Rockport Publishers, 1999), see Introduction by Walter Chatham, p. 10.

and respectable identity, and the identity of all that is associated with them.

As a segment of studying the Muslim history and their society, studying the history of Islamic housing will enable Muslims, professionals and users alike, to critically and aptly analyze the causes and conditions which led to abandoning the housing systems and styles, partly or completely, which epitomized the belief system, values and ideals of Islam in favor of some other philosophies, values and principles. They will be in a position to grasp the extent of the relationship between a regression in Islamic housing and the other Muslim social, political, economic and spiritual setbacks, one influencing and aiding the other. They, furthermore, will be able to critically assess and come to terms with the conspicuous insufficiency of authenticity and genuine value of present-day housing styles and systems which Muslims have adopted: how really (in)compatible with Islam and the Muslim ethical and spiritual preferences they are, where they have come from and how, and finally, are they what Muslims really want and crave for. Certainly, in terms of Islamic housing, a serious and in-depth self-evaluation is urgently needed at all levels of the Muslim presence, and the above-raised questions represent some of the core issues that must be investigated and solved. What Muslims need today is a culture of critical, independent and visionary thinking, as well as a culture of an audacious initiative, creativity and change. What is needed is a culture of comprehensive excellence, as well as a culture of intellectual and cultural enlightenment and elevation. What is needed, when all's said and done, is to translate the teachings, values and principles of Islam onto life realities, because all of the above-mentioned factors that are required are what Islam promotes and stipulates as the prerequisites for the creation of a genuine culture and civilization. Anything put forth other than this is a distorted, or at best, a questionable, version of understanding Islam. Islam, it follows, promotes a keen following in religion, and in equal measure, it promotes endless innovation and originality in civilization, an integral part of which is the built environment with housing as its nucleus.

It defies logic that some housing systems, designs and styles were excellent, yet the best ones, for many centuries and then, suddenly, they started to seem obsolete, old-fashioned and impractical. For example, how come that the concepts of the Islamic Arab, Turkish and Malay houses were the ideal solutions for

hundreds of millions of people in the Arab, Turkish and Malay lands, and for hundreds of years, satisfying their unified religious and diversified cultural, environmental and climatic prerequisites, but today such concepts have become outmoded and irrelevant? As a result, we dismiss such outstanding and total housing solutions and styles of the past as merely traditional and vernacular, reducing them to museums, pages of history books and, at best, to some rare appearances in some remote indigenous regions where the currents of the Western materialistic modernization is yet to arrive and sweep everything away. Isn't it better for Muslims, for example, to be true to themselves and talk about modernizing, adapting and modifying, if need be, their housing styles and designs which proved excellent and compatible for centuries, without compromising the philosophy, spirit and fundamental qualities of such styles and designs, rather than to let themselves, their culture, history and more than a few fundamental religious precepts down, and irresponsibly embark on importing some alien housing styles and designs which stem from another philosophies, ideologies and cultures?

If, admittedly, some of the Islamic housing styles and designs somewhat failed to cope with dramatic changes in the Muslim world during a couple of last centuries, and were sluggish and unresponsive to rapid advancements in modern science, technology and engineering, that in no way renders them outdated, worn-out and worthless. The problem simply was part of a bigger picture; it was part of a total decline in Islamic society and its cultures and civilization. Thus, the matter of Islamic housing in a recent history ought to be viewed, approached and solved as such, that is, as part of a bigger picture, or a problem. The problem, as a matter of fact, was never that of Islamic housing. The problem always was, and still is, linked to Muslims and how they actually coped with and responded to the growing Westernization and colonization challenges that targeted their culture and identity. Successfully restoring Islamic housing today, as both a concept and tangible reality, therefore, can only be viable if the same is regarded as part of a wide-ranging Islamization initiative. It cannot be treated independently, away from the rest of major Muslim problems and challenges.

According to Youssef El-Sayebi "there are (by and large) two types of housing prevailing in the Islamic world: the typical Arab Islamic housing and the modern Western housing type. Both types have their own impact upon the lives of their inhabitants. Ideally, the

designer of such housing projects must be of a high artistic inspiration based on the Islamic guiding principles, traditions and customs in order to initiate the positive impact of housing on the development of the Muslim individual. Far from such idealism, our Muslim world suffers from a severe mixture of alien Western architectural types. That is basically the result of our neglecting or misunderstanding of the Islamic civilization heritage, despite the presence of highly qualified architects in our world. Or, is it a dialectic mixing up we are living in? The government will have to take the initiative for the encouragement of the adoption of the traditional architectural type for individual housing, instead of the high-rise apartment buildings. It also will have to consider the general climatic conditions.”⁶

Indeed, the main reason for the Islamic housing problems is many Muslims’ ignorance of Islam and the history of its peoples, coupled with their abandoning of many fundamental values and laws of Islam, prolonged colonization and the onslaught of the Western materialistic modernization and culture. The reason is a drastic change in the mind-set and attitude of many Muslims, their feeble and shallow intellectualism and wisdom, as well as their poor and disoriented, or even completely flawed, spiritual tendencies. Consequently, in terms of housing, the situation became disturbingly so pathetic. Many Muslims became so impaired by the causes of the fall of Islamic culture and civilization, and were so blinded by the disingenuous and shallow alternatives served instead, that they eventually became incapacitated from seeing how inappropriate and inconsistent their imported housing systems, designs and styles were. They could not see that such designs and styles were foreign, some even looked very weird and awkwardly improper when juxtaposed with the backdrop of the Muslim contexts, and, due to the enormous importance of housing in life, those foreign housing designs and styles clearly served as a hindrance to a Muslim reawakening and a proper acculturation.

It is truly amazing why we can’t see and then properly judge these things, but we can see very clearly and then can properly judge many other aspects of culture and civilization. For example, if a person in a tropical or a hot-dry desert climate, with his own unique

⁶ Youssef El-Sayebi, *Housing Problems in the Islamic City*, (pp.135-142); Inside: *Housing in the Islamic City*, Proceedings of a Symposium held in Ankara, Turkey, on 21-25.7.1984. Proceedings prepared by: Center of Planning and Architectural Studies, Cairo.

weather conditions, indigenous culture and religious preference, were to completely abandon his native dress style in favor of a foreign one, which evolved as a result of the impact of sets of totally different indigenous cultures, religious preferences and weather conditions, such as – for example -- the cold continental four-seasons ones, that would appear to most people as weird, impractical and even ridiculous. Everyone will be able to see that and know why. This would be so because the newly adopted style of clothing of the person in question would betray the requirements of local cultures, local environmental factors and weather conditions. The person's behavior would be regarded as absurd and unnatural, hence improper. It simply would not go well with the overall conditions of the contexts in which he lives. The adopted dress style would eventually cause the person a feeling of discomfort, incongruity and incompatibility.

Thus, if a person walks under the scorching sun in the streets of -- for instance -- Dubai, Doha, Kuwait City, Riyadh, Cairo and Khartoum, all representing the hot-dry desert climate, or in the streets of Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta, both representing the hot-humid climate, and he wears, for instance, a dress that is normally worn in the places of the cold continental four-seasons climate, his actions would be regarded -- and rightly so -- as eccentric, mismatched and, by some, even ridiculous. In most of the mentioned cities, furthermore, if an adopted foreign dress style clearly violated some clear-cut rulings of Islam, it would be regarded as offensive and disrespectful to the beliefs and sentiments of a majority of population. An immediate change, or an adjustment, to the dress style, would, in all likelihood, be required from the person in question in most of the mentioned cities.

At the same time, however, adopting a foreign housing design and style, partly or completely, in the same Muslim metropolises, which evolved somewhere else in the West -- for instance -- as a result of fluctuating, often cold, continental weather and other environmental factors, foreign cultural orientations and penchants, as well as different belief systems which are incompatible with Islam – that, unfortunately, will not be regarded as strange, unsuitable and ridiculous a course of action. To make the things worse, there will be even those who would see that as a sign of modernization and progress. The proponents of this phenomenon would normally espouse that Islam either has nothing to do with the matter in

question, or it does to some extent but there could be no out-and-out conflicts and discrepancies between the two.

Moreover, while a foreign dress style that does not respect the Islamic tenet of covering the *'awrah* (parts of the human body that must be properly covered in certain situations and under certain circumstances) will be frowned upon by many and in most of the referred to Muslim cities, a foreign Western housing style and design which not only does not respect the subjects of the *'awrah* of the body and the *'awrah* of the family institution and human life in general (various levels of the privacy right among the family members and visitors), but also through its design and layout it promotes their outright violation – that, in contrast, will rarely be frowned upon, let alone rejected and substituted with better and more appropriate alternatives.

Also, as another example, if a person within the unique cultural, environmental and religious contexts of his life were to completely abandon his native cuisine in favor of a foreign one, which evolved as a result of a totally different cultural, environmental and religious contexts, his actions too will be looked upon as weird, inappropriate and ridiculous.

Undoubtedly, this principle of inevitable diversity, due to the diversity of life contexts and conditions, applies to virtually all aspects of culture and civilization. It even applies to the ways people conduct their political, economic, social, family and leisure activities. Calling for unity and standardization in sheer cultural matters would be extremely unfair and aberrant. It would be tantamount to betraying the human nature and instinct. Thus, people ought to be always mindful of cultural and life diversities and their inevitability, in turn appreciating, conforming to, and trying to get the best out of it for the sake of ensuring their earthly wellbeing.

That virtually everything in human life, including the way people look like and the languages they speak, is greatly influenced by natural elements, i.e., by the way the heavens and earth have been created, Allah, the Creator and Sustainer of everything, says in the Qur'an: "And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colors: verily in that are Signs for those who know." (al-Rum, 22) Placing the words "the variations in your languages and your colors" after the words "the creation of the heavens and the earth" implies that the ways the heavens and earth have been created and function hold sway over

the ways people conduct much of their lives. As there are permanent and immutable rules and laws of physics, similarly, there are permanent and immutable rules and laws of culture as well, as there are permanent and immutable laws and rules of human ethics and morality, etc. From this unity of truth, which is akin to the roots and trunk of a healthy tree, springs out diversity of cultural and civilizational expressions and achievements, which is akin to the brunches, leafs and fruits of the same tree. Each brunch, leaf or a fruit is independent, a world on its own, however, they all are tied to the same source, the tree's roots and trunk. Undeniably, unity in diversity is the ethos and the trademark of Islam and its *tawhidic* worldview.

The words “verily in that are Signs for those who know” in the above-mentioned verse from the Qur’an, represents an invitation to man, Allah’s vicegerent on earth for whom everything thereon has been created and to whom everything has been subjected, to explore and at the same time adhere to those Signs, i.e., the permanent laws and paradigms of life. The same Signs (laws of existence) man is to scrupulously observe and conform to in all of his dealings and pursuits while on a quest for the realization of his honorable earthly mission. Man is not to rebel against, or to defy, his own nature, and the nature of things that surround him. Man, and everything that he does, must at all times be realistic, rational, “natural”, and nature, or creation, friendly.

Without doubt, because of this pragmatic and intrinsic character of Islam and its attitude towards, and appreciation of, the inexorable cultural and civilizational diversity in the world, people’s customs and traditions (*‘adat*) and customary usage (*‘urf*) are regarded as a source of the rulings of the Islamic law (*shari’ah*) where there are no explicit texts from neither the Qur’an nor the Prophet’s *sunnah* specifying the rulings. It is also a requirement in making people’s customs (*‘adat*) and customary usage (*‘urf*) a source of *shari’ah* rulings that there are no contradictions between them and the contents of the Qur’an and *sunnah*. About the meaning of custom and customary usage Muhammad Abu Zahrah said: “Custom is a matter on which a community of people agree in the course of their daily life, and common usage is an action which is repeatedly performed by individuals and communities. When a community makes a habit of doing something, it becomes its common usage. So the custom and

common usage of a community share the same underlying idea even if what is understood by them differs slightly.”⁷

And about the reasons why *'adat* and *'urf* are deemed the appropriate sources of *shari'ah*, in absence of explicit texts from the Qur'an and *sunnah* and when there are no conflicts between the *'adat* and *'urf* and the latter, Muhammad Abu Zahrah said: “Many judgments are based on *'urf* because in many cases it coincides with public interest... Another reason is that custom necessarily entails people's familiarity with a matter, and so any judgment based on it will receive general acceptance, whereas divergence from it will be liable to cause distress, which is disliked in the judgment of Islam because Allah Almighty has not imposed any hardship on people in His *deen*. Allah Almighty prescribes what normal people deem proper and are accustomed to, not what they dislike and hate. So when a custom is not a vice and is respected by people, honoring it will strengthen the bond which draws people together because it is connected to their traditions and social transactions whereas opposition to it will destroy that cohesion and bring about disunity.”⁸

Islam is a complete way of life. Its values and teachings, together with the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), whose primary task was to explain to mankind and put into practice the precepts of Islam, are universal and timeless. The significance of Islamic built environment is universal and permanent too, in that the philosophy that it embodies is the Islamic one. However, such is the nature of Islamic built environment that it is receptive to both advances in science and technology and the dictates of people's living conditions. Since Islamic housing is fundamental to Islamic built environment, this conceptual blueprint applies to it as well.

It is an imperative that Muslim professionals in relation to housing always remember this verity while trying to revive and sustain the notions of the Islamic house and Islamic housing. In so doing, Muslim professionals in question are bidden to, firstly, identify the general Islamic guidelines and principles pertaining to the phenomenon of housing. Next, they must be fully aware of the implications of the dilemmas and challenges their time and the diverse regions in which they live entail. They cannot be trapped in a historical episode, overly romanticizing it and attempting to emulate

⁷ Muhammad Abu Zahrah, *The Fundamental Principles of Imam Malik's Fiqh*, <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/ABewley/usul12.html>.

⁸ Ibid.

the housing solutions the Muslims of that particular period successfully evolved. If something was the norm during a period and in a particular ecological setting, such by no means can be the same in every subsequent period and in different ecological settings. Technological advancements rapidly change; demands of different eras fluctuate, even under the same ecological conditions; climate exigencies must be painstakingly heeded; and, lastly, human psychology also changes with the change of time and space posing a number of exigencies of its own. No housing plan and design which served as a solution for an age and place can be simply “parachuted” to another age and place without properly modulating it to its rigorous environmental, socio-cultural and economic requirements. To do that is to betray the dynamic spirit of both the common sense and the perpetual message of Islam. Blind and ignorant imitations and following, even in sheer religious matters, are categorically rebuked by Islam.

While taking hold of the general Islamic guidelines and principles with reference to creating an Islamic housing, on the one hand, and while studying the needs of different times and situations so that the former can be accurately understood and applied, on the other, Muslim professionals in reality perform a degree of *ijtihad*, i.e., forming an independent opinion or judgment within the framework of an available text. In doing so, if one excels one receives two rewards from Allah, but if one for whatever reason fails to deliver, after he had tried his best, one is bound to receive one reward from Allah, as propounded by the Prophet (pbuh) in one of his traditions.⁹

Based on this tradition, in no way can a serious, enlightened, accountable and willing person be a loser as far as the execution of matters ordained by Allah is concerned. Verily, this divine assurance should serve to Muslim architects, designers and planners as a starting point to look carefully and critically at the state of Muslim residential architecture and planning and how houses and other residential units in the Muslim world are planned and designed, as well as to start contemplating the prospects of finding much better solutions which will be inspired by and infused with the values of Islam, and will be responsive to the exigencies of different times and regions.

⁹ Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Kitab al-I'tisam bi al-Kitab wa al-Sunnah, Hadith No. 6805.

At the start, Muslim housing professionals ought not to be bound by a single historical structural model, device or a solution. The past is to be viewed all the time as such, i.e., the past. It is to be neither excessively venerated or idealized nor completely disregarded. The past must be put in its true perspective with such notions as wisdom, pragmatism and practicality leading the way. In their daunting search for a contemporary Islamic residential architecture and planning, Muslim architects, designers and planners must be driven by a clear principled vision, a free spirit and an insatiable thirst for ingenuity, which must be shrouded in strong determination, self-belief and quest for excellence. However, should some modern structural devices or solutions appear to bear a resemblance, partly or totally, to the ones used in the past, one is not to shy away from reviving them within the existing contexts. The history of Islamic residential architecture and planning is not to be looked down at as entirely outmoded and worthless. As we are against blind and ignorant imitation of the past, we are likewise against disengaging ourselves from it and completely ignoring the numerous lessons that we can learn therefrom. Indeed, much can be learned from history because the protagonists of any historical episode while solving their problems possessed the same vision and objectives as we do today while solving the problems of our own. On the other hand, however, we have to be extremely mindful and selective as to what exactly to benefit from history, in which areas and how far we are to emulate our predecessors, because most of their problems were the product of the circumstances under which they operated, whereas our problems are the product of the circumstances under which we operate. Hence, seldom can their solutions be utterly ours.

There is no such thing as a standardized Islamic housing which can be reproduced anytime and anywhere. If truth be told, there is nothing as such in the whole body of Islamic built environment. Therefore, Muslim architects, designers and planners should not hesitate to unleash their burning Islamic spirit, desire, imagination and creativity in order to conceive and create such an architectural tradition in the sphere of housing that will be compatible with the requirements of both the Islamic religious message and modernity. Undoubtedly, the given solutions will have to vary from one region to another, somewhere more and somewhere less. But the essence of all the possible designs, including those adopted as the best solutions

in history, will remain one, because of the same worldview and the same religious spirit and foundation that underpin the presence of Muslims and bind all the Muslim peoples regardless of their different geographical locations, cultures and historical appearances. Whatever conception and form are eventually given to such a residential architecture and planning, the same is absolutely qualified to be branded as “Islamic”. On account of its location, sheer exterior, or association with a historical moment, no house, or any other building, can be more Islamic than others. What matters, imperatively, is the total function and utility, that every building is imbued with the soul and purity of Islam, and that it stands for a personification of the Islamic values and principles insofar as the fulfilling of a building’s functions and roles is concerned.¹⁰

Muslims must evolve housing systems and styles today that are in harmony with their people, their environment and their religious preferences. They must reject a blind following of their past because such is an exercise that is counter-productive, stifles ingenuity, and leads to a sturdy thinking and judgment degeneration. This leads to a retreat to the Islamic architectural and planning past and to an excessive and impractical idealism. This, at the end, can result in superficial, mock and tasteless hybrid residential buildings where traditional elements of arches, domes, courtyards, calligraphy and abstract decorative elements, are tastelessly and awkwardly grafted onto modern residential buildings. To an insightful observer, such buildings appear strange and even funny, and lack a true identity, substance and originality.

Similarly, Muslims must reject the invading Western-oriented residential architectural and planning legacy that completely ignores the Islamic spirit, and in the name of the rush for an industrial development, which is grounded in some alien-to-Islam belief and value systems, undermines the rich traditional culture of Muslim peoples. This leads to a haphazard and unreserved importation of Western modern housing systems and styles which, too, in the midst of Muslim lands, cultures and peoples, appear bizarre and incompatible, lacking a true identity, substance and originality. Just as blindly imitating the Muslim past, blindly imitating the Western culture and civilization is likewise, and even more, found objectionable. To

¹⁰ Spahic Omer, *Islamic Architecture: its Philosophy, Spiritual Significance and Some Early Developments*, p. 35-38.

the future of Islamic civilization, such is regarded as very damaging, futile and unproductive.

Muslims must understand the essence of Islam and Islamic residential architecture and planning, and then allow modern building technology and engineering to be a tool in the expression of this essence. Muslims must take advantage of opportunities that new materials and mass production techniques today offer. They have an opportunity to explore and transform the possibilities of the machine age for the enrichment of Islamic housing in the same way that craftsmen explored the nature of geometrical and arabesque patterns in the past. The forms that would evolve from this approach would have a regional identity, a stylistic evolution and a relevance to the eternal principles and values of Islam.¹¹ A modern Islamic housing must be an ingenious mixture of the worldview and values of Islam, of a quest for excellence and originality, and of the technical resources, inventions and services presented by rapid advances in modern building technology and engineering.

While evolving a modern Islamic housing, Muslims are to look back at their, as well as at other people's, history in order to learn from it for the benefit of their present and future condition, not to blindly imitate it. Their Islamic identity, and the identity of their culture and civilization, is by no means and under no circumstances to be compromised. Moreover, Muslims, by and large, are to look at the robust Western culture and civilization as a culture and civilization of others, not really theirs, and which ought to peacefully co-exist, and on an equal footing, with their own Islamic culture and civilization. While taking from, and giving to, the Western culture and civilization has become a necessity nowadays, largely due to the globalization phenomenon, Muslims should never end up glorifying and blindly following such culture and civilization. It is incumbent upon every Muslim, male and female, to contribute his/her share towards reviving the glory of Islamic culture and civilization. All their personal life goals and aspirations are to be geared, one way or another, towards the realization of this grand objective.

¹¹ *The Future of Islamic Architecture*,
<http://www.islamicart.com/main/architecture/future.html>



Terrace houses are very popular in Malaysia. Some terrace houses in Kuala Lumpur.



A traditional courtyard house in Cairo, Egypt.



A traditional house in Lahore, Pakistan.



Crudely screened balconies on an apartment building in Damascus, Syria. Obviously, the people embraced some utilitarian ends at the expense of the aesthetic ones.



A cul-de-sac street in a residential area in Wirghlah, Algeria.



An enclosed wooden gallery on a traditional house in Hamma, Syria.



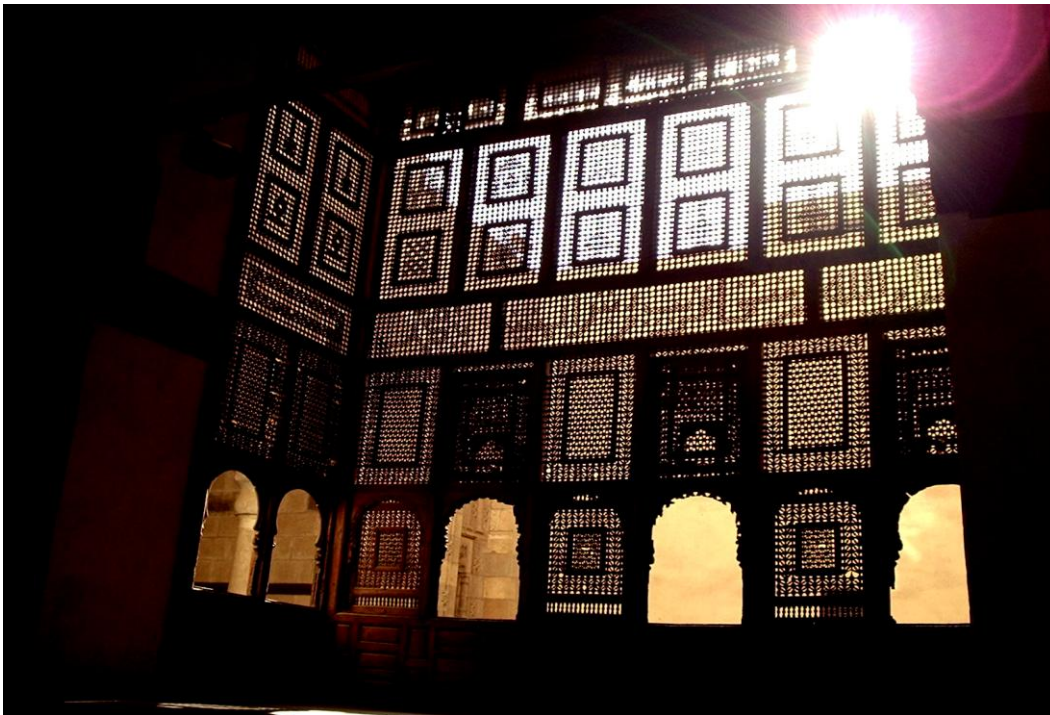
A courtyard house that once belonged to Imam Khomeini in Qom, Iran.



A residential area in Yazd, Iran.



A house in Penang, Malaysia.



An ambiance behind a screened window in a traditional house in Cairo, Egypt.



Traditional houses in Istanbul, Turkey.



A residential area in Ghadamis, Libya.

Education and Islamic housing

It is an undeniable truth that a proper education is a key to reviving the phenomena of Islamic housing as an essential part of the revival of the total of Islamic culture and civilization. A comprehensive educational vision and plan, coupled with concrete policies and laws and their avid and wise enforcement, account for the most powerful force that can lead to making the idea of contemporary Islamic housing a reality. A clever synthesis of knowledge and authority is the best way for taking the idea of Islamic housing from the world of abstract ideas to the real world of corporeal challenges and realities.

Indeed, knowledge without its systematic actualization and application is absurd and worthless, whereas authority, or power, with no support of an adequate and appropriate knowledge and its protagonists is a hollow and dangerous thing. It is a sham, and a farce. For knowledge to fully play its projected roles of enlightenment, enrichment, guidance, transformation and progress in society, it needs the unreserved help and support of genuine and honest authority, or power, and its protagonists. In the same vein, for authority and power to play their own projected roles of guidance, administration, protection and development in society, they need the constant help, advice and direction of knowledge and its own protagonists. Knowledge and authority need each other for their bare survival. The existence of either one of them in the absence of the other is rather illusory. Such an existence is artificial and ineffective in the extreme.

Certainly, it is because of this that in Islam one of the chief characteristics of a ruler is that he is pious and knowledgeable. He must hold in high esteem the people of knowledge and wisdom regularly consulting and listening to them. Mutual consultation the Holy Qur'an highlights as a foremost feature of the Muslim community (al-Shura, 38). Even Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) used to consult his companions in a number of worldly matters. The Qur'an explicitly instructed him to do so (Alu 'Imran, 159).

At the same time, and due to the same reasons, knowledge without its practical application and dimension is strongly repudiated and condemned in Islam, just as is the case with the sheer faith without deeds to supplement and support it. It is thus rightly said that knowledge without deeds, or a theory without practice, is like a tree without fruits. Due to this, furthermore, the Qur'an declares that it is

the learned believing men and women who fear Allah most, i.e., they make up the best category of believers as they exemplify and combine knowledge, faith and practice.

Echoing the importance of harmoniously combining true knowledge and its people with genuine and honest authority, or power, and its own people, and that the wellbeing of society depends on them, on the appropriateness of their respective services to society and how sound and solid the relationships between them are, Abdullah b. Mubarak, a leading Muslim scholar from the second Hijrah century, is reported to have said: "There are two types of people, when they are good and righteous the whole community becomes good and righteous, but when they are bad and morally corrupt the whole community becomes bad and morally corrupt, those two types of people are scholars and rulers."¹²

Thus, it is not the rulers alone who rule and are in charge of society. Rather, it is both rulers and scholars that are responsible for administering and leading society. The role of the public is not to be excluded in the process either, because it is nobody else but them who are the target, as well as the strength, of virtually all laws and policies. Public participation in every aspect of rule, in whatever regulated forms and capacities, is both crucial and reasonable.

Nor is it that scholars alone are to be the depositories and owners of the most precious commodity, knowledge, thus devaluing and misusing it. They must apply and share it with others so that everyone else can benefit from it. If there could be an autocracy and tyranny in relation to authority and power, likewise there could be an intellectual autocracy and tyranny in relation to knowledge as well, if it became a personal and concealed, or a manipulated and abused matter.

Truly, knowledge and authority stand for the two greatest responsibilities, or trusts (*amanah*), that a person can take up. They are for a common, and not for a personal, good or gain. They are more about giving than receiving. The rewards for fulfilling them are immense, and the penalty for neglecting and betraying them are proportionately immense too. Thus, if a person is not qualified for, or serious towards, them, there is then nothing special in coveting them.

¹² Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *l'lam al-Muwaqqi'in 'an Rabb al-'Alamin*, http://www.islamweb.net/newlibrary/display_book.php?flag=1&bk_no=34&ID=2.

They then simply can destroy their pursuers. They can be the main cause of their downfall in both worlds.

By the way, in Islam -- as a matter of fact -- nobody reigns over anybody, because the whole authority and power belongs to Allah alone (al-Baqarah, 107). Likewise, nobody is to selfishly claim any credit for an amount of knowledge he or she might acquire, because all knowledge belongs to Allah alone and we are bestowed but with a tiny portion of it (al-Isra', 85).

People are all servants of Allah. They are all Allah's vicegerents on earth. They are all equal. They are all important for the fulfillment of the spiritual purpose on earth. They all must contribute to their mutual good, something which cannot be done except if people are allowed to freely, honorably and responsibly operate in their diverse capacities and in their diverse societal positions. No capacity or position in society, it stands to reason, is to be viewed as superior, or inferior, to others, for the interests of society depends on the performances and productivity of each and every member. If a segment of society malfunctions or breaks down, the whole of society can be brought to a standstill. Capacities and positions in society are relative. Absolute is only a person's commitment to the cause, regardless of his or her societal rank or position. Hence, it is an Islamic tenet that the best among people are those who are most Allah-conscious (al-Hujurat, 13), as well as that Allah does not look at people's outward appearances, backgrounds and skin colors, but looks into their hearts and deeds. Rulers and scholars, it follows, are no more than the care-takers (*ra'in*) of society, and are thus the most responsible groups in it. Just like everyone else, they too in their respective capacities serve society and its people. No position in society is a privileged one. It is all about myriad levels and modes of serving within the intricate matrix of social responsibilities and duties.

This viewpoint is further supported by the following words of Allah in the Qur'an: "Say: "O my Lord! Let my entry be by the Gate of Truth and Honor, and likewise my exit by the Gate of Truth and Honor; and grant me from Your Presence an authority, or a power, (*sultan*) to aid (me)." (al-Isra', 80)

The Prophet (pbuh) also said: "Indeed, Allah curbs with (earthly) authority, or power, (*sultan*) what cannot be curbed by the Qur'an alone."¹³

¹³ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim*, <http://www.altafsir.com>.

The scholars of the Qur'an and the Prophet's *sunnah* unanimously agree that the message of the above mentioned Qur'anic verse and the Prophet's tradition is that in some circumstances the power and influence of the guidance, normative teachings, glad tidings and admonitions of the Qur'an -- the ultimate and primary source of knowledge -- alone is not sufficient for some people to take note of and adhere to them, notwithstanding the aptness of systems, methods, resources, commitment and zeal that might be in place. Due to the lack of an enforcing authority or power (*sultan*), achieving the ultimate goals and aspirations of knowledge -- which must be espoused by, and mirrored in, the vision and mission of society and its leadership -- is bound to be seriously affected. Thus, the impetus of a genuine power and authority is badly needed. This is especially so if the objectives of knowledge appear to be at odds with the objectives and aspirations of some other active and powerful forces in society. In this case, it is not only the duty of the highest societal authority to champion the knowledge calling and its noble purpose and goals, but also to deal with the negative trends and currents in society which could undermine the interests of knowledge and with it the interests and wellbeing of society as a whole. The Qur'an, as a symbol of knowledge and a spiritual power, and the *sultan*, as a symbol of worldly power and authority, support and complement each other in man's attainment of his honorable earthly *khilafah* (vicegerency) mission. They are both Allah's gifts to man which must be handled benevolently, gratefully and responsibly. They are both to be given their respective established dues. Neither one is to operate at the expense of, or in isolation from, the other. The Qur'an and the *sultan* constitute a unified whole that cannot be separated. Islam is both religion and state.

The following Qur'anic verse should also be seen in the same light of amalgamating knowledge -- as symbolized by Prophets and revelations sent to them -- and authority -- as symbolized by the idea of "iron" and its many worldly benefits -- as a path to comprehensive success and happiness on earth: "We sent aforetime our messengers with clear signs and sent down with them the Book and the balance (of right and wrong), that men may stand forth in justice; and We sent down iron, in which is (material for) mighty war, as well as many benefits for mankind, that Allah may test who it is that will help, unseen, Him and His messengers: For Allah is full of strength, exalted in might (and able to enforce His will)." (al-Hadid, 25)

So therefore, a significant step toward a contemporary Islamic housing will be a synthesis of true knowledge and education as well as authority, enforcement and implementation. Furthermore, it will also be important to realize that the current problems with regard to housing in the Muslim world are purely Muslim ones. Thus, the solutions must be Muslim ones too, closely linked with Islam. Some foreign factors and influences could somewhat be welcomed, but their roles should always be auxiliary ones, the roles of Islam being the main ones, and the scope of their authority should always be second to an Islamic one.

Indeed, perceiving and creating an Islamic housing is a very serious task. It is about giving people some of their fundamental rights, about executing a religious obligation, and about contributing to an appropriate, or an otherwise, implementation of the message of Islam. The immediate corollary of this noble initiative is that Muslim architects, and all the other professionals in the field of housing at large, must enhance considerably their knowledge of Islam: its *Sharia'h* (laws) and worldview. This may appear as a daunting task to many, however, needless to say that it is incumbent upon every Muslim, male and female, to learn and to know the rulings of Islam pertaining to the obligations and teachings they have to adhere to in their daily lives. Not surprisingly, the same teachings which Muslim housing professionals must be acquainted with so that they can practice them as part of their association with Islam, constitute the very core of Islam. As such, those teachings are closely correlated with, and are never far-flung from, the subject of Islamic housing, in that the latter embodies the essence of both Islam and human existence on earth.

It goes without saying that Islam is life and life is Islam, and housing is a physical locus of the broadest, most crucial and most vibrant life activities. Islamic housing, both as a notion and a corporeal marvel, and Muslim housing professionals, as the former's main protagonists, thus play a very important role in combining and integrating the phenomena of Islam and human life into a successful and powerful mix. Islamic housing, in addition, functions as a ground for such a mix to operate and express itself. Islamic housing, therefore, cannot exist without Islam. Nor can it be conceived, created and sustained without individuals: policy makers, housing professionals and users, who typify Islam in their thoughts, words and deeds.

Islam is a total religion that consists of faith, knowledge and practice. Islam cannot be fragmented and then reduced to any, or to a couple, of its three salient constituents. Therefore, every Muslim is duty-bound to conceive and plan his personal, family and professional life in accordance with this philosophy as much as possible, subjecting his/her personal wishes and interests to Islam and not subjecting Islam to his/her self. This code applies to Muslim housing professionals as well. And for one to practice and live the Islamic message, one must possess a reasonable amount of knowledge about it, in particular about those Islamic matters and issues with which one comes into contact on a regular basis. It is a paradox that a person claims to be a devout and practicing Muslim but is ignorant about the basic things of Islam concerning its beliefs, rites, values and morals. It is even a greater paradox that a person claims to be a completely secular Muslim, in the sense that he somewhat believes in the Islamic message but reckons that he has nothing to do with its foremost religious rites, values and morals. These beliefs are dangerously misleading and can seriously jeopardize one's spiritual standing and reputation both in this world and in the Hereafter. Hence, Islam strongly rebukes ignorance, egotism and indifference. It regards them as among the greatest impediments to man's realization of his spiritual purpose on earth. It is thus rightly said about the intents and goals of Islam that it was given to man so as to take him away from the darkness of sin and indulgence to the light of virtue and high morals, and from the ignorance rooted in faithlessness, bias and narrow-mindedness to the knowledge, wisdom and enlightenment rooted in faith, trust and man's total and accountable outlook on life, and from the worship of phony idols and shallow personal interests, desires and goals to the worship of the real Creator, Lord and Master of the whole universe.

Allah reiterates time and again that for Muslims there could be no civilizational ventures and activities which will not be steeped in the consciousness and spirituality of Islam. If, however, there are such endeavors, they are bound to eventually fall short without tasting the real success and victory. For example, in the course of advising and warning his materialistic and overly ambitious people, 'Ad, Prophet Hud is said to have told them, as testified by the Qur'an: "O my people! Ask forgiveness of your Lord, then turn to Him (in repentance); He will send on you clouds pouring down abundance of

rain and add strength to your strength, and do not turn back guilty.” (Hud, 52)

“So keep your duty to Allah, and obey me. Keep your duty toward Him Who has aided you with (the good things) that you know; has aided you with cattle and sons, and gardens and water-springs. Lo! I fear for you the retribution of an awful day.” (al-Shu’ara’, 131-135)

Prophet Nuh also told his disobedient and corrupt people: “Ask forgiveness of your Lord, surely He is the most Forgiving. He will send down upon you the cloud, pouring down abundance of rain. And help you with wealth and sons, and make for you gardens, and make for you rivers. What is the matter with you that you fear not the greatness of Allah?” (Nuh, 10-13)

Truly, as far as Islam and Muslims are concerned, one’s, or a nation’s, triumph is conditioned by the power of a fine synthesis of faith, unceasingly turning and keeping duty to Allah, knowledge that illuminates hearts and minds, and an all-embracing culture of excellence, hard work and willpower.

While Islamizing the notion of Islamic housing both in theory and practice, as a matter of great urgency and a remedial measure, Muslim architects, planners and engineers can draw on their own familiarity with the rulings of Islam, provided the same is adequate. Otherwise, trustworthy religious scholars, who are both qualified and broad-minded, should be consulted and engaged as many times as needed. Even as professional advisors and consultants some religious scholars could be appointed either by the government or by private firms and establishments. It goes without saying that unremitting inter and cross-professional housing studies and research activities appear to be inevitable. This is bound to lead gradually to narrowing down the glaring gap separating the religious scholars and their fields of interest from the secular ones and their own fields of interest. This way, every scholar will become aware as to his/her role in society and his/her obligations toward society, nature and Allah. Certainly, the religious scholars will have to widen their interests and concerns, becoming what they are actually always meant to be: the guardians of societies. But to secure that accolade they ought to reevaluate themselves and their undertakings, striving to be a more practical, approachable, people-friendly, and less dogmatic and idealistic lot. Whereas the secular scholars will have to think of Islamizing their knowledge, wherever there is a conflict of interests

and as much as possible, realigning their scientific goals and aspirations with the goals and aspirations of Islam and the Muslim community to which they belong.

Definitely, it is a high time that a serious and scientific initiative of integrating the Islamic worldview, ethics and value system into residential planning and architecture takes off in the Muslim world. However, such a scheme is to be only a segment of a broader Islamization project which will aim to bring about a total harmonization between the education systems of Muslims and the teachings and values of Islam. It is not only that residential planning and architecture should be targeted by this scheme, but also the whole of built environment professions. The process of integration between built environment professions and Islam will yield best results if it were embarked on wisely and gradually, after the people: policy makers, built environment professionals and users, have become convinced of its relevance and urgency, and that they all must as much contribute to as they benefit from it, and even more.

As a beginning, in universities and colleges where students undertake planning, design and architecture programs and where a strong emphasis on housing issues is made, some in-depth and deemed most needed programs on Islamic studies can be taught. Lecturers and tutors will have to be well-educated, well-trained and will have to lead by example. Their role will be critical. The mission of Islamization is a massive and complex one so students will always look up at their teachers for inspiration and guidance.

The programs can be taught independently, or they can be integrated into the syllabus of other courses. The latter option is an excellent one, as it is spontaneous and natural, hence more effective. Due to the obvious relevance and applicability of the integrated subject matter, the students will have little or no reasons to develop any aversion to what they are subjected to. The former option, however, if applied alone is not really a helpful one, as it is suggestive, nominally though, of perpetuating the existing rift between the religious and planning and architectural sciences. At best, the same can be seen as just an addendum to the existing curriculum, to which the students are bound to develop much indifference.

Unquestionably, the best and most workable solution would be a feasible combination of both options. In the process, either option can be given more emphasis on the expense of the other, subject to

the dictates of different situations. However, regardless of what model is eventually developed, this aspect of Islamization process can become effective only if students are constantly urged to incorporate what they have learned in the classroom into their practical work in studios and laboratories. Above all this, furthermore, intensive workshops, seminars and trainings on Islamic housing can be periodically organized for those who have already graduated and are actively and professionally involved in the housing sector, so that continuity is ensured and if considered necessary with some professionals, enthusiasm for the mission renewed.

It would be even better if the education systems of Muslims are such that all students come to colleges and universities with a reasonable amount of knowledge about Islam and its culture and history, which they have obtained beforehand at the lower levels of their study. What would then transpire in colleges and universities -- where the curriculum, teaching methods, references and the knowledge of the lecturers and tutors are all Islam compliant -- is that no time will be wasted on clarifying basic concepts and on dealing with introductory issues. Rather, straight from the beginning the core issues in Islamic housing could be seriously approached from perspectives that suite the level of students' study, aptitude and interests. It could be then hoped that within the prescribed timeframe which students spend in colleges and universities, a significant set of objectives with respect to Islamization and integration of knowledge in the housing sector can be successfully achieved. Then, the whole enterprise will in due time become a serious, sought-after and productive scientific project, rather than a superficial, superfluous and decorative addendum and diversion.

In universities and colleges the students can be taught some independent courses on the belief system (*'aqidah*), ethics (*akhlaq*), traditions, culture (*thaqafah*) and history of Islam. However, this will have little or no impact if the same knowledge is not referred to and is not attempted to be applied in those subjects which are directly linked with the question of housing as society's biggest concern, focusing on its historical, theoretical, cultural, aesthetic, religious, ethical and environmental dimensions.

For example, in an independent Islamic course the students are expected to thoroughly learn about the position of Islam on peaceful coexistence with the environment. Apart from the theoretical part, a lecturer in the same course must be ready to stir up the thoughts of

students through a discussion, an assignment, or a question in a test, towards the practical implications of that particular theme -- to which Islam, not by an accident, attaches so much importance -- for planning, designing and building houses. Next, in the studio where the students might be asked, for example, to plan an environment friendly neighborhood, or design an energy efficient or sustainable house, the environmental lessons learnt beforehand in an independent Islamic course should serve to the students as the foundation, inspiration and chief guidance in their works. The studio lecturers, in turn, are expected to be very familiar with the same lessons -- at best that those lessons make up the core of their own environmental education -- looking forward to seeing the students ingeniously apply those environmental lessons in their planning and design final products which can be called, for example, "an Islamic environment friendly neighborhood", or "an Islamic energy efficient house", or "an Islamic sustainable house".

Similar methods are to be devised and applied to the integration of the rest of the Islamic teachings and values which underpin the idea of housing in Islam, into the Islamic housing education. Indeed, for the Islamization of the housing education, the students and lecturers must work closely as a team, helping, supporting, encouraging and learning from each other, while relying on, and deriving the strength from, the oneness of their divinely sanctioned life vision, mission, purpose, objectives and knowledge sources.

Presently, the housing planning and building education in the Muslim world, by and large, is very heterogenic in terms of its historical, theoretical, philosophical and cultural propensity and substance. Unfortunately, one has got to believe that there is no clear sense of purpose and direction, which is always the case when blindly following others, in this case the West, becomes a trend.¹⁴ Undeniably, Islam and its cultural and civilizational perspectives are still there, however, they are choking under the constant pressure of the other willingly imported perspectives and options. Partly due to this, and partly due to the glaring lack of a political and decision-making will, it will be very difficult for Islamic housing to institute and

¹⁴ Ahmed Mejid Mollah Sherif, *The House of Al-Musel*, (pp. 1-10); Abdel Baki Ibrahim, *Revival of Deep Rooted Islamic Values in Contemporary Architecture*, (pp. 11-22); *Inside: Housing in the Islamic City*, Proceedings of a Symposium held in Ankara, Turkey, on 21-25.7.1984. Proceedings prepared by: Center of Planning and Architectural Studies, Cairo.

ascertain itself. The current overall climate is unfavorable for a dramatic change to take place in a foreseeable future.

As far as the relationship between the Islamic and non-Islamic housing perspectives in Muslim universities and colleges is concerned, the most ideal scenario will be that the lecturers and tutors whenever dwelling on any of the housing aspects, either in theory or practice, give a clear and comprehensive overview of the topics discussed firstly from an Islamic perspective, as the one to which both the lecturers and students faithfully subscribe, trying then to incorporate the clearly presented Islamic input into the practical works on housing. This process could be supplemented by occasional and brief references to some other cultural, historical, religious, philosophical and environmental perspectives on housing, but only for the sake of student exposure, comparative studies, and the broadening and enriching of the student minds, and not for the sake of becoming suspicious of the Islamic perspective's place and validity and for the sake of possibly abandoning and bartering it in favor of a foreign perspective.

However, there remain two main challenges to be overcome here. Firstly, there is a problem of educational systems and educators from the level of policy and system making and implementation to the level of training and teaching. Most of the personnel involved have obtained their education under the systems, locally or abroad, that does not recognize the Islamic perspective in housing – and in the whole of the built environment – as a potential and viable one. The Islamic perspective, even if somewhat deemed as an option, is still regarded by many as inferior, of a lesser value, and not on an equal footing with other housing planning and building perspectives. Since the systems and the personnel behind them, as well as the educators, signify the richest and most important source of knowledge and wisdom to the students, there could be no many significant changes, it goes without saying, until the situation improves at its source(s). The policy makers and implementers, lecturers, tutors and trainers, to a large extent, account for the most immediate cause of the predicament facing the Islamic housing education in Muslim universities and colleges, as much as they can become the most immediate agents of change and the most direct cause of any paradigm shift aimed at the improvement of the situation.

The second challenge is one of the housing planning and building curriculum and literature which too have been tailored and produced in Muslim universities and colleges least of all according to the Islamic perspective. This way, everything seems to be set for the perpetuation of the separation of the future Muslim professionals in the built environment from their true identity, culture and history. Thus, even if the level of Islamic awareness of some lecturers, tutors and students is remarkably high, they still cannot completely live, learn and operate away from the influences of the philosophical and empirical perspectives, some of which are neutral, but some of which are plainly contradictory and conflicting, insofar as the Islamic worldview and its value systems are concerned. This is so because the curriculum to which those Muslim lecturers, tutors and students have subjected themselves to, and the literature which their curriculum feeds and depends on, originate from the same philosophical and empirical perspectives from which they wish to disentangle themselves from. So depressing is the state of affairs that a person, especially from amongst the young ones, those with fragile minds, may simply lose his heart and end up believing that he is faced with a lose-lose situation. The best option that is left, one may think with an intellectual resignation, is to try and choose from the two predicaments a smaller and less painful one. Trapped in this vicious cycle, the Muslim mind can hardly free itself from its clutching fetters and burst through its inhibiting sway and authority, setting then out to contrive in line with its own preferences some feasible and more adequate and acceptable alternatives.

Central to the encountering and overcoming of the second challenge is the production of Islamic books and references on housing. They will counter and substitute those books and references which with their contents, ideas and interpretations tend to confuse and keep the Muslim students at bay from their authentic Islamic identity, culture and history. Some of those books with some of their malicious contents even manage to indoctrinate those young Muslims minds which are poorly grounded in Islam against themselves and their Islam.

As an example, there are people who believe that the four-square arrangement of rooms around a central domestic courtyard, which is the most conventional plan in many traditional Islamic houses, reflects the fact that a Muslim may marry as many as four wives. "In this case, each wing of the house must constitute a

separate dwelling, for each of his wives is entitled to equal treatment; she must be able to receive her husband in her own home, and he must be the guest in turn of each of his several wives according to strictly formulated rules or, more exactly, according to the Prophet's example whose fairness and generosity to his wives is the model to be emulated."¹⁵

This belief is not totally baseless, though, as the Muslim men indeed may marry up to four wives and courtyard houses are perhaps the most ideal type for a large family in terms of convenience and smooth interaction among family members. But to single out polygamy as the only reason, or as one of a very few reasons, for having courtyards on such a large scale in Islamic domestic architecture, failing to see sets of splendid Islamic values and principles which, in fact, called for their existence, would be a serious scientific, intellectual, and for Muslims, spiritual shortcoming.

Moreover, Islamic houses are sometimes depicted as "harems" (places for engaging in physical pleasures); as "prisons" in that many housing types, at a first glance, appear as though unable to receive any light from the street because they have no windows on their outside facades; as places meant for the total seclusion of women because their position and roles have nothing to do with the outside world; as intended images of Paradise (*Jannah*) in which case the house plans and designs are heavily loaded with needless literal symbolism; etc.

Successfully dealing with the second challenge, in particular, will be conditioned by the creation of a strong, excellent and all-pervading research culture on a variety of issues in relation to the subject of Islamic housing. A salient feature of such a culture will always be the encouraging, promoting and heavily investing in original, creative, critical, universal, unprejudiced and tolerant thinking. This means that each and every Muslim housing and built environment educator, supported by each and every Muslim housing professional on the field, cannot afford to turn his or her back to, and thus perpetuate, the present dismal scenario in the field of Islamic housing education by failing to grasp the extent of the problem and then fail to contribute his or her share to its improvement. Being educated, sometimes to the highest possible level and in the best of the world's educational institutions and establishments, implies that

¹⁵ Titus Burckhardt, *Art of Islam*, p. 191.

much has been invested in Muslim educators and professionals. They must give something back to their religion and society. Investments must be paid back. Holding a Master's or a PhD degree today in the Muslim world, for example, is not a privilege; rather, it is a burden and responsibility. Such becomes a mark of distinction only when society is duly served. It is not only about selfishly taking for one's self; it is about selflessly giving back to others as well. Ignoring the intellectual and spiritual plights, as well as the silent pleas, of their societies and peoples, after they had managed it to the top, often at the expense of societal and public resources, such actions of Muslim educators and professionals will be tantamount to betraying their people, society, culture and religion.

An illustration of this type of social betrayal is that a Muslim educator while teaching his students a course on housing – or some other relevant courses – uses constantly a reference book which contains elements that explicitly contradict the message of Islam. In doing so, the educator, maybe, fails to notice the problems, so he misleads his self and others. Or he notices them but fails to act and adequately address them, thus failing to properly warn the students and equip them with what it takes to deal with the problems at hand. Laziness, indifference and apathy eventually get the better of him. Despite all this, however, the educator never even bothers, let alone undertakes some constructive initiatives and some concrete steps, to come up, alone or with someone else, as a result of his own research activities or someone else's, with more acceptable and more compatible with the Muslim spirit and mind alternatives as a subject's main references. The educator thus betrays two trusts which have been placed on his shoulders: the trust of knowledge and the trust of students.

Therefore, it is incumbent upon each and every Muslim educator, in particular, to contribute greatly to cleansing and enriching the existing curriculum and its reference books on Islamic housing education in their universities and colleges by producing quality research papers, articles and books on the subject, and then by disseminating the same to the students and colleagues in the classrooms, studios and during the academic meetings, seminars and conferences, locally and internationally. These contributions are never to dwindle, or end, as the road to a global Muslim intellectual and spiritual recovery is long and challenges lying ahead immense and numerous. Intellectual mediocrity, lethargy and indifference in the

arena of Islamic housing, and the Islamic built environment, in general, it follows, are serious crimes with some far reaching consequences for the wellbeing of Muslims. Intellectual self-centeredness, selfishness and greed are equally repulsive in Islam with equally detrimental impact and consequences.

At any rate, however, it all boils down to the systems of education that the Muslim community adopts, and to what extent the same community is ready and willing to embrace that which is best for preserving its housing identity and reinvigorating its cultural and civilization prospects. Indeed, it is essential that people start realizing that by creating houses a framework for much of their lives is created. To a large extent, people's lives are thus dictated and influenced. Hence, the two, i.e., the framework with its character and services and the exigencies of people's lives, must be compatible.

It is very difficult to live delightfully, honoring and applying the teachings and values of Islam, in a residential architectural world that is alien to the same teachings and values and their divine philosophy. It is only when a compatibility between the two poles exists that people's actual interests and welfare will be ensured, and that residential planning and architecture will become more than just a process of planning, designing and erecting houses. Indeed, there is much more to Islamic housing than just that, that is, than the physical aspect of the whole thing.

Through a genuine Islamic housing, Islam is being observed and presented in a way it ought to be observed and presented. Islamic housing is about beholding much of the Islamic ideology and creed at work. It is about witnessing a microcosm of Islamic society, civilization and culture. Islamic housing is about much of Islam taking up a manifest form. This accurate image of Islamic housing can go a long way towards correcting a great many misconceptions about Islam and Muslims within the ranks of Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Islamic housing thus can become an excellent and effective means of *da'wah Islamiyyah*, that is to say, promoting the cause of Islam and inviting people to follow it.

Having said all this, it will be of a paramount importance that Muslim children be taught from the very beginning of their educational journey such fundamental concepts as the position, role and significance of man, Islamic morals, nature, the world, the family, the house, the neighborhood, neighbors and the whole of society. Studying these concepts must be done on the basis of both the

revealed knowledge, in the form of the Qur'an and the Prophet's *sunnah*, and the acquired or conventional knowledge as derived from and accumulated through the daily lives of people. This integrated knowledge must be real, alive, total, pragmatic and applicable. It must be Islamic in that its ideals and goals are instigated and watched over by the ideals and goals of Islam, the two remaining in agreement with each other all the way through. This integrated knowledge, furthermore, must be, principally, from Muslims, by Muslims and for Muslims. It cannot be unreal, deceiving or false, as it cannot stem from some foreign sources that are in an outright conflict with the Qur'an and *sunnah*. Nor can it be obsolete and dead, as it cannot be based on outmoded and dead life traditions, phenomena and experiences. Nor can it be unrealistic and utopian, as it cannot entertain imaginative, naive and fancy ideas that are far from the real world and its challenges. Nor can it be superficial, fractional and narrow-minded, as it cannot be focused on certain life aspects or phenomena only, while overlooking or paying very little attention to the others.

This integrated knowledge must be at the core of the general educational systems of Muslims because its fundamental concepts denote the fundamental aspects of both human existence and Islam as a comprehensive code of living. In those educational systems, there can be no such thing as a separation, or a rift, between the religious and secular realms, between the religious and secular sciences, and between the religious and secular scholars. In Islamic education, there can be no separation, or a rift, between the spiritual and material spheres, and between this world and the Hereafter. Nor can either sphere be pursued at the expense of the other. The two spheres finely balance each other up. Either one without the other will be incomplete. Because Islam is a practical and factual religion, seeing and appreciating life the way it is and in its total sense, meaning and being, each and every one of life's fields and facets is extremely relevant. Each and every person involved in cultivating those fields and aspects, as well as their roles in and contributions to life, are extremely relevant too and are to be duly appreciated.

Thus, by the time a Muslim child reaches the tertiary education, it is expected that he or she commands a reasonable knowledge about the basic concepts which are integral to the message of Islam and, as such, are integral to human life, culture and civilization, and due to the role and significance of housing in human life, are integral

to the subject of housing too. Such basic concepts, as mentioned earlier, are: life, man, family, nature and society. By then, a Muslim child should be very comfortable with the Islamic answers on those critical questions that revolve around his or her purpose in life, his or her place in the world, his or her duties and rights as a citizen, as a neighbor, as a future mother or father, as a future wife or husband, etc. In other words, a Muslim child while reaching the tertiary education should have a decent idea as to his or her place and role in the delicate webs of creation and the socio-political and economic contracts that hem him or her in. Islam with its educational outlook teaches a Muslim child to be optimistic, strong, sincere, pragmatic, balanced, open-minded, earnest and productive.

It would be grossly unfair if a Muslim child is not sufficiently acquainted with those matters and issues by the time he or she reaches the level of his or her tertiary education. Equally unfair would it be if a Muslim child is given a wrong and irreconcilable with Islam education, partly or completely, based on some alien worldviews, cultures and value systems. Such would signify the worst kind of frittering away, deceiving and betraying the young, potential, excited and keen minds and talents of Muslim children which have been entrusted to society's learning institutions and establishments for cultivation and development. What those children at the end of the day get in return are the firmly established tendencies for a further alienation from Islam, confusion, misguidance, lack of self-esteem, eternal doubts, and spiritual and intellectual hypocrisy, which will accompany and haunt the persons concerned till the end of their lives. These tendencies and these appalling academic and spiritual conditions which are endemic to many parts of the present Muslim world are elevated to the highest level in universities and colleges, by virtue of them being the leading institutions of higher learning. There, the process that commenced many years ago is finally brought to an end. The enthusiasm and promising talents of many young Muslims is misused and wasted forever, and their unfortunate fate, in all likelihood, sealed once and for all. Besides, when they establish families and start working, many of those former students through their family life and the professional engagements and contributions to society will become active, some unconsciously and unaware though, in promoting the same flawed educational policies, systems and conditions under the aegis of which they have been brought up and educated.

The university and college level education is rather a sophisticated one, as it spells the end of the educational journey for most people. Students coming to universities and colleges, therefore, must have a strong academic foundation with regard to general knowledge and the academic fields they intend to specialize in. Students in the institutions of higher learning are being guided and prepared to play a constructive role and make decent and diverse contributions to societies they belong to. They are trained to become agents of change, to lead and make the earth a better place to live in. Having said this, how can one expect the Muslim students to become agents of change, to transform and make their societies better places to live in if they are strangers, partly or completely, to Islam: its message, philosophy, worldview, history, culture and values? How can they contribute to reviving Islamic culture and civilization if they, apart from their ignorance of Islam, feel no affection and enthusiasm for, and can hardly associate themselves with, such a culture and civilization? As far as Islamic housing is concerned, how can one expect the Muslim architecture, planning, art and engineering students to appreciate its world of splendor, making an effort to play some constructive roles and make some decent contributions to reviving and preserving Islamic housing, if they themselves are strangers to the philosophy, principles, values, purpose and functions that its sophisticated and refined realm exemplifies?

The answer to reviving and upholding the phenomenon of Islamic housing obviously lies in education, more than anywhere else. By education we mean its widest horizons, its all levels and its all protagonists: the house as an educational center, kindergartens, schools, colleges, universities, institutes, organizations, NGOs and mass-media. Every educational horizon and level will play its expected roles in ways that suit it and its human resources best. Housing is the most important thing in society, so promoting and working towards the creation of a high-quality housing should be everyone's obsession. It should be an honor. It should feature most prominently in the hierarchy of priorities of almost all governmental and private agencies. The house is the only institution and a built environment component that is badly and constantly needed by every member of society. People's happiness with their houses is the best form of happiness that one can get.

It is thus required that all of the above mentioned institutions and establishments with their personnel, and in different capacities

and with different scopes and emphasis levels, work together towards a united goal: the endorsement and promotion of the Islamic personal and family lifestyles, coupled with the endorsement and promotion of the concept of the Islamic house as a framework or a physical locus where such lifestyles are nurtured, conducted and facilitated. Indeed, from this life core everything else in society emanates and starts off its public career, retaining proudly the house and family institutions as their foundation and point of reference. It follows that there cannot be an ideological dichotomy in the contents of the various curriculums, plans, agendas and the programs of study, as well as in the ways themes and issues are advocated, presented and taught, as far as the subjects and problems directly or indirectly related to Islamic housing are concerned.

For example, it is gravely erroneous that with regard to the Islamic concepts of the family, the house, aesthetics, man-woman relationships, the dress code, etc., a Muslim in a Muslim environment is bombarded with a way of life on television programs, or in newspapers, or in journals and magazines, but whenever he goes to the mosque, reads the Qur'an, the Prophet's *sunnah*, or any book with a pure religious content, he easily runs into glaring discrepancies between what has been served to him through the local mass media and what his religion propagates and teaches.

As another example, it is likewise gravely erroneous that a Muslim child is constantly being taught by his or her parents or grandparents at home about how significant, excellent, pure and principled the Islamic concepts of the family, the house, environmental protection, man-woman relationships, privacy, modesty, the dress code, etc., are, but in school he or she is being taught and encouraged to do some different things, often contrary to the principles and values of his or her family and house upbringing. At best, what he or she has learned at home is being totally ignored, or even scoffed at, in school and in its study programs. Moreover, he or she easily sees that in the real world too, just outside his or her house sanctuary, things are very different from what he or she is being taught and asked to duly adhere to.

Unfortunately, the present state of affairs in most Muslim communities is not helpful at all to the revival and restoration of Islamic housing. Moreover, owing to the importance of housing in society, such a situation clearly maintains and nourishes the other intellectual and spiritual ailments that have been afflicting Muslims

and their communities for many years by now. There is a real danger that even some new and hitherto unknown ailments can be generated in the process. If truth be told, there is very little in most Muslim societies today that renders them immune to such a potential hazard.

As said earlier, a comprehensive overhaul of educational systems in the Muslim world will be the key, not only with regard to Islamic housing, but also to all the other aspects of Islamic culture and civilization. In the field of education, everyone, from the leaders to the man on the street, and even children, can play a role and make a contribution. This exactly will be an answer to, as well as a compliance with, a divine *modus operandi* for a change. Allah says: "Surely, Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change their own condition (that is, what is inside their hearts)." (al-Ra'd, 11)

"This is because Allah has never changed a favor which He has conferred upon a people until they change their own condition; and because Allah is Hearing, Knowing." (al-Anfal, 53)

Education is everyone's concern and domain. Everyone has a duty towards it, and everyone reaps some benefits from it. By overhauling their educational systems, Muslims will become bound to cause some dramatic changes and improvements to their personal conditions, to the conditions of their hearts, minds and souls, both in short and long terms. What lies beyond and above their spheres of influence, however, that is not theirs to overly worry about. That is the responsibility of Allah, their Master, best Friend and Protector. He will take care of it as an extension of, and a reward for, what His servants heretofore have done to themselves and their personal conditions.

As part of Allah's way of doing things with people, He also says: "On no soul does Allah place a burden greater than it can bear. It gets every good that it earns, and it suffers every ill that it earns." (al-Baqarah, 286)

Finally, by revamping and Islamizing their educational systems, Muslims will be bound to bring the divine light, and all the goodness that goes with it, back to their lives. Such is the importance of creating, disseminating and applying the true knowledge in Islam. In doing so, the darkness and evil of ignorance and faithlessness, and all the malevolence and sin that go along with it, will become set to vanish sooner rather than later. This is so because in Islam the light and darkness, and the goodness and malevolence, cannot coexist. The presence of the light always renders the darkness imaginary, and

the presence of the goodness always renders the malevolence illusory. There, in point of fact, exist only the light and goodness, as there always exists Allah and with Him the truth and light. He said about His Holy Self that He is the Light of the heavens and the earth. (al-Nur, 35) There is no such thing as darkness. There is only the absence of the light which we mistake for the darkness. There is no malevolence either. There is only the absence of the goodness, which too we mistake for the malevolence. Hence, for Muslims to get rid of their present maladies they should not really worry about the maladies themselves. Rather, they should worry about how to make sure that the divine light and goodness of Islam are actualized and brought to life. Once that is done, the fading of their maladies and problems will be ensured, and will be both spontaneous and swift.

Allah says on this: “And say: the truth has come and the falsehood has vanished; surely falsehood is a vanishing (thing).” (al-Isra’, 81)

“Nay! We cast the truth against the falsehood, so that it breaks its head, and lo! it vanishes; and woe to you for what you describe.” (al-Anbiya’, 18)



A house in Raqqa, Syria.



A house in Travnik, Bosnia and Herzegovina.



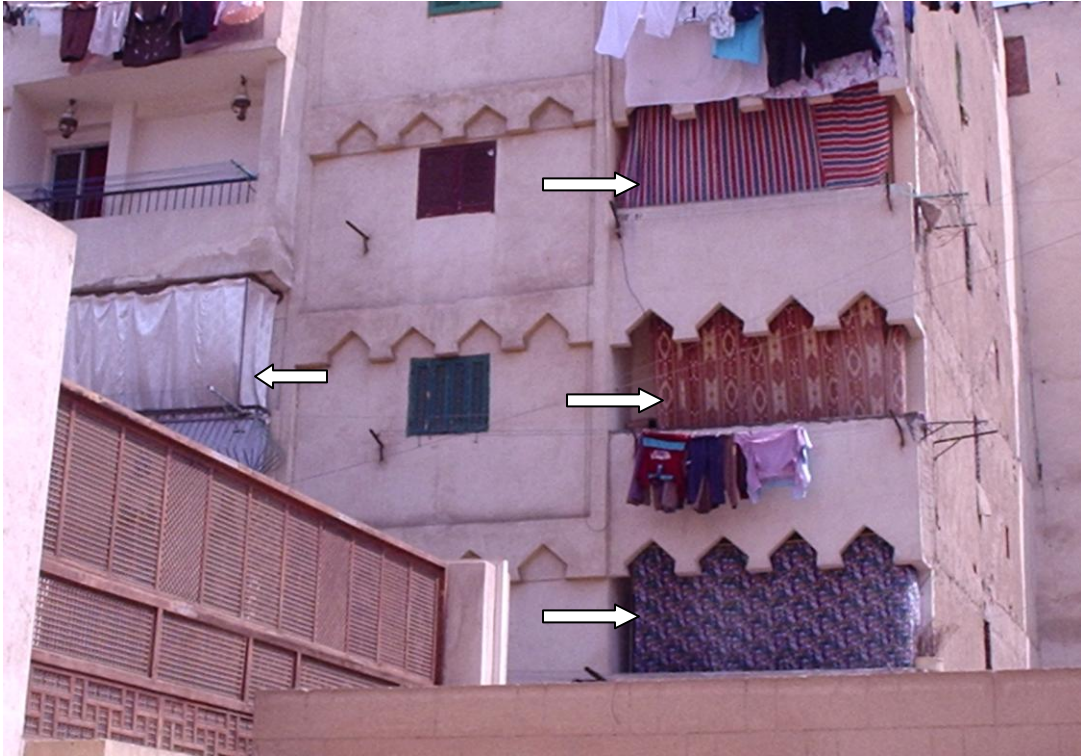
Traditional houses in Penang, Malaysia.



The courtyard of a house in Khartoum, Sudan.



A residential area in Zabid, Yemen.



Crudely screened balconies on an apartment building in Cairo, Egypt.



The roofs of traditional houses in Ghadamis, Libya.



A house in Damascus, Syria.



Residential areas in Kashan, Iran.



A courtyard house in Bukhara, Uzbekistan.



A house in Ghardaia, Algeria.



A narrow street running through a residential area in Marrakesh, Morocco.



A house in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina.