Cultural Expression of Arab Expatriate Communities in Foreign Countries through Architecture

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ABSTRACT

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Arab expatriate communities are subjected to strong social and cultural influences which restrain their ability to freely express their native culture, and - subsequently - express the rich long history of architecture that Arabic civilization has established. This problem can be traced to several reasons, whether different building laws at the new states of destination, exotic materials, dissimilar climate or different customs and traditions. Therefore, Arab communities end up melting in foreign cultures that are way far from their native culture as well as their original architecture. This leads to increase the gap between the intermixed communities of Arabs and native Westerns. Thus, this research aims to detect the significant attempts by Arab communities which reside in foreign countries to express their cultural identity through architecture, in order to enable such communities to exhibit their culture fairly, while conforming to the local conditions and preset limitations of their host countries.

1. Introduction

Architecture is always linked to community in a close relationship characterized by mutual
influence. This influence can be observed through two perspectives; the first is that community - by its different patterns – affects architecture, which leads to a type of architecture with certain characteristics and specific attributes. The second perspective considers the contrary, as it sees that architecture affects community through guiding and governing the behavior of individuals, which in turn determines relationships and organizes community patterns. However, community and its composition change due to several factors, while the most important factor causing such change refers to cultural influence between communities in case contact is established. This contact results in the concept of cultural influence between civilizations, in a process that is prone to many conditions. In some cases, such conditions may lead to unilateral influence, when a certain civilization of one community solely affects the other, causing several changes in the composition of the affected community, and consequently its architecture.

The research problem is sighted in the difficulty for Arab communities residing in Western countries to express their cultural and architectural heritage, which may attribute to several reasons such as: dissimilar laws, regulations and building materials of those countries, different climate and natural conditions, as well as different customs, traditions and lifestyles. This contributes to the cultural gap between Arab immigrants and the Western communities where they live, as it often leads to the relinquishment of Arabs in exotic civilizations that are far from their cultural identity. Without a real and effective integration, Arab expatriate communities become subject to a constant feeling of alienation and separation from their cultural roots, which also applies to the architecture of their homelands.

Therefore, the research objectives are to:

- Identify Arab expatriate communities in foreign countries, the reasons for their emergence, and the problems they encounter which relate to cultural adaptation.
- Detect the endeavors of Arab communities to express their cultural identity through architecture in foreign countries.
- Discuss the appropriate solutions by which Arab expatriate communities may be enabled to freely express their identity through architecture, while respecting the local conditions and limitations of Western nations, and avoiding the negative prospect of cultural conflicts.

In addition, the research importance can be identified in the following:

- Participating in solving the problems of Arab expatriate communities, especially, as those communities have been forming a highly growing population in Western countries.
- Supporting Arab communities in Western countries, encouraging them to communicate with the origins of their civilization through architectural expression in the communities they live in.
- Overcoming cultural conflicts, and contributing to the harmonious adaptation and integration of Arab immigrants in their countries of destination.

2. Arab Expatriate Communities in Western Countries

Out of their belief that the West may offer them bigger opportunities for stability and better living standards, thousands of Arabs left their original countries and headed for Europe, America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Brazil, Argentina and many other countries. This trend may attribute to different reasons and various motives including economical and political situations, sectarian and religious causes, as well as the search for freedom of opinion and expression. Moreover, other scenarios may refer to educational purposes, which has been a notably effective cause of the immigration of Arab youth to the West.

An Arab or Muslim individual may feel a bigger space of freedom, and acquire a bigger list of rights in the host society, compared to what he used to have in his native country. Yet, Arab expatriates usually encounter a sense of alienation and identity disorders when they get engaged in host societies, trying to stay connected to their homeland on one hand, and mingle in the new society on the other. At the end, each individual reaches his own equation to solve the dilemma of belonging to each of the two societies. Many individuals as well as groups of Arabs and Muslims develop a feeling of awe toward the Western society where they live, which in some cases may put them in a status of cultural isolation, forming clusters of separate groups.

This questions the significance of their stay in such a society, enduring the hardships of adaptation. On the other hand, many theories of identity and belonging have tried hard to explain that trend, usually in the light of what migratory communities face, either post natural crises, or during certain historical stages. Such trend has become of higher profile in Arab, Muslim communities as well as many other developing communities, than it is found in Western countries (Hassan, 2000).

By tracking the emergence of Arab communities in the West, and following their evolution, it could be found that they were formed generally in three main groups, as a result of three main factors which are: abroad studies - job opportunities - investment, as shown below.
2.1 Scholars and Researchers

Those are who resided in foreign societies for education or research, then were offered career opportunities with valuable salaries and comfortable conditions compared to available conditions in their own countries. So, after they had finished their studies, they decided to stay and avail the opportunity to improve their living conditions and enjoy a better life.

2.2 Investors and Elites

Those are mostly offered difficult jobs under hard conditions, as the majority of them immigrate illegally, while regulated immigration is confined only to certain careers, expertise and degree holders. As a result, they become subject to the control of their business chairmen, and may not be given full employment privileges as well as other rights that are given to their native peers.

2.3 Immigrants Searching for Work

Those represent the wealthy Arab upper class that possesses financial surplus, so Western countries facilitate their entrance and residence to encourage investment. Such category of expatriates usually stays for long, moves with their families, and easily acquires citizenship of the host country.

3. Situations of Arab Communities in Western Societies

In some Western countries, immigrants from the Middle East constitute the majority of the immigrant population of these countries, and form a broad fabric in their communities, which is evident in several aspects as the following shows.

3.1 Arab Immigrants in the United States

Arab immigration to the United States began when Arabs accompanied Spanish explorers to the US in the 15th century. However, Arabs did not start immigrating to the United States in significant numbers until the 19th century. Since this first major wave of Arab immigration in the late 19th century, the majority of Arab immigrants have settled in or near large cities.

Later, the 1948 Arab-Israeli War sparked a mass migration of Arabs in a second wave. Between 1967 and 2003 Arabs came to the United States, nearly in eleven times the number of immigrants during the second wave. Aside from Palestinians, Lebanese made up the next biggest group of immigrants during this time. The overwhelming majority came after the commencement of Lebanese Civil War and the Israel's 1982 invasion. Egyptians and Iraqis also immigrated to the United States in large numbers during this period. Many Iraqis fled during the country's drawn-out
war with Iran lasting from 1980 to 1988. Harsh United Nations sanctions following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait further deteriorated Iraq's economy, increasing immigration rates. Between the first and second US invasions of Iraq, larger numbers of Iraqis, Syrians and Yemenis immigrated to the United States during this wave (Badawi, 2004). Demographic chart Figure 1 shows about a quarter of Muslim Population in the United States. Table 1 shows Arab Immigrant Population statistics in foreign countries with highest in Brazil and France.

![Demographic Chart Showing Muslim Population in the United States](http://TuEngr.com/ATEAS/V03/0065.pdf)

**Figure 1:** Demographic Chart Showing Muslim Population in the United States (Naffm, 1993).

### 3.2 Arab Immigrants in Britain

Statistics differ in the enumeration of Arab community in Britain, but it is mostly up to one million people. London is considered for having the largest Arab density in Britain. Among other British cities having large Arab communities are Birmingham, Manchester, Sheffield, Glasgow, Cardiff, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Leeds and the British Darby. Egyptian, Moroccan, Palestinian, Yemeni, Lebanese, Iraqi and Gulf communities represent a significant presence. Meanwhile, the British government has adopted a policy of “Multiculturalism” towards immigrants. This policy was not based on achieving full integration more than regulating relationships between citizens and immigrants in the legal framework of rights and duties, which grants citizenship by law. However, the British experiment is considered memorable and distinctive, as it shows tolerance towards ethnic communities and their cultural diversity. Yet, it still could not reduce extremism and sectarianism which have caused a growing gap among Muslim and Arab communities on one hand and other citizens on the other (Steppat, F. 2004).

### 3.3 Arab Immigrants in France

It is noteworthy that the number of Muslims in France (about six million people, representing 10% of the population) have come from 53 countries, while Algerians represent a large majority of Muslims in France, followed by Moroccans, Tunisians and then come sub-Saharan Africans and
Lebanese Muslims. France, however, experienced many wide protests and demonstrations by Arab immigrants during the last two decades. Here, the situation was different as a result of the major problems faced by Arabs, including legal and political recognition of their position in the French society, particularly with regard to the issue of citizenship, residency and work. These problems are considered the most challenging for new immigrant generations in particular, as they mostly complain about being targeted for their race, and treated in manners of hostility. For example, if an immigrant has a job, he may be seen as taking a native citizen’s place which he has no right to, while unemployed immigrants are seen as a burden on the society, surviving on the welfare offered by the government, which French citizens see as their own deserved right (Ghoody, 2005).

Table 1: Statistics of Arab Immigrant Population in Foreign Countries (Steppat, 2004; Kayyali, 2006).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of Arabs</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>% Arabs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>470,000</td>
<td>34,190,000</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>5,500,000</td>
<td>65,073,482</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>418,000</td>
<td>17,196,000</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>800,000</td>
<td>60,234,000</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>600,000</td>
<td>61,113,205</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>1,650,000</td>
<td>78,785,548</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>700,000</td>
<td>16,928,873</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>6,000,000</td>
<td>191,241,714</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>1,336,000</td>
<td>40,482,000</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.4 Arab Immigrants in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands, the issue of Muslim presence has put forward strongly in the recent years, where about half a million Arab Muslims live, making up about 2.5% of the total population. Arabs in the Netherlands still suffer from the lack of actual societal integration, especially by new generations of Muslim immigrants, as they mostly still express their disinclination to engage in the European society. Perhaps that is clearly reflected in several sectarian issues and incidents of violence committed against Muslims or by them, under the allegations of insulting Islam or fighting to defend it. Those incidents have left notable negative impacts on the situation of Muslim communities in whole Europe, and have raised a lot of demands to change current policies in European countries toward the rights of minorities and the legality of their presence (Al-Hashimi, 1999).
4. Problems of Arab Communities in Foreign Countries

It should be noted that Arab groups residing in Western societies suffer many problems on multiple levels. The most important of such problems are summarized in the following:

(a) The difficulty of adaptation and integrating within Western societies, as new laws, regulations and social patterns usually imprint identity disorders on Arab individuals, families, and groups.

(b) The often lack of suitable job opportunities, which increases the sense of frustration due to unemployment. As a result, many of immigrant youth are forced to work in arduous occupations, especially at their early stage of migration, although a large number of them possess high educational qualifications that are recognized in their home countries.

(c) Abstinence from marriage and the inability to start new families, which is usually due to the cultural difference between immigrants’ home countries and the new host countries, as well as religion differences. While immigrants get busy, solving their economic and financial problems throughout their migration process, they soon collide with many social and cultural problems of several kinds, which mostly attribute to beliefs, morals and customs, and make it harder for them to accommodate to the Western concepts of living.

(d) Racial discrimination, persecutions, arrests, abuse and humiliation have been encountered more often by Arab and Muslim immigrants, especially after the incident of September 11th 2001, then the bombings of London and Madrid, and finally the consequences of the published cartoons about Islam in European newspapers (Al-Hashimi, 1999).

(e) The absence of official institutions that represent Arab immigrants on one hand, and the lack of impartiality in the role of official governments on the other, which compels immigrants to take responsibility of solving their own problems and overcoming the difficulties they constantly face. However, the often inconsiderable interventions by governments or institutions to help minorities still do not participate effectively in resolving their situations.

(f) The lack of social bonds in the new societies may lead young Arab immigrants to suffer...
psychological crises is terms of recurrent anxiety, dissatisfaction, sense of defeat and surrender, tension, and sometimes turmoil. However, this does not deny the tangible presence of Islamic charitable organizations which have contributed frequently to the accommodation of new immigrants, and tried to guide and inform them through their journey in the new society.

(g) Religious persecution in some cases, which restrains immigrants’ freedom to practice their religious rites, due to hostile views of Islam (Al-Hashimi, 1999).

(h) Some Arab immigrants are subject to deportation from the countries where they live, which is a trend that has increased clearly in most countries of destination, since the beginning of the new millennium. With the growing misconceptions about Arabs and Islam, and the wrongful association of them with terrorism, Arabs and Muslims have been a category which is deliberately targeted for deportation. Such communities that left their original homelands searching for a better life in the West may end up living between the hammer of abuse and discrimination, and the anvil of everyday-life hardships (Radwan, 1964).

(i) The fear of detachment from religion, mother tongue, customs and traditions, as well as the constant concern about losing communication with original roots, as Arab immigrants reside in exotic societies.

5. Strategies for Dealing with Arab and Muslim Immigration Issues

European governments’ points of view during Seville summit in Spain, 2002 were divided between two main courses. The first demanded more rigidity in the acceptance of immigrants by adopting stricter measures of punishment against countries that export such migration.

The second course encouraged condoning immigration acts, and suggested more economic support for poor and developing countries where immigrants come from, in order to reduce immigration rates, while providing aid for immigrants who wish to return to their original countries (Radwan, 1964). No matter what results and decisions this summit and other summits have reached, in the light of the global political changes due to September 11th aftermath, some major questions still remain and present themselves urgently up till today, as indicated in the following:

(a) What are the proper conditions or measures by which Arab and Muslim immigrants can
coexist with West European and American communities properly?

(b) While the whole world is witnessing a vigil of Islamic culture that coincides the beginning of the 21st century, where does the West actually stand from it, especially with the increasing percentage of Arab and Muslim population in Western societies (Kayyali, 2006)? Does this lead to an inevitable clash of civilizations? Or may it lead to the establishment of new benevolent dialogues between cultures?

(c) What are the implications of linking Islam with terrorism and violence by some political currents in America and Europe? And what are the real objectives of the war on terrorism which started with the beginning of the millennium, and its impact on the presence of Arabs and Muslims in the West (Othman & Ahmed, 2005)?

In all cases, Arabs and Muslims living in the West (and who will exceed fifty millions in number within quarter of a century) play an important role in deciding the fate of the relationship between the West on one hand and the Arab and Muslim world on the other. They may either succeed in proving the possibility and the advantage of coexistence between religions, civilizations and cultures of different communities, or they may become a cause for the increase of conflict between Western societies and the Arab and Islamic world. However, their choice remains dependent on the policies and strategies adopted by Western countries toward immigration and residency, just as much it also depends on the policies of Arab and Islamic countries toward the West (Orfalea, 2006).

6. Crisis of Identity for Arab Communities in Foreign Countries

In spite of what Imperative Social Logic states, that immigrants are conscious about the fact that they will eventually merge in their new community of destination, some still remain isolated from surroundings like an island. It has been particularly observed in the past two decades, alongside the expansion of Arab and Muslim immigration to the West, that groups of immigrants have tended to establish separate and isolated communities inside the fabric of Western societies. This can be clearly seen in the case of Turks in Germany, Arabs, Afghans and Pakistanis in Britain, France, Spain, Denmark, Belgium, and currently, America, Canada and Australia. However, Arab
social researchers agree that the main concerns of Arab immigrants in the West include several economic and social aspects which emphasize on ensuring a better future for their families. If this was always the case, would seclusion and isolation from the general ambiance of the host country help them to progress? Or would it cause them more trouble and stand in their way of progress (Reichmuth, 2001)?

As Western countries discuss means of allowing immigrants in general to freely maintain their customs, traditions and religious beliefs, out of the principles of democracy, humanity and respect for the other, many buildings were allowed to be established in representation of such principles. Mostly, mosques, community and cultural centers, Islamic and Arabic schools were among those buildings which reflect the cultural identity of immigrants. However, there is a great difference between the preservation of cultural identity and bigotry or intolerance toward Western civilization. The risk of misconception becomes clearly dangerous, when it leads to destructive activities, carried out by fanatical fundamentalist organizations that reject the local culture, religion and language. This may result in a serious of counterproductive consequences, developing Anti-Arab / Anti-Muslim racial attitudes, and inciting rejection toward the presence of Eastern communities in general. Therefore, the interest of humanitarian, social and economic future of Arab communities in the West is correlated with the elimination of fundamentalism and racism. Thus, it is also dependant on searching for common grounds within the new culture, in order for Arab and Muslim immigrants to live, work and socially integrate within the local community, also without having to be separated from their culture of origin (Mccarus, 1997).

7. Architecture of Arab Communities as an Expression of Identity

Due to the intense Arab immigration rates to Western countries in modern time, and the emergence of Arab cultural fabrics within existing Western societies, recognizable reflections had to be found in the architecture of those societies. In reference to the ongoing relationship between community and architecture, it was imperative that architecture would be affected in a way that expresses the culture of the present Arab fabrics. Such emergence of architectural trends can be referred to several reasons as indicated below:

(a) The most important reason represents immigrants’ psychological need to connect with their Arabian homeland, especially at the time when they are off work, or when they have time for
their own, away from the regular communication with the Western community. Thereby, they long to return to a familiar Arabic home atmosphere, which they relate and belong to.

(b) Immigrants’ need for appropriate spaces where they can practice their religious rites and perform prayers, such as mosques and attached services. For Muslims, prayer facilities must be characterized by privacy and purity, in order to meet worship requirements.

(c) Different social tendencies between Arabs and Westerns, regarding general lifestyles. While Westerns’ lifestyle is mostly characterized by individualism and strong independence for every citizen, Arab immigrants usually seek bonding and relating to one another in groups, which evoke the culture of Arab neighborhoods, in order to establish a sense of security and social interaction (Radwan, 1964).

(d) Lack of financial resources which often leads Arab communities to adapt to the surrounding built environment at the lowest cost, setting up their private spaces according to their own background. On the contrary, native citizens enjoy more financial resources, including their country’s provision of adequate housing, built in local architectural styles.

(e) Different perspectives of Arabs and Westerns on space, as Westerns’ idea of a space to live, is usually dominated by practicality, emphasizing space performance and maximizing its functional requirements by effectively utilizing every spot of it. Arabs, on the other hand, seem to prefer wider housing spaces, even if such spaces are not fully or efficiently utilized.

(f) Different customs, traditions and norms between Western societies and Arab communities. For instance, the reflections of such difference can be noticed in Western housing types in terms of openness to the outside, and the extensive use of openings and glass windows on facades, which is incompatible with the profound principle of privacy in the Arabic culture.

8. Models of Architectural Works Expressing the Cultural Identity of Arab Communities in Western Societies

In the next pages, notable endeavors of architectural expression are demonstrated. Such works were meant to emphasize the cultural identity of Arab communities residing in Western countries,
through the architecture of significant buildings as shown in the following models:

8.1 The Great Mosque of Rome in Italy

Philosophical concept of The Great Mosque of Rome, Italy, is elaborated in Table 2.

**Table 2: The Great Mosque of Rome, Italy.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place and date of construction</th>
<th>Rome, Italy, 1984 - 1995</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Architect</td>
<td>Paolo Portoghesi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Description and philosophy    | -The largest mosque in Italy and Europe. It has an area of 30,000 m\(^2\) and can accommodate up to 12,000 people.  
  -The overall design follows the traditional form of Islamic mosques.  
  -The prayer hall is covered with a huge central dome, surrounded by 16 smaller domes.  
  -Columns define corridor spaces, while each column branches upward into four smaller ones, bending externally in a form of curved tree branches.  
  -Natural light enters the prayer hall through a series of openings in the main dome, in order to create a meditative climate (Hassan, 2000).  
  -The structure is intended to be integrated into the surrounding green area, with a mix of modern structural design and omnipresent curves. |
| Social role                   | -In addition to being Rome’s Great Mosque, the building also accommodates the Italian Islamic Cultural Centre which is a meeting place for many religious, cultural and social activities.  
  -It provides cultural and social services variously, connecting Muslims together.  
  -Among its activities, it holds wedding ceremonies, funeral services, Quran interpretations and exegesis, conventions, and other related events.  
  -The Center plays an important role in uniting Muslims living in Italy, as well as establishing constructive dialogues between Muslims and Christians, providing multiple services to support Muslims in their interaction with the local community (Badawi, 2004). |

8.2 The Grand Mosque in France

Architectural concept of The Grand Mosque in France is summary in Table 3.
Table 3: The Grand Mosque in Paris, France.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place and date of construction</th>
<th>Paris, France, 1926</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Architect</td>
<td>Robert Fourniz, Maurice Mantout and Charles Heubés.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description and philosophy</td>
<td>Paris Mosque is the first Islamic landmark built by the French state, as it was built in memory of the Muslim soldiers in the French Army who died during World War I. - European fourth-largest mosque and the largest mosque in France, with a minaret height of 33 meters. - It is described as the most magnificent for its interior and exterior designs and wall patterns. - The mosque is renowned for its mosaics decorations, wood carvings and wrought iron brought from Morocco (Mccarus, 1997).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social role</td>
<td>- The mosque is not just a prayer facility, as it is also an important base of identity for more than ten million Muslims in France, where Islam is actually the second largest religion. - Besides its religious role, the mosque has been known for providing social and cultural services to all Muslim residents in France (Reichmuth, 2001). - Furthermore, the mosque plays an important role in spreading awareness about Islam and Islamic civilization among French and European citizens.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8.3 Arab World Institute in France

Another arabic civilization is Arab World Institute in France, as detailed in Table 4.

Table 4: Arab World Institute, Paris, France.

| Place and date of construction | 1987, Paris, France. |

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Architect | Jean Nouvel
---|---
Description and philosophy | - The institute contains a museum, a library and showrooms besides office spaces, in an eleven floors high building.
- The main facade of the Southern section was designed sophisticatedly, as it was covered by sensor-based panels that open and close automatically in response to the intensity of ambient light, which accurately adjusts light inside the building.
- The design of those panels was exclusively inspired by the Arabic traditional oriel windows (Mashrabiyas) (Razak, 2005).

Social role | - The institute mission is to disseminate information about the Arab world and its cultural and spiritual values.
- The Institute promotes cooperation and exchanges between France and the Arab nations, particularly in the areas of science and technology, contributing to understanding between the Arab world and Europe (Badawi, 2004).

8.4 The Mosque in Germany

The glass mosque hall shows magnificent architecture that combines educational, cultural and social activities, see Table 5.

| Place and date of construction | Penzberg, Bavaria, Germany, 2005 |
| Architect | Alen Jasarevic |
| Description and philosophy | - The mosque hall can accommodate up to 400 people.
- The prayer hall, offices, library and two classrooms were all well arranged under a single roof on an L-shaped plan.
- The sand-colored building has a full-height decorative blue glass façade and a column shaped minaret, decorated with Arabic script, welcoming and calling the faithful to prayer.
- The entrance features two concrete slabs that swing out of the wall like open gates, inviting visitors into the house in German and Arabic scripts.
- Natural lights floods the entrance and the main hall, while the light falls in a way that draws attention to the ceiling and wall panels.
- The abstract star motifs contain the 99 Names of Allah – such as “The Most Merciful” – in calligraphy.
- Exterior walls were made of transparent glass, in a deliberate design, so passer-bys could see the inside of the mosque.
- The building transparency was meant to show the true lives of Muslims and dispel doubts by others about Islam, in order to achieve greater integration of Muslims within the German society (D’Blois, 1983).
Penzberg mosque is not only recognized for its magnificent architecture, but also its educational, cultural, and social activities. The mosque has been organizing tours for people from different backgrounds to get a glimpse of the Islamic faith and Muslims’ lifestyle. This is in addition to religious and language courses as well as forums and workshops in different domains. It has also been a destination for students preparing thesis on Islam and Muslims. In front of the prayer hall, there is a room for books and other multimedia, where any willing person can borrow literatures dealing with the topics of religion, culture, or Islamic philosophy. More than 15,000 Germans have visited the mosque since its inauguration in 2005, which proves its role in supporting dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims (Hassan, 2000).

8.5 Washington Islamic Center in America

Table 6 shows Washington Islamic Center with succinct philosophy details and social roles.

Table 6: Washington Islamic Center, USA.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social role</th>
<th>-Penzberg mosque is not only recognized for its magnificent architecture, but also its educational, cultural, and social activities. -The mosque has been organizing tours for people from different backgrounds to get a glimpse of the Islamic faith and Muslims’ lifestyle. This is in addition to religious and language courses as well as forums and workshops in different domains. -It has also been a destination for students preparing thesis on Islam and Muslims. -In front of the prayer hall, there is a room for books and other multimedia, where any willing person can borrow literatures dealing with the topics of religion, culture, or Islamic philosophy. -More than 15,000 Germans have visited the mosque since its inauguration in 2005, which proves its role in supporting dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims (Hassan, 2000).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Social role**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place and date of construction</th>
<th>Washington, the United States of America, 1949-1957.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Architect</td>
<td>Mario Rossi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description and philosophy</td>
<td>-The Islamic Center in Washington is the first mosque to be built in America’s national capital, and is the first large Muslim place of worship to be built in the New World. -The mosque mainly comprises a large prayer hall, where the ceiling rests on a series of arches carried by huge pillars of white marble. -White pure stones were used in the construction of the mosque exterior walls, while the minaret stands at a height of about 50 meters. -The prayer hall is entered through four exquisite wooden doors, while the main entrance extends to a hallway of four marble columns, carrying five distinctive arches. -Above the entrance, the upper part of the main facade is adorned by revelations from Quran in Arabic calligraphy (Orfalea, 2006).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The center plays a leading cultural, social and political role, as it includes a vast prayer hall, a giant library, and a council for the ambassadors of Islamic countries. It accommodates many various events and maintains continuous communication with several national and international organizations. The center offers tutorials and organizes classes for the study of Islam and the Arabic language. Thousands of non-Muslims come to admire the Center's architecture, to study in the Center's library, or simply to seek further understanding of Islam in the Center's welcoming atmosphere (McCarus, 1997).

9. Discussion

(a) Arab and Muslim expatriates have immigrated to Western countries in accelerating rates, seeking more rights, bigger spaces of freedom and better living conditions. Nevertheless, they had to face many hardships in their adaptation to Western culture.

(b) Many Arab immigrants are subject to cultural crises, which develop into a sense of alienation, identity disorder, and may lead to seclusion from the ambient society. Dissimilar laws, regulations, climate, natural conditions and resources, as well as different customs and lifestyles, all contribute to the cultural gap between Arab groups and Western communities.

(c) Arab immigrants living in the West mostly face problems such as: exotic laws and legislations - unemployment or improper job opportunities - marriage hardships and difficulty to establish new families - racial discrimination - absence of sponsoring institutions and governments’ support – lack of social bonds - religious persecution - possibility of deportation - detachment from original roots.

(d) Western governments adopt either of two contrary approaches in dealing with immigrants’ situation in their countries. The more rigid approach tends to obstruct migratory activities, by adopting stricter measures and enforcing punishments, while the other approach shows more tolerance, suggesting extra economic support for poorer countries to reduce immigration rates, besides resolving the issues of current immigrants.

(e) The crisis of cultural identity and the difficulty of adaptation may increase the risk of misconception, and result in rejection and extremism by both Arab immigrants and citizens of Western communities. This undesirable trend has spread widely whether in Europe or America, in
regard to the recent violent acts and the tendency to associate them with Arabs and Muslims.

(f) The future of Arab communities in the West depends on the elimination of fundamentalism and racism which can only be achieved by proper coexistence with the new culture, without having to give up the culture of origin. This indicates the importance of cultural expression, when Arab immigrants are allowed to express their culture, including the architecture of their homeland.

(g) The significant presence of Arabs in the West had to leave an effect on the architecture of Western communities. Arab and Muslim immigrants endeavor to express their culture through architecture in response to many factors like: psychological needs due to home sickness - religious needs for praying facilities – shortage of resources – the need for social bonds – lifestyle difference - different spatial needs by Arabs versus Westerns in terms of area, privacy and other values.

(h) Mosques, community and cultural centers, Islamic and Arabic schools are buildings that mostly reflect the cultural identity of Arab and Muslim immigrants. Such buildings are located in European and American big cities, and play an important role in serving the Arab and Muslim community culturally and socially. Thus, they also help facilitating the integration of Arab immigrants within Western societies by promoting coexistence and developing dialogues of understanding.

10. Conclusion

(a) In Western communities, laws and regulations which govern the visual image of city and determine architectural styles of buildings should be more flexible toward architectural expression. Thereby, more space should be granted for Arab and Muslim communities to express their culture through architecture within proper legal frames.

(b) Under the supervision of Western states, areas of land can be allocated for Arab immigrant communities, to establish buildings in Arabic architectural styles, serving as representative models of Arabs’ architecture and emphasizing their cultural identity.

(c) Home countries should effectively work on solving the problems of Arab immigrants, and
collaborate with host countries to avoid immigrants’ issues like isolation or violence, which result from alienation and disintegration. On the other hand home and host countries must resist negative misconceptions, by spreading awareness and encouraging constructive dialogues.

(d) Arab communities in foreign countries should be represented by efficient organizations to look after their needs, defend their right for cultural expression, and submit their propositions to the authorities in charge.

(e) Arab architectural firms and consultants should increase their participation on the international level, by establishing joint projects with the West, in addition to organizing events and swapping expertise, which encourages cultural exchange and offers more chances for mutual understanding.

(f) Design contests may be held and sponsored by Western governments for building projects which are meant to serve Arab and Muslim communities, in order to guarantee proper and true expression of their culture as well as meeting their needs and requirements.

(g) More public, service and housing projects should be provided to meet the needs of Arab immigrants in Western countries, and help to emphasize their cultural identity. Meanwhile, such buildings also serve to introduce Western citizens to Arabic culture and architectural arts, and subsequently, promote societal integration and benevolent coexistence.

11. References


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