Transcript - Accelerating Islamophobia and emerging ‘Mosquephobia’

**SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

Inclusive space, Islamophobia, mosques

**SPEAKERS**

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**Sara Motwani:** Hi everyone, welcome to the inclusive spaces seminar series at the Bartlett the Faculty of built environment here at UCL. Today you have joined the October edition of inclusive spaces, my name is Sarah Motwani and I’m a second-year student studying engineering and architectural design and at the Bartlett school of architecture.

So, a bit about me, I am Indian and I was born and raised in India, so my first introduction to the built environment was through that of my city in New Delhi. The building, you can see behind me is actually one of my favourite buildings in New Delhi it's the Jama Masjid. So, you can see that the ethnic diversity of Delhi allowed me to witness the coexistence of diverse structures from numerous religions. We actually have all three temples and churches between you know one kilometre radius in Delhi and, hence, coming from a diverse and secular country played a very important role in instilling the values of inclusivity it in me.

So, now about Islamophobia and how it relates to me now, the partition of India continues to remain one of the darkest moments in its history of the country experienced or dramatic display of communion violence that stemmed from religious abhorrence between the Hindus and the Muslims.

As an offshoot, my grandfather and his whole family had to flee the country. And this incident is what caused and continues to be the cause of many instances of Islamophobia in my country. And is also the reason why I feel so connected with the issue and, hence, would like to discuss it further with special emphasis to my passion, which is the built environment.

So, for your information, this session will be recorded and add it to the Faculty YouTube channel bartlett EDI website and forward it to registered attendees. We encourage you all to submit questions for the speaker at any point during this lecture by clicking on the Q&A function at the bottom of the screen. You can submit your own question or upvote the question of others, or we will hear the presentation, for the first half of the session, and we will begin the Q&A in the second half, before we end at 2pm, that is, if we don't over on by a bit.

Okay, so yeah. In reading about Islamophobia in the built environment, I came across Dr Ali Alraouf, which was published in 2011 and it was called Mosquephobia; the dilemma of architecture, multiculturalism and Islam. The people define Moscquephobia as a rejection and resistance, the probable and dominating image of the mosque, particularly in the West, and you can see how in the people mosques have been described, to be used potentially as a tool in the present day to overcome Islamophobia. And how mosque design can be used to counter the question of the Islamic community being resistant to integrate with Western culture. So, without any further delay, I would like to you know, introduce Ali. So, Professor Ali is an architect, urban designer and planner interested in research and practice in the domain of theory, criticism and creativity and architecture and urbanism. He writes extensively in newspapers periodicals and architectural magazines locally and internationally and has published more than 130 journal papers, critical reviews, essays, numerous papers, and conference proceedings in addition to books and book chapters. His current research interests are knowledge based urban development of post-carbon contemporary Gulf cities, museums in the Gulf urban revitalization of historic districts, knowledge and creative cities, and has he has been invited to present his research work at international institutions in over 30 countries. I’m now going to give the floor to Ali.

**Ali Alraouf:** Thank you, Sarah. Can you please allow me to share the screen. Awesome, I think, by now, you can see my full screen. Awesome. Thank you so much for the introduction and thank you also for the invitation it's a great honour to be part of a school, in a faculty that I’m literally learning from the vitality of the place the diversity and the amount of knowledge and inspiration coming from Bartlett and the school of architecture and the Faculty of the built environment is quite amazing.

As you said, Sarah I started to almost a decade ago to be excited about the notion of how we as architects and urban designers and planners can provide an answer for the accelerating phenomena of Islamophobia. And then I also coined the term Mosquephobia because they also realized in the process of finding our own for us that also what we are doing in terms of our contribution to the built environment might also add positively to the acceleration process and therefore I want to start with, with sharing with you my fundamental questions regarding the issue.

I want to also share a bit of conceptual inquiry and my interpretation of the evolution of Islamophobia and then the emergence of Mosquephobia and then I want to go through some interesting regional and global cases and when I say regional, I’m talking basically about the Middle East, and some of the other Muslim communities.

One of the interesting questions that I was all the time, posing in front of me when I do visit the museums of Islamic art is the notion of are we frozen in a specific time frame wherever you go and visit the Museum of Islamic art - very component every exhibit is telling you that the creativity of Muslims, the contribution of Muslims to culture and art, and so one was only limited to a specific time frame. But all the museums of Islamic art didn't have a contemporary section or most of them, and to me that was a sort of a manifestation of another question, do we belong to the contemporary course when we say that we are Muslim artists Muslim architects Muslim urbanist and Muslim creators, in general, how to create the space and a place for us in the contemporary discourse.

But also, I want to tackle the notion of what I call it the dynamic interpretation of identity, because I think one of the major forces that led the Muslim communities, particularly in the Middle East to resort to a specific era in the history, is the notion of we want to look at one single chapter of our history and consider it representing our identity. And therefore, we are not that much subscribed to the multi-layered approach to construct contemporary identity, because if I will look at a country and the city that I live in now Doha, Quatar, and I would question which building exactly is a representation of Quatar identity its heritage, the forts, the old souk the old architecture or also the new additions to the urban fabric of the city which is suggesting a new paradigm and it's a vanity, based on the notion of knowledge based urbanism, as cultural centres museums, universities and so on and so forth, so one of the main line of thoughts that I’m excited about is the notion of how we move from focusing on interrupting identity as a solid frozen part of our history. To a more dynamic interpretation that would allow us to look at what is happening now, and what we are contributing with now, as also one edition or one dimension or one more chapter added to the narrative of Muslim identity.

Another idea, particularly when it comes to the design of mosques is related to the element of time and how the architecture is presenting its contemporary condition. This is the very famous composition of scale the two mosques Alrifai and Sultan Hassan in Cairo, and the two mosque, they have plenty of time difference, but yet the expression of the masses almost identical as if, as if we have a very straight jacket, particularly for the building types of mosques and we are trapped in this jacket, we are trapped in the specific visual components, like the minarets, the Dome, the arches and so on and so forth. And then, by keep on using those elements suddenly the element of time is becoming neglected, is becoming marginalized because if you keep on using the same elements with almost the same materials you don't know exactly if it's old or new.

The amazing new installation was done in Vancouver Biennale in 2018 and it was the installation was called Paradise has many gates. And I love the installation, because it was actually asking the right question in an incredibly profound symbolic manner. You're talking about a mosque, which is becoming a cage but at the same time it's very transparent so if you look at the upper picture to the left. Muslims are trapped in this mask as if there are punished by being Muslims, but on the other hand, if you look at the lower picture. Those people are sitting in a very peaceful manner changing ideas and changing speeches and so on, so forth, so here comes the notion of perception - its becoming fundamental part of how we interpret the meaning of architecture, particularly when it comes to Islam and mosques. And what is interesting, also about the architecture of Muslim communities or Islamic architecture, or what have you is that, when you look at how it was documented in most of the books tackling history of architecture, you will see that it was basically a historical account if you see the work of Fletcher, Spiro Kostof, Michell. All of them dealt with the Islamic architecture basically from a historical account, as if again it was a domination and the manifestation of exactly the point that worries me the most which is, are we only good when it comes to recite our history, but when we look at our contemporary moment we failed to construct a very solid creative position. This is one of my favourite surveys of Islamic architecture it's called the an illustrated history of Islamic architecture, but what I like about this book. That he kept on talking about in the introduction, he kept on talking about the beauty of older mosques middle sized bazaars courtyards and so on and so forth. But suddenly when he started to move towards the contemporary time He talked about all the book talk about today's modern Dubai skyscrapers as if, when it comes to the modern condition we cannot find anything but to talk about modern Dubai skyscrapers as the representation and the illustrated manifestation of Islamic architecture.

And, and therefore I think there is a there's a sort of a dilemma here, in my opinion, and this dilemma is related to The mosque, as a very unique building topology it's a physical representation of the governing ideology it's about sacred the speciality, but I think also it should, and it also represents evolving community and dynamic identity and to me this is fundamentally important because, as it is a building type and it is a representation of a relation between a specific community members and it's also about spiritual and sacred relations, it should evolve, it should change it should be subjected to a creative process that would help the mosque to be developed, physically, spiritually and architecturally. And this is why the narrative that I am suggesting today is is basically a narrative about How to use the mosque as a platform to investigate the relation between the building and the context and the context see I mean cultural context social context, urban and architectural and so on and so forth. Because if we dealt with the mosque as an independent building only for the practice of rituals, Totally divorce it from the context and culture and social and so on and so forth, we might accept the fact that the mosque is a space with a specific element, like the minarets and the Dome and so on and so forth, and we'll keep on repeating it for the rest of our life so there's the for humanity.

But if we started to make the connection between the mosque and the context, particularly the culture and the social, and we know that culture is changing the society is changing, then we have to have different alternatives. And therefore, I’m trying to share with you this kind of alternative how to shape a different position and proposition regarding the value of architecture in designing the mosque, and how to make the mosque more relevant to our contemporary time, to our contemporary values, and this would be valid in both western and eastern context. This is a very important and very crucial and very profound image in my mind this is from the magic appeared Lahore Pakistan. And I think the beauty of this picture I mean literally I can end the lecture here, because the beauty of this lecture is telling the whole its ability to tell the whole story. The whole alternative that I’m talking about how to transform the most into a destination, into a fun place, into a place where people feel interesting sense of belonging, different sense of belonging. This is not a space where you just go for rituals, you don't go only for Salah, and you leave. But this is a place where you are subscribing to it, you feel that this is part of your identity, this is part of your life if you are part of the youth, if you are an elderly if you are a family, the mosque is your place the mosque is your space.

And I think we had subjected them the last decade to decade to what I called it a scary journey from Islamophobia to what I have coined the Mosquephobia, and Islamophobia emerged. As a very, very strong ideology and it actually was totally threatening the essence of Islam, which is tolerance, because tolerance is embedded in the core principles of Islam, so the notion of the start - a wave through our different parts of the world, suggesting that Islam is a problem and Muslims are problem and Muslims are terrorists is becoming really painful for all of us. Not only that, what I was also excited about while considering the difference part of my research, is that Islamophobia, I came to the conclusion that it was globally and locally constructed. And it was globally and locally consumed, this is very interesting because I’m not a subscriber to the third theory of conspiracy, but I do know from different literature that Islamophobia emerged, But it was also constructed globally by a lot of dictators around the Middle East and other Muslim countries, and I will elaborate on that. And it was also globally consumed to portray an image about Islam and Muslims, but at the same time that was also used internally. So, one of the very interesting quotes from Obama that he when he gave a very interesting speech in Cairo and he was talking about that Islamophobia actually gives a sort of a very bad impression about Islam and made countries important countries like America started to have a very bad perception about how to view Islam as a hostile and also how to relate this to notions like a human rights and how to create more fear and more mistrust against Muslims.

But what is interesting is that also from the West, you can hear other voices; voices that would illustrate for us that Islamophobia is used as a tool as a previously said, the notion of constructed and consumed, the Islamophobia industry, how to make Muslims, the enemy and so on and so forth, and in all of these books and all of these publications some dignified authors were trying to alert us that the problem is not about Islam, the problem is not about Muslims, but the process of manipulations the process of how to use such a phenomena to help a specific dictator or to help a specifically regime or to help a specific process of controlling a country or community. But what is really important for us as architected and urbanists is that this kind of fear resulted in a new form of fear, which I call the Moscquephobia, because in the process of rejecting the Islam and rejecting Muslims, there was no concrete evidence of the presence of Muslims and Islam in different countries around the world, rather than mosques and, therefore most of the of the European cities and also a lot of American States they have witnessed them in demonstrations, where one of the very important signs that were used all over the place, with no more Muslims, no more mosques, no more Islamic centres but to me what was very, very interesting in all of this process is that the kind of graphics that was used exactly the same elements that we kept on doing for every single mosque that we built and I’m talking here about domes I’m talking about arches, I'm talking about minarets, so as if, as if the message is this kind of visual vocabulary this kind of visual message we need to stop it, because this message is so much related to the notion of the mosque and Islam.

I talked about how the Islamophobia was also consumed locally, this is, excuse me, this is a very interesting example of how you shape the collective conscious, this is an example from Cairo Egypt, where they were broadcasting on the Egyptian TV a drill for fighting terrorists. And this training drill they used a mock-up on the shape of a mosque. So, you're talking about one of the biggest Muslim countries in the world you're talking about the city of 1000 minarets and suddenly you are delivering your message again that the mosque is the Centre of terrorists Muslims are the responsible for is for terrorists, and this is happening in the heart of Cairo in the heart of Islamic world, this is again very, very interesting to reflect on, Excuse me, because it's against suggesting the idea of the local consumption of Islamophobia and the local construction of Islamophobia.

And this very first wave of Moscow phobia was so much manifested in the in the in the rejection of the park 51 Islamic community Center in New York, blocks away from the ground zero. But yet because of the fact that this is a design dedicated for Islamic community Center, although the architecture, as you can see, to the left hand side it's a very, very modern architecture, with a very interesting kind of geometry, nothing would that would resemble the classical elements that I talked about the dome, or minarets to have you out there, but yet the fact that this is an Islamic Center that give a lot of people in New York, the legitimate legitimacy to reject the project, not only that but also How the project was interpreted as a Centre for terrorism and they were making jokes in a lot of excellent papers in in the US, including the New York Times suggesting that this will be the control centres for more terrorist attacks, so…

I think we are in a sort of a defining moment because historically Muslim communities were doing an excellent balance between the faith and diversity of the different geographies and communities and cultures and political systems. You have mosques scattered all the way from Morocco to the Gulf and from China to South Africa and in wherever you go, you will see that the culture, the geography, the politics, the economy, the way of life of people dramatically change the appearance and the role, and that the way the mosques were designed and constructed. In our contemporary time we are suffering, we are suffering because we are in a challenging time. We need to express that we are not terrorists, we are not hostile, we are a civilized people that’s also seeking peace and harmony and we have to fight, because we have incredibly shattered image. And to me what is interesting is that mosque, particularly, was a manifestation of social and cultural and an artistic context. Because it was a place where the creativity of Muslims will be emphasized, it was a place where the notion of beauty would be manifested and beauty in Islam is absolutely interesting concept, because in Islam, you talk about the perfect beauty al-jamal-al-akmal, you're talking about visible beauty and therefore the appearance is very important al-jamal-al-zahir, how you will create continuous message for people where they would enjoy being engaged in a very profound beautiful experiences. And at the same time you have inner or invisible beauty al-jamal-al-batin, where you will really reflect and contemplate and have the opportunity to do a sort of meditation to be able to feel this kind of inner beauty and therefore the mosque was a representation of this al-jamal-al-batin, how you combine al-jamal-al-akmal and then al-jamal-al-batin in an architectural space.

And that was done through a lot of absolutely one different concept, but at the same time, all of these concepts were not standardized. We did this, the standardization, in our modern time but before that geometry form the quality of life, different patterns, calligraphy the use of water, all of these patterns and elements and design principles were so open to the unlimited creativity of Muslim architects, all the way, as I said, from Morocco to the Gulf, and from China and Iran, all the way to Africa, so you see the flooring the ceilings and the Judo geometrical orders, the notion of light and again geometry the relation between the end and our than this kind of tapestry between light and dark and calligraphy, of course, all of these elements were used in a in an incredible manner to achieve a space, by which Muslims would feel the outer beauty and the inner beauty.

Another very interesting dimension is related to the concept of creativity and this would take me back to how I started the lecture when I kept on questioning myself in all of the museums of Islamic art. Where is the creativity of Muslim artist and architects why we are not contributing to our contemporary time Islam is telling us, we have to be creative. The essence of Islamic art and architecture is about creativity, because in the in the in the spiritual interpretation of creativity, art is a connection to God, so a Muslim artist the Muslim architect, the Muslim painter or Muslim calligrapher in the process of doing his creative work is actually trying to connect to God and therefore his work is almost sacred and hence to limit the creativity, or to stop the creativity, or to say that we excelled on the only one period, or we have to keep on doing more Sultan Hassan, and we cannot do any country any fundamental profound substantial creative work in our contemporary time I think this is, this is a fundamental mistake.

And if you do a quick survey about what I was trying to say the diversity of architecture, the diversity of spaces, the diversity of building materials, the diversity of geometry. All of this is suggesting that in different places in the Middle East and the Muslim world from Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, all the way to Morocco to Damascus, plenty of evidences suggesting that creativity, was the name of the game and Muslim architect was so obliged to the fact that, although I am designing the mosque, with the same function but still is, I can use my creativity to come up with a new entity in the urban fabric of the Muslim city that would attain the beauty that I’m looking for. And also in some parts of the Muslim world, you will see what I would call it the timeless qualities versus the timeless image, this is very important, because it seems to me that, in the Sultan Hassan, for instance, the very famous mosque in in Cairo Egypt, when you when you look at the main courtyard and you see the place for doing evolution that will do I, I would say that this is a timeless quality that you need to preserve but we shouldn't transform it into a timeless image that we have to copy and paste and I think this is a fundamental difference that I was looking for.

Also there's something interesting about the relation between the mosque, and the Community and the notion of knowledge, because knowledge was manifested in different spaces within the Muslim city.

In the Masjid, in the Madrasa, in the Kullliyah, in the Souq, in the Khans and so on and so forth. All of these places, workplaces for education, for knowledge transfer for debate for globalized culture, traders and intellectuals that are coming from different parts of the world and they gather human exposure also attained, so all of these roads that the deep understanding of the relation between the building and the knowledge dissemination was also manifested in an excellent manner.

Also, I think what was interesting, is what I call the biology of the mosque the Saha, which is the open space and the Souq, which is the market. Again, this is a very interesting technology that was an essential part of any Muslim community or any Muslim city a building the most important building, which is the mosque, the public space and the market. But this is also suggesting that the mosque was not only for rituals the mosque when it's connected to a public space that's connected to a market. it's the centre of the city, it is the centre of the Community it's where places meet and talk and discuss and celebrate and get into intellectual discourse and so on, so forth, so this is again alerting us to. That was the past if we need to look at the past, we need to look at the principles of the past, not the images of the past. The past is telling us that the mosque was the centre of the city, the centre of the Community, not only the notion of the mosque was characterized by a dorm and amended and couple of arches. The mosque was incredibly alive, a life in its internal spaces and a life outside and I think as because an excellent representation of that how the mosque, was a very vibrant space inside and outside and was depicted in a lot of photos and a lot of paintings. And you go again all over the cities in the Muslim world, and you will see that the source, because they were so interacted with the mosque also became an extension of this vibrancy of the city.

So, it seems to me that we have this fundamental creativity crisis, and we need to be confrontational when it comes to how to deal with this, because do I have evidence to say that we do have a contemporary creativity crisis? Those are images that I took from different cities around the Middle East, from contemporary mosques and you would question how the Contemporary cities were within their fabric, they have examples like Sultan Hassan and so on and so forth the will end up with this kind of architecture that at sometimes you would question you would question how these additions were even legitimacy, what is the legitimacy of adding all of these to the urban fabric of different cities around the Middle East.

This is an interesting example where they decided to have kava right in the heart of the more so, sometimes you even question the rationale and the to which extent is if this is a serious process or somebody is making fun, as if designing a mosque is becoming a sort of a game, rather than a very spiritual exercise. Another interesting phenomenon that I want to share with you also is becoming really interesting in the Middle East is the notion of the mega mosques and I don't know why it's so much associated, Or at least I think I know but it's so much associated with dictators, all of them without exceptions, they are excited about huge mass because they want to deliver again the message that we are a representative of God, and we have a very, very moral commitment towards Islam, this is the case of Saddam Hussein in in Iraq, this is the case of Al Saleh in Yemen, huge mosques and all of these mosques are not related to how the local community is suffering, how people are really in a dire need for such a budget to be allocated for the uplifting and the Community development.

This is in UAE the Sheikh Zayed Mosque. This is one of the very interesting examples in a new desert development in Kairo called the new capital and, ironically, they built the mosque in the middle of the desert, so no one is going there, they called it the biggest mosque in the Middle East. And then, they were not able to get people to pray there so they started to bring soldiers from different military camps around the area and they will put them in buses every Friday, so they can give the illusion that the mosque is packed with people. Even in Kaaba the most sacred space for Muslims on earth, this is how a lot of painters where we're sort of portraying the notion of the dominance of Kaaba, how Kaaba is the Center of the rituals of Al Hajj or umrah. And this is a picture and all the photographic pictures also suggesting the same concept that the Kaaba is the dominate that the dominating a component of the whole journey, and this is a contemporary image. Now this is from one of the towers at the Fairmont hotel and the gentleman here is overlooking the car, but this is, this is a book that I wrote in Arabic. And I was comparing the urban development around Kaaba with what is happening in Las Vegas because I found a lot of similar similarities in terms of transforming the contents of Kaaba, not to deal with it as a spiritual conflict, but as a real estate paradise, and therefore you build the highest and you build the biggest to gain as much profit as you can.

And this is the situation now here are the main guy buildings that are constructed all over the place, and this is the cupboards becoming really a tiny space in this jungle of concrete towers. And then, when we go to the West, we are doing the same, so instead of trying again to speak to the context, we come and impose what I called it a sort of impose a specific image, I totally see the point of saying that we want to express being Muslims in the West, we want to say that we are part of the Community, but at the same time, I think the notion is not to impose elements that will not generated from the context architecture is about dialogue, architecture is about speaking to the context.

This is a very, very interesting example I think very similar to what Sarah started the presentation with and again, you would realize that no, it is not in India, it is not in Cairo, it is not in Saudi Arabia, this is the Islamic Center of America, in Dearborn, Michigan, and again I would question why do we have to do that, why do we have to use the same elements that were invented hundreds of years ago and duplicate it.

But at the same time, I think there is a lot of hope, a lot of hope from young architects and urbanist that are doing a lot of experimental work and some of them were able to build their work or so. This is what is called the vanishing mosque, and the idea here is to transform the mosque into a sort of a public space, rather than a very solid the independent individual space. This is also another very interesting experience, where the minimalist approach with a bit of extraction for domain shapes like in the case of the minaret or the absence of the Dome and also emphasizing more on the using of natural light and the idea of how the simplicity of the inner spaces with create more spirituality is also examine in a very interesting manner in this mosque. One of my favourite example Bait Ur Rouf mosque in Dhaka, Bangladesh designed by my friend Marina Tabassum, and it's a winner of the Aga Khan Award for architecture in the in the cycle 2014-2016. And I like the mosque because it's simple, and it's creative and it fits the environment, it speaks to the people that are suffering from a specific level of poverty very, very simple people, this is what they can afford. But I think the beauty of what shw was able to do is to use her own creativity to end up with A mosque that is different, that’s unique that it's contemporary and at the same time very, very special so different spaces within the experience of the mosque.

Another very interesting example, also in in Jakarta, Indonesia Said Naum Mosque also a winner of the fan, where the mosque was also a presentation of the vocabulary of the city, rather than the importance of a calculate from the history of mosques. And hence the mosque is becoming a sort of blending with the urban conflicts, not only that, but the mosque partially is a presentation of the triology that I talked about the mosque, the public space and the market and therefore the mosque created an interesting sense of belonging, because it's becoming the park and the mosque, and people are going to the park and going to the mosque and go to the mosque and enjoying the park, and this is exactly what I’m calling for and at the same time, you still see the creativity of the architect using very limited budget, but still being able to enhance the quality of the design to attain the no beauty and also the external beauty.

Another interesting example in sync in Singapore, Assayfaah mosque, and I think again, the notion of the invention of using the natural light, as I said before, natural light was a wonderful element in most in most of the of the traditional mosques, but not in the way we designed most in our contemporary time we will not that much excited about the element of life, but we are more excited about the visual elements, like the dome and minaret, and so what. I think here it's a very interesting example of how to use the natural light to create a spiritual experience.

One of my favourite examples in the West is the Penzberg mosque in Bavaria, Germany and what are I really like about this mosque is this transparent very transparent facade. A facade that would make a connection between the mosque, and the community that would invite people walking by To come and to see the space and even the even the entrance, as you can see, in the middle picture is also inviting people to see the minaret, again as a calligraphy articulated in a very, very interesting manner. So, suddenly the mosque is not ambiguous place it's not a place where it's surrounded by a stone wall, and you don't know what is happening there now with the mosque is open and transparent and therefore you see that people are praying, people are wonderful, people are simple and peaceful.

And another interesting creative contribution from Croatia, and again, you see the element of light you see the composition, you see revisit of the shape of the minaret. All of this is, we should give credit to all of these architects, because they were able to write a new chapter about the role of the mosque, and the design of the mosque and an interesting understanding of how the mosque should play a role with the Community and with the society.

Another interesting example in Turkey in Istanbul, the central mosque in Istanbul where the whole idea is about spirituality as a journey. And therefore, you will invite people coming to pray to go into this journey, all the way under very interesting platforms and landscape and they will end up in this space where natural light again is penetrating the space. The minaret is basically a piece of art, with Allahu Akbar on top of it. And this is the journey that would lead people to the mosque, and then they will come back to enjoy the vast landscape, this is the level of creativity that we should celebrate.

Another interesting example in Tirana Albania, where, and I think these two conceptual sketches are fundamentally important. This is the outer space, this is the Plaza this is disaha, and this is the mosque, and I think that even according to my lecture That was the traditional principle of the relation between the mosque, and the Plaza in Tirana Albania in this specific case, then called the new mostly Islamic Center in the Museum of a religious harmony. The idea was to create an open space surrounded by the different kinds of spaces, helping the Center, the museum and the mosque. And therefore, you are in the mosque and outside the mosque, you are within the sacred spaces, and you are out of the sacred spaces to a communal space, and I think making all these lines kind of blurred helped to transform the mosque into a public space. Again, to create a different kind of sense of belonging and people are enjoying the place enjoying the place as a place to pray and enjoying the place as a place to get together to hang out to eat to crypto have coffee and so on up absolutely a beautiful piece.

Final case from Cambridge designed again by my friend Julia Barfield, and it's absolutely a manifestation of creativity of everything, even from the moment to approach the mosque you feel that you are getting into a garden. You feel that you are getting into a space where from its reception is telling you, we are together we are a community, we are a peaceful people. And very similar to the concept of the mosque in Germany also the notion of transparency, the notion of a very blurred line between in and out is also helping in in absorbing people and inviting people and inviting the Community to look at Muslims from not only a positive perspective, but also, it's a manifestation of the ability to be creative. It was interesting that in my dialogue with the designer she told me that the donors, that people who donate money, although they enjoyed everything they enjoyed the reception garden the insured enjoy the beauty of the internal spaces and exterior spaces, but they were so afraid that, without using one of those typical elements people might not recognize it as a mosque, so they insisted on having this dome on top of the building.

My very final example which is related to the College, where I teach in Qatar and I just want to share with you how some professors of architecture described the building, it looks like a spaceship, it's not settled on the underground, it will fly, and so on and so forth, and they were talking about this, they were talking about the College of Islamic studies and the Education city mosque in Doha, Qatar and then on, in my opinion it's more a vibe of the idea of the Islamic concept of college and school equally it's also an contemporary your presentation of identity, it achieved that reality between the mosque and human knowledge and interesting interpretation of creativity, you have also the notion of the public space and how the public spaces related to the mosque. How to use architecture as a tool to question things, to provoke the Community how to use the building as an educational tool - it's not a replica of what people are used to see but it's giving them the opportunity to question things, this is the flow of spaces of the mosque and the different components, the library, the exhibition halls, the lecture rooms, the educational facilities, professors offices and so on, this is one of the semi internal courtyards, and this is when the place is packed with people after praying, and these are the two abstracted minerals, suggesting again a new interpretation for the design of the mosque, this is the main the main prayer Hall, and as you can see a very, very interesting composition of geometry natural light artificial light and so on, and this is when it's packed with prayers How the mosque is blending with the with the context. The main pillars of the most of five and oh presenting the five pillars of Islam with Category fee. And each of those verses again are presenting one of the most important notions of Islam so suddenly you have an interesting combination between a very, very ultra-modern composition that suggesting the ability to be very creative coupled with associations with our past and our principles, and then the components, as I said, the different components of the mosque, and the and the College is suggesting that it's becoming a place for people with the different activities happening there.

So I want to end up with suggesting that we need to look at the mosque as a place for the Community, and we have to make it a place, not only for people to perform rituals, but to meet and to talk and to celebrate and to feel freedom and to feel being proud of their religion and proud of their existence, a place where it can engage different people not even necessarily Muslims in a profound and deep spiritual experiences that would transcend all differences.

I think, also the appearance of the mosque is not that much related to the notion of the dome and the minaret it but it's more should be more related to the notion of openness. The notion of how to create a new perception that would encourage people to even not Muslims to interact with the mosque, and then how the mosque can be transformed into a place that would enhance sense of belonging between Community members, so it seems to me that if I want to end up my presentation, with a sort of an alternative mosque design conceptual understanding, I would call for how to transform the for the mosque into a vibrant place not a deserted space, I would argue that most of the mosques in the Middle East now in in a lot of Muslim Countries are becoming desert the places the open only to perform rituals some Muslim cities, the open the mosques only during pay time and the clothes that after that I think we have to be incredibly creative in functions, activities and different scenarios for users, that, as I said, would allow all the generations, all the cultural backgrounds, all the economic backgrounds to re-engage in the mosque, not only to perform rituals, but to regain its value as the centre of the Community, we need to claim the mosques spiritually and spatially, and hence the mosque can be transformed from a ritual place to ‘My place’.

And thank you so much for having me, it was my honour. I think I would stop share here, yes.

**Sara Motwani:** Thank you, that was really amazing presentation if it's okay with you, we now take a few questions that have been posted into the chat.

**Ali Alraouf:** Absolutely.

**Sara Motwani:** Okay, so there is this one question: Would it be possible to retain traditional features such as domes and arches alongside more contemporary designs, so that there is unity between mosques all over the world, despite their cultural designs?

And there's a second part to this question saying, is it possible that a mosque could lose its sense of identity, if it didn't retain classic elements alongside new designs? Like a minaret, for example, helps us to recognize a mosque and bring people together, even if they don't know the place very well.

**Ali Alraouf:** yeah I think is absolutely right very interesting two questions, and I would I would start by the notion of retaining specific elements and I think it's not about having elements from the modern or contemporary time, coupled with what she called the classical elements. I think what I was calling for in my lecture is that to look at the mosque not as a rigid solid piece of architecture, I think we should look at the mosque as a continuation of culture, a continuation of intellectual endeavour, a continuation of the creative process and, hence, there is nothing called classical elements here. I can revisit the element of the minute I can revisit the element of the dome I can look at it from a symbolic view because the function of the element is not it's not valid anymore, no one is going up the minaret and calling for prayer anymore so it's becoming a more a symbolic element. When it's becoming a symbolic element, you can look at it from a design point of view and creativity point of view. I think this is also related to the sense of identity, because, as I was trying to say also in my lecture. I think we all fall into the trap of looking at identity as a representation of a specific time frame a specific time era. In Egypt, for instance i'm originally from Egypt, Egypt, for instance, the participated in World Expo in Dubai 2021. And the design of the of the Egyptian pavillion what would what was a sort of a attempt at I feel I'm kind of thing because again their interpretation of their identity is that if you want to express Egyptian identity, the best time frame, or the best error that you should go to his differ Ionic era, or the ancient Egyptians or without you, so I think I would ask you to look at the notion of dynamic identity, because dynamic identity, would allow creativity and therefore we will totally refrain from the notion of classical elements in mosques. Thank you.

**Sara Motwani:** Thank you um there's another question: Do you believe that the widespread outsourcing of architects from the West for projects in the Middle East is a factor in the lack of contemporary progression and Islamic architecture. And how can we increase architectural participation from the local Muslim community in Middle Eastern cities.

**Ali Alraouf:** Well, the, this is an amazing question I shot, and I think this is why all the time, I say we have incredible responsibility on our shoulders Muslim architects and urban designers and planners. Because we need to understand number one that we have to have incredible confidence, we have to believe in ourselves, we have to understand that we can do excellent contributions to the fabric of our cities under condition under condition that we deal with architecture and urbanism as creative domains, we take our responsibilities as Muslims to be creative. To use every single element in our contemporary time, every single technology, every single new material, every single discovery to be aware of all of this and to learn about it and use it in the way we produce architecture and urbanism and don't be afraid of learning and at the same time and we have to reject the marginalization, I had opportunities here in Quatar to have discussions with people like Rem Koolhaas, like Zaha Hadid and so on and so forth. And all of them were extremely excited about what I call the local knowledge, all of the star architects, they are ignorant about our localities. they are ignorant about local cultures, they are ignorant about our local way of life and therefore If we started to have to believe in ourselves if we started to fight for our presence in our cities, I think the that that the chances to exhibit our creativity will be will be limitless I would say.

**Sara Motwani:** there's a lot of questions in the chat about how we can make mosques move towards more inclusivity in their design in terms of being more inclusive to women and marginalized groups, if you could answer that.

**Ali Alraouf:** Yeah this is, this is a beautiful question, too, and I think. We I showed you in my lecture number of mosques, either in the Middle East or in the West and I’m talking here about Brussels in Belgium different cities in Germany different cities in in France, and so on and so forth, and my main problem with all of these examples is that they are creating islands, there are creating isolated spaces and places there are using stones in a place where the temperature is very cold and you can use different kind of facades to allow the transparency that I’m talking about so. I would argue that the very, very important step that we should make two words the inclusiveness of mosques is by transforming the mosque into an inviting space, and when I say inviting space here I am not talking about Muslims, because Muslims, which search for the mosque would look it up would Google it, but the beauty of architecture is for passer-by for people who are walking in the street for people who are exploring the city or exploring the Community and suddenly, you will be in front of a place where it's open it's inviting it's packed with activities they can have tea,  can drink coffee, they can eat something they can read the book they can watch a movie they can see some paintings in the gallery, this is my vision about the future of the mosque. A mosque that would go beyond the notion of Salah it's not only about Salah it's not only about rituals. But when you start to insert all of these new functions and new elements and new activities in the fabric of the mass. It will be inclusive, by definition, because kids will enjoy the mosque teenagers would enjoy the mosque, elderly people would enjoy the mosque, families would enjoy the mosque, single people would enjoy the mosque, and so on and so forth, and by doing that you also create what I repeatedly said in my lecture different sense of belonging, because the mosque is not only a place where you would go to wait 10 minutes, in five times a day to perform a pain, no, you will subscribe to it, you will subscribe to it, as this is my hangout place I my dream is to have teenagers saying that I want to go to the mosque, not to the mall.

**Sara Motwani:** Yes, I completely agree with that, in a very good example of this is the first picture the picture on the first slide of the for young adults like taking a selfie in front of the mosque.

Okay, so we're already eight minutes over time, I think we won't be able to answer all questions, maybe let's just take another question. Okay, you can mosques, be the core of the contemporary Muslim city, how to achieve that, and how will they work along the other urban core elements.

**Ali Alraouf:** I would, I would definitely agree with the notion that the mosque should be the centre of Muslim cities, but not the mosque in its contemporary status, not the mosque as a place to perform Salah, performed rituals. If we look at the mosque, as the centre of the Community as the centre of life as a vibrant place as a place where knowledge is transmitted was knowledge is produced, where social interaction is happening, where inclusive, it is attained, then this is the centre of the city and the centre of the Community. If we kept on building mega mosques and independent mosques and the isolated mosques and fortified mosque I quoted fortified most because of the walls and all the solid appearances, that would this encode your from creating a connection with the different spaces of the mouse. If we do that definitely the mosque would be the centre because, as I said in my lecture also That was the original essence of the role of the mosque in the Muslim cities in the Muslim community, it was the centre white was the centre because Its function it's role it's attachment to people went By far beyond the notion of Salah it was the cultural centre it was the social centre it was the economical centre it's directly attached to the market, it's directly attached to the public space where people celebrate and enjoy the time so naturally this trilogy is the centre of the city.

**Sara Motwani:** And I think question is this one so: If for a second, we leave the Islamophobia and Mosquephobia for emerging in the world and look at the representation of mosques exactly similar to the representation of churches or temples, Do you think that this their representation of the churches and the gurdwara should also adapt like needs to adapt with The changing times?

**Ali Alraouf:** I yeah yes, my answer is absolutely yes and actually the same discourse is happening also when it comes to church and temples in a lot of countries around the world from Thailand to the to the western community. A lot of people are questioning the meaning of building yet more churches or why we built more temples if these own this, the role of these places would only for performing your rituals and but, the irony here is that it's not only about questioning religious building. In the case of Muslims in addition to questioning religious buildings we are question the religion itself. And therefore, we have Islamophobia and Moscow for you, we definitely have gesture for you, and we have them phobia but we don't have yet Christian-phobia or Jewish-phobia or what have you but, unfortunately, because of the process that I talked about the Islamophobia was globally and locally constructed and globally and locally consumed, and therefore we are fighting.

**Sara Motwani:** completely agree with you there, so I think we've already over time so … Thank you so much for like presenting for us today, it was very interesting and informative. I’m sure everybody enjoyed the session and I think we're going to wrap up here, if you have any last words before we wrap up the session.

**Ali Alraouf:** I enjoyed it and it was really great and I’m so grateful for you and for the school. Thank you so much, and I am grateful also for the people, more than 100 that's amazing. Thank you so much for being with me.

Thank you.