



THE CENTER FOR
MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Mecca: The Lived City

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Abstracts

Ali Almajnooni (SUNY Binghamton)

The Meccan Alley: The Decline of Vernacular Architecture

This presentation's aim is to study the gradual but rapid disappearance of the traditional Meccan alley, a marker of what Besim Hakim (1986) calls "vernacular architecture" in Islamic cities. In just a few years, massive developmental projects have been introduced to the urban landscape of the city of Mecca, leading to the utter obliteration of several neighborhoods. The ongoing removal of sixty-six neighborhoods described as "slums" (constituting over a quarter of the city) has been prioritized by the Saudi authorities in a masterplan to transform Mecca into an "advanced city." Moreover, the process of eradicating traditional neighborhoods has been accompanied by a campaign linking those neighborhoods or slums to certain economic, infrastructural, social and environmental challenges, such as crime and disease. As inhabitants of the demolished neighborhoods are forced to relocate, the only alternative made available for them is the new grid plan-based neighborhoods sprawling on the outskirts of the city. Barren spaces, those grid plans function in a purely instrumental way, failing to maintain the sociological role of the traditional alley. The array of social, commercial, and leisure practices allowed in and by the traditional Meccan alley are no longer guaranteed in the new morphology that has redefined concepts of urban planning and architecture, such as sustainability, friendliness, and diversity, to name only a few. Drawing from various backgrounds, including sociology, critical theory, spatial studies, and literary studies, this interdisciplinary presentation establishes a contrast between two models of urban planning, one organic and spontaneous and the other imposed and violent. Outlining the different approaches each model takes to environmental, social and cultural values, the presentation traces the significant impact of the massive transformation taking place in the city today on the lived experience of Meccan people. Finally, through looking at the novels of Raja'a Alem and artwork of Ahmed Mater, the presentation aspires to take into account how this large-scale urban transformation is represented and reimagined in contemporary literary and artistic expression.

Hussam Dakkak (Studio Bound)

Makkah's Belonging

Who does Makkah belong to? The question of Makkah's belonging poses an existential challenge in defining the identity of the city. Makkah is a city of alter egos, and unlike any other city, is a city where the ephemeral act of prayer not only transforms the city and our understanding of it, but also underwrites its very being. How does the event of prayer impact our experience and understanding of the city? By examining this question

more closely, the presentation elaborates on the concept of 'City as a Mosque' as we begin to decipher the question posed. An integral component in tackling Makkah's belonging also lies in addressing the notion of being grounded or the idea of permanence, or rather a lack of permanence. In a context that is subject to constant change and evolution, Makkah is a reactive city in a state of perpetual development, posing a challenge to defining what it is, can be or ought to become.

Tyler Kynn (Yale University)

Between Empire and Sacred Space: Mecca as a Global Space in the Early Modern World

This presentation aims to outline the ways in which Mecca served as an important space in the early modern Islamic world in which global claims of Islamic legitimacy could be proclaimed and contested. Building off data collected from the Ottoman *Surre defterleri* (records of yearly stipend payments made to the residents of Mecca and Medina) and anecdotes from hajj pilgrimage narratives, this presentation will examine the intersection of imperial power, sacred space, and global connectivity in early modern Mecca. The dynamics involved reveal new understandings of imperial power in the early modern world and the connective networks which tied the early modern Islamic world together creating the diverse and cosmopolitan space of Mecca.

Omer Shah (Columbia University)

"Made in Makkah": Smart Technology and Human Resources in the Holy City

In Saudi Arabia, the Vision 2030 national transformation campaign has sought to prepare the kingdom for a post-oil future, this has involved a movement from oil as a "natural resource" to a new idea of "human resources," thus demanding *al-sa'wadah* or Saudization of various industries and sectors, encouraging tech entrepreneurship, and intensifying a knowledge economy in the kingdom. What is often ignored in discussions of Vision 2030 is a more local-regional transformation happening around *hajj* and *umrah* work, where the Saudi state is preparing to increase the number of annual pilgrims from eight million to thirty million by the vision's deadline. *Hajj* and *umrah* work presents us with an alternative grammar and temporality, where if oil now has acknowledged limits, *hajj* and *umrah* work is framed as lasting "forever." In this paper, I want to explore the work of crowd and pilgrim management as a new "human resource" in Saudi Arabia. Based on ethnographic research with tech-startups in Mecca, consultants, and *mutawifeen* or pilgrim guides, I will explore the different textures, debates and challenges that structure the making of this new-old industry. Doing so, requires attention to the different scales and tournaments of belonging—national, local and otherwise, the image, format and tutelage of tech entrepreneurship and calculative reasoning, but also a certain spillover of *hajj* and *umrah* problem-solving into the everyday. Ultimately, I am interested in making an argument about how the holy city is made "smart," productive and open in new ways, the effect of which further blunts Mecca's cosmopolitan logics even in the moment of its intensification.

Drew Wensley (Moriyama & Teshima Planners, Toronto)

Mecca: City of Offering / City of Need

Across the globe our cities have a measurable pulse and a gravitational pull drawing us to opportunity and experience. Over the past several decades this gravitational pull has come at a cost. Cities around the world continue to suffer from broken systems, damaged ecologies and economies that work not for the planet but against it. We have all awoken to the fact that the pulse of the planet is directly linked to our health and well-being, that the performance of a river tributary is directly linked to our own blood stream. Today the



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challenges we now face have forced us to think differently about our cities, our future and the legacy we will leave distant generations. We see a different future and are committed to the task... the resilient cities of the future must be born and supported through the strength of their environment and in turn if we are to thrive in the 21st century we must respect, enhance and protect the natural systems that support us all.

Mecca's Living Natural Framework: Following the successful implementation of The Wadi Hanifah Comprehensive Restoration Program in Riyadh in 2010, Moriyama & Teshima Planners began work on the Mecca's Environmental Plan as part of its Master Plan 2011 Program. The program was built upon the strategic vision that outlined key development components while mapping Mecca's compromised environmental systems. One of the primary objectives of the program was to repair, preserve and enhance the city's natural and cultural resources. The Environmental Plan was developed to establish balance between the natural and built world and to reconnect the links between the city and its ecological systems that rendered this unique setting. Our discussion will explore the role the natural world will play in what we become in the 21st century. As urban pressures continue to expand the carrying capacity of Mecca's environment continues to be stressed. Decades of neglect must now be healed through immediate reparation.

Expanding Pressures: As the population of our planet continues to expand towards 8 billion, our cities will play a critical role in what we become. Today the daily news is filled with accounts of fire, flood, famine, and catastrophic events related to a climate that has changed...we see the problems within our built world and recognize these are shared by all. With data sets now immediately accessible, we can confirm the environmental performance of our planet and our cities in real time. Using tools such as Landsat 8 and remote sensing technology we are able to track storms, pollution plumes, carbon monoxide build up in the atmosphere migrating over regional and political boundaries. Today our global economy and our individual need to consume continues to harm the very biosphere that provides for all life on this planet. The science and its data confirm we are breaking it faster than it can repair itself.

Not Causal...Mutual: What we do to the environment we do to ourselves. With the cry for action and innovation becoming a deafening roar we ask ourselves what is the appropriate response. Continuing to build and expand our cities using 20th century methods will ensure a spiral collapse of our environment, our economy and narrow the opportunities of those who will inherit the mess. We must think, act, plan, design, and implement with the understanding that our built world and the natural world are not causal but rather mutual. Because a community is by definition placed, its success cannot be divided from the performance of its setting. Its souls, plants, animals, water, light and air are all co-dependents. Mecca's Environmental Framework Plan attempts to define a way forward for the ecological restoration and integration of its systems within a rapidly developing city and region. Its vision seeks to implement critical care mechanisms that will promote new performance for the environment and all of its co-dependents.

Systems Approach: In responding to the complexity of modern cities and the natural systems that support them, we dedicated our practice to improving and enriching urban environments through the integration of

science and design. A systems approach to city design focuses on the implementation of sustainable practices that will resurrect entire environments from collapse to become thriving focal points of community life. Nature and its processes maintains the power to transform our cities; to provide vital support to our urban lives. We must repair, reconnect ecologies, obey the flow of water and nutrients within the system and protect its performance...let nature do what it must do.

Reparation and Renewal: The next decade offers a critical moment of reparation and renewal. As many continue to build in places that we should not, our cities suffer from the pressures of climate impacts, density and mobility networks that isolate us rather than connect us to our living natural framework. Humans must be co-developers with evolving natural systems. Our understanding of place must push deeper into the temporal behavior of place. Pragmatic environmental solutions must be uncovered and expressed through an understanding of these complex systems. Energy, water, food production, mobility, waste, ecology and economy, are the ingredients that contribute to the pulse of the planet and shape the performance of our cities. Each element must perform for and within the system and its setting.

We are the Problem, Solution and Benefactor: The solutions must begin with the understanding of the “drivers” of the system including the geomorphology, climate, and ecology of the place. With this baseline understanding confirmed we must define the dynamic inputs of the “producers” including economic, agriculture, energy, infrastructure, mobility, industrial and social systems. These define the activities and intersections of our built and natural world. Through the ongoing activities the “receivers” display the impact of our world in real time. Often the first line of defense is our natural environment but it also bears the brunt of the negative influences. The receivers include the natural living framework, water resources, soil, air, habitat, flora, fauna, and importantly community health. We must find mechanisms to allow science and ecology to shape city form and function rather than imposing form and function to shape the ecology.

Less and More: As we test and embrace new building materials, form and technologies applied data is pointing us to a more ecologically focused design process. As many debate what we must remove, recycle and reduce, less waste less carbon, less impact, less harvesting of resources...we ask what do we need more of. Can we inject new ecologies into our cities to clean water, air and contaminated soils. Can we use natural systems to defend against sea level raise and expand marine terrestrial environments in the process. Can we further the trend of soft systems for the conveyance of storm water. There is a movement to repair, enhance and protect the natural living framework within our cities so that we may harness its power for performance and health gains...the natural performance of the natural environment is not a value add it is the baseline that makes all things possible. Does our “National Defense” now = our “Natural Defense”.

Innovation Through All Scales: Our individual health, wealth and wellbeing...the independent opportunities we dream of realizing are all DEPENDENT on the environment that we share with others. The impacts of consumption, pollution, and the unfocused development of our natural world are now traced back to our city, our community, our street and our own blood stream. The solutions we seek will not come from technology or any one silo of thinking. We are only part of a complex system. As actors in that system we must move toward the convergence understanding where science, design and ecology come together. We cannot thrive if the environmental systems that support us collapse.

“the solution lies in integrated systems approach to city redesign - reconnecting built and natural ecologies to perform throughout scales for individual and community needs...can Mecca perform as a new type of ecological engine contributing to local, regional and planetary health.” --DW/CEO/MTP