Comparing the Mosques by

American Vauntary Associations and the Mosque

During his travels around America in the 1960s, Jean-Paul Sartre wrote: “In many of the large cities of America one could notice how the mosques were proliferating. This is not just a matter of numbers, but also of a new social reality.” In 2023, the city of New York, with its diverse and growing Muslim population, is home to numerous mosques. These mosques are not just places of worship, but also centers of community, culture, and social cohesion.

The exterior of a mosque is often characterized by its architectural features. The main entrance, known as the ‘masjed’, is usually decorated with intricate calligraphy and geometric patterns. The Islamic calligraphy often features quotes from the Quran, which is the central religious text of Islam.

Mosques are also significant for their role in the broader community. They often host events such as lectures, workshops, and cultural festivals. These activities not only enrich the spiritual life of the community but also promote a sense of belonging and inclusivity.

The interior of a mosque is designed to facilitate worship. The central area, known as the ‘qibla’, is oriented towards Mecca. The patterned tiles on the walls and floors are often inspired by Islamic geometric designs, which emphasize the beauty of the divine.

The mosque’s role in the community is also evident in its impact on the social fabric. It serves as a gathering place for various community events, promoting social cohesion and shared values.

In conclusion, mosques are not just places of worship but also hubs of cultural and social activities. They play a crucial role in shaping the identity of the communities in which they are located. The rich cultural and architectural heritage of mosques highlights their significance as symbols of Islamic heritage and community.

Susan Slyomovics

*References*


---

Example: The exterior structure of the mosque exhibited the same architectural elements as those of the surrounding buildings. Its main entrance, decorated with intricate calligraphy and geometric patterns, was a central feature of the building. The interior, oriented towards Mecca, was designed to facilitate worship. The mosque’s role in the community was evident in its impact on the social fabric, serving as a gathering place for various community events, promoting social cohesion and shared values.
revival groups such as The Journeymen, The Kingston Trio, and Peter, Paul, and Mary, students from the mosque school offered their rewritten choruses: “A way of life, a way of life, Islam is a way of life.” The original American verses speak of the adventure, the poverty, and the romance of the lonesome road that sews reverts back home, as in: “If you miss the train I’m on / You will know that I have gone / You can hear the whistle blow five hundred miles / Not a shit on my back / Not a penny to my name / Lord I can’t go back home this way.”

The mosque’s lyrics make a different use of the metaphor of life as a road when worshippers sang in the mosque: “Do you know what Islam says? / It says life’s a big, big chance / It says that life is a far road space / Return upon rest.”

The method, a sort of architectural framework, is American, but the words are not. Conclusions: Mosques must take on multiple names, roles which juxtapose two notions of community: first, a traditional community evolved by the architectural form of a mosque and second, the creation of an eclectic community formed by the streets and neighborhoods of the American city. A New York city mosque simultaneously houses a traditional community stemming from a shared religious heritage, but also an eclectic community of volunteers associated members — in this instance, the West Indians, Indians, and West Africans of the Bronx. The mosque serves as a social club for many residents in the immediate neighborhood (an elective community) but also celebrates the Prophet’s birthday (the traditional Muslim community). Numerous activities, a school, religious rites, and an organization are used to create an eclectic community of volunteers associated members who comply with state rules for nonprofit clubs. The traditional structure, the mosque, must be sustained by the edifice of elective communities in the form of a voluntary association bureau.

Sunni-ul-Jamaat Mosque, Bronx
Photo: Susan Stryomvsky