

Chapter 1, InterAsian Islamisms: Monumental Mosques and Modernity in Kazakhstan and Qatar

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Some mosques are conceived from their outset as monuments. That is, besides assuming the nominal form as a site of religious practice, they are primarily designed, located, and otherwise managed to be *icons* of a particular identity or ideological narrative (Koch 2016; Koch et al. 2018). As icons, they exist in many different realms simultaneously – the material, the experiential, the rhetorical, the mediated – with all of these layers co-existing and shaping how individuals experience the sites themselves and their likeness. Some, and most notably the Great Mosque of Mecca, come to assume iconic status organically, given the special role they play within social, cultural, political, and religious life. Others, by contrast, are accorded iconic status by their authors. Rather than a bottom-up iconicity, theirs is imposed top-down by political leaders and their architect-allies. These are what I will refer to as “monumental mosques” and are the focus of this chapter.

Monumental mosques offer a unique insight into the “glocalness” of Islamism described in the introduction to this volume. They showcase how the universalism of Islam is parsed into a set of rhetorical and visual tropes that are then articulated into particular ethnic, national, and vernacular scripts across the Muslim world. It is precisely this parsing that allows for the multiple Islamisms that are made and re-made through the built environment. The “Muslim world” has always been exceptionally diverse, but the relationship between Islamism and the city forces us to ask precisely how common narratives are forged across the urban landscapes and lives of today’s rich patchwork of Muslim-majority countries.

In this chapter, I focus on two cases from Central Asia and the Arabian Peninsula by taking a critical perspective on “interAsian Islamism” that highlights nationalist narratives of divergence, but which are *emplaced* within global power structures and histories of commonality. I argue that “modernity” is a crucial unifying thread interwoven with the threads of Islamism and nationalist exceptionalism. The two monumental mosques I consider in Kazakhstan and Qatar exemplify how multiple ideological repertoires unite materially, rhetorically, and aesthetically. As with any iconic site, however, these mosques and the interAsian Islamisms inscribed onto and into their built form are only ever *efforts* at claiming fixity. The identity claims their authors make may succeed at one moment and fail the next. They may fail from the start. Or they may shift over time, among audiences, and across media. As a discursive effort, though, monumentality requires a tremendous amount of time, resources, and affective energies to impose – and thus bears serious investigation regardless of whether it “works” or not.

Monumentality, Modernity, and Nationalism

Modernity, writes Timothy Mitchell (2000: 24), “is defined by its claim to universality, to a uniqueness, unity, and universality that represent the end (in every sense) of history. Yet this always remains an impossible unity, an incomplete universal.” As an “incomplete universal,” modernity can mean anything, everything, or nothing at all. Yet as Batuman notes in his introductory remarks, the power of ideology is precisely this vagueness, which leaves it open to appropriation. Or, as Paul Veyne (1997: 156) puts it, ideology is “a noble and vague style, apt for

idealizing practices while appearing to describe them. Ideology is an ample cloak that dissimulates the crooked and dissimilar contours of real practices that succeed one another in history.” Modernity, like Islamism, can act as a mode of articulation to unite many different discourses, geographic imaginaries, and aspirations, to create new narratives in local contexts.

Further paralleling (indeed, working in tandem with) the Islamisms that Batuman identifies, state-builders, city-builders, and all other builders have long contended with the slippery nature of their vague and noble claims to modernity by turning to architecture. Physically inscribing a concept or narrative onto a site is imagined to make it more “real.” Veyne (1990: 56) describes this as the “focalization effect,” which I have sought to theorize in more detail elsewhere:

Singular sites or events, like a parade or a monument or a capital city, can substantiate an abstraction, or lend material form to an ideological narrative that is rather more diffuse, tenuous, or perhaps even illusory. [...] Fusing ideological narratives (such as democracy or communism) with a material object or site allows people to more concretely interact with it in everyday life. When mapped onto a material site, such as a monument, building, or even a city, abstract narratives are much easier to visualize. This in turn accords abstract concepts with more symbolic power than if they were to remain at the level of abstraction because people treat the material referent as evidence of its truth or reality. (Koch 2018: 27)

Regardless of whether the rhetorical move actually “works,” monuments of all kinds work through this *logic* of focalization. And it is a logic that actors promoting particular ideologies have been keenly aware of since the rise of nationalism in the 1700s.

The early European nationalisms struggled with the challenge of concretizing their claims to a fictitious new entity – the “nation.” Not only did they turn to city-building and inventing traditions, they also turned to building grandiose new monuments (Hobsbawm 1990; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Kedourie 1961). This has been amply explored in the literature on nationalism, with numerous scholars tracing how state-funded monuments and monumental city-scapes became central to promoting official identity narratives and, in so doing, “focalizing” the nation (e.g. Adams 2008; Agnew 1998; Atkinson and Cosgrove 1998; Cummings 2010; Ford 2008; Forest and Johnson 2002; Johnson 1995; Levinson 1998; Mitchell 2003; Rajagopalan 2012; Rajagopalan and Desai 2016; Stewart 1984). Extending this more global approach to urban monumentality, scholars have more recently built on the limited work of a few earlier studies (Harvey 1979; Sidorov 2000) to explore religious sites as monuments themselves, as well as places more generally coded and developed as special places for the articulation of national identity, heritage, and memory (e.g. Ali and Hassan 2018; Batuman 2016, 2018; Bissenova 2016; Hamdan 2017; Hammond 2014, 2020; Kinossian 2008; Koch 2016; Koch et al. 2018; Long 2017; Rizvi 2015; Rollason 2016; Sheline 2019). As this work illustrates, religious landscapes have long been important to materially narrating national and political visions of identity – as well as contesting those narratives, either from the bottom-up or the top-down, as regimes change and new ideological scripts are adopted.

Yet the primary challenge of nationalists claiming to be modern through building religiously-inflected monuments, icons, and cities is that religion has such deep associations with

“tradition.” Due to the secularist inflection of European nationalisms and their spread via colonialism, religious symbols and ideas were, if not outright expunged from new nationalisms, at least framed as “backward-looking” elements of their modern identities – despite always being essential to their syntax and structure (Asad 2003; Bellah 1967; Coakley 2002; Juergensmeyer 1993, 2006; Hefner 2005; O’Brien 1988). In this sense, the monumental mosques illustrate Batuman’s argument in the introduction that Islamist uses of architectural representation are complicated by the fact that they are “overdetermined” by colonial histories. As sites for their authors to monumentally proclaim their unique national identity and their modernity, the Islamist claim to an exceptional identity oriented around religion is nonetheless slotted into the same nationalist grammar set out by the colonial project. This is what Michael Billig (1995: 80) refers to as the “universal codes of nationhood” – a set of rules structuring the international performance of nationhood that defines the contemporary state system. Nationalism, he argues, is inherently mimetic: “To claim to be a nation is to imagine one’s group to fit a common, universal pattern” (Billig 1995: 85).

Boundaries between “tradition” and “modernity” have always been built into the discursive disciplining of nationalism, but are of special concern in postcolonial or new states, where anxieties about being taken seriously on the international stage are particularly high and governmental legitimacy may be in question (Barrington 2006; Geertz 1973; Hansen and Stepputat 2001). In such settings, narrating a nation’s modernity are often amplified. But as with any nationalism, visions of modernity must be articulated through a simultaneously global *and* local grammar. The joint aspiration and anxiety of claims to national uniqueness *and* modernity are approached differently around the Muslim world. Nationalists necessarily learn across national borders, but they may not look to all places equally for their lessons. InterAsian referencing is one result of this broader dynamic (Koch 2013, 2018; Moser 2012; Rizvi 2015).

An interAsian lens on Islamism is thus useful in understanding monumental mosques, which have become important sites at which nationalists and Islamists have come together in many parts of the world to focalize their claims to a *modern* expression of Islam. How this works in and across Asia is a complicated and ever-changing story, but the remainder of the chapter will consider two such cases – from Kazakhstan and Qatar. Part of a larger study of monumental mosques across Asia, which also included Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei, the present examples also reflect the same trends explored there: (1) each is the result of top-down, government planning and designed to represent a “new” symbolic order representing state-defined nationalism; (2) each was designed to be an iconic architectural showpiece in the country’s capital city; and (3) each is set apart, aesthetically and experientially, from other places of worship within its national context (Koch et al. 2018: 185). Together, these examples show how the making of Muslim subjectivities, the politics of representation, and the production of urban space are all united and contested through the monumental mosque – across Asia and beyond.

State-led Islamism: Kazakhstan’s Traditional Modernity (Hazret Sultan Mosque)

In Kazakhstan, modernity has been inscribed in the built environment through the grand capital city development scheme in Astana, which was recently renamed “Nur-Sultan,” but referred to here as Astana for clarity. The city has been the capital of independent Kazakhstan since 1997

and its redevelopment has been presided over by the Kazakhstan's first president in the post-Soviet era, Nursultan Nazarbayev, whose autocratic rule defined the country's entire independence period – from 1991 until his surprise resignation in March 2019. The massive state investment in transforming the city from a run-down Soviet town in the steppe, Tselinograd, to a glimmering beacon of “modernity” in has been defined by monumentality (see Bissenova 2013, 2016, 2017; Fauve, 2015a, 2015b, 2019; Koch 2010, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2018b; Laszczkowski 2011a, 2011b, 2013, 2015, 2016).

Among the many new icons populating the remade and newly-built urban landscape, the Hazret Sultan Mosque is the newest mosque built there (**Figure 1.1**). With a 5000-person capacity, it is the largest in Kazakhstan and one of the largest in Central Asia. Size was clearly important to Nazarbayev, who specifically congratulated the “Kazakh people” on “opening Kazakhstan’s biggest mosque” during its inauguration (quoted in Kilner 2012). The ceremony was held on 6 July 2012, which is a national holiday, Astana Day, that marks the moving of the capital to Astana (from Almaty). Astana Day is also the birthday of President Nazarbayev, who has fused his persona with the spectacular city scheme. Indeed, it is for this reason that the city was again renamed in 2019 – Nur-Sultan being the leader’s first name.



Figure 1.1. Hazret Sultan Mosque, Astana, Kazakhstan. Source: Natalie Koch, July 2013.

A major goal of the government's Astana development scheme has been to populate the city with major, iconic buildings, representing the independent state's national values and its newly capitalist orientation (Koch 2014, 2018b). Communicating the nationalist claims to modernity are a significant goal served by this search for iconicity. However, these projects are also means for political elites to enrich themselves, as they use big-ticket construction contracts to funnel state funds to private companies headquartered abroad (Koch 2015, 2016, 2018b). This broader

money laundering dynamic is dominated by only a few companies. Headquartered in Turkey, Sembol Construction Company is one such firm and it is widely understood in Kazakhstan that it is controlled by President Nazarbayev himself. Many of the high-profile buildings in Astana have been developed by Sembol and the Hazret Sultan Mosque is among them. Nazarbayev's state support for a monumental mosque in the capital city may truly have rhetorical and political goals, but it also fits squarely into how the leader has personally enriched himself throughout his presidency.

In addition to the economic incentive of developing the monumental Hazret Sultan Mosque, state control of the capital's religious landscape has also been an important aspect of how Nazarbayev and his team of urban planners have sought to articulate a new nationalist identity narrative. From early on in his rule, the leader specifically focused on promoting a narrative of religious "tolerance." This is exemplified with one of Nazarbayev's pet projects: hosting a triennial "Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions" beginning in 2003. After the first Congress, he decreed that a special site be developed for the event – the Palace of Peace and Accord, colloquially referred to as the "Pyramid." Since its opening in 2006, the structure has been a fixture of the government's effort to craft the president as a promoter of inter-faith dialogue and tolerance, and the wider national identity project of constructing Kazakhstan as a "crossroads" of world religions and cultures (Koch 2010: 769-787). This nationalist identity narrative is set in stark contrast to "religious extremism," which Nazarbayev has always framed as fundamentally *un-Kazakh*. For example, in a February 2005 address to the nation, President Nazarbayev first stressed the dangers of religious extremism:

All of the world's religions have left their mark on the Kazakh soil, which explains why we are strangers to intolerance and religious fanaticism. This spiritual tradition, this openness to the Word of God in any instantiation is one of the most important foundations of inter-faith accord in Kazakhstan. We are known throughout the world for our tolerance, interethnic and interfaith accord and dialogue. The growing peace-making potential of our country should be preserved and nurtured with great care. (Nazarbayev 2005)

For Nazarbayev, Kazakh observation of Islam has always been one of "moderation" – a narrative that is not only common across the Central Asian states, but also a major legacy of Soviet-era assault on religion.

Soviet policies effectively cut Central Asian Islam off "from its own past and from Muslims outside the Soviet Union," causing it to become deeply "localized and rendered synonymous with custom and tradition" (Khalid 2007: 82-83). To be sure, the severing of national communities from "globalized Islam" is a common pattern throughout the Muslim world (Mandaville 2007). In the Soviet Union, as globally, state-led efforts to do so has been seen as a way to stave off the politicization of Islam or – perhaps worse for strict authoritarian regimes – Islamist use of religious discourse to critique government authorities and question their legitimacy. Accordingly, from the Soviet times and into the era of independence in Central Asia, the ruling regimes have been wary of letting the state's monopoly on religious discourse slip from their grasp – preferring instead to articulate it as synonymous with "national" identity and "traditional" (Akiner 2003; Hanks 2016; Khalid 2003, 2007; Louw 2007; McGlinchey 2016; Peshkova 2014; Peyrouse 2007; Roy 2000). As Kangas (2006: 198) puts it, the goal of the newly

independent but firmly authoritarian states of Central Asia was “to create a system that is secular, while still utilizing the public discourse of Islam when referring to the cultural heritage of the populations. Within this system, it is nevertheless important to create a generic form of Islam that is culturally enticing, but ultimately politically neutered.”

The Hazret Sultan Mosque symbolizes this broader effort in Kazakhstan, whereby the Nazarbayev regime adopts the Islamist practice of appropriating key ideas and tropes of Islam to articulate a particular vision of religion and its “proper” place in society. Like the Palace of Peace and Accord before it, the monumental mosque in the heart of the modern new capital city reflects the government’s effort to focalize Nazarbayev’s vision of religious identity in Kazakhstan – specifically articulating Islam as a *national* tradition. This is underscored by the symbolic choice to locate the massive new mosque across the street from the Pyramid, and adjacent to the Palace of Independence and its large Independence Square with a 90-meter obelisk, the “Kazakh Eli” monument, visible in Figure 1.1. Alima Bissenova argues that the location is indicative of a broader trend of “rapprochement” between the Kazakhstani state and Islam because it emphasizes that the mosque is not only state-sanctioned, but state-promoted: “erecting a mosque in the symbolic center of the nation – near the Kazakh Eli monument – could not happen without the approval of the highest authorities, including the Architectural Council under the president and President Nazarbayev himself” (Bissenova 2016: 212). Since the Architectural Council oversees any development along the main East-West axis of capital’s master plan, the mosque’s siting as an anchor at the eastern edge, adjacent to Palace of Peace and Accord and surrounding Presidential Park, is an especially significant symbolic gesture of the state-sanctioned ideals in the spiritual realm. Notably, the western end of the axis is anchored by the Foster + Partners-designed “Khan Shatyr” shopping mall, which is iconic of the newly capitalist orientation of independent Kazakhstan (Koch 2014). The plan for the axis and the place of the iconic structures within it has shifted with time and development (for example, the older, Qatari-funded Nur-Astana mosque now occupies a less symbolic role toward the central Baiterek tower), but its overall vision has remained consistent as an effort to rhetorically and physically narrate the country’s “Eurasian” identity of fusing east and west (**Figure 1.2**).

The nationalistically-imbued Islamism seen in Kazakhstan today clearly fits within the “eastern” end of this spectrum, insofar as it is supposed to represent the Kazakh tradition. In this respect, it speaks in the language of populism. Stylistically, though, the Hazret Sultan Mosque striking white marble exterior is markedly different from the quintessential Timurid architecture associated with “Central Asian” tradition, which dots southern Kazakhstan and neighboring countries (**Figure 1.3**). Its sheer monumentality also sets it apart other, smaller mosques around the country. In addition to the siting and the size, then this allegedly populist version of Islamism written into the design of the Hazret Sultan Mosque is emphatically state-controlled. Indeed, as in the Soviet system, state agencies continue to monitor and control religious observance in Kazakhstan, where independent practice has been systematically quashed through a series of oppressive laws shutting down smaller mosques, banning religious attire, and more (Kumenov 2018; Lillis 2012a, 2012b; Schenkan 2012). In Bissenova’s ethnographic study of state-controlled sermons and prayer patterns at the Hazret Sultan Mosque, she traces what she terms “the étatisation of Islam” in Kazakhstan and shows how leaders have turned the mosque into “a state ideological apparatus” that goes well beyond “making the mosque part of the national landscape and a state-sanctioned public space” (Bissenova 2016: 212). But the monumental size

and opulent display of the capital's grand new mosque operates is important for its ability to amplify and privilege the state's vision of Islam and practice. Like any monument, it is designed to loudly broadcast the state's message – which is allegedly one of tolerance and support of Islam and local Muslim communities, but ultimately diverting attention from smaller-scale suppressions of religious freedom.



Figure 1.2. Map of “Left Bank” development axis in Nur-Sultan (Astana). Source: Suzanne Harris-Brandts (*modified with permission*).

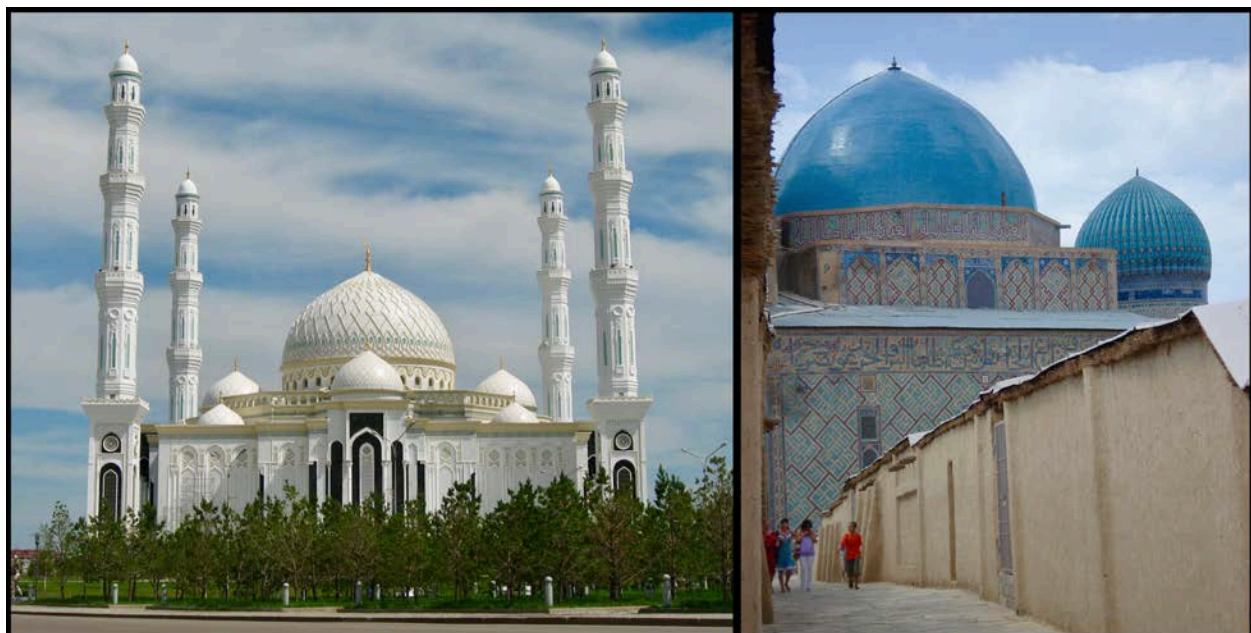


Figure 1.3. Hazret Sultan Mosque (left) and Timurid architecture at the Mausoleum of Khawaja Ahmed Yasawi in Turkestan (right). Source: Natalie Koch, July 2013 and August 2009.

Future-focused Islamism: Qatar's Knowledge Economy (Education City Mosque)

In Qatar, like Kazakhstan, modernity has been a major theme in the grand capital city development scheme in Doha, where it is built into the landscape in many ways. The large-scale investments in the city have been going on for several decades and parallel to a broader trend across the Gulf Arab states to showcase their prosperity and hyper-modern vision for the nation's future through iconic new towers, hotels, museums, sports venues and more (see Adham 2008; Exell 2016, 2018; Gierlichs 2014; Hutzell et al. 2015; Koch 2014, 2018a, 2018b, 2019a, 2019b; Mahgoub and Qawasmeh 2012; Mtapuri and Giampiccoli 2017; Rizzo 2013; Salama and Wiedmann 2013). Qatar's citizenship laws are such that only about 10 percent of its population are citizens. Due to property regulations and large state-provided benefits, these individuals are those who stand to profit most from the continuous urban development in Doha. So as in Astana, it is simultaneously a project to broadcast *and* distribute wealth (Koch 2015, 2018b). But in Qatar, the iconic projects of the capital are very explicitly elite projects, as most are sponsored by the Qatar Foundation (QF).

QF was founded as a nonprofit organization by the former Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani in 1995, and is headed by his wife Sheikha Moza bint Nasser. Putting education at the center of their development agenda, their mission is to promote “sustainable human capacity, social, and economic prosperity for a knowledge-based economy” (QF 2020). One of QF's first projects was to launch the Education City initiative to bring together a range of foreign branch campuses, like Texas A&M, Carnegie Mellon and Georgetown, in a single complex on the outskirts of Doha. From its inception in 1998, the focus was on Western education and each university within the enormous Education City compound has its own stand-alone building. Many indeed aspire to be icons, as QF has used the project to broadcast its modernity and its science-oriented vision for building a “knowledge economy” of the future (Ahmadi 2015; Gray et al. 2017; Kane 2015; Koch 2018a; Koch and Vora 2019; Mitchell 2015; Mitchell et al. 2015; Rizzo 2016; Vora 2015, 2018).

It was not until 2010 that the QF opened a local university at Education City – Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU). The vision for the university has shifted dramatically over the years, but as the home of the College of Islamic Studies. HBKU was originally supposed to be located in the Qatar Faculty of Islamic Studies (QFIS) building, which was subsequently renamed as the “Minaretein Building”. Designed by London and Barcelona-based Mangera Yvars Architects, the building was opened in 2015 – and with it came the opening of the first mosque in Education City (**Figure 1.4**). While Doha's Education City complex might not appear to be a logical site for a monumental mosque, it actually fits the Islamist agenda and the broader trends of monumentality in many more respects than might initially meet the eye. This is because QF has been the most important force in defining a new, modern Qatari national identity. That definition has been contentious among Qataris, however, as some portions of the citizenry are anxious that the country might lose its national and religious distinctness if it appropriates too much Western culture, ideals, money, and indeed, education (Vora 2018).



Figure 1.4. Education City Mosque, Doha, Qatar. Source: Natalie Koch, December 2014.

Integrating a monumental new mosque into the Education City complex, then, was an essential way for QF to signal its commitment to religious ideals and deploy the Islamist tactic of inscribing this narrative into the urban landscape. The inaugural Friday prayer services were presided over by Sheikha Moza. With a joint indoor and outdoor capacity of only 1800 people, the Education City Mosque does not aspire to be the biggest in all of Qatar. Rather, its monumental nature derives primarily from its symbolism within QF’s broader science-based development agenda. This is embodied in its ultra-modern architectural design – most notable for its two exceptionally unique minarets looking like a Nike swoosh (**Figure 1.5**) – and the fact that it is directly integrated with educational facilities. A Foundation press release elaborates:

QFIS is the only indigenous Qatari university on the Education City campus. In the building, Qatar Foundation aims to revive the traditional model of the madrasa, where both worship and knowledge are united in one place. It combines Education City Mosque with the Qatar Faculty of Islamic Studies, a college of Hamad bin Khalifa University. The building is a futuristic piece of architecture that is inspired in its very essence by the long valued architecture of the Muslim world. The design architects, Ali Mangera and Ada Yvars Bravo studied the Muslim landmarks across history and distilled their research in values that they then depicted within the building’s spaces. They mainly focused on two notions: knowledge and light. The entire building, combining both the faculty and the mosque, carry numerous symbols and poetic references to Islam and its civilization.

Not only do we encounter the conflation of Islamist and nationalist tropes of “indigenous” Qatari identity here, but we also see their association with the ruling family’s narrative of modernity defined by a dedication to education. An unequivocal focus on *knowledge*, the nationalist scripts pervaded all social and political realms suggest, is the only way for a prosperous *future*.



Figure 5. Education City Mosque, Doha, Qatar.
Source: Natalie Koch, December 2014.

Embodying these multiple future-oriented threads, the Education City Mosque was thus designed to be integrated with the Islamic college, and the building also houses 54 classrooms, faculty offices, a library, and hosts multiple research centers, including the Al Qaradawi Centre for Islamic Moderation and Renewal, the Centre for Islamic Economics and Finance, the Centre for the Study of Contemporary Muslim Societies and the Mohammed Bin Hamad Al Thani Centre for Muslim Contribution to Civilization, and the Center for Islamic Legislation and Ethics (D’mello 2015).¹ An architectural statement about the building elaborates on this integrated design:

QFIS is based on the Islamic “Kulliyya” or “place where all knowledge is sought” and the building provides a progressive learning environment which places the institution at the forefront of contemporary Islamic pedagogy countering the pejorative image of Islamic education. The Kulliyya implies that knowledge and faith are interwoven but that all knowledge ultimately comes from faith (Architonic 2015).

¹ In addition to these various centers, HBKU’s College of Islamic Studies includes Master’s program in Applied Islamic Ethics; Islam and Global Affairs; Islamic Studies; Islamic Art, Architecture and Urbanism; Islamic Finance, and a PhD program in Islamic Finance and Economy (HBKU 2020). The Education City Mosque also hosts a wide range of community events, which it advertises on its Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/ecmosque/>

Moving from this forward-looking narrative, in which a Qatari Islamism is imagined to value religious education in itself, the statement then shifts to emphasize how this sets Qatar apart – and above – places that might not be so committed to its progressive ideals:

QFIS has rapidly become a focal point not only for students but for the wider community, enabling the building to break down barriers of class and social-status. In a troubled world, QFIS suggests that an Islamic space can be contemporary, progressive and inclusive but, above all, can act as a beacon of hope in opposition to nihilistic conflict that has gripped the Middle East region. (Ibid.)

These examples vividly illustrate how negotiations between Islamisms and contemporary currents have influenced the narrative imposed on the building, but also how the building itself is used to re-define religious identity in Qatar and, theoretically, serve as a “beacon” for others to follow. Only an iconic site aspires to being a beacon and it is thus that the Education City Mosque is decided monumental.

Integrating the mosque into QF’s iconic new university sites and education-oriented spaces, is one way that hegemonic Qatari Islamism is focalized and, in so doing, its designers have aimed (or claimed) to promote the “right” kind of Muslim subjectivities among its students. The iconicity of the hypermodern architectural design – and it truly is a photogenic building – has been an important means for its planners to underscore and amplify the ideological narratives about an equally “modern” understanding of Islam and Qatari national identity, long promoted by QF and the Qatari government. Yet largely because of the “West”-facing orientation of their modernization campaign, Qatar’s leaders have been at pains to ensure that they highlight the ultimate “rootedness” of their ambitious development plans in national and religious values (Koch 2014, 2019a). The Education City Mosque’s unique, ultra-modern minarets, looking almost like a Nike swoosh, are a good example of how planners have tried to exemplify the possibility of “fusing” global, techno-scientific idea(l)s with local mores. This, together with the mosque’s surrounding educational facilities, points to its symbolic role not just as a religious site, but as a monument to Sheikh Hamad and Sheikha Moza’s future-oriented understanding of their faith, progress, and nationalist ideals in Qatar rooted in knowledge.

InterAsian Islamism

Monumental mosques offer a unique insight into the “glocalness” of Islamism, as they become sites for nationalists and Islamists (and their many allies) to unite their ideological orientations and inscribe them into the built environment. By parsing the tropes of Islamic identity, values, and worldviews, specific actors – whether cultural and political elites or ordinary people – can craft their own understanding of what the “good” version of religion and religious identity might look like. This basic practice is what this volume’s approach to Islamism begins with. But as with all practices, they are infinitely diverse and can be applied in the most surprising ways. The state-led Islamism in Kazakhstan and future-focused Islamism in Qatar might seem exceptional or surprising to some observers, but they actually fit within a broader set of power structures, including the global history of colonialism, nationalism, state-defined citizenship regimes, political economy, regional geopolitics, and more. As political leaders navigate these

complicated and overlapping systems, they invariably come up against a challenge of how best to concretize the ideological scripts they have found useful in mapping a route forward. Monumental mosques, I have suggested, are one such solution.

The state-led and future-focused Islamisms in Kazakhstan and Qatar are not dissimilar. In fact, the state's monopolization of discourses about what "modern" Islam looks like and how it is practiced is a hallmark of both contexts. Indeed, this interAsian learning *across* contexts has defined how state-builders and Islamists have thought about Kazakhstan's development for decades – and the Gulf region is precisely where they have looked for inspiration, as it is seen by local leaders as representing the most "modern" part of the Muslim World (Koch 2013, 2015, 2018b). In addition to financial flows, such as the Qatari support for the Islamic Cultural Center and Nur-Astana Mosque, initiated as early as 1999, flows of ideas have been an essential binding glue for the two countries (Koch 2017) – not only about the symbolic power of developing impressive new architectural icons to populate a spectacular capital city, but also how these monumental mosque landscapes can reinforce state control of religious discourse, while also stamping out alternative views.

This thread of Islamism – interweaving themes of the future and state control – may be understood or narrated today as distinctly *interAsian*, insofar as the actors from Kazakhstan and Qatar are directly engaging one another and participating in the same discursive theater, but the monumental mosques themselves are part of a much broader history of monumentality. Lenin, after all, cherished the idea of crafting Moscow's built environment around an idea of "monumental propaganda": "It was to be public art that wrote history onto urban space. The masses would see history as they moved through the city. The revolution entered the phenomenal world of the everyday" (Buck-Morss 2000, 42). In the case of the monumental mosques considered here, this goal of public edification is crucial to the logic of their construction, (aside from the elite financial aims, of course). But rather than highlight nationalist scripts focused on history, as in Lenin's vision, they advance a nationalism focused on religious identity that is nonetheless oriented toward a utopian vision of the future.

Future-oriented nationalisms invariably focus on that "incomplete universal," modernity. Its incompleteness is what makes defining modernity a political act. But as noted at the outset, any political actor seeking to dominate the definition of modernity also struggles with the problem of *focalizing* it, of giving substance to an abstraction. Built landscapes and iconic structures, like the monumental mosques discussed here, are therefore important sites for state-builders and Islamists to unite in this effort. Yet when they loudly proclaim their nation's modernity through such mosques, they have been forced to reckon with Western secularist notions of religion as somehow backward or backward-looking. In a world tightly bound by this hegemonic vision of nation-ness, Islamists aspiring that elusive ideal of modernity learn from one another: they see their counterparts in other parts of the Muslim world also struggling to define and appropriate modernity for themselves. This cross-contextual learning has resulted in many kinds of interAsian Islamisms. And even though Islamist architecture may in fact be "overdetermined" by colonial legacies and Western stigmatization of Islam, the Hazret Sultan Mosque and the Education City Mosque illustrate how their authors and builders are not merely resigned to the mimetic relationship of subordinating the center to the periphery. Rather, an interAsian perspective allows us to see how multiple Islamisms and multiple modernities are

articulated in two very different corners of the Muslim world, but in strikingly similar ways. These commonalities in the built environment are the surprising effect of Islamist ideology – noble and vague style that it may be.

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