

The Social Practices And Their Architectural Reflections On The Dwelling In The M'zab Valley Traditional

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Abstract:

The traditional architecture in the M'zab Valley was a real response to the needs of the natural community and a direct reflection of its lifestyle, nature of activities, environmental requirements, individual and collective life practices within the intellectual system and its natural framework. Therefore, we do not find any part in this architecture that does not serve a specific function or symbolize a certain goal, considering that all material production in this society is a homogeneous and harmonious expression between needs, aspirations, goals, religious values, organizations and interactive social relationships with nature and climatic factors. Thus, architectural production in general and traditional housing in M'zab specifically testify to all these values and ideas manifested in their patterns, plans, units and architectural elements, It was necessary to study the impact of these social organizations and practices on the traditional dwelling in M'zab, considering it as a fundamental urban unit in shaping its palaces and a real product that reflects the values and ideas of this society. And since the dwelling is part of this human production, its relationship with social practice is a strong and organic relationship.

Keywords: M'zab Valley, Social Practices, Architecture, Traditional Dwelling.

Introduction:

The topic of social practices and traditional architecture is considered a crossroads between what is social and what is historical. This integrated scientific view makes the subject of housing go beyond its material framework and gives it social dimensions that are in harmony with the dwelling, to the point where we can hardly distinguish between the architectural, social, and cultural aspects of the inhabitant.

Mouzabite architecture is not far from this view, as in its early folds it falls within what is known as the city or kosour in the traditional sense. The spiritual religious aspect cannot be neglected or separated distinctly in the emergence of Mouzabites kosours, as they represent an embodiment of Islamic order with all its spirituality and completeness.

This framework becomes more defined in housing, considering it as a space for family internally, while also representing a facade facing other dwellings in Mouzabite society; hence it is personal and social at the same time.

The value of the subject is manifested in affirming and understanding the social aspect of housing and its relationship with it, considering that modern architectural studies have emphasized its social aspect, as they noticed that housing has become a dry material devoid of any intellectual and social influence. Although these studies have recently begun in this field, we find that their embodiment is rooted in shaping the Islamic city since the history of Islam, especially in Valley M'zab. Also, despite the fact that architecture in Valley M'zab shares and participates in desert architecture in housing, we find differences from them and it distinguishes itself from them. This is due to the social practices immersed in it and distinguishing it from other buildings. Here we pose the problem: How did social practices affect traditional housing in Valley M'zab?

First: Social practice and housing from separation to meeting:

The dwelling is considered a material space with specific dimensions and multiple elements, representing the smallest unit in the city. We find that dwellings differ between regions due to the nature of the climate and building materials available in each area.

The concept of housing has transitioned from a material perspective to a deeper social perspective. Christian Norberg-

Schulz sees housing as: "more than just a roof over our heads and a number of square meters at our disposal; it is firstly an encounter with others for exchanging products, ideas, and emotions – experiencing life as different possibilities. Secondly, it means reaching agreement with them and accepting a set of shared values"¹.

This quote is rich in important ideas about housing:

Housing is not just a material aspect, but it brings individuals together in one space.

Dwelling means encountering others, meaning that the individual in the dwelling interacts with other individuals who are gathered with him at the same time. Here, social practice begins to influence and be influenced.

Dwelling is a life experience, meaning that the dwelling is a vessel into which the community pours all of its culture or most of it. This means that housing is affected by social practices approved and accepted by society, and conversely, housing rejects social practices rejected by society.

Housing involves accepting a set of common values. Here, housing becomes the basic building block for communal living, and communal living is a social practice that any city seeks to achieve. This communal living especially increases in cities based on religious social practices, as we will see in traditional dwellings in valley M'zab where the city relies on fundamental Islamic ideas.

Social practices mean all the life activities, spiritual and material, individual or collective that are subject to a set of relationships²:

1. The relationship of the human with his Lord.
2. The relationship of the human with the universe.
- 2.1. The relationship of the human with other humans.
- 2.2. The relationship of the human with nature.

The Islamic law has established social and behavioral values, and it obligates individuals within the Islamic community to adhere to these rules and not deviate from them. One of these rules that the Sharia has put in place, which has had a significant impact in the field of architecture, is the rights of neighbors. The right of neighbors encompasses almost all construction regulations because a neighbor is defined by property, not individuals. Therefore, when an individual moves to another place and someone else takes their place, that person becomes your neighbor. When an individual engages in construction, they are obligated to follow the provisions of

Islamic law from the very beginning until the completion of the construction process. This obligation is absolute in some cases and not so in others³.

A Muslim individual is obliged not to harm anything on earth; therefore, they should not encroach upon their neighbor's property by taking part of their courtyard or causing damage to their wall or obstructing sunlight and air for them. They have the freedom to build whatever rooms they wish but should also exercise restraint as Islamic tradition calls for economy and discourages extravagance in construction.

Secondly: The social and architectural structure in valley M'zab in the past:

We find that the social practices in M'zab have been reflected throughout history through the Ibadi doctrine, which is focused on Islamic creed, and thus we find the emergence of social practices through institutions and social organizations that sought to apply religious ideas, especially in architecture. The social organization in M'zab takes the form of a group called "Halakat Al-Azzaba," which is a limited number group representing the elite of the people of the country in knowledge and righteousness. This group supervises all the affairs of the Ibadi community: religious affairs, educational affairs, social affairs, and political affairs. During times of emergence and defense, it represents the Shoura council for the Imam or his representative, while during times of buying or concealment; it represents the Imam and performs his work⁴. The Halakat Al-Azzaba consists of⁵:

- 1- The Sheikh of the Halakat Al-Azzaba: called the Sheikh Baba and is at the top of the pyramid and is the most knowledgeable in the Halakat and the wisest.
- 2- The advisors: their number is four and they do not leave the Sheikh, and their role is to participate in the Sheikh's decisions, and they are the highest rank in the circle after the Sheikh Baba.
- 3- The Imam: responsible for prayer and may be one of the four members of the advisors, and the same applies to the muezzin.
- 4- Waqf agents: two people responsible for managing the waqf, regulating the incomes and expenditures in the Halakat budget, and they are chosen from among the people of integrity and trustworthiness.
- 5- Teachers: a group of Halakat members specializing in teaching and organizing education, and they must be knowledgeable, competent, and Quranic memorizers.

6- Erwans or Quran bearers: a group of students who have memorized the Quran, representing the force that continues and acts on behalf of the Halakat Al-Azzaba, similar to the House of Representatives for the Sheikhs.

The social practices in Valley M'zab were reflected through the Halakat Al-Azzaba and their tight and organized management of individuals' lives, through duties they perform.

The duties of the Halakat are definite and are the responsibility of the Al-Azzaba as a body. These duties can be summarized as follows⁶:

1- Supervising education and providing the means for it, facilitating ways for all children to receive education, learn a part of the Quran and their religious matters. This is the least that can be provided for the child. If the child's family is poor and cannot support him during study times, they must provide assistance by spending on him.

2- Considering the social status of people, facilitating life for the poor and weak, and finding work for everyone by demanding that the rich and leftists seek help from the poor to accomplish their work in exchange for wages, which is often appointed by members of the Halakat Al-Azzaba.

3- Resolving the problems that arise between people, adjudicating their issues, and ruling between them in their disputes, and ensuring that rights are delivered to their rightful owners.

4- Supervising the endowments of mosques, and the budget of the Halakat Al-Azzaba or controlling the incoming and outgoing, and spending all of that in its proper place, working on the development and reform of fixed endowments, and utilizing them in the best way.

5- Preserving the markets and monitoring them to prevent transactions that are not permitted by Sharia, or the return of suspicious funds to them.

6- Organizing night guarding of people's assets from agriculture and livestock so that they are not reached by the hands of raiding, theft, and harm.

7- Judging sinners and criminals and disciplining them, declaring innocence from them, and cutting off dealing with them until they repent and return to God.

8- Establishing and organizing foreign relations, whether they are relations of war or peace.

These are some of the tasks assigned to the Council of Halakat Al-Azzaba as a body responsible for the community before God and people, and the body should distribute the work among the members according to efficiency and capability, and the

one who does that is the sheikh after the Halakat Al-Azzaba agreement.

The elements of the Mouzabite architecture are: the mosque, the roads, the market, and the residence. These four elements are intertwined and form the Mouzabite city, which is characterized by the religious foundation that derives its strength from the principles of Islam, as well as being characterized by the facing pairs, represented as follows⁷:

- First husband: Internal / External.
- Second husband: Public / Private.
- Third husband: Religious / Worldly.
- Fourth husband: Alive / Dead.
- Fifth husband: Masculine / Feminine.

The fifth husband follows (Male/Female) other spouses determined by age, including the young, the old, the boy, and the young man, then the young man and the middle-aged, and then the middle-aged and the old man.



Photo (1): An aerial picture of the Spaces engineering in the kosours of Valley M'zab - The Qaser of Tagherdayt.

Thirdly: Social Practices and Traditional Housing:

The dwelling is the space that contains the family in particular, and for this reason, it is necessary to pay attention to defining the housing pattern. In addition, housing is an integrated unit of spaces that have been designed to suit activities and relationships. The dwelling also represents an application of Islamic values and principles for the Muslim family, the most important of which are mercy, affection, and solidarity, as Allah says: "And of His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates that you may find tranquility in them; and He

placed between you affection and mercy. Indeed in that are signs for a people who give thought". (Ar-Rum: 21).

The dwelling can also be analyzed through the interior pattern of the dwelling, as well as the exterior pattern that determines the relationship of the dwelling and its occupants with other dwellings.

1- The nature of the Mouzabite family:

Hiba El-Haj Ramadan says in his social study about the Mouzabite family⁸: "Its size sometimes exceeded three generations living together in a common life. It is a unified and independent social and economic institution, organized under one authority, which is the authority of the father, grandfather, or eldest brother." This means that the family maintains communication for three generations and sometimes more, indicating the strength of the family's cultural, ethical, and moral cohesion. This means that the Mouzabite family plays a role in preserving the heritage of the ancestors.

Hiba El-Haj Ramadan also adds: "The architectural pattern in this context relies on increasing the number of rooms to accommodate more individuals without their lives being completely independent. This is evident in other living facilities such as the kitchen, bathroom, house courtyard, roof, and others, which are designed in a way that supports communal life while respecting the separation between the male and female spaces"⁹.

This indicates two basic ideas in the design: the emphasis on a spacious housing pattern that affects the psychology and comfort of the residents, and the second idea is the separation, especially between men and women. Therefore, this housing considers this specificity, acknowledges the distinction and specificity between men and women, which is called in modern social studies gender.

2- The division of labor within the traditional Mouzabite household:

The predominant feature of the Mouzabite household is that it is the space reserved for the woman, and she is the only one who enjoys it, so she acts in it without restriction and is responsible for everything that happens in it, unlike the man who "only appears at specific times, such as when eating or during the day"¹⁰.

Social practice appears in the relationship of a man with his family when he enters, where he cannot enter his home without permission, to give a symbolic indication of veiling

himself, whether from visiting women or women whom it is not permissible to meet. The Sheikh Mohammed ben Yusef Atfayaish says: "If he knows that there are those whose gaze is not permissible to be uncovered, he must not enter without presenting what he knows about his entry and after waiting for as long as it takes to cover, and if he does not know whether it is permissible to be uncovered or not, it is good for him to present that and wait for it, like moving the door chain and coughing and speaking"¹¹.

The presence of a man in the house without a need is considered shameful for him, according to custom, as in the popular saying: "A lamp at noon is more useful than a man staying at home." Therefore, a man's place is outside the dwelling for work, hardship, and defense, while a woman represents the home, meaning tranquility, calmness, and stability.

In addition, the appearance of social practice is evident in the cohesion within the Mouzabite family, with its members forming several households within one dwelling. However, the roles are not divided according to households, but rather according to gender and age. Thus, the family is only visible within the room between the husband and wife, while the children and other family members perform their roles according to gender and age, regardless of the specific family's activities in the remaining rooms. The ground floor rooms are designated for the grandparents, parents, and the first generation, while the first floor rooms are designated for the newlywed couples.

This means that the division of roles within the family dwelling resembles the division of roles in Mouzabite society in the qaser, where cooperation is based on the gender and age of each individual to benefit the entire community. Therefore, "the Mouzabite family is a miniature example of the entire society, with the division of functions connecting its elements to each other. The dwelling is a miniature example of the entire qaser, including a public area, a men's area, a women's area, and a children's area. The rooms in the dwelling are like the residences in the Qaser"¹².

3- The structure of the traditional Mouzabite dwelling and its components:

The traditional dwelling in the M'zab Valley takes its general character from the residential character of the communities overlooking the Mediterranean and North Africa, by relying on the void in the dwelling so that the sun can illuminate and

ventilate the house, and the dwelling generally consists of two floors.

Nevertheless, there remains a local specificity of the Mouzabite dwelling through the influence of social practice in the design, as well as resistance to the conditions of the desert environment.

All the dwellings in M'zab share essential elements that vary in their scales with minor differences between one dwelling and another, and are distributed between the two floors according to each element and its role.

The ground floor contains from the outside in:

- The threshold.
- The veranda.
- The courtyard.
- Two reception rooms for men and women.
- Bedrooms.

- The hearth (kitchen).
- A sink.
- A toilet.
- Stairs.

As for the upper floor, it contains:

- The roof.
- The corridor.
- Bedrooms.
- A toilet.
- Purified.

If the dwelling is large and owned by a wealthy person, a lower floor is usually added, which is a space for prayer or storage. Additionally, to the ground floor, a stable for animals, a space for goats, a storage room, and a room or suite for guests are added.

As for the upper floor, a room or suite for guests and a storage for dates are added.

The need for functions in the dwelling according to the family members is the reason for the differences between small and large dwellings, because building in large dwellings without need is considered wasteful and is prohibited religiously and socially. Before delving into specifying the elements in detail, we find that the first thing we see in the dwelling is the facade.

3-1- The facades:

Social life in the M'zab is characterized by a lack of any signs of arrogance or superiority, to the point that we can hardly distinguish between rich and poor in practices such as

weddings or architecture, for example. In the facades of the houses, we find them lacking in decorative shapes or inscriptions, but they are nothing more than equal ordinary walls in height, with only a wooden door And a prominent gutter for rainwater to escape with some small openings distributed on the ground floor and the upper floor according to the space of the dwelling¹³. This similarity indicates the homogeneity within the Mouzabite society despite the differences in industries, works, and professions, indicating the value of equality among people and the absence of superiority even through construction.

3-2- The Sakifa:

The sakifain the M'zab takes its place in the corner of the dwelling, as is the case with the dwellings in North Africa, and is locally called "taskift". It is considered a space that separates and isolates acoustically between the inside of the dwelling and the outside. While it is impossible to see what is inside the dwelling from the outside, the veranda is monitored from the inside through an opening that is usually between it and the courtyard or the center of the house. As the sakifa is considered a waiting space for those seeking permission to enter, the sakifa ends with a transitional space that separates it from the center of the house, typically used for grinding grains like wheat using a millstone fixed in a corner of it, locally called "tahja"¹⁴.

The presence of a sakifa is of great importance in ventilating the dwelling, because its previous characteristics allow the door to remain open all day, creating an air current between it and the window opening that helps to provide a suitable climate in the dwelling, especially in the hot summer season¹⁵. In addition to the material aspect of the sakifa, a very important value is highlighted, which is the preservation of privacy, a sacred value for the Mouzabites, as the sakifa represents the preservation of the dwelling in the case of repeated opening of the door, especially unintentionally, so the canopy serves as a means of preserving the dwelling from the view of those inside.

3-3- The middle of the house:

The middle of the house in Maghrebian communities in general, and in the traditional Mouzabite dwelling in particular, is of great importance, because it is used for various purposes as it is semi-covered and not connected to the outside space, except through the window opening which can be covered

easily against sudden weather conditions. In addition to being a space for children to play, it represents the area where almost all household activities take place, starting from the kitchen where the stove occupies a corner of it, to washing dishes, clothes, and others. Also, as textile work is considered one of the most important activities for women, it usually occupies a specific and particular side of the middle of the house.

The middle of the house is also a place where children sleep at night when the weather is moderate, and it is used for religious holidays and celebrations, so the middle of the house is the main space in the dwelling¹⁶. Therefore, it represents the common bond between family members, which strengthens Mouzabite the individual's bond with the family, and also dispels the signs of isolation and introversion, which lead to detestable individualism.

3-4- The reception room for men:

Its direct connection is to the sakifa and its function is limited to men without women. It can be on the ground floor, in which case it is called a "room" or "Adwaira," or on the upper floor where it is more isolated from the daily activities of women, in which case it is called "la'li." It also has openings to the road or roof, and it is usually equipped with a staircase in the sakifa or next to it.

3-5- The women's reception room:

Is the space where a woman spends most of her day and receives her guests. It has been a fundamental site in the dwelling, occupying the best place in terms of orientation, usually facing the direction of prayer to enjoy the morning sun rays during the winter through the nearby horizontal window opening. This space is directly connected to the center of the house through a large opening without a door, as it is next to the sakifa without being opened, where a woman can monitor who wants to enter the dwelling through a small hole. As for the monitoring of the central courtyard, it is done through that large opening, and the staircase usually starts from the side of the women's reception room, so that it can be monitored without the woman having to go through the trouble of moving and thus stopping weaving. This space sometimes contains a stone mill so that one of the women can grind wheat without moving away from her companions¹⁷.

The other residential elements remain: the rooms, the kitchen, the storage room (bajou), the toilet (ajmir), the corridor

is prevented from exposing his neighbor, and the second is the shadow, where the neighbor is prevented from casting a shadow on his neighbor to the east and west, unless there is a building or leaving three arms of the shadow in the corners, crops, and plants in the eastern shadow not the western, considering that living in the corners is only in the summer when the western side is undesirable.

Conclusion:

Architectural heritage is one of the most important material sources about human social and cultural activities. It is a source of information that gives us the ability to retrieve lost information and find solutions and answers to new problems. It is the only source of information about people who lived and practiced activities in previous eras, through tracing human life, social life, and its developments.

Architecture has a set of characteristics based on intellectual, ideological, traditional, historical, environmental, climatic, and economic livelihood data. Each civilization is distinguished by a specific architecture, which largely reflects the lifestyle of its society, its approach to thinking, and therefore its social practices.

The relationship between architecture and society in M'zab is a relationship regulated by social and behavioral rules on one hand, and influenced by spatial and environmental determinants on the other. The social and behavioral rules in Islamic society are defined by Islamic law and its values, while the spatial determinants vary from one region to another, although the rulings of Islamic law and Islamic values do impact some of its organizational and legislative aspects. Thus, the relationship between architecture and Islamic society is actually a relationship defined by the rulings of Islamic law and social values.

Architectural output in general, and traditional housing in M'zab in particular, bear witness to all these values and ideas manifested in their patterns, layouts, architectural elements, and units. It was necessary to study the extent of the impact of these social organizations and practices in M'zab on traditional housing as a fundamental urban unit in shaping its kosours and as a real outcome that reflects the manifestations of the values and ideas of this society. Since housing is a part of this human production, its relationship with social practice is a strong and organic relationship.

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