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PHENOMENOLOGY OF BUILT ENVIRONMENT

INTERPRETING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
PEOPLE AND NATURE IN REMOTE COMMUNITIES:
THE SIWAN EXPERIENCE

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in Landscape Architecture
at
Lincoln University

by
Mervat El-Shafie

Lincoln University
1999
To earth, sky and five stars
Abstract of a thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Landscape Architecture

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The research problem is defined as how to interpret the impacts of modernity and globalization upon the quality of built environment and its phenomenal effect of "placelessness" of modern humans. The investigation approaches the problem by analogy, focusing upon the impact of modernity upon a remote desert community. Contemporary theoretical approaches to the problem of placelessness are outlined, and an argument made that a phenomenological perspective is fundamental to better understanding. A qualitative approach is therefore used as the methodological framework to explore different aspects of the way that built environment is expressed. Through this investigation the research seeks to better understand issues of development of built environment in countries such as Egypt.

An understanding of the experience of dwelling in a remote desert community is developed through the case study of Siwa oasis. The integration of inner and outer horizons of built environment in Siwa is revealed in the experience of everyday life of work, entertainment, rituals and belief. The relationship of humans to the natural environment was characterised in Siwa by the relationship between house and garden. The interconnection between everyday life experience, dwelling and society is expressed in layers of meaning in natural private and public space of built environment. It is concluded that our most fundamental relationships with nature are grounded in everyday life experiences that are involving, harmonious and ultimately reciprocal.

Key words
built environment, phenomenology, Siwa, vernacular architecture, cultural landscape, community in place, modernity, critical regionalism, grounded theory, analogy, dwelling experience, horizons of being, sense of place
PREFACE

We may explore the universal and find the particular, or we may explore the particular and find the universal. It matters not in which of these paths we travel. All that matters is that we explore, guided by our wish to find the truth.

Thus learning, investigating and interpreting, we evolve toward a holistic goal, knowing that what we add to the particular today we add to all, for the particular and the universal are one.

The idea of this thesis grew out of my own experience of detachment through immigration, which has been an opportunity to reflect on my past experiences with architecture and urban designing and the "taken for granted" environment of my everyday life. I have to confess that our social and environmental shortcomings have educational roots; and any improvement can only be obtained through changing our educational outlook. It is from within the studios and classes of various faculties that the understanding of and interaction with diverse social, cultural and environmental issues will shape the professional life of many students, and hence the trends for reshaping the human future.

During my five years of undergraduate study for Architecture and Urban Planning, I was introduced to the "architecture-of-the-academy", which was very different from the one I practised for several years after graduation. In the faculty we learnt that we build for people, but those people were hypothetical because our projects were only academic and not real projects. In these projects we were to wipe out complete neighbourhoods and rebuild them using a modern theory of design. The original inhabitants were replaced by other hypothetical clients of identical middle size and middle class families whose behaviour should comply with our theoretical thinking.

Yet throughout the years of practice I realised that economic and political forces play important roles in creating our surrounding environment. Even away from those forces our designs were influenced by the modernist atmosphere that overwhelmed our understanding of the meaning of architecture. Such understanding had developed through the "architecture of the academy" procedures and Eurocentric approaches. Therefore it was no wonder that we adopted the International Style and that the theories
and techniques of modern architecture were to be used in our design solutions and construction systems.

In our work in practice we treated the new communities and cities with the same modern conception. There was no investigation into the role of the real people or their unique living requirements or their social and psychological needs. There was no concern for the use of traditional forms which result from popular and collective will. We even adopted the Western, European solutions for design in hot climates without any appreciation of the appropriate technology which had appropriately transferred in space and successfully sustained the communities of our predecessors over time. During that time I never thought about the identity of the built environment we were creating. But with the passage of time an increasing feeling that the product of what we called "our neighbourhoods" was not satisfactory to the real inhabitants, clearly expressed in a flow of alienation which flooded those new communities, has torn my heart.

It was impossible to ignore the situation. I asked myself, why do we not have any studies that explore the qualities of the social and cultural meaning of built environment? Why is our work devoid of any philosophical thinking that appreciates the qualitative product of the everyday life of real people in the very way they develop their own place? That was the start of the stand with the "self" and later the study to produce this thesis.

My gratitude is given to all who helped me accomplish this task successfully. I would like to acknowledge the co-operation of many Siwans who made my research enjoyable, and without whom this study would have been impossible. I should like to thank the Department of Landscape Architecture of Lincoln University for financial assistance in connection with my field-trip in 1997. My thanks go to Dr Val Kirby, then the Head of Department and my thesis supervisor, whose encouragement in accomplishing this task was remarkable.

I owe particular thanks to my supervisor Professor Simon Swaffield and my associate supervisor Dr Tracy Bemo. Simon has given more than his formal responsibilities require in the way of critical comment and support. He has empathised with my enthusiasm, listened patiently, made positive suggestions and comments and helped me to temper my spiritual phenomenology with critical argument. Tracy has always been there to listen, encourage and provide feedback. In addition, I would like to extend my appreciation to
the staff and postgraduates of the Environmental Management and Design Division, Lincoln University, especially in the Landscape Architecture Group. A special thank you to my colleague Pip Richards for her help with proof reading.

With the research for this thesis extending over a period of more than three years there is a debt of gratitude for help and encouragement from Nadia El-Shafie, my sister, and her family in New Zealand and my mother and my extended family and friends in Egypt. Their support, care and love have been always of great value. As well there is a gratitude and loving memory of my first tutor, my father Mohammed El-Shafie. The kindness of my five children and their cheerful smile made it possible for me to write this thesis through the obstacles of everyday life. I am also enormously indebted to Abdel-moniem El-Shorbagy, my husband, for his continuous enthusiastic support, helpful comments and effective criticism; sharing the experience as fellow doctoral students has been an unforgettable stopover in our journey in life.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Modern man becomes ‘worldless’, and thus loses his own identity, as well as the sense of community and participation. Existence is experienced as ‘meaningless’ and man becomes ‘homeless’ because he does not any longer belong to a meaningful totality.¹

The impacts of modernity and globalization upon the quality of built environment have resulted in the phenomenal effect of the “placelessness” of modern humans. This phenomenon increasingly constitutes a source of subtle destruction. Evidence of this is clear in both the West and the East, the rich North and the poor South, and the developed First World and the underdeveloped or developing Third World.² My interest, as an architect, is how to interpret the phenomenon of “placelessness” within modern built environment, and what this interpretation means for traditional communities seeking to retain a sense of “dwelling” under the impact of globalization.

1. Placelessness in modern built environment

Anthony Giddens suggests that “the ‘meaningfulness’ of day-to-day organisation of social life is a taken-for-granted feature of human existence, and guaranteed by tradition”.³ He sees the routine of daily life as a feature of an “ontological security” grounded in a “basic trust” relationships, which are immediately and necessarily connected with the succession of the generations.⁴ However, Norberg-Schulz has argued that it is the notion of “meaningful totality” which is missing in modern life, leading modern man to become a “stranger to the world and to himself”.⁵ The dissolution of the “basic trust” relationships in modern societies identified by Giddens has resulted in a number of consequences, including the personal alienation and the loss of collective identity. Postmodern critiques have highlighted these consequences and called for a greater awareness of the problems that arise from the universalising tendency of culture modernity and globalization of technology and commerce which provides so much of its momentum.

² Not to mention the collapsed Second World.
⁴ Ibid.
My particular interest is in the impact of globalization and the adoption of a technological approach to environmental design. Both the interpretation of space and the adoption of a technological approach have contributed to a wide extent to the manifestation of the problem of placelessness in modern built environment. The increasing use of the electronic telecommunication through the world web, for example, prevents the individual from developing face-to-face social relationships through lived experience and participation. This also detaches the traditional context from its meaningfulness as a context of an ontological security in the individual’s experience. Such circumstances break up the locally defined “space” and create, instead, a worldwide universe, in which a modern person is able to reside, work and entertain in a “placeless” context. The consequence alienates the individual, as it makes meaningless the “sense of place” and its relationship to the definition of “space” as a bounded domain.

In his book *Poetry, Language, Thought* Martin Heidegger’s essay “Building, Dwelling, Thinking” provides a clearer insight from which to behold this phenomenon of universal placelessness. Heidegger suggests that the manifestation of our “being” is revealed in the notion of “dwelling”. Yet for this dwelling to occur, a concrete “space” is needed. Heidegger argues that the phenomenological essence of such a space/place is revealed by its concrete, clearly defined natural boundary. This “boundary”, he explains,

[I]s not that at which something stops, but, as the Greeks recognised, the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing. That is why the concept is that of horismos, that is, the horizon, the boundary.6

Kenneth Frampton, while elaborating on the notion of “critical regionalism”, has touched on this aspect of Heideggerian thought. He writes,

While we may well remain skeptical as to the merit of grounding critical practice in a concept so hermetically metaphysical as Being, we are, when confronted with the ubiquitous placelessness of our modern environment, nonetheless brought to posit, after Heidegger, the absolute precondition of a bounded domain in order to create an architecture of resistance. Only such a defined boundary will permit the built form to stand against... the endless processal flux of the Megalopolis.7

This study therefore, looks at a specific built environment, in a specific space and time, in order to reveal the phenomenological associations that contribute to the manifestation of

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space/place in which dwelling occurs. I seek insights into ways in which dwelling may be reconstructed as a "meaningful totality", despite the pressures of global modernity. Specifically, I seek to understand better potentials of resistance within a traditional built environment that is being transformed through modern development.

As Frampton notes, for a "space" to be a place of resistance, it should reflect the Heideggerian characterisation of a uniquely bounded domain. This boundary/horizon characteristic of space/place is analogous to an "oasis" in the midst of a desert. Can the problem of dwelling faced by modern humans, in a placeless, worldless, and timeless context, be usefully understood as if it is an experience of inhabiting the "desert"? Is the "phenomenology" of the desert perhaps able to help in finding an answer to the contemporary problem of dwelling in an increasingly global world? To dwell in the desert puts humans face-to-face with the challenge of placelessness, in a physical as well as psychological sense. The desert does not contain any fixed point to hold on to; it is barren, boundless and monotonous. It extends as a manifestation of unlimited space, in unfixed time. As a consequence the ancient Egyptians related it to death, and the very word "desert" means to abandon. As it does not offer any protection, the desert is the very negation of a bounded "place". So, how can "dwelling" in the desert occur?

In the desert the complexities of the life world are reduced to a few simple phenomena: the infinite extension of the uniform barren ground, the immense sky, the burning sun, the almost shadowless light, and the dry warm air. Yet dwelling in the desert involves the practices of everyday life in the specificity of place, revealed in these phenomena. As a whole, the desert experience seems to make an absolute and eternal order manifest. Nevertheless, there are "real" people inhabiting the desert. It is a fact that desert settlements are persistent over time. People have sustained everyday life in remote desert regions for many generations. However their experience and the lessons we may learn from it currently receives little attention in the modern world; especially in the policies and strategies of local development.

In this thesis I explore the experience of dwelling in a remote community which is represented by the case study of the Siwa oasis. I use this to investigate, by analogy, the particular-universal dilemma of placelessness of modern humans. Not only does the

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remote desert oasis community of Siwa offer a useful analogy, it also offers opportunity to trace the impact of modernity upon the community, through recent phases of development, and how the community can survive, resist and dwell in a modern world.

2. Remote communities

At a global level, "remote" communities, which may be a small island, an isolated community in the mountains, or an oasis in a barren desert, are isolated by distance from the greater urban and industrial centres. However even such remote places are touched by the impact of modernity, and they are in different stages of transition from pre-modern to modern. In developing countries, where pressure from global economies is evident, technology as well as a space-time compression is challenging traditional relationships with nature and between people. For modernity, "discovering" a place has meant the discovery and exploitation of its "natural resources" and its "scenic values", rather than defining and considering the social and cultural needs of its inhabitants.

The problem of remote communities exemplifies the impacts of Modernity. Whether it is logging in the tropical rain forests of Asia and Latin America, tourism activities in the Caribbean and Pacific coastal communities, or petroleum and groundwater extraction in the oasis communities of the North African Desert, modern technology in these localities affects their traditional lifestyles. The following chapter explores further the current global situation and raises the question: how can the experience of "meaningful totality" of the traditional built environment of remote communities survive the project of modernity with its ever extending process of globalization? Siwa, as a remote desert community, demonstrates the impact of modernity. My interest is in whether the interpretation of the Siwan experience can offer useful insights into our quest for a "meaningful totality" in our placeless modern built environment.

2.1. Siwa Oasis

Siwa is the most remote community in Egypt. It is situated at the western border of Egypt in the North African Desert. As such it represents a frontier location and was kept as a military zone following World War II. Siwa is a living medieval oasis community that has retained many pre-modern characteristics, but in which many socio-cultural changes have occurred in recent years. These changes were forced and influenced by internal and external factors. In Siwa, as elsewhere, traditional ways of living are being replaced by a modern life dependent on machines and technology. The issue is not only
the replacement of old buildings by new ones, but also the way in which traditional ways of living are being modified and disappearing. Whether the traditional ways of living are “backward” and “undesirable” compared with the easy modern life, or authentic and meaningful compared with alienated and less humanised modern ways of living, constitutes a global dilemma. This also highlights many concerns with the present plans for development and management of the built environment in Egypt.

2.2. Problematising Siwa

Since the beginning of the 1980s Siwa has become a region that government policy considered as a “good place for development”. It became part of a national project that aims to redistribute the population from the Nile Valley to new settlement areas. The population in Egypt has risen from around ten million at the turn of the century to over 60 million by 1996. As in many “developing countries” much of the increase has been absorbed by urban areas, and there has been no net increase in Egypt’s inhabited area in the Nile Valley. The cultivated land in the Valley is four percent of the total area of Egypt, which is one million square km. However, 99 percent of the total population of the country are settled in the Valley. Furthermore, there is no question of reversing the population shift to the cities, as the amount of available land in the countryside has dramatically declined due to the increasing urbanisation process. Yet in regard to development strategies, the density of the population in the urban areas in the Nile Valley is a problematic aspect.

Part of the current “modern” thinking by government has been that moving people to existing “remote” communities outside the Nile Valley would help in solving the overpopulation problem. As a consequence, Egyptian society increasingly has three distinct types of settlement: urban, rural, and resettled groups. Resettlement has mainly occurred in the five Egyptian oases of the Western Desert alongside the River Nile; Siwa is one of these oases. Siwa is also considered a good source of “pure” water, in contrast to the water quality in the Nile Valley, which has deteriorated as a consequence of modernisation. The contemporary problem of Siwa began with a proposal in the 1980s

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10 28,322 person/km\(^2\) in Cairo. Census, 1996.
11 60 million according to 1996 census.
12 The Nile Valley is 4% of the total area of Egypt, which is about one million square metres.
to build a new public housing project in Siwa town to address the ever increasing population in the Nile Delta. The project started by constructing a road from Siwa northward to Marsa Matruh on the Mediterranean Sea in 1990.

The development announcement was followed by a flow of investment projects, from the public and private sectors. These projects were designed to exploit the natural and cultural resources of the oasis: dates, olives and springs. Development was enhanced by investments for tourism activity, which built nine hotels in four years. Tourism activity however also required an “opening up” of the community, by cancelling the rules restricting movement in a military zone. Since 1991 Siwa has therefore been open for local and overseas travellers, as well as for Egyptians to visit, reside and work.

The “opening up” of a remnant medieval living community has attracted world-wide interest. As a result, attention has been focused on Siwa from several European institutions. Concern about the world heritage areas has resulted in an Egyptian-German project to mend the temple of the Oracle in 1993. The “ruined” medieval town of Shali was considered a historical place and a project to illuminate the medieval fortress was funded in 1994 by the United Nations. Consequently, electric power was introduced to six villages in the oasis for the first time in 1993-1995, and broadcasting of national television started. A new road from the oasis eastward to the Nile Valley has been funded to be carried out, and is still in progress. In 1996 the Egyptian president visited Siwa for a one-day visit for the first time. The visit drew attention to Siwa through local media.14 In this sense, what has been happening in Siwa is the (re)discovery of “place”.

The dilemma of Siwa is how to manage the impact of modern development on the traditional attributes of place. It has been increasingly argued that a central challenge for development and planning is to find ways in which remote communities can adopt aspects of modernity, without becoming victims of modernity itself.15 Yet in Siwa the impact of modernity on social activity has extended to influence native language and traditional clothes as well as traditional style in architecture and social settings.

14 See for example: (Al-Ahram, 14-4-1996; EI-Akhbar, 14-4-1996).
Figure 1-1, Egypt

Figure 1-2, Siwa Oasis
The way in which people develop their specific geographic region gives particular colour to a significant vernacular built environment. Nan Ellin, for example, argues that the vernacular built environment that is produced by the combined interaction of climate, culture, myth, and craft has two referents: the past (historic) and the locale (regional). We can see that Siwa has fused the past and the locale to produce a significant built environment that is a physical representation of its history. Its various accumulated levels of meaning form the specific values of place. One possible approach to modern development in remote communities is therefore to explore a policy of grounded yet critical regionalism. In Siwa this requires first an understanding of what went before, whether vernacular or modern; and second, an understanding of the self-conscious experience of meeting the changes and developing a strategy of resistance within the Siwan community.

3. Research questions
The investigation of the phenomenological attributes of the experience of the Siwan built environment, and the way they reveal Siwans' concrete grasp of the reality of inhabiting the desert, is intended to give insights and shed light on our understanding of the experience of built environment in a global sense. This understanding is essential to ground our modern experience of dwelling in the invisible layers of meaning originating in the phenomenal presence of the world's cultures and identities. Thus, for investigating the experience of the remote community of Siwa three questions are proposed:

1) How can a phenomenological approach be used as a framework to investigate the relationship between people and nature in an increasingly "placeless" world?
2) What special features, conditions and adoptions does a phenomenology of built environment in Siwa reveal?
3) How might this understanding inform future strategies of resistance to counter the consequences of modernity?

I shall argue that the built environment of remote communities in general and in Siwa in particular relates not only to functional and economical considerations, but also to the phenomenological associations underpinning the basic trust relationships between people and nature in a lived "space". The significance of the natural, architectural, and social

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space(s) of a community is traced in the cultural realities of its inhabitants. Thus it is not possible to achieve any positive development in remote communities, especially in the developing countries, without the sincere endeavour to enhance the understanding of these three layers of a "lived" space and to critically identify their meaningful attributes in the spatial context of its built environment.

4. Research approach

I started my research in two directions. On the one hand, I reflected on the phenomenon of development and modernisation, at macro and micro levels, from a global level to the Egyptian level and then focused on the context of Siwa. On the other hand, I re-examined my work experience as an architect and urban designer and the theories I had taken for granted for years, and re-thought the role of built environment in enhancing the social identity and cultural realities of a community.

The method employed to investigate the Siwan case study is phenomenological; that is, I consider the Siwan built environment as it occurs as a local context and attempt to see it as it is. This approach is grounded in the belief that built environment manifests the world to which it belongs, and reveals the invisible layers of meaning which constitute the cultural realities of that world. The research design took the form of a sequence of qualitative investigations of Siwa oasis, in order to reveal the layers of meaning underpinning the relationships between people and nature. A framework of qualitative methodology was adopted in this project and based on field experience involving observation and self-reflection, tape-recorded interviews and the collection of relevant materials (e.g. books, documents, articles, photos and slides,).

Given the complexity of the cultural context of the conservative community under study, as a predominantly tribal society, the techniques used in the field were adopted from ethnography. The adoption of these techniques was also influenced by the cultural considerations of the researcher. The in-depth interviews and document review sought to reveal the underlying meanings of a real-world portrait of the Siwan experience. This would help better understanding of the experiences of built environment in other remote communities. The use of this methodological framework allowed the development of a theory grounded in the research findings.
5. Research outline

The phenomenological method is based on understanding the "thing" the way it reveals itself to us through experience or recognition. The research outline therefore, emphasises the understanding of built environment as the life of place, in which a phenomenon of dwelling is revealed. Figure 1-3 provides an overview of the analytical process of built environment as a phenomenon.

Chapter Two explores theoretical perspectives upon the phenomenology of built environment. Firstly, it outlines the impact of modernity upon built environment within the broader context of the global environmental and social changes. Secondly, it examines responses from several perspectives to the meaning of built environment under the current global conditions. Then it outlines a philosophical understanding, which is
derived from the discourses of traditional phenomenology in order to develop a phenomenological perspective to the study of built environment.

Chapter Three proposes a phenomenological approach. It suggests a methodological framework for analysis, in which the methods used are phenomenological, ethnographic and qualitative, in order to allow the grounding of a theory in the research findings. The phenomenological approach is further developed in the following four chapters, which explore the case study in more depth.

Chapter Four introduces the case study of Siwa, and reviews the geographical and historical background of the emergence and establishment of Siwa as an Islamic desert community. Chapters Five, Six and Seven explore, analyse and interpret the Siwan experience of encountering modernity. They also review the specifications of Islamic urbanism as the framework of knowledge for the traditional built environment of Siwa. Finally, they offer a context for applying theoretical perspectives on the concept of built environment.

Chapter Five explores the phenomenal presence of the springs and gardens of Siwa, not only as natural resources but also as a cultural landscape. This natural space contributes to the manifestation of being of the Siwan community through cultural rituals and activities of everyday life. The chapter investigates the extent to which the introduction of Modernity and its consequential impact has changed the traditional context, and threatened the "existence" of the community. Then it demonstrates the reflexive process in which the Siwan community confronted the challenges of the modern impacts and adapted traditional and modern techniques to suit their everyday life.

Chapter Six further explores the phenomenal interrelationships of house/garden in the Siwan experience. It investigates traditional architecture and the relevance of the traditional built environment to the environmental and cultural context of Siwa. Then the chapter illustrates the impacts of Modernity manifested in the government development projects, which introduced modern style as well as building materials and techniques to the Siwan community. The chapter concludes that an understanding of the phenomenological relationships in the experience of private space of built environment is essential for the grounding of a strategy of "critical regionalism" in the Siwan context.
Chapter Seven delves deeper into the phenomenon of social space and how it manifests place as the "context" in which cultural identity is revealed. As such the chapter explores layers of public space. Then it discusses the "official" social reform in Siwa, and examines the implementation of a regional policy in the community. The chapter concludes that the achievement of an open communication with the local inhabitants of remote communities is essential to the success of development strategies. This conclusion is fundamental to the development of a grounded theory of critical regionalism sought for the strategies of management and design of built environment of a specific region.

Chapter Eight, the concluding chapter, sums up the critique, argument and interpretation of the experience of the built environment of Siwa, and by analogy the experience of modern humans seeking to overcome placelessness. It presents my contribution to the development of a phenomenological approach. A three phase model is proposed to enhance understanding of the phenomenal change in built environment at both individual and community level. The chapter concludes that a feedback process is evident in the experience of modernity; as such it reveals that "Modernity" itself is a phenomenon that can be understood through the three phase model. I also suggest what notions remain to be developed in more depth and what implications this thesis may have for the implementation of a phenomenology of built environment in the application of a grounded theory of critical regionalism in practice, education and research.
CHAPTER TWO
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON
THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Theoretical perspectives upon built environment suggest that the problem of the placelessness of modern humanity is rooted in the transformation of the people/nature relationship generated by modernity. The consequence of such transformation has been a subtle domination by individualism, an emerging global culture that knows no boundaries or local regions, and an exploitation of the natural environment. This in turn affects the ontological security embedded in the traditional people/nature relationships, and is represented in three fundamental crises: ecological, urban, and social. This chapter attempts to conceptualise the origin of the crises and to generate an holistic framework in order to interpret the phenomenon of placelessness within modern built environment.

1. Modernity and built environment

Modernity has been a project of human control and mastery over "environment". Whether it is the excessive use of water in Siwa or the production of nuclear waste in the West, the consequences of modernity have influenced both humanity and nature. Modernity neutralises emotional and religious responses to nature and converts it into mere sets of things surrounding people. In Egypt the problems concerned with the question of identity, and alienation from a significant past that always linked people and nature, are particularly acute.

It was modernity that transformed nature into "environment". For modern Egyptians, the Nile is no longer the tears of Isis, and Egypt is no longer the gift of the Nile. Instead, it is an environment that can be managed, modified and appropriated by building the Aswan High Dam to generate electric power. This also requires farmers to substitute chemical and artificial fertilisers for the fresh mud that came with the annual flood. A disproportionately small increase in yields in relation to the use of these environmental

management approaches contrasts with a large increase in the destruction of nature that is visible and painful to the farmer.

However there is no single way to “understand” built environment in isolation from other ecological and social crises. An authentic approach to this understanding reveals the consequences of modernity as a phenomenon of which built environment is one part of what it is. This kind of understanding is usually termed “phenomenological”, as it involves the study of the “thingness” of the thing. That means how things are related, interconnected and how they reflect each other.

In his *Being and Time*, Heidegger points out that our existence within-the-world means also within “space”. He explains that “spatiality” is a property of being-in-the-world.\(^7\) The understanding of built environment in this thesis, therefore, takes “space” as the phenomenal context. Further, it takes natural, private and public space(s) as the main categories of spatiality. These provide the analytical framework for investigating the impact of modernity upon people/nature relationships.

1.1. Modernity, nature and society

Modernity has led to instrumental, unsustainable and non-reciprocal treatment of the natural environment. Habitat modification, particularly removal of native vegetation for agriculture, urban development and forestry, has been, and still is, the most significant cause of ecological crisis.\(^8\) For example, the pastoral industry, grazing in arid and semi-arid regions, and declines in wetland, riverine and water quality are primary causes for a dramatic decline of species biodiversity. Introduced plants are also an acute and insufficiently appreciated ecological problem,\(^9\) and major pressures are caused by exotic organisms introduced for production purposes.\(^10\) The resulting ecological crisis influences our conceptualisation of built environment, in terms of “natural space”. Ecologists have contributed significantly here by developing the notion of “deep ecology”, as later explained in this chapter.

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Modernity is essentially a Utopian ideal, in which technology is seen as the means to improve the quality of urban life. A technological approach to architecture and built environment is therefore central to modernity. Thus Giedion argues that it is the concept of space-time which fundamentally distinguishes modern architecture from all previous architecture. A functional and relativist relationship between space and time is an essential feature of the modern age and the dominance of technology. Many art and architectural images express frozen representations of action, symbolising pure function similar to parts of a machine. The rational valuing human subject therefore exists in a world of mechanically operating objects. Even the house is seen as a machine, in the view of Le Corbusier.

This dilution of the experience of architecture into purely functional relationships has led to a transformation of "private space" in modern architecture, alienating people from lived experience of nature by eliminating its representations and expressions within architecture and replacing it with building materials and forms derived from industrial technology.

Modernity has also influenced the transformation of social life. This is expressed by the emerging new forms of global interrelationships variously referred to as globalization, the risk society, and reflexive modernity. Anthony Giddens, for example, sees globalization as the inherent thrust of modernity that works for a greater interconnectedness worldwide. He believes that globalization can be defined as:

> The intensification of world-wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.

In his *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*, Roland Robertson argues that globalization is a cultural process, in which the unity of the world is driven by global consciousness. He believes that globalization is "an updated and a nearly abstract version of the convergence thesis - homogenised modern man". This is expressed in the emergence of a society of risk on a global scale, as the relationships between

individualisation and environment are explained by Ulrich Beck.\textsuperscript{16} He argues that the risk society is not a class society, since both the rich and the poor are subjected to ecological hazards.\textsuperscript{17} We shall see in the Siwan experience how individuals' use of private artesian wells affected the water-table level for the whole oasis, and thus led to the disturbance of the ecological equilibrium of a region.\textsuperscript{18} Modernisation also affects social relationships. These changes have also generated new forms of individualisation. They affect patterns of interaction dependent upon housing and living arrangements… Thus traditional forms of community beyond the family are beginning to disappear.\textsuperscript{19}

The disappearance of traditional forms of settlement results in the emergence of a global "risk society", which knows no national boundaries and belongs to a "placeless" context. This transformation of social relationships, in the late stage of modernity, generates the need to understand globalization in relation to built environment and how it affects "public space".

1.2. Modernity and non-western countries

The forms and patterns of settlement in the developing non-western countries express the legacy of an era concerned almost exclusively with modernisation and symbols of modernity. The impact of migrants from the countryside in search of a more consumption based lifestyle has had in particular a direct expression in cities, and by the turn of the century, 18 of the 23 cities with populations of 10 million or more will be in developing countries.\textsuperscript{20}

Virtually every country has responded by trying to limit the growth of their largest cities.\textsuperscript{21} These efforts range from restricting internal migration to the creation of new capitals, smaller cities, or resettlement areas. There have also been attempts to simulate regional and rural development in order to achieve better balance between rural and urban areas.\textsuperscript{22} These efforts, however, have had limited success because of the lack of resources on the one hand and the fact that city-ward migration benefits the individuals

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid. p. 42.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
and community of origin on the other hand. In many developing countries, as O'Connell argues, "moving from rural to urban areas has become the only survival option".23

Yet, moving away from one's own place, physically and metaphysically, accelerates the phenomenon of the universal placelessness of built environment. The transformation of people/nature relationships represented by modernisation destabilises social/cultural order and place identity. David Harvey argues that in relation to this, the world's population increasingly recalls symbols of place and neighbourhood, region and ethnicity and tradition and heritage. This raises a fundamental question: as Harvey puts it, "If no one 'Knows their place' in this shifting collage world, then how can a secure social order be fashioned or sustained?"24 As a consequence,

There is still an insistent urge to look for roots where image streams accelerate and become more and more placeless...the forebodings generated out of the sense of social space imploding in upon us...translates into a crisis of identity. Who are we and to what space/place do we belong?25

However, the failure of a scientific approach alone to explicate the people/nature relationship does not mean that the modern approach is wholly defective. Beck argues that the solution to the negative consequences of modernity is not the rejection of modernity itself, but its radicalisation.26 This opens up possibilities for individuals to reflect critically on modern impacts and their ecological, urban, and social conditions of existence, and hence potentially to seek approaches to change them. The following section of the chapter, therefore, is an attempt to develop an understanding of contemporary responses to modern environmental, urban and societal conditions.

2. Conceptualising built environment

There have been a range of responses to the problem of modernity and the crises it has generated.27 Some of these are so inclusive and broad that they appear of little help in resisting modern impacts,28 others are so specific that they may, in the long run, generate

or encourage global intolerance. The main point of examining contemporary responses, however, is to come to an enhanced understanding of the people/nature relationship. This understanding is important in conceptualising the way in which people perceive “space”, in both physical and metaphysical senses, and experience its spatial meaning in the natural, private and public sectors.

2.1. Deep ecology

One of the responses to the modernist separation of nature into ecosphere, biosphere, physical landscape, natural resources, geosphere, and ecosystem that has emerged from ecologists, environmentalists and geographers is Deep Ecology. Introduced in the early seventies by Arne Naess, Deep Ecology is a philosophy that has become an environmental movement. It is a conceptual approach to ecology as “holistic”, based on two principles: a scientific insight into the inter-relatedness of all systems of life on earth; and the idea that anthropocentrism, regarding humans as something completely unique and chosen by God to dominate the Earth, is a misguided way of seeing things. This requires a change from an anthropocentric to an ecocentric perspective.

Deep ecology requires and expresses a fundamental change in the consciousness of humans and how they relate to the natural world. It argues that all other species have a right to exist, irrespective of their usefulness to human beings or human societies. Thus humans cannot presume dominance over other species and continue to see nature as a “resource” for exploitation and utilisation for industrialisation.

What is considered a normal lifestyle in industrial countries is clearly incompatible with living in wilderness. Industrial people interfere so severely with natural processes that even very small number of them can significantly alter the landscape.

Naess therefore believes that the major ecological problems cannot be resolved within the existing capitalist or socialist-industrialist economic system. He uses the term “shallow ecology” to describe the way ecological problems are currently resolved within

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industrial society. The use of the term shallow ecology follows the use of the term "shallow being" introduced to phenomenology by Merleau-Ponty. In shallow being, the sense of ontological depth is lost and things are manipulated independently. This makes the notion of things as related to a universe of being disappear and creates an existential crisis.

Thus deep ecology is a fundamental shift in ecological consciousness. It promotes biological, cultural and social diversity. As such, deep ecology can inform a strategy of critical regionalism and the struggle of communities for meaningful built environment that offers diversity and the sustainability of things as they are really related and interconnected. It may also inform a philosophy of dwelling and illuminate how people can seek a deep sense of inhabiting built environment as a universe of being.

In a deep sense of being, traditional societies perceived the physical landscape as "natural" heritage, whose physical elements are plants, animals, mountains, rivers, lakes, springs, deserts and oceans. Integral to people/nature relationships in this respect is their "sense of place" as heritage. It has always provided links with the past, with the history of human habitation and settlement in their particular place, and with the evolution of cultural landscape. These responses indicate the qualities of "natural space". It is not only its "naturalness" that matters, but also the multi-narrative context this "space" offers. Natural space will be the main focus in Chapter Five, as its phenomenological attributes are revealed in everyday life experiences within the Siwan community.

2.2. Regional vernacular

In his book Architecture Without Architects Bernard Rudofsky introduced a world wide review of vernacular architecture, which he termed "non-pedigreed" architecture. In search of a generic term, Rudofsky calls it "vernacular, anonymous, spontaneous, indigenous, rural, as the case may be". He suggests that the insights architects gain from non-architect-designed landscapes might help them to lead a movement to "design

in the vernacular". In Siwa, as a bounded space/place, living the vernacular is an experience of everyday life. We admire the tangible integration of natural and material conditions, patterns of life and forms of building, which were earlier hardly considered part of the realm of architecture and urbanism. They give us a strengthened sense of existence, a sense of being-in-the-world. Yet understanding the concrete qualities offered by the Siwan vernacular built environment must underlie a regionalist agenda. This approach is also adopted by John Brinkerhoff Jackson in his *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*, in which he examines the reciprocal relationship between people and built environment. Jackson's contributions have brought to light common landscapes of vernacular and commercial buildings.42

Like Jackson, the Egyptian architect Hassan Fathy sees building as the expression of culture, tradition, society, economics and the surrounding environment.43 In his book *Architecture for the Poor*, Fathy is concerned with rural rehabilitation for the poor in Egypt as well as in the Third World. He uses local materials and methods of building developed from the region. He believes that all these elements have a vital role in creating the significant characteristics of a place, as well as satisfying the needs of a community without ignoring the individual.

Vernacular built environment can be recognised as a source of inspiration.44 The beauty of the "primitive" architecture of Siwa, for example, represents an art form that has resulted from a unique mode of human life.45 The relationship between the Siwans and their cultural landscape clarify their understanding of the vital qualities of place.46 It touches the "togetherness" problem of how to live and let live, in a local sense and also in the global one,47 and of how to dwell despite the placelessness of place. A meaningful built environment is that which responds to living in a specific place. As such, a contemporary built environment can only manifest a true significance as it reveals "place identity", apart from just falling into naïve simulation of a local vernacular. In the pursuit

45 Ibid.
of meaningful built environment potentially appropriate to Siwa, there is a response to the specificity of the region as a way of thinking about built environment.48

Regionalism has been seen as a central issue of development, especially in Third World countries.49 Chris Abel, for example, argues that regionalism is a movement of more than local significance.50 He believes that regionalism represents a resistance to the culture of the coloniser in a global cultural shift; it is the main critical movement in reaction to Modernism.51 Suha Ozkan also recognises regionalism as a critique of Internationalism.

Internationalism however, demanding the necessity to reduce the building to skin and bones... Therefore, it would not be wrong to stress that the polarity is between internationalism which demands a global relevance for its existence and regionalism which seeks meaning and content under specific local conditions.52

These views of the regional vernacular raise important questions about the nature of built environment appropriate for remote communities in general and for Siwa specifically, as regionally defined entities. What this review has brought to light is that architects and town planners have come to a point in which they have had to go back to the past in order to pick up valid concepts and insights to enhance their understanding of the timely needs of their profession. It also highlights the effects of the space of modern architecture upon the qualities of “private space”. Chapter Six takes this discussion further and explores private space as the context in which nature lends itself to people as a commodity.

2.3. Community in place

Responses to the people/nature relationship have also received increasing attention in the realm of the social world. Theories, perspectives and interpretations are exploring the impact of modernity upon constructs of social life. Some of these have overcome the reductionistic mechanical world-view, replacing it with a more unified one. The conceptualisation of a unified world view has resulted from the realisation of our

relatedness to nature and the significance of public space as a medium for social interrelationships. Such realisation promotes the specificity of a community in place.

The modernist "mechanistic" world view, in which material possessions have priority over qualitative reciprocal relationships, has resulted in the loss of and lack of connection with community. Therefore, "community has become less relevant over time in describing societies in the developed world". Many current responses argue that one way to escape the catastrophic impact of modernity is to elevate local communities, who can argue, resist and take action through their collective efforts.

Recently, however, meaning of place has been reinterpreted as integral to social activity space. Both post-structuralism and Western Marxism conceptualise place as a product of individual people working within a given social structure. That structure in turn is a product of their everyday lives. They re-negotiate and transform that structure through their experiences and hence creatively manipulate existing meanings to produce new combinations. Central to any understanding and reading of this manipulation is the understanding of the role of power within a social and cultural context.

In their A Shrinking World, Allen and Hamnett define place as a cultural construction. Place in this sense is constituted by networks and interrelationships of social interactions, formed of "stretched out" social relations in unlimited social space. Social space, in this respect, is the spatial locations in which the activity spaces of different phenomena are performed. As a social construct, place has a meaning for the community as it is. Thus place identity is associated with community.

This interpretation indicates that the current global transformation of built environment is leading to the disappearance of concrete and mental boundaries, which may reduce place identity. The notion of community in place recalls Heidegger's notion of dwelling, which relies upon the phenomenological characterisation of a well defined boundary/ horizon of a space/place. As well, it raises the question: how can the built environment of remote

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56 Ibid.
communities promote "public space" while a universal placelessness has become a daily phenomenon? This question is explored further in Chapter Seven, based upon investigation of everyday social experiences in Siwa.

This discussion of ecological, urban, and social crises sets the foundation to conceptualise built environment in the contemporary world as a context that provides ontological security in terms of natural, private and social space. In the remainder of the chapter I integrate these considerations of spatiality into phenomenological perspective on built environment, drawing upon a critical theory of regionalism, as an approach to understanding the problem of modernity in Siwa.

3. A framework of understanding

The review of contemporary responses to the ecological, urban, and social crises indicated two main findings. Firstly, there is an increasing tendency to shift away from the objectivity of the scientific approach as the only way to conceptualise built environment. Secondly, there is a fundamental need to look for new frameworks that allow a more grounded approach to the study of built environment. I believe the framework of a strategy of critical regionalism, a theory of ontological security and a philosophy of phenomenology has the capacity to lay the grounds for such a holistic approach.

3.1. Critical regionalism

While the vernacular was typically produced by the combined factors of climate, culture, myth, and craft, modern anonymous "placeless" built environment is almost of the other extreme. Critical regionalism is a strategy with potential to provide an essential "place" dimension to future development. As coined by Tzonis and Lefaivre in their essay "The Grid and the Pathway", critical regionalism

upholds the individual and local architectonic features against more universal and abstract ones...certainly, critical regionalism has its limitations.... Despite these limitations critical regionalism is a bridge over which any humanistic architecture of the future must pass.\textsuperscript{58}

Frampton believes that the symbolic elements and idiosyncracies of traditional culture should be assimilated with rational and normative aspects of universal culture to generate

\textsuperscript{58} Cited in Frampton, K., (1983a: 20).
"regionally based world culture[s]". He asserts that there is no such thing as an authentic local or national culture due to centuries of cultural contact and inter-fertilisation. We can recognise cross-cultural effects even in the bounded, regionally defined places such as Siwa.

This strategy of double mediation between the particularity of the local and the inclusivity of the universal depends in part upon the tactile resilience of the place-form. An authentic building tradition must be related to unconscious factors such as the intensity of light, darkness, heat and cold as well as the feeling of humidity, the aroma of material, the presence of the building material as the body senses its own confinement.

The tactile resilience of the place-form and the capacity of the body to read the environment in terms other than those of sight alone suggest a potential strategy for resisting the domination of universal technology...the tactile is an important dimension in the perception of built form.

Frampton attempts to develop a hypothetical model of interrelated "vectors" determining built environment, in which both tectonic and typology are not natural choices. It is in this sense that critical regionalism also involves a dialectical relation with nature, and it considers architecture as a tectonic rather than the abstraction of modern international style. Thus critical regionalism may stress certain site-specific factors ranging from the topography to the intervention of local light. The medieval fortress of Shali in the natural landscape of Siwa fuses topography and structure, while manifesting its being through the local light. Yet the process of creating meaningful built environment requires an understanding not only of the symbolic elements and idiosyncracies of tradition and normative aspects of universal culture, as Frampton asserts, but also of the context that creates a "community" that is really a community; that has a sense of place.

The strategy of critical regionalism thus has the potential to integrate forces of globalization with physical representations of built environment. However, attention to the experience of place is also needed. A concept of particular relevance to the experience of built environment is that of ontological security.

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60 Ibid., p:313.
64 Frampton, K., (1983b).
3.2. Ontological security

In his *Modernity and Self-identity*, Giddens introduces the concept of “ontological security”. It is based on a sense of continuity and order for the individual, and operates on three levels: first, the unconscious; second, practical consciousness, where the framework of rules or “social order” is accessible to the individuals although they do not express them verbally or formulate them explicitly; third, discursive consciousness, where there is explicit and verbal formulation of these rules. Ontological security is achieved through a framework of rules which perform the task of “bracketing”. This bracketing, as interpreted by Lash and Urry, is to create order out of chaos for the individual and to generate reliable patterns out of anarchistic risk and anxiety.\(^\text{66}\)

Ontological security is grounded in “basic trust” relationships to create a “potential space”. This potential space constitutes both the field for sufficiently substantial, consistent and ordered relationships, and the stable framework of ontological security.\(^\text{67}\)

In this respect, the different types of phenomenological space in the built environment - natural, private and social space - can be regarded as an essential factor to achieve ontological security. Built environment represents the concrete space/place needed to reveal “basic trust” relationships. It is the context to ground an ontological security.

In a search for a culturally and regionally appropriate contemporary theory of built environment we need to integrate the concepts of critical regionalism and ontological security into a more grounded approach. This has the capacity to retain basic trust relationships and allow cross-cultural fertilisation, while discovering original roots. Yet such an integrative process needs a philosophical dimension to hold the fragmented elements and factors of built environment together. Kisho Kurokawa also believes that built environment needs a philosophy as its ontological basis; he writes, “I eagerly await news of... a philosophy that transcends methodology, in effect to construct a philosophical filter”.\(^\text{68}\)

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\(^{68}\) Cited in Powell, R. (1989:8).
This discussion highlights the need for a philosophical view that provides a framework for understanding built environment as a "phenomenon". The following sub-section pursues this demand.

3.3. Phenomenology

The influence of phenomenology on built environment has appeared in the work of few architects in the era of post-modernity. Louis Kahn, for example, believes that "silence" is the realm on which the artist draws in his creative expression. Kahn suggests that architecture exists at a threshold between "silence" and "light". He calls that which does not exist "silence" and that which exists "light". For Kahn, silence is "the unmeasurable, the desire to be, the desire to express, the source of new need... [and light is] the measurable, the giver of all presence, by will, by law, the measure of things already made". Kahn explains that through architecture silence meets light, and yet manifests itself; and the role of an architect is to work in the realm of silence to grasp an order from it and bring it into light. Kahn writes:

The only way you can build, the only way you can get the building into being is through the measurable... But in the end, when the building becomes part of living, it evokes unmeasurable qualities, and the spirit of its existence take over.

This conceptualisation of built environment as phenomenological meaning is influenced by a philosophical notion developed thorough traditional phenomenology. The notion of "silence" in particular is the contribution of Merleau-Ponty to philosophy. The following section therefore develops an understanding of several notions of traditional phenomenology that can constitute a phenomenological perspective upon built environment.

4. A phenomenological perspective

The confrontation of phenomenology with Modernism arose when scientific inquiry came to be seen as the sole kind of rational inquiry. Modern scientific questions, initiating of rational investigation, were factual questions about how things work. This view does not allow rational inquiry into values, qualities and meanings; thus we can not delve into different phenomena at a deeper level. If the phenomenology of built

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70 Ibid., p.48
environment is to be found anywhere, I believe it must be found in its values, qualities and meanings, as perceived and experienced by people in the "everyday life" world. Therefore this section of the chapter presents an account of notions of traditional phenomenology that may help understanding built environment as a phenomenon.

4.1. Dwelling, silence and horizons of being

There are many architectural theories concerning the way we relate to the world through conceptions of our houses. But in reality, our basic way of being in-the-world, our dwelling in our houses, and our attachment to our built environments are pre-theoretical. Phenomenology seeks to reveal these pre-theoretical perceptions as manifested in our experience of dwelling either on the conscious or the unconscious level.

Gaston Bachelard reflects a common, though often unconscious, understanding that the experience of the house affects the way in which we understand the rest of our world. In order to understand a house however, we must go beyond mere description and beyond the limited constraints of a realist "Cartesian" conception. We need to resort to the world of the daydream, because

Our house is our corner of the world. As has often been said, it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word...[the house] is the human being's first world before he is 'cast into the world'... Man is laid in the cradle of the house... Life begins well, it begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house.

Clear parallels can be drawn between Bachelard's and Heidegger's notion of dwelling, although the former sees the meaning of built environment as "enclosed" and the latter sees it as "openness". It is our perception of the spatiality of space that integrates the enclosed, private space of the house to the opening, natural space of the world.

While Marx, Habermas, Piaget, and Foucault assume that people can actively forge a better world through material, socio-economic change, Heidegger recognises that what makes any change positive is basically our understanding of the nature of our "Being". Heidegger's approach seeks to reduce people's sense of anthropomorphism by recognising that they are all participants in a universe of meaning, which is grounded in care, saving, and openness. Heidegger's main contribution to traditional phenomenology

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lies in what he calls “dwelling”. It is the process through which an integration of people, earth, and spirituality arises from people’s reflexive awareness as mortals, and manifests itself in the way they make their place-in-the-world a “home”.

Heidegger’s ontology provides a way of thinking by exploring the world and existence through the experiences of everyday life and the manifestation of things as they show themselves. It is the essence of his phenomenological method, “to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself”. To think, for Heidegger, is to ask questions of things and to allow those things to answer and respond as they are. He sees such a way of study as the essence of the phenomenological process.

Unlike most traditional philosophies, which see the human as a subject apart from world, Heidegger recognises the human as an integral, immersed member. The characterisation of people-in-the-world manifests a sense of immersion and inextricable togetherness rooted in time and space. Seamon explains how different Heidegger’s perspective is in comparison with the predominant model of the person-environment interaction which we hear of today in geography and other environmental studies. This model, Seamon asserts, is piecemeal because it speaks of an interaction of two parts, person and environment. Seamon writes:

The whole, person-in-world, is lost, as an interaction, generally founded on the mechanical interactions of systems theory or the hidden patterns of structuralism, takes dominance. The whole disappears at the expense of parts and inter-connections.

Heidegger seeks to re-establish the whole, and the key words, of the three stages of his life-time thesis are “in-the-world, Being and dwelling”; or, to put it in one sentence, in order to manifest our being we dwell in-the-world. There is similarity with Naess’ “deep ecology” and its quest to reintegrate the whole. Heidegger suggests that the project of authentic human existence is intricately bound up with the question of dwelling. To dwell authentically, for Heidegger, is to dwell poetically, since poetry is a revealing of truth restored to its artistic dimension. Built environment becomes a setting into work of

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“truth” to make the world visible. Heidegger sees the importance of built environment as the context that comprises “space”, while space contains a sense of “clearing-away”, of releasing place from wilderness, and allowing the possibility of dwelling. Space is therefore linked to Being.

Heidegger suggests that “what is within-the-world...is also within space”; this is why “spatiality” is a property of “being-in-the-world”. In his Building, Dwelling, Thinking, Heidegger asks “What is to dwell?”; he traces buildings back to their origins as houses and places for inhabitation. For Heidegger, dwelling involves a sense of continuity, at-homeness, nearness, neighbourhoodness, and community. Consequently, he argues that:

Today’s houses may even be well planned, easy to keep, attractively cheap, open to air, light, and sun, but - do the houses in themselves hold any guarantee that dwelling occurs in them?

Built environment brings the earth, as inhabited landscape, close to people. It situates people within-the-world and as such allows for dwelling. To dwell is to save the earth, “to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for” things, land, creatures and people.

Built environment, I believe, manifests the interrelationship of people and nature through layers of meaning which operate in space/place. These layers of meaning inhabit space as an invisible side of the visible built environment. It is in this sense that “inhabited landscape” means to visualise place as “natural space”. It is in how we perceive space with its two sides that we can inhabit nature and achieve dwelling. A further explanation of the notion of space as the invisible silence of the visible being could be drawn from Merleau-Ponty’s explanation of how things manifest their being, to be visible, through the notion of “Being as horizon”.

Merleau-Ponty believes that the view of the “being of the thing as massive plenitude, absolute positivity, self-identity, objectivity” is the result of the objective thinking of the Cartesian conscious subject or what is called the “philosophy of negativity”. This states

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80 Ibid., p.146.
83 Ibid., p.xliii
that the only addition of the viewer is to provide the void "in which the thing can be posited and opposed to the seer... in its own positivity and objectivity".84

This view has been adopted especially by architects and town planners, who manipulate built environment from above, through plans and maps. Yet it has misled them because it reduces everything to a shallow being: things as they really appear, which is an artificial construct and conceptualisation held before thought by the "positivity of language".85 But when we attend to "lived" experience, we can not visualise built environment as a positive-negative object in space. We recognise that things always and only appear in a horizon-structure.86 Merleau-Ponty asserts that "the immediate, is at the horizon, and must be thought as such; it is only by remaining at distance that it remains itself".87 Yet, for a thing to be visible, it has to enter my attention while other things recede into the periphery and become inactive, not, however, desisting to be there. This active-inactive situation, through which things manifest themselves, occurs because there are two kinds of horizon: exterior and interior.

Merleau-Ponty sees that "exterior horizon" is what guarantees the identity of the object in its visible situation. An object includes numerous attributes such as line, light, colour, relief, mass, and so on.88 None of these attributes is ever an isolated fragment of being offered to an isolated look; rather, they manifest themselves through participation in a universe of being. Merleau-Ponty calls this universal being the "interior horizon". It is within this inner horizon that the various aspects of an object become articulated and assume meaning.

What Merleau-Ponty's notion of "Being as horizon" brings to light is the fact that in order for being to be present a certain "absence" is needed. The horizon-structure, in this respect, shows that what makes an object visible and meaningful is not the object itself but a universe of being, a hidden being from which it is differentiated and by which it is articulated. Thus, the essence of visibility is to have a layer of invisibility, which makes it

84 Ibid., p.xlii
85 Ibid., P.88
86 Merleau-Ponty uses the term "horizon" with connotations to history-cultural and ontological senses.
87 Ibid., p.123
present as a certain absence. For Merleau-Ponty, to see is to enter a universe of beings which manifest themselves in a manner that never reveals completely. 

The notion of being as horizon conveys an important insight into the critique of the modernist idea that what is visible is positive and present, and makes unintelligible what is non-present. This objectivism misleads us and makes us believe that things exist self-sufficiently in self-present objectivity, which again gives rise to a dichotomous view. On the other hand, being as horizon can also shed light on how we understand the nature of meaning in the built environment: meaning is a matter of differentiation. We perceive built environment by reference to differentiation, but do not perceive differentiation itself. Hence, differentiation is the invisible ground of all perception, the unseen phenomenon against which we see built environment. Viewed from this perspective, it is impossible to perceive either the significance of built environment without its background of different unseen phenomena, or the meaning of these different unseen phenomena without their built environment, just as it is impossible to perceive either the visible being without the invisible “silence” or the invisible “silence” without the visible being.

“Space”, in its physical and metaphysical senses, acts as a medium for the interactive relationships between people and nature. As such, space is the invisible differentiation of the visible built environment. In order to perceive the experience of built environment and to understand how and why changes to its fabric occur, we need to explore its invisible differentiation, by investigating the layers of meaning inhabiting its space/place.

4.2. A deep sense of dwelling

Siwa, as a “desert community”, denotes a geographical identity in which the desert implies a sense of “placelessness”. Yet, Siwa as a “community” refers to the fact that “dwelling” in such a place has occurred. “Place”, therefore, is integral to the Siwans’ sense of form. The significance of “place” in Siwa is its capacity to withstand the desert’s sense of placelessness. The way it operates is by allowing for the establishment of phenomenological relationships between people and nature. These are the unseen, unreasoned, and mythical structures of differentiation within the “spatiality” of space. In

89 Ibid., p.68
“place”, the visible and the invisible are the two sides of one and the same reality.\footnote{Merleau-Ponty, (1968).} Elements of built environment can achieve meaning only when their invisible side succeeds in carrying a conceived meaning for people.

My framework of analysis is largely influenced by this phenomenological interpretation. Throughout the analytical chapters I will use the term “layers of meaning” to describe the unseen, unreasoned and mythical structures of differentiation.

My proposal is that in order to understand how and why people change their built environment, we have to start with understanding the invisible side of that visible built environment. The framework of understanding, developed in section 3, allows both philosophical and theoretical grounds for a process of analysis. The phenomenological perspective proposed in this section has the capacity to reveal the essence of the experience of built environment in Siwa as a phenomenon, and to bring its “two-sided” being into perception. Therefore I propose three main themes under which to analyse the experience of built environment in Siwa oasis, as a case study.

The first theme is: the phenomenological relationships between people and nature are manifested in the interaction with the natural resources. This theme focuses on the characterisation of the relationships within natural space and reveals how these relationships form a fundamental part of the socio-cultural rituals, myth and realities. Chapter Five investigates this theme within the context of the Siwan community.

The second theme is: the creation of “Home” is manifested in the way we build. It emphasises that architecture is primarily a built form, which allows dwelling when it gathers and represents its world. Chapter Six explores this theme in private space and investigates “place” as a foothold and dwelling. This is revealed in the Siwan tectonic, which manifests how to “live poetically” under the regional conditions, as the word “poetic” reveals and appreciates the qualitative identity of the desert.

Between these two themes, we find the “identity” of place, where the cultural landscape allows the characteristics of built form to emerge as a distinct “vernacular architecture”. The third theme therefore is: identity is manifested in social space. It suggests that
Public space is the realm in which people build invisible structures in which social identity can "dwell". Chapter Seven attempts to investigate the layers of meaning as embodied in public space.

Taken together the three themes constitute a grounded theory of critical regionalism concerning dwelling and building. And as I have suggested, the Siwan experience is of relevance because it makes regionalism a living reality. In the process of analysis, both the researcher and the subject matter were an essential instrument and an active factor for the interpretation. The next chapter extends this phenomenological perspective in designing the methodological framework. The aim is to develop a phenomenological approach suitable for the study of the experience of built environment in the lived world of Siwa.
CHAPTER THREE
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

This chapter outlines the methodological framework for the thesis. It explains how I use a phenomenological approach to allow an integrated and culture-sensitive approach to understanding, managing and designing the built environment in remote communities. The investigation and interpretation of the experience of built environment is a complex task and there is no single method that can provide a concise guide to empirical data. It requires a framework that combines several methods to explore the impact of different phenomena in the social world and its product of built environment. The methods used were phenomenological reflection, ethnographic fieldwork and qualitative analysis.

My particular focus of interest has been the way in which the Siwans experience, interpret and structure their built environment. Therefore the main objective of the fieldwork was to allow better understanding of the phenomenon of dwelling in the desert, and its significance for the provision of a meaningful built environment. A qualitative approach was adopted for the fieldwork, which involved four trips to Siwa oasis. They occurred during two visits to Egypt in 1997 and 1998. The first visit was from mid-April to mid-July 1997, and the second visit was for six weeks during February-March 1998.

The phenomenological qualitative approach allowed the investigation of local phenomena within the Siwan community. It revealed both concrete and intangible bonds between the Siwans and features of the landscape, which informed an understanding of the nature of reciprocity in such a relationship. A narrative approach to interpretation allowed me to elucidate the multi-voices of Siwa. This methodological framework influenced the collection of data, the sampling and the analytical processes.

1. Methodological framework
In order for me to truly perceive, and yet to analyse, I must somehow be both de-centred from and immersed into the phenomenon itself. Such a self-conscious standpoint is the essence of any qualitative research work. For the most part, it is the “self” that is involved with the universe of beings in the world; whether myself as a researcher or the “self” of my subject matter. The everyday self, I believe, tends to conceal things as they are. The enhancement of this everyday self, by revealing the significance of its
subjectivity, can facilitate authentic being for the self, thus enabling it to reciprocate with "other" things that manifest themselves as well. Heidegger suggests that one way to this enhancement is poetry. He believes that poetry reveals the universal and thus manifests a higher reality. As such poetry liberates us from the domain of reason and allows us to dwell authentically. What this concept offers me is the insight that to truly understand how we might dwell authentically, I have to delve into the realm of the unreason, the mythical and the unseen.

This type of research implies an emphasis on processes and meanings that are not measured in terms of quantity, amount, intensity or frequency. Instead it stresses the socially constructed nature of reality, and it tries to find answers to questions about how everyday life experience is created and given meaning. This makes a qualitative approach particularly relevant to this phenomenological study. Phenomenology itself is dedicated to describing the structures of experience as they present themselves to consciousness, without recourse to theory, deduction, or assumptions from the natural sciences.

What the methodological framework of this thesis does is to integrate qualitative techniques that can be used in the investigation of a single case study in order to reveal the significance of its local phenomena. Three themes were proposed in Chapter Two to undertake the theoretical investigation of this study: first, the phenomenological relationships between people and nature as manifested in the interaction with natural resources; second, the conceptualisation of “Home” as manifested in the way we build; third, identity as manifested in social space. The three themes were explored and explained in relation to natural, private and public space, in order to produce a grounded theory of critical regionalism.

Qualitative researchers study cases in their natural context to make sense of and interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them, and select and deploy

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strategies, methods or empirical materials according to the actual need and circumstances experienced in the field. They also invent or employ new tools if necessary. This flexibility and sensitivity is essential for conducting phenomenological inquiry, which relies on revealing everyday life experiences. Qualitative researchers undertake a number of diverse procedures ranging from interviewing to observing, to interpreting personal and historical documents. They also engage in intensive self-reflection and introspection. In other words, they bring forth their subjectivity to interpret the phenomenon as it is, rather than dissecting it for analysis. As such, the research is guided by both the investigator and the research subject. It is clear that the personal history of the researcher, who has a specific expertise, culture, class, gender and ethnic community perspective, stands behind these generic activities.

Qualitative research has been accused of being unscientific, unrepresentative, open to bias and manipulation, and therefore producing a distorted truth. Qualitative theorists reject such positivist criteria. In contrast, they consider these methods as only one way of telling a story about the social world; like measuring a house without experiencing living in it, this produces only a certain type of science. They believe that rich descriptions of the social world are a valuable and legitimate form of knowledge, reinforcing their relevance to phenomenological investigation. Phenomenologists tend to believe that not only objects in the natural and cultural worlds but also ideal objects, such as numbers, and even conscious life itself can be made evident and thus known. The importance of this to the phenomenology of built environment is that it makes concrete notions such as dwelling, ontological security and sense of place.

For the exploration of the three themes of investigation, I needed to understand how people perceive local phenomena. In his attempt to apply the phenomenological method to the social world, Alfred Schutz proposes a number of features as fundamental aspects of a conscious experience of everyday life. He believes that people can experience reality

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7 Glaser, B. G. and A. L. Strauss (1967).
through forms such as reciprocity of perspectives, objectivity and non-deceptiveness of appearance, practicality and goal-directedness, typifications and a stock of common-sense knowledge. Schutz’s analysis of everyday life emphasises the central significance of habitual activities. For him, this world is based upon common culture, through which individuals interpret their experiences in almost the same way. I found this view of the analysis of everyday life to be relevant to the Siwa case, which significantly expresses a common culture.

Ethnomethodology also studies the practices of reasoning in everyday life, the method by which people make assumptions about the world and their place in it. Harold Garfinkel argues that people account for social reality, thus everything is embedded in a surrounding context that must be taken-for-granted. Garfinkel therefore stresses reflexivity and indexicality as a radical version of social phenomenology. Ethnomethodology implies that people assume that meanings will eventually emerge and do not insist that everything be meaningful the moment they experience it. This was particularly important for the investigation of local strategies in encountering modernity, and also in their reflexivity in examining their social realities. As ethnomethodology points out, only when something happens to disturb people’s sense of normal flow of action do they examine their social realities.

In this respect research is a uniquely individual enterprise. As a field investigator however, I had difficulty with the differentiation between “I” as an external observer and my informants as “subject matter”. Thus a distinction first introduced by Max Weber was a useful guide in untangling some of the complexity involved. In a famous essay titled The Meaning of Ethical Neutrality in Sociology and Economics, Weber distinguished between “value relevance” and “value freedom”. “Value relevance” refers to those sets of interests, questions and puzzles that demarcate an area of knowledge and research as worthy of inquiry and analysis. What makes a given subject matter worthy of analysis, Weber wrote,

Is its perceived relevance for the value interests of the investigator situated in the present. These interests change over time and are culturally, historically, and politically motivated. “Value freedom”

14 Foltz, B. V. (19).
however, refers to the standards and criteria of scholarship, research, and theoretical presentations that a scholar has to follow and live up to once he has demarcated his subject matter and defined his techniques of investigation. Value freedom does not mean that a scholar should have no ethical or political commitments, or mean that he should not communicate them to others; it means that he should distinguish as carefully, as honestly, and as forcefully as he can between the demands of his subject matter and scholarship and his own stance on these issues.¹⁹

We are affected by our own social and cultural pasts. To be meaningful to others our own research should relate to the theories inherited from the past and be able to confront our contemporary lived world. Researchers should be aware of the sources of the ideas that motivate them in order to find an understanding of the social and cultural world. In my case, my “value freedom” is my point of departure as a Muslim woman who has inherited a holistic way of thinking and understanding of different phenomena through the intellectual-spiritual formation of my identity. Any identity, however, is based on differentiation from others. Yet it is not necessarily a differentiation which takes the form of opposition between “I” and the “Other”. It is rather a differentiation that might allow a wider perspective on the same phenomenon: an optional extra that might yield a successful understanding of our world and our place in it.

This methodological framework was my point of departure towards formulating a theory grounded in the research findings. However, a problematic issue in grounding a theory in the local phenomena of Siwa was how to support the validity of a theory produced from a single case study. The investigation of the Siwan experience in isolation may only produce unexplained phenomena; as Collins argues, “local phenomena within particular societies are not explicable by themselves, because they are part of a larger world system.”²⁰ This concept raises a methodological problem; yet as Collins asks, “if there is only one world system, how can we test a theory?”²¹ He sees the theory produced within such a framework as invalid. On the other hand, he sees a theory induced from a small number of instances, or even having exhausted a universe of cases in formulating it, “is in fact a valid picture of the underlying causal processes which govern our world”.²² He therefore asserts that although qualitative microsociology and observation-based

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²¹ Ibid., p.503.
²² Ibid., p.504.
studies do not rely upon statistical techniques, their validity comes from the degree to which they sustain a coherence with accumulated theoretical principles. The three themes of this thesis were therefore tested and explained through various fields of study in order to establish a consistent coherence with other well-grounded theories. This placement of the thesis supports the validity of the theory grounded in the research findings.

2. Grounded theory: A key tool of analysis

In qualitative field-studies, analysis is conceived as a product of an emergent process in which "the analyst is the central agent". Lofland, for example, defines analysis as "the fieldworker's derivative ordering of the data", and in this respect it is a creative act. It is guided by the data being gathered, and focused by evaluative criteria. Thus the process remains, and is intended to be, substantially open-ended in character.

Paul Atkinson has reflected on the inductive features of qualitative analysis as "making it all come together". However he also stresses the role of open-endedness; he says:

Quite apart from actually achieving it, it is hard to inject the right mix of (a) faith that it can be and will be achievable; (b) recognition that it has to be worked at, and isn't based on romantic inspiration; (c) that it isn't like the solution of a puzzle or math problem, but has to be created; (d) that you can't pack everything into one version, and that any one project could yield several different ways of bringing it together.

The significance of this approach to the analysis of built environment is that it allows the researcher to be involved with different phenomena which in turn get the time to be revealed. In a complex social and cultural context of built environment, where phenomena of everyday life are always open to interpretation and reinterpretation, the analysis of the immediate and final product is almost impossible without digging into the nature of everyday life itself. In other words, the phases of revealing the central phenomenon are very much dependent upon understanding its expression in everyday life experiences.

My analysis of the Siwan experience followed a grounded theory strategy developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), and further by Strauss and Corbin (1990). The central

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24 Ibid., p.181.
phenomenon of the investigation is the impact of modernity on the built environment, as manifested in the deprivation of the traditional context of its "meaningful totality". This manifestation was revealed in the Siwan narrative through the socio-cultural changes over the recent past. The story line of the Siwan experience conceptualised the core category of the investigation: the interrelationships between "people" and "nature". The core category was further explored in terms of its significance in the experience of everyday life. Strauss and Corbin summarise this process of formulating a grounded theory. They write,

Grounded theory is an action oriented model, therefore in some way the theory has to show action and change... The central phenomenon is at the heart of the interpretation process... The core category must be the sun, standing in orderly systematic relationships to its planets.27

The process of selecting the core category revealed the sub-categories involved in the manifestation of the story of Siwa. The interpretation of the integrated natural, environmental, social and cultural categories and their intervening conditions resulted in the emergence of three themes, representing the central phenomenon. The three themes were further explored and explained with various aspects of the theoretical framework.

Over the course of analysing and coding my field notes and interviews, I moved from initial coding which involved axial and selective coding to focused coding, this validated the theory against the data in order to ensure its grounding.28 In the first phase, I used myself as an instrument of the research, informed and stimulated by my "commitment, interests, expertise and personal history",29 to inductively identify several themes in the activities and relationships of life in Siwa. In the second phase, I progressively focused on a selection of key themes, brought forth their phenomenal significance and tested them within the theoretical framework. Then, I needed to go back to first findings in order to make sense of the central phenomenon. Yet the third phase needed more thinking and reflection, similar to the first phase; or as Agar sums it up, "for that, you need a little bit of data and a lot of right brain".30

The phenomenological model for the analysis of this thesis, introduced in Chapter One, is further developed in Figure 3-1. The model diagrammatically illustrates the grounded

theory strategy developed by Strauss and Corbin. This allowed the development of a reflexive, "vague-to-clear" approach of analysis, which may be considered characteristic of a phenomenological model. This model was used for the development of a theory grounded in the Siwan experience.

Figure 3-1, An analytical process of a grounded phenomenological theory of critical regionalism

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The phenomenological model for a grounded theory starts with defining the central phenomenon, which has resulted from specific causal conditions. This leads to the manifestation of the context in which the phenomenon is revealed. This context presents the story under investigation, interpreting its line and exploring its intervening conditions in everyday life experiences. The following steps are the induction of fundamental themes and the formulation of a theory grounded in the data. The model shows a double circulation between several stages of the process which means a reflexive view. It also shows a feedback process in which the central phenomenon and the emerging one are in a continuous state of recurrence and change due to the ongoing nature of the experience. Yet this state of recurrence and change support the validation of a grounded theory.

The development of the analyses of the Siwan narrative followed this model. The analytic process extracted three main themes and investigated their relationships with the Siwan built environment. The reflection on and interpretation of the three themes revealed "local strategies" as a new phenomenon that has emerged from the central phenomenon of the impact of modernity. The grounding of a phenomenological theory of regionalism was validated against the data as illustrated diagrammatically in Figure 3-1. The following section is a demonstration of the methods used to apply this model in the field.

3. Being there

A strategy of being with and around the participants of a setting over a period of time is the most directly involving and therefore the most intimate and morally hazardous method of social research. It is precisely because it is the most penetrating of strategies, the most close and telling mode of gathering information, that it raises different social and moral questions.\(^{32}\)

My first visit to Siwa was a trip to the unknown. I did not have any expectations or presuppositions as to how I would find my informants in such a tribal society or how I would introduce myself to them. Actually, I was afraid of what might happen. I tried to remember all the literature I had read about field work, but my situation was absolutely different from anything described elsewhere. The only way was to deal with it as a unique setting. A Muslim woman coming from a distance to stay for some time and to do research work concerning the life of the people and their built environment is an unprecedented situation. It would require me talking to both genders and to groups of

different status. Most importantly, it would involve me going into the houses of the local people and being directly in and around their public and private settings. From an Islamic perspective, it was a complicated case. I therefore returned to the cultural rules which might affect my situation.

In traditional Islamic societies, women’s travel is conditioned by Islamic principles. Generally, a Muslim woman should not travel alone, unless going to a well known destination. Otherwise, she should travel in a safe group, or be accompanied by a male family member. The aim of this principle is the safety of women and the provision of required privacy. I was therefore very careful about the first impression I made in Siwa, as it might affect my future interaction with such a conservative society. I decided to start my involvement within the context of a family visit. I asked my sister, her husband and her son to come with me. I promised them an exotic holiday away from the busy life of Cairo. It was April and the weather should be fine. Yet they had assured me that they would do this for me anyway. So it was that I started the first kilometre on the 846 km road to Siwa. I was full of excitement, passion, and hope that my fieldwork would be a pleasant and rewarding experience.

My participation in the Siwan experience began as a highly humanistic enterprise. I was utterly immersed in the flux of raw reality during my first visit to Siwa. I began with an open-ended and open-minded desire to “know” the significance of the Siwan community and its built environment. At the start, I could not envisage how the concrete activities I had been doing could help give structure to the process of emergent induction. The first visit to the “field” was certainly full of contradictory feelings.

3.1. Developing a strategy to fieldwork access
In order to undertake fieldwork in a remote community such as Siwa, gaining access was an essential phase in the research process. Access is a prerequisite for research to be conducted in general, and an essential element in any phenomenological study. Burgess, for example, stated that access influences the reliability and validity of the data being obtained. In addition, the points of contact will influence the collection of data, because in this type of investigation the researcher needs to delve into a deeper level of the experience, sometimes into the unconscious level of it. The personal activities of the

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researcher will also influence the informants' point of view.\textsuperscript{35} This has a direct impact on the way a phenomenological investigation can be undertaken. There were also other key issues involved in that phase of doing fieldwork, concerning initial contacts and cultural and ethical considerations of both the researcher and the case study. Subsidiary issues were the relevance of gatekeepers, and the presentation of the study.

The investigation of the Siwan case study involved four trips to Siwa oasis. The four trips occurred during two visits to Egypt in 1997 and 1998. The first visit, which I considered a pilot study, was from mid-April to mid-July 1997. During the pilot study, three trips to Siwa occurred with durations of one week for the first and second, and four weeks for the third trip. The second visit, which I consider the main fieldwork trip, was for six weeks during February-March 1998. The duration of the field trips was helpful in two ways; first, it helped in coping with the "different" context of the field; and second, it allowed the immediate coding of the data collected. Figure 3-2 summarises the development of a strategy of fieldwork access.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field trip</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Method to access the field</th>
<th>Gaining access to the field</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1\textsuperscript{st}</td>
<td>23-30 April 1997</td>
<td>Self-reflection Unknown observer (new strategy) Observation Gatekeeper (negotiation)</td>
<td>successful limited limited uncertain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2\textsuperscript{nd}</td>
<td>21-28 May 1997</td>
<td>Gatekeeper key informants</td>
<td>unsuccessful successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3\textsuperscript{rd}</td>
<td>3-30 June 1997</td>
<td>Key informants snowball sampling 11 Unstructured interviews Observation and self-reflection</td>
<td>successful successful successful successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4\textsuperscript{th}</td>
<td>15 February - 30 March 1998</td>
<td>Key informants Theoretical sampling 50 Unstructured interviews Observation and participation</td>
<td>successful successful successful successful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 3-2, Developing a strategy of fieldwork access**

*Time-method table*

For the first visit, the pilot study trips, I spent three months in Egypt and a total of six weeks in Siwa. The frequent trips allowed me to develop a self-conscious situation of being immersed in and detached from the field at suitable times. This process was important to reflect on the data and to develop and improve my strategy from trip to trip.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{35} Benson, D. and Hughes, J. A. (1983).
It was also an important opportunity for me, as a first time field researcher, not to feel the impact of being totally isolated in a different context. On each of the three trips I was accompanied, and especially on the second trip the company was also intellectual.

During the first trip (23-30 April 1997), as I explained earlier, I went to the oasis as a family trip. I used a covert research method. I started this stage of the investigation by observation and self-reflection. The importance of the first trip extended well beyond my expectations. A fundamental aspect was my desert journey and its impact on the development of my phenomenological understanding, and afterwards on the development of the core category of the analysis.36 In Siwa, I was immediately immersed in and fascinated by the context. The contrast between the emptiness and lack of context of the desert and the significant landscape and traditional building of the oasis illuminated many aspects of my previous reading in the literature of both modernity and phenomenology. I was wandering about, observing the local context with both the astonished eye of a traveller and the scrutinising eye of a researcher.

During that trip however, it was not possible to conduct interviews or contact official agencies. Instead, I started to develop some relationships with members of the community, which I maintained in the following visits. Those relationships were mainly directed to women, as my presence in Siwa as a member of a family was meaningful to them. A negotiation of access to the community with a gatekeeper, who was a Siwan residing in Cairo and was known to one of my contacts there, was also one of the achievements of the first trip.

In my second visit (21-28 May 1997), I was accompanied by my thesis supervisor at that time, and the “guide” (the gatekeeper) from Cairo to Siwa. My supervisor, a middle aged western woman, was very careful about her appearance, and she brought a covering all-over black dress to wear in Siwa. I advised that by doing so, she would be too good to be true. The Siwans were already familiar with European tourists, as I noticed in my first trip. Instead, she covered her head with a scarf the same way I did. I wanted to appear to the local people as an outsider, but not culturally a foreigner. My strategy on that trip was to act as a known observer. Thus, the presence of my supervisor was helpful in terms of validating my identity as a “student”.

36 The desert journey and its phenomenological attributes is discussed in Chapter Five, section 1.
My field experience indicated that using a guide was not a successful method. I found that the guide tried to direct my research, impose his ideas, and limit my entry to particular public settings and individuals. I therefore decided to seek access through key informants rather than a gatekeeper in the following trip. Accordingly I maintained my previous relationships and visited several families with my supervisor. That time it was not a family visit, but I was not totally a stranger. I started to speak of myself, my background and the nature of my visit. I gave some individuals simple and clear indications about my aim to study the relationship between the Siwans and their oasis. I told them that I do this research work for a scholarly reason. My message was clear that I would use their stories only as a light through which I might see the truth about our dwelling in-the-world. That was appreciated by everyone, with surprise that the Siwan experience, with its "simplicity" as they see it, may have any useful attributes. I told them that I would come on a later visit, a longer one which would be my substantial work. They agreed to help with promises to give me aid and support, later fulfilled.

During my second trip, I conducted my first interview, which was with the president of the Siwa City Council, at that time. Again, the presence of my European supervisor was helpful, as the official man made sure that his interview would not be used against him within the Egyptian context. Through that official I was introduced to some of the Siwan agencies, political representatives and the head of one of the tribes. The importance of this trip manifested in two ways: first, it assured my trustworthiness as a new figure in the community; second, it assured me of my ability to conduct fieldwork, with no fear. From then it was clear to the Siwans that my role was an observer, who might move about with a tape recorder, take photographs and ask questions. My role, as a known observer, was unrestricted by socially defined considerations of gender which may affect a male researcher, or by officially defined limitations of interaction with local people, in the case of a non-Egyptian researcher, who would in most cases be considered a "spy".

On the third visit I spent four weeks (3-30 June 1997). This time I was accompanied by my children (6 and 4 years) and my niece (13 years). The image of a mother and children was very helpful, and it opened doors for me without much trouble. It also gave me another perspective on the experience: how do people interact with the children? How do the children interact with such a context? The observation of their adaptation to an absolutely different context gave me a clue about how humans build up relationships with built environment in a phenomenological sense. In addition, it enhanced my recognition
of the peculiarity of the Siwan built environment in a practical way through the hard experiences we encountered. During this phase I used an ethnomethodological approach and overt research methods, as a known observer, and conducted the unstructured interviews. To give me permission to enter their private sphere, the informants were mostly interested in what the purpose of my research was and whether it could help them or hurt them. In this regard, I had to assure them that it was only academic research, and it had nothing to do with empirical development policies.

My fourth field trip to Siwa was the final fieldwork from 15 February-30 March 1998. This time I was alone in the "field", yet not a "new" figure. From the first day I started to initiate my old relationships and use them to generate new ones. In a few days the context of Siwa had become "my" fieldwork. People began to talk to me more freely, as they already knew about me. Women were calling me from the street and invited me to their houses. I became more confident and trusting towards them. However, it was a long six weeks in which I tried to maintain a subtle separation between myself and my informants. It was hard to be detached and close enough to observe and understand at the same time. I was investigating the case study through the personal accounts of real people, through their public and private experiences, and through their everyday life "at home". Thus there were moments that I wished to give everything up and return back to my family, to my context, and there were moments that I wished to stay for the rest of my life within the authentic context of the Siwan community. Between these extremes, I was sorting out my information; in other words, I was coding my data. The strategy of slow entry to the community, illustrated in Figure 3-2, allowed me to observe who stood where in the local hierarchy, which further helped the sampling process.

3.2. Data collection

In qualitative fieldwork research, collecting data is a multiple process. One way is through interviewing people; this raises the problem of sampling. My major aim was to observe the people in their natural interactive everyday life, to record their experiences with the phenomenological associations of built environment, and to test the central phenomena of the theory. Yet attention must be given to the context of tribal society, in which, although not obviously apparent, there are a local hierarchy, gender divisions and intellectual differences. In such a context, unless situations and temporal variations are captured, problems of data restrictions arise. Glaser and Strauss assert that, sampling
does not end until a completely grounded theory is constructed. To achieve this close relationship between theory and sampling, Denzin suggests that one might go beyond conventional sampling. Thus, "A fluid, interactive relationship must exist between theory and sampling".

"Theoretically directed sampling" was relevant to this research, as it achieves a satisfactory correspondence between theory and data. To harvest a theoretical sampling in Siwa however, gaining access to the community was an essential stage. A strategy of slow entry, as I explained earlier, offered the first step in the sampling process: the location and enumeration of a population of theoretical relevance.

In the pilot fieldwork, it was important to find individuals willing to co-operate and provide me with information. In particular, it was important to find women who approved the recording of their voice; some of them were unsure whether the tape recorder records the image as well as the voice, and in all cases I had to have prior approval from their husbands. Considering the social setting of Siwa, my key informants were selected in the first stage of the sampling process according to an opportunistic sampling technique; I had to find them as I went. Informants were from different age groups, both genders, and different educational levels. They were a starting point to put me in touch with their relatives and friends by a snowball method, which was a useful sampling procedure for a random enumeration within the Siwan community. I started with the same group in the substantial fieldwork trip.

The main sampling objective was to cover a wide range of cultural, social, historical and reflexive issues, at the level of both the individual and community experiences. The aim was to achieve a sample of the Siwan society that represents the core social structure of the community. This sample was sought to elucidate the multiple voices of Siwa. In this respect, the sample would allow the induction and deduction of data. But this raises the question of sample size: "How does an investigator know when a sample adequately mirrors a population?" Denzin suggests that a sample should not vary on relevant dimensions by more than 5 per cent from the population. For example, the Siwan community is 55 per cent male and 45 per cent female, therefore the representative

39 Ibid.
sample of 60 persons should have 33 male and 27 female. Furthermore, there are 9 tribes in Siwa, so the representative sample of 60 persons should have at least 6 people from each tribe. This way of drawing a representative sample was also used to select interviewees from different social units, such as educated-uneducated, employed-self-employed, members of the tribes-local residents, and age samples.

Yet Denzin argues that these procedures are not the only insurance of the adequacy of the theoretical sample. He believes that "to draw a sample of theoretical relevance a firm grasp of the theory under investigation is necessary." For example in the Siwan experience, if the theory contains propositions concerning the leadership attributes at the tribal society level, as further investigated in Chapter Seven, then the sampling procedure must yield data on such attributes. Therefore my sample contained interviews with three Siwan Sheikhs and two of their wives out of the nine tribes.

I conducted 53 individual and eight focus group in-depth unstructured interviews. All interviews were conducted for a period of time ranging between 45 and 90 minutes. Informants ranged in age from 15-75 years. I also spent some time with each interviewee observing, and in several cases, especially with women, participating in their everyday life. I kept a detailed diary of my experiences. I also documented the architecture of five old mud houses, fully occupied, as well as two new concrete houses. The biophysical characteristics of the built environment of Siwa were recorded through sketches, slides and photographs. Both in Cairo and Siwa, I collected documentary information from governmental agencies and organisations; the collection of this data occurred during the two visits in 1997 and 1998. This was useful in terms of reviewing the data of the pilot study and refining the three themes of the thesis, which resulted from the primary analysis of the 18 interviews conducted in 1997. Therefore the data collected in 1998 was focused on the interpretation of these themes.

40 Ibid., P.85.
41 Ibid., p.85.
42 See Appendix One for interviewees list. My interviewees approved the recording of their interviews and the use of their real names, only female and children quotations are anonymous.
3.3. Analytic process

The analytic process was drawn from the procedures and techniques of grounded theory. It offers a series of useful strategies for generating theory with qualitative research. It emphasises that, significant insights may come from one’s own experience, from those of others and from existing theory. This was helpful in developing my theoretical sensitivity to data analysis. Yet I developed a more flexible sense of examining the literature in my area of research. This perspective on analysis helped me to relate my research to that of others but, at the same time, I felt unconstrained by any specific hypothesis or theoretical system, this is useful in producing a phenomenological study.

The Siwan experience was recorded through unstructured interviews. The first part of each interview covered the personal background of interviewees and their perception of the changes taking place in the Siwan built environment. The second part was largely directed by the characteristics of the individuals, but focused on their phenomenological relationships with aspects of the Siwan natural and built environment. My aim was to give the interviewees the time and chance to recall their own experience in relation to the whole story of Siwa, which dependent on their abilities to express and recall.

The analysis of data involved the verbatim transcription of interviews and the review of documents, maps, architectural plans and photographs. These materials were used to analyse and make links between the individuals’ perception of the phenomenal changes in their built environment and the conceptual themes which the data revealed. The local phenomena were categorised by classifying different concepts of events, happenings and changes. A process of coding, examining, comparing and conceptualising produced the characteristics of each category. Finally a process of grouping of categories and validating the theory against the data ensured its grounding in the research findings.

4. Research Significance and self-consciousness

The product of my fieldwork in Siwa expresses the history of the Siwans using their own words to express their life, fears, needs and dreams. I have attempted to portray the conditions of their homes and families through personal observation and direct communication. I did that for the sake of the study, but I still feel that what I did was “uncover” the Siwans who allowed me to enter their life in a way that they never had with anyone before. They regarded my interest in their way of life in their secluded place as a sign of empathy and understanding. They appreciated the interest in their
experience and that their "place" has conveyed meaningful notions to "others" as it did to them. My phenomenological analysis of the Siwan community is the first ever for this particular oasis. My interviews with the Siwan women are historical, as it is the first time that a female Siwan voice has been recorded on a tape or participated in research work. The theoretical sampling procedures as utilised in this case study have also demonstrated the success of the strategy in tribal contexts.

The following chapters are therefore an opening up of the Siwan experience to our consciousness. The insights it gives us are the product of a real life experience of a specific group of people with whom we share the world. Many questions arise: How did the Siwans establish their community, and why has it become their "place"? What is the origin of their cultural understanding of nature and their inherited relationships with the physical landscape? What are the social and cultural practices that enhanced their sense of community and participation and sustained the tribal social order for eight centuries? And also, how relevant is the Siwan experience to enhancing our understanding of meaningful built environment in a remote community under the impact of modernity? These questions are the subject of inquiry throughout the following four chapters. The next chapter, however, explores the way in which Siwa as a traditionally Islamic society has evolved in place over time.

43 The use of the terms "us", "our" and "we" in the context of this thesis denotes the contemporary individuals within the human community in a postmodern world.
CHAPTER FOUR
THE SIWAN EXPERIENCE

The primary aim of this chapter is to develop a preliminary phenomenological understanding of the Siwan experience. An inquiry concerning the Siwan built environment must necessarily start with the origin of human attempts to form a permanent settlement in the oasis. This settlement has become a foothold in the world for its inhabitants, while it evolves and grows in place over time. The chapter reviews the geographic and historical background of Siwa, and expresses the Siwan experience through the narratives that have been kept over the years. The sources for this stage of the investigation are the writings of the few Egyptians who spent some time in Siwa during their employment in the oasis over the twentieth century, supplemented by material from my interviews with members of the Siwan community.

The four case study chapters, this and the next three chapters, adopt a phenomenological approach to the investigation of layers of meaning in the specific cultural context of the Siwan built environment. To ground this investigation of the Siwan experience, in a phenomenological sense, each of the chapters starts with a personal reflection upon human and natural phenomena which the researcher has experienced in the field.

1. First reflection: Getting to the “Field”?

Both the physical and metaphorical journey to the field left a significant impact on me. To go to Siwa, one has to take the Delta train from Cairo to Alexandria for 220 km, then the West Delta bus from Alexandria to Marsa Matruh for 320 km parallel to the Northern Coast. Then, after a short stopover, it goes south-west to Siwa for 306 km (see Figure 1-1). The long trip from Cairo to Siwa, lasting from 7 a.m. to 8:30 p.m., was a good opportunity to reflect on research and the actual work of doing research. I thought about what I wanted to do and how much of it I would be able to achieve.

On the trip from Alexandria to Marsa Matruh I came to realise that the “Northern Coast Villages”, a 1980s term to define the summer houses of rich Egyptians, covered almost all the 320 km between the two cities. The so-called “villages” are characterised by summer houses, enormous units and different styles and names mostly with foreign

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1 I should add the 21 hour flight from New Zealand to Egypt as well.
accents. Ironically this phenomenon represented a dream come true for me, because in 1978 I was one of four architects who promoted “the development of the Northern Coast” as one of the projects which belonged to the Public Sector and the Ministry of Housing. The project’s aim was to attract the population from the densely populated south part of the Nile Delta - which resembles an upside down triangle - to the northern part of the Mediterranean Coast between Alexandria and Port Said. The project became an essential part of our professional dream. The four of us had taken three years to finish the urban design and architecture of the chosen area, Al-Maamoura [the Inhabitable]. The main focus of our work was to exploit the best potential of the site for coastal summer houses, followed by services and recreation areas which separated it from the neighbourhood beyond. The whole project was a demonstration of the theories of modern architecture and urban design.

The early phase of development of the Northern Coast intended to present a prototype that could be repeated in other sites alongside the 700 km coast from Port Said to Marsa Matruh. I found however that the dream had turned to a nightmare. Its focus had changed from the urgent need of solving the “housing crisis” in the south of the Delta to the development of superficial luxury houses and waste of huge investments. Meanwhile, the housing problem in the Delta still grew, with an ever-increasing population preventing reasonable development. If the original project had proceeded in the right direction, it would have solved a critical situation of over-population in the Nile Valley.

I reflected on my research. What if the new “plans” for attracting the population from the Nile Valley to Siwa followed the same course? Could it be possible after ten years to find that Siwa had turned into a five star tourist resort? What would happen then? Would the community have to move to make room for the rich German and Japanese tourists? To escape such sad thoughts I turned my face towards an old friend, the Mediterranean Sea, but it was hard to see its lovely blue face through all those so-called “villages”.

2. The emergence of the Siwan settlement
The emergence of the Siwan settlement in such a remote and isolated oasis is a phenomenon that brought together people and nature in a reciprocal relationship. The early inhabitants had perhaps searched deliberately for a landmark or a feature on the horizon that was so prominent as to attract their attention. A flat surface of sand, which
expresses the desert, does not offer many possibilities of identification. Instead, it creates a sense of placelessness, in which a sense of dwelling would have been impossible. In their searching they had found the temple of the Oracle on the peak of a hill, maintained for hundreds of years and looking from its seclusion towards the life-sustaining palm groves in the lower parts of the depression. Thus, since the peak on the horizon was highly visible, their eyes paused at another peak. And finally they had found the place that made the structure of "being" manifest. That was the top surface of a 200 metre high hill. The two conical rocks at its top had evoked the memory of sacred sites in ancient times, where the conical peaks would have been apprehended as "the goddess' lap, like the lap of horned Isis upon [which] the pharaohs sat".

The following sub-sections are an outline of the geographical and historical aspects of the Siwa oasis. They examine the qualities that helped the emergence of the Siwan settlement in this place.

2.1. Geographical background

Geographically, Siwa is an extensive oasis in the Western Desert of Egypt. The Western Desert is a part of the north African desert belt, that starts at the Atlantic coast and extends to the Red Sea and Sinai, then continues eastward from Arabia to the centre of Asia. It is one of the most arid regions in the world. In fact, the Nile Valley is the only cultivated area in this desert (see Figure 1-1).

Siwa oasis is located in one of the depressions that form the end of a limestone plateau which extends from upper Egypt, slopes northward and ends in a great depression below sea level in some parts. The floor of Siwa averages 18 meters below sea level (R.L.: 17-24m), and the highest parts in this area average 200 meters above sea level. The depression of Siwa (see Figure 1-2) is some 82km long, between 25°east and 29° west. The breadth of the depression is about 9km in the west and reaches about 28km in the

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5 The Western Desert embraces about 66 % of the total area of Egypt, but contains and only 0.5 % of the population.
east. The town of Siwa is roughly at the centre. The extensive oasis was an important junction for caravan routes in prehistoric and medieval times.

2.2. Historical background

The prehistory of Siwa has not been thoroughly studied. Information about the prehistory of Siwa is based on the surface finds made by a very few historians. Yet Siwa was inhabited in Palaeolithic and Neolithic times. Archaeological finds show that the culture of its inhabitants was similar to those of the Nile Valley. The ancient Egyptians called the inhabitants of the districts to the West of Egypt “Tehenu”. These districts were Egyptianised only in the 18th Dynasty (15th century BC). Yet in the 26th Dynasty (663BC- 525BC) an important period of movement and change occurred in the Old World, which included Near Eastern countries, the Greeks and the Asiatic civilisations in Central Asia and China. Siwa, as part of the Old World, was affected by that change.

There are many speculations about the origin and meaning of the word “Siwa” but none of these is conclusive, as it was not known before the middle ages. In the 15th century Al-Maqrizi and other Arab writers called this oasis Santarieh; they mentioned that its inhabitant spoke a language called Al-Siwiyah [the Siwi]. Also in the writings of the Romans and Greeks it was referred to as the oasis of Jupiter-Ammon, after the Oracle of Ammon. The Oracle was built in the 26th Dynasty, in the rule of Amasis. According to the inscriptions at Jabal Al-Mawta, the oasis was prosperous and famous, especially after the visit of Alexander the Great to the oasis and his great devotion to the Oracle.

Christianity reached Siwa in the 4th century. The agents of Justinian were instructed to close the pagan temples throughout Egypt. They were enthusiastic in carrying out his orders to places as far as Siwa. They succeeded in converting a part of the population to Christianity and closing the Temple of the Oracle; but the new religion did not achieve the same success in Siwa as it did on the coast or in the Nile Valley.

11 Ibid.
13 Fakhry, A. (1973:24)
14 The king of Egypt from 527-565.
By the end of the 4th century, the power and authority upon the desert had dramatically decreased, thus anarchy and disorder spread. Instead, the power went to the pagan tribes of the Berbers who came from the north-west of Africa. 15 Their pagan belief system continued side by side with Christianity until the introduction of Islam into Siwa on the 11th century. 16 According to the Siwan Manuscript, 17 two Arab Muslim tribes settled in the oasis, learned the Siwan language and the Siwan Berbers accepted them as members in the community. 18 They invited the five Berber tribes to Islam, and the majority of the inhabitants were converted at that time. Since then, the seven tribes have formed the Siwan community, which encompassed the cultural backgrounds of all its members.

Over two centuries the seven Siwan tribes had suffered severely during the brutal raids of the desert pirates. As a consequence of these raids the population was reduced at the beginning of the 13th century to about 200 persons. The inhabitants comprised the seven tribes with a mere forty men. To protect themselves and save their lives from the raids, the forty remaining men decided to built a fortress on a hilltop. They called it "Shali". 19

The brief review of the geographical and historical background of Siwan society reveals the significant role of the built environment in the evolution and sustainability of Siwa. It can be understood as follows: 1) Members of Siwan society at the beginning of the 13th century came from diverse backgrounds, each of which had had its own mythical and phenomenological relationships with nature; 2) The social structure was a hybrid of both the Arab Muslims and the converted Berbers. It produced a Muslim society talking a non-Arabic language, and practising Islamic rituals while retaining pre-Islamic ones; 3) Siwa was in its worst days of decline in the period between the 9th and 12th centuries. The community had begun to revive only since the 13th century with the construction of the fortress at Shali; 4) Both concrete and intangible phenomena had influenced their understanding of the way in which their built environment had to be constructed. Their phenomenological relationships with nature were expressed in their understanding and familiarity with the surrounding physical environment and landscape, and in their fear of losing their lives and their aspirations for security; 5) The distinctive Siwan built

15 Waked, A. (1949).
17 Ibid.
19 Shali in the Siwi language means the Town.
environment as we see it today was influenced by the basic conceptual and theoretical framework of design and urban planning associated with traditional Islamic architecture.

3. The evolution of the Siwan built environment

This section of the chapter develops an understanding of the Siwan built environment as a traditionally Islamic society. It investigates how Islamic principles have influenced the understanding and practices of built environment. These principles have acted as an ontological framework which underpinned both social and spatial contexts of any Islamic society. According to these principles, the organisation of built environment is a physical demonstration of the equilibrium between the individual and the community. Traditional Islamic architecture developed a tripartite system of private, semi-public and public spaces, which characterised Islamic cities and houses. This organisation was aimed to respect the privacy of individuals while retaining the unity of the community. The essence of these principles came from the interpretation of the verses dealing with social life in the Islamic sacred book, the Koran.

3.1. Islamic tradition: A reference for the Siwan built environment

It is from the Koran that Muslims understood the definitions of Islamic tradition in the social life. This tradition puts the house at the core of social interactions, particularly for women. An example of the obligations arising from gender may be found in many places throughout the Koranic Suras [Chapters]. In the Sura of "the Confederate Tribes" it is stated to women, "If you fear God... Show discretion in what you say. Stay in your houses and do not display your finery as women used to do in the days of ignorance" (El-Ahzaab:32). In the Sura of "The Light", it is stated to Muslims: "O Ye believers, do not enter houses other than yours unless you ask for permission and say the word of peace to the occupants" (Al-Noor:27). These instructions were guidelines for social interaction in Islamic societies. It was both the explicit and implicit Koranic prohibitions that were the primary determining factors in the formation of a domestic unit throughout Islamic countries and in a wider sense in the formation of Islamic culture.

In the Islamic tradition there is a distinct segregation of domestic life from participation in economic and religious life. The individual is closely associated with the life of his

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community and also responsible for his family's right to live enclosed in its house. This led
to a clear separation between public and private spheres, which was a significant social
characteristic of Islamic culture. Architectural design in Islam is thus based on two
principles: hospitality and privacy.\textsuperscript{22}

Islamic domestic units exhibit the distinction between public and private spheres. The
house as a unit shows no expression from outside. Blank walls and austere facades are
presented to the outside world. This comes from the Islamic concepts of chastity and
modesty. Within the house degrees of privacy are expressed architecturally, the most
fundamental of which is the division between the family sanctum and the reception areas.
The interior courtyard house is the ideal expression of these concepts, as the interior
courtyard is the place where the family is free to work and relax. In addition, it serves as
supplier of both light and air\textsuperscript{23}. That is very important in a building-type that restricts
exterior window area, as there is still a need to ventilate the house to keep it cool.

Generally, in the architectural design of Islamic houses, there are two basic types of the
courtyard house of the Middle East and Mediterranean periphery.\textsuperscript{24} The first type is the
interior courtyard house, where the house encloses a courtyard. It has an important
function of climatic modification in hot arid areas. The second type is the exterior
courtyard house, in which the courtyard borders on the house, forming a private area
adjoining the dwelling units yet not enclosed by them. This type is likely to be found in
rural areas of the Islamic World, where pressure on building space is less demanding and
the village communities usually composed of closely related kinship groups. In this case
interference from strangers is not frequent and the protective privacy that the interior
courtyard house provides is less needed\textsuperscript{25}.

Islamic tradition therefore was an important reference in the way in which the Siwans
established their local built environment. But the limited space within the walled town of
Shali never gave the Siwans the luxury of having a courtyard in their houses. Thus they
adopted the second type of traditional house, with an exterior courtyard, once they

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{22}{Aba Al-Khail, A. (1993:453).}
\footnotetext{23}{See for example: Michell, G. (1978); Fathy, H. (1973:46).}
\footnotetext{24}{Michell, G. (1978).}
\end{footnotes}
started building outside the walled town in the 19th century. Yet this review raises questions about what is vernacular and how valid is the experience of the past in a present approach for a critical, sustainable and community based development.

The following section explores the evolution, development and change in the Siwan built environment. The phenomenological investigation revealed three main phases, occurring between 1203-1998, that have manifested this evolution. Thus the analysis focuses upon these phases of evolution and development of the Siwan built environment, as follows:

- Phase one: The establishment of Shali, 1203-1792
- Phase two: Going outside the Wall, 1792-1960
- Phase three: Siwa of the present day, 1960-1998

4. Phase one: The establishment of Shali

This section explores the origin of the present-day town of Siwa, which was established, according to the local history of Siwa, in the year A.D. 1203. Shali, which means in the Siwa language the "Town" was a fortified village on one of the three hills, which embraced the groves of palm and olive trees (Figure 4-1, 2). It had only one entrance, to facilitate defence and greater security. This entrance still exists at the northern side of the old girdle wall, near the ancient mosque and leads by an ascending narrow street to the interior of the town (Figure 4-3).²⁶

The spatial organisation of the interior space of the fortress expressed both social and environmental influences. It was divided by narrow streets (Figure 4-4), with a strong gate on the entrance of each of them. The only open space was around the two wells of the town.²⁷ The main street was the north-south axis from the town entrance on the northern side to the mill at the other side of the Wall. This organisation of space expressed the north-south axis as a "path", which Kevin Lynch defines as the channel which people move along.²⁸ This axis was not intentionally designated for movement, but it represents a symbolic direction, which unifies a number of elements in place.²⁹ Yet space within the walled town varied only between semi-public and private space.

Figure 4-1. Shali town

Figure 4-2. Shali town, plan of the medieval phase between 1203-1826
Figure 4-3. The fortress built-form helped the early inhabitants of Shali to gain a feeling of security.

Figure 4-4. The interior space of the fortress divided by narrow streets.
The north-south axis of the main street divided the town into two self-managing sections. Three families, known as the Easterners, resided in the eastern section; and four families resided in the western section and were known as the Westerners. The families in each side had close ties among themselves. This separation of the population goes back to the times before the foundation of Shali. The relationship between these two groups was full of tension at most times.³⁰ But the two groups had their own rules which they respected in any feuds or disagreement.³¹ Siwa was ruled overall by the heads of the seven families, the sheikhs, through a kind of “law” which they enacted for themselves.³² The sheikhs’ assembly was responsible for keeping the law.³³

The interior space of the fortress was affected by the growth in the size of the Siwan community. The inhabitants of Shali, who were living in some security, began to prosper and their numbers increased greatly over the centuries. They reclaimed more land from the desert, planted more gardens and added more houses within the walled town. The limited space within the fortress forced them to build in an extremely compact way (Figure 4-5), because nobody was allowed to build a house outside the wall.

³⁰ Fakhry, (1990:28-34)
³² Ibid.
³³ El-Gohary, R. (1949)
Cultural influences also appeared in the place-form. The patrilocal sequence of residence, which resulted from a custom that the married sons should stay at the same house with their father, could not be followed by building horizontal extensions to their houses. Each family would add one floor on top of the other for more rooms for its married sons. This potential of the place-form to produce a community, as Frampton argues, is the latent political resistance of a strategy of critical regionalism. He sees that “the provision of a place-form is equally essential to critical practices, inasmuch as a resistant architecture, in an institutional sense, is necessarily dependent on a clearly defined domain”.34 The same conception of place-form was applied when the only door of the fortress become inadequate. A second door was made in the south side of the wall facing the gardens in the south sector.35 In the 15th century, with the further increase of population, a third door was opened which served as a private door for women.

Security and privacy were the concepts that underpinned the urban structure of Shali. For a community to survive, it needs both concrete and ontological security. Shali acted as a house, brought the Siwans inside and as enclosure enhanced social life as being in “togetherness”. It is a situated security that we principally find in the private space of the house in the fullest sense of the word. Yet people usually possess a sense of space that makes the more private space part of a larger whole and they express this spatial relationship with nature in the natural and public spaces.

4.1. Natural materials in the Siwan built environment

Traditionally in Siwa, house building was linked to reclaiming new land for gardens. The process of reclaiming land from the desert within the depression of Siwa oasis required intensive labour. The first step was to remove about 7-10 cm of the salt crust that resulted from a salt-impregnated soil; the Siwans called this layer “Kerchief”. Then the good, less salty layers of the soil from the lower layer were turned to the top. The soil was then mixed with sand and animal manure. The kerchief was hand cleared and transported to the house construction site. There it was stamped to a thick pulp with water in ditches, and was then freely built up in layers which were fairly thick at the bottom and tapered towards the top. The process of reclaiming new land for gardens was always associated with building a new house or adding a new section to an old one; thus the links between house and garden were integrated and enhanced.

Natural construction materials signified the architecture of Shali. The oasis environment offered the Siwans many resources: wood, rocks and earth. The local material offered a significant sense of the tactile in the Siwan house. As Frampton explains, the tactile resilience of place-form carries potentials of resistance of the impact of universal technology.36

After drying, kerchief becomes almost like cement and has a very low conductivity for heat37. It was used for building walls, staircases, interior furnishings, ovens and fireplaces for cooking. The walls were plastered with finely sifted salt clay. Generally it can be said that the houses had a purely functional character, with few decorations. The whole tactile resilience of "the density of light, darkness, heat and cold; the feeling of humidity; the aroma of material"38 fused the house with its natural context (Figure 4-6).

Figure 4-6. The blend of natural building materials and built-form fused the houses in place

A similar tactile sensitivity was evident in the roofing of the house. Rough halved palm trunks were used for ceilings and roofs. These were fixed into the walls on edge and often protruded through the wall to the outside. On top of the trunks, a thick layer of palm fronds and twigs was placed, and rough kerchief spread above. When dried, fine

35 Waked, A. (1949).
kerchief was stamped in, which resulted in a firm and hard floor. Accordingly, it is said that some of the houses rose to seven storeys.\textsuperscript{39}

Jean Dethier indicates six advantages of using local natural materials for construction, which might be used as a framework for analysing its success in the architecture of Shali. First: \textit{Economic} appropriateness, as the use of affordable local materials considerably reduces construction costs and hence stimulates the economy. Second: \textit{Energy} reduction, as kerchief does not involve transport costs or industrial transformations. Third: \textit{Ecological} responses in the phases of manufacturing kerchief buildings would never contribute to pollution and the destruction of the environmental qualities of the oasis. Fourth: \textit{Political} representation in land management, as kerchief is by definition a locally used material, conforming to the regional resources of the oasis. Fifth: \textit{Social} implication, as building technology with kerchief allowed reduction in the cost of housing. Sixth: \textit{Cultural} representation by using kerchief, in which the land lends itself to a creative architectural language responsive to regional qualities.\textsuperscript{40}

The great drawback of building with kerchief, however, was that it relies on the fact that rain is rare in Siwa. Consequently, heavy rains have, on rare occasions over the centuries, caused disastrous results, since the salt in the building material dissolved. But the fortress was always sustained, perhaps because the inhabitants got used to repairing and maintaining their houses over time.

\textbf{4.2. A phenomenological analysis of the Shali phase}

An analysis of the Shali phase indicates two main phenomenological characteristics of the Siwan built environment: a response to environmental conditions and a sense of security. The urbanisation of Shali allowed the provision of climatically responsive architecture, where many houses shared one or more side-wall. The semi-detached houses reduced the conductivity of heat through walls and increased the shade and shadow for outer spaces and pathways. Houses were collected around semi-public or semi-private spaces and the streets and side pathways kept as narrow as possible to allow for shaded parts throughout the day.

\textsuperscript{39} El-Rifaie, H. (1932).
Spaces between houses were kept minimal and accommodated the irregular topography of the site. Meanwhile, parts of the houses protruded into the street to allow more shaded covered corridors for pedestrians. Such a tectonic form also appears to be a climatic response, as the prevailing cool wind blows from the north. The sheikhs’ houses were always located on the northern side of the town to enjoy the northern wind that helps modify the hot climate of the desert.

The urbanism of Shali also depended ultimately on the expressions of landscape elements to achieve the required feeling of security. The inaccessibility of Shali had always been a characteristic of the place. The solidity of the walled boundary had made the enclosure completely isolated, and the inside had become a segregated refuge. It appears that the Siwans saw what they built as equivalent to features of the natural landscape and consider their settlement in relation to the dominance and presence of the three hills. The Wall in this sense determined their “own” enclosure within a larger landscape.

As defined by Norberg-Schulz “enclosure primarily means a distinct area which is separated from the surroundings by means of a built boundary”.41 Although these boundaries differ, they have significant meaning for human settlement.42 In Shali, the enclosure began its presence from the Wall and depended ultimately upon its concrete properties. Yet by means of openings it manifested two phenomenological aspects, of spatial orientation and accessibility.43

The phenomenal presence of the built environment in the early phase of the establishment of the Siwan community was also revealed in their conceptualisation of space. Here I focus on three different examples of spatial organisation which were identified in the Siwans’ narratives. Their significance arises from their role in the everyday life, in the construction of social life and in the manifestation of the phenomenological relationships with nature. They are the natural space, represented by the organisation of paths to and out of the oasis, the semi-public space, represented by the millstone place; and the public space, represented by the Dates Market.

42 See for example: (Norberg-Schulz, 1980a; Jackson, 1984).
4.2.1. The paths: A representation of cultural interaction

The third example is the manifestation of a significant relationship with natural landscape through the organisation of paths to and out of the oasis. As Tilley argues, “paths” in their phenomenological organisation resemble a story that tells about a specific spot-in-the-world.44 We need the paths to give directions to others, remember them and find our way in relation to them.45 Thus their meanings for us often extend well beyond “superficial remembrance”.46 They tell about the history, the myths, the norms and the diverse ethnic groups which contributed to their creation and their names and titles. In Siwa, these names refer to myths and stories of the local narratives and are linked to the activities of ancestors who stopped on the historical journeys which created the path. The path is a fundamental existential symbol which concretises the dimensions of time.47

There are several significant paths that link Siwa to the world beyond the barren desert. The path of Mugahaz is a significant path in Siwa; it is 308 km away from the north coast. Reaching the end of such a long distance in the 400 feet above sea level desert, the travellers enter into the 75 feet below the sea level oasis. The road gradually descends, and opens to the magnificent scenery of the palm groves and silver lakes.48

Masrab al-Istabl [the Stable Path] is another significant way to reach Siwa from the north coast, equal in length to the Mugahaz Path. Its fame derived from the important journey of Alexander the Great, who created the path during his visit to the Oracle to present his offering to Ammon. This path was an important way for the caravans because of the existence of water from underground basins, which were constructed in medieval times to collect rain water. Currently it is the only paved road from the North Coast to Siwa.

Beside the two famous paths there are two other routes to the coast, al-Garawlah (350 Kms) passing through the Qattarah depression, and Masrab Diqnash (310 Kms) which connects Siwa with Sallum on the western boundary.49 Moreover, there are three other routes. The first goes west to the Libyan oasis Jaghbub. The second goes south-east, connecting Siwa with the other Egyptian oases, at the west of the Nile, then crossing the Nile to the Eastern-Desert which extends to the Red Sea. This route is known as Darbe

El-Arbyeen [Route of the Forty], and together with the route coming from the west constitutes Darbe El-Hajj [Route of Pilgrimage], which linked north Africa to central Asia in the medieval age. The third route goes east to link Siwa with the Nile Delta.  

Figure 4-7. The Messtah is a public space that represents social values of participation and belonging

Figure 4-8. The fortress of Shali in 1820 (After von Minutoli. Atlas. Pl. V)

50 El-Gohary, R. (1949).
From the 13th century till the 19th Siwa was a stopover for the caravans of the pilgrims of North Africa in their journeys to Mecca in Arabia. Siwa was visited by many thousands of people during those centuries, but unfortunately they did not record their trips or give any description of what they had experienced, maybe because no one was allowed to enter the walled town.  

4.2.2. The millstone place: A community’s memory

The first example is the traditional olive oil millstone, which was a significant feature in the Siwan community. Since the 13th century, the mill acted as a community memory in an institutional sense. Its record book was the manifestation of the ownership of the forty men mentioned by name as the original institutors of Shali town. They were also the eligible persons for civic interactions for the community through the constitution of the sheikhs Assembly.

Responsibility for working in the mill was divided between the seven families of Shali, a day’s work for each of them per week. The mill record kept the names of the original inhabitants, and the families that followed them. As such it had a latent political meaning as a part of the fortress with a public character. Meanwhile, the physical presence of the mill within the urban space of the town indicates a typical Mediterranean element. Yet social interaction within the mill was always limited to the Siwan, who recognised it as a semi-public space.

4.2.3. The Messtah: A symbol of belonging

The second example is the messtah [Dates Market] which demonstrates an understanding of a public space as a representation of social values of participation and belonging (Figure 4-7). In the first few centuries the Siwans used to keep the dates from the gardens compressed in small packets and store them in the houses to be exchanged through commercial deals; they represented an eligible currency for their daily life. Since the production of palm trees was limited, this form of social order was successful. But with the passing of time, the gardens were extended, and the limited spaces inside the walled town became inadequate. The problem which they faced was how to keep the dates from decay and also to provide enough spaces for storage.

52 Waked, A. (1949).
The dates market was a product of mass experience and the social order. From experience they knew that they should keep the dates in the sun and air, while avoiding damp ground. To establish the market, a site was identified in the plain landscape outside the walled town. Shared work to fill the planned site with dry soil was organised among different families, a day for each tribe, until it became completely flat and well shaped. Furthermore, the social division of the walled town, of Easterners and Westerners, was extended to the new site which comprised two sections.

The two sections of the dates market were congruent. Each section was called messtah and divided into 16 parts, each part was called Mars. The length of a mars was the width of the messtah. Every mars was known by the name of a family. Then each mars was divided into smaller sections equal in length, while its width was determined according to the number of palm trees owned by the section's owner. Every owner had the right to buy, lease, lend and sell a part of his or her section. Like the olive oil mill, the dates market provides a record of the Siwan families and their inheritance over time. They also express the Siwan understanding of place and land use as a communal structure.

Despite their seclusion, the Siwans used to travel quite often to trade their crops of dates, olives and olive oil with the rest of the people in the Nile Valley, but they never intermarried with the Egyptians. The majority of the Siwans intermarried only within the community, and they preserved many of their old customs despite changing times and events. However, by the 18th century the population in the walled town was more than 3,000 persons, many of whom were related.33 This stage of Shali was described by some European travellers to the oasis. For example, the first pictorial document about Shali came from the German consul von Minutoli, who visited the oasis in 1824 (Figure 4-8). In this drawing, the western hill is still mostly free of buildings.

The review of the development of the built environment of Siwa in its early phase reveals the significant contribution of natural landscape elements in the establishment of Shali, as a unique “man-made” place. Moreover, the essential qualities of the landscape were reflected in the way in which they had created and maintained the paths and roads which linked them with the world beyond the limits of their region. A significant character of Shali was its capacity to express both the enclosure and openness. As Norberg-Schulz

33 EL-Rifaie, H. (1932).
argues, "the solidity or transparency of the boundaries... [that] make the space appear isolated or as a part of more comprehensive totality [is determined by its degree of] openness".\textsuperscript{54} Shali, as an isolated refuge, drew its meanings from the presence of symbolic elements expressed in the Wall, which manifested the inside-outside relationship in this phase of the development of the old town.

The emergence and development of the built environment of Siwa in its medieval phase expressed an understanding of the qualities of a bounded space/place as an essential factor in the manifestation of a sense of dwelling. This manifestation was extended in later phases, where the relationship between the inside-outside was expressed through the fence around each house. The phenomenological relationships between people and nature have developed within the contexts of natural, private, and public spaces, which the Siwans maintained over time. The following section examines the second phase of development of Siwa town, which took place in the period between 1820 and 1960.

5. Phase two: Going outside the Wall

The Siwan experience of living in the fortress of Shali is the product of everyday life interrelationships with nature at a particular place in a particular time. It produced repetitive patterns of people's activity, which eventually constituted a social order.\textsuperscript{55} The previous section indicated that the continuity of the development of the walled town had been affected by local development of the society. In this section the story-line extends the investigation into the interwoven narratives that produced the second stage of the development of the Siwan built environment. It appears that a major feud arose in 1792, as a result of the encroachment of one of the Easterners by extending his house into the main street. The Westerners asked him to give back the piece of land to keep the old plan of the town. As a consequence of his refusal, war between the two groups started. This time Al-Agwad (the sheikhs) failed to establish peace between the two groups and feuds and disagreements continued between them for many years.\textsuperscript{56}

In 1816 another war started between the two groups and the Easterners won the battle again. The head of the Westerners complained to the central government in Cairo for the first time in their history. As a consequence, the troops of Egypt invaded Siwa under the

\textsuperscript{54} Norberg-Schulz, C. (1980a: 63).
command of El-Shamashergy in 1820. He excluded some of the sheikhs and some male members of their families. Siwa has theoretically been ruled by Egyptian law ever since.

5.1. The establishment of the town

Siwa thus became integrated into the Egyptian sphere of control. The Siwans realised that their oasis is not an isolated entity, but a region that belongs to a larger body. Thus the head of the Sheikhs assembly at that time, who used to travel to Cairo every year mainly for olive and date trade, gave permission to the people to build outside the Wall. This permission was a result of two reasons: first, the need to extend the urban area due to the growing population; second, the need to secure their domain of existence beyond the boundary of the fortress. However, he laid down strict rules to be followed by the builders.

![Figure 4-9. Shali town between 1826-1926](image)

Since 1826, the extension of the urban area took place on the east and west sides of Shali hill (Figure 4-9). Instead of the narrow streets of the walled town Shali, which were about two meters wide, the main streets in the new quarters were fourteen meters. The

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side streets were eight meters, and the small cul-de-sacs six meters. There were also open squares and the height of houses was limited to two storeys. The new regulations were to ensure that the people obtained enough air and light. At this stage the urban area grew in lines parallel to the contours of the Shali hill, and was always on the higher land. However, it followed the social influence of the historical division of Easterners and Westerners.

The extension towards the plain area on the eastern side allowed for more open spaces and large plots for houses. The houses built in this direction were mostly detached and limited to two storeys following the new regulation (figure 4-10). That produced wide streets and large open spaces, which reduced shaded areas around residential places and also increased glare and sun in the street and lacked the climatic convenience of the traditional urban style. As well, it diminished human scale within the extended streets as opposed to the intimate spaces offered in Shali town (Figure 4-11).

Figure 4-10. A plan of one of the houses in the easterners quarter

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Figure 4-11. The eastern extension was characterised by wide streets and large houses.

Figure 4-12. The extension towards the westerners' direction followed the traditional urban style of Shali town.
The urban development on the eastern side lacked the traditional tripartite division of public, semi-public and private. Both public and semi-public spaces were over-represented and were open and exposed from all directions, and lost the privacy of similar spaces in the old town. The open space in front of the houses was not an intimate space. Yet the inhabitants could not build protruded parts because of the lack of support points, which used to be offered by the facing house across the street. Moreover, the open urban fabric exposed the neighbourhood to the north-western and north-eastern wind, which blew strongly through the residential area and made the use of outdoor spaces difficult.

In contrast, the extension in the western direction followed the traditional urban style of Shali town. It was started on the western side of Shali hill and extended towards the foot of the medieval fortress (Figure 4-12). The extension on the western side offered more space for larger houses and wider streets. The houses in this area rose up to two storeys. The owners were mostly the heads and rich families. However, the limited overall area on the western hill did not allow for more extension westward, as the orchards and groves started at the foot of the hill in the north-west direction.

The transformational phase of the 19th century linked the core plan of Shali with further parts of the landscape. The Siwans understood that their dwelling on the hilltop of Shali was for defensive reasons which had become invalid. They were also sure that they could dwell in the gardens in the lower land, as it had integrated into their sense of place. Thus, there were further extensions towards the east and west of Siwa town over time. These were mainly around the new orchards or new land reclaimed for future agricultural extension or sited further away near the gardens and springs.

The process of going outside the Wall represented a new interpretation of the Siwans physical and mental boundaries, their understanding of domain and their spatial sense of space. Yet, the 19th century witnessed the revival of their vernacular and their relationship to the place. But the oasis retained its seclusion particularly due to several environmental changes occurred. The following section sketches out these changes and their influence on the Siwan built environment.

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5.2. Underlying influences on this phase of development

The movement away from Shali was intensified during the 20th century due to natural hazards. Various sources report the progressive decay of the fortress Shali which lay in ruins by the mid twenties. Fakhry (1973) mentions a heavy rain in 1926, which lasted for three days. This rain caused many buildings to collapse and resulted in a massive exodus. Several earthquakes are also mentioned, the last one in 1927. Because of the bad condition of the houses, the fortress of Shali was cleared of most of its inhabitants by the government in the thirties. Nevertheless, parts of the city continued to be lived in, especially the western hill.

Figure 4-13. Siwa town, the first aerial survey in 1929

60 El-Gohary, R. (1946).
61 See for example: Waked, (1949); El Rifaie, (1932).
In the 1930s, a new phase of the movement away from Shali started (Figure 4-13). The inhabitants who had to leave their houses in Shali started to build new houses anywhere in the plain area around the hill. They also had to take all wooden materials - half palm trunks, doors and windows - from their old houses, aiming to speed up the process of building, as they were already in need of a shelter.

Population growth and increased social complexity made issues of privacy urgent. High fences were introduced as strategic elements to ensure and determine privacy. However, urbanisation of this period did not follow any regulations. The extension of the urban area continued in a north-easterly direction. There were two main reasons for this direction. First, the extension evolved around the main “path” to Marsa-Matruh, which revealed its significance as an axis. Second, as Adel Yaseen argues, it is the natural extension for the region; similar to the extension of Cairo city in the same direction, where the northern wind blows all the time. Perhaps the location of the main cemetery in the south-west of the town might give credence to the second reason.

Two major events over the first half of the twentieth century have left fingerprints in the Siwan experience: a royal visit of the Egyptian king and the start of World War II. The following sub-section reveals how the Siwans interacted with the “other” during these two events, how they perceive issues of material heritage and to what extent this perception affected their relationship with their own environment.

5.3. Heritage and place as a commodity
The significant royal journey of an Egyptian king to the Western Desert in 1929, was a remarkable event in Siwa. It brought the oasis to the attention of the Egyptian government and resulted in new official arrangements. For example, the first governor was appointed and the first government house was built. Some garrisons remained in the oasis, and a mayor was chosen from the inhabitants, assisted as usual by the sheikhs assembly. The visit also resulted in projects to enhance the built environment: a road between Siwa and Marsa-Matruh was constructed 1931, a project to clean and maintain the springs and the drainage system managed to maintain 80 springs, and a project to

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construct the Big Mosque of Siwa was undertaken in 1932. Social life was enhanced by the arrival of some teachers of Arabic and Islamic teaching.

The Siwans appreciated the royal visit and responded to the king’s offers. They offered him the spring of Quryshat and the 2000 acres of gardens around it as an expression of their appreciation. They also offered the main messtah [Dates Market] in the plains in front of Shali hill to be used as a site for the construction of the mosque and police station. There had already been several smaller messtahs established in the suburbs of the new extensions of Siwa town since the 18th century.\(^\text{64}\)

The other major event of the 20th century was the start of World War II. The Italians and Germans were preparing to attack Egypt from the west. Allied troops were stationed on the coast of the Mediterranean sea at Marsa-Matruh and some of them were stationed in Siwa in 1940. The Italians frequently bombed Siwa from the air, which forced the inhabitants to leave their houses. They found shelter in the rock tombs of Jabal al-Mawta to keep them and their families out of danger.\(^\text{65}\)

The need for more room in their shelters encouraged the inhabitants to dig some caves in the side of the hill. To their surprise, they discovered new tombs. Numerous mummies and small ancient objects were found. Unfortunately, many of the soldiers came to visit the tombs, and on payment of money to the family living there, they were allowed to cut away any part of a painted scene to take home as a souvenir. According to Fakhry, who witnessed the event, that went on for almost two months and caused the destruction of the best preserved scenes, before the responsible authority in Siwa took action. The Siwans however, profited economically from the presence of the military troops during the period of their station in Siwa. However, this story raises questions about the meaning of heritage in the Siwan community as similar circumstances resulted in their selling their own heritage of silver ornaments during the 1970s.

The event of World War II brought a new perception of the outside world and what was going on beyond the boundaries of the oasis. The global transformations from the

\(^{64}\) In 1997, the original place of the old Messtah was the main city centre with a big mosque, city council, police station, post office, all official buildings, schools, petrol station, and several public housing buildings.

\(^{65}\) The phrase ‘Jabal al-Mawta’ means the mountain of the dead, the name referred to the ancient Egyptian tombs in which the Siwans discovered many mummies. See Fakhry, A. (1973).
beginning of the second half of the twentieth century at a macro level influenced many changes in localities around the world at a micro level. In Siwa, these influences resulted in a new phase of change in the Siwan built environment. This phase of development starts from the 1960s.

6. Phase three: Siwa of the present day
Environmental, social and political factors were interwoven to produce the third phase of the development of the Siwa town since 1960s. The increase of the population within the limited urban area around Shali hill and the critical situation that resulted from several disastrous natural events of heavy rain and earthquake were the primary reasons for directing the development towards radial axes. Moreover, the establishment of regional and local government authorities, represented in the city council in Siwa, linked Siwa to the general national policy plans administrated by the central government in Cairo.

Figure 4-14. Siwa city, 1988
The already existing gardens and farms around the periphery of the oasis encouraged some of the inhabitants to move to these sites. That produced several satellite neighbourhoods. These settlements became a focus of interest for official development, which established a number of new neighbourhoods through aid projects and/or the development of infrastructure and civic buildings. Over the past four decades, many of the satellite communities have become villages, having their own local council, school, mosque and health-care unit. However, while all these communities are connected to the centre of Siwa city by paved roads, there was no connection to the country outside except for the traditional caravan routes across the desert (Figure 4-14).

6.1. Official development

The official development of housing projects in Siwa oasis adopted a modern approach to urban planning. The projects within the core centre of Siwa town were a prototype design for public housing developed by the Ministry of Housing and Development. These projects were four storey apartment buildings that follow a conventional modern urban design, which does not relate to the physical qualities of the site but attempts to create its own neighbourhood spaces and landscape. On the other hand, official development plans in the satellite communities adopted a prototype programme for rural housing. Both prototype designs for urban and rural housing projects developed by the official authority is discussed in more detail in Chapter Six, which focuses on social and environmental factors that influenced the changes of the built environment in the third phase.

6.2. Local development

The local inhabitants have also had their own input in the change of the Siwan built environment during the third phase. Three main factors contributed to individuals desiring to change their lifestyle, which was then reflected in the built environment in a wider sense. The impact of modernity on the oasis resulted in the speeding up of the rates of change in irrigation techniques and building methods. Moreover, social factors during the 1960s and 1970s, brought about by the mobility of the Siwan labour force to outside the oasis, resulted in the evolution of an individual tendency toward risk taking. The traditional people/nature interrelationship in Siwa was confronted by modern processes, while the traditional built environment of an isolated oasis was undergoing a critical change due to the ecological, urban and social crises generated by modernity. The following three chapters analyse, criticise and interpret that change.
Summary

This chapter has explored the history of Siwa since 1203, and which have engaged the Siwans and Siwa. The narrative of Siwa indicates that after a long period of suffering and the fear of facing raids of violence and strife within an extended oasis, the few remaining Siwan families felt that they no longer needed to be spread out in the barren desert. They had found a meeting place, which invited them to come together and dwell.

In the course of examining the different phases of the evolution and development of the Siwan built environment, the research focused upon understanding the Siwan experience as a reciprocal interrelationship between people and nature. The first phase showed how the Siwans experienced security and refuge within the defensive fortress, while the built environment represented in the Wall around the town enhanced this experience through the demarcation of the inside-outside domains. In the later phases, they experienced being inside as long as they were within the larger boundaries of the oasis. They manifested their sense of dwelling through their understanding of the spatial meaning of natural, private and public space.

Siwa in space and time has become the “centre of the world” for its inhabitants. As such, Siwa has become “home” to the Siwans and its natural boundaries are its real walls. Now this home is encountering modernity and a new story-line will be added to the Siwan narrative. The following three chapters focus in more depth on the third phase of the evolution and development of the Siwan built environment. Their general aim is to conceptualise layers of meaning that influence the interrelationship between people and nature in remote communities under the impact of modernity.
CHAPTER FIVE

CULTURAL LANDSCAPE: THE ECOLOGICAL ENCOUNTER

Clearly, those who lived in that scene built, worshipped, had customs and so on - all of which occurred in close conjunction with the environment. For that to have happened, these people must have understood the environment’s essential features, interpreting them properly and fully, and evolving an indigenous way of life as a way of inhabiting just that place.¹

The phenomenology of built environment in Siwa manifests the relationship between people and nature. The aim of the analysis of the Siwan experience in this chapter is to explore the characteristics and significance of this relationship. Three main themes were proposed in Chapter Two in order to achieve this aim. The first theme is: the phenomenological relationships between people and nature are manifested in the interaction with the natural resources. This theme focuses on the characterisation of these relationships as revealed in the socio-cultural rituals, myth and realities within the “natural space”. The chapter investigates this theme within the context of the Siwan community and explores the ways in which people create a cultural landscape in order to form their place in-the-world.

The narratives in this chapter interweave the story lines of Siwa over the last three decades and are mainly focused on everyday natural, social and cultural settings. They help ground the research in today’s Siwan experience. Like the previous chapter, the first section of this chapter records a reflective experience, in which the researcher has engaged qualitatively with the phenomenal presence of the desert in the Siwan story.

1. Second reflection: the desert journey

After leaving the Mediterranean coast at Marsa-Matruh, the bus took the way south-west to Siwa for 306 km. Immediately, the scenery became remarkably different and at once the feeling that we were penetrating the desert filled me with excitement. There were no trees or fields, only some small green shrubs about 40 centimetres high for the first fifty or sixty kilometres, which are within the Mediterranean rain belt. From time to time some wild camels appeared to enrich the beauty of the peculiar view.

After 100 km the landscape became nothing but a flat horizontal barren desert of golden sand. The only feeling of security came from being on the paved road; any misfortune would be a disaster, since the nearest urban area was 120 km north and was getting further away each minute. Away from the road, to find Siwa is to search for a refuge in the placelessness of the desert.

The view of the desert during the following 100 km was uniform, with no apparent difference between one point and another. The neutrality and monotony of the scene gave the feeling that time had stopped or emptied. What was that? Something like a lacuna on Earth. The absolute silence gave me the feeling that there was nothing there. The bus had a stopover for half an hour, and I told my relations that I wanted to go for a walk for a while. I wanted to experience what it was like to be in such a place, within the silence and the emptiness (Figure 5-1). So in a few minutes I was all alone in the endless sea of sand. I stepped into the lacuna. On the other side of the road I went for a short meeting with an old friend, “the silence”. Although it is one of my daily habits to have a chat with that friend, that meeting was remarkable.

Figure 5-1. The desert and the manifestation of “silence”
I remembered Sartre. His notion of “nothingness” is what he meant by being\(^2\). I had the exact feeling of being in nothingness. There was absolutely nothing there, no sign to attach to or to detach from. There was nothing but the silence and its voice was clear and powerful. I had felt the impossibility of conceptualising that context in the absence of meaningful signs, but Merleau-Ponty’s notion of “empirical language” gave me a partial solution to my puzzling. Merleau-Ponty saw the empirical language as just a secondary language which is the result of the only authentic language, the “language of silence”\(^3\). I started to see the picture more clearly. His notion of language as differential relations made it clear that what makes a sign meaningful is not the sign itself, but an invisible differentiation between itself and others. It is then in the “silence” between signs and between things that meaning appears and the visibility of pictures arises.

In this respect, authentic or creative language originates in “silence”. So “silence” for Merleau-Ponty is not the opposite of being. It is the invisible side of the visible, the other side of the being. Viewed from this perspective, it is impossible to perceive the visible being without the invisible “silence”\(^4\). The visible in this sense, as Merleau-Ponty explains, is not a set of objects whose being is fixed by the norms of objectivity or inserted in a pre-existing locus of space. Rather, it organises a space of places and fields around itself and presides over a system of differential relationships.

What makes being visible is therefore the invisible background of differentiation. I looked for the signs of “Nature” for more explanation. To my surprise, there were many: the endless land of golden sand, the blue sky, the hot sun, and the horizontal line of the horizon. I asked, what does that mean? Nature itself revealed the answer: it was the “Earth” without “Water”, the crucial substance which simply means “Life”. Immediately, the picture became clear; the existence of the “Oasis” in this arid desert is the logical result of the existence of the “Springs”. Consequently, the existence of a human settlement in Siwa is due to the same phenomenon. I could not wait a moment longer, yet with all the passion, I was going to see the “phenomenon”. I was going to see the springs of Siwa, the source of life for both “People” and “Land”.

\(^2\) Sartre, J., (1994), *Being and Nothingness*. London: Methuen. Sartre considers the understanding of our being as originating in “nothingness” as the way to understand the “Being” of our being.

\(^3\) Merleau-Ponty, M., (1964:44).

\(^4\) Merleau-Ponty, M., (1968).
I reflected to myself, asking: Is it the presence of the "place" which made the gap between the "silence" and the "emptiness" more obvious and that helped to clarify the picture for me so that I could see the signs and pick the first theme for my inquiry? Or is it my presence in the gap between the "silence" and "nothingness" which revealed the signs and completed the picture? I would imagine that the answer is both. It is the interaction between the "self" and "place" that makes a phenomenon apparent.

The journey continued. Signs along the way helped us to locate ourselves. They were in two languages, Arabic and English, showing the distance. It was only two hours more to reach Siwa. I remembered that the caravans used to cover this route in about eight days. I can imagine how pleased the travellers were when they found themselves near the flowing springs, palm groves and olive trees, in whose shade they could rest after more than a week of continuous travel. Although the travel had become easier, the excitement of the journey was still the same. However another type of sign was also there, a symbolic one, made of stones in the shape of an arrow pointing to a built basin, which collects the rain water. The low land beside the basin was surrounded by small green shrubs. The austere view was just like a touch of beauty in that arid desert that derived its elements from one source, "simplicity".

About 30 km before Siwa some buildings appeared. The site was well arranged with small buildings painted in white and blue. That was the military airport of Siwa. Before the construction of the present road in 1990, the only way to reach the coast was to take one of the military aircraft which used to go to Marsa Matruh once a week as a civic service exclusively for the Siwans for three dollars each. Yet until 1993, Siwa was a military area accessible only to the Siwans or military soldiers. This observation raises questions about the military existence in the experience of remote communities.

Finally we reached the natural entrance of the oasis. This was the edge of the plateau across which we had travelled. The edge of the plateau was shaped by erosion over the years, which enriches its natural beauty. From a slot within the hill the road led us to descend the escarpment to the oasis. Immediately, the landscape of the oasis was revealed, with green palm groves and the silver salt lakes more manifest as greetings to our eyes. The view of the vernacular landscape made manifest the Siwans' ideas of nature and culture. It revealed their understanding of land use that recognised the value of land for shelter as well as for food, and of the oasis as a place that fulfils their social
and cultural lifestyle as well as their economic needs. It became clear to me that the natural resources were an essential manifestation of the Siwan phenomenon. Is it possible for a quality essential to sustainable “life” to be the “threat” that endangers the oasis? This question was my first phenomenological inquiry into the Siwan experience.

2. The phenomenal presence of spring and garden in the Siwan experience

On October 25, 1991, reporter Sanna Fath-Alla raised a call for UNESCO to save Siwa. She explained the problem in expressive words;

This call is to save Siwa, the oasis of Jubeter-Ammoun and the queen of all the oases world-wide...Siwa is facing a demolishing fate. It is not exaggeration to say that overnight this paradise could be just a memory... with fingers for accusation and fingers for regrets. This call is specially directed to UNESCO to nominate Siwa in the World Heritage list, and to give the oasis top priority in its fund for conservation. Siwa should be rescued by the international community, who previously saved Fiala Temple in Nubia for its archaeological value. Now it is a living community, a whole cultural heritage package, past and future.

This call reached national and international levels. Many concerns and responses were focused on the environmental problems of Siwa. In 1992 the Cultural Committee in the Egyptian Parliament undertook the first visit to Siwa since the establishment of the Egyptian Parliament in 1866. In 1993 they were followed by an expert committee of the Desert Research Centre. Their objective was to research the Siwan environmental phenomenon of the “drowning” of the oasis under the water of its own springs.

How did Siwans experience this phenomenon? Not only as a distinct physical reality but also as something apparent. This distinction between the real and the apparent, as Michael Hammond explains, is one that operates within the more general category of the “phenomenon”. So, what was that again? The drowning of an oasis by the water of its own springs? Neither the vernacular practices nor a strategy of critical regionalism can explain such problem, unless it is recognised as a phenomenon - a phenomenon that needs a more fundamental study than is possible by logic or psychology. It needs phenomenology to go beyond the objective structures of conscious experience.

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5 UNESCO had funded the project of rescue and replacement of Abou-Sumpl and Fiala temples away from the drowning area in Nubia, behind the High Dam, in 1960s.
6 Al-Akhbar, October 25, 1991.
The phenomenological relationships with springs and gardens in the Siwan experience was revealed in the narratives people told in the interviews. The phenomenal presence of the “spring”, particularly in the Siwan rituals, extends well beyond its functional quality. Tamusi, for example, as we shall see, is not only for washing up, physically and metaphorically, but it is also part of a mythical belief underpinning the cultural traditions where built environment acts as the spatial context of the ritual. Meanwhile, the garden is a place where living nature is concretised, where people take action towards the environment by accepting its rules of challenge and response. Its meanings are symbolised to become part of their daily vocabulary, and a metaphor for their social interactions. It offers protection, permanence and sustenance to the place and its people. “Saving the earth” is an existential expression of their being, a significant manifestation of their mass experience and an essential element of their cultural heritage.

The following section begins the chapter’s analysis of the phenomenology of Siwan built environment by exploring some of the ways it is possible to identify phenomenological associations particular to natural resources. I interpret these associations in terms of the meaning people give to particular places within the natural space. Thus places are interpreted from a social position: how do people feel about them? And to what extent do these feelings make meaningful notions like ontological security, dwelling, local identity, belonging and sense of place?

2.1. The springs

What makes Siwa significant is that nature has manifested its power and capacity in the contrast between the harsh desert and the generously sustained life of the oasis. In Siwa, the springs and the abundance of their water have been a significant phenomenon from the beginning of human inhabitation. According to the old narratives, there were one thousand springs in Siwa. Currently the number is about 200 springs, but only 80 are in use for drinking or irrigation. Most of these springs were well constructed in the form of circle basins (Figure 5-2). Many of them have some fame and glory derived from mythical association due to symbolic and phenomenological significance of their water.

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The most significant spring in Siwa is Ayn-Elguba, its hot water, its size and the vegetation in its region have given its special status. Some of these springs which follow

13 The name Ayn-Elguba is a combination between the Arabic word Ayn [Spring] and the Siwan word Elguba [Sun]. The word Ayn also means 'eye'; so in a metaphorical sense a human eye flows tears similar to the way a natural spring flows water. Yet the word "spring" is always referring to emotional experiences.
Ayn-Elguba in importance are Tamusi, Khamisah, Elzytoon, Taba, Fetnass, Tilihram, Tagzirt and Quryshat. My interviews revealed that the springs have become a significant part of the social order, not only as an expression of power and the management system but with symbolic meaning in gender interaction and social activities.

The springs are wonderful and their water is lovely; we like going there to swim, of course it should be a group of girls together... no men are allowed to be in the garden at that time... Most of the people in Siwa can swim, it is important to enjoy themselves with the springs... Usually the children of Siwa would start to learn swimming from the age of six. (A 16 year old Siwan girl, 27 February 1998. Interview No.25)

The springs of Siwa are divided into three types: common springs for the public use of the community, springs shared among a group of owners, and private springs; all of them flow perpetually. The first type, common use springs, were selected according to defined criteria: those that are close to the Shali hill and have a good quality of drinking water, and those that carry significant mythical meaning in the community, as the analysis shows later in this chapter, like Tamusi and Tilihram.

The second type, shared springs, follow a very strict system which divides the day into 16 parts and according to these parts the owners may take the amount of the water they actually need for irrigation. One particular feature is that the water of springs is owned by farmers. This ownership is inherited from generation to generation. A farmer may own the source of water but might not own a piece of land. He has the right to sell or to lease his share in the water or his water right for a period of time. But management of irrigation water at the farm level is the responsibility of the farmers themselves.

El-Hasseeb [the accountant] is the person who actually manages the whole process... sometimes he is one of the owners, so he gets extra water for his land, and sometimes he is an employee for the job, so we pay him for it. At all times he is a trustworthy person to be a registrar and he keeps a record for the accounting. (Sliman A., 10 June 1997. Interview No.3)

The third type, private springs, are those owned by the tribes before the establishment of Shali in 1203. These are fairly far from Shali hill. Evidence of the significance of this type of ownership was manifested in the Siwan “gift” to a king of Egypt during his visit to Siwa in 1929, as mentioned in Chapter Four; the gift was the spring of Quryshat (Figure 5-3).14 Yet the community as a whole has a phenomenological relationship with these springs, as the people of the community gather on a certain day every year to maintain,

14 El-Gohary, R., (1949)
clean and refine all the springs of Siwa, and also to look for undiscovered ones. A great deal of traditional Siwans' life was structured by relations with water. Wealth of a person is related to the amount of water owned.

2.2. The gardens

The gardens of Siwa reveal the tender face of Nature and manifest the phenomenal power of the union of water and earth. The gardens are generally located in the lower land between the three hills (Figure 5-4). They constitute the greatest source of income for the oasis and were always the symbol of sustainable life in the community. Generally the gardens are surrounded by fences made of mud and palm ribs to a height of two meters. The fences are for privacy and also for environmental reasons, to protect the gardens from the wind and sand dunes. There are no fences marking the divisions between different owners within the gardens. Ownership is defined by natural boundaries such as a canal or a specific tree, and also by the number of palms or trees which are owned. A way of organising ownership that has been argued to be a non-verbal communication from environment to people and among people.\(^\text{15}\)

In Siwa, anyone can get into any garden and eat as much as they want, but they are not allowed to carry anything out. Inside, the gardens are clean and well maintained. There are some patches between the groves where the owner can plant some vegetables for household use. The Siwan gardens are a manifestation of place meaning in a cultural understanding, a conceptualisation of place that Edward Relph describes thus:

The second manifestation of place meaning lies in what might be termed generosity. This is the constructive gesture of individuals and groups giving us rather more than we would expect from a purely efficient or commodified landscape... Generosity is doing something for its own sake, without an ulterior motive, and is an indication that someone cares for a place simply because it is his or hers.\(^\text{16}\)

The analysis of the organisation of space in the Siwa garden indicates the conceptual framework for understanding the activities, values and purposes of the individuals or groups doing the organising. At the same time, it reflects ideal images, representing the congruence between physical space and social space according to the Siwans' cultural evaluation and definition of space.


Basic technological understanding appears in the grade of the canals, with a significant division and control of the flow of water. Due to the physical properties of the land, the irrigation is managed every fortnight, a technique passed from generation to generation.

Everyone in Siwa is first of all a farmer... It is impossible for an employer to spend a day without working in his field. It is common to see the same person in his formal clothes in the morning and in his informal ones in his garden in the afternoon... We normally take our boys to learn agriculture from the age of eight (Abou-bakre Ottoman, 18 June 1997. Interview No.8)

Figure 5-4. The Groves between the Three Hills

Figure 5-5. A Shade at the side of Tagzirt Spring
The garden is not only a resource for productivity and increasing their income, but it is also a place where they can interact with nature on a daily basis (Figure 5-5). Even for employers and people in authority in the Siwan community, the gardens still keep their sense of belonging and recall images from childhood times.

Although I have farm workers, I go to the garden every day. I feel I should be there with the trees and spring, I have been with them since I was six. I know the trees one by one, I know how they feel, I understand their problems. I feel worried about them, and I ask them how they are, we talk together. Being head of a tribe is not the thing that can take me away from my land. On the contrary, many times I feel that I need to go back to the trees to ask their advice...this is true, we communicate. I have started to teach my son, Abduel-Allah [a six-year-old boy], to communicate with the trees, to listen and to learn to solve a problem by good listening. He is going to be a sheikh one day, isn't he [laughing]. (Sheikh Omar Ragih, 25 June 1997. Interview No. 11)

In Siwa people do not own the land in the freehold sense of ownership. Rather, they cultivate the land and claim it for themselves. When they sell, they sell trees and springs or artesian wells. That gives the place a significant weight in terms of mutual identification with people. In Siwa the notion of home-place is closely related to particular natural features. In this, they are like the aboriginal people of Australia and pre-Columbian North America; their attachment to particular rocks, paths, dunes and hills is due to recognition of their geographical place in the scheme of things which connect them to nature.17

Yet in Siwa as an Islamic society this connection is different from that of the Australian aboriginal, who for example recognise natural features as part of their cultural identity.18 Their inherited myths of creation are tied to the stories woven from and around specific areas, while in Siwa they conceptualise their relationship with nature as “coexisting”; both human and nature are “made” and “owned” by God, they can only interact together in His name.

My interviewees asserted different levels of interaction with the landscape of Siwa according to the Siwans’ everyday experiences and lifestyle. These levels differ in space and time and between genders. The analysis of the Siwan experience indicates three levels of interaction with springs and gardens: daily interaction, fortnightly interaction and occasional interaction. On a daily basis there is a routine interaction between men

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and gardens; all male members of a family should go to do some tasks in their garden from the age of ten. On a fortnightly basis each farmer has his share of water for irrigation. The garden and spring also have a significant recreational as well as productive role, yet occasionally a family may visit the garden for a picnic. The gardens resemble a semi-public space, especially for women, where they can share social interaction outside the house and enjoy being close to nature.

We usually go to the gardens to spend some time with our families... Normally we will go to the gardens when we feel low, there we can feel better... Women and girls can go to the gardens with male members of the family, but not as a couple. (A Siwan woman, 16 June 1997. Interview No. 6)

For women also the gardens have a functional role. A visit mainly for laundry work is an important event in every woman’s agenda. In their cultural practice, women take family laundry to be washed and dried in their garden; the peculiar qualities of mud houses limit laundry work to outside space. Special arrangements are made at the different springs to carry out the task. A special platform has been constructed to allow women to use spring water for this operation (Figure 5-6). All these activities however are connected to a particular space, whereas the family garden is the place for interaction.

Sometimes we go from the early morning to do the laundry at the spring. Sometimes we go early in the afternoon and the children can return back from school straight away to the garden, so we can have dinner there... of course we can arrange among ourselves that womenfolk go together for a laundry day, it becomes then a real fun time. (A Siwan woman, 23 February 1998. Interview No. 20)
The gardens in this way of organising natural space are used as a physical setting for social interactions as well as a context for cultural rituals and ceremonies. The phenomenological differentiation between layers of meaning in the natural space links the Siwans and the place. The springs and the gardens do not exist in isolation but as elements of a context that they represent and complement. The following sub-section shows how this occurs as spatial organisation in everyday life.

2.3. A phenomenological analysis of the springs and gardens

In Siwa, the springs, the landscape and the gardens have significant values in myth and ritual which characterise the Siwan culture. Many of these rituals are very much the preserve of women, who are more strictly secluded in the oasis and less physically interactive with the land through agriculture. Yet on a different level of interaction the Siwans have bound themselves to phenomenal associations of natural features in their life events and experiences in order to create their own “mythical space”. Yi-Fu Tuan explains the phenomenological conception of mythical space:

Two principal kinds of mythical space may be distinguished. In the one, mythical space is a fuzzy area of defective knowledge surrounding the empirically known; it frames pragmatic space. In the other it is a spatial component of a world view, a conception of localized values within which people carry on their practical activity...Mythical space of the first kind is a conceptual extension of the familiar and workaday spaces given by direct experience...A less well-known phenomenon is the hazy “mythical” space...which is yet necessary to our sense of orientation - of being securely in the world.19

Tuan indicates two conceptual extensions to empirical space in order to create mythical space. The first is the social “workaday” space (Figure 5-7). The other, less well-known, is the natural space in which people conduct their rituals and ceremonies. I am particularly concerned with the latter mythical space in this sub-section, because of its phenomenological influence on the understanding of natural and built environment. The conceptualisation of “mythical” space, as an identification of a sense of security and belonging, may also answer questions about the significance of cultural landscape in remote communities. In Siwa, the ritual and ceremonies that take natural space as a part of the ceremonial setting are those of weddings, mourning and community festivals20.

19 Tuan, Y. (1977:86) emphasis in the original.
20 See for full study of Siwan culture: Fakhry, A. (1973); El-Gohary, (1949); Waked, (1948); El-Rifaie, (1943)
For the purpose of this discussion, I focus here on the first two, the ceremonies of marriage and mourning, because of their connection with the phenomenal presence of the spring in the ritual and ceremonial processes, and also because the two ceremonies show how the Siwan sense of both personal and cultural identity is intimately bound up with place identity. The community festivals however are considered to be more related to the discussion of the construction of social space in Chapter Seven.

My interviewees revealed the role of the built environment in the interaction of people and nature during a ceremony of happiness or sadness. This interaction was managed by their interpretation of the experience of the particular event and its influence on the life of the individual and group. The experience of the wedding in traditional societies has significant importance, not only as the occasion of a happy event, but also as a celebration of the sustainability of the community and a sign of its survival. In Siwa, weddings may last for a week. They are a particularly special occasion for women, who are permitted an unusual amount of freedom to go about organising them.\textsuperscript{21} According to the Siwan manuscript, "when an important marriage takes place, the whole town is invited,"\textsuperscript{22} normally an important marriage means the first marriage for the bride.

\textsuperscript{21} El-Gohary, (1949)
\textsuperscript{22} Cited in Fakhry, A. (1973:56).
The analysis showed that arrangements of marriage express the socio-economic order of the community. The wedding usually occurs after selling the crops of dates or olives. The income from the harvest is essential for the arrangements for the wedding: food, clothes and silver ornaments. The ceremony take place at the spring of Tamusi and involves the interaction of people, spring and cultural artefacts, where the bride is accompanied by womenfolk and a few male relatives. The ceremony at the spring has metaphorical implications: as the productivity of the land starts with its relationship with water, marriage also does, since fundamentally both assure the sustainability of the community. In the Siwan interpretation, water and marriage seem to be related.

Built environment is a fundamental part of the arrangements for the ritual of a marriage. After the rituals at the spring the bride goes to her new house and stays there for a month before she can go out and visit her family and friends; it is a sign of her will to be a housewife. For the bridegroom the garden is the main focus. He leaves his wife one hour after their wedding, and spends two days in his garden. On the third day, he returns to his house with a traditional present of seasonal fruits fixed around a core of a palm tree, a sign of his will to be a husband.

These were stories from the past, now it is a bit changed...although many features of the ceremony are still the same. For example now they allow the bridegroom to share meals with his wife and to spend overnight in his house instead of sleeping in a garden. A visit to the spring is very symbolic, now they go on a vehicle and the bride would wash only her face and hands, she can't spoil her hair dressing, can she? [laughing] (Ibrahim Mosa, 25 March 1998. Interview No. 57)

The ceremony of marriage within the context of spring, house and garden manifests built environment as a meaningful totality and also brings marriage into the focus of human interaction as a means of sustainability and survival. Thus built environment has a significant role in sustaining the marriage by incorporating it into its mythical space (Figure 5-8). The analysis indicated that a significant event occurred in mid-century, which may credit this perspective. The Siwans changed the place of the ceremony from Ayn-Elguba to Tamusi.

In previous times, the brides were taken to Ayn-Elguba, which was called also spring of the “bath” because of this ceremony. Since the middle of the century, the Siwans prefer to take the bride to Ayn-Tamusi because it is far from the crowded roads and there women can find more privacy. (Abou-Musalim, 23 March 1998. Interview No.55)
The enculturation of space, including the naming of places, is a significant aspect of the development of a community’s identity. Although Ayn-Elguba, which is located in the middle of the gardens, should still be valid for the ceremony, we can see from the quotation that it had become less preferred. The change happened after the physical restoration of Ayn-Elguba during the 1930s; as a result it has lost part of its essential significance and thus its “mythical” space. This reveals the Siwans’ understanding of qualities of place meaning. Relph refers to this quality as “imperfection”. He writes:

> Where there is some restrained imperfection of finish, we can be confident that this place is one which is invested with significance, for it suggests that the inhabitants have put something of themselves into it.\(^{23}\)

The change from Ayn-Elguba to Tamusi therefore happened as a result of the change of place meaning. Tamusi has become more meaningful to the Siwans. Gillian Rose notes that places have no inherent meaning, only the meaning people give them.\(^{24}\) What the Siwans missed in Ayn-Elguba was its \textit{Genius loci}, the spirit that imbued the place and spring with meaning and appropriateness\(^{25}\). Genius loci can not be designed to order. It has to evolve through a long period of people/nature interaction, which involves mythical articulations. The “perfect” image of the “new” Ayn-Elguba destroyed its natural significance and so its cultural meaning (Figure 5-9); to quote Relph once again,

> Only machines and machine-made products are perfect and precise, and where we see perfection we also see lifelessness and the suppression of self-expression and human meaning.\(^{26}\)

The ceremony also manifests the important role of mythical space in creating cultural landscape and identifying people’s place in the world. The Siwans understand their place “as part of a wider social process”,\(^{27}\) in which “belonging” can be seen as a social activity that occurs within the natural “boundary” of the oasis. As a community, the dynamics of phenomenological interrelationships with nature link them to the territoriality of their space within the placelessness of the desert - a linking structure which Robert Sack explains quite clearly:

> Territoriality is a primary geographical expression of social power. It is the means by which society and space are related.\(^{28}\)


The other event which reveals the phenomenal presence of the spring in the Siwan experience is the ceremony of mourning. If marriage is seen as a sign of sustainability, death is rather a sign of decline. Like other Muslims, the Siwans wash the body of the deceased, wrap it in shrouds and bury it according to Islamic rules. The only different ritual which shows their attachment to their particular environment is that they cover the grave where the body is placed with logs, from the trunks of palm trees, and earth.
The Siwan lives with the palm, we call them “our aunts”... they support and sustain us when we are alive, and also when we are dead... After a funeral, we usually come together to remember the deceased, then we have a meal together, go wash up in Ayn-Tamus, then go back to our everyday life. Womenfolk and also close relatives stay together at the deceased’s house, share mourning with his/her family for three days, then they all go to Tamus, wash up and go back to their houses. (Mohammed Yousef, 3 March 1998. Interview. No. 28)

The experience of mourning, broadly speaking, has a strong impact on individuals; sometimes it brings up consequences that could be hard to overcome. In the Siwan experience, the cultural rituals for passing through this hard experience and returning to normal life are very much linked to phenomenal interaction between people and built environment, involving spring, house and garden. From their experience, the ritual should differ between men and women.

Traditionally, if a man lost his wife, he would spend three days mourning, go to the Tamusi spring and then return back to his normal life. It is considered very proper to go back to work in the garden on the fourth day. However, the opposite is true for women. If a man dies, his widow has to go through a special ritual, which starts just after the three mourning days following the funeral. The widow has to go with womenfolk to the spring of Tamusi where she removes all her silver ornaments and ordinary clothing, washes herself and dons a white garment, a sign of mourning. Then, the unlucky woman has to live in complete seclusion in her house for four months and ten days. She is only allowed to meet her close relatives.

When her period of seclusion has been fulfilled, she has to go to the Tilhram spring to wash herself with its water. Thereafter she is considered free from the evil spirit which possessed her during her time of sadness; then she dresses up, adorns herself, receives relatives and friends and can resume her normal life.

The Siwans interpret the experience of mourning as outside everyday life experience; a special situation. It is a situation which Kaplan et al refer to as mental fatigue. As they explain, some passive involvement in restorative settings provides time to recover from mental fatigue. For Kaplan, unfrequented places that are physically distant from one’s usual setting contribute to mental fatigue rather than restoring it. Mental fatigue can be
reduced by being in settings that offer restorative experience. The Siwans understand that men and women are different. For a man, being in a garden offers a restorative setting. Meanwhile, the time of seclusion between Tamusi and Tilihram is a metaphor for the woman’s need to minimise her “being” after such a huge impact on her life, the loss of her husband, through a restorative experience. The house during this time represents a womb in which a woman can begin, gradually, a new stage of being for herself; a necessary stage for starting a completely new life thereafter (Figure 5-10). The mourning experience needs the internal horizon of “things” to appear in order to allow a true being of the “self” to appear and thus remedy its fatigue; a total experience that compounds feeling, thought and space in a holistic interaction, as Tuan explains:

Experience is compounded of feeling and thought... Human spaces reflect the quality of the human senses and mentality... An object or place achieves concrete reality when our experience of it is total, that is, through all the senses as well as with the active and reflective mind.31

This analysis has attempted to outline the characteristics and implications of certain relationships between people and nature in the Siwan experience. It has demonstrated how people perceive space, and understand its invisible layers of meanings. In particular, it has been suggested that an examination of the existential dimensions of place has certain practical value: the identification of place meaning. The construction of invisible

layers of meaning, whether attributed to happiness or sadness, in the natural space has satisfied the provision and facilitation of more comprehensive understanding of built environment and also of their place in-the-world. I can refer to an old local folk-song that describes the simple life of a farmer in his garden in these words:

An extended earth is his bed,
and the blue tent is his cover

In the song the "extended earth" is nature, and the "blue tent" denotes the sky; in this sense the song expresses clearly their understanding of the world as a place of dwelling. That seems to be congruent with Heidegger’s definition of "the world" when he said "The world is the house where the mortals dwell", that is because:

"The manner in which we humans are on the earth, under the sky… is dwelling".33

Heidegger called what lies between "on the earth" and "under the sky", "the world". This is the mortals’ house, and accordingly, an inside private space. It is almost the same conception in the local folk-song; the world itself is a "bed" and a "cover", a home. Yet the relationship between the natural and private space is a gathering of place for inhabitation; a property brought about only in dwelling itself. As Foltz explains, "dwelling or inhabitation is not merely one human activity among others but rather ‘the basic character of human existence’".34

The phenomenal presence of the springs and gardens in the everyday life of the Siwans reveals not only their value as a natural resource, but also their cultural value for the community. In Siwa, the landscape is continually being encultured as part of a symbolic process through which people make sense of built environment and express it in a socialised form.35 The cultural meaning of the springs and gardens is the focus for a social life where the individual may experience participation and belonging.36

Yet Siwa’s great present problem is not the scarcity of water from its springs; rather, it is one of too much water and not enough drainage. The excessive water and the abundance of its springs were always a significant phenomenon in Siwa. Now this threatens Siwa,

33 Ibid., p147
and requires not only local but also global attention. The following section shows how the threat originated from global modern impact. The analysis here focuses on the extent to which the influence of modernity has affected natural and ecological stability in Siwa.

3. The spring/garden relationship and the challenge of modernity

The traditional relationship between the Siwans and the springs and gardens in their oasis was ruptured by the impact of modernity. The drawing of traditional societies into the global economy and their sharing in the world-wide move towards a space-time compression has extended to remote places such as north African oases. This "new" global experience has affected Siwa as well. This section analyses the effects of globalization trends on the environmental stability of Siwa and their consequential impact on the meaning of natural space in the development of built environment.

3.1. The impact of regional development

During the 1970s, a new petroleum site in Jakhboup oasis in Libya was discovered. Many Siwans were already involved in a relationship with the Jakhboup community, by marriage or trade. There had been a path, of about 120 kilometres in length, between the two oases since medieval times.

Jakhboup was a very poor oasis, it was also Egyptian until 1926... we had many relations there. Its people used to come to work in Siwa in the harvest seasons. They always took water from the springs on their way back as a gift for their relations. Then, they became rich with the discovery of petrol, and we went to work for them, it is life. (Said Elkanel, 26 March 1998. Interview, No. 59)

During the 1970s and 1980s, one third of the Siwan labour force sought employment in Libya’s booming petroleum industry. Their earnings were invested back home in Siwa as a demand for the reclamation of arable land.

In the 1980s the companies came to look for petrol in Siwa but they found only water, we already have had plenty of water. Ironically, each time they dig in Jakhboup they find petrol there, and each time we dig in Siwa we find water here. Our relations in Jakhboup send us requests that we find a way to make the water reach their oasis. (Sheikh Abdel-Rahman Othman, 14 March 1998. Interview No.39)

Jakhboup has enjoyed a time of prosperity and the Siwans who worked there returned to Siwa, bought and reclaimed more land and dug more artesian wells. Over two decades, about 1700 artesian wells have been added to the 80 natural springs already existing. The
amount of cultivated land rose from 1300 acres to 4500 acres. Yet the 1680 wells were not a result of traditional development in the community, but occurred because

Someone from outside introduced the idea of digging wells by using pipes, it was very easy, we could get pure water from about 52 metres deep. The problem was, people irrigated the land every fortnight, for 13 days the water used to flow to the salt lakes. At that time, people did not know that it is important to lock the pipes. (Buckour, 62-year-old Siwan man, 8 March 1998. Interview No.32)

Thus the introduction of modernity in Siwa was a consequence of the increase of modernisation in Third World localities without precautions against its negative outcomes. The marketers of artesian wells sold only pipes and overlooked the importance of the supplementary locks, mainly to make the price affordable.

With the global petrol crises in the 1980s and the increase of the number of petroleum sites in the Libyan Desert, more focus was given to the Western Desert of Egypt for petroleum research, and also for national security. In the mid 1980s, Libya thought that it would be better to take the “promising” Western Desert from Egypt. That resulted in the severing of diplomatic ties with Libya and the return of all the Egyptians working there, including the Siwans. Since then, they have focused their efforts on cultivating their new farms. Yet the mobility of the workers and their experience of a different lifestyle outside the oasis have also significantly affected traditional irrigation arrangements and techniques as well as traditional social demands.

3.2. The consequences of development at the Siwan level

According to inherited practices of agriculture and irrigation in Siwa, the farm is divided into small basins varying in size (4x4m or 6x6m), whether planted in olives or date palms. On the old farms, natural springs were continually flowing and each farmer would open the water-gate to his garden every fortnight. Irrigation is performed by diverting water from the network of ditches coming from a spring to these basins simply by moving out a piece of stone usually used to stop the flow of water. As a cultural practice, farmers apply the same amount of irrigation in summer and winter. The Siwans justify these practices by arguing:

We know our land and its needs. No technology will help with reclaiming the desert land of the oasis...the whole work must be done by hand not machines...only a Siwan can deal with the hard and difficult soil of Siwa.
The land needs much water to wash out the salt. (Salih A., 12 June 1997. Interview No. 5)

The answer to the Siwa case is summarised in an official report that exhibits the experts’ perspective according to the scientific approach to productive agriculture:

Irrigation intervals vary according to crop, soil type and growing season. In clay loamy soil planted with date palms [in Siwa], irrigation interval varies from 16 days during summer to 20 days in winter. In sandy soils, it varies from 8 to 10 days in summer and winter respectively. 39

Over the centuries the traditional techniques of cultivation kept the ecological balance due to the limited extraction of water from natural springs. Yet on the new farms, the size of a farm depends on the discharge of the artesian well (Figure 5-11). Meanwhile water and irrigation were managed by farmers who had followed their inherited traditional experience. The new artesian wells in the new farms were kept free flowing. With ongoing time, the increased volume of water, due to the increase of artesian wells and the excessive extraction of water, has created a drainage problem. Furthermore, there are many flowing wells whose water goes unused and drains into the salt lakes (Figure 5-12). The water level rises, which in turn harms neighbouring cultivated land.

Andrew McLaughlin’s conceptual approach to reading nature may explain this phenomenon. He suggests that a socialist system reads nature as owned by everyone, while a capitalist system reads nature as privately owned, and an industrial system reads nature as resources. 40 He argues that none of these systems holds much promise to withstand effectively ecological and environmental problems. 41 Alternatively an ecological environmentalist approach might go beyond these systems by looking for connecting patterns between different problems. McLaughlin sees these problems as symptoms of some profound mistake at a deeper level. In Siwa, ecological problems were obvious symptoms of real change, as (Figure 5-13) illustrates in relation to the presence of spring and artesian wells in old and new farms.

The analysis shows that there were three stages to the environmental change, which brought remarkable ecological disturbance in Siwa: first, the increase of arable land by reclaiming new areas within the oasis; second, the introduction of modern devices in

41 Ibid. p:62.
order to increase water extraction; third, the emergence of an environmental problem due to the first and second stages. The analysis also indicated that the rise of the water-table level, the inadequacy of the drainage system and the “desertification” were environmental phenomena associated with the emergence of the third stage. During 1980s, the official perspective dealt with each of these phenomena as a separate problem.

Figure 5-11. A New Farm in Siwa

Figure 5-12. The expansion of salt lakes, a great problem in Siwa
Artesian Wells increased individuality and detachment in new farms and gardens

The spring always resembles the heart in its relationship with old farms and gardens

Figure 5-13. The phenomenal presence of the Spring as a source of water on old farms has become meaningless on new farms by the introduction of individual artesian wells

The local government summarised the problem according to the available information during the 1980s. The collection of quantitative information was the first "modern" step to find a solution.

The rise of the water-table is a serious problem in Siwa now... Beside the 200 springs there are also 1680 wells which produce 300,000 cubic metres/year... The land consumes some of it, but the rest goes to the salt lakes which have extended to 25,000 acres... Considering that Siwa is 17-24m below sea level, we can understand the problem of the rise of the subsoil water level. (Mr. Tahoun, then President of Siwa City Council, 25 May 1997. Interview No.1)

In the absence of adequate hydro-geological information about the oasis, the Ministry of Development together with FAO and UNDP have collaborated in drilling a 960 metre deep well down to the Nubian Sandstone Aquifer and studied the information concerning soil and water to define the size of the underground reservoir. They have also drilled two 120 metre-deep shallow wells.

In the Siwa area, the basement lies at more than 4,000 metres below the ground surface. The basement rock is overlain by a formation mainly of sandstone with clay and dolomite and the thickness of this continental formation reaches and may exceed 2,500 metres. In
the Siwa region, there are two types of aquifer systems. The first is the lower aquifer system, known as the Nubian sandstone aquifer, and the second is the upper aquifer system in the Tertiary formation of limestone. The studies pointed out the reasons for the problem as the following:

The natural springs are flowing through cracks and faults till water reaches the ground surface. The water is used for irrigation after being transported through earth canals which can be extended more than 1000 metres from each spring. Plenty of this water is lost by seepage through the earth, causing a high water-table in the oasis...improper use of all spring water, and the growth of plenty of weeds around the springs and along the irrigation canals contributed to the problem as well.

From the official point of view the Siwans were neglecting the periodical deepening and clearing of the drains; this lowered their efficiency and led to a higher water table in the old farms, lower crop yields and more plant diseases, decreasing the land productivity by 50-60%. The Ministry of Development in co-operation with the World Food Programme (WFP) have cleared 20,300 metres of drains. To overcome this problem 202 old springs in Siwa have been restored to prevent any seepage to the neighbouring agricultural areas and 4000 metres of irrigation canals have been lined with stone and cement to solve the problem of seepage.

The drainage water from the drains feeding Aghurmi lake were diverted into a main drain leading the flow into a sump. The total discharge to the main drain varies from 400 cubic metres per hour in summer to 1400 cubic metres per hour in winter. A lifting station was constructed along the sump to lift water in a 350 mm-diameter asbestos main carrier into a reservoir of 1500 cubic metres capacity. At the lifting station, three pumping units have been installed, with ability to accommodate additional pumping units. The short term projects resulted a recognisable improvement in the old irrigation system and provided extra water for increasing the cultivated areas.

There are 200 springs in Siwa which means the source of life for people and plants, water is a fundamental substance for life. By recognising the ratio between the people (18,000) and the available cultivated land (13,000 acres) we find that it is 16/24 acre/person. This is considered a
high ratio compared with the ratio in the Nile Valley which is 1/24 acre/person.\textsuperscript{48}

According to official statistics the Siwans should consider themselves lucky by comparison to farmers in the Nile Valley. But the expansion of the cultivated land southward of the oasis brought the arable land to reach the southern border of the oasis and to face a new problem of desertification.

The south of Siwa is the “Great Sand Sea” which moves towards the north 7 metres/year as a result of the movement of the sand dunes, it is a well documented movement for a long time. Now we try to fix these sand dunes by using the drainage water at the other side of the salt lake.\textsuperscript{49}

From the official point of view, desertification due to the movement of the sand dunes from the south to northward is the main environmental problem threatening agricultural development in Siwa.\textsuperscript{50} To overcome this problem a major long term scheme has been proposed to construct a ring road around the oasis, which goes through the Great Sand Sea to the south of the oasis. This road would act as an axis around which an area could be cultivated with certain types of soil fixing trees and vegetation. The scheme included the reclamation of 15,000 acres in order to fix the sand dunes around the oasis. This project had been considered the dream of the 1990s. However, the official dream was not so satisfactory to the Siwan experts. In an interview with a Siwan agricultural engineer, he asked reluctantly:

I don't understand why we should waste money fixing the dunes in the Great Sand Sea, we know the nature of the land there, it is impossible to deal with, hard and unpromising. Why don't they use the money to construct a canal to carry the drainage water to the Qattara depression? They said it's impossible because of the distance, but Qattara depression is 137 metres below sea level, that may solve the whole problem of Siwa oasis. (Salama, A., 11 March 1998. Interview No.38)

Due to the length of drainage networks in some areas, and the obstacles which hinder the flow of drainage water in some of the drains,\textsuperscript{51} the scientific approach provided not only a hydraulic solution but also a biological one. A project has been started in co-operation with the Ministry of Development, the Desert Research Centre, FAO and UNDP, aiming at planting Eucalyptus trees along the drains and roads.\textsuperscript{52} A nursery has been constructed

\textsuperscript{48} Mr. Tahoun, A., then the president of Siwa City Council, 25 May 1997. Interview No.1.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{52} These trees are long rooted and able to stand water salinity and to consume large amount of water.
in Siwa for the production of seedlings of Eucalyptus and Acacia. Until 1991, 120,000 seedlings had been delivered to farmers to be planted along the roads, canals and new farms. However, planting of timber trees seemed to be unsatisfactory to the Siwan farmers who were unfamiliar with the exotic unproductive trees. Their interpretation of the way the officials introduced these trees to the oasis was negative.

Do you see that tree with the yellow flowers? This is our punishment for being obeyed... [a bit angry] it is useless, unproductive and dreadful to the land... Do you know that you can’t use the land around it for any crops, you can’t cut it down and you can’t get anything out of it? But we have to put it in, if we really want any official aid. (Ahmed El-Seanosy, 25 March 1998. Interview No. 58)

The quotation of the Siwan interviewee reveals the conflicting view between “shallow” and “deep” ecology. Arne Naess believes that the major ecological problems cannot be resolved within the existing modernist systems, which only produce “shallow ecology”. He sees as the basic platform for understanding “deep” ecology that:

1. The well-being and flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent worth). These values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes.

2. Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realisation of these values and are also values in themselves.54

Naess’s explanation includes habitat, populations, species, as well as human and non-human cultures in a fundamental concern and respect. Martin Heidegger made a contribution to deep ecology by his discussion of the development of “anthropocentrism” in the West. He also called for two fundamental alternatives: first, to dwell authentically on this Earth, which fits the ecological call to dwell within the bioregion and to dwell with alertness to the natural processes, and second, to step back to release ourselves from the usual analytical thinking and to use our intuitive power. In this, he arrived at an ecological biocentric position in which humans would “let being be”.57

The experimental introduction of timber trees faced an unsuccessful future, not only because the Siwans were unwilling to co-operate, but also by the scientific studies.

Planting of timber trees as an economic crop is not considered in the production plan of the oasis, for many reasons, namely:

57 Ibid. p:99
- Long roots of timber trees hinder the growth of orchard trees.
- Winds never blow so heavy as to need wind breaks.\textsuperscript{58}

Shallow ecological solutions may also appear as a way of controlling nature. Believing thus in control involves forgetting the context. The official strategy of controlling drainage by using Eucalyptus and Acacia was a response to their logic that we are separate from nature. The Siwans, in contrast, understand that they are entangled with nature. They understand the context at a deeper level. McLaughlin defines our situation in relation to nature from a deep ecological view; he wrote,

\begin{quote}
If this larger context is noticed, it becomes clear that we are not in control. Rather we exist within a web of complexly interrelated nature. We are parts of the web.\textsuperscript{59}
\end{quote}

The following diagram shows the analysis of the Siwan problem from the official viewpoint. Their analysis was based upon the breakdown of the Siwan phenomenon into three separate sets of problems. The professionals' approach tended to quantify the Siwan problem in order to find a scientific solution to it. Meanwhile, the Siwans were looking to the quality of things and recognised what happened as a phenomenon that needed to be dealt with by recalling diverse experiences. These conflicting perspectives show the divergence between professionals and the local community. Each of the perspectives represents the approach adopted on both sides.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{diagram.png}
\caption{Analysis of the problem from official viewpoint}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{58} Development Authority of the North-West Coast, (1991:10). Document No.1.
Quantifying the problem does not alone result in an adequate solution. Solving the Siwan problem lies in the understanding of its origins and social implications. The Siwans were, like many others world-wide, encountering Modernity: the mobility of labour force, money and economic prosperity, the introduction of technology and the experience of otherness. It was the temptation to increase the individual’s wealth and power that persuaded individuals to risk their societies and communities. Recognising the problem, the Siwans admitted that:

It was a matter of ignorance in the community...now we know it was a big mistake. Having one’s own artesian well, although prestigious, is not more important than the sustainability of the oasis. We didn’t realise that mistake until it became apparent to us...the palm trees were standing up dead. (Othman Kadura, 22 June 1997. Interview No. 10)

The scientific approach was not able to solve the problem in the absence of knowledge about the traditional experience within the Siwan community. Robert Mugerauer explains the linkage between scientific knowledge and traditional experience:

"Scientific knowledge of environment is possible only because there is a prior experience in which the environment appears as holistically intelligible. We always find ourselves in the midst of an already interpreted environment; from this placement we both deepen our understanding and make mistakes." 60

On the other hand, in the absence of basic scientific information, a traditional approach to solve the problem was not possible. The last section of the analysis in this chapter shows how the local community developed a strategy to adapt their everyday life through experiencing the phenomenon. The local strategy worked towards mapping both scientific information and traditional knowledge into a manifestation of the Siwan phenomenon as it is.


Finding a solution relates in part to understanding and exchanging basic information in shared experiences. In traditional pre-modern societies, the inherited information for managing and solving environmental problems depended on a long history of trial and error endeavours. The traditional cultures kept basic experiences that were adequate to deal with such traditional societies. In the “modern” experience, the compression of space and time, as well as the huge development of technological and scientific knowledge, needs more effective ways of communicating information to those in need of
it. Paradoxically, in Siwa people often ignored information that was provided, even if it was pertinent to their needs. Perhaps that reflects a misunderstanding of the failed efforts or a willingness to trust more in their inherited knowledge.

In the past, everything was by experience. Now, when I go to the garden with my children, one of them has a diploma in agriculture, if anything turned up, he would start thinking and reading. I told him it is not by reading about things, it is by experiencing them. Every place has its own thing, here is not like the Nile Valley, the soil is different, the climate is different. But I couldn’t give them advice when I saw the trees stand up dead and their roots were decayed. That has not had a precedent. (Abou-Musalim, 23 March 1998. Interview No.55)

The Siwans recognised the problem by the dramatic increase in the subsoil water. Through experience, they understood that the rise in the level of the water-table would have severe consequences for the orchards. Their traditional knowledge was not adequate to interpret the phenomenon as a consequence of the perpetual flow of water from too many artesian wells. The cause and effect, hence, was not clear to them. At that time, asking for professional help was crucial.

The process of understanding and exchanging basic information is closely related to the way in which people construct their mental maps. Information that does not concur with people’s experience is likely to be excluded. Having recognised the phenomenon, and sharing the same experience of its consequences, the Siwans started the process of dealing with it. This process involved ways of acquiring and seeing traditional and modern elements, and ways of organising life, different from any they ever had before. The Siwans realised that their local knowledge was not adequate to offer a practical solution. They were able to reinterpret their relationship with officials and experts to find a solution for their problem.

To solve the problem, according to the analysis of “modern” investigation, they must stop the continuous flow of water from the artesian wells. The scientific solution suggested two options: the installation of control valves to artesian wells, an expensive option, and/or the decommissioning of some wells. Following the scientific solution, some farmers tapped their artesian wells or plugged smaller ones. In both cases the number of wells were few and the majority of farmers could not follow this process for

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60 Mugerauer, R. (1985:51)
economic reasons. However, they reinterpreted a traditional idea, a large piece of stone to stop the running water (Figure 5-15). A piece of stone has always played the role of a water-gate to manage the flow of water to the garden; now it plays the same role by blocking the artesian well and stopping the flow of its water to the garden unless needed, at no monetary cost.

During the 1990s, with the development of their communication with experts, their mental map drew a connection between the organisation of old and new farms. They recognised that the perpetual flow of water from an artesian well could irrigate up to 14 farms, a day each every fortnight. Reclaimed areas were then divided into small basins and a similar irrigation practice is now performed to those in the old farms. Some organisational differences, however, were introduced such, as pre-fabricated units for canals and ditches and a roster for irrigation among owners.

Now, the artesian well is not made for one person, but for 10 or 15, according to its capacity. In the past, it could be three or four people irrigate at the same time, day or night, it was very much managed by El-Hasseeb [accountant]. Now it is a roster, every fortnight. So, there is no need for any accountant, every one is responsible for himself, if he does not show, it means he has lost his turn. (Baker Yousef, 10 March 1998. Interview No. 36)

Their vision of both of springs and artesian wells has become holistic. The manifestation of the environmental problems as a phenomenon made clear the importance of considering the relationship between “the demand for the delivery of grounds and the withdrawal of the soil that can be a basis”63. The phenomenon appeared to the Siwans such that the renewal of the world, even through modern technology, must proceed from a “saving of the earth”, as that upon which they will always dwell. For Heidegger saving the earth occurs through the conserving that lets things be, in this case springs and wells, by caring for them in a way that accords with and releases what is essential to them. To save means to rescue from danger or ruin; to save the earth entails neither exploiting nor exhausting it. The order of distributing the natural volume of water among the Siwan community is a responsive use that allows the earth to reveal its sustaining power; a use that is at the same time a safeguarding of the earth’s self-concealing.64

64 Ibid.
This vision extended well beyond the saving of the wells as merely a natural resource. It rested in large part upon the sense of understanding the poetics of dwelling in the place around the well in the form of a shaded meeting place. Technically, the expert engineers introduced the idea and design to build night storage reservoirs (Figure 5-16), so a farmer does not need to irrigate at night, and the water is still preserved. A traditional interpretation added a shade beside the storage reservoir and completed the traditional image of a natural spring, bringing together its functional and poetic qualities. Now in the new farms, friends can visit each other and have meetings at sunset, and families can have a picnic and wash their laundry as in the old days. In other words, they simply reinterpreted traditional elements derived from their everyday life experiences to relate "modern" elements to their inherited culture.

It is through poetic revealing, as we learn from Heidegger, that we promote the growth of "the saving": that the earth can be disclosed, yet conserved and saved as what it is. Poetically, saving the earth and dwelling upon the earth are not two different things: "Poetry is what first brings us onto the earth, making us belong to it, and thus brings us into dwelling".65 Dwelling in this respect is a revealing of both the inner and outer horizons of being, in Merleau-Ponty's terms.66 Thus the inner horizon of the artesian well in a new farm allowed an invisible mythical dimension to exist. Then it allowed a meaningful layer of natural space to appear, and to contribute to the manifestation of the phenomenological relationship between the Siwans and their new farms.

The consequences of applying modern technology without adequate scientific information were about to result in the drowning of the oasis, as the water-table was at minus 19 metres in 1997, despite all the official promises and scientific solutions. It took the Siwans a couple of decades to recognise the phenomenon and once it appeared to them they realised that they needed the help of scientific knowledge. However, for Siwa the scientific knowledge was mapped into the traditional thinking and an approach was developed. Such an approach may only work in the context of coexistence between modern scientific information and traditional knowledge; in other words, without the overwhelming of the traditional lifestyle by modernity and technology. Foltz explains the emergence of such an approach as rooted in Heidegger's philosophy:

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It is precisely the uncanny dominance of technology that enables it to co-opt and incorporate any attempts to stand outside the technological framework that are not derived from, and solidly rooted in, a thinking that approaches the earth poetically.  

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**Figure 5-15**. A piece of stone used to block an artesian well, a traditional strategy to solve a modern problem.

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**Figure 5-16**. A storage reservoir linked to an artesian well in a new farm acts as a natural spring by adding a shade and rest area on its side.

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Shared experiences rely on communicating and exchanging knowledge and information; some of these coincide with places and spatial contexts, yet not limited only to geographical and regional knowledge. They are also related to events, activities, big issues and everyday life experiences. The significance of place meaning and cultural meaning, as Robert Mugerauer asserts, are always analogous for those who inhabit a specific place. In Siwa, the springs were the main source of life, the phenomenon that brought the place to its “being” and the physical nature that sustained its existence. The Siwans have found the springs in the past and enriched their existence with meaning and invested in their natural space mythical values. Now they continue the same thing with the artesian wells because they simply understood them through experience.

Summary
This chapter began by suggesting that a phenomenological approach is relevant to the inquiry into modern transformation in the physical environment of Siwa. The chapter investigated the first theme of the thesis: the phenomenological relationships between people and nature are manifested in the interaction with the natural resources. This theme focused on the characterisation of the phenomenological relationships in the domain of “natural space” within the context of the Siwan community.

The chapter explored the ways in which the Siwans created a cultural landscape, which formed a fundamental part of their socio-cultural rituals, myth and realities, in order to form their place in-the-world. We can not look at the landscape of Siwa, however, with the contemporary picturesque eye, since the Siwans basically do not see it that way. Rather, they have developed an inherited eye to see the “specifications” and “integral meanings of landscape features”. They have been close enough to the earth to experience both its comfort and threat. In addition the analysis highlighted actions and procedures that have been taken so that significant places, settings and cultural landscape may continue to sustain the cultural experience they have always provided. The chapter in this respect attempted to answer the question: What kinds of relationships appear and exist between culture, identity and place?

Having outlined different transformations in the physical environment of Siwa, the analysis pointed out conflicting perspectives as the official and local community began to adopt new strategies to overcome the environmental changes. This conflict is mainly associated with the different approaches adopted to understand the phenomenon. While the official story shows that the Egyptian government still follows a modern objective approach to analysing and managing natural resources, the Siwan story revealed the phenomenological subjective approach adopted by the local community to enhance their understanding of ways of using and managing natural resources. Does the same conflict extend to other aspects of the Siwan built environment, in housing and building for example? The following chapter explores this inquiry and analyses the different perspectives concerning its implications in the Siwan experience.
CHAPTER SIX
VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE: AUTHENTIC OR BACKWARD?

Every people that has produced architecture has evolved its own favourite forms, as peculiar to that people as its language, its dress, or its folklore. Until the collapse of cultural frontiers in the last century, there were all over the world distinctive local shapes and details in architecture, and the buildings of any locality were the beautiful children of a happy marriage between the imagination of the people and the demands of their countryside.

Is vernacular architecture able to provide elements that can withstand the impact of modernity on a remote isolated desert oasis community such as Siwa? Researching the Siwan vernacular built environment leads to an investigation of the Siwans themselves. Their special feeling about the oasis as a place, as architecture, as landscape and as urban centre is largely responsible for their considering it as a part of themselves that they simply take for granted. This is their heritage from past generations. As a traditionally Islamic community, their understanding of the theoretical and conceptual meanings of Islamic principles has been reflected in the way they mapped their world and constructed their vernacular architecture.

This chapter investigates the second theme: the creation of “Home” is manifested in the way we build. The theme emphasises that architecture is primarily a built form. This built form allows dwelling when it gathers and represents the world to which it belongs. This theme is revealed in the Siwan tectonic, which manifests how to live under the regional conditions and appreciates the qualitative identity of the desert. The chapter explores this theme within “private space”. It investigates the vernacular architecture in Siwa as an expression of the Siwan culture and identity and a representation of everyday life experience. It also analyses the stages of recent change. The analysis focuses on both official and local involvement in the changes occurring in the traditional architecture of Siwa and upon their strategies to overcome the phenomenal changes brought about by Modernity. Like the previous two chapters, the first section of this chapter represents a personal reflection, in which insights from the field were revealed.

1. Third reflection: Experiencing the "Field"

In the field, surprises and consequences form an essential part of the everyday life of the researcher as a participant in the common life of the community. A researcher may struggle with the local everyday life. This affects his or her understanding about how to deal with the local environment: weather, food, norms and traditions. In the field, conflicts, surprises and consequences were good opportunities to enrich my understanding of the present built environment. Two personal experiences combined to influence the insights I needed to reveal traditional and modern building style in Siwa.

My experience of the modern style in the Siwan house began during my first visit to Siwa in April 1997. In the very first moments of my fieldwork, I was working through my visits to different places with my sister and her family. We went to visit the Oracle, the Alexander temple. There, I saw the guard of the temple, a dark man of short stature: his features carried a lot of his ancestors. I asked him several questions about the temple and the site, then I asked him whether we could visit his house. "It would be my pleasure", he said with a smile. "You are all invited to share dinner with us tonight. I'll come to take you from your hotel at 7:30pm". That is how I met my first informant, Hidow, and then his family, who have become close friends of mine since then.²

In the evening Hidow came to accompany us to his house. I was impressed because the man was poor, and we were four persons. I was also very excited: it was the first time I had entered a Siwan house. However, as visitors, we were only invited into the marboua [the sitting room], which was located to the left of the entrance door. There was a 4 x 7 metre courtyard in front of the marboua which was surrounded by a wall 3 meters high. There were several large plastic containers in the courtyard, used to keep water.

The marboua in the Hidow house was not a kerchief [mud] room, but had bricks for the walls and a concrete roof (Figure 6-1). Although it was the evening, it was hot inside the 5 x 6 meter room. Hidow had to put the electric fan on; we had to put it as close as possible. We were sitting on some small, colourful cushions on the floor when he put a round low table, covered with a colourful plastic sheet, in front of us. Then he disappeared for a while, and then brought back a dinner meal, and water.

² During my fieldwork in Siwa I tried hard to detach myself from my informants, but I found that reaching and capturing a phenomenal quality is very much related to the degree of involvement of a researcher in the everyday life of the people, not only physically but also emotionally.
Hidow’s wife and mother entered the room to share the meal with us. They were wearing traditional clothes of rural Egypt; nothing was significant about their dress or scarves. That appeared to me to mean they did not want to be culturally different. Although we were not very hungry, we washed our hands and started to eat. We said “Bisme Allah”, which means in the name of God, to give the food the blessing required and to show our host gratitude for his kind hospitality. Hidow insisted on our finishing the food. He said “We can not eat from what you will leave over for the whole week”. We all laughed at the comment.

That evening, I said to myself that those people are much happier than many others who have all the comforts of modern life, but still consider themselves “poor”. They were rich, not by our modern materialistic standards, but by the traditional definition of “Richness” which means “Giving” whether it is the giving of tangible materials including money, or intangible notions including warm feelings, care and participation.

My second experience took place during June 1997. For a three week visit, I was accompanied by my children (6 and 4 years) and my niece (13 years). The image of a mother and children was very helpful, and it opened doors for me without much trouble. It also gave me another perspective of the experience: how do people interact with the children? How do the children interact with such a context? Observing their interaction and instant adaptation to an absolutely different context revealed insights about how the relationship between people and built environment evolves in a phenomenological sense.

During the first week my younger child stopped eating for two days. She only drank water, juice or milk. It was 42°, and despite the continuous use of the electric fan it was terribly hot inside the hotel. It was a modern concrete and brick building (Figure 6-2). I was very worried about her, so I decided to take the children out with me on that day. I was going to meet a group of Siwan school teachers in Sidi Rahim primary school. It was the summer holidays, but the school was open and the classes were full of children. I knew that the school represents the oasis in the national festival for reading-for-all scheme for six weeks.

After I had finished my interview it was one o’clock. I wished to find a refuge away from the unbearable heat and glare. I remembered Hidow’s family, so I told my children that
we were going to visit some friends. We took the cart to the Westerners' quarter, where Hidow's house is located.

Figure 6-1. Marboua [a sitting room] in a Siwan House

Figure 6-2. Modern style used in the first official hotel built in the 1980s in Siwa city

We carried on to Hidow's house. There we met Salha his wife, who said that I had brought the children at a very hot time. She advised that we should stay in the old Kerchief [mud] part of the house, which was the private part. The house consisted of
three rooms that were accessible from the entrance corridor behind the Marboua. They used the third room as a kitchen. A bathroom was located behind the Marboua at the end of the corridor (Figure 6-3). We entered one of the two furnished rooms. It was 4.50 x 6.00 meters; there were two small windows blocked by wooden sheets. The floor was covered by plastic rugs, and several colourful cushions were placed around the room. The only opening out was the door which kept the room from the glare outside. It was cool, dim and peaceful. It was the refuge I had dreamed of finding.

![Figure 6-3. Hidow House plan](image)

I laid down on the floor, put my head on a cushion and looked up to the ceiling. The view of the half palm trunks which cover the ceiling, and the massive mud walls which carry them, gave me a feeling of peace and relaxation. The environment inside the room was a demonstration of the tender face of "Nature". The natural elements were harmonised in merciful composition (Figure 6-4). It was how Nature lends itself to the hands of a human in a reciprocal relationship of protection and care. The context inside the room was the sense of "being with Nature" in a private refuge. The convenience of the room evoked Fathy's words;

Therefore the comfort of people in this district [Upper Egypt] depends largely upon the thermal properties of the walls and roof. The best materials are those that do not conduct heat.⁵

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⁵ Fathy, H. (1973:45).
I slept for an hour, and when I opened my eyes I found my little one still asleep. Salha was cooking for us. When we sat for dinner, I was surprised to see my daughter eat normally. The bridge between my first and second experiences was the insight into the particularities of the Siwan built environment. Then I asked myself, why do I feel at home in this house? The answer was that the authentic feeling touches the heart. Siwa is no longer just a “field” for research work, it is rather a “real place”, which I can carry in my mind when I am back home.

![Roofing with palm trunks](image)

**Figure 6-4.** Roofing with palm trunks brings Nature “indoors”

### 2. Creating a “Home”

The word dwell in Arabic is *sakan*, which also gives the meaning of the term “in peace” *sakina*. As such the word *sakan* in its existential sense has the ability to symbolise the meaning of the term “at homeness”.¹ One may feel “at home” merely with the experience of the essence of settling; that is to, “dwell in peace”. This notion was the main core and the main goal when the Siwans began to establish their settlement in Shali, which was their refuge and their safe enclosure as well.

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2.1. Built form in the Siwan traditional architecture

An inquiry into the relationship between Siwans and their houses and dwellings offers insights into the Siwan culture and identity. A better understanding of such a relationship reveals the linkage between the “house”, as an objective function, and the “home”, as a context and site for “ontological security”. This linkage offers in turn the basic trust needed for social and economic life within the community.

The house plans of Siwa followed the vernacular architecture formed in the area of North Africa, Yemen and the south-west of Arabia from the 7th - 12th centuries. The typical double storey house that could be found in any Muslim society was almost always characterised by no outward-facing windows at all, only a high ventilation-hole in each bathroom. Windows were only present in the guest room, and were sufficiently high to prevent anyone passing in the street outside from seeing in. The Siwans adopted the exterior courtyard type, as shown in Chapter Four, after they started their buildings outside the Wall in the 19th century.

In the Siwan house the entrance was one of the most symbolic features, representing the threshold between the household and the public. Its symbolic importance was often emphasised by a monumental doorway, frequently decorated with images of the journey of the pilgrimage to Mecca. Although it was common to find a single entrance for most Islamic houses, a second entrance might be used exclusively by the women. Muslims understood that houses should have two entrances from the word of God in Al-Baqara, verse 189: “It is not good to enter houses from the back, rather it is good to be pious; enter houses through their front doors and be heeded so that you may win”. The basic idea of the verse is that houses should be approached from designated doors. It also suggests that the private entrance be located at the back of the house while visitors should be received at the front of the house. This design, according to the study done by Abdul Aziz Aba Al-Khail, had no precedent in Arabia before Islam.

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Occasionally, when the neighbours were family members, bridges across the street might allow the upper floors of houses to communicate. Examples of this are still evident in the old town Shali (Figure 6-5). The quest for privacy for the womenfolk also explained the orientation of the inner porch or guest room in such a way that, when the external doors were opened, it was impossible to see into the courtyard beyond; they were always opened onto the blank wall of a lobby or a passage with a right-angle turn. The entrance did not give immediate access to the domestic quarters; it emphasised privacy within the house domain (see Figure 6-3).

Provision for the privacy of women was noticeable in various forms. Inside the house, women could see through barriers without being seen by others on the outside of the private space. Outside the house, costume and veiling were designed to cover the face and body, and gender limitations on social interactions were accomplished in public space. Architecturally, the screen performed many of the functions of seclusion and introversion as well as the important function of modifying the hot climate of the desert through the closed facades and limited openings. A significant element of the Siwan vernacular architecture is the design of the windows on the first floor. They were made of four wings and were most often placed fairly low, so that the street could be seen when sitting (Figure 6-6). In this case, if the two lower wings were closed, privacy was secured with fresh air still being able to enter.

In traditional Islamic societies, males and females entertain separately. That led to an additional complexity of design in order to adopt a double circulation system. Accordingly, the men’s reception room was located directly accessible from the entrance lobby. In Siwa, the marboua [sitting room] was always open to the outside, even when it was on the first floor, and had another door to the inside of the house (see Figure 4-5,10). Nonetheless, the prevailing element in the plans of the traditional houses is the simple, essential functioning of spaces and the absence of unused ones. As for the arrangement of the rooms, the main consideration is the ease of movement within them, in such way as to serve the various functions and adapt to everyday needs. Generally, the significant divisions in Muslim houses were those of social accessibility, whether public or private.

Figure 6-5. Bridges across the street allowed the upper floors of houses to communicate and to extend in the limited space of Shali, Siwa city.

Figure 6-6. Four winged windows, a characteristic element in the Siwan vernacular architecture, interior of a mud house in Shali, Siwa City.
One of the most significant characteristics of Islamic culture was that the inhabitants of most Islamic houses sat and ate on the floor and used carpets, rugs, mats and cushions which could be easily rolled and stored away when not in need. Therefore, cupboards built into walls were a characteristic feature of the Islamic house. In Siwa, they added to built-in cupboards a storage room.

Historically, storage of date, olive and other crops was essential to keep the community safe in any crises of attack and also because of the remoteness of the oasis. Still today we store our needs on an annual basis, although many products come from the Nile Valley regularly, we still feel more secure when we have our store room full. (Sllman Abdel Allah, 10 June 1997. Interview No. 3)

The security of the community was achieved by the provision of sustainable built form and also by the enhancement of the natural resources. This needed an understanding of the local environment and revealed the reciprocal interrelationships between the house and the garden.

2.2. Environmental relationship between house and garden

The interrelationship of house/garden sustained an ecological balance in the Siwan built environment. In a reciprocal relationship, the house took building materials from the garden and also helped to clean it of dead branches and logs on a daily basis; meanwhile the garden took natural fertiliser from the house and helped to clean it from human and animal refuse. The Siwan developed a sustainable recycling system that influenced the architectural design of their houses.

In traditional houses the toilet is designed to keep the human refuse, which we cover every day with sand and ashes from palm logs burned in the oven for daily cooking and baking. Then we transport the refuse to the garden. We dig a basin around a palm and put the refuse as a fertiliser, it is very good for the palm and keeps the palm free from any bugs. In this way we might dig the same palm tree after two years. (Ahmed Mosa, 15 March 1998. Interview No. 42)

Generally, many cultures and religious rituals serve to promote hygiene as a way to prevent the transmission of disease. In Siwa, people are influenced in dealing with the “waste” of their houses by Islamic definition of wastes as “pure” and “impure”. Pure waste water is that coming from washing up and laundry. This water goes through an open ditch system from the house to the main drainage system. Impure waste water is the water involved with human refuse. When this “impure water” evaporates and the refuse has become completely dry, the product is no longer “impure” although still “unclean”.
In Siwa, they usually burn out the store before taking the refuse out to be transported to the gardens and used as fertiliser.

The design of a house in Islamic culture separates the bathroom and the toilet, as it is recommended to separate “pure” and “impure” actions and places physically as well as spiritually. This separation extends to the spatial arrangement of the house. For example, the positioning of toilets is influenced by religious injunctions relating to pollution and the sanctity of the Quibla [stand point for prayer in the direction of Mecca] orientation, which may cause impurity in a spiritual sense.11

My interviews revealed that the Siwans still conceptualise their understanding of what they consider “home” as it is mapped in Islamic principles, as culturally they still “live” these principles in their everyday life. They translate existential and belief logic into layers of meanings in private space. Therefore they can easily define their needs whenever they think about the architecture of what they consider a “home”.

What do we need for a home? I think it is a marboua [sitting room], accessible from the street, and a lavatory... in this way the visitor will be partly separated from the family rooms’ section.... Also, a rear courtyard for the birds and animals, that has a door, and another door for the house from the street. It’ll be more comfortable for a woman to have female visitors without disturbance. Meanwhile, a man could receive male guests with comfort as well. (Saleh Ibrahim, 12 June 1997. Interview No.5)

The analysis offers evidence of the survival of many principles of Islamic architecture in the vernacular architecture of Siwa. It also indicates the relevance of this architectural type to the social/cultural interpretations of the meaning of “home” in the Siwan community. Yet this leads to a fundamental question: How valid is the experience and memory of the past for the present and future? The following section interprets the impact of modernity on the Siwan built environment. The analysis focuses upon the official development and upgrading in Siwa. It also reveals the different perspectives and interpretations of the official development, as drawn from the context of Siwa.

3. The impact of modernity on traditional architecture
The impact of modernity on traditional architecture in Siwa has been expressed in a number of ways. The governmental projects produced a transformational phase of the Siwan built environment. At the community and individual level, the interviews revealed
that people had started to compare the old mud houses with the new concrete and block ones and were tempted to change. The analysis of the Siwan vernacular shows how the local, traditional house form has been transformed, and how the global and local factors influenced the adoption of new materials and new forms of housing.

The analysis of the “official” story of the development of Siwa revealed three stages in the development of governmental strategy. The first stage began in the 1960s and 1970s, when Siwa became part of the wider local governmental system. The second stage took place during the 1980s, and was primarily oriented towards socio-economic development. The following sub-sections attempt to analyse each of these stages.

3.1. The official development in the 1960s and 1970s.

The introduction of official buildings in the early 1960s, as well as modern transport systems, have certainly affected the traditional image of the oasis (Figure 6-7). At the official level, governmental development was principally through architecturally designed projects. Yet the problem of development was not only the introduction of modern materials and technology in building, but also the introduction of a modern architectural style. The official development projects adopted a prototype style of “public housing” which was prevalent in the Nile Valley, regardless of the climatic, cultural and social needs of the Siwan community.

The government adopted a prototype of high buildings built with concrete roofing and bricks or blocks of limestone for walls, which rose up to four floors. They started with 150 low cost housing units, as part of the national scheme of public housing in Egypt. The design for this scheme followed post World War II architecture, which almost solely considered the “house” as a functional object and disregarded its social implications. The Siwans rejected the official housing because “it is not socially suitable”. For example the apartments consisted of two bedrooms open to a reception area, and lacked the provision of privacy in the spatial context. The concrete roof in the modern style was about three meters high, which helped to retain the hot air under the ceilings. Each building embraced eight apartments, in four storeys, which means that eight families were sharing the same main entrance and staircase (Figure 6-8).

12 A Siwan woman, 14 March 1998. Interview No.41
It just wouldn’t fit, it would be completely inappropriate. It is not for us, not for our way of life...we can’t live in the same building with seven other families, we can’t live this way. (Baker Yousef, 14 March 1998. Interview No. 36)

Figure 6-7. The entrance of Siwa city shows the impact of modern style on the traditional image of the oasis

Figure 6-8. Modern architecture in Siwa
The public-housing projects during the 1960s and 1970s lacked the essential understanding of the Siwan culture and lifestyle. The problem of socio-cultural acceptance appears to have had a very low priority in the brief for designers and advocators of public housing schemes. The official justification for the adoption of this style is that since it is for the public it must be economical; a situation which Fathy argued is paradoxical, when he claimed that:

Unfortunately, the poor are not now given the advantage of aesthetics. People wrongly associate poverty with ugliness, which is a mistake. The less expensive, the poorer the project, the most care and attention that should be paid to aesthetics.  

The architectural design of the new governmental projects in Siwa, with the adoption of the International style, can be related to the ideological shift introduced by modern architecture. Its origins evolved beyond the borders of Egypt and its spatial arrangements were different from those the local inhabitants need in their houses:

I must have a rear courtyard for the birds and animals, and a door from the house to the yard and another door from the street to bring the farm animals and cart in. This is almost the most desirable design which fits with Siwan householders. (A Siwan woman, 21 March 1998. Interview No.52)

The result was that most of the public housing units were left unoccupied and kept locked. At the same time, many of the poor families in Siwa living in the lower lands were suffering from the rise of the water level in the walls of their houses, and facing problems when from time to time the houses collapsed after several events of heavy rain. In my visit to Siwa in 1997, many of these “new” units were still unoccupied, indicating the struggle of cultural resistance to the imported architecture, despite an apparent material need for shelter. However, some of those units have been used to accommodate officials and employers as well as new settlers from outside the oasis.

Nonetheless, on the local level, modern architectural construction methods and materials were being compared with the traditional mud. The Siwans recognised the speed and clean process of building with brick or block walls and concrete roofing, and started to imitate. The next sub-section investigates the effects of introducing new building materials on traditional style.

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3.1.1. The influence of the new building materials on vernacular architecture

By the 1980s, the local community was adopting the new materials and techniques for building. Limestone block walls and concrete roofing were increasingly used for smaller extensions such as store-rooms and stables in the courtyards. These new materials were also used for extensions to the living quarters, or even for a new marboua [sitting room]. Because of the high costs, only richer Siwans could afford the new building type. Limestone blocks were delivered by truck from a quarry owned by the city council on the plain to the north of the Siwa depression. Sand came from the “Sand Sea” lying to the south, and cement and iron rods were brought by truck from Alexandria about 650 kilometres away. On top of that there were the salaries of the non-local labourers and builders often employed for these constructions.

Some Siwans also built complete new houses with the “modern” materials. That was evident in the new districts, which were 15 minutes walk from the old town. These districts were divided into equal sections and the ground was levelled. In the new buildings, the foundations were about 0.40 metre deep and filled with concrete. These foundations were then painted with bituminous paint, which is very important because of the high level of ground water. Then a supporting skeleton of reinforced concrete was erected and walls were built of cement bricks or limestone blocks.

The analysis revealed the stages of change, which were indicated by the technique of using new building materials. Firstly, there was a gradual occupation in some houses. This stage expressed the local strategy for adaptation and modification of the spatial context. Secondly, extensions and some complete new buildings were not plastered. This shows a transitional stage between building using mud, which does not need plaster, and building using limestone block and plaster (Figure 6-9). Meanwhile the newly completed houses were in most cases plastered and painted very colourfully and in their entirety. Terraces, windows and doors had a painted border around them. The “new” vernacular style in this respect carried some features imported from the vernacular architecture of Marsa-Matruh, Libya and Arabia, an indication that a new wave of cross-cultural influence was overtaking the built environment of Siwa.
3.2. The influence of official development in the 1980s

The second stage of official development in Siwa took place in the 1980s. The government strategy at this stage focused upon socio-economic development projects that were aimed at changing and improving the local infrastructure. Many schools and mosques were built, as well as a public hospital. These projects were an integral part of
the national policy and implemented by the relevant departments of education, health, social and religious affairs. However heavy rain events during the seventies and eighties and the resulting collapse of many mud houses, as well as the subsequent growth of the community in terms of population and land reclamation, indicated that there was also a continuing need for more houses and services.

The Egyptian government reduced the emphasis upon development of housing in Siwa during the 1980s, yet it started to receive the attention of some international agencies. World Fund Programme (WFP), for example, assisted some projects implemented in the area. These projects developed a new type of house to be built by the inhabitants themselves, through a self-help housing scheme.¹⁵

Self-build housing in Siwa exemplifies a pattern for Third World populations. Global networks of both governmental and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) combine to exchange information and expertise on a world-wide scale. This way of building, as Chris Able argues, "lends itself readily to appropriate technology solutions, based on the use of unskilled labour, affordable and accessible materials".¹⁶ He suggests that self-built housing not only represents a solution for an urgent need for low-cost housing, but equally important, it provides chance for personal expressions to form social identity. He believes that social identity comes "from having control over one's own home and neighbourhood",¹⁷ in other words from the interrelationship with local context.

An example of this kind of new settlement for the Siwan families can be seen in Abou-Shrouf, 35 kilometres away from Siwa city. It provided each family with two acres of land, building plots and a housing fund for building materials (limestone blocks, cement, roof beams and rafters), partial subsidies for building elements (doors, windows and wash basins), and living costs (food). The site provided was 144 square metres (12 x 12 metres) to built the standard design. The provision of a housing site was subject to the cultivation of the first half acre, then the procedures for accessing the housing fund start.

The experience of development in Abou-Shrouf indicated the shortcomings of the official plans. The Siwans became more willing to co-operate and accept advice to move to the

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¹⁵ Wood was imported from overseas, reeds were available before the cleaning of drainage canals.


other new settlement areas. Meanwhile, the progress in the social reform policy during the 1980s made the official dialogue with the community easier. That became evident in the governmental strategies implemented during 1990s, as the following sub-section suggests.

3.3. Upgrading and development in the 1990s

The third stage of governmental development began in the 1990s. It resulted from a new perspective developed at the official level. A more communicative strategy was adopted as a result of the development of a self-awareness within the Siwan community; the following chapter attempts to analyse this period. Yet the legacy of modernity over the previous three decades, especially its consequences of destabilising the ecological balance of the oasis, as Chapter Five indicated, brought a huge burden of mistrust into the 1990s. This section analyses the official story and focuses on the third stage of governmental strategies for development in Siwan, but also points out the extent to which the Siwans’ interpretation of the phenomenal change they were experiencing has been disregarded in the official strategy.

Since 1990, many development and upgrading projects for the community have been studied, managed and funded. The 13,000 acres of cultivable land and the natural springs promoted Siwa as a national resource. In particular, settlement studies asserted that the development of remote communities such as Siwa would produce new centres to attract people from the overpopulated area of the Nile Valley. The social problems which have emerged from high density in the slums and small cities of the Valley were believed to be a reflection of the limited space and shortage of natural and economic resources.

From this perspective, a committee of the Egyptian Parliament visited Siwa on a field trip in 1994. The objective of the visit was to achieve a full picture of the significant potential resources of the oasis. The committee asserted that:

Siwa oasis is one of the most promising remote communities, which carry a great potential for a huge future development. That could be an important source of national income, which can be produced from the agricultural, urban and tourism development. The development of this area would have a positive result for the overpopulation problem in the Nile Valley. It would cause the resettlement of the uninhabited 96% of the total area of Egypt....The Parliamentary Committee sees that the government should carry out a national project that aims for new urban development to establish a new community in each of the five Egyptian oases. It is the only way that Egypt can overcome the serious problem of
overpopulation, where 60 million people live on 4% of the total area of Egypt in the Nile Valley, the same way their ancestors lived seven thousand years ago.\textsuperscript{18}

In Siwa the parliamentary committee had conducted several meetings with local people and officials to survey the best ways for rehabilitation and development in Siwa. The studies revealed the shortcomings of previous housing projects and aimed to develop a more sustainable perspective on development in future plans.\textsuperscript{19} The short and long term development plans in Siwa aimed for the development of the built environment, the development of education and cultural/social aspects, the development of tourism projects and the development of small projects in the community.\textsuperscript{20}

The development of the built environment had already been constrained by the absence of infrastructure. It was therefore considered essential to start with improved access roads to connect land reclamation areas with Siwa city. The unsuitability of the existing earth roads resulted from the high water-table, as they were flooded with water or attacked by seepage. The construction of new earth roads included the 310 km road between Siwa and Marsa-Matruh in 1991, as well as a 35km road between Siwa and Abou-Shrouf in 1996, a 25 km road between Siwa and Maraqui arable area in 1997, and 40 kilometres of paved streets within Siwa city during 1993-1997 (see map of Siwa city Figure 4-14).

Since 1993 we have got 40 kilometres of paved roads and streets from the city [the urban area] to the gardens. Before 1990, we used to have only one kilometre of paved road from the Big Mosque to the City Council.\textsuperscript{21}

The urban development project extended to local services. A generator was brought in 1990 to provide electricity to Siwa city and neighbouring villages with capacity of 3,000 KW/h. In 1993 another generator was started with capacity of 5,000 KW/h, to serve the small industrial projects in Siwa. Electricity networks were established in 1995 and a power station was constructed as well. Prior to 1990, electric power was limited to small generators in larger buildings.

The introduction of electricity encouraged the construction of a general hospital, first aid centre and two rural health units during 1991-1993. The Egyptian Broadcasting and

\textsuperscript{18} Al-Ahram the Economic, 17 October, 1994.
\textsuperscript{19} Development Authority of the North-West Coast. (1991). Document No.1
\textsuperscript{20} Development Authority of the North-West Coast. (1991). Document No.13
Television transmission was amplified to reach Siwa clearly in 1991. A telephone network was established to connect Siwa with the rest of the country. A switchboard of 155 lines capacity was provided in 1991, and a central station of 2500 lines capacity was ready to be operated in 1998. However the remoteness of the oasis confronted the project as Egyptian specialists still consider working there as an undesirable option.

Now we have a central station with a capacity of 2500 telephone lines ready to work. The only problem is this station needs an electronic engineer, we don’t have one in Siwa and no one from the Nile Valley is interested in coming. (Abdel-Rahman Ahmed, 18 March 1998. Interview No. 48)

The review in Chapter Two showed that an increase of focus on traditional and regional issues meant that a more culturally sensitive architecture has began to prosper. Many architectural projects in Egypt followed the neo-Middle-East architectural style developed in the area over the last few decades, which acknowledged the individuality and significance of each case. The Siwa City Council agreed on new legislation, which was applied in a more advanced governmental housing project in 1993 (Figure 6-11).

To conserve the urban style we legislated the construction of buildings up to two storeys... individual units each of which is a 4 flat block, each with a private entrance. This is to keep the privacy of each family. The location is at Jabal-El-Dakrour about 1.5 km. away from the urban area at Shali, and the site is an extended sand land. We aim to establish the nucleus of “New Siwa” from which the development of the Siwan society would start. This will replace the old quarters and narrow and untidy lanes [He refers to the old medieval town, which is already empty]. By this we aim to convince the people to come down from the old town.

The quotation exhibits the new strategy for public-housing projects. It also points out that the official interpretation of the role of built environment is still influenced by the objectivity of modernity, where the significant culture as well as the remoteness of Siwa and its historical features were only seen as an excellent setting for tourism growth. The increasing attention to the old town in Shali was not as a phenomenal example of a distinctive cultural setting, but as a promising tourism project.

The old town in Shali is about 800 years old, meanwhile there are some few families still living up there... I hope that the Egyptian Authority of Archaeology would consider the old town as a historical area and control any change in it. It could be emptied and conserved with reasonable
The local responses were therefore opposed to the official suggestion and the two parties looked at the same phenomenon from different perspectives. Yet the Siwans became aware of the consequences of the change in the built environment, which was becoming recognised during the 1990s. They understood the tourism option as one aspect that integrated into the development of the oasis as a "context".

The vernacular architectural style of Siwa is more distinguished than the cities and oases of Egypt. I think the first thing that would happen according to the changes in the architectural style is the loss of half of Siwa’s value as a historical and tourist place. It is obvious that the first thing any visitors will approach in any city, which they visit for the first time, is its significant architecture, then they would start to recognise its people’s culture and traditions through their experiences and existence in that place. Therefore, it is from the first sight of the built environment that any place can reflect a significance and a distinction. (Abu-Baker Ottoman, 18 June 1997. Interview No. 8)

The Siwans recognised tourism as inclusive activity and experience, rather than exclusive industry. Their approach to conceptualising the development of built environment at this stage was more related to a holistic and an open-ended view of culture, which was expressed in design and building - a characterisation of what Jusuck Koh termed “ecological design”.27 The new official housing project was more advanced than earlier housing blocks of the 1970s. It contains only four units in each building, and every unit has its separate entrance. Yet the housing project is still unaware of the interrelationships of the built environment with the users on the one hand and the site context on the other. If the official designs still apply the modernist dictum that “form follows function”, then function here must be the cultural needs of the people who prefer living in a modest mud house rather than sharing their privacy with others (Figure 6-12).

The government builds flats and apartments for rental or ownership by instalments... But if someone has already owned a good house [qualitatively], he will never move. I mean if he has water supply and electricity and he feels comfortable, he will never go. The government has built town-houses, but nobody wanted them, and nobody will take them, their style does not work with us, I wouldn’t go. (Hidow, 1 March 1998. Interview No.26)

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The analysis in this sub-section indicated that a continuous change has been occurring in the Siwan built form since the 1960s, which in great part was affected by the impact of modernity. Local people as self-motivating, active and creative were overlooked and interrelationships of people and nature in the Siwan context were ignored. The next sub-section outlines how the local community dealt with official development.
3.4. Discussion of the “official” story of development

The lack of communication between planners, decision makers and the local community resulted in the ignoring of the Siwan culture. The interviews showed that housing projects in Siwa were designed without reference to users’ and residents’ needs or satisfaction. The analysis shows that, even in the 1990s, no studies were done to guide the architectural and planning solutions. Satisfaction is linked to prior motivations and expectations, and the extent to which these are either met or surpassed. Female interviewees indicated that expectations of freedom and safety for women and children outside the house were disrupted by various aspects of modern urbanism such as speedy cars on the paved roads, which produced low levels of satisfaction: 28

The establishment of the paved road network introduced new concerns in Siwa. Now I have to be careful about the safety of my children while playing outside. Meanwhile, Siwan women used to go out for visits after sunset, but considering our dark coloured cover-up, it is not safe to walk in the dark while those cars are flashing around. (A Siwan woman, 22 February 1998. Interview No. 19)

The change started with the built environment and extended to everyday life. The introduction of modernity in Siwa initiated the space-time compression which is expressed in diverse aspects of socio-cultural changes. The Siwans experienced the new urban image of their oasis and had to adapt themselves to the unprecedented changes. 29

It is not possible to isolate individual decision-making from external influences, especially where material culture is concerned.

The change in the built environment causes the change in everyday life. For example, changing the transportation method from the urban area to the gardens happened after construction of the paved roads. The traditional transportation used to be the donkey, now it is a bike, a motorcycle, or a car. That means a person who used to wake up before dawn to catch up some work in his garden before the start of the working day at 9:00am, is now able to sleep until 7:00am because the transportation to his garden will take only few minutes, meanwhile, his work in the garden is made easier by using technological ways for irrigation or cultivation. (Abu-Baker Ottoman, 18 June 1997. Interview No.8)

28 See for example Savasdisara, T. (1988). Resident’s Satisfaction and Neighbourhood Characteristics in Japanese Urban Communities. Landscape Urban Planning, 15: 201-210, Amesterdam: Elsevier Science Publications. The study investigates the physical and socio-environmental components that influence the degree of residents’ satisfaction in Tokyo. The study revealed that environmental factors included noise, ground vibration caused by traffic and the amount and duration of sunshine inside dwelling units. Meanwhile social factors such as safety and security were dominant predictors affecting the degree of residents’ satisfaction.

29 Group interview with Siwan female students, 20 February 1998. Interview No.14
On the local level, the Siwans felt that the official plans that dealt with built environment were detached from the local context. This perspective stimulated a feeling of inferiority and marginality among some Siwans. Even in the late 1990s, when the cultural values were claimed to have priority, the application of the official strategy seemed to fail. In 1996, the City Council agreed to convert the central front of the hill to the west of Shali into a site for a cultural centre, replete with several handicrafts activities, public library and a computer laboratory. The aim was to promote the place as a public building that everyone could enjoy, with a restricted timetable of gender division of use. However, the community saw the city council's choice of the site as a final move toward the total commodification and control of space.

The people can't argue against any governmental decisions, this has happened when they cut a part from the hill, west of Shali, in order to construct the Cultural Centre, and also happened when they decided to renovate the big mosque. They covered the stones of the mosque with plaster, but the building has lost its authenticity. (Sliman Ahmed, 16 March 1998. Interview No. 43)

The bitterness in their comments reflects a significant relationship and attachment to particularly distinguished buildings and landscapes in their community. In the following quotation the metaphor of the resemblance between the hill and the sphinx indicates that the hill in the Siwan mind is perceived as a cultural heritage.

The Cultural Centre up on the hill is just like the sphinx wearing sunglasses. (Ottoman Kadwra, 22 June 1997. Interview No. 10)

The launch of the Siwa Information Centre and Siwa Cultural Centre (Figures 13 &14) in 1998 was a positive step to get information facilities and communication as well as social and cultural development at the community level. Both Siwa Cultural Centre and Siwa Information Centre, which were constructed in 1997, were architecturally designed. The architects who sent the designs from Cairo promoted these designs in the belief that such architecture represented the ideal, seamless harmony between built form, culture, place and climate - a naive view of neo-vernacularism. These applications occurred without essential consideration being given to the individuality of the Siwan vernacular architecture and to the cultural significance of space and form.

These architectural exemplars seemed to introduce an eclectic style into the community, producing a new source of impact on the vernacular built environment. That appeared, during my visit in 1998, in the style of some houses and hotels under construction, which
had adopted some architectural elements, for example the arched window and entrance, from the two buildings. As well, in my discussions with several individuals, they expressed their wish to include the dome form for roofing. They inquired whether the building style of the dome, developed by Hassan Fathy and applied in Upper Egypt, would be a relevant alternative to solve the problem of roofing in their new houses.

Figure 6-13. Siwa Information Centre

Figure 6-14. Siwa Cultural Centre
Unfortunately, the architects who introduced these new design paradigms in absentia have no authority or even interest in helping local people to adapt imported elements into their design and built form. Yet even their message is gaining hardly any credit in the official strategies or being heard in the development plans. It is the "cultural crisis" which Khaled Asfour suggests results from a "cut and paste" mentality in which images from different cultural backgrounds are transferred in space and time without adequate insight into their meaning.\(^\text{30}\)

The analysis of the official story highlighted the successive change in both the perspective and approach of governmental policy in dealing with Siwa. Thus the centralisation of decision-making and the control-from-afar policy were not successful at the micro level. The consequences of many aspects of development, especially in housing projects and urban planning, were negative impact on the community and wasting of a great portion of the governmental allocations.

4. Local perspectives on change

While I have suggested that the vernacular architecture, drawn from Islamic style, has succeeded in offering the Siwan built environment both appropriateness and significance, the traditional vernacular however failed to withstand the impact of modernity and its consequential change in environmental, economic and social conditions. On the other hand, the analysis of the "official" story of development has proved that the modern style has also failed to fulfil local needs. The analysis in this section focuses upon the strategies and approaches adopted by the local community to counter the impact of modernity.

4.1. Aspects of change

There are a number of factors involved in producing a local strategy towards a neo-vernacular. This sub-section investigates these factors by examining local interpretations and responses to current environmental, social and economic conditions.

4.1.1. Environmental factors

Specific environmental events have had a remarkable impact on the community. The persistence of the story makes clear the influence of these events in recent history, as quoted in the following:

The heavy rain in 1973 was a disaster. Many people died and many houses collapsed. We had to escape to the concrete buildings such as the big mosque, the City Council and the schools. We received lots of aid from outside at that time. Then, people started to add concrete and brick extension to their houses. In the beginning it was a small room or a Marboua for well-off Siwans. (A. Deab, 5 March 1998. Interview No. 31)

In 1986, an excessive rain forced the Siwans to shift to concrete buildings. The disastrous event left behind a bad experience, the collapse of many houses, loss of souls and crops and many people were left homeless. Since then, every Siwan is keen on having a refuge, even one room of concrete and brick. He would say, if the rain comes I will be able to save my family. (Said El-Kilany, 26 March 1998. Interview No. 59)

The change happened after the events of 1973 and 1986, because of the rain. Since that time people have had the idea of building an extension or annex of concrete and brick or block to escape to in case of heavy rain, something like a refuge. (Ibrahim Abdel Allah, 11 June 1997. Interview No.4)

Historically, the Siwans relied on the fact that rain is rare in the oasis, which is why they adopted a tradition of mud architecture. However, the heavy rain events in 1973 and 1986 should not appear as an exceptionally unusual phenomenon. There was evidence of heavy rains in the 1920s and the 1930s. Yet the Siwans reckoned on inherited experiences, without support of modern scientific knowledge. They were unaware of the environmental changes over the past four decades, which was manifested not only by successive heavy rain but also by the rise of the water-table.

In the past all houses were made of kerchief [mud], and palm trunks for roofing. They used to put palm leaves on top and a layer of kerchief to insulate it from heat and rain, which was seldom then. The problem has arisen since the rise of the water-table during the 1980s, and the retaining walls started to collapse. (Mahdy Hwidy, 20 June 1997. Interview No.9)

The Siwans had managed to survive the natural periodical cycle of rain over time. It was the disruption of the ecological balance brought about by excessive use of water and the destabilisation of the discharge of subsoil water, as shown in the analysis in Chapter Five, that amplified the problem and made it hard for the Siwans to overcome.

31 According to El-Gohary, R. (1946:25), there was a heavy rain in 1919 that caused the collapse of many houses in the old town. Also, Fakhry (1974:19) stated “According to what I was told in 1938, many of the families were very reluctant to leave their old homes prior to 1926, when an unusually heavy rain, which continued for three successive days, caused the collapse of many houses and rendered many others unsafe.”. See Chapter Four for historical details.
4.1.2. Social factors

Although the climatic response is a useful concept for determining a built form, it is not enough alone for designing a meaningful dwelling. As Rapoport pointed out, it "would range from need for no shelter at all...to areas with maximum need for shelter",\(^{32}\) if we drew on climatic grounds alone. The Siwans understand their dwellings as not just a way to find a shelter to escape the difficult climatic conditions, but also a lifestyle they acquire from cultural experiences.

Social change is therefore an important influence on the phenomenal change of the built environment. This includes the impact of the media, tourism, and the mobility of the Siwans outside the oasis and their experience of other contexts and lifestyles. For example, their work in Libya over the 1970s led to both the investment in many new houses and the introduction of new design elements.

We have relations in Libya, we visited them, and we saw their houses, what they are like. Their government built those houses, but the way they want their houses to be, healthy, lovely, one floor with a sitting room marboua, a hall and separate family room. It is spacious...so how can I receive them if they come to visit me, it is not suitable; that is why I have started to think about the change in my new house. (Mahdy Haboon., 9 March 1998. Interview No. 34)

These experiences also extended to an interactive involvement with the "other", through marriages of different cultural background. That brought a problematic issue which needed a more sensitive strategy to find a design solution.

Because I have a non-Siwan wife, I have to adopt a lifestyle that suits us both. It is not easy for her to live in a mud house. In my new house I made the ground floor in a traditional style, for visitors and guests, and the first floor in a modern style, for family bedrooms and a sitting room. (Y. Adoule, 27 March 1998. Interview No. 61)

In addition to other social factors, the following quotations indicate that a psychological factor is also present in the process of change. Given the impact of the media, the glamour of modern advertisements and the way in which modernity promotes "civilisation", the Siwans felt that they were left far behind.

Anyone who lives in a Siwan mud house is psychologically partly disturbed because he wishes to do the same [to change to a modern house] but he does not have the [economic] ability... It is not reasonable to take a guest to the toilet which does not have a good image, I mean it

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is only a hole in the floor sometimes without a ceiling or water supply. (Abu-Baker, 3 March 1998. Interview No. 29)

Some interviewees focused upon the feeling of cultural inferiority within the local community, especially those how had experienced other cultural contexts. They saw the Siwan lifestyle, as they live it, as belonging to the medieval age. Thus, they believed that it was not suitable, but rather distressing, when it came to a cross-cultural comparison.

If the guest is a Siwan it is not a problem because our houses are all alike, but now we have contact with people from outside, the thing is awful. (A high school Siwan boy, 22 March 1998. Interview No. 18)

A comparison with other cultures outside the oasis while examining their own culture is increasingly a trend among young Siwans. The clear influence of the media and television is underpinning the evolution of new dimensions of social values. Some interviewees emphasised the role of imported images in conceptualising their ideas of comfort and luxury and shaping their future dreams.

I wish I could have a bathroom like those I see on the TV, and since it is a dream, I’ll have all the walls made out of ceramics. (A high school Siwan girl, 21 March 1998. Interview No. 17)

The cultural attitudes of traditional societies in general reflect a world view which is based on constraint, mutual co-operation and a dependency on systems of existence which are centuries old.

What has happened in Siwa is actually a radical change in everything ... starting with the introduction of TV broadcasting in 1976, which opened the door to endless changes, and ended up by accepting education for girls and acknowledging their right to choose their husbands and the style of their houses. (Y. Adoule, 27 March 1998. Interview No. 61)

Traditional culture in Siwa today, like most Third World countries, is facing one of the overreaching effects of globalization, the overtaking of one culture by another, whether through media and increasing communication systems or building and transformation of the traditional built environment.

4.1.3. Economic factors
An economic influence has been a third factor for change. Siwans interpret change as a consequence of the inability of the traditional style to keep up with the prosperity of the national and local economy and the fast pace of developmental needs.

Now, building using kerchief [mud] is an undesirable option. The labour for good quality work [craftsmanship] is expensive and the building
process itself [for traditional style] needs a longer time than that for concrete and brick buildings. The thing is if you have money, in one month you can get yourself a complete house of concrete and brick. (Sheikh A.R. El-Demery, 18 March 1998. Interview No.49)

This viewpoint summarises the local factors as cost, availability, durability, level of skill, time, comfort and social acceptance. In a world that has encountered space-time compression as part of an overall trend of globalization, both environmental and socio-economic influences blend to produce a context for the evolution of modernity. On the community level, the Siwans understand that the phenomenal change is a complex set of interrelationships, including economics.

The traditional style has been confronted with the rise of the accumulated water. But even in the higher areas people build in a new modern style, of course this is linked to the intellectual level and cultural interests and also connected to the economy, because to build by using the new style and materials is cheaper and faster. (M. Ibrahim, 10 March 1998. Interview No. 35)

The choice between traditional architecture, with its vernacular style, and the modern ways of construction with concrete and brick are a sort of personal and individual matter within the Siwan community. When the choices are made between the different alternatives, it brings up some new experiences.

In the concrete and block house we can’t sleep before 3.00 am, we stay outdoors... children can’t sleep and cry most of the night... If I open the window the mosquitoes33 come in, if I shut the window it becomes hot, and if I turn on the electric fan it brings hot air. This is problem number one which puzzles me now... In the old Siwan houses one would never feel hot... (Ottoman Kadura, 22 June 1997. Interview No. 10)

Construction by using concrete and blocks was wrong, it is true that it is cleaner, cheaper and faster, but it is not climatically suitable. In summer, it makes it hot, and in winter it makes it cold, while the kerchief [mud] makes it cool in summer and warm in winter. Now people have started to build one or two rooms of Kerchief in the backyard of their concrete houses. (Ibrahim Abdul Allah, 11 June 1997. Interview No. 4)

The use of modern materials in new houses did not only interrupted the traditional style, but was also climatically inappropriate. However, building materials were not the only concern. The interviews showed that the impact of Modernity has extended also to influence the organic relationship of house and garden. It was broken in a similar way to

33 When the Siwans built in the plain, the rise of the water-table has caused several swamps between the urban areas, hence the increase of mosquitoes in the houses.
that of spring and garden in the new farms. However, when their vernacular style changed, they observed the consequences of breaking up that recycling circuit.

The change in the house style influenced the garden, which has lost a valuable element. Organic fertiliser is more useful, more convenient to palm trees, unlike chemical fertiliser which needs to be added more often. (Faies, 2 March 1998. Interview No. 27)

These conflicting perspectives stimulated many responses at the community level, and produced a new interpretation of Siwan built-form. The analysis of the Siwan story shows the different approaches developed within the community to reinterpret traditional architecture. These approaches evolved as collective experiences and combined to produce a neo-vernacular style that is able to adopt new building materials and techniques, meanwhile fulfilling the cultural and social needs of its inhabitants.

4.2. Local responses towards a neo-vernacular

The Siwan experience revealed that dwelling, as a phenomenon, indicates greater value than just shelter, it is the lifestyle people acquire from their cultural experiences over a long period. On a local level, they undertook adaptive strategies, but the analysis showed that none of these has reached a communal application within the community the way old traditions used to be. Many significant traditional elements, developed over a long time of cultural survival, have been overcome, for example the four wing window, traditional doors, palm trunk roofing (Figure 6-15), and also the traditional refuse recycling system. It is a paradox, which the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur explained as “how to become modern and to return to your source”. The interviewees suggested an approach to deal with this:

People could return to the traditional style unconsciously, because of its appropriateness. It could be through the leadership of a member of the community to introduce a paradigm or pattern in which the community may find a framework for the change. I may think of the change, but without a framework it would be uncertain that any positive change can occur. (Abu-Baker Ottoman, 18 February 1998. Interview No. 12)

The development of a framework on a cultural basis needs a time span long enough to evolve collective experiences from everyday life events. Yet the analysis of the Siwan response to the phenomenal factors of change, environmental, social and economic, indicated that the ongoing development of built environment signifies the emergence of

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that framework. The Siwans have moved away from the stage of the early impact of modernity, which expressed a “passiveness” in the community, when the community had to absorb imported information and techniques as they were, and they had to accept new materials and new ways of building and design without reference to cultural experience.

![Timber lintel of olive tree](image1)

![Window](image2)

![Door](image3)

![Roofing using halved palm tree](image4)

Figure 6-15. Traditional elements should be considered in an architectural design that expresses the individuality of local vernacular.

During the last two decades the Siwans have been re-examining the qualities of their traditional built environment and developing an adjustment strategy in order to remedy the consequences of the first stage. They were challenged by several technical, aesthetic and cultural obstacles in their endeavour to develop a neo-vernacular.

The interviews pointed out that the outcome of the experience of living in a modern house is their wish to return to the traditional one. They perceive “change” as the most insistent “fact” in life. The change to the modern was essential to the individuals as well as the community because of many factors; now the traditional is required as well.

People have had the idea of building an extension or annex of concrete and blocks to escape to in case of heavy rain, something like a refuge. Now I am considering the idea of building a room of kerchief [mud] to escape to in the hot weather. (Sheikh Omar Ragih, 25 June 1997. Interview No. 11)
Two basic elements in traditional Siwan house construction that pose an almost identical problem, hindering the return to traditional style, are the roof and walls. Alternative roofing systems were viewed with mixed feelings. Some felt that the climate control afforded by the traditional palm trunks and mud justifies their use. Others pointed to problems of shortage of palm trees in relation to the pace of urbanisation and anticipated difficulties in obtaining enough stock at an affordable price. Instead they suggested the use of reinforced concrete slabs, properly insulated by the traditional materials, the addition of a layer of olive leaves and mud. Other recommendations included interior adjustments and more wall openings, adequate shade and appropriate orientation; they referred to the quality of narrow streets in the old town.

For walls, the use of cement bricks or limestone blocks have been the only option in Egypt since the 1970s. The cumulative effect of continuous removal of large quantities of high-quality mud from the landscape of the Nile Delta resulted in the deterioration of soil quality. The mud removed was sold off for construction. Legislation was passed to prohibit the use of baked bricks. In Siwa, the same legislation is applied despite the different characteristics of the Siwan soil, which needs special treatment as shown in Chapter Five. Sheikh Ragih alluded to this fact in an unrecorded discussion. He saw the application of this regulation in Siwa as a hindrance to the traditional style.

Instead of rejecting utterly the new materials, concrete houses were adapted to solve the climatic problem. A scientific fact is that hot air goes up; unlike timber roofing, concrete roofs keep hot air underneath. The Siwans developed an understanding of this phenomenon. In the houses built after 1995, I realised that they kept the height of ceilings to four and half meters, instead of the three metre height common in concrete buildings following the standards of the International Style. They also place a number of windows fairly high with the openings placed in opposite sides. Thus the hot air goes out and the inside is cool enough. Although the Siwans followed a "do-it-yourself" technique, this interpretation of the adaptation of modern material in a climatic response is widely highlighted in many climate-sensitive architectural works world-wide.35

35 See for example: Powell, R. (1989:27) the work of Ken Yeang in Malaysia which exhibited the same strategy, especially his design for the Dason house; Steele, J. (1997a:130). Architecture for People, the Complete Work of Hassan Fathy. London: Thames and Hudson. The work of Fathy also clearly expressed a climatic response; an example is found in Nassif house in Jedda.
The framework also adopted a new approach to urbanism. The traditional Islamic division of urban space into three categories of public, semi-public and private spaces has been reinterpreted to fit with a traditional/modern lifestyle. The neo-vernacular style produced a new tripartite organisation consisting of public, semi-private and private spaces. This interpretation has brought a new architectural element to the Siwan vernacular architecture, the Loggia (Figure 6-16).

The loggias on the side facing the street were an architectural element imported from the North Coast. In Siwa, it is an innovation, which can only be found in the neo-vernacular buildings (see Figure 6-9). It works as a middle space between the public street and the inner private part of the house. The Siwans interpret the loggia as a symbolic as well as functional element.

The loggia is something new to Siwa, but it is not bad. We have found that constructing a loggia on the western side of the marboua [sitting room] gives good shade, keeps the sun away from the wall and makes the room cool in the evening. (Sheikh A.R Othman, 14 March 1998. Interview No.39)

The interviews indicated that the introduction of a loggia in the architecture of Siwa is a natural development to the vernacular built-forms in the Siwan community. They refer to the different historical stages of the development of their built environment since they established their first settlement in Shali. They interpret the current change as a new stage, after those of Shali and of the extensions outside the Wall illustrated in Chapter Four. Meanwhile they see that the new strategy is relevant for dwellings in both urban and suburban settings.
Because our house is in suburbia and surrounded by gardens, we enjoy having a loggia, which we have as a family setting in the hot evenings. (A Siwan woman, 26 February 1998. Interview No. 22)

The change encouraged many of the Siwan families to built new houses in their gardens, which is also a new attitude in the community and a significant sign of the development of their sense of dwelling. Although the previous studies suggested that women were reluctant to leave the old town and dwell in the suburbs because of the freedom they felt in Shali, my interviews with Siwan women pointed out a different perspective.

In my place, it's fairly comfortable because it's away from the centre of Siwa city and with all the family houses in the middle of the gardens, we feel more free to go out from a house to a house without covering all over... There are no strangers around. We only use the traditional cover when we go on a visit in Siwa town. (A Siwan woman, 22 March 1998. Interview No. 54)

The interpretation of life in the suburbs relied on cultural meaning, where the traditional division of space, once again, has been reinterpreted. Building a house in the garden produced a more flexible framework for the inhabitants. The potential of the place-form helped the “merging” of the houses into the landscape. The strong textures of the gardens made it possible for the house to blend into the site and gave the impression of being at one with the surroundings. The neo-vernacular style in the suburb dwellings arranged space as: public, semi-public, semi-private and private spaces; which has become a wonderful extra for the Siwan women.

The life in the town centre lacks the freedom we feel in suburbia... in town, a woman has to look carefully before going out of her door and she has to be covered all over, only one eye is allowed to appear. (A Siwan woman, 4 March 1998. Interview No. 30)

People were encouraged to inhabit new settlements, like Abou-Shrouf, and started to modify nuclear houses and give them cultural significance (Figure 6-17). They also apply some traditional elements such as the unroofed kitchen and the traditional recycling of humans refuse. The movement to the suburbs was not restricted to the families involved in the clearance of the collapsed houses. The suburbs provided opportunities, freedom, choice, and improved quality of life. Yet the suburbs are physically attached to the town; the social cohesion and communal life still influence the daily meeting of fellow men and women. The Siwans understand the change of built environment as a necessity to the growth of the community, which only means a longer trip for daily activity.

4.3. Discussion of local strategy of resistance

The interrelationship between Siwans and nature is more influential than simply a matter of self-orientation with the surrounding landscapes.\(^{38}\) It is a deeper process, through which they identified the qualities of their particular place. Their identifications of layers of space distinguished one place from another and revealed place identity; evidence in the domain of natural space were shown in Chapter Five. In the domain of private space however, the identifications are manifested in the tactile attitude of the new houses, obtained by non-plastered walls, by unpaved passageways, and by earth patios. The concern for tectonic forms is expressed in the austere facades and the massive blank walls with small windows, despite the use of structural building.

The reinterpretation of regional conditions has helped the Siwans to develop their neo-vernacular architecture. Thus this development was built upon an involvement with the context. Their endeavour pursued a true sense of dwelling, a *deep dwelling*. In contrast, the official architecture is still lacking this sense of place-making which stresses the totality of the experience of built environment. The official endeavour seemed to offer a “shelter”, a sort of built environment that carries a sense of a *shallow dwelling*. Thus the essential purpose of architecture is defined as a “foothold”. Norberg-Schulz wrote:

> The basic act of architecture is therefore to understand the ‘vocation’ of the place. In this way we protect the earth and become ourselves part of a comprehensive totality. What is advocated here is not some kind of environmental determinism. We only recognise that man is an integral part of the environment, and that it can only lead to human alienation and environmental disruption if he forgets that. To belong to a place means to have an existential foothold, in a concrete everyday sense.39

A cultural framework should be a reflection of people’s real needs and an expression of their identity. However, some voices elucidated the fact that under the external impact of modernity, the chances to develop fully such a framework could be ineffectual.

> Today, Siwans interact with tourists, with people from outside of a different mentality such as official employees and teachers, and also they watch TV; doing all this without backup of sufficient knowledge is not healthy. Once they see something in the TV they say ‘this is the life’. (Ahmed El-Seanosy, 25 March 1998. Interview No. 58)

But perhaps the Siwans achieve a sense of the dilemmas’ importance and seriousness. They did not continue with either methodologies or social transformations that would have separated them away from their culture. The authentic approaches they have chosen have been valid for surviving the impact of modernity so far, and to move them forward towards a new stage in which the community expressed a sense of self-activeness. The next chapter attempts to explore this stage within social space.

**Summary**

This chapter began by questioning the validity of vernacular architecture, and whether it is authentic or backward. The quotation in the first paragraph indicated that vernacular architecture is not just a building type; rather, it is a lifestyle people acquire from a long interrelationship with a specific context, involving phenomenological relationships. Therefore the investigation started by asking whether vernacular architecture is able to provide elements of design that can withstand the impact of modernity.

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The review of historical aspects of Siwan built environment led to a fundamental question: how valid is the experience and memory of the past for the present and future development of built environment? The analysis indicated the relevance of many elements of the vernacular architectural type to the social/cultural interpretations of the meaning of “home”, as well as the perception of space/place, within the Siwan community.

The chapter analysed the phenomenal change in the Siwan built environment from both official and local sides. Despite all the evident official shortcomings in the field of housing, the officials of Siwa claimed in their documents that Siwa never experienced the well-known Egyptian problem of “housing crisis”.40

Building under new environmental, social and economic conditions, the Siwans have learned, through everyday life experiences, to solve their problems by collaborating with the vernacular style. The neo-vernacular architecture of Siwa, at a micro level, expresses potentials for a strategy of critical regionalism based upon appropriate practical responses to modern impact in an extremely arid and hostile environment.

There are many dynamic factors which have helped to shape the decisions Siwans made about the physical nature of their built environment. It is important to track the linking of these decision-making factors to external forces influencing remote communities in order to arrive at a clear understanding of how traditional forms give way to new ones, both in material culture such as built environment and also in the socio-cultural context. The following chapter discusses the factors which have influenced social change in Siwa. It also analyses adaptive strategies in both social space and social structure adopted in order to confront the impact of modernity.

A tribal society has existed in Siwa for more than eight centuries. Does it continue into the present time, in spite of many external impacts, or has it been superseded altogether? In this chapter I reflect in more depth upon socio-cultural factors in the Siwan community which have influenced their interpretation of place. One thread of the analysis is that the identities of places are a product of social actions within three layers of space: natural, private, and public. This is revealed in the ways in which the Siwans construct their own representation of place. Chapter Four explored how the settlement grew over time and immediately raises questions of authenticity in the development of built environment. What is authentic? What is vernacular? And who has the right to decide? Chapters Five and Six demonstrated how built environment has been always value laden and carried different layers of meaning. The identities of places and dwellings are frequently linked to socio-cultural identities, where the built environment acts as a medium for social interaction.

This chapter explores the third theme of the thesis: local identity is manifested in social space. It suggests that social space is the realm in which people build layers of cultural meanings, where a local identity can “dwell”. The chapter attempts to examine such layers in “public space”. The analysis focuses upon aspects of social space in the past and under the impact of modernity. The chapter also analyses the official and local versions of the story of “development” to reveal strategies of adaptation to the current changes, its influence on the social structure and the experience of Siwan identity. In this respect it is complementary to the previous two chapters, and together they constitute an analytical perspective on the Siwa case study. The chapter begins by questioning the taken-for-granted view and how it may affect our understanding of the social world.

1. Fourth reflection: Taken-for-granted views
My investigation into the social life of the Siwan community was influenced by a taken-for-granted idea about life in Egypt. I have to admit that I went to Siwa on the first visit with a stereotyped perspective about tribal structure, and had assumed that its role was similar to that in other localities on the periphery of the Nile Valley. I certainly transposed the traditional image of the “mayor” in other Egyptian villages onto the Siwan sheikhs, and my idea of Siwa as a remote community was very much influenced by
my perspective of the other rural towns and small cities in the country. Indeed the outward appearance of the society was almost the same, with a concrete city council building, the large police station and the standard schools and mosques. These urban building types recalled at once the influence of a central administrative department. This was the product of the social structure after the 1952 revolution and the agrarian reform which brought with it a government hegemony over agriculture and rural society in Egypt. My expectations included Siwa within this hegemony.

My initial interviews with a local political committee, consisting of a sheikh of a tribe, the head of the local assembly of Siwa city and a Siwan member of parliament, appeared to give me the perspective of the local community. They insisted that political life in Siwa is a reflection of the political structure of Egypt. That was true, but it was not the whole truth. The investigation of the role of sheikhs and the representation of “power” as well as the responses which I received from the interviewees in 1997 were always consistent. They affirmed that the role of the tribal structure remains in the present as it was in the past. But even the consistency of the story did not add to my understanding.

The major outcome of my second fieldwork trip to Siwa, in 1998, was a change in my own perspective. It was wrong to project my old taken-for-granted theories onto the Siwan society. Although my first visit was successful in terms of self-reflection and self-adaptation into the community, those preconceived ideas had limited my insight into capturing the real picture of Siwan social life.

My perspective changed when I found that the president of the Siwa City Council had been replaced. Although on my first visit many Siwans assured me that on my next visit to Siwa I might not find the same man, I thought this might be a local bias. That official had been in the post since 1991. Given his military past I was not very sure about the suspicions of my interviewees. However in 1998 they acknowledged the difference.

Now we have a different man with a different background and a different approach...can't you see the difference, it is all around you all over the place. (Deab, 5 March 1998. Interview No. 31).

The difference between the approaches of the two officials was expressed in the built environment. It appeared immediately in the central area of Siwa city. Heaps of rubbish and waste in the roads and the main Souk [open-air marketplace] area had disappeared.
There were new walkways with new kerbs, and a new green area at the side of the big mosque and in front of the City Council. Although it was hard to believe that a green area could exist in such a harsh environment without being useful and purposeful, this time it was "green" only for visual pleasure: the start of what I would term "official" green in the urban landscape of Siwa city. This all happened in eight months. It was clearly important to know more about the man behind this change.

The new president of the city council was an agricultural engineer, who had worked in the Western Desert as president of a small town next to Al-Alymen. The Siwans told me that "his reputation came before him". He started with the sheikhs, telling them that he was an official employee and that his main objective was to offer his knowledge and expertise to the local people of the community. They accepted this framework positively.

He is not like the previous president, who used to work all day long considering Siwa as his own farm...he limited his work to the official working hours and also within the official working places. (Ibrahim Salama, 11 March 1998. Interview No.38)

Given the nature of community work, I could not fully agree with the local perspective. From my observation in 1997, when I saw the previous president in the coffee shops in the souk on several evenings, I thought that community work would occupy more than the official working hours. Actually I interviewed the former president after working hours as well. From this paradox my insight emerged. It became clear to me that the difference between the two approaches has an inherent relationship with the role of the tribes. I learned my lesson: not to take for granted everything as told to me.

2. Social space as a situated social order

It is important to investigate how Siwa as "place" has become invested with meanings through the development of human and mythological associations. In such a harsh context, how have the cultural practices influenced the construction of social space? And what role does the built environment play? The analysis indicated that the construction of social space in Siwa depended in large part on separation from the Egyptian context, by distinguishing between the two spheres of national and local. This was represented in turn in both spatial and societal contexts. In this section of the chapter, I seek to analyse the significance of this phenomenon for the experience of built environment in Siwa.
Activity spaces, even in an isolated community such as Siwa, may differ greatly among different individuals and agencies. Chapter Five showed how activity space varies within the realm of natural space: for example, between the activity spaces of the everyday life of a Siwan farmer or a Siwan woman. This routine pattern may change occasionally with events that create different meanings of space. These events may also stretch social space in ever extending rings, which may continue beyond the bounded space of locality. In Siwa for example, as an Islamic society, all men and women have a chance for a once-in-a lifetime overseas trip to Mecca for Pilgrimage, as this chapter later explains.

From the research findings, two intertwined themes emerged from the particularity of local identity and influenced the construction of the Siwan built environment: the layers of social space and the tribal social order. The following subsections investigate these themes as to how they integrate inner and outer horizons of both nature and people, and provide an understanding of built environment as being both closure and opening.

2.1. Layers of cultural meaning in social space

The analysis identified three layers of traditional social space that manifested the experience of the Siwan built environment. They were the meeting places at the Pergola, which work on the neighbourhood level; Eid-el-Syaha, a community festival at the hill of el Dakrure, which works on the oasis level; and El-Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca, which occurs on the international level.

2.1.1. Layer one, at the neighbourhood level: the pergola

The first layer of traditional social space in the Siwan built environment is that of meeting places. This layer works at the level of individuals who participate and share the experience, and it is limited to particular places within the urban area. Socialisation and meeting with other men several times every day is an important activity in the life of any Siwan man. Yet meeting places differ according to the space and time of the meetings.

In the evening everyone would sit with his friends for one or two hours, usually in the marboua. But during the day they sit in the shaded pergola where the men can spend some time doing handicraft and talking. The pergola is open from both sides to allow the air to pass through. (Ibrahim Abdul Allah, 1 June 1997. Interview No.4)

The previous chapters revealed the significance of different kinds of space for the identification of place meaning. Places like the shade beside a spring or artesian well
within the garden as well as the marboua [sitting room] in the domain of the house signify the differentiation between natural and private spheres. However they represent a semi-private space within the built environment. In the context of the public domain, the key meeting places for the neighbourhoods are the pergola structures. The pergola is considered a semi-public space, where anybody can approach at any time. As a meeting place it was the first public institution in Siwa and a true Siwan invention. The meeting place is of particular importance in the construction of cultural landscape.

In the pergola men from the same area can sit together in the hot afternoons to talk and argue about different aspects of life, while the youth and younger boys sit and listen to take useful lessons out of the real life experiences of the elders. (Faies, 2 March 1998. Interview No.27)

The organised meeting places in Shali struck me, first of all, as extremely functional. They are simple, elementary and do not offer any surprises to the surroundings, as they are in the middle of the residential area (Figure 7-1). Their architecture is an expression of a climatic response and cultural articulation. The pergola is usually sited away from the doors of surrounding houses and is closed to the side facing nearby homes. The early meeting places had an architectural form different than those of the house, the mosque, and the garden. The seating in the meeting places is placed above the earth by way of built in benches, so men could assemble. The role of the pergola extends well beyond its immediate function, as it reveals a social dimension of creating identity.

That was a way to have a reciprocal feeling between people instead of the isolation and loneliness in front of a TV nowadays for example. Also there was a chance in that meeting place to know about narratives from the past and stories about the present. It was a way to let people participate in the current events, for example to help someone to build his house or visit an ill person or even in special events like burying a dead person and helping his family. (Sheikh AR Othman, 14 June 1997. Interview No. 39)

The term meeting place suggests that a shaded pergola was not intended as a visiting place like the marboua or a garden shade, nor as a place where certain values are kept and revealed as in the big room attached to every mosque. In the meeting places men come together as individuals, and sometimes they accompany their sons. They also use the shaded pergolas as a workshop to practice traditional handicrafts. The Siwans linked the traditional meeting places to the way in which the cultural values were enacted.

1 The Pergola may be considered a semi-public space for two reasons: 1) when it was within the walled town, no outsiders were allowed to be there, and even when it has become outside the wall, it was signified as a “Siwan” meeting place; 2) women were not allowed to involve in the setting of the pergola. While the public space was understood as the domain of public interaction of every one.
Figure 7-1. Shaded Pergola in front of a Siwan traditional mud house appears as a complementary element to the architecture of the house.

Figure 7-2. The climatic response of the pergola adds to its function as a meeting place, it also works as a playground for young children during the day.
The significance of meeting places in a tribal society such as Siwa is that it offers the "medium". Whether this medium is termed "place" or, as Giddens suggests, "locale", its important feature is to ensure the provision of face-to-face interaction. These places were also seen from an ethnomethodological viewpoint as a medium; for example,

As the writings of Garfinkel in particular have made clear...the settings of interaction cannot be regarded only as the 'backdrop' or the given physical 'environment' of interaction, but are actively organised by participants in the production and reproduction of that interaction...In tribal societies the primacy of face-to-face interaction in locales with only limited internal regionalisation means that individuals normally have a detailed awareness of their own 'time-demography'.

The shaded pergolas within the urban area served the fundamental function of bringing the male Siwans together. The architectural design of these settings reflected an understanding of both the social and psychological needs of the inhabitants (Figure 7-2). As Massey and Jess put it:

[The] notion of community as requiring face-to-face interaction...has much in common with notions of 'place as community'. Such face-to-face contacts are said to be 'authentic'. If there is no distance between people, the reasoning goes, then their communication can be immediate and direct - unmediated...the very lack of spatial distance can give a community-in-one-place an authenticity which would otherwise not be possible.

Learning process in a traditional context owes much to the passing on of experience from generation to generation through narrative and storytelling, as well as observing and contributing in cultural practices. Community life is not just belonging to ideological relations or an ethnic group. It is mainly the way in which everyday practices exhibit a communal understanding of social needs as well as a communal wish to share experiences and events. The pergola offered this at the neighbourhood level.

2.1.2. Layer two, at the community level: el-Dakrure festival
According to Durkheim, a society is regarded as a necessarily clearly bounded and distinct entity. In Siwa, the provision of semi-public space at the first layer extended to form community space at the second layer. The community meeting place at the mountain of el-Dakrure provided a setting for both religious and local celebration.

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3 Ibid, p:161
The Dakrure festival is a significant event which the Siwans have kept, in addition to the two religious feasts of Muslims, over time. The festival is called Eid el-Syaha [Tourism Festival], where the Siwans themselves are the tourists. It occurs during the full moon of October every year. The men and children of the community move to the mountain of el-Dakrure and camp there for three days. Women stay in town and enjoy a time of freedom. Girls who accompany their fathers or uncles return to the city before the sunset and go back to the mountain the next morning. As the festival provides a reasonable chance for socialising, many girls get engaged at that time.

Although the Siwans pride themselves on retaining “old traditions”, in which religious observance penetrates every aspect of life, the blend of Islamic and local myth was revealed in interwoven practices during the three day festival. El-Dakrure festival offers sustainability of the particularity of culture. There people share food, find time to talk about their problems and find solutions for disagreements between individuals.

The significance of the festival comes from the appropriateness of its time in October. For Siwa, this time is the best possible climatically with not much heat and humidity. For the Siwans it is the time of “no more work to do in the gardens”, as they wait for the harvest season. In addition to its role as a leisure time, the festival also offers a time for arranging and preparing agreements about social and agricultural issues. This intimate connection between time and space was a feature of pre-modern societies. Giddens explains,

All pre-modern cultures possessed modes of calculation of time. The calendar, for example, was as distinctive a feature of agrarian states as the invention of writing...the basis of day-to-day life...always linked time with space - and was usually imprecise and variable.

In Siwa, space and place largely coincide, as the second layer social space is dominated by the “presence” of localised activities and face-to-face interaction. This layer extends also to secure the legitimate control of a domain as their “territory of operation”, where, as Giddens suggests, “the periodical movement of the whole society may be seen as one way in which the members of that society transcend spatial limitations of presence.”

Although the Siwan society is not the type of nomadic society Giddens described, still

7 Muslims celebrate two Feasts: Al-Feetre, which is the Day of Breakfast after the fasting month of Ramadan, and Al-Adhy, which is the Day of El-Hajj [the Pilgrimage in Mecca]
they require a kind of place identification. If “territorality” is taken to mean the formation of a type of authority over resources, then the Siwans needed to claim legitimate dominion over a specific spatial area.

Recently, as the oasis has become well known to travellers, many Europeans come to share this festival with the Siwans. Since 1993 it has been developed into a tourist attraction, promoted by both locals and officials. They also use the gathering of local inhabitants to hold workshops covering diverse disciplines, concerning political parties, agricultural issues, health care, social and educational problems and religious advice. It has become the most important local event in the oasis. Yet this layer of social space, like the previous one, grounded their sense of dwelling in the closure of a bounded space/place. The third layer of public space therefore extends the experience of built environment to an open space, while it integrates and ultimately ensures equality of public space. This higher, divine, opening of global space is represented by the religious pilgrimage to Mecca in Arabia. The following sub-section explores this event.

2.1.3. Layer three, at the global level: The pilgrimage

The third layer of social space links the Siwans to the world beyond the limits of their oasis through the religious ritual of *El Hajj* [the Pilgrimage to Mecca]. It is a significant event in the life of Muslims world-wide. In former times people had to travel in caravans using camels, hence the rituals for the journey were treated with great respect. Some of these rituals are still preserved mixed with local myth throughout the Islamic world. In Siwa the travellers start their journey about a month before the Hajj time.¹¹

The journey of Hajj raises an important question: how does this layer of social space integrate the phenomenological notions of “dwelling” and “at homeness” in the Siwan experience? I have referred to the Koran to find an answer from an Islamic perspective. It states that “The first house has been established for people, that is consecrated in Mecca”; “house” here means the house of God - the mosque. The initial meaning of the verse is that this house is the first place for worshipping which God offered to mankind.²²

That house is located in Mecca, in the middle of a barren valley in the Arabian Desert. It

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¹¹ In Cairo, people from all over the country who are going to the pilgrimage would take one of the many flights which fly continuously between Cairo and Jeddah to carry more than forty thousand Egyptian Muslims. Then they bus to Mecca to join about two million Muslims in the Hajj ceremony.

is a fourfold hollow cube of stone; its origin goes back to the time of Abraham, who built the fourfold walls on a pre-existing foundation to fulfil the order of God. Its walls have been many times re-built before and after Islam, but its ancient form and even its original stones have been preserved. Thus this house has been sacred and known by its current name El-Ka'aba since a long time before Islam, and it was filled with numerous idols and symbols of different beliefs of various groups. Only with Islam in 620, and its summons for monotheism, did the site become a “Sanctified Mosque”.13

According to Islamic belief, El-Ka'aba provides a symbolic home for people to dwell on Earth. The call of Abraham, which has been a fundamental tenet of Muslims' belief, suggested that one should visit that “divinely given” home once in a lifetime. However the meaning of this visit in Islam is to announce a full “Islam” [Submission] to The Creator by accepting the Earth as a “home” for mortals.

This perspective reveals that a Muslim is “at home” as long as he or she is “in-the-world”, under the sky and has access to visit El-Ka’aba. This notion had given the early Muslims the understanding that “place” means something more than location; rather it is dwelling by “staying with things”.14 Therefore they had moved from one place to another to establish one centre after the other, while these centres, as Heidegger might suggest, secure the fourfold regions.

In saving the earth, in receiving the sky, in awaiting the divinities, in initiating mortals, dwelling occurs as the fourfold preservation of the fourfold... Dwelling preserves the fourfold by bringing the presencing of the fourfold into things... Dwelling, insofar as it keeps or secures the fourfold in things, is, as this keeping, a building.15

For Heidegger, inhabiting the earth as a home must be understood in relation to the entire world-structure. To dwell upon the earth is also to dwell, as mortal, beneath the heavens and in sight of the divine greeting. The earth as homeland cannot be separated from the earth as a physical environment, as the topology of nature and its openness.16

I am not, however, seeking to map Heideggerian philosophy into Muslim belief; but this is perhaps an endeavour to interpret both ways of thinking, in order to show the rich and comprehensive scope that phenomenology can contribute. Most of all, it can enhance our

15 Ibid. p. 151.
understanding of the "wholeness" of the world that corresponds to the full dimensions of human inhabitation, in a dwelling that gathers together people and nature. Only in this case can the Earth be a "true" homeland for us all, a "house" within which we are at home. A similar view from Christianity, which is also an Abrahamic belief, was expressed in the words of Morrison.

Grace acts to integrate inner and outer horizons as it is uncreated and divine. This is the link to spirituality. It also provides the basis for the synthesis of architecture being both a closure and opening. The closure acts symbolically to enable us to know the higher-divine-opening, integrative and transcendent of inner and outer horizons. Finally it provides a basis for knowing all of creation to be home/dwelling, to the extent we are open to grace and participate with it flowing out of creation as the everyday community-sublime known in humility.¹⁷

For the Siwans, the journey of Hajj offers an extreme extension of social space and at the same time an identification of their place in the world. Its significance is reflected in the built environment as a story told in the murals on house facades (Figure 7-3), and also as a subject for discussion at a marboua or a pergola. The three layers of social space work together as a framework of spatial security for the Siwan community; a conception of social space that allows for the provision of place identity at both individual and community level.

Figure 7-3. Mural on a facade of a Siwan house tells the story of the journey of Hajj, significant events (the ship) and significant places (Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia)

¹⁷ Morrison, K. in a personal communication, 12-8-1999.
This identification, as Heidegger suggests, conserved the fourfold regions that allow the world to remain open. The here and there become apparent as the Siwans mapped their world and established their sense of place both inside and outside the oasis. Thus social space as a cultural construction provides a foothold for the Siwans. The three layer structure of social space in Siwa sets basic properties of existential space; Aldo van Eyck recognises this to be a determining force behind its relation to people “Man is both centre bound and horizon bound”. 18

This discussion about layers of social space in Siwa raises a basic question: how was extension in time achieved in the Siwan community, with consideration of social space as a medium for such extension? According to Giddens,

Extension in time in band societies is achieved primarily via two overlapping sets of phenomena: the grounding of legitimation in tradition, and the fundamental part played by kinship in societal structuration. Kin relations are embedded in time. 19

The kinship system, through tribal order, together with Islamic religion as a belief system, provide the main axes around which traditions solidified and community cohered. The connection between traditions, rules, norms and time-consciousness in such a non-literate community were so important in the Siwan history that it is worth spelling them out in a little detail. The following sub-section therefore discusses the tribal social order.

2.2. Community, tradition and tribal social order

Tribal order is a feature of pre-modern traditional societies. 20 In Siwa, the social structure has been defined as tribal since the establishment of Shali in 1203. Although their first experience of non-Siwan official authority dates back to 1820, the role of the official chief was limited to the constabulary and not civic functions. 21 Thus the tribal ties ensured the continuity and cohesion of the Siwan community through the role and place of the sheikhs. A sheikh is more than just a head or a chief, who enjoys some privileges due to the “power” inherited in his social role. Indeed he is the authority in his tribe, but at the same time he is the servant of his people. He should always be there, at their order,

as he devotes his time and effort to serve his tribe - a conceptualisation of "leadership" that Chris Maser described from his own experience:

As the leader of the facilitation process, I must be the servant of the parties involved. Servant leadership offers a unique mix of idealism and pragmatism. The idealism comes from having chosen to serve one another and some Higher purpose, appealing to a deeply held belief in the dignity of all people and the democratic principle that a leader’s power flows from commitment to the well-being of the people.22

This way of organising social life was expressed in the built environment. A sheikh’s house is the place where disputes would be examined, and both defendant and defender consider themselves guests until the sentence is fulfilled. That produces complexity in the spatial arrangements of the house. Also, it produces a different role for a Siwan woman once she is a sheikh’s wife.

The house of any Sheikh should always be ready for a large number of visitors. They might come at any time, day or night. The marboua is always full. The problem may involve a woman or some women, as such the private part of the house would become also a part of the tribunal. At all times we should offer food, nuts, juice and tea with peppermint to all guests several times. (A Sheikh’s wife. 26 February 1998. Interview No.21)

The role of a Siwan Sheikh should be understood as a long process of preparation through passing knowledge, moral, norms and set of rules and orders of interaction from generation to generation. It may also be understood through certain analyses of the concept of power, which the sheikhs represented. Giddens explains that:

The ‘interpretation’ of norms, and their capability to make an ‘interpretation’ count, by participants in interaction is tied in subtle ways to their compliance to moral claims. Failure to see this, or at any rate to spell out its implications, is bound up with some characteristic defects of both Durkheimian - Parsonian functionalism...the moral co-ordination of interaction is asymmetrically interdependent with its production as meaningful and with its expression of relations of power.23

Giddens defines “power”, in its most general sense, as the transformative capacity of human action. This definition occurs also in Marx, as a key element in the notion of Praxis.24 In this respect power in the analysis of the Siwan community is the capability of the sheikhs to mediate in a series of events so as to alter their course. It is a means of interaction which is secured by ontological trust of the identification of self and others.

If a Siwan moved to another place, he would never be able to live a normal life, he would never find his comfort, mainly because here we live as tribes, our problems never reach the police, rather the Sheikh would solve any problem. Outside the oasis, the situation may be different, it will never be the same as you are within your folks (Omar, 14 March 1998. Interview No.40)

Siwa for many years was a refuge to which people may escape in special circumstances. Over time, those who arrived at Siwa as refugees would approach any of the tribes and ask for membership. After a long process which involves ultimate obedience to the Siwan norms, a refugee would be given credit and affiliation and he might be allowed to marry a Siwan woman. But women from outside the oasis were not allowed to settle in the oasis without their original families. This perspective of gender role weighted and credited Siwan women; they are a symbol of continuity of the community.

The particularity of both social order and place appeared in a unique social phenomenon: the absence of a prison in the community. The interviewees referred to the fact that until the 1960s the police station was the only public building in Siwa. They interpret this as a result of the tribal rules, which controlled all social activities. These rules continued to exist, despite the presence of a governmental police department in Siwa since 1928.

We do not need any police, they have different rules, ours are more convenient. The chief officer knows that we accept his presence as long as he does not interfere in our rules. He knows that if he insisted on being involved that would cause many complications. (Abu-Baker, 3 March 1998. Interview No.29)

Yet the Siwan community has used the official presence of police officers to manage problems among the non-Siwan residents. That was evident during my visits in 1997 and 1998 in the very limited presence of policemen in the residential area. They were present only inside the police station and two policemen stood guard outside the front gate.

The police can work between strangers [local residents] as long as they don’t have any links with any of the tribes by marriage or affiliation. It is common that a new settler in the oasis will go and ask to belong to any of the tribes. In this case they will be treated as one of us in the bad and the good. (Mahdy Haboon, 9 March 1998. Interview No.34)

Tribal rules in Siwa are mainly driven from Islamic principles and rules. Yet the Siwans adapted them to work with their context and the currents of events. These rules can be summarised in three points: 1) the ultimate respect for the final judgement of the tribunal; 2) the full respect of the human rights of both the complainant and the defendant; and
3) all sentences are fulfilled by fines. The third point is always subject to change according to the circumstances of the community.

Although some of the interviewees complained about the hard decisions of the tribunals regarding fines, they asserted that tribal rules were responsible for keeping the community's cohesion and enhancing their sense of belonging. They also asserted that a breakdown of the system means the disappearance of the Siwan community itself. Although fines may be painful to the individuals, they are for the well-being of the community, which the sheikhs bear in mind. As Maser might describe them, "leaders do not inflict pain, although they often must help their followers to bear it in uncomfortable circumstances, such as compromise."25

In the past all fines were small, now it's thousands... fines would change over time and also in special circumstances, for example if an increase of any action or behaviour in a particular time was observed in the community, its fine would dramatically increase. (A High School Boy, 22 February 1998. Interview No.18)

In the tribal rules people and nature are equal. Among the actions that would be considered major were both verbal abuse and the burning of orchards. A fine would be calculated as a multiple of the number of words that had been used, or the trees that had been burned. Even a murder crime would be resolved by a fine and a commitment.

A murderer would go with his shroud to the victim's tribe, testifying his guilt and asking forgiveness. If they accepted, that means he would become a free man. In this case he will be responsible for the well being of the victim's children until their marriage; a complete financial responsibility. If he couldn't fulfil his duty, his tribe is responsible on his behalf. Even if he was taken by law and served his prison time, he would return to do the same thing. Murder is seldom found in Siwa according to these rules. (Mohammed Yousef, 3 March 1998. Interview No.28)

The tribal rules made it clear that "freedom" means the freedom of the community rather than a personal freedom. This concept of power does not logically imply the existence of conflict, unlike that of Max Weber, according to whom power is "the capacity of the individual to realise his will, even against the opposition of others" 26, which implies that power only exists when the resistance of others has to be overcome. In Siwa, the use of

power in interactions can be understood as a way to facilitate everyday life, "whereby the interaction is constituted as meaningful".27

Personal freedom is a selfish act, the real freedom is the freedom of the whole community from any serious problems. There is no personal freedom against the community’s freedom. Therefore, any Siwan who attempts to reject or argue against the tribal rules would face one final punishment, the abandonment and exile from the oasis. Siwa for those renegades would become a prohibited paradise, a fate that any Siwan would try his best to avoid. (Abu-Baker Othman, 18 June 1997. Interview No.8)

The discussion in this section indicates that identity of places is bound up with identity of communities. Both people and nature provide each other with self-identification and meaningful being. The intertwining of the two themes of this chapter, the three layers of social space and the tribal social order, significantly affected the particularity of the Siwan identity and its reflection in social space. The following section focuses on the changes brought about by modernity and its influence on the Siwans’ interpretation and identification of social space.

3. The Siwan society in an era of change

Until the 1960s Siwa was almost a forgotten region, an “unimportant” oasis in the Western Desert. Its real experience with official authority then must be dated from the early 1960s with the establishment of the Regional Government Departments (RGD) in 1961. The Arab Republic of Egypt (ARE) consists of 26 departments28. The Western Desert, which comprises two thirds of the total area of Egypt, is considered one department and given one governor located in Marsa-Matruh. He is responsible for the seven City Councils within the Western Desert; Siwa City Council (SCC) is one of them. The official employees are appointed directly by the central government in Cairo.

At the local level, Siwa City Council is responsible for the several villages, hamlets and districts in Siwa oasis, a total area of 240,000 acres. In the east there are Aghurmi, Zidan, Abou-Shrouf,29 Quryshat and Salaam. In the west there are Maraqui, Dahiba, Algari, Khamissa, Machindet, Bahyeldin and Gamalie. 150 kilometres away from Siwa city, there is Algarra -Karet Om Elsageer- a very distinctive oasis with population of only 331 persons30. In every village, there is a nominated Local Assembly.

28 Census, 1996.
29 Zidan and Abou-Shrouf are new neighbourhoods funded by FAO project.
30 Census, 1996.
During the 1960s and 1970s SCC was commanded by an absentee president, who was in Marsa-Matruh most of the time and left only a deputy president, the chief police officer. The officials who were given posts in the Western Desert at that time considered themselves unlucky, and regarded their official posts as unwanted jobs. That reflected on their relationship with the community. The omission and neglect were the consequences of this deficient situation and were expressed in development strategies. Chapters Five and Six illustrated many of the implications of those official strategies.

The official enhancement and upgrading of the Siwan built environment was accomplished within a national "social reform" policy. This policy expressed the main thrust directing social change and manifested the challenge of modernity. The analysis in the following sub-sections reveals the stages and strategies adopted by the government to achieve social reform in Siwa. My research findings indicated that three main approaches formed the framework of governmental policy for development. In varying degrees, socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-political strategies were adopted. The analysis focuses on different aspects of development, discusses the official story, and reveals the Siwan responses to the approaches.

3.1. Socio-cultural development

The first official approach to development focused on socio-cultural aspects of Siwa. Two main social phenomena were top priority in the discussion: the deterioration of education and the exclusion of females from any educational involvement. A governmental study was undertaken to review critically the state of education within the local community. The study indicated that the population of Siwa oasis was about 12,000 persons, with a density of 11 persons/square kilometre distributed along the length of the oasis. Yet 50% of the total population were in Siwa city.31

The study also indicated that a serious problem may hamper social reform policy, unless an educational strategy was established. During the 1960s - 70s, illiteracy was common among school boys and girls in Siwa. Education was operating in the Arabic language, while the children were only speaking Siwi [unwritten language] at home. This was limiting their advance in education. Thus a special scholarship sponsored by the Ministry of Education was given to several Siwans during 1980-85, to encourage them to join

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higher levels of education specially in the College of Education. Its aim was to prepare Siwan teachers to bridge the gap between the two languages. The outcome brought significant progress that encouraged the local community to become involved and also encouraged the official authority to erect the educational buildings (Figure 7-4).

Before 1982 there were two primary schools in the oasis. In the period 1982-1997 this became 19 primary schools, an Islamic college, 3 preparatory schools and 2 secondary schools. According to this development the ratio of the Siwan teachers has become and 93% in primary schools 90% in intermediate schools. At the level of high school it is likely to find teachers from the Nile Valley because it needs more specialists in chemistry, physics, and computer science. (Abdel Wahab Khalil, 19 February 1998. Interview No.13)

The phenomenon of the difficulty of learning through Arabic was disappearing during the 1990s, as small classes in every locality were opened for children to learn reading, writing and counting in Arabic for one year before they start elementary and primary education. Thus achievement in the field of education was attributed to the built environment which laid the setting for such development within the urban area of Siwa.

Unlike the extended area at the north coast, the urban area in Siwa is compacted in about two square metres and embraces all the schools. People live here together, close to each other and that resulted in the ratio of children away from education, in 1997, is 3-4%. (Group Interview, 20 February 1998. Interview No.15)

The conscious strategy adopted in the educational system encouraged the progress and positive development of the second socio-cultural aspect that of gender discrimination. Over the 1990s the number of girls joining primary school was almost equal to the number of boys. Many families now encourage their girls to continue preparatory education. In 1998, the first “Siwa Girls Preparatory School” was launched and there were five girls at the high school level.

Although the Siwan society is very conservative, they started to accept that girls can go to school to learn. But they do not yet accept that they can participate in any type of work. However, that was the case in Cairo in the early 1930s, so may be after 10 years the change will happen. (Group Interview, 20 February 1998. Interview No.15)

Development in the field of education also encouraged the development of cultural and sports centres, which offer services for both genders separately. For example, six youth cultural and sports centres and five halls for women’s activities and handicrafts were
established in the 1990s. These centres also offer training programmes and health care information.

Figure 7-4. Preparatory School (age 13-15) in Siwa city

Figure 7-5. Training Programme for carpet introduced Siwan girls to one of the most important export product in Egypt

The launch of the Siwa Cultural Centre in 1998 was a step to revive the Siwan handicrafts. There were 150 girls in different stages of training programmes which introduced many future possibilities for girls to contribute in work in small industry. (Figure 7-5) Its role also extended to cultural and social services. It contained a library, a
computer laboratory and a health care unit. However, women’s interest in visiting the Centre was still influenced by local traditions.

The socio-cultural strategy with emphasis upon education has helped to bridge Siwa from being a pre-modern, non-literate community to being a self-aware community that recognises its culture as well as its place in the world. Thus it influenced other reform strategies, for example, new small industrial and tourism projects as a strategy of socio-economic development. The following sub-section investigates these strategies.

3.2. Socio-economic development

The second strategy focused on socio-economic development. From the research findings tourism, small industries in agricultural and animal products, the revival of local handicrafts and the exploitation of mineral water were found to be the main aspects of development. These aspects needed new activity space and introduced new roles to the Siwan built environment. Yet the technologies involved varied between traditional, appropriate and late modern technology. People have now the opportunity to experience each of these technologies and their applications in everyday life.

3.2.1. Tourism

The experience of tourism in Siwa is new and untested. It was only after the construction of the Marsa-Matruh/Siwa road in 1991 and the “opening up” of the oasis by improved travel conditions and fewer limitations that it became possible for tourism to reach Siwa. There are no official statistics on visitor arrivals to Siwa, but through my observation mostly back packers, not the well-off type of tourists were to be found. They tended to stay an average of five days in cheap (US$ 3-4/day) mini-hotels. The owner of the only five star ecotourism resort in Siwa (US$ 90-129 a day) confirmed small numbers of tourist bookings in his resort. The main attractions cited by foreigners were: the peaceful nature of the community, such friendly people, a clean and non-commercialised environment “not spoilt by tourism” (Figure 7-6), and the quiet nature of the place with the absence of all sources of noise. They were mostly coming for a “remote” experience.

32 Still not working in 1998.
33 Group interview with trainees in the Cultural Centre, 17 March 1998. Interview No.51
34 Mr M. Abdel Aziz, 26 May 1997. Interview No. 2
35 Mr M. Mostafa, 11 March 1998. Interview No. 37
Welcome to Siwa • We ask the women to respect our customs and traditions by keeping their legs and arms covered
• Alcohol and afflicion forbidden in public! Enjoy your stay in our Special Oasis. Thank you

Figure 7-6. Most tourists defined Siwa as a unique place, different from anywhere else.

Figure 7-7. All information required on a simple ‘vernacular’ map for Siwa, available from the Siwa Visitor Information Centre.

In the mid 1990s, more attention was given to the oasis by the regional authority, as a promising place for a tourism resource. The remoteness of Siwa and its history are
significant features for tourism growth. Thus Siwa appeared on the tourism maps of Egypt. The launch of the Siwa Visitor Information Centre in 1998 was a further step in getting information and communication facilities. The reputation of the oasis as an extremely conservative society gives a particular image to European and Egyptian travellers. Women were advised in tourists’ brochures to cover their arms and legs; most of them as I observed actually do so. All tourists are warned not to be drunk in public. There was no serving of alcoholic drinks in hotels or restaurants (Figure 7-7).

In 1992 there was only one hotel in Siwa, now there are 9 different level hotels ranging from 20-100 bed. The only foreign investment in Siwa is an Italian company, they have a mineral water factory and a health resort over 11 acres, which is still under construction. (Mahdy Hwidy, 20 June 1997. Interview No.9)

Tourism activities introduced a new role for the Siwan built environment. Recently with the increase of tourists, the Siwans took tourist accommodation and tourist-goods shops as a new job. Most of the mini-hotels (20 rooms) are owned and run by Siwans. Shops in the central souk are family owned. These are mostly restaurants, (Figure 7-8), grocery and local products: baskets, silver, carpets and traditional dresses (Figure 7-9). Yet employment in tourism is not seen as a steady job or one with any prospects. Jobs are taken up in accordance with other agricultural obligations. Thus the development of tourism activities occurred in accordance with the development of small projects, as the following sub-section indicates.

3.2.2. Small agricultural projects

The second aspect of socio-economic strategy in Siwa was the development of small industrial projects for agricultural and animal products. These were started by training and demonstrating new agricultural styles through a permanent station run by experts from the Ministry and Faculties of Agriculture and the Desert Research Centre. Small industry projects involved sun drying, manufacture of date juice and olive oil, and fisheries in the canals and drains. Animal breeding was introduced through a project that gave some families high productive cross breads of cows and small animals. The space needed for such activities encouraged the Siwans to move and reside in suburbs as Chapter Six illustrated, thus influencing change in the built environment.

36 Anoar Ahmed, 17 March 1998. Interview No.47
3.2.3. Revival of local handicrafts

The revival of local handicrafts was the third aspect of socio-economic development. Ethnic embroidery has become important souvenir material. Outfits, pants and scarves are made to sell direct to tourists in four shops in the main souk. The embroidery work is
usually done by women and girls.\textsuperscript{37} Meanwhile, making baskets and souvenir items out of palm leaves has become a major part of the family business.

The commodification of material culture such as handicrafts attaches external market value to cultural activities. Yet from the Siwans’ point of view it served a double purpose, as it also kept the traditional items from being extinct under the vast impact of modern products.\textsuperscript{38} The example they gave me was the use of plastic baskets to collect and store agricultural products instead of the traditional handmade natural material baskets.\textsuperscript{39} They asserted that the loss of interest in handicrafts affected the traditional settings and the special time they used to spend together in the pergolas to practice these crafts.

3.2.4. Exploitation of mineral water

The fourth aspect of socio-economic development is the exploitation of mineral water. Two mineral water factories started work during the 1990s. The employees in this industry are mainly Siwans. The water of Siwa promotes “Siwa” as a place on the national level. My interviewees were happy with the fact that some Egyptians who are now living on the banks of the river Nile at Cairo may have a bottle of “Siwa” water on their dining table every meal. They referred to the old Egyptian adage that “Egypt is the gift of the Nile” in order to emphasise their own ethnicity:

If Egypt is the gift of the Nile, then Siwa is the gift of the Springs. (Ahmed El-Senosey, 25 March 1998. Interview No.58)

The awareness of Siwan ethnicity not only helped in integrating the official socio-cultural and socio-economic approaches to everyday life, but it was also a factor of resistance, as the following sub-section reveals.

3.3. Socio-political development

Socio-political development in the tribal society of Siwa was not an easy task. The physical remoteness of the oasis contributed to its marginality, and added negative connotations to its qualities. Although the Siwans accepted the fact that Siwa must be under Egyptian hegemony, they never accepted the abandonment of the tribal rules, or

\textsuperscript{37} A Siwan woman works as a handicrafts trainer, 21 March 1998. Interview No.53
\textsuperscript{38} Yousef, 23 March 1998. Interview No.56
\textsuperscript{39} Hidow, 1 March 1998. Interview No.26
the insufficient work of the officials since the 1960s. Weaving these aspects together produces a complex, inter-subjective view of political participation in Siwa.

For the Siwans, there was evidence of simultaneous marginality of people and place. This was evident in the report of the meeting of the local assembly of Siwa city which was conducted on May 26, 1987. The report asserted that the president of the SCC had refused to attend the previous meetings and had left the city for a whole month, which caused many problems for the local community as well as the infrastructure of the city. According to this meeting the local assembly invalidated the position of the official president of the SCC. This decision was carried to the LGD in Marsa-Matruh, but despite the decision, that official stayed in his post till 1989.40

The following SCC president took the post from 1989 to 1997. It was clear, as I demonstrated earlier, that he involved himself and overwhelmed the structure of the decision-making. His approach seemed to be locally unacceptable:

many angry opinions and suspicious objections from my interviewees in 1997 bear witness to this. The old approach was [perceived as] a limitation for the local self-rule within the community and the communication between the local/central government and the community was not efficiently working. The consequences were negative and resulted in isolation for the community and an anti-communicative attitude from the Siwans.41

The socio-political approach during this period failed to change the social structure of the Siwan community. This enhanced the self-rule and supported the position of tribal rule in the Siwan society. However, it was only in 1998 that a change in the official approach adopted by the new president of the SCC, who acknowledged and involved the tribal chiefs in decision-making. This was understood among the Siwans as "meaningful".

He met the sheikhs and told them what the problem was and what was his expert opinion for the solution, if they waited for the government to do it for them, they would wait for ages, the alternative was to do it themselves. (Baker Yousef, 14 March 1998. Interview No. 36)

The sheikhs were convinced and then co-operated; a situation that Drestske describes as "conscious experience".42 The local/official interrelationship in remote communities must

be built upon a reciprocal understanding and conscious experiences. "Authenticity is thus an effective approach when dealing with locality". The choice of people working as officials and decision-makers in localities must assist them as "outsider[s], but culturally aware". This is far more critical than the central government accounts for.

The analysis of the governmental development in Siwa indicated three stages of social reform implementations. Firstly, decision-making and control-from-afar policies were dominant. Secondly, avoiding the involvement of the community in a community development represented a paradoxical state for the Siwans. Thirdly, both officials and local community become aware of the important role of cultural representations and local identity in social reform strategies. The analysis in the following section therefore focuses upon the local interpretation of these approaches and the strategy to deal with them.

4. Local responses and the representation of identity in Siwa.

Two opposed, and perhaps irreconcilable, ideological visions of the nature and purpose of social space were evident in the words of old and young generations of Siwan in 1998, as they sought to explain the change of public space. Older men and women who used the public space according to cultural norms promoted a vision of a space marked by free interaction for men and the absence of intruding women. For them, public space was an unconstrained space within which men can discuss issues of life, while women could enjoy travelling around its borders. The vision of younger Siwans was quite different. Theirs was one of open space for recreation and entertainment, subject to usage by an aware public, whether men or women.

What is wrong in walking in the main souk? I know all the guys sitting or standing there, some of them were my class mates at the preparatory school two years ago. Now my mother says that it is wrong to talk to them or even to look at them. (A Siwan high school girl, 8 March 1998. Interview No.33)

These two visions of public space, as Mitchell explains, could be seen as a distinction between "representation space", which is a lived space according to cultural norms, and "representations of space", which is produced according to planned and ordered space.

In Siwa, the three layers of social space were reinterpreted according to the new

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44 Ibid.p:51
45 A Siwan woman, 27 March 1998. Interview No.60
experiences of many Siwans outside the oasis. For example, social space might differ in
the case of a Siwan man who went to Alexandria for University education and married a
non-Siwan woman and then returned back to Siwa for work. In this case, his spatial
activities would be “stretched out”. Some people might have a second home in Marsa-
Matruh and/or in Alexandria, where the wife’s family is settled. Thus the increase of
activities has produced an increase of the spatial complexity of social space.

Understanding of this phenomenon lies in its origins in the 1970s: the mobility of
labourers or university students outside the oasis. Although the Siwans stayed strongly
faithful to their community, they developed different feelings of their experiences.

On my way back to Siwa, I feel like going back home. When I see the
oasis I feel as if my soul is back to my body. At once I recognise every
palm tree, I know them one by one, the same way I know my own

However, sometimes experiencing the life of cosmopolitan cities brings rather negative
feelings, as one of my interviewees expressed.

Each time I accompany my husband on his work trip to Cairo or
Alexandria, I wish the time would never go. I feel that I breathe freely, I
feel alive. On my way back to Siwa, I feel that I am back to my coffin. (A
Siwan Woman, 16 March 1998. Interview No.46)

In all cases the Siwans returned back to their oasis, or as they say, to their roots. The
analysis revealed a significant change in their conceptualisation of the three layers of
public space. The booming time of the 1980s influenced the community in the early
1990s and many young men had little time or patience to share traditional activities in the
shaded settings of the pergolas. The changes in political and economic climate affected
changes of settings at the neighbourhood level.

Meanwhile local responses to tourism have affected social space at a community level, as
they experience the “other”. Their responses to tourists as strangers is based on the
traditional cultural frameworks of interpreting the meanings of “travel”. In Islamic
tradition, people travel for four specific reasons: respectively pilgrimage to Mecca,
education, trade, and travel to experience natural and historic places. This understanding

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reflects upon the tourists coming to Siwa and the way in which the local community
might interact with them.

People come to Siwa for two reasons, to watch or to experience. For the
first group we offer the natural landscape and the significant built
environment. However, what they get is something they might see in a
television programme about Siwa. For those, we limit their interaction
with the local community, we do not like to be watched. For those who
come for an experience and seek to be involved in the community's
everyday life, we offer an experience of cultural understanding which is
based upon the full respect of our traditions. For those, we open our
houses and hearts, we share food and talk and build up future
relationships of friendship. (Sheikh Omar Ragih, 25 June 1997. Interview No. 11)

The words of Sheikh Ragih reflect an understanding of the world view of sustainable
tourism, which encourages the quest for a true journey, as Calvino describes.

The true journey implies a complete change of nutrition, a digesting of the
visited country - its fauna and flora and its culture (not only the different
culinary practices and condiments but the different implements used...). This is the only kind of travel that has a meaning nowadays, when
everything else visible you can see on television without rising from your
easy chair.

However, responses to tourism may be short term survival strategies, which further
erode their position in the longer term. So far, the Siwans identify their work in tourism
activities as a means of increasing their land, similar to the time of their labour outside
the oasis, during the 1970s and 1980s.

The investment in the land is the only clean investment and please put one
hundred lines under the word clean. Depending on tourism is depending
on a soft economy because it depends on international policies and economies, which relay on international relationships and propaganda
techniques. What would happen if America announced that Egypt is a
terrorist country? (Ahmed Mosa, 15 June 1998. Interview No. 42)

Tourism activities acted as a factor of change in the built environment through new
arrangements of accommodation to cater for tourism in the community. Yet such
arrangements were always managed by the tribal rules. The local strategy limited tourist
accommodation to the central area of Siwa, within an area of a half square kilometre.

The tourism business is not granted, what would happen if all the people
turn up to work in tourism and ignore the gardens, then something comes up to stop the flow of tourism? We have to take care of the land, because

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48 See for example: Graig-Smith, S. & C. French, (1994); Griffin, T. & N. Boele, (1993); Calvino, I.
Aspects of change in social space brought about by tourism also affected the Siwan interpretation of the third layer, which links the local/global levels of social space. It is not now just limited to the journey of Hajj, as sub-section 2.3 illustrated, but it also extends to other locales and places. Even the most local Siwans have their lives touched by interventions of outside events and they are geographically linked to a wider space. They keep in touch with events in the capital city or overseas through television and local travellers. They understand that contacts between tourism agents in Siwa and Cairo would bring more tourists to Siwa, which means more income. They also know that political strategies outside the oasis are an important factor in the change in their lives.

4.1. Local strategy of social resistance

The local strategy of social resistance was worked out among the Sheikhs and reinforced by the tribal rules. Many interviewees asserted that throughout the tribal meetings increased emphasis on the idea of “real” local character of the oasis and “real Siwans” took place. New tribal legislation however, often implicit and sometimes explicit, gave the people of Siwan tribes more right in and to the place than the “outsiders”. The tribal rules confirmed that anyone who wishes to sell his/her land must ask permission of their sheikh and be supported by a good explanation. If anyone had to sell, they must prioritise selling, first to next neighbours, then members of the Siwan tribes, then outsiders. My interviewees asserted that gardens within the area of Siwa city had never been sold to outsiders. The only exception was an ecotourism resort, over an area of one acre.

All small backpackers’ hotels were in the centre of the urban area, the Souk, in front of the western side of Shali. That area was known as Al-Raml [The Sand]; the name needs no explanation. The water table in this area was 0.50 metre below the surface level of the street. The interviews revealed that until 1990, a large part of that district was covered with water. However, in 1998, it was not very wet and only small area was covered with water. Moreover, the soil profile varies widely across the Siwa oasis; four types of soil were identified. The analysis indicated that the Siwans only sold the less promising land, in the north-west of the oasis, to outsiders. Furthermore, the current tribal

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50 Anoar Ahmed, 17 March 1998. Interview No.47
legislation extended to affect local residents, as in the case of an Egyptian family settled in Siwa some 27 years before.

We like it here and my retail shop is going well... it is only over the last few years that the Siwans have started to be different. Now they have doubt and are worried about everything... they want me to leave my shop because it is in the main Souk. (Nabeil M, 17 June 1997. Interview No. 7)

Thus on a global level, as Harvey explains, we live in an increasingly unstable and uncertain world. That makes us need more forcefully that notion of place as secure and stable. Threatened by globalization, the Siwans need a place they can call “home”, in which they can escape from an unpredictable world outside. One way is “perhaps by keeping out things and people whom we argue do not belong”. It is true that nobody in Siwa community can live their everyday life in complete isolation as it used to be in the past. The time-space compression has happened and they all have touched by globalization. This however does not necessarily mean that the traditional and cultural importance of place has been denied altogether.

The traditions and customs change more slowly than the built environment, however the norms and rules which control the relationships in the community have been unchanged in the recent past... There is no individual freedom within the community, if it will conflict with the traditions, (Ahmed El-Seanosy, 25 March 1998. Interview No. 58)

The Siwans' defensive strategy is a result of their experience of modernity. Perhaps this is a microcosm of what is happening globally. As Harvey argues, this implies the recent resurgence of nationalism, regionalism and localism on a global scale.

Summary
The chapter has developed an understanding of definition and representation of *public space* within the Siwan community. Section 2 illustrated the inherited layers of meaning of social space, through which the local identity manifested itself. Section 3 indicated the changes that occurred due to modern impact in the near past. Section 4 clarified local responses and strategies of resistance to such impacts. The investigation in this chapter raised a critical question: who are the principal figures in defining and representing qualities of place meaning and what values and interests do they develop their strategies of resistance in order to secure?

CHAPTER EIGHT

PHENOMENOLOGY OF BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The case of Siwa oasis demonstrates how a phenomenological approach can allow a deep exploration into the built environment as a lived-in phenomenon, and give insights into the impact of globalization and modernity on a remote desert community. It also reveals the strategies of resistance developed by that community. This approach resulted in the development of a conceptual framework that can promote the sustainability of the relationships between people and nature, as well as enhance the quality of built environment. The aim of this chapter is, therefore, to bring it all together, to draw out the case study findings, to interpret the phenomenon of the placelessness of modern built environment, through analogy with the findings of the case study, and to conclude with a consideration of the contribution of this thesis to the study, investigation and interpretation of the phenomenology of built environment.

1. The case study findings

The Siwan experience makes concrete the notion of dwelling as a basic character of human existence. It also expresses the symbolic meaning of the ontological relationships of space. The meaningful totality of the Siwan built environment, as an enclosure and yet opening to what is beyond, integrates the inner and outer horizons of a lived space. In the past, the Siwans had experienced the feeling of being inside, even in the open spaces of the old town, where the sky acts as the upper boundary:

   In the present, they have experienced being inside the gardens while the unlimited barren desert acts as the outside. They have been inside [existentially] as long as they are within the larger boundaries of the oasis. As such, Siwa has become “home” to the Siwans and its natural boundaries are real walls for it.¹

The case study of Siwa gives us an insight into what Heidegger terms “the sole summons...to bring dwelling to the fullness of its nature”.² It shows that our place in-the-world is that spatial space in which we invest meanings and create phenomenological relationships, so that it carries a particular “sense of place”.

A sense of place provides a foundation upon which the Siwans have built a great store of culturally related meanings in order to make sense of the natural and the built world in

which they live. Chapter five indicated that while the origins of their sense of place seem remote to us today, they continue to be reflected in everyday life experiences. By enhancing feelings of belonging and connectedness to place they secure themselves against alienation and placelessness.

This culture/place relationship is also expressed in the Siwans' tectonics, in both building materials and forms. As Chapter Four indicated, their buildings have a complex relationship with place through the use of local materials. Both natural and man-made environment appeared as a complementary unit in the old town of Shali, as well as in the vernacular architecture of Siwa town. The traditional houses were ingeniously and generously proportioned to accommodate both the formal rituals of hospitality and the privacy necessary for the family within the potentially harsh desert environment. Chapter Six showed that the provision of culturally related built environment has ensured the ontological security needed for the survival of the community. This is expressed in the development of social space, which enhances the community’s sense of identity and sense of place, as Chapter Seven demonstrated.

My research findings revealed that the application and implementation of modernity in Siwa over the last three decades have had great impact upon the quality of built environment as well as the socio-cultural aspects of Siwa. Yet both the government and local Siwans have come to realise that excessive modernisation is not beneficial. However, the official policies so far implemented do not seem to offer an alternative model for development, as a programme of modernisation involving the attraction of outside investment is still being adopted. It has merely slowed down the process. Failure to recognise this and to address the problem is leading to the likelihood that such a programme will face considerable resistance from the Siwans who, in following their tribal rules, will refuse to co-operate. If the Egyptian government genuinely wishes to undertake regional development in Siwa, then it must approach the community as a “phenomenon” that has the right to reveal itself as it is.

The three phase model in Figure 8-1 represents a theoretical understanding of the strategy of resistance grounded in and developed from the Siwan everyday life

4 See Chapter Seven.
experience. It expresses three adaptive phases of self-passiveness, self-reflectiveness and self-activeness. This model encapsulates the particular contribution of my thesis to the study of the phenomenology of built environment.

![Diagram of three adaptive phases]

**Figure 8-1.** The three phase model of approaching and developing a strategy against modernity as a phenomenon within the Siwan community

The first stage was "self-passiveness", in which Siwans became increasingly introverted and absorbed any modern idea or technology without awareness of its limitations or implications. The mobility of the labour force and the introduction of modern technology for water extraction and building materials brought huge impacts on the community, in terms of society, culture and ecosystem.

The second stage was "self-reflectiveness", in which the Siwan community reinterpreted cultural realities and consciously reflected upon their experiences. They recognised, through their everyday experience, the shortcomings of taking modernity for granted. Their experience highlighted the continued relevance of many traditional methods and techniques, both to "coexist" with modernity and even to remedy its impact.

The third stage is "self-activeness", by which Siwans have become more confident in their abilities, their culture and their place. Now they can interpret the relevance of any proposal on their own cultural grounds; they can also evaluate the potentials of
modernisation to impact on ecological and societal conditions. Perhaps the nature of tribal society offers an ontological trust enabling the community to better withstand the impact of modernity and globalization. This contrasts with the situation of the individual within the technocratic "rich" society of developed countries in general.

The understanding of the potentials of resistance within the traditional built environment that has been transformed through modern development is, therefore, grounded in the experience of everyday life. The following sub-sections sum up such understanding in three main points: how people, phenomenologically, perceive space; what strategies they take to counter the consequences of modernity, and how a concept of space/place-resistance may be drawn from the Siwan experience. This also offers an answer to the set of three questions proposed in this thesis for investigating the experience of built environment in the remote community of Siwa.

1.1. Space in the Siwa built environment

The Siwan experience has demonstrated how people perceive "space" and understand its invisible layers of meaning. Meaning inhabits "silence" as its depth and yet manifests its deep being. In this respect, authentic or creative place-making originates in silence. So "silence" in Merleau-Ponty terms is not the opposite of being. It is the invisible side of the visible, the other side of the being. Viewed from this perspective, it is impossible to perceive the visible "being" of built environment without the invisible "silence" of meaning. An element of built environment becomes articulated and assumes meaning through its inner horizon; while its outer horizon guarantees its identity. But, this inner horizon of an element cannot become a meaningful visible object without the surrounding elements becoming a horizon; the inner and outer horizons of things, elements and objects are, therefore, not fixed but always in a state of change.

The visible in this sense, as Merleau-Ponty explains, is not a set of objects whose being is fixed by the norms of objectivity or inserted in a pre-existing locus of space. Rather, it organises a space of places around itself and directs an invisible system of differential relationships. This system is made concrete in the construction of invisible layers of meaning, in natural, private and public spaces in the Siwan experience. Such qualitative

5 Merleau-Ponty, M., (1964:43-44).
6 Merleau-Ponty, M., (1968:100).
division has satisfied the provision and facilitation of a more comprehensive understanding of a visible being of built environment as a place of dwelling.

The Siwans inhabit built environment as their place “in-the-world”; this is understood in relation to the entire world-structure in space. The earth as homeland cannot be separated from the earth as a physical environment, as the topology of nature and its openness. To dwell upon the earth is also to dwell, as mortal, beneath the heavens and in sight of the divine greeting. Yet the relationship between natural, private and public spaces is a gathering of place for inhabitation. A meaningful totality of the Siwan built environment arises from what is present is intertwined with what is absent.

The gardens in the Siwan experience, for example, make concrete the phenomenological notion of being in contrast with the silence of the desert. They are not only a resource for productivity and income, but also a place where the Siwans can interact authentically with the two sides of nature, the present and the absent. The trees in the gardens can only show themselves and reveal their being with the presence of silence. It is clear in the following quotation that the interaction has been through silence.

I know the trees one by one, I know how they feel, I understand their problems... we talk together... many times I feel that I need to go back to the trees to ask their advice... this is true, we communicate. (Sheikh Omar Ragih, 25 June 1997. Interview No. 11)

Merleau-Ponty saw the empirical language as just a secondary language which is the result of the only authentic language, the language of silence. He explains language as differential relations, in which what makes a sign meaningful is not the sign itself but an invisible differentiation between itself and others. In the Siwan experience silence enhances understanding of natural processes, for example, the expansion of the salt lakes in winter and the rise of the water table after the introduction of artesian wells. It is then in the “silence” between signs and between things that meaning appears and the visibility of culture/place relationship gives meaning to space.

1.2. Strategies of resistance

Understanding the Siwans’ experience of dwelling in the desert leads to understanding of the Siwan strategies of resistance against modernity. Phenomenological relationships
have resulted in the development of a qualitative division of space into natural, private and public spaces. In contrast to the space of modern built environment, which could not account for all aspects of human existence and cultural needs, this division has sustained the Siwan culture and tradition. Recent experience exhibits the Siwans' wish to identify place with the cultural interpretation of space. Their strategies of resistance, therefore, are manifested in natural, private and public spaces.

Firstly in *natural space*, the Siwans recognised their particular problem by the dramatic increase in the subsoil water. At that time, asking for professional help was crucial. The scientific investigation has interpreted the problem as a result of the use of too many artesian wells. As a solution, it suggested two options: the decommissioning of some artesian wells and the installation of control valves to the rest, an expensive option which the majority of farmers could not follow for economic reasons. Instead, they reinterpreted a local idea to stop the running water. A piece of stone has always played the role of a water-gate, now it plays the same role by blocking the artesian well and stopping the flow of its water unless needed. Also, reclaimed areas are divided into small basins and a similar irrigation practice, a day every fortnight, is now performed. Some organisational differences, however, have been introduced such as pre-fabricated units for canals and ditches and a roster for irrigation among owners.

As a phenomenon, the springs have brought the place to its “being” and sustained its existence. This perception extended to saving the artesian wells not only as merely a natural resource, but also in terms of understanding the poetics of place around the well, in the form of a shaded meeting place. They simply reinterpreted traditional elements derived from their everyday life experience to remedy modern elements.

The Siwans' vision of both springs and artesian wells has become holistically integrated with the land. The renewal of the world, even through modern technology, must proceed from a saving of the land upon which they will always dwell. "To save" means to rescue the land from danger or ruin neither by exploiting nor exhausting it. The Siwans' strategy of resistance in natural space has developed an approach that may work only in the context of coexistence between modern scientific information and traditional knowledge. It creates actions and procedures that have been taken so that significant places, settings

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and cultural landscape may continue to sustain the cultural experience they have always provided.

Secondly in private space, the Siwans became aware of the consequences of the change in the built environment, which influenced their dwellings. In my visit to Siwa in 1997 I realised that many of the "new" units, which were introduced by the government public housing project during the 1980s and 1990s, were still unoccupied. This indicates a cultural struggle against the imported architecture, despite an apparent material need for shelter, as many of the poor families in Siwa living in the lower lands were suffering from the rise of the water level in the walls of their houses, and their frequent collapse. A new approach to architecture and urbanism has expressed the local strategy of resistance.

In architecture, instead of modern building materials being rejected utterly, concrete houses are adapted to solve the climatic problem. Now they keep the height of ceilings to four and half meters, instead of the three metre height common in concrete buildings following the standards of the International Style. They also place a number of windows fairly high with the openings placed on opposite sides to keep the inside cool enough.

In urbanism, the traditional Islamic division of urban space into public, semi-public and private spaces has been reinterpreted to fit with a traditional/modern lifestyle. The neo-vernacular style produced a new tripartite organisation consisting of public, semi-private and private spaces. This interpretation has also brought the Loggia as a new architectural element to the Siwan house. The loggia on the side facing the street works as a middle space between the public space and the private space of the house. The loggia also works as a climatic modifier. As it is constructed on the western side of the marboua, it gives good shade, keeps the sun away from the wall and makes the room cool in the evening. This new strategy is relevant for dwellings in both urban and suburban settings.

The potential of the place-form helped the neo-vernacular style in the suburb dwellings to further organise space as: public, semi-public, semi-private and private spaces; which encouraged the Siwans to inhabit new settlements, like that of Abou-Shrouf. They have also applied some traditional elements such as the open courtyards and the traditional recycling of human refuse. The suburbs provide an opportunity to sustain culture and improved quality of life as they reveal place identity. This is manifested in the tactile quality of the new houses, obtained by non-plastered walls, unpaved passageways and
earth patios. The concern for tectonic forms is expressed in the austere facades and the massive blank walls with small windows, despite the use of structural building.

The Siwan experience revealed that dwelling, as a phenomenon, indicates greater value than just shelter. Contemporary built environment in Siwa seems more related to humans' tactile rather than visual sense. Consequently, its culturally adopted architecture is not a matter of visual style but of integration of culture, social order and local conditions. Yet many significant traditional elements, such as the four wing window, traditional doors and palm trunk roofing, have been overlooked. Adaptive strategies have not reached a communal application within the community, like old traditions.

Thirdly in public space, the Siwans assert that tribal rules are responsible for keeping the community's cohesion and enhancing their sense of belonging. The power of tribal rules, and the ultimate respect for their judgement in interactions, is understood as a way to facilitate everyday life. Meanwhile, it ensures the well-being of both the individual and the community. This conceptualisation of the self-rule system explains the mechanisms of a strategy of social resistance within the Siwan community. New tribal legislation, however, expresses such a strategy, as it gives the people of Siwan tribes more right in and to the place than the "outsiders". It restricts selling the land to outsiders.

Their strategy for public space integrates meeting places into the fabric of the new urban areas. They were perceived as bringing local identity to those locales. It also enhances meeting places in shaded settings beside artesian wells; ensuring a balance between the noisy, busy places in town and the silent, quiet places in suburbs.

The local strategy has also been extended to deal with the impact of tourism activities in the oasis. Its concept is to overcome the opposition between a "false tradition" for external consumption, and a "false modernity" for internal use. According to its legislation, all small backpackers' hotels are in the centre of the urban area, which is known as the Sand. Physical interaction between tourists and local community is, therefore, limited. Moreover, the Siwans sold only the less promising land for agricultural use, in the north-west of the oasis, to outsiders.

11 See Chapter Seven.
The Siwans have experienced modernity and now they trust in their cultural realities to enhance their understanding in dealing with globalization, with its ever-expanding impacts of media and systems of communication. Perhaps their strategy of resistance, in natural, private and public spaces, is a microcosm of what is happening globally. The Siwans have become self-aware, and they express this in their strategies towards their place, their built environment and other people.

1.3. Space/place-resistance

The conclusions of the analysis of the case study in chapters five, six and seven indicated that many aspects of contemporary development in Siwa do not emerge only from the historical, local experience. My research findings indicated that evidence of external impacts were salient in the Siwan experience, which makes the case of Siwa a concrete example of a strategy of critical regionalism. Yet as a place, Siwa can be interpreted as the location of particular sets of intersecting social relations and intersecting activity spaces. These are described as both local and those stretched-out internationally. This phenomenon of a place as a unique mixture is also described as a space in which lines of global interactions intersect over time. However, this quality of place is not a new phenomenon for Siwa, since it had been a stopover many times in its history. It is evident that Siwa was always open and hybrid. The enclosure of its original town Shali and the identity of place are themselves the product and result of connections and interactions with the beyond, with other people and places.

In the past, as Chapter Four illustrated, the Siwans had applied distinctive features of the urban context of Cairo to their new urban extensions since 1820. However, these features were re-evaluated in order to extract an appropriate urban setting that is grounded in the identity of place. The freedom of choice of alien, exotic forms was not understood as something absolute but as the recovery of origins, which became no longer sufficient. In the present, their strategy of resistance has also followed the same concept, as it adopted local ideas (e.g. a piece of stone as a lock) and exotic ideas (e.g. the pergola) to mediate between contemporary needs. Only in this way was the mediation adequate to resist the devaluation of values, and yet also the domination of the placelessness of the desert. Siwa has always been part of, and was thus created by, a wide set of social and cultural relations, as Figure 8-2 illustrates.

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The reciprocal local/global feedback arrow diagram shows that "experience" is not a detachable phenomenon. Rather, it is interactive and interrelated with the experiences of others, whether individuals or communities. Accordingly neither the individual nor the community can claim that they are victims of the global experience, as they are all in the same stage of being effective in and affected by the feedback process. This conceptualisation of the individual/community/universal relationship is more rational than the abstracted form which is offered by the modern interpretation of space. Evidence in the Siwan community illustrates the success of the historical development of social space as shown in Chapter Seven. This development has manifested the reciprocity of experiences in a feedback process. As well, it enhances the potentials of space/place-resistance to counter unfavourable global experiences in everyday life. This may generate an explanation of a strategy of critical regionalism and advise how the contemporary built environment can withstand the increasingly pressuring waves of globalization.

2. Analogical interpretation
The primary purpose of this thesis is to explain what it was that caused the "placelessness" of modern humans within modern built environment. Chapter One questioned whether the problem of dwelling faced by modern humans, in a placeless, worldless and timeless context, can be usefully understood as if it were an experience of inhabiting the "desert". The desert is barren, boundless and monotonous. It extends as a manifestation of unlimited space, in unfixed time. The investigation of the Siwan experience revealed that to dwell in the desert puts humans face-to-face with the challenge of placelessness, in a physical as well as psychological sense.
Investigating a phenomenon such as "placelessness" within the framework of understanding offered by phenomenology raised many questions both theoretically and methodologically. I found that using the exploratory function of "analogy" was helpful in interpreting the case study. My realisation of the relevance of the history of a remote desert community was, therefore, no arbitrary act of cognition, but was promoted by the phenomena I sought to explain. The cognitive transfer I have evolved between situations related by analogy was derived from Aristotle, who wrote,

The transference...on grounds of analogy...is possible wherever there are four terms so related that the second (B) is to the first (A) as the fourth (D) to the third (C), for one may then metaphorically put D in lieu of B and B in lieu of D.\(^\text{14}\)

Analogy in this respect constituted a legitimate method of enquiry into the phenomenology of built environment. I used an analogy between:

- [the modern built environment (A) / the modern human (B)]
- and
- [the desert (C) / the Siwan community (D)]

That is to say I have asked, does the experience of the Siwan community in creating a place in the desert offer any insights into the contemporary challenge of dwelling in the placeless modern world? Yet a note of caution is needed; while I was promoting the use of analogical interpretation, I was also aware of its limitations. In using analogy, one should be careful of both the differences and relatedness between the two halves of the analogy. As well, the use of analogy here is not intended to produce a universal conceptualisation. From a postmodern standpoint, I can not say that the so-called modern human is really inhabiting the desert or that the modern built environment has the natural capacity of the significant presence of the desert. However, in seeking advanced knowledge about contemporary humans a process of analogy may identify and elucidate some common issues. For example, the enhanced significance of the particularity of each human experience emphasised in postmodern critiques accords with the investigation of a single, rich and deep case study. I have therefore argued that I can interpret the central phenomenon of placelessness by the transfer of understanding between analogous situations. The function and limitations of analogy should be noted,

then, when I use the three phases of self-adjustment within the Siwan community in analogy with the contemporary situation of the individual within a postmodern society.

To return to the original analogy between modern humans and the experience of dwelling in the desert, what we find then is that modernity, with its characteristics of mobility and detachment, has caused modern humans to inhabit built environment in a kind of "shallow" dwelling which the space of modern architecture has provided. The phenomenology of the built environment of Siwa enhances our understanding of the way in which the community could establish a settlement within the placelessness of the desert that allowed a "deep" dwelling by recognising the qualities of existential space.

To achieve meaningful totality in modern built environment, we need to revive the concept of existential space. An existential space fulfils a double action: identifying the individual's spatial relations which form an essential part of his or her existence, and allowing describable spatial aspects of everyday life to form communal identity. The elements of existential space are made manifest in this thesis on natural, private and public levels.

These three qualitative layers of space, within the Siwan community, have provided a sense of deep dwelling that is based upon an ontological security within a framework of culture and belief. In contrast, the absence of meaningful and mythical dimensions in the space of modern built environment never allowed modern humans to anchor their "being" in a sense of deep dwelling. What the theory of being implies, as Merleau-Ponty explains, is that things are meaningful to the extent that they are attached to "silence". I have suggested earlier that "silence" is the invisible side of space, in which we invest meanings. As such, built environment degenerates into a "shallow being", a meaningless being, once it expresses only its "objectivity". When only what is visible is seen, what is present is present, that built environment possesses a "shallow being"; thus it allows only a "shallow dwelling" for its inhabitants. The loss of a sense of ontological depth converts both built environment and the individual into a state of meaninglessness and placelessness.

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15 See footnote 43, page 51.
The problem of modern built environment is that it reduces the representation of the three qualitative layers of space into a universal, open space. This kind of space might have succeeded in liberating architecture from heavy architectonic masses and agriculture from considerations of cultural landscape. But it demolishes a people’s sense of being in-the-world. The individual is situated in the abstract vacuum of Euclidean space, which is devoid of positive tactile qualities. The modernist aim was to connect the individual to the universal, without the help of the pre-established order, i.e., of culture and belief. Modern built environment has employed various devices to create a kind of virtual space. For example, the use of large windows or openings in walls gives full vision of the outside world. The landscape as such works as a huge screen, supported by its picturesque qualities. Another example is the shifting of walls from being enclosing boundaries to being objects freely standing in an open space. Such characterisation of space deprives architecture of its essence as a context of ontological security grounded in the definition of outside/inside relationships.

The experience of inhabiting virtual space created by modern built environment is expressed in the development of the International Style when too much attention is given to the outside space. This has caused the inside space to become empty, yet meaningless; the meaning of outside space is defined by the degree to which it is corporate to inside space. As well, this causes the individual’s context to be abstracted and unrelated to “lived” experience. The dissolution of tactile qualities implies an individual’s context unrelated to the senses. This contrasts with a strategy of critical regionalism which upholds the tactile as an essential quality of building: “lived” experience is in essence the determining of tactile qualities.

The experience of dwelling for modern humans may be better understood by transferring, by analogy, the concepts of the Siwan experience. By applying the three phase model, we find that the first phase, of self-passiveness, is for the modern human expressed in a sequence of experiences. At the early stage, we have what historians refer to as the “Enlightenment” era. Such enlightenment, as Frampton argues, has brought the modern human to “a situation when he begins to be as alienated from his own production [of

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built environment] as from the natural world". This stage was characterised in the Western, and also, to some extent, in the non-western world, by a period of absorbing uncritically new modern technologies and systems of operation. This was expressed in the deterioration of natural, urban and social life, which produced, by the mid-twentieth century, a series of global crises of ecological, urban and social conditions. This stage has alerted us as to the need for a careful examination of Western unsustainable trajectories.

This examination produced the second phase of self-reflectiveness, generally referred to as the post-modern condition, in which a multiplicity of approaches prevailed, forming an era of postmodernism. The review of contemporary theories and approaches in Chapter Two was informative as to what trends may continue into the future. Clearly, these would adopt socio-cultural and inter-disciplinary approaches to counter the hegemony of globalization. Yet the current state of rapid and noisy life prevents the modern human from being able to recall silence, a prerequisite to see the signs.

In comparison with Siwa, modern humanity has passed the self-passiveness phase of the 19th century. Yet it is perhaps still at the second stage of a self-reflectiveness phase during the 20th century. A hoped-for self-activeness phase may reveal itself at the threshold of the millennium. This phase will certainly express the self-awareness of future humanity, who perhaps will operate through an authentic understanding of a deep sense of ecology, dwelling and being in-the-world. By analogy, the Siwan experience over three decades expresses the global experience of modern humans over three centuries, and can inform localities as to how to adopt a strategy of resistance against modernity.

Potentials of a strategy of critical regionalism must be grounded in everyday life experiences and underpinned by an understanding of the qualitative structure of existential space. Thus its agenda can include a deep ecological sense of understanding nature while developing natural space, a deep sense of dwelling when dealing with building forms and materials in order to develop private space and a deep sense of the significance of socio-cultural diversity when developing public space. "The point is not to return to a more simple past, but to dwell better in what we are given". The need for a built environment rooted in place can be seen as a reaction against the increasingly dominating universal placelessness, which deprives our surroundings of their significance.

as a cultural landscape. The Siwan experience makes concrete this potential to withstand the impact of modernity upon the quality of built environment.

3. Conclusion and reflections

This thesis began with a single quotation from Norberg-Schulz (see p.1): the situation of the modern human in a "worldless" context resulted in a loss of identity, sense of community and experience of life as meaningless; as a consequence the modern human "becomes 'homeless' because he does not any longer belong to a meaningful totality".22 Thus the term "world" in the context of this thesis has been understood not only as a description of "entities": mountains, lakes, houses, people, activities, vegetation and the like, but also as a phenomenological description as a "place" of dwelling. This is the essence of understanding the world as the giver of identity, sense of community and sense of being. The world as a place is a "home" that can allow a "meaningful totality" for humans through their being in-the-world. A "worldless" context therefore means a "placeless" context.

"World" has also been taken ontologically and existentially to mean a horizon of everyday involvement and participation, which is humans' "closest" way of being in the world. In this respect "world" is an extended space/place not only in the scientific meaning of the term but also in the ontological conception of spatiality as an intertwining of presence and absence. This is the referential totality within which space/place is encountered. As such, spatiality is a property of being in the world, and also a characterisation of a "region".23 The region is the necessary condition for the determining of relations between places, things and people.24

Spatiality, in-the-world and place are interrelated in a "meaningful totality" which underpins people's perception of space. Thus the problem arose from the purely scientific interpretation of space as a pure extension of the abstracted form of entities. This interpretation facilitated the call for the individual/universal relationship in space, and yet developed the concept of the universal, open space of modern architecture as earlier discussed in this chapter. This technological, parametric space does not allow the

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24 Heidegger's example of the "bridge" is a concrete explanation of the gathering of place by a region in a phenomenological sense.
qualitative character of a region, as the gathering of places; instead, it offers a placeless context in which humans are only one defined entity among others.

The analytical chapters demonstrated an example of how people construct their built environment on a conceptual framework drawn from their perception of "space". People perceive space as layers of meaning which inhabit an invisible metaphysical realm. These meanings are based upon a strong foundation of the collective experience of social order.\textsuperscript{25} What makes a social order meaningful, and gives it a sustainable capacity, is its creativity in adapting everyday life to fit into the right layer of its meaningful space. The same can be said for a meaningful built environment, which may also adapt itself to everyday life needs so as to fit into the right layer of its historically, culturally and environmentally responsive space. Thus it can have the capacity to generate meaningful totality and to sustain culture.

My conclusion is that if the designers of modern built environment wish to overcome the state of placelessness and meaninglessness of their products, then they must approach built environment as a phenomenon that has its grounds in the experience of everyday life, and manifests its being in the layers of meaning in natural, private and public spaces.

3.1. Implications of the case study

A genuine conception of space enhances understanding of the relationship between people and nature in remote communities. My study has shown that an holistic approach to development in Siwa must begin with an exploration of the Siwan everyday life relative to ecological requirements, culture and belief system. This framework of understanding allows a strategy of critical regionalism to be grounded in place. Accordingly, a development in Siwa may result in a built environment which is contemporary in appearance, yet historically, culturally and environmentally responsive and specific.

In Siwa, a holistic approach of a contemporary development may portray the following: the gardens surround the urban areas which are merged into the landscape and appear as a part of it.\textsuperscript{26} Natural space is represented in the qualities of forms and materials, such as

weight and hardness, as well as in the prevailing conditions of natural processes and climatic phenomena. Each house needs to have indoor or outdoor courtyards. Openings need to be designed to relate to sun and natural ventilation, yet to carry a fingerprint of the local vernacular (e.g. four-wing windows in Siwa). Private space expresses the human character and socio-cultural properties. Public space refers to a pre-established order of culture and belief, which can be understood only in relation to the region. Both house and garden have the power to manifest their outer horizons, physically as well as in the mind’s eye, in contrast to the inner horizon of the desert around them. This would I believe appear as a empathetic conceptual framework for a meaningful built environment particular to Siwa.

3.2. Implications for theory and practice

For my theoretical framework, I have relied on a phenomenological account to enhance understanding of built environment. I have found that the phenomenology of built environment is to be grounded in an understanding of its “meaning”; the fundamental nature of meaning lies in creativity. Authentic expression is a creative act, that is, the act of manifesting meaning. Thus it lies in the view of architectural meaning as produced and evolved from the intertwining of presence and absence, and yet manifests the inner and outer horizons of things as meaningful. A communicative theory of design, however, does not evolve from creativity, as it is already expresses transmitted, established architectural meanings.

In an attempt to apply this theory in practice, we need to view an authentic designer as subjective, permanently bound up with the world in a lived experience and fundamentally creative in nature. This view is impossible to achieve within the already established way of objectivity and rational systems of thinking of the modern world. A key point to call such an authentic designer to action is to allow his or her inner horizon to be manifested. Such manifestation can suspend the frame of reference, of objectivity and rational systems, allowing and activating his or her creative nature.

My suggestion is to activate and polarise this creative act by bringing forth “silence”. Yet silence dwells in a pre-theoretical, pre-established form of rationality. As such its language is prior to the spoken language and its communicative power is more

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authentic. It is not formed by the transmitted meanings of the spoken language. Viewed from this perspective, silence can produce authentic expressions, thus achieving creativity in design. Furthermore, silence is a prerequisite for a stage of self-reflectiveness in the three phase model developed in this chapter.

The three phase model may help in understanding and interpreting the professionals' situation at present, and gives a clue to the future. Designers of built environment are now facing a challenge, as people are aware of the limitations of the modern theory of design and look to professionals for action. Taking a step forward towards a phase of self-activeness among professionals would be the way to produce "meaningful" built environment. The ability to be socio-culturally aware and inter-disciplinary is necessary for a theory of environmental design.

Architects and landscape architects as place-makers are in a unique position to revive people's faith in their culture. If they show what is significant in local forms and the tactile qualities of the region and use or implement them in their designs, the people would at once begin to reconsider their own identity with pride. It is important that this implementation involves elements and techniques of which the local people have full knowledge and mastery. Thus they are stimulated to use and develop local forms.

The three phase model may also be applied to the critique of the development of built environment in a specific context, in terms of whether it is developing from passive to reflective and then to active. First, we can evaluate the process of development according to its compliance with different stages of the model according to the time-frame allowed. Second, we can evaluate the approach of development. Some approaches however still operate within the stage of self-passiveness offered in the 19th century. The more the decision-makers are aware of the phases of the model the clearer the insight gained from the experience of any phenomenon.

The study of built environment is a growing multi-disciplinary field, as it involves architectural disciplines (i.e. architecture, town planning, landscape architecture and urban design), as well as resource management, cultural and human geography, and social and psychological sciences. Either at the undergraduate or post-graduate levels,

the introduction of a phenomenological approach contributes significantly to empower and enhance students’ ability to understand the layering of meaning, both in design concepts and environmental management processes.

A framework for responsive design theory in a teaching programme may also be enhanced by the three-stages of self-adjustment. The process of design development takes a three-stage sequence. Firstly, a self-passiveness stage, in which students absorb as much information as they can about the specific needs of the project, but without formulating ideas within a preconceived theoretical structure. Field trip experiences and design “for the sake of a real community” are invaluable inspirations for students at this stage.29

Secondly, in a self-reflectiveness stage, they reflect what is identified as significant in the collected information and recall their subjectivity to the task of relevant interpretation according to a collective background of knowledge and expertise. Students can perceive and relate themselves to different phenomena more readily when they reflect on their own lived experiences. They can also understand the experiences of other people, creatures, cultures, environments and places. It is essential for them at this stage to learn how to bring forth “silence”, which can be interpreted as an interaction with a white sheet of paper to draw out a meaningful differentiation between signs so as to let meaning appear. Thirdly, a self-activeness stage, in which a revealing of the unique phenomenal qualities of place evoke students’ creativity to produce a meaningful design.

Many questions, however, have been raised over the course of this research concerning philosophical and theoretical validation; thus further investigation is needed to test the same phenomenon in different cultural contexts. Furthermore, this study would not have been possible without the opportunity for a long-term field study being available. Support is needed for the establishment of well designed long-term phenomenological investigations, which allow delving into various phenomena at a deeper level.

3.3. Significance of the study
Although this study focused upon a single case of the Siwa oasis, the insights gained extend well beyond its locality. What I have tried to show throughout is the significance

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29 See for example the product of the third year students of Resource Management, Lincoln University, in the Wild Notes 1998.
of the built environment in remote communities for the phenomenological relationships between people and nature. Analysis of the Siwan built environment shows that place-making represents the essence of dwelling.

The study revealed that current adoptions within Siwa represent a further phase of its historical development, rather than a new phenomenon. This concept underpins the strategy of resistance within the traditional built environment of Siwa, in the way it counters the impact of modernity and its transformative effects. However, I believe that the particular contribution of my study has been to show that a theory of critical regionalism is grounded in everyday life experiences and their phenomenological representation in built environment.

The study demonstrated how the phenomenological approach, which is developed through the theoretical and methodological framework of this thesis, is applied in the field as a framework to investigate qualitatively the relationship between people and nature. This approach can contribute to the emergence of a phenomenological theory of environmental management and design. Furthermore, it has immediate implications for the case study of Siwa, as well as for professional practice, teaching and future research in environmental design disciplines.

You must start right from the beginning, letting your new buildings grow from the daily lives of the people who will live in them...mindful of the trees and the crops that will grow there, respectful to the skyline and humble before the seasons. There must be neither faked tradition nor faked modernity, but...[a built environment] that will be the visible and permanent expression of the character of the community.\(^{30}\)

APPENDIX ONE

My interviewees approved the recording of their interviews and the use of their real names, only female and children interviewees are anonymously refereed to in the text.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Interviewee background</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Interview Date &amp; No.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Official and non-Siwan interviewees</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Tahoun A.</td>
<td>President of Siwa City Council</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>25 May 1997. No.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr M. Abdel Aziz</td>
<td>Owner of tourist resort</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>26 May 1997. No.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nabeil, M.</td>
<td>Owner of a tourist goods shop</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>17 June 1997. No.7</td>
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<td><strong>Group interview [GI]</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Miss M Ahmed</td>
<td>Secretary of the Cultural Centre</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>27 February 1998. No.24</td>
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<td>Mr M. Moustafa</td>
<td>Hotel Manager</td>
<td>38</td>
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<td>Miss Mona</td>
<td>Trainer in the Cultural Centre</td>
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<td>Miss Aisia</td>
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<td>Ibrahim Abdel Allah</td>
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<td><strong>E. Shaker</strong></td>
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REFERENCES


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