CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION
1.1 Background of study

The dome of the rock (Fig. 1-1), a Mina’I ware bowl (Fig. 1-2), a silk carpet (Fig. 1-3), The Taj Mahal
(Fig. 1-4) are just but a few examples of Islamic art and architecture. Muslims comprise nearly one
quarter of the world’s population. At the beginning of the twenty first century Islam is the world
fastest growing religion. It has spread beyond the traditional heartland of Islam in the near East
and West Asia, North Africa to South East Asia and Sub Saharan Africa. Islamic art and
architecture spans 1300 years of history and has incredible geographic diversity.

Architecture is an art form and one of the most important features of Islamic art. It is the
hallmark of Islamic art tradition. The superiority of the Muslims in the field of architecture
requires no commentary for this art form still inspires the non-Islamic artists and evokes the
admiration of modern world architecture.

There are those who view Islamic art and architecture as their heritage and those who imagine it
as exotic, mysterious and aesthetically curious, carrying the whiff of far distant lands. Islamic
architecture is unique in its current form born of a unique synthesis of diverse cultures in
different countries.
1.1.1 Definition of Islamic architecture

The phrase Islamic architecture has been argued to be a useful but artificial concept, a modern concept created by art historians in the 19th century to categorize and study the material first produced under the Islamic peoples that emerged from Arabia in the 17th century. Ernst Grube defined Islamic architecture as that which displays a set of architectural and spatial features, such as introspection, that are inherent in Islam as a cultural phenomenon. Oleg Grabar argued that Islamic architecture is the architecture built by Muslims, for Muslims, in an Islamic country or in places where Muslims have an opportunity to express cultural independence in.

I instead opted for the definition whereby Islamic architecture refers to all of the arts that were produced in the lands where Islam was the dominant religion/ the religion of those who ruled/ areas where the religion of Islam had an impact on the culture of the people. It is not used merely to describe religious art and architecture, instead sought unity in culturally shared approaches to aesthetics and spatial sensitivity crossing all denominational, ethnic and national boundaries within the greater Islamic world and resulted in similar architectural expressions. It encompasses the works created by Muslim artists for a patron of any faith living in the Islamic lands, in fact much of Islamic art and architecture was and still is created through a synthesis of local traditions and more global ideas.
1.1.2 Location

The Islamic world spans from its traditional heartland of Islam in the near East and West Asia, North Africa to Southeast Asia and Subsaharan Africa. In the contemporary world Islam exists in Asia, Africa and Europe, however other Islam cultures have also emerged in countries throughout the world where muslims constitute the minority segments of the population (Fig. 1-5).

**Africa:** North African countries such as Morroco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt.

- North east African countries; Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Djibouti.
- Eastern African countries; Kenya, Tanzania, Sudan.
- West African countries; Mali, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Burkina faso,
  Sierra leone, Niger and Nigeria.

**Asia:** Central Asia; Kazakhastan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkemistan, Uzbekistan, Xinjiang

- Southwest Asia; Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Oman, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Turkey
  Cyprus and Iran.
- Southeast Asia; Indonesia, Brunei and Malaysia

**Europe:** Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo.

**Russia:** North Caucasus, Volga region and Ukraine.

In the Islamic world of architecture there are nine main traditions. The major ones include: Arabian, Iranian, Turkish, Indian and Pakistan. The minor ones include: West African, East African, Indonesian and Chinese.
Fig. 1-5 Map showing world Muslim population.

1.1.3 Why Islamic architecture

Although the majority of new projects in various countries of the Islamic world require designers to respect or adapt the principles of Islamic architecture, questions still abound in academia and in the world of practice about whether there is an Islamic architecture or not in the first place. Some of those who doubt the validity of the term Islamic architecture raise the following rhetorical challenge:

“What is Christian about European architecture?” and the ready and correct answer is usually “Very little except for the architecture of churches”. The parallel conclusion for Islamic architecture is Mosque architecture.

But if we change the tense in the first question and ask: “What was Christian about European architecture?” The answer is bound to be “a lot”. Medieval christianity indeed heavily contributed in shaping not only faith and rituals but also various patterns of life in Europe. Cultural, social and political attributes, werepredicated on religion, among other factors, just as they were in Islamic world. Things began to change first with the rise of enlightnment values, not because European architecture rejected the burdensome influence of religion but because European polity, mores and even epistemology broke away from christianity.

Architecture predictably absorbed these cultural transformations and began to reflect the new secularism, first in consiously returning to classical, pre christian forms and later in responding to the aesthetics and civic values of the enlightenment and then the industrial revolution with its accelerated technological progress.
The Islamic world, on the other hand, never experienced a total break with religion, nor did it undergo an enlightenment or an industrial revolution of its own. Its experience of secular modernism was late, imported wholesale from Europe at the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century and lacked the local, intellectual roots that would have ensured its full and easy adoption. Majority of thinkers in the Islamic world resisted secular modernism, some rejected it outright, but many worked hard at adapting it through the prism of religion.

Islam came out of its encounter with modernism changed but not defeated. It has remained a major force not only indicating ethics and beliefs of Muslims today, but also in shaping their social relations, their collective polity and imaginary, even if it’s adherents had to adapt modern means and methods. Religious motives, interpretations and inhibitions still transpire in the Islamic world in many aspects of modern life that have gone totally secular in the west.

**1.2 Problem statement**

Two generations ago, scholars viewed Islamic architecture as a tradition of the past that had ceased to be creative (Westernization, Modernization): yet no other methodological perspective was developed enough to accommodate its particular trajectory or internal cohesiveness while accounting for its regional, ethnic or national diversity. Scholars particularly in the late twentieth century have questioned the term Islamic architecture instead opt for regional or dynastic categories such as Maghribi (North Africa) or Mamluk (Egyptian and Syrian), while these terms can be useful they overlook the common features that run through much of the art and architecture created in the lands of Islam. This research paper focusses on the common features that run through many of the regional categories within the broad rubric of Islamic architecture, the distinct hierarchy of forms and themes, which could then applied and fused with the modern ways of design and construction.
1.3 Research Objectives

- To identify and document the diverse changes in Islamic architecture.
- To identify the salient features and principals of Islamic architecture.
- To analyze this features and principals and extract design concepts and principals that could be anchored and integrated with contemporary thinking and issues in architecture.

1.4 Significance of study

In architecture in the Islamic world, the battle about modernity is a phenomenon. It is important to reflect one’s time but it is difficult to preserve the identity of the Islamic world, as architects it is our role to remind that a building belongs to the specific land, which is not free, or completely bare, there’s a huge historic and geographic legacy also linked to religion and the general culture. Islam is not only a religion but a way of life, Islam fostered the development of a distinctive culture with its own unique artistic language that is reflected in Islamic architecture. Culture is always a link between different civilizations: it may be the first way of understanding each other through the expressions of a certain abstraction.

The built form is central to any community’s way of life, while it is easy to accommodate changes in environment and climate, it has been a challenge for architects to incorporate the influence of culture in architectural design. Architecture for the people needs to respond to these social cultural aspects of the built form in modern day architecture and building design.

This research thesis will help to increase the understanding of how architecture participates and engages with culture, to what extent architecture is a factor of culture.
1.5 Research questions

- What are the principles of Islamic architecture?
- What are the similarities and differences of the different regional categories of Islamic architecture?
- What are the factors that are responsible for the differences and similarities in Islamic architecture?
- What are the design concepts and values that can be extracted from Islamic architecture, and be incorporated into contemporary architecture?

1.6 Scope and Limitation of study

Due to limitations of time allowed for this research the author will rely on the work of other researchers through the review of both published and unpublished material to establish pre-existing as well as existing conditions of the Islamic world, to illustrate the socio-cultural history and values of the place and to illustrate the impact after influx of Islam, on the physical environment of the various regions.

Due to limited resources this research paper will limit itself to case studies of buildings influenced by Islamic architecture in East Africa a minor tradition in Islamic world of architecture, the major cities of Kenya (Nairobi and Mombasa).

Finally the author will attempt to proffer an intellectual and creative response to this difficult phenomenon. To demonstrate that a methodological perspective can be developed enough to accommodate the particular trajectory of Islamic architecture while accounting for its regional, ethnic or national diversity, without comprising on the identity of the Islamic world. To demonstrate that East Africa can benefit from the continuous presence of Islam and its dynamic theme.
1.7 Structure of research thesis

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTIONS
This introduces the reader to the research topic by giving the background Information about the research topic. It also gives the statement of the Problem, the study objectives of the study, its relevance and justifications and the scope the author is limiting him/herself to, given the complex nature of this subject matter.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW
This chapter looks at the relevant information from the published and unpublished materials. These include books, journals, articles, reports, newspaper reviews and thesis.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
This chapter will employ varied methods of research that have been used to help answers the research questions.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS
This chapter looks at synthesis of the collected data with the aim of answering the objectives of the study.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS
The chapter gives the summary of the conclusions reached by the author as well as his/her recommendations based on the facts informing his studies and research.