

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to go beyond the static analysis of typological classification or the purely morphological approach, I have aimed at developing a conceptual system of analysis which treats the various aspects of the community (kinship relations, gender segregation, land tenure, and belief systems) and examines their relationship to the built environment. In this work, I adopt a holistic approach whereby a hierarchy of socio-cultural factors are seen as determinants in ordering the built environment. It is argued that different environmental levels were governed by different variables. The complexity of interactions of many variables often made the selection of one determinant a difficult task. For example at the quarter level (el-harah) it was kinship more than any other factor that determined the formation of clan-based domains. However, kinship was almost certainly not the determining factor in shaping the built environment at the settlement level where a concentration of ecological and putative factors had the upper hand.

I therefore reject both the formalistic approach which sees vernacular architecture as objects d'art isolated from a specific cultural context and the approach which puts undue emphasis on the criticality of the physical aspects of architecture (need for shelter, climate, material, technology, etc.). The former is best exemplified in the work of B. Rudofsky, Architecture without Architects (1964), and the latter in F. Rugette, Architecture in Lebanon (1974). Such approaches have failed in my view to explain how a built form occurs and why it has a particular shape or pattern of organisation. The physical approach also underrates the 'significance' or 'meaning' that buildings or places come to acquire. It ignores the relation between a people's world view, the ordering of their lives, and consequently the ordering of their environment. Furthermore this study is neither chronological nor classificatory in nature.

The thesis deals with spaces at a level beyond their utilitarian usages or their technological constraints, at a level which allows for symbolic interpretations, and aiming at observing the built