

## **The Role Played by the Material World in the Creation and Maintenance of Memory**

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### **Introduction:**

The Landscape and buildings around us play an important role in our perception the environment around us. Landscape and its components form the background for all human daily activities, and are the space in which people's practices and interactions take place. People practices are considerable seen as an indicator of people's identity.

The construction of public memories and identity through the materiality of landscape and architecture have been the focus of substantial recent research, provoking discussion from both anthropological and archaeological perspectives.

during last few decades, several Arab countries have been experiencing remarkable development in urban expansion, in particular , the Gulf countries. It is unmistakable to notice western trends in architecture style. Many outlandish architecture started to be landmarks for traditional Gulf cities. These signs would construct alien cumulative memories and would have a negative effect on local identity.

The current paper will discuss the role of landscape and buildings, as affective material participants in the expression of authenticity. Taking Cairo, the capital of Egypt, as the first example for a prominent Arab city to be discussed, where several vivid historical symbols were invested to inspire inhabitants. The second example is Doha, the capital of Qatar, as a different example for modern gulf community where a developed vision was set to expand the global concepts of heritage and culture in the region. This paper will discuss the power of political vision and its role in maintaining local memories, and therefore preserving the national identity. The paper will examine how heritage can be manipulated in order to reform the public identity.

**Key words:** Maintenance of Memory – Creating the Memory – Local identity – Materiality of Culture

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**Creating a public memory:**

“Historical archaeologists interested in how past landscapes express and shape social memory have examined its role in the creation, retention, and refashioning of individual and group identities in the past and the maintenance of local, regional, and national loyalties” (Heath & Lee 2001:1354).

Since 1980's, studies have been discussing the relationship between landscape and maintaining the memory. It had been discussed how landscape can shape social memories, and landscape role in creating nations' identity. Ingold discusses the role of landscape as narrator for story, telling about human activities that had been taken a place in landscape. Where people” had left there something of themselves”. (Ingold 1993:157)

Ingold refuses to trivial the efficiency of landscape just to be like a ‘picture in the imagination’. He defines landscape as world for people to live in, to inhabit, and to practice their daily paths and connections. Whilst Meinig defines landscape ‘it is not identical to the nature nor against the nature. landscape is domain of human dwellings, which becomes part of them as they are part of the landscape, both are interacting together with all of their components. (Heath 2010:1360)

People have their own impact on landscape. Where community practices and relationships leave people's prints on. Hence, it is important here to understand that habitus is the relationship between the unconscious and the physical world, including landscape. Landscape is the place where we were taught many instructions, different patterns and sittings . Social actors actively know how people act with the existing structure or habitus (Pierre 1977: 38) .

**Evoking the past:**

Halbwachs, opposed that memories are the person's individual consequence. He argues that memories are process of collecting frameworks. These frameworks are gained from society, recalled and allocated socially. (Halbwachs1992:43). Halbwachs cites, that every collective memory recaptures the past, unfolds it, and then memory produces a pulse for us, in order to understand the past by understanding how it was. These steps are preserved in the surrounding materials and objects, which are occupying the space of landscape.

**Investing material culture in constructing memories:**

I agree with Gombrich's belief in adopting Platonic tradition for explaining the relationship between memory and objects. Gombrich believes that identity can be predicted and prefigured in the same way to origins. That demands to repeat the form of the materials and objects in the new context. He demonstrates his idea, with repeating the form of the Corinthian capitals in the decoration of European public buildings (Gombrich1979)

Significant of objects results from what they passed through and what events had these objects experienced in the past. Then the investment here would be valuable if objects significant is associated in. Therefore the link between past, present and future is waved through their materiality. (Rolands 1993: 146)

'The Memorial of the Unknown Soldier' in Cairo (figure 1) was built in 1975. It was built in order to memorize Egyptian soldiers who died in the war in 1973. The memorial is being visualized in modern artistic form. It was built with a stone, and is located in a new district in that time, Nasr City.

Nasr City was a new urbanized district, it was planned and inhabited in mid-1970's. Names for Muslims and Christian Egyptian soldiers, were written in Kufic inscription, in order to tell their sacrificing did not go in vain. The Kufic calligraphy on the pyramidal memorial structure refers to the Islamic identity of the modern pharaonic Egypt. In the same regard, Benjamin described this process as the re-enchantment of the World, by which he meant that a past evoked as a dream image can re-enchant a world gone cold (Morss 1990)

Choosing both pyramidal structure to be located in this specific landscape has its connotation. Egyptians used to memorize their kings by burring them in great pyramidal tombs. The landscape location refers to the new political and social era, that resulted after1973 war. It is the power of origins that gives value to repetition. (Rolands1993:146).

The memorial structure had succeeded to have the desired impact on the Egyptians public memory. It has the power to revive sense of nationalism and patriotism in Egyptians' daily life.



Figure 1 Memorial of the Unknown Soldier' in Cairo (Meital2015: 365)

### **Memory as a vessel for culture:**

Michel Rowlands discusses the role of memory in transmission culture. He relies a research on Kuechler arguments. Since she discusses the relationship between material culture and memory (Kuechler1987: 248). Kuechler states, that every memorized image can be derived from a template that generates various images and various interpretations. Rowlands argues that transmission of culture accrues when people “ are exposed constantly to highly visible example of material objects invested with authoritative credibility”. (Rowlands1993: 148)

### **Power role in constructing memory:**

Paul A. Shackel discuss building a public memory in the American society. Shackel explains the success of challenge of creating memories is situational upon the context, social and political power. He defines power to commemorates a patriot past.

Memory can be about forgetting an alternative past.<sup>2</sup>-creating and reinforcing patriotism<sup>3</sup>- developing a sense of nostalgia to legitimize a particular heritage. (Shackel 2001:667).

In history there are many accidents that can be analyzed to shed more light on the effective role of architecture as a material objects. On the same hand, architecture, as a material, can puzzle out the power of the political agenda in controlling the nation identity.

In 1171, the Sunni Salah El-Dien, had controlled upon all the Fatimid Caliphate territories, he wrote the end of Fatimid Shiit empire. Salah El-Din would not succeeded in reestablishing the Sunni doctrine, unless demolishing traces of Fatimid structures. Salah El-Dien destroyed both Fatimid two great palaces, which symbolized

their prestigious. Fatimid controlled Egypt over 200 years, they built enormous structures and monuments to legitimize their existence in Egypt. However, Salah Al-Dien managed to erase their memories when he destructed their significant landmarks in Cairo.

Power can control the identity for the nation. And the tools are much. The current paper argues, that state power can use both religious and patriotism past in order to create public memory. In the selected study case, a discussion will be analyzed in order to deepen our understanding on the way people interpret materials , construct memories and to identify role of materials in creating a group identity.

Doha as a study case:

This part discuss till what extend landscape and architecture can act as affective material participants in shaping and maintaining the memory. Moreover, it will discuss the features of landscape in heart city of Doha. The study attempts to explore the value of past materiality and its impact on constructing memories and reviving local identity. On the same hand, it is an attempt to discover till what extent the political power of the decision makers can invest material culture in performing national identity for present and future generations.

### **The Power of Origins :**

Holtorf and Williams define the concept of ‘retrospective memory’ that past can have impact on present through physical and material traces. people can recall what used to be happening in this landscape before their time. (Heath & Lee 2001:1361).

Reviving significant heritage and Islamic architectural symbols is clearly noticeable in designing the landscape of the heart of Doha.

The whole scene is like capturing a shoot in a live dynamic open-air museum. The scene illustrates view from past and portrays it in current present with many editions and modifications.

Museum of the Islamic Art is seen in the lead of the scene, while the highest culture center in Doha ‘Al-Fanar’ is positioned on the other side of the milieu (figure 2). Both monumental buildings call to our mind the iconic mosque of Ahmed Ibn Tulun in Cairo, from tenth century. Portraying past in the contemporary new image of Doha

has undeniable connotations. It represents how decision makers want to outline Doha as a cultural hub in Gulf region, that is dressed in authenticity guise.

The museum of Islamic Art was designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect I.M. Pei on the bay of Doha. The design was a result of I.M. Pei's journey in the heritage of Islamic monuments. When he found his way in the ablution fountain inside Ahmed Ibn Tulun in Cairo. The old structure in center of the old mosque fascinated I. M. Pei with its simplicity and abstracted form. The structure is almost cubist from geometric pattern which helped I.M. Pei to elaborate the design, he tried to weave both culture and religion in a modern way.

The Museum of Islamic Art is supposed to house masterpieces and different collections from the whole Islamic world.

Ahmed Ibn Tulun has another print in same plateau, just on eyesight from the Museum of Islamic Art. Al-Fanar, Qatar Islamic cultural center, which is considered by most Qatar inhabitants as a significant landmark not only for Doha, but for Qatar. The building formally is named commemorating the Qatari Islamic scholar Abdulla Bin Zaid Al Mahmoud.

Al-Fanar is considered the tallest religious building in Qatar with its 80 meter minaret. The architectural design is inspired by the spiral structure in mosque Ahmed Ibn Tulun. The original structure in Ibn Tulun mosque used to function as minaret, or Mi'dhanah, which was used for calling prayers. Whilst the new Qatari building is functioning as a religious and Da'wah center. The minaret of Ahmed Ibn Tulun would basically call to our minds the pre-Islamic 'ziggurat' structure in Iraq. It was designed with the spiraling form in time that flabbergasted Egyptians. The minaret remained unique till this moment and never repeated after its time in any of Islamic structures.

Designer of Al Fanar building intentionally used regional elements in facades. In clear connotation to the local heritage, as can be seen in using 'wooden mashrabiya' and stained glass (Ashraf & Wedmann 2016). These architectural elements were widely used in Islamic and local architecture, however with modernity, these elements were neglected despite their highly functionality in aired weather in most of Gulf region. Moreover, naming the center 'al Fanar' has a meaning in Arabic culture which is 'lighthouse' and that is what refers successfully to its function in lighting people's lives and guiding them faithfully.

The value of original object is conferring the prominence for the new replica structures. Both modern Qatari structures were inspired by heritage ruins inside one thousand year old mosque, which is located in a different context. These replications then became an iconic symbol of culture and art centers in gulf.

The repetition of the objects do not underestimate the value of the new structures, however, this repetition of the object can serve, as they gaining the access to unconscious traces, they allowing direct re-engagement with the past experience (Rolands1993:145) .



Fig 2 MIA and al-Fanar in heart of Doha



Fig 3 Ahmed Ibn Tulun mosque in old Cairo

State Power is also taking a place in this plateau. The existence of Amiri Diwan in same landscape, is symbolizing the domination of the state power on the scene. As used to happen in time of Ibn Tulun, Dar al-Imara (the administrative palace), was attached to his famous mosque, organizing the entire territories.

Reconstructing past in present daily life, reflects political vision. Decision maker aims to protect the heritage and local culture, by utilizing visual elements and materials.

Modern architectural style is notable in Doha, with metallic and ironic glassy facades. Most of these buildings are considered response to post modernism style. Therefore, it is understandable that decision maker would attempt to balance that peculiar exotic architectural style in the rest of Cornish area. And to construct traditional balancing force to promote heritage and legacies from the Islamic culture.

The planned landscape was chosen to be located in the most accessible and busy district in Doha. People pass across the whole view7/24, reacting to space's details and components. This dynamic repeated daily process, among sequences of these objects, is effective method consolidate the ownership of past and heritage in memories.

The whole visual composition of the context creates an extraordinary view. The balanced milieu with the two giant structures, would be a successful choice, for many reasons: firstly, both have a significant and clear identity. Secondly, both have an equality effect in the perception of viewers and users. Moreover, both have been presented in an impressive show. Finally, both come from a specific era that refers to peak of civilization in the Islamic heritage. Their materiality is being invested to link the past with both present and future.

### **Conclusion:**

For the last few decades, past landscape have been interesting topic to be explored by historical archaeologists. Many studies tried to investigate the effectiveness of landscape in past and different materials in manipulating memories. The current paper discussed in depth the essential relationship between landscape and architecture as effective materials with constructing a group memory . the paper explored in vast the theoretical framework for different theories and concepts which relate to landscape and memory construction topic.

Reviving past into present can impact effectively on construction process. Creating accumulative memories that result from the daily access, can impact positively on manipulating nation identity.

Landscape, as a context, evokes past memories to be dressed in present time. Structuring the bridge through past to present creates relationship between eras. These materials had a meaning in past, however, in present people interact with these reconstructed replicas differently, and their response vary in perception from person to another or from group to another. Through the daily life, people can interpret this message into certain different interpretations, interactions and practices.

In the discussed study case, political power considers landscape as dynamic adapter. Landscape can be invested to convey a sturdy message for social and public identity. I argue that political approach is strongly noticeable here. Since constructing an iconic museum inside Gulf has an important significant meaning to put Doha, the growing capital of Qatar, on the culture map not only in Gulf but in the entire region.

The paper clarify that constructing a memory for the nation can be accomplished by giving a considerable attention for past memories. Past memories almost faded and will disappear soon, especially that old generation who really preserve the past are



coming to close and finish. we can see the globalization aspects all around new generations, and traditions and heritage will be memories unless preserved and developed.

Effective and quick reconstruction process for memories and identities should take place in the entire context including buildings, landscape and the extended urbanism. All together are representing a repository for re-visualizing heritage, not only the

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