

Whose identity? Valuing the culture built heritage in diverse and tensioned societies

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Invited Paper

Abstract:

The UNESCO declaration on cultural diversity in 2002 has raised more questions than answers. More recent events around the World have highlighted the immediate need for legislative actions to protect cultural built heritage in tensioned societies. This paper discusses the potential global risks that face cultural built Heritage. The paper argues that such risks are not only limited to regions where military operations are taking place but also to nations where questions of identity and cultural diversity are raised. The paper questioned the reasons and the impact of the rise of ethno nationalism on the protection of cultural built heritage. The different discourses of these groups that will lead to destruction of cultural artefacts are also explored. In order to properly legislate means for the protection of vulnerable cultural built heritage in conflict areas, the underline value system should be clarified and the values under threat identified. The paper concludes with a plea to move our understanding and definition of culture from the previous 'old' definition with relation to 'people' to a 'new' one which is more relevant to context.

Introduction

'In these troubled times with the world in search of its bearings and way ward minds using the terms "culture" and "civilization" in an attempt to turn human beings against one another, there is an urgent need to remember how fundamental cultural diversity is to humanity itself' (UNESCO 2002). The progressive idea of culture and cultural diversity can be used in regressive ways by extreme nationalists who used it occasionally to champion claims for independence and sovereignty and also to pursue the politics of xenophobia, exclusion and ethnic cleansing. Today, there is urgent need to search out human wisdom regarding the nature and dignity of any community represented in its cultural values. The aim should be to examine the transformation of our built environment in order to share those values, and the relation of both to the quality of spatial and a-spatial urban experience of different individuals. One of the main causes that bring about conflicts is the difference in the systems of values treasured by different ethno cultures (CIPDD, 2003). Systems of values can be tangible and visibly demonstrated in the culture built heritage as Arts and Architecture play a major role in conveying social and cultural messages in the built environment. Willats (1994), for example, proposed a socially interactive model of art practice. Several efforts have been made to exploit this

resource to improve inter and intra communities' dialogues and relations in different contexts. Recent research emphasised the role of cultural dialogue in promoting peace and reconciliation between different communities and ethnic groups in various contexts (Elkadi, 2003). The CIPDD's report (2003) explains that tension and contradictions in culture can per se acquire the role of a catalyst factor when relations between ethnos / nations tend to come to a head. Inter-ethnic friction may also be filled with concrete ideological content and find their way into the minds of the common people, making them inclined to take this friction as a confrontation of cultural values and symbols. Orientation of ethnic groups in the systems of values through accumulation of visual experience is a process that leads either to rapprochement between and among these groups or, conversely, to their further alienation and ultimately to confrontation. We should therefore make our utmost effort to naturalize the values of the Cultural Built Heritage for all cultures, including those who are perceived to be in conflict. Cultural dialogue represents the central mechanism through which cultural diversity can lead to knowledge creation and social capital, which both underpin sustainable development. This mechanism is particularly important in visual culture and in architecture where people experienced cultural dialogues through their daily urban experience. Architecture and symbols of built heritage can, on the other hand, also be used as a catalyst for polarisation and territorial gains specifically in tensioned societies. Cultural Built Heritage can be manipulated for different political agenda. It is clear that visual culture represents one of the most influential and powerful elements in the cultural landscape in cities. The rise in ethno-nationalism have highlighted the claim for the need to 'protect' local culture against infiltration of alien ones (Coward 2003). Wright (1998) also described how cultural heritage is used to undermine cultural diversity. Incirlioglu et al (1999) drew a bleak picture of cultural dialogue and diversity in Europe. The authors were not however able to identify the mechanism to implement their suggestion to overcome the power differences in communities that are perceived to have different identities. There is therefore a need to describe a mechanism in order to develop, promote, and maintain a visual cultural dialogue.

Cultural built heritage in tensioned societies

The new rise of ethno nationalisation in many parts of the world has led to a wave of conflicts. Unlike conventional wars that characterises the 19th and 20th century, recent conflicts show shameless attempts to eradicate the heterogeneous identity of various communities. Many societies, which have lived in harmony for generations, are now exposed to waves of hate incited by a variety of ethno nationalists groups that aim for territorial self-determination or annexation to a separate and larger ethno national entity. New terms and languages have surfaced in the last two decades to either identify or confuse the debate. Terms such as 'genocide violence', 'ethnic cleansing', for example, are sometime mixed with more confusing terms such as 'political violence' and 'collateral damage'. Coward (2003) identified the difference between these terms and highlighted the importance of exposing the intentional nature of erasing cultural symbols of plural societies. This paper argues that exposing the nature of such intentional violence, despite its importance, might actually lead to submission to the aims of the ethno-nationalism works. Architecture and artefacts of the cultural built heritage are usually rightly perceived as strong historical evidence for grievance of certain groups. Preservation or in many cases destruction and demolition of such symbols are attempts to delete such physical evidences. There are many global incidents that violence, for

example in Bosnia, was deliberately targeting not only the people but also their cultural built heritage(s). Riedlmayer (1994) explained how the military violence in Bosnia aimed to deconstruct a heterogeneous and plural culture in order to destroy all records of co-existence. Such deliberate destruction of the urban fabrics of societies is a dangerous pattern that is copied in many recent conflicts. A variety of claims, by ethno-nationalists, are used to legitimate their violence and deliberate destruction of cultural symbols of heterogeneous coexistence. Such claims can have major impacts on recording, manipulating, or preserving, the cultural built heritage.

Identity and visual perception of cultural built heritage

The ever-evolving changes of definition and re-definition of the word 'culture' has not yet settled. For the context of this chapter, we will adopt the descriptive definition while challenging its interpretation. The descriptive definition of the word refers to 'all the characteristics activities by a people' (Eliot, 1948). While this description is generally accepted (Howells 2003), the interpretation of what 'a people' means is divisive. It is not clear how Eliot defines 'a people'. Is the term genetically prescribed or is 'a people' place related? And what about the moral and religious orientation? The political orientations, which can't be covered by Eliot's definition, have also an impact independently from other genetic or geographical ones. Boal and Douglas (1982) explained for example how the simplicity of cultural division, the 'planter' and the 'Gael', plays a major role in shaping the political landscape of Northern Ireland. The view of divided cultures in Northern Ireland was generally accepted in academic writing till the late 1970s. However, challenges to this view were apparent in the writing of, for example, Moody (1957) and Evans (1973). Opposition to the divisive stand of 'two people and two cultures' promotes the notion of 'regional identity' in Northern Ireland. The political orientations, which can't be covered by Eliot's definition, have also an impact independently from other genetic or geographical ones. The argument will inevitably lead us to the relationship on the other hand between building and earth, is our culture routed in the place? At the first glance, this might sound a follow up from Heidegger's essay but there is an essential difference. I argue here, unlike Heidegger that culture should be place related but genetically separated. This paper argues that culture is basically place related and the forces that shape a culture of a 'people' are deeply embedded in the environmental forces that also shape other aspects of the place making and its identity. All other factors are interpretative and changeable with time and knowledge base. The assemblage of texts, as culture explained by Geertz (1973), are deeply rooted in the natural make up of a place. Alien activities can therefore undermine place making and disturb stability. 'A people' should refer to all human beings that are capable to adopt, adapt, and conform to certain ecological setting in a specific locale. All other aspects that are 'thinly' described as cultural values, such as tradition, language, history, etc., are just interpretation that can be explained by hermeneutics. Understanding of certain cultural activities might or indeed might not enhance our cultural understanding of 'a people'. This uncertainty is echoed by Crapanzano (1986) who defies hermeneutics methodology for understanding cultures and criticises the supremacy role of the hermeneuticist in the process. For the same reason, this article differentiate between culture and human activities and firmly relate cultural basis to the stability of environmental shaping forces rather than human manipulation. Such interpretation can explain the contradictory statements outlined above of how different groups who supposedly share the same urban context can have different ways of looking at their shared built environment. It is now

clear that as the individuals, regardless of their background, religious, political, or socio-economic background, who shares the same locale, should also share the same culture. This doesn't however prevent different interpretation of what we prefer to call in this paper 'human' rather than 'cultural' activities. Human activities can differ according to background, education levels, economic status and so on. Cultural values, stemmed from the environmental setting and provide a reference base, do dictate neither human activities nor perception. Visual perception can be therefore more accurate description of visual interpretation of the built environment than visual culture. The latter assumes different cultures of various communities rather than the reality of one culture and different visual perceptions. As previously explained, a specific locale can't have more than one dominant culture but can accommodate a wide range of related activities that are widely opened to various interpretations. The architecture of the place should therefore be shaped by the local natural forces, not only as a green agenda or environmentally friendly approach but for cultural stability that would ensure harmony of co-existence and sustainable future.

Architecture & place identity: Causes or symptoms ingredient of conflict

If we accept the assumption of Ludwig Wittgenstein that architecture is a gesture, then its insertion within any context should be relevant. There is an art in arrangement of buildings and art in the life they are framed for us. There is a strong argument of whether ethics and aesthetics are the same. The argument is more difficult if we extend this to architecture and politics. Is there a relation between aesthetics and politics? Another way to look at it is to find more about the word aesthetics. The term is coming from the Greek word which means perception and feelings so what we really mean when we talk about aesthetics is the perception that buildings prompt us to have. Is there a link between aesthetics and politics? While some people argued against it, Philip Johnson for example, I would certainly see the links. History showed us a lot of examples (Styles of different eras, the fascist buildings, statements of politicians on architecture, links between architectural achievement and political epoques, and so on). In many time such link poses some serious moral questions (such as in Heidegger's case, building dwelling and thinking). I am not going to the extreme view of Ruskin's Lamps of Architecture that lead society or to the other extreme of Scruton (Architecture Principles in the Age of nihilism) for whom architecture is reduced to buildings. The gestural nature of architecture is probably somewhere in between. Such gesture can carry either positive or negative meanings; we know that from the work of various architects. The following section further explain the impacts of architecture and its cultural values on

We have seen so far that questions of conflicts, value systems, culture definitions are not so separable from architecture aesthetics. Proshansky et al. (1983,1987) argued that place identity is comparable to social identity. Korpela (1989) also conceived that place identity is part of the individual's on-going processes of emotion -and self-regulation that may involve one's sense of self. Adding to the place-well being perspective, there is a consensus underlying the contemporary phenomenon of *placelessness* or the *rootlessness* resulting in negative consequences. The loss of reaction was indicated reflecting the loss of continuity due to the personally uncontrollable change in the physical environment (e.g. Fried, 1963 and

Speller, 1988). Meaningful place is defined in this paper as the sphere where conscious reflection takes place. Such a sphere should aim to enhance local experience and makes local visual information represented by the surrounding facades explicit and understood by inhabitants as well as other users. It is important to clearly explain the different categories of places and spaces in order to position our intention. It is important to demonstrate the dynamic nature of space - place relations. a space configured by nature that accommodate feelings and reflections and a place designed to accommodate certain human activities. There are continuous changes in architectural experience of *place* where practices are situated and *space* where local experience takes place. Figure 1 illustrates such differences and highlights the ambiguity of moving from one category to another. The deliberate intervention through addition of a built form, in a space leads to a creation of a place that would be gradually inhabited and transformed. An erroneous intervention might lead to a loss of local identity and alienation of local cultures. Once local experience is lost, the place is likely to be re-shaped and re-configured by a more powerful economic pressure.

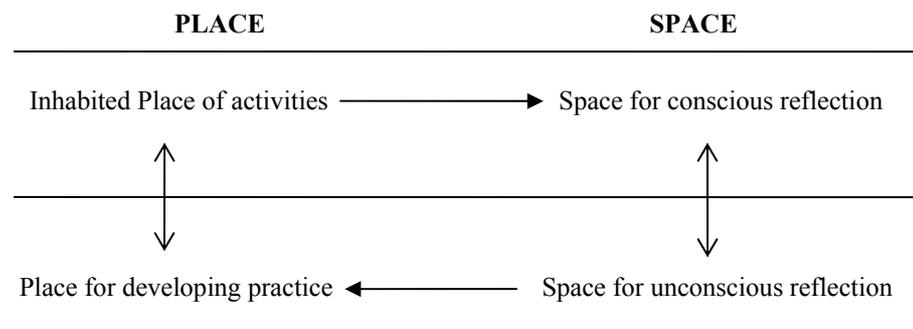


Figure 1: The dynamic cycle of architecture space and place formation

The following sections discusses the possible methods that are used by different groups to dismantle the co-existence of plural societies and to provide rationale, and in some cases to legitimise the destruction of cultural built heritage.

Discourses for destruction

Coward (2003) has identified three categories that ethno cleansers follow to legitimise their territorial claims. Two more claims that start to gain credibility with ethno nationalists in occupied territories round the world are the collective punishment and the planning measures. Pathways to legitimise territorial claims can therefore be summarised as follow:

- The political discourse
- The elaborate grievance by ethnic group(s)
- The denial of history of co-existence
- The collective punishment in occupied regions
- The planning measures

In the following section we will explain the impacts of each category on the preservation of and the threats posed to cultural built heritage.

The political discourse

Ethno-nationalism has followed fascism in claiming that heterogeneity is both threatening and unnatural. This claim is not only limited to ethno nationalism but is widely accepted in large sectors of population in civilised societies. The intensity of the debate is widely varied between seemingly 'benign' criticisms of cultural symbols of minorities in European cities to 'ethnic cleansing' efforts in other parts of the world. Extreme Jewish and Muslim groups in the Middle East, for example, continues to follow this ideological path as it relates to the roots of their very existence. Another example is the destruction of the Budha monuments in Afghanistan where it perceived as a threat to the cultural and religious harmony of the population. In these situations, any symbols of coexistence of the cultural built heritage have to be marginalized or demolished. Efforts for conservation are rarely encouraged. The separation of the two communities in Northern Ireland is another example where intense debate is taking place to decide which buildings are worth preserving. The debate is too politicised that a large number of buildings are left to slowly deteriorate.

The elaborate grievance

In regions where ethno-nationalists represent an ethnic group, a claim is usually put forward based on the suffering of this group as a consequence of heterogeneity. This claim is usually surfaced where a stronger entity and support of this group exist in neighbouring regions. Examples include Bosnian Serbs, Israeli settlers, and radical Republican groups in Northern Ireland. Threat and damage of cultural built heritage can be results of territorial gains of such groups where symbols of co-existence will be quickly deteriorate, if not demolished. The declaration of cultural diversity, on the other hand, will do little to help the silent majority. The UNESCO report emphasises the need to globalise the ownership of cultural built heritage. Silberman (1999) highlighted the plight of internationalise cultural heritage of the Middle East in the last century. Globalisation of culture built heritage, in particular with its visual existence, can have negative impacts and alienate support from the local population and local community.

The denial of history of co-existence

UNESCO declaration on cultural diversity (2002) emphasised the need for common heritage and plural identities. The necessity of cultural diversity is discussed and similarities are identified with natural bio diversity. Ethno nationalist groups in conflict region can negatively use such comparison. Drawing parallel comparison with ecology might even strengthen the argument of denial of history of non-existence and the 'un-natural' nature of cultural diversity. The denial of history of co-existence is usually a dangerous perception based on fiction rather than facts. In our time when the grey area between reality and virtuality is largely widened and when public relations are confused with journalism, the claim usually accepted unchecked. Destruction of what is perceived as 'alien built symbols' can therefore be seen as correction of unnatural existence. The call by certain groups in Northern Ireland for the demolition of what are perceived to be colonial architecture is an example of this category. Other examples include demand for the destruction of the Dome of the Rock by Jewish extremists, and the destruction of the Oriental Institute in Sarajevo.

The collective punishment

The recent rise in terrorism has provided excellent excuse for ethno cleansers to increase the legitimate use of force against civilian population

and their cultural symbols. The claim for the need to take drastic measures to combat terrorism has extended to provide platforms for collective punishment not only in regions under occupation but also to verbal and moral punishment of groups in democratic societies in Western Europe and United States. While the later will not directly lead to destruction of cultural symbols of such groups, the earlier situation definitely leads to deliberate destruction of the built environment. The destruction of the World Trade Centre can also be seen under this category. The deliberate targeting of such strong socio-economic symbols with indiscriminate civilian casualties cannot, and should not be seen as collateral damage.

The planning measures

Planning measures is one of the most systematic deconstruction tools that have been widely used in conflict areas. Most of the measures have been intentionally destructive while others were not. Three different factors can derive the use of planning measures:

- Military and security planning
- Social and economic isolation
- Upgrading infrastructure

This paper will discuss these particular factors in detail to emphasise and highlight the devastating effects of the planning measures on the cultural built.

Military and security planning

In many conflict regions, the structure of planning system and military machine is very much interlinked. This close alliance usually lead to domination of military objectives in occupied regions or war torn areas. These objectives highlight the claim that the survival of people comes first. 'Urbicide' is a term that surfaced in conflict literature since the Bosnian war to reflect the intentional destruction of the built environment. Survival of architecture and urban life are important to the survival of people (Adams, 1993). Urbicide is usually a result of claimed 'necessary military and security' measures. These systematic measures should not be confused with claims of collateral damage. Coward (2003) explained how urbicide in Bosnia was part of the ethno-nationalists' programme to eradicate difference in order to create and naturalise the idea of separate, antagonistic sovereign territorial entities. Urbicide can take a variety of forms from deliberate destruction of a whole area of artefacts and architectural heritage, as was the case in Sarajevo and Rafah, to a more subtle and softer architecture intervention, as was the case of peace line developments in Northern Ireland. The heavy bombardment of the small historic enclave of Mostar was deliberate by the Bosnian Croat army (Council of Europe, 1994). In Iraq, there is no evidence that damage to museums and cultural built heritage were results of deliberate targeting. The de-fragmentation of Iraq might however lead to similar systematic destruction of cultural built symbols. The glorification of destruction of artefacts that symbolise recent history in Iraq, including symbols of the past regime, can provide a dangerous precedent for further destruction of more memories of more distant historical entities.

Social and economic isolation

The debate regarding cosmopolitanism, diversity, and isolation has occupied the cultural landscape of the built environment in the last decade. The aim has been to present an attitude, which enables a harmonious co-existence of diverse cultures. There is a subtle difference between cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism. While cosmopolitanism aims to mix different cultures in

a more global context, multiculturalism seeks to preserve the identity of different cultures within their identified context. While the earlier term leads to a more plural protection of the cultural built heritage, the later raises questions of whose identity and why certain features should be conserved. Incirlioglu and Incirlioglu et al (1999) drew a bleak picture of the cultural diversity front in Europe. They indicated that while there are good intentions to diverse cultural participation in public places in European cities, this has only mounted to lip services to a myth of multiculturalism. The authors, however, didn't give any insights of the reasons of such failure nor they addressed the question of context. This paper argues that multiculturalism can only survive in global cities; in London, New York, Paris and Berlin but would fail where national forces are stronger than global economic drivers. Cosmopolitanism can therefore be seen as the successful version of multiculturalism. In this sense, multiculturalism tends to increase the rift rather than co-existence or reconciliation between different cultures. In conflict areas, the scene can be different from the previous description. Conflict areas by definition contain two or more competing cultures in the same context. The communities involved are likely to be balanced in the power share, either in size or military dominance. In order to shift the power towards one group, drastic measures are usually used in recent conflicts. The severity of actions that would isolate communities, sometimes deliberately confused with protectionism, has started to surface with the extreme measures of building walls and fences between communities. Hence replacing the invisible boundaries of multiculturalism with physical ones. The real problem of such measures is its permanent nature. In Northern Ireland, for example, temporary barricades between the two rival communities have been developed into permanent acceptance. The numerous peace lines in Belfast and the 'City Wall' in Derry are physical expressions of difference and division. Security installations have also contributed to the permanent nature of both the spatial and the a-spatial experience of the built environment. Both cities, Belfast and Derry, have been a centre for media concentration, particularly in the early years of the troubles when reporting was often framed by a clichéd 'war-torn city' syndrome with its attendant war-related language. An accumulation of the widely reported incidents and events, often situated on interfaces, has also led to development of mental maps of a more subtle and softer invisible interface in the city.

Upgrading infrastructure

Building roads has always been used to manipulate the urban environment with certain strategic aims. In conflict areas, such strategies using the upgrading of infrastructure in the built environment are widely used. These strategies include road networks, water supply, sewerage networks, etc. Weizman (2002) for example has exposed such strategies in the West Bank. Similar strategies have been used in other parts of the world. The British military machine has a history of successful use of such strategies. In Northern Ireland, the construction of road networks in Belfast and other cities are carefully planned to facilitate control over certain communities. Claims for upgrading infrastructure can also marginalize and in many cases destroy certain sites of cultural built heritage. As the sites are marginalized and neglected with poor accessibility, no provision of basic infrastructure, they will be left to quietly deteriorate. Hasankeyf, the selected location of the Ilisu Dam project, was awarded complete archaeological protection by the Turkish Department of Culture. The Turkish government's official publicity for the South-eastern Anatolia Project (GAP) claims that the network of dams

and power plans across southeast Turkey would "*dramatically change the social and cultural make up of the region*". Balfour Beatty, the contractor of the project, later describes Hasankeyf as "*the decaying remains of a medieval city*". Many similar projects are taking place in many other regions of conflict such as Lhasa where UNESCO had to investigate demolitions of Tibetan protected sites.

Conclusion

Since the 19th century, series of charters drafts have been produced to enhance the conservation and preservation of the cultural built heritage. The recent move towards area conservation rather than monument protection is particularly important in conflict regions. In order to properly legislate means for the protection of vulnerable cultural built heritage in conflict areas, the underline value system should be clarified and the values under threat identified. Similar to ideology among European racists and extreme right wing groups, cultural values of minorities or weaker population can be seen as a dilution and a threat to 'main stream' local culture. In this sense, multi-culturalism serves the ideology of these groups and emphasizes the vulnerability of the cultural built heritage. Minorities, on the other hand, who insist on imposing imported and fenced cultures to a well established diverse cultural landscape also increases the threat, not only to their inserted values but also to the established diversity and co-existence of cultural built heritage. International charters should address these issues and environmental forces that shape local cultures should be recognised and nurtured. UNESCO excellent work on promoting cultural diversity and plural identities has acknowledged the difficulties facing legislations with the rise of what is perceived by many as cultural conflicts. The attempts to humanising globalisation through references to common heritage of humanity, while welcomed, are not enough to combat determined destruction of cultural built heritage in conflict areas. In fact UNESCO's reference to 'monuments', developing links between cultural pluralism and natural biodiversity may actually emphasised the claims by ethno nationalist groups. This includes denial of co-existence, as biodiversity for example is location specific. It is therefore essential to differentiate between culture built heritage of people and culture of places. Wright (1998) identified two sets of ideas about culture in anthropology: an older set of ideas which equates 'a culture' with 'a people' which can be delineated with a boundary and a checklist of characteristics; and new meanings of 'culture', as not a 'thing' but a political process of contestation over the power to define key concepts, including that of 'culture' itself. This distinction between the two sets can be very easily understood in the light of the contemporary understanding of visual culture and identity. Threat to cultural built heritage in conflict areas highlighted the need to move our understanding and definition of culture from the previous 'old' definition to the 'new' one. A cultural built heritage should not be affiliated with people but with the environment in which it resides. The policies and strategies described and interpreted in the charters are therefore not enough in such tensioned areas. There is an urgent need to address the deliberate direct and indirect destruction and the rise of ethno nationalists in different parts of the world. The claims by the ethnic cleansers to legitimise their tutorial claims must be confronted with suitable and yet powerful measures. These measures should not be left to occupying powers to implement, as they are likely to compromise the role of cultural built heritage for strategic gains. One of the main problems highlighted in this paper is the extent of methods used to undermine the cultural built heritage in conflict areas. Cultural rubbles of uricide should be seen as much of

genocide as systematic ethnic cleansing. This will require development of extensive databases that extend to cover more than just recording of technical data. Recording of the population structure of the region, the socio economic base and the provision of infrastructure are as essential for the survival and conservation of the Cultural Built Heritage as the detailed survey.

Multiculturalism in conflict areas is deemed to fail and replacing terms of globalisation with glocalisation will even highlight differences. More pragmatic measures should be taken to protect the cultural built heritage of minorities or oppressed population. In the atmosphere of the new world order, the role for the United Nations cultural institutions must be reinforced. The claim that universalism to an answer to particularism will be automatically achieved as a bi-product of cultural diversity might not be realised unless relationship to place and locale rather than people is recognised.

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