

**« Cities, memories, territories :
urban patrimonialization in the Middle East . »**

C. PIERI - IFPO Urban Observatory, Beirut.

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In the Arab islamic city, where urban, vernacular or monumental heritage is concerned a monographic approach now covers most parts of erstwhile European colonization. Moreover the scientific and historical approach of urban modernity has shifted from the supposedly heritage “object” - site or monument, as was studied by André Raymond or François Georgeon (France), Attilio Petruccioli (Italy), Eugen Wirth (Germany), etc, - to the “idea” of heritage considered as a cultural, historical, social, political and symbolic construction.

This epistemological perspective lies at the heart of our project. Without doing away with its « object » dimension, which constitutes its founding stone, our interest here is with heritage seen more specifically as a process, one allowing several phases, whether successive or concomitant according to those involved : a break or at least a distancing from the object itself, a political will recognizing a heritage status, the different processes and procedures engaged until heritage is rendered accessible to the public (whether professional or institutional), increasing awareness and education of the public, construction of meaning, elaborating a system of references.

We shall then explore in what manner this heritage process « informs » territories, as this term is understood by A. Corboz , that is to say, as a « palimpsest » : an entity afferent to space, the idea of territory is scrutinised in its relationship to time-, that is, a present “sedimented” by erased traces, but on which man projects its future. Territory seen as a palimpsest forms a pair with the notion of heritage according to F. Choay, considered as an « allegory » and as a relationship to the past - history and memory.

Every « heritage territory » thus defined is the result *both* of a choice made in reference to a or to several pasts, *and* to the site of the current projection. This conjunction between the two is, in our eyes, a determining element in the definition of identities. The choice of a referential memory indeed can only be relevant, consensual or on the contrary dissonant according to the use it is put to influence the present or the future of a collectivity, with its groups and sub-groups. In other words, heritage is not only a “ memory trace”, it is first and foremost a societal project, and it is precisely in the connection between these two that the urban, local or national or nowadays, regional identities are at stake.

If Beirut occupies a central place in our scheme, it is in terms of its central role during the last thirty years in all the debates involving urban heritage as urban traces, memories, what with its successive destruction, its reconstruction, its repeated destructions, to the extent of having reached what critics regularly regard as an inflation of the memorial discourse, which now centers on loss as specifically linked to material, legal, social and symbolic reconstruction.

Our next step will be, radiating from Lebanon, to use the other IFPO sites and their networks (Syria, Jordan, Jerusalem-Palestine, Iraq-Irbil) in order to establish a transversal, comparative and multi-disciplinary gathering of data, to critically assess this research and to explore new perspectives by including the history of architecture, of urbanism and of heritage, not to forget social history, anthropology and political field, nor the contribution of the inhabitants, so as to confront their experiences with the surveys: professionals, academia, government representatives, associations... Indeed it is useful to examine expert opinions yet not to forget the on-site reception, for if there is a problem the area is confronted to, it is often that of the gap between the so-called civilian society and debates between experts.

The patrimonialization of contemporary cities as « vigilant watch » ; heritage territories, urban identities.

Heritage and territory are as precarious as they are precious in that they are linked to the capacity of building but also to that of destroying. Now, at the dawn of globalisation, we are witnessing in the Middle East an importation/exportation of urban (or architectural) models of the Gulf states type which by nature indirectly question, in the middle term, the borders of national urban identity through its penetration of different political, historical, or topographical contexts. What one sees in the older urban fabrics is not only the usual erasing of the “sedimented” layers of urban life, which made each territory its own palimpsest, but, by reference to this new model, an often aggressive *tabula rasa*. And when heritage awareness exists but when it is limited to monuments, or isolated items, the more diffuse, and mobile socio-urban notion of an *urban body*, is all the more threatened.

A cross-disciplinary approach of urban heritage will contribute to a better understanding and better formulation of the articulation between the different sustainable modern urban settings, whether inherited from colonial epochs or more recent, as for Beirut since reconstruction. This would allow, amongst other things, a relativising of often essentialist discourses, especially those which pertain to what P. Béghain calls the « painful memory”.

A critical heritage approach of the modern urban territory is part of a « societal watch », which we have elsewhere previously referred to as a « strategy of vigilance » (Pieri 2006), as an echo to the notion of “architecture as a form of resistance” in the terms of K. Frampton (in *Modern Architecture, a critical history*, 1987). An approach which questions the stakes underlying what A. Grumbach calls « the dialectics of constraints » (*Le Débat* n°80, 1994) : the dialectics between a logic of enhancement of social, cultural and symbolic bodies represented by these new heritage territories, confronted to the liberal development dynamics which are often synonymous with eradication in the name of a purely economical enhancement.

In the current context of hyper globalisation and hyper modernisation which has been analysed by the American geographer Mike Davis, amongst which the cities of the Gulf seem to be in the process of becoming a new regional archetype, the urban scale of a *neighbourhood* seems a fertile one in our eyes, both as “microhistory” and “heritage territory”. This concept, borrowed from C. Ginzburg, intersects that of “micro theoreisations” as formulated by the historian A. King when evoking colonial architecture. (*Colonial urban development*, 1979). We deem it operational as concerns a minute study of spatial and built work practices taking into account all the different levels of complexity inherent to the « entwined histories » evoked by E. Saïd, who also speaks of « layered territories » (*Culture and imperialism* 2000) .

In this respect, Beirut is emblematic: whereas reconstruction is not yet completed in the old downtown center, it is the object of permanent transformations including within the historic sectors (Sursock). Several instances and bodies in charge of conservation assessment and reconstruction of these urban areas illustrate this « vigilant watch », notably, on the scale of the civilian implication and academic as well- despite a constant real-estate mushrooming.

In Syria, the work led by IFPO in Aleppo, or in the old Damascus town center is exemplary in this respect, by the synthesis realised between history, architecture, urbanism and anthropology. Not to forget the work achieved by the Riwaq Association in Palestine, the rehabilitation of sectors surrounding Wakalat and Abu Baker Al-Siddeeq Streets, (Rainbow Street Urban Regeneration Scheme) in Jordan, which counterbalances the large operations led by the World Bank in the historic centers of Salt, Madaba, Kerak and Ajloun. As for Iraq, it is still too early to assess the work done; yet the Municipality of Baghdad organised in March 2010 for the first time a seminar on the subject of the rehabilitation of historic town centers, taking into account the notion of urban sector to be preserved, at least, on paper.

Globalization, fabrication and patrimonialization of memory territories: configurations, perspectives.

In the perspective of the works led by IFPO (F. Mermier) on cities and memories/traces, as founded on the notion of multiple memories, , « strong» or « weak » (E. Traverso 2005), we propose to dwell into the concrete incarnation, in the heritage field, of that which E. Glissant calls the traces « discernable from underneath » :

« Our landscape is our own monument. The trace it signifies is discernable from underneath. It's all history » Glissant, comments P. Chamoiseau in a work about the *Traces-mémoires du bagne* (1994)(Memory traces of the penal colony), proceeds to a « decoding of urban spaces, which[...] has marked our space with *memory traces /Traces-mémoires* whose affective, functional, and symbolic bearing, open, evolving, living significations, reach far beyond any steadfast equation of the traditional monuments listed in the Western memory [...] (Chamoiseau, pp. 16-17).

We see a interesting correspondence between this notion of « trace-memories » (« memories», thus, always in the plural form) and that in Arabic, of « Athâr » . These non- official «or non-monumental *traces-memories* compose the current urban landscapes of the Near and Middle East, as much as the visible memories displayed at the surface : the definition of heritage territories and practises in an urban context is indeed a manner of “archaeology of the presence” of these memories.

As conflicting memories go, Baghdad, for instance, presents a certain number of common symptoms with Beirut: conflict is inscribed in the city (directly, indirectly, physically, mentally, military, civilian or « between civilians »...) as well as through the remodeling of the city due to reconstruction (Beirut) and yet to be implemented (Baghdad). In both capitals, the city centers are those carrying the strongest traces of history, and thus, those most vulnerable to speculation, expropriation, disrupting of urban uses (social, technical and human) and fabric through exile or exodus, etc.. Through its multi- confessional structure, its political regime, its experience of reconstruction and its many avatars, Beirut constitutes, despite its specificities, a first-class example to articulate a reflection on today and tomorrow's Baghdad.

The heritage process of war memories will take on a greater importance with the emblematic realisation of the Museum of Memory, in Beirut, which is to be located in the Barakat building by Joseph Aftimos, on Damascus Street, the erstwhile Demarcation line. On the one hand, this operation constitutes the symmetric inversion of the reconstruction of the Beirut Museum at the bottom of the same street, which has erased all traces of the civil war, to the point of being called the “Museum without memory”, (an aspect which it shares in a striking manner with the Museum of Baghdad). On the other hand, notably through the municipality’s implication, which was held at a distance from the Downtown operations, it signals an important evolution in the officialisation of a memory which up to the present day was mostly diffuse and visible, that is to say, the ruins which still dot Beirut’s everyday fabric. Should one interpret this museification as a « dead crystallisation » as formulated by Chamoiseau, of conflictual memory, such as was the case of Oradour-sur-Glane (Debray, 1997) , or then, in the long run, could it mean the possibility of at last writing another history of the city?

Furthermore, we shall compare the variable statuses of memory given to the built work preservation operations throughout Lebanon ; this will be useful as it will provide us with a perspective on the work achieved in and on Beirut. In Damascus as in Amman , the accelerated urban development is strongly marked by the arrival of refugees and rural exodus populations. Functional and societal re-compositions, with their breaks, continuities and ramifications, are already well documented at IFPO. Yet we will take them into consideration when comparing the co-existences, in the midst of each of the two cities, of the strong and weak, dominant and dominated, official and non-official, « vertical and « horizontal » memories, and of their trace-memories, in terms of urban, built or experienced configurations. Regardless of their outcome, the current events (2011) should influence the writing of the city in the future, whatever this writing may be.

One of the components of this micro-history “sedimented” in « from underneath » memories, and which comes into consideration in the perimeters of urban identity, is the migratory factor, at the periphery or at the centre of more or less ancient urban continuities and in very different and almost opposite configurations. Not to forget that, it is precisely in this manner that the recent models circulate, for construction professionals who work in a country, for example in the Gulf countries, will then import into their own countries ready-made formulas, more specifically in the touristic complexes (Dead Sea Area), or drastic urban restructurations such as what has been designed for Al-Kadhimiya sector in Baghdad, where most of the Ottoman housing and urban fabric is to be erased.

Practical and organisational development of the scheme, expected outcomes

Workshops, seminars and conferences should be organised within the following fields :

1. Areas

- a) expertise collaborations ;
- b) the grammar of modern *urban* heritage; this pedagogy is essential to our methodology, and can be led in collaboration with local institutions (raising awareness of the type « Regard sur ville » (Looking at the city) organised in Beirut in May 2009) ;
- c) the notions of « changing neighbourhood » (demography, architecture, economics, sociology, culture....) and of the status of spaces: which will lead to a questioning of duration, and of its inscription (or not) in the neighbourhood’s urban fabric and to submit the adequation of a heritage process angle to the realities of a particular area.

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- 2. Stakes

- a): which appropriations, which discourses and political recuperation? Which projected affective or symbolic images? Modern avatars of orientalism.

- b) assessment of cultural heritage and decoding of assimilation or rejection processes in local fabric:, conflicts, consensus and compromise.

3. Documents : critical survey of different modes of urban heritage styles/writing

a) Fiction mode (films, novels, plastic arts) in which the city is a character ;

b) the « memories » mode, dramatising « invented traditions » (E. Hobsbawm)

c) Historiography : putting in perspective the city's history against the backdrop of general history (the debate of *Kitābat at-tārīkh* in Iraq during the 80's, for instance).

