

War and Landscape

Report of Round-Table at the Conference of War and Urban Landscape

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In the seventh series of conferences of The Phenomenology of Urban Landscape entitled as "War and Urban Landscape", the professional round-table was held on May 27 2016, at the Museum of Contemporary Arts in Tehran, by the presence of Annemarie Bucher, professor and senior researcher at the University of Zurich, Seyed Amir Mansouri, the head of landscape architecture department at University of Tehran and Mr. Eskandar Yarnasab, the general director of cultural advertising of Martyr Foundation and Veterans Affairs.



First, Dr. Mansouri discussed about the presented papers and noted the importance of the issue: "The capacity and role of war and urban landscape in our culture, society and city is high enough for production of social solidarity and it can be used as the common subject in the culture of citizens, the authorities and political parties. In spite of this capacity for creating national unity, the artists often move to the other fields such as identity and historical issues and they discount this fascinating approach. However, the capacities created by these epics can be used in order to unify the society. Therefore, it is our duty to emphasize on this issue at the universities and in our researches and professional discussions majorly. In our country, war is majorly discussed in the official meetings, while it is considered as a national issue in which the nation is involved and there is a considerable capacity for participation of the public."

In the following, the round-table experts responded to questions:

Question| In Ms. Bucher's opinion, how different is the view of Western and Iranian people toward war? For a western civilian, the concept of war is jointed with the fear and loss; however, the landscape paintings of Iraj Eskandari demonstrate the images of martyrs and the names of city streets from a different point of view. In fact, it is not a subject that can be searched in the past since it exists in our current life. How do you evaluate these different opinions?

Prof. Bucher| The concept of martyrdom is not well known to Westerners. According to Mr. Kurt Lewin "perception of war landscape is quite different from ordinary landscapes and peace landscapes." Westerners perceive these two landscapes very differently. The fact that war is a specific cultural issue and that the culture has very important role in evaluation of these landscapes is vividly undeniable.

Question| The results of the projects studied in the presented papers at the meeting by Hossein Parvin and Shahrzad Khademi were not optimal in terms of architecture and landscape, because of the wide gap between perception and demands of employers and experts as well as the absence of theoretical foundations. Consequently, these problems have led to a poor design in the field of landscape and museum arrangement. Hence, it is necessary to review this issue academically and conceptually due to the fact that the war took place a long time ago. Is it not the time for addressing theoretical foundation in museums and war landscapes rather than mere consideration of spatial physical organization issues?

Mr. Yarnasab| The bitter reality in our country, which is not just limited to the field of martyrdom and sacrifice or the holy defense, is that there can be seen a few examples of art

masterpieces in the field of environment in the last century despite the country's rich history of civilization, culture, art and architecture. The second fact is that Iran revolution and war happened in a country with affluent literary, art and architecture masterpieces throughout history which clearly draws a distinction between our revolution and other revolutions of the world in the cultural debate. Otherwise, the military of Iran facilities and technology, neither in the revolution nor in the holy defense, were not superior to others. The significant point in the cultural debates is that the founder of the revolution was not a man from military or economic spheres but a religious and cultural character. In addition, people of all ages, faiths, religions and classes participated in formation of revolution and the martyrs' cemetery is the best proof. Given this introduction, the war was imposed to Iranians and thereby can be considered as a holy defense. Regarding the impact of war on the landscape during the 80s, the Supreme Defense Council and War Campaign was organized by Imam Khomeini's command in 17 October, immediately after beginning of the war (21st of September). It can be said that despite the critical conditions, these organizations were the most successful ones in the state of war. Their most important actions included creation of the symbols, slogans, epic poems and even naming the military operations and base commands. Generally in the 1980s, splendid practices were done in the area of war advertising; however, the circumstances did not allow creation of long lasting works. Shortly after, the decade of 1990s became a milestone in war history with the arrival of prisoners to country and foundation of organizations such as the Foundation of Martyr and the Foundation for Conservation of Monuments with little attention to research and theoretical issues. Finally, the Research Department was formed in 1996 for further promotion of the sacrifice and martyrdom culture.

He continued, the project of the Holy Defense Garden Museum in Tehran was related to the municipality and Khorramshahr Holy Defense Garden Museum was related to the Foundation of Preservation and its aspects were more public and not settled in the Foundation of Martyrs and Veterans Affairs. Alike other newly-established organizations, the Foundation of Martyrs had structural and organizational deficiencies and problems of its own, but was improved by establishing scientific and technical cooperation with experts in the fields of visual arts, architecture and landscape. Improvement of links between the various professional fields directed the Foundation of Martyrs and reflected the effects of technical and specialized discussions and relevant theoretical principles in the art works. Objections and criticisms that have been leveled at Tehran's Museum of Holy Defense at the time of its construction was raised by a specialized team, but officials did not notice and continued the construction of

the project.

Question| war has had different symbols in the world with more or less strong conceptual backgrounds. How can using the concept of peace as a substitute for war with a global and humanitarian view be efficient in the urban landscape?

Bucher: it is hard for me to describe this specific situation in Iran. Looking deeper into this issue, the symbols or landscapes created for war and peace can be close due to the proximity of war and peace. However, the remarkable point is that these symbols and signs should be used for cultivating peace and preventing war. In Europe, these two categories are very close together and we were able to establish a good relationship between them. In other countries, including Iran, establishing such a relationship with the cultural entity can be difficult. Nevertheless, each country must determine a proper definition of the war and its goals in the first place. In my own definition, war is an armed conflict that must be prevented by creating landscapes.

Question| We have noticed in our previous studies that Foundation of Martyrs and the Foundation for Conservation of Monuments did not confirm sculpting the statues and busts of martyrs. What are the reason and what kind of policy is adopted for this act?

Mr.Yarnasab| This is not true in Foundation of Martyrs. We have held at least 7 National Visual Festivals so far in the both fields of creation of statue and bust. A part of this Festival was related to sculptures and statues. Also some works were done in this area by cooperation with municipality including 40 statues of martyr commanders in Velayat Park and the statue of Ayatollah Taleghani in Taleghani square or statues of Kerman's great martyrs in parks and squares of this city.

Question| what has the Foundation of Martyrs performed for the maintenance of the murals depicting Iran Revolution and War in cities? And why important paintings in Tehran were replaced by low quality paintings? For instance, in Hafte-Tir square the painting illustrating the flags of Israel and United states as the symbol of Iran's foreign policies, which are well known for Westerners, are replaced by another image or martyr Fahmideh's picture is replaced by an image which can only be recognized by Iranians as martyr Fahmideh. What is Dr. Bucher's viewpoint in this case? Would the Westerners do so with their valuable works?
Yarnasab: the paintings which were replaced by Foundation of Martyr were also revised twice by the Painting Commission in the Foundation of Martyr and the Painting Commission in Beautification Organization. However, all measures in the urban areas are not in our control and are managed by Municipality or Beautification Organization.

In addition, we have not approved many of works in the field of painting in terms of technical, cultural and the validity points. All the executed projects by the Foundation of Martyrs in cities are certainly studied technically and administratively by experts in the first place. Some of the mural paintings are ratified by the government which is complemented by some political demands. However, it is not reasonable to erase the fine art works of great scholars such as Dr. Iraj Eskandari and the Dr. Chalipa and replace them with other works and reconstruction of their works should be done by themselves.

Prof. Bucher| In our country, many of the artistic works such as statues and gardens are replaced due to various considerations. For example, the small square in Zurich in 1960 must be removed because of the technical requirements and its small scale. Sometimes these works are at risk of construction because of people's unfamiliarity with their cultural values and reconstruction pressures on them. Nevertheless, the cultural heritages and historical landscapes which are recognized as valuable are re-evaluated and special actions are proceeded for their maintenance and redefinition.

Question| According to the presented papers at the conference, two types of approach dominate the formation of landscapes and war monuments: a real and formal approach and a mental (subjective) and abstract approach. On the other hand, the war substance and content in Iran is different from other countries. Our war was considered as the holy defense and series of concepts and meanings are attached to it which does not exist in the war concepts of other countries. Regarding the differences in war content between Iran and other countries, can we conclude that it is better to have a more conceptual approach for creating landscapes and monuments and achieving these meanings?

Dr. Mansouri| in the presented papers at the meeting, three types of approach were criticized: first, the folk approach and preliminary designs that were more common in Iranian works; second, authoritative and sovereignty approach such as huge works observed in Iraq and finally pseudo-expert rather than expert approach, or technocrat approach, that can be detected in Tehran Garden Museum of Holy Defense. I believe that the characteristic of a desired approach is the public participation and the sufficient condition is the performance by professionals. These two conditions should be established at the same time to avoid being non popular and vulgar. Although Tehran Garden Museum of Holy Defense provides a lot of memories and information for people, it not last in the minds of addressees if not performed artistically. It is a specialized work that should be accomplished by public participation and the people who

participated in the war should be involved in this process. The technocratic approach of Tehran Garden Museum of Holy Defense and ignoring public participation has led to undesirable outcomes such as inaccessible location for citizens or the construction of a fountain named as Hoor Al-Azim that which does not imply any mental connection with the audience.

Question| in designing a cemetery of Martyrs, it was presupposed that replacing the gravestones and separating and specifying the section of commanders (Sardaran) from the other martyrs are enough for the cemetery organization while these ideas are not correspondent to the theoretical foundations of the subject. The principals in these conditions are not clearly identified by the Foundation of Martyrs. Are there any concrete principals for such actions yet?

Mr.Yarnasab| in a particular stage, this section of the Martyrs cemetery was subsidiary of the Foundation of Martyrs and specific principles were set for the landscape and architecture of Martyrs cemetery. Thereafter, according to these principles, the description of consultants' services was prepared and ratified. Separating commanders' gravestones from others was not the policy of the Foundation of Martyrs and probably done by individual aims. Martyrs Cemetery was a huge project and it was believed that the tombs of martyrs, according to the durability of used materials, be preserved as much as possible.

Question| considering different views to the subject of war, symbolic and dramatic approach to this field was common in all discussions and presented papers. Is considering the war as a cultural fact that requires stability and continuity for future generations recognized as a sustainable view or should we have a better interpretation of war like other landscapes?

Prof. Bucher| Although war is a static concept, culture is a dynamic one. For transmission of this concept to the future generations, we certainly must have a different look. In middle Ages, the war landscapes were primary landscapes which were quite different from the contemporary war landscapes that had military advanced armaments. There is a continuous and gradual transformation in showing attitudes to war and understanding of its concepts culturally. Conceptual looking to the culture in a process leads to discovery of these transformations. Using these new cultural concepts, artworks, landscapes and monuments, can prevent the wars from taking place.

Question: the quantity of advertising about the measures taken in the field of landscape is not sufficient or at least not in the right direction in the Foundation of Martyr on.

Expert commission activities take place entirely in Tehran and a few considerations are done in other cities of Iran. With these details, what plans do you have you for cities other than Tehran?

Mr.Yarnasab| this criticism is true about our advertising. Our information channels sometimes do not work properly and sometimes our data volume is limited; it is hoped that such conferences and experts altogether help us to amend these defects. The reality is that, unfortunately, in some provinces, some managers lecture instead of experts and cause the failure of their projects. Today, the Foundation of Martyrs has compiled useful data in the documentation center which was achieved from families and comrades in arms in different parts of the country. It is hoped that these precious treasure can be used by scientific methods such as holding specialized scientific conferences and be transferred to future generations.

Question| Considering that our war included a religious layer called the Holy Defense, how can the religious signs and war signs be managed at the same time for war landscaping?

Prof. Bucher| We are facing two approaches for building the monuments. The first approach has a realistic (pragmatic) aspect and tries to display the battlefield events by symbolization and creating war landscapes. The aim of the second approach is to show the war experience and concepts and perceptions that have been in our minds from the wartime. We can simultaneously demonstrate the memories of war and religious beliefs by these monuments and war landscapes.

Finally Dr. Mansouri summed up the discussion by mentioning two points:

The concept of war for Muslims has completely a different meaning from the west world. For the Westerners war is essentially improper incidence that must be escaped but for Muslims, war is a reality that must be avoided and at the same time should be accepted. Global mindset with absolute advertisings on peace has introduced war as a negative fact. It is not clear how they repress their absolute conception of war and consider it as a relative incidence and get prepared for defense when a war threatens them. In fact, they sacrificed the concept of defense for anti-war movements, while this concept is still exists in our society and is a holy conception. Naturally, these two interpretations cause the creation of the two different spaces, architecture and landscapes. At the same time we must explain a paradoxical concept while they explain an absolute concept. These points can be significantly considered as the new findings.